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Lost Somewhere in Between? On the Transmission of History from Islamic West to East in Premodern Times: The Case of the Almohad Caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb and the Battle of Alarcos

In his universal history *Ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār afrād al-bashar* (*Beloved of Careers: On the Accounts of People*), early 16th-century Iran and Mughal India’s leading historian Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Muḥammad Khvāndamīr (d. 942 H/1535-6 CE)¹ writes:

[S]ince the names and incidents related to the dynasty that ruled the Maghrib after the Banū ‘Abd al-Mu‘min [i.e. the Almohads] are not contained in the books which are available [to me] when writing these lines, I will continue with the accounts of the rulers of Egypt and the sultans of the Ayyūbid dynasty.²

This quote suggests that as far as events in al-Andalus and the Maghrib were concerned, Khvāndamīr had nothing to say about the 250 years between the rise of the Marinids and their conquest of the Almohad capital Marrakesh in 668 H/1269 CE and his own time, given the total lack of available books on the subject. And yet, we might expect that Khvāndamīr of all scholars would have had more information at his disposal, as he belonged to an important line of histori-

1 Arabic names of Persian works and Iranian authors will be given according to the Persian transcription rules.

2 Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (2001), 2: 584.

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ans. His grandfather was Muḥammad b. Khvāndshāh Mirkhvānd (d. 903 H/1498 CE), author of the famous universal history *Rawzat al-ṣafā*. Furthermore, he lived in post-Tīmūrid Herat in the 1520s, where he had access to some of the best libraries in the Islamic East. Nevertheless, Khvāndamīr apparently did not know anything about the decades-long struggle of the Naṣrids in the 15th century or the subsequent fall of Granada to the Christians in 1492, both normally seen as a landmark in the relations between Muslims and Christians in Europe.

In this article I will shed light on the question of what historians in the Islamic East knew about the western Islamic lands – al-Andalus and the Maghrib – up to the early 16th century. Afterwards, in early modern times, the ties between the western and the eastern parts of the Mediterranean were strengthened by the steady exchange of emissaries, traders, and travelers, which contributed to a greater flow of knowledge. As such, this article is a contribution to the field of the transmission of knowledge – in this case, knowledge about history – across the Arab and Persian parts of the Islamic world until around 1500. It addresses the questions of which Persian and Arabic sources were employed by historians in the East, the way in which information reached the Islamic East, and how to explain discrepancies between Western and Eastern sources' accounts of the same events. On a broader level, it also tackles the issue of the connectedness of the various parts of the Islamic lands in premodern times.³

This article is based on the analysis of several chronicles and biographical dictionaries written in Arabic and Persian, all of which have been subjected to the historical method of source criticism. It goes without saying that a study analyzing different strands of historiography focuses on the numerous ways information is presented, and not on the verification of the events described in the sources. In terms of the accounts of the Battle of Alarcos dealt with here, the latter approach is adopted by Ambrosio Huici Miranda in his seminal *Las grandes batallas de la Reconquista durante las invasiones africanas (almorávides, almohades y benimerines)*, in which he discusses the accuracy of various Arabic sources. Recent studies focusing on the transmission of historiographical knowledge are Luis Molina's analysis of the account of the Jewish villain Ṭālūt in Ibn al-Qūṭīyya's (d. 367 H/977 CE) *Ta'rikh iftitāḥ al-Andalus*, and Omayra Herrero Soto's article on the account of Ṭāriq b. Ziyād's speech in 92 H/711 CE and its transmission in various chronicles.⁴ Whereas both studies analyze Arabic texts, the present study is the first of its kind to take into account both Ara-

³ For a recent discussion on the transmission of knowledge from the Islamic West to the East, see Fierro 2018.

⁴ Huici Miranda 1956, 141–147; Molina 2011; Herrero Soto 2010.

bic and Persian sources concerning the transmission of historiographical knowledge from the Islamic West to the Islamic East.

The starting point are three Persian universal histories from the 16th century: the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* mentioned above, and, to a lesser degree, the *Nusakh-i (or Tārīkh-i) jahān-ārā* written by Qāzī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ghaffārī Qazvīnī Kāshānī (d. 975 H/1567-8) and the *Takmilat al-akhbār* of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn ‘Alī ‘Abdī Beg Shīrāzī (d. 988 H/1580 CE), all three of which contain information on the Islamic West. I will first give a brief general overview of the depiction of al-Andalus and the Maghrib in Persian historiography. I will then analyze the information on these regions contained in these three works. Subsequently, I will trace the (possible) sources Khvāndamīr used when covering an event related to one of the most famous figures of the Islamic West in premodern times: the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Mu‘min al-Manṣūr (r. 580–595 H/1184–1199 CE) and his victory over the Christians in the Battle of Alarcos in 591 H/1195 CE. Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr is a case in point, since whereas Khvāndamīr gives a very detailed depiction of the caliph that is based on various strands of historiographical knowledge, he has little to say about other figures from the West.

1 Persian historical writing on the Islamic West

From the 10th century onwards, al-Andalus and the Maghrib were regularly mentioned in history books written in Persian, starting with the Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 92 H/711 CE.⁵ The amount of text dedicated to these regions and the information conveyed varied from chronicle to chronicle. While works like the *Tārīkh-nāma* – Bal‘amī’s 10th-century Sāmānid-era Persian adaptation of al-Ṭabarī’s *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*⁶ – dedicate only a few lines to the history of the Islamic West, later chronicles composed in Īlkhānid-Mongol times (c. 1250–1350) contain more information. For example, the famous universal history *Jāmi‘ al-tavārīkh* by Rashīd al-Dīn Faḡlallāh Hamadānī (d. 718 H/1318 CE) and two works related to it, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Kāshānī’s (d. c. 736 H/1335 CE) *Zubdat al-tavārīkh* and Fakhr al-Dīn Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd Banākātī’s (d. 730 H/1329-30) *Rawḡat ūlī l-albāb fi*

⁵ For a general introduction to the development of historiographical works written in Persian, see Melville 2012.

