

A Letter from Mūlāy Ismāʿīl to Sultan Aḥmed III: An Episode in Moroccan-Algerian-Ottoman Relations

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Abstract: This article presents the text, translation, and an analysis of a letter from Morocco's ruler Mūlāy Ismāʿīl to the Ottoman Sultan Aḥmed III, and adds to our limited archival documentation from the Moroccan side for that period. Although Moroccan-Ottoman relations had stabilized by the early XVIIIth century, Moroccan relations with Algeria, nominally subordinate to the Porte, remained tense, as this letter illustrates, and the document highlights the interests and objectives of all three parties involved. Specifically, this letter, which had not been edited previously, focuses on Morocco's grievances surrounding Algerian activities that hampered the Moroccan siege of Ceuta, a key element of Morocco's defense and foreign policy, with Mūlāy Ismāʿīl seeking the Porte's intervention to influence Algerian policy, while at the same time insisting on the Porte's recognition of Morocco's predominance in the region.

Keywords: Morocco, Ottomans, Algeria, Ceuta, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl.

Introduction

The document presented here is a previously unknown letter that was sent by Morocco's Sultan Mūlāy Ismāʿīl (r. 1082-1139/1672-1727) (fig. 1) to the Ottoman Sultan Aḥmed III (r. 1115-1143/1703-1730) (fig. 2), and deals principally with Algerian affairs.² It is a copy, but drawn from the original (which would itself have been a record copy of the outgoing letter), and I discovered it in a manuscript collection that includes several other specimens of correspondence from and to Mūlāy Ismāʿīl. Judging from the other documents in this grouping, the unnamed copyist (probably working toward the very end of the XVIIIth century) had access to at least a portion of the royal archives, even if those documents might no longer have been at the palace but had been dispersed among private owners. This manuscript volume is in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, where it is part of the

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2. For an insightful analysis of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl's reign, see Magali Morsy, *Mūlāy Ismāʿīl ou l'instauration de l'Etat ʿalawite*, in *Les Africains*, eds. Charles-André Julien et al, Vol. 4 (Paris: Editions J. A., 1977), 131-63. For a summary biography of Aḥmed III, see Cl. Huart, "Aḥmed III," in eds. M. Th. Houtsma et al, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (London: Luzac, 1913), Vol. 1, 186.

Oriental Manuscript Collection.³ The copy here is incomplete, as it ends abruptly (although apparently already having almost reached the end of the original letter). Unfortunately, it is thus undated, and the first challenge is to determine a date but, relying on internal evidence, as will be seen subsequently, one can bracket the letter to within a fairly narrow approximate timeframe.



Fig. 1: A contemporary European portrayal of Mūlāy Ismā'īl, Nicolas de Larmessin, “Le Grand Cherif Mouley Sémein ou Ismael” (Paris: La Veuve Bertrand, late XVIIth c.). All the illustrations here are from the author’s collection

3. Ms. Arab. c. 79, *A Collection of Maghribi Historical Documents*, 18-21. This manuscript was acquired by the French orientalist and government official Louis Mercier (1879-1945), very probably during his service in Protectorate Morocco from 1912 to 1917, and it was his widow, Mme. L. Mercier, who donated it to the Bodleian Library in 1947. Alain Messaoudi, *Les arabisants et la France coloniale. Annexes*, (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2015), 261-62; and verbal information from the Bodleian Library staff to the author. Mr. Mercier drafted a brief summary of this letter, as he did for most of the documents in this collection.



Fig. 2: A near-contemporary European portrayal of Sultan Aḥmed III, Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, Vol. 5 (Amsterdam: J. F. Bernard, 1737, reprinted London: Alexander Hogg, 1788).

Contemporary and later chronicles provide some background about relations between Morocco and Algeria during this period, as well as about the diplomatic links between Morocco and the Ottoman Porte but, overall, our data base relevant to this aspect of Maghribi history, at least from the Moroccan side, is limited. European sources, including reports from residents and visitors with good access to knowledgeable locals, provide some additional information. However, working with the actual Moroccan documentary evidence would provide a more direct and more complete representation of events than can be determined just from the second-hand accounts, even when the latter are contemporary.

To be sure, even archival material, as much as any account in a chronicle, is not necessarily a depiction of ground-truth and is not an unbiased account of events nor is correspondence necessarily a record of the sender's complete and evident intent. Nevertheless, such official documents as are to be found in archives

can provide, in particular, a valuable window into the thinking and strategy of the decisionmakers themselves, even if at times indirectly, and can offer a perspective on official policy and policymaking to which even well-informed contemporary chroniclers and observers many not have had access. Conversely, other works from the period can furnish the context and detail that can help put such official documents into perspective and can help the modern scholar understand how such documents relate to broader issues. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of such official Moroccan documents for the XVIIIth century. Morocco's archives for the XIXth century are extensive, if not complete, but there is nothing comparable – whether for foreign relations or domestic events – for previous centuries. Logically, orderly archives must have existed in Morocco, including during Mūlāy Ismā'īl's reign, as that mechanism is necessary for any effective administration in need of an institutional memory and continuity, and there are allusions to such a resource in the works of some of the chroniclers. However, in many cases, the end of a reign or even a change in key personnel frequently meant the destruction of state papers or their transfer to private hands. In particular, the turmoil that followed Mūlāy Ismā'īl's death, with multiple pretenders to the throne and their often short-lived and unstable reigns, complicated by multiple competing actors among the tribes, 'abīd slave army, cities, or religious entities, likely led to the dispersal and demise of the state archives from his long reign. Over the years, some documents from that period have surfaced and have been published, even if at times, as is the case here, based on a copy from the original that is now lost, but such documents remain relatively rare. As such, any addition to the documentary base for Mūlāy Ismā'īl's reign can help expand our knowledge of this significant period in Moroccan history including, as is the case here, with respect to Moroccan-Algerian-Ottoman relations.

Appreciating the Geopolitical Context

Although the letter studied here is addressed to the Ottoman Sultan, what it really involves is Moroccan-Algerian relations and one can understand this document only within the context of that bilateral association. Morocco's interaction with its neighbor was often marked by conflict and, from the XVIth to the early XIXth century, that relationship, in effect, also meant dealing with the Ottoman Empire, whose Sultan was at first the direct and then increasingly the nominal suzerain of the local Regency of Algiers, (fig. 3).⁴ Even though the Ottoman Sultan theoretically could appoint a governor (*pāshā*), by the XVIIIth century it was a local Janissary leader (*dey*) who held real power in Algiers, whose ruling structure was composed of foreign-born Janissaries and the *kuloğlu* community (the offspring of Janissaries and local women), supplemented by the *ra'īs* contingent of maritime commanders, local clerics, notables, and tribal levies, all within a framework of considerable regional

4. The most comprehensive and insightful study of this topic is the unpublished dissertation by the late Abderrahmane El Mouddeh, *Sharīfs and Padishahs: Moroccan-Ottoman Relations from the 16th through the 18th Centuries. Contribution to the Study of a Diplomatic Culture*, PhD. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1992.

and tribal autonomy.⁵ In fact, the last attempt to install a *pāshā* by Constantinople was in 1729, but he was to be turned back upon arrival.⁶ Nevertheless, for the Janissary community in Algeria there was still benefit to remaining as part of the Ottoman Empire since that provided legitimacy to the local government and served as a balance to hostile European powers.⁷ The ruling elite in Algeria also still continued rely on its ties to the Ottoman Empire, as the latter could control Algiers' sources for manpower and modern armaments. Therefore, it is not surprising that Morocco would seek to involve the Ottoman Sultan as a way to increase its own leverage when dealing with Algeria.

The often tense dealings with Algeria that had marked the period of the Sa'ḍī dynasty (956-1076/1549-1666) in Morocco continued under their successors, the 'Alawīs (1076/1666-present). Although there were recognized state borders, these were often disputed and could change based on the current balance of power, while the border area's tribes could have a fluid loyalty, if any, to one or the other state and control of such tribes was always a concern for both state entities. At issue were influence and security in the border areas and, in particular, Morocco was sensitive to Algerian provision of refuge and support to dynastic rivals or political competitors such as the Dilā'ī *zāwiya*, as occurred on several occasions.

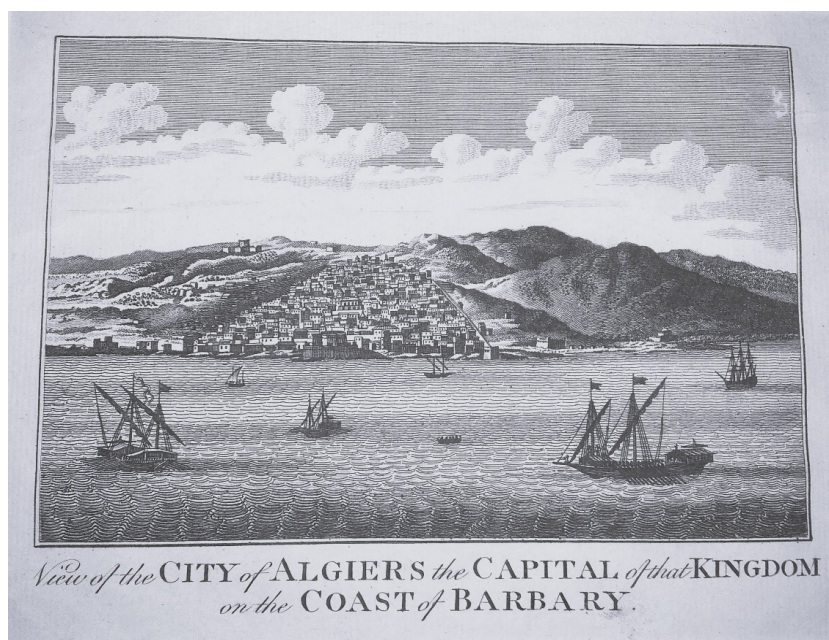


Fig. 3: Algiers in the XVIIIth century, Thomas Bankes, “View of Algiers, Capital of that Kingdom on the Coast of Barbary,” *New System of Geography* (London: C. Cooke, ca. 1788-90).

5. Robert Mantran, “L’évolution des relations politiques entre le gouvernement ottoman et les odjaks de l’Ouest du XVI^e au XIX^e siècle,” *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1964): 52-63; and Tal Shuval, “The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (August 2000): 323-44.

6. Shuval, “The Ottoman Algerian,” 334.

7. Ali Balcı, “Algeria in Declining Ottoman Hierarchy: Why Algiers Remained Loyal to the Falling Patron,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2022), 375-93.

