

THE BATTLE OF SALUT

The tale about the Battle of Salut is from the *Kitāb al-ansāb* (The book of genealogies) the most ancient Omani historical text that mentions Salut. The author of this book is al-‘Awtabī of the Banū Ṭāḥīya, a branch of the Banū Azd, who lived in the 10th century.

al-‘Awtabī, *Kitāb al-ansāb* II, 267-271

Mālik b. Fahm al-Azdī marched on, together with the tribes of Azd and the groups of Quḍā‘ah who were with him, toward the land of Oman where they entered with the army, their tribes and the Quḍā‘ah, with numerous knights and foot soldiers. In Oman he found the Persians of the king Dārā b. Dārā b. Bahman b. Isfandiyār who were his people at the time, and the inhabitants, whose chief was al-Marzubān, governor of the king of the Persians.

Mālik b. Fahm, his following, his family members, the women and the furnishings stopped by Qalhāt on the bank of Oman. To ensure their protection, he left with them knights and foot soldiers as he continued his journey with the rest of the army, the nobles with knights and others from the Quḍā‘ah. With his son Hunāt b. Mālik at the head of two thousand trustworthy knights from his people, Mālik b. Fahm, commanding the troop and the noble foot soldiers, entered the region of al-Ġawf where he settled on the desert plain and sent a message to the Persians whose commander, at the time, was al-Marzubān, governor of Oman in the name of the king.

He sent a message asking the permission to settle in an area of Oman, therefore he asked them to lend an area where they could have water and pastures, and live together in an area of Oman. When the request by Mālik b. Fahm al-Azdī to settle in Oman and use water and pastures, reached al-Marzubān and his men, they discussed around the matter for long. Finally, with these words they agreed on sending him away because his request could not be satisfied: “We do not want that these Arabs live together with us: our land and our country are too small for us and we do not need neighbours.” When their reply reached Mālik, he told them: “I need to settle in a region of Oman and that you share with me water and pastures. If you are willing to give me a part of it, I will settle in an area of the country and I will be grateful to you. If you are not willing to accept, I will stay against your will and if you attack me, I will attack you, and if I win I will kill your troops and capture your sons and will not allow that any of you stays in Oman.”

Mālik b. Fahm, on his turn, remained in the area of Ġawf to rest together with his men and prepare for the war against the Persians, and organise everything for the fight by digging in an area of Ġawf the canal that is still known today as “Mālik’s canal”. His encampment with the cavalry and the troop remained in that area until the Persians were ready to start the war and the fight.

Then al-Marzubān ordered to sound the war horn and to beat the drum, and he marched with the army and the troops out of Ṣuḥar with a large army which, it is said, was composed of more than forty thousand men, though others say that it was around thirty thousand accompanied by elephants as well. Heading toward Ġawf to meet the Arabs he settled in the desert plain of Salut. Mālik, who had the army with him, his trustworthy and brave men and the Quḍā‘ah who were

with him, was informed and they all got on their feet. They were about six thousand, knights and foot soldiers. In the advance guard there was his son Hunāt with two thousand knights and the noblemen of the Azd with their knights. He marched until he reached the desert plain of Salut where he settled in front of the troops of al-Marzubān. They remained in this position for a day until night without fighting.

Mālik spent that night dividing his men on the right, on the left, and in the centre, organising the squadrons and arrange the knights of the Azd in their positions. He deployed two of his sons: on the right side Hunāt b. Mālik and on the left Farāhīd b. Mālik while he positioned himself in the centre with the bravest and strongest of his men.

Also al-Marzubān spent the night arranging his army, dividing the squadrons and sending messages until they were ready to fight and each of the two parts was ready.

On a dappled horse Mālik b. Fahm was splendid in the two armours, splendid between the two coats of mail under which he wore a brownish red tunic and on his head an iron helmet around which he wore, in the shape of a turban, a yellow band. Together with him rode in formation, the sons and knights of the Azd also wore armours, helmets and coats of mail so that only the eyes were visible.

