

Preparing the Almohad Caliphate: The Almoravids*

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Abstract

Until the fifth/eleventh century, the Muslim West constituted a periphery under the influence of the Eastern Islamic world. This does not mean that the western provinces of the Dār al-Islām were closely controlled by the capitals of the Middle East, but that until that date, Arab elites retained significant authority over local populations. This was also the case in al-Andalus where the dynasty of the Umayyad emirs (138/756-316/929), then the caliphs (316/929-422/1031), reinforced this Arab supremacy. However, during the fifth/eleventh century and for several centuries thereafter, indigenous Berber dynasties seized power and founded original political structures that operated differently from those in the East. The first two dynasties that led the way to Western emancipation from the Eastern Arab matrix were the Almoravids (462/1070-541/1147) and the Almohads (541/1147-667/1269). The Almoravids respected the symbolic authority of the Eastern caliph by claiming only derived authority and functioning as an emirate. The Almohads, for their part, following the overthrow of the Almoravid dynasty, adopted a universalist claim to lead the entire community of believers; in doing so, they built an original and dogmatic political and religious system. The Almohad sovereigns also took the supreme titles of Islam as their own, those of imām, caliph, and prince of believers. In addition, they claimed possession of characteristics of holiness and divine election including impeccability (ʿiṣma), Mahdism, and proximity to God (wilāya). The article demonstrates that, despite opposition between the two dynastic systems, the Almoravid experience paved the way for the political and religious emancipation of the Muslim West under the Almohad caliphate.

Historical comparison is a delicate practice that requires a certain methodological rigor. This is particularly true for historians who intend to compare and contrast two successive political systems in the same geographical area. By playing with

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the chronological and geographical scales and shifting the historical viewpoint, distinctive features and key elements can emerge. As an example, across the Mediterranean Basin during the pre-modern history of Islam, the people whom Jean-Claude Garcin called the “new peoples of Islam” came into power in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries.¹ These non-Arab groups came from the periphery of major urban centers that had appeared or developed during the first centuries of Islam. These groups seized power and promoted political and religious reforms; from the East came the Seljuks and the Ayyubids, while from the West came the Berber Almoravids, Almohads, and Marinids. The perception of two of these periods, the Almoravid and the Almohad, depends on the chronological and geographical scale of the study as well as its perspective. From the Iberian perspective, in the chronological framework established by al-Andalus (1492/897-711/92),² the reigns of the two Berber dynasties resemble those of foreign powers, intervening in the Peninsula at the moment when the Christian kingdoms of the North threatened the existence of al-Andalus. From the historical perspective of the Maghrib, however, the perception of the Berber dynasties was fundamentally different. Their reign corresponded with the culmination of a process that saw the Islamization and Arabization of a growing portion of the local population and the slow emergence of local authorities whose influence extended far beyond the period and geographic framework of the Maghrib. Ultimately, the reputation of the Almohad Empire was perceived in the East in a new way. This political construction was not only regarded as one of the many peripheral powers of secondary princes, but also viewed simultaneously as a threat and a model.

Determining the fractures and continuities between the Almoravid period (c. 441/1050-541/1147) and the Almohad period (c. 513/1120-667/1269) in the Maghrib and al-Andalus is further complicated by the *damnatio memoriae* that covered the period and the political system of the Almoravids; any sources concerning the Almoravids have either been erased or rewritten by their successors and gravediggers. It is because the war against the Almoravids lasted long after the fall of their dynasty in 541/1147 that the rewriting of Almoravid sources by Almohad authors was so effective and had such a great significance. Indeed, its effects could be felt until the beginning of the thirteenth century, as the Banū Ghāniya, a dynasty whose founder was governor of Cordoba under the Almoravids, became the last resisting representatives of their Emirate. As successors and heirs to the Almoravids,

1. J.-Cl. Garcin (ed.), *États, sociétés et cultures du monde musulman médiéval. x^e-xv^e siècle*. 3 vols. (Nouvelle Clio, PUF, 1995 and 2000), t. 1, 123-167 (chapters by J.-C. Garcin and P. Guichard: “Les nouveaux peuples de l’Islam”).

2. This is already a historiographical postulate, depending on whether we consider the Arab, Berber, and Muslim conquest of the eighth century as a turning point (P. Guichard), or that its influence was superficial (Cl. Sánchez-Albornoz). Some authors, such as I. Olagüe went even further, supporting the fallacious theory that the conquest never took place, and the Islamicization of al-Andalus was due to massive conversion to Islam (I. Olagüe, *Les arabes n’ont jamais envahi l’Espagne*, 1969). It also depends on whether we insist on the permanence of Muslims and Islam after the “Reconquista” or, rather, the total elimination of all components of the Andalusī society after the disappearance of the kingdom of Grenada. On Islamic periodization, see A. Borrut, “Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam,” *Der Islam* 91/1 (2014): 37–68, and S. Bashir, “On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies,” *History and Theory* 53/4 (December 2014): 519–44.

