

## INTRODUCTION

Although a term seldom used when writing the history of Islamic societies, revolution is the most adequate to convey what the Almohads stood for in the Islamic West – the regions that are now Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, the western part of Libya and al-Andalus (Iberian Peninsula) – during the sixth/twelfth century. The Almohads did what revolutionaries do: they openly and explicitly marked the break between the old and the new times, resorting to the use of violence, but also developing an ambitious propagandistic and pedagogical programme to habituate their subjects to the new Almohad beliefs and ways of doing things.

The silver coins they minted were square instead of round and no date was mentioned in them, thus suggesting that a new era had begun. The mosques of the territories that submitted to their rule were purified. The *dhimma* status was abolished, an almost unprecedented step in Islamic history. In fact, not only Christians and Jews, but also non-Almohad Muslims, were obliged to convert to the Almohad understanding of what truth was. That truth was contained in the profession of faith formulated by Ibn Tūmart, the founder of the Almohad movement. Political and religious authority were united in this founding figure in a combination that evoked the Prophet Muḥammad, but that acquires contemporary meaning when inserted into a framework including Berber prophetism and aspirations to rule, Fatimid memory and the Fatimids' present, Ismā'īlī preaching (the new *da'wa*) and Sunni revival, Sufi claims to religious and political authority such as those of the Andalusī Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), the Andalusī Maliki scholars' reaction to such claims together with their internal debates about how to carry out the proper understanding of God's will under the forceful challenge of Ibn Ḥazm's Zāhirism, Christian military and commercial advance, and Jewish intense immersion in and contribution to the Islamicate intellectual milieu.

Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130) was *al-mahdī al-ma'lūm al-imām al-ma'sūm*, “the acknowledged rightly guided one and the impeccable or infallible *imām*”. One of Ibn Tūmart's pupils, ‘Abd al-Mu'min (r. 527/1130–558/1163), proclaimed himself caliph on the basis of having been chosen by the Mahdī as his successor. Mahdist<sup>1</sup> and caliphal claims transformed two Berbers, the

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<sup>1</sup> Mercedes García-Arenal, *Messianism and puritanical reform: Mahdis of the Muslim West*, transl. Martin Beagles, Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2006.

Mašmūda Ibn Tūmart and the Zanāta ‘Abd al-Mu’min, into Arabs, the first becoming a descendant of the Prophet and the second a Qaysī (Northern) Arab. The Mu’minid caliphs benefitted from this Arab genealogy in many ways, one of them being the fact that it allowed them to link themselves to the Arab tribes who had been penetrating into what is now Tunisia since the first half of the fifth/eleventh century, and who had taken advantage of the opportunities opened up by the Zirids’ abandonment of Fatimid obedience in 440/1048–49. Those Arab tribes were eventually incorporated into the Almohad army after their defeat by ‘Abd al-Mu’min in 546/1151. Their subsequent displacement westwards set in motion the process of Arabization of what are now Algeria and Morocco.

The Almohad movement had originated among Berber tribes whose allegiance to the Mahdī allowed its expansion out of the High Atlas mountains and made possible the defeat of the Almoravids and the conquest of their capital, Marrakech, in the year 541/1147. After 546/1151, these Berber tribes had to make room not only for the Arab tribes, but also for the new elites (the *talaba* and the *ḥuffāz*) recruited by the Mu’minid caliphs to help them carry out their political and cultural programme – but mostly to give them an independent basis of power. Members of those Almohad elites were intellectuals of such importance and lasting influence as Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185), the author of the philosophical and mystical novel *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* (*The Self-Taught Philosopher*), and the philosopher, jurist and doctor Averroes (d. 595/1198), who started to write his commentaries on Aristotle with the backing of the second Almohad caliph, Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf (r. 558/1163–580/1184). Maimonides (d. 1204), the great Jewish thinker whose works in theology and law – among many other disciplines – renovated Judaism, was trained during Almohad times and shared many of their religious and intellectual concerns. The same can be said of the famous Sufi thinker Muḥyī l-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240).

While Ibn Ṭufayl’s close links with Almohadism are generally accepted,<sup>2</sup> the nature of such links in the cases of Averroes and Maimonides has been subject to varied interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Underlying such interpretations there

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence L. Conrad (ed.), *The world of Ibn Tufayl*, Leiden: Brill, 1995 and *idem*, “An Andalusian physician at the court of the Muwahhids: some notes on the public career of Ibn Tufayl”, *Al-Qanṭara* XVI (1995), pp. 3–14.

