

History of Minorities in the Far Maghreb: The Case of Christians during the Middle Ages

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Since ancient times there have always been minorities and subgroups in human societies⁽²⁾, whether racial, religious, confessional, linguistic or cultural; the Maghreb is no exception to this rule. Thanks to its geographical location, open to various different worlds, it has remained a meeting-place for many different cultures and religions, above all the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The medieval period provided the melting pot in which these religions met in Morocco.

However, most historical studies of the medieval Maghreb have focused on the “Muslim majority”. The other constituent communities of Moroccan society

– especially religious minorities – were forgotten until only a few decades ago, when there began to be some interest in the Jewish minority.⁽³⁾ The Christian minority, meanwhile, has not received its fair share of study, on the pretext that the material evidence is lacking, the sources are sparse, and studies on the subject are rare.

It is against this background that El Hasan Laghraib has produced his *History of Minorities in Morocco: The Case of Christians During the Middle Ages*,⁽⁴⁾ which considers Morocco over the course of eight centuries, including the first few centuries of Islam that historians typically skip over. He has been able

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2 In the last few decades various researchers have shown an interest in the Jewish minority in the Maghreb throughout the medieval period. For example: Haim Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco* (Paris: Ktav, 2005); ‘Ata ‘Ali Muhammad Shahhata Reyy, *al-Yahūd fī Bilād al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā fī ‘Ahd al-Marīniyyīn wa’l-Waṭṭāsiyyīn* (Damascus: Dār al-Kalima, 1999); Mohamed Laghraib, “Yahūd Mujtama‘ al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā al-Wasīṭ”, doctoral thesis in history, College of Arts and Humanities, Dahr al-Mihraz, Fes, Morocco, 2002; Ahmad Shahlan, *al-Yahūd al-Maghārība min Manbat al-Uṣūl ilā Riyāḥ al-Firqa: Qirā‘a fī’l-Mawrūth wa’l-Aḥdāth* (Rabat: Dār Abī Raqrāq li’-Ṭībā‘a wa’n-Nashr, 2009); Fatma Bouamama, *al-Yahūd fī’l-Maghrib al-Islāmī Khilāl al-Qarnayn as-Sābi‘ wa’th-Thāmin Hijrī al-Muwāfiq li-14-15 Milādī* (Algiers: Maṭābi‘ Kunūz al-Ḥikma, 2011); Andre Goldenberg, *Les Juifs du Maroc: Images et texts* (Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1992).

3 A Moroccan academic holding a doctorate in history from the College of Arts at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes. Currently professor at the Centre Régional des Métiers de l’Education et de la Formation, Sefrou. Alongside the book under review here, he has published various studies and articles, including “Tanzīm Mulkiyyat al-Arḍ wa-Binā‘ al-Mudun bi’l-Maghrib al-Aqṣā fī’l-‘Aṣr al-Wasīṭ: Fās wa-Marākish Namūdhajān”, in Various Authors: *at-Tārīkh wa’l-Qānūn: at-Taḡāṭu ‘āt al-Ma’rifīyya wa’l-Ihtimāmāt al-Mushṭaraka*, p. 2 (Meknes: Kulliyat al-‘Ādāb wa’l-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyya, 2009), pp. 211-220; “Fuqahā’ Ifrīqiyya wa-Mufakkirūha: at-Tadāfu‘ al-Mustamirr”, in Various Authors, *as-Sulṭa wa’l-Fuqahā’ wa’l-Mujtama‘ fī Tārīkh al-Maghrib: al-I’tilāf wa’l-Ikhtilāf (A’ māl Takrīmiyya Muḥdā ilā’l-Ustādh Aḥmad ‘Azzāwi)* (Quneitra: Kulliyat al-‘Ādāb wa’l-‘Ulūm al-Insāniyya, 2013), pp. 47-60; “ar-Rabāṭ wa-Qanātuhā ‘l-Mā’iyya ‘l-Muwahḥadiyya, in Various Authors, *Madīnat Rabāṭ: at-Tārīkh wa’l-dh-Dhākira* (Rabat: Manshūrāt al-Ma’had al-Jāmi‘ī li’l-Baḥṭh al-‘Ilmī, 2015), pp. 75-84; “Le Maroc du XVIème siècle d’après Léon l’africain, les juifs et leurs activités,” in: *Le Maroc au temps des Wattassides, à travers les descriptions de Léon l’africain*, Mohamed Stitou (coordination), (Rabat: Rabat net editions, 2011).

