The Almohads (524–668/1130–1269) and the Ḥafṣids (627–932/1229–1526)

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The Almohad caliphate

The mahdī Ibn Tūmart and the Almohad movement

Ibn Yāsīn, the founder of the Almoravid movement, is depicted as a Mālikī jurist engaged in transforming the Lamtūna Berbers into good Mālikī Muslims, a mission he accomplished by resorting often to physical punishments. His teachings were transmitted for some time, but eventually forgotten. Despite both his relevance and the prominence of the Mālikī school under the Almoravids, Ibn Yāsīn did not come to play a central role either in western Mālikism or in Almoravid political legitimisation.

Ibn Tūmart, the founder of the Almohad movement, also aimed at a moral and religious reform. Accounts of Ibn Tūmart’s life more detailed than those of Ibn Yāsīn, as well as the ‘Book’ (Kitāb) attributed to him, are extant. The Almohad numismatic formula Allāhu rabbūnā wa-Muḥammad rasūlūnā waʾl-mahdī imāmunūnā (God is our Lord, Muḥammad is our Prophet, the mahdī [i.e. Ibn Tūmart] is our imām) bears witness to the central role he was accorded in the new polity. However, our understanding of how and when those accounts of his life were written down is still faulty, apart from the obvious fact that they moulded Ibn Tūmart’s life according to the Prophet’s biography. Much of the portrayal of Ibn Tūmart comes from the ‘Memoirs’ of al-Baydhaq, whose aim is nevertheless chiefly to establish ʿAbd al-Muʾmin’s right to lead the Almohads as caliph.

The picture those accounts convey is as follows. Ibn Tūmart was born in Īgillīz, a village in the Sūs, the great valley which separates the western range of the High Atlas from the Anti-Atlas to the south, and an area where the spread of Mālikism, Muʿtazilism and Shi‘ism is documented. He came from the Harga tribe, Maṣmūda Berbers, although he was properly a member of the Prophet’s family. He travelled to al-Andalus around the year 500/1106f. and then to the East to pursue his education. In Baghdad, he met al-Ghazālī...
The Almohads and the Ḥafṣids

d. 505/1111), the great religious reformer, who prophesied that Ibn Tūmart would put an end to the Almoravid dynasty, responsible for the burning of al-Ghazālī’s work Iḥyā’ ʿulūm al-dīn (The revival of the religious sciences) under the pressure of the conservative and fanatic Mālikīs. After a stay in Fāṭimid Alexandria where Ibn Tūmart practised ‘commanding good and forbidding evil’, he started his return to the Maghrib by sea. He disembarked in Tripoli and after stopping at al-Mahdiyya, Monastir, Tunis and Constantine, he arrived in Bougie in 511/1119. Everywhere he went he preached against deviations from proper Islamic norms and customs, censoring the consumption of wine and the use of musical instruments. In Mallāla, near Bougie, Ibn Tūmart met ‘Abd al-Mu’mīn, a Zanātā Berber from the area of Tlemcen, whose intention was to travel to the East to study. This meeting had been foretold in advance by Ibn Tūmart, who made his new pupil realise that the science he was expecting to acquire in the East was there in the Maghrib itself and secretly informed him of his great destiny. From Mallāla, Ibn Tūmart and the small group of his close followers travelled to Marrakesh, stopping at different places such as Tlemcen, Fez, Meknes and Salé. In the Almoravid capital, he censored the use of veils by males and the fact that women did not cover themselves. His debates with the local scholars provoked the āmīr to expel him from the town. After a stay in Aghmat, Ibn Tūmart moved to the Atlas, where local leaders – such as Abū Ḥaṣṣ ʿUmar Īntī (Hintātī), from whom the Ḥafṣid dynasty descended – became his followers. Ibn Tūmart eventually settled in his native town in the Sūs, and there he was acknowledged as the Mahdī, i.e. ‘the rightly guided one’ expected to appear in the Maghrib in the sixth/twelfth century, the one responsible for the suppression of error and the maintenance of truth whose orders had to be obeyed because they coincided with God’s will and order, and the one who would fill the earth with justice. The Almoravids had to be fought because of their departure from truth, clearly manifested in their anthropomorphic beliefs (tashbīḥ). As they were in fact unbelievers, jihad could be waged against them as against Jews and Christians. For nine years from his proclamation as Mahdī in 515/1121 until his death in 524/1130, Ibn Tūmart fought the Almoravids and those tribes such as the Haskūra who refused to acknowledge his leadership. In 518/1124, he and his followers moved to a settlement in the Great Atlas – Tinmal – that was to become the ‘Medina’ of the movement. The original population was massacred and only loyal Almohads were allowed to live there. Ibn Tūmart consolidated his hold over the mountains to the south and west of Marrakesh. Having realised that Tinmal was an impregnable site and having to deal also with the Christian advance in al-Andalus, the Almoravids
concentrated on building a belt of fortresses to stop the Almohads descending into the plains of Marrakesh.

One of Ibn Tûmart’s first followers, al-Bashîr al-Wanshariṣî, had the power to predict the future and also to distinguish between sincere believers and hypocrites, which he did during the great ‘purge’ (tamyîz) of the Almohad tribes, a bloodletting much criticised by Ibn Taymiyya. Shortly after, in 524/1130, an attack against Marrakesh was organised, but the Almohads were defeated in the battle of al-Buḥayra. Al-Bashîr mysteriously disappeared and Abû Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Êntî was seriously injured. Seventeen years of continuous fighting passed before the Almohads attacked Marrakesh again, and this only after having conquered the north of Morocco and part of Algeria. Three months after the Buḥayra defeat, Ibn Tûmart died, but his death was hidden for some three years. Tinmal, as well as Īgiliz, became places of pilgrimage, and the Almohad caliphs – who were buried at Tinmal, near Ibn Tûmart’s grave – often visited them.

Ibn Tûmart’s movement can only be understood within its Berber context, in which a charismatic figure with a religious message provided the ‘glue’ by which tribes were united in a common enterprise leading to state formation. The use of the Berber language is well documented, although it was precisely during the Almohad period that the Arabisation of the Maghrib was made possible thanks to the incorporation of Arab tribes (the Banū Ḥilâl and Banū Sulaym) into the army and their eventual settlement in certain areas of the Maghrib. Accounts of Berber merits and genealogies such as the Mafâkhîr al-barbar were recorded, although Ibn Tûmart was presented as a member of the Prophet’s family and ‘Abd al-Mu’min eventually adopted an Arab (Qaysî) genealogy. The original Almohad organisation was a combination of a religio-political hierarchy with Berber tribal structures. Together with the close circle of the Mahdî’s relatives and ‘servants’ (ahl al-dâr), the Council of Ten (al-jama’a) consisted of Ibn Tûmart’s first followers, such as al-Bashîr, Abû Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Êntî and ‘Abd al-Mu’min. The shaykhs of the tribes incorporated into the movement (Harga, Hintâta, Gadmîwa and Ganfîsa) constituted the Council of Fifty. As the latter most probably included the Ten, what we have here is the Berber institution of the Ait al-‘Arba’in. The tribe to which Ibn Tûmart belonged, the Mas’mûda, had a long record of producing prophet-like leaders during the process of acculturation to Islam. The Barghawâta branch, settled along the Atlantic coast, had their prophet Sâlih and a Berber ‘Qur’ān’. They managed to establish a polity of their own lasting from the second/eighth century until the Almoravids. The Ghumâra branch in the north responded in 315/927 to the prophet Ḥâmîm and his own Berber ‘Qur’ān’. In Ibn Tûmart’s case, Islamic acculturation had reached a point that did not
allow for the appearance of a new Berber ‘Qur’ān’, only for a Kitāb that contained legal discussions integrated into Islamic normativity.

Ibn Tūmart’s Kitāb, also known by the title of its opening words A’azz ma yuṭlāb (‘The most precious one can ask for’, i.e., ‘ilm or religious knowledge), is a composite book including different tracts collected after Ibn Tūmart’s death, to which a book on jihad was added by the second Almohad caliph. Although much work is still to be done to study its sources and redaction, the Kitāb – if it is the work of Ibn Tūmart – situates him within the circles of contemporary legal scholars who, like al-Ghazālī, were interested in legal methodology (uṣūl) and aimed at a religious renewal, although Ibn Tūmart seems to have developed a specially radical doctrine that seriously challenged prevailing understandings of Islamic religious law.11

Much has been written about Ibn Tūmart’s links with al-Ghazālī. While the idea of an encounter between the two is to be discarded, the use of al-Ghazālī’s figure and doctrine was then a powerful legitimising tool. Al-Ghazālī had undertaken an ambitious project of religious and political reform. Two aspects are of relevance here. First, al-Ghazālī had written extensively against the Bāṭiniyya (those who believed in an esoteric truth) at a time when the Fāṭimid caliphate was progressively losing political and religious power, but more radical Ismā’īlī groups, such as the Nizāris, still insisted verbally – and often with the sword – that following their impeccable imām provided religious certainty in this life and salvation in the next. Although al-Ghazālī opposed such doctrine, in some of his works he himself asserted that after the Prophet’s death the Muslim community was still in need of divine inspiration, to be found among God’s friends (awliyā’ Allāh), not necessarily to be identified with the Sufis. The role of the friend of God (walī Allāh) thus came close to that of the Ismā’īlī imām (al-Ghazālī’s Andalusi pupil Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī said that his teacher had digested so much of the thought of the philosophers and of the Bāṭiniyya that he could not extricate himself from it). Secondly, al-Ghazālī directed a severe criticism against those jurists who limited themselves to the letter of the law without paying attention to its principles and inner meaning. This criticism of traditional religious scholars paralleled the search for alternative authority figures, such as the ‘friend of God’ (walī Allāh), be it a Sufi or a mahdī.12 While it is difficult to imagine how Ibn Tūmart could have attracted his Berber followers with the dry discussion of fine points of legal methodology contained in his Kitāb, his proclamation as mahdī greatly contributed to his success. As such, he was in possession of the Truth (he was ‘the well-known rightly guided one and the impeccable imam’, al-mahdī al-ma’lūm al-imām al-maṣūm), and believers in his message had only to follow...
his teachings to achieve salvation. The Truth consisted in the strict mono-
theistic belief (tawḥīd) – linked by some sources either to Muʿtazalism or
Ashʿarism – that gave its name to the movement (al-muwahhidūn, i.e. the
believers in One God) and that implicitly charged its opponents with anthro-
pomorphism, an accusation that was also made explicitly. True belief was
acquired by learning Ibn Tūmart’s creed (ʿaqīda), of which different versions
circulated.  
Simpler versions of such a creed (the murshidas) were directed to
the common folk, reflecting the concern of the age to ensure that they could
not be charged with infidelity because of their ignorance (takfir al-ʿawāmm).
The obligatory character of learning such professions of faith led to their being
taught in both Berber and Arabic, and their wide diffusion explains the fact
that a Latin translation was produced in 1213.

Ibn Tūmart’s doctrine has also been linked to Zāhirism because of its
insistence on a strict adherence to God’s message as preserved in the Qurʾān
and the Prophetic Tradition, and its rejection of both speculative analogy
(qiyās) and imitation of human interpretation of the Law (taqlīd). Zāhirī
trends – in the general meaning of the word, i.e. literalist – are present
especially in the first period, when the Cordoban Zāhirī Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064)
was revered and when the Almohad caliphs favoured the study of both
Qurʾān and ḥadīth (Tradition of the Prophet), promoting the writing of
exegesis and of works in which Prophetic Traditions found in more than
one canonical collection were collected. At the same time, these trends could
also be connected with reformed Mālikism, which is what Almohadism
eventually looked like.  
Even if parallelisms with certain legal and theological
schools can be discerned, Almohad doctrines should be understood as a local
interpretation of the ‘Sunnī revival’ of the times, an interpretation that under-
go underwent changes and reorientations in tune with the political development of the
Almohad caliphate.

