Scoundrels, Dogs and Heathens: Christian Mercenaries in the Almohad Caliphate, 1121-1269

by Carl Churchill

Abstract

This article examines the complex phenomena of the Farfan, a Christian knight serving a Muslim ruler during the religious wars of 13th century Iberia. More specifically, it breaks down the development of Christian mercenary armies within the Almohad Caliphate of the late 12th, early 13th century as it relates to the Caliphates loss of political power in the region. Using primarily Islamic sources this article traces the history of the Caliphate followed by brief discussions on the religious nature of the Almohad movement, followed by the military structure of Maghrebi states of the period, with special focus on the distinction between a 'slave-soldier', and a mercenary. This article concludes that the massive increase in Christian military involvement in the Caliphates last years is a direct consequence of political and military failures over the course of Almohad rule in Iberia and the Maghreb.

In 1173, Moroccan officials captured, tried, and executed the Portuguese knight Geraldo Geraldes. A warrior of the Reconquista, Geraldo had a litany of conquered cities to his name, from Badajoz and Evora in the north to raids on Beja deep in the Islamic Algarve.[1] "The dog [Gerald]….[who]entered the city and fought whom they found and robbed them and captured them", sneered one Muslim chronicler.[2] At the head of a small private army, he carved out a sizable personal fiefdom in western Iberia, large enough to lead to a small war between Leon and Castile over who should claim it.[3] His nickname matched his career: *Sem Pavor*¸ "without fear". Yet he would die a servant of not a Christian king, but a Muslim one—Ya'qūb Yūsuf of the Almohad Dynasty (1121 to 1269 CE).

Hated by the Muslims and revered by Christians, Geraldo spent the last years of his life ruling an estate in Morocco in the name of the Caliph Yūsuf I of the Almohad Caliphate. The fearsome raider of Christian Portugal had offered his services to the same Muslim ruler who he had been at war with for decades, and the Caliph had readily accepted. [4] Geraldo was only executed after attempting to double-cross the Caliph and plot with the king of Portugal for an invasion of the same land he had been given in Morocco. His crime was not choosing to serve a foreign ruler, but to betray that ruler after pledging his loyalties.

Medieval Iberia is full of such examples, which proves an intriguing phenomenon against the backdrop of what was one of the most bitter religious battlegrounds of the era. During the years after the arrival of Islamic armies to the peninsula until the final conquest of the emirate of Granada, the Christian kingdoms of Iberia waged the *Reconquista* to recapture Iberia from Muslim powers. Likewise, the various Muslim states of the region waged their own wars to expand, and then

[1] Harold Victor Livermore. *A New History of Portugal* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 63-65

[2] Julian Clemente Ramos, "La Extremadura Musulmana (1142-1248). Organización Defensiva Y Sociedad." *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, (Barcelona: Institución Milá y Fontanals, 1995), 653.

[3] James F. Powers, *A Society Organized for War: The Iberian Municipal Militias in the Central Middle Ages, 1000-1284*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 42.

[4] Hussein Fancy. *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 89.

preserve, their territories. Both sides extensively interacted with the other, and the presence of cross-faith mercenaries is simply one symptom of centuries of warfare and cultural exchange.

This paper argues that Geraldo's story was not as unusual as might be suspected. Like Geraldo, thousands of Christian warriors, known as *Farfanes* in the thirteenth century, crossed the lines of religion to ply their trade for foreign rulers, moving back across this frontier when it suited them. This article will explore the history of the Almohad state alongside their relationships with Christians, both inside and outside their territory. It will trace the changes in Almohad religious policy vis-à-vis Christian mercenaries and identify key dates that marked turning points in such policy as part of a selective narrative from the rise to the fall of the Caliphate. It will conclude that, while the Almohads began their rule with a strict puritanical approach that led to intense persecution of native Christians, as their political power waned they grew to rely more and more on foreign mass-recruited Christian mercenaries to prop up their ailing military. By the end of their tenure the Almohads would have closely resembled the previous Maghrebi dynasties they had replaced, with similar policies of alliance and coexistence with Christian powers. The Almohads were the exception to the rule in the religious relations of medieval Iberia.

This paper uses both Arabic and Latin sources written during the Almohads reign, and later sources from the 14th-15th centuries such as the *Rihla* (travelogue) of Ibn Jubayr, and the histories of Ibn 'Idhari, and Ibn Khaldūn. Due to the paucity of fully translated sources, I will also rely on excerpts pulled from Al-Maqqari and the nineteenth century scholar Al-Nāsiri. Latin sources will include the *Chronica Adephonsi Imperatori* (Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso VII), Ramon De Penyaforts Letters from Tunis, and the Chronicle of James I, King of Aragon.[5]

The Historiography of the Almohad Dynasty

Since the Almohad period itself, a long string of religious and politically motivated narratives have left a negative mark on Almohad history. In his *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire*, Allen J. Fromherz summarized the four key problems with Almohad historiography as limited sources, political bias on contemporary chronicles, lack of significant overlap between sources, and the development of mythic stories surrounding the Caliphate over time.[6]

The first historians to study the Almohads were medieval Islamic chroniclers like Ibn Khaldūn, Al-Maqqari, Al-Marrakushi and Ibn Al-Abbar. These medieval chroniclers were chiefly concerned with the geopolitical consequences of a Christian 'victory' in Iberia and saw the Almohads as a powerful but ultimately self-destructive dynasty that fell due to their own hubris and infighting. They lamented the actual fall of the Almohads but felt it pre-destined by their own failings. The actual treatment of Christians under the Almohads is a moot point for these writers, since it simply was irrelevant to their narratives.[7] In addition, there is a startling paucity of translations of important documents relating to the Almohads and even day-to-day life under them.

