

Hostile Urbanism: Three Case Studies from the Medieval Maghrib

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Abstract: This paper takes three case studies from the medieval Maghrib –Sijilmasa, Marrakesh, and Rabat – as examples of the way control of the extramural landscape significantly influenced expressions of dynastic identity at the urban level. These identities, whether they were in sync with or dissonant to the local communities, were reflective of shifting attitudes towards urban settlement over the course of the twelfth century. They blurred the traditional dichotomy between urban and rural, a dynamic enacted through the hydraulic efforts of the Almoravids and Almohads as they developed their imperial personas.

Keywords: Urbanism, Extramural, Almoravid, Almohad, Maghrib, Hydraulic, Identity.

The role of walled spaces in defining the concept of the medieval *madīna* cannot be underestimated, and yet and their conceptual duality is often disregarded in discussions of how such spaces functioned. Though walls serve an important legal function in defining the parameters of a space, thereby creating the physical boundaries of the framework governing patterns of daily life, they frequently act as permeable membranes—an active passageway for people, goods, and more intangible modes of communication. What is more, walls can also be understood as the line at which a city begins (taking the counternarrative of walls as a constrictive boundary), a nexus of resources directed towards walled spaces that broadens urban relationships.

This paper explores how the medieval metropolises of Sijilmassa, Marrakesh, and Rabat reflect the extramural relationships of the ruling elite. I will argue that while wall systems were a common occurrence and even integral part of creating the bounded space of the *madīna*, they should be understood as flexible boundaries, at times constrictive while at others generative. Instead, we should understand the medieval city, particularly in the Islamic west, as reliant upon a complex series of relationships with the suburban and rural communities surrounding those cities. This is particularly evident when looking at the creation and maintenance of long-distance irrigation channels, which often determined the viability of long-term urban settlement and growth. Understood through the lens of complex tribal negotiations between the ruling elite of each dynasty and the local populations, it is clear that hydraulic infrastructure relied upon strong connections between the two. In an urban landscape where the elite and local communities are mutually supportive, these irrigation networks can rely

on extramural communities for their management and maintenance, as can be seen in Midrarid Sijilmassa. However, when those relationships broke down, as in Almohad Rabat, the walled city takes a hostile approach to its environment, fortifying access to its water resources. Marrakesh presents us with a case study in transition, reflecting the shift from one dynasty to another, and thereby from a hostile local relationship to a more stabilized one. Thus, wall systems and hydraulic works form an integrated network that extends through and beyond the physical boundaries of the city, redefining our notion of how the *madīna* functioned on a broader scale. Each space, through walled, creates a different microcosm that blurs the traditional dichotomy between urban and rural, the built environment and the natural one.

Sijilmassa

I begin with an examination of Sijilmassa, that walled city on the edge of the Sahara that marked the entry point of desert trading passages into the Maghrib and Ifriqiya. Though founded by neither the Almoravids nor the Almohads, I begin here for two reasons: firstly, because ninth-century Sijilmassa represents a similar scale and challenge to water management as the later cities of Marrakesh and Rabat, and secondly, this period established an essential urban infrastructure that fundamentally altered Sijilmassa's relationship to the surrounding Tafilalt oasis. Founded in 757-8, Sijilmassa occupied an interstitial landscape that posed numerous challenges to urban survival. Situated between the southern slopes of the Atlas Mountains and along the northern fringes of the Sahara desert, the new settlement relied on its position within the Tafilalt oasis to alleviate the extremes of the environment. The Tafilalt was formed as the alluvial basin between two rivers fed from Atlas snow runoff, the Wādī Zīz and the Wādī Gherīs, which appear to have remained consistent throughout the year, enough that they formed reliable riverbeds regardless of the season.¹ A community coalesced around the Kharijite figure of Abū al-Qāsim Samghū ibn Wāsūl al-Miknāsī (d. 785), a preacher and shepherd who was known to graze his flocks in the Tafilalt according to geographer and historian al-Bakrī (d. 1094), though this settlement likely remained quite small as dictated by the arable land of the plain.² Its location along various trans-Saharan trade routes sustained Sijilmassa's economic livelihood, but it was not until the ninth century that the city experienced a substantial architectural and infrastructural investment.

As has been deftly demonstrated by Chloé Capel, Sijilmassa experienced a significant urban shift under the reign of Abū al-Mustanṣir al-Yasa' (d. 824),

1. Jean Margat, *Mémoire Explicatif de la Carte Hydrogéologique au 1/50,000 de la plaine du Tafilalt* (Rabat: Éditions du Service Géologique du Maroc, 1962), 25, 82.

