

The kingdom of Berghwata: A Heresy -tattooed Memory

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Abstract

While some historians marvelled at the Berghwata legacy, others despised it and accused it of heresy. Some noted its wealth and strength, while others focused on its pagan, Jewish, and Christian aspects. The Berghwata dynasty represents a significant milestone in the history of the Amazigh people in Morocco. This dynasty is either totally forgotten or is remembered as heretical. In this paper, I aim to explore the contentious debate surrounding Berghwata with the goal of illuminating its philosophy. I will argue that regardless of the degree to which Berghwata's creed deviated from Islam, its thought has stood as a shield against Umayyad Arabization and invasion. The same thought also represents a melting pot where all elements of the then Moroccan society met. Additionally, the Berghwata's modification of the Islamic Orthodox is a heterodox reaction that natives exercised against the Umayyad's policy of favouring Arabs over other ethnicities, which created a bitter resentment among some Amazigh tribes.

1. INTRODUCTION

History has always been considered one of the deadliest weapons that have been created by cognition. It stirs dreams and numbs people. It creates illusions and makes people believe them; it adds more salt to their injuries, and it causes them to talk either as winners or victims. Winners always write history from their perspectives. It is this logic of history that rendered the fate of those who resisted the Arab invasion of North Africa into oblivion and neglect. Such was the case with the Berghwata. This ancient dynasty was minimized and belittled by Arab historians who coloured their image with paganism and heresy for the purpose of attenuating the impact of the Berghwata's resilience to the Arab invasion of North Africa under the banner of Islam.

While some historians marvelled at the Berghwata's legacy, others despised and accused it of heresy. Some noted its wealth and strong men, while others stressed its pagan, Jewish, and Christian aspects. Nevertheless, all these differing perspectives agree that the Berghwata dynasty represents a significant moment in the history of the Amazigh people in Morocco. This dynasty is either totally forgotten or is remembered as a heretical one. In this paper, I would like to bring to the surface the controversial discussion about Berghwata, hoping

to shed light on its thoughts. I will argue that regardless of the degree to which the Berghwata creed deviated from Islam, its thought has stood as a shield against Umayyad Arabization and invasion. The same thought also represents a melting pot where all elements of that period's society were dissolved. Additionally, the Berghwata's modification of the Islamic Orthodox is a heterodox reaction that natives exercised against the Umayyad's policy of favouring Arabs over other ethnicities, which created a bitter resentment among some Amazigh tribes.

North Africa has always been an attractive province for many settlers. It is no wonder that the oldest human skeleton was found in the *Ighoud* area in Morocco. Archaeological research has challenged the opinion that considers the area an uninhabited one. Ancient historians such as Hekataios (6 BC) and Herodotus (5 BC) referred to inhabitants of this province either as the Libyans, Moors, Africans, Berbers, or noble free people (Amazigh). It was in this rich part of Africa where Berghwata rose and was nourished.

2. BERGHWATA: ROOTS AND MEANINGS

According to Galand, the Berghwata are no more than the Bacuates who are mentioned in inscriptions that are found in the archaeological site of Volubilis (Galand, 1948, p. 2). Berghwata settled in today's Chaouia region of Morocco. There is a stark disagreement among historians regarding the origin and the religion of the Berghwata. The name has been the subject of debates among both ancient and contemporary historians.

It is noteworthy in this respect that historians distinguish between the social origin of Berghwata and the origins of their rulers, "Bani Tarif." The origin of their leader, Tarif Almtaghri, has been a topic of debate. For some, Berghwata is a distorted version of Barbati, which is a place in Cadiz, Spain, and is thought to be the birthplace of Tarif Almtaghri, as the following excerpt from the book of Abi Zara' states: "God curse him (the king of Berghwata), he was from Berbati from Andalusia, and his followers were named Berbati, and Arabs Arabized it and became Berghwati; hence the name Berghwata. Salih, their imposter prophet, was a cunning Jewish"¹ (Abu A'baydata Al Bakri, 2005, p. 135). Historians such as Jerome Carcopini denied this and asserted that Berghwata is the same as the Baquates, whom Roman historians mention as people who settled near Volubilis in the 6th century (Chtatou, 2021).

It is also believed that two historical figures with the same name are being conflated. Tarif was the leader who was appointed by Tarik Ibn Ziad of the army that led the exploratory raid to the Andalous in 91 Hijri and whose name was bestowed on the island on which the army

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are mine.

rested (Tarifa) and Berghwati Tarif. The army leader was of Arabic origin, and the Berghwata founder was of Berber origin. This latter was a Jew who converted to Islam, and his full name was Tarif ben Shamoun ben Isaac ben Ya'qoub from the Berbati in Cadiz (Mohamed Abdu Allah a'nan, 2009).

