
Caliphate of Uthman 644 CE

The Murder of Yazdgerd 651 CE

Fariborz Rahnamoon

The assassination of Umar by Phiroz Nahavandi (separate attachment)

A couple of days after the assassination of Umar, Uthman Ib Affan became Khalifa in 644 CE. Internal politics had worsened, again the claim to the Caliphate by Ali Ibn Abi Talab the son-in-law of the Prophet was ignored, which created some tension. According to Shia documentation, the Prophet had designated Ali as his heir. But the after the death of the Prophet the Arabs went back to their tribal affiliation of leadership.

The loss of the Persians in Nahavand gave the Arabs in-road through the mountain passes of Kurdistan into the rest of the Persian Empire through the north. The effectiveness of the Persian army was largely diminished. Each town was left to defend itself. Kufah became an important garrison town and home to fighters and their families. The Afghans and Khorasan had not yet been conquered.

“The battle of Nahawand (642 CE) was the Arab victory in the mountain passes leading from Iraq to Hamadan over Sasanian forces commanded by king Yazdegerd III. This victory opened the Iranian plateau to Arab attack and brought an end to centrally controlled Iranian resistance to the Arab invaders. It was not the end of the fighting in Iran, which stretched on for more than a decade and was often very bitter, but this was henceforth a matter of local sieges, regional campaigns, guerilla resistance, and the like.”¹

“When 'Uthman took office, he dispatched Abdallah b. Amir to Kabul-that is the province of Sijistan. He stayed in Kabul until he had captured all of it. Now the province of Sistan was larger than Khurasan until Mu'awiyah died; then the inhabitants of Kabul resisted stubbornly.”²

The first thing Uthman did was to designate his supporters as governors of various conquered cities. These governors had the privilege to collect taxes and send a fifth of it to the Khalifa. This nepotism was later the cause of dissatisfaction among the various Arab tribes. During this period most of Iran had been conquered.

“When 'Uthman took office, he retained Abu Musa in Basrah for three years, deposing him in the fourth. He appointed Umayr b. 'Uthman b. Sa'd as military commander of Khurasan, and 'Abdallah b. 'Umayr al-Laythi from [the tribe of] Kinanah as military commander in Sistan. (Abdallah) fought relentlessly there as far as Kabul, while Umayr waged war in Khurasan until he reached Farghanah, compelling every district (kurah) on this side of it to come to terms. (Uthman) sent Ubaydallah b. Mamar al-Taymi to Makran, and he battled unceasingly until he reached the river. To Kirman he sent Abd al-Rahman b.

Ghubays, and a small band to Fars and al-Ahwaz. He annexed the agricultural hinterland (Sawad) of Basrah to [the districts under] al-Husayn b. Abi al-Hurr. Then ('Uthman) removed Abdallah b. Umayr from Sistan and put Abdallah b. Amir in charge, retaining him there for a year; in turn, he deposed ('Abdallah b. 'Amir) and appointed 'Asim b. 'Amr. He also removed 'Abd al-Rahman b. Ghubays [from Kirman] and sent back 'Adi b. Suhayl b. 'Adi.

Whenever the Iranians had the opportunity, they revolted against the Arab governors who usually asked the Khalifa for additional troops and went on a killing spree to deter any future rebellion. When the Kurds revolted the Arabs had a problem taking back the mountainous area.

“During the third year [of 'Uthman's reign], the inhabitants of Idhaj and the Kurds rebelled. Abu Musa called out his people, exhorting them and charging them [to repress the rebellion. He spoke of the merit in making the jihad on foot, so that a few men loaded up their animals and agreed to set forth as infantrymen. But others said, "No, by God! We will not hasten to act until we see what he does. If his actions are like his words, then we will do as our comrades have done." ³

The wealth that the Arabs in the fields gained made them hungry for more. Their original enthusiasm for spreading Islam became secondary. They were not following the commands of Allah in the Quran. They were happy as long as the Iranians were agreeing to pay the Jaziyeh. Uthman had to remind them that they were supposed to be shepherds driving the Iranians towards Islam and not tax collectors.

