

The Umayyad Dynasty and the Western Maghreb. A Transregional Perspective

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The Islamic conquest of the seventh century marked the beginning of a process that pulled the Far and Central Maghreb into the emerging Islamic world. This process was, however, not straightforward. Step by step, commercial, political and intellectual bonds linked the Maghreb with the Middle Eastern centers, while religious missionaries and political dissidents arrived there and sought for adepts amongst the newly converted population. Umayyads and Fatimids used this territory to fight their battles. The conflicts between these rival regional macro-powers forced the Berber imamates to increase their dependence on the Western Umayyads in Al-Andalus. Economically the Maghreb had become part of a transregional commercial network (slave-trade) and eventually became part of the Islamicate world sharing legal practices, religious doctrines and globally connected scholarly elites. The growing influence of Maliki scholars and practices prepared the terrain for the adoption of the Maliki legal school and the marginalization of local forms of Islam. Finally, the Maghreb became part of a “Sunni” mainstream Islam throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Keywords: Central and Far Maghreb (modern Algeria and Morocco); *arḍ al-Barbar* (land of the “Berbers”); “Islamization”, “Arabization”; Umayyad caliphate; Khārijism, Idrisids, Ibāḍite communities; Kharijites; Shiites; Ismailites.

Introduction

The history of the Central and Far Maghreb (modern Algeria and Morocco)¹ between c. 700 and 1000 CE is a still rather neglected, “dark” period of Islamic history. The situation regarding sources is difficult: contemporaneous historiographical Arabic sources are mostly focused on what they perceived as metropolitan areas, namely Greater Syria, Iraq, Arabia, and Iran. Albeit to a lesser degree, they also consider Egypt, al-Andalus (Islamic Spain)

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1 These terms are used in this chapter together with “Western Maghreb”, thereby encompassing both regions. The two terms reflect the division in Arabic sources of pre-modern times, which roughly differentiate between “*al-Maghrib al-awsaṭ*” (= the middle/central west, roughly modern Algeria), “*al-Maghrib al-aqṣā*” (the far/distant west, roughly modern Morocco) and then *Ifriqiya* (roughly modern Tunisia). In a way, it reflects the ancient division between the two Roman Mauretania (*Mauretania Tingitana* and *Mauretania Caesariensis*) and Roman Africa. *Al-Maghrib* without specification usually encompasses the area between the Atlantic and Tripolitania, sometimes even Egypt. The terminology in the sources is not completely consistent. Cf. Yver, *al-Maghrib*.

and Ifriqiya (modern Tunisia). For Arab historians, the Central and Far Maghreb was the *arḍ al-Barbar* or land of the “Berbers” (an unspecific umbrella term used by Arabic sources for the autochthonous population), located in the extreme western periphery of the known world, and, in a strategy of “othering”, it was seen as populated by wild, rebellious, uncivilized, and heretical peoples.² It was barely perceived as part of the *Dār al-Islām* (“Domain of Islam”) also because, since the 740s, the Umayyad caliphs in Damascus and their successors the Abbasids had lost their control over these territories. Another problem is that several of the independent “Berber” polities that surfaced then seem either not to have developed a significant historiography, or it is lost, so that we lack the insider’s perspective.³ Fortunately, the nuanced interpretation of later sources from new perspectives,⁴ as well as the investigation of the material evidence (archeology, numismatics), for a long time neglected for various ideological reasons, has been gaining momentum in recent decades and is now helping to fill some of these gaps.⁵

Nevertheless, it must be said that this area was not on the periphery of the world. It rather entered into the first phase of a process that pulled the area into a global network of political, intellectual, and commercial stakeholders and interest groups, so that increasingly it functioned as an interface between Africa, Asia, and Europe. This was a consequence of the Islamic conquest at the end of the seventh century AD, an event that initiated the multifaceted integrative process that we call “Islamization”,⁶ understood as the gradual implementation of certain institutions, societal patterns and commercial connections that were shared with other countries governed by Muslim rulers. Even if this part of the Maghreb soon ceased to be part of the eastern caliphate(s), it was drawn into the macro-area of the Islamic world that had been emerging since the eighth century.

One of the most important vectors for this transformation was the commercial, intellectual, and political links to the Umayyad⁷ regime in al-Andalus (756–1030).⁸ The increasingly close interconnections between the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula would promote the Islamization and Arabization of the Maghreb on all levels. These transregional integrative processes will be the thematic focus of this chapter.

2 For the problems of the ethnonym “Berber” (*Barbar*) in the Arabic sources and the complex ethnogenesis of the Berbers, see de Felipe, *Leyendas árabes*, 379-396; Rouighi, *The Berbers of the Arabs*, 49-76. Arabic sources usually distinguish between *Barbar* (autochthonous population of northwestern Africa) and *Afāriqa* (the Latin-speaking, Christian autochthonous population, Amara, *L’islamisation*, 113-14).

