

Hereditary Transmission of Military Positions in the Umayyad Caliphate: Family Networks, Regional Abstract

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Abstract:

Objective: This article examines hereditary military succession in the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE) as a structural feature of early Islamic governance. It asks how far military posts were transmitted within specific families, which social and political factors enabled this pattern, and how it affected meritocracy, social hierarchy, and civil–military relations.

Methodology: The study employs a qualitative, historical–analytical approach. It combines close readings of classical Arabic chronicles and biographical works (al-ʿabarī, al-Balādhurī, Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Khallikān) with a critical synthesis of modern scholarship on the Umayyad period. Using a prosopographical method, it reconstructs the careers of selected military families over two or more generations, organizes them into a structured dataset, and presents the findings in a main summary table and genealogical figures.

Results: The analysis identifies recurring patterns of hereditary succession—direct father–son transmission, lateral succession within kin groups, and multi-generational concentration of military and military–administrative posts. These patterns appear most clearly in Syria, Iraq, and Khurāsān. Hereditary leadership is shown to be largely concentrated in Arab tribal elites, with limited access for non-Arab Muslims (mawālī).

Conclusion: Hereditary military succession emerges as a central mechanism through which the Umayyad state organized coercive power and managed relations between center and provinces. While it provided continuity and local stability, it also reinforced social and ethnic hierarchies and multiplied autonomous centers of authority, contributing to the structural vulnerabilities of Umayyad rule.

Keywords: Umayyad Caliphate; hereditary military succession; military elites; tribalism; civil–military relations; mawālī

Introduction

The Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE) occupies a central position in the formative period of Islamic history. Under Umayyad rule, the early Muslim polity was transformed from a small Arabian community into a vast imperial structure stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to the frontiers of India. This expansion required new forms of governance, administration, and social organization capable of holding together a diverse population and competing regional interests (Kennedy, 1986; Donner, 1981). At the heart of these developments lay the question of how power—especially military power—was distributed, maintained, and transmitted across generations.

One of the most striking yet understudied dimensions of Umayyad governance is the hereditary transmission of military positions. Rather than being filled solely on the basis of merit, communal consensus, or direct caliphal appointment, many key commanders and provincial military leaders emerged from particular families whose influence extended over several generations. The sources repeatedly mention sons, grandsons, and close relatives of earlier commanders taking up similar posts, especially in

strategically significant regions such as Syria, Iraq, and Khurāsān. This pattern reflects a deeper logic in the structuring of authority, in which tribal affiliations, kinship ties, and patronage networks were essential for both political survival and imperial cohesion (Crone, 2004; Kennedy, 2001).

The emergence of hereditary military leadership must be understood against the broader backdrop of the transition from the Rashidun to the Umayyad Caliphate. The first four caliphs (al-khulafā' al-rāshidūn) are often portrayed as ruling through relatively open consultation and a stronger emphasis on personal merit and piety, whereas the Umayyads made the caliphate itself dynastic within Banū Umayya, thereby normalizing hereditary succession at the highest level of political authority (Donner, 2010). This shift resonated throughout administrative and military structures and encouraged the consolidation of power in the hands of certain tribal elites and their families. Long-standing tribal identities, which had shaped social organization and patterns of loyalty before Islam, were not erased but reconfigured and mobilized in the service of the new imperial order (Donner, 1981; Kennedy, 2004). Entrusting military command to the sons and relatives of proven allies promised continuity, local knowledge, and predictability in an empire encompassing Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims.

This strategy, however, came at a significant cost. By concentrating command within particular lineages, hereditary transmission risked undermining meritocracy, narrowing the pool of potential leaders, and strengthening the bargaining power of Arab tribal elites—especially those closely linked to the ruling house—vis-à-vis the caliphal center. Non-Arab Muslims (mawālī), despite their increasing demographic, economic, and military importance, were often excluded from the highest ranks of military command or confined to subordinate roles (Crone, 2004; Perlman, 2015). The tension between the universal, integrative ideals of the new faith and the exclusionary tendencies of tribal and familial privilege is one of the central paradoxes of Umayyad rule and helps explain some of the grievances that later fueled opposition movements, including early 'Abbāsīd rhetoric (Donner, 2010).

Modern scholarship has examined many aspects of Umayyad history—the nature of the early conquests, the consolidation of imperial administration, the evolution of Islamic political thought, and the complex relations between Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims and dhimmīs (Kennedy, 1986; Crone, 1980; Donner, 1981). Yet the specific question of hereditary transmission of military positions has rarely been treated as the primary subject of analysis. References to “military families,” provincial “dynasties,” and multi-generational commanders are scattered across the sources and secondary literature, but they are seldom gathered and studied as a coherent phenomenon (Perlman, 2015; Shaddel, 2021). Building on research that has highlighted the roles of tribalism, kinship, and patronage under the Umayyads, as well as the emergence of powerful military families across regions such as Syria, Iraq, Khurāsān, North Africa, and al-Andalus (Kennedy, 2004; Crone, 2004; Rapp, 2017), this article proposes to read the Umayyad military not merely as an instrument of conquest and control but as a dense web of familial and patronage relationships that structured both loyalty and conflict within the empire.

Focusing on the reconstruction of family networks and dynasties whose members repeatedly held military posts over two or more generations—including lineages associated with figures such as Ziyād ibn Abīhi, al-ʿajjāj ibn Yūsuf, al-Muhallab ibn Abī ʿuḫra, Qutayba ibn Muslim, and Mūsā ibn Nuʿayr—this study uses genealogical and prosopographical data to reveal patterns that are not immediately apparent from narrative texts alone (Perlman, 2015). It also attends to regional and chronological variations, recognizing that family-based command in the Syrian heartlands operated differently from that in Iraq, Khurāsān, North Africa, or al-Andalus, and that practices evolved between the early post-Rashidun period and the more centralized reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik and his successors (Kennedy, 2001; Morony, 2005). The article thus aims, first, to describe and categorize patterns of hereditary transmission of military posts; second, to explore the socio-political factors that enabled and sustained them; and third, to assess their implications for the effectiveness of the Umayyad army, the distribution of status, and civil-military relations. In doing so, it argues that hereditary transmission of military positions was not a marginal irregularity but a central mechanism through which the Umayyad state managed power, loyalty, and

control, and it contributes to broader debates about the relationship between family, tribe, and state in Islamic political history.

2. Research Problem

Although the Umayyad Caliphate has been the subject of extensive historical research, the hereditary transmission of military positions has rarely been treated as a discrete and central object of inquiry. Most studies address this phenomenon only indirectly, in the context of tribal politics, provincial administration, or biographical accounts of individual commanders (Kennedy, 1986; Crone, 1980; Donner, 1981). As a result, our understanding of how military authority was reproduced within families, and how this shaped the broader structure of Umayyad governance, remains fragmented and incomplete.

The core problem this study addresses is the absence of a systematic and historically grounded analysis of hereditary military succession in the Umayyad period. While the narrative sources clearly document patterns in which command passes from father to son or within a lineage, these patterns have not been comprehensively collected, compared, and interpreted. We lack a detailed picture of how widespread hereditary appointments were, which families were most involved, how these practices varied across regions, and to what extent they affected meritocracy, civil–military relations, and the balance of power between the caliphal center and provincial elites.

A related problem is methodological. Existing scholarship tends to focus either on high politics—the succession of caliphs, major revolts, and doctrinal conflicts—or on individual figures whose careers are studied in isolation. Less attention has been given to reconstructing family networks over several generations and treating them as units of analysis in their own right. Without such a perspective, it is difficult to see the extent to which military command under the Umayyads was concentrated in certain lineages and how these lineages functioned as semi-dynastic actors within the imperial system.

This study therefore seeks to overcome these gaps by bringing together dispersed genealogical and prosopographical data, organizing them into coherent patterns, and interpreting them within a broader analytical framework. In doing so, it aims to clarify the historical role of hereditary military succession as a structural rather than merely anecdotal feature of Umayyad rule.

3. Research Questions

In light of the research problem outlined above, this study is guided by the following main questions:

1. How and to what extent were military positions transmitted hereditarily within specific families during the Umayyad Caliphate?

This question seeks to identify concrete patterns of succession in command posts across generations and to determine whether these patterns were exceptional or relatively common.

2. What socio-political factors enabled and sustained hereditary military succession under Umayyad rule?

Here the focus is on the roles of tribal structures, kinship ties, patronage networks, and the relationship between central authority and regional elites.

3. How did hereditary transmission of military posts vary across different regions of the Umayyad Empire?

This question asks whether practices in Syria, Iraq, Khurāsān, North Africa, and al-Andalus followed similar logics or reflected distinct local dynamics.

4. What were the implications of hereditary military leadership for meritocracy, social stratification, and the integration of non-Arab Muslims (*mawālī*) into the military hierarchy? This addresses the tension between familial privilege and competence-based advancement, as well as the limits of social mobility.

5. How did hereditary military succession affect civil–military relations and the stability of Umayyad rule over time?

This question considers whether hereditary military families functioned primarily as pillars of stability or as potential centers of opposition to the caliphal center.

Together, these questions aim to move the discussion from isolated anecdotes toward a coherent, comparative understanding of how familial power operated in the Umayyad military sphere.

4. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is both empirical and conceptual. Empirically, it offers one of the first attempts to gather, organize, and analyze in a systematic way the evidence for hereditary transmission of military positions during the Umayyad period. By reconstructing the careers of multiple military families across generations and regions, the study provides a clearer picture of how military authority was concentrated and reproduced within specific lineages. This goes beyond existing works that focus on individual commanders or isolated episodes and contributes a more integrated prosopographical perspective to Umayyad studies.

Conceptually, the research sheds new light on long-standing questions about the nature of early Islamic governance. It shows how tribalism, kinship, and patronage did not simply coexist alongside formal institutions, but actively shaped the structure of those institutions—especially in the field of military organization. By examining hereditary military succession, the study clarifies how the Umayyad state navigated the tension between traditional forms of authority rooted in lineage and the emerging needs of a centralized, territorially expansive empire (Crone, 2004; Donner, 2010; Kennedy, 2004).

The study is also significant for its implications for broader debates on meritocracy and social inequality in early Islamic history. It helps to explain why non-Arab Muslims, despite their growing numbers and contributions, often remained marginalized in positions of high command, and how hereditary practices reinforced social hierarchies within the Muslim community (*umma*). This insight is crucial for understanding both the internal dynamics of Umayyad society and the rhetoric of its critics, who frequently framed their opposition in terms of justice, equality, and “true” Islamic principles.

Furthermore, the research makes a methodological contribution by employing genealogical charts and summary tables to visualize family networks and their roles in the military structure. Selected figures and a synthetic table summarizing the distribution of military posts among key families—presented in the main text and appendices—allow readers to see at a glance patterns that are otherwise scattered across narrative sources. This combination of textual analysis and visual representation strengthens the empirical grounding of the study and may serve as a model for future work on other dynasties and regions.

Finally, the study has comparative significance beyond the Umayyad context. By situating hereditary military succession in a wider conversation on dynastic rule, tribal politics, and patrimonial civil-military relations, it offers a framework that can be applied to later Islamic empires (such as the Abbasids, Fatimids, and Ottomans) as well as to non-Islamic imperial formations. In this sense, the article contributes not only to Islamic history but also to general discussions in political and military history about how families and lineages shape the exercise of power.

5. Objectives of the Study

Building on the research problem, questions, and significance outlined above, this study pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To identify and classify patterns of hereditary military succession in the Umayyad Caliphate. This includes mapping out families whose members held military positions over two or more generations, and distinguishing between different types of posts (e.g., provincial commanders, frontier leaders, governors with military responsibilities).
2. To analyze the socio-political foundations of hereditary military leadership. The study seeks to explain how tribal affiliations, kinship ties, patronage networks, and relations with the caliphal court enabled certain families to secure and maintain military posts over time.
3. To explore regional variations in hereditary practices. An important objective is to compare how hereditary military leadership manifested in different regions—such as Syria, Iraq, Khurāsān, North Africa, and al-Andalus—and to identify factors that account for similarities and differences across these contexts.

4. To assess the impact of hereditary military succession on meritocracy, social status, and the position of non-Arab Muslims. The study examines how hereditary practices affected opportunities for advancement based on competence, how they reinforced or reshaped social hierarchies, and how they influenced the inclusion or exclusion of *mawālī* from top levels of command.
5. To evaluate the implications of hereditary military leadership for civil–military relations and the stability of Umayyad rule. This objective focuses on understanding whether military families primarily acted as stabilizing intermediaries between the center and the provinces, or whether they also posed challenges to caliphal authority under certain conditions.
6. To develop and employ visual tools—such as genealogical figures and summary tables—to present and analyze data on military families. By designing selected figures for the main text and additional charts for the appendices, the study aims to make the underlying data more accessible, transparent, and analytically useful, while keeping the article’s narrative clear and focused.

Together, these objectives ensure that the research moves beyond descriptive narrative to offer a structured and theoretically informed analysis of hereditary military succession in the Umayyad Caliphate.

6. Definition of Key Terms

In order to ensure conceptual clarity and to anchor the discussion in existing scholarship, the following key terms are defined in light of both classical sources and modern studies.

Hereditary Military Succession: In this article, “hereditary military succession” refers to the *de facto* transmission of military authority and command positions within the same family over two or more generations. This includes cases in which a son, grandson, or close agnatic relative (such as a brother, nephew, or cousin) succeeds an earlier family member in a comparable military role—such as provincial commander, governor with military responsibilities, or frontier leader. The concept is informed by modern prosopographical approaches that trace the careers of office-holding families over time (Kennedy, 2001; Perlman, 2015), as well as by classical narrative accounts that explicitly link appointments to lineage and kinship ties (al-ʿabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*).

Umayyad Caliphate: The “Umayyad Caliphate” denotes the Islamic polity ruled by the Banū Umayya between 41–132 AH / 661–750 CE, with its political center in Damascus and authority extending over Syria, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, parts of Central Asia, North Africa, and al-Andalus. This definition follows standard syntheses in modern scholarship (Kennedy, 1986; Donner, 2010), which treat the Umayyad state as both a dynastic regime and an expanding imperial structure that relied on a combination of Arab tribal elites, local notables, and diverse subject populations.

Military Elites / Military Families: “Military elites” are those individuals who held positions of significant command or responsibility within the Umayyad military system—such as provincial commanders, leaders of frontier garrisons, or governors whose roles included major military functions. “Military families” are lineages in which two or more members across successive generations can be identified as holding such posts. This usage is indebted to studies that emphasize the role of families and kin groups in early Islamic administration and warfare (Crone, 1980; Kennedy, 2001; Perlman, 2015), and to classical sources that repeatedly mention the same lineages in connection with military leadership (e.g. the families of Ziyād ibn Abīhi, al-ʿajjāj ibn Yūsuf, al-Muhallab ibn Abī ʿufra, and others).

Tribalism and Kinship: “Tribalism” refers to social and political organization structured around tribal affiliation, genealogical descent, and the solidarity that binds members of a tribe or clan. “Kinship” denotes ties of blood and marriage that link individuals and families together. In the context of early Islam, both concepts have been shown to play a crucial role in shaping political authority, patterns of recruitment, and access to office (Donner, 1981; Crone, 2004). Ibn Khaldūn’s notion of *ʿasabiyyah*—group solidarity rooted in kinship and tribal cohesion—provides a classical conceptual framework for understanding how

tribal and familial bonds underpinned dynastic power and military leadership in pre-modern Islamic societies (Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*).

Patronage Networks: “Patronage networks” are webs of asymmetric relationships in which a patron (such as a caliph, governor, or powerful commander) provides protection, resources, and access to office in return for loyalty, service, and political support from clients. In the Umayyad period, patronage often overlapped with tribal and familial bonds, producing layered systems of obligation and dependence (Crone, 1980; Donner, 2010). Modern analyses of patrimonial and neo-patrimonial rule in Middle Eastern and comparative contexts (Finer, 1962; Perlmutter, 1977) help illuminate how such networks functioned as informal institutions of power alongside formal offices and titles.

Mawālī (Sing. Mawlā): The term “mawālī” refers to non-Arab Muslims who became attached to Arab individuals or tribes through bonds of patronage, manumission, or alliance. They could be freed slaves, converts, or clients integrated into the Arab social framework but generally occupying a lower status than Arab tribal elites (Crone, 1980; Kennedy, 2004). In the context of this study, the term designates non-Arab Muslims who participated in the Umayyad military and administrative structures but were largely excluded from the highest ranks of hereditary military leadership—a pattern highlighted in modern debates on ethnicity and hierarchy in early Islam (Donner, 1981; Kennedy, 2004).

Civil–Military Relations: “Civil–military relations” denotes the patterns of interaction and balance of power between the political authorities of the state (the caliph and his central administration, provincial governors in their civil capacity) and the military leadership (commanders, garrison leaders, and frontier generals). This concept draws on broader theoretical work on the role of the military in politics (Finer, 1962; Perlmutter, 1977) and is used here to examine how hereditary military families both supported and, at times, constrained Umayyad caliphal authority, especially in key provinces where local power bases became entrenched.

Meritocracy: “Meritocracy” is used in a relative and heuristic sense to describe systems of appointment and promotion based primarily on competence, experience, or perceived merit rather than on lineage, tribal affiliation, or personal connections. While the Umayyad state did not operate as a modern meritocratic bureaucracy in the Weberian sense (Weber, 1978), the concept is useful as an analytical contrast to hereditary and patronage-based practices. It allows the study to assess how far opportunities for advancement in the military sphere were shaped by performance versus inherited privilege.

Genealogical Figures and Summary Tables: In this article, “genealogical figures” are visual representations (family trees) that trace the succession of military posts within selected families across two or more generations, while “summary tables” present aggregated data—such as the number of identifiable office-holders within each family, the types of positions they occupied, and the regions in which they served. This usage builds on prosopographical and network-based approaches in historical research, which seek to map patterns of office-holding and social connection across time (Kennedy, 2001; Perlman, 2015). In the present study, a main summary table is included in the body of the article, while detailed genealogical figures are provided for the most important families and, where necessary, in an appendix in order to support and visualize the argument without overloading the main text.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a multi-layered theoretical framework that combines insights from Islamic historiography, historical sociology, and the comparative study of civil–military relations. No single model fully captures the complexity of hereditary military succession in the Umayyad context; instead, several complementary lenses are used to illuminate different dimensions of the phenomenon.

