Draughtsman Engineers Serving the Spanish Monarchy in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries

Alicia Cámara Muñoz (ed.)
City, War and Drawing in the Sixteenth Century: from Tripoli to the Moroccan Atlantic

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at highlighting the importance of drawing as a reflection of a historical period (the sixteenth century) where the Spanish Monarchy exercised a strategic control on North African coasts and cities. The effort deployed in cities such as Melilla, Oran, Merz el-Kebir, Algiers, Bizerte, Bejaia, Bona or Tripoli was enormous, and the warlike actions were represented in different ways to facilitate the wide circulation of such events. This text tries to analyze a significant part of the set of images created with particular emphasis on military architecture and the urban areas. From this, we learnt that those plans, engravings, tapestries and paintings were used as graphic documents that complemented and enriched the literary text, in the drafting of history, while offering recreations that range from the reliable, the falsified and the imaginary.

KEYWORDS

Spanish monarchy, north Africa, sixteenth century, drawing, fortifications, siege, city, bulwark.
INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Monarchy always considered the North African territory as a priority area of interest. From the late fifteenth century and during the sixteenth century, Spanish monarchs considered North African coasts, and specially, cities, as a key location for the defence of Spain and Europe. This strategic role was going to be supported in the first stage by the key figures of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Kings, although it would be Charles I and his son, Philip II, who exercised a tighter control of the Mediterranean to face the Ottoman power and the corsairs.

The Spanish armies and navies hoped to extend their domain over cities and coastal areas, located between Tripoli, on the eastern Mediterranean, and Cape Ghir, on the Moroccan Atlantic. One of the consequences of this dominion was an interesting corpus of images, formulated as engravings, drawings, frescos, or even tapestries. Studying these representations can help provide a global idea of this enterprise; an approach from the reflection of them on the fortifications and war hostilities, offers an interesting iconographic aspect which usually goes unnoticed.

THE CATHOLIC KINGS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE NORTH AFRICAN CYCLE

Medieval Portuguese Representations about the Conquests on the Moroccan Coast

There is awareness, as mentioned, that the Catholic Kings promoted the first Spanish actions on North African soil. By then, Portugal had already started its own settling on the continent, through events that were magnificently depicted in the series of Flemish tapestries of Pastrana Collegiate Church. These tapestries portray the Portuguese activities in Ksar es-Seghir in 1458, Tangier in 1471 and Asilah in 1471.

In all of them, the medieval and gothic character of the representations is evident, with a strong connection to the Flemish aesthetic. Thoroughness is one of their characteristics, as it depicts contemporary weapons, artillery and fighting methods in great detail. There is, however, a peculiar representation of space and cities, which indicates a lack of perspective, giving a strong artificial character.

In the tapestry The landing at Asilah, the perception of places is absolutely simulated, which contrasts with the deal of information and authenticity depicted in the warfare implements of the period. However, the representation of the city becomes arbitrary to the point that it can be observed that the walls are similar to the medieval walls of any other European city. They show machicolations, battlements, gothic windows, and even church bell towers forcibly transformed into minarets.

The tapestry The siege of Asilah presents a similar composition, highlighting the idea of a besieged city, totally misrepresented, although notable references to assault systems can be found. In the last tapestry in the series, The attack on Asilah, the narrative rhythm is concluded, where the dynamism of the army takes over the main lines of the composition.
On the other hand, the tapestry *The conquest of Tangier* repeats the same ideas of the medieval city, Christian in form, and at the same time we find certain realism in the disposition of the port, with elements recalling the actual one. Regarding the series of tapestries dedicated to the conquest of Ksar es-Seghir, they do not show depictions of relevant urban structures.

**The Nearest North African Coast: Melilla, Cazaza and Vélez de la Gomera**

As mentioned before, the late fifteenth century represents the moment where a new period begins, where the determination of the Catholic Kings is expressed both in the first attempt to occupy the Island of Djerba and the city of Melilla, in 1497.

In this period, representation models were strongly influenced by Flemish aesthetics, as observed in the Pastrana tapestries, and also in the relief sculptures in the lower choir of Toledo Cathedral, depicting Granadan city sieges.

