

Introduction

If one were to say that Marrakesh is perfect, it is not due to the perfection of one of its parts, but of its whole.

—Attributed to 'ABD AL-WAHID AL-MARRAKUSHI (d. after 1224)

The palaces, madrasas, and mosques of Marrakesh do not declare themselves to the visitor as distinct landmarks so much as fold themselves within the dense urban plan, appearing suddenly as one turns the corner. Monumental minarets act as navigational beacons within the *madīna*, whose encircling walls set the medieval city apart from the striking landscape that surrounds it. Set in a subtle depression known as the Haouz Basin, Marrakesh is framed to the south by the heights of the High Atlas Mountains, part of the triad of mountain ranges that border the southern edges of modern Morocco (fig. 1). The impact of this dramatic landscape, and the city's relationship to it, was not lost upon medieval authors. Al-Idrisi (d. 1165), the twelfth-century geographer associated with the court of Roger II in Sicily, devoted more space in his geography to the landscape surrounding Marrakesh than to the city itself. He writes of the Atlas Mountains as having fertile terrain, filled with a variety of fruiting trees and cold, clear water, and a landscape dotted with fortified castles. His descriptions of Marrakesh focus more on how the water from the Atlas was brought into the city to irrigate the ground so successfully that its inhabitants had built their own lush gardens without any need for a well. The built environment is reduced to a single sentence: "The roads are large, the public places vast, the buildings

tall, the markets furnished with diverse and well-stocked merchandise."¹

The contours of this impressive metropolis were shaped over approximately a century in the transition between two empires that used Marrakesh as their capital: the Almoravids (r. 1040–1147) and the Almohads (r. 1147–1269). The Almoravids, who founded the city in 1070, established Marrakesh as an informal military encampment, taking an ad hoc approach to the organization of dynastic monuments and civic projects. The city was loosely organized into quarters associated with tribal divisions, framing the Almoravids and their associates as first among equals. This approach, however, would ultimately circumscribe their dynastic authority by highlighting their paradoxical relationship with power and identity, bringing their social differences to the fore and subverting the social contract by which they claimed their right to rule. By contrast, their competitors (and ultimate successors), the Almohads, sought to formalize the imperial relationship with Marrakesh in a direct response to the perceived failures of the recent past, creating large-scale public works and highly mediated arenas of public interaction. Separated from the general populace by elite districts tangential to the walled city, the Almohad court occupied an interstitial space between an urbanized imperial present and rural tribal





FIGURE 1
A. de Bérard, "Vue de la Ville de Maroc." From *Le tour du monde: Nouveau journal des voyages* (Paris: Hachette, 1860), 213. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

past. Under both dynasties, negotiation with the landscape formed the primary mode of architectural and urban communication, along with an ever-present awareness of what that landscape embodied: the complex tensions and mediation between the various tribes that peopled the extreme Islamic west, or Maghrib al-Aqsa. The development of Marrakesh is thus directly related to each dynasty's connection to its ethnic identity as expressed through its relationship to the surrounding landscape, interweaving imperial models of authority with the *genius loci* of their capital city.

Conventional scholarship has viewed the monuments of early Marrakesh in isolation or in unfavorable comparison with the more lavish

monuments on the Iberian Peninsula, but as al-Marrakushi's description of the city tells us, the key to understanding this city is in thinking interrelationally. This book broadens the analysis of Marrakesh's architecture, exploring these monuments' interactions with one another by attending to their awareness and manipulation of the landscape and to the imperial and religious ceremonies that tangibly linked the monuments into a cohesive whole. Postmedieval interventions have obscured much of Marrakesh's original outlines, but utilizing archaeological and archival sources can help recover the twelfth-century version of the city. The city's surrounding geography thus emerges as a principal actor in how Marrakesh functioned for each of its ruling

dynasties. This is particularly true in the case of the Almohads. The Atlas Mountains provided a visual touchstone for the Almohads' identity, as part of the Masmuda tribe, and their authority, which derived from those tribal relationships. Far from their traditional characterization as being unreceptive to western Mediterranean aesthetic traditions, the Almohads selectively integrated these with references to their tribal homeland to create a new and distinctly North African visual idiom. Tracing this process, *Marrakesh and the Mountains* integrates Marrakesh into the context of urbanism in the wider Islamic world, on par with hallmarks of the early medieval period such as Fez, Kairouan, and Córdoba.

THE ALMORAVIDS AND THE ALMOHADS, DYNASTIC COUSINS RATHER THAN TWINS

The Almoravids and the Almohads are inevitably linked to each other as the "Berber dynasties" in both the classical historiographies of the period as well as in modern attempts to unpack them. Certain parallels in their demographic descriptions, as well as in the outlines of their historical trajectories, have led to a general conflation of their roles and contributions to the Maghrib. Even efforts to tease the two apart, including this volume, have inevitably turned to a comparative approach as a way to substantiate the two dynastic profiles. It is not my purpose here to fully break from this tradition, as the nature of the historical sources and the architectural overlap at Marrakesh would make such a distinction both anachronistic and superficial. Rather, I wish to distinguish where and how the Almoravids and Almohads intersect in their historical and architectural trajectories and where they diverge, in order to reframe the parameters by which we understand these dynasties. Crossing disciplinary and geographical boundaries, the dynasties refuse to fit within traditional

scholarly confines, which has made them a subject of both fascination and frustration for generations of scholars. Part of the challenge in discussing these dynasties is the deep complexity of their social context, a network of tribal ties that can, on the surface, appear impenetrable and frequently contradictory. As such, the categorical descriptions of each dynasty bear a great deal of similarity to one another when stripped of this context. Both dynasties rose to prominence on a wave of religious devotion and reformism, the Almoravids through a militant form of Malikism and the Almohads through their own interpretation of Ghazalian thought and unitarian principles. Each dynasty then built its elite ranks from the tribal confederations that formed the earliest adopters of its reforms. The Almoravids grew out of the nomadic, Sahara-based Sanhaja confederation, and the Almohads from the Atlas-dwelling, pastoral Masmuda. Their origins among rural, non-Arabic-speaking communities contributed to the historical impression of the Islamic west's sudden emergence onto the political scene, with the newcomers frequently characterized as uncouth and fanatical in contrast to their Andalusí counterparts.²

But perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most historiographically impactful, connection between the dynasties is the role that they played in Ibn Khaldun's (d. 1406) theorization of history, a link that would go on to inform generations of scholars in their explorations of the period. Ibn Khaldun's model framed the dynastic trajectories of the Almoravids and the Almohads as the inevitable consequence of a dissolving social cohesion that stemmed directly from their increasing urbanization and contact with the more decadent branches of intellectual life, as embodied by the culture of al-Andalus. In his conception, both the Almoravids' and the Almohads' imperial strength derived from their

sense of *aṣabiyya* (often loosely translated as “tribal solidarity”), a fundamentally social and ethnic form of connection that resonated with twentieth-century scholars in its purportedly secular, rationalist tone. Much of the scholarship from this modern period, primarily Franco- and Hispanophone, adopted this model in discussions and dissections of the medieval era, seeing in its trajectory a fundamentally inferior social experiment that collapsed after a brief show of brute force over the more sophisticated Andalusī Arabic-inflected *tāʾifa* (“party” or “faction”) states. This perspective is inextricable from the project of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism, which saw in this historical narrative the justification for a European presence on the African continent. The study of the Almoravid and Almohad empires became folded into a dichotomy that depicted “intermixed Andalusians as proto-Spaniards, European and secular, and . . . Berbers as fanatical interlopers who are distinct ethnically, linguistically, and culturally.”³

Apart from the religious fervor that fueled their rise to power, the most notable quality linking the Almoravids and the Almohads is their historiographic identification as the two “Berber” dynasties of the Islamic west. This characterization presupposes an ethnocentric sociological model that underwrites the ways in which each dynasty organized and communicated authority, a model that has its roots in the readings (and rereadings) of Ibn Khaldun as the primary social theorist of the period. But the term “Berber” is a semantically ambiguous one, referring to different communities and means of kinship within different eras and (in its earliest forms) applied by communities external to those to which it referred. By the time Ibn Khaldun was writing his monumental seven-volume *Kitāb al-ʿibar* (Book of examples), which

famously theorized a cyclical model of history based upon the events of the Almoravid and Almohad periods, the Berbers appear to have constituted a distinctive people in terms of political ideologies and social organization, although there is little to suggest a universal Berber identity among the various tribes. The concept of a singular definition of “Berber” is a profoundly modern invention, inflected with the intonations of colonialism and postcolonial nationalism in its usage, which has in turn been reflected back onto the medieval period. This has created something of a methodological paradox for those scholars of the period who attempt to answer the question of the role a Berber identity played within these dynasties; repeatedly alluded to in the sources, its conceptual outlines nevertheless remain indefinite, prompting a general trend of either placing too much emphasis on its role or ignoring it entirely.

