



# *Akademik Eğitim ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* (AJESS Journal)

## *The Andalusians and Their Contribution to Maghrebi Maritime Activity During the Seventeenth Century*

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### Article History

Received : 11/03/2026; Accepted : 25/05/2026; Published : 30/08/2026

### Abstract

This article examines the prominent role and effective contributions of the Andalusians (Moriscos) in reviving and developing maritime activity in the Islamic Maghreb during the seventeenth century, following the severe sociopolitical transformations and persecution they endured in the Iberian Peninsula. The research begins by shedding light on the political, religious, and ideological drivers behind the Spanish Edict of Expulsion, alongside the fierce resistance manifested in Morisco uprisings across the Muela de Cortés and La Horra (Laguar) mountain ranges in defense of their identity and existence. Furthermore, the paper traces the trajectory of the final expulsion (1609–1614) and Morisco migration to the Maghreb, focusing on their strategic settlement across North African coastal urban centers. The core of the study highlights the active engagement of this incoming elite within the military, naval, and economic structures of the Maghrebi states, emphasizing their distinct footprint in bolstering the Algerian corsair navy, developing naval shipyards and autonomous fleet operations in Morocco (notably the Republic of Salé), and enhancing the defensive, artillery, and commercial capabilities of the Tunisian navy. Ultimately, this repositioned the Moriscos as a pivotal axis in Mediterranean maritime geopolitics and maritime resistance (Naval Jihad).

**Keywords:** Andalusians; Moriscos; Spanish Expulsion; Maritime Activity; Maghreb; Corsair Warfare; Naval Jihad; Mediterranean Geopolitics.

### Introduction

The fall of the Emirate of Granada in 1492 CE and the subsequent forced displacement, systematic persecution, and coerced conversion of Andalusian Muslims represented a profound historical earthquake that triggered extensive demographic shifts toward the North African coastline. This displacement transcended mere demographic relocation; it instituted a continuous resistance dynamic spanning the entire sixteenth century. By the dawn of the seventeenth century, this dynamic reached its zenith within a Mediterranean basin engulfed in conflict and governed by unprecedented strategic rivalry between the hegemonic Spanish Empire, the expanding Ottoman state, and local Maghrebi powers. In this volatile geopolitical crucible, the displaced Andalusians found an optimal arena to deploy their specialized field expertise, thereby culminating their existential struggle and maritime jihad.

Andalusian migration was not a transient episode of human flight, but an escalating, structured historical process. From the late fifteenth century through the sixteenth century, Andalusian refugees progressively integrated into Maghrebi urban and maritime hubs—most notably the ports of Algiers, Tunis, and Tétouan. They carried substantial technical knowledge in naval

architecture, shipbuilding, and intimate familiarity with the nautical routes and coastal defenses of the northern Mediterranean littoral. By the seventeenth century, this technical repertoire matured and fused with an acute collective psychological impulse: a burning desire for retribution against Spanish oppression and the safeguarding of their newly adopted homelands. Consequently, this reservoir of knowledge transformed into a formidable military and naval asset.

This creative synergy between historical tragedy and strategic opportunity placed the Andalusians at the epicenter of seventeenth-century Maghrebi maritime enterprise. They swiftly rose to become the vanguard spearhead countering Spanish imperial ambitions and recalibrating the naval balance of power across the Western Mediterranean.

**Central Research Problem:** *To what extent did the displaced Andalusians—driven by existential self-defense and the aspiration to reclaim their lost frontiers—succeed in driving and sustaining Maghrebi maritime activity during the seventeenth century? Furthermore, what were the primary military, navigational, technological, and strategic dimensions of this contribution?*

From this core problem arise several subsidiary research inquiries:

1. What specific historical, political, and psychological conditions surrounding the loss of Andalusian strongholds impelled them into extensive maritime mobilization immediately upon reaching the Islamic Maghreb?
2. What specialized technical, military, artillery, and navigational methodologies did they inject into the Maghrebi and Ottoman naval fleets?
3. How did their proactive participation reshape military equilibrium, corsair dynamics, and diplomatic negotiations in the Western Mediterranean during that era?

To address this problem, this study adopts the historical-analytical method. It rigorously reconstructs historical events, examines socio-economic, political, and psychological contexts, and critically interrogates primary historical documents, archival treaties, and specialized historiography on Andalusian and Maghrebi maritime history.

