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## **Violence and Warfare in Medieval Western Islam**

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## **Violence and Warfare in Medieval Western Islam**

Studies bearing on the relationship between religion and violence in Islam are numerous. So are those on Ibn Khaldūn's theory of the State, which bases the latter's emergence on the 'natural' violence of peripheral tribes. This contribution aims to put the general theory that can be drawn from these studies into perspective by confronting it with some local examples: the Andalusian Taifas, the Almoravid emirate and the Almohad caliphate. These case studies highlight the diversity of forms taken by state violence and warfare in Islamic contexts. The integration of secular or profane patterns in the killing of enemies or in warfare, and the justification of violence sometimes by religion, sometimes by popular wisdom or common sense, contradict the fairly widespread essentialist discourses on the congenital relationship that Islam and violence maintained from the beginning. On the contrary, these processes highlight the complexity and diversity of the discursive justification of physical violence.

**Keywords:** Berber empires; Islamic societies; medieval Maghreb; warfare; violence; religion

**Introduction**<sup>1</sup> Anthropological studies of desert and steppe societies have painted a striking and coherent picture of the violence endemic to nomadic pastoralists: defence of the group, sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of the community, an endogamy that contrasts with the northern Mediterranean's exogamy, the protection of women as safeguards of the group's fertility, with their consequent subjugation, and so on. One could spend pages describing at length this society of 'Harem and cousins' (Tillion 2015), but its analysis and understanding have already generated many books and articles (Geertz 1968; Gellner 1969; Chelhod 1986; Brett and Fentress 2010). Nevertheless, this anthropological approach has often remained a-historical. It emerged during the colonial era and, as such, is part and parcel of the Orientalism classically described and critiqued by Edward Said (2003). To a greater or lesser extent, this scholarship uses the same primary sources, first among them being Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406; Al-Azmeh 1982; Brett 1999; Fromherz 2010). This famous fourteenth-century Maghrebi historian was one of the first theorists of the Nation-State (ar. *dawla*, meaning the 'wheel' [of power], or the dynasty) in the Arab Islamic world. Ibn Khaldūn devoted many pages of his *Prolegomena* (*Muqaddima*) to the harsh and natural violence characteristic of the tribes on the margins of civilisation, and the solidarity ('*aṣabiyya*) that bound together the several members of a tribe. This vital energy, when it met a religious mission (*da'wa*), allowed them to conquer urban civilisation (*ḥaḍāra*) and take control of it. There, according to Ibn Khaldūn, within three generations (*ajyāl*), luxury, wealth and the abundance of goods present in the city dissolved the bonds of solidarity. The warrior would become a merchant, or even better, a scholar or an artist, and defend his own interests rather than those of the group. This process would gradually lead to the tribe's de-militarisation, which would then be ripe to be conquered by a new group emerging out of the city's rural hinterland.

The strength and coherence of Ibn Khaldūn's analysis of the sociological, historical and anthropological processes that led steppe and desert tribes to conquer the city and its

civilisation have influenced all researchers since the Baron de Slane translated into French in the nineteenth century the *Prolegomena (Muqaddima)* and the *History of the Berbers*, the last two volumes of Ibn Khaldūn's monumental *History of Examples (Kitāb al-ībar)*. Even today, sociologists, historians and politicians do not hesitate to use this interpretative framework to re-read the history of empires or contemporary jihadism (Bozarslan 2014; Martinez-Gros 2014; Martinez-Gros 2016). What was initially a schema meant to explain a locally and temporally bounded phenomenon has been turned into an essentialist recipe capable of accounting for processes and events that are hugely different from each other.

## **I- Context and traditional historiographical trends**

Within the framework of Ibn Khaldūn's interpretation, but aware of its limit and historical specificity, we shall try in this article to understand the evolution that the 'natural' or 'original' violence of the tribes underwent in contact with the religious mission (*da'wa*) and which allowed them to build an empire. One agenda will be to discern what in warfare can be attributed to local Islam(s) and what not. In order to do so, we shall present warfare and religion in a specific space, the Maghreb and Islamicate Spain, from the end of the eleventh to the end of the thirteenth century. This was the moment when, for the first time in history, indigenous Berber tribes gained power on a regional and imperial scale, by politically unifying the north of the African continent, from Tripolitania (today's western Libya) to the Atlantic coast, and al-Andalus – the Iberian part of the Muslim West. First the Ṣanhāja Berbers, core group of the Almoravids (1058–1147), then the Maṣmūda Berbers, core group of the Almohads (1147–1269), succeeded in uniting a large number of the Maghreb tribes around a dual project of Islamic reform and territorial expansion. In so doing, they were in historical continuity with the Kutāma Berbers, who had contributed at the beginning of the tenth century to the emergence of the Shiite Fatimid Caliphate of Kairouan (Halm 1996; Brett

2001). These two local dynasties opened the way for the Western Muslim emancipation from the Eastern Arab matrix. The first dynasty (the Almoravids) respected the Eastern Caliph's symbolic authority; it claimed mere delegated authority as an emirate. The second dynasty (the Almohads), which overthrew the Almoravids, made a universalist claim to the leadership of the whole community of believers – a new regenerated *umma*. It built an original dogmatic political and religious system. The Almohad sovereigns claimed for themselves all the supreme titles that were used in Islam: *imām* ('supreme guide'), caliph, and *amīr al-mu'minīn* ('prince of believers'). They also cloaked themselves in many attributes of holiness and divine election: impeccability (*iṣma*), mahdism, and proximity to God (*wilāya*).

Meanwhile, the northern Iberian Peninsula's Christian polities had begun to participate in a double movement: on the one hand, a demographic and military expansion, and on the other, the reform of Christianity, commonly known as the 'Gregorian reform'. Any work dealing with the Iberian Peninsula between the tenth and fifteenth centuries cannot avoid addressing the convergence of the military aspects of expansion and religious discourse; military and religious institutions; 'Holy War', 'Crusade', 'Reconquest', *jihād*, military-monastic orders (Temple, Hospital, Calatrava ...). To list the titles of articles or books dealing with these questions would fill a whole book by itself, which we shall spare ourselves here. Depending on their approaches, be it for instance law, archaeology, anthropology, social or cultural history, history of art, history of institutions, or intellectual history, authors either insist on the religious character of the war between Islam and Christendom or, on the contrary, attenuate this character. Some insist on the unification of territories and political, military and/or religious institutions on each side of the line of contact between the Christian and Islamic polities, and thus on the progressive reduction of conflicts within each side (the *frontera*), while others on the contrary underline opposite tendencies – alliances between Christian and Muslim kingdoms, betrayals, non-respect of

religious laws in the conduct of war, rupture with tradition, ‘mixed’ polities, internal dissensions. Fashionable facts, the international and geopolitical context of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and the political positioning of the authors help to explain these divergent approaches.