[5] This paper will use Arabic spelling like that from where the term is found according to the most recent scholarship, with vowel diacritics marked unless unknown. Some consonantal variations will be lost in transliteration, like the distinction between the standard [ت] and the emphatic [ط], which here will both be written as "t". The goal of the spelling here is to provide a compromise between clarity and accuracy, not to render the Arabic exactly as it would have been said, or even written in the period. For a more complete deconstruction of the most valuable sources in Almohad historiography, see: Eva Lapiedra Gutierrez, "Christian Participation in Almohad Armies and Personal Guards." *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, Vol 2, no. 2 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2010).

[6] Allen James Fromherz, *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 77.

[7] Ibn Khaldūn pioneered the concept of *'asabiyyah* (social cohesion) as an explanation for cyclical changes in history, blaming the Almohads for losing it gradually as they stagnated as a power.

This has made any holistic analysis that covers both sides functionally nonexistent as the histories of the Arab and Berber chroniclers remained untranslated for centuries. European historians, for their part, paid only lip service to the Almohads in their writings on the Reconquista.

After the medieval period, there was a dearth of significant Maghrebi research from western scholars until the French conquest of North Africa in the late 1800s, and the subsequent opening of Moroccan historical archives in the nineteenth century. The first comprehensive European history of Al-Andalus was Reinhart Dozy's *Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne, jusqu'à la conquête de l'Andalousie par les Almoravides, 711-1110* in 1861, which while groundbreaking, was marred by racially tinged anti-Arab bias.[8] There is little variation on the Eurocentric view of the Almohads, even during the colonial period. The French colonial regime in Morocco and Algeria produced many new translations of Moroccan documents, though with the intent of justifying their treatment of native peoples. Multiple histories by French authors like Charles-André Julien's *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord: Des origines à 1830* in 1931 and René Millet's *Les Almohades Histoire d'une dynastie berbère* in 1923 drew on these new translations to create comprehensive works, but few later authors capitalized on their work to produce more up to date research until the late twentieth century.[9] Like Dozy, French colonial studies of the Almohads reinforced contemporary ethno-racial hierarchies. For example, many scholars drew selective quotes from Ibn Khaldūn describing the supposed barbarity of black African peoples in Mauritania and Southern Morocco.[10] In this sense, the new works dealing with the Almohads were less concerned with providing an equitable look at the Caliphate or medieval Morocco in general but more to prop up a colonial narrative that required the alienization and barbarization of the native history. Specifically, the goal was to emphasize the 'Berberness' of Maghrebi peoples against the influence of both Islam and the Arabs, which was a prime strategy used by nineteenth century French colonial officials to break down pre-colonial national identities in the colonized Maghreb. The Almohads then became a byword for the corrupting effect of Islam on the Berbers and were pilloried for it.[11]

More significant changes appeared in the 1960s – 80s as part of a broader shift in Islamic studies towards a less religiously tinted and more equitable look at Islamic civilization. Rachel Arié's landmark works on Granada, the Nasrids and the history of Moorish Spain throughout the latter part of the twentieth century offered a more even-handed approach to the Almohads by focusing on the society of the Medieval Maghreb rather than a simple geopolitical timeline.[12]Arié's pioneering works on the social history of the Islamic West were followed up by a series of Spanish scholars, most notably Maribel Fierro, Eva Lapiedra Gutierrez, and Amira Bennison. These authors focused on the religious purges of the Almohads and their employment of Christian mercenaries. By doing so, as Bennison noted, historians "reassess[ed] the experience of Jews and Christians under the Almohads and question some previous historiographical assumptions."[13] The goal of these authors is to re-center the Almohads in the narrative of Al-Andalus and eliminate lingering colonial views on

[8] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 151.

[9] Pascal Buresi, and Hicham El Aallaoui. "Governing the Empire: Provincial Administration in the Almohad Caliphate (1224-1269)." *Studies in the History and Society of the Maghrib,* Vol. 3. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 18. doi:10.1163/9789004239715.

[10] Ibn Khaldūn, Franz Rosenthal, and N. J. Dawood. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). 117.

[11] Richard Serrano, *Against the Postcolonial: "francophone" Writers at the Ends of French Empire*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), 77.

[12] Albrecht Classen, *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms, Methods, Trends.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 4.

[13] Amira K. Bennison, and Maria Angeles Gallego. "Religious Minorities under the Almohads: An Introduction." Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies 2, no. 2 (2010): 143-54. doi:10.1080/17546559.2010.495288. 1.

the Berber dynasties of the Medieval Maghreb.[14] Many documents such as the *Kitab al-'Ibar* of Ibn Khaldūn remain untranslated, as well as much of Al-Nahiri and Ibn-Idhari, yet there have been significant strides among western academics on the study of Al-Andalus generally, and the Almohad dynasty in particular, towards a more equitable look at Maghrebi society. This is more in line with modern scholarship than antiquated colonial narratives. Still, while modern works on the Almohads have provided greater clarity on the dynasties politics, and especially the *farfanes*, there remains a shallow pool of recent scholarship that can adequately synthesize period primary documents with modern practices in Islamic scholarship (there is still significant debate for instance, on the spelling of Arabic terms between period writing, Modern Standard Arabic, Classical Arabic, and regional dialects).[15] Future work might help elucidate the true nature of the Almohads complex synthesis of Islamic doctrine, quasi-imperial state bureaucracy and tribal law. Then this could also lead towards new translations of vital works in Islamic scholarship, as yet restricted from western scholars.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Pascal and Aallaoui, 88.

