

**OFFICIAL LETTERS AND TREATIES BETWEEN THE MARINID DYNASTY
AND THE NASRID KINGDOM DURING THE 7TH AND 8TH CENTURIES
AH (13TH–14TH CENTURIES AD)**

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Abstract

Historical scholarship about the Islamic West in the 13th and 14th centuries has shown that royal letters were indispensable forms of governance - for political, military, and diplomatic institutional tasks. For example, letters exchanged between the Nasrid kings of Granada and the Marinid sultans of Morocco present a complex method of mediated communication, facilitated by the use of scribes and trained ambassadors. The mediated letters were frequently composed in Arabic prose with ornate rhymes and would include prayers, praises, and blessings. Diplomatic letters were employed to request military assistance and negotiate or renew treaties and alliance agreements - in particular because of the threat of Christian kingdoms (Castile and Aragon). Many sensitive and urgent matters were otherwise delivered via oral communication (potentially for legitimate reason to maintain operational security). Additionally, letters and treaties included gifts, congratulations, and marital alliances to demonstrate loyalty and trusted friendship to bolster political stability and support. The engagements between the two systems can collaborate together with repeated embassies and planned action, as the Marinids were dependent on granting and military support, while the Nasrid dynasty remained in functional political stability. The letters and treaties provide explicit evidence of the complex political relations, strategic priorities, patronage networks, and general cultural sophistication of the Islamic West.

Key words: Diplomacy, Correspondence, Marinids, Nasrids, Al-Andalus.

1. INTRODUCTION

Historical research does not depend exclusively on pure historical sources; it also makes use of auxiliary sources that possess more hidden information that can be tested and verified for accuracy. Among the most important auxiliary sources are literary sources, particularly those relating to a body of special correspondence (Tosh 2015). A good number of these types of correspondence were edited and distorted by those who collected them or by copyists who edited out the names of certain people and dates and were more interested in the skills of letter-writing than the contents of the letters ('Umayra 2008, 3). Historians confront huge difficulties in determining a text's proper chronology and identifying key players in political events because of this. For this reason, the present study wishes to examine a significant element of the political history of the western Islamic world in the 7th

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and 8th centuries AH (the 13th and 14th centuries AD) when there was considerable correspondence of royal letters which will be studied and analyzed in detail.

2. ASPECTS OF OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Both the monarchs of Morocco and Muslim Spain wrote, and received, many letters from the Diwan al-Rasa'il (Chancellery of Letters), the official state institution tasked with composing royal correspondence. Most correspondence directed to kings, despite its content, was dealt with in this institutional capacity; an example of an institutional body assigned to the drafting and compiling of letters from the sultan. The letter-chronicling body contained several offices, including the katib al-ashghal (Secretary of Affairs), katib sir al-sultan (Secret Kattib of the Sultan), or sahib al-'alama (Keeper of the Signet/Official Seal). (Hassan 1989)

These letters conformed to certain criteria, like preserving the Qur'an by memorization, having a great depth of learning about the Sunnah, history, and biographies, and being aware of a large number of official letters. Moreover, talent for poetry, eloquence of speech, and knowledge of languages and rhetoric were of utmost importance. These qualifications are summarized by Abu Hammu Musa II in his description of the qualities required of the Katib al-Sirr (Secretary of Secrets): "He should be eloquent in speech, courageous in spirit, articulate in expression, knowledgeable in literature, skilled in handwriting, and knowledgeable in resolving and drafting matters." He also said, "From your writing the intellect may be inferred." (Abu Hammu 1956, 288)

Since the letters hold political and historical value for what they reveal about the nature of relations between states, it was necessary to explain them, as they were mostly delivered by ambassadors. Sometimes they were written, while other times the ambassador would convey them orally, out of fear that they might fall into hostile hands. Some letters even contained symbols and coded signs. (Abdelhadi 1983, 22–23)

It becomes evident from the letters exchanged between the states of the Islamic Maghreb that their authors possessed a refined literary prose, encouraged by the rulers who supported men of this art. The style of saj' (rhymed prose) and rhetorical embellishments became widespread—sometimes to the point of exaggeration—in correspondence and written exchanges. These letters were usually introduced with the phrase "from so-and-so to so-and-so," beginning with mention of the addressee and prayers befitting his status. For example: "To the noble rank whose praise sweetens tongues, whose tidings adorn the pages of gratitude, whose sky outshines with the stars of glory and virtues..."; and in another letter: "...to the rank whose reign's conquests are strung together like pearls, whose firm resolve has repaid the debts of days as one redeems coins, and from the depths of whose sound opinions rise the faces of good fortune..." (Al-Qalqashandi 1913, 79)

Then, the name of the addressee would be mentioned, followed by an appropriate supplication for him. After that came the ba'diyya (transition phrase),

which was followed by blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad and his family and companions. The writer would then proceed to the main subject of the letter. At the end, a prayer was usually included for the continuity and stability of the ruler's reign. The letters would often conclude with the phrase: "...may your fortune endure, your glory be protected, and may the noble peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you."

