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# Pieces of a Mosaic: Revised Identities of the Almoravid Dynasty and Almohad Caliphate and al-Bayan al-mugrib

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

PIECES OF A MOSAIC:

REVISED IDENTITIES OF THE ALMORAVID DYNASTY AND ALMOHAD

CALIPHATE AND *AL-BAYAN AL-MUGRIB*

SUBMITTED TO

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### Abstract

This study seeks to clarify the identities of the Almoravid and Almohad Berber movements in the larger Crusade narrative. The two North African Islamic groups are often carelessly placed within the group identified as “Islam” in discussions about the series of military campaigns that took place not only in the traditional Holy Land but also throughout regions of the Mediterranean such as Spain; this generalized identifier of “Islam” is placed against a much more complex group of generally Christian parties, all of them seen as separate, unique groups under the umbrella identifier of Christianity. This foray into a late 13<sup>th</sup> century North African Arabic history of the two groups will attempt to build a more robust identity for the two groups. The way in which they were remembered by their immediate successors will reveal far more interesting parties than simply zealous Muslims waging jihad. The two groups in question are the Almoravids and the Almohads. The Almoravid (al-Murabitun; المرابطون) dynasty, an invading force of recently converted Berber tribes from the Maghrib, made their primary foray into the Iberian Peninsula in 1085; this provoked the beginning of the *Reconquista* in earnest and the true entrance of the crusade/*jihad* mentality in the region. The Almoravids were eventually succeeded by the Almohad (al-Muwahhidun; الموحدون) Caliphate in 1147; this next generation of recently converted Berber tribesman would become the primary rival in the tale of the *Reconquista* up until their defeat at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. Their presence in the region is primarily remembered by their military involvement with Christian forces in the region, though the history of Muhammad ibn Idhari, written around 1295, reveals the groups and their ideologies to be far more complicated than simply meets the eye.

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## Memory of the Berber Dynasties

On 16 July, 1212, the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in what is today southern Spain marked the turning point of the Spanish reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> The combined armies of the Christian kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, Navarre, the Spanish Military Orders of Santiago, Calatrava, the Temple, and the Hospital, and volunteers from southern France completely routed the “Saracen” army under the “king of Morocco”, having inflicted heavy casualties while their own losses were fairly light.<sup>2</sup> Within the next few decades, the peninsula would be under Spanish rule save for the southern most regions, a far cry from what had been the political norm for the Iberian Peninsula since the initial Islamic invasion in 711. While the diverse Christian alliance at Las Navas is well documented and has been the focus of many historians of the early Crusade period, the same cannot be said about their opponents on the field. Who were these opponents of the Christian kings of northern Spain and their Christian allies? To many, these warriors and their caliph were simply Berbers from the Atlas Mountains who had stumbled their way onto the stage of history, contending in pitched battle with their ideological rivals in perhaps one of the only conflicts during the Crusades that came close to

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<sup>1</sup> Within this work, the terms “al-Andalus”, “Iberian Peninsula”, and “Iberia” will be used in reference to the western European landmass that is today called Spain and Portugal. Al-Andalus will be used specifically for the identification of the southern half of the peninsula while under Islamic rule. “Spain” will only be used when prefaced with reference to the modern political entity that arose after 1492 in an effort to create meaningful geographic comparisons.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 70-74. O’Callaghan utilizes primary sources from the aftermath of the battle such as correspondence between King Alfonso VIII and Pope Innocent III to relay the disparity of the casualties. Alfonso VIII reports that some “100,000 armed men or more fell ... according to the Saracens whom we captured” on the caliph’s side while the Christian coalition lost “hardly twenty-five or thirty” men. These numbers are most likely exaggerated but do well to showcase the impact of the battle.

realizing a cosmic battle between two great faiths. More specifically, they were the Berber Almohad dynasty, a dynasty that had taken control of the majority of the Maghreb and half of Iberia. They and their predecessors, the Almoravid dynasty, have been consistently brushed aside in history in favor of scholarship focusing “exclusively on either the 'Abassids in the east, or Córdoba and the Umayyads in Andalusia”; in English, these dynasties have been “almost completely overlooked”.<sup>3</sup> Until recently, most scholarship focusing on the reconquest and crusades in the Iberian Peninsula only gave the dynasties a cursory glance at best; recent work on the subject has helped to make up for the centuries of neglect, though quality scholarship is still desperately needed in a topic that has been fairly unexplored.

With this in mind, the goal of this work is simple: to offer a more nuanced identity for the Almoravid and Almohad Berber dynasties based on the medieval history of the North African Islamic historian Muhammad ibn Idhari, who will be discussed in length with his history in the next section. The identities I propose are not meant to be all encompassing and are by no means identities that should be used to describe the two Berber movements as a whole. Instead, I intend to use the identities drawn from ibn Idhari's text to create a more robust memory of the Almoravids and Almohads, a memory that sees them as Islamic phenomena unique to North Africa and the time period, both inherently similar and yet vastly different from each other .

These identities will be exclusively founded on the political natures of the groups and the two groups' approaches to the ideology of *jihad* and holy war. While this is admittedly narrow, I believe that these are the two most overlooked or oversimplified aspects of the two groups'

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<sup>3</sup> Allen J. Fromherz, *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 5.

current identities. The political aspects of the Almoravid and Almohad movements are all but forgotten save for the few historians who specialize in the Berber Islamic movements. Thus, a focus on the political aspects of the groups in any manner would provide ample material to craft more complex identities. In a very different manner, the ideology concerning *jihad* of the two groups is perhaps the most remembered though overgeneralized aspect of the pair. Using Ibn Idhari's history, I intend to show a far more delicate and nuanced approach to religiously inspired warfare.

By examining the political growth and the specific approach to holy war, I hope to shed some light on these often forgotten characters in history. However, before this examination begins, I feel it is necessary to discuss what little is known about the author, Muhammad ibn Idhari.

### **Ibn Idhari and *al-Bayan al-mugrib***

It must be said that little is known of Abu Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi, the North African author of the medieval history *al-Bayan al-mughrīb fi akhbar al-Andalus wa-al-Maghrib*, translated as “The Amazing Exposition on the History of al-Andalus and the Maghreb”.<sup>4</sup> Ibn Idhari wrote during the first two decades of the fourteenth century in Marrakesh, as can be observed by his *nisba*, under the Maranid Dynasty, which had taken the place of the Almohad Caliphate.<sup>5</sup> It is not unwise to assume that he may have been a

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<sup>4</sup> N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, eds (1981), *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216.

<sup>5</sup> Levtzion, *Corpus*, 216; P. Bearman and Th. Bianquis, eds. “Nisba.” In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. 2012. [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nisba-COM\\_0866](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/nisba-COM_0866). The *nisba* “or ‘noun of relation’ is one of the components of the medieval Arabic proper name. Its function is to express the relation of the individual to a group, a person, a place, a concept or a thing”, thus indicating an



jurist due to his literacy and access to a number of historical documents. The text, which is more commonly known by its shorter name *al-Bayan al-mughrib (mugrib)*, is a three part history concerning the Maghreb; the third portion of which deals exclusively with the history of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties.<sup>6</sup> This history, in its extent form, covers the time period spanning from the foundation of the Almoravid movement circa 1040 to approximately 1172. The text follows a simple structure of an anecdotal chronology detailing selected events separated by identificatory headings. In this way, ibn Idhari manages to cover a number of political and military events with a surprising amount of detail all while slowly progressing through time from the beginnings of the Almoravids to, one can imagine, the end of the Almohads and the rise of his own Maranid Dynasty. While the history of the text itself and its discovery are worth writing about, such things are not the purpose of this section; I intend instead to use this brief section to discuss the nature of working with someones voice from the past.

Ibn Idhari wrote under the Maranid Dynasty; he most likely kept the political dynamics in mind while composing the text. He, no doubt, had his own peculiarities of faith and frameworks for the interpretation of history and religion. Despite the lack of information we have on the author, his perspective on the history of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties fits

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association with the city of Marrakesh. Thus, a rough English interpretation of his name might be Muhammad, son of Idhari, of Marrakesh.

<sup>6</sup> From this point forward, the title of this work will be referred to as *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, which is the Spanish transliteration; *mughrib* is the English transliteration of the Arabic title. While both are correct, I shall be using the Spanish form of the word as it is the primary version of the text I used. This same rule is applied throughout this paper when dealing with the Spanish transliteration of Arabic words and names. To denote the Spanish forms of words and names, quotation marks will be placed around the aforementioned selections.

within the accepted framework of traditional North African histories; this means a particular attention is paid to the history as it pertains to validating or legitimizing the current political institution and its policies. This must be kept in the reader's mind while examining the data mined from the text. Every word spoken about the Almoravid and Almohad groups was chosen with care; only when he explicitly states that he is quoting another source about a particular person, place, or event can we view things from an alternate perspective; even then, one must be aware that he chose that particular passage or source as opposed to another for a reason, intentionally posturing himself and the two groups however he saw fit. I intend to utilize this individuality in his writing to my advantage; by focusing on ibn Idhari's choice of terminology and selection of history, I will be able to tease out details that would not necessarily have been obvious in the text as a whole. His words regarding the Almoravids and Almohads will reveal their identities through a particular lens, providing me with a distinct and individual opinion of an individual far less removed from the history than some others who have written about them, both medieval and contemporary.

### **Almoravid Dynasty: Institutional Identity**

The institutional identity of the Almoravids was shaped by their ability to establish a dynastic regime out of a traditional tribal system, the ability to become a major trading power in the Islamic world, and the ability to exert military power in such a way that extended their presence far from their Marrakesh. Within ibn Idhari's history, one can find substantial evidence supporting and identifying the stages of growth that the dynasty went through on its way out of the Atlas Mountains and into the wider western Mediterranean. This evidence comes both in the

form of the words written down in *al-Bayan al-mugrib* and in what can be extrapolated from seemingly trivial pieces of information. Throughout the sections of the text that trace their political rise, I will attempt to follow the chronology of events as closely as possible in an effort to more accurately construct a political identity for the Almoravids. The benefit of following the chronology is this: the natural flow of events as recorded by ibn Idhari build upon each other, slowly crafting a more robust image of the dynasty as it progresses from a simple mission of evangelism focused primarily on the tribal unit to a dynastic kingdom spanning North Africa and al-Andalus.

The Almoravid movement began with three personages of historical significance: 'Abd Allah ibn Yasin (1040–1059), Yahya ibn Ibrahim (1040-1050), and Yahya ibn Umar al-Lamtuni (c. 1050-1056). Though the extant copy of ibn Idhari's history does not include this, it is well known through other historical chronologies of Islam in North Africa that Yahya b. Ibrahim, a chief of the Gudala tribe, made a pilgrimage to Mecca and, on his return journey, stopped at Qayrawan to seek out the Malikite teacher Abu Imran. Upon finding him, Abu Imran was “moved by the Sanhaja chief's [ibn Ibrahim]sense of nobility, his honesty, and his innocence, but he expressed shock at the Saharan's shallow understanding of the faith”; he thus recommended that one of his students in the Maghreb aid ibn Ibrahim in correcting Islam in his tribal lands.<sup>7</sup> According to ibn Idhari, ibn Ibrahim proclaimed “oh señor nuestro! Mira a quien envías conmigo a nuestro país para que nos enseñe nuestra religión ...”.<sup>8</sup> He then left to Sus

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald A. Messier *The Almoravids and the Meanings of Jihad* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib. Nuevos fragmentos almoravides y almohades. Traducidos y anotados* trans. Ambrosio Huici Miranda. (Valencia: Anubar Ediciones, 1963), 12. ““Oh our Lord! Look at who comes with me to our country to teach us our religion””.

al-Aqsa and the *dar al-Murabitun*, a religious school founded by one of Abu Imran's former students.<sup>9</sup> Here Ibn Ibrahim met the man who would be the foundation of the Almoravid movement's driving ideology: 'Abd Allah ibn Yasin. Ibn Yasin accompanied Ibn Ibrahim back to his home in the Atlas Mountains and began his earliest preaching missions. Preaching to the Berbers of the Gudala tribe, he gathered seventy members of the tribe in order to “les enseñase ... en la jurisprudencia de su religion”.<sup>10</sup> Ibn Yasin “imposed a strict enforcement of the laws of Islam” as they were understood in the Maliki school of law; such laws included the exact mimicry of the *imam* during prayers, the “obligation to strive for truth and the suppression of injustice”, and a vehement opposition towards non-canonical taxes.<sup>11</sup> This preaching mission succeeded in giving Ibn Yasin enough sway over the Gudala tribe in order to command them “atacar a las cabilas de Lamtuna, a las que guerreó Gudala hasta que las vencieron y entraron en la obediencia de 'Abd Allah b. Yasin y atacaron con ellas a las demás cabilas del desierto y les hicieron la guerra”.<sup>12</sup> Wielding the military power of several tribes, Ibn Idhari describes the situation of the Gudala tribe under the combined leadership of Ibn Ibrahim and Ibn Yasin as such: “Se fortaleció el poder de Gudala con sus triunfos hasta que murió Yahya b. Ibrahim”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Messier, *Almoravids*, 4. *Dar al-Murabitun* roughly translates to “the abode of those who are bound together in the cause of God”, though there are varying interpretations of what *murabitun* exactly means in this context.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 12-13. “... to teach them ... in the jurisprudence of his religion”.

<sup>11</sup> Messier, *Almoravids*, 4, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 13. “... to attack the tribes of the Lamtuna, with which the Gudala warred until they defeated them and they entered the obedience of 'Abd Allah b. Yasin. They attacked with them the other tribes of the desert and fought against them”.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 13. “The power of the Gudala was strengthened with their victories until Yahya b. Ibrahim died”.