‘Abd al-Muʿmin (r. 527–58/1133–63) and the foundation of the
Almohad caliphate

‘Abd al-Muʿmin’s rise to power seems to have started after al-Bashīr’s and the
mahdī’s death.  
Three years later, in 527/1133, he was proclaimed Ibn Tūmart’s
successor, a nomination that did not go uncontested. Ibn Malwiyya, a member
of the Council of Ten, rebelled and was defeated.

‘Abd al-Muʿmin’s political and military skills contributed to the formation
of a powerful army out of the tribes mobilised by Ibn Tūmart’s message, while
the Almoravid amīr ‘Ali ibn Yusuf (r. 500–37/1106–43) increasingly relied on a
Catalan mercenary, Reverter, and his men in the Maghrib. Avoiding open
confrontation, by 535/1140 the Almohads had completely taken over the Sūs. Incursions towards the north had already started in 532/1137, but it was three years later that ‘Abd al-Mu’timin launched a campaign that was to culminate with the conquest of Marrakesh in 541/1147. Keeping to the mountains, the Almohads won over the regions – rich in mines – of Tādlā, Fāzāz and the Jebala, reaching the Mediterranean coast at Bādīs, and then moving towards Oran and Tlemcen. The village near Nedroma where ‘Abd al-Mu’timin was born was conquered and his Kūmya tribe joined the Almohad movement. Other tribes, such as the northern Maṣmūda (Ghumāra) and Ṣanhāja, as well as various Zanāta groups, defected to the Almohads. Divisions within the Almoravid army erupted and the new amīr Tāshfīn (r. 537–9/1143–5), a Lamtūnī who was contested by the Massūfa, was not even able to establish himself in Marrakesh. Reverter’s death in 539/1145 further weakened the Almoravid cause. After defeating the Almoravids in the central Maghrib and conquering Oran and Tlemcen, the Almohads, now feeling strong enough, moved into the plains of western Morocco. Fez was taken after a siege in 540/1146, followed by Meknes and Salé. In March 541/1147, after some resistance, Marrakesh fell. The ensuing massacre was stopped by ‘Abd al-Mu’timin, who only entered the city once the erroneous orientation of its mosques was corrected. Marrakesh became the capital of the Almohads instead of Tinmal. The first Kutubiyya mosque was then built, to be followed a few years after by the second Kutubiyya, with its massive minaret and different orientation, and extensive gardens and basins were also constructed.16

‘Abd al-Mu’timin took the caliphal title after having firmly established his rule in the area. This happened once the rebellion of al-Massī along the Atlantic coast was crushed (542–5/1147–50). Al-Massī from Salé, claimed to be the Mahḍī and was followed by the Gazūla (Jazūla), Ḥāhā, Raghāga, Hazμūra, Haskūra of the plains and other tribal groups. Rebellion erupted also in Sijilmāsa and the Dra‘ valley. During the same period, the Almoravid Ibn al-Ṣahrāwiyya, who had taken refuge in al-Andalus, disembarked in Ceuta, hoping to restore Almoravid fortunes.

Shortly after the capture of Marrakesh, delegations from the independent rulers of al-Andalus (the second Taifas) arrived to pay allegiance. The Almoravid admiral Ibn Maymūn was the first to deliver the Friday sermon in the name of the Almohads in Cadiz in 540/1146, while the first Andalusī ruler to approach ‘Abd al-Mu’tinin was the Sufi Ibn Qasī, who had proclaimed himself imam and by the year 539/1144 was ruling in the Algarve (southern Portugal). Almohad troops crossed the Straits in 541/1147 and took possession of the Algarve and then of Seville. When Ibn Qasī realised that Almohad rule

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was under serious threat because of al-Massāḥ and Ibn al-Ẓahrāwiyya, he and other Andalusi rulers who had joined the Almohad cause defected. ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, using both the original Almohad troops and the Christian soldiers who had served the Almoravids in Marrakesh, defeated al-Massāḥ. Ibn al-Ẓahrāwiyya was also eventually defeated and joined the Almohads. Thus, control over the Maghrib was regained, and soon reinforced by fear. In 544/1149f., a great ‘purge’ (ittirāf) was carried out by the Almohad tribal leaders (the shaykhs), to whom ‘Abd al-Mu‘min had given lists with the names of those who had to be eliminated in the rebel tribes. The ensuing bloodshed ensured that peace was imposed, truth reigned and difference of opinion was suppressed. In al-Andalus, Cordoba was taken.

‘Abd al-Mu‘min then started building – opposite Salé – Ribāṭ al-fath (Rabat). It was also called al-Mahdiyya given its similarity to the Mahdiyya built by the Fāṭimids in Ifrīqiya (Tunisia), a town then in the hands of the Normans of Sicily, who had taken advantage of the upheavals caused by the invasion of nomadic Arab tribes to seize control of the coastal regions. 17 ‘Abd al-Mu‘min concentrated a large army in Rabat-Salé to undertake the conquest of al-Andalus, the rest of central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya.

In 546/1151, the rulers of the western regions of al-Andalus crossed the Straits to pledge obedience to ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, except Ibn Qasī, who having established an alliance with the king of Portugal was killed by some of his followers that same year. Troops under the command of Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Īntī were sent to al-Andalus, while ‘Abd al-Mu‘min led the campaign towards the central Maghrib. Algiers, Bougie, the Qalā of the Banū Ḥammad and Constantine were conquered in 547/1152. The defeat of the Arab tribes at Setif in 548/1153 opened the road to Ifrīqiya. But first ‘Abd al-Mu‘min put an end to internal dissent caused by Ibn Tūmart’s brothers and members of his tribe, the Harga, 18 as well as to the unrest in the Sūs coming from former Almoravid tribes. In 552/1157, the pledge of obedience of the original Almohad tribes was renewed and the caliph paid his traditional visit to Tinmal. In 553/1158, the campaign against Ifrīqiya was finally launched. Tunis was conquered in 554/1159 and in the same year Mahdiyya (in Christian hands since 1148), Sfax and Tripoli were seized from the Normans. The itinerary that Ibn Tūmart is alleged to have followed in his return from the East had now been completed in reverse order by ‘Abd al-Mu‘min. For the first time in the history of North Africa, a single state was created, ruled by Berbers.

As for al-Andalus, Almoravid rule had been seriously weakened as a result of Christian expansion and of the concentration on fighting the Almohads in the Maghrib. Although Tāshfin did react to the Christian threat, after 535/1140

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Andalusīs openly revolted against those foreign Berbers who had failed in delivering the military help that was the rationale for accepting their rule. Santarem and Lisbon were captured in 542/1147 by the king of Portugal, who availed himself of Crusader help. The Ebro valley was completely lost by 543/1148. During this period, central rule collapsed in the rest of al-Andalus. Judges, as representatives of the urban elites, came to power in towns such as Cordoba, Jaén, Malaga, Murcia and Valencia. Local soldiers trained in the frontier areas, such as Sayf al-Dawla Ibn Hūd, also made their bid for power. Ibn Hūd, who established his rule in the Levante, the eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula (Sharq al-Andalus), even adopted the caliphal titles of Commander of the Believers (amīr al-muʾminīn) and al-Mustanṣīr, but was eventually defeated and killed by the Christians in 540/1146. The main opposition the Almohads found in al-Andalus came from Ibn Mardanīs, another ‘man of the sword’ who also took power in the Levante. His territory was separated for a decade from that of the Almohads by the last Almoravids who resisted in Granada, and by the Christians, who with the help of Genoese naval power ruled over Almería from 542/1147 until 552/1157. Ibn Mardanīs came to depend on Castilian military help, an alliance strongly attacked by Almohad propaganda. His father-in-law, Ibn Hamushk, who ruled the fortress of Segura, caused great damage on the Almohad frontier, for example taking Granada for a brief period in 557/1162, but he eventually defected to the Almohads.

By then, the Almohad army had incorporated Arab troops, especially after the Arab tribes were again defeated in al-Qarn near Qayrawān in 556/1161. ‘Abd al-Muʾmin started the transfer of those Arab tribes to the extreme Maghrib as a way both to control them and to increase his own power. The Arabs were mobilised for jihad in the Iberian Peninsula by his successors after his death in 558/1163. ‘Abd al-Muʾmin had spent the previous year preparing an attack by land and sea to put an end both to local rebellions and to the Christian threat in al-Andalus. Great numbers of troops were recruited, many ships built, and large quantities of food and armaments stored. Before starting the campaign, during the winter of 557/1162, ‘Abd al-Muʾmin paid a visit to Ibn Tūmart’s grave in Tinmal, suffering great discomfort because of cold and rain. In February 558/1163, the troops were concentrated in Rabat, but shortly after this ‘Abd al-Muʾmin fell ill and died.

The Muʾminid dynasty till the end of the Almohad caliphate

‘Abd al-Muʾmin’s son Muḥammad, named heir in 549/1154, reigned for a few months, but was soon replaced by his half-brother Yūṣuf. The intervention of
the sayyid (the title given to the Mu‘minid princes) Abū Ḥāfṣ ‘Umar, Yūsuf’s full brother, was decisive. ‘Abd al-Mu‘min was said to have abrogated Muḥammad’s nomination shortly before his death, but this was an attempt to cover up what was in fact a coup within the Mu‘minid family.

The new ruler, Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf (r. 558–80/1163–84), had long experience, having served for seven years as governor in Seville. He could count on the loyalty and capabilities of his equally experienced brother Abū Ḥāfṣ ‘Umar. However, Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf had some trouble in obtaining the recognition of Abū Ḥāfṣ ‘Umar Īntī, the powerful member of the Council of Ten, as well as that of some of his own brothers, the governors of Bougie and Cordoba. This opposition seems to have been the reason for cancelling the great military campaign in al-Andalus organised by ‘Abd al-Mu‘min and for not yet taking the title Commander of the Believers (amīr al-mu‘minīn). Also, Mazīzdaq al-Ghumārī and his son rebelled. They were defeated only after a long campaign in 560–2/1165–6 in the Ghumārā mountains near Ceuta. In 561/1165, Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf sent a letter to the Almohad governors forbidding them to impose any death sentence without his approval, and in 563/1168 he felt strong enough to adopt the title of Commander of the Believers.

By then, he had obtained important successes in al-Andalus. In 560/1165, his half-brother, the governor of Cordoba, recognised his rule, while great damage was inflicted on Ibn Mardanīsh. Defeated near his capital Murcia, Ibn Mardanīsh was also abandoned by Ibn Hamushk in 564/1169. The following year, the planned expedition against Ibn Mardanīsh had to be postponed because the caliph fell ill after plague erupted in Marrakesh. But the sayyid Abū Ḥāfs ‘Umar left for al-Andalus and, with Ibn Hamushk’s help, Lorca, Elche and Baza submitted to the Almohads. The caliph arrived in 567/1171 with an army including Arabs from Ifrīqiya and raids were made in the area of Toledo. After Ibn Mardanīsh’s death in 567/1172, his sons surrendered Murcia and were incorporated into the Almohad hierarchy. They advised the caliph to attack the Castilians in the area of Huete. The Almohads took some fortresses, but failed to conquer Huete. The Castilians from Avila were able shortly after to cross the Guadalquivir, laying waste the area of Ecija and Cordoba in 569/1173.

