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Diplomacy in the Central Maghreb during the Hammadid Period A Historical and Analytical Study (405-547AH/1014-1152AD)

الدبلوماسية في المغرب الأوسط خلال العهد الحمادي

دراسة تاريخية تحليلية (405- 547هـ/1014–1152م)

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Abstract in English: This article seeks to shed light on the diplomatic dimension of the Central Maghreb during the Hammadid era by examining the relations of the Hammadid Emirate with its neighboring powers through the exchange of various types of embassies. It analyzes the extent to which the Hammadids employed diplomacy to serve their political and strategic interests.

The study also aims to highlight the different forms of Hammadid embassies exchanged with neighboring states—whether political, religious, or intended to establish alliances and cooperation—or those of a social nature, such as marriage alliances, the exchange of gifts, and messages of condolence. Through this, the research seeks to reveal the broader dimensions of Hammadid foreign policy and its position within the regional context.

Keywords: The Maghreb, Central Maghreb, Banu Hamad, diplomacy, embassies, Zirids, Almoravids, Fatimids, Andalusia, Hammad ibn Bilqīn, al-Nasir ibn Alnas.

الملخص بالعربية: يحاول هذا المقال التطرق إلى الجانب الدبلوماسي في المغرب الأوسط خلال العهد الحمادي، وذلك بتسليط الضوء على علاقات إمارة بني حماد مع جيرانها من خلال تبادل السفارات بمختلف أنواعها، ومدى تحكمها في استخدام هذا النوع من الدبلوماسية لخدمة مصالحها .سنقف في

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هذه الدراسة على ذكر مختلف أنواع السفارات الحمادية التي تبادلتها مع جيرانها سواء كانت سياسية أو دينية، أو لعقد علاقات تحالف وتعاون، أو من أجل المصاهرة وتبادل الهدايا والتعازي.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنّ إمارة بني حماد استطاعت تأسيس دبلوماسية فعّالة مكّنتها من تعزيز مكانتها في المغرب الأوسط رغم التحديات السياسية والعسكرية التي واجهتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بلاد المغرب، المغرب الأوسط، بنو حماد، دبلوماسية، السفارات، الزيريين، المرابطين، الفاطميين، الأندلس، حماد بن بلكين، الناصر بن علناس.

Introduction: The Central Maghreb maintained close relations with its neighboring regions, benefiting from a number of favorable factors foremost among them its strategic geographical position, which enabled its cities to serve as a bridge between the East and the West, as well as between Sudan, al-Andalus, and even northern Europe. These relations took on political, economic, and cultural dimensions, and embassies became one of the most significant means of diplomatic communication between the cities of the Central Maghreb and their regional counterparts.

The objectives of these embassies varied according to their contexts: some pursued political, religious, or scholarly goals, while others sought to establish alliances and cooperation, or to strengthen social ties through marriage alliances, the exchange of gifts, condolences, and congratulations. Embassies were among the most delicate and influential tools of statecraft, often accompanying wars both at their outset and conclusion, and shaping their outcomes. Consequently, the selection of ambassadors required individuals of notable eloquence, competence, and familiarity with political and royal affairs.

Like other states of the Islamic Maghreb, the Hammadid Emirate engaged in diverse diplomatic activities and exchanged embassies of various kinds and purposes with its neighbors. Hence, this study seeks to address the following questions: To what extent was the Hammadid state able to establish an effective diplomacy in the Central Maghreb?

And how did it employ embassies as a tool to advance its political and strategic interests?

1. The embassies between the Hamadids and the Maghreb countries:

1.1 Diplomatic Missions between the Hammadids and the Zirids: The relationship between the Zirids of Kairouan and their kinsmen, the

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Hammadids, was marked by significant political tension from the moment Hammad ibn Buluggin (405-419/1014-1029)[1] built the Qalʿat Banu Hammad and declared his independence from Zirid authority in Ifriqiya. This separation inaugurated a new era in the history of the Central Maghreb, transforming the relationship between the two branches of the Sanhaja confederation from one of subordination to one characterized by rivalry, competition, and intermittent reconciliation.

Despite their persistent political antagonism, the geographical proximity and shared Sanhaja lineage of the two dynasties imposed a form of forced interdependence, especially in the face of common challenges such as the Hilalian invasions and Fatimid ambitions in the region. Consequently, episodes of confrontation alternated with periods of diplomatic rapprochement, during which embassies were exchanged as instruments of negotiation and détente.

These diplomatic missions often carried a dual purpose-political and social-serving not only to manage crises but also to reaffirm kinship ties through marriage alliances and the exchange of gifts. Such gestures reflected mutual attempts to ease tensions and restore a measure of goodwill between the two Sanhaja houses.

