The accusation of Jewish ancestry formulated against Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd (Averroes) when he was exiled to Lucena is analyzed taking into account similar accusations made against other Andalusis during the Almoravid and Almohad periods, as well as Muslim representations of the Jews in which these were often depicted as agents of foreign heresies. The influence of the context of suspicion and anxiety created by the forced conversion of the Jews in the early Almohad period in such accusations is also dealt with.

*This paper has been written within the ARG-ERC project “Knowledge, heresy and political culture in the Islamic West (eighth-fifteenth centuries).” It was part of my contribution – entitled “Contacts with Jews and Jewish influences according to the Arabic sources written in al-Andalus” - to the Einstein Summer School on The transmission of ideas between religious communities in the medieval world of Islam that took place in the Freie Universität Berlin, September 2014. I wish to thank Luis Molina, Cristina Alvarez Millán and David Wasserstein for their comments and suggestions, and Virginia Vázquez for her help.

Copyright: © 2017 CSIC. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-by) España 3.0.
Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd (Averroes) and more generally those who engaged in the study of the rational sciences were persecuted towards the end of the reign of al-Manṣūr (r. 580/1184-595/1198) after having previously enjoyed the favour and support of this Almohad caliph. As an outcome of that persecution, Ibn Rushd was exiled to Lucena. The other scholars persecuted at the same time such as Abū Jaʽfar al-Ḍaḥabī, the faqīḥ Abū ʻAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm judge of Bajjāna, Abū Rabīʽ al-Kafīf, and the poet and ḥāfiẓ Abū l-ʻAbbās al-Jarāwī are not known to have suffered the same destiny.

Lucena is a town situated some sixty km south of Cordoba and was famous in al-Andalus for its abundant Jewish population, being called Lucena of the Jews. Within the walls of the town only Jews were said to live, while non Jews inhabited the outskirts. Such a description is the mirror image of Marrakech, the Almoravid and later the Almohad capital: as it was a town newly founded by Muslims (the Almoravids) and with no pre-Islamic population, non-Muslims were forbidden to live inside, so that Jews settled outside its walls. Averroes’ exile to Lucena was explicitly linked to the rumour of his alleged Jewish ancestry and his lack of an Arab (or Berber) tribal nisba. In the words of the Almohad historian Ibn ʻAbd al-Malik al-Marrākushī (d. 702/1302), after his disgrace, umira Abū l-Walīd bi-suknā al-Yussāna li-qawli man qāla innahu yunsabu fī Banī Isrā’īl wa-innahu lā yuʻrafu lahu nasab fī qabā’il al-Andalus.

1 The most informed and detailed treatment of this episode in Averroes’ life is that by Fricaud, “Le problème de la disgrâce d’Averroès”, pp. 155-189.
3 Maíllo, “The City of Lucena in Arab sources”. See also Peláez del Rosal (ed.), Los judíos y Lucena: historia, pensamiento y poesía. By Averroes’ times, the town of Lucena and its Jewish population had suffered from Almohad persecution as lamented by Abraham ibn Ezra in one of his poems (see the Spanish translation by Sáenz-Badillos, Literatura hebrea en la España Medieval, p. 150) and as noted by Maíllo.
4 Deverdun, Marrakech des origines à 1912; Gottreich, The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim space in Morocco’s Red City. Jews were also forbidden to enter Timbuctu: Hirschberg, “The problem of the judaized Berbers”, p. 332. On the rationale behind the prohibition for non-Muslims to live in towns newly founded by Muslims see Ward, “A fragment from an unknown work by al-Tabarī”.
Dominique Urvoy, on the basis of this text, pointed that Averroes’ confinement to Lucena was doubly abasing: it assimilated him to the inhabitants of the Jewish town and marked such inhabitants as dwelling in a mean place, so that they were bound to receive the philosopher with hostility. The same aim of humiliating someone with Jewish ancestry may have been behind another exile to Lucena that took place in Almohad times, that of Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥassān al-Kalbī (d. 626/1229), a descendant of Yemeni Arabs who worked as tax collector for the Almohads, although in his case there is no explicit statement about him being a Jew.