⁶ Cf. Peacock 2007.

tavārīkh al-akābir va-l-aṣṣāb (better known as *Tārīkh-i Banākātī*), give detailed accounts of the principalities in al-Andalus and Christian Spain during their time, relying in part on Christian sources. The reason for this is that Rashīd al-Dīn, the long-term vizier of various Īlkhānid-Mongol rulers, had access to information on regions far away from Iran, and was interested in composing a world history in the true sense, and not only the more habitual history of the Islamic lands.⁷ In the 14th and 15th centuries, after the Īlkhānid-Mongol Empire in Iran had broken apart and various local dynasties were in power, access to information on regions far from Iran became more and more difficult. This becomes clear when considering the world histories of the Timūrid historians Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū (d. 833 H/1430 CE) and Khvāndamīr's grandfather Mīrkhvānd, which do not mention any contemporary narratives or sources on the Islamic West.

Although its account is not based on contemporary sources either, Khvāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar* offers a much greater degree of detail about the early centuries of Islam in Spain, that is, on the Umayyads and their successors, as well as on later dynasties like the Almoravids and Almohads, before the narrative abruptly stops. Khvāndamīr wrote his work in post-Timūrid Herat in the 1520s under the reign of Ṣafavid shah Ismā'īl I (r. 906–930 H/1501–1524 CE), who had conquered Iran and various parts of Central Asia and Iraq some years earlier. As his aim was to cast Ismā'īl as a world conqueror who was both forceful defender of Islam and staunch champion of Shi'ism, offering more details on the most distant Islamic lands might have been a way to stress the shah's claim to be the ruler of the entire Muslim community (*umma*). In general, Khvāndamīr's chronicle contains much more information on lesser-known principalities in Iran, as well as on other parts of the Islamic world, than the one of his grandfather Mīrkhvānd.

In regard to the Islamic West, it is interesting to note that Khvāndamīr had problems covering the earliest periods in the history of the Iberian Peninsula under Islamic rule. The oldest manuscripts of his work⁸ reveal that Khvāndamīr did not have anything to say about the Umayyad period from the 8th century to the 11th century and, with one exception, the subsequent *taifa* rulers of the 11th century. The lack of attention to the celebrated Umayyad caliphate of 316–

⁷ Rashīd al-Dīn's extraordinary approach to Islamic historiographical writing is demonstrated by his detailed accounts of non-Islamic peoples; see the parts of his chronicle edited by Jahn 1971, 1973, 1977, 1980.

⁸ On the manuscript tradition of the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* and the various versions written by its author, see Bockholt 2021.

422 H/929–1031 CE is particularly striking; instead, the narrative starts with the *taifa* kingdom of the ‘Abbāids in Seville (r. 414–484 H/1023–1091 CE) and the beginning of Almoravid rule (r. 454–541 H/1062–1147 CE) in the 11th century. However, in a slightly revised version of his chronicle, based on additional sources, Khvāndamīr added new information on the first centuries of Islam in al-Andalus to the existing narrative. What remains remarkable is the complete omission of the last Islamic dynasty in the Iberian Peninsula, the Naṣrids of Granada (r. 629–897 H/1232–1492 CE), whose rule had ended only thirty years earlier. In particular, the downfall of the Naṣrids would have been an example of the centuries-old conflicts between Muslims and Christians, and thus would have fit one of the core patterns of Islamic historiography. As demonstrated above, Khvāndamīr remains silent about all of this, ending with the last Almo-had rulers in the 1260s.

By contrast, the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* covers the history of the Berber Muslim dynasties of the Almoravids and the Almohads (c. 1060–1270) at length, and gives accounts based on Arabic sources. Unlike this work, two other Ṣafavid chronicles of the 16th century, the *Nusakh-i jahān-ārā* by Ghaffārī Qazvīnī Kāshānī and the *Takmilat al-akhbār* by ‘Abdī Beg Shīrāzī, merely list rulers and events. Notably, the latter relies on the former and does not convey any further information.⁹ While the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* ends with the last Almohad ruler Abū al-‘Ulā Abū Dabbūs Idrīs II Muḥammad al-Wāthiq (r. 665–668 H/1266–1269 CE), the *Nusakh-i jahān-ārā* extends the narrative to the first Marīnid rulers, up to the reign of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān II (731–749 H/1331–1348 CE). At this point it stops abruptly, leaving out later rulers (the dynasty came to an end in 869 H/1465 CE).¹⁰ Unfortunately, the sources of the *Nusakh-i jahān-ārā* remain unknown, as it neither mentions any specific author or work, nor provides enough text for a thorough comparison.¹¹ Therefore, in order to trace a particular narrative or piece of information on the Islamic West found in a 16th-century Persian historiographical work, the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* alone can provide us with further insight into the transmission of knowledge during premodern times. Of the three chronicles addressed here, this is the only one that states its sources and

⁹ The text of the *Takmilat al-akhbār* has not been fully edited yet. For my research, I consulted MS Majlis 8401, fols. 92r–96r. For the later part of the work on Ṣafavid history, see ‘Abdī Beg Shīrāzī, *Takmilat al-akhbār* (1990).

¹⁰ Ghaffārī Qazvīnī Kāshānī, *Nusakh-i jahān-ārā* (1964), 153–154.

¹¹ The KITAB project, led by Sarah Bowen Savant (Aga Khan University, London), promises further insights into the composition of texts and the reuse of text units, cf. <http://kitab-project.org>.

includes longer narratives. In the following section I will take as a case study its account of the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr.