The Background of Al-Andalus and the Islamic West

The history of Islamic Spain (known to its own inhabitants as *Al-Andalus*) began in April, 711 CE when a force of approximately 12,000 Berber and Arab warriors under the Umayyad commander Tāriq ibn Ziyād landed on the shores of southern Spain near *Jabal Tāriq* (Gibraltar). Following Tāriq's victory over the local Visigothic armies, Islamic armies took over all of Iberia, stopping only at the Pyrenees and Asturias. By the tenth century, Islamic states subsumed all pre-Islamic governments of Iberia except for the far north and northwest, and the native Christian Hispano-Roman population found itself part of the greater Islamic world. Over the next millennia, the native population fragmented into different groups as Islamic culture, language, and religion suffused Iberia. A number of these groups are worth further examination. First were the Mozárabs, derived from the Arabic *musta'rib*, "Arabized".[16] These were the native Hispano-Romans who retained their Christian faith under Muslim rulers.[17] They spoke Arabic, wore Arab clothing, and lived under Andalusi law.[18] The second group were Christians who lived in the unconquered kingdoms to the north—Castile, Aragon, Portugal, Navarre, Leon and Galicia. Third were the Jews who had lived in Iberia as well as in the Maghreb and had developed a unique culture unto themselves over many centuries.[19] Lastly was the Muslim population, often called Moors in the Christian texts. While Moor is not a term used by those labelled as such, it was used in the twelfth century to mean any Arabs, Berbers, or Andalusians of sufficiently 'Islamic' appearance in the eyes of Christian chronicles.[20] These groups all interacted in a dense, closely knit social structure from the birth of Al-Andalus through the eleventh century prior to the Almohad conquest.

The religious situation in Andalusia before the Almohads has been called by some *la Convivencia*, or "The Coexistence". Though scholars still dispute the extent of this coexistence, in its ideal form *Convivencia* was a delicate triangle of religious interaction that fostered mutual harmony among the three religious groups.[21] One can see this *Convivencia* strongest when we examine the legal status of the different faiths in Iberia during these centuries. At the top of society were Muslims, who lived under laws that guaranteed their superiority and gave them greater legal freedoms and economic preferences. Yet not all Muslims were equal, with Arabs having a preferred status over Berbers or those with mixed heritage.[22] Next were the *dhimmī* the "Protected Persons," or what is

[16] There is confusion around the actual use of the term Mozarab. For further reading see: Thomas E. Burman, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, C. 1050-1200*. (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

[17] There are also the *muwalladun*, the mixed-race Muslims of Al-Andalus drawn from the stock of the native Iberians and the new Maghrebi migrants. However, they are generally a much less defined ethnolinguistic group than the mozarabs, Arabs or Berbers, usually affiliating themselves with Andalusian Arab identity than one of their own.

[18] Many mozarabs are recorded as even beginning Christian prayer with the Arabic invocation "*Bismillah Al-rahman Al-rahim*". This is a rendering of the Latin, "*in nomine domini nostril Iesu Christi…"*

[19] Unfortunately, they will receive inadequate service in this article, but to vastly summarize their presence in medieval Iberia; they were present as a notable long-standing minority in both Islamic and Christian states, and suffered cases of persecution, and tolerance in both.

[20] Leonard P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain: 1250 to 1500*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.

Harvey also relates variations of the term *moro*, or *mouro* in Portuguese. Alternatives include *mourisco, muçulmano,* as well as *muhummaden*. It was common for chroniclers on both sides to label the other by their affiliation with the chosen prophet of that faith. For more on European perceptions of Islam see Michelina Di Cesare, *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medieval Latin Literature a Repertory*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012.

[21] James L. Heft, "The Necessity of Inter-Faith Diplomacy: The Catholic/Muslim Dialogue." Lecture.

[22] Being able to trace one's heritage to either the family of Muhammad (a *sayyid*) or to a prestigious Arab tribe granted considerable social benefits.

described in the Qur'an as the *'Ahl al-Kitāb*, "People of the Book" (Christians and Jews).[23] While restricted legally in some regards, believers of the other Abrahamic faiths were accorded protection in Al-Andalus in exchange for a faith tax called the *jizya*.[24] Lastly, pagans or polytheists (*mushrikūn*), mostly Sahelian Africans or Berbers, had few rights and privileges, and were persecuted by the Muslim majority.[25]

The Almohads were not among these Andalusi socioethnic classes, but Maghrebi Berbers from the south. Originating among the Masmuda confederacy of the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, the Almohads were founded by the cleric Ibn Tumart who blended natural charisma and radical Sunni theology. Their armies met the then-current rulers of Al-Andalus, the Almoravids, another Berber dynasty based out of the Ṣanhaja tribes to the west and south.[26] The Almohads eventually prevailed, taking the Almoravid capital at Marrakesh in 1147. It was under the rule of the first proper Almohad caliph, Abd Al-Mu'min that the Almohads dismantled the region's existing religious blend.

The Almohads policy towards Christians, as well as all non-Almohads in general, was built on a strict interpretation of Islamic monotheism. Ibn Tumart laid this out in the Almohad creed (or *'Aqīda*), a copy of which survives from a later period, which centers on the concept of "*Tawḥīd*" (oneness) of God.[27] He cited a hadīth that stated, "Islam is according to five things: That God is One, performing prayer, giving alms, fasting during Ramadan and the pilgrimage" .[28,29] This *'Aqīda* also stated firmly that the Divine is "without delimitation, the Inward without particularization, existing in an absolute existence without similarity or modality."[30] Since God was of only a singular essence, there could be no other correct faiths. Dubbed Unitarianism, which in Arabic is the root of the Almohad moniker "*Al-Muwaḥḥidūn*" ("those who believe in the Oneness of God"), the *'Aqida* interpreted the other peoples of the book as willful deviancy from the undeniable, divine truth,[31,32] Consequently, the Almohads gradually expelled the region's Jews and Christians, first from the

[23] *Dhimmi* varies regionally according to the faith of the local population. In Persia it included Zoroastrians, while in parts of India it was applied to Hindus and Buddhists.

[24] The original logic behind the *jizya* being it was a compensation for *dhimmī* not having to either give *Zakat* (alms) or serve in the communal militia.