As for Maghrebi societies, many works, mostly anthropological in nature, have focused on Morocco or Algeria’s Berbers. One will mention several scholars who have played a major role in the study of Maghreb societies, including among others Ernest Gellner, Clifford Geertz and Jacques Berque. We shall insist especially here on the first named, rather than on the others because Berque’s literary and ethnographic approach is less relevant to the issue at hand, and since Geertz focused on a comparison between two forms of Islamic societies isolated from one another, the Moroccan and the Indonesian. Both Berque and Geertz deal only indirectly with violence, the conflictuality of the Berber societies of the Maghreb, or conflict resolution. It is perhaps Gellner’s work, in particular his *Saints of the Atlas*, that most directly concerns our topic – on three grounds. First, because his presentation of segmentation, which he borrowed from Evans-Pritchard (1951), and the role he attributes to peaceful saints as mediators in conflict resolution give us some avenues of work for the analysis of medieval Berber societies; second, because in later articles he raised the question of how large albeit ephemeral tribal coalitions formed themselves and managed to found empires; third and finally, because he admits that one of his sources of inspiration, along with the philosopher David Hume (1757) and the anthropologist Robert Montagne (1930), is Ibn Khaldūn. The famous and controversial segmental theory, unfamiliar to Maghreb specialists at that time, allowed the elaboration of a model of ‘ordered anarchy’. It explained how, in an egalitarian and acephalous society, the lineage system takes the place of a specialised political apparatus and ensures the minimum of order and cooperation necessary for social

life. Gellner developed this theory after a stay in Morocco at the end of the 1950s. I shall confront it with the Almoravid and Almohad configurations.

Following Hume, Gellner argues that every monotheistic faith experiences a pendular oscillation between the unitarian zeal of the central scholarly tradition and the deviant cult addressed to mediating figures (in relation to the divine) proper to local popular traditions. The city needs the scholar and begets him/her, while the tribe needs the saint and begets him/her. Gellner focuses on the role played by violence in the foundation of social order; in his version of segmentarity, violence is not only a vector of regulation but also the very way in which society is structured. How is order maintained in a segmented society? Gellner responds that only fear and the moderating role of the saints, through their function of arbitration, allow for a certain level of maintenance of order and civil peace. Religious groups, unlike other social groupings in that world, are stratified and unequal; power is concentrated there and its permanence gives the leader real authority. The saint is above segmental oppositions; his neutrality and pacifism (he does not bear arms) make him the indispensable arbiter of any conflict. Thanks to him 'lay groups' cooperate and avoid being constantly at war with one another. The saint guarantees permanence in a society that is constantly threatened with extinction because of the conflicts that its own structure engenders. Finally, the saint is the link between the tribes and the entire Muslim community.<sup>2</sup> Gellner's theory was much criticised.<sup>3</sup> His segmentary model was accused of being functionalist. Furthermore the binary and pendular scheme he attributed to Islam and the dual mediating function of the saints were deemed too schematic.

And indeed, the Almohads seem a good counter-example to Gellner's bipolar model: a charismatic figure, canonised during his lifetime or just after his death, the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130) gave birth to a highly theorised and conceptual religion, inspired, theologically and socially, by Neoplatonism and by Book 5 of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>4</sup> This Mahdī,

in Gellner's typology, should be categorised as the founder of a 'deviant cult', but the religion founded matches Gellner's 'unitarian zeal of the central learned tradition'. In fact, as Gellner explained in later articles, his opposition between the two types (unitarian zeal versus deviant cult) is more heuristic than descriptive. It is a help to understanding different moments in history. Gellner's theory thus provides an explanation for a paradox hitherto simply noted: the ability of Islam to serve both state-building and protest activism (Mahé 1998). In a way, as we shall see below, the Almohad example both confirms and nuances Gellner's theories: an educated saint, outsider to the tribes in which he intervened, unified these tribes, and gave them a mission (*daw'a*) that drove them to take over the cities and the state apparatus. This movement of conquest started from the veneration that a charismatic figure, Ibn Tūmart, generated among the Atlas Mountains' sedentary tribes and led to the establishment of a rigorous, and highly intellectual Islam, centred on scholars, knowledge and the city. The Almohads represent one kind of relationship between armed violence and religion; but we must first look at the two political systems that preceded them so as to explore constants and discontinuities.

## **II- Al-Andalus and the Almoravids**

In the tenth century, al-Andalus – the part of the Iberian Peninsula that belonged to the Islamic commonwealth – was ruled by a caliph who derived his legitimacy from his Umayyad lineage. Indeed, when the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus (660–750) was overthrown in 750 by the Abbasids, an Umayyad prince ('Abd al-Raḥmān I al-Dākhil 'The Immigrant'), whose mother was a Berber slave, allegedly fled towards the West and founded the Umayyad Emirate of Córdoba. This emirate was then promoted by one of his descendants, 'Abd al-Raḥmān III al-Nāṣir 'The Victorious' (r. 920–961), to a caliphate in 929, two decades after the appearance of the Shiite Fatimid caliphate of Kairouan (909). But



under the reign of his successor, al-Ḥakam II (r. 961–976), a civilian mayor of the palace (*ḥājib*), Ibn Abī ‘Āmir, seized power and founded a dynasty of chamberlains, the Amirids, competing with the caliphate, which he neither abolished nor claimed for himself. He built a palatial city near Córdoba, Madīnat al-Zāhira, to compete with Madīnat al-Zahrā’, the caliphal palatial city created earlier by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III. Although he was of civilian origin, Ibn Abī ‘Āmir led 52 military expeditions against the Christian northern territories of the Peninsula (including the sacking of Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela) during his 26-year ‘reign’, and based his reputation and legitimacy on the waging of military *jihād* against the ‘infidels’, thus receiving the nickname al-Manṣūr the ‘victorious’ (the Almanzor of the Romance sources).

### ***1. Fatimid and Umayyad rivalry in the Maghreb***

The Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba also engaged in a struggle for influence in the south, in the Far Maghreb (present-day Morocco) against the Shiite Fatimids of Ifrīqiya. However, in 358/969, the latter moved their capital to Egypt, founded al-Qāhira (the ‘Victorious’, Cairo), and relocated there the tombs of the first Imams of the dynasty. In 1009, the Umayyad political system entered a crisis and, in 1031, the caliphate of Córdoba broke up into about thirty principalities, the so-called Taifa kingdoms, each dreaming that it could be a ‘new Córdoba’. The prince-poets who ruled these little kingdoms created courts where they welcomed poets who sang their virtues and their merits and strengthened their legitimacy. Thus, Bruna Soravia (1998), who has studied the chanceries of the Taifa kingdoms, calls these authors, poets and scribes, ‘king-makers’. The Taifa kings waged war among themselves, using northern Christians as mercenaries.<sup>5</sup> When the Iberian Christian principalities of the North went on the offensive, these Taifa kings agreed to pay them heavy tributes to buy peace.

Due to the remoteness or disappearance of the earlier competing polities (Fatimids, now in Egypt, and Umayyad Córdoba now exploded Caliphate), external interventions in the Maghreb gradually ceased. This ultimately resulted in a power vacuum that allowed local forces to emerge. It was at this moment that the Almoravids arose. These Saharan tribes, belonging to the tribal confederation of Ṣanhāja, controlled the gold routes to and from the Kingdom of Ghana, which gave them significant financial resources. Thus, they managed to move northward and subdue the various tribes that had previously been supported by powerful allies, be they Umayyads or Fatimids. The rise of these partially Islamised Saharan tribes was backed by a programme of Islamic reform, which turned into a vast movement of Islamisation of the interior regions of the Maghreb. ‘Faithful to the Tradition (sunna)’, they allied with the weaker tribes ‘to proclaim the truth, fight against the violations of the Law, and suppress illegal taxes’ (Ibn ‘Idhārī 1983, IV: 11), and thus asserted their presence in the region. Interestingly, the two etymologies of the name ‘Almoravids’ (*al-muRāBiṭūn*) proposed by the Arab sources are either the ‘refugees in a fortified convent’ (*RiBāṭ*) or ‘those who form a highly cohesive group’ (*muRāBiṭūn*).

