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Pascal Buresi

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“Preparing the Almohad caliphate: the Almoravids”*

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Historical comparison is a delicate practice that requires a certain methodological rigor. This is particularly true for historians who intend to compare and contrast two successive political systems in the same geographical area. By playing with the chronological and geographical scales and shifting the historical viewpoint, distinctive features and key elements can emerge from such a comparison. Therefore, across the Mediterranean Basin during the pre-modern history of Islam, the people whom Jean-Claude Garcin called the “nouveaux peuples de l’Islam” came into power in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries.¹ These non-Arab groups came from the periphery of major urban centers that had appeared or developed during the first centuries of Islam. These groups seized power and promoted political and religious reforms; from the East came the Seljuks and the Ayyubids, while from the West came the Berber Almoravids, the Almohads, and the Marinids. The perception of two of these periods, the Almoravid and the Almohad, depends on the chronological and geographical scale of the study as well as its perspective. From the Iberian perspective, in the chronological framework established by al-Andalus (711-1492),² the reigns of the two Berber dynasties resembles those of foreign powers, intervening in the Peninsula at the moment when the Christian kingdoms of the North threatened the existence of al-Andalus. From the historical perspective of the Maghrib, however, the perception of the Berber dynasties was fundamentally different. Their reign corresponded with the culmination of a process that saw the Islamization and Arabization of a

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¹ Jean-Claude Garcin (ed.), *États, sociétés et cultures du monde musulman médiéval. x^e–xv^e siècle*. 3 vols, Nouvelle Clio, PUF, 1995 and 2000, t. 1, pp. 123-167 (chapters by J.-C. Garcin et par P. Guichard).

² This is already a historiographic postulate, depending on whether we consider the Arab, Berber, and Muslim conquest of the eighth century as a breaking point (Guichard, 1976 and 1977), or we deny the existence of this conquest (Olagüe, 1981), or we consider its influence to be superficial (Sánchez-Albornoz); it also depends on whether we insist on the permanence of Muslims and Islam after the “Reconquista” or, rather, the total elimination of all components of the andalusî society after the disappearance of the kingdom of Grenada.

growing portion of the local population and the slow emergence of local authorities whose influence extended far beyond the period and geographic framework of the Maghrib. Ultimately, the reputation of the Almohad Empire was felt in the East in a new way. This political construction was not only regarded as one of the many peripheral powers of secondary princes, but also simultaneously as a threat and a model.

Determining the fractures and continuities between the Almoravid period (c. 1050-1147) and the Almohad period (c. 1120-1269) in the Maghrib and al-Andalus is further complicated by the *damnatio memoriae* that covered the period and the political system of the Almoravids; any sources concerning the Almoravids have either been erased or rewritten by their successors and gravediggers. It is because the war against the Almoravids lasted long after the fall of their dynasty in 1147 that the rewriting of Almoravid sources by Almohad authors was so effective and had such a great significance. Indeed, its effects could be felt until the beginning of the thirteenth century, as the Banū Ghāniya, successors and heirs to the Almoravids, expressed a permanent hostility and remained a threat to the Almohad Empire: first from their maritime base in the Balearic Islands, then from their foothold in Central Maghrib, and finally through their alliance with the Arab tribes and the Ghuzz sent from the East by the Ayyubids to counter the Almohad advance in Ifrīqiya and Tripolitania.³ The survival of the Banū Ghāniya, the number of conflicts they participated in, both on land and at sea, and their tenacious nature have undoubtedly prompted such a rereading of the history of the Saharans. The Almohad sources insist on the radical break that Ibn Tūmart's dogma and reform represented from Almoravid ideology. The maintenance of a dynasty representative of an earlier, alternative legitimacy helped to strengthen the ideological identity of the Almohads and led them to further stand out from their predecessors. The Almohad political system was therefore built in opposition to the Almoravid one. The theorists of Almohadism (*tawḥīd*) were forced to refine their political system for a long time, well after the initial reign of °Abd al-Mu'min (r. 1130-1163). This decades-long political and military antagonism has been set into, and indeed strengthened, the historiography of the opposition between the two dynasties, thus influencing both parties: Ṣanhāja vs. Maṣmūda, plains vs. mountains, Sahara vs. Atlas, nomads vs. sedentary populations,

³ Alfred Bel, *Les Benou Ghanya et leur lutte contre l'Empire almohade*, Paris, Leroux, 1903 ; Mouton, Jean-Michel, "La conquête de la Cyrénaïque et de la Tripolitaine par Qarāqūsh : initiative individuelle ou entreprise d'État ?" », in C. Chanson-Jabeur et al. (eds.), *Aux rivages des Syrtes: la Libye, espace et développement de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Paris, Centre des Hautes études sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Modernes, 2000, pp. 59-69 ; Amar S. Baadj, *Saladin, the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya. The Contest for North Africa (12th and 13th centuries)*, Leyde, Brill, 2015.