2 The account of the Almohad ruler Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb and the Battle of Alarcos in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar*

Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Mu‘min al-Manṣūr (r. 580–595 H/1184–1199 CE) was the third ruler of the Almohad Caliphate in present-day Morocco, a Berber dynasty founded by his grandfather ‘Abd al-Mu‘min b. ‘Alī al-Kūmī (r. 524–558 H/1130–1163 CE) from Tlemcen, who was a close follower of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Tūmart (d. 524 H/1130 CE).¹² Ibn Tūmart, from Sūs (Sous, between the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas mountains), and his followers formed an Islamic reform movement against the ruling Almoravid dynasty, propagating what they touted as a “purer” Islam than the one practiced by their opponents. In the 1130s and 1140s, the Almohads (Ar. *muwaḥḥidūn*, “adherents of the divine unicity”), led by ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, took over the Almoravid capital of Marrakesh and the Almoravid territories in Islamic Spain. In the decades following the Almohad takeover, Muslim power in al-Andalus was steadily contested by Christian rulers from the north, most notably Alfonso VIII of Castile (r. 1158–1214).¹³ During his reign, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr fought the Christians in al-Andalus on more than one occasion. In the Battle of Alarcos (al-Arak in the Arabic sources) near Ciudad Real in the summer of 591 H/1195 CE, the Almohad caliph defeated Alfonso VIII, which contributed to his fame as a great warrior king. The details of this battle would later on become an important part of the accounts of the Almohads and the western Islamic lands in various Arabic and Persian works in the East.¹⁴

In the *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, among the Almohad rulers only Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb receives more than one chapter: Khvāndamīr first presents his life in a general

¹² On the history of the Almohad dynasty see Huici Miranda 1956–1957; Le Tourneau 1969; Viguera Molins 1997; Kennedy 1998; Fierro 2010; Fromherz 2010. For Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb in particular, see Huici Miranda 1960a.

¹³ On Alfonso VIII, see Sáez 1980.

¹⁴ Huici Miranda 1956, 141–147. For details on the battle, see Huici Miranda 1956, 137–216; Huici Miranda 1960b. Albarrán Iruela 2018 gives an analysis of multiple Arabic sources from later times depicting the caliph as a warrior and Ṣūfī.

biographical sketch, followed by an account of the Battle of Alarcos.¹⁵ Just how little information on the battle was available to Khvāndamīr is evident in the fact that he falsely refers to it as the “Battle of al-Zallāqa”, confusing it with a previous battle between the Almoravid ruler Yūsuf b. Tāshufīn (r. 453–500 H/ 1061–1107 CE) and Alfonso VI of León and Castile (r. 1065–1109) more than a century earlier, in 479 H/1086 CE.¹⁶ Concerning the combatants at the Battle of Alarcos, the numbers stated by Khvāndamīr are heavily exaggerated: by his account 100,000 Muslims fought under Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb against 240,000 “Franks” (i.e. the Castilians), leaving 146,000 of their enemies dead, although Alfonso VIII (*malik-i farang/farangistān*, “king of the Franks”) managed to escape. He reports that after the battle so many weapons and animals were captured that market prices plummeted – a donkey went for just a *dirham*, and a sword for as little as half a *dirham* –, details which further highlight the overwhelming victory of the Muslims. Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb later returned to North Africa, where he died in 595 H/1199 CE (or, according to another account given here, lived on as a Šūfī; see below). Given the specific details of his account, the question arises as to how this information reached Khvāndamīr, and which sources he relied on when constructing his narrative. Might he have even had access to sources that came from the Islamic West directly?

For his account of the battle, Khvāndamīr names as his sources a certain “Imām Yāfi‘ī” for the general account, and Abū Shāma for the numbers of Christians killed and the booty captured. By Imām Yāfi‘ī, Khvāndamīr is referring to ‘Abd Allāh b. As‘ad ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 768 H/1367 CE), a Yemenite scholar who spent most of his life in Mecca, where he wrote his *Mir’āt al-janān wa-‘ibrat al-yaqzān* (in Arabic), a cross between a history book and a biographical dictionary.¹⁷ In fact, an analysis of al-Yāfi‘ī’s account of Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb in his *Mir’āt al-janān* reveals that when writing his chronicle, Khvāndamīr most probably relied exclusively on this work, as the numbers supposedly given by Abū Shāma are cited here as well.¹⁸ The only source for the Battle of Alarcos in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is thus a compilation of older works written in the Arabian Peninsula some two hundred years earlier. Going a step further, by identifying the sources used

¹⁵ Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (2001), 2: 581–583; cf. MS Damat İbrahim Paşa 901, fols. 523v–524r.

¹⁶ This confusion occurs in earlier Arabic sources on the battle too, see Huici Miranda 1956, 141–147; on the battle and its sources, see Huici Miranda 1956, 19–82; Tibi 2002.

¹⁷ Geoffroy 2002.

¹⁸ Al-Yāfi‘ī, *Mir’āt al-janān* (1997), 3: 357 and 363–366.

by al-Yāfi'ī, we might come closer in our attempt to understand by what means and in what form this information on the Islamic West made its way eastward.

3 Tracking down the sources of the sources: From Herat to Mecca to Damascus

When writing the *Mir'āt al-janān* in Mecca, al-Yāfi'ī apparently had access to various Arabic sources. In the case of Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb's victory at Alarcos, one of the texts al-Yāfi'ī relies on heavily and quotes by name is the biographical dictionary *Tarājim rijāl al-qarnayn al-sādis wa-l-sābi' al-ma'rūf bi-Dhayl al-Rawḍatayn* (known as *Dhayl*) by the Damascene historian and biographer Abū Shāma Shihāb al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 665 H/1268 CE).¹⁹ As we have just seen, Khvāndamīr also points to Abū Shāma by name, in an apparent attempt to indicate the original source of his source. Both authors, al-Yāfi'ī and his source Abū Shāma, mention the details later copied by Khvāndamīr: the number of Muslim and Christian soldiers, and the number of Christians killed on the battlefield. They both also refer to the battle as “*waq'at al-Zallāqa*” (the Battle of al-Zallāqa), as copied in turn by Khvāndamīr in his *Ḥabīb al-siyar*.