The king of Portugal was also pursuing an aggressive policy in the River Guadiana region with the help of a frontier man, Giraldo sem Pavor – the ‘Portuguese Cid’ – who managed to occupy the town of Badajoz.21 Conflicts between Portugal, León, Castile and Navarra, as well as within the Castilian nobility, led to an alliance between Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf and Fernando II of León, and in 564/1168 the Leonese reconquered Badajoz and handed it over to the Almohads. Only Evora remained in Portuguese hands. However, the
Almohad hold in the area was tenuous. In 564/1170, a convoy with food and armaments had to be sent from Seville to Badajoz, but was captured by Giraldo. During the campaign of 565/1170, Giraldo could again be stopped thanks to the renewed alliance with the king of León. When the caliph arrived in al-Andalus in 567/1171, another convoy with food and armaments sent to Badajoz this time reached its destination without problems, but while the Almohads were busy with the campaign against Huete, Giraldo took Beja, only to see it abandoned by the king of Portugal after some months. When the Almohads raided the area of Toledo, the Castilian king asked for a truce, which allowed him to fight the king of Navarra. The Portuguese king also asked for a truce in 569/1173, which led Giraldo Sem Pavor to defect to the Almohads, serving them in the Maghrib where he died. Beja was repopulated by the Almohads, but peace did not last for long. The king of León now launched an attack against al-Andalus, while a member of the Castilian nobility, Fernando Rodríguez, defected to the Almohads. Shifting alliances and counter-alliances became a common feature of this period.22

During the almost four years of his stay in al-Andalus, Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf started building the impressive new mosque of Seville.23 He returned to Marrakesh in 571/1176, the year when Abū Ḥṣāfī Ṭūmarta’s companions, died. The Castilians besieged Cuenca and, although the governors of Cordoba and Seville attacked the areas of Toledo and Talavera as a distraction, the town fell after nine months. In 578/1182, Alfonso VIII of Castile camped in front of Cordoba and his raids reached Algeciras near the sea. The Almohads reacted by raiding again the area of Talavera. The king of Portugal, on his part, raided the areas of Beja and Seville in 573/1178, while one of Ibn Mardanīsh’s sons, leading the Almohad navy, attacked Lisbon. Naval encounters between the Almohads and the Portuguese ensued with varied fortunes. In 1183, Castile and León established an alliance to fight the Almohads. The caliph again crossed the Straits, to meet his death while his army was besieging Santarem in 580/1184. Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf had also to pay attention to his eastern North African frontier. In 575–6/1180–1, he led a successful expedition against rebel Gafsa and the defeated Arabs were sent to al-Andalus to wage jihad against the Christians. But some of them remained in the area to join other rebels against the Almohads, such as the Banū Ghāniya, descendants of the Almoravid ruling house.24 Having resisted for some time in Seville and in Granada, keeping their allegiance to the ‘Abbāsids, the Banū Ghāniya managed to rule an Almoravid outpost in the Balearic Islands that lasted until 599/1203. In November 580/1184, ʿAlī ibn Ghāniya (d. 584/1188) sailed to North Africa and occupied Bougie, Algiers and Milyānā.
Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf was succeeded by his son Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb (r. 580–95/1184–99), who later took the title al-Manṣūr. A reformer, he administered justice personally for some time, while prohibiting the use of wine, silk clothes and musical instruments. In Marrakesh, the citadel (qasba) with its mosque, new gardens and a hospital were built.

One of his first concerns was to fight the Banū Ghāniya. Bougie was reconquered and ʿAlī ibn Ghāniya fled towards Ifrīqiya, where he found support among the Arabs. He occupied the oasis of Tawzar and Gafṣa in 582/1186 and joined forces with the governor of Tripoli, Qarāqūsh. This Armenian had entered Ifrīqiya from Ayyūbid Egypt with an army of Turcomans (the ghuzz) in 568/1172. The coalition of Arabs, ghuzz and Almoravids took control of the Djerid. Only Tunis and Mahdiyya remained in Almohad hands. After visiting Tinmal, Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb launched an expedition against Ifrīqiya in 582/1186. An initial defeat of the Almohads at al-ʿUmra was followed by the victory of al-Ḥammar near Qayrawān. Gafṣa surrendered to the Almohads. In 583/1187f., the caliph returned triumphant to Tunis after having pacified the Djerid. But his defeat at al-ʿUmra had led his brother Abū Ḥāfs ʿUmar al-Rashīd, governor of Murcia, to sign an alliance with Alfonso VIII to foster his own cause, while his uncle Abū ʾl-Rābī‘ Sulaymān attempted the same in Tāḍlā. Both were taken prisoner and sent to Salé where they were executed in 584/1188f.

The Portuguese, in the meanwhile, had conquered Silves with the help of Crusaders travelling to Palestine after Saladin’s conquest of Jerusalem in 1187, and Alfonso VIII of Castile had raided the region of Seville. The caliph arrived in al-Andalus in 586/1191 and signed a truce with the king of Castile. While part of his army besieged Silves, he attacked the king of Portugal in the area north of Santarem. Lack of provisions and illness made him return to Seville, where he punished corrupt Almohad officials, administered justice personally and forbade music. In the meantime, ʿAlī al-Jazīrī, a member of the Almohad religious and administrative elites (ṭalaba) established under ʿAbd al-Muʾmin, rebelled in Marrakesh and gained a wide following. Persecuted, he fled to Fez and then to al-Andalus, his native land, where his teachings attracted the populace of the Malaga markets, until he and his followers were executed. Another rebel in the Zab was also defeated when the Arabs abandoned him.

In 586/1190, an ambassador sent by Saladin arrived asking the Almohad caliph to help to halt the Crusaders in the east by sea, but without success. The fleet was needed for the second attempt to reconquer Silves, accomplished in 587/1191. Unrest continued in the area of Ifrīqiya, where Yahyā ibn Ghāniya, the new Almoravid leader, would fight for some fifty years to prevent the
Almohads regaining control of the Djerid. The Almohad caliph could do little against him, as his intervention in al-Andalus was needed given the constant Christian pressure. In June 591/1195, the Almohad army defeated Alfonso VIII at Alarcos, a battle in which the Arabs’ way of fighting (karr wa-farr) and the strength of Almohad archery seem to have been decisive. Several castles were occupied and, in the next two years, raids were carried out in the area. Alfonso VIII did not dare to have another encounter with the Almohads for seventeen years. The king of León Alfonso IX, condemned by the pope for his alliance with the Almohads, travelled to Seville to obtain their help against a Castilian–Aragonese coalition, but to no avail. A period of ten years’ truce followed, during which Alfonso VIII of Castile recovered his strength.

Abū ʿabd Allāh Muhāmmad, who took the title al-Nāṣir (r. 595–610/1199–1213), was named heir by his father al-Manṣūr before the latter’s death in 588/1192. He had to fight in the Sūs the rebellion of Abū Qasaba, who, like al-Jazīrī, was a member of the Almohad ṭalaba and who persuaded himself of being destined to rule; his severed head hung for many years in one of the gates of Marrakesh. Another Almohad rebel was active in Ibrīqiya, where he collided with the Banū Ghāniya. They managed to expand and occupy Tunis and other towns, but at the same time they were cut off from their original power base in the Balearic Islands with the Almohad conquest of Majorca in 599/1202f. In 602–3/1206–7, Mahdiyya, Tunis and Tripolitania were reconquered in an expedition commanded by the caliph.

Al-Nāṣir tried to reduce the power of the Almohad shaykhs and the Muʿminid sayyids, but the ensuing tensions within the ruling elite affected the performance of the Almohad troops, whose payment stopped being regular. In 608/1211, al-Nāṣir led a campaign in al-Andalus. Initial success was followed by defeat in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (al-ʿIqaｂ) in July 609/1212 at the hands of a coalition of the Christian kingdoms which also included Crusader help. The Christians, for all the symbolic value of this victory, could not benefit greatly from it. Pedro II of Aragon and Alfonso VIII of Castile died shortly after and their successors were minors. Only when Fernando III (r. 1217–52) – under whom Castile and León were united – and James I of Aragon (r. 1239–76) reached maturity did Christian advance continue.

Al-Nāṣir died shortly after the battle of al-ʿIqaｂ, to be followed by five caliphs in a short period. Al-Nāṣir’s successor was his minor son Yūṣuf al-Mustansir (r. 610–20/1214–24). In the pledge of obedience to him, the caliph assured the obligation of dismissing the troops after every campaign, of not
appropriating anything of public benefit, of paying salaries on time and of not isolating himself from the Almohads. It is not clear if these restrictions had been spelled out before, or are an indication of the caliph's weakness. Al-Mustansir had in fact little control of the reins of power and never left Marrakesh, except for a visit to Tinmal. Famine was rampant, a Fāṭimid pretender stirred up rebellion among the Ṣanhāja and the countryside was raided by Arabs and Berbers. The Zanāta Banū Marīn reached Fez.²⁷ Yahyā ibn Ghāniya caused unrest in the areas of Tlemcen and Sijilmāsa. In al-Andalus, Alcacer do Sal was conquered by the Portuguese with Crusader help. Al-Mustansir died childless.

The vizier Ibn Jāmi‘ – descendant of one of Ibn Tūmart’s servants (ahl al-dār), an Andalusī with no tribal followers – had ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd al-Mu‘min elected as successor, but his reign was limited to the year 620/1224. Ibn Jāmi‘’s rival Ibn Yujjān – a relative of Ibn Tūmart’s Companion, Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar Ṭintī, and a Hintātī shaykh – persuaded the governor of Murcia, the sayyid ‘Abd Allāh, to rule with the title al-ʿĀdil (r. 621/1224–7). In Marrakesh, some of the Almohad shaykhs exiled Ibn Jāmi‘ and the caliph was deposed and killed: as a chronicler put it, the Almohad shaykhs had become for the Mu‘mins what the Turks had been for the ‘Abbāsids. Al-ʿĀdil could count on the support of his brothers, governors in Cordoba, Malaga and Granada. But some of his relatives opposed his nomination, among them the governor of Valencia and ‘Abd Allāh al-Bayyāsī, who in his stronghold of Baeza agreed to become a vassal of Fernando III of Castile. Al-ʿĀdil was unable to defeat him, while the Portuguese raided the region of Seville. As the Almohad army did not react, the people of Seville went out to fight, but were easily defeated. Contrary to the situation in the Christian kingdoms, the civil population was disarmed and inexperienced, and the Almohads did not try to channel their eagerness to defend their lives and properties by transforming them into local militias. Fernando III helped al-Bayyāsī to settle in Cordoba, giving him in exchange three fortresses, but the inhabitants of one of them, Capilla, refused to surrender. Fernando III besieged them with al-Bayyāsī’s help. The people of Cordoba, outraged by such behaviour, killed al-Bayyāsī and sent his head to al-ʿĀdil in Marrakesh. The caliph himself was killed shortly after, having fallen out with Ibn Yujjān and his Berber and Arab allies, and with other Almohad shaykhs.