### **1. The Spanish Royal Edict of Expulsion (September 22, 1609)**

At the opening of the seventeenth century, Andalusians in Spain endured the climactic phase of their protracted struggle against the Spanish coercive apparatus and the Inquisition—a conflict spanning over a century (1502–1609). This systemic confrontation culminated in total banishment as Spain's 'definitive solution' to eliminate an unassimilable population that posed persistent religious, demographic, and political challenges to the Crown. Nevertheless, the Moriscos never perceived exile as the final conclusion of their cause; rather, they viewed displacement to North Africa as a transitional phase to reorganize their depleted ranks, strike back at the Spanish Empire, and work toward the reclamation of their lost homeland. The fundamental historiographical question remains: Did the Maghrebi geopolitical landscape offer the necessary conditions for the realization of these ambitions?

The gradual exodus of Andalusians continued incrementally throughout the sixteenth century until late 1609, when King Philip III (reigned 1598–1621) decreed the definitive and total expulsion of all Moriscos. Philip III reinforced the hardline policies of his predecessor, characterized by subjugation, cultural erasure, and forced displacement. Spanish contemporary chroniclers and ecclesiastical authorities regarded Philip's reign as a 'golden age,' attributing to him the realization of what his forebears could not accomplish. On September 22, 1609, the king sanctioned the decree, declaring: 'The Moriscos must be expelled from all the kingdoms of Spain, but we shall commence with Valencia, for it represents the gravest danger.' This decree fulfilled the long-standing demands of the clergy and Catholic elites who rejected any continued Muslim presence across the Iberian Peninsula.

Faced with an existential ultimatum, the Moriscos were given two stark choices: submit to forced Christianization or preserve their Islamic identity in defiance of state coercion. Anchored by steadfast faith, the majority resisted cultural and religious assimilation. The failure of assimilation policies was demonstrated by the successive issuance of expulsion decrees continuing through 1611, accompanied by escalating state violence, mass confiscation of property, and brutal repression.

### **2. Andalusian Armed Uprisings**

In direct response to systemic oppression and impending forced deportation, the Moriscos launched armed insurrections. The most prominent among these were the rebellions in the mountain strongholds of Muela de Cortés and La Horra (Valle de Laguar).

#### **2.1. The Morisco Uprising of Muela de Cortés (1609)**

Triggered in protest against the decree of expulsion on October 20, 1609, this rebellion mobilized approximately 6,000 armed Morisco fighters resolved to defend their lives and dignity. Accompanied by their families, livestock, and essential provisions, they fortified themselves in the rugged topography of Muela de Cortés under the elected leadership of Pablo Ubícar and Vicente Torrijos. The uprising sent shockwaves through the Spanish Crown and ecclesiastical hierarchy. In response, royal authorities deployed regular infantry and summoned volunteer militias. Following a protracted siege, negotiations commenced under safe-conduct protocols; however, three days of deliberations collapsed due to irreconcilable demands: the Moriscos demanded religious liberty and retention of their ancestral lands, while the Crown demanded unconditional surrender and deportation. General Don García Bravo failed to crush the revolt, prompting the Crown to appoint Simeón Zapata, who eventually suppressed the rebellion on February 2, 1612, receiving royal commendations and rewards.

## 2.2. The Morisco Uprising of the Laguar Mountains (1609)

Coinciding with the events of Muela de Cortés, the Laguar insurrection arose from identical grievances: rejection of state terror, forced conversions, and compulsory banishment. Spanish authorities routinely used trivial pretexts to enforce severe penalties. The initial flashpoint occurred when a Morisco youth named Abdullah fled to the mountains with a Christian woman named Teodora, violating Spanish laws prohibiting intercommunal intimacy. When royal patrols apprehended them, Teodora suffered violations by her co-religionists, while Abdullah was brutally tortured and beaten unconscious by soldiers while attempting to defend her.

Historical sources estimate that around 20,000 Moriscos—including women, children, and fighters—gathered in the Laguar range. They were commanded by an intrepid leader named Mellini, who devised guerrilla tactics utilizing mountain ambushes, natural choke points, and sudden raids to disorient imperial forces. Confronted by resilient resistance, Spanish commanders employed deceptive diplomacy and issued coercive ultimatums, warning that refusal to accept immediate deportation would result in total annihilation.

