Kharijite Da'wa Between the Islamic East and West: Factors of Transmission and Conditions of Success

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Received: 19/07/2025 ; Accepted:01/04/2026 ; Published: 10/05/2026

Abstract

This article investigates the Kharijite da'wa (call and propagation) between the Islamic East (Mashriq) and the Islamic West (Maghrib), examining the factors that drove its transmission and the conditions that enabled its success. The study traces the emergence of early sectarian formations within the first Islamic state, centering on the Kharijite movement — its origins, principal factions, shared doctrinal commitments, and defining theological tenets. It then examines the circumstances that confronted the Kharijites in the Islamic East under the Umayyad Caliphate and the sustained persecution to which they were subjected, arguing that this repression constituted the primary catalyst behind their strategic relocation. Driven westward, the Kharijites abandoned direct military confrontation in favor of clandestine preaching (daʿwa) and political organization in regions beyond the immediate reach of Umayyad authority — a deliberate pivot that enabled them to exploit the volatile conditions prevailing in the Islamic West under Umayyad governance. The article concludes with a critical assessment of competing historiographical positions: those that seek to exonerate the Umayyad Caliphate of responsibility for events in the Maghrib, attributing culpability solely to individual governors, and those that hold the caliphate institutionally accountable for what transpired. A final section presents the study's principal findings.
Keywords: *Kharijites; Islamic East; Islamic West; Ibāḍiyya; Ṣufriyya.*

Introduction

In the earliest period of the Islamic state, Muslims lived in conditions of relative social and political harmony characterized by simplicity across the domains of religious practice, governance, economics, and communal life. Following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad — may God's peace and blessings be upon him — the question of political succession emerged as a defining challenge, initially resolved through the appointment of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and then ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as caliphs. The question resurfaced with greater intensity during the reigns of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in the wake of the Great Fitna (Civil Strife), which shook the foundations of the Islamic state and gave rise to the first formal political factions within Islam. Muslims fractured into competing groups, each articulating distinctive political positions, a process further energized by the richness of Islamic legal texts and the plurality of interpretive possibilities they offered.

One group held that the caliph must necessarily be of Qurayshi descent, citing the prophetic tradition: "*The caliphate belongs to Quraysh*" — and also on the grounds that Quraysh was the tribe of the Prophet and his family. This became the position of the broad Muslim majority, later known as Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamāʿa (the People of the Prophetic Tradition and the Community). A second group maintained that the caliphate was established by explicit designation and bequest for the household of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, to the exclusion of all others; this was the position of the partisans of the ʿAlid household, who became known as the Shīʿa.[1] A third group regarded the caliphate as a common right shared among all upright Muslims without distinction of race or color — a position adopted by the Kharijites, who thereby became the earliest proponents of a proto-democratic theory of governance in Islam.[2]

These divergent positions give rise to the central questions that orient this study: ***Who were the Kharijites? What were their doctrinal principles and political objectives? And to what* extent did their da'wa (propagation campaign) succeed in the Islamic West?**

1. The Kharijite Da'wa

1.1 The Kharijite Movement and Its Principal Factions

Any discussion of the Kharijite da'wa must begin with an account of who the Kharijites were — both as a historical term and as a sectarian movement that emerged in the earliest period of the Islamic state. In the classical sources, the term *khawārij* (literally, 'those who went out') denotes, in its broadest application, all who rose in rebellion against the legitimate imam upon whom the community had reached consensus — whether this occurred in the era of the Companions against the Rightly Guided Caliphs, or afterward in the time of the Successors and subsequent imams. In its specific technical usage, however, the term designates all those who revolted against ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib during the Great Fitna, repudiated his authority, and waged war against him. Over time the term acquired still another meaning, denoting a distinct and self-contained movement with its own intellectual, doctrinal, and political identity.[3]

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[1]Al-Shahrastani stated: "They are those who supported ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, specifically, and held that the imamate and caliphate were established by explicit designation — whether openly or covertly — and believed that the imamate could not pass outside his lineage… They argued that the imamate is not a matter of public interest to be entrusted to popular election and appointed by the community, but rather a foundational principle and a pillar of religion that the prophets — peace be upon them — were not permitted to neglect or delegate to the people." See: Abī al-Fath Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī, Al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal, ed. Amīr ʿAlī Muhanná and ʿAlī Ḥasan Fāʿūd, Dār al-Maʿrifa, 3rd ed., Beirut, Lebanon, 1414 AH/1993 CE, vol. 1, pp. 169ff.

