"They are like your Arabs": Giovanni Villani on Ibn Khaldūn's Tunis (The Ḥafṣid Civil War)

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The famous Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani (d. 1348), a basic source of information about his city and Europe, composed a detailed and overlooked account of a civil war among the Ḥafṣids, a North African Muslim dynasty, an event known primarily through the writings of Villani's famous contemporary Ibn Khaldūn, an eyewitness. Villani's account reveals a nuanced understanding of the social and cultural fabric of the Ḥafṣid Tunis that, paired with Ibn Khaldūn's description, provides insight into Christian and Muslim Mediterranean perceptions. Villani viewed the conflict not as a faraway affair among nonbelievers but as emblematic of the universal effects of internecine family strife.

INTRODUCTION

In 1348, outbreaks of the Black Death brought destruction and transformation throughout the Christian and Islamic Mediterranean. The contagion has elicited a great deal of attention in both the academy and popular press, in large part due to the COVID-19 crisis. As in the present, premodern pandemics occurred alongside concurrent phenomena that included heightened violence and warfare.[1] The civil war and invasion of the Ḥafṣid dynasty in North Africa in the fourteenth century serves as one such significant example. The Islamic polity (1229–1574) held sway over Ifrīqiyya, a region comprising modern-day Western Libya, Tunisia, and Eastern Algeria. Arabic sources recount how Ḥafṣid political authority and stability broke down, just prior to the Plague,

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[1] Caferro, 2018, 1–21.

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with the outbreak of a civil war in 1346, and the subsequent invasion in 1347/48 by the neighboring empire, the Marīnids.[2]

The Ḥafṣid civil war also received lengthy and detailed attention from the Christian Florentine writer Giovanni Villani (1280–1348), whose chronicle ranks among the most famous in the European tradition.[3] Villani's work has served as a critical source of information on Florentine politics, wars, and contemporary events throughout Europe, as well as a point of reference for the *Commedia* of Dante, the chronicler's personal friend, whom he frequently quotes (or vice versa?).[4] Villani's account of the Ḥafṣid civil war in Tunis has, however, been obscured from scholarly view.[5] Historians read Villani primarily in a Florentine and European context, emphasizing, as Louis Green has argued, his treatment of history as a reflection of the will of the Christian God and the workings of divine Providence that included celestial and astrological interventions.[6] The scholarly status quo reflects the separation between European and Islamic studies that has, as Hussein Fancy and others argue, created "artificial divisions" that belie the historical reality that Muslim and Christian societies crossed political, cultural, and linguistic boundaries.[7]

Villani's contemporary Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), the Muslim-Andalusi scholar, witnessed the civil war and subsequent invasion during his youth in Tunis and wrote about it during his middle age and within the last decade of his life in his chronicle (*Kitāb al-ʿIbar*) and in his autobiography (*al-Taʿrīf*), respectively.[8] Ibn Khaldūn's description of the events in Tunis remains the preeminent source for modern scholarship.[9] As Sebastian Garnier observes, Ibn

[2] Ibn Khaldūn, 1951, 19–20; Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 6:517–22; Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:327–34. The authors wish to acknowledge Joel S. Pattison's excellent essay, "Wine, Taxation, and the State in Ḥafṣid Tunis: Ethical Consumption and Public Finance in a Medieval Muslim City," which appeared in *Speculum* while our own essay was in the final stages of publication.

[3] On Villani's professional career, see Luzzati; on his chronicle, see Green, 1967; Green, 1972, 9–43; Salvestrini; Anuskiewicz; Porta, 2017; and Ragone.

[4] The literature on Giovanni Villani's relationship with Dante is vast and well known and has focused on whether Villani used Dante or vice versa, or whether they used a third source: the so-called Malaspini question. See, among others, Morghen; Davis, 290–99; Aquilecchia; and Porta, 1993.

[5] The description of the Ḥafṣid civil war and its aftermath were continued by Giovanni Villani's brother and successor as chronicler, Matteo. See Caferro, 2018, 17.

[6] Green, 1972, 17, 29–33, 38.

[7] Fancy, 5–6.

[8] Dale, 27–28.

[9] Shatzmiller, 1–8, 40, 72–75; Rouighi, 18–19, 73; Garnier, 52–53, 75–79, 514–24; Ibn Qunfudh, 168–73; Ibn Marzūq, 225–26, 260–61, 335–36.

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Khaldūn looms large over North African historiography, especially Ḥafṣid and Marīnid studies.[10] The scholarly preference for Ibn Khaldūn's chronicle of the history of Islamic North Africa is, indeed, exemplified by his account of the Ḥafṣid civil war and Marīnid invasion. Ibn Khaldūn provides far more details about these events than does any other source. Furthermore, he witnessed these wars in Tunis during his youth.[11] Therefore, he is far better suited than his other Muslim contemporaries as a historiographical counterpart to Giovanni Villani.

The present essay examines Villani's Christian account of the Ḥafṣid civil war in relation to that of his Muslim contemporary, Ibn Khaldūn.[12] It follows recent scholarship in crossing religious and cultural boundaries to better contextualize both Christian and Muslim perspectives about one another. Villani, a seemingly unlikely source, was geographically and culturally removed from Ibn Khaldūn's Tunis, but demonstrates a distinct familiarity with Ḥafṣid affairs. His chronology of events and knowledge of the various social and political actors strikingly resembles Ibn Khaldūn's account. As we shall demonstrate, Villani obtained his knowledge from Florentine mercantile networks in Tunis, and his narrative not only sheds light on Christian perceptions of Islamic North Africa but also adds nuance to our understanding of Tunis, broader Mediterranean trade networks, Florentine merchants' understanding of the term *Arab*, the nature of Florence's cultural and economic relations with Ḥafṣid North Africa, and, more generally, the transmission of cross-cultural knowledge across the Mediterranean.[13]

For Villani, the conflict in Tunis was not a distant episode taking place among nonbelieving, monolithic Saracens, but rather a reflection of the same strife that beset contemporary Florence, Italy, and Europe. For Villani, in general, avarice (*avarizia*) and internecine divisions were universal human forces that transcended both Christian and Muslim religious strictures and invariably brought destruction and disaster. Villani's account demonstrates a deeper understanding of the social fabric of the Ḥafṣid caliphate that, paired with Ibn Khaldūn's contemporary description, expands our insight into how Christian and Muslim societies in the Mediterranean perceived each other despite divides in culture, language, and religion.

