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The story of the Almohads in the Kingdom of Fez and of Morocco

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In 1147, the first Almohad *imâm*-caliph, Abd al-Mu'min, captured Marrakech, bringing an end to the reign of the Sanhâja, after a long struggle lasting seven years. The following year, in Mâssa, a ribât situated to the south of Marrakech, a serious uprising broke out led by Ibn Hûd al-Mâssî. According to the Almohad chronicles, people fleeing from different regions flocked together under his banner. He was proclaimed *mahdî* by the inhabitants of Sijilmâssa and of Dara, the Dukkâla, the Regraga, the Huwwâra and the Tâmesna. The Caliph had great trouble in putting down this rebellion. Often regarded as the « recognition » (*itirâf*) of Almohad power, in fact it was a bloody purge, which also involved the Almohad hierarchy, responsible for « pacifying » the different regions of the Empire : the Almohad chronicler, al-Baydhaq, quotes a figure of 32,780 executions! In spite of occasional small victories, Ibn Hûd al-Mâssî was finally defeated and killed in 1149. Only Marrakech and Fez did not take part in what Almohad chroniclers of this period described as a *ridda*, so recalling the Wars of Apostasy against rebel Arab tribes that broke out on the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Why was Fez, one of the great historic capitals of Morocco, if not the greatest, not rewarded for its loyalty? In the end, the Almohads chose Marrakech, an Almoravid foundation, as their capital and themselves founded Ribât al-Fath, the town that would later become Rabat. Their fate is therefore linked to Fez's two main rivals, Marrakech in the Mediaeval and Early Modern period, and Rabat the present-day capital. An analysis of the origin of the Almohads and the history of their Empire will perhaps shed light on why they made these choices.

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The fight against the Almoravids

The Almohad movement first appeared in the 1120s in the Atlas Mountains. Its founder, Ibn Tûmart (died 1130), is said to have returned from a journey to the Orient, where he had met the great thinkers of that era. He gathered his faithful around him, proposing the reform of morals and opposition to the government of the Almoravid Emirs. He accused the Almoravids of betraying the Revelation and of being « anthropomorphists » (*mujassimûn*) because of their literal interpretation of the Koranic verses. Ibn Tûmart's message gathered even greater support because the Almoravids were weakened by various military setbacks in the Iberian Peninsular after clashes with the Christian Kingdoms in the North. In 1118 for example the Aragonese took Zaragoza and two years later in Cutanda inflicted a heavy defeat on the Almoravid armies that were trying to recapture the town. At the same time the people of Cordoba rose up against the abuses being committed by the Almoravid troops. When at the end of the eleventh century the Almoravids had seized the territories ruled by the Taifa kingdoms, their success had been based on two main pillars, *jihâd* and economic stability. The first was now being undermined by these military defeats, while the second was being jeopardized by the raising of additional taxes and levies, ordered by Alî b. Yûsuf b. Tashfin (r. 1106-1143) to pay for the war effort.

It was not until 1147 that the Almohads finally seized Marrakech, the southern capital of an Emirate that stretched from the Sahara right up to the gates of Toledo in the Iberian Peninsular. The seizure of power by the Almohads and their victory over the Almoravid Dynasty was made more difficult by the fact that the Almoravid leaders had many allies within Maghreb and al-Andalus society. They were supported in particular by the oulemas and the *fuqahâ'* (experts in jurisprudence) from the Maliki School who helped them govern by means of *fatwas* that conferred

religious legitimacy on the decisions taken by the Emirs. Indeed, under the Almoravids, the Maliki School became the Emirate's official school of Islamic Law. They were also legalists. Yûsuf b. Tashfîn (d. 1106) and his successors recognized the authority of the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, whose name was mentioned in the Friday sermon and on their *dînâr*-s, which circulated in large numbers in the Maghreb, the Iberian Peninsular and even in Europe. Saharans, nomads and camel-drivers, they had founded a new capital, Mûr Yâkûsh ou Amûr Yâkûsh, « City of God » (Marrakech), in the Atlantic plain, with a stone castle (*qasr al-hajar*).

During their long years of struggle against the Almoravids (1124-1147), the partisans of Ibn Tûmart (died 1130) and his successor, Abd al-Mu'min (died 1163), forged an ideology that was radically opposed to that of their predecessors. In contrast to the legalism of the Almoravids, they emphasized the « impeccable » (*masûm*) character of the founder of their movement, Ibn Tûmart, who was hailed as a Mahdî (Messiah). Likewise, instead of the theoretical submission of the Almoravid Emirate to the Abbasid Caliph, they proposed their own Caliphate, claiming for themselves the leadership of the community of believers and in this way contesting the legitimacy of the other two supreme leaders of the time, the Fatimid *imâm* of Cairo (972-1171) and the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad (750-1258). Abd al-Mu'min also proclaimed himself *'imâm*-caliph and « Prince of the Believers » (*amîr al-mu'minîn*), while the Almoravids had asked their sovereign in Baghdad for his approval of the more modest title of « Prince of the Muslims » (*amîr al-muslimîn*), which they had created for themselves. Finally, in contrast to the promotion of the Maliki School of Law as a guarantee of the Almoravid Dynasty, the Almohads opposed the sentencing and prohibition of Malikism, ordering them to publicly repent for their collection of *fatwa*-s. From then on, the oulemas and the *fuqahâ'*, accused of having moved away from the Quran and the Sunna in the exercise of justice and of « servile imitation » of those they followed (*taqlîd*), were no longer considered the guardians and interpreters of Divine Law. Only the Caliph-*imâm*, inspired by God and by the example of the « impeccable *imâm*, the acknowledged Mahdî », was henceforth empowered to dictate the law according to the view of the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. The Almohad rulers demanded for example that someone that was condemned to death could not be executed without them first giving their approval, even in the case of a murder with witnesses and confessions, or in a case of apostasy, even though all the law schools in that period agreed on the penalty to be applied for these two « crimes ».

