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Christian participation in Almohad armies and personal guards

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This article aims to explain the importance of Christian slaves or ex-slaves in the army and personal guard of the Almohads. Numerous studies posit that, at the time of the Almohads, Christian troops were almost exclusively mercenaries. However, a comparative study between the Almohads and other Maghrebi dynasties, grounded in terminology, reveals the unmistakable presence in the Almohad forces of soldiers, guards and advisors who were either Christians or of Christian origin and had originally been captives or slaves.

Keywords: Almohads; Christians; slaves; Mozarabs; personal guards

The aim of this article is to analyse and provide information regarding the different types of Christians found in the service of the Almohads: above all, those who participated in the defence of the state and its representatives. This analysis is based on well-known historical accounts – mainly Arab-Islamic but also Latin – that deal with events that occurred under the Almohads or in contiguous periods. I have relied primarily on the sources closest in time to the actual events, such as *al-Mann bi'l-Imāma* [Blessings of the Imamate] by Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt, specific information from the memoirs of al-Baydhaq, the *Bayān al-Mughrib* [The amazing presentation] by Ibn ʿIdhārī, the *Muʿjib* [The admirable] by al-Marrākushī, or the *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* [The garden of the pages] by Ibn Abī Zarʿ. The anonymous *Akhbār Majmūʿa* [Compilation of traditions] and *Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya* [Book of the embroidered tunics in the account of the news of Marrakush], the *Kitāb al-Tibyān* [Exposition of the events] by the Zirid king ʿAbd Allāh, the *Kitāb aʿmāl al-aʿlām* [Book on the events of the outstanding men] or the *Iḥāṭa fī Akhbār Garnāṭa* [Detailed information concerning the history of Granada] by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, the *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* [Book of evidence] by Ibn Khaldūn, the *Kāmil fī'l-Ta'rīkh* [The complete history] by Ibn al-Athīr, the *Dhakhīra* [The treasury] by Ibn Bassām and the *Kitāb al-Istiqṣā'* [Book of investigation] by the nineteenth-century Moroccan compiler al-Nāṣirī have all been used to complete and contrast events narrated by the first set of sources. Despite their partial and biased view of Christians, they are also the nearest and most direct sources, relating battles and events that took place at court and in the entourage of Muslim rulers. As far as Latin sources are concerned, I primarily use the *Chronica Adephonsi Imperatori* [Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso VII], as well as shorter texts such as travel accounts or correspondence.

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The framework of analysis which I will employ is that of textual linguistics and semiotics,[1] focusing on all terms used to refer to Christians in Arabic chronicles, an approach which helps to locate them within their ideological context; each term conjures up an ideological universe, which in several cases harks back to the vocabulary of the Qur'ān or *ḥadīth* [tradition]. Rather than being static, this terminology sometimes undergoes changes in meaning over time. A diachronic study of the use of these terms in different contexts is therefore essential to a proper understanding of their meaning.[2] Particular attention has been paid to the terms *ʿilj*-*ʿulūj* [barbarian or uncivilised] and *rūmī*-*rūm* [Christian], which, though already studied and analysed in a great number of texts, allow me to structure the article around three themes in relation to the Christians serving in the armies and personal guard of the Almohads: their social and legal status, their geographical origin, as well as their religion or cultural-religious origins. The characterisations of the typologies of Christians involved in the defence of the Almohad state do not differ greatly from those found in other North African states, including the Almoravids, Zīrids, Naṣrids, Marīnids, Ḥafṣids, and ʿAbd al-Wādids (despite variations in their actual military infrastructure), and I will make use of examples that refer to other Maghrebi dynasties contemporary to the Almohads.

I will conclude that Christian slaves or ex-slaves were part of the armies and personal guard of the Almohad rulers in the same way as they had been in previous Muslim dynasties, and that this organisation continued in subsequent dynasties. The methods used to obtain contingents of slaves remained the same: capture in times of war, privateering, or piracy, either through purchase or as gifts. I will also show that Christian slaves and mercenaries shared many characteristics and circumstances and were not so very different from each other.[3] One of the article's main aims is therefore to distinguish, in so far as is possible, between Christians who had been slaves and free Christians or mercenaries, the latter being more numerous under the Almohads than other dynasties. Another aim is to revisit the issue of the presence of Mozarabs in the Almohad militias. Despite the dearth of information, I will conclude that there is no evidence at all that privileges Mozarab origins for these contingents over the use of Christian ex-slaves or mercenaries. Outlining the different types of Christians in an Almohad setting is a difficult task because, with few exceptions, Arab authors did not define or distinguish between the Christians in the armies, personal guard or the inner circles of rulers.

It is a well-known fact that the Almohad dynasty rested heavily upon the power of its army, which was composed of many different tribes and peoples.[4] The regular troops or *jund* included detachments or militias made up of different Almohad or Arab tribes, the *guzz* or Turkish corps, Andalusi Muslims, and Christians. The roles and functions of Christian troops or troops of Christian origin in the Almohad armies are not specifically defined; as pointed out by García Fitz, we know nothing of the purely military organisation of the regular army, its recruitment methods, training or internal hierarchy.[5] Yet it is possible to establish two areas in which these Christian groups

[1]Bibliography on this subject is extensive. See, for example, Carnap, *Introduction to Semantics*; Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics*; Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*; Chambers, *Sociolinguistic Theory*; Albadalejo, *Teoría de los mundos posibles*.

[2]See Lapiedra, *Cómo los musulmanes*, which analyses sixteen terms used to refer to Christians in the discourse of Arab-Muslim chronicles.