[10] Garnier, 75–76.

[11] Ibn Khaldūn, 1951, 20; Dale, 142; Fromherz, 45–46.

[12] Given the cross-cultural nature of this essay, we have eschewed Eurocentric period labels. The focus is the fourteenth century, which for scholars of Italy is often associated with the Renaissance, but this terminology does not apply to Ibn Khaldūn and the Ḥafṣids.

[13] Villani, 1991, 516–18.

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GIOVANNI VILLANI, IBN KHALDŪN, AND THE ḤAFṢID CIVIL WAR

Despite all the literature devoted to Villani and his chronicle, Villani was first and foremost a merchant writer living in an international merchant city. Villani worked for the great Florentine banking firms of the era, starting his career with the Peruzzi super company as a factor (*fattore*) and then working with the Buonaccorsi bank as a shareholder (1322) and director (1324).[14] The Peruzzi bank and its counterparts, the Bardi and Acciaiuoli banks, were known as the "pillars of Christendom" on account of their size and domination of international trade, which involved the transfer of papal funds, the movement of goods, and the extension of credit. They operated through an extensive network of correspondents and branches (*filiali*) that spanned Europe and the Mediterranean, including Paris, London, Avignon, Seville, Bruges, Rhodes, Cyprus, Constantinople, Mallorca, and Tunis, the only Muslim city. While much literature has been devoted to the super banks and their essential services to Christendom, their presence in Muslim Tunis has received surprisingly little scholarly attention.[15] Villani himself worked in Flanders, including in the town of Bruges, for the Peruzzi, which gave him considerable political and economic knowledge of events in the North. In 1316, Villani initiated his public career in Florence as a prior (executive) of the city, followed by appointments to the *ufficiali della moneta* in 1317, the priorate again in 1322 and 1323, the supervisors of fortifications in 1330, captain of Orsanmichele in 1335, and ambassador to Pisa in 1336. Villani's domestic political connections involved him in the factional disputes for which Florence was famous and led him on numerous occasions to speak harshly in his chronicle about government decisions with which he openly disagreed.[16]

The vicissitudes of Villani's career resemble in basic outline those of Ibn Khaldūn. The North African scholar-official was, like Villani, deeply involved in the politics of his day. He fluidly navigated sociopolitical networks, rivalries, and dynastic upheavals in the Islamic Mediterranean. His political ambitions took him to the Marīnid empire in 1354, a decision that started a cycle of intrigue involving both patrons and rivals, during which Ibn Khaldūn occupied prominent positions such as diplomat, tax collector, judge, and vizier at the royal courts of Fez, Granada, Tlemcen, Tunis, and Cairo.[17] At times, Ibn Khaldūn suffered dismissal, imprisonment, and exile, but his extraordinary skill

[14] Luzzati, 1–16.

[15] The seminal studies of Sapori do not examine the connection, nor does the more recent work of Hunt and Goldthwaite, among others. See Sapori, 1926; Hunt; and Goldthwaite.

[16] Green, 1972, 13–14; Luzzati, 1–16.

[17] Fromherz, 60–97; Dale, 118–49.

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as a diplomat also brought him into contact with an array of foreign rulers, including Pedro the Cruel of Spain (r. 1350–69) and the Turco-Mongol ruler Timur (r. 1370–1405), as well as Berber and Arab tribes in the countryside.[18] Ibn Khaldūn's career spanned across regions of the Islamic Mediterranean, making him an intriguing counterpart to Villani, who, in beginning his chronicle with the biblical account of the fall of the tower of Babel and the division of the world into Asia, Africa, and Europe, foreshadowed a historical purview that was international, cross-cultural, and ultimately rooted in connection with fellow Florentine merchants and their networks.[19]

The broader role of Islam in Villani's chronicle lies beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to note here that Villani routinely recorded events. His chronicle touches on conflicts and wars between Christian and Muslim polities, such as the battles between the Genoese and Turks (*Turchi*) on the seas near Greece (*Romania*), the Christian Crusade at Smyrna in 1344 against the Turkish Principality of Aydin, and the ongoing struggle between Christian Iberian powers and the Saracen Naṣrid dynasty of Islamic Granada in the late 1330s and early 1340s.[20] Villani first mentions the Ḥafṣids in 1319, recounting the political instability and tumult in their capital, Tunis, that served as a prelude to the civil war that followed two decades later. But that this account, encompassing the years 1319 to 1323, coincided with Villani's famous description of Dante and his death in 1321 further obscured the Ḥafṣid narrative from scholarly view.

Villani's broader awareness of Islam was mirrored by Ibn Khaldūn's own of Christendom. Ibn Khaldūn differentiated among the various Latin-Christian polities and ethnicities distinguishing, for example, the lands of the Germans ("al-Lamānīya"), Venetians ("al-Banādiqa"), Genoese ("Janawa"), French ("Faransa"), and Britons ("Farṭānya").[21] He also recognized that the pope ("al-Bābā") in Rome had the ultimate religious authority over Latin Christendom and provided religious legitimacy to all rulers throughout Western Europe, particularly those who acquired the status of Emperor ("al-Inbaradhūr").[22] Ibn Khaldūn's information came from late antique Christian and Jewish chronicles translated into Arabic as well as from the contacts he made in his own diplomatic mission in Castile.[23] And so both authors reflect the spread of cross-cultural understanding.

[18] Fromherz, 1–3; Dale, 148–50.

[19] Caferro, 2020, 205–06.

[20] Villani, 1991, 209–10, 225, 230, 239, 367–68, 372–73, 388.

