

Military borders, political frontiers: settling the Portuguese urban space in North Africa

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Historical context

The Portuguese presence in Northern Africa lasted from 1415, when king Dom João I (1385-1433) started what would become a series of conquests with the taking of Ceuta, to 1769. This last date represents the epilogue of a political, military, and commercial investment in the Maghreb, when the evacuation of the last stronghold was decided in Lisbon. For more than three and a half centuries, the Portuguese main expression of its territorial expansion consisted of isolated enclaves along the Strait of Gibraltar and Atlantic coasts, which corresponds today to a long seashore stretch in the Kingdom of Morocco, with exception of the Spanish city of Ceuta. This territory was never understood as a full colony by the Crown, with autonomous jurisdiction. It was rather based on the conquest and occupation of pre-existing Arab and Muslim cities, meaning a network of isolated possessions directly ruled by the king through local captains and governors. The period covers an important shift in ideas and ways of making war, transitioning from late-medieval images to early-modern conceptions on the verge of the year 1500.

Traditionally, historiography has divided Portuguese military conquests and the establishment of commercial outposts in Northern Africa into two important areas [Fig. 2.1]. On the northern tip of the territory, the military takeover of Ceuta, followed by Ksar Seghir in 1458, Asilah and Tangier in 1471, defined what was then called the 'overseas Gharb' [*Algarve de Além-mar*]. These former Muslim cities were integrated into the Portuguese Crown even though their influence only occasionally went beyond the limits of their walls. A peace treaty with the kingdom of Fez allowed the European power to extend its administration towards the hinterland for a period of a few decades at the end of the fifteenth century⁽¹⁾. Further south, Portuguese ambition was to prevent Marrakesh from accessing its seaports. The establishment of suzerainties in cities such as Azemmour (1486) or Safi (1488) in exchange for military protection clearly shows how vulnerable

While Mazagão represents the long-lasting Portuguese new settlement in North Africa (1514-1769), the Portuguese urban experience mainly opted for the occupation of existing Muslim cities in the region. In fact, during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, five coastal cities were seized and undertook an occupational praxis that implied a downsizing of the surface by new walls called *atalho*, and a revision of the street layout. In a territory where fortified perimeters often acted as borders, the former Islamic matrix implied not only a re-dimensioning of the urban space but also a will of erasing the previous built footprint. Military architecture and urban morphology became coherent with the European culture, at a time when urban concepts and practices were renewed through modern hygienist and rationalist wind. An interpretation of these legacies will be achieved through the analysis of historical cartography and recent field works.



2.1
South Iberia Peninsula and Northwest Africa map, showing all the Portuguese possessions and some reference cities. (drawing by the author)

these places were, being caught between internal Moroccan disputes. As a consequence, a few years later, both cities were militarily conquered (Safi, 1508; Azemmour, 1513) as a part of a broader plan by king Dom Manuel I (1495-1521) to ensure a stronger Portuguese presence in this southern area and a leading position in reaping the commercial benefits of its harbours. Furthermore, several castles were built upon strategically important sites along the coast, to provide additional protection for recently conquered cities, such as Mazagão, fifteen kilometres south of Azemmour, in 1514 or Aguz on the mouth of river Tensift, south of Safi. The sieging of these Muslim cities would irreversibly influence their urban becoming. In fact, the most frequent military approach was indeed the conquest. In the cities the Portuguese conquered in Northern Africa a pragmatic attitude

⁽¹⁾ Adolfo L. Guevara, *Arcila durante la ocupación portuguesa (1471-1549)* (Tangier, Publicaciones del Instituto General Franco para la Investigación Hispano-Arabe, 1940), 28.

was the rule, oriented towards the fortresses' sustainability in a hostile environment. Overall, the arrival of a new power and faith also implied a reconfiguration of the urban fabric, reducing its area. Urban appropriations shrank cities, erased suburbs, and promoted the opening of new streets and squares, closer to a Portuguese visual identification of the built environment. Significant reductions in perimeter and surface were carried out, in a procedure known as *atalho* (downsizing)⁽²⁾. Showing a deeply rational spirit, this technique led to a radical analysis of the appropriated cities' limits, regularizing them geometrically and re-evaluating their orientation and internal configuration. Furthermore, opportunities to experiment with more elaborate systems left an urban heritage that is still present today.

All political and military seizures had carried with them a complete separation between the Christian populations inside the walls and the Muslims, whether Arab or Berbers, outside the fortified boundary. Only a few exceptions were permitted by the new city tenants. From north to south, the most relevant case studies to be developed in this paper include Ceuta (1415-1640), Tangier (*Tânger*, 1471-1662), Asilah (*Arzila*, 1471-1550), Azemmour (*Azamor*, 1513-41) and Safi (*Safim*, 1508-41).

Besides conquests, the establishment of new settlements was another paradigm for expanding the Portuguese presence, if yet less successful. The foundation of Mazagão (today the neighbourhood of the Cité Portugaise in El Jadida), in 1541, signifies its utmost case study, representing the climax of all the urban and military architecture experiences acquired in a region where city walls generally meant a frontier for faith and possession. What Mazagão also embodies is indeed an epistemological shift owing to all the previous experience.

Military adaptations and urban appropriations

The Portuguese occupation of existing urban agglomerations enacted a superposition of the Christian layer over the Muslim one, its degree depending on the duration of their presence. From over two centuries in Ceuta (1415-1640) to less than three decades in Azemmour (1513-41), the mid-sixteenth century witnessed a crisis that shrank Portuguese military expression in the Maghreb; Safi's occupation ended in 1541, Ksar Seghir and Asilah in 1550. Although Ceuta and Tangier (until 1662), together with a new fortified investment in Mazagão, were the choices of the Crown as far as keeping enclaves in North Africa was concerned, building adaptation or urban appropriation occurred mainly during the immediate years following each conquest, which means during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As mentioned, five study cases will be exposed to

⁽²⁾ For further details on this matter: Jorge Correia, *Implantation de la ville portugaise en Afrique du Nord* (Porto, FAUP publicações, 2008), 353-357. This military strategy tool, which was thoroughly used by the Portuguese in North Africa at the combat and urban spheres, was not an invention at this time for this territory. Indeed, it had been a common practice centuries before, when significant reductions of surface were undertaken by the Romans in a last effort to sustain the Barbarian invasions.



show the Portuguese urban and architectural impact, relying on historical sources, coeval cartography and newly drawn production to document it [Fig. 2.2]. Frequently the captured walled-in area was too large for the scarce military means of the conqueror. Thus, new walls were introduced to cut short the pre-existing urban limits and, by doing so, to optimize the Portuguese military disposition. These operations of *atalho* left a strong Portuguese footprint, still readable in Morocco's modern cities.