A first key reference is Max Weber’s typology of authority, especially his distinction between traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational domination (Weber, 1978). The Umayyad Caliphate did not resemble a modern bureaucratic state; its legitimacy rested largely on traditional authority rooted in lineage, tribal precedence, and inherited status. Caliphs claimed authority as members of Quraysh and as heirs to an established ruling house, while many leading commanders derived their standing from tribal

background and family reputation. Within such a setting, it is unsurprising that military command could be perceived less as an impersonal office and more as a prerogative of particular families whose loyalty had been tested. Weber's framework thus helps explain why hereditary transmission of military posts could appear natural and legitimate, even when it conflicted with ideals of justice or merit.

Ibn Khaldūn's concept of *ʿasabiyyah*—group solidarity based on kinship and tribal cohesion—provides an indigenous lens for understanding the emergence and consolidation of dynasties in the Islamic world. For Ibn Khaldūn, ruling houses arise from strong tribal groups whose cohesion enables them to seize power, but this solidarity gradually erodes with wealth and luxury. In the Umayyad context, *ʿasabiyyah* did not vanish with the formation of the caliphate; it was redirected through tribal alliances and family networks. Hereditary military succession can be read, in this light, as a strategy to preserve *ʿasabiyyah* at provincial and regional levels, by keeping command within families that enjoyed strong local support—while at the same time creating potential centrifugal forces when such families developed their own power bases.

Modern theories of patrimonial and neo-patrimonial rule further clarify the relationship between family, military, and state. Scholars such as Finer (1962) and Perlmutter (1981) stress that in patrimonial systems the military often functions as an extension of the ruler's household or dominant social groups, with command posts distributed as personal favors to clients and relatives. In the Umayyad case, the army rested on overlapping networks of family, tribe, and patronage rather than on a professional officer corps. Hereditary military succession fits this logic: it turns offices that could in principle be reassigned into quasi-owned positions attached to particular lineages, creating semi-autonomous centers of power whose relationship to the caliphal center oscillated between cooperation and tension. Recent work on the Umayyad military, such as Kennedy's analysis of army and society (Kennedy, 2001) and Sijpesteijn's discussion of discipline and loyalty, underscores that the empire was characterized by multiple, negotiated coercive authorities rather than a single centralized apparatus.

Finally, the framework incorporates prosopographical and network-based approaches. Instead of focusing only on individual "great men," it reconstructs family trajectories and patterns of office-holding over time. The genealogical figures and the main summary table used in this study are not decorative but methodological tools that reveal concentrations of military office within certain lineages, their spread across provinces, and the continuity or rupture of their influence. By relating these empirical patterns to debates on meritocracy, ethnicity, and social stratification in early Islam (Crone, 1980; Donner, 1981; Kennedy, 2004), the framework allows the study to move beyond listing "who inherited what" and to ask why hereditary military succession emerged, how it was justified, and what it meant for the structure and stability of Umayyad rule.

8. Literature Review

The literature on the Umayyad Caliphate is extensive, yet hereditary military succession is usually treated only indirectly. For clarity, the relevant scholarship may be grouped into four broad strands: (1) general histories of the Umayyad period; (2) studies of tribalism, kinship, and dynasty; (3) works on military organization and civil-military relations; and (4) recent research on family power, patronage, and hereditary elites.

The first strand consists of general histories of the early Islamic Near East that provide essential political and social context. Hugh Kennedy's *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* offers a comprehensive narrative of the period with substantial chapters on Umayyad institutions and crises (Kennedy, 1986). Fred Donner's *The Early Islamic Conquests* reconstructs the seventh-century expansion and shows how patterns of conquest, settlement, and military organization shaped the emerging state (Donner, 1981). Such works supply the chronological and geographic scaffolding for more specialized analyses and highlight the centrality of tribal elites and regional powerholders in sustaining Umayyad authority—a theme closely tied to hereditary command.

A second strand focuses on tribalism, kinship, and dynasty. Patricia Crone's *Slaves on Horses* is concerned primarily with the later development of military slavery but offers important reflections on the limitations of tribal armies and the political logic of group solidarity (Crone, 1980). Studies inspired by Ibn Khaldūn's theory of 'asabiyyah emphasize that dynastic power rested on strong kin-based solidarities that linked ruling families to their supporters. More recent work has revisited Umayyad kinship and dynastic identity, exploring how the caliphal family and other elite lineages positioned themselves vis-à-vis local notables and tribal networks. This literature helps explain why hereditary patterns in military and administrative offices could appear natural, even necessary, within Umayyad political culture.

The third strand comprises studies of military organization and civil-military relations. Kennedy's *The Armies of the Caliphs* remains foundational, analyzing recruitment, pay, deployment, and the social composition of armies, and showing the importance of tribal contingents, garrisons, and leading families (Kennedy, 2001). More recent research by Sijpesteijn on discipline and loyalty in the Umayyad army underscores the existence of multiple overlapping centers of coercive power rather than a single unified chain of command. Within this scholarship, hereditary transmission of command is frequently mentioned—sons succeeding fathers, families providing multiple officers—but only in passing, without systematic treatment or quantification.

A fourth and particularly relevant strand is the emerging scholarship on family power, patronage, and hereditary elites. Perlman's work on the caliphs' bodyguards and military households, for example, shows how proximity to the ruler could create semi-dynastic military structures that persisted across reigns (Perlman, 2015). Other studies examine kinship networks of governors and provincial elites, revealing how family ties shaped appointments, decision-making, and patterns of loyalty. Research on opposition movements against Umayyad rule likewise highlights the role of powerful families and tribal coalitions as both pillars of the regime and potential focal points of dissent.

Despite these contributions, no study has yet offered a panoramic, comparative analysis of hereditary military succession across the Umayyad Empire as a whole. Existing works provide context, theory, and case studies, but stop short of reconstructing the broader pattern and its implications for Umayyad governance. The present article seeks to fill this gap by systematically collecting data on military families from classical Arabic chronicles and biographical works, presenting them in a main summary table and selected genealogical figures, and interpreting the resulting patterns through the theoretical and historiographical frameworks outlined above. In doing so, it aims to refine our understanding of the Umayyad period and to contribute to wider debates on how early states managed the intersection of family, tribe, and military power.

9. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, historical-analytical research methodology that is appropriate for examining a phenomenon rooted in narrative sources and long-term socio-political structures. The goal is not to quantify events in a statistical sense but to reconstruct and interpret patterns of hereditary military succession in the Umayyad Caliphate and to relate these patterns to broader issues of authority, tribalism, and civil-military relations.

9.1 Overall Research Design

The research is designed as an integrative historical study that combines two main components:

1. **Textual-historical analysis of primary sources:** The study undertakes close readings of classical Arabic chronicles and biographical works that document the political, military, and social history of the Umayyad period. These texts provide the raw material for identifying individual actors, their family connections, and their positions within the military hierarchy.
2. **Critical synthesis of modern scholarship:** In parallel, the study conducts a structured review of modern academic literature on the Umayyad Caliphate, tribalism, kinship, and civil-military relations. This scholarship offers interpretive frameworks and comparative insights that guide the

analysis of the primary material and help situate the findings within broader historiographical debates.

The design is **qualitative and interpretive** rather than quantitative. It seeks to produce a nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of hereditary military succession by tracing family trajectories, mapping networks of power, and examining how these networks interacted with the caliphal center and regional societies.

9.2 Sources of Data

The study relies on two main categories of sources: classical Arabic primary texts **and** modern secondary studies.

9.2.1 Primary Sources

The primary corpus consists of major works of Islamic historiography and biography that cover the Umayyad period in detail. Among the most important are:

- al-ʿabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*
- al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Bulḍān*
- Ibn Saʿd, *al-ʿabaqāt al-Kubrā*
- other relevant chronicles and biographical dictionaries that contain information on governors, commanders, and notable families.

These works are used to:

- identify individuals who held military or military-administrative posts under the Umayyads;
- trace genealogical connections between these individuals;
- determine the regions and time periods in which they served;
- collect qualitative information on loyalty, rebellion, negotiation with the caliphal authority, and relations with local societies.

Whenever possible, multiple primary sources are consulted for the same event or figure to cross-check information and mitigate the influence of individual authorial bias.

9.2.2 Secondary Sources

The secondary corpus includes monographs, edited volumes, and peer-reviewed articles in Arabic and Western languages that address:

- the political and administrative structure of the Umayyad state;
- tribalism, kinship, and dynasty in early Islam;
- military organization and civil-military relations in the first Islamic centuries;
- prosopographical and network-based studies of early Islamic elites.

This scholarship is used to:

- clarify the historical context of the primary sources;
- provide interpretive tools (e.g., concepts such as ʿasabiyyah, patrimonialism, meritocracy);
- identify existing debates, gaps, and points of contention in the historiography;
- situate the present study's findings within ongoing academic discussions.

9.3 Data Collection Procedures

The process of data collection unfolded in several stages:

1. **Identification of relevant figures:** From the primary sources, all individuals explicitly described as holding military or military-administrative positions under the Umayyads were identified. This includes governors with military responsibilities, commanders of provincial or frontier forces, and leaders of specific campaigns.
2. **Extraction of genealogical information:** For each identified figure, genealogical data were collected wherever available: lineage (nasab), family connections, tribal affiliation, and any mention of relatives in similar roles. Special attention was given to indications that a given commander was the son, grandson, brother, or other close kin of a previous office-holder.