The Almohads broke with almost all the practices of their predecessors: in the expansion phase, the Almohads moved first towards the Central Maghreb (today Algeria) which had never been controlled by the Almoravids, rather than towards al-Andalus. Then they coined some square dirhams and introduced the square motif on the inside of the dinars instead of the concentric circles; they also reformed the writing system and from then on used italics instead of the Kufic script, which had up until then been the most frequent on coins and epigraphic inscriptions. They installed a centralized administration for their Empire instead of the system of delegation of power (*niyâba*) used by the Almoravid Emirs. Similarly the *jihad*, which at the beginning of the 12th century, was waged every year by the provincial governors against the Christian Kingdoms in the north of the Iberian Peninsular became the prerogative of the Almohad Caliph-*imâm*, who had to lead the *jihad* in person. This resulted in a sharp increase in the number of ambassadors and truces with the principalities on the northern side of the Mediterranean. The monarch could not be at various different battlefronts at the same time and had to ensure peace on one front before starting an attack on another. The result was that while for example in 1120 during the Almoravid period, there was only one treaty in force with the Iberian kingdoms, many were signed during the Almohad times.

As we can see, the Almohads built an Empire that in many ways was strikingly different from that ruled by the Emirate of the Almoravids, and yet they kept Marrakech as their capital. Instead of razing the Almoravid capital to the ground, founding a new one or establishing themselves in Fez, a city that had remained loyal to them, the first two Almohad Caliphs decided to settle in the « castle of stone » that Yûsuf b. Tashfîn had ordered to be built and of which he was very proud. In fact the Almohads spent very little time there as they were always on the move with

their armies and had other cities available to them. Their decision to retain Marrakech as their capital can therefore be seen as a symbol of their victory. They were constructing their Empire on top of the last vestiges of the Dynasty they had overthrown and building their palaces and the foundations of their administration on the corpses of the vanquished. Establishing their base in Marrakech also enabled them to control the southern regions of what is today Morocco, where the traditional supporters of the Almoravids lived out a nomadic existence not far from the Atlas Mountains and Tinmâl, the birthplace of the Almohad movement.

In the 1180s, the Caliph Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf (1163-1184) decided to build a new palace complex to the south of the Almoravid city walls; But his death in al-Andalus in 1184 prevented him from seeing it to completion. It was his son al-Mansûr (1184-1199) who brought the works to a successful conclusion. Pro-Almohad sources describe this as a new city, Tamrâkusht, a name that harked back to the original Almoravid « Land of God » (albeit slightly modified). Tamrâkusht was divided into two separate parts: the first reserved for State departments, with the barracks of the Imperial Guard and the Christian mercenaries, the monumental granaries for storing wheat and barley, stables that were big enough to house hundreds of horses and mules, a depot run by the Treasury with adjacent financial services, hostelries for the merchants, a *qaysâriyya*, a large Mosque, a necropolis, two large esplanades for ceremonies, a Council chamber, a banqueting hall, a school for the sons of the Caliph and the future governing elite of the Empire, and a library that contained thirty thousand books or more. The other part of the palace was reserved exclusively for the Caliph, his wives, young children and slaves. It was a tangled array of courtyards, ponds, gardens and towers overlooking the city, from which one could also admire the landscape of the gardens. Only the Caliph could use the vaulted corridor that linked his residence with the Palace mosque.

Seville, Almohad capital of al-Andalus

For half a century, Seville was the Almohad capital of al-Andalus, which in turn was part of a unified Empire. This unification was the work of the first Sultans Abd al-Mu'min, Yûsuf I, al-Mansûr (r. 1184-1199) and al-Nâsir (r. 1199-1214). Unification of the Empire was a proactive policy that covered all fields: ideological, administrative, political, artistic and cultural. It was also linked to political centralization. The Almohad *imâm*-caliph was the holder of all powers: he was the interpreter of the Law, the Legislator and the guide enlightened by God. The people of the Empire were classified into a hierarchical pyramid of categories in an organic vision of society with the sovereign at the head. This conception of power centred on the *Imâm*-Caliph, as the « impeccable » representative of God on Earth developed through the combination « shepherd » (*raî*) / flock of the faithful (*riâyâ*), which left little space for any provincial autonomy or specific identity.

This was a new situation for al-Andalus, which since the 8th century had been used to playing the leading role in the Muslim West. Now for only the second time in its history, al-Andalus became a province dependant on the Maghreb (the first time was immediately after the conquest in the 8th century, when Cordoba was considered subject to the governorship of Kairouan and through it to the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus). Now in the 11th-13th centuries this was the first time that the dominant power in the region had emerged from the very heart of the Maghreb. If the Almoravid domination of the Maghreb only extended as far as its western end (today's Morocco), the Almohad Empire by contrast stretched from the Western Maghreb first towards the Central Maghreb and Ifrîqiya, and north towards al-Andalus. In both the Maghreb and al-Andalus, the Almohad occupation had been violent as few regions had spontaneously accepted their new rulers. A few enclaves on the Algarve were an exception, as to some extent they had been prepared by the revolt inspired by the religious principles of the mystic Ibn Qasî: in this way the Algarve and the centre of al-Andalus recognized the new masters of the Maghreb between 1144 and 1146. The alliance between the followers of Ibn Qasî and the Almohads swollen by the garrisons of the towns they had captured, marched on Seville, which they besieged by land and sea. The city fell on Wednesday 12 *shabân* 541/17 January 1147. The Almohad troops also took Marrakech that same year after similar violent combats.

