

# The *Almogataces*: A Historical Perspective

FELIPE MAÍLLO SALGADO

This paper discusses the historical role of the *mogataces* or *almogataces*. First, however, it is necessary to define the term briefly yet precisely, in order to understand its exact meaning before approaching its referent, that is the individual to whom it applied.

This will not be difficult, as I shall begin with an article that I wrote some years ago,<sup>1</sup> fairly precisely clarifying the meaning in Spanish of this term (derived from Arabic), and based on how it is used in various Spanish texts of the modern period.

## ETYMOLOGY, MEANING, USE, AND REFERENT OF THE WORD (*AL*)*MOGATAZ*

The term *almogataz* or *mogataz*, as Dozy has indicated,<sup>2</sup> comes from the verb *gattasa*, 'to baptize' (second conjugation), the passive participle of which, *mugattas*, 'baptized', passed into Spanish in two variants, one with and one without the Arabic article being incorporated; thus we have the forms *almogataz* and *mogataz* which refer, as we shall see, to a special category of Moors [North African Muslims — but 'Moors' is the closest term to the Spanish *moros* — *Tr.*] that did not exist in the Iberian Peninsula during the medieval period.<sup>3</sup>

The term (*al*)*mogataz* alludes to a reality that existed neither in the Iberian Peninsula, nor in medieval times, but did exist in North Africa and in more modern times; the ability to state this fact is due not only to the

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1. F. Maíllo Salgado, 'Breves notas sobre la historia y el significado de la palabra *almogataz*', *Studia Zamorensta*, 5 (1985), 471-80.
2. W.H. Engelmann and R. Dozy, *Glossaire des mots espagnols et portugais dérivés de l'arabe* (Leiden, 1869), p. 171.
3. Concerning medieval ethnic-religious categories in the Iberian Peninsula, see F. Maíllo Salgado, 'Esbozo tipológico étnico-religioso de los grupos humanos peninsulares en la Edad Media', *Studia Philologica Salmanticensia*, 7-8 (1984), 259-67.

texts in which the Arabism is recorded, but also to other clear indications that will be explained below.

In all the many medieval narrative sources that I have examined, I have never come across the word (*al*)*mogataz*. It is only in texts written in post-medieval times that this Arabism can be documented and is used; moreover, such works almost invariably issue from or relate to the region of Orán. Just as when I encountered the word for the first time, the work that provided me with further documentation also came from that region. In the latter case, however, there was a difference: the word was explained in the text.

Diego Suárez, a soldier for over 30 years in the city of Orán, and an undoubted authority on the customs and life of the region, used the term in his book written during the last decade of the sixteenth century, explaining its meaning and indicating that it applied to the Moors of the region of Orán who requested protection from the *capitanes generales* (commanders) of the Spanish fort. Such Moors were thus obliged to contribute to the maintenance of the fort with appropriate victuals at agreed-upon prices and 'the Moors who thus desire and request his friendship, which they themselves call *temín*,<sup>4</sup> generally receive all sorts of favours and assistance against their enemies the Turks and other hostile Moors, who thus dislike them; and they often come to blows because of the rumour that they are bad Moors who transgress the precepts of Muḥammad, since they make friends with the Christians, and therefore they are called *almogataces*, which means traitors (*tornadizos*) who desert and convert to another religious law.'<sup>5</sup>

This revealing context makes us aware of a reality different from that of the medieval Iberian Peninsula, not only because it belongs to another place and time, but also because such Moors, in view of the characteristics defining them, cannot be compared or associated with the *mudéjares* [Muslim subjects of a Christian sovereign — *Tr.*] and thus could not be included under the latter term; this was so especially since they were not subject, as were the *mudéjares* of the peninsula, to the tax burdens and compulsory tribute imposed by Christian conquerors occupying Muslim lands in the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the *almogataces*, Moors and

4. *Tamán* > *temín* means in Arabic, among other things, 'protection'. '*Romía* and *temín* are taxes that they pay to HM for protection they receive, in order to remain in the areas near the forts and sow their crops there.' L. Galindo y Vera, *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia, Historia, vicisitudes y política tradicional de España respecto a sus posesiones en las costas de Africa* (Madrid, 1884), p. 410.

5. Diego Suárez, *Historia del Maestre último que fué de Montesa*, ed. F. Guillén Robles (Madrid, 1889), p. 66.

6. One must also bear in mind that from the sixteenth century onwards and definitely in the seventeenth century the term *mudéjar* became more specialized in Castilian Spanish and came to denote the Andalusian Arabs who had settled in North Africa. See F. Maíllo Salgado, 'Acerca del uso significado y referente del término *mudéjar*

Christians would conclude arrangements that were mutually beneficial and that, in principle, and in general, were agreed upon by both parties.

Moreover, the Christians lived in walled towns on the coast and did not occupy the land of peaceful Moors; nevertheless, in their incursions, they would occasionally succeed in controlling some fairly extensive territory, including hostile Moors whom they had subjected by force (since there were sometimes expeditions to more distant territories).

