


The Emergence of the Almoravid State (1056) (Naming and Origins Issue)

Murâbıtlar Devletinin Ortaya Çıkışı (1056) (İsimlendirilme ve Köken Meselesi)

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Abstract

This study investigates the formative phase of the Almoravid State, founded in 1056, which initially emerged from the Sahara and later expanded to encompass Morocco. Originating as a religious reform movement led by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn among the Sanhaja Berber tribes, the Almoravid State was rooted in a revivalist ethos informed by Mālikī jurisprudence. The research addresses competing theories concerning the etymology of the term "Almoravid" and its association with the concept of *ribāṭ*, understood as both a physical frontier post and a spiritual commitment to jihad in the path of God. This concept came to symbolize the Almoravids’ steadfastness and religious devotion. Among the Sanhaja confederation, the Lamtūna tribe stood out and was particularly identified with the epithet *al-Mulaththamūn* ("the veiled ones"), a designation that carried strong cultural and social connotations. The adoption of the face veil is interpreted in the literature through various lenses; some situating it in pre-Islamic custom, while others link it to the symbolic and practical imperatives of the Almoravid reformist agenda. The origins of the Almoravids remain a matter of historiographical debate. While some sources claim an Arab lineage tied to the Himyarite tribe, others assert an indigenous Berber origin within the Sanhaja network. Tribes such as Lamtūna, Judāla, and Massūfa were strategically located across the Saharan expanse, from the Atlantic coast to the interior, exerting control over vital trans-Saharan trade routes. The rise of the Almoravids was marked by the unification of dispersed Sanhaja tribes under leaders like Yahyā al-Judālī and ‘Abd Allāh al-Lemtūnī. Following Yahyā’s death, leadership shifted to the Lamtūna, giving rise to internal tensions, particularly over military authority. After Ibn Yāsīn’s martyrdom in 451/1059, Abū Bakr ibn ‘Umar assumed leadership, founding Marrakesh as the political and religious capital. From this center, the Almoravids advanced a project of religious reform, military expansion, and political unification across North Africa.

Keywords: Morocco, Almoravid, Mulaththamūn, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, Sanhaja.

Murâbitlar Devletinin Ortaya Çıkışı (1056)(İsimlendirilme ve Köken Meselesi)

Öz

Bu çalışma, 1056 yılında kurulan ve başlangıçta Sahra’dan doğup daha sonra Fas’ı da içine alacak şekilde genişleyen Murâbitlar Devleti’nin teşekkül sürecini incelemektedir. Abdullah bin Yasin’in önderliğinde Sanhâca Berberî kabileleri arasında başlatılan bu hareket, dinî bir ıslah projesi olarak ortaya çıkmış ve Mâlikî fıkhına dayalı bir ihya anlayışıyla şekillenmiştir. Araştırma, "Murâbitlar" teriminin etimolojisine ilişkin çeşitli yaklaşımlar ile bu adın hem fiziksel bir sınır karakolu hem de Allah yolunda cihada adanmış bir ruh hâli anlamına gelen "ribâṭ" kavramıyla ilişkisi ele alınmaktadır. Bu kavram, Murâbitların dindarlığını ve İslam’a olan sarsılmaz bağlılıklarını simgelemiştir. Sanhâca konfederasyonu içinde özellikle Lemtûne kabilesi öne çıkmış ve "el-Mülessemûn" (peçeliler) unvanıyla tanımlanmıştır. Bu unvan, güçlü kültürel ve toplumsal anlamlar taşımış; peçe kullanımı, literatürde kimi zaman İslam öncesi geleneklerle, kimi zaman ise Murâbitların ıslahî projesinin sembolik ve pratik gerekçeleriyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Murâbitların kökeni, tarih yazımı açısından tartışmalı bir konudur. Bazı kaynaklar, onların soyunu Arap Himyer kabilesine dayandırırken, diğerleri yerli Berberî Sanhâca kökenli olduklarını ileri sürmektedir. Lemtûne, Cüdâle ve Mesûfe gibi kabileler, Sahra coğrafyasına yayılmış olup, batıda Atlas Okyanusu’ndan doğudaki iç bölgelere kadar uzanan stratejik konumlarıyla transsahra ticaret yollarını kontrol altında tutmuşlardır. Murâbitların yükselişi, Yahyâ el-Cüdâlî ve Abdullah el-Lemtûnî gibi liderlerin dağılık Sanhâca unsurlarını bir araya getirmeleriyle başlamıştır. Yahyâ’nın vefatının ardından liderlik Lemtûne’ye geçmiş ve bu durum, özellikle askerî otorite bağlamında iç gerilimleri beraberinde getirmiştir. 451/1059’da Abdullah bin Yasin’in şehadeti sonrası, yönetimi Ebû Bekir b. Ömer devralmış; Marakeş’i siyasî ve dinî merkez olarak inşa etmiş ve buradan hareketle Kuzey Afrika’da dinî reform, askerî genişleme ve siyasî birlik temelinde yeni bir İslamî yönetim modeli geliştirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fas, Murâbitlar, el-Mülessemûn, Abdullah bin Yasin, Sanhâca.

Introduction

Understanding the emergence, origins, and nomenclature of the Almoravids is essential for grasping the historical foundations of this movement and its role within the context of Islamic Maghrib. The Almoravids emerged during a period marked by significant political and military instability. They arose in a tribal social structure, particularly within the Sanhaja confederation, with the Lamtūna tribe playing a leading role. These tribes assumed decisive functions in the institutional formation of the Almoravid polity.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the major perspectives in the scholarly literature concerning the etymology of the term "Almoravid" and to examine its semantic and conceptual relationship to the term *ribāṭ*, which denotes both a frontier garrison and a spiritual station for striving in the path of God. The *ribāṭ* concept embodies the Almoravids' religious-reformist identity, especially their commitment to jihad and the dissemination of Islamic teachings in accordance with Mālikī jurisprudence. Additionally, the designation of the Almoravids as *al-Mulaththamūn* ("the veiled ones") and the practice of wearing the *lithām* (face covering) have generated considerable debate in the literature. This study will present and compare divergent scholarly views, providing the reader with a nuanced understanding of the issue's multifaceted dimensions—thereby enhancing the academic merit and analytical depth of the research.

The study also addresses the geographical scope of the Almoravids' activities and 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's strategic efforts to expand his religious movement. Both classical primary sources and modern academic literature have been utilized in the research process. In this regard, Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-Ibar wa Diwān al-Mubtadā' wa al-Khabar fi Ayyām al-'Arab wa al-'Ajam wa al-Barbar wa man 'Asarahum min Dhawi al-Sultan al-Akbar* gave valuable insights into the political and social conditions of the Maghrib, as well as the ethnic origins of the *al-Mulaththamūn*. Likewise, Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī's geographical book *al-Mughrib fi Dhikr Bilad Ifriqiya wa al-Maghrib* provides unique data on the nomenclature and origin of the *al-Mulaththamūn*. Furthermore, Ibn Abū Zar' al-Fāsī's *al-Anīs al-Muṭrib bi-Rawḍ al-Qirṭās fi Akhbār Mulūk al-Maghrib wa Tārīkh Madīnat Fās*. Ibn 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī's *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fi Akhbār al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib* are among the principal historical sources addressing the Almoravid State and are frequently cited in this study. In addition, Ibrāhīm al-Qadri Buchich's contemporary work *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābitin* stands out as one of the most comprehensive modern analyses on the Almoravids, particularly for its detailed examination of their social structure. In this study, the *isnad* citation style has been followed. However, some sources do not contain sufficient publication information, such as the year of publication or edition details.