In the expedition launched against Bougie, Abd al-Mu'min took two important measures that would upset those in favour of a collegiate leadership of the Empire: first he ordered that his eldest son, who like all his sons bore the honorary title of *sayyid*, be appointed as the heir apparent, immediately afterwards he appointed all his younger sons governors of the most important provinces in his Empire, at the expense of the *shaykh*-s of the tribes that had helped found the Almohad movement. In order to conciliate these tribes, he reduced what appeared to be a personalization of the regime and the family monopoly over its important positions by associating the son of one of the *shaykh*-s to each of the provincial governors. These new officials received the title of *hâfiz*. In order to reinforce the collaboration between the descendants of the Caliph and the tribal hierarchy, *sayyid*-s and *hâfiz*-s were trained together in Almohad administration, ideology and dogma. These different measures, and in particular the first, caused the brothers of the Mahdî Ibn Tûmart to leave Fez where they had been under house arrest after an earlier plot against Abd al-Mu'min. They won Marrakech with the hope of inspiring a generalized revolt against the Caliph. The failure of their rebellion and their subsequent death consecrated the victory of Abd al-Mu'min and of the dynastic principle.

In addition, faced with the refusal of some regions in the Iberian Peninsula to accept the new regime and by the pressure being exerted by the Christian kingdoms, the *sayyid* Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf b. Abd al-Mu'min, who was at the head of the armed intervention in al-Andalus appealed to his father for help. At that time (*rabî'î* 555/March-April 1160) his father Abd al-Mu'min was in Constantine after a victorious campaign in Ifrîqiya. He informed his son that he was to journey to al-Andalus, ordering that the Strait of Gibraltar be prepared accordingly. He stayed in Gibraltar for two months, during which time he confirmed his son the *sayyid* Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf as the Governor of Seville, leaving him various Almohad *shaykh*-s and the vizier Ibn Ayya as counsellors. He maintained his other son the *sayyid* Abû Saïd Uthmân in Granada and appointed the great *shaykh* 'Umar Intî, a Berber from the Hintâta tribe, as Governor of Cordoba. On his return to Marrakech, he dispatched his troops under the command of another great Almohad *shaykh*, Yûsuf b. Sulaymân from the Council of the Fifty, to govern Carmona, which had been recovered by the Almohads in late 1161 or early 1162. He also sent *masmûda* tribal contingents and Arabs to reinforce the Almohad garrisons of al-Andalus. After a religious visit to the tomb of the Mahdî in Tinmâl, Abd al-Mu'min fell ill and later died on 6 or 8 *jumâda* II 558/12 or 14 May 1163.

The conquest had no immediate definitive effects anywhere in al-Andalus. The Christian Kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula took advantage of the fall of the Almoravids and the subsequent period of transition — the second Taïfas — for military intervention in al-Andalus. Yahiâ b. Ghâniya in Cordoba was continually beleaguered by Alfonso VII of Castile-León who also took Úbeda and Baeza. In the end he entered the ancient Umayyad capital in 1147 and created a corridor which thanks to various staging posts (such as Baeza and Úbeda) reached as far as Almeria, conquered that same year and held for a further decade. The death of Alfonso VII in 1157 led to a brief pause in Castilian attacks during the short reign of Sancho III, but the attempts at expansion started anew in the reign of his successor Alfonso VIII, from 1158 and above all from 1169-1170, when he, by then a grown man, personally assumed the reins of power.

In al-Andalus and in the Maghreb, the Almohads largely maintained the administrative divisions instituted by the Almoravids. The proclamation of the hereditary nature of the Caliphate led to detailed reorganization: in order to compensate their local supporters, the Almohads initially maintained the Algarve as an independent governorate, but in 1157-1158 it was attached to the Province of Seville. The *qâdi* of Seville now represented the people of the Algarve in the eyes of the Caliph. Under the Caliphate of Yûsuf (1163-1184), the Almohads separated the two provinces again, although there was still only one governor for the two regions. Initially the region of Malaga was attached to the governorates of Ceuta and of Granada, but later became independent during the reign of Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf I (1163-1184). The family-controlled system established by Abd al-Mu'min by which the most important governorship posts were awarded to his descendants (who were all given the title *sayyid*) remained in place until the early 1220s.

The choice of Seville as the capital only implied that the city was the habitual residence of the Caliphs and the seat of the central administration of al-Andalus. In fact during the first period of the Almohad Empire, while the Caliphs travelled the Empire from one battlefield to the next, the city served as a place for their armies to regroup before once again launching themselves into *jihâd*. Other logistical solutions were applied on occasions such as in the expedition launched by al-Mansûr against Silves (Algarve), in which although the armies left from Cordoba, the provisions were dispatched from Seville. On his return from this campaign, the Caliph installed himself in Seville. During the reigns of the first Almohad Caliphs, the idea of a capital city was essentially administrative. Tinmâl, the place where the Mahdî Ibn Tûmart was buried and where a *mushaf* belonging to Uthmân b. Affân is conserved, was the symbolic capital of the regime, while the Caliph's court followed the incessant peregrinations of the rulers as they strode across the Empire, without staying anywhere for long.