[3]The opinion is shared by Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 515.

[4]See Aguilar, "Instituciones militares;" Ferhat, "Lignages et individus;" Molénat, "L'organisation militaire;" and Fromherz, "North Africa," 43.

[5]García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, 281–2.

existed: the personal guard of the caliphs and the factions of the regular army, commanded by Christian *qā'ids* [leaders]. Christians, or individuals of Christian origin, had a degree of importance in the inner circle of the Almohad caliphs. The military role of Christians became more conspicuous during conflicts between the Almohads and other Muslim dynasties in the Maghreb: against the Almoravids, during their rise to power, as well as against the Marīnids and the Ḥafṣids, as the dynasty began to decline. Indeed, these Christian elements appear more frequently in North Africa than in al-Andalus. As Ibn Khaldūn observed, Christian militias were used to fight against Muslims rather than against other Christians, because of the risks involved in possible desertion or collusion with the enemy.[6] There are two clear examples of this kind of collaboration and the resulting forcible relocation to the Maghreb: the Christian troops from Granada who provided intelligence and support to Alfonso I of Aragón during his campaign in 1126, and the military operations of Giraldo sem Pavor and his men, who switched sides from the Almohads to the Portuguese and ended up being deported to the Sūs in the Maghreb.[7]

The complex Almohad defence network included Christians of varying origins whose characteristics and functions differed according to the area of the state in which they worked. In fact, the negative image of the Almohads, shared with the Almoravids, as oppressors of Jewish and Christian minorities in the Iberian Peninsula, and their intense anti-Christian political propaganda, contrasts sharply with the systematic use of Christians in their militias and entourage.[8] Consequently, in recent years the negative image of the Almoravids and the Almohads has been played down.[9] It is important to note that the apparent contradiction in the treatment of Christians is common to any Arab-Muslim dynasty during the classical period. In other words, ideological positions do not prevent pragmatic "common sense", or what Ruiz Gómez has described as an "economy of alliances" that penetrated the system of religious oppositions.[10] This practical approach allowed members of the army and personal guard to be selected on the basis of their training, loyalty and efficiency, rather than their religious beliefs. The same approach, which depended purely on political and strategic concerns, prevailed when reaching agreements with Christian kings or leaders. The different sections of the Almohad army contained Christians with diverse origins and status, making generalisation extremely difficult. What might be dubbed "mercenaries", "soldiers of fortune" or "warlords" from the Christian kingdoms coexisted with Christian slaves captured in attacks on land or at sea, who were also of Catalan, Galician-Portuguese or Castilian origin, and perhaps with Andalusian Christians (Mozarabs), as well as clients or freemen of Christian origin who had converted to Islam.

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[6]See Alemany, "Milicias cristianas," 134–5; Maíllo, "Precisiones para la historia," 270, n. 10.
[7]See Lapiedra, *Cómo los musulmanes*, 224, 304–7; Lapiedra, "Giraldo sem Pavor."
[8]Hopkins also mentions the apparent contradiction between the negative attitude held by ʿAbd al-Mu'min towards Christians, despite his employment of Christian mercenaries and respect for Genovese merchants (*Medieval Muslim Government*, 69).
[9]See Fierro, "Christian Success;" Fierro, "Alfonso X 'The Wise';" García Arenal, "Jewish Converts;" Feria, Vega, and Peña, *El pensamiento de las monedas*; and Fromherz, "North Africa."
[10]Ruiz Gómez, "La guerra y los pactos," 152.

Social and legal status

Both Muslim and Christian sources make explicit reference to the coexistence of troops of slave origin and mercenaries in the Muslim armies of the North African dynasties. Three examples serve to illustrate this:

- Ibn ʿIdhārī collects precise information on the situation on the island of Majorca under the Banū Gāniya, during the period of conflicts between Almoravids and Almohads. ʿAlī Ibn Reverter, *qā'id* of the Almohad troops of Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, kept his promise, stating that "all of the Christian soldiers or slaves [*kull man kāna min al-rūm al-mujannadīn wa-l mutamallikīn*] left with their possessions, families and children and were sent, as promised, to their countries."[11]
- In 646/1248, the forces of the Almohad *emir* al-Saʿīd attacked a fortress held by his political opponent, Yaghmurāsan Ibn Zayyān. The *emir* was killed along with those accompanying him at the time: his *mawālīs* [clients] Naṣīḥ, one of the Christian slaves – or slaves of Christian origin – [*al-ʿulūj*] and ʿAnbar, one of the eunuchs, as well as the *qā'id* of the Christian troops [*qā'id jund al-naṣārā*] who was the count's brother.[12]
- Pedro Barrantes Maldonado, the official chronicler of the House of Niebla, says in his work *Ilustraciones de la casa de Niebla*, written in the mid-sixteenth century, that the Marīnid sultan Abū Yūsuf had given Alonso Pérez de Guzmán (Guzmán el Bueno), who had crossed the Straits of Gibraltar with other Christian knights to serve the same sultan, 600 Christians who "had come from Spain to earn a living, as well as others that were slaves of the king and his sons, that had been freed so they could serve in time of war."[13]

This sharp distinction, especially in the term *mutamallik* used for Christian slaves, is unusual. The sources do not ordinarily refer in such specific terms to the enslaved or free status of the Christians of the Maghrebi dynasties and, in most cases, make no mention of their origin or background. However, the terminology and information we have help to clarify the characteristics of these Christians to some degree. The terms most frequently used to refer to these groups are: *ʿabīd* [slave] (on rare occasions *mamālik or mutamallak* [property, owned, slave]), *ʿulūj* [barbarian or uncivilised], *rūm* or *naṣārā* [Christian] and, in just two cases, *īfarkhān* or *Banū Farkhān* [bastard, villainous, base]. Typically for Arab medieval discourse, these terms are sometimes interchangeable, while on other occasions they signify different concepts. It becomes clear from reading the Arab chroniclers that the authors did not feel the religion, whether Christians or converts to Islam, or legal status, whether slaves or freemen, of these "others" to be of particular importance, because in many cases the same terminology is used, even after these "others" had undergone changes to their religious or legal status.