4 Originally a doctoral dissertation presented at the College of Arts, Moulay Ismail University, Meknes, under the supervision of Ibrahim al-Qadiri Butshish.

to move beyond the well-trodden path followed by previous studies⁽⁵⁾ that have focused on specific issues in Moroccan-Christian medieval history where sources are comparatively rich.

In this work the author seeks to uncover the reality of medieval Moroccan Christians in discussion with its central question: *what* history of Moroccan Christians? He has been confronted by various obstacles in the course of this work, some connected to the nature of the topic. For example, Christians were not a group isolated from their environment – rather, their history overlaps with that of other religions and groups and with society generally. Other problems pertain to the availability of sources: given the loss of many important sources that we might have used to cast light on the history of Christianity during the pre-Almohad period in particular, the author has been forced to gather various scattered allusions from tens of secondary (indirect) sources, such as books of general history and geography, epics, and accounts of disaster.

In the first chapter of the book the author discusses the roots of the Christian presence in Morocco before the arrival of Islam, showing that Christianity in Mauritania-Tangier⁽⁶⁾ has “roots dating to before its official declaration as the (Roman) state religion” (p. 55), and that it has been present since at least the late third century AD. The various land and sea routes facilitated its spread into the Maghreb, which was a favoured destination for those fleeing Roman oppression of Christians, resulting in a Christian presence – whether “men from the sea”⁽⁷⁾ (p. 33, 64) or locals who had converted to Christianity – throughout Morocco, in both cities and villages, north and south of the *Limes*,⁽⁸⁾ and specifically in the right

bank of the Draa. The new religion thus “jostled” together with Judaism and Paganism, and found itself a foothold through a Christian kingdom based in the city of Tin Sita (p. 68).⁽⁹⁾

The book’s second chapter gives us an overview of the role of Christianity and Christians throughout the Islamic conquests of the Maghreb through two Christian kingdoms, the Kingdom of the “Princes” led by Kusaila bin Mulzim and the *Awrās* Kingdom led by Dihya bint Matiya, a Berber woman thought by the author to have been a Christian devotee, alongside the various tribes that made up the Jrawa confederation. The spread of this new proselytizing religion in the towns and villages and Christian practice of their religion in their homes and places of worship did not prevent the continuation of certain older practices, in particular “collective pilgrimage to places sacred to local saints” (p. 47), reflecting the mixture that came to exist in Morocco between various religious and cultural elements.

In the third chapter, the author traces the Christians through the first centuries of Islam in the Maghreb, the period of “Islamization,” which did not lead to a total disappearance of Christianity as Arab chroniclers and geographers claim. He cites various pieces of evidence supporting his position. With the end of the Islamic conquest of Morocco, whose crowning glory was the arrival of Muslims in al-Andalus, Christians formed part of Tariq bin Ziyad’s army; bin Ziyad also received assistance from the Christian Emirate of Ghomara in Ceuta in the form of several ships. The author also does not rule out Christian participation in the “Berber Revolts” of the 8th century CE which protested against the arbitrary behavior of the Umayyad governor and his agents.

5 These studies include: Jose Alemani, “al-Katā’ib al-Masīhiyya fī Khidmat al-Mulūk al-Maghāribā”, tr. Ahmad Madina, *Da’wat al-Haqq*, issue 187 (May 1978); Mustafa Nashat, “al-Irtizāq al-Masīhī bi’-d-Dawla al-Marīniyya, in Various Authors, *al-Gharb al-Islāmī wa’l-Gharb al-Masīhī Khilāl al-Qurūn al-Wustā* (Rabat: Maḥsūrāt Kulliyat al-Ādāb wa’l-’Ulūm al-Insāniyya bi’-r-Rabāt, 1995); Ibrahim al-Qadiri Boutshish, “al-Jāliyyāt al-Masīhiyya bi’l-Maghrib al-Islāmī Khilāl ‘Āṣr al-Muwaḥḥidīn,” *al-Ijtihād*, 28 (Summer 1995), pp. 77-107; Ibrahim al-Qadiri Boutshish, “Mas’alat Binā’ al-Kanā’is bi’l-Gharb al-Aqṣā Khilāl ‘Āṣr al-Murābiṭīn: Min Muntaṣaf al-Qarn 11 ilā Muntaṣaf al-Qarn 12”, in Various Authors, *al-Gharb al-Islāmī wa’l-Gharb al-Masīhī*, pp. 93 - 100. For more see the bibliography of the book under review.

