

The Correspondence of *Hājib* Ibn Tafrājīn with King Peter IV of Aragon: A Collection of Medieval Autographs in the Hafsīd Chancery of Tunis¹

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This study examines the Hafsīd hājib Ibn Tafrājīn (d. 765/1364) and his relations with the Catalan-Aragonese king Peter IV of Aragon (Pere the Ceremonious), with a focus on his innovative use of a personal autograph in official correspondence. Unlike the traditional formula of 'alāma used in by the Hafsīd sultans, Ibn Tafrājīn personally signed his letters, representing a notable departure from established protocol and thereby signaling his direct access to sovereign authority. A close reading of his correspondence sheds light on the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Tunis and Barcelona, through the arrival of an alleged consul at the Tunis court. The document CA 139 illustrates other topics and motivations, such as the reliance on commercial networks and resident merchants, suggesting Ibn Tafrājīn's efforts to anticipate the normalization of diplomatic ties in the following decade. Moreover, it implicitly reflects both internal challenges to legitimacy and external pressures from the Marinid threat. Finally, the analysis connects CA 139 to a key moment in the attempts to consolidate the power of Ibn Tafrājīn: the appointment of Ibn Khaldūn as ṣāhib al-'alāma at the court of sultan Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II.

Introduction

The Archive of the Crown of Aragon (hereafter ACA) preserves more than two hundred Arabic documents written by the chanceries of Granada, Morocco, Tilimsān, Ifrīqiya, and Egypt during the Late Middle Ages. These documents are letters addressed to the sovereigns of the Catalan-Aragonese dynasty, or to members of their administrative and diplomatic entourage. Referred to collectively as the “Arabic Letters” (*Cartes Àrabs*, hereafter CA),² they constitute one of the largest collections of Arabic medieval documents preserved in a Mediterranean archive. Far from being isolated exchanges, these texts document a continuous network of political negotiation and commercial interdependence between the Catalan-Aragonese Crown and the Mediterranean sultanates. While the recent inscription of the corpus on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register serves to highlight its global cultural value, it remains substantially

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²Digital images provided through the Spanish Ministry of Culture (PARES): <https://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/120536>

underexplored.³ Originally edited and translated into Spanish in 1940 by Alarcón and García de Linares, some parts have been the subject of a recent exhaustive study.⁴

Concerning Ifrīqiya,⁵ the collection contains approximately 30 documents, spanning between the years 1277 and 1362, and covering a special period of severe political instability within the Hafsid state through five letters, namely CA 139, 141, 142, 143, and 144. These letters are dated between *shawwāl* 751 / December 1350 and *ṣafar* 764 / November 1362, during the caliphate of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II (r. 751/1350–771/1369) and were sent to king Peter IV (r. 1336–1387). The five of them share two notable features: they were issued by the ḥājib ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Tafrājīn (d. 765/1364),⁶ and they bear the same autograph. One of the central objectives of this study is to examine the use of autograph signatures in these letters. Through this correspondence we can better understand the role of the ḥājib as a formal political player and the situation of the Hafsid state. Broadly, CA 139 reveals Ibn Tafrājīn's intention to establish contact with Barcelona to negotiate a peace treaty, which a decade later was finally established in 1360 (CA 140 bis). The clauses of the implementation of the agreement were ratified in CA 141, but concerns were raised in CA 142 over some violations of the peace committed by some merchants, and subsequent claims, were vocalized through CA 143 and CA 144. A further objective of this article is to offer a detailed analysis of document CA 139,⁷ the earliest of the series, which hints to an important pre-emptive intent of re-establishing political relations with Peter IV and functioned as a strategic instrument of political legitimation for its issuer, both internally within the Hafsid state and externally in the arena of Mediterranean diplomacy.

The document CA 139 was edited and translated into Spanish by Alarcón without identifying its sender, probably since the validation and authentication sign

³UNESCO Memory of the World Register: <https://www.unesco.org/en/memory-world/register-2025?hub=1081>

⁴M. de Alarcón and R. García de Linares, *Los documentos árabes diplomáticos del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón* (Madrid, 1940). On the Nasrid sultanate, see A. Labarta, *De la Alhambra a Barcelona. Los documentos nazaríes del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón. Vol. 1. Estudio* (A. Labarta, Ed.). Academia.edu. 2021.

⁵On the Hafsid dynasty, see J. M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) 118-134; R. Rouighi, “Ḥafṣids,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. K. Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2020). Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l’Afrique septentrionale*, trad. W. MacGuckin de Slane, 4 vols. (Alger: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1852–1856), 2: 286-481; 3: 1-124.

⁶On the ethnonym Tafrājīn, see O. Ould-Braham, “Tafrājīn: Toponyme ou ethnonyme?” *Études et Documents Berbères* 39–40 (2018): 183–188. For ‘Abd ‘Allāh ibn ‘Aḥmad Ibn Tafrājīn and his family, see Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères* 1: 260; 2: 286-481; 3: 9-37; 41-78. Ibn Tafrājīn activities are also referred in the chapter dedicated to de Marinids, in Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, 4: 206-211. Also R. Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Ḥafṣides: Des origines à la fin du XV^e siècle*, 2 vols., (Institut d’Études Orientales d’Alger; Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1940–1947), vol. 1: 155-156; 171-172, 174-182, vol. 2: 20, 38-40, 43, 51-60, 172, 181, 301, 339, 386, 410, 426, 432; S. Garnier, “Ibn Tāfrājīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); S. Garnier, *Histoires hafrides: Pouvoir et idéologie*. Leiden: Brill, 2022: 301-302.

⁷A. Torra, “Las relaciones diplomáticas entre la Corona de Aragón y los países musulmanes (siglos XIII–XV): Las fuentes documentales del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón.” In *El perfume de la amistad: Correspondencia diplomática árabe en archivos españoles*, 13–39. Barcelona: 2009: 13-37.

on it departs significantly from the traditional ones used by the Hafsid Chancery.⁸ In Section 1 we review the methods of the Hafsid Chancery, with particular attention to its distinctive *mise-en-page*, and the use of the authentication sign or *‘alāma*. The documents preserved in the ACA illustrate how the Hafsid *‘alāma* gradually evolved toward a more personalized form, in which the sultan’s own name could be used—probably written by a chancery official—. Our second axis (Section 2) deals with the fact that the *ḥājib* Ibn Tafrājīn replaced the use of the traditional *‘alāma* with a new practice, that of his own personal signature, and made extensive use of it in his correspondence with Peter IV. This provides an exceptional collection of medieval autographs that kept evolving in style over the years. It should be stressed that this substitution was a consequence of Ibn Tafrājīn’s assertion of power and appropriation of the authority to validate orders. It was not a routine administrative change but a deliberate symbolic act, transforming a ruler’s emblem into a personal instrument of political power. This is discussed in Section 3 as we trace the rise of the *ḥājib* Ibn Tafrājīn to the apex of the Hafsid state. In Section 4, we provide an analysis of the contents of CA 139, issued shortly after Ibn Tafrājīn rise (in *jumādā* I 751 / July 1350). While Ibn Tafrājīn and Peter IV have had prior contacts, it nonetheless marks the formal opening of diplomatic relations during Ibn Tafrājīn’s tenure. The letter displays carefully crafted rhetoric designed both to consolidate the ruler’s internal legitimacy and to secure recognition from the Catalan-Aragonese Crown. Finally, in Section 5 we point out that letter CA 139 was written while the historian Ibn Khaldūn was a member of Hafsid Chancery (in 751/1350), although firm evidence of his involvement on its elaboration cannot be established. Although Ibn Khaldūn may not have been the direct author, his proximity to the document’s production suggests possible participation, intellectual consultation, or at least a shared cultural and intellectual framework. This context enriches the reading of CA 139, by situating it within the historian’s intellectual milieu.

