

OPEN ACCESS**ABHATH**

(Research Journal of Islamic Studies)

Published by: *Department of Islamic Studies, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore.*

ISSN (Print) : 2519-7932

ISSN (Online) : 2521-067X

January-June-2026

Vol: 11, Issue: 39

Email:abhaath@lgu.edu.pkOJS:<https://ojs.lgu.edu.pk/index.php/abhath/index>

The Reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān: A Turning Point in the Development of the Early Islamic State

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Abstract

This study examines the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (65–86/685–705), one of the most influential rulers of the Umayyad dynasty, with particular emphasis on the political, military, administrative, and cultural developments of his caliphate. When ‘Abd al-Malik assumed power, the Islamic world was deeply divided by internal conflicts and competing claims to political authority, while rival political leaders challenged Umayyad legitimacy in several regions. Through an analysis of classical Islamic historical sources, including al-Ṭabarī, al-Ya‘qūbī, Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Kathīr, al-Dhahabī, and al-Suyūṭī, together with relevant Byzantine sources and selected works of modern scholarship, this article examines how ‘Abd al-Malik restored political unity and consolidated Umayyad authority. The study first examines the major internal political developments of the period, including the movement of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī, the revolt of ‘Amr b. Sa‘īd al-Ashdaq, the struggles against the Khārijite movements, the defeat of Mus‘ab b. al-Zubayr, and the elimination of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. It then analyzes Umayyad foreign policy toward North Africa, the Byzantine Empire, Anatolia, and the eastern provinces. Particular attention is devoted to the administrative and institutional reforms implemented during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, including monetary reform, the Arabization of the dīwāns, fiscal reorganization, the standardization of Qur’ānic writing, and the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The study argues that the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik marked a decisive turning point in the development of the early Islamic state. By ending prolonged civil conflict, restoring central authority, and introducing far-reaching reforms, he transformed the Umayyad polity into a more centralized and durable imperial structure. Many of the institutions established during his reign continued to influence Islamic governance for centuries and played a crucial role in shaping the political and administrative character of the medieval Islamic world.

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Keywords: ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, Umayyad Caliphate, Umayyad Reforms, Arabization, Dome of the Rock, Byzantine Relations, Islamic History

Introduction

The Umayyad period represents one of the most critical phases in Islamic history, both politically and administratively. The developments that followed the reign of Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, profoundly affected the nature of the caliphate and the administrative structure of the Islamic state. Debates over political legitimacy, tribal rivalries, and regional power struggles created the conditions for prolonged internal conflicts. Within this context, the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (65–86/685–705) occupies a distinctive place, not only because it re-established Umayyad authority but also because it marked a period in which the processes of centralization and Arabization accelerated significantly within the Islamic state. When ‘Abd al-Malik assumed power, the Islamic world was politically fragmented. The Umayyad administration based in Damascus faced challenges from multiple fronts. On the one hand, it confronted the movement of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī in Kūfa and its surrounding regions; on the other, it faced the opposition of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and his brother Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr, who had gained considerable influence, particularly in the Ḥijāz and Iraq. This situation resulted in the emergence of two competing political authorities within the Islamic state. The prolonged civil wars that followed severely weakened both the administrative order and the military capacity of the state. The primary objective of ‘Abd al-Malik was therefore to eliminate this fragmentation, restore political unity, and establish Umayyad authority throughout the Islamic world.

This article examines the major internal political developments that occurred during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān and their impact on the reconstruction of the state. Among the principal events that shaped the political landscape of the period were the movement of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī, power struggles within the Umayyad dynasty, the conflicts with various Khārijite movements, the defeat of Muṣ‘ab b. al-Zubayr, and the eventual elimination of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. However, the historical significance of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign cannot be reduced solely to military and political conflicts. This period also witnessed the reorganization of the administrative structure, the Arabization of the dīwāns, monetary reforms, and the construction of symbolic monuments such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, all of which contributed to the consolidation of political legitimacy. Furthermore, relations with the Byzantine Empire and their

influence on the internal politics of the Umayyad state constituted another important aspect of the period.

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the process through which ‘Abd al-Malik consolidated his authority and to analyze the internal and external political developments that emerged during his reign in the light of classical Islamic historical sources. In this regard, al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, Ibn al-Athīr’s *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Ibn Kathīr’s *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, al-Dhahabī’s *Tārīkh al-Islām*, and al-Suyūṭī’s *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’* constitute the principal sources of this research. Where relevant, these sources have been supplemented by Byzantine accounts and modern scholarly studies. By taking into account both the perspectives of these sources and the differences among their narrations, this article seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the political atmosphere of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign. Ultimately, the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān may be associated with two fundamental processes in Islamic history: the termination of civil war and the restoration of state authority. Rather than offering merely a chronological narrative, this article aims to demonstrate how ‘Abd al-Malik’s political strategies and administrative reforms transformed the structure of the Umayyad state and laid the foundations for its subsequent development.

2. The Life and General Characteristics of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

Throughout Islamic history, some rulers distinguished themselves not only through their political achievements but also through the lasting institutions and dynastic traditions they established. In this regard, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān may be regarded as one of the most influential rulers of the Umayyad period. Born in Medina in 26/646, he was the son of ‘Ā’isha bt. Mu‘āwiya b. al-Mughīra. His reign (65–86/685–705) marked a turning point in the history of the early Islamic state, during which Umayyad authority was consolidated and the foundations of a more centralized administrative system were laid. His full name was ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān b. al-Ḥakam b. Abī al-‘Āṣ b. Umayya, and he belonged to the Umayyad branch of the Quraysh tribe.¹ According to al-Balādhurī, ‘Abd al-Malik was known

¹ Abu Ja‘far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, ed. Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim, 2nd ed., vol. 6, Dar al-Ma‘arif, Cairo, 1967, p. 419.:- Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkar and Riyad al-Zirikli, vol. 7, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1996, p. 196.

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by the epithet *Rashḥ al-Ḥajar*, a sobriquet attributed to his reputation for frugality.² Classical sources also preserve various descriptions of his physical appearance. Ibn Kathir describes him as fair-skinned, of medium stature, large-eyed, thin-nosed, and handsome in appearance, while some reports state that his teeth were covered with gold.³ The sources also provide considerable information concerning his family background, wives, and children. From different wives he had several sons, including al-Walīd, Sulaymān, Yazīd, and Hishām, all of whom later became influential figures within the Umayyad state. Ibn Kathir records that he had nineteen children, whereas Ibn al-Athīr gives the number as seventeen.⁴ Al-Ya‘qūbī mentions only his male offspring and states that he had fourteen sons.⁵ Despite these discrepancies, the sources unanimously portray ‘Abd al-Malik as the patriarch of a large family that played a decisive role in shaping subsequent generations of the Umayyad dynasty. The political influence of ‘Abd al-Malik extended far beyond his own reign. Several members of his family later occupied the Umayyad caliphate, including his sons al-Walīd, Sulaymān, Yazīd II, and Hishām, as well as his nephew and son-in-law ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. For this reason, some sources refer to him as *Abū al-Mulūk* (“the Father of Kings”).⁶

‘Abd al-Malik distinguished himself not only through his political abilities but also through his scholarly and literary accomplishments. The sources describe him as intelligent, prudent, eloquent, and highly knowledgeable. Before assuming the caliphate, he devoted himself to learning in Medina and was counted among the leading jurists and traditionists of his time. Abū al-Zinād reportedly stated that the four foremost jurists of Medina were Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, Qabīṣa b. Dhu‘ayb, and ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. This testimony indicates the high scholarly reputation he enjoyed in Medina before entering political life.

² Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ al-Ziriklī, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 196.

³ **Ibn Kathir**, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, ed. Abdullah b. Abd al-Muhsin al-Turki, vol. 12, Dar Hijr, Cairo, 1997, pp. 378–379.

⁴ **Ibn Kathir**, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, vol. 12, p. 397, **Ali Ibn al-Athir**, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 3, ed. Umar Abd al-Salam Tadmuri, vol. 3, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, pp. 532–533.

⁵ **Ahmad b. Abi Ya‘qub b. Ja‘far b. Wahb al-Ya‘qubi**, *Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi*, vol. 2, Beirut, 1992, p. 281.

⁶ **Ibn Kathir**, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, vol. 12, p. 377, **al-Tabari**, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, vol. 6, p. 419.

Ibn Kathir further notes that before becoming caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik was known for his devotion, asceticism, attendance at the mosque, recitation of the Qur’ān, and engagement in legal scholarship⁷. These reports suggest that he was initially recognized primarily for his religious and scholarly qualities, whereas his later image as a determined and pragmatic statesman emerged during the years of his caliphate. His early commitment to learning earned him considerable respect in Medina. According to one report, when ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar was asked to whom people should turn for religious guidance after the elder scholars, he replied: “*Ask the jurist son of Marwān, namely ‘Abd al-Malik.*”⁸ Such statements indicate that even before his accession to the caliphate, he was regarded as a scholar capable of issuing legal opinions.

The sources also suggest that a significant transformation occurred in his character after he assumed political power. According to a well-known report, a copy of the Qur’ān rested on his lap when news arrived that allegiance had been pledged to him as caliph. Closing the manuscript, he reportedly remarked: “*This is the parting between you and me.*”⁹ Whether historical or symbolic, this report vividly illustrates the contrast between his earlier life of scholarship and devotion and the demanding realities of political leadership. Throughout his reign, he confronted civil wars, rebellions, dynastic rivalries, and persistent challenges to his authority, circumstances that compelled him to adopt a more pragmatic and sometimes uncompromising political approach. It is therefore possible that the prolonged internal conflicts of his age, together with struggles against political opponents and rivals within his own family, contributed to the development of a firmer and more resolute style of leadership. Consequently, any assessment of ‘Abd al-Malik’s personality must take into account both his scholarly formation in Medina and his subsequent role as the architect of a centralized Umayyad state based in Damascus.

3. The Accession of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān and the Political Context

‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān received the oath of allegiance immediately after the death of his father, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, in Ramaḍān 65/685. According to the

⁷ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, vol. 12, p. 377.

⁸ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa’*, ed. Muhammad Muhyi al-Din Mahmud, Cairo, 1952, p. 216.

⁹ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, vol. 12, p. 378.

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sources, the pledge of allegiance was given in Damascus on the very day of Marwān’s death.¹⁰ Thus, ‘Abd al-Malik assumed the leadership of the Umayyad state during one of the most turbulent periods in early Islamic history. At the time of his accession, however, the entire Islamic world was not under his authority. Only Syria and Egypt remained under Umayyad control, whereas ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr had established his authority over the Ḥijāz, Iraq, Yemen, and Khurāsān.¹¹ Consequently, during the early years of his caliphate, ‘Abd al-Malik faced not merely a rival claimant to the caliphate but a politically divided Islamic world.

The principal objective of his political programme was therefore to eliminate this fragmentation and reunify the Islamic state under a single authority. The most pressing challenge confronting him was the emergence of political divisions and rival political movements in various regions of the Islamic world. Several groups that refused to recognize the authority of Ibn al-Zubayr launched new movements in Iraq, the Ḥijāz, and the eastern provinces, further weakening central authority. As a result, the first years of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign were shaped not only by his struggle against Ibn al-Zubayr but also by a series of opposition movements and political challenges, particularly in Iraq. Among these movements, the most significant and influential was the movement of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī, which emerged in Kūfa and would play a decisive role in the political developments of the period. At the same time, various Khārijite groups remained a persistent challenge throughout his reign. Whenever one uprising was suppressed, another would emerge elsewhere, making the Khārijites one of the most enduring sources of instability faced by the Umayyad state.

4. Internal Political Developments during the Reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

The early years of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān’s reign were marked by severe political fragmentation and internal conflict throughout the Islamic world. Although he had succeeded his father as caliph in 65/685, Umayyad authority remained largely confined to Syria and Egypt, while vast regions of the empire were controlled by rival political forces. Consequently, the restoration of political unity became the central objective of his reign. The most significant internal developments of this period included the movement

¹⁰ Aḥmad b. Abī Ya‘qūb b. Ja‘far b. Wahb al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, vol. 2, Beirut, 1992, p. 269.

¹¹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’*, Cairo, 1952, p. 214.

of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī in Kūfa, the struggle against the Zubayrids, and the eventual re-establishment of Umayyad authority throughout the Islamic world.

4.1. The Movement of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī

During the early years of ‘Abd al-Malik’s caliphate, Iraq, and Kūfa in particular, was one of the most politically volatile regions of the Islamic world. The city contained a large population of non-Arab converts as well as many supporters of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the family of the Prophet. Throughout much of the Umayyad period, the region remained a centre of political opposition and recurrent unrest. In this environment, where the authority of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr remained fragile, a new movement emerged in Kūfa under the leadership of al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī. Claiming to act on behalf of the Ahl al-Bayt (the family and household of the Prophet Muḥammad, PBUH), al-Mukhtār called upon his followers to avenge the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (R.A.), the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), together with his relatives and companions who were martyred alongside him at Karbalā’ in 61/680. Through this appeal, he rapidly gained support and established himself as a significant political force in Kūfa.¹² After securing control of the city in 66/685, al-Mukhtār initiated a campaign against those whom he considered responsible for the tragedy of Karbalā’. A number of prominent figures associated with the Umayyad cause, including individuals who had participated in the events leading to Ḥusayn’s death, were targeted and executed. The sources emphasize that al-Mukhtār pursued these measures with considerable determination, presenting them as acts of retribution on behalf of the Ahl al-Bayt.¹³

The rapid growth of al-Mukhtār’s power attracted the attention of other political actors. Initially, he attempted to maintain cordial relations with ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, as both regarded ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān as a common rival. According to the sources, al-Mukhtār even proposed cooperation against the Umayyads and offered military assistance when he learned that forces had been dispatched toward the Ḥijāz. However, mutual distrust soon undermined this relationship. Ibn al-Zubayr and his supporters became increasingly suspicious of al-Mukhtār’s intentions, particularly after he sent a force of approximately three

¹² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 32.