[25] There are also heretics, apostates, and atheists, *kāfir*, *murtadd*, and *Dahriya*, respectively. It should be noted that by the time of the Almohads and especially under the Almoravids there was still a significant number of Berber tribes who remained unconverted or had fused Islam with their native beliefs to an extent that it was seen as heretically deviant by purer adherents to the faith. Specifically, one can recall the example of the Barghawāṭa, who were finally purged by the Almohads in 1149.

[26] Almoravid is a Latinization from the terms *Al-Murābiṭūn / Imṛabḍen*, "those who are ready for battle at a fortress (*ribaṭ*)". They were also known as the *Al-Mulathimun*, the "veiled ones", for their distinctive shrouded turbans, still worn by the Tuareg today as the *Tagelmust*.

[27] Olivia Remie Constable, comp. *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). 190-97.

[28] Ibid., 191.

[29] A *ḥadīth* is a 'report' or statement about the life or works of Muhammad that exists alongside the Quran proper.

[30] Constable, 194.

[31] Specifically, in context this was an accusation of greater shirk, *Shirke-Al-Akbar* i.e. stating that God has a partner. The Almoravids tended towards anthropomorphizing the nature of God, which Ibn Tumart considered as polytheism.

[32] The proper dynastic name for the Almohads is Mu'minid, after the first caliph, but both modern scholars and contemporary sources treat the name for the religious movement as equivalent to the political entity.

Maghreb, and then where they could in Al-Andalus.[33,34*] The result of this was a systematic, and climactic sweep of the entire Almohad empire of non-Muslims, swelling the ranks of the *ummah,* and forcing entire communities into foreign kingdoms.[35] Whatever semblance of a true, indigenous "C*onvivencia*" like had existed was for the moment, greatly degraded.

By the reign of the third Almohad Caliph, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb Al-Manṣūr, (1184 – 1199), the messianic zeal of the Almohads reached maximal intensity. This led to war with the Christians in the Iberian Peninsula escalating to catastrophic proportions, and the language used by Almohad state propaganda intensified in parallel. Al-Mansur's campaign began following the death of his father in a siege of Santarém in Portugal in 1184 after which he spent much of his reign alternating between raising armies in Africa and using them in Iberia. Coins minted during his reign listed him as *Rāshidūn* (orthodox, or conservative). According to contemporaries, his wars were more than *jihād*, they were *futūh*, the first conquests of Islam out of Arabia.[36] The Almohads became an imperial power, the new *Hijaz* of western Islam.[37] Abū Yūsuf inflicted a crushing defeat upon the armies of Castile at Alarcos (1195), and many cities were successfully returned to Islamic hands. In the succinct words of one poet, "in the days of Yakub, conquests succeeded each other without interruption."[38]

Yet victories would not continue to accrue after Yakub's death. It was in the rule of his son, Muhammad Al-Nāsir that the Almohads would suffer their worst defeat, after which the Caliphate began to break apart their old policy towards Christians. In the year 1212, the Almohads were decisively defeated at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. Led by a Christian shepherd through a mountain pass, Alfonso VIII of Castile ambushed the Almohad army, and routed them from the field.[39] Such was the scale and humiliation of the defeat (the Christians even seized the Caliphs personal standard and tent in the melee), that it initiated a period of decline in Almohad prestige and power. After 1212, never again would Islam have the upper hand in the Reconquista, and the Almohads never recovered their level of strength they had before the battle. This was not a fact lost in Al-Andalus, and the visible collapse of Almohad momentum created a crisis of power in the army that would, eventually, be filled by Christians.

Christian Mercenaries and Bodyguards in the Almohad Caliphate

Before examining the role of Christian soldiers in Almohad armies following the death of Yakub, it is worth discussing first the use of such soldiers in the region more generally, especially given certain distinctions in the categories of mercenary and slave-soldier that do not exist in European states. In its simplest form, a mercenary was a foreign soldier contracted for a period by a

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[33] John F. P. Hopkins, *Medieval Muslim Government in Barbary: Until the Sixth Century of the Hijra*. (London: Luzac, 1958). 62.
* This source is still frequently cited by modern historians like M. Fierro due to its inclusion of especially obscure translations of Almohad governmental texts, like the reports of Ibn Hamawayh, an aid to the Caliph Al Mansur.

[34] Matthias Martin Tischler and Alexander Fidora Riera. *Christlicher Norden - Muslimischer Suden: Anspruche Und Wirklichkeiten Von Christen, Juden Und Muslimen Auf Der Iberischen Halbinsel Im Hoch- Und Spatmittelalter*. (Munster: Aschendorff, 2011), 242.

[35] In the Maghreb, there was such systematic and total conversion of the Jews and Christians that later Caliphs often worried if the new mass of converts held sincere faith.

[36] Buresi and Aallaoui, 10.

[37] Al-Hijaz, or Ḥijāz being the western shore of Arabia, the home of Mecca and Medina.

[38] Ahmad Ibn Muḥammad Al-Maqqari. *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain*. Translated by Pascual De Gayangos. Vol. 2. (London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1843). 320.

[39] This was the shepherd Martín Alhaja, who was the direct ancestor of the famed explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca

ruler who could be paid either in lands, title, or a cash stipend while a slave-soldier was bound to a specific state, without the expectation that their term of service was temporary nor that they would necessarily receive any compensation. Slavery, however, could lead to social advancement. and despite legally being the property of their ruling patron, we see many Islamic slave soldiers holding personal estates and titles.[40]