Emirate vs. Caliphate, Abbasid legalism vs. the Maḥdī Ibn Tūmart's Imamate, Sharq vs. Gharb, Malikism vs. Almohadism, *taqlīd* vs. *ijtihād*, *tajāsīm* vs. *ta'wīl*, etc. These points of opposition were re-worked by the Almohads. Certain traits were emphasized: the wearing of the veil (*liṭām*), the role of women, the use of *furū'* rather than the Koran, and the use of Sunna by the Almoravids. Other developments that came from this rewriting included the Imamate, the infallibility of the movement's founder, the different roots of the Almohad authority, and the alleged illiteracy of the Almoravids. Important steps were taken; sometimes institutional and dogmatic, like the prohibition of the Maliki school, while others have been symbolic, such as the choice of white as the emblematic color of the dynasty or the reorientation of the *qibla* in the Great mosques of the Empire (Marrakesh, Tlemcen, Fez, etc).

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

The Rise to power of the Almoravids

The geopolitical dimension of this period plays an important role in understanding the appearance of the Almoravid movement. Until the end of the tenth century, the Umayyads of Cordoba and the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya were engaged in an extreme game of competing influences in Western Maghrib. This played out through the exchange of embassies, financial support given to different groups, and military backing. Eventually, in 969 the Fatimids of Ifrīqiya moved their capital to Egypt, founded al-Qāhira, and relocated the tombs of the first Imams of the dynasty. Meanwhile, across the Strait of Gibraltar, the Caliphate of Cordoba entered a period of crisis that lasted from 1009 to 1031. Due to the remoteness or disappearance of the previous competing powers, interventions in the Maghrib gradually ceased working and ultimately resulted in a power vacuum that allowed for local forces to emerge. It is in this moment that the Almoravids

came to power “to proclaim the truth, fight against the violations of the Law, and suppress illegal taxes”⁴ and thus asserted their presence in the region. Interestingly, the two etymologies of the name “Almoravids” (*al-murābiṭūn*) proposed by the Arab sources are either the “refugees in a fortified convent (*ribāṭ*)” or “who form a highly cohesive group” (*murābiṭūn*).

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

In 1071 Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar laid the foundations of the capital in Marrakech (*Murr Yakush* = the “City of God” in Berber⁶), thus establishing the roots of the movement in the territory. Symbolically, the construction of the *Qaṣr al-ḥajar*, the “stone palace,” in an area where most palaces were built from adobe, presented a stable and enduring foothold to the federation of nomadic tribes. This decision was the first step in the construction of an Emiral

⁴ Ibn ʿIdārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Beyrouth, Dār al-ṭaqāfa, 1983, t. 4, p. 11.

وهذه الثلاثة قبائل في ذلك الوقت مسلمون قاموا بدعوة الحق وردّ المظالم وقطع المغارم وهم متمسكون بالسنة.

⁵ Although Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, when he returned to Kairouan, he said to the great faqīh Abū ʿUmrān al-Fāsī that his people had no religious knowledge and did not belong to any school:

ما لنا علم من العلوم ولا مذهب من المذاهب لاننا في الصحراء منقطعين لا يصل الينا إلا بعض التجار الجهال حرفتهم الاشتغال بالبيع والشراء ولا علم عندهم.

(Ibn ʿIdārī, *Bayān*, t. 4, p. 7). ʿAbd Allāh b. Yasin gathered around him 70 *fuqahāʾ*, small or important, to teach them and strengthen them in their faith (p. 8).

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

State as well as the transformation of a reform movement into a State. That same year, Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar appointed Yūsuf b. Tashfīn as his lieutenant while he returned to the South to confirm his power in the Sahara. This episode is more important than it seems. Here, two models of political and social organizations are competing. First, the nomadic model of the tribes, in which the power moves with the *shaykh*. Second, the static model of the emirate, where institutions (offices, chancellery, palace guard, clienteles) constitute the heart of the power by ensuring the permanence of prince's sovereignty in his absence and establishing a fallback position for him.⁷ Indeed, Abū Bakr b. ʿUmar left Marrakech after having established it as the capital. However, his departure also occurred before he had established any institutions. It was his lieutenant, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn, who ultimately established a number of the institutions that were initiated by his master and cousin. These included administrative offices, a tax—he established a specific tax on Jews within the territories, respecting nonetheless the limits of Koranic taxation over Muslims—, a princely court, diplomacy, the dispatching of ambassadors in al-Andalus, and a royal guard composed of black slaves and Christian mercenaries whom he outfitted with horses.⁸ In doing so Yūsuf b. Tashfīn founded the administrative, fiscal, political, and military structures that would allow him to extract his power from tribal logic and the clientelism of his supporters. Based on these realizations and the established land base, in 1073 he was able to carefully depose of his cousin and marry his wife, Zaynab bt. al-Nafzāwiyya, thus becoming the undisputed ruler and true founder of the Almoravid emirate.