they expressed a permanent hostility and remained a threat to the Almohad Empire, first from their maritime base in the Balearic Islands, where they had sought refuge during the third quarter of the twelfth century, then from their foothold in Central Maghrib, and finally through their alliance with the Arab tribes and the Ghuzz, a Turkish tribe sent from the East by the Ayyubids to counter the Almohad advance in Ifrīqiya and Tripolitania.³ The survival of the Banū Ghāniya, the number of conflicts they participated in, both on land and at sea, and their tenacious nature have undoubtedly prompted such a rereading of the history of the Saharan Almoravids. The Almohad sources insist that Ibn Tūmart's dogma and reform represented a radical break from Almoravid ideology. The maintenance of a dynasty—the Banū Ghāniya—representative of an earlier, alternative legitimacy helped to strengthen the ideological identity of the Almohads and led them to further stand out from their predecessors. The Almohad political system was therefore built in opposition to the Almoravid one. The theorists of Almohadism (*tawḥīd*) were forced to refine their political system until well after the initial reign of 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 524/1130-558/1163) had ended. This decades-long political and military antagonism has been integrated into, and indeed strengthened, the historiography of the opposition between the two dynasties, thus influencing both parties: Ṣanhāja vs. Maṣmūda, plains vs. mountains, Sahara vs. Atlas, nomads vs. sedentary populations, Emirate vs. Caliphate, Abbasid legalism vs. the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart's Imamate, East (*Sharq*) vs West (*Gharb*), Malikism vs. Almohadism, *taqlīd* vs. *ijtihād*, *tajsīm* vs. *ta'wīl*, and so on. These points of opposition were re-worked by the Almohads so that certain ideas were emphasised: the wearing of the veil (*lithām*), the role of women, the use of *furū'*—rather than the Koran and the Sunna—by the Almoravids. Other developments that came from this rewriting include the Imamate; the infallibility of the movement's founder; the different roots of the Almohad authority; and the alleged illiteracy of the Almoravids. Some important steps were also taken; some were institutional and dogmatic, like the prohibition of the Maliki school, while others were symbolic, such as the choice of white as the emblematic color of the dynasty, or the reorientation of the *qibla* in the congregational mosques of the Empire (in Marrakesh, Tlemcen, Fez, and other cities).

While the bulk of the historiography concerning the Almoravids and the Almohads has focused on the differences between these two dynasties, this article will instead stress the elements of continuity between them. This perspective will show how, both despite and thanks to their apparent differences, the Almoravid period prepared the way for the emergence of the Almohad Caliphate and determined, either directly or indirectly, the features of the Almohad dynasty. The rise to power of the Almoravids, the political structures that they developed, and the challenges they faced at the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century paved the way for the Almohad Caliphate-Imamate as well as the unification and independence of the Maghrib from the Eastern core of the religious and political authority.

3. A. Bel, *Les Benou Ghanya et leur lutte contre l'Empire almohade* (Paris, 1903); J.-M. Mouton, "La conquête de la Cyrénaïque et de la Tripolitaine par Qarāqūsh: initiative individuelle ou entreprise d'État?" in *Aux Rivages Des Syrtes: La Libye, Espace et Développement de l'Antiquité à Nos Jours*, ed. Ch. Chanson-Jabeur (Paris, 2000), 59–69; A. S. Baadj, *Saladin, the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya: The Contest for North Africa (12th and 13th Centuries)* (Boston, 2015).

The Rise to Power of the Almoravids

The geopolitical dimension of this period plays an important role in understanding the appearance of the Almoravid movement. Until the end of the fourth/tenth century, the Umayyads of Cordoba and the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya were engaged in an extreme game of competing influences in the Western Maghrib. This played out through the exchange of embassies, financial support given to different groups, and military backing. Eventually, in 358/969 the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya moved their capital to Egypt, founded al-Qāhira, and relocated the tombs of the first Imams of the dynasty. Meanwhile, across the Strait of Gibraltar, the Caliphate of Cordoba entered a period of crisis that lasted from 399/1009 to 422/1031. Due to the remoteness or disappearance of the previous competing powers, interventions in the Maghrib gradually ceased working and ultimately resulted in a power vacuum that allowed for local forces to emerge. It was in this moment that the Almoravids came to power, “to proclaim the truth, fight against the violations of the Law, and suppress illegal taxes,”⁴ and thus asserted their presence in the region. Interestingly, the two etymologies of the name “Almoravids” (*al-murābiṭūn*) proposed by the Arab sources are either the “refugees in a fortified convent (*ribāṭ*)” or those “who form a highly cohesive group” (*murābiṭūn*).

The Almoravid movement first developed out of the Sanhāja tribes, particularly from the Banū Gudāla and the Banū Lamtūna. It was both Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm, a tribal chief responsible for political and military functions, and ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn, a spiritual guide, who were responsible for leading the movement. Al-Bakrī reported that Ibn Yāsīn would have met the grand master of Kairouan, Abū ‘Imrān al-Fāsī, after returning from pilgrimage. Born between 405/1015-411/1020 and deceased in Jumāda I 450/July 1059, Ibn Yāsīn was a missionary (*dā‘ī*) and reformer.⁵ Through his association with Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm, Ibn Yāsīn was able to impose his message on the Gudāla tribes, and then later, by force, on the Lamtūna. United by a common reformist ideology, these two tribes fought other tribes until the emir Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm’s death. The Gudāla were ultimately expelled by Ibn Yāsīn, who was welcomed by the emir of Lamtūna, Abū Zakariyyā’ Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar b. Buluggīn b. Turgūt b. Wartasīn al-Lamtūnī. The Lamtūna wiped out the Gudāla in 433/1042. Then, after uniting in 446/1055 while still under the direction of Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar, the two tribes seized Sijilmāssa and Awdaghust, two major caravan hubs at the northern and southern ends of the western trans-Saharan routes, thus linking the Kingdom of Ghana to the Mediterranean. After the death of the emir Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar, his brother, Abū Bakr b. ‘Umar, succeeded him.

4. Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Al-Bayān al-mughrib*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (4 vols. Beyrouth, 1983), t. 4, 11: *qāmū bi-da‘wati al-ḥaqqi wa raddi al-mazālim wa qaṭ‘i al-maghārim wa hum mutamasikkūn bi-al-sunna*.

