

## **Mbarka Bint Al-Khas: The Legend and Reality Along the Course of Wadi Sughar**

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### **Abstract:**

The topic of "Mbarka bint Al-Khas" is one of the subjects that have intertwined historical implications in terms of geographical dimensions and the dynamics of migrations experienced by human groups, including the Hilal migration towards Greater Maghreb, due to circumstances, motives, and reasons that necessitated migration, including the Fatimid desire for revenge against "Al-Mu'izz ibn Bādīs al-Zīrī" who declared his separation from them. This made it one of the migrations that had an impact on the geographical landscapes it traversed and inhabited, by transferring its heritage in various forms. Among these tribes is the Hilal tribe of Bani 'Āmir, which served as a major support for the Zayyanid state in the challenges it faced. The Bani 'Āmir tribe is the ancestral lineage of "Blessing bint Al-Khas Al-'Āmiriyah". This woman was known and renowned for her wisdom in managing affairs, her sayings of wisdom, poetry, and proverbs. Moreover, she was well-known throughout Wadi "Saghur" as Queen or Princess "Mbarka bint Al-Khas" between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries AD, and the most significant consequences resulting from this presence in later stages are attributed to Queen "Blessing" herself. Many architectural structures, from Berrizina to El-golea, are attributed to her, including palaces and wells she dug in the Algerian desert. Through this research paper, we attempt to clarify the most important events associated with this figure, to which many matters have been attributed, oscillating between legend and reality. We also highlight the extensions of the name "Al-Khas" or "Al-Khas" from the regions of the Arab East, the original homeland of this tribe, to its settlement in the central region of Maghreb, and we also illustrate the most significant events that occurred in the Berrizina region, and the relationship between Blessing bint Al-Khas and her tribe with the El-golea Palace.

**Keywords:** Hilal people - Bani 'Āmir tribe - Mbarka bint Al-Khas - Berrizina - Wadi Saghur – El-golea.

### **Introduction:**

"Mbarka bint Al-Khas" is one of the most famous women whose reputation spread during the late medieval period and the modern period in the Algerian desert. Her influence extended from the city of Berrizina in the Roboat region in the north to the city of – El-golea (Al-Meniaa) in the south, along the course of Wadi Saghur, and from the eastern Amour Mountains to the western valley bordering Tamanrasset. Her palaces include the Ain Al-'Amara Palace, located five kilometers west of Berrizina, and the Qalī'ah Palace in the city of – El-golea. According to studies, the latter palace was inhabited rather than built by Blessing, and its construction dates back to a period earlier than hers,

between the ninth and tenth centuries AD. We will discuss the most significant events associated with the life of this woman, known as the legend of "Mbarka bint Al-Khas," or rather Queen Mbarka bint Al-Khas. This woman traces her origins back to one of the Arab tribes that migrated from the East to Morocco during the historical migration of the Banu Hilal. This tribe is known as the "Banu 'Amir," which had strong relations with the kings of the Beni Ziyad of Tlemcen, who made them a shield protecting them from attacks by the Arab tribes in the stronghold. Moreover, she was their greatest supporter during times of crises and hardships. Therefore, at the beginning of this study, we will delve into the earliest references to the name "bint Al-Khas" from the Eastern region, known as "Hind bint Al-Khas Al-Iyadiyah," named after the "Iyad" tribe due to its precedence during the period in which she lived. Then we will move on to "bint Al-Khas Al-'Amiriyah," named after the Banu 'Amir tribe that migrated from the Eastern Arab region to Greater Morocco, carrying with them their heritage, especially that related to the name "Al-Khas" or "Al-Khas." We will address the most important questions, including: Does "Mbarka bint Al-Khas" of the Banu 'Amir actually exist, or is it merely a heritage passed down through generations? It underwent changes in terms of the language used, which in turn changed with the emergence of the colloquial dialect that accompanied the appearance of the Hilalian people in the region. What is her relationship with the – El-golea Palace in the city of Al-Munī'ah, despite her name not being mentioned in various sources except for its circulation in oral narratives? And why did the sources that mentioned the – El-golea Palace and the Banu 'Amir tribe, from which this queen descended, not mention her? Despite this tribe's frequent and prolonged visits to the – El-golea Palace, which she made her home.

## I. Bint Al-Khas Al-Iyadiyah

### A. The Origins of the Name Bint Al-Khas or Bint Al-Khus

To understand the origins and roots of this name, we can explore various sources that have mentioned Bint Al-Khas, such as the book "Al-Muzhir fi al-Lughah wa 'Ulumha" by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (died 911 AH)<sup>1</sup> and the book "Al-Nawadir fi al-Lughah" by Abu Zaid al-Ansari (112-215 AH)<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, Ibn al-A'rabī (died 231 AH), who is considered a prominent figure in Arab linguistics and language, has written extensively about her in his works of "Nawadir."<sup>3</sup> Ibn Tayfur (died 280 AH) also mentions her in his book "Balaqat al-Nisa."<sup>4</sup> Abu Zaid al-Ansari included references to her in his book "Al-Nawadir fi al-Lughah," and she is mentioned in the book "Al-Mathal fi Majma al-Amthal" where Abu al-Hasan said, "It is said, 'Al-Khus,' 'Al-Khas,' 'Al-Khusf,' and 'Al-Akhus'.<sup>5</sup>".

