

Marīnid Fez: The Economic Background of the ‘Quest for Empire’*

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Introduction

On April 25, 1348, the mighty Moroccan army, led by the Marīnid sultan Abū ‘l-Hasan suffered a momentous defeat at the hands of a coalition of Arab nomad tribes in Tunisia.¹ In what has since become known as the Battle of Qayrawan, the Arab tribes rose against their new overlords’ plan to seize grants of land they had secured under a weaker Hafsid government a few years earlier. Indeed, the Marīnid plan for their newly conquered territories was to centralize administrative measures aimed at consolidating tax collection and

*This paper was first read as a keynote address to the conference “The city of Fez in world history” Al-Akhawayn University, Oct. 24, 2008. For the most part I have kept here the style and the spirit in which it was presented.

¹ Ibn Khaldun, *Kitāb al-Ibar*, tr. Le Baron De Slane under the title *Histoire de Berbères*, (Paris, Geuthner, 1978) 4 vols. On this particular episode, see vol. 4: 259-68.

increasing state revenues from agriculture and from the pastures over which the nomads had the right to collect taxes. Empires need secure and monopolizing control over natural and human resources, and repossessing *iqta'* land was part of this process, but the Marīnids also needed to control the Tunisian Mediterranean ports in order to secure revenue from grain and gold shipments.² The policy may have been conceived earlier but it was put into place after the conquest of Tlemcen, when the vision of an empire crystallized. For several years the Marīnid court sojourned in the newly built administrative city of al-Mansūra almost adjacent to the 'Abd al-Wādīd capital, Tlemcen.³ After the conquest of the coastal Mediterranean cities to the East. it was Tunis' turn to submit but no one leading the Marīnid army could have anticipated that the Arab tribes' resistance would end in a disaster. Adversarial relationships between central governments and nomadic tribes was a normal phenomenon in North African politics at any time, and as Ibn Khaldūn observed in his *Muqaddimah*, it was the curse of civilizations the world over. In this case however, the defeat had major and unexpected consequences: it ended a successful Marīnid quest for empire.

A Long Term Quest

The defeat at Qayrawan highlights the strategic advantages which benefitted the Marīnids in their quest for empire. At this time, the mid 14th century, economic, demographic and political factors coalesced in Fez' favor under the leadership of three ambitious and visionary Marīnid monarchs who reigned between 1325 and 1361: Abū Sa'īd, his son Abū l'Hasan and grandson, Abū Inān. They established an empire stretching from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean and from the Western Sahara into the heart of Spain. The city of Fez prepared itself for its new role as capital of the new

² *Histoire*, 4:219-24. For the court workings, Maya Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State. The Marīnid experience in pre-protectorate Morocco*, (Princeton, Markus Wiener publishers, 2000), 69-82.

³ *EP* entry "al-Mansūra" (M. Shatzmiller).

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order, building an array of monuments, madrasas, mosques and palaces, and attracting the most renowned scholars and intellectuals to visit the city. The large army had been on its way to complete the final stage of the conquest and consolidate the imperial dream, but instead, the hasty, disorganized retreat of the ailing troops back to Morocco triggered the rejection of Marīnid rule in the newly conquered territories along the Mediterranean coast. In a quick reversal of fortunes the great Abū 'l-Hasan was transformed from a world conqueror into a fugitive. Abandoned by his soldiers and chased by his own son across the central Maghrib, he came back home to die, hiding in the mountain of the Hintata. Although he may not have known it at the time, the Marīnids were in the wrong place in the wrong time. The plague had arrived in the port of Tunis a year before it appeared in Fez - this is what you get when you go 'global': a global pandemic!⁴

Spread by a common rodent, the black rat normally found in all types of grain storage, the pandemic known as the Black Death quickly killed urban and rural populations, in Europe as well as in the Middle East, but typically spared the nomads. Human ecology explains the reason: the nomads traveling on camels or driving their herds before them do not store grains nor do they regularly transport stocks of stored grains in significant amounts. As a result, they are not exposed to the black rats or the house rats to the same degree as are urbanites.⁵ Tunis however, was a major grain shipment center, importing and exporting grain to Mediterranean destinations and it is probable that either a Sicilian ship carrying grain or an Italian cargo ship coming from Alexandria which brought the diseased black rats

⁴ On the global dimensions of the Black Death see Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346-1353. The Complete History* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2004), 67 for estimates of plague in North Africa and the Middle East. More below.

⁵ See Kenneth L. Gage and Michael Y. Kosoy, "Natural History of Plague: Perspectives from More than a Century of Research," *Annual Review of Entomology* (2005): 505-28. I wish to thank, Dr. Jeremy McNeil from the Biology department in the University of Western Ontario, for bringing this publication to my attention.

and their fleas to Tunis.⁶ Alexandria had been infected earlier, by an Italian ship bringing Circassian and Turkish slaves from the Black Sea regions to be sold to the Mamlūk rulers of Egypt.

Abū ʿI-Hasan may have been the greatest protagonist of the Moroccan ‘quest for empire’ but the quest did not begin with him. The Almoravids, 1061-1146,⁷ and the Almohads, 1147-1269,⁸ had already put in place several versions of the expansionist Moroccan state, with various degrees of success, duration and continuity, through political and military campaigns. They made repeated attempts to go south toward Black Africa north, toward Spain and east, toward Tunisia. Clearly, some strategic conditions were already in place, but, the 14th century, saw prolonged Marīnid interventions, including attempts at colonization and territorial integration in North-Africa and the European Mediterranean as well as in the African territories beyond the Sahara. In a similar manner to the Ottomans in the mid-14 century or to the European Atlantic empires, the Moroccan quest for empire had now become plausible.

From the moment he came to the throne Abū ʿI-Hasan saw himself and his country as having a universal calling and aptitude. Ibn Khaldūn, having spent several years at the Marīnid court in Fez, reflected: “With the conquest of Tlemcen, Abū ʿI-Hasan greatly enlarged his empire; from being the king of the Banū Marīn he became the king of all the Zanāta and after he became ruler of the Maghrib he found himself in control of both sides of the strait.”⁹ Ibn Khaldūn went on to describe how, driven by ambition and pride, Abū ʿI-Hasan sent ambassadors carrying sumptuous gifts to rulers in Africa, to the fabulously rich Mansā Mūsā, and to the Mamlūks in Cairo, and granted audience to the worried Castilian ambassadors after the capture of Oran, as he was on his way to conquer Tunis.