[21] Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 1:93, 1:97, 2:277, 4:234, 5:246; König, 291, 318.

[22] Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 1:291–93.

[23] König, 88, 94–95, 101, 120.

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The modern historiographical consensus on the Ḥafṣid civil war and Marīnid invasion has largely been shaped by Ibn Khaldūn's account of these events.[24] He starts the narrative:

> In a time when people are oblivious to fate, covered by the shade of prosperity, and sheltered from calamities under the pavilion of strength and the complete protection of justice, suddenly the flock becomes dismayed, turbidity muddies the pure stream, and the shadows of power and security fade as the domain of kingship becomes incapacitated. The death of Sultan Abū Bakr was announced unexpectedly in the middle of the night in Tunis on Tuesday, the 2nd of Rajab, the year 747 [19 October 1346].[25]

Ibn Khaldūn establishes from the start a somber and melancholic mood surrounding the death of the Ḥafṣid caliph Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr, and signaling to the reader that civil strife and the breakdown of order will ensue. He relays that the caliph's son, Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar (r. 1346–47), ordered the palace doors locked and, with the help of the influential *ḥājib* (chamberlain), Muḥammad b. Tāfragīn (d. 1364), conspired to become the ruler of Tunis at the expense of his brother Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad, the rightful heir. The chamberlain Muḥammad b. Tāfragīn was the head of the *mashyakha min al-mūwahhidīn* (Almohad chiefs), the descendants of the founding tribes who had settled Ifrīqiyya.[26] He oversaw the succession, and, according to Ibn Khaldūn, sent for the elders of the Almohads, the military elites, and the clients of the dynasty to affirm Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar's elevation.[27] Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad, the rightful heir and crown prince of southern Tunisia, challenged his brother for his royal claim with the support of the Arabian tribal confederations, but Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar defeated and killed him, placing his head on a lance for display.[28]

But his victory was short-lived, as his own grasp on power was tenuous. Ibn Tāfragīn, the powerful chamberlain, was delegated too much authority and monopolization of power (*ziyādat-tafwīḍ wa-istibdād*) and, owing to "constant slander" and "defamation" by members of the royal court, Ibn Tāfragīn withdrew his support and fled to the Marīnid sultan, Abū al-Ḥasan (r. 1333–49).[29] Subsequently, he urged him to invade. Abū al-Ḥasan was the son-in-law of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr. Using this familial connection to the Ḥafṣid dynasty as

[24] Abun-Nasr, 110–11; Rouighi, 46–47, 119; Brunschvig, 1:165–68; Garnier, 75–76.
[25] Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:327.
[26] Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:327; Abun-Nasr, 127.
[27] Brunschvig, 1:163–64.
[28] Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:329.
[29] Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 6:518; Ibn Qunfudh, 169.

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a pretext, the Marīnid sultan defeated and killed Abū Ḥafs ʿUmar and conquered Ḥafṣid Ifrīqiyya.[30]

Giovanni Villani's account corresponds well in its basic outline with that of Ibn Khaldūn. Like Ibn Khaldūn, the Italian chronicler began with the death of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr—whom Villani called the "mule Bucchiere," the "king" of the Ḥafṣids—and ends with the Marīnid conquest of Tunis by "Bukar/Bulafare"—that is, Abū al-Ḥasan in 1347/48. Like Ibn Khaldūn, Villani dates the death of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr to October 1346. Villani also identifies Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr's son, Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar, as "Amare." He recounts how Amare, despite not being the rightful heir, seized the throne with the help of "Con Betteframo," the chamberlain Muḥammad b. Tāfragīn, whom Villani describes as among the greatest lords of the kingdom, apart from the king. Villani specifically refers to the chamberlain Muḥammad b. Tāfragīn as "siniscalco" or *seneschal*, a term used in the nearby Italian kingdom of Naples for the leading advisor of the crown—and a position occupied at that time by Villani's Florentine contemporary Nicola Acciaiuoli—but an office that did not exist in Villani's republican Florence.[31]

Villani's description is detailed and demonstrates considerable knowledge of the event. His identification of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr as "mule Bucchieri" occurs alongside a brief explanation of his use of the term *mule* (mullah), which he describes as a "Saracen" word, similar to *king* in Latin.[32] The Arabic term *mawlāy* (my lord or master) derives from the word *mawlā*, meaning lord, vicar, master, and protector, and rendered in the North African dialect as *mūlāy*. The word serves as one of the many royal titles and honorifics that refer to a North African Muslim ruler or saint.[33] Although *mūlāy* is not the linguistic equivalent of *king* in Latin, contemporary Arabic sources would often include the honorific *mūlāy* (my lord) or *mūlānā* (our lord) before the names of Ḥafṣid rulers as well as high dignitaries.[34] Villani's explanation of the term suggests an awareness and sensitivity regarding this issue; elsewhere, Villani refers to Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr with the familiar Italian term "gran signore" (great lord) of the realm of Tunis.[35]

[30] Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 6:521; Ibn Qunfudh, 169–70.

[31] Villani, 1991, 514.

[32] Villani, 1991, 514.

[33] Clancy-Smith, 3, 79.

[34] Garnier, 505, 515, 525; Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:327. In his narrative of the death of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr and subsequent civil war, Ibn Khaldūn starts the chapter with the title "Account of the passing of *mūlānā al-sultan* Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr and the reign of his son, Amīr Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar." The Ḥafṣid historian and official Ibn al-Shammāʿ (d. 861/1457) refers to Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr and his sons Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad and Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar with the title *mūlāy*.

[35] Villani, 1991, 514.

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Villani mistakes, however, the Ḥafṣid prince, Khālid (whom he calls Calido) for the Ḥafṣid crown prince Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad, the rightful heir, who waged war against his own brother.[36] Villani reports that "Calido" was not in Tunis at the time of the sultan's death, while Ibn Khaldūn states that Prince Khālid (Calido) was in Tunis, having arrived a "few months earlier" before fleeing the city when his father died. Villani's error likely derives from the fact that Khālid was the more visible figure at the Ḥafṣid court in Tunis, where Florentine merchant interests lay. Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad was more obscure among the Florentine mercantile community, as he governed Djerid in southern Tunis.

