'Abd al-Mu'min: Mahdism and Caliphate in the Islamic West (Makers of the Muslim World)

by

Maribel Fierro
Synopsis

‘Abd al-Mu’mín (c.1094–1163) did not establish the first caliphate in the Islamic West, but his encompassed more territory than any that had preceded it. As leader of the Almohads, a politico-religious movement grounded in an uncompromising belief in the unity of God, he unified for the first time the whole of North Africa west of Egypt, and conquered much of southern Spain. Studying every facet of ‘Abd al-Mu’mín's rule, from his violent repression of opposition to the flourishing of scholarship during his reign, Maribel Fierro reveals an intelligent leader and a skilled military commander who sought to build a lasting caliphate across disparate and diverse societies.

Sort review

‘Maribel Fierro, an internationally acclaimed authority on the Almohads, presents an accessible account of the true founder of the Almohad empire, ‘Abd al-Mu’mín… Despite their importance, ‘Abd al-Mu’mín and the Almohads rarely receive the coverage they deserve in surveys of the Islamic world and Fierro uses her deep erudition to address the balance in a way that will intrigue the novice and encourage the expert to think again.’ (Amira K. Bennison, Professor in the History and Culture of the Maghrib, University of Cambridge )

‘Abd al-Mu’mín is a little known but very important figure in the history of the Almohad caliphate and the twelfth-century Maghrib in general. Maribel Fierro has brilliantly brought him to life. Grounded in her in-depth scholarship and with a clear narrative strand, this biography should be the first port of call for anyone interested in this controversial figure.’ (Hugh Kennedy, Professor of Arabic, SOAS, University of London )

About the Author

Maribel Fierro is Research Professor at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Madrid. Her work focuses on the intellectual history of the Islamic West, particularly with respect to law, religion, historiography and political thought. She is the author of ‘Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph, which is also published by Oneworld.

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Abd al-Mu'min

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This is a book about a man from the Berber Zanata tribe who in the first half of the twelfth century played a special role in events that altered the history of the Maghrib, al-Andalus (Muslim Iberia) and the Western Mediterranean. His name was 'Abd al-Mu'min and, from humble beginnings, he rose to become the leader of a new religious and political movement, that of the Almohads (al-muwahhidun) – the 'Unitarians', so-called because of their belief in the uncompromising Unity of God (al-tawhid). From 1130 to 1269, the Almohads ruled an empire that at its peak stretched from what is today southern Morocco to the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula and from the Atlantic to Tripoli (Libya).

'Abd al-Mu'min's own life had been changed by his encounter with the doctrinal founder of the Almohad movement, Ibn Tumart, a Masmuda Berber from the Sus, the southern region of what is now Morocco, whose followers came to consider him the Mahdi, a Messianic figure. These followers were mostly Masmuda tribesmen led by their shaykhs (elders, notables).

Before going on, it might be useful to explain some of the terms used above. The Maghrib is an Arabic term meaning 'the West', generally used to refer to the lands of North Africa west of Egypt: today's Libya, Tunisia (in Arabic, Ifriqiya), Algeria (al-Maghrib al-awsat, the central Maghrib) and Morocco (al-Maghrib al-aqsa, the far Maghrib). 'Abd al-Mu'min was born in a village near Nedroma in what is now western Algeria, while his teacher Ibn Tumart was born in Igiliz, in the Anti-Atlas Mountains.

Berber is our rendering of the Arabic term barbar, used in the Arabic sources to refer to the indigenous populations of North Africa who spoke local forms of the same language, referred to by modern linguists as Berber. One such form is Tachelhit, spoken in the Sus region. The term barbar was used in a derogatory sense, as in the Greek barbaroi and in the Latin barbari, to refer to peoples who spoke a language that sounded strange, and were thus considered to be uncivilized. In the Arabic sources, the Berbers are usually portrayed negatively, as rebels who resisted the Arab conquest and the process of Arabization (adoption of the Arabic language), and whose Islamization (conversion and acculturation to Islam) often followed trends such as Kharijism, Isma'ili Shi'ism and Almohadism that were considered deviant by 'mainstream' Sunni Muslims. The term Berber does not reflect the way those to which it referred viewed themselves. This in-group view is difficult to reconstruct today because of the scarcity of literary records in their spoken language, but they appear to have viewed themselves primarily as attached to specific tribal groupings, such as the Zanata, into which 'Abd al-Mu'min was born; the Masmuda, Ibn Tumart's tribe; and the Sanhaja, to which the rulers of the time, the Almoravids, belonged.

The Mahdi, an Arabic term that means 'the Rightly Guided One', is a
Messianic figure with an eschatological dimension; he is supposed to appear at the end of days to restore justice and fight the Dajjal (Antichrist). This eschatological Mahdi is generally considered to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. While belief in the Mahdi is found among Sunnis, it is especially developed among Shi'is, for whom genealogical charisma and eschatology are especially important. The term mahdi, more generally, refers to a man endowed with a superior type of knowledge that gives him access to the Truth in a way denied to ordinary human beings.

While al-tawhid (the belief in the Unity of God) is a central tenet of Islam, it can be formulated in different ways – in relation to God's attributes, for example. The Almohads or 'Unitarians' were known for their uncompromising conception of God's unity, in opposition to what they deemed to be the anthropomorphic deviation of their enemies, the Almoravids. Under 'Abd al-Mu'min's rule, scholars loyal to the dynasty were trained to teach and spread the Almohad tawhid. These scholars were called talaba (students; singular talib), and attached to the Mu'minid caliph and princes, the sayyids, who were the descendants of 'Abd al-Mu'min in charge of running the Almohad empire.

Throughout this book, Arabic terms are given in their most common Romanized form, without diacritics, with the exception of the 'ayn, represented as ' and the hamza when it is not the initial position, represented as 'ī. Berber terms and names are also rendered without exhaustive transliteration, according to their most common form. Dates are given according to the Christian calendar. Sometimes they are rendered as, for example, 1106–7; in the Muslim lunar calendar (or hijra calendar, starting in 622, the year of Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina), if no specific date is given within a year, the latter may begin in one solar year and end in the following. Thus, the hijra year 500 corresponds to the years 1106–7 CE (starting on 2 September 1106 and ending on 21 August 1107).

The translation of the Qur'anic verses is that of Arthur John Arberry (as found at http://tanzil.net/) with some changes according to the context. The main sources are discussed in Chapters 2 and 7.

