



**Sohibjon UMMATALIEV<sup>a</sup>**

*<sup>a</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies and  
Islamic Civilization Studies, International  
Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan  
Tashkent, Uzbekistan  
E-mail: [sohibjonummataliyev91@mail.com](mailto:sohibjonummataliyev91@mail.com)*

## MILITARY CAMPAIGNS BY THE ARABS TO MAWARANNAHR IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 7TH CENTURY

**Abstract.** *The article analyzes, based on historical sources, the military campaigns of the Arabs to Mawarannahr in the second half of the 7th century, the activities of the governors (Walis) of Khurasan during the Umayyad period, relations with Bukhara and Samarkand, treaties and battles, the personality of Qutham ibn Abbas, and the purely military nature of these campaigns. By the second half of the 7th century – mid-8th century, the Arab Caliphate was ruled by the Umayyads (661-750). The religion of Islam spread into the territories of North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, the Caucasus, North India, Iran, Khurasan, and Mawarannahr. The scope of state administrative reforms and the socio-economic changes implemented by the Umayyads in these regions distinctly set them apart from subsequent dynasties.*

**Keywords:** *Arab Military, Campaigns, Mawarannahr (Transoxiana), Umayyad Caliphate Khurasan Governors (Walis), Bukhara, Samarkand, Qutham ibn Abbas, 7th Century, Amu Darya, Jayhun/Oxus), Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, Sa'id ibn Uthman, Peace Treaties (Sulh), Military Expeditions.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Arab conquests of the seventh century marked a turning point in the political and cultural history of Central Asia. Following the capture of Merv in 651, Khurasan emerged as a strategic base for further military operations beyond the Amu Darya (Oxus), particularly during the Umayyad period. The governors of Khurasan played a decisive role in the early Arab incursions into Mawarannahr, initiating a series of campaigns that laid the groundwork for later Islamic expansion in the region.

This study examines the initial phase of Arab military activity in Mawarannahr from the mid to late seventh century, focusing on the campaigns conducted by Umayyad governors such as al-Hakam ibn Amr, ar-Rabi' ibn Ziyad, Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, Sa'id ibn Uthman, and Salm ibn Ziyad. Drawing upon classical Muslim historical sources, including the works of al-Tabari, al-Baladhuri, Narshakhi, and Ibn Kathir, the article analyzes the chronology of these campaigns, the nature of treaties concluded with local rulers, and the political consequences of Arab military actions. Particular attention is given to discrepancies among historical accounts and to the question of whether these early campaigns aimed at permanent incorporation of Mawarannahr into the Caliphate or were limited to temporary military expeditions.

### MAIN PART

After the capture of Merv, the center of Khurasan province, in 651, this region gained important strategic significance for carrying out subsequent conquest campaigns. The entry and spread of Islam into Mawarannahr was also accomplished by the governors of Khurasan during the Umayyad period. Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri and other historians provided detailed information about the Umayyad state. According to the historian Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the first Arab commander to cross the Amu Darya (Oxus) from Khurasan into Mawarannahr was al-Hakam ibn Amr (d. 50/670), who crossed the Amu Darya with his *mawla*, performed two *rak'ahs* of prayer, and returned (Al-Tabari, 1997:236). However, al-Baladhuri cites a narration recounted from Abdullah ibn Mubarak stating that al-Hakam ibn Amr conquered Chaghaniyan (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:577). The exact year al-Hakam ibn Amr crossed the Amu Darya is not specified in the sources. However, the event is mentioned at the end of the activities he undertook in Khurasan. Based on this, it can be assumed that al-Hakam ibn Amr came to Mawarannahr towards the end of his governorship in Khurasan (666-670), specifically in 669–670.

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Isma'il ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi stated that ar-Rabi' ibn Ziyad (d. 53/673), who became the governor of Khurasan after al-Hakam ibn Amr, came to Mawarannahr in 671 and carried out military campaigns (Al-Tabari, 1997:236). However, this information was not observed in the works of al-Baladhuri and other historians we studied. The next stage of the Arab entry into Mawarannahr took place

during the governorship of Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad (673–675) (Ismoilov & Nasrullayev, 2021:132). In 674, he crossed the Amu Darya with an army of twenty-four thousand men and captured Ramdin, Nasaf, and Paykand (Al-Tabari, 1997:243). The Queen of Bukhara, Khatun, sent troops to aid the Turks. A large army of Turks arrived for her. Ibn Ziyad's army was victorious over them. After this, the Queen proposed a peace treaty. Ubaydullah concluded a treaty on the condition that one million dirhams be paid. According to the treaty, Ubaydullah did not continue the conquest and withdrew from Mawarannahr (Al-Sallabi, 2008:384). Although al-Baladhuri was an Arab historian, he reported the events truthfully. According to him, Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad's soldiers destroyed everything they encountered along the way (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:577). According to the information provided by Narshakhi, «By the order of Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, trees were cut down and villages were destroyed (Narshakhi, 1966:39).

When Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad became the governor of Basra, he took nearly two thousand Bukhara archers with him (Al-Tabari, 1997:244) and established wages for them (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:578). After Ibn Ziyad, Sa'id ibn Uthman (d. 62/682), the new governor of Khurasan and the son of the former Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (644–656), came to Mawarannahr. Al-Baladhuri states that he was «the first commander to cross the Jayhun (Amu Darya) river with an army» (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:578). Yet, he had previously reported that Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad had come to Bukhara with an army of twenty-four thousand men. Therefore, a discrepancy is observed in the information provided by al-Baladhuri here, indicating a lack of critical approach to his own accounts.

When the Queen of Bukhara received news that Sa'id ibn Uthman had crossed the Amu Darya, she brought him the one million dirhams agreed upon in the previous peace treaty. At that time, the people of Sughd, Kish, and Nasaf opposed Sa'id with an army of one hundred and twenty thousand soldiers, and they clashed in Bukhara. The Queen of Bukhara regretted paying the tax, broke the agreement, and joined the allies. One of the leaders of the group within this combined army departed with his men, and the rest were defeated. After this, the Queen concluded a peace treaty with the Muslims again. Sa'id arrived at the city of Bukhara and occupied it (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:578).

After Bukhara, the Governor of Khurasan proceeded towards Samarkand. After a three-day battle with the Samarkand residents, the city was captured. A treaty was then concluded, stipulating that Samarkand would pay an indemnity of 700,000 dirhams,

and until the indemnity was paid, state officials and children of the ruler would be taken to Khurasan as hostages. Qutham ibn Abbas (2/624–57/677), the son of the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, participated in the Muslim army that came to Samarkand as an ordinary soldier. He died in Samarkand, and his grave has today been turned into a pilgrimage site. Medieval historians are divided regarding the place where Qutham ibn Abbas died. Works such as Al-Baladhuri's «Futuh al-Buldan» (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:580), Muhammad ibn Sa'd's «Tabaqat al-Kubra» (Ibn Sa'd, 2001:350), Izzuddin ibn al-Athir's «Usd al-Ghaba» (Ibn al-Athir, 2012:1004), Isma'il ibn Kathir's «Al-Bidaya wa an-Nihaya» (Ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi, 1998:78), and Ahmad al-Ya'qubi's «Tarikh Ya'qubi» (Al-Ya'qubi, 1960:237) state that Qutham ibn Abbas died in Samarkand. Ya'qubi also cites the following narration recounted from Abdullah ibn Abbas: «How far is the distance between his (Qutham ibn Abbas's) birthplace and his burial place. His birthplace is in Mecca, and his grave is in Samarkand» (Al-Ya'qubi, 1960:237). Ibn Battuta (1304–1369), in his work «Tuhfat an-Nizar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar,» stated that Qutham ibn Abbas died in Samarkand, that the people of Samarkand held him in special reverence, and that during the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, no damage was inflicted on the grave or its surroundings (Ibn Battuta, 1987:384–385). Abdullah ibn As'ad al-Yafi'i (1298–1367), in his work «Mir'at al-Jinan wa Ibrat al-Yaqzan,» provided information that Qutham ibn Abbas died in the year 56 AH (675–76 CE) (Al-Yafi'i, 1997:104).

Although there is also a view that Qutham ibn Abbas died in Merv, no source was found during the study that definitively accepted this information. Narshakhi's work «Tarikh-i Bukhara» presents narrations attributed to both cities (Narshakhi, 1966:24). Shamsuddin al-Dhahabi, in his work «Siyar A'lam an-Nubala,» cites two narrations regarding the place of Qutham ibn Abbas's death Samarkand and Merv and states that the narration confirming the companion's grave is in Samarkand is more reliable (Al-Dhahabi, 2006:442). Shamsuddin Kamaliddin, in the commentary section of the translation of the Khurasan part of the work «Futuh al-Buldan,» provided information that there was no mausoleum or shrine associated with Qutham ibn Abbas in Merv during the Middle Ages, and that among the companions, only al-Hakam ibn Amr al-Ghifari and Burayda ibn al-Husayb al-Aslami died in Merv. Qutham ibn Abbas's grave in Samarkand was already transformed into a mausoleum in the 11th century. During

the Middle Ages, this mausoleum was revered by all Muslims as a saint's shrine, and the most respected and honored individuals of Samarkand scholars, imams, and statesmen were buried nearby. Therefore, this place became a large cemetery.

Sa'id ibn Uthman left the city with the people he had taken hostage in Samarkand. On his return to Khurasan, he captured Termez by means of a peace treaty. When he arrived in Khurasan, news came that he had been dismissed from his post. Sa'id brought the Samarkandi hostages to Medina, stripped them of their clothes and belts, dressed them in wool-woven cloaks, and forced them to perform hard labor. Dissatisfied with this treatment, they stormed Sa'id's house, beat him to death, and then killed themselves (Ummataliyev, 2021:87).