With the death of ibn Ibrahim, ibn Yasin quickly lost favor amongst the Gudala and was driven out.<sup>14</sup> Ibn Yasin found protection in the form of the Lamtuna tribe, recently conquered and converted to the orthodox Islam of ibn Yasin's teachings, and their chief Yahya b. Umar b. Bulankain al-Lamtuni. Under Yahya b. Umar, the Almoravid movement would begin its expansion beyond the few tribes of the Atlas Mountains. Ibn Yasin continued his preaching mission to the neighboring tribes under the same structure as before. The Lamtuna tribe under the leadership of Yahya b. Umar provided a military base that could back up ibn Yasin's message of unification under orthodoxy with force. This early confederation of tribes is described by ibn Idhari as such: “Estas tres cabilas eran entonces musulmanes, que se levantaron para proclamar el derecho, rechazar la injusticia y suprimir los impuestos ilegales; seguían la sunna – la tradición ortodoxa ... preferían la muerte a la derrota y no respetaban al que huía del combate.”<sup>15</sup> This zeal to uphold *la tradición ortodoxa* and their ability to fight “sobre camellos más que a caballo y la mayoría marchaba a pie en filas, una tras otra” made the refusal to submit to ibn Yasin and the Lamtuna tribe a dangerous and often times fatal affair.<sup>16</sup> This description of the battle formation that the Almoravids would assume is also an indication of the groups development from tribal raiding parties into a more formalized fighting force, something that gave them a distinct advantage over their enemies. Some attribute this change of tactics to ibn Yasin's preaching mission as well since it was in the Qur'an that “the prophet

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<sup>14</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 19. “These three tribes were then Muslims who rose up to proclaim the right, reject injustice, and remove illegal taxes; they followed the *sunna* – the orthodox tradition ... they preferred death to defeat and they did not respect those that fled from combat”.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 19. “... on [the backs of] camels more than horses and the majority [of the fighters] marching on foot in files, one after another”.

Muhammad fought that way, and so did his first four successors”; modeling themselves on these “lofty series of precedents” is something that the Almoravids, the Almohads, and even their successors would strive for in order to create religious legitimacy for their rule.<sup>17</sup> The particular Qur'anic passage referred to here is from *Sura as-Saff* and reads:

ان الله يحب الذين يقاتلون في سبيله صفا كانتهم بنيان مرصوص .<sup>18</sup>

The passage's reference to the tightly packed battle array was adopted literally by the Almoravids; this quite nicely indicates how Islam seeped into the Berber way of life outside of the context of prayer, fasting, taxation, and pilgrimage. Even in the earliest years of the movement, the Almoravids were already shifting slowly from a tribal unit to a more organized body with ibn Yasin's orthodox Islam acting as a facilitator.

Ibn Idhari provides an excellent example of how this early system worked in the following passage: “Los [unas cabilas bereberes sin la religión de Islam] llamó Abd Allah b. Yasin a la religión y se le resistieron, por cual mandó a Lamtuna atacarlos, como lo hicieron”.<sup>19</sup> The new tribes were presented with a call to join ibn Yasin's movement peacefully by submitting to his strict adherence to Islam, which ibn Idhari describes as entering “en el Islam y en la ley de Muhammad y a que pagaran lo que Allah les había impuesto de la limosna legal – *zakat*”; if they refused, as those in this passage did, ibn Yasin would rally the forces of the Lamtuna to

<sup>17</sup> Messier, *Almoravids*, 13. The concept of the Almoravids and Almohads utilizing the precedents of militancy to provide legitimacy to their ideological positions is fairly common in the *dar al-Islam*. This point has been most recently argued by Thomas Sizgorich; I will discuss the importance of this theory and its implications for the identity of the Almoravids and Almohads in the following chapter.

<sup>18</sup> Qur'an 61:4 “Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure”.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 21. “Abd Allah b. Yasin called them [some Berber tribes without the religion of Islam] to the religion and they resisted, for which he commanded the Lamtuna to attack them, which was done”.

forcefully subjugate them.<sup>20</sup> Through this pattern of expansion, the early Almoravid movement began to grow beyond its own borders; in order to solidify this newfound power, “ los llamó Abd Allah b. Yasin Almoravides y llamó a su emir Yahya b. Umar emir del derecho”.<sup>21</sup> The name Almoravids comes from the Arabic *al-Murabitun*, المرابطون , a term that signifies the groups adherence to the cause of God while also implying a connection to the frontier military fort, the *ribat*, that dotted the frontier landscape of North Africa. The term given to Yahya b. Umar, “*emir del derecho*”, in Arabic translating to *amir al-haqq*/أمير الحق, can be seen as a term legitimizing the rule of a leader in an Islamic group. *Haqq* or *hakk* can be defined as “established fact ... and therefore truth”; it can also extend to imply “claim” or “right” in the sense of a legal obligation, which can be distinguished as “Islamic religious law the *ḥaḳḳ Allāh* , mainly Allāh’s penal ordinances, and the *ḥaḳḳ al-ādami* , the civil right or claim of a human”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the title *amir al-haqq* implies a leader whose claim to the power of jurisprudence acts as a legitimizing factor. The use of this term is no doubt connected to this; the term would have firmly established ibn Umar's position as the legitimate leader within the context of a political entity with a heavy emphasis on religion. The Almoravids, under the dual leadership of ibn Umar and ibn Yasin, would no doubt have qualified as such.

Following the success of the early leaders, the institutional dynamic of Almoravid group changed from a tribal confederation to a more centralized government. Reading ibn Idhari, one

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 22. “... into Islam and the law of Muhammad and that they pay the legal alms that Allah had imposed – *zakat*”.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 21. “Abd Allah b. Yasin called them Almoravids and called his commander, Yahya b. Umar, 'commander of truth'”.

<sup>22</sup> “Hakk.” In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/hakk-SIM\\_2639](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/hakk-SIM_2639).

can locate several instances of this process of centralization and the consolidation of an overarching power structure. One such instance is found in the successful creation of a dynasty, a clear indication of a transition from a tribal structure that elected its leaders through consensus to a localized hereditary power. Following the deaths of ibn Yasin in 1059 and ibn Umar in 1056, there was a successful and fairly peaceful transition of leadership to ibn Umar's son, Abu Bakr ibn Umar (1056-1072). Though the transition from Abu Bakr to his cousin Yusuf ibn Tasfin (1072-1106) was nothing less than an outright seizure of power on the part of Yusuf, the ability to wield centralized power had and would continue to be in the family until the end of Almoravid rule with the leadership of Ishaq ibn Ali in 1147. This power to rule was seen as religiously ordained, as Abu Bakr, when he had failed to find a suitable lieutenant in his absence on campaigns, was given a vision and “le inspiró Allah el recuerdo de Yusuf b. Tasfin hasta que llegó del país del Magrib”.<sup>23</sup> Tasfin made one more step in the direction of solidifying power; as ibn Idhari describes Yusuf's succession in the following way: “Cuando se agravó la enfermedad del emir de los musulmanes Yusuf b. Tasfin, confió el poder a su hijo, el heredero del trono”.<sup>24</sup> The term *heredero* is only overshadowed in this excerpt by the phrase “*emir de los musulmanes*”; this phrase is an honorary title reserved only for those leaders in the *dar al-Islam* of higher standing, reputation, and authority specifically in an Almoravid context.<sup>25</sup> Its

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 43. “God inspired the memory of Yusuf b. Tasfin until he [Abu Bakr] arrived in the Maghreb”.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 113. “When the Commander of the Muslims Yusuf b. Tasfin's sickness was aggravated, he confided power to his son, the heir to the throne”.

<sup>25</sup> “Amir al-Muslimin.” In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/amir-al-muslimin-SIM\\_0618](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/amir-al-muslimin-SIM_0618). “Lord of the Muslims, a title which the Almoravids first assumed, in contra-distinction to *Amīr al-Muʾminīn* [q.v.]. The latter title was borne by the independent dynasties; the Almoravids, however, recognized the supremacy of the ‘Abbāsids and did not wish to arrogate to themselves this title of the Caliphs. So they



importance as an alternative title to amir al-Mu'minin, indicating recognition as a caliph, will be discussed in further detail shortly.

Under the rule of Abu Bakr b. Umar, another milestone of institutional growth was met. Starting on May 7, 1070, Abu Bakr began construction on the city of Marrakesh, which would become the capital of both the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties.<sup>26</sup> This movement from a tribal way of life towards a sedentary one is a major marker of the group's overall institutional identity. The construction of a capital, a permanent installation and symbol of governance, acted as a means of securing political dominance that, when combined with a successful dynasty of rulers, effectively moved the Almoravids out of the category of scattered raiding tribes in the Atlas Mountains and into a larger arena of political influence in the Mediterranean. Following the construction of a capital and the succession of Yusuf b. Tasfin, the group's involvement in the region increased immensely. The Almoravid capacity for war, too, dramatically grew; Ibn Idhari describes an instance where an "ejército [envió] a la región de Sale" and "ese mismo año envió también Yusuf b. Tasfin otro ejército al Garb".<sup>27</sup> The use of multiple armies meant that more territory could be covered and conquered in a shorter amount of time while indicating a military presence unparalleled in western North Africa at the time. Ibn Idhari also reports "y este mismo

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established a kind of sub-caliphate with a title of their own. Afterwards the African and Spanish princes bore either the one or the other of these titles, according as they sought after the independent caliphate or recognized any supremacy"; "Dar al-Islam." In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dar-al-islam-SIM\\_1703](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dar-al-islam-SIM_1703). "The Land of *Islam*' or, more simply, in Muslim authors, *dārunā*, 'our Country' is the whole territory in which the law of *Islam* prevails. Its unity resides in the community of the faith, the unity of the law, and the guarantees assured to members of the *umma*".

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 55-56. "[He] sent an army to the region of Sale". "That same year Yusuf b. Tasfin also sent another army to the Garb".

año (1106) salieron setenta naves por el mar occidental, y se dirigieron a la Casa Santa – Jerusalén”.<sup>28</sup> Truly the Almoravids had reached a new level of martial prowess when they were able to lend naval support to the developing situation in the Levant following the fall of Jerusalem in 1099. Of course, none of the seventy ships made it to the Levant, as they all sank in the Mediterranean; this is beside the point however, as it is the projection of power embodied in this act that demonstrates the larger institutional transitions taking place. This ability to field multiple armies throughout the year provided the Almoravids with the fighting power necessary to eventually expand into al-Andalus and match in terms of force the armies of the Christian and *taifa* kingdoms.

The early territorial gains acquired through conquest included the important trade centers of Awdaghust and Sijilmasa, which acted as the main point in which gold entered the Sahara and the “principle port on the northern edge of the desert”, respectively.<sup>29</sup> This influx of trade, especially gold, provided the monetary backing for the campaigns that the Almoravids would continue to conduct on an almost annual basis for the next century. The development of currency is another landmark on the path of Almoravid institutional growth; Ibn Idhari notes that “este año [1072] hizo el emir Yusuf b. Tasfin la casa de la moneda en Marrakus, y acuñó en ella la ceca de los dirhemes redondos”.<sup>30</sup> These coins are described by Ibn Idhari in the following passage: “su dinar de oro llevaba en una de sus caras: 'no hay más Dios que Allah, Muhammad

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<sup>28</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 106. “And in this same year [1106] seventy ships left from the western sea directed towards the Holy City – Jerusalem”.

<sup>29</sup> Messier, *Almoravids*, 13-16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-Mugrib*, 47. “This year [1072] Yusuf b. Tasfin founded the mint in Marrakesh and from it minted round *dirhams*”.

enviado de Allah' y debajo de esto: 'el emir de los musulmanes Yusuf b. Tasfin', y en el círculo 'el que desea otro cosa que el Islam, como religión, no será recibida su tradición' - *sunna* -, etc. en la sura. En la otra cara el nombre del Amir al-Mu'minin al-'abasi".<sup>31</sup> The description of this coin is vital to understanding how the Almoravids positioned themselves as an Islamic power in the Mediterranean. The first of the faces described immediately establishes its makers as Muslims with the prominent placement of the *shahada* and the title *amir al-Muslimin* referring to Yusuf. The latter term firmly places Yusuf in the category of a rightful leader of an Islamic community. The phrase found in the circle, a reminder of the prominence of faith above all other things, identifies the makers not only as Muslims but as Muslims that espouse an ideology steeped in traditional ideology, as the aforementioned phrases and titles indicate a conservative stance on theology. The other side is perhaps the most telling of all and supports an argument positing that the Almoravids attempted to craft themselves as orthodox Muslims, as it bears the title and name of the Commander of the Faithful, the Abbasid Caliph.<sup>32</sup> The juxtaposition of one side of the coin to the other, of Commander of the Muslims to Commander of the Faithful, tells us exactly where the Almoravids, at least Yusuf b. Tasfin, sought to place themselves in terms of the Islamic powers on earth. Commander of Muslims indicates their sovereignty, their place as an Islamic kingdom in the Maghreb. The recognition of the Abbasid Caliph on the reverse face

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- <sup>31</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 109-110. "His dinar of gold had on one of its faces: 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of God' and under that 'the Commander of the Muslims, Yusuf b. Tasfin' and in the circle 'He that desires a thing other than Islam, like religion, will not receive its tradition' – *sunna* –, etc. in the *sura*. On the other side there was the name of the Abbasid Commander of the Believers".
- <sup>32</sup> While the Arabic phrase أمير المؤمنين translates literally as "commander of the believers", it is most commonly translated as the honorific title "Commander of the Faithful" when dealt with in the context of a caliphate. This title is usually reserved for the Caliph; thus, those who claim the title also claim the religious authority of being a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

of the coin identifies the Almoravids as loyal Muslims who fall under the religious authority of the Caliph in Baghdad; this not only removes them as a threat from the perspective of Baghdad but also bolsters the Almoravid claim of religious orthodoxy and legitimacy and therefore their right to correct those practicing the incorrect form of Islam.