According to Al-Zubaydi (1145-1205 AH), who was a linguist and grammarian with extensive knowledge of genealogy, it is mentioned about Bint Al-Khas that she was from the tribe of Iyad, and

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul Rahman ibn Abi Bakr, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, "Al-Mizhar fi Ulum al-Lughah wa Anwaihā", edited by Fuad Ali Mansour, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Abu Zaid al-Ansari: "Al-Nawadir fi al-Lughah", Dar al-Shorouk, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Arabi, "Nawadir Ibn al-Arabi", edited by Ahmed Ragab Abu Salim, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Lebanon, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Tayfur Abu al-Fadl Ahmad ibn Abi Taher, "Balaqat al-Nisa", edited by Ahmed Al-Alfi, Cairo, 1908 AD, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Zaid al-Ansari: Same, p. 593.

her father was Abu Hind<sup>6</sup>, the daughter of Al-Khas Al-Iyadiyah. She was renowned for her proverbs and eloquence of speech. Another opinion suggests that Bint Al-Khas belonged to the Amalikah tribe. However, the correct view is that the famous Bint Al-Khas, known for her eloquence, was from the Banu Iyad tribe. There is disagreement regarding her name; some say it was Hind, while others suggest Jam'a. Some claim that she was the daughter of Habis, tracing her lineage to her grandfather. The expressions "Bint Al-Khus" and "Ibnat Al-Khas" are used to refer to a wise woman among the Arabs, indicating that they refer to the same woman with a variation in her name<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, she became known as "Bint Al-Khas" with an open "kha" (خاء) and the name "Mubarakah" was added, making her "Mbarka Bint Al-Khas." Mbarka is present in the region of Morocco, especially in the central part of Algeria.

Al-Jahiz (159-255 AH) described them in his book "Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin," where he mentioned the words of Jamah and Hind bint Al-Khuss. He said, "They are skilled in intelligence, eloquence, and linguistic proficiency. They possess astonishing responses, articulate speech, flowing proverbs, and exceptional articulation. Hind bint Al-Khuss, also known as Al-Zarqaa, is among them." As for Jamah bint Habis, it is said that Habis belongs to the Iyad tribe. At the beginning of this paragraph, we mentioned "bint Al-Khuss" as two daughters, and at the end, we mentioned "Hind bint Al-Khuss." Jamah, sometimes referred to as "Khumah," bint Habis. Ibn Tayfur mentioned them as daughters of Al-Khuss<sup>8</sup> when they were questioned by Al-Qalmas<sup>9</sup> Al-Kinan<sup>10</sup>, the poet, in the market of 'Ukaz<sup>11</sup>. We will address these questions in their appropriate context.

### **The Period in which Hind bint Al-Khuss lived Al-Iyadiyya:**

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<sup>6</sup> She is Hind bint al-Khas al-Ayadi, ancient in pre-Islamic era, who encountered "Al-Qalmas" one of the Arab rulers. Refer to Abu Zaid al-Ansari's book "Al-Nawadir fi al-Lughah", margin p. 593.

<sup>7</sup> Murtada al-Zabidi, "Taj al-Arus min Jawahir al-Qamus", vol. 16, National Council for Culture and Arts, Kuwait, 2001, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Jahiz: "Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin", edited by Abdul Salam Haroun, vol. 1, p. 312.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Tayfur, himself, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> He died in Mecca, and the Arabs would not issue judgments until he preached there. He was the one who met the daughter of Khos in the market of 'Ukaz, the subject of our discussion. From what is mentioned in the book "Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Arab" (The Detailed Account of the History of the Arabs): "The people of knowledge mention that those 'Nasi'in' were prominent figures in their tribe, with great status and significance. For example, 'Al-Qalmas' was like a king among his people, from the Banu Kinanah tribe. He was knowledgeable among his people, and the one who succeeded the 'Nasi'in' would acquire leadership to arbitrate among the Arabs. It appears that they were people of knowledge, insight, and respected status in matters of religion within their tribe and among the tribes that made pilgrimage to Mecca. The word 'Qalmas', from what is apparent in the narrations of historians, was not a name of knowledge, but rather a term intended by the ignorant to mean the jurist and religious scholar in Islam." See: Jawad Ali, Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam, vol. 16, Dar al-Saqi, Beirut, 2001, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Yaquf al-Hamawi (d. 626 AH) says in "Mu'jam al-Buldan" about 'Ukaz': with a 'Damma' on the first letter and the last letter pronounced with 'Dhad' with a sukoon on it. Al-Layth said: "It was called 'Ukaz' because the Arabs used to gather there and sharpen each other with pottery, meaning they would polish each other. So-and-so would sharpen his opponent with arguments and evidence (hujjaj), which is called 'Ukaz'. Others said: 'Ukaz' means a man sharpening his riding beast, he restrains it. When the people gather and discuss their matters, they are said to be 'ta'akkaz' (i.e., gathered for discussion). It is said to be named 'Ukaz' for this reason." Al-Suhayli narrated: "They used to boast in the market of 'Ukaz' when they gathered. It is said that a man 'Ukaz' his companion when he boasts and outdoes him with bragging, so 'Ukaz' was named after that. And 'Ukaz' is the name of a market among the markets of the Arabs in pre-Islamic times. The Arab tribes would gather at 'Ukaz' every year, their poets would attend, they would exchange the latest poetry, then disperse. An 'Adimi 'Ukazi' is one attributed to 'Ukaz, and he is one who comes from 'Ukaz and is sold there." Al-Asma'i said: "There is a date palm in a valley between it and Ta'if for three nights' journey, and it was where the market of the Arabs was established, at a place called Al-Uthaydah. It was during the Days of Ignorance, and there were rocks they would circumambulate and make pilgrimage to." Al-Waqidi said: "'Ukaz' is between a date palm and Ta'if and Dhul-Majaz behind Arafat, and these are the markets of Quraysh and the Arabs, and there was none greater than 'Ukaz'." See: Shihab al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Yaquf ibn 'Abd Allah al-Rumi al-Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol. 4, Dar Sader, Beirut, 1995, p. 142.

