

Historical Dimension of Tlemcen from the Islamic Conquest to the Fall of the Zayyanid State (55–962 AH / 676–1554 CE)

البعد التاريخي لمدينة تلمسان من الفتح الإسلامي حتى

سقوط الدولة الزيانية (55-962هـ/676-1554م)

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Abstract:

This study seeks to explore the historical dimension of the city of Tlemcen from the Islamic conquest up to the fall of the Zayyanid dynasty. Tlemcen played a significant role in the Islamic Maghreb, serving as a major administrative center for Muslims in the region since the early stages of the Islamic expansion. Under the rule of the Sulaymanid emirate, the city marked a frontier between them and the Aghlabids, who were governors under the Abbasid Caliphate. Following the collapse of the Sulaymanid emirate, Tlemcen became the focus of a prolonged conflict between the Umayyads and Fatimids that lasted for over a century, until it ultimately came under Almoravid control. During this period, Tlemcen maintained its importance as a strategic administrative hub, a role it continued to fulfill under the Almohads. The city also witnessed considerable historical development during the rule of the Zayyanids:

Keywords: the central Maghreb; the Zayyanid state; Tlemcen; the Islamic conquest; the Almohads.

ملخص:

نحاول في هذا البحث التطرق إلى البعد التاريخي لمدينة تلمسان منذ الفتح الإسلامي إلى غاية سقوط الدولة الزيانية، حيث ظهر لتلمسان دور مهم في بلاد المغرب الإسلامي، لقد كانت تلمسان منذ الفتح الإسلامي مركزا إداريا هاما للمسلمين في المنطقة، و بعدما دخلت تلمسان تحت حكم الإمارة السليمانية التي أصبحت تمثل الحد الفاصل بينهم وبين الأغالية ولاة العباسيين، و قد شهدت تلمسان بعد انهيار الإمارة السليمانية صراعا أمويا فاطميا عليها استمر أكثر من قرن إلى غاية دخول المدينة تحت السيطرة المرابطية حيث ظلت مركزا مهما بالنسبة لهم، و استمرت المدينة مركزا إداريا هاما حتى بعد دخول الموحيدين لها. وقد عرفت مدينة تلمسان كذلك تطورا تاريخيا عند حكم الزيانيين.

كلمات مفتاحية: المغرب الأوسط؛ الدولة الزيانية؛ تلمسان؛ الغرب الإسلامي؛ الموحدون.

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1- Introduction.

The historical dimension of Tlemcen possesses substantial scholarly value, evidenced by the array of events the city witnessed from the Islamic conquest up to the fall of the Zayyanid dynasty. During this long span, Tlemcen emerged as a major player in the Maghreb Islamic world, due to its strategic location and the settlement of various Berber tribes in its vicinity. Right from the Islamic conquest, it became a vital administrative center for Muslims in the region. Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād emphasized its importance by using it as a base for operations. Afterward, Tlemcen fell under the Sulaymānī Emirate, which served as a buffer between the Umayyads, who were governors under the Abbasids, and the central authority.

Following the collapse of the Sulaymānī Emirate, the city endured a century-long struggle between the Umayyads and Fatimids until it ultimately came under Almoravid control. During that time, it remained a pivotal center. Later, despite the arrival of the Almohads, Tlemcen continued to function as a significant administrative hub.

Under Zayyanid rule, Tlemcen underwent notable development and attained one of the greatest statuses among Maghreb cities, as Ibn Khaldūn affirms. This study thus seeks to address the following core question : How did the historical events experienced by Tlemcen contribute to its development? Or rather: What were the key historical milestones that shaped the city during the period from the Islamic conquest to the fall of the Zayyanid dynasty—and how did they define its historical dimension ?

Despite the vitality and importance of the subject, and the prominent roles the city played during this era, it has not received thorough and focused academic examination. The existing literature—comprising articles, theses, and books—discusses the matter in general terms within the broader context of Zayyanid Tlemcen and its civilization, without giving due attention to the city's history during the earlier periods. Therefore, this study can be regarded as a novel scholarly contribution to this field.