Historian Ramzi Rouighi has recently approached the issue from a historically constructivist view. In doing so, he has conceptualized Berberization as a historical process that rejects the extrapolation of the present back onto the past.⁴ He painstakingly traces the emergence of “Berber” as a category through the Arabic sources, beginning with the Islamic conquest in the seventh century and coalescing in Ibn Khaldun’s *Kitāb al-ʿibar*. The term appears almost exclusively as an externally derived and politically motivated moniker until well into the medieval era. Against the background of competition among the petty kingdoms (*mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*) of the Iberian Peninsula (ca. 1009–31), comparisons in the literature of kingdoms ruled by Arab descendants and those with rulers of non-Arab Maghribi extraction led to a “new form of elite identity politics [that] envisioned ‘Berber’ and ‘Arab’ as alternative ideological articulations of dynastic domination.”⁵ It is not until the rise

of the Almohads that we see a concerted effort, originating in the Maghrib, to promote specific dialects or customs on an imperial scale. The Almohads wrote in the dialect of the Masmuda tribe (which made up the core of their ranks) and organized the governmental structure under a tribal logic. As Rouighi points out, the span of their empire created the conditions for an unprecedented scale of political integration and rhetorical unity, and even if practical conditions prevented complete ideological purity, the promotion of “Berber” as a category developed a more widespread public consciousness.⁶ It is therefore possible to talk about “Berber” as a generative category for the Almoravid and Almohad periods, albeit not with the universalizing interpretation that is often associated with it today.

Recent scholarship has attempted to unpack the colonialist legacy of this characterization, teasing apart the relationships not only between the Almoravids and the Almohads but also between both dynasties and their Andalusí and Maghribí subjects. Maribel Fierro, Pascal Buresi, Amira Bennison, Mehdi Ghourigate, and others have contributed significantly to this effort, approaching primary sources with a critical eye toward the generational biases built into frequently contradictory narratives.⁷ Their work has contextualized the Almoravids and Almohads within intersecting traditions of religion, language, anthropology, and economy. What is more, they have clarified for modern audiences the social forces at play in the medieval Maghrib, a daunting prospect for the casual observer who is new to the tribal politics and the intermittent course of Islamization in the region. They have, in short, begun the long process of recovering the historical role of these two dynasties from centuries of political and academic appropriation, offering a more nuanced view of each as a distinct actor in its own right.

This effort has been even more challenging within the realm of architectural history, frustrated by the state of preservation of the majority of Almoravid and Almohad sites. On the Iberian Peninsula, their urban contributions were frequently folded into later efforts at expansion and renovation, although they were, on occasion, destroyed entirely in the program of de-Islamization after the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain in 1492. Similarly, in the Maghrib, the sites suffered waves of successive dynastic appropriation or destruction, making the process of picking apart the medieval elements of their architecture a sometimes impossible challenge. What this has left to the architectural record is an uneven and incomplete idea of the focus of Almoravid and Almohad architecture, one understandably biased toward those monuments that are left to us. Much of the twentieth-century French and Spanish scholarship on the subject was dedicated to a comprehensive catalog of the remaining sites, their various states of disrepair, and formalist descriptions of their materiality, construction, and ornamental techniques. Aided by concurrent archaeological investigations, midcentury scholars such as Henri Terrasse, Henri Basset, Gaston Deverdun, and Jacques Meunié wrote the definitive volumes on the archaeology and architecture of Almoravid and Almohad sites.⁸ These works remain invaluable for their documentary quality, but many of their conclusions regarding the artistic merits and contributions of the period remain couched in a moralizing framework that equated ornamental decadence with intellectual and artistic superiority, a narrative that consistently put the Maghribí material in a lower tier of sophistication. Recent scholarship from art historians like Mariam Rosser-Owen, Cynthia Robinson, María Marcos Cobaleda, and Susana Calvo Capilla has made

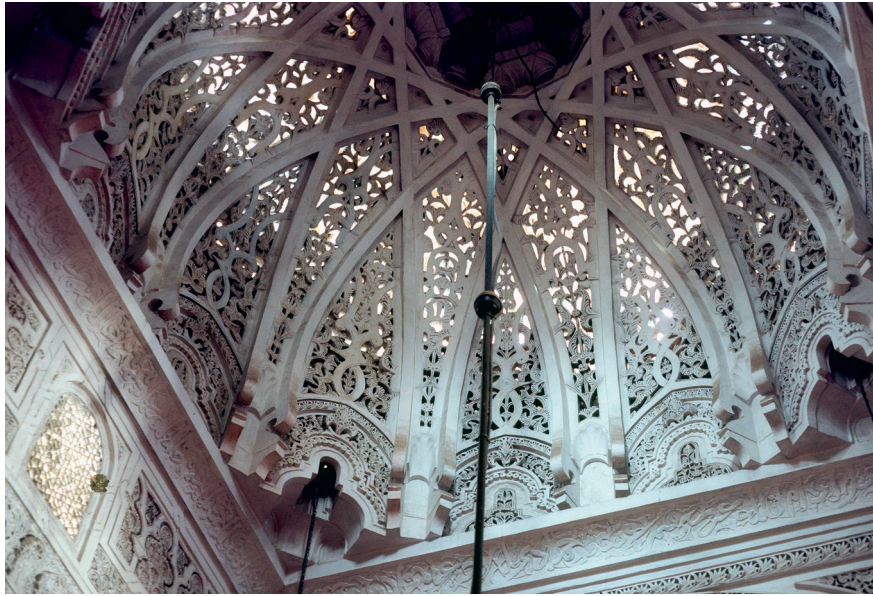


FIGURE 2 (*top*)
Dome in front of the mihrab at the Great Mosque of Tlemcen,
ca. 1136. Photo: B. O'Kane / Alamy Stock Photo.



FIGURE 3 (*bottom*)
Dome in front of the mihrab at the Great Mosque of Córdoba,
ca. 962–66. Photo: WHPics / Alamy Stock Photo.

significant progress in approaching Almoravid and Almohad architecture with a greater degree of agency and nuance, contextualizing it within the wide and fluid network of referents available.⁹ Engaging critically with ornamental and structural elements as well as their metaphysical and political theorizations, this new generation of scholarship has revealed the sophistication and innovative experimentation of each dynasty.