2. Al-Bakrī, *Description de l'Afrique Septentrionale*, ed. by W. M. de Slane (Alger: Jourdan, 1911), Arabic text 148.

the second son of Abū al-Qāsim Samghū.³ Medieval authors, al-Bakrī chief among them, describe al-Yasa‘’s reign with tones of authoritarianism and warmongering, characterized by raids into the Dra’ā valley and the expansion of Sijilmassa’s territory.⁴ Along with this expansion came the need for greater fortification, and al-Yasa‘ responded not by enclosing the existing settlement, but by shifting the nucleus of the city entirely into a more easily defensible position that simultaneously allowed for greater architectural and urban planning. Capel’s careful semantic analysis of al-Bakri’s language describing this undertaking, confirmed by archaeological and geological evidence, points to the construction of a monumental wall system as part of al-Yasa‘’s declaration of sovereignty.⁵ The precise dimensions of the ninth-century enclosure have yet to be excavated, but the Morocco-American Project at Sijilmassa (MAPS) has uncovered 300m of wall at the western edge of the site, featuring remnants of a guard tower and built according to al-Bakrī’s description of a stone foundation topped with pisé.⁶ The site itself sits upon a natural hillock, standing above the floodplain and overlooking the Wādī Zīz to the east. The complex was large enough to necessitate twelve gates, of which eight were covered in iron and four of which have recorded names: Bāb al-Qablī, Bāb al-Gharbī, Bāb Ghadīr al-Jazzārīn, and Bāb Mawqif Znāta. The names of these gates are not incidental, as shall be discussed below.

Al-Yasa‘’s “shifting” of the city had two major implications: firstly, for the organization and assignation of Sijilmassan territory amongst the tribes of the Tafilelt, and secondly, for the management of the Wādī Zīz. With regards to this first, al-Bakrī writes that once the walls were completed, around 814-815, al-Yasa‘ “betook himself unto the city and then divided it amongst the tribes.”⁷ This marks the cohesion of a variety of smaller settlements scattered throughout the Tafilelt—primarily rural, pastoral, and sedentary—into the symbolically powerful framework of a walled city under Kharijite Midrarid authority, though it notably does not erase the tribal complexity of the region. Instead, al-Yasa‘’s Sijilmassa is divided up into quarters designated for the occupation of different

3. It should be acknowledged here that there is some ambiguity about the precise reign of al-Yasa‘ between al-Bakrī, Ibn Khaldūn, and Ibn ‘Idhārī, with alternative dates given as late as sixty years later. This is likely in reference to the above’s son, who died in 909. By logical conclusion, an early ninth-century death date for the earlier al-Yasa‘ seems most likely. See Charles Pellat, “Midrār,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. by P. Bearman, et. al., consulted online on 16 May 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5181.

4. Paul M. Love Jr., “The Sufris of Sijilmasa: toward a History of the Midrarids,” *Journal of North African Studies* 15 (2) (2010): 180.

5. Chloé Capel, “Sijilmassa in the Footsteps of the Aghlabids: The Hypothesis of a Ninth-Century New Royal City in Tafilelt Plain (Morocco),” in *The Aghlabids and their Neighbors: Art and Material Culture in 9th Century North Africa*, ed. Glaire Anderson, Corisande Fenwick, Mariam Rosser-Owen, and Sihem Lamine (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 536.

6. Ronald A. Messier and James A. Miller, *The Last Civilized Place: Sijilmasa and its Saharan Destiny* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 74.

7. Love, “Sufris of Sijilmasa,” 179.

tribal groups, the organization of which is hinted at in the names of the known city gates. In particular, the Bāb al-Qablī (“the Northern Gate”) and the Bāb Mawqif Znāta (“the gate at the place of the Znāta”) make reference to the internal organization of Sijilmassa’s tribal districts. Utilizing the spatial freedom afforded by shifting Sijilmassa’s nexus of political and social life, al-Yasa‘ effectively marks Sijilmassa as part of an independent principality (likely in response to the Idrisid threat), complete with a recognizable representation of the Tafilelt’s tribal composition.⁸