The author of “Kitab Mafaxir Alberber” classified the Berghwata as a Zenati tribe. The author states that “Berghwata appeared in 128 Hijri during the reign of Hisham Ibn Abdel El Malik Ben Marwan, and they settled in Tamsna. The Berghwata are originally Zenati” (Abdel Kader Bubaya, 2005, p. 47; abdurahman Ibn Khaldoun, 2000, pp. 443–445). Ibn Khaldoun has another opinion in this regard. He does not agree with classifying Berghwata as Zenati and attributes them to Masmouda (Abdurahman Ibn Khaldoun, 2000, p. 444). Ibn Khaldun always mentions Berghwata as belonging to the Masmouda tribe whenever Masmouda is invoked in many places in his magnum opus. This opinion is widely accepted one by many contemporary Moroccan and non-Moroccan historians. This Masmoudi tribe stretched for more than 4 centuries in the area between the Bu Ragrag and Tansift rivers (Jihadi Lhoucine, 2009, p. 7). The legacy of the Berghwata was preserved in travelers’ narratives such as Iben Haouqal (10th century), Albakri (13th century), and Ibn Khaldoun (14th century). The Berghwata formed an intertribal allegiance among many Masmouda confederations, creating borders that were unstable and undefined (Chtatou, 2020). Berghwata’s frontiers expanded and shrank in proportion to how powerful their state was.



Figure [1] An AI-generated photo of a Berghwati warrior on the basis of the available descriptions in the Islamic History book.

It is so hard to say exactly whether the Berghwata were just one of the great Amazigh tribes or a state during the Islamic era. On the one hand, it is considered a powerful tribe that grew to be a strong state due to its natural resources and the strength of its men. According to Arabic sources, Berghwata was not just a tribe but a kingdom that successfully lasted for quite a long time (Abu A'baydata Al Bakri, 2005, p. 134). In terms of strength, it was comparable to Idrisi's state and Rustum's state. It had strong kings, and it played an essential political and historical role in Moroccan society. Unfortunately, its deviation from the Islamic orthodox and its adoption of a new creed rendered it a subject of purposeful oblivion not only in Islamic and Arabic sources but also in contemporary Moroccan historiography, especially at schools. The strength and expansion of the Berghwata was described by the Jewish orientalist Naom Slousch as an empire that enjoyed complete independence both economically and politically (Naom Slousch, 1910). Arab historians such as Ibn Abi Zara' (1972) and El Nassiri (1955) claim that Berghwata does not refer to one tribe but to a confederation of tribes that are not necessarily genealogically linked. Al Bakri numbered the tribes that were in the tribal union of Berghwata and stated that these tribes were "Gerawa, Zouagha, Branes, Banu Abi Nacer, Menjasa, Banu Abi Nuh, Banu Waghmar, Matghara, Banu Borgh, Banu Derr, Matmata, and Banu Zaksent.

This tribal union amounts to more than ten thousand knights.” (Abu A’baydata Al Bakri, 2005, p. 141) The Berghwata tribal union also included tribes that were military in their service but religiously detached from their creed. These tribes are “Zenata-Jbal, Banu Bellit, Nemala, Ounsent, Banu Ifren, Banu Naghit, Banu Nuaman, Banu Fallusa, Banu Kuna, Banu Sebker, Assada, Regana, Azmin, Manada, Masina, Resana, and Trara. This tribal union amounts to more than 12 thousand knights” (Araqiq Al qayraouani, 1994, p. 69).

In his description of the vibrant city of Berghwata, Tamsna El Ouazzani states that the Tamsna province is part of the Fes Kingdom. It stretches from the River Oum Rebi’ at the eastern side to the river Burgrag at the western side and from the Atlas Mountains at the southern side to the shores and ocean at the northern side” (Araqiq Al qayraouani, 1994, p. 70). All this area used to be under the rule of Ilian, Ceuta’s ruler (Abdurahman Ibn Khaldoun, 2000, p. 444). Among the 40 cities of the Tamsna province was Cella, which was built by the Phoenicians according to one view and by the Romans according to a different view. Cella was the heart of the Berghwata state in many instances. The unrest that characterized the Berghwata state affected the architecture of Cella (Abdurahman Ibn Khaldoun, 2000, p. 158). The Berghwata expanded beyond Tamsna by the early 5th century and reached as far as Al Hauz of Marrakech. Consequently, most of the inhabitants of those areas adopted the Berghwata’s Berberized Islam and their new doctrine. The historical span of the Berghwata was estimated to have been between 744 and 1158.