In this light, Hammadid diplomacy toward the Zirids may be viewed as a pragmatic response to the realities of regional power dynamics: the Hammadids sought to secure their internal stability and avoid isolation, while the Zirids aimed to preserve symbolic influence over the Central Maghreb through ongoing diplomatic contact with their erstwhile vassals.
A. The Embassy of al-Qāʾid ibn Ḥammād: The embassy of al-Qāʾid ibn Ḥammād took place amid a turbulent political context that followed the

1 - Hammad (405-419 AH / 1014-1029 AD): He is Hammad ibn Balkin ibn Ziri ibn Munad, a unique figure, unparalleled in his time, and a champion of his people. He studied jurisprudence and debate in Kairouan, and was brave, generous, and a shrewd strategist. His stories are well-known. He is the one who built the fortress named after him, where he constructed high palaces, strong fortifications, grand mosques, and beautiful gardens, attracting people from all over the region. He passed away in 419 AH / 1029 AD. See: Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib: **Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām fī man Būyiʿa qabla al-Iḥtilām**, edited by Sayyid Kasrawi Hassan, 1st edition, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2003, Vol. 2, pp. 328-329; and Ibn Khaldun: **Al-ʿIbar wa Dīwān al-Mubtadaʾ wa al-Khabar**, reviewed by Suhail Zakkar, Dar Al-Fikr, Beirut, 2000, Vol. 6, p. 229.

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violent confrontation between Ḥammād ibn Buluggin (405-419/1014-1029) and al-Muʿizz ibn Bādīs (406-454/1016-1062)[1] in 408/1017, which ended with a crushing defeat for Ḥammād and left him seriously wounded[2]. Realizing the difficulty of continuing open hostilities, Ḥammād turned to diplomacy as a means of resolving the crisis, extending a proposal of reconciliation to al-Muʿizz.

However, al-Muʿizz, holding the upper hand after his victory, demanded a gesture of good faith: that Ḥammād send his son, al-Qāʾid ibn Ḥammād (419-446/1028-1054), as an envoy to Kairouan to confirm his sincerity. Ḥammād accepted the condition and dispatched his son in Shaʿbān 408/1018. Al-Muʿizz received him honorably and granted a formal treaty of peace, by which Ḥammād was confirmed in the governorship of several key territories — al-Masīla, Ṭubna, Marsā al-Dajjāj, Zawāwa, Maqra, Dukkama, Bilizma, and Sūq Ḥamza — and was presented with banners and drums as symbols of delegated authority under Zirid suzerainty[3].

The reconciliation was further sealed by a marriage alliance, as al-Muʿizz married his sister to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥammād, thereby giving the accord a social and dynastic dimension. This peace agreement reflected al-Muʿizz's strategic intent to pacify the Central Maghreb by bringing Ḥammād under his authority and assigning him the task of defending the frontier against the rebellious Zenata tribes[4].

According to sources such as al-Nuwayrī, this diplomatic episode led

1- Al-Mu'izz ibn Badis (406-454/1016-1062): He is Al-Mu'izz ibn Badis ibn Balkin ibn Ziri ibn Munad al-Sanhaji. He was born in Mansouria in the year 398 AH. He was appointed as the Emir of Ifriqiya and its surrounding regions after the death of his father Badis in the year 406 AH. The Fatimid ruler bestowed upon him the title "Sharaf al-Dawla." He was a great king of high ambition, fond of scholars, and generous. He led the people of Ifriqiya to follow the doctrine of Imam Malik ibn Anas and to abandon Shiism. He died in the year 454 AH. See: Abu al-Abbas ibn Khallikan: **Wafayat al-A'yan wa Anba' Abna' al-Zaman**, edited by Ihsan Abbas, Dar Sader, Beirut, vol. 5, pp. 233-234.

2- Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Athir: **Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh**, edited by Abu al-Fida Abdullah al-Qadi, 1st edition, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1987, vol. 8, p. 89.

3 - Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri: **Nihayat al-Arab fi Funun al-Adab**, ed. Abdul Majid Tarhini, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, vol. 24, p. 114.

4 - Ibn al-Athir: op.cit, Vol. 8, p. 90; Al-Hadi Rouji Idris: **The Sanhaja State**, trans. Hammadi Al-Sahli, 1st ed., Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 163.

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to cordial relations between al-Qāʾid and al-Muʿizz, with the former frequently visiting Kairouan. Nevertheless, beneath this apparent harmony, al-Qāʾid harbored ambitions of independence, as al-Nuwayrī notes: "He concealed treachery and the desire to renounce obedience to al-Muʿizz, but weakness restrained him." This reveals that the Hammadid envoy was not a mere emissary but an active political figure whose mission subtly prepared the ground for future autonomy from Zirid control[1].