5. Although Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, when he returned to Kairouan, he said to the great *faqīh* Abū ‘Imrān al-Fāsī that his people had no religious knowledge and did not belong to any school: *mā lanā ‘ilm min al-‘ulūm wa lā madhhab minā al-madhāhib li-annanā fī al-ṣaḥrā’i munqaṭi‘ina lā yaṣil ilaynā illā ba‘ḍ al-tujjār al-juhḥāl* (Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, t. 4, p. 7). ‘Abd Allāh b. Yāsīn gathered around him 70 *fuqahā’*, small or important, to teach them and strengthen them in their faith (p. 8).

In 463/1071 Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar laid the foundations of the capital in Marrakech (*Murr Yakush* = the “City of God” in Berber⁶), thus establishing the roots of the movement in the territory. Symbolically, the construction of the *Qaṣr al-ḥajar*, the “stone palace,” in an area where most palaces were built from adobe, presented a stable and enduring foothold to the federation of nomadic tribes. This decision was the first step in the construction of an Emiral State and the transformation of a reform movement into a polity. That same year, Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar appointed Yūsuf b. Tashfīn as his lieutenant while he returned to the South to confirm his power in the Sahara. This episode is more important than it seems. Here, two very different models of political and social organizations are competing. The first is the nomadic model of the tribes in which the power moves with the *shaykh*, the second the static model of the emirate whose institutions (offices, chancellery, palace guard, clientele) constitute the heart of power by ensuring the permanence of the prince’s sovereignty in his absence and establishing a fallback position for him.⁷ Indeed, Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar left Marrakech after having established it as the capital. However, his departure also occurred before he had established any institutions. It was his lieutenant, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn, who ultimately established a number of the institutions that were initiated by his master and cousin. These included administrative offices; taxes, including a specific tax on Jews within the territories, and which respected the limits of Koranic taxation on Muslims; a princely court; diplomacy; the dispatching of ambassadors across al-Andalus; and a royal guard composed of black slaves and Christian mercenaries whom he outfitted with horses.⁸ In doing so, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn founded the administrative, fiscal, political, and military structures that allowed him to wield authority using a post-tribal model and the clientelism of his supporters. Based on these realizations and the established land base, in 465/1073 he was able to carefully depose his cousin and marry his wife, Zaynab bt. al-Nafzāwiyya, thus becoming the undisputed ruler and true founder of the Almoravid emirate.

The base of the Almoravid power, as with the Fatimids and the Abbasids before them, was two-pronged: an *imām*, a “religious” authority, who interpreted texts and traditions, and a political leader who was in charge of military choices and the politics on his behalf.⁹ The

6. On the origin of the name Marrakech, see M. Ghouirgate, *L’ordre almohade (1120-1269). Une nouvelle lecture anthropologique* (Toulouse, 2014), 88-102.

7. After the victory of Zallāqa, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn returned to Maghrib and to Marrakech because his heir, Sīr, had died. The continuity of dynastic power was threatened, and the physical presence of the sovereign was required for the reassertion of his authority. Al-Andalus was for the Berber dynasties one of the territories where the legitimacy was reinforced, particularly via the *jihād*, but it was in the Maghreb where the power was imposed.

8. Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān*, t. 4, ed. I. ʿAbbās, 23: “Once his power was strengthened, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn procured some black slaves for himself. He sent people to al-Andalus to find white slaves (*aʿāj*) for him, purchased with his own money. There were two hundred and forty of them and there were two thousand black slaves, he outfitted them with horses and made it his personal guard (*ḥasham*). His veil expanded (*fa-ghaluḥa ḥijābuhu*) and his power was consolidated (*wa ʿazuma mulkuhu*).”

9. In the middle of the third/eighth century, Muslim, head of the armies of Khurasān, a heavily militarised border province of the Umayyad Arab Empire and a region where many Arab rebels had been exiled, raised supporters against the Umayyad dynasty, considered as unfaithful. He undertook his revolt in the name of the prophet’s family, from which the community’s legitimate *imām* was to be recruited. This *imām*, well inspired,

prominence enjoyed by the charismatic *imām* allowed the political leader to make decisions that, without a spiritual and religious endorsement, might have shocked tribal traditions. If the supra-tribal movement was launched thanks to the personality of a preacher-reformer,¹⁰ then it was his death that allowed for the emergence of a political sovereignty and the establishment of a dynastic power. Tribal solidarities did eventually reappear, but the *dawla*, the “wheel” of power, was sufficiently rooted and would persevere without many risks to the ancient power structures. Indeed, prominent tribal members preferred this new system and took advantage of the benefits it provided rather than questioning it and risking the loss of everything.

Some sources claim that Yaḥyā b. ‘Umar (d. 488/1095) was the first to adopt the title of “Emir of the Muslims,” which did not previously exist within the Islamic political tradition.¹¹ However, even if that is the case, it was not until Yūsuf b. Tashfin sought out and received the recognition and official investiture from the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad that this title gained any sort of legitimacy.¹² An army of the faithful, guided spiritually by a reformer, was transformed into an army of compromise, where the solidarities, internal rivalries, and divergent interests were arbitrated by the sovereign. Yūsuf b. Tashfin was thus able to maintain his power through his ability to satisfy the appetites of some without arousing the jealousy and opposition of others.

The Provincial Organization of the Almoravid Emirate

The organization of provincial power in the Almoravid period satisfies this requirement to a certain extent. It favored the members of the movement’s founding tribes through a device based on the *niyāba*, the delegation of power.¹³ The governor was the *nā’ib*, that

was to restore the divine order. At the end of the victorious revolt that led to the fall of the Umayyads (132/750), it was among the descendants of ‘Abbās, the prophet’s uncle, that the new *imām* emerged and seized power. Shortly after his proclamation as Caliph, al-Saffāḥ (r. 132/750-136/754), executed Muslim, whose charisma and authority threatened his power. The Fatimid revolution followed much the same pattern. At the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, a Fatimid propagandist-missionary (*dā’ī*), Abū ‘Abd Allāh, raised the Berber tribe of the Kutāma in Ifriqiya and overthrew the Aghlabid dynasty that ruled the region on behalf of the Abbasids of Baghdad. He preached and led his military and political struggle in the name of a descendant of the prophet of Islam. There again, the accession to power of a new *imām*, al-Mahdī (r. 296/909-322/934), resulted in the execution of the military leader.