The Morisco leadership rejected all capitulation terms, affirming their readiness to endure death rather than surrender voluntarily to forced exile. On November 28, 1609, the decisive battle occurred. After desperate hand-to-hand combat against overwhelming artillery and infantry fire, the rebellion was crushed. Mellini and over 3,000 of his closest fighters perished on the battlefield after swearing never to surrender. These twin uprisings constituted the final armed stand of the Moriscos on Iberian soil prior to their forced maritime deportation to North Africa and the Ottoman Empire.

## 3. The Final Expulsion and Migration to the Maghreb (1609–1614)

Historical ties between Andalusia and the Islamic Maghreb were deeply rooted in shared faith, geography, and culture. Since the initial fall of Andalusian cities during the Reconquista, Maghrebi dynasties (Almoravids, Almohads, Marinids, Zayyanids, and Hafsids) had extended military aid, resources, and sanctuary to their Andalusian brethren. Consequently, North Africa was the natural sanctuary during the seventeenth-century crisis.

On September 22, 1609, King Philip III officially promulgated the expulsion of the Moriscos of Valencia, targeted first due to their strategic coastal location, their potential communication with Ottoman fleets, and their dominant role in local agriculture and craftsmanship. Their population in Valencia was estimated at 117,000. The decree mandated that all Moriscos vacate the kingdom within three days under penalty of summary execution. An armada of 62 galleys and 14 galleons, carrying 8,000 imperial troops, secured the port of Valencia to enforce the edict. Residents were confined to their homes for three days prior to forced embarkation.

The logistical success of the Valencian operation spurred the Spanish Crown to expand expulsions across all territories. On January 12, 1610, royal orders decreed the expulsion of Moriscos from Granada, Murcia, Jaén, and Andalusia, granting them a 30-day departure window with their families. By the conclusion of the final expulsion campaigns in 1614, official records documented the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals, as detailed below:

| Region / Kingdom                 | Estimated Population | Documented Expellees |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Valencia</b>                  | 125,000              | 117,464              |
| <b>Aragon</b>                    | 61,000               | 60,818               |
| <b>Catalonia</b>                 | 5,000                | 3,716                |
| <b>Castile &amp; Extremadura</b> | 45,000               | 44,625               |
| <b>Murcia</b>                    | 16,000               | 13,552               |
| <b>Andalusia (Guadalquivir)</b>  | 30,000               | 29,939               |
| <b>Kingdom of Granada</b>        | 3,000                | 2,026                |
| <b>Canary Islands</b>            | 1,000                | —                    |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>286,000</b>       | <b>272,140</b>       |

## 4. The Moriscos in North Africa

Following the mass expulsion of 1609, historical estimates regarding the total number of displaced Moriscos varied significantly among chroniclers and modern historians, ranging from 300,000 to over one million. Contemporary archival syntheses establish that Spain, aided by naval transports from Genoa, Portugal, and Italy, assembled flotillas that ferried roughly 270,000 to 300,000 refugees toward the Barbary Coast. Around 20,000 were transported in the initial convoys and 50,000 in subsequent waves, excluding thousands who departed independently.

Although leaving their homeland was agonizing, resettlement in North Africa offered liberation from a century of persecution, Inquisition trials, surveillance, and racial-religious disenfranchisement. Nevertheless, the sea transit was fraught with peril. Many refugees endured plunder, extortion, and violence by European shipmasters—particularly French and Italian privateers—who robbed passengers and cast many overboard. This traumatic crossing intensified their animosity toward Catholic Christendom, directly channeling their energies into organized maritime jihad.

The settlement conditions of the Moriscos varied considerably across the Maghreb due to divergent local economic and political climates. The prominent seventeenth-century chronicler Ahmad al-Maqqari al-Tilimsani vividly documented this dispersion and its hardships:

«Thousands arrived in Fez, and thousands in Tlemcen via Oran, while the vast majority landed in Tunis. Along the inland routes of Tlemcen and Fez, nomadic Bedouins assaulted and plundered their belongings, and few escaped this trial. Conversely, those who settled in the regency of Tunis found safety; they revitalized deserted villages and urban centers, as did those who settled in Tétouan, Salé, and the Mitidja plain of Algiers. When the Sultan of Morocco enlisted from among them a formidable army and settled them in Salé, their maritime jihad became legendary: they fortified the Kasbah of Salé, erected palatial dwellings, and established thriving public baths, maintaining their prosperity to this day.»

