

**‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn *ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran *min ahl* Ġazūla:
The Significance of a Name in the origins of the Murābiṭūn**

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It is a well-known fact in the history of religions that a person’s name contains a very special meaning’ (Schimmel, 105)

This very special meaning in the context of the history of religions, as Annemarie Schimmel asserts, is enhanced when the accounts written about religious movements are assessed as literary sources. This, however, requires manuscripts to be regarded in terms of historiography and not merely as historical facts. This paper offers a different approach to an understanding of the Murābiṭūn, namely a literary analysis¹. We set out to assess the literary source in terms of a narrative, hence. The core of this paper is the assessment of the chain of names which one literary source, al-Bakrī (d. 486 H./1094 C.e.), ascribes to the spiritual leader and initiator of the Murābiṭūn² in his manuscript *Kitāb al-masālik wa-’l-mamālik* (henceforth, *Al-Masālik*). The chain of names in question is rendered by al-Bakrī as: “‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn *ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran *min ahl* Ġazūla and may be translated as ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn whose mother’s name is Tīn Yazāmāran, from the people of Ġazūla.

Providing Information through a Chain of Names

“‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn *ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran *min ahl* Ġazūla”³ consists of a chain of names, which comprises the following elements: the personal name, or in Arabic, *ism*, which in this case is depicted as ‘Abd Allāh. The *ism* is followed by the *nasab*, which is marked by the word *ibn* (son) and a name that follows (Rosenthal, 968). The *nasab* is the patronymic element, and as such, sheds light onto genealogy. In general, the *nasab* is not confined to one name but can be one of a series of names that unfolds the name bearer’s ancestry. With regard to our name, the *nasab* reveals that ‘Abd Allāh is the son (*ibn*) of Yāsīn. The next element in this chain of names is the expression ‘whose mother’s name is Tīn Yazāmāran’ or “*ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran.” This expression is referred to as a *kunya* and represents an additional reference to genealogy (Wensinck, 395). The *kunya* is followed by a *nisba*, which is here marked by the reference “*min ahl* Ġazūla” and means ‘from the people of Ġazūla,’ a sub branch of the Ṣanhāġa confederation (Wehr, 41). As this brief explanation has shown, the four elements in this chain of names can reveal abundant information. This leads us to the

¹ Research with regard to the Murābiṭūn movement is confronted with at least two challenges. Firstly, an underestimated understanding for the various different Muslim mediaeval sources that range a time frame of roughly four centuries. Secondly, the lacking historiographical approach, hence assessing what is written about the Murābiṭūn from the perspective of a literary source analysis. This issue clearly undermines any sense of the author’s agency.

² The Murābiṭūn, usually known as Almoravids, were a Sunnī orthodox movement, active in the eleventh and twelfth century and indigenous in the Maghrib.

³ The name attributed to the initiator of the Murābiṭūn movement by al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-’l-mamālik*, found in the edition of this book of al-Bakrī.

act of story-telling, as a name in itself could be a literary device by transmitting information.

The fact that information can be transferred through names is best understood when the author's agency is taken into consideration. To demonstrate this, we shall look at the variations of the abovementioned name attributed to the person who is known for having initiated the Murābiṭūn apparent in the various manuscripts that relate the rise of the Murābiṭūn.

Al-Bakrī (d. 486 H./ 1094 C.e.)	Qāḍī 'Iyād (d. 543 H./ 1149 C.e.)	Ibn al-Aṭīr (d. 554 H./ 1160 C.e.)	Ibn 'Iḍārī (d. 557 H./ 1162 C.e.)	Ibn Abī Zar' (d. 714 H./ 1315 C.e.)	<i>Hulal</i> (c. 8 H./14 C.e.)	Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808 H./1406 C.e.)
'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn and the name of his mother was Tīn Yazāmāran, from the Ġazūla tribe from a village named Tamāmānāwt	'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn	'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn al-Ġazūlī	'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn	'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn Ibn Makūk Ibn Sīr Ibn 'Alī Ibn Yāsīn al- Ġazūlī	'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn al- Ġazūlī	'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn Ibn Makkū al- Ġazūlī