The second implication of Sijilmassa’s relocation and expansion is the rerouting of the Wādī Zīz to run flush against the newly established wall systems, a notable feat of engineering that represents one of the earliest examples of agrarian hydraulic infrastructure in the medieval Maghrib, (see fig. 1).⁹ Despite al-Yasa‘’s tense relationship with the nearby Draa Valley, the apparent success of the Zīz canal flies in the face of Wittfogel’s model that large-scale civic projects can only be accomplished through strong centralized authority. Medieval authors commented on the canal’s value to the surrounding plain, with Ibn Hawqal going so far as to compare its vitality and regularity to that of the Nile.¹⁰ That very reliability, so integral to an arid agricultural framework, was capable of sustaining Sijilmassa’s ninth-century expansion and continued to be supported with continual renovation throughout the medieval era. Curiously enough, the actual construction of the canal goes unremarked upon in the Arabic sources; the ninth-century dating is, instead, the result of detailed geological and archaeological evidence. But by integrating the Zīz into the new urban center, al-Yasa‘ simultaneously appropriated its vital qualities for his emergent dynastic ambitions. The royal compound would have overlooked the Zīz from its prominent situation atop this shallow hillside, presenting the appearance of a symbiotic correlation between the Midrarid dynasty and the Tafilelt’s growing prosperity.

What Sijilmassa’s new urban phase indicates is that there is a complicated and perhaps even contradictory relationship in how we understand the interlocking networks of “city” and “countryside.” This concept in and of itself is well-established in the debate over central place theory, but its implications for studying the history of urbanism within the medieval Maghrib must be emphasized again in light of the uneven literary landscape and complex questions of social identity.¹¹ The development of sophisticated hydraulic engineering such

8. Capel, “Sijilmassa in the Footsteps of the Aghlabids,” 538.

9. See Chloé Capel, “Une grande hydraulique saharienne à l’époque médiévale: l’oued Ziz et Sijilmassa (Maroc),” *Mélanges de la Casa Velázquez* 46 (1) (2016): 139-65.

10. Capel, “Une grande hydraulique,” 152.

11. For the seminal text on the “central place” model, see Walter Christaller, *Central Places in Southern Germany*, trans. Carlisle Whiteford Baskin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966). On the question of social identity and “Berberness” in the medieval Maghrib, see Ramzi Rouighi’s *Inventing the Berbers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

as the canalization of the *Zīz* relies upon a degree of complicit labor, and in the ninth-century Tafilelt, it is unlikely that that labor would have been imported given the limited extent of Midrarid authority. But that does not make al-Yasa's political ambitions any less noteworthy, nor does it diminish the significance of incorporating a complex network of sectarian politics into the urban organization of Sijilmassa. The new, walled version of Sijilmassa certainly grants al-Yasa a politically-expedient optical advantage over this territory, but the entire project is founded upon functional relationships that willingly sustain the supporting infrastructure, typified by the *Zīz* canal. Acknowledging the preexisting models of local authority, al-Yasa monumentalizes them on the urban scale, writ large through the interplay of wall and water.¹² The profound implications of this relationship may have served as a model for the later, larger imperial endeavors of Maghribi dynasties like the Almohads, whose tribal associations can be seen through their relationship to the suburban landscape.

