

## The Portuguese Art of War in Northern Morocco during the 15<sup>th</sup> Century

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*This paper not only reviews the motives underlying the Portuguese expansionist project in Morocco in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but also the political, economic, and particularly the social reasons that were in the basis of the Portuguese art of war in Morocco in that period. During the Iberian Reconquest (Reconquista), warfare was usually practiced by means of cavalcades, raids (razias) and ambushes, alongside with some siege actions. We will try to demonstrate that the Portuguese were forced to adopt a model of restricted territorial occupation and repeat the same technics and tactics of combat in Morocco, chiefly based on guerrilla war (guerra guerreada), as well as on siege and privateering actions, either offshore or onshore, by means of amphibian landings (saltos). We will also approach some of the changes that occurred in the defence systems of the Portuguese strongholds in North Africa, particularly at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a result of the need to respond to the new challenges by the Moroccan armies equipped with fire weaponry.*

**Keywords:** *Guerrilla war; maritime war; Northern Morocco; strongholds; siege war; fire weaponry.*

### Portuguese Expansion in Morocco in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century: Main Causes

The expansion project to Morocco by the Christian kingdoms from Iberia goes back to late 13<sup>th</sup> century, as attested by the Treaty of Soria, of 1291, signed by the monarchs of Castile and Aragon, which defined the areas to be occupied in the future by both kingdoms in North Africa, leaving the territorial stripe in the west of Ceuta to Portugal. On the Portuguese side, however, the "dreams of conquest" have eventually got a fresh impetus only after the victory achieved by the Christian forces over the Marinids in the battle of Salado, in 1430, which put an end to their expansionist intents in Iberia, after they had unified Northwest Africa<sup>1</sup>. By then, the Portuguese King Afonso IV got the enactment of the Papal Bull *Gaudemus et exultamus*, of May 30th 1341, which acknowledged the Portuguese Crown the right to conquer the Kingdom of Fez. Although it was successively renewed in 1345, 1355, 1376 and 1377, there was no attempt whatsoever by the Portuguese monarchs to organize any military campaign, a situation that prevailed in the next decades, not only because of the spread of the Black Death, which ravaged the Kingdom strongly, but also due to the successive wars against Castile.

The expansionist project was resumed only when the new ruling dynasty – the Aviz dynasty, supported by a Third Estate on the rise – have defeated both the Castilian armies and the Portuguese land aristocracy, which implied the victory of the Atlantic strategy instead of the expansion to Granada. With

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1. See J. P. O. e Costa, et al., *História da Expansão e do Império Português* [History of Expansion and the Portuguese Empire] (Lisbon: A esfera dos livros Ed, 2014), 27.

the peace with Castile assured in October 31<sup>st</sup> 1411, the bastard dynasty that had seized power by the force of arms and the shed of Christian blood, were now in a position to assert themselves politically and militarily among the European nations of that time and even the Papacy, through a feat of arms against the infidels, complying with the ideological tradition of the Crusades, with the result of a huge prestige to the Portuguese Crown. The latter, as partisans of the Pope of Rome, Gregory XIII, who was an opponent to Benedict XIII of Avignon, appealed to him and obtained a Crusade Bull that not only justified the military enterprise, both religiously and morally, but also helped fund it through exemptions of paying the ecclesiastic tithes the Kingdom was obliged to contribute for the Holy Seat.

This strategy was implemented by the Crown and had its starting point with the conquest of Ceuta. On the other hand, it benefited from the support of maritime cities in the Kingdom and its urban classes, increasingly involved in maritime trade with northern Europe, especially with England, and who faced this expansionist process as a world of new opportunities, resulting not only from the development of trade relations with Mediterranean ports<sup>2</sup>, but also from the access to new products and new markets in Morocco and the west coast of Africa. In addition, the conquest of Ceuta implied the annihilation of a powerful base of Muslim privateering and the acquisition of a very important strategic point for the Christians. The city was considered the key to the Strait, with immediate effects on the commercial circulation to and from the Mediterranean, and on the safety of the coastal communities of the Kingdom, especially those on the coast of Algarve and the Atlantic southern coast.

The conquest of Ceuta, on the other hand, was a first step to the conquest of the kingdom of Fez, which was dominated by the Marinid dynasty, of Berber origin, and had its authority questioned by Bu Hassan, the great lord of Meknes. As referred by Luís Filipe Thomaz, "without a firm authority, without navy, shredded by internal quarrels, the kingdom of Fez was presented to King João I as easy prey"<sup>3</sup>. To the Portuguese monarch, this conquest also represented a chance to transfer the surplus noble men existing in the Kingdom to North Africa, especially the second sons of manor houses, without a fortune of their own, who were limited in their functions of *milites* since the end of the wars against Castile. Their export to Morocco would diminish the strong social tension they used to provoke in the Kingdom, because of the permanent exactions and extortions they imposed upon the common people. In addition, it would also prevent the breaking of the peace so recently achieved with Castile, due to the occasional military actions practiced by them in Castilian territories. Furthermore, that knighthood would keep on fighting under the sovereignty of the Crown, thereby functioning as

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2. J. Heers, "L'expansion portugaise à la fin du Moyen Âge : la Méditerranée" ["The Portuguese expansion at the end of the Middle Ages: the Mediterranean"], in *Revista da Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa*, XXII, 2<sup>a</sup> série, n<sup>o</sup> 2 (1956).