The results of the application of this technique show a propensity for geometrically regular shapes where the construction of new curtain walls established ninety-degree angles with the pre-existing defensive structures, excluded sprawling inland sections, and opened the urban space to the harbor. All decisions made by the Portuguese enhance the effect of straightening the former Islamic medina's curved limits. In the vicinity of the port, new buildings were built to respond to a developing market of exchanges between Europe and the Maghreb: customs, an exchequer, and sometimes even a mint. The examples of Ceuta, Tangier, or Safi reveal another distinctive factor, a double *atalho*, which is only present in the larger Portuguese possessions that earned the status of a city (*cidade*), because they housed a cathedral and were the headquarters of a whole diocese.

Thus, after the process of reduction, sectors of former Islamic cities were preserved within a tighter perimeter of walls. A new image of the urban space was desired for the new strongholds, now Christian again, facing difficulties when

2.2
(G. Braun, F. Hogenberg, N. Simon, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*,
Köln 1572, fol. 57-57v)

⁽³⁾ For the case of Ceuta, several studies by Carlos Gozalves Cravioto concur for the understanding of the urban layout between 709, when it was taken by Umayyad Capiphate, until the 1415 Portuguese conquest: *El urbanismo religioso y cultural de Ceuta en la Edad Media* (Ceuta, Instituto de Estudios Ceuties, 1995); "La topografía urbana de Ceuta, en la Cronica de Tomada de Gomes Eanes de Zurara", in *Ceuta hispano-musulmana*, edited by Alberto Baeza Herratz (Ceuta, Instituto de Estudios Ceuties, 1993), 187-206; "La estrutura urbana de la Ceuta medieval", in *Actas del Congreso Internacional "El Estrecho de Gibraltar"*, edited by Eduardo Ripoll Perelló (Madrid, Universidad Nacional de Educación a distancia, 1988), 345-350.

⁽⁴⁾ During the reign of king Dom Manuel I, on legislation regarding Lisbon between 1498 and 1502, address to: Hélder Carita, *Lisboa Manuelina e a formação dos modelos urbanísticos da época moderna (1495-1521)* (Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1999).

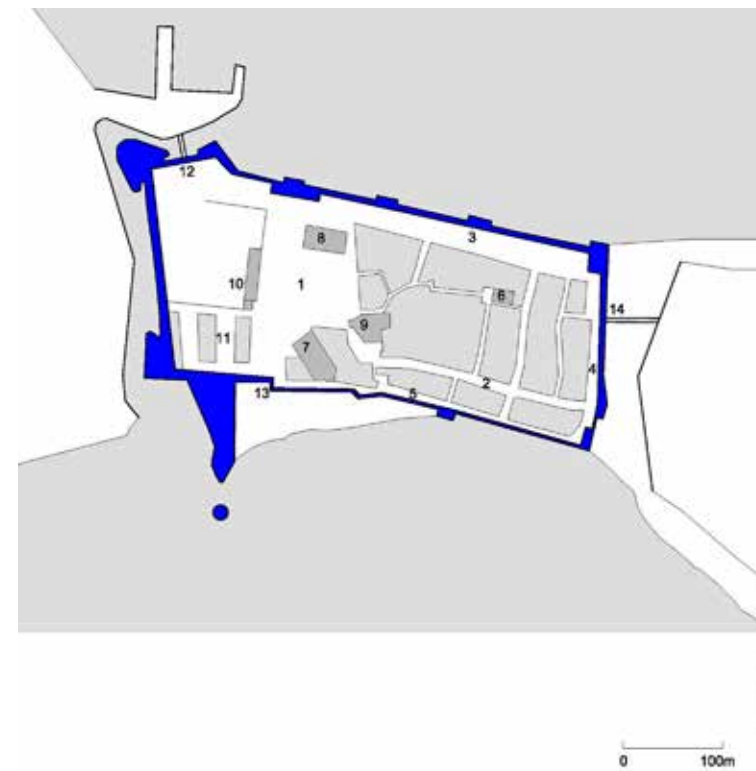
⁽⁵⁾ Carlos Gozalves Cravioto, "La estrutura urbana de la Ceuta medieval", 1988, 345-350.

⁽⁶⁾ Gomes Eanes de Zurara, *Crónica da tomada de Ceuta. Editado by Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira* (Lisbon, Academia das Ciências, 1915).

encountering Muslim fabrics and households that were deeply rooted in the urban landscape. The overall built environment aspect which had resulted from the Christian short Byzantine and late-antiquity periods in areas closer to the Strait of Gibraltar, notably in cities such as Ceuta or Tangier, seems to have been completely altered during centuries of Islamization process⁽³⁾. Not only earlier pagan temples, but more importantly paleo-Christian basilicas gradually disappeared, as did any remnants of grid planning, which were either abandoned or deeply reconfigured. Therefore, the non-Muslim built heritage was almost completely absent in the newly conquered cities. This was a situation the Portuguese felt the need to evaluate and re-access toward the establishment of more familiar urban environments that could also translate into efficient defensive units. Indeed, as the fifteen century wrapped up but, particularly, when the turn was done to the sixteenth century, ideas connected to urban renovations and additions occurring in tightly woven medieval tissues in Europe, particularly those in Lisbon⁽⁴⁾, were being shipped to North Africa in an attempt to recreate a sort of European flavor and praxis.

Dimensioning cities: Ceuta, Tangier and Safi

Most of the time, in the aftermath of the military takeover, the inherited in-wall area was too large for the scarce military means of the conqueror and such was the case of Ceuta, the first Portuguese conquest in the Maghreb. Medieval Muslim Ceuta was formed by an urban nucleus, called medina, in the narrowest part of the peninsula. To the east, several adjacent suburbs spread, including the largest suburb, the Almina that corresponds nowadays to mount Acho's area. Westwards, other suburbs extended the city into the mainland⁽⁵⁾. The Portuguese apprehended this territorial division during the military conquest, crossing different walls or moats, later described by the royal chronicler Zurara⁽⁶⁾. This was a too large territory for the Portuguese to defend. Moreover, being the solitary intrusion in Northern Africa for some decades, it suffered from two bigger handicaps: the constant attack from Fès and its total dependence from the metropolis. Thus, a shortening of the perimeter or *atalho* reduced the whole area to 14%, corresponding to the former medina area, meaning that the *atalho* selection excluded the vast area formerly occupied by the Arab suburbs and appropriated the medina's Islamic walls as new Portuguese limits. However, given the fragility of the narrow land border between the isthmus and the rest of the continent, which actually meant the frontier between the new Christian stronghold and the belligerent hinterland, military architecture has always played a fundamental role in Ceuta. After the first immediate appro-



2.3
Ceuta: reconstitution of the Portuguese city by the late 1500s.
(drawing by the author)

priation of the Islamic defences, this sector saw major transformations during the sixteenth century when a new bastioned curtain of walls was built over the former segment, originally built by the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba⁽⁷⁾. Thus, and besides the obvious survival quest, a complete obliteration of the Muslim past helped convey a European image of a city for only Portuguese in the Maghreb [Fig. 2.3].