At the very end of the letter, the Sultan's signature would be written in his own hand, in thick script, often with the phrase "Written on the dated day." As Al-Maqrī stated: "The phrase 'Written on the dated day' was the royal mark of that time, written in bold script. Some kings of the Maghreb would instead use the phrase 'Verified on the dated day.'" (Al-Maqrī 1968)

Through the examination of several letters, we can observe variations in their structure, despite efforts to maintain the general features, which typically included:

- The *basmala* and the *tasliya* (invocation and blessing).
- "From..."
- "To..."
- Greeting (*salam*).
- The *ba'diyya* (transition phrase).
- Praise (*tahmid*).
- Blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him).
- Supplication for the Sultan.
- "We have written this..."
- The main subject.
- The ambassador's name.
- The year of issuance.
- The royal mark or signature.

It is noticeable that in many of the letters issued from the Nasrid court, the name of the ambassador was concealed and referred to only as "so-and-so," which makes it impossible to determine whether the ambassador was a judge, a minister, or a scholar.

The Nasrids faced numerous external conflicts with the Christian Mamluks who were united against the Muslims, largely due to their geographical location. This situation compelled them to establish strong relations with the Marinids, driven by mutual interests. Consequently, the Marinid state viewed any attack on the Kingdom of Granada as an attack on Morocco itself. For this reason, they worked to protect the Kingdom of Granada from the Christian Reconquista wars—either in response to the pleas for help sent by the Nasrid kings of Granada or in adherence to the principle of jihad in the path of God (Amer Ahmad 2003, 123).

Sources have highlighted the prominent role of the Marinids in their jihad in al-Andalus, as will be detailed in the following events. Nevertheless, the Nasrids remained wary of them, much like the relationship between the Taifa king Al-

Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad and the Almoravid ruler Yusuf ibn Tashfin. For this reason, Nasrid policy often oscillated between cooperation with the Marinids to defend the Granadan kingdom and suspicion of their intentions, fearing interference in their internal affairs (Khaldun 2001)

3. THE DELEGATION OF 670 AH / 1269 CE

Sources from the period offer evidence of the correspondence sent from the Nasrid court to the Marinid rulers and in particular as it relates to the reign of Sultan Abu al-Hasan and Abu Inan and from the Diwan al-Rasa'il of Letters.

Most of these embassies were characterized by requests for military assistance due to the difficult situation of the Muslim communities of al-Andalus, particularly to the pressures arising from the emerging kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. Consequently, the Nasrid sultans often turned to the Marinids for help whenever the situation became critical.

In 670 AH / 1272 CE, Muhammad ibn Yusuf, the founder of the Nasrid dynasty, sent an important embassy to the Marinid Sultan Abu Yusuf Ya'qub, seeking aid to halt the Castilian advance led by Alfonso X ("Alfonso the Wise"). However, this appeal went unanswered. Although the Marinid Sultan expressed his willingness to assist, he made it conditional upon concluding peace with the Zayyanids, who were seeking revenge for the killing of Sultan Yaghmurasan's son. This refusal resulted in a dispute between the two sovereigns. (Al-Maqri 1968)

In this situation, the Marinid Sultan responded by prioritizing internal peace and interests in his own state, because he was concerned that direct intervention in the affairs of Andalusia might endanger the security of his state.

Embassy of 674 AH / 1275 CE

Sultan Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Marini crossed into al-Andalus four times. The first crossing took place in 674 AH / 1275 CE, following the arrival of an embassy from Muhammad al-Faqih requesting military assistance. Ibn Abi Zar' reported: "Ibn al-Ahmar's envoys came to him one after another, saying: 'O Commander of the Muslims, you are the ruler of this age and the one looked to in these times; it is your duty to aid the Muslims and support the oppressed.'" (al-Fasi 1964, 313)

Responding to this plea, Sultan Ya'qub crossed over to al-Andalus. Prince Yusuf played an active role during this first crossing led by his father. The Sultan entrusted him with command of the Marinid army, composed of five thousand cavalymen, and provided him with war drums and banners. The Marinid forces swept through the Guadalquivir valley, advancing as far as Córdoba, Úbeda, Baeza, and their surrounding areas.