¹³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, pp. 57–58; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 311.

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thousand men—most of them *mawālī* (non-Arab Muslim converts affiliated with Arab tribes as clients)—under the command of Shuraḥbīl b. Wars al-Hamdānī to assist the Zubayrid cause in the Ḥijāz.¹⁴ Although the force was presented as military support against the Umayyads, many of Ibn al-Zubayr's followers feared that al-Mukhtār sought to expand his own political influence. As al-Mukhtār consolidated his authority in Kūfa and began pursuing an increasingly independent policy, Mus'ab b. al-Zubayr, governor of Iraq and brother of 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, marched against him in 67/687. Following a prolonged siege and a series of military engagements, al-Mukhtār was defeated and killed. Some sources report that his hand was cut off after his death and displayed near the mosque of Kūfa as a warning to his supporters.¹⁵ With his death, the movement of al-Mukhtār effectively came to an end.

At first glance, the suppression of al-Mukhtār appeared to strengthen the position of Ibn al-Zubayr in Iraq. In reality, however, the conflict significantly weakened the Zubayrid camp. Mus'ab's campaign required substantial military resources and prolonged involvement in Iraqi affairs, while many of al-Mukhtār's supporters remained hostile to Zubayrid authority even after his death. The principal beneficiary of this situation was 'Abd al-Malik. Without expending significant military resources of his own, he witnessed the elimination of one rival while another emerged considerably weakened. During the early years of his reign, he lacked the resources necessary to confront all of his opponents simultaneously. The struggle between al-Mukhtār and the Zubayrids exhausted the competing forces in Iraq and enabled him to consolidate his position in Syria and Egypt. Consequently, when he later turned his attention toward Iraq, his opponents had already been substantially weakened.

The elimination of al-Mukhtār did not bring stability to Iraq. Tribal rivalries and political divisions continued to undermine order throughout the province, preventing Ibn al-Zubayr from establishing firm control. As a result, although the Zubayrids formally retained authority over Iraq, their position became increasingly fragile, while 'Abd al-Malik gradually strengthened his own power and prepared for the eventual reconquest of the region.¹⁶ Classical Sunni sources generally

¹⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 317.

¹⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 110.

¹⁶ Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall* (trans. Fikret İşıltan), Ankara University Press, Ankara, 1963, pp. 95–99.

portray al-Mukhtār in a highly negative manner, and some reports even accuse him of claiming divine inspiration. Such accounts, however, reflect the perspective of his opponents and must be approached critically. Modern scholarship and a careful reading of the sources suggest that, although al-Mukhtār employed the rhetoric of avenging Ḥusayn and defending the Ahl al-Bayt, he also sought to establish an independent political authority in Kūfa. The movement of al-Mukhtār therefore represents an important example of the interaction between religious legitimacy and political ambition during the period of civil war and political fragmentation that followed the death of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya. It also illustrates the fragmentation of authority in Iraq and the intense competition among rival political forces during the early years of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign.

4.2. The Revolt of ‘Amr b. Sa‘īd al-Ashdaq

One of the most significant political developments within the Umayyad dynasty during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān was the revolt of ‘Amr b. Sa‘īd al-Ashdaq. A prominent member of the Umayyad family and a cousin of the caliph, ‘Amr regarded himself as a legitimate candidate for the caliphate. According to Julius Wellhausen, the agreement concluded at Jābiya had envisaged the succession of Khālīd b. Yazīd and subsequently ‘Amr b. Sa‘īd after Marwān b. al-Ḥakam. Consequently, ‘Amr regarded the accession of ‘Abd al-Malik as an infringement upon what he considered his legitimate claim to the caliphate.¹⁷ Some classical sources further suggest that rivalry between the two men dated back to their youth and had been encouraged by members of their family.

The rebellion broke out when ‘Abd al-Malik departed from Damascus to address developments in Iraq and to campaign against Zufar b. al-Ḥārith al-Kilābī at Qarqīsiyā. Although ‘Amr initially accompanied the expedition, he secretly returned to Damascus with several supporters from the Kalb tribe after the army reached Butnān Ḥabīb. There he removed ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Umm al-Ḥakam, whom the caliph had left in charge of the city, and seized control of Damascus and the state treasury. Upon learning of these developments, ‘Abd al-Malik immediately abandoned his campaign and returned to the capital. Although both sides prepared for conflict, a temporary reconciliation was reached, largely because they belonged to the same ruling family. The agreement proved short-lived,

¹⁷ Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, pp. 81–82.

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however, and shortly thereafter ‘Amr was summoned to the caliphal palace, where he was arrested after being separated from his supporters.¹⁸

After a brief conversation, ‘Abd al-Malik ordered that ‘Amr be disarmed and placed in chains. The caliph reportedly declared that two rivals could not coexist in the same city and refused to grant him pardon. One report states that ‘Abd al-Malik initially instructed his brother ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to execute ‘Amr, but he declined because of their close kinship. Eventually, the caliph killed ‘Amr himself.¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī records that after the execution ‘Abd al-Malik was overcome with intense emotion and began to tremble, a reaction attributed to the killing of a close relative.²⁰ The death of ‘Amr b. Sa‘īd marked a turning point in the consolidation of ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule. While confronting external rivals such as ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and various opposition movements in Iraq, the caliph also had to eliminate potential challengers within the Umayyad family. With the removal of ‘Amr, no serious dynastic rival remained, allowing ‘Abd al-Malik to focus his attention on Iraq and the Ḥijāz. Although some historians have criticized the execution of ‘Amr after a promise of safety had allegedly been given, the episode nevertheless strengthened ‘Abd al-Malik’s position and contributed to the consolidation of centralized Umayyad rule. The incident also illustrates how political considerations and the power struggle could take precedence over family ties in dynastic politics.

4.3. The Defeat of Mus‘ab b. al-Zubayr

One of the most important phases of the internal political struggles during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān was his confrontation with Mus‘ab b. al-Zubayr, the brother of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the most powerful representative of the Zubayrid cause in Iraq. As governor of Iraq, Mus‘ab had established a strong political and military authority in the region and constituted the principal pillar of his brother’s rule outside the Ḥijāz. As tensions between the two sides intensified, the possibility of compromise gradually disappeared, making military confrontation increasingly inevitable.²¹ Mus‘ab was also a former companion of ‘Abd al-Malik during

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, pp. 145–147.

¹⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 358.

²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 145.

²¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, pp. 157–159.

their youth. According to al-Ṭabarī, ‘Abd al-Malik described him as a brave man from a brave family but believed that he lacked military experience and was poorly advised by those around him.²² Despite the growing conflict, ‘Abd al-Malik initially sought to avoid bloodshed. Before the outbreak of hostilities, he sent an envoy to Mus‘ab, proposing that if he ceased taking the oath of allegiance on behalf of his brother ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, military action would be avoided. Mus‘ab, however, rejected the proposal and reportedly replied: “*Only the sword will decide between us.*”²³

Before the decisive confrontation, Mus‘ab had already lost several of his most experienced commanders, including al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra and other prominent military leaders. This weakened both the military strength and morale of his forces. At the same time, ‘Abd al-Malik pursued a policy of attracting tribal chiefs and military commanders through promises of wealth, office, and political influence. As a result, many influential figures abandoned Mus‘ab’s camp and joined the Umayyad side. By the final stage of the conflict, only a small group of loyal supporters remained with him.²⁴ According to the sources, ‘Abd al-Malik made one final attempt to avoid bloodshed and offered Mus‘ab safe conduct through his brother Muḥammad b. Marwān if he would abandon the struggle. Mus‘ab, however, rejected the offer and declared that there was no path left except victory or death. During the battle, his remaining followers were gradually killed, and he was eventually slain by ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād b. Ḍibyān. His severed head was subsequently brought before ‘Abd al-Malik.²⁵ Upon seeing it, the caliph reportedly said: “*Conceal him, for by God there had long existed between us an old bond of respect; yet kingship is barren (al-mulk ‘aqīm).*”²⁶ The death of Mus‘ab effectively ended Zubayrid authority in Iraq. Following his defeat, many leading figures, including al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra and his supporters, pledged allegiance to ‘Abd al-Malik. Consequently, Iraq returned to Umayyad control, enabling the caliph to direct his full attention toward ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr in Mecca. For this reason, the elimination

²² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 157.

²³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 379.

²⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, pp. 158–159.

²⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 159.

²⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 161.

of Mus‘ab marked one of the most decisive turning points in the consolidation of ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule.

Ibn Kathir preserves a symbolic account illustrating the rapid reversals of fortune during this period. According to the report, while sitting in the governor’s palace of Kūfa, ‘Abd al-Malik heard a man remark that he had once seen ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād there with the head of al-Ḥusayn, later al-Mukhtār with the head of Ibn Ziyād, then Mus‘ab with the head of al-Mukhtār, and now ‘Abd al-Malik with the head of Mus‘ab. The caliph was reportedly shaken by these words and ordered the demolition of the structure.²⁷ Whether historical or symbolic, the narrative reflects contemporary perceptions regarding the transient nature of political power and the uncertainty of worldly authority.

4.4. The Elimination of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr

The elimination of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr constituted the final and most decisive stage of the internal political struggles during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. Following the defeat and death of Mus‘ab b. al-Zubayr, Iraq came under Umayyad control, enabling ‘Abd al-Malik to concentrate his efforts on Mecca, where ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr continued to claim the caliphate. Unlike many contemporary political figures, ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr possessed not only political influence but also considerable religious prestige. Classical sources record that he was the first child born to the Muhājirūn (the early Muslim emigrants who migrated from Mecca to Medina with the Prophet Muḥammad, PBUH) in Medina after the Hijra and that the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) performed taḥnīk for him (the practice of placing a small piece of softened date in a newborn’s mouth) and prayed on his behalf.²⁸ His close relationship with ‘Ā’isha, the wife of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), daughter of the first caliph Abū Bakr, and maternal aunt of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, who reportedly held him in exceptional affection, further strengthened his standing within the Ḥijāz.²⁹ Following the death of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya, he proclaimed his caliphate and gradually

²⁷ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, vol. 12, p. 156.

²⁸ Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Al-Maṭba‘a al-Sultāniyya, Cairo, 1311 AH, Vol. 5, p. 62, Hadith No. 3910.

²⁹ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, p. 182, no. 3505.

established authority over the Ḥijāz, Yemen, Iraq, and Khurāsān.³⁰ The political balance shifted dramatically after the death of Mus‘ab in 72/691–692. With the loss of Iraq, his principal military and financial base, ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr became increasingly isolated in the Ḥijāz. Recognizing that the Zubayrid movement had been substantially weakened, ‘Abd al-Malik appointed al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, a former schoolteacher from the tribe of Thaqīf in Ṭā’if, to eliminate the remaining Zubayrid resistance and restore Umayyad authority over Mecca. After establishing his headquarters in Ṭā’if, al-Ḥajjāj marched on Mecca and began a prolonged siege. During the campaign, ‘Abd al-Malik instructed him to offer ‘Abd Allāh one final opportunity to submit peacefully, promising him safe conduct if he accepted Umayyad authority. ‘Abd Allāh rejected the proposal and chose to continue the struggle.³¹

As the siege continued, many of ‘Abd Allāh’s supporters accepted the amnesty offered by al-Ḥajjāj and abandoned his cause, leaving him increasingly isolated.³² According to al-Ṭabarī, he consulted his mother, Asmā’ bt. Abī Bakr, concerning his situation. She advised him that if he believed himself to be in the right, he should remain steadfast and refuse any worldly compromise.³³ This episode suggests that ‘Abd Allāh regarded his struggle as a matter of principle as well as political authority. In Jumādā al-Ūlā 73/692, he made his final stand with a small group of loyal supporters. After fierce fighting, he was killed, and his head was sent to al-Ḥajjāj and later to ‘Abd al-Malik. His body was publicly displayed for a period before being buried at the request of his mother.³⁴ With his death, the most serious challenge to Umayyad rule disappeared, and the political fragmentation that had followed the death of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya effectively came to an end.

Modern historians have likewise regarded the fall of Mecca as the inevitable conclusion of the conflict. According to Julius Wellhausen, the Ḥijāz had largely lost its position as the political centre of the Islamic world after the death of ‘Uthmān. Although ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr possessed considerable religious

³⁰ Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, vol. 12, p. 187.

³¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, p. 399.

³² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 188.

³³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, pp. 188–199.

³⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 6, p. 188.

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legitimacy, he lacked the political and military resources necessary to compete successfully with the increasingly centralized Umayyad state.³⁵ His defeat enabled ‘Abd al-Malik to reunify the Islamic world under Umayyad authority and brought to an end the prolonged period of civil war and political fragmentation that had begun after the death of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya, thereby paving the way for the consolidation of Umayyad rule.

5. External Policy during the Reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

Although the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān is primarily remembered for the internal conflicts and political fragmentation that followed the death of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya, his foreign policy also played a significant role in the consolidation of Umayyad power. During the early years of his caliphate, ongoing rebellions and internal divisions prevented the Umayyad state from pursuing an active expansionist policy. Once political stability had largely been restored and rival claimants eliminated, however, ‘Abd al-Malik was able to redirect his attention toward the frontiers of the Islamic state. Consequently, military campaigns were renewed in several regions, particularly in North Africa, along the Byzantine frontier, and in the eastern provinces. These developments not only strengthened Umayyad authority over existing territories but also laid the foundations for the major conquests achieved under his successors in both the western and eastern parts of the Islamic world.