His brother Abū ʿl-Ulā Idrīs – a grandson of Ibn Mardanīsh on his mother’s side – was named caliph in Seville with the title al-Ma‘mūn (r. 624–9/1227–32). He signed a truce with Fernando III by paying the king of Castile-León a huge sum (300,000 maravedis), as he needed time to ensure his acceptance in
Marrakesh. The Mašmūda shaykhs, displeased by the support he had among the Haskūra and the Khulṭ Arabs, named another candidate, Yahyā al-Muʿtaṣim billāh (r. twice, 624/1227 and 633-5/1234-6). Almohad failure in resisting the Christians stimulated Andalusī attempts at independence. Ibn Hūd al-Judhāmī became the main focus of such attempts. A soldier in the Murcia army, he rebelled against the Almohads in 625/1228, condemning their heresy and ordering the purification of their mosques. He managed to defeat the governors of Murcia and Valencia – the latter, the sayyīd Abū Zayd, eventually converted to Christianity – while the people of Cordoba expelled the Almohads. Ibn Hūd pledged obedience to the ʿAbbāsids and adopted the title Commander of the Muslims (āmīr al-muslimīn) previously used by the Almoravids. Unable to stop Andalusī resistance, al-Maʿmūn decided to travel to Marrakesh to depose Yahyā al-Muʿtaṣim. He crossed the Straits in October 625/1228 with the Almohad army and 500 Christian horsemen. His departure marked the end of effective Almohad rule. Cordoba and Valencia were lost to the Muslims in 633/1236 and 635/1238, Jaén and Seville in 646/1248. Only the Nasrid kingdom of Granada survived.

In the Maghrib, now depopulated by famine, plague and war, the Almohad tribes retreated to the area of Marrakesh and the Atlas mountains. Al-Maʿmūn defeated his rival, massacred the Almohad shaykhs and renounced Almohad doctrine. Under al-Mansūr, there had already been signs of repudiation of Ibn Tūmart’s teachings and his infallibility, as shown for example by a text by Averroes, where the philosopher holds such teachings to be valid for Ibn Tūmart’s age, not for present times. The dismissal of what was in fact the doctrinal basis of the empire – a dismissal that was an attempt to deprive the Almohad shaykhs of the power still held by them, and perhaps also the result of the pressure of Islamic universalism – fatally undermined the Almohad caliphate.

Allied to the Arab Khulṭ and the Haskūra, al-Maʿmūn fought the Hintāta and the people of Tinmal. In al-Andalus, Seville acknowledged Ibn Hūd, who lost Badajoz and Mérida to the Leonese. Majorca was conquered by the Aragonese in 628/1231 and Menorca acknowledged their authority, paying tribute to them. In Ifrīqiya, in 627/1229f., the Almohad shaykh Abū Zakariyyāʾ proclaimed himself independent, marking the beginning of the Ḥafṣīd caliphate. Al-Maʿmūn died trying to recover Marrakesh from his rival Yahyā al-Muʿtaṣim. Al-Maʿmūn’s son and successor, al-Rashīd (r. 629-40/1232-42), managed to conquer the capital with an army in which there were no Almohad troops, his main support being Christian mercenaries and the Khulṭ Arabs. The Haskūra supported Yahyā al-Muʿtaṣim, but were defeated,
taking refuge in the area of Sijilmása. The surviving Almohad shaykhbs then approached al-Rashīd through the mediation of the Christian mercenary leaders. Their return to Marrakesh was accompanied by the restoration of the Almohad doctrine. The Arab Khulṭ, whose leader Mas‘ūd ibn Ḥumayyān was treacherously killed, then allied themselves with the Haskūra, raided the area around Marrakesh and besieged the town. Al-Rashīd managed to escape and took refuge with his followers in Sijilmása, from where he made an alliance with the Arab Sufyān.

In the meantime, Marrakesh was occupied by Yahyā al-Muʿtaṣim and his Khulṭ allies, but he had neither the power nor the resources to act as a real caliph. The few Almohads who had joined him in Marrakesh defected. Al-Rashīd then moved against him with an army formed by Christian mercenaries and the Arab Sufyān, and having defeated his rival in 633/1235, started with great difficulty to reorganise Almohad administration and to collect taxes as far as the Ghuma region. Part of the surviving Khulṭ were deported to the Sūs, and their former ally, the Haskūrī chief Ibn Waqārīt, acknowledged Ibn Hūd and in 634/1236 attacked Rabat and Salé. But Ibn Hūd was losing ground in al-Andalus, and in 635/1238 Seville pledged obedience to al-Rashīd, as did Ceuta and Granada. Al-Rashīd tried hard to appease the Banū Marīn, by then active in the Gharb, but a fight erupted, the Almohads were eventually defeated and the Marīnids took control of northern Morocco.

Almohad military weakness made unthinkable any intervention in the Iberian Peninsula, where Fernando III’s advance reduced Muslim territory to Granada and the surrounding regions. Under al-Saʿīd (r. 640-6/1242–8), who sought support again among the Arab Khulṭ and the Christian mercenaries, Almohad disintegration increased, with Yaghmurasaʿn ibn Zayyān becoming independent in Tlemcen and with the expansion of the Marīnids’ area of influence. In 645/1248, al-Saʿīd attempted to regain control of the Maghrib and Ifrīqiya, but was defeated by the ruler of Tlemcen. Under his successor al-Murtaḍā (r. 646–65/1248–66), the Marīnids took control of towns of northern Morocco such as Taza and Fez. Ceuta became independent under Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-ʿAzaft in 647/1250. Salé, taken by the Marīnids, was attacked in 659/1260 by the navy of Alfonso X. Marrakesh itself was attacked by the Marīnids in 660/1262. The diplomatic exchange with the papacy started under al-Saʿīd continued in al-Murtaḍā’s times, in relation with the nomination of a Franciscan friar as bishop in 1246 to cater for the needs of the Christian mercenaries in Marrakesh (a church had been built there under al-Maʿmūn). Innocent IV invited the caliph to convert to Christianity and to give possession of fortresses to his Christian soldiers, but his advice was disregarded. As a
result, recruitment of Christian mercenaries became more difficult and this may have influenced al-Murtada’s poor military performance. The Marinids inflicted many defeats on him and the caliph seems to have abandoned any attempt at new military campaigns, concentrating instead on building activities. The rebellion of his relative Abū Dabbūs led to al-Murtada’s execution. Abū Dabbūs ruled less than three years. Defeated by the Marinids, his head hung in one of the gates of Fez. The Marinid amīr Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb entered Marrakesh in September 668/1269 and took the title of Commander of the Muslims (amīr al-muslimūn). Abū Dabbūs’ sons, one of whom was proclaimed caliph in Tinmal, eventually emigrated to the Iberian Peninsula and put themselves under the protection of the king of Aragon. The Almohad shaykhs who resisted in Tinmal were decapitated in 674/1275.

The Almohad empire had lasted some 140 years. Control of both al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya proved in the end too difficult to manage. On the one hand, both regions provided the Mu’minid caliphs with troops (Arabs from Ifrīqiya and Christian mercenaries from the Iberian peninsula) that allowed them not to depend exclusively on the original Almohad tribal units. On the other hand, they demanded constant intervention. In Ifrīqiya, the ghuzz threat and Arab raids became even more dangerous with the Banū Ghāniya’s activities in the area. Their attempt to restore Almoravid rule failed, but they inflicted great damage on the Almohads by stirring up the nomadic Arabs, feeding their passion for loot, and extending the Arab sphere of action in the Maghrib. Independent rule of Ifrīqiya under the Ḥafṣids was the eventual solution to Almohad inability to exert permanent control. In al-Andalus, Almohad military might, which depended heavily on the caliph’s presence and massive armies moving slowly and always short of provisions, proved in the long run no match for the damage caused by the local militias of Christian towns. Opposition on the part of sectors of the Andalusī population to both the rule and doctrine of the Almohads contributed to weakening the foundations of the empire. The succession of minors, unable to keep up the essential ‘active and beneficial presence’ expected from the Almohad caliphs, allowed the rise of the Almohad shaykhs and viziers with their rivalries and ambitions and led to civil wars.

**Politics and religion under the Almohads**

The Almohad historian Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt (d. after 600/1203) gave to his official chronicle the title al-Mann bi-l-imāma ‘alā ‘l-mustad’afīn bi-an ja’alahu Allāh a’imma wa-ja’alahu al-wārithīn, ‘[Divine] favour of the imamate granted to those considered weak on earth, and made by God imams and heirs’. The title
is grounded in Qur’ān 28:5, and it implies a reversal of the existing order. The verse had previously been used by revolutionary movements of Shi‘ī inspiration, such as those of Muḥammad al-Nafṣ al-Zakiyya and the Ismā‘īlīs of Bahrāyn.37 In its origins, the Almohad movement was closer to Shi‘ism than to Sunnism, as it started with a charismatic figure, Ibn Tūmart, consistently referred to as the ‘well-known rightly guided one and impeccable imam’ (al-mahdī al-ma‘lūm al-imām al-ma‘ṣūm) and the ‘inheritor of the station of prophecy and infallibility’ (wārith maqām al-nubuwwa wa’l-‘isma).38 His charisma served the legitimisation of Berber rule and the creation of new elites.

Seeking legitimacy: between Shi‘ism and Sunnism

Ibn Tūmart was a Masmūda Berber, but eventually he adopted or was given an Arab genealogy that linked him with the Prophet as a descendant of his grandson al-Ḥasan (the ancestor of the oldest Maghribi dynasty, the Idrīsids). He was succeeded by another Berber, the Zanāta ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, whose right to rule as Commander of the Believers (amīr al-mu‘minīn) was established in al-Baydhaq’s Memoirs by accounts of miraculous signs since his childhood and by the Mahdī’s predilection for him. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) had difficulties fitting the case of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min into his model of dynasty formation, in which a noble lineage makes tribal solidarity (‘aṣabiyya) coalesce around it, because he was a Zanāta and not a member of the Mahdī’s tribe. ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s adoption of an Arab Qaysī genealogy was meant to solve this problem.39 It was a genealogy with a long tradition within his tribe, the Zanāta, and it had many advantages. Qays includes Quraysh, the Prophet’s tribe, and ‘Abd al-Mu‘min was moreover said to descend directly from the Prophet on his mother’s side. Qays also includes ‘Abs, the tribe of the Arab Prophet Khalīd ibn Sīnān: given that the Qaysīs had been a lineage chosen for prophecy, they were even more entitled to the caliphate (fa-hum ahl bayt li-l-nubuwwa fa-ahrā an yakūnī ahl bayt li’il-khilaṣa). The Qaysī genealogy also includes Hilāl and Sulaym, the Arab tribes that ‘Abd al-Mu‘min had to fight in his expansion towards the central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya, and that were eventually incorporated into the Almohad army as a way both to control them and to liberate the Mu‘minids from dependency on the original Almohad troops.

The conquest of al-Andalus opened new venues for legitimisation and reinforced the tendency towards Sunnism. It linked the Mu‘minids with a prestigious local caliphate, that of the Umayyads, to which the Zanāta had been closely connected in the past. The transfer from Cordoba to Marrakesh of the Qur’ān alleged to have belonged to ‘Uthmān was one of the ways in which such a link was established,40 and Ibn Tūmart’s alleged transmission of

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Ma‘lik’s Muwatā‘a was a way to establish a connection with Sunnī al-Andalus – where Ma‘likism had become the ‘official’ doctrine in Umayyad times – and Ifrīqiyya. But the Mu‘minids, in their eclecticism, did not disdain to establish links with the other local caliphate, that of the Fāṭimids, as shown by the importance given to their conquest of Mahdiyya, their predilection for Mahdiyya-like foundations – as in the case of Rabat – and the possession attributed to Ibn Tūmart of a Kitāb al-jafr reminiscent of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s. The assimilation between God’s order (amr Allāh) and Almohad/Mu‘minid rule also points to Fāṭimid-like models. For all the ways (still to be fully analysed) in which they attempted to strengthen their political and religious legitimacy, the Mu‘minids’ Berber origins were never forgotten or forgiven. One of the accusations made against Averroes was that, while commenting on Aristotle’s Book of animals, he mentioned that he had seen a giraffe at the court of ‘the king of the Berbers’. Whether true or not, the anecdote is plausible: Andalusī acceptance of Mu‘minid legitimacy was of paramount importance for the dynasty, but it was never fully granted.