The base of the Almoravid power, as with the Fatimids and the Abbasids before them, was two-pronged: an *imām*, a “religious” authority, who interpreted texts and traditions, and a political leader who was in charge of military choices and the politics on his behalf. The prominence enjoyed by the charismatic *imām* allowed the political leader to make decisions that, without a spiritual and religious endorsement, might have shocked the tribal traditions. If the supra-tribal movement was launched thanks to the personality of a preacher-reformer,⁹ then it

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

⁸ Ibn ʿIdārī, *Bayān*, t. 4, éd. I. ʿAbbās, Beyrouth, Dār al-ṭaqāfa, 1983, p. 23 :

“Once his power was strengthened, Yūsuf b. Tašfīn procured some black slaves for himself. He sent people to al-Andalus to find white slaves (*aʿlāj*) for him, purchased with his own money. There were two hundred and forty of them and there were two thousand black slaves, he outfitted them with horses and made it his personal guard (*ḥaṣam*). His veil expanded (*fa ḡaluḏa ḥijābu-hu*) and his power was consolidated (*wa ʿazuma mulku-hu*).”

was his death that allowed for the emergence of a political sovereignty and the establishment of a dynastic power. Tribal solidarities did eventually reappear but the *dawla*, the “wheel” of power, was sufficiently rooted and would persevere without many risks to the ancient power structures. Indeed, prominent tribal members preferred this new system and took advantage of the benefits it provided rather than questioning it and taking the risk of losing everything.

Some sources claim that Yaḥyā b. ʿUmar (d. 1095) was the first to adopt the title of “Emir of the Muslims,” which did not previously exist within the Islamic political tradition.¹⁰ However, even if that is the case, it was not until Yūsuf b. Tashfīn sought out and received the recognition and official investiture from the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad that this title gained any sort of legitimacy.¹¹ An army of the faithful, guided spiritually by a reformer, was transformed into an army of compromise, where the solidarities, internal rivalries, and divergent interests were arbitrated by the sovereign. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn was thus able to maintain his power through his ability to satisfy the appetites of some without arousing the jealousy and opposition of others.

The Provincial Organization of the Almoravid Emirate

The organization of provincial power in the Almoravid period satisfies this requirement to a certain extent. It favored the members of the movement’s founding tribes through a device based on the *niyāba*, the delegation of power. The governor was the *nāʾib*, that is to say the “substitute,” of the prince, and thus had all his prerogatives. Several letters, which were representative of the Almoravid approach to the responsibilities of provincial governors, were written after Tashfīn’s ascent to power in 1143:

“It is our substitute (*nāʾib*), for your leadership, for the conduct of your affairs, and for the government of the young and old among you; no one has the authority to these things [except for] him, [...] and we appoint the governor for all of you [...]; and everything that he will do, it is us who does it through him, and what he will say to this affect, it is as if we were saying it [...]; with our tongue, he speaks [...] so listen to him, obey him, and do not defy him.”¹²

⁹ The use of the standards (*rāyāt*) and the organization by the Emir of the orders of battle were also a way to impose a supra-tribal authority, without knowing if the sovereign truly combined the troops from different tribes, or if he only imposed a unified command on them, which is most likely (see M. Ghouirgate, *L’ordre almohade*, p. 62-66).

¹⁰ Translation of al-Qadi Iyad (in Ch. 26 of N. Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins (eds), *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, University of Ghana, 2000, p. 102).

¹¹ É. Lévi-Provençal, « Le titre souverain des Almoravides et sa légitimation par le califat ʿabbāside », *Arabica*, 2, 1955, pp. 265-288; Ma J. Viguera, « Las cartas de al-Ġazālī y al-Ṭurṭuṣī al soberano almorávide Yūsuf b. Tašfīn », *Al-Andalus*, 42, 1977, pp. 340-374; V. Lagardère, « Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, grand cadī de Séville », *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 40, 1985, pp. 91-102, especially pp. 96-97.

¹² They were written by Abū Bakr Ibn al-Qasīra on behalf of ʿAlī b. Yūsuf from his camp in the outskirts of Cordoba: *wa huwwa al-nāʾib ʿan-nā fī tadbīri-kum wa iqāmat umūri-kum, wa siyāsāt ṣaġīri-kum aw kabīri-kum*,

Almoravid governors are thus characterized, both in fact and in law, by a fair amount of independence. Control over the governors by the prince of the Almoravids, however, remained very strong, since he was the one who was responsible for their appointment or dismissal.¹³ In fact, the independence of the governors was closely supervised. Any political, military, or fiscal failure in the provinces was blamed on the provincial governor. For example, as he was the one who organized the military expeditions of legal war (*jihād*) against the Christians each year, any failure on this front inevitably led to his dismissal by the prince. Mehdi Ghouirgate points out how, in this regard, the control of the armies was the chief of the tribe's pillar of power.¹⁴ This was preserved in the Almoravid era, as control of the armies was delegated to the provincial governors for the practice of razzias. This is especially true of Tāshfīn b. °Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn who, as governor of Cordoba and Granada, carried out *jihād* against the Christian principalities of the North. It was also the Almoravid governor who controlled the coinage. Contrary to what the numismatists often argue concerning the privatization of governmental functions that affected Latin societies, the proliferation of coinage mints did not imply a weak central government in the Almoravid emirate. In fact, changes in the various mints (mentions of the crown prince, changing the name of the designate heir, etc) were implemented in all the mints of the emirate within a year. The number of mints —as, in fact, all seats of government had one— does not reveal a weakness in the central government, but instead highlights a decentralized mode of territorial management.