As the table above (or a synoptic reading of these manuscripts) reveals, the name attributed to the figure is consensually agreed upon as 'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn; yet the details vary to some degree. Some sources, for instance, Qāḍī 'Iyād and Ibn 'Iḍārī, confine the name to 'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn. Other sources, for instance, Ibn al-Aṭīr, include the *nisba* al-Ġazūlī, or an additional *nasab* is added, as Ibn Abī Zar' and Ibn Ḥaldūn do. Essentially, these variations should be understood as the result of historiography in which all subsequent works are, to some degree, a derivation of the earliest source. This means that to some extent, sources writing after al-Bakrī (the earliest) may have drawn from his manuscript. Stemming from this, the question arises why a reference to the maternal genealogy ("*ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran") of 'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn is only noticeable in al-Bakrī's manuscript. The reasons may be speculative; however, it cannot be ruled out that later sources either simply did not mention it, or deliberately excluded the maternal genealogy, perhaps as a piece of information that was not considered worthy of transmitting. Therefore, we may regard this chain of names as a literary device which al-Bakrī could have used in the course of writing the rise of the Murābiṭūn. By means of literary onomastics, the following assessment of the name "'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn *ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran *min ahl* Ġazūla" will discuss how this chain of names can be regarded as literary devices that convey meaning for the narrative.

The *Ism*: 'Abd Allāh and the Connection to the Prophet Muḥammad

All sources that tell the story of the Murābiṭūn's rise agree that the person responsible for the rise of the Murābiṭūn was called 'Abd Allāh. As a result of this congruence, the only interesting fact in the context of story-telling is whether the *ism* 'Abd Allāh unfolds a particular meaning for the narrative. This leads us to Muslim mediaeval historiography where elements ascribed to the pre-Islamic era and elements ascribed to the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad were incorporated into the

manuscripts. This enabled a sense of enhancement, as these elements were perceived as symbolically representing the golden age of Islam. This process is what Jaroslav Stetkevych describes as neo-mythography (Stetkevych, 12). Turning to the manuscripts relating the rise of the Murābiṭūn, the *ism* ‘Abd Allāh fulfils precisely this neo-mythographical element by creating a connection to the Prophet Muḥammad *qua* function and blood tie, and at the same time representing a pre-Islamic element. ‘Abd Allāh comprises ‘*abd* (slave or servant) and *Allāh*. As a result ‘Abd Allāh is a theophoric phrase ‘slave to a human being’ or ‘servant to a divine being’ (Bockropp, 576). As related in the Qur’ān, it was bestowed on prophets of Islam, and the most prominent bearer of this title is the Prophet Muḥammad (Bockropp, 577). The second context in which ‘Abd Allāh depicts a direct connection to the Prophet Muḥammad is through his genealogy and unravels the pre-Islamic connection mentioned earlier in the context of neo-mythography. This is established through creating a connection to the father of the Prophet Muḥammad: ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 53 before H./570 C.e.) (Rubin, 16).

The *Nasab*: Ibn Yāsīn and the Numerical Value

A further connection to the Prophet Muḥammad can be seen in the *nasab*, Ibn Yāsīn. As attested by ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 H./661 C.e.), Yāsīn is one of the seven names of the Prophet Muḥammad which occur in the Qur’ān (Lumbard, 1070). As stated above, the *nasab* is the patronymic element that demonstrates ‘Abd Allāh is the son (*ibn*) of a certain Yāsīn who is not further specified by any of the accounts that give a literary record of the rise of the Murābiṭūn. What can be discerned is that when the rise of the Murābiṭūn was written, the name Yāsīn was atypical, which is evident when *Al-Taḥḍīb*, the compilation of Ḥadīṭ transmitters, is consulted. As a personal name, Yāsīn occurs twice and Ibn Yāsīn only once⁴. That said, let us turn to the etymology of the *nasab* and assess, similarly to the *ism*, whether it unfolds meaning for the narrative.