The elites of the empire

The original structure of the Almohad movement developed under Ibn Tūmart underwent changes under ‘Abd al-Mu‘min. The first caliph established a three-layered structure: at the top, there were the earliest adherents of the movement (those who had joined before the battle of Marrakesh in 524/1129); then followed those who had joined between 524/1129 and 539/1144f., the date of the conquest of Oran; then the rest of those who had joined the Almohad cause (tawḥīd). With this hierarchy, ‘Abd al-Mu‘min preserved the respect due to the survivors of the Councils of Ten and Fifty, and to their descendants, the Almohad shaykhs, to whom he gave employment in the administration of the state as governors or in the entourage of those governors who belonged to the caliphal family. The main role of the Almohad shaykhs was to control their tribes and provide soldiers for the military campaigns. Although their advice was sought, the caliph’s decisions did not necessarily follow it. The Maṣmūda and the Almohad shaykhs came increasingly to feel that ‘Abd al-Mu‘min’s fight was no longer theirs, but the defeat of Ibn Tūmart’s brothers and his followers also indicated to them that the preservation of what they had gained and the rewards to come now depended on being on the caliph’s side.

‘Abd al-Mu‘min and his successors were interested in keeping open the possibility of new recruitment, as they did with Ibn Mardanīsh’s family. It took ‘Abd al-Mu‘min twenty-seven years before he dared to suggest that he would
be succeeded by one of his sons and before giving preference to his many sons
in the administration of the empire. But he had taken earlier steps towards this
move, not limited to purging the more disaffected members of the original
Almohad tribes, or recruiting new troops among his own tribesmen and the
Arabs. He also promoted the training of servants loyal to the dynasty, the
țalaba and the ǧuzz, starting an ambitious educational programme. He
gathered promising young men from different parts of the empire, together
with his own sons and those of the Almohad shaykhs, and gave them both
religious and military training (including swimming, perhaps owing to the
importance of the Almohad fleet). An indispensable part of the religious
training was memorisation of Ibn Tūmart’s creeds and study of the other
tracts compiled in his Kitāb. The caliph closely followed their progress, and
once trained they served as preachers, muezzins and directors of prayer in the
mosques. Some of them – the țalabat al-ḥadīr – formed part of the entourage
of the caliph and held sessions of intellectual debate with him. Some joined the
Mu’minid governors and other Almohad officials. Many of these țalaba were
Berbers and Berber was used both as a language of instruction and a religious
language – Berber formulas for the call to prayer have been preserved and Ibn
Tūmart’s creeds were taught in Berber. Ideally, the țalaba should have been
able to engage in independent religious and legal reasoning, as servile imi-
tation of late precedents (taqlīd) was censored. Under both Abū Ya’qūb and
al-Manṣūr, much thought was devoted to the issue of how to establish proper
legal doctrine and practice, the main trend being close to Zāhīrīsm in the sense
of reliance on the original sources of Revelation. To this end Averroes devoted
his legal work Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtashid (‘The beginning for
him who is striving towards a personal judgement and the end for him who
contents himself with received knowledge’), which helped to direct
Almohadism towards reformed Mālikism. In connection with the need to
train their elites, but also out of concern for the spread of knowledge among
the population at large, the Almohad caliphs promoted the production of
encyclopedic works collecting everything that was known at the time about a
particular subject, as well as didactic works often in versified form, and this in
practically all disciplines.

Linked to the țalaba (if not part of them) were those who engaged in the
study of the rational sciences, to which an impressive impulse was given under
the second and third Almohad caliphs – as shown by the careers of Ibn Ṭufayl
(d. 581/1185) and Averroes – for reasons still to be fully explored. The latter’s
disgrace has usually been interpreted as the result of the struggle between
Almohads and Mālikīs, but it could be better understood as the result of

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internal fights among the Almohad elites themselves, more specifically between those who wanted to preserve the original doctrinal orientation and those more philosophically oriented. Sufism, like philosophy, flourished under the Almohads, but was also subject to suspicion, especially in the Andalusí context, with all the major figures emigrating to other lands, as in the cases of Abū Madyan, Ibn ‘Arabî or Ibn Sabîn. A doctrinal and political movement that had originated with an impeccable imam (and which used the term baraka to refer to the salary paid to the army) could not but be apprehensive regarding what similar charismatic figures might achieve, while at the same time sainthood, if controlled, increased the dynasty’s legitimacy.49

The ṭalaba were not the only specialised bodies in the administration of the Almohad state. There were, for example, also those responsible for the minting of coins with very specific features: square dirhams, dinars with a square inscribed within a circle, with no specification of dates or (usually) of mints.50 The training of these and other ‘civil servants’ of the state helps to explain the high degree of centralisation achieved in the Almohad empire, a centralisation that made possible, for example, the successful movement of the massive Almohad armies, an efficient postal service supporting a sophisticated propaganda system (the caliphs wrote letters that reached almost every corner of their empire), and, most importantly, the collection of taxes. Coins were a fiscal instrument: minted as a monopoly by the state, they represented the extent of its power. Whereas in Almoravid times there had been a massive minting of gold, in Almohad times silver predominated. It is not clear what determined this quasi mono-metalism of silver, but perhaps difficulties in controlling the African gold trade. ‘Abd al-Mu’mín had tried to persuade the inhabitants of Constantine to join the Almohads by stressing the difference between the many illegal taxes imposed by the Almoravids and the strict fiscal policy of the Almohads. On the other hand, he seems to have considered as conquered territory all the land of the empire (except for the original nucleus and al-Andalus), and thus this was subject to kharāj. The Almohad state later developed a centralised system of territorial concessions that, together with the salaries paid from the fiscal revenues, were bestowed to reward services.51

The writing of Almohad history: the case of the suppression of Judaism and Christianity

In direct relationship to their ambitious political and religious project, the Almohads promoted the official writing of history, as shown in the works by
al-Baydhaq, Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt and Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, and also in the official letters, many of which have been preserved constituting a valuable source still to be properly exploited. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī wrote his chronicle in Egypt at a time when the Almohad caliphate was disintegrating, and his treatment, as those by Ibn Ḥdārī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Abī Zarʿ or Ibn al-Athīr, reveals to a significant degree what Émile Fricaud has called the process of ‘de-almohadisation’ by which many specificities of Almohadism were silenced or omitted.53 As a revolutionary movement, the Almohads initially followed policies that were later considered unacceptable or deviant. Ibn Tūmart, for example, had declared that all the inhabitants of the territories conquered by the Almohads were the slaves of the members of the Council of Ten, something that was later remembered with much embarrassment.54 But even more striking was the suppression of the dhimma status of Jews and Christians. After the conquest of Marrakesh in the year 541/1147, ‘Abd al-Muʿmin told the Jews and Christians who lived in the territory under his rule that their ancestors had denied the mission of the Prophet, but that now they (i.e. the Almohads) would no longer allow them to continue in their infidelity. As the Almohads had no need of the tax (jīza) they paid, dhimmīs had now to choose between conversion, leaving the land or being killed. Christians left for the north of the Iberian Peninsula and few of them converted. Jews decided to stay in order to keep their properties and many converted to Islam. Synagogues were demolished, Hebrew books burnt, and observance of the sabbath and other Jewish festivals forbidden, although Jews continued their practices in secrecy. Al-Mansūr, well aware that many Jews were Muslims only in name, forced them to wear distinctive clothes to differentiate themselves from the ‘old’ Muslims.55 No extant source provides a satisfactory explanation of this seemingly unprecedented step, which is probably to be understood within the context of the Prophetic model applied to Ibn Tūmart. The presence of non-Muslims was explicitly forbidden by the Prophet in the Ḥijāz. Was the territory under Almohad rule considered a new Ḥijāz in which other religions were forbidden? The fact that the abolition of the dhimma status was attributed not to Ibn Tūmart but to the caliph ‘Abd al-Muʿmin could be explained by the fact that Ibn Tūmart’s activities were restricted to territories where there were no dhimmīs. It was after the conquest of Moroccan cities such as Fez and Marrakesh that ‘Abd al-Muʿmin had to deal with Jews, and after the conquest of Tunisian towns such as Mahdiyya that he had to deal with Christians (who were mostly Normans, as North African Christianity had almost disappeared by then). The first Almohad caliph may have decided to act as ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb did, carrying out the Prophet’s decision to expel non-Muslims.56
The Hafsids (627–932/1229–1526)

Introduction

After its temporary unification under the Almohads, the Islamic west became again divided between the Marinids of Fez, the ‘Abd al-Wâdids of Tlemcen, the Hafsids of Tunis and the Nasrids of Granada. The Hafsids openly claimed the legacy of the Almohad caliphate, and thus Ibn Khaldûn referred to them as ‘al-muwaḥḥidûn’. The Hafsids were descendants of the Hintat Berber Abû ‘Umar Hafs Êntî, one of the close Companions of Ibn Tûmart, but they also claimed to have as their ancestor the second caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭtab. Some of the Hafsids took the caliphal title, sometimes obtaining the acknowledgement of other rulers, especially those of Tlemcen.

Sources on the Hafsids are not abundant. While seventh/thirteenth-century chronicles are not preserved, for later periods we can count on the works by Ibn Qunfudh, Ibn al-Shâmmâ‘, Ibn Khaldûn and Leo Africanus, as well as the Ta’rîkh al-dawlatayn attributed to al-Zarkashî and the travels (rihlas) by al-Tijânî, al-‘Abdarî and Ibn Baṭtûta. There are also a few biographical dictionaries, such as al-Ghubrîn’s ‘Unwân al-dirâya dealing with Bougie and the one devoted to Qayrawân by al-Dabbâgh and Ibn Nâji. Al-Burzûlî’s Nawâzîl and Ibn ‘Arafî’s legal and doctrinal works are rich sources for society and culture, while the archival documents preserved in Aragon, Sicily and Italian towns (Pisa, Genoa, Venice, Florence) offer valuable materials for economic history, reflecting the importance of Hafsîd territory for the commercial linking between Europe, North Africa and the Levant.

The rule of the Hafsids lasted for more than three centuries, a duration that has been explained by their ability at keeping a healthy financial situation in their reign, as their army and navy were never very effective, especially after the crisis of the end of the seventh/thirteenth to the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth centuries.

The Hafsids reigned over a territory that comprised Ibrîqiya – corresponding to present-day Tunisia – Tripolitania (in Libya) and the western region of Constantine/Bougie (in Algeria). These two regions tended towards autonomy, and in the case of Bougie this tendency recalls the breakdown between the Hammâdids and the Zirids. Reunification was usually achieved not by the ruler in Tunis but by the amîrs ruling in the western region. In their efforts to stop territorial fragmentation, the rulers of Tunis often sought the alliance of the ‘Abd al-Wâdids of Tlemcen against Bougie. The Marinids in their expansionist policy managed to conquer Tunis for two short periods.
(748–50/1348–50 and 753–9/1352–8), but the population remained loyal to the former rulers, even if they were willing to shift their fidelity from one Ḥāfṣīd to another. Andalusí attempts to secure Ḥāfṣīd help against the Christian advance – even acknowledging Ḥāfṣīd sovereignty – did not succeed.