From the above, especially the last point, it emerges that, despite being labelled *tornadizos*, the *almogataces* were not so in the strict sense, as they continued being Muslims. These two traits that distinguish them (co-operation with the Spanish and loyalty to their own religion) enable us to understand the logic behind the term that was used to name them, since there was an unavoidable need for a term that would take into account specificities that had not existed earlier in the framework of the socio-professional and ethnic-religious categories of medieval Spain.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, considering the term's etymology, it must have retained some connection with the meaning of the Arabic word which, as we know, means 'baptized'. We should thus assume that some of the *almogataces* at least were baptized, that is, that they became *tornadizos*.

This is Dozy's opinion, since he assures us that in Arabic *mugaffas* already referred to the Moor who received baptism, the apostate.<sup>8</sup> Eguilaz, for his part, states that *almogataz* means the 'baptized Moor who serves Spain in the garrisons of Africa'.<sup>9</sup>

Leaving aside for the moment the accuracy of these assertions, we realize that each definition is based solely on etymology, rather than on the meaning the Arabism acquires in a particular Spanish context. Both Arabists in this case unwittingly fall into the etymological fallacy, by believing that they can arrive at a word's meaning by uncovering its origin.

Dozy, the Dutch scholar, takes a fourteenth-century text and ascribes the meaning of the word *taḡtīs* (baptism) in its language of origin to another isolated word, one which is more or less neutral and not dated (stemming from the same root), and that has been incorporated into Spanish and about which we now know that it was not used in those days, in fact not until two centuries later; while the Spanish philologist,

in *Actas del IV Congreso Internacional Encuentro de las tres Culturas (Toledo 1985)*, ed. C. Carrete Parrondo (Toledo, 1988), pp. 109–11.

7. Studied in Maíllo Salgado, 'Esbozo tipológico'.

8. R. Dozy states, in fact, that *mugaffas* in Arabic denoted 'a Moor who has been baptized a Christian, an apostate', on the basis of a single document found in a non-clarificatory text by al Ḥaṭīb in which, moreover, this passive participle form does not appear. See *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2nd edn. (Paris–Leiden, 1927), pp. 216–17.

9. See L. Eguilaz y Yanguas, *Glosario etimológico de las palabras españolas de origen oriental* (repr. Madrid, 1974), pp. 232–3.

following in the Dutchman's footsteps, is guided by intuition as much as by etymology, and, perhaps, by some other piece of information that he knew.

Obviously, due to chronological impossibility, we cannot hold against these scholars the fact that they were not aware of the distinction between the diachronic and synchronic aspects of language, established subsequently and today a methodological necessity; but, for that very reason, when these eminent scholars take, as they often do, texts from periods far apart in time, and treat them as examples of the same language, we cannot fully subscribe to the considerations and definitions that they deduce from this, however eminent they were and however great was their knowledge of Arabisms imported into Spanish. If we do not bear this in mind, we will never be able to understand the true nature of the loan words.

And so, leaving aside the earlier definitions, let us look at what the actual context provides. Fortunately, Diego Suárez himself includes additional clarifications, indicating that when the troops of Orán made a seizure, 'and the Moorish spy who sold it to them is aware that the others know about it, he does not dare to remain among them and comes to Orán with the Christians, where they free his wife and children and the rest of his family when the lots are drawn as they sell off the booty; and to the dragoman involved they likewise give his due, a certain number of doubloons for each prisoner. This Moorish spy stays in Orán, where he receives a simple wage; of such Moors there are usually half a dozen, called *almogatazes* which, in their language, means traitors. The hostile Moors, if they take them, will cut such people in pieces, because they always act as spies for the kingdom and many seizures are made with their help.'<sup>10</sup>

We thus see that the *almogataz* was also a kind of spy who received wages and a percentage of the prisoners who had been captured through his efforts. We may thus deduce that the *almogataces* were indispensable and most essential elements in Spanish domination of the territory around Orán. This way of behaving, however, despite what one might think, did not necessarily lead to the abandoning of Islam nor to the conversion to Christianity of these subjects. That this was the case can easily be seen when one reads the texts, which say nothing about their supposed baptism.

It is obvious that these were not baptized Moors, but rather friendly Moors or Moorish spies who for various reasons collaborated or made agreements with the Spanish in Orán; it is nevertheless possible that occasionally someone did get baptized but, interestingly, in the cities of North Africa the convert is never called an *almogataz*, this term being used initially only in the area around Orán.

This confirms that the diachronic analysis of a term or, to put it in another way, the study of its semantic trajectory and of its eventual

10. Suárez, *Historia del Maestre*, p. 8.

changes between two temporal points in a particular language cannot be studied independently of social, economic, and cultural history (nor of the dimensions of time and geography) of the community in which it arose or has been used.

In summary, the word *almogataz*, originating from an Arabic passive participle meaning 'baptized', probably reflects the fact that in principle the Moor who entered the service of the Spaniards and betrayed his own people became Christian, in the sense that he was a renegade. The consequences of this were two-fold: given the individual's characteristics, that is, those of the referent, the word (*al)mogaṭṭas* in Arabic acquired pejorative connotations as a process of semantic depreciation unfolded; in the eyes of the Muslims, such an individual could only be despicable. From the Christian point of view (it is already significant that the terms *tornadizo* or *renegado*, generic terms laden with pejorative shades of meaning are not applied), it is equally plausible that the Arabic term *almogataz* should become more ennobled, semantically speaking, due merely to the fact that it refers to a converted Moor (a rather infrequent occurrence in those parts),<sup>11</sup> and one, moreover, who provided the Christians with opportunities for booty.

