

The conflict between the Mayorks and the Almohads and its impact on the central Maghreb (580 AH - 631 AH)

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Abstract:

Throughout its long history, central Maghreb has experienced continuous human movement and numerous events that have led to the settlement of different tribes. It has also served as a crossroads for trade and cultural interaction between east and west, north and south. However, there were times when it became a zone of conflict. A notable example is the fighting between the Banu Ghaniya of the Moors and the Almohads. This conflict lasted some fifty years, exhausting both parties and devastating the land and its people. This article examines these dynamics.

Keywords: Banu Ghaniya, Central Maghreb, Conflict, Almohads

INTRODUCTION

The impact of Andalusian migration to Maghreb is often perceived as positive, especially in terms of cultural contributions in literature, science, art and architecture. However, there is another type of migration that has a negative, even dangerous, impact on all aspects of life. This was the case in central Maghreb around 580 AD, with the influx from Andalusia, which manifested itself in the migration of hundreds of Banu Ghaniya Berbers from Majorca to the city of Bejaia, then under Almohad rule. This migration reflected a kind of political and military movement aimed at countering the growing influence of the Almohads and recovering the glory of the Almoravid state and its waning power.

During this period, the arrival of the Turkish Ghuzz from the followers of Qarqosh in Maghreb coincided with the presence of both Berber and Turkish-Armenian elements. The Arab tribes of the Hilali and Sulaymi had settled in Maghreb about a century earlier, creating a diverse demographic landscape of Berber, Arab and Turkic tribes under the Almohad state.

In this paper we focus on the migration of the Banu Ghaniya from Andalusia to central Maghreb. We will examine the motives and reasons for their migration, their choice of settlement in Bejaia, and the manifestations and effects of the conflict between these Majorcans and the Almohads on central Maghreb. We will also discuss the positions of the Arab and Berber tribes in relation to the conflict, as well as the views of notable personalities from both sides of the struggle.

The origins of the Banu Ghaniya and their attitude to the Almohads

The Banu Ghaniya descended from the Musufa tribe, one of the Sanhaja tribes that formed the human element of the Almoravid state. As a result, they held an important position within the state. Ali ibn Yahya al-Musufi is regarded as one of their earliest notable figures, known for his bravery. He served as a leader under Yusuf ibn Tashfin because of his status among his people. Yusuf arranged for him to marry a woman from his own family, named Ghaniya, in accordance with her father's wishes. The Banu Ghaniya trace their lineage to her, following the custom of the Almoravids.

Ghaniya bore Ali al-Musufi two sons, Muhammad and Yahya, who grew up under the protection and guidance of Yusuf ibn Tashfin. Prince Ali ensured their prominence, appointing Yahya to govern western Andalusia and settling him in Cordoba. In 520 AH¹, he assigned Muhammad to the eastern regions of Algeria, Mallorca, Menorca and Yabasa.

The Almoravid state did not last long, however, and Yahya ibn Ali al-Ghani died in Granada in 543 AD. His younger brother Muhammad then moved to Denia and eastern Algeria and continued the line of the state. One of the most famous descendants was Isaac ibn Muhammad (d. 579 AD), known for his military campaigns against the Romans and for maintaining a delicate balance of alliances with the Almohads. The Almohads often sent him messages asking for his allegiance, to which he responded with promises. His advisers were divided between loyalty to the Almohads and separation from them. This state of affairs continued until he was martyred on one of his campaigns against the Romans in 579 AD².

Al-Ghabrini tells of Prince Isaac's attitude when a messenger from the Almohads came to invite him to swear allegiance. He refused, saying that he did not see them and they did not see him (referring to the Almohads). He told the messenger, "Tell the Almohads to pay their expenses for these two," referring to his sons, Yahya and Ali. His words proved prophetic. After him, his eldest son, Ali, was one of the first Moors to arrive in Bejaia³.

The conflict between the Majorcans and the Almohads⁴ lasted from the year 580 AH, when they settled in Bejaia, until 631 AH, the year of the death of the last Majorcan prince, Yahya ibn Isaac ibn Muhammad ibn Ali al-Musufi, who died as a wanderer in 631 AH. With his death, the era of the Majorcans and the Almohad state came to an end.

The Majorcans, influenced by a number of factors, decided to make central Maghreb and Ifriqiya a battleground against the Almohads⁴.

Reasons and factors for settling in Bejaia

¹- Ibn Khaldun, *The Records and the Book of Beginnings and News in the History of the Arabs and Berbers and Their Notable Contemporaries*, ed. and trans. Khalil Shahada and Suhail Zakar, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1st edition, 1981, p. 6/253. Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakshi, *The Admirable Summary of the News of the Maghrib from the Time of the Conquest of al-Andalus to the End of the Almohad Era*, ed. Salah al-Din al-Hawari, Al-Maktaba al-Asriya, Sidon-Beirut, 1st edition, 1426 AH - 2006 AD, p. 196.

²- Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakshi, *The Admirable Summary*, previous source, p. 197.

³- Abu al-Abbas al-Ghabrini, *The Title of Knowledge About Notable Scholars in the Seventh Century in Béjaïa*, ed. Adel Nuyhayd, Dar al-Afaq al-Jadida, Beirut, 2nd edition, 1979, p. 46.

⁴- It is worth noting that all these Banu Ghaniya individuals who migrated from Mallorca to Béjaïa and central Maghreb were born in al-Andalus. Due to their location in the east of al-Andalus, they were closer to the Lower and Central Maghrib than to the Far Maghrib, which, along with other factors, influenced their migration.

Bejaia was the capital of the Hammadids, a tribe allied to the Shiite Banu Ubayd. The Sanhaja tribe had declared their defiance of the Ubayd Shiite call during the reign of Prince Al-Mu'izz ibn Badis in 440 AH¹, and rallied to the Abbasid Caliphate instead. This prompted the Ubayd caliph to send Arab tribes from the clans of Hilal ibn Amir and Sulaym ibn Mansur to discipline the Sanhaja and lure them with the riches of Maghreb. This migration led the Hammadids to settle in Bejaia and make it their capital. This situation continued until the Almohads rose up against the Almoravids, expanding into central Maghreb and taking control in 540 AD, when Abd al-Mu'min appointed his son Abdullah to govern Bejaia².

Bejaia was a commercial city, and among the goods offered along its shores were captives and white slaves brought from the lands of Rome after conquests. People came to buy these captives at the butcher's market. The Banu Ghaniya were among the merchants who roamed its coasts selling slaves³.

When the Almohad caliph Abu Yaqub Yusuf ibn Abd al-Mu'min died in 580, Prince Ali ibn Ishaq ibn Muhammad of Majorca seized the opportunity and, according to al-Nuwayri, prepared a fleet of twenty ships, consisting of his family and men, to sail to Béjaïa. The author of the "Al-Mu'jib" mentions that a group of notables from Bejaia had corresponded with him, taking advantage of the absence of their Almohad ruler. He entered the city without significant resistance, performed the Friday prayer and delivered a sermon for the Abbasid al-Nasir li-Din Allah⁴.

Several factors motivated Ali ibn Ishaq ibn Muhammad and his brothers to choose Bejaia as their landing place, including:

Social, sectarian and political ties

Both the Mu'raqi Masufis and the people of Bejaia trace their ancestry back to the Sanhaja tribe. This link explains why the Hamadans sided with the Almoravids when the Almohads invaded central Maghreb⁵. The author of Al-Istibsar states: "The overseer said: When this city was as described, and with it remained a remnant of the aggrieved Sanhaja, they began to ally themselves with others who had grievances in this world and the next, like the people of Mallorca who were cut off from their kinsmen".

In 580, Ali ibn Ishaq ibn Hamou ibn Ghaniya Masufi arrived in Bejaia during the early reign of the caliph Amir al-Mu'minin Abu Yusuf⁶. This highlights their social affiliation, as both groups share a common lineage, as well as their sectarian affiliation to the Sunni Maliki school and their political loyalty to the Abbasids. This was further demonstrated when al-Mu'izz ibn Badis declared his rejection of the Fatimid call and its Shia doctrine, choosing loyalty to the Abbasids and adopting the Sunni Maliki school.

Commercial and geographical links

¹- Al-Qalqashandi, *The Dawn of the A'sha in the Art of Composition*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, p. 5/120.

²- Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakshi, *The Admirable Summary*, previous source, p. 153.

³- Al-Ghabrini, previous source, p. 45.

⁴- Al-Nuwayri, *The End of the Four in the Arts of Literature*, Dar al-Kutub wa al-Wathaiq al-Qawmiyya, Cairo, 1st edition, 1423 AH, p. 28/372.

⁵- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/252.

⁶- Anonymous Marrakshi (d. 6th century AH), *Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyya*, Baghdad, ed. Saad Zaghoul Abdul Hamid, 1986, p. 1/131.

The link between the Mu'raqi people and Bejaïa was not only established during their movement in 580 AD, but also existed before that, going back to the time of Ishaq ibn Ghaniya. Al-Ghabrini expresses this as follows: "The trade routes of Ishaq ibn Ghaniya reached Mallorca as well as Bejaïa"¹.

This commercial relationship was facilitated by geographical proximity, which was one of the key factors in their closeness. As a coastal town, Bejaïa faced the eastern islands, making it a focal point for Mallorca, which was on the opposite shore, with three currents flowing between them².

Reasons for moving to Bejaïa

Based on the previous information, it is clear that the migration of the Mu'raqi people to Bejaïa and the lower and middle Maghreb was an attempt to combat the Almohad state, which had dismantled the Almoravid state. They wanted to restore the glory of the Almoravids in terms of governance, kingship and jihad. Béjaïa and central Maghreb were chosen because of the social, political and sectarian compatibility between the incoming Mu'raqi elements and the Sanhaja inhabitants of Béjaïa, providing a Sanhaja support system to confront the Almohad state.