Mehdi Ghouirgate, in *L'ordre almohade*, identifies a link between the Almoravid's use of the veil (*liṭām*) and the delegation of power. By visually differentiating the ruling elites from the rest of society, the veils of the Almoravids created an association between all who wore the veil and the exercise of power. Anyone who wore the veil became an indistinct representative of the Emir.¹⁵ The “ethnic” developments in the historiography of the wearing of the *liṭām* in al-Andalus is well known; for example, the interpretation of Ibn °Abdūn's manual of *ḥisba*, written at the beginning of the twelfth century and considered to be part of the production of the

laysa li-ahad ma°a-hu fi dalika yad [...] wa ḥakamnā-hu fi jamī°i-kum [...] wa mā fa°ala min dalika kullu-hu fa-naḥnu fa°alnā-hu, wa mā qāla fi-hi fa-ka-annā naḥnu qulnā-hu [...] bi-lisāni-nā yatakallam [...] fa sma°ū wa ṭi°ū wa lā taḥālafū-hu (Maḥmūd °Alī Makkī, « Watā°iq tārīḥiyyat jadīda °an °aṣr al-Murabiṭīn », *Revista del Instituto de Estudios Islámicos de Madrid*, 7-8, 1959-1960, pp. 109-198, letters n° 5, 6 and 7, pp. 174-177).

¹³ The average length of a governor's term was two and a half years, which reveals the full control over government careers by the sovereign.

¹⁴ Ghouirgate, *L'ordre almohade*, pp. 177-178.

¹⁵ Ghouirgate, *L'ordre almohade*, p. 63.

shu‘ubiyya. This manual would have been the expression of a movement of resistance to Berber domination in the Iberian Peninsula. It seems as though the distinctions made in this book between the Almoravids and non-Almoravids were influenced by the communal nature of the laws, the protection of the privileges of officers, social distinctions, and the positioning of scholars against violence in the city, rather than against an opposition of an ethnic nature.¹⁶ Ibn ‘Abdūn’s main concern does not seem to be the superiority of the Andalusians. Instead, his focus is on the respect due to social hierarchies and to legitimate political powers, whether they be a stranger or not. Additionally, this manual contains the opposition of a lawyer to factors that might lead to disorder, particularly individuals carrying weapons within the community. If the ruling class had the sole right to wear the veil as a sign of distinction and respect, it was therefore not admissible for a simple man-at-arms to also wear one. As a sign of respect that was meant for an Almoravid officer, the *liṭām* was usurped from the nobility when it was worn by people who were not believed to be deserving of it. It was against this usurpation that Ibn ‘Abdūn rebelled.

The last feature of this period of Almoravid domination that this paper will examine is, on the one hand, the relationship of the sovereigns with the ulemas and the Maliki school of law and, on the other hand, the relationship between the central power and the provincial legal-judiciary elites. In al-Andalus the political disintegration of the eleventh century made room for the emergence of local elites in the different courses of taifas. In the eleventh century it was the “secular” elites, the *kuttāb*, who emerged. Bruna Soravia characterized the most famous representatives as king-makers.¹⁷ However, in the middle of the twelfth century, in the midst of the Almoravid crisis, it was the “religious” elites who seized power, as in Seville or Granada. This was only possible because their power had been asserted under the reign of the Almoravids. At first they attempted to force Maghribis with positions of responsibility in the cities of al-Andalus, but then they had to compromise with the great local families¹⁸. Thus, in 1097, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Samajūn, who belonged to a family that was close to the Emir

¹⁶ How could we otherwise understand that Ibn ‘Abdūn advises that four of the ten auxiliaries (‘awn-s) of the qāḍī of Seville ought to be black Berbers in cases concerning the Almoravids (Article 99)? Ibn ‘Abdūn thus reserved the use of the veil (*liṭām*) to Ṣanhāja, Lamtūna, and Lamṭa and prohibits it to the mercenaries and the militias of black Berbers because the veil should be a distinctive sign of the Almoravids “who must be regarded with honor and respect and who should receive aid and assistance” (Article 56).

¹⁷ Bruna Soravia, “Entre bureaucratie et littérature : la *kitāba* et les *kuttāb* dans l’administration de l’Espagne ummayyade”, *Al-Masāq*, 7, 1994, pp. 165-200.

¹⁸ For a complete study of the appointments of judges in the Almoravid period, see Rachid El Hour, *La administración judicial almorávide en al-Andalus: élites, negociaciones y enfrentamientos*, Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica. 2006.

and was earlier appointed *qāḍī* of Algeciras, was appointed *qāḍī* of Granada by Yūsuf b. Tašfīn himself.¹⁹ However, the tensions with the population and with the *fuqahā* from Granada provoked the dismissal of the judge.²⁰ Twenty years later, another North African Berber, Ḥallūf b. Ḥalaf Allāh, was appointed *qāḍī*, though the post was quickly reclaimed by a major local lineage. Also in Valencia it seems that there was an attempt to impose a Maghribi *qāḍī* and *ḥaṭīb* by the Almoravid *qā'id* al-Mazdalī.²¹ All of these attempts ultimately failed and the Almoravids were forced to come to terms with the local Andalusian elites who continued to exercise the office of the judicature and to control its access throughout this period, to the point that they were able to claim to exercise power during the crisis of Almoravid power in the middle of the twelfth century.