⁶ On the Black Death in Egypt see Michael W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, (Princeton, Princeton University press, 1977) and Stuart J. Borsch, *The Black Death in Egypt and England. A Comparative Study*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2005)

⁷ Pedro Chalmeta, “al-Murābitūn” *EF*²

⁸ Maya Shatzmiller, “al-Muwahhidūn” *EF*²

⁹ *Histoire*, 4:224.

Well before sending his army to Tunis, Abū 'l-Hasan cemented his grip on the Western Mediterranean with an extraordinary victory at sea over a Christian armada which included fleets from Castile, Portugal and Aragon, all rapidly expanding maritime powerhouses. Abū'l-Hasan crossed the straits in March 1339 escorted by 60 galleys which he had rented from Genoa. This was the same fleet Philip the VI of France had hired a year earlier to use in his war against England. Far from being oblivious to the importance of naval strength he already had in his possession another fleet of 48 galleys which he had been preparing elsewhere, thus creating a combined force which dominated the waters of the Western Mediterranean. The usual hostilities between the Iberian powers ceased in 1337, in anticipation of an attack by the Marīnid troops who were rumored to have crossed the straits. The Aragonese king Peter wrote to Pope Benedict XII to say that the king of Morocco, having captured Tlemcen had set his sights on Spain and he feared that a North African invasion would stir up the Muslims in Valencia, where they constituted one third of the population, some 170,000 souls. By April 1340 the Marīnid victory unveiled an expansionist state with a strong navy and army, which became the topic of discussion for European kings and Popes alike.¹⁰

Abū 'l-Hasan's death did not spell an end to the Marīnid 'quest for empire'. His son and heir, Abū Inān . who died in 1358, regained control of the central and the eastern Maghrib and minted coins claiming the title of Caliphes, amīr al-mu'minīn, which his father never adopted. The Sa'adi dynasty made sure that the quest for empire continued to vibrate across the Maghrib during the 16th century with further Moroccan expeditions into African territories.¹¹ But the Marīnid army's defeat should not deter us from investigating the strategist assets and the pursuit of economic gains which motivated the Marīnids in their quest for empire. To begin with its location on the shores of the Atlantic, which would act as a launching

¹⁰ On this episode see J. A. Robson, "The Catalan Fleet and Moorish Sea-Power (1337-1344)" *The English Historical Review*, 74(1959): 386-408.

¹¹ On Abū Inān and his attempts to re-conquer the lost territories, *Histoire*, 4:292-317.

pad for future Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch empires, provides an intriguing pattern to the Marīnid quest.¹² Their awareness of the significant flow of the West African gold to Europe and the Middle East, the decision to control the Mediterranean grain trade, the awareness of pastures and manufactures potential, are all indications of keen economic observation. But it was the demographic strength of the Moroccan countryside and the national policies of consolidation and institutional reinforcement which were rationally and pragmatically implemented at home, and which the Marīnids harnessed together in a sensible manner which made the entire experience realistic. In the following section I will indicate some of the strategic areas which enabled the Marīnid court in Fez to develop and carry out their ‘quest for empire’.

The Demographics of the ‘Quest for Empire’

The defeat at Qayrawan may be termed as the end of the ‘quest’ but in some surrealist fashion it also provides us with a useful entry point to the historical link between demography, the Black Death and economic growth.¹³

The population of North Africa, together with that of the Mediterranean regions, is assumed to have declined before the 7th century Arab conquest, because of the Justinian plague of 541, and probably continued to do so after recurrent pandemics.¹⁴ Estimates

¹² On Morocco and the Atlantic ocean in historical perspective, see Christophe Picard, *L’Océan atlantique musulman: de la conquête arabe à l’époque almohade*, (Paris, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1997) and Ch. Picard, *La mer et les Musulmans d’Occident at Moyen-Âge VIIIe-XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1997).

¹³ More and more economic historians are now persuaded that the aftermath of the Black Death ushered in the process of the economic growth in Western Europe which caused the great inequality between Europe and the rest of the world. Known as the ‘great divergence’ or the ‘great divide.’ We now know that in the case of Egypt wages failed to grow in relationship to prices and thus prevented improvement in productivity in agricultural crops, in spite the decline in manpower. See Robert C. Allen, “The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War,” *Explorations in Economic History*, 38(2001): 411–447, and for Egypt, Stuart Borsch, *The Black Death in Egypt and England*.

¹⁴ On the Justinian plague see now *Plague and the End of Antiquity. The Pandemic of 541-750*, Lester K. Little ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

made for the year 1000 suggest that the population of North Africa was between 2 and 5 millions, distributed through the region at a rate of 2:1:1, meaning that historically Morocco had always had a population double that of the other two regions, central and eastern North Africa.¹⁵ Turning to the North/West regions, it is estimated that the population of Muslim Spain increased to about 8.3 million in the 11th century, then declined to 7 million by the 12th century, probably as a result of internal wars, otherwise inexplicable. In North Africa however, it is estimated that to have followed the pattern of the Arab Middle East, where the population had declined before the arrival of the Black Death. According to Muhammad Talbi, the population of Tunisia declined considerably as a result of the nomadic invasions in the 11th century.¹⁶ Nonetheless, human ecology in Morocco, especially in the areas inhabited by mountain and desert tribes, followed a different demographic pattern. This may have allowed the population to recover by the 11th century, and provided manpower for the three centuries of uninterrupted territorial expansion by the Almoravids, Almohads and Marīnids. Abū l'Hasan, like the Marīnid sultans who preceded him in the 13th century, had enough combatants to allow him to send some to Muslim Spain, where they chose to remain and he did not press them to come back. He may have had a good reason to send them there in the first place: the restless, turbulent Marīnid tribal elements were the people sent to carry out the Jihad in Spain. Still, the fact that he could dispense with them is quite indicative. In fact, for all intents and purposes the only manpower numbers available to us are those of Abū l'Hasan's army. In 1339 Catalan merchants reported that Abū l'Hasan crossed the strait with an army of 8,000-10,000 men, joining another contingent of 4,000 men already stationed in Ronda. In addition, Abū l'Hasan was able to staff his galleys with new recruits from his newly

¹⁵ On population size in the Islamic world see Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*, (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1994), 55-68. More estimates for medieval Morocco in Ennahid, *Political economy*, 38-40. The long term demographic history of medieval Morocco, and that of medieval North Africa in general, remains a desiderata.