Nevertheless, Villani's Calido (Abū al-ʿAbbās) sought assistance from "Arab" forces against his brother Amare and Ibn Tāfragīn (Con Betteframo), whom Villani similarly portrays as the power behind the new ruler, and who ultimately defected due to Amare's daily threats "to have him killed," which the chronicler attributes to the vice of "ingratitude" (*ingraditudine*).[37] Calido (Abū al-ʿAbbās) appealed to the "lords of the Arabs" for reinforcements in his army and rode "without opposition" to Tunis. He then "dwelled in the baths with his women" and "gave himself up to carnal delights." The Arab contingent of Calido (Abū al-ʿAbbās) abandoned his service, leaving him to face his brother Amare, who had already assembled a force of two thousand cavalrymen, including Christian soldiers, unprepared. Amare (Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar) defeated Calido (Abū al-ʿAbbās), whom he murdered along with his two other brothers. Calido's severed head was attached to a lance and displayed for all to see; the other brothers had their hands and feet chopped off and died soon after.

Villani's description parallels Ibn Khaldūn's account both in its somber tone and in its sequence of events, relaying with considerable unease the defilement of the bodies of the brothers. Ibn Khaldūn casts Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr as the epitome of Ḥafṣid justice and prosperity, whose then unexpected death broke the realm's cohesion and political stability.[38] Ibn Khaldūn honored Abū Bakr with the titles of *mūlānā* and caliph, which he did not apply to other Ḥafṣid rulers.[39] Conversely, Ibn Khaldūn characterized Abū Bakr's son, the usurper Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar, as driven by the monopolization of power (*istibdād*) and the repression of the government elites (*wa-l-ḍarb ʿalā aydī ahl-al-dawla*) from the tribal Arabs and others.[40] Ibn Khaldūn also castigated his rival and brother Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad for having illicit sex with the women of the

[36] Villani, 1991, 515.
[37] Villani, 1991, 515.
[38] Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:327.
[39] Garnier, 198.
[40] Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:328.

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populace during "the madness of his youth and the imposition of his pleasure at his villa."[41] Villani similarly condemns Calido (Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad) for his pursuit of carnal pleasures and "dissolute life," which facilitated his defeat. He also describes his brother and opponent Amare (Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar) as guilty of "a dissolute life," as well as "bad government" that led to his downfall.[42] Both Ibn Khaldūn and Villani, in short, found the warring claimants undeserving of the throne.

Villani ends his account of the Ḥafṣid civil war with the Marīnid invasion by Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan, whom he calls "Bukar/Bulafere" and identifies as "the King of Garbo."[43] Garbo (Lat. *Garbum*) refers to North Africa during its control by the Almohads, whose territories corresponded with those of the Marīnid empire (modern-day Morocco).[44] Villani relates how Ibn Tāfragīn convinced the Marīnid sultan to invade.[45] The sultan secured the support of local officials, as Ibn Khaldūn stated, and, according to Villani, he set out from the city of Bougie with a "great" army that numbered 30,000 cavalrymen, including a naval component. Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar (Amare) recruited his own army of 2,500 cavalrymen and prepared for an engagement at Bougie, awaiting reinforcements. But Abū al-Ḥasan's navy reached the port at Tunis before Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar was prepared, and he returned hastily to Tunis, sending archers to the port in Tunis to prevent the landing of Marīnid ships. In the meantime, Abū al-Ḥasan's land army arrived at Tunis, and Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar fled with his now smaller force of both Berbers and Christians, the latter refusing service owing to Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar's "avarice" (*avarazia*). The Ḥafṣid sultan was captured at a distance from Tunis, unhorsed by a spear thrown by a Christian soldier. He was killed, his head cut off and presented to the Marīnid king, who sent it for royal burial. Villani claims that the war ended in January 1348 and that Abū al-Ḥasan celebrated his conquest with a great feast.[46]

Notwithstanding its inaccuracies regarding the Ḥafṣid prince Calido, Villani's account, following Ibn Khaldūn's narrative and the modern historiography, suggests that the Florentine was well informed of events. To be sure, Villani adds details that have a distinctive Italian/Florentine coloring. Villani describes, for example, Calido and his brothers in their final moments as moving about Tunis trying to get urban *borghesi* to take up arms in their defense, which the city's burgers collectively refused to do, replying that they

[41] Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, 12:329.
[42] Villani, 1991, 515.
[43] Villani, 1991, 516.
[44] Nef and Thom, 448.
[45] Villani, 1991, 516.
[46] Villani, 1991, 517.

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did not care which brother was king. Villani's application of the term *borghesi* to Ḥafṣid urban elites is noteworthy; the Florentine context for the word applied largely to merchants, which, although not entirely accurate, corresponded to a substantial Ḥafṣid trading sector that requires further study.

Overall, however, Villani, like Ibn Khaldūn, depicts the Ḥafṣid civil war as a moral tale. He addresses his audience directly in this regard. "Please note, reader . . . that what we have presented in this chapter [the account of the war] are the sins of arrogance (*superbia*), excess (*lussuria*), and avarice (*avarizia*) among brothers and cousins." This combination destroyed Abū Bakr's "family" and "extinguished his lineage."[47] For Villani, the civil war in Tunis mirrored contemporary events in his native Florence and in the nearby kingdom of Naples, where internal discord—the latter between the Hungarian and French Angevin ruling houses—brought destruction. At the time Villani was writing, the king of Hungary, Louis I, invaded Naples, a deed that the Florentine chronicler saw as a threat to both sides, as well as to Florentine trading interests in the region. Villani's comparison was overt, as we shall discuss further later. Villani does not stray far in this regard from Ibn Khaldūn, who portrays the internecine nature of the Ḥafṣid war as at odds with his own preference for group solidarity. Khaldūn equates justice with peace and prosperity, which was characteristic of Abū Bakr's reign but undone by the warring brothers and the absence of solidarity.