Negotiation with the Andalusian religious elites and, to a lesser extent, Maghribis, became all the more necessary as the Almoravids had chosen a path of legalism and respect of the Maliki school. The two pillars on which Yūsuf b. Tašfīn built his emirate were thus the two legal requirements of direct concern to the people of al-Andalus: respect for a taxation that was framed and limited by the sacred texts, and military unity to confront the Christian kingdoms on the Peninsula. Military defeats²² and the proliferation of non-Koranic taxes eventually undermined in al-Andalus the legitimacy of the Almoravid sovereigns, who were at the same time weakened in the Maghrib by the Almohad rebellion.

¹⁹ M. Lucini, « Los Banū Samayūn: una familia de cadíes », *Estudios Onomásticos Biográficos de al-Andalus*, 5, p. 171-198, esp. p. 186.

²⁰ F. Rodríguez Mediano, « Instituciones judiciales: cadíes y otras magistraturas », in Viguera (dir.), *El retroceso territorial de al-Andalus. Almorávides y Almohades. Siglos XI al XIII*, vol. VIII/2 de la *Historia de España* Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1997, p. 175-177.

²¹ P. Guichard, *Les musulmans de Valence et la Reconquête (x^e–xiii^e siècles)*, Damas, Institut français de Damas, 1990, t. 1, p. 81.

²² The military defeats culminated with the disaster of “Cullera” or “Alcala” near Alcira on the left bank of the Júcar in *Rajab* 523/June 1129. It was because of this defeat that Abū Marwān Ibn Abī l-Khisāl reportedly wrote a letter insulting the Almoravids: “Sons of vile mothers, you flee like wild asses... The time has come when we will give you a heavy punishment, in which no veil will hide your face, and we will chase you in your Sahara and we will wash al-Andalus from your filth” (cited in P. Guichard, *Musulmans de Valence*, t. 1, pp. 91-92). Episode evoked by al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-muʿğib fī talhīṣ alḥbār al-Mağrib*, ed. R. Dozy, Amsterdam, Oriental Press, reed. 1968, p. 127-128, ed. Ḥalīl ʿUmrān al-Manṣūr, Beyrouth, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2005, p. 125, spanish translation H. Miranda, *Lo admirable en el resumen de las noticias del Magrib*, Tetuan, Editora Maroquí, 1955 (Colección de crónicas árabes de la Reconquista, IV), p. 134.

Almohad Achievements and Continuities

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

Initially, from the preaching of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart (c. 1120-1130) until the conquest of Marrakech (1147), the opposition was total and the discourse was polemic: the Almoravids were accused of supporting an anthropomorphist interpretation of the Book (*tajsīm*) and betraying the text of Revelation. In this way the Almohad movement was constructed in opposition to the power of the reigning dynasty. Their ideology and militant organization was thus turned towards the fight against the Saharan enemy of the plains. There only exists later testimony which reconstructs this period in the hagiographic model of the prophetic *sīra* and the messianic or Mahdist movements. Further, these movements themselves had likely tapped into an Islamic, or perhaps pre-Islamic, tradition. This first phase of the development of the Almohad ideology, compared with the Almoravids, can be linked to the story that describes the meeting between the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart and Yūsuf b. Tashfīn in the Great mosque in Marrakech:

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

— “Welcome the Emir by his title of Caliph”

— “Where is the Emir? I only see veiled (*munaqqabāt*) courtesans (*jawārī*).” At these words, ‘Alī b. Yūsuf took off the veil that covered his face and said to his followers: “He’s right!” When he saw the Emir’s face uncovered, the Infallible said:

— “The Caliphate belongs to God and not to you, O °Alī b. Yūsuf!” And he continued: “Arise from this dyed cloth and if you want to be an *imām* of justice, do not sit yourself on this black mantle!”

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

— “So what is the problem with its dye?”