The first attempt to conquer Djerba ended in a defeat (which would not be the last), although in the same year, 1497, Melilla was occupied. However, the procedure used for this operation, based primarily in the organization of the enterprise in a bloodless manner, for the city was abandoned, is probably the reason why we have no drawings or representations of the events, far from conquests of a heroic nature. It would not be
until 1540 when Pedro Barrantes Maldonado included a drawing in the framework of an illuminated manuscript destined to glorify the deeds of the Duke of Medina Sidonia. The truth is that it was a sketch of great simplicity, although it gives an idea of a credible Islamic city, including the area where the fleet landed. The image is quite correct, with indication of the walls and the gates to the city. In this work we can already find already the elements that will later appear in these kinds of representations: the fleet (with several different kinds of ships), the army (infantry and cavalry) and the city to be occupied.

There is no drawing of the conquest of Cazaza (Gassasa) in 1505 (a castle near Melilla, a possession of the ducal house of Medina Sidonia until 1532), nor of the conquest of Merz el-Kebir the following year (1506-1708 and 1732-1792) or that of the Peñon de Vélez de la Gomera (Badis) by Pedro Navarro in 1508 (possession of Spain until 1522 and later reconquered in 1564 until today).

The Expansion towards the East: Oran, Bejaia, Peñón de Algiers and Tripoli

It was not until the 27th May 1509 that Cardinal Cisneros would carry out the conquest of Oran (Wahran), together with Merz el-Kebir, that a notable representation of such a deed is found. Juan de Borgoña is the creator of this painting, where the figure of Cardinal Cisneros, as the promoter and conductor of the deed, and where medieval models were still quite present. The narrative aspect is to be highlighted; the meticulousness of the details cannot lead us to ignore the inaccuracy of the representation of the city. Oran is presented as a city full of Christian medieval architecture, even when, in some cases, a tower might simulate a minaret of rough manufacture. However, the general representation has a
greater accuracy, for it presents several fortifications, especially those on the right side, which could match the castle of Rosalcazar. Without underestimating the sloping structure, crowned by a higher ground where the kasbah was located, or the existence of the two buildings with their respective gates, higher and lower, Juan de Borgoña couldn’t rely on any first-hand graphic material to represent the city of Oran, although he did have a recollection of the deeds and some descriptions of the city.

1510 was an important year for the African expansionist policy. As a matter of fact, on January 6th, engineer and soldier Pedro Navarro retakes the city of Bejaia\(^7\) (Bejaïa or Biyaya), which remained under Spanish control until 1555. We have knowledge of an engraving of the city which, even mentioning the conquest by King Ferdinand, gives evidence of the state of the city in 1551, when the Emperor’s engineers had already fortified
the place, and the Spanish defences are visible, which indicates a precise knowledge of the compound.

Bejaia, in this drawing, consisted of a medina, surrounded by Islamic walls, presided by a Kasbah with ramps, and embracing between them the gate to the sea, which led to the port. Just outside this compound, there was a bigger one, with another gate to the sea, tracks, and the Spanish fortress, located on the highest place inside it. The gates, roads, and communications between the different compounds are perfectly depicted. Regarding the siege of the city, it can be considered anachronistic, because many of the buildings in the drawing did not exist then. The warfare apparatus is focused particularly on the fleet, from which the siege begins, and on the ground troops surrounding the city.

The same year, on April 24th, the Peñon of Algiers (Al-Yaza’ir) was conquered, and remained under Spanish control until 1529. The Peñon is a small headland which became an outlook to control the commercial and military traffic of the city. On the Peñon, the Spanish built a small garrison, with a reduced number of troops. On the other hand, on July 25th 1510, Tripoli (ar bulus al-Garb) was occupied, and remained in Christian hands until 1551.

And finally, as a dramatic conclusion of 1510, on August 29th a new disaster occurred in the Djerba, dramatized in a poem by Garcilaso de la Vega:

Oh, crying country, and how you
turn your eyes to Djerba, sighing!