Sa'id ibn Uthman had not kept the agreement. Because he was supposed to keep the princes as hostages until the agreed payment was made, and then return them. However, contrary to the agreement, he took them to Medina and forced them to perform hard labor. Since they were the children of rulers and nobles, they could not tolerate this treatment and killed both Sa'id and themselves. Salm ibn Ziyad, who was appointed Governor of Khurasan by Caliph Muawiyah in 680, also campaigned in Mawarannahr. His military activities began in Khorezm (Khwarazm). The Khwarazmians did not want to fight and concluded a peace treaty with Salm for four hundred thousand dirhams (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:581). In the same year, Salm ibn Ziyad also campaigned against Samarkand. His wife was with him. During the Samarkand campaign, Salm had a son with this wife. Salm named his son Sughdi (Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, 2005:1020).

After Samarkand, Salm ibn Ziyad campaigned to Khujand. However, he was defeated in Khujand and forced to retreat to Merv. In 681, Salm ibn Ziyad crossed the Amu Darya for the second time and campaigned into Sughd. An army composed of Turks and Sughdians, led by Bandun as-Sughdi, opposed him. Bandun as-Sughdi was killed in the battle (Al-Baladhuri, 1987:582). The Arabs did not campaign to Mawarannahr until the late 80s of the 7th century. This was due to the intensification of internal conflicts within the center of the Caliphate. Furthermore, the governors in Khurasan engaged in continuous struggle with each other. For this reason, the people north of the Amu Darya remained safe from Arab campaigns. The campaigns carried out up to this period were purely military in nature and were not aimed at incorporating

Mawarannahr into the Caliphate. No information was found about the construction of a fortress or fortification in any city or the relocation of Arab soldiers there. The governors of Khurasan concluded peace treaties with the captured cities, receiving a certain amount of indemnity, and then retreated. Therefore, the cities of Mawarannahr maintained their independence.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of early Arab campaigns in Mawarannahr demonstrates that the military activities carried out during the second half of the seventh century were largely exploratory and punitive rather than integrative in nature. Although Arab forces repeatedly crossed the Amu Darya and achieved significant military successes in cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khwarazm, these expeditions did not result in the permanent establishment of Arab administration or military garrisons in the region. Instead, the governors of Khurasan generally concluded peace treaties, collected indemnities, and subsequently withdrew their forces.

The internal political struggles within the Umayyad Caliphate and the rivalry among Khurasan governors significantly limited the continuity and effectiveness of Arab expansion beyond the Amu Darya. As a result, Mawarannahr retained its political autonomy during this period, and the spread of Islam remained minimal and largely disconnected from local society. The evidence suggests that the true incorporation of Mawarannahr into the Islamic world occurred only in later decades, when military conquest was followed by administrative consolidation and sustained settlement. Thus, the early Umayyad campaigns should be understood as a preliminary stage that shaped, but did not yet complete, the Islamization and integration of Central Asia into the Caliphate.

## REFERENCES

1. Al-Baladhuri. (1987). *Futuh al-buldan*. Mu'assasa al-ma'arif.
2. Al-Dhahabi. (2006). *Siyar a'lam an-nubala* (Vol. 4). Dar al-hadith.
3. Al-Sallabi, M. (2008). *Ad-dawla al-Umawiyya: Awamil al-izdihar, tada'iyyat al-inhayar* (Vol. 1). Dar ul-ma'rifa.

4. Al-Tabari. (1997). *Tarikh ar-rusul wal-muluk* (Vol. 3). Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya.
5. Al-Yafi'i. (1997). *Mir 'at al-jinan wa ibrat al-yaqzan* (Vol. 1). Dar al-kutub al-ilmiya. Al-Ya'qubi. (1960). *Tarikh Ya'qubi*. Dar Sadir.
6. Ibn al-Athir. (2012). *Usd al-ghaba*. Dar Ibn Hazm.
7. Ibn Battuta. (1987). *Tuhfat an-nizar fi ghara'ib al-amsar*. Dar Ihya al-ulum.
8. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari. (2005). *Tarikh al-Tabari*. Bayt al-afkar ad-dawliya.
9. Ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi. (1998). *Al-bidaya wa an-nihaya* (Vol. 8). Dar al-ma'rifa.
10. Ibn Sa'd. (2001). *Tabaqat al-kubra* (Vol. 6). Maktaba al-Khanji.
11. Ismoilov, M., & Nasrullayev, N. (2021). O'rta Osiyoning arab xalifaligi boshqaruvi davrida davlat muassasalari tarixi. In *O'zbekistonning davlat muassasalari tarixi*. Turon Iqbol.
12. Narshakhi, A. B. (1966). *Buxoro tarixi* (A. Rasulev, Trans.; A. O'rinboev, Ed.). Fan nashriyoti.
13. Ummataliyev, S. (2021). *Islom tarixidan oltin sahifalar – Umawiylar davri*. O'qituvchi matbaa uyi.