Thinking along these lines, it is easy to realize that the Arabism *almogataz*, in order to adapt to its new system, underwent a process of semantic restriction, since from the generic meaning of 'baptized', the meaning that the word had in its Arabic original, it acquired the more specific meaning of 'baptized Moor' in the new language, into which it incorporated itself as a new, specialized appellative, thereby filling a lexical void due to the absence of a word to denote a specific reality that did not exist previously for Spanish-language speakers.

Thus *almogataz* in its earlier meaning refers to the 'Moor who, baptized or not, served as a spy, guide or auxiliary in the forces of some Spanish garrisons in Africa'. In its other meaning it refers by extension to the 'friendly Moor in the vicinity of some Spanish garrisons who, in exchange for his security, would make agreements to coexist with the Christian troops of the garrisons'.<sup>12</sup>

11. This was infrequent but not rare. José Vallejo, the governor of Orán between 1733 and 1738, in his *Memoria sobre el estado y valor de las plazas de Orán y de Mazalquivir*, written in 1734, relates that he succeeded in drawing up statistics on christenings of Muslims, and that they amounted to an average of 30 a year, although he was told that only those who received the sacrament before the age of seven continued to live as good Catholics. See J. Cazeñave, 'Contribution a l'histoire du vieil Orán', *Revue africaine* (1925), 368.

12. Maíllo Salgado, 'Breves notas sobre la historia', 480.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE *ALMOGATACES* IN MAINTAINING  
THE SPANISH STRONGHOLDS IN AFRICA

In the late fifteenth century the North African strongholds were conquered mainly by the Portuguese or by special expeditions subsidized by Andalusian magnates (Azamor and Melilla were taken in this way).

In the early sixteenth century Ferdinand and Isabella — the Catholic Monarchs — decided to send a fleet organized by the count of Tendilla, governor of Granada, to North Africa, with the immediate aim of cutting off the communications that the *moriscos* of Granada — who then were in rebellion — maintained with their fellow-Muslims in the Maghrib. The expedition had other purposes as well, such as subjecting the Muslim kingdoms to Christian rule and, through a military presence, controlling them in an economic sense by monopolizing their foreign trade.

These plans were not carried out, however, because the wars of Naples and the illness and death of Queen Isabella led to their postponement. Finally the enterprise was launched again by Cardinal Cisneros, and an expedition which set out in 1505 conquered Mazalquivir. Another fleet under the command of Pedro Navarro in 1508 took the Peñon de Vélez, the fortress which had served as a base for piracy and for attacks on the Spanish coastline. Orán was conquered in 1509 and Bejaïa in 1510.<sup>13</sup>

In the face of this series of Spanish triumphs, the sovereigns of Tunis, Tlemcen, and other cities signed capitulations of vassalage to King Ferdinand. When Tripoli was taken in the same year, it marked the crowning achievement of Spanish expansion in North Africa, preceding the defeat at Gerba, which dampened Spanish spirits. This disappointment and other more important and urgent matters gradually pushed the African campaigns into the background, so that after Gerba and the failure of Charles V's expedition against Algiers, the Spanish strongholds that remained could only maintain themselves through a system that carefully balanced a defensive attitude with military intervention, a system that enabled Spanish rule over those cities to last for centuries.

From the time that they first occupied the cities of Orán and Mazalquivir, the Spanish realized that life would only be possible for them in the recently taken strongholds if they could achieve alliances and collaboration with the friendly Moors<sup>14</sup> and the service of the *almogataces*.

13. See A.C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 35–44.

14. Diego Suárez writes: 'When the Moors of the Kingdom of Tlemcen are at peace with the forts of Orán, they supply Orán generously with many provisions, especially wheat and barley for the army, some for money, at moderate and low prices, and others for the protection that His Majesty gives them; in addition to the great quantity of wheat and barley which they mainly supply to the region there is often too much, and some of it is exported to Spain and elsewhere, even though Orán



We know that the friendly Moors, or rather those subjected to Spanish rule, paid the authorities of Orán an annual tribute called *rūmiyya*, normally a quantity of grain amounting to up to two *doblas* (a measure) per *aduar* (village or tent settlement); by paying this tribute, the *aduar* acquired freedom from war for a period of a year (renewable in the month of August).

The volume of this *dobla* varied according to the size of the *aduar*: 'In 1708, the year in which Algiers recovered the city of Orán, the *dobla* was equivalent to 112 Arabic *almudes* (about 4.6 litres), that is 28 Spanish *barchillas* (*barsal*), or 43 Castilian bushels, or the equivalent of 2,000 kilos.<sup>15</sup> In accordance with this, in order to be exact, bearing in mind that the Castilian bushel is a measurement of volume equivalent to 55.5 litres, each *aduar* paid a tribute each year of at least 4,773 litres of wheat.