In fact, as far as overturning the Islamic city image is concerned, in Ceuta, there was also another degree of urban appropriation where, again, very pragmatic decisions had to be made, including a selection of inherited morphological urban elements. Since the earliest years, the Portuguese tried to identify signs of familiarity in the street layout. *Zanqat Ibn Isa* in Ceuta was immediately assumed as the new main street due to its broad section and a quite linear trace⁽⁸⁾. Then renamed 'rua Direita' by the Portuguese, it connected important town gates or notable public buildings and it allowed for new public performances such as military parades or Christian religious processions.

Upon the conquest, Maghreb cities presented a model where public spaces were usually absent. Portuguese wanted central squares or yards as places of gathering or public announcements by the governor or captain. Ceuta's novel central square was particularly keen on establishing a logistic platform that linked rua Direita with the castle and the cathedral, seeking a geometrized regular configuration. Indeed, a tendency towards a grid sketch of the whole urban display was the result of decades of slow Portuguese intervention, a sort of second degree of urban intervention. Morphological urban consequences were reflected in the way of a continuous rejection of the inherited fabric towards a street lifestyle related to the opening of more windows towards the public space. Like Ceuta, Tangier was also a recognizable symbol of power, glory, greatness and the king of Portugal was aware of the upcoming fame. The year 1471 would finally put the city into Portuguese hands. The first level of speculation

⁽⁷⁾ José Manuel Hita Ruiz, Fernando Villada Paredes, *Las fases constructivas de la muralla real de Ceuta, in Lisboa 1415 Ceuta - historia de dos ciudades / história de duas cidades*, edited by André Teixeira, Fernando Villada Paredes, Rodrigo Banha da Silva (Ceuta / Lisbon, Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta / Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2015), 241-244.

⁽⁸⁾ Leopoldo Torres Balbas, *Ciudades hispano-musulmanas* (Madrid, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1985), I, 337.

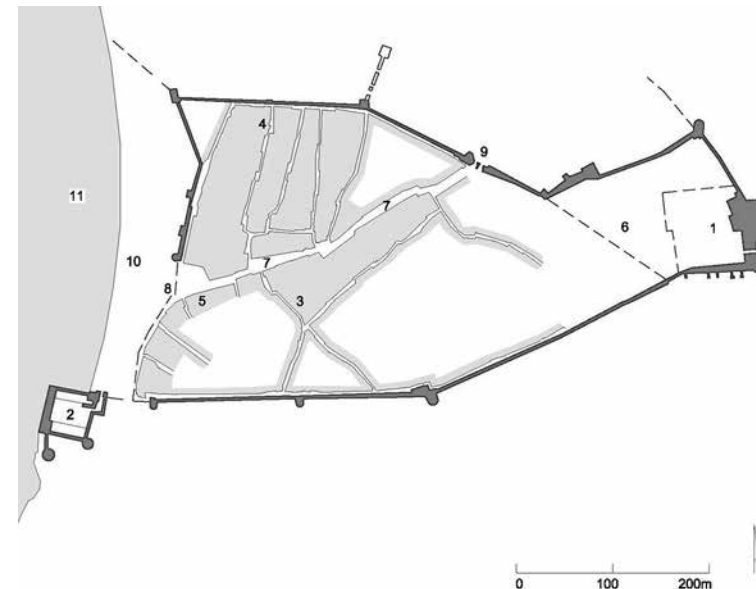
2.4
Tangier: aerial photograph, 1925.
(Direction du Patrimoine Culturel – Ministère de la Culture et
de la Communication, Royaume du Maroc)



concerns the reconstitution of the former Merinid perimeter of Tangier at the time of the conquest in the late-fifteenth century. The city was much bigger than the actual medina surface and the inland wall should have run further inland than the current medina's limit, most probably along the hills surrounding today's medina [Fig. 2.4]. Therefore, the city was too big for the Portuguese to keep as a sustainable settlement and the king clearly refers to the intention of reducing the city's surface to a quarter. So, again, an effective perimeter and surface reduction was carried out, established by new short cut walls that can be detected by its linearity. At this point, the *atalho*, a dimensional and military readjustment, was about to become a routine in Northern Africa.

This perimeter contraction led to a profound change in the sense of the city, pushing Tangier to the sea, for defence and accessibility purposes. The sea was the gate to Portugal whereas the hinterland was the enemy's territory. Unlike the inherited Islamic urban matrix, which had favoured intimate clusters of households as its main morphological characteristic, on the other hand Portuguese transformations searched for regularity of streets. Canals were gradually sided by façades acting as meaningful screens to the exterior and linked important buildings⁽⁹⁾.

Further south, the Muslim city of Safi had been under Portuguese suzerainty since 1488, when protection was asked by the local population to the Portuguese Crown and the setting of a factory inside the walls was agreed in exchange. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine medieval Islamic Safi, before falling into Portuguese hands after the definite 1508 conquest. Its current linearity of contour denounces a deliberate intention of quickly joining the upper castle to the sea by new wall curtains. In the northern part of the city, some evidence of the previous Islamic wall is still present. However, the changes cut short the surface and, today, Safi's medina occupies less than a half of its late medieval shape. The site's topography challenged this rational appropriation, so a double *atalho* was



2.5
Safi: reconstitution of the Portuguese city.
(drawing by the author)

needed both in the northern and southern sections of the city in order to considerably reduce vast sprawling inland areas⁽¹⁰⁾. The purpose was to determine a change in the orientation of the city by directing the urban space to the harbour. The *atalho* procedure was carried out between 1511 and 1512 and, to conduct this matter, master builder Diogo de Arruda was sent by the Crown to town⁽¹¹⁾. His intervention was particularly oriented towards the building of new walls and the renovation of existing ones inherited from the Islamic period. Leading a team of builders, Arruda's trace was shown by long sections of wall with *chemin de ronde*, divided into an upper vertical stretch pierced by arrow slits, and a battered section in the lower level. On the southern segment of the *atalho*, this typology was interrupted by U-shaped bastions comprising two floors of embrasures for fire [Fig. 2.5].

The street layout in the interior of the urban assemblage was structured around Rua Direita, the main inherited canal, today called Rue des Marchés. It connected the port and beach to the Almedina gate, the former Islamic Bab Chabah. This main axe acted as the spine of the public space. Signs of perpendicular or parallel secondary streets can still be detected as of today in the lower area. Here, the cathedral, Sainte Catherine's convent⁽¹²⁾, the market, the port and the mercantile structures could be found, while the upper city was centralized around the upper castle, a less and less used structure.