Tribes were important in the political history of North Africa because of the support they gave to those in power. On their part, rulers never succeeded in establishing their dominance over the tribes, which then ended up being a factor of instability that aggravated regional conflicts and loss of authority on the part of the state. The Ḥāfṣīds, while always trying to exert control over the Arab and Berber tribes especially to the east and the south,61 made territorial concessions to them by the end of the seventh/thirteenth century. Between total submission – never achieved – and total secession, the Ḥāfṣīds found middle terms, such as acceptance of mere declarations of obedience or momentary submission accompanied by irregular collection of tribute. Many other times, by leaving in their place those local chiefs who had assumed power, a more long-term obedience was in effect. Sometimes the Ḥāfṣīds themselves managed to appoint those chiefs, but they had to elect them among local families of notables. The Ḥāfṣīds seldom managed to impose their own men – never in the case of nomadic tribes, with the ever-present danger of autonomous rule or open dissidence. The tribes profited from ‘Abd al-Wāḍid or Marinid intervention to show open opposition to the Ḥāfṣīds by acknowledging foreign rule. On his part, the Ḥāfṣīd ruler could always play with the dissensions between the tribes or among branches of the same tribe. In the towns, the councils of the notables tended to fall under the influence of one single family in which power passed from father to son: the Banū Muznī in Biskra, the Banū Yamlūl in Tozeur, the Banū Khalaf in Nefta.62

The establishment of Ḥāfṣīd rule (603–75/1207–77)

When the Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir took the town of Mahdiyya from the Banū Ghāniya in January 602/1206, he left as his deputy in Ifrīqiya the Almohad shaykh Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Abī Ḥāfṣ al-Hintātī (r. 603–18/1207–21), the son of Ibn Tūmart’s Companion Abū Ḥāfṣ ‘Umar Īntī. Abū Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wāḥid accepted the position on the condition that he enjoy a high degree of autonomy, which he put to use to halt Yahyā ibn Ghāniya and his Arab allies, thus bringing ten years of peace to the area. There was a failed attempt to pass his post to his descendants, and a Mu’limid sayyid (a member of the Almohad caliphal dynasty) was sent from Marrakesh as the new governor. But in 623/1226, the Almohad caliph al-ʿĀdil appointed another
Hafsíd, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid, soon replaced by his brother Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā.

Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā (r. 625–47/1228–49) obtained the submission of Arab (Banū Sulaym, Banū Riyāḥ / Dawāwīda) and Berber tribes and annexed the old Ḥammādīd state (Constantine and Bougie) in 628/1230. The Almohad caliph al-Ma‘mūn and his successors were unable to react against his bid for independence. In fact, Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā profited from al-Ma‘mūn’s abandonment of the Almohad doctrine and from his attacks against the Almohad shaykhs – mostly belonging to Hintāta, the Hafsids’ tribe – and in the name of defending the purity of Almohad tradition (‘restorer of the Mahdī’s doctrine’, as Ibn al-Abbār described him),63 omitted the name of the Mu‘minid caliph in the Friday prayer in 627/1229. In 634/1236f., after Córdoba was conquered by the Christians, Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā had his name mentioned in the Friday sermon, although he never took the caliphal title. In 640/1242, Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā obtained the submission of the ‘Abd al-Wādīds of Tlemcen and reinforced his area of influence in the central Maghrib by establishing a number of small vassal states. His rule was even acknowledged in al-Andalus and by the Marīnids. Treaties were signed with Genoa, Pisa and Venice, as well as with Provence and Aragon.65 From 636/1239, tribute was paid to Frederic II to back maritime trade and Sicilian wheat was sold directly to Tunis. Abū Zakariyyā’ Yahyā maintained the Almohad elites in his civil and military administration, while at the same time welcoming the Andalusī refugees. In Tunis he built an open-air oratory and a college (madrasa).

In 650/1253, his son Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad (r. 647–75/1249–77), some months after having a maqṣūra (closed area reserved to the ruler) built in the mosque of Tunis, adopted the caliphal title of al-Mustansīr bi’īlāh. It was a propitious moment: the Mu‘minid caliphate was in disarray, the Ayyūbids had just disappeared (648/1250) and the ‘Abbāsids were weakened by Mongol advance. When the conquest of Baghdad took place in 656/1258, the Hijāz and Egypt acknowledged for a brief period the Hafsīd caliphate on the initiative of the Sufi Ibn Sabīn.66 The ‘Abd al-Wādīds and Marīnids also acknowledged Hafsīd rule. Internal dissent, including the rebellion of some members of his family often with Arab support, was suffocated. Control over the central Maghrib – a permanent headache for the Hafsīd rulers in Tunis – was eventually reasserted, while Arab tribes were set against other Arab tribes and sometimes displaced to facilitate their control. Following the Mu‘minid caliphal tradition, al-Mustansīr built magnificent gardens around Tunis. Diplomatic activity with Christian states was intense (even a Norwegian ambassador arrived in Tunis in the summer of 1262), as well as with the
African kingdom of Kanem and Bornu. Political developments in Sicily, with the fight between the last of the Hohenstaufen and the Anjou, saw the Ḥafṣids on the former’s side. The Crusader army that turned towards Iftiqiya probably under pressure from the preaching orders of Franciscans and Dominicans left – shortly after St Louis’ death in 1270 – when a treaty was signed by which the Ḥafṣid caliph preserved the integrity of his state in exchange for paying money to the Crusaders. In 658/1260, al-Muṣṭānṣir ordered the execution of his chancery chief, the Andalusī man of letters Ibn al-Abbār, a reflection of tensions within the Ḥafṣid elites.

*Internal fission and Marīnid expansionism (675–772/1277–1370)*

Al-Muṣṭānṣir’s death was followed by internal upheavals that lasted more than forty years (675–718/1277–1318). His son al-Wāṭhiq (r. 675–8/1277–9), ruling under the influence of the Andalusī Ibn al-Ḥabbabar, eventually abdicated in favour of his uncle Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm. After leading a revolt of Dawāwīda Arabs in 651/1253, this Abū Ishāq had sought refuge first at the Naṣrid court and then with the ‘Abd al-Wādīd ruler of Tlemcen, with whom a marriage alliance was established later on. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm’s rise to power was helped by the revolt of the people of Bougie provoked in 677/1279 by Ibn al-Ḥabbabar’s hostile policies against the Almohad shaykhāt. He also received military aid from Peter III of Aragon, who was in need of Ḥafṣid allegiance in his struggle with Charles of Anjou.

Once in power, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm (r. 678–82/1279–83) – who never took the caliphal title, calling himself ‘the most sublime amīr’ (*al-amīr al-ajall*) and ‘the Combatant on God’s path’ (*al-mujāhid fī sabīl Allāh*) – executed al-Wāṭhiq and his supporters. His son Abū Fāris was appointed governor of Bougie, having as his chamberlain the grandfather of the famous historian Ibn Khaldūn. Peter III of Aragon intervened again in Ḥafṣid policies when he unsuccessfully supported the rebellion of Ibn al-Wazīr, governor of Constantine, by landing at Collo. Two months later, the Sicilian Vespers (30 March 1282) made the king of Aragon sail towards Sicily to take advantage of the Anjous’ predicament.

Members of the influential family of the Banū Muznī of Biskra were appointed as governors in the Zab and the Djerid. A man from Msila called Ibn Abī ‘Umāra proclaimed himself Mahḍī among the Arab Banū Maʿqil and was later acknowledged as one of the sons of the Ḥafṣid caliph al-Wāṭhiq by the Arab Dabbāb of Tripolitania. In 681/1282, with the support of Berber and Arab tribes of southern Tunisia, Ibn Abī ‘Umāra took control of Tunis and was proclaimed caliph. Abū Ishāq fled to Bougie where his son Abū Fāris obliged
him to abdicate in his favour and adopted the caliphal title al-Mu’tamid ‘alā Allāh (end of 681/spring 1283). Abū Fāris – who got the support of the Arab Riyāḥ and Safwīḵis – was eventually overthrown and put to death by Ibn Abī ‘Umāra (r. 681–3/1283–4). On his part, Abū Išāq was captured and his severed head exhibited in Tunis. Ibn Abī ‘Umāra eventually alienated the Arabs and the Ḥafṣid faction that had supported him, being dethroned by Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar, a brother of al-Mustansīr and Abū Išāq.

The new caliph Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar (r. 683–94/1284–95) tried to gather as much support as he could and did not persecute those who had served Ibn Abī ‘Umāra. He manifested great respect for living saints and financed many religious buildings. Command of the army was given to the Almohad Abū Zayd ‘Īsā al-Fazāzī. The main threat came from Aragon-Sicily. The admiral Roger de Lauria seized Djerba (683/1284) and later plundered the coasts of Ifrīqiya, while the Aragonese acquired by the treaty of 684/1285 the ‘tribute’ formerly paid by the Ḥafṣids to the Anjou of Sicily. The new king of Aragon Alfonso III, allied with the Maṛīnids, supported the rights of the Almohad price Ibn Abī Dabbūs – who had taken refuge in Aragon in 668/1269 – to the Ḥafṣid throne, but this attempt failed. In 684/1285, Abū Zakariyyāʾ, a nephew of Abū Ḥafṣ, availing himself of the help of Arab and Berber tribes, took control of the western region (Bougie and Constantine). The next year he marched against Tunis, but was defeated by al-Fazaẓī, who repelled him towards the south. Abū Zakariyyāʾ then seized Gabes and advanced towards Tripolitania. In the meantime, Abū Ḥafṣ obtained the help of the ‘Abd al-Wādid sultan of Tlemcen, who still acknowledged his suzerainty and attacked Bougie, thus forcing Abū Zakariyyāʾ to retreat in order to defend his capital. In the Djerid, at Tozeur and at Gabes the local population chose their own governors, but paid formal alliance and taxes to the ruler in Tunis. While the Arabs of the south and of Tripolitania showed hostility, the central and eastern Arabs kept their allegiance and obtained grants of land and of revenues.69 On his part, Abū Zakariyyāʾ annexed the Zab and in 693/1294 gave its governor the control of all southern Constantine. He also obtained the allegiance of the lord of Gabes. The Mamlūk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 698–708/1299–1309) would extend his support to Abū Zakariyyāʾ Yahyā in Tripoli and Tunis in exchange for nominal Mamlūk domination.

chief minister. This Ibn al-Lihyānī – who later became ruler himself – unsuccessfully attempted to reconquer Djerba in 706/1306. Abū ‘Aṣīda had to face disturbances from the Ku‘ūb Arabs in the Tell. Relations with Christendom included treaties signed with Venice and Aragon, the employment of Catalan and Aragonese militias whose commander was named by the king of Aragon, and the payment of the tribute due to Sicily complicated by the changes undergone in the island’s suzerainty. As regards the independent kingdom of Bougie, it was threatened by the Marīnids, who had obtained the submission of the Almohad masters of Algiers and continued their expansionist policies. Bougie, after suffering an attack from Tunis in 695/1296 and seeking support from the ‘Abd al-Wādīds, was then attacked by the Marīnids in 699/1300 while also having to face the hostility of the Arab Dawāwida. Abū Zakariyyā‘ Yahyā was succeeded in 700/1301 by his son Abū ‘l-Baqā‘ Khālid, who tried to win for his side the support of the Marīnids – then besieging Tlemcen – that his rival in Tunis was also seeking to obtain (while playing this game, Abū ‘Aṣīda eventually lost the ‘Abd al-Wādīd recognition of Ḥafsīd rule). Finally, in 707/1307f., Abū ‘l-Baqā‘ Khālid and Abū ‘Aṣīda signed a treaty, according to which on the death of one of the two Ḥafsīd rulers, the survivor will be acknowledged in both Tunis and Bougie, thereby reuniting the kindgom. Abū ‘Aṣīda died first, and the Almohads of Tunis – who were against acknowledging Bougie’s ruler – proclaimed as his heir a very young Ḥafsīd prince whose reign was very brief (709/1309). Abū ‘l-Baqā‘ (r. 709–11/1309–11), however, soon managed to depose him and the two Ḥafsīd branches were reunited.