## ***2. A power vacuum and the rise of the Almoravid Emirate***

In 463/1071, the prince of the Ṣanhāja, Abū Bakr b. ‘Umar, laid the foundations of the capital, Marrakech (*Murr Yakush* = the ‘City of God’ in Berber; see Ghouirgate 2014, 88–102), thus rooting the movement in the territory. Symbolically, the building of the *Qaṣr al-ḥajar*, the ‘stone palace’, in an area where most palaces were built from adobe, constituted a stable and enduring foothold for the federation of nomadic tribes. This decision was the first step in the construction of an emiral State and the transformation of the reform movement into a polity. That same year, Abū Bakr b. ‘Umar appointed Yūsuf b. Tashfīn as his lieutenant before returning south to confirm his authority in the Sahara. This episode is more important

than it seems. Here, two very different models of political and social organisations were competing. The first is the nomadic, tribal model in which power moves with the shaykh, the military and political leader; the second is the sedentary model of the emirate, whose institutions (offices, chancery, palace guard and clienteles) constitute the heart of power by ensuring the permanence of the prince's sovereignty in his absence and establishing a fallback position for him. One sees, for instance, how after the victory of Zallāqa (1085), Yūsuf b. Tashfīn returned to the Maghreb and to Marrakech because his heir, Sīr, had died. The continuity of the dynasty's power was threatened, and the sovereign's physical presence was required for the reassertion of his authority. Al-Andalus was for the Berber dynasties one of the territories where their legitimacy was reinforced, particularly through *jihād*, but it was in the Maghreb that their power was imposed and confirmed.

Abū Bakr b. 'Umar left Marrakech after establishing it as the capital. However, he had not yet laid the durable foundations of an Islamic state. It was Abū Bakr b. 'Umar's lieutenant and cousin, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn, who ultimately brought to completion a number of the institutions that had been initiated by Abū Bakr b. 'Umar. These included administrative offices; taxes, which respected the limits of Qur'ānic taxation on Muslims but included a specific tax on Jews within Almoravid territories; a princely court; diplomacy; the dispatching of ambassadors across al-Andalus; and a royal guard composed of black slaves and Christian mercenaries whom he outfitted with horses (Ibn 'Idhārī 1983, IV: 23). Whatever religious imperative moved the Almoravids, it did not prevent them from employing unbelievers – like the Umayyads of Damascus (660–750), who had made massive use of Byzantine civil servants in their administration, or the Byzantine Chalcedonian emperors, who had used non-Chalcedonian Armenian contingents in their armies.<sup>6</sup> Through all these policies, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn established the administrative, fiscal, political and military structures that allowed him to wield an authority that no longer relied on tribal ties and

patron-client relationships with his supporters. On the basis of these accomplishments and the established land base, he was able in 465/1073 to skilfully depose his cousin Abū Bakr and marry the latter's wife, Zaynab bt. al-Nafzāwiyya, thus becoming the undisputed ruler and true founder of the Almoravid emirate (Ibn 'Idārī 1961, 69; Ibn Khaldūn 1999, II:71–72; Viguera Molíns 1997; Messier 2010, 30).

### ***3. The expansion of the Iberian Christian kingdoms***

In 1085, Alfonso VI of Castile-Leon took possession of the powerful Taifa state centred on Toledo, the first great Muslim city to be captured by Christians since the beginning of the Islamic conquests. This loss resonated strongly in the Islamic world of the time, even in the Middle East, where it was mentioned in many contemporary and later chronicles, such as Ibn al-Athīr's thirteenth-century *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*. In the West, it provoked the intervention in the Iberian Peninsula of the new force that had just emerged in the Maghreb: the Almoravids. The reigning Emir, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn (r. 1071–1106), crossed the Strait of Gibraltar with his army, answering the call of the Andalusian ulemas to defend al-Andalus. Then, after asking Malikite scholars whether it was legitimate for him to declare *jihād* against Muslim princes (Lévi-Provençal 1955; Viguera Molíns 1977; Lagardère 1985),<sup>7</sup> he conquered the various Taifas one by one in order to re-establish Qur'ānic taxation and wage *jihād* against the Christians in the north.

But the battle Yūsuf b. Tashfīn fought against Alfonso VI of Castile reveals the way war was conceived in al-Andalus. Arriving with his Saharan troops in 1086, the Emir met Alfonso VI at Zallāqa (Las Sagradas). The chronicles describe the order of battle: Yūsuf's army held back while the Andalusian troops led by the Taifas princes and the Andalusian garrisons were put in the front line facing the Castilian-Leonese cavalry. The enthusiasm of the Andalusian troops and the city garrisons seemed muted, recalling a characteristic of Andalusian society

that inspired Ibn Khaldūn's thought a few centuries later: the development of 'civilised' urban societies goes along with the disarmament of the population. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the pre-modern nation-state is characterised less by the Weberian 'monopoly of legitimate violence' than by its disarmament. In the eleventh century, the cities of al-Andalus were at the very end of the evolutionary process that Ibn Khaldūn would envisage: the rise of culture, civilisation and its refinements (architecture, libraries, poetry, philosophy...) was made possible by the accumulation in the city of material wealth, through the tribute that the city / state levied on its periphery and on the outlying nomadic areas. And indeed, we have many indications that Andalusian cities were not militarised during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For instance, in 1124, the troops of Alfonso the Battler, King of Aragon, spent almost a year in al-Andalus, plundering the countryside around the big cities, without encountering any resistance. After this episode, Ibn Rushd al-Jidd (d. 1126), Averroes's grandfather, a Maliki lawyer and Great Judge of Córdoba, issued a *fatwa* banishing Granada's Christian community for having allegedly helped the Aragonese and thus broken the Islamic pact of the *dhimma* that ensured the security of the subjected Christians and their property (Lagardère 1989; Serrano 1996).

The issue of the diffusion (or not) of the spirit of *jihād* in the Iberian Peninsula in the twelfth century has been addressed by Pierre Guichard in his book on the Muslims of Valencia (1990). Guichard uses Ibn Khafāja's poetry to deduce the absence of this spirit of *jihād* in al-Andalus, noting the absence of the term *jihād* in these poems. Ibn Khafāja was a high-ranking official in the Almoravid province of Valencia, who as a youth had seen his best friend killed by Christian troops. Guichard concludes that, if an author who had been personally hurt by the conflicts with Christians did not use his poetry to defend the necessity of war against Christians, it was a sign that *jihād* was not at all widespread in his society. Indeed, the poetry of Ibn Khafāja is famous in the Islamic world for his pastoral descriptions

of the flora and fauna al-Andalus. But it is anachronistic to interpret it as an argument for religious tolerance in Andalusian society and for some generalised convivencia in the Iberian Peninsula (Menocal 2003; for a critique, see e.g. Catlos 2001–2002; Soravia 2009; Buresi 2013). The references and lexicon used by this poet all come from the Arabian (not Iberian) Peninsula and there are many references to the great ancient Umayyad and Abbasid poets of the East (al-Mutanabbī, al-Jāhiz, Ibn al-Muqaffa' ...). So this poetry should to be read as a spiritual *jihād*, a recollection of a disappearing world. It is not *jihād* in itself that is weak in al-Andalus, as Guichard argues, but military *jihād*. Indeed, *jihād* may simultaneously mean asceticism, introspective effort and living memory, as well as physical warfare (Heck 2004) 'in the path of God' (*fī sabīl Allāh*). In the Muslim West, and particularly in al-Andalus during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the pen was considered the best weapon to use in *jihād*, and it is not surprising that polemical treatises against Christians or Jews multiplied at that time. Is this very different in the East, or could a similar analysis be made of, for example, al-Sulamī's *Book of jihād* (1105)? Emmanuel Sivan (1968) considers this treatise as emblematic of the spread of the spirit of *jihād* in Near Eastern societies, although it can be interpreted in a completely different sense. In fact, in both the Islamic East and West, the duty to wage *jihād* (as combat) is delegated to the prince, and the predominant idea is that the population should be exempted from it (it is a *farḍ kifāya*, an obligation falling on a subset acting for the group, not *farḍ 'ayn*, an obligation that falls on each and every individual). It is only in the case of an attack (city siege) that this duty is imposed on all (Sivan 1968). Al-Sulamī's treatise is in fact a rather classical condemnation of the rulers by a pious scholar who despised and criticised the exercise of power. As for al-Andalus, one could also refer to another *fatwa* (legal opinion) of the Maliki jurist Ibn Rushd al-Jidd, who died in Córdoba in 1126. He placed *jihād* before *ḥājj* in the hierarchy of individual obligations falling on the Muslim faithful, not because al-Andalus was threatened by attack by northern Christian