To frame the present study, it is first necessary to review several key aspects of the relations between the Hafsids and the Catalan-Aragonese Crown in the mid-fourteenth century. Although a substantial body of historiography has been devoted to this period, our attention here is limited to a selection of works, ranging from several classical studies of the last century to more recent publications dealing, specifically, with the relations between Tunis and Barcelona. The most useful works are those of Giménez Soler (1909), Brunschvig (1936, 1940-1947), Charles Dufourcq (1946, 1952, 1966), Udina Martorell (1980), Mutgé (1988a, 1988b), López Pérez (1995, 1997) and the most recent Garnier (2022). However, within this historiographical landscape, the years of Ibn Tafrājīn’s diplomatic activity toward the Catalan-Aragonese Crown have received relatively little scholarly attention. Consequently, the letters examined in the present study have themselves remained insufficiently analysed.

For the identification of individuals and specific classical notions, we rely primarily on the standard reference works on Arabic and Islamic civilisation. Regarding the formal features of the letters—such as their layout and calligraphic execution—in

⁸A re-edition of the Arabic text and Catalan translation has recently been made by M. Viladrich, followed with an study by R. Salicrú, in “Carta de la Cancelleria de Tunis a Pere el Cerimoniós: Les relacions diplomàtiques amb el món islàmic.” *Els documents cabdals de la història de Catalunya* (Andorra la Vella: Antiquvm Edicions, in press).

recent years there has been a profound renewal of knowledge about the arts of handwriting and manuscript production in North Africa. Within this broader scholarly reassessment, the decisive role of Andalusian influence in the formation and diffusion of the Andalusī-Maghribī tradition of handwriting in Ifrīqiya has been emphasised. Drawing on these contributions, we examine the dynamics of the production of written documentation for political purposes in the Western Mediterranean during the Late Middle Ages, as reflected in the materials under study.⁹

Documentary Validation and Authentication in the Hafsīd Chancery

The document CA 139 complies with the highest requirements of validation and authentication of the Hafsīd Chancery. This protocol has long constituted both a practical concern and a stimulus to the creativity of the political powers over time. In the Chanceries of the medieval al-Andalus and Maghrib, from the Almoravid period onward, official letters displayed two particularly striking characteristics: the arrangement of the text on the writing support—generally paper and only rarely parchment¹⁰—and the *‘alāma*, an institutional sign or emblem identifying the sender. Together, these elements ensured both the validation (that is, the formal correctness) and the authentication (the origin and authority) of the document. Today, they also testify to the high degree of sophistication attained by the chancery arts in al-Andalus and North Africa. The arrangement of the text on the page contributed to the development of a kind of documentary meta-language and often played a role in facilitating the authentication of a document. The practice of arranging the text in triangular forms was well known, and early references to it appear in the works of the Andalusian secretary Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḡafūr (d. after 1148), who mentions it in connection with Almoravid documentation produced in the Iberian Peninsula.¹¹ The *‘alāma*, for its part, fulfilled an essential function of authentication. Executed in larger calligraphy with thicker strokes, it was designed to create a striking visual effect on the reader, reflecting the distinct visual culture cultivated by each dynasty. Its use appears early among Andalusian dynasties—such as the Banū Hūd, the Banū Ghāniya, and the Almoravids—as noted by the Nasrid prince Ismā‘īl ibn Yūsuf ibn al-Aḥmar.¹² A

⁹On Andalusī–Maghribī writing arts see Labarta, *De la Alhambra a Barcelona*. Los documentos nazaries del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón. Vol. 1. Estudio (A. Labarta, Ed.). Academia.edu. 2021; U. Bongianino, *The Manuscript Tradition of the Islamic West: Maghribi Round Scripts and Andalusī Identity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022) and L. Hinrichsen, *The Lost Libraries of Tunis. Book Culture of Ḥafṣīd Ifrīqiya and Arabic Manuscripts in Europe after the Sack of Tunis (1535)*, De Gruyter, 2024: 102-114.

¹⁰Among the materials we study, only CA 140 *bis*, which contains a peace treaty, is written on parchment.

¹¹On Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḡafūr see B. Soravia, “L’ornement des anges. Perspectives andalouses sur la *kitāba*, V–VI°/XI–XII° siècles,” in *Documentos y manuscritos árabes del Occidente musulmán medieval*, ed. N. Martínez de Castilla (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), 26-31. On exempla of the distribution of script on the page of diplomatic correspondance, see Bongianino, *Manuscript Tradition*: 332-340.

¹²Ibn al-Aḥmar (725/1324-807/1404 or 810/1407) is the author of the *Mustawdi’ al-‘alāma wa-mustabdi’ al-‘allāma*, a treatise devoted to the office of the secretary of the paraph (*ṣāhib al-‘alāma*). See Abū-l-Walid Ismā‘īl Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Mustawdi’ al-‘alāma wa-mustabdi’ al-‘allāma*, ed. al-Turkī,

proper understanding of the *'alāma* therefore requires attention not only to its formula but also to its graphic execution. Regarding the particularities of the *'alāma* and its execution, practices varied between al-Andalus and North Africa. While among the Nasrids in al-Andalus the practice of autographing is well documented,¹³ among the North African sultanates there is no unanimity of customs: each ruler maintained a distinctive *'alāma*, frequently employing a pious formula that differentiated dynasties, and occasionally individual sultans within the same dynasty. Some kings delegated the writing of the *'alāma* to their chief scribe or shared it with an official in charge of writing it, as the Marinids did.

The designated official, known as the *ṣāhib al-'alāma*, was the head of the chancery, entrusted with this task and exercising delegated authority by affixing the sultan's signature. This official often occupied a position very close to the sultan, and in some cases the office became hereditary within privileged families. In other cases, the sultans themselves intervened, either by adding a stroke or paraph to the calligrapher's work, or by executing the *'alāma* with their own hand, as in the case of the Almohads. The most comprehensive description of the Hafsīd Chancery remains that provided by Brunschvig, who also questions the presumed division between the execution of the *'alāma* and the drafting of documents (*inṣā'*).¹⁴ The present analysis focuses on the *'alāma*.

The Hafsīd use of the *'alāma* must be understood within the broader legacy of Almohad chancery practices, since there was administrative and symbolic continuity between the two powers. However, the formula of the Hafsīd *'alāma* employed the pious expression *al-ḥamdu li-llāh wa shukr li-llāh* ("Praise be to God and thanks be to God"), in contrast to the Almohad formula *al-ḥamdu li-llāh waḥdahū*. Yet, while the institutional formula was preserved, individual initiatives demonstrate the capacity of Hafsīd administrative culture to innovate within inherited documentary conventions. From the reign of Hafsīd Abū Zakariyyā' I (r. 625/1228 – 647/1249) onward, the drawing of the *'alāma* by a specialised calligrapher became dissociated from the writing of the text of official documents. Over time, the pious invocation could also be replaced by the title, name, filiation, and *laqab* of the sovereign. During the reign of Muḥammad al-Mustansīr I (r. 647–75/1249–77), a distinction was established between a major sign (*'alāma al-kubrā*) and a minor sign (*'alāma al-ṣuḡhrā*). The *'alāma al-kubrā* was used for decrees issued by the emir or caliph, whereas the minor sign—bearing the formula *tawakkaltu 'alā Allāh wa huwa ḥasabī* ("I trust in God, and He is my sufficiency")—was employed in documents issued by viziers and other officials.¹⁵ The extant documentation further suggests that certain Hafsīd sultans—or their scribes—made use of more than one formula for the *'alāma al-kubrā*, alternating between pious

M.; Ibn Tāwīt, M., Tetuan, Institut Moulay El-Hassan, 1964. https://www.eea.csic.es/red/hata/autor.php?idg=2991&pag_o=1; <https://www.eea.csic.es/red/hata/obra.php?ido=16975>

¹³A. Labarta, "La *'alāma* nazārī: una galería de autógrafos reales." *Revista del Centro de Estudios Históricos de Granada y su Reino* 30 (2018): 27–49.