10. The use of the standards (*rāyāt*) and the organization by the Emir of the orders of battle were also a way to impose a supra-tribal authority, without knowing if the sovereign truly combined the troops from different tribes, or if he only imposed a unified command on them, which is most likely (see Ghouirgate, *L’ordre almohade*, 62-66).

11. Translation of al-Qādī Iyād in Ch. 26 of J. F. P. Hopkins and N. Levtzion, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 102.

12. É. Lévi-Provençal, “Le titre souverain des Almoravides et sa légitimation par le califat ‘abbāsīde,” *Arabica* 2 (1955): 265-288; M. J. Viguera Molins, “Las cartas de al-Gazālī y al-Ṭurṭuṣī al soberano almorávide Yūsuf b. Tashfin,” *Al-Andalus* 42 (1977): 340-74; V. Lagardère. “Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabī, grand cadī de Séville,” *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 40 (1985): 91-102, especially 96-97.

13. On the issue of the delegation of power, a useful parallel can be found in M. Cook, “Muhammad’s Deputies in Medina,” *Al-‘Usūr al-Wuṣṭā* 23 (2015): 1-67.

is to say the “substitute,” of the prince, and thus had all his prerogatives. Several letters, which were representative of the Almoravid approach to the responsibilities of provincial governors, were written after Ibn Tashfīn’s ascent to power in 537/1143:

It is our substitute (*nāʿib*), for your leadership, for the conduct of your affairs, and for the government of the young and old among you; no one has the authority to these things [except for] him, [...] and we appoint the governor for all of you [...]; and everything that he will do, it is us who does it through him, and what he will say to this affect, it is as if we were saying it [...]; with our tongue, he speaks [...] so listen to him, obey him, and do not defy him.¹⁴

Almoravid governors are thus characterised, both in fact and in law, by a fair amount of independence. Control over the governors by the prince of the Almoravids, however, remained very strong, since he was the one who was responsible for their appointment or dismissal.¹⁵ In fact, the independence of the governors was closely supervised. Any political, military, or fiscal failure in the provinces was blamed on the provincial governor. For example, as he was the one who organised the military expeditions of legal war (*jihād*) against the Christians each year, any failure on this front inevitably led to his dismissal by the prince. Mehdi Ghouirgate points out how, in this regard, command of the armies was the chief source of the tribe’s authority.¹⁶ This was preserved in the Almoravid era, as control of the armies was delegated to the provincial governors for the practice of razzias. This is especially true of Tāshfīn b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn who, as governor of Cordoba and Granada, carried out *jihād* against the Christian principalities of the North. It was also the Almoravid governor who controlled the coinage. Contrary to what the numismatists often argue concerning the privatization of governmental functions that affected Latin societies, the proliferation of coinage mints did not imply a weak central government in the Almoravid emirate. In fact, changes in the various mints (mentions of the crown prince, changing the name of the designate heir, etc) were implemented in all the mints of the emirate within a year. The number of mints—since all seats of government had one—does not reveal a weakness in the central government as it did in contemporary Latin Christendom, but instead highlights a decentralised mode of territorial management.

Mehdi Ghouirgate, in *L’ordre almohade*, identifies a link between Almoravid use of the veil (*lithām*) and the delegation of power. By visually differentiating the ruling elites from the rest of society, the veils of the Almoravids created an association between all who wore the veil and the exercise of power. Anyone who wore the veil became an indistinct

14. They were written by Abū Bakr Ibn al-Qasira on behalf of ʿAlī b. Yūsuf from his camp in the outskirts of Cordoba: *wa huwa al-nāʿib ʿannā fī tadbīrikum wa iqāmat umūrikum wa siyāsāt ṣaghīrikum aw kabīrikum laysa li-aḥad maʿahu fī dhalika yad [...] wa ḥakamnāhu fī jamīʿikum [...] wa mā faʿala min dhalika kulluhu fa-naḥnu faʿalnāh wa mā qāla fīhi fa-kaannā naḥnu qulnāhu [...] bi-lisāninā yatakallam [...] fa smaʿū wa ḥiʿū wa lā taḥālafūhu* (M. A. Makkī, “Wathāʿiq taʾrīkhiyya jadīda ʿan ʿaṣr al-Murabiṭīn,” *Revista Del Instituto de Estudios Islámicos de Madrid* 7–8 (1960 1959): 109–98, letters n° 5, 6 and 7: 174–177).

15. The average length of a governor’s term was two and a half years, which reveals the full control over government careers by the sovereign.

16. Ghouirgate, *L’ordre almohade*, 177–178.

representative of the Emir.¹⁷ The “ethnic” dimension in the historiography on the wearing of the *lithām* in al-Andalus is well known. The Andalusis would have been boldly opposed to the Berber domination of the Almoravids, who would have been considered crude louts, barely out of the desert. But the distinctions between the Almoravids and non-Almoravids in Ibn ‘Abdūn’s manual of *ḥisba*, written at the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century by an Andalusī scholar, were influenced by the communal nature of the laws, the protection of the privileges of officers, social distinctions, and the positioning of scholars against violence in the city, rather than by an opposition of an ethnic nature or a manifestation of a kind of Andalusī nationalism.¹⁸ Ibn ‘Abdūn’s main concern does not seem to be the superiority of the Andalusis. Instead, his focus is on the respect garnered by elite social standing and legitimate political authority, whether foreign or local. Additionally, this manual contains the opposition of a lawyer to factors that might lead to disorder, in particular individuals carrying weapons within the community. If the ruling class had the sole right to wear the veil as a sign of distinction and respect, it was certainly not permissible for a simple man-at-arms to also wear one. As a sign of respect that was meant for an Almoravid officer, the *lithām* was usurped from the nobility when it was worn by people considered undeserving of it. It was against this usurpation that Ibn ‘Abdūn rebelled, not in the name of a kind of Andalusī pre-nationalism against a Berber domination.

