



MILITARY-DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES OF THE SUGHD RULERS AGAINST THE INVASION OF THE ARAB CALIPHATE OF THE BEGINNING OF THE 8TH CENTURY (ON THE EXAMPLE OF TARKHUN, GURAK AND DEVASHTICH ACTIVITIES)

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Abstract: Drawing on a comparison of Sogdian, Chinese and Arabic sources, the article analyses how the rulers of Sogd – Tarkhun, Ghurak and Devashtich, lord of Panch – responded to the expansion of the Arab Caliphate in the first quarter of the eighth century. Compromise, alliance-building, appeals for outside help and open armed struggle are treated as alternating strategies of the Sogdian elite. The author argues that the conduct of local rulers is best explained through the logic of their geopolitical situation rather than through one-dimensional moral verdicts.

Keywords: Sogd, ikhshid, Tarkhun, Ghurak, Devashtich, Qutayba ibn Muslim, Mount Mugh documents, Tang annals, Turgesh, diplomacy, resistance.

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the political processes that took place in Moqarounnahr in the 7th-8th centuries, two visions often dominate in historical memory: on the one hand, the consistent marches of the Arab armies under the command of Qutaybah ibn Muslim, and on the other side the scattered but persistent resistance of the local population. Whereas, in these two polar ranges, there are specific individuals who seek to preserve their possessions, dynasty and people – the Sughd specialists, the rulers of the Qur'an, and their advisers. Each of their decisions was a response to a particular situation and therefore requires a cautious interpretation from the historian. A.S.Sagdullayev in his latest textbook-monograph on the history of Uzbekistan describes the period of the Arab conquest as inextricably linked with the political fragmentation of the region [1; 412]. This approach encourages to see the activities of local rulers not separately, but in the system of relations between the oasis estates. Indeed, the inability of the rulers of Sughd, Bukhara, Chach and Fergana to form a single front was one of the factors that determined the pace of the conquest. Yu.Ergasheva also explains the success of the Arabs primarily by the political, social and cultural fragmentation of Central Asia [2; 100]. The author notes that since the region was divided into many small states, it was unable to organize a serious and unified defense. We would like to add that fragmentation was not only a sign of weakness, but also an opportunity for the local elite to conduct flexible diplomacy. This flexibility is considered in this article in the case of the activities of the three rulers of Saudi Arabia – Tarhun, Gurak and Devashtich. The purpose of the study is to determine the military and diplomatic strategies they used against the Arab invasion on the basis of a comparison of sources, to reveal the reasons for the exchange of these strategies. Such an approach makes it possible to bring the information collected within the framework of the thesis in Sogdian, Chinese, Arabic and Persian to a single

analytical field. To solve this problem, the article first briefly considers the historiography of the topic, then describes the sources and methods, and the results are consistently presented according to the chronological stages of the rulers' activities.

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency in foreign studies to study the process of conquest not from the "center" but from the "edge", i.e. from the point of view of local rulers. In the dissertation of S.R. Hussein, defended at the University of Leiden, it is substantiated that the rulers of Bactria saw the Arab-Muslim forces as a powerful ally in defeating their internal and neighboring rivals [3; 15]. The author believes that the conquest was not a one-sided invasion, but a complex process in which local competition and external power interests intersected. This conclusion is also relevant for Saudi, since similar calculations can be traced in the politics of Tarragon and Iraq. It is also noteworthy that in European Oriental studies, there has been an increased emphasis on documentary sources. In the collection, published under the editorship of A. Kaplony and M. Malchiski, documents in Greek, Sughd and Arabic are interpreted as direct testimonies showing how the authorities practiced in different parts of the Islamic world [4; 3]. Such documents are closer to events than the chroniclers' accounts created in the later period. For this reason, the Sughd letters found on Mount Mugh' have special value in the examination of the information of Arab historians. However, in Uzbek historiography, the activities of the Sughd rulers are presented in the form of short plates, against the background of general political history. Tarhuon's reconciliation and death, Ghurak's letter to the Chinese emperor, or Devastich's recent resistance are often cited as disconnected episodes. Tying them together in a chain and asking why each ruler chose this particular path remains a problem that has not yet been adequately studied. The scholarly novelty of this paper is also evident in the search for an answer to this question, namely, in the reinterpretation of the behavior of the Sughd elite as a strategic choice. This, in turn, helps to move away from the tradition of portraying local rulers as passive victims or unconditional heroes. In this article, this interpretation is enriched with new translations introduced into scholarly circulation within the framework of the thesis, including the text of the contract in Ibn A'sam al-Kufi'i and excerpts from the Khiva manuscript of Bal'ami's translation.