Thanks to the breadth of their conquests, the Almohads aspired to all the emblems of classical Islamic sovereignty and strongly insisted on all aspects of protocol and of court ceremony. This could be seen both in the narrative references and in the staging of the sermons of the great preachers and of the apologetic poems recited by the men of letters, who had become members of the Court. These ceremonies were repeated all over the Empire, wherever the Almohad *imâm*-Caliph travelled with his royal tent (*afragh*) and they helped unify all the different territories. The Almohads also set about building unity through architecture and wall decorations. The great mosques they built in Marrakech, Rabat, Tlemcen and Seville were all adorned with the same diamond-shape motifs. They can also be found on the façades of all the Almohad minarets, including the Giralda in Seville, which in this way became one of the jewels of the Empire and a showcase for Almohad art. The political, ideological and cultural programme of the Almohads did not stop with the geographical unification of the Empire, it also sought a unified rereading of the history of Western Islam.

Cordoba, the Arabs and the Umayyad heritage

Marrakech was at the head of the Empire throughout the entire Almohad period (1147 - 1269). The Almohads had other capitals, but Fez was not one of them, despite its illustrious Idrissid heritage. In al-Andalus, as mentioned earlier, the Almohad capital was Seville. In 1162 however, the first Almohad *imâm*-Caliph, Abd al-Mu'min (died 1163) decided to reinstate Cordoba as the capital of al-Andalus. This scheme was interrupted by his death in 1163, allowing Seville to retain its position. The chronicler Ibn Sâhib al-Sâla, a civil servant in the Almohad *makhzin* who witnessed these events, tells the story in his book, *Le don de l'imâmat*:

While in the vicinity of Jaén, laying siege to it, [the two sons of the Caliph] received an order from on high to establish themselves in Cordoba, as I said so as to make it the seat of government in al-Andalus, as it had been under the Banû Umayya, the former rulers, and that it should occupy the centre of al-Andalus, and that the work of the most senior public servants be based there, so that they would be within reach of anyone coming there from its region [...]

All the people of Cordoba came out to watch them arrive and I was one who came out to receive their blessing, with the delegation of the aforementioned Secretaries from Seville, at the Gate of the Bridge (*Bâb al-qantara*), which opens onto the countryside, through which the road to Jaén passes. The noble families that had stayed in Cordoba after the rebellion, came out with the Sevillians to welcome them along with other onlookers from Cordoba. Cordoba had 82 men at that time, because many had abandoned it during the rebellion to go to the countryside, because of the drop in population and people taking flight, which happened in its region and in the surrounding countryside. The mark of misfortune could be seen in their gait and in their possessions, and their lands were visited and laid low by desolation and they dressed in

rags. They were most cheered by this meeting with the Sayyides and prayed to God that he should make them prosper greatly during their lives.

Cordoba was a significant choice. It had been the ancient capital of the Umayyad Caliphate from 929 to 1031. The Umayyads still enjoyed great prestige in the Maghreb at the beginning of the 12th Century. Their legacy was still very much alive and their architectural achievements were renowned throughout the Islamic world of that era: the Great Mosque of Cordoba, the palace cities of Madīnat al-Zahrâ' and Madīnat al-Zahāira. The Almohads very explicitly enrolled themselves within the Umayyad heritage. They adopted white as the colour of their ensigns instead of the black used by the Abbassids. In addition in 1158 in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, two sons of Abd al-Mu'min « discovered » a copy of the Quran attributed to Uthmân b. Affân (died 656), the third of the orthodox Caliphs of Sunni Islam, and a member of the Umayyad family. This Quran was transferred with great pomp from Cordoba to Marrakech and thence to Tinmâl, where it is still preserved together with the Book of the Mahdî Ibn Tûmart.

There are numerous colourful legends about this Quran. Mediaeval authors tell that it was one of the four copies that Uthmân had ordered to be drafted and sent out to the provinces so as to unify the text of the Revelation while suppressing any different versions. It was said to be the one that Uthmân was reading when he was assassinated. His bloodstains could still be seen on many pages. This relic, linked to the earliest period of Islam and through Uthmân, to the Umayyad family was an object of cult for the Almohads. After military ceremonies, the Book was put on display in front of the armies alongside that of Ibn Tûmart, the first on a white camel, the second on a mule. A richly decorated cabinet was built for this purpose by the best craftsmen in the Empire. Ibn Sâhib al-Salâ describes this precious box as ranking amongst the « wonders » (*ajâ'ib*) of the world:

« Umar b. Murajjî al-Ishbîlî, one of those who adorned the Book, told me that one of the pearls was as large as a horse's hoof and he said that he had been told that this pearl had once belonged to Abû l-Jaysh Hamarayh b. Ahmad b. Tulûn, Lord of Egypt and of Damascus, Ifrîqiya and of the Zâb, and that over time and the changes in the situation, the miracles of its preference for this glorious power, made it fall into the hands of the Prince of the Believers, son of the Prince of the Believers [in other words Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf (1163-1184), son of Abd al-Mu'min (1130-1163)] »

Nonetheless in the 13th century al-Marrâkushî claimed that the pearl had been part of the gifts presented by the King of Sicily to the Caliph Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf (1163-1184) on the occasion of his victory over the Arab rebels of Gafsa in 1177-1181. In this way, as well as the eastern and western Umayyad heritage, the new dynasty were in some way laying claim to the symbolic tutelage of the Tulunids of Cairo and the Norman Kings of Sicily.