¹⁶ M. Talbi, "Effondrement démographique au Maghreb du XI^e au XV^e siècle," *Les cahiers de Tunisie* 7 (1977):51-60.

conquered territories, Tunis and Bougie. Each of the 44 galleys and 35 lenys he used for the crossing carried between 300 and 400 men including some 200 archers and cross-bowmen stationed in three castles in every ship. With the final addition of troops from Granada it could be estimated that he had mustered an army of between 18,000 and 20,000 men. In 1342, despite of years of ongoing warfare, government agents fanned out across the country, mostly among the tribal population of the Rif and Atlas mountains, but also in the cities, in order to raise more troops; clearly the State administrators responsible for recruitment believed that manpower was still available there.¹⁷ The ethnic composition of the Marīnid army is also of interest, mostly because it provides more clues about its capacity to pay recruits from a wide area. According to al-Umāri, a contemporary, "there were many Arab tribes, 1500 ghuzz arrow-shooting cavalry of Turkish origin, 4000 Frankish cavalry, 500 'ulūj Muslim cavalry, more than 1000 Andalusī shooting arrows from a foot bow and a large group of Berber tent dwellers."¹⁸ Under Abū 'l-Hasan the Marīnid army with its Turks, Berbers, Catalans, Castilians, Arabs, was a reflection of the Mediterranean's new face, a global society. Army commanders did not seem to mind; despite being ethnically different from each other and speaking different languages, the natives and mercenaries trained together, bringing to bear their different military skills, weapons and strategies, in order to achieve military victory on the battleground. The payments they received even convinced some Castilians to remain in the country, where they later played a nasty role in palace politics.¹⁹ Since no specific records for the Black Death mortality rate in the Middle East and North Africa regions currently exist, Benedictow suggests a mortality rate similar to that of Europe, and the rapidity and ferocity with which the Marīnid army was hit by the Black Death pandemic in 1348-

¹⁷ *Histoire*, 4:234.

¹⁸ 126-28.

¹⁹ Maya Shatzmiller, "An Ethnic Factor in a Medieval Social Revolution: The Role of the Jewish Courtiers under the Marīnids" *Islamic Society and Culture, Essays in Honour of Professor Aziz Ahmad*, edited by M. Israel and N. K. Wagle (New Delhi, 1983): 149-64.

confirms it.²⁰ If the mortality rate which affected European regions is calculated as being between 60% and 65% for the years 1346-1353, or 50 million out of a general population estimated at 80 million, that means that the Marīnid army lost about two thirds of its manpower recruits, but it also means there were strong numbers to begin with. All in all this suggests that the demographic growth of 14th century Morocco was probably closer to that of Europe, if not that of the Atlantic regions, which enjoyed a century of rapid demographic growth almost up until the Black Death, rather than that of the Arab or Middle Eastern Islamic regions to which it is sometimes compared.²¹

Did the Marīnid state make use of the large manpower supply to the South, namely Black Africans in its 'quest for empire'? Given that the Atlantic shores further South were the source of the largest ever shipment ever of manpower across the ocean, the question needs to be asked.²²

Slave soldiers are found throughout Islamic history. One of the ways through which the Islamic state handled its chronic shortage of manpower, both for military service or domestic labour, was through a sustained purchase of slaves, white ones from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and black ones from sub-Saharan Africa.²³ The two areas are believed to have been spared the ravages of the plague and therefore could respond to market demands. The dependence of Mamlūk Egypt, a state contemporary to the Marīnids, on slave supply for its military and administrative survival highlighted the irony through which Genoa enabled the final victory of the Mamlūks over

²⁰ Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346-1353*, 383: "presumably this was also the case where plague appeared elsewhere according to the same pattern, for instance in North Africa, the Middle East and the Near East for which there are no usable mortality data."

²¹ Charles Issawi, "The Area and Population of the Arab Empire: An Essay in Speculation," *The Islamic Middle East 700-1900. Studies in Economic and Social History*, A. L. Udovitch, ed. (Princeton, Darwin Press, 1981): 375-96.

²² Ralph Austen, *African Economic History, Internal Development and External Dependency*, (James Curry, London, 1987); John Wright, *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, (Routledge, London and New York, 2007).

²³ B. Musallam reached the conclusion that birth control was prevalent in medieval Islamic societies. B. Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983).

the Crusaders states in the 13th century by constantly and regularly supplying it with slaves.²⁴ Research into the slave trade with sub-Saharan Africa has now established that a regular supply mechanism had been in place since the beginning of North Africa's occupation for the yearly provision of black slaves. Given the nature of the Islamic economy and its use of money, most, if not all slaves, ended up in North Africa or the Middle East. Some slaves arrived at the Mediterranean, but since European demand for slaves practically disappeared from with the early Middle Ages onward. African slaves were sold in East African ports, in answer to the increasing demands of the economy in the Islamic Middle East.²⁵ Austen estimated that between the years 650 and 1500 the entire slave trade had provided about 5 million slaves, with at least 2 million to 2,5 million taken captive directly from the regions bordering the Red Sea, thus avoiding the "Western" road, via Sijilmāsa and Fez, making it a by-product of the gold export route.²⁶ According to E. Savage, Ibādi slave traders in Ifriqiya managed this import single handedly in the 8th to 10th centuries.²⁷ Black soldiers were a common phenomenon in the Islamic armies of North Africa, particularly in Ifriqiya where the dynasties more commonly employed servile black units. While Austen estimated that the Almoravids employed some 2000 to 4000 slaves in the army, he could not find indications that their successors, either the Almohads, or the Marīnids, had black slaves in their armies.²⁸ He therefore concluded that "the Moroccan military need for slaves would not seem to have induced the massive slave trade as was the

²⁴ Andrew Ehrenkreutz, "strategic Implications of the Slave Trade between Genoa and Mamluk Egypt in the Second half of the Thirteenth Century," *The Islamic Middle East 700-1900. Studies in Economic and Social History*, A. L. Udovitch, ed. (Princeton, Darwin Press, 1981): 335-45.

²⁵ Austen, *African*, 59. The evidence for his calculations is provided in R. Austen, "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in H. Gemery and J. Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market. Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, (San Francisco, Academic Press, 1979): 23-72.

²⁶ Different Tables and calculations in Austen "The Trans-Saharan."

²⁷ Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Paradise*, (Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1997), 67-89.

²⁸ Austen established a table of the Islamic armies using units of black slaves, including the Almoravids and Almohads, but found no information on the Marīnids. Austen, "The Trans-Saharan," Table 2.6, p. 54-55.

case in Egypt.”²⁹ African slave trade was transformed from “an investment in luxury consumption,” to the “largest capitalistic enterprise ever.”³⁰ The Moroccans purchased black slaves for domestic use, but there was no Atlantic slave trade before the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century. Even though, the ‘abīd soldiers were an important component in later Moroccan armies, black military slavery was never a factor in the Marīnid ‘quest for empire’. African gold, however, was an entirely different matter.