In fact, the renovation strategy of previous Islamic sectors of the walls, as well as the construction of the new *atalho* segments, was reinforced by the building of a new castle by the seashore, repeating the same approach Tangier had had. Here too the upper castle, the former Muslim citadel, was distant from the harbour where protection and vigilance were needed. In both cities, the new sea castle presented a double standard: well-equipped and prepared to shoot fire from a series of embrasures in the walls and bastions at a lower level whereas the skyline was left to an atavistic and prismatic donjon.

⁽⁹⁾ For example, in Ksar Seghir, a Portuguese possession between 1458 and 1550 located between Ceuta and Tangier on Strait of Gibraltar (the complexity and specificity of this archaeological field justifies its absence from this paper), one can perceive the Portuguese appropriation of Islamic households in detail and their relation to the public space. See: André Teixeira et al., "L'évolution de l'habitat domestique à Ksar Seghir à la fin du Moyen Âge", in *Entre les deux rives du Déroit de Gibraltar: Archéologie de frontières aux 14-16e siècles / En las dos orillas del Estrecho de Gibraltar: Arqueología de fronteras en los siglos XIV-XVI*, edited by André Teixeira (Lisboa, CHAM-FCSH-UNL-UAç, 2016), 81-121.

⁽¹⁰⁾ On the military architecture changes in Safi, see: Luís Gil, *A arquitectura militar portuguesa em Safim, Marrocos (1508-1541)* (Lisbon, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2020).

⁽¹¹⁾ *Livro desbaratado do almoxarife de Safim Lourenço Mendes em que se carregou a despeza que fez com as obras da d.ª cid. no anno de 1512* - IAN-TT, Núcleo Antigo, n. 768, fls. 55-59v.

⁽¹²⁾ On the late-Gothic religious architecture the Portuguese introduced in Safi, address to: Ana Sara Centeno Almeida, *(Re)desenhar memórias, da arquitetura portuguesa em Safim durante o século XVI* (Guimarães, Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade do Minho, 2011).

⁽¹³⁾ For further details on medieval Portuguese cities and processes of regular urban patterns, see: Luísa Trindade, *Urbanismo na composição de Portugal* (Coimbra, Universidade de Coimbra, 2008).

⁽¹⁴⁾ See note 1.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Bernardo Rodrigues, *Anais de Arzila: crónica inédita do séc. XVI* (Lisbon: Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, 1915-1919), 9, and David Lopes, *História de Arzila durante o domínio português (1471-1550 e 1577-1589)* (Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1924), 123-124, 127. Dom João de Meneses, the captain of the expedition, did not succeed in conquering the city, which was defended by the king's brother of Fez. The Portuguese siege attempt was swiftly countered by the latter, who took advantage of Dom João's disorganization and headed for Asilah to prevent a new landing on the shores of the Portuguese town.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Rodrigues, *Anais de Arzila*, 14: (...) os mouros não entenderão senão em roubar e saquear a vila, asi de roupa e fato como d'outra fartura que em Asilah avia, e asi outras muitas mercadarias que muitos mercadores tinham (...); 15: (...) atabales com muito grande grita, se deixarão vir ao muro e pondo fogo ás portas do castelo fôrão logo queimadas (...); 13: (...) derrubando algúas casas que dentro do castelo estavam, como a cozinha e despensa do conde e outras casas do alcaide-mór (...).

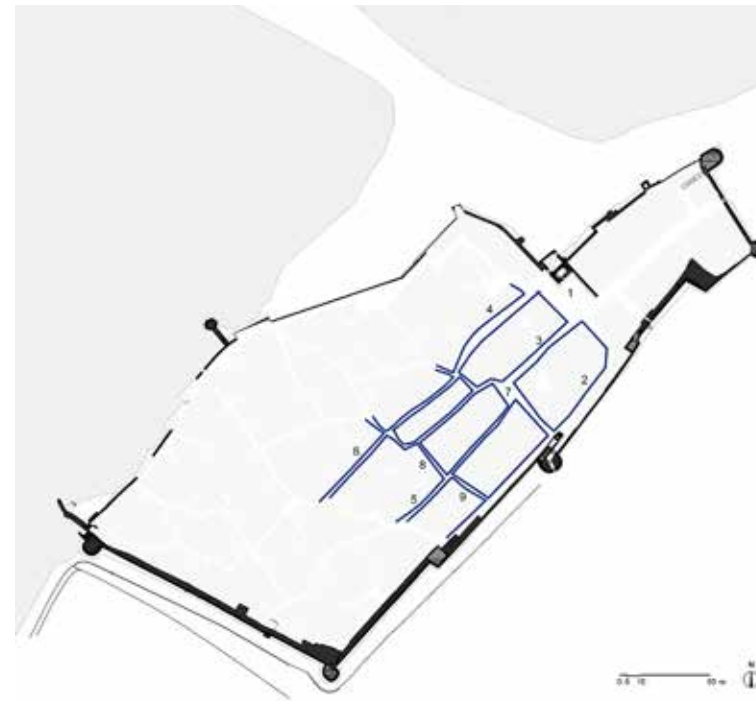
Designing for new towns: Asilah and Azemmour

Another level of urban settlement occurred in Azemmour and Asilah where signs of regular planning are clearer. Indeed, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, there were opportunities to recreate new towns from scratch. In fact, completely or almost empty areas that were free from the constraints of existing buildings, as was usually the case in the conquered coastal cities analyzed previously, provided similar scenarios for urban planning⁽¹³⁾.

When the Portuguese decided to attack and occupy Asilah in 1471, the city was much larger than its present-day walled area. Benefiting from a thirty-year treaty of truce between the king of Portugal and the sultan of Fès⁽¹⁴⁾, it was only in the transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries that king Dom Manuel I felt the need to implement exceptional defensive measures and agreed to reduce the inherited urban surface, which was too large for effective military sustainability. Actually, the implementation of the *atalho* process in Asilah was prompted by an Arab counter-attack and assault in 1508, which constituted a central point in the urban/building evolution of the northern Portuguese strongholds and triggered a series of works in their walled systems and respective interior areas. This military episode, which took place in Asilah between October 15th, 1508 and the end of the same month, was the result of a failed expedition to Azemmour that king Dom Manuel I was organizing⁽¹⁵⁾, which resulted in a looted, burned, partially knocked down⁽¹⁶⁾ and structurally deteriorated town.

As a result, the *atalho* fostered a series of reforms, including the reduction of Asilah to around 45% of its pre-Portuguese extension⁽¹⁷⁾; practically only the half of the town that faced the sea was kept [Fig. 2.6]. The selected area consisted of two juxtaposed rectangles: the smallest corresponding to the castle and the largest to the burg or town. This operation was combined with a complete revision of the military architecture, including a keep tower and new bastions, in an ambivalent dialogue between rhetorical symbolism and gunnery effectiveness⁽¹⁸⁾.