METHODS

In the study, methods of problem-chronological and comparative analysis were used, relying on the principles of historicity and objectivity. The source base consists of four groups. The first group consists of the sug'd documents found on Mount Mug', in particular, document A-14, which mentions that Devastych sent an envoy to the Chach, Fergana and Turkish khokans, and letter A-9, which reports on the situation in neighboring properties. The second group is the chronicles of the Tang dynasty, in which the appeal of Gurak to the emperor in 719 has been preserved. The third group includes the works of at-Tabari, al-Balozuri, Ibn A'sam al-Kufi, Khalifa ibn Hayyat and Ibn al-Asir, and the fourth group includes the biographies of Persian-language muarrikhs such as Narshahi and Bal'ami. The sources were compared and the differences in the different narratives of the same event were noted separately. In the analysis of documentary texts, the observations of E. Garosi were an important methodological base. On the basis of the ostracons found in the administrative centers in Movarounnahr, he shows that by the middle of the 8th century, secretaries with knowledge of Arabic and Sughd script were operating in the local bureaucracy [5; 9]. This observation means that Arab rule did not replace

local government at once, but rather gradually adapted it to itself. This means that documents in the Sughd language can also be read as an indicator of the depth of influence of Arab rule. In addition, B. Goibov's study of the formation of early medieval state structures in the territory of Uzbekistan was used to understand the internal structure of the Sughd confederation [6; 94]. The author characterizes the political units of this period as an alliance of oases, rather than a centralized state. This requires taking into account the limited nature of the specialized power and the role of institutions such as the Council of Elders. In the process of analysis, the Hijri dates were transferred to the AD dates, the forms of the names of individuals in different sources (for example, Ghurak – Ugrak – Ulega) were compared. Thus, a set of information was formed for the activities of each ruler, which were systematized in chronological order. All citations were re-compared with the source text and, if necessary, the accuracy of the translation was checked separately.

RESULTS

Analysis of sources showed that the first stage of the strategy of the Sughd rulers, i.e. between 706 and 710, compromise and temporary alliances prevailed. According to Sh.A. Yovkachev, Qutayba ibn Muslim led consistent marches from 705 onwards, Poykand was occupied in 706, and the Bukhara oasis was occupied in 707–708, and Bukhara resisted until 709 despite several attacks [7; 266]. This chronology explains why the Sughd conqueror Tarkhun was initially in the ranks of the allies. The collapse of Bukhara posed a direct threat to Samarkand, and Tarkhun defended his capital by protecting the neighboring oasis. N. Duraj's study notes that during the Qutayba period, the Arabs captured most of the main cities in the valleys of Amu Darya, Kashkadarya, Zarafshan and Akhangaron [8; 67]. The Polish researcher connects this process with the spread of Islam, but also emphasizes that those who converted to the religion were seen as the support of the Arab authorities. In our opinion, it was precisely this situation that presented the Sughd nobility with a difficult choice: the adoption of the religion became a sign of political loyalty. The thesis materials show that although Tarhun, Vardon, and Turkish troops combined to besiege Qutayba in the Battle of Tarob, Hunbun, and Romitan in 709, the Arab warlord managed to arouse mutual suspicion among the allies. Tarhun's abandonment of the battlefield and subsequent peace was perceived by the Sughd community as a betrayal. But it would not be correct to explain this decision solely in terms of personal weakness. Tarragon may also have been concerned that the 'Turkish allies' long stay in Sughd would threaten local independence. Thus, the strategy of the first stage was based on the logic of "choosing the lesser evil": the ruler tried to preserve the integrity of his possessions without fully trusting both an external ally or an enemy. The failure of this strategy ended with the overthrow of Tarhun in 710 and the transfer of power into the hands of Gurak. This incident also illustrates how delicate the balance between the ruler and the council of nobility was in the internal politics of Sughd.