"To proceed: God has commanded the imams to be shepherds; He did not direct them to be tax collectors. Indeed, at the inception of this Community, they were made shepherds and not tax collectors. But your imams are surely on the verge of becoming tax collectors rather than shepherds.” ⁴

Unless a city decided to surrender before war broke out, they were given the choice to convert or pay the Jaziyeh, once they were engaged in war and lost the repercussions were devastating. It was common practice among the Arabs to kill all the men and enslave their women and children. This had been their practice since fighting each other as tribes. Uthman was worried about the situation when the children of the Persian women that were raped grow up and they don't speak Arabic. This also shows that there was a lot of resistance and a lot of men were slaughtered.

“The attainment of adulthood by the children of captive women, and the recitation of the Qur'an by both Arabs and non-Arabs (al-Adjam). The Messenger of God has said, 'Unbelief stems from speaking Arabic badly; if something seems foreign to them, they will do it awkwardly and [thereby] bring about innovation.'” ⁵

The Arabs kept the pressure on the various regions that they had conquered. Azerbaijan and Armenia had stopped paying taxes after the death of Umar. So, Uthman had to reassert his dominance by sending in troops.

“Al-Walid b. 'Uqbah raided Adharbayjan and Armenia because their inhabitants had repudiated the terms to which they had agreed with the Muslims during Umar's reign.” ⁶

“Then al-Walid made peace with the inhabitants of Adharbayjan, in return for [a tribute] of 800,000 dirhams.” ⁷

Umar had established the town of Kufah and Basrah as garrison towns after the battle of Gadisiyeh and they became stronger after they laid their hands on the weapons and wealth of the Persians. These garrison towns became richer every time they were sent to capture new territory or to quell a rebellion. Now, they were better equipped. After Nahavand was captured, they advanced to other parts of the Persian Empire and took control. Any resistance was punished ruthlessly killing all the men even if they surrender. A governor would be appointed with a detachment of soldiers to collect taxes and control the city the rest would return to Kufah and Basrah.

*“In (the garrison town of) Kufah itself, there were at that time 40,000 warriors, and every year 10,000 of them would go on a campaign to these two frontier zones so that a man would be subject to one campaign every four years.”*⁸

PERSIAN REBELLIONS

Whenever there was a rebellion, the Arabs would call for reinforcement and slaughter the people to set an example so that they would not repeat such a rebellion. There are many stories of such atrocities committed by the Arabs. The famous among them is the hanging of Iranians on two sides of the road for four farsangs to honour the Kalifa as he passed through and the operation of the watermill with Iranian blood. Some towns managed to keep the Arabs at bay either by paying the Jaziyeh regularly or defending their city successfully.

*“In 649 CE Fars burst into rebellion during the regime of Ubaydallah b. Mamar, and (the rebels) assembled against him in Istakhr. They clashed at the gate of Istakhr, and Ubaydallah was killed and his army routed. When Abdallah b. Amir heard the news, he called the Basrans to arms, and the people marched forth with him, Uthman b. Abi al-As being in command of the vanguard. (The two armies) met at Istakhr, and he slaughtered many of (the rebels), as a result of which they remained submissive thereafter.”*⁹

*“The Ispahbadh (of Tabaristan) had made peace with Suwayd b. Mugarrin, based on the understanding that (Suwayd) would not attack (the region) in return for a certain tribute (mal) to be paid to him. No one attacked (Tabaristan) until Uthman b. Affan came to power; then Said b. al-As attacked it in the year 30 (650-51).”*¹⁰

*“Then Said b. al-As came to Jurjan and concluded a treaty with it requiring a tribute of 200,000 [dirhams].¹¹ Said b. al-As made peace with the inhabitants of Jurjan; then later on they became obdurate and manifested unbelief. No one came to Jurjan after Said, and they closed off that road so that no one took the road to Khurasan by way of Qumis save in fear and dread before the Jurjanis. The (usual) road to Khurasan went from Fars through Kirman and the first man to open up the road through Qumis was Qutaybah b. Muslim when he became governor of Khurasan.”*¹²