3. See L.F.R. Thomaz, "Expansão Portuguesa e Expansão Europeia – Reflexões em torno da Génese dos Descobrimentos" ["Portuguese Expansion and European Expansion - Reflections on the Genesis of the Discoveries"], in *De Ceuta a Timor [From Ceuta to Timor]* (Lisbon: Difel, 1994), 67.

its main base of recruiting men of arms to the strongholds and fortresses to be settled in North Africa.

### **The Transfer of the Traditional Military Organization of the Portuguese Kingdom to Morocco: the Role of Nobility and the Establishment of a Restricted Territorial Model of Occupation**

Until the reign of King John II, the Portuguese military action in Morocco, as stated by Luis Filipe Thomaz, was "the last episode of medieval history, rather than the first episode of modern history"<sup>4</sup>, a situation resulting especially from the fact that the Crown depended, right from the start, on the military potential of the nobility, thus having a decisive influence on both the developing model of military organization and the military tactics performed throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

During the *Reconquista*, the Portuguese noblemen became familiar with the Arabic warfare that was mostly based on individual actions by horsemen, carried out through sudden cavalcades, raids and surprise attacks - the so-called *guerra guerreada* (guerrilla war). Therefore, they would exhaustively practise this kind of emotional and apparently disorganized warfare in Morocco, which not only articulated itself perfectly with the military operations carried out by the Moroccan cavalry but also fitted their mentality, while perfectly serving their economic interests. In order to understand the reasons that supported the kind of warfare practiced in Morocco, it is important to analyse the motivations and composition of the nobility as well as the political, economic and social conditions that supported the restricted territorial model of occupation made up by the Portuguese in Northern Morocco.

As it occurred in Europe, the Portuguese nobility also endured a significant crisis in Portugal which arose not only from its growth throughout the last century but also from the effects caused by the general crisis in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The end of the war against Castile also contributed to increase the tension within the nobility, as the second sons of the Portuguese noblemen were no longer allowed to accomplish, in Iberia, their traditional occupation: war. Without financial means to organize their households, they could only go to the king's court or leave the country and put themselves at the service of one of the numerous European armies, as it happened in the Hundred Years War.

Therefore, to the Portuguese Crown, Morocco was an escape to which the traditional turbulence of the aristocracy was conducted. All that manpower was taken out of Portugal and put at the service of the Portuguese Crown, thus transforming North African battlefields into military schools where several generations of Portuguese cavalymen in search for "honour and profit"<sup>5</sup> were trained throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

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4. See Thomaz, "Expansão Portuguesa e Expansão Europeia", 28-29.

5. Morocco was the perfect place where the Portuguese noblemen could, as stated by Gomes Eanes de Zurara, "exercise their forces and their bravery pertaining to the young people as well as to assert their ranks as cavalymen". In *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta por El Rei*

For the aristocracy, the expansionist and warlike policy initiated in Northern Morocco meant, mainly for the noblemen pertaining to secondary lineages as well as for the second sons, better opportunities to enrichment and social promotion. Indeed, due to the permanent situation of war, exacerbated by the old religious antagonism between Christians and Muslims, these men could enhance the honour of their families and also their revenue, through the favours granted by the king as payment for their military achievements and also the sacks and pillages of the Moroccan populations. Moreover, the organization of the strongholds that were eventually conquered would require the settlement of a number of military and administrative posts, and, in the event of a significant territorial conquest, they could also dream of the possibility of building land domains.

As a result of the adoption of a violent policy of occupation of the main strongholds in Morocco, which was marked by the expulsion of its inhabitants outside a security area of the fortified perimeter, the Portuguese created a model of occupation in the north of Morocco defined by Robert Ricard as a restricted territorial model of occupation<sup>6</sup>. By facing the need to manage and defend structures that are too large for their reduced numbers, the Portuguese would try to solve the problem by using shortcuts in the strongholds, which was described by Frederico Mendes Paula as "wall sections inside the walled perimeter that divided the city into two parts. And so, both the 'new town' and the 'old town' were created. The former had a smaller dimension and comprehended the area closer to the sea, where the supplies were possible to be made. The buildings and walls of the 'old village' were progressively demolished, since, without inhabitants, they became dangerous because of the ambushes that used to take place there"<sup>7</sup>. That process was simultaneously accomplished with the reconstruction of the pre-existing structures of defence that might have been affected during the conquest, as was the case in Ksar es-Seghir, or reinforcing and improving its defences, in view of the use of gunpowder artillery<sup>8</sup>, as it happened in Ceuta. In Asilah, the stronghold area was reduced to less than half of the previously occupied area, with the wall running parallel to the beach<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, in order to provide the garrisons with an easy access to water, other structures (known as *couraças*) were built as

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D. João I [*Chronicle of the Conquest of Ceuta by King João I*] (Lisbon: Academy of Sciences, 1915), 22.

6. R. Ricard, "Le Problème de l'occupation restreint dans l'Afrique du Nord (XVe-XVIe siècles)" ["The Problem of Restricted Occupation in North Africa (15th-16th centuries)"], in *Annales de l'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, n° 41 (1936): 426-437.