However, upon learning of the mobilization of Castilian forces under the leadership of their commander Don Nuño de Lara (Nunio de Lara), Yusuf returned to his father. A battle soon took place between the two sides near Écija on the fifteenth of Rabi' al-Awwal, 674 AH / 1275 CE. Prince Yusuf commanded the Marinid army of one thousand horsemen and achieved a decisive victory over the

forces of Alfonso X, King of Castile, during which the Castilian commander Don Nuño de Lara was killed. (al-Fasi 1964, 24)

These victories had a significant impact on the survival of the remaining Muslim presence in al-Andalus, as they strengthened the independence of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada and provided it with temporary protection from the Christian threat. Moreover, these successes contributed to consolidating Marinid influence in the southern Andalusian strongholds, such as Gibraltar, Algeciras, Tarifa, and Ronda. It is most likely that the three subsequent crossings of Sultan Abu Yusuf were also undertaken in support of the Nasrids. (Abun-Nasr 1987, 125)

Embassy of 691 AH / 1291 CE

Despite the Marinid victories, they did not have a positive echo at the Nasrid court, and suspicion once again arose in the mind of Muhammad al-Faqih. This apprehension can be attributed to what became known as the "Banu Ashqilula Crisis." As a result, Muhammad al-Faqih reached an agreement with the Castilians to seize Tarifa from the Marinids. King Sancho IV of Castile (Sanch) sent his fleet into the Strait of Gibraltar to blockade Tarifa from the sea and prevent the arrival of reinforcements, while Muhammad al-Faqih provided support on land. (Abun-Nasr 1987, 285)

After a siege that lasted five months, Tarifa fell into the hands of the Castilian Christians and the Granadans in 691 AH / 1291 CE. (al-Fasi 1964, 380 - 81)

When Ibn al-Ahmar requested that King Sancho return Tarifa to him, the latter refused and broke his promise. Consequently, Ibn al-Ahmar sent an embassy to implore the Marinid Sultan to accept his apology for having been deceived by Sancho's treachery. The embassy was headed by Abu Sa'id Faraj ibn Isma'il ibn al-Ahmar and his vizier Abu al-Sultan Aziz al-Dani. Their mission was to present apologies and to renew the peace agreement with Sultan Yusuf ibn Ya'qub. (al-Fasi 1964, 312-13)

The Marinid Sultan received them warmly in Tangier, honored their delegation, and agreed to restore peace between the two parties. It appears that the Marinid Sultan preferred reconciliation in order to preserve the mutual interests of both sides.

Embassy of 692 AH / 1292 CE

After Granada realized the futility of its alliance with Castile and Aragon against the Marinid state, Muhammad al-Faqih decided to travel personally in Dhu al-Qa'da 692 AH / 1292 CE to meet Sultan Yusuf ibn Ya'qub of the Marinids, with the aim of reaffirming friendship and offering an apology. (al-Fasi 1964, 110)

One of the key outcomes of this embassy was the success of the Marinid Sultan in persuading Ibn al-Ahmar to cede to him control over Algeciras, Ronda, Al-'Arsiya, and twenty fortresses. The Granadan delegation also presented several valuable gifts to the Marinid Sultan, among which was a copy of the Qur'an attributed to Uthman ibn 'Affan. Ibn Khaldun recounts:

“...He presented before him a magnificent gift, which greatly delighted the Sultan; among its most precious items, as they say, was the Great Qur’an — one of the four copies sent out by Caliph Uthman ibn ‘Affan to the regions of the Muslim world. This particular copy was the one associated with the Maghreb... it had been inherited by the Umayyads in Cordoba.” (Khalidun 2001, 383)

Embassy of 701 AH / 1301 CE

After the death of Sultan Muhammad al-Faqih, he was succeeded by his son and heir, Muhammad III—known as al-Makhlu’ (“the Deposed”). Upon his accession to the throne in 701 AH / 1301 CE, Muhammad III hastened to renew the bonds of friendship with the Marinids. He sent an embassy headed by his vizier Abu al-Sultan Aziz al-Dani and his secretary Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad ibn al-Hakim al-Lakhmi to the court of Fez, where they were warmly received and honored.

During their visit, the Marinid Sultan requested that Granada send troops to assist him in the siege of Tlemcen. The Nasrid ruler complied with this request and dispatched a contingent of soldiers who fulfilled their mission successfully.

However, the situation soon changed in 703 AH / 1303 CE, when Muhammad III decided to renew his alliance with the King of Castile, Ferdinand, son of Sancho. This act angered the Marinids, prompting the Sultan to send back the Granadan troops who had been assisting him in the siege of Tlemcen. (Ibn Khalidun 1981)

Embassy of 710 AH / 1310 CE

Muhammad al-Makhlu’ instructed his cousin and son-in-law, Abu Sa’id Faraj ibn Isma’il, the governor of Malaga, to incite the people of Ceuta to renounce their allegiance to the Sultan. At the same time, Ibn al-Ahmar himself prepared for war against the Marinid ruler. Under the pretext of defending against the Christians, Abu Sa’id organized a naval expedition and directed it toward Ceuta, successfully entering and seizing control of the city in 705 AH / 1305 CE. (‘Inan 1997, 212-13)

