The Struggle for North Africa between Almohads, Ayyubids, and Banū Ghāniya (Late Twelfth to Early Thirteenth Centuries A.D.).

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the invasion of the Almohad Empire by the Banū Ghāniya of Majorca and the Ayyubid amir Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries A.D. This long and destructive conflict, which sapped the strength of the Almohad state in North Africa, has received little attention from modern scholars, particularly in the west. It is our aim to contextualize the revolt of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh’s expeditions within the wider African and Mediterranean worlds. In particular, we will shed light on the economic background of the great power rivalries that affected North Africa during this period.

The Banū Ghāniya were descendants of the Almoravids who established a principality in the Balearic Islands after the fall of the Almoravid state in the mid-twelfth century. In 1184 they invaded North Africa and fought against the Almohads in a struggle which lasted until the 1230s and ranged from Tripoli to Sijilmāsa under the amirs ʿAlī (1184-1187) and Yahyā b. Ghāniya.
The arrival of the Banū Ghāniya in North Africa coincided with the conquest of Almohad Ifrīqiya (Tunisia) by the Ayyubid amir Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh. For several years Ayyubid forces fought side by side with the Banū Ghāniya and various Arab tribes against the Almohads until Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn made peace with the latter in 1190. The tenacious resistance of the Banū Ghāniya and their allies, though ultimately unsuccessful, put an end to Almohad dreams of an empire embracing all of northwest Africa and forced them to eventually relinquish their hold on Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib which passed under the rule of the local Hafsid and Zayyanid dynasties in the first half of the thirteenth century.
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There are many people who have assisted me in various ways throughout my student career and without them I would not have reached this final stage. First and foremost I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Linda S. Northrup. I met Dr. Northrup in 2000 when I was a first-year undergraduate student enrolled in her course on the history of the caliphate. This was my first formal introduction to the study of Islamic history. Ever since that time I have regarded her as an esteemed teacher and mentor. At the graduate level I have benefitted immensely from her seminar on classical Arabic biographical literature as well from countless discussions in her office. It is safe to say that with her rigorous standard of scholarship and keen eye for detail she helped to make this a better thesis than it would otherwise have been. I am truly grateful to her for giving unstintingly of her time over the years and for having confidence in me as a scholar.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the other professors who were a part of the thesis committee: Dr. Victor Ostapchuk, Dr. Ed Keall and Dr. James Reilly, all of the University of Toronto; Dr. Maya Shatzmiller of Western Ontario University; Dr. Maribel Fierro of the Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales (CCHS) in Madrid who served as the external examiner; Dr. Walid Saleh of the University of Toronto who served on the committee during its early days but later resigned because of other responsibilities; and Dr. Lee Bartel of the University of Toronto who served as the chair of the exam.

It was in Dr. Ostapchuk’s seminar on the medieval steppe frontier that I first presented my research on Qarāqūsh. I have benefitted a great deal from his comments on my drafts at all stages of this thesis. He has taught me the importance of clarity and precision in historical writing. Dr. Keall brought the valuable perspective of an archeologist to my committee and I am particularly
grateful for his insights on irrigation techniques and nomad-peasant relations. In his seminar on the medieval Islamic city I presented a paper on the Qalʿa of the Banū Hammād which latter formed the nucleus for Chapter Four of my thesis.

I would like to thank Dr. Shatzmiller who commuted from London, Ontario in order to participate. She has enriched the committee with her great knowledge of medieval economic history. The reader will see that I have benefitted much from her studies on the historiography of the medieval Maghrib. I am grateful that Dr. Reilly kindly agreed to join the thesis committee on very short notice. His judicious questions and comments during the defense have helped me to see the “bigger picture” and to regard certain aspects of my thesis in a new light.

I am delighted that Dr. Fierro, one of the world’s leading authorities on the history of al-Andalus in general and on the Almohads in particular, agreed to serve as the external examiner for this thesis and that she has shown great interest in the topics that I have investigated here. I have benefited from her many important articles on the Almohads as well as her helpful comments in the external evaluation of this thesis.

Thanks are also due to my M.A. supervisor at the American University in Cairo from 2004 to 2006, Dr. Elizabeth Sartain. The rigorous training which I received during those two years has served me well at the doctoral level. It was Dr. Sartain who introduced me to the study of the Fatimids and the medieval Egyptian-Nubian frontier. In particular I would like to thank her for sharing with me her valuable paper on Egyptian-Nubian relations during the Fatimid period according to the Qaṣr Ibrīm documents and for answering my questions on this subject. I hope that her pioneering work in this area will be more widely recognized in the future.

I would be remiss if I did not mention here the great debt of gratitude that I owe to Dr. Richard Blackburn and Dr. Michael Marmura, the latter now sadly deceased. These patient and
kind gentlemen, both exemplary scholars and teachers, gave me a solid foundation in the Arabic language during my undergraduate years at the University of Toronto upon which all of my subsequent studies have depended.

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I am very fortunate to have made many friends among my fellow graduate students in the NMC department and in other departments at the University of Toronto. Their companionship over the past few years has been a great pleasure and they will be sorely missed. I hope that they will all finish soon and graduate with flying colors.

Finally I would like to thank my family. Both of my grandfathers, Serafino Cerasa and Amar Baadj, were avid readers of history and they imparted in me a love for the subject when I was very young. I hope that they would be proud of this work if they were still here with me today. My parents, Maryann and Najib Baadj, my sister, Nadia Baadj, and my grandmother, Olimpia Cerasa, have always been my greatest source of support and encouragement and my gratitude to them is immeasurable. This thesis is dedicated to them.
To my family
Transliteration

For transliterating Arabic words I have employed the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* with two exceptions. The َā with *shadda* (doubled y) is indicated by a letter i with a macron followed by a single y rather than an i followed by two ys. The َātā is indicated by a single letter a at the end of the word rather than ah. Thus I write Ayyūbiya instead of Ayyūbiyyah. When the word containing َātā is in construct with another word the ending is written at as in Dawlat al-Mamālīk.

Names of persons and tribes have been given in their transliterated form without exception. Names of dynasties have been given in their Latinized form such as Hammadid, Abbasid, Ayyubid etc. I have not given the transliterated Arabic forms for the names of North African and Arab cities that are important and well-known in our present day such as Algiers, Fez, Marrakech, Constantine, Annaba, Cairo, etc. The names of lesser cities have been given in Arabic transliteration with the French names beside them in brackets for their first appearance. Therefore I write Tilimsān (Tlemcen), Bījāya (Bougie), etc. For the most part I have avoided giving the Arabic forms for the names of Spanish and Portuguese cities. Well-known Arabic terms such as dinar, caliph, and vizier that have entered the English vocabulary have been left in their Anglicized forms. Less-familiar ones such as khutba or bay’a are transliterated.
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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the invasion of the Almohad (*Muwahhidî*) Empire by the Banū Ghāniya and the Ayyubid general Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries A.D. This was an important event in the medieval history of North Africa like the Hilālī migration of the mid-eleventh century A.D., though it has not received as much attention as the latter in the scholarly literature. It is impossible to treat the amirs of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh separately for though they had very different origins they became inextricably linked through their alliance against the Almohads and their involvement in the labyrinthine politics of Ifrīqiya at the end of the twelfth century A.D.; therefore I have covered them together in my study.

The period of roughly two centuries of Northwest African history beginning with the Hilālī migration and the rise of the Almoravids around the middle of the eleventh century A.D. and ending with the breakup of the Almohad Empire in the second quarter of the thirteenth century A.D. witnessed many important developments that distinguish it from earlier and later periods. The first four centuries of Islamic rule in the region had been characterized by a succession of strong states (the Umayyads, Aghlabids, Fatimids, and Zirids) that ruled over Ifrīqiya (modern Tunisia, western Libya, and eastern Algeria) and adjacent regions from the great metropolis of Qayrawān. The regions lying west of Ifrīqiya, though they boasted early dynasties of their own, seem to have lagged behind Ifrīqiya in terms of cultural and political development at this time. In the second half of the eleventh century the Zirid state disintegrated, and was replaced by feuding city-states and tribal principalities, and Qayrawān was largely abandoned. For the next two
centuries Ifrīqiya became the theatre of conflicts between external powers: Hammadids and later Almohads from the west, Normans from Sicily, the Banū Ghāniya from Majorca, and the Ayyubids from Egypt. With the coming of the Hafsids in the early thirteenth century a strong regional dynasty was once again established in Ifrīqiya.

Added to this mix were the turbulent Hilālī and Sulaymī Arab tribes. They migrated to Ifrīqiya from Upper Egypt during the Zirid period in the eleventh century. Over the next two hundred years they spread across Northwest Africa until they reached the Atlantic coast. Wherever they went they intermarried with the local Berber population and unwittingly contributed to the linguistic arabization of much of the North African countryside. The Hilālī and Sulaymī tribes participated on all sides of the great struggle for Ifrīqiya between the Almohads, Qarāqūsh, and the Banū Ghāniya in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Therefore, we have deemed it necessary to discuss the background of these tribes and the circumstances of their arrival in Ifrīqiya in this thesis as they cannot be excluded from any study of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh that aims to be comprehensive.

While Ifrīqiya experienced a prolonged period of decentralization following the Hilālī migrations, the western Maghrib witnessed the rise of two great Berber empires. The first of these, the Almoravid Empire, succeeded in uniting al-Andalus and the western Maghrib. The Almohads succeeded them in both of these regions and even exceeded their achievements by conquering Ifrīqiya in the middle of the twelfth century. Thanks to the influence of the brilliant Andalusī civilization and the wealth which accrued to the Almoravid and Almohad rulers through their control of the Trans-Saharan gold trade, the great cities of the western Maghrib such as Marrakech and Fez came to rival Qayrawān in its heyday in terms of population, commercial importance, and cultural and artistic splendor.
Great changes were also occurring in the wider western Mediterranean world. The twelfth century saw the rise of Christian naval and mercantile powers such as Genoa, Pisa, and Aragon, not to mention the establishment of the Norman kingdom in Sicily. For the first time since the Arab conquests it appeared that the balance of power in the western Mediterranean was no longer massively in favor of the Muslims. The Normans briefly occupied coastal Ifrīqiya in the 1140s and 1150s. More importantly, in the second half of the twelfth century the Pisans, Genoese, and Catalonians began making routine direct voyages to Muslim ports along the entire length of North Africa. They also secured the earliest trading concessions from the local authorities. It is true that the Almohads expelled the Normans completely from North Africa, halted the advance of the Reconquista for approximately half a century, and maintained a navy that was more than a match for any opponent; however, with the decline and break-up of the Almohad Empire in the thirteenth century the balance of power switched decisively in favor of the Christian maritime states which made ever greater inroads on North Africa through trade and conquest in the coming centuries. These momentous developments form the background for the story of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh, the subject of this thesis.

The Banū Ghāniya were a branch of the Almoravids (al-Murābiṭūn). They survived the fall of the Almoravid Empire in al-Andalus and the Maghrib at the hands of their bitter enemies the Almohads in the middle of the twelfth century A.D. by taking refuge in Majorca with their partisans. There they established an independent principality led by amirs who possessed a powerful fleet and engaged in piracy and trade with their neighbors in the western Mediterranean. The Banū Ghāniya never abandoned their dream of restoring the Almoravid Empire and taking revenge on the Almohads. In 1184/580 the amir ʿAlī b. Isḥāq b. Ghāniya landed in Bijāya on the Algerian coast with a small army and raised the banner of revolt against
the Almohads. This marked the start of a lengthy and bitter war in North Africa between the two sides that lasted until the death of ʿAlī’s brother and successor Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya in 1235/633, by which time the Almohad Empire was in the process of disintegrating.

Among the allies whom ʿAlī b. Ghāniya acquired in North Africa was the formidable Qarāqūsh, a Turkic officer of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī. In approximately 1172/568 Qarāqūsh set out from Egypt conquering Barqa, the Libyan oases, Tripoli, and finally the Almohad province of Ifrīqiya (Tunisia). In 1187/583 ʿAlī and Qarāqūsh fought together against the Almohad caliph al-Manṣūr but they were ultimately defeated and forced to take refuge in the oases and mountains of southern Ifrīqiya. ʿAlī died shortly thereafter and was succeeded by his brother Yaḥyā. The latter had a falling out with Qarāqūsh whom he defeated and drove into the desert. Qarāqūsh took refuge in the oases of Waddān in the northwestern Libyan Sahara while Yaḥyā campaigned against the Almohads and made himself master of Ifrīqiya between the years 1191/587 and 1204/600.

In 1203/599 the Almohads captured Majorca and put an end to the half a century of rule by the Banū Ghāniya there. Between 1204/600 and 1207/604 the Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir campaigned in Ifrīqiya at the head of a large expeditionary force and succeeded in retaking the province from Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya. Recognizing the difficulty of holding Ifrīqiya and the real possibility that Yaḥyā, who was defeated but not subdued, might reinvade as soon as the caliph returned west, al-Nāṣir decided to leave behind in Tunis a governor from the Hafsid family to whom he granted unlimited powers. From this time onwards Almohad rule over Ifrīqiya became little more than a formality. After suffering a major defeat at the hands of the Hafsids in Tripolitania, Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya and his followers directed their attacks at the heart of the Almohad Empire and they raided as far west as Sijilmāsa in Morocco. In 1212/609 Yaḥyā
returned east and besieged his old enemy Qarāqūsh in Waddān, eventually capturing and executing him. He then resumed his campaigns against the Almohads which continued until his death in the 1230s.

It is my hope that this thesis will help to fill a major gap in our secondary historical literature on the medieval Maghrib. The Almohad period in general has not attracted much attention in the west though this has begun to change in the last two decades thanks to the efforts of Spanish and other European scholars. The great Spanish orientalist Huici-Miranda wrote a two volume political history of the Almohads informed by his unparalleled familiarity with the relevant Arabic and Latin chronicles many of which were edited and translated by him.¹ Recently a collaborative work in two large volumes entitled *Los Almohades: Problemas y Perspectivas* has appeared containing studies in various languages on social, cultural, and religious topics.² The Spanish scholar Maribel Fierro has written many important articles on the religious and intellectual history of the Almohad period which have now been translated into English and published in a single volume.³

A number of monographs and dissertations have been written in Arabic about different aspects of the Almohad period. ṢInān, one of the greatest modern Egyptian historians, wrote a history of Islamic Spain from the Arab conquest to the expulsion of the Moriscos entitled *Dawlat al-Islām fī al-Andalus*, a work of meticulous scholarship and beautiful style.⁴ The third and fourth volumes cover Almoravid and Almohad rule in North Africa and al-Andalus and they can

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¹ Ambrosio Huici-Miranda, *Historia Política del Imperio Almohade*, 2 vols, (Tetuan: Editora Marroquí, 1956-7);
easily stand alone. Müṣā has written a valuable book on the economic history of the Maghrib and al-Andalus during the Almoravid and Almohad periods as well as a volume of studies on the Almohad period. His Ph.D dissertation deals with the administrative apparatus of the Almohads.⁵ Al-Ghannāy has written a valuable history of the rise and fall of the Almohads in two volumes.⁶ Ḥasan and al-Manāwī have treated the civilization of the Maghrib and al-Andalus during the Almohad period in their respective works.⁷ Khalafallāh has written about Almohad and Hafsid relations with the eastern Islamic world, an important but little studied topic.⁸

The only monograph written in a European language about the Banū Ghāniya is Bel’s classic study that was published in 1903.⁹ Since that time many important primary sources have come to light that were unknown to Bel including the Almohad portion of Ibn ʿIdhārī’s chronicle, the biographical dictionary of Bijāya by al-Ghubrīnī, and collections of letters from the Almohad chancellery. In Arabic mention should be made of Sīsālim’s exhaustive history of the Balearic Islands under Muslim rule.¹⁰ This work is particularly valuable for its thorough reconstruction of the history of the principality of the Banū Ghāniya in Majorca during the twelfth century A.D.

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I have not encountered any monograph, western or Arab, devoted to the career of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and the invasion of Ibrīqiya by the Turks. Thiry’s \textit{Le Sahara libyen dans l’Afrique du Nord medieval}, a very useful work in general, includes a chapter on Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya.\footnote{Jacques Thiry, \textit{Le Sahara libyen dans l’Afrique du Nord medieval}, (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), pp. 249-91.} Unfortunately Thiry does not make use of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s \textit{Midmār al-Ḥaqāʾiq}, our best source for Qarāqūsh’s campaigns, and he greatly exaggerates the negative impact of Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya on civilization in North Africa. Gaudefroy-Demombynes wrote an important article on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s relations with the Almohads; his conclusions on the nature of Qarāqūsh’s expedition are in need of updating in light of our findings (see below).\footnote{Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, “Une lettre de Saladin au calife Almohade,” in \textit{Mélanges René Basset}, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1925), vol. 2, pp. 279-304.}

Only when I had nearly completed writing this thesis was I finally able to obtain a copy of a short article by Mouton on Qarāqūsh’s conquests in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.\footnote{Jean-Michel Mouton, “La conquête de la Cyrénaïque et de la Tripolitaine par Qarâqûsh: initiative individuelle ou entreprise d’état?” in \textit{Aux rivages des Syrtes: la Lybie, espace et développement de l’antiquité à nos jours: colloque du 25-26 octobre 1999}, pp. 59-69. Paris: Centre des études sur l’Afrique et l’Asie moderns, 2000.} It was encouraging to find that Mouton is also convinced that the conquest of Libya and Ibrīqiya in the 1170s and 1180s was an Ayyubid conquest directed and supported from Cairo; not the work of a band of renegades and deserters as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s apologists would have us believe. Nonetheless there are two major shortcomings in Mouton’s article which detract from its usefulness. First of all, he does not give much thought to the question of why Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Ayyubids were
interested in the west. He gives no space at all to consideration of economic factors which we believe motivated Ayyubid expansion in Libya and Ifrīqiya. Secondly, like Thiry he does not make use of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s chronicle, without which any account of the career of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh must be considered incomplete. It is curious that so many scholars have overlooked this important source. To his great credit, the Libyan historian al-Ghannāy appears to be the first modern scholar to recognize the importance of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s chronicle as a source for Qarāqūsh and the Ayyubid campaigns in Libya. As a result al-Ghannāy’s treatment of these events is superior to the above-mentioned accounts by Thiry and Mouton which were written a decade after al-Ghannāy’s work first appeared.

There are two very important questions about Qarāqūsh that have not been satisfactorily addressed by historians and which I intend to answer in this thesis. First of all we must ask what was the nature of Qarāqūsh’s relationship with the Ayyubids, was he largely acting alone as an adventurer or was he following orders from Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn? I intend to demonstrate that he was in fact following orders from Cairo and that we can therefore speak of an Ayyubid invasion of the Almohad Empire. The question that follows is what could Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s motive have been; what could have enticed him to send hundreds if not thousands of veteran Kurdish and Turkish troops to northwestern Africa to make war on the Almohads while he was fighting the Crusaders in Syria? I make the case that his motive was above all economic; in the face of an unprecedented shortage of gold in Egypt and the east, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sought to gain control over the northern termini of the Trans-Saharan routes that passed through the Libyan and Tunisian oases.

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This thesis is divided into twelve chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter surveys the most important primary sources that I have used in this dissertation. The second chapter is intended to give the reader important background information that will assist him in understanding the rest of the thesis. I have divided the second chapter into four parts: a section on the geography of the Maghrib including clarification of terminology; a section on the Berber tribes, their genealogies and their distribution in the period under study; a section on the development of the Saharan trade in the Middle Ages; and finally a section on the kingdoms and peoples that existed along the southern border of the Sahara and the sources of African gold. The third chapter is a brief survey of the history of the Maghrib from the emergence of the first local Islamic states in approximately 800 A.D. until the great Hilālī migration of the mid eleventh century A.D. with an extended discussion of the latter event and its consequences. The fourth chapter covers the history of the Central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya from the Hilālī conquest down to the establishment of Almohad rule under ʿAbd al-Muʿmin in the middle of the twelfth century A.D.

The fifth chapter covers the rise of the Banū Ghāniya, the history of their principality in Majorca, and the invasion of North Africa by ʿAlī b. Ghāniya. At the very end of this chapter Qarāqūsh is introduced and mention is made of his alliance with the Banū Ghāniya. Chapter Six discusses the economic conditions in Egypt in the late twelfth century and provides the necessary background for understanding the gold crisis of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s reign. This is complemented by Chapter Seven where I discuss the rise of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the decline of the Egyptian economy that took place during his reign partially as a result of instability in Upper Egypt and Nubia due to the wars which his brother Tūrānshāh fought in these areas. In the eighth chapter I discuss the reasons for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s interest in the Maghrib and compare and analyze various accounts of
his motives for sending an expedition to the west. Here I propose that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sought to control the eastern and central axes of the Trans-Saharan trade routes in order to compensate for the disruption of mining in the mines of Wādī ‘Allāqī in Egypt’s Eastern Desert. In Chapter Nine I discuss the conquest of Libya and Ifrīqiya by Qarāqūsh relying on the valuable but too often ignored chronicle of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn.

Chapter Ten covers the Almohad invasion and reconquest of Ifrīqiya under al-Manṣūr. Included in this chapter is an analysis of the diplomatic correspondence between Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr. Chapter Eleven describes the rise of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya in Ifrīqiya and the Almohad counterattack under al-Nāṣir. It later treats the history of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya after his expulsion from Ifrīqiya and the expansion of his war against the Almohads to embrace the central and western Maghrib. Also covered here is the death of Qarāqūsh. Chapter Twelve covers the decline of the Almohad state, the transition to Hafsid rule in Ifrīqiya, and the death of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya. Finally in my conclusion I discuss the legacy of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh in North Africa.
Chapter 1
Primary Sources

In this chapter we will discuss the most important of the medieval sources upon which this thesis depends and summarize what is known about the lives of their authors. Historians and anonymous historical works have been divided into two groups: Maghribī (western) and Mashriqī (eastern). The vast majority of works in these two categories are chronicles with the exception of a few specialized treatises, a biographical dictionary, and the collection of official Almohad letters (see below). A third section has been created for geographers and writers of travel literature.

1.1 Maghribī Historians

Not surprisingly most of the important sources for the history of the struggle between the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya were written by Maghribī authors. The bulk of the surviving chronicles were written by historians who lived after the fall of the Almohad state under the Marinids or Hafsids. Fortunately some of the Marinid chroniclers, in particular Ibn ʿIdhārī, preserve a great deal of earlier material (see below). The three Maghribī historians who have the most to say about the Banū Ghāniya are Ibn ʿIdhārī, Ibn Khaldūn, and Al-Marrākushī. In this section we will consider each of the Maghribī authors in chronological order and pay special attention to their influences and the sources upon which they drew.

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Al-Baydhaq (First half of the 12th century A.D.)

Abū Bakr b. ‘Alī al-Ṣanhājī, known as al-Baydhaq, was one of the original Almohads and a close companion of the Almohad mahdī Ibn Tūmart as well as the first caliph, ‘Abd al-Mu‘min.

Thirty-six manuscript pages have survived from a work of his entitled Akhbār al-Mahdī Ibn Tūmart.² Little information can be gleaned from this text about al-Baydhaq’s life because the beginning of the manuscript is missing. Nonetheless it is evident that he was a close follower of Ibn Tūmart and his account is very valuable as it gives the testimony and point of view of a man who took part in the establishment of the Almohad movement from its earliest days until the great Almohad triumphs in the Maghrib and al-Andalus in the middle of the twelfth century A.D.³ In a recent study of the Akhbār Bombrun has drawn attention to important parallels between the depiction of Ibn Tūmart’s career in this work and the sīra (biography) of the prophet Muḥammad.⁴

Almohad Letters (Various authors, 12th and 13th centuries)

Approximately 160 official Almohad letters are known to have survived.⁵ These range in date from the time of Ibn Tūmart in the early twelfth century until the terminal phase of the Almohad state in the mid-thirteenth century. It is important to note that these letters do not survive as separate documents; rather they were recorded in various manuscripts. While some of these letters are contained in the manuscripts of well-known published works such as the major

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Almohad chronicles discussed in this chapter and various literary anthologies, a large number of them were found in unpublished manuscripts in the Moroccan royal library (*al-Khizāna al-Ḥasanīya*) in Rabat and the Escorial. Among the unpublished works is a scribal handbook by a thirteenth century Almohad secretary named al-Balawī. The surviving letters were composed by dozens of Almohad *kuttāb* (secretaries). Many of the latter were celebrated for their literary accomplishments and as a result we know something about their lives and careers. The subjects treated in these letters include announcements of victories by the caliphs, exhortations and reprimands directed at the inhabitants of specific cities, orders and information sent from the caliph to his regional governors, diplomatic exchanges, and private correspondence between the secretaries themselves.

So far two major collections of Almohad letters have been published. The first of these was Lévi-Provençal’s *Trente-sept lettres Almohades* which appeared in 1941. The letters in this collection date from the reigns of the first four Almohad caliphs; the bulk of them are from the reign of the first caliph, ʿAbd al-Muʾmin. A few of them deal with the Almohad campaigns against the Banū Ghāniya and the Hilālī Arabs in Ifrīqiya and we have made use of them in this study. Another set of letters was published in two volumes with extensive commentary by ʿAzzāwī in 1995. The majority of the letters in ʿAzzāwī’s collection date from the later period of Almohad history, after the reign of al-Nāṣir.

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6 For more details on the authors of the Almohad letters and the manuscripts that contain them see *Rasāʾ il Muwahhidīya: Majmūʿ a Jadīda*, ed. Āḥmad ʿAzzāwī, (Qunayṭra, Morocco: Manshūrat Kullīyat al-Ādāb, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 10-37.


ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī (1185/581 - ?)

We have very little information on the life of al-Marrākushī. He was born in Fez in 1185/581 where he received his education. Later he lived for a time in Marrakech, Seville, and Cordoba. In 1217/613 he travelled to Egypt where he settled down and lived the latter part of his life. It was while in Egypt in 1224/621 that he wrote his famous history entitled al-Muʿjib fī Talkhīṣ Akhbār al-Maghrib. According to Lévi – Provençal he wrote his history from memory as he obviously did not have access to Almohad documents in Cairo.

The Muʿjib consists of three sections. The first deals with the history of al-Andalus and the Maghrib before the Almohads. This part focuses mainly on the Umayyads of Cordoba, the Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif, and the Almoravids. The second part is the most important. Here al-Marrākushī deals with the history of the Almohads on a reign by reign basis from Ibn Tūmart down to the death of the caliph al-Mustanṣir in 1224/620. The entries are detailed and taken together they constitute an important source for Almohad history. Another author added short notices on the later Almohad caliphs until the fall of the dynasty and the Marinid takeover for the sake of completeness. The third part of the Muʿjib, which is poorly organized, contains information on the geography and natural resources of al-Andalus and the Maghrib.

The Muʿjib is an important source for the history of the Banū Ghāniya from their establishment in the Balearic Islands until the death of ʿAlī b. Ghāniya. It also has important information on the recruitment of Ghuzz (Turks) by the Almohad caliphs that is not found in any other source. There is some information on the early part of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya’s career.

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However, since the *Muʿjib* was written well before the death of the latter, it does not cover the end of the Banū Ghāniya and the transition to Hafsid rule in Ifrīqiya.

**Al-Ghubrīnī (1246/644-1304/704?)**
Al-Ghubrīnī was a native of Bijāya. He was renowned for his erudition in the religious and linguistic sciences and in his youth he had studied under numerous shaykhs in Bijāya and Tunis. He served as qāḍī of Bijāya and gained a reputation for being very harsh in his judgments. According to some accounts he fell out of favor with the authorities and was executed in 1304/704. Others say that he died of the plague in 1315/714. Al-Ghubrīnī composed a biographical dictionary which contains the lives of eminent persons from Bijāya entitled *ʿUnwān al-Dirāya*. It is the only surviving medieval historical work from Bijāya making it an important source of information on this key port city in particular and on the intellectual life of Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib in general.\(^\text{11}\) A few of the entries in this book concern scholars who were alive during the conquest of Bijāya by the Banū Ghāniya in the 1180s. We have made use of these passages as they give an indication as to how the Banū Ghāniya were perceived by the Bijāyans.

**Ibn ʿIdhārī (second half of 13th – first half of 14th century A.D.)**
Ibn ʿIdhārī was born in or near Marrakech during the Marinid period. He received an excellent education in religious and literary subjects and he frequented the lectures of scholars in his native city, which enjoyed a vibrant intellectual life in that epoch. Little is known about his life other

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than that he served as a judge in Fez for a time and that he was working on his historical masterpiece, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib*, in the year 1312/712.12

The *Bayān* covers the history of al-Andalus and the Maghrib from the Arab conquest until the fall of the Almohad Caliphate and the establishment of the Marinid state in the late 1260s. It is without a doubt the richest source that we possess for much of this period. Portions of the *Bayān* first came to light in the late nineteenth century and new fragments have been discovered and published throughout the twentieth century. The first three volumes, edited by Colin and Lévi-Provençal, treat respectively the history of the Maghrib from the Muslim conquest until the conquest of Zirid al-Mahdiya by the Normans (1148/543), the history of al-Andalus from the conquest until the fall of the Caliphate of Cordoba, and the history of al-Andalus during the period of the *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif* (Party Kings) in the eleventh century A.D. The portions covering the Almoravids and Almohads were only published and made available to scholars in the second half of the twentieth century. The surviving fragments on the Almoravids were edited in one volume by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Huici-Miranda, Tāwīt, and Kattānī edited and published the portion on the Almohads in 1963. Later a further twenty six pages on the Almohads came to light and these were incorporated in the Beirut/Casablanca edition of 1985.13

Ibn ʿIdhārī was a great admirer of the Almohads and it is noteworthy that he ended his work with their fall and avoided the Marinid period altogether. According to Shatzmiller there were

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two schools of historiography in Morocco during the early Marinid period.\textsuperscript{14} The Fāsī school was associated with the Marinid court in Fez. The works produced by this school were naturally pro-Marinid and they tended to focus on the history of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā (Morocco) in isolation from the greater Maghrib. For them the Marinids were the culmination of successive regional dynasties that had ruled in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā beginning with the Idrīsids in the eighth century A.D. An example of a history produced by this school is the \textit{Rawḍ al-Qirṭās} of Ibn Abī Zarʿ (see below).\textsuperscript{15}

On the other hand there existed an independent Marrākushī school in Ibn ʿIdhārī’s native Marrakech, the former imperial capital of the Almohads, the adherents of which were naturally very pro-Almohad. Since Almohad rule had extended to al-Maghrib al-Awsat, Ifrīqiya, and al-Andalus, this school had a less parochial outlook than the palace sponsored Fāsī school. Ibn ʿIdhārī’s chronicle and the anonymous \textit{Hulal al-Mawshīya} are the surviving specimens of the work produced by this school.\textsuperscript{16}

In Ṭāhā’s opinion the greatest value of Ibn ʿIdhārī’s work is that it contains substantial excerpts from a wide variety of primary sources that are now lost.\textsuperscript{17} In his judgement Ibn ʿIdhārī was remarkably objective, avoiding praise and censure, and always allowing the sources to speak for themselves. He considers Ibn ʿIdhārī to have been very precise in the transmission of \textit{akhbār} (narratives), as he always states if he was unsure of the veracity of an account or if he did not know the precise year in which an event occurred.\textsuperscript{18} He also praises Ibn ʿIdhārī for the inclusion


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ṭāhā, \textit{Ibn ʿIdhārī}, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. pp. 44-5.
of much valuable social and economic information (relating to prices, famines, natural disasters, etc.) particularly in the sections on the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties.¹⁹

There is a noticeable difference in style between the volume on the Almohads and the volumes covering earlier periods. The prose in the latter is very clear and straightforward whereas much of the section on the Almohads is written in *saj*¹ (rhyming prose). In order to extract the historical data from this portion of the chronicle one must first grapple with the author’s flowery style and recondite vocabulary. Nuwaywa finds that the author’s style in this part is “affected” and it “does violence to the clarity of meaning.”²⁰

Ibn ʿIdhārī relied on a variety of sources including chronicles, biographical dictionaries, geographies, and literary works from the eastern and western halves of the Islamic World, oral reports, official documents, and even on occasion “books of the ʿajam” meaning sources in Old Spanish or Latin.²¹ Ṭāhā has analyzed these sources in great detail. We will make mention here of some of the more important authors whose works Ibn ʿIdhārī relied upon in the sections of his history that concern us in this thesis.

Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt (1067/460 – 1134/529?) was born in Denia (Dāniya) in al-Andalus. He travelled extensively in the Maghrib and Egypt before settling down for twenty years or more in al-Mahdīya, which was then the capital of the Zirid sultan Tamīm b. al-Muʿizz. He wrote a chronicle which he dedicated to Tamīm entitled *Dibāja fī Mafākhir Ṣānhāja*. This work is concerned with the history of the Zirids down to 1123/517. It is a rich source of information on the reign of Tamīm’s father al-Muʿizz and the Hilālī invasion of the mid eleventh century A.D.

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¹⁹ Ibid., p. 46.


As a result of his long residence in al-Mahdiya and his acquaintance with Tamīm, Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt was well informed about his subject matter and we are very fortunate that Ibn ʿIdhārī has included many excerpts from this now lost work. 22

Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt (d. late twelfth century A.D.) was born in Beja (Bāja) in southern Portugal and he later lived in Seville. He held various administrative posts under the Almohads. He wrote a history which was dedicated to the second Almohad caliph Yūsuf b. ʿAbd al-Muʿmin entitled Al-Mann bi al-Imāma of which only one part out of three original parts survives. 23 The chronicle is detailed and its value lies in the fact that the author was a witness to many of the events which he recounts. Ibn ʿIdhārī borrows extensively from this text up to his entry for the year 1184/580. 24

Ibn Qattān (d. 1271/670) was the son of an influential Almohad dāʿī (religious propagandist) from Fez. Ibn Qattān was himself a secretary in the Almohad palace. He wrote an important history of North Africa and al-Andalus from the Arab conquest down to the thirteenth century A.D. entitled Naẓm al-Jumān. The work contained several chapters on the geography of the Maghrib and descriptions of its cities as well as a substantial account of Fatimid Egypt. The surviving portion of this work covers the period from 1106/500 to 1138/533. Ibn ʿIdhārī borrowed heavily from Naẓm al-Jumān, particularly from the geographical chapters. 25 It is not surprising when one considers his position at court and his family background that Ibn Qattān

22 Ibid., pp. 177-9; Pons Boigues, Historiadores, pp. 198-201.


25 Ibid., pp. 156-7.
was a great partisan of the Almohads; indeed Ṭāhā describes the *Naẓm al-Jumān* as a perfect example of “palatial history” written to glorify the regime.26

**Ibn Abī Zar’ (late 13th – early 14th century A.D.)**

The *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* is composed of two parts that are intertwined in our text but which may very well have been separate works at one time. One of these parts is a local history of the city of Fez while the other is a history of the dynasties that ruled in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā from the Idrisids to the Marinids.27 The history of each dynasty is divided by reign in a very orderly fashion. At the beginning of each entry mention is made of the ruler’s relatives and officials before recounting the major events of his reign. It is a good source for Almoravid and Almohad history. However, as one would expect in a work concerned with Fez, it is mainly focused on events in the western half of the Almohad Empire (i.e. al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus). Little original information on the Banū Ghāniya and Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh is to be found in this work.

The authorship of the *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* is disputed. Three candidates have been proposed including Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Abī Zar’ who was for a short time the khaṭīb (preacher) and imām (prayer-leader) of the Qarawīyīn mosque in Fez, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Abī Zar’, and a certain ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm. Shatzmiller has suggested that the author was another unknown member of the same family who went by the name Ibn Abī Zar’.28

**Al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiya (author unknown, composed in late 14th century A.D.)**

*Al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiya fī Dhikr al-Akhbār al-Marrākushīya* is an anonymous chronicle that covers the history of the Almoravid, Almohad, and Marinid dynasties with an emphasis on the

26 Ibid.


28 Ibid., pp. 20-4.
first two.\textsuperscript{29} Shatzmiller considers this work to be representative of the Marrākushī or southern Moroccan school which had a strong pro-Almohad orientation in contrast to the Fāsī school which reflected the viewpoint and propaganda of the Marinid court.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Ibn Khaldūn (1332/732 – 1406/808)}

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn hardly needs an introduction since he is universally famous as the author of the \textit{Muqaddima} in which he presents his philosophy of history. Ibn Khaldūn was a statesman-scholar who had a tumultuous career of service in the courts of various Maghribī and Andalusī dynasties before moving to Mamluk Cairo where he held the chief mālikī judgeship on and off for a number of years while lecturing in the famed colleges of that city. The \textit{Muqaddima} (Introduction) is but the first volume of a seven volume universal history which extended down to the author’s own lifetime. We are concerned with the sixth and seventh volumes which treat the history of the Maghrib. The beginning of the sixth volume deals with the Arabs in North Africa from the time of the great Hilālī and Sulaymī migration in the mid-eleventh century A.D. The rest of the sixth volume and the seventh in its entirety are devoted to the history of the Berber tribes and the dynasties that were founded by them.

The sixth and seventh volumes were translated into French by De Slane in the nineteenth century in four volumes with the title \textit{Histoire des Berbères}.\textsuperscript{31} Since he served as the chief translator for the French army in Algeria, De Slane had extensive first-hand knowledge of North African geography, ethnology, and dialects. Unfortunately, the printed Arabic editions of the


\textsuperscript{30} Shatzmiller, \textit{L'historigraphie}, pp. 133-5.

Kitāb al-ʿIbar (all published in Beirut or Cairo) are riddled with errors, particularly in the sections pertaining to North Africa. The editors appear to lack even a basic familiarity with medieval Maghribī history and geography. As a result one finds many inexcusable errors in the orthography of personal, tribal, and place names in these editions. This is no less true of the recent critical edition by Khalīl Shaḥāda which I have relied upon here. Whenever there was a significant difference between De Slane’s translation and Shāḥada’s edition in orthography I favored De Slane and included a reference to the corresponding pages of his translation in the footnotes.

Ibn Khaldūn’s history is distinguished from contemporary Arabic chronicles by his novel arrangement of the subject matter. Rather than following a strictly annalistic approach like Ibn al-Athīr or al-Maqrīzī for instance, Ibn Khaldūn organized his work by the history of peoples and dynasties. A consequence of this is that whenever the histories of two or more dynasties overlap (which is often the case) an event is mentioned more than once in different parts of the Kitāb al-ʿIbar. The history of the Banū Ghāniya is treated in a section of the chapter on Şanhāja Berbers but since it is also an integral part of Almohad history it is necessary to consult the account of the Almohads which is found in the chapter on Maṣmūda Berbers. The last two decades of the Banū Ghāniya rebellion in Ifrīqiya occurred at a time when the Hafsids were effective rulers of Ifrīqiya but they had not yet formally cut their ties to the Almohad caliphs in Marrakech. Thus the events of these years belong to the histories of three dynasties which each have their own entry in the Kitāb al-ʿIbar: the Banū Ghāniya, Almohads, and Hafsids. To make matters more complicated,

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32 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Khaldūn, Dīwān al-Mubtada wa al-Khabar fi Tārīkh al-ʿArab wa al-Barbar wa Man ʿĀṣarahum min Dhavī al-Shaʾn al-Akbar [volumes 2 through 8 of this work comprise what is popularly known as the Kitāb al-ʿIbar], 8 vols., ed. Khalīl Shaḥāda and Suhayl Zakkār, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2000). The field is in dire need of a proper critical edition of the Kitāb al ʿIbar, preferably undertaken by a team of experts on the various regions and periods that this work covers.
Ibn Khaldūn did not merely copy the same account under each heading. More often than not there are significant differences between the accounts; each one containing details not found in the others. On rare occasions there are even contradictions between two accounts of the same event.

A unique feature of the Kitāb al-ʿIbar is the large space devoted in it to the origin, genealogy, and history of the Berbers, more so than in any other surviving work from the medieval period. Shatzmiller argues convincingly that the “History of the Berbers” contained in the Kitāb al-ʿIbar is not an anomaly; rather it is the culmination of a local North African school of historiography that was concerned with recording traditions about the Berbers. Traces of this school are to be found in the surviving fragments embedded in various works entitled Mafākhir al-Barbar (Great Deeds of the Berbers) and Faḍāʾil al-Barbar (Virtues of the Berbers). Collectively these fragments constituted what Shatzmiller calls the Berber Kitāb al-Ansāb (Book of Genealogies). This Kitāb al-Ansāb was the source from which Ibn Khaldūn drew his vast information on the Berber tribes and their history.

For the history of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh the Kitāb al-ʿIbar is indispensable. It is the only work that presents a complete account of the Banū Ghāniya from their origin to their demise. Ibn Khaldūn is the only historian who informs us about the last years of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya including the date and circumstances of his death. For events in Ifrīqiya Ibn Khaldūn relies heavily upon the Rihla of al-Tijānī. Sometimes he abridges entire passages from the latter.

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34 Ibid.
Al-Zarkashī (late 15th/9th century)
Little is known about the life of al-Zarkashī. It has been surmised that he was descended from a Turkish slave. He was a secretary at the Hafsid court in Tunis during the late fifteenth century.
He wrote a history of the Almohad and Hafsid dynasties which is far more informative about the latter. Out of 165 pages only the first twenty or so are devoted to the Almohads. There is little information on the Banū Ghāniya in his work. Its main value for us is that it can occasionally be used to corroborate information from other sources.  

Ibn Ghalbūn (Late 17th – early 18th century A.D.)
ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Khalīl b. Ghalbūn was born in Miṣrāta, Libya. He studied at al-Azhar in Cairo before returning to Libya and settling in Tripoli where he taught hadīth, fiqh, and tafsīr. It is as a historian, however, that he is best remembered. He was concerned with recording the history of his native Tripolitania and to this end he wrote his masterpiece, the chronicle entitled al-Tīdhkār fī man malaka Ṭarāblus wa mā kāna bihā min al-ʿAkhbār. This work commences with legends concerning the origin of the Berbers and proceeds to recount the Islamic conquest and the various dynasties that ruled over Tripolitania. It contains accounts of the Hilālī migration, Norman conquest, the Almohads, the Banū Ghāniya, and Qarāqūsh. The later part of the chronicle gives a detailed history of the Ottoman pashas in Tripoli. It is certain that he relied on al-Tijānī’s Riḥla because he abridges the latter’s account of the execution of Qarāqūsh, which is not found in other sources.

Ibn Ghālbūn is unique in presenting a Libyan perspective on the struggle between the Almohads and Banū Ghāniya. It is striking that he is vehemently anti-Almoravid (this term includes the Banū Ghāniya as they were but the continuation of the Almoravid movement). He refers to them as “an evil, cursed dynasty, having no religion and politics,” and he says that they usurped al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā (Morocco) from the Zanāṭa Berbers. On the other hand he is clearly an admirer of the Almohads.

1.2 Mashriqi Historians

With the exception of Ibn al-Aṭhīr, the Mashriqi historians have less to say about the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya than their Maghribī counterparts. However, on the subjects of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and Ayyubid-Almohad relations the eastern sources are indispensable. The chronicle of the Ayyubid prince Ibn Taqī al-Dīn is our most detailed source on the campaigns of Qarāqūsh in Libya and Ifrīqiya despite its fragmentary state. Most of the information that we have concerning the diplomatic contacts between Šalāḥ al-Dīn and the Almohad court, including the texts of letters from Šalāḥ al-Dīn to the Almohad caliph Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr, is preserved in the Mashriqi chronicles.

Ibn Taqī al-Dīn “al-Manṣūr” (d. 1220/617)

Ibn Taqī al-Dīn was an Ayyubid prince. His father was Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s nephew al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Taqī al-Dīn who held important commands in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām under his illustrious uncle. The city of Hama was appointed to al-Malik al-Muẓaffar as an hereditary iqtā’. Upon his death in 1191/587 it passed to Ibn Taqī al-Dīn. Throughout the approximately thirty

37 Ibid., p. 73.

38 For the Mashriqi historians who wrote in Arabic see the monumental reference work by Shākir Muṣṭafā, Al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī wa al-Muʿarrikhūn, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 1979).
years of his reign as amir of Hama Ibn Taqī al-Dīn succeeded in preserving the independence of his principality in the face of greater powers such as Aleppo, Damascus, and the Crusader states. Among his descendants on the throne of Hama was the famous historian and geographer Abū al-Fidā.  

Ibn Taqī al-Dīn was known as a great patron of scholars who delighted in the company of poets and historians. In addition to being a talented poet in his own right he wrote a *fabaqāt* or biographical dictionary of poets which survives in one unpublished manuscript. He is most famous for the great chronicle which he wrote entitled *Mīḍmār* al-Ḥaqāʾiq wa Sirr al-Khalāʾiq. This work consisted of ten volumes in its entirety but unfortunately only a very small portion of it survives today covering the years between 1180/575 and 1186/582. The arrangement of the *Mīḍmār* is chronological with long and detailed entries for each year. Each entry is divided into three parts: an account of affairs in Abbasid Iraq, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s activities in Egypt and Syria, and Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh’s activities in Ifrīqiya.

The portion of the *Mīḍmār* that deals with Qarāqūsh is extremely important. As far as I know it has not been utilized by any of the Western historians. Of the Arab researchers only al-Ghannāy has realized the value of this work and he makes extensive use of it in his study on the decline of the Almohad state. The amount of detail in Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s account of Qarāqūsh’s campaigns is unparalleled in any other primary source. He provides us with a wealth of information on the battles and sieges in which the Ayyubids participated in the west. He also informs us about the ever-shifting alliances between the Ayyubid commanders and the Arab and

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40 Ibid., Introduction.

Berber tribes of Ifrīqiya. His account of Qarāqūsh’s expeditions in Jabal Nafusa provides us with a unique glimpse of conditions in this remote and too-often neglected region during the Middle Ages. It is worth noting that Qarāqūsh was a mamlūk of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s father, al-Malik al-Muẓaffār. Ibn Taqī al-Dīn tells us that he drew information from Ayyubid soldiers who had accompanied Qarāqūsh to Ifrīqiya and later returned to Syria. This means that he was very well-informed. Indeed the portrait of Qarāqūsh that emerges from the surviving pages of the Miḍmār is quite vivid; he appears as a bold, iron-willed leader who was respected and feared by his friends and enemies alike. It is a pity that so little of this chronicle has survived; it is to be hoped that the later portions of the chronicle will come to light one day so that we can fill in the gaps in the biography of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and the history of the Ayyubid-Almohad rivalry in Ifrīqiya.

Ibn al-Athīr (1160/555 – 1233/630)
Ibn al-Athīr has been called “the greatest Islamic historian after al-Ṭabarī.” He was a native of Mosul where he received a thorough training in the religious sciences in his youth. He was the author of a massive chronicle of world history entitled Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh which begins with creation and concludes in the year 1230/628. The arrangement of the Kāmil is strictly annalistic. Unlike many other chronicler from the Mashriq, Ibn al-Athīr was well-informed about events in the western Islamic lands of Spain, Sicily, and North Africa and he devoted considerable space to western developments in his history. For most years there is at least one entry devoted to Maghribī affairs. As a result the Kāmil is a standard source for the history of the

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42 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, p. 54.
Zirids, Hammadids, Almoravids, and Almohads. It is an indispensable work for the reign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn though it should be noted that Ibn al-Athīr was partial towards Nūr al-Dīn and the Zankids and he took the side of the latter in their disputes with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.\(^{45}\)

**Abū Shāma (1203/599 – 1268/665)**

Abū Shāma was a Damascene historian who composed a famous work entitled *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī Akhbār al-Dawlatayn*.\(^{46}\) This book is a history of the two great Muslim heroes of the Crusades: Nūr al-Dīn Zangī and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbī. It is written in *sajʿ* rather than the simple unadorned prose common to other historians such as Ibn al-Athīr. For the section on the Ayyubids Abū Shāma relied heavily on the accounts of earlier historians such as Ibn al-Athīr, ‘Imād al-Dīn, Ibn Abī Ṭayy, and in particular on original letters and documents from the pen of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s secretary al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil. With his considerable literary talent he managed to form the many passages which he borrowed from these and other authors into a coherent and unified work. The *Rawḍatayn* is of value to us because of the information which it provides on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s assumption of power in Egypt, his wars with the Nubians and the Kunūz, the early expeditions of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh, and especially the text of a letter from Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to the Almohad caliph Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr which Abū Shāma copied in the fourth volume of this work.

**Ibn Wāṣil (1208/604 – 1298/697)**

Ibn Wāṣil was a native of Hama who travelled extensively throughout the eastern Islamic world. He wrote an important history of the Ayyubids in five volumes entitled *Mufarrij al-Kurūb fī Akhbār Banī Ayyūb*. The *Mufarrij al-Kurūb* supplements the *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn* as a source for


the establishment of the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt. It also contains some short passages on Qarāqūsh but the author tells us that he has recounted most of his information on Qarāqūsh’s conquests in another work entitled Al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr which unfortunately has not survived.47

Al-Maqrīzī (1365/766 – 1441/845)
Al-Maqrīzī was undoubtedly the greatest of the medieval Egyptian historians and also one of the most prolific. He was born in Cairo where he was educated by many of the leading scholars of the day including Ibn Khaldūn himself. In this study we have benefitted from a number of al-Maqrīzī’s works. His Ittiʿāẓ al-Ḥunafāʾ is a three volume history of the Fatimids.48 It is by far the most valuable surviving source for Fatimid history, particularly during that dynasty’s Egyptian period. Al-Maqrīzī was himself of Fatimid descent and this no doubt contributed to the respectful and enlightened attitude with which he approached the topic of Fatimid history, in contrast to other Sunnī chroniclers of his time.49 The Sulūk is a lengthy chronicle which covers the whole of the Ayyubid period and the Mamluk period down to al-Maqrīzī’s time.50 His Khiṭaṭ is an encyclopedic work on the geography and history of Egypt with a large section devoted to the history of Cairo and its monuments.51 The Muqaffā al-Kabīr is a vast biographical dictionary which is particularly rich in biographies of personalities from the Fatimid period as well as from

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49 Muṣṭafā, Al-Tārīkh wa al-Muʿarrikhūn, vol. 3. p. 140.


al-Andalus, Sicily, and the Maghrib. He also wrote a number of short treatises on various topics such as the Bayān which is an account of the Arab tribes in Egypt and Al-Nuqūd al-Qadīma al-Islāmīya which is as its title suggests a history of the Islamic coinage.

1.3 Geographers and Travelers

Geographies and travel accounts form our second most important body of source material after the chronicles. They are particularly useful for the information that they yield on trade routes, distribution of tribes and ethnic groups (Arabs, Berbers, etc.), and on conditions in regions that were somewhat remote from the core areas of the Islamic World such as the Sahara oases, West Africa, and Nubia. Travel literature is valuable because it can provide us with information on how particular rulers or dynasties were perceived by contemporaries. The classical Arabic geographical tradition is a particularly rich one. We have mentioned below the authors of this genre whose works have been found most helpful in elucidating conditions in North Africa during the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D.

Al-Bakrī (d. 1094)

Al-Bakrī’s father and grandfather were amirs of the tiny principality of Saltès (Shalṭīsh) on the eastern coast of Spain. While still a young boy, al-Bakrī was forced to flee along with his father to Cordoba when a rival dynasty annexed their native town. As a result he was raised and educated in Cordoba which still retained its importance as a cultural and intellectual center even

after the fall of the Umayyad caliphate of al-Andalus. Al-Bakrī held offices at the courts of the amirs of Almeria and Seville but he returned to Cordoba before his death. Al-Bakrī was famous in his lifetime as a poet and man of letters (adīb) though we know him primarily due to his important works on geography. Interestingly, he never once travelled beyond the borders of al-Andalus.\(^{55}\)

The work of al-Bakrī which concerns us here is his *Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*. The portions of this book which have survived cover Africa, al-Andalus, Iraq, and the land of the Slavs. The section on North Africa (including the Maghrib and Egypt) is the most extensive of the surviving parts. Al-Bakrī’s use of sources that have not survived, including rare western Islamic sources that were not utilized in the east as well as actual documents, makes his account particularly valuable.\(^{56}\)

One important author upon whose work al-Bakrī relied heavily for information on North Africa was Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Warrāq (904/292-973/363). Al-Warrāq was born in Qayrawān to a family of Andalusī origin. He moved to the Umayyad capital of Cordoba during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥakam II (961/350 - 976/366). Al-Warrāq was dazzled by the rich intellectual environment of this city and he made full use of its libraries and archives. Al-Warrāq was a distinguished historian and geographer of North Africa, particularly his native Ifrīqiya. He composed a work entitled *Masālik Ifrīqiya wa Mamālikuhā* and it is suspected that he wrote a *Tārīkh Ifrīqiya* as well. He also had a great interest in Berber history and he composed an *Anṣāb


*al-Barbar*. He relied on his personal knowledge of Ifrīqiya as well as on written and oral accounts. Al-Ḥakam maintained al-Warrāq in his court as a resident specialist on the affairs of Ifrīqiya since he was in need of intelligence on this region in order to aid him in his struggle against his bitter rivals the Fatimids who were then based in al-Mahdīya.\(^57\)

**Al-Idrīsī (1100/493 – 1165/560)**

Al-Idrīsī was descended from a branch of the Idrisids, Morocco’s oldest Islamic dynasty and the builders of Fez. He was born in Sabta (Ceuta) on the northern Moroccan coast. He was educated in Cordoba and in his youth he travelled widely in al-Andalus and the Maghrib. According to his own testimony he visited the southern coast of France, Portugal, England, and Asia Minor. He does not appear to have visited Ifrīqiya or the eastern Arabic-speaking lands. In 1134/529 he travelled to Sicily and took up residence at the court of Roger II (1130-54) in Palermo. It appears that al-Idrīsī faced difficulties in Sicily following the death of his patron Roger which caused him to return to Sabta where he lived the last few years of his life.\(^58\)

It was while at Roger’s court that al-Idrīsī wrote his world geography entitled *Al-Mushtāq fī Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq* (also known as *Kitāb Rūjār* or “the Book of Roger” to whom it was dedicated) which was completed only weeks before the death of the Norman king. He divided the globe into ten longitudinal zones and seven latitudinal “climates” making a total of seventy regions. He devoted a chapter with a map to each region. Naturally his information on North Africa and Western Europe, of which he had first-hand knowledge, is more detailed and accurate than the information which he provides about other areas.\(^59\)

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\(^{58}\) Kratchkovsky, *Adab Jughrāfī*, vol. 1, p. 270.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 285.
Al-Idrīsī’s approach is based on descriptions of individual cities and their surrounding districts. He usually makes mention of the importance and size of a particular city before delving into a thorough account of the crops grown in its vicinity, the animals and fish to be found there, and its mineral resources. He always mentions the distances between cities. De Goeje and Dozy edited and translated into French the section of the Nuzhat al-Mushtāq that treats North Africa and al-Andalus. Al-Idrīsī had a favorable opinion of the Almoravids but he was hostile to the Almohads. He had a negative opinion of nomads in general.

**Ibn Jubayr (1145/540 - 1217/614)**

Ibn Jubayr was born in Valencia and educated in Játiva. He worked as a secretary for the Almohad governor of Granada and he gained renown for his prose and verse compositions. In 1183/578 he set off on a journey to the holy cities of Islam that would last more than two years. He travelled by sea to Alexandria. Then he visited Cairo and afterwards he travelled up the Nile to Qūṣ where he crossed the desert to ʿAydhāb on the Red Sea. From ʿAydhāb he embarked on a vessel which made the Red Sea crossing to Jedda. After concluding his visit to the holy cities he visited Baghdad, Mosul, and Aleppo before returning home from Acre in a European vessel.

This voyage was immortalized in his *Rihla*. According to Kratchkovsky this work represents the pinnacle of classical Arabic travel literature. Ibn Jubayr was a master of style with a gift for conveying the sights that he witnessed on his voyage in vivid detail. Ibn Jubayr returned to the

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64 Kratchkovsky, *Adab Jughrāfī*, vol. 1, p. 301.
east between 1189/585 and 1191/587 and he settled there permanently in 1204/601. He spent the last ten years of his life lecturing in Palestine, Egypt, and the Hijaz until his death in 1217/614.\(^{65}\)

Ibn Jubayr’s importance to us lies in his account of conditions in Egypt and the Red Sea basin during the early years of Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s rule. He had great admiration for the Almohads and he repeatedly expressed the wish that they would extend their conquests to Egypt and the east where he was certain that they would find many supporters.\(^{66}\)

**Kitāb al-Istibṣār (Anonymous, 1191?)**
The *Kitāb al-Istibṣār* was written at the close of the twelfth century A.D. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, the editor of the standard edition, describes this work as a unique combination of history and geography written for the entertainment of a cultured audience.\(^{67}\) We are not certain about the identity of the author but it has been surmised that he was an official of the Almohad caliph Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr. Ibn Sharīfa has proposed that the author of the *Kitāb al-Istibṣār* was an Almohad secretary named Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi al-Ḥafīd who was attached to the governor of Bijāya in the early 1180s when the Banū Ghāniya landed there.\(^{68}\) The work is divided into three parts: a section on the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, a section on Egypt where the author shows a great interest in the ancient history and monuments of that country, and finally a detailed

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\(^{65}\) Ibid., pp. 298-301.


\(^{68}\) I am grateful to Dr. Maribel Fierro for bringing to my attention Ibn Sharīfa’s important monograph on this person. Ibn Sharīfa’s work is a valuable contribution to the study of both Almohad scribal culture and the *Kitāb al-Istibṣār*. See Muḥammad Ibn Sharīfa, *Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi al-Ḥafīd: Fuṣūl min Sīra Mansūhya*, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1992), especially pp. 26-54, 159-207.
section on the Maghrib and adjacent lands in Africa. It is evident that the author relies heavily on al-Bakrī’s *Masālik wa al-Mamālik* but he also includes much additional information that is not to be found in the earlier work. Not surprisingly the author appears to be very pro-Almohad and he fiercely condemns the rebel Banū Ghāniya.\(^{69}\)

**Al-Tijānī (1272/670 – ?)**

Al-Tijānī was born in Ifrīqiya in the 1270s. He came from a prominent family of scholars and administrators from Morocco who settled in Ifrīqiya following the Almohad conquest of that land. Al-Tijānī himself reached high rank in the Hafsid bureaucracy. He served as personal secretary to the Hafsid prince Abū Yaḥyā Zakařīya al-Liḥyānī whom he accompanied on a military campaign against the island of Jirba in 1306/706 and an inspection tour of Ifrīqiya that lasted for over two years. His extensive travels throughout the Hafsid empire during these years formed the basis for the famous *Rihla* or “Book of Journeys” that he composed upon his return to Tunis. His patron Abū Yaḥyā became sultan in 1311/711 (he reigned until 1317/717) and al-Tijānī was appointed as the head of the *Diwān al-Rasā’il* (chancellery). This is the last that we hear of al-Tijānī.\(^{70}\)

The *Rihla* is an extremely rich source of information on the geography as well as the political and cultural history of Ifrīqiya. It is arranged into chapters on the cities and towns of Ifrīqiya. He frequently includes long digressions on various subjects such as important battles that took place in the vicinity of a given city or the lives of famous scholars. He incorporates a great deal of poetry into his entry, much of it composed by Ifrīqi poets who would otherwise remain

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unknown. The Riḥla is an important source for the history of the Zīrids, Normans, Almohads and Banū Ghāniya in Ifrīqiya. It also contains information on the death of Qarāqūsh and on the career of one of his sons which is not to be found in any other source. Ibn Khaldūn had a high regard for the Riḥla and he frequently quotes from it in the parts of the Kitāb al-ʿIbar that deal with Ifrīqiya.
Chapter 2
Background

2.1 Geography

Terminology
The basic definition of the Arabic word maghrib is “west”; its opposite is mashriq which means “east.” Westerners refer to the countries of North Africa collectively, apart from Egypt, as le Maghreb or the Maghrib. In modern Arabic usage the proper name Maghrib refers specifically to the Kingdom of Morocco; the region comprised by Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya is called al-Maghrib al-ʿArabī, or occasionally out of deference to Berber sentiment, al-Maghrib al-Islāmī.

In the medieval period the geographical term Maghrib had different uses. What we now call Morocco was known to the medieval geographers as al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā or the Far Maghrib. Central Algeria was called al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ meaning the Central Maghrib. Tunisia, Tripolitania, and the eastern part of Algeria comprised the region known as Ifrīqiya. It was not uncommon for medieval writers to refer to Ifrīqiya as al-Maghrib al-Adnā, or the Near Maghrib. Often medieval authors applied the term Bilād al-Maghrib to all of the lands west of Alexandria.¹ There are instances when the term was stretched to include al-Andalus and Sicily, thus corresponding to l’Occident musulman of the French orientalists. At least one medieval writer considered Egypt part of Bilād al-Maghrib.²

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¹ For an example of this see Ibn Wāṣil, Mufarrij, vol. 1, p. 235.

It has to be stressed that definitions of regions such as *Ifrīqiya, Bilād al-Maghrib,* etc. must always be approximate and somewhat vague as they rarely corresponded to fixed political entities and their boundaries fluctuated according to the perspective of each writer and the conventions of the time. For a modern parallel one has only to consider such vague and ill-defined contemporary terms as the “Middle East,” “Near East,” and “Central Asia.”