¹⁴On the *'alāma* under the Hafsīd dynasty: R. Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale*, vol. 2: 60–66. Also, B. Jadla, "De l'usage du sceau en terre d'islam: la *'alāma* comme symbole du pouvoir dans le Maghreb médiéval," in *Le cérémonial dans les sphères politiques et religieuses à travers les âges*, Tunis: 2017: 151–174.

¹⁵On the *'alāma* under the Hafsīd dynasty: R. Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale*, vol. 2: 60–66; Jadla, "De l'usage du sceau": 160–174.

invocations and the sovereign's personal name.¹⁶ Thus, for example, the Hafsid letters preserved in the ACA, nos. CA 130, 131, 132, 133, and 134, issued by the then emir of Qusṭanṭīna and Bijāya, Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr b. Abī Zakariyyā' (d. 747/1346), display his name prominently at the top of the page, written by a chancery official, whereas document CA 138 employs a pious formula.¹⁷ This diversity in the use of the *'alāma* reflects a broader stylistic plurality within Hafsid documentary practice, resulting in a certain lack of visual uniformity. Yet, rather than indicating disorder, this multiplicity of forms of validation and authentication reflects evolving strategies for expressing authority and legitimacy. It is commonly asserted that the Hafsid emirs did not draw the *'alāma* with their own hand. The examples presented below suggest a shift in practice, whereby the *'alāma al-kubrā* was supplanted by the ruler's autograph signature. This autograph fulfilled the same functions as the *'alāma al-kubrā*, serving as a visible manifestation of consolidated authority and typically appearing once a given individual had reached the apex of political power. Over time, the adoption of the *ḥājib*'s autograph as a formal signature was an assertion of his power and consolidated authority within the Hafsid sultanate, as the documents analysed in this study demonstrate.

Ibn Tafrājīn's Autograph

Before we describe the formal aspects of CA 139, it should be noted that jointly with the other four letters, it is of private and diplomatic nature, meaning it was folded close and wore a distinctive seal.¹⁸ It was sent to Peter IV on *shawwāl* 751 / December 1350, during the initial months of the caliphate of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II (r. 751/1350–771/1369). The document consists of a sheet of yellowish paper¹⁹ on which the text, on the *recto*, is arranged in two triangular areas of writing (Fig. 1). On the *verso* appears the name of the recipient, justified between the margins of a fold (Fig. 2).

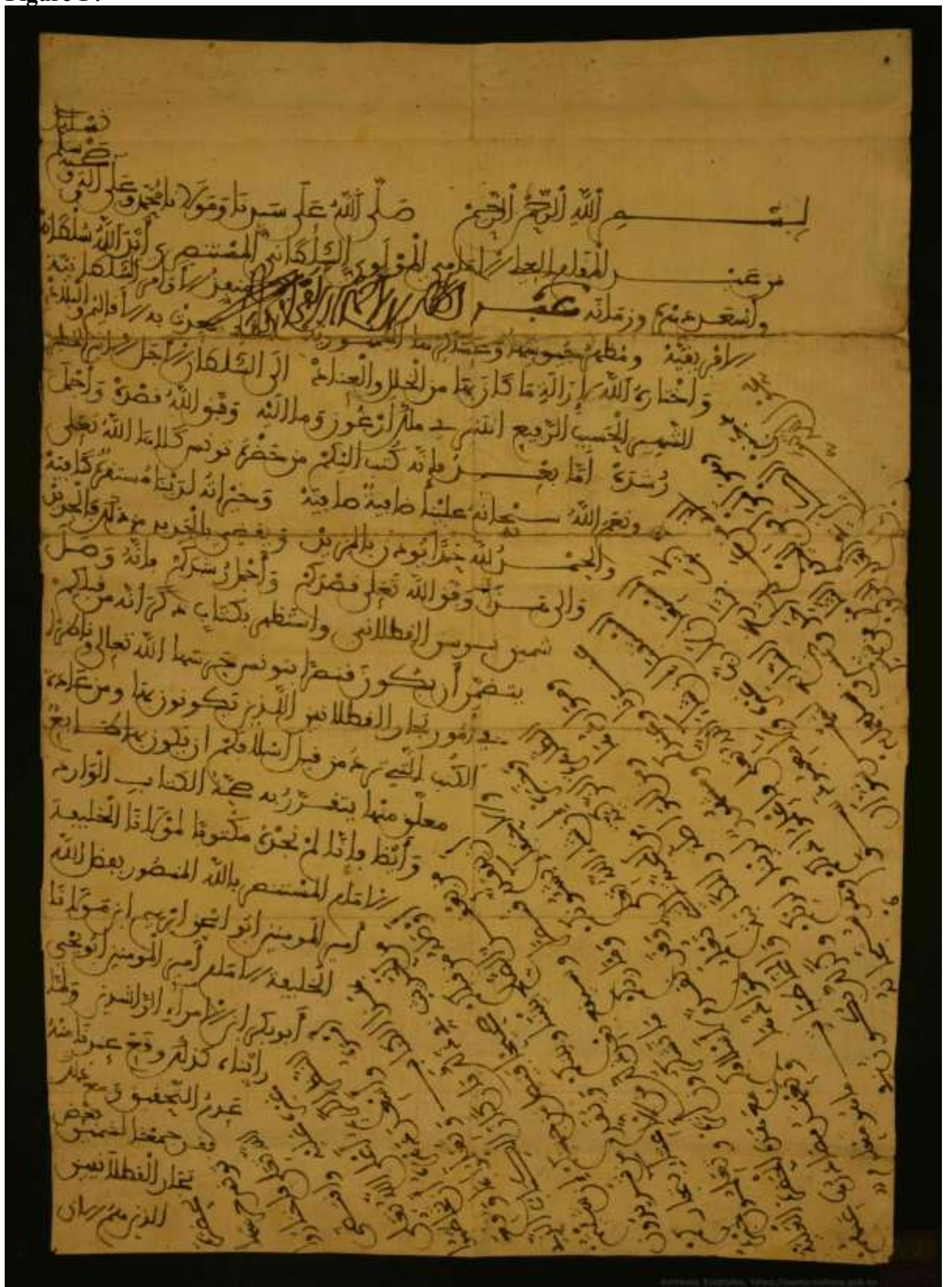
¹⁶Alternatively, no *'alāma* was used. At least one known case of a Hafsid letter in the ACA does not bear an *'alāma* (CA 128).

¹⁷The correspondence was sent between 1314 and 1333 to King James II (d. 1327) and King Alfonso III (d. 1336).

¹⁸CA 141 preserves traces of the wax used in sealing it. The sealing of a letter involved bending, perforating and fastening the document with a tie or a cord. Regarding the use of the seal to close letters, particularly in the Hafsid context, see M. Ouerfelli, "Le sceau de la paix: Le traité de 669/1270 entre Philippe III et al-Mustanṣir al-Ḥafṣī," *Annales islamologiques* 52 (2018): 309–352.

