

THE ALMOHAD MECCA
LOCATING IGLI AND THE CAVE OF IBN TŪMART ¹

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«Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher who created...» (Sura XCVI: 1). The history of Islam began when Muḥammad the prophet received a divine revelation from Allah in the Cave of Ḥīra near Mecca. The basic components of this revelation, most importantly belief in one God, would be repeated in various cultural and ethnic manifestations as the Muslim faith spread to North Africa and Central Asia. As a place where God had spoken, the Cave of Ḥīra (Ghār al-Ḥīra) became a highly sacred space visited by Muslim pilgrims on the Ḥajj throughout the centuries.

Considering the central place of the Cave of Ḥīra in Islam, it was not surprising that Ibn Tūmart, the Mahdī of the Almohads, would also proclaim the beginning of his movement of Islamic revival in a simple cave, the Cave of Iqli, near the village of Iqli, the place of his birth. Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart's attempt to mirror and even exceed the life and example of Muḥammad the Prophet was a major thesis of Huici Miranda's book *Historia Política del Imperio Almohade*.² Muḥammad the Prophet proclaimed the word of God to the Arabs. Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart the Mahdī proclaimed the word of God to the Berbers of North Africa.

Like the rise of Islam in Arabia, the rise of the Almohad Empire in North Africa and al-Andalus had a profound impact on the historical, religious and political development of the entire region. It is ironic, therefore, that there is a basic lack of knowledge in Western literature about the exact location of the many sites mentioned in Almohad primary sources. Even the exact location of Iqli, the birthplace of Ibn

¹ I want to thank my supervisor Professor Hugh Kennedy at the University of St. Andrews and Maribel Fierro at CSIC for their encouragement and guidance.

² Tetuán, 1957.

Tūmart and one of the most important sites in Almohad historical geography, has remained an embarrassing mystery. While Mecca and Madina are known by Muslims throughout the world, Iqli, the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart, the place where he received his revelation in a cave, a place that from the events described in primary sources could reasonably be called «Mecca» of the Almohad movement, has not been located on the modern map with any certainty. Where is the Cave of Iqli? Where, in fact, is Iqli of the Almohads? As of yet, there have been few convincing answers to these most basic questions about the origins of the Almohads, one of the largest empires in African history.

Several scholars assumed that Iqli or «Igilliz» became the town of Guilliz near Marrakech.³ Henri Basset and Henri Terrasse in their famous series of articles for *Hespéris* on the fortifications of the Almohads placed Iqli somewhat arbitrarily in modern-day Guilliz south of Aghmat Ourika on the Oued Regaia. The rationale for this seemed to be that Guilliz sounded somewhat like «Igilliz» and the Regaia sounded similar to Hargha, the tribe of Ibn Tūmart. Terrasse and Basset provided no reasonable evidence proving that Guilliz was in fact the Iqli mentioned in the chronicles. On Huici Miranda's map of the major sites of the Almohad period «Igilliz?» is written with a large question mark somewhere in the wadi Sous to the east of Tarūdant. I believe Huici Miranda's speculation was probably much more accurate (see Figure 1). Indeed, he was very close.

In a more recent article on Igiliz Muḥammad Rabaṭa al-Dīn places Igiliz only a few kilometres away from Marrakech on the hill of Gilliz. This seems highly improbable for several reasons. First, there is no clear mention in the sources of such a location. Second, the Almohads would have been very vulnerable to interference by the Almoravids at such a location, so close to Marrakech, the center of Almoravid power. Although Muḥammad Rabaṭa al-Dīn provides some fascinating observations about the history and philology of the word Igiliz, he does not provide any real evidence for the location of the birthplace of Muḥammad ibn Tūmart. Yes, there is a hill named Gilliz near Marrakech. But as his own research suggests, Igiliz, Iqli, and Gilliz are all variations of a Berber word. He does not emphasize

³ Basset, H. and Terrasse, H., "Sanctuaires et Forteresses Almohades: 1. Tinmel", *Hespéris*, IV (1924), 9-93.