[...]
The sand was burning, the sun was scorching
people fell, half dead [...]
The beginning of the Emperor’s reign finds him occupied with several affairs other than the North African coasts, and will not find new remarkable military deeds until the beginning of the thirties in that century. It is true that an unfortunate event took place in the Kerkennah Islands, and that in 1517 and 1519 both Francisco de la Vega and Hugo of Moncada were defeated in Algiers.

In 1529, an event represented a warning sign about the power of the Ottoman Empire and their expansive policy towards Europe and the Mediterranean. An important event, such as the siege of Vienna by the Turks, was accompanied, within the scope we are dealing with, by the loss of Peñon of Algiers, and the city freed itself from the control or tutelage exerted by Spain.

**The Cities of Bizerte and Mahdia**

In 1531 Honaine (Honaine) is occupied, until 1534, and in 1535 Bona (Annaba) will fall to Spain until 1541, as well as Bizerte (Banzart).

There is an engraving of Bizerte representing the combined attack on the city of Andrea Doria’s navy and a squadron of 1,000 foot soldiers. The drawing depicts the landing in front of Chavalabiat Tower and the eastern part of the city, on November 4th. The representation is succinct in details, except for the fortress, which crowns the city, and shows bastioned towers and a poorly defined wall. In the same year, 1535, Mahdia (also called Africa) is occupied, and in this case there is a cartographic image drawn years later by Franz Hogenberg in *Civitatis Orbis Terrarum*.

The engraving shows many details, although it presents some geographical misrepresentations. The peninsula on which the city lies is longer and it shows several incorrect details. However, the fortified perimeter is well represented, as well as the crowded rows of houses in the city, within the walls. The attack of the navy occurs both from the west and the east, and, above all, the different elements and buildings for the siege are highlighted: parallel trenches, ditches and approach covers which indicates the siege was rigorous, including Christian campaign artillery shooting from protecting cover.
The conquest of La Goulette (Halq al Wadi) and Tunis (Tunis) in 1535 was, without doubt, one of the most reproduced and celebrated military events of the Emperor, to the extent that there are abundant representations intended to glorify the monarch, which is the reason for their obvious symbolic nature.

One of the most significant representations is the one developed in the series of twelve tapestries on the conquest of Tunis, manufactured in Brussels between 1548 and 1554. The manufacturer is Willem de Pannemaker on a cartoon drawn by Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen and Pieter Coecke van Aelst. Vermeyen witnesses the development of the military events and took sketches of everything he observed on the field. On the other hand, the tapestries have explanatory texts attributed to Alonso de Santa Cruz, the captions of which accompany the images, emphasising the propaganda role of the set.
Currently, ten of the twelve original tapestries (VIII and XI are missing) and ten of the twelve cartoons are extant (I and IX are missing), besides trustworthy copies that were made during the eighteenth century, so the set can be perfectly described. On the other hand, this collection of tapestries has been the object of remarkable studies and analyses from varied perspectives and approaches. We will focus our research on those aspects expressly detailing the elements of the city and the fortification.

The descriptive and narrative interest of the set explains why tapestry I is actually a map presented as an inverted image, with the south at the top and the north at the bottom, the western Mediterranean, as a sea crowded with Spanish ship, from the Atlantic to Italy, with the city of Tunis as a great regional capital.

On the other hand, while in nº II the gathering of troops in Barcelona, led by the Emperor himself, can be seen, nº III represents his landing at La Goulette, on June 16th, 1535, together with his court and 12.000 foot soldiers. Curiously, this landing took place on the ruins of the old city of Carthage, which was occupied by humble shacks, and which will appear in several of the tapestries as a silent witness of the deeds. In the background, on the left, Tunis can be seen with its walled enclosure, as well as some neighbourhoods outside the walls. In the mid-distance, the Ottoman fortress of La Goulette can be seen, as a square tower, built by Sinan the Jew and heavily armed. Outside the fortress we can see other defences, such as the Tower of the Salt and the Tower of the Water, both well equipped.