On the basis of Ibn Ḥassān al-Kalbī’s case, the information given by Ibn Ḥassān al-Kalbī regarding Averroes’ alleged Jewish origins, as well as his lack of a tribal nisba and his exile to Lucena does not necessarily imply that all these elements were dependent on each other. Ibn Ḥassān al-Kalbī had a tribal nisba well attested in al-Andalus, and still through his exile to Lucena he may have been suggested to be of Jewish ancestry. On the other hand, someone may not have a tribal nisba and that does not necessarily transform him into the descendant of a Jew. The famous Cordoban scholar Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ b. Bazī (d. 287/900) who lacked such a nisba was known to be the descendant of a prisoner of war probably from Oviedo. His contemporary Baqī b. Makhlad (d. 276/889) also lacked an Arabic tribal nisba and no suggestion was ever made of him being of Jewish descent. This was so even though Baqī b. Makhlad was also accused of heretical deviation like Averroes. As Steve Wasserstrom showed in a study published in 1995 in which he dealt with Muslim representations of the Jews, these were often depicted as secret agents of foreign heresies. The trend to ascribe to Muslim sectarians Jewish lineages is described by Wasserstrom as the

8 Terés, “Linajes árabes en al-Andalus según la Yamhara de Ibn Ḥazm”.
9 He was called al-Umawī because his ancestor was an Umayyad client (mawlā). See on him Fierro, “Ibn Waḍḍāḥ, Abū ’Abd Allāh”, pp. 545-58, nº 1294.
sustained and often ingenious efforts by Muslim scholars to derive ‘Islamic’ heresies from what were represented as actual Jewish figures, who were then equipped with the rudiments of a biography. It would be difficult to find a Muslim heresy that was not at one time or another traced back to a Jewish originator. Thus, to cite only a few, the ghulat deification of ʽAli was assigned to ʽAbd Allah b. Saba’; the origination of Ismaʽilism was ascribed to Maymun al-Qaddah; the Fatimids were said to have been further inspired by Yaʼqub ibn Killis; the idea of the ‘Created Qurʼan’ was ascribed to Labid; and the heretic Jahm b. Safwan was said to have been taught by Aban b. Maymun, who was taught by Talut b. Aʼsam ‘the Jew who bewitched Muhammad.’

A more generalizing, and inverted, variation on the ad hominem proposition were the traditions that read ‘The X [a heretical group] are the Jews of this umma’... The Jews are the paradigm in this case of the religious community gone astray. They are thus held to be model for the various subversions of Islam, an accusation frequently made of the Rafida, the Murjiʼa, and the mushabbiha.’

Wasserstrom’s examples are of real or alleged Jews presented as engaging in the religious subversion of Islam, an association that made it easy to condemn all those who for different reasons were considered to join in the same effort as having been Jewish. Jewish ancestry could also be merely adduced as a term of abuse, as happened even with some members of the Umayyad family. The Jews had a lowly status and an accusation of Jewish origin may have been thought an effective way to denigrate an opponent. Non-Arab, especially Jewish blood, was usually considered to be of particularly degraded status in the kinship system.

The same kind of associations can also be documented in the Islamic West. In one of the many stories told about the Cordoban scholar Ibn Waḍḍāḥ, he was warned that his son was learning suspect theological doctrines from a Jew, although it is not clear whether the teacher is called so because he was really a Jew or just because he was a heretic. The same doubt has been voiced in the case of the author of the refutation against the Qurʾān that was the target of Ibn

---

12 Wasserstrom, Between Muslim and Jews, pp. 157-8.
13 Not that they were necessarily marked that way. For example, none of the famous freethinkers of early Islam was said to be of Jewish descent: Stroumsa, Freethinkers of Medieval Islam.
14 “Muhammad said: ‘you are only a Jew from the Jews of Sephores’”, pp. 31-41.
15 Ward, “Muhammad said: ‘you are only a Jew from the Jews of Sephores’,” p. 42.
16 Crone, Roman, provincial and Islamic law, p. 67 and ss.