[2]Mūsā Laqbāl, Al-Maghrib al-Islāmī [The Islamic West], Société Nationale d'Édition et de Distribution, 2nd ed., Algiers, 1981, pp. 147–148.

[3]For further details on the subject, see: Al-Shahrastānī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 132ff.; Muḥammad Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Abū Qaḥf, Qiṣṣat al-Khilāfa: Nashʾ at al-Khawārij wa-Taṭawwur Firaqihim wa-Madhāhibihim ḥattā al-ʿAṣr al-Ḥadīth

As a movement, the Kharijites began in the Islamic East as a predominantly Arab phenomenon. They subsequently drew converts from among the newly Islamized populations of various regions, attracted by their celebrated courage and their tenacity in the pursuit of their principles, and above all by their doctrine that the caliphate was an open right belonging to any Muslim who met the requisite qualifications — a position embraced by virtually all Kharijite factions[4] with the sole exception of the Najdāt.[5]

The Kharijites developed their political theories through a succession of formal debates — with Companions such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, and with Umayyad governors and caliphs, most notably **ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz**.[6]

On a number of fundamental questions, the Kharijite factions[7] maintained a shared consensus:

- Recognition of the legitimacy of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, with the caveat that ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān was disavowed after the sixth year of his caliphate, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib following his acceptance of arbitration.
- The obligation to rise in rebellion against any unjust ruler.

On other questions, however, the Kharijite factions were sharply divided:

- Whether to wage active jihad or abstain from combat; whether to practice dissimulation (taqiyya) or to act openly; and whether the territory of their opponents constituted a realm of war or a realm of peace.
- The proper treatment of opponents — including their women, children, and property — as well as whether cohabitation with them was permissible and whether it was lawful to kill one of them by stealth.

[The Story of the Caliphate: The Origins of the Kharijites and the Development of Their Sects and Doctrines to the Modern Age], Al-Maktaba al-Qawmiyya al-Ḥadītha / Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Egypt, 2005–2006, p. 144ff.

[4]Mūsā Laqbāl, op. cit., p. 151.

[5]The Najdāt were followers of Najda ibn ʿĀmir al-Ḥanafī; his sect was known as the ʿĀdhiriyya because they excused ignorance in subsidiary legal rulings. He had originally been a follower of Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq but broke away from him when he held that dissimulation (taqiyya) was impermissible and that refraining from combat constituted unbelief, and so on. For further details on this sect, see: Al-Shahrastānī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 141ff.

[6]See the correspondence of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz with the Kharijites in: Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, Sīrat ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz 'alā mā Rāhu al-Imām Mālik wa-Aṣḥābuhu [The Biography of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz According to the Transmission of Imam Mālik and His Companions], narrated by Abī ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad, copied, corrected, and annotated by Aḥmad ʿUbayd, ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 6th ed., Beirut, 1404 AH/1984 CE, pp. 74–79.

[7]According to al-Baghdādī, the Kharijites divided into twenty sects, each of which further fragmented into numerous subsects, including the original Ḥakamiyya, the Azāriqa, the Najdāt, and the Ṣufriyya, among others. See: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq wa-Bayān al-Firqa al-Nājiya Minhum [The Distinction Between the Sects and the Identification of the Saved Sect], ed. Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Khusht, Maktabat Ibn Sīnā lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', n.d., p. 72.

Each faction developed its own distinctive positions on these contested questions, which in turn generated an ever-proliferating number of subsects. Among the most significant was the Azāriqa,[8] named after Nāfiʿ ibn al-Azraq — the most doctrinally extreme of all Kharijite factions; it ultimately perished without leaving any lasting trace. Somewhat less extreme were the Najdāt and the Ṣufriyya,[9] both of which also became extinct. By contrast, the most moderate and pacific of all the factions was the Ibāḍiyya,[10] whose remnants survive to this day in several regions of the Islamic world: the Mzab Valley in Algeria, the island of Jerba in Tunisia, the Nafūsa Mountains in Libya, and Zanzibar and the Green Mountain (Jabal al-Akhḍar) in Oman.

As the late Mūsā Laqbāl observed, it was fortunate for the peoples of the Islamic West that the only Kharijite factions to penetrate the Maghrib were the moderate ones — the Ibāḍiyya and the Ṣufriyya — both of which launched their da'wa activities and military campaigns against the Umayyad authorities in the region.[11]

2. The Westward Migration of the Kharijite Movement

2.1 Umayyad Persecution of the Kharijites

The Umayyad authorities recognized the threat that Kharijite activity posed to the unity of the Islamic community and responded with firm and systematic measures, combating the movement by every available means. Despite the Kharijites' remarkable valor and their fierce determination to achieve their objectives,[12] the combination of doctrinal extremism and political inexperience repeatedly led them to defeat against the Umayyad state. Their situation was further complicated by the near-universal Muslim opposition they provoked through their practice of declaring ʿUthmān ibn

[8]The Azāriqa were the followers of Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq, whose kunya was Abū Rāshid. They were the most numerous and powerful of the Kharijite sects. Among their tenets were the declaration of unbelief (takfīr) against all opponents, the designation of opponents as polytheists, and the permissibility of killing the women and children of opponents, who they declared eternally condemned to Hellfire. See: Al-Baghdādī, op. cit., p. 78ff.