The first interaction between the Berghwata and Islam is estimated to have happened during the raid of Ouqba Iben Nafi during his second reign on Tamsna (Ibn Al Athir, 1886, pp. 1–5). This raid did not last for long, and as a result, Islam was not spread. It was during the raid of Mosa ben Noussair in 78 Hijri that Tunisia (Sous Al adna) and parts of Berghwata land were invaded (Ahmed Al-Moukhtar’ Al-’abadi, n.d., p. 488).

The new doctrine that the Berghwata developed is thought to have been influenced by diverse elements such as Judaism, Sunni and Shia Islam, and pagan elements that existed in a predominately Amazigh society. Their so-called Koran consisted of 80 Suras, Their diet included the prohibition of poultry, a sign of the deeply rooted culture of ostrich culture that was spread in the area (Stein, 2010), and the prohibition of horses as a reflection of the Atlantean culture, which values Eurus and Poseidon, the gods who bring rain (Anzar) and warmth.

It is very challenging and unclear when the Berghwata dynasty first appeared. What is known is that many historians trace its appearance to the adoption of the heretic Kharijite

doctrine by one of its founders, Salih Ben Tarif. In terms of their doctrine, the Berghwata were one of the three Kharijites of North Africa. According to Mohmed El Mansour (2020), there were three Kharijite kingdoms in Morocco. The Berghwata, the Rostum's (Tairat Algeria), and the Midrarides (Seijilmasa Tafilat) (El Mansour, 2020, p. 51).

The adoption of the Kharijite creed was due to the idea that they were calling for the judgment of the people based on their deeds and not on the basis of their ancestors. They believed that being a committed Muslim must not be attributed to one's ancestry but to one's actions. The emphasis here is on equality among all Muslims from different ethnicities and races. This perspective challenged the hierarchical social structure prevalent in the Arab peninsula at that time and highlighted the value of an individual's deeds in determining one's religious piety. The idea of pure bloodline was brought to Morocco first by the Idrissi dynasty, and they paid dearly for it because the Berbers revolted against them, for that matter, as the idea of pure blood was odd in their culture. After that, the Almohad, the Amazigh dynasty, took over for a long time, 1060-1549 (Julien, 1994).

3. THE BERGHWATA IN THE EYES OF THE ARABS

Epithets such as heresy and magianism were attached to Berghwata. Strikingly enough, a magianism temple exists neither in Tamsna, the homeland of Berghwata, nor in all parts of Morocco. Heresy was used by those who were looking for reasons to conduct jihad against Berghwata. The Berghwata did not deny the teachings of Islam. But criticized the extremity of some of them. They adopt the Kharijite sect because it goes hand in hand with their egalitarian belief. Al Bakri describes them as “people of great and enormous knowledge (العلم العظيم), and they possess skills of occultism (الغيبية) (Abu A'baydata Al Bakri, 2005, p. 105).

Although historical sources disagree about the full name and the origin of the founder of the Berghwata dynasty, there is a consensus that Tarif Al-mtaghri (Ben Shamoun) was Kharijite (Safri), just like his companion, Maysara Al-mtaghri. It was his successor, Salih Ben Tarif, who was notorious for altering the teaching of Islam and the adoption of a new creed for this emerging dynasty. According to Ibn Khaldoun, Salih deviated from Islam when he changed verses from the Quran and even claimed prophecy by stating that he was the promised “Salihu Al-mumenin” in the following Quranic verse (Abdurahman Ibn Khaldoun, 2000, p. 428):

إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ (التحریم الآية 4)

There had been many attempts by some prophecy imposters in the Arab Peninsula to convince people that they also had their own Quran. This was a very common phenomenon

among Arabs who apostatized and invented what was known as prophecy imposters' prose. Travellers and chroniclers had mistaken the compiled laws of Berghwata for that, and they could not think of it but in terms of prophecy and imposter prose.

Berghwata believed in the Prophet Mohammad, and, just like the Arabs, they could not understand that the place of a prophet could be left void after his death. They knew from their contact with other religions (Judaism and Christianity) that they had to wait for the one who would fill this void. But unlike the Arabs who said that if Mohammad were a prophet, he would not die, “لو كان محمد نبيا لما مات.” The Berghwata asserts that religion would not end by the death of its prophet and that someone will surely come to fill the void. One of their famous sayings goes as follows: “He is a liar, the one who said the road ends if there is no God’s messenger” (iskarks wanna inan ibid unzgi ig ur il ili umazzan n rebi).