There was also a strategic motive to extend their areas of influence and confrontation to larger and safer geographical areas. The islands they inhabited were narrow and easily besieged, limiting their ability to escape. They saw central Maghreb as a safer and larger area, thus shifting the battlefield from the confines of the islands to the vastness of the Maghreb.

Consequently, the sources do not mention resistance to the Andalusian newcomers; rather, there are indications that this movement was initiated by internal factions³ seeking to revive the Almoravid state. There is some disagreement about the date of the arrival of the Mu'raqi on the Bejaïa coast. Al-Ghabrini states that the Mu'raqi fleet reached the shores of Bejaïa at a place where slaves were sold. There was no military presence in the city, and the people welcomed them in the customary manner of the slave trade. The cavalry arrived prepared, and when they reached the area, the people were unaware of their intentions. They climbed Mount al-Khalifa and entered through the "Luz" gate and took control of the city. At that time there was no wall over the Luz Gate. They then asked for the allegiance of the people and the people pledged their allegiance to them⁴.

However, another account mentions that the Mu'raqi fleet arrived in Bejaïa at the time of the Friday Dhuhr prayer. The author of "Al-Istiqa", quoting Ibn Abi Zar'a, states that Ali ibn Ishaq entered the city of Bejaïa on Friday, the sixth of Sha'ban in 580 AH, while the people were performing the Friday prayer.

Prior to this, the city gates were not normally closed during Friday prayer, so Ibn Ghaniya waited for the people to begin their prayers before storming the city. He directed his cavalry and men towards the Great Mosque, and those who pledged allegiance to him were spared,

¹- Al-Ghabrini, previous source, p. 45.

²- Al-Humairi, *The Garden of the Countries*, ed. Ihsan Abbas, Nasser Foundation for Culture, Beirut, 2nd edition, 1980, p. 567.

³- Anonymous, *Al-Istibsar*, p. 131.

⁴- Al-Ghabrini, previous source, p. 46.

while those who hesitated were executed. He then remained in Bejaïa for seven months before it was recaptured¹.

Expansion of Mu'raqi influence in central Maghreb

Once Ibn Ghaniya had established control over Bejaïa, he began to expand into the regions of central Maghreb, appointing governors to assist him. Al-Hamiri explains: "He went to Algiers and entered it, then to Miliyana, then to Mazouna, and entered Ashir by force. Then he went to Qal'a and took control of it. After three months he had gained a remarkable reputation among the Arabs and appointed officials and governors in these regions. He then set his sights on Qusantina, marching towards it and besieging it for several months, but without success².

Thus Ali ibn Ghaniya quickly extended his influence over the eastern cities of central Maghreb, from Shlef and Miliyana to Ashir, Bejaïa and the Qal'a, reaching Setif, while Qusantina resisted until Almohad reinforcements arrived. This suggests that the Almohad garrisons in some of these towns were minimal and unable to repel the Mu'raqi advance.

Conflict and confrontation between the Banu Ghaniya and the Almohads

To trace the conflict between the Mu'raqi people and the Almohads, we can divide it into two phases. The first phase covers the Banu Ghaniya during the reign of Prince Ali ibn Ishaq from 580 AH to 585 AH. The second phase is the longer one, lasting almost half a century from 585 AH to 631 AH.

Phase One: The Era of Prince Ali ibn Ghaniya (580-585 AH)

News of the Mu'raqi presence reached Marrakech during the early reign of Caliph Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur. He sent his cousin, the esteemed Abu Zayd ibn Abi Hafs, at the head of an Almohad army to attack Bejaïa, accompanied by a fleet of ships. When Ali ibn Ghaniya heard of this movement, he left Bejaïa and headed for the lands of the Jareed. As a result, the Almohads regained control of Algeria, Shlef, Miliyana and Bejaïa, the latter being recaptured in the Safar of 581 AH, only seven months after its initial conquest³.

The Almohads' military campaign against the Mu'raqis provided them with an opportunity to increase their influence in central Maghreb. They fortified Tlemcen, called for an amnesty among the population, and the people then revolted against Ibn Ghaniya and his followers.

Ali bin Ghaniya's alliance with the Armenian Qaraqosh

Ali bin Ghaniya turned his efforts towards Tripoli, where he met Qaraqosh⁴. They agreed to work together against the Almohads and to divide the Maghreb between them: the central and

¹- Al-Salawi al-Nasiri, *The Comprehensive History of the States of the Far Maghrib*, ed. Ja'far al-Nasiri / Muhammad al-Nasiri, Dar al-Kitab, Casablanca, p. 2/160.

²- Al-Humairi, *The Garden of the Lands*, p. 568.

³- Al-Marrakshi, *The Admirable Summary*, p. 199.