New Islamic Movements in the Maghrib and ‘Mysterious Letters’

The name Yāsīn is, in itself, special as it literally consists only of two Arabic letters, *yā* (ي) and *sīn* (س). Interestingly, elsewhere in *Al-Masālik*, al-Bakrī notes that a figure named Hāmīm (d. 314 H./927 C.e.), whose name similarly consists of two letters *hā* (ح) and *mīm* (م), arose in 312 H./925 C.e. near Tiṭwān in the Rif Atlas Mountains among the Banū Ġumāra (Creighton, 15). According to al-Bakrī, Hāmīm was a self-proclaimed Berber prophet who initiated his own Islamic movement after having allegedly received a Qur’ān in the Berber language. Ibn Yāsīn also initiating an Islamic movement in the Maghrib and being the spiritual leader of the movement demonstrates parallels between these two figures to a certain extent.

The letter combinations *yā/sīn* and *hā/mīm* enclosed in the names of these two spiritual leaders depict a further parallel as they belong to a group of letters that contain mystified Qur’ānic symbolism: the so-called mysterious letters⁵ which are known in Arabic as *ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa‘a* or *al-ḥurūf al-fawātiḥ* (opening letters) (Massey, 427). Of the twenty-eight letters in the Arabic alphabet, fourteen appear as *muqaṭṭa‘a*, either singly or in combinations of two, three, four or five letters. These are unique letter combinations that appear at the beginning of twenty nine Suras of the Qur’ān and therefore appear to open the Suras. With regard to Yāsīn, it precedes Q36 in the Qur’ān

⁴ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Yāsīn in Ibn Ḥaḡar (2: 219). Second, Yāsīn Ibn Ṣaybān and ‘Aṣīm Ibn Yāsīn who are mentioned in Ibn Ḥaḡar (4: 337.10).

⁵ The term “mysterious letters” results from the unanswered question in research concerning their function, hence mysterious.

and therefore seems to open (*al-ḥurūf al-fawātiḥ*) this Sura. Bearing in mind the similarities between both figures, in particular the occurrence of the mysterious letters enclosed within their names, the question arises whether these mysterious letters could have a further meaning for the narrative *Al-Masālik*. We shall, therefore, look at the so-called functions ascribed to mysterious letters and assess whether they entail meaning for the narrative.

The Functions ascribed to Mysterious Letters

There are various theories with regard to the function of the mysterious letters that are held and disputed in Muslim tradition as well as in the research field of Islamic studies. These theories range from regarding these letters as abbreviations or names of God to elements of mysticism. In what follows, the most common theories will be presented.

A prominent theory states that these mysterious letters are abbreviations for truncated words that unravel deeper meaning. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 H./1505 C.e.), for instance, suggests that the mysterious letters were attributes of God. Accordingly, *alif lām ra* (the opening letters of the Suras Q10; 11; 12; 14; 15) allegedly stand for al-Raḥmān (i.e. ‘most merciful’). Another abbreviation theory is acrophony, which considers the mysterious letters to be representative of words, e.g. *Alif* was equated to *anā* (i.e. ‘I am’ in Arabic). Western orientalists dedicated new consideration to this field. Hans Bauer, for example, considered the mysterious letters to be catchwords (Bauer, 159). According to Theodor Nöldeke, the letters were references to names of people who were consulted for their readings of the Suras (Nöldeke & Schwally, 215). When applied to selected mysterious letters, the aforementioned theories can be taken into consideration; however, none of them seems to be applicable to the mysterious letters rendered in the name Yāsīn and the Murābiṭūn.