3 For the possible reasons, see the discussion below.

4 For instance, cf. Bencheikroun, *Les Idrissides*, 171-188; Bencheikroun, *Rāšid et Les Idrissides*, 7-37; Fenwick, *Umayyads and North Africa*, 303-312; Coghill, *How the West was won*, 539-570; Bencheikroun and Liétard, *Les Idrissides à la lumière de fulūs frappés*, 727-740.

5 Cf. for a recent survey on the state of research and the problems of the marginalization of the Maghreb, Aillet, *Islamisation et arabisation*, 7-34, and the entire collected volume *Islamisation et arabisation de l’Occident musulman médiéval (viie-xiie siècle)* edited by Valérian with many contributions on the material remains. Cf. also Bencheikroun, *Le Maghreb médiéval et l’antiquité*, 195-223; Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa: A New Perspective*, 12-15; 19-30; and Panzram, *Entre Civitas y Madīna: El Mundo de Las Ciudades*, passim.

6 For a discussion of both processes on all levels, cf. the collected volume Valérian (ed.), *Islamisation et arabisation*.

7 It is important to distinguish between the Umayyads in al Andalus (756-1030) and the Eastern Umayyads in Syria (661-750). To avoid confusion, since both played a distinct, but quite different role in the early history of the Maghreb, I am using “Eastern Umayyads” to specify when I am referring to the Umayyad caliphate of Damascus (661-750); “Umayyad” will be used as a shorthand for the Umayyad caliphate in Cordoba.

8 Ali-de-Unzaga and Gaiser, *Facets of exchange*, 1-6.

Beginnings of Islam in the Maghreb (8th–9th century)

In 706, the Islamic conquest of North Africa was almost completed with the seizure of Tangier, putting an end to the expansion towards the west which had started in around 646 with raids sent from Egypt towards Tripolitania. In contrast to the rapid conquest of the countries of the Middle East, it was a long and complicated campaign, characterized by several expansive waves interrupted by drawbacks and pauses.⁹ The new caliphal province “(wilāya) al-Maghrib” was administered from Qayrawān in Ifrīqiya, a garrison city founded in around 670 as a strategic bridgehead, and which would evolve in the following centuries into a bustling city and a focus of Islamization and Arabization for the whole region.¹⁰ Between 711 and 718, the almost complete conquest of the Iberian Peninsula added the new subprovince of al-Andalus to this vast province.

The following decades between 720 and 740 CE were a period of administrative and political consolidation, coinciding with a phase of stability in the Eastern Umayyad caliphate. However, it ended with a disaster – the great Berber rebellion between 739-743, a movement which encompassed broad parts of the Berber population on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar. The upheaval contributed significantly to the downfall of the Eastern Umayyad caliphate and is seen to have anticipated the Abbasid revolution in 750.¹¹

Probably, the upheaval was a reaction to the oppressive policy of the caliphal administration towards the autochthonous population. Despite their relatively rapid conversion to Islam and successful integration into the army as auxiliaries, the “Berbers” were still treated as conquered people, which meant that they were enslaved and taxed heavily. The abduction of booty and slaves towards the east seems to have been massive and responded to the great demand for manpower and riches to fulfil the needs of the expanding empire of the Eastern Umayyads.¹² Against this background, it is not surprising that, when the newly converted Berber population was exposed to the doctrines of the Ibādites and the Ṣufrites, both variants of the Kharijite spectrum, it willingly embraced this rather egalitarian and less Arabo-centric variant of Islam.¹³

9 For this, apart from Coghill, *How the West was won*, cf. Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse* and Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 31-46.

10 Talbi, *Al-Kayrawān*.

11 For these events, cf. Guichard, *Une "Méditerranée berbère"*, 9-18; de Felipe, *Leyendas árabes*; Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 26-31; de Felipe, *The Butr and North African Ibādism*, 88-110; Fenwick, *Umayyads and North Africa*.

12 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 61.

13 For a recent overview (with further bibliography) on the doctrines of the Kharijites, their subdivisions (Azraqites, Ibādites, Ṣufrites, and Najdites) and the problems with reconstructing these “heretical” doctrines, cf. Hagemann and Verkinderen, *Kharijism in the Umayyad period, 497-500*. Furthermore, Kharijites were associated with extreme, in some cases even militant piety, and a strong anti-Umayyad position. The (ethnic) egalitarian features have been related to the fact that, in contrast to the Sunni/Shia doctrine, legitimate rulership (imamate) should be restricted to the Prophet’s tribe, the Quraysh (Sunna)/or his close family (Shia), the Kharijites argued that it was due to the most virtuous and pious man, Arab or not. Originally an anti-aristocratic tribal Arab movement, Ibaḍism finally became absorbed by the “Berbers” into a movement with a strong anti-Arab dynamic. Cf. Aillet, *Une étude des modèles politiques et sociaux de l’ibadisme médiéval*, 10, and de Felipe, *The Butr and North African Ibādism*.