In particular during the reign of Mūlāy Ismā‘īl, an energetic and ambitious ruler who was able to consolidate his control over Morocco and to marshal the country’s military capabilities to a remarkable degree, relations with Algeria were characterized by frequent clashes and short-lived truces against a background of little mutual trust.⁸ In 1090/1679, for example, a force led by Mūlāy Ismā‘īl in person was defeated when its Arab tribal component melted away, frightened by the noise that the Ottoman artillery made.⁹ However, in 1093/1682, a Moroccan expedition had fared better, focused as it was on the Banī ‘Āmir tribe living in Algerian territory, who were allied to the Spanish. Benefiting from the element of surprise, the Moroccan force on that occasion had been able to pillage that tribe’s flocks.¹⁰ In 1100/1688, the Algerian “Turks,” as one Moroccan chronicler called them, came to Mūlāy Ismā‘īl to conclude peace (*ṣulḥ*).¹¹ That pause, apparently, did not last long, for in 1103/1692 another Moroccan force again moved against Algeria but was checked by the defenders, and the unit of the Fes militia (*rumāt*) serving on the campaign returned home precipitously.¹² So dire was the situation on that occasion that Mūlāy Ismā‘īl had found it necessary to go in person to contain the damage. And, as the Algerians subsequently counterattacked along the vulnerable Taza-Fes Corridor, he had been forced to request a truce.¹³ Eventually, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl was also to form a de facto anti-Algerian coalition of co-belligerence with the *bey* of Tunis, and Moroccan forces were able to raid Algerian territory in 1106/1694 while Sha‘bān, the *dey* of Algiers, was preoccupied in dealing with the ruler of Tunis.¹⁴

In a subsequent campaign in 1695-96, a Moroccan expeditionary force commanded by Mūlāy Ismā‘īl’s son Aḥmad was soundly defeated by the Algerians, forcing his father to redeploy 4000 *‘abīd* from the Ceuta siege as a rescue force for

8. Indeed, the local Algerian ruler, or *dey*, Ḥājījī Sha‘bān in 1103/1692 was to write to the French Foreign Ministry that in his view Mūlāy Ismā‘īl was “treacherous and neither keeps his word nor a promise,” letter of 3 Rajab 1103/24 March 1692, *Correspondance des Deys d’Alger avec la Cour de France 1579-1833*, Vol. 1, ed. Eugène Plantet (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1889), 381.

9. Bilqāsīm b. Aḥmad al-Zayānī (1147/1249-1734-35/1833), *Al-Turjumān al-mu‘rib ‘an duwal al-Mashriq wa-l-Maghrib (Le Maroc de 1631-1812 par Ezziani)*, ed. and tr. Octave V. Houdas (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969), 17 Arabic text, 32 translation. Dominique Busnot (1647-1714), a French priest who visited Morocco for the redemption of captives in 1704, 1708, 1712, gives an account of what was, apparently, this same campaign, noting that the Moroccan army although far superior in numbers, was composed of untrained recruits, had poor discipline, and had many personnel who were armed only with sticks, leading to their being routed by the smaller, but well-armed and disciplined, Algerian force, *Récits d’aventures au Maroc au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Pierre Roger, 1928), 95-96.

10. Al-Zayānī, *Al-Turjumān*, 19 Arabic text, 36 translation.

11. Muḥammad al-Qādirī (1112/1187-1724/1773), *An Edition of the Bodleian Version of the Nashr Al-Mathānī*, ed. Norman Cigar (Rabat: Academic Institute for Scientific Research, 1978), 15.

12. al-Qādirī, *An Edition of the Bodleian Version*, 17.

13. Letter from the *dey* Ḥājījī Sha‘bān to the French Foreign Ministry, 3 Rajab 1103/24 March 1692, *Correspondance des Deys d’Alger*, Vol. 1, 381.

14. Letter from Ḥājījī Sha‘bān to King Louis XIV, 11 Muḥarrām 1106/1 September 1694, *Correspondance des Deys d’Alger*, Vol. 1, 418; and Auguste Cour, *L’établissement des dynasties des chérifs au Maroc et leur rivalité avec les turcs de la régence d’Alger, 1509-1830* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904), 205.

his beleaguered son.¹⁵ Reducing the besieging force at Ceuta, however, carried a risk, as the Spanish apparently seized the opportunity to carry out a large raid against the weakened Moroccan positions, during which they inflicted heavy casualties on the besiegers.¹⁶ As a consequence, the best Mūlāy Ismā'īl could do on that occasion had been to conclude another truce with the Algerians in 1108/1696, aided by a delegation which delivered a letter from the Ottoman Sultan in which the latter had urged concluding peace with the Algerians, but the subsequent deal yielded no advantage to Morocco.¹⁷ Significantly, Sha'ḥbān was able to deal with the Moroccan and Tunisian threats sequentially, first defeating the ruler of Tunis and a local rebel leader in Algeria before turning to the West. In effect, in 1111/1699-1700, as the *dey* had been focused on dealing with Tunis, Mūlāy Ismā'īl's son, Zaydān, had led a significant foray into the Tlemcen area, taking considerable booty but had concluded a truce and withdrawn, thereby sparking his father's anger.¹⁸ Apparently seeking to expand on his son's success, Mūlāy Ismā'īl thereupon had undertaken an expedition of his own into Algeria but Muṣṭafā, the new *dey* of Algiers, having neutralized the Tunisian threat on the eastern front, was able to defeat the invading Moroccan force soundly in 1701.¹⁹ In 1707, Mūlāy Ismā'īl, at the head of an expeditionary force, again entered Algeria, reportedly seeking to take Oran, but again had been soundly defeated, this time by the Spanish forces occupying that city.²⁰ By this time, direct Ottoman-Moroccan hostility had abated, although friction between Algeria and Morocco was to remain as a factor.²¹

Where Does This Letter Fit into Moroccan-Ottoman Diplomacy?

Determining when the undated letter studied here was sent is important for an understanding of how it fit into Morocco's broader geopolitical situation and diplomatic strategy as well as for appreciating the letter's potential implications.

There is no mention of this specific letter or of the related events in the standard modern accounts of Ottoman-Moroccan relations or in contemporary Moroccan chronicles.²² The Moroccan letter notes that 11 years (presumably lunar) remained in an existing truce generated by a treaty signed by the Ottomans with

15. According to a report by a French merchant active in Morocco, Jean-Baptiste Estelle, "Mémoire de J.-B. Estelle," 20 November 1695-2 April 1696, in *Les Sources Inédites de l'Histoire du Maroc, Deuxième série, Dynastie filalienne, Archives et Bibliothèques de France*, vol. 4, ed. Pierre de Cenival (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1931), (SIHM), 401-07.

16. *Monthly Mercury* (London), January 1696, 236.

17. Al-Qādirī, *Bodleian Version of the Nashr Al-Mathānī*, 19.

18. There are different interpretations for Mūlāy Ismā'īl's anger, with al-Zayānī claiming the reason was because Zaydān had violated the truce then in force with Algiers, whereas Cour concludes that the reason was that Zaydān had not exploited his military advantage further. Al-Zayānī, *Al-Turjumān*, 25-26 Arabic text, 48 translation; and Cour, *L'établissement des dynasties des chérifs*, 205-06.

19. Letter from Count de Pontchartrain, French Secretary of State for the Navy to Mustafa Dey, 25 May 1701, *Correspondance des Deys d'Alger*, Vol. 2, 10; and *Mercure Galant* (Paris), May 1701, 282-87.

20. Henri-Léon Fey, *Histoire d'Oran avant, pendant et après la domination espagnole* (Oran: Adolphe Perrier, 1858), 115.

21. El Moudden, *Sharīfs and Padishahs*, 210-15.

22. For example, Cour, *L'établissement des dynasties des chérifs*; and Aziz Samih İlater, *Al-Atrāk al-'uthmāniyyūn fī Afrīqiyyā al-shimāliyya*, Maḥmūd 'Alī 'Āmir, tr. (Beirut: Dār al-Naḥḍa al-'Arabiyya, 1409/1989).

the Europeans. This might be an allusion to the Treaty of Passarowitz, signed in 1130/1718 between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy League, which was envisioned for 24 lunar years.²³ But that calculation would yield 1731 and Mūlāy Ismāʿīl died in 1139/1727. However, the reference could be to a series of treaties between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the interim Pruth Treaty (1711) and the Istanbul Treaty (1712), which lasted less than a year before the resumption of hostilities, and were superseded by the definitive Treaty of Edirne/Adrianople (1125/1713) that was to remain in force for 25 years.²⁴ A calculation in this case would yield 1139/1727, which, although at the very end of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl's life, might be plausible as the date for the letter. However, there is no guarantee that those Moroccans drafting the letter were correct in their calculations.

Instead, perhaps one can suggest 1137/1725 as a more likely date. Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 1316/1899), a Moroccan court historian writing some 150 years after the fact, brings some light to this facet of Morocco's diplomatic history, as he mentions an exchange of correspondence from late in Mūlāy Ismāʿīl's reign, a series initiated by a letter from Mūlāy Ismāʿīl to the Ottoman Sultan Aḥmed III in what was apparently 1136/1723-24 or 1137/1725.²⁵ The contemporary historian and biographer of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl, Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr al-Īfrānī (1080/ca. 1156-1669/1670-c. 1742/1743), provides the complete text of the reply sent back by the Ottoman Sultan to Mūlāy Ismāʿīl, dated 30 Jumādā II 1137/16 March 1725, as does Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥājj, who also provides additional commentary.²⁶ However, neither source was able to find the original letter from Mūlāy Ismāʿīl. Based on its contents, the letter in the Bodleian manuscript presented here most probably is a missing third piece in this same correspondence series, a letter subsequent to the one from Mūlāy Ismāʿīl that Ibn al-Ḥājj mentions and is a follow-on to the reply that Sultan Aḥmed III had sent to that first letter, thus placing the present document most probably in 1137/1725.²⁷

The flurry of diplomatic activity of which the document presented here was part may have been triggered by a recent deterioration of relations between Algeria and Morocco. According to Ibn al-Ḥājj, the calm and apparently correct, if cool, relations with Algeria along Morocco's eastern frontier had been broken again, likely in 1135/1722-23 by the Algerians who, as Ibn al-Ḥājj suggests, had launched

23. Gabriel Noradounghian, *Recueil d'Actes Internationaux de l'Empire Ottoman: 1300-1789*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Cotillon F. Pichon, 1897), p. 220.

24. Tatiana Bazarova, "The Process of Establishing the Border between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the Peace Treaty of Adrianople (1713)," in *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, eds. Maria Baramova, Grigor Boykov, and Ivan Parvev (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2015), 121-32; and Noradounghian, *Recueil d'Actes Internationaux*, 207.

25. Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥājj al-Sulamī al-Mirdāsī, *Al-Durr al-muntakhab al-mustahsan fī ba'd ma'āthir amīr al-mu'minīn Mūlānā al-Ḥasan*. Royal Palace Library, Rabat, Zaydāniyya collection, Ms. 1875, vol. 8.

26. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr al-Īfrānī, *Rawḍat al-ta'rīf bi-mafākhir Mūlānā Ismā'īl b. al-Sharīf*, ed. 'Abd al-Wahhāb Bin Maṣṣūr (Rabat: Al-Maktaba al-Malakiyya, 1995), 136-40; and Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Durr al-muntakhab*, 35-43.

27. If this calculation is correct, the *dey* in power in Algiers at the time would have been 'Ali Aga (r. 1724-1732), P. Boyer, "Des Pachas Triennaux à la révolution d'Ali Khodja Dey (1571-1817)," *Revue Historique*, Vol. 244, No. 1 (July-September 1970), 113.

incursions in the Oujda area of Morocco, thinking that Mūlāy Ismāʿīl was by then senile and incapable of leading an expedition to counter any attacks.²⁸ In response to the challenge, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl had written to the Algerian leadership reminding them of the treaty in force between the two entities and informing them that he would also be writing of the matter to their suzerain, the Ottoman Sultan, sparking an exchange of letters between Morocco and the Porte. According to Ibn al-Ḥājj, this initiative had sufficed to frighten the Algerians into withdrawing, although a plausible alternate reason may well have been that the Algerian incursion had only been intended as a short-term foray.²⁹

It was then that Mūlāy Ismāʿīl had apparently also written to Sultan Aḥmed III and, as we learn from the letter presented here, the Ottoman Sultan's letter had been brought back from Constantinople by an unnamed Moroccan envoy who had been sent there apparently to deliver Mūlāy Ismāʿīl's initial message. From Aḥmed III's letter, we learn at least the main points that the Moroccan ruler's first letter had contained. According to Sultan Aḥmed's letter, the thrust of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl's letter had been to complain about the Algerian incursion and to ask the Porte to pressure the Algerians to cease and desist.

The tone of the Ottoman Sultan's reply had been very accommodating, with many fulsome compliments and references to a tradition of correspondence and of great affection between the rulers of the two states, glossing over, in particular, the assertive Ottoman policy toward Morocco during the Saʿdī era.³⁰ At the same time, as one might expect, Sultan Aḥmed III had refrained from designating Mūlāy Ismāʿīl by either the title of Caliph or of Commander of the Faithful, which the latter normally used in his correspondence and on public occasions, and had limited himself to addressing him as “King” (*malik*) and “Lord” (*mawlā*), a title reserved for a *sharīf*.

On the substantive issues, Sultan Aḥmed had proffered his excuses in that letter, claiming – perhaps disingenuously – not to have been aware of the situation in Algeria, as no one had told him because the Algerians had not been providing him with reports, and thanks Mūlāy Ismāʿīl for letting him know. And, moreover, Sultan Aḥmed resorts to the excuse that the Porte had been preoccupied with their own jihad. He regrets the Algerian attack on Morocco about which Mūlāy Ismāʿīl had complained and, seeking to distance the Porte from any responsibility, he assures his counterpart that he did not authorize, nor does he not approve of, what had happened. As an explanation, the Ottoman Sultan notes that one has to expect such bad behavior from the Algerians, whom he dismisses as a mixed lot (*akhlāṭ al-nās*) having no family lineage or honor. He assures Mūlāy Ismāʿīl that he will reprimand the Algerians and that, if the latter persist, he will authorize the Moroccan ruler to

28. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Durr al-muntakhab*, 35.

29. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Durr al-muntakhab*, 36.

30. Chantal de la Véronne, *Relations entre le Maroc et la Turquie dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle et le début du XVIIe siècle (1554-1616)* (Aix-en-Provence: Association pour l'étude des sciences humaines en Afrique du Nord, 1973).

retaliate against them directly. However, Sultan Aḥmed does not think that will be necessary, as he is confident the Algerians will stop their attacks. In fact, Sultan Aḥmed promises to appoint a new *pāshā* and *qāḍī* to Algiers every year to oversee the situation and to channel information back to the Porte. Indeed, he offers to Mūlāy Ismāʿīl the services of the Algerians to help him fight against any Christian-held city. And, Sultan Aḥmed even directs Mūlāy Ismāʿīl to inform him should the Algerians fail to do so, and “You’ll see what we do to them.”³¹ Realistically, this may have been a pro forma courtesy, as the Moroccans would have been loathe to allow the Algerians to operate on Moroccan territory. At the same time, almost as an aside, Sultan Aḥmed notes that the Porte does not provide Algiers with any subsidy, perhaps a subtle way to indicate the limited influence that the Ottoman Sultan could exert realistically.

In any event, Sultan Aḥmed had sought to redirect Moroccan military efforts to fighting against the Christian powers, as the Ottoman ruler advises Mūlāy Ismāʿīl to carry on a continuous jihad against the latter, a jihad such as he affirms the Ottomans are themselves waging diligently and aggressively, both against the Christians and against the Shiʿa Persians (*al-aʿjam*).³² In fact, according to the Ottoman Sultan, were Mūlāy Ismāʿīl to attack the Algerians as he had threatened to do in his letter, that would only serve to divert the Algerians’ energy away from their own all-important jihad, and is one more reason why Mūlāy Ismāʿīl should forgive them for their misdeeds, especially as a favor to Sultan Aḥmed.³³

Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s Follow-On Letter: Documenting Ideology and Realpolitik

The letter presented here can be understood more fully within the context of the preceding correspondence and of Morocco’s geopolitical strategy, as well as part of an interplay with Sultan Aḥmed’s response to Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s initial grievances. From the Moroccan perspective, the Ottoman sultan may have seemed unwilling or unable to do anything meaningful, at least not to Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s satisfaction, and there is a sense of passive aggression on the latter’s part, with negative sentiments being expressed indirectly rather than outright. As a diplomatic instrument, the Moroccan letter follows vectors of both ideology and Realpolitik in addressing the complicated competing objectives that the Moroccan monarch apparently was seeking to achieve, and which often are unspoken but can be inferred from the subtext of this letter. As part of this sophisticated diplomatic maneuvering, he would continue to pursue, on the one hand, the Ottoman sultan’s cooperation in pressuring the Algerians while also endeavoring to create friction between the Porte and Algiers. To that extent, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl may have wanted to avoid encouraging the Porte from becoming disinterested in this far-away provincial affair where it had

31. al-Īfrānī, *Rawḍat al-taʿrīf*, 137.

32. In effect, beginning in 1722, the Ottomans had become embroiled in neighboring Shiʿa Iran when the Safavid dynasty had come to an end and turmoil had ensued, weakening Iran, Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Vol. 1, 239.

33. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 137 and 138.

minor interests at stake. Quite the contrary, the Moroccan ruler appears intent on having his Ottoman counterpart engage the Algerian regency, of course, in support of his own interests.

Yet, at the same time, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl unsubtly makes it clear that the Ottomans should not become involved directly in the Maghrib, thereby competing for influence there with Morocco, or even from subordinating Morocco's status in the wider Islamic world. As such, one has the sense of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl sparring verbally with his counterpart, as the texture of the letter reflects a tone that is alternately both cordial and affectionate, as well as condescending or even menacing. The shared frame of reference between the Ottoman Empire and Morocco in itself made it possible to craft language that is evocative of common values that could also serve as an instrument of persuasion. Abderrahmane El Moudden termed the basis for such an exchange as "diplomatic culture," which he described as "a host of values praising Muslim mutual help and union in the path of God," while also using such shared values as a "concrete means of power to pressure the Muslim counterpart in the direction sought."³⁴

Mūlāy Ismāʿīl's letter begins by seeking to enlist the Ottoman Sultan's benevolence with effusive praise and expressions of affection, and he evinces his satisfaction, indeed joy, with more than a hint of hyperbole, that the Ottoman Sultan's message had conveyed the latter's intent to excuse himself for not reacting to the Algerians' actions. In fact, the extent of flowery language that characterizes this letter, beyond reflecting common protocol in diplomatic correspondence, was likely meant to encourage a divide between the Porte and the Algerian regency by winning over the Ottoman sultan's sympathies. In fact, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl interprets the Porte's political intent as a desire to reaffirm "brotherhood and good relations" and focuses on the positive aspects of their past dealings. He emphasizes that good relations, and even mutual love, are of "ancient date," and stresses the personal tradition of this affectionate bond dating back to Sultan Aḥmed's father, that is Meḥmet IV (r. 1648-1687). Tactfully, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl avoids mentioning the intervening rulers, that is Aḥmed III's uncle and cousin who had succeeded the latter's father, as well as his own brother Muṣṭafā II (r. 1695-1703), who had been ousted following a military mutiny and replaced by the current Sultan. In a passing allusion, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl also excuses himself to Sultan Aḥmed about a past incident in which the Moroccans had treated an Ottoman individual well at court only because they had believed his claims out of respect for the Porte, apparently a reference to an individual who had tried to pass himself off as a member of the Ottoman family and had been sent along with an earlier Moroccan embassy to Constantinople.³⁵

Establishing Parity in the Jihad and Delineating Spheres of Influence

Despite the friendly tone of the letter, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl nevertheless was intent on confirming his equality with the Ottoman Sultan in terms of protocol and prestige. He acknowledges Aḥmed as King or Monarch (*malik*) and Sultan, but not as Caliph,

34. El Moudden, *Sharīfs and Padishahs*, 204.

35. El Moudden, *Sharīfs and Padishahs*, 219; and İlder, *Al-Atrāk*, 443-44.

a title that Mūlāy Ismā‘īl claimed for himself. In particular, one can detect a subtle competition in the important field of the jihad, where each ruler could seek to establish his own personal prominence and prestige, as well as legitimacy in support of a claim to being the rightful *imām* empowered to lead such an effort, as well as to delineate one’s geographic spheres of influence.³⁶

To be sure, stressing their shared interests and beliefs, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl has recourse to the unifying ideology of service to Islam, as he praises the Ottomans’ commitment to confront the Christian powers in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, as well as their support for Mecca and Medina and the *hajj*. In fact, he praises both of these areas of endeavor as “the greatest jihad of them all” and encourages his Ottoman counterpart to pursue that as actively as possible. However, one can also interpret such praise as an indirect way of telling Sultan Aḥmed III that those undertakings, rather than any activity in the Maghrib, should be the appropriate fields of direct interest for the Ottomans, while at the same time reminding the latter that they are already fully committed in those areas on their borders in any event. Mūlāy Ismā‘īl also gives his unsolicited advice, cautioning the Ottoman Sultan not to trust the Christians, who are full of guile and not to be believed (p. 20 of the manuscript). Subtly undercutting Sultan Aḥmed’s self-aggrandizement about the permanent jihad the Porte is waging, the Moroccan ruler notes that the Ottomans had signed a treaty with the Europeans and, while not criticizing the Porte directly, suggests he is willing to believe the Ottomans did so only in order to better prepare for the jihad against those same adversaries, implying there would be no other valid reason for doing so. In fact, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl adopts a tone in the letter of a more senior statesman advising a less experienced, younger, counterpart, recommending what he thinks Ottoman policy should be. And, he even tells Sultan Aḥmed “you must listen to our counsel” and cautions him that he must “heed and understand our advice” (p. 20).