The Portuguese crown sent master-builder Boytac to Asilah to design the reform plan⁽¹⁹⁾, which was executed from 1511 onwards by Francisco Danzilho. The works carried out at the other northern strongholds, which also included Ceuta, Ksar Seghir and Tangier, are described in the 1514 *Livro das Medidas das fortalezas de Arzila, Alcácer, Ceuta e Tânger* [...]. The focus was on the introduction of military devices that tried to outdo the existing ones from Islamic times and/or medieval inspiration, by adding active defencing elements to the pre-existing ones or by building new ones. Military architecture played a fundamental role for the newly reduced perimeter, being wall curtains and bastions



geometrically disposed in order to create an efficient defensive system and a homogeneous safe area around them, targeted through fire.

The plan articulated two distinct dimensions. The late-medieval looking tower insisted on sending a rhetorical message to the outside, affirming a new lord and faith over Asilah, whereas the fortified belt adapted itself to the most recent military techniques, displaying pre-modern architectural innovations for gunpowder combat⁽²⁰⁾. Braun's atlas engraving, and a rare surviving iconographical source of the time, depicts the situation during the process, with the donjon already built, but several portions of the defences still to update. However, the artist has no doubt when calling *arx nova* (new work) to the new additions and *art vetus* (old work) to the former. Boytac would return to North Africa in 1514 to evaluate, measure and to write down the works in a report.

Besides dimensioning Asilah, the short Portuguese period has marked the urban image of the town at a time when urban concepts and practices were being modernized not only through the experience with the founding of medieval new towns, but also by adjusting to a hygienist spirit intertwined with an announced modernity in Europe. The search for a new identity related to a new lord and faith has induced strategies of fabric regularisation, now subordinated by a permanent re-islamization process.

Even if the report was mainly focused on military architectural constructions, what happened inside the walls was also relevant. Besides, it acknowledges that the works went clearly beyond the original indications and a housing

2.6

Asilah: plan of the medina with evidence of the Portuguese stratum.

(drawing by Ana Lopes and the author)

⁽¹⁷⁾ A new stone-and-clay wall followed a secant line in relation to the present-day Tambalão and Santa Cruz bastions, corresponding to the long southeast front of the medina today. Rodrigues, *Anais de Arzila*, 11-12. Conclusions on the dimensional redesigning of Asilah by the Portuguese were drawn out of topographical and architectural surveys undertaken during two research projects led by the author between 2012 and 2019, in collaboration with the Municipality of Asilah.

⁽¹⁸⁾ For a thorough perspective on the military architecture transitional moment that the town witnessed then, see: Indira Peixoto, Jorge Correia, "Military Architecture during the Portuguese period in Asilah, Morocco. Moments, Partakers, Meanings", in *The Iberian Peninsula and North Africa (15th to 17th centuries). History and Heritage*, edited by Jorge Correia, André Teixeira (Lisbon/Braga, CHAM / Lab2PT, 2019), 107-137.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Francisco Sousa Viterbo, *Dicionário Histórico e Documental dos Arquitectos, Engenheiros e Construtores Portugueses*, 1988, 124, and Rodrigues, *Anais de Arzila*, 27: (...) mandando com o conde mestre Butaca, grande mestre de obras, que fizesse os muros de pedra e cal; e asi mandou prover como em Vila Nova de Portimão se fizesse muita cal (...).

⁽²⁰⁾ See note 18.

⁽²¹⁾ “Ua cousa poso afirmar, que foi Francisco de Lenzina parte e causa com que Arzila se reformou de casas, porque estando as mais derrubadas dos mouros, ao tempo que entrarão, e dos soldados, nunca morador pedio ùa carga de cal ou duas que lh’a não dése, um dia e ùa semana, tudo tão liberal e largamente (...)” in Rodrigues, *Anais de Arzila*, 78.

⁽²²⁾ Robert Ricard, “Sur la chronologie des fortifications portugaise d’Azammûr, Mazagan et Safi”, in Congresso do Mundo Português, vol. III (Lisbon, Comissão Executiva dos Centenários, 1940), 108. Although called ‘bastions’ in this paper, a direct translation of Portuguese ‘*baluartes*’, they were mostly gun towers rather than modern and fully artillery structures.

⁽²³⁾ Letter from Rui Barreto to Manuel I, 21 February 1514, published in Pierre Cénival, *Les Sources Inédites de l’Histoire du Maroc. Première Série – Dynastie Sa’dienne*, Archives et Bibliothèques de Portugal, I (Juillet 1486 – Avril 1516) (Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1934), 489-501: “Quanto a Vosa Alteza mandar hyr totalas sseis bombardas grossas e toda outra muniçam; ainda que Vosa Alteza digua por quanto a fortaleza jaa ssera forte, ainda que ho ela nom sseja, bem me parece que podemos escussar tres d’elas, (...) ainda que eu nom ssey como Vosa Alteza querera tirar de huum baluarte que se faz no canto do castelo da parte de dentro da cidade muy grande e muy fre-mosso, a que chamam Sam Cristovam, hum par de bombardas grossas; e ao canto onde o muro da cidade vem entestar, onde foy o combate, se faz outro, a que chamam do Rayo (...) que, com outras duas bombardas grossas d’aly, aja Vosa Alteza por certo que em toda a cidade, nom podera entrar nenhuma jente com estes dous baluartes, ainda que lhe abram as portas da cidade.”

⁽²⁴⁾ Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, *Documentos Inéditos para a História dos Portugueses em Azamor* (Lisbon, Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português, 1970), 147-48.

program was taking place to replace all the surface destroyed upon the 1508 Arab assault. The idea of a new plan for the Portuguese town is never openly mentioned but several pieces of evidence concur for the establishment of a new town grid scheme over the devastated area⁽²¹⁾. Among them are also co-eval references to the ‘old town’ versus ‘new town’. Like in Braun’s picture, the excluded part of Islamic Asilah, located in the open field above the town in the engraving, seems entirely erased from ancient representations, whereas the Portuguese nucleus appears filled with constructions, probably reflecting more of a wish than the real situation.

Several blocks with a high propensity for geometrical rectangular shapes were formed between the castle, the sea gate and the town gate. They were divided by streets perpendicular and parallel to the main square, next to the donjon, and to the walls of the town. Roughly, these oblong blocks presented 28 to 30 brasses (around 62 to 66 meters) in length and a ratio of a half or a third for the width. They were encircled by a street running along the wall for military displacement purposes and the system was structured around the rua Direita, the traditional spine of Portuguese medieval cities. The report reinforces the rational spirit of the intervention when mentioning the care devoted to street pavement and water supply through a public fountain.