However, in contrast to Khvāndamīr, whose universal history tends to run through older historical events unrelated to Iran as quickly as possible, al-Yāfi'ī and Abū Shāma provide more details on the battle and its aftermath. From their accounts the reader learns, for example, that the Christian prisoners numbered 30,000, and that the market price for a horse was 5 *dirhams*, which is nowhere mentioned in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar*. In this context, it is important to note that the accounts of the booty and market prices seem to indicate that the two texts draw on different sources. Whereas Abū Shāma states that the price of a prisoner plummeted to a single *dirham*, and that the booty consisted of 150,000 tents, 80,000 horses, 100,000 mules, and 400,000 donkeys, as well as jewelry and clothing, al-Yāfi'ī only mentions 60,000 suits of chain mail taken from the *bayt al-māl*, the treasure house of the Christians. Abū Shāma also provides details about Alfonso

¹⁹ On Abū Shāma's life and works, see Pouzet 1975; Hirschler 2006; Antrim 2009. Despite its name, Abū Shāma's work is in fact not a continuation (*dhayl*) of his *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāhiyya* – a history of the Zangid and Ayyūbid rulers of Syria, Nūr al-Dīn (r. 541–569 H/1147–1174 CE) and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (r. 564–589 H/1169–1193 CE) – but a work on the scholarly community of Damascus that Abū Shāma had started earlier and updated regularly during his lifetime; see Hirschler 2006, 10–14.

VIII after the battle which are not found in al-Yāfi'ī's *Mir'āt al-janān*: according to the *Dhayl*, Alfonso's mind was so agitated that he vowed only ride by donkey, and to neither have intercourse with a woman nor sleep on a carpet, until he had exacted his revenge. However, al-Yāfi'ī is the only one to state the exact date (9 Sha'bān 591 H/19 July 1195 CE) and place of the battle ("close to the fortress of Ribāḥ"). Considering the significant differences between al-Yāfi'ī and Abū Shāma's accounts in terms of the booty and other details, it is clear that al-Yāfi'ī did not rely on Abū Shāma's text alone, but had access to at least one other source. On the other hand, Abū Shāma's account contains information not given by al-Yāfi'ī. Where does this information come from?

Fortunately for us, unlike Abū Shāma, al-Yāfi'ī does cite his sources. It is of great interest here that the *Mir'āt al-janān* contains information on the Battle of Alarcos and on the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb in *two different* places in the text: first in the account of the battle included alongside the events of the year 591 H/1195 CE, and again in the obituary of Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb in 595 H/ 1199 CE. Whereas the account of the battle itself draws on Abū Shāma more or less directly, as stated above, the information on the booty and further details given in the obituary differs from Abū Shāma's text. Here, al-Yāfi'ī relies on the biographical dictionary of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān (d. 681 H/ 1282 CE), the well-known *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, as he himself states in the text. Ibn Khallikān's multi-volume work contains biographical entries on several hundred people, among them a lengthy entry dedicated to Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb.²⁰ In the *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, Ibn Khallikān deals with Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb's life in general, as well as with the Battle of Alarcos in particular. He gives the exact date of the battle, and even specifies the place as "to the north of Córdoba, near the fortress of Ribāḥ, on [the field of] Marj al-ḥadid". In regard to the booty, he mentions the 60,000 suits of chain mail from the *bayt al-māl* later alluded to by al-Yāfi'ī. Of greatest interest here is the fact that Ibn Khallikān lists various sources for his account, among them members of the Maghribi community in Damascus, which could be the first direct link back to the western Islamic lands.²¹

²⁰ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (1994), 7: 3–19. On Ibn Khallikān, see Fück 1971.

²¹ Here, "Maghribi community" refers to people who emigrated from al-Andalus and North Africa to Damascus.

4 A direct line of transmission? On the ties between Damascus and the Maghrib in the 13th century

As is clear from Ibn Khallikān's own words, the exact information on the place and date (now even specified as *Thursday*, 9 Sha'bān 591) of the Battle of Alarcos as well as the booty taken from the Christians goes back to Maghribis living in Damascus (*jamā'a min fuḍalā' al-maghāriba*). Interestingly, nowhere does Ibn Khallikān state the vast numbers of soldiers and booty mentioned by Khvāndamīr and his sources, al-Yāfi'ī and Abū Shāma. Also, unlike them he does not confuse the Battle of Alarcos with the one that had taken place over a hundred years earlier at al-Zallāqa. Apparently, Ibn Khallikān did indeed rely on sources that differed from the ones quoted by the other authors mentioned. This is especially interesting in regard to Abū Shāma, a contemporary of his who had close ties with the Maghribi community in Damascus.²² According to Louis Pouzet, who in an article discusses Abū Shāma's connections with this community, the number of Maghribis in the city began to grow after the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, between Alfonso VIII and Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb's son and successor Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Nāṣir (r. 595–610 H/1199–1213 CE) in 609 H/1212 CE, which the Muslims lost. In total, Pouzet lists 92 Maghribis who lived in or at least visited Damascus during the 13th century, among them the famous mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī from Murcia, who died in Damascus in 638 H/1240 CE, and whose name is also mentioned by Ibn Khallikān as one of his Maghribi sources.²³ Others mentioned by name in the *Wafayāt al-a'yān* are the scholar Abū al-Khaṭṭāb 'Umar b. al-Ḥasan al-Kalbī Ibn Dīḥya (d. 633 H/1235 CE) and his brother Abū 'Amr (or Abū 'Uthmān, d. 634 H/1237 CE; both probably from Valencia), whose names are subsequently mentioned by al-Yāfi'ī as well.²⁴

²² Apart from other family members, one of Abū Shāma's wives belonged to the 'Abdari family, which was originally from al-Andalus, see Pouzet 1975, 170–172; Hirschler 2006, 33–36.

²³ Pouzet 1975, 194–199. Ávila 1990 even counts 555 people from al-Andalus and the Maghrib cited in al-Ṣafadī's biographical dictionary *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, written around eighty years later than Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-a'yān*. See also Ávila 2002 and her analysis of Ibn Ḥārith al-Khushani's biographical dictionary *Akhbār al-fuqahā' wa-l-muḥaddithin*, in which 225 out of 527 people covered in the work are said to have traveled to the Islamic East.

²⁴ For Ibn Dīḥya, see Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (1994), 3: 448–450; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (1962–2004), 22: 327; Granja 1971.