The second stage is related to the Gurak power, the main feature of which is the active search for external allies and multidirectional diplomacy. The nobles of Samarkand expected a tougher policy towards the Arabs as soon as Gurak ascended the throne. A.B. Sarsenbayev and co-authors cite a letter from Gurak to the Turkash Khakan in 710, in which he noted that there was a warning: "If the Arabs take Samarkand, you will experience difficult times like us" [9; 198]. This quote shows that Gurak presented the fate of Sughd as a matter of security for the en

tire region. In other words, he did not ask for help, but with a reference to the common interest. At the same time, the authors write that after the defeat of the Turkish troops, the Sughds were forced to conclude the "Treaty of Samarkand" with the Arabs in 712, and that the Turkish warriors were the "last hope" for them [9; 199]. This means that the Uruguayan diplomatic initiative led to a compromise again in the absence of military assistance. The economic foundations of Turkish-Sogdian relations also played a major role in this process. A.B.Sarsenbayev and A.S.Abdiraiymova reveal the importance of the Sughd trade caravans and settlements in the development of the cities of Yettisu and South Kazakhstan [10; 159]. This information means that for the Sughd elite, the Turkic world in the north was not only a military ally, but also a trade network and a refuge when necessary. For this reason, Gurak and his successors never completely abandoned the hope of the Khaganate. The text of the treaty in Ibn A'sam al-Kufi's Kitap al-Futuh, which has been translated into Uzbek for the first time in the thesis, also shows that Gurak retained dynastic power even though he surrendered. Although the treaty imposed obligations such as paying tribute, having an Arab garrison in the city, and building a mosque, the title of ikshid was not abolished. This situation provides reason to see Ghurak's compromise not as a defeat but as a way to gain time for future resistance. Such a compromise remained the main pillar of Ghurak's policy for the next decade.

In the third phase, the Tang Dynasty's policy reached a wide diplomatic arena that also included the Chinese Empire. The 719 appeal, preserved in the Tang chronicles, states that the ruler of Samarkand had been at war with the Arabs for thirty-five years, that Qutayba had besieged the city six years earlier, had drilled three large holes in the walls, and that he had asked the emperor to send a detachment of troops. Although the tone of the appeal is modest, its content is a well-thought-out political document: it emphasizes Saud's loyalty to the empire, the transience of the Arab danger, and the inevitability of victory if help comes. Archaeological evidence supplements this statement with material evidence. S. Mantellini and co-authors, studying the dynamics of settlements in the southern part of the Afrosiyob and Middle Zarafshan valleys, show the dense and complex structure of the network of settlements in the Samarkand oasis [11; 127]. On the one hand, such a network was a source of economic power, and on the other hand, it was a difficult task to fully protect it. Therefore, it is understandable that Gurak preferred to go on the defensive behind the city walls. The results of the exploration work carried out by the Uzbek-Italian expedition in the Karatepa mountain region also record the presence of many ancient monuments on the southern borders of the oasis [12; 24]. These monuments advance the issue of strategic control over the roads linking Samarkand to the Caucasus. This field information suggests that behind the castles and villages, which are briefly mentioned in Arab sources, stood a large-scale economic and defense system. Although Gurak's appeal to China was inconclusive, it itself shows the scale of diplomatic reflection: the Tang ruler sensed the balance of regional power and sought a third force that would balance the Arabs. The Tang court's rejection, on the other hand, indicated the limited capabilities of the empire on its western borders, forcing Sughd to rely on its own power again. This experience later became the impetus for some of the Sughd nobility to give up hope of external aid and move to an independent movement. As a result, the uprising of 720–722 began precisely on the initiative of local forces.