¹⁹CA 139 measures 455 × 305 mm. A paper watermark depicting a griffin is visible along the central vertical fold, attributable to Italian paper production of the fourteenth century; this letter provides the earliest documented evidence of such paper in North Africa, as mentioned by J. Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001: 86 and Hinrichsen, *Lost Libraries*: 124. Also, references to letters from Ifriqiya, identified by the colour of the paper—such as "la carta groga" ("the yellow letter") or "la carta blanca" ("the white letter")—were common in the Catalan royal Chancery, as mentioned by A. Giménez Soler, "Documentos de Túnez, originales ó traducidos, del Archivo de la Corona de Aragón," *Anuari de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans* 3 (1909): 254-57.

Figure 1 .



Notaries and secretaries typically wrote in a flowing cursive hand, a style associated with the everyday administrative tasks and temporal concerns of their profession.²⁰ The document begins with the usual invocation—*basmala* and *taṣliya*.²¹ This is followed by the sender's *intitulatio*, in which the chamberlain Ibn Ṭafrājīn refers to himself as *'abd al-maḡām al- 'ālī*, “the servant of the Most Exalted” Sultan [Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II] al-Mustaṣṣir.²² A pious formula dedicated to Ibrāhīm II follows. Next, in a prominent position, appears the autograph signature of the sender of the missive, occupying a reserved blank space between the *basmala-taṣliya* and the main body of the letter (Fig. 3). Highly stylized, it is difficult to read, so much so that the editors and translators Alarcón and García de Linares considered it illegible, noting that it was written in the form of a signature and therefore refrained from translating it.²³

Figure 3. 'Alāma CA 139: 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḡmad ibn Ṭafrājīn [...]



By contrast, in 1909 Andrés Giménez Soler published the Arabic text together with an abridged Aragonese translation of CA 139, produced at the time of the reception of the Arabic original (now preserved in the ACA).²⁴ Giménez Soler correctly attributed the dispatch to Abū Muḡammad ibn Ṭafrājīn, minister of the emir Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, son of Abū Yaḡyā Abū Bakr. However, his edition of the Arabic text

²⁰The body of the letter is written in a medium-sized Andalusī–Maghribī rounded script or *mudawwar*. See Bongianino, *Manuscript Tradition*: 13-71; 330-348. It is executed with a fine, rounded, pencil-like (non-bevelled) nib, which produces a uniform outline to the letters. The angles are softened into curves, giving the hand a light, and polished movement. The writing features abundant diacritical marks and precise vocalisation signs, as would be appropriate for an official document of this nature and importance. The use of the *shadda* coincides with that described for the Nasrid Chancery letters in Labarta, *De la Alhambra*: 98.

²¹*Basmala*: *bismi Allāh al-Raḡmān al-Raḡīm*, “In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate; *Taṣliya*: *ṣallā Allāh 'alā ṣayyidinā wa mawlānā Muḡammad wa-āli-hi wa-ṣaḡbi-hi wa-sallama taslīman*, “May God send blessings and peace upon our master and lord Muḡammad, his family, and his companions.”

²²Garnier, *Histoires hafssides*: 193 documents the caliphal *laqab* of al-Mustaṣṣir bi-llāh in 'Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II's coins.

²³However, Alarcón in *Documentos árabes diplomáticos*: 321 referred to “*Maccléxech ben-cafraquim*”, a name that he probably obtained from Giménez Soler's edition of Catalan version of CA 141.

²⁴Giménez Soler, “Documentos de Túnez”, Doc. XXX, 253-54. Other documents published by Giménez Soler, mentioning Ibn Ṭafrājīn are Doc. XXXI, 254-55, containing the Catalan translation of CA 143; Doc. XXXII, 255-57, containing the Catalan translation of CA 141, where the chamberlain is mentioned as 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Aḡmad Ibn Bakr... and *Macelexech bencafraquim*; Doc. XXXIII, 258-259, Catalan translation of CA 142, letter attributed to *Abu Muhammad ben Tafrachin*; Doc. XXXIV, 259, corresponding to CA144. There are errors in readings and dates by Giménez Soler. In contrast, Stern observed interesting details on the Hafsid 'alāma and photographs published by Giménez Soler, in S. M. *Stern Fāṭimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fāṭimid Chancery*. London: 1964.

is less complete than that of Alarcón, as it omits several lines from the header—where the sender’s name appears. Moreover, the Aragonese version does not mention the name of the chamberlain. It is most likely that Giménez Soler deduced it from the Catalan text of CA 141, which he also published.

The autograph signature in CA 139 corresponds well to the name of the ḥājib ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Tafrājīn.²⁵ We also know that his *nisba* is al-Tīnmalī, a well renowned Almohad tribe that was part of the new Hafsīd nobility, although its official use has not been recorded. The last element of the signature (which overwrites the word *alladhī* in the text of the letter) appears to have undergone the greatest stylistic transformation, evolving in later examples into an ornamental flourish that becomes almost illegible. What makes this autograph particularly distinctive is its personal character: a fluid, continuous cursive stroke with rounded forms, revealing an expressive and non-formal style that closely resembles a personal signature.

The ruler’s autograph introduced a new level of personal graphic identity within Hafsīd documentary practice, contrasting with the institutional character of the traditional *‘alāma*. A decade later, Ibn Tafrājīn maintained a long correspondence with Peter IV, sending him four additional letters (in chronological order CA 141, 142, 144 and 143), issued between *rabi‘ al-awwal* 761/February 1360 and *ṣafar* 764/November 1362. Every letter appears to have carried the same signature, and no other forms of validation are attested in this context, which substantiate the authorship. The use of Ibn Tafrājīn’s signature on the letters confirms what was mentioned by Ibn Khaldūn: that chamberlains could sign the letters they issued on behalf of the authority they served, equating their autograph to an official signature.²⁶ The historian also notes that some educated sovereigns wrote their letters entirely in their own hand.²⁷

Cronology of Ibn Tafrājīn 's Diplomatic Documents

CA	Dates (<i>Hijrī</i> / Julian Calendar) ²⁸
139	7 <i>shawwāl</i> 751 / 8 Dec 1350
140 <i>bis</i>	25 <i>ṣafar</i> 761 / 16 Jan 1360
141	15 <i>rabi‘ I</i> 761 / 4 Feb 1360
142	29 <i>jumādā II</i> 761 / 17 May 1360
144	16 <i>rajab</i> 763 / 11 May 1362
143	9 <i>ṣafar</i> 764 / 28 Nov 1362

²⁵The spelling appears to correspond to *Tafrakīn*, with *kāf*, (rather than *Tafrājīn*), which in the Maghrib would be pronounced with a /g/ sound.

²⁶Ibn Khaldūn, *Les Prolégomènes d’Ibn Khaldoun (al-Muqaddima)*, trans. W. MacGuckin de Slane, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1862–1868), 2: 26-271 (section on *dīwān al-inshā‘* and *‘alāma*). Ibn Khaldūn notes that the secretary affixed the *‘alāma*, although in later periods the authority to validate documents could shift to higher officials such as the ḥājib.

²⁷This was the case of Abū Darbā Muḥammad b. Abī Yahyā Zakariyyā’, who in 1320 addressed document CA 123 to the Catalan king James II of Aragon. The poor state of preservation of this document prevented Alarcón from reading it; however, the contemporary Catalan translation—although incomplete—indicates that it was written by the sovereign’s own hand. See Giménez Soler, “Documentos de Túnez,” Doc. XXIV, 243-245.

²⁸Calendar converter <https://www.muqawwim.com/>

The letters deal with diplomatic exchanges and disputes arising from piracy or from violations of a peace treaty established between Tunis and Barcelona on 761/ January 1360. This treaty is preserved in an additional document held at the Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid), added to the series as CA 140 *bis*.²⁹ It does not contain any type of *‘alāma*, but it includes the autographs of six witnesses as well as that of the notary. In all these documents it is stated that Ibn Tafrājīn exercised delegated authority on behalf of Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II. All letters display the *facto-ruler’s* titles and attributes, reflecting the consolidation of his power, although its most striking expression appears in the peace treaty, where the list of adjectives describing the chamberlain is overwhelming. Ibn Tafrājīn was no longer presented as a servant of the sultanate, but rather as the supreme leader of the state.