7. See F. M. Paula, *Portugal em Marrocos. Olhar sobre um património comum [Portugal in Morocco. Look at a common heritage]* (Lisbon: Argumentum, 2016), 32.

8. G. E. de Zurara, refers to *caramanchões* (small protruding structures in a fortification, wall or building) where gunpowder artillery pieces were placed. See *Crónica do Conde D. Pedro de Meneses [Chronicle of Count Pedro de Meneses]* ed. M. T. Brocardo (Braga: FCG-JNICT, 1997), I, XXXV, 320-321.

9. J. Correia, *Implantação da Cidade Portuguesa no Norte de África. Da tomada de Ceuta a meados do século XVI [Implantation of the Portuguese City in North Africa. From the conquest of Ceuta to the mid-sixteenth century]* (Porto: FAUP, 2008), 181.

early as 1502, in Asilah, Tangier and in Ksar es-Seghir, which linked the fortress to the beach in an extension of more than 100 meters<sup>10</sup>.

The restricted model of occupation was adopted by the Portuguese in North Africa as a result of a number of structural deficiencies of the Portuguese Kingdom. As a matter of fact, very soon the lack of armament and soldiers made the project of territorial conquest that was initially chosen for Morocco unfeasible. Therefore, a new political and military strategy was adopted. It consisted of conquering the most important strongholds along the Northern coast of Morocco aiming at controlling the navigation of the Gibraltar Strait more effectively and minimizing the effects of the Muslim navy. The initial idea of conquering the kingdom of Fez<sup>11</sup> was thus abandoned and replaced by the attempt to economically stifle the kingdom of Fez by cutting off access to the sea through the conquest of its main port cities. Indeed, in Northern Morocco, a restricted model of occupation was chosen where the Portuguese domination was confined to the area within the forts and to a small territory around it; the garrisons of these forts were supported by a naval force that varied from fort to fort, a model that would later be transferred to the Southern Coast of Morocco and to the shores of the Indian Ocean.

As a result of this failure of human and material means, which forced the construction of said *shortcuts*, throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the period to which our study is confined, the Portuguese would eventually occupy four strongholds only, located on the north coast of Morocco, namely: Ceuta (1415), Ksar es-Seghir (1458), Asilah (1471) and Tangier (1471). Contrary to what would happen in the south of Morocco, where several fortresses would be built later, with only two strongholds occupied - Safi and Azzemour -, in the North only one fortress would start to be built, but without practical results. As a matter of fact, in 1489, during the reign of John II, the Portuguese would pay a high price for the decision to build a fortress in the interior of Morocco, on the Loukkos River, just a few kilometres upstream of its mouth. The intent of its construction was to cut off the links between Ksar el-Kebir and Larache, which was at that time one of the main privateering ports in northern Morocco, and to demarcate the frontier zone resulting from the peace agreement previously made with the kingdom of Fez; therefore, the Portuguese expeditionary force would be sieged and forced to surrender, their lives having been spared by the intervention of the sovereign of Fez. This military failure marked the end of the Portuguese expansionist project towards the south during the reign of João II, only to be resumed by his successor, King Manuel, later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Given the great hostility that always marked the daily life in these strongholds and the strong blockade imposed on them by the sovereign of Fez, which caused their immediate commercial decline and isolation, these fortresses have quickly turned into places defended by the garrison and equipped with some royal craftsmen, crucial to its normal functioning,

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10. Paula, *Portugal em Marrocos*, 34.

11. In the notice sent by King João I to the garrison of Ceuta in 1415, he assures them that he would be back the following year with a strong army to conquer the *Marinid* kingdom. See Zurara, *Crónica do Conde Dom Pedro de Menezes*, I, IX.

joined by the so-called *fronteiros* - noblemen who would serve temporarily in a stronghold, for a more or less extended period, taking a group of several soldiers with them<sup>12</sup>. Defended by a stripe of "no man's land" conquered with the plunders on the neighbouring populations, as in Ceuta, these strongholds, which turned out to be real scavengers of men and money, depending on the Kingdom and on the Azores islands for their regular supply, would, however, remain in the hands of the Crown because of its strategic importance. In fact, throughout the period in study, they served not only as a deterrent to the North African privateering activity that devastated the Portuguese coast, but also as a support for the Portuguese navigation operating to and from the Mediterranean, or southwards, where the Portuguese had the monopoly of the trade on the African coast, being the factory of Mina their highest exponent.

### The Maritime War

In the light of the aforementioned conditions, Ceuta would remain, until the conquest of Ksar es-Seghir, in 1458, a thorn thrust in the vast Muslim domains in Northern Morocco. Operating mostly as a military base for the control of the navigation in the Strait, a small naval force, mainly consisting of galleys, was stationed there when Ceuta was conquered. D. Pedro de Menezes, the captain of this fortress between 1415 and 1437, equipped it with other ships, mostly fust-boats (*fustas*), caravels and small boats more suitable for the kind of navigation that was practiced there.

On the other hand, and as it would occur in other Portuguese fortresses in Morocco, there was a general coexistence of these ships from the Portuguese Crown and those belonging to private ship owners, especially the captains of the fortresses who took part on naval operations. Those ships were used in amphibian attacks nearby coastal settlements, or in the transportation of their infantry forces to places near their targets and in rescue operations for support to the besieged fortresses. In fact, it was about the transfer and the adaptation in the northern coast of Morocco of the old devastating sea raids practised in Iberia against the Muslim populations<sup>13</sup>.