The fourth stage is associated with the activities of the Panch governor Devashtich, which is the most vivid example of the strategy of open armed resistance. N. Duraj notes that after the

death of Umar II, the policy of relief towards the conquered peoples was suspended and Sa'id al-Harashi revived a severe repression, which provoked a new uprising in the Zarafshan Valley [8; 67]. The author also connects with this condition the fact that in 721 a part of the population of Samarkand fled from Arab control to the side of Khojand. In our opinion, it was this mass migration that opened up a political space for Devashtich to lay claim to the Sogdian specialty. Mugh's documents show how he acted under these conditions: he sent an envoy Fatufran to Chach, Fergana and the Turkish Khakhan, while the Fergana king kept the commander sent by Alutar in his camp. In E. Mahmudov's study, it is substantiated that the ruler of Fergana, Alutar, died later during the marches of Nasr ibn Sayyar, and that his successors sought support from the Tang Empire [13; 410]. This information confirms that Fergana, with whom Devashtich wanted to form an alliance, also resisted Arab pressure for a long time. Therefore, the Panch governor's hope in Fergana was not unfounded. F.E.Toshbaev and Sh.Jonukanov write that Ustrushana also tried to maintain its position through resistance to Arab invasions and diplomatic relations [14; 129]. Their observation allows us to assume that the mountain roads between the upper reaches of the Zarafshan and Ustrushana were an important retreat route for Devashtich. At the same time, the rulers of this region also put their interests first. M.Khomidjonova notes that in Ustrushana, local authorities were in the hands of peasants and afshins, and Arab culture entered the region in limited numbers [15; 206]. This observation shows the geographical basis of the coalition planned by Devashtich, namely the system of mountainous areas connecting Zarafshan, Ustrushana, Chach, and Fergana. Although the fall of the Mugh' fortress in 722 and the execution of Devashtich meant that this strategy was defeated militarily, it remained in historical memory as the last symbol of Sughd's independence.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained indicate that it is not enough to characterize the behavior of the Sughd rulers with single-line concepts of "resistance" or "surrender". Although Tarkhun relied on compromise, Gurak relied on multidirectional diplomacy, and Devashtych relied on open armed struggle, all three paths served one goal - the preservation of local dynastic power. T.M. Gulyamov, analyzing the resistance of the population of Movarounnahr to the Arab invaders on the basis of medieval Persian sources, shows that this resistance was not limited only to the initiative of the rulers, its social roots were wide [16; 25]. This view is important because the Council of Elders, which overthrew Tarhun, also expressed the mood of the community. This means that the freedom of the rulers to compromise was limited by the society. A Tajik scholar notes that the opposition of the local population to the Arabs in Movarounnahr was repeated several times even after the Qutayba period [16; 28]. In this context, the Saud experience is seen as part of a broader regional phenomenon. The repetitive nature of the resistance, on the other hand, provides grounds for assessing it as an expression of sustained social discontent rather than random outbursts. In another article by the author, the resistance of the inhabitants of Khorasan is separately investigated on the basis of medieval sources in Persian, where it is noted that even there the interests of the local elite and the common people did not always coincide [17; 39]. This situation provides comparative material in interpreting the internal contradictions in the Qur'an, and in particular the fate of Tarhun. The results also suggest that the tendencies of Arab sources must be taken into account. Al-Tabari and al-Balazuri often portray Gurak as a cunning and unstable ally. In the Chinese chronicle, however, he appears as a loyal and

courageous ruler. The Sughd documents stand between these two disguises, reflecting daily political practices – the exchange of ambassadors, the Houthi information, and the detention of military leaders. Comparing the three groups of sources is, in our opinion, the way to form the most balanced picture of the local rulers. However, it should also be recognized that the paucity and fragmentation of sources leave some conclusions in an approximate character.

