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Original paper



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## **Yemen under the Sasanids. Article One. The Rule of Yaz'an**

### **Abstract.**

The conquest of Yemen by Sasanid king Khusraw I Anushirwan (531–579) resulted in South Arabia becoming a territory under the Sasanid power. Initially, a model of indirect rule involving the administration by a local ruler, a vassal of the Sasanids, was applied, as was the case in some other regions, e.g., in al-Ḥīra. That ruler was a member of the noble family of Yaz'an, who appears in the sources under the name of Sayf or Ma'dīkarib. Although he had initiated the conquest of Yemen, the Sasanid general, in compliance with Khusraw's instructions, vested him with power only after becoming sure that his enthronement would be agreed to by Yemenite aristocracy. Yaz'an ruled under a title sounding like *ḥimyarān-shāh* (King of the Ḥimyarites). Following Khusraw's example, Yaz'an made a register of South Arabian noblemen and chieftains of vassal Arabic tribes, which identified the place of each nobleman in social hierarchy. Yaz'an's relationship with other Arabic tribes was based upon agreements the contents of which varied from case to case. Yaz'an's rule lasted for about 4 years, from the beginning of 572 till the beginning of 576 when he was assassinated.

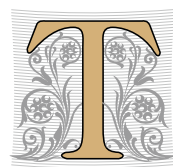
Then Khusraw, distrusting the Yaz'an family's ability to rule over Yemen, appointed an Iranian governor.

**Keywords:**

Arabs; Pre-Islamic Arabia; Sasanids; Yemen

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This work, which is a study of the history of Sasanid rule in Yemen (571/2 – 30s of VII century), should begin with some introductory remarks. On the one hand, the volume of materials requiring attention is such that the results of their study are difficult to fit into one article. Therefore, the author finds it appropriate to present the results of his research in two articles, dividing the period under study into two parts—the rule of Yaz'an, a Sasanid-subordinated representative of South Arabian nobility, and the rule of Iranian governors. This article is the first of these two studies. On the other hand, this work is a continuation of a study begun in the article *The Sasanid Conquest of Yemen*<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it makes sense here to repeat some of the conclusions and observations made in it. The Sasanid king Khosrow I Anushirvan (531– 579) conquered Yemen in the winter of 571– 572. As far as can be judged from

<sup>1</sup> *Мишин Д.Е. Сасанидское завоевание Йемена // Исторический вестник. 2025. Т. LI. С. 112–137. For brevity, this work will hereafter be referred to as *Conquest (Завоевание)*.*

the historical context, he was driven primarily by military-strategic considerations: the king sought to forever exclude the possibility of a strike against Sasanid possessions from the southwestern, interior regions of Arabia, and also to deprive his main opponent, Byzantium, of its most important ally in the south.

In Khosrow's decision to consolidate his power in Yemen, other considerations could have played a certain role. As shown in the *Conquest*, one of the initiators of the campaign was Yaz'an, a representative of the noble South Arabian Yaz'anid clan who had taken refuge with the Sasanids, and who appears under the name *Sayf*<sup>2</sup> in most sources. In one of the earliest accounts, written by Ibn Ishāq (d. in the 60s of VIII century), Sayf tells Khosrow I: "The mountains of my land are nothing but gold and silver". Ibn Ishāq then makes a significant addition: "He (Sayf. — *D.M.*) sought to arouse in him (Khosrow. — *D.M.*) the desire to possess it (i.e., his country, Yemen)"<sup>3</sup>. It is difficult to vouch for the fact that these exact words were actually spoken, but it is quite likely that Yaz'an, seeking to convince the Sasanid king of the expediency of the campaign, spoke, among other things, of the possibility of obtaining precious metal mines. As will be shown in the second article, there is evidence of the development of such mines under the Sasanids.

After defeating the Ethiopian forces, Khosrow I faced the task of establishing firm power in Yemen. First of all, it was necessary to appoint the governor. As far as can be judged, Khosrow took into account the unwillingness of Sasanid nobility to fight in Arabia with their own forces (if the accounts discussed in the *Conquest* of mutiny on ships heading to Yemen are true, it manifested itself during the campaign,

<sup>2</sup> As shown in the *Conquest*, the question of this person's proper name (Sayf or Ma'dikarib) has not been definitively resolved (*Мушин Д.Е. Сасанидское завоевание ...*, 2025. С. 114). Therefore, here, as in the *Conquest*, he will be referred to by the family name Yaz'an.

<sup>3</sup> *Sīrat al-Nabī li ...* Ibn Hishām. Ed. M.F. al-Sayyid. Tanta: Dār al-ṣaḥāba li-l-turāth bi Ṭanṭā, 1995. Pt. 1. P. 106. Cf. *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Tabari*. Ed. M.J. De Goeje. Prima series. II. Rec. J. Barth, Th. Nöldeke. Lugduni Batavorum, 1881–1882. P. 947; *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab. Ta'rif ...* al-Nuwayrī. Vol. 15. Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya, 1949. P. 310.