This loyalty to the Abbasid Caliph can be explained by the caliphal presence in al-Andalus starting with Abd al-Rahman III in 316/928.<sup>33</sup> Proclaiming himself Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty in opposition to the Abbasid usurpers, Abd al-Rahman introduced caliphal politics into the peninsula, which remained a constant factor in the peninsula until eventual civil war and disintegration into autonomous *taifa*, or party/faction, kingdoms. While the Almoravid dynasty arose a half century after the disintegration of the Caliphate of Córdoba, Almoravid leaders were no doubt aware of the constant competition between self-proclaimed caliphal rights and deemed it best to join the Abbasid Caliphate. Thus, the absence of any Almoravid claim to the title of Caliph and submission, at least nominally, to Baghdad can be explained by a disinterest in challenging Abbasid political power while still maintaining a position of authority in the region by creating a unique title, amir al-Muslimin, to legitimize their rule.

Yusuf b. Tashfin led the Almoravids into the Iberian Peninsula following the fall of Toledo in 1085 and the *taifa* kingdoms' plea for aid.<sup>34</sup> Here, the Almoravids entered European,

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<sup>33</sup> "Amir al-Mu'minin." In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/commander-of-the-faithful-COM\\_25531](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/commander-of-the-faithful-COM_25531).

<sup>34</sup> From the fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba in 1031 to the capture of Toledo by Alfonso VI of Castile, the *taifa* kingdoms had been primarily focused on intense competition with each other that alliances with the northern Christian kingdoms were common practice. However, with the fall of Toledo and the rise of a Christian power, some of the *taifa* kingdoms decided to take necessary precautions against conquest by inviting the Almoravid armies into the Iberian Peninsula with the sole purpose of rallying against Alfonso.

and more specifically Spanish, history with their legendary engagements with Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, The Cid. These battles over Valencia are remembered in song, poetry, and Spain's *Reconquista* history and are the primary memory conjured up when the Almoravids are mentioned. This moment of expansion across the sea is where one can see the full extent of the Almoravid system of bureaucracy that had developed in an organic effort to support the new kingdom. This is most evident in the multitude of letters sent from Yusuf's successor, Ali ibn Yusuf (1106-1143), to his many appointed governors and military leaders spread out across the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghreb. Ibn Idhari records Ali as giving “a su hermano Abu-l-Tahir Tamim al gobierno de Granada, y a Abu Abd Allah Muhammad b. Abi Bakr al-Lamtuni el de Córdoba”.<sup>35</sup> This and many other recorded examples of personal appointments to the multitude of positions within each city captured demonstrates the extensive network of government that had developed.

Of course, the governance of al-Andalus was very different from that of the Maghreb. In the latter, the Almoravids had experienced unparalleled power in their ability to conquer and subjugate other tribes that did not conform to their particular interpretation of orthodox Islam; this included the populations of Jews and Christians that had made the Maghreb their home over the centuries. However, the medieval Iberian Peninsula, with its truly unique character of what some may call *convivencia* in regards to the social dynamics, proved to be an entirely different environment altogether. Ibn Idhari records some instances of the new struggles the Almoravids faced when ruling over substantial non-Muslim populations: “Cuando llegó a la capital del emir

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<sup>35</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 115. “... to his son Abu-l-Tahir Tamim the governorship of Granada and to Abu Abd Allah Muhammad b. Abi Bakr al-Lamtuni the governorship of Córdoba”.

de los musulmanes Ali b. Yusuf, fue denunciado por los mozárabes de Granada ... hasta que los compensó de sus injusticias”.<sup>36</sup> This new wave of non-Muslims must have had a major impact on the Almoravids. In order to maintain some form of control over the territories in al-Andalus, the Almoravids themselves had to fundamentally change by allowing for the existence of non-Muslims in the community. Such a compromise could prove beneficial for the Almoravids. One such benefit can be seen in the extensive use of Christian mercenaries in Almoravid armies near the end of their rule, such as for one of the campaigns against the rising power of the Almohads, which ibn Idhari describes as: “El año 535 (1140-41) salió el ejército de los Lamtunies de Marrakus con mercenarios y cristianos y se encontró con los Almohades en la montaña de Gadmiwa; lucharon ambas partes y triunfaron los Almohades sobre los Lamtunies, que se volvieron a Marrakus perdidos y con el maldito caíd de los cristianos herido”.<sup>37</sup> Of course, this compromise on values within the institution could no doubt be turned against the Almoravid institution by their enemies.

Thus, from tribal beginnings and itinerant preaching to a kingdom spanning the Maghreb and parts of modern Spain, the Almoravids were far from the simple enemies of Christians that European memory takes them to be. They were a dynastic kingdom that ran in part on their ferocity when waging war and their intelligence when establishing a centralized dynasty and administrative bureaucracy. Their ability to wage war effectively allowed them to crush any

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<sup>36</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 178-179. “When the Commander of the Muslims Ali b. Yusuf arrived in the capital, he was denounced by the Mozarabs of Granada ... until he had compensated them for the injustices done upon them”.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 226. “In the year 535 [1140-41] he [Ali b. Yusuf] sent an army of the Lamtuna of Marrakesh and mercenaries and Christians which encountered the Almohads at the mountain of Gadmiwa; both sides fought and the Almohads triumphed over the Lamtunas, who returned to Marrakesh defeated and the head of the wounded Christians damned”.

opposition from rival tribes early on and to compete with the wealthy established powers to the north. A fairly simple though effective administrative system allowed the Almoravids to manage this growing territory; when the diversity of the people who lived in these territories arose as an issue, the dynasty was adaptable and even benefited from the inclusion of other confessional groups within its ranks. This religious zeal and intelligence in administration allowed the Almoravids to find a comfortable position in the Mediterranean world of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; even when remembered by the successors of their kingdom and successors of the Almohads, Maranids like ibn Idhari described them not as some blot in Islamic history but as a serious and dangerous political entity that commanded the deserts of North Africa and struck fear into the hearts of the Christians in the Iberian Peninsula .

### **Almoravid Ideological Identity**

The Almoravids, despite the clear political identity and complexity discussed in the previous section, have been remembered throughout history for primarily one thing: being called “to what the prophet Muhammad described as the lesser *jihad* (holy war) against those tribes who refused to follow the religion of Islam”.<sup>38</sup> The aura of *jihad* that has shrouded Almoravid history has grown into the singular notion of their existence. Many historians are prone to equate their campaigns against the tribes of the Sahara and the kingdoms of al-Andalus to the Crusades undertaken in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries along the eastern Mediterranean coast. This is not only a serious misunderstanding and over-generalization of the Almoravids as a

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<sup>38</sup> Messier, *Almoravids*, 12. Throughout the text, the term *jihad* will be used in accordance with the definition presented by Firestone. Any reference to the word *jihad* as translated by Huici in the Spanish edition of *al-Bayan al-mugrib* will be done so with the term *guerra santa*. This will be done to eliminate confusion and further bring to light the nature of my argument concerning internal ideological distinctions.

political entity but also of the concept of *jihad* itself. Therefore, any discussion of the ideological identity of the Almoravids must be prefaced by a definition of the term *jihad* and reflection on what context constitutes an appropriate use of the term.

*Jihad* as an Arabic word “has no relation to holy war or even war in general”; the word itself comes from the word root ج ه د , meaning an effort or labor undertaken by an individual; in a religious context, this takes on an ascetic meaning.<sup>39</sup> Thus, *jihad* can assume a multitude of forms that have nothing to do with warfare<sup>40</sup>. Firestone delves into this distinction, explaining the difference between a “*jihad* of the heart”, which “denotes struggle against one's own sinful inclinations”, and *jihads* “of the tongue”, requiring “speaking on behalf of good and forbidding evil”.<sup>41</sup> There is, obviously, the form of *jihad* that defines the term throughout most of history and which is the focus of puritan groups like the Almoravids and Almohads. This form of *jihad*, usually qualified with “the phrase 'in the path of God' (*fi sabil Allah*)”, denotes a form of “activity ... furthering or promoting God's kingdom on earth”; while this can be achieved through the aforementioned non-violent methods, the issues of “defending Islam and propagating

<sup>39</sup> Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>40</sup> “Djihad.” In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/djihad-COM\\_0189](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/djihad-COM_0189). Concerning warfare, the entry says: “In principle, the *djihād* is the one form of war which is permissible in Islam, for, in theory, Islam must constitute a single community organized under a single authority and any armed conflict between Muslims is prohibited. Following, however, the disintegration of Muslim unity and the appearance, beginning in the middle of the 2nd/8th century, of an ever increasing number of independent States, the question arose as to how the wars which sprang up between them were to be classified. They were never included within the strict notion of *djihād*—even in the case of wars between states of different religious persuasion—at least according to the general Sunnī doctrine; and it is only by an abuse of language that this term is sometimes applied to them, while those authors who seek for a precise terminology label them only as *kitāl* or *mukātala* (conflict, war). There is even hesitation in referring to the struggle against the renegade groups in Islam as *djihād*”. Firestone’s definition of jihad compliments this as it attempts to create a purely Qur’anic base for the word as it pertains to warfare.

<sup>41</sup> Firestone, *Jihad*, 17.



the faith”, sometimes referred to as *jihad* of the sword (*jihad al-sayf*), are understood as conducting “war on the behalf of Islam”.<sup>42</sup>

The waging of holy war, therefore, is seen as an extension of religious asceticism. This idea itself is well explored by Muslim historians and theologians such as 'Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak (d.797), who is known for his *Kitab al-jihad* (Book of *jihad*) in which he discusses the monastic nature of *jihad*. Al-Mubarak states that “Every community has its monasticism, the monasticism of my community is *jihad* for the sake of God”; perhaps even more explicit, he states that, “Roving monasticism was mentioned in front of the Prophet: The Prophet said: 'God gave us in its stead *jihad* on His path and the *takbir* [the act of shouting “God is greatest”] on every hill”.<sup>43</sup> This almost natural association of holy war with ascetic and pious activities continued to grow with the cross-pollination of ascetic stories from the Christian and Muslim religions. Sizgorich sees the Christian ascetic, the monk, as “an emblem of militancy and ascetic piety joined in the person of communal vanguard”, emerge in the Muslim tradition in the form of the *mujahidun*, these “horsemen by day and monks by night”.<sup>44</sup> With these new found spiritual models, one can easily see how a devout, recently converted Berber Muslim would be “gazing longingly from a frontier *ribat* ... at the *dar al-harb* or 'abode of war' and its promise of martyrdom” and would see his work as “an embodiment of a pure and primordial strain of Islam”.<sup>45</sup> However, Firestone’s *jihad* is not without its flaws. The primary issue with his

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<sup>42</sup> Firestone, *Jihad*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 161.

<sup>44</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 160 -61.

<sup>45</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 168-69.

argument is that is almost entirely theoretical in the sense that it relies completely on Qur'anic passages and the first decade or so following Muhammad's death to create a baseline definition that does not account for any historical change outside of the context of the early Islamic conquest. Ibn Idhari's history comes at a time where there is no longer single Islamic community. Instead, there are a number of competing factions all across the Mediterranean and the Near East, each of them interacting with each other and with non-Muslim political actors. Thus, the context in which a holy war can be declared, such as when the community is threatened, becomes ambiguous and gray. Still, even with its flaws and inability to be completely flexible in the context of the twelfth and thirteenth century Maghreb, Firestone's definition will be the basis for my analysis of *jihad*, holy war, and religiously inspired violence throughout ibn Idhari's text. With this etymological history in mind, we can now analyze the language with which ibn Idhari describes the conquests and missions of the Almoravids.

The earliest instances in which we see the Almoravids participating in actions that help define their ideology are in fact the same instances in which we see their early political and institutional identities develop. The early days of raiding against other tribes in the Atlas Mountains did more than simply consolidate power under the Lamtuna tribe; the process of evangelizing, or at least attempting to, and then retaliating violently when demands for conversion or religious reformation by the other tribes were met with hostility established the Almoravids as a movement obsessed with enforcing a very strict interpretation of Islam. Ibn Idhari refers constantly, though rarely in any detail, to these “lucha[s] contra estos politeístas”

during the early days of the movement.<sup>46</sup> It is in these early raids against the so-called “polytheists” that distinguish the Almoravids so much from their successors the Almohads; in Arabic, ibn Idhari uses the phrase:

"حرب هؤلاء المشركين".<sup>47</sup>

The use of the word “حرب” as opposed to “الجهاد” is, to say the least, not what one would expect when describing highly orthodox Muslim tribes waging wars for the sake of religion on the brink of the Crusade era. Yet, there the word is in all of its secular glory, devoid of any obvious religious connotations. As seen in the aforementioned example, Miranda translates the word as *lucha*, which is a term not often associated with a specifically religious conflict; instead, it is an altogether general term indicating only some sort of conflict. Messier has also noted this lack of the term *jihad* in other portions of ibn Idhari's account of the Almoravids, stating that “the word he uses here is *ghazat*, not *jihad*”.<sup>48</sup> Along with these two words, ibn Idhari uses the

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 22. “Fights against these polytheists”.