**Libya**

Libya is divided today into three regions: Cyrenaica which consists of the eastern coast and its hinterland, Tripolitania which is comprised of the western coast with its interior, and Fezzan which is the Saharan portion of Libya. Two mountain chains conserve moisture from the Mediterranean: the Jabal al-Akhḍar which separates Cyrenaica from the Sahara and Jabal Nafusa which performs the same role in Tripolitania. The boundary between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was traditionally fixed at the town of Tāwargha near Sirt.

In the Islamic period Cyrenaica was known as Barqa. Barqa was the name of the region and its chief city; most of the time one has to rely on context to determine if a chronicler is referring to Barqa the city or Barqa the country.³ Likewise the term Ṭarāblūs (Tripoli) was sometimes applied not just to the city but to the region of Tripolitania as well. Tripolitania was usually considered to be a part of Ifrīqiya by the medieval authors.

According to Thiry, the term Fezzan appears to have referred only to the oasis of Jarma until the twelfth century A.D. when the name came to be applied to most of the Libyan Sahara.⁴ Fezzan’s importance in the medieval period was derived from the crucial role played by some of

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³ Other examples of this phenomenon are the names *Miṣr,* which can mean Cairo or Egypt, and *Shām,* which is still commonly applied to the city of Damascus, the nation-state of Syria, or the entire region of *Bilād al-Shām.*

its oasis-towns, most notably Zawīla, as way-stations along the great Trans-Saharan trade routes. The most important route led south from Zawīla and neighboring oases to Kuwwār (a cluster of oases in northeastern Niger) and thence to the powerful sub-Saharan African kingdom of Kanem on the shores of Lake Chad.

**Ifrīqiya**

*Ifrīqiya* is derived from the Latin *Africa*. The heart of this territory corresponded roughly to the modern nation-state of Tunisia. As we have noted, Tripolitania was normally considered part of Ifrīqiya as well. The limits of Ifrīqiya’s western frontier vary according to different sources. Rouighi notes that during the Hafsid period (late thirteenth to sixteenth centuries A.D.) some scholars included Bijāya (Bougie, located near the center of the Algerian coastline) within the boundaries of Ifrīqiya.\(^5\) Usually the boundary between Ifrīqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsat was placed in eastern Algeria, near the cities of Annaba or Constantine.

Ifrīqiya is the most fertile and the least mountainous region of northwest Africa. Until the Hilālī invasion in the middle of the eleventh century A.D. it was also the seat of the greatest urban centers between Egypt and the Atlantic: Carthage in Antiquity and Qayrawān during the early Islamic period. Ifrīqiya consists of several distinct zones. The coastal plain includes Binzirt (Bizerte) and its environs in northern Tunisia, Tunis and the mouth of the Bajrada River, Cap Bon, Sūs (Sousse), al-Mahdiya, Ṣfāqus (Sfax), the Gulf of Qābis, and the island of Jirba. It is widest in the northeast of Tunisia and gradually narrows in the south. In this area the olive tree is the mainstay of agriculture.\(^6\)

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In the far northwest of Tunisia along the Algerian border lies the mountainous and densely forested region of Kroumirie which was a major source of timber for shipbuilding in the Middle Ages. Further east, in the interior of northern Tunisia is the valley of the Bajrada river, the city of Bāja and its environs, and the region of al-Faḥṣ (meaning “the Plain”) which together constituted the breadbasket of Ifrīqiya. While this northern region of Tunisia is well-watered, the central Tunisian steppe or Qamūda receives considerably less rainfall. The steppe traditionally supported a mixture of pastoralism along with agriculture assisted by extensive irrigation works. Qayrawān is located in this zone.\(^7\)

In the southwest of Tunisia between the cities of Qafṣa, Nafta, and Tūzur lies the region known as al-Jarīd or Qaṣṭiliya (from Latin Castella or “fortresses”) in the medieval period. This area is characterized by the shaṭṭs (vast salt-lakes that are dry for part of the year) and by oases that are rich in date-palms. In addition to their wealth in dates, the towns of the Jarīd were important centers of commerce, lying astride the routes which linked the great cities of northern and coastal Ifrīqiya to Saharan oases such as Wargla and Ghadāmis and thence to sub-Saharan Africa. In southeastern Tunisia, near the Libyan border, lies the Jabal Dummar range which is the natural extension of the Jabal Nafusa in Tripolitania.\(^8\)

**Al-Maghrīb al-Awsaṭ**

Al-Maghrīb al-Awsaṭ or the Central Maghrib consisted of the greater portion of the modern state of Algeria, excluding the Sahara. Mu'nis says that the dividing line between al-Maghrīb al-Aqṣā and al-Maghrīb al-Awsaṭ was the Mulūya River Valley which lies slightly west of the modern


Algerian-Moroccan border. He further divides al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ into two halves: an eastern region centered around Tāhart and a western region whose chief city is Tilimsān (Tlemcen). The territory occupied by al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ is characterized by imposing mountains running parallel to the coast which are known collectively as the Tell Atlas. The Tell Atlas does not form a single unified chain; rather it is divided in many places by wādīs (river valleys) such as the Shalif (Chelif) which empties into the Mediterranean at the port of Mustaghānim (Mostaganem) or the Summām which empties into the sea near Bijāya. From west to east the sub-ranges that comprise the Tell Atlas include the Tassāla, Warsanis, Tittiri, Bībān, Ḥudna, and Bābūr. In some areas such as Oran and Bijāya the mountains approach quite close to the coastline. Another line of fragmented mountain chains, referred to collectively as the Saharan Atlas, runs roughly parallel to the southern border of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ with the Sahara. These ranges bordering the Sahara are from west to east: the Quṣūr, Amūr, Aвлād Nāʿil, and the mighty Awrās (Aures) which boasts the highest peak in Algeria. The unity of the Saharan Atlas is broken by depressions such as the Shaṭṭ al-Ḥudna and the Zāb. Between the Saharan Atlas and the Tell Atlas there are some substantial plains particularly in the west surrounding Tilimsān.

**Al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā**

Al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā or the Far Maghrib corresponded more or less to the territory occupied at present by the Kingdom of Morocco. In the north of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā the Rif mountains extend from east to west parallel to the Mediterranean coast, separating the northern ports such as Mallīla (Melila), Sabta (Ceuta), and Taṭwān (Tetouan) from the interior. The Rif is not part of

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the Atlas chain, rather it is the geological extension of the Baetic system in southern Spain. From the west al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā is shielded by the imposing wall of the Atlas Mountains. The Atlas Mountains form a rough crescent shape with the Middle Atlas in the north, the High Atlas in the center, and the Anti-Atlas in the south curving west towards the Atlantic coastline. In northeastern Morocco, between the Middle Atlas and the Rīf, there is an ample space known as the Tāzā gap which afforded easy passage for merchants and conquering armies between al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Maghrib al-Awsāṭ.11

The heart of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā lies in the plains which are located between the Atlas Mountains in the east and the Atlantic coast in the west. This coastal plain is intersected by several rivers which originate in the Rīf or Atlas Mountains and flow west to empty into the Atlantic Ocean. From north to south these rivers include the Sabū, Abū Raqraq, Umm al-Rabī’, Tansīft, Sūs, and Dar’a. Mu’nis divides this plain into three zones from north to south based on the river boundaries. The first zone between the river Sabū and the northern coast is a fertile region, forested in places, which receives ample rain and yields generous harvests. The key port of Tangiers (Ṭanja) is situated in the northwestern corner of this region where the Atlantic passes into the bottleneck formed by the opposing African and Spanish coasts. Further south, in the basin of the Sabū itself, lie the important inland centers of Meknes (Miknās) and Fez (Fās). Fez was the oldest Islamic city in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and it was the seat of the Idrisids who established the first great independent Muslim dynasty in the western Maghrib.12

The second zone lies between the Sabū valley in the north and the Tansīft river valley in the south. According to Mu’nis this zone was the economic and political heart of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā

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12 Ibid., pp. 26-7.
during the Middle Ages. On the coastline of this zone are the twin ports of Salā (Salé) and Rabat (Ribāṭ al-Faṭḥ) at the mouth of the Abū Raqraq river. Inland in the Tansīft valley lies Marrakech (Marrākush), an Almoravid foundation which supplanted Fez as the capital of the Maghrib during the Almoravid and Almohad periods. The third zone is the plain which is watered by the Sūs. This region was well-irrigated and very fertile.13

Finally there are two semi-arid regions which lie outside of the above-mentioned zones and on the fringes of the Sahara. The first of these is the Darʿa (Draa) basin which is located south of the Sūs river valley and the Anti-Atlas range. To the northeast of the Sūs valley and east of the High Atlas shield is the Tāfilalt valley. The chief center in the Tāfilalt during the Middle Ages was the oasis-city of Sijilmāsa which was for a long time the most important northern terminus of the Trans-Saharan gold trade. The principal crop in the Darʿa and Tāfilalt regions was the date-palm.14

2.2 The Berbers
The Berbers are the original inhabitants of North Africa. The modern population of the region is mainly of Berber stock with an admixture of the various peoples who have conquered and settled in North Africa since Antiquity including the Phoenicians/Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantine Greeks, Arabs, and Ottoman Turks. The Arabic al-barbar is derived from the Greek barbaroi which was a designation for all foreigners who did not speak Greek. Obviously this word had lost its original connotation by the time it entered the Arabic language; it simply became the designation for a large group of peoples inhabiting the space between the Nile Valley

13 Ibid.
and the Atlantic Ocean. This term, imposed by outsiders, masked a great deal of ethnic, linguistic, and even racial diversity. The medieval Berbers consisted of several nations that were further subdivided into tribes and sub-tribes.\(^\text{15}\)

It was natural that once the Arab conquerors established themselves in North Africa they attempted to assign the Berbers a place within their historical/mythological worldview. Shatzmiller has ably traced the formation and the development of the Berber origin myth in the medieval Arab-Islamic tradition.\(^\text{16}\) According to her this myth had three distinct schools: a Mashriqi (eastern), an Andalusí, and an Idrīsí school. The Mashriqi scholars of the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. either attempted to place the Berbers within a Qur’anic-Biblical framework by claiming that they were descended from Goliath (Jālūt) or from Shām son of Noah (Nūḥ), or they traced their origin to the ancient semi-legendary kings of Ḥimyar in southern Arabia. She notes that they showed little hostility to the Berbers as a people.\(^\text{17}\)

The Andalusí school of the tenth and eleventh centuries was motivated by certain experiences unique to the Iberian Peninsula. The Umayyad caliphs of Cordoba had introduced large numbers of Zanāṭī Berber soldiers into al-Andalus. With the breakup of the Umayyad state in the early eleventh century A.D., these Berbers played a key role in the ensuing strife and carved out mini-states of their own. They were resented and looked upon as upstarts by the Arabs. This gave rise to a great war of letters between the detractors and defenders of the Berbers in al-Andalus. Those


\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 146-8.
opposed to the Berbers tried to disprove the stories of an eastern, Arabian origin while their supporters upheld these claims.\textsuperscript{18}

In the eleventh century, with the establishment of the powerful and cultured Şanhâjî Berber dynasties of the Zirids and Hammadids in Ifriqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsat, the question of Berber origins became a subject of great concern. It was part of the propaganda of the Zirids to emphasize their supposed links to the kings of Ḫimyar and this was a theme that was taken up by court historians of the period.\textsuperscript{19}

With the unification of Northwest Africa by the Almohads in the twelfth century the debate took a new turn. The Almohads staked their claim to legitimacy on the proclaimed ʿAlid ancestry of their movement’s founder, the mahdī Ibn Tūmart. According to Shatzmiller this marked an important development because henceforth dynastic legitimacy would be grounded in claims of family descent from the house of the Prophet rather than racial descent from the Ḫimyarites as the Zirids had advertised.\textsuperscript{20}

Like other ancient and medieval peoples the Berbers had a complicated semi-legendary genealogy according to which their various nations and tribes were classified. Naturally there is much confusion and contradiction in the details as conveyed to us by the medieval historians and genealogists. Muʿnis has sifted through the mass of accounts and presented us with a simplified outline of the major Berber tribal divisions in the early Islamic period which will guide us here.

As was the case with the Arabs who were divided between the descendants of the mythical ancestors Qaṭṭān and ʿAdnān, the Berbers were classified according to their descent from two

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 148-50.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 150-2.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 151.
\end{itemize}
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ancestors named Madghīs al-Abtar and Burnus.\textsuperscript{21} The descendants of Burnus, or the Barānīs, included several important nations such as the Ṣanhāja, Maṣmūda, Awraba, and Kutāma. The Ṣanhāja were divided into two major groups: a southern Saharan branch whom Ibn Khaldūn refers to as the first generation of Ṣanhāja (al-Ṭabqa al-Ūlā), and a northern branch called the Talkāta which inhabited the mountains of Kabylia in central Algeria and constituted Ibn Khaldūn’s second generation of Ṣanhāja. In the first group of Ṣanhāja we find the tribes of Lamṭa, Jazūla, and Haskūra who lived in the southern part of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. Of these the first joined the Almoravid confederacy while the latter two were allies of the Almohads. Further south, from Wādī Darʿa in the north to the basin of the Senegal river in the south (the very name of which is derived from Ṣanhāja) were the tribes of Lamṭūna, Massūfa, Judāla, Banū Wārith, and Tārjā. These Saharan nomads formed the core of the Almoravid movement. Their modern descendants are the Touareg (Ṭawāriq, apparently derived from Tārjā).\textsuperscript{22}

The Talkāta Ṣanhāja inhabited the Bībān Mountains in the Tell Atlas south of Algiers. They were a nation of hardy of mountaineers who dominated al-Maghrib al-Awsāt in the tenth century A.D. when they were allies of the Fatimids and later they established the Zirid dynasty when the Fatimids moved to Egypt. To their east, in the Bābūr Mountains located southeast of Bijāya, was the abode of the Kutāma. The Kutāma were the most loyal supporters of the Fatimid daʿwa in Ifrīqiya. They played a key role in the establishment of the Fatimid state and fought in all of its early wars. When the Fatimids moved to Egypt in 361/972 the bulk of the Kutāma followed them there where they continued to play a major role in the Fatimid army and administration for some

\textsuperscript{21} Muʿnis, Tārīkh al-Maghrib, vol. 1, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 47-51.
time. Mu’nis notes that groups such as the Talkāta and Kutāma were in fact large tribal confederations which took their name from the most dominant member.  

The Awraba inhabited the area between Tilimsān and the gap of Tāzā near the present-day Moroccan-Algerian border. They played an important role in the establishment of the Idrisid dynasty in the Maghrib. Their western neighbors were the Maṣmūda tribes who dominated the central and northern parts of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. The distribution of the Maṣmūda tribes was as follows: the Ghumāra inhabited the north of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā between the Rīf mountains and Wādī Sabū; the Barghawāṭa, who gave their name to a heretical movement that played an important role in early Maghribī history, were settled between Wādī Sabū in the north and Wādī Abū Raqraq in the south; the tribes of Hintāta, Tinmallal, Hargha, Dukkāla, Ḥāḥā, Kunfīsa, and Warīka, among others, inhabited the area between Wādī Umm al-Rabīʿ in the north and Wādī Darʿa in the south. The Maṣmūda tribes in this area created the Almohad Empire.

We now move on to the second great division of Berber tribes, the so-called Butrī tribes or descendants of Madghīs al-Abtar. These included the Zanāta, Lawāta, Hawwāra, Nafūsa, and Naḍzāwa. Mu’nis notes that the Zanāta were by far the most prominent of the Butrī peoples and eventually their name came to be substituted for the entire Butrī family though they were originally but a single branch of it. Nonetheless, this should not cause us to lose sight of the importance of other Butrī tribes. The Lawāta were found in Cyrenaica and the eastern Libyan oases. The Hawwāra were found in Fezzan, Tripolitania, and even in the Nile Valley itself. The

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23 Ibid., p. 46.
24 Ibid., pp. 47, 51-3.
25 Ibid., p. 56.
Nafūsa were found in Tripolitania and they gave their name to Jabal Nafūsa in the southern part of that region.²⁶

Some Zanāta were found on the northern fringes of the Sahara along the oasis belt that stretched between Tripolitania in the west and the region of Sūs in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā as well as in the Awrās Mountains of eastern Algeria. The heaviest concentration of Zanāṭī tribes was in the plains of western Algeria and northern Morocco. Specifically, they inhabited the area around Tilimsān and the Mulūya valley. Among the greatest Zanāṭī tribal confederations in this area were the Miknāsa (who gave their name to the city of Meknes), Maghrāwa, and Lamāya. After the decline of the Almohad Empire in the late thirteenth century, the Zanāta pushed west through the gap of Tāzā to the Atlantic Ocean, displacing some of the Maṣmūda tribes in the process. Two of the great states that arose following the Almohad collapse, the Marinids of Fez and the Zayyānids (Banū ‘Abd al-Wād) of Tilimsān were Zanāṭī in origin.²⁷ It must be emphasized that for the most part the larger tribal divisions among the Berbers did not translate into political unity; it was normal to find tribes from the same “nation” like Ṣanhāja or Zanāta on both sides of a conflict.

### 2.3 Trade Routes

The Trans-Saharan trade was an important economic reality in North Africa during the Islamic period. Thus it is appropriate to devote some space to its origin and development. In general merchants from the north traded salt (of which there was a dire shortage in West Africa) and manufactured goods for gold, slaves, and occasionally items such as ivory, live exotic animals, leopard pelts, and kola nuts. It should be noted that West Africa was the most important source


of gold for the entire Old World economy prior to the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru in the sixteenth century.

Historians of the Sahara usually group the Saharan routes into a few major “axes” with each axis consisting of a bundle of routes with differences in the particular way-stations employed on each of these routes. Lombard spoke of three clusters of routes: a western cluster with northern termini at Sijilmāsa or Nūl Lamta (a town on the Atlantic coast in southern Morocco), a central group with northern termini at Wargla, Sidrāta, or the M’zāb (oases on the northern edge of the Sahara in central Algeria), and an eastern cluster which terminated in the Jarīd (southern Tunisia).\(^{28}\) Some historians follow Mauny in denying the existence of a central axis, maintaining instead that the routes of the central trunk were merged with the eastern or western axes.\(^{29}\)

Unfortunately neither of these positions adequately account for Saharan trade east of the Jarīd because they do not include the old and well-travelled route which led across the Libyan Sahara via Fezzan to Chad. For this reason Vanacker’s division of the routes is to be preferred.\(^{30}\) The eastern axis consists of the Fezzan-Chad routes according to her arrangement. The central axis includes all of the routes with northern termini from Wargla in the west to Ghadāmis and the Jarīd in the east and southern termini near the Niger River valley which is reached via the oasis of Tadmakka. Vanacker’s western axis is the same as Lombard’s.\(^{31}\)

There were also important routes that ran from west to east across the Maghrib, Ifrīqiya, Libya and Egypt. These routes were important not only for merchants but also for the many

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., pp. 665-7.
pilgrims from western Islamic lands who had to pass through Egypt on their way to the holy cities of the Hijaz. Lombard speaks of two such routes: one ran through the plateau between the Tell and Saharan Atlas from the Jarīd to the Tāzā Gap, the second more southerly route called the “Quṣūr” route also begin in the Jarīd but it followed the oases on the northern fringe of the Sahara to Sijilmāsa in the southwestern corner of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. 32 Before the Hilālī invasion in the middle of the eleventh century Qayrawān was connected to the Jarīd by a route that ran from north to south via Qamūda and Qafṣa. Ifrīqiya was connected to Egypt by a route which ran parallel to the coast between Qābis and Alexandria. Tilimsān was connected to Sijilmāsa by a well-traveled route which passed through the Mulūya Valley and Fez. 33 According to Ibn Ḥawqal at the beginning of the Islamic period there was a route which connected Egypt to the gold-exporting lands of West Africa. 34 Travellers on this route went southwest from Fusṭāṭ to the oases of Khārija (also known as Kharga) and Kufra and thence to the southern border of the Sahara which they followed westward to the kingdoms of Gao and Ghana. Ibn Ḥawqal says that this route was closed by Ibn Ṭulūn in the ninth century A.D. due to the threat posed by sandstorms and marauding tribes. When Ibn Ḥawqal wrote nearly a century later some of the oases along the route such as Kufra had been largely abandoned and returned to a wild state. 35 Shaban believes that the route fell into decline because Ibn Ṭulūn’s rivalry with the Ibāḍī

35 Ibid.
Khārijīs of the oases led him to seek alternatives to it.\textsuperscript{36} In any case, we do not hear again of a
direct route between Egypt and West Africa through the oases until the Mamluk period.

There are differing opinions on when the Trans-Saharan trade commenced. Swanson rejects
the possibility that there was any Saharan commerce worth mentioning during the Roman
period.\textsuperscript{37} The traditional view upheld by scholars such as Devisse and Thiry is that the trans-
Sahara trade began in the late eight century A.D. due to the activities of the Ibāḍī merchants in
Tāhart and other centers.\textsuperscript{38} This trade was initially restricted to slaves as the Muslims were not
yet aware of the significant gold deposits in West Africa. Only in the tenth century A.D. when
the Fatimids ruled Ifrīqiya did gold begin to flow north of the Sahara in significant quantities, the
bulk of it passing along the western Sijilmāsa – Awdaghust axis.\textsuperscript{39}

A few scholars have challenged this notion and argued that the Trans-Saharan trade,
especially the gold trade, was of much earlier origin. Liverani believes that Herodotus’
description of Libya in Book Four of the \textit{Histories} is at its core not a semi-mythical ethnological
account as most scholars suppose but rather a practical merchant’s itinerary for a Trans-Saharan
journey from Egypt to the Niger river bend via Siwa, Awjila, Zawīla, Ghāt, Ideles, and
Tassilīt.\textsuperscript{40} He compares Herodotus’ itinerary with similar itineraries by medieval geographers
such as al-Bakrī and al-Idrīsī and finds a close correspondence between them in terms of the


\textsuperscript{38} Jean Devisse, “Routes de commerce et échanges en Afrique Occidentale en relation avec la Mediterranée: Un
essai sur le commerce africain medieval du XIe au XVIe siècle,” \textit{Revue d'histoire économique et sociale}, 50, no. 1,

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Mario Liverani, “The Libyan Caravan Road in Herodotus IV.181-185,” \textit{Journal of the Economic and Social
route and the distances from one oasis to the next. He says that the route described by Herodotus is almost identical to the Cairo-Timbuktu route of the Mamluk era which the famous Malian king Mansā Mūsā traversed in the fourteenth century A.D. On the basis of his re-reading of Herodotus and recent archeological discoveries in the Libyan oases, Liverani pushes the origin of the Trans-Saharan gold trade to approximately 500 B.C.⁴¹

Garrard says that gold coinage, which was previously all but unknown in Roman Africa, made its first appearance there around 300 A.D.⁴² The amount of gold coins and objects in circulation slowly increases under the Late Empire and the Vandals. However, during the period of Byzantine rule from 534 to 695 A.D. large quantities of gold were minted at Carthage without interruption. Then for nearly a century following the Arab conquest of Ifriqiya in 695 Byzantine gold coinage became extremely rare throughout the remainder of the empire. This is clear evidence that the Byzantines had been obtaining their gold from Africa during the previous two centuries. At the same time, the Arabs began minting large numbers of gold dinars at their new capital in Qayrawān almost as soon as they had finished expelling the Byzantines from North Africa. Garrard finds that textual and archeological evidence indicate that gold dinars were plentiful in Ifriqiya under the Umayyad governors and the Aghlabids during the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. Garrard believes that the Trans-Saharan gold trade was already in full-swing by the sixth century A.D. and that it continued under the earliest Muslim rulers without interruption. To bolster his claims he attempts to demonstrate that the system for measuring gold dust that was used in the trading towns on the southern flank of the Sahara until the late nineteenth century

⁴¹ Ibid.

was of Roman origin. It is interesting to note in passing that Garrard and Liverani both make the case for an extensive pre-Islamic Saharan gold trade along the eastern axis via the Libyan oases.

2.4 Bilād al-Sūdān and the Sources of Gold
The classical Arabic term for the lands lying south of the Sahara was *Bilād al-Sūdān* meaning “the Land of the Blacks.” This term was especially applied to West Africa and Chad, less so to Nubia and the East African coast which will be covered later in relation to Egypt. Broadly speaking West Africa can be divided into two ecological zones: the savanna which borders the Sahara in the north and encompasses the Senegal and Niger River valleys; the tropical forest zone which lies further south by the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. The great kingdoms of medieval West Africa arose in the savanna zone while the forest zone was inhabited for the most part by less-sophisticated tribal societies.

Like their counterparts in the Maghrib the medieval states that arose in West Africa were not highly centralized; rather they consisted of a core area which dominated many lesser “kingdoms” and tribes on the peripheries. The major states in West Africa between the eighth and twelfth centuries from west to east were Takrūr in the lower Senegal Valley; Ghana which was bordered by the Sahara in the north, the Senegal River in the west, and the Niger River in the east; Gao or Kawkaw which was the name of a city and kingdom centered just east of the Niger bend; and finally Kanem near Lake Chad. The kingdom of Ghana (called *Ghānā* in the Arabic sources and *Wagadū* by the locals) was established by the Soninke people. Its capital at Kumbi-Salih has been excavated by archeologists and was found to consist of two cities: a royal city containing the king’s palace and surrounded by the huts of his subjects and a second city built to

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43 Ibid.
accommodate a colony of Muslim merchants from the Sahara. Gao was inhabited by the Songhay people while Kanem was dominated until the close of the eleventh century by the Zaghāwa, a people attested in the Arabic geographical sources who appear to have inhabited Chad and possibly Darfur and Kordofan to the east as well. In the late eleventh century the Zaghāwa were replaced by a new dynasty called the Sayfūwa who made Islam the official religion of Kanem. Under their rule Kanem continued to play a major role in the Lake Chad region and the Libyan Sahara until its demise in the late fourteenth century A.D. In the early thirteenth century the Malinke [or Mandinka] who lived to the south of the kingdom of Ghana established the Malian Empire which absorbed the area once occupied by Takrūr, Ghana, and Gao as well as lands further south.\footnote{See Nehemia Levtzion, \textit{Ancient Ghana and Mali}, (London: Methuen, 1973), pp. 1-83; B.W. Barkindo and D. Lange, “The Chad Region as a Crossroads,” in \textit{UNESCO General History of Africa}, vol. 3, ed. M. El-Fasi, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), pp. 436-460; Thurston Shaw, “The Guinea Zone: General Situation” in \textit{UNESCO General History of Africa}, vol. 3, ed. M. El –Fasi, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), pp. 481-87.}

Two of the most important gold-producing regions were Bambuk, lying south of the Senegal River, and Bure on the Upper Niger. These sources are close to the Atlantic and the westernmost Trans-Saharan axis which ran between Sijilmāsa and Awdaghust. The gold was acquired here by locals who panned for it in the streams. The kings of Ghana and Mali acquired this gold as tribute or through barter. Then they traded the gold in their capitals under carefully regulated conditions with Berber and Arab merchants from the north who brought salt, horses, and manufactured goods in return.

There were other gold sources located well to the southeast such as the gold-producing regions of Lobi and Akanland (in the modern Republic of Ghana) and even further east in the tropical forest zone of modern Nigeria. Messier assumes that during the Fatimid period (tenth
and eleventh centuries A.D.) these eastern regions had not yet been exploited.\textsuperscript{45} In his account of the Trans-Saharan trade down to the end of the Almohad period (late thirteenth century), Devisse makes no mention of production in any goldfield apart from Bambuk and Bure.\textsuperscript{46} Garrard suggests that the gold mines of Lobi and Ife may have been exploited as early as the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.\textsuperscript{47} McIntosh argues that the fabled West African “Gold Island” known as Wangara, which is mentioned by the Arab geographers including al-Idrīsī and often assumed to be a reference to Bambuk or Bure if not an altogether mythical place, should be identified with the lands lying south of the Niger River Bend (the so-called Inner Niger Delta). She suggests that as early as 1000 A.D. gold from Lobi was traded here.\textsuperscript{48} Of course if the eastern sources of gold were being exploited then it follows that gold from these regions was transported across the Sahara along the eastern and central Trans-Saharan routes which were much closer to these sources than the western Awdaghust-Sijilmāsa route. We are convinced that the Lobi and Nigerian goldfields were in production during the period covered by this study (the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D.) and that there was a considerable gold-trade across the Sahara via the Libyan oases (eastern axis) at the same time and we will present our evidence for this assertion in a later chapter.


\textsuperscript{46} Jean Devisse, “Routes de commerce,” pp. 42-73.

\textsuperscript{47} Garrard, “Myth and Metrology,” pp. 459-60.

Chapter 3

Northwest Africa down to the Hilālī Invasion (Mid-Eleventh Century)

By the beginning of the ninth century A.D. a constellation of independent states had emerged in northwest Africa. Ifrīqiya was controlled by the Aghlabids, an Arab Sunnī dynasty of the Ḥanafī madhhab that ruled from Qayrawān while giving token recognition to the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad.¹ Al-Magrib al-Awsaṭ was dominated by the Rustamids.² They belonged to the Ibāḍī sect of Khārijī Islam.³ This dynasty was established in the late eighth century by a Persian immigrant. The Rustamids took the title imām and they ruled over a confederacy of Khārijī Berber tribes, mostly Zanāta, from their capital in Tāhart. The authority of the Rustamid imāms extended at times to the Ibāḍī communities in the Jarīd, Jabal Nafūsa, and Jirba, thereby encircling their Aghlabid rivals from the south and potentially denying them direct access to the


³ The Khārijīs (*Khawārij*) are, along with the Sunnīs and Shīʿīs, one of the three major Islamic sects that emerged after the battle of Ṣiffīn in 657/37. Whereas the Sunnīs required their caliphs to be descendants of Quraysh and the Shīʿīs followed charismatic imāms who were descendants of ʿAlī, the Khārijīs maintained that the only necessary qualification for a caliph was that he be a Muslim of irreproachable morals and piety. They also believed that any Muslim who sinned should be regarded as an apostate from the faith. The Khārijīs were divided into several sects. We are concerned with two of these, the Ibāḍīs (*Ibāḍīya*) and the Ṣufrīs (*Ṣufrīya*). Both of these sects originated in Basra in the seventh century but they developed a strong presence in northwest Africa; the Ṣufrīs in Al-Maghib al-Aqṣā and the Ibāḍīs further east in Ifrīqiya and al-Maghib al-Awsaṭ. These two sects are grouped among the “moderate” Khārijīs because they did not share the belief of the more extreme Khārijī sects that all non-Khārijī Muslims should be considered polytheists (*mushrikūn*) making it lawful to kill and enslave them. The Ibāḍīs were heavily influenced by the Muʿtāzilī school of theology. The Ṣufrīs and the extreme Khārijīs became extinct in the medieval period but the Ibāḍīs survive to this day in Oman as well as in isolated regions of Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. See G. Levi Della Vida, “Khāridžites,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 4, pp. 174-77; T. Lewicki, “Al-Ibādiyya,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 648 – 60; K. Lewinstein, “Ṣufrīyya,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 9, pp.766-69.
Sahara. At the same the time intrepid ʿIbāḍī merchants dominated the central and eastern axes of the Trans-Saharan trade during this period. They pioneered the route Wargla/Jarīd – Tadmakka – Gao, establishing colonies in all of the way-stations. Further east they established colonies in the oases of Fezzan and Kuwwār through which all trade with Kanem had to pass. Salt was traded for gold and slaves along these routes.⁴

In al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā there were three important dynasties that ruled during the ninth century. The Idrisids were ʿAlids (descendants of ʿAlī but not Shiʿa) who established an independent state in the northern part of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā with its capital at Fez. They took the title of imām. To the south of them along the Atlantic coastal plain were the Barghawāṭa, a heretical Berber group who had their own prophet and holy-book. They tenaciously maintained their independence until the Almoravid conquests of the eleventh century. Sijilmāsa in the Wādī Tāfilalt (southeastern Morocco) was ruled by the Berber Midrārid dynasty which held power over a confederacy of Zanāta and Ḥuwwāra Berbers.⁵ The Midrāreds were Khārijīs of the Ṣufrī sect. While the Rustamids controlled the eastern and western axes of the Trans-Saharan trade, the Midrāreds monopolized the western axis trading salt from the mines at Awlīl (on the Mauritanian coast) for gold in Awdaghust. In the process they became fabulously wealthy. Ibn Ḥawqal reports that in the early tenth century Sijilmāsa had an annual income of 400,000 dinars, equal to half of the annual revenue of the Fatimid state in Iḍrīqiya.⁶

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The coming of the Fatimids marked a drastic change in the political landscape of North Africa. Fatimid dāʿīs arrived in the Tell Atlas of eastern Algeria in the late ninth century where they recruited to their cause the Kutāma Berber tribes and launched a long and bloody uprising against the Aghlabids. In 909/296 they captured Qayrawān and became the new masters of Ifrīqiya. In the same year the victorious Fatimid army marched west and sacked Tāhart, putting an end to the Rustamid state. The supporters of this dynasty fled south to the oases of Wargla and the Mʿzāb in the Algerian Sahara where they continued to be involved in the Trans-Saharan trade to Tadmakka and Gao. After the fall of Tāhart the Fatimids captured Sijilmāsa and brought an end to the Midrārid dynasty. The mahdī ʿUbaydallāh returned in triumph to Qayrawān and he was hailed as the first Fatimid caliph (909/297 – 934/322).

For the next sixty years the Fatimids fought tenaciously to maintain their newfound empire in northwest Africa and Sicily against internal and external enemies while never losing sight of their primary goal which was the conquest of Egypt and the victory of the Fatimid movement in the Mashriq. The Fatimids drew most of their manpower from the Kutāma and the Talkāta Șanhāja who inhabited the Tell Atlas in what is now eastern and central Algeria. These tribes were old rivals of the Zanāta, their neighbors to the west. The Umayyads of Cordoba felt threatened by Fatimid expansion so they supported the Zanātī tribes and contested possession of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā with the Fatimid caliphs.

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8 Lombard, Golden Age, p. 60.
In the mid tenth century a chief of the Talkāta named Zīrī b. Manād established the Zirid dynasty with its capital at a city called Ashīr in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. The Zirids proved to be capable and loyal fighters for the Fatimid cause. When the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz decided to move his court to Egypt in 972/361 he left the Zirids behind as vassal rulers over Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib. The Zirid sultans henceforth took up residence in Qayrawān. At first the Zirids attempted to rule an empire that stretched as far west as the Atlantic. However, before the close of the tenth century they had to resign themselves to the permanent loss of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and the western portion of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ to the pro-Umayyad Zanātī tribes. This entailed the loss of direct access to the western Trans-Saharan axis via Sijilmāsa which now fell within the Andalusī Umayyad sphere of influence. The struggle between the Zirids and Zanāta continued in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. A branch of the Zirid family known as the Hammadids established themselves at the old capital of Ashīr. In the early eleventh century they split from the Zirids and an independent Hammadid state emerged in this region.

When al-Muʿizz moved to Egypt he took measures to check the power of the Zirids by retaining control over the treasury and the Ismāʿīlī daʿwa in Ifrīqiya. He also ensured that Tripoli and Sicily were ruled by separate governors who were independent of Qayrawān. The Zirids acted like independent rulers in all but name and inevitably there was friction between the

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10 *Daʿwa* in this context is the call or invitation to join a religio-political movement such as the Abbasids or Fatimids. This call was made by professional propagandists of the movement called *dāʿī*. The Ismāʿīlīs are one of the major Shīʿī sects. They split from the *Imāmī* or Twelver Shīʿīs as a result of a disagreement concerning the succession to the *imām* Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765/148) who is regarded as the fifth *imām* by the Ismāʿīlīs and the sixth by the Twelvers. The sect takes its name from Jaʿfar’s son Ismāʿīl who predeceased his father. The Fatimids were Ismāʿīlīs. See W. Madelung, “Ismāʿīliyya,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam 2*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 4, pp. 198-206.

two courts. On three different occasions in the 970s and 980s Fatimid agents instigated rebellions against the Zirids in Ifriqiya with the support of the Kutāma Berbers. These efforts ended in failure and by 1000 the Fatimids were no longer in a position to exercise much influence over the course of events in Ifriqiya; they were content with Zirid recognition of the caliph in Cairo and regular exchanges of embassies and gifts. Part of the reason for this change in attitude was that Libya had completely slipped out of the grasp of the Fatimids. Cyrenaica had fallen under the control of the Banū Qurra, a Hilālī Arab tribe, while in Tripolitania a Zanātī Berber dynasty known as the Banū Khazrūn had come to power. In 1006/397 the Banū Qurra and other tribes invaded Egypt under the leadership of the rebel Abū Rakwa and threatened the very survival of the caliphate. In 1051/443 the Banū Qurra invaded Egypt again causing destruction in the vicinity of Alexandria.

The reign of the Zirid sultan al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs (1016/406 – 1062/454) witnessed the greatest crisis of this North African dynasty’s history, namely, the Hilālī invasion. Since the Fatimid departure to Egypt, Ifriqiya’s Mālikī Sunnī community had grown in strength and confidence while the influence of the Fatimid Shīʿa declined. Al-Muʿizz was under great pressure to cut relations with Cairo and pledge allegiance to the orthodox Sunnī caliph in Baghdad. By 1050/442 at the latest al-Muʿizz took the decisive step of substituting the name of the Abbasid caliph for that of the Fatimid caliph in the Friday sermon (khūṭba).

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According to our sources the reigning Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir (1036/427 – 1094/487) and his vizier al-Yāzūrī retaliated against the Zirids by encouraging two large Arab tribes that were then settled in Upper Egypt, the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym, to invade Ifrīqiya. The Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym belonged to the so-called “northern” or ʿAdnānī group of Arabs as opposed to the “southern” group who were known as the descendants of Qaḥṭān. Their history stretched back into the Jāhilī period. Both tribes were allied to the Qārāmīṭa, an Ismāʿīlī movement that split from the Fatimids and fought against them in Bilād al-Shām in the late tenth century A.D. following the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. For this reason the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAzīz (975/365 – 996/386) punished the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym by forcibly resettling them in Upper Egypt.  

It would be wrong to think of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym as mere tribes; as we shall see they were more akin to nations composed of many tribes and sub-tribes. Among the most prominent Hilālī tribes were the Riyāḥ, Athbaj, Jushm, Zughba, ʿAdī, Qurra, and Maʿqil. The major Sulaymī tribes were Hayb, Labīd, Dabbāb, ʿAwf, Zughb, and Rawāḥa. Each of these tribes was itself composed of numerous lesser tribes and clans.

We ought to treat with skepticism the chroniclers’ claim that the Hilālī and Sulaymī Arabs were “sent” to Ifrīqiya by the Fatimids in order to punish the refractory Zirid ruler since the Fatimid state was in the midst of a grave crisis and it was hardly in a position to coerce the two powerful Arab tribes and to influence developments in Ifrīqiya. The middle of the eleventh century coincided with a prolonged period of famine and political instability in Egypt known as “the Great Crisis” (al-Shidda al-ʿUzmā). In an important study on the factors behind the Hilālī

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17 For these tribes and their sub-divisions see Ibn Khaldūn, Ibar, vol. 6, pp. 17-91. Ibn Khaldūn notes that the Maʿqil were by origin Qaḥṭānī (Yamanī) Arabs who later joined the Banū Hilāl, Ibid., p. 78.

18 Ibid., pp. 94-105.
migration Daghfūs argues that deteriorating economic conditions and the threat of starvation in Upper Egypt prompted the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym to move west.¹⁹

Though some of the sources imply that the migration consisted of one mass movement in a single year we should perhaps consider ‘Abbās’ suggestion that the migration occurred in separate waves.²⁰ It appears that the Banū Sulaym established themselves in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania while the Banū Hilāl entered Ibrīqiya. At first al-Mu‘izz tried to placate the Banū Hilāl by forming marriage-alliances with their chiefs and incorporating their warriors into his army but this was not enough to sate their ambitions. Soon open warfare broke out between the Arab newcomers and the loyal Zirid forces that were comprised of the Ṣanhāja and al-Mu‘izz’s black slave-soldiers. In the early 1050s the Zirids suffered a severe defeat at the battle of Ḥaydarān in southern Tunisia. In the aftermath of the defeat al-Mu‘izz fled with the remnants of his army to Qayrawān. For the next few years he watched helplessly as the Banū Hilāl overran the countryside of Ibrīqiya and important towns such as Sūs and Bāja slipped out of Zirid control. Eventually al-Mu‘izz’s position in Qayrawān became untenable and he was forced to flee to the better-protected coastal stronghold of al-Mahdīya in 1057-8/449. Qayrawān fell to the Banū Hilāl in the same year and it was thoroughly pillaged.²¹ From then on the Zirid state survived as little more than a coastal principality at al-Mahdīya. After its sack by the Banu Hilāl Qayrawān never recovered its former importance; it survived as a minor town of little consequence.

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¹⁹ Daghfūs, Dirāsāt, pp. 151-80.


²¹ For these events see Khudayrī, ‘Alāqāt, pp. 65-71; Idris, Al-Dawla al-Ṣanhājiya, vol. 1, pp. 245-85; Daghfūs, Dirāsāt, pp. 197-214.
The effect of the Hilālī invasion on Ifrīqiya and North Africa in general has been a source of considerable controversy among modern scholars. The traditional view is that the arrival of the Banū Hilāl marked the triumph of nomadism over civilization. A strong, prosperous, and vibrant Zirid state succumbed to an unexpected and catastrophic invasion that plunged Ifrīqiya into a "dark age" of sorts. This was more or less the view of Idris who entitled the chapter on the Hilālī migration in his magisterial history of the Zirids "The Catastrophe." Recent studies have questioned this assumption. Poncet argues that the Zirid state was already weakened by internal factors; the Central Maghrib had seceded under the rival Hammadids, Tripoli was ruled by the Zanāta, and there were Khārijī revolts in the Jarīd which denied the Zirids access to this gateway of the Sahara. Furthermore pastoralism and nomadism were hardly alien to Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib; a large portion of the Berber population had been living a Bedouin lifestyle since well before the coming of Islam. Cahen warns us not to assume that nomads always had a harmful effect on agriculture and sedentary populations. More often than not they were able to coexist in mutually beneficial relations from an economic point of view. He adds that the Hilālī migration and the associated mid-eleventh century crisis in Ifrīqiya must be seen as part of a larger process of political decentralization and "bedouinisation" that affected the wider Islamic world in its eastern and western halves during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

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25 Ibid., p. 132.
Mūsā’s observations on the post-Hilālī invasion economy of North Africa are worth considering here.26 According to him prior to the arrival of the Banū Hilāl agriculture flourished in Ifrīqiya (which he calls Bilād al-Sharqiyya) as well as in the interior plateau between Qayrawān and Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād. On the other hand agriculture was less-developed in the valleys of the eastern Tell Atlas (the coastal mountain chains of central and eastern Algeria and northern Tunisia). At this time the principal crops in Ifrīqiya were wheat and barley. After the mid eleventh century A.D. the cultivated zone of Ifrīqiya receded, particularly in the interior. Agriculture was restricted to protected areas close to the important towns. Wheat and barley were often grown within the city walls. In Ifrīqiya cultivation of tree crops such as olives on the coast and dates in the semi-desert areas (bastana from bustān, “orchard”) replaced field-cultivation of wheat and barley (zirā’ā) as the primary agricultural activity and the main source of income. He cites the thirteenth century geographer Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī who says that as a result of the Bedouin invasions the date became the principal food source in Ifrīqiya.27 Perhaps olive and palm groves were preferred during this time of insecurity because they required less space than wheat fields and they could be clustered inside or close to the city walls for better defense.

Mūsā suggests that due to depopulation of the countryside in Ifrīqiya caused by the Hilālī invasion there was an acute shortage of farm laborers at this time which cut into the profits of landowners as they had to pay higher wages to the workers who harvested and transported their

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crops. The steppes lying south of the Tell Atlas between Qayrawān and Qal‘at Banī Ḥammād were also gravely affected. Cultivation of saffron, cotton, flax, and sugarcane ceased in this area and pastoralism predominated. While the cultivated zone declined in Ifrīqiya and in the interior of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ around the Qal‘a, there was an upsurge in agricultural activity along the coast of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ in the valleys of the Tell Atlas.

We believe that the best approach to evaluating the impact of the Hilālī invasion is to consider its effects on a region by region basis. There is no doubt that the invasion had a drastic effect on the Qamūda or Tunisian steppe. In this region there was always a careful balance between herding and farming. Due to the area’s limited rainfall, an elaborate hydraulic network which has been described by Solignac was developed under the Aghlabids, Fatimids, and Zirids in order to supply water for irrigation as well as to meet the water needs of the citizens of Qayrawān. The fall of Qayrawān and the ensuing political vacuum that was most pronounced in the interior of Ifrīqiya meant that there was no strong central authority to maintain the networks of canals. At the same time there was no doubt intense pressure from the Arab newcomers who were in need of the steppe’s prime pastureland for their flocks. Thus there was an inevitable decline of agriculture along with the abandonment of urban centers such as Qayrawān. These developments were accompanied by a great increase in pastoral activity. The effect on the coastal plain was less severe and rather temporary. Coastal cities such as Tripoli, Qābis, Ṣfāqus, Sūs and al-Mahdīya retained their importance throughout the chaotic period of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. By the mid-twelfth century Tunis, another port, had become the unrivalled

28 Mūsā, Nashāḥ, p. 194.
29 Ibid., pp. 192-4.
30 Solignac, “Recherches.”
cultural, economic, and administrative capital of Ifrīqiya, occupying the place that had once been held by Qayrawān in the interior. We have no reason to doubt that agriculture continued to play a dominant role in the coastal plain and in the “breadbasket” region of the Wādī Bajrada in northern Tunisia.

As one would expect the mountainous regions like Jabal Nafusa and Jabal Dummar were little affected by the Arab migrations. In the Almohad period the inhabitants of these areas were still predominantly Berber Khārijīs and they appear to have been well-off at least until Qarāqūsh invaded their lands in the 1180s. After a careful comparison of geographers’ accounts from before and after the Hilālī migration (particularly al-Bakrī from the eleventh century and al-Idrīsī from the twelfth), Thiry concludes that there was remarkably little change in the Libyan oases: cultivation of date palms and other crops continued as before, the trade and communication routes between oases and to sub-Saharan Africa remained active, and in many places the population remained Berberophone.\textsuperscript{31} The Libyan coast was not spared since it lay directly on the path of the migration. According to Goitein, the Geniza documents show serious disruption of the overland traffic between Ifrīqiya and Egypt along the coastal route by the middle of the eleventh century such that travel between the two countries was thereafter mostly by ship.\textsuperscript{32} He ascribes this situation to the Hilālī invasion.

In conclusion we can say with certainty that the Hilālī invasion resulted in the political fragmentation of Ifrīqiya. Whereas previously there had been a series of strong regional states based in Qayrawān (Aghlabids, Fatimids, and Zirids), after the mid-eleventh century the region was divided into numerous city-states and tribal principalities. There was also a new trend of

\textsuperscript{31} Thiry, *Sahara*, pp. 234-43, especially pp. 242-3.

coastal cities replacing inland centers as regional capitals, a clear sign that old powers were 
losing their grip on the interior. The Zirids abandoned Qayrawān for the coastal city of al-
Mahdīya, and as we will see later, the Hammadids would eventually abandon their inland capital 
at Qalʿat Banī Ḫammād for a new coastal capital at Bijāya when confronted with the same Hilālī 
threat that had overcome their eastern cousins. Agriculture declined in certain areas but this was 
by no means uniform. Finally, perhaps the most lasting legacy of the Hilālī migration was the 
linguistic arabization of the Ifrīqī countryside which occurred as the newcomers intermarried 
with the locals and were absorbed into the fabric of society.
Chapter 4

Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib from the Hilālī Invasion to the Almohad Conquest (Mid-Eleventh to Mid-Twelfth Century)

4.1 Introduction

The history of Ifrīqiya during the period from the fall of Qayrawān (1057-8/449) until the Almohad conquest of the region slightly less than a century later is confusing and difficult to follow due to the large number of local and outside powers that were involved in its affairs. One historian has named this period the age of the Ifrīqī *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif* or “Party-Kings”, a term used to describe the numerous local petty kings who ruled in Islamic Andalus during the period of decentralization which followed the break-up of the Spanish Umayyad caliphate in the early eleventh century.¹ The history of this period is essential if we wish to understand the state of Ifrīqiya when the Almohads arrived there and incorporated it into their empire in approximately the middle of the twelfth century.

In presenting the history of this period I have followed the approach of Ibn Khaldūn in the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* who treats separately each of the local Ifrīqī dynasties which arose following the fall of Qayrawān; beginning with the Zirids themselves in their new capital at al-Mahdiya.² While this entails occasional repetition of the same event, I have found it to be preferable to al-Nuwayrī’s method of treating all of the dynasties at once.³ The latter approach is destined to result in a patchwork of lengthy digressions which will only make the history of this already confusing period harder to follow. I have also covered the history of the Hammadids in this

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section though their center of power was in the Central Maghrib rather than Ifrīqiya. This is because the Hammadids were a sister dynasty of the Zirids and their experiences paralleled those of the Zirids in many ways including invasion by the Banū Hilāl, the loss of control over the interior and a retreat to coastal strongholds, the threat of Norman attacks on their ports, and eventual incorporation into the Almohad Empire. In addition the Hammadids intervened extensively in Ifrīqī affairs during this period and the histories of the two regions of Ifrīqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ are difficult to separate during this period.

4.2 The Zirid State in al-Mahdīya
The fall of Qayrawān and the transfer of the capital to al-Mahdīya led to a transformation in the very nature of the Zirid principality. Prior to the Hilālī invasion the Zirids were in firm possession of both the coast and interior of Ifrīqiya. On many occasions they were able to project their authority into Libya in the east and al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ in the west. With the move to al-Mahdīya the Zirids became rulers of a coastal city-state that was merely one of several competing powers in the new post-invasion Ifrīqiya. While Arab tribes jostled with one another for control over the interior, the major cities of the region (Ṣfāqus, Tunis, Sūsa, Qābis, Tripoli, Qalṣa, and others) had managed to secede from Zirid rule under local dynasties of Ṣanhājī Berber, Arab, or even Turkic origin. The powerful Hammadid state in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ attempted to fill the vacuum created by the Zirid decline until it met a similar fate at the hands of the Hilālī Arabs.4 At the close of the eleventh century the Christian maritime powers, especially Pisa and Genoa, took an interest in the affairs of North Africa and they launched frequent raids

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4 See below for more information on this dynasty which split from the Zīrids in the first quarter of the eleventh century.
on the coastal cities. The Normans of Sicily followed their example and their efforts were
crowned with the capture of al-Mahdīya in 1148/543.

Al-Muʿizz died in 1061/453 and he was succeeded by his son Tamīm. The latter inherited a
diminished realm confined to the territory of al-Mahdīya. He was an energetic ruler who devoted
much of his long reign (he died in 1106-7/501) to war and intrigue in an attempt to restore Zirid
primacy over Ifrīqiya and it seems that he was partially successful in this regard. In 1063/455 the
independent ruler of Ṣfāqūs besieged al-Mahdīya but Tamīm defeated him and forced him to
withdraw. In the same year Tamīm captured Sūs, a major coastal city north of al-Mahdīya.⁵

The powerful Hammadid ruler al-Nāṣīr b. ʿAlannās interfered in the affairs of Ifrīqiya at this
time. His sovereignty was recognized by the local rulers of Ṣfāqūs, Tunis, and Qayrawān.⁶ Tamīm organized a coalition of Hilālī and Sulaymī tribes to oppose the Hammadids and they succeeded in inflicting a serious defeat on the latter at the battle of Sabība in 1065/457.

Hostilities continued until 1077/470 when a truce was declared and Tamīm married his daughter
to Ibn ʿAlannās.⁷ In 1081/474 Tamīm attempted to reduce Qabis to submission but he was unsuccessful. Two years later al-Mahdīya was besieged by the Hilālī chief Mālik b. ʿAlawī. When Mālik realized that his forces could not capture al-Mahdīya, he turned his attention to Qayrawān and took possession of it. When Tamīm heard this news he led his entire army out to Qayrawān and inflicted a major defeat on the Arabs. After this event Qayrawān once more passed under Zirid control.⁸

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⁷ A detailed analysis of this battle and its consequences can be found below in my section on the Ḥammādīds.
In 1087/480 a combined Pisan-Genoese fleet comprised of 300 ships and 30,000 men attacked al-Mahdīya. The sources indicate that the assault was a complete surprise: the walls were in a state of disrepair, the Zirīd fleet had no time to put to sea, and the army was away on campaign. The Italians captured and plundered Zawīla, which was the main commercial and residential section of the city. They withdrew only after Tamīm agreed to pay 100,000 dinars. The last years of Tamīm’s reign were crowned by two notable successes: the capture of Qābis in 1097/489 and the capture of Ṣfāquṣ in 1100/493. With these conquests an uninterrupted chain of coastal cities from Tunis in the north to Tripoli in the southeast recognized Zirīd authority.

Yaḥyā b. Tamīm succeeded his father in 1108/501. He captured an important fortress near Carthage called Iqlībīya whose commander had revolted against him. During his reign Yaḥyā’s fleet launched extensive raids against the Christians in Sardinia and Genoa, taking a great many captives. Yaḥyā recognized the authority of the Fatimids. In 1111/505 an emissary from the caliph in Cairo arrived at the court of Yaḥyā bearing costly presents and letters of greeting. In 1113-14/508 he appointed one of his sons as governor of Ṣfāquṣ and a second as governor of Sūsa. Yaḥyā was assassinated in 1116/509 by two of his exiled brothers who entered the palace disguised as alchemists.

Yaḥyā was succeeded by his son ʿAlī who had previously been governor of Ṣfāquṣ. Among his first actions were the conquest of Tunis and the pacification of Mt. Wasilāt. In 511/1118, an
embassy arrived from Egypt with gifts and a letter from the Fatimid caliph al-ʿĀmir. In the same year ʿAlī blockaded Qābis by sea though he did not succeed in capturing it. The ruler of Qābis, one Rāfīʾ b. Jāmiʿ, retaliated by leading an army to the walls of al-Mahdīya and later to Qayrawān. He was eventually defeated by the Zirids. It is reported that at the end of ʿAlī’s reign there was deterioration in relations between the Zirid and Sicilian courts. As a precaution ʿAlī built a fleet of forty vessels equipped with Greek fire. Ibn al-Athīr claims that he wrote the Almoravids proposing a joint invasion of Sicily. He died in 1124/515.

ʿAlī was succeeded by his twelve year old son al-Ḥasan, the last of the Zirids. At the beginning of his reign effective power was held by his father’s eunuch Ṣandal. After the death of the latter, a commander named Abū ʿAzīz Muwaffāq played a leading role in state affairs. In 1122/516 the Almoravid admiral ʿAlī b. Maymūn led a fleet which raided the coast of Sicily. Suspecting that the Almoravids were acting in agreement with al-Ḥasan, King Roger of Sicily reacted by sending a large fleet in the following year against al-Mahdīya. This expedition was headed by George of Antioch and it comprised 300 vessels according to Ibn Khaldūn. After some initial setbacks, the defenders succeeded in repulsing the Normans who withdrew to Sicily.

Ibn ʿĪdhārī reports that in 1141/536, during the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥāfīz, a Zirid ship was detained in the port of Alexandria by the Egyptian Ṣāḥīb al-Dīwān. The reason for this

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14 See below in the section on Qābis for more about Rāfīʾ.
18 For the most complete account of this expedition see al-Tijānī, Riḥla, pp. 335-9.
was that the latter was attempting to disrupt relations between the Fatimid caliph and the Zirids while corresponding with the Hammadids. The Hammadid ruler had also sent a ship from Bijāya to Alexandria loaded with gifts for the Fatimid caliph. The Hammadid ship was permitted to return to Bijāya laden with presents for the Hammadid ruler while the Zirid vessel was prevented from leaving the port. In revenge, al-Ḥasan’s fleet captured the Hammadid ship off the coast of Ḥifrīqiya and they brought it to the harbor of al-Mahdīya where it was emptied of its precious cargo. The vessel was destroyed in port during a violent fall storm but a splendid new ship was constructed from its timber which later fell into the hands of the Normans when they conquered al-Mahdīya.\footnote{Ibn ʿĪdhārī, Bayān, vol. 1, pp. 312-3.}

In 1134/529 the Hammadid ruler Yaḥyā b. ʿAzīz sent an expeditionary force under the command of a respected jurist named Muṭarrīf b. ʿAlī b. Ḥamdūn to besiege al-Mahdīya by land and sea in cooperation with his Arab allies.\footnote{There is some difference in the sources over the cause of this expedition. Ibn al-Athīr claims that the reason for it was that the Zirid ruler al-Ḥasan favored a certain leader of the Arabs named Maymūn b. Ziyāda, causing the other chiefs to incline towards the rival Ḥammādīd ruler, Yaḥyā b. ʿAzīz. They persuaded him to send an army to assist them in their goal of overthrowing the Zirids and this request was seconded by some shaykhs in al-Mahdīya. A very different explanation is given by Ibn Abī Dīnār. He says that Yahyā intervened when he heard that al-Ḥasan had signed a treaty with King Roger of Sicily. ʿUways believes that Ibn al-Athīr’s explanation is closest to the truth. He notes that the struggle between the Zirids and the Normans had a long history, predating al-Ḥasan’s reign. Throughout this period the Ḥammādīds had never shown any interest in supporting their cousin dynasty against this overseas threat. He believes that the Ḥammādīds were merely exploiting Zirid weakness, caused in part by the wars with the Normans, in order to annex Ḥifrīqiya. I would add that Ibn al-Athīr’s account is consistent with a common trend in Zirid and Ḥammādīd relations after the arrival of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym. This was their habit of forming rival coalitions of Arab tribes to fight their proxy wars. Ibn al-Athīr, Kāmil, vol. 9, p. 285; Ibn Abī Dīnār, Kitāb al-Muʿnis fī Akhbār Ḥifrīqiyyawaw Tūnis (Tunis: Maṭbaʿat al-Dawla al-Tūnisīya, 1869), p. 90; ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿUways, Dawlat Banī Ḥammād (Cairo: Shārikat Sūzlar li-al-Nashr, 1991), pp. 158-60.} At first Muṭarrīf attempted to avoid bloodshed in the hope that al-Mahdīya would surrender peacefully. Contrary to his expectations, the defenders of the city fought back with great tenacity and his forces suffered heavy losses. At one point al-Ḥasan himself sallied out of the city gates at the head of the Zirid troops and routed the besiegers while his galleys forced the blockading fleet to withdraw. Shortly thereafter twenty ships arrived
from the Kingdom of Sicily and captured the remaining Hammadid vessels though al-Ḥasan ordered them to release the captured galleys which they did. The Sicilians had come under the pretext of aiding al-Ḥasan against his enemies but the Zirid ruler was under no illusion about their true motives and he stockpiled provisions and improved the defenses of al-Mahdīya as much as possible in anticipation of a Norman attack. As for al-Muṭarrif, with his forces caught between the Zirids and the Arab allies of the latter and with his fleet defeated, he had no option but to ask for a truce from al-Ḥasan and retreat to Bijāya.  