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[11] *Al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 184.

[12] Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, VII: 97; Al-Nāṣirī, *Kitāb al-Istiqṣā',* II: 243.

[13] Gayangos, *Memorial histórico español*, 66. Quoted in Maíllo, "Precisiones para la historia," 273. Dufourcq mentions the coexistence under the government of the *emir* Abū Zakarīyā' of a Christian *qā'id* named Guillermo de Moncada – first captain of the company sent to Tunis in 1254, with the permission of Jaime I the Conqueror, following a peace treaty with the Ḥafṣid sultan and one Abū ʿAbd Allah, also noted as a Christian *qā'id*. Lack of further information prevents us from ascertaining whether the latter, a convert to Islam, was of slave origin. See Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 101; and Batlle, "Noticias sobre la milicia," 128.

I will now deal with each of these terms in more detail. *ʿAbd – ʿabīd* is the most general or neutral term used to refer to slaves and seems to have been used specifically to refer to a particular group: black slaves. However, as in many other cases where this terminology is used by medieval Arab writers, we cannot take for granted that the use of *ʿabīd* always denotes black slaves. Although many translators of Arabic sources interpret the meaning of the word in this way, in many passages this interpretation goes beyond the text itself. To some extent, this taboo or misunderstanding is caused by the modern western concept of slave, which does not correspond to that which appears in medieval Arab-Islamic historical discourse. Christian slaves were captives who, according to the literature, could be described broadly as those having a pact of obedience or loyalty with their master. They could own property and have families and, if they wished, could continue to practise their religion (for which they required places of worship, priests and bishops). Furthermore, a small number rose to positions of responsibility at court or in the army, controlling cities or sometimes even governing them. However, despite the possibility of high office, they remained slaves from the moment of their capture, in many cases as children or adults transported against their will across the sea, where they had to begin a new life and create new social relationships in the service of their Muslim master.[14]

By the same token, the term *rūm* [Christians] (sometimes *naṣārā* or *ifranj* [Christians or Franks] poses specific problems related to lack of precision in two areas. In Arabic chronicles, *rūmī* or *rūm* denotes both Christian enemies to be fought against and the Christians that were part of the Almohad armies. In addition, within the Almohad armies (or those of any other North African dynasties), *rūmī* or *rūm* refers both to slave troops or troops of slave origin and mercenaries. Despite this, there is a certain tendency to use *rūm* for troops of slave origin and *naṣārā* for mercenaries. In other words, when an Arabic text cites a *qāʾid ar-rūm*, it is often only the context that tells us whether reference is being made to a commander of the troops of Alfonso VIII or a general of the Christian troops in the Almohad army, and on very few occasions does it tell us about a particular Christian's origins, whether they are captives or came to the Maghreb in search of fortune.

What does help to distinguish between *qāʾids* is their names, although sometimes the sources mention different names for the same person. There are two broad tendencies: those that have Latin names, such as Lope, Gil, Gonzalo, Juan Gaitán, and perhaps Fransil and those that are given Arab names or nicknames, such as Rashīd, Bashīr, Shadīd, Zunnār, Nāṣiḥ, Abū al-Misk. The second type of name seems to indicate slave origins, conversion and a greater degree of immersion in the host culture. The Muslim custom of giving slaves brought up from childhood by their masters the names of precious stones or affectionate nicknames is well known. As a famous general example from the history of Islam, the *qāʾid* of the Fāṭimid armies and founder of Cairo, Jawhar (jewel, pearl), was a Sicilian of slave origin. In contrast, we also know that the names of some individuals such as Giraldo or Reverter, who served in the Almohad armies against their will after being captured, were not changed.

I will limit myself to two examples on this issue, where chroniclers not only mention the name, but also provide information worthy of consideration:

[14]The bibliography on slavery in Islam is extensive. On military slaves, see Lewis, *Race and Slavery*; Pipes, *Slave Soldiers*; Gordon, *Slavery*; Ibn ʿĀm, *al-Ḥaḍāra al-Islāmiyya*. On slavery in general, see the monographic issue of the magazine *al-Qanṭara*, "Esclavitud e Islam," 28, no. 2 (2007).