Unfortunately for modern scholars, the lines between a slave, a mercenary, a soldier and a servant are blurry at best. For instance, the Mamluk, a warrior taken as a slave-child from a non-Muslim or at least, non-Arab family and was raised within the faith and often rewarded with significant personal wealth, bound to the state with no pre-existing familial ties or options of a non-military lifestyle. But unlike the pre-modern western concept of a African chattel slave, Mamluks often had far more individual social standing and power than freedmen of these states.[41] And while the Almohads did not use either Mamluks nor their predecessors the Ghulams in the same sense as did the eastern states (that being of Turkic or Caucasian mercenaries), they did employ a similar warrior in the *'Abid al-Makhẓan*, ("servants of the Government"), a cadre of Malian cavalry who shared the same legal status and personal fortunes of high-ranking Mamluks in other states.[42] Finally, it was common practice to use captured enemies as mercenaries whenever possible to bolster the ranks of the campaigning army, regardless of any official doctrinal points against it. A helpful parallel to this is the *Wāfidīyah* of the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt of roughly contemporaneous period. These groups of Mongol turncoats and captives were seamlessly integrated into the Mamluk army at the same time the Mamluks were waging constant warfare with the Il-Khanate itself. Some even served in the bodyguard of the Sultan (the *khāṣṣakīyah*), much like Christians would during the later Almohad period.[43] It was a carefully cultivated skill among such rulers like the Mamluk Sultans and Maghrebi rulers to adopt directly the soldiers of the enemy and bring them up within the state to serve with often uncompromising loyalty their new lords against their own compatriots. The use of foreign slave-soldiers in various military functions was a ubiquitous trait of Maghrebi dynasties of this period, the only significant difference was the ebb and flow of different ethnicities based on short-term political demands. The Almoravids before them had used *'Abid* troops (black slave-soldiers captured in the Sahel region) and Christians in great quantities from the beginning, while the thirteenth century Marinids relied on comparatively large numbers of *Saqāliba* slaves from Slavic Europe.[44]

[40] These would be *laqab*, names bestowed as a reward for estimable service. Salah-ad-Din is the most famous example, meaning "Righteousness of the Faith".

[41] A chattel slave being defined as when the slave is the personal property of the owner and can be traded as such. While it can technically apply to a Mamluk, the fact that Mamlukhood was imposed after birth and that it was more of a client – liege relationship marks it as a fundamentally different system.

[42] Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). 124.

[43] Nakamachi Nobutaka, "The Rank and Status of Military Refugees in the Mamluk Army: A Reconsideration of the Wafidiyah." *Mamluk Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006), 56. Accessed November 6, 2017.

[44] Ezad Azraai Jam, Mohamad Zulfazdlee Abul Hassa, Roziah Sidik Mat Sidek, and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor. "The Integrity of the Marinid Kingdom's Administrative System." *Research Journal of Applied Sciences,* Vol. 7, no. 5 (Dubai: Medwell Publishing, 2012), 247-57. Accessed November 6, 2017. doi:10.3923/rjasci.2012.247.257. 252.

Despite being anathema to the Almohad *'Aqīda*, Christian allies were in no way an oddity in aghrebi warfare at all.[45] Pope Clement III stated in his decretal *Quod olim* in 1187 that he would excommunicate "all those who will thenceforth trade with Saracens in general…as long as the war between us and them will last…."[46] Another piece of evidence that points toward the extensive use of mercenaries in these years comes from Ramon de Penyafort, who in his letters to the Holy See from Tunis, mentions such mercenaries. The Almoravids and other Maghrebi dynasties chose to use Christian soldiers for three reasons. First, Christians proved an enticing alternative to relying on often rebellious native troops. Despite the often-staunch Islamism of the rulers themselves due to their lack of tribal loyalties, the integration of large numbers of non-Muslim, non-Maghrebi personal into the government was not inherently problematic since such practices were common across Islamic states, and Christians were able to plug a tactical gap in Maghrebi armies that other available forces simply did not, that of heavy cavalry.

These factors led other Maghrebi dynasties to utilize Christian mercenaries, but the Almohads initially steadfastly refused. The Almohads were initially repulsed by the Almoravid usage of Christians and had strong ideological and political distrust of Christians serving in any capacity. As we have already seen, the early Almohads scoffed at the old Almoravid traditions of Christian mercenaries, ordering the Christian forces within Marrakesh to vacate the city and flee to Christian lands rather than adding them to their own army, despite very likely being entirely aware of the potential military benefits of such a move.[47] It is possible this move was based on lingering fears of the duplicitous nature of Christians, a concern that nagged the Almoravids enough to deport communities of Mozarabs to the Maghreb to ward off rebellion (though these were civilian populations, not former mercenaries).[48] What appears more likely though was that it was primarily out of a religious and ideological aversion. Christian mercenaries were not only anathema to the very nature of Unitarianism, but they also represented a distinctively Almoravid policy. The Almohad movement, being a direct repudiation of the Almoravids on ethnic, religious and political grounds, had little reason to adopt such iconic, and heretical Almoravid policies, especially when they appeared to achieve so many stunning military successes without them, while the Almoravids had failed despite their own usage of *farfanes*.

Before we can talk about how the Almohads came to adopt *farfanes* in such large quantities, there needs to first be a survey of how the early, pre-Christian influx Almohad army looked. The first Almohad armies considered of a number of different elements including Andalusians, *'Abid* Sudanese slave-soldiers, Berber and Maghrebi Arab infantry (most of whom acted either as forces of roving 'holy warriors' called *ghuzat*, or wartime levies called *mushud*), and tribal cavalry from the Sahara (the *Hasham*, incorporated former Almoravid tribes). There was then also paid mercenaries from the east, called the *Ghuzz* / *Ghuzziyya* (Oghuz), professional Turkish horsemen from Anatolia,

[45] There are many different names used for Christians in this context, including several terms for 'slave' like 'abid, mutammallak, rûm, or derogatory terms for Christians in general, 'uluj, nasāra, or even just ifarkhan, "bastard". 'Abid does primarily carry a different definition however in most sources.

[46] Krasimir Stefanov Stantchev, *Spiritual Rationality: Papal Embargo as Cultural Practice.* (Oxford (GB): Oxford University Press, 2014). 50.

[47] Michael Lower, "The Papacy and Christian Mercenaries of Thirteenth-Century North Africa" *Speculum* Vol. 89, no. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 607. doi:10.1017/s0038713414000761.