princes, which would have been insufficient reason to lower the rank of the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five mandatory ‘pillars’ of Islam, but because the risks of the journey were considered greater than those incurred by doing *jihād* (Lagardère 1998, 184; Buresi 2003).

#### **4. War under the Almoravids**

The juridical legalism of the Almoravid rulers (1170–1147) and the administrative organisation of their principality had many consequences for warfare. The Almoravids based their legitimacy on their military *jihād* against the Christian Iberian princes and the restoration of taxation as mandated by the Qur’ān. The Almoravid prince delegated to the provincial governors the task of carrying out this *jihād* annually, and this resulted in a few raids on the borders of al-Andalus, and the taking of plunder (cattle, booty and captives for slavery or ransom). All the sources reveal that the endemic state of war and the annual friction between the two parties across the border rarely led to deaths. The aim was to take enemy captives to boost the supply of slave labour for the armies, agriculture and domestic work or for ransom. The ransom and redemption of captives was institutionalised during this period and, at the end of the twelfth century, professional Latin institutions appeared, such as the Order of Santiago, founded in 1171, the Mercedarians and the Trinitarians, who devoted a large part of their activity to supplement the efforts of officials specialised in ransoming (in Spanish *alfaunque*, from the Arabic *fakkāk*; see Buresi 2007).

At this point, the Almoravids resurrected the practice of *niyāba* (‘delegation’) that the Abbasids had conceptualised in the tenth-century Caliphate of Bagdad. The *nā’ib* is a substitute for the prince, whose prerogatives he has. A letter of 1143 clearly describes the Almoravid conception of the powers of provincial governors: ‘Through the mouth of the governor’, says the text, ‘it is the prince who speaks; through his eyes, it is the prince who sees.’ The Almoravid governors are therefore characterised, in fact and in law, by a high

degree of independence, which *pace* Vincent Lagardère (1998), should not be seen as a reflection of the weakness of the central power. In fact, the Almoravid Emir's control of the governors was very strong: he appointed and dismissed them. Another telling detail is that the average term in office for a governor was two-and-a-half years. These men's independence was matched by their accountability. Any failure of provincial policy, military or fiscal, was attributed to the provincial governor. It was he who organised the annual military expeditions of legal war (*jihād*) against Christians, and it was he who controlled the minting of coins.

War was then a legal activity, governed by law, as interpreted by the lawyers (*fuqahā'*), particularly with regard to its various stages: declaration of war – the state of war was in fact permanent, but an invitation to convert or submit to God's law had to be made and rejected before battle could be joined, division of the spoils, treatment of enemy combatants, women, children and the elderly (Morabia 1993; Abou El Fadl 2001; Bonner 2008). Respect for God's law and the 'right path' that He has charted for His faithful was meant to protect the Muslims from error and ensure their ultimate victory over the pagans, and those who had gone astray, that is Christians and Jews. This legal framework explains why only a single truce is recorded during the Almoravid period, in 1120. War was not continuous, but was systematically organised. In the second quarter of the twelfth century, a few military defeats and increased fiscal pressure weakened the two pillars on which the Almoravids had built their legitimacy. We have here therefore a very different relation of religion to war than among the Taifa kingdoms, which, as we shall see, also diverges from that obtaining under the Almohads.

### **III- The Almohads**

Tribes from the Atlas Mountains took advantage of this weakness to challenge the Almoravid Saharan regime that dominated the plains of Morocco, and to rebel under the direction of Ibn



Tūmart, a charismatic personality regarded as the Mahdī, the Messiah who was to come at the end of time to fight the forces of the Antichrist (the Islamic *Dajjāl*). From then on, the relationship of the authorities to the divine law changed profoundly: the Malikite legal school that had been dominant in the Maghrib was prohibited. The *fuqahā'*, whose job was to give their advice in the form of legal opinions (*fatwas*), and who embodied Gellner's urban literary Islam, were excluded from the process of interpreting the divine law and replaced by the sole person of the Mahdī, Gellner's 'rural saint', and his successors, the 'rightly-guided' (*rāshidūn*) caliphs-*imāms*. When the Almohads overthrew the Almoravids, they initially took a directly opposite position from their opponents. Accused by the Almoravids of being Kharijites (*khawārij*), 'those who left [the ranks, of Islam]', which is the pejorative name given by their enemies to the third major trend in Islam (now mainly represented by the Ibaḍī communities), after Shiism and Sunnism, the Almohads accused the Almoravids in turn of being anthropomorphists (*mujassimūn*) because of their rejection of the allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses that refer to corporal elements in the divinity (hands, eye, throne, etc.; see Lévi-Provençal 1928, 77/125).<sup>8</sup> Thus, they presented their rebellion against them as a religious war waged not against other Muslims, but against pagans.

### ***1- The fight against the Almoravids: rebellion and conquest***

The rebellion against the Almoravids is presented as the perfect *jihād*, as is clear in this letter, reproduced in the twelfth century by al-Baydhaq, which Ibn Tūmart addressed to his followers (1124–1130):

Know – May God help you – that fighting them is a religious obligation for most of you, for those who are able to fight. Wage constant *jihād* against the veiled infidels [i.e. the Almoravids], for it is more important to fight them than to fight the Christians (*Rūm*) and all the infidels, twice or more. Indeed, they have

attributed a bodily aspect to the Creator – May He be glorified, rejected monotheism (*tawḥīd*), and were rebellious against the truth ... (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 9/15)

The originality of this text lies in the fact that it makes *jihād* an individual duty (*farḍ ‘ayn*) for all those who have the strength to fight, and says it is imperative to give priority to fighting against the Almoravids (the ‘veiled infidels’) rather than against Christians. This is a doctrinal innovation: individual duty rather than collective, priority to the struggle against internal infidels (who claim to be Muslims), rather than against the external unbelievers (Christians). This reformulation of the traditional doctrine of *jihād* is conceived as a means to encourage mobilisation and ideological support of the Almohad movement. This rupture is confirmed in another letter addressed to the Almoravids:

The Almohads will come to you, please God. In their hands are sharp sabres and fine lances from Samhar and Rudayna. The Almohads armed themselves to stop your attacks, as did the people of Badr [famous victory of the Prophet Muḥammad in 624 against the Quraysh of Mecca]. They will strike with their sword, and with their spear they will strike in the path of God! Certainly there will come an army of Arabs whom the divine authority will lead: it will bubble over you as the water of a pot boils on a burning fire! ... I ask God for infallibility, for no one but God knows what is hidden. The orders of God are judgments that we must obey. And those who act differently will have to be killed. (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 12/19–20)

