

THE SPLENDOR OF ALMERIA IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY DURING THE PERIOD OF THE *MULUK AL-TAWA'IF* (KINGS OF TAIFAS)

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Abstract

In this year 2014, is celebrated the Millennium of one of the most important periods in the history of Almeria, i.e. the Taifa Kingdom, in which an economic, social and cultural splendor was got, never before achieved. Three people were the main architects of this progress during the eleventh century in Almeria: Khayran, Zuhayr and Al-Mu'tasim. This paper is an approach to the study of this glorious moment in the history of Almeria due to the achievements of these three relevant personages.

Keywords: The Taifa Kingdom of Almeria in the eleventh century, Khayran, Zuhayr, Al-Mu'tasim, Millennium of the Kingdom of Almeria

Preliminary notes

In the early eleventh century, around the year 1009, took place the beginning of the fragmentation of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova. During this period, called in Arabic *fitna*, there was a political, social, economic and cultural breakdown, as well as the gradual appearance of a large number of independent territories which are known as *Tawa'if* (Taifas) (Dozy, 1849; Dozy, 1877). Each Taifa was led by one of the three castes existing in the Andalusian society of the moment: Arabs, Berbers and Slavs (Gayangos, 1840-1843). That is to say, there were Arab Taifas, such as those of the Banu Hud from Zaragoza, the Banu 'Abbad from Seville, the Banu Yahwar from Cordova or the Banu Sumadih from Almeria, etc; Berber Taifas, such as those of the Banu Aftas from Badajoz, the Banu Hammud from Malaga and Algeciras or the Zirids from Granada, etc; and Slavic Taifas, such as those of the *fatàs* Mubarak and Muzaffar, in Valencia; Labib, in Tortosa; Mujahid, in Denia and the Balears; and Khayran and Zuhayr, in Almeria (Viguera, 1992).

Since the Taifa of Almeria was Slavic in the first stage, before all I will refer to them.

The Slavs, the *saqaliba*, were captives from Europe and Orient. Many of them were intended to be eunuchs. They were castrated by the Jews, probably in Lucena, and were sold very expensive for positions in domestic services and harem, even the Caliphate guard. Although they were slaves, most were freed, becoming then *mawali* (clients), and took the name of the adoptive family; and, in this case, reached positions of some responsibility in the administration and the Caliphate army. Some less, as Khayran and Zuhayr, became governors. The Slavs were involved in diverse important events throughout the history of medieval Islam, but is now in the eleventh century when they had a very prominent role in al-Andalus since, as I said, they led some Taifas.

The Slavic kingdom were mostly loyal to the Umayyad cause and the Amirid dynasty. Their rulers, in spite of having absolute power over the territories under their domination, never took the title of *King* but they named themselves as *Hajib* (chamberlain), the same title adopted by Ibn Abi Amir Almansor, the well-known father of the Amirid family which had absolute power in the Caliphate of Cordova during the final third of the tenth century and

early in the eleventh. In fact, they were regarded themselves as descendants of Amirids and their representatives in the territories under their rule (Dozy, 1932).

The Taifa Kingdom of Almeria (1014-1091)

In the Taifa of Almeria (1014-1091), we can distinguish three stages (Tapia Garrido, 1991):

1) *Slavic stage* (1014-1038)

- Rulers:

- Khayran (1014-1028)
- Zuhayr (1028-1038)

2) *Stage under domination of the Kingdom of Valencia*, in which the Taifa of Almeria belonged to the Taifa of Valencia (1038-1042)

- Rulers:

- ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz Ibn Abi ‘Amir (1038-1042)

3) *Arabic stage under the Banu Sumadih dynasty* (1042-1091)

- Rulers:

- Ma‘n Ibn Muhammad Ibn Sumadih (1042-1052)
- Abu Yahyà Muhammad Ibn Ma‘n Ibn Sumadih Al-Tujibi, known as Al-Mu‘tasim (1052-1091)
- Mu‘izz Al-Dawla (1091)

Three people were the main architects of the splendor of Almeria in the eleventh century: Khayran, Zuhayr and Al-Mu‘tasim (Castro Guisasola, 1930).