6 By “Mauritania-Tangier” prior to Islam we mean the space extending from the Moulaya River (with changes over time to the eastern border) to the Atlantic coast (northern Morocco today). For more detail see: Muhammad al-Liyyar, “Mawrītāniyā at-Ṭanjīyya”, in Various Authors, *Ma’lamat al-Maghrib*, p. 21 (Rabat: al-Jam’iyya al-Maghribiyya li’-t-Tālīf wa’-t-Tarjama wa’n-Nashr, 2005) pp. 7311 - 7315.

7 As the locals called the émigré Christians. The book demonstrates how difficult it is to identify who these people were exactly.

8 The *Limes* was a wall, or a complex arrangement made up of trenches, roads and defensive fortifications, established by the Romans in North Africa from the second century CE for the purposes of defense, expansion and colonial stability. For more detail see: Mustafa A’shi: “al-Līmis,” in *Ma’lamat al-Maghrib*, part 20, p. 6913. El Hasan Laghraib considers the Limes to have been a line of cultural cross-fertilization more than a military barrier, and that it is possible that Christians may have crossed it southwards (p. 39).

9 Tin Sita sits on the right bank of the Draa, approximately three kilometres from Zakoura.

These revolutions led to the emergence of Moroccan states or emirates independent from the Caliphate in the Mashreq, including the Idrisid Emirate. The author also shows that there was a Christian presence under this latter, emphasizing their role in the move of the Idrisids themselves from Oualili to Fez and their presence in large numbers in these two cities and the surrounding area, as well as around certain mines in the south of Morocco in particular.

The fourth chapter presents us with the opportunity to discover, alongside the author, the reality of the Christians during the Almoravid and Almohad periods. Their presence is shown clearly by their use in military formations by various Emirs and Sultans of the two dynasties, alongside their activity in the commercial sphere. This situation contributed to the settlement of Christians in various cities, especially Marrakesh, Fez, Miknasa, Ceuta and Salé, alongside important numbers in the south and south-east, particularly in Sijilmasa, Draa and Wadi Noun.

In the fifth chapter the author discusses the economic, social and religious situation of the Christians during the Almoravid and Almohad eras, emphasizing the effect of economic and political transformations within the Christian West during the Middle Ages in Morocco through the commercial relations shared by the two, which expanded during the 12th century CE within the framework of various agreements and treaties. This commercial openness, alongside banishment and imprisonment and the recruitment of Christians into the Almoravid and Almohad armies, produced an increase in their numbers in Morocco; they were frequent visitors to its ports and involved in commerce of various kinds, including the trade in clothing, and settled in their own particular areas and hostels – some of which came to resemble stand-alone cities – in which they enjoyed full religious freedom (p. 226). These areas also had their own “Consuls” who conducted their general business, as well as “Notaries” (*Mutiqin*) who oversaw commercial transactions between Christians and Muslims. Christians did not restrict themselves to commerce but also engaged in various crafts, including tailoring and various other professions related to construction, agriculture and

medicine – alongside the production and sale of alcohol.

The sixth chapter is dedicated to a survey of various scenes of coexistence and tolerance between Muslims and Christians. Having refuted what he calls “the myth of anti-Christian oppression” under the Almoravids and Almohads, he presents various instances of integration between the two groups in Morocco. Shared celebrations during religious holidays – such as the *Dāntīsiyā* celebrating the first teeth of a child (pp. 294-296), the *Mūlid* (birthday) of the Prophet Isa/Jesus, etc – continued in spite of certain Muslim legal scholars ruling against Muslim participation in these celebrations. Moroccan society was also no stranger to mixed marriages between Christians and Muslims, to the point that Christian women found their way into the Almoravid and Almohad palaces, with some of them playing a decisive role during times of political unrest. For example, Hubab ar-Rumiyya (‘the Christian’) swore allegiance to her son ar-Rashid the Almohad after the death of his father al-Ma’mun in 1232 (p. 297). Likewise, various traders and monks learnt Arabic, and some of them converted to Islam, just as some Muslims converted to Christianity in striking opposition to fatwas forbidding such conversions.

This work is an attempt to study the situation of Christians and Christianity in Morocco during the Middle Ages. The author has generally achieved remarkable success in tackling a topic that has remained largely unstudied for decades and succeeded in piecing together one of the “missing links” in Moroccan historiography. However, various factors – the remarkable temporal and geographical scope of the study, the novelty of the topic and the complexity of the questions involved, and constraints pertaining to the scarcity of references to Christians in sources produced by both Muslim and Christian historians,⁽¹⁰⁾ all mean that there are some issues raised in the study which require more discussion.