that Igiliz or Igli was the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart or that he built a *ribāṭ* there to gather supporters after fleeing Marrakech.⁴

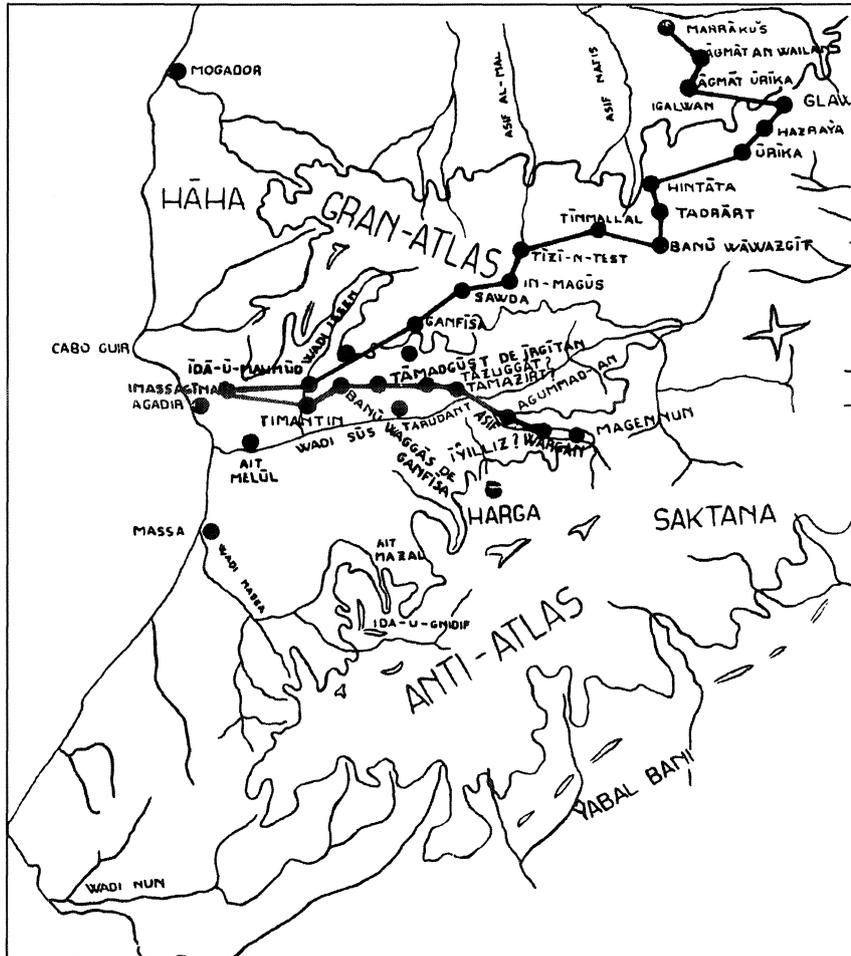
I propose one highly probable location for this Mecca of the Almohads in the Sous valley, a location that corresponds with the primary sources, a location oral tradition identifies as the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart. From a close study of the sources, and from research in Morocco conducted under a Royal Historical Society grant, it is my conclusion that the small town of Igli, about 30 kilometers east of Tarūdant in the Sous valley, is the birthplace of Muḥammad ibn Tūmart. There are several reasons for this conclusion. Igli actually corresponds with the name as mentioned in al-Marrākushī source written as «Ijli ‘n Warghan», Igli of Hargha.⁵ Also, as I will discuss, the primary sources clearly seemed to suggest the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart was located in the Sous valley, East of Tarūdant, the same location as present day Igli. Third, there is still a «forbidden»⁶ cave near present day Igli that may have been the very same cave where Ibn Tūmart received his revelations and began the Almohad movement. Finally, present-day oral place names, tradition, and physical remains confirm that Igli was the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart. Even the central mosque of Igli remains the «Mosque of Ibn Tūmart».

