

Facing the Maḥdī's True Belief: Abū 'Amr al-Salālijī's Ash'arite Creed and the Almohads' Claim to Religious Authority*

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Abstract

This paper addresses the impact of the Almohad caliphs' claim to religious authority, their religious policy, and specifically their propagation of the creeds attributed to the movement's founder Ibn Tūmart. It offers a case study of an Ash'arite creed, Abū 'Amr al-Salālijī's al-'Aqīda al-burhāniyya which was produced in the sixth/twelfth-century Almohad period. The author argues that rather than echoing the teaching of the Almohads, al-Salālijī's creed closely draws on and often literally reproduces a comprehensive compendium of Ash'arite theology, namely al-Juwaynī's Kitāb al-Irshād. A specifically noteworthy feature of al-Salālijī's creed is that it makes theological claims that should have been considered, from the perspective of Almohad doctrine, highly problematic. This in turn raises questions discussed in this paper about the extent to which theological scholars were impacted by the Almohad agenda.

During the early history of Islam, the question of whether or not the legitimate leader of the Muslim community was required to combine political and religious authority gave rise to a momentous controversy. As is well known, fierce discussions in regard to this issue eventually led to the community's most significant schism. Those who supported the view that the legitimate political head of the Muslims should also be their highest religious authority came to form the seedbed of Shi'ism. Its various sub-groups agreed on the basic principle that the community's supreme authority, the *imām*, must be a descendent of the prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/600–661) and at the same time serve as the community's spiritual guide. Sunni scholars, on the other hand, formulated the position that political authority could be exercised by any member of the prophet's tribe, Quraysh, without his being granted superior religious standing. In the end, the Sunni position gained acceptance among the majority of the Muslim community, and

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the office of the caliph was increasingly reduced to a mere political function where the caliph was not expected to provide spiritual guidance.¹

Yet in the sixth/twelfth-century Maghrib, we observe a contrary development. With the rise of the Almohads, the region saw the triumph of a movement that brought all of Maghrib and al-Andalus under its political control. Although they never declared themselves Shī‘ites, the new Almohad rulers claimed they had religious authority and thereby broke with established Sunni practice. The movement’s founder, Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130), was proclaimed by his successors to be the infallible (*ma‘ṣūm*) and rightly guided (*mahdī*) leader.² The major lines of the Almohads’ doctrinal teachings were laid down in several creeds attributed to Ibn Tūmart.³ The Almohad caliphs gave these texts the normative status of true belief and imposed their ideas on the rest of the population. Whoever rejected the Almohad creed could be declared an unbeliever, and Christians and Jews were forced to convert.⁴

Both pre-modern and modern scholars have struggled to situate Almohad doctrines within the spectrum of Muslim theological traditions. There is a consensus that at least some specific elements of Ibn Tūmart’s theology correspond to the teachings of the Ash‘arites, the dominant school of theological thought in the Islamic west since the fifth/eleventh century.⁵ Actual points of agreement between the two include man’s obligation to acquire knowledge about God by means of rational reflection,⁶ the reasoning provided as proof of

1. For an account of the Sunni doctrine of the imamate and its historical emergence see P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004), 219–255.

2. Maribel Fierro pointed out the fact that the Almohad movement emerged in a context where large parts of North Africa were under the rule of the Fāṭimids. Her discussion, regarding the extent to which the Almohad conception of the caliphate drew on Ismā‘īlī-Fāṭimid ideas, is found in M. Fierro, “The Almohads and the Fatimids,” in B. D. Craig (ed.), *Ismaili and Fatimid Studies in Honor of Paul E. Walker* (Chicago, 2010), 161–175 [reprinted in M. Fierro, *The Almohad Revolution. Politics and Religion in the Islamic West During the Twelfth–Thirteenth Centuries* (London, 2012), text IV].

3. Ibn Tūmart’s writings were edited as part of J. D. Luciani, *Le livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert mahdi des almohades. Texte arabe accompagné de notices biographiques et d’une introduction par I. Goldziher* (Algier, 1903). Two texts are particularly relevant for the Almohads’ theological teaching: the short *al-Murshida fi al-tawḥīd* (pp. 223–224) and *al-‘Aqīda al-kubrā* (pp. 313–325); for a French translation see H. Massé, “La profession de foi (‘aqīda) et les guides spirituels (*morchida*) du Mahdi Ibn Toumart,” in *Mémorial Henri Basset. Nouvelles études nord-africaines et orientales, publiées par l’Institut des hautes études marocaines* (Paris, 1928), 105–121.

4. For an up-to-date survey of research on the Almohads’ theology and religious policy, see M. Fierro, “The Religious Policy of the Almohads,” in S. Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (Oxford, 2016), 679–692; D. Serrano, “Later Ash‘arism in the Islamic West,” in S. Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (Oxford, 2016), 522–527.

5. Pre-modern scholars who draw this doctrinal link include Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406); for further details, see D. Urvoy, “La pensée d’Ibn Tūmart,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 27 (1974), 20.

6. F. Griffel, “Ibn Tūmart’s Rational Proof for God’s Existence and Unity, and His Connection to the Nizāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdad,” in P. Cressier, M. Fierro, and L. Molina (eds.), *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas* (Madrid, 2005), 775–777.