As far as the temporal framework is concerned, the author traces the Christian minority in Morocco from the pre-Islamic period to the Almohad era. This is a temporal scope appropriate to the nature of the topic, whose articulations and particularities

10 Dominique Valérian, “La permanence du christianisme au Maghreb: l’apport problématique des sources latines,” in: Dominique Valérian, *Islamisation et arabisation de l’Occident musulman médiéval (VIIe-XIIIe siècle)*, (Paris: Edition de la Sorbonne, 2011), accessed on 28/3/2017, at: <https://goo.gl/LwKweo>

require a long-term view to properly understand. While this has meant taking on the burden of studying what is otherwise a very unclear period in Moroccan history, the length of the period under study, the political dynamics at work and the issues and questions raised have left many regional particularities and specificities within Morocco in need of more research. These include the position of Christians in the independent Emirates which emerged after the Kharijite rebellions in the early 820s, particularly Barghawata, where certain fragmentary evidence indicates Christian influences on religious belief – for example in the writing of Abu Ubaydallah al-Bakri, who reports that Salih bin Tarif al-Barghawati claimed “that he would return to them during the rule of the seventh of their kings, that he was the Mahdī al-Akbar who will appear in the end times to fight the Antichrist [*ad-dajjāl*], that Isa bin Maryam [Jesus] will be one of his companions and will pray behind him [i.e. that he would lead ‘Isa in prayer]. And he said much which he ascribed to Musa al-Kalim [Moses], Satih al-Kahin [a Jewish Rabbi said to have predicted the coming of the Prophet Muhammad] and Ibn ‘Abbas.”⁽¹¹⁾ Salih’s language – invoking various characters with religious symbolism, including Jesus – demonstrates the syncretism of various religious creeds that had taken place.

As far as the geographical scope of the study is concerned, the author has restricted it to Morocco “in order that it receive more study” (p. 13). This decision appears simultaneously difficult and sensible: difficult because of the paucity of sources, and sensible because a wider scope would have meant

many local particularities. Nonetheless, Morocco’s neighbours – where the influence of the states of the Islamic West was always felt, and which share with Morocco various structural economic, social and cultural particularities – remain in need of study that might shed more light on the history of their own Christian minorities.⁽¹²⁾ Christianity in “Muslim al-Andalus” has already been the subject of various studies⁽¹³⁾ making use of the broad availability of sources and material evidence compared to the Maghreb.

Turning to methodology, the author has adopted an open-minded historical method using three mechanisms in tandem: documents, time, and comparison. Likewise, he attempts to deconstruct and analyze certain medieval documents, drawing attention to the difficulties involved. This diversity of methods allows him to overcome the traditional narrative of historical events and extract information from these sources in order to learn more about Christianity and Christians in medieval Morocco. Since the author is confronting a new topic, he depends on the information provided by Latin and Arab sources. This does not allow him space to discuss certain issues and phenomena generally related to Christians, however, such as the idea of the awaited Messiah and its connection to Muslim and Jewish Messianic thought, particularly during the Almohad era.⁽¹⁴⁾ Simon Levy has gone so far as to say in this respect that some Jews believed that the “Mahdī” Ibn Tomert was the Messiah whose coming was prophesied by Rabbi Musa ad-Dra’i. This latter had declared the imminent advent of the Messiah from the pulpits of Fes a few years prior

11 Abu Ubayd Allah al-Bakri, *al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik: al-Juz' al-Khāṣṣ bi-Bilād al-Maghrib*, Zaynab ‘Azzawi ed. (Rabat : Maṭābi‘ ar-Rabāṭ Net, 2012) , p. 249. Ibn ‘Adhari also mentions Salih’s claim that he would return during the reign of the seventh king of Barghawata and that ‘Isa would pray behind him. See: Muhammad bin Adhari, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib*, Kolan and Bruffensal ed., part 1, 3rd ed (Beirut: Dar ath-Thaqāfa, 1983), p. 224.