⁴- This title was held by two Turks: Baha al-Din Qaraqosh, the minister of Salah al-Din, and Sharaf al-Din, the latter of whom went to the Maghrib. "He was a slave of the victorious Taqi al-Din, Salah al-Din's nephew, and he led military campaigns in Tripoli and southern Tunisia, occupying Tripoli, Qabis and other regions for some time. King al-Mudhafar was personally motivated by his ambitions to abandon the idea of invading Ifriqiya, which the Almohads did not fully control, and assigned the task to his slave Sharaf al-Din Qaraqosh. It is very likely that this idea was encouraged by Salah al-Din". Summary of the Islamic Encyclopaedia, p. 26/8271.

western regions would belong to the Banu Ghaniya, while the eastern territories would be given to Qaraqosh. He also tried to win over the Arab tribes of Sulaym and Hilal, while the Zughba tribes sided with the Almohads.

Ali ibn Ghaniya then turned to the Lametuna and renewed the symbols of kingship, extending his influence in the Jareed and calling for allegiance to the Abbasids. He formalised his rule by issuing letters from the caliph's diwan to the governor of Egypt and Syria, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub. When he reached Egypt, Salah al-Din wrote to Qaraqosh and their alliance was strengthened in support of the Abbasid cause¹.

This new alliance enabled them to control all of the Jareed and Ifriqiya except Tunisia and Mahdia. Muhammad Abdullah Anan describes Ali ibn Ghaniya's rule over these lands as follows: "Ali ibn Ghaniya imposed a reign of terror in Ifriqiya, unleashing his allies among the Arab tribes to wreak havoc wherever they could, using violence, plundering and enslaving without regard for sanctity or compassion for the weak. Ali was unable to restrain or curb them and maintain their loyalty and alliances"².

Caliph Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur's journey to Tunisia

When news of the situation reached Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur, he decided to personally lead an expedition at the end of 582 AH, accompanied by twenty thousand Almohad knights. It is noteworthy that in preparing this Almohad campaign, the caliph chose to take with him only a few elderly leaders of the Banu Riyaḥ, such as the Banu Ziyān, in order to guard against possible defections to their Arab brethren³.

The army moved quietly until it reached Tunisia in early 583 AH, from where a force of six thousand was sent to confront the Mu'raqis. However, the alliance of the Arabs, Berbers and some of Qaraqosh's followers with the Mu'raqis overwhelmed the Almohad forces in the plain of 'Umra. Many of the Almohads died of thirst and were forced to retreat to Tunisia, where the caliph regrouped.

He assembled another army and set out to confront the Mu'raqis, engaging them at a place known as Al-Hama in the Jareed region in 583 AH. Ali ibn Ghaniya's forces were defeated and he fled, badly wounded. He finally died in the desert in 585 AH as an exile. After his death, Ali's brothers chose their sibling Yahya to lead them⁴. Yahya continued to lead the Banu Ghaniya for almost half a century until his death in 631 AD.

Qaraqosh's shift to the Almohad side:

In 586 AD, Qaraqosh switched his allegiance to the Almohads and migrated to Tunisia, where he was welcomed by Abu Zayd ibn Abi Hafs. After spending a few days with him, Qaraqosh fled to Qabis, where he entered the city under false pretences and killed several of its inhabitants. He then took control of the elders of the Dabbab and Al-Ka'oub tribes of Banu Sulaym, killing seventy of them in Qasr al-'Arousiyeen, including notable figures such as Mahmud ibn Taraq, Abu al-Muhamid, and Hamid ibn Jariyah, Abu al-Jawari.

¹- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/256.

²- Muhammad Abdullah Anan, *The Islamic State in al-Andalus*, Al-Khanji Library, Cairo, 2nd edition, 1990, p. 4/159.

³- Anan, previous source, p. 4/159.

⁴- *The Admirable Summary*, pp. 197, 198, 199; *The End of the Four*, p. 28/372.

He then moved to Tripoli, which he conquered, and returned to the Jareed region, where he conquered much of it. However, tensions arose between him and Yahya ibn Ghaniya¹.

Phase Two: The era of Prince Yahya ibn Ghaniya (585-631 AH)

Yahya ibn Ghaniya succeeded his brother as leader of the Mu'raquis after the latter's death. His era was marked by a longer duration and a wider geographical scope, extending from Tripoli and Ghadames in the east to Sijilmasa in the west. This period lasted until the fall of the Almohad state and the rise of the three main emirates: the Hafids in Tunisia, the Ziyayids in Tlemcen and the Marinids in Fez.

The regions of the Zab and the hills and plateaus of the central Maghreb suffered greatly during this prolonged conflict, which lasted almost half a century, and became the scene of numerous battles. Throughout this period, Ibn Ghaniya and his followers plundered and pillaged in order to strengthen themselves against their enemies.