Although these people might indeed have been among Ibn Khallikān's informants, clearly there is no way we can gain further information as to how and when such an encounter might have taken place. It also remains unclear whether Ibn Khallikān's Maghribi contacts transmitted their information orally or in writing, e.g. via drafts of works produced in the West that they had at their disposal in Damascus. The following example of a certain Ibn Ḥamūya mentioned by Ibn Khallikān shows that even "eyewitness" accounts from people in the Islamic East who had traveled to the West and transmitted knowledge about events taking place there cannot be taken at face value.

Apart from his Maghribi contacts, in the entry on Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb, Ibn Khallikān states that "in 668 (1269-70 CE), I saw a fragment (*juz'*; maybe part of the now lost *'Atf al-Dhayl* or *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*?) by the *shaykh* Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Ḥamūya"²⁵ (d. 642 H/1244-5 CE), which Ibn Khallikān draws on in order to embellish his account with further details on the relations between the Almohad caliph and his Christian opponent before the battle took place. Tāj al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥamūya al-Sarakhsī was born in Damascus and traveled to the Maghrib in 593 H/1196-7 CE, where he stayed until 600 H/1203-4 CE, apparently serving the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb.²⁶ As Ibn Ḥamūya's works *'Atf al-Dhayl* and *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik* are now lost, we only have the information conveyed by Ibn Khallikān, and the details given in his *Wafayāt al-a'yān*. Apart from Ibn Khallikān, in *Ta'rikh al-islām* the historian and biographer al-Dhahabī (d. 748 H/1348 CE) reproduces a conversation between Ibn Ḥamūya and a certain Ibn 'Aṭiyya, a member of the 'Aṭiyya family who served as scribes for the Almoravids and Almohads, which would indeed have made Ibn Ḥamūya a direct witness to events taking place in the Islamic West from 593–600 H/ca. 1196–1204 CE.²⁷

According to Ibn Ḥamūya's account as told in the *Wafayāt al-a'yān*,²⁸ in 590 H/1194 CE Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb assembled a vast army in order to ferry across from North Africa to al-Andalus and raid the lands of the Christians. When the caliph suddenly fell seriously ill, the preparations were called off and his army dispersed. Shortly after, his opponent Alfonso VIII sent him a letter written by

²⁵ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (1994), 7: 5.

²⁶ Information on Ibn Ḥamūya can be found in the following works: al-Yāfi'i, *Mir'āt al-janān* (1997), 4: 82; Abū Shāma, *Tarājim* (1974), 174; al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-ṭib* (1988), 3: 99–111.

²⁷ Al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-islām* (1990–2000), 42: 222–223; Fierro 2010b, 159. Among the prominent members of the 'Aṭiyya family at that time were 'Aqīl Ibn 'Aṭiyya al-Quḍā'i (d. 608 H/1211 CE), the *qāḍī* (judge) of Sijilmasa (present-day Morocco), and his brother Abū Zakariyyā' Hilāl, who worked as a scribe in al-Andalus; cf. Lirola Delgado 2009.

²⁸ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (1994), 7: 5–7.

his vizier Ibn al-Fakhkhār, in which he provoked him by saying that the tide had turned (as proven by Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb’s illness), and the caliph would be well advised to be on good terms with him. Instead of sending the ambassadors Alfonso VIII had asked for, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb replied with a quotation from the Qur’ān (Q: 27.37): “Go back to your people: we shall certainly come upon them with irresistible forces, and drive them, disgraced and humbled, from their land”.²⁹ He also quoted a verse by Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ju‘fī al-Mutanabbī (d. 354 H/965 CE), one of the most important poets in the Arabic language: “Not letters but swords, and not emissaries but many soldiers [will I send]!”.³⁰ Ibn Ḥamūya’s account ends with the statement that Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb gathered a mighty army once more, sent it over the Straight of Gibraltar, and defeated Alfonso VIII “in the year 592” (which is incorrect).

Apparently, Ibn Khallikān had serious doubts about the veracity of the account given by Ibn Ḥamūya. In the following lines, he points out that he read the same details of the correspondence between the caliph and the king in the *Tadhkir al-‘āqil wa-tanbih al-ghāfil* by Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī al-Bayyāsī, who was originally from Baeza (Spain) and died in Tunis in 653 H/1255 CE.³¹ According to Ibn Khallikān, in his work (now lost), al-Bayyāsī reproduces the account of “Ibn al-Ṣayrafī *al-kātib* al-Miṣrī”, i.e. Abū Bakr Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Ibn al-Ṣayrafī al-Anṣārī al-Gharnāṭī (d. 557 H/1162 CE or 570 H/1174 CE).³² Ibn al-Ṣayrafī was an Almoravid-era historian who served as a scribe under Tāshufin b. ‘Alī (r. 537–540 H/1142–1146 CE), who was the governor of Granada during the rule of his father ‘Alī b. Yūsuf (r. 500–537 H/1107–1142 CE), and later on briefly ruled the Almoravid empire as a whole in the years of its downfall. Ibn al-Ṣayrafī’s historiographical works *Taqasṣī al-anbā’ wa-siyāsāt al-ru‘asā’* and *Ta’rīkh al-dawla al-lamtūniyya* (or *al-Anwār al-jaliyya fī akhbār al-dawla al-murābiṭiyya*, also known as *Ta’rīkh al-Andalus*) are lost, but he is frequently mentioned as a source for the history of the Almoravids in Ibn ‘Idhārī al-Marrākushī’s *al-Bayān al-mughrib* and Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s *al-Iḥāṭa fī ta’rīkh Gharnāṭa*, from the 14th century, as well as in many other works.³³

According to Ibn Khallikān, the details of the correspondence given by al-Bayyāsī and Ibn al-Ṣayrafī clearly refer to the battle of al-Zallāqa between the Almoravid ruler Yūsuf b. Tāshufin and Alfonso VI of León and Castile in 479 H/

²⁹ Translation from Abdel Haleem 2004.

³⁰ Cf. al-Barqūqī 2014, 1289. On al-Mutanabbī and his times, see Hamori 2011.

³¹ See Aguirre Sádaba 2012; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān* (1994), 7: 238–244.

³² Ibn Khallikān refers to him incorrectly by the *nisba* “al-Miṣrī” (the Egyptian).

³³ Guichard/Benhima 2007.