B. The Embassy of the Athbaj Leaders to al-Nāṣir ibn ʿAllānās: The embassy of the Athbaj tribal leaders to al-Nāṣir ibn ʿAllānās (454-481/1062-1088) stands among the most perilous diplomatic episodes in Hammadid history, as it ultimately led to the disastrous Battle of Sabība in 457/1065.

A delegation of Athbaj chiefs, belonging to one of the Hilalian tribes recently settled in North Africa, came to al-Nāṣir seeking military assistance against their rivals, the Banū Riyāḥ. Despite the volatile nature of intertribal politics and the evident risks of involvement, al-Nāṣir, driven by ambitions of expanding his authority and strengthening his influence over the central and southern regions, accepted their appeal.

He mobilized a large composite army, consisting of his regular troops (mainly slaves and Sanhaja warriors), reinforced by contingents from Zenata, and from the ʿUday and Athbaj tribes themselves. The combined forces advanced toward the village of Sabība, near al-Arbus (modern-day Le Kef) in Ifriqiya. However, the campaign ended disastrously: the Hammadid army was surprised and routed by the Banū Riyāḥ and their allies, suffering heavy casualties and a humiliating defeat that shook the political and military foundations of the Hammadid emirate[2].

This episode reveals that Hammadid diplomacy in its dealings with the Hilalian tribes lacked strategic foresight and prudence. What began as a seemingly routine embassy seeking alliance turned into a diplomatic and military catastrophe. It also underscores a major shift in the nature of diplomacy during this period—from formal interstate relations to

1 - al-Nuwayri: op. cit, Vol. 24, pp. 114, 122.
2 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, p. 230.

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complex interactions involving tribal powers that had become decisive actors in the Maghrebi political landscape of the 5th/11th century.

C. Embassy of Abu Bakr ibn Abi al-Futuh: Although Minister Abu Bakr ibn Abi al-Futuh did not personally lead this embassy, he was its principal architect and executor. When al-Nasir ibn Alnas (454-481/1062-1088)[1] learned of Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz ibn Badis' (454–501/1062-1108)[2] desire for peace following the disastrous Battle of Sbiba in 457/1065, he entrusted Abu Bakr with the delicate task of restoring diplomatic relations between the Hammadid and Zirid emirates.

Historical sources describe Abu Bakr as a shrewd politician inclined toward reconciliation, who consistently advised al-Nasir to avoid conflict with the Zirids and instead unite against the Hilalian tribes, whose growing strength threatened both dynasties. Acting on his master's orders, Abu Bakr dispatched an unnamed Hammadid envoy to Mahdia, bearing apologies and a formal peace proposal. The embassy likely took place shortly after Sbiba, and before 461/1068, when the Hammadids were preparing to establish Bejaia as their new capital[3].

The mission seems to have been easily accomplished. Despite his military success, Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz realized that continued hostilities with his Hammadid kin would only benefit the Hilalians. Consequently,

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1 - Al-Nasir ibn Alnas (454-481/1062-1088): He is Al-Nasir ibn Alnas ibn Hamad ibn Balkin ibn Ziri ibn Munad. He came to power in the year 454 AH after taking revenge on Balkin ibn Muhammad ibn Hamad, who had killed his sister. He was bold in shedding blood and very jealous of women. The status of the Hamad family rose during his time, as he built magnificent and elegant buildings and established great cities. He is the one who built the city of Bejaia and named it Al-Nasiriya, and he built the Pearl Palace there. He also invaded Morocco. He died in the year 481 AH. See: Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, pp. 229, 232; and Ibn al-Khatib: op. cit, Vol. 2, p. 333.

2- Tamim (454-501/1062-1108): He is Abu Yahya Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz ibn Badis ibn al-Mansur ibn Bulkin ibn Ziri ibn Munad. He was born in Mansouriya in the year 422 AH. He was known for his good conduct and commendable deeds, and he was fond of scholars. He was one of the poets among the sons of kings. His father appointed him to Mahdia in the year 445 AH, and he remained there until his father's death in 454 AH. He then took over the rule until his death in 501 AH. See: Ibn Khalkan: op. cit, vol. 1, pp. 304-305; and Abu Abdullah Ibn al-Abbar: **Al-Hullah al-Sira**, ed. Hussein Mo'nis, 2nd ed., Dar Al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 21-22; and Ibn al-Khatib: op. cit, vol. 2, p. 325.

3 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, Vol. 8, p. 373; Al-Nawawi: op. cit, Vol. 24, p. 124.

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persuaded by his counselors, he accepted al-Nasir's peace offer, thus marking a temporary rapprochement between the two Maghrebi powers[1].

D. Embassy of Muhammad ibn al-Ba'ba'.

After Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz (454-501/1062-1108) accepted the peace proposal conveyed by al-Nasir ibn Alnas through Minister Abu Bakr ibn Abi al-Futuh, he decided to dispatch a special envoy to the Hammadid court to consolidate the agreement. He selected Muhammad ibn al-Ba'ba', providing him with money, mounts, and servants as tokens of goodwill.