The meaning of the above saying is that the cultural encounters of the Berghwata with other religions taught them that there is never an end to God’s messengers, from Moses of Judaism to Jesus of Christianity to Mohammad of Islam. The Berghwata, just like the Arabs who could not tolerate the void created by the death of the Prophet, were ready to accept anyone who could fill that void. When a pious man of them stood and filled the void, he was welcome. Saleh Ben Tarif stepped in and was the spiritual leader of the Berghwata. It should be noted that what was taking place in Berghwata was concomitant with what was taking place also in the Mashreq (the East), where apostasy started to take place after the first year of Hijra (Jihadi Lhoucine, 2009).

The grandson of Tarif Al-mtaghri, the founder of the Berghwata dynasty, was Younes ben Saleh ben Tarif. He was the only one who did pilgrimage among his family and was interested in earthly sciences and Islamic jurisprudence. His advisor was Abu Ghaffir, an example of asceticism, mysticism, and self-conquerment (Jihadi Lhoucine, 2009, pp. 17–24). Berghwata then could not have revolted against the monolithic teachings of Islam, which were spreading in the area prior to the arrival of Islam thanks to Judaism and Christianity. Historians and chroniclers reported that among the Berghwata, those who follow Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. They revolted against the injustices of the Umayyad governors, and they called for the application of the egalitarian *Azerf* custom, which regulated their social life and placed everyone on equal footing.

4. THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS OF THE AMAZIGH CUSTOMARY LAWS

The Berghwata revolted against the Umayyad but not against Islam. Their revolution was the expected outcome of the injustices of the Umayyad, and it represented an instance of

nationalism that unified all Amazigh who were Kharijite from different parts of Morocco (Al Talibi, 2017, p. 13). In what follows, I will follow the three steps of acculturation (honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, and accommodation) to describe how the Amazigh customary law was merged with the new teachings of Islam to produce the Berghwata creed.

4.1. The Honeymoon Stage

At this stage, the Amazigh accepted Islam and Arabism. The Arabs' legitimacy was accepted, and so was the authority of the Umayyad. Allegiance was to the central authority in Damascus. The reason why Amazigh accepted Islam but not Arabization was due to the fact that they had drawn from many religions that call for one God. That is why Abu Lmohajir was welcomed, but Ouqba ben nafi'a was not (Ahmed Al Nassiri, 1955, p. 682). The Berghwata legislation attests to their acceptance of the divine religions, and even when they went to complain to the Umayyad Caliphate, they resorted to the teachings of the Koran. Neither Salih nor his son, Younes, proclaimed themselves prophets at this stage. However, the two remained strong followers of the Ibadites sect, Kharijite Muslims who called and advocated for democracy and egalitarianism and rejected the rights of the Arabs as the only ones who could govern. Younes ben Salih received the Fiqh (Islamic teachings) of his father, Salih, and kept them until he felt that the time was right to reveal them. There is an emulation here of what happened in the Arabian Peninsula with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Salih and his son wanted to follow the same steps of the revelation of the Prophet Mohammed. The difference between those two situations is that Salih, the Berghwati leader, who was able to secure the allegiance of many Amazigh tribes, kept his beliefs secret and never announced them.

4.2. The Negotiation Stage

By this stage, the Amazigh people in Morocco had started to split from Arabism but retained their adherence to Islam. Adopting the Kharijite sect was the only tool that granted them such a separation between Arabism and Islam. Religious authority was accepted, but the political one was rejected. It was during this stage that the great Amazigh revolution happened (739/740–743).

The Iraqi-based Kharijite was adopted by the Amazigh population because its teaching echoes their egalitarian system of governance. Moreover, it was a suitable path for resisting the Arab invasion. The great Berber revolt of 740 took place as a reaction against the way a ruler was chosen. The Kharijite was adopted as a means to question the way a governor is chosen. The tradition in the East is that the Caliphate ascends the throne either because it is of the Prophet's lineage (the Shiism way of choosing a ruler) or elected by the nobles (the Sunni way). The closest thesis to the Berber way of choosing a ruler is the Kharijite. According to the Berber

thesis, leadership is not inherited nor imposed by the few but rather chosen by all members of the community (Marco Demichelis, 2015).

The Berghwata state was the natural outcome of many events that led the Amazigh to revolt against the Umayyad's authority. For a better understanding of how and why Berghwata was created, it is advisable first to give a brief sketch of the political and historical events that led the Amazigh to revolt against the Umayyad caliphate.

The governor, Ubaid Allah bin Al-Habhab, was appointed by the Umayyad Caliph, Abdul Malik Ben Marwan, to rule in his name in Morocco. The appointed governor, in turn, assigned Sus and Tamsna to his son Ismail. His other son, Omar Bin Abdullah Al Muradi, was assigned Tangier and Alib al-Aqsa. Omar was notorious for favouring the Arab race over the indigenous. This was the reason why the Amazigh revolted against him. From there on, the Kharijite sect found Morocco a fertile land for their thought. The moderate Ibadi thought prevailed in the central west of the country, and the extremist version (Safri Kharijite) prevailed in most southern parts of Morocco. Tenets of the Kharijites called for equality between all races, and they seized the downtrodden situation in Morocco to preach their ideas. In response to the cruel treatment of the Arab invaders, the Amazigh revolted a dozen times. Among the Amazigh figures who adopted the Kharijite doctrine was Maysara Al-Matghari.