The *aduares* or tribes that requested protection from the Spanish in Orán had to send their sheikh's (*jeques*' sons to the city as hostages, to be kept there until the tax payment had been made in full (if it was not, after several extension periods and if the *aduar* was moving away to escape reprisals, the sons would be sold into slavery and the proceeds from the sale would go into the royal coffers). In exchange for the payment, the Spanish authorities in Orán committed themselves to protecting the *aduar* from the attacks of hostile Moors, and later on from those of the Turks, and allowed its members to conduct trade with Orán. The Spanish authorities would also practise a sort of arbitrating role in conflicts between tribes that had surrendered (these tribes were obliged to provide troops if the Spanish were attacked by hostile Moors or Turks).

The treaties of protection were granted only for a year, and had to be renewed each August. *Aduares* wishing to continue to be allies of the Spanish had to request a new treaty at sowing time; the *capitán-general* of Orán would then specify any increase or decrease in tax, depending on whether the *aduar* had more or fewer tents than before.<sup>16</sup>

The amount of the *romfa* (*rūmiyya*) and the price — generally a very low one — for the grain that the Moors were obliged to bring to Orán was established by the sheikhs of *aduares* or tribes, at a meeting with the Spanish commander in the city; at this meeting, following a ceremonial meal and the giving of gifts to the sheikhs, the commander would lay down his requirements.<sup>17</sup>

requires 40,000 bushels of wheat each year and 12,000 bushels of barley to satisfy its needs.' *Historia del Maestro*, p. 50.

15. A. Tawfiq al-Madani, *Harb al-Thalathimi'a sana bayna al-Djazār wa-Isabāniyā 1492-1792* (Algiers, 1969), p. 448.

16. These issues are examined in detail in Vallejo's *Memoria*, translated and annotated by azenave, 'Contribution à l'histoire du vieil Orán', 358-61.

17. According to an original report dated 6 Feb. 1634, upon the invitation of the commander of Orán, 'the sheikhs came on the 20 July last to fix the price of the

The friendly Moors of the *zafinas*<sup>18</sup> of Chafai, Hamian, and Habra, a group of tribes, now more or less sedentary, that lived near the city of Orán, were under a different regime: they were obliged neither to provide hostages nor to pay the tax itself. In the sowing season, the Spanish authorities in Orán would send a few *almogataces* to the *aduares* of these tribes to observe how many fields the villagers were planting. Afterwards the commander called in the sheikhs and the names of the contributors were provided in a register. Each tent had to supply one *dobla* of grain and 30 *almudes* of straw for each field sown. The sheikhs — like those of other friendly tribes — received in recompense one silver *real* for each *dobla* of wheat that reached Orán.

The Moors of the neighbouring villages of Ifre and Canastel, serving as they did as auxiliaries for the Spanish of Orán, seem to have had a special status. The people of Ifre received part of the booty won in the expeditions<sup>19</sup> or forays (*cabalgadas*) that were conducted against the hostile Moors.

Whenever regular tax levies did not cover the expenses made by the aforementioned Spanish towns in North Africa, the Spanish had to turn to forays or expeditions of plunder. On these occasions, in addition to acquiring booty and provisions for the fort (livestock and cereals) they achieved other purposes, such as spreading terror among the indigenous people so that they would submit to Spanish rule,<sup>20</sup> while the winnings were topped off with recruits for a flourishing slave trade. Orán was the

*romía*. Those who came were of the tribes of Uled [ <awlād]-Muza: Ben Abd-Allah, Uled-Arvía, Uled-Jubara, Uled-Brahen, the inhabitants of the *zafinas* of Xafá and Gamayán with many mounted soldiers; they came up to the Alcaçaba and the marquis received them handsomely, pointing out to them the advantages and benefits that they gained with peace and how bad war would be for them, and exhorting them to set a moderate price for the *romía*; they all answered him that they would comply with HE's wish and agreed to provide the three bushels of wheat and six of barley at 8 *reales*. HE gave them gifts and ordered that the money that is customarily given on such occasions be distributed among the sheikhs and nobles'. Galindo y Vera, *Memorias de la Real Academia de Historia*, p. 406.

18. 'When the lineages of Moorish nobles ... assemble with their vassals at a particular place designated for the purpose and possessing water, wood and pasture for their flocks ... which congregation and assembly they commonly call a *zafina*'. Suárez, *Historia del Maestro*, p. 47.
19. When the booty was distributed we find '97 Moors on foot from the town and from Ifre, people who do not capture Moors and serve only to rob and create disorder; half of them are to be freed'. Galindo y Vera, *Memorias de la Real Academia de Historia*, p. 419.
20. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the expeditions of punishment or plunder were very frequent; in the eighteenth century, after the cities of Orán and Mazalquivir had been reconquered in 1732, the Crown moderated and even at times prohibited this type of expedition.



main supplier, if not the only one, during the whole of the modern period for the east of the peninsula.<sup>21</sup>

Such a situation was encouraged by the very nature of the cities, for once the conquests had become established, the coastal fortified cities of Orán and Mazalquivir became the setting for urban communities revolving around military life, since many of their inhabitants were soldiers or their families, obtaining a large proportion of their income from the pillaging expeditions that the cities' governors or commanders ordered or led. This income at the same time encouraged the development of crafts, commercial transactions, and other activities.<sup>22</sup>

In a society with characteristics such as these, the role that the *almogataces* played was necessarily an extremely important one, since their very existence was one of the original differentiating traits of these Spanish-African communities. Such communities would have found it difficult, or well-nigh impossible, to come into being without friendly Moors in the immediate neighbourhood. It seems that, by extension, these were consciously confused with the *almogataces*, being given this name whenever they collaborated in any way at all with the Christians living in Orán and Mazalquivir.