This event caused great alarm to the new Sultan of Granada, Abu al-Juyush Nasr, prompting him to seek the goodwill of the Marinids. He sent an embassy to Sultan Abu al-Rabi’, informing him of his decision to cede Algeciras, Ronda, and their fortresses, as an encouragement for him to engage in jihad. The Marinid Sultan accepted the offer, and to further strengthen their alliance, he married his sister to the Nasrid ruler and sent him reinforcements, funds, and horses under the command of ‘Uthman ibn ‘Isa al-Yarnyani. Relations between the two dynasties remained friendly until the death of Sultan Abu al-Rabi’. (al-Fasi 1964, 138)

The cordial relations between the Marinids and the Nasrids during the reign of Sultan Abu al-Rabi’ were disturbed only by an incident caused by one of Ibn al-Ahmar’s envoys, who arrived at the Marinid court in a state of severe intoxication. By order of the judge al-Zawili, the envoy was subjected to the prescribed punishment (had).

Seizing upon the situation, the vizier ‘Abd al-Rahim ibn Ya’qub al-Wattasi surrounded the judge in his mosque. The Marinid Sultan intervened to lift the siege and ordered the execution of all the vizier’s supporters who had participated in the

act. Consequently, al-Wattasi renounced his allegiance to Sultan Abu al-Rabi' in 710 AH / 1310 CE and gave his oath of loyalty to 'Abd al-Haqq ibn 'Uthman ibn Muhammad 'Abd al-Haqq. He then attempted to seek assistance from Sultan Abu Hamu Musa II. (al-Fasi 1964, 138)

This incident demonstrates that, although envoys traditionally enjoyed diplomatic immunity, they could still be punished if they violated public order. It also raises the question of whether such punishment applied equally to all offenders, or if it stemmed from underlying political tensions between the two states.

The Embassy of 745 AH / 1344 CE

Sultan Yusuf I sent a letter to Abu al-Hasan al-Marini through his envoy Abu al-'Abbas al-Hassar, informing him about the terms of the Treaty of Algeciras. From this correspondence, it appears that the envoy dispatched by Sultan Yusuf I had initially been sent by the Marinid Sultan Abu al-Hasan to inquire about the events that took place in Algeciras. (Ibn al-Ahmar 1979, 312-13)

The letter referred to the peace agreement concluded with the Castilians but did not detail its main clauses, leaving it instead to the envoy, Shaykh Abu al-Hasar, to explain the content of the treaty orally. This indicates that royal correspondence often avoided including sensitive information—most likely out of fear that the letters might fall into enemy hands. Hence, ambassadors were appointed to deliver the sultan's message verbally and clarify what could not be written down.

The Embassy of 745 AH / 1344 CE

Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj sent numerous letters to the Marinid state concerning the relations between the Muslims of al-Andalus and the Christian kingdoms to the north, namely Castile and Aragon. Among these was a letter he dispatched with his envoy to the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan, informing him about the Granadan–Castilian relations as governed by the existing treaties between the two kingdoms. It was deemed necessary to keep the Moroccan ruler informed about current events, especially following the mutual complaints exchanged between Granada and Castile.

The letter stated: "...The King of Castile has repeatedly sent envoys to us, seeking the release of his men who have taken refuge with us. They have presented numerous complaints and submitted various grievances, some of which are related to your noble authority... Therefore, we have dispatched to your court someone who will explain these matters in detail, clarify their purposes, and provide a full account of the situation. He is well-informed, experienced, and knowledgeable in these affairs. He is that commander, and we trust that your noble court will kindly listen to what he conveys and give due consideration to what he presents..." (Muhammad 2005)

This correspondence illustrates the diplomatic coordination between Granada and the Marinid court regarding sensitive issues in Andalusian–Christian relations, as well as the reliance on envoys to communicate and clarify complex political matters.

The Embassy of 748 AH / 1347 CE

From the letter dated 748 AH / 1347 CE, which Sultan Yusuf I sent to Abu al-Hasan concerning the announcement of two Granadan victories over the Christians, it appears that the Marinid Sultan was actually the first to dispatch an embassy seeking information about the wars of Banu al-Ahmar against the Christians. The letter reads: "...We have received your letter, which holds the weight of an army in the eyes of the enemy, and your message filled with sincere promises and successive determinations..." (al-Khatib 1973, 129)

The messenger who delivered this letter was the noble commander Sheikh Abu Mahdi ibn al-Zarqa. Sultan Yusuf I also entrusted him with a reply to the Marinid Sultan, in which he wrote:

"...When our purpose was made clear and revealed, we entrusted your reward to God, asking Him to increase your prosperity, protect your glory, and spread your good reputation across the two horizons. Your envoy, the esteemed commander—may God honor him—will clarify to you what we have briefly mentioned and present before you the details of what God has granted us. Your noble attention to his words shall be sufficient, and your noble judgment shall be gracious..." (al-Khatib 1973, 133)

Thus, Sultan Yusuf I refrained from disclosing the full purpose of his message in writing, leaving the confidential details to be conveyed orally by his envoy, Sheikh Abu Mahdi ibn al-Zarqa. This reflects the discreet diplomatic practice of the time, aimed at safeguarding sensitive information from falling into enemy hands. (al-Khatib 1973)

The letter reveals that this embassy was preceded by other missions from the Banu al-Ahmar concerning the Christian threat; embassies served as the link between the two parties to learn about enemy movements and the main plans that needed to be implemented.