Conversely, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl seeks to establish Morocco’s primacy in conducting the jihad in the Maghrib and presents Morocco’s own efforts on behalf of the jihad as an equivalent to those of the Ottoman Sultan. In fact, the jihad was an important part of the process of consolidating legitimacy and prestige for Mūlāy Ismā‘īl, especially as the ‘Alawī dynasty had not come to power as part of a religious movement as such.³⁷ At the same time, the jihad had also provided a useful justification for the build-up of the new *‘abīd* army, as Mūlāy Ismā‘īl argued for the legality of enslaving menfolk from the dark-skinned Ḥarrāfīn community – who were ostensibly free – for the new army based on the need to fight the jihad against the neighboring Christian powers.³⁸

36. As El Moudden points out, both the ‘Alawī and the Ottoman rulers viewed their engagement in the jihad as a “symbolic issue” and a basic element of their legitimacy, *Sharīfs and Padishahs*, 175.

37. Patricia Mercer, “Palace and Jihad in the Early ‘Alawī State in Morocco,” *Journal of African History*, Vol. 18, no. 4 (1977), 531-53.

38. Letter from Mūlāy Ismā‘īl to the prominent Fasi religious figure Maḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Fāsī, 6 Jumādā I 1110/10 November 1698, Royal Palace Library, Rabat, Ms. 4490, unnumbered pages.

Over the years, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl had succeeded in retaking most of the foreign-held enclaves along the nation's coast either by assault or through pressure, a process facilitated by the fact that such holdings had by then lost their strategic importance for the powers controlling them. Thus, al-Ma'mūra/al-Mahdiyya (1092/1681) and Larache (1101/1689) were taken by force from Spain, which was also compelled to evacuate Asila (1103/1692) under pressure, as had also been the case with England's earlier evacuation of Tangier (1091/1680).

There is, perhaps, a degree of false modesty about the "small scale" as Mūlāy Ismāʿīl puts it of his jihad initiatives launched from the recently-retaken towns of al-Mahdiyya, Larache, and Tangier, as he claims those towns at present have a small population base. At the same time, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl also belittles jihadi efforts elsewhere in the region, specifically in Algeria. In his view, the jihad there is of a lesser type, for example characterizing the campaign by Algiers against the Spanish-held town of Oran as having been on "a very small scale" (p. 20). In fact, the Algerian Ottomans had retaken Oran from the Spanish in 1708 (although the latter would subsequently retake it in 1732), but Mūlāy Ismāʿīl seems to disparage that success, claiming that the city had been held by just a small number of Christians, while most of the rest of the population had been what he terms "Christianized" (*mutanaṣṣira*) and baptized Ḥannāsha, a tribe in the area, although the derogatory term probably only designates those who were allied to the Spanish, rather than having converted to Christianity.³⁹ If anything, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl gives the credit for retaking the town to the Moroccans because of the latter's constant pressing and embarrassing the Ottomans of Algiers into taking that step. And, in any case, he minimizes the importance of Oran itself, which he terms "a village" (*dashra*) (p. 20).⁴⁰

However, downplaying those other operations only serves to set the on-going Moroccan effort against Ceuta – the showcase of Morocco's jihad – in greater relief, and Mūlāy Ismāʿīl labels the siege of that town "a real jihad" (p. 20). Seized by Portugal in 1415, Ceuta had eventually devolved to Spanish control, and Mūlāy Ismāʿīl had initiated what would turn out to be a long-term siege to retake the city – a campaign that can be divided into two phases, 1106/1133-1694/1720 and 1133/1139-1721/1727 – in an undertaking which was characterized by periods of fighting of varying intensity and by lulls. For Morocco, it is the issue related to the siege of Ceuta, in fact, that may be at the heart of this letter, underlining the asymmetry of interests between Morocco and the Ottoman Porte. For the former, Ceuta was a major national defense and foreign policy interest, but for the latter it was only a peripheral interest, if that. As such, it is not surprising that Mūlāy Ismāʿīl takes the initiative here

39. In fact, the French Ambassador to Morocco reported that a Moroccan official had argued that the Algerians "are not real Muslims," François Pidou de Saint-Olon, "Mémoire de Saint-Olon," 7 September 1693, *SIHM*, p. 186. By the time of the French conquest, information about the origins and past of the Ḥannāsha, who had submitted to the French in 1842, had become rare. In 1867, they numbered 715 individuals and inhabited an area some 20 km. southwest of Médéa (al-Madiya), *Bulletin officiel du gouvernement général de l'Algérie*, 1867, Vol. 7 (Algiers: Bouyer, 1868), 1069-72.

40. In fact, in 1707, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl, at the head of an expeditionary force, had reportedly sought to take Oran himself from the Spanish, but had been badly defeated, Fey, *Histoire d'Oran*, p. 115.

in seeking to affect Ottoman policy, whereas the Ottoman sultan could take a more detached and tranquil approach.

At the same time, the Moroccan monarch finds it necessary to explain why he has been unable to take the town. As justification, he notes that Ceuta sits in “an indescribably well-fortified and impregnable site,” (p. 20) located as it is on the Strait of Gibraltar and that it is so close to the Spanish mainland that food and bread prepared on the latter can be brought over to Ceuta with hardly time to cool. Moreover, Spain had invested heavily in manpower and money and was willing to take significant casualties in the city’s defense. Therefore, the implication fostered by Mūlāy Ismā‘īl is that the Ceuta jihad is fully equivalent to the jihad waged by the Ottomans in the Balkans or against the Shi‘a Persians, and thus placing Morocco on a par with the Porte in the Islamic world.

In effect, Ceuta represented a daunting operational problem even in terms of terrain, given its location on a peninsula accessed from the mainland by a strip of land whose defenses presented a narrow front that made it difficult for Morocco to mass its forces or fires even when it had a numerical advantage, (fig. 4 and 5). Moreover, Spain was willing to make a significant effort to defend Ceuta, as the city was of continuing importance due to its site overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar which, if anything, had increased once Spain had lost the strategic position at Gibraltar on the Spanish side of the Strait to an Anglo-Dutch attack in 1704 and had been unable to retake it subsequently. As the letter points out, the town’s very location on a peninsula in near proximity to the Spanish mainland made it difficult for the Moroccans to overcome, especially given the latter’s lack of naval power, as Mūlāy Ismā‘īl was well aware.⁴¹

41. For example, in a letter to England’s King James II (r. 1685-1688), by then forced into exile in France, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl sympathized: “Were it not for the fact that we are Arabs, with no familiarity with the sea, or if we had among us anyone who had that expertise or whom we could entrust with the command of our forces, we would write to the English and send you our forces with which you could attack them [i.e. those who had replaced him on the throne] and with which you could retake your domains,” in Henry de Castries, *Moulay Ismail et Jacques II: Une Apologie de l’Islam par un Sultan du Maroc* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1903), 7 of the Arabic text. In a letter to Great Britain’s Queen Anne (r. 1702-1714) in 1125/1713, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl again noted that “As for us, we are ... landsmen who do not know the sea, and have no need of it,” in *Letters from Barbary 1576-1774*, ed. and tr. J.F.P. Hopkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39. Foreigners were also well aware of the implications of this vulnerability specifically for the Ceuta campaign, and the British media noted that the Moroccan ruler had long besieged Ceuta “without being able to make himself Master of it, because he has no Fleet, and the Spaniards throw Succors into it when they Please,” *Monthly Mercury*, January 1706, 346.

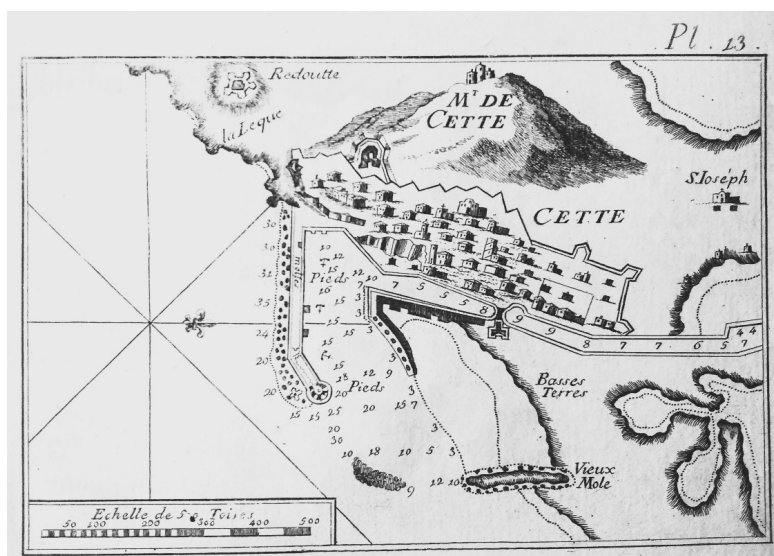


Fig. 4: Image of Ceuta's defense perimeter, Joseph Roux, *Recueil des principaux plans des ports et rades de la Mer Méditerranée* (Marseille: Service Hydrographique du Roi, 1764).

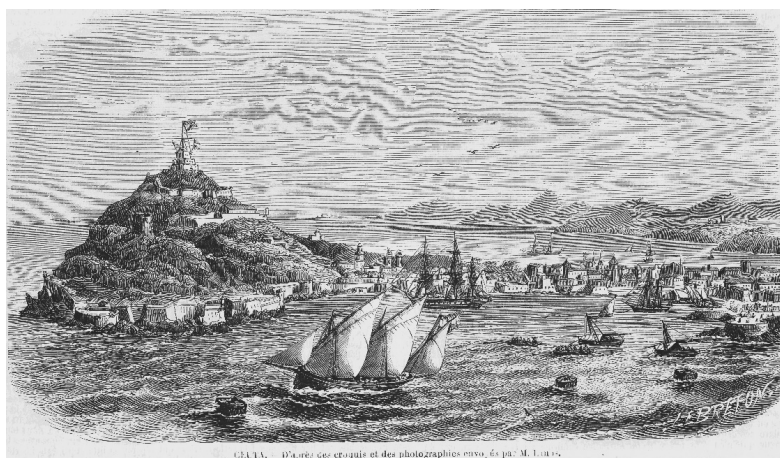


Fig. 5: Three-dimensional view of Ceuta's terrain, *L'Illustration* (Paris), 10 December 1859, 409.