As mentioned previously, the name was originally derogatory: to summarize, it meant 'renegade', 'turncoat', 'traitor'. Such individuals

21. R. Torres Sánchez, 'La esclavitud en Cartagena en los siglos XVII y XVIII', *Contrastes: Revista de Historia Moderna*, 2 (1986), 93-4.

22. Due to the tribute paid by peaceful Moors and the booty collected thanks to the *almogataces* the governors of Orán enjoyed pomp and splendour. When John of Austria arrived in Orán, according to an account by D. Suárez, he said to the city's commander, 'Maestre, I warrant that you put on a far better show than my brother the King' (*Historia del Maestre*, p. 215). Thus the city became, and was even called, the 'Little Court' (as opposed to the Great Court in Madrid). The process was assisted by the fact that, from the time of Philip II, Orán also became the 'headquarters' for nobles and important figures who had fallen into disgrace. As punishment for their crimes, they had to contribute there to the public good through their own efforts or through those of their servants. Many of them would go out and fight the Moors and Turks with the city troops and would even be active participants in expeditions and forays (*cabalgadas*).

This élite of exiles living in close proximity to Muslims and Jews — a unique experience at the time in the Hispanic world — recreated an environment similar to that of Spain in the late Middle Ages. Thus situations recurred and scenes were relived similar to those that in other ages had inspired the poetry of the *Romancero* (folk ballads), an echo of which reaches us still in the song of one of our most famous writers of the Golden Age of Spain, in a beautiful *romance* (ballad with refrain) beginning like this: 'Servía en Orán al Rey/ un español con dos lanzas./y con el alma y la vida./a una gallarda africana ...' (In Orán there served the King/A Spaniard with two lances/With his soul and with his life/He served a lovely African lady [the phrase *dos lanzas* implies that he provided two servants for expeditions and also means 'service' or a 'tax paid in defence of the city'], Luis de Gongora y Argote, *Obras Completas* [Madrid, 1961], p. 72).

(whether subjected by the Spanish, as were the so-called friendly or peaceful Moors, or active collaborators with them, as were the *almogataces* and the Moors of Ifre) turn up from the same date of the occupation of Orán, in 1509. They existed by the logic of alliances. Thus many *aduares* or villages began to pay taxes to the Spanish because they were subject to raids from more warlike tribes or bands. They thus sought support and assistance from the Spanish forces of Orán, and willingly joined their side in order to repel attacks or get their revenge over their enemies. On other occasions they took refuge in or near the Spanish stronghold when their livestock had been stolen, their tents or villages destroyed, and some of their family members killed. It also happened that some of them, who wished to encourage razzias against enemy villages, came to inform the Spanish, offering to serve as guides in the hope of winning some good booty.

This diffuse situation, with its complex psychology, its loyalties and changes of heart, gave rise to the many-faceted and particular group of people known as the peaceful Moors, and within it to the socio-professional category of the *almogataces*, a category which would acquire a distinct personality in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, especially in the garrisons of Orán and Mazalquivir.

Indeed, they would constitute one of the main factors enabling the Spanish presence to survive in North Africa. They contributed in great measure towards maintaining the Spanish cities, whose immediate hinterland consisted of the space inhabited by the friendly Moors, and also by hostile Moors who refused to pay the *romía*; this hinterland extended about 100 kilometres<sup>23</sup> around both cities (at times it reached as far as Tlemcen) and could only be controlled by means of continual demonstrations of force and military expeditions. That was where the important function of *almogataz* would come into play for, due to his knowledge of the country, its customs and language, the *almogataz* was able to spy on behalf of the Spanish; without this the military forces of Orán would have found it difficult to be effective in defending either their allies or their own interests, which were at risk whenever a portion of the Spanish economic territory was blockaded or captured.<sup>24</sup> The *almogataz* made it possible to carry out accurate and effective surprise attacks, striking the enemy in places that the latter considered too far away for Oranese reprisals or capture.

23. Some areas had a large number of villages and thousands of inhabitants. See al-Madani, *Harb al-Thalathimi'a sana*, p. 447.

24. 'The peaceful [Moors] who are friends of Orán and the hostile Moors seldom agree, and the hostile Moors frequently carry out raids and assault them, preventing them from bringing supplies and other merchandise to Orán, sometimes bringing the Turks to their assistance to wage full war and do as much damage as they can.' Suárez, *Historia del Maestre*, p. 66.