God's existence,⁷ and denial of the idea that God possesses corporeal and spatial qualities.⁸

Yet the Almohad creed also established a number of doctrines that were strongly opposed to Ash'arite teaching. As a corollary to the creed's central concern that God is absolutely distinct from any of His creations, it radically dismissed what it considered anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*).⁹ This included the rejection of such beliefs as affirming, for example, that God possesses knowledge by virtue of which he is described as knowing.¹⁰ Ash'arite theologians, in turn, stressed the actual existence of such attributes and supported their claim by using the exact line of reasoning that Ibn Tūmart rejected in drawing an analogy between man and God.

From the perspective of Ash'arite theologians, the Almohads' claim to their founder and spiritual leader's infallibility remained in conflict with their own Sunni mainstream conceptions. Nor would they typically consider it the caliph's business to impose specific doctrines on his subjects. Yet if their teachings were incompatible in several respects, what was the position of Ash'arite theologians vis-à-vis the theology promoted by the Almohad rulers? To what extent did Ibn Tūmart's doctrines affect them in formulating and defending their own positions?

Questions about the impact of Almohad teachings on scholars who lived and wrote during their caliphate have been raised primarily with regard to the discipline of *falsafa*, that is, Hellenizing philosophy, and specifically with regard to the teaching of Averroes. The latter served the Almohads over many years, participating, for example, in scholarly circles at the caliph's court in Marrakesh. It was there that he wrote several commentaries on Aristotle's works, whose Latin translations would become the foundation for his later renown in Christian Europe. Modern scholars' portrayals of Averroes's teachings range from describing them as containing "certain traces of the Almohad ideology"¹¹ to claiming that they were actually formulated within the theoretical framework of Ibn Tūmart's doctrine.¹² Several works, in which he engages with *kalām* and defends *falsafa* against the theologians' attacks, are specifically relevant in the assessment of the relation between the Almohads' and Averroes's teachings. One of these works, entitled *al-Kashf 'an manāhiġ al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla* appears to have caused controversy within the Almohad court. In response,

7. Urvoy, "La pensée d'Ibn Tūmart," 24; Griffel, "Ibn Tūmart's Rational Proof," 782–793—more precisely, Ibn Tūmart's argumentation supporting God's existence was connected to teachings developed at the Nizāmiyya *madrassa* in Baghdad.

8. M. Fletcher, "The Almohad Tawhīd: Theology Which Relies On Logic," *Numen* 38/1 (1991), 119–120.

9. The Almohads' rejection of anthropomorphism was one way to stress their break with the previous Almoravid dynasty and to underline the reformist claim of their movement: see D. Serrano Ruano, "¿Por qué llamaron los almohades antropomorfistas a los almorávides?," in P. Cressier, M. Fierro, and L. Molina (eds.). *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas* (Madrid, 2005), 815–852.

10. Cf. Ibn Tūmart, *al-'Aqīda al-kubrā*, 337.

11. S. Stroumsa, "Philosophes almohades? Averroès, Maïmonide et l'idéologie almohade," in P. Cressier, M. Fierro, and L. Molina (eds.). *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas* (Madrid, 2005), 1137–1162.

12. M. Geoffroy, "À propos de l'almohadisme d'Averroès: L'anthropomorphisme (*taġsīm*) dans la seconde version du *Kitāb al-Kāšf 'an manāhiġ al-adilla*," in P. Cressier, M. Fierro, and L. Molina (eds.). *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas* (Madrid, 2005), 853–894.

Averroes produced various revisions of the text that allowed him to accommodate his differing positions to the Almohad creed.¹³

The specific case of Averroes supports the typical view that the Almohads claimed both religious authority and spiritual leadership. Should we therefore conclude that ideological control and, perhaps, even a ban on teachings that deviated from the creed of the infallible Mahdī were among the methods used by the Almohads in the exercise of their caliphal authority? And if so, would not the practitioners of *kalām*, for whom issues addressed by the Almohad creed were of chief concern, have been expected to have been specifically affected by this agenda? In this article of admittedly limited scope, I will approach the question by studying a short theological epistle from the earlier Almohad period, entitled *al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya*.¹⁴ More precisely, I will examine the intellectual and textual sources of this treatise in order to ask whether the Almohad doctrine is echoed in this work.

Al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya was written by Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān al-Salālījī. Born c. 521/1127–8, al-Salālījī died either in 564/1169, 574/1179 or 594/1197–8.¹⁵ A theologian with some level of mystical inclination, he was primarily active in the city of Fes, where he received his elementary education and later studied at the Qarawiyyīn mosque. Later, he traveled to the Islamic east (*bilād al-mashriq*) to seek further instruction. However, it appears that Almohad attempts to discourage their population from making the pilgrimage to Mecca¹⁶ spoiled al-Salālījī’s plans: he made it no further than Bugie (Bijāya), where the local governor prevented him, along with other travelers, from continuing their journey. Al-Salālījī had to return to Fes, where he obviously achieved a reputation as being well-versed in grammar. Eventually, his good name captured the attention of a member of Marrakesh’s Almohad elite, who was looking for a teacher who could help his sons learn Arabic. Al-Salālījī accepted the offer and moved from Fes to Marrakesh. While there, he also met Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Lakhmī al-Ishbīlī (d. 567/1171), a major figure of Maghrebi Ash‘arism.¹⁷ At some point, he returned to Fes, where he devoted himself primarily to the teachings of *‘ilm al-kalām*.¹⁸

13. Geoffroy, “À propos de l’almohadisme d’Averroès;” S. Di Donato, “Le *Kitāb al-Kašf ‘an manāhiḡ al-adilla* d’Averroès: les phases de la rédaction dans les discours sur l’existence de dieu et sur la direction, d’après l’original arabe et la traduction hébraïque,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 25/1 (2015), 105–133.