too<sup>4</sup>) and therefore considered it best to appoint as governor a man whose power would be accepted both by South Arabian nobility and by the leaders of Arab tribes. The intention to establish relations with these forces is evidenced by the fact that after the victory over the Ethiopians, Wahrīz ordered his warriors to destroy only them, sparing the Himyarites and Arabs<sup>5</sup>. However, if South Arabian nobility and Arab leaders accepted the establishment of Sasanid power in general (at least the sources do not report that any of them advocated for the restoration of Ethiopian rule), the question of who exactly would be governor remained open. The appointee would have to stand above the nobility and tribes, and for them he had to be worthy of such elevation. From this point of view, Yaz'an's candidacy, the main ally of the Sasanids, was not undisputed: he did not belong to the royal dynasty of Himyar and Saba rulers, and his merits in organizing the campaign did not place him first among the nobility. In favor of Yaz'an's supremacy—if the accounts of sources are true—speaks only the fact that his father, in 525, after the defeat and death of Iosaphat (Yousof) Asar Yatsar (Ywsf 's'1'r Yṭ'r of South Arabian inscriptions), the last king of the united realm of Himyar and Saba, proclaimed himself ruler and attempted to organize resistance to the Ethiopians, but lost a decisive battle at al-Sāḥūl and soon died<sup>6</sup>. In this case, Yaz'an could be con-

<sup>4</sup> *Мишин Д.Е. Сасанидское завоевание ...*, 2025. С. 127–128.

<sup>5</sup> *Annales ...*, 1881–1882. P. 955.

<sup>6</sup> *Khizānat al-adab wa lubb lubāb lisān al-ʿarab. Taʿlif ʿAbd al-Ḳādir ... al-Baghdādī*. Ed. A. Hārūn. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāndjī, 1997. Pt. 2. P. 293; *Kitāb al-iklīl li ... al-Hamdānī*. Pt. 2. Ed. M. al-Akwaʿ al-Ḥiwālī. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-sunna al-muḥammadiyya, 1966. P. 258; *Tārīkh al-ʿallāma Ibn Khaldūn*. Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-lubnānī, Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-miṣrī, 1999. Vol. 3. P. 116; *Ṭurfat al-aṣḥāb fī maʿrifat al-ansāb. Taṣnīf al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar Bin Yūsuf Bin Rasūl*. Ed. K.W. Zetterstéen. Beirut: Dar Ṣādir, 1992. P. 48. The reliability of this report is supported by the fact that the last of the cited authors not only was a scholar but also belonged to the Rasulid dynasty ruling Yemen, which gave him (or at least facilitated) access to earlier sources, including those that have not survived. It should be noted, however, that in some other accounts, after the Ethiopians' victory over Joseph As'ar Yath'ar, resistance is led by a representative of another noble South Arabian clan—the Gadan. (*Kitāb al-aghānī li-l-imām Abī-l-Faradj al-Aṣbahānī*. Ed. A. al-Shinkīṭī. Cairo, 1905. Pt. 16. P. 69; *Nashwat al-ṭarab fī tārikh djāhiliyyat al-ʿarab. Taʿlif Ibn Saʿīd al-Andalusī*. Ed. N. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Amman: Maktabat al-Aqṣā, 1982.

sidered a man who belonged to the royal dynasty and therefore stood above the other nobility. Understanding that Yaz'an's appointment might entail disputes about seniority among South Arabian nobles, and in the most unfavorable case—turmoil, Khosrow I acted very carefully. According to sources, he ordered Wahrīz to make Yaz'an ruler of Yemen only if there was agreement among the nobility on this<sup>7</sup>. As

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P. 158; al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya li Ibn Hishām li ... al-Suḥaylī. Ed. 'A. al-Wakīl. Part 1. Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-islāmiyya, 1967. P. 219). In a number of sources, Gadan is named as the last king of the united Himyarite–Sabaeen state after Joseph As'ar Yath'ar. (*Garbers* K. Eine Ergänzungen zur Sachaus Ausgabe von al-Bīrūnīs "Chronologie orientalischer Völker" // Documenta islamica inedita. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1952. S. 49; Ḥadīqat al-aḳālīm. Ta'rif ... Bilgrāmī. Lucknow, 1879. P. 9; Liber Mafātiḥ al-olūm ... auctore ... al-Khowarezmi. Ed. G. Van Vloten. Lugduni-Batavorum, 1895. P. 110; al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar li ... Abī-l-Fidā'. Ed. M.Z.M. 'Azib, Y.S. Ḥusayn, M.F. al-Waṣīf. Pt. 1. Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1998. P. 91; Nashwat ..., 1982. P. 157; al-Rawḍ ..., 1967. Pt. 1. P. 219; al-'Umda fī maḥāsin al-shi'r wa adābi-hi wa naḳdi-hi. Ta'rif ... Ibn Rashīk. Ed. M.M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd. Beirut: Dār al-djīl, 1981. Pt. 2. P. 227). These versions are not mutually exclusive: former officials of Joseph As'ar Yath'ar could have acted independently. A possible objection is that Yaz'an and Gadan are never mentioned together in the sources; each appears only in the absence of the other. However, this argument is not decisive, since we do not know the original sources, and surviving texts may derive from different local traditions.

<sup>7</sup> Among the earliest accounts of the Sasanid conquest of Yemen, this episode appears in the narratives of al-Sha'bī (*al-Sha'bī*, c. 660, died in the 720s) and Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā (*Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar Ibn al-Muthannā*, c. 728/9 r., died in 824/5 or 828/9 r.). Al-Sha'bī reports: "Then he (Wahrīz) wrote to Khosrow about the victory. Khosrow wrote back ordering him to inquire about Sayf ibn Dhī Yaz'an, saying: 'If he proves to be of the Yemeni princes, place him on his throne and depart from him; if not, cut off his head'. When the letter reached Wahrīz, he gathered the nobles (*ashbrāf*), distinguished men (*ahl an-nabāha*) and leaders (*[ahl] al-ri'āsa*) of the Qaḥṭānites (i.e., the descendants of *Qaḥṭān*, traditionally considered Southerners Arabs, whereas the Northern Arabs were the descendants of 'Adnān (Adnanites. — *D.M.*), read them the letter of Anushirvan and asked them about Saif. They informed him that he was among the descendants (*wuld*) of King Dhu Nuwas (i.e., Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar. — *D.M.*), who attacked the people of Najran and burned them in the trench (*ukhdūd*), the one whose attack on the people of Najran became the cause of the Ethiopians' invasion of their land. And Wahrīz, upon hearing this, granted Saif royal authority over Yemen, left with him the Persians who were with him in Sana'a, and departed to Khosrow. (*Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-furs wa al-'arab*. Ed. M.T. Dānishpezhūh. Tehran: Andjoman-i-āthār wa mafākhir-i-farhangī, 1996/97. P. 319. Cf. Ni-