These forays or expeditions against hostile Moors who, obviously, did not pay tribute to Orán, began almost always with a denouncement by a Moor or spy who suggested to the Oranese authorities that they capture one or two *aduares*. After the governor or commander had received information on the matter and weighed the pros and cons of a particular expedition, he would send *adalides* (scouts) and *almogataces* to reconnoitre the terrain and guide the raiders later on; once he possessed reliable, verified information, the cost of the operation would be calculated and, after all these factors had been taken into account, if it seemed feasible and profitable, the expedition would be launched; if it succeeded, commanders of *escuadrillas* would be selected to distribute the booty.<sup>25</sup>

José Vallejo, in his *Memoria* (Report) written in 1734, states that avarice and the desire for booty led the Spaniards of Orán to organize raiding expeditions without reasonable motives on *aduares* that had requested assistance and protection. 'That was the original and principle cause for losing it [Orán]'.<sup>26</sup>

Don Antonio de Zúñiga, the marquis of Flores de Ávila and governor of Orán, sent an expedition 24 leagues from the city (equivalent to 114 kilometres) to a place on the edge of the desert, where the inhabitants 'had never seen any Christians nor did they wish to be granted protection by His Majesty, as they considered themselves hardly in need of it, both because they were far away at the edge of the desert and because they possessed more than 25 armed villages'.<sup>27</sup> The operation succeeded due to the precise

25. Until 1565 the commanders would keep the booty, but after that year, following the reform by Hernando Tello de Guzmán, the booty would be shared between all the participants in the operation and others who, though they had not participated, had a right to some of it for various reasons. See Ch. 7 in Suárez, *Historia del Maestro*, pp. 124–31; see also Appendix 21, 'Manera de repartir las presas', Galindo y Vera, *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia*, pp. 415–23, where articles 53 and 54 read:

-'Some Jews (*hebreos*) who receive a salary here and Moors who do not and other people are given, without participating and without recourse to the booty, the following portions:

- Jacob Çaportas, Jew, 3 parts and 12 fourteenths, as a salary.
- Yaho Çaportas, a Jew, 5 parts and 8 fourteenths, due to his salary.
- Yuna Cansino, a Jew, 2 parts and 4 fourteenths, as a salary.
- Abrahén Cansino, a Jew, 4 parts and 5 fourteenths, in proportion to his salary.
- Çaid Sheikh of Yfre, one part by custom.
- Mulao, a Moor of Yfre, one part.
- The *alferez* of Yfre, one part.
- Another Moor whom they call the sergeant of Yfre, one part.
- Jacob Cansino, son of Ayon Cansino, one part.

26. Vallejo, *Memoria*, p. 367.

27. *Relación verdadera de la gran victoria que el Sr. D. Antonio Zúñiga tuvo con los moros venarajes*, in *Guerras de los españoles en África*, F[uensanta] del V[alle] edn. (Madrid, 1881), pp. 388, 391, 395.

information that the spies or *almogataces* had acquired for the expedition's leader, and had several purposes. The primary and most important one was to make Spain's presence felt, so that no one would doubt the effectiveness of the Spanish in Orán, however distant they might be, or dare to interfere or create difficulties for the trade of its economic territory or hinterland. Secondly, as a punitive expedition, the purpose was to secure sufficient booty to finance the cost of the operation (concretely, during the 1632 expedition about 300 prisoners were taken as part of the booty, and, when sold by public auction brought 42,000 ducats, in addition to livestock 'which went to *almogataces* and the Moors of Ifre',<sup>28</sup> and other items). Lastly, actions of this type served to raise the prestige of Spanish arms in the region in relation to Turkish power, and thus marked off areas of influence.

The same report records the immediate effects of the operation, stating: 'The Blad-Adax Moors, horsersiders dwelling at Tlemcen, fearful due to the little security that they had on their lands, came to request protection. And Corte, a fortified place with a tower and Turkish garrison 15 leagues to the south, they have depopulated, through fear of Your Excellency.'<sup>29</sup>

Besides being spies and auxiliaries, the *almogataces* fulfilled the function of guides, like the *adalides*, as is clearly shown in the seventeenth-century texts. One report among many that exist concerning the deeds of the marquis of Flores de Avila states: 'His Excellency sent the *almogataces* and *adalides* to try them (certain *aduares*) and to look and reconnoitre from a distance.... Once that was done, they waited until the *almogataces* and *adalides* came back, and until day broke, before the attack was launched' ('para darles con el Santiago').<sup>30</sup>

In this case the *almogataces* also appear to have been expert guides or scouts, sent ahead before the bulk of the troops into unknown or uncertain

28. As Félix Nieto de Silva, the marquis of Tenebrón, and commander of Orán in 1691, explains in his memoirs, Yfe or Yfre was 'a small village of 70 souls about a harquebus' shot away from Orán'. *Memorias de D. Félix Nieto de Silva*, ed. A. Cánovas del Castillo (Madrid, 1888), p. 188.

29. *Relación verdadera de la gran victoria*, p. 396.