This means we have to take into account the environment al-Bakrī was writing in and the meaning of mysterious letters. The writings of Andalusian scribes, such as Judah ha Levi, Moses Ibn Ezra and Joseph Ibn Zaddiq mirror the influence of Ibn Masarra’s (d. 319 H./931 C.e.) *Kitāb ḥawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf wa-ḥaqā’iqihā wa-uṣūlihā* (‘The Books of the Properties of Letters, Their True Essences and Roots’) (Asín Palacios, 41). This is a manual of mystic cabala that includes a section on mysterious letters. According to Michael Ebstein, the mysterious letters were the ‘building blocks of creation’ for Ibn Masarra (Ebstein, 88). Since Ibn Masarra had a circle of experts who carried his learning for more than a century after his death and, in addition, because his writings seem to have influenced some scribes in al-Andalus, it is plausible that al-Bakrī was acquainted with mysterious letters in general, and in particular, as explained by Ibn Masarra. Subsequently, the environment in which al-Bakrī was writing was receptive to understanding the mysterious letters and mysticism.

At the same time, the aforementioned connection between mysterious letters and mysticism mirrors another prominent stance held in Muslim tradition, as well as by Orientalists, which claims that the mysterious letters depict ‘mystical signs with symbolic meaning based upon the numerical value assigned to the letters’ (Massey, 473). Semitic languages ascribe a numerical value to alphabetical letters, a practice known as numerology (Variso, 554). Numerology is probably best known from Jewish mysticism where it is referred to as Gematria and implies numbers are equivalent to letters, words or even verses. Accordingly, the numerical values of certain mysterious letters were regarded as means of prognostication.

According to al-Suyūṭī, the Prophet Muḥammad was informed by some Jews that the numerical value of some mysterious letters would indicate how long his community (Islam) would survive (Loth, 602). One example he provides is the numerical value of the mysterious letters found in Q2, *Alīf* (1) + *lām* (30) + *mīm* (40), giving the amount of years Islam would last. Al-Suyūṭī renders three more attempts of prognostication that all fail and concludes by claiming that the knowledge of the function of these mysterious letters must be confined solely to God (Welch, 400). Otto Loth revisited this theory and argued that since the Suras, which include the mysterious letters, are categorised by scholarship as Meccan and early Medinan, they may embody some influence of Jewish mysticism (Loth, 603). This leads us to the numerical value of Yāsīn and a potential meaning within the context of the literary text of the Murābiṭūn.

The Numerical Value of Yāsīn and Reflection in the Manuscript

According to Gematria, the letter *yā* equates to 10 and *sīn* to 60, hence the numerical value of *yā* (10) and *sīn* (60) is 70. We find a parallel in al-Bakrī's manuscript in the sense that the number seventy corresponds to the number of members from the Banū Ḡuddāla who assembled to welcome Ibn Yāsīn according to al-Bakrī (Al-Bakrī, 859). This means that it signifies the number of people from amongst whom Ibn Yāsīn would initiate the Murābiṭūn.

The number seventy is not confined to al-Bakrī, but is also included in the accounts of Ibn 'Idārī (46) and the anonymous *Al-Ḥulal* (10). This element seems to have been of some concern for chroniclers, as a synoptic reading reveals that even though three accounts that relate the rise of the Murābiṭūn include this piece of information, four do not (Ibn Abī Zar', 78; Ibn al-Aṭīr, 425; Qāḍī 'Iyād, 781). Conversely, this indicates that not all chroniclers perceived this information either worthy of being included or considered it as false. In terms of al-Bakrī's manuscript, we cannot know for certain whether Ibn Yāsīn actually, i.e. historically, was met by seventy people, because the evidence we possess today is only found in literary sources.

The incongruence amongst the sources may be of some importance in this case, since as it seems, some sources chose not to make mention of this number. However, of more relevance is the fact that the number of people Ibn Yāsīn is described by al-Bakrī as having been met is conspicuously reflected in the numerical value of the two letters *yā* and *sīn* (70) indicating partaking role in the narrative and should be seen in light of the act of story-telling. This leads us back to the aforementioned Berber prophet, Hāmīm whose name similarly consists of two mysterious letters placed together. It cannot be ruled that there existed a fashion by spiritual leaders amongst Berber tribes of some sort to use mysterious letters as names. In spite the unanswered questions around these names, we can deduce a mysterious Qur'ānic symbolism which can be regarded as a means to legitimise a new Islamic movement.