5.1. The Conquests in North Africa

North Africa occupied a position of great strategic importance for the Umayyad state due to its location on the Mediterranean trade routes and its role as a frontier region against the Byzantine Empire. However, the internal conflicts that dominated the first years of ‘Abd al-Malik’s caliphate—particularly the struggle against ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr—prevented the Umayyad government from pursuing an active policy in the region. After restoring internal stability, ‘Abd al-Malik reactivated Umayyad expansion in North Africa. At the time of his accession, however, Muslim authority in the region had been seriously weakened. Following the death of ‘Uqba b. Nāfi‘, an alliance between the Byzantines and several Berber

³⁵ Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, pp. 93–95.

groups had led to the loss of important centres, including Kairouan, forcing Muslim forces to retreat. Consequently, even before the complete resolution of internal conflicts, 'Abd al-Malik sought to halt this decline by sending military assistance through his brother 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān, the governor of Egypt.³⁶ Although the conquest of North Africa had begun before his reign, it was under 'Abd al-Malik that the process regained momentum and achieved lasting results. Governors such as Zuhayr b. Qays al-Balawī, Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān al-Ghassānī, and later Mūsā b. Nuṣayr played key roles in this process. While Zuhayr achieved some military successes before being killed in battle against Byzantine forces, Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān emerged as the principal architect of the Umayyad reconquest of the region.³⁷

One of the most important stages of 'Abd al-Malik's North African policy was the dispatch of Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān with a large army. Establishing Kairouan as his base, Ḥassān captured Carthage, inflicting a major blow on Byzantine power in North Africa.³⁸ He subsequently faced strong resistance from the Berber leader known in the sources as al-Kāhina. Although Muslim forces initially suffered setbacks, reinforcements sent by 'Abd al-Malik enabled Ḥassān to resume the campaign and ultimately defeat her. Following this victory, large numbers of Berbers accepted Muslim rule, and many later joined the Muslim armies participating in subsequent conquests.³⁹

Despite facing other challenges, including Kharijite revolts and disturbances in Iraq and the eastern provinces, 'Abd al-Malik continued to support the consolidation of Umayyad authority in North Africa. The process reached its most successful phase under Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, during whose governorship most of the Maghrib was brought under Muslim control. These developments not only secured Umayyad authority in North Africa but also laid the foundations for the later conquest of al-Andalus. Consequently, the reign of 'Abd al-Malik represents a decisive stage in the incorporation of North Africa into the Islamic world and in the emergence of the Umayyad state as a major political and military power in the western Mediterranean.

³⁶ "'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, Istanbul, 1988, pp. 266–270.

³⁷ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, Dār al-Hilāl, Beirut, 1988, pp. 226–227.

³⁸ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, p. 143.

³⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, pp. 415–418.

5.2. Relations with the Byzantine Empire

Relations with the Byzantine Empire constituted one of the most important aspects of Umayyad foreign policy during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. Although the Sasanian Empire had been eliminated during the early Islamic conquests and major Byzantine provinces such as Syria and Egypt had come under Muslim rule, Byzantium remained the principal external rival of the Umayyad state. During the early years of his caliphate, however, 'Abd al-Malik was unable to pursue an active policy against Byzantium because of the internal conflicts that engulfed the Islamic world. Consequently, he concluded a treaty with the Byzantine Empire similar to earlier arrangements made during the reign of Mu'āwiya and agreed to pay a regular tribute in exchange for peace and security along the northern frontier.⁴⁰

Islamic and Byzantine sources present this agreement from different perspectives. While Muslim historians portray it as a temporary measure necessitated by internal political instability, Byzantine sources depict it as evidence of imperial superiority. According to Theophanes, Emperor Justinian II eventually violated the terms of the agreement, leading to renewed tensions between the two powers.⁴¹ These differing accounts illustrate how the agreement was interpreted through contrasting political perspectives, although in practice it served only as a temporary arrangement. The treaty enabled 'Abd al-Malik to concentrate on internal affairs and to confront rivals such as 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. Nevertheless, Justinian II sought to exploit Muslim internal divisions and launched military operations in Syria, reportedly capturing Antioch with the assistance of local groups, including the Jarājima. Once internal stability had been largely restored, however, 'Abd al-Malik adopted a more active policy toward Byzantium.

A turning point in Byzantine-Umayyad relations occurred with the Battle of Sebastopolis in 72/692. According to Byzantine sources, Justinian II advanced against the Muslims with an army that included approximately thirty thousand Slavic troops. During the battle, however, a substantial number of these forces defected to the Muslim side, including a Slavic commander who reportedly crossed over with twenty thousand soldiers. This development contributed significantly to the Byzantine defeat and altered the balance of power along the frontier.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, Vol. 6, p. 150; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, p. 636; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, p. 130.

⁴¹ Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, Oxford, 1997, p. 509.

Theophanes notes that following this victory Muslim **forces** intensified their military operations against Byzantine territories.⁴² Notably, while Islamic sources provide only limited information about the battle, Byzantine chroniclers discuss it in much greater detail, reflecting their greater interest in frontier warfare. Military campaigns along the Byzantine frontier continued in subsequent years. Ibn Kathir records that in 75/694–695 Muḥammad b. Marwān led a summer expedition into Byzantine territory and maintained pressure on the border regions.⁴³ As Umayyad power expanded, military and administrative measures were introduced to strengthen frontier control. According to Ibn al-Athīr, in 84/703–704 ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik captured al-Maṣṣīṣa (Mopsuestia), constructed a fortress and a mosque there, and stationed three hundred selected troops in the city.⁴⁴ This policy demonstrates the Umayyad effort to establish a permanent military presence along the Byzantine frontier rather than relying solely on seasonal raids.

At the same time, the conflict remained balanced and continuous. Theophanes records that Byzantine forces occasionally inflicted significant losses on Muslim armies in Armenia and Cilicia during the years 83–84/702–704.⁴⁵ Thus, despite notable Umayyad successes, neither side achieved a decisive and permanent victory. Overall, the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik witnessed a transition from a policy of temporary accommodation with Byzantium to renewed military confrontation. This transformation reflected the caliph’s ability to redirect Umayyad resources toward external expansion after restoring internal political stability.

5.3. Campaigns in Anatolia

The struggle against the Byzantine Empire during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān was not confined to North Africa and the Syrian frontier but also extended into Anatolia and the border regions of Asia Minor. Following the restoration of internal stability, military operations against Byzantium intensified and took the form of regular campaigns known in Islamic sources as the *ṣawā’if* (summer expeditions) and *shawāṭi* (winter expeditions). These campaigns aimed to maintain pressure on the Byzantine frontier, secure Muslim border regions, and expand Umayyad military influence in Anatolia. Following the Battle of Sebastopolis, Muslim military activity in Anatolia increased considerably. According to Theophanes, around 73/692–693 Muḥammad b. Marwān led an

⁴² Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, pp. 513–515.

⁴³ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, p. 243.

⁴⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, p. 517.

⁴⁵ Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, pp. 519–520.