Taken together, the documents attest to the long tradition of the Hafsid Chancery, the maturity of its style, the subtlety of the diplomatic language –both semantic and visual– that it employed, and the high political symbolism attached to relations with Barcelona. As can be seen in figs. 4, 5, 6 and 7, over the years Ibn Tafrājīn’s signature evolved and denotes greater sophistication. The comparison of the calligraphic traces allows us to attribute them to the hand of the *ḥājib*, forming an exceptional³⁰ collection of medieval autographs produced by a servant of the state.

²⁹Alarcón, *Documentos árabes diplomáticos*, 311-320 (ed. and trans. by Federico Galbis of MS 80 Salazar Collection, which also preserves a sixteenth-century Spanish version of the document). The chamberlain is mentioned as: Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh, son of Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Tafaṛājīn. A Latin version of the treaty was edited by I. De las Cagigas in “Un traité de paix entre le roi Pierre IV d’Aragon et le sultan de Tunis Abū Ishāq II (1360)” *Hesperis* XIX (1934): 65-77. In it, Ibn Tafrājīn was referred as *Bumachamet abdalla [...] filius domini [...] Abbulabbes achamet benthefregin*. De las Cagigas did not provide any archival reference for the Latin document he published, merely noting that: “Le traité que je possède est l’acte même dressé en présence des plénipotentiaires.” He further stated that it was a signed parchment, which suggests that it originally existed as a loose document. We may further add that we have recently identified the Latin text in the records of the Chancery of Peter IV, Reg. 1389, f. 19r - 21v. For our part, it may be noted that, among the six Tunisian witnesses who subscribed to the 1360 peace agreement with the Catalans, at least two had likewise participated in the signing of the well-known Hafsid treaty with Pisa of May 16th, 1353, published by M. Amari, *I diplomi arabi del R. archivio fiorentino : testo originale con la traduzione letterale e illustrazioni*, Firenze : Le Monnier, 1863, vol I, XXX, 98-111; vol II, XXX, 303-308 and plate (not numbered). These witnesses are named: Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Ibrāhīm al-Yamāmī and Abū Sa‘īd ibn Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad al-Maghribī. A more detailed prosopographical identification of witnesses, together with a comparison between the treaties, will be provided in a forthcoming publication.

³⁰Comparable examples are found in Nasrid documentation, particularly in the signatures of the minister Riḍwān ibn ‘Abd Allāh (d. 1359) in CA 32, 33, 35 and 46, sent between 1333-1336, and who also had a seal, see Labarta, *De la Alhambra*: 26-27, 103.

Figure 4. 'Alāma CA 141



Figure 5. 'Alāma CA 142



Figure 6. 'Alāma CA 144



Figure 7. 'Alāma CA 143

We may conclude this section by comparing Hafsīd and Catalan-Aragonese chancery practices. Within the Crown of Catalonia-Aragon, Peter IV appears to have been the first ruler of his dynasty to employ a personal autograph signature in the validation of royal correspondence. His adoption of autograph subscriptions constitutes one of the most significant developments in the documentary culture of the late medieval Aragonese monarchy.³¹ Whereas earlier rulers had generally relied upon the traditional *signum regis* and the formal mechanisms of chancery authentication, the Cerimonious increasingly emphasised the symbolic and political value of the sovereign's own handwritten intervention. In this respect, the rise of similar autograph practices in the Hafsīd Chancery points to a contemporaneity of individualised modes of sovereign expression on both sides of the medieval Mediterranean. Such autographs authenticate documents in diplomatic terms, projected the sovereign's power and reinforced the growing association between written authority and the ruler within increasingly bureaucratized political structures.

Ibn Tafrājīn's *cursus honorum*

As mentioned earlier, 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Tafrājīn's ancestors belonged to a powerful Almohad family from Tīnmal.³² One of them, 'Abd al-Ḥājj ibn Tafrājīn, left the Maghrib to settle in Ifrīqiya in the service of the Hafsīd al-Mustanṣir. 'Abd al-Ḥājj's nephews followed in his footsteps and obtained dignities, wealth, and honours in Ifrīqiya. Later, the eldest of these, called Aḥmad (d. 703/1303–04), governor of Gafsa and al-Mahdiyya, was the father of 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Tafrājīn. The

³¹As stated by E. Fenu in "Graphic symbolism in the handwritten signature of the kings of Aragon: notes on the "L Coronada de Valencia"", *Writing, Preserving and Reading History*, edited by A. Pereira Ferreira et al., Publicações do CIDEHUS, 2025.

³²In 515 / ca. 1121-1122, 'Umar ibn Tafrājīn (m. ca. 549 / 1154-55) and other members of the Tinnallal tribe pledged allegiance to Ibn Tūmart in support of his doctrine of divine unity, see Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, 2: 170-171, 190-191, n. 5. Ibn Khaldūn provides a complete account of the family, which we summarize here, see Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, 3: 9-15.

date of his birth is unknown,³³ but he received a courtly education at the palace, among the sons of the magnates, which provided him with knowledge of the administration and affairs of the state. We also know that ‘Abd Allāh made an advantageous marriage with the daughter of Abū Ya‘qūb ibn Izdūtin, minister of Abū l-Baqā’ Ḥālid an-Nāṣir, the Hafsid emir of Bijāya (r. 709-11/1309-11). The first notable position held by Ibn Tafrājīn was that of vizier, in the service of Sultan Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr (r. 718–747/1318–1346). Abū Bakr sent him to Fez (in 730/1330 and 737/1337) to request the help of the Marinids against the Zayyanids and to negotiate family alliances—important and delicate missions. In 742/1341–42 he was appointed “shaykh of the Almohads” and he maintained all his influence in the council of state. In the summer of 1343/744, he was named chamberlain of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr. Beyond supervising the palace and the sultan’s expenditures, the *ḥājib* assumed major administrative and political functions, particularly as intermediary between the sovereign and the population. The office gradually acquired powers comparable to those of a prime minister, capable of acting in the sultan’s absence. Ibn Tafrājīn undoubtedly came to exercise extensive authority within the sultanate.³⁴

Then, after the death of Sultan Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr (d. 747/1346), the Hafsid clans of Tunis, Bijāya, and Qusṭantīna were plunged into a brutal fratricidal struggle for the succession, and Ibn Tafrājīn was compelled to take part. Ibn Tafrājīn orchestrated the initiative of Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar II (r. 747–50/1346–50), son of Abū Bakr, against his brother Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad, the designated heir (who reigned for a week in 747/1346). The plot resulted in the assassination of Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad and two other brothers of the same phratry. While preparations were underway for the ceremony of allegiance (*bay‘a*) to the victorious Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar II, Ibn Tafrājīn learned that his lord intended to eliminate him. The *bay‘a* took place while the funeral of the sultan’s father was being prepared. The *qādīs*, occupied with the burial arrangements, readily accepted the new ruler once they saw that the population had already acknowledged him, offering little resistance. Ibn Tafrājīn fled to Fez, where he was welcomed at the Marinid court. Later, Ibn Tafrājīn accompanied the Marinid ruler Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī in his intervention in Ifrīqiya (748–750/1347–1349), which had disastrous consequences for Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar II, who was defeated, captured, and executed in 1347. Ibn Tafrājīn unsuccessfully sought control of the kingdom. When his ambitions were thwarted by the Marinids, he fled and forged an alliance with the rebellious Arab tribe of Banū Ka‘b, where he assumed the role of chamberlain to their leader, Aḥmad ibn Abī Dabbūs, and directed his opposition against the Marinid Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī. Then, Ibn Tafrājīn temporarily fled to Alexandria (in *rabī‘ II* 749 / June–July 1348), and visited the holy city of Mecca in late 750 / February 1350. During this time, he was conspiring against the governor of Būna, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Faḍl (r. 750/1350), another son of Abū Bakr, who had forced the Marinids out of Qayrawān and had taken control of Tunis. In *jumādā I* 751 / July 1350, Ibn Tafrājīn

³³No later than 703/1304.

