Revue d'Histoire Méditerranéenne. Vol. 8, n° 02. Juin 2026, p.103-115

P-ISSN: 2716-764X, E-ISSN: 2716-7747

Reçu le : 30 – 03 - 2026	Accepté le : 16 – 05 - 2026	Publié le : 30 – 06 - 2026

The Empire That Never Was: The persistence of imperial ideas and portuguese political projects on Morocco (16th–17th Centuries)

L'empire qui n'a jamais existé : la persistance des idées impériales et des projets politiques portugais au Maroc (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)

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Abstract:

This article analyses a set of discourses devoted to Portuguese imperial policy in Morocco, written between the mid-sixteenth and the late seventeenth centuries. Its main objective is to analyse, at the ideological level, the persistence of the ambition for conquest and territorial expansion in Morocco after the Battle of Alcácer-Quibir (1578). The central problem is to understand how and to what extent the ideal of crusade and religious war against Islam continued to structure Portuguese discourses on Morocco after this defeat, in a context in which Portuguese imperial policy became predominantly defensive under Spanish rule (1580–1640) and was later marked by a process of strategic retrenchment during the period of the Portuguese Restoration War (1640–1668). Broadly speaking, it seeks to answer the following question: during a period when Portuguese Moroccan policy was losing strength, what discourses and arguments were mobilised in defence of Portuguese territorial expansion in the region?

The study is based on an approach that combines intellectual history and the history of written culture, seeking to cross-reference the discourses of authors from the period with documents from "high politics" – related to the court, tribunals, and royal councils –produced by advisors, diplomats, and the king himself. It is based on the analysis of discourses, treatises, chronicles, memorials, and historiographical texts, considered within their contexts of production, circulation, and political function. The corpus includes printed and manuscript works written by Portuguese authors between the late sixteenth century and the last quarter of the seventeenth century, such as Amador Arrais, Diogo do Couto, D. Gonçalo Coutinho, D. Jerónimo de Mascarenhas, Manuel de Faria e Sousa, and D. Fernando de Meneses, among other speeches that circulated during the period.

The analysis shows that, despite the gradual shift of official royal policy toward strategies of containment, negotiation, and abandonment, the idea of conquering Morocco persisted over the longue durée. Furthermore, we propose that the disintegration of Portuguese imperial policy in Morocco began in the 1640s, with the new Braganza dynasty, rather than during the period when Portugal was part of the Hispanic Monarchy (1580-1640). We argue that, starting with the Restoration War (1640–1668), under the Portuguese Crown of the Braganza dynasty, there was a political orientation focused on "practical" or "pragmatic" aspects at the expense of one focused on religious, Catholic ends. Adapted to different contexts and mobilised for a variety of purposes, these discourses are the appropriation of its historical, symbolic, and religious legacy by a segment of Portuguese society and reveal the persistence of an African-oriented imperial political culture beyond the material decline of the Portuguese presence in the region.

Keywords: Portuguese Empire, Morocco, Political discourse, Hispanic Monarchy

Résumé :

Cet article analyse un ensemble de discours consacrés à la politique impériale portugaise au Maroc, rédigés entre le milieu du XVIe siècle et la fin du XVIIe siècle. Son objectif principal est d'étudier, sur le plan idéologique, la persistance de l'ambition de conquête et d'expansion territoriale au Maroc après la bataille d'Alcácer-Quibir (1578). Le problème central consiste à comprendre comment et dans quelle mesure l'idéal de croisade et de guerre religieuse contre l'Islam a continué à structurer les discours portugais sur le Maroc après cette défaite, dans un contexte où la politique impériale portugaise devint principalement défensive sous la domination espagnole (1580–1640), avant d'être marquée par un processus de repli stratégique durant la Guerre de Restauration portugaise (1640–1668). Plus largement, cette étude cherche à répondre aux questions suivantes : dans une période où la politique marocaine du Portugal perdait

progressivement de son importance, quels discours et arguments furent mobilisés en faveur d'une politique d'expansion territoriale portugaise dans la région ?

L'étude adopte une approche combinant histoire intellectuelle et histoire de la culture écrite, en mettant en relation les discours des auteurs de l'époque avec des documents relevant des sphères centrales de décision politique – liés à la cour, aux tribunaux et aux conseils royaux – produits par des conseillers, diplomates et par le roi lui-même. Elle repose sur l'analyse de discours, de traités, de chroniques, de mémoires et de textes historiographiques, envisagés dans leurs contextes de production, de circulation et de fonction politique. Le corpus comprend des œuvres imprimées et manuscrites rédigées par des auteurs portugais entre la fin du XVIe siècle et le dernier quart du XVIIe siècle, parmi lesquels Amador Arrais, Diogo do Couto, D. Gonçalo Coutinho, D. Jerónimo de Mascarenhas, Manuel de Faria e Sousa et D. Fernando de Meneses, ainsi que d'autres textes ayant circulé durant cette période.