- The *Bayān* says that Don Lope, the leader of the Christians [*qā'id al-naṣārā*], had recently arrived from al-Andalus [660/1261]. He did not achieve his purpose and asked only for his daily wages. The Almohad *emir* al-Murtaḍā sentenced him to death in Marrakesh. The chronicle further notes that the Christians under his command did not speak Arabic, and had an interpreter.[15]
- Several sources mention the following episode in different versions, though only one notes something which seems to be of particular significance: when the Marīnid *emir* Abū Bakr captured Fez in 646/1248, he asked those members of the Almohad armies that were not Almohads, in other words those serving the dynasty, to stay. These included a group of some 200 Christians, sent by a *qā'id* known as Shadīd (on other occasions he appears alongside the *qā'id* Zunnār). The people of Fez decided to betray the Marīnids and side with the Almohad *emir* al-Murtaḍā. They then called Shadīd and told him to kill the Marīnids' representative in the city. According to the version of al-Nāṣirī (whose original source is unknown) the Christian *qā'id* agreed [*wa-kāna mīlu-hu ilā al-muwaḥḥidīn wa-hawā-hu ma'a-hum li-kawni-hi ṣanī'ati-him*] "because he was inclined towards the Almohads as one of their protégés [*ṣanī'a*]"[16]

Lastly, the term *'ilj –'ulūj*, on which I have produced several other studies,[17] alludes pejoratively to any Christian or to any individual deemed to be a barbarian or uncivilised from an Arab-Islamic perspective. This term was also commonly used by North African dynasties throughout the eleventh to sixteenth centuries to refer to Christian captives that fulfilled roles as protégés, personal servants, courtiers, troops and military commanders. The term is especially found in three different contexts that will be dealt with below: (1) the procurement of Christian captives; (2) servants or protégés of *emirs* or caliphs (in these cases the term usually denotes possession by using an *iḍāfa* construction, a possessive pronoun or the preposition *li*);[18] and (3) the well-known man-at-arms of the borderlands, Giraldo sem Pavor.

(1) *Taking of Christian captives*. Many chronicles relate border raids and attacks on fortresses in the Iberian Peninsula during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in which the Muslims obtained large numbers of Christian captives ['*ulūj*].[19]
(2) *Servants or protégés of emirs or caliphs.* As Ferhat observes, the Almohad sovereigns' servants consisted of several categories of '*abīd* [slaves], whose exact functions are unknown.[20] The few passages that make explicit reference to Christian slaves, or slaves of Christian origin, deal with the Almohad *emir*

[15]Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 428–9.
[16]Al-Nāṣirī, *al-Istiqṣā',* III: 15. See also Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 396; and Ibn Abī Zar' al-Fāsī, *Rawḍ ar-Qirṭās*, 294.
[17]Lapiedra, *Cómo los musulmanes*, 189–247; "Giraldo sem Pavor," 148–9; and "'Ulūğ, rūm," 108–10.
[18]It has also been said that Sisnando Davidiz, confidant of King Alfonso VI of Castile, had been one of the slaves of Ibn 'Abbād of Seville [*kāna aḥad a'lāj ibn 'Abbād*] (Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhīra*, I: 166).
[19]For examples of Almohad attacks on the Iberian Peninsula and the taking of captives, see Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt, *al-Mann*, 296, 357, 503; Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 93, 138, 219; Ibn Abī Zar' al-Fāsī, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, 219; and al-Nāṣirī, *Kitāb al-Istiqsā*', II: 175.
[20]He explains how documents distinguish between '*abīd al-dār,* '*abīd al-makhzan* [storeroom or storehouse slaves] and the '*abīd raḥma*, among others. See "Lignages et individus," 691.

al-Rashīd. Ibn ʿIdhārī mentions the killing of a person of Christian slave origin, one of al-Rashīd's protégés[21] and later on cites his pages, protégés and Christian slaves [*fityānu-hu wa-khaṣṣātu-hu wa-ʿulūju-hu*].[22]

(3) *Giraldo sem Pavor*. This individual, so vilified by the Almohad chronicler Ibn Sāḥib as-Ṣalā,[23] was Galician-Portuguese [*jillīqī*] and was taken captive during a battle by the Almohads. His great military talent allowed him to rise through the ranks of the Almohad army and to make a pact of loyalty to the Almohads, which was subsequently broken after he sided with the King of Portugal. The constant use of the term *ʿilj* to refer to him and his historical profile point to the fact that he must have been a slave.[24] However, Huici Miranda places him in the group he calls the "rootless", a term that was subsequently used by other researchers.

Other historical characters with the same captive/slave profile that rose to important positions in their new environment are the *qāʾid* of Catalan origin, Reverter, under the Almoravids; Riḍwān, tutor and vizier to Muḥammad IV, Naṣrid king of Granada;[25] and Hilāl al-Catalānī, a slave at the Naṣrid court given as a child to the sultan of the Banū ʿAbd al-Wād, ʿUthmān Ibn Yaghmurāsan, and who was raised with his son, Abū Tāshfīn. He was the favourite and became vizier when Abū Tāshfīn rose to power.[26]

Several now-classic studies on Christians in the Maghreb consider that the Christians in the Almoravid army were mainly slaves, while those in the Almohad military, especially from the reign of the Caliph al-Maʾmūn, were freemen.[27] This idea has once again been taken up in more recent studies, by García Fitz, who only deals with Christian mercenaries or black slaves, and by García Sanjuán, according to whom "the clearest and most reliable sources, from the Almohad period onwards, do not suggest that Christian knights and contingents were in the Maghreb against their will as a result of deportation or captivity."[28] This idea does not seem to be historically credible for a number of reasons. There is information in historical sources

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[21]Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 327.

[22]Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 345. In the much documented case of the destruction of the church of Marrakesh in 1231 by Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq and its reconstruction by the caliph al-Maʾmūn, this term does not appear but, as pointed out by Fromherz, "Apparently the insurrectionists were concerned about the growing influence of the Christian slaves, merchants and mercenaries" ("North Africa," 50).

[23]Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Ṣalāt, *al-Mann*, 372–98, 526–7.