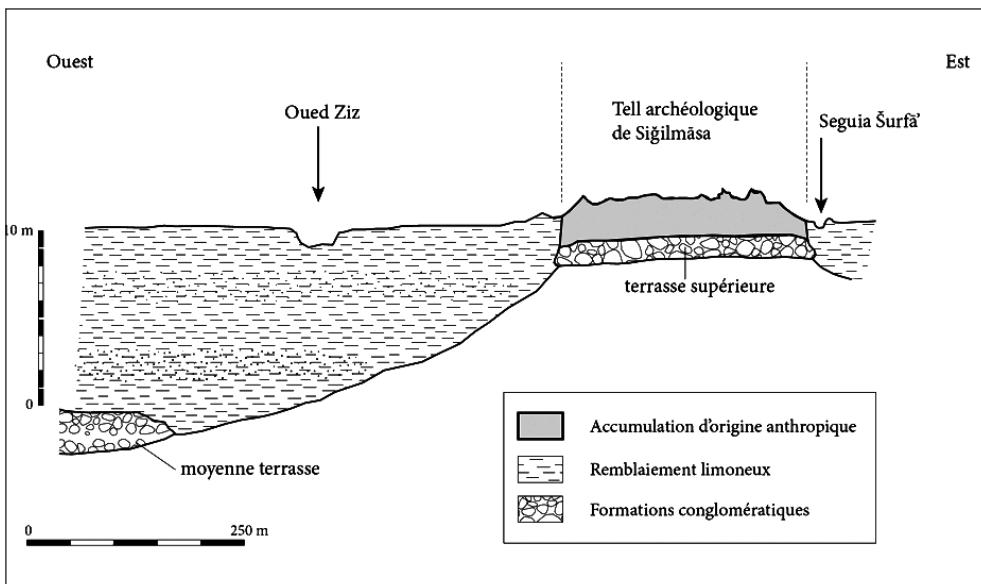


Fig. 1: Chloé Capel, “Une grande hydraulique saharienne à l'époque médiévale: l'oued Ziz et Sijilmassa (Maroc),” *Mélanges de la Casa Velázquez* 46 (1) (2016): fig. 2.

Marrakesh

When Marrakesh was founded in 1062, the city was little more than an exaggerated campsite, populated by tents and surrounded by temporary fortifications. This was in keeping with the traditions of the Lamtūna tribe, a subsidiary of the larger Ṣanhāja that formed the Almoravid elite, who were primarily nomadic in habit. The city had been constructed as a strategic link between the Ṣanhāja homeland in the pre-Saharan and Fez, the gateway into

12. Capel, “Sijilmassa in the Footsteps of the Aghlabids,” 541.

central Morocco which had until then been under the control of an opposing tribal group. Yet by alienating themselves from their tribal power base, the nascent Almoravids were forced to fight on two fronts, distracted by both insurrection in the south as well as the complex negotiations of consolidating political power amongst the various tribes. This meant that the city's earliest built structures were constructed not by the Almoravid elite, but by the Maṣmūda, the same tribe that would eventually form the Almohad base and who maintained sedentary habits in the Atlas that they brought with them when they initially came to Marrakesh as Almoravid vassals. The combination of temporary and vernacular mud-brick architecture created, as Ronald Messier has described it, "a curious juxtaposition of the semi-sedentary becoming nomadic and the semi-nomadic becoming sedentary."¹³ It was precisely this shift from nomadic to sedentary under the Almoravids that contributed to Ibn Tūmart's criticisms of the dynasty as he gathered together his Almohad followers. After having been arrested for inciting public unrest and hauled in front of the Almoravid emir to answer for his crimes, Ibn Tūmart accused him of having allowed evil into this domain through innovation – *bid'a* – with wine being sold openly and pigs walking freely about the city.¹⁴ The emir, rendered speechless in the face of such allegations, exiled Ibn Tūmart from the city, though defiant as ever, Ibn Tūmart immediately set up shop in a cemetery outside the city walls, bragging to the authorities, "I am not in the region of Marrakesh, but among the dead."¹⁵ What I wish to emphasize here is how abhorrent the notion of innovation is under Ibn Tūmart's philosophy, and how in this context, a move towards sedentary urbanism can be viewed as an innovation that abandoned those very principles upon which the Almoravids had gained their power. Not so for the Maṣmūda and the nascent Almohad movement, whose tradition of built architecture was part of their cultural habit and therefore could transition more easily into an urbanized setting. Additionally, it is worth noting here that the presence of the city walls as boundary markers, as the signifiers of the transition from urban to rural, was an important one for Ibn Tūmart and his followers, and one whose significance would be taken advantage of upon 'Abd al-Mu'min's rise to power.

By 1147, 'Abd al-Mu'min had not only secured his role as Almohad leader, but more importantly, had focused the movement towards defeating their Almoravid rivals, culminating with the conquest of Marrakesh. Almost immediately he began on a project of urban reorientation, shifting the locus of

13. Ronald Messier, "Rethinking the Almoravids, Rethinking Ibn Khaldun," *The Journal of North African Studies* 6 (1) (2001): 62.

14. Al-Baydhaq, Abū Bakr ibn 'Alī al-Šanhājī, *Tārīkh al-Muwahhidīn li-Abī Bakr ibn 'Alī al-Šanhājī al-mukannā bi-l-Baydhaq. Documents inédits d'histoire almohade, fragments manuscrits du legajo 1919 du fonds arabe de l'Escurial*, trans. Évariste Levi-Provençal (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1928), 64-5.