This innovative feature of the Almohad movement is also evident from the names given to cities and in epigraphy. The founding of *Ribāṭ al-Faṭḥ* (‘fortress of victory’, Rabat) reveals the militant nature of the Almohad movement, especially when compared with the name of *Madīnat al-salām* (‘the city of peace/salvation’) given to Baghdad by its Abbasid founders (750). The other name the Almohad chroniclers gave to Rabat is *Mahdiyya* (the ‘Mahdi’s

[city]’), competing with the city of the same name that the Fatimids had founded in the tenth century not far from Kairouan. In addition, the Almohads renamed Gibraltar (*Jabal Ṭāriq*, named after the eighth-century conqueror, Ṭāriq b. Ziyād) as *Jabal al-fath* (‘the mountain of the victory’). From then on, all the chroniclers and later authors would use this new name. It contributed to anonymising the seventh-century territorial expansion and to make the Almohads re-enactors of the original Iberian conquest. This renaming attests not only to the Almohads’s reformulation of the concept of *jihād* but also to the symbolic importance that they attributed to the wresting of al-Andalus from the Almoravids.

## ***2- The Almohad community’s bloody foundation***

The Almohad political system seems to have operated through the use of a ‘purgative’ violence that was concentrically centrifugal. The first to have to pay with their blood were the members of the movement’s founding tribes. Thus al-Baydhaq reports that after the ninth expedition, Ibn Tūmart allegedly charged his general al-Bashīr with carrying out the ‘sorting out’ (*al-tamyīz*):

Many days passed and God gratified the Mahdī of al-Bashīr’s call (*da‘wa*). Then he ordered the ‘sorting out’. Al-Bashīr began to exclude from the Almohads those who were dissenters, hypocrites and deceitful, so that the perfidious were separated from the good. Then the people saw the truth through their eyes and the believers redoubled their faith. As for the wrong-doers (*al-ẓālimūn*), they tasted the fire knowing that they were going to be thrown there and would find no refuge to escape [an echo of Q XVIII, 53: ‘And the criminals will see the Fire and will be certain that they are to fall therein. And they will not find from it a way elsewhere.’]. The sorting out operated by al-Bashīr in the party lasted from Thursday to Friday, forty days later. The people of the five tribes were killed

during this period in the place called Īgar-an-ūsannān: this is where the Īsalayīn-an-uh-nā'in perished. Among the Hintāta, the Īmattazgā died. The Īn Māgūs were executed at the place called Īgar-an-Ait Kūriyīt, as well as the Āṣāddan and the Gadmīwa of Tākūšt. Then al-Bashīr passed the survivors in review, to go on an expedition, with the blessing of God the Mighty. (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 78/126–127)

Here we are witnessing an internal purifying violence. Its duration, forty days, refers not only to Qur'ānic verses but also to a biblical period of deprivation, penance and purification, and more particularly to the book of Jonah (Jonah, III, 4; Q X: 'Yūnus'), whose importance as a prophet in Islam in general, and in the Maghreb in particular, is confirmed by numerous historical references.<sup>9</sup> This bloody purge is atypical, given what one would expect from anthropological studies, which have established that, in the tribal environments of the steppe and the desert, the preservation of life and of the group takes priority (Chelhod 1986).<sup>10</sup> In the absence of more precise knowledge of how the Atlas tribes functioned before the twelfth century, this purifying massacre can be interpreted as a manifestation of the introduction of an Old Testament eschatology, via its Qur'ānic interpretation, into the Berber societies of the Maghreb.

A few years later, after the Almohads' conquest of Marrakech in 1147, 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 1130–1163), the first Almohad caliph-*imām* ('successor-guide'), repeated the process. He ordered purges, which this time were called 'acknowledgment' or 'confession'. None of the targeted groups had recognised Ibn Tūmart's authority from the beginning, and they were punished for that. Before the executions, the sovereign always made a speech justifying the action. He had up to 32,000 persons executed by the members of their own tribe (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 112/185). However, nothing is said about the actual procedure followed for the executions (al-Marrākushī 1984, 192; Ibn 'Idhārī 1985, 284–285).

Then the Caliph went to the Almohads, he gathered them together and preached a sermon to them, saying: ‘What does one who has drunk deserve when he prevents others from drinking milk and water in turn?’

- ‘Let’s do the same for him!’ they answered

- ‘You are right’, said the Caliph. He then entered his home and wrote lists for them, exhorting them and asking them to recognise the Almohad power. Then he distributed these lists to Almohad shaykhs and ordered them to use the sword.

Starting with the gates of Marrakech, he gave a list to Ayyūb Āgdam and Yaḥyā b. Gurūt: they gathered the Hazmīra at their fort (*ribāṭ*) and killed five hundred troublemakers among them.

The Caliph gave another list to Muḥammad b. Maḍqād and ‘Abd Allāh b. Māllāt, both shaykhs of the Ragrāga: they killed eight hundred of their contributors, troublemakers, at Āṣākkā-n-Kamāt.

[... 4 lists]

The Caliph gave another list for Haskūra to Sulaymān b. Maymūn, to ‘Alī b. Yaḥyā, at Kamāt b. ‘Uthmān and ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūmūr: they killed eight hundred of them and attacked the others in their tents. The total number of people killed was two thousand five hundred.

The Caliph gave another list for people from Tādlā to ‘Umar b. Maymūn, ‘Abd Allāh Allāh b. Dāwūd al-Jarāwī, Muḥammad b. Tūfāwt and Sulaymān b. Tizangāt; they killed five hundred of them at the place called Naḍīr. Then, ‘Umar b. Maymūn gathered troops and went to Tāzaraft of Īmalwān: he killed the people of this tribe at Tīfsart and brought their booty and wives back to Tādlā. Abū Bakr b. al-Jabr interceded with the Caliph on behalf of their wives,

so they were not sold. Abū Bakr b. al-Jabr then left for the region of Tādlā and killed among the Ṣanḥāja and Jarāwa thousand men at the place called al-‘Amrī. Similarly, Āgg-u Angī went to the *Qal‘a* of Mahdī b. Tawālā to have the Almohad power recognised by its inhabitants: he killed six thousand men among them, Zanāta from Fazāz

[11 additional lists]

The ‘acknowledgement [of Almohad power]’ (*i ‘tirāf*) ended thus, thanks to God and His help. Prayer on Muḥammad His prophet. God thus offered the land to the Almohads, assisted them for the Truth and made them triumph. They corrected the religion (*al-dīn*) without any dissension. The earthly world (*al-dunya*) was flattened out and God put an end to the confusion that was going on there. These were the reasons for the ‘recognition’. Praise be to God. Pray on Muḥammad His prophet, and that His Mahdī be approved. These events took place in the year 544 (May 1149–April 1150), with the agreement of God. (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 111–112/183–185)

This second episode places the Caliph as the enlightened successor of the Mahdī and gives him the same ability to select impure elements within the group. But we should point out that the saying used at the beginning of the text to justify the punishment is not a religious one: it refers rather to a steppe principle, wisdom and custom: the harsh rule of the *lex talionis*. What is the punishment for those who did not share the gifts (milk and water) of the desert, whose rules they did not respect by doing so? An eye for an eye. This *lex talionis*, which harks back to the Bible, and is even pre-Biblical and Semitic, is legitimised and Islamicised by means of the example of the Prophet Muḥammad. Alone, in the isolation of his palace, which suggests his transcendental knowledge, the Caliph drew up numerous lists of people to be eliminated, recalling the periods when the prophet of Islam withdrew when he was receiving God’s

messages. In addition, we should note the evolution in the name given to the process: first it was a ‘sorting out’ (*tamyīz*), and then it was an ‘admission [of the offence] / acknowledgment [of the Almohad authority]’ (*i ‘tirāf*), an evolution that may also indicate the emergence of the notion of penance / atonement after the founding sacrifice of purification of the movement’s original tribes.