[48] Burman, 30.

rewarded with cash stipends and estates in Ifrīqya.[49,50] These mercenaries existed alongside these cadres of slave-soldiers, providing a force of highly skilled horse archers to supplement Maghrebi armies otherwise lacking in such units.[51] The *Ghuzziyya* filled the strategic role Turkish Ghulams provided in other states.[52] Almohad armies were strategically flexible with a wide base of available units from the beginning of the true professional Almohad army after Al-Mu'min, but none of these units fought as heavy cavalry, but either as foot infantry, skirmishers or light horsemen of some flavor, and the majority were beholden to traditional clan loyalties often above that of the individual state ruler. Christians could fight as heavy knights with couched lances, and they were loyal to that ruler who controlled their pay, not to a council of sheikhs. This tactical advantage had been the primary reason the Almoravids had used Christians, and it was the same reason that Ibn Khaldūn had observed in person that later post-Almohad Muslim rulers "have come to employ groups of Franks in their army […] because their countrymen only know how to attack and flee…". [53] Therefore, there was already several strategic precedents for employing Christians by Maghrebi rulers, and the Almohad rulers must have been aware of this since they would have likely fought Christian knights in the Almoravid army during their initial revolt. The Almohads had other reasons beyond simple strategy for refusing initially to deliberately seek out *farfanes*¸ but then there was also that knowledge of their usefulness so that when later pressures overrode these initial restrictions, it would have been well known where to employ these Christians, and how to use them effectively. Despite this early policy, however, there are still lingering mentions of Christian mercenaries serving the Almohads before 1212. The first named Christian mercenary in Almohad service was a certain Fernando Rodriguez de Castro who joined Almohad ranks in 1174 for a campaign into Leon.[54] Fernando's son also served as a Almohad mercenary, though he was caught and excommunicated for his betrayal.[55]

We can see a belated predecessor of these later Almohad armies by examining the way in which Christians acted in the armies of the Almoravids before them.[56] The first Almoravid rulers, Ibn Tashfin and Ali bin Yūsuf (1061 – 1106 and 1106 – 1143 respectively) not only used Christians as mercenaries, but Christians tax collectors and contracted public servants as well as a large number of Christian slaves particularly for domestic work. [57] In the Almoravid army, they employed top military Christian commanders like Reveter I de la Guardia, who served in the mid-eleventh century

[49] Ramzi Rouighi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiya and Its Andalusis: 1200-1400*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 64.

[50] These estates were in the form of the *iqtā* and the *mawāt*, land grants. The *iqta'at* system rewarded aristocratic warriors with parcels of land and title, not unlike European knights.

[51] Those Berbers who fought as mounted skirmishers primarily used javelins rather than bows, like the fabled *jinetes* of later times.

[52] In period parlance this region, from southern Morocco as far south as Senegal and Sosso was dubbed *Jnawa*, a derivation of the term Ghana, from the Ghana Empire, known as *Wagadu* in Soninke . Another term was the *Bilād Al-Sudan,* "Land of the Blacks." Black slaves were referred to as *'abid*, while white slaves were *a'laj*

[53] Ibn Khaldūn, Franz Rosenthal, and N. J. Dawood. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Vol. 1. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). 214.

[54] Lower, 607.

[55] Simon Barton, "Traitors to the Faith? Christian Mercenaries in Al-Andalus and the Maghreb, C.11001300." Medieval Spain, 2002, 23-45. doi:10.1057/9781403919779_2. 28.

[56] Tarek Ladjal, "The Christian Presence in North Africa under Almoravids Rule (1040-1147 CE): Coexistence or Eradication?" *Cogent Arts & Humanities,* Vol. 4, no. 1 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 4. Accessed November 6, 2017. doi:10.1080/23311983.2017.1334374.

[57] Ibid.

during the Almohad rebellion. The Almoravids knew fully the nature of the *farfanes*, and exploited it as such, and it was partially this reliance on Christians that had initially caused such revulsion among the Almohads (who, as one can recall, were believers in the fundamental impossibility of co-existence with Christians at all).

This early Almohad policy towards Christians shifted decisively after 1212 and the shift in Almohad wars from disputes with Christian forces internal wars with Berber coalitions in the Maghreb. For example, Al-Maqqari mentions soon after that the humiliation from this defeat created political unrest and intercine warfare between the Andalusian emirs and Almohad commanders. "They came at length not only to hire the enemy's [Christian] troops, but to surrender to the Christian kings the fortresses of the moslems, that they might secure their aid against each other."[58] The real glut of mercenaries though came not during the war itself, but in the short peace that followed as Christian mercenaries streamed south both to aid the rebel confederations cropping up in the Maghreb and the Almohad armies opposing them. After Al-Nāsirs death in 1213 his successor Al-Mustansir rapidly employed Christian mercenaries to supplement his armies, with the distinction that in this comparatively early period most of these mercenaries were aristocrats and their private armies, not state-provided contingents like would characterize the purchases of the last Almohad emirs. These early Almohad rulers were still wary about contracting entire armies of Christians but were more open to individual noblemen joining their cause with their private forces. One possibly apocryphal figure from this period, a certain Gonzalo of Castile, was said to be directly related to the royal family of that nation through his mother. He served in Morocco and fathered a son with the Arab name of Abu Zakariya Yahya, who served Yūsuf al-Mustansir with distinction.[59] Other aristocrats from both Portugal and Castile joined the Almohad cause. Sources always describe these mercenaries as 'franks' or equivalent terms as opposed to *'mustar'ab'* (except for two isolated cases), showing that native Mozarabs were not the target of this aggressive recruitment campaign, likely because their numbers had been so devastated by the earlier Almohad policy of stamping out the native Christians in the Maghreb and Andalusia. [60]