Хосров I Ануширван (изображение на блюде).  
*From open sources*

can be seen from the reports to which references are made in notes 7 and 10, the nobility recognized Yaz'an as senior in their midst, and he received power.

Legally, Yaz'an occupied the position of a ruler subordinated to the Sasanids, similar to, for example, the Lakhmids of Hira. He was considered a governor and bore a title that should have sounded ap-

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hāyat ..., 1949. P. 310–311). Abu 'Ubayda said: "Wahrīz, upon entering Sana'a, summoned them (the supporters of Saif. — *D.M.*) and asked: 'Who among you is Saif?' They said: 'He is the son of our kings, the noblest among us, the one who avenged us'. Then he (Wahrīz. — *D.M.*) gave him (Saif. — *D.M.*) a [ceremonial] garment, clothed him in it, and granted him authority to collect taxes (*kharādj*) and to administer affairs (*'amal*)". (Kitāb al-dībādj. Ta'rif ... Abī 'Ubayda Mu'ammār Ibn al-Muthannā al-Taymī. Ed. 'A. al-Djarbū', 'A. al-'Uthaymīn. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khāndjī, 1991. P. 105–106). Similar independent reports are found in later authors as well (Kitāb al-ilmām bi-l-i'lām fī-mā djarat bi-hi al-aḥkām wa al-umūr al-maḥdiyya fī waḥ'at al-Iskandariyya li ... al-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī. Pt. 1. Ed. E. Combe, 'A.S. 'Atīyya. Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-'uthmāniyya, 1968. P. 294–295; Mulūk Ḥimyar wa akyāl al-Yaman. Ḳaṣīdat Nashwān bin Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī ... wa sharḥu-hā al-musammā Khulāṣat al-sira al-djāmi'a li 'adjā'ib akhbār al-mulūk al-tabābi'a. Ed. 'A. al-Mu'ayyad, I. al-Djarāfi. Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-salafiyya, 1974. P. 151; Nu-zhat al-djalīs fī munyat al-adīb al-anīs. Ta'rif ... al-Makkī. Najaf: al-Maktaba al-ḥaydariyya, 1967. Pt. 1. P. 418). See also footnote 10.

proximately like *ḥimyarān-shāh*, i.e., “ruler of the Himyarites”<sup>8</sup>. This title, however, was used in the Sasanid officialdom; the Arabs, as far

<sup>8</sup> The title of Yaz’an can be reconstructed on the basis that, in the list of rulers whom Ardashir (i.e., Ardashir I (240–225), the founder of the Sasanid state) endowed with the titles of shahs, Ibn Khurdādhbih (Ibn Khurdādhbih, wrote in the mid–late 9th century) includes *شاه یمان* or, according to the spelling in one of the manuscripts, *سمدار شاه* (*Kitāb al-masālik wa’l-mamālik* (Liber viarum et regionum) auctore ... Ibn Khordādhbeh et excerpta e *Kitāb al-kharādīj* auctore Kodāma ibn Dja’far. Ed. M.J. de Goeje. Lugduni-Batavorum, 1889. P. 17). The mention of Ardashir I should not be misleading: in fact, the list contains the titles that the Sasanids bestowed at different times. As for the form *شاه سمدار*, M. J. de Goeje, the editor of the work of *Ibn Khurdādhbih*, suggested—though not categorically—reading it as *سمدان*, relating it to the name of the fortress Samadān in Yemen, which is mentioned by Yāqūt. (*Mu’djam al-buldān li ... Yāqūt*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977. T. 3. P. 246). However, a more convincing explanation of this form seems to be based on parallels with Middle Persian texts. In the account of the legendary Iranian Kayanid kings in the treatise *Bundahišn* (“Primal Creation”), it is said that Kay Kāvus was deceitfully captured in the land of Samīrān (The *Būndahishn*. Ed. T. D. Anklesaria. Bombay, 1908. P. 212). In the text of the edition (a facsimile of the manuscript), the form *𐭮𐭲𐭩* appears, which evidently represents a corrupted *𐭮𐭲𐭩*. In the treatise *The Cities of Ērānshahr* (*Shabrastānīhā-ī-Ērānshahr*), a city is mentioned whose name is read as S.m.lān; further in the same passage it is reported that the legendary king Frēdōn (Farīdūn) put to death the king of S.m.rān and once again made the land of S.m.rān a possession of Iran, giving the wilderness of the Arabs to their king. (*The Pahlavi Texts*. II. Ed. J.M. Jamasp-Asana. Bombay, 1913. P. 23). In writing, the forms *𐭮𐭲𐭩* (S.m.lān) and *𐭮𐭲𐭩* (S.m.rān) are hardly distinguishable, and it can be assumed that they refer to one and the same name rather than two different ones. In the commentary on *The Cities of Ērānshahr*, this form is rightly associated with the name of Himyar (*Daryae T. Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānshahr*. A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic, and History. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2002. P. 52; *Nyberg H.S. A Manual of Pahlavi*. II. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974. P. 176) — apparently, this occurred through the reconstruction of the original spelling as *𐭮𐭲𐭩* via an intermediate, corrupted form *𐭮𐭲𐭩*. This form, evidently identical to the one we find in the *Bundahišn*, appears in Arabic script transliteration as *سمیران* (S.mīrān). On the other hand, in one of the accounts of Yazān’s arrival at Khosrow, we find an important passage: the Sasanid king asks the Lakhmid ruler whether Yazān is the king of S.m.rān, and receives an affirmative answer (*Mulūk ...*, 1974. P. 150). The form *سمران* (S.m.rān) is thus evidently an intermediate link between *ḥimyarān-shāh* and Ibn Khurdādhbih’s *سمدار*. The above allows us to assume that Yaz’an’s title sounded approximately as *ḥimyarān-shāh*, but its Middle Persian spelling was altered from *𐭮𐭲𐭩 𐭮𐭲𐭩* to *𐭮𐭲𐭩 𐭮𐭲𐭩*. It is in this form, apparently, that the title stood in the list available to Ibn Khurdādhbih’s source. Later, Arabic copyists distorted the unfamiliar forms, resulting in *سمران*, and subsequently in *سمدار*.