In Umayyad propaganda against the Fatimids during their rule in Ifrīqiya, the Fatimid imam-caliph is called a Jew19. A Jewish origin was often attributed to Berbers, either tribes20 or individuals, such as Ṭarīf, the alleged founder of the religion of the Barghawāṭa, who was said to have been a Jew21. The Cordoban poet Ibn Shuhayd al-Ashjaʽī (382/992-426/1035) attacked a Berber vizier of the Hammudid caliphs calling him ape22 and sodomite, and assimilating him to the Jews23. The Zirid emir ʽAbd Allāh stated that the characteristics of the Jews were avarice, meanness, stinginess, deception and treachery because they are governed by the planet Saturn.24

In the sixth/twelfth century and in contexts related to both the Almoravids and the Almohads, a number of scholars were said to have Jewish origins, and in some of these cases there were also accusations of religious deviation or political dissent. Thus, Qāḍī ʽIyāḍ (476/1083-544/1149), known for having opposed the Almohads and for having supported the Almoravids against them, was said to have been Jewish because he never left his house on Saturday as if he was secretly practising Judaism25, The famous Banū Zuhr, who served as doctors to both the Almoravids and the Almohads, were also said to have had Jewish origins.26

18˙See the different views on this issue in Fierro, “Ibn Ḥazm et le zindīq juif”, pp. 81-90 (English translation in Adang, Fierro and Schmidte (ed.), Ibn Hazm of Cordoba.
19 Ibn Ḥayyān, al-Muqtabas, vol. V, pp. 221/247 and 237/263. See also Rius, La alquibla en al-Andalus y al-Magrib al-Aqsā, p. 299 where the Fatimids are connected to the Medinan Jewish tribe of the Banū Qurayza.
21 Talbi, “Hérésies, acculturation et nationalisme des berbères Bargawāṭa,” p. 84. The information is found in the geographical works by al-Bakrī (5th/11th century) and in the Kitāb al-istibsār attributed to Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi al-Ḥafīd, while Ibn Khaldun denies this Jewish connection: Iskander, “Devout Heretics: the Barghawata in Maghribi Historiography”, p. 46.
22 For the association between apes and Jews see Rubin, “Apes, Pigs, and Islamic Identity”.
23 Velázquez Basanta, “Ibn Ayyūb al-Lamāʽī, Abū ʿĪya’far”, pp. 472-7, nº 360. Negative views on the Jews are also found in Ibn Quzmān’s (d. 554/1160) Dīwān, pp. 73-77.
25 Serrano Ruano, “Iyāḍ, Abū l-Fadl”, pp. 404-434, nº 1479, p. 413; Gómez Rivas, “Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149)”, pp. 323-38. ʿIyāḍ, according to a late source (Ibn Farḥūn), was also said to have been poisoned by a Jew, perhaps as a way to exonerate him from the accusation of crypto-Judaism?
ancestry: according to this view, Zuhr was a Jew from Játiva who converted in the fourth/tenth century. According to Leo Africanus, the philosopher Ibn Bājja (d. 533/1139) was also said to have been of Jewish origins. Another scholar, trained under the Almohads whom he served as secretary, passing later to the service of the Hafsids in Tunisia, was accused of being a Jew. This scholar, Ibn 'Amīra (d. 658/1260), had the Arab tribal *nisba* al-Makhzūmī (Quraysh). Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī records in his biography included in *al-Dhayl wa-l-takmilah* how such genealogy – that he had seen written by Ibn 'Amīra himself – was denied by some, mentioning specifically the doctor from Shāṭiba called Abū Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Ḥājj who stated that Ibn 'Amīra's grandfather or father was an abandoned child (*laqīṭ*) who had been taken in by the Banū 'Amīra – a Berber lineage settled in Alcira – and that their origin was Jewish.

Of Ibn 'Amīra's contemporary, the poet Ibn Sahl (d. 643/1245 or 649/1251), it was firmly established that he was of Jewish ancestry, as reflected in his *nisba* al-Isrā'īlī. In fact, he was a former Jew himself and a convert to Islam. His attachment to his previous religion and his dubious allegiance to Islam were revealed – according to some – in

---


30 In a later period, the jurist and Sufī Ahmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) was called a Jew as an insult for breaking with the Qadiriyya Sufi order: Kugle, *Rebel between Spirit and Law*, 2006, p. 24.