### ***3- Almohadism and the crushing of rebellions***

Mehdi Ghouirgate has devoted a chapter of his *L’ordre almohade (1120–1269)*, to ‘Le souverain vengeur: L’éclat des tortures’ (the avenging sovereign: the splendor of tortures), in which he describes the treatment that the Almohads meted out to defeated enemies (2014, 253–310). Just as the Prophet Muḥammad was a model on which later Islamic practices were based, so Ibn Tūmart, the founder of the Almohad movement, was a model, because during his life he gave indications of what was necessary to build a virtuous society. Once, as he attended a crucifixion ordered by the Almoravid authorities, he intervened: ‘

He joined the crowd and scattered the gathering, saying: “Why put living men on the cross? One must crucify only the dead! If this man deserved death, kill him, then crucify him!” (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 62/96).

Ghouirgate points out that, under the Almohads, such crucifixion of living criminals did not take place, although the matter of public executions was not an issue. The Almoravids had been practising crucifixion on a large scale for many years in the Maghreb.

The killings took place in a society in which the highest importance was accorded not only to the critical moment of agony, but also to the treatment that was given to the body [...] Agony was perceived as a moment of truth, when one, even the caliph, had to answer for his actions before God. (Ghouirgate 2014, 254)

Ghouirgate notes the sources' reluctance to mention the actual moment of the killing of common criminals who had not challenged the ruler, while rebels against authority were humiliated before execution. A few legal opinions suggest that the Berber rulers were more severe than their predecessors, and the accused were heavily chained when they were brought before the judges. Such was the case of Yaḥyā Ibn al-ʿAṭīyya, a close advisor of the Caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin (al-Marrākushī 1984, 144, 161). These *fatwas* do not specify whether the families could recover the body of the victim to cleanse it and give it a ritual burial.

There is a contrast between death in combat and execution. In combat, the usual Almohad practice was to kill the opponent and decapitate him. Beheading the leader generally signified the end of a rebellion. Thus the death and decapitation of the rebel Abū al-Qaṣāba in 598/1201 put an end to the revolt of Sūs, a very important province (al-Marrākushī 1998, 226–227/262–263), as this was an ignominious death for its leader (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 122–127/207–212). For an execution, Ibn Khaldūn uses the expression: *qutila ṣabran* ('he was killed with patience', in cold blood). One does not seek to inflict suffering, but the dishonouring of the body – hence the post-mortem crucifixion, sometimes upside down. Historical sources are generally silent about how rebels were put to death, but al-Marrākushī repeatedly mentions that they were beheaded, then crucified, and their head was sent to the capital, Marrakech. However, things may have been different at the beginning of the Almohad movement. Thus, at the end of his book, al-Baydhaq gives a list of thirty-two rebels executed by the Almohads (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 122–125/207–212). Seven were crucified (before or after death? – most probably after), and only two were beheaded. One of these rebels was executed by a 'slave of the caliph's house' (*ʿabīd al-dār*), who killed him with a spear. Before the execution, a session of invectives took place.

There are many indications that the motivation for some episodes was not religious. For example, ʿAbd al-Muʿmin organised a public execution ceremony in which the populace



took part, putting to death some of their fellow citizens. This was not canonical – quite the contrary. He had daggers, spears and shields distributed to the people of the city who had remained faithful to him and watched the massacre from the top of a tower: the prisoners went out ten by ten, and the population stood in two lines and killed them by emasculating them (Lévi-Provençal 1928, 120/199). When a future victim asked what he was accused of, a compromising letter written by his own hand was given to him and he was executed. The participation of the population in the slaughter reinforced their allegiance to the Caliph. This procedure is anything but religious. This macabre display may be seen as having a political or psychological purpose, which would explain the inversion of the process: normally the caliph would be the main protagonist in all actions, but this ceremony is meant to create a holistic community around its leader. The condemned were stripped of their clothes, their turban and their sandals, symbols of their eminent position in the Almohad and social hierarchy. The punishment passed through dishonour: the victim was humiliated by being stripped naked in denial of his rank. Then came death and decapitation. We do not know the order of the various stages: casting down the turban in front of the spectators, shaving the beard, impaling the head on a spear (apparently this practice was widespread in Morocco until the French Protectorate). The vizier Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, summoned before a tribunal, presented himself with his turban around his neck on the order of the Caliph in 553/1158, which has no religious or Prophetic precedent.

In general, medieval Arabic sources do not dwell on the macabre details or on the feelings and sufferings of the tortured. Leaving the world of the living erased them as people. About the execution of Ibn al-Abbār, the great Valencian writer and vizier, executed in 658/1260, Ibn Khaldūn reports that ‘The corpse of this unfortunate man, his books, his poems and his collections of notes written at the dictation of his teachers were burnt together on the same pyre’ (Ibn Khaldūn, cited in Ghouirgate 2014, 257). By the cremation of his body and

his works, he was condemned to oblivion, as the chain of transmission (*isnād*) between his masters and his disciples was broken. Suffering is never mentioned in the sources – even that of a sovereign, such as Yūsuf I (r. 1163–1184), who died as a result of a spear wound received during the siege of Santarem. The sources hardly ever give an indication of the executioner. When they say that he was one of the ‘servants of the palace’, we can assume that he was black. Because it was disgraceful to take up arms against an unarmed person (for murder or execution), the task was often entrusted to strangers, and in the Maghreb, to black slaves of the Caliphal guard (Ghouirgate 2014, 258).

Very likely, being speared to death was all the more humiliating. Indeed, from al-Baydhaq to al-Idrisī, it appears that the spear was the weapon of the common people, a metaphor for un-civilised war and violence (Ghouirgate 2014, 259). It is on spears that the heads were impaled and exhibited. Ghouirgate reminds us that the wood used for spears was fig tree wood, considered in the Maghreb as attracting evil forces. Poetry written by the caliph al-Ma'mūn associated fig tree wood with subjects earmarked for extreme punishment (Ghouirgate 2014, 259). Only death in combat by the sabre was considered noble. Killing by flagellation is also attested, this time to inflict maximum of suffering on the condemned (a practice contrary to the general policy of the Almohad regime). It was meant to give a foretaste of the torments of hell, the body in shreds and lifeless being delivered to the flames. Here, the method of execution had a religious signification, but it was common to most of the Islamic dynasties (Ghouirgate 2014, 264). The ordeal (*miḥna*) of the whip and the suffering inflicted were equal to the affront endured by the prince. Rebels were driven along on the backs of mules or dromedaries, while the caliphs rode thoroughbred horses. Rebels were very rarely taken alive to the capital. In the case of Almohad rebels, their corpses, or more usually their heads, were brought back and exposed in the capital so that their families would be warned of the fate that awaited them if they joined a revolt. It was at the same exact spot

where allegiance was paid to the Caliph that burning, hanging or exposure took place, most generally under the gates of the city. One may doubt the effectiveness of this practice: the son of one called al-‘Ubaydī, who had been slaughtered in Fez under a city entrance, called after that ‘the Gate of the Burned One’ (*Bāb al-Maḥrūq*), led an uprising in 610/1213 among the Ghumāra (Ibn Abī Zar‘ 1999, 357) and, at the end of the thirteenth century, a man declared himself a descendant of the Fatimids in the same tribe, and he suffered the same fate as his predecessors.