In 1148-9/543 the Normans captured al-Mahdīya. King Roger’s fleet, commanded by George of Antioch, captured the island of Qawṣara (Panteleria) and appeared unexpectedly before the harbor of al-Mahdīya. George arrived under the pretext of requesting troops to assist him in returning the overthrown ruler of Qābis to power. Al-Ḥasan guessed that the Sicilian admiral was merely stalling for time until the wind changed direction and he could enter the harbor and land his men so as to take over the city. At this time Ifrīqiya was in the midst of a severe famine that had seriously reduced the number of inhabitants of al-Mahdīya and the number of troops that the Zirids could muster. Furthermore, nearly the entire Zirid force was outside of the city, assisting the friendly ruler of the citadel of al-Muʿallaqa near Carthage against a rival. Under these circumstances, al-Ḥasan and his advisors decided that it would be best to withdraw from al-Mahdīya. In less than a day the city was nearly abandoned; al-Ḥasan and the bulk of the inhabitants had fled taking only the possessions that they could carry. George of Antioch sailed into the harbor and occupied al-Mahdīya as soon as the winds permitted. He called for the return

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21 For the fullest account of this episode see Ibn al-ʿAthīr, Kāmil, vol. 9, pp. 285-6.
of the native inhabitants and most of them came back. Their lives and property were safeguarded on the condition that they pay the *jizya* to the king of Sicily.\(^{22}\)

Al-Ḥasan and his family took refuge for several months with his friend the Arab chief Muḥriz b. Ziyād, lord of al-Muʿallaqa citadel. He was received most generously in the beginning but later his host became visibly tired of his presence. Al-Ḥasan then sought to take refuge in Egypt at the court of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥāfiz. He had hired a ship to take him there when the Sicilian admiral George of Antioch heard of his plans and positioned his galleys to intercept him. Al-Ḥasan abandoned this plan and decided instead to travel to the court of the Almohad caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin in Marrakech. He obtained permission from the Hammadid ruler Yahyā in order to cross through his territory on the way to the Almohad court. Nonetheless, when he entered Hammadid territory he was seized and placed under house-arrest in Algiers. He remained there until 1152/547 when the Almohads conquered Algiers and set him free.\(^{23}\)

4.3 *Qafṣa and the Banū al-Rand*

The governor of Qafṣa at the time of the Hilālī invasion was a certain ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Rand. He declared his independence from the Zirids in 1053-54/445 and came to dominate the major cities of Qaṣṭilīya including Tūzir, Nafta, and al-Ḥamma. By paying tribute to the Arab tribes he ensured the safety and tranquility of his land. He died in 1072-3/465 and was succeeded by his son Abū ʿUmar al-Muʿtazz. The latter further expanded the territory of the Banū al-Rand


into the Qamūda (Central Tunisian Plateau) and the remainder of the Jarīd. The Banū al-Rand ruled Qafṣa without interruption until the Almohad conquest of that city in 1159/554.\(^{24}\)

### 4.4 Tunis and the Banū Khurāsān

After the fall of Qayrawān the citizens of Tunis left the Zirid fold and sent a delegation to the Hammadid ruler Ibn ʿAlannās placing themselves under his protection. He appointed ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Khurāsān to govern them in his name. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq laid the foundation for a semi-independent dynasty, the Banū Khurāsān, who would dominate Tunis and play an important role in Ifríqiya for nearly a century. He was an effective administrator who brought prosperity to his subjects. Like the Banū al-Rand of Qafṣa, he also found it expedient to pay tribute to the Arabs in order to prevent them from harassing his subjects. In 1065-6/458 the Zirid ruler of al-Mahdiya, Tamīm b. al-Muʿizz, besieged Tunis in cooperation with the Hilālī tribe of Zughba. After four months Tamīm consented to withdraw in return for a token submission to Zirid authority by the Banū Khurāsān who retained effective control over the city.\(^{25}\)

ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq was succeeded in 1095/488 by his son ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz who ruled until 1106/500. The latter was succeeded by his son Aḥmad. Aḥmad killed his powerful uncle, Ismaʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq, and the latter’s son fled to Binzirt. According to Ibn Khaldūn, Aḥmad freed himself completely from the constraints imposed by the patricians of Tunis with whom his predecessors had been forced to cooperate, and he ruled the city in an absolute fashion while Ibn ʿIdhārī says that he expelled large numbers of prominent citizens of Tunis to neighboring cities and that he

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\(^{24}\) For the Banū al-Rand see Ibn Khaldūn, *ʿIbar*, vol. 6, pp. 220-1; De Slane, *Berbères*, vol. 2, pp. 33-34.

behaved like a tyrant. In 1116-7/510 Tunis was besieged by the forces of the Zirid prince ʿAlī b. Yaḥyā b. Tamīm and Aḥmad was forced to recognize his authority. In 1120/514 he switched allegiance and recognized the Hammadid ruler al-ʿAzīz, who had invaded Ifrīqiya. In 1128/522 he was removed from power by the Hammadid general Muṭarrif b. ʿAlī b. Ḥamdūn (the Hammadid ruler at this time was Yaḥyā b. al-ʿAzīz) and led off to captivity in Bijāya with his entire family.27

Muṭarrif occupied Tunis and installed the first in a series of governors from the Hammadid family: Karāma b. al-Manṣūr, uncle of the current Hammadid ruler Yaḥyā. Karāma was succeeded in Tunis by his brother Abū al-Futūḥ, then by his son Muḥammad. The latter was an unpopular tyrant and he was replaced by his uncle Maʿadd b. al-Manṣūr who was the last of the Hammadid governors of Tunis. Maʿadd ruled until 1148-9 /543.28 In that year the people of Tunis were facing a severe famine and they were in great fear of the Normans who had landed at al-Mahdīya. According to Ibn ʿIdhārī, they awoke one morning to find that their food supplies had been loaded into a merchant ship that was set to sail for an area under Norman control.29 The citizens blocked the ship from leaving and they revolted against their governor, butchering his ʿabīd (black slave-soldiers) and forcing him to surrender. A Hammadid ship was sent from Bijāya to return Muṭarrif and his family to their native land. Another Hammadid representative was left in his place, but no one respected his authority and the shaykhs of Tunis took control over their own affairs, appointing a respected judge named ʿAbū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim as

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
their leader. As there were fears of retaliation by the Hammadids and of a Norman attack, ʿAbd al-Munʿīm attempted to place Tunis under the protection of an Arab chief named Ibn Ziyād, but when the latter arrived in Tunis he was attacked by the masses who refused to give allegiance to an Arab. 30

Following this incident the citizens of Tunis sent a delegation to their previous masters, the now exiled Banū Khurāsān, requesting that a prince from this house be sent to govern them. Abū Bakr b. Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Khurāsān accepted and he ruled in Tunis for seven months. He was betrayed by his nephew ʿAbdallah b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz who ruled until the arrival of the Almohads in 1157/552. 31

4.5 Qābis and the Banū Jāmiʿ

During the siege of Qayrawān by the Arabs, the governor of Qābis was a Ṣanhājī Berber named al-Muʿizz b. Muḥammad whose two brothers, Qāḍī and Ibrāhīm, were officials in the palace of the Zirid ruler al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs in Qayrawān. The latter expelled the two brothers and they took refuge with the chief of the Hilālī tribe of Riyāḥ, one Muʾnis b. Yahyā. He greeted them with honor and they prevailed on their brother the governor of Qābis, to withdraw his allegiance to the Zirids and place the city under the protection of the Hilālī chief Muʾnis. In this way the first major Hilālī conquest in Ifríqiya was peacefully achieved. Ibrāhīm ruled as the deputy of Muʾnis for a while, then he was succeeded by his brother Qāḍī. The latter was hated by the populace and they revolted and killed him. 32


31 Ibid.

After the murder of Qāḍī the citizens of Qābis placed their city under the rule of ʿUmar, the brother of the Zirid ruler Tamīm b. al-Muʿizz, in 1096/489. ʿUmar had revolted against his brother and as a result Tamīm led an army against Qābis and succeeded in capturing it. After a short while Qābis threw off its allegiance to the Zirids and recognized the authority of Makkī b. Kāmil b. Jāmiʿ, an amir of the Riyāḥī branch of the Banū Ḥilāl. This chief was an enemy of Tamīm. He received Muthannā, the son of Tamīm, after he had revolted against his father. Together, Muthannā and Makkī b. Kāmil besieged al-Mahdiya but Makkī broke off the siege after he became disillusioned with Muthannā. After his death he was succeeded in Qābis by his son Rāfiʿ b. Jāmiʿ. 33

Rāfiʿ allied with Roger of Sicily against the reigning Zirid, ʿAlī b. Yaḥyā b. Tamīm. The latter besieged and captured Qābis in 1117/511, surprising some Norman ships that were in port at that time according to al-Tijānī. Rāfiʿ fled from Qābis and met with the shaykhs from his tribe, the Riyāḥ. They decided to give him Qayrawān (which was now a minor city) to compensate for the loss of Qābis. When ʿAlī heard this he sent an army against Rāfiʿ which included a large number of Arab auxiliaries. A number of battles occurred but it appears that no decisive result was reached before ʿAlī died in 1121/515. 34

While Rāfiʿ was in Qayrawān another member of the house of Banū Jāmiʿ named Rashīd b. Kāmil took power in Qābis. He was succeeded by his son Muḥammad b. Rashīd. While outside of the city on a military expedition one of Muḥammad’s freedmen named Yūsuf seized power in Qābis and recognized Roger of Sicily as his lord. The outraged citizens of Qābis revolted and

33 Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, pp. 97-100; Ibn Khaldūn, ʿIbar, vol. 6, pp. 221-3; De Slane, Berbères, vol. 2, pp. 35-7.
34 Ibid.
expelled him, but this did not prevent Roger from sending a fleet to blockade the city.\textsuperscript{35} When 'Abd al-Muʿmin the Almohad arrived in Ifrīqiya, Qābis was ruled by Mudāfiʿ b. Jāmiʿ, the last representative of the Banū Jāmiʿ.\textsuperscript{36}

4.6 Șfāqus
During the reign of the Zirid prince al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs, Șfāqus was governed by one of his retainers named Manṣūr al-Barghawāṭī. Manṣūr took advantage of the confusion caused by the fall of Qayrawān to declare his independence from the Zirids and to ally himself with some of the Arab tribes. Manṣūr was murdered in the bath by his cousin, Ḥammū b. Mašlīl al-Barghawāṭī. Manṣūr’s Arab allies besieged Șfāqus in revenge for this act but Ḥammū bribed them and convinced them to serve him.\textsuperscript{37}

In 1063/455 Tamīm succeeded his father al-Muʿizz as the Zirid ruler in al-Mahdīya. Ḥammū seized this opportunity to attack Tamīm and to contest with him the mastery of the Tunisian coastal plain. With his allies from the Hilālī tribes of ‘Adī and Athbaj, Ḥammū marched to the walls of al-Mahdīya and placed it under siege. Tamīm allied himself with the Arab tribes of Zughba and Riyāḥ. A major battle occurred between the two sides at a place called Salqaṭa about halfway between Șfāqus and al-Mahdīya. Though Ibn al-Athīr cites this as a great victory for Tamīm and the Zirids, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd suggests that the battle was not decisive since Ḥammū escaped with enough followers to continue his struggle with the Zirids for a long time after this event.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} For more on this individual see below.
Tamīm sent his son Yahyā to besiege Ḥammū in Ṣfāqus but Yahyā lifted the siege and returned without result.39 In 1099-1100/493 Tamīm himself led an expedition to Ṣfāqus and he succeeded in capturing the city. Ḥammū fled to Qābis where he took refuge with Makkī b. Kāmil.40 For the next half century the Zirids retained control of Ṣfāqus. They appointed governors from their own family. In 1148-9/543 Ṣfāqus was captured by the fleet of King Roger. The Normans appointed as governor of the city one ʿUmar b. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Firyānī while holding his father hostage in Sicily to ensure his good behavior. Nonetheless, before leaving for Sicily Abū al-Ḥasan told his son to wait for the right moment to throw the invaders out. In 1156/554 the inhabitants of Ṣfāqus revolted and expelled the Normans. The other North African towns under Norman occupation followed the example of Ṣfāqus and revolted. ʿUmar was retained as governor of Ṣfāqus by the Almohads when they arrived in Ifrīqiya shortly thereafter.41

4.7 The Hammadids in al-Maghrib al-Awsat
In 997/387 the Zirid ruler Bādīs appointed his uncle Ḥammād governor of Ashīr in the Central Maghrib giving him effective control over all of the Zirid territory west of Ifrīqiya.42 Ḥammād was called upon to quell a dangerous rebellion by several of Bādīs’ relatives and later he undertook campaigns against the Zanāta. Within ten years of his appointment Ḥammād had

39 See al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 71 who suggests that Yahyā intentionally lifted the siege because of the friendship and trust between him and Ḥammū which dated back to an incident in which Yahyā was abducted by some Turkish adventurers and taken to Ṣfāqus. Contrary to the expectations of the abductors, Ḥammū treated the Zirid crown prince honorably, freeing him and sending him back to his father in al-Mahdiya. Yahyā never forgot this.

40 See above for more about Makkī b. Kāmil.


become a semi-independent viceroy of the Central Maghrib and as we shall see he nursed ambitions of establishing his own dynasty.

In 398/1007 Ḥammād gave orders to begin construction of a new capital called Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād.\(^{43}\) It appears that from the very start he intended that the Qalʿa become his new capital and the stronghold of his dynasty. Golvin suggests that Ḥammād made this decision because Ashīr, the previous capital, was too far to the west. Though Ashīr was an ideal base for controlling the frontier against the Zanāta, Ḥammād needed a new capital that was located in the center of his territory and from which he would be able to defend against Zirid attacks from the east. Thus it appears that the very act of building the Qalʿa was an assertion of independence by Ḥammād.\(^{44}\)

The final break between Ḥammād and his nephew Bādīs occurred around 1014/405. When Bādīs’ son al-Manṣūr was declared as heir to the Zirid throne, Bādīs attempted to carve a small principality out of Ḥammād’s territory for the new crown prince. He demanded that Ḥammād relinquish control of the districts of Constantine and Tījīs. Ḥammād refused and shortly thereafter he removed the name of the Fatimid caliph from the *khutba* and replaced it with that of the orthodox Sunnī caliph in Baghdad and he proceeded to massacre the Shīʿa in his domains.\(^{45}\) By changing the state creed in such an abrupt and violent manner Ḥammād was proclaiming his complete independence of the Zirid court. Bādīs could not let such a challenge go unpunished and he personally led the expedition to chastise his uncle. He captured Ashīr and defeated Ḥammād’s army at the river Shalif. Ḥammād fled with his remaining followers to the Qalʿa

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\(^{43}\) The Qalʿa is located in eastern Algeria on the edge of the Shaṭṭ al-Ḥudna and about 12 miles distant from the town of Msīla. See al-Idrīsī, *Description*, p. 86.


\(^{45}\) Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, vol. 6, p. 228.
where he was besieged by the Zirids. It appeared that Ḥammād was on the brink of failure and that his dynasty would be nipped in the bud. Unfortunately for the Zirids, Bādīs died unexpectedly in 407/1016, and he was succeeded by his eight year old son al-Muʿizz, as al-Manṣūr had predeceased his father. The Zirid army withdrew to Qayrawān and Ḥammād was able to regain his lost territory. The following year, Ḥammād sent his son al-Qāʾid to the Zirid court bearing gifts and a treaty was signed preserving the status quo. The Zirids were now willing to accept an independent Hammadid state in the central Maghrib, their former homeland. Ḥammād died in 419/1028.

Al-Qāʾid succeeded him and reigned until his death in 446/1054. In 434/1042, war broke out with the Zirids. Al-Muʿizz invaded the Central Maghrib and besieged al-Qāʾid in his capital before a peace treaty was signed. A few years later, when al-Muʿizz cut off his relations with the Fatimid caliph and recognized the Abbasids, al-Qāʾid took the opposite step of renouncing his allegiance to the Abbasids and returning to the Fatimid fold, receiving the honorific “Sharaf al-Dawla” from the caliph in Cairo.46 This was no doubt done in order to annoy the Zirids. The most important event of al-Qāʾid’s reign was the migration of the Banū Hilāl into northwest Africa. While the Zirid state nearly disintegrated under the impact of the Arab invasion, the Hammadids were left in a much stronger position than their eastern cousins.

One historian describes the borders of the core Hammadid territory as forming a triangular shape. The base of the triangle was comprised by the Algerian coastline from Annaba in the east to Oran in the west. Among the port cities included in this long stretch of territory were Bijāya and Algiers, which was then known as Jazāʾir Banī Mazaghanna after a local Şanhāja tribe. Moving inland, the Hammadid realm included important cities such as Constantine, Biskra, and

Niqāwus in the east while in the west the Hammadid state included Ashīr and Milyāna and at times it embraced Tāhart and Tilimsān which were contested with its western neighbors. In the south the Saharan oasis of Wargla also fell under Hammadid rule to form the apex of the triangle.  

On its western frontier the Hammadid state faced the same Zanāta Berber tribes which had previously opposed the Fatimids and the early Zirid rulers. The most powerful of the Zanāta tribes was the Maghrāwa who were concentrated in the area between Fez and Tilimsān covering much of northern Morocco and western Algeria. Some minor Zanāta tribes in this region such as the Banū Wammānū were allied to the Hammadids and this probably accounts for the frequent appearance of Zanāṭī contingents in the Hammadid army. The border region between the confederation of the Maghrāwa and the Hammadids was fluid and cities such as Tāhart and Tilimsān changed hands frequently. According to Ibn Khaldūn the Hammadid ruler Bulukīn (1055-6/447-1062/454) led an expedition into northern Morocco and occupied Fez for a few months before he was assassinated by his paternal cousin al-Nāṣir b. ʿAlannās. A new actor arrived on the scene with the coming of Yusuf b. Tashfīn and the Almoravids. The latter were Şanhāja Berbers from northern Mauritania. They had a long and bitter rivalry with the Zanāta tribes whose homeland they invaded as they steadily expanded north and then east. In 1070/462 Yūsuf captured Fez from its Zanāṭī amir. The Almoravids now replaced the amirs of Maghrāwa to become the most powerful western neighbors of the Hammadids. Other Zanāta groups lived

47 ʿUways, Dawlat Banī Ḥammād, p. 83.
48 Ibid., p. 126.
49 Ibid., pp. 135-6.
along the edge of the Sahara desert on the southern flank of Hammadid territory and in the area of Biskra in the southeast and like their western cousins these tribes also frequently found themselves in conflict with the Hammadids. We have mentioned above how a branch of the Maghrāwa Zanāta, the Banū Khazrūn, came to power in Tripolitania in the early eleventh century. It should be noted, however, that the latter were too distant to have any significant influence on events in the Central Maghrib.

Under al-Nāṣir b. Ḥānnās (1062/454-1089/481) the Hammadid polity reached the peak of its power and it briefly became the most important state in northwest Africa. Many scholars and artisans from Qayrawān took refuge in al-Qal’a during his reign, contributing to the wealth and importance of the Hammadid state and its capital. The Trans-Saharan routes which terminated at Tāḥart in the Central Maghrib and in the Jarīd of Ifrīqiya (on the border between Tunisia and Libya) were temporarily cut off by the Arabs. This left only the westernmost Trans-Saharan route which terminated at Sijilmāsa in the north open to travelers. According to Messier, after the arrival of the Banū Hilāl, merchants from Ifrīqiya and the eastern Islamic lands in general were forced to travel west through Hammadid territory (where they no doubt passed through the Qal’a) in order to access the one remaining Trans-Saharan route at Sijilmāsa.

Al-Nāṣir exploited the power vacuum created by the victory of the Banū Hilāl over the Zirids at Ḥaydarān and the fall of Qayrawān. At the beginning of his reign his authority was recognized in Qayrawān, Ṣfāqas, and Tunis in the heart of formerly Zirid Ifrīqiya. It was inevitable that the Hilālī tribes would seek to push westward from Ifrīqiya and enter the Central

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Maghrib through peaceful infiltration or by conquest. One might expect that the two related dynasties of the Banū Zīrī and Banū Ḥammād would have cooperated to meet the threat posed by the Arabs but in fact they were unable to overcome their bitter rivalry. Al-Nāṣir was drawn into a conflict with the Zirids and their Arab allies which would culminate in his defeat in the battle of Sabība.

The sources differ on the actual pretext for the clash. According to Ibn Khaldūn, there was a conflict between two rival Hilālī tribes, the Athbaj and the Riyāḥ, and the former requested the assistance of Ibn Ṭālānānās.⁵⁵ According to Ibn al-Atlīr and al-Nuwayrī, who largely follows his account, Tamīm heard that Ibn Ṭālānānās had cursed him in his council session and that he had resolved to lead his army to Ifrīqiya and besiege al-Mahdīya.⁵⁶ Tamīm summoned the amirs of Riyāḥ and said to them: “you know that al-Mahdīya is an impregnable fortress which is entirely surrounded by sea except for four towers defended by forty men and al-Nāṣir only gathered this army in order to fight against you.”⁵⁷ The amirs agreed with Tamīm’s assessment and they requested from him money, weapons, and supplies which he readily granted. The Riyāḥī amirs then spoke to the chiefs of the other Hilālī tribes who were allied to Ibn Ṭālānānās and who contributed contingents to his army. They warned the chiefs that if Ibn Ṭālānānās became stronger he would exterminate their tribes; therefore they could only remain in secure possession of their lands if Hammadid power weakened. They concluded by requesting the assistance of the other tribes. The chiefs agreed that their contingents would pretend to face the Riyāḥ in battle and withdraw after the first charge. At the opportune moment they would return and attack their

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⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 230; p. 48.
unsuspecting allies from the rear. In return they requested one third of the booty. A similar understanding was reached between the Zanātī tribesmen in Hammadid service and a Zanātī chief named al-Muʿizz b. Zirī.58

At the core of the Hammadid army were the Ṣanḥāja and Ibn ʿAlannās’ personal guard of ʿabīd (black military slaves).59 These were supplemented by Arabs from the tribes of Athbaj and Zughba and some Zanāta Berbers. The opposing army consisted of Arabs from Riyāḥ, Zughba, and Sulaym as well as groups of Zanāta Berbers.60 The plain of Sabība where the two opposing sides met in (1065/457) was located one day’s journey from Qayrawān on the road which connected that city to Qalʿat Banī Hammad and fifty kilometers south of al-Urbus (Laribus).61 The Riyāḥ attacked the Arab allies of Ibn ʿAlannās while al-Muʿizz b. Zirī and his followers attacked the Zanātī contingent in the Hammadid lines. According to the arrangement, the Arab and Zanātī troops feigned defeat and appeared to flee at first before they turned against the remaining Hammadid troops. The result was a crushing defeat for Ibn ʿAlannās who escaped with only 10 horsemen. According to some of the sources, 24,000 Zanāta and Ṣanḥāja were killed in the battle. The Arabs took all of the plunder except for some banners, trumpets, and drums which they sent to Tamīm though the latter refused to accept these on the grounds that he could not take joy in the plundering of his cousin’s possessions.62


60 ʿUways, Dawlat Banī Ḥammād, p. 130; ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, al-Maghrib al-ʿArabī, p. 454.

61 Ibid., p. 131; p. 454.

The role of Tamīm and the Zirids in this incident is difficult to determine. It appears that the army which opposed the Hammadids at Sabība consisted almost entirely of Arab tribes and Zanāta who were led into battle by their own chiefs. There is no mention of regular Zirid forces, whether Ṣanhāja or ʿabīd, nor of the presence of a Zirid commander during the battle. As we have seen, Ibn Khaldūn presents the conflict as an inter-Arab dispute between Athbaj and Riyāḥ in which the Hammadids intervened for the benefit of the former. But he is alone in this view. Ibn al-Athīr and al-Nuwayrī dwell at length on the machinations of Tamīm and at the end of their accounts they write that the victorious Arabs presented the captured Hammadid banners to him, an indication that they acknowledged his authority in at least a token fashion. Ibn ʿĪdhārī gives a very short account of the battle but he mentions that one of the most important reasons for the Hammadid defeat was the plotting of Tamīm.63

The battle of Sabība opened the Central Maghrib to penetration by the Banū Hilāl. Some of the Arabs took the route from Sabība to the Qalʿa of the Banū Ḥammād, others bypassed the Awrās Mountains to enter the Zāb and many of them settled in the plains south of the Bābūr and Bīban mountain ridges between Constantine and Ashīr.64 Sabība was the Ḥaydarān of the Banū Ḥammād. After this defeat, the interior of the Hammadid realm became vulnerable to raids by the Arab tribes. The lines of communication to the Qalʿa were no longer secure. Despite the seriousness of the Hammadid defeat at Sabība, neither Ibn ʿAlannās nor his successors appear to have relinquished the goal of expanding eastward into Ifrīqiya. In 1067-8/460, only a year after Sabība, the chronicles report that Ibn ʿAlannās entered al-Urbus and Qayrawān with his allies

63 Ibn ʿĪdhārī, Bayān, vol. 1, p. 299.
64 See the map in Golvin, Maghrib Central, p. 22; ʿUways, Dawlat Banī Ḥammād, p.131.
from the Hilālī tribe of the Athbaj. The signing of a peace agreement between the Hammadid ruler Ibn ʿAlannās and the Zirid ruler Tamīm in 1077/470 cemented by the marriage of Tamīm’s daughter to Ibn ʿAlannās did not prevent future conflicts between the two dynasties.

Al-Nāṣir decided to adopt the strategy of the Zirids by transferring his capital from an inland to a coastal stronghold. In 1067-8/460 he began construction of the new capital at Bijāya on the Algerian coast. Besides possessing an excellent harbor, Bijāya was protected on its landward side by an arc-shaped mountain ridge. Ibn ʿAlannās brought settlers from other regions to populate Bijāya amid he exempted Bijāya from the kharāj in order to encourage further migration. In 1068-9/464 he himself moved to Bijāya. The Qalʿa remained an important urban center for some time, but it would gradually be overshadowed by the new foundation.

Al-Nāṣir was succeeded by his capable son al-Manṣūr (1088/481-1105/498). According to Ibn Khaldūn, al-Manṣūr left the Qalʿa for Bijāya in 1090-1/483. The region around the Qalʿa had been devastated by the raids and plundering of the Arabs and the old capital was considered too vulnerable to serve as the sultan’s residence. Bijāya was difficult of access from the interior due to the mountain barrier surrounding it, thus it was spared the ravages of the Hilālī tribes. Al-Manṣūr was a great builder who commissioned several magnificent palaces in both the Qalʿa and Bijāya. In the latter city he also enlarged the Great Mosque and created an elaborate water distribution network to supply the numerous gardens and parks.

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66 Ibid., p. 300.
69 Ibid.
Al-ʿAzīz ascended to the Hammadid throne in 1105/498. During his reign the island of Jirba off the coast of Tunisia was captured by the Hammadid fleet and Tunis recognized Hammadid authority. The Qalʿa was attacked by Arab tribesmen who plundered the area and retreated after the arrival of reinforcements from Bijāya under the command of the crown prince Yahyā. It was during his reign in 1118-9/512 that Ibn Tūmart, the Almohad mahdī, passed through Bijāya while returning from his studies in the Mashriq. He attempted to teach his doctrine there but he fell afoul of al-ʿAzīz and was forced to flee to avoid arrest. Al-ʿAzīz died in 1121-2/515.

The last Hammadid ruler was Yahyā who held power from 515/1121 until 547/1152. Sometime during his reign he began striking coins inscribed with the name of the ʿAbbasid caliph al-Muqtafī, indicating that the Hammadids had cut their ties with the Fatimids once again. Before the reign of Yahyā the Hammadids did not mention their own name on their coins, a practice which they shared with the Zirids. Unlike the Zirids, the Hammadids did not mention the place of minting on their coins. They appear to have relied on Abbasid and Fatimid dinars for everyday use. It would appear that the only principle which the Hammadids followed in the course of their relations with Baghdad and Cairo was that of opposing the Zirids. Whenever the Zirids recognized one of the two rival caliphates, the Hammadids would declare their submission to the other.

Ibn Khaldūn tells us that in 1148/543 Yahya had all objects of value removed from the Qalʿa. Yahya won some successes in the east where Tunis submitted to him and he besieged al-

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71 Ibid.
Mahdiya until he was forced to withdraw by the appearance of a Norman fleet. The Hammadids were unable to face the powerful new foe who menaced them from the west. In 1152/547 ‘Abd al-Mu’min the Almohad led a combined land and sea expedition into the central Maghrib. He captured Algiers, Bougie, and the Qal’a in quick succession and he easily defeated a Hammadid army led by Yahya’s brother al-Harith. Yahya took refuge in Constantine for a few months before surrendering to the Almohads. ‘Abd al-Mu’min exiled the last Hammadid to an estate near Salā in Morocco, where he died in 1163. The Qal’a changed hands several times before it disappears from our sources altogether, indicating that it was no longer a town of any importance.

Ifrīqiya was in a pitiful state by this time. The province that had been chosen by the caliphs of Damascus as their base of operations for North Africa and Spain and which later became the cradle of the Aghlabids, Fatimids and Zirids had been transformed into a patchwork of weak city-states and ephemeral tribal entities that were nearly always at war with one-another and with outside powers both Muslim and Christian. The great metropolis of Islamic North Africa, Qayrawān, had been largely abandoned in the aftermath of the Hilālī invasions while al-Mahdiya, the bastion of the early Fatimids, had fallen under the occupation of the Normans. The Central Maghrib had not fared much better. At first the Hammadids had benefitted from the decline of the Zirids and they seemed poised to fill the power vacuum that had emerged in Ifrīqiya but they were unable to stop the tide of Arab tribes which seeped into the Maghrib with

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74 See above on the fall of al-Mahdiya to the Sicilian Normans.
increasing force after the battle of Sabība while their modest navy was no match for that of the Normans who occupied a string of ports from Tripoli to Annaba.

4.8 The Almoravids
The Almoravids (1056/447 – 1147/541), Ṣānhāja Berbers from northern Mauritania, had come to dominate al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā in its entirety by approximately 1080/473. Equally important, they had taken control of the southern and northern termini of the western Trans-Saharan route (the route which connected al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā to Ghāna): Awdaghust (conquered in 1054-5/446) and Sijilmāsa (conquered 1055-6/447). It should not be forgotten that as Saharans themselves the Almoravid tribes had always been directly involved in all stages of the Trans-Saharan trade and they were thus in a far better position to dominate it than their northern neighbors. Lange has suggested that Almoravid religious propaganda spread by emissaries and travelers exerted an influence on the three major states located just south of the Sahara in western and central Bilād al-Sūdān between the Atlantic and Lake Chad (from west to east these kingdoms were Ghāna, Kāw, and Kānim). This Almoravid influence strengthened the resolve of the local Muslim communities that were already present in all three states and spurred the noticeable Islamization of these states (or at any rate of their ruling families and elites) during this period.\footnote{Dierk Lange, “The Almoravids and the Islamization of the Great States of West Africa,” in Itinéraires d’Orient: Hommages à Claude Cahen, ed. Raoul Curiel and Rika Gyselen, (Bures- sur- Yvette, 1994), pp. 65-76.}

4.9 The Realignment of the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes
As a result of the factors listed above, it is not surprising that the Saharan gold trade flourished under Almoravid rule. Almoravid dinars made from West African gold were highly prized and used in transactions far outside of the Almoravid borders not only in the Mashriq but also in Christian Europe where they were called marabotins and even in China where they were called
It is the contention of Devisse and Messier that the Almoravids attained a near monopoly over the traffic in gold from western Bilād al-Sūdān. It may be recalled from our survey of trade routes in the first chapter that there were three major clusters of Trans-Saharan routes during the Islamic period: the westernmost with its northern terminus at Sijilmāsa (the most direct route to the sources of the gold at Bambuk, south of the Senegal River, and Bure on the Upper Niger); a central route with its northern terminus at Wargla in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ (Algeria); and an eastern branch which passed through the Libyan oases. Powerful dynasties in Ifrīqiya such as the Fatimids and Zirids as well as the Rustamids of the Central Maghrib benefitted from the central and eastern Trans-Saharan routes although these latter routes were probably not as profitable as the Sijilmāsa-Awdaghust route which was the closest route to the most important sources of gold at this time, and in fact it appears that most West African gold arrived in Sijilmāsa during the tenth and eleventh centuries. During the Fatimid and early Zirid periods (early tenth century to middle eleventh century) when Ifrīqiya was politically and economically the most developed region of North Africa, Sijilmāsa had been linked to Qayrawān by east-west routes. Beginning in the 1050’s, the Trans-Saharan routes were affected by a great “disequilibrium” as Devisse calls it. The eastern

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80 The Awdaghust-Sijilmāsa route was the most direct route to the gold since it is commonly supposed that the two sources of West African gold during this period were at Bambuk, south of the Senegal River, and Bure on the Upper Niger. Both regions were located on the borders of the kingdom of Ghana, that is to say in western West Africa lying directly south of Morocco (al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā) on the other side of the Sahara. A traveler who crossed the Sahara directly from a more easterly base than Sijilmāsa such as the Jarīd or the Libyan oases would still have to travel west a considerable distance to reach these areas. For more about Bambuk and Bure see Messier, “Exploitation of West African Gold,” pp. 129-32.

81 Ibid., p. 147.

82 Devisse, “Routes de commerce,” p. 70.
and central routes nearly fell out of use altogether except for a small amount of activity in Wargla where the Ibāḍī merchants maintained their Trans-Saharan links.  

There were several reasons for this pronounced shift in favor of the western routes. First of all, the Almoravids had expanded deeper into the Sahara and West Africa than any previous Islamic dynasty and with direct control over Sijilmāsa, Awdaghust, and the salt fields of Tāza, they could deny the use of these locations to their rivals. Secondly, the Almoravid period witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of civilization in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. Both Fez and the new foundation of Marrakech became world-class cities on a par with Qayrawān and Cordoba in their respective heydays. The addition of al-Andalus with its great cities such as Seville to the Almoravid Empire meant that there was now a large domestic market with sophisticated tastes and an insatiable appetite for African gold. On the other hand, Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib witnessed a relative decline in the size and opulence of their urban centers with the abandonment of Qayrawān and al-Qal’a and the lack of powerful wealthy state patrons for building projects. Furthermore, the east-west routes which had once connected Sijilmāsa, via Fez, to Qayrawān and its sister cities in Ifrīqiya had almost certainly fallen into disuse due to the lack of stability in the interior that was a consequence of the Hilālī invasions.

Though they clashed with the Hammadids on occasion, the Almoravids never made a determined effort to incorporate the Central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya into their empire. They did not advance beyond Tilimsān in the east. The Almoravids appear to have considered the Andalusian front their primary concern. In the early twelfth century they found themselves between the two fires of the Christian Reconquista and the insurrection of the Almohads and as a result they could not undertake any new conquests. It was the Almohads who managed to unite the entire Greater

83 Ibid., p. 69.
Maghrib from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of Egypt. Such a feat had not been achieved since the time of the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz li-Dīn Allāh in the late tenth century.

The incorporation of Ifrīqiya and the Central and Far Maghribs into one state by the Almohads had important economic repercussions. Devisse points out that after the conquest of the Central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya by the Almohads, the latter had no reason to permit the continuation of a useless rivalry between the eastern and western axes of the Trans-Saharan gold trade.\(^8^4\) The route across the Sahara to the oasis of Wargla and then to the ports of Ifrīqiya came back into extensive use during this period. The Almohads minted gold coins in Wargla and there appears to have been a revival of commercial activity in the coastal towns of Ifrīqiya. In Devisse’s opinion the western axis through Sijilmāsa was still more important than the eastern axis but it no longer had a near monopoly over the gold trade as was the case under the Almoravids.\(^8^5\)

\subsection*{4.10 The Rise of the Almohads}

The founder of the Almohad movement was a Maṣmūda Berber from the Anti-Atlas Mountains in Morocco named Ibn Tūmart, known as the mahdī to his followers. He was born in approximately 1081/474. In 1106/500 he undertook a long voyage in search of knowledge which brought him to al-Andalus for one year and then to the Islamic Mashriq where he stayed until 1115/510. It was during this period that Ibn Tūmart formulated the Almohad doctrine, the details of which we will discuss below. His return to his homeland took several years as he stopped along the way to preach and recruit followers. We have mentioned above how he ran into difficulties with the Hammadid authorities while resident in Bijāya. In 1117/511 in the same city

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84 Devisse, “Routes de commerce,” p. 72.

85 Ibid.
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he converted to his cause ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. The latter was from the minor Zanāṭī tribe of the Kumyā near Nadrūma in western Algeria. He was on his way to the Mashriq where he hoped to pursue his religious studies but Ibn Tūmart convinced him that his future was with him and he became Ibn Tūmart’s most trusted supporter and his eventual successor as head of the Almohad movement. In 1120/514 Ibn Tūmart appeared in Marrakech at the court of the Almoravid ruler ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfin (1106/500-1142/537) where he openly denounced the religious policy of the Almoravids and what he perceived to be their moral laxity. Fearing for his safety, he left the capital and established himself in the vicinity of Aghmāt in southern Morocco. In 1121/515 he proclaimed himself to be the mahdī at the cave of Ījīlīz and received the bayʿa (oath of allegiance) from ten chosen followers including ʿAbd al-Muʿmin.86

With the support of the major Maṣmūda tribes he set out to overthrow the Almoravids. The Maṣmūda were sedentary highlanders scattered between the Anti and High Atlas ranges and they had a strong dislike of the desert-dwelling Ṣanhāja tribes that formed the basis of the Almoravid state. In 1123/517 Ibn Tūmart established a new base of operations at Tīnmallal in the High Atlas. It is worth noting that Ibn Tūmart consciously emulated the career of the prophet Muḥammad to the extent that he called his move to Tīnmallal a hijra, referred to his military campaigns as maghāzī and his followers as Muhājirūn and Anṣār. In 1130/524 the Almohads suffered a major defeat at the battle of Buḥayra. Ibn Tūmart died only a few months later though his death was kept secret secret for a while by his closest followers so as not to demoralize the troops.87


87 Ibid.
It is appropriate here to consider the religio-political ideology of the Almohads. The ulema in the western Islamic lands during the Almoravid period placed a greater emphasis on the study of furūʿ or applied law than on study of the uṣūl or sources of the law. That is to say that they restricted their studies to the legal compilations of the Mālikī school without reference to the Qurʾān and the Prophetic Tradition (Sunna) which were the sources of its inspiration. This narrow legalism had been criticized by the scholars of the eastern Islamic World, most notably the great al-Ghazālī who had called for a spiritual revival of Islam. Ibn Tūmart, who had been profoundly influenced by such views during the course of his studies in the east, insisted on a return to the Qurʾān and the Sunna.88

Like the Muʿtāzila of ninth century Baghdad, Ibn Tūmart was bitterly opposed to those who interpreted the physical attributes of God in the Qurʾān in a literal manner. According to Ibn Tūmart, the Qurʾānic verses in question had to be interpreted purely allegorically. Those who refused to do this were guilty of tajṣīm or anthropomorphism, a sin of which Ibn Tūmart accused the Almoravids.89

The most notable feature of Almohad ideology was Ibn Tūmart’s claim to be the infallible mahdī who would establish justice in the world and who required absolute obedience from his followers.90 The political consequence of this belief was that the Almohads did not recognize the

89 Ibid.
90 Such a claim, on first consideration, might suggest Shīʿī influence given the obvious parallel with the rise of the Fatimid Empire in North Africa and the career of its founder, ʿUbaydallāh the Mahdī. It should be noted, however, that the Almohads did not attach any special importance to the line of ʿAlī nor did they believe in an esoteric bāṭinī doctrine reserved for the spiritual elite after the manner of the Fatimids. Apart from his claim to be the Mahdī, Ibn Tūmart’s teachings reflected the influence of the trends that were current in the eastern Sunnī madrasas where he studied for many years. For these reasons Fromherz is doubtful that there was any significant Fatimid influence on the Almohad doctrine. Fierro believes that at the very least the Fatimid state provided an important political model for the Almohads. See Allen Fromherz, The Almohads: the Rise of an Islamic Empire, (London: Tauris, 2010),
Abbasid caliphs in Baghdād. This was an important departure in Maghribī history. Even the Almoravids had only used the title *Amir al-Muslimīn* instead of *Amir al-Muʾ minīn* which was the prerogative of the Abbasid caliph. It is important to note that throughout their history the Almoravids never ceased to acknowledge the authority of the Abbasids.

ʿAbd al-Muʾ min received the *bayʿa* from the Almohads in 1133/527, three years after the death of Ibn Tūmart. He took the bold step of declaring himself *Amir al-Muʾ minīn*. He and his successors regarded themselves as the true caliphs of Islam. During the first thirteen years of his reign he carried on the difficult struggle against the Almoravids in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. The Almoravids had a marked superiority in cavalry which had won them the day at the battle of Buḥayra. For this reason ʿAbd al-Muʾ min concentrated on subduing the highland regions in the north and south of Morocco before descending to the open plains. His efforts were crowned by the fall of the Almoravid capital at Marrakech in 1147/541.91

Even as he was completing the conquest of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā in the 1140’s, ʿAbd al-Muʾ min also began intervening in al-Andalus which he hoped to wrest from the Almoravids while at the same time fending off the threat of the Christian kingdoms. In 1145-6/540 the first Almohad expedition across the straits of Gibraltar was launched and in 1147/541 Seville was captured followed by Cordoba.92 In 1150/545 ʿAbd al-Muʾ min was in Salā where he received most of the remaining independent Andalusian amirs who now pledged allegiance to him.93 The next likely step would have been for the caliph to cross the straits in person with the bulk of his

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92 Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, vol. 6, pp. 312-3.
93 Ibid., p. 315.
forces in order to consolidate his gains in the peninsula and perhaps to campaign against the Christians. Contrary to public expectations, ʿAbd al-Muʾmin resolved to first turn his attention against the east, specifically against the Hammadids.

Various reasons have been given for this move. Saʿīdī suggests that ʿAbd al-Muʾmin had dreams of unifying the Maghrib in its entirety.94 Huici-Miranda suggests that he wanted to avenge the poor treatment of the Mahdī by the Hammadids, to expel the Normans from their coastal strongholds in Ifrīqiya, and to restore order in the east after the chaos caused by the Hilālī invasion.95 Less probable is his suggestion that the caliph wanted to attack the Hammadids because they were Ṣanhāja Berbers like the Almoravids. In fact there was a great difference in culture, lifestyle, and even physical appearance between the Ṣanhāja of the Mauritanian desert from whom the Almoravids were derived and the mountain-dwelling Ṣanhāja of the eastern Algerian coast who had founded the Zirid and Hammadid states. As we have seen, ancient kinship did not prevent the Almoravids and the Hammadids from fighting against one another in the past. There was perhaps a more personal motivation for ʿAbd al-Muʾmin’s decision. We should not forget that his tribe, the Kumyā, inhabited the area between Tilimsān and Nadrūma which was located on the disputed frontier between the Almoravid and Hammadid states. This region was more closely linked to the Central Maghrib than to the homeland of the Maṣmūda Berbers in the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains of southern Morocco. It is possible that ʿAbd al-Muʾmin sought to make the position of the the Kumyā more secure by removing their Hammadid neighbors from power.

After two years of preparations the caliph led his army out of Salā. It was announced that he intended to cross the strait to al-Andalus and the army marched in the greatest secrecy. He had the route of march from Salā to Miknās, Miknās to Fez, and Fez to Tilimsān monitored by officials who forbade civilians from traveling along these roads. Soldiers were forbidden by threat of execution from mentioning the true destination of the army. The army arrived before Algiers unexpectedly and took the town without resistance. It was in Algiers that ʿAbd al-Muʿmin encountered the last Zirid amir, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī. As we have previously mentioned, al-Ḥasan had abandoned al-Mahdiyya in the face of the Norman onslaught and after wandering around Ifrāqiya in search of a refuge for himself and his family he was treacherously imprisoned in Algiers by his cousin, the Hammadid sultan Yaḥyā. ʿAbd al-Muʿmin set al-Ḥasan free and showed him great favor. Al-Tijānī says that al-Ḥasan encouraged the Almohad caliph to attack Bijāya in order to take revenge on the relative who had been responsible for his misery though ʿAbd al-Muʿmin hardly needed such encouragement.

The Hammadid ruler Yaḥyā was a careless and pleasure-loving individual who left the business of governing in the hands of his wazīr Maymūn b. Ḥamdūn. The exact course of events leading up to the fall of Bijāya is difficult to determine because of the contradictions in our sources. Ibn al-Athīr says that Maymūn led an army out of Bijāya that was defeated by the Almohad advance guard. Ibn Khaldūn claims that there was a clash between the two sides at a location a day’s journey from Bijāya called Umm al-ʿUlū. On the other hand al-Nuwayrī says

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97 Al-Tijānī, Rihla, p. 343.
that Maymūn deliberately avoided giving combat.\textsuperscript{100} There are some additional sources which claim that Maymūn himself surrendered Bijāya to the Almohads without a fight. Among these is an official letter from the caliph praising Maymūn and his brother, a prominent jurist, for their role in peacefully delivering Bijāya to him.\textsuperscript{101} This makes it unlikely that there was any serious fighting before the fall of Bijāya since Maymūn, the wazīr and commander of the Hammadid army, seems to have had a secret agreement with the caliph. The Almohads entered the city unopposed. The sultan Yaḥyā had already fled from Bijāya to Constantine in eastern Algeria while most of his family took refuge in Sicily. The Almohads proceeded to besiege Constantine until Yaḥyā finally surrendered. He was well-received by ʿAbd al-Muʾmin who sent Yaḥyā and his relatives to al-Maghrib al-Aqsā where they lived in great splendor and luxury.\textsuperscript{102}

After the fall of Constantine the caliph sent a detachment which marched to the Qalʿa of the Banū Ḥammād.\textsuperscript{103} A large force of Ṣanḥāja, partisans of the Hammadids, as well as some Lawāta and Kutāma Berbers had gathered to oppose the Almohads. According to Ibn Khaldūn they were led by Yaḥyā’s brother, one Jūshan, while Ibn al-Athīr says that their commander was named Abū Qaṣaba. A fierce battle took place outside the city between the two sides resulting in the

\textsuperscript{100} Al-Nuwayrī, \textit{Nihāya}, vol. 24, p. 166.


\textsuperscript{102} Lévi-Provençal, \textit{Rasāʾil}, Letter 8, pp. 24-5; Anon., \textit{Ḥulal}, pp. 149-50.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibn Khaldūn says that this force was led by the Caliph’s son ʿAbdallāh while Ibn al-Athīr and al-Nuwayrī say that the commander was one Abū Saʿd Yakhluf. See Ibn Khaldūn, \textit{Ibar}, vol. 6, p. 316; Nuwayrī, \textit{Nihāya}, vol. 24, p. 167; Ibn al-Athīr, \textit{Kāmil}, vol. 9, p. 373
defeat of the Hammadids. The Almohads then stormed the Qal’a which they thoroughly looted and burned while its inhabitants fled to the surrounding hills.\textsuperscript{104}

The Hilālī Arabs who occupied a large swath of territory south of Bijāya felt threatened by the Almohad presence. They had been treated well by the Hammadid sultans who permitted them to keep half of the harvest in the lands where they had settled in return for guarding the frontier.\textsuperscript{105} They feared that the Almohads would expel them from the Central Maghrib altogether. As a consequence the Hilālī tribes of Riyāḥ, Zughba, Athbaj, Qurra, and ’Adī banded together to face the Almohad army. The Normans offered to send 5,000 men from Sicily to assist the Arab confederation but the Arab chiefs turned down the offer claiming that they did not need the assistance and that in any case they could not ally with a Christian power against fellow Muslims.\textsuperscript{106}

The most likely account of the battle is given by Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khaldūn with only minor variations. According to them ’Abd al-Mu’min had already started his return march to Marrakech when he received word of the Arab uprising and he sent against them a force of 30,000 horsemen under his son ’Abdallāh. They met the more numerous Arab army at Siṭīf, a town in eastern Algeria, in 1153/548. The Almohads won a crushing victory; the goods, animals, and families of the Arabs fell into their possession and were brought back to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. The caliph treated the captured women and children honorably and he wrote to the Arabs to come to Marrakech to take back their family members. When the Arabs arrived not only were

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.


they reunited with their wives and children but they also received generous presents.\textsuperscript{107}

According to Ibn al-Athīr the caliph sought their support in securing the appointment of his son as crown prince; no doubt he also wanted to appease them so that they would not cause further headache for him in the Central Maghrib and to make use of them as auxiliaries in his army.

The account of the battle of Siṭīf in al-Baydhaq’s chronicle presents a number of problems. According to this account ʿAbd al-Muʾmin was still in Bijāya when the battle of Siṭīf had occurred. He had sent the bulk of the Almohad army off under two commanders: his son-in-law Ibn Wannūdīn and Yiṣlāsin b. al-Muʾizz. These two quarreled and separated with their respective contingents. The Arabs took advantage of this rift by attacking Ibn Wannūdīn’s column which they defeated and Ibn Wannudīn himself was captured and later executed by them. The caliph was angered by this and he sent all available men except for his own personal bodyguard to fight the Arabs whom they defeated at Siṭīf. Meanwhile the caliph was attacked in Bijāya by Ibn Qaṣaba at the head of a tribe called Banū Zaldaway. The caliph and his retinue fought them off and Ibn Qaṣaba was killed.\textsuperscript{108}

There is no mention in the other chronicles of a fight between the Almohad commanders and the capture of one by the Arabs or of any Almohad setback before the battle of Siṭīf. Furthermore, the other sources imply that the caliph was on his return march at the time of the battle if he had not reached Marrakech already. The mention of Ibn Qaṣaba further complicates the narrative. This person is clearly referred to by the other chroniclers as the leader of the Shanḥāja in the battle for the Qalʿa, which they insist proceeded the battle of Siṭīf. Al-Baydhaq does not refer to the battle for the Qalʿa; he simply inserts the improbable account of Ibn

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{107}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{108}] Al-Baydhaq, Akhbār, pp. 74-5.
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Qaṣaba’s assault on the caliph within the narrative of the battle of Siṭīf which suggests that he has confused the two events. This would not be surprising since al-Baydhaq makes no pretense of being an historian. His work is a panegyric on Ibn Tūmart and ‘Abd al-Mu‘min.

Unfortunately the two greatest modern historians of the Almohad Empire, the Spaniard Ambrosio Huici-Miranda and the Egyptian Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh ʿInān, have obscured and distorted the events surrounding the battle of Siṭīf through their attempts to accommodate the version of this campaign that is presented by al-Baydhaq. Huici-Miranda mentions two major battles against the Arabs, a position that is not supported by any of the primary sources. For the first battle he gives no name or location. He works the story of the dispute between Ibn Wannūdīn and Yiṣlāsin b. al-Mu‘izz into the narrative of this battle as well as the attack on the caliph by Ibn Qaṣaba. According to him the main Almohad army was victorious against the Arabs and the caliph defeated Ibn Qaṣaba. ‘Abd al-Mu‘min commenced his return march to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā leaving behind him a sizeable contingent to occupy the former Hammadid territories. When the caliph reached Mitīja (south of Algiers), word reached him that the Arabs had gathered near the town of Siṭīf. He sent the bulk of the troops who were with him to reinforce the local Almohad force and together they won a second victory over the Arabs at Siṭīf, capturing the families and flocks of the Arabs.109

ʿInān implies that ‘Abd al-Mu‘min was present in the Central Maghrib during the battle of Siṭīf. According to him Ibn Qaṣaba led the Ṣanhāja, Kutāma and Lawāta against the Almohads following the battle of Siṭīf while the caliph was in Bijāya. This means that according to ʿInān

there were two battles with the Berbers: the first was the battle at the Qal’a which occurred before Ṣiṭīf, and a second battle which occurred after Ṣiṭīf.\footnote{Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh ʿInān, Dawlat al-Islām fī al-Andalus: ‘Aṣr al-Murābīṭin wa al-Muwaḥḥidin fī al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus, 2 vols, (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʾālīf, 1964) Vol. 1, pp. 284-5.}

This is a needless complication of events. Our fullest and most reliable sources, Ibn al-Athīr, al-Nuwayrī, and Ibn Khaldūn, make it clear that there was one battle at the Qal’a with the assembled Berber tribes under Ibn Qaṣaba which occurred after the fall of Bijāya and shortly before or at the same time as the fall of Constantine. This was followed by a single decisive battle against the Arabs at Siṭīf which occurred when the caliph was on his way back to Marrakech. If an attack was made on ʿAbd al-Muʿmin when most of the Almohad forces were away then it must have happened during the campaign against the Qal’a when the caliph was still in Bijāya and Almohad forces were divided between the Qal’a and Constantine. Al-Baydhaq is the only author who mentions the attack on the person of the caliph. It appears that ʿInān has been mislead by the fact that al-Baydhaq inserted his account of the attack on the caliph by Ibn Qaṣaba after his mention of the battle of Siṭīf but this means little since al-Baydhaq appears to be careless with chronology.

The campaign against the Central Maghrib concluded in approximately 1153/548. It resulted in the fall of the Hammadid state and its absorption into the expanding Almohad Empire. ʿAbd al-Muʿmin spent the next five years consolidating his hold on power. He suppressed a number of revolts and conspiracies in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and he forced the senior Almohad chiefs to accept the succession of the caliphate in his own line. During this time he had received numerous delegations from the Muslims of Ifrīqiya pleading for assistance against the Normans. It should also be remembered that the last Zirid sultan, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, was present in Marrakech at this
time. He was a close friend and advisor to the caliph and he also strongly urged him to wage war on the Normans who had deposed him from the throne of al-Mahdiya.

In the winter of 1159/554 the caliph left Salā at the head of a large army whose number is given by Ibn al-Athīr as 100,000.\(^{111}\) He was accompanied by al-Ḥasan the Zirid. They marched to Tunis, which was then governed by the Banū Khurāsān, and they reached it in less than five months. A fleet of seventy galleys sailed along the coast parallel to the Almohad army commanded by the admiral Abū ʿAbdallāh b. Maymūn.\(^{112}\) There are conflicting accounts of what happened next; some sources say that the city surrendered peacefully while others insist that there was a siege.

The fullest account is given by al-Tijānī.\(^{113}\) He says that the caliph’s son, ʿAbdallāh, had besieged Tunis in 1157/552 but the defenders had annihilated his army. As a result they were overconfident in the face of ʿAbd al-Muʿmin’s forces and rejected his offer of a peaceful surrender. After three days of siege the city leaders sent a delegation to negotiate with ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. Perhaps the Tunisians realized that this time they would face the entire might of the Almohad Empire. They begged the caliph’s pardon which he granted under stringent conditions, confiscating half of the property and money of the citizens of Tunis and the inhabitants of the surrounding villages and expelling the Banū Khurāsān from the city.\(^{114}\)

He appointed an Almohad governor for Tunis and advanced to al-Mahdiya. The Christian defenders, who numbered 3,000, had abandoned the suburb of Zawīla and they were

\(^{111}\) Ibn al-Athīr, Kāmil, vol. 9, p. 428.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

\(^{113}\) Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, pp. 344–6.

\(^{114}\) Ibid.
concentrated in the nearly impregnable peninsula. ‘Abd al-Mu’min commenced the siege in August 1159/Rajab 554 and it lasted until 21 January 1160/Muḥarram 555. All attempts to storm the citadel ended in failure; the Almohads had no recourse but to wait until the supplies of the defenders ran low. A Sicilian fleet of 150 vessels attempted to break the siege but it was defeated by the Almohad navy outside of the harbor of al-Mahdīya. After this event the defenders lost hope and entered into negotiations with ‘Abd al-Mu’min. He agreed to allow the defenders to return to Sicily unmolested with all of their possessions since the new Norman king, William, had threatened to massacre the Muslims on that island if any of his knights were harmed. With this treaty twelve years of Christian rule in al-Mahdīya came to an end.115

During the four years preceding the siege of al-Mahdīya revolts had flared up in most of the other coastal cities of Iffīqiya. Tripoli, Ṣfāqus, Jirba and Qābis threw off the Norman yoke, no doubt in anticipation of the arrival of the Almohads.116 When ‘Abd al-Mu’min reached Tunisia the new rulers of Ṣfāqus and Tripoli hastened to submit to him as did many of the towns in Jabal Nafusa and the Jaṛīd. Qābis refused to submit and as a result it was conquered by a contingent under the command of the caliph’s son. The rulers of Qafṣa heeded the example of the other cities and recognized Almohad authority.117

Ibn al-Athīr and al-Nuwayrī relate that as ‘Abd al-Mu’min was preparing to leave Iffīqiya in 1160/555 he summoned the amirs of the Banū Riyāh, a Hilālī tribe that was then settled in that province, and asked them to provide him with 10,000 horsemen to help the Almohads defend al-Andalus from the Christians. The amirs agreed and sent the troops that had been requested of

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117 Ibid., pp. 429-30.
them. In private the Arabs resented ʿAbd al-Muʾmin’s orders as they believed that his real intention was to remove their tribes from Ifrīqiya and resettle them in the west. After only two days of marching the Arab fighters slipped away from the caliph’s army near Jabal Zaghwān between Tunis and Qayrawān. The caliph continued his march to the vicinity of Constantine where he set up camp in a remote valley for twenty days taking care that the army’s whereabouts were kept secret. The Arabs assumed that ʿAbd al-Muʾmin had been compelled to hurry back to al-Andalus and they let their guard down. When the moment was ripe the caliph sent out his sons Abū ʿAbdallāh and Abū Muḥammad at the head of a picked force. They surprised the Arabs at Jabal al-Qarn near Qayrawān while ʿAbd al-Muʾmin followed closely behind with the main body. Together they inflicted a devastating defeat on the Arabs. The chief of the Banū Riyāḥ was killed and their families and possessions fell into the hands of the enemy. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin protected the dignity of the captured womenfolk and he returned them safely to the Riyāḥī emissaries who came to Marrakech, just as he had done after the battle of Siṭīf. After Jabal al-Qarn all of the Arab tribes in Ifrīqiya submitted to the caliph and their contingents joined him on his next campaign in al-Andalus. For the time being Ifrīqiya was quiet and pacified according to our chroniclers.118

This account may be exaggerated as Huici-Miranda suggests but it is nonetheless of considerable importance in that it sheds light on the Almohad policy towards the Hilālī and Sulaymī Arab tribes which had come to occupy significant territory in Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib in the previous century.119 The Almohad caliphs, beginning with ʿAbd al-Muʾmin, moved entire Arab tribes from their abodes in Ifrīqiya to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā where they resettled

them. This strategy of forced resettlement was connected to both the internal and external politics of the Almohad state.

One motive for this policy was 'Abd al-Mu'min's desire to counterbalance the influence of the original Almohad (Maṣmūda and Zanāta) tribes in the army.¹²⁰ 'Abd al-Mu'min intended to create a hereditary caliphate that would be restricted to his descendants alone. Such a move was bound to create tension in Almohad ranks as it meant that Ibn Tūmart’s descendants would be excluded from the office of caliph. To further complicate matters the caliph had agreed early in his reign that he would be succeeded by Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Hintātī who was one of the most influential companions of the mahdī Ibn Tūmart. In order to pave the way for his son’s accession the caliph went to great lengths to woo the Arabs. He treated the defeated Arab chiefs with great leniency after the battle of Siṭīf (1153/548), showered them with gifts, and even proclaimed that he shared a common Northern Arab (ʿAdnānī and Muḍarī) ancestry with the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym.¹²¹ Since the Arabs were outsiders with no previous involvement in internal Almohad disputes 'Abd al-Mu’min could count on their continued loyalty to his family alone. In 1156/551 'Abd al-Mu'min met in private with the Hilālī chiefs and told them to raise a great outcry and ask him to designate an heir from among his sons. While the Arabs created a public uproar and let it be known that they could only accept a son of 'Abd al-Mumin as the heir-apparent, 'Abd al-Mu’min feigned innocence by protesting that Abū Ḥafṣ was the right person to succeed him. Abū Ḥafṣ understood very well what had transpired behind the scenes. He prudently withdrew his claim to the succession and hastened to give the bay’a to Muḥammad,


the eldest son of ʿAbd al-Muʿmin.122 This incident clearly demonstrates the importance of the Arab element in the internal policies of the Almohad caliphs.123

A second motive behind the forced resettlement of the Arabs was the pacification of Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib. It was hoped that the power of the Arabs in the eastern provinces could be diluted by removing some tribes to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā where they would be surrounded by loyal Berber tribes and under the close watch of the caliph in Marrākush.

The third reason for the transfer of Arab tribes to the west was the need for their military services on the Andalusian front. The Arab tribesmen had a formidable reputation as soldiers in the western Islamic lands at this time.124 They were particularly prized as cavalry, much like their Turkic counterparts in the Mashriq during the same period. In contrast to the Turks, the Arab horsemen typically fought as lancers rather than mounted archers.125 Their signature tactic was the karr wa farr (attack and retreat) which consisted of a series of fast, furious charges punctuated by abrupt withdrawals. These moves were calculated to confuse the enemy and draw him out of formation.126

The military value of the Arabs was reflected in their salaries which were considerably higher than those of other troops in the Almohad army. According to a passage from Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt’s al-Mann bi al-Īmāma, the caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (1163-1184/ 558-580) commanded

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123 Shortly before his death ʿAbd al-Muʿmin decided that Muḥammad was unfit for the caliphate and he instead designated another son, Yūsuf, as his successor. Abū Hašʿ ʿUmar continued to serve the Almohads loyally in the capacity of vizier. His family (the Hafsids) remained very influential in the Almohad state as we shall see.


125 Francisco García Fitz, Las Navas de Tolosa, (Barcelona: Ariel, 2005), pp. 327-28; Lev, Saladin in Egypt, pp. 145, 147.

126 Fitz, Las Navas, pp. 326-29.
that ordinary fully-equipped infantrymen be paid eight dinars, unequipped infantry three dinars; fully equipped horsemen ten dinars, unequipped horsemen eight dinars. For the Arab troops a separate pay scale was applied: fully-equipped horsemen were to be paid twenty-five dinars each, unequipped horsemen fifteen dinars; and footsoldiers were to be paid seven dinars. Each minor Arab chief was to receive fifty dinars, and the major chiefs were to be paid two hundred.  

The resettlement of Hilālī and Sulaymān Arab tribes in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā occurred on a large-scale during `Abd al-Mu’min’s reign following his conquest of the Central Maghrib (1153/548) and Ifrīqiya (1160/555). This policy continued during the reigns of his successors Yūsuf (1163/558 - 1184/580) and Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr (1184/580 - 1199/595).  