Historiographical estimates of the displaced population encompass Don Juan Antonio Llorente's estimate of 1,000,000; intermediate figures of 600,000 to 900,000; Ali Hassan al-Shatshat's estimate of 3,000,000 total refugees from 1492 to 1614; and Shakir Mustafa's conservative minimum of 500,000. Renowned historian Fernand Braudel characterized the expulsion as a brutal 'surgical operation' (\*opération chirurgicale\*) that severed Islamic civilization from the Iberian body politic. French historian Charles-André Julien observed that from Djerba to the Atlantic coast of Morocco, Andalusian maritime colonies established semi-autonomous corsair republics equipped for extensive maritime warfare.

#### 4.1. The Moriscos in Ottoman Algeria

The Regency of Algiers (\*Dar al-Sultan\*) emerged as a primary haven and destination for the Moriscos. Throughout the early seventeenth century, massive arrivals transformed the urban and cultural fabric of Algiers. Historian Nacer Eddine Saidouni, citing Father Diego de Haedo, notes that by the late sixteenth century, Algiers contained no fewer than 1,000 Andalusian households. By the post-1609 migrations, this figure surged to over 2,000 families (approx. 25,000 individuals), constituting nearly one-fourth of the city's cosmopolitan population alongside Hadharis, Kouloughlis, Baldis, and European converts (\*Renegades\* / \*Ulujs\*). Father Pierre Dan, visiting Algiers in 1634, estimated the city's population at 100,000, reflecting continuous Andalusian immigration.

Historian John B. Wolf records that Andalusians arriving in Algiers accounted for approximately 7,000 households. Leo Africanus (al-Hasan al-Wazzan) previously noted that in Cherchell, Andalusian settlers revived agriculture, silk manufacturing using white mulberry trees, and naval construction, creating an affluent community of 1,200 households. In Blida, Andalusians constituted at least half the population. Significant colonies also flourished across Annaba, Mostaganem, Breshk, Kolea, Jijel, Tlemcen, the Mitidja plain, and Arzew. French chronicler Henri de Castries (citing La Peyre) noted that on October 17, 1609, the Marquis de Santa Cruz escorted 17 transport ships carrying 3,406 Moriscos toward Oran, enduring severe abuses and extortion at sea.

#### 4.2. Andalusian Contributions to the Algerian Navy

Possessing native fluency in Castilian and intimate hydrographic knowledge of the Iberian coastline, the Moriscos became an indispensable asset to Algerian naval power. Immediately upon arrival, they engaged in naval operations from Algerian ports, equipping warships driven by a commitment to liberate Muslims remaining under Spanish rule. Operating alongside seasoned Algerian corsair captains, they executed coordinated raids against Spanish coastal towns and merchant convoys, inflicting catastrophic economic losses. John B. Wolf characterized the Andalusians as the 'backbone of the Algerian navy.'

A contemporary European observer highlighted this dynamic:

«The universal trait among the Moriscos is their intense hatred for fanatical Christians; whenever opportunity and resources allow, they outfit vessels, intercept Spanish ships, and take their crews captive as an act of vengeance.»

Beyond combat, the Moriscos introduced sophisticated craft industries to Algeria, including superior leather tanning, arms casting, and advanced ship carpentry at the naval shipyards of Algiers and Cherchell. They transformed Cherchell and Breshk into fortified forward naval bases. The strategic significance of Andalusian maritime enterprise is formally evidenced in the Peace Treaty of July 7, 1640, between the Regency of Algiers and the Kingdom of France. Article 10 explicitly established legal and financial liability for private Andalusian naval outfits (\*Tagarins\*):

**Treaty Clause Excerpt:** «If it should occur that vessels from Algiers, fitted out by local inhabitants or by Tagarins (Andalusians settled in Algiers) without official Diwan officers on board, capture any French subject in violation of the peace treaty, the outfitters of said vessels shall be held strictly responsible and shall fully compensate for all damages.»