The beginnings of Khārijism in North Africa are difficult to reconstruct and complicated by the biased nature of the sources. The first groups of Kharijites (*al-khawārij*, “those who go out”) were loosely connected groups of insurgents in Iraq, who, driven by a combination of piety and political grievances, waged guerrilla warfare against the Eastern Umayyad caliphate for several decades.¹⁴

By the end of the seventh century, and pressured by the oppressive policy of the caliphal authorities, many had left Iraq and sought refuge at the periphery of the Islamic world (Oman, Yemen, the Maghreb). In North Africa, they seem to have found first adepts in Tripolitania in the 730/740s, and then expanded westwards through missionaries who were in loose contact with their leaders in Iraq. Many autochthonous “Berber” groups seem to have first come into deeper contact with Islam through these Eastern missionaries, who thus functioned as important vectors of Islamization. Probably, members of the Kharijite spectrum also participated in some ways in the great Berber rebellion, though the information is scarce and could be partly a back-projection.¹⁵ What can be said is that the Kharijite movement in North Africa gained momentum in the late 740s, coinciding with the crisis of the Eastern Umayyads and the Abbasid revolution, and led to the rise of several independent Kharijite principalities in Maghreb: the most important were the Ṣufrite Midrārīds around Sijilmāsa in the Tāfilalt in southeastern Morocco (757-909), at the gateway to the desert, connected to the Berber tribe of the Miknāsa;¹⁶ the Ibāḍīte Rustamīds around Tahert (the ancient Tingatia, in modern Algeria) (778-909), broadly connected with the Zanāta, Hawāra and Nafūsa;¹⁷ and the idiosyncratic imamate of the Barghawāṭa along the Atlantic coast of Morocco (744-1058), that practiced a very peculiar, nativist form of Islam.¹⁸

Located in a wide area in the frontier zone to the desert that reached from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, these “Berber” polities became wealthy thanks to the support from the Ibāḍīte communities of the east for agricultural and urban development, but first and foremost through the impulse given by trans-Saharan commerce. Themselves previously captured and traded as “Berber” slaves by Muslim merchants, the rulers of these imamates now became merchant princes and for a while assumed almost a monopoly on the slave-trade, which thereafter concentrated on sub-Saharan black slaves.¹⁹ Slaves were in great demand in the Islamic Empire as domestics, luxury concubines, dancers, and wet nurses, but also served as much-needed manpower in rural estates.²⁰ Other commercial goods in high demand were gold, silver, cereals, and animals. It should be mentioned that up until then, neither

14 For a nuanced update of the source problems encountered when studying the early Kharijites, cf. Hagemann and Verkinderen, *Kharijism in the Umayyad period*.

15 Ibāḍī sources claimed that the rebellion had been instigated by Kharijite and Ibāḍī missionaries from Basra 20 years earlier, but these remarks could be back-projections. Cf. Hagemann and Verkinderen, *Kharijism in the Umayyad period*, 497.

16 Pellat, *Midrār*; Capel and Fili, *Sijilmasa au temps des Midradides*, 37-68.

17 Sometimes also called Rustumīds. Aillet, *Tahart et l'imamat rustamīde*, 47-78; Bahaz, *Réflexions*, 127-136.

18 Le Tourneau, *Barghawāṭa*. The sources for this community are particularly poor and contradictory.

19 Savage, *Berbers and Blacks*, 351-368.

20 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 61.

the Romans nor the Byzantines had managed to establish sustainable, long-term trans-Saharan trade; however, the intensified use of the dromedary in Islamic times,²¹ the introduction of new financial tools, and the increased demand for slaves and metals in the Arab Empire favored the establishment of stable commercial bonds, routes and entrepôts.²²

On the other hand, the princes of the originally Arab dynasty of the Idrisids dominated a broad zone that had extended from Fes/Volubilis to the far south of Morocco since the late eighth century. The founder of the dynasty, Idrīs b. ‘Abdallāh (r. 789-791), was a descendant of the Prophet’s grandson Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, who had escaped to the Maghreb under obscure circumstances after a disastrous defeat near Mecca in 786, and was a representative of the moderate Zaydī branch of the Shia. He found allies among the local Berber groups surrounding Walīla (Volubilis) and established a Zaydī imamate in the newly founded city of Fes. After some decades of splendor under Idrīs II (r. 791-828), the Idrisid imamate collapsed in 828 and split into numerous Idrisid petty imamates that dominated a large zone from the Mediterranean coastline up to the far south of Fes.²³ Like the Kharijites, the Idrisids stood in ideological opposition to the Umayyads and Abbasids since they were Zaydī Shiites.²⁴

All these “Berber” states had in common that they were politically independent from the Abbasid caliphate in the east, ideologically dissident, idiosyncratic, probably mainly Berberophone, dominated by large tribal “Berber” confederations, sometimes led by a tiny elite that claimed an eastern background.