31 David Wasserstein has shown how the appellation *al-isrā’īlī* is used with names of Jews and also of converts from Judaism (*al-yahūdī* is reserved for actual Jews): “What’s in a Name? ’Abd Allāh b. Isḥāq b. al-Shanā‘a al-Muslimānī al-Isrā’īlī and Conversion to Islam in Medieval Cordoba”.

many of his verses in which he played with ambiguity of meaning and other resources, something widely commented upon, but which does not seem to have put his life in danger. The scholar Umar al-Sakūnī complained in his book Lahn al-‘awāmm that in Seville lived the poet Ibrāhīm b. Sahl al-Yahūdī – the appellation ‘al-Yahūdī’ implied that in al-Sakūnī’s view Ibn Sahl was not a convert but a Jew – who filled his poetry with Koranic verses changing their meaning without anybody forcing him to stop such behaviour, this lack of action against him being one of the reasons for the loss of Seville to Christian hands. Taking into account this case, the fact that the nisba-s al-Isrā’īlī or al-Yahūdī are not mentioned for Ibn ‘Amīra may indicate that in his case – as in those of Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, the Banū Zuhr and Ibn Bājja – Jewish ancestry was being used as a term of abuse, not as reflecting a real situation.

The forced conversion of the Jews that had taken place at the beginning of the Almohad period under the first caliph Abd al-Mu’min (r. 527/1133-558/1163) gives us the context for understanding why those suspected of being against Almohad ‘orthodoxy’ – whatever it was at any given moment – could be accused of being Jewish. Forced conversions almost inevitably give rise to suspicions about the faith of those obliged to convert as well as tensions between the old and the new converts when the latter try to find a place in the society into which they had been incorporated en masse, tensions that are often formulated in genealogical terms. This is well known for the case of the forced conversion of Jews in Christian Spain with the connected phenomena of the statutes of ‘limpieza de sangre’ and the accusation of crypto-Judaism attached to dissidents or critics of normative religion. In the Maghrebi case, decades after the forced conversion, under the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya’qūb al-Manṣūr (r. 580/1184-595/1198), those Jews who had converted to Islam in the Almohad way were obliged to dress in a dis-

34 The most recent studies on this issue are Fierro, “A Muslim land without Jews or Christians”, pp. 231-47, and Mohamed, “Encore sur le statut des gidmi-s sous les Almohades”, pp. 65-87.
tinctive, humiliating way reminiscent of the regulations included in the Pact of ʽUmar. They were no longer Jews from a legal point of view, but ‘new (Almohad) Muslims’ whose sincerity was doubted. In an often quoted passage, the Almohad historian ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī (d. after 621/1224) explained that had the caliph Abū Yusuf Ya’qūb been sure about their faith, he would have let them intermarry with the old Muslims and mix with them in all normal affairs of life. Had he been sure of their infidelity, he would have killed the men and enslaved their children, giving their properties as booty to the Muslims. The problem was precisely that he did not know what their true nature or status was.

The Jewish author Ibn ʽAqnīn, who himself had been forced to convert, recorded in his Tibb al-nufūs the sufferings and discrimination to which the converts were subject, being forbidden to own slaves, to take part in some legal acts, to marry ‘old Muslims’ and so on. His following statement is very telling: “The more it appears that we obey them as to everything they tell us, and incline after their Law, the more they oppress and enslave us.” On the part of the Jews, the conviction existed that the forced converts continued to be the sons of Israel.

As the initially revolutionary Almohad movement sought adaptation to the Sunni local tradition, the Almohads’ concern about the outcome of their early policy of forced conversion provoked not only anxiety but also embarrassment. This led to narratives seeking to ensure that the forced converts were accepted as Muslims, and also at portraying Jews in a good light, as the following examples indicate. In the ‘Mem-
oirs’ by al-Baydhaq – a text written in order to prove ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s rights of succession as leader of the movement after the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart’s death in 524/1130, and also as a legitimate caliph⁴¹ – Ibn Tūmart is alleged to have witnessed in Tunis how a Jew who had converted to Islam was denied Muslim burial. Ibn Tūmart openly stated that such behaviour was wrong⁴², thus reflecting the position of those Almohads who were for integration and equality disregarding doubts about the true belief of those who had been forced to convert. Under the third Almohad caliph al-Manṣūr, his secretary Ibn ʽAyyāsh al-Burshānī (d. 618/1221) wrote a document for a Jew in which he described the man as someone endowed with piety and nobility (al-birr wa-l-karāma)⁴³. The caliph required from Ibn ʽAyyāsh to find support for such a description of a Jew who was after all an unbeliever (kāfir) in the Prophet’s Tradition (sunna). Ibn ʽAyyāsh did manage to find a hadith that allegedly supported the part on nobility (karāma), but failed with piety. It was the caliph himself – putting Ibn ʽAyyāsh to shame – who quoted a Koranic verse that confirmed also the part on piety (Koran 60:8)⁴⁴. The Banū Ṭāhir al-Qaysī were an important family from Murcia, and one of its members, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṭāhir al-Qaysī (d. 574/1178), was Averroes’ friend and also a supporter of the Almohads⁴⁵. His contemporary al-Ḍabbī (d. 599/1203) included in the biography he devoted to his ancestor Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir b. Muhammad b. Ṭāhir al-Qaysī al-Tudmīrī (336/947-378/988) a miraculous story about a pious Muslim who lived