Yahya ibn Ghaniya managed to resist the Almohad state throughout this period thanks to the alliances he formed with various Arab and Berber tribes. However, this long struggle eventually exhausted the Almoravid forces, and many of Ibn Ghaniya's supporters among the Arabs and Berbers died during the conflict.

As a result of the prolonged struggle in the deserts and cities of central Maghreb, Yahya ibn Ghaniya's power and influence declined. Despite this decline, he continued to resist until his death in 631 AH near Miliyana in the Wadi Shlef region, with some accounts suggesting that he perished in the deserts of Badis or the lands of the Zab. His death marked the end of the Almoravid presence in the regions of Lametuna and the surrounding areas of Ifriqiya and the Maghreb, as well as in Al-Andalus. The rule of the Sanhaja tribe virtually disappeared with the end of its leadership².

When we examine the movements of Ibn Ghaniya during the last decade of his revolt, we can see their significant impact on the cities of central Maghreb. Ibn Khaldun documented the ongoing conflict in this region, highlighting that the areas most affected were the eastern regions, particularly the Zab cities, with Biskra at the forefront. This city served as a pivotal point between the spheres of influence of the two factions: the Almohads, who controlled the coastal cities of Bejaïa, Tunis and Mahdia, and the Ibn Ghaniya, who dominated the desert regions of the Jareed and other arid areas.

The struggle between these powers not only shaped the political landscape of the time, but also had far-reaching consequences for the local populations and economies of these regions.

The impact of the conflict on Ashir, Qusantina and the destruction of Biskra:

Before examining the destruction caused by the conflict, it's important to note that these cities in central Maghreb were once thriving, with populations, palaces and fertile fields. Ibn Khaldun gives a vivid description of the architecture and prosperity of the cities of Zab and the Righa region, and describes the devastation that resulted from the ongoing struggle. He writes:

¹- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/257.

²- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/262.

“It includes the great city and the medium-sized village, where the citadel is adorned with trees and the edges are lined with palm trees. Water flows through it and the springs in the desert flourish. The urban development was rich in its palaces of Righa, which were well known at that time. The population consisted mainly of the Banu Sanjas, Banu Ifren and other Zanata tribes. Their groups were divided by disputes over leadership, with each faction building its own palaces.

It is said that their numbers were far greater. When Ibn Ghaniya the Masufi launched his campaigns against Ifriqiya and the Maghreb during his conflict with the Almohads, he destroyed their urban centres, uprooted their trees and drained their waters. The ruins of houses, the remains of buildings and the fallen palm trees are all that remain of the city’s development. This devastation can be traced back to the early days of the Hafid state, attributed to the governor of the Zab¹.

Yahya ibn Ghaniya set his sights on the city of Qusantina, prompting Abu al-Hasan of Béjaïa to march against him. Abu al-Hasan defeated Yahya, who then entered Biskra, where he destroyed the date palms and took the city by force. Yahya then laid siege to Qusantina, but when it resisted he withdrew to Bejaïa and besieged it instead².

In 618 AH, Abu Muhammad ibn Abi Hafs and the Almohads overpowered Yahya the Mu’raqi at Al-Hama in the Jareed region, inflicting heavy losses on the Arabs³.

Revenge on Biskra In 619 AH:

The people and property of the cities were not spared by either faction, as each side saw the inhabitants as a resource to sustain its efforts. In 619 AH, Abu al-Ala left Tunisia with Almohad forces for the area around Qabis to cut off Yahya’s support. He settled in the Qasr al-‘Arousiyeen and sent his son Abu Zayd with a contingent to the regions of Draï and Ghadames for preparation and taxation. He also sent another army to attack Ibn Ghaniya at Wudan.

However, news of Ibn Ghaniya’s forces caused panic among the troops and they disbanded and retreated to Qabis. Abu Zayd stayed behind in Ghadames when he heard of their retreat and informed his father of the situation. This news angered the military commander, who threatened to punish him.

When Abu al-Ala fell ill and returned to Tunisia, he learned that Ibn Ghaniya had moved from Wudan to the Zab and that the people of Biskra had submitted to him. Abu Zayd was then sent with Almohad forces to confront him, but Ibn Ghaniya’s strategic movements allowed him to evade capture. Abu Zayd returned to Biskra, where he inflicted severe punishment on its inhabitants, looting and destroying their property⁴.

Despite the Almohads tightening their grip on Mu’raqi influence in Tripoli and the Jareed, the Mu’raqis returned to central Maghreb, seizing Ashir and advancing towards Qusantina. Almohad forces stationed in Bejaïa, led by Abu Hafs Umar ibn Abu Zayd, fought battles that

¹- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 7/64.

²- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/329.

³- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/44.

⁴- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/378.

eventually drove the Mu'raquis back to Biskra, where they once again wreaked havoc, damaging the date palms and further destabilising the region¹.