African Gold and the Return to Gold Minting in Europe

As a historian of medieval North Africa I have always been mystified as to why the Marīnids were not mentioned in the story of Europe’s return to gold. The Marīnids came to power in the 1250s, at the precise moment when gold minting returned to gold, in the so called ‘revolution’ of 1252.³¹ Instead, the analysis of Europe’s return to gold has focused on the Almoravids and the Almohads and their relationships with the Italian republics, even though, as Walker admits, “the disintegrating Almohad state may have helped to cause a temporary breakdown of the long-distance gold trade.”³² To my mind, it was the uninterrupted provision of gold across the Sahara during the late 13th and 14th centuries, which had more effect on the sustainability of the ‘revolution’ and its overall sway and dependence on Marīnid rule, especially the fact that they remained in control of the gold trade, rather than on anything else. The flow of bullion has a considerable effect on monetization, monetary circulation and the quantity of money in the economy and is arguably crucial to the economic development, productivity and sophistication of economic

²⁹ Austen, “The Trans-Saharan,” 57.

³⁰ Austen, “The Trans-Saharan,” 43.

³¹ See the discussion by Walker, “The Italian.”

³² Walker, “The Italian, 36, and my entry “al-Muwahhidūn” *EI*².

transactions, financial tools and the balance of payments. Bullion flows are assumed to have linked the two economies, Islamic and European, through international trade.³³ This process, however, needs to be qualified. The case of Islamic silver serves as a good example.³⁴ This was credited with the Carolingian renaissance, and was transferred to Western Europe by the Vikings, who had received it from Muslims. Millions of dirhams buried along the Northeastern trade routes, provide evidence for the existence of Muslim silver in the Baltic regions and in Russia but not in Western Europe, where no dirhams have survived. Gold on the other hand, which was scarce in Europe between the 8th and 10th centuries, was supplied from Islamic mines in sufficient quantities for the minting needs of the Islamic economy in East or West Africa, central Asia and Arabia.³⁵ Much has been made of the shift in the routes through which gold travelled from sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East and later Europe. During the 8th -10th centuries, the African gold route initially went through Fez. It shifted to Qayrawan during the 10th century but probably shifting back again by the 11th century, as a result of the Hilalian invasion in 1050.³⁶ The routes shifted because of aridity, security, and tribal domination, but had only a minor effect on gold minting in the Islamic territories. Moroccan prominence in the gold trade began by the end of the 11th century, when Nūl, Aghmāt, Sijilmāsa, Fez and Marrakesh, all Moroccan cities clustered along the Western gold route, gained prominence as the most prolific producers of gold coins. In Europe meanwhile, the decreased circulation of both gold and silver coins during the early Middle Ages contributed to the

³³ The merit of elaborating this intricate historical question goes to Andrew M. Watson, "Back to Gold-and Silver," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 20, No. 1(Apr., 1967): 1-47. On the gold flow from Morocco to Europe, as well as to Egypt, Eliyahu. Ashtor, *Les métaux précieux et la balance des paiements du proche-Orient à la basse époque*, (Paris, S.E.V.P.E.N,1971), 15-29.

³⁴ Sture Bolin, "Mohammed, Charlemagne and Ruric," *The Scandinavian Economic History Review*, Vol. 1/1(1953): 5-39, for a general introduction.

³⁵ See A. Ehrenkreutz, "Money" in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1977), 84-97.

³⁶ Much of the literature dealing with the subject is concerned with this question. Michael Brett, "Ifriqiya as a market for Saharan trade from the tenth to the twelfth century A.D." *Journal of African History* 3(1960): 347-364. Also Said Ennahid, *Political Economy and settlement Systems of Medieval Northern Morocco*, (Oxford, BAR International Series, 2002), 27-31.

prolonged economic decline of that continent between the 7th and the 12th centuries.³⁷ England and France stopped minting gold coins altogether in the 7th century, and Italy and Spain in the 8th century. From then until the beginning of the 13th century, a period of about 500 years, Europeans had no gold currency apart for some gold coins from Byzantium, while the Islamic lands continued to mint gold coins uninterruptedly. After an initial period, before the 10th century, when very little gold minting took place, al-Andalus played its usual role as a 'bridge' supplying African gold to Europe. As a large amount of West African gold began flowing by the 11th century, the Cordoban armies could afford to recruit Catalan mercenaries and pay them with gold coins or metal. When this gold reached Barcelona it contributed to the revival of the Catalonia's monetary economy during the mid-11th century.³⁸ Barcelona itself may have not adopted gold currency until the 14th century,³⁹ but in 1052, Count Ramon Berenguer gave money fiefs based on an annual payment of 10 ounces of gold to his vassals, a rent which could reach up to 100 gold ounces.⁴⁰ Between 1062 and 1071 he invested 10,000 ounces of gold in purchasing castles and acquired the counties of Carcassonne and Razès. By the second half of the 11th century more than 87% of the land transactions in Barcelona were recorded in mancuses, imitations of Islamic gold coins. By late 1030, the Barcelona mints were supplied with ingots from Ceuta and gold dust which came through Sijilmāsa, the Moroccan desert trade outpost illustrated by the flow of bullion, which for all intents and purposes began only in the 12th century. European gold coins imitated the Islamic dinars and sometimes even included Arabic inscriptions. The earliest gold minting took place in Southern Italy in the 11th century, first by the

³⁷ Peter Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7-26.

³⁸ Pierre Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe*, J. Birrell tr. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 183. Spufford, *Money*, 167.

³⁹ According to Thomas Walker "It was not until well into the 14th century that a regular gold coinage began." Th. Walker, "The Italian Gold Revolution of 1252: Shifting Currents in the Pan-Mediterranean Flow of Gold," *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern World*, J. F. Richards, ed. (Durham, Carolina Academic Press, 1983): 45.