14. The text is available in several recent editions. I have consulted Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b. ‘Alī al-Salālījī, *al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya al-ash‘ariyya*, ed. Jamāl ‘Allāl al-Bakhtī (Tetouan, 2008), and *al-‘Aqīda al-Burhāniyya wa-al-fuṣūl al-īmāniyya li-al-imām Abī ‘Amr ‘Uthmān al-Salālījī ma‘ Sharḡ al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya li-al-imām Abī ‘Uthmān Sa‘īd b. Muḥammad b. al-‘Uqbānī*, ed. Nizār Ḥammādī (Beirut, 1429); when citing the *‘Aqīda*, I provide pages for both editions. On the *‘Aqīda* and al-Bakhtī’s edition of the text see also M. Bilal-Achmal, “Textos del legado aš‘arī magrebí. *Al-‘aqīda al-burhāniyya al-aš‘ariyya* de Abū ‘Amr al-Salālīyī al-Fāsī,” *Al-Qantara* 34/1 (2013), 205–213.

15. For the sources on al-Salālījī’s death dates, see the introduction in *al-‘Aqīda al-Burhāniyya wa-al-fuṣūl al-īmāniyya*, 14–15.

16. M. Fierro, “The Legal Policies of the Almohad Caliphs and Ibn Rushd’s *Bidāyat al-mujtahid*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 10/3 (1999), 227.

17. Serrano, “Los almorávides y la teología aš‘arī,” 503; Serrano, “Later Ash‘arism in the Islamic West,” 519.

18. Al-Salālījī, *‘Aqīda*, 115–33; al-Salālījī’s service to the member of the Almohad elite is reported by Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā Ibn Zayyāt al-Tādīlī, *al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-tašawwuf wa-akhbār Abī al-‘Abbās al-Sabtī*,

Although al-Salālījī—at least for part of his life—interacted relatively closely with the Almohad elite, he appears to have always been a dedicated Ash‘arite. Several biographical reports stress that from as early as his introductory studies in the field of theology, al-Salālījī was deeply influenced by his readings of Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī’s (d. 478/1085) *Kitāb al-Irshād*. While teaching grammar in Marrakesh, he deepened his knowledge of the text by studying with Abū al-Ḥasan al-Lakhmī.¹⁹ It is consequently not surprising that some religious scholars pointed to the *Irshād*’s impact on al-Salālījī’s *al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya*, going so far as to describe the latter text as a brief summary (*mukhtaṣar*) of al-Juwaynī’s theological *summa*.²⁰ As I will discuss in more detail, this characterization is appropriate, especially if one bears in mind that al-Salālījī immensely shortened al-Juwaynī’s voluminous work into just a few pages.

The text of *al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya* itself does not reveal anything about al-Salālījī’s motivation in compiling the short creed. Later sources—including al-Salālījī’s student Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Mu‘min al-Khazrajī (d. 598/1193), who is quoted in one of the commentaries on the *‘Aqīda*—report that al-Salālījī wrote it at the request of an Andalusī woman named Khayrūna.²¹ Thus, the fact that al-Salālījī composed this work for his Almohad patrons appears to have been omitted.

Let us start examining the text. Al-Salālījī’s *al-‘Aqīda al-burhāniyya* follows the typical structure of an Ash‘arite *kalām* treatise.²² After the *ḥamdala*, the work opens with the definition of the world (*al-‘ālam*) and of atoms (*jawāhir*) and accidents (*a‘rāḍ*), which are the world’s components according to the concept of the *mutakallimūn*. Atoms are defined as “that which occupies space” (*al-mutaḥayyiz*), and accidents as “entities that subsist in atoms” (*al-ma‘nā al-qā’im bi-al-jawhar*). The wording of these definitions has been reproduced almost verbatim from al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād*.²³

ed. A. al-Tawfiq (Rabat, 1404/1984), 199–200. French translation: Ibn Zayyāt al Tādilī, *Regard sur le temps des Soufis: vie des saints du sud marocain des v^e, vi^e, vii^e siècles de l’hégire*. Texte arabe établi, annoté et présenté par Ahmed Toufiq. Traduit de l’arabe par Maurice de Fenoyl (Casablanca, 1995), 149–150.

19. Al-Salālījī, *‘Aqīda*, 17–19. For the transmission of this work to the Islamic West see J. M. Fórneas Besteiro, “De la transmisión de algunas obras de tendencia aš‘arī en al-Andalus,” *Awrāq* 1 (1978), 7–8.

20. See al-Salālījī, *‘Aqīda*, 51, quoting the famous traveller and religious scholar Ibn Rushayd al-Fihri al-Sabti (d. 721/1321): Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Umar Ibn Rushayd al-Fihri al-Sabti, *Mil’ al-‘ayba bi-mā jumi‘a bi-ṭūl al-ghayba fi al-wijha al-wajīha ilā al-ḥaramayn Makka wa-Ṭayba*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb Ibn Khawja (Tunis, 1982), 2:226. See also Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Fihri al-Labli’s (d. 691/1292) *Fahrāsa*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Shūbad (Rabat, 1434/2013), 88; al-Labli studied with al-Salālījī’s student Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Kātibī (d. 596/1295).