“Then Saed came to Tamisah, which is situated between Tabaristan and Jurjan; it is a city on the shore [of the Caspian] Sea, at the boundaries of Jurjan. Tamisah inhabitants fought him until he performed the prayer of fear. He had said to Hudhayfah, “How did the Messenger of God pray?” (Hudhayfah) told him, and Saed performed there the prayer of fear while they were fighting. On that day Saed smote one of the polytheists on the sinews of his shoulder and his sword emerged below (the man's) elbow. He besieged

them and they sought safe-conduct (aman). He granted it to them with the condition **that he would not kill one man** among them. Then they threw open the fortress **and he put them all to death save one man.** (Thereby observing the letter of the peace terms.) He seized the contents of the fortress.”¹³

MURDER OF YAZDEGERD

Yazdegerd along with his private army of about 4 to 5 thousand soldiers moved from place to place trying to contain the Arab onslaught with the help of the local armies and the people. He ends up in Marw in Afghanistan near the border of Turkmenistan and China in 650 CE. The Degan (landlord) of Marw by the name of Mahwayeh suspects that Yazdegerd wants to depose him. So with the help of the Turks, he rebels against the King and as a consequence Yazdegerd gets killed at the hands of a stone miller. The Persian Empire lost its King in 651 CE and his army disintegrated. The Christian community of Marw retrieved the king's body from the river and buried him with due respect remembering the service of the royal family towards its Christian subjects. This also shows that the Sassanians were not religious fanatics but accommodated all religions.

*“Ibn 'Amir arrived in Basrah; then he set out for Fars and conquered it. Yazdagird fled from Jur- (Firuzabad) which is [the chief town of the district of] Ardashir -Khurrah in the year 30 (650-51). Ibn Amir sent Mujashi' b.Mas'ud al-Sulami in pursuit, and he followed (Yazdagird) to Kirman. Mujashi made camp with the army at al-Sirajan, while Yazdagird fled to Khurasan.”*¹⁴

*“In this year, (650 CE) according to one (authority), Yazdagird b. Shahriyar fled from Fars to Khurasan.”*¹⁵

*“Al-Mujashi' set out from al-Sirajan and followed Yazdegerd. While he was at the castle in Bimand, the one [now] called Qasr Mujashi', they were struck by blizzards. Snow fell and the cold became intense; the snow reached the height of a lance. The army perished, but Mujashi and a man with a slave girl were saved. He slit open the stomach of a pack camel, put (the girl) in it and fled. The next day he came back, found her alive, and carried her away. That castle was named Qagr Mujashi because his army perished in it while he was five or six farsak from al-Sirajan.”*¹⁶

“Yazdegerd came to Khurasan with Khurrazadh-Mehr, the brother of Rostam. (Khurrazadh-Mehr) said to Mahawayh, the Marzban of Marw, "I have entrusted the king to you." He then left for Iraq. Yazdegerd remained in Marw and resolved to depose Mahawayh. Thus, Mahawayh wrote to the Turks, informing them of Yazdagird 's flight and his coming to him. He made a contract with (the Turks) to support (the people of Marw) against (Yazdagird), giving them free entry [into Khurasan].

According to (al-Mada'ini): The Turks reached Marw, and Yazdagird went out to meet them with the companions who were with him. He fought them, supported by Mahawayh with the heavy cavalry (al-asdwirah) (Middle Persian Usvaran) of Marw. Yazdegerd made a great slaughter among the Turks, and Mahawayh feared they would flee. Thus, he went over to them with the heavy cavalry of Marw.

Yazdagird's troops fled and were killed, while his horse was wounded in the course of the evening. He fled on foot until at last, he reached a house with a mill on the banks of the Murghab, staying there two nights while Mahawayh searched in vain for him. Then on the morning of the second day, the millowner entered his house. Seeing the form of Yazdagird, he said, "What are you, human or demon?" (Yazdagird) responded, "Human. Do you have any food?" "Yes," he said and brought it to him.