The motivation behind choosing the historical dimension of Tlemcen from the Islamic conquest to the fall of the Zayanids stems from several considerations: the desire to highlight the major milestones the city experienced during this period, the significance of the topic, and my aspiration to compose a scholarly medieval history of Tlemcen that restores its rightful historical standing.

1. Tlemcen from the Islamic Conquest to the Era of Independent Emirates:

The name Tlemcen first appears in Islamic chronicles during the campaign led by Governor Abū alMuhājir Dīnār (55–62 AH / 675–681 CE) into the central Maghreb, tasked with suppressing a Berber uprising led by Kusayla ibn Lamzān of the Urbah tribe near Tlemcen in 55 AH / 675 CE. Upon reaching Tlemcen, Abū alMuhājir fought a decisive battle against Kusayla in 59 AH / 678 CE,

resulting in the defeat of Urbah coalition forces and the capture of Kusayla(Ibn Amira Muhammad,2008, 103)

During the second governorship of 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' (62–64 AH / 681–683 CE), he reached Tlemcen and faced sturdy resistance from Berbers and their Byzantine allies at its gates. Though nearly defeated, 'Uqba ultimately prevailed, driving the enemy into the city's fortifications. As mentioned by Mahmoud alMaqdisi:

"... he marched to Tlemcen—one of their greatest cities... fought them at their fortress gate, took many spoils, and then departed toward the Zab [River]".(Mahmoud Maqdish, 1964, 214)

After the death of 'Uqba at the hands of Kusayla, Tlemcen experienced political unrest until the arrival of Governor Ḥassan ibn alNu'mān in 73 AH / 693 CE, who defeated the Kahina and established Tlemcen as the administrative center of the western Maghreb region(Salem alSayyid Abd al-Aziz, 1981, pp , 16)

Under Mūsā ibn Naṣīr, Tlemcen maintained its administrative prominence. It became the center of the central Maghreb province, stretching from the Chélif River in the east to the Moulouya River in the west; a governor resided there, supported by an Arab–Berber garrison to ensure the region's security. Under their rule, Tlemcen was also authorized to mint coinage.(Nasser Muhammad alNaqshbandi, 1974,54).

The Maghreb experienced several Berber revolts against Umayyad governors. In 122 AH / 740 CE, a revolt broke out in Tlemcen during the absence of Governor Ḥabīb ibn Abī 'Abdillāh, who was campaigning in Sicily(Ibn alKhatib Lisan alDin, 2003 :109) Despite the initial success of the revolt, Governor 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥabḥāb responded by recalling Ḥabīb—who was well-regarded by the locals. Eventually, relations between Governor Ḥabīb and the inhabitants stabilized and continued through his son 'Abd alRaḥmān's tenure (Khaled Belarbi, 2011, 25)

During the age of independent emirates in the Maghreb, Abū Qurra alYafarnī aṣ-Ṣifrī established a shortlived independent emirate in Tlemcen. Leading the Ṣifrī movement across the central and western Maghreb after ḥamid ibn Ḥumayd azZanāṭī(Mahmoud Ismail, 1976 , 51) he declared himself Khalīfa. In 124 AH, he joined the siege of Kairouan with 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Yazīd al-Hawwāri. The movement persisted in Tlemcen until the Abbasid Caliphate dispatched Ibrahim ibn alAghlab ibn Sālim of the Aghlabid dynasty with a large army to suppress it. Ibn alAghlab, knowing the Ṣifrī forces' strength, engaged them near the Zab River, prompting Abū Qurra to retreat. He pursued Tlemcen (al-Bakri, 1965,68) and eradicated the Ṣifrī presence in 155 AH / 772 CE, returning the city to Abbasid control until it was taken by the Idrisids in 173 AH / 789 CE. "After

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Musa ibn Abi al'Afiyya seized it in the year 319 AH (931 CE), he became its ruler." (Ibn Khaldun, 2016:112)

2. Tlemcen Between the Fatimids and the Umayyads of al-Andalus :

Tlemcen stood as a significant focal point of conflict between the Fatimid Caliphate in Ifriqiya and the Umayyad regime in al-Andalus. It was a coveted, contested city due to several reasons:

First : The Fatimids captured territories formerly under the Idrisids, including Tlemcen in 319 AH/931 CE. This was unacceptable to the Umayyads of al-Andalus, who meticulously tried to free Tlemcen from Fatimid control, turning the city into a contested frontier between the two dynasties (AlSalawi AlNasiri, 1997,245)

Second : The Umayyads managed to influence certain Fatimid-aligned local leaders in the region—most notably Musa ibn Abi al'Afiyya—who abandoned the Fatimid cause and allied themselves with the Umayyads. As a result, the region from Tlemcen to Fes shifted into the control of the Umayyads of al-Andalus. (Ibn AlKhatib, 2003 ,135)

Third: The Fatimids supported revolts against the Umayyads in al-Andalus, prompting the Umayyads to back Berber uprisings in Tlemcen—particularly among the Maghrawa tribe of the Zanata, whose homeland extended from Chélif through Tlemcen to Téghert. They sided with the Umayyads rather than the Fatimids.

Under pressure from the Umayyads and tribal leaders, Musa ibn Abi al'Afiyya left the Fatimid alliance and joined the Umayyad cause in 331 AH/933 CE. His decision was influenced by the death of his cousin Misala ibn Ḥabus, internal instability in the Fatimid Caliphate during and after al-Mahdi, and a desire to rule independently with support from his Maghrawa faction. (Fethi Za'rout, 2006 , 49)

In response, Bulqin ibn Ziri led a military campaign for the Fatimids to reclaim Tlemcen in Rabi' II 360 AH/971 CE. He defeated Muhammad ibn alKhayr, leader of the Maghrawa aligned with the Umayyads, in a fierce battle that reportedly resulted in the deaths of 3,017 Zanata warriors. After this victory, Tlemcen fell under Sanhaja's rule. (Fethi Za'rout, 2006 , 52)

Even after the Fatimids moved their base to Egypt (360 AH/970 CE), the struggle persisted through proxy alliances with Berber tribes. The Fatimid-appointed Sanhaja leader Yusuf ibn Bulqin was resented by Zanata, who viewed Sanhaja as more entitled to rule. This tension led Zanata to call on the Umayyads to regain Tlemcen and central Maghreb. In 362 AH/973 CE, Yusuf marched into the city, executed thousands, and expelled the survivors to Ashir. (Ibn Adhari al Marrakushi, 1967 ,307)

Yusuf's death in 372 AH/983 CE triggered internal Sanhaja conflicts, which the Umayyads exploited. They supported Ziri ibn Atiya of the Maghrawa, who seized Tlemcen in 376 AH/983 CE, expelling the sons of Yusuf (Ibn Khaldun, 2016,79)

Tlemcen remained under Ziri's descendants, despite attempts by Ya'la ibn Muhammad alMaghrawi to retake the city, until the Almoravids captured it in 474 AH/1081 CE. (Ibn alKhatib, 2003 : 109)

During this period, the contest between Mālikī jurists and Ismaili missionaries from the Fatimids in Ifriqiya spilled into Tlemcen. The city became a stronghold of Mālikī scholarship, opposing Fatimid Shī'ism. Fatimid attempts to impose their doctrine by force failed, and Mālikī scholars in Tlemcen actively resisted them.

Simultaneously, Umayyad patronage—backed by Andalusian Mālikī jurists—extended to North African cities like Tlemcen. They reportedly sent support amounting to ten thousand dinars to local Mālikī scholars, reinforcing Sunni orthodoxy. ((Ibn Khaldun, 2016 , 622)

3. Tlemcen Under the Almoravids and Hammadids:

Tlemcen eventually came under Almoravid control during Yūsuf ibn Ṭāshfīn's reign. He resolved to dismantle the last Zanata principality—the Emirate of Tlemcen. In 472 AH/1079 CE, he dispatched Masdali ibn Tilkān alLumtūnī with some 20,000 troops. The Maghrawa, led by Ya'la ibn alAbbās ibn Bakhti, resisted effectively, repelling the initial invasion. (Abdel Hamid Hajjat, 1984 : 296)

A year later, in 473 AH/1080 CE, Yūsuf launched a second campaign, personally leading his forces. After a prolonged siege that lasted several months, he captured the city, killed Emir alAbbās and many of his followers, and founded the adjacent settlement of Tajrārat (Abdel Hamid Hajjat, 1984 , 297).