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*From open sources*

as can be judged from a verse by a contemporary of the events, the poet Umayya Ibn Abī-l-Ṣalt, called Yaz'an a "king" (*malik*)<sup>9</sup>. The sign of Yaz'an's power was a tiara received from the Sasanid king, his residence was Ghumdān, the palace of Sabean kings<sup>10</sup>. At the same time,

<sup>9</sup> "When they (the camels. — D.M.) reach Sana'a, they will find themselves in the capital, the dwelling of ancient glory. | [We proceed] to a king with an open and cheerful face, who has showered us with gifts" (Dīwān Umayya Ibn Abī-l-Ṣalt. Ed. 'A. al-Siṭlī. Damascus: al-Maṭba'a al-ta'āwuniyya, 1974. P. 426).

<sup>10</sup> This is also evident in a verse by Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt, in which there are words addressed to Yaz'an (in the text: Ibn Dhī Yazān): "So drink — while you wear the tiara (*tādġ*) — what is beneficial and auspicious for you — and at the summit of Ghumdān there is a dwelling (*dār*) in which you often reside" (Dīwān ..., 1974. P. 458). In the accounts of how Wahrīz, on Khosrow's orders, questioned the Yemeni nobility about Yaz'an, the tiara repeatedly appears, which the Sasanid king had given to his commander before the campaign, for the possible later enthronement of Yaz'an. For example: "... Khosrow gave Wahrīz a tiara (*tādġ*), a robe, and a belt, and ordered him: 'When you reach Yemen, ask its inhabitants about this man (Saif. — D.M.), and if he is among the kings, transfer authority to him, place the tiara, robe, and belt upon him; but if he is not among the kings, send me his head and govern the land until my command reaches you'" (Mulūk ..., 1974. P. 151). In another account, Khosrow says to Wahrīz: "When you reach Yemen and defeat these people, gather its inhabitants and ask them about Saif ibn Dhī Yazān. And if he is among the princes, as he claimed and asserted, crown him with this tiara (*tādġ*) — and

Yaz'an was completely subordinate to the Sasanid king. According to Wahb Ibn Munabbih (d. in 728/9 or 732/3), "Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an was a ruler from Khosrow, corresponded with him and in matters acted as he considered necessary"<sup>11</sup>. This report is well supplemented by the words cited by al-Ṭabarī (838/39 – 923) from Ibn Ishāq: "Khosrow imposed annual tributes on Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an, which he was supposed to pay to him each year<sup>12</sup> in a certain amount"<sup>13</sup>. According to yet another account, at some point, Khosrow summoned Yaz'an and made clear to him what he should not do<sup>14</sup>. It is possible that Yaz'an, like the Lakhmids, was supposed to periodically, at a certain time of year, travel to the Sasanid king<sup>15</sup>.

The previous paragraph concerns the arrangement of central authority. Much less is known about the state of affairs locally, and the

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he (Khosrow. — *D.M.*) gave him a tiara and two bracelets — and install him as king over his people" (Kitāb al-‘ilmām ..., 1968. P. 294). As for Ghumdān, it is highly significant that one source, citing Ibn Ishāq (d. 760s), states that "his royal residence (*mulk*) (of Saif ibn Dhī Yazān and his father. — *D.M.*) was Ghumdān; to him came the rulers (*maqāwil*) and nobles (*ashraf*), and there the visitors and guests gathered around him" (al-Fāsil bayna al-ḥaqq wa al-bāṭil min mafākhir abnā' Qaḥṭān wa al-Yaman, ed. M. 'A. Džāzim, M. 'Arbash. Sana'a: 2009, p. 53; cf. al-Mukhtaṣar ..., 1998, p. 91; Tārīkh ..., vol. 3, P. 123). Ibn Khordādbēh also states that Saif ibn Dhī Yazān lived in Ghumdān, adducing as evidence the words of Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt cited above (Kitāb al-masālik ..., 1889, Arabic text. P. 136). As will be shown below, in Ghumdān Yaz'an received a delegation of Arab tribes, including the Quraysh. One of al-Yaqūt's sources stated that Ghumdān belonged to the family of Dhū Yazān (Mu'jam ..., 1977, vol. 4, P. 153). It is likely that this family settled in Ghumdān precisely during Yaz'an's reign.