Maysara Al-matghari and Tarif Almtaghri Alberghwati went to complain to the Umayyad Caliph Hisham Ben Abdel Malik about the cruelty of his governors. No reception was granted, and the leaders felt offended. The Amazigh leaders, in anger, led a revolution against the Umayyad. Maysara proclaimed himself caliph. Many tribes joined him and fought against the Arab invaders. This unity of the Amazigh tribes was so rare, and it looks like the injustices of the Umayyad were so untenable that they united tribes against one enemy. The great Berber revolution spread to all parts of Morocco. The Umayyad governors were killed. Maysara, supported by the Berghwata tribe, marched to Suss, where he defeated the army of Ismail Bin Ubaid Allah. The Umayyad Caliphate initiated another raid in response to what happened in the Suss battle. The battle ended in a humiliating defeat for the Arabs in a battle known as the Battle of the Nobles.

The Amazigh killed Maysara after the nobles' battle, believing he sought peace with the Umayyad to end the bloodshed. In 122 Hijri, Khalid ben Hamid Azenati took over as leader. After Maysara Al-matghari's death, Tarif Alberghwati exiled himself to Tamsna in 744, where he was laying the bedrock of a new religion, organised beliefs, and establishing a jurisdiction. He entrusted this religion to his son Salih, who was ordered to convince the Berbers to adopt

it. Later, Salih's son Ilias took over, and while practising the principles of Islam publicly, he secretly propagated this new religion, eventually passing it on to his son Younes, who actively promoted and enforced it among the community that founded the Berghwata dynasty (Ibn Al-Athir, 1886, p. 42).

4.3. Adjustment and Accommodation Stages

At these stages, the Berghwata creed reached its full development and diverged significantly from Islam. Nothing has created more contention in Morocco than Berghwata's creed. Historians devoted sections to the Berghwata belief because it was alleged that they had their own Koran. As described by Abu Salih Zemmour, their prayer leader, this Berghwata Koran consisted of eighty verses that covered various topics such as prophets (Adam, Ayoub, Harout, Younes), stories (Pharaoh, Hajouj and Majouj, Charlatan, the Calf), and animals (the rooster, the camel, the locust, the snake). Although no written version of this Quran has been found in the region where the Berghwata settled, an excerpt from the Ayyûb sûrah, equivalent to the Koranic Fatiha, was quoted by al-Bakri, providing insight into their religious beliefs.

"بسم الله الذي ارسل رسله الى الناس، و هو الذي بين لهم مع اخباره عام ابليس، ابي الله ان يعلم ابليس ما علم الله رسله من شيء، و يقلب الالسنه في الاقولة، ليس يقلب الالسنه في الاقولة الا الله بالحق الى الناس، و به استقام الحق و انار، محمد كان حين عاش استقام الناس للدين، فلما مات فسد الدين، كذب من يقول ان الحق استقام و ليس ثم رسول" (Jihadi Lhoucine, 2009, p. 112).

The quoted text is an excerpt from the Berghwata's own version of the Koran, which they believed was sent by Yakûsh (interpreted as their god or a local version of Allah) to enlighten people about the truth. This passage mentions that Yakûsh disagreed with Iblis (Satan) and did not support him when people questioned the truth. This suggests a unique interpretation of religious beliefs within the Berghwata community, which had its own religious practices and independent version of Islam.

Contrary to what is common, Salih ben Tarif did not claim himself to be a prophet, nor did his son Ilias make known their belief. They both publicly aligned themselves with the Ibadites of the Kharijites, who were calling for egalitarianism. This approach had Islamic relics as it mirrored the actions of the prophet Muhammad in the East. It was Salih's grandson, Younes, who made public their new faith and doctrine. The argument of Younes ben Ilias Ben Salih ben Tarif was that if God sent the prophet Muhammad as an Arab to transmit God's message to the Arabs, his grandfather would have the same status but use the tongue of his

people². No anthropologist or archaeologist found relics of this Koran in the region where Berghwata lived. The only examples we have are reported in Al Bakri's account. It is also claimed that Salih ben Tarif was the awaited one (المهدي المنتظر). This attests to the various elements that compose the Berghwat'a's new creed.