15. Al-Baydhaq, *Kitāb Akhbār al-Mahdī Ibn Tūmart wa bidāyat dawlat al-muwahhidīn* (Ar-ribāṭ: Dār al-Manṣūr, 1971), 39.

religious and political authority, which were inextricably linked, toward a highly mediated and yet decidedly equivocal urban form. This shift was initiated with the construction of the Kutubiyya Mosque, the primary extant example of Almohad architecture, located at the edge of the medieval city and over the remnants of the previous Almoravid palace. I have written elsewhere about the curious history of the Kutubiyya's construction, which would determine the precise orientation of its qibla (direction of prayer) through astronomical methods, but its alignment would have echoing repercussions for the rest of 'Abd al-Mu'min's urban program.¹⁶



Fig. 2: Aerial view of the reservoir in the Agdal garden, courtesy of Mohammed El Faïz.

Along this axis, 'Abd al-Mu'min sponsored the construction of a massive garden complex south of the city known as the Agdal. Unlike a smaller garden built to the west of the palace, which appears to have been a private garden for the caliph, the Agdal served a number of functions that directly impacted the urban public. Built in 1157, the Agdal was a massive rectangular enclosure, only slightly smaller than the walled city itself, (see fig. 2). The term *agdāl* comes not from Arabic, but rather from a dialect of Tamazight, an Afroasiatic language particular to the Atlas region. Meaning a "meadow enclosed by a stone wall," the term is a technical one that implies a space used for seasonal herding, meant to regulate resource consumption and to preserve a plot of land for grazing in the

16. See Abbey Stockstill, "A Tale of Two Mosques: Marrakesh's Masjid al-Jami' al-Kutubiyya," *Mugarnas* 35 (2018): 65-82.

late summer when resources were at their scarcest.¹⁷ The concept was developed amongst Maṣmūda herdsman in the Atlas who strictly regulated access to and the use of *agdāl* enclosures via intertribal councils. Since herding patterns often crossed other tribal territories, these councils may also have functioned as de facto political alliances.¹⁸ To create the impression of a verdant green landscape in an arid basin that received little annual rainfall, a series of canals were developed to divert snow and rain runoff from the Atlas streams into the basin. These canals then fed into a large pool at the southern end of the complex that served to irrigate the surrounding gardens as well as provide drinking water for the entire city. The scope of such a project would not have been possible without the Almohads' political control of the mountain terrain, as well as the Maṣmūda's familiarity with the practice of consolidating water resources on a large scale.¹⁹

Rabat

By the time ‘Abd al-Mu’min and the Almohad forces arrived in the region in 1146, Salé was unresisting, possibly due to their connection with the Barghwāṭa, who were subsidiaries of the same Maṣmūda tribe as the bulk of Almohad forces. Notably, the only stipulation from Almohad forces was that Salé demolish their existing ramparts, as proof of their submission to Almohad authority.²⁰ After a relatively quick capitulation, ‘Abd al-Mu’min then turned back to Marrakesh for the final assault on the remnants of the Almoravids, but he returned to Rabat soon after being declared caliph in 1150. It was from here, at the *ribāṭ* across from Salé, that ‘Abd al-Mu’min gathered his forces together in order to launch new campaigns to al-Andalus, whose provinces were proving rather contentious for the new caliph and his nascent empire. It is likely at this time, too, that ‘Abd al-Mu’min realized the potential of the site as a secondary residence or capital at the intersection of the Maghrib and al-Andalus, both for military campaigns as well as diplomatic and political meetings. He almost immediately set about renovating the *ribāṭ* and turning into a more permanent dwelling as a fortified palace, as well as congregational mosque and new reservoirs designed to bring water in from the ‘Ayn Ghbūla springs nearly ten miles away.²¹ In this midst of all this construction, ‘Abd al-Mu’min invited the intellectual, literary, and political elites from al-Andalus who had recently pledged their allegiance to the

17. Mohammad El Faïz, “The Garden Strategy of the Almohad Sultans and Their Successors (1157–1900),” in *Middle East Garden Traditions: Unity and Diversity*, ed. Michael Conan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 95.

18. Pablo Domínguez Gregorio, “Vers l’éco-anthropologie. Une approche multidisciplinaire de l’agdal pastoral du Yagour (haut atlas de Marrakech)” (PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2011).

19. Paul Pascon, *Le Haouz de Marrakech* (Rabat-Tanger: Éditions marocaines et internationales, 1977).

20. Mission Scientifique du Maroc, *Villes et tribus du Maroc. Rabat et sa région: documents et renseignements* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1920), 12.

21. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 54.