The last feature of this period of Almoravid domination that this paper will examine is, on the one hand, the relationship of the sovereigns with the ‘*ulamā*’ and the Maliki school of law and, on the other hand, the relationship between the central power and the provincial legal-judiciary elites. In al-Andalus the political disintegration of the fifth/eleventh century made room for the emergence of local elites in the different Taifa courts. In the fifth/eleventh century it was the “secular” elites, the *kuttāb*, who emerged. Bruna Soravia characterised the most famous representatives of this elite element as king-makers.¹⁹ However, in the middle of the sixth/twelfth century, in the midst of the Almoravid crisis, it was the “religious” elites who seized power, as they had in Seville or Granada. This was only possible because their power had been asserted under the reign of the Almoravids. At first the Almoravid rulers attempted to force Maghribis into positions of responsibility in the cities of al-Andalus, but then they had to compromise with the great local families.²⁰ Thus, in 490/1097, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Samajūn, who belonged to a family that was close to the Emir and had been earlier appointed *qāḍī* of Algeciras, was appointed *qāḍī*

17. Ghouirgate, *L’ordre almohade*, 63.

18. E.g.: Ibn ‘Abdūn advised that four of the ten auxiliaries (‘*awn*-s) of the *qāḍī* of Seville ought to be black Berbers in cases concerning the Almoravids (Article 99). Ibn ‘Abdūn thus reserved the use of the veil (*lithām*) to Ṣanḥāja, Lamtūna, and Lamṭa and prohibited it to the mercenaries and the militias of black Berbers, because the veil should be a distinctive sign of the Almoravids “who must be regarded with honor and respect and who should receive aid and assistance” (Article 56).

19. B. Soravia, “Entre bureaucratie et littérature: la *kitāba* et les *kuttāb* dans l’administration de l’Espagne umayyade,” *Al-Masāq* 7 (1994): 165–200.

20. For a complete study of the appointments of judges in the Almoravid period, see R. El Hour, *La administración judicial almorávide en al-Andalus: élites, negociaciones y enfrentamientos* (Helsinki, 2006).

of Granada by Yūsuf b. Tashfīn himself.²¹ However, the tensions with the population and with the *fuqahā*²² from Granada provoked the dismissal of the judge.²² Twenty years later, another North African Berber, Khallūf b. Khalaf Allāh, was appointed *qāḍī*, though the post was quickly reclaimed by a major local lineage. Also in Valencia it seems that there was an attempt to impose a Maghribi *qāḍī* and *khaṭīb* by the Almoravid *qā'id* al-Mazdalī.²³ All of these attempts ultimately failed and the Almoravids were forced to come to terms with the local Andalusī elites who continued to exercise the office of the judicature and to control its access throughout this period, to the point that they were able to claim power during the crisis of Almoravid power in the middle of the sixth/twelfth century.

Negotiation with the Andalusī religious elites and, to a lesser extent, Maghribis, became all the more necessary as the Almoravids had chosen a path of legalism and respect of the Maliki school. The two pillars on which Yūsuf b. Tashfīn built his emirate were thus the two legal requirements of direct concern to the people of al-Andalus: respect for a tax regime that was framed and limited by the sacred texts, and military unity to confront the Christian kingdoms on the Peninsula. Military defeats²⁴ and the proliferation of non-Koranic taxes eventually undermined the legitimacy of the Almoravid sovereigns in al-Andalus, who were at the same time weakened by the Almohad rebellion.

Almohad Achievements and Continuities

The differences between the bases of power in the successive eras of the Almoravids and Almohads are fairly clear. The former claimed an authority over the Maghrib and al-Andalus that was derived from the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad and they also relied on the *‘ulamā*²⁵ to legitimate their authority. The latter, however, claimed the universal direction of the *umma*, refusing any instance of legitimization other than the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart and his “orthodox successors” (*al-khulafā’ al-rāshidūn*). Even with these differences, it is possible to reconstruct an overview of the relationships between the Almohads and the memory and heritage of their Almoravid predecessors.

Initially, from the preaching of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart (c. 513/1120-525/1130) until the conquest of Marrakech (541/1147), the opposition was total and the discourse

21. M. Lucini, “Los Banū Samayūn: una familia de cadíes,” *Estudios Onomásticos Biográficos de Al-Andalus* 5 (1992): 171-98, esp. 186.

22. F. Rodríguez Mediano, “Instituciones judiciales: cadíes y otras magistraturas,” in *El retroceso territorial de Al-Andalus: Almorávides y Almohades, siglos XI al XIII*, ed. M. J. Viguera Molíns, Historia de España, 8/2 (Madrid, 1997), 171-186, esp. 175-177.