L'analyse montre que, malgré l'évolution progressive de la politique royale officielle vers des stratégies d'endiguement, de négociation et d'abandon, l'idée de conquérir le Maroc a persisté sur le long terme. De plus, nous proposons que la désintégration de la politique impériale portugaise au Maroc ait eu lieu à partir des années 1640, avec l'avènement de la nouvelle dynastie régnante des Bragance, et non durant la période où le Portugal faisait partie de la Monarchie Hispanique (1580-1640). Nous soutenons qu'à partir de la guerre de Restauration (1640-1668), sous la dynastie des Bragance, la couronne portugaise privilégiait une orientation politique axée sur des aspects « pratiques » ou « pragmatiques », au détriment d'une approche religieuse et catholique. Adaptés à différents contextes et mobilisés à diverses fins, ces discours témoignent de l'appropriation de son héritage historique, symbolique et religieux par une partie de la société portugaise et révèlent la persistance d'une culture politique impériale à orientation africaine, au-delà du déclin matériel de la présence portugaise dans la région.

Mots-clés : Empire portugais, Maroc, discours politique, monarchie hispanique

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Introduction

The Portuguese presence in North Africa, particularly in what is now Morocco, is linked to the genesis of the Lusitanian colonial empire, dating back to at least 1415, with the capture of Ceuta during the reign of King D. João I (1385–1433). From that point onward, the Moroccan strongholds[1] conquered throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries came to play diverse roles within the Portuguese Empire. Reaching its territorial zenith under D. Manuel I (1495–1521), the subsequent expansion of the Saadian sharifian dynasty in Morocco – combined with factors such as the French threat in the Americas and Ottoman pressure in Portuguese India[2] – led D. João III (1521–1557) to adopt a policy of strategic retrenchment, abandoning certain cities and restricting the Portuguese presence in the region to Ceuta, Tangier, and Mazagan.

The return to an expansionist policy in Morocco, rather than being a futile aspiration confined to the mind of D. Sebastião (1557–1578), remained alive among a considerable segment of the population, resonating in works and discourses throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, even after the "disaster" of Alcácer-Quibir[3] – which resulted in the deaths of the Portuguese king, the Moroccan pretender to the throne Abu Abdallah Mohammed II (1574–1576), and the sultan Abu Marwan Abd al-Malik I (1576–1578). Although, as some scholars argue, Portuguese policy in Morocco shifted toward a more defensive posture after 1580, it is still possible to identify voices advocating expansionist strategies and proposing projects of territorial conquest. We seek to characterize the persistence of these proposals and projects – disseminated across works

[1] In this study, "Moroccan strongholds" or "North African strongholds" refers to the fortified Portuguese possessions located on the Moroccan coast, conquered throughout the 15th and 16th centuries.

[2] "Portuguese India" is used here to refer to the territories, ports, fortresses, and political networks administered through the *Estado da Índia*, the central structure of Portuguese imperial governance in the Indian Ocean from the early sixteenth century onward. It functioned as a maritime and commercial network linking strategic enclaves across East Africa, the Persian Gulf, India, and Southeast Asia.

[3] The episode was considered a "disaster" in Portugal, as the defeat resulted in the death and captivity of a large part of the Portuguese nobility, in addition to ending the lineage of the Portuguese kings of the Avis dynasty.

of various genres, as well as in opinions, consultations, and letters – while identifying the interests and motivations underlying such discourses.

Thus, considering that imperial discourses did not vanish even after the loss of Portuguese fortresses in Morocco helps us understand how the imperial imagination was built, legitimised, and perpetuated. It also sheds light on how memory can be mobilised for ideological purposes. This concern remains relevant today in a world where selective memory often underpins nationalist or xenophobic politics. The focus on Portugal–Morocco relations (and, by extension, Europe-Maghreb) contributes to a connected and transnational history, allowing for a rethinking of the Mediterranean's role within the Portuguese empire, beyond the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Broadly speaking, the central historical problem lies in understanding how and to what extent the ideal of crusade and religious war against Islam persisted in Portuguese discourses on Morocco after the defeat at Alcácer-Quibir (1578), in a context where the Portuguese imperial policy became predominantly defensive under Spanish rule (1580-1640) and increasingly oriented toward strategic retrenchment during and after the period of the Portuguese Restoration (1640-1668).

The research adopts an intertextual analysis of political and ideological discourses, considering both their sociopolitical and intellectual contexts, in line with Quentin Skinner's methodological propositions (2005). In dialogue with John Pocock (2013), the study highlights the importance of understanding not only the political setting in which an author was writing, but also the debates in other texts and discourses of the time. Both authors emphasize the political dimension of discourse, as articulated in projects and proposals for territorial conquest[4].

Although there is a growing body of work on the relationship between the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco during the Early Modern period[5], Portuguese and Brazilian studies – especially those focusing on ideological aspects – remain scarce in comparison to Spanish academic production. In the Spanish case, extensive research has been carried out by scholars such as Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra (1989; 2017), who has written extensively on the representation of Muslims in Iberian texts. Alongside Mercedes García-Arenal (1992; 2009), both have made significant contributions to the political and social history of Spanish-North African relations.

In the Portuguese context, few studies have examined ideological narratives following D. Sebastião's death at Alcácer-Quibir in 1578. While Fernand Braudel's classic work emphasised the Mediterranean as a mosaic of interacting units (2016), Andrew C. Hess's critique remains particularly relevant (1978), especially concerning the Portuguese Maghreb, which persisted in the writings of some authors as a theatre of conflict and a "religious frontier". This study follows the path of Portuguese scholars such as António Dias Farinha (1999), Augusto Ferreira do Amaral (1989) and Maria Augusta Lima Cruz (2021; 2024), among others, who have examined the Portuguese presence in Morocco from the 15th to the 18th centuries.

