

Project:

My experience at the Medieval Mediterranean Institute in Barcelona 2010 led to the drafting of a book proposal entitled “North Africa and the Medieval Mediterranean.” The proposal has been accepted for publication by Edinburgh University Press. Several of the sources used and the discussions shared at the institute were also used in the construction of the proposal and will be the basis for the book.

A summary of the proposed chapters is provided below.

Introduction (12,000 words) – An accessible narrative on the sources, methods and historiography of the Western Mediterranean.

Chapter 1: The Islamic Conquests and the Western Mediterranean – A Reassessment (8,000 words)

The first chapter will focus on the recent reevaluation of the first Muslim conquests. Many Arab chroniclers came to rewrite and claim the history of Berber conquests. It will discuss the earliest encounters between North Africans and Europeans not only in Al-Andalus but in other parts of Europe.

Chapter 2: The Middle Period (8,000 words)

The second chapter examines the almost immediate political disintegration of unified Muslim rule over the Western Mediterranean into the realms of the Idrissids, Rustamids, Aghlabids, Fatimids and Umayyads. Using chronicles in Arabic and new sources from recent research done by North African colleagues this section will examine the intricate and complex relationship between these highly diverse early Medieval Muslim polities through trade, war and rivalry. Next the chapter will discuss the apogee of Western Mediterranean political unity under the Almoravids the Almohads.

Chapter 3: The Persistence of the Western Mediterranean (8,000 words)

Assumptions about the “inevitable” rise of Christian power and the predominant advantages of Christian powers after battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 will be challenged and reassessed in this chapter. The chapter will explain how newly confident European powers jockeyed for influence in the courts of the major North African dynasties that succeeded the Almohads.

Thematic Chapters

Chapter 4: European Christian Encounters in North Africa (Lope d’Ayn: Bishop of Marrakech) 9,000 words

Although most studies of “convivencia and conflict” between Jews, Muslims and Christians have focused on Al-Andalus and places such as Cordoba, Seville and Valencia, there was a very similar and very vibrant system of “convivencia” in places of contact and conflict that have typically been left out

of the field of convivencia and Mediterranean studies, places such as Marrakech, Tunis, Fes and Bijaya.

Chapter 5: North African Encounters in Europe (Tariq bin Zayd – Conqueror of Al-Andalus) 9,000 words

Opening with an account of Tariq bin Zayd, the Berber credited with the conquest of Al-Andalus, this chapter discusses the important role of Berber influences in Al-Andalus. In addition to travel narratives by Muslim writers, there will also be an account of Muslims in France, unaffiliated with any Amir, who captured the Abbot of Cluny and held out on the southern shores of France until the tenth century.

Chapter 6: Traders and Merchants – 9,000 words

As J. Abu Lughod argued for medieval Mamluk Egypt, the imbalance of trade that eventually favored European nations was by no means inevitable as late as the fourteenth century. Similarly, North African commercial relations with Christian Europe were not tied to any ‘inevitability’ of the rise of the West. North Africa’s commercial relations with the Christians were stronger than they had been both before and after the moment when the “rise of the west” was supposed to have occurred – the twelfth-century renaissance.

Chapter 7: Mercenaries and Slaves (A Christian Almoravid Mercenary) 9,000 words

One of the most fascinating and under-studied subjects in Medieval North African history is the influence and impact of Christian mercenaries in North African courts and armies and how these mercenaries were a direct link between North Africa and their homeland in Europe – a link much stronger than that allowed the “permanent” Mamluk mercenaries of Egypt. The Arabic sources and chronologies of the period are unusually rich in their description of Christian mercenaries as well as European and Christian born slaves.

Chapter 8: Conversion (Constantinus Africanus, Anselmo of Turmeda, Bodo-Eleazar) 9,000 words

While mercenary activity led to cultural interactions between North Africa and Europe, outright conversion of mercenaries was rare. However, conversion was certainly not unknown. The three biographies compared and studied here, Constantinus Africanus, Anselmo of Turmeda, Bodo-Eleazar represent the three major religious traditions of the Western Mediterranean. There will be a discussion of so-called “phantom converts.” The chapter will also demonstrate how scholars moved freely, if haltingly across and between Christian-Muslim realms.

An **Epilogue (12,000 words)** will discuss how Muslim and Jewish exiles to North Africa interacted with an already vibrant indigenous cultural and intellectual tradition that had been bridging the Western Mediterranean Sea. The inter-religious culture of the Medieval Western Mediterranean did not disappear with the

inquisition and the 1608 expulsion from Al-Andalus. Rather, artifacts of the medieval western Mediterranean world was preserved in the streets of the madinas of Fes, Tunis, Marrakech, in the libraries of Berber chiefs and Arab sharifs in places as far away as the Saharan desert-port of Tamegroute and as remote as the Gadmiwa region of the Atlas.