⁴² Al-Baydhaq’s memoirs in Documents inédits d’histoire almohade, p. 50 (French transl., pp. 75-6).

⁴³ Note that taqwā is not employed in this story, the Koranic term for the discussion of the relationship between nobility and piety according to the famous Qur’ānic verse 49:13 (“...Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you...” in the translation of Arberry).


in Mecca and who dreamt twice about being together with a Jew in the Day of Judgement. Wondering how that Jew who served the sultan of Egypt could have reached salvation, the pious Muslim decided to visit the Jew to learn if he could have been saved for any good action he might have performed. The Jew eventually remembered a good action he had done only for God’s sake. Relieved, the pious Muslim told him the dream he had had and the Jew, astonished, converted to Islam46. Almohad historical works include in their narratives about the revolt of the Arrabal in Cordoba during the emirate of the Umayyad emir al-Hakam I (r. 180/796-206/822) the story of how the Muslim scholar Tālūt was saved thanks to the good action of his Jewish neighbour, a story originating in Ibn al-Qūṭiyya (d. 367/977), but which was amplified by later authors.47

These are all stories that aim at proving that Jews could be good, noble and pious, that if they converted they could have a place in a Muslim polity, that conversion should be the outcome of conviction and not of coercion, and that a Jew who converted to Islam had to be treated equally with the rest of the believers. As mentioned, these and other narratives are to be understood within the context of suspicion and anxiety on the part of ‘old’ Muslims towards the new Muslims caused by the forced conversion, while such suspicion and anxiety provided on the other hand the context in which political and religious opponents of the Almohads or those believed for different reasons to have deviated from strict allegiance to their ideological or political programme were discredited with accusations of Jewish ancestry or suggestion of such ancestry by confinement to Lucena.

Let us now turn to the lack of Arabic nisba in the case of the Banū Rushd. Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī – the scholar who in the entry devoted to Averroes registered the rumour that the Banū Rushd had Jewish ancestry48 – provided also data about their genealogy in the entries

48 See above note 5.
he devoted to other members of Averroes’ family in the same biographical dictionary. This information was recently analyzed by Delfina Serrano. She points out that in the case of Averroes’ grandfather (Ibn Rushd al-Jadd) what we find is a short nasab (genealogical chain): Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Aḥmad b. Rushd al-Qurṭubī (d. 520/1126). In the case of Ibn Rushd al-Jadd’s father (who was alive in 482/1089) we find a long nasab: Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Rushd. According to this nasab and taking into account what has been established about the generational reproduction for al-Andalus, the first Rushd for whom we have information must have lived in the first half of the 4th/10th century. Serrano concludes regarding the short nasab: “The reader is thus led to think that this scholar [Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, d. 520/1126] was the first member of his family to have gained public relevance and that his ancestors’ conversion to Islam might have been relatively recent’ (early fifth/eleventh century?).” Regarding the long nasab she states that “[i]t projects the genealogy of the Banu Rushd about one century and a half backwards, to the end of ninth or beginning of the tenth century, when the majority of the indigenous population of al-Andalus converted to Islam.” Ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Marrākushī would have recorded both nasab-s, Serrano concludes, because he wanted to rebuke the rumour that Averroes had Jewish ancestors and instead of making an explicit refutation of such accusation he opted for a ‘more subtle strategy’ consisting in mentioning a “then unknown [sic]” early member of the family and fabricating for them a genealogy that – according to her – “undermined the claim that the Banu Rushd were Jews with no affiliation with any of the Arab-Muslim lineages of al-Andalus and who had converted to Islam late enough to be remembered during Averroes’ lifetime, all this posing an unexpected threat to Averroes’ social and religious standing”.

49 Serrano, “Explicit cruelty, implicit compassion: Judaism, forced conversions and the genealogy of the Banū Rushd”, pp. 217-33. She refers to a future Ph.D. Thesis on the Banū Rushd’s lack of nisba, but to my knowledge it has not yet been written.