In his Kitāb al-‘Ibar Ibn Khaldūn recorded the distribution of the resettled tribes in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. The Banū Riyāḥ (a major Hilālī tribe) were settled in northwestern Morocco in the coastal plain between Tangiers and Salā. The Jusham (a large Hilālī tribe with three important branches in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā: Khulṭ, Banū Jābir, and Sufyān) and some clans of the Hilālī Athbaj were settled in the fertile plain of Tāmasnā (the region bounded by Wādī Abū Raqraq to its north, Wādī Tansīft in the south, the Atlas mountains in the east, and the Atlantic in the west). According to Ibn Khaldūn the Jusham maintained their traditional nomadic lifestyle in Tāmasnā for a while but eventually they settled down and took up agriculture during the Marinid period.  

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The Banū Maʿqil (a tribe of Qaḥṭānī origin that took part in the great Hilālī migration of the eleventh century) had three major sub-tribes: the Dhawū ʿUbaydallāh, Dhawū Manṣūr, and the Dhawū Ḥassān. These tribes roamed the deserts to the west and south of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and together their abodes formed a rough crescent. The Dhawū ʿUbaydallāh were the northernmost tribe. They controlled an area south of Tilmisān that extended westwards as far as Tāwrīt (a northern Moroccan city just over 100 kilometers west of the modern Algerian-Moroccan border). The Dhawū Manṣūr in the center of the crescent controlled Wādī Mūla and Wādī Tāfilalt. The Dhawū Ḥassān controlled a swath of territory extending from Wādī Darʿa to the Atlantic coastline, including the region around Wādī Sūs.  

Fitz and Nawwāra present evidence which suggests that the Almohads resettled many Hilālī Arabs in al-Andalus as well as al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. It is important to note that a considerable number of the Jusham and Riyāḥ remained in the Central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya since they took part in the wars between the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya in both regions during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

The impact of the resettled Arab tribes on the Almohad state was considerable. We have already seen that they played a role in converting the state into a hereditary caliphate ruled by the family of ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. When the Almohad Empire began to decline in the 1220s these same tribes played an important part in the civil wars and succession disputes which sapped its strength. A notable example of such intervention by the Arab tribes was the civil war between the caliph al-Maʿmūn (1229/626–1232/630), who was supported primarily by the Khulṭ, and Yaḥyā al-Muʿtaṣim (1227/624–1229/626) who drew support from the Banū Sufyān. The Khulṭ

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131 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 77.
were a major source of instability during the reign of al-Rashīd (1232/630 – 1242/640). When the Almohad caliph al-Saʿīd (1242/640 – 1248/646) undertook an expedition against the Zayyanids (Banū ʿAbd al-Wād) of Tilimsān, factional fighting between the Arab contingents in his army indirectly caused his defeat and death at the hands of the enemy.\(^{133}\)

Even more important than their role in the decline of the Almohad state was the long-term impact that the Arabs had on the population of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. There was a high degree of intermarriage between the Arab newcomers and the Berbers in the Atlantic coastal plains of Morocco which resulted in the rapid spread of the Arabic language and the realignment of old tribal structures.\(^{134}\)

ʿAbd al-Muʿmin died in 1163/558, approximately three years after the successful completion of his campaign in Ifrīqiya. Ibn Tūmart was the mahdī and spiritual leader of the Almohad movement but when he died in 1130/524 he left behind a small political entity in central Morocco whose survival was by no means certain. It was ʿAbd al-Muʿmin who defeated the Almoravids and established a great empire which stretched across North Africa from the Atlantic Ocean to Tripolitania and included most of the Muslim territory in al-Andalus as well. For this achievement he deserves to be ranked among the great rulers of medieval history, on a par with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Baybars.

In the preceding pages we have covered the history of northwest Africa during the period of approximately one century that elapsed between the Hilālī invasion (mid-11th century) and the incorporation of both regions into the Almohad Empire (mid-12th century). In Ifrīqiya this period was characterized by political fragmentation with the emergence of city states on the coast and


petty tribal chiefdoms in the interior. The weakness of these local political entities invited interference by outside powers such as the Hammadids, Normans, and Almohads. In al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ the Hammadids established a powerful state though they too felt the impact of the Hilālī migrations after their defeat by the Arabs at the battle of Sabība in 1065/457. Despite their best efforts the Hammadids were thwarted in their attempts to conquer Ifrīqiya and the remnants of the Zirid state. Further west the Almoravids ruled over al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus. They founded Marrakech, monopolized the Trans-Saharan gold trade, and turned al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā into a region of great political and cultural significance. In the early decades of the twelfth century the Almoravids were supplanted by the Almohads. The Almohads were successful in conquering al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ and Ifrīqiya, thereby bringing political unity to the whole of the “Greater Maghrib” for the first time since the days of the Fatimid Caliphate in the late tenth century.

As we shall see, the incorporation of Ifrīqiya into their empire created new problems for the Almohad caliphs. There were three elements which contributed to the instability of this region: the Arabs of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaým; the Banū Ghāniya, a remarkably tenacious dynasty of pro-Almoravid rebels who were based in the Balearic Islands and later in Ifrīqiya as well; the “Ghuzz”, bands of Turkish and Kurdish troops who entered Ifrīqiya by marching overland from Ayyubid Egypt. We have already recounted the establishment of the Arabs in Ifrīqiya; in the pages that follow we will take up the history of the Banū Ghāniya and the Ghuzz.
Chapter 5

The Rise of the Banū Ghāniya

The Almoravid state was based on the alliance of the Ṣanḥājī tribes of Northern Mauritania. The ruling tribe was the Lamtūna from whose ranks the two greatest Almoravid sultans arose: Yūsuf b. Tashfīn (1061-1106/453-500) and ʿAlī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfīn (1106-1142/500-537). Another tribe called the Massūfa played a very important role in the Almoravid state. The sultan Yūsuf b. Tashfīn married a female relative named Ghāniya to a courageous chief from this tribe named ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Massūfī. The descendants of this union between the aristocracy of the Lamtūna and the Massūfa were known as the Banū Ghāniya. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Massūfī and Ghāniya had two sons, Muḥammad and Yaḥyā, both of whom were raised at the Almoravid court under the supervision of the sultan himself. In 1126/520 Yaḥyā was appointed governor of the western provinces of al-Andalus which he ruled from Cordoba while Muḥammad was made governor of the Balearic Islands.¹

At first Yaḥyā was successful in holding off the Christians. In 1133-34/528 he won a great victory over a superior Aragonese army led by Alphonso the Battler at the battle of Fraga (located in northeastern Spain halfway between Zaragoza and Barcelona). The Almoravids were unable to reap the fruits of this success as they were losing the Maghrib to the Almohad caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. Anti-Almoravid revolts soon flared up throughout al-Andalus. In 1145/539 one Aḥmad b. Qasī (Abencasi), captured Mertola, Silves, Evora and Béja in the western part of the Iberian Peninsula and proclaimed himself to be the Mahdī. His followers were known as the

Mūrīdūn. While Yahyā was away facing Ibn Qasī, Cordoba seceded under the qadi Ibn Ḫamdīn. Granada and Malaga followed suit. In 1146/540 Yahyā recaptured Cordoba. Ibn Ḫamdīn appealed to the king of Castile, Alphonso VII, for assistance. The latter led an army to Cordoba where he succeeded in capturing the city while Yahyā held out against him in the citadel.2

Unfortunately for Yahyā, the Almohads chose this moment to invade al-Andalus from the south. An army crossed the straits under Abū Ishāq Barrāz b. Muḥammad al-Massūfī, a former Almoravid commander who had defected to the Almohads. With the assistance of the Mūrīdūn the Almohads captured Algeciras and cities of western al-Andalus. In 1147/541 they entered Seville. Yahyā’s position was desperate; he surrendered to the Castilians and in return Alphonso allowed him to rule Cordoba as his vassal. This arrangement did not last very long as Alphonso desired to take direct control of Cordoba. He presented Yahyā with an ultimatum to either pay more tribute or cede Cordoba to the king in return for an appanage elsewhere. Instead Yahyā entered into secret negotiations with the Almohad commander and he surrendered Cordoba and Carmona to him, thereby frustrating Alphonso’s plans. Now an Almohad vassal, Yahyā made his way to Granada, the last Almoravid stronghold in the Peninsula, where he convinced the garrison to submit to the Almohads. He died there in 1148-9/543.3

Meanwhile Yahyā’s younger brother Muḥammad b. Ghāniya had by now established himself as an independent ruler over the Balearic Islands. It is necessary to give some background information on the condition of these islands and their place in the larger twelfth century Mediterranean world. The largest of the islands is Majorca followed by Ibiza, Minorca, and

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Formentera. The Balearic Islands did not fall under permanent Muslim rule until approximately 902/290 when they were annexed by the Umayyads of Cordoba. In the early eleventh century, as the Cordoba Caliphate disintegrated and al-Andalus entered the period of the *Mulūk al-Ṭawā’if* (the “Party Kings”), a former Umayyad military slave named al-Mujāhid carved out an independent principality in Denia (a port on the east coast of Spain slightly south of Valencia and directly opposite Ibiza) that also embraced the Balearic Islands. He was a remarkable character who was famous for his generous patronage of scholars and his daring military exploits. In 1015/405 he invaded Sardinia though he was repulsed two years later by the combined forces of Pisa and Genoa. Al-Mujāhid died in 1044/436. The Balearic Islands continued to be ruled by his successors in Denia until the annexation of the latter by the prince of Zaragoza in approximately 1076/469. When this event occurred the governor of the Balearic Islands on behalf of the rulers of Denia, a certain al-Murtaḍā, declared his independence. He died in 1093/486 and he was succeeded by a eunuch named al-Mubashshir.

In 1109/503 a fleet of Norsemen led by king Sigurd I of Norway sacked Formentera, Ibiza, and Minorca (though not Majorca which was too strongly defended) while en route to Palestine where they joined the Crusade. In 1114/508 a combined Pisan-Catalonian expedition led by Raymond Berenguer III, count of Barcelona, attacked Majorca with Papal blessing. After an epic

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5 Ibid., pp. 177-82.

6 Ibid., pp. 185-90.

7 Ibid., p. 194.

8 Ibid., pp. 206-7.

9 Ibid., pp. 206-20; Gary B. Doxey, “Norwegian Crusaders and the Balearic Islands,” *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 68, no. 2 (Spring, 1996), pp. 139-60.
siege that lasted for over one year with tremendous losses and suffering on both sides, the Muslim defenders surrendered and the Christians were rewarded for their efforts with a great quantity of looted treasure. Upon learning of the approach of a 300 ship strong Almoravid relief fleet the Pisans and Catalonians abruptly returned home without making any effort to permanently control the islands.\textsuperscript{10} The Almoravids appointed a governor named Wannūr b. Bakr who was despised by the inhabitants for his harshness. As a result he was replaced by the aforementioned Muḥammad b. Ghāniya in 1126/520.\textsuperscript{11}

During the Islamic period the island of Majorca contained a sizeable port city of the same name on the site of the present day city of Palma. It was defended by triple walls and boasted a citadel of great strength.\textsuperscript{12} According to Abulafia the Balearic Islands had few valuable goods to export with the exception of the famous salt of Ibiza which was traded for West African gold by the Saharan merchants.\textsuperscript{13} Abulafia says that Majorca imported grain from abroad in order to feed a large population while Sans Rosselló claims that Majorcan fruits and grain were purchased by the Genoese and Pisans.\textsuperscript{14} In Abulafia’s opinion the importance of the islands was primarily due to their strategic location. The islands were important waystations along the maritime routes that connected the ports of Provence and Liguria to those of Levante (the eastern coast of Spain) and

\textsuperscript{10} Mulet, “Mallorca Musulmana,” 234-69.
\textsuperscript{12} Mulet, “Mallorca Musulmana,” pp. 225-34, 256-57.
\textsuperscript{13} David Abulafia, “Gli inizi del commercio genovese a Maiorca,” in Mediterranean Encounters, Economic, Religious, Political, 1100-1550, (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 4-5 (non-continuous pagination). Abulafia does not explain why Ibizan salt was attractive to North African merchants involved in the Trans-Saharan gold trade since the latter also had access to the great Saharan salt mines such as Taghāza and Awlīl which were obviously located much closer to the West African gold markets entailing cheaper transportation costs.
the Central and Western Maghrib.\textsuperscript{15} Another important source of income for Majorca and the neighboring islands was piracy.\textsuperscript{16} At this time both Muslims and Christians saw piracy as an extension of the Holy War. The ships and coastal towns of the “unbelievers” were fair game for both sides unless there was a treaty between a Muslim and Christian ruler specifically prohibiting such attacks; of course such treaties only applied to the subjects of the two rulers and not to all of their coreligionists.\textsuperscript{17} The Balearic Islands provided convenient bases for squadrons that raided Catalonia, Provence, Sardinia, Corsica, and the western coast of Italy. Conversely, the Balearic Islands were themselves the targets of destructive raids by various Christian powers as we have already seen.

When the Banū Ghāniya took over Majorca towards the middle of the twelfth century there were several maritime powers, Christian and Muslim, competing for influence in the western Mediterranean. The Italian republics of Pisa and Genoa demonstrated their naval prowess in the previous century when they repulsed al-Mujāhid from Sardinia (1017/407) and attacked al-Mahdīya in Ifrīqiya (1087/480).\textsuperscript{18} It is worth noting that there was a fierce rivalry between the two city states. While they made common cause with the Pisans against al-Mujāhid and during the raid on al-Mahdīya, the Genoese were notoriously absent from the great expedition to Majorca in 1114/508. The Pisans and Genoese were mainly concerned with protecting the maritime routes to Spain and North Africa; distance and lack of manpower meant that they had


\textsuperscript{17} On the ubiquity of piracy and slaving in the western Mediterranean during this period see Abulafia, \textit{Great Sea}, pp. 246-50.

\textsuperscript{18} See Chapter Four above for the assault on al-Mahdīya.
little inclination to permanently occupy Majorca or the ports of al-Andalus. This was not the case with the Catalanian County of Barcelona which was the closest of the great Christian maritime powers to Majorca and which sought to expand at the expense of the Muslims in Levante and the Balearic Islands.\(^{19}\) It is an indication of Barcelona’s strength in the twelfth century that the Pisans petitioned count Raymond Berenguer III to assume overall command of the Christian armada during the siege of Majorca in 1114/508.\(^{20}\) In 1162/558 the County of Barcelona merged with the Kingdom of Aragon, its landlocked neighbor to the west.\(^{21}\) The fourth major Christian power in the western Mediterranean at this time was the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. We have seen that the Normans possessed a great fleet with which they subjugated the ports of Ifrīqiya during the 1140s.\(^{22}\)

The Almohads without a doubt possessed the greatest Islamic fleet in the Mediterranean by the middle of the twelfth century; however, they did not yet control Levante and its ports. In that region the capable ruler of Murcia, a certain Ibn Mardanīsh (known in Spanish as El Rey Lobo or the “Wolf King”), managed to hold out against the Almohads until his death in 1171-2/567.\(^{23}\) It should also be noted that the Banū Ghāniya themselves possessed a considerable navy that was likely inherited from the Almoravids. As we have seen the interests of Almohads, Catalanians, Pisans, Genoese, and Sicilians collided in the western Mediterranean. The Banū Ghāniya had to

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\(^{19}\) See Doxey, “Muslim Majorca,” p. 59.


\(^{22}\) See Chapter Four above.

\(^{23}\) Bel, Benou Ghania, pp. 20-2; Sīsālim, Juzur al-Andalus, pp. 335-6.
play a difficult balancing act between these great maritime powers in order to preserve the independence of their Majorcan principality.

After the collapse of Almoravid power in al-Andalus in the 1140s Majorca became the last refuge of the great Saharan dynasty whose cause was now championed by the Banū Ghāniya under the amir Muhammad. Muḥammad b. Ghāniya continued to have the khutba recited in the name of the Abbasids according to al-Marrākushi.24 In this he followed the practice of the Almoravids who had always refused the title of caliph for themselves, choosing instead to recognize the caliphs of Baghdad. This was a clear message to the Almohads that he did not recognize their claim to the caliphate. His land and naval forces were bolstered by the arrival of large numbers of Almoravid soldiers and supporters who had fled across the sea to take refuge in Majorca after the final Almohad victory in al-Andalus.

Few details are known about the foreign policy of Majorca under Muḥammad. He signed treaties with the republics of Genoa and Pisa in 1149/544 and 1150/545 respectively. Sans Rosselló says that the purpose of these early treaties was limited to ensuring that both sides would refrain from attacking each others’ shipping.25 Ibn Ghāniya’s contemporary, Ibn Mardanīsh, who ruled most of the eastern coast of al-Andalus independently of both the Almoravids and Almohads, also signed an agreement with the Italian republics at about the same time. Unlike Muḥammad b. Ghāniya, Ibn Mardanīsh was required to pay an annual tribute of 10,000 mithqāls of gold to the Pisans and Genoese in return for their undertaking to refrain from raiding his territory. In Sīsālim’s opinion, the fact that the Banū Ghāniya avoided paying tribute to the Italian maritime powers and faced no direct attacks from them, in contrast to Ibn

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24 Al-Marrākushi, Muʿjib, p. 344.

Mardanīsh’s kingdom and the Muslim principalities on the coast of Ifrīqiya, indicates that
Majorca was already a formidable naval power during Muḥammad’s reign and as a result it had
to be treated as an equal by the Genoese and Pisans.  

The circumstances surrounding the death of Muḥammad and the accession of his son Ishāq
are obscure. Some sources say that Muḥammad had appointed his son ʿAbdallāh as crown
prince, arousing the jealousy of another son named Ishāq who murdered both of them and
usurped the throne. Al-Marrākushī adds that it is not clear whether ʿAbdallāh was killed before
or after his father. The sources also differ widely on the year of Muḥammad’s death and
Ishāq’s accession to the throne of Majorca. Sīsālim, who has carefully scrutinized the various
accounts, follows Ibn ʿĪdhārī in giving 1155/550 as the year of Ishāq’s accession.

Under Ishāq the principality of Majorca continued to grow in power and influence. Ishāq led
seasonal plundering raids against the coasts of Italy, Provence, Catalonia, Sicily and Sardinia.
According to al-Marrākushī, Ishāq led two great raiding expeditions against the lands of the Rūm
every year from which he and his companions gained great wealth. He devoted all of his
attention to these raids and cared for little else. An indication of Majorca’s prosperity under
Ishāq is the fact that the latter minted his own gold dinars. Al-Ghubrīnī records that at this time
Ishāq’s ships frequently visited Bijāya bringing captives to be sold in that city’s bustling slave

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28 Sīsālim, Juzur al-Andalus, pp. 323-4.
29 Sīsālim, Juzur al-Andalus, p. 331.
30 Al-Marrākushī, Muʾjib, p. 344.
market.\textsuperscript{32}  Išāq’s raids are also mentioned in the Latin chronicles. In 1178/573-4 the city of Toulon fell to the Banū Ghāniya. Among the many noble prisoners who were taken was the viscount of Marseille, Hugo Godfrey.\textsuperscript{33}

Like his predecessor, Išāq maintained amicable relations with the Pisans and Genoese.\textsuperscript{34} An envoy of the Pisan consuls visited Majorca in 1161/557, presumably to sign a peace treaty that was renewed in 1173/569 and again in 1184/580.\textsuperscript{35} At the beginning of the 1160s the Genoese signed treaties with Ibn Mardanīsh, the Almohads, and Išāq b. Ghāniya. By establishing relations with all of the Muslim powers in the southwestern corner of the Mediterranean, the Genoese secured the protection of their merchant vessels which pld the shipping routes between Italy and the ports of Levante and the Maghrib.\textsuperscript{36} The Majorcan-Genoese treaty was renewed in 1181/577.\textsuperscript{37} We are fortunate to possess the Arabic and Latin texts of the Genoese-Majorcan treaty of 1181/577 and the Pisan-Majorcan treaty of 1184/580.\textsuperscript{38} These treaties, which are very similar, basically served to guarantee that each party along with its respective subjects and allies would refrain from causing any harm to the other by sea or land. It is stipulated that

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\begin{itemize}
\item Henrique Florez, España Sagrada, vol. 38, p. 346, quoted in Álvaro Campaner y Fuentes, Bosquejo histórico de la dominación islamita en las Islas Baleares, (Palma: Juan Colomar y Salas, 1888) p.144.
\item Campaner, Bosquejo, p. 229.
\item Doxey, “Muslim Majorca,” pp. 44-6.
\item For the Arabic and Latin texts of the Pisan treaty see Michele Amari, I diplomi arabi del R. Archivio Fiorentino, (Florence: Le Monnier, 1862), pp. 230-36, 273-77; the Arabic text of the Genoese treaty along with a modern Italian translation and extensive commentary can be found in Frédéric Bauden, “Due trattati di pace conclusi nel dodicesimo secolo tra i Banū Gāniya, signori delle isole Baleari, e il commune di Genova,” in Documentos y manuscritos árabes del Occidente musulmán medieval, ed. Nuria Martínez de Castilla, (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), pp. 33-86.
\end{itemize}
Genoese and Pisan subjects who embark in the ships of nations unfriendly to Majorca will be treated as enemies if captured. A clause in both treaties ensures that if Pisan or Genoese vessels are shipwrecked near the Balearic Islands their crews will be assisted in salvage operations and that there will be no seizure of cargo that washes up on shore by the Majorcans. The most curious feature of these treaties is that unlike his successors Ishāq used the title al-faqīh al-ajall (literally “the great jurist”) rather than amīr. Bauden points out that this epithet is not as unassuming as it appears; under the Almoravids the title faqīh had been accorded not only to scholars but to princes and great men of state.

Further evidence of relations between Majorca and the Italian city-states during the reign of Ishāq is found in the commercial records of Genoa. The Genoese cartularies contain six merchants’ contracts for trade in Majorca and Ibiza from the two decades of the 1150s and 1160s. These documents have been analyzed in detail by Abulafia who notes that some of the most prominent merchants in Genoa were partners in these contracts, an indication of the importance which was attached to commerce with the Balearic Islands at this time.

It appears that throughout Ishāq’s reign [1155/550? – 1184/580] the Banū Ghāniya had hostile relations with both Aragon and Norman Sicily. In 1159/554 the Sicilians attacked Ibiza. In 1178/574 the Banū Ghāniya raided the northern Catalanian coast and sacked the church of Santa Maria d’Ullà. In the same year negotiations took place between Aragon and Sicily concerning plans for a joint invasion of the Balearic Islands. The two powers even agreed to divide Majorca

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39 Ibid.

40 Bauden, “Due trattati,” p. 60.

41 Abulafia, “Commercio genovese ,” p. 5.


in half between themselves. In 1181/577 a Sicilian expeditionary force embarked for Majorca in a fleet of over 200 vessels. The Sicilians never reached their intended destination; most of their ships were wrecked in a series of storms off the coasts of Sardinia and Liguria and the remainder limped home. The Aragonese, who had longstanding designs on the Balearic Islands, were noticeably absent on this occasion, perhaps due to internal political problems. It should also be noted that the Genoese and Pisans refused to take part in this expedition even though the Sicilian fleet stopped in both of their cities and requested assistance from them.44

We have mentioned above that the eastern coast of al-Andalus was ruled by an independent Muslim prince named Ibn Mardanīsh. Ibn Mardanīsh managed to keep the Almohads at bay until his death in 1171-2/567. The territory that he ruled over formed a very convenient buffer state from the viewpoint of the Banū Ghāniya in Majorca, for it shielded them from the Almohads on their western flank. As a result there was little pressure on them from this quarter and they were able to devote their energy to their naval jihād against the Christians while still maintaining their traditional allegiance to the Abbasid caliphate and ignoring the claims of the Almohads. After Ibn Mardanīsh’s death his son submitted to the Almohads and all of his remaining lands were incorporated into their empire.45 Once they had taken control over the port cities of southeastern Spain it became inevitable that the Almohads would make a determined attempt to secure the submission of the Balearic Islands. They could not tolerate an independent emirate in Majorca sitting astride the lines of communication between al-Andalus on the one hand and the ports of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ and Ifrīqiya on the other, especially when this island was ruled by descendants of their most bitter foes, the Almoravids. It should also be remembered that the Almohads

44 Doxey, “Muslim Majorca,” pp. 56-60.

45 Bel, Benou Ghania, pp. 20-2; Sīsālim, Juzur al-Andalus, pp. 335-6.
possessed one of the strongest navies in the Mediterranean. Already in the reign of ’Abd al-Mu’min they had constructed hundreds of galleys and possessed a string of naval bases along the Spanish and North African coasts.\(^4^6\) The fleet commanded by the Banū Ghāniya, which was also quite formidable and very capable as we have seen, constituted an obstacle to Almohad maritime expansion and its elimination was imperative if the Almohads were to realize their ambitions in the western Mediterranean Basin.

İshāq regularly sent a portion of the slaves and plunder that he acquired on his expeditions against the Franks to the Almohad caliph Yūsuf b. ’Abd al-Mu’min.\(^4^7\) It would appear that he attempted to cultivate the good-will of the caliph while avoiding recognition of Almohad authority. In early 1184/580 he was mortally wounded in combat with the Franks. There are conflicting accounts as to whether he died overseas or was first carried back to his palace in Majorca where he lingered for a few months before finally succumbing to his injuries.\(^4^8\) In any case effective power passed to his son and heir-apparent Muḥammad. Muḥammad announced that he intended to recognize Almohad rule and as a consequence the caliph Yūsuf b. ’Abd al-Mu’min sent one of his leading commanders, ‘Alī b. al-Reberter, at the head of a squadron to Majorca in order to receive Muḥammad’s submission and act as the caliph’s representative on the island.\(^4^9\) This decision was bitterly opposed by many in Majorca including Muḥammad’s brothers who feigned goodwill towards Ibn al-Reberter at first while they plotted against him in secret. Emboldened by news of the Almohad caliph’s death in battle against the Portuguese (in


\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibn Khaldūn, *‘Ibar*, vol. 6, pp. 253, 326.
the summer of 1184/580), Muḥammad’s brothers launched a coup against him and replaced him with a second brother named ʿAlī b. Ishāq b. Ghāniya. At the same time Ibn al-Reberter and his men were imprisoned and their ships were seized by the conspirators.  

50 Sīsālim believes that the coup took place some time between June and October of 1184/580; it could not have occurred any later as ʿAlī b. Ishāq was clearly in control of Majorca by November of the same year when he launched his expedition to Bijāya in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ.  

ʿAlī b. Ishāq was not content to remain ensconsed in the citadel of Majorca and await the inevitable Almohad response. The Banū Ghāniya still identified strongly with the Almoravid Empire which they dreamed of reestablishing in some form. Furthermore, from a purely practical standpoint there was little hope that a principality confined to the Balearic Islands would be able to survive a war of attrition against the Almohad Empire with its overwhelming manpower and resources. For these reasons he resolved to take the battle to the enemy from the beginning of his reign.  

Shortly after securing his rule in Majorca, ʿAlī embarked on his fateful expedition to North Africa. This marked the beginning of a nearly forty year long struggle between the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya and their respective allies in the Central Maghrib and Ifrīqiya. It is curious that the Banū Ghāniya chose to confront the Almohads in these provinces where there had never been an Almoravid presence. The Banū Ghāniya in particular had always been closely associated with al-Andalus where members of their family had held the governorship before the fall of the Almoravid Empire. Yet, after their flight to Majorca we do not find them making landings on the

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50 Ibn Khaldūn, Ibar, vol. 6, pp. 253, 326; Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān al-Mughrib, al-Qism al-Muwahhidī, p. 175. Huici-Miranda says that Yūsuf died on July 30 but his death was kept secret for 11 days until the 10th of August when the succession of his son Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr was officially announced. See Huici-Miranda, Imbrāṭūrīya Muwahḥidīya, pp. 303-4.

51 Sīsālim, Juzur al-Andalus, p. 350.
Iberian coast and raising the standard of revolt there; rather all of their offensive efforts seem to have been directed against the eastern portion of the Almohads’ North African possessions. What attraction did this region, and especially the port of Bijaia, hold for Alī b. Ishāq and his followers?

We must bear in mind that the heart of the Almohad Empire was the north-south axis of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus. The caliph’s court was in Marrakech, and the Maʾmūda tribes that formed the backbone of the Almohad army lived in the valleys of the Moroccan Atlas. Indeed, the Almohads seem to have kept the bulk of their troops and most of their navy in the western half of the empire, divided between the cities and fortresses of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus. All of the towns and districts east of Tilimsān were in some sense peripheral to the imperial core; this was especially true of Tripolitania and southern Tunisia. Whenever Ifriqiya was threatened by an invasion or major revolt that could not be quelled by the local governor and his forces (and this happened frequently as we shall see) the usual solution was for the caliph to intervene personally at the head of a large expeditionary force. Of course he could only afford to do this when the Andalusian front against the Christians was calm and and when there was no danger of revolt in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. As a result of this the Almohad caliphs were often slow in reacting to threats from the east such as the Banū Ghāniya and the Ghuzz.

Conditions for intervention in Ifriqiya and al-Magrib al-Aswaṭ were favorable at this time. It is helpful to give an overview of the disposition of the Arab tribes in the second half of the twelfth century following the mass deportations of Abd al-Muʾmin’s reign. The Hilālī tribes were found primarily in the Central Maghrib; they appear to have been driven westward and out of Ifriqiya by the Banū Sulaym. The westernmost Hilālī tribe was the Zughba who inhabited an area stretching from Tilimsān in the west to Algiers in the east. The Athbaj inhabited areas to the
south and east of the Zughba. The Riyāḥ were found in the vicinity of Constantine and Maṣīla in eastern Algeria as well as in northern Tunisia. The Maʿqil, a Yemenite tribe which claimed Hilālī ancestry, were also found in pockets along the Algerian coast and in the interior.  

Of these tribes the Zughba alone were consistently loyal to the Almohads. They had close relations with a Zanāṭī Berber tribe from Tilimsān called Banū Badīn. Ibn Khaldūn remarks that the Zughba and Banū Badīn cooperated to defend the Almohad Empire during its long wars with the Banū Ghāniya. As for the other Hilālī tribes, they were always looking for an opportunity to shake off Almohad rule and the Banū Ghāniya could count on their support as long as there was the prospect of booty. The same could be said of the Banū Sulaym in Ifrīqiya. Other factors that would have encouraged ʿAlī b. Ghāniya to invade North Africa at this time were the widespread sympathy for the deposed Hammadids in Bijāya and other towns in the Central Maghrib and the invasion of Almohad Ifrīqiya by the Ayyubid commanders Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn.

Bijāya was reputedly one of the finest ports on the North African coast. It was not far from Majorca (approx. 350 km.) and not surprisingly there is evidence of prior commercial ties between the two places. Al-Ghubrīnī mentions that Majorcan ships frequented Bijāya in the time of Isḥāq b. Ghāniya bringing large numbers of white slaves from the land of the Rūm who were sold in its markets. Al-Idrīsī, who wrote in the middle of the twelfth century, has this to say about the condition of Bijāya:

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55 Al-Ghubrīnī, Ḫunwān al-Ḏirāya, pp. 45-6.
In our time Bijāya is the capital of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ and the chief city of the Hammadids. Ships sail to it, caravans arrive there, and goods are brought there by land and sea. The merchandise there is of good quality and the inhabitants are prosperous traders. The manufactured goods and the artisans who make them are superior to those of most other lands. The inhabitants of Bijāya are in contact with the merchants of al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā, the Sahara, and those of the Mashriq as well. Debts are settled and goods are sold there for enormous sums. In the valleys and fields outside of Bijāya there is plentiful wheat, barley, and fodder and many varieties of fruit are grown in great quantity. There is an arsenal for the construction of various types of ships since timber is plentiful in the nearby mountains and valleys and there is pitch and tar of high quality in the surrounding districts as well as good iron mines. All sorts of goods are manufactured in this city...Bijāya is a central point of trade and communication for many lands.  

There is evidence that Bijāya played a significant role in the Trans-Saharan trade at this time. Al-Ghubrīnī notes that black slaves were exchanged there for European captives. Al-Ghubrīnī, ʿUnwān al-Dirāya, p. 45. According to this passage the black slaves came from al-Wakhsh but I have found no reference in any other source to a people or place with this name in Africa. Wakhsh or Vakhsh is also the name of a city in Tajikistan that was well-known to the medieval geographers but it is clearly not intended here.
settled by Khārijī Berbers of the Ibāḍī sect, had links with Sub-Saharan Africa from at least the ninth century A.D.\textsuperscript{58} After the fall of the Rustamid capital of Tāhart to the Fatimids in 914/302 Wargla received large numbers of refugees and it increased in importance, becoming the chief Ibāḍī center in North Africa. It was a major station on the east-west route between Egypt and Sijilmāsa, the northern terminus of the great western axis of the Saharan gold trade. Travelers from Egypt and Ifrīqiya passed through Wargla on their way to Sijilmāsa. Al-Bakrī informs us that Wargla was directly connected to the gold-producing regions of sub-Saharan Africa by another route which ran from Wargla to Tādmakka (a journey of fifty days) and thence to the kingdom of Gao (nine days of travel from Tādmakka).\textsuperscript{59}

Both Devisse and Valérian maintain that these routes were still in operation in the twelfth century A.D. and that the Ibāḍī merchants of Wargla had captured a portion of the gold trade even if the bulk of this trade continued to pass along the Awdaghūst-Sijilmāsa axis further west.\textsuperscript{60} This is borne out by al-Idrīsī’s remarks on the prosperity of Wargla in his time:

\begin{quote}
Wārqilān [Wargla] is a city inhabited by prosperous tribes and wealthy merchants who travel through Bilād al-Sūdān to the countries of Ghāna and Wānqāra where they obtain gold from which they mint coins in Wārqilān in the name of Wārqilān. In religious matters they are Wahbī Ibāḍītes of the Khārijite [sect].\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} Lewicki, “L’État nord africain du Tāhert,” p. 532.


\textsuperscript{60} Devisse, “Routes de commerce,” p. 69; Valérian, Bougie, pp. 230-2.

\textsuperscript{61} Al-Idrīsī, Description, pp. 120-1/141.
Devisse believes that al-Idrīsī and the modern scholars who follow him have exaggerated the wealth and commercial importance of Bijāya in the twelfth century. In particular he is skeptical of the claim that Bijāya was an outlet for the African gold trade at this time. He notes that no gold coins have been found in Bijāya dating from before the mid-twelfth century and that though the Almohads established a mint there only a handful of Almohad period coins have been found, indicating that little gold was minted there in comparison to the western cities such as Fez, Marrakech, and Sijilmāsa. Nonethelss, even Devisse recognizes Wargla’s role in the Trans-Saharan gold trade during the twelfth century as noted above. The Ibāḍī merchants of Wargla needed an outlet on the Mediterranean and the only major port that was well-placed to serve this purpose at this time was Bijāya. Valérain argues that the paucity of gold coins in Bijāya does not necessarily reflect the actual volume of raw gold that was imported into the city. He notes that the right to strike coins was a royal prerogative that was granted to provincial cities such as Bijāya based on political and economic needs and not according to how much gold the city imported. Valérain believes that the Banū Ghāniya chose Bijāya for the site of their first conquest on the North African coast due to their desire to control an outlet of the Trans-Saharan gold trade.

Bijāya also played an important role in Mediterranean commerce at this time. Bijāya enjoyed close trade relations with the Balearic Islands due to the proximity of the latter to the great North African port. It was not only Muslim ships which frequented Bijāya’s harbor in the twelfth century. There was also a brisk trade between the Italian maritime cities, primarily Pisa and

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Genoa, and the ports of the western and central Maghrib via Majorca. It appears that Bijāya captured the largest share of this trade. According to Doxey the cartulary of Giovanni Scribi (1150s and 1160s), one of our most important sources for twelfth century Genoese trade, contains eighteen contracts involving Tunis, twenty-one involving Sabta, and over forty mentioning Bijāya as a destination.

The most important European exports to Bijāya were textiles. The Genoese and Pisan ships supplied Bijāya with textiles from various manufacturing centers including Lombardy, Flanders, Germany, and even from al-Andalus. It is interesting to observe that by the late twelfth century the Genoese and Pisans were also serving as middlemen in the trade between the Mashriq (Islamic East) and North Africa. Cargoes such as spices (especially pepper), silks, flax, and cotton were transported from the great eastern ports of Alexandria and Acre to Genoese warehouses and then re-exported to Bijāya. It is well-documented that Aragon and Genoa often sold grain to Bijāya and other North African ports in the fourteenth century but it would be hazardous to assume that this was the case a century earlier in the absence of any hard evidence. The goods that were purchased by the Italian merchants in Bijāya included wool, leather, goat and sheep skins, and alum. In addition to these products we should not forget that some West African gold entered the Mediterranean market through Bijāya but there is still confusion among scholars regarding the mechanics of this process and the quantities of precious metal involved.

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64 The ports of Ifrīqiya such as al-Mahdiya and Tunis were accessible to the Italians via Sicily, however, for the ports lying further west in modern-day Algeria and Morocco, Majorca proved to be a convenient waystation.

65 Doxey, “Muslim Majorca,” p. 46.

66 For more detail on the goods that were traded in Bijāya see Hilmar C. Krueger, “Genoese Trade with Northwest Africa in the Twelfth Century,” Speculum, vol. 8, no. 3 (July, 1933), pp. 377-95; Valérian, Bougie, pp. 332-413.

67 Valérian discusses this problem at some length and he reviews the meager documentary evidence of gold flow from Bijāya to Genoa from the late twelfth century onwards. See his Bougie, pp. 413-20.
We have established in the preceding paragraphs the unique commercial and strategic importance of Bijāya by the second half of the twelfth century, when it was the leading city in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. Thanks to direct links with the key Saharan stations of Wargla and Tadmakka on the one hand and with the great western Mediterranean entrepôt of Majorca on the other, Bijāya served as a commercial bridge between Africa and Europe. In light of this situation, we can better understand why the conquest of Bijāya was a desirable objective for the Banū Ghāniya of Majorca in the early 1180s.

In mid-November of 1184/580 ʿAlī b. Ghāniya appeared before the harbor of Bijāya with a fleet of 32 ships carrying 4,000 infantry and 200 cavalry. He was accompanied by his brothers Yahyā, ʿAbdallāh, and Ghāzī along with the admiral Rashīd al-Rūmī while a relative of his – who was according to Ibn Khaldūn either ʿAlī’s paternal uncle Abū al-Zubayr or his brother Ṭalḥa - was left in charge of Majorca.

The Banū Ghāniya captured Bijāya without any serious opposition. The Almohad governor, the sayyid Abū al-Rabī’, was on his way to Marrakech at the time. It is likely that he intended to pay homage to the new caliph, Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr. The citizens of Bijāya were surprised and unprepared for the sea-borne assault. Al-Ghubrīnī notes that there were no soldiers in the city and that the inhabitants went out to the slave market to meet ʿAlī’s ships believing that the Majorcans were ghāzīs (volunteer warriors who fought against the unbelievers) who had come to

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68 This is the date given by Ibn al-Athīr and al-Marrākushī and preferred by Huici-Miranda and Sīsālim among modern scholars. Ibn al-Athīr gives a figure of 20 ships for the Majorcan fleet while Ibn Khaldūn records its strength at 32; the higher figure is preferable given the number of men and horses in the expeditionary force. Ibn al-Athīr, Kāmil, vol. 10, pp. 128-9; al-Marrākushī, Muʿjib, pp. 345-6; Huici-Miranda, Imbrāṭūriya Muwaḥḥidiyya, p. 313; Sīsālim, Juzur al-Andalus, pp. 360-1; Ibn Khaldūn, ʿIbar, vol. 6, p. 254.

sell their captives. As we have seen this was a routine event in Bijāya. They were stunned when the Majorcan cavalry landed on the beach in full battle-gear and swiftly occupied all of the strategic points in the city.

Ibn ʿIdhārī recounts that the attackers first sent a small boat to reconnoiter the port of Bijāya and that when this vessel was discovered by the inhabitants the crew claimed that they were ghāzīs who had come searching for provisions from the shore. Sympathizers inside of the city had alerted ʿAlī to the unpreparedness of the citizens and the lack of soldiers. When the Majorcans attacked they were confronted by a disorganized mob which they quickly routed. Then they scaled the wall with ladders in a weak spot to which they had been guided by traitors from within the city. Al-Marrākushī notes that ʿAlī b. Ghāniya had been in correspondence with sympathetic Bijāyans prior to the invasion who encouraged him to occupy the city. He adds that had it not been for such support from within Bijāya as well as the fact that the Almohads were preoccupied with the accession of a new caliph, ʿAlī would not have embarked on this campaign.

Ibn Abī Zarʿ says that the Majorcans arrived on a Friday during the noon-prayer when the city-gates were customarily left open. They entered without resistance and surrounded the congregational mosque sparing all those who gave the bayʿa to ʿAlī and butchering those who refused. From this time onwards the Bijāyans were always careful to lock their city gates on

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70 The Arabic sources frequently refer to the Banū Ghāniya and their troops as “Majorcans.” The Majorcans were comprised of the Lamtūna and Massūfa Berbers who took refuge in the Balearic Islands with the Banū Ghāniya and formed the core of their army.

71 Al-Ghubrīnī, ʿUnwān, p. 46.

Friday.\textsuperscript{73} This silly account appears to be an attempt by an historian who is generally favorable to the Almohads to avoid mentioning the true extent of dissatisfaction with Almohad rule in Bijāya and the popularity which the Banū Ghāniya enjoyed among certain sectors of the population that helped them gain control of the city with little fighting.

Anti-Almohad sentiment in Bijāya and perhaps other towns in the Central Maghrib stemmed from two elements: Hammadid loyalists who chafed under the Almohad yoke and dreamed of reestablishing their kingdom and urban Mālikī faqīhs who saw in Ibn Tūmart’s doctrine a dangerous heresy and a threat to their status. As we have seen the religious and political establishment in Bijāya was hostile to the Almohad mahdī when he visited that city in 1117/511. Ibn al-Athīr says that the Majorcans were joined in Bijāya by descendants of the Banū Ḥammād.\textsuperscript{74}

The biographical dictionaries indicate that some of the leading scholars in Bijāya at the time of ‘Alī’s invasion enthusiastically supported him while others were at least indifferent to the temporary cessation of Almohad rule there. In a Friday sermon following the fall of Bijāya to the Majorcans the khaṭīb declared “Praise be to God Who returned affairs to their natural state and removed them from the hands of the usurpers.” A celebrated faqīh and judge named ‘Ammāra b. Yāḥyā wrote poetry praising ‘Alī b. Ghāniya and accepted his largesse, actions which led to his imprisonment when the Almohads retook the city.\textsuperscript{75} Another noted religious scholar and ascetic, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abdallāh al-Azdī al-Ishbīlī, had turned down the offices of qāḍī and khaṭīb when these were offered to him by the Almohads but he accepted the same

\textsuperscript{73} Ibn Abī Zar’, \textit{Rawd al-Qiṣṭās}, p. 269.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibn al-Athīr, \textit{Kāmil}, vol. 10, p. 128.

\textsuperscript{75} Al-Ghubrīnī, \textit{‘Unwān}, p. 46.
positions with alacrity when he was called to them by ʿAlī b. Ghāniya and thereafter he enthusiastically cooperated with the Banū Ghāniya.\(^{76}\) Al-Ghubrīnī’s remark that the Almohads severely oppressed the ulema and jailed large numbers of them following the reconquest of Bijāya because of the sympathy which they expressed in words or deeds for the enemy is another clear indication of the problems that existed between the Almohads and their subjects in the former Hammadid capital.\(^{77}\)

The Almohad sayyid and governor of Ifrīqiya, Abū Mūsā b. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin, happened to be passing through Bijāya on his way from Ifrīqiya to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā when the city was surprised. He was captured along with other Almohad notables and their treasures were looted by the invaders. ʿAlī b. Ghāniya had the khuṭba delivered in the name of the Abbasid caliph in keeping with the practice of his Almoravid ancestors. After spending only one week in Bijāya (from November 13-20, 1184), ʿAlī placed the city under the command of his brother Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya and the admiral Rashīd al-Rūmī while he set off in pursuit of the Almohad governor of Bijāya, Abū al-Rabīʿ.\(^{78}\)

Abū al-Rabīʿ was in Mitīja (south of Algiers) accompanied by his personal escort of 300 Almohad cavalry when he received word of the fall of Bijāya. He was joined there by the Almohad governor of Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād who had also been en route to Marrakech. Together they gathered an additional 1,000 horsemen from the Arab tribes and marched east to meet the invaders. ʿAlī b. Ghāniya had 1,000 cavalry with him indicating that his original force of 200


\(^{77}\) Al-Ghubrīnī, Ṣunwān, p. 46.

cavaliers had already been augmented by allies such as the Hammadids and perhaps some of the Arabs as well. The opposing forces met at a place called Īmīlūl. Abū al-Rabī’ s Arab auxiliaries switched sides at the beginning of the battle and the result was a total defeat for the Almohads who abandoned their camp and baggage to the Majorcans. Abū al-Rabī’ and the governor of the Qal’a fled first to Algiers but upon finding this city unsuitable for a defensive stand they continued westwards until they reached Tilimsān which was commanded by Abū al-Rabī’ s cousin the sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan b. Abī Ḥafṣ b. ‘Abd al-Mu’min. Abū al-Ḥasan took a defensive posture and and worked tirelessly to strengthen the walls of Tilimsān against the advice of his guests who had hoped that he would immediately assist them in retaking their lost provinces.

ʿAlī followed up his victory by advancing westwards and conquering Algiers, Māzūna, and Milyāna in quick succession. Of the major Hilālī tribes then present in the Central Maghrib the Jusham, Riyāḥ, and most of the Athbaj sided with the Banū Ghāniya while only the Zughba supported the Almohads. Ibn Khaldūn attributes the Arabs’ support of ʿAlī to his generous distribution of booty but it is also likely that they wanted to avenge their defeat at the hands of the caliph ʿAbd al-Mu’min and restore their lost primacy in the Central Maghrib. ʿAlī appointed one Yiddir b. ‘Ā’isha as governor of Milyāna and left his nephew Yahyā b. Ṭalḥa in charge of Algiers. ʿAlī abruptly halted his western advance after the fall of Milyāna and marched southeast to the Qal’a of the Banū Ḥammād. It is surprising that he did not continue marching west and attempt to capture Tilimsān which was a key station on the route to Marrakech and al-

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80 See Ibn Khaldūn, *ʿIbar*, vol. 6, p. 28.

81 Ibid. vol. 6, p. 254.

82 Ibid.
Maghrib al-Aqṣā and which was also where the Almohads were attempting to regroup. Bel suggests that perhaps he had already received intelligence that the caliph al-Manṣūr was marching against him and that he had difficulty recruiting the Berbers in the area of Tilimsān.\(^{83}\) It is probably the hostility that he encountered from the Hilālī Zughba and their Zanātī allies in western Algeria which deterred ʿAlī b. Ghāniya from advancing west of Milyāna.

ʿAlī captured the Qalʿa after a siege of only three days. Bel believes that this was done at the urging of his Hammadid allies who were no doubt pleased by the recapture of their old capital even if little remained of its former glory.\(^{84}\) After this success he laid siege to Constantine, the easternmost city in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. The inhabitants mounted a fierce resistance against the Banū Ghāniya for which they were praised in an official Almohad letter.\(^{85}\) Due to the steadfastness of the defenders and the natural strength of Constantine’s position on a high plateau surrounded by a steep ravine the Majorcans were unable to take the city. Worse yet, the long and bloody siege kept ʿAlī and the bulk of his forces tied down well to the southeast of Bijāya and they were thus unprepared to meet the Almohad counterattack from the west.

The caliph al-Manṣūr sent an army under the command of his cousin Abū Zayd b. Abī Ḥafṣ and a fleet led by Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Siqillī and Abū Muḥammad b. ʿAṭūsh al-Kūmī under the overall supervision of the admiral Abū Muḥammad b. Jāmi to retake Bijāya and the Central Maghrib. The fleet sailed along the North African coast from Sabta. Abū Zayd marched with his army from Marrakech to Fez, where they were delayed by heavy rains and flooding, and thence

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\(^{83}\) See Bel, *Benou Ghanya*, p. 46.

\(^{84}\) Bel, *Benou Ghanya*, p. 47.

to Tilimsān where the walls had been strengthened and the garrison reinforced thanks to the efforts of the governor, Abū Zayd’s brother Abū al-Ḥasan.  

Al-Manṣūr prepared the ground for this expedition by making skillful use of propaganda and intelligence in order to divide the Banū Ghāniya from their newly conquered subjects. He sent letters of pardon that were distributed by Almohad spies in all of the conquered cities reassuring the citizens that no harm would befall them or their possessions if they cooperated with the caliph’s army and rejected the rule of the Majorcans. These letters appear to have produced the desired effect since rebellions preceded the arrival of the Almohad forces in all of the major cities that were held by the Banū Ghāniya. The inhabitants of Milyāna rose up and expelled their governor, Yiddir b. Ā’iṣa. Yiddir took refuge with some friendly Berber tribes but the Almohad troops defeated his protectors and captured him whereupon he was brought before the sayyid Abū Zayd and executed. In Algiers rebels seized control of the city and placed the governor Yahyā b. Ṭalḥa under arrest. He was handed over to the Almohads when they arrived but Yahyā’s life was spared out of respect for his father, Ṭalḥa, who had defected to the Almohads earlier.

As the Almohad fleet drew near to Bijāya, Aḥmad al-Siqillī sailed ahead in a single galley accompanied by some leaders of the city’s pro-Almohad faction. They landed on the coast and slipped into Bijāya undetected. Together they distributed letters to their supporters informing them that the Almohad fleet was on its way and instructing them to revolt when it arrived. When the Almohads landed and commenced their assault on Bijāya the conspirators rose up, attacked

the garrison, and opened the city gates to the invaders. The Majorcan fleet was captured along
with 'Alī’s admiral Rashīd al-Rūmī while the sayyid Abū Mūsā and the other Almohad prisoners
were liberated. The lower classes indulged in an orgy of looting and destruction until they were
violently suppressed by the Almohad supreme admiral, Abū Muḥammad b. Jāmi‘. All of this
occurred in May of 1185/581, approximately 7 months after the arrival of the Banū Ghāniya in
Bijāya.⁸⁹

Yahyā b. Ghāniya, brother of 'Alī (not to be confused with the Yahyā b. Ţalḥā mentioned
above), managed to escape from Bijāya to his brother’s camp outside of Constantine. The hard-
pressed defenders of Constantine were on the verge of surrender when news reached ‘Alī about
the capture of Bijāya by the Almohad fleet and the approach of the Almohad army led by Abū
Zayd. He abandoned his heavy baggage, set fire to his siege engines and hastily withdrew to the
south. Abū Zayd and his army reached Tiklāt, a small town just south of Bijāya, three days after
‘Alī lifted the siege of Constantine. As we have seen the fleet preceded him and captured Bijāya
without his assistance. He rested his soldiers for a few days and oversaw the execution of the
Majorcans and their collaborators and the division of the booty. He then set off in pursuit of ‘Alī
b. Ghāniya while Ibn Jāmi‘ and the fleet continued to hold Bijāya.⁹⁰

‘Alī was abandoned by many of his allies, and he was now accompanied only by his relatives
and a small core of supporters. They lived off the land and travelled in the desert by night on
camels. The advantage of this situation was that it afforded him greater mobility than the large
Almohad army with its baggage train. Abū Zayd pursued the elusive Majorcans across eastern
Algeria in vain for six months before he finally returned to Bijāya with his army and assumed the

⁸⁹ Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān, al-Qism al-Muwahhidī, pp. 178-9; Levi-Provençal, Rasā’il, no. 29, p. 178.
post of governor. ʿAlī fled south from Constantine to Niqāwus, a town located about ninety kilometers southeast of Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād and then he entered the wilderness of the Awrās Mountains close to the modern Algerian-Tunisian border.91

He eventually appeared in southern Tunisia in the Jarīd, a region consisting of numerous oases and *shaṭṭs* (salt lakes). There he embarked on a fresh round of conquests. He captured Tūzur, one of the two chief cities of this region, in late 1185-6/581. Then he marched to Qafṣa, the other major city in the Jarīd. Qafṣa, under the leadership of the Banū Rand, a local aristocratic family, had revolted against the previous Almohad caliph Abū Yaʿqūb who reconquered it in 1180/576. Still smarting from the suppression of their revolt a few years earlier, the inhabitants of Qafṣa eagerly rose up against the Almohad garrison on this occasion and opened the gates to the Banū Ghāniya who were received as liberators.92

ʿAlī’s star was once again in ascendance. He had a foothold in Ifrīqiya where he was able to regroup and attract new supporters from the Arab tribes. He sent an emissary to Qarāqūsh, the Ayyūbid *mamlūk* who dominated Tripolitania and who had proven to be a thorn in the side of the Almohad state. Qarāqūsh with his band of Turkish and Kurdish troops, veterans of the wars against the Crusaders in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām, was potentially a valuable ally for the Majorcans. In his letter ʿAlī emphasized his allegiance to the ‘Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. He asked Qarāqūsh to join him in ridding Ifrīqiya of the Almohads and he proposed an equal division of all conquered land between the two warlords and their followers to which Qarāqūsh readily agreed.93

91 Ibid.
According to Ibn Khaldūn, ’Alī went in person to Tripoli in order to conclude the agreement with Qarāqūsh and the two leaders rallied to their cause the Hilālī sub-tribes of Jusham, Riyāḥ, and Athbaj who lived in Ifrīqiya and the Central Maghrib, as well as all the Banū Sulaṃ of Cyrenaica while the Hilālī sub-tribe of the Zughba remained loyal to the Almohads as usual. He adds that the Majorcan leader proclaimed the reestablishment of the Almoravid Empire and that he sent his son and his personal secretary as emissaries to the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir (1180/575 - 1225/622) in order to renew the traditional allegiance of the Almoravids to Baghdad and to request assistance from the caliph. Al-Nāṣir accorded to ’Alī b. Ishāq b. Ghāniya the titles and privileges that his Almoravid ancestors had enjoyed. He instructed Šalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, who was in theory the Abbasid deputy in Egypt and Syria, to assist the Banū Ghāniya in any way possible. The Ayyubid sultan ordered Qarāqūsh to cooperate with ’Alī in restoring the Abbasid da’wa to Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib.94

Before turning our attention to the rise of Qarāqūsh and the problem of Ayyubid-Almohad relations, we should briefly review events in the Central Maghrib and the Balearic Islands. Ibn ‘Idhārī and Ibn Khaldūn furnish some information on the condition of the Central Maghrib after the return of the sayyid Abū Zayd and the Almohad army to Bijāya following their unsuccessful pursuit of ’Alī Ibn Ghāniya in late 1185/582. Abū Zayd assumed the governorship of the Central Maghrib while the fleet departed for its base in Sāla. A brother of ’Alī b. Ghāniya named Ghāzī captured Ashīr and killed the local Almohad commander.95 Abū Zayd sent an army from Bijāya under his son, Abū Ḥafṣ Umar, and another commander named Abū al-Ẓafar b. Mardanīsh.


95 The ruins of Ashīr, the original capital of the Zīrids, are located about 100 km. southwest of Algiers and well to the west of Bijāya. The fact that the Banū Ghāniya could still operate in the very heart of the Central Maghrib after the fall of Bijāya and ’Alī’s retreat indicates that the Almohad victory was by no means complete in this region and that there was still support for the Banū Ghāniya in some quarters.
They defeated Ghāzī and his followers in the mountains outside of Ashīr and sent Ghāzī’s head back to Bijāya. Ghāzī’s brother ‘Abdallāh continued resisting until he was captured and executed by the Almohads.96

Meanwhile in Bijāya Abū Zayd took measures to punish the families that had cooperated with the Banū Ghāniya during their occupation of the city. The Banū Ḥamdūn, a hereditary dynasty of viziers who came to prominence during the late Hammadid period, were exiled to Sāla in al-Maghrib al-Aqsā for their assistance to the Majorcan invaders. At this time Bijāya suffered from a severe food shortage as a result of the fighting between the Almohads and the Banū Ghāniya which had led to the plundering of its surrounding fields and the flight of many peasants to the mountains. Enemies of Abū Zayd took advantage of the situation to accuse him of corruption and mismanagement before the caliph, who reprimanded his governor in a letter. Abū Zayd returned to Marrākush and cleared his name. He was replaced in Bijāya by the former vizier, Abū ‘Abdallāh.97

We recall that when ‘Alī b. Ghāniya departed from Majorca to attack Bijāya in 1184/580 he left his brother Ṭalḥa in charge of the island. ‘Alī had taken power a few months before his departure in an anti-Almohad coup. He imprisoned the previous amir, another brother of his named Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, in a remote fortress in Majorca while the personal representative of the Almohad caliph, Ibn al-Reberter, was imprisoned in the citadel. The finest and most dependable troops (Lamṭūna and Massūfa Berbers) had accompanied ‘Alī to North Africa according to Ibn ‘Idhārī.98 There were many Frankish mercenaries and renegades left behind in

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the garrison of Majorca as well as large numbers of captives from the Christian countries; the latter victims of piracy who yearned to return to their homes. Ibn al-Reberter, the son of a prominent Catalanian mercenary, won the trust and support of many of the Christians in Majorca.\(^9\) Huici-Miranda suggests that Ibn al-Reberter, though raised in the court of the Almohads and unswervingly loyal to them, was himself a Christian.\(^10\) He promised to repatriate the Franks if they would support him in carrying out a coup against the Banū Ghāniya.

Ibn al-Reberter and his co-conspirators took over the citadel of Majorca on a Friday morning when the townsmen were readying themselves for prayer. They captured the weapons and treasure that were stored there as well as some valuable hostages including ʿAlī b. Ishāq’s mother. Supporters of the Banū Ghāniya besieged the citadel when they realized that it had been seized by the rebels, but when they saw ʿAlī’s family and servants paraded before them on the walls, they relented and dispersed. Meanwhile, Muḥammad b. Ishāq had escaped from his captivity in a different part of the island. He met with Ibn al-Reberter who reinstated him as amir. They then travelled in person to the Almohad court in order to give the bayʿa to al-Manṣūr who honored them and bestowed favors on them. Thus the Balearic Islands passed back under Almohad rule with the exception of a band of loyalists who continued to hold out under the leadership of one Najāḥ, a former servant of Ishāq b. Ghāniya of Frankish origin and a staunch supporter of his son ʿAlī. The fall of Majorca to the Almohads most likely occurred in 1185/581 while ʿAlī was besieging Constantine.\(^10\)

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 183-4.


It was only when he began to establish himself in Ifrīqiya in late 1185/581 or early 1186/582 that ʿAlī was able to turn his attention to retaking the Balearic Islands. His brother ʿAbdallāh sailed from Tripoli to Sicily.\(^{102}\) There his modest squadron was reinforced by ships provided by the Norman king William II (1166-1189).\(^{103}\) The Normans looked with apprehension at the growth of Almohad power in the western Mediterranean basin. They must have viewed the revolt of the Banū Ghāniya favorably as it caused a weakening of the Almohad presence in Ifrīqiya and prevented the caliphs from contemplating any offensive action against Sicily. It was also to their advantage for Majorca to remain independent of Almohad control thus explaining their support for ʿAbdallāh.

From Sicily ʿAbdallāh sailed to Majorca. The bulk of the peasants on the island still supported the Banū Ghāniya and they rose up as soon as he arrived. He was also supported by Najāḥ who had not yielded to the Almohads. He recaptured Majorca and the neighboring islands before the Almohads had a chance to send reinforcements. Muḥammad b. Ghāniya was probably still in Marrakech when this happened. He was compensated by the Almohads for the loss of his province by being made governor of Denia in al-Andalus, where he remained until his death.\(^{104}\)

In this chapter we have discussed the Almoravid origins of the Banū Ghāniya and their establishment of an independent principality in the Balearic Islands in the middle of the twelfth century, just as the mainland of al-Andalus was falling under Almohad domination. The early amirs of the Banū Ghāniya grew wealthy from trade and piracy, all the while harboring the ambition of avenging the defeat of their Almoravid ancestors by the Almohads. In the middle of

\(^{102}\) Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, vol. 6, pp. 327-8.