Arabic sources indicate that she lived during the pre-Islamic era (the Age of Ignorance). She encountered Al-Qalmas ibn Umayyah Al-Kinanī in the market of 'Ukaz, and a dialogue took place between them that has been immortalized in the sources. Al-Qalmas, as described by Al-Zarkali in his book "Al-A'lam," was known as "Al-Qalmas ibn Umayyah ibn 'Auf Al-Kinanī, Abu Thumamah, from the Banu Al-Harith ibn Malik ibn Kinanah. He was one of the last to practice the "Nasi" system during the pre-Islamic era, which involved postponing the intercalary months. "Nasi" means postponement or delay in language. The Arabs used to postpone certain days each year to synchronize their Hajj pilgrimage. Later, they started to postpone some months to allow for warfare during the sacred months. "Al-Nasi" was the one who announced the gathering of pilgrims in Mina. Al-Qalmas inherited this role from his father, who inherited it from his grandfather, and he continued in this position for about forty years. However, with the advent of Islam, this practice was abolished. It is also said that his name was "Janadah," and "Al-Qalmas" was his title, which means "the master" or "the distant and deep one." Anyone who assumed the role of postponing the intercalary months was referred to as "Al-Qalmas."<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Hind bint Al-Khuss lived IN Al-Iyadiyya during the time of Al-Qalmas, who was a preacher and orator among his people. This was confirmed by Ibn al-Jawziya when he said, "He was one of the pre-Islamic preachers and orators." And how could she not be? She and her sister, Khumah, engaged in a conversation with him, and she praised him in verses, saying:

"When Allah rewards a benefactor for his kindness,

May He reward you, O Qalmas, with generosity."

Through this speech, we can see the eloquence of Hind bint Al-Khuss, who engaged in a dialogue with Al-Qalmas, answering questions that demonstrate her eloquence, wisdom, and status among her people.

Arabic poetry immortalized her, including what was mentioned in a poem by Al-Farazdaq, who lived for about ninety years (641-728 CE/20-110 AH). It was said about Al-Farazdaq, "If it weren't for Al-Farazdaq's poetry, the Arabic language would have disappeared, and if it weren't for his poetry, half of people's stories would have been lost, as he is the source of poetry."

According to what was mentioned by Abdul Qadir al-Baghdadi in a couplet by Al-Farazdaq, Hind bint Al-Khuss passed away during the reign of King "Nu'man ibn Mundhir" at the hands of his daughter Hind, as he said:

"You fulfilled your promise as an act of honor,

Just as the daughter of Al-Khuss Al-Iyadiyya fulfilled her duty."

Abdul Qadir al-Baghdadi, the linguist, grammarian, and researcher who was proficient in the various aspects of Arabic language, stated that the meaning of this verse is that Hind bint Al-Khuss confronted

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<sup>12</sup> Khair al-Din al-Zarkali, Al-A'lam, vol. 5, Dar al-Ilm li-l-Malayin, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, p. 203.

her sister, Khumah bint Al-Khuss, and not the daughter of Nu'man ibn Mundhir. This is because some sources claim that Hind bint Al-Khuss is not the daughter of Nu'man ibn Mundhir<sup>13</sup>.

Therefore, we observe that both Hind bint Al-Khuss and Khumah bint Al-Khuss have relationships with prominent individuals or even kings, engaging in dialogue with a specific purpose. For example, Al-Iyadiyya engaged in a conversation with Qalmas Al-Kinan in matters related to wisdom, while Al-Khas Al-A'amiriyya conversed with "Sultan Al-Akhal" when he proposed to her and she rejected him.

Regarding Al-Khuss Al-Iyadiyya, she was not mentioned as a queen but rather as a wise woman who held a significant status and influence in her tribe and among the Arab tribes. Some sources mention that she was taken by King Nu'man to accompany his daughter. However, there are conflicting opinions regarding the relationship between Hind bint Al-Khuss and Hind bint Nu'man ibn Mundhir.

As for Mbarka bint Al-Khas, she is mentioned as a princess who succeeded her father in leading her tribe or as a queen who ruled over the entire course of Wadi Saghur, spanning the vast region of Burayzina until its estuary in the city of Al-Munay'ah, with her last palace being located there. This will be further elaborated in this section of the explanation.

## II. Bint Al-Khass Al-Amiriyya:

Bint Al-Khas her lineage traces back to the tribe she descended from, which is the Banu 'Amir Al-Hilaliyya tribe. The sources, including oral narratives, mention her father's name through her name, "Bint Al-Khass" or "Bint Al-Khuss." What sets her apart in terms of name is that she was named Mbarka. This name is usually found in the Maghreb regions, especially in central Morocco (referring to Algeria). The sources do not provide detailed information about her father's name, only referring to her as Bint Al-Khass Al-Amiriyya. Even her husband's name is not mentioned, despite the existence of proverbs and wisdom attributed to her in many households. Her father, as mentioned in the legend, was a generous farmer, and her cousin was a horse breeder. However, what characterized her was that she was a wise woman of her time. This led to many sayings and wisdom being attributed to her<sup>14</sup>. Interestingly, these proverbs and wisdom are remarkably similar to those mentioned in the Mashriq (Eastern) region, albeit expressed in different language and vocabulary. During the period when the tribe resided in the Mashriq, Classical Arabic was used, while in the Maghreb, it was the colloquial language that emerged and spread among the Hilaliyyin in the region, based on the chronological period and geographical area. However, they convey the same meaning.