Moreover, the Ceuta campaign was not popular, especially with forces from more distant parts of Morocco, since not only were casualties very high but service there also entailed long periods away from home under trying field conditions and with no apparent progress. And, it was society that bore most of the cost in

the form of financial exactions and obligatory military service.⁴² At times, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl himself would acknowledge that the operation was going badly, as he did to some ‘ulamā’ around 1128/1716.⁴³ Tellingly, in 1130/1718 Mūlāy Ismā‘īl felt it necessary to write a letter to Fes rebuking the city for not providing enough of its *rumāt* for the siege and accusing even those who did deploy of being unenthusiastic in combat.⁴⁴ Moreover, in 1720, the Spanish, once freed from their preoccupation with the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718-1720), launched a major breakout attempt from a now-reinforced Ceuta. Although the Moroccan defenders were able to hold in the end, it was only at considerable cost in personnel, (fig. 6).⁴⁵ Significantly, in 1132/1720, the ‘ulamā’ of Fes, apparently at the behest of Mūlāy Ismā‘īl, would write letters to those Fasis deployed against Ceuta, urging them to be patient and to exert a greater effort.⁴⁶ In addition, some Moroccan commanders seemed reluctant to press for a decisive outcome, either because of the financial benefits they received from the current situation or because they sought to avoid having to deploy to some more distant and more arduous operational theater if Ceuta fell.⁴⁷ Despite the difficulties, re-taking Ceuta had become an enduring major national interest and something of a personal point of honor for Mūlāy Ismā‘īl, resulting in a long-term commitment of funds and manpower even in light of frequent negative assessments by his subordinates as to the prospects for success.⁴⁸

42. *Relation de ce qui s'est passé dans les trois voyages que les religieux de l'ordre de Nostre-Dame de la Mercy ont faits dans les états du Roy de Maroc pour la Rédemption des Captifs en 1704, 1708 et 1712* (Paris: Antoine-Urbain Coustelier, 1724), 342-44. A British official who visited Morocco shortly after Mūlāy Ismā‘īl's death confirmed the unpopularity of the siege not least due to the additional financial burden, as he reported that "This was a great Grievance to the People, because all that time they were obliged to find themselves as well in Ammunition as Provisions, and their Taxes were not in the least abated for this Service," John Braithwaite, *The History of the Revolutions in the Empire of Morocco: Upon the Death of the late Emperor Muley Ishmael* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1729), 10.

43. Ibn al-Hājj, *Al-Durr al-muntakhab*, v. 7, 376.

44. Norman Cigar, "Une lettre inédite de Moulay Isma‘il aux Gens de Fès," *Hespéris-Tamuda*, Vol. 15 (1974), 105-18.

45. José A. Marquez de Prado, *Recuerdos de África: Historia de Ceuta* (Madrid: Nieto y Compañía, 1859), 192; and al-Qādirī, *Bodleian Version of the Nashr Al-Mathānī*, 28.

46. These letters are in the same manuscript collection, Ms. Arab. c. 79, 25-41.

47. *Relation de ce qui s'est passé*, 342-44; and Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Khālīd al-Nāṣirī al-Slāwī (1250/1835-1315/1897), *Kitāb al-istiṣā li-akhbār duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā*, eds. Ja‘far al-Nāṣirī and Muḥammad al-Nāṣirī, vol. 7 (Casablanca: Dār al-Kitāb, 1956), 78.

48. See "Mémoire de J.-B. Estelle," 21 April -29 September 1695, 357; "Nouvelles du siège de Ceuta," February-November 1698, in *SIHM*, Vol. 4, 720; and *Relation de ce qui s'est passé*, 343-44. Reportedly, even his military commanders had urged him to abandon the costly siege, *Monthly Mercury*, October 1698, 405.

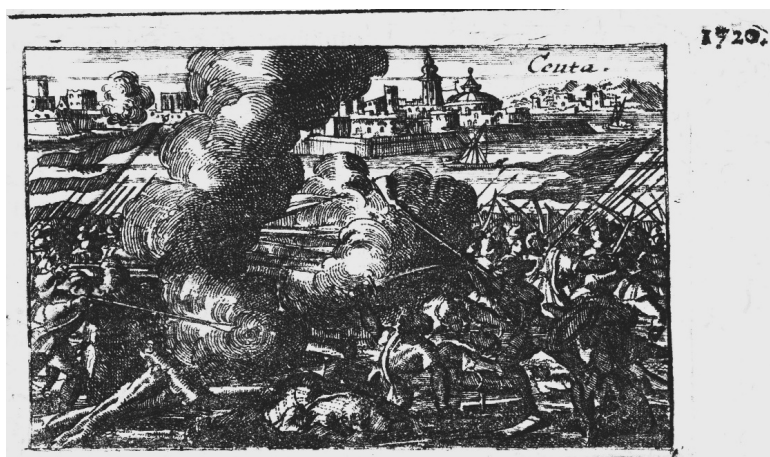


Fig. 6: Contemporary image intended to convey the intensity of fighting around Ceuta, 1720.

Given this context, the present letter underscores the importance Morocco gave to pursuing every avenue, to include diplomacy, in support of the Ceuta jihad or of finding an acceptable alternate solution. Not surprisingly, like most states' foreign policies, this effort needed to balance ideology and Realpolitik, and Mūlāy Ismā'īl was not above making deals with Christian powers to advance his interests. For example, he explored the possibility in 1700 of having Great Britain's King William III (r. 1689-1702) approach Spain for a diplomatic solution over Ceuta, albeit always anxious to avoid giving the impression of weakness, which could have had negative repercussions for his credibility at home and abroad.⁴⁹ Although nothing came of this diplomatic gambit, probably due to London's unwillingness to pressure Spain, who was then an ally, Mūlāy Ismā'īl at times appeared so frustrated that he had even held out the possibility to Great Britain that the latter could keep Ceuta in return for its help to Morocco in ousting the Spanish from that city. In effect, perhaps taking advantage of the rivalry between France and Great Britain, who by then were fighting against each other as part of the War of the Spanish Succession in which they backed competing contenders for the Spanish throne, Morocco's ruler reportedly sent an emissary to the Anglo-Dutch fleet in 1702, at the time holding the Spanish port of Cadiz, with a proposal for a combined operation to take Ceuta.⁵⁰ Significantly, the instructions from Great Britain's new monarch Queen Anne to the country's ambassador to Morocco, Izreel Jones, in 1703 directed her envoy to explore further with the Moroccans the

49. According to a British naval officer who was negotiating with one of Mūlāy Ismā'īl's senior officials and the overall field commander of the siege of Ceuta, 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh Bin Ḥaddu al-Rīfī, for a renewed treaty, the topic of an apparent earlier British offer of "mediating a peace" between Morocco and Spain arose, to which al-Rīfī "reply'd that he had as yet receiv'd no positive answer" from Mūlāy Ismā'īl, but that although the latter was anxious to not give the impression that he was tiring of the siege or that he was incapable of achieving his objective "he desired to know the Method & manner his Maj^{ty} [i.e. King William III] would propose for bringing it [i. e. the peace] about, soe as to save his Hon^r & Reputation & whether his Maj^{ty} would send some Person of Quality to negotiate the said Mediation, expressing noe aversion to the thing it selfe." Abstract of a Conference Between Lt Francis Vaughan (HMS Winchester) & Alcayde Aly Ben Abdala, 1-2 July 1700, U.K. National Archives, Ms. State Papers, Vol. 71, document 14.

50. *Mercure Galant*, December 1702, 12-14.

possibility of that and the earlier demarche.⁵¹ This plan too did not come to fruition, as the British may have felt that, having already taken Gibraltar, it might be unwise to further alienate Spanish opinion to the detriment of their candidate for the Spanish throne, quite apart from incurring an additional financial burden. In the event, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl appeared to have no option but to continue the siege, unable either to take Ceuta or to find an alternate war termination strategy.

Airing Current Moroccan Grievances

The letter, so far, had been painstakingly laying the groundwork for its main purpose, namely to air Morocco’s main grievance against the Algerians for their relationship with Spain and to seek to gain the Porte’s support on that issue. Mūlāy Ismā‘īl was especially sensitive to anything he felt would complicate the Moroccan effort against Ceuta and, unavoidably, Morocco’s relations with Algeria would have an impact on the prospects for success of the siege, as the periodic Moroccan confrontations with Algeria acted as an unwanted military distraction, thereby reducing Moroccan capabilities against Ceuta. In particular, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl resented the friendly relations between the Algerians and Spain as, in his view, such commercial and security links not only encouraged the latter but also provided the Spanish, and Ceuta in particular, with badly-needed supplies from a nearby Algerian source. Specifically, he accuses the Ḥannāsha of having sold grain and other foodstuffs to the Spanish in the past, and adds that another tribe, the Banī ‘Āmir, also had good relations with the Spanish, which he characterizes as “abominable activities.”⁵² Mūlāy Ismā‘īl notes that he had threatened those actors, which he thinks had at least frightened them.

Mūlāy Ismā‘īl complains that, recently, in fact, there had been reports that grain was being exported to the Christians from the ports of Mostaghanem and Oran, and some even from Algiers itself – including probably to Ceuta – which he calls “unacceptable.” Such resupply no doubt would have added to the Moroccans’ frustration with their siege of Ceuta and in his letter he urges the Ottoman Sultan to prevent the Algerians from continuing such commerce. However, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl is skeptical that the Algerians will desist, as he claims that that is part of their long-established policy (“their ways are deeply ingrained”) (p. 21), being motivated as they are in his view by a quest for economic gain and allegedly not caring about consequences in the hereafter.

Moreover, Mūlāy Ismā‘īl accuses Algiers of seeking to create friction between the Porte and Morocco and, perhaps presumptuously, instructs Sultan

51. The text of the Queen’s instructions notes that Jones had earlier brought the message from Morocco to the effect that al-Rīfī had told him he “wou’d assist the English to take Ceuta which in case of success they should keep without any molestation, and that he would add so much land to the second Point within the Straights as should be sufficient for ten thousand head of cattle to manure and manage,” and that if the British were to leave it eventually they would be compensated, 3 March 1703; from the Entry book of the Secretary of State, the Earl of Nottingham, Ms. Rawlinson 55, fol. 15, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The copy was made in 1719.

52. “Mémoire de J.-B. Estelle” reports that when the Moroccans had attacked the Banī ‘Āmir in 1693, the latter had been able to move their valuables for security to the Spanish-held town of Oran, frustrating the Moroccan raiders, 125-26.

Aḥmed on how to deal with the Algerians, advising him “do not ignore them, and only accept from them what is right.” He stresses that that the only alternative in that case is for Morocco to threaten the Algerians and to take reprisals. And, he asks the Ottoman Sultan not to protect the Algerians when Morocco takes such justified measures, as that would simply embolden the Algerians to continue in their “greedy pursuits.” (p. 21) Here, too, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl appears to establish his preeminent role in the region, suggesting he knows best about local affairs, as he tells Aḥmed III that those on the ground, that is the Moroccans, can understand the situation better than those who are far away, implying the Ottoman Sultan.