3. **Construction of family lists:** Individuals were then grouped into **families** (lineages) according to shared ancestry. Within each family, all members who occupied relevant posts were listed, along with their positions, regions of service, and approximate dates.
4. **Compilation of prosopographical database:** The information collected was organized into a structured list or database that records, for each family and each individual, the nature of the military position, the chronological frame, and available qualitative remarks (such as loyalty, revolt, or notable achievements).
5. **Preparation of tables and figures:** Based on this database, a **summary table** was constructed to present, in synthetic form, the main military families identified in the study and the number of office-holders associated with each. In addition, **genealogical figures** (family trees) were prepared for selected key families whose influence was both multi-generational and geographically significant. These visual tools are later used in the analysis to illustrate patterns of hereditary succession and regional distribution.

9.4 Analytical Procedures

The analysis is thematic and interpretive, and it proceeds in several interrelated steps:

1. **Detection of hereditary patterns:**
Using the prosopographical data, the study identifies cases in which military posts are clearly transmitted within the same family across at least two generations. These cases are examined to determine the types of posts involved (e.g., provincial command, frontier leadership), the degree of continuity (e.g., direct father-son succession versus broader kin group), and the duration over which the family remained influential.
2. **Regional and chronological comparison:**
The identified hereditary patterns are then compared across different regions of the Umayyad Empire (Syria, Iraq, Khurāsān, North Africa, al-Andalus) and across different phases of Umayyad rule (e.g., early post-Rashidun period, reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, late Umayyads). This allows the study to assess whether hereditary military succession was more pronounced in certain regions or periods and to explore the reasons behind such variations.
3. **Contextual interpretation:**
Each major family case is interpreted within its specific political and social context: the nature of its relationship with the caliphal court, its connections to tribal groupings, its role in suppressing or leading revolts, and its interactions with local populations. The genealogical figures and the summary table serve as tools to organize and visualize this contextual analysis, showing how local and central dynamics intersected.
4. **Theoretical framing:**
The empirical findings are analyzed in light of the theoretical frameworks outlined earlier. Patterns of hereditary succession are related to Weber’s notion of traditional authority, Ibn Khaldūn’s concept of ‘asabiyyah, and modern analyses of patrimonial civil-military relations. This step seeks to move beyond descriptive narrative to explain why hereditary military leadership emerged and what functions it served within the Umayyad system.
5. **Assessment of implications:**
Finally, the study evaluates the implications of hereditary military succession for meritocracy, social stratification, the position of non-Arab Muslims (mawālī), and the overall stability of Umayyad rule. It asks whether hereditary families primarily acted as stabilizing intermediaries or whether they also posed structural risks by concentrating coercive power in semi-autonomous lineages.

9.5 Reliability, Validity, and Limitations

Working with classical Islamic historiography presents well-known challenges. Many of the major chronicles were compiled under ‘Abbāsīd patronage and may contain retrospective criticism of Umayyad

rule. There are also discrepancies between sources and gaps in the documentation, especially for certain regions (such as North Africa and al-Andalus) and for less prominent figures.

To address these issues, the study adopts several strategies:

- **Source cross-checking:** Whenever possible, information about a given figure or event is verified across multiple primary sources.
- **Attention to authorial context:** The political, intellectual, and sectarian background of each author is taken into account when interpreting his portrayal of Umayyad figures and institutions.
- **Focus on recurring patterns:** Greater weight is given to patterns that recur across independent sources and families, rather than to isolated, anecdotal reports.

In terms of **validity**, the use of a transparent prosopographical database, a clearly defined set of criteria for identifying hereditary succession, and explicit visual tools (tables and genealogical figures) strengthens the internal coherence of the analysis. However, the study does not claim to identify every single case of hereditary military leadership in the Umayyad period; rather, it presents a representative and well-documented sample that is sufficient to establish the structural relevance of the phenomenon.

The main limitations are:

- the uneven coverage of different regions and social groups in the surviving sources;
- the difficulty of distinguishing, in some cases, between genuine hereditary patterns and coincidental occurrences of related individuals holding office;
- the absence of quantitative data that would allow precise measurement of the frequency of hereditary appointments in relation to other forms of recruitment.

These limitations are acknowledged throughout the study, and the conclusions are framed with appropriate caution.

9.6 Ethical and Scholarly Considerations

Although this is a historical study that does not involve human subjects in the contemporary sense, it adheres to standard scholarly ethics by:

- providing accurate and honest representation of sources;
- distinguishing clearly between primary evidence and later interpretation;
- citing all works and authors whose ideas or data are used;
- avoiding anachronistic judgments that impose modern categories uncritically on pre-modern societies.

By combining rigorous source criticism, systematic data organization, and theoretically informed interpretation, the methodology employed in this study aims to meet the standards expected of historical research in peer-reviewed journals such as the An-Najah University Journal for Research (Humanities) and to provide a solid foundation for the analytical sections that follow.

10. Patterns of Hereditary Military Succession in the Umayyad Caliphate

The empirical material collected for this study reveals that hereditary military succession in the Umayyad Caliphate was neither a rare accident nor a universally applied rule. Rather, it appears as a structured and recurring pattern that took several distinct forms and operated with varying intensity across different regions and periods.

The prosopographical data are presented in two complementary formats: a main summary table (Table 1), which lists the principal military families and the number of identifiable office-holders in each, and a set of genealogical figures (Figures 1–5; Appendix Figures A1–A10) that visualize multi-generational patterns of hereditary succession.

Table 1. Demonstrate families with hereditary military positions in the Umayyad State and their Numbers.

No	Number of Individuals	Family Numbers
1	Family of Ziyad ibn Abihi	6
2	Family of Khalid ibn al-Walid	3
3	Family of al-Mughira ibn Shu`ba	4
4	Family of al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf	20
5	Family of al-Muhallab ibn Abi Sufra	10
6	Family of Qutayba ibn Muslim	7
7	Family of Khalid ibn `Abdullah al-Qasri	11
8	Family of Hisham ibn Isma`il	3
9	Family of `Umar ibn Hubayra	4
10	Family of Abd al-Malik ibn al-Qaqa	2
11	Family of `Abd al-Rahman ibn Habib	2
12	Family of Khalid al-Fahmi	5
13	Family of al-Mughira ibn `Ubayd Allah	3
14	Family of Musa ibn Nusayr	6
15	Family of Bishr ibn Safwan	2
16	Family of Mu`awiya ibn @adij	4
17	Family of `Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad	7
18	Family of al-Rayyan ibn Khalid	2
	Total	101

10.1 Degrees and Forms of Hereditary Succession

The first task is to clarify what “hereditary” means in the concrete cases documented in the sources. The data show at least three overlapping forms of hereditary succession:

1. Direct linear succession

In the clearest cases, military command passes directly from father to son in the same province or in an equivalent position. A governor of a strategically important region is succeeded by his son as commander or as governor with combined civil and military responsibilities. This pattern is especially visible in families whose members enjoyed high levels of trust from the caliphal center and whose loyalty had been tested in earlier conflicts. Direct succession of this kind creates a strong sense of continuity: for local populations and troops, the “house” of the commander rather than the abstract office becomes the reference point for authority.

2. Lateral succession within the kin group

In other cases, command passes not from father to son but laterally within the wider agnatic kin group: between brothers, cousins, or uncles and nephews. Here, the family as a whole rather than a single nuclear line is recognized as a pool of potential commanders. When one member dies, is dismissed, or is transferred, another member of the same lineage steps into a comparable role. This form of succession reinforces the prominence of the family as an enduring political actor, even if no single branch monopolizes command.

3. Multi-generational concentration of posts

A broader and more diffuse pattern emerges when we consider families that, over two or more generations, repeatedly provide holders of military and military-administrative posts, even if there is no simple one-to-one succession from one specific office to another. In such cases, sons or grandsons of a famous commander may serve in different provinces or in related but distinct capacities (e.g., as provincial governors, frontier leaders, or high-ranking officers). What matters is not the strict inheritance of a single post but the enduring capacity of the family to occupy positions near the top of the military hierarchy.

These forms are not mutually exclusive; in many families, we see a combination of direct linear and lateral succession. The genealogical figures prepared for the most important lineages—in particular those associated with well-known commanders—make these patterns visible by tracing how names and offices repeat across generations. The summary table aggregates this information to show the number of identifiable office-holders within each family and the span of time over which they appear, this pattern is clearly illustrated in the case of Ziyād ibn Abīhi and his descendants (Figure 1).