Embassy of the year 754 AH / 1353 AD.

As part of strengthening the bonds of affection and friendship between the two states, Sultan Yusuf ibn al-Ahmar received an embassy sent by Sultan Abu Inan al-Marini. In response, he sent his own envoys back with the Marinid delegation to express his desire and goodwill in maintaining continuous relations between the two kingdoms. The letter stated: "...We have decided to send to your exalted court this letter along with your envoys who have arrived to us, renewing the covenant and reaffirming the affection you have shown and we have reciprocated, and expressing our appreciation for your noble intentions, which will only grow stronger. The bearer of this message is the commander Abu [name omitted], who holds a high position in our court and possesses experience and integrity in diplomatic matters. We have sent him alongside your envoys—may God bless their journey and residence—entrusting him with all the details discussed with them and charging him to convey to your court all that we wish to express..." (al-Khatib 1973, 131)

It seems that the sultans used to take advantage of the arrival of a foreign embassy to send their own envoys back with it, both to save time and to ensure that their message was delivered verbally by representatives who directly embodied the authority of the ruler.

Embassy of the year 750 AH / 1349 AD:

Following the internal revolt launched by the people of Tunis against Abu al-Hasan al-Marini, the latter sent an embassy headed by Sheikh Abu Muhammad ibn Ahbana, requesting assistance in facing this uprising. Sultan Yusuf I responded with a letter written in 1349 AD, in which he expressed his regret for being unable to provide support due to the circumstances he was facing from the Christians. He also informed him of the arrival of two Moroccan ships on the Andalusian coasts, the first of which had docked at the port of Al-Munakkab² (Almuñécar). (Ibn Khaldun 1981)

Embassy of the year 751 AH / 1351 AD:

Sultan Yusuf I sent an embassy led by his ambassador, Commander Abu al-Hasan 'Abbad, to the Marinid Sultan, informing him of the withdrawal of the armies of Alfonso XI from Gibraltar following the latter's death due to the plague in 751 AH / 1351 AD. He also informed him that he had sent a letter of condolence to the Castilian throne, addressed to King Pedro I, upon the death of his father, Alfonso XI. (Muhammad 2005, 352)

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

Sultan Yusuf I sent a mission to Sultan Abu Inan concerning the appointment of Sheikh Abu Zakariya al-Barqaji as governor of the city of Marbella. The latter himself headed this embassy, carrying with him a letter of recommendation confirming his nomination for the post. It appears that Yusuf I's choice to have the new governor personally lead this mission aimed to allow him to engage directly with the Marinid Sultan and become better acquainted with him.

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

² Port of Al-Munakkab (Almuñécar):

Al-Himyari described it as follows:

"The port of Al-Munakkab is a summer harbor, protected on its eastern side. It has a river that flows into the sea, and upon it stands a large, impregnable fortress surrounded by a suburb, a market, and a congregational mosque. Within it are numerous ancient ruins, including aqueducts and wells still used today for irrigation. Near the fortress, to the north, stands a great vaulted structure built of stone — square at the base and pointed at the top — about a hundred cubits high, with an opening at its summit for channeling water brought to it. On the southern side of this vaulted building, a channel was carved from top to bottom to allow the water to flow down to the ground, indicating that the water came from a source higher than this monument. It was from this port that Imam Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya set sail when he entered al-Andalus, in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal of the year 138 AH. Following the port of Al-Munakkab lies a pleasant medium-sized town with abundant fisheries and plentiful fruit."

The Marinid Sultan Abu Inan sent an embassy laden with gifts and accompanied by a fleet to assist Sultan Yusuf I against the Christians, in response to the mission previously sent by Yusuf requesting military reinforcements and supplies. However, it appears that this embassy did not receive a favorable response from the Marinid Sultan. Consequently, Yusuf I sent another letter requesting aid from the Marinids, stating: "...We have sent someone to present before you the loyalty we hold toward your noble brotherhood, to speak in your presence about these matters, and to express the sincerity of our intentions with complete clarity. He is the distinguished and honorable ." (al-Khatib 1973, 254)

Beyond what is mentioned in the letter, nothing is known about the events or the dialogue that took place between the two rulers, and thus many details have been lost.