The Situation in Morocco Before the Emergence of the Almoravids

After the Islamic conquest, Morocco was under the control of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus. However, after the fall of the Umayyads in 132 AH (750 CE), the region came under the dominance of various Islamic states and caliphates that adopted different sects.¹

In 140/757, the Banū Midrār State, centered in Sijilmasa, was established in Morocco. This state became an important center for the Sufri Kharijites who came from various regions.² At the same time, the Idrisid State, which adhered to the Sunni sect, also emerged in Morocco. This state was founded by Idrīs b. ‘Abd Allāh, who fled from the Abbasids in 169/786 and sought refuge in the region.³ The Idrisids ruled from 172–363/788–974 but weakened due to Fatimid attacks, and in 305/917, Fatimid armies entered Morocco and defeated the Idrisids. After the Fatimids took control of Ifriqiya, they moved to dominate Morocco as well. During this period, allegiance was given to Ubaydullah al-Mahdi, and the Idrisid's rule was limited to the remaining parts of Morocco.⁴ The Fatimids' alliance with Abū'l-Futuh Buluqin bin Zirī bin Manād from the Zirid dynasty further accelerated the collapse of the Idrisids, and thus, the Maghrib entered a new period characterized by political instability and chaos, known as the "Age of Storms." This process paved the way for the rise of the Almoravids.⁵

During this period, various emirates emerged, engaged in struggles with each other. One of these was the Beni Zirī bin Atiyya Emirate, founded in 368/978 in Morocco, which recited the khutbah on behalf of the Umayyads of Andalusia and ended the Fatimid rule.⁶ However, the general character of this period was marked by wars and internal conflicts. At the same time, some emirates that were considered deviated from the faith also emerged. The most notable among these was the Berghawata Emirate. Their settlements spread from Masamida to the Tamesna plains and along the Mediterranean coast, including regions such as Sala, Azemmour, Anfi, and Asfi.⁷ The founder of the emirate, Tarīf bin Sabīh, claimed

¹ Aḥmad Mukhtār al-‘Abbādī, *Dirāsāt fī Tārīkh al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus* (Alexandria: Mu'assasat Shabab al-Jami'a, n.d.), 44.

² Sayyid Abdulaziz Salim, *Tārīkh al-Maghrib fī al-‘Asr al-Islami* (Alexandria: Mu'assasat Shabab al-Jami'a, 1999), 497.

³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Āmulī al-Ṭabarī al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, "Critical ed." Ibrāhīm Abū al-Fadl (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 8/ 192.

⁴ Abū al-‘Abbās Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Khālīd ibn Ḥammād al-Nāṣirī al-Salāwī, *al-Istiḳṣa li Akhbār Duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqsa*, "Critical ed." Ja'far al-Nasir - Muḥammad al-Nasir, (al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Dār al-Kitāb, 1997), 1/239.

⁵ Ahmad Sharaf, *al-Sulta wa al-Mu'jtama fī al-Andalus fī ‘Asr al-Murābiṭīn 479-532 H/1085-1144 AD* (Algeria: The University of Algeria, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, master's thesis, 2008), 22.

⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Umar ibn Abī Zar’ al-Fāsī, *al-Anīs al-Muṭrib bi-Rawḍ al-Qirṭās fī Akhbār Mulūk al-Maghrib wa Tārīkh Madīnat Fās* (Rabat: Dār al-Manṣūr, 1972), 102-105.

⁷ Abū Zayd Waliyy al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan ibn Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍramī, *Kitāb al-*

prophethood, and then his son Sālih took over leadership, claiming that the Qur'an was revealed to him. Sālih's emergence is dated around 227/842.⁸ The Berghawata Emirate continued to exist until the mid-5th century but was eventually eliminated by the Almoravids.⁹

The Origins of the Name of Almoravids (al-Murābiṭūn)

The historical sources concerning the name and origin of the Almoravid state are marked by significant contradictions. Some historians attribute the designation to the early phase of the reformist movement founded by 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn in the upper basin of the Senegal River, where the group established the ribāt as their operational base.¹⁰ The term "Almoravids" is derived from the Arabic word al-Murābiṭūn (المرابطون), which signifies the group's commitment to the cause of God and simultaneously denotes their association with the ribāt—military-religious fortresses that dotted the frontiers of North Africa, functioning as both centers of spiritual discipline and military defense.¹¹ An other scholar challenges the commonly held view that the Almoravids derived their name from receiving religious instruction in a ribat, pointing out that the term ribat acquired its Sufi and militaristic connotations at a later stage as a result of sustained interaction with Christian forces.¹² Some scholars also argue that the term al-Murābiṭūn refers to those who constitute a highly cohesive and disciplined group.¹³

Historian Ibn Idhārī, however attributes the name to a later period, after 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's supporters left the Ribāt to fight tribes that did not heed his call and defeated their enemies. Their naming as "Almoravids" comes from the immense patience they demonstrated during their jihad. During one of the battles with a tribe that did not answer their call, when they lost half of their army, their imam, 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, urged his companions to be patient, and they eventually defeated their enemies. As a result, they were called "Almoravids," and their leader, Yaḥyā bin 'Umar, was called "Amir al-Haqq" (Commander of the Truth).¹⁴

The narrative linking the term 'Almoravids' to ribāt underscores the move-

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Ibar wa Diwān al-Muṭadā' wa al-Khabar fī Ayyām al-'Arab wa al-'Ajam wa al-Barbar wa man 'Asarahum min Dhawī al-Sultan al-Akbar, "Critical ed." Khalīl Shāḥāta - Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut : Dār al-Fikr, 2000), 6/276.

⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, 6/276.

⁹ al-Salāwī, *al-Istiqsa*, 1/171.

¹⁰ Ibrāhīm al-Qadri Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn: al-Mu'jtaṣam, al-Dhihniyyat wa al-Awliya* (Beirut : Dār al-Ṭalī'a, 1993), 7.

¹¹ Rolando J. Gutierrez, *Pieces of a Mosaic: Revised Identities of the Almoravid Dynasty and Almohad Caliphate and al-Bayān al-mugrib* (Claremont : Claremont McKenna College, CMC Senior Theses, 2014), 14.

¹² Soha Abboud Hagggar, "Los Almorávides Ideología guerrera y ortodoxa", *Cuadernos Historia* 16 (1996), 6.

¹³ Pascal Buresi, "Preparing the Almohad Caliphate: The Almoravids", *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*, 26 (2018), 154.

¹⁴ Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn Idhārī al-Marrākushī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib*, "Critical ed." Ihsan Abbas, (Beirut : Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1983), 4/12.

ment's religious-reformist character, emphasizing its dedication to jihād and spiritual discipline. This discourse effectively serves to legitimize the Almoravids' religious authority. In contrast, Ibn Idhārī's account introduces elements of legend and heroism, associating the name with endurance in battle and victory over "recalcitrant" tribes. This interpretation adds a tribal-military dimension that enhances the narrative of martial glory.

Ibn al-Aḥmar has stated that 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's companions wanted to fight the Burghawata tribe, which did not accept Islam, and they marched towards them with a large army consisting of thirty thousand camels and a few horsemen. In this battle, 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's army emerged victorious, shared the spoils of war, and were thereafter called Almoravids.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Ibn al-Aḥmar cannot be considered historically reliable, as the battle 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn fought against the Barghawata took place at a later stage, during which he was martyred. We believe that these interpretations, despite their rich symbolic value, largely lack documented and material historical evidence, relying heavily on oral transmission and literary tradition. Moreover, the various narratives remain within a framework of glorification and have not been subjected to critical scrutiny that considers the social and political contexts in which these texts were produced. This highlights the need for a more precise historical approach—one grounded in textual criticism and anthropological analysis to better understand the actual dynamics that gave rise to this designation and its connection to Almoravid state identity.