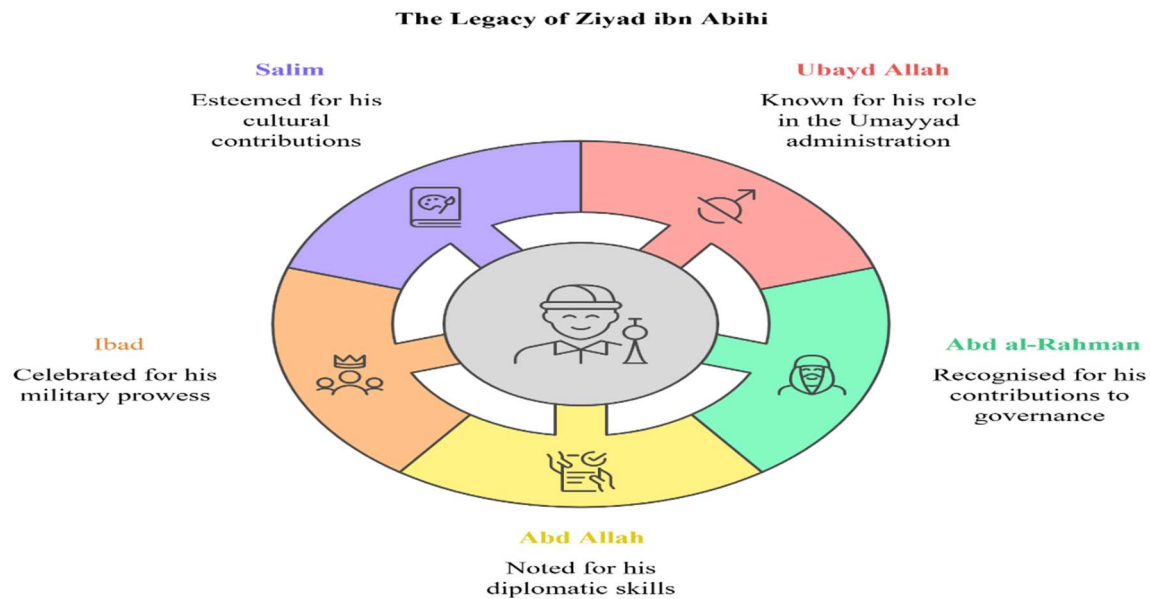


Fig 1. Genealogical chart of the family of Ziyād ibn Abīhi, showing multi-generational transmission of military and administrative posts.

10.2 Types of Military and Military-Administrative Posts

Hereditary succession did not occur in a vacuum; it attached to specific types of posts that combined military and political authority. The data reveal that hereditary patterns are especially prominent in the following categories:

- **Provincial governorships with military command**

In many regions, the *wālī* or governor was not only a civil administrator but also the supreme military commander responsible for local troops, tax collection, and security. When such posts became associated with a particular family across generations, the line between military and civil authority blurred: the family became the *de facto* ruler of the province under the nominal oversight of the caliph.

- **Frontier and garrison commands**

On the edges of the empire—in Khurāsān, North Africa, and al-Andalus, as well as along key Byzantine frontiers—command of garrisons and expeditionary forces tended to require familiarity with local conditions and robust ties to tribal groups. In several cases, families built lasting reputations in frontier warfare, and their members reappeared in successive generations as leaders of campaigns or as commanders of fortified towns.

- **Internal security and strategic nodes**

Certain cities and regions within the heartlands of the empire also saw recurring appointments from the same families to roles that combined policing, tax enforcement, and military readiness. In

these cases, hereditary succession functioned as a way of keeping sensitive internal nodes—such as major garrison cities or tax-rich provinces—in the hands of trusted lineages.

By cataloguing the posts held by each family and presenting them in the summary table, the study shows that hereditary succession tended to cluster around offices where both local knowledge and long-term loyalty were at a premium. The genealogical figures specify, for each family, which posts were held, in which regions, and in what chronological order.

10.3 Continuity, Duration, and Breaks in Family Influence

A striking feature of the prosopographical data is the varying duration of family prominence. Some families appear at the forefront of military affairs only briefly—perhaps across one generation or one major conflict—while others maintain a visible presence over several decades. This suggests that hereditary succession should not be understood as a static or guaranteed privilege but as a contingent process shaped by political success, failure, and shifting caliphal priorities.

In certain lineages, we can trace a clear arc: an initial rise under a powerful early member, a period of consolidation during which sons and relatives hold important posts, and eventually a decline due to political miscalculation, defeat in battle, loss of favor at court, or changes in regional conditions. In other cases, familial influence is more intermittent: members of the same lineage reappear in high office after intervals of relative obscurity, indicating that the family retains social capital and regional support even when temporarily sidelined.

The genealogical figures are particularly helpful in capturing these trajectories. By arranging individuals chronologically and annotating their posts, these figures show at a glance whether a family's influence was concentrated within a single generation, stretched across several, or revived after periods of eclipse. The summary table complements this visual representation by indicating, for each family, the approximate chronological span of military office-holding and the number of different posts occupied.

10.4 Hereditary Succession and Caliphal Control

From the caliphal center's perspective, hereditary military careers were a double-edged sword. On one side, relying on well-known loyal families gave the Umayyads stability: these lineages had local networks and *ʿasabiyyah* that helped mobilize troops, keep order, and secure frontiers, so appointing a son or relative of a trusted commander both rewarded past service and promised continued loyalty. On the other side, when a family controlled key garrisons or provinces for generations, it could feel entitled to those posts and become dangerous to bypass or remove, especially if it had strong tribal or urban support. The evidence in the tables and figures suggests that Umayyad policy moved back and forth between strengthening such hereditary arrangements where they were useful and cutting them back—by appointing outsiders, splitting commands, or rotating governors—when they threatened central control, a tension clearly visible in the case of al-ʿajjāj ibn Yūsuf's family (Figure 2).

Genealogy of al-Hajjaj

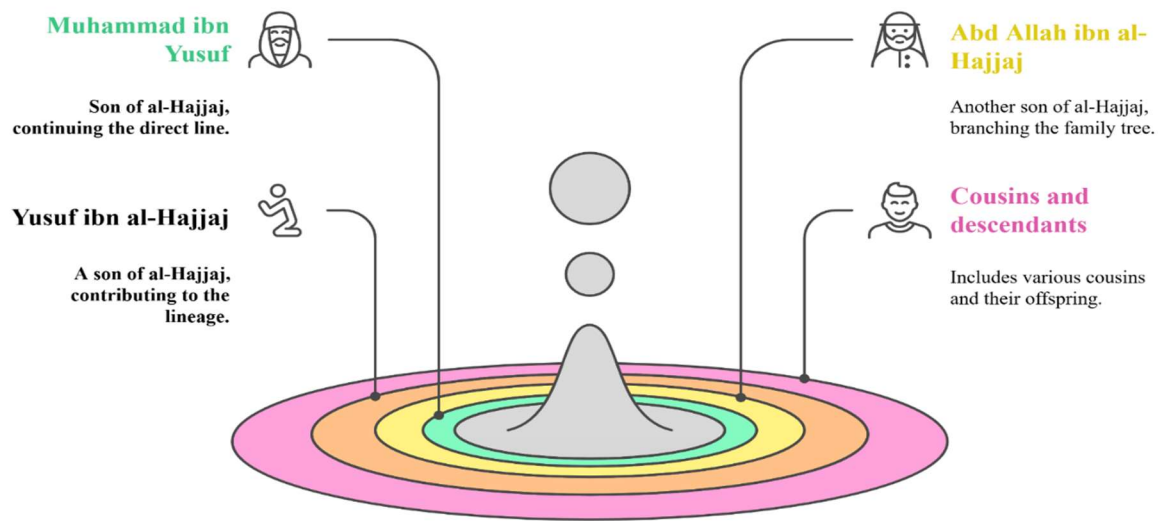


Fig 2. Genealogical chart of the family of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī, illustrating the concentration of military authority in Iraq and the East

10.5 Social Boundaries and the Exclusion of Non-Arab Elites

The patterns of hereditary military succession also reveal important social boundaries within Umayyad society. The overwhelming majority of identifiable military families belong to the Arab tribal elite. While non-Arab Muslims (*mawālī*) certainly participated in the army and, in some cases, rose to positions of responsibility, they rarely appear as the heads of lineages that transmit high-level command across generations. The concentration of hereditary military authority in Arab families thus reinforced existing ethnic and social hierarchies, limiting the opportunities for non-Arabs to translate military service into long-term dynastic power.

This exclusion is not absolute; there are scattered examples of *mawālī* achieving prominence. Yet the overall pattern visible in the genealogical material and summarized in the table is clear enough to support the conclusion that hereditary succession was, in practice, a mechanism for reproducing Arab dominance at the top of the military structure. It consolidated the position of certain lineages as intermediaries between the caliphal center and the broader population, while leaving other groups in more precarious or subordinate roles.

10.6 Summary

In summary, the evidence presented in this section shows that hereditary military succession under the Umayyads manifested in multiple, overlapping forms: direct father–son succession, lateral succession within kin groups, and multi-generational concentration of posts within particular lineages. These patterns were especially pronounced in offices that combined military and administrative authority, particularly in strategically important provinces and frontier regions. The genealogical figures and the principal summary table are central to making these patterns visible and analytically tractable; they transform scattered narrative references into a structured representation of how military authority was distributed and reproduced.

The next sections build on this foundation by examining how these hereditary patterns varied across different regions of the Umayyad Empire and by analyzing their broader implications for civil–

military relations, meritocracy, and the stability of the regime, Additional genealogical charts for other military families are provided in Appendix Figures A1–A13

11. Regional Variations in Hereditary Military Leadership

The patterns of hereditary military succession described in the previous section did not manifest uniformly throughout the Umayyad Empire. The geographical extent of Umayyad rule—from the Syrian heartland to Iraq, Khurāsān, North Africa, and al-Andalus—meant that local social structures, tribal configurations, and frontier conditions shaped the ways in which military authority was organized and transmitted. This section examines these regional variations, using the data summarized in Table 1 and illustrated in selected genealogical figures, in order to highlight both the common underlying logic and the specific forms it took in different provinces.

11.1 Syria: The Heartland of Umayyad Power

Syria, and especially Damascus and its surrounding regions, formed the political and symbolic center of the Umayyad Caliphate. It is therefore unsurprising that many of the most influential military families were closely tied to Syrian tribal elites and to the ruling house itself. The sources depict a dense network of alliances among the major Syrian tribes—such as Kalb, Qays, and others—and the Umayyad court, in which military command was both a reward for loyalty and a means of binding tribal leaders to the dynasty (Kennedy, 1986, 2001).