Accompanied by the Hammadid ambassador, Ibn al-Ba'ba' traveled to Bejaia, which at that time was still a small settlement inhabited by local Sanhaja farmers. There, the Zirid envoy offered a strategic suggestion to al-Nasir: to relocate his capital from Qal'at Bani Hammad to Bejaia. He emphasized Bejaia's coastal position and natural defenses, as well as its proximity to Ifriqiya and Mahdia, which al-Nasir coveted.

However, upon Ibn al-Ba'ba''s return, Tamim discovered his envoy's unauthorized advice and viewed it as an act of treason. He promptly ordered his execution. Shortly thereafter, al-Nasir uncovered his minister Abu Bakr ibn Abi al-Futuh's loyalty to Tamim, and had him put to death as well. Thus, the embassy of Ibn al-Ba'ba', intended to consolidate peace, ended up igniting renewed hostilities between the Zirids and the Hammadids- tensions that persisted until a new peace treaty was concluded in 470/1078[2].

E- Exchange of Gifts with the Ruler of Sfax: The invasion of Ifriqiya by the Banu Hilal tribes, followed by a wave of uprisings and local revolts, led to the collapse of Zirid authority in Qayrawan and Mahdia. The Zirid dominion shrank to a few coastal cities, while many regional governors declared independence, transforming Ifriqiya into a collection

1 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, vol. 8, pp. 373, 374, 375.

2 - Abu al-Abbas Ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi: **Al-Bayan al-Maghrib fi Akhbar al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib**, ed. J. S. Colin and Lévi-Provençal, 3rd ed., Dar Al-Thaqafa, Beirut, 1983, vol. 1, p. 300; and Ibn Al-Athir: op. cit, vol. 8, pp. 374-375.

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of small principalities, much like the Taifa states in al-Andalus[1]. Ibn Khaldun aptly described this situation, stating: "Rebellions multiplied against them, and rivals arose from within their own state."

Amidst this fragmentation, the Hammadid ruler al-Nasir ibn Alnas (454–481/1062-1088) seized the opportunity to expand his influence at the expense of the Zirids. He sought to win over local leaders who had rebelled against Zirid authority, using diplomacy rather than direct warfare. Among these was Hammu ibn Milil al-Barghwati, the ruler of Sfax, who pledged allegiance to al-Nasir and sent him gifts and letters as tokens of submission and loyalty[2].

This exchange of gifts reveals how the Hammadids employed subtle diplomatic tools- such as symbolic alliances and gestures of goodwill- to extend their political reach in Ifriqiya without resorting to military confrontation.

F. Embassies for Marriage Alliances and the Exchange of Congratulations and Condolences: Marriage alliances and ceremonial embassies of congratulations or condolences represented a refined form of soft diplomacy between the Hammadid and Zirid dynasties. They helped to consolidate peace and transform a long history of hostility into bonds of kinship and symbolic cooperation.

Following the peace agreement of 408/1017 between Hammad ibn Buluggin and al-Mu'izz ibn Badis, both rulers sought to strengthen their reconciliation through family ties. Thus, in 415/1024, al-Mu'izz married his sister Umm al-'Ulū to 'Abd Allah ibn Hammad, in a magnificent diplomatic procession led by the prince himself. Her dowry amounted to one hundred thousand dinars, carried on ten camels, reflecting the grandeur of the occasion[3].

Similarly, after the peace treaty of 470/1078, the Zirid ruler Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz married his daughter Ballāra to al-Nasir ibn Alnas. She was escorted from Mahdia in a splendid embassy laden with gifts and jewelry, and al-Nasir responded with equal generosity, marking a renewed era of

1 - Jacques Thiry: **The Libyan Sahara in Medieval North Africa**, Leuven, Belgium, 1995, p217.
2 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, pp. 230, 232.
3 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, Vol. 8, p. 90.

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cordial relations between the two dynasties[1].

The tradition continued under Yahya ibn Tamim (501-509/1108-1116), when in 509/1115, al-'Aziz ibn al-Mansur al-Hammadī (498-515/1105-1121) married Badr al-Duja, daughter of Yahya ibn Tamim, demonstrating the persistence of marital diplomacy as a means to maintain stability and peace[2].

In addition, embassies of condolence and congratulation reinforced these familial ties. Ibn al-Athir records that in 481/1088, al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir received letters from kings expressing condolences for his father's death and congratulations on his accession to power-among them a message from Tamim ibn al-Mu'izz, his maternal grandfather[3].

Thus, marriage, gift exchanges, and ceremonial embassies became essential instruments of diplomatic culture in the central Maghreb, reflecting the political flexibility and sophistication of Hammadid- Zirid relations during the fifth century AH.