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

As part of the cordial relations between the two states, Sultan Abu Inan sent an embassy bearing a gift to Sultan Yusuf I. In response, Yusuf I dispatched an embassy with a letter in which he expressed his gratitude for this gesture and praised the Marinids' support for the cause of jihad in Al-Andalus. The Marinids were always careful to send gifts that would strengthen the Kingdom of Granada and help it withstand Christian attacks. These gifts often included horses and finely crafted spurs and weapons. (al-Khatib 1973, 108)

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

Sultan Yusuf I sent an embassy bearing a congratulatory letter to Sultan Abu Inan on his recovery of the city of Tlemcen from the Banu Ziyān. The letter does not specify who led the mission, mentioning only "so-and-so." It also indicates that Sultan Yusuf of the Nasrids entrusted the ambassador with additional verbal messages to deliver personally, as stated in the letter: "...We have chosen for this mission those who will represent us in this matter and fulfill the duties required of them at the proper time. They are the foremost among our officials and the finest of our servants — so-and-so and so-and-so. May God grant them honor and dignity, bless their journey and their stay. We have dispatched them to your noble court, the destination frequented by embassies, to convey to your gracious attention the sincerity of our friendship and to emphasize the depth of our esteem for you — matters whose foundations, we know, need no further explanation to you..." (al-Khatib 1973, 216)

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

Yusuf I sent a letter to Sultan Abu Inan through one of his servants named Ghalib, on the occasion of the conquest of Tlemcen. The letter expressed support and a desire to maintain the friendly relations between the two states. The ambassador was also entrusted with a gift, as stated in the letter: "...Having learned of your movement, which — God willing — heralds good fortune and success, we have sent along with it such mule mounts as we were able to provide, hoping they may be of

service to your noble endeavors, offered in the spirit of generosity and in keeping with the tradition of gifting..." (al-Khatib 1973, 75-77)

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

Yusuf I sent a letter to Sultan Abu Inan through one of his servants named Ghalib, on the occasion of the conquest of Tlemcen. The letter expressed his support and his wish for the continuation of the friendly relations between the two states. The ambassador carried a gift, as mentioned in the letter:

"...When we learned of your campaign, which — God willing — ushers in the signs of prosperity, we sent along with it as many mules as we could provide, hoping they might be of service to your noble station, offered generously and in accordance with the custom of gift-giving..." (al-Khatib 1973)

Embassy of the year 752 AH / 1351 AD.

The victories achieved by the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan Faris in North Africa, where he managed to subdue the provinces that had rebelled against him, prompted Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf I to send a congratulatory embassy. The letter stated: "...Upon the first arrival of this news, we granted it the joy it deserved and appointed our messenger to be sent to your noble court to affirm our commitment and convey what is customary to express of glory and generosity. We now renew our congratulations to you and spread praise for your steadfastness. And if we were to describe the joy we feel for your happiness and the delight at the order you have restored..." (Muhammad 2005, 86)

In this letter as well, as in most of those reported by Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib, the name of the envoy who carried out this embassy is not mentioned.

Embassy of the year 753 AH / 1352 AD.

A special embassy was dispatched regarding Prince Abu al-Fadl al-Marini, the brother of Sultan Abu Inan, who had fled from the custody of Sultan Yusuf I. Consequently, the latter sent an embassy to apologize for his shortcoming. He appointed as envoy someone who had personally witnessed the events, entrusting him with explaining all their details, as he was the most capable of accurately describing and reporting what had happened. The letter stated: "...We have sent to you with this letter the commander so-and-so, who happened to witness this affair in person and saw its events unfold before his eyes. He will convey to you our position on the matter as love dictates and will clarify what cannot be expressed in writing. Your noble station will kindly listen to what he delivers and receive with acceptance what he conveys..." (al-Khatib 1973, 547)

Both parties exchanged letters and embassies following the flight of Abu al-Fadl. Three successive letters reached the Marinid court, the first of which reported his escape. These letters aimed to refute the allegations that Sultan Yusuf I had assisted Abu al-Fadl in rebelling against his brother. In the end, he relied on the bonds of affection and the historical ties that had long united the two kingdoms. However, the Marinid Sultan's response to this matter remains unknown. (al-Khatib 1973, 142)

Embassy of the Year 753 AH / 1352 AD:

Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf I sent a message to Sultan Abu Inan Faris informing him of his recent correspondence with the King of Castile regarding the rights of Muslims living under his rule and among his Christian subjects. The message was accompanied by a gift to the Marinid Sultan. (al-Khatib 1973, 135)

Sultan Abu Inan, in turn, responded with an embassy and a gift worthy of his status. Sultan Yusuf I stated: "...Your servant, so-and-so, the bearer of the noble gift, appeared before us and conveyed your gracious intentions, noble purposes, and sincere promises..." Sultan Yusuf I then replied to this Marinid embassy with a letter addressing political and diplomatic matters with Castile, accompanied by a gift that included several horses. (al-Khatib 1973, 547)

Embassy of the Year 754 AH / 1353 AD:

The exchange of letters and embassies between the two states continued, whether to inform one another of events taking place in al-Andalus or to convey congratulations. Among these was the embassy sent by Sultan Yusuf I to Abu Inan to congratulate him on his victory over Prince Abu Thabit al-Zayani in Tlemcen.