21. See al-Salālījī, *‘Aqīda*, 50–51, who quotes ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Madyūnī’s *Sharḥ*; this is also related by Aḥmad Ibn al-Qāḍī al-Miknāsī, *Jadhwat al-iqtibās fi dhikr man ḥalla min al-a‘lām madīnat Fās*, 2 vols. (Rabat, 1973), 2:458.

22. For the basic scheme of Ash‘arite compendia see R. M. Frank, “The Science of *Kalām*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 2/1 (1992), 7–37, as well as fn. 12 on the general omission of theoretical discussions on knowledge and reasoning in such shorter works as the one discussed here.

23. Cf. al-Salālījī, *‘Aqīda*, 87–9/23 and Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi‘ al-adilla fi uṣūl al-‘itiqād*, ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, and ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1369), 17 (l. 5–8).

The next section of the *‘Aqīda*, Chapters 1-5, focuses on arguments for God’s existence. Specific historical developments in the argumentation of Muslim theologians allow us to conclude that al-Salālījī’s proof draws on arguments that were advanced in some of al-Juwaynī’s writings. Beyond the boundaries of theological schools, the traditional *kalām* proof for God’s existence departed from the assumption that because the world is created, it consequently requires a creator, who must be God. The world’s createdness was demonstrated by the so-called “proof from accidents,” that built upon the following reasoning: 1) accidents—like movement, rest, composition, or separation—do exist, 2) accidents have a temporal existence, 3) bodies necessarily carry accidents, and 4) whatever does not precede the temporally existent is itself temporally existent.²⁴

Al-Juwaynī appears to have been the first person within the Ash‘arite school to recognize that this proof had several shortcomings and propose revisions.²⁵ To prove God’s existence, he developed the so-called “particularization argument” that finds its most elaborate shape in *al-‘Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*.²⁶ Its argumentative strength lie in the fact that it no longer presupposed the existence of accidents. A preliminary revision of the revised proof can be found in al-Juwaynī’s earlier works *al-Irshād*²⁷ and *Luma‘ al-adilla fī qawā‘id ahl al-sunna wa-al-jamā‘a*,²⁸ where he still relies on the proof from accidents argument. Unlike the traditional proof, al-Juwaynī now infers from the createdness of atoms that the existence of the world is possible (*jā‘iz al-wujūd*), which means that rather than being existent, it is just as possible that the world could also be non-existent or come into existence at different times. This leads him to the conclusion that there must be an agent that chooses arbitrarily whether or not the world exists and when, who in other words “particularizes” (*ikhtaṣṣa*) the world’s creation and who cannot be anyone other than God.²⁹

Al-Salālījī’s argumentation in his *‘Aqīda* follows al-Juwaynī’s earlier revision of the proof as found in the *Irshād* and the *Luma‘*: using the proof from accidents, he first establishes the createdness of atoms and then concludes that the world’s existence is possible. Based on

24. H. A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York/Oxford, 1987), 134–143; D. Gimaret, *La doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī* (Paris, 1990), 219–227; U. Rudolph, “La preuve de l’existence de Dieu chez Avicenne et dans la théologie musulmane,” in A. de Libera, A. Elamrani-Jamal, and A. Galonnier (eds.), *Langage et philosophie. Hommage à Jean Jolivet* (Paris, 1997), 340–341.

25. Similar concerns were articulated earlier by the Mu‘tazilite theologian Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 426/1044); see W. Madelung, “Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s Proof for the Existence of God,” in J.E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One. Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank* (Leuven, 2006), 273–280.

26. Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, *al-‘Aqīda al-niẓāmiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Zubaydī (Beirut, 2003), 11–13.

27. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 17–21, 28–29.

28. M. Allard, *Textes Apologétiques de Ḡuwaynī* (Beirut, 1968), 120–131 (Arabic edition and French translation of al-Juwaynī’s *Luma‘*).

29. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 161–162; Rudolph, “La preuve de l’existence de Dieu,” 344–346; Madelung, “Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s Proof for the Existence of God,” 279.

these assumptions, he then affirms the need for a “particularizer,” that is a Creator (*ṣāni*), whose arbitrary choice causes the world to be precisely the way it is.³⁰

In Chapter 6 of the *‘Aqīda*, al-Salālijī presents proof of the Creator’s eternity (*qidam*). He reasons that if the Creator were not eternal, He must also have been created and His existence would consequently have required the existence of another creator before Him—clearly absurd reasoning, since this process of creation would result in an infinite regress.³¹ Al-Salālijī literally reproduces parts of the corresponding chapter in al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād*.³² The same line of reasoning is also found in al-Juwaynī’s *Shāmīl* and *Luma*.³³

In Chapter 7, al-Salālijī affirms that God “subsists by Himself” (*qā’im bi-nafsihi*). In fact, the description *qā’im bi-nafsihi* was open to interpretation, and it appears that al-Ash‘arī himself hesitated in regard to whether or not it could be rightly—or exclusively—applied to God.³⁴ It is again al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād* that offers an almost literal parallel to the *‘Aqīda*.³⁵ Al-Salālijī’s argument is, in turn, because it is so condensed, not entirely clear:

The proof for God’s subsisting by Himself is that He must be described as living, knowing and powerful. Yet attributes (*al-ṣifāt*) cannot be described by predications necessitated by other entities (*al-aḥkām allatī tūjibuhā al-ma‘ānī*). If God is necessarily described [as living, knowing and powerful], he must consequently subsist by Himself.³⁶

If we compare this passage with al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād*, we realize that al-Salālijī’s reasoning is based on the implicit premise that if God did not subsist by Himself, He would need a substrate (*maḥall*) and would be an attribute that qualifies His substrate.³⁷ If we add this premise from the *Irshād* to the passage from the *‘Aqīda*, the argument makes sense: according to Ash‘arite teaching, God is living, knowing and powerful by virtue of the entities of life, knowledge, and power. However, life, knowledge, and power cannot subsist in an attribute and therefore God must subsist by Himself.