In this context, hereditary military succession tended to be particularly pronounced. Provincial governorships within Syria and command of key garrisons were often entrusted to members of families whose relationship with the caliphal center was reinforced through marriage, patronage, and shared participation in earlier campaigns. The genealogical figures for selected Syrian lineages show multiple instances of fathers and sons, as well as brothers and cousins, successively commanding troops or administering militarized provinces. Over time, such families came to embody a dual identity: they were both local tribal notables and pillars of the Umayyad regime.

At the same time, the proximity of Syria to the caliphal court meant that the center retained a relatively high capacity to manage and, when necessary, limit hereditary accumulation of power. Caliphs could dismiss or rotate Syrian commanders more readily than those posted to distant frontiers, and they could play off different tribal factions against one another to prevent any single family from becoming too dominant. The patterns recorded in Table 1 suggest that while certain Syrian lineages maintained a recurring presence in military offices, their dominance was periodically interrupted by the appointment of outsiders or by internal rivalries within the tribal landscape. In this sense, Syria illustrates a form of hereditary succession that was strong but also more directly supervised by the center.

11.2 Iraq: A Crucible of Tension and Contestation

Iraq, with its major urban centers such as Kufa and Basra and its dense mix of tribal and non-tribal populations, presented a more volatile environment. It was a region of economic importance, doctrinal and political ferment, and recurrent opposition to Umayyad rule. As a result, the appointment of governors and military commanders in Iraq was a matter of acute sensitivity for the caliphal center (Crone, 1980; Donner, 1981).

The prosopographical data indicate that certain families did indeed manage to build multi-generational careers in Iraqi military and administrative posts. Some of these families were associated with hardline enforcement of Umayyad authority, others with attempts to negotiate between local factions and the central regime. The genealogical figures for these lineages often reveal patterns of both vertical and lateral succession, as sons and other relatives stepped into roles vacated by earlier family members.

However, the Iraqi context appears less stable than that of Syria. Periods of hereditary continuity are frequently punctuated by episodes of rebellion, dismissal, or reorganization. The caliphs' efforts to impose governors from outside the region—sometimes with their own family followings—reflect both distrust of local elites and a recognition that entrenched hereditary power in Iraq could easily turn against the center. The interruptions visible in the family trajectories in Table 1 for Iraqi-based lineages reflect this

fragility. They illustrate a dynamic in which hereditary succession existed but was contested more sharply, both by local opposition groups and by caliphal efforts to reassert direct control. The al-Muhallab family provides a clear example of a lineage whose influence extended from Basra into Khurāsān (Figure 3).

Genealogy of al-Muhallab ibn Abi Sufra

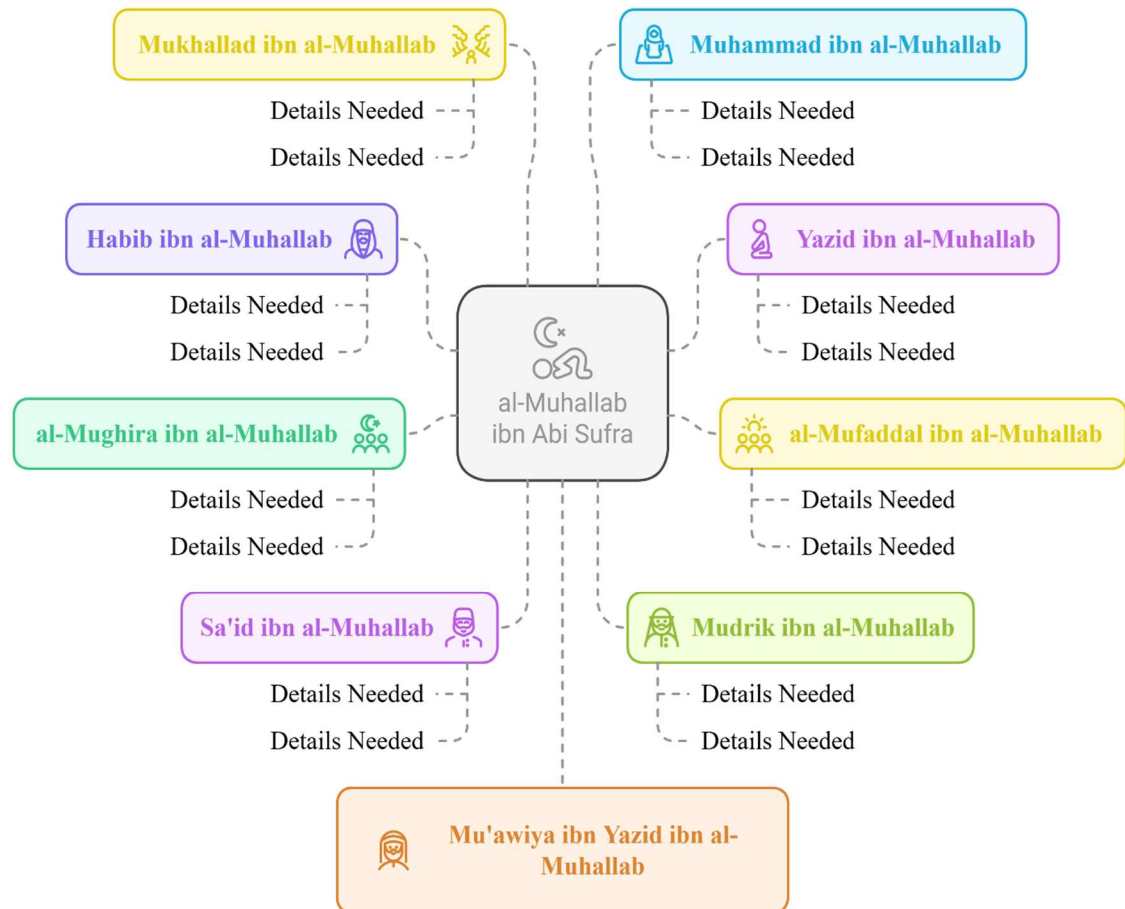


Fig 3. Genealogical chart of the al-Muhallab family, showing the extension of their military and administrative influence from Iraq into Khurāsān.

11.3 Khurāsān and the Eastern Frontier

Khurāsān and the eastern frontier regions present a distinct yet crucial case. Here, the combination of long distances from Damascus, ongoing military campaigns against non-Muslim powers, and the presence of diverse populations (Arabs, non-Arab Muslims, and non-Muslims) created a context in which strong local commanders were indispensable. Modern scholarship has emphasized that Khurāsān functioned, in many respects, as a semi-autonomous military zone whose elites played a decisive role in the eventual rise of the 'Abbāsīd movement (Kennedy, 2001; Morony, 2005).

The data collected for this study show that several families became closely associated with Khurāsān and its frontier warfare. Their members appear repeatedly as leaders of expeditions, governors, and commanders of garrisons over extended periods. In the genealogical figures devoted to these families, one can trace how the reputation and influence of an initial commander were inherited, to varying degrees, by his sons and other kin. Unlike in Syria, where the caliph could more easily rotate personnel, the logistical

and political realities of Khurāsān often made it practical—or even necessary—to maintain continuity by drawing repeatedly on the same lineages.

In Khurāsān, the family of Qutayba ibn Muslim stands out as a paradigmatic frontier military lineage (Figure 4).

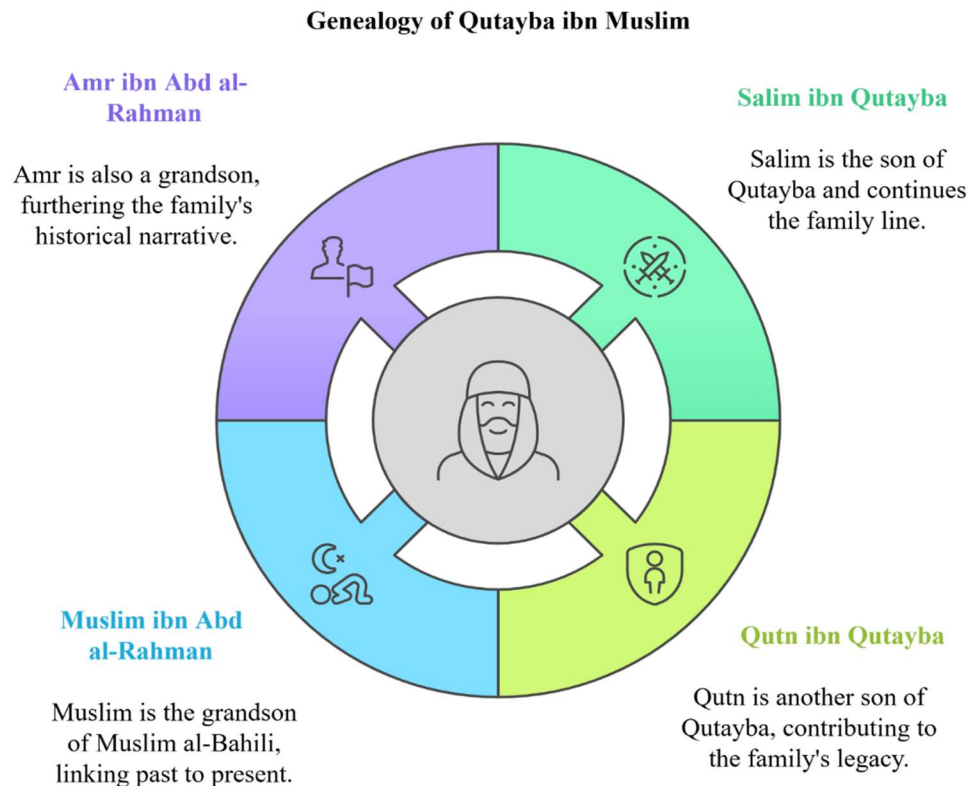


Fig4. Genealogical chart of the family of Qutayba ibn Muslim al-Bāhili, illustrating hereditary

Yet this continuity also fostered a distinctive pattern of regional power. Families with deep roots in Khurāsān developed alliances with local Arab tribal groups and, over time, with segments of the non-Arab population. They became intermediaries not just between the caliph and the army, but also between the empire and newly incorporated societies. The summary table shows that, for some of these eastern families, the number of recorded office-holders rivals or exceeds that of prominent lineages in the Syrian heartland. This concentration of hereditary military authority in a frontier region helps explain why Khurāsān later emerged as a launching ground for revolutionary movements: the local military families possessed both the institutional experience and the social connections necessary to mobilize large forces and to negotiate with central regimes.