⁴ Muhammad Rabaṭa al-Dīn, “Ḥawl Tasmīyyat Jabal Giliz”, *Marrākush Atlas*, (1993), 16-27.

⁵ Interestingly, it is Basset and Terrasse who pointed this out in their article cited above. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī transliterates the Berber name into Arabic as Ijli ‘n Warghan, *Al-Mu‘jib*, ed. by Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-‘Aryān and Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-‘Alamī, Rabat, 1949, 178.

⁶ The residents of the area called it ‘ḥaram’.

Figure 1. Huici Miranda's map *Historia Política del Imperio Almohade*, p. 61.
See "Iyilliz?" This is virtually the same location as modern Igli



Primary Source Evidence

The Almohad primary sources provide a rich illustration of Igli's central importance in the early history of the revolutionary movement. I will describe two primary accounts of what happened at Igli and why it was such an important site in Almohad history. Next, I

will describe an Almohad letter that referred to the Almohad Igli as being the same place as modern-day Igli.

The Biography of the Mahdī

According to al-Baydhaq, the Mahdī's close companion and personal biographer, Ibn Tūmart spent several days inside the cave near Igli.⁷ He spread out his burnous, a long, rough woollen cloak, as if it were a carpet. One day, Ismā'īl Īgīg saw this and he asked, «Oh my brother, is it only but a burnous that you make like a carpet that inspires the light of knowledge? Light is nothing if not clothed by light!» This burnous of Yaliltan as it was called in the text, was later worn during various battles against the Almoravids. Ismā'īl took off his cloak and put it on the floor declaring, «Sit here, you are more dignified than me for this, and God has ordered us to treat you with honor». After sitting down at the entrance of the cave, Ibn Tūmart looked to the left and the right and said «Make a great enclosure for the horsemen...». Then he ordered the construction of mangers saying, «Those who construct one will have one horse, those who construct two will have two, and those who would judge my word about the mangers, may God castigate them!» Then a communal meal was prepared: the Imam put salt on his hand and said: «Here is a pact of God, a pact of the prophet, between us and them, to conform to the Book [the Qur'ān] and the Sunna!» When the food was ready the people said, «The Imam neither drinks nor eats!» He turned towards them; detached a portion of meat from a lamb shoulder and brought it to his mouth. Then he said, «I eat as people eat, I drink as people drink. I am from the offspring of Adam, I must do as they do... Eat as all the prophets have eaten!».⁸

What was the significance of this enigmatic scene near the sacred cave of Igli? In my view there are at least two possible explanations for al-Baydhaq's account. The first purpose of this scene was to confirm the status of Ibn Tūmart as a prophet with special access to God. As he remained alone in the cave, Ibn Tūmart was somehow trans-

⁷ "Les Mémoires d'al-Baydhaq", *Documents Inédits d'Histoire Almohade*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal, Paris, 1928, 116, 73 in Arabic.

⁸ *Documents Inédits*, 117, 72-73 in Arabic.

formed. The cave was a boundary space between the sacred and the earthly, a channel to the light of prophecy, and a passage only the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart could follow. The cave scene also presaged the future illumination of North Africa by the Mahdī's message.

Ibn Tūmart eats and his followers are astounded that such a sacred man would eat simple earthly food. This confirmed how Ibn Tūmart's experience in the cave transformed him from a mere preacher and moral reformer to the leader of a new Islamic era. His image had been so transformed by the cave that he had to say to his followers, «I am the offspring of Adam!» The second purpose behind Ibn Tūmart's actions was to enforce the absolute loyalty and just participation of his followers. Or, as Ibn Khaldūn might have said, the purpose of this exercise was to solidify their *'aṣabiyya*, their group feeling against a common enemy - the ruling Almoravids.