This book was inspired by the research conducted within the Advanced Research Grant Knowledge, heresy and political culture in the Islamic West (Eighth–fifteenth centuries), European Research Council, Grant Agreement 229703 (2009–2014). It was written during Spain's Covid-19 lockdown from March to June 2020, as well as through summer 2020, after the lockdown was lifted.

I am very grateful to the personnel of the Biblioteca Tomás Navarro Tomás and to Lourdes Martín-Forero Morente for their support. Many colleagues helped me in one way or another, among them Bilal Amroune, Carlos de Ayala, Xavier Ballestín, Umberto Bongianino, Pascal Buresi, Alejandro García Sanjuán, Mehdi Ghouirgate, Tawfiq Ibrahim, María Antonia Martínez Núñez, Aurélien Montel, Alejandro Peláez, Mounir Saifi, Jan Thiele, Houari Touati, and Jean-Pierre van Staëvel. Luis Molina's assistance has been invaluable. I wish also to thank the Association El Mouahidia, Nedroma (Algeria), for their kind help.

Nicholas Callaway as always did more than a linguistic revision of the text: with his questions and suggestions he also improved it. Thanks also go to Jonathan Bentley-Smith and all those at Oneworld who have made this book possible. My deep gratitude to them all. I also owe special thanks to my son Andrés, with whom I spent the confinement and who, as always, was supportive and patient with
my dedication to Almohad matters. 'ABD AL-MU’MIN, THE ZANATA BERBER WHO BUILT AN
EMPIRE AND BECAME PRINCE OF THE BELIEVERS

Although largely ignored outside the field of the history of the Islamic West, ‘Abd al-Mu’min should be counted among the great conquerors and builders of empires. As such – and also because of the violence employed against his foes – some of the Western scholars who have studied his biography have compared him to Charlemagne. The caliphate that ‘Abd al-Mu’min established was not the first in the region, but it was more geographically vast than those that had preceded it, i.e. the caliphate of the Cordoban Umayyads and that of the Fatimids before their departure to Egypt. It did not last as long as that of the Umayyads (some 140 years as against 276), but its impact on the region is comparable. ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s accomplishments were many. After defeating the Almoravids and conquering their capital Marrakesh, he united the whole of North Africa west of Egypt, as well as parts of al-Andalus, for the first time. A member of a Zanata Berber tribe, he adopted the caliphal title of Prince of the Believers (amir al-mu’minin), which until then had been almost exclusively reserved for descendants of the Quraysh, the Arab tribe of the Prophet Muhammad. One exception, the Midrarid ruler of Sijilmasa – Muhammad ibn al-Fath, a Miknasa Berber – had proclaimed himself caliph in 953, but his claim had proved short-lived, while in the East, Hamza ibn Adharak (d. 828), a Khariji rebel in Sistan and Khorasan of dihqan stock, had made the same proclamation (I owe this information to Michael Cook), but neither attempt had the same relevance or impact as ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s. ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s reign (1130–1163) came into being when the Isma’ili Fatimid imamate–caliphate (909–1171) was approaching its end, and when the Sunni Abbasids (750–1258) still held Baghdad as the capital of their caliphate, but were struggling to maintain their religious and political authority over the rest of the Islamic world. ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s success in establishing a non-Arab caliphate – even though he would eventually legitimize his rule by claiming Arab descent – was due to a number of factors that will be explored in the following chapters. Among those factors, his personality certainly played a crucial role. Physically he was of medium size, muscular, robust, with fair complexion and dark hair; in his advanced age he had a dignified bearing, white hair and thick beard. Pro-Almohad sources report that he was an eloquent man who was loved at first sight by everybody who met him. His teacher Ibn Tumart described him as endowed with a generous hand and a smiling face, firm in his faith and prudent in his conduct. His appearance had been predicted in verses, according to the anonymous Almohad source Kitab al-ansab:

Among [the Arab Murra] a handsome man will appear, whose nature was made to bring good news. His whole mien will radiate splendour around him and his looks will be as brilliant as if water fell drop by drop. A thirteenth-century Latin chronicle written in the Iberian Peninsula, the Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla, describes ‘Abd al-Mu’min as a man of discerning intelligence, generous and bellicose (vir discretus largus et bellicosus). Ibn Tumart’s follower, al-Baydhaq, said of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s intelligence that in the time it took others to grasp one issue, he had understood ten – and he was undoubtedly an intelligent ruler, as will become evident in the following chapters. An outsider among the Masmuda, he prevailed in the difficult process of the succession of the
Mahdi Ibn Tumart (d. 1130), who had never married and died without offspring. 'Abd al-Mu'min afterwards managed to successfully hold together the lands he had conquered with a powerful army and an efficient administration. This included the establishment of the talaba, the political-religious scholarly elite loyal to him, in order to balance the power of the Masmuda tribes that had formed the original basis of the Almohad movement. This helped him ensure the continuity of rule within his family. After executing those who had shown disaffection, ‘Abd al-Mu’min managed to avoid alienating the Masmuda who constituted the Berber backbone of the Almohad army, even after incorporating into that army the Arab tribes he had defeated in the battle of Sétif, in modern-day Algeria. His economic policies were largely effective in gaining him support, and involved efficient taxation and agricultural development; the peculiarly shaped coins he minted demonstrate his acumen to convey complex religious and political messages in simple, but not simplistic, ways. As for his generosity, ‘Abd al-Mu’min knew how to reward those who helped him, and how to bestow benefits in order to gain new followers. This was especially so in al-Andalus, where the population had risen up against the previous Berber rulers, the Almoravids, and where local rulers had emerged who did not generally welcome a new military intervention from across the Strait of Gibraltar. Examples of ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s generosity towards Andalusis – both men and women – are many. Asma’ al-’Amiriyya, a woman who claimed descent from al-Mansur ibn Abi ‘Amir – the powerful chamberlain who had held effective power in tenth-century Umayyad Córdoba – wrote to him asking to be exempted from hosting his troops and from having her house and fortune confiscated. After he granted all of her requests, she composed multiple poems praising him. In Bougie, he sought out a merchant who had given him food when he was a poor student; when it turned out that he had already died, he bestowed his generosity on his family. In his dealings with the Arab tribesmen incorporated into the Almohad army, he lavishly fed them at magnificent banquets, in addition to rewarding them with booty and payments. Sharing food was a crucial activity in ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s way of rule, one that originated in the Berber custom of communal meals. This was only one among other existing practices that he cleverly used to support his rule and to ensure his dynastic succession. In al-Dhahabi’s (d. 1348) Tārikh, the caliph is praised for his austerity: ‘During his life he only wore wool (suf). In his audience hall (majlis) there were not mats, the floor was covered with just gravel and in the place where he sat there were palm leaves as the only sign of distinction.’ After meeting ‘Abd al-Mu’min, the Zirid prince Ibn Shaddad (d. after 1204) highlighted among his virtues his equanimity and deep religiosity. ‘Abd al-Mu’min was also a great military commander, who complemented his own abilities by surrounding himself with capable men. He fought primarily against the Muslim opponents of the Almohads; although he did not engage directly in battle with the Christians in the Iberian Peninsula, he did fight against the Normans in present-day Tunisia. His secretary, the Andalusi Abu Ja’far ibn ‘Atiyya, took delight in the caliphal gardens, while ‘Abd al-Mu’min retorted that nothing was comparable to a military parade. Like other conquerors and builders of empires, he was not shy about resorting to violence, or even cruelty, in order to quash internal revolts and threats to his rule. The earliest non-Almohad
source to mention the Almohads, the Damascene historian Ibn al-Qalanisi (d. 1160), highlighted this aspect of his reign. In verses dedicated to 'Abd al-Mu'min, Asma' al-'Amiriyya wrote:

We know that God's help and the clear victory belong to our lord, the Prince of the Believers…

You have transmitted Ibn Tumart's knowledge, you have taught it to us and you have kept his promise intact until now. In the above portrait of 'Abd al-Mu'min as a generous and bellicose man of discerning intelligence, his religious knowledge has received little mention, yet his career actually started when, as a young religious student, he left his village to continue his studies in the East, as many Maghribis had done before him. However, he was soon to discover that he need not travel so far: he found what he was looking for in the Maghrib, in the teachings of Ibn Tumart, whom he met in Mallala, near Bougie (in present-day Algeria). After learning Ibn Tumart's doctrines, he shaped and disseminated his tutor's works to such an extent that what we know about Ibn Tumart today has all essentially come to us through 'Abd al-Mu'min. 'Abd al-Mu'min is said to have been eloquent in Arabic, unlike most of his contemporaries, whose mother tongue was Berber. He is not credited with having authored any book of his own; only a handful of verses are attributed to him, although it is highly improbable that he actually wrote them himself. His secretaries wrote the letters he directed to the talaba in the main urban centres of his empire and to the rest of his subjects. He was the patron of famous scholars such as the physician Ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar) (1090–1161), and the doctor and philosopher Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185). During his reign, Ibn Rushd al-Hafid (d. 1198), known in the Latin West as Averroes, was recruited into the Almohad religious elites and started writing his commentaries on Aristotle. The Kutubiyya mosque in Marrakesh, with its imposing minaret, was built during 'Abd al-Mu'min's reign, as was the mosque of Tinmal in the Atlas Mountains, where Ibn Tumart was buried. Pilgrimage to the grave of the Almohad Mahdi was one of several religious and political rituals that 'Abd al-Mu'min established in order to lend legitimacy to his rule, and for some time fully replaced the pilgrimage to Mecca within the lands of the empire. Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims, were also forced to convert to the Almohad understanding of Islam under 'Abd al-Mu'min's rule. These unconventional policies highlight the fact that these were extraordinary times. Both Ibn Tumart and 'Abd al-Mu'min were considered deviant by Sunni scholars such as Ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328). The historian Ibn al-Qalanisi accused the Mahdi of contradicting the Revealed Law (mukhalafat al-shari'a al-islamiyya). While Almohadism is difficult to define as it evolved through time, suffice it to mention here that it involved a radical re-centring of Islam: with the appearance of the Berber Mahdi, it was as if the Hijaz – the part of the Arabian Peninsula where Mecca and Medina, the holy places of Islam, are situated – had been relocated to the Maghrib. Truth now resided there, as brought by the Mahdi Ibn Tumart, 'the heir of the station of prophecy' (warith maqam al-nubuwwa), and maintained by the Almohad caliph. This radical re-centring, whereby the Berbers replaced the Arabs as the chosen people, would eventually be undermined by some of the decisions taken by 'Abd al-Mu'min himself. Foremost among these was his adoption of an Arab genealogy and his incorporation of Arab tribes into the Almohad army, as well as the gradual undermining of Ibn Tumart's Mahdism through the support of
reformed Malikism and philosophy, especially by 'Abd al-Mu'min's first two successors, his son Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (r. 1163–1184) and his grandson Abu Yusuf Ya'qub (r. 1184–1199). Usually understood as a rigorist and puritanical movement, Almohadism looked to the past in order to change the present, while at the same time departing in many ways from that past, as shown by its non-Arab, Berber roots. Apart from its original Masmuda tribal basis, it found support among certain scholars who had felt alienated under Almoravid rule, who had described themselves as 'strangers' (ghuraba'), according to a famous hadith. Their input fostered a complex, vibrant and stimulating intellectual milieu that characterizes the rule of the first three Mu'minid caliphs. It was then that thinkers such as Ibn Tufayl, Averroes, Maimonides (d. 1204) and the Sufi Muhyi l-din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) were active with their path-breaking intellectual output closely connected to the Almohad political, religious and educational project. The emergence under Almohad rule of these and other highly innovative thinkers, and the fact that Almohadism was presented as a retour aux sources while promoting breaks with standard doctrines and practices (e.g. Mahdism and impeccability; the imposition of a single creed; forced conversion; a new pilgrimage centre; the religious use of the Berber language; the abandonment of some Maliki legal practices), remind us of the difficulty of pigeonholing what the Almohads did and represented throughout their history. Yet 'Abd al-Mu'min's life opens a window to a better understanding of how it all began.