In pursuit of the interests of the Banu al-Ahmar, it appears that the Zayyanid sultans had previously assisted them whenever Christian attacks occurred. However, during this period, relations with the Zayyanids were strained. Therefore, political pragmatism dictated that maintaining good relations with the Marinids—who possessed superior military power—was a wiser course.

The letter stated: "...We rejoiced greatly at the completion of God's blessing upon you and the consolidation of your fortune, as required by sincere affection. Our relative, so-and-so, has been sent to you for this purpose; he will convey to you what we have entrusted him with, and we trust you will graciously accept what he delivers and listen to what he communicates..." (al-Khatib 1973, 547)

Hence, sultans would send ambassadors personally to deliver their messages, as written letters did not always include the full purpose of the communication. The ambassador, acting as the sovereign's voice, would orally convey the sultan's intentions—especially given the sensitivity of such missions and the risk of letters falling into enemy hands.

Embassy of the Year 754 AH / 1353 AD:

In the letter sent by Abu al-Hajjaj to the Marinid court, it is shown that Sultan Abu Inan had previously dispatched his ambassador, Sheikh Abu al-Abbas Ibn al-Khatib, who delivered a verbal message to Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj. Later, another embassy was sent, headed by Abu Abdullah Ibn Faruq. Abu al-Hajjaj took advantage of Ibn Faruq's arrival to send him back with a message to inform Abu Inan of the arrival of his envoy in Granada and to brief him on the treaty concluded with the King of Castile.

The letter stated: "...During his stay with us, your messenger, the esteemed commander Abu Abdullah Ibn Faruq—may God honor him—delivered your letter, which contained the good news of the assistance granted to you by divine

providence. However, we do not know the reason for his embassy..." It was customary that, upon the arrival of an envoy to one of the two kingdoms, the receiving ruler would send a message to the other sovereign informing him of the envoy's arrival and confirming that he had conveyed his message. Subsequently, Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj sent two letters to Abu Inan: one concerning the 1348 treaty concluded between Granada and Castile, and the other regarding the conquest of the fortress of Qanit, achieved by Sultan Yusuf I (al-Khatib 1973, 493)

From what has been mentioned above, we can conclude that every victory achieved by the Nasrid sultans was also considered a victory for the Marinids. For this reason, both dynasties were keen to exchange congratulations and gifts after each triumph, sharing with one another the details of their accomplishments. The Marinids had become the military and protective wing upon which the Nasrids relied in times of conflict or war. Therefore, it was in the Nasrids' best interest to seek their assistance. The close geographical proximity between the two kingdoms also played a significant role in strengthening their relations, particularly in the frequent exchange of embassies sent to the Marinid court to request military support—sometimes more than three embassies in a single year, which was notably more than those exchanged with the Zayyanid or Hafsids dynasties. Thus, these embassies formed a bridge of communication that helped delay the fall of al-Andalus. It is also noteworthy that the rulers consistently relied on prominent figures and scholars, whose names appeared repeatedly in the historical records of these diplomatic missions.

Embassy of the Year 754 AH / 1353 AD

Following the victory achieved by the Marinid Sultan Abu Inan over Prince Abu Thabit, Sultan Yusuf I sent him a congratulatory embassy. In the letter he wrote to him, he stated:

"...We have felt great joy at the completion of God's blessing upon you and at the fulfillment of your victory, with the utmost affection that a devoted ally may feel. We have rejoiced in the continuity of your good fortune, which divine grace has made manifest. We have therefore sent one who represents us to convey our congratulations in the spirit of sincere friendship — our relative, the noble Abu [name omitted]. We have entrusted him with our message for you, which he will deliver and convey, and we hope you will graciously accept what he presents and listen to what he conveys..." (al-Khatib 1973, 82)

This letter, like many others, does not specify the name of the ambassador who headed the mission, except for the mention that he was one of Sultan Yusuf's relatives.

Embassy of the Year 754 AH / 1353 AD

The exchange of congratulations and news between the two kingdoms was a distinctive feature of their relations, as they never missed an opportunity to send embassies or letters of congratulations. In 754 AH / 1353 AD, Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj

Yusuf I sent a congratulatory embassy to Sultan Abu Inan al-Marini on the occasion of his conquest of Bejaia.