In Chapter 8, al-Salālijī establishes that God is absolutely distinct (*mukhālīf*) from His creation. He consequently follows the progression of arguments found in the *Irshād*, but without reproducing textual elements that can be clearly identified as quotations from al-Juwaynī’s text. Al-Salālijī argues that two things are identical whenever they share all of their essential attributes (*jami‘ ṣifāt al-nafs*).³⁸ The same reasoning was already put forward by al-Ash‘arī to prove God’s otherness, and al-Juwaynī also draws on it in the *Irshād*.³⁹ Based

30. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 90–96/24–25.

31. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 97/25.

32. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 32 (l. 6–7).

33. Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. F. ‘Awn, and Sh. M. Mukhtār (Alexandria, 1969), 617–618; Allard, *Textes Apologétiques de Ğuwaynī*, 130–131.

34. Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 257.

35. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 34 (l. 4–5).

36. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 98/25.

37. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 34.

38. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 99/25.

39. Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 249; al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 34.

on this conceptualization of the resemblance of two things, al-Salālijī goes on to argue that God transcends all qualities (*simāt*) of atoms and accidents and, therefore, is distinct from them. Atoms are distinguished by the fact that they occupy space and consequently exist in a specific location, in that they carry accidents and may form composites. Accidents in turn subsist in atoms, which means that they need a substrate; they have no self-sustained continued existence and cannot be described by predications necessitated by other entities. These fundamental properties of atoms and accidents cannot be applied to God, which proves, according to al-Salālijī, His absolute distinctiveness.⁴⁰ Some of these arguments can also be found—in more elaborate versions—in various chapters on the distinctions between God and His creatures in al-Juwaynī's *Irshād*,⁴¹ whereas others were already affirmed in the proof of God's self-subsistence.⁴²

In Chapter 9, al-Salālijī goes on to prove that God is knowing, powerful, willing, living, hearing, seeing, perceiving and speaking. The line of argumentation, and the reliance on certain specific formulations, confirm the *'Aqīda's* dependency on the *Irshād*. Al-Salālijī supports the claim that God is knowing and powerful with the evidence of His creation, every detail of which He ordered and arranged. Like al-Juwaynī, and in almost the same words, he argues that this implies that God is knowledgeable and powerful.⁴³ The intentionality of God's acts, revealed by the fact that they come into being at a specific moment and in a specific shape rather than coming into existence at another possible moment and in a different shape, serves as proof of God's will.⁴⁴ Unlike al-Juwaynī in his *Irshād*, however, al-Salālijī does not support this claim by drawing an analogy to man's voluntary acts.⁴⁵ In order to prove that God lives, he argues that only living beings can possibly possess the aforementioned attributes. This is a standard argument in *kalām*, although God's knowledge and power are often considered sufficient evidence for the claim that God lives.⁴⁶

Al-Salālijī then reproduces, almost verbatim, a passage from the *Irshād* to prove that God hears, sees, perceives, and speaks. The argument goes as follows: all living beings can possibly hear, see, perceive, and speak; if God could not hear, see, perceive, and speak, he would be defective, and this would be an absurd assertion.⁴⁷

In Chapter 10, al-Salālijī expounds upon the doctrine that God possesses co-eternal attributes, including life (*ḥayāt*), knowledge (*ʿilm*), power (*qudra*), and will (*irāda*), by virtue

40. Al-Salālijī, *'Aqīda*, 99–102/25–26.

41. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 39 (God does not occupy space and has no location), 44 (He does not carry accidents) and 42–43 (He is not a composite).

42. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 34 (unlike God, accidents cannot be described by predications necessitated by other entities).

43. Al-Salālijī's proof (*Aqīda*, 103/26) is mainly composed of fragments from the corresponding chapter in the *Irshād*, namely pp. 61 (l. 4)–62 (l. 1) and 61 (l. 10–11).

44. Al-Salālijī, *'Aqīda*, 104/27.

45. Cf. al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 64.

46. In the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī also builds his argumentation exclusively on God's being knowing and powerful: al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 63.