LOOKING FOR KNOWLEDGE: THE ENCOUNTER WITH IBN TUMART

TRAVELLING EAST IN HAMMADID TERRITORY: MALLALA AND IBN TUMART

'Abd al-Mu'min was around twenty-three years old in 1117, when in the company of his paternal uncle Ya'lu he reached the town of Mallala, near Bougie, as a student travelling to the East in pursuit of knowledge. It was there that he met Ibn Tumart. Bougie would be conquered by 'Abd al-Mu'min some thirty years later. When he first arrived in the vibrant port town, it was the capital of the Hammadid kingdom (1015–1152). The Hammadids were a branch of the Zirids, Sanhaja Berbers who had been set up as governors of Ifriqiya by the Fatimid caliphs when in 969 they departed to Egypt, never to return. By the mid-eleventh century, after the Zirids of Qayrawan declared their independence from the Fatimids, the imam-caliphs in Cairo sent groups of Arab nomads to invade their lands. Pillaging ensued, and many urban centres such as Qayrawan suffered destruction and abandonment. The Zirids took refuge in the coastal town of al-Mahdiyya, and the Hammadids also felt more secure moving from their inland capital, Qal'at Bani Hammad, to a new maritime capital, Bougie, that prospered thanks to trade with the rest of the Islamic world and with Genoa. 'Abd al-Mu'min was born around 1094 in the village of Tajra near Nedroma, in a mountainous region of the district of Tlemcen, home to his tribe, the Zanata Kumya. Since childhood, there had been indications that an extraordinary destiny awaited him, and while a student in Tlemcen, 'Abd al-Mu'min continued to show signs of a charismatic personality. One day, when he was staying outside the town, he was informed that one of his fellow students had been imprisoned. He returned to the town and managed to set him free, as the porters and guards obeyed his orders and touched him to obtain his blessing (baraka). Al-Marrakushi (d. after 1224) states that 'Abd al-Mu'min met Ibn Tumart in Fanzara, a village where he was a
school teacher, but most sources place their encounter elsewhere. Ibn al-Qattan (d. after 1252) records that 'Abd al-Mu'min was studying in Tlemcen when a former fellow student informed him that a scholar specializing in the fundamentals of religion (usul al-din) had arrived in Bougie, prompting 'Abd al-Mu'min to travel there to meet him. According to Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), when news reached Tlemcen that the scholar Ibn Tumart had arrived in Bougie, 'Abd al-Mu'min was assigned the task of bringing him to the town in order to replace a teacher who had just died. An earlier source, al-Baydhaq, states that 'Abd al-Mu'min's trip to Bougie was motivated by his desire to continue his studies in the East. Travel for study (rihla fi talab al-'ilm), usually combined with pilgrimage to Mecca, was a common practice among those from the Maghrib and al-Andalus who aspired to become scholars. Ibn Tumart, the man 'Abd al-Mu'min met in Mallala who changed his destiny, was a scholar who had already performed this rihla. Born between 1078 and 1081 in Igiliz, Ibn Tumart was fourteen to seventeen years older than 'Abd al-Mu'min. His birthplace was a village in the Anti-Atlas Mountains facing the Sus Valley, situated high up on a mountainside at an altitude of 1354 m, some 60 km east of Tarudant, a location identified in 2004 by Abdallah Fili and Jean-Pierre van Staëvel (see Map 1). Broadly speaking, Ibn Tumart belonged to the Masmuda of the Sus, the region to the south of Marrakesh between the Atlantic Ocean and the Dra' river valley, including not only the Sus river valley, but also the Atlas and Anti-Atlas Mountains. More specifically, Ibn Tumart belonged to the Harga tribe, the Arabic rendition of the Berber name Ait Argen. This name refers to the argan tree, which is common in the area to this day, providing wood for fuel and construction, fodder for livestock, and oil. Map 1 Igiliz (© Mission archéologique Igiliz). The Masmuda tribal confederation included other tribes apart from the Harga, such as the Ragraga, Masakkala, Haha and Massagina between the Tansift and Sus rivers, while in the valleys of the Atlas Mountains there were the Gadmiwa, Ganfisa, Saktana, Hintata, Urika, Hazraja, Igalwan (Glawa), Banu Wawazgit and Haskura. Ibn Tumart's father is described in some sources as a local notable (amgar), but also as a poor man who improved his situation through marriage to a woman of the Masakkala tribe. The name Tumart has been interpreted as a female name that means 'happiness, joy' and as evidence of the Berber matrilineal trends that produced feminine affiliations common among the Almoravids (Ibn Fatima, Ibn Ghaniya). According to Mehdi Ghouirgate, the eventual weight of Arabness – with its prevalent agnatism that went together with the attribution of Arab genealogies to Ibn Tumart and 'Abd al-Mu'min – obliterated this matrilineal reality among the Almohads. As a child, Ibn Tumart was known as asafu, a Berber word which refers to a flaming torch, an ember, and to light more generally. He began studying the Qur'an at an early age. Around 1106–7, when he was roughly twenty-eight, he is said to have visited al-Andalus to study under Ibn Hamdin (d. 1114). This Cordoban judge was later involved in the burning of The Revival of Religious Sciences (Ihya' ulum al-din) – a famous work by the Shafi'i jurist, theologian and Sufi al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who became the foremost representative of the period's aspirations for religious reform – in the mosque of Córdoba in 1109. Ibn Tumart travelled by ship to the East; most sources make no mention of a pilgrimage to Mecca, and those that do are late and do not record any teacher he
might have met there. He supposedly visited Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid caliphate, when the de facto rulers were the Turkish Seljuk emirs, and studied with scholars of the madrasa Nizamiyya, including al-Ghazali himself. Upon learning that his Ihya' 'ulum al-din had been publicly burnt, al-Ghazali expressed his desire for someone to one day exact revenge on his behalf. Ibn Tumart demanded to be charged with this task, and set off on his return to the Maghrib. This anecdote fashions Ibn Tumart as the student of the most influential scholar of his times, thus providing him with both a scholarly genealogy and a rationale for his revolt. However, due to chronological inconsistencies, from very early on doubts were raised about this alleged encounter with al-Ghazali, for example by the Eastern historians Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233) and Ibn Khallikan (d. 1282). As in the case of Ibn Tumart's alleged visit to al-Andalus, there is no confirmation outside the Almohad sources that he ever visited Baghdad. Local biographical dictionaries of scholars that would have documented such stays had they taken place, especially given Ibn Tumart's later relevance, are silent. Today there is consensus that the encounter with al-Ghazali never took place, but was fabricated in order to rally to the Almohad cause Maghribi and Andalusi scholars who had been attracted by al-Ghazali's doctrines and had been disappointed by the Almoravid response to them.