23. P. Guichard, *Les musulmans de Valence et la Reconquête (XI^e-XIII^e siècles)* (Damas [Paris], 1990), t. 1, 81.

24. The military defeats culminated with the disaster of “Cullera” or “Alcala” near Alcira on the left bank of the Júcar in *Rajab* 523/June 1129. It was because of this defeat that Abū Marwān Ibn Abī al-Khisāl reportedly wrote a letter insulting the Almoravids: “Sons of vile mothers, you flee like wild asses... The time has come when we will give you a heavy punishment, in which no veil will hide your face, and we will chase you in your Sahara and we will wash al-Andalus from your filth” (cited in P. Guichard, *Musulmans de Valence*, t. 1, 91-92). Episode evoked by al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-mu’jib fī talkhīṣ akhbār al-Maghrib*, ed. R. P. A. Dozy (Amsterdam, 1968), 127-128, ed. Khalīl ‘Umrān al-Manṣūr (Beyrouth, 2005), 125, Spanish translation A. Huici Miranda, *Lo Admirable en el Resumen de las noticias del Magrib* (Tetuan, 1955), 134.

polemical: the Almoravids were accused of supporting an anthropomorphist interpretation of the Book (*tajsīm*) and betraying the text of Revelation. In this way the Almohad movement was constructed in opposition to the power of the reigning dynasty. Their ideology and militant organization was thus turned towards the fight against the Saharan enemy of the plains. There only exists later testimony that reconstructs this period in the hagiographic model of the prophetic *sīra* and messianic or Mahdist movements. Further, these movements themselves had likely tapped into an Islamic, or perhaps pre-Islamic, tradition. This first phase of the development of the Almohad ideology, compared with the Almoravids, can be linked to the story that describes the meeting between the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart and Yūsuf b. Tashfīn in the Great mosque in Marrakech:

Once in Marrakech, the *imām* went to the *maṣjid Sawma‘at al-ṭūb* (“the oratory of the clay minaret”). We remained there until Friday. Then he went to the congregational mosque of Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn. He found the latter sitting on the mantel of Ibn Tīzamt. The viziers were standing near him. They said to the *imām*:

—“Welcome the Emir by his title of Caliph.”

—“Where is the Emir? I only see veiled (*munaqqabāt*) courtesans (*jawārī*).”

At these words, ‘Alī b. Yūsuf took off the veil that covered his face and said to his followers: “He’s right!”

When he saw the Emir’s face uncovered, the Infallible said:

—“The Caliphate belongs to God and not to you, O ‘Alī b. Yūsuf!” And he continued: “Arise from this denatured [thing] (*qum ‘an hadhihi al-mughayyarati*), and if you want to be an *imām* of justice, do not sit yourself on this denatured carpet (*hadhihi al-ghifārati al-mughayyarati*)!”

The Emir pulled it out from under him and gave it back to the one to whom it belonged and said to the Mahdī:

—“What has denatured it? (*mā taghayyarahā*).”

—“It was woven with rot (*li-annahā tu‘qad bi-al-najāsa*),” he answered.²⁵

The story, constructed as a dialogue between the Mahdī and the Emir, highlights the pre-science of Ibn Tūmart.²⁶ His knowledge of hidden things allowed him to immediately distinguish the pure from the impure. However, paradoxically, he was not able to distinguish the Emir from the other veiled persons who accompanied him. This

25. Interview reported in Ibn Simāk (attributed to), *Al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Būbāyah (Beyrouth, 2010), 167, and especially by Abū Bakr b. ‘Alī al-Ṣanhājī al-Baydhaq, *Kitāb akhbār al-Mahdī Ibn Tūmart wa ibtidā’ dawlati al-Muwaḥḥidīn*, ed. É. Lévi-Provençal (Paris, 1928), 67-68, french transl. É. Lévi-Provençal, *Documents inédits d’histoire almohade. Fragments manuscrits du ‘legajo’ 1919 du fonds arabe de l’Escorial, publiés et traduits avec une introduction et des notes par É. Lévi-Provençal*. (Paris, 1928), 108-109, cited by Ghouirgate, *L’ordre almohade*, 52-53.

26. Ibn Tūmart is characterized by his knowledge of things and beings. In the account of his meeting with ‘Abd al-Mu’min, he knows who is ‘Abd al-Mu’min, before him and better than him. He knows both his obscure past and his illustrious future. For accounts of the meeting in al-Baydhaq see *Documents inédits*, 85 and following, and al-Marrākushī, *Mu‘jib*, text 129-130, transl. 156-157.

difference—the perception of the impurity of the carpet vs. the non-recognition of the figure of the Emir—creates two figures of authority. The first figure is inspired; he sees the religious things and is distinct from the rest of the mortals because of his own qualities. The other figure, dressed as a woman, confuses the genres, ignores the impure nature of the objects he touches, and does not stand out from the ordinary because of either his charisma or his extraordinary knowledge. In both cases it is the fabric that creates the connection between the two orifices: the pure one for speech and the impure one for excrement. M. Ghourigate highlights how the Almoravids considered it obscene to show their mouths. This story utilizes this taboo to better discredit these figures: how would it be possible for the Almoravids to govern with accuracy and justice if they could not distinguish the pure from the impure, the men from the women, or, indeed, one part of their anatomy from another? Furthermore, the Almoravid Emir is presented as an usurper who, by agreeing to unveil and leave the “denatured carpet,” is implicitly recognised to be completely disqualified from using the title of *khalīfat Allāh*, “God’s Caliph,” that was reserved for Ibn Tūmart and his successor ‘Abd al-Mu’min.

This mention of the term *khalīfat Allāh* in association with the Almoravids is not an isolated incident. It can also be found in Ibn ‘Idārī’s *Bayān*, a “dis-Almohadised” Merinid chronicle (Émile Fricaut’s neologism), concerning the invention of the title of the “prince of Muslims” by Yūsuf b. Tashfīn:

That year, the *shaykh*-s of the tribes gathered around prince Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. Tashfīn and said to him:

—“You are God’s Caliph in Maghrib (*anta khalīfat Allāhi fī al-Maghrib*) and you have the right to call yourself not ‘commander’ (*amīr*) but rather ‘commander of the believers’ (*amīr al-mu’minīn*).” He replied to them:

—“God forbid that I claim this title, for it is that borne by the Caliphs, and I serve the Abbasid Caliph (*wa anā rājilu al-khalīfati al-‘abbasī*), charged with spreading his call in the West (*wā al-qā’imu bi-da‘watihi fī bilādi al-Gharb*).”