51 She is following here Bulliet, Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period, although his results do not point to ‘the majority of the population’, but just to that part of the population that would eventually be converted to Islam. On this reminder see Alwyn Harrison, “Behind the curve: Bulliet and conversion to Islam in al-Andalus revisited”, pp. 35-51.

However, the longer nasab does not undermine the claim that the Banū Rushd were Jews, it only projects a century back the conversion of the eponym of the family, the man called Rushd who appears at the end of the nasab. This Rushd is a non Arab both in the short and the long nasab, the extension of the nasab being irrelevant for the ethnic and/or religious adscription of the oldest known ancestor. That he converted in the fifth/eleventh century or in the fourth/tenth century has no bearing whatsoever on the possibility of his having been a Jew. The long nasab of the Banū Rushd cannot be understood as any ‘subtle’ attempt by Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī to show ‘compassion’ for the ‘cruelty’ of the accusation. Moreover, and putting this case into a more general framework, controversial genealogical claims were openly debated in Islamic societies as proven by so many examples, especially satirical poetry. For al-Andalus specifically there are the cases of so many dynasties and also individuals such as Ibn Ḥazm and al-Bunnāḥī. Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī’s shortening or elongating nasab-s in entries devoted to members of the same family can be explained in a simple way, one that fully belongs to the craft of the authors of biographical dictionaries (ṭabaqāt). In fact, there are many examples of similar procedures being followed in ṭabaqāt works when recording biographies of members of the same family, i.e., recording in some of them nasab-s longer or more complete than those that appear in some other biographies. To give some examples taken from Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī’s al-Dhayl wa-l-Takmila:

– Şadaqa b. Aḥmad b. Lubb was a scholar who died in 380/990 and whose biography is recorded by Ibn al-Faraḍī. His descendant Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. ʽAbd Allāh b. Şadaqa al-Sulamī (d. 559/1141) is recorded

References:


54 For the case of Ibn Tūmart and the Mu’minids see Fierro, “Las genealogías de ‘Abd al-Mu’min, primer califa almohade”, pp. 77-108. For the case of Ibn Ḥazm – who claimed Persian ancestry while his ancestors belonged to the indigenous population of Iberia- see Fierro, “El conde Casio, los Banu Qasî y los linajes godos en al-Andalus”, p. 187. On the case of al-Bunnāḥī, whose Arab genealogy was considered suspect, see Calero Secall, “El proceso de Ibn al-Jafīb”.

by Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī without noting the full nasab of his ancestor Ṣadaqa.56

– Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Ahmad b. Rabī’ b. Ahmad b. Rabī’ (d. 549/1109) had a descendant called Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Rabī’ (d. 616/1120) in whose biography Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī again does not quote the full nasab.57

Similar patterns can be detected in the recording of the nasab-s of the members of families who have entries in the same work such as the Banū Ghālib al-Sharrāṭ, the Banū Ḥamdīn and the Banū l-Ṭaylasān.

The reasons for acting in this way are obvious: if a nasab is recorded fully in the entry devoted to a member of the family, why repeat it again in other entries of members of the same family recorded in the same work? Often – but not always – the author of the biographical dictionary tells the reader that if he wants to know the more complete nasab he should look for it in such and such entry: an example is to be found in the entry devoted by Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī to 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Marwān b. Zuhr al-Iyādī al-Iṣbīlī al-Dānī (d. 471/1078) where it is said wa-qad taqaddama raf‘ nasabihi fi rasm ibnihi Zuhr.58 Unfortunately, the biography Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī devoted to Zuhr b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Marwān b. Zuhr al-Iyādī has not been preserved.59

Moreover, in the case of the biographical dictionary by Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī, the kind of work he is writing has to be taken into account: the title is al-Dhayl wa-l-Takmila li-kitabay al-Mawsīl wa-l-Ṣīla, i.e., it is a supplement (dhayl) and a complement (takmila), a work supplementing and completing previous works: those by Ibn Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183) and Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403/1013). Now, Ibn Bashkuwāl had included a biography of Ibn Rushd al-Jadd (Averroes’ grandfather) in his Kitāb al-Ṣīla, and Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākushī completed his predecessor’s information on Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd’s an-
cestors by adding an entry on Ibn Rushd al-Jadd’s father where he recorded the long *nasab* of the family. This – as we have seen – is a standard procedure that does not depart from what the same author does in other cases.