To consolidate rule, Yūsuf appointed his trusted lieutenant, Muhammad ibn Tin'umar alMasūfī, as governor, who was later succeeded by Yūsuf himself. This resulted in a duality system—Old Tlemcen and New Tlemcen—surrounded by a single outer wall, although the old western fortifications remained intact.

The Almoravid conquest was aided by the weakening of Zanata power—especially of the Maghrawa—who were unable to resist, despite sporadic revolts such as that of Makhūṭh alWanāti in 507 AH/1113 CE. (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2002 , 97).

The Almoravids pursued control of Tlemcen for strategic reasons:

had seized Fes in 454 AH/1062 CE. (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2002 :99)

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They aimed to secure their eastern frontier against incursions by the Arab tribes Banu Hilāl and Banu Sulaym.

They wished to prevent Hammadid expansion into central Maghreb. Tlemcen was a major commercial hub on trans-Saharan trade routes. (Abdel Hamid Hajjat, 1984 : 298)

Under Almoravid rule, Tlemcen became a central provincial capital, administered by prominent officials like Masdali alLumtūnī, Yūsuf ibn Tin'umart, and Prince Tamīm (Yūsuf's brother). The Almoravids built administrative and monetary institutions similar to those in Fez, Toledo, and Córdoba, transforming Tlemcen into a vibrant cultural and scholarly center. alNuwayri Shihab alDin, 1980 :263)

4-Tlemcen in the Era of the Almohads:

With the advent of the Almohad dynasty, and as soon as 'Abd al-Mu'min b. 'Alī came to power, and his attention turned to Tlemcen. In 539 AH / 1145 CE, he led his army to Tlemcen, encamping on a high ground called al-Ṣakhratayn (The Two Rocks) to the south of the city (Belarbi khaled, 2011 :78) Meanwhile, the Almoravid forces, commanded by Ṭashfin ibn 'Alī held out near Wādī al-Ṣafsāf in the city.

Following a few skirmishes and a siege lasting several months, the Almohads entered the city. Historical sources note that after capturing New Tlemsan (Tajrarat), the Almohads killed most of its inhabitants—likely as retribution, since years earlier, 'Abd al-Mu'min and Ibn Tūmart had been expelled from Tlemcen by the city's ulema for their doctrinal positions opposed to those of the Almoravids (Ibn alKhatib, 2003 , 267)

Once in control, 'Abd al-Mu'min appointed Sulaymān b. Muḥammad b. al-Nūḍīn as governor, elevating Tlemcen to one of the most important centers of the Almohad state. He enhanced the city's status by renovating its fortifications—including rebuilding its walls—and declaring it the western province of central Maghreb. (Abdel Hamid Hajjiyyat,2011,307)

Tlemcen later faced a threat from the Banu Ghāniya (Ghāniyyid dynasty), led by Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya allied with some Zanāta tribes south of the city. Their governor, Abū Imrān Mūsā, attempted to negotiate with them but was ambushed and killed, along with his entourage. This forced the Almohad governor of Fes, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā, to dispatch reinforcements to defend the city. They were later succeeded by a reinforced governor, Abū Zayd B. Yūjān, whose strong army ultimately dissuaded Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya from attacking Tlemcen. (Abdel Hamid Hajjiyyat,2011 , 310)

Tlemcen remained under the Almohad administration for an extended period, governed successively by several Almohad caliphs and deputies—until the rise of the Zayyanids under Yaghmurasan b. Zayyan, asserted independence in Tlemcen in 633 AH / 1235 CE, marking the end of Almohad power in central Maghreb. (Belarbi khaled, 2011 , 112)

5. Tlemcen under the Zayyanids:

The emergence of the Zayyanid dynasty marked a pivotal moment in Maghreb's history. Sensing weakness in the Almohad center in Marrakesh (Shawqi al-Jamal, 1997, 23) they promptly declared independence centered on Tlemcen—Yaghmurasan ibn Zayyan proclaimed himself ruler in 633 AH / 1235 CE and took the regnal title of al-ʿAbd al-Wāḍi. With Tlemcen as their capital, the Zayyanids aimed to establish a strong state to lead the Maghreb and to assert authority over the Zanāta confederation—similar to the Marinids' role among the Zawāwa in western Maghreb. (Abdelaziz Filali, 2011, 15).