The union was, however, short-lived. The Constantine region defected under Abū ‘l-Baqā‘’s brother Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr, who eventually made himself master of Bougie in 712/1312. In the meanwhile, Ibn al-Lihyānī (r. 711–17/1311–17) – who had left Tunis to perform the pilgrimage and met the famous scholar Ibn Taymiyya during his stay in the East – became after his return the ruler of Tunis with the support of tribes from the area of Tripoli. During his brief reign, the Almohad army was submitted to a purge and the name of the Mahdī was suppressed in the prayer. On the other hand, Ibn al-Lihyānī assumed a caliphal title with Mahdist overtones, al-Qā‘im bi‘amr Allāh, and for some reason the Aragonese believed in his secret conversion to Christianity.

Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr, the ruler of Bougie, moved against Tunis (715–16/1315–16) after having resisted two attacks of the ‘Abd al-Wādīds of Tlemcen (713/1313 and 715/1315) with Catalan naval help. The Tunisians elected a son of Ibn al-Lihyānī, Abū Ḥarb (r. 717–18/1317–18) as their ruler, but he was also unable to resist the attacks of Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr.
Hašid unity was thus restored under Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr (r. 718–47/1318–46), who nevertheless had to face the growing autonomy of many areas and to react against several revolts taking place between 718/1318 and 732/1332. They were stirred up by several pretenders, among them Abū Darba and one of his brothers, as well as a son-in-law of Ibn al-Liḥyānī (Ibn Abī ‘Imrān), who obtained the help of the Arabs and often of the ‘Abd al-Wādids. Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr managed to put an end to the expansionist policy of the sultan of Tlemcen by establishing a marriage alliance with the Marīnids of Fez. Djerba was reconquered. Abū Yahyā tried to regain control of the territory over which he nominally ruled by following a policy that had been effective in the early Almohad period, that of entrusting the administration of the provinces to his sons, advised by chamberlains of different backgrounds. In Tunis, the Almohad shaykh and powerful chamberlain Ibn Tafraḡīn favoured the alliance with the Marīnids, who had annexed the ‘Abd al-Wādīd kingdom.

When Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr died in 747/1346, two of his sons disputed his succession, and this offered an excuse for the conquest of Iftīqiya by the Marīnīd Abū ʿl-Ḥasan. During his brief reign (748–50/1348–50), he alienated the scholars of Tunis and more importantly the Arabs’ support (Kuʿūb and Ḥakīm), by abolishing the revenues which the Bedouins had been collecting from the settled populations, either through government concession or according to customary use. The ensuing Arab revolt – in which a descendant of ‘Abd al-Muʿmin, the first Almohad caliph, was offered the throne – led to the military defeat of the Marīnīd sultan in 749/1348. Dissaffection was not limited to the east. The Marīnīd Abū ʿInān Fāris (Abū ʿl-Ḥasan’s son) took power in Morocco, while the ‘Abd al-Wādīds recovered Tlemcen and the Hašīds ruled in Bone, Constantine and Bougie. In Shawwāl 750/late December 1349, the Marīnīd Abū ʿl-Ḥasan escaped from Tunis by sea to find some months later his death in the High Atlas trying to reconquer his reign. The Hašīd al-Faḍl – who was governor of Bone – was proclaimed in Tunis. Ibn Tafraḡīn availed himself of the help of the Kuʿūb Arabs – thanks to the friendship he had established in Mecca with their shaykh ʿUmar ibn Ḥamza – and soon (751/1350) replaced Abū ʿl-Faḍl.

The very young Abū Ishāq (r. 750–70/1350–69) was in the hands of Ibn Tafraḡīn for fourteen years. Tunis had little control of most of the territory nominally under Hašīd rule. The Banū Makkī of Gabes and Djerba refused to acknowledge the new ruler, seeking help from dissident tribes, while in the west the Constantine region maintained its autonomy while making several attempts at conquering Tunis (752/1351, 753/1352 and 754/1352). Tripoli was
briefly occupied by Genoa (756/1355) and then handed to the Banū Makkī. Ḥaḍīṣīd political fragmentation helped again the expansionist policy of the Maʿrīnīd of Fez, Abū īnān Fāris, who took Tlemcenc, Algiers and Médéa, counting on the support of the Banū Muznī of the Zab and the Banū Makkī of Gabes. Bougie was conquered in 753/1352, leading to the second Maʿrīnīd occupation of Idrīqiyya (758–9/1357–8), with the capture of Constantine, Bone and Tunis, and the submission of the Djerid and Gabes. Abū īnān Fāris’ and the Maʿrīnīds’ dream of recreating the Almohad empire ended in 758/1358, as they lost first Idrīqiyya (the abolition of the revenues that the Arab Dawāwwīda collected from the settled population is again given as the reason that led to the defeat of the Maʿrīnīd army) and then Tlemcenc.

Although Abū Ishāq and Ibn Tafraġīn took the reins in Tunis, the situation continued to be one of fragmentation with Bougie, Constantine and Tunis governed by three different and independent Ḥaḍīṣīds, and the whole of the south, the south-east and a part of the Sahel maintaining their independence. When Ibn Tafraġīn died (766/1364), Abū Ishāq was able to rule in person, with growing dependence on the Kuʿūb Arabs and no real gains in controlling the territory. On the other hand, the Ḥaḍīṣīd of Constantine, Abū l-ʿAbbās, seized Bougie from his cousin Abū ʿAbd Allāh and succeeded in uniting the whole of the Constantine region (767/1366). The weakness of the next Ḥaḍīṣīd ruler in Tunis Abū l-Baqaʿī Khālid (r. 770–2/1369–70), who was a minor, led to the unification of Idrīqiyya by the Ḥaḍīṣīd ruler of Constantine and Bougie for the third time.

The century of Ḥaḍīṣīd power (772–893/1370–1488) and its decline

Abū l-ʿAbbās (r. 772–96/1370–94) was the restorer of Ḥaḍīṣīd power and prestige, acting with firmness but without unnecessary violence. During ten years (773–83/1371–81) he successfully strove – often himself leading the military expeditions – to recover control of the territory; he then concentrated on consolidating his hold over it. His endeavour was greatly helped by ʿAbd al-Wādid infighting and by rivalry between ʿAbd al-Wādīds and Maʿrīnīds. Piracy and privateering flourished, with Bougie described by Ibn Khaldūn as one of its main centres.27 Aragon under Peter IV (r. 1336–1387) seemed on the verge of waging war against Idrīqiyya, but eventually it was a Franco-Genoese expedition that attacked Mahdiyya (792/1390) and was repelled. The next year treaties were signed with Genoa and Venice.

During his long reign (r. 796–837/1394–1434) Abū Fāris continued his father Abū l-ʿAbbās’ policies by strengthening Ḥaḍīṣīd power in the interior and his
own authority against dissident members of his family. Soon, in fact, he replaced his sons and other relatives in the posts he had granted them at the beginning by appointing his freedmen instead, as happened in Constantine and Bougie (798/1396). He followed the same policy in Tripoli, Gafsa, Tozeur and Biskra, where the local dynasties were uprooted after military campaigns conducted by the ruler himself between 800/1397 and 804/1402. Not that he was always successful: his army suffered defeat first in the Aurès (800/1398) and then in the Saharan borders of Tripolitania (809/1406f.). The absence of Abū Fāris from his capital during this campaign favoured a conspiracy, involving some high officials and members of the royal family, that was severely repressed. Soon afterwards Abū Fāris had to face another Ḥafṣid pretender in the area of Constantine and the south-east (810–11/1407–8). His success led to the conquest of Algiers (813/1410f.), prelude to the expansionist policies that he would start in 827/1424. The ‘Abd al-Wādids’ weakness facilitated Ḥafṣid indirect control over their territory (827–34/1424–31) that was extended even over Marīnid Morocco. The Ḥafṣid navy was active in the Straits of Gibraltar against the Portuguese, who had occupied Ceuta in 1415. Abū Fāris also became involved in Naṣrid internal policies, supporting Muhammad IX al-Aysar in the recovery of his reign. The building of the palace of the Bardo in Tunis, first mentioned in 823/1420, illustrates how far Andalusi influence had penetrated into Ḥafṣid lands.

The pacification of Ḥafṣid territory by Abū Fāris went together with a well-meditated religious policy with social and economic implications. Respect was shown to ‘ulamā’, saints and sharīfs, Sunnism in its Mālikī variant was promoted, heresy was fought against (especially Khārijiism in Djerba) and much care was put into the public celebration of the nativity (mawlid) of the Prophet. Public constructions (such as a hospital) and economic reforms (abolition of non-Qur’ānic taxes) were undertaken. Privateering (kursān) – a main source of wealth – was presented as jihad. Abū Fāris took great care in fostering and protecting the pilgrimage to Mecca and his name was mentioned by the official preacher at ‘Arafā as one of the great Islamic rulers. Relations with other Islamic states (Marīnids, Naṣrids, Mamlūks) resulted in embassies and exchange of presents.

Abū Fāris was responsible for the building of fortresses in the north-eastern coast, rendering difficult surprise attacks on the part of the Christians. Relations with Genoa and Venice were strained by acts of piracy on both sides. A number of treaties were signed with Pisa, that of 824/1421 when the town was already under Florence’s rule. The treaty signed in 800/1397 followed previous agreements, but more emphasis was put on reprisals
against the Pisan consuls in case of attacks against Ḥafṣid ports. In that same year, after the village of Torreblanca in Valencia was attacked by Muslim forces, a naval expedition – granted the quality of Crusade – was prepared in retaliation. It aimed at the port of Tédellis under ʿAbd al-Wādid rule and not Bougie, another indication of Ḥafṣid power, as the kingdom of Aragon seems to have had in mind reaching an agreement with Abū Fāris rather than confronting him militarily. Confrontation took place in 1399 CE when the Crusaders carried out an attack against Bone, but its failure led in 1403 CE to the signing of a treaty.73 The expansionist policies of the new king of Aragon, Alfonso V (r. 1416–58), led to campaigns against the Tunisian islands. The Ḥafṣids reacted with an attack against Malta and by repelling the Aragonese attempt at occupying Djerba in 835/1434.