30. *Relación muy verdadera de dos presas y aerrotas que ... tuvo el Señor Marqués de Floresdávila*, in *Papeles de mi archivo: Relaciones de Africa, III (Argel-Tunez-Tripoli)*, ed. Ignacio Bauer Landauer (Madrid, 1922), p. 36. The expression 'darles con el Santiago' refers to 'shouting the name of St. James' in order to further disconcert the surprised Moors, who would become easy prey for the Spaniards who had prepared in advance for the attack. The goal was to capture the Moors rather than kill them, which happened only to those who resisted; livestock and valuable property would also be stolen. In this case, those being attacked with the Santiago were the Benaraje Arabs, hostile Moors who were always feared in Orán. Their most important town was Carte, which was defended by a Turkish and Algerian garrison in a fortified tower. This place was ravaged several times by the Spaniards.

terrain to examine the area. Their fulfilling this task, in view of the difficulties that it entailed and the responsibilities it required, leads us to suppose that the *almogataces* were known subjects of proven trustworthiness, since it was they who would indicate to the expedition's leader the goal he was seeking and the path he should follow. Contexts such as the following prove this: 'Then came the *almogataces* and said that the *aduar* that His Excellency was seeking was at the place that they call Hamu of the Benarahas.'<sup>31</sup>

The *almogataces* were, obviously, warriors possessing tactical and strategic skills. Probably in some cases, together with the *adalides*, they formed an advisory council to the leader of the expedition, largely made possible due to the guidance and skills of the *almogataces*, and the information they provided.

To summarize: of considerable value and importance, the *almogataces* were much appreciated and one might say almost cultivated by the authorities of the Spanish strongholds in North Africa.<sup>32</sup> The reason for this favour and high estimation may be seen in the functions inherent in the position, which were both varied and fundamental: a) They provided information on possible booty; b) They carried out spying and reconnoitring of possible targets; c) They were well practised in laying and avoiding ambushes; d) They served as experienced guides and scouts; e) They would serve as advisers to the expedition leader; f) As fighting men, they were usually expert in attacking and withdrawing; g) For the purpose of determining how much tribute was owed, they could be sent to assess the number of fields sown by peaceful Moors.

As we see, their services were extremely valuable, and thus the *almogataces* comprised a socio-professional category — typical of these walled towns<sup>33</sup> — that flourished during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and

31. *Relación muy verdadera de dos presas*, ed. Landauer, pp. 39–40.

32. So much so that one of the few arguments given as to why the Jews should be expelled from Orán (which happened in 1669), is the following: 'They cause the *almogataces* to absent themselves from the city, with great risk to it, by persuading men who are conversant and well-informed to go and live with the enemy, where they are persuaded to work for our enemies whenever we are slightly less vigilant'. Galindo y Vera, *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia*, p. 430.

33. We know that there were *almogataces* not only in Oran and Mazalquivir, but also in Melilla, that is the other garrison town which was purely Spanish (Ceuta was a Portuguese stronghold and opted to become Spanish in the time of Philip IV). The *Relación de lo que don Juan Rejón de Silva Sotomayor, Comendador de Villarruvia, de la Orden de Calatrava, obró de la ciudad y fuerza de Melilla en el tiempo que estuvo gobernando y visitando por orden de su Magestad...*, dated Melilla, 31 March 1645, states *inter alia*: 'As for the *almogataces* who come to serve His Majesty after being forced to flee from their land, he ordered that they be seized, so that they could not leave the fort, because they could do much damage to it, being aware of what went on there and having had experience of it.' See I. Bauer Landauer, *Papeles de mi Archivo: Relaciones de Africa I (Ceuta y Melilla)* (Madrid, n.d.), p. 320.



eighteenth centuries, though during the last of these centuries its social importance diminished as its tasks and functions changed.

THE *ALMOGATACES* IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: THEIR HISTORICAL  
TRAJECTORY UP TO THE MODERN PERIOD

Manuscript sources in the library of El Escorial refer to the position and employment of the *mogataces*, and inform us that whenever one of these *moros mogataces* distinguished himself by his loyalty and bravery, 'he received appropriate orders to distribute to others of his kind, and even if he were a simple soldier with no higher grade or wages than the others, they would name him their captain'. They were usually incorporated into the cavalry and would often show outstanding conduct and bravery.

It seems that, without intending to do so, the *almogataces* as a group also consolidated themselves in the form of a special military unit, since from the late seventeenth century various grades appear among their members.

This evolution into a military body was cut short by the events of the War of Succession, when the garrisons found themselves abandoned to their own devices. The commander of Orán, Melchor de Avellaneda Sandoval y Rojas, saw that resisting would be impossible, and in 1708 decided to retreat, ordering the evacuation of civilians and troops. Despite this order, a portion of the troops and some of the *almogataces* refused to leave, and buttressed themselves in various strongholds within the town, the last defenders being flushed out three months later after a heavy siege. Those who remained alive were taken captive. There must have been many of them: they appear repeatedly in the documents concerning redemptions carried out by the various Christian orders in North Africa.<sup>34</sup>

After both garrisons, Orán and Mazalquivir, had been recaptured on the orders of Philip V, they both flourished for a while under the competent administration of José Vallejo, which lasted for five years (1733-38). Through his managerial dynamism, he succeeded in totally overhauling the way the city of Orán was organized, among other things rebuilding the road network, paving and lighting, streets and squares, improving the infrastructure, particularly the water distribution, putting up buildings, repairing the city walls, reinforcing defences. He also

34. The detailed report on the three redemptions carried out in 1723, 1724, and 1725 by the Order of Mercy, the first two in Algiers and the last in Tunis, shows that in 1723, the first year, 64 captives taken mostly at the castles of Almarza, San Felipe and San Andres in Orán were freed; 60 were freed in 1724, and 69 were freed in 1725, all captured when Orán was taken in 1708, in the previously-named castles, or others nearby. See the work written between 1724 and 1729 by Fr. M. Garcia Navarro, *Redenciones de cautivos en África*, ed. Fr. Manuel Vazquez Pájaro (Madrid, 1946), pp. 485-577.