[24]Another similar case can be found in al-Marrākushī, *Muʿjib*, 199, which deals with the conflicts between Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq Ibn Gāniya of Majorca, a supporter of the Almohads, and one of his brothers, and mentions "one of his father's Christian slaves – *ʿilj min ʿulūj abī-hi-*, named Najjāḥ, who had not broken the pact nor tested loyalties" (Lapiedra, "Giraldo sem Pavor," 152).

[25]"He was of Christian origin [*rūmī al-aṣl*]; his family was from Castile on his father's side and from Barcelona on his mother's side. He was taken captive by the Granadans, brought to Granada and educated in Islam, where he entered service in the palace" (Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa*, I: 507).

[26]Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, VII: 104; Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 474–86.

[27]Alemany, "Milicias cristianas," 133–4; Cénival, "L'église chrétienne," 73; Mesnage, *Le christianisme en Afrique*.

[28]García Sanjuán, "Mercenarios cristianos," 441: an opinion shared by Hopkins, *Medieval Muslim Government*, 54–5, 75–6; Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, 73; and García Fitz, *Las Navas de Tolosa*, 285–7, 302, 317.

on the existence of Christian slaves serving in the Muslim military from the ninth century onwards. In al-Andalus, the Umayyad *emir* al-Ḥakam I purchased a large number of slaves,[29] and the monarchs of several Taifa Kingdoms also had Christian slaves.[30] The first to purchase Christian slaves and use them in the Maghreb was Yūsuf Ibn Tāshfīn, the first Almoravid *emir*.[31] From then on, all of the Maghrebi dynasties were strengthened by Christian contingents of slave origin.[32] The Almohads were no exception. As well as male slaves, explicit mention is made of the mothers of Almohad *emirs* that were *rūm* [Christians] or Abyssinians, from the two main sources of slaves for the Muslim governments of al-Andalus and the Maghreb: the Christian kingdoms of the northern Iberian Peninsula – including the islands – and Sub-Saharan Africa.

On the other hand, it can be said that the inner circles of the leaders of the Almohads and other dynasties contained more slaves than mercenaries. This intimacy is expressed in terms such as *baṭāna* [retinue, entourage], *dā'ira* [circle], *ḥāshiya* [entourage, suite, servants], *khāṣṣa* [entourage], *ʿabīd al-dār* [home slaves], and *ṣanīʿa* [protégé]. The prominence of mercenaries or freemen during the Almohad period could be explained by the fact that many slaves went more unnoticed than before and that serving as a mercenary for the North African dynasties had become a viable career option in the Christian kingdoms from the twelfth century.

It should not be forgotten, as Fromherz points out, that "the Almohad navy was one of the greatest Muslim fleets ever created. This unchallenged control of the seas gave the Almohads access to and control of western Mediterranean markets, trade and taxation."[33] This dominion over trade went hand in hand with privateering and piracy. Although there is only scant information on the issue, a useful example is provided by Ibn Khaldūn on the large number of Christian captives in Béjaïa and the surrounding

[29]Lafuente Alcántara, *Akhbār majmūʿa*, 109; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, 27; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fʾīʾl-Taʾrīkh*, V: 172.

[30]The ʿAbbādids of Seville, see note 18; the Hūdids of Zaragoza (Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhīra*, III: 898); the Zīrīds of Granada (ʿAbd Allāh ibn Buluggīn, *Kitāb al-Tibyān*, 151).

[31]Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, IV: 23; *al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya*, 25. In the opinion of Hopkins, "[…] it is reasonable to suppose that these contingents of Rūm were formed from bought slaves, with the possible addition of prisoners of war" (*Medieval Muslim Government*, 75–6). Hopkins also mentions an interesting piece of information on Ibn Ṣaghīr, a chronicler of the Rustumids at Tāhart, according to whom the *khāṣṣa* or entourage of the *emir* Abū Bakr Ibn Aflāḥ was composed of Christians [*masīḥīyyūn*] and Rustumids (*Medieval Muslim Government*, 67). While a single piece of information does not allow us to draw conclusions, it might be supposed that the use of Christians in armies and personal guards followed the same pattern in al-Andalus and the Maghreb from the ninth century.

[32]According to Ibn al-Khaṭīb, ʿUbayd Allāh, the first Fāṭimid caliph, took as slaves [*ʿabīd*] 12,000 *mamlūk* [slave] *rūm* and *ḥabashī* or Abyssinians (Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl*, III: 51). Al-Nuwayrī mentions in the *Kāmil* that the caliph al-Muʿizz bought slaves [*ʿabīd*] and collected 30,000 *mamlūks*, though he does not specify their origin; as cited in Idris, *La Berbérie orientale*, II: 530 and I: 211. The Zīrīds (ninth–twelfth centuries) bought slaves and Christian slaves rose to influential positions at their court: see Idris, *La Berbérie*, I: 227–8, II: 575, 685; on Christian slaves of the Banū ʿAbd al-Wād at Tlemcen, see Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 150, 474, 514–15. Examples of Christian slaves under the Marīnids can be found in Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 353; Ibn Abī Zarʿ al-Fāsī, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, 289, 314–15, 349, 355; under the Ḥafṣids in Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 396; and the Naṣrids, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl*, 297–; and Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa*, I: 507, 540, in. In fact, there are references to Christian slaves in Morocco and Algeria, though used principally in construction or as artisans, up to the eighteenth century. See Lapiedra "Piratas, corsarios," 83–4.