Almohad cause to Salé. Referred to by the sources as *thuwwār*, or rebels, it is clear that there was a certain tension between ‘Abd al-Mu’min and his Andalusi allies, perhaps reflective of Andalusi anxieties about Almohad religious fervor and retribution.²² Here they formally pledged the submission of their lands and titles to ‘Abd al-Mu’min, and he in turn granted them clemency and incorporated them into the wider network of Almohad elite, reconfirming their positions in Andalusi society as he did so. In a theatrical bit of staging, ‘Abd al-Mu’min met with these notables in the courtyard of the former residence of the Banū ‘Ashara, in full view of massive construction site on the opposite bank.²³ At the juncture of these bodies of water, ‘Abd al-Mu’min had erected the walls of the *qasba*, which form an irregular pentagon stretching from the northeast to the southwest. Not all of what remains can be reliably dated to the twelfth century, but much of the restorations that do remain extant are evidently built upon twelfth century foundations. This is particularly true for the northwest face of the wall which runs along the coastal side of the *qasba*, built directly on top of rock face and which would have received substantially more weathering from ocean winds and tidal erosion. The other portion of the *qasba* that postdates the Almohad era is the quarter that now encloses the Andalusi Garden and the Museum of the Oudayas, which appears to have been an extension of the medieval walls under Sidi Muhammad ben Abdallah in the middle of the eighteenth century. That leaves us with a twelfth-century enclosure measuring roughly 166 meters on the coastal side, 140 meters on the southwest inland side, and a wall measuring 162 meters running diagonally from the northeast towards the southwest, interrupted by the garden at one end and an eighteenth-century platform known as the Semaphore at the other. Because of these later interventions, it is difficult to precisely gauge ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s *ribāt*, but we can estimate that the mid-twelfth-century *Ribāt al-Fath* enclosed roughly 2.5 acres of rocky terrain.

Most notably, ‘Abd al-Mu’min was responsible for constructing a series of aqueducts that brought potable fresh water from the springs of ‘Ayn Ghbūla, nineteen kilometers to the southwest of present-day Rabat. The twelfth-century canal is no longer extant, having been replaced by an eighteenth-century version in order to supplement Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh’s new palace situated just outside the Almohad-era city walls. However, certain inferences about ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s canal can be made, based on the archaeological, geographic, and historical evidence. Firstly, the canal followed the northeast slope from ‘Ayn Ghbūla, and turned northwest to enter the city along what is now the Avenue Chellah.²⁴ This journey was both shorter and not as steep as the series of

22. Amira Bennison, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 77.

23. Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ‘Alī, vol. 4 (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2009), 122–3.

24. Jacques Caillé, *La Ville de Rabat jusqu’au Protectorat Français*, vol. 1 (Paris: Publications de l’Institut des Hautes Etudes marocaines, 1949), 542.

kheṭtaras that brought water into Marrakesh; only two-thirds as long as its more southern cousin, the ‘Ayn Ghbūla system is also not nearly as steep. The Arabic sources – namely the *Rawḍ al-Qirtāṣ* and an-Nāṣirī’s nineteenth-century *Kitāb al-Istiqlāṣ* – only mention that ‘Abd al-Mu’min was responsible for bringing water from ‘Ayn Ghbūla into the city, neglecting any details as to its construction or manner of shifting water. Meanwhile, more modern sources simply refer to the system as aqueducts, conflating them with the Roman-era systems of water management, none of which appear in Moroccan archaeological contexts. It is more accurate and likely to say that the system was similar to that of the *seguias*, the aboveground channels that more typically diverted rain runoff. Based on the comparable evidence at Marrakesh, we know that the channels were used over distances at least as long as the 19 kilometers between ‘Ayn Ghbūla and Rabat.

Aboveground water channels like the *seguias* necessitated proper stewardship and management of the surrounding territory. At Marrakesh, this was accomplished through the Mu’minid court’s itinerant schedule through the Atlas and the reliable network of Maṣmūda clans. In the plains around Rabat, protection comes in the form of fortification. According to a 1933 survey by Raymond Thouvenot, a village-located seventeen kilometers southwest of Rabat and colloquially known in the twentieth century as Dchira-housed the ruins of a fortress that overlooked the water channels coming from ‘Ayn Ghbūla. Located on the northern fringes of the village on top of a hillock, the fortress remains command the view over the rolling countryside outside Rabat. To the east, inland, views look out over a eucalyptus grove that housed a local market, while to the west, one has a clear view to the Atlantic. The southern side of the fortress is protected by a sharp rise in the topography towards the springs, while the northern view towards Rabat is somewhat obscured by the rolling hills. Though not mentioned in any of the historical texts (to this author’s knowledge), Thouvenot convincingly dates the structure to the Almohad era based on the site’s construction materials and methods. The tell-tale reddish limestone and mortar is present, as are the large quantities of rubble that serve as infill, and Thouvenot goes even further, noting that the absence of concrete in the exterior walls is typical of Almohad constructions from ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s reign.²⁵