A comparison of the experience of Sughd with the neighboring Bukhara oasis leads to another important conclusion. In a multidisciplinary study of the Bukhara oasis authored by R. Rante, F. Schwartz and L. Tronka, it is shown that the system of settlements in the oasis continued to take shape in the process of long-term evolution, including in the centuries following the Arab conquest [18; 45]. This conclusion means that the conquest did not completely destroy the system of settlements, but subordinated it to a new political center. A similar process is observed in Sughd: although Samarkand became the center of the Arab garrison, its economic basis was preserved. In Narshahi's work "History of Bukhara", translated into Hungarian by M. Sharkozi, the activities of Qutayba ibn Muslim in Bukhara are described in a separate chapter [19; 65]. The translator's comments show that the text of Narshahi consists of several layers, and that a critical approach to its use is necessary. This requires caution in applying the information of Persian sources to the events of Sughd. Comparing the experience of the two oases, it shows that in Bukhara the local dynasty lived longer and more resiliently, while in Sughd the resistance was sharper. The reason, in our opinion, was the strong ties of Samarkand with the Turkish Khaganate and the orientation of the trade elite in northern directions. For the Sughd nobility, the Turkic world was a constant alternative, which deterred them from compromising with the Arabs. The Bukharats, on the other hand, chose the path of compromise more because they were geographically closer to the Khorasan nobility. Thus, geography, trade networks, and internal social structure are manifested as the main factors that determined the strategy of the local rulers. This conclusion indicates the need to study the activities of the rulers of Chach, Fergana and Ustrushana on the basis of the same comparative model in the future. In particular, the relations with Chach and Fergana mentioned in the Mughal documents allow for a deeper study of the eastern direction of Sogdian diplomacy. Such a study will allow for a more accurate map of political ties on the eastern borders of the Sughd confederation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were reached. First, in the first quarter of the 8th century, the Sug'd rulers used four successive strategies against the Arab invasion: temporary compromise (Tarhun), alliance with the Turkic world (the policy of the Sughd in 710–712), seeking help from a distant empire (the Appeal of 719), and open armed struggle (Devashtich). Second, the exchange of these strategies was determined not by personal qualities, but by the possibility of external allies, the hardening of Arab noble policies, and internal pressure from the Sug'd society. Third, a comparison of Sughd, Chinese, and Arab sources frees the image of each ruler from one-sided assessments and allows us to understand their activities in the context of a clear historical context. Although the Sughd resistance ended in military defeat, its long-term impact was significant. The dissatisfaction of the local elite with the policies of the caliphate was later expressed in joining the Abbasid movement. T.M. Gulyamov, analyzing the role of Abu Muslim Khurosoni in this process, shows that the inhabitants of Movarounnahr and Khurasan took an active part in the anti-Umayyad movement [20; 8]. This

fact means that the resistance of the 7th-8th centuries did not disappear without trace, it prepared the social ground for subsequent political changes. Therefore, it is appropriate to assess the activities of Tarkhun, Gurak and Devashtych not only as a history of defeat, but also as an important stage in the struggle to preserve the political subjectivity of the region. The results of the research can be used in enrichment of training courses on the history of the early Middle Ages of Uzbekistan in higher educational institutions, as well as in the preparation of scientific and popular materials dedicated to the history of the Sogd. For future research, a comparative study of the attitude of the rulers of Chach, Fergana and Ustrushana towards the Arabs, as well as the active involvement of new readings of Mugh documents in Uzbek historiography, remains an urgent task. In general, the experience of the Sughd rulers also provides rich material for studying the strategies of survival of small political units under strong imperial pressure.

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