\(^{103}\) Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān, al-Qism al-Muwāḥḥidī*, p. 185.

the 1180s the amir 'Alī b. Ghāniya landed in Bijāya on the North African coast and conquered most of the Central Maghrib from Milyāna in the west to Constantine in the east. Within a year he lost all of his conquests to the Almohads and he fled with his followers to Ifrīqiya which was then dominated by an Ayyubid amir named Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh. The two leaders then concluded an alliance against the Almohads. In the three subsequent chapters we will discuss what brought the Ayyubid forces to Ifrīqiya and the story of their conquests in this region. To do this we must begin with an examination of economic and political conditions in Egypt during the late twelfth century.
Chapter 6

Economic Conditions in Egypt under the Fatimids

Egypt is aptly known as the “Gift of the Nile.” The Nile Valley is a thin band of green surrounded by desert on either side. Without the Nile Egypt would be able to support only a small population in the oases and along a very narrow strip of coastline, for she possesses nothing comparable to the great Atlas range and its subsidiaries in Northwest Africa which retain the moisture of the Mediterranean permitting the existence of an extensive agricultural hinterland. Beginning just south of Aswan, a series of *cataracts* (great rock masses) impedes navigation of the Nile. Most of the time the First Cataract served as the border between Egypt and Nubia, though occasionally the frontier was pushed further south during Egypt’s periods of strength. For a distance of about 750 miles north of Aswan, the Nile valley has a width of between ten and thirty miles; the river valley is several hundred feet below the desert ridges on either side. Just north of Asyūṭ there is a break in the valley walls out of which a western tributary of the Nile called “Bahr Yusuf” flows for some two hundred miles to water a large, extremely fertile area known as the Fayyūm. When the Nile approaches Cairo it starts to branch out into the Delta which extends for 100 miles to the Mediterranean coast.¹

South of Egypt was its ancient neighbor, Nubia. Nubia extended from the First Cataract just upstream from Aswan to the area of modern Khartoum, which is south of the Sixth Cataract. Lower (northern) Nubia is a poor and arid country with a meager arable hinterland; it has often imported foodstuffs from Egypt. Upper (southern) Nubia, on the other hand, is lush and fertile due to the broadening of the Nile and an increase in rainfall as one heads south.

During the early Middle Ages Nubia was divided into three kingdoms that had arisen following the collapse of the Meroitic Empire in the fourth century A.D. From north to south these kingdoms were: Marīs (known as Nobatia to the Romans) which extended from the First Cataract to an area just south of the Third Cataract, Maqurra (also known as Makouria) which extended to al-Abwāb about halfway between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts, and lastly ‘Alwa (Latinized as Alodia) which extended to the Jazīra and Buṭāna, marking the southern limit of the Nubian cultural zone. The chief cities of Marīs were Faras and Qaṣr Ibrīm. Marīs came to be governed by a powerful semi-independent viceroy of the king of Maqurra who was known as the Ṣāhib al-Khayl (Commander of the Cavalry). The capital of Maqurra was Dongola while the capital of ‘Alwa was at Soba, close to modern-day Khartoum.²

Christianity, which arrived in in the area during the Late Roman Empire, played a dominant role in the spiritual and cultural life of Nubia as is attested by the remains of many cathedrals and monasteries in northern Sudan. The Nubian Church recognized the supremacy of the Coptic Patriarch in Alexandria. There were also Muslim and Animist subjects who recognized the authority of the Nubian kings. In their inscriptions and in the chancery the Medieval Nubians used four written languages: Old Nubian, Coptic, Arabic, and curiously enough Greek, some knowledge of which persisted in Nubia into the twelfth century A.D.³

West of the Nile Valley lies the Sahara Desert. The major oases in the Egyptian Sahara from north to south are Bahrīya, Farāfra, Dākhila, and Khārija. Al-Bakrī informs us that Khārija is six


stages distant from Nubia and he refers to it as “the last outpost of Islam.” Due to its southern location Khārija played an important role in trade between Egypt and Sub-Saharan Africa. To the northwest of these oases near the modern Libyan border lies Sīwa (medieval Santarīya) which was an important station on the coastal caravan route which connected Alexandria to Qābis and by extension the other cities of Ifrīqiya. The majority of the inhabitants in these oases were Lawāta Berbers with an admixture of Copts and Arabs in some places. The Āl ʿAbdūn, a powerful Lawātī dynasty based in Dākhila, dominated the Egyptian oases from around the time of the Arab conquests until at least the tenth century A.D. which is when Ibn Ḥawqal wrote about them.5

Between the Nile and the Red Sea lies the so-called Eastern Desert. The original inhabitants of the Eastern Desert were the Bajā, a nomadic African people who were the eastern neighbors of the Nubians.6 They lived in skin tents and their diet consisted almost exclusively of meat and milk. They were formidable warriors who proved their mettle in their encounters with the early Muslim conquerors. Their weapon of choice was the javelin and they fought mounted on their famous “wine-colored” camels which were prized throughout the Islamic World for their swiftness and trainability. The Bajā often raided the towns of Upper Egypt and Nubia; their swift camels allowed them to withdraw deep into the desert beyond the reach of government forces. Their political and social organization was first described in some detail by al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 897

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6 It is generally assumed that the Bajā are identical to the Blemmyes of classical antiquity however MacMichael argues that the latter were a distinct sedentary people who inhabited a stretch of the Nile Valley just south of Aswan who bore no relation to the pastoral Bajā. See H.A. MacMichael, A History of the Arabs in the Sudan, (New York, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 37-40.
A.D.). He divides them into five “kingdoms” (large tribal confederations) and notes that the majority of them were polytheists or dualists.\(^7\)

There were three important economic activities in the Nubian borderlands and the Eastern Desert that are of particular concern to us: gold mining in Wādī ʿAllāqī and other locations in the Eastern Desert, the lucrative Indian Ocean trade for which the Red Sea port of ʿAydhāb served as Egypt’s principal outlet, and lastly trade between Egypt and the Nubian Kingdoms. These activities all appear to have reached their apogee during the Fatimid Period and they contributed significantly to the exceptional prosperity of Egypt under that dynasty. The success of these enterprises depended on a delicate balance of power between the Arab tribes of Upper Egypt, the Bajā, the Nubian kings, and the government in Fustāṭ/Cairo. The disruption of this balance by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Ayyūbids near the end of the twelfth century caused an economic and monetary crisis in Egypt which we believe lay behind the decision to send Qarāqūsh to Ifrīqiya.

The portion of the Eastern Desert that lies east of Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia, that is to say from Qūṣ in the north to the Third Cataract in the south, was rich in deposits of gold, emeralds, and turquoise. The medieval geographers refer to it simply as the “The Land of Mines.” Al-Yaʿqūbī provides us with a long list of the mines and their distances from one another in the Kitāb al-Buldān.\(^8\) The most important of these were the gold mines in Wādī al-ʿAllāqī which is located in the Eastern Desert between Aswan and the medieval Red Sea port of ʿAydhāb. Gold had been obtained from the mines of Wādī al-ʿAllāqī since the days of the

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8 Al-Yaʿqūbī, Buldān, pp. 172-3.
Pharaohs. In 297 A.D. the emperor Diocletian abandoned all territory south of the First Cataract due to the chronic instability in this region that was brought about by the destructive raids of the Bajā. The Bajā, in whose lands the mines were situated, appear to have been uninterested in exploiting them. It was only in the ninth century A.D. that heavy activity resumed in the mines as their fame spread throughout the Islamic World, attracting large numbers of immigrants who arrived to search for gold. Ibn Ḥawqal reports that while the governor of the towns of Aswan, ‘Aynūna, and al-Ḥawrāʾ (the latter two towns are ports on the Arabian side of the Red Sea), a mawlā (freedman) of the caliph al-Maʿmūn named ʿUbayd b. Jahm, was campaigning against the Bajā in the Eastern Desert in 847/232, he and his men discovered gold nuggets and observed traces of the old Roman mining works. As a result of this many of the men returned to this area after the conclusion of the expedition. At the same time there was a large exodus of Rabīʿa and Muḍar Arabs from Yamāma in the Arabian Peninsula to the mining country. Needless to say, the arrival of so many Arabs in the mining country sparked conflict with the Bajā and a pattern of attacks and reprisals ensued. In 854/240 an adventurer named Muḥammad b. ʿAbbālāh al-Qummī came with 1,000 volunteers to fight the Bajā. He was joined by another 3,000 men from the Arab tribes that had settled in the area. Together they inflicted a severe defeat on the Bajā and captured their king, one ʿAlī Bābā.


11 Hasan, Arabs and the Sudan, p. 50.


The following years witnessed increased Arab migration to Aswan and the mines. Entire tribes settled in the area and soon the stage was set for the rise of the first independent Arab-Islamic political entity in Upper Egypt and the Nubian frontier. ‘ Abdallāh b. ‘ Abd al-Ḥamīd al-ʿUmarī was a native of Medina and a descendant of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. After studying the religious sciences in Qayrawān and Fusṭāṭ he decided to try his luck in the gold mines so he purchased some slaves for the purpose and arrived in Aswan in 855/241. He took up residence in a mining camp that belonged to the Muḍar Arabs and eventually became their chief. After a dispute with the powerful Rabī’a tribe he led his clan further south to another mine at al-Shanka in the desert east of the kingdom of Maqurra. The Nubians of Maqurra attempted to block his access to the Nile so he directed his men to forge their mining implements into weapons and they defeated the Nubians at Shunqayr near the Fifth Cataract, driving them to the west bank of the Nile. After this success al-ʿUmar became involved in the internal disputes of the Maqurran royal family. He supported a prince named Zakarīya against another named Nīyūṭī. With his help Zakarīya triumphed; however, it was not long before Zakarīya turned against his benefactor. Aided by dissension within the ranks of al-ʿUmarī’s Arab followers, Zakarīya inflicted a sharp defeat on him and compelled him to withdraw to the north.

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16 Ibid. p. 405.

Al-ʿUmarī reestablished himself in Wādī al-ʿAllāqī and Aswan. He was recognized as the leader of the major Arab tribes in the mining country: Juhayna, Rabīʿa, and Qays ʿAylān. The mining enterprise was organized on a scale never witnessed before. Al-Maqrīzī claims that 60,000 camels were needed to bring provisions to the mines from Aswan in addition to ships that plied the Red Sea bringing supplies from Qulzūm to ʿAydhāb which was the closest sea port to Wādī al-ʿAllāqī and the one that served it. The great wealth that al-ʿUmarī controlled through mining and trade enabled him to support a large army and he ruled as an independent monarch.

He was twice victorious over the armies of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn (868/254 – 884/270). When Ibn Ṭūlūn attempted to cut off the seaborne trade between Qulzūm and ʿAydhāb, al-ʿUmarī threatened to march against him with 100,000 soldiers. Ibn Ṭūlūn was intimidated by this display of power and he made no further attempts to subdue the wily Arab chief. In the end it was an internal conflict which caused al-ʿUmarī’s downfall. The powerful Rabīʿa revolted against him and though he emerged victorious from the struggle he was assassinated shortly thereafter by two tribesmen from the Muḍar who brought his head to Ibn Ṭūlūn.19

The years following the demise of al-ʿUmarī’s principality saw an increased Arab tribal presence in the mines of the Eastern Desert. Al-Yaʿqūbī says that ʿAllāqī, the principal settlement in the wādī of the same name, was like a great city in his day, teeming with Arabs and ʿajam (non-Arabs) who arrived with their slaves to mine for gold. It possessed bustling markets and it was closely connected to Aswan in the Nile Valley and ʿAydhāb on the coast.20 The remains of this city, covering 7.5 hectares and consisting of approximately 300 structures, have

20 Yaʿqūbī, Buldān, pp. 172-3; Hasan, Arabs and the Sudan, pp. 56-7.
been identified by modern scholars.\textsuperscript{21} Aswan and ‘Aydhāb supplied the miners with the provisions that they needed while also serving as the only viable export outlets for the gold and precious stones that came from the mines. Often the various Arab tribes had their own mines. The Banū Sulaym settled at Duḥ, the Juhayna worked the mine at Mīzāb, and other Arab tribes from Yamāma controlled several mines.\textsuperscript{22}

Of all the Arab tribes in the mining country the Rabīʿa were the most powerful and they succeeded in establishing their own principality on the Egyptian-Nubian frontier in the early tenth century A.D. filling the vacuum caused by the collapse of al-ʿUmarī’s state. One of the keys to the success of the Rabīʿa was their partnership with an important Bajā tribe known as the Ḥadāriba. Ibn Ḥawqal reports that the realm of the Ḥadāriba extended from the Red Sea coast to the banks of the Nile and that they had already converted to Islam in his day though their attachment to the faith was only skin-deep.\textsuperscript{23} There was considerable intermarriage between the Rabīʿa and the Ḥadāriba, not least among the chiefs and their families. The Rabīʿa benefitted from this situation since descent among the Bajā was matrilineal. This meant that when the Rabīʿa chiefs married Bajā princesses, the sons produced by these unions inherited the lands and titles held by their maternal grandfathers or uncles.

The two chiefs of the Ḥadāriba, ʿAbdak and Kawk, were succeeded by their half-Arab nephews, Ishāq b. Bishr and Abū al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī b. Bishr. Ishāq b. Bishr became the first ruler


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibn Ḥawqal, Ṣūrat al-ʿArḍ, p. 55-6.
of the joint Ḥadāriba-Rabīʿa principality by approximately 943/332.24 During his reign the Rabīʿa and the Bajā became “like one” according to one of our sources.25 Bishr was later killed during a civil war which engulfed the Rabīʿa in Wāḍī al-ʿAllāqī. Eventually the situation was restored after Bishr’s paternal cousin from another branch of Rabīʿa that inhabited Bilbays in northeastern Egypt was invited to become the new amir in Wāḍī al-ʿAllāqī. His name was Abū Yazīd b. Ḥaqq. In his reign the Rabīʿa established their capital in Aswan while continuing to dominate Wāḍī al-ʿAllāqī.26 According to al-Maqrīzī one of his titles was “Protector of Aswan”.27 Abū Yazīd’s son was Abū al-Makārim Hibatallāh, the amir upon whom the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh bestowed the title Kanz al-Dawla in 1006/396 for his role in apprehending the rebel Abū Rakwa. This title was held by all of Abū al-Makārim’s successors while his mixed Rabīʿa and Bajā subjects were henceforth referred to as the Kanzūs or Kunūz.

A cache of Arabic documents from the eleventh and twelfth centuries discovered in Qaṣr Ibrīm (now an island in the middle of Lake Nasser) sheds some light on conditions in the Egyptian-Nubian borderlands during the Fatimid Period including the status of the Kunūz and the nature of their principality. Though these documents have yet to be published, the information that they contain on Fatimid-Nubian trade and political relations has been presented by Elizabeth Sartain.28


26 Al-Qūṣī, Kunūz, pp. 36-7; Al-Maqrīzī, Bayān, pp. 45-6.

27 Al-Maqrīzī, Bayān, p. 45.

Sartain’s findings serve as a corrective to the works of scholars such as Hasan and al-Qūṣī who had to base their accounts on the chronicles and geographies alone. The core of the Kanz al-Dawla’s territory consisted of Wādī al-ʿAllāqī as well as Aswan and its vicinity.29 Thus he controlled the gold mines, the overland routes running through the wadi that connected Aswan to ʿAydhāb, and all commerce between Nubia and Egypt. This accounts for his considerable wealth and power. Sartain notes that the amirs of the Kunūz had their own chancellery and remarks “…the Kanz al-Dawla was able to maintain an establishment fitting for a high-ranking Egyptian amir, and it is certainly an error to view these Aswānī notables as crude Bedouin.”30 The Kanz al-Dawla was not a de facto independent ruler on the margins of the caliphate; he was in fact an important player in the Fatimid system and he benefitted from its continuation. According to Sartain, “There is nothing in these documents that suggests that the Kanz al-Dawla was independent of Fatimid authority…If at times of political upheaval in Egypt, such as during the shidda al-ʿuzmā in the second half of the eleventh century, he took steps to defend Aswan and his followers and clashed with other power groups, that was not incompatible with his loyalty to the caliphate.” 31

The caliphs relied on him to regulate relations with Nubia. His duties in this regard included the collection of customs taxes at the border, issuing letters of safe conduct to travelers, and exchanging embassies with his Nubian counterparts. He was also responsible for policing the portion of the Eastern Desert between Aswan and ʿAydhāb, ensuring the security of the caravans.

29 Ibid., p. 6.
30 Ibid., p. 8.
31 Ibid., p. 10.
that passed between these cities and protecting the gold mines of Wādī al-ʿAllāqī.\textsuperscript{32} The Kanz al-Dawla reported directly to the governor of Upper Egypt, who was based in Qūṣ during the later Fatimid Period.\textsuperscript{33}

There is no evidence in the documents to support al-Qūṣī’s claim that the authority of the Kanz al-Dawla extended to Marīs, the northernmost region of Nubia.\textsuperscript{34} On the contrary they confirm that until the end of the Fatimid period this area was controlled by the kings of Maqurra who were represented in Marīs by a powerful semi-independent viceroy known as the Eparch or Ṣāḥib al-Jabal who held court in Qaṣr Ibrīm.\textsuperscript{35} Sartain describes this official as the Nubian equivalent of the Fatimid Kanz al-Dawla; both were powerful governors responsible for policing sensitive frontier regions as well as regulating trade and the movement of people across borders.\textsuperscript{36} The source of the confusion may lie in the existence of “lesser Kanzī chiefs” as Sartain calls them, who are indicated in the documents as having lived in Marīs with their followers.\textsuperscript{37} Though these chiefs were Muslims of mixed Bajā-Rabī’a stock, they pledged allegiance to the king of Nubia and his viceroy and they had no relation to the Fatimid Caliphate.

Throughout the duration of their rule over Egypt the Fatimids enjoyed good relations with Nubia.\textsuperscript{38} Both sides benefitted from a vigorous cross-border trade. The most important Nubian exports to Egypt were slaves followed by luxury goods such as exotic animals, ivory,

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{34} Al-Qūṣī, \textit{Kunūz}, p. 47.  
\textsuperscript{35} Sartain, “Egyptian-Nubian Relations,” pp. 12-16.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 10.  
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., pp. 11-12.  
\textsuperscript{38} Hasan, \textit{Arabs and the Sudan}, pp. 91-3.
hardwoods, aromatic plants, and gold. Adams notes that between the years 1050/441 and 1150/544 Lower Nubia was flooded with cheap Egyptian glass and pottery. Much of the pottery was manufactured in Aswan and since very few of these pots have been found in Egypt itself Adams believes that they were produced specifically for export to Nubia. In the Qaṣr Ibrīm documents there is mention of Nubian imports from Egypt of “spices, dyestuffs, medicinal substances, textiles, and garments.”

The slave trade was of particular importance during the Fatimid Period. It was fueled in part by Fatimid demand for black slave-soldiers though this was certainly not the only use for African slaves as they were also employed extensively in the mines and there was no doubt a market for domestic slaves as well. Ibn Ṭūlūn was the first ruler of Egypt to recruit large numbers of black troops; according to the sources as many as 40,000 African troops served in his army. We have no reason to believe that this practice did not continue under the Ikhshidids. The black slave troops formed a major component of all Fatimid armies from the conquest of Egypt (969/359) until the fall of the caliphate (1171/567), often numbering in the tens of thousands alongside other nationalities such as Turks, Kutāma (Berbers), Armenians, and Arab Bedouin. It is likely

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39 Welsby, who has excavated at Soba, the capital of ʿAlwa, believes that some gold was obtained from ʿAlwa though not as much gold as was extracted from Wādī al-ʿAllāqī. See Derek Welsby, The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia: Pagans, Christians, and Muslims on the Middle Nile (London: British Museum Press, 2002) p. 211.


that the Nubians acquired these slaves from neighboring peoples; Adams suggests that the kings of Maqurra obtained most of their slaves from Kordofan and Darfur to the west of Nubia.43

It is clear that the amount of trade between Egypt and Nubia was considerable during the Fatimid period, especially as a result of the remarkable stability of the borderlands at this time and the absence of any serious conflict. The importance of this trade to Nubia is obvious. As Welsby notes “Trade in Nubia, as documented at present by the literary and archaeological sources, seems to be totally confined to trade with Egypt in all periods. The volume of goods is often considerable and often in high value goods.”44 Sartain points out that the Nile trade was probably no less important for the economy of Upper Egypt during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.45 The Qaṣr Ibrîm documents provide some examples of ulema and notables from Aswan who participated in the trade with Nubia and became very wealthy as a result.46

The years following the Fatimid conquest of Egypt witnessed the flowering of the Red Sea ports, particularly ʿAydhāb. The western outlet of the Indian Ocean spice trade had for many centuries oscillated between the Red Sea ports on the one hand and those of the Persian Gulf on the other, depending on the respective strength of the dynasties in Egypt and in Mesopotamia/Iran. During the ‘Golden Age’ of the Abbasid Caliphate in the eighth and ninth centuries the lion’s share of this trade was captured by Basra and other Iraqi ports. With the establishment of the Tulunid dynasty in Egypt in the late ninth century the pendulum began to slowly swing back in favor of Egypt. Power suggests that the ‘Gold Rush’ in the Eastern Desert

43 Adams, Nubia, p. 505.
46 Ibid., pp. 24-5.
played a role in the rise of the Red Sea ports as these could now serve to supply the new 
settlements created by the miners. After the Fatimids gained power in Egypt they successfully 
diverted the bulk of the Indian Ocean trade to the Red Sea Basin at the expense of the declining 
Abbasid Empire.

The Fatimids chose ʿAydhāb as their principal port on the Red Sea over its northern rivals 
such as Qulzum and Quṣayr. Located near the modern Egyptian-Sudanese border, ʿAydhāb had 
three major advantages over the other ports. First of all it was just across the Red Sea from 
Jedda, making it an ideal point of departure for pilgrims from North Africa and Spain. Indeed 
al-Maqrīzī notes that for two hundred years, from the time of the Shidda al-Mustanṣirīya (the 
years of calamity during the reign of the caliph al-Mustanṣir) in the middle of the eleventh 
century until the reign of the Mamluk sultan Baybars in the late thirteenth century, pilgrims had 
preffered this route to the overland route via Sinai. Secondly, as noted before, ʿAydhāb was 
very close to the gold mines of Wādī al-ʿAllaqī. Finally, it was closer to Aden than its 
competitors. Goods from India were first shipped to Aden in large ocean-going dhows and then 
they were transferred onto smaller vessels better suited to the treacherous waters of the Red Sea 
for shipment to Egypt. According to Hasan, by unloading their cargoes in ʿAydhāb the merchants 
avoided the most dangerous stretches of the Red Sea which lay further north. From ʿAydhāb 
caravans would take the offloaded merchandise overland to Aswan or Qūṣ for further shipment


by boat down the Nile to Fusṭāṭ.\textsuperscript{51} It was also during the Fatimid Period that the Kārimī merchants established their hold over the Indian Spice Trade, which they continued to dominate until well into the Mamluk Period. The Kārimīs were a group of extremely wealthy Egyptian merchant families who dominated the seaborne trade between India and the countries of the Red Sea Basin during the later Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{52}

In medieval accounts it was remarked that ʿAydhāb was one of the busiest ports in the world. The town itself had no walls and most of its buildings were reed huts. Since it was surrounded by a barren desert all of its food and water had to be imported.\textsuperscript{53} Al-Maqrīzī notes that the journey from Qūş to ʿAydhāb takes seventeen days and that water may be unavailable for stretches of three or four days at a time on this route.\textsuperscript{54} Travellers through the desert were at the mercy of the Bajā who served as guides and porters.\textsuperscript{55} Their chiefs no doubt made a handsome profit from the tolls and protection money that they collected from pilgrims and merchants. It is clear from these details that ʿAydhāb was potentially very vulnerable and its existence as a great international port and market would have been impossible without the cooperation of the Bajā, a point that was not lost on the Fatimids.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{54} Al-Maqrīzī, \textit{Khiṭat}, vol. 1, p. 567.

Al-Idrīsī wrote in 1165/560, shortly before the fall of the Fatimid Caliphate, that the revenue of ʿAydhāb was divided equally between the Fatimids and the Bajā.\(^{56}\) The Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr visited ʿAydhāb at the beginning of the Ayyubid Period in 1183/579 while en route to Mecca for the pilgrimage. He notes that the majority of the inhabitants were Bajā and that the town was ruled by a Bajā chief who he calls the ‘sultan’. There were also some resident Turks (ghuzz) led by a governor (wālī) who represented the interests of the Ayyubid court. According to Ibn Jubayr it was the Bajā chief who kept the lion’s share of the port’s profits.\(^{57}\) This means that the Egyptian government under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn benefitted far less from the Red Sea trade through ʿAydhāb than had been the case a mere twenty five years previously in the days of the Fatimids. This supports our contention that instability in Upper Egypt and the Eastern Desert as a result of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s wars with Nubia and the Kunūz contributed to an economic crisis that affected Egypt during his reign.

The remarkable prosperity of Fatimid Egypt (969/359-1171/567), symbolized by the unmatched purity and consistency of its gold dinars, could not have been maintained without easy access to a gold source. Given the impressive amount of evidence for extensive gold-mining activity in Wādī al-ʿAllāqī before and during the Fatimid Period, it is surprising that some scholars downplay the significance of these deposits and assume that the Fatimids were still relying heavily on gold from West Africa long after they had abandoned Ifrīqiyya and moved across the continent to Egypt. Bacharach tells us without further elaboration:

\(^{56}\) Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Idrīsī, Nuzhat al-Mushtāq fi Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq, manuscript, (Oxford: Bodleian, Grav. 3837,65), f. 113, quoted in Hasan, Arabs and the Sudan, p. 73.

Until the 1070s West Africa was the primary supplier of bullion to Egypt.

After that date the source for gold bullion needs, is uncertain. Supplies from local mines, from Ethiopia, possibly some trade with West Africa (undocumented), and existing stocks appear to have been adequate.⁵⁸

Messier’s analysis of the copper content in sixty Fatimid gold coins minted during different years of the caliphate’s Egyptian period reveals that twenty five coins were made of “Nubian” gold (from Wādī al-ʿAllāqī), nineteen were made of gold originating in the Western Sudan (i.e. West Africa), five of Andalusian gold, and eleven appear to be mixed, meaning that they likely contain gold from more than one of the above sources.⁵⁹ He notes that of the coins which date from the years between the Fatimid conquest of Egypt (969/359) and the cutting of relations between the Fatimids and their Zirid vassals (circa 1047/439) forty seven percent fall within the range of copper content of West African gold. Of the coins dating from the mid eleventh century until the fall of the Fatimid caliphate only twenty four percent fall within the same range. He suggests that the Hilālī invasion in Ifrīqiya and the monopolization of the Sijilmāsa-Awdaghust route by the Almoravids at around the same time deprived the Fatimids of whatever West African gold they had been able to acquire by trade in the preceding period.⁶⁰

Messier believes that the Fatimids retained control over Zirid fiscal policy and that the gifts which the Zirid rulers sent to the caliph’s court in Cairo were actually a form of tribute.

Therefore, according to Messier, through the Zirids the Fatimids would still have had access to


⁵⁹ Messier, “Exploitation of West African Gold,” Figure 13, p. 116.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 118-23.
gold from the West African mines. When the Zirids broke with the Fatimids the latter sent the Banū Hilāl against them in punishment. It is likely that al-Muʿizz (953/341-975/365) and al-ʿAzīz (975/365-996/386), whose reigns are generally considered to mark the pinnacle of Fatimid power, were able to exert some pressure on the Zirids especially since the Fatimids had only recently left Ifrīqiya and support for them was still strong in some sections of the population; they could still count on the loyalty of the Kutāma, the Ismāʿīlī dāʾīs, and key officials who had been appointed by al-Muʿizz himself in order to keep the Zirid amirs in check. And yet even during the caliphate of al-ʿAzīz the Fatimids had troubled relations with the Zirids. The latter succeeded in crushing two rebellions against their rule in Ifrīqiya led by Fatimids dāʾīs who had no doubt been encouraged by Cairo. By 1000 A.D. the Fatimids had lost any ability to coerce the Zirids. The rebellion of Abū Rakwa, which occurred at this time, revealed that the Fatimids could no longer control Cyrenaica and Tripoli which were henceforth ruled by the Banū Qurra and the Banū Khazrūn respectively. It is hard to see how they could have continued to extort gold from the Zirids after this date, if they had ever done so before.

Moreover the Zirids themselves were now no longer in control of the Trans-Saharan routes of the gold trade. The Umayyads and their Zanāta allies had captured Sijilmāsa from the Zirids in 977/367 and over the next two decades they extended their authority as far as Tilimsān and Tāhār in western Algeria. Then at the beginning of the eleventh century the Central Maghrib seceded from Zirid rule under the Banū Ḥammād. It is clear from the evidence above that the Fatimids were cut off from the sources of West African gold long before the great split with the

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61 Ibid., pp. 41-4.
Zirids. In fact it was their old enemies who were now in control of the gold trade: the Zanāta in Sijilmāsa, and the Ibāḍī Khārijīs in Wargla and the Jarīd. That the Fatimids continued minting their famous dinars in considerable quantities can only be attributed to the fact that the mines of Wādī al-ʿAllāqī were in full production throughout this period making up for the loss of control over the Trans-Saharan routes.

The following account by al-Idrīsī indicates that the gold mines of the Eastern Desert were still in use when he wrote towards the end of the Fatimid Period:

Ethiopia is bordered on the north by the land of the Bajā which is situated between Ethiopia, Nubia, and Upper Egypt. There are no settlements or cultivated lands in this country, only barren steppe. The meeting place for its people and the goal of merchants is Wādī al-ʿAllāqī. The Bajā and the people of Upper Egypt are attracted to this wadi. There is a large population in the wadi and in it there is a village where the people gather. Its water comes from sweet springs. In the middle of the wadi is the famous ‘Nubian’ mine which is located in a desert with no mountains around it, only soft shifting sands. On the first and last nights of the Arab month the seekers of gold plunge into these sands at night, each one looking at the ground next to him and if he sees fragments of gold gleaming in the night he marks the spot to remember it and he passes the night there [in the sands]. When he awakes each man goes out to the mound of sand that he marked and he takes the sand and loads it onto his camel. He transports the sand to the nearby wells where he proceeds to clean it with water in a large wooden bowl in order to extract the gold nuggets. Then he mixes the gold with mercury and melts it. Then
the miners sell the gold that they have managed to recover to others and the merchants transport it to other countries. This [the mining] is their [the inhabitants of ʿAllāqī] customary work. They never abandon it for they earn their living from it. It is the basis of their income and upon it they depend.  

In this chapter we have discussed some aspects of the Egyptian economy during the Fatimid period. Particular attention was paid to the situation in Upper Egypt and the Eastern Desert. There we identified three important economic activities: the gold and emerald mines of Wādī al-ʿAllāqī, the Red Sea/Indian Ocean trade which passed through the port of ʿAydhāb, and the Nilotic trade between Egypt and the Nubian kingdoms. We presented evidence which suggests that most of the gold minted by the Fatimids during the twelfth century was of Egyptian origin from the mines of the Eastern Desert rather than from West African sources. We also examined in some depth the relations of the Fatimid state with major actors in this region such as the Kunūz, the Nubians, the Arabs, and the Bajā. We believe that for the most part these relations were harmonious and mutually beneficial, allowing trade to flourish in this economically vital region.

In the following chapter we will discuss the rise to power of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and some of the steps he took to consolidate his power in Egypt. We hope to demonstrate that the destructive Ayyubid campaigns against Nubia, the elimination of the Kanzī principality in Aswan, and the alienation of the sizeable black African and Upper Egyptian Arab contingents of the Fatimid army all served to destabilize Upper Egypt and the Eastern Desert thereby imperiling the mining

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64 Al-Idrīsī, Description, pp. 26-7/31-2.
and commercial activities in these areas and contributing to the economic crisis of Egypt under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s rule.
Chapter 7
The Rise of Salāḥ al-Dīn and the Ayyubids in Egypt

In 1161/556 the Fatimid vizier Ṭalāʾiʿ b. Ruzzayk (1154/549 – 1161/556) was brutally murdered by enemies in the imperial household who were alarmed by the degree of influence which he exercised over the boy-caliph al-ʿĀḍid (1160/555 – 1171/568) and in particular by his decision to marry his daughter to the latter in order to merge his line with that of the Fatimid caliphs. ¹ Ṭalāʾiʿ was the last strong vizier who remained committed to the continuation of the Fatimid system. He was succeeded in his post by his son al-ʿĀdil Ruzzayk (1161/556 – 1163/558). Al-ʿĀdil wanted to curb the growing power of Shāwar, the ambitious governor of Upper Egypt, so he issued an order for his replacement by another amir. Rather than relinquish power Shāwar rose in rebellion.² He was an Arab from the tribe of the Judhām who were settled in northeastern Egypt.³ With widespread support from the Arab tribes he managed to defeat and kill al-ʿĀdil in Cairo in the summer of 1163/558, thereby assuming the vizierate himself.

Shortly after he became vizier Shāwar faced a rebellion led by another popular Arab commander named Dirghām. While Shāwar and Dirghām were fighting over the vizierate, forces from the Kingdom of Jerusalem attacked Egypt but they faced stiff resistance in the eastern Delta and they were forced to withdraw. Dirghām emerged victorious in the civil war and he was appointed as vizier in Cairo by al-ʿĀḍid. Shāwar was forced to flee Egypt and in early 1164/559

² Ibid.
he took refuge in Syria with Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zankī. This ambitious ruler of Turkic
descent had recently united the principalities of Aleppo and Damascus and he was now the
leader of the struggle against the Crusaders. Shāwar requested Nūr al-Dīn’s assistance against
Ḍirghām, promising to reward him generously and to accept the presence of Zankid officers in
Cairo. Nūr al-Dīn readily agreed; for him it was a perfect opportunity to establish a foothold in
Egypt and outflank the Crusaders. He dispatched an army to Egypt under the command of a
Kurdish officer named Asad al-Dīn Shīrkūh in spring of the same year. Ḍirghām appealed to the
king of Jerusalem for assistance but the latter was unable to intervene in time to save him. In
June 1164/559 Ḍirghām was killed and his forces scattered as Shāwar was restored to the
vizierate.⁴

As soon as he had returned to power, Shāwar tried to get rid of his new allies. When Shīrkūh
refused to leave Egypt Shāwar called on king Amalric I of Jerusalem (1163-1174) promising to
pay him an extravagant sum if he would expel Nūr al-Dīn’s forces from Egypt. The king’s forces
arrived and besieged Shīrkūh in Bilbays at the eastern entrance to the Delta for three months
before both sides called a truce and agreed to evacuate Egypt.⁵ This experience demonstrated the
wealth of Egypt and the weakness of the Fatimid state to the Crusaders and the Zankids. Each
side wished to dominate Egypt thereby denying the benefit of its riches and strategic location to
the other.

In 1167/562 Shīrkūh returned to Egypt with 2,000 cavalry accompanied by his nephew Ṣalāḥ
al-Dīn. Amalric, fearing lest Egypt fall into the hands of Nūr al-Dīn’s lieutenant and enticed by

⁴ For the struggle between Shāwar and Ḍirghām see Claude Cahen, “Un récit inédit du vizirat de Dirghām,” Annales

⁵ Ibid.
Shāwar’s promise to pay him 400,000 dinars, personally led an expedition to Egypt in the same year. The two armies advanced down opposite sides of the Nile; Shīrkūh on the west bank and the Franks on the east bank, until the Franks managed to cross over and join battle with the Zankids at al-Bābayn in Upper Egypt. The Franks were worsted in this engagement but not decisively and they still enjoyed the support of the Fatimid army under Shāwar who controlled Cairo. In the aftermath of the battle Shīrkūh divided his army sending half of the troops to Alexandria under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn while keeping the remainder with himself in Upper Egypt where he hoped to gather money and supplies. The Crusaders besieged Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in Alexandria and they reduced the defenders to desperate straits before Shīrkūh turned the tables by threatening Cairo. Eventually a treaty was signed by which both Amalric and Shīrkūh agreed to evacuate Egypt once more with their men.\(^6\)

The Franks did not keep to their side of the bargain. Amalric’s advisors persuaded him to invade Egypt once more as relations between Shāwar and the Crusaders had soured when the former stopped paying tribute to Jerusalem. In the fall of 1168/564 Amalric returned to Egypt with his army. The Crusaders destroyed Bilbays and committed a horrific massacre of its population. Fearing that the same fate would befall Fusṭāṭ, Shāwar ordered its evacuation and razed it to the ground while he prepared to hold out behind the walls of Cairo which was the administrative capital and the residence of the caliph. In Cairo there was great fear for the future and general disillusionment with Shāwar. While some officials were in correspondence with

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Amalric, others called upon Nūr al-Dīn to interfere. Finally the caliph al-ʿĀḍid himself appealed to the lord of Aleppo to rescue him from Shāwar and the Crusaders.⁷

Nūr al-Dīn sent Shīrkūh and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn back to Egypt with 8,000 picked soldiers. When they arrived in January 1169/564 the Crusaders were camped outside the walls of Cairo attempting to extort more gold from Shāwar. Fearful of becoming trapped between the Fatimids and Shīrkūh’s army, Amalric retreated to Palestine once more. Shāwar, as unscrupulous as ever, had been conducting negotiations with both sides trying to play them off against one another for his own benefit. This time Shīrkūh decided to do away with the troublesome vizier for once and for all. With the permission of the caliph he had him arrested and executed.⁸

The caliph now invested Shīrkūh with the robes of the vizierate but the latter died shortly thereafter in March of 1169/564. He was immediately succeeded by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the last of the Fatimid viziers and the first of the Ayyubid sultans. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn paid lip-service to the caliph while working to undermine Fatimid institutions and pave the way for a new order in Egypt. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was a devout Sunnī and like Nūr al-Dīn he was a great patron of the Ashʿārī school of theology which was propagated in the madrasas that he built. He targeted the Fatimid religious establishment by replacing Ismāʿīlī judges with Sunnī judges and by converting Ismāʿīlī teaching establishments into sufī lodges or colleges for the orthodox law schools.⁹ He also assigned iqṭāʿs to his own followers at the expense of Fatimid loyalists.¹⁰

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⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sayyid, Al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiyya, pp. 303-5.

As we shall see the Fatimid army posed an obstacle to Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s agenda. The Ayyubids had arrived in Egypt with their own private army of Turkic and Kurdish horsemen who were in need of iqtā’s for their support. Šalāḥ al-Dīn had little interest in retaining Fatimid troops on the payroll. It is important to note that the largest single bloc in the multi-ethnic late Fatimid army was formed by the black footsoldiers soldiers known as the südān or `abīd. The Armenians, who had first risen to prominence in the late eleventh century, were also primarily infantrymen. Bacharach observes that Šalāḥ al-Dīn and his successors made no use of professional infantry forces in their campaigns. He explains the hostility between the blacks and other elements of the old Fatimid army on the one hand and Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s troops on the other as follows:

For the African infantrymen the appointment of Saladin, a Kurd and Sunni, to the wazirate was not just another government change. There had been Fatimid Shi´ite, Twelver Shi´ite, Sunni, and even Christian wazirs before Saladin. Saladin, however, represented a totally new philosophy in terms of the use of military forces, Africans and, by extension, Armenians, faced a bleak future. Even if the Fatimid Caliphate was retained by Saladin, which was doubtful, their military role would come to an end. The ferocity of the African attack on Saladin’s troops was a result of the Africans’ concern for survival.11

Almost as soon as Šalāḥ al-Dīn assumed the vizierate Fatimid loyalists began plotting against him. The ringleader was a black eunuch named Mu´tamin al-Khilāfa who commanded the südān and held a powerful position at the caliph’s court. Mu´tamin al-Khilāfa planned to make contact

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with Amalric and convince him to invade Egypt from Palestine. While Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was busy facing the invaders, the conspirators would seize power in Cairo and massacre his supporters. The messenger who was supposed to deliver the letters to the Franks happened to fall into the hands of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s soldiers before he could even leave Egypt. Mu’ tamin al-Khilāfa was seized and executed in the summer of 1269/564. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn consolidated his position by appointing one of his talented and loyal followers, the famous eunuch Bahāʾ al-Dīn Qarāqūsh, to head the civil administration in Cairo. Bahāʾ al-Dīn would later govern Egypt on Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s behalf when the latter was away fighting the Crusaders in Syria.\(^\text{12}\)

Within days of Mu’ tamin’s execution the black and Armenian soldiers, who were garrisoned in Cairo, were in full revolt and the streets of the capital witnessed fierce fighting between the rebels and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s followers. According to the chroniclers al-ʿĀdid and his servants supported the sūdān at first when it seemed that they would prevail but he withdrew his support from them when Shams al-Dawla Tūrānshāh, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s brother, ordered his naphtha throwers to point their tubes at the observation tower where the caliph was seated watching the battle unfold below him. The loss of the caliph’s backing coupled with the death in battle of one of their leaders caused the sūdān to waver and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s men emerged victorious. The quarters where the blacks and Armenians had lived were demolished. Thousands of the rebels took refuge in Upper Egypt where they continued to cause problems for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn over the next few years.\(^\text{13}\)

With the demise of Mu’ tamin al-Khilāfa and the defeat of the black soldiers, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s position in Egypt was much stronger and he could continue his campaign against the Fatimid

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\(^\text{13}\)Ibid.
religious establishment unimpeded. Al-ʿĀḍīd became in effect the prisoner of his own vizier who stripped him of his wealth, honors, and supporters. Al-Maqrīzī remarks that the caliph had nothing left to him save the mention of his name in the *khutba*.

In 1171/567 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn took the decisive step of ordering the substitution of al-ʿĀḍīd’s name with that of the Abbasid caliph al-Mustaḍī` bi Amr Allāh (1170/566 – 1180/575). Nūr al-Dīn had pressured Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn earlier to take this step but the latter preferred to wait, fearing lest he provoke a Shīʿī revolt. Al-ʿĀḍīd had fallen gravely ill in the same year and he died not long after the change in the *khutba*. According to some sources Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn kept the news from him and he went to his grave without knowing that he had been deposed.

It is not our intention here to give a comprehensive account of the rest of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s career which must by necessity center around his wars with the Crusaders and his involvement in the wider politics of the Eastern Mediterranean World, a topic that is outside the scope of this study. Rather we will restrict our focus to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s actions in Upper Egypt, including his wars with the Kunūz and the Nubians, and the impact that these policies had on the Egyptian economy during his reign. After explaining the reasons for Egypt’s economic crisis and its gold shortage, we will show how it was these economic factors that led Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to authorize the expedition of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh to Libya and Ifrīqiya, thereby bringing him into direct conflict with the Almohad Empire.

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In 1171-1172/568 the Nubians invaded Upper Egypt and attacked Aswan in conjunction with the remnants of the *sūdān* from the disbanded Fatimid army. The Kanz al-Dawla appealed to Šalāḥ al-Dīn for assistance. The latter sent a contingent under al-Shujā’ al-Ba’labakī who assisted the Kunūz in expelling the Nubians and their allies from Aswan. Al-Shujā’ returned to Cairo and Šalāḥ al-Dīn sent a larger expeditionary force under his brother Tūrānshāh with orders to invade Nubia. Tūrānshāh captured Qaṣr Ibrīm in northern Nubia and granted it as an *iqṭāʿ* to an officer named Ibrāhīm al-Kurdī and a contingent of Kurds under his command. For the next two years Ibrāhīm and his men used Qaṣr Ibrīm as a base from which they launched raids deep into Nubia while Tūrānshāh governed Upper Egypt from Qūs. Archeological evidence suggests that al-Kurdī’s men may have been responsible for an assault on the city of Faras in which the bishop was killed. This town had once been the capital of Marīs and it had retained its importance as an ecclesiastical center. In 1175/571 al-Kurdī and some of his men drowned while attempting to reach the island of Adindān in the Nile. Following this incident the Kurds retreated back to Egypt with their plunder and the Nubians reoccupied Qaṣr Ibrīm.

We have seen that Šalāḥ al-Dīn and Shīrkūh brought with them from Syria a new Turco-Kurdish military aristocracy which displaced the old multi-ethnic Fatimid army, particularly the *sūdān*. But it was not only the latter who suffered as a result of the Ayyubid takeover. The Arab tribes also found that their status declined greatly under the new regime. The Fatimids seem to have cultivated good relations with the Arab tribes. This was in part due to pride in their own

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Qurayshī Arab ancestry, which was disputed by their opponents. Thus they made a special point of honoring the Qurayshī clans, a number of which were settled in Egypt. Two of the Fatimid viziers, Shāwar and Ḍirghām, were Arabs. The Arabs had not held such a high rank in Egypt since the mid ninth century A.D. when the last Arab governors ruled Egypt for the Abbasids nor would they occupy such positions again under the Ayyubids and Mamluks.

The Arabs were also affected by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s military reforms. In his Bayān al-Maqrīzī enumerates the Arab tribes that were settled in Egypt at the time of Shīrkūh’s arrival and he notes that thousands of Arabs were on the state registers. In a passage from the Khiṭāṭ he relates that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ordered a review of the Arab troops and he reduced their number from 7,000 to 1,300 and that he also imposed burdensome taxes on the Banū Taghlib which angered them and caused them to incline towards the Franks. The Arab tribes of Upper Egypt and the Kunūz saw their traditional privileges and lands threatened by the new order.

In 1174/570 the Kanz al-Dawla, whose name is given as Ibn al-Mutawwaj, revolted against the new regime in a bid to restore the Fatimids. He managed to rally a large number of supporters to his cause including the Bedouin of Upper Egypt and the sūdān who were always eager to fight against Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. The latter had provoked the Kunūz by granting their iqtāʾs to the brother of a powerful Ayyubid amir named Abū al-Hayjāʾ al-Samīn earlier in the same year. They retaliated by attacking and killing the new grantee and his followers. Why Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn took such a hostile measure against the Kanz al-Dawla who had only recently assisted him in his

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19 See Ḥābidīn’s remarks in the essay appended to his edition of Maqrīzī’s Bayān, pp. 116-17; Hasan, Arabs and the Sudan, p. 94.

20 Al-Maqrīzī, Bayān, pp. 122-3.

21 Al-Maqrīzī, Khiṭāṭ, p. 250.


campaign against the Nubians is not entirely clear. Al-Qūṣī suggests that he may have had economic motives such as the desire to push the Kunūz out of their share of the trade between ‘Aydhāb and Aswan or that he wished to punish the Kanz al-Dawla for giving refuge to the sūdān and other Fatimid loyalists after their expulsion from Cairo in 1168/564.\textsuperscript{23} At the same time another insurrection was brewing further down the Nile. A Qurayshī Arab chief named ‘Abbās b. Shādī who had enjoyed great power and influence under the Fatimids raised the Arab tribes of Middle Egypt in revolt against the Ayyubids. Once again the dispute was land related. Šalāḥ al-Dīn had confiscated Ibn Shādī’s iqṭā’s in the area of Ṭawd (near Luxor) and granted them to Ayyubid amirs.\textsuperscript{24}

Šalāḥ al-Dīn sent a large expeditionary force to the south under the joint command of his brother al-Malik al-‘Ādil Sayf al-Dīn and the amir Abū al-Hayjā’, who yearned for revenge after his brother had been killed by the Kanz al-Dawla. The latter had assembled his army and he was marching towards Ṭūd in the hope of joining forces with Ibn Shādī’s army so that they could face the Ayyubids together. Al-‘Ādil beat the Kunūz to Ṭawd where he defeated the Arabs and killed Ibn Shādī. Then the Ayyubids advanced to Aswan where they fought a fierce battle against the Kunūz who were decisively defeated. Ibn al-Mutawwaj fled and was eventually captured and killed.\textsuperscript{25}

The prosperity of the Eastern Desert and the Nubian frontier during the Fatimid period rested on the wise and judicious management of the Arab and Bajā tribes by the central government. This was essential since the mines and the Red Sea ports were entirely at the mercy of the Bajā.

\textsuperscript{23} See Al-Qūṣī, \textit{Kunūz}, pp. 71-80


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Places like ‘Aydhāb and the mines in Wādī al-‘Allāqī imported everything including food and water. In the event of hostilities they could not have lasted for even a short period on their own. The Kunūz and the other Arab tribes of Upper Egypt were well-integrated into the Fatimid system and their amirs benefitted handsomely from the gold mines, the Red Sea trade, and the Nilotic trade with Nubia. They also enjoyed extensive *iqṭāʾs* and attained high rank in the caliphs’ armies. It is worth noting that most of the Arab tribal rebellions during the Fatimid Period occurred in the province of Buḥāyra in the northwestern corner of the Nile Delta while Upper Egypt witnessed few rebellions apart from the calamitous years of the middle of the eleventh century known as *al-Shidda al-ʿUzmā*. This is in marked contrast to the earlier periods of the *wulāt* (governors), Tulunids, and Ikhshidids and to later periods, particularly the Mamluk, when large tribal confederations often contested possession of Upper Egypt with the authorities in Cairo/Fusṭāṭ. During the two century long Fatimid presence in Egypt the Nubian border remained remarkably stable as well with little sign of hostility between the governments in Egypt and Nubia.

The fall of the Fatimid Caliphate meant the demise of the elaborate system of alliances which maintained the stability of Upper Egypt and the Eastern Desert. We have seen that after Şalāḥ al-Dīn’s expulsion of the *sūdān* from Cairo thousands of these ex-soldiers took refuge in Upper Egypt where they supported first the Nubian king and later the Kanz al-Dawla against the Ayyubids. Another consequence of this purge was a severe reduction in the slave trade that had largely been fueled by the insatiable demand of previous Egyptian regimes for African slave-troops and upon which the economies of northern Nubia and Aswan were heavily dependent.

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26 For more on the Arab revolts in Egypt during the Fatimid Period see Amar Baadj, “Relations between the Fatimid Caliphate and the Tribal Peoples of Egypt and North Africa,” (M.A. thesis, American University in Cairo, 2006).
The Ayyubid campaigns against Nubia led by Tūrānshāh and Ibrāhīm al-Kurdi were prolonged and purely destructive. In the end the Ayyubids were unable to make any permanent conquests south of the First Cataract but they left the northernmost Nubian kingdoms of Marīs and Maqurra in ruins and killed and enslaved many thousands of people.

The reassignment of Fatimid iqṭā’s to his own followers and his desire to eliminate potential sources of opposition brought Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn into conflict with the Arab tribes and in particular the Kunūz culminating in the war of 1174/570. This campaign had important repercussions. Al-Maqrīzī says that the thaghr (frontier) of Aswan had been well defended by the Kanz al-Dawla and his men during the days of the Fatimids but it was neglected after the arrival of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn due to the latter’s conflict with the Kunūz.27 In the wake of their defeat and the loss of Aswan the Kunūz migrated further south to Marīs on the other side of the frontier and they established themselves there, taking advantage of Nubian weakness following Țürānshāh’s invasion of that country. Their presence in Marīs accelerated the Islamization of northern Sudan.28 It is not surprising that the gold mines of the Eastern Desert gradually fell into disuse after the Fatimid Period until they were abandoned altogether under the Mamluks.29 No doubt the collapse of the Kanzī principality left the routes which connected Aswan to the mining communities and ʿAydhāb unprotected and vulnerable to the attacks of the nomads. In effect Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s policies had succeeded in alienating the most important actors in this vital and strategic area: the Kunūz, the Nubians, the Arab tribes, and the fugitive sūdān.

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Ehrenkreutz has demonstrated that there was a grave monetary crisis during the reign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.\(^{30}\) Whereas the Fatimids consistently issued gold dinars of high purity and regulated the weight of their coins until the very end of the dynasty, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn deliberately debased his dinars and he lifted controls on their weight which fluctuated wildly.\(^{31}\) He also implemented the switch to a silver standard so that the silver dirham replaced the gold dinar as the unit of official record-keeping.\(^{32}\) In his treatise on the history of coinage al-Maqrīzī includes a passage by al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil in which the latter laments the shortage of gold and silver in Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s Egypt and he describes a massive flow of wealth outside of the country:

> When the Fatimid Caliphate ended with the coming of the horsemen of Bilād al-Shām under al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in 569, coins were struck in Cairo in the name of al-Murtaḍā bi Amr Allāh [the Abbasid caliph] and al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zankī, ruler of Bilād al-Shām. In this year an economic catastrophe engulfed the people of Egypt because gold and silver left the country without returning and they were nowhere to be found. The people were driven mad by their distress and it came to pass that when a pure dinar was mentioned [to a man] it was as if his wife had been mentioned and if such a dinar ended up in his possession it was as if the tidings of heaven had reached him.\(^{33}\) The [crisis] reached such an extent that more dirhams, dinars, dyed cloth, jewels, copper,

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., pp. 179-81.


\(^{33}\) Dīnār aḥmar means a pure gold dinar, see Ehrenkreutz, “Crisis,” p. 178, note 4.
clothes, furniture, linen, and weapons flowed out of the palace than could ransom the kingdom of the Khusraws, more than the mind can conceive, all the kingdoms cannot contain the likes of such wealth and no one can count it save for the one who is able to count all creation in the hereafter.  

There can be little doubt that the gold shortage was connected with the disruption of mining in Wādī al-'Allāqī due to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s troubles with the the sūdān, the Nubian War, and above all the war with the Kunūz and the subsequent dissolution of their principality in Aswan. This situation was aggravated by the long and costly conflict with the Crusaders in Bilād al-Shām which preoccupied Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn until his death in 1193/589. The need to fund his war efforts led Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to take drastic measures such as debasing the gold dinar and it likely accounts for the great outflow of wealth from Egypt described in the passage above. In the next chapter we will argue that one of the ways by which Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sought to compensate for the Egyptian gold shortage was to invade the Libyan oases in a bid to control the northern termini of the great Trans-Saharan trade routes and thereby secure access to West African gold.

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35 Ehrenkreutz suggests that the war on Nubia and the revolt of the blacks may have caused production to suffer in the gold mines but in fact it was the Kunūz who were the most relevant to this situation since they seem to have exercised a near stranglehold over Wādī al-'Allāqī as evidenced by the accounts of the mines in the medieval geographies. Ehrenkreutz, “Crisis,” p. 183.
Chapter 8

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s Western Ambitions

The chronicles give various reasons for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s decision to send an expedition to Libya and Ibrīqiya. The most common explanation links this issue to a dispute between the Ayyubids, who were now in effective possession of Egypt, and their overlord Nūr al-Dīn Zankī. Ibn al-Athīr and al-Maqrīzī have provided the most detailed account of the reason behind the deterioration of the relationship between Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Nūr al-Dīn. In 1171/567 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn laid siege to the crusader castle at Shawbak in what is today southern Jordan until it was on the brink of surrender. Nūr al-Dīn hastened south from Damascus to open another front against the Crusaders. At this point Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s advisors urged him not to press his offensive against the Franks but rather to retire to Egypt. They cautioned that if the Crusader states in Palestine fell there would no longer be any buffer between Egypt and Nūr al-Dīn and the latter would then be free to invade Egypt and remove the Ayyubids from power. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn accepted this advice and withdrew to Egypt without capturing Shawbak. He excused himself to Nūr al-Dīn by claiming that he feared a Shīʿī uprising in Egypt in his absence. Nūr al-Dīn did not accept Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s justification of his action and he resolved to lead an expedition to Egypt at some point with the goal of removing him from power. Word of his plans reached Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in Cairo and he assembled all of the Ayyubids to discuss the situation. Some of his relatives proclaimed openly their readiness to fight against Nūr al-Dīn but Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s father, Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, certain that Nūr al-Dīn’s spies were present in the gathering, announced that he and the other senior amirs were loyal to Nūr al-Dīn above all others and he vowed that he would kill his own
son if Nūr al-Dīn so ordered. Later in private he confided to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn that his speech before the audience had been a mere ruse to convince Nūr al-Dīn’s agents to report to their master that all was well in Egypt and that there was no danger of it slipping out of his grasp. Nūr al-Dīn refrained from entering Egypt on this occasion and the Ayyubids managed to avoid a direct confrontation with him before his death in 1174/569.  

Ibn al-Athīr reports that Tūrānshāh’s expedition to Nubia in 1172/568 and his invasion of Yemen in the following year were undertaken in order to secure a possible refuge for the Ayyubids in the event that they were ousted from Egypt by Nūr al-Dīn. He does not mention this as a motive behind the dispatch of Qarāqūsh to Libya, which took place in 1172/568 according to him. Al-Tijānī clearly states in a passage that appears to have been copied by both Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn Ghalbūn that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his brothers sought to conquer land in the *Maghrib* (which simply means the lands west of Egypt in this context) as well as Yemen so that they would have a place to which they could escape if Nūr al-Dīn invaded Egypt.

Al-Maqrīzī presents us with another explanation for the Maghribī expedition. According to him in 1171/567 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn held a council with his amirs in Alexandria concerning the organization of an expedition to the west. At this time Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was concerned about the overpopulation and poverty of Alexandria so his advisors had suggested to him that he launch a raid on the region of Cyrenaica (Barqa) which they claimed was rich and poorly defended. It was

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3 Ibid. p. 47.
decided that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s nephew Taqī al-Dīn would lead an army to Cyrenaica. His orders were to sow crops there so that they could be reaped by the next harvest time.\textsuperscript{5}

Al-Tijānī says that Taqī al-Dīn was jealous of Tūrānshāh because of the latter’s achievements in Nubia and Yemen and therefore he made preparations to lead an expedition westwards to Ifrīqiya. At some point Taqī al-Dīn gave up on this project fearing that it would be too difficult an undertaking but some of his soldiers were still eager to go west so they set out without Taqī al-Dīn’s permission in two groups: one led by Taqī al-Dīn’s mamlūk Qarāqūsh and a second band led by Tūrānshāh’s silāḥdār (arms-bearer) Ibn Qarātikīn.\textsuperscript{6} A passage in Abū Shāma’s Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn also ascribes jealousy of Tūrānshāh’s successes in Yemen as a motive behind Taqī al-Dīn’s interest in conquering the lands west of Egypt.\textsuperscript{7}

Several of the chronicles report that in 1186/582 Taqī al-Dīn once again prepared to lead an army in person to Libya and Ifrīqiya as a result of internal rivalries in the Ayyubid clan. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who now spent most of his time in Bilād al-Shām fighting the Crusaders, had decided to send his own son al-ʿĀzīz to Egypt in order to replace Taqī al-Dīn as governor of that country. The latter was furious about his impending ouster from Egypt. He assembled his soldiers and retainers in Giza and announced that he intended to march to the Maghrib and establish a kingdom there. His mamlūk Qarāqūsh who had already been active in Tripolitania and Ifrīqiya for over a decade had written to his master and urged him to join him, pointing out that the lands of the west were neglected and not well defended. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn needed the support of Taqī al-Dīn and his men on the Syrian front; he could ill-afford such adventurism on the part of his

\textsuperscript{5} Al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, vol. 1, p. 153.

\textsuperscript{6} Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{7} Abū Shāma, Rawḍatayn, vol. 2, p. 274.
impetuous nephew. He summoned Taqī al-Dīn to Damascus and assuaged his wounded pride by granting him extensive iqṭāʾs in central Syria. Taqī al-Dīn’s men had enthusiastically supported the proposed western expedition in anticipation of the conquered lands and booty that they expected to acquire but now they followed him to Syria with the exception of a contingent led by one of his mamlūks whose name is given as Yūzbā or Būzaba in the sources. The latter marched to Ifrīqiya where he fought against the Almohads who later captured him and took him into their service.\(^8\)

The claim that the Ayyubids invaded Nubia, Yemen, and the Maghrib because they hoped to flee to these lands in the event that Nūr al-Dīn attacked Egypt should be treated with skepticism. The expeditions to these countries, all undertaken during the late 1160s and early 1170s, required the commitment of precious manpower in remote locations at a time when the Ayyubids were still consolidating their authority in Egypt. Is it likely that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn would have approved the dispatch of a fleet and army to Yemen if he believed that an invasion of Egypt by Nūr al-Dīn was imminent? And what sort of a kingdom could the Ayyubids have hoped to found in Nubia, Yemen, or Cyrenaica? Their power rested on an army composed exclusively of Kurdish and Turkish horsemen who required extensive iqṭāʾs for their support. Egypt had the land and wealth to maintain such a force but the other countries (particularly Cyrenaica) did not. They all had limited arable land, hostile populations, and difficult terrain that facilitated resistance to central authority. From what we know of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn it is hardly credible that he was prepared to abandon Egypt, the prize that he and his followers had successfully defended from the Crusaders on so many occasions, with minimal resistance and seek an uncertain fate in the Libyan Desert or

Nubia. It is likely that if faced with a Zankid invasion he and all of his relatives would have closed ranks and staked everything on the defense of Egypt. It is interesting that the longest and most dramatic account of the deterioration in relations between Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Nūr al-Dīn is given by Ibn al-Athīr in a passage that was copied by subsequent chroniclers. Ibn al-Athīr was noticeably biased in favor of Nūr al-Dīn and the Zankids. By suggesting that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had sent armies to Nubia and Yemen in search of a remote refuge to which he could flee in the event of an attack on Egypt by the Zankids, Ibn al-Athīr stressed Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s fear of Nūr al-Dīn and inferiority to him while emphasizing the greatness of the latter.

The accounts of Taqī al-Dīn’s near invasion of the Maghrib in 1171 and again in 1186 are also problematic. The two incidents sound suspiciously similar. In each case a dispute was triggered by Taqī al-Dīn’s jealousy of another more successful Ayyubid prince, first Tūrānshāh and then al-ʿAzīz. Taqī al-Dīn responded by threatening to lead his men off to the Maghrib to found his own kingdom. He reconciled with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn at the last minute but a disobedient mamlūk, Qarāqūsh in the first incident and Yūzābā/Būzaba in the second, marched west with some of his men and conquered lands there. These accounts also conveniently absolve Ṣalāḥ al-

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9 See Muṣṭafā, Tārīkh vol. 2, p. 114.