Conclusions

One can draw several conclusions from this letter. First, everything considered, one might conclude that Mūlāy Ismāʿīl very likely did not expect the Ottoman Sultan to be able to do anything concrete to punish the Algerians or to prevent them from continuing their policies, given the lack of direct control the Porte exercised by that time in Algeria. Perhaps the Moroccans hoped to send a message to the Algerians via the Ottoman Sultan with a warning that Morocco would feel obliged to take direct action against the Algerians if the latter’s conduct did not change. Or, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl may have been seeking seeking Ottoman acquiescence, thereby providing legitimacy for any action Morocco might take against the Algerians. Realistically, however, Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s threats to deal with the Algerians himself may have sounded somewhat hollow, especially given his age and the largely negative record of previous Moroccan campaigns in that area.

While in many ways Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s efforts vis-à-vis Algeria and the Ottoman Sultan were indecisive, a temporary solution of sorts imposed itself following Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s death in 1139/1727, as Morocco entered a 30-year period, marked by competition among his sons and a turbulent rebalancing of national actors to remake the previously congealed power system, a time during which Morocco looked inward. Subsequently, as research by Ramón Lourido Díaz indicated, the reign of Mūlāy Ismāʿīl’s grandson, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh, saw a resumption of enduring Moroccan interests and objectives, with Moroccan relations with Constantinople, meant, not least, as a way to outmaneuver Algeria, with whom rivalry continued to be prominent and never really resolved, although no longer reaching the stage of open combat.⁵³ Such continuity also extended to the mechanics of diplomacy, featuring as it did Morocco’s balancing of cordiality with an effort to ensure an independent religious and political role for Morocco in the region as an equal.

Second, despite the Porte’s very limited concrete presence and assets in Algeria by the early XVIIIth century, this letter suggests that it was still perceived as having at least a capability for moral suasion and of being a source of legitimacy for those governing Algeria, motivating Morocco to appeal to the Porte. In fact,

53. Ramón Lourido Díaz, “Relaciones del Alawi Sidi Muhammad B. Abd Allah con el imperio turco en el segundo periodo de su sultanato (1775-1790),” *Hespéris-Tamuda*, Vol. 24 (1986), 231-72.

after the Porte became bound by the 1699 Karlowitz treaty to protect the ships of European signatory states from attacks by North African corsairs, Sultan Aḥmed III had still been able to convince the *dey* of Algiers in 1718 to avoid targeting Hapsburg shipping.⁵⁴ If nothing else, in the absence of other mechanisms for arbitration between Morocco and Algeria, the Ottoman Porte could still play a positive role as a mediator, projecting an image of impartiality and serving as an outside third party, to arbitrate disputes even when it could really exert little beyond moral suasion to enforce its decisions.

Third, this document provides yet more proof, if more such proof was needed, of the shortcomings of Samuel P. Huntington's well-worn clash of civilizations theory, with the persistent conflict between Morocco and Algeria, despite being states that not only would be considered as part of the same cultural mega-sphere, but also as having as similar a culture in terms of religion, ethnicity, and language as any two states.⁵⁵ Indeed, this letter highlights the reality that the policies of Islamic states are not just a product of ideology (as some publicists today insist) but, as is true of any other state, an amalgam, in different proportions depending on the issue, of ideology and Realpolitik. In this case, even when the jihad, as a religious enterprise, was involved, states still made decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis and were still able and willing to make compromises and deals with non-Muslim powers in the pursuit of their state interests. In particular, it is likely that policymakers in Algiers may have viewed Spanish control of Ceuta preferable to its retaking by Morocco. That is, at this juncture, from the Algerian strategic point of view the threat from a weakened Spain appeared manageable, while that from Morocco was potentially existential, such as when, according to the Algerians, Mūlāy Ismā'īl, in coalition with the Tunisian ruler, had had the objective no less than of seizing Algiers itself.⁵⁶ From that perspective, control of Ceuta could have provided Morocco with a permanent base with which to control Algerian sea traffic and from which to support campaigns against Algeria itself.

Editing and Translating the Letter

In editing the letter, the accepted academic protocol for editing Arabic texts was followed. This system entails indicating such features as passive voice, shaddas, etc. I have modernized the orthography only where the original text might otherwise be unclear, such as with the indication of hamzas, but have preserved other elements of the original orthography and have indicated in the footnotes any differences from modern-day usage. Although written in standard literary Arabic, Moroccanisms are evident in the text, whether in vocabulary, syntax, morphology, or orthography. At times, even the standard vocabulary may reflect administrative usage specific to Morocco. This factor underlines that it made sense to have a

54. Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 88.

55. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

56. Letter from Ḥājī Sha'bān to King Louis XIV, 11 Muḥarram 1106/1 September 1694, *Correspondance des Deys d'Alger*, Vol. 1, 418.

knowledgeable envoy accompany a letter, one who could explain and elucidate the language subtleties and ensure the correct intent was imparted to the letter's receiver. Such points are dealt with in the accompanying notes, and I have also corrected the divergences in orthography, which may often have been due to the colloquial influence in pronunciation of certain Arabic letters at variance with their pronunciation in the classical language. The Maghribi orthography of the letters *fā* ف and *qāf* ق has been standardized in the text. Ordinarily, pre-modern Arabic texts were not divided into sentences and had rare punctuation and, here, punctuation has been added throughout to facilitate a reading. The copy of this letter is written in a bold yet unassuming Maghribi script, with thirty lines per page, and is pleasing to the eye in its regularity and straightforwardness.

Any translator faces a dilemma of how closely to adhere to the original text in terms of style, vocabulary, and tone, as opposed to a more modernized and idiomatic rendition. The present translation seeks a balance between literal and idiomatic approaches, avoiding stilted phraseology while at the same time not descending into an anachronistic literary paraphrase, with the uppermost consideration being the rendering of the author's intent in an understandable form that is faithful to the original.

The Arabic Text of the Letter

(ص 18) الحمد لله وحده صلى الله وسلم على سيدنا ونبينا ومولانا محمد وءاله⁵⁷ وصحبه

من عبد الله المتوكل على الله المفوض جميع اموره الى سيده ومولاه الغي به تعالى عمّن سواه اسماعيل بن الشريف الحسيني ايدته الله تعالى وقواه وكان له ولياً ونصيراً وعاوناً وظهرياً.

الى صاحب المقام الذي اختصه الله تعالى واختاره من بين جنسه فأقامه ملكاً مؤيداً وسلطاناً مسدداً وعمراً به وبأسلافه المرعيين المقدسين المرحومين بفضله وكرمه اماكن مكيته وبلدانا عديدة واوطاناً، الافضل الاجل الامثل المبجل الملاحظ المرعي الاخلص المبرور العزيز علينا الحبيب الينا المخصوص بالمكانة السامية المكيته النامية الاصعد الاسعد الاسنى الاود الاسمى السلطان الاعظم الخاقان الافخم ملك البرين والبحرين ومصر والشام والعراقين المجاهد في سبيل رب العالمين الغازي ابي العباس احمد بن اخينا في ذات الله المقدس المرحوم بكرم الله سبحانه السلطان محمد خان بن الملوك الاجلة المجاهدين من بني عثمان رحم الله السلف وبارك بحوله وطوله في الخلق ووصل بمنه وبممه وكرمه نعمة بالك وبهجة نفسك واصفى موارد جزلك ومشارع انسك واطلع عليك من غر البشر واليمن والبركة ما يزيد في ضياء قمرک ونور شمسک ولا زالت نجوم سعودک وصعودک طالعة وبوارق اقبالات دولتک لامعة وعزتك الجهادية متصلة بأبد الأبد وحوزتک محروسة بالمعوذتين وسورة ﴿قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ﴾ وحرس بعينه التي لا تنام جنابک وجعل التيسير والفتح اليسير لمعاقل الشرك يتعاهد بطول الازمنة وبابنا وبابک ويسر لطرق الجهاد في سبيل الله رب العباد اسبابنا واسبابک.

سلام كريم برطيب عميم عليك تتارچ⁵⁸ الأرجاء بأرجه وثناء جميل منّا اليك وترقص الجمادات بألحان رجزه وهجزه ورحمة الله تعالى وبركاته ورضوانه الاعم السرمدي وتحياته.

57. This is an older variant orthography for آل

58. For the standard orthography تتارچ, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

اقا بعد: فقد كتبناه (كتب الله لنا ولكم من نعمه السابعة ادومها وابقاها وجعلنا واياكم في استعمال عوارفه الجميلة بانواع الشكر نلقاها) عندما وصل الينا سفيرنا الذي كُنا وجهناه اليكم واوفدناه وفادة خير ومواصلة رحم عليكم ورجع الينا بكتابتكم وشهى خطابكم شارحاً ومبيناً لما توخيتموه من تمكين الاخوة والمواصلة من حسن الفحوى والمنحى وكرم القصد المحيط المحفوظ من سائر الانحى وكان وحياتكم علينا يوم وصوله محبة فيكم موسماً وعيداً شرح من صدورنا وسر من اتباعنا قريباً وبعيداً. فوقفنا منه في الحين على ما تضمن وعرفنا من منطوقه ومفهومه ما قرروا واضح وبيّن. وقبلنا ما سطرتموه ورسمتموه وامليتموه علينا وانهيتموه الى مسامعنا في الاعتذار عن الايقاع بذلك الشخص الذي اعظم الفرية وادعى ما ادعى وسعى لحتفه بظلفه فنعاه ناعي البوار فيمن نعى وعلى كل حال فأنتم اعرف بما يلبق بكم في مصالحكم في شأنه⁵⁹ وشان مثله ممن تتوقع الفتنة كما ذكرتم من اجله. (ص 19) ويرى الشاهد ما لا يرى الغائب⁶⁰ من المصالح ومن المعايب غير انا (والله تعالى شاهد علينا ومطلع على ضمائرنا)⁶¹ ما اعتنينا به وعاملنا تلك المعاملة الا محبة في داركم واعتناء بجانبكم وتعظيماً لرايكم⁶² ان لو كان صادقا في دعواه وما فعلنا معه ما فعلنا الا على التوهم والظنة الضعيفة ولو انا جزمنا وتحققنا صدقه في دعواه تلك لعلنا معه من الخير والبر اضعاف من ذلك كما شرحنا لكم قضيتيه سابقاً. وكل ذلك عندنا قليل في جانبكم الاعز علينا الملحوظ بعين الكمالات لدينا. وما ذكرت (اعزى الله وخلد نعمه علينا وعليك ونظر بعين عنايته الينا واليك) من ان الاصل في المحبة قديم وانك ورثت محبتنا وودنا عن والدك (قدس الله روحه واسكنه من الجنان فسيحه) فقد صدقت في ذلك ولقد كان (رحمه الله) يحبنا ونحبه ويراعي جانبنا ونراعيه. وانت والحمد لله وارثه في ذلك وخليفته. والملوك اصحاب الهمم العلية يتمسكون في مثل هذا بأدنى سبب ولا سيما ان كان السبب قوياً مثل ما كان بيننا وبين والدك ﴿قدس الله تربته﴾. وقد قال ﷺ ﴿مَنْ أَبْرَأَ الْبِرِّ أَنْ يَصِلَ الرَّجُلُ أَهْلَ وَدِّ أَبِيهِ﴾ فما احببتنا ولا اثرتنا⁶³ حتى اطالعك الله على ما في قلوبنا لكم من خالص الوداد وجميل المراعات والاعتناء. وفي الاثر الصحيح ﴿إِذَا أَحَبَّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَخَاهُ الْمُؤْمِنِ⁶⁴ فَلْيُعَلِّمُهُ وَيَقُولْ لَهُ إِنِّي أُحِبُّكَ﴾. وكيف لا نوثركم ولا نحيتكم آل بني عنان وانتم باطبع مجاهدون في الله حق جهاده وساعون بالجد والاجتهاد في تعمير ارضه وبلاده. فما الجهاد في الحقيقة الا جهادكم لأن الله تعالى اسكنكم في مجبوحة اجناس النصرارى وبين ظهراهم واقامكم هنالك بمقتضى حكمته ضدًا للكفار وقذى في اعينهم فاحمدوا الله واشكروه على ما حوّلكم واقامكم فيه. وجدوا ثم جدوا واجتهدوا في نكاية العدو وقهره والغلظة عليه والارهاب له كما امر الله تعالى عباده المؤمنين⁶⁵ فقال جل من قائل ﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ آخِطِلِ تَرْهَبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ﴾ الآية.