[9]This sect is attributed to Ziyād ibn al-Aṣfar. It emerged when he parted with Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq over the question of those who abstained from fighting (al-qa'ada) in 65 AH/684 CE, adopting a middle position between the extremist Azāriqa and the moderate Ibāḍiyya. For further details, see: Al-Shahrastānī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 159; Al-Baghdādī, op. cit., p. 84.

[10]The Ibāḍī school is attributed to 'Abd Allāh ibn Ibāḍ al-Murrī al-Tamīmī. It emerged when Ibn Ibāḍ parted with Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq on the issue of declaring those who abstained from combat to be unbelievers. The Ibāḍiyya became known for their moderation: they forbade the shedding of Muslim blood, the enslavement of Muslim women and children, and the seizure of their property. They regarded the territory of their opponents as land of divine unity (tawḥīd), excepting the caliph's military camp, and permitted intermarriage and mutual inheritance with them. They held that the grave sinner is a monotheist whose unbelief is unbelief of ingratitude (kufr ni'ma) rather than apostasy from the faith — a position that made them the Kharijite sect closest to Sunni Islam. See: 'Abbās Saʿdūn Naṣr Allāh, Al-Khawārij fī Bilād al-Maghrib Ḥattā Muntaṣaf al-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijṡrī, Dār al-Thaqāfa, Casablanca, Morocco, 1985, p. 51.

[11]Laqbāl, op. cit., p. 152.

[12]Maḥmūd Ismā'īl 'Abd al-Razzāq, Al-Khawārij fī Bilād al-Maghrib Ḥattā Muntaṣaf al-Qarn al-Rābi' al-Hijṡrī, Dār al-Thaqāfa, 2nd ed., Casablanca, Morocco, 1406 AH/1985 CE, p. 24ff.

ʿAffān and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib apostates, together with the participants in the Battle of the Camel[13] and all who accepted the arbitration.[14] As a result, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib fought them at the battles of al-Nahrawān and al-Nukhaylaوول,[15] ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr turned against them once his own position had consolidated, and the Umayyads waged war against them for decades.[16]

The extremism of their principles also fueled devastating internal fragmentation: each faction declared all others to have departed from the faith and treated their members as apostates, making their blood and property licit. The Najdāt tore itself apart in internal strife; the Azāriqa underwent a similar implosion, which ultimately led to its annihilation and the effective end of its activities in 72 AH/691 CE. The Ṣufriyya likewise fractured from within, with a significant contingent of its army defecting at a critical moment, thereby forfeiting a decisive victory over the forces of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf.

The Umayyad state exploited this disarray to deliver the decisive blow, deploying a combination of intimidation, inducement, financial rewards, and the offer of official appointments. The harshest chapter of anti-Kharijite repression came during the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān,[17] who unleashed against them simultaneously both al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī and al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra.[18] Al-Ḥajjāj executed vast numbers of them on the basis of accusation rather

[13]These were Ṭalha ibn ʿUbayd Allāh, al-Zubayr ibn al-ʾAwwām, and ʿĀʾisha, may God be pleased with them. The battle takes its name from ʿĀʾisha's camel, as she played a central role in it. It took place in Basra in 36 AH, between the forces of Caliph ʾAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and those of al-Zubayr and Ṭalha, constituting part of the Great Fitna (civil strife) that erupted among the Companions following the assassination of ʿUthmān ibn ʾAffān. See: Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khuḍrī Bek, Al-Dawla al-Umawiyya [The Umayyad State], ed. Shaykh Muḥammad al-ʿUthmānī, Dār Ibn al-Arqam li-l-Ṭibāʾa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʾ, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d., p. 233ff.

[14]This refers to the arbitration that followed the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 37 AH, which was fought between ʾAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Muʾāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, and concluded with a formal arbitration agreement aimed at sparing Muslim blood. For details on the arbitration, see: the same reference, p. 240ff.