<sup>11</sup> Kitāb al-tīdjān fī mulūk Ḥimyar. Sana: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa al-abḥāth al-yamaniyya, 1979. P. 317.

<sup>12</sup> These concepts are rendered in the text using the Muslim terms *djizya* and *khardj* (sic. in the source), respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Annales ..., 1881–1882. P. 949–950.

<sup>14</sup> "News reached Khosrow that Saif was taking women for himself, and he wrote to him ordering him to come. And he (Saif. — *D.M.*) did so. Khosrow said: 'Do you take pleasure in sitting with children in the harem?' He (Saif. — *D.M.*) understood [what was meant] and said: 'I will not return [there]'. Then he (Khosrow. — *D.M.*) said: 'Return to your domains.' And he (Saif. — *D.M.*) returned" (Kitāb al-dībādj, 1991. P. 106).

<sup>15</sup> On this rule for the Lakhmids, see Мишин Д.Е. История государства Лакмидов. М.: ООО «Садра», 2017. С. 272–273.



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available information amounts mainly to Hisham al-Kalbī's (b. c. 738, d. in 819/20 or 821/22) words that Wahrīz appointed governors over Yemen provinces during the conquest<sup>16</sup>. As will be shown below, South Arabian noble families retained power in the provinces they ruled; consequently, it can be assumed that the people appointed by Wahrīz were commanders of Sasanid garrisons, placed in the most strategically important points.

After placing Yaz'an on the throne, Wahrīz left Sasanid troops with him under a military commander and returned to Khosrow<sup>17</sup>. There is little information about Yaz'an's subsequent rule, but it allows us to imagine at least the main directions of his actions. According to Ibn Ishāq, Yaz'an pursued the remaining Ethiopians in Yemen, acting very cruelly in the process, and ultimately killed many of them, making the rest his servants<sup>18</sup>.

Yaz'an's establishment of power as king (albeit subordinate to the Sasanids) meant his supremacy over Yemenite nobility. Memories of this are reflected, it seems, in one verse preserved by a Muslim author

<sup>16</sup> Annales ..., 1881–1882. P. 956.

<sup>17</sup> The most detailed account of this is found in Ibn Khaldun (*Ibn Khaldūn*, 1332–1406) (*Tārīkh* ..., 1999. Vol. 3. P. 123).

<sup>18</sup> Annales ..., 1881–1882. P. 956; Cf. *Nihāyat* ..., 1996/97. P. 319.

from the first half-middle of the 10th century, al-Hamdānī, in which Yaz'an is called *ḳayl al-maḳāwil*, i.e., "prince of princes"<sup>19</sup>. Very little is known about relations between Yaz'an and the nobility, but two significant pieces of information have come down to us, which allow us to understand the development of events at least in general terms. According to a recently published treatise by an unknown author, *Division of Truth and Falsehood Regarding Objects of Pride of the Qaḥṭānites and Yemenites*, Sayf struggled with the noble clan of Dhu Manākh, which is characterized as second in social standing after the royal one; it is reported that members of this clan were uncles of the kings of the united realm of Himyar and Saba (tabābi'a) on the paternal line<sup>20</sup>. It is difficult to verify how accurate this is, as little is known about the dhu Manākh clan as a whole: mentions of it are not found in South Arabian inscriptions, and it is encountered rather rarely in the lists of the eight most noble clans of pre-Islamic South Arabia (*mathāmina*) by Muslim authors. In the *Division* we further read that Sayf won and established himself in power<sup>21</sup>. These words should not be understood as indicating a military victory of Yaz'an over the rebellious clan and its elimination from the historical stage: the sources mention a certain Nābit Ibn al-Rayyān, who conducted affairs related to the conclusion of a peace treaty between Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an and the clan of dhu Manākh<sup>22</sup>. An indirect indication that the conflict ended with the achievement of agreement is found in the text of the *Division*, too, which asserts that these events relate to a verse of the poet of the late pre-Islamic period Maymūn the Weak-Visioned (al-A'shā Maymūn): "And if the Himyarites set their affairs straight and arrange how to give water to their children together..."<sup>23</sup> Comparing the information presented, we can conclude that the leaders of the dhu Manākh clan capitulated and recognized Yaz'an's supremacy; nothing is known about other terms of these agreements.

<sup>19</sup> *al-Hamdānī*. Al-Iklīl. Erstes Buch. Hrsg. O. Löfgren. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB. Heft 2, 1965. S. 80.

<sup>20</sup> al-Fāṣil ..., 2009. P. 192.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Kitāb al-iklīl ..., 1966. P. 163.

<sup>23</sup> al-Fāṣil ..., 2009. P. 192. The verse see in: Gedichte von Abū Baṣīr Maimūn Ibn Qais al-'Aṣā. Hrsg. R. Geyer. London: Luzac & Co., 1928. S. 54.



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Another piece of information is contained in the Persian translation of al-Ṭabarī's history made by Bal'amī (d. in 974), and consists in the fact that Yaz'an created for the Himyarites and Arabs a *dīwān*, i.e., a register, and appointed governors to all cities from the people indicated in it<sup>24</sup>. It seems that Yaz'an followed the example, and probably also the instruction, of Khosrow Anushirvan, who had established a similar register for Sasanid nobility. Such a register made it possible to organize troop recruitment, and also to determine for each magnate his place among the nobility, which Khosrow needed after the defeat of the Mazdakites, and Yaz'an—after creating a state, at the head of which, albeit subordinate to the Sasanids, he now was.

