

= Battle of Baykand =

The Battle of Baykand was fought in 729 between the Turkic Turgesh khaganate and its Soghdian allies and the Arabs of the Umayyad Caliphate at Baykand , a town near Bukhara in Transoxiana (in modern Uzbekistan) . The Arab army , under the governor of Khurasan Ashras ibn Abdallah al @-@ Sulami , campaigned across the Oxus River to suppress a large @-@ scale rebellion of the subject Soghdian princes , that had broken out the previous year and received Turgesh support . As the Arab army advanced on Bukhara , it was encircled by the Turgesh and cut off from water . A series of engagements followed that almost ended in a disaster for the Arabs like the " Day of Thirst " five years earlier , but in the end , through the inspirational bravery of a few Arab leaders and the actions of the vanguard under al @-@ Harith ibn Surayj and Qatan ibn Qutayba , the Arabs broke through and reached Bukhara , which they laid siege to .

= = 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 (reigned 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 of the autonomous local rulers remained questionable , however : in 719 the Transoxianian princes sent a petition to the Chinese court and their Turgesh vassals for military aid against the Umayyad Caliphate 's governors . In response , from 720 on the Turgesh launched a series of attacks against the Muslims in Transoxiana , coupled with uprisings against the Caliphate among the local Sogdians . The Umayyad governors initially managed to suppress the unrest , although control over the Ferghana Valley was lost . In 724 governor Muslim ibn Sa 'id al @-@ Kilabi and his army suffered a heavy defeat (the so @-@ called " Day of Thirst ") at the hands of the Turgesh when he tried to subdue Ferghana . This defeat pushed the Arabs on the defensive , and even though no pitched battles took place , over the next few years the Arab position in Transoxiana collapsed swiftly .

= = Ashras al @-@ Sulami 's campaign = =

Faced with this crisis , the Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al @-@ Malik (r . 723 ? 743) took drastic measures : Khurasan was separated from the purview of the governor of Iraq and raised to a separate province , under the Jaziran general Ashras ibn Abdallah al @-@ Sulami . Like his predecessor , Asad ibn Abdallah al @-@ Qasri , Ashras tried to win over the loyalties of the local population and the native , non @-@ Arab converts to Islam (mawali) , by addressing some of their grievances on taxation . Soon , however , this policy was reversed ? possibly due to pressure from the Caliph himself ? and the often brutal measures the Arab tax @-@ gatherers employed to gather the taxes from the mawali and the local landed aristocracy (dihqans) led to a general revolt in Transoxiana . This was made all the more dangerous to the Arabs due to the rebels ' call for assistance to the Turgesh ruler , the khagan , who replied by leading his army in person against the Arabs . By the time the khagan entered the field in 728 , only Samarkand and the two fortresses of Kamarja and Dabusiyya on the Zarafshan River remained in Arab hands in all of Transoxiana .

In order to confront the Turgesh , Ashras assembled the forces of Khurasan , and led them to Amul on the Oxus River . A vanguard under Qatan , son of Qutayba ibn Muslim , was sent over the river and established a fortified camp , but with the arrival of the combined native Soghdian and Turgesh armies , the bulk of the Arab force was unable to cross for three months . During this period Qatan 's force was beleaguered by the Turgesh , who at the same time crossed the Oxus in small raiding parties . Ashras gave command of his cavalry to Thabit Qutnah , who managed to rout the raiders and drive them to Amul . There the Arabs defeated the Turgesh , although a decisive victory eluded them as Turgesh reinforcements crossed the river and allowed the raiders to escape to safety back over the Oxus . At length Ashras got his forces across , linked up with Qatan ibn Qutayba , and began to advance on Bukhara . The Arabs beat off attacks to reach the trading town of Baykand ,

some five farsakhs ? roughly 30 kilometres (19 miles) ? south of Bukhara itself and outside the oasis that surrounded the latter . After the Arab army encamped at Baykand , the Turgesh and Soghdians cut off the water supply from the oasis .

Threatened with thirst , the Arab army left Baykand and headed for Bukhara , with Qatan in the vanguard . When the Turgesh and Soghdian forces attacked , the vanguard , some 6 @, @ 000 men , was cut off from the main body under Ashras , and Ashras and Qatan gave each other up for lost until they met again two days later . The king of Samarkand , Ghurak , who had unto this moment remained ostensibly loyal to the Arabs ? although , ever careful to hedge his bets , he had sent his son Mukhtar to the khagan ? now switched sides . Exhausted by thirst , the Arab vanguard was almost cut down by their enemies , losing 700 men . At this point , according to the account preserved by al @-@ Tabari , the Tamimi warrior al @-@ Harith ibn Surayj , who was later to lead a widespread revolt in Khurasan , urged the Arabs forward , crying that " being killed by the sword is nobler in (this) world and greater in reward with God than death by thirst " . Encouraged by his example , the Tamimi and Qaysi cavalry under al @-@ Harith and Qatan broke through the Turgesh lines and reached the water sources , narrowly staving off a second " Day of Thirst " and allowing Ashras to continue his advance towards Bukhara .

= = Aftermath = =

Following the series of battles around Baykand , the Turgesh retired north to Samarkand , where they assaulted the fortress of Kamarja , while Ashras with his troops besieged Bukhara and wintered in its oasis . Warfare did not die down , however , and the Arabs ' situation remained precarious : when , in early 730 , Ashras ' newly appointed successor Junayd ibn Abd al @-@ Rahman al @-@ Murri tried to reach the army , which was still encamped in the Bukhara oasis , he had to be escorted from Amul by 7 @, @ 000 cavalry who were attacked on the way by the Turgesh and almost destroyed . Although Bukhara was recovered by the Arabs at this time , either under Ashras or under Junayd , in the very next year the latter led the Khurasani army to disaster in the Battle of the Defile , an event which shattered the tenuous Arab control over what remained of their possessions in Transoxiana . The Arabs were not able to recover their position until the governorship of Nasr ibn Sayyar , who in 739 ? 741 managed to re @-@ establish the Caliphate 's authority up to Samarkand .