—“You need a title that distinguishes you.”

—“So it will be ‘Commander of the Muslims’ (*amīr al-muslimīn*).”

It is said that it is he who chose this title for himself and that he ordered the secretaries of the chancellery to write letters with this title, in his name or in addressing him.²⁷

In both of these cases, it is the prince’s entourage that assigns the title to the Almoravid sovereign, possibly along with that of “commander of the believers.” That these two chronicles—one Almohad, intended for an Eastern population, and the other post-Almohad—mention the presentation of the title of “God’s Caliph” to the Almoravid Emir, shows that the fifth/eleventh century Almoravid political construction was important enough that its founder could claim the Caliphate at least as much as his Umayyad and Fatimid predecessors.

27. Ibn ‘Idhārī, *Bayān*, t. 4, 27.

A new era began after the conquest of Marrakech in 541/1147. The last Almoravid sovereign was executed, the principal city of the central Maghrib joined the Almohad movement, and the capital of the emirate fell. However, after al-Māssi's revolt in 542/1148, all the provinces (except Marrakech and Fez) required that the Almohads change from their original militant organization into a territorial administration, and appeal to the skilled ancient elites, whose support was essential in ensuring control over a territory where they still retained some power: the central Maghrib and al-Andalus. 'Abd al-Mu'min, the first Almohad Caliph, attempted to use the Almoravid heritage. Judges, administrators, possibly the tribes, and even the great dignitaries who had served the fallen dynasty were integrated into the Almohad imperial administration. That is the case, for example, of the *kātib* Ibn 'Aṭīyya who became, as Vizier for a time, the closest advisor and favorite of 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 524/1130-558/1163).²⁸ Similarly, Yintān b. 'Umar, who led the Almoravid troops during the first victorious battle against Ibn Tūmart, became Vizier. He was supposedly spared for having defended Ibn Tūmart during his interview with 'Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn. His subsequent appointment to the post of Vizier demonstrated the confidence he had inspired in the Almohad sovereign, despite his former responsibilities in the heart of the Almoravid regime. Generally, the families of the secretaries seem to have retained their power despite the change in dynasty. Abū al-Ḥakam 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Lakhmī al-Murkhī was the secretary for 'Abd al-Mu'min, following his father, who held the same position under 'Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn. Similarly, when 'Abd al-Mu'min decided to restore Cordoba as the capital of al-Andalus, he entrusted this task to a former Almoravid dignitary, Barrāz b. Muḥammad al-Massūfī.²⁹ Many other examples of the continuity of careers between the two dynasties can be seen in the Chancellery, in the legal-judicial field (with the Banū Rushd), and even in the control of the armies (e.g. the Banū Maymūn, the Almoravid admirals of the fleet). The Almohad sovereign also exploited certain episodes from Almoravid history for their political and religious value; for example, 'Abd al-Mu'min asked Ibn 'Aṭīyya to bring forward those who participated in the battle of Uclés, an Almoravid victory, where the heir-apparent of Castile-León died, in 501/1108. 'Abd Allāh b. Zaydūn and 'Umar b. Tūrizgīn *min ash-yākh al-Lamtūna* were thus invited to participate with the *shaykh*-s of the *jund* at the High Council (*al-majlis al-'ālī*), where, after having testified, they were rewarded with 500 dinars each, while the Almohad *shaykh*-s in attendance received 100.³⁰

Until the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, the Banū Ghāniya resistance, descendants of the Almoravid sovereign who were sheltered in the Balearic Islands, put the integration of the ancient Almoravid elites at risk. Ibn 'Aṭīyya and his brother were ultimately executed as the result of a plot carried out by some Almohads who were jealous

28. Ibn 'Aṭīyya was married to Yūsuf b. Tashfīn's grand-daughter and his brother-in-law was Ibn al-Ṣaḥrāwiyya, a notorious, fierce and stubborn Almoravid rebel who repented and was forgiven by the Almohads in 550/1155.

29. Ibn Ṣāhib al-Ṣalā, *Al-Mann bi-al-imāma*, ed. 'Abd al-Hādī Tāzī (Beyrouth, 1987), 138-139.

30. Ibn al-Qattān, *Nazm al-jumān*, ed. M. 'A. Makkī (Beyrouth, 1990), 177-178. There is a precedent for this, in the story of the battle of Yarmūk by Bal'amī. Khālīd b. al-Walīd made those who participated in the battle of Badr leave from the ranks and demanded that they pray instead of fight (cited in *Les quatre premiers califes, extrait de la Chronique de Tabari (m. 922)*, translated by Hermann Zotenberg, Sindbad, Paris, 1981, pp. 108-110).

of their power. It is not known if their ties to the earlier power was the determining factor in their fate, or, rather, if they were killed because of their acquired power and the danger inherent to being in the proximity of the prince.³¹ After ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s death in 558/1163, the exclusion of the heir, Muḥammad Abū ‘Abd Allāh, can also be attributed to his Almoravid ancestry as his mother came from Sūs. The future Caliph, Abū Ya‘qūb, and his half-brother Abū Ḥafṣ, grandsons from the maternal side of a Maṣmūda judge, were more skilled in dealing with the system of tribal hierarchy that the Almohads were implementing. However, this opposition appears to have been of a political nature as much as an ideological one. This also applies to the elimination of the brothers of the Maḥdī Ibn Tūmart in 552/1157-1158. As the main body of Almohad ideology formed gradually, including the apocryphal draft of the writings of the Maḥdī, one might ask whether the Almohad opposition to the Maliki school might not also have been based on a political rationale rather than a dogmatic one, in order to compete with the local elites who, through the patrimonial heritage of judicial offices, formed an “aristocratic judicature” with great financial power in al-Andalus.³²