<sup>47</sup> Muhammad ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mughrīb fi akhbar al-Andalus wa-al-Maghrib* (Beirut: Ihsan Abbas, 1983), 12. “The war against these polytheists”; “Shirk.” In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/shirk-SIM\\_6965](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/shirk-SIM_6965). “A term from the religious vocabulary, of Qur’ānic origin, which signifies the act of “associating” with God, in other words, accepting the presence at His side of other divinities; it may be translated either literally, by *associationism* or, in more explicit fashion, by *polytheism*. In numerous instances in the Qur’ān there is criticism of the “associators” ( *al-mushrikūn* , 42 occurrences; also encountered nine times is the phrase *alladhīna ashrakū* ), defined as those who invoke ( *yad’ūna* ), adopt ( *yattakhidhūna* ) and worship ( *ya’budūna* ), besides God ( *min dūni ’llāh* ), other gods ( *āliha* ), give Him “associates” ( *djā’alū li ’llāhi shurakā’* ) and equals ( *andād* )”.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Messier, “The Almoravids and Holy War,” in *Jihad and its Times* ed. Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Ronald A. Messier (Ann Arbor: Michigan Center Series on the Middle East, IV, Center for Near East and North African Studies, 1992), 16; “Ghazw.” In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ghazw-SIM\\_2499](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ghazw-SIM_2499). “Expedition, usually of limited scope, conducted with the aim of gaining plunder. The noun of unity *ghazwa* (pl. *ghazawāt* ) is used particularly of the Prophet’s expeditions against the infidels [see *maghāzī* ], but has also special meanings (for which see Dozy, *Suppl.* , s.v.). In its most common sense, *ghazw* (and the dialectical variants) signifies a raid or incursion, a small expedition set on foot by Bedouins (both in the Sahara and in northern Arabia) with booty as its object, and also the force which carries it out”.

form three Arabic verb “قتل”, which means to combat or engage in warfare with another; once more, this word is devoid of any religious connotations.<sup>49</sup> This indicates that, according to ibn Idhari, these particular acts of warfare against the tribes surrounding the Lamtuna did not constitute *jihad*. This is something unique to ibn Idhari's view of the early Almoravid movement; later rulers of the Almoravids will be described as having conducted holy war, as will the Almohads, but for some reason the earliest Almoravid conflicts were simply out of the realm of *jihad* according to the terminology used.<sup>50</sup>

Why does ibn Idhari avoid use of the term *jihad* in the early history? Utilizing Firestone as a guide, one can reasonably assume that ibn Yasin's zeal to wage war on behalf of Islam and to purify the religion of the surrounding tribes falls neatly within the definition of *jihad* as laid out by particular verses in the Qur'an. This insistence on proclaiming the just, following the sunna, and getting rid of illegal taxes is rather telling, as this is a common theme in some of the more prolific verses in the Qur'an regarding the waging of war against the enemies of Islam; the first half of Sura 9:5 states:

"فاذا انسلخ الاشهر الحرم فاقتلوا المشركين حيث وجدتموهم وخذوهم واحصروهم واقعدوا لهم كل مرصد."<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly enough, the verse continues and elaborates on the conditions under which an enemy could surrender and be spared:

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mughrib fi akhbar*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Messier, *Holy War*, 17. In particular, Messier constantly refers to al-Bakri and his commentary on the Almoravids as the primary source which utilizes the phrase “holy war” to describe their early raids. See also Levtzion, *Corpus*, 70.

<sup>51</sup> Qur'an 9:5 “Then, when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)”.

"فإن تابوا وأقاموا الصلاة وآتوا الزكاة فخلوا سبيلهم إن الله غفور رحيم."<sup>52</sup>

Another verse within the same sura, 9:29 also states:

"قاتلوا الذين لا يؤمنون بالله ولا باليوم الآخر ولا يحرمون ما حرم الله ورسوله ولا يدينون دين الحق من الذين أوتوا الكتاب

حتى يعطوا الجزية عن يد وهم صاغرون."<sup>53</sup>

These verses indicate that, even within the earliest formation of an Arabian monotheistic movement that would eventually coalesce into the traditions of Islam, there were criteria defining who was and was not within the community of believers; those on the outside were subject to attack until they found themselves as either fellow Muslims or as a tax-paying group under Muslim rule.<sup>54</sup> Thus, ibn Yasin and the early Almoravid movement saw themselves as modern renditions of the early Islamic community, making those who did not follow their particular view of Islam outsiders subject to attack. This is especially true when recalling how much emphasis ibn Idhari asserts the Almoravids placed on paying only legal, Islamic taxes. All of the illegal taxes that ibn Idhari claims the tribes outside of the Lamtuna were collecting were grounds for labeling them as heretics who were not strictly following the tenets laid out in the Qur'an or *sunna*. The raids against them were in fact on the behalf of Islam, reforming the local tribes and bringing the faith back to what the Almoravids considered to be orthodoxy. Following this train

<sup>52</sup> Qur'an 9:5 "But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful".

<sup>53</sup> Qur'an 9:29: "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

<sup>54</sup> My position regarding the formation and social structure of the early Believer's movement is primarily shaped by Fred M. Donner's work. For more information, see Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

of thought, the early raids conducted by the Almoravids surely must have been seen as *jihad*; however, the term is nowhere to be found.

This still does not explain why ibn Idhari avoids the specific term. When dealing with the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula and their Muslim allies, he does not hesitate to utilize the word *jihad* or *guerra santa*.<sup>55</sup> When dealing with the later group of the Almohads, the term is used often. It is simply not used in the context of the early tribal raids of the Almoravids nor in the earliest conflicts of Yusuf ibn Tashfin in both North Africa and his subsequent campaigns into the heart of the al-Andalus. One can only speculate as to why he chose to label some conquests against particular groups as *guerra santa* and others simply as campaigns or raids. Messier describes how the famed historian ibn Khaldun wrote about a particular episode in which ibn Yasin receives a letter from Sijilmasa extolling him to convince the Lamtuna tribe to wage holy war against their unjust rulers.<sup>56</sup> With this, it is shown that it is not unheard of amongst other records of the Almoravids that they waged holy war against their enemies. This only strengthens the idea that ibn Idhari deliberately chose to use different terminology when describing the early conquests against Berber peoples in North Africa. As pointed out before, Muhammad b. Idhari was writing under the Marinid Dynasty, which was the Berber dynasty that succeeded the Almohads. This dynasty was formed from Zenata tribes, one of the peoples whom the Almoravids had conquered during their early expansion in the Maghreb. This connection could help explain why, according to ibn Idhari or at least to the

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<sup>55</sup> As will be discussed later on in the section, ibn Idhari only begins to use the term *guerra santa* or *jihad* in the Almoravid conflicts following the rule of Yusuf ibn Tashfin.

<sup>56</sup> Messier, *Holy War*, 22.

audience he was writing for, the Almoravid conquests of North Africa up until Ali ibn Yusuf's reign were not considered holy, as they were waged against the ancestors of the current ruling faction.

However, while this may be a plausible reason concerning the conquests of ibn Yasin, it still does not provide much in the way of cause for excluding Yusuf b. Tasfin's campaigns against the Christian kingdoms of northern Iberia, especially Valencia, from the realm of holy war. Once more, it is evident that the terminology describing his actions as *jihad* exist within other histories about the Almoravids; and once more, ibn Idhari seems to be the exception to this trend.<sup>57</sup> The sections concerning Yusuf b. Tasfin and his interactions with Valenica and Rodrigo Díaz the Cid, the Kingdom of Castile and Alfonso VI, and the various *taifa* kingdoms of al-Andalus are strange in that, while lacking in direct references to the term *guerra santa*, there is an ample amount of ideological positioning going on that certainly creates an environment in which holy war on behalf of Islam could exist.

This ideological positioning is one method utilized by ibn Idhari to create a specific identity for the Almoravids; by recording the deeds and misdeeds of other groups, especially those who were enemies of the Almoravids, he could effectively create a context for a war or campaign to be holy and on behalf of the faith without having to use the actual terminology. The conflicts with Valencia and Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar are recorded with a particular focus on the suffering of the Muslim population within the city itself. Ibn Idhari relays the following concerning the defense of Valencia: “Cuando las tropas almoravides vinieron a sitiarse, el maldito [Rodrigo

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<sup>57</sup> Messier, *Holy War*, 24.

Díaz] decidió expulsar a las mujeres y los niños de los musulmanes indigentes y obligarles a ir al campamento de los asediantes, diciéndoles: ‘reuníos con los de vuestra religión’”.<sup>58</sup> This ideological positioning places the Christian ruler of the city in the light of someone who is pitiless towards what could literally be read as the most helpless social group within the city: poor and needy Muslim women and children. This renders ibn Tasfin's siege of Valencia all the more noble, as he is now fighting not for conquest but for Islam and its *umma*, whom have been cast out by that accursed and damned Christian, Díaz. Ibn Idhari describes the recapture of the city as an act of divine will: “... y sacó Allah a Valencia de manos del politeísmo y del poder de los cristianos; la limpió y volvió a ella la luz del Islam y de la religión de Muhammad ...”.<sup>59</sup> The interventionist role of Allah in the capture of the city automatically frames the conflict in the lens of religious warfare; the talk of purifying the city afterward, “cleansing her and returning her to the light of Islam and the religion of Muhammad”, places the whole act of conquering the city from Christian and “polytheist” forces as either a defensive act of Islam or as a propagation of the faith. Other instances of this ideological positioning take place outside of the context of particular sieges and instead focus on individuals. At one point, in an effort to paint the Christian forces to the north as the ideological and moral enemies, ibn Idhari makes reference to a fairly well known scandal of the time: “Se refiere que Alfonso cometió adulterio con su hermana

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<sup>58</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 81. “When the Almoravid troops arrived [at Valencia] to siege it, the accursed one [Rodrigo Díaz] decided to expel the women and children of the indigent Muslims and forced them to go to the camp of the besiegers, saying: 'Reunite with those of your own religion'”.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 102. “... and Allah took Valencia from the hands of the polytheists and the power of the Christians; He cleansed her and returned her to the light of Islam and the religion of Muhammad ...”.



Urraca, uniendo el cristianismo al paganismo”.<sup>60</sup> This is a statement that very firmly places Islam and the Almoravids on the moral high ground. The acts committed by their Christian enemies help ibn Idhari justify a series of campaigns that resemble *jihad* waged by the Almoravid ruler Yusuf b. Tasfin. Thus, one can only assume that the lack of the term itself is simply representative of the writer's own preference for alternative though similar terminology; Tasfin conducted *jihad* in all aspects but its name.

Ibn Tasfin's successor, Ali b. Yusuf, is depicted by ibn Idhari as an even more pious and holy warrior. While the motivation, circumstances, and even language used to depict ibn Tasfin's campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula could be used to claim that they were acts of *jihad*, the author never once calls them so; this is most certainly not the case with ibn Yusuf. Ali b. Yusuf's first act of war following his consolidation of power in Africa is described in the following terms: “El año 503 -1109/10- partió el emir de los musulmanes Ali b. Yusuf de Marrakus para la campaña de la guerra santa y conquistó la ciudad de Talavera”.<sup>61</sup> This is the first direct mention of the term *guerra santa*, or holy war, within the history of the Almoravid dynasty. As opposed to the terms “حرب” or “قتل”, there is no doubt as to what term ibn Idhari uses in the Arabic text:

”و في سنة ثلاث خمسمائة تحرك امير المسلمين علي بن يوسف من مراكش الى الاندلس برسم الغزو و الجهاد و فتح

مدينة طليبرة”<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 121. “It refers to Alfonso [VI], who committed adultery with his sister Urraca, uniting Christianity and paganism”.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 122. “In the year 503 – 1109/10 – Ali b/ Yusuf, Commander of the Muslims, departed from Marrakesh on the campaign of holy war and conquered the city of Talavera”.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mughrib fi akhbar*, 52. “In the year 503 – 1109/10 – Ali b/ Yusuf, Commander of the Muslims, departed from Marrakesh on the campaign and holy war and conquered the city of Talavera”.

The word “الجهاد” is present in an almost ideal context; everything about this statement suggests *jihad* as holy war. What distinguishes this moment from the reconquest of Valencia is not clear, as the capture of the city of Talavera is described as such: “Se purificó la mezquita y se devolvió a la forma musulmana”.<sup>63</sup> Once more, as in Valencia, we have ibn Idhari describing the conquest as one of purifying the city and returning it to its Muslim form; all of these actions, again, constitute a method of defending Islam and propagating the faith, justifying the act as *jihad*.

These acts of purification through war were not solely centered on the Christians of modern-day Spain. At this point in time, there were several groups and movements in North Africa that sought to challenge both the military and spiritual authority of the Almoravids. A brief yet telling example of this comes in the form of al-Jadr, who was a mysterious, self-proclaimed prophet that was neither affiliated with the Jews nor the Arab peoples in the line of prophets, according to the brief note Miranda leaves in his translation.<sup>64</sup> His story is brief: “un hombre pretendiendo que era al-Jidr ... y desde ella fue llevado a la capital, Marrakus, donde fue muerto y crucificado”.<sup>65</sup> His arrival at Marrakesh prompted his death and crucifixion, a punishment historically used against heretics, nonbelievers, and pagans throughout ibn Idhari's text. Such innovations against the faith that the Almoravids propagated would not be tolerated,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 123. “He purified the mosque and returned it to the Muslim form; he renewed the sacred, instated the prayers, and Allah erased the infidelity within her”.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 173.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 173. “A man pretending that he was al-Jidr (al-Jadr) ... and from there he went up to the capital, Marrakesh, where he was killed and crucified”.

just as illegal taxes and a refusal to follow the *sunna* had led to raids against fellow tribes at the movement's beginning.

Near the end of the Almoravid rule, ibn Idhari presents one more fascinating insight into the notion that the Almoravids and their followers believed that they were conducting *guerra santa*, or at least a historian chronicling their campaigns believed they were conducting holy war on God's behalf. The passage, which depicts Ali b. Yusuf's successor, his son Tasfín ibn Ali, reviewing his troops, reads as such:<sup>66</sup>

Le [los caudillos de los Almoravides] dijeron: “el reino es para nosotros; en cuanto a dejarlo o defenderlo, no se excusará nadie de nosotros en encontrarse con el enemigo; y si sufrimos el martirio, el poder será para quien Allah quiera, después de nosotros” ... luego llamó a los Arabes y le dijeron: “lanza al enemigo sobre nosotros, y no nos mezcles con nadie, y Allah verá nuestra obra” ... Luego llamó a Zanata y a los mercenarios – hasam – y le dijeron: “no hay más respuesta que los hechos, y nuestra condición es que te encargues de nuestros huérfanos”.<sup>67</sup>

The answers of the three groups reveal much, as the language is most definitely in line with holy war rhetoric while also revealing a more practical reason to join and campaign with the

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<sup>66</sup> Tasfín b. Ali b. Yusuf, the son of Ali b. Yusuf, assumed control of the Almoravid dynasty in 1143 after some issues regarding a brother and rival to the throne, at least according to ibn Idhari. His rule ended in 1145 following an ill-fated attempt to flee a siege by the rising Almohad group. Following his death, the Almoravid dynasty quickly crumbled under the control of two final, short-lived kings, officially being replaced by the Almohad group in 1147.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 216-17. “The leaders of the Almoravids said to him: 'The kingdom is for us; in leaving or defending, there is no excuse for any of us in closing with the enemy; and if we suffer martyrdom, the power to be who Allah wills, it is subsequently from us.' ... later he [Tasfin b. Ali] called the Arabs and they said to him, 'We launch ourselves into the enemy, we do not mix with anyone, and Allah will see our work.' ... later he called to the Zanata and to the mercenaries – the hasam – and they said to him, 'There is no other answer aside from the fact of the matter, and our condition is that you take care of our orphans’”.

