The reasons for the fall of the Khuzestan Province

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Abstract

In the seventh century AD, the Moslem Arabs attacked two of the great empires of the period, the Sassanid Empire in Iran and the Byzantium Empire and conquered vast tracts of land. One of the most important events in this period was the fall of the Sassanid Empire. Historians believe that there are various reasons for the fall of the Southern province of Khuzestan to the invading Arabs. The research shall review the historical importance of the Khuzestan province in the South of Iran and the underlying reasons for the fall of the Persian empire due to the conquering of this region.

Keywords: Khuzistan, Islamic conquest, Arabs, Islam

1. Introduction

Reasons and Causes for the fall of the Khuzestan Province

The fall of the Khuzistan province has historically been attributed to the following elements: Geography of the province; the migrating Arabs residing in the province; the treachery of local Sassanid rulers and landowners; the betrayal of mercenaries in the Sassanid army; the behaviour of the conquerors towards the populace and the existence of religious minorities. In terms of geography, the Khuzistan province bordered the Mesopotamian region and was easily accessible for the Arab Muslims because there were no natural impediments, which would make the conquest of the region difficult. In addition the arid and hot climate of the region was familiar to the Arab Muslim and was not a detriment; whereas regions such as Taberestan and Gilan due to the mountainous forest covered regions and rainy climate remained for years inaccessible and free from the Arab Muslim invasion. The existence of migratory Arab nomad tribes which had for years settled in the form of enclaves and pockets in the Khuzistan region was another important factor in the fall of the Khuzestan province. These tribes joined forces with the Arab Muslims and aided in the weakening of the morale and strength of the Persians in the region; thus encouraging the Arab Muslims to strike further within the province to link the aforementioned enclaves together. The Arab tribes, which had migrated to the Khuzistan delta in pre-Islamic times, were from the clan of Bakr bin Vayee'l whom had settled near the Ahvaz region. Atibeh bin Ghazvan, began to secretly negotiate with the tribes inciting them to rebellion and guerilla warfare in the area. The tribes inflicted heavy losses on the forces of Hormozan in the Nahr Tiri area;

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forcing them to retreat beyond the river. The Caliph then gave the governorship of the Manazer region to Salmi and Ghaleb and the Nahr Tiri region to Haramleh and Kalib whom were among the leaders of these tribes. These leaders were constantly at ends with Horozan regarding the borders of their lands and this border warfare erupted into the second major war between Hormozan and the Arab Muslims (7).

The betrayal of the local Sassanid lords and landowners in the Khuzistan province was also another influential factor in the fall of the province. The betrayal of the Persian forces through the treachery of the landowners and local lords in several cases aided the Arab Muslim forces in gaining the upper hand. This is especially seen in the battle of Shushtar; in which even though the Persians were gaining the upper hand and resisting the Arab invaders; one of the local nobles named Sineh son of Dadviyeh betrayed the Persians by showing a secret passage into the city to the Arab forces and this resulted into the fall of the city itself. During the battle of Shush, a Persian landowner named Shappur son of Azarmahan in lieu of his life and the lives of eighty other of his dependents handed over the city to the Arab forces. The betrayal of the Sassanid mercenary cavalry force during the battle of Shush was also another important factor in the defeat of the Persians and the fall of the Khuzistan province. Yazdegerd III had sent a large cavalry force under the command of "Siya" to assist the Persians and Hormozan's forces in the Khuzistan delta; however Siya upon entering Khuzistan decided to see what the outcome of the battle of Shush would be and upon the subsequent fall of the city he joined the Arab forces on the condition that he and his men get a share of the spoils upon the capturing of the city of Shushtar and other cities (8).

It is of note that after Anushiravan had created a permanent conscripted army and all military expenditure was paid for through the royal Sassanid court; local and tribal alliances deteriorated and the Persian army became a mercenary force, seeking its own benefit in as such that in many cases instead of resisting the Arab forces; and for their own monetary benefit, the Persian forces would create alliances with the Arab invaders in order to partake of the spoils (2).

The betrayal of Siya and the mercenary forces under him can also be attributed to the aforementioned fact. The treatment of the Arab conquerors of the population and cities they subdued were influential in the fall of the Khuzistan province. As the Arab hordes advanced into the Khuzistan province, they massacred the populace of the cities that resisted them or would enslave them. Such harsh measures resulted into other cities and townships to reconsider resistance and to surrender unconditionally. This can be best exemplified in the Arab's conquest of the city of Shushtar. As the Muslim Arabs over ran the city and began to pillage and massacre the population; many women preferred to throw themselves and their children into the Karun river and drown rather than let themselves fall into the hands of the Arab invaders (3).

This method of warfare is also seen in the battle between Salmeh bin Ghays Ashjayee and the Kurdish tribes in the Khuzistan Delta. In order to subdue the Kurds; all males were massacred and the women and children divided among the Arab forces as slaves (4).

During the Sassanid era the official religion was Zoroasterism and therefore the Zoroastrian priests had great influence on all aspects of society and a great deal of pressure was imposed upon the non-Zoroastrian sects, and they were not able to perform their religious rituals in public and freely. With the advent of the Arab Muslims' invasion of the Khuzistan delta, these minority religious sects embraced the opportunity to free themselves from religious oppression and through the payment of "Jaziyeh" to the Arab Muslims be allowed to perform their rites in peace (1).

2. Methods

This descriptive study focuses on Reasons for the fall of the Khuzistan Province. In addition, this study surveys The Motivations of the Arabs Invasion of the Southern Province of Iran.

3. Results

In the Khuzistan delta a large number of religious minorities existed at the time of the Arab invasion, including Christians; Jews and Mithraists especially in the vicinities of the cities of Shush and Jondi Shappur (5). According to Tabari Histories; the Christian priests in Shush negotiated a peace agreement with the Arab Muslims and the city of
Jondi Shappur opened its gates to the Muslim invaders through the intercession of the large community of Christians whom were residing in the city (6).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The research has focused on the reasons for the fall of the Khuzistan province and from the evidence obtained, it is possible to conclude that the fall of the Persian empire and the subsequent conquest of various regions in Persia were the result of the aforementioned factors which had essentially weakened the infrastructure of the empire and which resulted into the rapid expansion of Islam in the area. The Khuzistan province became the gateway into the central regions of Persia and the collaboration of local governors and rulers greatly aided the Arab conquerors in the retaining of order and the governing of such a vast empire. It is believed that further research in various provinces in Iran shall show similar underlying causes and will assist in the providing of a clearer picture of the Arab conquest of Persia and their method of subduing or coercing various ethnic tribes in the region.

Acknowledgements

I really appreciate and have special thanks than all my friends that helped me to do this project, I wish them the best.

References

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