1.2 Embassies between the Ḥammādids and the Tribes and Notables:

A. The Embassies of the Athbaj Notables to al-Nāṣir ibn ʿAlnās: This embassy was one of the most perilous received by the ḥammādid rulers, due to its serious political and military consequences. It was the cause of the Battle of Sbība in 457/1065.

Representatives of the Hilalian Athbaj tribe went to Emir al-Nāṣir ibn ʿAlnās, seeking his support against their rivals, the Banū Riyāḥ. Al-Nāṣir saw this as a propitious opportunity to achieve several objectives: to attract the alliance of the Hilalian tribes, a rising force in Ifrīqiya after their great migration, like his Zirid cousins, and to use their power in his expansionist enterprises at their expense, as well as in his struggles against the Zanāta, and later against the Almoravids.

To this end, he raised an army composed of his regular troops-slaves and Sanhāja-reinforced by Zanātian contingents, as well as the ʿUddī and Athbaj tribes.

But the battle, which took place near the village of Sbība, not far

1 - Ibid, Vol. 8, p. 415.
2 - Ibn Adhari: op. cit, Vol. 1, p. 306.
3 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, Vol. 8, p. 455.

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from al-Arbus, ended in a crushing defeat for the Ḥammādids and their allies. This failure marked a turning point in al-Nāṣir's policy toward the Hilalian tribes, prompting him to reevaluate his strategy of exploiting the nomads for state purposes[1].

Thus, this embassy illustrates the conflictual nature of tribal diplomacy during the ḥammādid era: far from always being a vector of peace, it was sometimes a catalyst for war and the reshaping of power relations in the central Maghreb.

B . The Embassy of the Hilalians to Yaḥyā ibn al-ʿAzīz: The Banū Hilāl Arabs often exploited the ongoing conflict between the Hammadids and the Zirids to advance their own interests, aligning themselves with whichever side could offer greater advantages. During the dispute between the Hammadid prince Yaḥyā ibn al-ʿAzīz (515-547/1121-1152) and the Zirid ruler al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī, a delegation of Hilalian leaders arrived in Béjaïa, offering their support to Yaḥyā in capturing Mahdia, the Zirid capital[2].

This shift in allegiance stemmed from the treaty concluded between al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī and Roger II of Sicily, a humiliating agreement that effectively placed the Zirids under Norman control. The people of Mahdia, angered by this submission, corresponded with Yaḥyā ibn al-ʿAzīz, promising to surrender the city and leaving their sons as hostages to demonstrate their sincerity[3].

Responding swiftly, Yaḥyā dispatched in 529/1135 a naval fleet accompanied by a land army led by the jurist Muṭarrif ibn Ḥamdūn. Numerous Hilalians joined his forces, eager to avenge themselves against the Zirids. Upon reaching Mahdia, the Hammadids imposed a land and sea siege lasting about seventy days; however, the city's formidable fortifications prevented its capture[4].

1 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, p. 230.
2 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, Vol. 9, p. 285.
3 - Abu Abdullah ibn Abi Dinar: **Al-Muʾnis fī Akhbār Ifrīqiyā wa Tūnis**, 1st edition, Tunisian State Printing House, Tunisia, 1286 AH, p. 90; and Mamdouh Hussein: **The Crusades in North Africa and Their Civilizational Impact**, 1st edition, Dar Ammar Publishing, Jordan, 1998, p. 206.
4 - Ibn al-Athir op. cit, Vol. 9, p. 285; and Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, p. 215; and Ibn Abi Dinar: op. cit, p. 90.

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In response, al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī sought aid from Roger II of Sicily, who sent a Norman fleet that reversed the balance of power and forced the Hammadids to withdraw without achieving their objectives. This campaign not only failed militarily but also opened a new front of maritime confrontation with the Normans, while deepening the existing rift between the Hammadids and the Zirids. It further revealed the political opportunism and diplomatic pragmatism of the Hilalians, who skillfully manipulated inter-state rivalries in pursuit of their tribal ambitions[1].

C. The Embassy of the People of Tunis: Following the collapse of the Zirid emirate caused by the incursion of the Banu Hilal tribes, the people of Tunis decided to declare their allegiance to the Hammadids. They sent a delegation to al-Nasir ibn Alnas, requesting that he appoint a governor over them. Al-Nasir granted their request and appointed ‘Abd al-Haqq ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Khurasan, who began his governorship by concluding a peace treaty with the Hilalians in exchange for a tribute to prevent their raids. Among the distinguished members of the Banu Khurasan family was Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abd al-Haqq, who firmly established control over Tunis, rebuilt its fortifications, and constructed the palaces of Banu Khurasan. He was also renowned for his love of scholars and his frequent association with them[2].