Increasing political crises engendered further Christian entrenchment in the military structure of the ailing caliphate after Al-Mustansirs death. Civil war led to a need for further concessions by individual sheikhs to secure manpower, and in 1230, Marrakesh was reopened to non-Muslims as part of an arms deal between the caliph Al-Mā'mūn and the Castilian king Fernando III. [61,62] As the Caliphate was losing momentum in Iberia and stability in the Maghreb, it increasingly relied on previously forbidden sources of manpower. One clear sign of the increasing entrenchment of Christians within the Almohad military was the developing family dynasties of Christians, who retained their language, faith and customs, but served Almohad rulers in succession through the mid- twelfth century. One text only recorded in excerpt in the massive Moroccan history by Al-Nāsiri, the *Kitāb al-istiqsā li-aḫbār duwal al-Maghrib al-aqsá*, records that in 1248, the "leader of the Christians," "*qa'id al Nasāra,"* (known as Shadīd) was serving as the ally of the Almohad emir Al-Murtaḍā. In this capacity, Shadīd agreed to combat the Marinid emir Abu Bakr on the pretense that

[58] Ladjal, 4.

[59] Lower, 608.

[60] Gutierrez, Eva Lapiedra. "Christian Participation in Almohad Armies and Personal Guards." Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies 2, no. 2 (2010): 235-50. Accessed August 26, 2017. doi:10.1080/17546559.2010.502667. 243.

[61] Marrakesh by that point had held a status as a city reserved for Muslims. Indeed, its name is believed to be derived from the Berber *Amur-n-Akush* (ⴰⵎⵓⵔ ⵏ ⴰⴽⵓⵛ), "City of God".

[62] Ibid., 610.

"he was inclined towards the Almohads, [being] one of their proteges."[63,64] Another Christian captain required an interpreter to travel with his men since they could not speak Arabic.[65] Such was their loyalty that after the 'Abd āl-Wādids of Tlemcen (one of the many rebel dynasties that appeared gradually after 1212) conquered Almohad territories in Ifrīqya the reigning general there, a man by the name of Yaghmurasan,[66] attempted to incorporate the Almohad corps of Christian knights into his own force, but had to expel them as they were still loyal to their fallen masters.[67] There are actually multiple narratives describing almost fanatical loyalty among the Christians serving these last Almohads, including Shadīd, who independently conspired to seize Fez from the Marinids and return it to the Almohads.[68] Stories like this one show that the close relationship developed between these last Almohads and their Christian soldiers was a two-way street, with plentiful rewards heaped on these mercenaries in exchange for loyalty that sometimes far surpassed that of their accompanying Muslim troops.

Because of their availability and loyalty, Christians did not just begin to appear in the rank and file military over the course of the twelfth century, but also in the personal retinue of Almohad rulers. In a medieval Islamic state, it was expected that a ruler would have an expansive network of bodyguards, servants and advisors. Ibn Tumart had played a large part in centralizing from their founding, the entourage system of a Almohad ruler (as part of a larger plan of social engineering of the Almohad *talabāt*, or social hierarchy). Derived partially from his own teachings and existing norms, it is visibly similar enough to the retinue of any ordinary Maghrebi sultan, but several differences do appear – especially in the usage of foreign mercenaries. For an Almohad ruler, this entourage, or *khāṣṣah*, would have included representatives of the tribal sheikhs to whom the ruler was beholden (the *ṭalabat Al-muwaḥḥidīn* for the Almohads), an armed bodyguard of religious youths (*ḥuffāẓ*), imams, domestic servants as well as court bureaucrats, slave girls and representatives from the various client tribes.[69] This entourage also encompassed the Councils of Ten and Fifty (the *ahl Al-jamā'a*), groups of dynastic 'companions', drawn from the original allies of Ibn Tumart.[70] There was already a set position for Islamized black slave-soldiers in this entourage, the *'Abid Al-Makhẓan*, so if Christians did intrude into this sprawling network of advisors, they did so as members of the *jund*, the army, (also in this context meaning bodyguards). Ibn Tumart, in constructing this hierarchy of allies, aids and servants, never provided a set place for Christians within the entourage, apparently expecting that the old Almoravid norms would not return (for that would require an assumption that the Almohads would ever need to resort to using Christian allies). As a result, whenever

[63] * the word used here is *ṣani'a*, which also appears in Persian governmental documents from the same period. The base root ṣ.n carries the implied meaning of "to nourish", and the word appears in a legal sense as a codifiable term referring to the close relationship between a lord and his liege.

[64] Gutierrez, 240.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Yaɣmurasen ben Zayan, The Zenata Berber founder of the Zayyanid Dynasty.

[67] Hussein Fancy*, The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 83. Ironically enough, Yaghmurasan went on to recruit his own force of Catalan Christians (who were gaining renown as crossbowmen and cavalry) rather than end the practice of using Christian mercenaries altogether.

[68] Roger Collins, *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 30.

[69] Albrecht Fuess, and Jan-Peter Hartung. *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2014. Slave girls are mentioned specifically in sources as disparate as descriptions of Mansa Musa's court (the *wasa'if*) and the Abbasid court.

[70] Buresi and Aallaoui, 32.

Christians appear in later Almohad retinues, they do without being part of a special 'regiment' or caste, demonstrating how unplanned their eventual intrusion was into Almohad courtly politics and governance. Certainly, the eventual dominating influence Christians had on later Almohad military policy was not an engineered policy like with the Almoravids, but a necessary reaction to unexpected political setbacks. A clear example of this intrusion is the court of one later Caliph, 'Abd Al-Wāhid II, also known as Al-Rashid (whose mother some source claim to have been a Christian slave) who used a personal bodyguard that included a number of Christian servants, his "[*fityanu-hu wa-khassatu-hu wa-'uluju-hu*], "youths, entourage, Christians].[71] As the stringent precepts of the first caliphs fell to the wayside, the old habits of the Almoravids were re-appearing in force. The processes of alliance and toleration instigated by the defeat of 1212 accelerated forcefully as the Caliphate crumbled.