Under Yaghmurasan, frequent military confrontations erupted with neighbors, especially the Hafids and the Marinids. To the east, instability stemmed from rivalries with the Hafids—who, after securing the eastern Maghreb, sought to dominate the central region, justifying intervention under Almohad legitimacy. In the west, the Zayyanids and Marinids clashed over the leadership of the Zanāta and of their lands. (AlAkhdar Abdelli, 1987: 53) Under Sultan Abū Saʿīd ʿUthmān (681–703 AH / 1282–1303 CE), these conflicts intensified. The Marinid ruler Yūsuf b. Yaʿqūb of Fes launched five major offensives against Tlemcen in rapid succession: 689 AH (1290), 695 AH (1296), 696 AH (1297), 697 AH (1298), and 698 AH (1299). Despite a long (nine-year) siege, Tlemcen's inhabitants resisted fiercely, with losses estimated at up to 120,000 from famine (Belarbi khaled, 2011, 147) When Abū Saʿīd's son, Abū Zayān Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān (703–707 AH / 1303–1307 CE), succeeded, and he continued to defend the city. Chroniclers such as Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn al-Aʿraj praise the city's extraordinary resilience, stating it stunned and demoralized the Marinids. After the death of Yūsuf b. Yaʿqūb, the siege was lifted, allowing Abū Zayān and his brother Abū Ḥammū to restore authority across their provinces—including Chélif, Wanshira, Médéa, and Mاتييا—following a nine-month military campaign. However, Sultan Abū Zayān died in 707 AH / 1307 CE. (Yahya Ibn Khaldun, 1981, 153)

In 707 AH / 1307 CE, Sultan Abū Ḥammū Muṣā I (also known as Abū Ḥammū I) revived and stabilized the Zayyanid state. He negotiated peace with the Marinids (Treaty of Good Neighbourhood), expanded eastwards beyond Hafsid borders, and secured dominance over central Maghreb. Nevertheless, his ambitious son, Abū Ṭashfīn I, deposed him in 718 AH / 1318 CE and further extended Zayyanid control: east to Mount Ankafādū (Zan), to the Soummam Valley, west to the Moulouya River, and southwest to Figig. (Ibn Marzuq, 1981, 495)

In 735 AH / 1335 CE, Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan of the Marinids invaded and besieged Tlemcen. Unable to capture the city directly, he resorted to building a fortress—also named “al-Manṣūrah”—similar to his predecessor Yūsuf b. Yaʿqūb. This led to a 30-month siege. In

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Ramadan 737 AH / 1337 CE, the city fell, defended predominantly by Abū Ṭāshfin and his sons. A failed Marinid campaign in 749 AH / 1348 CE, defeated by Arab tribes near Kairouan, compelled their withdrawal.

The Zayyanid authority was shaken in 749 AH / 1348 CE (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011:52) when residents revolted against the Marinid governor, Emir B. al-Jarrār, welcoming Abū Saʿīd b. Muṣā back to power. He and his brother Abū Ṭāshfin ruled jointly for a time, restoring sovereignty over the central Maghreb for four years—but in 753 AH / 1352 CE, Sultan Abū ʿInān of the Marinids returned, killed Abū Saʿīd, and seized Tlemcen.) Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011 :56) In 760 AH / 1359 CE, Sultan Abū Ḥammū Muṣā II retook Tlemcen, ending Marinid domination. He launched four military campaigns: in 760 AH, 761 AH (1360 CE), 772–774 AH (1371–1373 CE), and 784 AH / 1383 CE. (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011 , 52).