The naval war engaged near the fortresses or through attacks (*saltos*) - amphibian landings carried out at a significant distance from the fortifications and followed by raids on the settlements - was very similar to the war undertaken in land, because the naval battles were indeed conflicts between two infantry forces on board and not real battles between ships. Therefore, occasionally the attacks would start with a brief simultaneous discharge of artillery and arrows shot by crossbowmen<sup>14</sup>, followed by frontal attacks and

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12. See D. Lopes, *A Expansão em Marrocos [The Expansion in Morocco]* (Lisbon: Teorema, 1989), 41-65; A. D. Farinha, "Características da presença portuguesa em Marrocos" ["Characteristics of the Portuguese presence in Morocco"], in *Portugal no Mundo [Portugal in the World]*, ed. L. de Albuquerque, vol. I (Lisbon: Alfa, 1989).

13. On this subject, see M. H. da Cruz Coelho, "Portugal – Um Reino Plantador de Naus" ["Portugal - A Kingdom Planter of Naus"], in *Revista Portuguesa de História*, XLIII (2012): 71-89.

14. See Zurara, *Crónica de D. Pedro de Menezes*, I, XXXIII, 68.

ship boarding; the battle was decided in a fight among the soldiers equipped with spades and small shields (*rodelas*).

Although we know that the vessels of the small fleet that remained there after the conquest were equipped with gunpowder artillery<sup>15</sup>, this was only meant to intimidate and confuse the enemy before the assault and after the boarding of their vessels. This naval operation ended with the seizure of one of the vessels, after cruel and bloody hand to hand<sup>16</sup> fights with spears, swords, broad swords<sup>17</sup> and hunting knives, the main offensive arms. It was customary to keep lime on board in order to blind the enemy when they assaulted their ships as well as "chests jammed with rocks" that were used as projectiles because they caused serious damage on the crews and soldiers on board<sup>18</sup>. They also used all sorts of materials and incendiary projectiles, mainly "pots of fire" full of tar, oil or brimstone to burn the enemy and throw fire to their decks. The *trons* or mortars were used to keep the enemy at a distance whenever they were numerously disadvantaged or when the ships were anchored with a few men on board<sup>19</sup>.

As they needed fast and easily handled vessels, the Portuguese very soon abandoned the large galleys; their war fleets stationed in North Africa throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century would later include smaller ships, such as galliots, brigs and mostly fust-boats<sup>20</sup>.

### Defensive War

Regarding their military organization on land, the Portuguese strongholds in North Africa throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century and even later were characterized

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15. In fact, even before the great siege of Ceuta, its fleet (which enclosed several ships owned by D. Pedro de Meneses) included four fust-boats, four barges, some small boats and, at least, one brig whose captain was Diogo Vasques, equipped with one *trom* (ancient cannon) and cross-bowmen. See Zurara, *Crónica de D. Pedro de Meneses*, I, XXXI, 303.

16. A very elucidative example of the numerous naval battles between the Portuguese and the Muslims at this period is the one occurred in the 1420's between three fust-boats owned by D. Pedro de Meneses and six fust-boats from Tangier and one from Asilah; the Portuguese fust-boats while trying to help a fust-boat that was assaulted by the Moors, attacked the enemy with their rams thus throwing them into the sea. Then an attack on the opponent ship took place, and iron and wood grapples were used to secure the vessels. A hand to hand fight occurred afterwards on the enemy fust-boat deck "and on one part and on the other they fought with swords and the sound was so loud and their blows so strong that it sounded like a blacksmiths quarter in any street of any city." See Zurara, *Crónica de D. Pedro de Meneses*, II, X, 575-577.

17. Short and broad swords.

18. It's important to mention that we didn't find data, for this period, concerning the technical specifications of the neuroballistic tools used on board either by the Portuguese or the Muslim people; they were only mentioned as *trons* or mortars.

19. On tactics and techniques of combat used on board, see L. M. Duarte, "A Marinha de Guerra. A Pólvora. O Norte de Africa" ["The Navy. The Gunpowder. The North of Africa"], in *Nova História Militar de Portugal*, ed. M. T. Barata and N. S. Teixeira, vol. I (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2003), 324-325.

20. See Duarte, "A Marinha de Guerra. A Pólvora. O Norte de Africa," 413-414.

by the coexistence of royal and nobility military forces<sup>21</sup>; they could be thought of as being the embryo of the formation of a permanent army. In fact, the garrison stationed there became, throughout the years and particularly since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, a durable regular structure, with a uniform hierarchy of command subjected and subordinated to the Portuguese Crown<sup>22</sup>.

The presence of the Portuguese in Morocco during such a long period was also due, notwithstanding the existing difficult conditions, to a complex defensive military action that was based on the building of shortcuts (*atalhos*) in the strongholds conquered in the North, as we mentioned above, and on the setting of numerous defensive systems around the fortresses, through the building of ditches and trenches, in addition to several observation posts, equipped with sentinels whose mission was "keeping the field safe" near the fortresses. This defensive system was known as the *Rebate*, or *Rebato*, which, according to Robert Ricard, "began in the Peninsula during the *Reconquista*, with the battles between the Christians and the Muslims"<sup>23</sup>. As it fitted very well the Moroccan warfare, the system was being improved by the Portuguese throughout the years in Northern Morocco, and very soon local people were being used as spies and sentinels as they knew much better the local geography as well as their military practices.