Strictly speaking, we cannot say how these pieces of information relate to each other: the leaders of the dhu Manākh clan might not have been satisfied with either Yaz'an's very reign or the place allotted to them in the register. However, the general meaning of events can be understood: Yaz'an, with Sasanid forces behind him, forced Yemenite noble clans to recognize his supremacy and established order in relations between them, allotting each its place.

<sup>24</sup> Tārīkh-nāmeḥ-i-Ṭabarī. Gardānīdeh-i-mansūb be Bal'amī. Ed. M. Rowshan. Tehran: Soroush, 1995. P. 732.

Yaz'an's relations with Arab tribes were ambiguous; everything depended on the balance of forces in given circumstances. Some tribal leaders recognized Yaz'an's supreme power over them; they were probably the ones who entered the register mentioned above. Others came to some agreement with the new ruler. According to an account common in Muslim sources, after Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an's victory, the Arabs began to send him embassies; then follows a detailed mention of a Qurayshite embassy mission, which Sayf received in Ghumdan<sup>25</sup>. In some cases, military alliances were reached. According to sources, there is a known case when the leaders of the Banū Khawlān tribe, on the advice of a man named 'Alqama Ibn Zayd, about whom it is reported that he had traveled to the rulers of Yemen and Syria, turned to Yaz'an for help against the Banū Hawāzin and Banū Sulaym tribes. Yaz'an sent four princes (*aḳwāl*) to the lands of Banū Khawlān to help them, but the reports of this are very brief and do not allow us to say how the campaign ended<sup>26</sup>.

According to the unanimous opinion of medieval Muslim authors, Yaz'an was killed by Ethiopian captives whom he had made his bodyguards<sup>27</sup>. As for what happened next, the available information is am-

<sup>25</sup> al-Ansāb li ... al-ʿAwtabī al-Ṣuḥārī. Ed. M. Iḥsān al-naṣṣ. Muscat: Wizārat al-turāth al-ḳawmī wa al-thaḳāfa, 2006. P. 251–254 (with attribution to Hishām al-Kalbī and Ibn ʿAbbās, a participant in the Arab conquests of the first half of the 7th century and a scholar); Dalāʿil al-nubuwwa wa maʿrifat aḥwāl ṣāhib al-sharīʿa li Abī Bakr ... al-Bayhaḳī. Ed. ʿA. al-Ḳalādī. Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīyya, 1988. Vol. 2. P. 9–13; Dalāʿil al-nubuwwa li ... Abī Nuʿaym al-Aṣbahānī. Ed. M.R. Ḳalʿatdī, ʿA. ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār al-nafāʿis, 1986. P. 95–99; al-Fāṣil ..., 2009. P. 53–55; Kitāb al-aghānī ..., 1905. Pt. 16. P. 72–74; Kitāb al-ʿiḳd al-farīd. Taʿlīf ... Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi al-Andalusī. Pt. 2. Ed. A. Amīn, A. al-Zayn, I. al-Abyārī. Cairo: Ladīnat al-taʿlīf wa-l-tardjama wa-l-nashr, 1956. P. 23–27; *al-Masʿūdī*. Murūdj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-djawhar. Ed. Ch. Pellat. Beirut: al-Djāmiʿa al-lubnāniyya. Pt. 2, 1966. P. 206–208; Mulūk ..., 1974. P. 152–155; Nihāyat ..., 1996/7. P. 320–322.

<sup>26</sup> *al-Hamdānī*, 1965. S. 133; Kitāb al-ikhlāl ..., 1966. P. 118.

<sup>27</sup> Annales ..., 1881–1882. P. 957; Kitāb al-aghānī ..., 1905. Pt. 16. P. 72; Kitāb tāriḳh sunī mulūk al-arḍ wa al-anbiyāʾ. Taʿlīf Ḥamza ... al-Aṣfahānī. Berlin: Kaviani GmbH, 1921/22. P. 90; Le livre de la création et de l'histoire de Motahhar ben Ṭāhir el-Maqdisī attribué à Abou-Zéid Aḥmed ben Sahl el-Balkhī. Pub. et tr. Cl. Huart. T. III. Paris, 1903. P. 195; al-Maʿārif li Ibn Ḳutayba. Ed. Th. ʿUkāsha. Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1981. P. 638; *al-Masʿūdī*. Murūdj ..., 1966. P. 208; Nihāyat ..., 1996/97. P. 323; Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān li ... Ibn Khallikān. Ed. I. ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977. Vol. 6. P. 36.



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biguous. According to a recently published commentary to al-Hamdānī's *Ḳaṣīda, Resembling a Piercing Blow That Strikes the Head and Reaches the Brain (al-ḳaṣīda al-dāmigha)*, composed, in the editor's opinion, by his son (but with his participation), Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an was succeeded on the throne by his brother Shuraḥbīl, who ruled for 3 years<sup>28</sup>. This man is never mentioned elsewhere as a ruler of Yemen; in all sources that have come down to us, Yemen was under the control of Iranian governors<sup>29</sup>. According to Ibn Ishāq, after the death of Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an, a certain Ethiopian launched a rebellion, to suppress which Khosrow I sent Wahrīz<sup>30</sup>. Al-Mas'ūdī narrates these events in somewhat more detail; according to him, after the death of Ma'dikārib, the commander of the Sasanid forces whom Wahrīz had left with him suppressed the uprising of Ethiopians and informed Wahrīz of this by written report. Wahrīz informed Khosrow of what had occurred, and the latter sent him to Yemen again, ordering him

<sup>28</sup> *Kitāb al-Dāmigha ḳaṣīdat ... al-Hamdānī bi tafsīri-hā wa ma'ānī-hā. Ta'līf ... al-Hamdānī. Ed. M.ʿA. al-Aḥmadī. Sana: Madjma' al-Arabiyya al-sa'īda, 2023. P. 594. In another work, al-Hamdānī mentions Sharāḥīl, Saif's younger brother, who ascended to power after him. (Kitāb al-iklīl ..., 1966. P. 256, 258). The similarity in pronunciation and spelling of both names suggests that they may refer to one and the same person.*

<sup>29</sup> On this, see Article 2 of the present research.