It remains a slowly dying practice among Berbers in parts of the Sous valley to share their labour in a communal way, to reap the rewards of their work in common. Thus, the whole community will be involved in the cultivation of each family's field. When Ibn Tūmart calls on his followers to 'build the mangers' for the horses he says, those who have one horse shall construct one. Those who have two will need to construct two. In effect he said, give up your horses, a horse is the most prized asset of any male Berber, to the cause. Not only should they provide their horses, they must build a stable for the horses in the *ribāṭ* of Ibn Tūmart at Iqli. This was more than a symbolic act. Once a Berber warrior gives up his horse, he relinquishes his freedom and his ability to resist. Those who have one shall have to give their one, those who happen to have more will give more. Along with the meal scene, the purpose of this scene was to solidify the loyalty of his followers, to demand the sacrifice of property, to become, as it were, one tribe, one messianic community following the commands of the Mahdī. Whereas before it was most honourable to defend blood, it was now most honourable to defend and promote the ideals of the Mahdī. Those who did not follow his words were shamefully expelled from this new community, this new spiritual tribe.

The Book of Ancestry

In a different version of the same story, the *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, or *Book of Ancestry*, describes the cave at Igli as a center of pilgrimage and devotion after the death of Ibn Tūmart.⁹ A certain Abū Marwān ibn Yaḥyā, for example, remained at the *ribāṭ* of Igli as a hermit until the end of his life. The reasons for this constant devotion during and after the life of Ibn Tūmart were made clear by the *Book of Ancestry*, «All these great men [«the men of 50» or the ruling cadre of the Almohads] passed in review [a tribal display of force usually on horses still practiced today] with the Harga tribe....When the Imam went inside the cave to go on a [spiritual] retreat in Igli, at the *Ribāṭ* of the Harga, the people of the Harga come to the entrance of the cave early in the morning and saluted the Imam who spoke to them: «What is it that you need?» he would ask. They responded, «We have come to obtain your *baraka* [blessing or holiness] so that you may invoke Allah in our favor!» Having said this they inclined toward him and saluted him. Then, he passed his hand over their heads and invoked God in their favor. This [ceremony] was performed several times. Ibn Tūmart blessed what seemed to be a throng of followers from his cave, transferring the *baraka*, the blessing and grace of God onto them. The Hargha were joined by «adopted» Hargha sheikhs, non-Hargha who joined the tribe. They remained at Igli listening to Ibn Tūmart. Then the Mahdī decided to immigrate (similar to the the *hijra* of Muḥammad to Madina) to Tīnmallal. They accompanied him until he had fixed his residence there. After a certain time, the Hargha were subjected to the *tamyīz*: a religious discrimination or separation. It can mean the execution of disloyal members.

Like the scene described by al-Baydhaq, the *Kitāb al-Ansāb* story confirmed Ibn Tūmart's spiritual legitimacy and solidified his support. He publicly blessed his followers and invoked the name of God in their favor. A great procession of horsemen surrounded him as warriors and sheikhs abandoned their former tribes and proclaimed themselves Hargan - members of the tribe of Ibn Tūmart, the Harga. Like the Anṣār of the prophet Muḥammad, the «adopted» Harga gave up their former deep-seated loyalties, loyalties of blood, tradition and

⁹ *Documents Inédits*, 59-62, 39-41 in Arabic.

honor, to follow this Mahdī. In this case, the cave was the ceremonial center of this process of transforming the blood, of redefining ancestry and identity. From this close band of followers, the Almohads would sweep across the mountains of North Africa and al-Andalus, transforming loyalties, demanding Almohad Islam, «submission», and *tawhīd*, or strict unity, from all.