The *Kunya*: Tīn Yazāmāran

The *kunya* is the most interesting part of the chain of names that is attributed to Ibn Yāsīn by al-Bakrī. The table mentioned earlier in this article which depicts the various different ways mediaeval Muslim historiography referred to the name of the spiritual leader of the Murābiṭūn, 'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn, underlines that al-Bakrī's version of the name is unique. A synoptic reading namely shows that the other chroniclers do not make mention of the *kunya*. Al-Bakrī, however, reveals a further piece of identity of 'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn through the reference of the maternal genealogy. Ultimately, this *kunya*, which is uniquely rendered by al-Bakrī, depicts 'Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn as the son of a woman named Tīn Yazāmāran. This *kunya* is presented by al-Bakrī as "*ism ummi-*

hi Tīn Yazāmāran min ahl Ġazūla” which means ‘whose mother’s name is Tīn Yazāmāran from the people of Ġazūla’ (Al-Bakrī, 859). Effectively, two points are important in this context. First, it is noteworthy that al-Bakrī, as the earliest source that relates the rise of the Murābiṭūn, and a contemporary of the movement, is the only one to make mention of this *kunya*. Second, the expression Tīn Yazāmāran is not Arabic, but Berber, as the literary onomastics of the name will later show.

The Importance of Matriarchs for Berbers

Since al-Bakrī is the only chronicler who mentions the maternal genealogy, which, in turn, carries a Berber connotation, we shall look into the significance of matriarchs in the Berber society. The name Tīn Yazāmāran bears at first sight similarity to Tīn Hinān. This Berber woman dates from the fourth century before common era and according to Hsain Ilhiane personifies the melding of mythmaking into contemporary oral history with the aim of validating Tuareg social organisations (Ilahiane, 126). In the oral folk tradition, Tīn Hinān is commemorated as a Berber noble woman, the sister of Barānis from whom all Berber tribal confederations are claimed to descend⁶. Various Tuareg tribes, for instance, Kel Ahhagar, Kel Rala and Taytok, today relate their genealogy to this matriarch (Ilahiane, 127).

Let us turn to the etymology of the name. Tīn Hinān consists of the Berber genitive construction *tī-n* (i.e. ‘she of’) and *Hinān* (i.e. ‘tents’). Following Gabriel Champs, Tīn Hinān or ‘she of the tents’ is figuratively understood and means ‘mother of all tribes’ (Champs, 499). Tīn Hinān is, however, not the only matriarch in Berber culture. Johannes Nicholeisen claims that other Tuareg tribes trace their ancestry to a figure recalled as Lamtūna, likewise portrayed as a sister of the aforementioned Barānis (*ibid.*).

The name Lamtūna is of considerable significance for us because the tribes that would build the military bulk of the Murābiṭūn are referred to as the Banū Lamtūna (Lewicki, 652). Banū is Arabic and means ‘sons’ (sg. *ibn*) and is followed by the name of the ancestor of the tribe (Ansari, 1021). Consequently, Banū Lamtūna literally means ‘sons of Lamtūna’ (Norris, 110)⁷ which suggests that the common ancestor of the Banū Lamtūna was a matriarch remembered as Lamtūna. This supports the notion that Berber tribes are coined by a culture of matriarchs and that the maternal genealogy was important for al-Bakrī. This leads us to the etymology and onomastics of the *kunya* Tī-n Yazāmāran.

The Morphological Assessment of Tīn Yazāmāran

It is noteworthy that the exact wording, Tī-n, which we have already encountered in the name Tī-n Hinān, recurs in the maternal genealogy of Ibn Yāsīn. Since Tī-n Hinān means ‘she/mother of all tents or tribes’ analogously, this could mean that Tī-n Yazāmāran is ‘she of’ or ‘mother of’ Yazāmāran. In order to now decipher the meaning of Yazāmāran, a brief discussion of Berber morphology is required.

In a free-state construction, Berber nouns consist of a stem, which may be supplemented by prefixes and suffixes depending on the masculine, feminine or plural forms⁸. The masculine singular form of Berber nouns is indicated by an initial *a* that is added to the stem of the word. Its plural form consists of the prefix *i* (instead of *a*) and

⁶ Barānis (Burnus) descendants claimed to be were Kutāma, Azdāfa, Awraba, Ṣanhāḡa, Aḡīsa, Maṣmūda and Awrīḡa (Ibn Ḥazm, 495).