Effects on the Mitidja region

The lands and villages of the Mitidja region witnessed the final stages of this conflict involving the Hafids of Tunisia, the Banu Mandil of the Zanata (allies of the Almohads) and Ibn Ghaniya. The region was badly damaged, with infrastructure and agricultural productivity devastated by the ongoing struggle for power between the competing factions. This was particularly significant as the Almohad state was on the verge of collapse.

Yahya ibn Ghaniya sought to reassert his authority and ventured into the coastal towns and urban centres, wreaking havoc and destruction. He even crossed into Ifriqiya and raided the Zanata territories, where he met with repeated confrontations. In 622 AH he gathered forces led by Mandil ibn Abdul Rahman, the ruler of Maghrawa, and confronted him in Mitidja. The conflict turned against Mandil, leading to his eventual death at the hands of Ibn Ghaniya around 623 AH.

Following this victory, Ibn Ghaniya extended his control over Algeria, and in 624 AH he forcibly entered Béjaïa and Dilas, causing widespread devastation in these cities as well. The continuing turmoil further destabilised the region and left a lasting impact on its communities and economy².

Extension of influence to Tlemcen and other western regions

It is clear from the above that Yahya ibn Ghaniya's expansions focused on the eastern regions of central Maghreb, from Shlef, Miliyana and Algeria to Béjaïa and Sétif, passing through the cities of the Zab. However, Ibn Khaldun mentions that the western regions were also affected by Ibn Ghaniya's movements.

The influence extended to the western cities as Yahya ibn Ghaniya, after escaping from the encounter at Ashir, intended to go to the lands of the Zanata near Tlemcen. This coincided with the arrival of Sheikh Abu Imran ibn Musa ibn Yusuf ibn Abd al-Mu'min, who had been appointed governor of Tlemcen from Marrakech, and his journey to the lands of the Zanata to prepare them for taxation.

Sheikh Abu Muhammad wrote to him as a warning about Yahya, advising him not to confront him and that he was following him. However, he rejected this advice and travelled to Tahert, where he was confronted by Ibn Ghaniya, resulting in the dissolution of his camp. The Zanata fled to a fortress and Sheikh Abu Imran was killed. Tahert was sacked, marking the end of its urban prosperity, and they collected considerable booty and prisoners³.

Yahya ibn Ghaniya frequently raided the outskirts of Tlemcen and the lands of the Zanata, bringing with him the instigators of discord and leading to the destruction of many of their towns, such as Tahert and others. Tlemcen thus became the capital of central Maghreb and

¹- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, pp. 6/327 and 329.

²- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, pp. 7/87 and 88. Mubarak ibn Muhammad al-Mili, *The History of Algeria in Ancient and Modern Times*, ed. Muhammad al-Mili, National Publishing Foundation of Algeria, 1986, pp. 2/320 et seq.

³- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/375.

served as a refuge for these Zanata communities and others. These areas had become their resting place after the destruction of the two cities that had been strongholds in previous states and eras: Arshkul by the sea and Tahert between the coast and the desert.

The ruins of these two cities were a consequence of the turmoil caused by Ibn Ghaniya, along with the invasions of the Zanata, who descended upon the inhabitants with plunder, devastation and pillage. They seized travellers, destroyed urban areas and overpowered the Almohad garrison stationed there.

The damage to the western regions was less severe, however, due to the strong alliance between the Zanata and other western tribes with the Almohads, who agreed to repel Ibn Ghaniya's incursions. As a result, Tlemcen was able to withstand the onslaught and its urban development continued¹.

The city expanded further when the Banu Rayan arrived and established it as their capital, building elegant palaces and large houses, cultivating gardens and orchards, and channeling water through them. Tlemcen thus became one of the largest cities in the Maghreb. People came from distant lands, and the markets of knowledge and crafts flourished. Scholars were born, and the city became famous and rivalled other Islamic cities and the capitals of the caliphates, as described by Ibn Khaldun².

Results and consequences of the movement of the Banu Ghaniya into central Maghreb

Bloodshed, looting and urban destruction:

The conflict between the Mu'raqi Banu Ghaniya and the Almohad state, which lasted almost half a century, had serious consequences for central Maghreb and Ifriqiya, affecting all aspects of life. Security and stability deteriorated due to the prevalence of fighting, resulting in bloodshed, honour crimes, urban destruction and financial plunder. The cultural status of Bejaïa declined, while Tlemcen was less affected by these events and began to prepare to become the capital of central Maghreb.

The author of *Al-Istibsar*, who lived in the sixth century, describes the devastation and corruption caused by Ibn Ghaniya:

“He attacked Bejaïa, targeting Ibn Ishaq ibn Hamu, and wreaked havoc there. He then moved to Constantinople but was expelled by the Almohads. He then invaded the Jareed region, causing destruction, shedding blood, seizing wealth and raping women³. His actions in the Jareed region affected the cities of central Maghreb.