— “That is because it was involved, when it was used, with excretions.”²³

This story, constructed as a dialogue between the Mahdī and the Emir, highlights the pre-science of Ibn Tūmart.²⁴ His knowledge of hidden things allowed him to immediately distinguish the pure from the impure. However, paradoxically, he was not able to identify the Emir from among the other veiled persons who accompanied him. This difference —the perception of the impurity of the mantle vs. the non-recognition of the figure of the Emir— creates two figures of authority. The first figure is inspired; he sees the religious things and is distinct from the rest of the mortals because of his own qualities. The other figure, dressed as a woman, confuses the genres, ignores the impure nature of the objects he touches, and does not stand out from the ordinary because of either his charisma or his extraordinary knowledge. In both cases it is the fabric that creates the connection between the two orifices: the pure one for speech and the impure one for excrement. M. Ghouirgate highlights how the Almoravids considered it obscene to show their mouths. This story utilizes this taboo to better discredit these figures: how would it be possible for the Almoravids to govern with accuracy and justice if they could not distinguish the pure from the impure, the men from the women, or the different parts of their anatomy? Furthermore, the Almoravid Emir is presented as an usurper who, by agreeing to unveil and leave the black mantle, is implicitly recognized to be completely disqualified from using the title

²³ Interview reported in *Hulal al-mawšīyya*, éd. °Abd al-Qādir Būbāyah, Beyrouth, dār al-kutub al-°ilmiyya, 2010, p. 167, and especially by al-Baydaq, Arab texts of *Aḥbār al-Mahdī*, ed. É. Lévi-Provençal, Paris, Geuthner, 1928, p. 67-68, transl. É. Lévi-Provençal, *Documents inédits d'histoire almohade*, Paris, Geuthner, 1928, p. 108-109, cited by Ghouirgate, *L'ordre almohade*, p. 52-53 :

وذلك أنه لما دخل مرآكش نزل بها بمسجد صومعة الطوب فمكثنا بها الى يوم الجمعة ثم اقبل الى جامع علي بن يوسف فوجد علي بن يوسف قاعدا على غفارة ابن تيممت والوزراء واقفون فقال له الوزراء ودّ الخلافة على الامير فقال لهم وأن الامير انما ارى جوازي منقبات فلما سمع ذلك علي بن يوسف حطّ النقاب عن وجهه وقال لهم صدق فلما رآه المعصوم قال له الخلافة لله وليست لك يا علي بن يوسف ثم قال له المعصوم يا علي قم عن هذه المغيرة تكون امام عدل ولا تقعد على هذه الغفارة المغيرة فأزالها واعطاها لمولاه وقال له [ما] تغيّرها قال له لانها بعقد بالنجاسة ثم خرج المعصوم الى باب المسجد...

²⁴ Ibn Tūmart is characterized by his knowledge of things and beings. In the account of his meeting with °Abd al-Mu'min, he knows who is °Abd al-Mu'min, before him and better than him. He knows both his obscure past and his illustrious future. For accounts of the meeting in al-Baydaq see: *Documents inédits*, p. 85 and following, and al-Marrākushī, *Mu'jib*, text p. 129-130, trad. p. 156-157.

of *ḥalifat Allāh*, “the vicar of God,” that was reserved for Ibn Tūmart and his successor °Abd al-Mu’min.

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

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

— “You are the vicar of God in Maghrib and you have the right to call yourself more than ‘prince’, but rather ‘prince of believers’.” He replied to them:

— “God forbid that I claim this title, for it is that born by the Caliphs, and I serve the Abbasid Caliph, charged with spreading his call (*da°wa*) in the West.”

— “You need a title that distinguishes you.”

— “So it will be ‘Prince of the Muslims’.”

It is said that it is he who chose this title for himself and that he ordered the secretaries of the chancellery to write letters with this title, in his name or for addressing him.²⁵

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

A new era began after the conquest of Marrakech in 1147. The last Almoravid sovereign was executed, the principal city of Central Maghreb joined the Almohad movement, and the capital of the emirate fell. However, after al-Māssī’s revolt in 1148, all the provinces (except Marrakech and Fez) required that the Almohads change from their original militant organization into a territorial administration and appeal to the skilled ancient elites, whose support was essential in ensuring control over a territory where they still retained some power: Central Maghrib and al-Andalus. °Abd al-Mu’min, the first Almohad Caliph, attempted use the

²⁵ Ibn °Idārī, *Bayān*, t. 4, p. 27:

وفي هذه السنة اجتمع أشياخ القبائل على الأمير أبي يعقوب يوسف بن تاشفين وقالوا له انت خليفة الله في المغرب وحقك اكبر من ان تدعى الامير إلا بأمر المؤمنين فقال لهم حاشا لله ان اتسمى بهذا الاسم إنما يتسمى به الخلفاء وانا راجل الخليفة العباسي والقائم بدعوته في بلاد الغرب فقالوا له لا بد من اسم تمتاز به فقال لهم يكون أمير المسلمين فقليل انه هو الذي اختاره لنفسه فأمر الكتاب ان يكتبوا بهذا الاسم اذا كتبوا عنه او اليه.