⁴⁰ Bonnassie, *From Slavery*, 183.

dukes of Apulia and later by Robert Guiscard in Sicily. These were small gold coins, known by their Arabic names rubais and taris, and minted using African gold. By the 12th century larger amounts of African gold were appearing in Europe. In November 1190, Richard I of England received 40,000 ounces of gold from King Tancred of Sicily in the form of 1,200,000 taries which he carried to Acre and divided equally with King Philip of France. With the tari standard, if not the tari coin, used from Palermo to Acre, the Latin empire in Constantinople also switched eventually to using African gold, rather than Byzantine gold, which all but disappeared with the last emperor.⁴¹ Between 1235 and 1250 the Crusader state in the Holy Land which began to use gold coinage much earlier than the rest of Europe, also used the tari standard. In Spain, the progress of the Reconquista increased the number of people using gold coins in commercial transactions and encouraged their circulation in Christian Spain. As gold continued to flow into the Iberian peninsula, Castile and Portugal began minting gold in the 12th century, keeping the Arabic script on their respective coins. By the 13th century the doblas, imitating the Almohad double dinar, replaced the morbetinos in Castile, and were described as the ‘standard’ gold coin of Castile from the 13th century onwards.⁴² The Italian cities led the Christian Mediterranean adoption of commercial practices based on an internally accepted gold coin.⁴³ From 1180 onwards, the Genoese who traded between Tunis and Sicily brought Tunisian gold to Sicily while exporting Sicilian goods to Genoa. By 1220, when Tunis replaced Ceuta as the major trading post with the Genoese, grains and gold dust, paiola, as well as minted gold, were exported. By the mid-13th century, sufficient African gold had been accumulated in Genoa and Florence to allow these cities to begin minting their own gold coins, the Florin and the Genovino. The newly minted coins

⁴¹ Robert D. Leonard, “The effects of the Fourth Crusade on European Gold Coinage,” in *The Fourth Crusade: Event, Aftermath, and Perceptions*, Th. Madden ed. (Ashgate, 2008): 75-85. R. Lopez paper, “Back to gold,” in the *Economic History Review*, 2nd series IX (1956): 219-240. The part related to Islam is replete with factual errors.

⁴² Spufford, *Money*, 169.

⁴³ Lopez, “Back to Gold.”

were based on the existing currency system of Genoa and Tuscany,⁴⁴ and were no longer imitations of the Islamic dinar. By the 14th century the demand for gold in Europe was at its height. Gold currency was common in the Mediterranean economy, while Northern European countries such as France and England became increasingly acquainted with gold currency and gold bullion even though regular minting of gold currency did not take root there.⁴⁵

The Islamic world preferred payment in silver, of which there was a dearth in the Islamic East, but learned to accept the new coins since these were now used to pay for the purchases of Oriental goods in Syria and Egypt. The payments in silver enabled North African dynasties dealing with the Europeans to resume silver minting on an accelerated scale and once again changed the balance of payments. From the mid-13th century onwards, North African states began minting their own silver dirhams, which the Europeans called millares, using European silver, while the Europeans themselves engaged in minting imitations of Islamic coin and shipping them as equal to the Islamic original coins.⁴⁶ Again Tunis played a central role in this. The availability of African gold changed the ratio of gold to silver in the Middle East and North Africa, with part of the gold being exported back there. Monetary circulation, quantity of money in circulation and monetization must all have been greater in North Africa than in the Middle East. By the end of the 13th century North African ports were flooded with silver, which they received in payment for gold and other raw and manufactured items. By the beginning of the 14th century gold was cheaper in Bougie because it lay close to the desert outlets, such as Sijilmāsa, while silver was cheaper in Tunis, where European silver was most easily found. The amount of silver paid for gold in Tunis “was so high, at least temporarily, that Tunis was drawing in not only fresh West African gold, but also gold that had been sent to Europe before coming back

⁴⁴ Spufford, *Money*, 177-78.

⁴⁵ Spufford, *Money*, 180-186.

⁴⁶ For the *millares* see Spufford, *Money*, 171-76.

to North Africa.”⁴⁷ The supply of gold continued unabated. “As late as 1343 the problem in Venice was still of how to help the mint cope with the enormous quantities of gold being imported into the city from overseas.”⁴⁸

The new global economic conditions did not go unnoticed in the Marīnid court in Fez. The Marīnids had plenty of the metal for their minting needs. The beautiful double gold dinars, minted for Abū ‘Inān, were superior in quality to any other dinars minted in the rest of the Islamic world at the time.⁴⁹ The treasury had sufficient reserves to pay wages to the army, and no need to turn to *iqṭā’*, land grants which alienated the State’s lands. Always in need of more ships and soldiers, the secret of the Marīnid army and navy’s strength lay in that country’s purchasing power, which paid for a long-standing, large mercenary army. The chroniclers tell us that the Christian militia numbered around 5000, including mercenaries from Aragon, Castile and France, and that for their services the Marīnid sultans before and after Abū ‘l-Hasan, paid wages in gold every few months, in addition to a fee paid to their Christian lords.⁵⁰ The price of 50,000 gold dinars which the sultan Abū ‘Inān paid for ransoming the city of Tripoli in modern-day Libya, was deemed ‘a trifle’ by him, as indeed it was when compared to Ibn Hawqal’s report that in the 10th century the city of Sijilmāsa drew 400.000 gold dinars each year from the trade.⁵¹ Working with precious metals was a common occupation in Fez, the mint director explained in his manual. As to the desert routes, according to Ibn Khaldūn, here were two gold export routes from sub-Saharan Africa, one leading directly to Egypt, through which 12,000 camel caravans passed annually, the other through Timbuktu to Fez. The Marīnid impact on the gold supply was two fold: they contributed much to the security and efficiency of the

⁴⁷ Spufford, *Money*, 179.

⁴⁸ Spufford, *Money*, 180.

⁴⁹ See for example the monetary crisis in Egypt, Jere L. Bacharach, “Monetary Movements in Medieval Egypt, 1171-1517, in *Precious Metals*, 159-182.

⁵⁰ Shatzmiller, *The Berbers*, 126-28.

⁵¹ Shatzmiller, *The Berbers*, 128.

Saharan gold trade, but also wanted to be in control of the maritime ports, where the benefits of the trade were accumulating. The Marīnid port of Ceuta was obviously not capturing enough of the returns, since gold also was passing to the Genoese through Almeria; thus military occupation was the way of achieving it.

The deterioration in security along the routes also corresponded to a succession crisis within the Marīnid dynasty after 1361. Palace revolts and insurrections affected the state's power to protect the trans-Saharan gold route and the Mediterranean gold outlets,⁵² and changes to the caravan routes followed. Caravans increasingly avoided the direct routes across the arid zones due to the drying up of former water sources along the way.⁵³ The decline in securing adequate water supplies rendered the transient's life precarious and explained the decline in Moroccan gold supply after 1375.