[15]The Battle of al-Nahrawān took place near Baghdad, Iraq, in 38 AH/659 CE, between ʾAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Kharijites — a group that had formerly fought on his side but rose against him after he accepted the arbitration — raising the slogan "Judgment belongs to God alone" (lā ḥukm illā li-Llāh). The battle ended in ʾAlī's victory. See: the same reference.

[16]Maḥmūd Ismāʾīl ʾAbd al-Razzāq, op. cit., p. 25.

[17]ʾAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān held the caliphate between 65 AH and 86 AH. During his reign, ʾAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr controlled much of the eastern Islamic world; ʾAbd al-Malik set his sights on eliminating him, and eventually succeeded in having him killed and consolidating caliphal authority over all Islamic provinces in 73 AH. Among the most notable achievements of his caliphate were the Arabization of the state chanceries, the minting of Islamic gold coins, and the continuation of Islamic conquests. Key events of his era include the revolt of al-Mukhtār ibn Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī — who preached the imamate of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya — and his death in 67 AH; the suppression of Ibn al-Zubayr's caliphate; and the persecution of the Kharijites. See: Aḥmad ʾAwaḍ Abū al-Shabāb, Tārīkh al-Khilāfa al-Umawiyya bayna al-Ḥaqāʾiq wa-l-Awhām [A History of the Umayyad Caliphate Between Facts and Illusions], Muʾassasat al-Rayyān, 1st ed., 1424 AH/2008 CE, p. 167ff.

[18]Both were among the most powerful and ruthless governors during the reign of ʾAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān. The former governed Kufa and the latter Khurasan; both were deployed against the Kharijites and succeeded in substantially curbing their activities. See: Ibrāhīm Zaʾrūr and ʾAlī Aḥmad, Tārīkh al-ʾAṣr al-Umawī al-Siyāsī wa-l-Ḥaḍārī [A History of the Umayyad Era: Political and Civilizational], Publications of Damascus University, 1996, pp. 56–57.

than proven guilt, while al-Muhallab favored cunning and stratagem over the sword, employing formal debates to sow discord among the Kharijites and weaken their cohesion — achieving what military force alone had failed to accomplish. His most celebrated success was bringing the Azāriqa faction to its final end in the Islamic East.[19]

Kharijite activity declined further under the caliphates of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.[20] ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz pursued a policy of rational debate and persuasion, while Hishām favored a strategy of co-optation through the distribution of offices and wealth. The cumulative effect of these measures was to sap the movement's will, ultimately enabling Marwān ibn Muḥammad[21] to extinguish the remaining Kharijite insurgencies in the Islamic East.[22]

2.2 The Shift Toward Proselytization and Clandestine Political Organization

By the late first and early second Islamic centuries, the Kharijites found themselves unable to sustain open activity in the Islamic East. Weakened and beleaguered, they redirected their energies toward the consolidation of their movement in the peripheral regions of the Islamic world — above all the Islamic West — adopting a new strategy founded on clandestine preaching and covert political organization. In so doing, they sought to exploit the deep resentment and discontent that pervaded the Maghrib under Umayyad rule.[23] The methods they employed to this end included:

- Stationing themselves in frontier garrisons and along the coastal territories of the Islamic West, from Alexandria to Tangiers.
    - Commercial travel and trade, both recognized as effective vehicles for the dissemination of ideas and social practices.Sustained da'wa activity — the earliest figures in this field being Salama ibn Saʿd,[24] who propagated the Ibāḍī doctrine, and ʿIkrima, the

[19]Maḥmūd Ismā'īl 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., p. 25ff.

[20]Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik held the caliphate between 105 AH and 125 AH, succeeding his brother Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik by the latter's bequest. He was known as a diligent collector of revenues and appointed his sons to lead campaigns against the Byzantines. Among the most notable achievements and events of his reign were: the suppression of religious innovations; the continuation of Islamic conquests in the east, Andalusia, and France; the apostasy of the people of Samarqand after their conversion; the emergence of the da'wa of Zayd ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn and his death in 122 AH; the beginning of the 'Abbāsid movement; and Kharijite uprisings in the west. See: Aḥmad 'Awaḍ Abū al-Shabāb, op. cit., p. 329ff.

[21]Marwān ibn Muḥammad held the caliphate from 127 AH to 132 AH, following the assassination of al-Walīd ibn Yazīd, the death of Yazīd ibn al-Walīd, and the deposition of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Walīd. The most defining event of his reign was the rise of the 'Abbāsid movement and its propagandist Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī, culminating in the fall of the Umayyad dynasty with his death in 132 AH. See: the same reference, p. 406ff.