³⁴Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale*, vol. 1: 155-156. His brother Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad (d. 747/1346) gave him support at the head of the army, until his death, and lost his life doing it, see Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, 3: 18-19.

managed to enter Tunis and elevate the adolescent Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II (the last brother of the Bijāya clan), whom he would serve as *ḥājib*.³⁵

Under the effective authority of Ibn Tafrājīn, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II took the caliphal *laqab* al-Mustansir bi-llāh al-Manşūr. The new regime briefly faced a crisis when the Marinid ruler Abū ‘Inān Fāris advanced against Tunis, Bijāya, and Qusṭantīna (*ramadān* 758/August–September 1357), but Ibn Tafrājīn soon restored the regime of his lord,³⁶ maintaining the high dignity of *ḥājib* until his death in *rabi’* I 766/December 1364. His death, announced by the astrologers, was greatly mourned by the sultan Abū Ishāq, who held great obsequies. Ibn Tafrājīn was buried in the madrasa he had founded, near Bāb al-Suwayqa, to the north of the medina of Tunis.³⁷

Ibn Tafrājīn’s *cursus honorum* demonstrates considerable strategic vision. He secured the pacification of the territory through negotiations with Arab tribes, reorganized state finances, and managed relations with foreign powers. His rise to the head of the state enabled institutional reforms and gradual transformations of the palace bureaucracy, projecting an image of strength and legitimacy. Ibn Tafrājīn forced a change in the chancery uses, with his appropriation of the validation and authentication instruments, which ultimately led to the replacement of the official *‘alāma* by his own signature. Undoubtedly, the fact that the chamberlain validates these missives with his autograph is a clear gesture of usurpation of the function of the caliph, who in 1350 was still a child under his protection. From 1357 onward, Ibn Tafrājīn, occupying an unrivalled position, exercised decisive influence over the state’s foreign policy, drawing upon the experience he had accumulated in his earlier roles. It is by no means insignificant that Ibn Tafrājīn used his autograph within the context of Mediterranean diplomacy and vis-à-vis a power of the stature of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown at that time. The presence of a tangible external threat with considerable economic and military capacity—namely the Catalan-Aragonese Crown—further underscored the necessity of legitimizing a strong central authority to safeguard the territory. Furthermore, both personalities were well acquainted as we uncover in the next section.

Ibn Tafrājīn’s Relationship with Peter IV and the Content of CA 139

In the mid-14th century, relations between Barcelona and Tunis were experiencing an intense moment, even though North African politics were quite unstable. Peter IV, eager to secure control over Sicily, wanted to re-establish ties with Ifrīqiya and coveted the imposition of tribute on the Banu Hafṣ. Since facts have been well described by historians,³⁸ we will only highlight some aspects concerning the relationships between Ibn Tafrājīn and Peter IV, of interest for the analysis of the content of CA 139.

³⁵Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, 3: 23-46.

³⁶Garnier, *Histoires hafṣides*: 179-182.

³⁷Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, 3: 70-72.

³⁸On the origins and historical development of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown’s tributary claims over the Hafṣids, as well as on its impositions on Hafṣid customs, see Robert Brunschvig, “Documents inédits sur les relations entre la couronne d’Aragon et la Berbérie orientale au XIV^e siècle.” *Annales de l’Institut d’Études Orientales* (1936): 239-243; Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, “La Couronne d’Aragon et les Hafṣides au XIII^e siècle (1229–1301),” *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 25 (1952): 51-

It is well established that, prior to Ibn Tafrājīn's rise to power, two Catalan embassies were formally received in Ifrīqiya—in 1337 and 1345—with the purpose of negotiating a peace treaty. The correspondence sent from Barcelona to the then-sultan, Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr, concerning peace negotiations reveals that Ibn Tafrājīn was already well acquainted with Peter IV as early as 1344. The ḥājib is mentioned, among others, in the following documents:

- a) The king's instructions for negotiations to the ambassadors Guillem de Clariana and Benet de Blanques, (dated 10/11/1344).³⁹ The messengers, sent on matters of great importance to the king, would ask *Bente Fragrīn*, the "*haagip*", to be present during the discussions. This clearly indicates that Peter IV was aware of the position's authority and the role of Ibn Tafrājīn in the Hafsid administration.

“Après, los dits missatgers li diran que ells són aquí trameses a ell per alguns affers qui toquen molt los dits reys, et que-ls deurà de oyr-los et que-l pregarien que a la relació de lur missatgeria sia present Bente Fragrīn, haagip seu.”

- b) Also, a recommendation letter (dated 10/11/1344) in favour of the ambassadors Guillem of Clariana and Benet of Blanques, to be delivered to the beloved *Abdalla Bente Fragrīn, haagip of the king of Tunis, our friend*.⁴⁰ Peter IV showed his care in guaranteeing the legitimacy of his emissaries and recognized the power of the chamberlain, begging him to heed the message they convey to him:

“per què us pregam que als dits missatgers creegats sens dupte de ço que us diran de part nostra, [...]et per tal havem acordat de scriure a vós en special, confian de vós e pensan que per vostra mà los dits affers hauran, si a Déu plau, bon acabament”.

However, diplomatic missions did not achieve their objectives over years 1337 to 1345, since King Peter's demands required the payment of very onerous taxes, that

113. This work provides a detailed account of Catalan embassies to Ifrīqiya in the years preceding the period examined here. Also, Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, “Les activités politiques et économiques des Catalans en Tunisie et en Algérie orientale de 1262 à 1377”, *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras* XIX (1946): 5–96; Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane et le Maghrib aux 13e et 14e siècles: De la bataille de Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) à l'avènement du sultan mérinide Abou-l-Hasan (1331)*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1966; A. Masià de Ros, *La Corona de Aragón y los estados del Norte de África : Política de Jaime II y Alfonso IV en Egipto, Ifriquia y Tremecen* (Madrid, 1951) ; Frederic Udina Martorell, “Las relaciones entre Túnez y la Corona de Aragón en el segundo tercio del s. XIV hasta 1360.” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 10 (1980): 331–339; María Dolores López Pérez, “La Couronne d’Aragon et Tunis au XIV^e siècle: les relations politiques,” in *Tunis: cité de la mer: actes du colloque organisé dans le cadre des manifestations relatives au choix de l’UNESCO de Tunis, capitale culturelle, 1997*, ed. A. Baccar Bournaz (Tunis: L’Or du Temps, 1997), 46–59.

³⁹Doc ACA, C, reg. 555, ff. 75v-77v. Published by Brunschvig, “Documents inédits” doc. 10, 255-258. The king also intercedes for a citizen of Tunis at that time in Barcelona, who wants to return to his home.