According to basic principles of social anthropology, tribal societies existed around blood loyalties and were regulated by certain circles of relations: boundaries and rules to defend those loyalties, ensure the propagation of one's blood and maintain a certain level of informal order between tribes. E. Gellner and E. Pritchard used this «segmentary theory» to explain the supposedly static nature of tribal societies, divorced from the reality of historical change.¹⁰ However, as this scene of adopted Harga sheikhs surrounding the cave of Ibn Tūmart showed, ancestral loyalties were never really static. Blood was important, but even more important was history and spiritual politics. Tribes could change. Blood could be transformed. The adopted Harga sheikhs following Ibn Tūmart at the cave of Iqli were an example of this. In fact, Ibn Tūmart's mission was to disrupt the *status quo ante* of blood relations and from that chaos reconstruct a truly powerful movement where old loyalties do not necessarily disappear, they were simply redirected towards a spiritual purpose, an ultimate loyalty to God, the father of fathers, and the Mahdī, sheikh of sheikhs.

The Almohad Pilgrimage

Having established the importance of the Cave and of Iqli in Almohad history, what of its location? A letter by the commander of the faithful, 'Abd al-Mu'min, successor to Ibn Tūmart, written down by Abū 'Aqīl Ibn 'Aṭīya in Marrakech (13 Nov., 1157) gave details about the sacred cave and the devotion it attracted after the death of Ibn Tūmart.¹¹ The contents of this letter were the most explicit proof

¹⁰ Gellner, E., *Saints of the Atlas*, University of Chicago, 1969.

¹¹ This is one of the earliest sources available for the period. It is probably highly reliable. The Arabic text is letter number seventeen, *al-risāla al-sābi'a 'ashara* in *Rasā'il muwahhidiyya*, E. Lévi-Provençal ed., Rabat, 1941, p. 81. For a short summary of the letter in French see E. Lévi-Provençal, "Un Recueil de Lettres Officielles Almohades", *Hespéris*, XXVIII, 1941, 41. The first volume of a new, more complete edition of the letters came out recently, Azzawi, A., *Rasā'il Muwahhidiyya: Majmū'a jadīda*, 2 vols., Kenitra, 1995.

that present-day Igli near Tarūdant was the «Mecca» and the birthplace of the Almohad empire, a place of pilgrimage and great devotion. The letter referred to a voyage made by ‘Abd al-Mu’min to the various regions of the empire to reinforce the Almohad doctrine, *tawhīd*, among the various populations. Naturally, one of his major destinations was Igli. He arrived in the Sous valley in October of the same year gaining the loyalty of the ancient, and historically independent, walled city of Tarūdant. The royal entourage resolved to visit the places Ibn Tūmart, the Mahdī, had blessed with his presence during the course of his life. They left Tarūdant along the Sous River and began the sacred pilgrimage at Igli, where they conducted a solemn visit to the mosque of the Imam and the «cave from whence he had arbitrated». This route would have put them almost exactly where Igli is today. Tarūdant is only 30 km to the west of the modern town of Igli. Also Igli is very near the road still taken to Tīnmallal and eventually Marrakech.

The pilgrims remained in Igli for some time, placing a door inside the cave to prevent damage. The letter indicates that they renovated the cave, they flattened the floor and put up a masonry vault inside the cave. There were also roofs placed on the sides of the cave. At the same time, the Qur’ān was recited day and night inside the mosque of Ibn Tūmart in Igli. Probably some sort of ceremony was performed at the cave. After some time, the caravan went forward and arrived at Ansā, a place that was said to be up the Atlas along the Sous river. This simple account only confirms the high likelihood that Igli, 30 km west of Tarūdant in the Sous valley, is the same Igli described in the Almohad sources. The geographic placement was clear. The Almohads moved from Marrakech to Tarūdant to Igli to Ansā. The first great pilgrimage to the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart served to solidify the legitimacy of his successor ‘Abd al-Mu’min.

Surviving Physical Evidence

Figure 2. The road sign for modern Igli, 30 km East of Tarūdant



Igli today is a moderately sized village, probably housing some 1000 people dedicated to agriculture, the oil press and animal husbandry. Although many ancient agricultural practices remain, including the cultivation and pressing of olives and the production of Argan oil, the present-day site of Igli has gone through several generations of renovation. The so-called mosque of Ibn Tūmart, for example, looks very little like its probable Almohad original. There are several decaying kubbas, the «Zāwiya of Tiyliina», in the village that seem to be at least from the Merinid or Saadian period, very possibly they

were Almohad structures as well. A much more thorough survey of Igli by experts in Almohad architecture will be necessary before any concrete conclusions can be made. Simply judging by the presence of common Almohad decorative motifs, I think it is highly likely that the Almohad traditions have survived in the interior architecture of the central mosque of Ibn Tūmart.