After the demise of the Almoravid dynasty in Marrakech (22 March 1147), the repression of the al-Mâssî rebellion and the foundation of Rabat in 1150, Abd al-Mu'min regrouped his troops and marched towards Ceuta, as if planning to embark for al-Andalus before veering off at the last moment towards the *hammâdide* principality of Bougie, who had supported the Almoravids by sending them troops. The situation in Ifrîqiya and in Tripolitania was by now confused: Bâja was in the hands of the Riyâh Arabs, the Normans from Sicily had just taken Tripoli and Mahdîya, and the people of Kairouan had abandoned the city in droves. En route, Abd al-Mu'min captured Algiers, defeated the Sanhâja troops and took Bougie encountering almost no resistance. Commanded by Abd Allâh, one of the sons of Abd al-Mu'min, the Almohad troops also attacked the Qal of the Banû Hammâd and raised it to the ground. Constantine capitulated soon afterwards. The Arabs who exercised a form of protectorate over all these regions while excising money for their keep, began to harass the troops of Abd al-Mu'min. After various skirmishes, the two sides clashed at the Battle of Seti in the spring of 1153, resulting in the complete defeat of the alliance of Arab tribes.

This episode is generally viewed as an important turning-point in the life of the Almohad Empire: from then on Abd al-Mu'min began recruiting the Arabs into the Almohad armies and gave them land in strategic areas, in al-Andalus facing the Christian Kingdoms and on the Atlantic coastal plain near what is today Casablanca. All the policies of Abd al-Mu'min and his successors, based on family control of the State apparatus that they were building, were also firmly rooted in an increasingly sophisticated and rigid dogma, that was gradually becoming established, and at the same time they opened up to a wider society enabling the integration at the highest level of the elites from the conquered provinces and of all the enemies that had been defeated or had joined their cause. The attitude of the Almohad Caliph with regard to the Arab tribes in the Central Maghreb and Ifrîqiya was inspired by the still developing Almohad ideology: the original people of Islam, the Oriental Arabs, the birthplace of Mohammedan prophecy, were now bowing down to the Prince that incarnated the rebirth of that same prophesy; this marked the renewal of the Revelation in the new centre of Islam, the Western Maghreb, and cast the Arab origins back to a distant Oriental periphery.

Tinmâl, religious capital of the Empire

Not far from Marrakech is the other important religious capital of the Almohad Empire, Tinmâl. This town has two sites the Îgîlîz-des-Hargha, the birthplace of Ibn Tûmart, and, Tinmâl itself a new Medina with its *Ansâr*, its *Muhâjirûn* and the tomb of the Mahdi. This was the base from which the Almohads set out on their struggle against the Almoravids. Situated in a valley in the Atlas Mountains not far from the mountain pass of Tizi n-Test and surrounded by high peaks, Tinmâl conserves a mosque, dating probably from the reign of Abd al-Mu'min — which was restored in the 1980s —, as well as fragments of the wall that once encircled the town. Abd al-Mu'min set out from Tinmâl when he took the city of Îgîlî for the first time in 1134-1135, and when he captured it definitively in 1140, along with Târûdânt. Soon however the conquest of the Almoravid Empire occupied the Almohad Caliph's every moment and he rarely returned to Tinmâl. His first « visit » (*ziyâra*), which had both religious and political significance, took place in 1157, and according to al-Baydhaq the next visit by a Caliph happened in 1170, during the reign of Abd al-Mu'min's son, Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf (r. 1163-1184). Meanwhile the tomb of the Mahdî, the founder of the Almohad movement had become a shrine and with the burial of Abd al-Mu'min himself, the site of an imperial necropolis.

In this way an official pilgrimage to Tinmâl was instituted. It was organized by the Monarch who was accompanied by his court. In 1157, after a trip around the area to ensure the allegiance of the neighbouring tribes, the official cortege of the Caliph reached Îgîlîz, the town where Ibn Tûmart had been born, which had a cave like the one on Mount Hira. They then moved on to Tinmâl, to his tomb. An official letter sent out to all the regions of the Empire stated that this journey was inspired by the pilgrimage to Mecca. Indeed, the description of the Caliph's journey says that it involved circumambulation, « touching » (*lams*), the cave (*ghâr*) and numerous signs of God. At the end of this journey on the 28th day of the month of Ramadan, the story goes that the participants were purified. This religious visit (*ziyâra*) to Tinmâl, which in subsequent Almohad chronicles was referred to as the *hâjj*, the name given to the pilgrimage to Mecca, was the only alternative for a reigning Prince who aspired to religious reform and could not escape from his duties for several months to make the long journey to Mecca, without running the risk of a rival seizing power in his absence, above all as ruling the Empire required his permanent presence and mobility.

The importance of the holy places of Îgîlîz-Tinmâl also appears in another political decision taken by the Almohad sovereigns. In the Maghreb and in al-Andalus, after the Umayyad Era, the direction in which the faithful had to pray, the *qibla*, was oriented towards the south-south-east, like in Syria and not towards the south-east as it should have been. The Umayyads of al-Andalus viewed the Iberian Peninsula as a reproduction of Syria, their original homeland. One example of this were the oriental names they gave to their armies: *jund Filastîn* (« army of Palestine »), *jund al-Urdun* (« army of Jordan »), *jund Hims* (« army of Homs »). The Almoravids had begun to adjust the

Umayyad *qibla* in particular in their mosque in Marrakech and when the Almohads came to power, they ordered the knocking down of the walls of the *qibla* in the Mosques in Marrakech, Fez and Tlemcen to « correct » the direction of prayer. Strangely however the direction they chose was even more southerly than that of the Umayyads, because it pointed towards Îgîlîz / Tinmâl, the new source of guidance (*hidâya*) and prophecy (*nubuwwa*), which they now faced when praying.