Then (Yazdagird) said, "I am a Magian, so bring me what I need to perform my rites! " So the miller went to one of the cavalrymen and sought from him what he needed to perform Magian rites. (The soldier)

asked, "What are you going to do with it?" "I have in my house a man whose like I have never seen, and he has sought this from me." (The cavalryman) brought (the miller) before Mahawayh, who said, "This is Yazdagird. Go and bring me his head." The Magian priest (mawbadh) said to him, "That is not yours to do. You know that religion and kingship are twins; one of them cannot stand without the other. If you do [this deed], you will defile all that is most sacred." The people spoke up, looking upon this as a grave enormity. But Mahawayh cursed them and said to the heavy cavalry, "Whoever speaks up, kill him."

Then he commanded a number [of men] to go with the miller and kill Yazdagird. They rushed off, but when they saw him they found killing him hateful and refused to do it. They said to the miller, "You go in and kill him."

So he entered (Yazdagird's) presence while he slept; he crushed his head with a stone. Then he severed his head, handed it over to them, and threw his corpse into the Murghab. A party (qawm) of Marwazis went out, slew the miller, and razed his mill.¹⁷

"A man from Ahwaz named Iliya, who was the archbishop of Marw, learned of the murder. He assembled the Christians who were under his authority and said to them, "The King of the Persians has been murdered, the son of Shahriyar son of Kisra. Now Shahriyar is the child of Shirin the Believer, whose just conduct and beneficence toward her coreligionists you must know. This king [that is, Yazdagird] had a Christian lineage. [We should note as well] the honour that the Christians obtained during the reign of his grandfather Kisra, (Khosrow Parviz) and the good previously received by them during the regime of certain kings among his ancestors. He even built some churches for them and settled [the debts] of some of their coreligionists. It is therefore fitting for us to bewail the murder of this king because of his generosity, [which was] commensurate with the beneficence of his ancestors and his grandmother Shirin toward the Christians. Now I think it right that I build a tomb for him and bear his body in honour in order to inter it there."

The Christians answered, "Oh archbishop, we submit to your command and concur with you in this opinion of yours." Thus, the archbishop ordered a tomb to be built within the Garden of the Archbishops in Marw. He, accompanied by the Christians of Marw, went out and took the corpse of Yazdagird from the river, wrapped it, and placed it in a coffin. Then the Christians who were with him bore it on their shoulders until they brought it to the tomb that he had commanded to be built, interred it therein, and walled up the doorway.¹⁸

The reign of Yazdagird lasted twenty years, among them four years in peace and quiet and sixteen in fatigue due to the ruthless warfare of the Arabs against him. He was the last king of the lineage of Ardashir son of Babak to reign, and after him, the kingship passed to the Arabs.

In this year that is the year 31 (651-52 CE) Abdallah b. 'Amir set out for Khurasan. He conquered Abrashahr, Tus, Abiward, and Nasa, reaching as far as Sarakhs. In (the same year) he made a peace treaty with the inhabitants of Marw.¹⁹

SUMMARY

A Persian slave by the name of Phiroz Nahavandi famous as **Abu Lu Lu Ah'** murdered Umar and Uthman became the second Khalifa.

Yazdegerd reached Marw in Balkh and was murdered by a grain miller in 651 CE

Tabaristan Khorasan and Balkh in Afghanistan had not yet been captured till after the death of Yazdegerd.

IMPORTANT DATES

BATTLE OF NAHAVAND	642
UMAR MURDERED	644
YAZDGERD MURDERED	651
KHORASAN CONQUERED	652

¹ History of Tabari Translators note 16 to 2806

² History of Tabari 2803

³ History of Tabari 2829

⁴ History of Tabari 2803

⁵ History of Tabari 2804

⁶ History of Tabari 2805

⁷ History of Tabari 2806

⁸ History of Tabari 2805

⁹ History of Tabari 2831

¹⁰ History of Tabari 2836

¹¹ History of Tabari 2837

¹² History of Tabari 2839

¹³ History of Tabari 2837

¹⁴ History of Tabari 2863

¹⁵ History of Tabari 2862

¹⁶ History of Tabari 2863-64

¹⁷ History of Tabari 2874

¹⁸ History of Tabari 2884

¹⁹ History of Tabari 2884