

= Day of Thirst =

The " Day of Thirst " (Arabic : Yawm al- ' Atash) is the name traditionally given in Arabic historiography to a battle fought in 724 between the Turkic Turgesh khaganate and the Umayyad Caliphate on the banks of the river Jaxartes , in Transoxiana (in modern Tajikistan , Central Asia) . The Umayyad army , under Muslim ibn Sa 'id al @-@ Kilabi , was campaigning in the Ferghana Valley when it learned of the Turgesh advance . Immediately , the Arabs began a hasty retreat to the Jaxartes , pursued and harassed by the Turgesh cavalry . Finally , after 11 days , the Umayyad army reached the Jaxartes , where it was caught between the Turgesh and the forces of the native Transoxianian principalities . Nevertheless , the Arabs managed to break through and cross the river to Khujand . The Umayyad defeat led to the collapse of Muslim rule over much of the region , which until ca . 740 remained disputed territory , with both the Arabs and the Turgesh fighting for control over it .

= = Background = =

The region of Transoxiana (Arabic : Ma wara ' al @-@ nahr) had been conquered by the Umayyad leader Qutayba ibn Muslim in the reign of Al @-@ Walid I (r . 705 ? 715) , following the Muslim conquests of Persia and Khurasan in the mid @-@ 7th century . The loyalties of Transoxiana 's native Iranian and Turkic populations and those of autonomous local rulers remained questionable , however , as demonstrated in 719 , when the Transoxianian princes sent a petition to the Chinese and their Turgesh vassals for military aid against the Caliphate 's governors . The Turgesh responded by launching a series of attacks against the Muslims in Transoxiana , beginning in 720 . These incursions were coupled with uprisings against the Caliphate among the local Sogdians . The Umayyad governor of Khurasan , Sa 'id ibn Amr al @-@ Harashi , harshly suppressed the unrest and restored the Muslim position almost to what it had been during the time of Qutayba , except for the Ferghana Valley , control over which was lost .

= = Expedition against Ferghana and the " Day of Thirst " = =

In 723 , al @-@ Harashi was replaced as governor by Muslim ibn Sa 'id al @-@ Kilabi , who resolved late the next year to launch an expedition with the goal of seizing Ferghana . The campaign faced difficulties already in its early stages , when the news arrived of the accession of a new Caliph , Hisham ibn Abd al @-@ Malik , and the appointment of a new governor of Iraq , Khalid al @-@ Qasri . Expecting Muslim 's imminent recall by the new regime , the Yemeni troops in Balkh initially refused to join the campaign , but were forced to join the army when a force composed of Mudaris (northern Arabs) under Nasr ibn Sayyar marched against them and defeated them at Baruqan . The campaign eventually went ahead as Khalid al @-@ Qasri wrote to al @-@ Kilabi , urging him to proceed with it until his replacement , Khalid 's brother Asad , arrived in Khurasan . Nevertheless , 4 @, @ 000 troops from the Yemeni Azd tribe withdrew from the army .

Al @-@ Kilabi led his army along the Jaxartes valley to Ferghana , and laid siege to it while devastating the surrounding countryside . At this point , the Umayyad army became aware that the Turgesh khagan Suluk was advancing against them with a stronger army . Abandoning their advance , the Muslim army retreated so hastily towards the south that it was claimed they covered a distance in one day that equalled three days of normal travel . On the second day , after the Arabs crossed the river Wadi al @-@ Subuh , the Turgesh army caught up with them , and attacked a secondary camp pitched by Abdallah ibn Abi Abdallah separately from the main Arab force . The Arabs and their Sogdian allies suffered heavy casualties ? the brother of the ruler of Samarkand , Ghurak , being among the slain ? but managed to repel the attack .

The Arabs continued their retreat for eight more days , during which they were constantly harassed by the Turgesh cavalry . On the ninth day , the Arabs reached the Jaxartes only to find their path blocked by their enemies , troops of the native principalities of Shash and Farghana , and the remnants of the Sogdian rebellion Sa 'id al @-@ Harashi had suppressed . The Arabs made camp

for the night and burned all their baggage , allegedly worth one million dirhams , in preparation for battle . On the next day , despite suffering from thirst and being hemmed in between the Turgesh on their rear and the Transoxianian forces in front , the desperate Arabs managed to break through the enemy lines and cross the Jaxartes . As al @-@ Tabari writes , when they reached the relative safety of Khujand , " suffering from hunger and exhaustion , the troops spread out in disorder " . There , the leadership of the army was formally transferred to Abd al @-@ Rahman ibn Na 'im al @-@ Ghamidi , who led the remnants of the army back to Samarkand .

= = Aftermath and impact = =

The defeat of the Arab army , and the casualties suffered , was a catalyst for the almost complete collapse of Muslim rule in Transoxiana over the next few years . In the words of the British scholar H.A.R. Gibb , " it was practically the last aggressive expedition of the Arabs into Transoxania for fifteen years , but of much greater importance was the blow which it struck at Arab prestige . The roles were reversed ; from now onwards the Arabs found themselves on the defensive and were gradually ousted from almost every district across the Oxus . " The new Umayyad governor , Asad al @-@ Qasri , campaigned incessantly over the next few years , but without achieving any major result . Asad also tried to secure the cooperation of the local elites by abolishing for a time the payment of taxes by the native converts (mawali) , but this policy was opposed by the Khurasani Arabs themselves , and was reversed by Asad 's successor Ashras ibn Abdallah al @-@ Sulami . This led to a general uprising of Transoxiana in 728 , and with Turgesh military aid the Arabs were evicted from almost the entire region . Transoxiana thereafter remained contested , and the Arabs did not recover their previous position until the campaigns of Nasr ibn Sayyar in 739 ? 741 , who took advantage of the collapse of the Turgesh khaganate into civil wars after the murder of Suluk in 738 .