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expedition into Byzantine territory accompanied by Slavic troops who had previously defected from the Byzantine army and succeeded in capturing a large number of prisoners.⁴⁶ Islamic sources likewise indicate an intensification of military operations during this period. Ibn Kathir records that in 73/692–693 Muḥammad b. Marwān defeated Byzantine forces during a summer campaign, while in the same year ‘Uthmān b. al-Walīd achieved notable successes against Byzantine forces in Armenia.⁴⁷

Military operations in Anatolia continued throughout the remainder of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign. Ibn Kathir reports that in 81/700–701 ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik captured Qālīqalā (Erzurum) and secured substantial spoils of war.⁴⁸ Byzantine sources also confirm the increasing intensity of Muslim campaigns in Anatolia and Armenia during these years. According to Theophanes, around 83–84/702–704 ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik launched expeditions deep into Anatolia and strengthened the strategic city of Mopsuestia (al-Maṣṣīsa) by rebuilding its fortifications and stationing troops there.⁴⁹ These measures demonstrate that the Umayyads sought not merely to conduct seasonal raids but also to establish permanent military centres along the Byzantine frontier. The Anatolian campaigns conducted during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik represented more than temporary military incursions. They formed part of a systematic frontier policy designed to increase pressure on Byzantium, strengthen Muslim control of the border regions, and establish a lasting military presence in Anatolia. These developments contributed to the consolidation of Umayyad authority and laid important foundations for the military expansion undertaken by later Umayyad rulers.

5.4. Conquests in the Eastern Provinces

During the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, the eastern provinces of Khurāsān, Sijistān, and Sind occupied an important place in Umayyad foreign policy. Following the suppression of major internal revolts and Kharijite uprisings, military activity along the eastern frontier intensified. Unlike the western conquests, however, campaigns in the east progressed more slowly due to difficult geographical conditions, tribal rivalries, and the resistance of local rulers. In the early years of ‘Abd al-Malik’s caliphate, Khurāsān remained under the control of

⁴⁶ Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, p. 512.

⁴⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, pp. 224–225.

⁴⁸ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, p. 305.

⁴⁹ Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, p. 518.

‘Abd Allāh b. Khāzim, who supported ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. After the collapse of Zubayrid authority in the region and the death of Ibn Khāzim, Khurāsān returned to Umayyad control. Thereafter, ‘Abd al-Malik appointed a series of governors to strengthen Umayyad authority, including Umayya b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Khālid b. Asīd, whom al-Ṭabarī describes as enjoying the caliph’s particular confidence and support.⁵⁰

A significant portion of the military activity in the east took place in Sijistān and the surrounding regions. According to Ibn Kathir, al-Ḥajjāj reorganized the administration of the eastern provinces and reassigned several commanders in an effort to improve military efficiency.⁵¹ In 78/697–698, he appointed ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Abī Bakra as governor of Sijistān and ordered him to campaign against the powerful local ruler Rutbīl. Although the Muslim army initially achieved some successes, difficult terrain and logistical problems eventually forced it to withdraw after suffering considerable losses.⁵² This episode illustrates the challenges that distinguished eastern campaigns from the more successful conquests in the western regions of the Umayyad Empire. Military operations continued under al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra and later his son Yazīd b. al-Muhallab. Al-Muhallab conducted campaigns in the regions of Balkh, Kish, and Nasaf before his death in 82/701–702. His son Yazīd subsequently expanded Umayyad influence and achieved important victories, including the capture of the fortress of Nīzak in Bādghīs. According to al-Ṭabarī, Yazīd informed al-Ḥajjāj of this success in a detailed report describing the defeat and dispersal of enemy forces.⁵³ These campaigns demonstrate the continued Umayyad effort to establish a more permanent presence in Khurāsān despite persistent local resistance.

A major turning point occurred in 85/704–705 when al-Ḥajjāj dismissed Yazīd b. al-Muhallab and appointed Qutayba b. Muslim as governor of Khurāsān. Although Qutayba’s most famous conquests—including Bukhara and Samarqand—belong primarily to the reign of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik, the political and military foundations of those successes were laid during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. The city of Marw emerged as an important military base, and Umayyad influence in Transoxiana steadily expanded. These developments would later play a significant role in facilitating closer contact between the Turks and

⁵⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, Vol. 6, p. 200.

⁵¹ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, pp. 280–281.

⁵² Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 386–387.

⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, Vol. 6, p. 387.

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Islam. As Zekeriya Kitapçı has observed, the expansion of Islam in the region involved not only military conquest but also the establishment of mosques, settlement policies, and administrative institutions.⁵⁴

Military activity also continued in Sind and Makrān. Al-Ḥajjāj appointed Sa‘īd b. Aslam b. Zur‘a al-Kilābī as governor of Makrān in 75/694–695, but local rebellions disrupted Umayyad authority. Subsequent campaigns restored control over parts of the region and prepared the ground for the later conquests of Muḥammad b. Qāsim. According to al-Balādhurī, some areas around Kandābīl were incorporated into Muslim territory during this period, although the complete conquest of the region occurred only in the following generation.⁵⁵ Although Umayyad authority in the eastern provinces was not yet fully consolidated during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, important foundations were laid for the expansion of Muslim rule in Khurāsān, Sijistān, and Sind. The military and administrative measures adopted during this period paved the way for the major conquests achieved under Qutayba b. Muslim and Muḥammad b. Qāsim in the early eighth century

6. State Formation and Reforms during the Reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

The reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān represents not only the restoration of political unity in the Islamic world but also a crucial phase in the institutional development of the Umayyad state. Following the suppression of internal revolts and the restoration of central authority, a series of administrative, financial, and cultural reforms transformed the Umayyad polity into a more centralized and durable state. Monetary reform, the Arabization of the dīwāns, fiscal reorganization, and other administrative measures strengthened the foundations of government. Cultural initiatives, including the construction of the Dome of the Rock and efforts to standardize Qur’ānic writing and recitation, further reinforced

⁵⁴ Zekeriya Kitapçı, *How Did the Turks Become Muslims?*, Yedikubbe Yayınları, Konya, 2004, pp. 67, 87–90.