The sources analysed will include printed and manuscript works written by Portuguese authors who focused on the Western Maghreb region between the disaster of Alcácer-Quibir and the end of the seventeenth century. These include texts by Portuguese authors such as Amador Arrais, Diogo do Couto, D. Gonçalo Coutinho, D. Jerônimo de Mascarenhas, Manuel de Faria e Sousa, and D. Fernando de Meneses, as well as other speeches that circulated during the period, both in print and in manuscript. These texts will be compared with letters, reports, and proposals preserved in collections, with the aim of cross-referencing royal policy with the analysed discourses.

[4] In this case, "intellectual history" is understood here as the contextual study of political languages, concepts, and discourses, emphasizing the historical circumstances in which texts were produced and the meanings they acquired within specific political contexts. Similarly, the "history of written culture" is understood as the study of the production, circulation, uses, and social functions of texts, considering them as historically situated objects whose meanings have been shaped by specific contexts of production and political use.

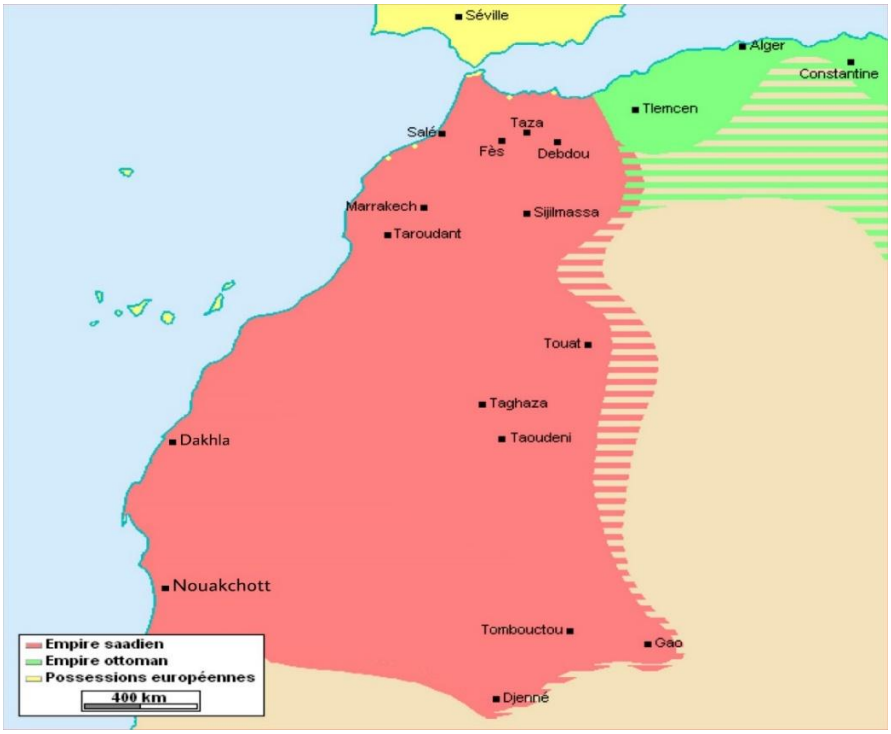
[5] The term "Early Modern period" is employed here as a heuristic and conventional chronological category referring broadly to the fifteenth–eighteenth centuries.

1. Discourses about the North-African *fronteira* under the Hispanic Monarchy (1580-1640)

The reign of Felipe I of Portugal and II of Spain (1580–1598) was marked by a shift in political focus from territorial expansion to maritime dominance and the Atlantic and northern Europe. Greater concern was directed toward the war against England and the revolt in the Habsburg Netherlands, and less toward the Ottoman Empire and the exploitation of the "West Indies" in the Americas. Although still important, the Mediterranean became a secondary theatre of war, and from 1580 onward the Spanish king also had to concern himself with maintaining the Portuguese conquests. The truces concluded in the 1580s with the Ottoman Empire are one indication that, both in the Mediterranean and in North Africa, the emphasis shifted toward a strictly "defensive" policy aimed at preserving the *status quo*, far removed from ambitions of territorial expansion. With the consolidation of the Saadian dynasty in Morocco under the rule of Ahmad al-Mansur (1578–1603), the Spanish monarch sought to maintain diplomatic relations, mindful of the strategic value of a local power capable of countering Ottoman expansion in the western Mediterranean, thereby keeping the Ottomans at a distance from the Atlantic and the Iberian Peninsula (Bunes Ibarra; García-Arenal, 1992: 108–116).

Figure 01:

The Saadian Empire at its maximum extent (c. 1600)



Source: https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Map_saadi.jpg

Despite the relatively limited Portuguese written production on Morocco, it is still possible to identify voices advocating a return to expansionism in Morocco during the early years of Spanish rule over Portugal, even in works not entirely devoted to the region.

