



## The Arab King who made the Biggest Mistake in History

# King Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan

## who expelled the Abyssinians and brought Persians to Yemen

Historical views about the personality of the Arab King Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan (born: 516 – died: 574 CE) varied, upon whom tales and legends that exaggerated his description and powers were created. In general, he sought liberty from Abyssinians in Yemen during the second half of the 6th century. During that period, Yemen was languishing under the rule of Abyssinians, who tried to invade Mecca led by Abraha al-Habashi before the advent of Islam.

Some historical stories, including Ibn Kathir's (Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya) book, say that Abd al-Muttalib Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) grandfather lived in the era of Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan and visited him in his palace in Sana'a. The visit occurred when Abd al-Muttalib, one of Quraysh's leaders, was on a trade journey to Yemen and the Levant.

Many historians depict Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan as the liberator of the land of Yemen from the Abyssinians, as he used the Persians to help him expel them. Thus, he uprooted the reign of Abyssinians and placed Persians in the heart of Yemen. In his book "Abyssal Invasion of Yemen", the Iraqi writer Abdul Rafi Jassim comments that the occupation of Yemen by the Abyssinians was an order of the Byzantine Empire in response to the acts of the Yemeni King Dhu Nuwas, who persecuted Christians there. Thus, the Abyssinian raid was an act of revenge against King Dhu Nuwas, stemming from Christian rigorism.

History, though, does not embrace a unilateral vision of the triggers of the events. Even when King Dhu Nuwas persecuted the Christians, who were under the protection of the Byzantine Empire through the Abyssinians, the important real reasons behind the Abyssal occupation and Byzantine support were to take control of the sea lanes and trade routes in the old world. Since Yemen was a major trade lane through which the incense trade route passed, making the Abyssinians and Byzantines made a fortune by occupying it.

In the light of the deliberation and repetition of historical events from the dawn of history to the present day, the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen were strategic targets for both the ancient and modern world empires, as attempts to intrude on Yemen were constant. In the old days, the Abyssal-Byzantine invasion and occupation occurred, followed by the Persian invasion a few years later during the period of Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan, who sought help from the Persians against the Abyssinians and Byzantines, and the Persians set a Persian ruler behind the scene as if history is repeating itself and stories are recurring over time.

The Egyptian writer Mohamed Bayomi Mahran asserts in his book "Abyssal Occupation of Yemen" that historians provided several reasons for the Abyssal invasion, including the desire to dominate Yemen to ensure a fair distribution of abyssal goods, avoiding attacks from Homeritaes. In addition, the old Abyssinian hostility toward ancient Arabs arose because Yemeni Arabs used to abduct Abyssinians from the coasts of Habasha and sell them as slaves in the Arab countries; as Abyssinians were found in Hejaz, as well as the provocative act by the southern Arab countries towards the Abyssinians at that time.

The strategic goals remain the major cause of the conflict. Perhaps the importance of Bab al-Mandab Strait was the main trigger. During the period of the Eastern Roman Empire, Yemen's status had been given to Egypt and various other Eastern Romanian states, which could benefit from its geographical location, especially since Christians had settled in many of the Eastern Romanian states. Hence, Romans began to consider exploiting the religious factor to merge the Southern Arab countries into their empire. Therefore, they sent missionaries to spread Christianity among the Arab urban and desert areas in Yemen, and to predispose the Yemenis to accept the Roman domination. On the other hand, Dhu Nuwas's torture of Christians in Najran was not the real cause of the Abyssal invasion of Yemen. The Greek and even Abyssal sources provide the proof as they reported that the Abyssinians raided Yemen years before the incident of Christians torture, and they had triumphed over Dhu Nuwas and compelled him to hide in the mountains. However, after that Dhu Nuwas succeeded in recruiting his army, then attacked the Abyssinians and regained victory. After that, he raided Najran and took his revenge against them. Moreover, the interference of the Abyssinians in Yemen's affairs and their attempts to invade it began in the 4th century AD.

During the Abyssal occupation era, Yemen's situation was poor, as Abraha al-Habashi and his successors imposed repressive policies on Yemen that led to widespread poverty and social degradation. Consequently, the people of Yemen suffered after the change of the sea lanes and the possession of money and fiefdoms by the Abyssinians. This situation created the opportunity for revolutions that were ignited one after the other until the historical moment came by the mistake made by Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan when he brought the Persians to his land.

Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan attempted to get rid of the Abyssinians' occupation of his country. First, he went to al-Hirah and Byzantine to seek their help, but he failed to persuade them to support him. Besides, how would Byzantines, the allies of the Abyssinians, support him. Then he sought help from the Persians, particularly because they were the parallel force to Byzantine in the East. Khosrow who was reluctant for a while said to Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan "Your country is far off our country, its resources are scarce, and the road to it is rough, so I am not going to sacrifice my army for this cause". Ultimately, Khosrow consulted his ministers and approved to help Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan, as Mohamed Bayomi Mahran mentioned in his book. His consent was perhaps in pursuit of the Persians' dream of controlling the Red Sea trade route, as well as eliminating the Byzantine political, economic, and religious domination in Yemen.

Khosrow insisted that the raid on Yemen should be by an army made of prisoners of Persia, under the command of the Persian commander "Wahrez". Provided that Persians may marry Yemeni women, while Yemenis may not marry Persian women. In addition, he imposed an annual tax collected and sent by Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan. Thus, Persia found, by requesting the support of Arab Jews and their pagans against the Christian empire, a means to expand its control in the Arab countries.

Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan knew the consequences; therefore, he prepared an army to fight the Abyssinian leader Masruq ibn Abraha, who led an army that consisted of one thousand soldiers. Once Sayf arrived with the Persians, many Yemenis who were exasperated by the Abyssal occupation joined his army. However, back then, they did not know that they had replaced the occupation with another occupation behind the scene. Persians always seek to spread their influence through their allies, as the situation in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon today.

The Abyssinian leader "Masruq" along with his one thousand-soldier army, Himyarite, and Nomads allies fought against Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan and his army that consisted of Persians and Yemenis. However, the great battle ended with the defeat of the Abyssinian army and its allies and the death of Masruq. Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan and his ally commander "Wahrez" entered Sana'a hailing their victory. In fact, this was a half-won commander as the Persians later proved that when Persians entered Yemen, they intended to get out of it only with red hands.

Yemenis succeeded in liberating their country from the Abyssal occupation and apparently persuaded the Persians to establish national governance that condemned their subordination. Around 575 CE, Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan became the king of Yemen. Historians assert that his reign did not cover all areas of Yemen, but Persian leaders ruled it since 598 CE. Hence, Yemenis replaced and occupation with another.

Yemen's economic and social conditions deteriorated under the Abyssinians' rule. People revolted against them until King Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan ascended the throne

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