⁴⁰ACA, C, reg. 555, f. 78r, see Brunschvig, “Documents inédits” doc. 12, 259-260.

were previously paid to the ruler of Sicily before the island fell into the king's hands. Contacts on Catalan initiative remained interrupted for years.⁴¹ Then, a few months after coming to power, Ibn Tafrājīn addressed Peter IV through CA 139. Let us now look at its content.

a) Ibn Tafrājīn explained that:

“Xmyn Busn, the Catalan, has arrived bearing a letter said to be from you, concerning his appointment as consul in Tunis—may God Almighty protect it—and as procurator for the affairs of the Catalan merchants residing there.”

b) The document, however, did not conform to the practices of Catalan diplomacy, revealing Ibn Tafrājīn suspicions:

“It was customary for the writings of your predecessors to bear a hanging seal, which guaranteed the authenticity of the writing's content.”

c) Ibn Tafrājīn also noted that the letter was not addressed to sultan Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II (just been proclaimed), an omission that would imply either ignorance or discourtesy, something unlikely to be attributed to the Catalan king:

“Likewise, this was not addressed to our master, the Caliph, Imām al-Mustaṣir bi-llāh al-Manṣūr by the grace of God, the Prince of the Believers, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm, son of our master, the Caliph, the Imām, the Prince of the Believers, Abū Yahyā Abū Bakr, son of the Rightly Guided Princes.”

d) In response, Ibn Tafrājīn took a decision:

“Upon examining it, we deemed it inauthentic. We therefore consulted the Catalan merchants present in Tunis—may God Almighty protect it—and they selected another individual, whom they preferred.”

It is certainly striking that a designated consul would travel without validated credentials. Catalan embassies were known for the meticulousness of their preparation, as demonstrated in years 1337–1345.⁴² King Peter's elevated conception of the royal office, reflected in the particular care he devoted to the supervision of the consular institution. Besides, the mission should have been recorded in the Catalan Chancery, as the abundance of documents that were generated in previous occasions seems to indicate. If other records existed, we have not been able to find them.

⁴¹J. Mutgé, “L'ambaixada a Tunis de Guillem de Clariana i de Benet Blanques (1345),”, *Miscel·lània de Textos Medievals*, (1988a): 163-219; J. Mutgé, “Algunas noticias sobre las relaciones entre la Corona Catalano-Aragonesa y el Reino de Túnez de 1345 a 1360.” In *Relaciones de la Península Ibérica con el Magreb*, 1988b: 131–164. Two additional documents refer to Ibn Tafrājīn: Doc. ACA, C, reg. 555, ff. 93r-94v and f. 127r, see Mutgé, “Algunas noticias”: 151-156; 163-164.

⁴²A letter sent from the Marinid Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī dated 1350 addressed similar questions. In it (CA 99), the sultan declares to sign his letters with his own hand.

It also cannot be ruled out that “Xmyn Busn” was an impostor, acting personally for profit or on behalf of a group of Catalan or Majorcan merchants,⁴³ independently of the king’s interests. This could have involved a betrayal of the monarch or a dispute among the king’s subjects in North Africa. If the appointment was indeed falsified, neither ḥājib Ibn Tafrājīn nor the Catalan community in Tunis were deceived, as another consul was appointed. Yet if the matter was resolved locally, it is puzzling that Ibn Tafrājīn did not inform Peter IV of the name of the chosen representative. On the other hand, the presence of Catalan merchants in Tunis created a vital channel for communication with the Crown of Aragon. These resident traders—including both Christian and Jewish merchants active in Mediterranean commercial networks—frequently acted as intermediaries between the Hafsid court and Peter IV, facilitating the exchange of letters, intelligence, and diplomatic initiatives.⁴⁴

Or could Ibn Tafrājīn have magnified a local merchants dispute to address to Barcelona? We have not been able to identify “Simon Busn” among the well-known merchants who travelled to Tunis in those years. Alarcón gives his name as “Simón Porcell” in his translation, which he probably read in the Aragonese version of CA 139, published by Giménez Soler. This name does not correspond to the Arabic text, which intends to reflect a transcription of a Catalan name: “xmyn” may correspond to Simó / Simón (cf. Maghribi Šimūn) while “busn” could represent a surname (with a metathesis), like Bons, Buns or even Bust,⁴⁵ or an adaptation to Arabic phonology (e.g., p → b). Although a reconstruction such as Simó Ponç/Pons is conceivable, the identification remains uncertain; comparisons with names attested in contemporary Catalan and Mallorcan sources highlight the difficulties of correlating individuals across Arabic and Romance documentary traditions. The confusion could originate in the fact that the well-known patrician named Francesc des Portell, who served as general procurator of the king in Mallorca, took part in diplomatic and commercial contacts involving the Marinid and Nasrid realms. He is mentioned in CA 104, a letter from the Marinid sultan Fāris to Peter IV, dated 7 shawwāl 751 / 8 December 1350, which coincides –exactly– with the date of letter CA 139.⁴⁶

⁴³During the reign of James II, the Catalan consulate in Tunis became a matter of dispute, particularly regarding the rights and fiscal obligations associated with its use by Majorcan merchants. A. Masià de Ros, *La Corona de Aragón*, 232-234. On the activity of Catalan consuls in Tunis and Bijāya, Dufourcq, *La Couronne d’Aragon*, 67-70.

⁴⁴A review of the lists of Jews serving the Crown as diplomats up to 1327 reveals no name that could reasonably be identified with, or mistaken for, Simo Busn. See Y. T. Assis, “Diplomàtics jueus de la Corona catalanoaragonesa en terres musulmanes (1213–1327),” *Tamid. Revista Catalana Anual d’Estudis Hebraics* 1 (1997): 7–40.

⁴⁵A patron named Simó de Bons went to Cherrchell in 1396—many years later, M. D. López Pérez, María Dolores. *La Corona de Aragón y el Magreb en el siglo XIV (1331–1410)*. Barcelona: Institución Milà y Fontanals, 1995, 246. Also, royal emissary named Berenguer Bust is mentioned in an undated letter (CA 156) from a vizier named Muhammad ibn Ibrahim to King James II (m. 1327), which Alarcón (p. 400-401) dates to around 1295 and PARES ca. 1306.

⁴⁶In Catalan writing style of the 14th century, the letters “c” and “t” can be easily confused. The Desportell family maintained a notable presence in international affairs. “One of Portell’s sons” is recorded in CA 109, dated in Fez in *ṣafar* 759 / January 1358, as a royal messenger. Other members of the family were active in Mallorca’s municipal spheres in the decade of 1340. (<https://cronicodemallorca.cat/h1340>)

On the other hand, the call of the local Catalan merchants to chose their consul indicates a special concern to guarantee the prosperous functioning of the foreign community. The letter assumes the continuity and normalization of pre-existing relations with Barcelona.

- e) Finally, Ibn Tafrājīn urged Peter IV to restore diplomatic ties, perhaps legitimizing the new sultan and his *ḥājib*:

“Should you so desire, send us a representative on your behalf to conclude peace between us and to confirm whomever you appoint as consul. Thereafter, we shall attend to your merchants and to your affairs and profits, whose benefits you will come to know by experience, God willing—praise be to Him.”

In doing so, he pressured the Catalan court to safeguard its economic interests along the Tunisian coast and nearby Mediterranean. According to Dufourcq, in November 1351 Peter IV established contact with Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Abī Bakr—a grandson of Sultan Abū Bakr (d. 1346)—then based in Bijāya, with the aim of negotiating fiscal arrangements. Later, in September 1352 Peter sought to renew his contacts with Ifrīqiya.⁴⁷ These contacts may reflect King Peter’s uncertainty in determining the most legitimate interlocutor for re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Hafsids. But, after all, observing the situation from the perspective of Ibn Tafrājīn, what greater prestige for the *ḥājib*—future father-in-law of the sultan—⁴⁸ than correspondence with the king dominating that strategic region, and what stronger shield against the Marinid threat (or other neighbours) than friendship with the powerful Catalan monarch?⁴⁹

Was CA 139 written in the presence of Ibn Khaldūn?