This ruler emphasized urban development and economic renewal: he rebuilt the city following Andalusian architectural styles, established the prestigious Dār al-Ṣināʾa (Royal House of Armaments), famous for twice-daily demonstrations before the caliph Abū Zakariyā. He also promoted the production of metalware, luxury textiles, leather goods, and other crafts, igniting unprecedented commercial and economic prosperity. Under his reign, Tlemcen became one of the greatest cities of the Maghreb. (Yahya Ibn Khaldun, 1981 :151(

This period in Tlemcen's history begins with the return of Marinid dominance over the city and the accession of Sultan Abū Tashfin II ʿAbd alRaḥmān ibn Abī Ḥammū, who ruled from 791 to 795 AH (1389–1392 CE). He was characterized by a weak personality, complicity with the Marinids (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011 :57). and a general lack of resolve. The situation remained stagnant until he died in 795 AH (1393 CE). Afterward, Tlemcen witnessed a fierce power struggle between Abū Thābit Yūsuf ibn Abū Tashfin II (795–796 AH / 1392–1393 CE) and Abū Ziyān II ʿAbd alRaḥmān ibn Abī Ḥammū (797–801 AH / 1394–1399 CE) over the throne. The Marinids played a significant role in this rivalry, plunging Tlemcen into a spiral of armed conflict and political intrigue. (AlTansi, 1985 , 235)

Amidst this turmoil, Abū Fāris alMarīnī seized control of Tlemcen in 796 AH (1393 CE), despite fierce resistance from the local population. This marked the reintegration of the Zayyanid realm in Central Maghreb under Marinid influence. However, once Abū Ziyān ascended to power in Tlemcen with Marinid support, he managed to restore calm and stability, dedicating himself to rebuilding his state and repairing the damage caused by war (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011 , 69)

The Marinids did not hesitate to further weaken the structure of the Zayyanid state in Tlemcen. They arbitrarily removed and appointed rulers as they pleased. They assassinated Abū Ziyān in 805 AH (1404 CE)—the very ruler they had previously installed—then appointed Abū ʿAbd Allāh I ibn

Abī Ḥammū II in his place, only to depose him shortly thereafter and replace him with his brother, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad, known as Ibn Khūla, in the same year (805 AH / 1404 CE). Following him, his son 'Abd alRaḥmān III took the throne of Tlemcen (813–814 AH / 1411–1412 CE), ruling for a single year before being overthrown by his uncle, alSa'īd ibn Abī Ḥammū II, in a military coup that forced him to flee Tlemcen (AlZarkashi,1961 , 136)

Abū Mālik 'Abd alWāḥid ibn Abī Ḥammū II ruled Tlemcen after alSa'īd ibn Abī Ḥammū II, from 814 to 827 AH (1412–1424 CE). During his reign, he managed to restore the prestige of the capital, Tlemcen. However, the eastern regions of his domain were subjected to repeated Hafsid incursions, which eventually led to Hafsid dominance over these territories—a hegemony that lasted for approximately sixty years. (Abdel Aziz Filali,2011, 69)

The internal conflict within the Zayyanid household continued throughout this period, escalating at times into outright warfare among members of the ruling family. This infighting opened the door to increased Hafsid intervention, to the point where the later Zayyanid rulers became mere pawns in the hands of the Hafsid dynasty. The Hafsids exerted influence through both intimidation and persuasion, further weakening the already fragile Zayyanid state and undermining its structural integrity. Members of the Zayyanid dynasty began competing for the throne not via Fes, as had previously been the case, but through the court of Tunis, vying for the favor and approval of Hafsid sultans(AlZarkashi,1961, 154)

When the Hafsid Sultan Abū 'Umar 'Uthmān attempted to invade the Central Maghreb in 1463 CE, the Zayyanid ruler at the time, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad III alMutawakkil 'alā Allāh (r. 866–873 AH / 1462–1468 CE), sent him a letter pledging loyalty and submission before his arrival, hoping to spare the Central Maghreb the devastation of war. Later, when Sultan Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad IV alThābitī tried to sever religious allegiance to the Hafsids by halting the mention of their name in Tlemcen's Friday sermons, the Hafsids responded forcefully and compelled him to yield, as the Zayyanid state was too weak at this point to resist their power.(hawqi AlJamal,1997, 213)

