

World Conference on Social Sciences, Law and Public Policy
Hosted Online from Toronto, Canada
Date: 26th October, 2026
Website: https://econferencia.com

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF STUDIES ON THE KHARIJITE MOVEMENT IN KHURASAN AND SISTAN IN THE EIGHTH AND EARLY NINTH CENTURIES (BASED ON THE SCHOLARLY LEGACY OF T. KADYROVA)

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Abstract

This article examines T. Kadyrova's scholarly interpretations of the Kharijite movement in Khurasan and Sistan during the eighth and early ninth centuries from a historiographical perspective. The primary focus is her monograph published in 1965, which addresses social and political movements in the region. Particular attention is paid to the origins, religious-political characteristics, and social foundations of the Kharijite movement. The relationship between the policies of the Arab Caliphate and expressions of resistance among local populations is explored. The regional characteristics and historical circumstances of Kharijite activities in Khurasan and Sistan are examined. The political significance and social dimensions of the movement led by Hamza ibn Adharak are analyzed separately. Kadyrova's methodological interpretation of Kharijite uprisings as a form of social struggle is critically assessed. Her conclusions are compared with accounts preserved in medieval Arabic and Persian historical sources. Special emphasis is placed on the historical value of al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, and the Tarikh-i Sistan. The article considers the implications of Kharijite activities for the political stability of the Abbasid Caliphate. The influence of class-based interpretations characteristic of Soviet historiography is critically evaluated. The study highlights the significance of Kadyrova's scholarly legacy for understanding the socio-political history of Khurasan and Sistan.



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Keywords: T. Kadyrova, Khurasan, Sistan, Kharijites, eighth–ninth centuries, Hamza ibn Adharak, Abbasid Caliphate, socio-political movements, uprisings, Arabic and Persian sources, al-Tabari, Ibn al-Athir, Tarikh-i Sistan, historiography, source criticism.

The Kharijite movement in Khurasan and Sistan was one of the significant developments in Abbasid political history from the late eighth century to the first quarter of the ninth century. Describing this movement merely as a religious dispute or an ordinary peasant uprising fails to reveal its complex nature. The legitimacy of caliphal rule, the practical powers of provincial governors, methods of tax collection, and the political mobilization of local communities were closely interconnected. The evidence presented in Chapter V of T. Kadyrova's monograph is compared with Arabic and Persian historical traditions to identify the causes of the movement led by Hamza ibn Adharak [1, pp. 148–169; 2; 3].

Kharijism is a historical designation encompassing various currents that emerged amid political conflicts within the early Muslim community in the seventh century. However, the activities of groups in the eastern provinces during the eighth and ninth centuries were not simply a continuation of earlier Arab political conflicts. On the peripheries of Sistan, Kirman, and Khurasan, local social relations, military-geographical conditions, and religious leadership interacted. Hamza ibn Adharak's followers are generally associated with the Ajarida tradition; sources also refer to them as the "Hamziyya." Internal divisions within the movement caution against portraying the Kharijites as a single centralized organization [2; 4].

Sistan's position as a frontier region was particularly important. While towns such as Zaranj served as administrative strongholds of the Caliphate, control over rural and foothill areas was not consistently maintained. Holding a town did not

necessarily mean governing the entire province. The Kharijites may have exploited this uneven territorial control. Nevertheless, such an inference should be applied cautiously to individual episodes: although sources mention the plundering of certain towns or attacks on tax collectors, they do not provide a continuous map of territorial control [2; 3; 5].

Changes in geographical scale must also be considered when studying this period. A report about a single town or battle cannot fully represent the political situation throughout Khurasan or Sistan. Likewise, there could be a difference between a governor's formal appointment and his effective control over local forces and rural districts. This distinction is important for understanding the history of both the Kharijite movement and Tahirid rule [1, pp. 148–169; 5; 8].

Hamza ibn Adharak (Ḥamza b. Āḏarak; also recorded as Atrak in some sources) was among the best-known leaders of the Kharijite movement in Sistan and Khurasan. According to C. E. Bosworth, his uprising began in AH 179/795–796 or somewhat later, and in AH 182/798 he achieved a victory over caliphal forces. Minor discrepancies in historical dates should be investigated in light of differences in chronicle traditions and calendrical reckoning rather than automatically treated as errors. Reports that he came from a landowning notable family complicate interpretations of the movement solely as a revolt of impoverished peasants [2; 4].

There are reports that Hamza styled himself "Commander of the Faithful" (amīr al-muʾminīn). This claim to a title indicates that his opposition was not merely administrative discontent but rested on an alternative conception of legitimate authority. Nevertheless, use of the title does not mean that Hamza actually established authority over all Muslims. Sources emphasize that he could not fully capture such centers as Nishapur, Herat, and Zaranj, although he launched attacks

around Bayhaq and posed a threat in rural areas. The movement's political influence therefore cannot be measured solely by direct control of cities [2; 4].

An important aspect of Hamza's movement was its activity against tax collectors. Modern studies drawing on the Tārīkh-i Sīstān note that he encouraged some peasants not to pay the kharāj and other obligations. Two issues must be distinguished: first, resistance to a particular fiscal policy; and second, rejection of the religious-political legitimacy of state authority. These could reinforce one another, but they are not identical. Targeting tax collectors directly undermined the Caliphate's revenue-collection system [2; 3].