Yakush, a Berghwata term, was thought to be either a Berghwata diet or the translation word for Allah that Kharijite Amazigh believed in. Talbi was the pioneer of this latter view (Mohmed Al Talibi, 2017). Talbi's argument is that Berghwata did not fully detach themselves from the teachings of Islam. What we call Berberized Islam was an attempt by the Berbers to accommodate the new religion in their local customs. Ibn Hawqal, in his description of the Berghwata, narrates that "among them are those who recite the Quran carefully and with the utmost degrees of respect and even memorize verses of it and adapt the verses of their Koran to their book" (Ibn Hawqal, n.d., p. 83).

Talbi's analysis of what could have happened as a result of the acculturation is a very relevant one here. According to Talbi, the Berghwata fasted in Rajab instead of Ramadan. They prayed collectively, not on Fridays but on Thursdays. They performed prayers, but some without any prostration or genuflection. They performed abolition but with more steps added (washing the belly), and they prayed five times a day and five times at night. According to Jihadi Lhoucine, the Berghwata's deviation was attributed to their desire to express their total detachment from the West and Arabs (Jihadi Lhoucine, 2009, pp. 22–23). Berghwata also immersed themselves in the pleasures of life. Polygamy was permitted, and one could take back a wife even after divorce. Restrictions were on Muslim women and third-degree cousins (Chtatou, 2021).

In his attempts to seek legitimacy for his new state, Younes Ibn Ilias (842 and 884) flouted Islamic orthodoxy and developed a religion that kept its name as Islam but incorporated ideas from the eastern Islamic tradition along with local Berber traditions. This "Berberized" version of Islam maintained the legitimacy of the religion and granted the Berghwata rulers the same status that the Umayyad Caliphate had, thanks to Islam. It provided them with religious status and presented them as orthodox figures. It was a way for the Amazigh to assert their identity and preserve their cultural heritage away from the Arabic/Islamic rule (Norris, 1982, p. 69). The need to assert the uniqueness of the Amazigh identity among an Arabic/Islamic

² وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانٍ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

dominant group can be seen in some ideas that the Berghwata claims. For example, Berghwata acknowledged Prophet Muhammad as the prophet of the Arabs while hailing Salih Ibn Tarif as the Mahdi, to whom the Berber Koran was revealed in secret.

5. THE BERGHWATA: THEIR WORSHIP, KORAN, AND THEIR RITES

Historians refer to religion each time the Berghwata dynasty is mentioned because of the hot debate stirred by their alleged Koran. According to Berghwata prayer leader Abu Salih Zemmouri, the Berghwata Koran is composed of eighty verses that are named after prophets' names, such as Adam, Ayyoub, and Youness, or narratives such as those of Pharaoh, Gog and Magog, and the Charlatan and the calf, or animals such as the rooster, the camel, and the snake. No tangible records can be found about this Koran in Tamesna, the territory of Berghwata. The most cited verse is the one reported by Abu eubayda Allah Al-Bakri. It is a verse from the Ayoub³, and it is thought that it is a corresponding verse of the Fatiha Verse from the Quran.

While some academics contend that Yakush, the Berghwata word for God, refers to, especially, another divinity, others believe it to be a translation of Allah, the God word used by the Kharijites among the Muslim Berbers. Al Talibi (2017) is in favor of the view that the Bani Tarif did not deviate that far from Islam and that the developed Islam was a distinguishing landmark of the Amazigh Islam from that of the East (Al Talibi, 2017, p. 35).

Berghwata's rituals were also at the heart of the discussions about this understudied dynasty. Instead of Ramadan, they fasted Rajab, and their communal prayer was on Thursday instead of Friday. Similar to Christianity, some of their prayers were performed without prostration and genuflection, as is the case with Muslim ones. Their ablutions included the cleansing of their abdomens. Along with the five daylight prayers, the other five prayers were performed during the night. The driving force behind these deviations from Islam is to assert the distinctiveness of Berber Islam and to mark their independence from the East (Al Talibi, 2017, p. 36).

“Any Barghwati could marry as many women as his possibilities allowed, but he could not contact a union with an orthodox Muslim woman or with a cousin up to the third degree. He could repudiate and take back his wives. The liar was branded with the title of *morhaier* (one

³ In the name of Yakûsh, the Almighty, who sent his book to people to enlighten them about his

Truth. Then they said, Iblis (Satan) knows about this truth. Yakûsh objected. He does not support Iblis.

who deviated from the truth) and generally expelled from the country. As food, the head and belly of animals were illegal.” (Lhassane Ben Mohammed Alzayati, n.d., p. 358).

El Jihadi El Houssine reports that the greeting of Berghwata is “God is above us, nothing of the earth or the heavens is unknown to him” (Jihadi Lhoucine, 2009, p. 46).