Tapestry IV revolves around the battle before the conquest of La Goulette. In the foreground, we can see some secondary defences, such as the Tower of the Water, the lagoon between La Goulette and Tunis, Carles V’s infantry, Barbarossa’s cavalry, and the
FIG. 8  Scene of a ditch with parapet in tapestry VI. The enemy leaving La Goulette.

FIG. 9  Scene from Tapestry VII. WILLEM DE PANNEMAKER on a cartoon by JAN CORNELISZ VERMEYEN (Brussels, 1546-1554). Royal Palace, Madrid.
pike square, formed by new Spanish nationals. In the background, we can see the arrangement of the old Spanish Tercios, arrived from Italy.

Tapestry V represents the Turks leaving La Goulette. There is an essential element in the attacks of fortresses: the use of trenches and other assault weapons. The attacking army started the approaching manoeuvres for which they had to carry firewood and branches from the ships to the works. The omnipresent ruins of Carthage are also represented.

The conquest of La Goulette is represented in tapestry VII: the fortress defended by more than 400 pieces of artillery and 8,000 Turks is defeated from the land, by eleven cannons, and from the sea, by nine galleys. Finally, the fortress is taken because part of a wall fell down. In this tapestry we can also see how the system formed by Tunis and its natural port worked. Between the city and the open sea there is a shallow lagoon, almost entirely closed by a sand strip, with a channel to the open sea. La Goulette fortress was located at this spot, as a control point for the only exit. Communications started in Tunis and there was a covered track, formed by vaults and defensive walls, which arrived to the shore of the lagoon, and protected those circulating or trading by a cover from any enemy. From the lagoon, the transport was by boat to the sand strip, where a new defence system controlled the traffic from the canal to the open sea. As can be appreciated, La Goulette really controlled the main communication system of the capital, and therefore its economy and defence.

The Emperor’s march on Tunis is represented on tapestry VIII, whereas nº IX presents the well-known Battle of the Wells of Tunis. In tapestry X we find the Plundering of Tunis and the liberation of 20,000 Christian slaves, who were held prisoner in the Alcazaba, while in XI we can see the return of the army to the inlet after the city had been occupied. This latest is quite interesting because it shows the state of all the siege fortifications built around La Goulette, as well as the defences set up by the Turks. Ditches, fences, covered tracks, artillery settlements and other mechanisms, among which we have to highlight the artefacts on the canal.
Finally, in Tapestry XII, the Emperor returns to La Goulette, orders its fortifications, and entrusts the enclave to Bernardino de Mendoza, with a guard of 1,000 Spanish, while placing in Tunis a vassal king. In this tapestry, we can see Vermeyen sketching, representing the city, its walls and gates with great detail.

Undoubtedly, Vermeyen’s works manage to gather one of the most interesting sets on one of the North African conquests, where the exaltation of the Spanish Monarchy and the Emperor appear well balanced with a detailed visual account of the deeds and a description of all the details.

Another remarkable series on the subject of the Conquest of Tunis are the paintings of the tower of the Queen’s Hairdresser, in the Alhambra of Granada. In this case, eight frescoes are preserved with the following topics: 1º Gathering of the imperial fleet in Cagliari, 2º Navigation of the fleet, 3º The Navy attacks La Goulette, 4º The Fleet approaches La Goulette, 5º Conquest of Tunis, 6º Boarding of the fleet, 7º The fleet arrives in Sicily and Triumphant entrance in Trapani. The narrative aspect of the set is easily noticed. For our analyses, frescoes nº 4 and 5 are the most interesting. The first one focuses on the fleet; geography is used as a scenographic perspective, and the urban and fortification details are not accurate. Nº 5, the fleet is in front of La Goulette, presenting the order of the fleet, the fortress and the lagoon, with Tunis in the background. A wise use of colours can be perceived in order to achieve a contrast between different elements: blue sea, red land, and orange Tunis. On the other hand, it offers scarce description, although we can see some ditches and other fortification works.