The *Rebate* was based on the use of lookouts placed on the uppermost towers of the fortress and on sentinels and scouts (*atalaias* and *escutas*) scattered all over the area. They had the difficult task of "securing" the camp, i.e. to assure the area around the fortified places was free of enemies. Only after the reconnoitring and the certification of the camp by spies and sentinels that no ambush was laid by the nearby Moors, the daily tasks of provisioning the fortress such as the supply of water, timber, hay and the herding of cattle, was undertaken. Only then, the people from the fortress could work on the adjoining fields, a constant target for the guerrillas and raids by the Moors. The sentinels on their lookouts kept watch over the fields during the day, and alerted the fortress when the enemy forces approached. They signalled the enemy's presence by ringing the bells and hoisting up the flags; then the population and the animals took shelter inside the fortress walls<sup>24</sup>.

With the regular tasks of defending the fortress, when a siege of big proportions was eminent (after its conquest, Ceuta was subjected to two big

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21. The presence of groups of protégés by the noble men in the strongholds, either Portuguese or Castilian (in this case, in lesser number), was constant during the 15th century.

22. See "Regimento de D. Afonso V, de 1472, para Rui de Melo, capitão de Tânger", in B.N.L., *Fundo Real*, codex n°1782, ff. 1 - 3v. According to the mentioned *Regimento*, in the fort of Tangiers, the distribution of the soldiers was as follows: foot soldiers – 184; noble men – 160; cross-bowmen – 130; gunners – 10; spies – 10; sentinels – 6.

23. See R. Ricard, "A propos de 'rebato'. Note sur la tactique militaire dans les places portugaises du Maroc" ["About 'rebato'. A Note on Military Tactics in the Portuguese Places of Morocco"], in *Études sur l'Histoire de Portugais au Maroc* (Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra Ed., 1955), 348.

24. See Ricard, "A propos de 'rebato', 345-355; Lopes, *A Expansão em Marrocos*, 41-42. Specifically for Asilah, see D. Lopes, *História de Arzila durante o Domínio Português (1471-1550 e 1577-1589)* (Coimbra: Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, 1925), 67-69. See also Farinha "Características da Presença Portuguesa em Marrocos", 120-121.



sieges<sup>25</sup>), the garrisons had also to ensure the strengthening of all its defensive systems. They reinforced doors, stockades<sup>26</sup>, trenches and *caramanchões*<sup>27</sup>, as well as the equipment of the fortresses, with weapons, mainly crossbows, *trons* and mortars.

Throughout this period, the gunpowder artillery, along with the crossbowmen, defended the Portuguese fortifications efficiently from continuous attacks and sieges by the Muslims; however, it would be of little or no use in North Africa, until 1458, as an effective weapon to destroy the walls of the fortresses. Luís Miguel Duarte stated that for the Portuguese, the use of firearms took "longer than in other countries of Europe to conquer its place in siege operations"<sup>28</sup>. In fact, these weapons were not decisive during the conquest of Ceuta, as the Portuguese had conquered it through an amphibian attack, and they were inefficient to defeat Tangier in 1437. On the other hand, the same happened to the Moroccan armies whose gunpowder artillery was always incapable to cause much harm to the Portuguese fortified places. However, this situation would only change after the siege of Ksar es-Seghir, in 1458. Thenceforth, the gunpowder artillery overcame the defensive systems of Muslim fortresses, playing a decisive role in their conquest<sup>29</sup>. While the pyro ballistic armament used by the Portuguese managed to be better, from this date on, than the one used by the Muslim fortresses (as it was confirmed in 1471 with the seizure of Asilah), the opposite did not occur.

For the first time, musketeers may have participated in the siege of the fortress of Tangier, as stated by Rui de Pina; together with the crossbowmen they manned the wooden castle in the attack on the fortress<sup>30</sup>. Probably equipped with culverins (*colubretas*)<sup>31</sup>, as mentioned in King Duarte's "special

25. On this subject, see J. G. Monteiro and A. M. Costa, *1415. A conquista de Ceuta [Ceuta Conquest]* (Lisbon: Manuscrito Ed., 2015), 129-130.

26. Stockades built with wooden poles strengthened with debris and rubble facing the fortresses in parallel lines sometimes separated by small ditches. They aimed at hampering the progression of the besieging army to the fortress walls.

27. Small prominent house on a fortified city, wall or building; it was also used as a military lookout or to keep the gunpowder artillery. See *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa [Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language]* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2003).

28. See L. M. Duarte, "África" ["Africa"], in *Nova História Militar de Portugal*, ed. M. T. Barata and N. S. Teixeira, vol. I (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2003), 405.