Almoravid heritage. Judges, administrators, possibly the tribes, and even the great dignitaries who had served the fallen dynasty were integrated into the Almohad imperial administration. That is the case, for example, of the *kātib* Ibn ʿAṭīyya who became Vizier for a time, the closest advisor and favorite of ʿAbd al-Muʿmin (r. 1130-1163).²⁶ Similarly, Yintān b. ʿUmar, who led the Almoravid troops during the first victorious battle against Ibn Tūmart, became Vizier. He was supposedly spared for having defended Ibn Tūmart during his interview with ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn. His subsequent appointment to the post of Vizier demonstrated the confidence he had inspired in the Almohad sovereign, despite his former responsibilities in the heart of the Almoravid regime. Generally, the families of the secretaries seem to have retained their power despite the change in dynasty. Abū l-Ḥakam ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Lakhmī al-Murkhī was the secretary for ʿAbd al-Muʿmin after his father had been the secretary for ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn. Similarly, when ʿAbd al-Muʿmin decided to restore Cordoba as the capital of al-Andalus, he entrusted this task to a former Almoravid dignitary, Barrāz b. Muḥammad al-Massūfī.²⁷ Many other examples of the continuity of careers between the two dynasties can be seen in the Chancellery, in the legal-judicial field (with the Banū Rushd), and even in the control of the armies. The Almohad sovereign also exploited certain episodes from the Almoravid's history for their political and religious value; for example, ʿAbd al-Muʿmin asked Ibn ʿAṭīyya to bring forward those who participated in the battle of Uclés, an Almoravid victory, where the heir-apparent of Castile-León died, in 1108. ʿAbd Allāh b. Zaydūn and ʿUmar b. Tūrzigīn *min ašyāḥ al-Lamtuna*²⁸ were thus invited to participate with the *shaykh*-s of *jund* at the High Council (*al-majlis al-ʿālī*), where, after having testified, they were rewarded with 500 dinars each, while the Almohad *shaykh*-s in attendance received 100.²⁸

Until the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Banū Ghāniya resistance, descendants of the Almoravid sovereign who were sheltered in the Balearic Islands, put the integration of the ancient Almoravid elites at risk. Ibn ʿAṭīyya and his brother were ultimately executed as result of a plot carried out by some Almohads who were jealous of their power. It is not known if their

²⁶ Ibn ʿAṭīyya was married to Yūsuf b. Tashfīn's grand-daughter and his brother-in-law was Ibn al-Ṣaḥrawīyya, a notorious, fierce and stubborn Almoravid rebel who repented and was forgiven by the Almohads in 550/1155.

²⁷ Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalā, *Mann bi-l-imāma*, ed. ʿAbd al-Hādī Tāzī, Beyrouth, Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1987, p. 138-139.

²⁸ Ibn al-Qattān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, ed. M. ʿAlī Makkī, Beyrouth, Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1990, p. 177-178. There is a precedent for this, in the story of the battle of Yarmouk by al-Ṭabarī. Ḥālīd b. al-Walīd made those who participated in the battle of Badr leave from the ranks and demanded that they pray instead of fight (cited in *Les quatre premiers califes, extrait de la Chronique de Tabari (m. 922)*, translated by Hermann Zotenberg, Sindbad, Paris, 1981, pp. 108-110).

ties to the earlier power was the determining factor in their fate, or, rather, if they were killed because of their acquired power and the danger inherent to being in the proximity of the prince.²⁹ After ʿAbd al-Muʿmin's death in 1163, the exclusion of the heir, Muḥammad Abū ʿAbd Allāh, can also be attributed to his Almoravid ancestry as his mother came from Sūs. The future Caliph, Abū Yaʿqūb, and his half-brother Abū Ḥafṣ, grandsons from the maternal side of a Maṣmūda judge, were more skilled in the system of tribal hierarchy that the Almohads were implementing. However, this opposition appears to have been as much of a political nature as an ideological one. This also applies to the elimination of the brothers of the Maḥdī Ibn Tūmart in 1157-1158. As the main body of Almohad ideology formed gradually, including the apocryphal draft of the writings of Maḥdī³⁰, one might ask whether the Almohad opposition to the Maliki school might not also have been based on a political rationale rather than a dogmatic one, in order to compete with the local elites who, through the patrimonial heritage of judicial offices, formed an “aristocratic judicature” with great financial power in al-Andalus.³¹

The portrait that was painted by al-Marrākushī of the Almoravid sovereign, ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn, in his *Muʿjib* reveals that Almohad writers were selective in their appreciation of the Almoravids and that they only paid tribute to certain sovereigns of the Saharan dynasty. As it was intended for an Eastern audience, this narrative consisted of princes whose piety was

²⁹ Amira K. Bennison, “Tribal identities and the formation of the Almohad elite: the salutary tale of Ibn ʿAtiyya”, in Mohamed Méouak (ed.), *Biografías magrebíes: identidades y grupos religiosos, sociales y políticos en el Magreb medieval*, Madrid: CSIC, 2012, EOBA, XVII, pp. 245-271.

³⁰ Madeleine Fletcher. “Al-Andalus and North Africa in the Almohad Ideology”. In *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*. Eds. Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Manuela Marín. Handbuch der Orientalistik 12. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.