The paintings were commissioned by Charles V, following his secretary’s advice and the set is a work by Alejandro Mayner and Giulio d’Aquili, although it seems the latter was mainly dedicated to the grotesque in the scenes. Recently restored, the models for the paintings were obtained from Vermeyen’s works, although we can see evident differences that show their own distinctive personality. This is perceived particularly in the composition of the set, and in the interest of the geographical setting, as well as in the way chosen to reflect individual elements such as the landscape background, the city of Tunis, the lagoon, La Goulette and the fleet, which creates a singular perspective effect.

Despite their transcendence, these were not, however, the single representations of the Conquest of La Goulette and Tunis. Many of them are inspired in the drawings for the tapestries. In an image of the Conquest of La Goulette made by Hogenberg, this similitude is evident. All the elements of the attack appear together in this engraving, with the eastern and western fronts, including attacks from ship to ship, parallel trenches, ditches, artillery, saps, etc. Hogenberg makes other engravings on the subject; some of them follow Vermeyen’s work, while others present a freer composition. Such is the example of the landscape of Tunis, where a reference to the year 1535 is made, although in a forced manner, for the fights are secondary and theatrical, and the profile of the city is highlighted, above the rest of the composition.

There are other representations which deform, to a greater or lesser extent, the descriptive discourse of the images. In some cases they help to build a context for the geographical framework of the events, at the expense of the fortification and assault elements, which appear oversimplified. In other cases, the figure of the Emperor is emphasized, within an imaginary urban framework, where the violence of the combat is...
stressed, as in the calcographic engraving VII, drawn by Maarten van Heemskerck and engraved by Dirck Coornhert. Tunis appears in one of the 12 prints of this series, created in 1555 for the glory of the Emperor.

In this spirit Taddeo y Federico Zuccaro’s fresco, Paul III receives Charles V after the Battle of Tunis, dated 1562-1563, can be included. This painting is located in Palazzo Farnese de Caprarola, Italy, showing the Emperor, on his knees, telling the Pope about the great deed in Tunis. The work, relinquishing the descriptive restraints of the combats, focuses on the consequences of the deed, and on the power balance between the Empire and the Papacy.

The Representation of Defeat: Algiers Expedition

Between 1539 and 1541 a new season of attacks and conquests takes place on the North African shores. The Spanish navy and army occupy the cities of Mahometta (la Mahometta), Sousa (Susa), Monastir (al-Munastir) and Kerkennah islands (Kerkennah).

In 1541, Charles I carries out a large scale action against a relevant corsair capital: Algiers. Spain had already had control of the small fortress on the Peñon, at the port, which was lost in 1529. The loss of control over the corsair city and the increasing Ottoman threat, set out what was called Algiers expedition, which was to end with a sour defeat. The city was well fortified, but had scarce troops: about 800 Turks and 5,000
Muslims and Spanish moriscos. The siege and attack on the city was planned, including the support of a galley fleet from the sea. However, the lack of heavy weaponry (siege artillery, tools for climbing the walls, etc) caused the attack to be delayed, and the bad weather conditions added to destroying the Emperor’s ambitions.

Although the event didn’t have a positive end, there are several representations of the attack, such as the one carried out by Antonio Salamanca and the engraving of the besieged city Algeri.

This last engraving depicts the Spanish attempt to conquer Algiers, although it more explicitly shows the impregnable character of the city. The port is depicted, with the sea front covered by walls – which curiously present mannerist details in the ashlar stones –, and the artillery shooting; on the other hand, in the countryside, the Spanish army is portrayed, with their cannons and camp. There are noticeable errors in the representation of the fortresses on the sea front, which appear quite deformed, thus the function of representing reality gives way to the visual message of an impregnable city.

The last years of Charles I’s reign would see new operations, conquests and events. Such are the ones at Monastir in 1550, Mahdí between 1550 and 1553 and, particularly, Tripoli, which is conquered by the Ottomans, proving that the Turk threat was more active than ever, and that all the efforts made to fortify the city had been in vain.
Philip II will inherit most of the Mediterranean worries of his father, and his kingdom will be strongly conditioned by different events on the North African coast. The first of these events took place at Cape Ghir\(^2\) (cap Ghir, 40 kilometres north of the Moroccan city of Agadir), where in 1556, the fleet led by Álvaro de Bazán prevented the supply of weapons to the sultan of Fes from two English ship. On this matter there is a fresco in the palace El Viso del Marqués\(^4\), quite damaged, which offers details of the fleet and disembarkment on the Moroccan coast, even though the urban or defence references are vague.