Walker's theory, which upholds the evidence that a growing, sustainable amount of gold was a trigger of the revolution, together with the growing demand for a recognizable, reliable and international coin to facilitate exchanges, is correct, though ending the discussion with the Almohads is not.⁵⁴ The Marīnids were a global factor because they enabled Europe's return to gold minting in the 13th century, and because they maintained the process by securing massive shipment of gold bullion and gold dust from West Africa.⁵⁵ No other power could have guaranteed the safety of the gold trade over hazardous and difficult terrain inhabited by hostile nomadic tribes, certainly not the Genoese traders on their own. We need to recognize the long term impact of well functioning state institutions, a strong Marīnid army, centralized control and a rational decision

⁵² See Abī ʿI-Hasan Alī b. Yūsuf al-Hakīm, *al-Dawba al-mushtabikka fī dawābit dār al-sikka*, ed. Husein Munis (Madrid, 1960).

⁵³ Ian Blanchard, "African Gold and European Specie Markets ca. 1300-1800" *Relazioni economiche tra Europa e mondo islamico. Sec. XIII-XVIII*, a cura di S. Cavaciocchi, (Firenze, Le Monnier / Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini," Atti delle Settimane di Studi e altri convegni, 38. 2007) : 451-84.

⁵⁴ Walker, "The Italian, 31.

⁵⁵ Based on Spufford, *Money*, 163-186.

making process.⁵⁶ The West African gold was significant in two ways. Firstly, the Islamic gold currency with its various regional coins provided the model for European coins. Secondly, it provided a sufficiently sustained level of precious metal stock to permit the European return to gold minting. Maintaining this level from an independent, indigenous source explains Marīnid Fez strategic position in the new economic order in the 14th century. Control of the overland and maritime trade was another. The Marīnid control over the gold outlets of the sub-Saharan regions made Marīnid Fez responsible for the long-term stability in gold prices which characterized European specie-markets during the mid-14th century (1325-1375), and which in turn rested upon the existence of a delicately balanced bi-metallic flow within and between a series of linked specie markets.

Marīnid Grains and Merino Wool

With the Trans-Sahara trade in gold and slaves qualified as international trade, the rest of the Marīnid overland trade took place within its regional framework. The Sūs region had always had commercial relations with the big cities of the Sahara where sugar and salt were exchanged for precious metals and slaves. Marīnid Morocco exported raw materials such as hides and manufactured goods such as sugar, but the great revenue derived from trading in the two most lucrative commodities, grains and wool, escaped them.⁵⁷ Maritime trade and Atlantic shipping was fragmentary at best. Although Ceuta was well frequented, a series of recent studies based

⁵⁶ On the Marīnid institutions see below, on the desiccation theories see Ian Blanchard, "African Gold and European Specie Markets."

⁵⁷ Maya Shatzmiller, "A Misconstrued Link: Europe and the Economic History of Islamic Trade" *Relazioni economiche tra Europa e mondo Islamico secc. XIII-XVIII*, a cura di S. Cavaciocchi, (Firenze 2007): 237-415. Le Monnier / Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini," Atti delle Settimane di Studi e altri convegni, 38. On sugar export destinations such as Bruges in the 13th century, which imported low quality of sugar from Morocco see Mohamed Ouerfelli, *Le sucre. Production, commercialization et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, (Brill, Leiden, 2008), 399.

on archival documents from the trading houses of Barcelona, Genoa, Venice, Florence and Pisa, have shown that they favoured the Eastern Mediterranean ports of North Africa, which were visited more frequently than were the relatively smaller Atlantic Ocean ports of Anfa, Arzila and Salé.⁵⁸

The North African grain trade was at its highest and most lucrative point between the 13th and 15th centuries.⁵⁹ It supplied the European Mediterranean countries in years when their own crops failed and imported grain from them when the reverse situation occurred. Thus, the Maghrib, which was an importer in the 13th century, became an exporter of grain to the cities of Genoa and Florence in the 14th century, while in the 15th century, thousands of tons of grain reached Genoa from Tunis, Bone, Stora, Bougie, Alger, Oran, Tenes. From their inland perch in Fez the Marīnids witnessed the largest trade expansion in North African history and were fully aware that they had no part in it. They realized they were at a strategic disadvantage, and a large portion of the Mediterranean trade was eluding them, and decided to reverse this situation. If global trade would not come to their Atlantic or Mediterranean ports, they were ready and able to take over those ports favoured by global traders. As with modern corporate raiders, the Marīnids' business shortcomings could be fixed by buying, or in what we would call today "a hostile takeover," acquiring economic assets which had already proven their income-generating capacity. Established markets, port installations, transport services and related industries could be acquired, if not with capital than with military power. The conquest of Tlemcen, Oran, Bougie, Tunis makes this clear.

The potential of the grain trade did not go unnoticed in Marīnid Fez and there was some limited participation in it by individual Marīnid entrepreneurs. One noteworthy example is that of the

⁵⁸ See María Dolores López Pérez, *La corona de Aragón y el Maghreb en el siglo XIV*, (Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1995). G. Jehel, *L'Italie et le Maghreb au Moyen Age. Conflits et échanges du VIIe au XVe siècle*, (Paris, PUF, 2001).

⁵⁹ The two fundamental studies of the Catalan trade with Marīnid Morocco, are Ch.-E. Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane et le Maghreb aux 13 et 14 siècles* (Paris, 1966), and M. D. López Pérez, *La corona de Aragón*. See also on navigation and trade between Genoa and the medieval Maghrib, Jehel, *L'Italie*, 143-156, 157-69.

preacher, khatib, al-Mazdaghī, who in spite of his religious occupation, was a wealthy man and eyed the lucrative grain export. According to Ibn Marzūq, the chronicler of Abū 'l-Hasan's exploits across the Maghrib, he had easy access to capital since he was entrusted with guarding the inheritance money of orphans in the city as well as the waqf revenue funds, all of which were deposited in his mosque, the al-Qarawiyyin. As a good entrepreneur he invested in grain, "he had a lot of grain in store, waiting for the price to go up," wrote Ibn Marzūq.⁶⁰ As he admitted when the fraud was discovered, he used the money to purchase grain for speculation, intending to pay it back to the public treasury but his sons and partners sold it before he could do so. Abū'l-Hasan, who resided in al-Mansūra at the time, decided to replace the missing funds, "so that the people will not suffer from the greed of individuals," he said, but refused to grant an audience to the disgraced khatib turned investor, when the later came to al-Mansūra.

The new global economic order also reserved a place of honor for wool for local consumption but especially for export to the new centers of Europe, Italy, Flanders and England. The Zanata, the tribal groups to whom the Marīnids belonged, had long been herders involved in wool production, though their merchandise, shipped from Ceuta or Bougie, was not of a high enough quality for the fine woolen cloth manufacturers of Europe. Yet it was the humble Marīnid ram who earned a place of honor in the annals of the wool production and the global economic history.⁶¹

The circumstances which made merino wool the most expensive and most sought after wool in the world during the 16th to 18th centuries arose from two events closely linked to Marīnid Fez. The first was the long military campaigns in Spain, the second, the import of the merino sheep from North Africa to Spain. The territories of Christian Spain were always thinly populated, something which made

⁶⁰ See Shatzmiller, *The Berbers*, 69-82.