While Asilah had reborn from the ashes of the destruction caused by the Arab assault of 1508, the Portuguese castle/town of Azemmour resulted from the process of downsizing of a larger Arab city that had already witnessed such an episode during the Marinid period and was about to witness yet another reduction process. After the takeover in 1513, the Portuguese found it necessary to organise and fortify the township. The utmost priority went toward strengthening defensible points, adapting some of the pre-existing towers and reinforcing the walls with bastions⁽²²⁾. At the beginning of 1514, orders were issued to cut back the current number of those in the military garrison⁽²³⁾. A defensive offset was imposed by the efficiency of the architectonic system built, especially concerning the decrease of the kept area and perimeter to happen after the *atalho* operation. For the Portuguese it was imperative to insert a secant wall into the former city, in order to shorten its area and perimeter. This required the demolition of the surplus area, which would be known as the ‘old town’ and the determination of a space for the building of a castle for the new rulers. For that purpose, the ‘*Regimento da obra do muro e atalho da cidade dezamor*’ [Statute of the wall’s work and cutting of the city of Azemmour] was approved in Lisbon in 1517⁽²⁴⁾. The presence of master builders Diogo and Francisco de Arruda proved central for the discussion on the town’s military and urban situation.

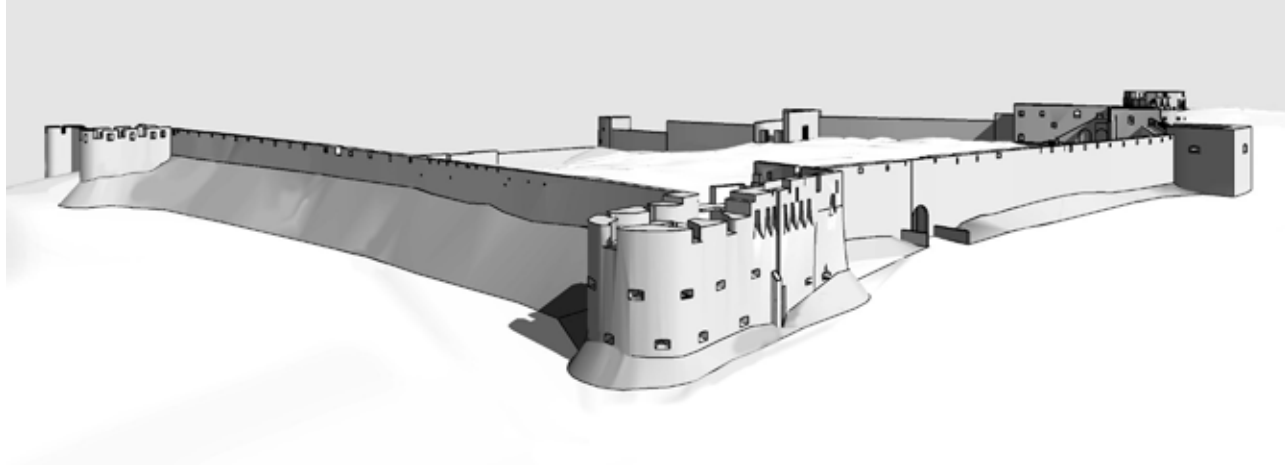


The new wall wing was perpendicular to the urban sprawl inherited by the Portuguese, and went from the countryside to the river, passing by the old mosque, now transformed into a church. The choice of the area where the Portuguese forces gathered was the top north of the ancient Islamic city, located closer to the river’s mouth. The *atalho* wall corresponds to the south wall of the sector today known as Kasbah/Mellah neighbourhood in present day Azemmour and contributed to its imperfect quadrilateral shape [Fig. 2.7].

The cutting wall was limited on the countryside edge by the circular bastion of *São Cristóvão* (Saint Christopher), presenting a cylindrical drum typology with three platforms for gun embrasures and a distinct topping of balconies for vertical shots⁽²⁵⁾. The wall’s intermediate zone was interrupted by a rectangular bastion and it ended in a pointed and semi-circular bastion overlooking the river. The rectangular bastion worked as a town gate too, together with the river bastion, helped to defend Azemmour; its artillery capacity was oriented to land and water. On the north-western corner of the castle stood the bastion of

2.7
Azemmour: plan of the Kasbah/ Mellah neighbourhood with evidence of the Portuguese urban stratum.
(drawing by Ana Lopes and the author)

⁽²⁵⁾ Letter from Nuno Gato to Manuel I, 31 Mars 1514 (Cénival, *Les Sources Inédites*, 530-533): “Queremos lhe fazer depois de cerrarmos as janelas por onde a de gugar artelharya grossa, que a de ir na grosura da mesma parede, que he nove palmos, e d’ahy pera cyma avemos de lançar huas sacadas como quaes todo a rroda (...)”.



2.8
Azemmour: 3D model of the Portuguese castle showing the bastion of Raio.
(drawing by Ana Lopes)

Raio (thunderbolt)⁽²⁶⁾, which had adapted and transformed a former Azemmouri tower. Facing the hinterland, both the São Cristóvão and Raio (Thunderbolt) bastions were considered sufficient to ensure the city's protection [Fig. 2.8]. The town's defensive efficiency, in case of attack, depended on the combination of the architectural arrangement with the weapon's range. The device of military architecture assembled by the Portuguese succeeded in creating a space that was difficult to approach around the fortified perimeter⁽²⁷⁾. The *atalho* process should be understood as the full adaptation of Azemmour to a castle/town for military/sustainability purposes. It was not just a wall that separated the new and old town.

In a 1517 letter sent to king Dom Manuel I⁽²⁸⁾, the reference to the old town alludes to another dimension of the downsizing: the demolition of some parts of the conquered Islamic city. That part of the city excluded from the cutting wall was considered a threat to the castle, since an attack to the Portuguese stronghold could be prepared from ruined houses and void streets⁽²⁹⁾. In Azemmour, however, the pre-existing walls were preserved, intended as walls of a farm or even a large barbican, in which the production of wine, fruit and vegetables was foreseen. One of the gates was altered and used as the main exits of Azemmour. It remains up to today one of the main accesses to the intramural medina, named Bab Medina.

While the cities conquered by the Portuguese in Northern Africa separated the castle from the town (i.e. military from civil), the Portuguese modified this strategy here. There the outline of the city's cutting wall allowed for the creation of a town which accommodated the entire Portuguese population⁽³⁰⁾. To that effect, Simão Correia, the town captain since 1516, devised an urban plan for Azemmour, organized in several fronts, with special focus on the internal disposition of the new walled area of the castle. The proposal became effective in the above-mentioned letter to the king, which announced the layout of paved streets for houses with a good threshold, with special care placed on the town's cleansing and public health⁽³¹⁾. This proposal regulated the urban design, displaying a pioneering effort that did away with the narrowed street system that the Portuguese had observed in their Northern African conquests. The new design was more attentive to public space, matching the Manueline tendency in the urbanism of the time⁽³²⁾.