Those who follow her from the Mashriq to the Maghreb can easily conclude that this similarity is primarily due to the transmission of heritage being linked to the movement of the tribe. Therefore, the researcher must trace the movements of the Banu 'Amir tribe in order to uncover everything related to their heritage. Thus, the question arises: Who are the Banu 'Amir tribe to which "Mbarka bint Al-Khass" belongs?

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<sup>13</sup> Abdul Qadir al-Baghdadi, "Khoznat al-Adab wa Lub Ababil Lisan al-Arab", vol. 10, Khanji Library, Cairo, 1997, p. 261.

<sup>14</sup> René Basset, "A Supposed Arab Folk Song," Review of Folk Traditions. Paris, 1892, p. 219.

## 1- Introducing the Banu 'Amir tribe:

The origin of the Banu 'Amir tribe can be traced back to the Hilaliyya tribes that inhabited various regions, especially the southern areas of Tlemcen. Ibn Khaldun states: "The information regarding their lineage traces back to Zughba and their sub-tribes from Hilal bin 'Amir, Zughba, and Riyah, the sons of Abi Rabia bin Nahiq bin Hilal bin 'Amir.<sup>15</sup>" We will elaborate on this point to provide the reader with an understanding of the origins of the Banu Hilal.

Renowned scholar Ibn Khaldun mentioned the Arab migrations of the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym to the Maghreb, indicating that the lineages of Hilal and Sulaym are from Mudar, and their territories are located after Al-Hijaz in Najd. The Banu Sulaym settled near Al-Madinah, while the Banu Hilal settled in Jabal Ghazwan near At-Ta'if. They would travel between different regions during the winter and summer seasons (Iraq and Sham).

The Hilaliyyin used to conduct raids on their neighbors and disrupt trade routes. Concerning the Banu Sulaym, it was mentioned that they would even target the caravans of the Hajj (Makkah and Madinah). The Muslims complained to the Caliph about their behavior. Furthermore, the Banu Sulaym and Abi Rabia bin 'Amir showed favoritism towards the Qarmatians when they emerged. They served as soldiers in Bahrain and Oman. When the Shia gained control over Egypt and Sham, the Qarmatians were expelled from Sham to Bahrain. Arab tribes of the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym were then relocated to the Upper Egypt and the eastern part of the Nile Delta and continued to cause harm to the people.

When Al-Mu'izz ibn Badyis ibn al-Mansur ascended to the throne of the Kingdom of Kairouan, he separated Ifriqiya from the Fatimids and adopted the Sunni doctrine. This prompted the minister, Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Ali al-Yazuri, to devise a plan against Al-Mu'izz, whom he referred to as "Al-Mu'izz, the Deviant of Allah, the Fatimid." The plan aimed to achieve two objectives simultaneously. First, to push the Hilaliyyin and Banu Sulaym towards the west to get rid of their troubles. Second, to discipline the Sanhaja, led by Al-Mu'izz ibn Bilkhin al-Sanhaji, who had separated themselves from the Fatimids to such an extent that they even pressured those who were not willing to join them willingly or forcefully. Consequently, this plan was seen as an artificial process of alienation initiated by the Fatimids and became known as the alienation of the Banu Hilal towards the Maghreb al-Kabir (Greater Maghreb)<sup>16</sup>.

As a result, the Banu 'Amir belong to the Arab Hilaliyya tribes who migrated to the Islamic Maghreb in the middle of the 5th century AH and settled in various territories, particularly in the central Moroccan plateaus and general African lands. Their period of settlement can be traced back to the beginning of the Zayyanid dynasty, when Yaghmurasen ibn Zyan ibn Thabit ibn Muhammad Abd al-Wadhi (603AH-681AH/1206-1284CE) brought them and ruled from 633 AH onwards for more than forty years. He used them as a barrier between himself and the Arab Maqil tribe to secure his rule, and the association of Guelma in southern Algeria, specifically the city of El-Meina, with the Banu 'Amir dates back to their role as the intermediary between Tlemcen and its southern regions.

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<sup>15</sup> Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, "The Lessons", vol. 6, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, 1971, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Same Reference, pp. 17-19.

Yaghmurasen allocated these lands to them to serve as a barrier between himself and the Arab Maqil tribe, who caused him numerous problems<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, all relationships, especially trade relations, passed through the road connecting Sigilmassa, Guelma, Rajlan, Tizil, and Tlemcen. Yaghmurasen's political astuteness strengthened his relationships with Arab tribes such as the Hilaliyya tribe of Banu 'Amir and with Berber tribes such as the Zenata.

### **Who is Mubārahah bint al-Khaṣṣ and when did she live<sup>18</sup>?**

Mubārahah bint al-Khaṣṣ is a member of the Bani 'Amir tribe, residing in one of the plateaus known as "Al-Ghawr" on the left bank of Wadi Sghir, south of Béchar, as described by the eulogist. According to René Basset, Mubārahah's lineage in the central Maghreb can be traced back to the period identified by De Gastrier<sup>19</sup>, which places it during the 14th and 15th centuries CE in the Wahranian Sahara. Mbārka was known for her wisdom, wit, and intelligence, as well as her esteemed position among her people, inheriting her father's leadership of the tribe. One of the qualities that reflects her status is her beauty, which will be discussed based on the circulating narratives.