[33]Fromherz, "North Africa," 44 and 48. See also Idris, *La Berbérie orientale*, II: 685.

area in the thirteenth century, as a result of Muslim privateering in the area;[34] we know less of the daily process of development under the Almohads and other North African dynasties during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Lastly, the Arabic texts do not make any distinction between free troops or mercenaries. As pointed out by Huici Miranda, "The Bayān has nothing to say about the "rootless" Christians that served in the Almohad army."[35] Neither do the chronicles distinguish between high born individuals and their troops; a relevant example is provided by the case of Pedro Fernández de Castro, who appears in the *Bayān* as "the friend of the Muslims" [*muwālī li-l-muslimīn*],[36] and people of less noble ancestry. It may only be possible to relate the term *farkhān*, as we shall see, to the concept of "exiled" or "rootless" transmitted by the Christian sources.

Geographical origin

The main origins here are Catalonia, Galicia, Portugal, and – to a lesser extent – Castile. All hailed from frontier lands where slaves were traditionally acquired, similar to the way in which the frontiers of Central Asia provided the eastern dynasties with Turkish slaves. Another important issue to be taken into consideration, however, and one about which there is little information and which is highly ideologically charged, is the role of the so-called Mozarabs – Christian *dhimmīs* [protected groups] – in the structure of the armies of the North African states, especially that of the Almoravids and to a lesser degree, of the Almohads. The few precise descriptions of Christians in the armies and militias of these dynasties talk of captives taken outside al-Andalus or at sea, of contingents that different Almohad rulers sought out in the peninsula or those sent by a Christian king. However, under no circumstances do they mention a specific Andalusi origin that could relate to *dhimmīs*, in relation to any group of Christians serving in the defence of the Muslim states of the Maghreb. It is important to remember, on the one hand, that Arabic sources make only scant reference to protected Christians in *dār al-islām* [Islamic territories] and, on the other, the minimal presence of Mozarabs in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in the view of most researchers on the subject.

In fact, apart from the well-known and previously mentioned texts from the Almoravid period on the expulsion from Granada to the Maghreb of Christian troops who broke the pact due to their support for and siding with Alfonso I the Battler,[37] I have only been able to find two references in Muslim and Christian sources to the existence of Mozarabs in the Christian troops of the Maghreb and their subsequent return to the peninsula. One is from the *Chronica Adephonsi Imperatori*, while the other is from a passage containing the term "farfanes".

The anonymous Latin source, *Chronica Adephonsi Imperatori* or Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso VII which seems to have been written in the first half of the twelfth century, provides specific information – often quoted in studies focusing on the

[34]Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, VI: 399–400. The role of thirteenth-century missionaries from different religious orders and nationalities in organising the ransoms paid for Christian slaves in the Maghreb must also be taken into account. See Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 106–7.
[35]Huici Miranda, *Colección de crónicas árabes, Los almohades*, I: 189.
[36]Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 220.
[37]See Lagardère, "Communautés mozarabes;" Serrano, "Dos fetuas;" and Lapiedra, *Cómo los musulmanes*, 304–7.

Mozarabs – on the Almoravid policy of capturing and transporting a large number of Christians, including Mozarabs, to the Maghreb.[38] Among the numerous and detailed passages that state that Christian captives were transported to North Africa by the Almoravids, there are three that reveal, according to the Latin texts, a Mozarab presence in the Almoravid policy of reinforcing their troops with Christians in North Africa in order to fight the Almohads. These same sources say that this policy was not continued under the Almohads.

> (1) King Tashfin marched to the other side of the sea to the city called Marrakesh, to the house of his father, King Ali [*in domum patris sui Regis Ali*] and took with him many Christians known as Mozarabs, who had lived in the lands of the Mohammedans since distant times. And he also took with him all the captives he found in his domains and put them in his cities and castles along with the other Christian captives near to the peoples known as *muzmutos* [Almohads], which were attacking the lands of the *moabitas* [Almoravids].[39]

> (2) In the same year as God achieved the mentioned victory in Cordoba, the people commonly known as *muzmutos* arrived from Africa […] and established themselves in [the cities] killing their nobles, the Christians known as Mozarabs and the Jews that had lived there since ancient times and seized their women, houses and riches.[40]

> (3) In this period, thousands of Christian knights and infantrymen [*multa milia militum et peditum Christianorum*] crossed the sea and arrived at Toledo in the company of their bishop and many of their clerics that had belonged to the palace of King Ali and his son Tashfin [*qui fuerant de domo regis Ali et filii eius Texufini*].[41]

In relation to this last and most frequently quoted passage, I would like to comment on two issues. First, the Latin text does not necessarily allow us to deduce that Mozarabs were among those who returned to Toledo, or that these consisted solely of Mozarabs.[42] The Almoravids carried out a multitude of raids and attacks on the Toledo border, taking a large number of captives. The fact that the Latin source mentions troops does not necessarily imply that they were mercenaries, and demonstrates that troops of slave origin were also allowed access to ecclesiastical infrastructure. Secondly, the phrase used to refer to these Christians [*domo regis Ali*] is very similar to the Arabic expression *ahl dār Tāshfīn* [the people of the house of *Tāshfīn*], alluded to during the Almohad siege of Oran. Ibn ʿIdhārī describes them as some 300 men, including the *rūm* and their families, servants and entourage or troops. They also included Bashīr al-Rūmī, also named *al-ʿilj*, a term that would seem to point to his slave origin. There are also references to the *ahl al-dār* of other Almohad rulers, such as the interesting story of the people of the house of the Almohad *emir* al-Rashīd,