On his way back home, Ibn Tumart stopped in Alexandria, where he met an Andalusi Maliki scholar, al-Turtushi (d. 1126), who really was a student of al-Ghazali. There, Ibn Tumart started to put into practice the Islamic precept of commanding right and forbidding wrong (al-amr bi-l mar'ruf wa-l nahy 'an al-munkar). As was not uncommon with other self-styled censors, his activity was not well received, and he was forced to leave Alexandria, although, according to the Kitab al-ansab, he had already begun to attract some followers there. After boarding a ship headed towards Tripoli (Libya), he began to receive credit for miraculous deeds. In one version of events, Ibn Tumart reprimanded the crew and passengers for disregarding prayer and for the presence of wine on the ship. When they ignored him, he caused a storm that finally got him everyone's attention. In another version, he was thrown into the sea by the crew, but when he failed to drown, they rescued him and finally agreed to change their ways. The ship arrived in Tripoli in 1116–7, and from there Ibn Tumart proceeded to the Zirid capital al-Mahdiyya, where he again rebuked the people for drinking wine. Fearing for his life, he continued along the coast to Monastir and Tunis. There, he rebuked the locals for refusing a proper Muslim burial to a convert from Judaism. In Constantine, he explained the correct punishment for bandits and thieves. In Bougie, he attacked the way the people dressed, as well as the fact that men and women mixed during the celebrations marking the end of Ramadan. Ibn Khaldun described him as wearing a traditional Maghribi bag and carrying a stick that he sometimes used against those he rebuked. Local authorities were not pleased with the activities of 'the jurist from the Sus', as he was called. Asked who had given him permission to command what was good, his answer was that God and his Prophet had entrusted him to do so. He was then either asked to leave or decided for himself to depart out of fear for his life.

After leaving Bougie, Ibn Tumart stopped over in Mallala for several weeks. There, he was offered protection by the local Banu Uryagul; according to another version, the sons of
the Hammadid emir of Bougie built a small mosque for him to teach in. The mosque was near the house of Abu Muhammad Yarzighan ibn ‘Umar, whose Berber name Ibn Tumart replaced with the Arab name ‘Abd al-Wahid, and who would accompany him back to Igiliz. In Mallala, where he would typically sit on a stone under a tree, Ibn Tumart devoted himself to prayer and teaching. One day, he announced the arrival of someone who would be decisive in the success of his preaching.

Before arriving in Mallala, ‘Abd al-Mu’min had been having dreams he did not know how to interpret. For example, in one he was eating from the same plate as the Almoravid emir, but was so hungry that he eventually took all the food for himself. He decided to ask Ibn Tumart about the meaning of these dreams. Once in Mallala, Ibn Tumart singled him out from among the other students. When ‘Abd al-Mu’min explained that he was travelling to the East in pursuit of knowledge, Ibn Tumart gave him a famous reply: ‘The science that you are looking for in the Mashriq [East] you have now found in the Maghrib [West].’

‘Abd al-Mu’min met in secret with Ibn Tumart, who showed him a book with a red cover that dealt with predictions (al-jafr), based on which Ibn Tumart concluded that ‘Abd al-Mu’min would be instrumental in establishing the order (al-amr) that would ensure the life of the faith. He then called him ‘Lamp of the Almohads’. ‘Abd al-Mu’min decided to discontinue his journey to the East, attaching himself instead to Ibn Tumart until his death thirteen years later. He was not the only one to do so, as the charismatic teacher attracted disciples from various tribes and geographical areas, a global appeal prefiguring ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s later imperial ambitions. One of those students was Abu Bakr ibn ‘Ali al-Sanhaji al-Baydhaq, whose ‘Memoirs’ are our main source on this early period.


TRAVELLING WEST THROUGH ALMORAVID TERRITORY TO IGILIZ: MAHDISM

One day, Ibn Tumart announced that the time had come to depart from Mallala. He was accompanied by ‘Abd al-Mu’min, al-Baydhaq and ‘Abd al-Wahid ibn ‘Umar, referred to as al-Sharqi, ‘the Easterner’, because he hailed from Ifriqiya, the eastern region of the Maghrib. ‘Abd al-Wahid ibn ‘Umar’s mother had given him a mare, while Ibn Tumart rode a mule. ‘Abd al-Mu’min at a certain point grew sore and Ibn Tumart asked ‘Abd al-Wahid to let him mount the mare, predicting that he would repay him for the favour with ‘elevated palaces, adorned slaves and beautiful horses’. They headed west on a trip that would take them to Marrakesh, the capital founded by the Almoravids (1042–1147). The Almoravids were Sanhaja Berbers who earned their livelihood as nomad camel drivers in the Saharan desert, and who were known for their characteristic veil covering the men’s faces, as among the modern Tuaregs. According to the Almoravid foundational narrative, a group of Sanhaja tribal leaders performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and, on their way back, stopped over in Qayrawan. There, they asked a renowned Maliki jurist and Ash’ari theologian, Abu ‘Imran al-Fasi (d. 1037), to send a scholar to the desert who could teach them. The scholar was Ibn Yasin (d. 1058). The Almoravids eventually moved out of the Sahara, conquering the lands of the far Maghrib and western Algeria under the political leadership of Yusuf ibn Tashfin al-Lamtuni. In 1086 they crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to help the Andalusian...
T aifa kings in their fight against the Christians. Soon, however, they deposed those kings, and ruled over an empire that stretched from the Sahara to al-Andalus, and from the Atlantic to western Algeria, this being the first Berber empire and the first time the whole of al-Andalus had been subject to Berber rule. The Almoravid emirs relied on the Maliki jurists as advisors in their policies, which were synthesized in the motto, 'Calling to the Truth, rejecting injustice and abolishing illegal taxation'. The main source of legitimization for their rule was jihad against the Iberian Christians. The Almoravids, like the Seljuk Turks in the East, lacked an ethnic link with the origins of Islam, whereas the Sunni caliphs of the time, the Abbasids, were members of the Prophet Muhammad's tribe and close relatives of the Prophet himself. In order to justify their fight as a jihad, the Almoravids were told by some Andalusi T aifa kings that they needed to acknowledge a legitimate imam (leader). They then paid obedience to the caliph in Baghdad as Prince of the Believers (amir al-mu'minin), inventing for themselves the lesser title of Prince of the Muslims (amir al-muslimin).

After leaving Mallala in 1117, Ibn T umart and his students travelled through Almoravid territory. On the road to Tlemcen, Ibn T umart renovated two mosques that had fallen into disrepair. In Wansharish, they met 'Abd Allah ibn Muhsin al-Wansharisi, nicknamed al-Bashir for his clairvoyance, who decided to join them. In Batha, they were hosted by a rich landlord, Yusuf ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. Ibn T umart left him a talisman made with a piece of leather from his bag, and told him to keep it for his children, as they would need it one day when a king arrived – as indeed happened when 'Abd al-Mu'min conquered the village.

