The Political and Economic Reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid Era and Its Impact on the Status of Jews in the Arab Maghreb

Dr. Nasim Zureik Abu Shalouf
Head of the History Department at Al-Aqsa University in Palestine

Some historical studies have examined the status of the dhimmis (non-Muslims) in the countries of the Arab Maghreb during the early Islamic centuries. However, these efforts remain modest compared to the studies that have addressed the dhimmis in the Islamic East for various reasons. Therefore, in this study, we aim to examine the political and economic reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era (668-869 AH / 1269-1464 CE) from a political and economic perspective. We will also review their areas of settlement. Despite the difficulties encountered in writing this study, particularly due to the scarcity of historical material about them, some historians specializing in Marinid history, such as Muhammad Al-Mununi, have acknowledged the scarcity of written sources about them. Furthermore, the death of the historian IbnKhalidun in the first decade of the ninth century AH / fifteenth century CE deprived us of a historical source and detailed information about Moroccan society and its conditions, which any researcher studying the history of Morocco after his death faces. Nevertheless, these difficulties and the importance of the subject served as a motivation for us to investigate and research. As a result, we have uncovered the truth about the role of Jews and the significant impact they had on the Marinid Morocco, including the eventual collapse of the Marinid dynasty due to their influence. Based on the aforementioned, this study seeks to shed light on the political and economic reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era and its impact on their status in the Arab Maghreb countries. Therefore, the study poses the main question: What was the political and economic reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era, and what were the repercussions of this reality on their status in Morocco during that period?

- From the main question, secondary qualitative questions arise: • How did the Jewish presence in the Arab Maghreb countries develop? • What was the economic reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era? • What was the political reality of Moroccan Jews during that period? • How did the economic and political reality impact the status of Jews in the Arab Maghreb countries during that period? • Summary of the study: The study aims to shed light on the political and economic reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era, which lasted from 668-869 AH / 1269-1464 CE, and to clarify the repercussions of this reality on their status in the region. Jews in Morocco played a political role as a result of their influential economic presence in the country, which had social and political implications for their status. The study adopts a historical approach and a descriptive-analytical method, drawing on the literature of what is known as role theory. The study is divided into four axes: • The first axis: An overview of the reality of Jews in the Arab Maghreb countries (origins and formation). • The second axis: The social and economic reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era. • The third axis: The political reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid era. • The fourth axis: The impact of the economic and political reality on the status of Jews in the Arab Maghreb countries during the Marinid era.