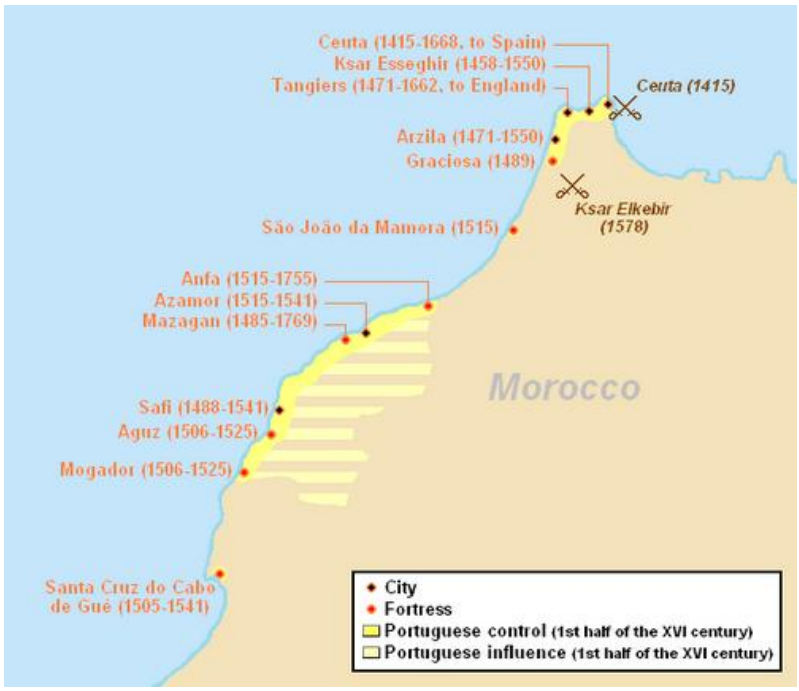
Friar Amador Arrais, Bishop of Portalegre, presents one of the most effusive defences of the Portuguese presence in North Africa, especially a policy of territorial expansion. In the first edition of his *Dialogos*, written in 1588 and published the following year, Arrais provides a historical narrative of the Portuguese presence in Morocco, criticising the negligence of his contemporaries' chroniclers on the subject. In the second edition, completed in 1600 and published posthumously in 1604, the author changes his tone and begins to criticise the imperial focus on Asia to the detriment of a Moroccan policy, even commenting that "perhaps it would have been more correct to continue with this conquest than with that of India" (Arrais, *Dialogos*: 107).

It is worth recalling that D. João III (1521–1557) was compelled to deal with a critical situation, particularly due to the pressure exerted by the sharifian forces of the Saadian dynasty,

which grew in power and expanded from south to north across Morocco, having captured Marrakesh in 1524, united under the pretext of confronting the Portuguese presence in the region (Farinha, 1999). This led D. João III to seek counsel on the possible directions of Portuguese policy: whether to prioritise efforts in North Africa or focus on the Asian enterprise at the expense of Morocco. After lengthy debates between the 1520s and 1540s, the king adopted a policy of strategic withdrawal from Morocco, abandoning certain strongholds and reducing the Portuguese presence to Ceuta, Tangier, and Mazagan, while choosing to invest in the Asian enterprise and in the colonisation of Brazil (Fontoura, 1998).

Figure 02:

Portuguese possessions in Morocco, 15th-18th century



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portuguese_Morocco.PNG

It is therefore not surprising that Arrais, in seeking to persuade his readers – especially those connected to high Luso-Castilian politics – also mobilises colonial arguments regarding the region of Morocco. In his description of Morocco, he emphasises the region's great fertility and abundance, highlighting resources both profitable and necessary for Portugal. Nevertheless, he laments that "so much wealth has been invested in the conquest of India that it seems human remedy is impossible unless it comes from the hand of God" (Arrais, *Dialogos*: 107). The Bishop of Portalegre thus expresses a critical stance toward the emphasis on the "East Indies" at the expense of North Africa, while maintaining hopes for a return to an expansionist policy in the region.

It may be possible to consider the heightened Portuguese interest in Western Maghreb from the early decades of the seventeenth century onward – expressed in works and discourses of the time – as a result of the Mediterranean policy of Felipe II of Portugal and III of Spain (1598–1621). The Spanish monarch, in contrast to his father, resumed a policy oriented toward the Mediterranean, taking advantage precisely of the Twelve Years' Truce with the Dutch Republic (1609–1621) and the Treaty of London (1604), which established peace with England. This period was marked by a "Catholic" policy, reviving the idea that positioned the Hispanic Monarchy as a bastion of the faith and defender of Christendom, in contrast to an earlier policy focused on dynastic interests, such as the preservation of royal patrimony in Flanders. By maintaining peace in northern Europe, Felipe II of Portugal and III of Spain was able to redirect his attention to the Mediterranean and the North African frontier, undertaking several military campaigns in the Maghreb (Rodríguez, 2005).

To this factor must be added the state of relative "anarchy" that took hold in Morocco following the death of al-Mansur (1603), resulting from an intense civil war among rival claimants to the throne, which once again fragmented the region into smaller kingdoms and local powers. The reign of Felipe II of Portugal was thus marked by a renewed interest in North Africa, taking advantage of internal conflicts in Morocco to secure strategic gains. This led to the cession of Larache to the Spanish king in 1610, in exchange for military support granted to the pretender Mohammed esh Sheikh el Mamun (1603–1613) against his brother, Zidan Abu Maali (1603–1627), as well as to the conquest of La Mamora in 1614 (Bunes Ibarra; García-Arenal, 1992: 127–134).