In Tlemcen, Ibn T umart stopped a wedding procession, breaking the drums and ordering the bride from the chair in which she was transported. In Agarsif, he condemned the crucifixion of a living convict, stating it was only permissible to crucify the body of a criminal after execution. By doing so, he was criticizing the practice of the Maliki legal school prevalent in North Africa and al-Andalus, and showing his preference for the Shafi'i position, which was later followed by the Almohads. He also convinced the governor to abolish illegal taxes. In Dashr Qallal, he condemned the mixing of men and women at musical gatherings, but the people replied that that was just the way things were done there. In Fez, he taught the fundamentals of religion, ordered his companions to break musical instruments and debated with the local scholars. His success led the governor to exile him, and to send a report about him to Marrakesh.

In Salé, a port town on the Atlantic coast, Ibn T umart and his companions were hosted by a local family, the Banu 'Ashara. 'Abd al-Mu'min would later remember how he, Ibn T umart and 'Abd al-Wahid ibn 'Umar al-Sharqi were so poor at this point that they had but one piece of bread. When they had to cross the river Bu Ragrag, they offered the bread to the boatman, but he would only accept it as fare for two of them, forcing 'Abd al-Mu'min to swim across. When he grew tired and tried to grab on to the boat, the boatman beat him away, so that only with great effort did he manage to reach the other side. Proceeding along the Atlantic coast, in Umm Rabi' they were asked to pay a toll in order to cross a bridge. Ibn T umart, furious, refused, claiming that the road belonged to all Muslims. He spoke in Berber, as he did on other occasions, recorded by al-Baydhaq and the anonymous author of the Kitab al-ansab, sentences that are among the
earliest testimonies of the Masmuda language. Ibn Tumart and his students arrived in Marrakesh in the year 1120 or perhaps earlier. He publicly criticized the traditional face veil worn by Almoravid men, while Almoravid women moved about in public unveiled, including a sister of the Almoravid emir ‘Ali ibn Yusuf ibn Tashfin (r. 1106–1143). Ibn Tumart entered the Friday mosque and sat in the first row near the pulpit; told that this place belonged to the emir, he answered that mosques belonged to God alone, and did not move. When the emir arrived, Ibn Tumart advised him to forbid the evil in his domain, as he was responsible for his subjects. Ibn Tumart also taught the fundamentals of religion, debating with the local scholars in the presence of the Almoravid emir. One of these scholars was the Andalusi Malik ibn Wuhayb (d. 1131), who alerted the emir that Ibn Tumart was the man ‘of the square dirham’ – a reference to the peculiar shape of the Almohad dirhams later minted by ‘Abd al-Mu’min. Ibn Wuhayb also warned the emir that Ibn Tumart was an innovator who would corrupt the masses, and called for him to be imprisoned. Two viziers – one of them Yintan ibn ‘Umar – argued that to imprison someone who knew God so well was poor advice. Eventually, Yintan ibn ‘Umar managed to convince the emir that it would be better to expel Ibn Tumart from town instead. Ibn Tumart then settled in the cemetery, and when asked why he had not left Marrakesh, answered that he was now in a land over which the emir did not rule. Ibn Tumart was keen to establish a distinction between God’s territory and the ruler’s sphere of control – paradoxically, the Almohad polity was to merge both. Eventually, Ibn Tumart and his companions left Marrakesh, moving to Aghmat Urka, where he again debated with local scholars. According to Ibn al-Qattan, it was there that Ibn Tumart broke his oath of allegiance to the Almoravids. From Aghmat, Ibn Tumart and his companions travelled through the Atlas Mountains. In Igalwan they stayed with the Hazraja tribal leader (shaykh) Isma’il Igig. They then moved to the territory of the Hintata, where they met Abu Hafs ‘Umar Inti and Yusuf ibn Wanudin. He preached to the Ganfisa and descended towards the Atlantic Ocean. Finally, in 1121 they arrived in Igiliz, Ibn Tumart’s village. He had been away for fifteen years. They settled in the so-called Ribat of the Harga. The term ribat refers to the activity of those who devoted themselves to a life of asceticism and renunciation but also of military engagement with external enemies or internal heretics. In the history of post-conquest North Africa, this activity had played an important role in the process of Islamization. The term can also refer to a specific place or building where such activity took place. In fact, the Almoravids (al-murabitun) derived their name from this term: they were those who had engaged in ribat life along the border with the pagan bilad al-sudan (the land of the blacks), and also fought against the heretical Bargawata, who followed a prophet of their own and who were located along the Atlantic coast to the south of Salé. In the case of Ibn Tumart and his followers, the enemies were the Almoravids, denounced as unbelievers. Since 2009, a Moroccan–French team led by Ahmed S. Ettahiri, Abdallah Fili and Jean-Pierre van Staëvel have been excavating the site of the Ribat of the Harga at the summit of Jebel Igiliz. The site is a true eagle’s nest, a rural mountain fortress surrounded by double walls with three gates, two of which must have been quite monumental. Similar fortresses that served as a refuge for the local population when subject to an external...
attack or as point of control of the surrounding territory were probably common in the region. While it is not yet possible to ascertain how representative the ribat at Igiliz was of broader local customs, it offers important materials on the endogenous processes of state formation in tribal and rural contexts. Indeed, the excavations at Jebel Igiliz have brought to light a large settlement containing stone buildings for political, military, religious and economic purposes, as well as several dwellings. Of special interest is a command zone (qasba), formed by an area shaped as a nearly perfect square (the imperfection is the result of the orography of the site) inserted into a larger site, all revealing the existence of a clear hierarchy of authority and power. A small elite resided here, protected by a complex system of entrances shaped in such a way that control could be easily exercised. The hierarchical relations are inscribed in the site: the lower court of the qasba was a place for service and communal practices, and was subordinate to the area where the leader lived. Also of interest are a large mosque and two smaller oratories, several cisterns for collecting water, two excavated caves and a building between the qasba and the large mosque that can be identified as a centre for religious teaching and a lodge for students. The whole settlement can be confidently dated to the early twelfth century, although some constructions may have been established earlier. The community of men and women who lived there were led by those who occupied the qasba and engaged in military as well as religious activities, as proven by the remains of numerous weapons found at the site. The presence of latrines and ablution rooms, and a material culture that includes ceramics imported from al-Andalus, point to a community that had links beyond the local setting. The information provided by the literary sources matches up well with what has been found: a base from which to wage jihad against the Almoravids and a centre for the indoctrination and spread of Ibn Tumart's teachings. Retiring to a cave for a time in order to seek purification and obtain baraka (blessings) was common in Berber lands; the Prophet Muhammad himself had retired to a cave in Mount Hira, where he first received God's revelation. At Jebel Igiliz, Ibn Tumart confined himself for an unspecified period in one such cave (ghar). The local people used to visit him at the beginning of the day to seek his baraka. Ibn Tumart stroked their heads with his hand and invoked God in their favour. The fourteenth-century chronicle al-Hulal al-mawshiyya describes Ibn Tumart's teachings: The first thing [Ibn Tumart] did upon taking command was to write them a book in the Berber language which he called al-tawhid. It was divided into seven parts according to the seven days of the week, and he ordered them to read a section each day after the morning prayer after finishing the selection from the Koran. In it, there was the knowledge of God and the other dogmas, such as the knowledge of God's decrees, and predestination, and faith in what is characteristic of God, and of what is impossible in Him and what is possible, and what a Muslim should do to impose orthodoxy and prohibit the illicit and to join together in brotherhood for this purpose. (Translation by Madeleine Fletcher, 1991) Manuscript arab. 1451, preserved at the National Library of France, contains the Kitab (book) attributed to Ibn Tumart, and records that it was dictated in the year 1121 at the Ribat of the Harga. It contains a section on the Mahdi, which essentially explains that falsehood can only
be vanquished by the Mahdi and truth can only be established and maintained by the Mahdi because of his ‘impeccability’ (‘isma). Belief in the Mahdi is obligatory and to doubt him is unbelief. The Prophet Muhammad had put an end to ignorance, but innovations and discrepancies had reappeared after the rule of the Rightly Guided Caliphs that succeeded him. The Mahdi would restore truth, filling the earth with justice just as now it was filled with iniquity; his rule would last until the Final Hour. Ibn Tumart also taught that the Almoravids had to be combated, as they had departed from the truth through their corrupt practices and their anthropomorphic beliefs. According to most sources, it was in Igiliz that Ibn Tumart was acknowledged as being the Mahdi and the impeccable imam (leader). During his stay at Igiliz, Ibn Tumart held a communal banquet (asmas) and put salt in the food, claiming: ‘This is the pact [‘ahd] of God and his Prophet between us and you according to the Qur’an and Sunna.’ He then started to eat to prove that he was a man like everybody else and that prophets also ate. The contractual aspect of this episode is evident: the Mahdi was using a pre-existing tribal practice – the communal banquet – to bind his followers to him and his cause. On this particular occasion, Ibn Tumart predicted that the Almoravids would be defeated and lose their horses. He ordered his tribesmen to build an enclosure (asarag) to keep these plundered steeds, as Igiliz would soon become a military base. In 1122, the Almoravid governor of the Sus sent one of his delegates against the Banu Wartatik of the Harga. They were taken captive and imprisoned in Tiwanwin, the capital of the Sus. Shortly afterwards, the Harga inflicted a defeat on the Almoravids, who had attacked them at Igiliz, taking prisoners and horses, just as Ibn Tumart had predicted. Fearing another Almoravid attack, Ibn Tumart ordered cisterns to be built to collect water in case of a siege. He also offered to leave so that his tribesmen would not suffer, but the Harga maintained their support for him. Some of Ibn Tumart’s followers travelled to the neighbouring Atlas Mountains to rally the local tribes to his cause. In 1123, the Almoravid emir, after returning from al-Andalus, sent in troops to besiege Igiliz. Ibn Tumart directed the defence, reminding the Harga of the booty they would gain if victorious. They were on the verge of being defeated when they heard the drums of the Hintata, who were coming to their aid. The Almoravids were defeated, while the Harga tribesmen who were held prisoner in Tiwanwin escaped and joined the Mahdi. That same year saw further military engagements with the Almoravids, the outcome of which is difficult to discern. Ibn Tumart and his companions resided at Igiliz for three years, from 1121–2 to 1124–5, when they left for Tinmal in the Atlas Mountains at the invitation of the Hazmira tribe, who had joined Ibn Tumart’s cause, perhaps because Igiliz was not considered safe enough. Little is known about the fate of Igiliz after their departure. Jebel Igiliz and especially the cave remained a place of local veneration, but the move to Tinmal relegated it to a marginal position in Almohad memory.