⁷ Without explanation claims that Ilemfīn (Lamtūna) is the common ancestor of all Tuareg tribes.

⁸ By free-state and construct state is meant that depending on the position of words in Berber syntax the orthography changes.

the suffix *ən*. For instance, the stem of the Berber word for bovine is *funas*. A masculine singular form of bovine is *a+funas* (*afunas*). In order to transform it into a masculine plural form the prefix *a* is substituted by an *i* and *ən* is added as a suffix, resulting in *i+funas+ən* (*ifunasən*). Feminine nouns follow a similar pattern whereby the prefix *ta* and suffix *t* in the singular form are added to the stem *funas* (*ta+funas+t* or *tafunast*). Feminine plural nouns alter the initial *ta* of the singular forms into a *ti* and the suffix *t* of the feminine noun is substituted by *in*, hence *ti+funas+in* (*tinfunasin*).

The transliteration of Berber vowels into Arabic is complex due to the manifold dialects and localised vernacular of Berber tribes. We should therefore follow the convention that *y* and *i*, which are indicated by the same letter *yā* (ﻱ) in Arabic, and the ending *an* and *ən*, are identical. Essentially, this means that *yazāmāran* can equally compare to *izāmārən*. That said, we must now determine the stem of *yazāmāran/izāmārən*⁹. In order to receive the stem of the word, the initial *ya/i* and the ending *ən/an* should be ignored. This leaves us with the masculine plural substantive for *zmer*. In Central Moroccan Berber *izmər* is the male form, *tizmər* the female form, of ram and ewe¹⁰ (Kossmann, 155). Consequently, this would make ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn’s mother, Tī-n Izmərən, which, translated, means ‘she/mother of rams’¹¹.

A Quasi Divine Status through the Significance of Rams

With regard to the question what the *kunya* ‘she/mother of rams’ could mean, al-Bakrī himself gives the clue through the references he makes to first, the Ġazūla tribe and second, the native village Tamāmānāwt (Al-Bakrī, 859). The Banū Ġazūla belonged to the Ṣanhāġa confederation, who inhabited a region that is located in today’s southern Morocco and were less powerful than the other tribes situated in the region (Lagardère, 18). Vincent Monteil identifies Tamāmānāwt as Tamānart, which is located in southern Morocco (Monteil, 389). Considering Tamānart would be for our purpose more interesting, as al-Bakrī alludes the cult of ram worship in *Al-Masālik* on the route between Aġmāt and Sūs near precisely Tamānart (Al-Bakrī, 851-856). Other indications of similar venerations can be found elsewhere in *Al-Masālik*. Al-Bakrī, for instance, describes how the Ġumāra tribe (who have been mentioned earlier in this article in reference to the so-called Prophet Ḥāmīm) used the heads of animals were used to determine a person’s future (Al-Bakrī, 777-778). Subsequently, this suggests that rams were part of a Berber cult practised in the valley of Tamānart, the land the Ġazūla inhabited. Bearing in mind that ram worship was practised near/in the same village that Ibn Yāsīn was native to, and that his mother is, following al-Bakrī, literally the ‘she/mother of rams,’ we are compelled to assess rams as deities and question whether Ibn Yāsīn could have been portrayed by al-Bakrī to be considered as of Berber divine origins.

Rams belong to the group of animals, in North Africa, that supposedly possess *baraka*, an Arabic word which can be translated as blessing or benediction (Wehr, 54). In the Berber context, *baraka* is used ‘to denote a mysterious wonder-working force which is looked upon as a blessing [or grace] from God, a blessed virtue’ (Westermarck, 99) which can be compared to a certain sense of holiness. Even today, rams and ewes carry the epithet *lālla mēnni kull ši mēnni* (my lady from me, everything

⁹ Vincent Lagardère in *Les Almoravides* (26) transliterates the name as Tin-n-Izmāren. A similar version is rendered as Tin Izāmāran by Bosch Villa, *Los Almorávides* (51).