The meaning of this name evolved alongside the Murābiṭūn movement's development. Indeed, before the Almoravid movement transitioned into the phase of its call (dawah), this name was used for prominent students of the Mālikī school, studying at the Dārul-Murābiṭīn in the school of Wajāj ibn Zallū al-Lamṭī. It is well known that 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn graduated from this school. After the Almoravids conquered Andalusia, the name became a symbol of position, honor, and prestige. Similarly, it was used for those who exerted effort for the state without any personal gain and achieved great successes through wars. It became an honorary and prestigious medal for those who served the state.¹⁶

In fact, the concept of "ribāṭ" (watching or guarding) is mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an. "O you who believe! Be patient, and advocate patience, and be united, and revere Allah, so that you may thrive."¹⁷ To partake in the great reward of ribāṭ (guarding) in the path of Allah, 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, when the number of his

¹⁵ Abū al-Walid Ismail ibn Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad ibn Faraj al-Nasri ibn al-Aḥmar, *Buyutat Fas al-Kubra* (Rabat: Dār al-Manṣūr li al-Tiba'a wa al-Waraqā, 1972), 28-29.

¹⁶ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 7-8.

¹⁷ The Qur'an English translation, trns Talāl Itāni (Beirut: Clear Quran Dallas, nd), *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, 3/200.

brothers exceeded a thousand, named them "Murābiṭūn" due to their patience, determination to help and defend Islam, and their resolve for jihad.¹⁸

The Origins of the Name of al-Mulaththamūn

The Sanhaja tribes have historically been known by the name "al-Mulaththamūn". Before adopting the name Almoravids (al-Murābiṭūn), the veil (Litham) was their symbol. Some historians claim that the name al-Mulaththamūn refers to the Lamtūna tribe, one of the branches of the Sanhaja tribe. The Lamtūna tribe led various tribes, including Masūfa, Mīsrata, Madāsa, judāla, Lamta, and others. Later, leadership passed to the judāla tribe during the reign of Yaḥyā ibn Ib-rāhīm al-Judālī. It seems that the name "al-Mulaththamūn" was initially specific to the Lamtūna tribe, but later expanded to include tribes that allied with them and fell under their control.¹⁹

Assuredly, each of these tribes was of great importance, and independent research should be conducted on each one. These tribes are known to have played a significant role in the establishment of the Almoravids state, particularly in spreading Islam in Africa and West Sudan²⁰. After being illuminated by the light of Islam, these tribes engaged in jihad with the tribes of Sudan, raising the Islamic flag. There are several reasons behind the practice of wearing the veil. It could have been a custom inherited from pre-Islamic times. The reason for this custom is more likely to stem from security or social factors rather than the environmental conditions they lived in.²¹

According to al-Bakrī, in these tribes, the veil was worn from childhood. The reason for this is that the nose is considered an area of awrah (private part). Therefore, it must be covered and not exposed. The belief was that just as other private areas should be covered, the nose, being considered an undesirable area, should also be covered. For this reason, they never parted with their veils, whether it was day or night. The Mulaththamūn used to call those who opposed their dress code "fly-mouthed" as a nickname.²²

There is a contradiction in the views of historians regarding the Almoravids wearing of veils. Aside from the views we have mentioned, Ibn al-Athir also referred to the reasons why the Almoravids adopted the veil as an official garment. According to his account, when the men of the Lamtūna tribe set out to fight the

¹⁸ Hamid Muḥammad al-Khalifa, *Yusuf bin Tashfin, Muwahhid al-Maghrib wa Qaid al-Murābiṭin wa Munqidh al-Andalus min al-Salibiyyin* (Damascus : Dār al-Qalam, 2000), 19.

¹⁹ 'Alī Muḥammad al-Ṣallābī, *al-Jawhar al-Thamin bi Ma'rifat Dawlat al-Murābiṭin* (Cairo : Dār al-Tawzī' wa al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 2003), 11-12.

²⁰ Ḥasan Ahmad Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭin: Safha Musharifa min Tārikh al-Maghrib fi al-Usur al-Wusta* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.), 39.

²¹ al-Khalifa, *Yusuf bin Tashfin*, 21.

²² Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn 'Amr al-Bakrī al-Andalusī, *al-Mughrib fi Dhikr Bilad Ifriqiya wa al-Maghrib* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitāb al-Islami, n.d.), 170.

enemy, the elderly realized that the enemy would likely raid their lands, where only women, children, and the elderly remained. The elderly advised the women to wear men's clothing, don swords, and face the enemy. When the enemy army saw men facing them, they took the livestock and retreated²³. Similarly, one of the poets claimed that the Almoravid wore the veil due to their modesty, shyness, courage, and constant readiness for battle.²⁴

Some scholars believe that the veiling practices of the Mulaththamūn (the veiled ones), particularly their custom of covering the mouth, can be primarily traced back to pre-Islamic magical beliefs prevalent among them. According to these beliefs, it was thought that jinn disseminated diseases through the air, and that these illnesses could enter the human body through the mouth and nose. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to cover these parts of the body to protect oneself from harmful spirits. Notably, this practice was specific to men.²⁵

Among the views explaining why the Almoravids were referred to as "al-Mulaththamūn," the view preferred by the historian Buchich is that it was not because the Arabs and other Sudanese tribes had adopted the practice of wearing veils. If that were the case, other tribes would have been named by this term as well. Indeed, their designation as "Mulaththamūn" stems from their distinctive way of dressing. While other tribes covered their faces with a mask-like object, they differentiated themselves by covering their faces with a veil. It is also noted that they did not wear veils before adopting this custom; rather, they began wearing veils after the start of their reform movement. The veil they wore became the most significant symbol of their influence over the rulers.²⁶

Some have linked the reason for their being called "al-Mulaththamūn" to their ancestors from the Himyar tribe, who wore veils due to the extreme heat, and they continued this tradition. The basis for this view is that the Sanhaja tribes, for economic and political reasons, migrated from the East to the Maghrib region.²⁷

The accounts regarding the Almoravids wearing the veil vary, with some adopting a legendary character, such as the narrative of Ibn al-Athir, while others were driven by material ambitions for gain, as seen in the works of poets. It is likely that the custom of wearing the veil was imposed by the harsh desert environment, as well as the nomadic lifestyle of these tribes, which relied on herding and migration. Over time, this practice became an integral part of their cultural

²³ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Izz al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Shaybānī al-Jazarī Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, "Critical ed." Muḥammad Yusuf al-Daqqāq, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), 8 / 330.

²⁴ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 77.

²⁵ al-Nani Weld al-Ḥusayn, *Sahra' al-Mulathamīn*, (Beirut : Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2007), 102.

²⁶ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 78-79.

²⁷ al-Ṣallābī, *al-Jawhar al-thamin*, 12.

identity. We believe that conducting rigorous anthropological research on this topic is essential to more accurately capture the nature of the dress and culture of these tribes. This would provide information grounded in academic foundations, distancing it from unreliable narratives or interpretations driven by non-scientific motives.