What is more, the subtle differences between the two open a window onto how they engaged with the process of Islamization in their communities, leading each dynasty to a distinctive architectural program. The Almoravids, who adopted a Maliki form of Sunnism and professed at least nominal allegiance to the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, certainly drew from the ornamental vocabulary of their eastern sponsors. Much has been made of their use of muqarnas in interstitial cupolas and the central nave ceiling at the Qarawiyyin Mosque, as well as their use of a geometric form of interlaced strapwork known as *girih* (most notably in the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin; see fig. 13), which Yasser Tabbaa has interpreted as a definitive Abbasid homage within the Almoravid oeuvre.¹⁰ But the Almoravids also looked to Córdoba and to the precedents set by the so-called Spanish Umayyad caliphate (r. 929–1031), which had established some of the most recognizable and lasting ornamental and architectural forms in the region. This was subtle at times, as in the use of ribbed or fluted domes in front of the mihrab, such as at the Almoravid congregational mosque at Tlemcen (see figs. 2, 3). At other times it was more direct, such as in the use of spolia taken directly from Córdoba and installed at iconographically charged points in Almoravid mosques.¹¹ Yet—contrary to the historiographical narrative of Berber primitivism—the Almoravids were

also patrons of artistic innovation. The same Tlemcen mosque, for example, features the first use of pierced stucco in the construction of a dome, crafted in lush vegetal forms to create a forested effect within the architectural space.¹² Cynthia Robinson has posited a philosophical lens of interpretation for this effect, arguing for a rationalist invitation to contemplate the divine, inspired by the work of Andalusí philosopher Ibn Bajja (d. 1139).¹³ What is clear from this brief analysis is that the Almoravid corpus of visual references had multiple sources and was multivalent in semiotic and mimetic signification. Almoravid architecture could be triumphalist, deferential, and rich in exegetical potential and aesthetic preference. Frequently, these qualities could be found within the same site, as at the Tlemcen mosque, establishing a complex and occasionally contradictory network of references.

The Almoravids' successors, the Almohads and the Mu'minid dynasty based on their movement, drew upon a similar codex of artistic precedents, and yet their architecture marks a decisive interlude in a general preference for Andalusí vegetal ornament in its various forms across the Andalusí and Maghribi regions. While still referencing Córdoba in particular ways—primarily through the orientation of their mosques and in certain ceremonial practices, discussed further in chapter 2—the Almohads' architecture rejects much of the luxurious materiality and explicitly paradisiacal references of the Andalusí caliphate. In the extant examples of Almohad-era architecture, much of the interior space is stripped back to an almost austere simplicity. Featuring whitewashed plaster-covered walls and solid brick piers, ornamental application is almost exclusively reserved for the most ideologically charged areas, such as in front of the mihrab.¹⁴ Where vegetal ornament does occur, it is abstracted to the barest hint of leaves



and vines, concordant with the ample geometric strapwork ornamenting the rest of the surface. Far more proliferative is the geometric ornament that highlights these spaces—six- and eight-pointed star motifs, connected by interlaced strapwork, that exhibit a preference for straight lines and negative space (fig. 4). While these motifs create structure around the mihrab, the ceilings are also hierarchically defined through increasingly ornate arch typologies, moving from clearly pointed horseshoe forms to polylobed arches and, finally, to lambrequin types as one moves through the space toward the qibla transept (fig. 5). Extensive use of muqarnas ceilings with fluted cells further heightens the intensely geometric program that defines the ornamental preferences of Almohad-era architecture. Much of this program has been read in light of the Almohad doctrine's emphasis on *tawhīd*, or unity, rooted in the absolute oneness and abstract incomprehensibility of God. The use of highly geometric forms interspersed with the occasional vegetal design, with leaves stripped to their most bare, represents the intellectual

FIGURE 4
Vegetal ornamental screens above
the mihrab in the Almohad-era
Kutubiyya Mosque, Marrakesh,
ca. 1154. Photo: author.



FIGURE 5
View from the southeastern corner of the Kutubiyya Mosque, with the Kutubiyya's hierarchical arch typologies. Lambrequin arches frame the qibla transept and the two aisles at either end of the mosque, while polylobed arches highlight the horizontal axis of the qibla transept, and slightly pointed horseshoe arches occupy the rest of the hypostyle space. Photo: author.

process by which the Almohad faithful divested the concept of God from any representative qualities, an exercise explicitly rejecting the accusations of anthropomorphism they had levied against their Almoravid predecessors.¹⁵

The metaphysical and intellectual reading of the Almoravid- and Almohad-era architecture discussed above has a strong basis in the profusion of philosophical literature from the period, which guides the historian to a number of conclusions regarding the medieval Maghrib. First, the common characterization of North Africa in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as an intellectual backwater is clearly a misconception, created by a diffusion model that posits Baghdad and, to a lesser extent, al-Andalus as the undisputed arbiters of enlightened thought. The presence of scholars working in and around the Almoravid and Almohad courts indicates an active participation in the intellectual disputes of the day, and many of these scholars contributed their own sophisticated understandings of the issues as they related to Maghribi society. Even when such scholars were not openly embraced within the courtly sphere, as was the case with Ibn Bajja, the diffuse and hardly hegemonic nature of both empires opens the door to a refined, philosophical reading of their architectural ornament. Second, scholars (and art historians in particular) must acknowledge the multivalent application of architectural references within both periods, for while both the Almoravids and the Almohads may have looked to Baghdad and Córdoba for inspiration, the reception of those motifs and even directly spoliated goods can hardly be interpreted as passive. For example, the elegant and intricate carved wooden minbar commissioned by the Almoravids from Córdoba, and later relocated to the Almohad Kutubiyya Mosque, carries with it a host of interpretive possibilities (fig. 6). Its Andalusian craftsmanship, widely admired

by historical observers such as Ibn Sammak (d. after 1381; who described its “perfect accomplishment”), speaks to the Almoravids’ and Almohads’ high regard for the skilled tradition of the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁶ But the minbar’s materiality, crafted from a variety of woods imported from as far away as Senegal and the Levant, also speaks to the impressive extent of the Almoravid empire and trading network.¹⁷ More than a straightforward adoption of Andalusí motifs (though these are present in the vegetal carvings that recall Córdoba ivories), the minbar expresses a new synthesis of ornament, texture, and locality that made use of those motifs to express something entirely new. The minbar takes on additional layers of meaning when it becomes spoliated under the Almohads, relocated from its original setting in the Almoravid Masjid al-Siqaya to the new Almohad congregational mosque known as the Kutubiyya, both located in Marrakesh. Triumphalism is certainly present, but there is also a degree of practicality and adaptation that is both a long-standing tradition within the Maghrib and a particular hallmark of Almohad-era architecture.

The Almoravids and their Almohad successors were masters of this multivalent mode of communication through an architectural medium, refashioning visual precedents for a distinctly Maghribi audience. Their sensitive treatment of ornamental and structural schemas supported and reiterated the religious and social reforms that underlay their dynastic claims to authority and legitimacy, as has been made evident through the recent scholarship of the period. Yet this scholarly approach has largely remained framed through the formalist methodologies of the earliest theorizations of this material, relying on the aesthetics of individual monuments as the ultimate expression of specific identities. This approach has attempted,



relatively successfully, to rehabilitate our understanding of philosophical and religious thinking of the period as a generative force within the architectural sphere of the Maghrib. It is inherently limited, however, by the available source

FIGURE 6
The Almoravid minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque, now housed in the Badi' Palace Museum, Marrakesh. Photo: author.

material, the majority of which falls under the category of religious spaces, apart from a few remnants of palatial or military constructions hidden within larger trans-dynastic sites. The extant architectural record from this period primarily consists of mosques and their attendant architectural elements—ablution fountains, minarets, mihrab renovations—which, from our historical vantage, may skew us toward thinking of the Almoravids and the Almohads as excessively concerned with spiritual practice. To follow through with this logic would be to fall into the trap of conceiving of their versions of Islam as diametrically opposed to other conceptual categories, most significantly those of the “secular” or “social,” when the historical phenomenon of the Islamic world suggests otherwise. As described by intellectual historian Shahab Ahmed, Islam “is a field of meaning where truth is constituted, arranged, and lived in terms not of categories constituted by mutual exclusion, but rather by categories of mutual inter-sorption and inter-locution that run athwart and conceptually frustrate the religious/secular binary or religion/culture division.”¹⁸ In other words, we must approach the architecture of this period as inherently polysemous, expressive not only of particular theological ideas but of an entire multitude of societal experiences.