29. In fact, after a very difficult landing with a great number of casualties among the Portuguese soldiers, and a failed attack on the city, its defenders responded with "many pans of fire and artillery shots, crossbows, and stones"; the leaders of the expedition and King Afonso V understood, as stated by D. de Góis, that it was necessary to use the gunpowder artillery "because without other war instruments they could not take over the city as soon as they wished for". See D. de Góis, *Crónica do Príncipe D. João [Chronicle of Prince John]*, ed. G. Almeida Rodrigues (Lisbon, UNL, 1977), XII, 36; R. de Pina, *Crónica do Senhor Rey D. Afonso V [Chronicle of King D. Afonso V]* (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1977), CXXXVIII, 776-777.

30. See R. de Pina, *Chronica do Senhor Rey D. Duarte [Chronicle of King D. Duarte]* (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1977), XXVIII, 548.

31. Ancient rifles; these individual firearms were the most ancient portable weapons in Portugal. They may have been used during the assault of Asilah, as stated by Mário Barroca. Their presence in the *Tapeçarias de Pastrana* testifies it; they were used by both the Portuguese and the defenders of the stronghold. See M. J. Barroca, "Armamento medieval português. Notas sobre a evolução do equipamento militar das forças cristãs" ["Portuguese medieval

warnings" sent to his brother<sup>32</sup>, the musketeers' actions may not have been important, as no other references have been found concerning them. Later in 1458, the musketeers were present in the conquest of the fortress of Ksar es-Seghir, whose conquest meant the strengthening of the Portuguese military intervention in Morocco. However, they will not replace the crossbowmen definitely until the 16th century.

In the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese have mostly carried out some works of modernization and reinforcement of the pre-existing defensive structures of Ceuta, especially in its defensive structure of the land front<sup>33</sup>. After the conquest of the remaining cities in the north of Morocco - Ksar es-Seghir (1458), Asilah (1471) and Tangier (1471) -, in addition to the restoration and reinforcement of the affected walls, the Portuguese Crown ordered the edification of the aforementioned shortcuts inside these strongholds and a set of defensive systems outside. It was not until the reign of King João II that new defence systems were built, representing, as stated by Rafael Moreira, a separation between medieval castles and modern military architecture, influenced by the need to respond to the gunpowder artillery improvements<sup>34</sup>. An example of what we have just mentioned is the set of works of adaptation and reinforcement of the round towers (*torreões*) of Ksar es-Seghir, which "were strengthened and diminished in height, to be adapted to the defence against the new firearms<sup>35</sup>", and the construction of the "new castle" of Tangier, with a four-storey tower, also of medieval appearance, which linked to a lower rectangular body, reminding the Tower of Belém (for defence in the Tagus river). The defensive system was still completed by four round towers, a keep and a barbican<sup>36</sup>, from which a *couraça*<sup>37</sup> emerged, ending in a polygonal bulwark by the water.

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armament. Notes on the evolution of military equipment of Christian forces"], in *Pera Guerrejar. Armamento Medieval no Espaço Português* (Palmela: Câmara Municipal, 2000), 106; see also N. J. V. Rubim, "A Artilharia Portuguesa nas Tapeçarias de Pastrana. A tomada de Arzila em 1471" ["The Portuguese Artillery in the Tapestries of Pastrana. The taking of Arzila in 1471"], in *Revista de Artilharia*, (1987), 25.

32. The king mentions that, if the soldiers were attacked by the Moors during the land journey from Ceuta to Tangier, they should "let them get close to the *trons*" and the "*colobretas* and the crossbows and then sent them a simultaneous discharge of guns". See "Avisos especiais del-Rei sobre a expedição a Tânger", undated (prior to August 22nd 1437), in J. M. da Silva Marques (ed.), *Descobrimentos Portugueses [Portuguese Discoveries]* (Lisbon: INIC, 1988), I, 388.

33. P. Dias, *Arte de Portugal no Mundo. Norte de África [Art of Portugal in the World. North Africa]* (Lisbon: Público Ed., 2008), 17; C. G. Cravioto, "Las Fortificaciones Medievales del Frente de Tierra" ["The Medieval Fortifications of the Earth Front"], in *El Estrecho de Gibraltar*, vol. II (Ceuta: 1984).

34. See "A época manuelina" ["The Manueline era"], in *História das fortificações portuguesas no Mundo [History of Portuguese fortifications in the World]*, ed. Rafael Moreira, (Lisbon, Alfa, 1989), 102.

35. See P. Dias, *Arte de Portugal*, 30.

36. Low wall that surrounded the fortress defending not only the walls of the stronghold, but also the moat.

37. Defensive element formed by two walls that advanced of the castle towards the water ending in one or two bulwarks.

But it was not until the next reign that the Portuguese were obliged to carry out an in-depth program of reinforcement of their strongholds and fortresses in Morocco, in the first decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, actually turning the whole area into an experimentation field of military architecture outside Europe, as a response to the modernization of the Moroccan kingdoms, in particular their gunpowder artillery and military organizations, to which they were increasingly supported by the Turks. This effort redoubled in intensity after the siege of Asilah, in 1508, by the troops of the Sultan of Fez, who destroyed the walls of the stronghold, and forcing the defenders to take refuge in the keep. King Manuel was thus obliged to make an effort to modernize his defensive structures, while at the same time he tried to equip the strongholds with a higher number of soldiers, mostly recruited by the Portuguese factory in Andalusia, from then on.