The first axis: The emergence and development of the Jewish presence in the Arab Maghreb countries. • Jews are considered one of the religious minorities that settled early in the Arab Maghreb countries (1). After the spread of Islam in their cities, this minority benefited from the spirit of tolerance prevailing in the society and chose certain cities as their residence based on the requirements of the professions they practiced (2). • Most sources that discuss the Jewish presence in the Arab...
Maghreb countries during the Marinid era indicate that their settlement began in the capital city of Fez. IbnAbiZar' mentioned that Sultan Ya'qubibnHaq al-Marinid (656-685 AH / 1258-1286 CE), the founder of their dynasty, settled them in the neighborhood of Al-Mallah, located across from the new city of Fez, after they were expelled from the Idrisid Fez (3). The construction of their neighborhood started on the second day of Shawwal in 674 AH / 1275 CE (4). Another source states that Sultan UthmanibnYa'qub (710-731 AH / 1310-1331 CE) built the city of Hims, which he established in the new Fez, also known as Al-Mallah (5), and it was said to be a neighborhood for Jews (6), alongside the Christian quarter designated for the residence of the guards protecting the Sultan (7). • It is worth noting that the reference to Al-Mallah was not limited to Jews alone. In later periods of Marinid rule, it was also used as barracks for Christian soldiers. Their numbers in Fez were estimated to be around three hundred fighters when the Marinids took control of Morocco. Sultan Ya'qubibnAbd al-Haq employed them to continue his campaigns against Tlemcen. Later, their number reached a thousand and six hundred fighters, and their leader during that time was called "Carsi Martinez Calico," who was one of the ambassadors sent to Spain to lift the siege of the Green Island (8). Al-Mallah also became a place for the consumption of alcohol away from public view (9). • While the sources focused on their settlement in Fez as the capital of the Marinids, following the accounts of previous historians like Al-Bakri, who mentioned that Jews were scattered from there to various regions (10), Al-Wazzan, who lived in the mid-10th century AH / 16th century CE, identified the Jewish residential areas in the cities of the farthest parts of Morocco. He noted that their numbers increased after their expulsion from Al-Andalus (11), including the migration in 794 AH / 1391 CE when a significant number of Jews from Al-Andalus migrated to Morocco (12). They were known as "the migrants" and settled in Fez, and many of them hypocritically converted to Islam (13) Al-Wazan found them during his journey in the region of Haha in the cities of Tadnast, Hadkis, and AitDaoud, and in Mount Demnsra in the Atlas Mountains, where he saw them carrying weapons and fighting on behalf of their leaders against the inhabitants of their region. They are called "Al-Qaraoun." He also found them in the region of Souss in the cities of Tiout and Tidssi, and in Mount Hantah, where they belong to the same sect mentioned earlier. He found them in the cities of Safi and Azemmour in Doukkala, and in the city of Haskoura. Their number was estimated to be two hundred households in the city of Tafza. In the region of Tadla, he observed them in the cities of AitAttab and AitAyad. Al-Hamiri adds that they settled in Sigilmassa in the south of the country in small numbers of craftsmen. This was also mentioned by the author of "Al-Istabsar," who mentioned that they became owners of extended wealth. Finally, the last Jews were mentioned in Ceuta. • The most available information indicates that Jews did not face severe administrative measures during the Marinid era compared to the measures taken against the Almohads. They were distinguished by the Marinid Caliph al-Mansur in 595 AH/1199 CE by their distinctive attire, known as "Al-Shaklah." It consisted of blue clothing with oversized sleeves that reached their feet, and they wore "Qulans" instead of turbans on their heads. This practice continued until the reign of al-Mansur's son, who changed their attire to yellow clothes and turbans. They claimed conversion to Islam, and al-Mansur said, "If their conversion to Islam were true, I would let them mingle with Muslims in their marriages and all other matters. If their disbelief were true, I would kill their men, take their children as captives, and confiscate their wealth for the Muslims. However, I am undecided regarding their situation." The sources also show that this attire persisted among the Jews of Tunisia during the Hafsid era, as they adhered to it in 648 AH/1347 CE. According to "Hopkins," it was a long shirt with sleeves and blue trousers and tunics. The Wattasid dynasty (876-961 AH/1471-1553 CE) imposed special shoes on them, and they were required to wear a black turban or a cap with a piece of red fabric added to it. • The Marinid state imposed the jizya tax on Jews based on what is stated in the Quran. There are references indicating that they were subject to jizya since the reign of Sultan YaqubinAbd al-Haqq, who allocated the revenue for the care of lepers, blind people, and the poor. A late piece of information indicates that they paid it in the form of gifts instead of the prescribed cash amounts in the cities of Tadnast in Haha and Tiout in Souss. The amount paid by those subject to it in cities and rural areas was four Marinid dinars, equivalent to forty dirhams in Sharia weight. • The Third Axis: The Political Reality • To understand their image in Marinid society and the administrative positions they held, it can be said that the events recorded in historical sources reveal a significant flaw in their behavior. They remained a strange entity that did not accept integration and interaction. Their main concern was
Materialistic gain and their deceptive methods, disregarding the destruction of the society they lived in. In the first mention of them, in the year 674 AH/1227 CE, there is a reference to one of them assaulting a Muslim slave girl in Fez, forcing her into his house, which led to public outrage against them. The unrest only subsided after Sultan Ya'qub Ibn Abd al-Haq personally intervened, leading to their relocation to their new neighborhood (25). In terms of administrative influence, they sought to gain proximity to the sultan's palace. A Jewish family known as the Bani Raqasa managed to become close associates of Prince Yusuf ibn Ya'qub from his childhood. They took charge of his personal affairs and gained prominence in his court. Among them, Khalifa ibn Raqasa and his brother Ibrahim, his brother-in-law Musa ibn al-Sabti, and his cousin Khalifa al-Asghar stood out. Prince Yusuf continued to associate with them until he became aware of their schemes and their exploitation of his name. In the month of Sha'ban in the year 701 AH/1301 CE, during the siege of Tlemcen, the capital of the Banu Abd al-Wad, Prince Yusuf captured and killed Khalifa, his brother, his brother-in-law, and left Khalifa al-Asghar alive, which marked the downfall of the Bani Raqasa (26). This ending is reminiscent of the fate of the Barmakids during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, with the difference being that Khalifa al-Asghar survived. He harbored a deep hatred for the writer Abdullah ibn Abi Madin, believing that he had conspired against his family. Despite the passage of time and the advancement of their positions, Khalifa al-Asghar worked as a hajib (chamberlain) for three Marinid sultans (27). He seized the opportunity to sow his venom in the body of his victim, the writer Abdullah ibn Abi Madin. Khalifa al-Asghar gained favor with Sultan Abu al-Rabi Sulaiman ibn Abdullah ibn Yusuf (708-710 AH/1308-1310 CE) like no one else did, to the extent that all the army called him "Sidi Abu Khurz from the Banu Marin" and others. This was all done to enhance the sultan's estimation of him and to give him control over his state, out of fear of him (28). In the darkness of the night, Khalifa al-Asghar plotted against Abdullah ibn Abi Madin, the writer who held the signet of the Sultan since the time of their founder, Ya'qub ibn Abd al-Haq (29). He fabricated a story about the Sultan's concubine, informing him in a forged letter that she loved him. Khalifa gave the letter to Abu Madin, instructing him not to read it until he reached his home. Abu Madin left the Sultan's palace, while the Jew returned to inform the Sultan about the writer's affair with the concubine. The Sultan was enraged and ordered him to be brought back. Abu Madin hurried back, unaware of the trap that awaited him, thinking that the Sultan had issued an order for him to carry out some task. When he stood before the Sultan, the Sultan ordered him to give him the letter in his pocket, and he handed it over, unaware of its contents, and returned to his home. The Sultan took the letter and gave it to his scribe Yahya al-Malyani, who confirmed, based on what the Jew had said, that it matched. He then instructed al-Malyani to kill Abu Madin after he arrived "To the secret place where he was working" (30). In another account, it is mentioned that Sultan Sulaiman ordered his Christian commander, Ghansalo, in his army to kill Ibn Abi Madyan, and he was killed near the tomb of Abu Bakr ibn Arabi while he was visiting it (31). Al-Nasseri adds a third narrative about his death, stating that Khalifa al-Asghar claimed that Ibn Abi Madyan accused Sultan Sulaiman of having relations with his daughter, and that it disturbed him and he was conspiring against the state and plotting against it (32). In any case, on the following day, Sultan Sulaiman learned about the deception that the Jew had plotted against him, especially when the news reached the ears of the prominent members of the Marinid dynasty, who were convinced that it was a plot by the Jew. They investigated the matter and found evidence that the Jew had forged the letter without Ibn Abi Madyan's knowledge, with the permission of the slave girl.