These practices were turned against the Almohads themselves. In 674/1275, six years after the fall of the dynasty, the Almohad notables who had rallied to the Merinids, the new masters of the Maghreb, rebelled against them. The Almohad leaders were beheaded and their heads suspended from the *Bāb al-Sharī‘a* (‘The Gate of the Law’) in Marrakesh. The remains of the Caliphs Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf I (d. 1184) and his successor al-Manṣūr (d. 1199), dug up from Tinmāl, were exposed (Ibn Khaldūn 1999 VII: 202; 2010 IV: 83). The Almohads never desecrated tombs, although they had apparently been tempted to do so and had looked for the tomb of ‘Alī b Yūsuf b. Tashfīn (r. 1106–1143), their fierce enemy, for almost forty years.

No women are mentioned among those who were tortured and there is no record of the public execution of a woman under the Almohads. However, the women of rebel tribes were publicly auctioned, as non-Muslim women were in external war. Taking women and children prevented the perpetuation of the lineage (*nasab*) and thus annihilated the adversary. Dangerous women were locked up, and their death was kept secret. Their fate was arranged in complete contrast to that of male rebels, as their bodies were neither exposed nor dismembered. The Almohad attitude to rebels was to equate every political opponent with an evil person. Terrestrial punishment was the harbinger of God’s punishment and the torments of Hell, and gender issues were also an important factor in the difference between Almohads

and Almoravids. Indeed, the importance of matrilineal structures among the Ṣanhāja, the survival of certain forms of matriarchy and the wearing of the veil by men – women being deprived of it – led the Almohads to make numerous sexist allusions to Almoravid fighters, who would fight like women. The insistence on gender ambiguity was fundamental to the foundational relations between the Almohad leaders and their Almoravid predecessors, as is evidenced not only by al-Baydhaq's text on jihād, but also by the account of a meeting that supposedly took place between the Maḥdī Ibn Tūmart and Yūsuf b. Tashfīn in the Great Mosque of Marrakech in the 1120s:

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

– 'Welcome the Emir by his title of Caliph.'

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

– 'The Caliphate belongs to God and not to you, O 'Alī b. Yūsuf!' And he continued: 'Arise from this denatured [thing], and if you want to be an *imām* of justice, do not sit yourself on this denatured carpet!'

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

– 'What has denatured it?'

– ‘[it has been denatured] because it was knit with rot’, he answered. (Ibn Simāk 2010, 167; Lévi-Provençal 1928, 67–68/108–109)

This story, constructed as a dialogue between the Mahdī and the Emir, highlights Ibn Tūmart’s prescience. His knowledge of hidden things allowed him immediately to distinguish the pure from the impure and creates two figures of authority. The first figure is inspired; he discerns things related to religion and is set apart from other mortals by his personal qualities. The other figure, dressed as a woman, confuses the genders, ignores the impure nature of the objects he touches, and has no charisma or extraordinary knowledge that marks him out. 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. Ghouirgate (2014, 52–53) highlights that the Almoravids considered it obscene to show their mouths and this story utilises this taboo to discredit the Saharan Berbers. How could it be possible for the Almoravids to govern with accuracy and justice if they could not distinguish the pure from the impure, men from women, or, indeed, one part of their anatomy from another? Furthermore, the Almoravid Emir is presented as a usurper who, by agreeing to unveil and leave the ‘denatured carpet’, implicitly recognised that he was completely disqualified from using the title *khalīfat Allāh*, ‘God’s Caliph’, which was reserved for Ibn Tūmart and his successor ‘Abd al-Mu’min. On the other hand, as we have just seen, women appear very little in the Almohad records, their historical role being hidden under two veils, physically in society, and symbolically in writing.

#### **4- The Almohads and jihād**

The last point I would like to address here is the management of *jihād* by the Almohad dynasty. The Almohad way of organising ‘legal war’ against the Iberian Christian infidels contrasts with the Almoravid way, which was quite ‘classical’ and matches Michael Bonner’s description of the Abbasid border warfare (Bonner 2008). After the Almoravid endemic war

– small-scale raids organised annually by the local governors who had authority delegated to them by the Almoravid emir – the Almohad *imām*-caliphs organised immense armies in battles led by the sovereign himself (1153, 1162, 1172, 1184, 1195, 1212). The community and the Empire were considered as forming a single body of which the person of the *imām*-caliph was the head and sole intercessor with God.

Before the departure of the troops from Marrakesh, a ceremony was organised, with a military parade preceded by the two ‘guides’ (*imām*), i.e., a relic of the Qu’rān attributed to ‘Uthmān (the third ‘Rightly-Guided’ Caliph in Sunni Islam, a member of the Umayyad family, and not recognised by the Shiites) on a white-she camel, and Ibn Tūmart’s book on a white mule. All the provinces prepared staging posts for the great army, with stores of food and grain in warehouses and silos. Ghouirgate (2014) describes the very precise ordering of the armies in the battle, and emphasises the visibility of the caliphal red tent. This visibility of the prince as head of the army and guide of the community in arms sometimes had very negative strategic consequences, and explains, for example, the fact that the Caliph Yūsuf I was wounded by a spear in Santarem in 1184, and that the Navarrese knights were able to seize the caliphal tent at Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), despite its being guarded by black slaves chained, so that they could not leave the tent nor retreat.

In addition, during the Almohad period, regional governors were no longer given autonomy and the attendant accountability, even though they were no longer recruited from the sovereign’s tribe as in the Almoravid period, but exclusively from those of the descendants of the ruling Almohad caliph who were counted as the *sayyids*. In the Almohad period, this term referred to the sons of the first Almohad Caliph, ‘Abd al-Mu’min (r. 1130–1162), and then to their descendants. Thus the tightening of the recruitment pool within the ruling family, and more precisely among the descendants of ‘Abd al-Mu’min resulted not in greater autonomy for the regions from 1147 to 1228, but, on the contrary, in increasing

submission to the caliph, the father's 'natural' authority over the son being added to the political authority of the sovereign over his provincial administrators. The decision-making process was concentrated in the hands of the Caliph, who personally led legal war expeditions, while the provincial governors saw their role reduced to preparing the Caliph's welcoming ceremonies and supplying the armies. This concentration is reflected in the multiplication of truces with the Christian kingdoms: power – the *amr* of the Arabic texts, this polysemous term also designating, significantly, the 'Project/Design [of God]' – emanated exclusively from the person of the Caliph (the sole successor of the Prophet and the only legitimate sovereign in Islam). Since he did not have the gift of ubiquity that the Almoravid *niyāba* achieved *de facto* thanks to the complementary and non-competitive authority of the provincial governors, the Caliph had no choice, before attacking a kingdom, but to ensure that other fronts were calm. This centralised and complex organisation implied that, when war was waged against one enemy, truces were signed with the others. Hence the development of diplomacy and diplomatic relations with Christian princes. The rise of the Almohad caliphal *jihād* was not in fact contradictory to the development of peaceful relations with enemies and the establishment of diplomatic norms. On the contrary, the Almohad caliphate developed long-lasting alliances with the kingdoms of León and Navarra.<sup>11</sup> By way of comparison, it should be recalled that, during the Almoravid period, only one truce is attested in the sources, in 1120.