The Portuguese town was organized into two clusters. The Captain's House was placed uptown, spread around the town's yard, while the main church and the access were located next to the Town Gate. The rua Direita started there and reached the lower River Gate. Here, near the river entrance, another clus-

ter was created gathering three trade-oriented edifices: the commercial factory, the exchequer and the customs house⁽³³⁾. The path set on rua Direita led to a certain regularity of parallel and perpendicular streets. The set of elongated city blocks can still be detected in today's street and plot plans and dimensions are closer to those applicable to Asilah's case.

Staging power in the Maghreb

Portuguese influence in former Muslim cities of the Northwestern coast of Africa didn't resume to changes in their urban display, whether dimension or internal configuration. It went beyond and took specific buildings for the creation of a new city image. As seen, after the process of reduction, sectors of former Arab cities were preserved within a tighter perimeter of walls. New symbols of faith and power were urgent in Christian territories subtracted to the kingdoms of Fès and Marrakesh and now completely devoid of the autochthonous population. The key issue spanned around the foundation of a new image of a city where not only churches or cathedrals evolved from former mosques, but also late-gothic castles effaced Muslim *kasbahs*. The presence of the Portuguese Crown was to be apprehended through a rhetorical language wishing to send a firm message to frequent hostile outskirts. In a territory where fortified perimeters often acted as borders, walls and bastions also played a central role in this process, acting as screens of propaganda, imparting a rhetorical message as important as their military capacity and fire range.

As for many aspects of the Portuguese presence in the Maghreb, Ceuta was inevitably the paradigm to be followed and that was definitely what happened with the inherited main mosque inside the Portuguese new city limits. As usual, the mosque was consecrated as a church, its internal layout was kept, the *mihrab* turned into the main altar and the minaret adapted into a belfry. Nevertheless, it was in neighbouring Tangier where significant architectural statements were staged to the outside of the fortified belt. The prominent Moorish *kasbah* was completely replaced by a new building on which a late-Gothic language could be read. The new *château-type* structure was closer to a palatine acropolis than to a military facility, as observed in Braun's atlas. It was mostly blind at ground level, pierced by generous windows on the first floor and covered by tiled roofs punctuated by chimneys. However, since this upper castle did not fulfil any defensive duties, serving rather as an emblematic representation of the Portuguese crown overseas, another castle was then needed in Tangier's lower city, as it was the case of Safi too. Although more pragmatically located, to allow the effective control of the harbor and its activity, the late fifteenth-century

⁽²⁶⁾ See note 23.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ana Lopes, (A)cerca de Azamor. *Estruturas militares ao manuelino* (Guimarães, Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade do Minho, 2009), 167-173.

⁽²⁸⁾ Letter from Simão Correia do the king, 3 October 1516, published in Pierre Cénival, David Lopes, Robert Ricard, *Les Sources Inédites de l'Histoire du Maroc. Première Série - Dynastie Sa'dienne*, Archives et Bibliothèques de Portugal, II, Première Partie (Mai 1516 - Décembre 1526) (Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1939), 37-40.

⁽²⁹⁾ Letters from governor D. Álvaro de Noronha to the King, 18 April and 18 May 1520, published in Cénival, *Les Sources Inédites* (1934), 273-274 and 240-242 respectively.

⁽³⁰⁾ The population was estimated between 1000 and 1250 inhabitants in the letter from captain Correia mentioned above, 3 October 1516 (Cénival, Lopes, Ricard, *Les Sources Inédites*, 37-40).

⁽³¹⁾ *Ibidem*: "(...) e sayba Vosa Alteza que cheo todo de casas na ordem que vam as de Vosa Alteza e as ruas aruadas e calçadas de ladrilho, de muyto que ha nesta cydade, que cada hum calçara sua porta, com que se escusaram de muyto poo e lama que qua ha, (...) eu nam sey cousa que mays fermosa podesse ser, nem mays valença pera os omens vyverem nela (...)". The reconstitution of the former Portuguese urban fabric was drawn out of topographical and architectural surveys undertaken during a research project coordinated by Maria Augusta Lima Cruz between 2007 and 2011.

⁽³²⁾ See note 4.

⁽³³⁾ Letter from captain Simão Correia mentioned above, 3 October 1516 (Cénival, Lopes, Ricard, *Les Sources Inédites*, 37-40): "(...) e ha porta da rybeyra feita hum cays, e a alfandega e feytoria logo pegada com ela (...)".

castle boasted late-medieval architectural features such as a donjon crowned by machicoulis and watch-towers. It seems that architecture required a visual language that was portrayed in constructions seen from afar or from the sea, even if outdated military.

As seen earlier, North Africa would gradually function as a great field of experimentation during the reign of king Dom Manuel I, reflecting a crucial moment for the evolution of military architecture. While Boytac's interventions in the northern strongholds such as Asilah were the start of the adaptation of the structures to new technologies, a second coeval generation – the brothers Diogo and Francisco de Arruda – confirmed this modern design in a more southern geographical arch, mainly in Safi and Azemmour. These cutting edge experiences clearly demonstrate the refusal of the neuroballistic systems and the irreversible embracement of pyroballistic techniques, a technological revolution⁽³⁴⁾. In fact, Diogo had previously contacted with Francesco di Giorgio Martini and might have worked with him on the fortifications of Naples⁽³⁵⁾. From the beginning the architectural plans of the Italian master were careful to include new artillery apparatus, assigning it to a useful location for the defence of the fortification. New establishments should take advantage of the natural conditions on site, managing the role of each tower/bastion in a joint action. Actually, this was the practical use of the principles of flanking and enfilading fire, exposed in Francesco di Giorgio's *Trattato di architettura ingegneria e arte militare*. Custom made by Diogo and Francisco de Arruda, the bastions built in Azemmour show a preference for circular shapes. As for their design, it would have been the result of fundamentally an opinion based on the Arruda masters own experiences in Portugal, most probably with a certain degree of influence by the instructions gathered in the writings by Giorgio Martini, and the use of geometrical patterns in the design and building processes⁽³⁶⁾.

This evolution was joined by the introduction of aesthetic concerns in military architecture, resulting from a desire for the symbolic exhibition of power, also a characteristic of the Manueline style. Coinciding with the increasing use of pyroballistics, fortifications underwent adaptations not only aimed at the introduction of firearms, but also at ornamentation and embellishment.

One of the cases in which this particularity is more notorious, within the overall panorama of the Maghreb strongholds, is Asilah's donjon, built by Boytac in 1509 [Fig. 2.9]. The traditional late-Gothic model, with a blind ground floor, a guardhouse on the intermediate level and an audience room on the upper level⁽³⁷⁾, was adapted using several openings on its three sides: east, south and west. The southern window has a frame based on the coeval decorative aesthetics, with curvilinear designs that contrasted with the smooth and plain



2.9
Asilah: general view over the walls and donjon.
(photo by the author)

surfaces of the tower. As opposed to Boytac's *atalho* adaptations, which aimed at an efficient use of weaponry, the purpose of this tower was not a military function, its intention being mainly propaganda, serving as a hinge between the town and the castle, adjacent to the governor's quarters.