The Berghwati rites resonate with the common pagan practices of their time. The rooster was sacred in their belief and consuming eggs and the rooster’s meat was prohibited as this animal was considered the prayer caller. This belief is still widespread among the Imazighen, who call the rooster “the Muāddin”

Feature	Mainstream Islam	Berghwata Religion
Sacred Text	Quran in Arabic	Quran in Tamazight (Berber language) with 80+ suras
Prophet	Muhammad (Prophet of all mankind)	Salih ibn Tarif (Prophet of the Berbers), Muhammad (for Arabs)
God's Name	Allah	Yakush
Daily Prayers	Five times a day	Ten times a day (five during the day, five during the night)
Weekly Prayer	Friday	Thursday
Fasting Month	Ramadan	Rajab
Dietary Restrictions	Generally pork, alcohol prohibited	Eggs, chickens, heads of animals prohibited
Marriage	Limited to four wives under certain conditions	No strict limit on the number of wives
Cousin Marriage	Generally permitted	Banned
Additional Beliefs	Belief in the oneness of Allah	Belief in baraka of Salih ibn Tarif's family

Figure [2] Comparison of Mainstream Islam and Berghwata Religion.

5.1.The Legislation of Berghwata

It is unfair to consider the legislation of the Berghwata as a reaction to Islam. Their legislation was deeply rooted, and they had their customary laws by which they regulated their state politically, religiously, and militarily. There is no wonder that the *Azerf* custom was at the backbone of all these laws along with the tributaries that were feeding the Amazigh culture back then, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Judaism was the one with the deeper effects, as it was as old as the Berbers themselves. Research shows that the first Jewish immigrant communities most likely arrived in southern Morocco near the mouth of the Oued Noun, aboard Phoenician ships along the Atlantic coast. Over time, these communities gradually moved inland toward regions such as the Drâa and Dades valleys and the High Atlas. According to legends, King Solomon sent Jewish explorers to the Drâa region in search of gold around the 10th century BC. At the same time, other groups may have arrived directly from the

interior of the continent following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC and the subsequent deportation of surviving Jews to Babylon (Schroeter, 2007).

6. AMAZIGH CUSTOMARY LAW OF “AZERF”

These were flexible laws that guided the Amazigh laws. They were flexible because they go hand in hand with the social and economic events. Laws can be added, rectified, or removed, if need be, depending on time, context, and situations. The *inflas* committee would always meet upon call whenever a dilemma faced them. The Berghwata were also in touch with other cultures and traditions (El Guabli, Brahim, 2024).

6.1. Devine Religions

The Amazigh accepted Islam but rejected Arabization because they had drawn from many religions that emphasize the belief in one God. That is why Abu Lmohajir was welcomed, but Ouqba Ben Nafia was not (Ahmed Al Nassiri, 1955, pp. 82–86). In terms of rites, the Berghwata practiced rituals that could be traced to ancestral paganism, which included the rooster’s scarification. This tradition is still practised in some rural areas around saints and shrines (Chtatou, 2021).

The teachings of Islam are present in the Berghwata’s creed because its founder was a Muslim. Berghwata believed in the existence of one Creator and His Messengers. Some of their practices were inspired by Islam, such as fasting (though the month is different), praying (though the number of times and the manner are different), polygamy (though the number is not limited), and food restrictions (though they narrowed the list). Shiism was also present in Berghwata’s creed. Shiism was common in the area back then, especially among the Idrissi Shiites of Fes. Shiite thought can be observed in the “Taqiyya” concept that was practiced by Tarif ben Ilias and his son Salih ben Tarif when they concealed their thoughts and beliefs. This idea of (taqiyya) was practiced by Ismaili Shia, who believed in the concealed Imams. Berghwata’s creed was influenced very much by the Kharijite sect. This thought can be seen in their unconditioned belief in their creed and the extremity with which they applied the Kharijite teachings, especially when it came to punishments (amputating the hand of the thief, exiling the liar).

The Jewish impact on the Berghwata creed is very visible, especially in their diet. Eggs were prohibited, and so were roosters. Roosters were highly valued by the Berghwata. Relics of this belief can still be observed in some areas in Chaouia and Doukala, where bones and leftovers of roosters are buried, especially in some festivities (Ahmed Al-Moukhtar’ Al-’abadi, n.d., p. 491).

The Berghwata creed had also been influenced by the pagan Berber ideas that were widely spread in the air back then. Their so-called Koran consisted of 80 suras, and their diet included the prohibition of poultry, a sign of the deeply rooted culture of ostrich culture that was spread in the area, and the prohibition of horses as a reflection of the Atlantean culture, which values Eurys and Poseidon, the gods who bring rain (Anzar) and warmth.