### **The Beauty of Mbārka bint al-Khaṣṣ**

Mbārka bint al-Khaṣṣ was renowned for her captivating beauty, which combined purity of soul, intelligence, sharpness of mind, and eloquence of speech. Her physical appearance was equally remarkable. She possessed enchanting black eyes and a radiant forehead resembling the moon. Observers would see her as a ring that governed its rotation around her perfectly defined, flowing lips. Occasionally, a gleam of her white teeth would shine through her lips. Her shoulders were gracefully arched like ivory bows, and her long, full neck would cradle sleeping children. A man would be enchanted by her if he desired to caress her. She had a slender figure and, among her bestowed qualities by God, she had the ability to see things at a distance of three days' journey, equivalent to three stages, like a "blue dove."

In a related account, one day her camel strayed from the caravan, and its price reached four hundred "bijū" (a type of currency)<sup>20</sup>. Mbārka climbed to the top of a hill, placing her hand on her forehead in a position that enhances the physical and sensory power in service of the sense of sight, enabling her to see at a far distance. The twilight's light at sunset aided her in this endeavor. She exclaimed, "I see my camel!" and shouted, "Zam! Zam!" which means "Stop! Stop!" The knights rushed towards the direction indicated by "Bint al-Khaṣṣ," and after three days, they found her camel.

Mbārka bint al-Khaṣṣ lived for a hundred years, and when she passed away, it is said that the kohl from her eyes descended onto her teeth. The use of the tooth stick (miswak) caused her gums to

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<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Mekouy, "The Role of Yaghmuras in Establishing the Zayyanid State," *Journal of Civilization and Intellectual Studies*, Vol. 1, 2008, pp. 207-216.

<sup>18</sup> Trumelet, C: "The French in the Sahara," Paris, 1853, p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> De Gastrier, "The Saints of Sidi Abderrahman Em-Medjeoub," 1896, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> A Spanish currency was often circulated in the North African region during that period.

redde, and the redness ascended to her eyes. That is why it is said that she preserved her captivating beauty until her death<sup>21</sup>.

### **Main Property Attributed to her**

Several structures have been attributed to Bint al-Khaṣṣ, indicated by the remaining traces. These include palaces in the area of Ain al-'Ammara, located 5 kilometers west of Béni Abbès, and Jabal Bounaghta in the Rbawat region. She resided in the fortified palace of Al-Mini'ah and was renowned for digging wells such as Hassi Thelja, Hassi Aysha, Hassi Zarara, and Thaghir. This is consistent with the oral tradition in the city of Al-Mini'ah<sup>22</sup>.

In popular Arabic folk songs, Bint al-Khaṣṣ is described as a great water carrier all the way to Mecca, ensuring that pilgrims find water in all the places they pass through<sup>23</sup>. Lieutenant Verdier, located 5.5 kilometers south of Lioua and 4 kilometers from Wadi Jdi, mentions a stone ridge extending from west to east, parallel to the course of Wadi Jdi. This ridge is called "Saqiyat Bint al-Khaṣṣ." According to Verdier's belief, this saqiyah dates back to the Roman era when they used it for irrigation<sup>24</sup>.

However, the Arab legend firmly asserts that this saqiyah was built by the Arabs and traces back to Bint al-Khaṣṣ, indicating her great stature. The width of this saqiyah is four meters, and it irrigates an area of up to 15,000 hectares<sup>25</sup>.

### **Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ Relationship to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Murīnī<sup>26</sup>**

The historical incident of the relationship between Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Murīnī (Sultan Lekḥal) is not documented in historical sources that we have come across. However, it has been circulated through oral tradition, specifically in the geographic region spanning from Rbawat in Béni Abbès to the city of Al-Mini'ah. The problem here is that even the residents of Al-Mini'ah narrate the story of the siege as if it took place around the Al-Mini'ah palace. However, Sultan Lekḥal did not reach Al-Mini'ah from that direction. Furthermore, Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ did not build the Al-Mini'ah palace but resided in it since it was constructed in a period preceding her time, between the 9th and 10th centuries AD, while Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ lived between the 14th and 15th centuries AD. Therefore, if this historical incident did occur, it most likely took place in the Ghour area in Béni Abbès.

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<sup>21</sup> Le Roux, Hugues: "In the Sahara," Paris, 1891, p. 144.

<sup>22</sup> Meeting on August 17, 2022, with "Mohammed Bouchrit" from the heritage holders of the city of Al-Minya, aged 70, a keeper of many historical events and the names of the city's figures and famous geographical locations.

<sup>23</sup> René Basset: "The Legend of Bent el-Khass," African Review, Volume 49, 1905, p. 25.

Moinier, A: "EL GOLÉA: The Ksar, Zenata, and Harratin," African Review, 1906, p. 348.

<sup>24</sup> Stéphane Gsell, Administrative Inquiry into Ancient Hydraulic Works in Algiers, 1902, p. 124.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>26</sup> Abu al-Hasan al-Marini, known as al-Mansur bi'llah, was born in 693 AH / 1293 CE, and he was popularly known as the "Black Sultan" because his mother was Ethiopian. See Najlaa Mohamed Awaïd Al-Mutairi: "The Campaign of Abu al-Hasan al-Marini in Africa and Its Results (748-752 AH / 1347-1351 CE)," Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. 1, No. 63, 2021, pp. 1-36.