When Sultan Sulaiman confronted the two writings, he verified Ibn Abi Madyan's innocence and ordered the execution of the Jewish hajib for his crime (33). It is worth noting that the historical sources (Moroccan) completely omitted any mention of them holding any positions in the Marinid administration until its end, except for scattered references here and there that reflect the state and the general public's resentment towards them for causing economic crises in the Moroccan cities. It is said that Sultan Ali ibn Uthman Al-Marini (731-752/1331-1352 CE) kept them away from state positions, which may explain the reaction towards them. Some say that the mentioned sultan did not employ any dhimmis in his state plans, such as the positions of revenue, the diwan, accounting, surveying, and he did not appoint them as physicians or storekeepers (34). However, it is noteworthy in the context of Sultan Ali ibn Uthman's rule the story of the infiltration into his capital, Fez, to overthrow his deputy, Amir Mansour ibn Abi Malik ibn Ali, who was appointed by his grandfather in the new Fez when he
launched his campaign against Tunis al-Hafsiya. When news of his death spread in Kairouan (35), his son Prince Abu Anan came forward to take control of it and remove his cousin from it, sparking a conflict between them. The balance tilted in favor of Prince Abu Anan, who laid siege to his cousin in Jumada al-Akhirah in 749 AH/1348 CE and persisted in his hardship and distress until he managed to forcefully enter the city on Tuesday, the 22nd of Shawwal, 749 AH/1348 CE (36).

However, what is strange about this is that the capital was invaded through the Mellah neighborhood designated for Jews, as stated by the historian Ibn al-Ahmari in his statement: "And he forcibly entered the city, Abu Anan, through the alleys of the tribes' neighborhoods from a place called Mellah" (37). The question that arises is whether they intended to facilitate the task of infiltrating Fez through Mellah in order to gain the favor of Abu Anan, hoping that he would compensate them for what they had lost during his father's reign? The answer provided by the sources is that Abu Anan followed in his father's footsteps in dealing with the dhimmis, and his stance did not change (38). Furthermore, some Moroccan writings reflected popular and cultural impressions about them. Ibn al-Naqash al-Daqali (d. 763 AH/1316 CE) wrote a book entitled "Al-Mathma fi IstimalAhl al-Dhimmah" (39). The Marinid state also remained keen on not employing them in its positions, as expressed by one of its ministers who visited Cairo in 700 AH/1301 CE and met with Al-Nasir "Muhammad ibn Qalawun." He expressed his dissatisfaction with what he witnessed regarding the privileges and positions enjoyed by the Jews of Egypt, as this was not the case in his country. Consequently, he launched a campaign that affected them greatly, and from that day on, they were required to wear yellow hats and were exempted from the positions they held with the princes or in the Sultan's court (40).