... tried to improve relations between the city and the inhabitants of the neighbouring areas, rejecting policies based on terrorism and systematic destruction of the farmers' resources. It seems that he achieved some results in the small villages close to Orán, but did not manage to put an end to the large tribal federations armed by the governor of Algiers and determined not to tolerate a foreign presence on their land.<sup>35</sup>

Governor José Vallejo was not only outstanding as a manager and administrator, but also excelled in his reorganization of the city's army: in 1734, he decided to set up and organize the *Compañía de Moros Mogataces de Orán* (Company of *Mogataz* Moors of Orán). The Ministry of War approved its founding by means of a royal decree in May 1734, granting this auxiliary force an official statute.<sup>36</sup>

The Company of *Mogataz* Moors was actually constituted in July of 1734, consisting of a captain, a lieutenant and two sergeants, four corporals and 92 *mogataces*. These troops were equipped and rules were drawn up for the care and maintenance of the horses, bonuses for soldiers, and other matters. However, due perhaps to the fact that the name *mogataz* was then considered an insult or, most probably, to the *almogataces'* dislike of fighting in a unit subject to military discipline, by 1735 only 46 *almogataces* could be recruited, and among these only a few cavalry.<sup>37</sup>

It was not until some time had passed that it became a title of honour for Moors loyal to Spain to serve in forces carrying out such brilliant and remunerative enterprises, when finally the effectiveness of the *Compañía de Mogataces* and the benefits that its incursions and surprise attacks brought became apparent.

35. M. de Epalza and J.B. Vilar, *Planos y mapas hispánicos de Argelia* (Madrid, 1988), pp. 69–70.

36. See Cazenave, 'Contribution à l'histoire du vieil Orán', p. 327.

37. José Vallejo gave a complete account of this in his *Relación de todas las obras de fortificación correspondientes a ella, que se han executado en las Plazas de Orán, Mazalquivir y sus Castillos ... del número y estado actual de su Guarnición y de las demás disposiciones que se observan para su Gobierno Militar y Político*, MS, report preserved in the El Escorial Library. It states:

Although this Company was formed in July of last year, 1734, and was supposed to consist of 100 mounted Moors ... up to now it has not been possible to recruit such a number, only 24, due to the aversion that these inhabitants of the Barbary Coast have to serving under this name and in this class; nor has it been possible to buy more than this same number of horses for them, despite diligent efforts to find them, because of how difficult it is to buy not even good horses but passable ones; because the Arabs are constantly on horseback, and are continually at war between themselves, they want to have good horses, and will pay exorbitant prices to acquire them. *Relación*, Sec. 'Legajos de Orán', pp. 39 bis–40, El Escorial Library.

It is important to indicate that José Vallejo's initiative was the first attempt, in modern times, to create a colonial army in Africa. Thus, through various denominations and permutations, the *almogataces* formed the nucleus of the famous regular indigenous troops, the loyalty and heroism of which can be traced down from the eighteenth to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Testimonies to the warlike and valiant enterprises of the *almogataces*, either alone or in conjunction with Spanish troops, occur from 1748 to 1775.<sup>38</sup>

The history of the *almogataces* did not come to an end when the strongholds of Orán and Mazalquivir were finally abandoned in February 1792. Although some of them decided to stay in the country, the majority chose exile, first in Cartagena and later in Ceuta. There they experienced many difficulties due to the well-known lack of understanding on the part of the Spanish authorities.<sup>39</sup> In both Ceuta and Melilla, where there had already been *almogataces* for some time, they would serve as a basis and model for the creation, initially in Melilla and later in Ceuta, of the company of *Moros Tiradores del Rif* (Moorish Riflemen of the Rif). This unit served from the time of O'Donnell (1860)<sup>40</sup> up to the mid-twentieth century in the protectorate of Morocco and in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla under the name *Regimiento de Regulares* (Regiment of Regulars).<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the historical and existential trajectory of the *almogataces* stretches over five centuries<sup>42</sup> and constitutes yet another proof of the necessity for living together (*convivencia*), through both misery and grandeur, on the part of two peoples which have had to share a single geographical space for half a millenium.

38. T. García Figueras, *Presencia de España en Berbería Central y Oriental, Tremecén-Argel-Túnez-Trípoli* (Madrid, 1943), p. 254.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

40. This was the time when Tetuan was occupied, though it had to be abandoned later due to British pressure. See M. Tuñón de Lara, *La España del siglo XIX*, 8th edn. (Barcelona, 1976), Vol. 1, p. 219.

41. Military units with the following names still exist in the two cities: *Regimiento de Infantería Motorizada de Regulares de Melilla No. 52* (Fifty-Second Motorized Infantry Regulars of Melilla), and the *Regimiento de Infantería Motorizada de Regulares de Ceuta No. 54* (Fifty-Fourth Motorized Infantry Regulars of Ceuta). They are no longer composed of indigenous or volunteer soldiers, as they were until the mid-twentieth century, but rather of draftees doing their national service.

42. Three in Orán and Mazalquivir and five in Melilla.