A significant number of renowned military architects and masters of works were sent there, during the first years of the 1500s, namely: Diogo Boytac, Francisco Danzillo, João de Castilho, Bastião Luís, Martim Lourenço. For the strongholds in the south, Diogo and Francisco Arruda, already greatly influenced by the Italian art of fortification, deserve special mention. Together they will mark what became known as a transition period in the art of fortification in which, as referred to by Frederico Mendes Paula, "the medieval model coexists with the Renaissance innovations, but the medieval concepts of the military constructions are more and more abandoned, and the fortresses begin to undergo modifications to better resist the attacks of the gunpowder artillery"<sup>38</sup>.

### **The *Guerra Guerreada* (Ancient Guerrilla Warfare)**

In regards to the art of war of the Portuguese, as they had to undertake a restricted occupation of the territory, very soon they adapted themselves to the kind of war carried out in Morocco, as this was very similar to the one practiced in Iberia, during the *Reconquista*. In fact, throughout this period, the land warfare developed by the Portuguese in Northern Africa will be defined by the Portuguese chroniclers as the "war fought" (*guerra guerreada; torna fuye*). At the end, it was, as João Gouveia Monteiro who points out, "the medieval variant of the 'guerrilla', this age-old way of war still commonly practiced by the so-called primitive peoples, based on armed actions that imply non-reciprocity and are related to surprise attacks and 'sleights of hand' "<sup>39</sup>. Fought to avoid the enormous risks arising from the great camp battles, but carried out with sufficient military potential to cause significant damage to the enemy on several fronts, it was here the most usual way of warfare, together with the siege war - both offensive and defensive siege manoeuvres - and the example of what had already happened in Iberia during the *Reconquista*. In fact, it will be necessary to get to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the year of 1514, to come

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38. See Paula, *Portugal em Marrocos*, 50-51.

39. See J. G. Monteiro, *A Guerra em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média [The War in Portugal in the late Middle Ages]* (Lisbon: Editorial Notícias, 1988), 374.

upon the first pitched battle in Moroccan territory between the Portuguese and Moroccan armies<sup>40</sup>.

The garrisons of the Portuguese strongholds besides their defensive functions, tried to establish a "no man's land" around the fortresses by means of highly destructive and intimidating warfare actions. The permanent condition of endemic war, resulting from a number of "cavalcades", "surprise attacks" and "raids" within Muslim territory (military expeditions not always easy to distinguish; they mostly concerned the social status of the participants and the purpose of these actions). It also resulted from the Portuguese noble men's need to perform great feats in order to obtain more "honour and wealth" for their families, obtained not only from loots and captures but mainly from the granting of favours by the King.

In fact, it was a way of making war through sudden attacks carried out by the cavalry, where the surprise element was prevalent. The ambushes and traps were part of this warfare, the "torna fuye" being a frequently used tactic of combat and very similar to the one used by the light cavalry in Iberia. It consisted of simulating an attack on the enemy's forces with a small body of cavalymen in order to lure them to a place where the bulk of the Portuguese cavalry remained hidden; the soldiers attacked without warning and devastated the enemy.

The action of the crossbowmen was also very important as constitutive elements of the innumerable cavalcades, entries (*entradas*) and raids that marked the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, throughout this period, the crossbowmen equipped with cranequin and stirrup crossbows, as they were lighter and easier to prepare<sup>41</sup>, were included in most military expeditions carried out on Moor soil, and their number varied according to the number of horses. They restrained the counter-attacks of the enemy after the attacks by the Portuguese cavalry equipped with spears and swords, or during the retreats, while helping defend their captures.

Exceptionally, their number amounted to several hundreds, as occurred in 1416, in an ambush set by the Moors near Ceuta. Then D. Pedro de Meneses mobilized most of his soldiers to help the cavalry that was retreating, while positioning them between the fortress and the location of the ambush. He ordered the soldiers "to shoot alternately in order to put the Moors always under fire"<sup>42</sup>. D. Duarte de Meneses, his son, would later adopt and improve this tactical manoeuvre on the numerous cavalry charges and "entries" onto Moor territories; his peers praised him on the way he organised "his troops of crossbowmen"<sup>43</sup>. The crossbowmen were therefore an excellent support to the cavalry and the foot soldiers for their guerrilla actions, characterised by their speed and violence wherever the surprise element was fundamental.

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40. See J. P. Oliveira e Costa and V. L. G. Rodrigues, *A Batalha dos Alcaides. 1514. No Apogeu da presença portuguesa em Marrocos* [*The Battle of the "Alcaides". 1514. In the Apogee of the Portuguese presence in Morocco*] (Lisbon, Tribuna Ed., 2007).

41. On the several types of crossbows and their characteristics, see Monteiro, "Glossário de Armas", in *A Guerra em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média*, 534-535.

42. See Zurara, *Crónica do Conde Dom Pedro de Menezes*, I, XXVII, 287.

43. See Zurara, *Crónica do Conde Dom Pedro de Menezes*, I, XII, 80-81.

Equally common were the "entries" and surprise attacks onto enemy camp, followed by raids on farms and houses and the capture of people in order to lower their morale and to cause economic damage on them, as well as the loss of human lives. The Portuguese learned with the local people how to carry out a mobile war; they were forced to lighten up their cavalry, initially very heavy for the climate and the physical geography of Northern Africa. They started using Spanish horses (light horses), almost exclusively, as they were much more fit to raids and ambushes. Later on, this feature would also be very important in India, mainly in Goa, Bassein and Daman, where their light horses became extremely efficient.