The Origins of Almoravids

According to certain manuscripts reviewed by the researcher al-Qadri Bouchich, there are divergent views regarding the origins of the Almoravids. Some historians argue that they belong to the Himyarite tribe, an Arab tribe, a view supported by scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Tamimi in his manuscript *Muntaha al-A'lām bi-Wafāt al-Sahābah wa Mulūk al-Islām*, al-Muasqari in his manuscript *Al-Khabar al-Mu'arib*, and Ibn al-Qadi in his work *al-Durr al-Ḥalūk al-Mushriq*. According to this view, these tribes migrated from Yemen to Africa in ancient times, settling there, with some reaching the Saharan region near the Atlantic Ocean²⁸. In contrast, other historians, such as al-Zayani in his manuscript *al-Tarjumān al-Mu'arrab*, assert that the Almoravids have Berbers origins. However, those advocating this theory have not provided substantial evidence to support their claims.²⁹ Among the scholars who rejected the attribution of the Sanhaja to the Himyarite tribes is Ibn Hazm, a view subsequently endorsed by Ibn Khaldūn. The latter not only dismissed the genealogical link between the Sanhaja and Himyar but also critically deconstructed the historical reports that supported such claims. This skeptical stance was later adopted and echoed by a number of subsequent historians and scholars, contributing to a broader trend in the historiographical tradition that questioned the Arabization of Berber tribal origins.³⁰

Some modern sources mention that the number of these tribes reached up to seventy. Historians note that the most important and largest among them were the Lemte, Terne, Sirte, Jezule, Lemçune, judāla, Semta, Tazkaghīt, and Masūfa tribes. However, the most significant among these were the Lemte, judāla, and Masūfa tribes. Leadership was generally held by the Lemte tribe, but the judāla tribe constantly competed with Lemte for leadership. Eventually, the judāla tribe emerged victorious, taking leadership from the Lemte.³¹ It has been argued by some Orientalists, including Gauthier, that these tribes did not belong to the Sanhaja branch due to differences in their social structures and lifestyles. However, material and contemporary references have proven that the Mulaththam tribe origina-

²⁸ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 8.

²⁹ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 8.

³⁰ See Abū Muḥammad Ibn Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Jumharat Ansāb al-'Arab*, "Critical ed." 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971). 485. "Via "Weld al-Ḥusayn, *Sahra' al-Mulathamin*, 41-42.

³¹ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 40.

ted from the Sanhaja tribe. One of the Orientalists stated that the inscription on the tomb of an Almoravid princess bears witness to this. The inscription on the tomb reads: " This is the tomb of Badr, daughter of Abū Ḥasan bin ‘Alī bin Tashfin, the Sanhaji".³²

The Homelands of Almoravids

Ibn Khaldūn mentioned about their homeland: "This class of the Sanhaja is The Mulaththamūn (The Veiled Ones). They lived in a remote area behind the desert lands in the south. They had distanced themselves from many activities even before Islam. Instead of staying in the countryside, they preferred to live in the desert."³³ These tribes' tents were located in the deserts and plains of the Maghrib in northern Africa. However, in the third century AD, they migrated westward from their homeland and then headed south. After the Islamic conquests, some of the Sanhaja tribes fled to Maghrib al-Aksa. When Muslims withdrew from these lands, the tribes returned south. Whenever the Maghrib faced a political crisis, these tribes would retreat from the south.³⁴ The vast and desolate lands stretching between the southernmost cultivated regions of Morocco and the plains of the Senegal and Niger rivers were characterized by an extremely harsh natural environment—endless expanses of gravel and sand, marked by intense heat and frequent winds. The area contained only a few scattered wells and rare grazing spots, discernible only to the experienced eye. The Berber populations inhabiting this region led a fully nomadic lifestyle.³⁵

The tents of the Lamtūna tribe extends from the Nul Valley, located by the Atlantic Ocean, to the area known today as Bujadur. To the East, seven days' journey from the Nul Valley lies Ezki, the fortress and center of the Lamtūna tribe. The city of Ezki is known as the northern gateway to Sudan. It seems that the tents of this tribe stretched as far as the Wasil route, located between Ghana and Sijilmasa in the desert. It is not unlikely that some branches of this tribe settled near Ghana. The Lamtūna tribe took control of an important trade route over the Atlantic Ocean. To the south, the tents of the Lamtūna tribe extends to the Teyser Desert or Ezvada, and they also stretch to Sudanese territories. The tents of the judāla tribe extend to the southern area, reaching the mouth of the Senegal River. They have made the city of Ulil their center. The salt transported by caravans to the south and north comes from this region. The tents of the Masūfa tribe are located in a dry

³² See Lévi-Provençal L'inscription arabe d'Espagne, NO. 24. 31. "via" Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 41.

³³ ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, 6/ 241.

³⁴ 'Iṣmat 'Abd al-Laṭīf Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri'l-Islam fī Garbi Ifriqiya 430-515/1038-1121* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988), 32.

³⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal A Political History of al-Andalus* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 154-155.

area between Sijilmasa in the north and Odageṣt in the south. Some branches of the tribe have moved eastwards toward Tadmakka and Koukou³⁶. The homeland of the Mulaththamūn can be defined as follows: to the East, from the Great Sahara to Gadamis, to the west, to the Atlantic Ocean, to the north, up to the Dern Mountains, and to the south, reaching the center of the Great Sahara.³⁷

The Rise and Establishment of the Almoravid State

Islamic sources such as Ibn Khaldūn provide the following reports about the Mulaththamūn: "The Mulaththamūn were Magi who worshiped idols in the desert. They were introduced to Islam in the third century of the Hijra."³⁸ The author of *al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya fī Dhikr al-Akḥbār al-Marrākushiyya* states: "They adopted Christianity. Later, with the Islamic conquests, Islam spread in these regions. They embraced Islam and applied it in the best way in their lives."³⁹

The rise of the Almoravid state began with the first alliance of the Sanhaja tribes. These tribes were originally scattered groups living separately. The King of Ghana had control over the trading city of Oghest. To the north, the allies of Zanāta and Mesamīde controlled the routes of the Maghrib. Therefore, for the Mulaththamūn, the only way forward was through unity. Recognizing that uniting would strengthen them, the Lamtūna, Judāla, and Masūfa tribes formed an alliance. The powerful Lamtūna tribe, which had long held leadership over the southern Sanhaja tribes, played a significant role in this alliance⁴⁰.

Some accounts indicate that this alliance was established under the leadership of Muḥammad bin Tayfat al-Lemti;⁴¹ however, he was killed in one of the battles against the Kingdom of Ghana. Following his death, leadership passed to his brother-in-law, Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jūdālī, who is credited with unifying the Sanhaja tribes under a single banner.⁴² Nevertheless, Ibn Khaldūn presents a different view, asserting that the Sanhaja tribes remained fragmented until Abdullah bin Tuafut al-Lemtūni assumed power and successfully achieved their actual unification.⁴³ Regardless of the differing opinions regarding the true founder of this alliance, the prevailing view holds that leadership of the alliance passed to Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jūdālī in 429 AH.⁴⁴

³⁶ Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri'l-Islam*, 34.

³⁷ Alī Muḥammad al-Ṣallābī, *Tārikh Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn wa'l-Muwaḥḥidīn fī al-Shamal al-Ifriqi* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2009), 16.

³⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, 6/242.

³⁹ *al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya fī Dhikr al-Akḥbār al-Marrākushiyya*, "Critical ed." Suhayl Zakkār - Abdul-Qadir Zamama (Fas: Dār al-Rashād, 1979), 17.

⁴⁰ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 101.

⁴¹ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 101.

⁴² Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus 'Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 9.

⁴³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, 242.

⁴⁴ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 102.