To do so, this volume steps away from the individual architectural monuments as enclosed spaces of architectural expression to look at the interrelated ways in which those monuments interact with one another as well as the landscape around them. An urban perspective resists unilateral definition while acknowledging the legal and rhetorical framework that religious and philosophical literature from the period can provide. Without disregarding the sensitive and detailed analysis provided by the ornamental schemas of each dynasty’s architecture,

expanding the perspective outward to look at the urban plan allows us to include no longer extant monuments and sites attested by the historical and archaeological record. As shall be discussed in the following chapters, while the mosques of the Almoravid and Almohad eras have received significant attention for their extant remains, their capital city was populated even further by palaces, gardens, complex hydraulic works, and public squares. These spaces were enlivened by rituals and ceremonies that encoded the religious milieu characteristic of the period with specific references to traditions only tangentially related to an Islamic context. Intervening centuries of destruction, expansion, and renovation may make uncovering these spaces a complicated endeavor, but it is no less vital to our understanding of the period. The morphological development of Marrakesh reveals distinctive approaches taken by the Almoravids and the Almohads that go beyond the spiritual or religious needs of their communities to highlight other dimensions of their respective dynastic identities. If the architectural vocabulary of the period was inherently communicative on a variety of levels, as recent scholarship suggests, then so too were the very identities that they expressed.

MARRAKESH AS AN ARCHETYPE: THE ISLAMIC CITY IN QUESTION

As the stage for these multivalent modes of communication on an imperial scale, Marrakesh bears the archaeological and morphological remnants of each dynasty’s approach to the urban project. The generational shifts between the two dynasties are born out physically as the mosques, palaces, and public spaces shift location and orientation. Marrakesh thus participates in a long-running scholarly debate surrounding urbanism in the Islamic world, the

role the city played as a locus of identity and culture, and the ways in which social organization was reflected in urban morphology. The concept of the “Islamic city”—that is, a city whose fundamental organizational principle is rooted in Islamic tradition—is one that has been widely debated among historians and rightly criticized for its origins in an Orientalist worldview.¹⁹ And yet it persists as an analytical category for understanding the interconnected phenomena of the appearance and spread of Islam as a major religious and social category and the exponential growth and development of new cities and urban networks under various Islamic polities. Marrakesh, despite its marginal status among the larger and more well-studied cities of the Islamic world, stands at the crux of this debate, acting as both an archetype of the Islamic city model and a product of its theorization.

Beginning in the 1920s, the French Orientalist school of Algiers published a number of essays that constructed a checklist for what constituted the Islamic city, which was followed by a series of monographic studies that confirmed those characteristics.²⁰ Within this model, a market (*suq*) and a congregational mosque operated in a gravitational equilibrium, forming the core of the city with other, smaller networks expanding away from them. Occasionally a hammam also formed a locus of social gathering, while the relationship of administrative centers to the mosque-market hybrid disclosed relative degrees of confidence or anxiety in their own political authority.²¹ The rest of the city was loosely organized into residential quarters grouped by trade or what the French scholars termed “ethnicity,” referring to the tribal or geographic origin (based on patronymics) of their occupants.²² This structure formed the antithesis of what Max Weber termed the *Gemeinde* of Europe, describing autonomous

urban communes that conformed to an ideal type. The effect was to create a mode of societal comparison between the colonial powers and the Mediterranean regions they controlled, justifying their “civilizing” intervention.²³

Among the monographs that detailed this dynamic was Gaston Deverdun’s *Marrakech des origines à 1912*, which charted the city’s major monuments by dynasty, interspersed with historical overviews of the sources.²⁴ The closing date of his work, 1912, marked the year that Marrakesh was officially absorbed into the French Protectorate of Morocco, and the following year saw the establishment of the *ville nouvelle* under the guidance of Resident-General Hubert Lyautey. With the aid of urban planner and designer Henri Prost, the *ville nouvelle*, known as Guéliz, employed a radiating grid plan and imposed a height restriction on all new constructions. No building was to be taller than four floors (or the approximate height of a palm tree) so as to maintain the medieval profile of the metropolitan skyline and to avoid competing with the silhouette of the Kutubiyya Mosque’s monumental minaret (fig. 7).²⁵ This mandate had the effect of creating an economic and social segregation at Marrakesh between the wealthier French expatriates and tourists and the poorer local Moroccan inhabitants, who were siloed into the old town, which retained the designation of *madīna* and was preserved as a time capsule of an imagined Orientalist past.²⁶ Simultaneously, this preservation of the historic core of Marrakesh created the perfect venue for the French scholars of the region to test their theories of the Islamic city.

The resulting scholarship took specificities of place, time, and social context for granted, constructing an abstract concept full of generalizations about cities in the Islamic world. Moreover, these theories often conflated the



FIGURE 7
The Kutubiyya minaret under repair,
ca. 1930s. École nationale d'Archi-
tecture, Rabat.

medieval past with a colonized present, uncritically accepting a singular urban form “at one long historic moment without unpacking the various causes of that particular outcome.”²⁷ The model was applied to cities as diverse as Cairo and Aleppo, which not only had experienced stark urban changes under Ottoman rule but had emerged from vastly different foundational circumstances. The examples that informed the model—nearly all of which were based in the Maghrib—were both small in number and eccentric in character. In response, modern scholarship has faced a choice: to reject the model outright as ethnocentric; to accept the model as a useful category of analysis, albeit to varying degrees of accuracy; or, as has been suggested by Dale Eickelman, to recognize that categories of urban-ness are not universally translatable.²⁸ What is described as “urban” (*ḥaḍarīya*) in the Maghrib does not necessarily carry the same implications of social difference or distinction

as it does in the Levant or in Europe. While there may be certain parallels or coincidental occurrences, the role of those elements is particular to an audience of a given time and place. As a case study for urbanism in the Islamic world, Marrakesh carries the historiographical weight of serving as the basis for its theorization and development in keeping with colonial-era ideas about how such a city should appear. Deeply contextualizing its origins outside of this model and its comparative tendencies offers a path forward for a more nuanced and expansive reading of the city.

As an experiment in medieval imperial urbanism, Marrakesh integrated established expectations of what a city needed to do within the function of an empire and newer social and philosophical attitudes about the city’s role in identity formation. Although few authors contemporary to either dynasty explicitly discussed the dynamics of the city, its rulers, and its inhabitants, the later theorizations of Ibn Khaldun can provide some insight into the inherent contradictions at play. The close relationship between Khaldunian thought and the urban experiment at Marrakesh is what marks the city yet again as a particularly important example in the wider history of urbanism in the Islamic world. Historians have rightly interrogated the outsized influence of Ibn Khaldun’s work on the scholarly understanding of the period, arguing that it posits a priori a coherent social structure in which large-scale state formation is doomed to fail. This, in turn, established a deterministic trajectory that elided the political and historical complexities of the period.²⁹ But with regard to the study of medieval Maghribi urbanism, and in particular its effect on shifting social networks, Ibn Khaldun outlines the delicate negotiations and inherent contradictions that faced both the Almoravids and the Almohads by explicitly

linking the landscape with the character and priorities of their respective social groupings.