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The end of Almohad domination of al-Andalus

The constant rebellions, incessant Christian attacks and the growing rivalry within the ruling family amongst the descendants of Abd al-Mu'min led inexorably to the progressive break-up of the Empire. In spite of the constant efforts of successive sovereigns to doctrinally unify and pacify such diverse regions as Tripolitania, Central Maghreb, Morocco and the Iberian Peninsula, while trying to subdue the religious movements that were continually brewing there and channelling the military force of the nomad, Turkish and above all Arab populations originally from the Orient, in spite of all the energy they had put into gaining supporters and conciliating those excluded from the governance of the Caliphate, after the defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa on 18 *sa'far* 609/16 July 1212, and the death (of natural causes?) of the Caliph al-Nâsir, while still young, the accession to the throne of a boy king and the games of intrigue played out around him, all resulted in the break-up of the Empire.

In the wake of the Almohad defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa (*al-Uqâb*) at the hands of the royal triad formed by the Kings of Castile, Aragon and Navarre, the Christians took Baeza, Vilches, Baños de la Encina, Tolosa, Castro Ferral and Úbeda, leaving the frontier very near the border of present-day Andalusia. The death of Alfonso VIII of Castile and that of Pedro III of Aragon in Muret in 1213, as well as the signing of various treaties, interrupted the Christian advance for a time, and it was not until the end of the 1220s that they were able to take advantage of the rivalries between senior figures within the Caliphate.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|--|--|---|--|
| I. Abd al-Mu'min (r. 1130-1163) ⇩ | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf (r. 1163-1184) ⇩ | | | | Umar Abû Hafs ⇩ | | | | | |
| 3. al-Mansûr (r. 1184-1199) ⇩ | | | 6- al-Makhlû' (r. 1224-1227) | | Ishâq ⇩ | | Muhammad (Governor of Valencia and Malaga) ⇩ | | |
| 4. al-Nâsir li-dîn Allâh (r. 1199-1213) ⇩ | | 8bis- al-Ma'mûn (r. 1227-1232) ⇩ | | 7. Al-Âdil (r. 1224-1227) | | 11. al-Murtadâ' (r. 1248-1266) | | Abû Zayd Ceyt Abu Ceyt m. v. 1265-1270 ⇩ | |
| 5. al-Mustansir (r. 1214) | | 8. al-Mutamir (r. 1222) | | 9. al-Rashîd (r. 1232-1236) | | 10. al-Saïd al-Mutadid bi-Llâh (r. 1236-1242) | | Al-Bayâsî Governor of Cordoba (d. 1226) | |
| 12. Abû Dabbûs al-Wâthiq (r. 1266-1269) | | Christian Aragonese and Muslim noblemen | | | | | | | |

| | | | |
|--------|-------------|-------|--------------------|
| -1224) | 7- 1236) | 1242) | (r. 1242- 1248) |
|--------|-------------|-------|--------------------|



Almohad Family Tree

Until the end of the 12th Century, rallying to the *tawhīd* (One God) entailed religious adhesion, but from then on it essentially implied a political submission to the Almohad Caliphate. In this way Abd al-Mu'min classified the Almohads into categories, so imitating Umar b. al-Khattāb (r. 634-644). The most senior were the « first companions » (*al-sābiqūn al-awwalūn*), who had given the *baya* or declaration of loyalty to Mahdī Ibn Tūmart and had accompanied him on his military expeditions, followed by those who had joined up between the defeat at al-Buhayra and the conquest of Oran (1145), and finally those that had rallied to the cause after the conquest of Marrakech in 1147. It is possible that this classification had financial implications, in that the highest incomes were reserved for the highest categories, but it is also possible that it sought to guarantee the loyalty of the earliest supporters of the Almohads in a period of transition between the partisan system and the nascent imperial administration. Having said that, Abd al-Mu'min was happy to promote, within this theoretically unquestionable hierarchy that was supposed to be based on a fixed chronology, certain tribes that had joined up very late, in particular his own tribe of origin, the Kūmya Zenetas, whom he placed on the second rung of the Almohad hierarchy, just after his original supporters from Tinmāl; this of course could not happen without arousing discontent.

But the decisive turning-point came in 1155, when Abd al-Mu'min transformed the original structures of Almohad power, which certain historians have described as a « theocratic tribal oligarchy », into a dynastic, autocratic and hereditary monarchy to the benefit of his own line. This decision was taken, within a chain of events in which the chronology is far from clear, but which involved the members of the family of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart, who were unhappy with the evolution of the relations of power in the heart of the ruling elite and were probably representative of a certain number of Almohad *shaykh*-s. Indeed the relations between the Caliph Abd al-Mu'min and the brothers of Ibn Tūmart, who himself had died without issue, worsened after they were ejected from the government of Seville where their heavy-handedness had caused the people of the city to revolt in 1148. Whatever the exact order of the causal links, this tension between the interests of the Mahdī's close family, or of his tribe and those of Abd al-Mu'min, the founder of the Empire, was resolved in favour of the latter. Indeed, and not without considerable trouble, the Almohad Caliph succeeded in establishing a dynastic system that benefited his own line the « Mu'minides », after removing or crushing any opponents that had dared to speak out against him.