The leadership of the Mulaththamūn tribes passed to the judāla tribe. At that time, Yahyā bin Ibrāhīm al-Judāli, the brother-in-law of ‘Abd Allāh bin Tuafut al-Lemtūni, was the leader of the judāla tribe. There is a discrepancy in the sources regarding the leader of the Mūlessimin. Ibn al-Athir mentions that their leader was known as "al-Jawhar," a learned figure associated with the judālatribes⁴⁵, while al-Bakrī refers to "al-Jawhar" as one of those who later opposed Faqih ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn. Ibn Idhārī shares this view as well. Yahyā bin Ibrāhīm, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, launched a jihad movement against Sudan. He left behind his son, Ibrāhīm bin Yahyā, to continue the jihad movement and lead the Mulaththamūn tribes in the Sanhaja region. Yahyā himself set out for the east to perform the Hajj pilgrimage.⁴⁶

The judāla tribe was destined to lead this religious movement, which culminated in the founding of the Almoravid state. The leader of the judāla tribe had a special, yet general, virtue among the Berbers and the Almoravids. He was a visionary, pious, and honest individual who cared for the future of his community. All these qualities led the leaders of the Mulaththamūn to recognize that their influence would no longer be confined to their tribe, Sudan, or the Maghrib, but was now intrinsically connected to the broader history of the Islamic world in the east and west. Therefore, the unity of these tribes with one another was essential.⁴⁷

Yahyā bin Ibrāhīm is said to have moved in the year 427 AH (1035 CE), according to the most widely accepted view. At the time, the pilgrimage was closely connected with the pursuit of knowledge. After performing the Hajj, he set out to seek knowledge in the jurisprudence schools of the Maghrib.⁴⁸ During his travels, he encountered the Maghrib scholar Abū ‘Imrān al-Fāsī in Kairouan. They discussed plans to dismantle the small Zanāta tribal states and establish a Sunni, Mālikī-based state that would purify the Maghrib society from innovations and correct it.⁴⁹

The major Sanhaja tribes had long been dissatisfied with Zanāta leadership, as one tribe leading another eventually leads to the dominated tribe losing power and becoming subjugated. This fear prompted Yahyā bin Ibrāhīm to seek religious scholars who could teach Islam and unite his tribe, illuminating their hearts with knowledge. He was aware that such movements were driven by figures like Abdul-A’la bin al-Semh al-Ma’firi and Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shi’i, who inspired the Berber tribes and prepared them for state-building while emphasizing religious zeal and

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 8/328.

⁴⁶ al-Bakrī, *al-Mughrib*, 164; Ibn Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 4/8.

⁴⁷ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 104.

⁴⁸ Sadun Abbas Naṣr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn fī al-Maghrib wa’l-Andalus: Ahd Yusuf b. Tashfin Amir al-Murābiṭīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Naḥḍa al-‘Arabiyya, 1980), 20.

⁴⁹ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus ‘Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 9.

devotion.⁵⁰

Yaḥyā bin Ibrāhīm asked Sheikh Abū 'Imrān al-Fāsī to send someone to help him achieve his goal. The Sheikh agreed and sent him with a letter to Faqih Wajāj ibn Zallū al-Lamṭī in the city of Nefis.⁵¹ The letter contained the following message: "Now, when Yaḥyā bin Ibrāhīm al-Judāli arrives with this letter, trust him for his knowledge, piety, and good governance. Send him those whom you trust in their faith, piety, and knowledge to teach them the Quran, Islam, and the Shari'ah. There is great reward for both you and him in this, and Allah does not waste the deeds of the righteous." ⁵² Yaḥyā continued his journey until he met Faqih Wajāj ibn Zallū al-Lamṭī around 430 AH. Faqih Wajāj ibn Zallū gathered his students and read the letter. As instructed by Sheikh Abū Imran, he appointed 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn as their leader.⁵³

'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, known as Faqih al-Sus, studied under Wajāj ibn Zallū and later traveled to Andalusia during the reign of the Taifa kingdoms, where he spent seven years. In the year 430 AH (1038 CE), he entered the Far Maghrib with Yaḥyā bin Ibrāhīm el-judāli. ⁵⁴ He noticed that these tribes knew little about Islam. For example, in these tribes, it was common for someone to have more than four wives. The Imam began calling them to good, forbidding evil, and urging them to abandon their false customs.⁵⁵

'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, being fluent in Berber dialects and possessing excellent oratory skills, was able to influence people and attract scholars to learn from him. People from various regions came to study under him. Due to the Saharan conditions and the people's distance from knowledge, 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn adopted a gradual and accessible method to help them understand Islam, communicating in a way that matched their level of understanding. His sharp intelligence and experience with the nature of people allowed him to reach their hearts. He brought about a complete transformation in the lives of the people, revitalizing their religious spirit, making them practice Islam's rules, and teaching them the concept of equality among people. He particularly impressed the leaders of the Mulaththamūn, who had shown superiority over their slaves, instilling this concept of equality in them.⁵⁶

As with every reform movement, 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's reform efforts faced resistance. Some ignorant individuals, opposed to the Imam's calls against their

⁵⁰ Ḥusayn Mu'nis, *Ma'alim Tārikh al-Maghrib wa'l-Andalus* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Usra, 2004), 182-183.

⁵¹ Ḥasan 'Alī Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya fi al-Maghrib wa'l-Andalus: Asr al-Murābiṭīn wa'l-Muwahḥidīn*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānījī, 1980), 19.

⁵² al-Salāwī, *al-Istiḡsa*, 1/ 6-7.

⁵³ al-Khalifa, *Yusuf bin Tashfin*, 27.

⁵⁴ Naṣr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn fi al-Maghrib wa'l-Andalus*, 21-22.

⁵⁵ al-Salāwī, *al-Istiḡsa*, 1/7-8.

⁵⁶ Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fi Neshri'l-Islam*, 66.

desires and whims, began to rebel. In response, Imam ‘Abd Allāh decided to migrate to Sudan upon learning of a community that had embraced Islam there.⁵⁷ Ibn Idhārī mentions that the Mulaththamūn had strictly followed everything ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn had taught them until a person named al-Jawhar bin Sahim rose against him. This individual, along with his followers, opposed some of the Imam’s teachings, preventing him from expressing his views, seizing his possessions, and looting his house. Imam ‘Abd Allāh, fearing for his safety, sought refuge with Yaḥyā ibn ‘Umar ibn Bulungīn el-Lemṭūnī, the al-Amīr of Lamtūna, who received him hospitably.⁵⁸ Historians have different views on this incident.

Abū Zer’, in his work *Rawḍ al-Qirtās*, explains that this event occurred during the period of Yaḥyā bin Ibrāhīm el-Judālī. After Yaḥyā’s death, ‘Abd Allāh became vulnerable and unwanted. As a result, he chose to seek protection from Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar el-Lemṭūnī, and leadership passed from Judāla to Lamtūna.⁵⁹ Another account mentions that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn either visited his teacher wejaj bin Zellu or wrote to him. Following this, the teacher sent letters to some leaders of the Judāla tribe, reprimanding them for their actions against ‘Abd Allāh. When the tribes apologized for their actions, the teacher instructed ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn to return to them.⁶⁰

The Ribāṭ of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn

In the face of the persecution he experienced, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn realized that it was time to separate from these tribes and seek refuge elsewhere. He feared that what had happened to him in the north might also happen in the south. His concern was rooted in not knowing how the tribes would treat him. Yaḥyā bin Ibrāhīm al-Judālī, however, did not want him to leave, fearing that his departure would result in the loss of all hope⁶¹. As Abū Zar’ mentions, Yaḥyā bin Ibrāhīm al-Judālī offered ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn the option of worshipping Allah on an island with trees, game, and seafood. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn accepted this offer, and along with seven companions, they began to worship Allah on the island, turning it into a ribāṭ⁶² (a place of spiritual retreat). The island is believed to be located where the Senegal River empties into the Atlantic Ocean. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn and his companions spent nearly three months there in worship. When people learned of their devotion and their desire to seek Paradise while avoiding Hell, many came in groups to join them in their retreat. As their numbers grew, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn took advantage of the situation by establishing a methodical schedule to further spread

⁵⁷ Ibn Abi Zar’, *Rawḍ al-Qirtās*, 125.

⁵⁸ Ibn Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 4/8-9.

⁵⁹ Dandash, *Dawru’l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri’l-Islam*, 67-68.

⁶⁰ Ibn Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 9.

⁶¹ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 123.

⁶² Ibn Abi Zar’, *Rawḍ al-Qirtās*, 124-125.