We will have to wait until 1560 to state a curious affair, the representation of a siege that actually never took place: that against Tripoli\(^5\). The engraving Città di Barbaria shows an attack with 60 galleys and as many other ship. The image represents the siege of the city by Christian ships and represents its status with a detailed description of the fortifications built at the request of Spain during the first half of the century. It even includes the measurements of the walls, most of them of the Islamic type, with several Modern adaptations, such as an armed bulwark defending the port, and a quadrangular fort with pentagons, castello fato da cristiani. In addition, the walls have pentagonal frontal bulwarks acting as berms. The urban design of the city appears careful and detailed, showing some landmarks.

**PHILIP II: THE NEW MEDITERRANEAN CESAR**

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From Defeat to Glory: the Battle of Djerba and Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera

In the same year of 1560 a new disaster occurs in Djerba, which leaves a macabre monument which engrosses a repertoire of Romantic images; that is, a tower allegedly formed by 5,000 skulls of Spanish soldiers dead in the battle, which apparently still was standing in 1848. In P. Forlani’s Atlas we find an interesting engraving of the event, Disigno dell’Isola de Gerbi, where all the fortresses of the island are located, with a special focus on the bastioned castle built by the Spanish.

One of the main campaigns of Philip II in the Mediterranean was the occupation of the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera in 1564, a carefully planned and successfully executed operation. From that moment, the image of the Peñón was perpetuated as a graphic icon, remarkable because of the preservation of all its defensive structures until today. The monarch relied, for the occasion, on an exceptional painter, Antoon van den Wijngaerde, who made two exceptional drawings of the event.

The first of them is a perspective taken from land, from one of the heights surrounding the peñón. This promontory appears in the centre of the image, as the objective of the composition, while the siege from land and sea can be perfectly appreciated, with the Spanish fleet as the protagonist. The fortifications described in this picture are part of those initially built by Pedro Navarro, to be added to those built by the Turks during 42 years. On the top of the peñón there are a tower and walled compounds, distributed on several terraces. There are also several platforms for cannons, an enclosure with turrets and walls adapted to the terrain, which made use of the extreme irregularity of the rock.
The second image shows in the foreground the fleet used for the operation, with the geography in the background, extremely complex and abrupt, framing the Peñon. It is curious to note that each of the ships appears labelled with its name. The Peñon, seen from the sea, is perceived as impregnable, and merges with the cliff.
The models created by Wijngaerde will be well known and reproduced in later engravings and drawings, especially the first one. Prime examples are found in the one by Giulio Vallino\textsuperscript{30}, \textit{Siege and conquest of the peñon de Vélez} (1564), in several Flemish engravings, and that by Frans Hogenberg\textsuperscript{31} popularizing the profile of the Peñon as the prototype of the isolated and unassailable fortress. There is no doubt that this latter served as a model for many other later images, even those which relinquished of the warfare subject\textsuperscript{32}.

This iconographic and emblematic tradition related to the Peñon\textsuperscript{33} culminates in a draft drawing in ink and gouache which, undoubtedly, was part of a plan for a more elaborate painting, destined to illustrate the main battles of Philip II\textsuperscript{34}. However, the drawing, beyond its relevant significance, does not provide us with new elements regarding the Peñon definition of its fortifications.