10 I am grateful to Dr. Ed Keall for drawing my attention to the thorough analysis of the reasons behind the Ayyubid invasion of Yemen which is given by G.R. Smith in the commentary which accompanies his edition of the medieval Yamanī chronicle entitled Kitāb al-Simṭ by Ibn Ḥātim (alive in 1295/694). After an exhaustive review of all of the various explanations advanced by both medieval and modern historians, Smith concludes that the conquest stemmed from a variety of factors the most important of which were Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s search for a refuge from Nūr al-Dīn, his desire to control the Red Sea trade, and his concern over the strong Ismāʿīlī presence in Yemen (there was in fact an Ismāʿīlī state in Aden during this period). While we find the latter two explanations very probable we have already registered above our objections to the thesis that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Ayyubids planned to flee Egypt in the event of an invasion by Nūr al-Dīn. See G.R. Smith, The Ayyūbids and Early Rasūlids in the Yemen (567-694/1173-1295), 2 vols. (London: Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, 1978), vol. 2, A Study of Ibn Ḥātim’s Kitāb al-Simṭ, pp. 31-49.

11 Mouton believes that there was a second Ayyubid expedition to the west under Yūzābā in 1186. In his opinion Yūzābā was sent by Taqī al-Dīn to reinforce Qarāqūsh in Ifrīqiya, he was not a defector as Abū Shāma portrays him. See Mouton, Conquête, p. 62.
Dīn and the other high ranking Ayyubid princes of any responsibility for the actions of Qarāqūsh and the Ghuzz in Almohad Ifrīqiya. As for al-Maqrīzī’s claim that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sent Qarāqūsh to Cyrenaica in order to occupy it and sow crops there in order to alleviate the poverty of Alexandria, while this may provide a motive for the conquest of Cyrenaica, it does not give a sufficient explanation for the subsequent campaigns which saw Ayyubid forces under Qarāqūsh reach Fezzan, Tripolitania, and finally Ifrīqiya.

Two modern scholars, al-Ghannāy and al-Sāḥilī, have attempted to make the case that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn sent Qarāqūsh to Libya in order to secure the approaches to Egypt from the west because he feared an Almohad invasion. Al-Sāḥilī in particular has assembled a considerable amount of evidence which suggests that there was a widespread expectation in the late twelfth century both in the Maghrib and in the Mashriq that the Almohads would eventually conquer Egypt and assume the leadership of the Islamic umma. We will review some of the most important passages below.

According to a short epistle entitled “A List of the Mahdī’s Companions in the Land of Egypt,” when Ibn Tūmart stopped in Egypt on his way back to the Maghrib he left behind fifty one of his most loyal Egyptian followers (in essence dāʿīs) commanding them to work for his movement in their native country rather than accompany him to the Maghrib.

An account by the historian Ibn Abī Ṭayy which has been preserved in the Kitāb al-Rawdatayn by Abū Shāma relates that a certain individual had a dream in which he awoke in a strange land full of pigs and that he saw a man with a sword in hand slaughtering the pigs. The


pigs represented Crusaders; when he asked the name of the man who was slaying them he was told “this is Yūsuf.” There were three Muslim sovereigns bearing the name Yūsuf at this time: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the Abbasid caliph al-Mustanjid bi- Allāh, and the Almohad caliph Yūsuf b. ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. According to the passage, when the man recounted his dream the audience immediately assumed that the Yūsuf in question was none other than the Almohad caliph.14 Yūsuf’s son, the caliph Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (1184/580 – 1199/595), is reported to have said “Egypt is a land of heresy and we shall be its purifiers,” and he maintained the wish of conquering Egypt until his death.15

Ibn Jubayr, who visited Egypt in 1183/578, was a great admirer of the Almohads and he makes it clear that they had many sympathizers there. He notes that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had constructed a six mile long causeway west of Cairo in order to allow troops to move quickly across the cultivated land between Cairo and the desert during the flood season. This would allow him to meet any invading army that chose to approach Cairo from the direction of the western desert. Ibn Jubayr then remarks that “to the Egyptians, the construction of these bridges is a warning of a coming event, for they see in it an augury that the Almohades will conquer it and the eastern regions.”16

In another passage Ibn Jubayr asserts that “there is no Islam save in the Maghrib lands…There is no justice, right, or religion in His sight except with the Almohades – may God

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15 Al-Marrāḵuṣī, Muʿjib, p. 360.
render them powerful.”

He adds “A singular circumstance that we observed in the matter of the propagation of the Mu’min Almohade faith and the spreading of its word in these lands, and the inclination of its people to their dominance, is that most, indeed all their peoples, hint at it covertly and even quite plainly.”

He also claims that some of the ulema in the Mashriq had prepared speeches to be delivered upon the arrival of the Almohad caliph in their lands and that the latter looked forward to his arrival in the eastern lands of Islam just as he “expects the Day of Resurrection…”

Al-Sāḥīlī’s analysis of these passages is marred by her evident hostility to the Almohad doctrine and her forced comparison of the Almohads to the Fatimids. It is not surprising that in the middle and late twelfth century some Muslims in the Mashriq looked favorably upon the Almohads nor that the Almohad caliphs themselves entertained the thought of invading Egypt at this time. This was only natural since the Almohad Caliphate was the largest and most powerful Islamic state west of Khurasan. Nonetheless there is no evidence that the Almohads took any practical steps in order to pave the way for an Egyptian campaign. During the Ifrīqī period of their caliphate [909/297 – 969/358] the Fatimids had made no secret of their intention to conquer Egypt and settle there. With remarkable foresight and tenacity they subordinated all other concerns to the realization of this goal. The Fatimid caliphs invaded Egypt three times (914/301, 919/306, 935/323) before they finally succeeded in conquering it on the fourth attempt in 969/358. These campaigns required considerable logistical support in addition to control of the

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18 Ibid.


20 Al-Sāḥīlī, Tawajjuhāt, pp. 135-6.
entire length of the Libyan coast. In contrast, the Almohads never considered the transplantation of their court and capital outside of the Maghrib and we do not read of Almohad fleets and armies operating west of Tripoli; indeed, their control over the latter appears to have been nominal at best. Judging by the slowness of their response to Qarāqūsh’s incursion we can conclude that the Almohads were quite unprepared for a major war on their eastern frontier.

Modern historians like al-Sāḥilī and al-Ghannāy are reluctant to attribute baser motives to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s foreign policy. A destructive and unprovoked invasion of the territory of another Muslim dynasty would be inconsistent with his heroic image as defender of the faith. For al-Sāḥilī the Almohads are convenient villains as they did not recognize the Abbasid caliphate and their belief that their founder Ibn Tūmart was the mahdī is enough for her to group them with the Shī‘a and the Fatimids of whom she has a very dim view. 21 Nonetheless all indications point to the Ayyubids as the aggressors.

In her recent biography of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Eddé attributes Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s conquest of Libya and Ifrīqiya to an Ayyubid policy of “general expansion.” 22 She suggests economic motives may have played a role in the Ayyubid conquest. Eddé makes mention of the bustling markets of the Libyan towns and the various products that they may have furnished such as dates, grain, precious stones and gold. Unfortunately she does not develop this idea any further. 23 Libya’s limited agricultural output would hardly have sufficed to meet the demands of a populous country like Egypt. As we will now demonstrate, it was likely gold alone out of all the products that passed through the Libyan oases that attracted the attention of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his amirs.

21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.,
We have shown in Chapter Seven that there was a dire shortage of gold in Egypt during the days of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and that the dinars of this period were debased to an unprecedented extent. Mining activity in Wādī al-ʿAllāqī and the long distance trade with the Nubian kingdoms appear to have been severely reduced during the last decades of the twelfth century as a consequence of the disruption of the old Fatimid network of clients and allies in Upper Egypt. For these reasons it seems that the most likely motive for the Ayyubid campaigns in Libya and Ifrīqiya was to establish control over the eastern routes of the Trans-Saharan gold trade.

The Trans-Saharan trade routes can be roughly divided into three major groups: western routes which passed through Awdaghust and Sijilmāsa, central routes which passed through the oasis towns of Tadmakka (in the northeastern corner of modern Mali) and Wargla (in central Algeria), and the easternmost routes which passed through the oases of Fezzan in the Libyan Sahara. At the time of Qarāqūsh’s arrival in Libya (1170’s) the Fezzan was controlled by an Ibāḍite Berber dynasty known as the Banū Ḥaṭṭāb (918/306 - 1172/568). Their capital was in the oasis of Zawīla. It has been assumed by modern scholars that the Trans-Saharan trade through Libya was mostly in slaves while little gold flowed across this route in comparison with the western route.24 Zawīla had been such an important supplier of black military slaves (who originated in the lands south of Lake Chad) to the Fatimids that these troops were collectively referred to as the Zawīla.25 As we have seen the Ayyubids had liquidated the black soldiers

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24 When discussing the Trans-Saharan gold trade during the Almohad Period Devisse makes no mention of gold being transported north through the Libyan oases. Thiry remarks that the Libyan Sahara owed its prosperity mainly to the slave trade. According to Austen “The Central Sudan controlled by Kanem-Borno seems to have sold more slaves than the Western Sudan according to both the impressionistic evidence of various visitors and the logic of its geographical situation. This region was closest to the major Arab lands and dense African populations but far from gold mines, without which slaves offered the only source of highly profitable exports.” And again “Here [the Central Sudan] gold had never been the major item of trans-Saharan trade…” See Devisse, “ Routes de commerce,” p. 72; Thiry, Sahara Libyen, p. 535; Ralph A. Austen, African Economic History, (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987), pp. 36, 39.

whom they regarded as a threat to their rule and there was no place for African infantrymen in the Kurdish and Turkish dominated Ayyubid military. Therefore we can safely conclude that the Ayyubids did not invade Libya in order to obtain more black slaves. As we intend to demonstrate below, it was gold which attracted the Ayyubids to the lands west of Egypt.

The West African goldfields which are known to have been exploited during the early Middle Ages are located in the regions of Bambuk (on the Upper Senegal River near the modern Senegalese-Malian border) and Bure (on the Upper Niger River, south of Niani in modern Guinea). These mines supplied the medieval kingdoms of Ghâna and Mālī respectively. Since the western route through Awdaghust and Sijilmāsa was the closest one to both of these areas it is to be expected that the bulk of the gold that was extracted from Bambuk and Bure found its way north by this route although political circumstances might have made the central and eastern routes more attractive at certain times.

Sutton believes that around 1200 A.D. newer sources of gold were discovered and exploited further east near the Gulf of Guinea at Begho in Akanland (modern Ghana) and at Ife (in southwestern Nigeria near the Bight of Benin). Ife was the ancient capital of the Yoruba people. It occupied a commercially advantageous position on the border of two ecological zones: the savanna of the north which extended as far as the Sahara and contained powerful settled kingdoms such as Ghâna, Mālī, and Kanem which were involved with trade with the Islamic world and the resource-rich forest zone of the south which was inhabited by less sophisticated tribal societies. Settlement at Ife and the rise of an organized state-structure there began in the first millennium A.D. From the twelfth to the fifteenth century Ife experienced its commercial


and artistic “golden age.” During this period magnificent brass sculptures were produced at Ife and in surrounding centers. Sutton notes that there was no knowledge of brass production in West Africa at this time; brass was imported in large quantities from the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, often in rods to be melted down again, in order to meet the insatiable local demand. Other imports from the north included copper (probably from the mines of Tadmakka in the southern Sahara), textiles, beads, horses, and salt. Archeologists have puzzled over what goods the merchants of Ife offered to their northern partners in return. Most have assumed that they traded slaves and exotic products such as ivory and kola nuts. But Sutton observes that since these products were widely available throughout the more northerly savanna zone little advantage would have accrued to Ife, which was more distant from the Sahara than its competitors, through trade in such items. He believes that the key to Ife’s prosperity was in its control and exploitation of rich local gold deposits which fueled a “gold rush” as recently as the middle of the twentieth century.

If new gold mines were entering production in the eastern parts of West Africa in Lobi and Ife in the late twelfth century then it is likely that this gold was shipped north via the central and eastern Trans-Saharan routes which were much closer to these new sources than the westerly route via Awdaghust. The Yoruba state of Ife was geographically closer to Kānem (the great Chadian kingdom located directly south of Fezzan) than Mālī. Perhaps gold from Ife reached Fezzan (which was in turn linked to Egypt and the ports of the Libyan coast) via the intermediary

28 For background on the rise and development of Ife see Shaw, “Guinea Zone,” pp. 481-7.


of Kānem. Lange notes that along the 2,000 kilometer long route between Tripoli and Lake Chad water sources are never more than three days apart and he adds that the Libyan Trans-Saharan route was “...by far the most advantageous line of contact across the Sahara between the Atlantic Ocean and the River Nile.”32 Archeologists have recovered gold dinars minted at Zawīla by the Banū al-Khaṭṭāb, proving beyond a doubt that the latter had access to sub-Saharan African gold during the twelfth century.33

To further support our contention that significant quantities of gold were travelling through the Libyan oases in the late twelfth century we must look for textual references and indeed there are two passages, both in non-Arabic sources, which mention the gold trade in Zawīla. A passage from the anonymous Persian geography entitled Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam (written in 982/372) states that Zawīla was inhabited by Berbers who were rich in gold.34

The famous medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (d. 1173) is believed to have visited Cairo sometime between 1160 and 1173, making his account particularly valuable for us as this period coincides with the establishment of Salāḥ al-Dīn in Egypt.35 He reports that caravans routinely set out from Helwan (Heluan in the translation) and crossed the desert to Zawīla. During the course of this journey they were often exposed to violent sandstorms. According to


him Helwan was a twelve day journey from Aswan and contained a colony of 300 Jews.\textsuperscript{36} Benjamin says that the caravans brought copper, grain, salt, fruits, and legumes to Zawīla and they returned with gold and precious stones.\textsuperscript{37} It is worth noting that there is no mention of slaves here.

Hess argues that the Helwan in this passage is actually the Hebrew rendering of ‘Alwa, which was the largest and southernmost Nubian kingdom rather than a reference to the famous Egyptian city called Helwan which is located just south of Cairo.\textsuperscript{38} He reads the “Desert of Seba” mentioned in this passage as Desert of Soba.\textsuperscript{39} Soba was the name of ‘Alwa’s capital. If we assume that the Helwan in question was located in Nubia, then the caravans would probably have travelled northwest across the desert to Zawīla via Kharga and Kufra.\textsuperscript{40} If Benjamin’s Helwan was located in the vicinity of Cairo then the caravans would most likely have proceeded to Alexandria and followed the coastal route to Barqa and Ajdābiya. From the latter city they would have travelled southwest to Zalla before they finally reached Zawīla.\textsuperscript{41}

During the early Ayyubid period there was a severe shortage of gold in Egypt due to the decline in production of the mines in Wādī al-ʿAllāqī. This situation was exacerbated by the high cost of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s campaigns in Bilād al-Shām and the Jazīra which was borne by Egypt alone. At this time new sources of gold, located well to the east of the Sijilmāsa – Awdaghust


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} For information on the various routes connecting the Nile Valley to Kharga see Ibn Ḥawqal, Ṣūrat al-Arḍ, pp. 144-45; Trans. J. H. Kramers and G. Wiet, Configuration de la Terre, vol. 1, pp. 151-53.

\textsuperscript{41} See this route in Thiry, Sahara, Map V.
axis and thus much closer to Ifrīqiya and Libya, had gone into production. The gold from these mines travelled north via the Libyan oases, especially Zawīla, and thence to the ports of Tripolitania and Ifrīqiya, or further west by way of Tadmakka – Wargla – Bijāya. In order to control these trade routes Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his relatives were prepared to expend precious resources and manpower and risk conflict with the Almohad Empire. The story of the Ayyubid conquests in the west follows in our next chapter.
Chapter 9

Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and the Conquest of Libya and Ifrīqiya

Before recounting the various stages of the conquest of Libya a word must be said about the leaders of the Ayyubid expedition to the west and the composition of their forces. Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh (d. 1212/609) was a mamlūk of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s nephew Taqī al-Dīn ʿUmar, “al-Malik al-Mużaffar.” For this reason the adjective “al-Taqawi” or “al-Mużaffarī” is often added to Qarāqūsh’s name. Qarāqūsh is a compound Turkish name meaning “black bird.” The ethnicity of Sharaf al-Dīn is uncertain; al-Tījānī calls him Qarāqūsh al-Armanī (the Armenian), while Ibn Khaldūn calls him Qarāqūsh al-Ghuzzī (the Turk). Qarāqūsh was the most important commander associated with the invasion of the west but he was not the only one. The sources mention two other Ayyubid officers who led contingents in Libya and Ifrīqiya, Ibrāhīm b. Qarātikīn and a certain Būzāba/Yūzāba. Gaufroy-Demombynes is of the opinion that Ibn Qarātikīn and Yūzāba were the same person while Mouton maintains that they were two different individuals. As for the Ayyubid forces these appear to have been composed almost exclusively of cavalry.

1 This name is sometimes written Qarāqush or Qaraqūsh, but Bel says that the proper spelling is Qarāqūsh with long vowels in the second and third syllables. Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh should not be confused with his illustrious contemporary, the eunuch Bahā’ al-Dīn Qarāqūsh (d. 1200/596) who was Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s chamberlain and who effectively administered Egypt on his behalf. See Bel, Benou Ghania, pp. 59-60; M. Sobernheim, “Karākūsh, Bahāʾ al-Dīn,” in Encyclopedia of Islam 2, vol. 4, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 613-14; C. Pellat, “Karākūsh, Sharaf al-Dīn” in Encyclopedia of Islam 2, vol. 4, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 614.

2 Ghuzz is the Arabic rendering of Oghuz, the name of an important group of Turkic tribes which originally inhabited the Eurasian Steppe near China. Later large numbers of them entered the Near East with the Seljucks in the eleventh century A.D. The medieval Arabic historians often used this term, sometimes with the plural aghzáz, to refer to the Turks in general without distinction by tribe. See C. Cahen and G. Deverdun, “Ghuzz,” in Encyclopedia of Islam 2, vol. 2, (Leiden: Brill, 1991) pp. 1106-1111; al-Tījānī, Rihla, p. 103; Ibn Khaldūn, Iḥbar, vol. 6. p. 328.


Three ethnicities are mentioned: Ghuzz, Kurds, and an unidentified people called the *Akādish*.

These Ayyubid troops were often supplemented by fighters from allied Arab tribes in Tripolitania and Ifrīqiya.

Ibn al-Athīr says that Qarāqūsh set out from Egypt in 1172/568. Al-Tījānī, Abū Shāma, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ghalbūn all appear to follow the date given by Ibn al-Athīr. Ibn Khaldūn gives 1190/586 as the year in which Qarāqūsh commenced his expedition by conquering Siwa; this date is almost certainly a copyist’s error since it is far too late.

Al-Tījānī and Ibn al-Athīr compress the conquest of Libya by the Ayyubids in the 1170s into a single account without specifying the years in which each conquest was made and without indicating that Qarāqūsh ever returned to Egypt. According to al-Tījānī, in approximately 1172/568 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s nephew Taqī al-Dīn had assembled an army and contemplated invading the Maghrib but he was dissuaded by fear of the difficulties involved in such an undertaking. Two of his commanders, Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarátkīn, intent on conquering the Maghrib with or without Taqī al-Dīn’s permission, fled west with a body of his troops. When they reached the pass of al-ʿAqaba (located near the coast on the modern Egyptian-Libyan border) they divided their men and went their separate ways. Qarāqūsh conquered Siwa (medieval Santarīya) and he had the *khutba* recited in the name of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Taqī al-Dīn. Then he went on to conquer Zalla, Awjila, and finally he reached Zawīla in the Fezzan where he put an end to the dynasty of

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5 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, *Miḍmār*, p. 34.
9 The verb used is *farra*, “to flee,” indicating that they were doing this against Taqī al-Dīn’s and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s wishes.
the Banū al-Khaṭṭāb. He tortured to death their last king, Muḥammad b. al-Khaṭṭāb, while trying to make him reveal the whereabouts of his treasures. Then he had the ḫuṭba recited in the name of Śalāḥ al-Dīn and Taqī al-Dīn.\footnote{10}

Al-Maqrīzī and Abū Shāma record several separate Ayyubid expeditions to Libya in the 1170s, leaving no doubt that the conquest was a gradual affair that occurred in stages. This is also the opinion of al-Ghannāy who says that Qarāqūsh’s early campaigns were seasonal affairs at the end of which he always returned to Egypt to rest and reinforce his troops.\footnote{11} In al-Maqrīzī’s entry for the year 1171-2/567 he mentions that Śalāḥ al-Dīn had assembled his relatives in Alexandria to plan the conquest of Cyrenaica. It was decided that Taqī al-Dīn would invade the province with all of his troops plus an additional 500 horsemen. The entire revenue of the province of Buḥayra was assigned to support this army. The goal, according to al-Maqrīzī, was to sow crops there and harvest them in order to alleviate shortages in Alexandria. He also records that the zakāt was collected from the Arab tribes in the region and they were warned to stop harassing travelers.\footnote{12} Unfortunately he does not say anything else about the campaign against Cyrenaica. We know that in the twelfth century Cyrenaica was dominated by the Sulaymī tribes of Labīd and Hayb. The abode of the latter consisted of the entire coastline from the environs of Alexandria in the east to Sirt in the west.\footnote{13} Thiry says that the Sulaymī Arabs of Cyrenaica supported Qarāqūsh although the primary sources only mention Sulaymī tribes from Tripolitania as his allies.\footnote{14}

\footnote{10} Al-Tūjānī, Riḥla, pp. 111-113.
\footnote{12} Al-Maqrīzī, Sulūk, vol. 1, p. 153.
\footnote{13} Barghūthī, Tārīkh Lībīyā, pp. 264-5.
\footnote{14} Thiry, Sahara, p. 344.
There is a letter preserved in Ibn Wāṣil’s *Mufarrij al-Kurūb* from Nūr al-Dīn Zankī to the Abbasid caliph al-Muṣṭaḏī bi Nūr Allāh (1170/566 – 1180/575) in which the former mentions the conquest of Cyrenaica and Nubia and declares that his armies had reached the confines of the Maghrib.\(^{15}\) This document is of interest to us because it confirms that Cyrenaica was conquered before Nūr al-Dīn’s death in 1174/569. Furthermore, it shows that this conquest was undertaken in Nūr al-Dīn’s name and with his full knowledge and approval such that he boasted of the deed in a letter to the caliph. It is worth remembering that Qarāqūsh was a client of Taqī al-Dīn, who was a client of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, who was in turn a client of Nūr al-Dīn, who was himself in theory a client of the Abbasid caliph. Al-Ṭījānī’s claim that Qarāqūsh was acting alone contrary to the orders of Taqī al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is refuted both by this letter and by al-Ṭījānī’s own statement that Qarāqūsh had the *khutba* read in the names of both Ayyubid leaders in the Libyan cities that he conquered.\(^{16}\)

In his passage concerning Libyan affairs for 1175/571 al-Maqrizī informs us that Qarāqūsh reached Awjila in eastern Libya and collected 30,000 dinars in tribute from its ruler. After he had marched away to other unspecified locations news reached him that the ruler of Awjila had suddenly died. He returned to the city, besieged it, and eventually captured it whereupon he executed 700 of its men and made off with a great quantity of booty before returning to Egypt.\(^{17}\)

Abū Shāma has more details on this particular expedition.\(^{18}\) He says that Qarāqūsh was in Cyrenaica on Taqī al-Dīn’s orders restoring an abandoned fort of great strategic importance at a

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\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 171.

place called Azbarī when some visitors from the western regions encouraged Qarāqūsh to advance deeper into Libya and whetted his appetite with tales of the riches to be had there. A five day march took Qarāqūsh to Awjila. The ruler of Awjila married his dauther to Qarāqūsh and gave him one third of the country’s annual revenue (30,000 dinars of which Qarāqūsh kept 10,000 for himself and divided the rest among his men) on the condition that the Ayyubid amir defend Awjila from some local Arab tribes. Qarāqūsh was so successful in this task that the ruler of a nearby town called al-Azrāqīya invited him to defend the crops in his territory from marauders. Qarāqūsh left an officer named Šabbāḥ in Awjila with just nine cavaliers (fawāris) and he led the rest of his men to al-Azrāqīya whose ruler rewarded them handsomely for their services.  

While Qarāqūsh was away his father in-law, the king of Awjila, died. Immediately the inhabitants of Awjila revolted and massacred the token garrison that Qarāqūsh had left in their city. Qarāqūsh returned to Awjila and stormed the city killing 700 of its inhabitants. According to Abū Shāma, Qarāqūsh only returned to Egypt because of pressure from his men who were homesick. Before leaving he appointed a deputy in Awjila and he promised the inhabitants that he would return soon after recruiting new troops in Egypt. When Qarāqūsh returned to Egypt his lord al-Malik al-Mużaффar Taqī al-Dīn married one of his slave girls to him.  

It is clear from the passage above that there was no break between Qarāqūsh and the Ayyubid leadership at this stage. The fact that Qarāqūsh was able to return to Egypt to raise a fresh army excludes the possibility that he was a rogue deserter acting alone. It is also interesting to observe that Qarāqūsh and the Ayyubids were not simply raiding the oasis towns for the sake of easy loot. They seem to have already envisaged a permanent presence in Libya as is evident from

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19 Al-Azrāqīya is an obscure place to which there are very few references in the classical Arabic sources. Al-Bakrī says only that it was the name of the chief city in the oasis cluster of Awjila. See Al-Bakrī, quoted in Iḥsān ʿAbbās and Muḥammad Yūsuf Najm, Lībīyā fī Kutub al-Jughrāfiya wa al-Riḥlāt, (Benghazi: Dār Lībīyā li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 1968) p. 36; Thiry, Sahara, p. 344.
Taqī al-Dīn’s construction of the fort at Azbarī and Qarāqūsh’s appointment of a deputy in Awjila before he returned to Egypt.

In 1176/572 Qarāqūsh returned to Libya with his troops but an order was issued for his arrest by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s younger brother, al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Sayf al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, who was then governing Egypt on his behalf. Qarāqūsh was arrested in the Fayyūm and brought back to Cairo in chains. Qarāqūsh was released shortly thereafter thanks to the intervention of ʿIzz al-Dīn Farrukhshāh, one of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s nephews, and he returned to Awjila with fresh troops.

It appears that Ayyubid expansion into the lands west of Egypt commenced in 1172/568 with the capture of Siwa. The next three years witnessed the conquest of Cyrenaica (Barqa) and the consolidation of the Ayyubid grip there. By 1175/571 Qarāqūsh was ready to invade the Libyan oases that were located closest to Cyrenaica. He captured in succession Awjila, al-Azrāqīya, and probably Zalla as well. These oases were inhabited by Berbers and they were somewhat insulated from events on the coast; they appear to have been little affected by the migration of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym in the middle of the eleventh century. Siwa and Zalla in particular were important stations on a route linking Egypt to Zawīla, the latter an important hub of the Trans-Saharan trade as we have seen. Thus after the fall of Awjila and Zalla, Zawīla was the next logical target for the Ayyubids. Zawīla and the neighboring oases in Fezzan were inhabited by Hawwāra Berbers of the Ibāḍī sect. There were also many immigrants from Khurasan and Iraq living in Zawīla, a testimony to the international importance of this oasis.

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21Ibid.
22Ibid., pp. 344, 347; Barghūthī, Tārīkh Lībīyā, p. 272.
23See Thiry, Sahara, p. 343; Anonymous, Kitāb al-Iṣṭīḥār, p. 147.
24Barghūthī, Tārīkh Lībīyā, p. 213.
According to Abū Shāma, Qarāqūsh’s campaign against the Banū al-Khaṭṭāb of Zawīla occurred in 1177/573 shortly after his release from imprisonment in Egypt and his return to Awjila.\(^{25}\)

It is not clear when Ibn Qarāṭikīn, another *mamlūk* of the Ayyubid prince Taqī al-Dīn and the commander of a second contingent in Libya, made his first appearance in the west. Al-Tijānī says that Ibn Qarāṭikīn entered Libya with Qarāqūsh in 1172/568 but he adds that the two commanders divided their force in two and separated shortly thereafter.\(^{26}\) On the other hand, Abū Shāma reports that Ibn Qarāṭikīn entered Libya after Qarāqūsh, driven by jealousy over the latter’s accomplishments there. He adds that the two *mamlūks* fought against each other for a time until Taqī al-Dīn intervened and made peace between them.\(^{27}\)

In any event we find that shortly after Qarāqūsh’s conquest of Zawīla in 1177/573 both he and Ibn Qarāṭikīn cooperated for a time in order to extend the Ayyubid conquests into the oases of the western Libyan Sahara. First they besieged a city called al-Rūḥḥān for forty days before they managed to capture it, kill its ruler and levy a tribute of 14,000 dinars on its inhabitants.\(^{28}\) Since the classical and modern sources give no reference to a place in Libya with this name we suggest that Waddān is intended here. Waddān, almost equidistant between Zawīla and the Mediterranean port of Sirt, would have been an ideal meeting place for Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarāṭikīn as the former was presumably returning from Zawīla while the latter was arriving from Egypt with reinforcements. Of all the great oases of Fezzan it is the closest one to Tripolitania, thus it makes perfect sense that the Ayyubids sought to secure it before continuing west. We also


\(^{26}\) Al-Tijānī, *Rihla*, p. 112.

\(^{27}\) See Abū Shāma, *Rawḍaṭayn*, vol. 3, p. 36.

know that Waddān was large and wealthy enough to furnish the heavy tribute which Qarāqūsh collected on this campaign; al-Idrīsī mentions that it was an important station for trade with Bilād al-Sūdān.²⁹

After the fall of Waddān to their forces, Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qaratikīn marched west and captured Ghadāmis without resistance, collecting 12,000 dinars from its population.³⁰ The oasis of Ghadāmis is located at the southern edge of the modern Libyan-Tunisian border. Like most of the other Libyan oases it still had a predominantly Berber population and it does not seem to have been affected much by the Hilālī migration.³¹ There are a few references in the classical sources which mention Ghadāmis’ important role in the Trans-Saharan trade and its close links to the kingdoms of West Africa via Tadmakka in the southern Sahara.³²

Al-Maqrīzī informs us that after these exploits the two commanders once again separated. Ibn Qaratikīn marched north to Jabal Nafūsa (the mountain range which marks the southern limit of Tripolitania, shielding it from the Sahara) where he captured many towns and amassed a great quantity of booty. Meanwhile Qarāqūsh sent raiding parties to “Bilād al-Sūdān”.³³ Tadmakka was probably the target of these raiding parties since most of the caravans coming to Ghadāmis from the south had to pass through Tadmakka first, making possession of the latter highly desirable. It is highly unlikely that Qarāqūsh’s forces reached the savanna belt which lay beyond

²⁹ Al-Idrīsī, Description, pp. 132-3 /158.
³¹ Thiry, Sahara, p. 339.
³³ Ibid.
the Sahara and marked the beginning of the Bilād al-Sūdān of the medieval geographers. The campaigns against Waddān, Ghadāmis, and Tadmakka/Bilād al-Sūdān must have taken place during the last three years of the 1170s, between the capture of Zawīla in 1177/573 and the appearance of Qarāqūsh in Tripolitania in 1180/575. These campaigns completed the subjugation of the Libyan oases and placed the Trans-Saharan trade in Ayyubid hands. They also resulted in the encirclement of Tripolitania and paved the way for its eventual conquest.

We do not hear of Qarāqūsh again until 1180/575 when he is reported to have been in the vicinity of Tripoli. This is the first reference to Qarāqūsh in the surviving portion of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s (d. 1220/617) Miḍmār al-Haqāʾiq. The latter is without a doubt our most important source for the career of Qarāqūsh as his conquests in Tripolitania and the Jarīd are recounted in great detail in this work. The author was none other than the son of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s nephew Taqī al-Dīn, the patron of Qarāqūsh and the prince who at one point considered leading an expedition in person to the Maghrib.

Before continuing with our narrative it is worth pausing to give a short overview of conditions in Tripolitania and IFRĪQIYA circa 1180/575. By this time the Sulaymī tribes were present in the coastal plains of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania and throughout IFRĪQIYA as far west as Annaba and the Awrās Mountains. We have already mentioned the tribes of Hayb and Labīd who were found mainly in Cyrenaica. The other major Sulaymī tribes were the Dabbāb, ʿAwf, Hayb, Zughb, and Rawāḥa. These tribes were concentrated in Tripolitania and IFRĪQIYA, in other words from 34

34 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, p. 34.
35 Not to be confused with the Hilālī Zughba who inhabited the Central Maghrib between Bijāya and Tilimsān during this period.
the Gulf of Sirt in Libya, across much of Tunisia, to Annaba and the Awrās mountains in eastern Algeria. The Dabbāb were comprised of several lesser tribes including Jawārī, Maḥmīd, Banū Salmān, Banū Sulaymān, and Banū Sālim. Broadly speaking it can be said that the Dabbāb were present along the coast from Tripoli in the east to Qābis in the west though some of their clans were found outside of this area in Jabal Nafusa, northern Fezzan, and occasionally east of Tripoli. The 'Awf were comprised of two continuously feuding sub-tribes, the 'Allāq and Mirdās. The 'Allāq were themselves split into a number of tribes only one of which need concern us here: the Kaʿūb who are mentioned in the context of Qarāqūsh’s wars. The Hilālī tribes were mainly found west of Ifrīqiya in the Central Maghrib with the exception of the Riyāḥ who were present in northern Tunisia during this period.

Intermixed with the Arabs in the coastal plain between Sirt and Qābis were the original Berber inhabitants, predominantly Hawwāra and Mazāta. Al-Bakrī mentions the presence of people who spoke a strange, unidentifiable language in Sirt and he remarks that around Tripoli there were large numbers of “aqbāṭ (Egyptians) who dress like Berbers.”

According to al-Bakrī, the eastern border of the Jabal Nafusa area was a three day journey from Tripoli; from east to west it could be traversed in six days. The chief city in this region was Sharrūs which could be reached in five days from Tripoli. Altogether Jabal Nafusa contained

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37 Nawwāra, Al-Ḥayāt al-Ijtimā’īya, p. 286.
38 See Barghūthī, Ṭārīkh Libyā, p. 266.
40 Ibn Khaldūn, Ibar, vol. 6, pp. 95-6.
41 Nawwāra, Al-Ḥayāt al-Ijtimā’īya, p. 286.
42 Ibid., pp. 267-273.
43 Al-Bakrī quoted in ‘Abbās and Najm, Libyā, pp. 30-1.
over 300 villages. In the center of Jabal Nafusa there was an area of dense forest rich in fruit, olives, and dates. When the need arose 16,000 able-bodied men could be summoned to appear there. 44 Another important city in Jabal Nafusa was Jādū. As a center for trade it may have surpassed Sharrūs in importance. According to the Kitāb al-Istibṣār Jādū was a very large city with crowded markets and the majority of its inhabitants were Jews. 45 Its markets are also mentioned in the Ibāḍī sources which note that the city was famous as a center for trade in livestock and slaves. 46 Jādū was the northern terminus of an important trade route described in detail by al-Bakrī which connected it to Zawīla, Kuwwār, and the kingdom of Kanem. This route could be traversed in about one month. 47

The demography of Jabal Nafusa differed then as now from that of the coastal plain due to the remoteness of this mountainous area and the difficulty of its penetration by invading armies and migrating tribes. At present Jabal Nafusa contains perhaps the largest pocket of Berber speakers east of Algeria and the bulk of its inhabitants belong to the Ibāḍī sect of Khārijīs. The medieval authors frequently cast aspersion on the Ibāḍites of this region for their perceived laxity in religious matters. Al-Bakrī claims that there was no congregational mosque in all of Jabal Nafusa

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45 Istibṣār, p. 144.
47 Al-Bakrī quoted in ’Abbās and Najm, Libiyya, p. 34; Al-Sharqawī, Jabal Nafūsa, pp. 134-5.
and that the people did not pray.\textsuperscript{48} The author of the \textit{Kitāb al-Istibṣār} says that they neglected the ritual ablutions and that prostitution was practiced widely and openly in Jabal Nafusa.\textsuperscript{49}

During the medieval period the dominant Berber tribe in this area was the Nafūsa which gave its name to the region. This tribe was comprised by several major clans including the Banū Zammūr, Banū Tadramīt, Banū Māṭwasa, and the Banū Maskūra. Alongside the Nafūsa there were members of other tribes inhabiting the mountain range including some Hawwāra, Lawāta, Mazāta, Zawāgha, Sadrāta and Zanāta.\textsuperscript{50}

The inhabitants of Jabal Nafusa lived in numerous villages which were situated in the most inaccessible, hence easily defensible, locations. These settlements were frequently perched on cliffs and rock outcroppings or overlooking one of the many steep and treacherous ravines that are to be found in the Jabal. The so-called \textit{quṣūr}, which are actually fortified granaries, are ubiquitous in this region. The \textit{qaṣr} was a walled enclosure containing a group of two or three story tall storehouses that were often arranged around one or two “alleys.” The storehouses were comprised of individual storage rooms which overlooked a small courtyard. Archeologists have found \textit{quṣūr} that range in size from nine to twenty- two square meters. Every village had at least one of these structures; larger villages were comprised of several \textit{quṣūr} each surrounded by a cluster of lesser structures. In the center of many villages there was a “citadel” complex consisting of a \textit{qaṣr} and a mosque standing side-by-side with attached towers which were used

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 33. This statement is surely false because the ruins of many medieval \textit{masājid} have been found in Jabal Nafusa, but it is indicative of the contempt in which the Ibāḍī mountaineers were held by the Sunnīs of the coastal cities like Tripoli.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 59.

for defensive purposes and for communication by fire-signal. Despois notes that with the combination of a nearly unassailable physical location and the close grouping together of houses, *qūṣūr*, and mosque, there was little need for building a true citadel in most villages.

Consequently we should bear in mind that when the medieval authors speak of cities in Jabal Nafūsa they are actually referring to the villages that we have described above and the citadels or *qilāʿ* of which they speak are in fact the clusters of *qūṣūr* (dual-purpose fortified storehouses) and their dependent buildings.

The inhabitants of Jabal Nafūsa lived from a combination of farming (cereals, figs, olives, dates) and herding (mostly goats and sheep). They were not completely sedentary because they would habitually leave their villages for a few months every year. These migrations occurred during the “milking” season and at the time of the fig-harvest. During these periods they would live in tents, makeshift huts, or temporary cave-shelters in order to be close to their flocks or fields which were usually no more than a few days’ journey from the village. This was the state of Tripolitania and its inhabitants on the eve of Qarāqūsh’s arrival.

The first period of Qarāqūsh’s career spanned the decade of the 1170s when he conquered Cyrenaica and the Libyan Saharan oases. This stage of conquests was completed at the end of that decade with the fall of Ghadāmis which is mentioned by al-Maqrīzī, our only source for this event. Evidently the strategy of the Ayyubids was to secure the Trans-Saharan routes first before advancing to the coast. After the conquest of Ghadāmis, Ibn Qarātikīn invaded Jabal

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53 Ibid., pp. 174-81.

54 *Sulāk*, vol. 1, p. 176.
Nafusa in Tripolitania while Qarāqūsh undertook an expedition to the south, probably to Tadmakka.\textsuperscript{55} We recall that the first entry on Qarāqūsh in Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s chronicle places him in Tripolitania in 1180/575.\textsuperscript{56}

The second period of his career lasted from 1180/575 to 1186/582. During these years he achieved remarkable conquests in Tripolitania and Ifrīqiya, the details of which are preserved in Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s chronicle alone. By 1186/582 he was in control of the greater part of both of these provinces when ʿAlī b. Ghāniya approached him and the two decided to make common cause against the Almohads.

In 1180/575 Qarāqūsh arrived in the town of Suwayqa (located between Tripoli and Sirt) leading a force of 400 Kurdish and Turkish troops. There he formed an alliance with the chief of the Dabbāb (tribe of the Banū Sulaym), one Ḥamīd b. Jāriya, who agreed to support him with 5,000 fighters from his tribe. Together they proceeded west to Labda, Maslāta, the plain of Tripoli, and finally the eastern foothills of Jabal Nafusa. Meanwhile the other Ayyubid commander, Ibn Qarātikīn, was also in Jabal Nafusa at the head of a small contingent of Turks and Kurds. He had already formed an alliance with another Sulaymī tribe, the Zughb, rivals of Dabbāb. Apparently relations were already bad between Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn. When Ibn Qarātikīn heard of Qarāqūsh’s approach he immediately withdrew further west into the Jabal. Qarāqūsh wanted to move slowly and win the Turks and Kurds who were serving Ibn Qarātikīn to his side before risking battle but Ibn Jāriya pressured him to fight immediately or else risk losing the support of his Arabs.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, \textit{Miṣmār}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., pp. 34-5.
Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qaratikīn faced off at a wādī in Jabal Nafusa called Araqṭīn. They were each accompanied by their followers from Egypt and their respective Arab allies. Ibn Qaratikīn won the day by employing a clever strategem; he had a page dress in his armor and mount his richly caparisoned horse, while, unbeknownst to the enemy, he took up a position with his Arab allies, the Zughb. He knew that Qarāqūsh and his Turkoman warriors would rush from the very outset of the battle towards the spot where they believed him to be, so by this ruse he hoped to divert them and lead them far away from the main action of the battle. His plan worked perfectly. Qarāqūsh and his companions pursued the person whom they believed to be Ibn Qaratikīn until they finally caught him and discovered that he was merely a boy. By this time they were far removed from their own Arab allies and the real action of the battle. Ibn Qaratikīn had managed to persuade most of the Arabs from Dabbāb to switch sides. Together with the Zughb they had plundered Qarāqūsh’s camp while the latter was chasing after the page whom he believed to be Ibn Qaratikīn. There they discovered that Qarāqūsh had 1,300 camels and that every one of his Turkish and Kurdish troops possessed thirty camels for transporting the tremendous amount of booty that they had acquired over the course of their campaigns in Libya.58

When Qarāqūsh realized the scale of his defeat he was forced to withdraw, accompanied by only 140 Turks. He took refuge in the camp of his ally Ibn Jāriya who received him with great hospitality. When he complained to the Arab chief about the treacherous conduct of the Dabbābī warriors at Araqṭīn, Ibn Jarīya assured him that the betrayal had occurred without his knowledge. Qarāqūsh regrouped his forces and conquered the city of Tājūrā fifteen kilometers east of Tripoli. He won back the Arabs from Dabbāb and he also attracted many of Qaratikīn’s Turks to his cause. Ibn Qaratikīn, sensing that his position was growing weaker, entered into negotiations

58 Ibid., pp. 35-7.
with Qarāqūsh. It was agreed that Qarāqūsh would have the eastern half of Jabal Nafusa as his
sphere of influence including the towns of Ghiryān, Yifrān, and the fortress of Umm al-ʿIzz,
which would become Qarāqūsh’s principal stronghold and residence. He also conquered the
abodes of the Berber tribes of Lamāya, Zawwāgha, and Zuwwāra in this area. Ibn Qarātikīn and
his allies from Zughb would rule over the western half of the Jabal. Any territory which
Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn managed to capture in the west (i.e. lands west of Jabal Nafusa in
southern Tunisia) was to be divided equally between them.59

Not long after making this agreement both Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn faced difficulties with
their Arab allies. The Zughb left Tripolitania and migrated to Ifrīqiya while Ibn Qarātikīn refused
to accompany them and stayed in Jabal Nafusa. Qarāqūsh found the Dabbāb untrustworthy and
in the following year (1181/576) he left their company in order to campaign in southern Ifrīqiya.
He left his family and wealth in the fortress of Umm al-ʿIzz and he received Ibn Qarātikīn’s
assurance that he would protect them while he was away.60

Qarāqūsh commenced his invasion of Ifrīqiya by campaigning in an area which the medieval
geographers referred to as Jabal Dummar.61 Jabal Dummar is the natural continuation of Jabal
Nafusa on the Tunisian side of the border, extending in a crescent shape from Nālūt to Qābis in
the north.62 According to al-Idrīsī Jabal Dummar lies three days distant from Jabal Nafūsa across
continuous sands.63 Ibn Khaldūn says that it could be traversed in seven days.64

60 Ibid., p. 38.
61 In modern maps it is comprised of three distinct regions: Maṭmāta, Jabal al-Abyad, and Jabal Duwayra. See P.
62 Ibid.
Dummar tribe gave its name to this area, though there were also Lawāta Berbers living alongside them. Ibn Taqī al-Dīn says about the inhabitants of Jabal Dummar, “All of them are Khārijīs who curse ‘Alī, may peace be upon him!”

First he intervened in a quarrel between two Dummarī chiefs named ʿUthmān and Farrūkhā, taking the latter as his ally and invading the lands of the former. He defeated ʿUthmān’s army and besieged him in his citadel after burning its vulnerable suburbs. The defenders surrendered on the condition that they be allowed to leave with their portable possessions. ʿUthmān swore an oath of loyalty to Qarāqūsh and became his vassal. His lands were assigned as *iqṭāʾs* to Qarāqūsh’s soldiers.

After this episode Qarāqūsh attacked another citadel known as Qalʿat al-ʿAṭash. Ibn Taqī al-Dīn says that some of his close friends who had taken part in the siege of this fortress swore by God that they had not seen a higher or stronger citadel in all of Bilād al-Shām. It was so high that their arrows could not reach it and for eighteen days Qarāqūsh and his men camped underneath it bewildered. Then one of his slaves managed to scale the mountain on which the citadel rested and the soldiers followed his path. The defenders were stunned by the ascent of Qarāqūsh’s army and they were also running short of arrows so they surrendered. Qarāqūsh allowed them to stay in their land as long as they paid him tribute.

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66 *Midmār*, p. 54.
67 Ibid., pp. 53-4.
68 Ibid., p. 54.
69 Ibid., pp. 54-5.
His next conquest was the fortress town of Umm Lāma. He camped beneath it for one month but found it impervious to all of his efforts so he ordered his men to plunder and massacre the Berbers who lived in the countryside around the citadel. This provoked a response from the chief of Umm Lāma who called on his kinsmen, the rulers of the Manāya tribe who lived near Qafṣa, to come to his aid. Together they mustered a force of 20,000 men at the citadel. They descended from Umm Lāma to attack Qarāqūsh but he had managed to occupy a narrow pass on the only road suitable for horses leading down the mountain. As a result he was able to engage them in small groups one at a time negating their numerical advantage. Defeated, they ascended the same path back up to their citadel. During the course of the battle a youth of high rank had been captured by Qarāqūsh’s men. As they prepared to execute him in plain view of the citadel the defenders shouted for his life to be spared and messengers descended offering first 10,000 dinars, then 20,000, then any amount requested of them. Qarāqūsh refused and one of his amirs beheaded the boy. Then a messenger arrived from the chief bearing the keys to the citadel and announcing its unconditional surrender. Qarāqūsh was puzzled by this move as he knew that he and his men would have been unable to take the fortress on their own. He asked the lord of Umm Lāma why he had surrendered so abruptly and he told him that the boy who had been beheaded was his only son. This meant that after his death Umm Lāma would have passed to the sons of his brother whom he hated. So in order to forestall this he preferred to open the gates to Qarāqūsh. After collecting a great quantity of booty from Umm Lāma Qarāqūsh reinstated the chief as his vassal and left him on friendly terms.70

After this battle Qarāqūsh campaigned against the Maṭmāta at the northern end of Jabal Dummar just south of Qābis. In 1182/577 Qarāqūsh emerged from Jabal Dummar and attacked

70 Ibid., pp. 55-7; Abū Shāma, Rawḍatayn, vol. 3, p. 49.
al-Urbus (Laribus, in northwestern Tunisia near the modern city of Le Kef [al-Kāf] and not far from the Algerian – Tunisian border) which al-Idrīsī describes as a major city lying northwest of Qayrawān from which it could be reached by a three day journey.\textsuperscript{71} He was assisted by the Mirdās, the leading clan of the Hilālī sub-tribe of the Riyāḥ. As we have mentioned the Riyāḥ were the only Hilālī tribe present in Ifrīqiya at this time and they appear to have been concentrated in northern Tunisia. Qurāqūsh and his new allies spent a few months besieging the city but they were ultimately unsuccessful even though they had employed siege engines. After this setback he looted and pillaged his way unchecked through the countryside of Ifrīqiya.\textsuperscript{72}

In the summer of 1182/577 Qurāqūsh attempted to take Qafṣa. He entered into correspondence with partisans of the Banū al-Rand, the dynasty that had ruled Qafṣa before the Almohad invasion of Ifrīqiya. On the agreed upon night Qurāqūsh’s men began scaling the city walls by ladders that had been lowered by their allies. Unfortunately for them there was also a large pro-Almohad faction in the city which had been alerted to the conspiracy. They counterattacked and drove Qurāqūsh’s men back down the walls.\textsuperscript{73}

Near the end of this year Qurāqūsh besieged the city of al-Sikka near Qayrawān. He was joined by 1,000 horsemen from the Sulaymī tribe of the Sharīd and also by his old friend Ḥamīd b. Jāriya, chief of the Dabbāb near Tripoli. The latter fled to Qurāqūsh’s camp with 200 loyal followers after having fallen afoul of his subjects. It was not long before Ibn Jāriya’s followers


\textsuperscript{72} Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, \textit{Miḍmār}, pp. 67-8

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 68.
and the Sharīd found themselves at odds with one another. Qarāqūsh’s Turks supported Ibn Jārīya and together they defeated and expelled the Sharīd.\textsuperscript{74}

Shortly after this quarrel a large Almohad army numbering 10,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry according to Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, took the field against Qarāqūsh. Qarāqūsh was forced to break off his siege of al-Sikka in a hurry in order to avoid encirclement. He abandoned the baggage but against the entreaties of his men he insisted on taking all of the siege engines declaring “I will not go anywhere without my catapults!”\textsuperscript{75} Finding himself greatly outnumbered he regretted the expulsion of the Shārīd and he begged them to return which they did. From the Sharīd, Dabbāb and other Arab tribes he was able to assemble over 1,500 horsemen, all eager to face the Almohads in battle. Qarāqūsh carefully studied the latter in order to determine the best way to fight them. When he engaged the Almohads in battle Qarāqūsh managed to break their ranks with the first cavalry charge which he led in person with 300 picked men. The Almohad force was unable to recover and scattered in headlong flight to Qayrawān. The Ayyubids and their Arab allies took a great number of prisoners including the chief qāḍī of Ifrīqiya and the ṣāḥib al-dīwān (head of the treasury) for the province. Qarāqūsh ransomed them for 60,000 dinars in cash as well as the revenues of Sūs and al-Mahdiya which came to another 40,000 dinars annually. Al-Sikka fell within a day of the battle and Qarāqūsh imposed an annual tribute of 20,000 dinars on its inhabitants. He took up a new position on the road between al-Mahdiya and Qayrawān, which he seemed poised to capture next.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 69.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 69.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., pp. 69-70. There is a short notice in Abū Shāma’s chronicle which appears to allude to the battle at al-Sikka, see Abū Shāma, Rawḍatayn, vol. 3, p. 66.
It was just then that devastating news reached him from Libya. While Qarāqūşīsh had been campaigning in Ifrīqiya rumours circulated in Tripoli that he had died. Ibn Qarātikīn decided to attack Umm al-‘Izz, the citadel in Jabal Nafusa in which Qarāqūşīsh had placed his family and his wealth before departing to Ifrīqiya. The citadel was defended by a token force commanded by Ḫusām al-Baqsh, one of Qarāqūşīsh’s most trusted officers. Ibn Qarātikīn captured it without much trouble and he kept Ḫusām and Qarāqūşīsh’s relatives under guard in one of his strongholds.\(^77\)

Qarāqūşīsh learned of this happening by chance after the fall of al-Sikka where his soldiers discovered some Almohad correspondence mentioning the fall of Umm al-‘Izz and the capture of Qarāqūşīsh’s family. Immediately he gathered his amirs and rushed back to Tripoli. On his way there he crossed paths with the Zughb, Ibn Qarātikīn’s former allies who were now settled in the vicinity of Qābis in south eastern Tunisia. They decided to support Qarāqūşīsh; as a result Ḫamīd b. Jāriya and the contingent of Dabbābī Arabs who were with him left Qarāqūşīsh because they were implacable foes of the Zughb.\(^78\)

When Qarāqūşīsh reached Jabal Nafusa Ibn Qarātikīn refused to give battle, fleeing before him from one mountain stronghold to another. Finally he took refuge in an imposing fortress called Tinzalt which was located in the middle of a great wādī and reputed to be unassailable. Arrows and stones launched from the heights overlooking the wādī always fell short of the citadel’s


\(^78\) Ibn Taqī al-Dīn mentions here that the Zughb could muster 1,200 horsemen while the Dabbāb had a strength of 5,000. In his opinion the former were more trustworthy and courageous than the Dabbāb and they were very fond of the Turks. He then mentions a key point saying that though the Zughb were outnumbered several times by the Dabbāb, the latter by virtue of their alliance with the Turks were unbeatable, and that even if the Dabbāb had been as brave as the Zughb they still would not have been able to beat the Turks. This passage shows us that the Turks already had a formidable reputation in North Africa and it demonstrates that even relatively small Turko-Kurdish cavalry forces trained in the type of warfare that was common in the Near East during this period, such as those commanded by Qarāqūşīsh and Ibn Qarātikīn, could defeat larger armies of Arabs or Berbers. See Miḍmār, p. 71.
walled. Qarāqūsh’s engineers worked tirelessly to build new catapults with a greater range. Finally they managed to land a stone in the very center of the fortress. When Ibn Qarātikīn saw this he knew that there was no hope of further resistance and he sent messengers to negotiate his surrender, asking for safe conduct to Tripoli where he would board a vessel and sail back to Egypt. Qarāqūsh intended to grant his request and then seize and kill him anyway but his Turkish soldiers would not countenance this and they forced him to swear by the life of his lord, the Ayyubid Taqī al-Dīn, that he would not harm Ibn Qarātikīn. He relented and Ibn Qarātikīn was escorted to Tripoli by sixty horsemen. At this time a local ruler named Rāfīʿ b. Maṭrūḥ was still governing Tripoli on behalf of the Almohads. He convinced Ibn Qarātikīn to serve the Almohad caliph instead of returning to Egypt. Ibn Qarātikīn sailed first to Tunis where he was received honorably by the Almohad governor of Ifrīqiya, one ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, before continuing on to the caliph’s court in Marrakech.79

The status of Tripoli at this time has been a matter of some controversy. The city of Tripoli was occupied by the Sicilian Normans in 1145/540.80 They ruled over it for about twelve years, installing Ibn Maṭrūḥ to oversee the affairs of the Muslim community.81 In 1158/553, encouraged by the Almohad caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin’s invasion of Ifrīqiya and his capture of the Norman strongholds there, the inhabitants of Tripoli under the leadership of Ibn Maṭrūḥ revolted and expelled the Normans. Two years later Ibn Maṭrūḥ led a delegation to al-Mahdiyya where he gave the bayʿa to ʿAbd al-Muʿmin.82 Iḥṣān ʿAbbās believes that Ibn Maṭrūḥ and the notables of

79 Ibid., pp. 70-2.
80 Al-Tijānī, Rihla, p. 241.
81 Ibid., pp. 241-2.
82 Ibid., pp. 242-3.
Tripoli welcomed the Almohads because the latter brought stability to the region and protected them from the encroachments of the Banū Sulaym. He notes that whereas the townspeople looked favorably on ʿAbd al-Muʿmin and the Almohads for their role in expelling the Normans from the ports of Ifrīqiya, the Arab tribes feared Almohad expansion and they unsuccessfully resisted ʿAbd al-Muʿmin.

According to al-Tijānī, Ibn Maṭrūḥ continued to rule in Tripoli until well into the reign of the Almohad caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (1163/558 – 1184/580) when he stepped down due to old age.

We know that Qarāqūsh captured Tripoli at some point in his career but we cannot be certain of the year in which this act occurred. Al-Tijānī gives us two dates for the capture of Tripoli while our other sources do not mention the date of its fall to Qarāqūsh. In one part of his Riḥla al-Tijānī says that Qarāqūsh captured Tripoli in 1190/586, but he contradicts himself when he mentions in another passage that on a visit to Tripoli he saw with his own eyes a decree issued by Qarāqūsh concerning the expansion of certain properties in the city that was dated 1183-4/579. ʿAbbās proposes 1172/568 as the year of the conquest. This is too early and it is refuted by Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s statement that Ibn Maṭrūḥ was still ruling Tripoli on behalf of the Almohads when Ibn Qarātikīn took refuge there in 1182/577. Abū Shāma reports that Qarāqūsh

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83 ʿAbbās, Tārīkh Lībiyā, p. 182.
84 Ibid., p. 179.
85 Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 243.
86 Incidentally there is a western suburb of Tripoli called Qarqārish (pronounced Gargārish in the local dialect), a corruption of Qarāqūsh. Barghūthī believes that he may have built his palace in this area. See Barghūthī, Tārīkh Lībiyā, p. 376, note.
88 ʿAbbās, Tārīkh Lībiyā, pp. 185-6.
besieged Tripoli in 1182/577 while it was still under the rule of Ibn Maṭrūḥ.⁸⁹ The latter finally agreed to receive a delegation from Qarāqūsh to discuss the surrender of his town. The behavior of Qarāqūsh’s envoys was so outrageous (one of them had defecated in the city’s drinking water cistern!) that the citizens of Tripoli forced Ibn Maṭrūḥ to expel the ambassadors and they refused to countenance the surrender of Tripoli to such barbarians. Qarāqūsh withdrew disappointed only partially consoled by the payment of an annual tribute.⁹⁰ We believe that Qarāqūsh’s conquest of Tripoli occurred at the earliest in 1183-4/579, by which time Ibn Maṭrūḥ was no longer in power, and no later than 1186/582 by which time Qarāqūsh received ʿAlī b. Ghāniya’s envoys in Tripoli according to Ibn Khaldūn.⁹¹

Following the departure of Ibn Qarātikīn to Tripoli, and thence to the Almohad court, Qarāqūsh took over all of his remaining territory in Jabal Nafusa. At this time hostilities broke out between Ḥamīd b. Jāriya, who had evidently been reinstated as chief of the Dabbāb, and Qarāqūsh due to attacks on Qarāqūsh’s caravans by some Dabbābī tribesmen. The other Sulaymī tribes: Sharīd, Zughb, and ʿAwf, automatically aligned themselves with Qarāqūsh. Ibn Taqī al-Dīn says that this was because the Dabbāb with their 5,000 warriors were the most numerous and dangerous Sulaymī tribe and the other tribes had to band together in order to defend themselves from the Dabbāb.⁹²

In spring 1183/578 Qarāqūsh led his troops from Jabal Nafūsa to Qābis, a journey of eight days, which he besieged but failed to capture. Then he captured al-Qaṣd, a coastal fortress close

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⁹⁰ Ibid.
⁹² Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, p. 72.
to Qābis which was frequented by Christian (Rūmī) ships that came to trade with the locals. Here he bought a large quantity of silver, grain, and other goods. He came next to a large Berber fortress called Qalʿat Ḥasan somewhere in the vicinity of Qābis and the northern tip of Jabal Dummar. After a one month siege he managed to take the fortress by surprise while most of its defenders had sallied out against his camp. Over 2,800 of the defenders were killed and a great quantity of grain was captured in its warehouses, a welcome find since there was an acute food shortage in Tripolitania in this year. After this success he captured another citadel in southeastern Tunisia called Umm Adūt which surrendered when its water supplies ran out. He appointed a deputy over it and it remained in his possession for years until it was taken over by the Banū Ghāniya.93

After these victories Qarāqūsh marched to Nafzāwa. This region, located just to the south of the Jarīd and the city of Tūzur (Tozeur), was inhabited by a Berber tribe of the same name. According to Ibn Taqī al-Dīn it was populous and contained more than fourteen cities and 200 villages.94 It was rich in date palms and its fields were irrigated from springs. Al-Tijānī says that the two principal cities of Nafzāwa were Ṭurra and Bashrī. He also remarked that it was a land full of palm trees which yielded the finest quality of dates.95 Two of its cities, Ṭurra and Biyāmin, were ruled by a chief whose title was Sayyid al-Nās (Lord of the People). Sayyid al-Nās was involved in a bitter feud with the ruler of Bashrī, which was a two day journey from Qafṣa. He had heard of Qarāqūsh’s conquests in the surrounding lands and he wrote to him asking for his assistance in subduing Bashrī. In return he offered to make him ruler over all of

93 Ibid., pp. 164-6.
94 Ibid., p. 167.
95 See Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 142. Al-Tijānī writes Bashrī while Ibn Taqī al-Dīn writes Bashtarī.
Nafzāwa. 96 In the following year he accepted the submission of Sayyid al-Nās and the cities under his control. Immediately thereafter the inhabitants of Bashrī, anxious to avoid a war with Qarāqūsh, hastened to submit to him as well. He assigned a Turk named Ḥarrāj, who had previously served under al-Malik al-Muẓaffār Taqī al-Dīn in Egypt, to administer Bashrī. 97 Thus did Qarāqūsh become master of the entire district of Nafzāwa.