<sup>30</sup> *Annales ...*, 1881–1882. P. 957.

to exterminate all Ethiopians there<sup>31</sup>. Wahb Ibn Munabbih reports that “authority (*amr*) spread among the Yemenites, and they did not set one man over themselves as king, but in each province they set over themselves a man from the Himyarites; they (the provincial rulers in question. — *D.M.*) were like provincial kings, and this continued until Allah brought Islam”<sup>32</sup>. In Wahb’s words, the mention of “provincial kings”, which he calls *mulūk al-ṭawāʿif*, is remarkable. The concept of *mulūk al-ṭawāʿif* in early Muslim sources usually denotes the rulers of individual provinces of the former Achaemenid state, who had held power during the period from its defeat by Alexander the Great to the beginning of Sasanid rule (so one can assume that it represents a translation of Middle Persian *kadagxwadāyān*). For medieval Muslim authors, the era of *mulūk al-ṭawāʿif* is considered a time of weakness of kings (Arsacids) and the omnipotence of local rulers<sup>33</sup>. Since the authors of surviving works reproduced the ideas of their predecessors, including Wahb Ibn Munabbih, the words about “provincial kings” mean that local rulers (probably, first of all—those who belonged to the highest nobility) entrenched themselves in their possessions and became, in fact, independent. Probably, disputes remaining from the past broke out anew among the “provincial kings”. Al-Hamdānī quotes a verse by an unnamed poet from the Banū Khawlān, beginning with the words “the stars of the princes of Himyar (*maḳāwil ḥimyar*) have become dim, their sun and moon have been covered with shadow”; two lines later: “the son of Dhu Yaz’an departed [into oblivion] and left among them the war that had begun before, the flame of which does not go out”<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> *al-Masʿūdī*. Murūdj ..., 1966. P. 210.

<sup>32</sup> Kitāb al-tīdjān ..., 1979. P. 317. Cp. al-Maʿārif ..., 1981. P. 639.

<sup>33</sup> A discussion of the Arsacid period in Iranian history lies beyond the scope of the present study. However, as an illustration of the point made above, it is worth citing the words of Bīrūnī (d. after 1050), according to whom the Arsacids “were the worthiest among the petty kings (*mulūk al-ṭawāʿif*), while the others among them (the petty kings. — *D.M.*) did not obey them (the Arsacids. — *D.M.*), but only honoured them, because they (the Arsacids. — *D.M.*) belonged to the royal house of the Persians” (Chronologie orientalischer Völker von Albērūnī. Hrsg. E. Sachau. Leipzig, 1878. S. 113).

<sup>34</sup> Kitāb al-iklīl ..., 1966. P. 273.

Comparing these indications, we get the following picture. Yaz'an's murder sparked an uprising of Ethiopians, which, being suppressed in Sana by a Sasanid garrison, continued in other areas of Yemen. Shuraḥbīl (Sharahil) was apparently the most influential in the Yaz'anid clan and could count on appointment as governor, but did not receive it. South Arabian magnates entrenched themselves in their possessions (the Ethiopian uprising could have threatened them or at least some of them) and did not recognize Shuraḥbīl's (Sharahil's) supremacy, as they did not take an oath of loyalty to him. Without the support of the nobility, Shuraḥbīl (Sharahil) could only rely on the forces of the Yaz'anids, which, however, were insufficient to overcome the Ethiopians and extend his power over all of Yemen.

According to the sources, Wahrīz, arriving in Yemen with a four-thousand-man force, waged a fierce struggle against the Ethiopians, ruthlessly exterminating them. After slaughtering the remaining Ethiopians, he notified Khosrow I of the victory, and the latter appointed him governor<sup>35</sup>.

To reconstruct the sequence of events established above, one must determine their chronology. As a starting point, one can take al-Mas'ūdī's indication that Ma'dikārib held power for 4 years<sup>36</sup>. Ibn Khallikān gives the same length of reign (but of Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an)<sup>37</sup>, 1211–1282, unfortunately without reference to the source<sup>38</sup>. Less plausible seems the opinion of al-Sha'bī, according to which Sayf Ibn Dhi Yaz'an's reign lasted 7 years<sup>39</sup>. If one accepts this dating, Yaz'an's murder must have taken place in 579. However, then the question arises: could Khosrow I, who died in the spring of 579, have sent troops again to conquer Yemen at that time? For the same reason, it is impossible to accept the claim found in some sources of 20 years of Sayf's reign<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Thus according to the most detailed account transmitted in the sources on the authority of Ibn Ishāq. (Annales ..., 1881–1882. P. 957–958; Tārikh ..., 1999. Vol. 3. P. 124). Cf. *al-Mas'ūdī*. Murūdij ..., 1966. P. 210; Nihāyat ..., 1996/97. P. 323 (with reference to al-Sha'bi).

<sup>36</sup> *al-Mas'ūdī*. Murūdij ..., 1966. P. 208.

<sup>37</sup> In both cases, the reference is to Yaz'an. (see footnote 2).