اذ لا يردهم ولا يردعهم الا الصحيح والجهاد الدائم⁶⁶ بالقول والفعل والقصد المليح (والله القوي المعين). وقد تفضّل الله (سبحانه وتعالى) عليكم بجهاد اخر هو من اعظم الجهادات الظاهرة والباطنة وهو خدمتكم لآل الحرمين الشريفين واعتناؤكم بصددهم وبلوازمهم وعلوفاتهم وضروريات معايشهم على تعددها وتقديمكم إياهم في منافعهم ومرافقهم على منافع نفوسكم ورءوسكم. ثم نظركم ايضاً السديد ورايكم⁶⁷ الموفق الرشيد في مصالح اركاب الحجاج عجمي وشامي ومصري وعراقي وغيرهم والكل لكم فيه نظر وخدمة لوجه الله تعالى. فمن لا يحبكم ويوثركم وانتم بهذه المثابة كمحبتنا نحن فيكم يوشك ان يكون ضعيفاً في دينه دخيلاً في اعتقاده لا يعرف غثه من سمينه.

59. For the standard orthography **شأنه**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

60. For the standard orthography **الغائب**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

61. For the standard orthography **ضمائرنا**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

62. For the standard orthography **لرايكم**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

63. For the standard orthography **آثرتنا**.

64. For the standard orthography **المؤمن**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

65. For the standard orthography **المؤمنين**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

66. For the standard orthography **الدائم**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

67. For the standard orthography **رايكم**, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

فجهادكم انتم لمن ولاكم من اجناس النصرارى (قصمهم الله) هو والله الجهاد الاكبر. واما جهادنا نحن فيما تسمعون عن هذه الثغور المهديّة والعرايش وغيرها وحتى طنجة بنفسها فجهاد على قدر حاله وعلى قدر رجاله وقدر البلاد اذ كلّ بلاد من هولاء⁶⁸ البلدان المذكورات⁶⁹ لا تكاد عمارتها تزيد على ستمائة او ثمانماية مقاتل والغاية الف او الفان اذا انحازوا ولم يتركوا شيئاً من الجهد والاستعداد اللهمّ الا اذا كان جهاد ثغر سبتة (اعادها الله بفضلها دار اسلام) (ص 20) فهو جهاد حقيقيّ يُسمّى عند اهل الهمم الكبيرة جهاداً لأنّ سبتة جاءت في موضع اكثر من ان يُوصف من التحصين والمنعة الا ما يُرجى فيها من عون الله وتيسيره اذ هي في جانب البوغاز مركبة على ذلك البرّ وما بينها وبين تلك الجزيرة الا مقدار مسافة او اقلّ في البحر لا غير. فالطعام الطريّ والحبزة اذا طُبخت في ذلك البرّ او في هذا البرّ وركب بها الراكب لا تكاد تبرد الا في هذا البرّ او في ذلك البرّ لقرب المسافة وعدم المشقّة في العبور. فمن اجل قرب المسافة اليهم كانوا يعسون الليل⁷⁰ والنهار على رقايمهم من المسلمين ويخافون وثوبهم عليهم وسنحوا عليها باموالهم وراقيمهم حتى افنوا عليها من المال فوق الحدّ والحصر والعدّ. واهلك الله عليها من رقاب طغاتهم ورءوس بغاتهم منتهى العدد وتجرّعوا غصص فقدان بطارتهم ولا ينسون مصارعهم الى ابد الابد. فجهاد سبتة إي والله جهاد يشبه جهادكم فيمن قرب منكم او بعد عنكم وخصوصاً من ولاكم من الكفّار اعداء الله ورسوله تقبل الله تعالى منّا ومنكم وجعله خالصاً لوجهه الكريم ومقرباً من جنّات النعيم.

وأما جهادنا في غير سبتة وجهاد جيراننا اهل مزغنة في دشرة وهران فأمر خفيف والاجر والثواب على قدر المشقّة وبعد المشقّة حُفّت الجتّة بالمكاره وحُفّت النار بالشهوات مع أنّ وهران ما كان عمرها قبل الآ رباعات من الحناشة المنتصرة المغطّسين وشردمة⁷¹ قليلة من النصرارى لا عبرة بهم ولا معول عليهم فما كان اكثر عمارتها الا الحناشة. وحيث كان بها هذا المنكر البشيع والامر الشنيع الذي سمعتم به من بيع الزروع وانواع الاقوات للنصارى وفرار عرب بني عامر مع الكفرة والحناشة الذين كانوا بها ما زلنا وقتئذ نجد ونجتهد في ذمهم ونعيب فعلهم على اهل مزغنة ونهددهم ونخوّفهم ونوعدهم ونغريهم ونخصّضهم على التصديّ لإزالة ذلك المنكر القبيح حتى خافوا ان نرفع اليكم الشكاية بهم في شأنها⁷² او نخيّم عليها ونتولّى امرها بانفسنا. فارتاعوا لذلك وتنافسوا فيه ونزلوا عليها فلم يحتاجوا لها لكبير عمل حتى اخذوها واستولوا على من كان بها من الحناشة المنتصرة. وفرحنا بذلك غاية اذ كلّ ما يغيظ الكفّار ويسرّ المسلمين كثيراً كان او قليلاً وقلنا "الحمد لله وله المنّة والشكر" حيث كان السبب في اخذهم ايّاهم من اجل ذلك التحريض الذي كنّا نخرضهم عليها في كلّ ساعة وفي كلّ وقت وحين. ومع هذا كلّ ما زال اهل مزغنة يحسدوننا على محبتكم ويكرهون لنا المواصلة معكم وكنا والله نشتهي ونحبّ وتمنّى ان يكونوا مقتدين بكم في محبة جانبنا ويكونوا في تعظيم احوالنا على مذهبكم اذ الجامع بيننا امران: المجاورة واخوة الاسلام ولاكنّ اهل مزغنة امة وحدهم لا يكاد الانسان يقف لهم على حقيقة ولا يعرف ما عندهم ولولا أنّهم حالوا بيننا وبينكم بجفوتهم وغلظ طباعهم ما قطعنا عنكم مواصلة ابداً. وفي هذه الساعة بنفسها كنّا نسمع عنهم افعالاً كرهناها ولا احببنا والله سمعنا ولا رضيناها ولا قبلناها وهي أنّهم كانوا يبيعون الزرع للنصارى (دقرهم الله تعالى) وأنّ اعداي الدين كانوا يحملونه الى ذلك البرّ من مرسى مستغانم ومن مرسى دشرة وهران بل وحتى من مزغنة حملوا منها شيئاً.

وهذا ومثله فعل تكرهه الاسماع وتجه من المسلمين الموحدّين الطباع فإنّ راء⁷³ اخونا وابن محبتنا في الله ان يجرهم عن ذلك وينهاهم عنه فليُفعل ماجوراً مثوباً. (ص 21) ولا اخلم ينتهون ولا ينزحرون ولا يتعظون لأنهم لا يفعلون الا هذا ومثله طمعاً في الاغراض الدنيوية وزهداً في الاعمال الآخروية. وعلى ما هم عليه فلا تغفل عنهم

68. For the standard orthography هؤلاء.

69. For the standard singular adjective form المنكورة for an inanimate plural, here influenced by the colloquial usage.

70. For the more usual orthography الليل, drawn from the Andalusian usage.

71. For the standard orthography بشرذمة, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

72. For the standard orthography شأنها, here influenced by the colloquial pronunciation.

73. For the more common modern orthography راء.

ولا تقبل إلا الحق منهم وأما وعظنا نحن لهم وتخوفنا آياهم فما بقي ينفع فيهم منه شيء لأنهم طُبعوا على ما طُبعوا وتعودوا ما تعودوا، إذا نحن جزناهم على امر ديني حقيقي يتعين علينا ان نحوزهم عليه للمجاورة وحق الجوار وقرب الدار من الدار. ولا تمكن لنا الغفلة عنهم فيه فيهربون ويهرعون لنا لجانبكم ويدعون بدعوتكم وإذا هم امنوا وسلموا من محاسنتنا لهم وتشنيعنا عليهم رجعوا الى ما الفوه وتعددوه من شهوات نفوسهم ولا يجنحون إلا لما في رءوسهم ﴿إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَا كُنَّ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ﴾. وكما نوكد عليك ايها الاحب الانجب ان تبالغ كل المبالغة في الاستعداد للنصاري وتمتن روحك بالعدد وانواع المدد في اثناء هذه المدة الاحدى عشر سنة الباقية من المهادنة بينكم وبينهم وان تكون في اهبة وتيقظ لأن النصاري هنا وهنالك عاقا عُرِف منهم وحُفِظ عنهم اثم اهل غدر وحيل ومكر لا يقفون مع عهودهم التي التزموها ولا يوفون بعهودهم اللائى⁷⁴ اوثقوها وابرموها بل ينقضون ايمانهم إن ظهرت لهم فرصة بعد توكيدهم ويهدمون⁷⁵ مباني شروطهم غب تشييدها. فلا نرى لكم ولا لأحد من المسلمين ان يطمئن لعهودهم وإن هم بذلوها واكدوها ولا ان يعتز او يعرج على اقوالهم التي يلها المكر ويتلوها لا سيما مع ما كان يظهر من اجناسهم (اباد الله جميعهم) من امتداد ايديهم ويُفهم من الحاحهم وتعدديهم وقد تحققتنا واستيقنا انكم لم تهادنوهم في هذه المدة التي سلفت وبقي منها ما بقي إلا بقصد التفرغ للاستعداد والتوسعة على المسلمين الى وقت وامد وحين لا فشلا ولا مللا. فالله سبحانه وتعالى يعيننا ويعينكم ولا يبطل لنا ولكم من اعمال البر والجهاد في سبيله عملاً. وبالجملة يا حبيبتنا ويا ابن اخينا في الله لا بدتم لا بد ان تصغي لحديثنا ببصيرتك وقلبك وتفتهم ارشادنا وتنبهنا لك بثاقب ظنك ولتلك وتحمله على طريق النصيحة الواجبة على المسلمين.