¹⁰ In Ṣanhāġa Berber we encounter the male form *izmər*, *izimmar*, in Nefūsa *zumər*, in Tarifit *izma*, in Sūs *izmər*, Zenaga *iži?mār*, Tuareg *əžemər*.

¹¹ Vincent Lagardère ascribes similarly “the one of the rams” to the *kunya* of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn (47).

from me) which denotes that only good things such as milk, wool and meat come from them (*ibid.*).

Henri Basset hypothesised that *lälla mēnni* could be therefore considered heir to the god Amun and became a patron for sheep in north-west Morocco (Basset, 15). Amun was the supreme god of the Ancient Egyptian pantheon, and even today, the Temple of Karnak or Thebes shows the iconographical representation of him as a ram with curved horns¹². Amun became associated with the sun god and his name was supplemented with the suffix *Ra*, which thus made him ‘Amun-Ra king of the gods’ (Hart, 15) The rock paintings across North Africa from the Neolithic period reveal veneration of rams, bulls and antelopes, which indicate a form, not further specified, of zoolatry. Europeans scholars from the early twentieth century such as Henri Basset, Émile-Félix Gautier and Stéphane Gsell asserted that an Amun cult was practised in North Africa due to the widespread presence of these rock paintings.

There is, nevertheless, an analogy between supreme deity and the horns of a ram in ancient cultures. For instance, the high god in Ancient Greek mythology, Zeus, was iconographically depicted with the horns of a ram, as was Jupiter as the high deity of the Roman pantheon. It is suspected that in the sixth century before common era, the Berber tribes in eastern Libya adopted into their religion the Ancient Egyptian Amun Ra whose anthropomorphic depiction was a ram (Camps, 597). The problem we encounter is that there is no known Berber name for this deity whose temple supposedly was in the Libyan Desert at the Oasis of Sīwah. The names known to us are from Egyptian, Greek and Phoenician sources¹³. According to Herodotus, he was Ζεύς Ἄμμων (Zeus Amun) (Westermarck, 100). In Ancient Greek mythology, his name was confined to Zeus, who interestingly, was not the sun god, but rather the god of thunder. Zeus, nevertheless, is also associated with rams and simultaneously represents the king of gods in the Greek pantheon.

In the Carthaginian pantheon, this Amun deity was known as Ba’al Ḥaman and was also the supreme deity (*ibid.*). As far westwards on the African continent as the Canary Islands, the name Amun was found among the Guanche, as remarked by Basset who recorded that the name Amun Lord referred to the sun (Basset, 12). Distinguishing between these deities, and determining which culture incorporated which deity into its religion, and from whom, is not the intention of this paper. It is, nevertheless, important to acknowledge that this deity, whatever its name may be, was found among various ancient religions around the Mediterranean as the supreme deity of their pantheons and associated with the ram.

This leads us to a possible understanding of the name Tīn Yazāmāran in al-Bakrī’s narrative. Even though al-Bakrī does not explain the meaning of the *kunya* explicitly, we can follow from the absence of the *kunya* in the other Muslim mediaeval sources that related the story of the Murābiṭūn that it must have been something of significance. The fact that Ibn Yāsīn, in al-Bakrī’s version, derives from a region and culture connected to the veneration of rams where the ram *per se* was an ancient feature associated with supreme deity is significant for the act of al-Bakrī’s story-telling. It is precisely this title ‘mother/she of rams’ which combines the elements of matriarchs and the deity in form of a ram in Berber culture that suggests that Tīn Yazāmāran may have been some kind of quasi divine being venerated in an ancient Berber cult. Conversely,

¹² The ram and the Nile goose were the sacred of animals of this deity (Owusu, 53).