Almoravids. The first group replies that there is no excuse amongst them to avoid closing with the enemy and suffering a martyr's death by the will of Allah. The second group, the Arabs, speak of their self-sacrifice in launching themselves into the enemy, an act of unmatched bravery, and of their purity of company, all of which Allah will see. The third group, comprised of the neighboring umbrella Berber tribe of the Zenata and of Christian mercenaries, is perhaps the only one who may not share in the belief of *jihad*; instead, they fight for a very practical purpose: in the event of their death, Tasfin and his Almoravid group will be the ones to take care of their orphans.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the majority of Tasfin's fighters appeared to have seen themselves as conducting *guerra santa* and eligible to the benefits of honor and glory on earth and in the afterlife, should Allah will their deaths as martyrs.

Thus, one can see that in the eyes of ibn Idhari the Almoravids were much more nuanced than other historians portray them. Though this is his own limited opinion of them, it helps to flesh out the varying interpretations of the Almoravids and their place within North African history and notions of warfare. There is no doubt that they waged holy wars against those they deemed to be enemies of their faith; however, ibn Idhari shows us that there was some dissent about the memory of this great Berber dynasty. By indirectly questioning the ideological nature of the group, he has allowed us to craft a much more careful identity for the Almoravids, one that recognizes a more complicated ideological approach to *jihad* than other historians, both past and present, give them credit for. The Almoravids were driven by religious

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<sup>68</sup> The Christian mercenaries are not a novelty in the medieval Iberian Peninsula. There are many records indicating that Christian *infantes*, *hidalgos*, and *ricohombres* found employment fighting for Muslims; Rodrigo Díaz is perhaps the most well known of these noblemen acting as soldiers-for-hire. Ibn Idhari makes explicit references to Christian mercenaries elsewhere throughout the text.

zeal to uphold their form of orthodoxy. We can see now that this included *jihad* and war on the behalf of Islam; however, ibn Idhari reveals to us the possibility that they were also driven by the means to survive and thrive, just like any other political organization founded on a raiding society. Raiding neighboring tribes may be backed by some religious motivation, but the act of subjugating a rival through force by conducting these raids is a simple and effective way for a single tribe to become dominant in the region. This mundane and fairly obvious motive for waging war and conquering is, in my opinion, too often downplayed in favor of highlighting the religious aspects of their conquests, which could have very easily been added and expanded upon in the memory of the historians who wrote of them long after their fall.

Perhaps, in light of the absence of *jihad* rhetoric in ibn Idhari's text, one might argue that there is a fundamental issue with the framework used in modern readership when analyzing Islamic conquest narratives; this issue can be summarized as a modern obsession with *jihad* and holy war sparked by violent events in the past decade of American and western European history and with an effort to contextualize such violent acts in a modern setting. This newfound interest in the subject and language of Islamic holy war has caused modern scholarship to search everywhere for it, attaching it to texts that would otherwise have been purely historical in nature and perhaps even discarded as they serve no purpose except for those who are experts in the area. Proof of this is evident in titles of books that may convey to an audience some groundbreaking revelation on *jihad* even when the content of the work itself concerns itself with other matters. Several of the sources I utilize for this paper bear titles that indicate a focus on religiously inspired violence, themes that resound in the modern American mind. The need to

find historical precedents for unrelated current events has, no doubt, brought to light a number of texts and groups that would have otherwise remained obscured in history; unfortunately, the medieval sources that have surfaced have become the victims of extremely skewed analyses and struggle to appear as anything but examples of *jihad* for a modern audience to take out of context.

### **Almohad Institutional Identity**

Along similar developmental lines as the Almoravids, the Berber tribal confederation that would eventually become the Almohad Caliphate started out in the Atlas Mountains of North Africa. With the help of a religiously inspired charismatic leader, the Masmuda tribes came together to form a political entity that would eventually overthrow the Almoravids and lay claim to the Maghreb and al-Andalus. However, just as the Almoravids are far too often relegated to the position of a single part of the amorphous Muslim opponent of European Christian forces during the time period marked by crusading ventures, so too are the Almohads limited to the role of the great Muslim opponents during the height of the Spanish *Reconquista*. Aside from these similarities in generalized backgrounds, destinies, and portrayals, the Almohad Caliphate is a wholly different phenomenon than its predecessors. Whereas the Almoravids grew from a loose confederation of allied and conquered Berber tribes bent on purifying Islam throughout the region to a hereditary monarchy submitting itself under the nominal religious authority of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, the Almohads started as religious movement and continued to think of themselves as the movement and keepers of the true faith at least up until the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. Unlike the Almoravids, whose religious mission of

purification could be altered significantly by the mere language of ibn Idhari, the religious aspect of the Almohad movement, which is arguably the most defining feature of the group, could not be ignored as easily.

Charismatic leadership without a doubt is a common trait between the Almoravids and the Almohads. This generalized statement is where the similarity stops. While ibn Yasin preached his particularly strict form of Islam under the authority and protection of those tribal leaders who had originally believed his message, such as ibn Ibrahim and ibn Umar, the Almohad movement began with one man: Muhammad ibn Tumart. Ibn Tumart was “the son of a minor Berber chief from the Atlas Mountains south of Marrakech” who, following a pilgrimage into the eastern heart of the Islamic world, returned to the Atlas Mountains with his mind set on religious revival.<sup>69</sup> Unlike ibn Yasin, he did not simply preach a mission to return to orthodoxy in accordance with the religious authorities found in Baghdad; he decided instead to completely shift the center of the Islamic world to the west, with himself as the *mahdi*, “the one who would herald the end of time and the beginning of a new era in Islam”.<sup>70</sup> This proclamation as *mahdi* immediately places the movement in a far more religious light than that of the Almoravids, which, considering the preaching mission of ibn Yasin and the early Almoravid movement, is a

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<sup>69</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 2. Fromherz elaborates on the term *mahdi* and its possible origins in his book; simply put, the term and tradition itself have very little to no basis in Qur'anic and *hadith* sources. The term *mahdi* is applicable in many situations, ranging from leaders of small scale urban reorganization to fabled herald of the end times bringing sweeping changes to the world of Islam. This latter application is how Fromherz understands the term *mahdi* in ibn Tumart's case; Fromherz argues this due to the eerily coincidental sequence of events leading to ibn Tumart's being named *mahdi* by his followers to the proclamation of Muhammad as prophet, which Fromherz discusses in detail. From this point forward it should be assumed that any reference to the term *mahdi* as it applies to Muhammad b. Tumart is meant to describe him as the one who would guide the Islamic community along the correct path in preparation for the heralded end of days.

considerable claim. By proclaiming himself *mahdi*, ibn Tumart asserted that he alone was to set the Islamic community upon the right path, starting in the Maghreb. However, ibn Idhari does not seem to have viewed ibn Tumart's claim as anything spectacular or unique in any sense. Of ibn Tumart's proclamation, ibn Idhari says: ““El año 518 (1124) Muhammad b. Tumart se llamó al-Mahdi”.”<sup>71</sup> Ibn Idhari says no more of ibn Tumart as the *mahdi*; this lack of interest is peculiar, as he was obviously familiar with ibn Tumart's title. Whereas the lack of the term *guerra santa* in ibn Idhari's sections concerning the early Almoravid campaigns against Christians in the Iberian Peninsula could be explained by a disagreement in religious terminology or possibly the actual lack of religious warfare, he does not seem to have an issue with ibn Tumart's claim when taken at face value as a self-imposed title. His lack of discussion on the topic could signify that he does not agree with the religious claim and does not see the topic as a thing worth even gracing with discussion. However, the same silence on the matter could also signify that he agrees with the religious claim or, as mentioned before, sees no issue with ibn Tumart's designation as *mahdi* in a historical sense, which is far more likely; this is backed up further by ibn Idhari's continued use of the term *mahdi* throughout the rest of the text. If he had truly disagreed with the religious implications of ibn Tumart's use of the term *mahdi*, ibn Idhari, one could assume, would have made a vehement effort to either provide the counterarguments of some trusted theologian or would simply have refused to use the term in any other situation referring to Muhammad b. Tumart from that point onwards. Perhaps, even though many historians are inclined to disagree when it comes to any ancient or medieval source, ibn Idhari

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<sup>71</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 158. “In the year 518 (1124), Muhammad b. Tumart was called mahdi”.



was simply attempting to remain as objective as possible when dealing with such controversial and charged historical figures and events. Alas, we are left to wonder about such choices of the author with very little hope that such questions will be answered in the future with the current set of sources available to historians.

As opposed to the Almoravid movement, which started in a Maghrebian context with no central governing power and only a patchwork of tribal confederations, the Almohad movement was born in world where the the Almoravid dynasty was at the height of its power as it stretched from North Africa to al-Andalus and waged wars throughout with those who were considered heretics. Thus, ibn Tumart's Almohad movement had to deal with the political issues of not only rallying local tribes to its cause but with assembling a confederation powerful enough to topple over the reigning dynasty and all of its armies and resources. Ibn Tumart wasted no time in using his message of *tawhid*, or belief in the absolute unity and oneness of Allah, as a rallying point for his movement. It is from this term that the movement's name is based, the Arabic being al-Muwahhidun or الموحدون , meaning “the followers of the doctrine of divine unity”.<sup>72</sup> With this message of divine unity, he directed the conflict of orthodox Islam directly at the Almoravids and their kingdom, whom he claimed had corrupted the faith with their jurists. Ibn Idhari relates this pointed ideological assault on the Almoravids in the following passage: “Se puso excitar a sus compañeros a luchar contra los velados – Almorávides – y les decía: 'matad a los antropomorfistas y a los bereberes pervertidos y a los alfaquíes detestados’”.<sup>73</sup> By calling

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<sup>72</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 158 . “He excited his companions to fight against the 'veiled ones' – the Almoravids – and said to them: 'slay the anthropomorphists, the perverted Berbers, and the detested al-faqiha’”.

for the death of the “veiled ones”, the Almoravids, and their jurists, ibn Tumart was calling into question the religious and secular authority of the Almoravid dynasty.<sup>74</sup>

This outright hostility would eventually lead to open conflict with the Almoravids; as if in anticipation of this, ibn Tumart had a series of fortress monasteries built that would constitute the religious centers of his movement and of the empire it would become. Ibn Idhari dedicates a fair amount of descriptive text to the first of these sanctuaries atop the mountain of Iyilliz:

Cuando se propagó su fama en las cabilas de las montañas y le llegaron a él, se fue con ellos a la montaña del Iyilliz de Harga, y cuando se vio protegido por la montaña y defendido por sus seguidores, escribió a las cabilas y extendió su mano para el reconocimiento. Fue esto el año 516 (1122), según expondré en su lugar. Dice al'Yasa b. Isa, el de Gafiq, que, cuando subió el imán a la montaña, mando fortificar su sitio, porque no tenía más que un solo camino por el que no podíasino un jinete tras otro, por su mucha fragura.<sup>75</sup>

This rather lengthy description of ibn Tumart's sanctuary at the top of Iyilliz, which was abandoned shortly thereafter for the mountaintop fortress of Tinmal, is indicative of ibn Tumart's

<sup>74</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 81-2. While wearing veils was and continues to be a tradition of most Saharan tribes, ibn Tumart made the wearing of the veil an insult pointed at Almoravid gender roles. Fromherz argues that the traditional role of women within the tribal matriarchy was diminished as Islam permeated Almoravid culture; however, a fair amount of tradition was left intact especially in regards to dress. Traditionally, men that belonged to the Saharan Berber tribes wore veils and were often “identified ... as the *mulithamun* (the *litham* or mouth-veil wearers). As the men wore veils and the women wore “their hair uncovered so high and haughty it resembled Bactrian camel humps”, ibn Tumart found an easy target in his campaign against the Almoravid backwardness and heresy.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 158. “When he [ibn Tumart] had propagated his fame amongst the tribes of the mountains and they had come to him, he went with them to the mountain Iyilliz de Harga, and when he was protected by the mountain and they defended it for their security, he wrote to the tribes and extended his hand for recognition. This was the year 516 (1122) al'Yasa b. Isa of Gafiq said, that, when the imam rose from the mountain, he commanded that they fortify the site because it had only a single path that but one rider after another (single file) could go on as the road was this rough”.

political situation. Surrounded by Almoravid enemies, the only logical location to foster his movement was from the security of a *ribat*. The fortified position would not only protect his people from the weapons of Almoravids attempting to put down heresy but also from the spiritual influences of the Almoravids and their jurists. Thus, armed with an inspiring theological movement and a sanctuary from which to preach his mission, ibn Tumart was free to begin the process of accumulating enough tribes and power to openly challenge the Almoravid dynasty.