Due to the consequences of the siege, Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ sought refuge in the Al-Mini'ah palace. This estimation, from our perspective, was not arbitrary but rather connected to the period when the Banī 'Āmir tribe fled to Qalī'a and Al-Mini'ah from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Murīnī when he seized Tlemcen in 737 AH/1337 CE. We will provide evidence for this, although the evidence specifically mentions the descent of the Banī 'Āmir to the Al-Mini'ah palace with their leader "Saḡīr" and does not mention "Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ."

According to "Du Colomb," it is mentioned that the wide area south of Jurfīl, extending to the western edge separating it from Gourara, was inhabited by an Arab tribe called "Banī 'Āmir" from the Hilalian tribe in this Ghour region. There are numerous wells along Wadi Saghra until the foot of the western edge, but they are barricaded to make it difficult for enemies to reach these borders, referring specifically to the Tuaregs and resilient warriors<sup>27</sup>.

The story of Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ with Sultan Lekḡal is also mentioned by "Du Colomb,"<sup>28</sup> beginning with the following words: "Sultan Lekḡal heard about the daughter of al-Khaṣṣ and ordered the preparation of his horse and his knights, intending to reach the remote areas where she resides. In his mind, there were only two possibilities. First, she would accept his proposal, and he believed that she would not refuse, and she would accept him as a husband, even if from a political perspective. The second possibility, if she rejected his offer, he would besiege her palace, forcing her to submit to him in the end.

When he arrived at her domain, he sent musicians and singers, and upon their arrival at the base of the hill, they began to sing praises in honor of their lord, Sultan Lekḡal. When they finished their praises, Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ responded with words that included: "I dwell in a fortress with water, and I have the capability to do as I please. My fortress is elevated, beyond the reach of even the eagles themselves. Even if I face adversity, it cannot harm me.

Afterwards, Sultan Lekḡal sent his ministers once again to the base of the hill to announce the reason for his presence. They presented to her the gifts brought by their prince, fitting for her status, and began to offer them as follows: "Our lord has come to bring you a thousand (1000) duros, enclosed in a chest, and ten (10) slaves. There are bracelets to adorn your arms, countless in number, and matching ones for your legs, made of silver, including two necklaces called 'khalkhal' (a type of ankle bracelet, some are twisted and others are round<sup>29</sup>) that a woman places on her heels, creating a distinct sound when she walks, especially when the two khalkhals touch, attracting attention from anyone who hears it.

He further added: "Our lord also presents to you, in the Marrakech dialect, two pieces of Sudanese fabric equivalent to ten adras, four pieces of smooth and glossy silk, a carpet, Fassi accessories, forty

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<sup>27</sup> He was called the "Black Sultan" due to the dark color of his skin, attributed to his mother being Ethiopian from the land of Sudan.

<sup>28</sup> De Colombe, Exploration of the Ksours..., op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> "The one who molds it calls out 'Dawwadi'" - a saying from the heritage of the city of Al-Minya referring to the anklet as a metaphor for "Mubarakah, daughter of al-Khas."

(40) baskets of wheat, and twenty (20) baskets of barley, along with six hides of butter, cloves, kohl for the eyes, and perfumes."

Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ responded to the ministers, saying: "Tell your prince that we have more black arsenic than what exists in his country." This was a metaphorical way of expressing her rejection, implying that the poison was with them, not with him. This made him erupt in anger. After two hours past sunset, he ordered a siege and instructed the preparation of dinner for a thousand (1000) individuals. He also ordered the blocking of the wells surrounding the hill, so that the residents of the palace would not be able to access water. After a week, thirst took its toll, and only enough water remained for one day. Mbārka bint al-Khaṣṣ devised a plan and ordered the following: "The cloth, blankets, and straw mats should be washed and spread on the ropes, visible from the top of the palace." The voices rose from around her due to the decision made by Mbarka bint al-Khaṣṣ, as they found it illogical since they were in desperate need of water, while she wanted it for laundry purposes.

And here lies the difference between a leader and the common people. She sees from the perspective of responsibility, while they see from the perspective of need. But due to her strong personality, she reissued the order for the second time with a sharp and loud tone that reflected her unwavering determination. She reiterated her command: "Do as I have instructed you. I see more than you can see." She ordered the ignition of fires everywhere to signal to the enemy that she had an abundant supply of firewood. She fed the remaining barley to a goat and released it towards the enemy, fully aware that it would fall into the hands of the besiegers. When they slaughtered the goat, they would say, "This goat and the barley found in its stomach prove that the palace residents have enough barley to last for months. Inform Sultan Lekhal of what we have discovered." The Sultan, convinced that he could not capture this woman through the siege, ordered its lifting during the night after executing the person implicated in this matter<sup>30</sup>.

### **The relationship between Mubarka bint Al-Khas and the Qalaat al-Qalii'a Palace<sup>31</sup>:**

After the siege that took place in the Brizina region, Mubarka bint Al-Khas sought refuge in the Qalii'a Palace and resided there. This raises several questions: Did she inhabit this palace? If so, when did she do so? Did she enter as a guest or as a controller?

Answering this question, the renowned scholar Ibn Khaldun states that after Abu al-Hasan al-Mariniid seized Tlemcen, the Banu 'Amir ibn Ibrahim fled to the desert. Their sheikh at that time was "Saqir," and they resided in the Qalaat Wann. However, Ibn Khaldun never mentioned their leader, "Mubarka bint Al-Khas," even though he mentioned their sheikh and his relationship with Abu al-Hasan al-Mariniid. We know that during this period, the Qalii'a Palace was still under the control of the Zanata tribe, as the Shu'aniba in the past took control of the old palace only in the first quarter of the 16th century.