[22]Maḥmūd Ismā'īl 'Abd al-Razzāq, op. cit., p. 30.

[23]Ibid., p. 31.

[24]An Ibāḍī missionary who entered the Islamic West bearing his doctrine and propagating it (he was alive in 135 AH/752 CE); al-Darjīnī classified him among the generation of the successors of the Successors (tābi'ī al-tābi'īn). For his biography and account, see: Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd al-Darjīnī, Ṭabaqāt al-Mashāyikh bi-l-Maghrib [The Classes of Scholars of the Islamic West], ed. Ibrāhīm Ṭalāy, n.p., 1974, vol. 1, pp. 11–12; Al-Shammākhī, Al-Siyar, vol. 1, p. 91.

freed slave (mawlā) of Ibn ʿAbbās,[25] who spread the Ṣufrī doctrine.[26] Both men undertook remarkable da'wa work during this period, and the series of uprisings that swept the Maghrib in the 120s AH were in no small measure the fruit of their efforts. They also dispatched delegations to the Islamic East: some of a social character, to convey the grievances of the region's inhabitants directly to the caliph; others of a scholarly character, including a mission sent to study under the leading Ibāḍī authority Abū ʿUbayda Muslim ibn Abī Karīma in Basra.[27]

3. Conditions for the Success of the Kharijite Mission in the Islamic West

The success of the Kharijite da'wa in the Islamic West was rooted above all in the oppressive policies pursued by the Umayyad governors of the region. The Umayyads treated the inhabitants of newly conquered provinces — in both the Islamic East and the Islamic West — as subordinate client peoples, failing to extend to them the equality with Arab Muslims that Islamic law unambiguously guaranteed. They sought to maintain control through force of arms, generating a wave of profound resentment that swept across all the conquered territories.

The Kharijites capitalized on this discontent, turning it against Umayyad rule by exploiting, in particular, the **tribal rivalries between the Yamaniyya and the Qaysiyya**,[28] which played out most acutely in the Islamic West. These factional conflicts may indeed be counted among the primary catalysts of the Berber revolts against the Umayyad governors. It is well established that the Arab conquerors who settled in the region were predominantly of Yemeni origin, and it was they who stood behind Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr throughout his governorship, which lasted until 96 AH. When he was dismissed, his replacement — Muḥammad ibn Yazīd — was a Qaysī partisan who systematically hunted down the house of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr in an effort to dismantle their influence.[29]

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[25] ʿIkrima, the freed slave (mawlā) of ʾAbd Allāh ibn ʾAbbās, was one of the foremost jurists and hadith scholars of his age. He studied under Ibn ʾAbbās and senior Companions. It is reported that he may have been of North African origin. He adopted the Ṣufrī doctrine and became one of its leading jurists. When the Ṣufriyya turned to organizing their missionary activities, he was entrusted with spreading the Ṣufrī doctrine throughout the Islamic West. See: Maḥmūd Ismāʾīl ʾAbd al-Razzāq, op. cit., p. 47ff.

[26] Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Abī Bakr, Siyar al-Umma wa-Akhbārihim [The Lives and Accounts of the Community], ed. and annotated by Ismāʾīl al-ʾarabī, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2nd ed., Beirut, Lebanon, 1982, pp. 40–41.

[27] Laqbāl, op. cit., p. 153.

[28] Tribal partisanship reverted to its pre-Islamic form during the Umayyad era, particularly between the Qaysiyya and the Yamaniyya, despite ʾAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān's awareness of the danger it posed and his attempts to maintain an equitable balance between the two groups. These factional conflicts spread to the Islamic West, where the Umayyad governors turned the region into a theater of tribal warfare at a time of grave political instability. See: Ibrāhīm Zaʾrūr and ʾAlī Aḥmad, op. cit., p. 54.

[29] Ḥusayn Muʾnis, Fajr al-Andalus: Dirāsa fī Tārīkh al-Andalus min al-Fatḥ ilā Qiyām al-Dawla al-Umawiyya (711–756 CE) [The Dawn of Andalusia: A Study in the History of Andalusia from the Conquest to the Establishment of the Umayyad State], Dār al-Rashād, 3rd ed., Cairo, 1462 AH/2005 CE, p. 141ff.