The most immediate difference between the two movements and their political identities is the nature of their religious foundation. As previously mentioned, the Almohad concept of the *mahdi* was completely divergent from the orthodox system set in place by the Almoravids. However, scholars such as Fromherz believe that the development of the *mahdi* as the central figure of the movement and the *mahdi*'s ability to rally a large number of tribes under a single banner were natural extensions of the Berber tradition that was well established throughout the Atlas Mountain region. According to Fromherz, "in a country where the rain is not always faithful in its visits, where tribal discord can maintain a state of insecurity and economic crisis, Morocco's history has been shaped by those critical moments when charismatic chiefs emerge with enough prestige to resonate through an entire dynasty. Maintaining power ... required a heavy and consistent application of spiritual charisma"; he argues that the terrain, political nature, and "appeal to a miraculous situation" lent themselves to a history of "hagiocracy (the rule of saints) and Mahdis".<sup>76</sup> Thus, ibn Tumart's call to reform Islam from the ground up, backed up by his extraordinary acts before arriving at Iyilliz that ibn Idhari simply leaves out in his text, and

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<sup>76</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 146.

his proclamation as mahdi made him an ideal candidate to rally tribes either unsatisfied or unallied with the Almoravids.<sup>77</sup>

Once more, of this ibn Idhari has little to say regarding ibn Tumart's accumulation of forces; what he does have to say is far from positive. Ibn Idhari paints the early rise of the Almohad movement in a violent light:

Refiere esto ibn al-Qattan y me contó Abu Ali Salih que, cuando mató Muhammad b. Tumart a los Hazmira de Tinmal, le dijo el alfaquí al-Ifriqui, uno de sus íntimos: “cómo matas a gente que te ha reconocido y ha entrado en tu obediencia y repartes sus bienes?”. Mandó matarlo y crucificarlo porque dudaba de su inviolabilidad. El matar a los Hazmira de Tinmal fue el año 518 (1124). Reunió el Mahdi contra ellos a la gente de aquella montaña, se levantó con ellos y mató quince mil personas. Cuando los exterminó y saqueó sus bienes, edificó el castillo de Tinmal, y cuando se apoderó el Mahdi de aquellas montañas y de sus dependencias, se hizo apretada la situación para el emir Ali b. Yusuf y envió a ellas ejércitos, que fueron derrotados.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 71-5. The Almohad chronicler and “ibn Tumart's close confidant” Abu Bakr ibn Ali al-Sanhaji al-Baydhaq recorded a fair amount of the early career of the mahdi. Some of this account includes an encounter with Almoravid “caliph” Ali ibn Yusuf in Marrakesh in which ibn Tumart, praying at the mosque, witnesses ibn Yusuf praying with his “viziers and counsellors”. When told to pay his respects to the “caliph”, ibn Tumart responds, “Where is the amir? For I see nothing but veiled women,” and then proceeds to lecture the amir about the proper manner to pray in. In the *Rawd al-Qirtas*, Ibn Abi Zar, an early fourteenth century chronicler, recorded the aftermath of ibn Tumart's encounter with Ali b. Yusuf in which he left the city and definitely preached amongst the dead in the cemetery.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 159-60. “Ibn al-Qattan refers to this and Abu Ali Salih recounted to me that when Muhammad b. Tumart killed the Hizmira of Tinmal, the *faqih* al-Ifriqi, one of his intimates, said to him: ‘Why do you kill the people that have recognized you and entered under your obedience and given up their goods?’. He [ibn Tumart] order him killed and crucified for doubting his inviolability. The killing of the Hizmira of Tinmal was in the year 518 (1124). The mahdi met with the people of that mountain, rose with them, and killed fifteen thousand people. When he exterminated them and sacked their goods, he built the castle of Tinmal, and when he seized those mountains and their dependents, the situation tightened for emir Ali b. Yusuf, who sent armies at them, which were defeated”.

The brutal taking of the mountain where the future fortress of Tinmal would be built is aggressive and straightforward. If anything, ibn Tumart's violent reaction towards al-Ifriqi reveals a character willing to kill those who question his authority on the spot. Simply put, this is a negative view of the Almohad Caliphate. Even though ibn Idhari attributes the particular incident to another author, he chose a rather damning view of the Almohads. While many Islamic historians in the Maghreb, especially those of successor states like ibn Idhari's Maranid Dynasty, tend to focus on "portraying the legitimacy of movements and rebellions starting in North Africa", ibn Idhari seems to have attempted to legitimize his regime by denouncing the other two.<sup>79</sup> With the Almoravids, a use of vocabulary denouncing some of their earliest raids against fellow Muslims was sufficient; with the Almohads, it seems ibn Idhari has avoided using the storied beginning of the Almohads, the divine selection of the mahdi, and the holy mission of rebuilding the Islamic world from the West. Instead, he opted to simply omit most of this and for what scant history he does include about the rise of the Almohads, there is nothing holy about it.

This passage also provides, though I believe unintentionally, insight into the Almohad institutional philosophy. Ibn Tumart's reaction towards an individual who questioned his authority is highly indicative of the overall focus on unity within the Almohad community. The doctrine of *tawhid*, or unity and singularity of God, "meant not only the absolute unity of God, but also the absolute unity of God's community".<sup>80</sup> Following this train of thought, the death and crucifixion of al-Ifriqi was a message communicating the unquestionable nature of the mahdi, and therefore the religious element of the movement, and the absolute hierarchy within the early

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<sup>79</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 199.

Almohad world. This lies in stark contrast to the beginning of the Almoravid movement, where the religious element was merely tacked on to the pre-existing tribal hierarchy and only possessed power through the head tribe. The Almohad system rallied tribes around a single religious and political leader, leading to greater solidarity than a strategic confederation of tribes.

Ibn Idhari, as opposed to how he relays the Almoravid rise to power, which he follows with great detail, only jumps to key moments in the Almohad timeline. Following the establishment of Tinmal but preceding the fall of the Almoravid dynasty, ibn Idhari only mentions the Almohads in their military forays against the various Almoravid armies sent to subdue them. He states at one point: “Este mismo año 524 (1129/30) bajó una taifa de las cabilas de los Almohades a Kik y derrotaron a un ejército de Ali b. Yusuf y cogieron sus riquezas, armas y tiendas; luego bajó con ellos Abd al-Mu'min a Agmat; la sitiaron y mataron en un día a cerca de trescientos, la mayoría negros”.<sup>81</sup> These victories indicate exactly how far the movement had grown since its initial founding in the mountain *ribat*. Within five years, ibn Tumart had taken the movement from the Atlas Mountains and was able to defeat the armies of the Almoravids in battle. This trend continued as the Almohads defeated more and more Almoravid armies, sowing discord among the various tribes residing within the mountains. Ibn Idhari records this in the following: “Envió a ellos a su hermano Ibrahim, el conocido por ibn Tagyast, y se deshizo su contingente sin lucha, cogiendo los Almohades sus tiendas, armas y banderas. Cuando corrió esta desgracia y se divulgó esta derrota por el país de los Masmuda, aumentaron los que venían

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<sup>81</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 193. “This same year 524 (1129/30) a group of the Almohad tribes came down upon Kik and defeated an army of Ali b. Yusuf. They took their riches, weapons, and stores. Later they came down upon Abd al-Mu'min at Agmat. They besieged the city and in one day killed close to three hundred, the majority of which were Blacks.

a ellos y surgió la revuelta *-fitna-* entre las cabilas de los Masmuda; el hombre mataba a su padre en su casa, si se resistía a seguir al Mahdi ...”.<sup>82</sup> The military victories inspired further dissension, building the Almohad numbers.

With increased numbers and military victories, the Almohads as a political unit grew from a single tribe to a force able to vie with the Almoravids directly, pulling away tribes from the Almoravid confederation one by one and gaining legitimacy on both political and religious fronts. The discord this wrought on the loose alliances of the Almoravids is apparent as the dynasty was toppled soon after. This trend also says much about both the inherent tensions within Almoravid system of subjugating defeated tribes and the appeal of the Almohad’s anti-Almoravid message. In 1130, ibn Tumart died, “his followers [keeping] his death secret for three years for fear that the tribes would abandon their beloved Mahdi”; surprisingly, the movement survived and began to thrive under the leadership of the dynasty’s new leader, Abd al-Mu’min (1130-1163).<sup>83</sup> In order to solidify the gains made under the tenure of ibn Tumart, Abd al-Mu’min created political alliances via marriages. Ibn Idhari records such an instant during the sack of Melilla: “salió ibn Zayu con el ejército y saqueó a Melilla y cogió en ella cien doncellas y las repartió 'Abd al-Mu'min entre los Almohades; los favoreció Allah con ello. Estaba entre ellas la hija de Maksan b. Mu’azz, señor de Melilla, y Fátima, hija de Yusuf; y cogió Abd al-Mu’min a la hija de Maksan y Abu Ibrahim a Fátima y hicieron un banquete

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<sup>82</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 196. “He [Tasfin b. Ali] sent to them his brother Ibrahim, it is known to ibn Tagyast, and his contingent was gotten rid of without a fight, the Almohads taking their stores, their arms, and their banners. When this disgrace spread and the defeat was divulged throughout the country of the Masmuda, those who came increased and the revolt *-fitna-* arose between the tribes of the Masmuda; a man killing his father in his house if he resisted to follow the mahdi”.

<sup>83</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 2.

-*asmas*”.<sup>84</sup> The *asmas* was a Berber ritual banquet which tied families together and formalized tribal and marriage alliances; in this way, Abd al-Mu'min legitimized Almohad power in the traditional political and cultural manner, ensuring that the new tribes' religious allegiance extended well beyond belief and was backed up by blood and Berber tradition.<sup>85</sup>

In this way, the Almohads grew from ibn Tumart's original following to a tribal confederation that would eventually replace the Almoravid dynasty. The last of the Almoravid kings with any power, Tasfin ibn Ali, was defeated and killed in 1145. Following this, the Almohads pronounced themselves as the seat of a new Caliphate, separate from the Abbasids in Baghdad. Ibn Idhari does not relay the exact moment or decision to utilize the title; he simply and without much excitement states, “Envió la carta sobre la victoria al Califa 'Abd al-Mu'min ...”.<sup>86</sup> This title begins to appear with frequency after the defeat of the “pretender” Muhammad Abd Allah ibn Hud, who called himself al-Hadi/al-Massi and raised an army of followers in opposition of Abd al-Mu'min in 1147 immediately following the fall of Marrakesh and the official end of the Almoravid dynasty. As opposed to their predecessors, who paid homage to the Caliph in Baghdad, ibn Tumart's vision came to fruition and placed the Almohads in a position where they claimed to be the heart of the Islamic world and holders of the true faith. With North Africa under their control, the Almohads could turn their attention to al-Andalus, which had returned to a system of taifas following the collapse of the Almoravids. Thus, the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 230. “Ibn Zayu left with an army and sacked Melilla and took from her one hundred maidens. Abd al-Mu'min partitioned them between the Almohads; Allah favored them with this. There was among the maidens the daughter of Maksan b. Mu'azz, lord of Melilla, and Fatmia, daughter of Yusuf; Abd al-Mu'min took the daughter of Maksan and Abu Ibrahim took Fatima and they had a banquet -*asmas*”.

<sup>85</sup> Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 97.

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 291. “He sent a letter about the victory of Caliph Abd al-Mu'min”.



Almohads were poised to enter European history as the rampart of Islam in the face of Christendom; this is the role that they would inherit in medieval Spanish history.

However, after reviewing the establishment and early history of the Almohads, even in the scant and superficial manner outlined by ibn Idhari, one can gather that the Almohad Caliphate was more nuanced than a simple band of *jihad*-obsessed fanatics. Their political identity was molded primarily by their unique *mahdi* movement and by their Berber origins. Ibn Tumart and his successors crafted a distinct identity for the movement, one that stressed the absolute unity of religion and of governance, Islamic purity and Berber traditions and loyalties. As opposed to the Almoravids, who entered the historical scene in what could more or less be described as a North African power vacuum, the Almohads entered history under the unified rule of a ruling dynasty with wealth and power. Whereas the Almoravids utilized religion to bolster the position of the leading tribe and coerced other tribes to join politically through conquest, the Almohads used religion and a strict sense of unity in authority to showcase their cause as the more just one; by positioning themselves as more divinely favored or simply more powerful than the Almoravids, other tribes willingly submitted to the Almohads. If they did not, conquest worked just as well. The Almohads, as authors like Fromherz are increasingly demonstrating to a modern audience, are a novel blend of Islam and Berber tribalism that deserves to be recognized as more than the enemies of Christendom during the height of the *Reconquista*.

### **Almohad Ideological Identity**

The Almohad Caliphate established its political identity around the concept of the

mahdi. In doing so, the political identity and the ideology of the movement became one and the same. Almohad ideology, like that of the Almoravids, was fundamentally based on the idea of purity and orthodoxy of Islam presumably akin to the earliest Islamic community. However, while the Almoravids were set on a strict adherence to this ideal form of Islam as interpreted through the Malikite school of law, the Almohads defined orthodoxy in their own terms, placing themselves in an ambiguous theological position that was not quite Sunni nor Shia. Their form of Islam was one based on the absolute oneness of Allah, or *tawhid* (توحيد); this concept was brought to the Islamic community by the mahdi, the rightly guided one who would restore Islam to the correct path in preparation for the end of time. This *tawhid* as presented by the mahdi ibn Tumart opened up the path for the Almohads to conduct religiously inspired war against their immediate rivals, the Almoravids, and then any others who fell outside of their definition of orthodoxy, which included the Christian kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula and rival Islamic movements.