⁵⁵ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 419.

the ideological foundations of Umayyad rule. Together, these reforms exerted a lasting influence on the subsequent development of Islamic governance.⁵⁶

6.1. Monetary and Financial Reforms

One of the most significant reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign was the introduction of an independent Islamic currency system. During the early Islamic period, Byzantine and Sasanian coins continued to circulate, often with only minor Islamic additions. In 76/695, however, ‘Abd al-Malik ordered the minting of the first fully Islamic gold dinars bearing Arabic inscriptions. According to Ibn al-Athīr, this reform was partly prompted by political tensions with the Byzantine Empire. When the Byzantine emperor allegedly threatened to place offensive references to the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) on coins used by Muslims, ‘Abd al-Malik consulted Khālīd b. Yazīd and abandoned the use of Byzantine coinage in favour of an independent Islamic currency.⁵⁷ In the following year, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf introduced the minting of silver dirhams in Iraq, completing the transition toward a distinct Umayyad monetary system.⁵⁸ The reform was gradual rather than sudden. Byzantine-style coins initially remained in circulation, later incorporating Arabic and Kūfīc inscriptions before being replaced by fully epigraphic Islamic coinage. Beyond its economic significance, the reform represented an important assertion of Umayyad sovereignty and cultural independence from Byzantium. Standardization of weight and purity strengthened fiscal administration, facilitated trade, and enhanced central control over the empire’s financial resources. By creating a uniform currency system, ‘Abd al-Malik reduced monetary fragmentation across the provinces and reinforced the authority of the central government.⁵⁹

The reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik extended beyond coinage to broader fiscal administration. The prolonged civil wars of the Second Fitna had disrupted revenue collection in several provinces and weakened central control over taxation. Consequently, the Umayyad government sought to reorganize fiscal administration and secure a more stable source of income. The rapid expansion of Islam and the

⁵⁶ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, Macmillan, London, 1970, pp. 216–219; Fatih Erkoçoğlu, “Abdülmelik b. Mervân’ın Para Reformu,” *İstem*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 2006, pp. 173–176.

⁵⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, pp. 452–454.

⁵⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, 1970, p. 217.

⁵⁹ Fatih Erkoçoğlu, “Abdülmelik b. Mervân’ın Para Reformu,” *İstem*, Vol. 4, No. 8, 2006, pp. 173–176

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growing number of non-Arab converts created additional challenges for the taxation system. According to Philip K. Hitti, many converts in Iraq and Khurāsān sought exemption from certain taxes after embracing Islam and consequently left agricultural lands for urban centres or military service. This development reduced state revenues while simultaneously increasing military expenditures. In response, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf attempted to preserve the fiscal system by returning many converts to agricultural production and maintaining existing revenue structures.⁶⁰ These measures illustrate the Umayyad effort to strengthen fiscal administration, stabilize state revenues, and support the growing administrative and military needs of the empire.

6.2. The Arabization of the Dīwāns

One of the most significant administrative reforms of the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān was the Arabization of the state dīwāns. During the early Islamic conquests, the Muslims largely preserved the administrative systems of the territories they conquered. Consequently, government records continued to be maintained in the languages traditionally used in each region: Persian in Iraq and Iran, Greek in Syria, and Greek and Coptic in Egypt. Important institutions such as the *Dīwān al-Kharāj*, which administered taxation and state revenues, continued to operate in these local languages. As political stability was gradually restored under ‘Abd al-Malik, however, efforts were made to reorganize the administrative structure of the empire and establish Arabic as the common language of government.⁶¹ According to al-Balādhurī, the process began in Iraq under the governorship of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf. The fiscal registers there had long been maintained in Persian by officials of Iranian origin. One of al-Ḥajjāj’s secretaries, Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, who was proficient in both Arabic and Persian, proposed that the records could be translated into Arabic. After being entrusted with the task, he successfully completed the Arabization of the Iraqi dīwān despite opposition from elements of the existing bureaucracy.⁶²

A similar reform was carried out in Syria, where Sulaymān b. Sa‘d supervised the translation of the Greek administrative records into Arabic. According to the sources, this measure effectively ended the dependence of the Umayyad administration on Greek-speaking bureaucrats and strengthened the role

⁶⁰ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 218–219.

⁶¹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, 1970, p. 217.

⁶² Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 294–295.

of Arabic within the machinery of government.⁶³ Although medieval sources often explain these developments through anecdotal reports, modern historians generally regard the Arabization of the dīwāns as part of a broader programme of centralization pursued by ‘Abd al-Malik and continued under al-Walīd.⁶⁴ The reform involved more than a simple change of language. It transformed the composition of the administrative elite and reduced reliance on non-Muslim and non-Arab bureaucrats who had dominated fiscal administration since the conquest period. Ibn Khaldūn argues that by the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, Muslims had acquired sufficient experience in administrative and financial affairs to manage state institutions independently. The emergence of Arabic-speaking Muslim secretaries and accountants made the Arabization of government administration both practical and sustainable.⁶⁵

The Arabization of the dīwāns therefore represented a major step in the institutional development of the Umayyad state. It strengthened central control over revenue and expenditure, enhanced administrative cohesion, and contributed to the formation of a distinct Islamic imperial identity. Moreover, the reform paved the way for later Islamic administrative systems and helped establish Arabic as the common language of government, scholarship, and culture throughout much of the Islamic world.⁶⁶

6.3. The Development of Qur’ānic Script, Dotting, and Vocalization

The cultural reforms undertaken during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān also included important efforts to improve the written form of the Qur’ān. The rapid expansion of the Islamic state and the increasing number of non-Arab Muslims made the correct recitation of the Qur’ān an issue of growing importance. Consequently, measures were introduced during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik and the governorship of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf to facilitate the accurate reading of the Qur’ānic text and reduce the possibility of errors in recitation.⁶⁷ Classical sources preserve differing accounts regarding the origins of Qur’ānic dotting and vocalization. Al-Dhahabī identifies Yaḥyā b. Ya‘mar among the earliest figures associated with the

⁶³ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 192–193.

⁶⁴ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 217.

⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘Ibar wa Dīwān al-Mubtada’ wa al-Khabar*, ed. Khalīl Shihāda, 2nd ed., Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1988.

⁶⁶ Faruk Korkmaz, “Abdülmelik b. Mervān Döneminde Divanların Arapçalaştırılması,” *Dergiabant*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2025), pp. 121–139.

⁶⁷ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, London, 1970, pp. 219–220.

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introduction of diacritical marks⁶⁸, while Ibn Kathir reports that the process assumed a more systematic form under the orders of ‘Abd al-Malik and the supervision of al-Ḥajjāj, who entrusted the task to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Yaḥyā b. Ya‘mar. Other traditions attribute the earliest initiatives to Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘alī.⁶⁹ Al-Suyūfī likewise records various opinions on the subject and notes the important contribution of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad to the refinement of the vocalization system.⁷⁰ Taken together, these reports suggest that the development of Qur’ānic dotting and vocalization was a gradual process that reached a more organized and institutionalized form during the period of ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj.

These developments represented more than a technical modification of the written text. They formed an important cultural and religious reform aimed at preserving the correct recitation of the Qur’ān. According to Philip K. Hitti, the principal objective of al-Ḥajjāj’s measures was to prevent errors in reading the sacred text.⁷¹ The wider use of diacritical marks and vocalization signs contributed significantly to the accurate transmission of the Qur’ān and complemented the broader process of administrative and cultural consolidation within the Umayyad state.

6.4. The Construction of the Dome of the Rock

One of the most remarkable architectural projects undertaken during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān was the construction of the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Ṣakhra) and the extensive building activities carried out around al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. According to Islamic sources, the construction of the Dome of the Rock began in 69/688–689 and was completed in 72/691–692. Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī records that ‘Abd al-Malik initiated the construction of both the Dome of the Rock and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in 69 AH and completed the project in 72 AH.⁷² Ibn Kathir, however, reports that the construction commenced in 66/685–686 and

⁶⁸ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Waḥayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-A‘lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1993), Vol. 6, p. 503.