When **Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim** *(governed 101–103 AH / 720–723 CE)* assumed power,[30] Yameni influence was restored. He avenged the persecution of the Yamaniyya under the previous governor, imprisoning him. After Yazīd's assassination, **Bishr ibn Ṣafwān**[31] was appointed to the Maghrib governorship — a committed champion of the Yamaniyya faction — under whom the Qaysiyya suffered renewed persecution. Their fortunes revived again under the Caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, who appointed **ʿUbayda ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (governed 110–115 AH / 728–733 CE)**[32] — a governor who relentlessly pursued the partisans of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr until he had destroyed their remnants. The tribulations of the Yamaniyya in the Maghrib continued under **ʿUbayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb, who assumed the Maghrib governorship in 116 AH/735 CE.**[33]

Beyond these tribal conflicts, the governors competed with one another in the extraction of revenue for the caliphal court in Damascus, treating the Berbers with systematic abuse and burdening them with oppressive fiscal demands. Some governors went so far as to classify the Islamic West as territory of war (dār ḥarb) even after its inhabitants had embraced Islam — in flagrant disregard of the Caliph **ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz**'s efforts to curb these governors' excesses and restore Berber confidence through the appointment of a pious governor for the province of Ifrīqiya, **Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī al-Muhājir Dīnār, in 100 AH.**[34] Yet this reformist policy died with ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz himself: the Umayyad Caliphate under **Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik** swiftly reverted

[30]Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim was appointed governor of the Islamic West following the death of the just Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʾAbd al-ʾAzīz and the dismissal of his governor Ismāʾīl ibn Abī al-Muhājir Dīnār. The old Umayyad policies thus resumed, particularly since Yazīd had been a client (mawlā) of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī and sought to replicate his patron's methods over the people of the West, imposing the jizya upon them. For details of his governance: ʾAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn al-Maʾrūf bi-l-ʾIbar [The History of Ibn Khaldūn, Known as the Book of Lessons], ed. Khalīl Shaḥāda, rev. Suhayl Zakkār, 1st ed., Dār al-Fikr li-l-Ṭibāʾa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʾ, Beirut, 1981, vol. 4, p. 240; ʾAbd al-Ḥamīd Ḥusayn Ḥamūda, Tārīkh al-Maghrib fī al-ʾAṣr al-Islāmī [A History of the Islamic West in the Islamic Era], al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyya lil-Nashr, 1st ed., Cairo, 2006, p. 127ff.

[31]Bishr ibn Ṣafwān governed the Islamic West during the reign of Yazīd ibn ʾAbd al-Malik, between 102 AH and 109 AH (721–727 CE). He sought to implement a new policy founded on equality between Arabs and Berbers and to restore security and order to the region; however, he hunted down the killers of Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim from among the family of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, punishing them severely, confiscating their wealth, and remitting it to the eastern Islamic world. He was subsequently reappointed by the Caliph Hishām ibn ʾAbd al-Malik after the death of his brother Yazīd. He also undertook notable naval operations in the Mediterranean until his death in 109 AH/727 CE. For the events of his governorship, see: Ibn Khaldūn, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 240; ʾAbd al-Ḥamīd Ḥusayn Ḥamūda, op. cit., p. 130.

[32]ʿUbayda ibn ʾAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī was appointed during the caliphate of Hishām ibn ʾAbd al-Malik and governed between 110 AH and 115 AH (728–733 CE). The most notable events of his tenure include the resurgence of tribal rivalries between the Yamaniyya and the Qaysiyya, naval activity in the Mediterranean, an attempted conquest of Sicily, and the granting of authority to appoint governors over Andalusia. See: Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, Al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib [The Lucid Exposition of the History of Andalusia and the Islamic West], ed. and rev. J.-S. Colin and É. Lévi-Provençal, Dār al-Thaqāfa, Beirut, Lebanon, 1983, vol. 1, p. 50.

[33]Maḥmūd Ismāʾīl ʾAbd al-Razzāq, op. cit., pp. 32–33.

[34]Muḥammad Muḥammad Zaytūn, Al-Qayrawān wa-Dawruhā fī al-Ḥaḍāra al-Islāmiyya [Kairouan and Its Role in Islamic Civilization], Dār al-Manār li-l-Ṭabʾ wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʾ, Cairo, 1988, p. 107.

to its customary conduct, replacing the virtuous governor Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUbayd Allāh with **Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim al-Thaqafī,** who dismantled ʿUmar's reforms and returned to tyrannizing the Berbers.[35]

Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim had previously served as a client (mawlā) of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī before advancing through successive positions: secretary, chief of police, and tax administrator in Iraq. His administrative competence had prompted al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik to retain him in office after al-Ḥajjāj's death, and Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik had considered appointing him as secretary — an appointment blocked only by ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz himself.[36]