The Umayyad Emirate and the Maghreb (9th Century)

The connection between the Western Umayyads and these Berber states already begins with the arrival of the Umayyad prince Abd- al-Raḥmān b. Mu‘āwiya in the Maghreb, where he found protection from his persecutors in the aftermath of the Abbasid revolution.²⁵ He stayed for some time in the region of Tahert; subsequently he sought hospitality first from the Berber tribe of the Miknāsa, and then from the Nafza tribe around Nakūr on the coast. For this, he took advantage of his family connections – his mother was a captive of Nafza origin – and stayed with them for a while, until he moved to the Iberian Peninsula, where he established the Umayyad emirate in Cordoba. This all happened in the context of collapsed caliphal authority, chaos, and the emergence of independent autochthonous Berber principalities between the Berber revolt and the Abbasid revolution (c. 740 and 756).

21 The exact date for the introduction and domestication of the dromedary in North Africa is controversial, but it is undisputed that the Islamic conquest gave its use in the desert routes a significant boost. Cf. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel*, 198.

22 For the slave-trade in North Africa cf. the studies by Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*; Botte, *Les réseaux transsahariens*, 27-59; Savage, *Berbers and Blacks*; Taher, *Les rapports socio-économiques*, 225-236. For the reconstruction of the Saharan trading networks with archeological evidence, Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 98-101.

23 Bencheikroun, *Rāšid et les Idrissides*; Bencheikroun, *Les Idrissides*.

24 They also shared many other basic views, cf. the comparison by Madelung, *Some reflexions on the origins*, 42-47.

25 Molina, *Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mu‘āwiya*.

To begin with, the Berber element was predominant among the Andalusī Muslim population – they had composed most of the invading Muslim forces – and the toponymics show that they settled widely in the countryside, where they soon merged with the local converted population. Berbers continued to be an important component in al-Andalus in the next centuries, particularly as mercenaries.²⁶

After an initial period of hostility that culminated in the Berber revolts of the 740s, seventy years later the sources evidence the existence of regular diplomatic relations between the Umayyads and Berber imamat in North Africa. The Umayyad emirate, effectively independent from the Abbasid caliphate since 756, depended on its capacity to maintain friendly relations with the Berber states in the Western and Central Maghreb. This was for both security and economic reasons, as Adam Gaiser has argued, since, as previously stated, these imamat controlled the traffic of slaves, which was an essential pillar of the economy of the time.²⁷

White Andalusī slaves and eunuchs (*ṣaqāliba*), captives from the Christian territories, were a precious export ware that was in high demand in the Islamic East, and there are many indications that the Umayyad regime collaborated with the Berber slave-traders in this regard and participated in the slave boom of the early centuries.²⁸ They also reexported black slaves previously bought from the North African slave-traders.²⁹ Another important good that attracted the Umayyads was African gold. When ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III died in 961, the coffers of the caliphal treasure were full of gold, so that al-Ḥakam had enough surplus to pay rich stipends to his Berber allies.³⁰ In a letter sent by al-Ḥakam to his general al-Ghālīb in North Africa, the caliph explicitly refers to the “full treasure chests and granaries”, which guarantee the continued supply of resources to finance the stipends to the Berber principalities.³¹

Driven by these concerns, the Umayyads chose to cooperate with the main political players in the Maghreb and maintain a network of alliances and clientele links with them. Ideologically, this posed problems, given the anti-Umayyad past of the Kharijite movement,

26 For a nuanced study of the Berber element in the conquest of al-Andalus, cf. Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, Emires y Califas*, 166-186; for the Berber element (particularly Berber mercenaries) in the later caliphate, cf. 493-499.

27 Other goods were also traded: horses from North Africa, gold from sub-Saharan Africa, as well as ivory, ostrich feathers and animal skins; in the other direction, it was wheat, sugar, and cotton, as well as silk and luxury items. However, slaves predominated, cf. Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 44; Taher, *Les rapports socio-économiques*. Numismatic evidence suggests an economic boom in North Africa as a result of the slave-trade, see Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 59, 62-65. For the Ibāḍī monopoly of the trade with black slaves, cf. Savage, *Berbers and Blacks*.

28 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 45, 63-65. The *ṣaqāliba* were slaves from diverse European backgrounds, brought from Galicia, Francia, Lombardia and Calabria. It seems that the castration of eunuchs was carried out in Pechina by Jews and gave Umayyad al-Andalus a monopoly on the eunuch trade in the Mediterranean.

29 Botte, *Les réseaux transsahariens*, 47.

30 Taher, *Les rapports socio-économiques*, 190. Botte, 84 and passim. For the effective tax system of the Umayyads under the caliphs ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, al-Ḥakam and how the resulting wealth was also used to finance the foreign policy, see Manzano Moreno, *La Corte*, 59-93. According to Manzano, under ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, the tax income had reached 5,480,000 dinars (from 1,000,000 in emiral times), to which one has to add the private income of the caliph (around 765,000 dinars), Manzano Moreno, *La Corte*, 61-63.