The opening of Ibn Khaldun's *Kitāb al-'ibar*, commonly known as the *Muqaddima* (Introduction), describes the geographic scope of his project as such: "Our main concern is with the Maghrib, the home [*waṭan*] of the Berbers, and the Arab home countries [*awṭān*] in the east."³⁰ The term *waṭan* is frequently translated in a premodern sense as "homeland," although in modern parlance it carries more loaded connotations of nationalism. In the twelfth century, however, it was used in reference to the emotional, physical, and social attachments that people felt to their place of birth, ancestral home, or place of residence.³¹ Whereas other terms were used to describe political boundaries or the physical qualities of land, *waṭan* was reserved for the relationship between human beings and nature, a connection that fundamentally implied nourishment of both body and soul. That relationship could be determined by an intrinsic kinship to a place, developed through the kinds of intimate geographic and topographic knowledge that come from farming, herding, or traversing a particular landscape over generations. It could also, however, express a more conscious relationship to the land, a relationship established by choice rather than circumstance, such as the incorporation of land through conquest and resettlement. The concept of the *waṭan* had been formalized in early Islamic belles-lettres (*adab*) as the natural habitat of a given people; originally describing the bedouin life of the Arabian Peninsula, Ibn Khaldun here transposes it to the (semi)nomadic life of the Berbers.³² In doing so, he declares the Maghrib their definitive homeland, and he goes on to detail the homelands of each specific Berber tribe, locating the Almoravid Sanhaja in the Saharan desert and the Almohad Masmuda in the Atlas Mountains.

A deep connection with one's *waṭan* also established a strong sense of camaraderie, a deep connection that Ibn Khaldun argued was imperative for developing the movement that would bring a ruler to power. Known as *aṣabiyya*, it is frequently translated as "esprit de corps" or even "proto-nationalism," although neither of these fully encompasses the social principles embodied by the term. The notion of *aṣabiyya* as a structural paradigm is a rather fraught one in Islamic philosophy. In its pre-Islamic connotations, the term had an ambiguous meaning that reflected the sort of blind allegiance to a clan group that threatened any supra-tribal collective, and the concept was therefore condemned by the Prophet Muhammad as a danger to the early Islamic community. And yet by the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldun considered it the primary agent of political change in the Islamic west as social cohesion waxed and waned. The term expressed both bonds of consanguinity and elected subscription to a particular group, allowing for at least a degree of social expansion. But its inherently unstable and dialectical nature means that while it allows for group cohesion in ethnic environments, it impairs the centralization of power needed for large-scale imperial endeavors in areas with multiple social and ethnic groups. Historians have debated elsewhere the role *aṣabiyya* played in the administration of both the Almoravid and Almohad empires, but the general consensus is that the earlier Almoravids were hampered by their *aṣabiyya*, unable to supersede clan divisions as their empire expanded.³³ By comparison, the Almohads were more successful in translating *aṣabiyya* from an explicitly ethnosocial category to a religious one through the recognition of their founder, Ibn Tumart, as the *mahdī*, an apocalyptic figure meant to redeem Muslims before the end of days. Ibn Tumart organized his followers

by tribal categories, but they were all bound together by his particular brand of Islam, in a deliberate echo of the narrative of Muhammad and the early believers.³⁴

These relationships needed to be continually reinforced, whether through performance, literature, or art. According to Ibn Khaldun's theorization of the social contract, *aṣabiyya* could be corroded through the trappings of urban life, where exposure to alternate customs and ways of living might supplant those patterns that had initially generated imperial authority and strength.³⁵ The nurturing aspect of the *waṭan* could and would fade over time, which is why one's removal from it caused feelings of depression, sickness, or madness.³⁶ The physical environment that is defined by the *waṭan* should be understood as the active agent in determining the qualities that make up *aṣabiyya*. Climate, topography, and landscape shape the principles by which a society lives, creating the ideological boundaries of what it means to belong. *Waṭan* and *aṣabiyya*, then, are more than parallels of each other; they are mutually reinforcing. Though both concepts are mutable within an individual, a dynasty, or even a culture more broadly, they admit an inevitable relationship between the landscape and a code of social mores. To leave the *waṭan* is to abandon the ideals and practices that created a community in the first place. It may be this understanding of how social structures were determined that led to Ibn Khaldun's model of empire in the fourteenth century, which he based on the Almoravids and the Almohads. In that model, a dynasty's initial power stems from its moral conviction—a strength of *aṣabiyya* that results from inhabiting the synchronistic environment. As the dynasty grows, imperial expansion results in an abandonment of (or at least a diminishing attention to) the *waṭan*, leading to a discordance between environment and moral

authority that ultimately ends in a fall from power. Khaldun's model enunciated the specific kind of anxiety that appears during times of political instability and transition, the sense that one's *waṭan* is at risk, a feeling that could be ameliorated through acts of connection and recollection. At the dynastic level, this is most directly expressed through architecture, whether materially, structurally, or spatially. Marrakesh, in its shift between the Almoravid and Almohad periods, reveals the active development of a city designed for such recollection in an effort to maintain social stability on the imperial scale.

IBN TUMART AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL CRITIQUE

One of the central figures of this work is, without a doubt, Ibn Tumart (d. 1130). Despite having no dynastic position within either the Almoravid or the Almohad empire, his relationship to them would have profound consequences for the way in which we understand the city of Marrakesh and each dynasty's relationship to its capital city. His life and teachings occupy the interstitial space between the transition from one era to another, and he thus provides modern scholars with the best literary source material to contextualize the philosophical and social underpinnings of each. There are certainly historiographical hurdles to overcome in relying on such a contentious and clearly ideological figure to explicate multiple generations' worth of architectural and civic construction, and I am by no means suggesting a one-to-one correlation between Ibn Tumart's critiques and the architectural choices of two powerful dynasties. But Ibn Tumart was known as a keen observer of Maghribi society in the twelfth century, and his philosophy grants us a unique insight into the cultural and sociological undercurrents that motivated these dynasties. Couching his particular brand of religious

reformism in explicitly ethnosocial rhetoric, Ibn Tumart tapped into the complexities of Berber politics and made explicit certain expectations and norms that had heretofore been only implicit from the perspective of historical sources. His critique of the Almoravids—and his founding of the Almohad movement that toppled them—places him at the crucial point of transition between the two, and in many ways, the evolution of Marrakesh can be mapped through the concepts that Ibn Tumart highlights in his warnings and proscriptions to both.

The early details of Ibn Tumart's life can only be reconstructed from later Almohad hagiographies and thus bear a distinct political bias. The general framework, though, suggests a figure conscious of the socio-religious dynamics surrounding him. Born around 1080 in the village of Igliz to the Hargha tribe, a subsidiary of the larger Masmuda confederation that occupied the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas Mountains in the southwest part of what is today Morocco, Ibn Tumart's early life was characterized by a marked propensity for religious learning in a family already known for piety and devotion. Among the Hargha, Ibn Tumart's family was known as *isarghinen*—a term that, in the Masmuda dialect, alluded to sharifian ancestry.³⁷ This traditional role of religious and spiritual leadership was taken up by Ibn Tumart, who earned a reputation for spending long hours in the mosque at prayer and in study, on hand to light the candles at dusk and earning the nickname "Asafu," a Masmuda term meaning "a lover of light."³⁸ His early aptitude is undoubtedly part of the hagiographical model of Mahdism—the millenarian and eschatological tradition of a righteous religious reformer sent to purify Islam before the end of days. Following in this tradition, upon reaching maturity, Ibn Tumart left his mountain village for Aghmat, then the

largest town in the region and considered a local center of religious learning. From there, he made the journey to al-Andalus, stopping in Córdoba and Almería, where he was likely exposed to the teachings and political leanings of Ibn Hazm's (d. 1064) Zahiri followers as well as the tumultuous activities of Andalusian Sufism under Ibn al-'Arif (d. 1141).³⁹ Both of these figures were heavily influenced by the philosopher al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the Persian scholar who is said to have had the greatest effect on Ibn Tumart's ideas and to have been his tutor upon the latter's arrival in the Mashriq around 1108. Here, the sources and secondary scholarship are at odds, as the timelines of the pair's meeting are hard to match up. Anecdotally, al-Ghazali is said to have urged Ibn Tumart to overthrow the Almoravids after learning of their hostile reaction to al-Ghazali's famous text *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The revival of the religious sciences), which had been publicly burned in al-Andalus.⁴⁰ However, by the time Ibn Tumart is said to have arrived in Baghdad, al-Ghazali had supposedly retired to Tus, near the border of present-day Afghanistan. This chronological problem has been tackled by numerous scholars over the years, who have suggested everything from a chance meeting in Alexandria to a journey entirely fabricated by Ibn Tumart.⁴¹