47. Al-Salālijī, *'Aqīda*, 104–5/27; the almost identical formulation is found in al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 72 (l. 15)–73 (l. 4).

of which He is living (*ḥayy*), knowing (*ʿālim*), powerful (*qādir*), willing (*murīd*), and so on. This claim was considered valid within Ashʿarite thought, but for other theologians it posed a fundamental problem: how could there be co-eternal beings if God alone is eternal and free from multiplicity of any kind? It was primarily the Muʿtazilites who, on the basis of this claim, accused the Ashʿarites of violating the notion of monotheism. Yet in our specific context, it is even more important that Almohad doctrine, as expressed in Ibn Tūmart's *al-ʿAqīda al-kubrā*, also rejects the idea of co-eternal attributes. However, unlike the critics from the Muʿtazilite school who intended to resolve the problem posed by God's multiple qualities rationally, the Almohad creed categorically rebuffs such speculations about God's attributes and explicitly rejects any attempt to analyze God's attributes by way of analogy between God and His creatures.⁴⁸

Drawing such analogies was at the center of the Ashʿarite approach, whose goal was to logically resolve the problem.⁴⁹ In accordance with the solution proposed by the Ashʿarites, al-Salālījī presents two arguments that correspond to the first and third of the four analogies used by al-Juwaynī in his *Irshād* to establish God's co-eternal attributes.⁵⁰ The first posits that whenever a predication or judgement (*ḥukm*) in this world is grounded in, or causally depends on, another entity (*muʿallal bi-ʿilla*), the same must be true for the transcendent. That is, if we affirm that man's knowing something is grounded in an entity of knowledge, God must be omniscient by a co-eternal entity of knowledge. Al-Salālījī's second argument is that the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) behind predications such as "he is knowing" is identical irrespective of whether it is affirmed of man or of God: if in the case of man, it means that knowledge subsists in the subject described as knowing (*qāma bihi al-ʿilm*), the meaning cannot change when the same is affirmed about God.⁵¹

It is worth recalling here the case of Averroes and the fact that it was precisely the question of God's attributes that created controversy around his *al-Kashf ʿan manāhiḥ al-adilla*. The dispute finally led Averroes to revise the sections of his text which, from the Almohad perspective, were seen as problematic. The reason for the debate was Averroes's conviction that sophisticated explanations for corporeal and spatial descriptions of God would be inaccessible to common people, and, even worse, would cause people to deviate from the truth. He therefore claimed that a literal understanding of God's hands, face, or

48. Ibn Tūmart, *al-ʿAqīda al-kubrā*, p. 337. See also Urvoy, "La pensée d'Ibn Tūmart," 27–28.

49. I do not agree with Fletcher, "The Almohad Tawhīd," 114–117, who identifies Ibn Tūmart's affirmations of God's attributes in the *Murshida* with Muʿtazilite doctrine and then suggests that the Mahdī revised his position in *al-ʿAqīda al-kubrā* according to the Ashʿarite doctrine. The denial of co-eternal attributes as found in the *Murshida* is actually confirmed by the passage of *al-ʿAqīda al-kubrā* quoted in fn. 48; the *ʿAqīda* only adds that man has to refrain from speculating about the modality of God's qualities. This is in agreement with neither Muʿtazilite nor Ashʿarite teachings: indeed, the Muʿtazilites denied any co-eternal attributes, but they nonetheless described God by multiple qualities and attempted to explain their reality by rational means; the Ashʿarites in turn not only affirmed co-eternal attributes of God, but they also explained them rationally (their *bi-lā kayf* approach was limited to such revealed qualities as those which appeared to suggest corporeality or spatial characteristics in God).

50. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 83 (l. 5–9 for the *ʿilla*-argument) and 84 (l. 1–3 for the *ḥaqīqa*-argument).

51. Al-Salālījī, *ʿAqīda*, 106–107/27.

His sitting on the throne is fully legitimate. From the position of the Almohad creed, this was illicit anthropomorphism.⁵² Yet drawing analogies between man and God, as in the example of Ash‘arite reasoning described above, should have provoked the same accusation. Nonetheless, al-Salālijī draws on the controversial argument and makes no concession to the Almohad claim that God is absolutely transconceptual.

Chapter 11 is devoted to presenting proof of God’s oneness (*waḥdāniyya*). The argument advanced by al-Salālijī was actually used by theologians from the entire spectrum of *kalām* schools. Essentially, the argument is that there can be only one God, because if there were two, any time their wills were opposed they would mutually prevent each other from acting.⁵³ This so-called *tamānu*-argument (from *tamāna*‘a, “to mutually prevent”) was already raised by Mu‘tazilite theologians and also used by al-Ash‘arī.⁵⁴ There are some textual similarities between this chapter and the corresponding one in al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād*.⁵⁵ In addition, al-Salālijī quotes Q. 21:22, 40:62, and 42:11 to support the claim of God’s oneness.⁵⁶

In Chapter 12, al-Salālijī argues that the possible—that is, things that come to be or are possible but will not come to be—are infinite in number. This position entailed a certain risk, since it could be misinterpreted as being a violation of the monotheistic idea that except for God, everything is finite. Yet the discussed question has additional implications for the conception of God as omnipotent: the reason behind this is that the possible is tantamount to potential objects of God’s creative capacity (*al-maqdūrāt*).⁵⁷ Hence, if the possible was finite, then God’s power would likewise be finite. In order to prove the infiniteness of possible things, al-Salālijī departs from the contingency of the world; this means that the world could also be considered differently, because there could have been things other than those that actually exist. Now possible things do not come into existence by themselves (*lā yaqa‘u bi-nafsihī*), but rather their existence must be caused by God. However, if God’s power was limited to the finite things that actually come to be, we would have to concede that that which is possible but does not happen is impossible—and this, al-Salālijī argues, is self-contradictory.⁵⁸ Here again, al-Salālijī’s argumentation reproduces phrases from al-Juwaynī’s corresponding chapter in the *Irshād*.⁵⁹

Chapter 13 of al-Salālijī’s *‘Aqīda* contains rational proof of the possibility of beatific vision (*ru’yat Allāh*). The entire chapter is an almost verbatim reproduction of a passage found in

52. Geoffroy, “À propos de l’almohadisme d’Averroès;” Di Donato, “Le Kitāb *al-Kašf ‘an manāhiḡ al-adilla* d’Averroès.”

53. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 109–111/28.

54. Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 252–254.

55. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 53 (l. 4–6 and 11–12).

56. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 111/28.

57. For the Ash‘arite conception of the possible and its identification with objects of God’s creative capacity see R. M. Frank, “The Non-Existent and the Possible in Classical Ash‘arite Teaching,” *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales* 24 (2000), 1–37 (specifically p. 6).

58. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 112/29.

59. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 57 (l. 4–6 and 8).

the corresponding chapter of al-Juwaynī's *Irshād*.⁶⁰ The line of argument originates from ideas about how visual perception operates in the created world. The distinct objects of our perception, it claims, all have in common the fact that they exist. The specific features (*aḥwāl*), by virtue of which these objects can be distinguished, do not affect their visibility in any way: what actually makes these objects visible to the human eye is their very existence. Now, if we see objects because they exist, we must necessarily conclude that whatever exists can be seen—this, *a fortiori*, includes God.⁶¹ Al-Salālijī's Ash'arite interpretation of the vision of God—and specifically its rational justification—clashes with Ibn Tūmart's doctrine in his *ʿAqīda*: although the founder of the Almohad movement in principle affirms that God will be seen at the Last Judgement, he insists that this is true only as it is expressed in the Qurʾān; any further explanation that derives from visual perception in this world must be avoided and he categorically excludes the possibility that man will see Him with his eyes.⁶²

At this point in the text, the style of al-Salālijī's *ʿAqīda* changes slightly. Unlike the previous sections, the remaining ones no longer consist of short rational proofs, but rather of a series of doctrinal statements. These doctrines are in fact Ash'arite commonplaces. They are also affirmed by al-Juwaynī in his *Irshād*, but the brevity of al-Salālijī's exposition no longer allows a clear inter-textual dependency to be established. In the following synopsis of the remaining chapters of al-Salālijī's *ʿAqīda*, I will provide references that show our theologian's indebtedness to Ash'arite teaching, and more specifically I will also point to the sections in al-Juwaynī's *Irshād* where the same doctrinal principles are formulated.

Chapter 14 is a highly condensed affirmation of the Ash'arites' belief in God's absolute arbitrariness. It includes the following doctrines: God's creation of man's acts belongs to the realm of possible existents; God's acting is not necessary; He is not compensated for His acts; whenever He compensates man, He grants him a favor; God's punishment is just and He judges man as He wills.⁶³

Following this, Chapter 15 contains the major lines of prophetology and consists of the following positions: it is possible (*jāʾiz*) for God (in other words, it is not necessary for Him) to send prophets and to support their veracity by miracles; the prophet's miracles disrupt the habit and they are God's acts; they are a challenge to imitators and whoever attempts to produce something similar will fail.⁶⁴

60. Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 177 (l. 2–8).

61. Al-Salālijī, *ʿAqīda*, 113–114/29.

62. Ibn Tūmart, *al-ʿAqīda al-kubrā*, 337–338; see also Urvoy, “La pensée d’Ibn Tūmart,” 28 on Ibn Tūmart's position on beatific vision.

63. Al-Salālijī, *ʿAqīda*, 115–116/29. For the Ash'arite position see Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 433–451. In his *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī treats these principles on pp. 188 and 381.

64. Al-Salālijī, *ʿAqīda*, 117–118/29–30. Cf. Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 453–454 and 459–463 for the identical Ash'arite position; in his *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī treats these doctrines on pp. 302–303, 307–309, 312–313; see also Allard, *Textes Apologétiques de Ġuwaynī*, 169.

Chapter 16 affirms the two fundamental qualities of prophets as found in Ash‘arite teaching: the prophets are infallible in what they say, and do not commit grave sins (*kabā’ir*).⁶⁵

In Chapter 17, al-Salālijī starts with a record of the prophet Muḥammad’s miracles, by which he challenged his rivals and sceptics.⁶⁶ He then advocates the principle of theological voluntarism, as is typical in Ash‘arite ethics: good and bad are not distinguished by rational principles but can only be extracted from the Prophet’s message.⁶⁷ The sources for moral judgments include the Qur’ān, the prophetic tradition (or *sunna*), and the consensus of the community or of the community’s learned men.⁶⁸

In the same chapter, al-Salālijī moves on to a subject where followers of Ash‘arite teaching should have strongly disagreed with Almohad doctrine: namely, the question of who is to be considered a believer. Al-Salālijī introduces the issue by defining the notion of repentance (*tawba*) for one’s sins according to the Ash‘arite understanding as being tantamount to regret (*nadam*). Further following Ash‘arite teaching, he claims that repentance may be accepted by God to such an extent that He would even forgive a believer who committed a grave sin (*kabīra*), or He could alternatively punish him for some time before He lets him enter paradise. This position was derived from the teachings of the Murji’ites, a theological strand of early Islam: arguing against Mu‘tazilites and Khārijīs, they believed that even a grave sinner should be regarded as a believer. They claimed that actual belief was not demonstrated through moral conduct, but that it merely consists of knowing that God exists and expressing belief in His existence. They deferred judgment of man’s fate to God, and therefore refrained from declaring others infidels—the practice known as *takfīr*. The Ash‘arites later followed the Murji’ite line of reasoning and defined belief as “assent” (*taṣdīq*) in one’s heart, that is, a mere interior act. This is also al-Salālijī’s position in the *‘Aqīda*.⁶⁹ One might wonder whether this could not be interpreted as de-legitimising the Almohad practice of *takfīr* of people who refused to profess the creed they imposed.