The portrait painted by al-Marrākushī of the Almoravid sovereign, ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn, in his *Mu‘jib*, reveals that Almohad writers were selective in their appreciation of the Almoravids and that they only paid tribute to certain sovereigns of the Saharan dynasty. As it was intended for an Eastern audience, the characters in this narrative consisted of princes who were famous for their piety. Criticisms are actually reflected in certain explanations or details, and contributed to the value of the path followed by the Almohad Caliphs:

When he succeeded his father, he took the same title of *amīr al-muslimīn* (‘Commander of the Muslims’) and called his companions “Almoravids.” He followed the path taken by his father (‘*alā sunan abīhi*) in choosing the *jihād*; in terrorising the enemy (*ikhāfat al-‘aduww*); and in defending the country (*wa ḥimāyat al-bilād*). He had good behavior and good intentions, a noble soul, he stayed away from injustice (*ba‘d^{an} ‘an al-ẓulm*); he was closer to the hermits (*zuhhād*) and the ascetics (*mutabattilīn*) than the king (*mulūk*) and the dominant ones (*mutaghghalibīn*). Very attached to the people of the Law and Religion, he made no decisions in his kingdom without first consulting the doctors of the Law (*mushāwarat al-fuqahā*). When he appointed a *qāḍī*, he demanded that they appeal to four doctors of the Law, when making any decision.³³

‘Alī’s piety, presented here as a quality, becomes a flaw due to his over-the-top character and the excessive caution that it generated in him. It is in this way that the Almoravids

31. A. K. Bennison, “Tribal Identities and the Formation of the Almohad Elite: The Salutary Tale of Ibn ‘Atiyya,” in M. Meouak (ed.), *Biografías Magrebíes: Identidades y Grupos Religiosos, Sociales y Políticos en el Magreb Medieval*, Estudios Onomásticos Biográficos de Al-Andalus, XVII (CSIC, 2012), 245–71.

32. On this question, see M. Fierro, “The Qāḍī as Ruler,” in *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam: actas del Simposio Internacional (Granada, 15-18 octubre 1991)* (Madrid, 1994), 71–116. The figure of the judge benefitted from his dedication to the *‘ilm* (the monopoly over the transmission of science had a strong power of legitimization), but also from his financial strength. This judge-wealth relationship is a topos in the Arab sources and clearly designates the judicature as a source of political power.

33. al-Marrākushī, *Mu‘jib*, ed. 122, Spanish translation 127.

served as counter-models and shaped, in part, representations of the Almohad power by the court authors.

Conclusion

If the often-rewritten chronicles do not allow us to know whether the idea of the Caliphate was present with the first Almoravids, then the later sources, by the credit they granted to this notion and by certain allusions, reveal that the Caliphate was the target of all important powers in the Maghrib in the fifth/eleventh century. The etymology of the place-name, ‘Marrakech,’ composed from *amūr* and *Yākush* and meaning “The City of God,” reveals the original nature of the political-religious project of the Almoravids: the construction of a city of God on earth. The recognition of the Abbasid authority was therefore a pragmatic and cautious path chosen by the Almoravids. However, it was the political structures that they founded in both the Maghrib and al-Andalus that paved the way for the Almohad emancipation. The conservation of the capital and the semantic revitalization of its name by ‘Abd al-Mu’min ensured that the Almohad mission was a progression from the Almoravid movement. The Almohad authors also presented the accession of the Almoravids in a positive manner. This can be seen in a passage from the *Muʿjib* that equates the assimilation of al-Andalus at the end of the fifth/eleventh century with the *jāhiliyya*, and consequently, in implicit terms, the intervention of Yūsuf b. Tashfīn in the unification of the Arabian Peninsula by Muḥammad:

The situation of the kings of al-Andalus, after the *fitna*, resembled the situation of the kings of the Taʿifas of Persia after the murder of Darius, son of Darius. The situation of al-Andalus was weakening; its borders were troubled; the appetite of its Christian neighbours increased; and they multiplied their interventions. This lasted in this way until God assembled the word, resolved the objections, organized the group, suppressed the dissents, strengthened the religion, elevated the word of Islam, and broke the ambitions of the enemy through the fortunate intervention of the Prince of the Muslims (*amīr al-muslimīn*) and Defender of the religion (*nāṣir al-dīn*), Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf b. Tashfīn al-Lamtūnī—Peace of God in his soul.³⁴

In the system of government that was developed in the fifth/eleventh century, the Almoravids imposed the *faqīh* as a point of legitimization and a source of law. They also delegated a fraction of their power to the provincial governors, as shown through the proclamation and leadership of the *jihād* as well as coin production. The Almohads thus aligned their legitimacy and authority in the person of the *imām*-Caliph, who had a monopoly over all functions, including that of Supreme Judge, general in chief of the army of the faithful, interpreter of the Rule, and as the source of the Law. This resulted in the Almohad Era, from the military perspective, through the disappearance of the summer border raids and by an increasing number of truces. The *jihād* gave rise to the formation of large Caliphal armies led personally by the *imām* (in 547/1153, 556/1161, 567/1172,

34. al-Marrākuṣī, *Muʿjib*, ed. 64, Spanish translation 74.

580/1184, 591/1195, 601/1205, 607/1211, 608/1212) and, from a monetary perspective, through the removal of any reference to the date or the workshop stamped on dinars and dirhams. The provincial Almohad organization was thus the culmination of a process set in place by the Almoravids through the development of nation-state structures with a concentrated and extreme centralization of powers.

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