CHRISTIANS, BERBERS, AND ARABS

A critical feature of Villani's account is the knowledge he possessed about the participants in the Ḥafṣid civil war. As noted previously, Villani mentions the heterodox nature of the armies involved, which included Berbers (*barberi*), Arabs (*arabi*), and Christian mercenary soldiers—the last largely absent from Muslim accounts. Villani's Christian soldiers fought for both Ḥafṣid princes and for the Marīnid sultan Abū al-Ḥasan. Indeed, in Villani it was a spear thrown by a Christian soldier that felled Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar (Amare) after his own Christian forces abandoned him on account of his *avarizia*. The participation of Christian soldiers in rivalries among Islamic North African rulers was an integral part of Mediterranean politics. North African Islamic and Western European polities formed alliances in the late Middle Ages, creating what scholars have called a "mercenary economy" with the Marīnids and Ḥafṣids on the one side and the Aragonese and other Latin-Christian powers on the other.[48] This economy constituted a major dynamic in relations between the Ḥafṣid dynasty and the

[47] Villani, 1991, 518.

[48] Fancy, 3–10, 78–79.

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kingdom of Aragon, which was the Ḥafṣids' most important Christian commercial and military partner.[49] Nevertheless, with the exception of the Ḥafṣid historian Ibn Qunfudh (d. 1407), who mentions *ʿulūj* (European barbarians) among the entourage of the Marīnid sultan Abū al-Ḥasan, Arabic sources are notably silent about Christian involvement in the civil war.[50] In his accounts of Ḥafṣid history before the civil war, Ibn Khaldūn briefly mentions the presence of *naṣārā* (Christian) commanders and troops in the Ḥafṣid army. He notes that the king of Aragon would send ships for warring Ḥafṣid claimants.[51] But Ibn Khaldūn fails to report on Christian involvement during the Ḥafṣid civil war and the Marīnid invasion. The modern scholar Robert Brunchvig has argued that, apart from various treatises and negotiations, very little is known about the relations between Christian powers and Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr during the second half of this Ḥafṣid ruler's reign. Ḥafṣid relations with Christian powers appear more clearly in 1355 with the military involvement of the Genoese in Tripoli.[52] In any case, the Christian forces mentioned in Villani's narrative were likely Aragonese militias, but this cannot be conclusively determined.

Villani's use of the distinct terms *Berber* (*berberi, barbari*) and *Arab* (*arabi*) for the participants suggests an awareness of the ethnocultural classifications of the Ḥafṣid caliphate, despite the cultural, linguistic, and religious divides. Villani refers to "berbari," or Berbers, in terms of the Ḥafṣids in general, and in relation to members of Amare's army. When Villani ends his discussion of the Ḥafṣid civil war, he pointedly says, "let us leave the deeds of the Berbers [*Barbari*] in the kingdom of Africa," making clear that these were the specific people involved.[53] And when he describes Abū al-ʿAbbās's (Calido's) appeal for external help in the war, Villani writes that Calido contacted "the lord of the Arabs." Villani then qualifies the statement with an explanation delineating who Arabs were. They were not Berbers, but "lords of open lands and mountains"

[49] Historians note that the Aragonese king had the right to appoint the militia's commander, or *alcayt* (*al-qaiʿd*) in Tunis, who was obliged to send to the treasury of Aragon a fixed proportion of the salaries that the militiamen received from the Ḥafṣid sultan. See Fancy, 78–79; Abun-Nasr, 121; and Brunschvig, 1:153–54, 1:161–62.

[50] Ibn Qunfudh, 170.

[51] Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 6:437, 6:439, 6:440, 6:441, 6:451–52, 6:483, 6:496. Ibn Khaldūn also has a detailed passage in his *al-Muqadimma* on the use by North African rulers of Christian troops against their Muslim rivals. Ibn Khaldūn, 1951, 338.

[52] Brunschvig, 1:161, 1:172.

[53] Villani, 1991, 514, 517, 518.

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("terre campestre e le montagne"), who "lived in the countryside with their tents because they did not have cities, castles, villages, or walled fortifications."[54]

"OUR ARABS OF THE LAND" AND "MOUNTAIN PEOPLE"

The brief but detailed description of Arabs warrants close attention. The Arabic word *aʿrāb* denotes nomads or Bedouins.[55] Historians of premodern Islam debate the ethnolinguistic and cultural dimensions of Arab identity, which varied in different societies and eras—particularly in North Africa, where they were associated with certain nomadic and seminomadic groups.[56] Ramzi Roughi has argued that the term is vague and used in a derogatory sense by urban North African authors to refer to both settled agriculturalists and nomadic pastoralists. Yet the term is rendered more ambiguous because not all so-called Arabs lived nomadic lifestyles or lacked settlements of their own.[57]

The ethnocultural layer behind the conception of *aʿrāb* or Arabs is further complicated by the significant role they played in the political-military structures and developments of the Ḥafṣid and Marīnid dynasties. According to dynastic chronicles, the interaction between the Arabs and the Ḥafṣid dynasty was rooted in several pledges of allegiance and tribute for military support.[58] These temporary alliances could easily turn into rebellion or aid for the enemies of the dynasty. This fraught symbiotic relationship between the Ḥafṣids and Arabs was further complicated by tax farming privileges and land tenure grants given to Arabs by Ḥafṣid rulers in exchange for military support.[59] Ḥafṣid caliphs gave lands and tax revenues to Arabs along the Mediterranean coast southward toward the Sahara, which was less fertile, referred to as *bādiya* or Bedouin lands. The Bedouin territories formed a third belt at a distance from the two green belts that surrounded Ḥafṣid cities. The latter were filled with farms, gardens, large royal parks, and large estates with villages. Thus, while the Ḥafṣids financially integrated Arabs, they kept them outside of the domain of cities. This tense arrangement with the Arabs was born out of necessity and rendered commerce by land routes more dangerous, with maritime travel the preferred choice even of Christians.[60] Conversely, pastoral nomads and

[54] Villani, 1991, 518.
[55] Rouighi, 10–11.
[56] Webb; Abun-Nasr, 128–30; Coope, 38–60.
[57] Rouighi, 10–11.
[58] Rouighi, 27.
[59] Rouighi, 64–65.
[60] Rouighi, 71.