In the turmoil of the events surrounding CA 139, a new personage was making his first steps into the world of chanceries. Ibn Khaldūn’s intellectual formation and early career trajectory may be seen as having predisposed him to chancery service. Among his ancestors was at least one intellectual with a known written work: his great-grandfather, Abū Bakr Ibn Khaldūn, author of a treatise on *adab al-kātib* (studied by Évariste Lévi-Provençal, in 1955), probably composed during the reign of the Hafsid al-Mustanṣir I—a work unknown to his great-grandson. His grandfather

⁴⁷See Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, *L’Espagne catalane*, 278–283. These contacts, however, merit a separate study. Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Abī Bakr should not be confused with Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad of Constantine, who had been his father’s designated heir, and died in 1338/39. His premature death led instead to the appointment of another son, Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad, who briefly ruled (r. 750–751/1350).

⁴⁸A few weeks before his death, Ibn Tafrājīn married his daughter to Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II, with the marriage contract drafted by Ibn Marzūq, who had likely arrived in Tunis around *ramadān* 765 / June 1364. F. Provenzali, *El-Bostan ou Jardin des biographies des saints et savants de Tlemcen par Ibn Maryem ech-Cherif el-Melity*, tr. F. Provenzali (Florence, 1910): 508 and n. 789.

⁴⁹Labarta has already drawn attention to the propagandistic functions of the Nasrid *dīwān al-inšā’*, describing it as a kind of political propaganda bureau in the context of Granada, Labarta, *De la Alhambra*, 218-220.

also held a position at the Hafsid court. His father, however, chose another direction in life, dedicating himself entirely to the study of religious sciences. Born in Tunis in 732/1332, Ibn Khaldūn was educated alongside numerous scholars whom he himself would remember in his works. Among his teachers who excelled in the art of writing, Ibn Khaldūn also refers to ‘Abd al-Muḥaymin ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 749/1348)⁵⁰, who served as secretary of the Ceuta court in 712/1312 and later headed the secretariat of the Marinid sultans Abū Sa‘īd (d. 731/1331) and Abū-l-Ḥasan ‘Alī during the Tunis stage.⁵¹ The historian also cites his fellow student and friend ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yūsuf b. Riḍwān⁵² who oversaw the Marinid correspondence, and his disciple and biographer Ibn al-Aḥmar, the above mentioned author of the *Mustawdi ‘al-‘alāma*. Ibn al-Aḥmar praised Ibn Khaldūn’s skills as *faqīh*, *ḥājib*, *kātib* and *ṣāhib al-qalam al-a‘lā* ("holder of the highest pen"), indicating multiple positions at the service of the sultanate in different courts. The biographer also mentioned Ibn Khaldūn’s high ambition for leadership.⁵³ Surrounded by these intellectuals, Ibn Khaldūn would have been initiated in the chancery arts in Tunis, which would later earn him the appointment of *ṣāhib al-‘alāma*, at the head of the chancery office (in his words, *dīwān al-rasā’il wa-l-kitāba*, literally “Bureau of Correspondence and Writing”). The responsibilities attributed to him are reflected in this paragraph:

“I held this position [of calligrapher] ... which consisted of writing in large letters the formulas at the end of the letters and orders of the Sultan [of Tunis], praise be to God!”⁵⁴

Even if the historian witnessed the elaboration of CA 139, he was not required to stamp the *‘alāma* on it, as the minor Caliph Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm II did not issue orders; Ibn Tafrājīn validated and authenticated them with his autograph. Shortly thereafter, Ibn Khaldūn left Tunis for the Marinid court in Fez, later reflecting on the decline in prestige and function of the office of *ṣāhib al-‘alāma*, which he had observed firsthand. He specifically attributes this decline to the absolute power of the *ḥājib*, who assumed the emission of orders.

In the chapter *Fī al-‘alāma wa-annahā min sha‘ā’ir al-mulk* of the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn stresses that sovereign decrees must bear an indubitable and distinguishable mark. It is tempting to suggest that his formative years exposed him to experiences such as those surrounding CA 139: a decisive moment in which the *ḥājib* Ibn Tafrājīn usurped the sultanic *‘alāma*, revealing the dissociation between formal sovereignty

⁵⁰https://www.eea.csic.es/red/hata/autor.php?idg=3236&pag_o=1

⁵¹M. Maḥdī, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, 2018 ed. (London: Routledge, 2018): 27-37. Also, A. J. Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldūn: Life and Times* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011): 41-44. Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, vol. 1: XXX-XXXI. T. Ito, “Writing the Biography of Ibn Khaldūn,” in *The Maghrib in the Mashriq: Knowledge, Travel and Identity*, ed. M. Fierro and M. Penelas (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 513–536.

⁵²https://www.eea.csic.es/red/hata/autor.php?idg=398&pag_o=1

⁵³Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Mustawdi ‘*: 64-65. The transcription of the attributes ascribed to him by Ibn al-Aḥmar suggest a multiplicity of roles within the sultan’s service, whose precise functions remain difficult to determine. As observed by Labarta generalizations may lead to inaccuracies. See, for the Nasrid Chancery, Labarta, *De la Alhambra*, 213-218.

⁵⁴Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères*, vol. 1: XXXIX; Fromherz, *Ibn Khaldūn*: 60.

and effective authority—an idea he later develops in his chapter on dynasties, royal authority, and the caliphate.

If validation and authentication were uncertain, orders risked being ignored. Ibn Khaldūn's remarks seem to echo Ibn Tafrājīn's distrust of unvalidated documents. Although no direct link can be established between the episode of CA 139 and the historian's insistence on documentary rigor, it illustrates the importance he attached to this issue.

Conclusion

We have examined a series of Hafsid letters authenticated by the handwritten signature of their author, the *ḥājib* Ibn Tafrājīn. The replacement of the Hafsid *'alāma* with the *ḥājib*'s autograph signature not only resulted in the formation of a small but remarkable corpus of medieval autographs—which has few close parallels—but also signals a significant transformation in the mechanisms of authentication and validation within the Hafsid documentary system during Ibn Tafrājīn's reign. Its broader implications remain insufficiently explored and should be considered in relation to possible changes affecting the chancery during his rule, and, more broadly, the configuration of his government. At present, the available evidence does not allow us to reconstruct in detail either the practices of the chancery or the precise functions of the officials under it. The defection of Ibn Khaldūn to Fez may suggest a reluctance to serve as “secretary to the *ḥājib*”, whose authority—deprived of the official Hafsid *'alāma*—was likely considerably diminished. Ibn Khaldūn himself would later remark upon the degradation of the secretary's office, a development he had observed from a position of proximity over the course of his life.

An additional question that merits attention is the delay in the response of Peter IV to Ibn Tafrājīn's initiative, which seems not to have been answered until several years later. If the relationship between the two rulers was indeed characterized by mutual respect and amicable exchange, the absence of an immediate reply calls for explanation. In this regard, the correspondence maintained by Peter IV of Aragon with the Hafsid political centre of Bijāya in 1351–1352 indicates that diplomatic engagement with Ifrīqiya was not entirely suspended during the succession crisis following the death of Abu Bakr II but was instead reoriented—an issue that warrants further scholarly attention.

In any case, letter CA 139 revealed to be of high diplomatic and symbolic importance: it seems to reflect an early initiative on Ibn Tafrājīn's part to renew relations with the Crown of Aragon, after an interval of interruption, and to prepare both sides for the negotiation and signature of the peace treaty of 1360. The case of the consul highlights the mutual concerns regarding the verification and authentication of documents of both chanceries. Likewise, the letter reflects merchant communities as Mediterranean intermediaries, maintaining communication even in the absence of formal diplomatic relations.

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