A quote referenced earlier provides an excellent example of the essence of the early Almohad ideological position: “Se puso excitar a sus compañeros a luchar contra los velados – Almorávides – y les decía: 'matad a los antropomorfistas y a los bereberes pervertidos y a los alfaquíes detestados’”.<sup>87</sup> The comment recorded by ibn Idhari, perhaps quite intentionally, is succinct and aggressively pointed towards the Almoravid establishment. The *velados* came under attack as *antropomorfistas*, or anthropomorphists. This attack is founded on the idea

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<sup>87</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 158. “He excited his companions to fight against the 'veiled ones' – the Almoravids – and said to them: 'slay the anthropomorphists, the perverted Berbers, and the detested al-faqiha’”.

that the Almoravids, through their *los bereberes pervertidos y a los alfaquíes detestados*, had perverted the pure nature of Allah by relying too heavily on their legal interpretations of the Qur'an and, by doing so, took away from the mystery and unknowable character of Allah. In essence, by lessening Allah's divinity through texts of jurisprudence, they likened Allah to a human. This was the most heinous of crimes in the minds of the Almohads. Their war with the Almoravids, therefore, was justified as a necessary act to purify Islam. However, just as ibn Idhari was seemingly highly selective about which Almoravid acts of violence counted as *jihad* proper, it would seem that ibn Idhari does not deem the Almohad military campaigns against the Almoravids as anything more than secular, political military operations devoid of any religious justification. While he certainly attributes a religious motivation to the forays against the Almoravids, he once more is hesitant to use the term *guerra santa*.

Again, as was done with the Almoravid sense of holy war, Reuven Firestone's theories concerning *jihad* founded primarily on Qur'anic verses and how ibn Idhari utilizes the term will be the primary focus of this section. The majority of the time period covered by the author concerns the Almohad struggles against fellow Muslims within North Africa as they solidified their claim to power. There is evidence, as Firestone briefly argues, that indicates the historical precedent for *jihad* to be waged against fellow Muslims. Chronologically speaking, this is reasonable as "conflicts between Muslims", including "wars fought against groups of apostates rebelling against proper Islamic authority", "highway robbers and other violent people", and "deviant or un-Islamic leadership" are some of the first wars fought within the Arabian Peninsula

before major expansion outward occurred in the mid to late seventh century.<sup>88</sup> Thus, just as the early Almoravids were justified in their religious wars against tribes whom they felt were incorrectly practicing Islam, so too did the Almohads feel justified in combating their fellow Muslims in North Africa a century later. Their storied part in the *Reconquista* opposite crusading armies and the Spanish Military Orders would come in the thirteenth century, a section of ibn Idhari's text that has unfortunately been lost to time. We can only speculate as to the terminology that he utilized when discussing such a religiously charged subject.

In his initial conflicts against the Almoravids, ibn Tumart founded a headquarters from which to launch both his preaching mission and attacks against his enemies. Once more, the description of the first mountain fortress provides the appropriate evidence to analyze the ideological position of the Almohad dynasty:

Cuando se propagó su fama en las cabilas de las montañas y le llegaron a él, se fue con ellos a la montaña del Iyilliz de Harga, y cuando se vio protegido ~~por~~ <sup>en</sup> la montaña y defendido por sus seguidores, escribió a las cabilas y extendió su ~~mano~~ <sup>mano</sup> para el reconocimiento. Fue esto el año 516 (1122), según expondré en su lugar. Dice al'Yasa b. Isa, el de Gafiq, que, cuando subió el imán a la montaña, mando fortificar su sitio, porque no tenía más que un solo camino por el que no podíasino un jinete tras otro, por su mucha fragura.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Firestone, *Jihad*, 17.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 158. “When he [ibn Tumart] had propagated his fame amongst the tribes of the mountains and they had come to him, he went with them to the mountain Iyilliz de Harga, and when he was protected by the mountain and they defended it for their security, he wrote to the tribes and extended his hand for recognition. This was the year 516 (1122) al'Yasa b. Isa of Gafiq said, that, when the imam rose from the mountain, he commanded that they fortify the site because it had only a single path that but one rider after another (single file) could go on as the road was this rough”.

This fortified site from which to launch his preaching mission and campaign against the detested veiled Almoravids bears a striking resemblance to a *ribat*, a fort “rather like a monastery for traveling ascetics, mystics, pilgrims, or *mujahidun*”, thus giving the Almohads a site associated with holy war to launch their *jihad* against their enemies.<sup>90</sup> The establishment of the *ribat* can be seen as a manifestation of religiously inspired violence, if not *jihad*, in stone; it is a striking symbol of religious militancy akin to the crusader fortress in the Levant. With the Almohad movement and their *mahdi* centered around a cluster of these fortresses in the mountains, they made it abundantly clear that their purpose was war on behalf of Islam.

After gaining the upper-hand in their war with the Almoravids, the Almohads under the leadership of Abd Allah al-Mu'min ended the ruling dynasty after besieging the city of Orán in 1145. When Tasfin b. Ali fell to his death while attempting to escape from the Almohad siege, his enemies searched for and eventually found his body. Ibn Idhari describes their actions upon finding his body as such: “se buscó a Tasfín y fue encontrado muerto, se crucificó se cadáver y se envió se cabeza a Tinmal”.<sup>91</sup> Their treatment of the Almoravid king's body indicates their belief that he was hardly deserving of a proper Islamic funeral but rather the death and morbid display of a heretic. This trend is continued as the Almohads found themselves dealing with rival tribes and religious movements that sought to displace the new dynasty, just as what had happened with the Almoravids. One such movement was that of Muhammad Abd Allah b. Hud, who called himself al-Hadi/al-Massi and, as mentioned before, raised an army of followers

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<sup>90</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 168.

<sup>91</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 262. “They searched for Tasfín and encountered him dead; they crucified his body and sent the head to Tinmal [the city where al-Mu'min was currently at]”.

in opposition to Abd al-Mu'min in 1147, the year in which the Almohads had finally seized Marrakesh and killed the last of the Almoravid dynasty.<sup>92</sup> This “pretender” and his movement were promptly crushed by the military might of the Almohads; however, remnants of his army and followers still existed and had to be dealt with. In a section of *al-Bayan al-mugrib* entitled “Noticia de las marcha del jeque Abu Hafs al-Hintati desde la capital de Abd al-Mu'min para combatir a los hipócritas y a las cabilas que se alzaron por la inovación de al-Massi, el llamado ibn Hud, después de vencerlo y matarlo”, ibn Idhari describes the action taken against them: “se dirigió contra ellos y lo atacaron, resistiendo a la gente de 'Abd al-Mu'min y manteniéndose en la obediencia del Massi ...”.<sup>93</sup> This violent and ruthless reaction towards a rival *mahdi* is indicative of the willingness of the Almohad Caliphate to purge Islam of any innovations as they perceived them, especially potential political and religious rivals. These could easily be justified as *jihad* under the circumstances of purifying the religion from innovations and defending the faith from false prophets. The campaign against their fellow Muslims, the Almoravids, could be explained by the reasoning given by Firestone beforehand: *jihad* could be waged against those who are false Islamic authorities leading the *umma* astray. Following the successful end to the revolt, Abd al-Mu'min made a religious move that would solidify the Almohad dynasty's religious authority and political dominance in North Africa and eventually al-Andalus: he

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<sup>92</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 290-1. - Miranda explains the terms *al-Massi/al-Hadi* as alternatives to *al-mahdi*, thus giving ibn Hud some religious authority in his claim against the Almohads.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 293. “News of the march of Sheikh Abu Hafs al-Hintati from the capital of Abd al-Mu'min to fight the hypocrites and the tribes who took up the innovation of al-Massi, called ibn Hud, following his defeat and death”; “He [al-Mu'min] directed [his army] against and attacked them, [al-Massi's followers] resisted the people of 'Abd al-Mu'min and maintained their obedience towards Massi”.

proclaimed himself as “*califa*”.<sup>94</sup> As discussed earlier, the term *khalifa* not only implied political separation from the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad but also a religious independence from the traditional leaders of the *dar al-Islam*. This claim to religious authority and autonomy, in essence, completely removed the Almohad Caliphate from the contemporary world of religious hierarchy in Islam. This gave them unprecedented flexibility in determining and enforcing orthodoxy as they saw fit.

Once more, as with the Almoravids, one must simply assume that ibn Idhari did not agree with the particular definition of *jihad* that Firestone is using currently. As he does not use the term *guerra santa* with both the Almoravid and Almohad campaigns against fellow Muslims within North Africa but rather attributes it more or less only to campaigns against Christian opponents in the Iberian Peninsula. For the Almohads, ibn Idhari marks this change with the Almohad campaign against the Sicilian Christians in the city of al-Mahdiya in Ifriqiyya around 1159. He describes it in simple terms: “Cuando se completaron los ejércitos del resto del país hacer la guerra santa, nombró su lugarteniente a Abu Hafs ...”.<sup>95</sup> The following siege of the city and its conclusion are described in terms that recall to memory the sieges of Christian cities by the Almoravids who waged war against Valencia earlier in the century. Ibn Idhari describes it as such: “Duró el asedio de esta ciudad, defendida con fortificaciones elevadas, por espacio de siete meses, hasta que Allah facilitó su conquista por capitulación de los cristianos, que pidieron salir con el aman hacia su país. Les concedió lo que pedían y los sacó de ella, limpiando Allah

<sup>94</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 291.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 324. “When the armies of the rest of country completed to make holy war, he [Abd al-Mu’min] named Abu Hafs his lieutenant ...”.

con ello la región de Ifriqiya y el Zab, y se le concedió ante Allah un gran premio y recompensa”.<sup>96</sup> The divine intervention and purifying acts of Allah are indicative of ibn Idhari’s approval of this particular campaign.

Once more described as holy war, the fighting against the Sicilian Christians in al-Mahdiya is distinct from earlier campaigns in only two respects: location and the nature of the enemy. As opposed to fighting in lands that were technically under the control of an Islamic dynasty, one many would call orthodox, the Almohads were now fighting in lands lost to Christian conquests following the onset of the First Crusade. This, as one can imagine, could be viewed in a holy light by most Islamic historians such as ibn Idhari; the recapture of lands that had long been under Muslim control which had then been lost to Crusading Norman forces surely resonated with a wider community of the Islamic faith. Thus, by the very nature of the location of the conflict, it was far easier to apply religious connotations to the enemy fought: Norman Christians. As opposed to the gray area of combating and purifying Muslims, the ideology of fighting Christians, especially those directly associated with the conquest of what would have been considered a portion of the *dar al-Islam*, was a far clearer and more widely supported view.

However, the same event can be examined from a purely political point of view as well. After having purified their own domain of heretics and dissident groups, a war waged against a

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<sup>96</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 326. “During the siege of this city, defended by high fortifications for the space of seven months, until Allah facilitated its conquest and capitulation of the Christians, they [the besiegers] called out with love for their country. Granted with what they called for, they took the city and Allah cleansed the region of Ifriqiyya and Zab, and they were rewarded before Allah a grand prize and reward”.



less controversial enemy may have been less religiously inspired and more an act of political positioning and the consolidation of power; one can see a paralleled strategy in Christian Europe and the call for crusade against an enemy that was far from home and would require local powers to make peace with each other. Surely the aforementioned purges would have been less than popular politically speaking and the replacement of one ideologically driven ruling party for another was no doubt grating to those tribes that had so unwillingly joined the Almoravids. Though the Almoravids had indeed grown weak enough to be defeated by an upstart group with superior organizational and political structure, it was the nature of their rise to power that could have made the Almohads equally unpopular amongst some groups. The early cited incident of ibn Tumart killing the *al-faqih* al-Ifriqi provides an excellent example of how extreme this ideology of solidarity could be: “cuando mató Muhammad b. Tumart a los Hazmira de Tinmal, le dijo el alfaquí al-Ifriqui, uno de sus íntimos: ‘cómo matas a gente que te ha reconocido y ha entrado en tu obediencia y repartes sus bienes?’ . Mandó matarlo y crucificarlo porque dudaba de su inviolabilidad.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, one can reasonably assume that the strike against Sicilian Christians was not only conducted out of a religious zeal to wage *jihād* but also to move war and conflict against a more common ideological enemy at the edges of the Almohad domain. In this sense, the campaign becomes an instance of solidifying power within Almohad borders by focusing conflicts externally; all of this is assumed without taking into consideration the strategic importance of Ifriqiyya and all of the ports to be found in what is modern day

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<sup>97</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 159-60. “When Muhammad b. Tumart killed the Hizmira of Tinmal, the *faqih* al-Ifriqi, one of his intimates, said to him: ‘Why do you kill the people that have recognized you and entered under your obedience and given up their goods?’ . He [ibn Tumart] order him killed and crucified for doubting his inviolability.

Tunisia, which could have very easily provided further incentive to look outward after years of internal strife.

Following this foray with Christian forces in al-Mahdiya, ibn Idhari records a series of conflicts that the Almohads undertook against Muslim enemies who engaged with Christians as allies. The first instance of this as recorded by ibn Idhari also marks the return to al-Andalus by the Almohads following their initial campaigns into the peninsula in during which they wrested lands away from the last of the Almoravid holdouts.

El año 554 (1159) salió Muhammad b. Mardñis de la ciudad de Murcia con su ejército y sus compañeros los cristianos y con su grupo perverso, aprovechando la ocasión, según el creía, e imaginando lo que le perturbó el vino en su mente, que en la ausencia del Amir al-Mu'minin, vencería a los Almohades hasta que sitió la ciudad de Jaén, en la que estaba Muhammad b. Ali al-Kumi, quien le acompañó en violar el reconocimiento, accediendo a sus deseos y lo apresuró su infortunio en su idea de apostatar.<sup>98</sup>

The depiction of ibn Mardñis and al-Kumi as apostates and deviants who gave in to their desires, were corrupted by wine, and did not recognise Almohad religious authority was only worsened in ibn Idhari's eyes by the fact that they openly associated with Christians and their *grupo perverso*. The only association between ibn Mardñis and al-Kumi that seems to have mattered to both ibn Idhari and the Almohads is that they were both *taifa* princes outside of the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 328. "The year 554 (1159) Muhammad b. Mardñis left the city of Murcia with his army and his fellow Christians and their deviant group, taking the opportunity, as he thought, and imagining what wine disturbed in his mind, that in the absence of the Commander of the Believers, he would defeat the Almohads until the siege of the city of Jaen, in which there was Muhammad b. Ali al-Kumi, who accompanied him in violating recognition, fulfilling desires, and hastened his misfortune in his idea of apostasy".

sovereignty of the Almohad Caliphate. Once more, there is plenty of data as provided by Ibn Idhari to support both religious and political motives behind waging war in al-Andalus. The ideological components to this are simple enough to understand: by refusing to acknowledge Almohad religious authority, Ibn Mardānis and al-Kūmī both placed themselves in the position of heretics. Their heretical behavior led to an association with Christians on such a level that Ibn Idhari sees fit to assume that they had not only refused the debatable authority of the Almohad Caliphate but had altogether abandoned Islam and apostatized. Politically speaking, Almohad campaigns against enemies in al-Andalus only strengthened their own position and extended their borders further into Iberia.