[38]Maya Sánchez, *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*; and Lipskey, "Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor."
[39]Maya Sánchez, *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, 216, paragraph 45; and Lipskey, "Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor," 140. It is odd that the *Crónica de Alfonso VII*, despite numerous mentions of the Almoravid policy of the systematic transport of Christians to the Maghreb, should be favourable to the Almoravids. Christians were favoured and given support at the Almoravid court in Marrakesh. This image contrasts with the usual portrayal of the Almohads.
[40]Maya Sánchez, *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, 247–8, paragraph 109; and Lipskey, "Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor," 204.
[41]Maya Sánchez, *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, 248, paragraph 111; and Lipskey, "Chronicle of Alfonso the Emperor," 205.

which included several slaves that were charged with killing one of his political opponents.[43] My impression is that these inner circles so close to the corridors of power must have been first and foremost of slave origin, whether Mozarabs or not, and more loyal followers of their masters than the soldiers of fortune.

The second mention is related to the "farfanes". *Farkhān* is an imprecise term. Aguilar gives it the meaning of "young", equivalent to *fatā*.[44] However, I think it's more plausible that its meaning be closer to the term *ʿulūj*, another pejorative term used to refer to Christians. As noted by Maíllo in his article on the farfanes, it has the meaning of bastard, man of no ancestry, lowly and fainthearted.[45] Several classical Arabic dictionaries define the term as "*al-rajul al-dhalīl al-maṭrūd*" [a villainous, outlawed or exiled man]. In the Arab-Islamic chronicles, the term also appears in the memoirs of al-Baydhaq in reference to the 350 men belonging to the *'ilj* Giraldo sem Pavor,[46] as well as in a single passage in the *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās* in relation to the destruction of the church and massacre of the Jews and farfanes of Marrakesh in 629/1231–1232 by the Almohad Yaḥyā.[47] That is, the term is used in Almohad texts and contexts. Oddly, the same passage quoted by the late Moroccan chronicler al-Nāṣirī, removes the reference to the farfanes, probably because the word had lost all meaning for him.[48] As noted in his study on this group, Maíllo found only one mention in Christian sources with a pejorative meaning, and the term reappears in the fifteenth century in the *Crónica del Halconero de Juan II*. Its author, Carrillo de Huete, states that while King Juan II was at Valladolid in 1432 "there arrived to the King invaders from Tunis, Christians known there as farfanes" with the message that the King of Tunis would not ally himself with the Naṣrids against the King of Castile.[49] In his work dating from 1541 quoted above, Barrantes Maldonado mentions the different types of Christians that in the fourteenth century were tied in some way to the Marīnids: mercenaries, slaves and others that lived in Fez and maintained their own law after the Moors conquered Spain [*Hespaña*], and those known as farfanes. This deep rootedness is corroborated in the *Anales eclesiásticos* of Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga (1795) which mentions the *farfán* Sancho Rodríguez who, in 1386 petitioned

[42]Neither do the Arabic chronicles provide any evidence supporting their status as Mozarabs. According to the version of *Ḥulal*, which uses Ibn al-Yasaʿ (chronicler of the Almoravids) as its source, in 541/1147, the Christian soldiers [*jaysh al-rūm*] inside Marrakesh, requested the *amān* [safety, security, protection] of the Almoravid caliph ʿAbd al-Muʾmin, who after granting it, opened one of the gates of the city, betraying the Almoravids (*al-Ḥulal*, 138; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fʾīʾl-Taʾrīkh*, 11 vols). I have found no mention of the return of thousands of Christian troops from Marrakesh to the Iberian Peninsula, especially to Toledo in the work of Ibn al-Athīr. Years later, the same caliph, after taking Mahdia from the Normans in 1159, granted *amān* to the Christians there [*al-naṣārā al-ladhī bi-hā*], who left the city for Sicily (al-Marrākushī, *al-Muʿjib*, 163). It is important to remember that the coastal city of Mahdia was considered by the Pisans and Genovese to be a nest of pirates filled with Christian captives (see Idris, *La Berbérie orientale*, I: 286–8). Other cases of the "return" of troops in the service of the Maghrebi dynasties to their places of origin are those of the slaves and soldiers of the Banū Gāniya of Majorca in 1185, mentioned above.

[43]Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, 313–15.

[44]Aguilar, "Instituciones militares," 207.

[45]Maíllo, "Precisiones para la historia," 266–7.

[46]Al-Baydhaq, "Les memoires d'al-Baydhaq," 127, 216.

[47]Ibn Abī Zarʿ al-Fāsī, *al-Anīs al-Muṭrib bi-Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, 253. Molénat defines them as "European mercenaries" (see "L'organisation militaire," 554).

[48]Al-Nāṣirī, *al-Istiqṣā',* II: 232.

[49]Maíllo, "Precisiones para la historia," 268.

King John I to request that the King of Morocco give them permission to move from Fez to Seville. Already in this context, they are related to the lineage of the Goths.[50]

A subject as complex as the idealisation of the Mozarabs is too lengthy to analyse here. It is worth pointing out, however, that the identification of Mozarabs and farfanes with the Goths is a historical reconstruction, Neo-Gothicism, represented in the work of historians Lucas de Tuy in his *Chronicon mundi* and, especially by Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, Archbishop of Toledo from 1209, in his well-known work *De rebus hispaniae*, written during the reign of Fernando III of Castile (1217–52).[51]

Cultural and religious origin

As mentioned in the previously cited text on the Christians living in Majorca under the anti-Almohad government of the Banū Gāniya, Christians in the Muslim armies and personal guards had the option to keep their original religion or convert to Islam. It seems that many of them remained Christians. Obviously, conversion was more commonplace among individuals who had grown up as children or youths in Muslim lands than mercenaries who had been raised in a Latin-Christian environment. However, the object of study here is limited to Christians rather than converts to Islam.

