



The people's democratic republic of Algeria

Ministry of higher education and scientific research

Department of history

Year: 2nd year

The Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates

- The Islamic Conquest and Early Rule in the Maghreb (7th–8th Centuries)-

1. Historical Context

Following the death of Prophet Muhammad (632 CE), the Islamic Caliphate expanded rapidly. After consolidating control in the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant, Muslim forces began moving westward into North Africa. The Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE), based in Damascus, initiated a series of military campaigns aimed at integrating the Maghreb into the growing Islamic world.

2. The Conquest of the Maghreb

The conquest began under Uqba ibn Nafi, who led forces across Egypt and into what is now Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. He famously founded the city of Kairouan in 670 CE, which became a major center of Islamic learning and military operations. His campaign reached as far west as the Atlantic before he was ambushed and killed near Biskra (modern-day Algeria).

Subsequent campaigns under Hassan ibn al-Nu‘man and Musa ibn Nusayr subdued various Berber tribes and coastal cities. However, the conquest was not easy — many Berber groups resisted and fought for autonomy. One iconic figure in this resistance was al-Kahina, a Berber queen and warrior-priestess who led a revolt in present-day Algeria. Despite initial victories, she was eventually defeated and killed.

3. The Berbers and Islam

While military campaigns introduced Islam to the Maghreb, the full conversion of the Berber population took decades. Many Berbers embraced Islam but resisted Arab political dominance. Their incorporation into the Islamic world came with tensions — particularly regarding taxation, inequality, and exclusion from leadership roles. These issues would later contribute to Berber support for dissident Islamic sects and the founding of independent states.

4. Transition to Abbasid Rule

In 750 CE, the Abbasid revolution overthrew the Umayyads. The new Abbasid Caliphate, based in Baghdad, claimed control over the entire Islamic world, including the Maghreb. However, their control in the western regions was largely nominal. With growing geographic distance, limited infrastructure, and ongoing tribal resistance, Abbasid authority weakened. This vacuum allowed local rulers to assert independence, setting the stage for autonomous dynasties like the Rustamids.