Meanwhile reinforcements had reached Qarāqūsh from Egypt. An Ayyubid commander named Shujā’ al-Dīn Ibn Shakl arrived with 400 Turks and Kurds. Qarāqūsh already had about 400 Turks and Kurds under his command before Ibn Shakl’s arrival thus the number of Mashriqī (Eastern) troops at his disposal had now doubled. He assigned to the newcomers 120 villages near Suwayqa in Tripolitania as iqṭā’s with a regular income of close to 40,000 dinars. Ibn Shakl and his men ruthlessly exploited the peasants and ruined the productivity of the lands that had been granted to them. When word of their behavior reached Qarāqūsh he remarked “I gave them this land and I will not interfere whether they choose to cultivate it or destroy it.” 98

In 1184-5/580 Qarāqūsh laid siege to al-Ḥammām in Ifrīqiya for forty days without success. 99 During this siege Ibn Shakl revolted against Qarāqūsh with the assistance of the Banū ‘Awf (a Sulaymī tribe) and their chief Jannāḥ b. ‘Uqayl. He expected that the Turks and Kurds would rally to his cause but only twenty of them followed him to the camp of the Banū ‘Awf. 100

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96 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Midmār, p. 167.
98 Ibid., pp. 167-8.
99 There are many locations in Tunisia with the name Ḥammām or Ḥamma, meaning “hot spring”. Al-Ghannāy says that this is Ḥammat al-Bahālīl which is located in the Jarīd near Tozeur. We believe that the city in question is Ḥammat Maṭmāṭa, a strong fortress in the Maṭmāṭa region near Qabis that is described by al-Tījānī and whose capture is described below. See Al-Ghannāy, Suqūṭ, p. 206; Al-Tījānī, Rihla, p. 136.
100 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Midmār, pp. 167-8.
After the failed siege of al-Ḥammām, Qarāqūsh invaded the peninsula of Bāshū (Cape Bon). Bāshū was extremely fertile and it contained over 1,000 villages. Qarāqūsh remained there for three months looting and pillaging the entire region. Then he marched back into the interior of Ifrīqiya in order to deal with the rebel Ibn Shakl. He sent an advance force of 500 Arabs from Banū Zughb and 200 Turks to meet Ibn Shakl and his allies the Banū ‘Awf at Sardāniya, a small town in the vicinity of Qayrawān. They managed to defeat the rebels well before Qarāqūsh arrived at the battlefield with his main force. After this episode Qarāqūsh attempted unsuccessfully to capture a fortress called Qaṣr Abū Naṣr before retiring south to Jabal Dummar.¹⁰¹

He was approached by envoys from the Banū ‘Awf who sought his pardon. He forgave the Banū ‘Awf along with Ibn Shakl for whom they had interceded. He also received the chief of the Dabbāb, Ḥamīd b. Jāriya and reconciled with him and his tribe. Then he made the shaykhs of the Dabbāb, ‘Awf, and Zughb swear an oath of loyalty to him. Qarāqūsh invaded Ifrīqiya again accompanied by the above-mentioned tribes. They advanced to the walls of Tunis itself and amassed more booty on this expedition than any on of the previous ones. Ibn Shakl attempted to switch sides but he was caught by an alert Turkish soldier.¹⁰²

When winter approached Qarāqūsh returned to Jabal Dummar. He found that the inhabitants of Ḥammat Maṭmāṭa had abandoned their city and taken refuge in a citadel on a nearby mountain. Meanwhile, the three brothers from the Banū Thumāl who ruled the city happened to be away on a visit to al-Mahdiya. On their return they fell into the hands of Qarāqūsh’s soldiers. Qarāqūsh told the inhabitants of Ḥamma that he had no cause for quarrel with them. He

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 202-3.
¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 203-4.
promised to treat them fairly if they would return to their city and accept his authority which they did. As for the three brothers, he intended to execute them but Sayyid al-Nās, one of Qarāqūsh’s vassals in Nafzāwa, interceded on their behalf and Qarāqūsh spared them. In Almohad-controlled Qābis there was great consternation over the fall of Ḥamma because of its proximity to the former and as a result some prominent shaykhs who were suspected of corresponding with Qarāqūsh were killed or exiled.¹⁰³

In late 1185-6/581, ‘Alī b. Ghāniya arrived in the Jarīd with his followers after being chased from the Central Maghrib by the Almohads. He and Qarāqūsh agreed to fight the Almohads together, with the blessing of ślalḥ al-Dīn and the Abbasid caliph. They cooperated in subduing the chief cities of the Jarīd: Nafta, Tūzar, Ḥammat al-Bahālīl, Kadkīn, as well as Qafṣa. They agreed on a division of their future conquests: lands west of Annaba would go to the Banū Ghāniya while Qarāqūsh would rule over the lands to its east.¹⁰⁴ By now Qarāqūsh was at the height of his power. He controlled Cyrenaica, Fezzan, Tripolitania, and all of Ifrīqiya save for the cities of Tunis and al-Mahdiya, the last bastions of Almohad rule in the east. He could count among his allies the major Sulaymī tribes: Zughb, ‘Awf, Dabbāb, and Sharīd, all united in their hatred of the Almohads, and he had at least 800 veteran Ayyubid troops who were amply provided for with generous iqṭā’s. According to Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Qarāqūsh was the senior partner in his alliance with the Banū Ghāniya.¹⁰⁵ This is not surprising when we consider that ‘Alī b. Ghāniya had lost all of his conquests in the Central Maghrib during the previous year and he was

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¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 204.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 229-30.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 230.
now in the process of rebuilding his army whereas Qarāqūsh had suffered no great setback as of yet.

In the 1170s the two Ayyubid amirs Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn established control over Cyrenaica as well as the Libyan oases from Siwa in the east to Ghadāmis in the west. At the beginning of the subsequent decade Qarāqūsh conquered most of Tripolitania and then he invaded Ifrīqiya proper where he came into conflict with the Almohads. Also at this time tension developed between the two Ayyubid amirs and Qarāqūsh emerged victorious becoming the undisputed leader of Ayyubid forces in the west. By 1185-6/581 most of Ifrīqiya had fallen under Qarāqūsh’s control and the Almohad caliph was compelled to act in order to save the eastern half of his empire.
Chapter 10

The Almohad Response

10.1 Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr Reconquers Ifrīqiya

The Almohad forces under the command of the governor of Ifrīqiya had not been up to the task of dealing with Qarāqūsh and finally the caliph himself was forced to intervene. In 1186/582 Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr led an expedition to Ifrīqiya in person. Ibn al-Athīr says that he took only 20,000 cavalry because after the devastation caused by Qarāqūsh and his allies there was not enough fodder and food left in Ifrīqiya to support a larger force. According to Ibn ʿIdhārī he did not take any Arab soldiers with him save for a single trustworthy clan from the tribe of Riyāḥ since he doubted the loyalty of the other tribes. He visited the tomb of the Mahdi in Tinmillal and then headed to Fez and then Ribāṭ Tāzā where he saw to some administrative matters. From Tāzā he marched east until he reached Constantine. There he received word that Qarāqūsh, ʿAlī b. Ghāniya, and the chiefs of the Banū Sulaym had assembled their forces in the plain of Qayrawān. The caliph’s impulse was to attack immediately before the enemy could finish their preparations but when he consulted the Almohad shaykhs they advised going to Tunis first so that the soldiers could rest. The caliph decided to follow their counsel.¹

Once he had established himself in Tunis, Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr sent a large force under the command of the governor of Ifrīqiya, Abū Yūsuf b. Abī Ḥafṣ to confront Qarāqūsh and his allies. The encounter took place in the summer of 1187/583 at the plain of ʿUmra near Qafṣa. The Almohad army was weakened by divisions among its commanders. On the day of the battle the Almohad troops were exhausted and hungry after a long march. Qarāqūsh’s Turks led the charge

and the Almohad lines collapsed. A number of prominent prisoners were taken including Ibn al-Reberter, whose imprisonment in Majorca by the Banū Ghāniya has already been mentioned. He was tortured to death on the orders of ʿAlī b. Ghāniya. A large body of Almohad soldiers fled to Qafṣa where Ibn Ghāniya opened the gates for them and he even pretended to be concerned about their well-being before he had them rounded up and slaughtered. The luckiest of the survivors, including the governor Ibn Abī Ḥafṣ, made their way back to Tunis exhausted and broken.  

The caliph spent the next few months drilling, equipping, and reinforcing his army in Tunis in preparation for a second encounter with Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya. In the fall of the same year he led the army out in person. He went first to Qayrawān where he gave orders to repair the damage that had been caused in the city by the rebels. According to one account, Ibrāhīm b. Qarātikīn was with the Almohad army leading a contingent of Turks but he was imprisoned by the caliph for lagging behind the other commanders. From Qayrawān the caliph advanced to the vicinity of Ḥammat al-Bahālīl in the Jarīd where the enemy awaited him. An Almohad raiding party attacked the camp of Qarāqūsh’s Arab allies from Banū Sulaym, spreading mayhem and lowering the morale of the enemy. During the main engagement the Banū Ghāniya and the Ghuzz were thoroughly routed. The survivors fled in the direction of Tūzur and thence into the desert. Both Qarāqūsh and ʿAlī b. Ghāniya managed to escape. Rather than pursue them the caliph marched immediately to Qābis and recaptured it.  

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3 Ibid., p. 190.  
5 Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān: al-Qism al-Muwahḥidī, pp. 190-2; Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, pp. 236-7; Al-Ḥimyarī, Rawḍ, pp. 414-5.
announcing his victory reports that Qarāqūsh’s family was captured in the citadel of Qābis along with much of the loot that he had amassed in his earlier campaigns. After securing Qābis the caliph set about subduing the towns of the Jarīd one by one while retaining the local leaders as his vassals. Whenever he encountered Turks he pardoned them and welcomed them into his service but Majorcans were killed on the spot.

After pacifying the Jarīd the Almohads turned their attention to Qafṣa which was held by a garrison of Qarāqūsh’s Turks. The caliph made elaborate preparations for the siege which he observed from a wooden observation tower (dīdabān). After the city wall had been pummeled by powerful catapults the Almohads brought a seven story tall siege tower against a breach which had appeared and their infantrymen poured over the ramparts. After two days of fierce fighting the shaykhs of Qafṣa visited the caliph to discuss the terms of surrender. He granted a pardon to the natives of Qafṣa and the Turks but the Majorcans and Arabs were not to be spared. On the following day all of the males in the city were led out for judgement. As promised the citizens of Qābis and the Turks were spared but all of the Majorcans including ʿAlī b. Ghāniya’s son were executed.

At this time the caliph sent a letter to the court in Marrakech announcing the fall of Qafṣa. The letter contains some very important information on Qarāqūsh. In the wake of the Almohad victory at al-Ḥamma Qarāqūsh’s governor in Tripoli, a Turk named Abū Zayyān, had switched sides and submitted to the Almohad caliph. Now Qarāqūsh asked Abū Zayyān to intercede on his behalf with the caliph as he too wished to recognize the Almohads and enter their service,

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7 Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān: al-Qism al-Muwahhidī, p. 192.
especially since they still held his family in captivity. Unfortunately the letter does not tell us if the caliph immediately accepted Qarāqūsh’s request and if so on what terms. Ibn Khaldūn and al-Tijānī say that Qarāqūsh recognized the Almohads in 1190/586, long after the caliph had returned to Marrakech so perhaps there were protracted negotiations before Qarāqūsh received his family back and was accepted as an Almohad vassal.

The fate of Ibn Qarātikīn is not clear. Al-Tijānī reports that Ibn Qarātikīn was among the Ghuzzī and Majorcan defenders of Qafṣa who were captured and executed by order of the caliph al-Manṣūr in 1187/583. Mouton uses this passage to support his argument that Ibn Qarātikīn and Yūzāba were two separate persons (and not the same individual as suggested by Gaudefroy-Demombynes) because there are three references to Yūzāba which suggest that he was alive a few years after the battle of Qafṣa. In the Kitāb al-Istibṣār it is reported that Yūzāba (who is called “Bū Zabā the Persian” in this text) was appointed by Qarāqūsh as his deputy in Tripoli. When al-Manṣūr arrived in Ifrīqiya with the Almohad army Yūzāba hastened to defect to him. A few years later Yūzāba revolted against the Almohads. By this time Qarāqūsh had already submitted to al-Manṣūr and taken service as an Almohad commander. Therefore Qarāqūsh was dispatched to Tripoli by the governor of Ifrīqiya where he captured Yūzāba and sent him in chains to Marrakech in 1190/586. Al-Maqrīzī says that in 1186/582 one of Taqī al-Dīn’s

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10 Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, pp. 103-4; Ibn Khaldūn, ʿIbar, vol. 6, p. 258.
12 Mouton, Conquête, p. 69, note 24.
13 Anonymous, Istibṣār, p. 111.
14 Ibid.
mamlūks named Zayn al-Dīn Būrī went to the Maghrib at the head of a contingent. Later he was captured by the caliph al-Manṣūr and he took service with him. Finally a letter from al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil quoted by Abū Shāma states that Yūzāba (spelled Yuzbā) was seen bound and shakled in al-Mahdiya in the year 1190/586. He was en route to Marrakech where he was being sent by Qarāqūsh who had captured him earlier.

Mouton believes that Ibn Qarātikīn was sent from Egypt by Taqī al-Dīn to reinforce Qarāqūsh in 1177/573 and that he was executed by the Almohads following the siege of Qafṣa in 1187-8/583. Yūzāba was sent to at the head of another contingent to join Qarāqūsh in 1186/582. By 1190/586 he was a prisoner of the Almohads whom he later served. There is a passage in the Rawḍ al-Mīṭar about Ibn Qarātikīn which appears to have escaped Mouton’s notice. According to this report Ibn Qarātikīn commanded a unit in the Almohad army but he was imprisoned before the battle of al-Ḥamma because he lagged behind the rest of the caliph’s host. Ibn Taqī al-Dīn confirms that Ibn Qarātikīn travelled west to Marrakech and entered the service of the Almohad caliph in late 1182/577. It is hard to reconcile these passages with al-Tijānī’s assertion that Ibn Qarātikīn was among the defenders of Qafṣa, on the side of Qarāqūsh and ʿAlī b. Ghāniya, in 1187-8/583. And is it possible that the Bū Zabā of the Kitāb al-Istibṣār and the Abū Zayyān mentioned in the official Almohad letter announcing the fall of Qafṣa (no. 31 in

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17 Mouton, Conquête, p. 69, note 24.
19 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, pp. 70-2.
Levi-Provençal’s collection) are the same person since both are supposed to have governed Tripoli on Qarāqūsh’s behalf? For now we have more questions than answers.

In the aftermath of the siege of Qafṣa the Almohads deported Arabs from Riyāḥ and other Hilālī tribes as well as some of Qarāqūsh’s Ghuzz to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā where they were called upon for military service. Al-Marrākushī says that the Ghuzz who joined the Almohads were treated better than regular Almohad troops. According to him, while the regular Almohad soldiers received cash payments from the treasury only three times a year the Ghuzz were paid once a month. The caliph justified this saying that the Ghuzz did not possess iqtāʾs thus they were in need of more frequent payments. Al-Marrākushī says that this was not the case; the Ghuzz also received iqtāʾs that were equal in size to or even larger than those of the other troops. He mentions some of the Ghuzz who settled in the Maghrib by name including Aḥmad al-Ḥājib from Irbil who received iqtāʾs greater than those of the caliph’s relatives and an amir named Shaʿbān who was granted lands in al-Andalus with an annual income of 9,000 dinars.

Before leaving Qafṣa the Almohads raised its fortifications and chopped down the date palms on which its economy depended. The caliph al-Manṣūr returned to Tunis with his army in the winter of 1187-8/583. After reordering the affairs of Ifrīqiya he appointed his brother Abū Zayd governor of that province. We recall that this same Abū Zayd had recaptured Bijāya from ʿAlī b. Ghāniya in 1185/581 and he had subsequently become governor of the Central Maghrib. The caliph left Tunis in a hurry in the spring of 1188/584 when news arrived that some of his

21 Ibn Khaldūn, ʿIbar, vol. 6, p. 257.
relatives were plotting against him in Marrakech during his absence. He returned to his capital via Tāhart and Tilimsān.\textsuperscript{24}

10.2 The Correspondence Between Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr

In 1187/583 Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn won a great victory over the combined forces of the Crusader principalities at the battle of Ḥitṭīn and he recaptured Jerusalem shortly thereafter. This provoked a massive response from Christendom in the Third Crusade which threatened to tip the scales against the Ayyubids in Palestine. In 1189/585 the Crusaders commenced the siege and naval blockade of Acre. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s army in turn surrounded the Crusaders on the landward side. The latter were now sandwiched between the defenders and the Ayyubid army. Nonetheless the position of the Crusaders remained strong because of their overwhelming superiority over the Ayyubids at sea which allowed them to continue the naval blockade of Acre and to reinforce the besieging army. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s efforts were unable to prevent the surrender of Acre to the Crusaders in 1191/587.

The Ayyubids had a small, weak navy; thus they were unable to counter the fleets of Genoa, Pisa, Venice, and the kingdom of Sicily, all of which were assisting the Crusaders at this time.\textsuperscript{25} Most importantly, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was powerless to stop the steady flow of reinforcements from Europe to the Crusader-held ports. This led him to request assistance from the Almohads who possessed one of the largest navies in the Mediterranean and who were ideally situated to intercept the ships of the English and the French when the latter were en route to Palestine.

Copies of two letters from Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to the caliph Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr requesting the latter’s assistance have survived: one is preserved in al-Qalqashandī’s Ṣubh al-Aʿshā and another in Abū

\textsuperscript{24} Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān: al-Qism al-Muwabhidī, p. 197.

Shāma’s *Rawdatayn fī Akhbār al-Dawlaṭayn*.26 Gaudfroy-Demombynes dates the letter which was preserved by al-Qalqashandī to the autumn of 1189/585 and the second letter to 1190/586.27 In the first letter al-Manṣūr is addressed as *amīr al-muʾminīn* (Prince of the Believers), a title reserved only for caliphs. Mention is made of how the Ayyubids “purified” Egypt and Yemen and liberated Jerusalem from the Crusaders. Then it describes how the fall of Jerusalem caused great consternation in the lands of the Christians who sent massive reinforcements to the port of Tyre. The letter goes on to mention the siege of Acre and the arrival of the Christian monarchs from beyond the sea. It states that the vast Chrisitan fleets could only be challenged with the assistance of the Almohad navy whose ships were so numerous that even half of them would suffice. In the event that the fleet had to stay in port until the spring or summer, the caliph was asked to station half of his ships opposite Sicily in order to keep the Sicilian navy tied down in the western Mediterranean. Then the letter makes reference to the importance of defending Muslim lands and spending generously of one’s treasure to this end. Finally it states that the Muslims were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Islamic (Almohad) fleet.

The letter preserved by Abū Shāma does not address al-Manṣūr by the title *amīr al-muʾminīn*. It recalls the numerous conquests made by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in Palestine following the battle of Ḥiṭṭīn and it notes that only Tyre, Tripoli and Antioch remained in Crusader hands. Then it says that the Christians and their kings came to Bilād al-Shām by land and by sea answering the call of their patriarch (this could be a reference either to the pope or the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem). Among them it mentions the “king of the Germans,” Frederick Barbarossa. Then it recounts the

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siege of Acre. With obvious exaggeration it claims that the Christian soldiers numbered over 100,000; as soon as they fell in battle others came to take their place as if they were returning from the dead! Their superiority at sea allowed them to bring in supplies and men at will. After this mention is made of the death by drowning of Frederick Barbarossa and the advance of the remnants of the German army toward Antioch under the leadership of one of his sons. Then the letter repeats the request for naval support from the Almohads. It says that it is expected that the Muslims of the West will support their brethren more than the infidels of the West have supported their own. This is followed by the standard closing.28

This letter was delivered to the Almohads by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s ambassador ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Munqidh (d. 1203/600). He was the nephew of Usāma b. Munqidh, the prince of Shayzar and author of the famous autobiographical account of the Crusades entitled Kitāb al-Iʿtibār. Along with the letter the ambassador bore gifts including amber, balsam, musk, a precious ring, twenty Indian swords, and various other items.29 Abū Shāma has also preserved the text of a letter of special instructions for the ambassador on his mission to the Almohad court which was written by the great Ayyubid vizier al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 1199/596).

At the beginning of this letter al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil mentions the exalted titles by which the Almohad ruler is to be addressed including isfahsalār (supreme commander), shams al-dīn (sun of the faith), and ṣafwat al-mulūk wa al-salāṭīn (best of kings and sultans). Interestingly he does not include any titles which would imply recognition of al-Manṣūr as caliph, such as amir al-muʾminīn. Then he tells the ambassador to recount to al-Manṣūr how the Ayyubids had come to power in Egypt and purged it of heresy (a reference to the Fatimids) and their conquests in

29 Ibid., p. 119.
neighboring countries. The ambassador is to mention in detail the battles with the Franks, the capture of Jerusalem, and the Christian counterattack. Then he is to mention the siege of Acre and the ongoing stalemate there as well as the attempts of the Muslims to break the naval blockade of that port. The march of the German emperor through Asia Minor and his accidental death by drowning are also to be recounted. He tells the ambassador to emphasize that the Christians depend on the sea for their reinforcements and that if only the Almohads could send a powerful fleet that would deny to the enemy his command of the sea, the remaining Crusader strongholds would be forced to surrender through siege and threat of starvation.  

Then the vizier instructs his ambassador how to respond if he is questioned by the Almohads regarding the actions of the *mamlūks* Qarāqūsh and Yūzabā in the west. He must say that the latter are not from among the chief amirs and commanders of the state and they are the sort of men of whom it can be said “when they depart they are not summoned, when they become lost they are not missed.” Their followers are a motley rabble who come and go. “God forbid that we would command a criminal to sow mischief in the world!” Then the letter makes reference to some troops from Egypt (Ghuzz most likely) who are cooperating with the Christians in the west and the ambassador is instructed to deny any responsibility for their actions. Gaudefroy-Demombynes suggests that perhaps some of the Ghuzz who accompanied Qarāqūsh to Ifrīqiya had entered into relations with the king of Sicily.

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30 Ibid., pp. 111-114.
31 Ibid., p. 114.
32 Ibid.
We are told that Ibn Munqidh arrived in Tunis by sea in the year 1190/586. There he was received hospitably by the governor Abū Zayd. Then he went to Bijāya where he was entertained by the governor of al-Maghrib al-Awsat, Abū Ḥasan. The governors had written to al-Manṣūr about the ambassador’s arrival but he was unable to grant him an audience right away as he was campaigning against the Portuguese in al-Andalus at this time. He ordered that Ibn Munqidh be conducted to Fez and that he should be treated with full honor and well looked-after until he had a chance to receive him personally. In the following year al-Manṣūr captured the key fortress of Silves (Shalib) in the Algarve from the Portuguese and he returned to the Maghrib shortly after. He met with Ibn Munqidh who presented him with the gifts and letter. The caliph showed Ibn Munqidh great honor and bestowed precious gifts upon him in turn but he did not respond positively to the Ayyubid request for naval assistance. Ibn Munqidh returned to Alexandria by sea, probably in 1192/588.  

Various explanations have been put forward as to why the Almohads did not send their fleet to the aid of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. According to Abū Shāma, this was because the Ayyubid ambassador had not addressed al-Manṣūr as amir al-muʾminīn as befitted a caliph. Abū Shāma himself seems to disapprove of this deliberate oversight as he then notes that al-Manṣūr was a good ruler who upheld the sharīʿa and fought in defense of the faith. Gaudefroy-Demombynes remarks that if even a very pious scholar like Abū Shāma saw no objection in addressing the Almohad caliph as he was wont to be addressed, then surely Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his advisors would have been willing to make an exception on this occasion especially considering that so much was at stake for them and the welfare of Islam. He then asks if the letter preserved by Abū Shāma was not a forgery,

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35 Abū Shāma, Rawḍatayn, vol. 4, p. 120.
perhaps concocted by enemies of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil and Ibn Munqidh in the Ayyubid chancellery (of whom they had many) in order to blame them for failing to secure Almohad assistance. He believes it likely that the surviving texts were at least altered in some way.  

Despite his speculation on the authenticity of the letters, Gaudefroy-Demombynes does not doubt that there was an Ayyubid embassy which visited Marrakech during the siege of Acre and requested the presence of the Almohad fleet in eastern Mediterranean waters. He suggests, wrongly we believe, that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn cultivated his alliance with the Banū Ghāniya primarily in order to benefit from the intelligence which they could provide him on the movements of the English, French, and Sicilian fleets in the western Mediterranean. When al-Manṣūr defeated the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh at the battle of Ḥamma in Ibrīqiya (1187/583) Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn decided to throw his lot in with the winner and extend a hand of friendship to the Almohads in the hope that they could support him against the Crusaders. In Gaudefroy-Demombynes’ opinion the reason that the Almohads did not send a fleet to Acre was that they needed all of their available ships to transport their troops between North Africa and al-Andalus. Furthermore it was not in al-Manṣūr’s interest to unduly provoke the French king who might have decided that the struggle against the Muslims in Spain, which was much closer to home, should take precedence over the Crusade in Palestine where he was presently preoccupied.

Both ʿInān and Khalafallāh are skeptical of the accounts which say that al-Manṣūr refused to assist Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn because the latter had not addressed him as caliph. They believe that the Almohads could not spare ships and men because of their commitment to the war against the Christian kingdoms in al-Andalus. ʿInān notes that during the late 1180s and early 1190s there

was a constant threat of invasion by Portugal in the western part of the Iberian Peninsula, and Castile in the center. The Almohad fleet served as a deterrent by patrolling the southern and western coasts of al-Andalus. Khalafallāh observes that the defense of al-Andalus was al-Manṣūr’s first priority and as proof of this she refers to the caliph’s last testament. According to Ibn ʿIdhārī when the caliph lay on his death bed he told his followers that they had no greater charge than the defense al-Andalus, the protection of its frontiers, the upkeep of its fortifications, the training of its soldiers, and the security and welfare of the Muslims who lived there. He likened the latter to orphans whose protection was a sacred duty.

A fragile truce with the Castilians expired in 1194/590 and the new king, Alfonso VIII, invaded al-Andalus. In the following year Al-Manṣūr crossed the straits with a large army and he won a great victory over the Castilians at the battle of Alarcos (al-Arak in the Arabic sources). The battle of Alarcos was the crowning achievement of al-Manṣūr’s reign; one might say that it was the Ḥiṭṭīn of the Almohads.

There can be no doubt about the centrality of the Andalusian front to Almohad military and naval planning. Nonetheless, this does not explain why the Almohads responded negatively to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s request. Al-Manṣūr had sent large fleets as far east as Ifrīqiya to deal with the Banū Ghāniya. Surely it would not have been impossible for him to have spared a flotilla of thirty or forty light ships in order to run blockades and raid Frankish supply convoys in the eastern Mediterranean. Such a force, if combined with existing Ayyubid naval resources, might

41 For a good summary see Ḥusayn Muʿnis, Maʿālim Tārīkh al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Usra, 2004), pp. 438-9.
have tipped the scales towards the Muslim side during the siege of Acre. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s ships, despite a marked numerical inferiority, had managed to break the blockade of Acre unaided on three occasions.\(^{42}\) At the very least it would not have been difficult for al-Manṣūr to comply with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s other request; that he station a fleet in the ports of Ifrīqiya opposite Sicily in order to distract the Sicilian fleet and prevent it from sailing to the aid of the Crusaders.

It seems that there is an apologetic undertone in the excuses which are proffered by some of the modern historians. ʿInān says that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and al-Manṣūr were working towards the same great goal which was “to entrench a spiritual solidarity and a force of shared feeling between the eastern and western flanks of Islam at this time when they were both threatened by the same Crusader enemy.”\(^ {43}\) He implies that had it not been for pressing concerns in al-Andalus the Almohads would gladly have assisted Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn for the sake of Muslim solidarity.\(^ {44}\)

Khalafallāh is not so naïve; she admits that there were still significant ideological differences between the Ayyubids and Almohads and a legacy of distrust because of the Qarāqūsh episode.\(^ {45}\)

There can be no doubt that Qarāqūsh and the Ghuzz acted under the orders of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself at least until their defeat by al-Manṣūr at the battle of Ḥamma in 1187/583. The claim made by the Ayyubid ambassadors that Qarāqūsh and his men were renegades for whose actions Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his amirs bore no responsibility rings hollow upon consideration of the evidence. The names of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Taqī al-Dīn were mentioned in the *khutba* in the captured cities of Libya and Ifrīqiya. The historian Ibn Taqī al-Dīn notes that

\(^{42}\) This is the claim made by al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil in his letter of instruction to Ibn Munqidh. *Abū Shāma, Rawḍatayn*, vol. 4, p. 113.


\(^ {44}\) Ibid.

after Ibn Qarātikīn surrendered to Qarāqūsh in Tripoli, the latter’s soldiers forced him to swear by the head of al-Malik al-Muẓaffār that he would spare the life of Ibn Qarātikīn. 46 Most importantly, we know that Qarāqūsh was receiving reinforcements from Egypt. Qarāqūsh himself returned to Egypt more than once during the 1170’s, presumably to raise troops. In 1183/578, after the Ghuzz had already defeated an Almohad army and occupied much of Ifrīqiya, Ibn Shakl arrived in Tripoli from Egypt with 400 Ayyubid troops all of whom were generously rewarded by Qarāqūsh. 47 The frequent use of heavy siege weapons by Qarāqūsh also points to an Ayyubid connection since these were not typically found in the arsenals of Arab and Berber tribes in Libya.

We cannot escape the conclusion that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was at war with the Almohads during this period. What had started out in the 1170s as a campaign to secure Barqa and the Libyan oases eventually turned into a full-fledged invasion of the Almohad Empire. With the blessings of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Abbasid caliph Qarāqūsh entered into alliance with the Banū Ghāniya, mortal enemies of the Almohads, and the rebellious Arab tribes of the Banū Sulaym and Banū Hilāl. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was gambling on the hope that this coalition could defeat the Almohads and wrest Ifrīqiya from their grasp. Then Qarāqūsh would rule from Tunis as an Ayyubid vassal while the Banū Ghāniya would establish their state further west in the Central Maghrib. These hopes were dashed after the battle of Ḥamma and the swift reestablishment of Almohad authority as far east as Tripoli. With the surrender of Qarāqūsh himself and the Ghuzz to al-Manṣūr, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn lost his last card in Ifrīqiya. In addition he was now fighting for survival against an unprecedented coalition of European rulers who joined forces against him in the Third Crusade.

Amid such circumstances he could ill-afford trouble on his western frontier and he decided that the time had come to mend fences with the Almohads. We believe that the true purpose of the embassy which Šalāḥ al-Dīn sent to the Almohad court was to establish peace and mutual recognition of boundaries and spheres of influence. Šalāḥ al-Dīn implicitly recognized Almohad sovereignty over Ifrīqiya and Tripolitania and he gave up any claim to the lands west of Egypt. The caliph was receptive to peace because his attention was now focused on the Andalusian front and he did not want to deal with further revolts in Ifrīqiya. But this did not mean that he had forgotten Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s past actions and there could be no question of an actual military alliance between the two states. The peace with the Ayyubids held and we do not hear of any further Maghribī adventures under Šalāḥ al-Dīn or his successors although the Almohad Caliphate’s troubles with the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh were far from over.

In this chapter we have discussed the reconquest of Ifrīqiya by the Almohad caliph al-Manṣūr who inflicted a major defeat on the combined forces of Qarāqūsh and ’Alī b. Ghāniya at the battle of Ḥamma in southern Tunisia in 1187/583. Over the course of the three years following this defeat Šalāḥ al-Dīn entered into negotiations with the Almohad caliph. Šalāḥ al-Dīn renounced his project of western conquest and denied any responsibility for the actions of Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn. Amicable relations were established between the courts of Marrakech and Cairo although Šalāḥ al-Dīn was unable to secure Almohad naval assistance against the Crusaders in Syria. After this episode we do not hear of any further Ayyubid involvement in Libya and Ifrīqiya. Qarāqūsh and his men entered Almohad service for a short time while the Banū Ghāniya retreated to the margins of Ifrīqiya waiting for a chance to avenge their recent defeat.
Chapter 11

The Resurgence of the Banū Ghāniya

11.1 Yahyā b. Ghāniya Conquers Ifrīqiya

We recall that after their defeat at Ḥamma (1187/583) both ʿAlī b. Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh fled into the desert with the remnants of their army. ʿAlī died not long after the battle. Ibn Khaldūn says that he was killed in a skirmish with some Nafzāwa Berbers and his body was taken back to Majorca while al-Tijānī reports that he died of an arrow wound in Tūzur following a clash with an Almohad detachment there.¹ He was succeeded by his brother Yahyā b. Ghāniya, an equally tenacious rebel who continued to harass the Almohads for nearly three decades.

It has been mentioned that Qarāqūsh and his followers entered Almohad service at some time between 1187/583 and 1190/586. He resided in Tunis for a short while at the court of Abū Zayd b. Abī Ḥafṣ, the governor of Ifrīqiya. Then he slipped out of Tunis and fled south with some followers to Qābis which he captured. He decided to settle an old personal score with the Dabbāb, the fickle Sulaymī tribe that had betrayed him more than once in the past. He invited their shaykhs, including his old ally Ḥamīd b. Jāriya, to a hall in the Qaṣr al-ʿArūsayn (Palace of the Newlyweds) in Qābis and slaughtered them there. About a century later the spot where the massacre occurred was excavated and over sixty skulls were found according to al-Tijānī. After this incident Qarāqūsh recaptured Tripoli from the Almohads and gained mastery over most of Nafzāwa and the Jarīd.²

The alliance between Yahyā b. Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh fell apart very quickly and soon there was open hostility between the two. Bel suggests that Qarāqūsh’s ruthless measures against the

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¹ Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 162; Ibn Khaldūn, ʿIbar, vol. 6, p. 257.
² Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 104; Ibn Khaldūn, ʿIbar, vol. 6, p. 257.
Sulaymī Arabs played a part in the collapse of his alliance with Yaḥyā since the latter was on good terms with the Banū Sulaym whose support he cultivated. He also maintains that the ambitious and capable Yaḥyā resented being the junior partner of Qarāqūsh.\(^3\) In 1190/586 Yaḥyā attacked the city of Ṭurra in Nafzāwa. The garrison of 100 Turks surrendered to him and they were incorporated into his army. Then he subdued the Jarīd and the Arab tribes in the region submitted to his authority.\(^4\)

Having secured southern Tunisia, Yaḥyā marched east into Libya. Qarāqūsh met him in battle with his main force at a place called Muḥsin in the vicinity of Tripoli. The result was a crushing defeat for Qarāqūsh who took refuge in Jabal Nafusa following the battle. Yaḥyā pursued him for a short while before he gave up the chase and turned his attention to Tripoli. Qarāqūsh had left a trusted Turkish officer named Yāqūt in command of the garrison in Tripoli. Yāqūt took his task seriously and he made sure that Tripoli was well-prepared to meet the siege. The Banū Ghāniya made no progress at first and Yaḥyā was forced to request assistance from his brother ʿAbdallāh b. Ghāniya who was in charge of Majorca. The arrival of a Majorcan naval squadron and the blockade of Tripoli by sea tipped the scales in favor of the besiegers. Yāqūt surrendered and was imprisoned in Majorca until 1202/599 when he was set free after the Almohad conquest of the island. Yaḥyā appointed his cousin Tashfīn b. Ghāzī as the new governor of Tripoli.\(^5\)

After the fall of Tripoli, Qarāqūsh made no further attempt to contest possession of Tripolitania and Ifrīqiya either with the Almohads or with his dangerous new rival, Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya. Instead, he betook himself to the oasis of Waddān in central Libya with his family and

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\(^3\) Bel, *Benou Ghanya*, pp. 94-5.

\(^4\) Al-Tijānī, *Ribla*, p. 147.

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 243-5.
loyal followers from among the Ghuzz. He ruled over Waddān until his murder by the Banū Ghāniya in 1212/609 under circumstances that will be related later on. Yaḥyā ignored Qarāqūsh for the time being and focused his efforts on driving the Almohads out of Ifrīqiya.  

The city of Qābis had been reoccupied by the Almohads after Qarāqūsh’s defeat. The Almohad governor of Ifrīqiya, Abū Saʿīd b. Abī Ḥafṣ, appointed a certain Ibn Tāfrājīn as his deputy there. 

Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya marched to Qābis and addressed a letter to its inhabitants, threatening them with the same fate as Tripoli if they did not open their gates to his army. When the defenders did not reply he laid siege to Qābis and devastated the surrounding countryside, chopping down every one of its date palms save for a single tree that he left standing as a reminder. The defenders of Qābis finally surrendered in 1194/591 on the condition that they pay 60,000 dinars in tribute. In return Yaḥyā permitted Ibn Tāfrājīn and his family to depart by sea.

At this time the Almohad position in Ifrīqiya was seriously undermined by internal disagreements among the leadership. As mentioned above the governor of Ifrīqiya was Abū Saʿīd b. Abī Ḥafṣ. The military forces in the province were commanded by a certain Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Rajrājī. The latter was from the Zanāfī tribe of Kūmiya, the tribe of the caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. His ancestors were among a group of Berber tribesmen from the Maghrib known as the jund (militia) who had been settled in Ifrīqiya by the Almohads in order to defend the province and keep the Banū Sulaym in check. Al-Rajrājī had great success in

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7. Abū Saʿīd probably replaced the previous governor Abū Zayd at some point after the caliph al-Manṣūr returned from his expedition to Ifrīqiya in 1187/583; Ibn al-Athīr’s gives the date 1185/581 for Abū Saʿīd’s appointment which is too early because it precedes the Almohad reconquest of Ifrīqiya. Kāmil, vol. 10, p. 259.
subduing the Arab tribes and pacifying the countryside, a feat which made him popular with the city-dwellers.9

A conflict arose when Abū Saʿīd appointed his brother, Abū ʿAlī Yūnus b. Abī Ḥafṣ, as deputy governor in al-Mahdīya. Al-Rajrājī and his men had grown accustomed to enjoying great quantities of loot and tribute which they exacted from the Arab tribes but now Abū ʿAlī demanded a share of the tribute which al-Rajrājī collected. When the latter refused Abū ʿAlī imprisoned him and humiliated him. This provoked an outcry among the inhabitants who regarded al-Rajrājī as a hero and finally Abū Saʿīd intervened to secure his release and return him to his command. Al-Rajrājī and his soldiers were determined to exact revenge on those who had mistreated them. They launched a surprise attack on al-Mahdīya and captured Abū ʿAlī in 1199/595. Abū ʿAlī was released after the intercession of relatives and the payment of a ransom of 500 gold dinars. When he was firmly in possession of al-Mahdīya, al-Rajrājī proclaimed his revolt against the Almohads and took the title al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh.10

Meanwhile the Almohad caliph Yaʿqūb al-Mansūr had died in Salā in the Maghrib during this same year (1199/595). He was succeeded by his son Muḥammad al-Nāṣir (1199/595 – 1214/611). In the following year (1200/596) Abū Saʿīd was removed from his post as governor of Ifrīqiya and replaced by the previous governor, Abū Zayd, who arrived in Tunis from the west at the head of an army and a squadron of ships. Al-Rajrājī now resolved to capture Tunis. He and his men encamped nearby at Carthage. Abū Zayd led the Almohad forces out of Tunis but they fell into a series of cleverly planned ambushes which al-Rajrājī and his men had laid for them. The Almohads suffered a devastating defeat and only a handful of men made it back into Tunis.9

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10 Ibid.
alive. Al-Rajrājī’s troops spread out over the suburbs of Tunis which they thoroughly plundered.\(^1\)

While the Almohads were preoccupied with their civil war Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya’s power had been steadily growing in southern Tunisia. Abū Zayd attempted to negotiate with al-Rajrājī and he sent some senior Almohad shaykhs who reminded him of his and his family’s service to the Almohad caliphate and urged him to reenter the fold. Al-Rajrājī made a truce with Abū Zayd and returned to al-Mahdīya. Upon his return a dispute broke out between himself and Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya against whom he resolved to fight. He left his son ʿAbdallāḥ in charge of al-Mahdīya and led his army to Qābis. When he reached the city and saw its defenses he lost hope of being able to take it by assault. He changed direction and captured Qafṣa instead. Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya followed him and the two clashed at a place called Qaṣr Lāla in the vicinity of Qafṣa in 1201/597. Al-Rajrājī was soundly defeated and he fled with the remnants of his army to al-Mahdīya, abandoning his tents and baggage to the Banū Ghāniya.\(^2\)

Yaḥyā then besieged al-Mahdīya. He approached Abū Zayd for an alliance and the Almohad governor accepted his offer, eager for an opportunity to humble the rebel al-Rajrājī. This would turn out to be a very shortsighted move on Abū Zayd’s part as we shall see. Abū Zayd sent some ships to blockade the port of al-Mahdīya. When al-Rajrājī saw the Almohad ships he lost all hope of holding out and he sent his son ʿAbdallāḥ to negotiate the terms of surrender. Yaḥyā agreed to respect the lives and property of al-Rajrājī and his family but as soon as he took over

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Ibid.
the city he had the father and son seized and imprisoned. They were both murdered in captivity shortly thereafter.\(^{13}\)

By this time Yahyā b. Ghāniya was in possession of most of Ifrīqiya except Tunis and the northwestern corner of the province. He controlled Tripoli, Qābis, Ṣfāqus, the entire Jarīd, Nafzāwa, Qayrawān, and al-Mahdīya. After the fall of the latter he campaigned in northwestern Ifrīqiya. His first target was the city of Bāja which lay 105 kilometers west of Tunis in the middle of the richest wheat-producing region in Ifrīqiya. He levelled its walls with his catapults and killed its governor, ʿUmar b. Ghālib. The inhabitants fled from their city in terror. The Almohad governor of Bijāya, Abū al-Ḥasan b. Abī Ḥafṣ, marched east leading an army that was composed primarily of Arab auxiliaries. He engaged the Banū Ghāniya outside of Constantine. The Arabs switched sides at the beginning of the battle and set about looting his camp. With great difficulty Abū al-Ḥasan and his retinue fought their way to Constantine where they took refuge. After this victory Yahyā b. Ghāniya turned south and captured the oasis city of Biskra (on the edge of the Algerian Sahara, 190 km. south of Constantine) where he gave orders to amputate the hands of every inhabitant. After this grisly deed he took possession of Annaba and Tabassa (a town near the Algerian-Tunisian border). Alarmed by these developments, the caliph sent his vizier Ibn Yujjān to the Central Maghrib at the head of a large army in order to prevent any further westward incursion by the Banū Ghāniya. Ibn Yujjān travelled to Constantine via Tilimsān and Bijāya but he did not engage the enemy; he seems to have been concerned only

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
with shoring up the defenses in these cities. Later he returned to Tilimsân where he looked after administrative affairs before being recalled to Fez.  

Yaḥyā’s conquests in northwest Ibrīqiya completed the isolation of Tunis. Now he decided to direct his efforts toward the capture of this city, the prize that had eluded both ʿAlī b. Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh. The Banū Ghāniya and their allies surrounded Tunis from every side. The Lake of Tunis, which lies directly to the east of the city and its port, is connected to the Mediterranean Sea by a single passage called Ḥalq al-Wādī (La Goulette). Yaḥyā’s brother Ghāzī led a force around the lake to Ḥalq al-Wādī which he filled with rubble thereby blocking all seaborne traffic in and out of Tunis. He also filled up the khandaq (moat) which guarded the southern approach to Tunis and he erected catapults and other siege engines on top of the landfill. After a bitter siege of four months Tunis fell at last in December of 1203/600. The governor Abū Zayd, his two sons, and a number of Almohad shaykhs were captured and imprisoned in the citadel. Yaḥyā imposed a tribute of 100,000 dinars on the citizens of Tunis as this was the amount that he had spent on the siege. The sum proved excessive and the officials overseeing the collection of this tribute were ruthless. Some individuals were even driven to suicide by the sudden loss of their wealth. When Yaḥyā heard this he had mercy on the inhabitants and he reduced their tribute to a more manageable 15,000 dinars.  

After the capture of Tunis, Yaḥyā made a brief foray into Jabal Nafusa where some of the Berber tribes had stopped paying tribute. He brought them back into submission and returned to Tunis which now replaced al-Mahdīya as his capital. In 1204-5/601 Yaḥyā went to Qafṣa to receive loyalty oaths and good-will hostages from some Sulaymī Arab chiefs. Then he proceeded

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to Ṭurra in Nafzāwa where he brutally suppressed an uprising by the locals, plundering and burning their villages. From Nafzāwa he headed to Ḥammat al-Bahālīl near Qābis where he received word that an Almohad expedition was on its way.\footnote{Al-Tijānī, Rihla, pp. 354-7; Ibn Khalidūn, Ibar, vol. 6, pp. 259-60; ‘Inān, ‘Aṣr al-Muwahhidūn, vol. 2, pp. 262-3.}


A few words about Ibn Fursān are appropriate here. He attached himself voluntarily to the cause of the Banū Ghāniya serving first ʿAlī and then his brother Yaḥyā as vizier and chief secretary. He earned renown not only for the fine prose and verse compositions that he wrote in praise of Yaḥyā but also for his skill as a commander and his heroism on the battlefield. He personally commanded detachments of troops whom he led on daring raids against the enemy. Ibn Fursān’s tenacity and zeal astonished even Yaḥyā himself. The sources agree that his death...
from wounds suffered on the battlefield in 1215/612 was an irreparable loss for the Banū Ghāniya.\(^\text{18}\)

### 11.2 The Almohads Capture the Balearic Islands

Meanwhile the new Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir had not been idle. He was determined to be rid of the troublesome Banū Ghāniya for once and for all. The caliph and his advisors decided to capture Majorca first, before dealing with Yaḥyā in Ifrīqiya. When ʿAlī b. Ghāniya sailed to Bijāya in 1184/580 he had left his brother Ṭalḥa behind as governor of Majorca. Both Muḥammad b. Ishāq, the previous pro-Almohad amir whom ʿAlī had deposed in a coup shortly before invading Bijāya, and the Almohad envoy Ibn al-Reberter were both imprisoned on the island. In 1185/581 Muḥammad and Ibn al-Reberter managed to escape from prison and overthrow Ṭalḥa with the help of their supporters. Barely a year later ʿAlī b. Ghāniya’s brother Ṭabdallāh, who was with the expeditionary force in Ifrīqiya, left Tripoli and slipped into the harbor of Majorca with his squadron while Ibn al-Reberter and Muḥammad were both away in Marrākush. He made contact with Banū Ghāniya sympathizers on the island and fought to retake it.

The caliph al-Manṣūr immediately tried to dislodge Ṭabdallāh from Majorca. He sent two large fleets against Majorca, the first under the command of Abū al-ʿUlā b. Jāmiʿ and the second under Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Hazrajī, but both expeditions ended in failure. By 1187/583 Ṭabdallāh was firmly in control of Majorca.\(^\text{19}\) He is referred to from then on as the amir of Majorca; it seems probable that there was a power-sharing agreement between him and his brother ʿAlī b. Ghāniya which left ʿAlī as the senior amir of Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib while Ṭabdallāh held


\(^{19}\) Ibn Khaldūn, *ʿIbar*, vol. 6, p. 332.
Majorca. ʿAbdallāh ruled over Majorca until his defeat and death in 1203/599. His reign was particularly prosperous for the islanders. He signed a treaty with Genoa in 1188/584 which allowed the Genoese to establish a funduq (a hostel for foreign merchants) and a church in the city of Majorca.\textsuperscript{20} Huici-Miranda believes that there was an alliance between the amir ʿAbdallāh and king Pedro II of Aragon and Catalonia, who assisted him in fending off the Almohad assaults on Majorca.\textsuperscript{21} This did not stop ʿAbdallāh from raiding other Christian countries; Provence in particular suffered from the Majorcan corsairs. Naturally the Almohad possessions in eastern Spain were also subject to raids by the Banū Ghāniya.\textsuperscript{22}

Since they were unable to take Majorca the Almohads focused their efforts on the smaller Balearic Islands. The Almohad admiral ʿAbbās al-Siqillī captured Ibiza from the Banū Ghāniya in 1187/583. Minorca was also captured by the Almohads at an unspecified date. In 1203/599 ʿAbdallāh tried unsuccessfully to retake Ibiza by surprise in a winter assault but his efforts were thwarted by the Almohad admiral Ibn Maymūn.\textsuperscript{23} Undeterred he set his sights on Minorca which surrendered after a brutal siege which saw the inhabitants reduced to cannibalism. He installed Ibn Najāḥ as his deputy there. When the winter storms subsided the main Almohad fleet sailed out of Sabta under the command of Abū al-ʿUlā while the landing force was led by Abū Saʿīd b. Abī Ḥafṣ. The fleet of the Banū Ghāniya was caught by surprise and destroyed in the harbor of Minorca. Then the island itself was captured along with Ibn Najāḥ, who was taken to Marrakech and crucified. After the fall of Minorca the Almohad fleet proceeded to Majorca. The

\textsuperscript{20} For the Arabic text of this treaty along with a translation and commentary see Bauden, “Due trattati,” pp. 68-81.


\textsuperscript{22} Sīsālim, \textit{Juzur}, pp. 395-6.

\textsuperscript{23} Naval activity was limited during the winter months on account of the rough seas which are common in the Mediterranean during this season. The Almohad fleet usually wintered in Sabta in Morocco during these months.
defending forces quickly collapsed and ʿAbdallāh b. ʿIshāq b. Ghāniya was executed. Thus was half century of rule by the Banū Ghāniya over the Balearic Islands brought to a close. Majorca would remain under Almohad control until its conquest by James I of Aragon in 1229, when it passed out of Muslim hands forever.24

11.3 The Caliph al-Nāṣir Invades Ifrīqiya
In 1204-5/601 al-Nāṣir set out from Marrakech at the head of his army while the fleet sailed parallel to the coast under the command of Abū Zakarīyā al-Hazrajī. When he received word that the Almohads had reached Bijāya, Yahyā b. Ghāniya placed his cousin ʿAlī b. al-Ghāzī in charge of al-Mahdīya and moved his treasury there from Tunis for safekeeping. Yahyā himself remained in the south of Ifrīqiya in the neighborhood of Qābis. The Almohad fleet captured Tunis with little resistance; Ibn ʿIdhārī says that the Banū Ghāniya had evacuated it beforehand.25 Upon their entry into Ifrīqiya, al-Nāṣir and the Almohad army had immediately marched south in pursuit of Yahyā, bypassing al-Mahdīya for the time being. The Almohads recaptured Qafṣa and Qābis while Yahyā sought refuge in Jabal Dummar. Deciding that any further pursuit of the Majorcan warlord was futile, al-Nāṣir appointed governors over the southern cities and turned his attention to al-Mahdīya.26

Unlike Tunis, al-Mahdīya was well-defended. Its garrison, under the leadership of the aforementioned ʿAlī b. al-Ghāzī, was confident and ready for a long siege. The Almohads deployed catapults, battering rams, siege towers and scaling ladders against the city walls but in their overconfidence they had neglected to adequately protect them. As a result the Majorcans


succeeded in burning all of the Almohad siege engines during a sally which caught the besiegers by surprise. Undaunted by this setback, al-Nāṣir built new machines and continued to press the siege. From a garbled passage in Ibn ʿIdhārī’s chronicle it would appear that an Arab force comprised of the Hilālī Riyāḥ and the Banū Sulaym attempted to break the siege. They followed the pre-Islamic Arab custom of bringing their women to the battlefield in order to cheer them on and strengthen their resolve to stay and fight to the bitter end. Nonetheless the Almohads defeated them and they fled south to Qābis.\textsuperscript{27}

After this success al-Nāṣir sent the veteran Almohad commander Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Abī Ḥafṣ at the head of 4,000 cavalry to resume the pursuit of Yaḥyā. The latter gave battle at Jabal Tājrā southeast of Qābis.\textsuperscript{28} Initially there were doubts among the Almohads about fighting Yaḥyā’s larger army but in the end they won an overwhelming victory and killed a great number of troops from the opposing side. Yaḥyā’s brother Jabbāra and his secretary ʿAlī b. al-Lamṭ were among the fallen; his children and female relatives narrowly escaped capture. The Almohads were successful in rescuing the governor of Ifrīqiya, Abū Zayd, along with other prominent prisoners who had fallen into the hands of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya when he captured Tunis. In Yaḥyā’s abandoned camp the Almohads found black Abbasid banners and an enormous quantity of booty which the Banū Ghāniya had amassed from twenty years of campaigning in North Africa between Tripoli and Bijāya. According to Ibn Khaldūn, Yaḥyā’s abandoned baggage train amounted to 18,000 pack loads.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Ibn ʿIdhārī, \textit{Bayān: Qism al-Muwahhidīn}, p. 245.

\textsuperscript{28} Not to be confused with the town of Tājūra in Tripolitania. See Bel, \textit{Benou Ghanya}, p. 130.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibar}, vol. 6, p. 334.
Al-Nāṣir had the black banners and the spoils from Yaḥyā’s camp displayed in plain view of the defenders on the walls of al-Mahdīya in the hope that their morale would weaken upon seeing signs of their leader’s defeat. However, they refused to believe that Yaḥyā had been defeated and they continued to resist for a while. They only surrendered when the Almohads succeeded in breaching the wall in a certain spot with their catapults. The terms which al-Nāṣir offered were generous: ʿAlī b. al-Ghāzī and his men were granted safe conduct to depart from al-Mahdīya and join Yaḥyā in the south. After leaving al-Mahdīya, ʿAlī switched sides and entered the service of al-Nāṣir who showered him with gifts and honors. ʿAlī b. al-Ghāzī would later travel to Marrakech with the caliph and fight for him on the Andalusian front where he died a martyr’s death. The fall of al-Mahdīya occurred in January 1206/602. Al-Nāṣir stayed there for one month to put the city’s affairs in order. Then he left for Tunis after appointing Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Yaghmūr al-Hintātī as his governor in al-Mahdīya.\(^\text{30}\)

The caliph resided in Tunis for almost a year. During his stay in Ifrīqiya he saw to the pacification of the countryside, the resettlement of populations that had been uprooted by the war with the Banū Ghāniya, and the expansion of irrigated lands. An expedition was dispatched to Tripolitania under Abū Ishāq b. al-Manṣūr to reduce the Berber tribes of the mountainous areas into submission and to pursue Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya and the remnants of his host. Abū Ishāq’s men nearly extirpated the Banū Dummar and the Banū Maṭmāṭa in the mountains south of Qābis. Then they traversed the Jabal Nafusa and reached Tripoli and Suwayqa before turning back. Though the expedition was hailed as a triumph, Yaḥyā and the core of his supporters were still at large, waiting for a chance to renew their struggle against the Almohads.\(^\text{31}\)


Al-Nāṣir and his advisors were concerned that Yaḥyā would return to ravage Ifrīqiya as soon as the caliph left this easternmost province. Therefore, he decided to appoint a semi-independent viceroy entrusted with wide-ranging powers in order to ensure the stability and defense of Ifrīqiya. His choice fell on Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ who was the victor of Tājrā and son of Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar b. Yaḥyā al-Hintātī. The latter had been one of the most distinguished companions of Ibn Tūmart as well as a trusted general and advisor to the caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. The Hafsid family which was descended from him continued to play an important role in the Almohad state. As Rouighi notes, the appointment of a Hafsid to the governorship of Ifrīqiya marked a significant departure in Almohad policy. Previously this sensitive post had been reserved for immediate members of the ruling family.\(^{32}\) Al-Ghannāy points out that this was the first time that the Almohads had granted an entire province as an hereditary iqṭāʾ to one of the great noble families.\(^{33}\) This illustrates the extent of the difficulties which the Almohads faced in governing and defending Ifrīqiya, situated as it was on the eastern periphery of the caliphate.

Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ refused at first, fearing that his appointment was an attempt to distance him from the caliphal court in Marrakech. Al-Nāṣir pleaded with him to accept the position, assuring him that he could not find another worthy candidate. Abū Muḥammad accepted on three conditions: that his appointment would last no longer than the time it would take to crush the Banū Ghāniya, that he be allowed to handpick his soldiers and retinue, and that he be granted full authority over all of the deputy governors in Ifrīqiya with the right to retain or dismiss them as he saw fit. The caliph readily agreed to these conditions but as we shall see Abū Muḥammad ended up staying in Ifrīqiya until his death well beyond the three year limit which he


\(^{33}\) Al-Ghannāy, *Suqūṭ*, p. 278.
had originally set for himself. In the spring of 1207/604 al-Nāṣir returned to the west. Before his departure the inhabitants of Tunis had clamored for him to stay longer because they were still afraid of Yahyā b. Ghāniya. The caliph presented Abū Muḥammad to the assembled crowd and assured them that the new governor was his personal representative who had been hand-picked for his virtues, thus assuaging their fears.  

Ibn Ḣidārī reports that the caliph travelled from Tunis to Tilimsān, rested there for a while and saw to local affairs, and continued to Fez without incident in the spring of 1207/604. Ibn Abī Zar‘ says that Yahyā Ibn Ghāniya attacked the caliph in Wādī Shalif (a river bed that empties into the Mediterranean west of Algiers, between Sharshāl and Tinis) at the head of an army of Arabs, Zanāta, and Şanţāja but that he was resoundingly defeated by the Almohads. We have good reason to be skeptical of this account because Ibn Abī Zar‘ is our only authority for the battle and the date which he gives, October 1207/604, is clearly incorrect since the caliph had already returned to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā several months earlier. 

It is more likely that Yahyā remained in hiding in southern Tunisia, biding his time until the caliph’s departure. He formed an alliance with the powerful Dawwāwīda, a sub-tribe of the Hilālī Banū Riyāḥ, and their chief Muḥammad b. Maṣ‘ūd al-Balṭ along with other unspecified Sulaymī tribes while the Sulaymī Banū ʿAwf supported the Almohad governor Abū Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ḥafṣ. Yahyā b. Ghāniya and Ibn Abī Ḥafṣ clashed in 1207/604 at Wādī Shabrū near Tabassa

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(located in Algeria 20 km. west of the Tunisian border) accompanied by their respective allies; the Banū Ghāniya were routed and they fled to Tripoli.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{11.4 Yaḥyā Expands his Raids throughout the Almohad Empire}

After this defeat Yaḥyā left Ifrīqiya altogether in order to strike at the very heart of the Almohad Empire. Accompanied by his loyal ally Ibn Masʿūd and a mixed army of Arabs and “Mulaththamūn” (Lamtūna and Massūfa Berbers), he travelled to al-Maghrib al-Aqsā and plundered Sijilmāsa and the surrounding region of Wādī Tāfilālt. His appearance close to the imperial capital in Marrakech caused great consternation among the caliph’s court. Then he headed to al-Maghrib al-Awsat in 1208/605 where he made common cause with the Zanāta tribes in western Algeria. The governor of Tilimsān, Abū al-Ḥasan, resigned in this year due to illness. He was replaced by a new governor named Abū ʿUmrān who was immediately confronted by Yaḥyā’s army and the Zanāta rebels. The latter had posted spies among the governor’s troops who kept Yaḥyā well-informed about the situation in the Almohad camp while they passed deliberately misleading information to Abū ʿUmrān concerning the whereabouts of Yaḥyā’s force. As a result the Almohad army was surprised by the Banū Ghāniya outside of Tāhart and utterly annihilated. Abū ʿUmrān and his retinue died fighting to the end. His sons, his personal secretary, and some notables from Tilimsān were taken prisoner. In addition the Almohad camp and baggage train fell into enemy hands.\textsuperscript{37}

Following this battle the Banū Ghāniya and their Arab and Zanāta allies roamed throughout the countryside plundering and burning crops. They surrounded Tilimsān hoping to starve it into submission. Al-Nāsir raised another army and placed it under the command of his vizier Abū

\textsuperscript{36} Ibn Khaldūn, \textit{Ibar}, vol. 6, pp. 260-1; Bel, \textit{Benou Ghanya}, pp. 142-3.