It seems purely logical that the existence of those who chose to remain Christians in the most important urban centres, such as Marrakesh, Fez, Tunis, Béjaïa, Oran or Tlemcen, including those in the inner circles of the emirs, as well as merchants living predominantly in coastal cities, would necessitate the presence of specific religious infrastructure such as churches, bishops and priests. Christian missionary activity in the Maghreb directed by the Papacy and inextricably linked to the ideology of the Crusades is well documented.[52] According to Ferreiro Alemparte in his study on the Normans and crusaders on the coasts of the Iberian Peninsula, the earliest reference to missionary activity in Morocco appears in a short account of a journey, occurring in 1217, by a Frisian crusader whose ship was heading from northern Europe to the Holy Land through the Straits of Gibraltar. It recounts a Christian miracle in which "the king [of Morocco] was fearful and the Christians strengthened […], from that day the sacrifice of the mass was held in public and churches were built in the city of Morocco".[53] The same Ferreiro cites a letter from Pope Honorius III (1216–27) to the Almohad caliph Abū Ya'qūb delivered by a father of the hospitable order in which he requested that Christians living under his rule be allowed to practise their law [*ut existentes in terra sua cristianos uti lege sua libere permitteret* …].[54] Furthermore, it is important to mention the exchange of letters that took place in 648/1250 between Pope Innocent IV (1243–54) and the Almohad emirs al-Sa'īd (second son of al-Ma'mūn and brother of al-Rashīd) and his successor al-Murtaḍā, quoted by Huici Miranda in his *Historia política*.[55] This correspondence reveals the places of residence of the Christian militias in the mid-thirteenth century – Marrakesh, Tunis, Béjaïa and Ceuta – as well as the existence of ecclesiastical structures to sustain them.[56]

[50]Quoted in Maíllo, "Precisiones para la historia," 275.
[51]Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*; Lapiedra, "'Ulūğ, rūm," 122–7.
[52]See Linehan, *The Spanish Church*; and Logan, *A History of the Church.*
[53]Ferreiro Alemparte, *Arribadas de normandos*, 96–7/Latin text, 149.
[54]Ferreiro Alemparte, *Arribadas de normandos*, 150.
[55]Huici Miranda, *Historia política del imperio almohade*, II: 545–7. See also Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 98, n. 5, 160; Fromherz, "North Africa," 49–50.
[56]Tisserant and Wiet, "Une lettre."

Neither these letters nor the brief Latin quote make any mention of captives or slaves. Both the Latin and Arabic texts seem to refer only to mercenaries [*al-naṣārā al-mustakhdimīn bi-bilād al-muwaḥḥidīn/Christianos in illis partibus degentes a tuo servitio*].[57] Similarly, the crusader's short account refers to Ceuta as a place "which received Christian mercenaries that had trading relations with Africa, especially Genovese and Pisans";[58] and Batlle deals with the close relationship between merchants and mercenary knights in Tunis.[59] However, subsequent information, especially in relation to the exchange of captives between states on both sides of the Mediterranean corroborates the existence of a large number of Christian slaves not only in the armed forces, but also in many different areas of activity. To finish, one last quote, though clearly exaggerated, from a fragment of a letter written in 1319 by Abū Tāshfīn, Sultan of Tlemcen, to Jaime II of Aragon, testifies to the importance of Christian slave-captives in Maghrebi governments:

> In relation to your request to free all the captives in our domain, this is not possible, just as it would not be so if we were to ask you to liberate the Muslim captives in your country; as you must know, in our lands captives undertake all activities and most are artisans in different professions.
>
> Should you request the liberation of five or six, which is the only number we could dispense with under present circumstances, we would grant your request and satisfy your wishes; but to free all is a thing of great difficulty, because places would be depopulated and the necessary functioning of different professions would be brought to a halt.[60]

Conclusions

In relation to Christians, the Almohads followed the same policies as previous dynasties (Zīrids, Almoravids) and successor dynasties (Naṣrids, Marīnids, ʿAbd al-Wādids, Ḥafṣids): the systematic use of Christians in the enormous cosmopolitan armies and as a protective barrier surrounding the *emir*, as advisors, servants and domestic staff in the innermost circles of confidants. Within the various points of origin of Christians in the Almohad guards, troops and armies, it is important to highlight the role of the slaves because, owing to their greater acculturation within the Muslim milieu, which in many cases led to conversion, they go more unnoticed and are frequently hard to recognise. The Christian components of the armies, whatever their origin, received wages, owned property, founded families and must have enjoyed sufficient infrastructure to enable them to continue practising the basic rites of their religion. Arab-Islamic discourse hardly distinguishes between different types of Christians. From a Muslim perspective, this information is simply not relevant. However, they do note Christians for their military courage and their important role in the intrigues and vicissitudes of power between political opponents in the Maghreb.

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[57]Tisserant and Wiet, "Une lettre," 32 Arabic text/52, n. 3 Latin text.
[58]Ferreiro Alemparte, *Arribadas de normandos*, 202.
[59]Batlle, "Noticias sobre la milicia cristiana," 129.
[60]"*Carta de 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Mūsā ibn 'Utmān de Tremecén a Jaime II*," in Alarcón Santón and García de Linares, *Los documentos árabes*, 185, quoted in Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane*, 474.

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