<sup>38</sup> Wafayāt ..., 1977. Vol. 6. P. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Nihāyat ..., 1996/97. P. 323, 324.

<sup>40</sup> Kitāb al-Dāmigha ..., 2023. P. 594. Cp. Ṭurfāt ..., 1992. P. 48.

If we assume that Yaz'an held power for four years starting from the time of the conquest, i.e., from the winter of 571–572, his rule should have ended by the spring of 576. Al-Mas'ūdī also reports that the commander of the Sasanid garrison, after suppressing the Ethiopian uprising, sent a report about this to Wahrīz, who received it while at the court of Khosrow I in Ctesiphon<sup>41</sup>, the Sasanids' winter capital. The most precise data on when exactly the Sasanids resided there are found in the Chinese *History of the Northern Wei*. According to conversions of the data from this source to our calendar, the Sasanid king left Ctesiphon in April–May<sup>42</sup> or in the fourth month of the Chinese year, i.e., in May–June<sup>43</sup>, and returned in November<sup>44</sup> or November–December<sup>45</sup>. Based on the data presented above, the news of Yaz'an's death reached Ctesiphon no later than May, i.e., if we adhere to the calculation presented above, in May 576.

This intermediate conclusion should be compared with al-Mas'ūdī's statement that Wahrīz defeated the Ethiopians and killed their king Masrūq after 45 years of Khosrow I Anushirvān's reign<sup>46</sup>. In such indications, the term is usually calculated from the time of the king's actual accession to power<sup>47</sup>. Khosrow I's reign had begun in September 531; 45 years therefore expired in September 576. One

<sup>41</sup> *al-Mas'ūdī*. Murūdj ..., 1966. P. 210.

<sup>42</sup> Hori K. A Chinese Account of Persia in the Sixth Century // Spiegel Memorial Volume. Bombay, 1908. P. 248.

<sup>43</sup> Daffinà P. La Persia sassanide secondo le fonti cinesi // Rivista degli studi orientali. Vol. 57 (1983). P. 156.

<sup>44</sup> Hori K. A Chinese Account ..., 1908. P. 248.

<sup>45</sup> Daffinà P. La Persia..., 1983. P. 156. François Thierry's new translation was, unfortunately, not accessible to the author of this article. According to another translation, in the fourth month of the Chinese year the king did not depart, but returned to the capital. (*Tashakkurī* 'A. Īrān be riwāyat-i-Chīn-i-bāstān. S.l.: Mu'assasa-i-rawābit-i-baynalmilālī, 1977/78. P. 123). In this case, however, it would follow that the king came to Ctesiphon for the summer, which contradicts the available information about the Sasanids. It is known that the Sasanids stayed in Ctesiphon from late autumn to early spring, and during the hot season they moved to the northern regions of their realm. (Мишин Д.Е. Хосров I Ануширван (531–579), его эпоха и его жизнеописание и поучение в истории Мискавейха. М.: ИВ РАН, 2014. С. 73).

<sup>46</sup> *al-Mas'ūdī*. Murūdj ..., 1966. P. 204–205.

<sup>47</sup> Мишин Д.Е., Хосров I Ануширван ..., 2014. С. 39.

cannot entirely exclude the possibility that it refers to the end of the forty-fifth year of Khosrow's reign as reckoned by the Sasanid calendar; that fell in July 576.

It is impossible not to notice that in both cases we arrive, albeit by different paths, at the year 576. This can hardly be a coincidence; on the contrary, the events form a coherent chronological chain:

– the first months of 576 – the murder of Yaz'an, the Ethiopian uprising;

– by May 576 – delivery of the news of Yaz'an's murder to Ctesiphon;

– after September (or, less likely, July) 576 – Wahrīz's campaign to Yemen against the Ethiopians.

Based on the above, we can assume that al-Mas'ūdī's words about Wahrīz's campaign against the Ethiopians after 45 years of Khosrow I's reign refer not to the initial conquest of Yemen (when the Ethiopian ruler called Masrūq in Muslim sources perished), but to the commander's actions to suppress the uprising that followed the murder of Yaz'an. When exactly Wahrīz made his second campaign to Yemen is difficult to say (a certain amount of time must have been taken up by gathering troops, preparations, etc.). If we assume that this happened after September 576, the hypothesis suggests itself that this campaign, like the first one in 571–572, took place in winter (i.e., in the winter of 576–577), and the fleet transporting the troops used the monsoons favorable for voyages to Arabia. In this case, we must assume that sending troops to Yemen was not an urgent matter. This is best explained by the fact that the Sasanid governor of Ṣan'a', having suppressed the uprising there, retained control over part of the lands of Yemen, although he was unable to destroy the centers of resistance locally; this became Wahrīz's task.

Also noteworthy is the political decision of Khosrow I, who did not appoint any of the Yaz'ans as governor (the aforementioned Shurahbīl (Sharāḥīl) appears in sources only as a ruler, but not as a Sasanid governor). Apparently, the Sasanid king, following events through the reports reaching him, became disillusioned with the Yaz'ans, who had proven incapable of dealing with the Ethiopian uprising, the omnipotence of the local nobility, and of preventing the assassination of the governor. The sources do not say whether Khosrow considered trans-

ferring power to some other Yemeni clan; if one takes the historical context into account, it is difficult to imagine what might have convinced the Sasanid king that any particular clan would manage the governance of Yemen better than the Yaz'ans. A new stage began in the history of Yemen – the period of its being under the authority of Iranian governors. This is intended to be examined in the second article of this study.

### Conflict of interests

The author declare no relevant conflict of interests.



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