The case of the chronicler of Portuguese India, Diogo do Couto, is likewise revealing of the persistence of ideas and projects aimed at the conquest of the Moroccan region in the early decades of the seventeenth century. One of his most emblematic works, the dialogue *Soldado Prático* (1612), is well known for its criticisms and denunciations of the abuses and mismanagement that occurred in the Estado da Índia (Romeiro, 2017; Winius, 1985).

At the end of his work, after discussing at length the possibilities of territorial conquest for the Portuguese in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, Couto goes on to address the fact that "in this kingdom, opinions were being considered to abandon India, because it was detrimental to the kingdom to sustain itself, and that the kingdoms of [North] Africa should be conquered, which would be of greater credit and benefit" (Couto, *Soldado*: 286). In other words, the possibility of abandoning the Asian enterprise and redirecting the colonial focus to Morocco was being debated in Portugal, and "on this there were great changes in this kingdom and many opinions from both sides", pondering whether it was still worthwhile to sustain Portuguese India, with the path to follow not being so clear (Couto, *Soldado*: 286).

From then on, the author seeks to undermine the "reasons given by those who speak in favour of the conquest of Africa and the abandonment of India" (Couto, *Soldado*: 286–287). First, he presents the main arguments of the African faction, such as that Morocco was rich in wheat and cattle, and that some regions contained gold. Next, he counters that the conquest of the region would be impossible, since neither the Romans nor the Spanish, with larger troops and armies, had succeeded; much less the Portuguese, who suffered disasters and an unsuccessful occupation, as could be seen through history (Couto, *Soldado*: 287–292). He concludes the book by defending the economic superiority of the conquest and trade originating in the East Indies, criticising those who propose replacing them with the Moroccan enterprise.

In royal policy, this impetus directed toward Saadian Morocco was once again curbed under the reign of Felipe III of Portugal and IV of Spain (1621–1665), who resumed a purely defensive policy in the region, marked by lesser interest in the Mediterranean
(Bunes Ibarra, García-Arenal, 1992: 136–138). However, these imperialist interests in Morocco still appear in Portuguese authors, more or less explicitly, as in the *Discurso da jornada* (1629) by D. Gonçalo Coutinho.

Noteworthy is the description of a letter that, according to the author, he had received from a captive ransomed from Salé, in which religious issues, military concerns, and colonial interests are intertwined. In the supposed transcription by Coutinho, the letter highlights that Salé is "full of gold and riches from the conquests of Spain"; it would be much more convenient in the present time to conquer the city, "so near and so dangerous", than it was to take Algiers in the time of Emperor Charles V, "farther away and less harmful" (Coutinho, *Discurso*: 111).

According to the author of the letter, this would be the opinion of all people, except for the "merchants" who "have houses and businesses established there, to the just scandal of the Christian Republic" (Coutinho, *Discurso*: 111-112). Here, again, a common dichotomy of the time emerges, which opposed commercial and economic interests – therefore, driven by "greed" – to the religious objectives of expanding the faith and defending Christendom. The proposal to conquer Salé, offered through the letter, would have a religious and defensive objective, which, for the author, was contrary to that of the Christian merchants who operated in the area, criticising this practice precisely as "scandalous".

2. The Moroccan "frontier" during the Portuguese Restauration War (1640-1668)

Following the palace coup launched on December 1, 1640, the Duke of Braganza was proclaimed D. João IV, King of Portugal, inaugurating a long war of independence against the Hispanic Monarchy of Felipe IV that would last almost three decades. During these torturous years, Portugal had to confront Spain for its independence and the Dutch Republic for its empire, undermining its already scarce human and monetary resources on various battlefronts. Hence the urgency with which numerous Portuguese diplomats were sent, whether to seek recognition of independence from the Pope in the Roman Curia, to achieve peace with the Spanish and Dutch, or to secure a defensive alliance with France and England – Castile's main rivals at the time (Valladares, 2006).

The Restoration War period can be considered one of the most critical moments of the Portuguese presence on Moroccan soil. Of the three Moroccan strongholds that Portugal still maintained, Ceuta remained loyal to Felipe IV of Spain. At the same time, Tangier only recognised the new Portuguese king in mid-1643, with Mazagan being the only stronghold to have sworn loyalty to the Duke of Braganza from the beginning.

We can say, from the outset, that the Crown spared no effort in using the remaining strongholds as diplomatic bargaining chips in the pursuit of a peace agreement, a treaty, or a defensive league. In November 1645, the king complained to the Count of Vidigueira, the Portuguese ambassador to France, about the "great expense that this fortress imposes on this Crown", without possessing "any utility other than opinion and fame"
(Coelho, *Cartas de el-Rei*: 286). Although useful for defending the Portuguese coast against attacks by Maghrebi corsairs, the high cost of its maintenance was one Portugal was unwilling to bear during the Restoration War.

Figure 03:

Map of the kingdoms of Fez (yellow) and Morocco (pink), present-day Morocco



Source: https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/8w8ujj

D. João IV very likely knew of the inconveniences and unpopularity of adopting a policy of abandoning the Moroccan strongholds, as had been done in the past. Father António Vieira, acting as a diplomat, recalls how difficult it would be to force the inhabitants of the stronghold to submit to a "foreign king" in the case of handing over Tangier: "to persuade them to leave their homeland,

homes, wives and children (and this to an entire people and soldiers who depend on so many wills and are so free) is not an easy task to arrange and carry out". Should the king choose to hand over the stronghold, let him do so "with great skill and secrecy" (Azevedo, *Cartas do Padre*: 160). It shows us that, despite the known expenses of the Moroccan strongholds, there was still a certain social sensitivity that defended their maintenance. With the loss of Ceuta to the Castilian party, handing over one of the remaining strongholds was a delicate matter, with social consequences recognised by the king and his counsellors.