The weakening of the Zayyanid regime in Tlemcen, the continuous warfare within its territory, and the dominance of tribal allegiances that characterized the Central Maghreb during this time all contributed to the fragmentation of the state. Many tribes broke away, and new emirates emerged that refused to acknowledge the authority of the Zayyanid state. A prominent example of this is the Emirate of the Banū Jallāb in Tuqqurt (Touggourt), led by Sulaymān alMarīnī alJallābī.(IAlAkhdar Abdeli,1987 , 113)

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The political situation along the coast was no better than in the desert interior. Several cities began operating with effective autonomy from the Zayyanids. Algiers, for instance, once under Zayyanid control, surrendered to the ruler of Béjaïa, Abū al'Abbās 'Abd al'Azīz, as the Zayyanid government in Tlemcen was too weak to defend it. Similarly, the port of Mers elKebir near Oran fell into Portuguese hands in 1471 CE. During this era, many Arab tribes—such as Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym (Shawqi AlJamal, 1997, 213) sought to impose their dominance over vast territories that had once belonged to the Zayyanid state, taking advantage of its vulnerability.

The internal strife that afflicted Tlemcen in the final phase of the Zayyanid era—exacerbated by Marinid and Hafsid interventions and the tribal domination over large swathes of territory—left the shores and urban centers of the Maghreb increasingly vulnerable to Spanish military threats and frequent assaults. By transferring the battlefield from Spanish soil to Central Maghreb, the Spanish choked the Zayyanid state and directly threatened its very existence. The political cohesion of the state further deteriorated, and the later sultans of Tlemcen found themselves incapable of mounting an effective resistance. (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011, 72).

The Spanish employed every means at their disposal to penetrate inland. Initially confined to Oran and its environs, their expansion was facilitated not only through military force but also due to the political naivety of Tlemcen's late rulers, who were embroiled in internecine conflicts and failed to grasp the gravity of the threat. The political fragmentation of the Central Maghreb in the early sixteenth century emboldened the Spanish, who had recently unified their kingdom and extinguished Islamic rule in alAndalus in 1492 CE. Their conquest of the Algerian coastline—after first advancing through the Moroccan coast—was motivated by a desire to exact vengeance on the Muslims, to prevent the return of Andalusian refugees to their lost homeland, to encircle Muslim territories in North Africa, and to thwart any potential reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Moreover, they sought to exploit Algeria's economic resources and its strategic Mediterranean ports to achieve Spanish dominance over the western Mediterranean basin—a goal that could not be realized without occupying Algeria (IAkhdar Abdeli, 1987, :202).

Beginning in 1503 CE, the Spanish threat in the Central Maghreb became a concrete reality. A succession conflict emerged in Tlemcen between two brothers, Abū Zayyān III alMas'ūd and Abū Ḥammū Mūsā III. The latter gained the upper hand thanks to support from the Spanish king at the time, Charles V (Carlos I). The Spanish capitalized on the political instability that plagued Tlemcen and seized the port of Mers elKebir in 1505 CE, (Abdel Aziz Filali, 2011, 75). led by Don Ramón de Córdoba. Upon arrival, he encountered only 400 Zayyanid soldiers stationed at the port, who resisted valiantly until their commander was killed, after which they surrendered following a three-day siege. Despite the arrival of a large reinforcement force—comprising 22,000 fighters and 2,000

cavalry, including the royal army of Tlemcen—on 17 September 1505 to reclaim Mers elKebir and Oran, their efforts ultimately failed. (Ibn Khaldun,2016 , 156).