This duality that combines function and rhetoric is also clear in Azemmour. Beyond technological, urban and military innovations, the Portuguese presence here was affirmed through symbolic rhetoric that would often surpass the political occupation itself. The new urban space sought a more identifiable city image with the one left at home by the Portuguese. Azemmour was imagined as a new town made by Portuguese for Portuguese, whose limits were circumscribed to the walled space, isolated from its countryside. The meeting place of the population for the royal audiences was the yard of the Captain's House⁽³⁸⁾, which also featured a number of openings in Manueline taste, and was adjacent to São Cristóvão bastion.

It is in this oscillating climate between a latent and an explicit hostility towards Muslims that the Portuguese monarch ordered to show off the bastions ornamented with his flags bearing the royal arms and the Cross of Christ. Such a bold display probably wished to confirm and emphasise the Portuguese Crown's rights and claims over its conquered territories in North Africa. Inside the bastions of São Cristóvão and Raio there are still traces of sculptures with Manueline decoration, including corded and torso elements and half spheres. Those elements have been thought to have been used, in fact, as bracings or shims supporting a continuous and paced distribution of flags allusive to the kingdom's coat of arms and to Christianity⁽³⁹⁾. Such display, combined with the firing power of guns was meant to provoke fear in a potential enemy. Shots were fired without a specific target, just to display the weapon's power, an action that would send a clear message of a permanent and active state of defence. Therefore, the combination of these elements reveals the message that the Portuguese wished to send outside the walls of Azemmour.

⁽³⁴⁾ John R. Hale, *Renaissance fortification. Art or Engineering?* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 12. Also see the prologue in Christopher Duffy, *Siege Warfare. The fortress in the Early Modern World 1494-1660* (London/New York, Routledge, 1979).

⁽³⁵⁾ Rafael Moreira, *História das Fortificações Portuguesas no Mundo* (Lisboa, Alfa, 1989), 106-07.

⁽³⁶⁾ Luís Costa e Sousa, *A arte na Guerra: A arquitectura dos campos de batalha no Portugal de Quinhentos* (Lisbon, Tribuna da História, 2008), 95; Pedro Aboim Inglês Cid, *A Torre de S. Sebastião da Caparica e a arquitectura militar do tempo de D. João II* (Lisbon, Edições Colibri, 2007), 284-85.

⁽³⁷⁾ Moreira, *História das Fortificações*, 121.

⁽³⁸⁾ Lopes, *(A)cerca de Azamor*, 85..

⁽³⁹⁾ Moreira, *História das Fortificações*, 132.

2.10
Safi: Bordj Dar, former upper castle bastion of Alcáçova.
(photo by the author)



The same can be said regarding Safi some years later when a new large bastion on the upper castle bore witness of both military pragmatism and symbolic intentions⁽⁴⁰⁾. Built in 1540, just one year before the Portuguese would evacuate the city, the side facing the hinterland and the enemy capital of Marrakech was decorated with the Portuguese coat of arms flanked by armillary spheres [Fig. 2.10]. The Alcáçova bastion was the last effort of a city that had failed to dominate Morocco, denying the eve of a new era. If its disproportionate scale achieved one of its main objectives, namely to install fear, it only barely hid its obsolescence in the face of evolving military technology. The scale of the massive volume compared to the very small openings for artillery seems to identify the building as a sheer frontier of power and belief. Given that the evacuation of the city was being discussed as early as 1534, this last building effort in Safi shows the same (re)foundational spirit that enabled the transformation of the Tangier kasbah in the previous century.

Ending notes

Overall, in North Africa, the Portuguese undertook an empirical approach since the earliest conquest of Ceuta in 1415 to the last significant military success, the siege of Azemmour in 1513 and the years of occupation that followed it. They sought to control dimension, showing a preference for geometrical forms shaped with morphological elements such as streets or blocks as linear as possible within the walled perimeter. New buildings and urban spaces set by the Portuguese in Northern African soil were as strong as a weapon. The message carried by architecture and the urban display was political, religious and aimed at a military standard of sustainability. Levels of propaganda ranged from symbolic statements to more explicit and visual apparatus, from a simple cross framed by a former *mihrab* to the conception of a whole town. Sometimes, they were clearly identified as the late-medieval *bastides* or new towns, “exported” to North Africa, at a time when urban concepts and practices were being modernized under a hygienist spirit underlying an announced modernity in Europe. The *atalho* or downsizing process preserved only sectors of former Islamic cities within a tighter circuit of walls. A new image of the urban space was pursued during the occupation course wishing to match a European identity, which faced difficulties when inheriting Muslim fabrics and households, which traditionally fought perspective and alignment in the street layout and privileged privacy. Iconographical or cartographical material, urban morphological surveys and recent field studies have helped track architectural battles staged in late-medi-

⁽⁴⁰⁾ For further details, refer to note 10..



2.11
Plan de la forteresse de la Place de Mazagan, 1757 (Bibliothèque National de France)

eval and early modern scenarios in the Maghreb, where the Portuguese presence wasn't, most of the times, more than an interruption in an Arab-Muslim military, political and social continuum. In 1541, the loss of Santa Cruz to the hands of the Berber conquerors questioned and pushed the abandonment of several cities and towns, including Asilah, Azemmour and Safi. It was also the date of the foundation of Mazagão, a new fortress-town over a 1514-Manueline castle that used to support Azemmour⁽⁴¹⁾. Compared to the previous cases of conquest followed by occupation, this town is probably the climax of all the learning and knowledge acquired in North Africa [Fig. 2.11]. In Mazagão, there were architects, plans, sketches and builders that enabled the construction of a modern fortification with a regular scheme of streets in its interior⁽⁴²⁾. The grid shows a tendency for the multiplication and subdivision of a central model based on the original quadrangular castle, then transformed into cistern and administrative headquarters. No direct relation can be pointed, as far as blocks and plots are concerned, between this foundational experience and the previous adaptation examples. A middle point between the experience acquired in North Africa and early-modern technical improvements, Mazagão resulted in a pioneer fortification and urban settlement of the African continent, making way for a new chapter in the history of early-modern fortification and urbanization in Portugal, Europe and overseas.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Letter from Francisco de Diogo de Arruda to Dom Manuel I, Azemmour, 31 Mars 1514, in ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, 1ª parte, m. 15, nº 14.
⁽⁴²⁾ In fact, Mazagão is the summit of a process and opens a new chapter in the Portuguese presence in North Africa as far as city planning and military architecture are concerned; for these reasons, it cannot be thoroughly explored in this paper where previous experiences that led to it were stressed; for further details, see: Correia, *Implantation de la ville portugaise en Afrique du Nord*, 396-410.