12 For studies which have shown an interest in Christianity and Christians in the Maghreb see: Nasser Jabbar, “Fanādiq at-Tujjār al-Masīhiyyīn fī d-Dawla al-Ḥaḥṣiyya,” *al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib*, issue 17 (2012), pp. 77-89; Virginie Prevost, “Les dernières communautés chrétiennes autochtones d’Afrique du Nord,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, no. 4 (2007), pp. 461-483; Valerian, pp. 131-149; Abdelkader Hadouch, “Les communautés chrétiennes en Afrique du Nord du VIIIe au XVe siècle, » thèse de doctorat en histoire, sous la direction d’A. Vauchez, l’université Paris 10, France, 2001.

13 For example: Reinhart Dozy, *Spanish Islam: A History of the Moslems in Spain* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), Obada Kuheila, *Tārīkh an-Naṣārā fī'l-Andalus* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Islāmiyya al-Ḥadītha, 1993); Ibrahim al-Qadiri Butshish, “al-Murābiṭūn wa-Siyāsāt at-Tasāmuḥ ma’ Naṣārā'l-Andalus : Namūdḥaj min al-‘Aṭā’ al-Ḥadārī al-Andalusī,” *Dirāsāt Andalusīyya*, issue 11 (1994), pp. 22 - 34 ; Ismat Dandash, “‘Alāqāt al-Andalus bi-Mamakāt Qashtāla min Khilāl al-Aqallīyyāt (Ahl adh-Dhimma) ilā'l-Qarn as-Sābi’ al-Hijrī,” in Various Authors, *al-Gharb al-Islāmī wa'l-Gharb al-Masīhī*, pp. 101 - 116. See also: Brahim Harakat: « La communauté chrétienne et celle d’origine chrétienne en Espagne musulmane, vues par les sources arabes, » in: Various Authors, *al-Gharb al-Islāmī wa'l-Gharb al-Masīhī*, pp. 179 - 182 ; Muhammad Bashir al-Amiri, *at-Taḥā‘ul al-Ḥadārī Bayna Ahl al-Andalus al-Muslimīn wa'l-Isbān an-Naṣārā fī'l-Qurūn al-Wuṣṭā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2014).

14 Halima Ferhat, “Faux prophètes et mahdis dans le Maroc medieval,” in: Halima Ferhat, *Le Maghreb aux XIIème et XIIIème siècles: les siècles de la foi* (Casablanca: Wallada, 1993), p. 167.

to Ibn Tomert's appearance.⁽¹⁵⁾ It is well known that both Jews and Muslims await the coming of the Messiah.⁽¹⁶⁾

The author has not restricted himself to indigenous Christians – the so-called *Dhimmi*⁽¹⁷⁾ – but has also discussed and analysed non-Moroccan Christians, the “European community”, hoping to highlight the quotidian social dimension of the Christian minority in Morocco in such a way as to sketch out a picture of its members' way of life. However, the structure of the medieval Moroccan Christian family and details of their rituals and customs, particularly as regards birth, marriage and death, is still in need of more study.

Likewise, certain thorny topics related to relations between Maghrebi Christians and their coreligionists in Europe and Asia await researchers' attention, in particular the influence of relations between the Islamic and Christian worlds on the position of Christians in the Maghreb. There are already some studies on the participation of Muslims in the Crusades⁽¹⁸⁾ – so how did Maghrebi Christians understand them? Is it possible to talk about “some sort of participation” in the Crusades, fought in the name of religion, by Maghrebi Christians? What were the implications of the Crusades for the position of Christians in the Maghreb?

The author presents various evidence highlighting the atmosphere of tolerance that prevailed between Muslims and Christians in the medieval Maghreb, and ascribes some of the responsibility for disturbances in the otherwise good relations between the two to the Maghrebi Christians, saying that “the prevailing climate at the time was troubled only by these

incidents, in which certain Christians played a role in fanning the flames of dislike and hostility, either by assisting Christian armies in besieging or attacking Christian cities in al-Andalus or showing contempt for or cursing [Islam], which necessitated punishments prescribed by judicial scholars' fatwas giving legitimacy to the reaction of Caliphs and Emirs to these challenges” (pp. 289-290). Some readers may see in this position a sort of subjectivity placing blame on the “other” side, as well as a degree of generalization, since it is never possible to ascribe responsibility to one or the other side in any of the cases of increased tensions between Muslims and Christians. But this is the debate between those who affirm that Christians were the victims of persecution during the Middle Ages and those who are opposed to this view, which will only be settled by the discovery of new evidence or the emergence of sources with some minimum level of neutrality and objectivity.