Allah's call.⁶³

The location of 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's ribāṭ was near the borders of the pagan Ghana Empire, indicating that the area was under threat. Therefore, the people in the ribāṭ were expected to engage in jihad to defend themselves. The proximity of the ribāṭ to the lands of the Mulaththamūn meant that, in case of danger, they could seek assistance from them. The ribāṭ began on this island in 433 AH (1040 AD), and in a short time, its numbers swelled to over a thousand.⁶⁴ For 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, this task had become increasingly difficult. However, his previous experiences with the tribes helped him maintain control and train a generation that would follow his commands and serve as examples for others.⁶⁵

'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn set certain conditions for the new arrivals. These conditions ensured that only qualified individuals would join the ribāṭ, preventing anyone from harming its sanctity. He preferred individuals from the Muleththamun tribe who were the most pious, patient in the face of hardships, and committed to their faith. He asked the new arrivals to forget everything they had previously known and re-enter Islam. The failures in his earlier attempts with these tribes were likely due to this requirement.⁶⁶

The people in the ribāṭ fully relied on themselves, obtaining their food by hunting both land and sea animals. They also practiced restraint, preparing minimal amounts of food. Their clothing was made from coarse fabric, reminding them of the transient nature of this world and the importance of living simply. In matters concerning religious practices, the followers of 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn would consult the Mālikī school of thought, as 'Abd Allāh himself adhered to the Mālikī jurisprudence.⁶⁷

The ribāṭ movement in Senegal was part of a broader trend that started with the ribāṭ movement in the Maghrib during the era of Islamic conquests. 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn knew that strengthening the borders was necessary. This was vital to defend Islam and prevent the Byzantine forces from advancing into these areas. As a result, the Mālikī school of thought spread, with Mālikī scholars beginning to establish their presence in the region. This simple and ascetic way of life allowed them to maintain their spiritual devotion and continue their religious mission⁶⁸. The first phase of 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's ribāṭ was marked by the establishment of both a religious and military structure. Although the exact duration of this period

⁶³ al-Khalifa, *Yusuf bin Tashfin*, 33.

⁶⁴ Naṣr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 26.

⁶⁵ Hamid Muḥammad al-Khalifa, *Intisarāt Yusuf b. Tashfin 400/1009-500/1106*, (Sharjah: Maktabat al-Ṣaḥāba, 2004), 20.

⁶⁶ Naṣr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn fī al-Maghrib wa'l-Andalus*, 27.

⁶⁷ Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri'l-Islam*, 74.

⁶⁸ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 128-131-132.

is not known, it is believed to have lasted between seven to twelve years. This period was sufficient for the formation of a 3,000-strong military and religious organization.⁶⁹

Jihad and Conquest : The Role of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn

‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn did not limit his efforts to merely explaining his cause and principles to his followers in the ribāṭ. He sent missionaries to different tribes to spread his principles and the way of life in the ribāṭ. Afterward, he moved on to the practical phase of his mission. He emphasized the necessity of commanding good and forbidding evil.⁷⁰

The author of the book *Rawḍ al-Qirtās* has shared the content of a letter that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn wrote to his followers: *"O Murābiṭūn! You are the leaders of your tribes, the heads of your clans, and you are numerous. Allah Almighty has guided you to the right path and improved your condition. We can show our gratitude for these blessings by commanding good, forbidding evil, and striving in Allah's path."* They responded, *"O blessed sheikh! Tell us what you desire, and insha'Allah you will find us among those who obey your commands and listen. If you command us to fight even our mothers and fathers, we will fight them."* ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn replied, *"Go with Allah's blessing! Warn your people and scare them. If they turn to the truth, leave them; but if they reject and oppose, we will fight them until Allah decides between us."*⁷¹

Meanwhile, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn did not immediately allow his newly established community to embark on jihad. First, he understood that he needed to organize them in a way that would lead them to victory. He also knew that they needed to be properly equipped, so with the resources he obtained from zakat and alms, he began buying the necessary weapons and training the community in warfare.⁷² This call by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn is considered the spark that ignited the Almoravids combative life. It was quite normal for the first battles to be against the tribes that opposed ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's authority. He first invited the judāla tribe, and when they refused, he led a 3,000-strong army to raid them. This event took place in the month of Safar in the year 430 AH (1042 CE). After this battle, those who survived from the judāla tribe responded to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn's call.⁷³

Following judāla, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn moved towards the Lamtūna tribes. He fought and defeated them, and the survivors pledged allegiance to him. Other tribes, upon witnessing the fate of these tribes, also pledged allegiance. al-Amīr

⁶⁹ Buchich, *al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus ‘Asr al-Murābiṭīn*, 10.

⁷⁰ Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya*, 21.

⁷¹ Ibn Abi Zar‘, *Rawḍ al-Qirtās*, 125.

⁷² Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 146-147.

⁷³ al-Salāwī, *al-Istiqsa*, 1/10.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn continued to wage war against other tribes in the desert to gain control over the region. He allocated the spoils of war for the the Almoravids’ resources.⁷⁴ Although ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn was a guide and mentor in the ribāṭ, he also appointed commanders for administrative tasks. When it came to important matters, he would consult with a council, and discussions would be held on the issues at hand.⁷⁵ Despite these military and administrative responsibilities, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn did not neglect his scholarly pursuits. We can see him sending aid to scholars and judges in neighboring countries. Neither the hardships of the newly-established state nor his participation in military activities prevented him from pursuing knowledge. His approach played a significant role in the spread and recognition of the Murābiṭūn movement.⁷⁶

The Transition of Leadership to the Lamtūna Tribe

The Judāla tribe played a significant role in the emergence of the Almoravid movement, primarily due to the efforts of its leader, Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Judālī, who was instrumental in bringing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn and initiating his mission. In turn, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn initially entrusted him with leadership. However, following the death of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, the situation shifted, as ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn appointed Yaḥyā ibn ‘Umar ibn Talqaqin al-Lemtūni to assume command. It is worth noting that historical sources do not provide a clear cause of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm’s death, nor do they agree on its exact date. For instance, Ibn Abī Zar’ mentions that after the death of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn appointed Yaḥyā ibn ‘Umar, but he does not specify the year⁷⁷. In contrast, Ibn al-Khaṭīb reports that Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm died in 446 AH after achieving several military victories and conquests. He adds that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn selected Yaḥyā ibn ‘Umar ibn Talqaqin al-Lemtūni for leadership because of his righteousness and strong obedience.⁷⁸ Some contemporary researchers suggest that his death occurred in the year 447 AH, after which ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn transferred the leadership of the military wing to Yaḥyā ibn ‘Umar ibn Talqaqin al-Lemtūni.⁷⁹ However, this decision led to a crisis that could have fractured the unity of the Almoravid movement and potentially destroyed its power. The Judālī tribe, feeling they were more deserving of military leadership because they had sheltered ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn when he was weak and had helped him, began to question the decision. However, al-Amīr ‘Abd Allāh remained firm and expressed his intention to meet with these individu-

⁷⁴ Ibn Abī Zar, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, 126.

⁷⁵ Naṣr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 10.

⁷⁶ al-Khalifa, *Intisarāt Yusuf b. Tashfin*, 25.