11.4 North Africa and al-Andalus

In North Africa and al-Andalus, hereditary military patterns reflect the particular challenges of conquest, settlement, and integration of new territories at the western edge of the Umayyad world. Campaigns in these regions often lasted for years and required sustained coordination between expeditionary commanders, local tribes, and the central treasury. The sources highlight figures such as Mūsā ibn Nuʿayr and other leaders whose families played key roles in the establishment and consolidation of Umayyad authority in the Maghrib and Iberia. The family of Mūsā ibn Nuʿayr provides a key example of hereditary leadership in the western provinces (Figure 5).

Genealogical Connections of Musa ibn Nusayr's Family

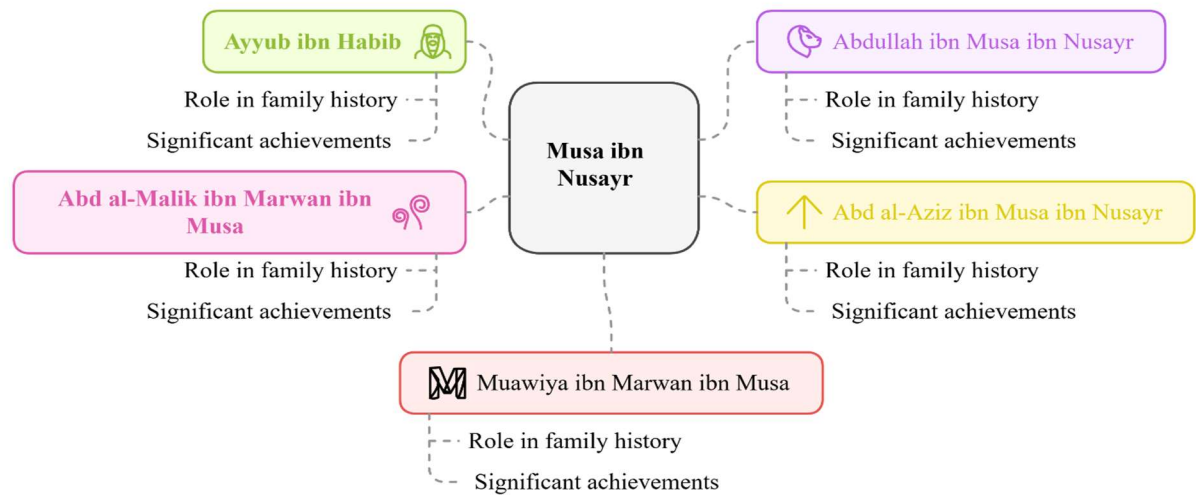


Fig 5. Genealogical chart of the family of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, showing the transmission of military authority in North Africa and al-Andalus

The available evidence for hereditary succession in these regions is more limited than for Syria or Iraq, but the prosopographical data nonetheless reveal families that provided multiple commanders or administrators. In some cases, sons and relatives of initial conquerors were appointed to govern newly subdued cities or to hold frontier posts, suggesting an attempt to build continuity and to capitalize on existing networks of trust and knowledge. In other cases, arrears in pay, conflicts with local Berber groups, and shifting political priorities in Damascus led to abrupt changes in personnel and the truncation of embryonic hereditary patterns.

The genealogical figures for selected North African and Andalusí families, along with their entries in the summary table, illustrate this mixed picture: some lineages display several generations of involvement in western campaigns, while others appear only briefly before disappearing from the record. This unevenness reflects both the fragmentary nature of the surviving sources and the fluid political situation in the western provinces, where the balance between central control and local autonomy was constantly renegotiated.

11.5 The Arabian Peninsula and Internal Security

The Arabian Peninsula, including the Hijaz and other core regions of early Islam, played a distinctive symbolic and religious role within the Umayyad Empire. While it remained important as the site of the holy cities and as a reservoir of tribal prestige, it was no longer the primary theater of large-scale external warfare. Military activity in Arabia during the Umayyad period largely involved managing internal unrest, suppressing revolts, and ensuring the safety of pilgrimage routes (Donner, 1981).

Hereditary military succession in this context took different forms. Some families with roots in the Hijaz and Najd retained a measure of influence in security-related roles or in the command of smaller contingents, but the overall concentration of high-level military authority in Arabia appears more modest compared to Syria, Iraq, or Khurāsān. The data suggest that the Umayyads preferred to maintain a relatively tight grip on appointments in the peninsula, mindful of its symbolic importance and of the potential for opposition movements to gain legitimacy by anchoring themselves in the sacred centers.

This does not mean that hereditary patterns were absent. Certain lineages associated with the early conquests and with prominent Companions continued to play roles in local power structures. However, the summary table shows that the number of clearly identifiable multi-generational military families with primarily Arabian bases is smaller, and their posts are less frequently among the top levels of imperial command. This reflects the broader shift of the military and political center of gravity away from the Arabian core toward the provincial and frontier regions.

11.6 Comparative Synthesis

Viewed together, these regional profiles confirm that hereditary military succession under the Umayyads was shaped by a combination of imperial logic and local conditions. Across all major regions, we find evidence of families whose members held military or military-administrative posts over more than one generation. Yet the intensity, stability, and political implications of these hereditary patterns vary:

- In Syria, hereditary succession is closely tied to the heartland of Umayyad power and is more directly managed by the caliphal center.
- In Iraq, such patterns are more frequently contested and interrupted, reflecting the region's volatility and its role as a focal point of opposition.
- In Khurāsān, hereditary military families become key intermediaries on the frontier, accumulating significant regional power and playing a pivotal role in later transformations.
- In North Africa and al-Andalus, hereditary patterns are emergent but fragile, shaped by ongoing conquest and integration.
- In Arabia, hereditary military roles are more limited and oriented toward internal security rather than large-scale imperial command.

The use of the main summary table and regional genealogical figures is essential to bringing these variations into focus. The table allows a comparative overview of how many identifiable office-holders each family produced and where they served, while the figures provide more fine-grained insight into the internal dynamics of each lineage. Together, they demonstrate that hereditary military succession was a flexible mechanism adapted to different regional needs and constraints, rather than a rigid, centrally imposed policy.

In the following sections, the analysis will turn to the implications of these patterns for civil-military relations, meritocracy, and the long-term stability of Umayyad rule, drawing more explicitly on the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier.

12. Hereditary Military Succession and Civil-Military Relations

The patterns of hereditary military succession outlined in the previous sections had profound implications for civil-military relations in the Umayyad Caliphate. By concentrating military authority within particular families and lineages, the Umayyad state reshaped the balance between the caliphal center and provincial elites, between Arab tribal notables and other social groups, and between formal institutional structures and informal networks of kinship and patronage. This section examines these implications along several axes: the relationship between caliph and commanders, the dual role of military families as both pillars and potential challengers of the regime, the impact on meritocracy and social stratification, and the ways in which these dynamics contributed to the broader trajectory of Umayyad rule.

12.1 Caliphal Authority and Delegated Power

From the perspective of the caliphal center, hereditary military succession was both a tool and a constraint. On one level, entrusting command to families with proven loyalty offered clear advantages. The caliph could delegate power to individuals embedded in local societies, confident that their family's reputation and interests were tied to the survival of the regime. Reappointing the son or close relative of a trusted commander served as a signal of continuity to provincial populations and garrisons, reducing uncertainty during transitions. The data summarized in Table 1, which show repeated appointments from the same families to key posts, reflect this strategic reliance on established lineages.

Yet delegation on this basis inevitably involved a partial transfer of effective sovereignty. The more a family became entrenched in a province—accumulating local followers, economic resources, and symbolic capital—the more it could act as a semi-autonomous power center. The genealogical figures for major military families make this process visible: over time, successive members of the same lineage occupy roles that straddle the boundary between “officers of the caliph” and “regional lords.” Their kinship networks reach into local tribal groups and urban notables, and their command of troops gives them leverage in negotiations with Damascus. In this sense, hereditary military succession created a layered sovereignty: the caliph remained the theoretical source of authority, but provincial power was increasingly mediated through familial nodes.