The captains of the strongholds, or some noblemen appointed by them, conducted these operations, and the commanding officers helped them reconnoitre the land. The military expeditions included several men armed with spears or swords (the noblemen), as well as equestrians using a crossbow or a firearm, and the foot soldiers; with the exception of the noble men, the guide (*adail*) conducted them. The most important military operations were sometimes extended to many leagues; this fact afforded more pillages as well as greater risks. In this instance, some cavalymen and crossbowmen that had remained in the fortress supported them during their retreat, waiting for them on previously appointed places. When they were inside the fortress, they divided the booty.

Equally important were the "maritime assaults" (*saltos*) launched onto the coastal settlements, not only for the frequency they were inflicted but also because they allowed the widening of the scope of their troops. These attacks were amphibian military operations that transported the infantry soldiers by boat, and disembarked them at night in solitary places near their intended target. There, they remained ambushed until daybreak; at that time, they hurled themselves over the enemy forces to avoid the retreat of the villagers, in order to make as many prisoners as they could. Afterwards, the soldiers ran away transporting their plundering to the ship, thus avoiding the confrontation with occasional reinforcements of the local people.

As mentioned before, this kind of amphibian operations along the North African coast, as well as the successive episodes of the siege and attack on the Muslim strongholds, would later on become extraordinary important on the Eastern seas, especially for the establishment and consolidation of the Portuguese presence. These operations supported many of their military triumphs and contributed decisively for a quick establishment of the fortresses' network that, operating in articulation with their fleet, were the basis of the "Estado da India".

The Moroccan fortresses were, throughout this period, a training field where the Portuguese soldiers practised and improved their knowledge on the defence of the fortresses. There, they made contact with the technology and the technique of siege combat, a characteristic of the Arabic war where the mining and countermining techniques were very important; this fact would be very useful in the Far East when, once more, the Portuguese had to confront the Muslim armies, especially the Turkish.

In regards to the besieging war, the Portuguese developed a more accurate technique of organizing their camping ground<sup>44</sup> and using the offensive system of stands<sup>45</sup>, mobile towers and elevated platforms; they also developed the efficiency of their field gunpowder artillery with more and better cannons and gunners<sup>46</sup>. It allowed them to successfully confront the Moroccan forces throughout approximately one century and gave them a significant advantage over other countries, when they arrived at the Indian Ocean.

### Conclusion

It is important to stress that this way of engaging war contributed for the constancy, within the noble men and the soldiers at large, throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and even the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, of a chivalrous mentality whose conception of the art of war maintained its medieval values. This fact conditioned all the subsequent evolution of the Portuguese military organization, either in strongholds in Southern Morocco or in India, since it postponed the adoption of the new concepts of discipline and tactical organisation, resulting from the technical revolution taking place in Europe at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, within their army. In fact, during almost one century, the Portuguese soldiers, particularly the noblemen and their subordinates, chose an individual action instead of a collective one, as well as sudden attacks instead of planned operations, hardly complying the disciplined military structure of orderly troops. They were therefore against the continuous attempts to restructure the existing military organisation undertaken by King Manuel I, in early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore, it is understandable that throughout this period, the Portuguese military forces in Morocco learned not only how to guard their encampment but also how to fight defensively and offensively according to the local techniques and practices that were very similar to the ones formerly used during the *Reconquista*. Thus, the Portuguese had little or nothing invented on this subject, and preferred to adapt these techniques to a different context particularly unfavourable to them. And so, they improved them. Morocco was therefore a true war school where several generations of Portuguese noblemen and army men exhaustively practiced military techniques that, later on, would be successfully exported to the new war sceneries in Asia.

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44 Geoffrey Parker states that the use of a double siege fortification by the European armies gave them a great superiority over the Muslims, as it allowed them a more efficient defense against a possible attack from the outside, as well as against any sudden attack from the besieged forces, in order to spike the artillery guns of the besieger army. See G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: military innovation and the rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 29.

45. Disassembled and mobile wooden stockades, used as campaign forts; later on, the Portuguese would use them in the Indian Ocean.

46. From the analysis of several chroniclers' texts, we perceive that these military actions taken place in Northern Africa throughout the 15th century contributed to a better knowledge of the secrets of field gunpowder artillery by the Portuguese.

Finally, it is also important to point out that, in Morocco, throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the art of war practiced there by the Portuguese was limited to the accomplishment of naval military operations (naval battles and amphibious landings), siege operations (as besieging elements or as defenders of the strongholds) and guerrilla war (*guerra guerreada*), without notice of any pitched battle throughout the century. The first pitched battle involving Portuguese and Moroccan armies in North Africa would not take place until 1514, in southern Morocco, in Bū al-'awān near Azzemour, and the Portuguese gunpowder artillery was decisive in defeating the Moroccan armies<sup>47</sup>. The second military action of this type took place in Ksar el-Kebir in 1578, where the Portuguese king Sebastião perished, an episode that marks the end of the Portuguese expansionist intents to Morocco.

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47. See Costa, *A Batalha dos Alcaides. 1514. No Apogeu da presença portuguesa em Marrocos*.

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