D. The Embassy of the People of Constantine: After the Zirid power had become confined to the region of Ifrīqiya due to the successive attacks of the Hilalian tribes, the inhabitants of Constantine decided-following the example of those of Kairouan, Tunis, and Sfax-to pledge allegiance to Emir al-Nāṣir ibn ʿAlnās. They sent a delegation headed by Yaḥyā ibn Waṭṭās, representing the city’s notables, to renew their allegiance and express their loyalty and obedience. Emir al-Nāṣir received them with great honor and generosity, bestowing rich gifts upon them. He then appointed a Sanhāja noble named Yūsuf ibn Khlūf to

1 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, Vol. 9, p. 285; and Abdul Halim Oweis: **The State of Banu Hammad, a Glorious Chapter in the History of Algeria**, 2nd ed., Dar Al-Sahwa for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 1991, p. 162.
2 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, p. 217.

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govern the city on behalf of the Ḥammādid state[1].

E. Marriage Alliances between the Hammadids and the Zenata Tribe: Relations between the Hammadid state and the Zenata tribe were predominantly characterized by hostility, as the Hammadid rulers spared no effort in resisting Zenata's repeated rebellions and separatist ambitions. Nevertheless, the relationship occasionally experienced periods of calm and reconciliation, notably through marriage alliances that served to strengthen political and social ties. Historical sources indicate that the Banu Wamanu, the leading branch of the Zenata confederation, gave one of their daughters in marriage to al-Nasir ibn Alnas, and another to his son al-Mansur. Following their example, al-'Aziz ibn al-Mansur (498-515/1105-1121) also sought peace with the Zenata and married the daughter of the Zenata leader Makhukh, thereby consolidating relations between the two sides[2].

3.1 Diplomatic Missions between the Hammadids and the Almoravids

A. Missions of Condolence and Congratulations: Although relations between the Hammadid Emirate and the Almoravid state were often strained, this did not prevent diplomatic communication between the two powers. After the death of al-Nasir ibn Alnas and the accession of his son al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir to power in 481/1088, Yusuf ibn Tashfin sent him a letter expressing condolences on his father's death and congratulations on his accession to the throne. This gesture reflected the persistence of diplomatic channels despite the prevailing political tensions between the two states[3].

B. The Embassy of Ḥawāʾ, Wife of Tashfīn ibn Yaghmūr: This diplomatic mission took place following the Battle of Tlemcen in 496 /1103, which erupted between the Hammadids and the Almoravids as a result of the latter's repeated incursions into Hammadid territories. The Almoravid army had seized Tlemcen, turning it into a base for attacks on Hammadid cities such as Oran, Chlef, and Tenes, and had even laid siege

1 - Ibid, Vol. 6, p. 230.
2 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, pp. 233, 234; and Ibn al-Khatib op. cit, Vol. 2, p. 334.
3 - Ibn al-Athir: op. cit, Vol. 8, p. 455.

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to Algiers in 475 /1083[1].

After the battle, the Hammadid army, under the command of al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir (481-498/1088-1105), succeeded in defeating the Almoravids and capturing the city. At that moment, Ḥawāʾ, the wife of the Almoravid commander Tashfīn ibn Yaghmūr, went out to meet al-Mansur and implored him, invoking the ties of Sanhaja kinship, to release the prisoners. Moved by her plea and impressed by her courage, al-Mansur honored her request, freed all the captives, and then withdrew his troops from Tlemcen, returning to Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād[2].

C. The Letter of Yusuf ibn Tashfīn to al-Manṣūr ibn al-Nāṣir: When the Almoravid commander Muzdalī ibn Tublukān invaded Tlemcen in 472AH/1080CE, he succeeded in capturing the city and appointed Muḥammad ibn Yaghmur al-Masūfī as governor on behalf of Yusuf ibn Tashfīn. The Almoravids turned Tlemcen into a military base from which they launched raids against Hammadid territories[3]. This provoked the anger of the Hammadid rulers, making an armed confrontation between the two sides inevitable in order to put an end to these continual aggressions.

Relations worsened further when al-Manṣūr ibn al-Nāṣir offered refuge to Muʿizz al-Dawla ibn Ṣumādhḥ, heir to the throne of Almería, one of the ṭāʾifa rulers deposed by the Almoravids. Seeking protection from Almoravid vengeance, Ibn Ṣumādhḥ fled to al-Manṣūr, who received him with honor and granted him the district of Tedelles, where he remained until his death[4].

In response, al-Manṣūr ibn al-Nāṣir (481-498 AH/1088-1105 CE) mobilized an army of twenty thousand men and marched on Tlemcen in 496 AH/1103 CE, inflicting a severe defeat on the Almoravid forces[5].