On the one hand, the Portuguese who joined the party of D. João IV were concerned about Ceuta and Tangier joining the Braganza cause; on the other hand, those exiled in Castile, loyal to Felipe IV, expressed interest in the return of a policy focused on the Iberian presence in Morocco. An exemplary case is that of Jerónimo de Mascarenhas, prior of Guimarães and bishop of Leiria, who left for Castile at the beginning of the Portuguese Restoration War (Megiani, 2023), later writing a *Historia de la ciudad de Ceuta*, completed in mid-1648.

An interesting aspect of his work is precisely that, rather than merely "narrating" the city's history, Mascarenhas disseminates ancient "prophecies" and expresses hope for a return to a policy of conquest in Morocco. Two examples are notable in the early chapters of his work. In "Chapter 6", where he deals with some "memoirs", he mentions a prognosis made by a prophet named Brafome, prophesying the conquest of Ceuta and, through it, of all Muslim Africa by an Iberian king. In his description, the prophecy spoke of a "Lion with three cubs his children accompanied by a great armada and he will conquer this city [...] and from his seed will come the destroyer of the parts of Africa" (Mascarenhas, *Historia*: 24). In "Chapter 10", he reproduces the prophecies of a hermit named Friar Juan Escuder, who had predicted the "recovery" of Jerusalem after the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. Then would come a "great Lion of Spain" who, commanding a powerful army, would cross "through the Strait of Gibraltar into Africa", heading to "besiege the city of Libya, or Fez", drawing the "Sword of Virtue" and continuing his journey throughout Barbary, i.e., Western Maghreb (Mascarenhas, *Historia*: 40).

D. Jerónimo de Mascarenhas did not merely reproduce the prophecies. The Portuguese bishop hopes that Ceuta will serve as "the gateway through which this glorious enterprise" of "conquest of Africa, and recovery of the Holy Land by the Kings of Spain" will begin. More than that, he believes in the hermit's words. He hopes that they will be fulfilled, especially that from the city of Ceuta, the forces of Spain will come to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and begin the "glorious conquest of the Kingdom of Fez", just as the city served as the entrance for the "Moors" to conquer the Iberian Peninsula. He concludes the chapter with a cry: "May that Lord, in whose powerful hand lies the changing of the Monarchies of one people to another, allow the fulfilment of this prophecy, for so great is His cause, and so great is the exaltation of His Holy Church"
(Mascarenhas, *Historia*: 39-41).

Mascarenhas would not be the only case of a Portuguese partisan of the Habsburgs writing about Western Maghreb policy in an apologetic tone. Jorge Mendoza da Franca, also in 1648, published his effusive memorial *Informe sobre la calidad moral de Muley Hamet,* containing a brief account of some of the main political events impacting Morocco in the preceding years, accompanied by a description of the members and descendants of the Saadian dynasty as a way to explain the quarrels over succession to the throne. This entire descriptive, highly detailed picture of Morocco's socio-political context is presented as a period of opportunity for the Spanish Crown, especially regarding North African policy.

As previously noted, the death of Ahmad al-Mansur inaugurated a prolonged period of political instability within the Saadian dynasty. Although a degree of stability was restored under the rule of Zidan Abu Maali (1603–1627), his death in 1627 reopened dynastic disputes
(Bunes Ibarra, 1988, pp. 300–301). It is within this context of fragmentation, civil war, and crisis in Morocco – similar to the conflicts affecting Europe and especially Spain – that Jorge Mendoza da Franca's work should be situated.

In his text, Franca emphasises the advantages of a good relationship between the Spanish king and a Moroccan monarch aligned with Castilian policy. Hence, the author defends the "moral

superiority" of Ahmad al-Abbas, the "Muley Hamet", as a pretender to the Moroccan throne, in a context of civil and military quarrels over succession. In the second part of his text, he describes each of the Portuguese and Spanish fortresses in North Africa, noting their condition, their armaments, and the garrisons they maintain. All this is no coincidence, aiming to ascertain the "importance of the frontiers and maritime places of Castile and Portugal", in the author's own words (Landauer, *Papeles*: 39).

In the following lines, the author's description always highlights key elements, ranging from reinforcing the strategic importance of a given fortress to detailing the costs and effort expended in acquiring it. In the specific case of the Portuguese ones, Franca shows himself to be a fierce critic of the policy of strategic withdrawal and abandonment of Portuguese positions in Morocco during the time of D. João III, which reduced the Portuguese presence in Morocco to the positions of Ceuta, Tangier, and Mazagan, considering it the result of bad counsel (Landauer, *Papeles*: 40–41).

At this point, Franca emphasises the importance not only of maintaining the aforementioned strongholds but also of pursuing a Morocco-focused policy. In the author's words, control of Tangier prevents the "Moors" from accessing the "fertility of the best fields the world has" and controlling the coast of Andalusia; in the case of Ceuta, it prevents the numerous "damages that could occur to Spain". Next, he recalls the great effort made by Iberian kings in "acquiring frontier strongholds" in North Africa, mainly as a way to reinforce the "authority of Spain" and harm the commerce of the Moors (Landauer, *Papeles*: 41).