Later, in 1565, large and small scale military events converge in the same Mediterranean framework, sometimes quite separated, but always as part of the same strategy. In this period, a coincident event is the \textit{siege of Malta}, where the Turks are stopped, with relevant actions, such as the operation on \textit{Tetouan’s estuary}\textsuperscript{35} (Martil) to prevent the corsairs from using it. This event appears in an interesting fresco in the palace El Viso del Marqués, depicting the naval action, focused on blocking the waterway by sinking several barges. The operation was directed by the master builder of fortifications and expert in hydraulic engineering, Esteban de Guillisástegui\textsuperscript{36}. Through the painting we can see the fleet and the estuary defended by several coastal turrets, and, in the background, a splendid view of Tetouan, which has been thoroughly studied by José Luis Gómez Barceló\textsuperscript{37}.
The Decade of the Seventies: Great Victories and Huge Defeats

The decade of the seventies in the Fifteen hundreds started with a key naval battle in the war history of the Mediterranean: Lepanto. In all, the period will last for another ten years, due to other actions which were the prelude to a change of rhythm in this geographical area, rather than the end of a conflict; therefore, these events will be considered as the culmination of Philip II’s reign and the sixteenth century.

One of the most outstanding fortresses of the Mediterranean, La Goulette, will become the base for an operation, in 1570, against neighbouring city of Tunis, always conflictive due to the presence of the Turks. An engraving displays the event carried out by Alfonso Pimentel, General Captain of La Goulette, where its fortifications appear in detail showing bulwarks and moats to defend the canal that leads to the inner lake. Tunisia is a big walled city, with settlements beyond the walls, thus proving its demographic growth.

On the other hand, Lepanto (1571) has become one of the most represented naval battles in the history of painting, although the models and forms of the images vary enormously from one author to another, depending on the intended purpose. Beyond those where symbolic, religious or power representations prevail, there are others, more descriptive, where the disposition of the fleets and the battle can be appreciated, as well as others that depict the battle within its geographical context, more or less recognizably. It is true that this is a naval battle, although it is set in a specific space, due to the presence

of coastal fortresses, as can be observed in some of the many engravings, drawings and paintings made of the event. Some examples of this latter kind show the towers at the Dardanelles, Patras or Lepanto, more as passive witnesses of the event than any other thing, the fresco in the cartographic gallery of the Vatican being the best example of this.

With the triumph at Lepanto, other victories would come, such as the re-occupation of Bizerte and Tunis in 1573. Don Juan de Austria, who arrived at La Goulette commandeering an impressive fleet, ordered Don Álvaro de Bazán to conquer Tunis, which was in the hands of a Turkish garrison. The victory was displayed in another of the frescoes at the palace El Viso del Marqués, where an extraordinary perspective of La Goulette can be seen, with the bulwarks and moats, as well as the existing defensive towers. There is also a symbolic representation of the handover of the keys by Álvaro de Bazán to the expedition leader. This Spanish success will mean the extension of the walls of La Goulette as well as the building of a new fort next to Tunis, as a citadel.

However, these actions were short-lived, as the following year, in August 1574, a definitive attack by the Turks against La Goulette had as a consequence the disappearance of the Spanish presence in this part of the Mediterranean. An engraving in Civitatis Orbis Terrarum shows the event together with the state of its fortifications: the quadrangular fort with bulwarks, surrounded by a moat, and also belted by a circuit of six
bastions defending the isthmus and the channel leading to the lagoon. From this channel there was a waterway which connected the new fort, still in construction, Nova Arx, as a citadel with six bastions and a moat. The engraving shows the Turkish army attacking Spanish fortresses during their biggest extension and development.41

Lastly, we will mention two fresco works in the palace El Viso del Marqués. Both were executed very closely in time and they have Don Álvaro de Bazán commandeering his fleet as the main character. The first, dated 24th June 1576, is called The event at Kerkannah Islands, and shows the general when he is about to take the island, surrounded by his troops. The most important element in the painting is the battle, although some urban elements can be identified.

The last representation in this study, which closes this cycle, is The aid to Ceuta and Tangier, which took place in 1578, where these cities were aided by a galley squadron after the disaster at Al-Ksar al-Kebir. During this battle, the Portuguese King Dom Sebastian died, and both fortresses were left undermanned. In the foreground, the painting shows Don Álvaro de Bazán’s galley squadron, and above all, the background, showing the area of the Strait, between Ceuta and Tangier, with several intermediate fortifications, thus offering an overall view of both cities in a highly strategic area. This image is a prelude of the integration, in 1580, of the cities of Ceuta, Tangier and El Jadida (El-Yadida) in the Spanish crown, due to the union between the kingdoms of Portugal and Spain.