Such is the prevalence of Argan trees in the surrounding mountains, I think it is possible that the name of Ibn Tūmart's tribe «Ait Hargan» actually refers to the Argan: a short prickly tree grown in the surrounding mountains that produces a green, olive-like fruit famous in the Anti-Atlas region. Igli has long been a Berber word for this specific village and region.¹²

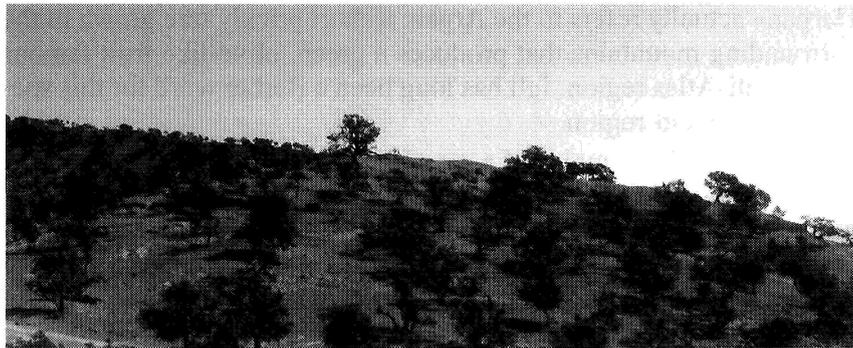
There are also remains of a cave in the foothills of the Atlas to the north of modern Igli. From the Igli olive press one can see the magnificent Jebel Shama and the Atlas chain in the distance capped in snow. On the very first series of foothills near the small hamlet of Shama, there is a section of hill that seems to have high iron concentrates, giving it a bright red color. Underneath this iron red band there is a chalky limestone strata. From here an underground stream bubbles out during certain seasons, carving out a cavern in the limestone. Unfortunately, the entrance to the actual cave remains completely blocked with stones. According to shepherds working nearby there was another entrance but we were unable to locate it. On the hill to the west of the Cave there are at least two, perhaps three rings of what appear to have been ramparts, surrounding the entire hill.

The *Kitāb al-Ansāb* narrative mentioned a *ribāṭ*. One might speculate that these were simply the remains of a typical Berber fortress village. However, no such villages can be seen similarly placed in the hills as most settlements are either on or very near the Sous plain. Again, there is no immediate evidence proving that these remains were Almohad. However, the curious, double ringed wall structure, its proximity to the cave, and the testimony of local shepherds, seem to indicate that this was in all probability the cave and *ribāṭ* of Ibn Tūmart (Figure 3). More work will need to be done to find and clear

¹² The grand Qasbah al Hida, or palace of the Hida pashas, similar to the Galoui who ruled around Marrakech, was built only a few kilometers west of Igli, indicating how the region probably maintained some of its importance, up through the French protectorate. The Ait Bahamran ruled this area under French auspices.

the original entrance of the cave, to see if the cave renovations mentioned in Abd al-Mu'min's letter survive and to possibly excavate the hilltop remains.