<sup>3</sup> For Averroes’ case see Sarah Stroumsa, “Philosophes almohades? Averroès, Maimonide et l’idéologie almohade”, in *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas*, eds P. Cressier, M. Fierro and L. Molina, Madrid: CSIC / Casa de Velázquez, 2005, pp. 1137–62 and Josep Puig, “Ibn Rušd and the Almohad context”, in Resianne Fontaine, Ruth Glasner, Reimund Leicht and Giuseppe Veltri (eds), *Studies in the History of Culture and Science. A tribute to Gad Freudenthal*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011, pp. 189–208. For Maimonides’ case see Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his world: portrait of a Mediterranean thinker*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009 and

seems to be a reluctance to accept the connection of two major intellectual figures who greatly influenced Christianity and Judaism to a Berber Muslim dynasty that used to be mostly associated with fanaticism and violence. We are especially indebted to Dominique Urvoy<sup>4</sup> and Madeleine Fletcher<sup>5</sup> for proposing a more nuanced picture, to which Pierre Guichard, Michael Brett and Tilman Nagel, among others, have also greatly contributed.<sup>6</sup> The advances made in our understanding of Almohad coinage and intellectual elites should also be highlighted.<sup>7</sup>

In my case, I owe my dedication to researching different aspects related to the Almohads for the past twenty years to the generous invitation that María Jesús Viguera made for me to contribute a section on religion to the volume she was editing on the Almoravid and Almohad periods as part of the multi-volume *Historia de España Menéndez Pidal*. I very much enjoyed the opportunity to pay attention to an age of which I knew little – my research till

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Carlos Fraenkel, “Legislating truth: Maimonides, the Almohads and the thirteenth century Jewish Enlightenment”, in Fontaine et al. (eds), *Studies in the History of Culture and Science*, pp. 209–32.

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Urvoy, *Le monde des ulémas andalous du VI/XI au VII/XIII siècles*, Gêneve, 1978; “La pensée d’Ibn Tūmart”, *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* XXVII (1974), pp. 19–44; “La pensée almohade dans l’oeuvre d’Averroès”, *Multiple Averroès: Actes*, Paris, 1978; *Penser l’islam. Les présupposés islamiques de l’“Art” de Lull*, Paris, 1980; *Pensers d’al-Andalus. La vie intellectuelle à Cordoue et Sevilla au temps des Empires Berberes (fin XIe siècle – début XIIIe siècle)*, Toulouse, 1990; *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*, transl. O. Stewart, London, 1991; “Les divergences théologiques entre Ibn Tūmart et Gazālī”, *Mélanges offerts à Mohamed Talbi à l’occasion de son 70e anniversaire*, vol. II, La Manouba, 1993, pp. 203–12, among many others.

<sup>5</sup> Madeleine Fletcher, “The anthropological context of Almohad history”, *Hespéris-Tamuda* XXVI–XXVII (1988–89), pp. 25–51; “Vida y teoría política en la España musulmana del siglo XII”, in *La voluntad del humanismo*, ed. B. Ciplijanskaitė and C. Maurer, Barcelona, 1990, pp. 31–43; “The Almohad Tawhīd: Theology which relies on Logic”, *Numen* 38/1 (1991), pp. 110–27; “Al-Andalus and North Africa in the Almohad ideology”, in Salma Kh. Jayyusi (ed.), *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 235–58; “Ibn Tūmart’s teachers: the relationship with al-Ghazālī”, *Al-Qanṭara* XVIII (1997), pp. 305–30. She has announced a book under the title *Western Islam: the Almohad Renaissance of the twelfth century in Spain and the Maghrib*, that has not yet appeared.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Guichard, ‘Les Almohades’, in J.-C. Garcin (ed.), *États, sociétés et cultures du monde musulman médiéval, Xe–XVe siècle*, Nouvelle Clio, 3 vols, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995–2000, I, pp. 205–32; Michael Brett, “The Lamp of the Almohads: Illumination as a Political Idea in Twelfth Century Morocco”, in M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS627, Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate/Variorum, 1999, number VI, pp. 1–27; Tilman Nagel, *Im Offenkundigen das Verborgene. Die Heilszusage des sunnitischen Islams*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Miguel Vega Martín, Salvador Peña Martín, Manuel C. Feria García, *El mensaje de las monedas almohades: numismática, traducción y pensamiento islámico*, Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2002; Émile Fricaud, “Les *ṭalaba* dans la société almohade (le temps d’Averroès)”, *Al-Qanṭara* 23.2 (1997), pp. 331–88.

then had mostly focused on the early history of Islam and the Umayyad period in al-Andalus –, especially because what I found was an exciting atmosphere of intellectual and religious effervescence that crossed religious boundaries. The enjoyment, however, was not accompanied by satisfaction. After finishing my section that appeared in the volume published in 1997,<sup>8</sup> I knew for sure that what I had produced was good enough, but that I still did not understand what the Almohads had tried to do and why. In 1999 and 2000 I co-edited with my colleague María Luisa Ávila two volumes of the series *Estudios Onomástico-Biográficos de al-Andalus* devoted to different aspects of Almohad history, studied mainly through the material found in the biographical dictionaries.<sup>9</sup> Between 2000 and 2002, in collaboration with Patrice Cressier and Pierre Guichard, three seminars were held in Madrid dedicated to new perspectives on Almohad politics, society, art and culture, the results of which were published in 2005.<sup>10</sup> The contributions included in these and other publications appearing around the same time revealed that the Almohads had to be acknowledged as having set in motion an exceptional and sophisticated political, religious and intellectual experience that mostly affected the Islamic West, but that also influenced Latin Christendom, Judaism and the Islamic East in ways still to be fully explored.