Ibn Idhari records a similar disposition towards another *taifa* prince, Ibrahim Ibn Hamusk of Murcia. He relays the following concerning the many who died fighting against the *traición de Ibn Hamusk*: “Sufrieron el martirio ese día muchos Almohades y Andaluces, y fue una gran desgracia y un infortunio grave. Allah mantuvo a los Almohades sitiados en la alcazaba sitiada, a pesar de ver la desgracia ante sus ojos, pues contemplaban desde lo alto de la alcazaba la muerte de sus hermanos. Se retiró Ibn Hamusk de este combate con sus compañeros, los cristianos, a la alcazaba roja en Granada, y mataba a los prisioneros almohades que estaban en sus manos y los atormentaba a la vista de sus hermanos”.<sup>99</sup> Ibn Idhari describes the plight of the Almohad forces dying in their struggle with the apostate Ibn Hamusk. Just as

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<sup>99</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 349-50. “The treachery of Ibn Hamusk”; “That day many Almohads and Andalusians suffered martyrdom, and it was a great disgrace and grave misfortune. Allah maintained the Almohad siege in the besieged fortress despite the misfortune before their eyes, as they had sight from the top of the citadel of their brothers’ deaths. Ibn Hamusk withdrew from this fight with his fellow Christians to the red citadel of Granada; he killed the Almohad prisoners which were in his hand and were tormented at the sight of their brothers”.

before, this conflict with a Muslim who is accompanied or allied with Christians appears to be a more comfortable topic for ibn Idhari; here he has no difficulty recalling how Allah maintained the besiegers and provided the opportunity for many of them to become martyrs before the very eyes of their brothers.

However, there is the almost out of place mention of the disgrace and misfortune in ibn Idhari's recollection of the siege. This is one more instance of ibn Idhari's character as an author and historian separating itself from the typical North African historian. He was, as one can very easily see from the data provided thus far, not opposed to the use of common tropes within Islamic historiography: his use of formulaic curses and praises of key figures in his histories, his focus on battles, *jihad*, and other religiously motivated conflicts, and his attribution of Allah's divine will in most temporal events serve to demonstrate this point.<sup>100</sup> Then again, his curses and praises are highly selective, as are his selections of battles; his use and very specific criteria for the term *jihad* has already been discussed several times in this overview. While he has a place for Allah's will in events, ibn Idhari seems to attribute more to the politics and nature of man in the playing out of events. One can imagine that ibn Idhari, though outwardly praising the opportunity to wage war on behalf of Islam, seems to have disapproved of Muslims slaughtering each other, whether they be Berbers or Andalusian.

The final two examples to be examined take place under the reign of Abd al-Mu'min's successor and son, Abu Ya'qub Yusuf I (1163–1184). He is the last of the Almohad Caliphs

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<sup>100</sup> Throughout *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, ibn Idhari dedicates several chapters to the praise of key figures like Yusuf b. Tasfin and his son Ali b. Yusuf. He also regularly utilizes the phrase "*Dios lo maldiga*", which is a typical curse (God damn them!) seen in crusade chronicles.

that the extent version of ibn Idhari's text covers and the following excerpts constitute some of the final examples of the use of the term *jihad/guerra santa*/الجهاد within the text. The first of this pair occurs four years into Abu Ya'qub's reign: "Este año (563) [1167] llamó a los Arabes y les escribió una carta y una qasida en la que los excita a la guerra santa, y los llama a la expedición y a prepararse ... Este año se sublevaron los bereberes hipócritas en la montaña de Tasrirt".<sup>101</sup> This call to *guerra santa* is accompanied by a *qasida*, a traditional Arabic poem, calling the "Arabs" to rise up and fight the Berbers who had revolted in the mountains.<sup>102</sup> Just as before, this call can easily be seen for both religious and political gains, the former being a call to purge heretical tribal elements from the mountains and the latter being a call to mobilize a military force to quell disruptive political dissent. The reference to the "Arabs" could be a possible attempt to frame the Almohad community as reflections of the original followers of Muhammad in the early days of Islam. This trend is reflected again in Abu Ya'qub's call for a *guerra santa* against the *maldito tirano Giraldo, el gallego*, which ibn Idhari describes as such: "... el Amir al-Mu'minin tendió su mirada al Oeste del Andalus para ayudarla y defenderla y dirigió su

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 399. "This year (563) [Abu Ya'qub] called the Arabs and wrote them a letter and a *qasida*, exciting them to holy war, and calling them to the expedition and to prepare themselves ... This year the hypocritical Berbers revolted in the mountain of Tasrirt".

<sup>102</sup> "Kasida." In *Encyclopedia of Islam*,

[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kasida-COM\\_0461](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kasida-COM_0461). "*Ḳaṣīda* collective *ḳaṣīd* is the name given in Arabic to some poems of a certain length. The *ḳaṣīda*, which numbers at least seven verses, but which generally comprises far more, consists essentially of three parts of variable length: (1) a prologue in which the poet sheds some tears over what was once the camping place of his beloved now far off ( *bukā' alā 'l-aḫlāl* ), then describes the charms of the latter, which he forebears to pursue (the *nasīb* [see *ghazal* ] ). (2) The poet's narration of his journey ( *raḥīl* ) to the person to whom the poem is addressed. This part of the *ḳaṣīda* is a pretext for descriptions of the desert and the hero's mount, as well as for lyrical flights of eloquence, for example on the insignificance of man. (3) As a general rule, this *raḥīl* leads without any great transition into the central theme, constituted by the panegyric of a tribe, a protector or a patron, or in satire of their enemies.

acción al propósito de hacer la guerra santa y compadecerse de los musulmanes y defender la religión, cuando vio que el enemigo abrió contra ella la boca y corrieron las lágrimas de su gente en sangre”.<sup>103</sup> Again, the language indicates dual purposes of waging what ibn Idhari considers *jihad*. References to people’s blood and the need to defend the religion against enemies like Giraldo the Galician fall under the criteria of defensive *jihad* when utilizing Firestone’s definition. The enemy, a Christian lord who was seen as a tyrant over Muslims, was easy to position in a way that put the Almohads in the religious right. Just as the other calls, this one too could easily be manipulated for political gain in the Iberian Peninsula. The salvation of Muslims under Christian tyranny acted as the reasoning for expansion into the peninsula, which had obvious political and expansionist goals in mind, namely a strengthening of the frontier zone between the Christian kingdoms to the north and al-Andalus in the south.

In the end, the data drawn from ibn Idhari’s records of the Almohads indicates, just as with the Almoravids, a far more nuanced approach to holy war than is usually attributed to them. While we will never know what exactly the Almohads believed they were doing, we can craft a far more complex notion of their ideology and approach to *jihad* by examining the examples and language ibn Idhari chose to use in his history.

### **The Berber Dynasties and Their Place in the Crusade Mosaic**

By the time the Almohads had been routed at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, the identity of the Almohads had been set. The crusading mentality of the period, especially in the Christian

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<sup>103</sup> Ibn Idhari, *al-Bayan al-mugrib*, 405. “The accursed tyrant Giraldo the Galician”; “The Commander of the Believers held his gaze to the west of Andalus with the purpose of helping and defending it and directed his action to the purpose of *jihad*, to sympathize with the Muslims, to defend the religion when he saw the enemy open its mouth against them and the tears of the people ran in blood”.

kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula following the *Reconquista*, had placed the Almoravids and the Almohads in the role of the Muslim enemy. As the crusade mentality ran rampant throughout the Levant, the opportunity to capitalize on recently converted Berber Muslims invading the Iberian Peninsula and waging wars against the Christian kingdoms could not be missed. Unfortunately, the efforts to frame both dynasties as the opponents of Christendom through the writing of history, stories, and song have been far too successful, leaving the dynasties virtually unknown to European audiences until recent scholarship was published and brought them back to light.

Ibn Idhari's work provides one more opportunity to study these two groups, and what he has to say is enlightening. His focus on the early political and military campaigns of the dynasties and his selective and fairly unique definition of *jihad* provides a perspective on the Almoravids and Almohads that can help add complexity to their identities. Using Ibn Idhari's work, we can make several conclusions regarding the Almoravid and Almohad movements. First, though placed in the same geographical constraints as each other, each group rose to political power through subtly different methods. Second, both dynasties, at least according to Ibn Idhari, approached the concept of holy war in vastly different ways.

Regarding their political rises to power, there are some similarities. Both were inherently conquest-oriented, relying heavily on military prowess to defeat political rivals and conquest to place themselves in the highest positions of power in the North African region surrounding the Atlas Mountains. Both utilized Islam as a rallying point in their causes, though the exact manners in which they used the religion differed. The Almoravids utilized religion to justify their campaigns

over fellow Berber tribes, convinced that they were purifying Islam of corruption in the process. The Almohads on the other hand utilized the mahdi movement to not only justify the cleansing of the *umma* and Islam as a whole of impurities, such as the Almoravids, but also to create unity in leadership, both religious and political.

This leads to the next major point regarding the political structures of the two dynasties. Both were able to expand from tribal movements to continent-spanning kingdoms. It can be assumed that both movements had impressive administrative systems with which to manage this sprawling span of land mass, though ibn Idhari primarily showcases the Almoravid administrative system with data, albeit cursory data at best. Along this same train of thought, it can be assumed that both the Almoravids and the Almohads had effective systems of leadership, though ibn Idhari's record indicates some notable differences. The Almoravids, without a doubt, had a strong sense of leadership within their movement centered around the *amir al-Muslimin*; however, this leadership seems to have broken down by the time of Ali b. Yusuf, as he not only had to deal with the rebellion of the Almohads, but his descendants quarreled with each other and were deposed by the up and coming Almohads. The Almohads, as mentioned before, were able to utilize the position of the mahdi as a religious and political figure of solidarity and unity so well that, following his death, the movement did not fall apart and instead simply continued under the leadership of a succession of Caliphs.

The notion of holy war and *jihad* is one that both dynasties seemingly approached with different mindsets. Of course, this discussion must always be prefaced by the fact that it is ibn Idhari's words we are reading, not ibn Yasin or ibn Tumart's; however, this provides an



particularly unique angle from which to examine the question. As discussed previously, ibn Idhari did not use the term الجهاد/*guerra santa/jihad* liberally. On the contrary, based on the instances given to us by ibn Idhari we can assume several things. First, war against Christians outside of the Iberian Peninsula (such as Normans) could be considered *jihad*. This extended, with some notable exceptions, to Christians and Muslims allied to Christians within Iberia; the aforementioned notable exceptions include the campaigns of Yusuf b. Tasfin against Valencia and Rodrigo Díaz, the Cid. This is unusual to say the least, as it is this instance in history in particular that has shaped modern notions of the Almoravids as the *jihad*-crazed invaders who El Cid valiantly beat back as the savior of Christian Spain on the brink of *Reconquista*. Yet, while there is a plethora of language that could easily justify the campaigns as religiously inspired wars or, at least, wars with a heavy emphasis on religious ideology, ibn Idhari simply does not deem it necessary to use the term *jihad*. Second, war against other Muslims was not deemed *jihad* except in rare cases. The early Almoravid raids against their fellow Berber Muslim tribes, again while described with *jihad* rhetoric, are not labeled as *jihad* proper by ibn Idhari. This extends to the Almohad battles against the Almoravids as well; while it was certainly well reported that the Almohads believed they were purifying Islam by fighting the Almoravids, ibn Idhari once more refuses to use the term while describing their exploits. Aside from some minor cases of rebelling Berbers in the mountains and traitorous Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, we can assume that ibn Idhari did not see war against Muslims, no matter how religiously justified, as *jihad*.

Moving away from how the author depicts *jihad* as a whole, we can observe that, while

both groups definitely participated in some sort of religious warfare, the context in which they entered the conflict varied between the groups. The Almoravids, for example, waged religious war against any of those who did not follow Islam in the strict form they perceived to be orthodox. The term *jihad* was only used when waging war against the Christian kingdoms in northern Spain; in a sense, they only waged *jihad* when Islam was actually perceived to be under attack. Perhaps the *taifa* kings and their open affiliation with Christians prevented the Almoravid response to their plight to be labeled as *jihad*, as the faith itself was not under siege. The Almohads, on the other hand, while waging religious wars against the Almoravids, saw the majority of their campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula as *jihad*, as these were directed against Christians and traitorous Muslims. Unlike the Almoravids and by virtue of their adherence to *tawhid*, the Almohads practically viewed all of Islam as under attack, both by enemies from within and without. This extended the realm of *jihad* to include fellow Muslims. This could help explain their seemingly broader definition of the term. No matter what the reasons, ibn Idhari's peculiarly specific usage of the term *jihad* certainly provides perhaps not a clearer but a far more complicated, sometimes dizzyingly confusing, and almost random understanding and utilization of *jihad* that should be examined further.

Altogether, it must be said that ibn Idhari and *al-Bayan al-mugrib* do not simplify or clarify the identities of these two often overlooked dynasties. However, his text and opinions regarding the history of the Almoravids and Almohads without a doubt provide a far more nuanced, complicated, and possibly more realistic view of the two. By shedding some light on this, it is my hope that the Almoravids and Almohads will be able to break free from the

amorphous label “enemy of Islam” that has for so many centuries been on the opposing side of the crusade mosaic and find a more comfortable and more accurate place in the mosaic as two more parties involved in what is by far one of the most misunderstood eras of history.



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