#### 4.3. The Moriscos in Morocco (al-Maghrib al-Aqsa)

Between 1609 and 1614, substantial waves of Andalusian, Castilian, and Valencian emigrants crossed into Morocco. Many entered through Spanish-occupied enclaves such as Ceuta, Melilla, and Tangier, exploiting lax vigilance to reach the Moroccan interior. They established major communities in coastal and northern cities near the Strait of Gibraltar—such as Tétouan, Chefchaouen, Fez, Rabat, and Salé. Tétouan alone accommodated roughly 10,000 Moriscos by 1613, while another large group settled at the mouth of the Bou Regreg estuary, constructing modern residential quarters, public baths, and defensive ramparts.

Historical analyses, including studies by Damián Fonseca, estimate that between 40,000 and 60,000 Moriscos entered Morocco. This influx permanently enriched Morocco's cultural, architectural, and economic landscape, introducing specialized manufacturing, agricultural techniques, and linguistic heritage.

#### **4.4. Andalusian Leadership in Moroccan Maritime Warfare & the Republic of Salé**

Settling along the Atlantic seaboard, the Andalusians initiated aggressive maritime campaigns against Spanish shipping. Establishing their base at the Bou Regreg estuary (Rabat-Salé), they waged an unrelenting war of attrition across the Atlantic shipping lanes and the Iberian coast. They constructed a naval dockyard (\*Dar al-Sina'a\*) and established a prestigious navigational academy in Rabat, teaching celestial navigation, naval engineering, and cartography.

Official Morisco privateering expanded rapidly after 1617. Dutch naval captain Abbe Willemsz reported to Rotterdam: 'A year ago the Moriscos possessed no ships; today they operate four, and they will become exceedingly powerful unless decisive measures are taken... they acknowledge neither royal authority nor foreign treaties.' In a memorandum dated November 26, 1626, French diplomat Isaac de Razilly informed Cardinal Richelieu: 'The corsairs of Salé and Tétouan began deploying their vessels eight years ago; they have captured nearly 6,000 Europeans and seized over 15 million livres... Starting with a single tartane, they now command over 60 armed ships.' By 1622, Salé corsairs operated in conjunction with Algerian fleets as far north as the English Channel and the North Atlantic.

Despite internal political fragmentation during the Saadian decline, Moroccan sultans heavily relied on Andalusian naval commanders (\*Rais\*)—such as Admiral al-Abbudi, al-Mestiri, and al-Arabi—due to their mastery of European languages (English, Spanish, Italian) and modern naval artillery. The Hornacheros (Moriscos from Hornachos in Extremadura) utilized their wealth to equip warships with advanced European firearms, Dutch shipbuilding designs, and mixed crews comprising Andalusians, native Moroccan sailors, and European converts.

Father Pierre Dan observed that the shallow sandbar at the mouth of the Bou Regreg estuary offered ideal tactical protection: while it prevented deep-draft European warships from entering, the shallow-draft, swift polacres and tartanes of the Salé corsairs crossed safely, allowing them to ambush merchant traffic traversing the Atlantic and the Strait of Gibraltar.

Between 1620 and 1630, Salé corsairs captured over 100 Christian vessels. In response to these incursions, France dispatched an armada under Admiral Isaac de Razilly in June 1629 to blockade Salé and liberate French captives. Following intense naval engagements and the burning of several Morisco vessels, negotiations led to a formal five-month truce on February 2, 1630, followed by the landmark Franco-Moroccan Treaty of September 3, 1631, which secured the release of 200 French prisoners and regulated bilateral maritime commerce.

#### **4.5. The Moriscos in Ottoman Tunisia**

Tunisia under the Ottoman Deylik offered exceptionally hospitable conditions for Morisco refugees. Uthman Dey (reigned 1593–1610), assisted by prominent civic and religious leaders such as the revered Sufi scholar Abu al-Ghayth al-Qashshash, implemented proactive settlement policies. Uthman Dey exempted refugee transport vessels from customs duties and granted incoming Andalusians fertile agricultural lands under hereditary tenure (\*Inzal\*) across the Medjerda Valley, Cap Bon, and coastal plains.