The articles collected in this volume are indebted to such contributions, as well as to the different forums that allowed me to present and debate what I was learning from my readings of Arabic sources, but also from books on the Fatimids, the so-called Sunni revival, Sufism, philosophy, Batinism and Latin Averroism. The articles are not chronologically ordered according to the date of their publication, and some internal cross-references are therefore at odds in the present arrangement. But their present order attempts to shed light on the Almohad experience as it developed and changed through time.

The first two articles explore the political, religious and intellectual developments taking place during Almoravid times in order to contextualize the appearance of the Almohad movement. The third and fourth articles focus

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<sup>8</sup> Maribel Fierro, “La religión”, in vol. VIII/2 (*El retroceso territorial de al-Andalus. Almorávides y almohades. Siglos XI al XIII*) of the *Historia de España R. Menéndez Pidal*, coord. M.J. Viguera, Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1997, pp. 435–546. In the same year, a monographic section devoted to the Almohads appeared in the journal *Al-Qanṭara* XVIII/2 (1997), with studies by T. Nagel, M. Fletcher, E. Fricaud, J.-P. Molénat, M. A. Martínez Núñez, S. Fontenla Ballesta, M. Alvíra Cabrer.

<sup>9</sup> *Estudios onomástico-biográficos de al-Andalus IX. Biografías almohades. I*, ed. María Luisa Ávila and Maribel Fierro, Madrid: CSIC, 1999; *Estudios onomástico-biográficos de al-Andalus X. Biografías almohades. II*, ed. Maribel Fierro and María Luisa Ávila, Madrid: CSIC, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas*, ed. P. Cressier, M. Fierro and L. Molina, Madrid: CSIC / Casa de Velázquez, 2005.

on some of the possible sources of influence to which the original Berber Mašmūda movement was subject, and that contributed towards shaping it in the early period: the contact with al-Andalus, on the one hand, and the Fatimid caliphate, on the other hand. The fifth and sixth articles concentrate on two specific features of the Almohad-Mu'minid caliphate: the adoption of Arab genealogies and the minting of coins. Religious knowledge and scholarship, law and history writing were of crucial importance for the new dynasty, as they served to mark the specificities of the revolution and to give it the legitimacy it needed. They are dealt with in the seventh, eighth and ninth articles. Articles number ten, eleven and twelve follow certain developments in the political and legal construction of the Almohad Mu'minid caliphate, namely the itinerancy of the ruler, jihad and Sufism, and the context in which Averroes wrote his legal work, in close connection with Almohad abhorrence of diversity of legal and religious opinions. Finally, the last two focus on the yearning for universal religion and for the ruler's "sapientialism" that can be detected during Almohad times and that allow a close connection to be established between the Almohad political and cultural project and certain developments in Latin Christendom, such as the appearance of a "wise king", Alphonso X. The thread that runs across all these studies is precisely the intertwining of knowledge and political power, or how knowledge should stand at the foundation of both religion and politics.

In spite of how much we have advanced on the road to a better understanding of "Almohadism", there are still many miles ahead of us. The figure and the work of Ibn Tūmart still have to be subjected to a thorough critical analysis, to be greatly helped by the archaeological excavations carried out by A. Ettahiri, A. Filii and Jean-Pierre van Staëvel in the Maḥdī's birthplace, Ġīlīz.<sup>11</sup> The Almohad political project will become clearer thanks to the study of the "letters" sent by the Almohad caliphs, being carried out by Pascal Buresi.<sup>12</sup> The study of works produced by Almohad scholars still has much to offer.<sup>13</sup> Almohad influences on the Islamic world, and on the Christian and

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<sup>11</sup> For some preliminary results, see Jean-Pierre van Staëvel and Abdallah Filii, "*Wa-ṣaḥalnā 'alā barakat Allāh ilā Ġīlīz*: à propos de la localisation d'Ġīlīz-Des-Harga, le *Ḥiṣn* du Maḥdī Ibn Tūmart", *Al-Qaṭara* XXVII (2006), pp. 153–94, and see now Jean-Pierre van Staëvel, "La caverne, refuge de 'l'ami de Dieu': une forme particulière de l'érémisme au temps des Almoravides et des Almohades (Maghreb extrême, XIe–XIIIe siècles)", *Cuadernos de Madinat al-Zahra* 7 (2010), pp. 311–26.

<sup>12</sup> Pascal Buresi presently directs the project "Imperial government and authority in Medieval Western Islam (IGAMWI)", Advanced Research Grant – European Research Council: see <http://www.cnrs.fr/inshs/recherche/docs-actualites/erc-buresi.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> As shown, to give just two examples, by Muḥammad b. Šarīfa, *Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi al-Ḥafīd: fuṣūl min sīra mansīyya*, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1992 and Ze'ev Maghen, "See No Evil: Morality and Methodology in Ibn al-Qaṭṭān's al-Fāsi's *Aḥkām al-Nazar bi Ḥāssat al-*