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agriculturalists were often victims and sought to defend themselves against Ḥafṣid militias.[61]

The power dynamics between the nomadic and sedentary peoples played a major role in the Ḥafṣid civil war, and in Ibn Khaldūn's understanding of it. Ibn Khaldūn described Arabs in the *al-Muqaddimah* as possessing hardiness, bravery, and strong group cohesion due to their nomadic lifestyle as compared to sedentary civilizations.[62] Giovanni Villani does not disparage the nomadic lifestyle of the Arabs but appears to be aware of the distinction between North African Muslim urbanites and the nomadic Arabs, who wielded significant military force.

Important additional insight into Villani's view on Arabs is evident earlier in his chronicle. For the year 1250, Villani relays a story about merchants in Tunis, which he claims was told by merchants from Pisa, Florence's neighboring and rival city. Unlike Florence, Pisa possessed a port and maintained well-documented and long-standing economic relations with Tunis. Villani relays his story as part of his well-known description of Florence's coining, in November 1252, of its famous gold florin, which became the standard currency of international trade. Villani tells first of the minting of the coin, describing its appearance and fineness. He then curiously digresses to tell the tale of Pisan merchants in Tunis, who showed the new gold coin to the "king of Tunis" ("re di Tunisi"). The Tunisian ruler, whom Villani calls a "valiant and wise man" ("valente e savio uomo"), carefully studied the coin, which bore the image of John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence, and had it weighed and assayed.[63] Deeply impressed, the Tunisian ruler asked the Pisan merchants what type of city Florence was that it alone among Christian cities was able to produce a coin of such high quality. The Pisans replied "disrespectfully and with envy" ("dispettosamente e per invidia"), according to Villani, that the Florentines "are our Arabs of the land" ("sono nostri arabi fra terra"), which was to say that they "are our mountain people" ("sono nostri montanari").[64] The Tunisian ruler dismissed the Pisans' account and replied that neither Arab nor Pisan produced a gold coin of such quality, a response that confounded the Pisan merchants. The Tunisian ruler, according to Villani, then granted Florentine merchants the right to build their own *funduq* (*fondaco*) in Tunis, along with a church, and offered them the same trading privileges as the Pisans.[65]

[61] Rouighi, 72.
[62] Ibn Khaldūn, 2006, 1:151, 1:153–60.
[63] Villani, 1990, 279–81.
[64] Villani, 1990, 280.
[65] Villani, 1990, 280–81; Constable, 129–30.

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As Olivia Constable and others have observed, the story is likely apocryphal, and, indeed, Villani himself introduces it as a "bella noveletta," "a good little tale," which played upon Florence's long-standing rivalry with Pisa.[66] But rather than dismiss the "noveletta" as mere literary embellishment, it is better understood in context as additional evidence of Villani's comprehension of the term *Arab*, now applied disrespectfully to his native city in much the same way that it was used by the Ḥafṣids and Muslim elites. The landed Florentines, in fact, lacked a port, which both Pisa and Ḥafṣid Tunis possessed, and were "mountain people" insofar as they were hemmed in along their northern border by the Apennine mountains, off the main trade routes. As a port city, Pisa had deeply rooted economic relations with Tunis, having already obtained "favored" trade status and built *funduqs* (*fondachi*) by 1230.[67]

Villani attributes his awareness of the Pisan tale to a rendering of it by a Florentine merchant, a man "worthy of faith," who was in Ḥafṣid Tunis at that time and told the story to Villani when the Florentine merchant returned home and served the city as a prior, a public executive position held by Villani at the same time. Villani gives the merchant's name as Pera Balduccio, and describes him as a "discreet and wise" ("discreto e savio") man from the Oltrarno district of Florence.[68] Balduccio claimed he responded to the Pisan slight by telling the ruler of Tunis about "the potency and magnificence of Florence," and how Pisa had "neither people nor power worth half" of that in comparison.

It is a measure of the scholarly status quo that the identity of Balduccio has been the focus of scholarly debate rather than the cultural implications and meaning of the story Villani heard and relayed. In 1990, the Italian scholar Arrigo Castelli, based on careful examination of the original manuscript of Villani's text, speculated that the chronicler referred not to Pera Balduccio but to a "Pela Gualchieri," whose name appears in contemporary documents as a Florentine merchant working at the time in Genoa, which had relations with Tunis.[69] The differences in names, which may in the first instance owe to the nature of the Tuscan vernacular dialect, is of little importance, since numerous Florentine merchants, including those with direct ties to Villani and his banking career, worked in Tunis. What is critical to our argument here is that Villani received his information about North Africa from a fellow merchant, a key source of the international events he describes in his chronicle. And, indeed, in his later discussion of the Ḥafṣid civil war in Tunis, Villani again notes that he received his information directly from a Florentine "friend and merchant

[66] Constable, 130.

[67] Davidsohn, 746; Lower, 48–49; Sayous, 76–92, 157–62 (appendix).

[68] Villani, 1990, 280.

[69] Castellani.

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worthy of faith" ("amico fiorentino e mercantante degno di fede"), without in this instance giving the name.[70] The detailed information available to Villani on the Ḥafṣids could only have been possible through Florentine mercantile networks in Tunis.

TUNIS AND FLORENTINE MERCANTILE NETWORKS

It is significant that Villani depicts Pisan merchants as equating Florence with nomadic Arabs, and describes Pisa and Tunis as port cities that were therefore superior to the landed Florentines and Arabs. Villani's nuanced perceptions and account were the product of transmission of intercultural knowledge, derived from Florence's direct commercial relations with Tunis and North African merchant networks that have too often been obscured from scholarly view by the better-known activities of the port cities of Pisa and Genoa and by a historiographical tradition that has placed greater emphasis on Florence's European north-south trade axis.