The fall of Oran dealt a severe blow to Zayyanid Tlemcen, as it lost a vital commercial hub. Spanish influence did not remain limited to Mers elKebir and Oran but expanded to encompass nearly all of Algeria's coastal cities. They captured Béjaïa in 1510, Mostaganem in 1511, Honaine in 1531, and approximately four years later, they took Annaba after securing Tunis in the summer of 1535. Under such dire circumstances, one would have expected the internal factions of the Zayyanid state to unify in the face of the growing Spanish menace. However, the opposite occurred. Internal unrest broke out in Tlemcen against Abū Ḥammū III. Supporters of his imprisoned brother, Abū Zayyān, turned against him and sought assistance from the Ottoman commander 'Arūj (Aruj Reis), who was then stationed in Tenes. In 923 AH / 1517 CE, 'Arūj advanced toward Tlemcen and deposed Abū Ḥammū III, who had succeeded Muḥammad V upon the latter's death in 922 AH / 1517 CE. (Abdel Aziz Filali,2011, 81).

Following his ousting, Abū Ḥammū III sought refuge with the Spanish monarch Charles V (Carlos I), who provided him with substantial military support. In 924 AH / 1518 CE, aided by the Spanish, Abū Ḥammū successfully launched a counteroffensive and recaptured Tlemcen from 'Arūj. During the campaign, the Spanish forces managed to eliminate 'Arūj, his brother Ishāq, and a large number of Tlemcenian troops(Yahya Ibn Khaldun,1980 , 85).

Under the restored rule of Abū Ḥammū III Muḥammad alThābitī (924–934 AH / 1518–1528 CE), Tlemcen remained firmly under Spanish influence, with the sultan complying with their demands without hesitation until he died in 934 AH / 1528 CE. By this time, the authority of the Zayyanid dynasty had dwindled significantly, restricted to the city of Tlemcen and its immediate surroundings. He was succeeded by his son, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad alThābitī, who sought to pursue a neutral policy, avoiding alignment with either the Ottomans or the Spanish. To consolidate his position, he exiled his rival brother, Abū Sarḥān alMas'ūd, who opposed this stance. However, with the support of Khayr alDīn (Barbarossa) in Algiers, Abū Sarḥān returned and seized control of Tlemcen in 1529 CE.

Tlemcen remained in a state of decline until alḤasan ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh II assumed power (957–962 AH / 1550–1554 CE). As the final ruler of the Zayyanid dynasty, he pledged unconditional allegiance to the Ottomans in 957 AH / 1550 CE. Nevertheless, he was deposed in 1554 CE by the Ottoman commander Ṣāliḥ Ra'īs due to his inability to govern effectively and his suspected sympathies toward the Spanish. Tlemcen and its environs were annexed into the Regency

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of Algiers, marking the end of the Zayyanid dynasty, which had ruled for over three centuries and eighteen years (Ikhda'r Abdeli, 1987, 210).

6-Conclusion:

From the preceding overview, it becomes evident that the region of Tlemcen experienced a succession of significant historical events throughout the period spanning from 55 AH to 962 AH (676–1554 CE), beginning with the Islamic conquest and concluding with the fall of the Zayyanid state. During the early Islamic period, Tlemcen was conquered by Abū alMuhājir Dīnār following a decisive battle against Kusaila in 59 AH / 678 CE. During the era of the autonomous principalities in the Maghreb, the city fell under Idrisid influence and came under the rule of the Sulaymanid emirate established by Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, who was granted authority over Tlemcen by his cousin Idrīs II.

Tlemcen later emerged as a focal point of rivalry between the Fatimids in Ifriqiya and the Umayyads in alAndalus, with both powers vying for control over the city. The tribal factions of Ṣanhāja and Zanāta played central roles in this struggle. Subsequently, the Almoravids took control of Tlemcen during the reign of Emir Yūsuf ibn Tāshfin, valuing its strategic location in western Central Maghreb and its position along key trade routes. The Almoravid presence ignited conflict with the Ḥammādid dynasty, culminating in the siege and capture of Tlemcen by alManṣūr alḤammādi in Shawwāl 496 AH / July 1102 CE.

The city later came under Almohad rule in 539 AH / 1145 CE under the leadership of 'Abd alMu'min ibn 'Alī. Upon the Almohads' decline, Tlemcen passed into the hands of the Zayyanids, who governed for over three centuries. During this period, the city withstood persistent expansionist attempts by the Marinids from the west and the Ḥafṣids from the east, maintaining its resilience against repeated military incursions launched by both powers

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