

The Eastern Maghrib in the Period of City-States and Petty Dynasties

Magrib
130054

2.1 Introduction

The history of Ifrīqiya during the period from the fall of Qayrawān (449/1057–8) until the Almohad conquest of the region slightly less than a century later is confusing and difficult to follow due to the large number of local and outside powers that were involved in its affairs. One historian has named this period the age of the Ifrīqī *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif* or “Party-Kings”, a term used to describe the numerous local petty kings who ruled in Islamic Andalus during the period of decentralization which followed the break-up of the Spanish Umayyad caliphate in the early eleventh century.¹ The history of this period is essential if we wish to understand the state of Ifrīqiya when the Almohads arrived there and incorporated it into their empire in approximately the middle of the twelfth century.

In presenting the history of this period I have followed the approach of Ibn Khaldūn in the *Kitāb al-Ibar* who treats separately each of the local Ifrīqī dynasties which arose following the fall of Qayrawān; beginning with the Zirids themselves in their new capital at al-Mahdiyya.² While this entails occasional repetition of the same event, I have found it to be preferable to al-Nuwayrī’s method of treating all of the dynasties at once.³ The latter approach is destined to result in a patchwork of lengthy digressions which will only make the history of this already confusing period harder to follow. I have also covered the history of the Hammadids in this section though their center of power was in the Central Maghrib rather than Ifrīqiya. This is because the Hammadids were a sister dynasty of the Zirids and their experiences paralleled those of the Zirids in many ways including invasion by the Banū Hilāl, the loss of control over the interior and a retreat to coastal strongholds, the threat of Norman attacks on their ports, and eventual incorporation into the Almohad Empire. In addition the Hammadids intervened extensively in Ifrīqī affairs during this period and the histories of the two regions of Ifrīqiya and al-Maghrib al-Awsat are difficult to separate.

1 ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, *al-Maghrib al-‘Arabī*, vol. 3, p. 441.

2 See Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, vol. 6, pp. 217–27.

3 See al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, vol. 24, pp. 121–39.

30-47

The fall of Qayrawān and the transfer of the capital to al-Mahdiyya led to a transformation in the very nature of the Zirid principality. Prior to the Hilālī invasion the Zirids were in firm possession of both the coast and interior of Ifrīqiya. On many occasions they were able to project their authority into Libya in the east and al-Maghrib al-Awsat in the west. With the move to al-Mahdiyya the Zirids became rulers of a coastal city-state that was merely one of several competing powers in the new post-invasion Ifrīqiya. While Arab tribes jostled with one another for control over the interior, the major cities of the region (Şfāqus, Tunis, Sūsa, Qābis, Tripoli, Qafsa, and others) had managed to secede from Zirid rule under local dynasties of Şanhāji Berber, Arab, or even Turkic origin. The powerful Hammadid state in al-Maghrib al-Awsat attempted to fill the vacuum created by the Zirid decline until it met a similar fate at the hands of the Hilālī Arabs.⁴ At the close of the eleventh century the Christian maritime powers, especially Pisa and Genoa, took an interest in the affairs of North Africa and they launched frequent raids on the coastal cities. The Normans of Sicily followed their example and their efforts were crowned with the capture of al-Mahdiyya in 543/1148.

Al-Muʾizz died in 453/1061 and he was succeeded by his son Tamīm. The latter inherited a diminished realm confined to the territory of al-Mahdiyya. He was an energetic ruler who devoted much of his long reign (he died in 501/1106–7) to war and intrigue in an attempt to restore Zirid primacy over Ifrīqiya and it seems that he was partially successful in this regard. In 1063/455 the independent ruler of Şfāqus besieged al-Mahdiyya but Tamīm defeated him and forced him to withdraw. In the same year Tamīm captured Sūs, a major coastal city north of al-Mahdiyya.⁵

The powerful Hammadid ruler al-Nāşir b. ‘Alannās interfered in the affairs of Ifrīqiya at this time. His sovereignty was recognized by the local rulers of Şfāqus, Tunis, and Qayrawān.⁶ Tamīm organized a coalition of Hilālī and Sulaymī tribes to oppose the Hammadids and they succeeded in inflicting a serious defeat on the latter at the battle of Sabiba in 457/1065. Hostilities continued until 470/1077 when a truce was declared and Tamīm married his

4 See below for more information on this dynasty which split from the Zirids in the first quarter of the eleventh century.

5 Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*, vol. 24, pp. 121–2; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibar*, vol. 6, p. 212; De Slane, *Berbères*, vol. 2, p. 22.

6 See ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, *al-Maghrib al-‘Arabī*, vol. 3, p. 452.

01 Kasım 2013