The motivations for an imperial policy in Western Maghreb, initially of a defensive "frontier" nature, also reflect colonial interests, as the Spanish king could take advantage of revenues from land, commerce, and vassalage with regional powers. Not only to cause harm to the "enemy of the faith" and increase royal authority, but also to prevent a possible territorial invasion of Spain and reduce pirate attacks. Therefore, more than just bolstering existing strongholds, Franca presented the advantages that would come from controlling the coastal cities of Salé and Tetouan as territorial conquest projects that would bring benefits, a goal desired by Iberian kings since the beginning of the sixteenth century, who recognized that the more regions they controlled in Morocco, "the more it mattered to the security of their kingdoms and coasts"
(Landauer, *Papeles*: 42).

Figure 05:

Map of the Regency of Algiers in 1650 (Algeria) and the Kingdom of Fez



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carte_de_la_R%C3%A9gence_d%27Alger_en_1650_(Alg%C3%A9rie)_et_du_Royaume_de_F%C3%A8s.jpg

We see that, as in the previous period, several themes recur, such as criticism of the policy of strategic retreat during the reign of D. João III and proposals for territorial conquest projects in Morocco. This occurred during a period when the Portuguese Crown faced a critical situation, with no intention of resuming a North African policy. On the contrary, it is precisely in the face of the challenges posed by the war against Spain and the Dutch Republic that the king will seek, more than in previous periods, to "get rid" of the North African strongholds – going in an opposite direction to the Portuguese, who, in the mid-seventeenth century, desired a policy of territorial expansion in North Africa.

3. The persistence of the idea of conquering Morocco in Portugal at the end of the 17th century.

Under the Treaty of Lisbon, signed by Portugal and Spain in 1668 and which formally ended the Portuguese Restoration War, all territories conquered by Castile during the conflict were to be restored, except Ceuta. With the cession of Tangier to England in 1662, as a dowry for the marriage between the Infanta D. Catarina de Bragança and King Charles II of England (1660–1685), Mazagan remained as the last Portuguese stronghold in Morocco (Castro, *Collecção dos Tratados*: 368). Unlike the Hispanic Monarchy, which preserved part of the strongholds and fortresses in the western Mediterranean, the town and fortress of Mazagan represented the solitary bastion, the last remnant of the memory of the Portuguese presence in Morocco (Farinha, 1999). D. Pedro II (1683–1706), the king who succeeded D. Afonso VI of Portugal (1656–1683), had to deal with this reduced presence, focusing on administrative and legislative reforms.

Regarding Portuguese written production, it is perhaps possible to speak of a final editorial impulse interested in the Moroccan region and its relationship with Portuguese history. This occurs in the editorial interest that arises in the publication of posthumous works by authors such as Manuel de Faria e Sousa and D. Fernando de Meneses.

The historian Manuel de Faria e Sousa, known for his works *Asia Portuguesa* and *Europa Portuguesa*, which narrate the history of Portugal and the achievements of the Portuguese in Asia, was also the author of Africa Portuguesa, which, unfinished at his death in 1649, was published posthumously in 1681. Despite its incompleteness, the author leaves in the work records of his views and understanding of the Portuguese presence in Morocco.

A relevant example is Sousa's prioritisation of Portuguese policy in Morocco over the Asian enterprise, as with previous authors. Right in the introduction to his work, the chronicler reproduces some common tropes of the period, such as the notion that the conquest of Asia brought "delights" and "riches" to Portugal, causing the Portuguese to forget to "support with a powerful and strong hand those African strongholds", which had brought so much glory, triumphs, and "trophies" to the Lusitanians. In this sense, for Sousa, Portuguese intervention in Morocco is justified both by the fight against the "enemies of the Catholic Faith" and by the "defence of their homes, their strongholds, their kingdoms, and their riches" (Sousa, *Africa*: 1).

It is within this argumentative framework that Sousa criticises the abandonment of the southern Portuguese strongholds in Morocco, throughout his narrative about the events of the 1540s. According to the author, D. João III had received opinions from his "Ministers" and also from "some Christian Princes" who considered the strongholds difficult to maintain, as they were located in coastal regions with poorly situated ports, resulting in constant enemy attacks and difficulties in sending aid; and relatively useless, as they did not enrich the kingdom (Sousa, *Africa*: 175).

Despite presenting the "pragmatic" arguments of the party that advocated withdrawing from the region, even mentioning that other ministers considered the measure prudent as it allowed the forces to be directed to strategic positions in Africa, he vehemently asserts that these opinions were the product of flatterers of princes, careless in the fight against the "enemies of the Catholic Faith" and in the defense of past conquests. He concludes categorically that the abandonment of the southern strongholds was the result of the allure of "Asian enterprises" with their spices, which

were not available in Africa. In a tone of disgust, he laments that, as experience shows, devout interests have less power than earthly and temporary ones (Sousa, *Africa*: 175).

For Sousa, as for other authors, the ideological interests of the fight against the Muslim and the defence of royal patrimony outweigh political pragmatism, even considering the military disadvantage, the financial cost, and the supply difficulties. This is precisely because of the understanding of the Moroccan enterprise as miraculous, blessed by God and anchored in Catholic devotion, opposed to the mercantile and enrichment interests commonly associated with East India.