A meeting between al-Ghazali and Ibn Tumart, whether apocryphal or not, serves two functions within Ibn Tumart's hagiography among the Almohads. First, this account contributes to the future Mahdi's prophetic background, establishing a journey of enlightenment that granted him intellectual and spiritual legitimacy through a lineage of respected thinkers from both al-Andalus and the Mashriq. As Mercedes García-Arenal has pointed out, the narrative of Ibn Tumart and al-Ghazali's meeting speaks to the desire of Ibn Tumart and his followers to

“stake a claim to Ghazalian thought, and . . . the reverential prestige which then attached to the figure of al-Ghazali in the Maghrib.”⁴² Second, Ibn Tumart’s purported travels reveal the degree to which he and his doctrine were in the process of capturing a specific cultural, spiritual, and political moment of anxiety and frustration. In teasing apart his influences and background through the lens of a scholarly journey, what is revealed is someone who was exceedingly sensitive to moods of societal critique and change, moods that would propel Ibn Tumart’s movement toward its successful conclusion of overthrowing the Almoravids. The activities of Ibn Hazm, although predating Ibn Tumart’s arrival on the Iberian Peninsula, nevertheless left an indelible mark on the region’s discourse on Maliki thought, and the literalist critique of Maliki *‘ulamā’* was taken to heart by the young Maghribi scholar. Under this particular strain of Zahirism, the practice of consensus (*ijmā’*) among Maliki scholars was deemed an insufficient rubric for interpreting the law as laid out in the Qur’an and hadith, leading inevitably to societal corruption and waywardness.⁴³ This critique coincided with the rise of Andalusian Sufism in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, in which the doctrine of illumination by divine will (*ma’rifā*, often translated as “gnosis”) superseded that of knowledge acquired through study and legal discourse.⁴⁴ One could, through asceticism and emulation of the Prophet Muhammad, attain a state of spiritual enlightenment through communication with the divine will, which then allowed the enlightened person to interpret and guide the faithful. This enlightened figure was known as the *quṭb al-zamān*, the “axis of the age,” proposed as the spiritual center of gravity for an entire generation of Muslims. The ultimate such figure was the Mahdi, who was predicted to come in the year 500 of the Hijri calendar (1106

in the Gregorian), the same year in which Ibn Tumart was supposed to have undertaken his educational travels.⁴⁵

In his writings and teachings, al-Ghazali touched upon each of these issues as part of his critique of the *uṣūl al-fiqh* (sources of jurisprudence or law) in the hands of the *‘ulamā’*, and he interwove them with the juridical impulse toward corrective action. Central to his thesis was the *ḥisba* “al-amr bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar,” the Qur’anic precept to “command right and forbid wrong.”⁴⁶ Although this *ḥisba* informed numerous schools of thought, including the mainstream Maliki *‘ulamā’* in the Islamic west, al-Ghazali’s interpretation was innovative in its insistence that it was compulsory for all Muslims—so long as they were legally of age and could reasonably carry out the responsibility—to enact the practice. Al-Ghazali dismisses the idea that one needs permission from the ruler or the courts in determining how and when to carry out the *ḥisba*, and in fact he muses at length over the necessity to speak out against unjust rulership; though it may ultimately be an ineffective exercise due to the imbalance of power, it is nevertheless virtuous to do so.⁴⁷ In this expression of the *ḥisba*, al-Ghazali equates both the commanding of right and the forbidding of wrong as mutually incumbent upon all Muslims, regardless of social status, a philosophical model in which silence (in either case) has no place. Dissent thus becomes an ethical duty, and it was this element of al-Ghazali’s work that made him such a polemical author in the Maghrib. Taken up by both political reformers as well as the Andalusian Sufis, the *ḥisba* was interwoven with an increasingly eschatological outlook, creating a climate of moralistic activism (frequently couched in the vocabulary of jihad) that railed against the status quo.⁴⁸ This expression of the *ḥisba* would eventually form the foundations of

Ibn Tumart's own doctrine as he returned to the Maghrib and began preaching an ascetic and reformist brand of Islam.

Ibn Tumart—his teachings and the development of Almohadism—was thus very much a product of his era, although the interweaving of each of these disparate elements added up to something much greater. In addition to these various schools of nonconformist thought, Ibn Tumart also acquired an education in Ash'ari legal tradition, which included *fiqh* along with *uṣūl al-dīn* (principles of religion) and *uṣūl al-hadīth* (the principles of hadith). Ibn Tumart's teacher in this respect was likely Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Turtushi (d. 1126), a preeminent Maliki jurist and ascetic in Alexandria who himself had been a student of al-Ghazali's (even though he later renounced his teacher's work). It may have been while in Egypt that Ibn Tumart was first exposed to al-Ghazali's understanding of the *ḥisba* and integrated it into the more esoteric elements of his "search for knowledge" (*ṭalab al-ilm*).⁴⁹ Social reform, activism, and an eschatological mysticism combined with a profound knowledge of the Qur'an and hadith to coalesce around a revived conception of monotheism, the eternal oneness of God, or *tawḥīd*. This doctrine of *tawḥīd* would form the basis for Ibn Tumart's reformist movement and the name of his followers, the Almohads (*al-muwahḥidūn*, frequently translated as "unitarians"). It is important to interject here that the chronology surrounding the development of Ibn Tumart's doctrine (*ʿaqīda*) is complicated by the series of revisions and recensions of the source texts of his teachings. There are references to *tawḥīd* in al-Baydhaq's (d. after 1164) memoirs as a disciple of Ibn Tumart's, though these were written under the reign of 'Abd al-Mu'min and reflect a preoccupation with the legitimacy of the new dynasty more than metaphysics. Even Ibn Tumart's

own writings on the subject, compiled in the text known as *A'azz mā yuṭlab* (The greatest object of desire), only come to us through an 1184 recension, a good fifty years after Ibn Tumart's death and, again, possibly manipulated for political consistency at the height of the Mu'minid era.⁵⁰ As received, the debates surrounding the oneness of God are framed to target the Almoravids as anthropomorphists who took literally the Qur'anic descriptions of God as having human attributes, a heretical position.⁵¹ From this perspective, the Almoravids were incapable of inferring the allegorical nature of such descriptions, relying overmuch on Maliki jurists rather than developing their own practice of logical and rational thinking. While there is undoubtedly a polemical nature to the versions of the texts that are extant, at their core they express Ibn Tumart's keen interest in developing his followers' skills to assess what was "right" and "wrong" in following the *ḥisba*. In other words, commanding right and forbidding wrong were personal obligations decreed in the Qur'an, but how was the average Muslim to determine what that meant in any given situation?

Ibn Tumart's doctrine advocated personal responsibility as the pathway to a just and ethical society, a moral imperative to carry out the *ḥisba* on an individual level as well as on a structural one, ensuring consistent action throughout. This could not be carried out solely by an elite class of jurists and scholars (although under 'Abd al-Mu'min, just such a class of Almohad theologian-administrators was incorporated into the caliphal retinue). Rather, it required a practical framework of applicable knowledge in order to shape the juridical principles that would form a truly Almohad society. This was the guiding force behind one of Ibn Tumart's most famous axioms, "Understanding is the mother of ability" (*al-idrāk umm al-istiṭā'a*).⁵² Less concerned with

a metaphysical sort of knowledge, Ibn Tumart urged instead the cultivation of logical reasoning in order to accept the responsibility of action within Islamic doctrine as outlined in the Qur'an. In understanding the ethical principles of the law, a good Muslim is thereby enjoined to action, framed as the "ability" to command good and forbid evil. This ability was determined through ten aspects outlined in the law—number, goods, tools, money, feelings, strength, understanding, intelligence, knowledge, and choice—the absence of any of which would negate the responsibility associated with the precepts of the *hişba*.⁵³ Those who remained ignorant through poverty, circumstance, or mental acuity were excused from their responsibilities, but the counterbalance to this was the absolute necessity for those who *did* understand to act in accordance with the law and promote it to their utmost ability. Action thereby becomes an integral part of the Almohad doctrine, and social critique becomes the right of every devout and capable Muslim rather than a select class of learned jurists.