The *‘Aqīda* closes with two chapters, 18 and 19, on the imamate. Al-Salālijī professes in just a few lines the major lines of mainstream Sunni teaching, also shared by Ash‘arite theologians.⁷⁰ As scholars have argued previously, this teaching differed significantly from

65. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 119/30 (in Ḥammādi’s edition, this passage is not a separate chapter); for the Ash‘arite doctrine see Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 459, and the corresponding passage in al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 356.

66. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 120–122/30 (in Ḥammādi’s edition, this passage not a separate chapter); see al-Ash‘arī’s list of Muḥammad’s miracles in Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 464–467 and al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 345, 353.

67. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 123/30; for al-Ash‘arī’s ethical voluntarism see Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 444–447 and al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 8, 358.

68. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 124–125/30–31.

69. Al-Salālijī, *‘Aqīda*, 126–128/31; for the corresponding sections in al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād* see pp. 398, 401, 403–404; for the Ash‘arite understanding of belief, its origins in the teachings of the Murji’a and the sinner’s fate see Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 469–500; more specifically, on the identification of the notions of *tawba* and *nadam*, see Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 490 and for the definition of belief as “assent,” see R. M. Frank, “Knowledge and *Taqīd*: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ash‘arism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109/1 (1989), 38–46 and Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 472–479.

70. See for the Ash‘arite theory of the imamate Gimaret, *Doctrine*, 547–566 and Y. Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of al-Baqillani* (Beirut, 1966).

the Almohad doctrine, which was centered on the infallible figure of the rightly guided *imām*, the community's highest authority.⁷¹ Nothing in al-Salālijī's exposition reflects the Almohad conception of the imamate: for him, the *imām* is legitimized by a contract (*ʿaqd*), and possible candidates must fulfill the following criteria: they must be members of the Quraysh tribe; they must be qualified for the practice of *ijtihād*, that is, individual reasoning in legal matters; and they must act competently and vigorously whenever calamities and unrest occur.

In addition, for al-Salālijī, the prophets alone are infallible (*lā maʿṣūm illā al-anbiyāʾ*), whereby he concludes that infallibility does not apply to the *imāms*. In other contexts, this claim would have exclusively targeted Shiʿite doctrines. It is therefore clear why al-Salālijī rejects, immediately afterwards, the idea that the *imām* must necessarily be designated (a claim Twelver-Shiʿites actually made), since he can also be legitimated by election (read in both editions *ikhtiyāran* instead of *ijtihādan*).⁷²

Finally, al-Salālijī professes the Sunni opinion that after the death of the prophet Muḥammad, the people preferred (*afḍala al-nās*) Abū Bakr, followed by ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, then finally ʿAlī. To whom did al-Salālijī address his assertion that these four are the rightly guided caliphs and *imāms* (*fa-hum al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn wa-al-aʿimma al-mahdiyūn*)?⁷³ One can only speculate as to whether, in his chapters on the imamate, al-Salālijī actually intended to dismiss the Almohads' claim that their founder Ibn Tūmart was infallible and rightly guided.

My observations from al-Salālijī's brief treatise do not permit any conclusions regarding larger-scale tendencies in Ashʿarite teaching under the Almohad caliphate. A much wider corpus of theological texts from this era will have to be analyzed to draw a more comprehensive picture. At this point, the examined text can only speak for itself. Considering the prominent place of Ibn Tūmart's creed in Almohad propaganda, it is striking that al-Salālijī in no way echoes the Mahdī's teaching. He does not even attempt to hide or minimize points of disagreement, or to argue that Ashʿarite teaching perfectly harmonizes with Almohad doctrine—let alone that he developed some form of "Almohadized" Ashʿarism. Instead, *al-ʿAqīda al-burhāniyya* could have just as easily been written in any other Ashʿarite context. It actually reflects an analogous trend found in the eastern Shāfiʿite milieu, where al-Juwaynī's *Irshād* was an influential compendium: there it also served as the basis for numerous derivative works, including commentaries and abbreviations.⁷⁴

71. M. García Arenal, "The Almohad Revolution and the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart," in M. García Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform: Mahdīs of the Muslim West* (Leiden, 2006), 179–181.

72. Al-Salālijī, *ʿAqīda*, 129–130/31. For al-Juwaynī's criteria for the Imām in the *Irshād* see 426–427; for the rejection of the necessity of the Imām's designation see pp. 419–423; and for the possibility of his election p. 424.

73. Al-Salālijī, *ʿAqīda*, 131/32. Al-Juwaynī treats the four rightly guided caliphs on pp. 428–430 of his *Irshād*.

74. Such works include Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Maʿmūn al-Mutawallī's (d. 478/1086) *al-Mughnī*, Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī's (d. 512/1118) *Sharḥ al-ʿIrshād* (preserved only in manuscript form) and *al-Ghunya*, or the only surviving work written by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's father Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn al-Makkī, *Nihāyat al-marām*, that depends greatly on Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī's *Ghunya*.

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