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Le Roux, Hugues: op. cit., p. 144. <sup>30</sup>

The name "Al-Qal'a" is derived from the name of the small fortress built on the hill in the city of Al-Minya, so the city was named after it "Al-Qal'a". Before that, it was known as "Tawerirt," meaning the high place or elevation, referring to the Zanata tribe, to which the construction of the palace was attributed. Then it became known as Al-Minya for its resistance to enemies. <sup>31</sup>

## **The migration of the Banu 'Amir to the Qalii'a Fortress (Al-Minya'a) and their resistance to Abu al-Hasan al-Marinid:**

This relationship between the "Banu 'Amir" and the inhabitants of Qalii'a became intertwined during the reign of Sultan Abu al-Hasan al-Marinid (Sultan Lekhal) over Tlemcen in the year 737 AH/1337 CE, following a three-year siege<sup>32</sup>. After Abu al-Hasan al-Marinid seized Tlemcen, the Banu 'Amir ibn Ibrahim fled to the desert. Their sheikh at that time was "Saqr," also mentioned in some sources as "Saqir," as noted by Dr. Abdulhamid Hajjiat<sup>33</sup>.

The reason for their escape towards the south was their apparent refusal to submit to the new authority, which led to numerous conflicts and made the Sultan pursue them until they reached beyond the western border, which was considered a barrier safeguarding Arab territories. They arrived at Walen<sup>34</sup> Fortress, and more than that, they settled there for a long period. The Banu 'Amir would frequent Qalii'a whenever they faced difficulties, using it as a refuge due to its fortifications. It is said that the name "Al-Minya'a" (The Fortified) was derived from this period, indicating that anyone threatened by danger would be deterred there. After some time, Saqr managed to convince Abu al-Hasan and became one of his loyalists. He attended the Battle of al-Qurwan in 750 AH, where Sultan Abu al-Hasan al-Marinid was defeated.

This account is directly mentioned by Ibn Khaldun, and we present it as a quotation, serving as definitive evidence for what happened in the Al-Minya'a Palace during the reign of Abu al-Hasan al-Marinid and its implications for Qalii'a Fortress. "When Sultan Abu al-Hasan prevailed over Tlemcen, the Banu 'Amir ibn Ibrahim fled to the desert... A small group of them sought refuge in the wilderness<sup>35</sup>, escaping through the sand dunes that served as a barrier to Arab territories, and they settled in Qalii'a Fortress. Eventually, Saqr managed to gain Abu al-Hasan's favor, and before his death, he entrusted his brother Abu Bakr to him. Saqr accompanied the Sultan to Africa and participated in the Battle of al-Qairawan. Afterward, he returned to his people, and they all returned to Lawata, the land of the Banu Yaghmurasen.<sup>36</sup>"

From here, we can conclude that during this period, "Saqr" and his brothers resided in the fortress of Al-Munay'iyah after fleeing from Abu al-Hasan al-Marrakeshi in 1337 CE. They settled there for a long time. Ibn Khaldun stated that they descended to Qal'at al-Nahyan, and the term "descended" here means residing for a period that ensured tranquility and the recovery of lost strength. He further added that they made it their homeland, meaning they adopted it as their domicile, and therefore, he and his

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<sup>32</sup> Ahmed ibn Khalid al-Nasiri: "Investigation of the News of the States of Far Western Morocco", Vol. 3, p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> Abdelhamid Hajjiat: "The Role of the Banu Amer in the History of Western Algeria during the Zayyanid State," Journal of Literature and Languages, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003, pp. 157-162.

<sup>34</sup> This village is well known, located to the southwest of Al-Minya, with a shrine of a righteous man called by the people of Al-Minya "Sidi Mohammed Wal-N". It is also mentioned by the modern traveler "Abu Salim al-Ayashi" in the 17th century, and we will discuss this in detail in due time. Most French military and explorers passed through it when they wanted to head south.

<sup>35</sup> The name "Saghir" is mentioned by Ibn Khaldun, while some other sources and references use the name "Saqr".

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Khaldun, Al-Ibar, previous reference, vol. 6, p. 70.

tribe became citizens of Al-Munay'iyah. Ibn Khaldun did not mention any conflicts with the previous inhabitants, indicating a good relationship with the residents of the fortress.

When Ibn Khaldun specified the period of the escape of the Banu 'Amir tribe to Qal'at al-Nahyan, it helped us understand that Abu al-Hasan al-Marrakeshi did not pursue them to the fortress of Al-Munay'iyah, and they remained there until they reconciled with him. Prior to their departure, Abu Bakr, the brother of their leader Saqr, had provided security guarantees. Hence, it confirms that the siege imposed by Abu al-Hasan on the palace of Mbarka bint al-Khas was at the level of the Berrizina region, assuming it indeed occurred, and not at the level of the fortress of Al-Munay'iyah.

There remains one possibility, which is a hypothetical scenario: when Saqr resided in Qal'at al-Nahyan (Al-Munay'iyah), he lived there with his tribe, which may have included a prominent woman known for her wisdom, proverbs, and poetry. Her reputation spread among the inhabitants of the fortress throughout the period that represented the phase of the Banu 'Amir tribe's escape from Abu al-Hasan al-Marrakeshi. Moreover, it is possible that the women of the Banu 'Amir tribe stayed in the fortress for a while because it was not easy for Sheikh Saqr to place complete trust in Abu al-Hasan al-Marrakeshi. Therefore, he left the women in the safety of Qal'at al-Nahyan, allowing this influential figure, Mbarka bint al-Khas, to emerge and exert her leadership in the fortress.