TRAVELLING NORTH: TINMAL AND THE PURGES

On the road to Tinmal, the Ganfisa pledged obedience to Ibn Tumart. Tinmal was an impregnable fortress on the upper part of the Nafis river in the High Atlas Mountains, some 100 km south of Marrakesh. We do not know how many of Ibn Tumart’s followers accompanied him on this ‘emigration’ similar to the Prophet Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina.
However, the events that ensued shortly after they settled in Tinmal indicate that they must have been relatively numerous. Every day, Ibn Tumart went to the open-air oratory (shari'a), sat on a square stone and taught his doctrines to the inhabitants of Tinmal. The Hazmira who attended these sessions carried weapons, which made Ibn Tumart fear for his life. Eventually, they were massacred, the first of other purges to follow. Fifteen thousand men are said to have been killed, their families taken captive and their possessions distributed among the Almohads. Only those loyal to Ibn Tumart were allowed to live in Tinmal, whose population was now made up of an array of groups from various tribes and geographical locations that came to be referred to as ahl Tinmal, or 'People of Tinmal'.

Ibn Tumart reinforced the fortress's natural defences during the year 1126. He also consolidated his control of the mountains to the south and west of Marrakesh. The Gadmiwa joined the movement, while the Haskura would hesitate until the conquest of Marrakesh. The Almoravids were at the time tied down in al-Andalus, trying to stop the Christian military advance. Alfonso the Battler, king of Aragon (r. 1104–1134), had launched a campaign inside al-Andalus that reached all the way to the sea in Algeciras, with the help of some Andalusi Christian communities. The Cordoban Maliki jurist Ibn Rushd al-Jadd (d. 1126), Averroes' grandfather, travelled to Marrakesh to discuss the deportation of these communities to the Maghrib with the emir, and during his visit he recommended building walls to protect Marrakesh from the Almohads. It was probably then that a number of fortresses were also built to stop the Almohads from descending into the plain of Marrakesh. This was an effective move that did manage to halt them for a time. In 1127, Ibn Tumart led a campaign in the Sus. Later, a group of the Haskura killed the Almohad instructor sent to them, and in 1128 were in turn attacked and massacred; during the fighting Ibn Tumart received a head injury.