CONCLUSIONS

A century of events has left a legacy of a century of images. Images, in the form of drawings, engravings and paintings, which reflect a history in danger of becoming as fragmented as the history of the Mediterranean. However, they are part of a policy continued by the Spanish monarchs during the century, so it is worth reconstructing it from an analytical perspective.

These representations, besides the events, depict the reality of the cities, their walls, ports and the means used in battle. They are, therefore, an invaluable document to understanding the period, and this is the reason for attempting a visual reconstruction of its history.

The images become a priceless document in order to know the state of frontier cities, permanently at war, where solid fortifications were build with a titanic effort of the Spanish monarchy in order to consolidate their control over the Mediterranean.


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Draughtsman Engineers
Serving the Spanish Monarchy
in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth
Centuries

Alicia Cámara Muñoz (ed.)
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface ...............................................................................................................................11
  ALICIA CÁMARA

## I ENGINEERS VS ARCHITECTS, DESIGN DRAWING

1 Drawing Instruments, Engineering Methods and Representation Systems in Sixteenth- through Eighteenth Centuries Fortification Design..................................................17
  ALFONSO MUÑOZ COSME

2 From Stonecutting to Descriptive Geometry. Orthographic Projection and Military Engineering from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment.................................45
  JOSÉ CALVO LÓPEZ

3 Eighteenth Century Engineers’ and Architects’ Drawings for the «Royal Sites»: Survey Record and Design ..........................................................................................69
  JAVIER ORTEGA VIDAL

4 Military Map-Making Urgency in Early Eighteenth Century Spain. Ordinance of Engineers and the Academy of Mathematics .........................................................91
  JUAN MIGUEL MUÑOZ CORBALÁN

5 Methodology Applicable to the Graphic Analysis of Fortification Projects ............119
  FERNANDO COBOS

## II DESCRIBING FRONTIERS

6 Keeping Secrets and Mapping Frontiers: Government and Image in the Spanish Monarchy .........................................................................................................................143
  CARLOS JOSÉ HERNANDO SÁNCHEZ

7 Luis Pizaño and his Projects for Roses: Idea, Drawing and Decision .....................181
  PABLO DE LA FUENTE DE PABLO

8 Alliance or Defence: Military Strategy and Diplomacy in the Spanish Monarchy’s Seventeenth Century Projects for Western Liguria ..................................................197
  CONSUELO GÓMEZ LOPEZ

9 City, War and Drawing in the Sixteenth Century: from Tripoli to the Moroccan Atlantic ..........................................................................................................................221
  ANTONIO BRAVO NIETO y SERGIO RAMÍREZ GONZÁLEZ
Designing the Bastion against the Turks: Sicily and Malta ..................................................247
Maurizio Vesco

Defending a Border. Piedmont and Lombardy Cities in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century ..........................................................271
Annalisa Dameri

III DISSEMINATION: CUSTOM AND FORM

The Rationalisation and Codification of the Cartographic Practices of French Military Engineers under Louis XIV ..................................................297
Isabelle Warmoes

The Engineer, the Royal Academies, and the Drawing of Maps and Plans in France in the Early Modern Period ........................................315
Emilie D'orgeix

«Looking at the World on Two Sheets of Paper»: the Image of the Orb and Mathematics in the Education of Prince Philip III ..................................331
Margarita-ana Vázquez-Manassero

«Tengo gran macchina di cose per intagliare...» [I have a large collection of things to be engraved...]. The Drawings of Commander Tiburzio Spannocchi, Chief Engineer of the Kingdoms of Spain ..................................................351
Alicia Cámara

IV DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN THE DIMH PROJECT

Modelling, Access and Visualization in the DIMH Spanish Project ..................................383
Ana García Serrano y Ángel Castellanos

Future Answers to the Historian: the Current Development of the Semantic Web in the Area of Historical Archives ..................................405
Jesús López Díaz

Books Published by Fundación Juanelo Turriano ..........................................................414