The letter sent by Sultan Yusuf reveals that he learned of this victory from his envoy, who was present at the Marinid court. When the envoy returned, he informed him of the news, as stated in the letter: "...When our messenger returned from your court, having clarified the ambiguities and resolved the uncertainties, he informed us of the conquest that made heads rise high in pride, that brought joy to swords, that made steeds delight in its glory, and lances sway in its honor — the conquest of Bejaia, may God protect it..." (al-Khatib 1973, 87)

Following this, Sultan Yusuf sent a letter of congratulation through a special envoy, saying:

"...We hastened to dispatch one who would convey our heartfelt joy for these blessings and express our delight in full measure. For this purpose, we selected so-and-so — may God preserve him and bless his journey and stay — and entrusted him to convey the sincerity of our friendship, whose fruits are true, whose proofs silence opponents, and whose fabric shines with the silk of loyalty. We hope he fulfills his duty to the fullest and conveys our message in the best possible manner, confident that Your Grace will kindly listen to his words and receive what he delivers with favor..." (al-Khatib 1973, 92)

Embassy of the Year 754 AH / 1353 AD

Sultan Abu Inan al-Marini sent to Sultan Yusuf Abu al-Hajjaj a gift consisting of horses, a number of fine weapons, and spurs, accompanied by a special embassy for this purpose. Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj replied with a letter expressing his gratitude for the gift. The exact year of this embassy is not known, though one researcher suggested that it likely took place toward the end of Abu al-Hajjaj's reign. The letter reads: "...Your envoy, so-and-so, arrived before us and delivered words whose truth was confirmed by deeds, and expressions made eloquent by glory and virtue, words that strengthened and fulfilled the bonds of hope..." (al-Khatib 1973, 150)

Embassy of the Year 755 AH / 1354 AD

After the death of Sultan Abu al-Hajjaj Yusuf I, his son, Sultan Muhammad V al-Ghani Billah, sought to maintain the friendly relations between Fez and Granada as they had been during his father's and ancestors' reigns. To this end, he sent his vizier, accompanied by a delegation led by Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib, and among the envoys was the judge Abu al-Qasim al-Sharif. The embassy carried a letter announcing the death of his father, Abu al-Hajjaj, and expressing his desire to preserve the amicable relations that had long existed between the two states, as well as requesting assistance against the Christians. When Ibn al-Khatib appeared before the Marinid sultan, he recited verses, among which were the following (al-Khatib 1973, 498):

Khalīfat Allāh sā'ada al-qadar, 'Ulāk mā lāḥa fī ad-dujā qamar

(O Caliph of God, aided by destiny, your glory rises like the moon in the dark night.)

Wa dāfa'at 'anka kaff qudratihi, Mā laysa yastaṭī'u daf'ahu al-bashar

(The hand of His power has defended you from what no mortal could ever repel.)

Wajhuka fī an-nā'ibāt badru dujā, lanā, wa fī al-muḥl kaffuka al-maṭar

(Your face in trials shines like a full moon, and your hand in the land brings rain.)

Wa an-nāsu ṭarran bi-arḍi al-Andalus, Lawlāka mā awṭanū walā 'amarū

(All the people of Andalusia — without you, they would have neither homes nor life.)

Wa jumlat al-amri annahu waṭan, Fī ghayri 'ulyāk mā lahu waṭar

(In sum, the homeland's honor and purpose belong to you; without you, it has no protector.)

Wa man bihi mudh waṣalta ḥablahum, Mā jaḥadū ni'matan walā kafarū

(Since you joined them with care, they have never denied your favor nor turned away.)

Wa qad ahammat'hum nufūsum, Fawajjahūnī ilayka wantazarū

(Their hearts were troubled, so they sent me to you, awaiting your guidance.)

These verses, which Ibn al-Khatib recited before the Marinid Sultan, had a profound impact on him. Ibn Khaldun described the event, saying: "...The Sultan was moved by these verses and granted him permission to sit. He told him to present himself to them with all their gifts, then he loaded them with generosity and granted them all they requested. Our Shaykh, the judge Abu al-Qasim al-Sharif, who was part of that delegation, said: he had never heard of an ambassador completing his mission before being received by the Sultan except in this case..." (al-Khatib 1973, 241)

Thus, the eloquence of Ibn al-Khatib served both as a means and an end to achieve his objectives. The Sultan Abu al-Anan praised him highly, and Ibn al-Khatib returned crowned with success, becoming an exemplary ambassador relied upon for important missions. This embassy also highlights the new Sultan's concern for consolidating his authority, both to guard against internal ambitions and the ever-watchful Christians.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, the importance of letters and treaties in documenting the political history of the Islamic West becomes clearly evident. They allow us to understand the nature of the relationships that linked the Sultans of Islamic Morocco with the Christian states and the Kingdom of Granada, which were mostly aimed at improving relations and strengthening ties. Accordingly, we have enumerated these embassies according to the date of their dispatch and their purpose. These treaties also demonstrate the sultans' care in setting specific conditions regarding who would draft the treaties and which ambassador would be entrusted with delivering the message.

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