It is clear that the author is entirely aware of the difficulties that accompany any attempt to explore a community considered by Arab historiography to be “foreigners”⁽¹⁹⁾ and which has thus largely been silent as regards their affairs, as “the absence of any literary text or inscription pertaining to the period in which Christianity developed in the Maghreb makes discussion of the topic a difficult matter that in some cases cannot move beyond mere supposition.”⁽²⁰⁾ This all means that there is no option other than to wait for the emergence of new Maghrebi or Latin sources, or new archaeological discoveries, in order to seek answers to various questions: What was the atmosphere between the two communities like during periods of disaster or political crisis? Where did the Christians bury their dead?

15 Muhammad al-Maghrabi, *al-Muwahhidūn wa-Azamāt al-Mujtama'* (Rabat: Judhūr li'n-Nashr, 2006), p. 126; Robert Assaraf, *Eléments de l'histoire des juifs de Fès, de 808 à nos jours* (Paris/Rabat: Centre de recherche sur les Juifs du Maroc, 2010). Musa ad-Dra'i appeared in Fes in 1127. See: Ja'far Hadi Hasan, *Firqat ad-Dōnma bayn al-Yahūdiyya wa'l-Islām*, 2nd ed (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Fajr, 1988), p. 23.

16 Michael Brett, "Le Mahdi dans le Maghreb médiéval," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 91 - 94 (Juillet 2000), accessed on 22/2/2017, at: <https://goo.gl/uAFLCo>.

17 *Dhimma*, in Arabic, refers to originally to oaths and guarantees. See Ibn Mandhur, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol 12 (Beirut: Dar Sader [n.d.]), p. 221. It is a historical expression referring to the Jews and Christians who lived in Islamic societies, who were granted a special status guaranteeing freedom of religious practice in exchange for the payment of a sum of money known as *Jizya*. For more details, see: Muhammad bin Abi Bakr bin Qiyam al-Jawziyya, *Ahkām Ahl adh-Dimma*, Yusuf al-Bakri and Shakir al-'Aruri ed., vol 1 (Dhomam, Ramādī li'n-Nashr, 1997); Hasan al-Mummi, *Ahl adh-Dhimma fi'l-Ḥaḍāra al-Islāmiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998).

18 For example, Muhammad al-Arusi al-Matwi, *al-Ḥurūb aṣ-Ṣalībiyya fi'l-Mashriq wa'l-Maghrib*, v. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982); Mohamed al-Manufi, “Namūdḥaj min Musāhamāt al-Gharb al-Islāmī fi'l-Ḥurūb aṣ-Ṣalībiyya bi'sh-Shām wa-mā ilayhi”, *Majallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb wa'l-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya*, Rabat, issues 20 - 21 (1996-1997), pp. 143-149; Marcel Dieulafoy, “Le Maroc et les croisades,” *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, vol.62, no 1 (1918), pp. 32 - 32.

19 Butshish, “al-Jāliyāt al-Masīhiyya bi'l-Maghrib al-Islāmī,” p. 79.

20 Ibid, p. 31.

The author follows the Christians of Morocco throughout the medieval period. It is thus possible to identify a constant settlement of Christians in the Maghreb since the pre-Islamic period. What varied, however, was the role played by these Christians, which seems to have been influenced by the general trajectory of development of economic and social structures as well as being subject to the needs of medieval Moroccan states since at least the Almoravid era, when Christians were integrated into the ranks of the army, leading to growth in their numbers and an improvement in their social and religious position, since the Almoravid authorities allowed the construction of churches for the Christians.⁽²¹⁾ But the study stops at the Marinid era, considered a turning point in the history of the Maghreb, making it legitimate to ask certain questions: Why did the Jewish presence remain strong in the medieval Maghreb compared with Christianity, in spite of the

fact that Christianity is a proselytizing religion, unlike Judaism? What was life like for Christians during the end of the medieval period and the beginning of the modern period in the Maghreb?

The importance of the study lies in two considerations. The first is that it explores an understudied issue, and thus its results may give hope of “rewriting and rereading our medieval history through the lens of difference” (p. 14). The second is the contemporary relevance and novelty of its topic and the role that it may play in “making the past and present importance of minorities felt.”⁽²²⁾ This “excavational” work has cast light on important aspects of the history of the Christian minority that have remained forgotten in Moroccan historiography. It opens up new horizons for continued probing into the depths of the history of this minority who have played such an active role in the history of the Maghreb.

21 On the issue of church-building, see Butshish, “Mas’alat Binā’ al-Kanā’is”.

22 Abdelaziz Aynour in his introduction to the book, p. 11.