In the Maghrib, Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim sought to replicate al-Ḥajjāj's Iraqi policies: he levied the jizya (poll tax) on the Berbers despite their conversion to Islam, moved to classify their share of war spoils as one-fifth (khums) due to the state, recruited them as his personal guard, and reportedly intended to brand their hands with the word "guard" to distinguish them from the wider population. He also forbade them from residing in Kairouan, emulating al-Ḥajjāj's treatment of the inhabitants of Iraq.[37]

These provocations aroused the fury of the Berbers, who responded with fierce resistance to conduct that bore no relationship to Islamic principles. They killed Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim and reinstated the previous governor, sending an explanation to the caliph in which they insisted that their action was not a rebellion against the caliphate but a defense of their honor, stating: "*Yazīd imposed upon us what does not please God or His Messenger, so we killed him and restored your governor.*"[38]

As for ʿ**Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb,**[39] he had previously governed Egypt with demonstrable efficiency and managerial skill. Convinced that the same methods would succeed in the Maghrib, he combined preemptive military campaigns against Berber territories, lavish remittances to the caliphal court, and the appointment of his associates and sons as governors over various districts — all of whom adopted his own policies. He deployed his forces throughout the Sūs region, pursuing a strategy of mass killings, collective punishment, the enslavement of women and children, and the seizure of plunder — targeting in particular the Ṣanhāja tribe of Masūfa. Heedless of the fate that had befallen

[35]Ibid., p. 34.

[36]Ibn Khaldūn, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 240; Mūsā Laqbāl, op. cit., p. 155.

[37]Ḥusayn Muʾnis, Fajr al-Andalus, p. 142; Laqbāl, op. cit., p. 155.

[38]The people of Ifrīqiya installed their own judge, al-Mughīra ibn Abī Burda al-Qurashy, as their governor; he declined and withdrew, whereupon they appointed Muḥammad ibn Aws al-Anṣārī until the caliph Yazīd could send his ruling. Yazīd appointed in his place his governor of Egypt, Bishr ibn Ṣafwān, who arrived the same year that Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim was killed. His first act was to execute ʾAbd Allāh ibn Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr and to pursue his partisans, confiscating their wealth. He also dismissed al-Ḥurr ibn ʾAbd Allāh al-Thaqafī from Andalusia, replacing him with a Kalbite, ʾanbasah ibn Sukhym al-Kalbī. See: Ḥusayn Muʾnis, op. cit., p. 143.

[39]For his biography and further details, see: Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 51ff.; Ibn Khaldūn, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 241.

Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim, he wounded Berber dignity for a second time, provoking another violent uprising.[40]

His deputy at Tangiers, ʿ**Umar ibn** ʿ**Abd Allāh al-Murādī,**[41] proved no better. He became notorious for his misconduct and for his contemptuous attitude toward the Berbers, regarding them as a subjugated people. He imposed the jizya upon them, enforced its collection harshly, and denied them their rightful shares of war booty, despite routinely placing them in the vanguard of battle. In his eagerness to ingratiate himself with the caliph, he reportedly ordered the slaughter of hundreds of sheep in search of white and honey-colored hides to send to Damascus. His injustices against the peoples of the Maghrib reached their nadir when he began selecting beautiful women from among them to dispatch to the caliphal household in Syria.[42]

Being a people of honor and dignity, the Berbers found these actions an intolerable affront to their pride. Determined to ascertain whether the caliphate itself bore responsibility for such abuses, they dispatched a delegation to the caliph to present their grievances, headed by **Maysara al-Maṭgharī,** who was charged with conveying to Caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik the full reality of the situation and demanding redress. Despite their long journey from the distant Maghrib, the delegation was denied an audience with the caliph. They returned home resolved to change their circumstances by their own hands, through the force of uprising and armed resistance to restore their violated dignity.[43]

4. Historiographical Assessment

Some scholars have sought to defend the Umayyad Caliphate and exonerate it from responsibility for what occurred in the Maghrib, attributing blame exclusively to the individual governors. Among them is the historian **Ḥusayn Muʾnis,** who wrote: "There is no room for doubt that the Umayyad caliphs would not have approved of the policies of Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim and Bishr ibn Ṣafwān in Ifrīqiya, and that they were unaware of the methods to which these two had recourse in oppressing and tyrannizing the Berbers. Evidence for this is that Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik expressed no indignation upon learning that the Berbers had killed his governor Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim, stating

[40]Ḥusayn Muʾnis, op. cit., p. 145.

[41]Ibn ʿIdhārī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 51ff.

[42]Laqbāl, op. cit., p. 157; Muḥammad Muḥammad Zaytūn, op. cit., p. 108.