During the Almohad period, the regime was very strictly personalised and centralised: the Caliph was also the ultimate judge and the sole interpreter of God's revelation and Tradition (the Qur'ān and *sunna*), and he led both the Friday prayer and holy war (*jihād*) in person. This process is related, on the one hand, to the prince's status as God's caliph and divinely inspired *imām* and, on the other, to the imperative that Almohad power conform to the Prophetic script, locking each actor into a history that was already written, with room for

manoeuvre being reduced to a minimum to bring individual political decisions into line with a chosen and accepted framework because that was considered the ideal.

## **Conclusions**

The Almohad Empire is the archetype of the socio-political process that Ibn Khaldūn theorised about almost a century later. This process, which he established in some sense as a historical law, sees rural tribal groups attacking urban power structures and consequently dissolving the very conditions that made their success possible. More than any earlier Maghrebi polity, the Almohads took this evolution to the extreme by developing an Empire as brilliant as it was ephemeral, with all the characteristics – cultural, scientific, social, artistic, economic and political – that constitute the civilisational ideal, according to Ibn Khaldūn. The political ‘theory’ of history that he developed can be considered profane, insofar as the mechanisms he highlights are independent of the divine will and stem rather from motives that can anachronistically be described as psychological, social and anthropological. Nevertheless, the Maghrebi author assigns an important place to religion, which gives its ideological framework to the process as a whole. This is his way of reintegrating divine providence into socio-political mechanisms whose sequence and logic are purely human. Born in Tunis in 1332, Ibn Khaldūn was educated under the rule of a dynasty that drew its legitimacy from the Almohad precedent. He pondered about the turning wheel of power. However, if we remember one thing from his attempt to understand the cycles of emergence and disappearance of imperial powers in the pre-modern era, it should be his articulation between the ‘ideology’ that he calls ‘mission’ (*da‘wa*) and the human, rational and intelligible mechanisms that we would consider to be anthropological or sociological. Rather than focusing artificially on the possible application of Ibn Khaldūn’s theory of history and the State to modern times, it would be better to enquire into the material



and intellectual conditions that made it possible for this conceptualisation to emerge in the fourteenth-century Maghreb.

With regard to the question of the relationship between religion and warfare during the period of the Berber empires, Ibn Khaldūn's analysis provides leads that do not exhaust local particularities or contingencies. In presenting first a general framework and then specific examples, I have aimed to show the gap between the 'theory' of war and relations with 'non-Muslims', which Muslim theologians gradually developed, and local Maghrebi specificities, during two adjacent periods in western Islamic history. These variations within the same theoretical framework, and two movements of Islamic reform, have led me to confirm that religious beliefs had different impacts on the practice of war. There are also variations in ways of killing, with some practices empty of religious symbolism and others not. This whole question deserves to be thoroughly studied so that comparisons can be made with the conclusions drawn by Philippe Buc (2015), who posits recurring patterns in the relationship between religion and violence in Christian and post-Christian Western societies.

Of the three examples studied in this article, one group (the Almoravids) seems very close to the 'classic' pattern of the Islamic law of war as described by Majid Khadduri (2010), or Alfred Morabia (1993) for the Abbasids. Yet in some ways the Almoravid case illustrates with some nuances Gellner's model of the role of saints as external arbiters of inter- and intra-tribal conflicts. Indeed, at the origin of the Almoravid movement we find the collaboration of a Malikite scholar, 'Abd Allāh b. Yāsīn (a Gellnerian proto-saint) and Abū Bakr b. 'Umar (the tribal military chief). Spiritual authority initially belonged to the scholar, who did not hesitate to order the tribal chief to be whipped for exposing himself in battle. The Almoravid example is a borderline case, because the scholar was not part of a holy lineage – did holy lineages already exist at that time? – but he came from a city and was an outsider who intervened to reform customs and religious practices in the Saharan tribes and regions.

When he died, the tribal chief continued his mission by relying henceforth on the collective body of the ulemas and doctors of the law (*fuqahā'*). The second example, the Andalusian Taifas, is a quietist version of the same, with a retreat into the 'greater *jihād*' without much enthusiasm for military *jihād*; Gellner's frame does not apply to this urbanised and apparently de-tribalised society. As for the eschatological and charismatic pattern of the Almohads, it fits quite well with Gellner's theory: yet, like the Prophet Muḥammad, the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart did not established a biological lineage, but he was considered a saint, and his successors claimed to be his spiritual and political heirs: guides (*a'imma*), orthodox successors (*khulafā'*), and supreme Judge in the name of God's law. In fact, the Almohads achieve this feat of merging into one person, that of the sovereign-Caliph, the Mahdī's holiness and the tribal chief's ruthless strength. They achieved this by relying on an elaborate and complex dogma, which the greatest philosophers and scholars of the time, including Ibn Tufayl (d. 1174) and Averroes (d. 1199), helped to formalise, promoting philosophical reason along with Revelation, perhaps even at the expense of the latter.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Abdallah Hammoudi (1974) criticises Gellner's book, arguing that Gellner situates the saints outside of society and seems to confuse their normative marginality with a sociological one.

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<sup>3</sup> Gellner's theory has been criticised for, among other things, having imported an African (primitive) model into a (developed) Islamic society. As Gianni Albergoni and Alain Mahé (1995) state, this critique is not really well founded, as Evans-Pritchard's model of segmentarity was based originally on his previous study of the Arabian Peninsula.

<sup>4</sup> At least, this was the very convincing hypothesis that Maribel Fierro supported in here paper presented at the conference 'Education for the People? The Case of the Almohad Revolution (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries)' at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in 2012. An article of hers on the topic is in press.

<sup>5</sup> The presence of Muslim mercenaries in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghreb has been studied by Nikolas Jaspert (2018). He shows that this group of professional fighters did not constitute a watertight group in the host society – an example of 'harmonious transculturality' – but, on the contrary, provoked debates on apostasy and **commingling** from the end of the twelfth century. Hussein Fancy (2016) argues (erroneously) that the *Jinetes* (the Muslim mercenaries hired by the King of Aragon from the end of the twelfth century) were holy warriors (*ghuzāt mujāhidūn*), and that the Aragonese kings deliberately used their religious otherness in order to demonstrate a kind of imperial authority transcending political or religious borders. (There are parallels in ancient Rome and Byzantium, under the Abbasid and Almohad caliphates, and also under the Hohenstaufens.) For critiques bearing on several assertions in Fancy's book, see Catlos (2017).

<sup>6</sup> I draw here on an unpublished May 2017 Vienna workshop paper by Iannis Stouraitis. **Add this, with its title to the list of References.**

<sup>7</sup> A group of seven texts reproduced in the *Rihla* of the Sevillian judge Ibn al-ʿArabī legitimises Yūsuf b. Tašfīn's action against the kings of Taifa. For instance, the well-known theologian, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) wrote in his letter: 'Anyone who rebels against the truth, must be brought to it by the sword.' **Reference?**

<sup>8</sup> References to Lévi-Provençal indicate first the page(s) of the Arabic edition, then the page(s) of the French translation

<sup>9</sup> According to the geographer al-Bakrī, who died in 1094, the Barghawāṭa sect had a Berber Qur'ān with 80 suras, the last of which was titled Yūnus [Jonah] (Ferhat 1994; Buresi and Ghouirgate 2013, 9).

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<sup>10</sup> For a fictional (in fact science fiction) description of steppe and desert societies, see Franck Herbert's science-fiction novel, *Dune* (1965).

<sup>11</sup> While the Almohad Empire was united, the Christian Iberian Peninsula was divided into five kingdoms: Portugal, Castile, León, Aragon and Navarre (the last did not share a border with al-Andalus).

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