1086 CE (see above). In fact, the earliest extant source that contains the cited verse of al-Mutanabbī as part of the correspondence between the two rulers (though not the verse from the Qur'ān) is Abū Marwān 'Abd al-Malik b. Abī al-Qāsim Ibn al-Kardabūs al-Tawzarī's (d. in Tunis c. 1200) universal history *Kitāb al-Iktifā' fī akhbār al-khulafā'*.³⁴ This proves Ibn Khallikān's point that the account of the correspondence between the two rulers given by Ibn Ḥamūya actually dates further back, to a completely different event in the history of al-Andalus. Although this became clear to Ibn Khallikān, it was not understood by other historians: various Arabic chronicles and biographical dictionaries of later times contain both the quotation of the verse Q: 27.37 and al-Mutanabbī's verse as part of the correspondence between Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb and Alfonso VIII, and thus take up core parts of Ibn Ḥamūya's account of the events related to the Battle of Alarcos. It is important to note that this confusion shows up in both Eastern and Western works. For example, the Easterner Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764 H/1363 CE), who lived in Damascus and wrote the multi-volume biographical dictionary *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, mentions in his entry on Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb³⁵ both verses as part of the correspondence, as does the Westerner Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Zar' al-Fāsī (d. 726 H/1326 CE), from Fez, author of the *Rawḍ al-qirṭās* (i.e. *al-Anīs al-muṭrib bi-rawḍ al-qirṭās fī akhbār mulūk al-Maghrib wa-ta'rikh madīnat Fās*).³⁶ In conclusion, the fact that certain details wrongly attributed to events in the history of al-Andalus were transmitted through the centuries was not based on geographical distances, but took place in the West and the East alike.

5 Other strands of knowledge transmission

A similar, but not identical, strand of Arabic historiography about the Battle of Alarcos is the universal history *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rikh*, by Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630 H/1233 CE) from Mosul, which was written decades before Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-a'yān*.³⁷ In fact, Ibn al-Athīr is the *first* source that gives exaggerated numbers of combatants killed in battle as well as the

³⁴ Ibn al-Kardabūs, *Kitāb al-Iktifā'* (2008), 1256–1257; on Ibn al-Kardabūs, see Abellán Pérez 2004; Zomeño 2012.

³⁵ Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (1962–2004), 29: 5–16. On al-Ṣafadī and his sources, see van Ess 1976–1977; Rosenthal 1995.

³⁶ Ibn Abī Zar', *al-Anīs* (1972), 220–231; on Ibn Abī Zar', see Manzano Rodríguez 2012.

³⁷ On Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rikh* see Micheau 2007.

immense booty taken by the Muslims (here it consists of 46,000 horses, 100,000 mules, 100,000 donkeys, 143,000 tents, and 70,000 garments).³⁸ Interestingly, Ibn al-Athīr also gives the verse Q: 27.37 as part of the correspondence between Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb and Alfonso VIII, which, together with the exact same numbers he mentions, was one hundred years later repeated verbatim by Cairo's Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bakrī al-Tamīmī al-Nuwayrī (d. 733 H/1333 CE) in his biographical dictionary *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*.³⁹ It was probably Ibn al-Athīr's account that formed the basis for Abū Shāma, who also puts the number of Christians killed at 146,000. From there, the same number subsequently found its way into al-Yāfi'ī's *Mir'āt al-janān* and Khvāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar* in the 14th and 16th centuries, respectively.

In contrast to Ibn al-Athīr, early sources written by authors from al-Andalus and the Maghrib, like Ibn al-Kardabūs's *Kitāb al-Iktifā'* mentioned above or Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. 'Alī al-Tamīmī al-Marrākushī's (d. 621 H/1225 CE) *al-Mu'jib fī talkhīṣ akhbār al-Maghrib*, do not contain further information on the Battle of Alarcos.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is not clear which oral or written sources Ibn al-Athīr relied on when dealing with the Almohad caliph and the Christian king. What is evident, in any case, is that authors of works written in later times, both in the West and the East, based their narratives on Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī ta'rīkh* as well as on Abū Shāma and Ibn Khallikān. As shown above, all of these accounts differ in terms of the number of participants, the combatants killed, the booty, the correspondence between caliph and king, and, in the case of Abū Shāma, in the vivid account of Alfonso's vow, which was copied by al-Nuwayrī in his *Nihāyat al-arab*, al-Dhahabī in his *Ta'rīkh al-islām*, and 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 H/1373 CE) in his universal history *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*.⁴¹

In later times, the various strands of historiography are brought together in Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tilimsānī al-Maqqarī's (d. 1041 H/1632 CE) important biographical dictionary *Nafḥ al-ṭib min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb wa-dhikr wazīrīhā Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb*.⁴² Al-Maqqarī, born

³⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil* (1987–2003), 10: 236–238 and 258–260.

³⁹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab* (n.d.), 24: 180–187; on the author, see Chapoutot-Remadi 1995; Benhima 2009.

⁴⁰ In his *al-Mu'jib*, al-Marrākushī mentions the place and the date of the battle, and states that most of the Christians were killed, whereas only a few Muslims lost their lives; see al-Marrākushī, *al-Mu'jib* (1994), 234–235. On the author, see Benhima 2009.

⁴¹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab* (n.d.), 24: 184; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh al-islām* (1990–2000), 42: 9; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* (1997), 16: 668.

⁴² On al-Maqqarī, see Fierro/Molina 2009; Lévi-Provençal/Pellat 1991.

in Tlemcen around the year 986 H/1578-9 CE, traveled to Cairo and Damascus, where he became known as an expert in the Islamic West and wrote not only his famous history-cum-biography but other works as well. Regarding the Battle of Alarcos, the *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* combines information contained in several of the works mentioned above, as becomes clear from the entry on Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb, where al-Maqqarī records 146,000 Christians killed, as stated by Abū Shāma and Ibn al-Athīr, whereas for the booty, he provides the numbers given by Abū Shāma, but also the 60,000 suits of chain mail from the *bayt al-māl* that we find in Ibn Khallikān.⁴³ Furthermore, al-Maqqarī rounds out his account of Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb and the Battle of Alarcos by citing Alfonso's vow, which was first mentioned by Abū Shāma. In addition, in his entry on Ibn Ḥamūya, al-Maqqarī repeats the verses from the Qur'ān and al-Mutanabbī as part of the correspondence between the caliph and the king.⁴⁴ Therefore, the account of the Battle of Alarcos in al-Maqqarī's *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* is a case in point for the method of compilation applied by Arabic historians of premodern times. It is important to note that for the main details on the Battle of Alarcos, al-Maqqarī exclusively relied on sources written in the Islamic East, even though he himself was originally from the West, and was writing a work on the history of al-Andalus.