Figure 3. This hill, directly across from the remains of the cave, has two rings of ramparts. A closer inspection reveals what appear to be the remains of towers



Oral Evidence

Although oral histories of the Almohads and the cave of Ibn Tūmart are perhaps less scientifically reliable than the written sources, they do provide even more confirmation that Igli was, in fact, the Mecca of the Almohads. Stories passed down in Berber through the centuries have focused on the special, sometimes dangerous powers of the cave where Ibn Tūmart once preached. Indeed, the cave and the entire region around the cave where the soil is colored white is still considered to this day a place of high spiritual danger, a realm of *jinn*, magic waters, and Berber gold. These may have simply been stories told to prevent children of shepherds from losing themselves in the cave. However, they do reveal a continued «sacred fear». The site is definitely *haram*. Many people in Igli simply remained silent about the cave when we asked about it. Even while the manager of the olive press, and a local shepherd were willing to tell us about the cave and even point it out, they would not go with us there for fear of «disrupting the *jinn*». According to the manager of the olive press, an en-

tire cadre of *fuqahā'* sat around the cave some 40 years ago attempting to exorcise the spirits. They found the task impossible and decided instead to seal off the cave with boulders and rocks, thus our present difficulty in finding an entrance. Our visit to Igli¹³ and our attempt to find the cave probably sparked a wave of speculation about our true intentions. One older man warned us about «not looking for the Gold». According to tradition, a rich group of Berbers had left their treasure in the cave with a curse on anybody who went to find it. Some stories tell of a Portuguese man who attempted to enter the cave for the gold. He set off a type of booby trap and nothing but his skeleton remains. Further down in the cave there is supposedly a spring of strange liquid that looks like antifreeze. If you drink this water the *jinn* and the Devil will not touch you. Anybody possessing this sacred water could, in a sense, lead a war against evil. There are probably several other tales about the cave and even about Ibn Tūmart in Igli. Although they do not provide any conclusive evidence, they do indicate the remarkable, continuous impact of Ibn Tūmart's revelations from the Cave of Igli and the sense that this is still an area of some spiritual significance. In all likelihood the cave of Igli had a certain sacred quality long before Ibn Tūmart was born, making it the natural choice for Ibn Tūmart as he proclaimed the beginning of a new era in North Africa and al-Andalus. The hundreds of crumbling remains scattered across the Mediterranean, the stern, square minarets, the kasbahs in isolated mountainsides, the massive mosques of Seville and Rabat, were all testimony to the power of a message proclaimed from the cave. It is little wonder that the cave of Igli remains today a place of power and mystery, a source of myth and legend, a doorway to another world. A cave was God's most basic shelter, originally unworked by human hands, the mythical habitat of our earliest ancestors, a place of darkness, of supreme simplicity, even a reflection of the saint or prophet's soul. Caves are the border outposts between the material universe and the realm of the spirit. In Cave al Hira and the Cave of Igli the voice of God echoed and the light of prophecy was revealed. Once released from the metaphysical realm, the world outside the cave would be transformed.

¹³ I travelled with two Moroccan students from Rabat, Nabil Chaloui and Reda bin Abdullah. Both provided invaluable assistance and deserve part of the credit for this work.

The central importance of the Cave of Iqli, even after the death of Ibn Tūmart, and the incorporation of Iqli the first and possibly primary pilgrimage destination for his successors, adds to the scholarly debate about the relationship between ‘Abd al-Mu’min, the powerful successor of Ibn Tūmart and Ibn Tūmart himself. Since ‘Abd al-Mu’min was not related to any of the Maṣmūda tribes, he was forced to battle the immediate descendants of the Maḥdī. Nevertheless, I believe the status of Ibn Tūmart as infallible Maḥdī, as the connection between humanity and the divine was not seriously doubted for decades. In the article “The Lamp of the Almohads: Illumination as a Political Idea in Twelfth-century Morocco”, Michael Brett discusses Ibn Tūmart’s retreat into the cave as a passage to illumination, infallibility and divine legitimacy.¹⁴ Ibn Tūmart rejects the burnous or cloak of his friend because only light should be upon light. Nevertheless, Michael Brett also suggests that Ibn Tūmart’s role as ultimate founder of the empire was somehow diminished by his successor ‘Abd al Mu’min. Brett refers to a dream scene in the biography of al-Baydhaq when in his view Ibn Tūmart, «takes second place as a John the Baptist whose role is to recognize and proclaim the Messiah with whom the kingdom will come».¹⁵ In fact, judging from the central importance of Iqli as a shrine to the birth of the Maḥdī, the reverse may have been true. Ibn Tūmart not only provided guidance, he was the light of guidance. Despite the actions of his relatives, he was not merely a second-place figure but the primary mythical construct. It was easier for ‘Abd al Mu’min to be a temporal ruler than a Maḥdī. A caliph who rules an empire fulfils the message of the Maḥdī but cannot be expected to possess all of his supernatural powers. Rather, the burden of miraculous expectation, so important to support in any human society, is placed upon the original founder, the Maḥdī, not ‘Abd al-Mu’min. Further research on the archaeology of Iqli may shed more light on the debate about the relationship between the founder of the Almohads and his successor. The efforts of ‘Abd al-Mu’min to restore the cave of Ibn Tūmart even as he began his struggle with the descendants is even more evidence that the light of the Maḥdī was neither diminished nor demoted until decades later as the empire began its decline and the divine illumination of the Maḥdī was called into question.