When they were in line to fight, Mālik b. Fahm started to walk among his men group after group, squadron after squadron saying: "You people of al-Azd full of bravery and tenaciousness, defend the nobility and protect everything you inherited from your fathers, fight and be loyal to your king and lord, because if you will be destroyed and forced to flee, the Persians will come after you with their troops, they will seize you and will turn every stone and clump of earth looking for you and your king. Your determination and your power will decline. Prepare to fight, be tenacious and strong, what happens today will shape the future."

He started to walk among his men ordering them to be strong and careful, walking among them group after group, squadron after squadron, so that the squadrons and the troops would do their best.

al-Marzubān marched forward with his troops, with all the commanders and the elephants to the front, heading toward Mālik b. Fahm and his men. Mālik shouted to his men to charge: "You knights of the Azd come and join me in the assault, may my father and mother be of help to you against these elephants: hit them with the tip of your spears and with your swords."

He lunged forward with his men toward the elephants with spears and swords, and hit them with arrows. The elephants retreated and went back to the troops of al-Marzubān treading on many of them. Mālik b. Fahm with his men and knights of the Azd charged al-Marzubān and his men destroying the strategic deployment of troops and dominating the field; then the Persians marched on once again confronting the enemies by crossing the swords while al-Marzubān incited his men and shouted to the army ordering to resist the attack of the enemy, and they stood still.

They faced each other, the fight became confusing, the battle intensified, there was nothing to be heard but the arms clashing and the swords crossing. They fought violently the whole day, but they reciprocally resisted the attacks until the shadow of the night fell upon them. They walked away

from each other and parted. The day after they continued the fight and battled with vehemence: on the second day many Persians were killed whereas the Azd resisted until nightfall. They walked away from each other and left many dead bodies and wounded fighters on the field.

On the third day, the two armies battled one against the other and stopped under their own banners. Four noble knights each commanding a thousand men, marched until they were close to Mālik: "Come forward, we will behave honourably and fight you one by one."

Mālik approached the first who charged him with rapid movements, Mālik turned to face him with the courage of a king and the might of the Arabs: he hit the knight so hard that he annihilated him; the knight fell from his horse and Mālik raised his sword and killed him. Then the second knight came forward against Mālik and hit him, but the blow did not shake Mālik who hit the knight back right in the middle of the head and his shining sword got slightly damaged while the brain of the man was crushed, and the man fell dead. Then the third knight came forward toward him wearing an armour and a helmet. Mālik hit him on a shoulder and broke the armour in two so that the sword ended up on the saddle of the horse also breaking it in two. When the fourth knight saw what Mālik did to his three companions he was worried and, to avoid the fight, he walked backwards to turn around and go back to join his other companions. Then Mālik went back to his original position, his success bearing positive auspices. The Azd also rejoiced at his victory and prepared to fight with enthusiasm.

When al-Marzubān, the commander of the Persian army, saw what Mālik did to his three officers he grew angry and full of hatred, and walked out of the rows of his knights saying: "Without them there is nothing good in life!" Then he shouted at Mālik: "Oh Arab man, come forward! If you are trying to get hold of the reign with shrewdness, one of us will defeat whoever tries to do that. We don't want our companions to be destroyed."

Mālik moved toward him fearless and with a strong heart. They began to walk in circle for a long time in front of the two armies who were already holding the reins of horses tight, standing still to see what the two warriors were doing. After al-Marzubān charged Mālik with his sword of a brave lion, Mālik quickly swerved to the side like a fox and turned to face him with the sword, hitting him on the head protected by the helmet and the chainmail: he crushed the helmet and the head, and al-Marzubān fell dead.

The Azd attacked the Persians who charged back, they hit each other with vehemence from noon until afternoon: the companions of al-Marzubān held the sword tight while the Azd hit hard the whole day until they started to chase the defeated army to their camp, where the Azd killed and wounded a large number of soldiers.

(Translation by D. Amaldi)