The fortress is utilitarian in plan with only two entrances in the outer wall, one on the east side and another on the western side. Both gates appear to have been guarded; the western gate possessed the foundations of a tower over the entrance, while the eastern gate’s lateral walls featured a tower to either side, (see fig. 3). The exterior walls themselves formed a roughly rectangular enclosure, measuring 286.5m by 143m, with the walls reinforced with a series of sixteen solid tower blocks, four on both of the longer sides, two on each shorter side,

25. Raymond Thouvenot, “Une forteresse almohade près de Rabat, Dchira,” *Hespéris* 17 (3) (1933): 62.

and one tower at each corner. Within the fortress, isolated series of buildings form one- or two-room structures, and though few remains can guide us to their purpose, Thouvenot suggests that they were housing for soldiers or small shops. There is also evidence of grain silos and potters' ovens, creating the impression of a relatively self-sufficient settlement. Further emphasizing this impression is the presence of a small mosque along the interior of the fortress' northern wall. It is clearly a provincial mosque, measuring only 10.35m by 6.15m along the exterior faces, and forms a singular prayer hall with a small south-facing mihrab axially positioned across from the entrance. A small tower platform served as the mosque's minaret, positioned at the northeast corner, while along the southern face of the mosque, at the eastern corner, stood a rectangular enclosure that seems to have served as a sort of cistern or fountain.

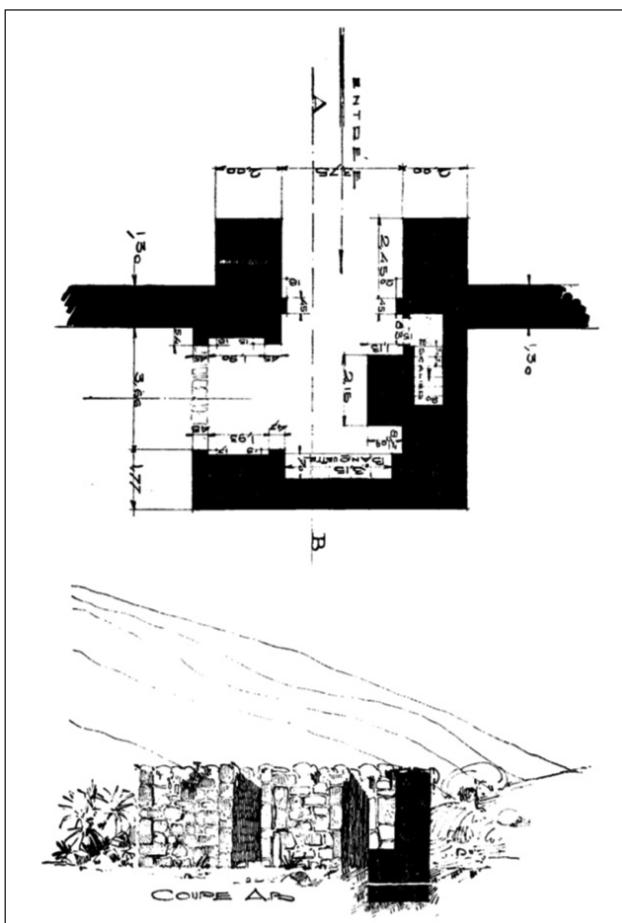


Fig. 3: Thouvenot, "Une forteresse almohade," fig. 5.

The presence of such a fortress in the Rabat-Salé region tells us a number of things about the Mu'minid control over the area. Chiefly, it implies the *need* for protection of the nearby water source, as a guarantee that much-needed fresh water would actually reach Rabat. At Marrakesh, the Mu'minids' connection to their Maṣmūda brethren and their Atlas homeland was immediately present in

the landscape. The mountains dominated the Marrakesh horizon, and the annual progress through the Atlas to Tinmal ensured that the political and social ties necessary for extra-urban civic projects remained strong. The Mu'minid attitude towards Rabat, by contrast, reveals an anxiety and decidedly more aggressive approach to water management. A military outpost that appears strategically placed to protect the *seguias* reflects the Mu'minids more tenuous relationship with the region, where the inter- and intra-tribal politics were less reliable. Despite the local Barghwāṭa's subscription to the Maṣmūda clan, their Kharijite history and beliefs put them at odds with the unitarian doctrine of the Almohad faith, a requirement for subscription into the Mu'minid elite in the empire's early stages.