As its followers increased in number, the movement acquired a more defined political and military organization, to be discussed in Chapter 4. The Council of Ten (al-jama'a) was formed by the first disciples of Ibn Tumart, including 'Abd al-Mu'min and al-Bashir al-Wansharisi. The tribal leaders (shaykhs) of the Harga, Hintata, Gadmiwa and Ganfisa formed the Council of Fifty. In the year 1129, according to al-Baydhaq (1125 according to other authors), while the Almoravids were too engaged in al-Andalus to pay close attention to the Almohads, a purge (tamyiz) was carried out among the tribes that had joined Ibn Tumart. His disciple al-Bashir al-Wansharisi would fall into a lethargic sleep, and in this state acquired the power of distinguishing between true and false believers, a gift used to guide the purge. Only one among Ibn Tumart’s early students voiced his opposition – an unnamed jurist from Ifriqiya who was consequently executed.

Shortly after the tamyiz, probably in order to deflect the tensions and resentment among the Almohads that ensued, an attack against Marrakesh was organized. This was a risky decision: until then, the Almohads had confronted the Almoravids in the mountains where they had the advantage; now they were moving to the plains, where the Almoravids moved with ease. The military campaign was headed by al-Bashir al-Wansharisi. A first encounter outside the walls of Marrakesh proved promising for the Almohads, who decided to camp in the al-Buhayra orchard. The ensuing siege lasted some six weeks. A battle took place in April or May 1130 in which the Almohads suffered
many losses. Abu Hafs 'Umar Inti was seriously injured, and another five members of the Council of Ten died on that day. Al-Bashir al-Wansharisi's body was never found. He was said to have disappeared into the red dust; Ibn al-Qattan suggests that he was taken up to the sky, while according to some, he was buried secretly by 'Abd al-Mu'min. The French historian Évariste Lévi-Provençal was convinced that he was killed by his enemies among the Almohads for his role in the tamyiz.

During the siege of Marrakesh, Ibn Tumart voiced particular concerns for 'Abd al-Mu'min's safety. Having been informed that he was alive but injured in his right thigh, he said: 'qad baqiya l-amr' ('the order remains'), indicating that 'Abd al-Mu'min was destined to succeed him, as al-amr was the term used to refer to the Almohad order.

The defeated Almohads returned to Tinmal divided into two groups: one led by 'Abd al-Mu'min, the other by 'Abd Allah ibn Yala, known as Ibn Malwiya. Seventeen years would pass before the Almohads dared another attack on Marrakesh. The Almoravids later attempted to attack Tinmal but were unsuccessful.

Ibn Tumart's death and 'Abd al-Mu'min's succession

Ibn Tumart died three months after the battle of al-Buhayra, in Ramadan (August) 1130. The Mahdi had taken ill suddenly and called the Almohads together to preach to them, announcing: 'I am leaving for a long journey.' He was buried secretly in his house.

Ibn Tumart's death was kept secret for three years, a period called ghayba – the same term used by Shi'is to refer to the occultation of their imams. According to al-Baydhaq, 'Abd al-Mu'min – who was by now in his fifties – was proclaimed successor in 1133, while Ibn al-Qattan gives the date as 1135. An assembly of all the loyal tribes, with women also in attendance, was convened in Tinmal. 'Abd al-Mu'min preached and asked if the pact that they had sealed with the Mahdi still stood. They answered that it did. After sermons by two members of the Council of Ten, Isma'il Igig and 'Umar Asnag, along with the tribal leaders, Ibn Tumart's death was announced. When people broke into tears, 'Abd al-Mu'min ordered them to stop. He then extended his hand and everyone paraded in front of him pledging obedience, in a ceremony that lasted three days.

'Abd al-Mu'min's succession to the Mahdi was not easy, as shown by the existence of divergent narratives on the course of events. Most sources state that Ibn Tumart had made it clear in various ways that 'Abd al-Mu'min was his choice: he was given the privilege of riding a black horse and named to lead the prayers – in the same way that Abu Bakr was considered to be the successor intended by the Prophet Muhammad because he had named him his substitute in this same capacity. A late source, al-Zarkashi, states that the successor first acknowledged by the Council of Ten was 'Umar Asnag (from the Sanhaja), but he rejected the offer, claiming that Ibn Tumart had chosen 'Abd al-Mu'min for the role. Ibn Tumart's preference for 'Abd al-Mu'min is a recurring theme in al-Baydhaq's 'Memoirs'. This work alleges that it was known that 'Abd al-Mu'min was destined to have a glorious future even before he was born. When his mother Ta'lu was pregnant with him, she dreamt that fire came out of her and dispersed towards the four cardinal points. A diviner from Tlemcen explained that her son would one day rule over territories situated to the north, south, west and east. Another day she went with her husband to a field and fell asleep, and two swarms of bees hovered over her. When 'Abd al-Mu'min was born, she went to the same field,
put her son down to join the harvest and he fell asleep. A great number of bees hovered over him without harming him, then flew away in two groups, one towards the west, the other towards the east.

However, for the pro-Marinid historian Ibn Abi Zar’ (d. between 1310 and 1320), a trick was instrumental in the choice of ‘Abd al-Mu’min. While the Council of Ten was deliberating, two extraordinary things happened. First, a man who owned a bird whistled and the bird said: ‘Victory, conquest and power for our lord the caliph, the Prince of the Believers, ‘Abd al-Mu’min.’ Then a guard released a lion; everybody fled in terror, except for ‘Abd al-Mu’min, who did not move in his seat. When the lion approached him, he extended his hand, calmed the animal and made it obey his orders. The Council then unanimously decided to elect ‘Abd al-Mu’min as the worthiest successor to Ibn Tumart because of these seemingly miraculous deeds, without knowing they had been a calculated ruse: ‘Abd al-Mu’min had secretly acquired the bird and the lion, and had trained the first to speak those words and the second to obey him. We can only speculate about what exactly sealed ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s place as Ibn Tumart’s successor. Ibn Tumart had left no offspring – his chastity can be contrasted with the many marriages of Ibn Yasin, the religious authority at the origins of the Almoravid movement. Ibn Tumart’s brothers do not seem to have been considered for succession, perhaps because they lacked the scholarly training that Ibn Tumart and the members of the Council of Ten possessed. They may also have stayed on at Igiliz, so that when Ibn Tumart died in Tinmal they could not have any say in his succession. During the battle of al-Buhayra, five of the members of the Council of Ten had died and Abu Hafs ‘Umar Inti had been seriously wounded. One of those who died was al-Bashir al-Wansharisi, Ibn Tumart’s companion who was endowed with charismatic powers and probably was the ‘heir apparent’ of the Mahdi. His disappearance and the death of the other four eliminated many possible competitors. New members were chosen for the Council, but they would have been younger in age or more recent disciples, and thus would have had less influence.