And so, the conditions of the Marinid state continued in their approach towards them. When it was within the power of the last Sultan to disassociate himself from that, he wrote the end of their rule with his own hands. The sources mentioned that Sultan Abdul Haqibn Said (823-869 AH/1420-1464 CE) had arrested his minister YahyaibnYahyaibn Umar al-Watasĩ, who succeeded the minister Ali ibn Yusuf in 863 AH. He was less competent than his predecessor, so the Sultan dismissed several governors and officials and appointed others in their place. This provoked the anger of Sultan Abdul HaqibnAbi Said, who had lived for forty years under the guardianship of the Watasĩ ministers. He arrested the minister, his family, and executed them, sparing only Muhammad al-Shaykh (41), who sought refuge in Assila and fortified himself there. Then, the public and private resentment grew against him after he fell into the hands of the Watasĩs. He made the dangerous decision to appoint Jews in his ministry, namely Shawil and Harun, as an act of vengeance and to further humiliate them. As an additional act of persecution against them, he appointed Harun's Jewish man, who had immigrated from Andalusia, as his police chief. It was said about him that he spared no effort in extortion and embezzlement, and the people were in great distress (42).

The Jewish ministers compelled people through beatings and punishment to pay taxes. They granted clear privileges to the Jewish immigrants from Andalusia, monopolizing trade in the markets of Fes. While Sultan Abdul Haq was absent on a campaign in certain regions, the Jewish police chief assaulted a woman from the people of Huma Al-Balidah in Fes, humiliating and beating her. This enraged the people of Fes, who approached the preacher of the Qurayshi tribe, the jurist Abdul Aziz ibn Musa Al-Waryakifi, and said to him, "Don't you see the humiliation and subjugation we endure, with Jews ruling over Muslims and abusing them to the extent we have heard?" Upon hearing this, Sultan Abdul Haq abdicated and appointed Abu Abdullah Al-Hafid, the grandson of the honorable Adarisah, as the ruler of the country. They all then headed to the new city of Fes, where they unleashed their anger on the Jews responsible for the incident. The news of what had happened reached Sultan Abdul Haq, who turned back towards the capital. Along the way, his forces abandoned him, and the remaining ones captured his minister, Harun, and killed him. They then arrested Sultan Abdul Haq, who was taken to the capital. He met his demise on the morning of Friday, the 27th of Ramadan, 869 AH/1464 CE, and was buried in some of the mosques of the new city of Fes. With his death, the Marinid dynasty, which had ruled for more than two centuries, came to an end (43). In general, if the fall of the Marinid state was caused by them, historical sources have depicted a picture of them in the economic sphere and the resulting economic crises and blatant destruction, which inflicted significant damage on their society.
Second Axis: The Economic Reality • The most beautiful Marinid historian mentioned the occupations practiced by them in Fes. He stated that those who converted to Islam worked as tailors, weavers of clothing, cupping therapists, sellers of dairy products, cobbler, and tanners in the markets (44). Meanwhile, their clients specialized in breadmaking, pottery, oil extraction, soap making, selling salt and fish, confectionery, selling herbs, bookbinding, house painting, woodwork, knitting tools, ceramics, dyeing, bathhouse service, water supply, some food industries, selling wool and linen, musical instruments, coin minting, women's jewelry, coral trade, renting construction tools, well digging, metal refining, and marble work (45). • If the aforementioned covers the occupations they practiced in Marinid society, another source mentioned that they engaged in the professions of construction and jewelry making in Sijilmassa due to its proximity to gold sources and their expertise in these crafts (46). • In the fields of jewelry making and currency, the economic practices they engaged in harmed the Marinid economy and forced the state to make a series of decisions. The first of these decisions was made by Sultan Ali bin Uthman, who prohibited them from engaging in "jewelry making, money-changing, money collecting, and anything involving fraud against Muslims" (47). Each time they presented their pledges before the sultans of the state, they committed to working under the supervision of the Amin of the Mint. A decree was issued by Sultan Abu Inan on the fourth of Dhu al-Hijjah, 756 AH/1355 CE, obliging them to "not sell any jewelry or other precious items without first presenting them to the Amin of the Mint for approval, and to stamp what is accepted. Only those who are trustworthy should be allowed to handle currency exchange, and they should not deceive or deny Muslims or engage in usury with them. They should not treat a Muslim with what they permit for themselves from deferred payments through interest or what they have as collateral. No one accused of drinking alcohol or engaging in other prohibited obscenities by Islamic law should be allowed entry to their establishments. Their elders should adhere to these rules, and all the people in their jurisdiction should be bound by them" (48).