31 Ballestín Navarro, *Jil’ a y monedas*, 395-96, with reference to *the Muqtabis* by Ibn Ḥayyān.

and because the Western Umayyads followed a traditionalist, anti-Shiite orientation, and relied on the support of the “orthodox” Malikite scholars from the 820s on.³² One of the arguments the Umayyads used was to emphasize that the Berbers of the Maghreb were their clients, because they had converted to Islam under the protection of the Eastern Umayyads at the time of the conquest.³³ The Umayyads also seem to have systematically used Berber personalities from al-Andalus as mediators when negotiating affairs and conflicts involving the Berber population on either side of the Straits.³⁴ Finally, they probably exerted indirect influence through the numerous Andalusī communities living along the North African coastline (seamen and traders), and in Fes.³⁵

The policy was broadly successful. Almost all the new Berber principalities in the Maghreb became part of the Umayyad system of alliances. The first attested diplomatic mission to Cordoba in 822 from the Rustamids shows that this event was not the first of this type, but rather part of an already functioning relationship. The emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān (r. 822-852) hosted them with exquisite hospitality.³⁶ There are indications that this exchange was regular and had already begun under emir al-Ḥakam (r. 796-822). One of the latter’s close counselors was the grandnephew of the Rustamid imam Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II (r. 822-852) employed him as chamberlain (*ḥājib*), courtier and diplomat, and he married into the family of the famous Iraqi court singer Ziriyāb.³⁷

This policy of good understanding with the Rustamids was continued by the emir Muḥammad (852-886). The evidence for Umayyad-Midrārīd relations is not as copious, but it seems that they were also intense and friendly.³⁸ The Ṣāliḥīds of Nakūr, the Midrādīds in Sijilmāsa, the Barghawāta in Tamasna and also the Idrisid petty rulers were all more or less pro-Umayyad.³⁹ Despite doctrinal differences, all these polities had in common their anti-Abbasid position, and they shared many interests based on the geopolitical situation.

The Umayyad Caliphate and the Maghreb (10th Century)

In the early tenth century, the Umayyads changed their strategy and started to intervene directly in the Maghreb, thereby reacting to the military and ideological pressure of a new player on the scene, namely that of the Ismaili caliphate of the Fatimids (established since 909 in Ifrīqiya), which actively pushed westwards, by attacking the Berber states and the North African Mediterranean coastline.⁴⁰ This turn of events surprised the Umayyad emirate in a dire moment of existential crisis, weakened as it was by many internal conflicts and rebellions. Its anxiety was aggravated by the Fatimid policy of sending secret agents to the peninsula to spread their propaganda.⁴¹ The fact that the most important rival of the Umayyads,

32 Mones, *Le rôle des hommes de religion*, 47.

33 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 53.

34 Guichard, *Une “Méditerranée berbère”*.

35 Taher, *Les rapports socio-économiques*, 183-184. He mentions i. a. Andalusī communities in Ceuta, Basra, Fes, Wazaqur and Sijilmāsa.

36 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 54.

37 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 54-56.

38 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 57.

39 Gaiser, *Slaves and Silver*, 58; Bencheqroun, *Les Idrissides entre Fatimides et Omeyyades*, 31-32.

40 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 55 et passim.

41 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 55-57.

the rebel 'Umar b. Ḥafṣūn, sent a message of allegiance to the newly established caliphate of the Fatimids in 909, shows how menacing the situation was. On the other hand, in the Maghreb, violent internal conflicts among the many Idrisid rulers, as well as internal crises in many of the Berber states, destabilized the southern frontier zone.⁴² The Fatimids managed to subjugate Tahert and Sijilmāsa in 909 and destroyed the Midrārid and Rustamid imamat; they also conquered Fes in 917 for a short while and pushed further westwards in 920-922.⁴³

In 912, the young and dynamic 'Abd al-Raḥmān (announced as caliph in 929) was proclaimed as the new Umayyad emir in Cordoba and successor to his grandfather.⁴⁴ He started his rule by waging numerous military campaigns to secure his control over the central territories in al-Andalus. From 916 onwards, he also started to take measures to stabilize his dominion over the frontier regions. Besides several campaigns against the Christian territories in the north, he took care of the southern frontline along the coast to defend the peninsula against potential Fatimid aggressions. Thus, in 914, he fortified Algeciras as a naval base for the Umayyad fleet and as a bridgehead for expeditions to the Maghreb, reinforced the watchtowers along the whole southern coastline of the peninsula, and secured Umayyad domination over the eastern coast of Spain. During the 920s and the 930s, he actively intervened in North African politics. The Ṣāliḥids of Nakūr, deposed by the Fatimid governor Masāla b. Ḥābūs in 917, were offered help by the Umayyads.⁴⁵ Soon Melilla (927) and the almost impregnable fort of Ceuta (931) came directly under the authority of the Umayyads. At the end of these campaigns, the northern coastline of the Western Maghreb had been transformed into an extension of the Western Umayyad territory, which gave them control over the commerce between the Iberian Peninsula and the North African hinterland. Umayyad policy contemplated allowing local Idrisid and Berber rulers to keep their position if they acknowledged the sovereignty of the Umayyad caliphs.⁴⁶