Khayran Al-‘Amiri (1014-1028)

Khayran was a Slavic eunuch, Almansor’s confidant attendant in Cordova. In recognition of his services and his fidelity, Almansor (or perhaps his son ‘Abd Al-Malik Al-Muzaffar) made him governor in the cora of Almeria, one of the most important in al-Andalus because its capital was the naval base of the Cordovan Caliphate. In 1009-1010, Khayran goes, in company of other Slavic generals, to Cordova immersed in a deep crisis and in serious conflicts of fragmentation, in order to support of Caliph Hisham II since, as I said, at the beginning he was loyal to the Umayyad cause. By leaving Almeria, he appointed as governor to one of his fellows named Aben Hamit, who shortly after was replaced by another Slav, Ibn Aflah, who, according to some, was the first regulus of Almeria from 1012. A stage of confusion appears in which another personage, the Berber Ibn Rawis, tried to take power. Khayran, who had been alerted by Aben Hamit, finished with this situation: effectively, he headed towards Almeria and besieged it for 20 days; and, after winning to these enemies and killing Ibn Aflah and his sons, he proclaimed in July of 1014 the independence of Almeria, starting one of the most glorious moments in its history.

Politically, he was immersed in many conflicts with neighboring kingdoms and he was proposed to extend his dominions with annexing the nearest territories such as Murcia, Orihuela and Jaen, and later, by the areas of La Mancha, to the North, and Valencia, to the East.

He held in Almeria new constructions and the expansion of the already existing ones. During his reign, Almeria got the status of capital that would retain until its conquest by the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabella, in 1489.

Among his accomplishments, we have:

- a) He ordered the construction the wall of neighborhood called as *Musallà*.
- b) He rebuilt the Alcazaba from the ground and gave it its current perimeter. This reconstruction was so considerable that from then the Alcazaba was known as "the Fortress of Khayran".

c) He enlarged the Great Mosque with two new naves.

During his reign, Almeria had a great demographic development due to the economic progress based mainly on Macael marble and luxurious fabrics of silk, gold and silver which were exported all over the Mediterranean Sea through its port.

In this time, Almeria began to be host land of writers and men of *belles lettres*, such as, for example, the renowned Cordovan polygraph Ibn Hazm (994-1064) and the well known Berber poet from the Algarve and Almansor Court's official bard, Ibn Darraj Al-Qastalli (958-1030), who dedicated some panegyrics to Khayran (Garulo, 1998).

At his death, in 1028, after fourteen years of reign, he was succeeded by his companion and protege Zuhayr.

Zuhayr Al-'Amiri (1028-1038)

Zuhayr was another Slavic eunuch belonging to the family of Almansor. He reigned in Almeria during ten years, continuing the work of progress and splendor initiated by his predecessor Khayran. He was, like Khayran, a great military and politician; and, before inherit the kingdom of Almeria, he was governor in Tudmir and lord of the feuds of Jaen, Baeza and Calatrava. His reign was shortly peaceful due to the continuous wars with other Taifas, especially the Zirids from Granada.

According to some historians, for example Al-Nuwayri (Gaspar Remiro, 1915), Zuhayr extended his dominions until Xativa, by the East, and until the boundaries of Toledo, by the North, and he remained them until his death with an absolute power and authority, even managing to mint coins to his name.

Among his achievements, we have:

a) He ordered to close the wall of the *Musallà* suburb by the beach side. According to some, he also commanded to build the wall in the *Al-Hawd* suburb but no evidence of it, as only is known that it was built before 1085.

b) According to Al-'Udhri (Ahmad Al-'Udhri, 1965), he enlarged the Great Mosque adding two more naves to the five existing.

c) He strengthened the economy of the Great Mosque assigning it the rents of the surrounding shops and stores.

d) He commanded to build an underground canal that brought water from the fonts of Alhadra, which were discovered in times of Khayran, to the cisterns built close to the so-called Gate of Pechina. These cisterns were constructed by Zuhayr although, according to some, for example Al-Himjari (Levi-Provençal, 1938), Khayran was who ordered their construction. In anyway, these cisterns are known as the Aljibes of Khayran.

Al-Mu'tasim (1052-1091)

Al-Mu'tasim ascended to the throne at the age of fourteen years and for three years took place the regency of his uncle Abu 'Utba.

His long reign was characterized, like that of the previous rulers, by continual strifes with the Christian kingdoms and the other Muslim Taifas, especially the Zirids of Granada and the Banu 'Abbad of Seville, as well as several agreements and pacts according convenience.