Abū Fāris, whose wealth, prudent rule and renown were exalted in diplomatic correspondence,74 died in 837/1434, while conducting personally – he was seventy years old – a campaign against Tlemcen. He was succeeded by two of his grandsons. Al-Muntaṣir’s reign was brief (837–9/1434–5) and was spent fighting rebellious relatives and those Arabs who supported them. His brother ‘Uthmān’s reign, on the contrary, lasted for fifty-three years (839–93/1435–88). Continuing his grandfather’s precedent, he was a great constructor, carrying out many hydraulic works, completing the madrasa al-Mustansiriyya initiated by his predecessor and founding several zawiyas in both the capital and other localities. Relations with Aragon, Venice, Florence and Genoa continued, subject to the ups and downs of both official policies and pirate activities. The familiar pattern of rebellion of the sultan’s relatives, tribal dissidence and defection of the towns repeated itself at the beginning of his reign. For seventeen years (839–56/1435–52) he had to fight – among others – his uncle Abū ʿl-Ḥasan ʿAlī in the region of Constantine. ‘Uthmān also undertook military operations in the south (845–55/1441–51) and gave the provincial governments to his relatives accompanied by one of his freedmen – often of Christian background – with the title of qaṭid. These qaṭids – who sometimes ended up as being the only representatives of the sultan – proved to be loyal, although sometimes subject to suspicion, as was the case with Nabil, imprisoned in 857/1453 to check the power and wealth he had achieved. ‘Uthmān’s initial success in pacifying the country was praised in an Italian document commenting on the uncommon degree of safety prevailing in Ḥafṣid territory.

But this situation was not permanent. Outbreaks of plague in 847/1443, 857/1453 and 872/1468 caused many deaths, with the sultan escaping from the capital to avoid contagion. Tunis suffered famine during the winter of 862/1458. Tribal rebellions added to these difficulties. In 863/1459 the Sīlīn in the
Kabylia and in 867/1463 the Arabs who had caused unrest in the central region of Tunisia were defeated. The sultan tried to impose on the tribes leaders chosen by him, but he seems to have succeeded only momentarily. The need to ensure control of the territory forced ‘Uthmān to move constantly, making his presence visible, according to a pattern well established in North Africa.75 He also led personally the army in the military campaigns to submit Tlemcen to obedience in 866/1462 and 871/1466, obtaining in 877/1472 the acknowledgement of his suzerainty on the part of the new lord of Fez, the founder of the Waṭṭāsid dynasty. To the usual relations with the Italian cities (Genoa, Florence, Venice) the novelty was added of a treaty signed in 1478 CE with the Hospitallers of Rhodes, who feared an Ottoman attack. In the Iberian Peninsula, Aragon and Castile were united under the Catholic kings, a union that would soon lead to a joint attack against the Naṣīrs. Their appeal to the Ḥafṣid sultan for his support after the fall of Malaga in 1487 CE was again unsuccessful.

‘Uthmān’s death in 893/1488 was followed by internecine fights among the Ḥafṣids, three of whom succeeded each other after brief reigns. The consequences of the fall of Granada in 897/1492 and Ottoman expansionism started to be felt under Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad (r. 899–932/1494–1526). The Spaniards extended to North Africa their policy of conquest to consolidate what they had recently acquired. Bougie and Tripoli fell into Spanish hands in 916/1510. The year 857/1453 had seen the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans and ‘Uthmān is known to have sent two ambassadors to convey his felicitations. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad’s death in 932/1526 can be taken as the actual end of the dynasty, as from then onwards Ḥafṣid rule was virtually nonexistent, with the Barbarossa brothers from their basis in Algiers and other ports initiating a new era that would end with the incorporation of most of former Ḥafṣid territory into the Ottoman empire in 977/1569.76

Almohads, Mālikīs and saints under the Ḥafṣids

The Ḥafṣid Abū Zakariyya’ (r. 625–47/1228–49) had taken power as ‘the restorer of the Mahdi’s doctrine’, and during his reign the invocation of the Mahdi Ibn Tūmart in the Friday sermon was maintained. It was in 711/1311, under Ibn al-Lihyānī, that the invocation was eliminated, although the khutba preserved part of its Almohad character. The Almohad legacy was especially visible in the coins minted by the Ḥafṣids.77 The Almohads who descended from those who had settled in Iffīqiya during the Mu’minid caliphate were the original foundation of Ḥafṣid power. Until the eighth/fourteenth century, they constituted the core of the Ḥafṣid army, a kind of military aristocracy
entitled to land concessions.\textsuperscript{78} They were complemented by the nomadic Arabs – with a growing presence from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards\textsuperscript{79} – Berbers, Andalusis and Christians.\textsuperscript{80} The special position of the Almohads was reflected in Ḥāfṣid ceremonial. When the caliph Abū Zakariyyāʾ held the public audience of justice each Saturday, his relatives were situated to his right, the Almohad shaykhs to his left, while the high officials of the administration were in front of him. In an official reception that took place in Tunis in 734/1334, the order of rank was as follows: in the first place, the chief military commander, then the qāḍī, then the Almohad shaykh Ibn Qunfudh and a doctor, then the secretary, followed by the rest of the military commanders. By the ninth/fifteenth century, the number of the Almohads – already reduced after the genealogical inquiries ordered by Ibn al-Lihyānī (r. 711–7/1311–17) – greatly diminished. Mention is made of the shaykh of the Almohads under Abū Fāris and ‘Uthmān, but after 866/1462 no further name is recorded in that capacity.\textsuperscript{81} When the Ḥāfṣids lost their power at the beginning of the tenth/sixteenth century, no Almohad organisation was in place to keep or establish another state. In spite of all their efforts – as shown by Ḥāfṣid official historiography, including Ibn Khalduṅ – the Ḥāfṣids eventually failed to make Almohad doctrine the foundation of their legitimacy.

While the Almohads were still a main component of the state, the Ḥāfṣid rulers found much support in them and sought their intervention, but they also tried to control them and to balance their power with other groups. In the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, many Andalusīs – among them craftsmen and men of letters – migrated to Ḥāfṣid Iffīqiya and they soon appeared as a powerful group in the capital alongside the Almohads.\textsuperscript{82} The Andalusīs found employment especially as secretaries in the chancery and stood out for their mastery of Islamic knowledge, excelling in calligraphy, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and music. All this conveyed a certain feeling of superiority on their part. The Almohads developed hostility against the Andalusīs – and also against the manumitted slaves employed by the caliphs – when they threatened their status by increasing their influence in the Ḥāfṣid court. Under al-Mustanṣir, who had attracted many Andalusīs to his court and showed them great favour, the Almohads attempted a coup in 648/1250 and in 658/1260 managed to have two Andalusīs, the secretary Ibn al-Abbār and the officer in charge of finances al-Lulyānī, executed.\textsuperscript{83} Other Andalusī favourites during the seventh/thirteenth century were Saʿīd ibn Abī ʾl-Ḥusayn and Ibn al-Ḥabbabar. Only two Andalusīs, however, were appointed to the supreme magistrature (qāḍī ʾl-jamāʿa), whereas their
nomination as provincial judges found no opposition. Slaves and manumitted slaves gained power and influence during the reign of Abû Fāris (r. 796–837/1394–1434). Mālikism coexisted with official Almohadism during the seventh/thirteenth century and triumphed over it during the eighth/fourteenth century, especially thanks to the work and the influence of Ibn ‘Arafa (716–803/1316–1401). If Almohadism with its insistence on legal methodology and the principles underlying the law had put out of fashion the rich Almoravid tradition of fatâwâ (legal opinions) compilations, the return to Mālikism meant the return of jurisconsults (muftîs) and their fatwâs. The collection carried out by al-Burzulî (d. 841/1438) exemplified this trend. But the Hafṣids maintained – following the Almohad precedents – the periodic meeting of the scholars of Tunis under their presidency to impart justice, and the caliph had the last word in case of discrepancy among the jurists. A striking peculiarity was the respect due to custom (‘āda, ‘urf), as well as to expert knowledge, required, for example, in legal issues dealing with construction and urbanism.

The Mālikî Ibn ‘Arafa was the man responsible for banishing Ibn Khaldûn to Cairo, where he died in 808/1406. Ibn Khaldûn’s approach to history and his concern for searching for the causes of both human behaviour and societal changes owed much to the intellectual atmosphere developed under the Almohads with their interest in investigating the principles of each discipline. Sufism had strong political and social implications. The Sufi Ibn Sabîn had been instrumental in bringing about the recognition of the Hafṣid caliph in the Hijâz and Egypt after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 656/1258. The Hafṣids openly paid respect to saints, while fearing them, as saintly power and authority could be useful to the dynasty, but also dangerous, in both rural and urban settings. Abû Ḥafṣ ‘Umar consulted the saint Abû Muḥammad al-Murjânî to choose his heir to the throne. ‘Uthmân took the Tunisian miracle-worker Sidi Ben ‘Arûs (d. 868/1463) under his protection. In Constantine the saint Abû Hâdî channelled local displeasure at Marînid occupation. The famous al-Shâdhîlî (d. 656/1258), the alleged founder of one of the most important brotherhoods in the Islamic world – the Shâdhiliyya – eventually abandoned Tunis for Egypt, and was accused of making Mahdist claims. His hagiography abounds in acts that parallel those of a sultan: he extended his protection to those who travelled with him, rewarded his followers with wealth, concluded marriages between his relatives and powerful people, and mentioned that he had his own army of Sufi novices. The Arab Ḥakîm revolted against Abû Fâris led by their saintly shaykh Aḥmad ibn Abî Ṣa’ûna – who was eventually put to death in 833/1430, while al-Ḥasan (r. 932–50/1526–43)
had to fight against Sidi ‘Arafa (1540), the chief of the ‘marabout’ state founded at Qayrawân by the Shâbbiyya tribe.95

Notes


3. Évariste Lévi-Provençal, Documents inédits d’histoire almohade, Paris, 1928; Arab. text, 50–133; French trans., 75–224.


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19. See Chapter 4.


34. Elż, art. ‘Banū Ghāniya’ (G. Marçais).
40. Huici, *Historia política*, vol. II, 248, 283, 327. The use of *spolia* from al-Andalus in Almohad constructions was another way to indicate such a link.
43. É. Lévi-Provençal, *Trente-sept lettres officielles almohades*, Rabat, 1941, number XII.

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52. A large number of his sociological and political theories are illustrated by examples drawn from Almohad history: Maya Shatzmiller, L’historiographie méridionale: Ibn Khaldun et ses contemporains, Leiden, 1982, 54–65.
59. For this area we have now the excellent study by Dominique Valérien, Bougie, port maghrébin, 1067–1510, Rome, 2006.
60. See Chapter 2: M. Brett, ‘The central lands of North africa and Sicily, until the beginning of the Almohad period’.
61. An overview for the western region in Valérien, Bougie, port maghrébin, 153–73.


71. Ibid. vol. I, 196.

72. Ibid. vol. II, 87.

73. Ibid. vol. I, 217, 219–24; López Pérez, La corona de Aragón y el Magreb, 713, 728.

74. In the treaty with Genoa signed in 1429 CE Abû Fâris was described as ‘rex opulentissimus, prudentissimus et magna fama in toto orbe clarissimus’: Brunschvig, La Berbérie orientale, vol. I, 238.


76. How this incorporation took place is discussed in Chapter 18: Houari Touati, ‘Ottoman Maghrib’.


80. Ibid. vol. II, 75–6, 79–81, 85.

81. Ibid. vol. II, 39 and vol. I, 211–12 (the governor of the Kasba in Constantine in 798/1396 was an Almohad who bore the nisha al-Timmâlî), 259.

82. Ibid. vol. II, 51–2, 155–6; Mohammed Salah Baizig, ‘L’élite andalouse à Tunis et à Bougie et le pouvoir hafside’, in Communautés et pouvoirs en Italie et au Maghreb...
85. Ibid. vol. II, 59, 81, 158, 166.
92. Their rise to power in North Africa is discussed in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 18.

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