⁷⁷ Ibn Abī Zar’. *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, 126–127

⁷⁸ Lisān al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Amāl al-a’lām fī man būyi’a qabla al-iḥtilām min mulūk al-Islām. al-Qism al-Maghribī*, “Critical ed.” Aḥmad Mukhtār al ‘Abbādī - Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Kattānī (al-Dār al-Bayḍā’: Dār al-Kitāb, 1964). 228

⁷⁹ Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya*, 22.

als. After meeting with them, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn sentenced them to death for sowing discord and betraying his cause.⁸⁰ al-Bakrī mentions that Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar was one of the most loyal followers of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, and when ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn ordered his punishment during a war, Yaḥyā did not resist.⁸¹ It was not unusual for leadership to pass from one tribe to another, as succession among the desert tribes followed the maternal line (matrilineal descent). It was customary to choose the sons of sisters to inherit leadership. Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar’s mother was from the noble class of The Judāla and had married a man from the Lamtūna tribe, so his Lamtūna lineage was significant.⁸²

Apart from this, the Lamtūna tribe controlled vital trade routes and had led tribes in the region for two centuries, making them crucial in ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn’s view. Therefore, he gave the Lamtūna tribe a special position among the Mulaththamūn. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn’s decision showed how well he understood the local tribes and their readiness to carry the banner of leadership. The Lamtūna tribe and its descendants would continue to bear responsibility for the Almoravid state until its end.⁸³ It is also worth noting that the Almoravid state was called "the Lemtūni State" in reference to the Lamtūna tribe, which was one of its founding tribes.⁸⁴

In 447 AH (1055 CE), scholars from the Sijilmasa and Dera regions gathered and sought the help of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar, and the leaders of the Almoravid movement to free themselves from the oppression of their rulers and cleanse their lands from corruption. They wrote a letter asking for help to liberate the Muslims and the scholars from the tyrant, Mas‘ūd b. Wānūdīn al-Zanātī. When the letter reached ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, he gathered the leaders of the Almoravid movement to consult them, and they responded, "O Sheikh, this matter concerns both you and us; let us proceed with the blessings of Allah." ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn encouraged them to prepare for jihad and action.⁸⁵

al-Bakrī describes the Almoravid’s war against Sijilmasa: ‘The people of Sijilmasa and their leader, Mesut al-Maghrawi, were met, but after failing to reach an agreement, the Almoravid army, numbering thirty thousand, fought them’.⁸⁶ The army reached Dera and captured fifty thousand camels belonging to Massud al-Maghrawi. Upon hearing this, Mesut gathered his army, and a great battle ensued, with Allah granting victory to the Almoravid forces. al-Maghrawi and most of his

⁸⁰ Maḥmūd, *Qiyam Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 147.

⁸¹ al-Bakrī, *al-Mughrib*, 166-167.

⁸² Ronald A. Messier, *The Almoravids and the Meanings of Jihad* (California: Praeger, 2010), 10.

⁸³ Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya*, 23.

⁸⁴ İsmail Yigit, "Murabitlar", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (Ankara: TDV Publications, 2020), 31/152.

⁸⁵ Ibn Abi Zar‘, *Rawḍ al-Qirtās*, 128.

⁸⁶ al-Bakrī, *al-Mughrib*, 167.

army were killed, while the remaining forces fled. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn distributed the spoils of war, reserving a fifth for the scholars of Dera and Sijilmasa. The remainder was divided among the Almoravid troops. Afterward, they moved towards Sijilmasa, where they encountered resistance from the Maghrawa tribe. After assessing the situation in the city, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn implemented Sharia law, removing immoral activities such as the selling of alcohol and music, abolishing oppressive taxes, and only maintaining zakat and other Islamic obligations. He appointed someone from the Lamtūna tribe to oversee the city and then returned to the Sahara.⁸⁷ However, after Ibn Yāsīn’s departure to the Sahara—and in the same year, 447 AH—an uprising broke out aiming to end Almoravid control over the city of Sijilmasa, which resulted in the city falling out of their hands.⁸⁸

‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn realized that the recapture of Sijilmasa was necessary. The loss of control over the city would pose a significant threat to him in the future, as the Mulaththamūns current loyalty did not guarantee their continued support. Additionally, the presence of another Arab community in Sijilmasa after the rebellion posed a potential threat. Therefore, he decided to recapture Sijilmasa and prepare to fight the distant Maghrib by first securing the Atlas region. After gaining control of the region, he intended to engage in battle with the distant Maghrib.⁸⁹ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn sent Almoravid forces to recapture Sijilmasa and compelled the judāla tribe to participate in the campaign. He reached their tents by the Atlantic Ocean and ordered Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar to punish the judāla tribe. Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar, stationed in the Lamtūna mountains, led a 200-man force towards Sijilmasa. Along the way, Abū Bakr bin ‘Umar joined them with a larger army. Thus, the Zanāta tribe was defeated, and Sijilmasa was recaptured. However, the judāla tribe ambushed Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar’s forces. The two armies clashed at a place called Tifrihi, and in 448 AH (1056 CE), Yaḥyā bin ‘Umar was martyred.⁹⁰

In his place, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn appointed his brother, Abū Bakr bin ‘Umar al-Lemtūni, in 448 AH (1056 CE) and ordered him to continue military campaigns towards the north. Abū Bakr bin ‘Umar led attacks in the regions of el-Mesamida, el-Sus, and the southern area of el-Wahat. He then appointed his cousin, Yusuf bin Tashfin, to lead the army in 448 AH (1056 CE). The Almoravid movement emerged as a political and military authority.⁹¹ Abū Bakr bin ‘Umar also played a new role in the movement. He turned towards the pagan Barghawata tribes, leading to a fierce battle.⁹² ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn personally participated in the battle and was ultima-

⁸⁷ Ibn Abi Zar‘, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, 128.

⁸⁸ Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya*, 24.

⁸⁹ Dandash, *Dawru’l-Murābiṭīn fi Neshri’l-Islam*, 82-83.

⁹⁰ Weld al-Ḥusayn, *Sahra’ al-Mulathamīn*, 141.

⁹¹ Naṣr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 31.

⁹² Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya*, 25.

tely martyred as a result. However, according to the scholar Adnan Adigüzel, it is likely that his death was not instantaneous. Rather, he sustained critical injuries and was subsequently transferred to a secure location to receive medical attention. During this period, he is reported to have instructed his followers to persist in their struggle without hesitation and strongly emphasized the necessity of maintaining leadership under Abū Bakr ibn ‘Umar al-Lamtūnī. He eventually succumbed to his wounds and passed away on 8 July 1059 CE, / 24 Jumādā al-Awwal 451 AH.⁹³ Some studies indicate that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn’s decision to eliminate the Barghawāṭa tribe, known for its doctrinal deviance, was driven by both geographical and jihadist considerations. Many contemporary scholars agree that religious motivations played a significant role in this conflict; however, economic factors—particularly the desire to control northern trade routes—were also of considerable importance.⁹⁴

The martyrdom of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn marked the rise of Yusuf bin Tashfin in the newly established state. During ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn’s time, the emirate and the religious authority were separate. However, with his death, the Almoravid movement needed both religious and temporal authority to unite. Thus, the state began to take on a political framework, and in the following years, conditions necessitated a shift toward Yusuf bin Tashfin’s style of leadership.⁹⁵

Although, the Almoravid’s hasty and disorganized assault on Berguwata, a powerful tribe established in the region since the 127th year of the Hijra, ended in defeat and the martyrdom of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn. After his death, the Almoravid army selected Suleyman bin Adu to replace him, but he too was martyred in the battle against Berguwata.⁹⁶

After completing the burial of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, Caliph Abū Bakr ibn ‘Umar directed his forces against the Barghawāṭa tribe, inflicting severe damage upon them and driving them deep into the desert. He then distributed their wealth and spoils among the Almoravid forces and succeeded in restoring security and stability to the region.⁹⁷ Caliph Abū Bakr then returned to his capital, Agmat, and continued his conquests northward, capturing Fazzan and Maknasa. These regions were under the control of Amīr al-Mahdī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tawāla who, after meeting with Abū Bakr, acknowledged his inability to resist and swore allegiance to the Almoravid state.⁹⁸

⁹³ Adnan Adigüzel, “Abdullah B. Yasin ve Murabıtlar Hareketi”, *İslami İlimler*, 7/13, (2012), 64-65.