Aware of the difficulties in overcoming this threshold of ignorance—especially in a population like the Masmuda, many of whom were pastoral herders in the Atlas with little access to formalized religious education—Ibn Tumart was careful and deliberate in the application of his doctrine to his followers. He developed two versions of his *aqīda* to be memorized, known as *murshīdas* ("spiritual guides"): the first a series of Qur'anic references that accorded with the central Almohad tenets, and the second a more elaborate form phrased as a rational proof for those intellectually initiated. The former avoids the use of abstract terms and begins with a version of the *shahāda* (profession of faith, literally "testimony" or "witness") that positively affirms God's existence before embarking on a series

of negatively framed qualifications to illustrate the futility of trying to describe the divine. The first *murshīda* thus implicates its speaker in understanding without taxing the intellect with complex logical exercises. The latter *murshīda* appears as a rational proof of God's existence, followed by a series of human conditions implicated in the statement of God's existence, such as worship and devotion, littered with Qur'anic quotations.⁵⁴ Both emphasized Ibn Tumart's message of *tawhīd* and were composed as didactic works not only in Arabic but in the Berber language as well (likely a linguistic antecedent of the modern Tashelhiyt).⁵⁵ Described in the medieval Arabic sources as the *lisān al-gharbī* (the "western" or "occidental" language), this particular variant of the Berber language was specifically directed toward the Masmuda tribes. As has been noted by philologist Mohamed Meouak, the attention to this fact by Arab-speaking authors—the bilingualism of Ibn Tumart's preaching and writing—indicates his particular attention to the general population of the Maghrib al-Aqsa beyond the typical concerns of the sociopolitical elites.⁵⁶ Those authors who documented the life and lessons of Ibn Tumart, both under the Mu'minid dynasty and afterward, appear aware of the political potential of these populations in the success or downfall of dynastic ambitions, and of course no one was more explicit in the connection between political power and tribal relationships in the Maghrib than Ibn Khaldun, as discussed above. But Ibn Tumart appears to have been keenly aware of this in his own time, making a point of using both Arabic and *al-lisān al-gharbī* to spread his message, which had the effect not only of reaching a greater number of people but of cementing his core tenets of understanding and responsibility as well. Language would not be a barrier to entry in his philosophy.

Returning to the Maghrib after his sojourn abroad, Ibn Tumart became infamous for his strict adherence to his activist doctrine, frequently inspiring violent public disruptions to economic and civic livelihoods. His foundational social critique, however, appeared to garner him an avid following even as it became increasingly untenable for him to remain in urban areas. After a tense encounter with the Almoravid emir, Ibn Tumart sought refuge among his Masmuda tribesmen and returned to Igliz, where he established a *ribāṭ*, a type of (frequently rural) educational center that also served as a point of communication and exchange and was typically associated with a specific tribe.⁵⁷ While the village of Igliz was located in the Sous Valley on the southern side of the Atlas foothills, the *ribāṭ* occupied a high promontory overlooking the village. The promontory was inaccessible on three sides, and the site takes advantage of its natural topography in its fortifications. Recent excavations led by Jean-Pierre van Staëvel and Abdallah Fili have revealed the outlines of Ibn Tumart's *ribāṭ*, a walled enclosure housing a fortress (*qaṣba*) in its southeastern corner, surrounded by residential cells and an L-shaped courtyard, with a high wall on the northern side toward the access path.⁵⁸ Van Staëvel and Fili have also discovered two caves near the complex, potential loci for a pivotal moment in the Ibn Tumart hagiography—his declaration as the Mahdi in 1121. Sources differ on whether this declaration came from Ibn Tumart himself or from his followers, and perhaps predictably, those later sources embarking on a project of anti-Almohad propaganda tend to characterize the declaration as a deliberately crafted and cynical one.⁵⁹ The general narrative, however, is that after a period of spiritual retreat and reflection in a cave near Igliz, Ibn Tumart made a speech to his followers, enjoining them to command

good and forbid evil, for the time of the Mahdi was coming if one paid attention to the signs. These signs, whether deliberately planted or subconsciously recognized, represent the culmination of independent intellectual and social trends within the figure of Ibn Tumart, granting an immediacy and vibrancy to his nascent movement. By donning the mantle of Mahdism, his creed and social critique became imbued with an aura of prophetic certainty, turning his warnings and proscriptions into a structural framework for the future Mu'minid caliphate and administration. As shall be argued throughout this book, however, these critiques should not be categorized as purely religiously or politically motivated. They most assuredly were, to some degree, but they also reflected Ibn Tumart's perceptive ability to frame his critiques in the context of the social habits uniquely adapted to the Maghrib.

From Igliz, and in what has been understood as a calque on the Prophet Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina, Ibn Tumart gathered his followers and emigrated in 1124 to the village of Tinmal, located within the High Atlas a mere forty kilometers away from Marrakesh. This shift, from the place of his birth to that of his movement, is indicative of both practical concerns as well as symbolic ones, and the two are often intertwined in the same concurrent events. Tinmal held all the practical features of Igliz—easily defended in its location by a single mountain pass, still within Masmuda territory—but provided access to Marrakesh for the next stage of the Almohad mission: overtures to other tribes with grievances against the Almoravids and the eventual launch of jihad campaigns into the Haouz Basin. As part of this process, Ibn Tumart folded local practices of alliance and kinship into the development of an Almohad hierarchy, such that the distinctions between

tribal affiliations were subsumed under a system that operated on two simultaneous levels. The first and most apparent is the religious one, which drew upon the hierarchies established within Ibn Tumart's two *murshīdas* and distinguished between those who were new to the Almohad cause (and therefore spiritual neophytes) and those who had become the backbone of Ibn Tumart's community and were capable of communicating the message on his behalf. The second is more subtle. It justified the same hierarchies through a lens of intertribal trust and negotiation. The Masmuda would continue to form the core of the Almohad movement even as members of other tribes joined the cause, though that did not necessarily translate into homogeneous representation at the top. Ibn Tumart's inner circle, known as the Council of Ten, included representatives from a variety of tribal backgrounds, including 'Abd al-Mu'min, representing the Zenata, and Abu Hafs 'Umar ibn 'Ali (d. 1142), who belonged to the Almoravids' tribal confederation of the Sanhaja.⁶⁰ Allen Fromherz has argued that tribal *aṣabiyya* was intended to form the "building blocks" of a societal pyramid with the figure of the Mahdi, as a righteous guide to a just and pious community, at the top.⁶¹

This particular structure would be, perhaps predictably, inherently short-lived, as Ibn Tumart died in 1130 following a rout of the Almohad forces at the Battle of Buhayra. In the retreat to Tinmal, a wounded or ill Ibn Tumart gave a final sermon to his followers before embarking on a journey "that [no one] could make with [him]"; he withdrew into his house and was never seen again.⁶² Even his death was shaped into legend, framed as a *ghayba*, or period of occultation, that lasted between one and three years before 'Abd al-Mu'min assumed leadership of the Almohad community. But rather than collapsing entirely, the Almohad movement

regrouped under new leadership. Despite 'Abd al-Mu'min's non-Masmuda affiliation and lack of messianic charisma, the Almohads conquered Marrakesh, and the Almoravids, in 1147. The veneration of Ibn Tumart would become institutionalized under 'Abd al-Mu'min and his early successors, part of a program specifically geared toward maintaining Mu'minid legitimacy in the face of numerous challengers. But the central role of Ibn Tumart goes beyond the patronage of specific sites and ritual practices. The Mahdi's message and manner of social critique—of what was right, what was wrong, and how to communicate that to the people—were assimilated into the very structure of the Mu'minid imperial project.