The last few Almohad rulers abandoned any semblances of puritanism entirely, signing personal deals with Christian kings and bartering for men in exchange. Two famous treaties, the 1229 agreement between Al-Mā'mūn and Fernando III of Castile and the 1287 treaty of 'Abd al-Wāhid and Alfons III of Aragon show how far last Caliphs bent the rules to preserve their own positions. In the treaty between 'Abd al-Wāhid and Alfons III in 1287, the Almohad prince promised "that whenever you call upon us by letter or messenger, we will help you with all our might to oppose anyone, whether Christian, Muslim, or otherwise, of whatever community, religion or creed and we will do this without deceptions, malice, or treachery."[72] One Almohad ruler in 1266 even revealed his conversion to Christianity in exchange for aid from the court of Aragon.[73] That an appointed official to abandon his oaths and embrace the state of *murtad fitri*, apostasy, only 40 years after Almohad Caliphs styled themselves as *Rāshidūn* indicates that there were significant pressures on Almohad leaders to soften towards their Christian neighbors. The treaty between 'Abd Al-Wāhid and Alfons III also shows the sort of relationships now expected between the Almohads and their Christian counterparts. He promised places of worship for the mounted knights and squires he would receive, and even the usage of Christian censers for their burial rites.[74] In the same cities where there would still be ruins of mosques demolished for being a few degrees off the *qibla*, there were now the ringing of Christian bells only a few decades later.[75]

There is a clear pattern then, that the usage of Christian mercenaries both in the larger army and in personal entourages very neatly parallels the breakdown of Almohad power. As their power base fractured, their willingness to broach boundaries that were once seen as unthinkable heresies widened rapidly. This is a clear reversal of an earlier justification for the abolition of *dhimmī* status in the first place, which as stated by Abd al Mu'min was simply that the Muslims had the power now and did not need to be conciliatory to the Christian minority anymore or rely on the *jizya*.[76] Now that the situation began to reverse, that old harshness softened very quickly.

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[71] Buresi and Aallaoui, 80. The terms here are tangentially very enlightening in their own right. Both *fityanu* and *khassatu* show Iraqi influence, as *fityanu* possibly relates to the common terms *fityan* and *fata* of the near-eastern *futuwwa* guilds, while *khassah* also relates to Levantine parlance.

[72] Fancy, 83.

[73] Ibid., 81.

[74] Ibid., 83.

[75] The direction one faces towards the Kaaba during prayer.

[76] Maribel Fierro, "Conversion, Ancestry and Universal Religion: The Case of the Almohads in the Islamic West (sixth/twelfth–seventh/thirteenth centuries)." Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies 2, no. 2 (London: Taylor and Francis, 2010), 155-73. Accessed August 26, 2017. doi:10.1080/17546559.2010.495289. 160.

Concluding Thoughts

Foreign soldiers, recruited from the very peoples being fought against, were no great oddity in the Maghreb. On the contrary, there was a long-standing and respected tradition of mercenaries and slave-soldiers in the region, supplementing the core army and providing much-needed military flexibility to suit rulers' needs. Christians often provided the most useful of these mercenaries. From before the Almohads to their successors, Maghrebi Berber dynasties used Christians as slaves, servants, soldiers and allies, often while still repressing civilian Christians in their own territories. The short period of Almohad repression in the period between their conquest of Al-Andalus and the defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa, appears increasingly to be an aberration in the historical record, a momentary spurt of over-confidence and zealotry by a youthful, pious empire. Once the momentum of *jihād* stopped however, the same processes that gave the Almohads so much success against the Almoravids began to return in force, as the empire gradually disintegrated from political infighting and foreign pressure, the Almohads withdrew to the same tactics they had spurned their predecessors for.

The use of Christians in the Almohad military followed a path that directly relates to the rise and fall of Almohad power itself. Those few Christians who served the Caliphs in the first 50 years of the Caliphate acted as single agents, working for the Caliphs in the hope of personal enrichment, such as Geraldo Sem Pavor or Fernando Rodriguez de Castro (and therefore, more prone to betraying their masters if they saw a potential new opportunity in it). These Iberian nobles served the Caliphate at the same time there was systematic and intensive repression of the native Christian and Jewish population of the newly incorporated Almohad territories. This same movement wished to wash clean Al-Andalus and the Maghreb through an inexorable tide of *jihād* making a new *Hejaz* in the west. Yet, after suffering serious military setbacks in the early twelfth century, most notably at Las Navas de Tolosa, and then a wave of Berber revolts in the Maghreb, the Almohads eased their old policies, and began to rely increasingly on large contingents of Christian mercenaries, to bolster their increasingly fragile state. As the Almohad state collapsed into a series of rump emirates in Morocco, these last would-be Caliphs actively competed to hire as many Christians as possible, creating a close relationship between the ruler and the mercenary that led to these same Christians often showing loyalty to the Almohad rulers long after their actual power had faded in an area. In just under a century, the entire military organization of the Almohad state, bloated from a Berber-dominated force of *ghuzat* and tribal *mushud* and black slave-soldiers, *'abid*, to a core of Berber loyalists and thousands of Iberian, Frankish Christian soldiers. The Almohad experiment would end and be replaced by the same sort of armies they had once so decisively defeated. The succeeding dynasties in Morocco, the Marinids, ʿAbd āl-Wādids, and Ḥafsids, would all continue to use Christian soldiers, often the same mercenaries gathered from defeated Almohad armies.

The true legacy of the Almohads and their attempted war with Christianity was less a statement of religious zeal but more of how that zeal bends itself to a complex world. In Medieval Iberia where the great *futūh* of the first Caliphs could be aspired to but not easily imitated, perhaps it was inevitable that the creed of Ibn Tumart could not survive, strangled slowly by the demands of a multireligious, multiethnic empire at war with everyone, and itself. Today the lessons of the Almohads serve as a reminder as to the hubris of the holy warrior. The false belief that righteousness alone creates an empire, that faith can stock an army ranks, or save an empire.

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