The religious practices of the Berghwata have elements of ancient pagan beliefs and witchcraft rituals (the veneration of the rooster whose call is termed “Adan” by the Berber up to now). Restrictions on eating rooster’s meat originated from Jewish communities in the Sahara region. This fact was supported by Slousch, who concluded that the Berghwata’s creed combined Muslim practices, Berber rites, and Jewish elements in its essence and spirit.

7. RELICS OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

The Berghwata dynasty endured numerous changes and triumphed over the Idrissids' attacks, among other challenges. The Berghwata dynasty came to an end with the fall of another Amazigh dynasty, the Almohids, in 1148. The winners always start by erasing the traces of the people they defeated. That was the case with the Berghwata, whose traces were eradicated by the Almohids and whose lands were superseded by Arab tribes that the Almohids imported to Morocco. Nevertheless, relics of this past can still be observed in names of some places, such as Oued Almalih (Assif Merzig), Fdala (a Berghwata fortification), Zenata (a Berghwata tribe), Madyouna, and Tit Mellil, which refers to a plain valley with black soil, and Berghwata calls it white because they consider black unlucky. Even the name of the largest city in Morocco carries with it these relics of this gone past. Casablanca, or Anfa, as the UNESCO’s book of Africa Ethnonyms and Toponyms, is a town that was established in the 10th century B.C. Present-day Casablanca went through an unstable history before becoming one of Morocco’s largest cities. Anfa, the little hill, was a port that was established by the Romans to serve as a link, crucial link between it and the Port of Mogador. According to some history books, it is believed that the Amazigh king, Juba II, departed from the Port of Anfa on his exploratory trip to the Canary Islands (Rogerson & Hoste, 2012). Anfa was described as a Punic port that was taken by the Berghwata as their capital port during the period of the 8th to 12th centuries.

8. THE BERGHWATA AND THE AMAZIGH CULTURAL MOVEMENT

A fundamental connection between the historical Berghwata Confederacy and contemporary Amazigh identity movements lies in their shared desire for greater autonomy and recognition. Both the Berghwata, through the establishment and defence of their independent state, and the Amazigh cultural movement, through their pursuit of cultural,

linguistic, and political rights, demonstrate a deep-seated aspiration to assert their distinct identity and exercise greater control over their destiny.

However, there are also significant points of divergence, particularly concerning the role of religion. The Berghwata actively created and adhered to a syncretic Islamic faith as a key element of their identity. In contrast, contemporary Amazigh movements exhibit a wider range of perspectives on Islam. The Amazigh cultural movement advocates for secularism despite the fact that many Amazigh people are pious Muslims. Therefore, while the Berghwata adapted Islam to their Amazigh identity, modern Amazigh cultural movements grapple with a more complex relationship between their cultural heritage and the dominant religion.

Another key difference lies in the historical context of Arab influence. The Berghwata emerged during the early stages of Arab expansion in North Africa and actively resisted it. The contemporary Amazigh cultural movement, however, is confronting the legacy of more recent and systematic Arabization policies implemented by post-independence North African states. These policies have had a profound impact on language use, cultural transmission, and the collective identity of the Amazigh people, presenting a different set of challenges compared to the earlier periods of Arab expansion.

The Amazigh cultural movement operates within a vastly different global context compared to the Berghwata creed. Modern communication technologies, globalization, and the rise of international human rights discourse play a significant role in shaping the goals and strategies of cultural movements. These factors enable greater organization, mobilization, and international advocacy, tools that were not available to the Berghwata in their time.

9. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I argued that Berghwata's creed, whether it is considered a deviation from Islam or a rectification of its principles, succeeded in unifying many Amazigh tribes through the mechanism of acculturation. The creed, regardless of the controversies it has stirred, was the shield that protected the Amazigh culture from being totally assimilated by the Umayyad's Arabization. Berghwata's creed is the outcome of an Umayyad's fanaticism that collapsed with the ardent Amazigh adherence to the customary laws of their culture and the unwavering defence of their fertile land against the greed and avarice of the Umayyad. Defending the land and the culture started with small acts of complaining about the injustices to rejecting all that is linked to Arabism and ended up with a new version of Islam that assimilated all the varied components of the egalitarian Amazigh society.

Further research is deemed highly important to support what has been said about Bergwhata. Berghwata, be it Zenata, Masmouda, Senhaja, or a mixture of them all, represents

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a state in North Africa that has self-sufficiency in everything. They have created a book that uses their language and that encompasses all their customary as well as cultural laws. It includes laws that regulate their life in just the same way that the Muslim Quran governs the life of the Arabs and all those who converted to Islam.

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