The system instituted by Abd al-Mu'min around 1155 functioned without much friction until 1224, with four successive transmissions of power in direct line from father to son: in 1163 Abū Yaqūb Yūsuf (Yūsuf I) succeeded his father Abd al-Mu'min, in 1184, he was in turn succeeded by Yaqūb Abū Yūsuf al-Mansūr. Next came Abū Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Nāsir in 1199 and finally Yūsuf II al-Mustansir in 1213. A knowledge of the anthropological structures of Berber societies, which are similar in form to most Arab, Turkish or Persian desert or steppe societies, gives a clearer understanding of the logic and the tensions within the ruling circles: the relations of power within the tight-knit families of the southern Mediterranean are characterized on the one hand by the force of paternal authority and on the other by equal status between brothers, whether or not they share the same mother. Abd al-Mu'min's decision to impose his sons as governors of the different regions was therefore for the duration of his reign, a way of guaranteeing the cohesion of an immense group of territories that he was in the process of constructing. However the succession of his son Abū Yaqūb Yūsuf (Yūsuf I) at the expense of his twenty other brothers, who could each legitimately aspire to inherit the number one position, eliminated *de facto* all the other lines with the same male ancestors. The memory of the founder of the Empire, even after his

death, seems to have been sufficient to guarantee the solidarity between the brothers and the authority of Yûsuf I was imposed without much difficulty, although he showed tactful prudence by not taking the previous Caliph's title of « Prince of the Believers » until several years after he came to power. Even so, three of the seventeen brothers of Abû Yaqûb Yûsuf (Yûsuf I) and various Almohad nobles expressed their opposition to his accession to the throne in 1163. In this period of the Empire, the possibility of offering remuneration and rewards ultimately guaranteed the best position to whoever had built up the best network of supporters and had the best means of imposing his position without undue trouble. As time went by therefore such ambitions were expressed with increasing force.

When Yûsuf al-Mustanşir (Yûsuf II) came to power, he was 10 or 15 years old and real power was wielded by his uncles and two Almohad *shaykhs* until his death in 1224. The sources disagree on the causes, some claiming he was poisoned by his vizier, while Ibn al-Khatîb assured that he was gored by a cow. The fact was that during his reign real power was wielded by his uncles. The young Caliph had no real power and never left Marrakech except to go to Tinmâl. After his death, accidental or otherwise, power was never again passed on from father to son. The great-uncle of the deceased Caliph, al-Makhlû' (the « deposed »), succeeded him, but his reign only lasted eight months (1224) and marked the beginning of the wars of succession.

Two further aspects should be noted. First the great majority of the Caliphs descended from the line of Yûsuf I, one of the 18 sons of Abd al-Mu'min. The other important branch descended from Abû Hafs 'Umar, brother and close adviser of the former, but all the Caliphs who came to power from the 1220s onwards had held senior positions in al-Andalus. Al-'Âdil (1224-1227), son of al-Mansûr, and nephew of al-Makhlû', was the Governor of Murcia when he was proclaimed Caliph on 6th March 1224. He appointed his brother, the future Caliph al-Ma'mûn, as Governor of Seville, and one of his cousins, the *sayyid* Abd Allâh al-Bayâsî, Governor of Cordoba. Thanks to the support of other brothers who were Governors of Malaga and Granada, he received the backing of the whole of al-Andalus, except for Valencia, Denia, Játiva and Alcira, governed by one of his cousins, the brother of al-Bayâsî, the *sayyid* Abû Zayd (also known as Ceyt Abu Ceyt), who remained loyal to the Caliph of Marrakech (al-Makhlû'), who was however murdered soon afterwards in September 1224. Al-'Âdil was by then popular in the Maghreb, but in al-Andalus he had to deal with an uprising led by the *sayyid* al-Bayâsî who had entered an alliance with Ferdinand III and fell ill in Baeza (the town from which he received his nickname or *shuhra*). Ferdinand III entered Murcia and Abû Zayd (Ceyt Abu Ceyt), brother of al-Bayâsî, declared himself his vassal in the summer of 1225. For his part, Al-Bayâsî managed to take Cordoba, but his alliance with the Christians alienated the people, who rebelled against him and executed him (summer 1226). Al-'Âdil left the Iberian Peninsula to his son al-Ma'mûn (r. 1227-1232), who in September 1227 proclaimed himself Caliph so provoking his father's assassination in Marrakech (5 October 1227). Al-Ma'mûn then marched off to the Maghreb in order to try to impose his position at the expense of one of his nephews, Yahyá al-Mu'tasim (r. 1227-1236), son of Muhammad al-Nâsir and brother of al-Mustansir, who had just been proclaimed in Marrakech. Al-Mu'tasim was the only Caliph from this later period that was to emerge from the Maghreb.

In October 1228, al-Ma'mûn crossed the sea to the Maghreb and chased al-Mu'tasim out of Marrakech where he had himself proclaimed King and where shortly afterwards he renounced the Almohad dogma of the *isma* (sinlessness) of the Mahdî Ibn Tûmart, ordering that the name of the Mahdî be removed from *khutba* (sermons) and from coins. These changes in dogma were accompanied by a genuine purge of his adversaries in Marrakech, in particular within the Hintâta tribe, a purge that would have very important consequences in that it led, as we will go on to see, to the secession of Ifrîqiya. He then sought to reestablish the links with the rest of the Muslim realm in the Iberian Peninsula, notably with Seville, where the Almohads were solidly installed and from where he had set out. To this end he tried to recapture Ceuta from his brother Abû Mûsá 'Imrân taking up arms against him, in vain. The departure of al-Ma'mûn from al-Andalus was to prove a breaking point in the history of the Iberian Peninsula : he was the last Almohad sovereign to have spent time there and in spite of some subsequent half-hearted attempts at unification by

the Almohad monarchs of Marrakech, one could argue that al-Andalus never again fell under a Maghreb-based central authority.