Ibn Anan states: “Ali ibn Ghaniya imposed an atmosphere of terror on Ifriqiya, unleashing his allies from various Arab factions to wreak havoc wherever they could. They acted with impunity, committing acts of violence, plunder and enslavement, showing no respect for sanctity and no mercy for the weak. Ali was unable to prevent or restrain them as he sought to

¹- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 7/105.

²- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 7/105.

³- Anonymous, *Al-Istibsar fi 'Ajayib al-Amsar*, p. 1/131.

maintain their loyalty and alliances. A historian and traveller succinctly described the situation in Ifriqiya at that time: “The people perished and the land lay in ruins”¹.

The corruption and devastation wrought by the Banu Ghaniya was met with a strong response from the Almohads. Almohad forces, consisting of twenty thousand cavalry and a naval fleet, moved in to fight the Mu’raqis, eliminate their presence and discipline the Arab and Berber allies who supported them.

This willingness to shed blood is not surprising, as is shown by the writings of the author of “Al-Mu’ajjab”, who suggests the use of force. He notes a statement by the respected and noble Abu Zakariya Yahya, son of the Imam Amir al-Mu’minin Abu Yaqub, who claimed to have seen the following couplets on a copy of “Al-Hamasah” in the handwriting of Caliph Abd al-Mu’min

“Let the sword decide, do not worry about the consequences,

And let this conduct endure through the ages.

For nothing can be achieved without the sword,

Nor can the charge of horses be stopped with books”².

The author of A History of Modern Algeria summarises the impact of the conflict on the cities of central Maghreb:

“Ibn Ghaniya’s revolt lasted half a century and left the homeland in ruins. Many palaces in the desert were destroyed, including those in Wadi Righ and others. Tahert, Qasr Ajisah, Zarqa, Al-Khadra, Shlef, Mitidja, Hamza, Marsa al-Dajaj, Al-Ja’abat and the Qala’a were all devastated”³.

Social:

Since the middle of the fifth century AD, central Maghreb has consisted of two major groups: the Berbers and the Arab tribes sent by the Fatimids from Upper Egypt. With the arrival of the Mu’raqis, these tribes became divided between loyalty to the Almohad state and loyalty to the Mu’raqi Sanhaja.

In this conflict, most of the Arab tribes and many of the Berber tribes sided with Ibn Ghaniya, which explains the longevity of his rebellion. However, some tribes had allied themselves with the Almohads since their arrival in central Maghreb. Some remained loyal, while others shifted their allegiance to Ibn Ghaniya. When Abd al-Mu’min entered central Maghreb, the Jashm and Al-Athbaj swore allegiance to him, and the Hilaliyan revolted against the Sanhaja, who were then confirmed in their positions. The Almohads clashed with the Rih at Sétif, emerging victorious and seizing spoils, and pursued them to Tebessa until they surrendered and released their prisoners.

The Almohads used the Arabs in their campaigns, and this continued until the arrival of the Mu’raqis. The Sanhaja united and rallied the Arabs, communicating with the Abbasid caliph,

¹- Anan, previous source, p. 4/159.

²- Al-Marrakshi, The Admirable Summary of the News of the Maghrib, p. 168.

³- Al-Mili, The History of Algeria in Ancient and Modern Times, p. 2/321.

who supported their fight against the Almohads. Arab tribes, including the Jashm, the Rih and some al-Athbaj from the Hilaliyan, supported them, while the tribes of Sulaym ibn Mansur joined them. Meanwhile, the Zughba and some of the Al-Athbaj sided with the Almohads, who were allied to the Zanata¹.

This loyalty was not always stable, however, as power dynamics often dictated allegiance. For example, the Hawara fought alongside the Almohads in 621 AD, and their leader, Bi'ra ibn Hanash, performed admirably. The Almohads² triumphed, killing the Mu'raquis and their allies. In another instance, it is noted that the Hawara later turned to corruption, which led to their attack and the arrest of their leaders, who were sent to Mahdia. This suggests that tribal loyalties often lie with the stronger party.

When the Almohad forces led by Al-Mansur advanced against the Mu'raquis, they scattered their Arab allies, the Jashm and Rih, and exiled them to the far west. The Jashm were settled in the region of Tamassna, while the Rih were settled in the region of Al-Habt and Azgar, from the coast of Tangier to Salé³.

Al-Mansur wanted to redraw the tribal map by moving and dispersing these Arabs beyond the lands of the Zanata, who were loyal to the Almohads and lived in the hills and deserts of central Maghreb. He settled his allies, the Zughba and Banu Badin, in the areas between M'zab and the Bani Rashid mountain in Tlemcen.

This had a negative impact on society, as there were cases of violations of property rights, including the looting of houses and crops. An example of such violations is reported by Al-Ghabrini⁴.

Cultural

During the Almohad period, Béjaïa experienced a period of political, economic and cultural prosperity, thanks to the policies of its rulers and its strategic coastal location on trade and pilgrimage routes. This explains the flourishing trade and scientific revival in the city⁵. However, with the arrival of the Mu'raquis and the onset of conflict, scientific and literary activity declined, leading to a division of loyalties between the Almohads and the Mu'raquis.