• The Marinid state imposed strict measures on Jews, obligating them to conduct transactions in pure cash and avoid counterfeit currency by order of Sultan Abu Fares Abdul Aziz bin Abi Al-Hasan (767-774 AH/1365-1372 CE) (49). • Despite such strictness and monitoring, it is mentioned that they managed to take a quantity of silver at the time of casting in the Mint in Sijilmassa. They would place it inside a piece of charcoal after drilling a hole in it, and they would extract an equivalent amount of gold (50). • Additionally, Jews sometimes took advantage of currency minting outside of the Mint. There is a reference to the Shamayin Hotel in Fes being a place for currency minting (51). The fee for minting every hundred dinars of gold was one dinar and six athaman, and for every ounce of silver, the calculation was two dirhams. This encouraged Jews to exploit the situation, and complaints about their tricks increased, prompting the state to prepare the metals and administrative apparatus to handle minting independently from them (52). • On the other hand, the phenomenon of money changers, which was often associated with corruption and usury, was mainly dominated by Jews. They adopted it as a means to achieve exorbitant profits, especially in their dealings with merchants and providing them with loans to facilitate their commercial transactions. This led to the spread of fatwas warning against such practices and emphasizing adherence to the prescribed religious boundaries (53). • In terms of commercial life, sources indicated their engagement in trade. It is mentioned that the Jews of Fes and Ceuta had connections with the Jews of Marseille, ensuring their involvement in the trade with Sudan (54). They also worked as translators between Morocco and Europe (55), acted as intermediaries in the redemption of captives and prisoners among Mediterranean countries (56), and served in the inspection system at city gates. They were stationed at the gates of Tlemcen to monitor goods and examine travelers and merchants. They even mistreated anyone passing through their inspection, whether male or female, until Sultan Ali bin Uthman al-Marinid exempted them from such duties (57). • Notably, the sources did not mention their involvement in agriculture as a legitimate source of income (58). Their best occupation was considered to be diverse (59), excluding a late reference from the Saadian period, indicating their monopoly over sugar mills. The state would contract with the protected subjects for their farms and mills in exchange for an annual amount (60).

Fourth Axis: The Economic and Political Implications on the Jewish Community during the Marinid Era. • Conclusion: • From everything mentioned above, it becomes evident that the Jews exploited the Marinid state and manipulated every opportunity available to them, prioritizing personal profit over the interests of the country and its people. On the political front, it is clear that despite the care
The Political and Economic Reality of Moroccan Jews during the Marinid Era and Its Impact on the Status of Jews in the Arab Maghreb

provided by the Marinid state, the Jews acted against it, causing political crises and even the assassination of Marinid figures known for their loyalty to the state. This was driven by their desire for dominance and control over the sultans. • Additionally, they worked in secrecy to overthrow certain sultans, disregarding the consequences that the resulting conflicts might have on the stability of the state. Their primary aim was to remove Marinid sultans who prioritized the country's interests and discovered the Jewish interference in state affairs, leading to their dismissal. • One of the most significant impacts on the Marinid state was the culmination of their actions, as their daily practices and harm inflicted on people eventually led to a popular revolution in the capital, Fez, which overthrew the last Marinid sultan after he had already appointed two ministers and a police chief from among them. • On the economic side, the research reached several conclusions, including: • Jews did not engage in any profession within the Marinid state except for the pursuit of profit and the availability of means to achieve their goals. They engaged in fraudulent currency practices, usury, and deceitful practices in their professions, despite the economic measures taken by the state to curb their destructive activities. They persisted in these practices despite warnings and threats. • Furthermore, the research in this field revealed that they avoided engaging in professions that could provide legitimate earnings, such as agriculture, and instead pursued any occupation, no matter how menial, as long as it yielded significant financial gain.


Copyright: © 2023 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)