Conclusion

These case studies – one from the ninth-century precedent of Midrarid Sijilmassa, and the two Almohad examples of contrasting approaches to Marrakesh and Rabat – reveal the potential of using archaeological, architectural, and urban evidence to address the subtle and complex issues of sectarian power dynamics in the medieval Maghrib. Al-Yasa'a's relocation and expansion of Sijilmassa reflects the coalescence of a preexisting political authority within the ninth-century Tafilalt, transformed from the theoretical into the physical through the canalization of the Wādī Zīz. As Capel and others have demonstrated, by approaching historical questions of sectarian politics and statecraft with archaeological and architectural evidence to answer those questions, historians of the medieval Maghrib can “escape the shackles of the thought of the state,” that singly-voiced narrative that in this context is often external to the subject at hand.²⁶ This is all the more imperative when examining a dynasty like the Almohads, and in particular the changes and transitions enacted as part of the development of the Mu'minid state. 'Abd al-Mu'min's initial capital at Marrakesh had been demarcated by his Almoravid predecessors, but with the expansion of the Agdal toward the south, the urban landscape becomes indelibly linked to the Almohads' Maṣmūda heritage. This becomes all the clearer in the comparison made with Rabat, where the extramural hydraulic projects reflect a more contentious relationship with the local Barghwāṭa.

The historical sources – primarily either state – sponsored or else written centuries after the fact and with strong presentist biases of their own- may acknowledge the powerful political currents of sectarian identities, but rarely do they substantiate how those systems meaningfully participate in the structures of power. The notion of '*aṣabiyya*' has provisionally provided the theoretical underpinnings of this relationship, but the reliance on Ibn Khaldun's perspective in assessing this model is inherently limited and perhaps over-determinative in

26. Chloé Capel, “At the Dawn of Sijilmasa: New Historical Focus on the Process of Emergence of a Saharan State and a Caravan City,” in *Urbanisation and State Formation in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond*, ed. Martin Sherry and David J. Mattingly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 595.

scope.²⁷ This is where the interdisciplinary model of urban history can supplement the subject, but only if scholars look beyond the traditional boundaries of what makes a city a city, most concretely outlined by its wall systems. The extramural environment and the landscape, both archaeologically and architecturally, are as much a part of the medieval *madīna* as what has been inscribed within those walls, made possible through the blurred boundaries between urban and rural.

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27. Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 48.

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العنوان: العمران العدائي: دراسة ثلاث حالات من المغرب الوسيط

ملخص: تتناول هذه المقالة ثلاثة حالات من المغرب في العصر الوسيط - سجلها سة ومراسخ والرباط - كأمثلة للوقوف على مدى تأثير مراقبة الفضاء خارج الأسوار، في تعابير الهوية الحضرية للسلالة الحاكمة. وتحيل هذه الهويات المنسجمة أو المتنافرة مع الجماعات المحلية، على تغير في الموقف من الاستيغاثان الحضري خلال القرن الثاني عشر. لقد قدمت بعثة الشائبة التقليدية القائمة بين الحضري والبدوي، وهي دينامية أرساها المرابطون والموحدون بفعل جهودهم الهيكلية، وإبان - سعيهم لتأسيس معالم إمبراطوريتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعمير، ما وراء الأسوار، المرابطون، الموحدون، المغارب، الهميدروليكية، الهوية.

Titre: Urbanisme hostile: Trois études de cas du Maroc médiéval

Résumé: Cet article prend trois études de cas du Maghreb médiéval – Sijilmasa, Marrakech et Rabat – comme exemples de la manière dont le contrôle du paysage *extra-muros* a influencé de manière significative les expressions de l'identité dynastique au niveau urbain. Ces identités, qu'elles soient synchronisées ou discordantes avec les communautés locales, reflétaient un changement d'attitude à l'égard de l'établissement urbain au cours du XII^e siècle. Ils ont brouillé la dichotomie traditionnelle entre l'urbain et le rural, une dynamique mise en œuvre grâce aux efforts hydrauliques des Almoravides et des Almohades alors qu'ils développaient leurs personnalités impériales.

Mots-clés: Urbanisme, *extra-muros*, almoravide, almohade, Maghreb, hydraulique, identité.