The basis of Khvāndamīr's account of what happened to Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb *after* the battle, however, stems from a very different strand of historiography than any of the works mentioned above. According to the *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, in the aftermath of the Battle of Alarcos the Almohad caliph retired to North Africa, where he decided to abandon his caliphate and become a *faqīr*, that is, a Ṣūfī.⁴⁵ Khvāndamīr quotes here two stories from the *Nafaḥāt al-uns min ḥaṣarāt al-quḍs*,⁴⁶ a biographical dictionary of Ṣūfis written by the famous Herati poet 'Abd al-Raḥmān Nūr al-Dīn Jāmī (d. 898 H/1492 CE) for Mīr 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī (d. 906 H/1501 CE), an important patron of artists and poets in Herat and close advisor to Timūrid ruler Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (r. 873–911 H/1469–1506 CE).⁴⁷ In his account of Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb, Jāmī states that for political reasons the caliph gave the order to execute his brother, an act that he later came to regret. In an attempt to devote his life exclusively to the service of God, he sent emissaries to

⁴³ Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* (1988), 1: 443, and 4: 382.

⁴⁴ Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* (1988), 3: 102.

⁴⁵ Khvāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (2001), 2: 582–583.

⁴⁶ Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns* (2011), 570–571.

⁴⁷ On Jāmī and his *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, see Losensky 2008; Browne 1959, 435–436 and 509–548; Storey 1927–1977, 1/2: 954–959; for Navā'ī, see Subtelny 2011.

the Ṣūfī *shaykh* Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb (d. 594 H/1198 CE)⁴⁸ in order to summon him to court. Abū Madyan, however, died in Tlemcen while on his way to Marrakesh, but not without first appointing another *shaykh* to teach the caliph the right path to God. According to Jāmī (and repeated by Khvāndamīr), the name of the *shaykh* was Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī, an adherent of the founder of the Shādhilī brotherhood, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656 H/1258 CE). In fact, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī lived around one hundred years *after* Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb, and died in Alexandria in 686 H/1287 CE, not in Tlemcen.⁴⁹

The first account of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī contained in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* and the *Nafaḥāt al-uns* is not untypical for a story on Ṣūfis: since Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb wanted to find out whether the *shaykh* was a real Ṣūfī and had special gifts which would enable him to lead the caliph towards God,⁵⁰ Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī was examined at court. There, courtiers placed two dishes of chicken in front of him, of which he had to choose one. Without thinking, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī chose one of them, stating that the other was nothing but a corpse, meaning that the chicken had not been properly slaughtered but simply killed (and therefore eating it would not be permitted by Islamic law). Upon hearing this outcome, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb felt sure that the *shaykh* would be the right one, and proceeded to step down and hand over power to his son. In a second account, given only by Jāmī, after a long dry spell, the *shaykh* asked the caliph to pray for rain as they wandered through the desert, and the rain began to fall immediately after Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb’s invocation. But how did Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī get cast as the contemporary of an Almohad caliph from generations before his time? Where did these stories originate?

In his *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, Jāmī refers to al-Yāfi‘ī as a source for both stories, without mentioning a specific work. While Khvāndamīr relied on the *Mir’āt al-janān* when depicting the Almohad caliph, the entry dedicated to him by al-Yāfi‘ī contains no information on the Ṣūfī stories apart from the information that Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb “used to wear wool” (*kāna yalbasu al-ṣūf*, i.e. dressed like a Ṣūfī). Apparently, the story about the caliph and Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī does not show up in the *Mir’āt al-janān* at all. In an entry on a certain Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad *al-zāhid* (“the ascetic”) al-Andalusī al-

⁴⁸ Cornell 1996; Marçais 1960. In fact, Abū Madyan was summoned to court because the sultan questioned his loyalty, and feared rebellion by the *shaykh*’s followers; see Cornell 1996, 15.

⁴⁹ For the biography of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī and his master Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, see Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, *Laṭā’if al-minan* (2005).

⁵⁰ Ferhat 1993, 91–99 contains further stories about the Almohad caliph and his encounters with Ṣūfis.

Mursī, who died in 591 H/1195 CE, al-Yāfi'ī does not include any information related to the Almohad caliph. Another *shaykh*, the famous Šūfī from Ceuta Abū al-‘Abbās al-Sabtī (d. 601 H/1204 CE), who lived in Marrakesh where Ibn Ḥamūya met him when he was in the West (as mentioned by al-Maqqarī in his *Nafḥ al-ṭib*), is also not described in relation to the caliph.⁵¹ Could this mean another dead end for source criticism?