T. Kadyrova interpreted the movements of this period in terms of social contradictions and peasant resistance. This approach is useful for examining taxation and economic pressure, but it may relegate the movement's religious ideas to a secondary position. Hamza's supporters may have included rural inhabitants, local warriors, and other groups; however, sources do not provide consistent information about their exact numbers or social composition. Generalizations such as "the entire population" or "all peasants" should therefore be avoided [1, pp. 148–169; 2; 3].

In Arabic historiography, chroniclers such as al-Tabari and Ibn al-Athir mention the movement in episodes connected to the political chronology of the Caliphate. The Persian local history Tārīkh-i Sīstān, by contrast, offers information more closely connected to internal regional relations, leaders, and the memory of local groups. The two types of sources address different questions: general chronicles focus more on the center and its governors, while local histories devote greater attention to political balances within the province. This difference cannot be reduced to a simple distinction between a "correct" and an "incorrect" account [3; 6; 7].



The Tārīkh-i Sīstān preserves an account of correspondence between Harun al-Rashid and Hamza; modern research associates this episode with plans for a campaign in AH 193/808. These letters are important for studying ideas of political legitimacy and obedience, although their verbatim historical authenticity requires textual criticism. A dated event in al-Tabari or Ibn al-Athir and a leader's speech preserved in a local narrative are not equivalent types of evidence. Accordingly, the article considers the function of each report, the author's standpoint, and the subsequent transmission tradition separately [2; 3; 6; 7].

Personal names and place names may appear in different forms in Arabic and Persian historical works. The variants Āḏarak and Atrak for Hamza ibn Adharak provide one example. Such differences may be interpreted as possible forms referring to the same person, but it is inappropriate to equate every variant categorically without examining the texts themselves. Academic writing should indicate the original form and the transliteration used [2; 4].

Kharijite attacks are identified as an important factor in Harun al-Rashid's plans for an eastern campaign in 808. The caliph's death in Khurasan in 809 and the subsequent civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun made it difficult for the central government to maintain continuous attention to the eastern territories. Nevertheless, the proposition that "the movement grew stronger because the center weakened" must be tested separately for each period: local military capabilities, alliances, and religious divisions also affected outcomes [2; 4].

Reports that Hamza remained active until 828 indicate that his movement was not a short-lived rebellion lasting only a few years. This longevity should not be equated with uninterrupted military victories: continued resistance could coexist with temporary agreements, declining mobilization, or territorial retreats. The Tārīkh-i Sīstān also reports a reconciliation with one of al-Ma'mun's governors, illustrating this complexity. Assessing the movement requires examining not only

the number of battles but also the territories in which administrative control functioned or failed [3; 4].

Overall, the events under consideration cannot be represented as a linear chain of cause and effect. Political decisions at the center, local interests in the provinces, religious mobilization, and military capabilities influenced one another in different ways. It is therefore unsurprising that previously established social and religious groups continued to operate after a major historical turning point. Considering both continuity and rupture is an essential methodological requirement of this research [4; 5; 10].

The analysis shows that the movement led by Hamza ibn Adharak developed at the intersection of claims to religious-political legitimacy, opposition to fiscal policy, and the territorial characteristics of governance in Sistan. Its long duration demonstrates that the Caliphate was unable to establish uniform control over towns and rural districts in its eastern provinces. Interpreting the movement solely as "religious heresy" or a "peasant uprising" is insufficient; each source selected and presented events according to its own political and literary tradition [1, pp. 148–169; 2; 3; 4].

The article makes three analytical contributions: it distinguishes local manifestations of Kharijism from the broader history of the movement; examines fiscal resistance alongside, but without conflating it with, claims to religious authority; and compares a Soviet-era monograph with Arabic-Persian sources and contemporary scholarship. This approach may also be applied to research on the history of Abbasid administration in Khurasan and Transoxiana. Rather than concealing discrepancies between sources, treating them as an integral part of historical knowledge strengthens the reliability of scholarly conclusions.

Priority should be given to actions confirmed by sources and to their documented scale. Episodes such as the death of a particular individual, the dispatch of troops,

the capture of a town, or resistance to taxation should be evaluated individually according to their evidentiary strength. Only then can cautious conclusions be drawn about the consolidation of political authority or the weakening of opposition. This approach prevents excessive generalization of research findings [1; 3; 8].

Reassessing T. Kadyrova's scholarly legacy makes it possible to understand the Kharijite movement in Khurasan and Sistan in the eighth and early ninth centuries not merely as a peasant uprising or religious opposition, but as a complex historical phenomenon closely associated with the political legitimacy of the Abbasid Caliphate, its taxation system, local governance, and processes of social mobilization. The principal scholarly significance of this study lies in revealing the multifactorial nature of the Kharijite movement by bringing Kadyrova's socioeconomic interpretations into dialogue with Arabic-Persian written sources and modern historiographical approaches. This perspective provides an important basis both for a deeper understanding of the socioeconomic and political history of Khurasan and Sistan in the eighth and ninth centuries and for investigating the evolving relationship between central authority and local political forces in the eastern provinces of the Abbasid Caliphate.

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