The words of Father António Vieira were precise in highlighting the social resistance that would accompany a suggestion to hand over the city of Tangier to a foreign king, with D. Fernando de Meneses, 2nd Count of Ericeira, being one of the main critics and spokespeople for the "conservative" party. A delicate matter at the time, it was nevertheless deliberated upon within the Council of State during the reign of D. Afonso VI, under the regency of his mother, D. Luísa de Gusmão. However, the proposal to hand over the fortress was approved by the said Council, showing once again the direction of "high politics" towards the cession of Western Maghreb fortresses. Tangier was an essential part of the dowry, of no small importance to the English, so that right in the 2nd Article of the Treaty, after the 1st, which only reaffirmed the treaties made between Portugal and England since 1641, it explicitly stated the perpetual transfer of the fortress to the kings of Great Britain (Castro, *Collecção dos Tratados*: 236).

D. Fernando de Meneses, recounting the handover of the city under his rule by order of the regent queen, D. Luísa de Gusmão, describes the regret "that a nation, even one with interests united with those of Portugal, different in Religion, would occupy a City where Catholicism had flourished for nearly two hundred years", whose own family "were the first Conquerors, and later defenders" (Meneses, *Historia de Tangere*: 272). Just as had happened a little over a century earlier with D. João III, Portuguese vassals had to witness the abandonment of yet another Moroccan stronghold, adding more sand to the grave in which lay the Portuguese imperial project to conquer Morocco.

The author, despite lamenting the handover of the fortress, abandoned shortly afterwards by the English to the Muslims in 1684, "renewing our sorrow with its ruins", still hopes that the city will one day be restored by the Portuguese Crown, "so that, reborn like a Phoenix from its own ashes, it may become more glorious" (Meneses, *Historia de Tangere*: 273). This hope is nourished by the religious fervour that underlies colonial ambitions. It cannot be considered mere rhetoric when the author, hoping "in Divine Mercy", believes in and yearns for a future "restoration" of the city, understanding it as promised to the Portuguese by God since D. Afonso Henriques (1143–1185), the first king of Portugal. Tangier, understood as a "gateway", would be able to open the "path" to the "fields of the most fertile and abundant Provinces of the World", making it possible to sustain the Portuguese presence in Morocco and introduce into Portugal "an abundance of horses, cattle, provisions, other fruits, and merchandise" (Meneses, *Historia de Tangere*: 283). Religious fervour that, as usual, serves as a basis for colonial ambitions.

Conclusion

An analysis of the discourses produced from the Union of the Iberian Crowns (1580) until the end of the seventeenth century allows us to relativise the idea, still recurrent in historiography, that the disaster of Alcácer-Quibir represented a definitive breaking point in Portuguese policy regarding Western Maghreb. Perhaps we can consider that, in fact, the ultimate "decline" of Portuguese policy in Morocco occurred much more during the reign of D. João IV, from 1640 onwards, than in the immediate aftermath of D. Sebastião's death.

Following the loss of Tangier to England in 1662 and the cession of Ceuta under the peace agreement with Spain in 1668, the final blow to Maghrebi policy would come roughly a century later, with the evacuation of Mazagan in 1770, under the reign of D. José I (1750–1777), assisted by the Marquis of Pombal. However, as in the time of D. João III, decisions of "practical" policy did not necessarily extinguish "ideological" fervour. As we have seen, the tendency was quite the

opposite: while, from the standpoint of political practice, the Portuguese presence in Morocco entered a process of gradual retrenchment, at the discursive and ideological level one can observe precisely the reverse movement – the persistence, re-elaboration, and, at certain moments, intensification of projects, hopes, and justifications aimed at the conquest or restoration of the Portuguese presence in the region. The political adversities faced by the kingdom or the Moroccan strongholds were insufficient to curb imperial ambitions in the region; rather, moments of crisis were consistently accompanied by discourses of conquest and restitution.

We have seen how, from the War of the Restoration onward, with the Portuguese Crown under the House of Braganza, political orientation increasingly shifted toward "practical" or "pragmatic" concerns, to the detriment of those guided by religious, Catholic ends. Although the political language of Catholic "reason of state" in the period often subordinated politics to religion, where the struggle against the "infidel" enjoyed popular support (Rodríguez, 2005), concerns with a North African "frontier" policy and the preservation of royal patrimony gave way to other priorities, given the urgency of the war of independence.

In this sense, what changes over the period is not the disappearance of the Moroccan imperial idea, but rather its place within Portuguese political culture. After 1578, the conquest of Morocco ceased to be a concrete policy within the Crown's immediate horizon and increasingly became a symbolic repertoire, selectively mobilised by different agents in specific contexts.

The "empire that never was" in Morocco thus reveals itself less as an isolated failure and more as a lasting component of Portuguese political culture in the Early Modern period, whose long survival helps explain both past choices and how those choices were remembered, justified, and contested. Only through a comparison of these works with later Portuguese historiography, as well as with Arabist and Orientalist studies, can we assess the extent to which such works and sources served either as legitimising instruments of European imperialism in Africa or, conversely, as forms of lamentation or reflection on the failure of Portuguese imperial policy in Morocco.

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