

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Expansion of Islam and Military Campaigns

Expedition To Nubia

The land of Nubia lay to the south of Egypt. It stretched from Aswan to Khartoum and from the Red Sea to the Libyan desert. The Nubians were Christians and were ruled by a king. The capital of the kingdom was Dumqula.

In the summer of 642, Amr bin Al-Aas sent an expedition to Nubia under the command of his cousin Uqba bin Nafe. The expedition was ordered by Amr bin Aas on his own account, and it appears that the approval of Umar to the undertaking of the expedition was not sought. Amr bin Al-Aas thought that the victory over the Nubians would be an easy affair and that he would inform the Caliph after he had conquered another land.

Uqba bin Nafe who later made a great name for himself as the Conqueror of Africa, and led his horse to the Atlantic complaining that there were no lands left for him to conquer in the way of Allah came in for an unhappy experience in Nubia.

In Nubia, no pitched battle was fought. There were only skirmishes and haphazard engagements and in such type of warfare the Nubians excelled the Muslims. The Nubians were skilful archers. We have it on the strength of Balazuri that they would shout to the Muslims where would they like to be hit by the arrow, and where the Muslims mockingly named some part of the body, the arrow invariably struck there to the great grief of the Muslims.

One day Uqba came across a concentration of the Nubians. Before the Muslims could attack the Nubians, the Nubians subjected the Muslims to a merciless barrage of arrows. The arrows were aimed at the eyes and in the encounter 250 Muslims lost their eyes.

The Nubians were very fast in their movements. The Muslim cavalry was known for its speed and mobility, but it was no match for the Nubian horse riders. The Nubians would strike hard against the Muslims, and then vanish before the Muslims could recover their balance and take counter action. The hit-and-run raids by the Nubians caused considerable damage to the Muslims.

Uqba wrote to Amr bin Al-Aas of the state of affairs. He said that the Nubians avoided pitched battle, and in the guerilla tactics that they followed the Muslims were the sufferers Uqba further propheted out that Nubia was a poor land, and there was nothing therein worth fighting for or to tempt by way of booty.

Thereupon Amr bin Al-Aas asked Uqba to withdraw from Nubia. Uqba accordingly pulled out of Nubia with his forces. The Muslims were not defeated, but it was a fact that their expedition had not succeeded. It was a drawn battle.

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