Although Al-Mu'tasim did not neglect his assignments as a king, statesman and politician, he is more known in history for his role as Maecenas or protector of poets, scholars and writers. He himself was a poet (Ibn Al-'Abbar, 1887-1889).

On the death of Zuhayr, were lost many territories of Almeria which passed to other Taifas, such as Granada and Denia. This loss of lands increased, so that at the time of Al-Mu'tasim the Taifa of Almeria was practically reduced to the current Spanish province. However, this did not prevent the economic, social and cultural apogee of the Taifa kingdom

in the epoch of Al-Mu‘tasim. In fact during his rule took place the definitive economic rise of Almeria until becoming the first commercial port of Muslim Spain and one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean Sea, coveted even by Catalans and Genoese.

In the eleventh century was overflowed in Almeria industrial activity in craft workshops and, when these workshops could not meet the growing demand of traders and merchants, the industrial activity spread to the other regions of the Spanish South East and the products found the natural exit through the port of Almeria, with a profit which converted the citizens of Almeria in the richest ones of al-Andalus and its rulers in the most coveted ones of all the sovereigns of Spain by the tithes received.

Therefore Al-Mu‘tasim, with the money that remained after paying the tribute to the Zirids of Granada, could improve the water supply, build two palaces and welcome all poets, scholars and writers who sought his hospitality.

Effectively, he ordered the construction of an underground conduction channel of water from the Aljibes of Khayran to the city center and he built a public font close to the Great Mosque from which began to emanate water for the first time on the 27th of July of 1066; and later, from this public font to the Alcazaba, moving it up by means of some wells. He also transformed the surly and solid construction of the Alcazaba (the Fortress of Khayran) in a marble palace surrounded by gardens and orchards, along with another building that served as the seat of government and the barracks. Besides he commanded to construct the *Sumadihiyya*, a recreation property located at the entrance of the Valley of Pechina, where he used to retreat with his friends the poets and the writers hosted your hospitality.

Al-Mu‘tasim indeed surrounded himself with a literary court that had fame and prestige at that time and competed with the famous literary court of Al-Mu‘tamid, King of Seville. The gatherings of Al-Mu‘tasim's renowned literary court were usually held in the *Sumadihiyya*.

Ibn Sa‘id Al-Maghribi (Ibn Sa‘id, 1953), Ibn Bassam (Ibn Bassam, 1939-1975) and Ibn Khaqan (Ibn Khaqan, 1990), among others, give information about the artists who frequented the literary court of Almeria, all of them well known in the history of the literature of al-Andalus (González Palencia, 1945; Rubiera Mata, 2004). Thus among the poets, we have: Ibn Al-Haddad, from Guadix in Granada; Al-Sumaysir, from Elvira in Granada; Ibn Ukht Ganim, from Malaga; Al-Nahli, from Badajoz; Ibn Sharaf, from Berja; Ibn ‘Abd Al-Samad; Ibn Billita; the panegirists of Al-Mu‘tasim: Abu Ja‘far Ibn Al-Jarraz and ‘Umar Ibn Al-Shahid; Muhammad Ibn ‘Ubada Al-Qazzaz, from Malaga, author of *muwashshahas*; the sons of Al-Mu‘tasim: Umm Al-Kiram, Rafi‘ Al-Dawla, Abu Ja‘far Ahmad and ‘Izz Al-Dawla; Al-Mu‘tasim's slave girl: Wayalmana; Abu-l-Asbag Ibn Arqam, etc. Among the prose writers, we have: Ahmad Ibn Burd Al-Asgar, from Cordova, author of *maqamas* and epistles, written in rythmed prose; the already mentioned as a poet, ‘Umar Ibn Al-Shahid, who is also author of *maqamas* in rithmed prose; the historians: Ibn Abi-l-Fayyad and Ibn Mudayr Al-Azdi; the historians and geographers: Al-Bakri, from Huelva, and Al-‘Udhri, from Dalias in Almeria; the expert agronomist and poet, Al-Tignari; etc.

Conclusion

Almeria reached in the eleventh century during the Taifa Kingdom an economic, social and cultural apogee that never would get to have in another time in its history. And this was possible thanks mainly to the work of three important historical figures: Khayran, Zuhayar and Al-Mu‘tasim. This current year 2014, thousand years after its initiation, the Millennium of Kingdom of Almeria is commemorated ([Internet1], 2014) because, owing to the splendor and the prestige achieved then, well worth the celebration of the different events scheduled ([Internet2], 2014).

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