As part of the ideological offensive, the regime financed the work on Sunni mosques in the Maghreb. For instance, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir sent money for the extension of the prayer hall of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque in Fes, a building of high symbolic value.⁴⁷ The mosque continued to be a site of conflict between both powers: when Buluqqīn b. Zirī, a Fatimid ally, conquered Fes in 980, he commissioned a new minbar, from which the *khuṭba* was pronounced in the name of the Shiite imam, and added a commemorative inscription. Five years later, when Abū 'Āmir Muḥammad al-Manṣūr's cousin 'Aṣqalaja reconquered Fes for the Umayyads, he removed the minbar's backrest with the Fatimid inscription, replacing it with an

42 Bencheikroun, *Les Idrissides entre Fatimides et Omeyyades*, 36-38.

43 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 58-59.

44 For the ascension of 'Abd al-Raḥmān, cf. Fierro, *'Abd Al-Rahman III*, 37-41. His father Muḥammad, the presumed heir, had been assassinated by his own brother under unclear circumstances in 891, cf. Fierro, *'Abd Al-Rahman III*, 34-35. 'Abd al-Raḥmān's proclamation was undisputed, and it seems that his grandfather had shown his preference for him repeatedly. According to Ibn Ḥazm, he was chosen by the venerable system of the *shūrā* (council), not by designation, as was usual by then, although Maribel Fierro questions the historicity of this information: cf. Fierro, *Sobre la adopción del título califal*, 38.

45 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 58.

46 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 59.

47 Cf. Deverdun, *al-Karawiyyīn*.

inscription naming the Umayyad caliph Hishām and the *ḥājib* al-Manṣūr.⁴⁸ Later, when in 388/998 al-Manṣūr's son al-'Abd al-Malik al-Muẓaffar conducted an expedition as far as Fes, he also attempted to embellish the Qarawiyyīn. A beautiful cupola was constructed at the entrance of the axial nave of the oratory. A new minbar was set up and a cistern was laid out, but neither have been rediscovered.⁴⁹

The caliphs also used to send official robes (*khil'a*) and precious clothes (*khazz*) produced in the *dār al-ṭirāz*, the official caliphal manufacture, as gifts to their allies, who could then exhibit these as symbols of caliphal favor.⁵⁰ Other presents were valuable horses from the caliphal stables (*makārib al-khilāfa*).⁵¹ They also sent exquisite ebony boxes filled with perfumes: for instance, among the luxurious gifts sent to Mūsā b. Abī al-'Āfiya were "a pyxis of white ivory, containing sticks of frankincense seasoned with ambergris; another ivory pyxis, also with silver hinges, that had an Iraqi vase inside filled with an excellent *ghāliya*".⁵² They also sent vast amounts of coins, often golden caliphal dinars⁵³ as well as Umayyad banners, that would then manifest Umayyad allegiance.⁵⁴ 'Abd al-Raḥmān also seems to have continued the Umayyad policy of employing Andalusī Berbers as ambassadors to deal with the North African allies.⁵⁵

The direct confrontation of both regional superpowers on the soil of the Maghreb would put the local players under pressure from both sides and end up making them lose their political semi-independence. The details of the complicated and confusing ups and downs of this fierce fight for hegemony between the Umayyads and the Fatimids in the tenth century have been analyzed in several articles and will not be repeated here in detail.⁵⁶ Roughly speaking, the war was waged through intermediaries, and the tribal confederation of the Zanāta in Central Maghreb mostly sided with the Umayyads, the Sanhāja Zirids rather with the Fatimids. However, many minor players changed sides in accordance with the course of events, and the great powers sought allies amongst whoever would help them to fight their enemy. For instance, the Umayyads supported (in vain) the upheaval of the Kharijite rebel Abū Yazīd ("the Man of the Donkey") against the Fatimids in the 940s.⁵⁷ Similarly, the governor of Fez under the Fatimids, Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr al-Zanātī, changed sides in 955, acknowledged the Umayyad caliph and received vast sums of money from him.⁵⁸

48 Rosser-Owen, *Articulating the Hijāba*, 43.

49 Cf. Deverdun, al-Karawiyyīn.

50 Manzano Moreno, *La Corte*, 67-77. For a detailed study of the many gifts sent to the North African rulers based on the letter sent by the caliph al-Hakam to al-Ghālib, cf. Ballestín Navarro, *Jil'a y monedas*, 398-410, and *passim*.