The established and certain truth is the continuity of the presence of the Banu 'Amir tribe in Qal'at Al-Nahyan until the period of Khalid ibn 'Amir, who succeeded Sheikh Saqr after killing his brother Shuayb. Unfortunately, luck did not favor the Banu 'Amir tribe when Abu al-Hasan al-Marrakeshi was defeated in the Battle of Al-Qarawan. Abu Sa'id II Al-Zayyani seized the opportunity and established the Zayyanid Emirate, with the Banu 'Amir joining him. However, this did not last long as Abu 'Anan ibn Hassan Al-Marrakeshi seized power and once again destroyed the Zayyanid Emirate, causing the Banu 'Amir to flee to the desert and remain scattered there until the death of Abu 'Anan. Ibn Khaldun mentioned the following: 'When the Banu 'Abd al-Wad perished and their group dispersed, Saqr fled to the desert as he normally would and settled in the barren lands, keeping an eye out for the Khawarij. Many of his people from the Banu Ma'rif ibn Sa'id joined him. The descendants of Husayn in Al-Maqla rebelled against Sultan Abu 'Anan in the year 557 AH and descended to Sigilmassa, and many others joined them. They were attacked by the forces of the Marinid dynasty led by 'Asakir ibn Marin in some of their valleys... They remained scattered in the desert... and continued on their path until the death of Sultan Abu 'Anan.<sup>37</sup>

Saqr ibn 'Amir did not surrender but instead devised a plan to seek refuge with the Dawwadah tribe and urged them to reclaim the Zayyanid rule. He took advantage of the opportunity presented by the death of Abu 'Anan in 760 AH and began advocating for Abu Hamu Musa II, who would rule for a long period (760-791 AH/1359-1389 CE). This time, they successfully regained the glory of the Zayyanid dynasty and reclaimed their lands and status, thanks to the significant sacrifices they made to solidify the foundations of this state. Saqr ibn 'Amir passed away in 761 AH (1360 CE).

A significant dispute arose between Khalid ibn 'Amir, who was supposed to succeed his brother Saqr, and Abu Hamu Musa II over the appointment of Shuayb, his brother, as the leader of the Banu 'Amir tribe. This prompted Khalid to seize the opportunity presented by the emergence of another rival to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Lessons*, previous reference, p. 71.

Abu Hamu Musa II, namely Abu Zayan ibn Sa'id II, and stand by his side to reclaim the kingdom of their forefathers. However, the attempt failed, leading Khalid to flee to the desert. It so happened that Khalid killed his brother Shuayb, who was leading the Banu 'Amir, and was subsequently captured by Abu Hamu Musa II.

Another rival emerged against Abu Hamu Musa II, namely Abu Zayan ibn Tashfin II, known as Al-Qabi. The Banu 'Amir joined him, and they were able to defeat Abu Hamu Musa II. However, the scales tipped in favor of Abu Hamu Musa II only after the release of Khalid ibn 'Amir. As a result, the Banu 'Amir tribe returned to supporting Abu Hamu Musa II in exchange for regaining their position within the Zayyanid state.

### **Conclusion:**

Through this study, the significant relationship between the Banu 'Amir Al-Hilali tribe, Qal'at Al-N (Al-Mani'ah), and Qal'at Al-Qal'ah becomes apparent, regardless of the lack of direct reference to the figure of "Mbarka bint Al-Khas" in the sources that mention Qal'at Al-Qal'ah, such as the travelogue book "Al-Rihla Al-Ayashiyah" by Abu Salim Al-Ayashi, who passed by Qal'at Al-Qal'ah during the second half of the 17th century. He did not mention Mbarka bint Al-Khas but merely described the palace and its affiliation to the Sultan of Ouargla. Thus, the character of Mbarka bint Al-Khas remains part of the oral heritage brought by the Hilali people from the East, circulating from one generation to another with changes in words and expressions. Despite the emergence of colloquial language, it has maintained the same significance, connotations, and meaning.

Mbarka bint Al-Khas is a symbolic figure, and this name signifies any Arab woman who possesses wisdom, poetry, and beauty qualities similar to those of Al-Khas's daughter.

The significance of the Banu 'Amir tribe in the political theater of the Zayyanid dynasty lies in their contribution to supporting the state of the Banu Zayan. In fact, the survival of the Zayyanid state was heavily dependent on the loyalty of the Banu 'Amir tribe. Their strategic withdrawal to the desert regions and their ability to seize opportune moments allowed them to assert themselves and regain what they had lost within the Zayyanid court.

The Banu 'Amir, to whom Mbarka bint Al-Khas belongs, resided in Qal'at Al-Qal'ah throughout their ordeal. This was during the period of their escape from Abu Al-Hasan Al-Marinid, with Saqr ibn 'Amir leading them until he was succeeded by Khalid ibn 'Amir, who reconciled with Abu Hamu Musa II. Qal'at Al-Qal'ah served as a refuge and sanctuary for them until they regained their strength and returned to defend their position. Thus, we can say that Qal'at Al-Qal'ah acted as a rear base for the Banu 'Amir tribe, which, in turn, served as a pillar relied upon by the Zayyanid state to maintain its security and status.

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