[43]Ibn Khaldūn, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 241.

that he had not approved of his conduct, and then confirming **Muḥammad ibn Aws al-Anṣārī,**[44] whom the people of Ifrīqiya had appointed over themselves."[45]

The historian **Muḥammad ʿAlī Dabbūz** argued similarly: "ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik were the most forthright in condemning the conduct of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr in the Maghrib. Sulaymān harbored a personal grudge against him and, upon assuming the caliphate, subjected Mūsā to severe punishment and made an example of him for those governors whose conduct was driven by self-interest and greed for wealth..."[46]

A number of researchers have been influenced in their appraisal by a narrative transmitted by the anonymous author of *Akhbār Majmūʿa fī Fatḥ al-Andalus* [A Compilation of Reports on the Conquest of Andalusia], which states: "Let it be said by whoever imputes blame to the caliphs: that the Berbers rose only because of their resentment of their governors' conduct, and that the caliph and his son used to write to the governors of Tangiers requesting white and honey-colored sheepskins, leading to the slaughter of a hundred sheep from which perhaps not a single suitable hide could be found — and this is the claim of those who bear malice toward the caliphs (meaning the Kharijites)."[47] This anonymous author stands as virtually the only historian who undertook a systematic defense of the Umayyad dynasty — a fact that is unsurprising given that he lived under Umayyad rule in Andalusia, a context that readily explains his partisan alignment against the dynasty's enemies.

In this author's view, the argument advanced by Ḥusayn Muʾnis, while representing his personal scholarly judgment, is ultimately difficult to reconcile with historical reality. The full course of events during that period consistently suggests that the caliph took the Berber reaction into account and chose not to pursue a confrontation whose consequences he could not predict — particularly given his thorough knowledge of Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim's background as a product of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī's school, and the explanatory statement that was sent to him justifying the Berbers' stance toward this governor and the reasons for his execution.

The account offered by Muḥammad ʿAlī Dabbūz regarding the tribulations of the family of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr under the caliphate of Sulaymān likewise requires careful handling, given the substantial personal animosities between the two parties. The historical circumstances of the period

[44]Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 49.

[45]Ḥusayn Muʾnis, Fajr al-Andalus, p. 132.

[46]Muḥammad ʾAlī Dabbūz, Al-Maghrib al-Kabīr [The Great Maghreb], Muʾassasat Tawālīt al-Thaqāfiyya, Libya, 2010, vol. 2, p. 169.

[47]Anonymous author, Akhbār Majmūʾa fī Fatḥ al-Andalus wa-Dhikr Umarāʾihā Raḥimahum Allāh wa-l-Ḥurūb al-Wāqiʾa fīmā Baynahum [A Compilation of Reports on the Conquest of Andalusia and the Account of Its Rulers, May God Have Mercy on Them, and the Wars That Took Place Among Them], ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī / Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Cairo–Beirut, 1410 AH/1989 CE, p. 37.

also provide their own explanation: the new governor conducted an aggressive campaign of persecution against the partisans of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, hunting them down and confiscating their property.[48]

It is, in any case, beyond serious dispute that the Umayyad approach to governing the conquered provinces was consistent and deliberate, and that these governors were nothing more than instruments of Umayyad authority — selected, appointed, and directed by the caliphate itself. Were it otherwise, how would one account for the profound transformation that took place in the region under the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who set out to repudiate the injustices of the old order, appointing capable governors committed to justice, equality, and governance in accordance with divine command? The caliphate of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz stands as a singular and luminous exception in the otherwise troubled history of Umayyad rule over the conquered provinces, and the governorship of Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUbayd Allāh — and the marked difference it produced — offers perhaps the clearest demonstration of what was possible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be affirmed that the Kharijite movement in the Islamic West made exceptionally effective use of the region's volatile conditions — a landscape of seething resentment against the Umayyad governors and the relative shallowness of Islamic roots in the population. The Kharijites succeeded in disseminating their message within the Berber tribal communities, which received them, sheltered them, and supported their pursuit of the ultimate goal: the establishment of independent polities founded on democratic principles of governance in the Islamic West, following the failure of that same enterprise in the Islamic East.

The Ṣufrī state of the Banū Midrār at Sijilmāsa in the Far Maghrib — which endured from **140 to 352 AH (757–963 CE)** — constituted the first independent political entity to break away from the caliphal seat in the Islamic East. Some decades later, the Ibāḍī state of the Rustamid dynasty was established in the Middle Maghrib (present-day Algeria) and governed from **160 to 296 AH (777–909 CE).** After nearly half a century of continuous warfare, both polities turned toward stability and the construction of a material and cultural civilization.

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[48]Maḥmūd Ismāʾīl ʾAbd al-Razzāq, op. cit., p. 36.

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