51 Ballestín Navarro, *Jil'a y monedas*, 400.

52 Ibn Ḥayyān, Muqtabis, quoted in Rosser-Owen, *Articulating the Hijāba*, 238.

53 Manzano, *La Corte*, 67-77.

54 Manzano, *La Corte*, 269-296.

55 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 59, 61-62; Fierro, *'Abd Al-Rahman III*, 76.

56 Guichard, ; Bencheqroun, *Les Idrissides entre Fatimides et Omeyyades*; Lévi-Provençal, *La politica africana*, 351-388.

57 Fierro, *'Abd Al-Rahman III*, 77; Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 62-63.

58 Fierro, *'Abd Al-Rahman III*, 78.

These changes complicated the political map of the Maghreb even more. For instance, the governor for the Fatimids installed in the newly conquered Meknès, Mūsa b. Abī al-‘Āfiya, also switched to the pro-Umayyad faction in 928. He then persecuted the northern Idrisids in the name of the Umayyads, thereby pursuing a policy that ran counter to the traditional Umayyad policy. As a result, some Idrisids, formerly pro-Umayyads, switched sides and sought an alliance with the Fatimids. The Umayyads, in turn, reacted by fighting them and finally subjugating the Idrisids in the 950s.⁵⁹

In 969, the Fatimids relocated their capital to Cairo; from then on, their center was transferred to Egypt, so that their political ambitions and strategic interests changed significantly, now more orientated to the east. Ifrīqiya was left in the hands of their allies, the Sanhāja Zīrids. The Umayyad caliph al-Ḥakam II (r. 961-976) continued the policy of indirect rule pursued until then, namely by sending stipends to the Umayyad’s Berber allies in the Zanāta, bestowing them with robes of honor and other legitimizing insignia, and providing military support in their fights against the Sanhāja Zīrids, allies of the Fatimids.⁶⁰

The Umayyads even welcomed the alliance with the “heretic” Barghawāta, who sent an embassy to Cordoba in 963.⁶¹ Indirect rule in the Maghreb continued under the ‘Āmirids, de facto rulers in Umayyad Cordoba during the caliphate of Hishām II (r. 976-1009).⁶² The conflict took place between adversaries who used their acknowledgement of either the Umayyad or Fatimid caliph rather symbolically, as a tool to legitimize their rule and reinforce their own status. Broadly speaking, the western part of the Maghreb, dominated by Zanāta groups, belonged to the sphere of the Umayyads until their collapse at the beginning of the eleventh century, whereas Ifrīqiya, dominated by the Sanhaja Zīrids, remained under Fatimid influence. In the end, the long-lasting conflict led to the reinforcement of the dominance of the tribal Marghāwa chiefs of the Zanāta confederation in Central and Far Maghreb.

The “Malikization” of the Maghreb

One of the main long-term outcomes of these events was that they prepared the terrain for the “Malikization”⁶³ of the Maghreb in the 11th-12th centuries, thereby meaning the gradual marginalization of Kharijite and Shia forms of Islam and the adoption of Malikism, a rather conservative and mainstream variant of Sunni Islam. The growing interconnectedness with Maliki Umayyad al-Andalus,⁶⁴ and the loss of the monopoly over the slave-trade significantly weakened the Kharijite communities in the tenth century. The Fatimid repression of the

59 Benchekrroun, *Les Idrissides entre Fatimides et Omeyyades*.

60 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 64.

61 Guichard, *Omeyyades et Fatimides*, 63.

62 There was only a short interlude between 998-1004, when al-Manṣūr al-‘Āmirī established his son ‘Abd al-Malik as governor of an Andalusī province of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā in 998, a vast province that included almost the whole territory of modern Morocco. In 1004, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar had to reassume the policy of indirect rule, since he had to deal with the internal problems in al-Andalus and direct rule had proved to be too onerous. Taher, *Les rapports socio-économiques*, 188-189; Rosser-Owen, *Articulating the Hijāba*, 72-80.

63 Term used by Amara in the excellent analysis of this process: Amara, *L’ibadisme et la malikisation*, 329-347.

64 The expansion of Malikism among the Kharijite Berber principalities allied with the Umayyads, mainly as a result of Andalusī influence, seems to have been already very palpable in the 10th century. Benchekrroun, *Les Idrissides entre Fatimides et Omeyyades*, 21.

