

Khalifa Uthman bin Affan - Muslim Conquest of North Africa

Sequel to the battle of Subetula

After the battle of Subetula the people of North Africa sued for peace. They agreed to pay an annual tribute. Instead of annexing North Africa, the Muslims preferred to make North Africa a vassal state. When the stipulated amount of the tribute was paid, the Muslim forces withdrew to Barqa.

True to the declaration, Sabiyya the beautiful daughter of Gregory was awarded to Abdullah b Zubair. In this battle immense booty fell into the hands of the Muslims. When the booty was distributed according to the prescribed formula, the share of each warrior came to as much as 3,000 diners.

Uthman had declared at the outset of the campaign that if Abdullah b Sa'ad succeeded- in his mission he would be given one fifth of the booty out of the State share. Abdullah b Sa'ad kept one fifth of the State share of the booty for himself, and sent the rest to Madina through Marwan b Al Hakam.

When the news of the victory of Subetula reached Madina, the Muslims rejoiced and Uthman led a prayer of thanksgiving. When Marwan b Al Hakam reached Madina with the booty, he prevailed upon Uthman to sell the entire booty to him for five lakh dinars. Uthman was in a generous mood, and he conceded to the request of Marwan. According to some accounts even the amount of five lakh diners was paid by Uthman out of his own pocket.

The people felt bitter at the disposal of the booty in this way. The people were also critical of the award of one fifth of the State share of the booty to Abdullah b Sa'ad. A delegation from Egypt came to Madina to see the Caliph. They complained against the misappropriation of the booty by Abdullah b Sa'ad. Uthman said that there was no misappropriation as he had himself announced that in case Abdullah b Sa'ad was victorious he would get one fifth out of the state share as his reward. The delegation said that even if it was so, there was no justification for such a high reward to Abdullah b Sa'ad. The battle was won through the feat of Abdullah b Zubair, and there was nothing conspicuous about the services of Abdullah b Sa'ad.

Uthman said that if the people of Egypt felt dissatisfied at the grant of the reward, he could ask Abdullah b Sa'ad to return it. The delegation said that the people of Egypt were very bitter at the grant of the reward. Thereupon Uthman wrote to Abdullah b Sa'ad that the share of the booty kept by him should be distributed by him among the poor in Egypt.

The delegation demanded that as they had complained against Abdullah b Sa'ad, he was prone to be vindictive, and as such he should be deposed. Uthman said that as Abdullah b Sa'ad was not to be blamed for anything, there was no justification for his deposition. He, however, wrote to Abdullah b Sa'ad that he should not take any action against the members of the delegation for having made a complaint against him.

Unfortunately the account that has reached us is distorted and confused. Extensive conquests had been made under Abdullah b Saad and immense booty had fallen to the share of each person. Abdullah b Saad who had the Muslims to victory must have been very popular with the soldiers, and it is difficult to believe that immediately in the wake of the victory, the soldiers should be dissatisfied against their commander who had led them to victory and send a delegation to Madina to complain against him. Again it is unbelievable that the Head of the State should promise a reward for a certain achievement, and rescind the order when the achievement is made, merely because certain person chooses to represent against such reward. Obviously these stories have been concocted because of partisan considerations merely to condemn the administration of Uthman on one pretext or the other.

[View Page](#)

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