This dynamic echoes broader patterns observed in patrimonial polities, where rulers must constantly balance the need for reliable agents against the risks posed by those same agents if they become too powerful (Finer, 1962; Perlmutter, 1981). Under the Umayyads, hereditary military families were among the most important of these agents. The caliphs’ efforts to rotate governors, split commands, or introduce outsiders into sensitive regions can be interpreted as attempts to reassert central control when familial influence threatened to become excessive.

12.2 Military Families as Pillars and Potential Rivals

Hereditary military families thus occupied an ambiguous position within Umayyad civil–military relations. On the one hand, they functioned as pillars of the regime. They provided continuity in command, intimate knowledge of local conditions, and the *‘asabiyyah* necessary to mobilize and discipline troops in often hostile environments. Their genealogical prestige and repeated service gave them credibility with local tribes and communities, making them effective intermediaries between the caliph and his subjects.

On the other hand, the same characteristics that made these families valuable also made them potential rivals. Entrenched in provincial structures, they could resist or reinterpret orders from the center, slow down the implementation of policies, or negotiate concessions in exchange for continued loyalty. In extreme cases, they could become focal points for opposition, using their control over troops and local resources to support rebellions or to switch allegiance to rival claimants. The historical record contains examples of commanders whose families had long served the Umayyads but who eventually defected to or cooperated with opposing movements when political winds shifted.

The prosopographical data and the visualizations derived from it help clarify this dual role. Families that appear prominently in the table often have complex trajectories in the sources: phases of close cooperation with the caliphs alternate with moments of tension, dismissal, or conflict. This suggests that hereditary succession did not automatically produce either loyal clients or disloyal magnates; rather, it created actors with enough institutional and social weight to be decisive in struggles over the future of the regime. Civil–military relations in such a context cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between “state” and “army”; they involve triangular relationships between the caliphal center, hereditary families, and the wider communities that those families helped to organize and represent.

12.3 Meritocracy, Patronage, and Social Stratification

Hereditary military succession also shaped the internal composition of the officer corps and the broader social hierarchy of the Umayyad state. By privileging certain lineages in access to high command, the system limited opportunities for advancement based on military skill or administrative competence alone. While merit certainly played a role in initial appointments—families often rose to prominence through the achievements of a founding figure—subsequent generations benefited from inherited status that did not always correspond to their individual capabilities.

The tension between merit and lineage is a recurring theme in both classical and modern discussions of early Islamic leadership. On the one hand, there are narratives emphasizing piety, justice, and competence as ideals for those in authority. On the other hand, the practical realities of tribal and familial politics often dictated that office-holding be distributed according to existing power structures. Hereditary military succession is one of the clearest institutional manifestations of this tension. It provided

a measure of stability and predictability but did so at the expense of a more open and competitive system of promotion.

The effects on social stratification were significant. The concentration of military posts within Arab tribal families, documented in Table 1, reinforced the dominance of these groups at the top of the social hierarchy. Non-Arab Muslims (*mawālī*), despite their contributions as soldiers, administrators, and scholars, encountered structural barriers to entering the ranks of hereditary military elites. Even when individuals from *mawālī* backgrounds achieved prominence, they rarely founded lineages with long-term hereditary access to command. This asymmetry contributed to feelings of exclusion and injustice, which in turn fed into the ideological critiques of Umayyad rule developed by various opposition movements—including those that emphasized equality among believers (Donner, 1981; Kennedy, 2004).

At the same time, within the Arab elite itself, hereditary military succession helped to differentiate an inner circle of service families from other tribesmen. Members of these families could leverage their history of office-holding to secure advantageous marriages, privileged access to resources, and a durable identity as “people of the sword” (*ahl al-sayf*). Thus, civil–military relations intersected with social stratification in complex ways: the army was not merely a professional institution but a channel through which certain families consolidated their position within the broader aristocracy.

12.4 Local Communities, Provincial Societies, and Legitimacy

The impact of hereditary military succession on civil–military relations extended beyond the interaction between caliph and commanders to encompass local communities and provincial societies. In many regions, military families were also involved in tax collection, dispute resolution, and the mediation of conflicts between tribal groups. Their authority had both coercive and integrative dimensions: they could deploy force, but they also had to maintain legitimacy among those they governed.

From this perspective, hereditary succession offered both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, a family with deep roots in a region could draw on long-standing relationships with local tribes and notables. Its members could present themselves as known quantities, responsible for maintaining order and defending the community. The genealogical figures for certain families show multiple branches distributed across different towns or segments of a province, indicating a broad local presence that could bolster their claims to represent regional interests.

On the negative side, hereditary elites could also be perceived as exploitative or as excessively aligned with the central regime. When tax burdens grew heavy, when religious or sectarian tensions surfaced, or when military defeats undermined confidence in leadership, local populations might blame not only the distant caliph but also the families who served as his agents. In some rebellions, the targeting of provincial commanders and their kin suggests that hereditary military families were seen as complicit in perceived injustices. Civil–military relations at the local level thus oscillated between cooperation and resentment, depending on how these families balanced their role as imperial representatives with their embeddedness in provincial societies.

12.5 Long-Term Consequences for Umayyad Stability

In the longer term, the system of hereditary military succession contributed to both the resilience and the fragility of Umayyad rule. On the one hand, the reliance on experienced families allowed the regime to project power across a vast territory with relatively limited administrative infrastructure. The continuity provided by hereditary commanders helped maintain garrisons, secure frontiers, and manage complex provincial landscapes over decades. Without these familial intermediaries, it is difficult to see how the caliphate could have functioned at all in its historical context.

On the other hand, the same structures that underpinned Umayyad expansion and consolidation also laid the groundwork for its eventual transformation. As hereditary families entrenched themselves in key regions—especially in frontier zones like *Khurāsān*—they accumulated the capacity to act independently of, or even against, the caliphal center. When ideological, economic, or political grievances converged, these families were well positioned to broker alliances between local forces and external

challengers. The ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, with its strong roots in Khurāsān and its ability to mobilize both Arab and non-Arab elements, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the role of pre-existing military and administrative networks, many of which had hereditary dimensions (Kennedy, 2001; Morony, 2005).

Thus, hereditary military succession shaped civil–military relations in a double-edged way. It created durable channels through which the Umayyad state could exercise power, but it also multiplied centers of authority that could recalibrate their loyalties or redefine their relationship to the caliphate. The genealogical figures and the summary table used in this study make this duality visible: they show, in concrete terms, how military power was distributed among families and how potential alternatives to the existing regime were structurally embedded within the very system that sustained it.

12.6 Interim Conclusion

The analysis in this section shows that hereditary military succession was a central factor in shaping civil–military relations under the Umayyads. Concentrating military authority in specific families gave the regime indispensable intermediaries, but it also produced actors with their own interests and power bases. This arrangement affected the autonomy of the caliphal center, the internal composition and ethos of the military elite, the social hierarchy of the Muslim community, and the perceived legitimacy of imperial rule in the provinces. The concluding parts of the study bring these insights together to assess how hereditary military leadership influenced the broader trajectory of Umayyad rule—from consolidation to collapse—and to outline directions for comparative work on hereditary patterns in other Islamic and non-Islamic polities.

13. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study faces several limitations inherent in its sources and methods. The main chronicles and biographical works were compiled later, often under ‘Abbāsīd patronage, and reflect the perspectives and biases of their authors; despite cross-checking and cautious reading, distortions in the portrayal of Umayyad commanders and their families cannot be fully eliminated. The evidence is also unevenly distributed: Syria and Iraq are relatively well documented, while parts of North Africa and al-Andalus are not, resulting in a prosopographical sample skewed toward better-attested regions. In addition, the criteria used to identify hereditary cases and the qualitative nature of the material do not allow for precise quantification of hereditary versus non-hereditary appointments.

These constraints point to several promising avenues for future research. A larger prosopographical project, supported by digital tools, could extend the database of Umayyad office-holders and refine the patterns identified here. Comparative studies across other Islamic and non-Islamic empires, as well as focused regional or family-based case studies that draw on papyri, inscriptions, and legal documents, would help illuminate local variations. Finally, closer engagement with juridical and theological discussions of authority could better connect historical practices of hereditary command with contemporary debates on legitimacy and justice in early Islamic thought.

14. Conclusion

This study has argued that hereditary military succession was not a marginal irregularity but a structural feature of Umayyad rule. By tracing multiple families whose members held military and military–administrative posts across two or more generations, and by organizing this material prosopographically, it has shown that hereditary patterns—whether direct father–son succession, lateral kin-based succession, or multi-generational concentration of offices—were especially prominent in provincial governorships, frontier commands, and key garrisons. These arrangements varied across regions, being relatively integrated into the caliphal system in Sria,

more contested in Iraq, particularly influential in Khurāsān, and more fragile in North Africa and al-Andalus, while remaining limited and security-focused in the Arabian Peninsula.

Concentrating military authority in specific lineages had far-reaching implications. It strengthened Arab tribal elites, restricted the scope of merit-based advancement, and helped marginalize non-Arab

Muslims (mawālī) from the highest levels of command, even as hereditary families served as essential intermediaries for governing a vast and diverse empire. By combining Weberian ideas of traditional authority, Ibn Khaldūn's 'asabiyyah, and patrimonial models of civil-military relations with detailed genealogical and prosopographical evidence, the study has highlighted families—not just individuals or institutions—as crucial units of analysis. Approaching Umayyad military history through the lens of hereditary succession thus offers fresh perspectives on legitimacy, inequality, and the balance between central and provincial power in early Islam, and opens the way for broader comparative work on how pre-modern states organized coercive power through lineages and networks of kinship.

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