⁶¹ Jehel, *L'Italie*, 164.

possible the co-existence of nomadic and settled habitation.⁶² Given this particular human ecology, the general expansion in herding began in the 11th to 12th centuries and followed the military frontier as it shifted southward in junction with the progress of the war against the Muslims, the reconquista. By the 13th century the patterns of movement between seasonal pastures along recognized routes, which made the Spanish wool industry so profitable, were in place. Spanish demography changed by the late 12th century, as demographic and economic growth occurred in many regions while pressure on the resources increased. The post-plague depression of the mid-14th century reduced the pressure on farmland, thus allowing sheep farming to increase even further. The reconquista, the battle fought by the Marīnids on Spanish soil, further helped to keep the size of the flocks in check. Nonetheless, while by the end of the 14th century, Spanish wools were still the cheapest and least coveted in the wool markets of Italy, England and Belgium, something changed in the 15th century. As a result of the introduction of the merino breed of sheep from North Africa to Spain and their cross breeding with the native sheep, the wool industry in Spain became highly profitable. By the beginning of the 16th century Merino wool was known all over Spain and the number of sheep was estimated at 3 million. Years of experimentation by the Castilian sheep breeders went into developing the already extremely fine wool into a short, less than 5cm, strand of very fine wool which captured an increasing share of the fine wool market. The production of fine merino wool was so successful that “from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, Spain, thanks to her virtual monopoly of the breed, dominated the world market of wool,” In Spain, “the entire economic social structure of the country both its assets and liabilities was etched by merino sheep grazing.”⁶³

⁶² The economic history of the Merino wool is studied by Carla Rahn Phillips and W. D. Phillips, *Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth Century*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁶³ Robert S. Lopez, “The Origin of the Merino Sheep,” *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume, Jewish Social Studies*, 5, (New York, 1953): 161. On the wool industry see John Munro, “Medieval Woolens: Textiles, Textile Technology and Industrial Organisation, c. 800-1500,” *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, ed. David Jenkins, (Cambridge, 2003), I: 181-386.

In spite of its importance, the origin of the word ‘Merino’, and the circumstances of its introduction into Spain remained a mystery to economic historians. A document in the Genoese archive, dated 1307, contains the first ever mention of import of merino wool from Tunis and thus a link between the name and the wool. In 1953, the Italian-American economic historian Robert Lopez suggested that the name of the Merino sheep was derived from the Moroccan rulers’ tribal name, the Banū Marīn, and that the sheep itself was a 14th century crossbreeding of the North African Barbary ram with the indigenous Spanish sheep. The fact that the wool was exported from Tunis, not from Western North Africa where the Marīnid Zanāta tribes were grazing in the Northern Rif mountains, did not cast any doubt on the attribution since as we saw earlier, Tunis was the major export port of North Africa. After that early mention, merino wool disappeared from the Genoese records until the 15th century. Further possible links suggest a connection with the Marīnid troops which crossed the straits in the late 13th century since a contemporary list of booty plundered through Christian-Islamic warfare included captured Marīnid flocks. Yet another explanation is suggested by a record of Marīnid rams being imported by the Castilian monarch Pedro IV around 1336-87.⁶⁴ Regardless of whether the introduction was initiated by Genoese merchants, who brought an existing Merino breed to Southern Spain and who persuaded Castilian rulers and administrators to develop it, or whether it was purely Spanish initiative, the economic development of the breed into an industry required a combination of technical knowledge, availability of transportation and markets. Unbeknownst to themselves, the Marīnids played an important part in the creation of the wool industry. Its eventual transformation into the largest and most profitable manufacturing enterprise in Europe also makes it a story of a lost opportunity for them.

⁶⁴ G. Jehel reports an import of Maghribi sheep and goats to Sicily by Charles d’Anjou but does not think that these have any common traits with the Merino sheep. Regardless, this is additional indication about the existence of the practice. Jehel, *L’Italie*, 163, and note 40, p.207.

Institutions and Empires

Institutions and property rights are two of the newly minted terms credited with facilitating the long-term economic growth of the West.⁶⁵ Both are visible in the Marīnid environment. The Islamic state institutions in Morocco, whether public or private, political, economic, social or religious, always had a strong Berber social infrastructure in addition to their Islamic patterns, and therefore show a different system of evolution from those of the Middle East. In addition, the processes of Arabization and Islamization were never complete in Morocco, something else which interfered with individual, as well as national, identity formation. At times, the classical Islamic state institutions coexisted side by side with Berber ones, most notably under the Almohads.⁶⁶ For instance the army and the privy council institutions, which played empire building roles, were notoriously ‘Berber-like’ under the Almoravids and the Almohads. Under the Marīnids, the religious institutions shifted from the Almohad creed back to the more traditional Maliki religious and legal practices and thus lost most of their Berber like features. Economic institutions enjoyed more continuity. The tax collecting bureau, for instance, maintained the registers of tax paying urban properties, such as stores and bath houses, already established by previous administrations. Property rights were more difficult to enforce. In the case of the waqf khayri properties, endowments for the public good, which were supposed to provide revenue for the upkeep of the municipal and religious foundations, those were administered by the religious personnel in the mosques in conformity with Maliki rules.⁶⁷ But managers, such as al-Mazdaghi, the grain

⁶⁵ Especially Douglass C. North, *The Rise of the Western World. A New Economic History*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973) On property rights in the Marīnid environment see Maya Shatzmiller, “Islamic Institutions and Property Rights: The Case of the ‘Public Good’ Waqf” *JESHO* 44/1 (2001): 44-74.

⁶⁶ On the Idrissids see Ennahid, *Political economy*. A lengthy discussion of the Marīnid institutions is provided in Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State*.

⁶⁷ Maya Shatzmiller, “Islamic Institutions and Property Rights: The Case of the ‘Public Good’ Waqf” *JESHO* 44/1 (2001): 44-74.

speculator whom we met earlier, failed to respect and enforce respect for property rights. On the other hand, a new and important religious institution was inaugurated in the medrasas, a college for religious training for future judges and muftis.⁶⁸ The question remains which institutions contributed to the ‘quest for empire’ and whether they facilitated or hampered it?