Already in the thirteenth century, Florence participated in a "Tyrrhenian triangle" trade network that involved Tunis, Tuscany, and Sicily.[71] Florentine and Tuscan merchants moved grain and wine from southern and western Sicily to Tunis in return for skins, wool, and above all gold—the latter recalling the subject of Villani's "noveletta" and which David Abulafia saw as a critical factor in adjusting the balance of Tuscan trade in favor of Florence and its partners.[72] Meanwhile, an extant account book of the Peruzzi super bank for which Villani worked reveals the names of numerous Florentine merchants working in Tunis at Villani's time, including Lamberto Velutti in 1326, and Franco Forzetti and Nato di Neri Albertini in 1336–37.[73] Forzetti, like Villani, also served in public office in Florence, and was one of the members of the war council that raised money to fight the della Scala of Verona in 1336–38. The Buonacorsi bank, for which Villani served as a director and investor, likely conducted a more indirect trade with Tunis. The bank did not have a branch in the city, but it did have branches in Pisa and Genoa.[74] Nevertheless, members of the Buonacorsi family, including Piero Buonacorsi and Lapo Buonacorsi, can be documented as working in Tunis in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[75] In addition, the Buonacorsi maintained connections to the Mediterranean through its *fondaco* in

[70] Villani, 1991, 513.
[71] Abulafia, 1993, 53–57.
[72] Abulafia, 1993, 73.
[73] Sapori, 1934, 26.
[74] Luzzati, 13, 14, 40.
[75] Abulafia, 1993, 63; Sapori, 1934, 104.

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Barletta in Southern Italy, where it dealt in spices and grain to and from numerous markets.

The extant merchant manual of Giovanni Villani's Florentine contemporary, Balduccio Pegolotti (d. 1348), who oversaw the Bardi bank branch at Famagusta on the island of Cyprus, decisively confirms Florence's close commercial ties with Tunis and provides details about the trade.[76] Pegolotti focused on practical aspects—weights, measures, tariffs, and types of merchandise bought and sold—rather than on cultural ones. But like Villani's chronicle, Pegolotti's *Pratica della Mercatura* (ca. 1310 or 1340) devotes substantial, indeed disproportional, space to Tunis and, like Villani, pointedly refers to it as "Tunizi di Barberia."[77] Pegolotti mentions the participation in commerce of the city of Bougie, which Villani also mentions, and cites links not only between Florence and Tunis but also between Tunis and numerous other European and Mediterranean ports. Tunis's Italian trade partners included well-known participants such as Pisa, Genoa, and Venice. But the city also conducted trade with Palermo in Sicily, Gaeta, and Naples in "the principate" in Southern Italy, Ancona in the Marche, Tropea and Scalea in Calabria, Città di Castro in Sardegna, as well as the Champagne fairs in France, Nimes in Provence, and Seville and Ceuta in Spain. Pegolotti makes clear, however, that in Tunis, the Pisans were a favored "nation," and were assessed lower taxes than the Florentines.

The Ḥafṣid war coincided, in 1346, with the bankruptcy of the Bardi firm and of the overall international Florentine merchant banking community, which devastated the economy and damaged Florentine trade networks in the Mediterranean to such a degree that scholars have found it difficult to locate them after that date.[78] But, as Francisco Apellaniz has recently pointed out, Florence continued to operate in North Africa, often through trade networks that included Florentine exiles who did business in the name of others.[79] Much of the Tuscan trade with Tunis at that time went through the island of Mallorca, which was incorporated into the kingdom of Aragon in 1343.[80] The island maintained close economic ties with Tunis and the Maghrib, which served as an outlet for goods from North African ports and caravan routes across the Sahara.[81] And for all the discussion of Florence's rivalry with Pisa, the two cities cooperated closely at this time in international trade, and both profited

[76] Pegolotti, 130–33, 136, 137; Sayous, 87–90.

[77] Dotson.

[78] Apellániz.

[79] Michienzi, 2013, 1; Michienzi, 2012.

[80] Michienzi, 2012, 152.

[81] Abulafia, 1994, 120, 227; Michienzi, 2012, 152–53.

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from relations with Tunis. Pisa transported Florentine goods by means of the Arno River, which flowed to the *porto pisano*, and served as a natural "outlet" (*sbocco*) for Florentine goods.[82] Pisan merchants liked the arrangement, despite the often tense political relations between the cities and verbal slights noted by Villani, because the sale of Florentine goods on Pisan fleets was beneficial to the Pisan economy.[83]

What must be emphasized here is that Tunis was a key part of Florence's international and Mediterranean trade network. The founding generation of Italian economic historians pointed proudly to the "global" reach of the Florentine super banks and their role as "pillars" that supported the economy of Christendom.[84] But the same scholars paid little attention to the fact that Tunis was a Muslim city that inevitably required Christian Italian merchants to traverse religious and cultural borders. The lacuna in the research is all the more curious given the work of Avner Greif and his interlocutors on Jewish merchants, who served as intermediaries along the fluid frontiers of the Maghrib during an earlier period in the same region.[85] Similarly fluid frontiers existed at the trade depot of Cyprus, where Pegolotti worked and earned the highest salary of all Bardi managers—evidence of the importance of that island to Florentine international trade. Those who lived and worked in fourteenth-century Christian Cyprus included Armenians, Nestorians, Jews, Jacobites, and Nubians, among others.[86] David Jacoby has documented business ventures and investments on the island that cut across ethnic and religious divides, with Greek merchants routinely dealing with Syrian Nestorians, Latins, and Greeks.[87] Christian Mallorca was home to residents and merchants of various religious backgrounds and ethnicities, including Italians, Catalans, Africans, and Jews.[88] As Villani's comments on Tunis and the Ḥafṣid war illustrate, these commercial relationships had a deep cultural impact on how Italian scholars and merchants conceptualized themselves in the greater Mediterranean—a subject that warrants further research, particularly from the Florentine perspective.[89]

[82] Silva, 25–26; Dati, 86.