³¹ On this question, see Maribel Fierro, « The qāḍī as ruler », *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam*, Madrid, 1994, pp. 71-116. The figure of the judge benefitted from his dedication to the ʿilm (the monopoly over the transmission of science had a strong power of legitimation), but also from his financial strength. This judge-wealth relationship is a topos in the Arab sources and clearly designates the judicature as a source of political power.

famous. Criticisms are actually reflected in certain explanations or details, and contributed to the value of the the path followed by the Almohad Caliphs:

When he succeeded his father, he took the same title of *amīr al-muslimīn* and called his companions “Almoravids”. He followed the path opened by his father in choosing the *jihād*, in terrorizing the enemy and in defending the country. He had good behavior and good intentions, a noble soul, he stayed away from injustice; he was closer to the hermit and the ascetic than the king and the dominant ones. Very attached to the people of the Law and Religion, he made no decisions in his kingdom without first consulting the *fuqahā’*. When he appointed a *qāḍī*, he demanded that they appeal to four doctors of the Law, when making any decision.³²

°Alī’s piety, presented here as a quality, becomes a flaw due to his over-the-top character and the excessive caution that it generated in him. It is in this way that the Almoravids served as counter-models and shaped, in part, representations of the Almohad power by the court authors.

Conclusion

If the often-rewritten chronicles do not allow us to know whether the idea of the Caliphate was present or not with the first Almoravids, then the later sources, by the credit they granted to this notion and by certain allusions, reveal that the the Caliphate was the target of all important powers in the Maghrib in the eleventh century.³³ The etymology of the place name ‘Marrakech,’ composed from *amūr* and *Yākush* and meaning “The Land of God,” reveals the original nature of the political-religious project of the Almoravids: the construction of a city of God on earth. The recognition of the Abbasid authority was therefore a pragmatic and cautious

³² Al-Marrākuṣī, *Mu‘jib*, ed. p. 122, spanish translation p. 127:

وقام بامر من بعده ابنه على بن يوسف بن تاشفين وتلقب بلقب ابيه امير المسلمين وسمى اصحابه المرابطين فجري على سنن ابيه في ايثار الجهاد واخافة العدو وحماية البلاد وكان حسن السيرة جيّد الطوية نزبه النفس بعيدا عن الظلم كان الى ان يُعدّ في الزهّاد والمتبتلين لُقرب منه الى ان يُعدّ في الملوك والمتغلبين واشتدّ ايثاره لاهل الفقه والدين وكان لا يقطع امرا في جميع مملكته دون مشاورة الفقهاء فكان اذا ولىّ احدا من قضاته كان فيما يعهد اليه ألا يقطع امرا ولا يبتّ حكومة في صغير من الامور ولا كبير الا بمحضر اربعة من الفقهاء

فبلغ الفقهاء في ايامه مبلغا عظيما لم يبلغوا مثله في الصدر الأوّل من فتح الاندلس ولم يزل الفقهاء على ذلك وامور المسلمين راجعة اليهم واحكامهم صغيرها وكبيرها موقوفة عليهم طول مدّته فعظم امر الفقهاء كما ذكرنا وانصرف وجه الناس اليهم فكثرت لذلك اموالهم واتسعت مكاسبهم

³³ Al-Marrākuṣī, *Mu‘jib*, ed. p. 64, spanish translation p. 74:

فاشبهت حال ملوك الاندلس بعد الفتنة حال ملوك الطوائف من الفرس بعد قتل دارا بن دارا ولم يزالوا كذلك واحوال الاندلس تضعف وثغورها تختلّ ومجاورها من الروم تشتدّ اطماعهم ويقوى تشوّفهم الى ان جمع الله الكلمة ورأب الصدع ونظم الشمل وحسم الخلاف واعزّ الدين واعلى كلمة الاسلام وقطع طمع العدو يُمْن نقيبة امير المسلمين وناصر الدين ابى يعقوب يوسف بن تاشفين اللمتونى رحمه الله .

path chosen by the Almoravids. However, it was the political structures that they founded in both the Maghrib and al-Andalus that paved the way for the Almohad emancipation. The conservation of the capital and the semantic revitalization of its name by ʿAbd al-Muʿmin ensured that the Almohad mission was a progression from the Almoravid movement. The Almohad authors also presented the accession of the Almoravids in a positive manner. This can be seen in a passage from the *Muʿjib* that equates the assimilation of al-Andalus at the end of the eleventh century with the *jāhiliyya*, and consequently, in implicit terms, the intervention of Yūsuf b. Tashfīn in the unification of the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad:

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

In the system of government that was developed in the eleventh century, the Almoravids imposed the *faqīh* as a point of legitimization and a source of law. They also delegated a fraction of their power to the provincial governors, as shown through the proclamation and leadership of the *jihād* as well as coin production. The Almohads thus aligned their legitimacy and authority in the person of the *imām*-Caliph, who had a monopoly over all functions, including that of Supreme Judge, general in chief of the army of the faithful, interpreter of the Rule, and as the source of the Law. This resulted in the Almohad Era, from the military perspective, through the disappearance of the summer border raids and by an increasing number of truces. The *jihād* gave rise to the formation of large Caliphal armies led personally by the *imām* (in 1153, 1161, 1172, 1184, 1195, 1205, 1211, 1212) and, from the monetary perspective, through the removal of any reference to the date or the workshop stamped on dinars and dirhems. The provincial Almohad organization was thus the culmination of a processes set in place by the Almoravids through the development of nation-state structures with a concentrated and extreme centralization of powers.