The loss deeply angered Yusuf ibn Tashfīn, who, replying to a letter from

1- Moussa Heisam: **The Algerian Army in the Hamadi Era**, Publications of the Directorate of Culture, Medea, 2008, p. 118.
2 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, p. 234; and Roger Idris: op. cit, Vol. 1, p. 330; and Golvin. L: **Le Magrib central à L'époque des zirides**, arts et métiers graphiques, Paris, 1957, p126.
3 - Ali ibn Abi Zar'a: **Al-Anis**, Dar Al-Mansour for Printing and Publishing, Rabat, 1972. p. 143.
4 - Ibid, p. 155.
5 - Ibn Al-Khatib: op. cit, Vol. 2, p. 333.

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al-Manṣūr (the contents of which are not preserved), wrote a sternly worded message rebuking the Hammadid ruler for relying on the Arab tribes of Banū Hilāl, whose support had been decisive in the battle. Among the surviving excerpts of Yusuf's letter are the following: "To the lord of Qalʿat Ḥammād: your letter reached us from Wādī Minā, issued from the direction wherein you gained strength through your foes and squandered both your recent and ancient wealth..." He further reproached him, saying: We found you blaming and reproaching those who deserve no reproach…" And, condemning his alliance with the Bedouins, he wrote: "You summon the wolves and vagabonds of the Arabs from near and far, giving away your treasures recklessly and squandering what your forefathers had amassed in vain extravagance"[1].

2. The embassies between the Hamadids and the outside world:

1.2 The embassies between the Hamadids and the Fatimid state: After seeing what happened to his cousins, the Zirids, when the Banu Hilal tribes swept into Ifriqiya, the Hammadid ruler al-Qa'id ibn Hammad (who reigned from 419-446 AH/1028-1054 CE) realized that he would soon face the same threat. Determined to avoid that grim fate, he looked for ways to protect himself and his state. His first move was to renew his allegiance to the Fatimids. Historical sources tell us that he received a letter from the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir, who granted him the prestigious title "Sharaf al-Dawla"- the very same title that had once belonged to his cousin al-Mu'izz ibn Badis[2].

This is backed up by a letter al-Mustansir sent to the ruler of Yemen, in which he describes how a delegation that included Ibn Hammad (the brother of the lord of the Qal'a) went to Gabès. There they met with Makin al-Dawla al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Mulhim, pledged their loyalty and obedience, and asked the caliph for forgiveness: "Ibn Buluggin came to him—his brother-in-law through his sister—along with Ibn Yalmu, the leader of his people, and Ibn Hammad, brother of the lord of the Qal'a of Kutama. They came seeking safety, placing themselves

1- Al-Fath ibn Khakan: **Qala'id al-'Uqyan wa Mahasin al-A'yān**, 1st ed., Al-Manar Library, Jordan, 1989, pp. 310-311.
2 - Ibn Khaldun: op. cit, Vol. 6, p. 229.

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under the mercy of the Commander of the Faithful, and arriving at his court as representatives of the Sanhaja"[1].

However, while Ibn Khaldun claims that al-Qa'id submitted to the Fatimids, Ibn al-Khatib offers a different version: he says al-Qa'id actually broke away from Fatimid authority, following the example of his cousin al-Mu'izz ibn Badis, and began having the Friday sermon pronounced in the name of the Abbasid caliphs—a practice he maintained until his death in Dhu al-Qi'da 446 AH[2].

2.2 Relations and Embassies between the Hammadids and al-Andalus: Direct ties between the Hammadids and the rulers of al-Andalus were virtually nonexistent for a long time, and there were good reasons for that. The Hammadids remained politically subordinate to the Fatimids for many years, and the Fatimids were on very bad terms with the Umayyad state in Spain. On top of that, the Zenata tribes—who were closely allied with the Umayyads in al-Andalus—effectively blocked any political contact with the Hammadids.

Still, this didn't completely prevent some interaction. A few Andalusian rulers sought refuge in the Central Maghreb when things fell apart at home[3]. Several historians record that after the Almoravids conquered the emirate of Almería, its crown prince Mu'izz al-Dawla ibn Sumadih fled with his family and some of his followers to the court of the Hammadid ruler al-Mansur ibn al-Nasir. Al-Mansur welcomed them warmly and granted the prince the region of Dellys (Tadlis), where he lived out the rest of his days[4].

2.2 The Embassies between the Hammadids and the Christian Kingdoms: The Hammadid Emirate maintained generally cordial relations with the Papacy of Rome, particularly during the reign of al-Nāṣir ibn al-Nāṣir. These ties dated back to the early foundation of the Hammadid state, when the rulers of Qalʿat Banī Ḥammād displayed

1- **The Mustansiriya Records**: Edited by: Abdul Moneim Majid, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 1954, p. 44.
2- Ibn Al-Khatib: op. cit, Vol. 2, p. 333.
3- Owais: op. cit, p. 183.
4- Ibn Abi Zar'a: op. cit, p. 155; and Ibn Khaldun, op. cit, vol. 6, p. 234.