¹⁴ Brett, M., *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghreb*, Variorum-Aldershot and Ashgate (1999), 1-27.

¹⁵ *Id.*, 15.

In conclusion, I want to say again that I do not claim to have complete and absolute proof that modern Iqli is in fact the Iqli where Ibn Tūmart was born. Excepting al-Idrīsī, who did not mention Iqli, there are no exact maps of the region from the era. Possibly names changed, locations shifted. Yet I believe I have shown beyond a reasonable doubt that the Iqli of today is in all likelihood the very same Iqli or Igilliz that had such a prominent place in Almohad history. The primary sources, especially the letter of ‘Abd al-Mu’min, confirm the geographic location of Iqli near Tarūdant. They also mentioned sites and events that correspond with sites around Iqli: the cave and what appear to be the possible remains of a *ribāt* on the next hill. Finally, the oral traditions are but one more confirmation that Ibn Tūmart has had a lasting impact on the region. There is as much reason to believe the oral testimony about Iqli and Ibn Tūmart, as to be sceptical, especially when so much basic evidence seems to confirm their fundamental claims about the location. There may indeed be other towns with a mosque named after Ibn Tūmart, but how many other towns in the Sous valley are named Iqli with a «forbidden cave» only a kilometer away? All of this evidence, historical, physical, oral and circumstantial would make proving that the Iqli of today was not the Almohad Iqli very difficult indeed. It is a sign of our lack of knowledge about Moroccan historical geography that this «Mecca of the Almohads» was not discovered long before.

There remain several important cities mentioned in North African historical sources that have no confirmed location on modern maps. They seem to be floating in a sea of approximation and guesswork, cut from any specific geographic context. Systematic survey work in Morocco backed up by a close reading of the sources in the library may confirm the precise location of these ‘lost’ cities.

ABSTRACT

Iqli was the Mecca of the Almohads. In the Cave of Iqli Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart proclaimed the beginning of the Almohad movement in North Africa. Despite the obvious importance of Iqli, there was little knowledge about the precise location of Iqli or the famous cave of Ibn Tūmart on the map. This paper details the discovery of the small village of Iqli 30 kilometers East of Tarūdant. The location of this modern village corresponds with Almohad Iqli. Primary sources, oral testimony and physical remains are all evidence that modern Iqli was the birthplace of Ibn Tūmart.

RESUMEN

Igli era La Meca de los Almohades. En la cueva de Igli Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart proclamó el principio del movimiento almohade en África del norte. A pesar de la importancia de Igli, no se conocía su localización exacta o de la cueva de Ibn Tūmart. Aquí se detalla el descubrimiento de la pequeña aldea de Igli 30 kilómetros al este de Tarūdant. La localización de esta aldea moderna parece corresponder con el Igli almohade. Las fuentes primarias, el testimonio oral y los restos físicos se aducen como evidencia de que el Igli moderno era el lugar de nacimiento de Ibn Tūmart.