⁹⁴ Mawlūd ‘Ashshāq, “al-Majal al-Jughrafi wa’s-Sira’ al-Burghawti al-Yasini”, *Abdullah b. Yasin’s Semposium*, ed. Ibrāhīm Harkat (Qunaitra : al-Buqaili li’l-Tibaa wa’l-Nashr, 1998), 37.

⁹⁵ Naşr Allāh, *Dawlat al-Murābiṭīn*, 40.

⁹⁶ ‘Ashshāq, “al-Majal al-Jughrafi wa’s-Sira’ al-Burghawti al-Yasini”, 38.

⁹⁷ Ibn Abi Zar’, *Rawḍ al-Qirtās*, 133.

⁹⁸ Ḥasan, *al-Hadara al-Islamiyya*, 25.

Having completed the first phase by incorporating al-Mehdi into his ranks, Abū Bakr moved on to finish the Berguwata issue. In 452 AH, he returned to Agmat and sent a large army, led by Yusuf bin Tashfin, composed of Lamtūna, el-Mesamide, and other Berber tribes to fight the Zanāta and Beni Yefran tribes in the region of Fas. After several battles, the rebels were killed, and peace was restored in the region.⁹⁹

In 461 AH, al-Amīr Abū Bakr ibn Umar deployed a large army under the command of his cousin Yusuf ibn Tashfin, comprising leaders from the Lamtūna, Masmuda, and other Berber tribes, to confront the Zanāta, known as Banu Ifran, in the Fez region. After defeating the Zanāta and forcing Muansir ibn Hammad to flee, Yusuf suppressed rebellions against Lamtūna rule, including executing individuals from the Sidrata region.¹⁰⁰ Abū Bakr bin 'Umar then continued his efforts to unite the scattered tribes, bringing peace and security to the Sahara region. He directed them towards waging jihad against the pagan community in Sudan, and by gaining control over Sudan, the Almoravid state expanded its influence further.¹⁰¹

Some sources only indicate that Abū Bakr bin 'Umar's return to the Sahara was a result of a "disruption" that occurred there, without providing details regarding the nature of this disruption. It is also stated that he returned to Morocco after stabilizing the situation in the region, only to discover that his cousin had usurped control and was no longer willing to relinquish power. Consequently, Abū Bakr decided to relinquish his claim to Morocco in order to prevent further bloodshed among the Muslims and to preserve the unity of the Almoravid state.¹⁰² According to available sources, Abū Bakr subsequently returned to the Almoravid southern base or capital at Azuggi (in present-day Mauritania), accompanied by a small group of Mālikī jurists, including Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Murādī of Qayrawān. His mission was to coordinate the Almoravid campaign southward against the Soninke Kingdom of Ghana, which was reportedly conquered around 1076–1077 CE, leading to the eventual collapse of the kingdom.¹⁰³

The Construction of Marrakesh

Abū Bakr established the city of Agmat as the center of his army's control. He and his brothers lived in tents. Due to delegations from the Sahara region visiting him, there was a growing population in the Agmat area. The local people, troubled by this situation, complained to the emir, saying, "Give us a region! With Al-

⁹⁹ al-Khalifa, *Yusuf bin Tashfin*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 17-18.

¹⁰¹ Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri'l-Islam*, 101.

¹⁰² Weld al-Ḥusayn, *Sahra' al-Mulathamīn*, 143.

¹⁰³ Amira K. Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, (United Kingdom : Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 37.

lah's permission, we will build a new city there!"¹⁰⁴ Subsequently, a location near the Dukala and Nefis Valleys, close to the Dern Mountain, was proposed. This site was more accessible for control. The Amir, along with tribal leaders, travelled to the Marrakesh region and found it to be a completely vacant area. This area, situated between Heylane and Hezmire, was accepted by the tribes. The decision ensured that the tribes were satisfied, and the area was found to be suitable for the establishment of the Almoravids.¹⁰⁵

In the year 454 AH (1062 AD), Abū Bakr, together with tribal leaders, laid the foundations for the city. The tribal leaders provided both financial and material assistance in the construction. A palace, known as Qaṣr al-Ḥajar or Dār al-Ḥajar, was built and soon after, people began constructing houses within their means.¹⁰⁶ Historians note a discrepancy regarding the year the city's construction began and who founded it. According to Al-Idrisi, Marrakesh city is located 12 miles north of Agmat, and the founder was Yusuf bin Tashfin. He bought the region from the people of Agmat, and at that time, there was nothing in the area except for a small mountain.¹⁰⁷

This situation can be explained as follows: While Abū Bakr bin 'Umar did not directly construct the city, he was the one who chose the site and planned its construction, and Yusuf bin Tashfin was the one who completed and finished the project.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Almoravid movement was the result of a unique interplay between tribal cohesion, religious reform, and geopolitical opportunity in the Islamic West. Originating from the Sanhaja tribal confederation—particularly the Lamtūna, Judāla, and Massūfa tribes—the Almoravids succeeded in transforming themselves from fragmented nomadic groups into a centralized Islamic polity. This transformation began with Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm's quest for religious guidance and later crystallized through the reform project based on the concept of ribāṭ, initiated by 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn along the banks of the Senegal River.

The Almoravid identity was shaped around two central appellations: al-Murābiṭūn and al-Mulaththamūn. The former, derived from the concept of ribāṭ, reflects their role as defenders of the faith and practitioners of a spiritual-military discipline grounded in Mālikī jurisprudence. The latter, meaning "the veiled ones," stems from pre-Islamic Sanhaja customs and, within the context of political expan-

¹⁰⁴ Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri'l-Islam*, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Dandash, *Dawru'l-Murābiṭīn fī Neshri'l-Islam*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Sharīf al-Idrīsī, *al-Maghrib wa Ard as-Sudan wa Misr wa'l-Andalus* (Leiden : Brill, 1863), 67.

sion, came to symbolize moral distinction and tribal solidarity. Scholarly sources differ regarding the true origins and the historical moment when these names first emerged. While some historians associate the term al-Murābiṭūn with religious practices carried out in ribāṭ fortresses, others trace it back to a military or heroic context, as presented in the accounts of Ibn Idhārī and Ibn al-Aḥmar.

The most plausible view suggests that the name al-Murābiṭūn first appeared in the context of religious reform and missionary activity led by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, drawing directly on the Qur’anic concept of ribāṭ. It later evolved to acquire political and military connotations. The designation al-Mulaththamūn, on the other hand, predates this usage and is rooted in Sanhaja tribal custom. Over time, it was reappropriated as a symbolic expression of distinct identity and cohesion within the broader Almoravid project.

One of the most controversial issues surrounding the Almoravids is the question of their ethnic origins. While some medieval and later sources attributed them to Himyarite Arab tribes from Yemen, other sources asserted that they were of Berber descent. The more plausible view is that the Sanhaja tribes trace their origins back to Himyarite ancestry—a view supported by numerous scholars, among them the researcher Weld al-Ḥusayn. This perspective is reinforced by the fact that opposing views lack solid evidence, and the characteristics of these tribes differ from those of Arab tribes only in language. This divergence highlights that ethnic identity was not merely a matter of biological lineage but served as a tool for asserting legitimacy and constructing historical narratives.

On the geopolitical level, the Almoravids capitalized on their strategic control of trans-Saharan trade routes and relied on tribal diplomacy to expand their influence from the southern Sahara to the Maghrib al-Aqṣā and into al-Andalus. Under the leadership of figures such as Abū Bakr ibn ‘Umar and Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn, the movement evolved into a structured imperial authority, culminating in the foundation of Marrakesh, a symbol of Almoravid statehood and an integrated model of Islamic governance. Thus, the Almoravid movement constitutes not merely a pivotal chapter in the religious and political history of North and West Africa, but also serves as an analytical model for how tribal networks, religious reform, and strategic expansion can converge to produce a cohesive and enduring Islamic empire.

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