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remarkable tolerance toward the Christian community residing within their territories. The Hammadids treated them with generosity and guaranteed their religious freedom throughout their rule.

According to historical sources, in 508 AH/1114 CE, the Church of the Virgin Mary was built within the Qalʿa. Moreover, the Christians of Bône (modern Annaba) elected a bishop named Servandus, whose appointment was approved by al-Nāṣir ibn al-Nāṣir. When Bishop Servandus traveled to Rome, he carried with him a friendly letter and valuable gifts from al-Nāṣir to Pope Gregory VII, as well as all the Christian captives found in Hammadid lands, whom the ruler had decided to release as a gesture of goodwill.

This noble act greatly impressed the Roman clergy, who expressed their gratitude by sending letters of thanks and praise to al-Nāṣir through Bishop Servandus upon his return to Bône. Among the surviving documents from this diplomatic exchange is a papal letter from Gregory VII dated 469 AH/1076 CE, regarded as one of the most significant papal correspondences addressed to a ruler of the Islamic Maghreb.

The letter reads in part: "From Gregory, Servant of the Servants of God, to al-Nāṣir, King of Mauretania and the province of Setif in Africa: Apostolic greetings and blessings. You have written to us concerning the appointment of a priest according to Christian law- namely, this servant of God, Servandus- whom we have confirmed in his office, for your request was just".

The Pope continues, expressing appreciation for al-Nāṣir's benevolence in freeing Christian prisoners: "At the same time, you sent us letters and released the Christians who had been held captive in your realm, out of regard for the blessed Pierre, Prince of the Missionaries, and out of love for us. You have also promised to free any others who may still remain".

The letter concludes by noting that the nobles of Rome admired al-Nāṣir's gesture, and that they wished to strengthen the bonds of friendship and communication between the two realms through continued correspondence and diplomatic exchange.

From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that the Hammadid state succeeded to a considerable extent in establishing a prudent and

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balanced diplomatic policy in the central Maghreb, despite the complex regional and religious context in which it operated — one marked by rivalries among Muslim powers in the western Islamic world and pressures from the Christian kingdoms and the Papacy across the Mediterranean.

The Hammadid diplomatic practice demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptability and flexibility in dealing with diverse counterparts, both Muslim and foreign. It combined political pragmatism with religious commitment, enabling the dynasty to safeguard its political entity against both external threats and internal challenges.

The numerous embassies exchanged between the Hammadids and their neighbors reflected a mature political consciousness among the rulers of the dynasty, who understood that letters, gifts, and alliances could be as effective as armies and weapons in maintaining sovereignty and extending influence.

While relations with the Almoravids were often marked by caution and mutual suspicion, they nevertheless included significant diplomatic exchanges, testifying to a degree of mutual respect between the two powers. Conversely, the Hammadids' relations with the Christian kingdoms and the Papacy were characterized by openness and religious tolerance, revealing a civilized political vision that transcended dogmatic conflict in favor of broader human and cultural interaction[1].

Conclusion: In conclusion, Hammadid diplomacy served as one of the most effective instruments of the state in maintaining internal and external balance and contributed significantly to the longevity of its political existence. It left a clear imprint on the history of Maghrebi-Mediterranean relations during the 11th and 12th centuries CE (5th–6th centuries AH). The Hammadid experience thus stands as an early and insightful example of the art of negotiation and international communication in the medieval Islamic West — a testament to the dynasty's sophisticated understanding of diplomacy as a means of

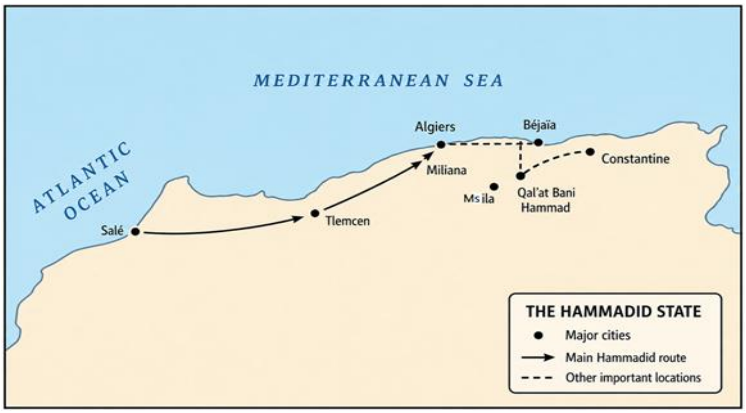
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statecraft and survival.

Annexes:

Map 1.The territories of the Banu Hammad[1]



Map 2. Main Diplomatic and Commercial Routes in the Central Maghreb during the Hammadid Era[2]



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