Questions of identity, expression, and empire all find their answers within the capital city that both dynasties shared at Marrakesh. Their respective approaches to organizing and utilizing urban space reveal a distinctive shift from a more ad hoc approach under the Almoravids to a clear and delineated plan under the Mu'minids, a shift that is less about a developing understanding of urban potential than indicative of the social structure each dynasty sought to construct. The Almoravids, whose ethos of egalitarianism informed a court culture of accessibility and informality, found themselves on display in a way that highlighted fundamental differences encoded through the tribal practices of their Sanhaja (and specifically Lamtuna) elite. The urban stage cast an unflattering light on these differences, which ultimately led to a dissonance between the *aṣabiyya* of the Almoravids and their imperial ambitions. But the Mu'minids, who were perhaps wary of the paradoxical risk of setting a transhumant community within an urban model of authority, approached the project of Marrakesh with a subtle development

that blurred the lines between urban and rural. Moreover, they placed themselves—their public rituals and ceremonies—at the interstitial nexus of this liminal space, holding a particular interpretation of their dynastic identity in performative stasis. While this approach would prove relatively successful at Marrakesh, it would be difficult to execute elsewhere, revealing the limits of the Maghribi model as developed over the course of these two dynastic periods. Rooted in an urban vernacular that relied on landscape as a primary actor in the *genius loci* of the city, Marrakesh becomes inextricably tied to its locality.

This book traces the development of Marrakesh as an urban expression of power and identity over the course of the Almoravid and Almohad periods. The first chapter addresses Marrakesh's foundation and development under the Almoravid dynasty between 1040 and 1147. Although little remains of the Almoravid-era city, archaeological and historical evidence points toward an urban morphology that was extemporaneous and idiosyncratic—its shifting morphology highlighting the social paradox the Almoravids found themselves in as rulers in Marrakesh. Inherited from their Lamtuna brethren, social traditions practiced by the Almoravids—like the male face veil (*lithām*) and the public role of elite women—were distinct from the rest of the North African tribes and Arabic-speaking communities. These markers of social difference set the ruling dynasty at odds with their own egalitarian principles. Drawing upon the political philosophy of medieval Islamic writers like al-Farabi (d. 950) and Ibn Bajja, who likened the well-being of a city to a body and the ruler to its soul, I demonstrate that this uneasy relationship between the rulers and the ruled finds expression in the shape of the Almoravid city. At Marrakesh, the Almoravids created an enclosed city that showcased both their easy

accessibility and the tribal differences that set them apart from the rest of the public. The urban core was originally unwallled, an unusual decision that highlights the idiosyncratic nature of Marrakesh's early form, which remained this way until the imminent threat posed by the Almohads necessitated the construction of urban fortifications. This process coincided with the change between the two congregational mosques—first a mud-brick structure known as the Mosque of the Earthen Minaret (Masjid al Sawma'at al-Tub) that was later replaced by a more lavish structure known as the Mosque of the Fountain (Masjid al-Siqaya). More than just an elaboration of an existing structure, this new mosque introduced an alternate direction of prayer (*qibla*), creating two perpendicular axes whose morphology can be determined from the city's gates. The new walls also enclosed the stone fortress (*qaṣr al-hajar*) that served as the Almoravid court palace, located on the southwestern fringes of the city, creating a bipolar nexus of authority between the city's religious center and its political one. These urbanistic idiosyncrasies undermined the social contract that characterized relationships of authority in the medieval Maghrib, such that the Almoravids' authority ultimately struggled to resonate within their own capital city.

The failures of the Almoravid city were seized upon by contemporary sources, including the Almohad founder, Ibn Tumart. The second chapter thus discusses the contrasting Almohad approach to the city, conceived as a direct and calculated response to criticisms of the Almoravid dynasty. Whereas the Almoravid city sought to establish the dynasty as first among equals, the Almohad approach to urban planning employed a strict spatial hierarchy that set the figure of the ruler at a remove from the activity of the general populace. Working from a hierarchical

political structure based on the tribal networks between the various Masmuda clans, the Almohads sponsored the construction of a series of enclosed open-air spaces, taking advantage of the landscape's natural topography and its rise toward the Atlas foothills in the south. Each of these spaces was designed to frame the figure of the Almohad caliph in the guise of a ruler only tangentially connected to the city itself, occupying a liminal space in which the caliph's presence was consistently associated with practices that recalled a recent Masmuda past. Through ritual programs associated with Berber practices and temporary architecture within these walled spaces, the Almohad caliph appeared in stasis, continually emerging from the Atlas Mountains as the righteous liberator of the city without abandoning the markers of a seminomadic existence that characterized his tribal society.

This urban and ceremonial framework accomplished two aims within the Almohad imperial self-conception. First, it established a strict structural hierarchy within the city, setting the caliph at a remove from the general public except in those instances where his surroundings confirmed his authority and his origins. Integrating a system of ritual performance within those spaces that recalled the dynasty's Masmuda heritage through the manipulation of the landscape, the Almohad caliph consistently maintained the moral authority necessary within the social contract of power in the medieval Maghrib. Second, this hierarchy curbed the corrupting power of cities that would be later theorized in Ibn Khaldun's historiographical model. The Almohad additions to the city—essentially periurban spaces tangential to the walled *madīna* itself—indicate an anxiety over abandoning their tribal origins as transhumant communities. In Ibn Khaldun's model, it is harsh living in a wild environment that breeds

the qualities essential for strong leadership—an atmosphere absent in the decadence of urban life. The Almohads understood these risks and attempted to respond to them by utilizing their urban model to make calculated visual and structural connections to their ancestral homeland in the Atlas Mountains, creating a liminal space in which they both participated in urban life and yet were distinct from it.

The third chapter explores the Almohad urban model as it was applied to the two other major cities in the Almohad empire, Seville and Rabat. The former served as the empire's capital on the Iberian Peninsula, where it already had a reputation as a wealthy agricultural and administrative center by the time of the Almohads' arrival. The construction of a new congregational mosque and palace complex, and renovations of the walls and waterworks, was standard practice under the Mu'minid dynasty. The mosque was built toward the center of urban activity, while the palace was set at a remove from the general population, occupying the fringes of the walled city itself. Yet while the structure and location of these civic and imperial projects recall the plan at Marrakesh, in Seville, they struggle to create the same clarity of hierarchy in a densely packed, preexisting urban settlement. At Rabat, this was not a problem. A new city built by the Almohads as a launching point for campaigns across the Strait of Gibraltar, Rabat featured a fortified castle (*qaṣba*) and congregational mosque constructed along the north-south axis along the left bank of the Bou Regreg River. Each of these monuments stood at the two respective highest points along the river, with a walled *madīna* situated in the slight depression between them. At Rabat a clear manipulation of the topography and the development of an urban hierarchy emerge, and yet without the resonance of the Atlas Mountains to frame Almohad imperial

rituals, the city fails to connect to the Almohads' social manipulation of ethnic ties and politics. Rabat was abandoned soon after the dynasty's fall. Neither Seville nor Rabat possessed all of the requirements for executing a city plan that relied upon subtle manipulations of topography and morphology for the expression of imperial authority and identity, two concepts interwoven in the Mu'minid ethos. As such, neither city proved to be as politically and ideologically powerful within the Mu'minid urban program, throwing into sharp contrast the indelible links between landscape, authority, and identity for the dynasty. The limited effectiveness of this model, however, further underscores the sophistication and ingenuity demonstrated at Marrakesh itself.