Kharijites contributed further to their marginalization. The defeat of the Ibadite rebel Abū Yazīd in 946 (supported by the Umayyads against the Fatimids) was followed by brutal Fatimid punitive expeditions. On the other hand, the Sanhāja Zīrids, based in Ifrīqiya, a stronghold of Malikism, although they accepted the sovereignty of the Shiite Fatimids, actively supported the spread of Malikism in the regions they dominated.⁶⁵

Looking back to the earliest phases of Islamization of the Far and Central Maghreb, one must consider its religious idiosyncrasy and plurality in the beginnings.⁶⁶ The presence of Kharijite, Shiite, and autochthonous, “Berber” variants of Islam has already been discussed. It is also noteworthy that for the first two centuries of Islam, there is no biographical information on Islamic religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*) from the Central and Far Maghreb recorded in the biographical dictionaries, in contrast to the rich information preserved for scholars in al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya. According to Fierro, this indicates the absence of a basic social constituent of Islam – the *‘ulamā’* – which further demonstrates that the Maghreb was not a part of “Sunni” mainstream Islam until the tenth and eleventh centuries, when it was gradually drawn into it through the adoption of Maliki Islam.⁶⁷ The majority of the population were Muslims (in fact, the Berbers converted remarkably early to Islam, in comparison to the autochthonous peoples in the Islamic East), albeit of a different sort, and their existence reflected the real diversity of early Islam, a societal and doctrinal model which was still in its formative phase and whose doctrinal and practical plurality later fell into oblivion.⁶⁸

It cannot be excluded that the non-preservation of an autochthone, local history of the Shiite Idrisids, the Ṣufrī Midrārīds and the idiosyncratic Barghawāṭa is the result of a filtering by later generations who were either not interested in preserving their memory, or deliberately obliterated it. The silence of the sources also suggests that these communities were not connected with other Muslims in the east. This contrasts with the case of the Ibāḍīte Rustamids in Tahert, for which parts of their historiography are still preserved.⁶⁹ Ibāḍīte communities have not only survived to this day and developed a theological and legal school doctrine of their own but they also maintained connections with the communities in the east through the circulation of scholars, pilgrims, merchants, knowledge, texts, and goods.⁷⁰

Summary and Conclusions

As has been shown, the Islamic conquest in the seventh century marked the beginning of a process that pulled the Far and Central Maghreb into the transregional area of the emerging Islamicate world that spanned from Africa to Persia and India. Increasingly, commercial, political and intellectual bonds connected this area: events taking place in the Islamic East – for instance, the repression and marginalization of political parties in Iraq in the eighth century – soon had effects on the Maghreb; religious missionaries and political dissidents from

65 Qayrawān was the center of Malikism from the late eighth century, cf. Idris, *L’aube du malikisme ifriqiyen*, 19-40; Amara, *L’ibadisme et la malikisation*, 334-336.

66 Amara, *L’islamisation du Maghreb central*, 103-130; Aillet, *Islamisation et arabisation*.

67 Fierro, *El proceso de islamización*, 79-103.

68 For similar phenomena in the Islamic East, one should compare with Crone, *Nativist Prophets* 167. Crone remarks that the Maghrebi nativist movements are the only ones documented (albeit poorly) besides the Iranian cases. My thanks to Maribel Fierro for pointing to this parallel.

69 Talbi, *Rustamids*, see the list of sources there.

70 Dridi, *La communauté ibadite*, 348-366.

the east migrated to the Maghreb and sought for adepts amongst the newly converted population (Kharijites, Shiites, Ismailites); political players from the east used this territory to fight their battles (Umayyads, Fatimids); the Maghreb became an integral part of a huge, transregional commercial network (slave-trade); and finally, by developing “Sunni” Islamic institutions of knowledge (Malikization), the Maghreb became part of the large network of interconnected ‘*ulamā*’, which integrated it into a large Islamicate world that shared legal practices, religious doctrines and globally connected scholarly elites.

This long-term and complex integration and Islamization, however, was not straightforward, and the vicinity to the Umayyads in al-Andalus has been shown to be a very important factor. In the first phase (8th-9th centuries), after some decades under the control of the Eastern caliphate in Damascus, the Far and Central Maghreb became politically independent, it developed regional and idiosyncratic variants of Islam which did not follow the mainstream, metropolitan “Sunni” version, and was not perceived as an integral part of the Islamic world. However, the intensifying commercial and diplomatic connections with their neighbors in the north, Umayyad al-Andalus (much more Islamized by then), not only brought them into contact with mainstream Islam, but it also enriched this area and made it increasingly attractive for the political players of the region. This is also confirmed by the archeological evidence, which demonstrates a widespread economic revival and an expansion of commercial activity in North Africa from the mid- to the late ninth century.⁷¹

In the second phase (10th century), the fight for hegemony of the two regional macro-powers, the Umayyad caliphate and the Fatimid caliphate, transformed the Maghreb into their arena. The need to seek protection from the Fatimids forced the Berber imamates of the Far and Central Maghreb, already loosely allied with the Umayyads, to establish closer bonds with them. This opened the door to a growing influence of Maliki scholars and practices and prepared the terrain for the uniform adoption of the Maliki legal school and marginalization from nativist forms of Islam in the Maghreb which would take place in the next centuries and draw this region closer into the global Islamicate world.

71 Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 87-103.

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