Arab sources, including the Morisco diplomat Ahmad ibn Qasim al-Hajari (Aphonso de Luna), note that tens of thousands of Aragonese, Castilian, and Valencian Moriscos arrived in Tunisia. Western historiographical estimates range between 40,000 and 80,000 immigrants. In his chronicle \*Al-Mu'nis fi Akhbar Ifriqiya wa Tunis\*, Ibn Abi Dinar recorded: «In this year and the next, Andalusians arrived from the lands of the Christians, banished by the King of Spain in vast numbers. Uthman Dey welcomed them warmly, provided shelter, distributed the vulnerable among the populace, and granted them liberty to settle wherever they chose. They purchased estates, founded flourishing towns, erected splendid mosques in the Andalusian style, endowed substantial Waqf properties, and cultivated lush vineyards, olive groves, and exotic fruit orchards... They populated the country and became fully integrated among its people.»

#### **4.6. Andalusian Impact on the Tunisian Fleet & Coastal Defenses**

Equipped with administrative support and artillery knowledge, many Andalusians joined the Tunisian naval forces. A distinguished figure was Ibrahim ibn Ahmad ibn Ghanim ibn Zakariya al-Andalusi, known as 'Al-Marbash' (al-Murbash). In his autobiographical treatise, al-Marbash recounted:

«The ruler of the city, Uthman Dey—may God have mercy upon him—received me with great honor, appointed me over two hundred Andalusian warriors, and supplied me with five hundred gold Sultanis, two hundred muskets, two hundred combat knives, and all necessary maritime provisions... We set sail seeking enemy fleets off the coast of Málaga, where we engaged eleven armed galleys in a fierce battle that claimed many casualties on both sides.»

Al-Marbash arrived in Tunis in 1609, commanded a squadron of six corsair vessels, and was captured off the Spanish coast in August 1610. After seven years of imprisonment, he returned to Tunis in 1617 to command the critical fortress of La Goulette (\*Halq al-Wadi\*) until 1631. During his career, he authored a comprehensive Spanish treatise on modern artillery casting and ballistics, reflecting his prior service in the Spanish Atlantic fleet. Translated into Arabic in 1639 by Ahmad al-Hajari during the reign of Murad II Bey, this work served as the technical foundation for modernizing Tunisia's naval artillery foundries.

Andalusian maritime activity energized coastal ports including Tunis, La Goulette, Ghar al-Milh (Porto Farina), Bizerte, Sousse, Sfax, and Djerba. Prominent corsair leaders such as Usta Murad (a Genoese-born Murad Raïs who rose to become Dey) closely coordinated privateering ventures. In 1634, Usta Murad captured two Maltese warships, entering Tunis to public celebrations. Following a devastating raid by the Knights of Malta against Ghar al-Milh on August 24, 1640, Usta Murad commissioned the master Andalusian architect Usta Musa to design and construct the fortress of Ghar al-Milh (\*Borj al-Loutani\*), transforming it into a secure naval base and shipyard garrisoned by skilled Andalusians from Tunis and Algiers. Notable Andalusian naval commanders of this era included Captain Usta Ali, Ali Raïs al-Andalusi, and Mansur Raïs.

### Conclusion

The traumatic expulsion of the Andalusian Moriscos from Spain (1609–1614) did not represent merely the tragic closure of the Islamic chapter in Iberia; it catalyzed a major strategic and cultural revival across the Mediterranean basin. Despite the brutality of forced displacement and the collapse of armed insurrections at Muela de Cortés and Laguar, the Moriscos demonstrated remarkable resilience, converting adversity into geopolitical agency.

Their migration to North Africa injected invaluable demographic, technical, and military capital into Maghrebi societies. The Moriscos provided the organizational core and technical expertise that revitalized Algerian naval warfare, spearheaded the Atlantic corsair offensive from the Republic of Salé in Morocco, and established modern artillery casting and fortress engineering in Ottoman Tunisia. Their commitment to naval warfare was driven primarily by existential resistance, the defense of Islamic sovereignty, and the enduring hope of reclaiming their homeland.

Ultimately, the Andalusians established a formidable trans-Mediterranean bridge. In doing so, they preserved their cultural and religious heritage while fundamentally reshaping maritime balances and diplomatic relations across the early modern Mediterranean world.

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