In the famous encounter between Averroes and the Almohad caliph Abū Ya’qūb Yūsuf (r. 558/1163-580/1184) that led to his charging the young Cordoban scholar with commenting and paraphrasing Aristotle’s *oeuvre*, the Almohad caliph is said to have inquired about his family. Such inquiries were a normal procedure to ensure that people admitted into the court and especially into the close entourage of the caliph deserved to be there in terms of nobility and merit. We do not know what Averroes answered, but there are grounds to believe that he would have given the longest possible *nasab*, as its antiquity would prove his inherited merit (*ḥasab*), while not having any qualms about the lack of genealogy (*nasab*), that is, of any tribal *nisba* in his family: to be an ‘old’ family was what counted for him, ‘old’ in his view being synonymous with ‘good’. This can be deduced from what Ibn Khaldūn tells us regarding Averroes’ position on non-genealogical nobility (*ḥasab*).

According to Ibn Khaldūn, Averroes mentioned *al-ḥasab* in his commentary to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, saying that it belonged to the ancient settlers in a town, without considering that a ‘house’ (*bayt*) possessed an original nobility through group feeling based on genealogy (*’aṣabiyya*) – to which of course also personal qualities could be added. Ibn Khaldūn did not agree with him, wondering how a long residence might help anyone to gain prestige if he does not belong to a group that makes him feared and causes others to obey him. For Averroes, *al-ḥasab* depends exclusively on the number of forefathers, whereas for Ibn Khaldūn prestige lasts at best four generations. Ibn Khaldūn thinks

---

60 Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī, *al-Mu’jib*, pp. 353-4, where Averroes states that the caliph *sa’alanī ʿan ismī wa-sm abī wa-nasabī*; before, mention is made of his ‘house’ and his lineage (*baytī wa-salafī*). The encounter and its dating have been analyzed by Morata, “La presentación de Averroes en la corte almohade”, pp. 101-122.


62 On this concept see Marlow, *Hierarchy and egalitarianism in Islamic thought*, index. She translates it as ‘inherited merit’, adding that it is often understood as ‘a store of merit inherited by a man as a result of the deeds of his forefathers, but one which could either increase or decrease by his own actions’ (p. 5, note 20). It can also be translated as social esteem or prestige. On the latter see Hurlet, Rivoal and Sidéra, “Entre affirmation de statut et désir de reconnaissance. Introduction au prestige”, pp. 9-21.

that this erroneous view was due to the fact that Averroes grew up in a region and period in which people had lost the experience of group feeling and were not familiar with the conditions governing it, this being the reason Averroes did not take it into consideration. Behind this divergence of opinions there is of course the crucial role played by 'aṣabiyya – group solidarity heavily dependent on and expressed through genealogy – in Ibn Khaldūn’s conceptions, and the Islamic debate on the relationship between ethnic and social egalitarianism, on what constitutes nobility, and how social esteem and prestige are created and preserved.

As noted by D. Serrano, we shall never know if the Banū Rushd had Jewish ancestors unless new sources bring new data to the fore. When the accusation of Jewish ancestry made against them is analyzed in the chronological context in which it took place and is put together with similar accusations made against contemporary scholars it allows us to complete our picture of how the Almohad establishment or parts of it treated some of those who belonged to their elites who at a certain moment were suspected of ideological deviation or political disaffection: they could be discredited through the accusation of having Jewish ancestry in the hope that this would throw upon them all the negative connotations that Jewishness was associated with, increased especially because of the anxiety caused by the crypto-Judaism engendered as a result of the early Almohads’ forced conversion. It is important, however, to note that there was no lack of attempts at putting both Jews and converted Jews under a better light. Almohadism was a path that included a number of lanes and to do it justice it cannot be reduced to just one of them.

Sources and bibliography


al-Ḍabbī, Kitāb bughyat al-multamis fī taʾrīkh rijāl ahl al-Andalus, ed. Francisco Codera and Julián Ribera, Madrid, 1885.


Leo Africanus, De viris quibusdam illustribus apud Arabes, c. 15, in J. A. Fabricius, Bibliotheca Graeca, t. XIII.


*Recibido*: 08/01/2016  
*Aceptar*: 06/11/2017