¹³ According to Oric Bates in *Eastern Libya*, this is the reason why this Berber Amun deity was coined “Deus Fatidicus” (Bates, 150).

this understanding suggests a sense of Berber identity amongst the Murābiṭūn in al-Bakrī's narrative which is void in the other sources.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the necessity of applying literary onomastics in general and treating what we know of the Murābiṭūn as the products of writing history. With regard to the Murābiṭūn, the historiographical approach has often been underestimated. The article has briefly shown how even with regard to the name attributed to the initiator of the Murābiṭūn, the other manuscripts are not congruent. Names, in the context of the Murābiṭūn, have been taken as mere historical facts presented by the respective chroniclers. This approach, however, neglects entirely a possible interaction between names and literary texts. The assessment of “‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn *ism ummi-hi* Tīn Yazāmāran *min ahl* Ġazūla” has shown that the name al-Bakrī ascribed to the initiator of the Murābiṭūn in his literary reconstruction of the movement works on three levels through manifold symbolism. The first level that the *ism* ‘Abd Allāh illustrates is the reversion to pre-Islamic and Islamic elements. It connects the initiator of this new Berber movement to the Prophet Muḥammad *ipso facto* by means of regarding ‘Abd Allāh as a theophoric phrase bestowed on prophets in the Qur’ān, in particular to the Prophet Muḥammad. Subsequently, both are ‘servants of God.’ In addition, the assessment has shown that the *ism* ‘Abd Allāh depicts an element mirrored in the genealogy of the Prophet Muḥammad by being the same *ism* assigned to the latter's father.

The second level, which is depicted by means of the *nasab*, Ibn Yāsīn, unravels a mystified Qur’ānic connotation. Being one of the names of the Prophet Muḥammad, which is attested in the Qur’ān, the *nasab* reveals another direct connection to the Prophet Muḥammad. The assessment of the *nasab* has, additionally, shown an interaction between literary context and name in two cases. First, the number of people, amongst whom the Murābiṭūn is described to have been initiated, that is equivalent to the numerical value of the ‘mysterious letters’ *yā sīn* (seventy). Second, the similarities between Ibn Yāsīn and Ḥāmīm: both related by al-Bakrī, both initiators of new Islamic movements amongst Berber tribes in the Maghrib, both figures whose names consist of mysterious letters. A comparison of these two literary accounts may suggest the following. First, there may have been a fashion for using mysterious letters as pseudonyms for the initiators of new Islamic movements in the Maghrib. Second, it could mean that Ibn Yāsīn imitated Ḥāmīm. Third, it may even be suggested that Ibn Yāsīn and Ḥāmīm were fabricated in the literary accounts of al-Bakrī. In any case, the *nasab* Ibn Yāsīn demonstrates that there is a certain Qur’ānic-mystified aura that encircles the movement.

Until this point, the name of the initiator of the Murābiṭūn depicts a pre-Islamic/Islamic connotation through ‘Abd Allāh, supplemented by an additional mysterious Qur’ānic connotation by means of Ibn Yāsīn. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Yāsīn is also the name agreed upon by all seven accounts that relate the rise of the Murābiṭūn. The only source that deviates and mentions the maternal genealogy is al-Bakrī. This reference unravels the Berber identity of the first Islamic movement from the Maghrib that would rule the Muslim West: the Murābiṭūn. As the assessment has shown, the Berber identity of the movement depicted through the *kunya* is the third level.

The discussion of the *kunya* demonstrated the importance of the maternal reference which was presented through this name. The *kunya* Tīn Yazārāman has to be considered in the context of Berber collective memory, as Berber trace their origins to the fourth century matriarch Tīn Hinān. Bearing in mind that this significant female figure in

Berber culture, Tīn Hinān, and Tīn Yazārāman share etymological similarities through the name Tīn, suggests that al-Bakrī may have intentionally used the symbolism endowed in Tīn to enhance the Berber identity of the Murābiṭūn.

If these three levels are conflated and applied to the Murābiṭūn, we encounter the following: pre-Islamic and Islamic elements, mystified Qur'ānic connotation and a Berber quasi divine identity. In the act of story-telling, these elements can be understood as relevant in presenting a Berber movement as legitimate key players in the Muslim realm.

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