After further research, it becomes clear that Jāmī's reference to al-Yāfi'ī is in fact correct; he simply does not mean the work *Mir'āt al-janān*, but rather *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn fī ḥikāyāt al-ṣāliḥīn*, a biographical dictionary of Šūfis. The work contains an entry on the Almohad ruler that gives the name of the *shaykh* who passes the exam with the two dishes put in front of him as Abū al-‘Abbās al-Marīnī (not al-Mursī).⁵² Tracing back Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Marīnī in the sources shows that he was a *shaykh* who lived in the Maghrib during the late 12th and early 13th centuries. He is mentioned in the Šūfī biographical dictionary by the Egyptian Šafī al-Dīn b. Abī al-Manṣūr b. Zāfir (d. 682 H/1283 CE), the *Risāla*, where an entry dedicated to him contains the same stories of the encounter between *shaykh* and sovereign as conveyed in the *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn*, and later on repeated by Jāmī and Khvāndamīr.⁵³ Denis Gril, who edited the *Risāla*, discusses the possibility that al-Marīnī might have been a pupil of Abū Madyan, the *shaykh* first summoned to court who died on his way to Marrakesh. In the *Risāla*, nothing more is told about him apart from two more typical Šūfī-related stories wherein the *shaykh* speaks to Muḥammad's daughter Fāṭima in a dream, and is saved from an enormous snake while sleeping. It is unknown whether al-Yāfi'ī used the *Risāla* when writing the entry on Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb for his *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn*, but not unlikely. Thus, the path of the Šūfī stories conveyed in the works of Jāmī and Khvāndamīr in late Tīmūrid and early Šafavid Herat might have led from the Maghrib via Egypt to Mecca before ending up in Iran. To conclude, when dealing with the transmission of knowledge from the West to the East, it is important to note that apparently very different strands of knowledge about a certain person or a single event – here Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb's Šūfī and non-Šūfī connections – could be transmitted by one and the same author in different literary genres, as seen in regard to al-Yāfi'ī's two works *Mir'āt al-janān* and *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn*.

51 Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭib* (1988), 3: 99. On Abū al-‘Abbās al-Sabtī, see the biography by his contemporary al-Zayyāt (d. 627 H/1229-30 CE); al-Zayyāt, *al-Tashawwuf* (1984), 451–478.

52 Al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn* (1897), 208.

53 Šafī al-Dīn, *Risāla* (1986), 151–153 and 216.

6 On the transmission of knowledge from the West to the East

For historians in 16th-century Iran, acquiring knowledge on distant parts of the Islamic world like al-Andalus and the Maghrib was a difficult task. Despite the fact that Khvāndamīr had access to the libraries of Herat, which at that time was one of the main cultural centers in the Islamic East, he was unable to track down any information on events taking place in the Islamic West from the 13th century onwards. What is even more striking is the fact that he and later 16th-century historians apparently had no knowledge about the end of Islamic rule in the Iberian peninsula, or, at the very least, did not find this fact worthy of mention. Even decades after Khvāndamīr's death, Qāzī Aḥmad Ghaffārī Qazvinī Kāshānī and 'Abdī Beg Shīrāzī seem unaware of these momentous developments. Their histories of the Islamic lands are as silent about the Naṣrids and their centuries-long fight against the Christians, as they are about the fall of Granada in 1492, which resounded throughout Europe, and has been considered one of the central events in the history of the Mediterranean ever since.

Beyond this specific issue it seems that, on a more general level, historians in early Ṣafavid Iran only rarely received information about the western lands. As demonstrated above, the source for nearly all of Khvāndamīr's information on the last dynasty of the Islamic West covered in his *Ḥabīb al-siyar* was al-Yāfi'ī's *Mir'āt al-janān*, which was written in Mecca in the 14th century. Therefore, Khvāndamīr clearly did not have any access to sources produced in the Islamic West, which says a great deal about books' ability to make their way from the West to the East. Equally telling is the fact that his source, al-Yāfi'ī, does not refer to any "Western" books either, and mainly copies the information given by the Damascene scholar Ibn Khallikān in his 13th-century biographical dictionary *Wafayāt al-a'yān*. A second source was Abū Shāma's *Dhayl al-Rawḍatayn*, from which Khvāndamīr draws the statistics on the Battle of Alarcos. Thus, Ibn Khallikān and Abū Shāma constitute the most important links to the West in the transmission of the account of Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb at Alarcos, as they had direct connections with the Maghribi community in Damascus.

However, the story of the correspondence between Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb and his adversary Alfonso VIII shows that even in Damascus, located much further west than Herat, authors of history books and biographical dictionaries had problems distinguishing between events that had occurred in the Western Mediterranean. The same is also true for historians of the Islamic West like Ibn Abī

Zar' al-Fāsī who, despite the fact that he lived in the Maghrib, relied on *Eastern* sources. In fact, readers of history books and biographical dictionaries from the 13th century to the 17th century interested in the Almohad caliph and the Battle of Alarcos would have had to turn to very different sources of information. Al-Maqqarī's *Nafh al-ṭib*, in this sense, is a good example of an author who attempted to pull together these various strands of history into a single text. This is also the case for Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb's depiction as a Ṣūfī: whereas the main biographical dictionaries simply refer to him as a king who went on to don Ṣūfī garb, in Khvāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, based on Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-uns* and going back to al-Yāfi'ī's *Rawḍ al-rayāḥīn*, the account of this caliph contains the vivid story of how he found the right spiritual leader, Abū al-'Abbās al-Marīnī, whose biography is first given in a biographical dictionary of Ṣūfis written in 13th-century Egypt. This highlights the fact that knowledge was transmitted within the confines of discrete literary genres, here general biographical dictionaries and specific Ṣūfī dictionaries, respectively.

The example of the Almohad ruler Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb and the Battle of Alarcos in al-Andalus has shown that narratives were able to make their way from one region of the Islamic world to another, which means that generally speaking authors in the East did in fact have access to knowledge about events in the West, despite the many constraints. It is not surprising that given the conditions of textual transmission in premodern times, contradictory accounts of one and the same event could be found in different texts. Among all the examples cited, only Ibn Khallikān applied a certain kind of source criticism to the accounts at his disposal, which did not prevent later historians from embellishing their narratives with stylistically rich but apparently ahistorical details that had already been flagged by one of their predecessors. Surprisingly, the Battle of Alarcos in 591 H/1195 CE and the last decades of the Almohads remained more or less the last detailed information on the Iberian Peninsula available to the readers of the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* and other early Ṣafavid-era history books, thus providing us with insight into their world and perceptions of space, e.g. the limited scope of their "universal" histories, which in fact mainly narrate regional developments. Further research into texts dealing with historiographical knowledge, that is, information on events, people, customs, and the beliefs prevalent in a one region and conveyed to another, might reveal just how entangled and interconnected the Islamic world of premodern times really was.

Fig. 1: The Battle of Alarcos (591 H/1195 CE) and its chain of transmission from the Islamic West to the Islamic East

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