This period also saw movements among scholars. For example, Ibn al-Kharrat, Abu Muhammad Abd al-Haq ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Ishbili (d. 582 AH), author of "The Collection of the Two Authentic Books", moved from Lebla to Bejaïa after the Almohad conquest of al-Andalus. He made Bejaïa his home and spread his knowledge there. He was invited to be a judge and preacher for the Almohads, but he refused. However, he later accepted the post when Ibn Ghaniya arrived in the city and became a renowned orator. The caliph Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur intended to appoint him, but this did not happen⁶.

¹- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/28.

²- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, pp. 6/378-380.

³- Ibn Khaldun, previous source, p. 6/29.

⁴- Al-Ghabrini, previous source, p. 27.

⁵- See the section on Algeria in the Almohad period in the book: Algeria in History, by a group of authors, pp. 201 to 284.

⁶- See his biography in: Al-Marrakshi, The Admirable Summary, p. 198; Al-Ghabrini, The Title of Knowledge, p. 41; Al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala, p. 21/198.

Abu Ali Hassan ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Masili was a man of learning, piety and asceticism. He served as a judge in Bejaïa and was confronted by the Mu'raqi while in office. They pressured him to swear allegiance to their cause, covering their faces with veils. He refused to swear allegiance to those he could not identify, saying: "We will not swear allegiance to someone we do not know, whether he is a man or a woman". One of the Mu'raqi then revealed his face, demonstrating the extent of his resistance, which was significant given the circumstances surrounding the demand for allegiance¹.

Al-Sharif Abu Tahir

Al-Sharif Abu Tahir, known as Imara ibn Yahya ibn Imara al-Hassani, was a learned, cultured and noble figure who served as a judge in some areas of Bejaïa. When the Banu Ghaniya entered Bejaïa, Abu Tahir praised them and delivered a speech on their behalf. In his sermon he said: "Praise be to Allah who has restored things to their rightful place and taken them out of the hands of usurpers".

However, the Almohads increased their oppression of the scholars and many were imprisoned, including Al-Sharif Abu Tahir. When the Almohads arrived, he returned to the area where he had served as a judge. He was captured and brought before them in chains, and he and his companions were imprisoned for a long time².

Al-Rumayli:

Al-Rumayli was a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Málaga that was named after him. He had served Ali ibn Ghaniya, the Mu'raqi, who had come from Mallorca and taken control of Bejaïa. As a result, he was executed in Bejaïa. He is quoted as saying: "You are the dawn of religion that dispels the darkness of heresy, and with you the world will shine"³.

Conclusion

During the Almohad period, central Maghreb experienced a brief period of calm and stability before being invaded by the Almohad army from the west and the Mu'raqi forces from al-Andalus, who ravaged the country in their conflict. Earlier, in the middle of the fifth century, there had also been an influx of Arab tribes sent by the Fatimids of Upper Egypt to avenge the people of Maghreb, who had chosen the Maliki Sunni doctrine and allied themselves with the Abbasid state. This human tide brought chaos and destruction.

For half a century, from 580 to 631 AD, the hills, deserts, towns and villages of central Maghreb became a battleground for the struggle for power between the masked Sanhaja from Majorca and the Almohad state from the far west. Each side sought to extend its power and influence, which eventually led to the downfall of both factions, leaving behind devastation and ruin that destroyed lives and resources.

The conflict saw a division of loyalties, with Arab and Berber tribes in the eastern regions of central Maghreb, Ifriqiya and Tripoli fighting alongside Ibn Ghaniya. Meanwhile, some Arab

¹- Al-Ghabrini, previous source, p. 34.

²- Al-Ghabrini, previous source, p. 46.

³- Ibn Said, *The Maghrib in the Decoration of the Maghrib**, ed. Shawqi Duf, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 3rd edition, p. 1/436.

and Berber tribes in the western regions of central Maghreb, such as the Zanata of Tlemcen and its environs, sided with the Almohads.

The war waged by the Banu Ghaniya against the Almohads weakened them considerably. Their authority diminished as their efforts were scattered on several fronts, eventually leading to the collapse of their state. This period saw the emergence of new powers such as the Hafids in Tunisia, the Zayyanids in Tlemcen and the Marinids in Fez.

In terms of urban centres, the status and cultural importance of the central Moroccan cities, especially the eastern ones such as Bejaïa, declined, while Tlemcen became the capital of central Maghreb.

In conclusion, if the Banu Ghaniya - who spent fifty years fighting the Muslims in central Maghreb and Ifriqiya - had abandoned their path of revenge against the Almohads and instead chosen loyalty, following the example of their ancestors who waged jihad against the Christian infidels in al-Andalus, their efforts could have fostered unity and strength among Muslims against a common enemy, potentially sparing the lands of Islam further bloodshed and tears.

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