Those who regard institutions as crucial to the rise of the Atlantic empires, speak of the change and adaptation which has taken place in the political institutions of the European Atlantic states, and how easily it was accomplished. Political change allowed the economic players more freedom in their pursuit of profit, thus facilitating global trade and optimizing returns for both the state and individuals.⁶⁹ Islamic institutions however, in particular those facilitating economic activities, came under attack precisely because they did for not allow such changes.⁷⁰ Based on comparison with the European institutions, the theory argues that institutions change through ‘self reinforcement’, namely by applying negative feedback to their economic behavior, eventually resulting in self destruction and the development of newer institutions, which will better accommodate better the changing circumstances. If this was the way in which Medieval European institutions have changed, the argument goes, why did Islamic institutions not follow their path from “self destroying” into regeneration? Why, in the Islamic case are there no signs of behavior exhibiting negative feedback and institutional re-modification? These are important and legitimate questions with repercussions well beyond the scope of this paper, but some reflection on the nature of the Marīnid institutions seems appropriate here.

⁶⁸ Maya Shatzmiller, "Les premiers Mérinides et le milieu religieux de Fès: L'introduction des Médresas" *Studia Islamica* 33 (1976): 109-18.

⁶⁹ D. Acemoglu, S. Johnson, J. Robinson, "The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change and Economic Growth, *The American Economic Review*, (June 2005): 546-79. See for general background *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, J. D. Tracy ed. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991) and D. C. North, "Institutions, transactions costs, and the rise of merchant empires," in *The Political Economy*, 22-40.

⁷⁰ Timur Kuran, "The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East," *The Journal of Economic History*, 63(2003): 414-46.

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By the mid 14th century what the Marīnids were able to achieve through their institutional fabric was national political and social cohesion. Religious personnel, rebellious and bellicose under the Almohads and early Marīnid rulers, now submitted to state control, lured into compliance by appointments, court patronage or payments in support of religious institutions.⁷¹ The centralization of state institutions in and around the court was successful, particularly the establishment of fiscal control over tax collection and the proceeds of trade, including gold.⁷² National cohesion was especially difficult to achieve, especially in the cities themselves where Arab and Berber intellectuals competed for different agendas, yet national unity around the ruler was manifested in the cohesion of social classes around the court, army and intellectuals and finally the appearance of urban tradesmen in processions welcoming the ruler back into the city, something which was seen for the first time. The intellectual malaise among the Berbers, which had been expressed by intellectual elites, dissipated. Acculturation to the Arab language, religious and social norms progressed under the Marīnids, with Berber representation at the court. Poetry and chronicles were written in Arabic but the language at court was frequently Berber. The incorporation of Berber tribal leaders into the army under the Marīnids secured the support of the Zanata Berber tribes. New national and urban historiography was written.⁷³ The ambitious and visionary splendor of the Marīnid capital which was particularly evident during the succession of the three long reigning monarchs was enhanced by the monuments. The Marīnids had their own monumental architecture. Medresas, mosques, monumental gates and mausoleums, not only in Fez but in other cities throughout the entire Maghrib bear testimony to the Marīnid fiscal policy and generosity. Migration to North Africa from al-Andalus, which began under the Almoravids and Almohads, continued under the Marīnids with the

⁷¹ Shatzmiller, *L'historiographie mérinide*.

⁷² The gold trade issue is far from clear. Ashtor had doubts whether the rulers of the Moroccan state were able to control the income from the gold trade. Ennahid, *Political Economy*, 23-31.

⁷³ Maya Shatzmiller, *L'historiographie mérinide*.

three great men of the 14th century, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Marzūq, Ibn al-Khatīb, all distinguished minds of medieval Islam, spending time at the Marīnid court in Fez at one point or another. Yet, the Marīnid ‘quest for empire’ did not succeed in the long term. Why?

Conclusion

National reconciliation, reformed and strengthened institutions, strong military, demographic resurgence and plenty of money, resulted in a policy of conquering neighboring territories and forcing them to hand over their resources to the empire. By the conquest the coastal regions and making their populations pay for the takeover expenses through taxation, the Marīnids achieved a North African economy with an extraordinary maritime exposure. While there are instances of landlocked empires in world history, for example, the Mongol Empire in the 13th to 14th century,⁷⁴ the case of both the Atlantic Ocean empires and the Italian cities and the Mediterranean, have demonstrated - both theoretically and empirically- that maritime trade was a condition for economic expansion. The Marīnids were considered a global power by contemporaries.⁷⁵ This enabled them to play an important role in Europe’s return to gold since all the gold which fed it originated in North Africa. Unified under a powerful dynasty controlled from Fez, the country could arguably sustain a ‘quest for empire’. Territorial gains, demographics, institutions and maritime trade were all there, so why were all these elements insufficient to launch a long-term, solid enterprise? Clearly the Marīnids lacked the wherewithal to hold on to their newly conquered territories, but other, more stable, empires, were in a similar position. The fact that eventually all the Atlantic Ocean empires collapsed and their rulers resumed the national territorial shape they had earlier, does not obscure the fact that before they did so, they brought a

⁷⁴ See the interesting case of the Golden Horde, D. De Weese, *Islamization and Native religion in the Golden Horde*, (University Park, 1994).

⁷⁵ H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic. Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*, (Yale University Press, 2006).

great economic boom to the citizens. Which brings us back to the Black Death. Again, comparison with Europe provides some clues. In the current economic thought, the event of the Black Death had more to it than simply a world brought down by rats and fleas. In fact, the Black Death signaled a new beginning for Europe in real terms.⁷⁶ After Europeans experienced the worse pandemic in history and the consequent demographic collapse of the mid 14th century, both social and economic institutions were transformed. Demand for labour increased and wages rose, while an abundance of land led to lower rents. The decline in manpower also led to technological innovations and a rise in the standards of living. The 'Rise of the West' is undoubtedly linked to this aftermath. One explanation could be that Morocco's population was not decimated to the same degree as Europe's. Another could be that the rise in agricultural productivity, which fed the rise of Europe, did not materialize in Morocco. There were no technical innovations such as those which fed the European industrial infra-structures. There were no Moroccan explorations overseas which would have helped coastal ports to develop before the Europeans developed them. In the long term all the other assets did not help and the Marīnid 'quest for empire' lacked the necessary resiliency. By the same token, the Black Death did not signal the new beginning for Morocco that it did for Western Europe, rather, it led to economic decline and marginalization for the rest of the Islamic world. It was truly a case of a lost opportunity.

⁷⁶ Şevket Pamuk, 'The Black Death and the Origins of the Great Divergence inside Europe, 1300-1600,' *European Review of Economic History*, 11 (2007): 289-317.

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