⁶⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, ed. Sāmī b. Muḥammad Salāmah, 3rd ed. (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyibah li’l-Nashr wa’l-Tawzī’, 1999), Vol. 1, p. 50.

⁷⁰ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li’l-Kitāb, 1974), Vol. 4, p. 185.

⁷¹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 219–220.

⁷² Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt al-Zamān fī Tawārīkh al-A‘yān*, ed. Muḥammad Barakāt et al., Vol. 9 (Damascus: Dār al-Risālah al-‘Ālamiyyah, 2013), p. 39.

was completed in 73/692–693.⁷³ The inscription on the monument itself likewise attributes its construction to ‘Abd al-Malik and records the date as 72 AH. Classical Islamic sources frequently discuss the construction of the Dome of the Rock within the context of the political rivalry between ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. According to a report preserved by Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn al-Zubayr’s control of Mecca enabled him to influence pilgrims during the pilgrimage season and to conduct propaganda against the Umayyads. In response, ‘Abd al-Malik reportedly restricted travel to Mecca for a period and subsequently sponsored the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the renovation of al-Masjid al-Aqṣā in Jerusalem. The same report further mentions that some people performed rituals around the Dome of the Rock resembling circumambulation (ṭawāf) during this period.⁷⁴ Philip K. Hitti likewise associates the construction of the monument with the political struggle between ‘Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr, arguing that it may have served as part of a policy intended to redirect pilgrims temporarily toward Jerusalem.⁷⁵

The sources also preserve detailed information concerning the construction process. According to these accounts, ‘Abd al-Malik allocated substantial financial resources to the project and appointed Rajā’ b. Ḥaywa and Yazīd b. Sallām to supervise the work. According to the sources, substantial financial resources were allocated to the project, which was supervised by Rajā’ b. Ḥaywa and Yazīd b. Sallām and involved craftsmen from various regions.⁷⁶

Byzantine sources likewise indicate that significant building activities were undertaken in Jerusalem during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. According to Theophanes, the caliph carried out construction and restoration projects within the sacred precincts of the city and sought architectural materials, including columns, for these works. These accounts suggest that the Umayyad administration regarded Jerusalem not only as a religious centre but also as a city of considerable political and symbolic importance.⁷⁷ When considered alongside the monetary reforms, the Arabization of the dīwāns, and the broader process of administrative centralization, the construction of the Dome of the Rock appears as part of a wider programme aimed at strengthening Umayyad state identity. The monument was not merely a

⁷³ Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 12, pp. 41–42.

⁷⁴ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt al-Zamān*, Vol. 9, pp. 39–40.

⁷⁵ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 220–221.

⁷⁶ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt al-Zamān*, Vol. 9, pp. 40–44.

⁷⁷ Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, pp. 509–510.

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religious structure but also a powerful symbol of Umayyad political legitimacy, architectural achievement, and leadership within the Islamic world.

7. The Death of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān died in Damascus in 86/705. According to al-Ṭabarī, his death occurred in the middle of Shawwāl, and several reports identify Thursday as the day of his death. The sources provide varying accounts regarding both the length of his caliphate and his age at the time of death. Al-Ṭabarī reports that ‘Abd al-Malik remained in power for approximately twenty-one years. Nearly nine of these years were spent in conflict with ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, while the remainder of his reign witnessed the restoration of Umayyad authority over most of the Islamic world. Regarding his age, Abū Ma‘shar states that he died at the age of sixty, al-Madā’inī records sixty-three, while other reports mention fifty-eight years.⁷⁸ Classical sources preserve several accounts concerning his final days. According to Ibn al-Athīr, ‘Abd al-Malik is reported to have remarked that he feared dying during the month of Ramaḍān because he had been born in that month, weaned in it, completed his recitation of the Qur’ān in it, and received the pledge of allegiance during it. Nevertheless, he died not in Ramaḍān but in the middle of Shawwāl in 86/705.⁷⁹ Other reports state that during his final illness physicians advised him not to drink water, but when his thirst became severe he requested water from members of his family.⁸⁰

Ibn al-Athīr also records the advice that ‘Abd al-Malik gave to his sons on his deathbed. He urged them to remain conscious of God, preserve family unity, respect the rights of both elders and younger members of the family, and seek the counsel of experienced statesmen in political affairs. He specifically recommended consulting Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik and emphasized the services rendered to the Umayyad state by al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf. These instructions reflect his desire to preserve the political stability and cohesion of the Umayyad dynasty after his death. Following his death, the funeral prayer was led by his son al-Walīd, and he was buried outside Bāb al-Jābiya in Damascus.⁸¹ Ibn al-Athīr also records that during the Abbasid revolution in 132/750, the grave of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān was

⁷⁸ Abu Ja‘far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, pp. 418–419.

⁷⁹ Ali Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, p. 531.

⁸⁰ Ali Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 3, p. 531.

⁸¹ Ali Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, vol. 3, pp. 531–532.

opened and only parts of his remains, including his skull, were reportedly found. This account reflects the hostility directed toward the Umayyads following the collapse of their dynasty.⁸² His success in ending the period of political fragmentation and civil conflict, restoring central authority, implementing administrative and monetary reforms, and strengthening the institutional foundations of the caliphate secured his place among the most influential rulers of early Islamic history.

8. Conclusion

The reign of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān represents one of the most transformative periods in the history of the Umayyad Caliphate and the early Islamic state. When he assumed power, the empire was divided by civil war, regional rivalries, and competing claims to political legitimacy. Through military skill, political pragmatism, and administrative vision, he succeeded in restoring central authority and re-establishing Umayyad control throughout the empire. The suppression of opposition movements and the strengthening of Umayyad influence in North Africa, Anatolia, and the eastern provinces further consolidated his rule. Equally significant were the reforms that reshaped the institutional foundations of the state. The introduction of an independent Islamic currency, the Arabization of the dīwāns, fiscal reorganization, the standardization of Qur’ānic writing, and the construction of the Dome of the Rock contributed to the emergence of a more centralized and coherent imperial system. These measures not only strengthened Umayyad authority but also helped define the administrative and cultural identity of the Islamic state.

The historical significance of ‘Abd al-Malik therefore extends far beyond his military achievements. His reign marked a decisive transition from political fragmentation and civil conflict to administrative consolidation and imperial stability. He may thus be regarded as one of the principal architects of the classical Islamic state, whose reforms continued to influence Islamic governance long after the end of the Umayyad dynasty.

⁸² Ali Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 5, p. 24.

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(a) Gold coin of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (Istanbul Archaeology Museums, Display No. 31).

(b) Dirhams minted during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān.



(Source: Hakkı Dursun Yıldız, “'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (TDV İA), vol. 1 (Istanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1988), 266–270.

(c) Gold dīnār minted in Damascus during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān.



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