Zayd b. Yujjān. The latter was ordered to rescue the city and province of Tilimsān from the Banū Ghāniya and to serve as its new governor, replacing the fallen Abū ʿUmrān. Ibn Yujjān left Marrakech with great pomp and high expectations. When the Almohad expedition arrived in Tilimsān Yahyā and Ibn Masʿūd fled into the Sahara with their followers to take refuge once more in Tripolitania.38

Yahyā evidently still had his army intact for no sooner had he returned to the east than he began raiding throughout Ifrīqiya. In a short time he was joined by Arabs from the Hilālī tribe of Banū Riyāḥ and various tribes of the Banū Sulaym. Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ had been appointed as governor of Ifrīqiya with special powers to deal with the Banū Ghāniya. He led his army out of Tunis and headed south to face Yahyā. The two sides clashed in a great battle somewhere in Jabal Nafusa in 1209/606. In the beginning of the battle the Almohad left wing, where the Arabs and Ghuzz were stationed, collapsed under the charge of Yahyā’s Arab allies. Nonetheless the Almohad center, where Abū Muḥammad and the Almohad huffāẓ were stationed, remained steadfast. After a while the troops on both flanks of Yahyā’s army fled, believing that their center had been beaten. Their flight turned into a panicked rout as they stumbled into their own families and camp followers while the Almohads hotly pursued them. The greatest losses were suffered by the Banū Riyāḥ who lost many of their leaders. Yahyā’s faithful ally Ibn Masʿūd lost his son ʿAbdallāh. An enormous quantity of baggage and treasure fell into the hands of the victorious Almohads.39

In the aftermath of the battle the Berbers of Jabal Nafusa revolted against Ibn ʿUṣfūr, Yahyā’s governor in the region, expelling him and killing both of his sons. Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ

38 Ibid.
led his army through southern Ifríqiya in order to pacify the countryside. He punished the Sulaymī tribes for their support of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya and deported their shaykhs to Tunis where they were held under guard with their families.40

In 1210/607 Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya’s brother Sīr b. Isḥāq, who had commanded a column of troops during the invasion of Tilimsān, defected to the Almohads in Ifríqiya. He stole away from Yaḥyā’s camp by night with a group of loyal followers to avoid detection and appeared before the governor Abū Muḥammad who received him with honor. He requested permission to visit the caliph in person in Marrakech and this was granted.41

11.5 The Death of Qarāqūsh
After his defeat in Jabal Nafusa by Abū Muḥammad, Yaḥyā abandoned his attempts to reconquer Ifríqiya for a while and he turned his attention to the Libyan oases. He was still accompanied by some of the Majorcans and by his Arab allies from the tribe of the Dawwāwida, a sub-tribe of the Banū Riyāḥ. We recall that after his defeat by Yaḥyā in 1202/599, Qarāqūsh had established himself in Waddān with his family and followers. Yaḥyā was intent on settling scores with his old rival. He formed an alliance with the Dabbāb of Banū Sulaym. Qarāqūsh had massacred the leaders of this tribe, including their chief Ḥamīd b. Jāriya, at the Qaṣr al-ʿArūsayn in Qābis nearly twenty years previously and they were eager to exact revenge on the old Ayyubid mamlūk. In 1212/609 Yaḥyā laid siege to Waddān with the intent of starving the defenders out since the site was too strong to take in a frontal assault, as Bel points out.42 Eventually Qarāqūsh was forced to surrender. He did not even bother to plead for his life since there was no chance

42 Bel, *Benou Ghanya*, p. 156.
that the Dabbāb would be satisfied by anything short of his death. He asked only that he be executed before his son, whom he loved dearly, so that he would not have to witness the latter’s death. When Qarāqūsh was led out of Waddān his son asked him “Oh father where are they taking us?” to which Qarāqūsh replied “To the place where we took their fathers.” Qarāqūsh was executed first, followed by his son. Then his body was crucified and displayed outside of Waddān. Al-Tijānī reports that he heard the story of the execution of Qarāqūsh from the Banū Dabbāb in his own day, and that this story had been passed down from their grandfathers who witnessed the event.43

Qarāqūsh had another son who survived him and took service with the Hafsids, eventually rising to become a commander under the Hafsid caliph caliph al-Mustanṣir (1249/647 – 1277/675). According to al-Tijānī he revolted against the Hafsids and followed in the footsteps of his father by invading the Saharan oases.44 He sacked and razed Waddān, the oasis town where his father had been killed. This prompted the intervention of the king of Kanem who defeated and executed this son of Qarāqūsh in 1258/656.45

In this chapter we have seen that Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya succeeded his brother ʿAlī as amir of the Banū Ghāniya in the aftermath of the battle of Ḥamma in 1187/583. In the 1190s Yaḥyā conquered all of Ifrīqiya from the Almohads including the cities of Tunis and al-Mahdīya. He defeated Qarāqūsh forcing the latter to flee with his followers to Waddān in Libya. The Almohad response was directed first against Majorca where the rule of the Banū Ghāniya was ended in 1203/599. In the following year the Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir set out for Ifrīqiya with his army. In

43 Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, pp. 110-11; Bel, Benou Ghanya, pp. 155-7.
44 Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 111.
45 Ibid.
1206/602 he succeeded in driving Yaḥyā out of Ifrīqiya. He left the province in the capable hands of Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ who was given unprecedented power for an Almohad governor. Whereas previously Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya had tried to conquer and hold Ifrīqiya, he now changed his strategy to one of hit- and- run raids along the exposed southern flank of the Almohad Empire. The scope of his raids extended from Tripoli in the east to Sijilmāsa in the west. When pursued he simply withdrew into the Sahara to regroup and wait for another opportunity. In 1212/609 Yaḥyā attacked Waddān and killed Qarāqūsh.
Chapter 12

The End of the Banū Ghāniya and the Transition to Hafsid Rule in Ifrīqiya

While Ifrīqiya enjoyed a period of relative tranquility under the capable stewardship of Abū Muḥammad and Yahyā b. Ghāniya besieged Qarāqūsh in Waddān, al-Nāṣir’s attention was drawn to al-Andalus where king Alfonso VIII of Castile, still smarting from his defeat at the hands of al-Manṣūr in the battle of Alarcos (1195/591), resumed his southward thrust towards the Guadalquivir. This time a crusade had been called by pope Innocent III to assist the Iberian Christians and as a result contingents arrived from throughout Europe to form what was undoubtedly one of the largest Crusader armies in history. The Almohad response was proportionate as the caliph crossed the straits with a massive expeditionary force drawn from all of the various ethnicities in his empire. In July of 1212/609 the Christian and Muslim armies met in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, which the Arabs call the battle of al-ʿUqāb, located northeast of Cordoba. At first the Christians seemed to be on the verge of defeat but later the tide of battle turned in their favor thanks in part to the personal intervention of Alphonso and his Castilian veterans. The Almohads suffered a devastating defeat; tens of thousands of their troops were lost. Al-Nāṣir escaped from the battlefield a broken man; after returning to Marrakech he never left his palace and he died one year later. He was succeeded by his sixteen year-old son al-Mustanṣir (1214/611 – 1224/620) who led a life of pleasure-seeking and was content to leave the business of governing to others. The battle of Las Navas de Tolosa was one of the great decisive battles of history. It ushered in the decline of the Almohad Caliphate which never fully recovered from its defeat. One could even say that Las Navas was the Manzikert of Iberian Islam. A slow,
inexorable contraction of Muslim territory in al-Andalus continued for nearly three centuries, culminating in the fall of Granada in 1492.\(^1\)

The governor of Ifrīqiya, Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ, died in 1221/618. Under his rule Ifrīqiya enjoyed stability and prosperity for the first time since the beginning of the war with the Banū Ghāniya. Abū Muḥammad had been reluctant at first to recognize the accession of al-Nāṣir’s son al-Mustanṣir when the latter became caliph in 1214/611 and this was held against him by the court in Marrakech which decided to appoint a non-Ḥafṣid to succeed him in Tunis rather than one of his relatives. The man whom they chose was Abū al-ʿUlā, brother of the caliph al-Manṣūr and former governor of Seville. On his arrival in Tunis Abū al-ʿUlā began persecuting the Hafsids and their supporters; he had Ibn Abī Ḥafṣ’s secretary Ibn Nakhîl arrested and later executed along with some of his family members.\(^2\)

From his base in Waddān, Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya had watched the unfolding of events in Ifrīqiya. He dared not attack Ifrīqiya while Abū Muḥammad was alive but now the moment seemed ripe for intervention. Once more his bands ravaged southern Ifrīqiya. Abū al-ʿUlā took up residence in Qābis to prevent the capture of this city, the key to the south, by the Banū Ghāniya and their Arab allies. He dispatched a force under his son, Abū Zayd, to Ghadāmis while another Almohad column marched to Waddān under orders to besiege the wily Majorcan there. Yaḥyā defeated the troops who were sent against Waddān and he fled west to the Zāb (the region south of Constantine) where he captured Biskra, the chief city in this territory. Abū Zayd pursued him and retook Biskra but Yaḥyā evaded capture and raised a fresh army of Arabs and Berbers. In

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1224/620 Abū Zayd and Yahyā clashed in a great battle near Tunis from which the Almohads emerged victorious thanks to the invaluable assistance of Berber allies from the Hawwāra tribe who distinguished themselves in the fighting. 3

Abū Zayd had no time to enjoy his victory. Having received word of his father’s death he returned to Tunis expecting that he would be appointed to succeed him as governor of Ifrīqiya. Instead he learned that al-Mustanṣir had assigned the post to another. Then al-Mustanṣir died in the same year, to be succeeded by ʿAbd al-Wāḥid I “al-Makhlū” (his epithet means “the Deposed,” 1224/620), a brother of the caliph al-Manṣūr and grandson of ʿAbd al-Muʾmin. The latter reversed his predecessor’s decision and appointed Abū Zayd as the governor of Ifrīqiya. Abū Zayd was an oppressive governor and his harshness turned the people against him as they recalled the happier days under Abū Muḥammad. Shortly after ascending the throne ʿAbd al-Wāḥid faced a rival claimant to the caliphate in the person of ʿAbdallāh b. Yaʾqūb al-Manṣūr, a son of the caliph al-Manṣūr and governor of Murcia. ʿAbdallāh took the throne-name al-ʿĀdil and received the support of the Almohad forces in al-Andalus and the Balearic Islands. The caliph ʿAbd al-Wāḥid was forced to step down in fall 1224/621 and he was murdered shortly afterwards. 4

Al-ʿĀdil ruled as caliph until 1227/624. In 1226/623 al-ʿĀdil replaced Abū Zayd with ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Ḥāfṣī (not to be confused with the murdered caliph above, also named ʿAbd al-Wāḥid) as governor of Ifrīqiya, thereby restoring the Hafsids to power as the hereditary viceroys of Ifrīqiya. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid arrived in Ifrīqiya accompanied by his brothers Abū Zakarīya and Abū Ibrāhīm whom he appointed as his deputies in Qābis and Qastālīya (in the

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4 Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 337-8, 379-80.
Jarīd) respectively. Meanwhile Yahyā b. Ghāniya invaded al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. He captured Bijāya and Tadallis (Dellys, a port between Algiers and Bijāya). Then he came into conflict with the powerful Zanātī Berber tribe of the Maghrāwa who occupied the plains southwest of Algiers. The Maghrāwa had been loyal supporters of the Almohads since the time of the first caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin. When Yahyā entered the Mitīja (a fertile plain in the hinterland of Algiers) in 1225/623 he was opposed by the Maghrāwī chief Mandīl b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Yahyā defeated the Maghrāwa and captured Mandīl. Then he captured Algiers itself and he had the hapless Maghrāwī chief crucified on its ramparts. The governor of Ifrīqiya, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Ḥafṣī, was forced by these dangerous developments to intervene personally. He led an army from Tunis to the central Maghrib. At the town of Ubba (near al-Urbus/Laribus in northwestern Tunisia) he fought and defeated the Hawwāra who had been raiding their neighbors and he sent their captured shaykhs to al-Mahdīya. He retook Bijāya, Algiers, and the Mitīja before returning to Ifrīqiya in 1227/624 while Yahyā fled westward to Sijilmāsa where he continued his depredations.  

Meanwhile there was renewed conflict over the office of caliph. Abū al-ʿUlā, who was the brother of the reigning caliph al-ʿĀdil and the senior Almohad governor in al-Andalus, proclaimed himself caliph in 1227/624 taking the throne name al-Maʿmūn. Shortly after this proclamation al-ʿĀdil was assassinated by the Almohad shaykhs in Marrakech. They installed Yahyā b. al-Nāṣir, known by the throne name al-Muʿtaṣim, in his stead. For the next two years a civil war ensued between al-Maʿmūn, who was based in al-Andalus, and al-Muʿtaṣim whose support lay in the Maghrib until al-Maʿmūn took Marrakech and received the bayʿa there in

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1229/626. Al-Muʿtaṣim (Yaḥyā b. al-Nāṣir) fled with some supporters to Sijilmāsa where he continued to resist until his death in 1232/630.⁶

There are two conflicting accounts of what happened in Tunis while the civil war was taking place. Al-Zarkashī and Ibn Khaldūn say that al-Maʿmūn wrote first to the governor Abū Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid demanding the latter’s allegiance but Abū Muḥammad hesitated. Thereupon al-Maʿmūn wrote to Abū Muḥammad’s brother Abū Zakarīyā who was in Qābis offering him the governorship of Ifrīqiya if he would recognize him as caliph. Abū Zakarīyā readily agreed and he marched north to face his brother after winning the support of prominent Almohads in southern Ifrīqiya. Abū Muḥammad led his army out of Tunis intending to fight the rebels but when he reached Qayrawān his own soldiers switched sides and arrested him. Abū Zakarīyā entered Tunis in 1228/625 and assumed the governorate without a fight. He imprisoned Abū Muḥammad for a time before expelling him to the Maghrib. Then the caliph al-Maʿmūn attempted to replace the Hafsids with new governors but Abū Zakarīya expelled them and he switched his allegiance to the rival caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (Yaḥyā b. al-Nāṣir). In 1229/627 Abū Zakarīyā had the names of the Almohad caliphs removed from the khūṭba; only the names of the four Rāshidūn caliphs and the Mahdi Ibn Tūmart were mentioned. Al-Zarkashī says that this was the amīr’s first step on the path to independence. In 1236/634 Abū Zakarīyā added his own name to the khūṭba, thus finalizing his split from the Almohads.⁷

Ibn ʿIdhārī says that Abū Zakarīyā urged his brother Abū Muḥammad to declare full independence from al-Maʿmūn and rule in the name of the Hafsids but Abū Muḥammad would not hear of this and he had Abū Zakarīyā placed under house arrest in Tunis. The latter managed

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to escape to Qābis where he gathered supporters and revolted against his brother. Abū Muḥammad was determined to quash the uprising and kill Abū Zakariyyā but he was abandoned by his supporters in Qayrawān and forced to surrender. Eventually he arrived in Marrakech where he was murdered. As for Abū Zakariyyā, he received the bay’a in Tunis in the manner of an independent ruler and his authority extended as far west as Bijāya.  

The split between Tunis and Marrakech was certainly due in part to the dynastic ambitions of Abū Zakariyyā and the Hafsids but this was not the only reason. The caliph al-Ma’mūn had executed a large number of high ranking Almohad shaykhs including many from the Hintāta tribe which supported his rival al-Mu’tasim and to which the Hafsids belonged. More importantly, he had attacked the very foundation of the Almohad creed. Al-Ma’mūn ordered the removal of the name of the Mahdi Ibn Tūmart from the khutba and the Almohad coinage; he also denied the Mahdi’s infallibility (ʿisma) and even insulted him. He is reported to have introduced a number of changes in the rituals of prayer. The Hafsids and many others were no doubt deeply antagonized by such policies.

Abū Zakariyyā ruled until 1249/647 and he is generally regarded as the founder of the Hafsid dynasty. We should bear in mind, however, that he and the other early Hafsid rulers saw themselves as the heirs and continuators of the Almohad movement. This is confirmed by the fact that they retained mention of the Mahdi in their Friday sermons. As Rouighi notes “Abū Zakariyyā fashioned himself as the inheritor of the charisma and spiritual leadership of Ibn

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9 See Ibn Khaldūn, Ḩabar, vol. 6, pp. 340-1, 381.
Tūmart…While he was viewed as rooted in the region, his political legitimacy still drew on roots in the far west.\textsuperscript{10}

Meanwhile the saga of the Banū Ghāniya entered its last chapter. According to Ibn Khaldūn Yahyā b. Ghāniya was still active in the late 1220s and the early 1230s. While the Almohad Caliphate, plagued by civil war and partition, careened towards its final collapse, Yahyā conducted raids from al-ʿAqaba in the east (on the Egyptian coast halfway between Alexandria and the Libyan border) to Sijilmāsa in the west. He captured Suwayqa in Tripolitania and Abū Zakariyya was forced to defend Ifrīqiya from his attacks. Yahyā died a free and unconquered man in 1233/631 or 1235/633 after a reign of approximately fifty years. Ibn Khaldūn gives various locations for his place of death and burial; Bel believes that Yahyā most likely died in the vicinity of Milyāna in the Shalif valley of western Algeria.\textsuperscript{11}

It is sobering to reflect on Yahyā’s long career and his amazing tenacity. He was one of the commanders in the Majorcan expedition against Bijāya in 1184/580. When his brother ʿAlī died in 1187/583 Yahyā assumed overall command of the Banū Ghāniya in North Africa until his death in the 1230s. Yahyā had probably not yet been born when the Maghrib fell to the Almohads in 1147/541. This means that he was raised within the (relatively) confined space of Majorca and any early military experience that he gained would have been in the naval battles and piratic raids that the Banū Ghāniya engaged in with the maritime states of Italy and Provence. In light of his background it is perhaps surprising that he adapted so readily to the far different conditions of warfare in North Africa; indeed, he was the uncontested master of desert warfare in his time. We often see him in the later part of his career traversing the Sahara between

\textsuperscript{10} Rouighi, \textit{Mediterranean Emirate}, pp. 32-3.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibn Khaldūn, \textit{Ibars}, vol. 6, p. 262; Bel, \textit{Benou Ghanya}, p. 185.
Libya and Morocco along the entire southern flank of the Almohad Empire probing for points of weakness. He would emerge from the desert in the places where he was least expected, wreak havoc, and then withdraw into the vastness of the Sahara as soon as a large army opposed him. He must have been an extraordinarily charismatic man who possessed in abundance all of the qualities of leadership for he was always able to raise armies with ease from among the Arab tribes even after the worst defeats. Bel has pointed out the notable similarities between Yahyā and another great North African general, Hannibal Barca. Just as Hannibal spent the years between 218 and 203 B.C. in the Italian Peninsula with no hope of significant reinforcement from his native Carthage, so too did Yahyā b. Ghāniya find himself alone in his struggle against the Almohads, particularly after the fall of Majorca (1203/600). Both men had to rely on their own resources and in order to supplement their core followers they relied heavily on local allies (the Gauls and the Arabs) who were motivated by the promise of booty.

Yahyā’s death marked the end of the Banū Ghāniya as a political movement. During the later years of his career Yahyā’s followers were most likely motivated by personal loyalty to their remarkable leader rather than the ideological fervour (i.e. pro-Almoravid and anti-Almohad) which characterized the Banū Ghāniya when they first raised the banner of revolt against the descendants of ʿAbd al-Muʿmin.

Yahyā left behind no male progeny, only daughters. When his death was near he ordered his loyal Frankish freedman Jābir (or Ṣābir) to take his daughters to Tunis where they would be entrusted to the protection and care of his old foe Abū Zakarīyā al-Ḥafṣī, of whose chivalry and magnanimity Yahyā was confident. Abū Zakarīyā did not disappoint him; he assigned a generous

12 Bel, Benou Ghanya, pp. 183-4.
13 Ibid.
stipend to the royal ladies and constructed a special palace for them in Tunis known as *Qaṣr al-Banāt* (the Palace of the Girls). They lived out the rest of their lives there and refused all offers of marriage as their father’s last request was that they remain celibate. Ibn Khaldūn says that in 1310/710 his father met one of Ibn Ghāniya’s daughters who was then approaching ninety years of age and he remarked that she was the most noble and virtuous woman that he had known.\(^\text{14}\)

Until his death in the 1230s Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya remained steadfast in his defiance of the Almohads and he continued to launch raids against them at every opportunity. By the time of Yahyā’s death the Almohad Empire was wracked by coups and civil wars and its demise seemed certain. Before the close of the 1230s the Hafsids of Ifrīqiya and the Zayyānids in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ had both become formally independent of the Almohad caliphs in Marrakech. Al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā fell to the Marinids in 1269/668 marking the fall of the Almohad state.

\(^{14}\) Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar* vol. 6, pp. 262-3.
Chapter 13

Conclusion

13.1 An Appraisal of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s Maghribī Policy

In this thesis we have argued for a new understanding of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and the nature of the Ayyubid military campaigns in Libya and Ifrīqiya. In our opinion two factors have hampered earlier treatments of this subject by other scholars. The first of these is the curious neglect of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s Miḍmār by most of the modern scholars of the Almohads with the notable exceptions of al-Ghannāy and al-Sāḥilī. Despite its fragmentary state it contains the most detailed surviving account of Qarāqūsh’s activities in Tripolitania and Ifrīqiya. It is also the most reliable source on Qarāqūsh and the one closest in time since it was written by the son of Qarāqūsh’s patron Taqī al-Dīn. Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s sources for the events in question were Ayyūbid soldiers who had served in person with Qarāqūsh and Ibn Qarātikīn and later returned to Syria.1

The second factor that stands in the way of an objective and balanced treatment of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and the subject of Almohad-Ayyubid relations in general is the romantic image of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as a noble idealist who placed the interests of the Islamic World above other political considerations. There is an assumption on the part of some modern scholars that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, in contrast to his contemporaries, was motivated by Pan-Islamic sentiment. We believe that such a view is anachronistic and unhelpful in understanding Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn who was a product of a particular time and context like any other person of historical significance. It is true that the recent Western biographers of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn such as Ehrenkreutz, Lyons and Jackson, and Eddé

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1 Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, p. 54.
take a more critical approach and attempt to separate the man from the myth.\(^2\) Unfortunately none of the above has much to say about Qarāqūsh and Ayyubid-Almohad relations. It seems that these topics have been left for historians of the medieval Maghrib and the Almohads. Among the latter group Arab historians have shown far more interest in Qarāqūsh than their Western counterparts.

To these historians Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was an idealist who was devoted to the jihād against the Crusaders and the victory of orthodox Sunnī Islam above all else. They are reluctant to admit that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn could be cynical and manipulative in his relations with other Muslim leaders. The consequences of such a view are apparent in their treatment of the Ayyubid entanglement with the Almohads in the west. Therefore Müsā, who does not make use of Ibn Taqī al-Dīn’s Miḍmār, attributes the invasion of Ifrīqiya to the personal ambition of Qarāqūsh and other amirs. He rejects the possibility that there was an Ayyubid plan of conquest.\(^3\) As we have mentioned previously, the Miḍmār leaves us with little doubt that the conquest of Libya and Ifrīqiya was directed and supported by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his advisors. It is the only source that records the dispatch of the Ayyubid amir Ibn Shakl with 400 veteran Kurdish and Turkish cavalry from Egypt to Ifrīqiya in 1183-4/579 after Qarāqūsh had already defeated a large Almohad army in the field at the battle of Sikka in the previous year.\(^4\) Surely there can be no stronger indication of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s approval of hostilities with the Almohad Empire at this time.

For those who adhere to the view of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn as an idealist who placed the interests of the larger Islamic World before the narrower interests of the Ayyubid dynasty, this presents a


\(^3\) Müsā, Dirāsāt, pp. 19-23, especially 23.

\(^4\) Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, pp. 167-68.
problem. How can the image of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn the champion of Islam be reconciled with the reality of a leader who launched a war of aggression against the Almohads at a time when the latter were engaged in a momentous struggle against the Christians in al-Andalus? The Ayyubid invasion resulted in a temporary loss of Ifrīqiya by the Almohads, a province that ʿAbd al-Muʾmin had liberated from the Normans with great difficulty. Its reconquest from Qarāqūsh necessitated the personal intervention of the caliph Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr and his absence from the Spanish front.

Al-Ghannāy and al-Sāḥilī, who are aware of the significance of the Miṣmār, cannot escape the conclusion that the campaigns of Qarāqūsh and the Ghuzz in North Africa were approved by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself. In their zeal to justify Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s actions, they try to portray the Almohads as the aggressors.⁵ On the basis of a few reports of dreams and predictions of a future Almohad conquest of Egypt and the Mashriq that are recorded in different sources, they argue that an Almohad invasion of Egypt was imminent and therefore the Ayyubid expeditions to the west were intended to forestall any such attack.⁶ Of course it is not at all surprising to find that during the time of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart and during the reigns of the first three of his successors, under whose rule the Almohad Empire experienced its greatest growth and its most important military victories, there were some who hoped that the Almohads would one day conquer the east and unify the Muslims under their banner.

In any case, our sources indicate that the Almohads paid little attention to their eastern frontier. It is telling that Qarāqūsh faced no opposition from the Almohads until he reached al-

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⁵ Al-Ghannāy, Suqūṭ, pp. 196-98; Al-Sāḥilī, Tawajjuḥāt, pp. 135-43.

Sikka, located well within modern Tunisia, in 1182/577.\(^7\) Al-Tijānī remarks that when Qarāqūsh captured Tripoli from the Almohads the city had no garrison, weapons, or supplies for withstanding a siege. He adds that the reason for this lack of preparedness was that the inhabitants never expected an attack from the east.\(^8\) Mūsā has pointed out that the Almohads did not even exercise nominal control over any territory east of Tripoli.\(^9\) There is only one reference to an Almohad army operating in Tripolitania; this occurred in 1206/602 during the pacification of Ifrīqiya by the caliph al-Nāṣir, many years after the death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. The force in question turned back after advancing no further than half of the distance between Tripoli and Suwayqa.\(^10\) On the basis of this evidence we can safely say that there never was any danger of an Almohad invasion of Egypt.

Aḥmad Fuʿād Sayyid argues that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn inherited Nūr al-Dīn’s role of champion and chief deputy of the Abbasid Caliphate.\(^11\) He asserts that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the Abbasid caliph sought to lead the other great Muslim powers of the time (the Almohad, Rum Seljuk, and Khwarazmī states) against external enemies such as the Crusaders and the Mongols/Khitay. According to him, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was a visionary whose overriding ambition was to unite the

\(^{7}\) Ibn Taqī al-Dīn, Miḍmār, pp. 68-70.

\(^{8}\) Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, 243.

\(^{9}\) Mūsā, Nashāṭ, 311. In one of her articles Fierro proposes that the itinerary followed by Ibn Tūmart on his return from Egypt to the West (1116/510 – 1117/511) in the Akhbār al-Mahdī of al-Baydhaq is a symbolic delineation of the future borders of the Almohad Empire. She notes that he first sailed from Egypt to Tripoli where he began the land portion of his journey. This suggests that Tripoli was the furthest western outpost of the empire while the rest of Libya, which he bypassed in his ship, was destined to lie outside the borders of the Almohad state. Maribel Fierro, “Some Considerations on Almohad Itinerant Power,” trans. Jeremy Rogers, in Maribel Fierro, The Almohad Revolution: Politics and Religion in the Islamic West during the Twelfth-Thirteenth Centuries, (Burlington, U.S.A.: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 8-10 (non-continuous pagination).

\(^{10}\) Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān: Qism al-Muwahhidīn, p. 248.

Muslims under a revived Abbasid Caliphate and wage the jihād against the Crusaders. What thwarted this great plan was the stubborn refusal of the Almohads and the Khwarazmshāhs to accept Abbasid authority. In Sayyid’s opinion Šalāḥ al-Dīn invaded Ifrīqiya in order “to restore the Abbasid khutba to the pulpits of Qayrawān.”

Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s actual conduct towards other Muslim powers, particularly towards his own Zankid overlords, does not support Sayyids’s thesis that his actions were guided by the desire to create a great Pan-Islamic bloc. We have seen that Šalāḥ al-Dīn and Nūr al-Dīn were deeply suspicious of one another. In 1171/567 Šalāḥ al-Dīn chose to withdraw from Shawbak in order to avoid a meeting with the Zankid sultan who had expressed a desire to combine forces against the Crusaders. By 1174/570 Nūr al-Dīn was preparing to invade Egypt and oust Šalāḥ al-Dīn by force when death cut his plans short. Ehrenkreutz believes that for a long time Šalāḥ al-Dīn deliberately resisted pressure from Nūr al-Dīn to abolish the Fatimid Caliphate because “…removing the Fatimid caliphate meant that prestigious institution would no longer shield him from the pressure of his Syrian overlord.”

The history of Šalāḥ al-Dīn’s involvement in the Maghrib also evinces his pragmatism and flexibility with regard to ideological and religious matters. He readily agreed to an anti-Almohad alliance with the Banū Ghāniya under the pretext of restoring the Abbasid khutba to the western lands in the early 1180s when his deputy Qarāqūsh was at the height of his power. After the defeat of Qarāqūsh and ’Alī b. Ghāniya at the battle of Ḥamma in 1187/583 Šalāḥ al-Dīn

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 267.
16 Ehrenkreutz, Saladin, p. 85.
disavowed any responsibility for Qarāqūsh and Yūzāba and harshly denounced them in his subsequent letters to the Almohad court. His previous zeal for the Abbasids was conveniently forgotten as he lavished the Almohad anti-caliph with praise and sought the succor of the Almohad fleet. What is most striking is that he readily abandoned several hundred troops of the Ayyubid expeditionary force in Ifrīqiya, an act the cynicism of which has been remarked upon by Eddé.17

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s foreign policy was motivated not by ideological considerations but rather by self-interest. In this he was no different than his contemporaries. It is worth considering the following remarks by Ehrenkreutz: “The political, social, and economic climate prevailing in the Near East in the second half of the twelfth century was not conducive to seeking power through the exercise of tolerance, magnanimity, chivalry, or any altruistic behavior…Ideological or religious principles were readily compromised; the presence of the Crusaders primarily furnished an opportunity for expanding diplomatic intrigues, or for promoting selfish propaganda, rather than uniting the leaders in a sincere effort to defend Islam.”18

In Chapter Eight we made the argument that the original aim of the Ayyubid campaigns in the west was to establish control over the Trans-Saharan trade routes which passed through Zawīla and the Jarīd. We contended that it was not African slaves or the agricultural products of the oases that attracted Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s attention but rather gold from the mines of West Africa. Considerable evidence was presented to demonstrate that gold was travelling north along these routes in significant quantities during the period in question.

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17 Eddé, Saladin, p. 110.
18 Ehrenkreutz, Saladin, 8.
During the 1170s a series of planned expeditions resulted in the conquest of the Libyan Sahara from Siwa in the east to Ghadāmis in the west. There were two separate Ayyubid forces under the command of Sharaf al-Dīn Qarāqūsh and Ibrāhīm b. Qarātim. Qarāqūsh eventually overpowered Ibn Qarātim and incorporated the latter’s men into his own force. In the early years of the subsequent decade the Ayyubids turned their attention to Ifrīqiya proper where they inevitably came into direct conflict with the Almohads. Šalāḥ al-Dīn did not intervene in any of the internal quarrels between the Ayyubid amirs in the west. Nonetheless, he was clearly pleased by the general direction of the conquests which he supported with reinforcements from Egypt. Qarāqūsh reached the height of his power by 1185-6/581 when he was in control of all of Ifrīqiya save for the cities of Tunis and al-Mahdiya. His alliance with the Banū Ghāniya and a coalition of Sulaymī tribes was directed against the Almohads with the full approval of Šalāḥ al-Dīn and the Abbasid caliph. In 1187/583 the Almohads defeated Qarāqūsh and his allies at the battle of Ḥamma and reoccupied Ifrīqiya.

In the late 1180s the Almohads under Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr appeared to be stronger than ever. Meanwhile Šalāḥ al-Dīn was bearing the full brunt of the Third Crusade in Syria and he had neither the men nor the cash to spare for new campaigns on secondary fronts. It was at this point that the relation between Šalāḥ al-Dīn and Qarāqūsh came to an end. Šalāḥ al-Dīn entered into negotiations with the Almohads which resulted in the conclusion of peace between the two rulers. Šalāḥ al-Dīn denounced Qarāqūsh and his men as criminals and deserters and disavowed any responsibility for their actions. Since he was trying to secure the assistance of the Almohad fleet he probably regarded Qarāqūsh and the Ghuzz who remained in Ifrīqiya as expendable. Qarāqūsh and his men switched masters and entered the service of the Almohads who appreciated their military skills and richly rewarded them.
It is not possible to determine whether the Ayyubid administration in Cairo benefitted directly from the campaigns in Libya and Ifrāqiya. Qarāqūsh acquired large quantities of booty in his raids but the sources do not tell us if any of this loot was shipped back to Egypt. Any gold that was acquired from the conquered territories would have been used to pay the troops in Bilād al-Shām rather than being spent locally in Egypt. In conclusion, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s intervention in the west must be regarded as a failure. It had little effect on the fortunes of the Ayyubid state in Egypt. After the late 1180s we hear no more of Ayyubid involvement in the affairs of the lands lying west of Egypt.

13.2 The Legacy of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh in North Africa

We can discern several phases in the revolt of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh against the Almohads. From approximately the mid twelfth century A.D. until 1184/580 the Banū Ghāniya were confined to the Balearic Islands; engaging in piracy against both the Almohads and the Christian states. Qarāqūsh spent the decade of the 1170s subduing Cyrenaica and Fezzan. In the period from 1180/575 to 1185-6/581 he built up an empire in Tripolitania and Ifrāqiya and attained the height of his power. In 1184/580 Ṭalī b. Ghāniya landed in Bijāya and made himself master of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. Within a year all of his gains were lost to the Almohads and he was forced to take refuge in Ifrāqiya with his new ally Qarāqūsh. In 1187/583 the Almohads defeated the rebel allies and reestablished control over Ifrāqiya. Ṭalī b. Ghāniya died and was succeeded by his brother Yahyā who defeated Qarāqūsh and forced him to flee to Waddān in the Libyan Sahara. Between 1191/587 and 1203/600 Yahyā established an empire in Ifrāqiya that surpassed Qarāqūsh’s achievement in the previous decade. The Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir

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reconquered Ifrīqiya with great difficulty between 1204-5/601 and 1207/604. From 1207/604 until his death in the early 1230s Yaḥyā adopted a new strategy. He moved along the southern face of the Saharan Atlas between al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and Tripolitania and wreaked havoc across the entire length of the Almohad Empire with his raids during the course of which he managed to hold Sijilmāsa, Algiers, and Bijāya for a short time. By the time of his death the Almohad Empire was already in its terminal phase; having suffered defeat in Spain and the secession of Ifrīqiya under the Hafsids. We can see from the summary above that beginning in the 1180s and until 1230 Ifrīqiya was the main theater of a bitter conflict between the Banū Ghāniya (assisted by Qarāqūsh in the beginning) and the Almohads that frequently spilled over into al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ and on occasion reached Sijilmāsa in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. It remains for us to evaluate the impact that these events had on Ifrīqiya and the Almohad Empire in general.

For the Almohads the protracted war with the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh was a costly and time-consuming diversion from the Andalusian front. On two occasions the war in the east required the prolonged presence of the caliph himself in Ifrīqiya: from 1187/583 to 1188/584 during the reign of al-Manṣūr, and from 1204/601 to 1207/604 during the reign of al-Nāṣir. During al-Manṣūr’s absence several of his governors in the Maghrib and al-Andalus committed gross abuses of power and some even conspired against him. His brother al-Rashīd had secretly plotted against him with Alfonso VIII of Castile while his uncle Abū al-Rabī’ instigated a tribal revolt against him in central Morocco. The Portuguese and Castilians went on the offensive against the Muslims in al-Andalus during the same period.20 Al-Nāṣir returned to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā in 1207/604 to find that the governors of Fez and Meknes had abused their stations and

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earned the hatred of their subjects.\textsuperscript{21} It is clear that while the caliphs were in Ifrīqiya they were often unable to oversee affairs in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus due to the distance involved and their absence was frequently exploited by enemies both internal and external.

The invasions of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh also placed a heavy burden on the Almohad treasury due to the loss of income from the eastern provinces for many years and the cost of mounting major land and naval expeditions to retake the lost territory. According to al-Marrākushī in the time of the caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (just prior to the invasion of North Africa by the Banū Ghāniya) the Almohad treasury received an annual tribute of 150 mule-loads of gold from the province of Ifrīqiya alone excluding Bijāya and its districts.\textsuperscript{22} Nuwaywa concludes that from the arrival of ’Alī b. Ghāniya in the late 1180s until the appointment of Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ as governor by the caliph al-Nāṣir in 1207/604 the Almohads were deprived of this tribute; he believes that even when Almohad rule was restored briefly for a few years following al-Manṣūr’s expedition (1188/584) the Almohads were unable to collect more than ten percent of the previous tribute since not enough time had elapsed for Ifrīqiya to recover from the ravages that both sides had inflicted on the land.\textsuperscript{23}

There is no doubt that the wars between the Almohads, the Banū Ghāniya, and Qarāqūsh had a harmful effect on agriculture and trade in Ifrīqiya and adjacent areas. The Jarīd and the districts around Qābis and Qafṣa were among the most heavily affected regions since many battles and sieges took place there between the 1180s and the 1220s. In 1187/583 during the siege of Qafṣa

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 249.

\textsuperscript{22} Al-Marrākushī, \textit{Mu jih}, pp. 328-9.

\textsuperscript{23} Nuwaywa, “Athar Thawrat Bani Ghāniya,” p. 104. Nuwaywa says that according to al-Tijānī Al-Nāṣir spent 120 mule-loads of gold on his expedition to Ifrīqiya in 1204/601 but I can not find such a passage in al-Tijānī’s \textit{Riḥla} ; Ibid., pp. 104-5.
by al-Mansūr the Almohads chopped down every date-palm in the vicinity. In 1194/591 Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya destroyed all of the date-palm plantations around Qābis. The date was the primary crop in the Jarīd; it was one of the main sources of nutrition for the locals and the area’s chief export. Since the date-palm requires six to seven years from planting in order to bear its first fruit, the systematic cutting of trees by invading armies was a long-term disaster. Only a sustained period of stability and peace could have reversed its effects but such conditions did not prevail in the Jarīd during the decades-long conflict between the Banū Ghāniya and the Almohads.

Other regions were similarly laid waste. The mountain villages of Jabal Nafusa and Jabal Dummar that had been spared from the worst effects of the Hilālī invasion suffered grievously from the many campaigns that Qarāqūsh conducted there during the early 1180s. In 1184-5/580 Qarāqūsh and his men devastated the rich agricultural lands around Tunis, in particular the promontory of Bāshū (Cap Bon). At about the same time the Ayyubid commander Ibn Shakl established himself in eastern Tripolitania with several hundred Turks. The atrocities which they committed against the peasants in this area caused agricultural production to plummet. In 1208/605 Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya ravaged the rich province of Tilimsān; destroying its fields in order

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24 Al-Tijānī, Riḥla, p. 139.

25 Ibid., p. 106.


28 Ibid., pp. 167-8.
to force the capital city of the same name to surrender. In 1225/623 he devastated Bijāya and the fertile Mitīja plain in the eastern half of al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ.  

According to Mūsā the Almohad period saw a continuation and intensification of trends that began with the Hilālī migration of the mid eleventh century A.D. At the end of the eleventh century the invading Arab tribes had overrun the plateaus between the Tell Atlas and Saharan Atlas in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ causing the abandonment of the Qal’a and the decline of agriculture in this area. The transfer of the Hammadid capital to Bijāya had been accompanied by development of the fertile valleys of the coastal Tell Atlas. The Almohads devoted great effort to the revival and protection of agriculture in Ifrīqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. The caliph al-Nāṣir is said to have overseen the construction of irrigation works and the restoration of abandoned farmland in Ifrīqiya following his reconquest of that province in 1206/603. Under Almohad rule agriculture (mostly cereals) flourished in regions of the Tell Atlas such as Milyāna and Mitīja. On the other hand, the Almohads were unable to restore the interior steppe around the Qal’a and the semi-desert areas such as the Jarīd and Nafzāwa to their former prosperity, no doubt due at least in part to the destructive raids of Qarāqūsh and Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya. In Ifrīqiya the olive tree and the date palm were still preferred to wheat and barley fields as the mainstays of agriculture.

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31 Mūsā, Nashāṭ, pp. 192-4.
33 Mūsā, Nashāṭ, pp. 192-4.
Mūsā believes that agriculture in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā prior to the Almoravid period was limited to certain areas such as Tilimsān, Fez, and Sijilmāsa. Under the Almoravids and Almohads the region underwent a veritable agricultural revolution; the extent of the cultivated zone was greatly increased and a wide variety of new crops were introduced. Wheat and barley cultivation spread throughout al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā during this period. Under the Almohads the olive tree became widespread for the first time and olive oil replaced argan oil as the principal cooking oil. Al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā became the main supplier of food to al-Andalus. Mūsā concludes that al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā was the leading agricultural region in northwestern Africa during the twelfth century A.D. This was a time of increased agricultural production in the western Maghrib while Ifrīqiya underwent a relative decline due to the conflict with the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh.

Industry in twelfth and early thirteenth century century Ifrīqiya suffered as well. Prior to the invasion of Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya, Ifrīqiya’s exports to the Maghrib had consisted of quality cotton, wool and linen garments. After the invasion the region’s exports were reduced to low value goods such as fennec hides, coral, and salt. What caused the decline of Ifrīqiya’s considerable textile industry? Nuwaywa notes that the traditional areas of wool production in Qafṣa, Nafżāwa, and Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād were scenes of heavy fighting during the war with the Banū Ghāniya and he suggests that flocks of sheep were requisitioned by both sides in order to feed their armies, thereby destroying the local economy. Saffron, which was used to dye wool,

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34 Ibid., p. 194.
37 Ibid.
was no longer grown in Ifrīqiya. The devastation of cotton and flax growing areas such as the Zāb south of Constantine was another factor in this decline.38 The silk industry of Qābis was completely disrupted by the invasion; it was only revived during the Hafsid period.39 Presumably the mulberry trees in this area were chopped down by Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya’s men during the siege of Qābis. Nuwaywa keenly notes that when the caliph al-Manṣūr carried out the restoration of the Great Mosque of Qayrawān during his expedition to Ifrīqiya in 1187/583 he had its kisā (ceremonial drapes) sewn by weavers in eastern al-Andalus, an indication of how far the once famous local textile industry had declined in prestige.40 Another industry that disappeared during this period was the rose-water industry which was centered in Qafṣa.41 Ifrīqiya’s paper industry suffered due to a shortage of cotton and flax and it was unable to compete with rival producers in al-Andalus and the western Maghrib.42

Some of the overland trade routes in North Africa were affected by the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh. During the Almohad period the principal west-east route followed the Mediterranean coast between Oran (which was itself connected to Fez via Tilimsān and the Tāzā gap) and Tripoli. This route linked the most important cities of al-Maghrib al-Awsāṭ and Ifrīqiya such as Bijāya, Tunis, al-Mahdīya, and Qābis. It was the usual route followed by Almohad armies on their eastern campaigns. The land route between Tripoli and Alexandria was disrupted in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries due to the presence of Qarāqūsh, Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya, and their Arab allies. The Almohads could not guarantee the security of this route since even in the

38 Ibid.
42 Ibid., pp. 90-1, especially the chart on page 91.
best of times their authority never extended east of Tripoli. It appears that travelers to the eastern Islamic lands were compelled to make their voyage by sea during this period.⁴³

Almohad control of the Trans-Saharan routes was imperiled by the Banū Ghāniya and their allies as well. The Jarīd, which was the main departure-point for caravans heading to sub-Saharan Africa from Ifrīqiya, was under the control of first Qarāqūsh and later the Banū Ghāniya for most of the period between the 1180s and 1230. We have seen that ʿAlī b. Ghāniya conquered Bijāya in 1184/580 with the intent of controlling the Trans-Saharan traffic that reached the port via Tadmakka and Wargla though his success was short-lived as the Almohads retook Bijāya a year later. The most serious threat to the Trans-Saharan trade was posed by Yahyā b. Ghāniya in the period beginning with his expulsion from Ifrīqiya by the governor Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ in 1207/605 and ending with Yaḥyā’s death in approximately 1233/631. During these years Yaḥyā adopted a new and audacious strategy for confronting the Almohads; rather than attempting to carve out an independent principality in Ifrīqiya and defend it from the inevitable counterattacks he withdrew to the northern fringe of the Sahara and waged a guerrilla war along the entire length of the vulnerable southern flank of the Almohad Empire from Sijilmāsa in the west to the Jarīd and Tripoli in the east. He was in a position to raid the northern termini of the Trans-Saharan trade routes and deny their use to the Almohads.

Guichard and his colleagues have undertaken a valuable study of the Almohad coinage and their findings lend support to the notion that the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh succeeded at least temporarily in depriving the Almohads of access to sub-Saharan African gold.⁴⁴ Whereas the

⁴³ Mūsā, Nashāṭ, pp. 306-11.
Almoravids employed a gold standard minting large quantities of gold dinars and relatively few silver dirhāms the Almohad period was characterized by initial bimetallism followed by what Guichard describes as “un quasi monometallisme argent” during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.\(^{45}\)

Through analysis of Almoravid and Almohad gold dinars Benhsain-Mesmoudi has estimated the theoretical weight of gold that was minted per year by rulers from the two dynasties.\(^{46}\) During the Almoravid period an average of 1500 kilograms of gold was minted annually with a highest average of 2000 kilograms per year during the reign of the sultan Tashfīn b. ‘Alī (1142/537 – 1146/540) even as the Almoravid state was on the verge of collapse. Under the first Almohad caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmin (1130/524 – 1163/558) an average of 629 kilograms of gold was minted each year. Under the succeeding caliphs there was a steady decline: Yūsuf I (1163/558 – 1184/580) minted an average of 220 kilograms per year, Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (1184/580 – 1199/595) minted 84.3 kilograms per year, al-Nāṣir (1199/595 – 1214/611) minted 77 kilograms annually, Yūsuf II al-Mustanṣir (1214/611 – 1224/620) minted 63 kilograms per year, and ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Makhlūʿ (1224/620-21) did not issue any dinars. Under Yahyā al-Muʿtaṣim (1224/621 – 1227/624) an average of 180 kilograms was minted per year and this figure increased gradually until it reached a height of 569 kilograms per year under al-Murtaḍā (1242/640 - 1248/646).\(^{47}\)

Guichard notes that it was between the years 1184/580 and 1227/625 that the least amount of gold was minted and the ratio of gold to silver coinage overwhelmingly favored the latter leading

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 607.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., pp. 608-9.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., pp. 608-9, chart on pg. 615.
him to speak of a near complete silver monometalism during these years. This period corresponds almost exactly to the duration of the war in North Africa between the Banū Ghāniya and their allies against the Almohad Empire. It should be noted, however, that there appears to be little correlation between the amount of gold in supply and the political and military strength of the dynasty. The caliphates of Yūsuf I, Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr, and al-Nāṣir (at least until the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212/609) marked the apogee of the Almohad state and the age of its greatest victories despite the dearth of gold dinars from their mints. It was the last Almoravid and Almohad rulers who struck the most gold coins, even as their respective empires were losing territory and hastening towards the final collapse.

While rejecting the traditional view of the Hilālī migration as an unmitigated catastrophe for civilization in North Africa, Thiry, and to a lesser extent Kabra, blame Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya for the “decline” of Ifrīqiya. They correctly take to task an earlier generation of French historians including Gautier and Marçais whose remarks on the Banū Hilāl were colored by a profound anti-Arab and anti-nomad bias. Thiry notes that while Ibn Khaldūn’s likening of the Banū Hilāl to a “swarm of locusts” is well-known to all students of medieval North African history, few have noticed his equally severe judgement of the seventh century conquest-era Berber princess known as “al-Kāhina” and the Berber Banū Ghāniya. Indeed Ibn Khaldūn

48 Ibid., p. 610.
49 We recall that even the great Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ruled during an historic gold shortage.
devotes more space to the atrocities of the Banū Ghāniya than to those of the Hilālī and Sulaymī Arabs.\textsuperscript{53}

It is unfortunate that Thiry’s evaluation of the legacy of the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh is not characterized by the same critical spirit and levelheadedness that is evident in his treatment of the Hilālī migration. In his view the revolt of the Banū Ghāniya “was one of the most painful crises that North Africa experienced.”\textsuperscript{54} He says that Qarāqūsh and Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya recruited “all the thieves, brigands and murderers that were to be found in Ifrīqiya” and he even accuses them of turning their Arab allies into pillagers!\textsuperscript{55} He concludes by attributing the decline of Ifrīqiya to the “ambition and greed of one man (Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya).”\textsuperscript{56} It would seem that Thiry has defended the Banū Hilāl from the exaggerated accusations of historians who viewed them as nothing more than a destructive barbarian horde only to find new scapegoats in the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh.

It is impossible to treat the Hilālī migration of the mid eleventh century and the rebellion of the Banū Ghāniya in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century as if they were two separate events with no chain of continuity between them as Thiry has done. By the twelfth century the various tribes of the Banū Sulaym and Banū Hilāl were spread across North Africa between Cyrenaica and Tilimsān. Consequently they played a crucial role in all of the struggles that engulfed this region during the Almohad period. Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh relied heavily upon Arab allies in all of their campaigns. In fact, it appears that apart from a small core of

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Thiry, \textit{Sahara}, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 274-75.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 277.
Almoravid (Massūfā and Lamtūna) troops from Majorca in the case of the former and Ayyubid (Turkic and Kurdish) troops in the case of the latter, the majority of their followers were Hilālī and Sulaymī Arabs. Since the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym were divided into many rival tribes and sub-tribes that lacked overall unity, it followed that the Almohads were always able to find allies among the rivals of the tribes that supported the Banū Ghāniya. The Almohad policy of forced migration (tahjīr) of Arab tribes to al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus which was adopted by ʿAbd al-Muʾmin and his successors in response to Arab rebellions in Ifrīqiyya led to the settlement of Hilālī tribes in these western provinces for the first time. Thus the wars between the Banū Ghāniya and the Almohads facilitated the expansion of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym into new territories and ensured their continuing military importance to the North African dynasties.

Since the major chroniclers upon whose works we depend such as Ibn Ṭadhārī, al-Marrākushī, Ibn Khaldūn, and Ibn Qalба and they had unfavorable views of the Banū Ghāniya, it is easy for modern scholars to fall into the trap of blaming the Banū Ghāniya and Qarāqūsh for every real or imagined ill that befell Ifrīqiyya during the thirteenth century. There is no evidence, however, that the Almohads were any less ruthless or destructive than their opponents. We have already mentioned how al-Manṣūr chopped down all of the date-palms around Qafṣa during his siege of that city. The siege of Almoravid Marrakech by ʿAbd al-Muʾmin in 1147/541 was at least as brutal as the worst atrocities attributed to the Banū Ghāniya or the Banū Hilāl. According to the pro-Almohad author of the Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya 120,000 people died of starvation during the nine month siege and cases of cannibalism were

57 Al-Tijānī, Ṭibla, p. 139.
reported. When the Almohads captured the city they slaughtered over 70,000 people in three days and executed all Almoravids of rank who fell into their hands. Nuwaywa notes that such a savage and pitiless act must have had an effect on the Banū Ghāniya who as members of the Almoravid elite knew that they could expect no mercy from such a foe and this may explain the tenacity with which they resisted the Almohads.

We have already seen that the issue of civilizational “decline” in North Africa is problematic with regard to the Hilālī migration; this is no less the case in relation to the invasion of Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya. The conflict between the Banū Ghāniya, Qarāqūsh, and the Almohads was a long and bitter one and neither side was inclined to show mercy to the tribes and towns that stood in its path. Scenes of repeated clashes such as the Jarīd must have suffered terribly and they were set back a generation or more by the destruction of crops, the chopping of trees, the ruin of irrigation works, and the massacres of able-bodied men. But there is little evidence that Ifrīqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsat as a whole experienced a demographic, economic, and cultural decline far below the levels that they had known prior to the arrival of Qarāqūsh and ʿAlī b. Ghāniya.

Whereas the period of the Hilālī migration saw the sudden decline and near abandonment of Qayrawān and Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād, the political, economic, and cultural capitals of Ifrīqiya and the central Maghrib respectively, neither Qarāqūsh nor the Banū Ghāniya have been associated with the long-term decline of any major cities. It is true that Ibn Khaldūn says in a passage from the Kitāb al-ʿIbar that Tilimsān owed its status as the preeminent city in [the western half of] al-

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58 Ḥulal, pp. 137-42.
59 Ibid.
Maghrib al-Awsaṭ to the destruction of neighboring Tāhart and Arshkūl (Rachgoun, a port in western Algeria) by Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya. However, it would appear that he greatly exaggerated the importance of the latter two cities at this time.⁶¹ It seems that Tilimsān was already the largest and most important city in the region well before the arrival of the Banū Ghāniya since it served as a major provincial capital on a par with Tunis and Bijāya throughout the Almohad period. Indeed Tilimsān receives far more mention in sources from the twelfth century than either Tāhart or Arshkūl. Furthermore, it well known that the decline of Tāhart dates back to its destruction at the hands of the Fatimids in 909/297 and the fall of the Rustamid imāms under whose rule Tāhart had flourished.

Some scholars have portrayed Qarāqūsh and the amirs of the Banū Ghāniya as adventurers and bandit princes whose principal motivation was plunder as well as revenge in the case of the latter.⁶² We have already discussed at length the motivations of Qarāqūsh and we have demonstrated that throughout the 1170s and 1180s he acted not as an independent warlord but rather as an Ayyubid commander who was charged with carrying out the expansionist policy of his masters al-Malik al-Muẓaffar and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in Libya and Ifrīqiya. His aim was to establish an Ayyubid vassal state in Ifrīqiya, a goal that was realized for a few years from 1180/575 until his defeat by al-Manṣūr in 1187/583. Mouton believes that Libya and Ifrīqiya formed a regular Ayyubid province during the 1170s and 1180s with Qarāqūsh as its wālī or governor.⁶³

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⁶² For example ʿInān says that the Banū Ghāniya were transformed into “a band of adventurers.” Muʿnis says that Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya and his men became “nothing more than a band of thieves,” their sole motivations were “hatred and revenge,” and he views their revolt as a colossal waste of lives and resources which only benefitted the Christian kingdoms of al-Andalus as they faced a weakened and distracted Almohad Empire. ʿInān, Aṣr al-Muwahḥidīn, vol. 2, pp. 267-9; Muʿnis, Maʿālim, p. 231.

⁶³ Mouton, Conquête, p. 63.
The Banū Ghāniya were always motivated by the desire to expand out of Majorca and create a viable state. Thiry’s accusations that the Banū Ghāniya were inveterate raiders and pillagers implies that they had neither the wish nor the ability to actually rule the lands that they invaded but we find that this was not the case. We have seen that they managed to rule over the Balearic Islands for slightly more than half a century. Under their rule these tiny islands came to constitute a formidable naval and commercial power in the western Mediterranean; a thorn in the side of the Almohads and a competitor to the Genoese and Pisans. The Banū Ghāniya seem to have been popular with the inhabitants of Majorca who rose up en masse on their behalf to expel an Almohad invasion force in 1185/581 while ʿAlī b. Ghāniya was in North Africa with most of his troops and ships.64

When ʿAlī b. Ghāniya landed in Bijāya in 1184/580 he had considerable support from certain sections of the population and he managed to take the city without resistance.65 He attempted to rule al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ but he was defeated and forced to withdraw eastward one year later in the face of an Almohad counterattack. It is noteworthy that after every setback ʿAlī and Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya had no difficulty recruiting new armies from among the Berber and Arab tribes in Ifrīqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ. If we look beyond the repeated condemnations of the Banū Ghāniya by the pro-Almohad chroniclers it is obvious that the Banū Ghāniya never lacked supporters in North Africa for how else could they have maintained a decades long rebellion against the Almohads with only limited reinforcements from overseas in the beginning and none at all after the fall of Majorca in 1203/599?

64 Al-Marrākushī, Muʾjib, pp. 351-2; Ibn ʿIdhārī, Bayān, al-Qism al-Muwahhīdī, p. 185.

Like the Hafsids who came after them both Qarāqūsh and Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya attempted to establish states in Ifrīqiya and they both briefly succeeded in establishing short-lived states there between 1180/575 and 1187/583 and from 1191/587 to 1206/402 respectively. It was the success of Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya in particular which convinced the caliph al-Nāṣir that the only long-term solution to the threats on his distant eastern frontier was the establishment of a trusted family of viceroys in Tunis who would rule independently over Ifrīqiya in all but name and defend it from the Banū Ghāniya while still recognizing Almohad authority. His choice fell upon the loyal and capable Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ. It was the sheer tenacity of the Banū Ghāniya and the seriousness of the threat that they posed which forced al-Nāṣir to accept the de facto partition of his empire. The caliphs could not afford to absent themselves from Marrakech and al-Andalus every time a rebellion broke out in distant Ifrīqiya. The long war with Qarāqūsh and the Banū Ghāniya spelled the end of the great Almohad project to unify the three regions of northwestern Africa: al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā, al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ, and Ifrīqiya, under one rule and it indirectly paved the way for the rise of the Hafsids in the latter province.

The foundation for the rise of an independent Hafsid state in Ifrīqiya was laid with the appointment of Abū Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥafṣ as viceroy of Tunis in 1207/603. In 1229/627 the separation of Ifrīqiya from the empire became official with the removal of the Almohad caliphs’ names from the Friday sermon by the Hafsid governor Abū Zakarīyā Yaḥyā. In 1236-7/634 Abū Zakarīyā inserted his own name in the sermon though merely as amir. His successor al-Mutanṣir took the title of caliph in 1253/650. In 1235/633 the Zayyanids [Banū Ṭabd al-Wād], a dynasty of Zanātī stock whose members had been entrusted with the governorship of Tilimsān by the Almohads, established an independent state in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ under their chief
Yaghmurāsan (1235/633 – 1283/681). Finally, in 1269/668 the Banū Marīn put an end to the Almohad Caliphate and established themselves as rulers over al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā.

In the 1250s one of Qarāqūsh’s sons revolted against the Hafsids and fled to Waddān in the Sahara where he attempted to establish an independent principality in imitation of his father. His raids on the oases brought about the intervention of the formidable king of Kanem, Dūnama Dībalāmi, who invaded Waddān and executed Qarāqūsh’s son. This was no isolated raid as Dūnama Dībalāmī annexed Waddān and other oases in Fezzan placing them under the rule of Kanemī vassals. The domination of the Libyan oases by the kings of Kanem appears to have continued until well into the fourteenth century. Thanks to the stability which the Kanemī presence ensured, trade flourished between Egypt and West Africa (the Niger Valley) via the Libyan oases during this period.\(^\text{66}\)

In the second half of the twelfth century the Almohads succeeded in uniting the central and western Maghribibs along with Ifrīqiya under a single state, an achievement that had eluded even the Fatimids as they never controlled al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā in its entirety. The Almohads also inherited the role of their Almoravid predecessors in al-Andalus as the only Muslim power that stood a chance of stemming the tide of the Reconquista. In the end the Almohad imperial project foundered because the caliphs were unable to deal effectively with simultaneous challenges on far-flung frontiers. Ifrīqiya was the first province to slip away because it was the most distant from the empire’s core in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā and al-Andalus. Ifrīqiya was plagued by Arab revolts, an Ayyubid invasion under Qarāqūsh, and repeated invasions by the Banū Ghāniya who seemed to reemerge whenever the caliph was not present in Tunis.

\(^{66}\) Al-Tijānī, Ribla, p. 111; Thiry, Sahara, pp. 279-91.
The Almohads dealt with their problems in the same manner as the declining Abbasids by permitting the devolution of power to families of hereditary governors who were independent in all but name. Qarāqūsh and Yaḥyā b. Ghāniya were precursors to the Hafsids as both of these men had established independent principalities of their own in Ifrīqiya (1180/575 - 1187/583, 1191/587 - 1206/402 respectively). Al-Nāṣir recognized the inevitable when he installed the Hafsids in Tunis as viceroys with unlimited power. It was better to leave Ifrīqiya in the hands of the Banū Ḥafṣ, a noble Maṣmūda family with a long record of service to the Almohad cause, than to watch it fall into the hands of the Banū Ghāniya or Qarāqūsh for a third time. The same process was repeated in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ where power devolved into the hands of the Banū Zayyān. In the end three states arose out of the debris of the Almohad Empire in North Africa: the Hafsid in Ifrīqiya, the Zayyanid in al-Maghrib al-Awsaṭ, and the Marinid in al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā. The vacuum that was created in the Libyan Sahara by Qarāqūsh’s conquest of the kingdom of the Banū al-Khaṭṭāb in Fezzan, and the subsequent demise of his own short-lived Saharan empire, was filled by the northward expansion of Kanem into the Libyan oases.
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Tables

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Muḥammad b. Ghāniya: 1126/520 – 1155/550?


ʿAlī: 1184/580 – 1187/583

Yaḥyā (brother of ʿAlī): 1188/584 – 1233/631 or 1235/633
2. *Almohad Caliphs*

Ibn Tūmart (al-Mahdī): d. 1130/524

‘Abd al-Muʿmin (the first caliph): 1130/524 – 1163/558

Yūsuf I (also known as Abū Yaʿqūb): 1163/558 – 1184/580

Yaʿqūb “al-Manṣūr” (also known as Abū Yūsuf): 1184/580 – 1199/595

Muḥammad “al-Nāṣir”: 1199/595 – 1214/611

Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf II “al-Mustanṣir”: 1214/611 – 1224/620

‘Abd al-Wāḥid I “al-Makhlūʾ”: 1224/620 – 1224/621

Abū Muḥammad Abi al-ʿUqdah “al-ʿĀdil”: 1224/621 – 1227/624

Yaḥyā “al-Muʿtaṣīm”: 1227/624 – 1229/626

Abū al-ʿUlā Idrīs “al-Maʿmūn”: 1229/626 – 1232/630

Abū Muḥammad Abū al-ʿUlā Idrīs II “al-Rāshid”: 1232/630 – 1242/640

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