[83] Davidsohn, 746; Lower, 48–49. Sayous calls the fourteenth century a period of "true prosperity" ("vraie prosperite") in Tunis: Sayous, 92, 157–62.

[84] De Roover, 2–3.

[85] Greif; Goitein, 308–10.

[86] Schabel.

[87] Jacoby, 2009; Jacoby, 1989; Coureas.

[88] Assis.

[89] For maritime activities in the Mediterranean for the early modern period, see Fusaro et al.

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CONCLUSION

The Ḥafṣid civil war and Marīnid invasion that transformed North Africa in the second half of the fourteenth century drew the attention of two leading contemporary historians from the Islamic and Christian Mediterranean respectively. Despite a religious-cultural divide, Villani and Ibn Khaldūn's narratives share parallel political, social, and cultural themes centered on royal sovereignty and rooted in kinship and virtue, the nature of ethnic identity, and the rural-nomadic/urban divide that drove the conflict. Most important for our purposes here, Giovanni Villani's awareness of the social and political structures and terminologies in the Ḥafṣid sultanate provide insight into the transmission of cross-cultural knowledge in the Mediterranean. The point is important given the prevailing view of Villani and his chronicle as reflective of a distinctive Christian morality, with a focus on divine augurs. But as a merchant, Villani had access to merchant trading networks in the Mediterranean, including Italian merchants who lived in Tunis. His intellectual curiosity regarding a different culture and religion speaks to how international trade could help foster such attitudes.

For both Villani and Ibn Khaldūn, the Ḥafṣid war was a particularly sad affair because it transgressed the bounds of group and family solidarity. As noted above, Villani addressed his readers directly to denounce arrogance (*superbia*), excess (*lussuria*), and avarice (*avarizia*), which were deadly sins in Christendom. The sins play a central role throughout Villani's chronicle, and are often applied to events in Villani's home city of Florence. The great flood of 1333, which nearly wiped away the city, elicited a long description from Villani of "pestilences, battles, disasters, arsons, persecutions, and shipwrecks" that had befallen Florence over the years on account of its arrogance (*superbia*), lack of solidarity among neighbors ("l'uno vicino col altro") and families ("l'uno fratello e vicino coll'altro"), and "willful excesses" ("disordinate lussurie") among men and women that led the one to seek "lordship and tyranny" over the other. The prime mover was "infinite avarice" ("infinita avarizia"), deeply displeasing to God, who punished Florence for its sins.[90] Avarice (*avarizia*) also stands at the center of Villani's description of the revolt by the Bardi family against Florentine government in 1340 and his subsequent protracted description of the bankruptcy of the Bardi firm and Florentine international banking sector that coincided with the Ḥafṣid war in Africa. In the latter case, Villani compared Florence to "a cursed and greedy wolf" ("maladetta e bramosa lupa"), "full of the vice of avarice [*avarizia*]," which ruled its "blind and crazy citizens" ("pieno del vizio dell' avarizia regnante ne' nostri ciechi e matti cittadini").[91]

[90] Villani, 1991, 22–23, 25.
[91] Villani, 1991, 424–26.

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The descriptions share in common the link between sin and "destruction" and "disasters."[92] To be sure, avarice had, in a Florentine context, a strong economic dimension, juxtaposed at the time of the flood (1333) with "evil earnings" ("mali guadagni") from usury and at the time of the collapse of the Florentine banks (1346) with "cupidity for earnings" ("per cuvidgia di guadagnare") and "so much loss of treasure" ("tanta perdita di tesoro").[93] Villani's portrayal of the Ḥafṣid war is shorn of an overt economic aspect, but closely follows the pattern of linking avarice to disaster, here the "many homicides and destructions" that ultimately destroyed the royal Ḥafṣid lineage. *Avarizia* remained the prime evil and motivating force for the destruction of families and group solidarity.

Villani explicitly compared the Ḥafṣid war to the contemporaneous struggle occurring "in a similar manner among us Christians," involving "the royals" in the nearby kingdom of Naples, where, as in Tunis, Florentine merchants were particularly active.[94] His account of the Neapolitan civil war bears resemblance to his description of the Ḥafṣid civil war in both length and detail.[95] The civil war in Naples began with the death of a prince, the Hungarian Angevin Andrew (d. 1345), whose French Angevin wife, Queen Giovanna of Naples, and her entourage stood accused of the murder.[96] Andrew's murder was, according to Villani, the result of envy (*invidia*) and avarice (*avarizia*) among his cousins and consort. Queen Giovanna succumbed to the "wicked vice" of "willful excess" ("disordinato lussuria"). The vices brought "the destruction of all things good" ("guastono ogni bene").[97] Andrew's older brother, the Hungarian King Louis I, descended into Italy in 1347 to avenge the murder, setting off an internecine war characterized by *superbia* between the rival Hungarian and French branches of the ruling Angevin family.[98]

Villani's decision to juxtapose the Neapolitan civil war and the Ḥafṣid civil war in his chronicle was intentional and meaningful, and underscores Villani's merchant identity, as both places were Florentine markets. King Louis of Hungary's role as relative and foreign invader resembles that of the Marīnid ruler Abū al-Ḥasan, the son-in-law of Abū Yaḥyā Abū Bakr, the deceased Ḥafṣid

[92] Villani, 1991, 231, 291–92.

[93] Villani, 1991, 425.

[94] Villani, 1991, 518.

[95] The Florentine chronicler devoted a full twelve chapters to the war in his chronicle. For our purposes, see Villani, 1991, 416–21, 433–37, 539–47.

[96] Villani, 1991, 511.

[97] Villani, 1991, 417.

[98] Villani, 1991, 545.

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sultan.[99] The coincidence of civil wars brought to light the universality of the vices of *superbia*, *lussuria*, and *avarizia*, and encouraged Villani to treat the conflicts as integral to understanding a common humanity.

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[99] Ibn Khaldūn, 2001, 6:520.

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