

Maghili (130621)

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al-Maghīlī

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm **al-Maghīlī** (d. 909/1503–4 or 911/1505) was the most prominent scholar of premodern West Africa. His influence extends to the present. He is primarily known for his persecution of Jews, his role as an Islamic reformer (*mujaddid*), and his works of political thought. He was born in Tlemçen (Tilimsān), but left at a young age to settle in Tamanūt, a town in the Algerian Sahara. He studied under the Ṣūfī scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tha‘alibī (d. 875/1470), the *qāḍī* of Tuwāt, Yaḥyā b. Yadir (d. 877/1472), and the Mālikī Ash‘arī scholar, Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490). The most thorough scholarly biographies of al-Maghīlī have been written by Hunwick in his *Sharī‘a in Songhay* (29–48), Gwarzo in his *The life and teachings of al-Maghīlī*, and Hānim in the introduction to his edition of al-Maghīlī’s *Sharḥ al-Tibyān fī ‘ilm al-bayān* (17–33). Al-Maghīlī’s impact and legacy is assessed in Starratt, *Oral history in Muslim Africa*, Batrān, *A contribution* (393–4), and Brenner, *Muslim thought in eighteenth-century West Africa*.

Al-Maghīlī was widely known for his campaigns against Jews. He both authored legal texts arguing that Muslims were religiously obliged to persecute the then vibrant Jewish communities of the Saharan oases, and he participated in the practical implementation of his ideas, rousing a mob to destroy synagogues and kill Jews. His legal justification is contained in an untitled work that is commonly referred to as *Ta’līf fī mā yajīb ‘alā l-Muslimīn min ijtihād al-kuffār* (“A compilation on the Islamic obligation to avoid unbelievers”). Despite the title, the work refers almost exclusively to Jews, rather than unbelievers in general, with a few scattered references to Christians. The work deals with three main issues: (1) the love of the Prophet that requires Muslims to distance themselves from Jews; (2) what the Sharī‘a requires regarding the humbling and abasement of Jews; and (3) what the Sharī‘a requires regarding the Jews of al-Maghīlī’s own time. This final section justifies the killing of male Jews, the enslavement of their women and children, and the destruction of their synagogues. Those Muslims who come to the defence of Jews, he says, are to be

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