Even before al-Ma'mûn crossed the Straits he had to deal with yet another rebellion. An Andalusian official named Abû Abd Allâh Muḥammad b. Hûd, who claimed to be a descendant of the Kings of the *hûdide* Taifa of Zaragoza from the beginning of the 12th century, rebelled in May 1228 in Murcia. He recovered the Almoravid title of *amîr al-muslimîn*, took the *laqab* (nickname) al-Mutawakkil and took up arms against al-Ma'mûn. He linked his Emirate with the Abbasid Caliphate in Bagdad, by recovering the black colour of their standards in contrast to the white used by the Almohads and obtained a diploma of investiture from the Caliphs of the East. The power of Ibn Hûd was strongly influenced by the Sufi mystic current of Ibn Sabaîn. So began the period known as the third Taifa period. Ibn Hûd al-Mutawakkil headed rebel movements that were fiercely anti-Almohad which in a few months had conquered all of al-Andalus. The people of Seville went over to his side in October 1229. He appeared to be in a position to rebuild an autonomous Muslim power in al-Andalus, but his hopes were soon dashed.

In Valencia, the Almohad *sayyid* Abû Zayd was ejected by the head of his cavalry, Zayyân Ibn Mardanişh, in late 1228-early 1229. He then set up his own independent power base and refused to recognize al-Mutawakkil. In 1231, al-Mutawakkil endured a serious defeat at the Battle of Alange to Alfonso IX of León, who had embarked on the conquest of the Muslim cities of Extremadura (Badajoz in 1229, Cáceres in 1230, Mérida in 1231). In 1231-1232, the Sevillians managed to cast off the authority of al-Mutawakkil and appointed as their sovereign their *qâdî* al-Bâjî, who took the title of al-Mu'taḍid. The Balearic Islands, ruled by Almohad governors since their conquest by al-Nâsir at the beginning of the 12th Century, fell into the hands of Jaime I of Aragon in 1230.

At around the same time in 1232, Muḥammad b. Naşr Ibn al-Aḥmar established an independent taifa in Arjona near Jaén, where he was proclaimed before going on to Granada, which became his capital. In 1238, the Almohad Caliph al-Rashîd was formally proclaimed in Seville and Ceuta. Ibn al-Aḥmar, by now the Nasrid Emir of Granada, also recognized his authority shortly afterwards, in order to clearly distance himself from Ibn Hûd al-Mutawakkil who in Murcia had recognized the Abbasid Caliphate, but the reestablishment of the Almohad Caliphate under al-Rashîd was more apparent than real and al-Andalus had effectively liberated itself. Now, after the Christian conquest of Cordoba (1236), Valencia and Seville (1248), all that was left of al-Andalus was the Nasrid Emirate of Granada.

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Fez in the Almohad Empire

Ever since the reign of Abd al-Mu'min (1130-1163), the Almohads had had great territorial and maritime ambitions. At the crossroads of the Saharan and Mediterranean trade routes, the Almohad Empire had on the one part to affirm its control over the ancient route of the Almoravid camel-drivers, who controlled the gold routes with Ghana, and on the other to develop its naval infrastructure to counter the growing influence of the Christian fleets in the Mediterranean.

The policies of the first four mu'minid Caliphs, known as the « orthodox » (*râshidûn*) in Almohad sources — Abd al-Mu'min (d. 1163), Yûsuf (r. 1163-1184), al-Mansûr (r. 1184-1199) and al-Nâsir (1199-1214) — were generally successful. At a territorial level, they were the only « Maghrebians » to have managed to unify North Africa under one single authority, from Tripolitania to the Atlantic coast, with very active diplomacy, alternating alliances with large-scale military campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula. At sea, they were the last Muslim Mediterranean power to have built at great cost a fleet that was worthy of its name. Very early on they recruited Admiral Ibn Maymûn, who belonged to an Andalusian line of seamen and commanded the Almoravid fleet stationed in Almeria. Ribât al-Fath (Rabat) was founded in 1150 as a base at which to gather the troops and the fleet bound for al-Andalus. The reputation of the Almohad fleet was such that in 1183 Saladin himself turned to the Almohad King for support in the fight against the Franks of the third crusade. In the Western Mediterranean the Almohads also competed with the Italian, Pisan,

Genoan and Venetian fleets, whose influence began to increase from the end of the 11th century. Numerous trade treaties were signed with the Italian Republics and with Aragon, to regulate maritime trade, reduce piracy and arbitrate the disputes between Italian, Aragonese and Maghrebian merchants. Special reserved areas were set up in Bougie, Tunis and Ceuta to welcome Christian traders.

Fez was an inland city situated on the great caravan trail, but it was far away from the ancient Almoravid homelands. The Almohads showed little interest in it either, viewing it above all as a place of exile for rebels, a place of shelter for Muslims fleeing from al-Andalus and a place of knowledge. Although Fez's first rulers, the Idrissids, had an illustrious family background, they had only had limited Caliphal ambitions and were often at odds with the Masmûda tribes of the region. That must have been forged in the memory of the Almohad movement, which evolved from these tribes, and helps explain why the Almohads did not choose Fez as their capital. For its part, the Idrissid principality of Fez was eclipsed by the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba, which contributed to the decline of the city. When the Caliph al-Ma'mûn renounced the Almohad dogma in 1229, Ifrîqiya, where many of the Hintata Berbers lived, declared itself independent proclaiming its loyalty to the Almohad principles, and founding the Hafsîd Caliphate shortly afterwards. Fez would have to wait until the middle of the 13th century and the emergence of the Marinids to recover its role as the capital. The Almohad Caliphate was by then a shadow of its former self and hardly extended beyond the Marrakech region, which was finally conquered in 1269 by the new dynasty.