Translation

Praise be to God alone, and the peace and blessings of God be on our master, prophet, and lord Muḥammad and on his family and Companions.

From the servant of God, who relies on God, who defers all his affairs to his master and lord, and who has all he needs in God, Ismā'īl b. al-Sharīf al-Ḥasanī (may God support and strengthen him, and may He be his protector, helper, aide, and defender).

To the holder of the throne that God the Almighty conferred on and designated for him from among his compatriots and made him a strengthened-by-God king and guided-by-God sultan, and whom God has supplied – as He did with his ancestors whom He protected, and who are sanctified and recipients of mercy – through His grace and kindness powerful positions and numerous lands and countries, the noble, the honorable, the exemplary, the highly respected, the very loyal, the notable, the prominent, the sincere, the blessed one, the one who is dear to us and beloved by us, he who enjoys a noble, potent, vast-ranging dominion, the lofty, the blissful, the noble, the beloved, the sublime, the great Sultan, the splendid monarch, ruler of the Two Continents and of the Two Seas, and of Egypt, Syria, and the Two Iraqs.⁷⁶ To the mujahid on behalf of the Lord of Creation, the warrior fighting for the religion (*ghāzī*) Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad b. our brother in God (the late blessed by the grace of God,

74. The standard singular relative pronoun *التي* would be preferable for an inanimate plural noun instead of the plural form, here influenced by the colloquial usage.

75. For the text's erroneous *يهدون*, apparently the copyist's mistake.

76. Traditionally, these titles for the Ottoman Sultan were understood as alluding to, *respectively*, Europe and Asia, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and the two Iraqi cities of Basra and Kufa.

may He be praised) the Sultan Muḥammad Khān b. the noble mujahid monarchs, the Banī 'Uthmān, may God grant pardon to the ancestors and bless mankind with His power and might.

And may God in His benevolence, His right hand, and generosity bless you and increase your magnificence, multiply your abundance, bestow success to your undertakings, and reveal to you deceptions by others, and [bestow] prosperity and grace to magnify the light of your moon and the brightness of your sun. and, may the stars of your good fortune and success be in the ascendancy, and the splendor of the prosperity of your dynasty be bright. And may your jihadi glory continue forever, and may your domains be protected by the *mu'awwidhatān*.⁷⁷ The *sūra*: “Say: He is Allāh, the One.”⁷⁸ May [God] protect you with His eye that never sleeps and may He smooth your way and facilitate your conquest of the strongholds of the idolators. And may He always safeguard your rule and ours and enable you and us to carry out the jihad in the path of God, the Protector of His servants.

Noble and wholehearted greetings redolent with fragrances that impart a delightful scent to the surroundings and sincere praises from us to you. Even inanimate bodies dance with joy to melodies of lyrics in the *rajaz* and *hazaj* [poetical] meters. And may God the Exalted grant His all-encompassing endless mercy, blessings, favor, and a long life.

Now then: We wrote this [letter] to you (May God grant you and us His blessings from His munificent and perpetual graces and permit you and us to benefit from His countless gifts which we accept with heartfelt gratitude) as soon as our ambassaor – whom we had sent to you and entrusted with a mission of goodwill and of maintaining our ties of kinship – had returned bearing your letter. Your missive, with its elegant language and noble purpose that were evident throughout, deserved an eloquent expositor in order to deliver fully and clearly your intent to reaffirm [our] brotherhood and continuing noble intentions and good relations. You can be more than sure⁷⁹ that the day [the letter] arrived was like a joyful feast day for us because of the love we bear for you, and we were filled with delight, as were our subjects both near and far.

We read the [letter] as soon as it arrived and understood the text and the meaning clearly. We welcomed what you wrote and expounded and sent to us, [that is] justifying yourself for having executed that certain individual whose deceit is so great and who made all those [unfounded] claims. He brought about his own ruin. In any event, you know best what is in your best interest with respect to him and others like him who, as you noted, are liable to foment disorders. He who is on the scene sees the advantages and the disadvantages better than someone who is far away. Nevertheless, we (and

77. That is, what are sometimes called the “Verses of Refuge,” the last two *suras* of the Qur'an, which focus on seeking refuge in God.

78. Qur'an, 112 (1). All translated quotes from the Qur'an are from the official Saudi version, *The Holy Qur'an, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Medina: King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1410/1989-1990).

79. Literally, “May we give up our lives for you.”

may God the Exalted, who can see in our hearts, be our witness!) dealt with him as we did only out of love for your family and out of deference to you and out of respect for your interests, assuming he was truthful about his claims. We dealt with him as we did even though we had our suspicions and doubts. Had we been absolutely certain and had we been completely convinced of the truth of his claims we would have dealt with him with even greater consideration and benevolence, as we explained to you already in reference to his case.

All this is of little import to us when compared to [how we value] you, who are most dear to us and whom we hold in the utmost regard. And, as you noted, the origin of our love is of ancient date (May God sustain you and always grant His grace to you and to us, may He watch over us!) and that you inherited our love and affection from your father (May God sanctify his soul and grant him the highest paradise!) You were correct in noting this, for [your father] (May God have mercy on him!) loved us and we loved him and we esteemed each other. You (Praise be to God!) are his heir and successor in that. Monarchs, as those who deal with great matters, maintain relations even when such relations are weak, and how much more so when [relations] are as close as those between your father (May God bless his tomb!) and us were. [Muḥammad] (May the blessings of God be upon him and grant him peace!) said: “The finest form of devoutness is nurturing relations with those whom one’s father loved.”⁸⁰

How could we not but cherish and love you, the house of the Banī ‘Uthmān who are, of course, mujahids conducting the most authentic jihad for God, and those who do the utmost to preserve His lands? Yours is the only true jihad, since God the Exalted has placed you in the midst of the Christian nations, positioning you there in His infinite wisdom in order to oppose the infidels and to be a thorn in their side. Praise be to God, then, and thank Him for having granted and accorded you this. So, strive to do the utmost to inflict pain to and so vanquish the enemy, treating the latter severely and instilling in him terror, as God the Exalted has enjoined on His faithful creatures. As He said: “Against them make ready Your strength to the utmost Of your power, including Steeds of war, to strike terror Into (the hearts of) the enemies, Of Allah and your enemies.”⁸¹ Indeed, they [i.e. your Christian enemies] can be thrown back or deterred only by serious efforts and a permanent jihad in word, deed, and noble intent (God is powerful and ever-helpful!).

God (He is glorified and exalted) has honored you by also granting you another jihad, which is the greatest of them all, whether visible or hidden from view. We are speaking about your service to the people of the Two Holy Shrines, and about your concern in providing them with their necessities, stipends⁸² and anything else they

80. This is a *ḥadīth* of which there are various versions, and which was reported to have originated with ‘Abdallāh Ibn ‘Umar and was recorded in *Al-Jāmi‘ al-mukhtaṣar min al-sunan ‘an Rasūl Allāh* by Abu ‘Isa Muḥammad *al-Tirmidhī* (209-279/824-892).

81. Qur’an, 8 (60),

82. In standard Arabic, *‘alaf* (pl. *a‘lāf*, *‘ilāf*, or *‘ulūfāt*) means forage, but in Moroccan usage it had come to mean salaries, stipends.

need, as you place the consideration of their needs and welfare above your own. In addition, there is also your discerning attention and blessed and rightly-guided care of the Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi, and other pilgrimage caravans. You serve and take care of them, all for the sake of God the Exalted. Anyone who, given all this, does not love and hold you in esteem as much as we do is, therefore, patently weak in his religion and insincere about his faith, and someone unable to distinguish good from bad.⁸³

Your jihad against the neighboring Christian nations (May God crush them!) is, by God, the greatest jihad. Our own jihad from the ports of al-Mahdiyya, Larache, and elsewhere, and even from Tangier itself, is, as you have heard, only on a small scale, being in proportion to the limited number of men available and to the small size of these towns. There are barely more than 600 or 800 able-bodied men in the population of each of the aforementioned cities, that is one or two thousand at most if they all join forces and spare no effort. By God, only the jihad at Ceuta (May God in His grace return it to Dār al-Islām!) is a true jihad in the sense of the word as understood by monarchs. That is, Ceuta is located in an indescribably well-fortified and impregnable site which necessitates God's help greatly. It is perched on one of the shores of the Strait, and between it and the Peninsula is only a distance of a day's journey (*masāfa*) or less. Freshly-prepared food and bread on either shore can be ferried over to the other side before it even gets cold because of the negligible distance and the ease of the crossing. Due to this proximity, [the defenders] have been able to be on guard day and night against the Muslims, fearing an attack, and have expended unfathomable sums of money and numbers of lives on its behalf. God caused vast numbers of their tyrants and leading oppressors to perish there, and [the Christians] were terribly aggrieved by the loss of their bishops, whose deaths they will never, but never, forget. The jihad at Ceuta, by God, is therefore similar to your jihad against those near and far, and especially [similar to the jihad] against those infidels (the enemies of God and of His prophet) who are your neighbors. May God the Exalted accept this from you and from us, [done] out of love for Him and as a path to blissful Paradise!

However, our jihad elsewhere than at Ceuta, just as the jihad [that was formerly waged] by our neighbors, the People of Mazghanna,⁸⁴ against the village (*dashra*) of Oran, is on a very small scale. The reward and recompense are commensurate to the effort, for after the struggle "Paradise is surrounded by hardships, and Hell is surrounded by [illicit] desires."⁸⁵ This was true even though formerly Oran was populated only by a small band of baptized Ḥannāsha who had embraced Christianity and by a small sprinkling of Christians of no significance and who were unreliable and, in fact, the majority of its population consisted of Ḥannāsha.

83. Literally, "the lean from the fat."

84. That is, of Algiers, here designated as Mazghanna, an older name originating from the Banī Mazghanna tribe in the area.

85. *Ḥadīth* recorded in the collection *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* compiled by Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (c. 202-261/817-875).

When the awful and abominable deeds, of which you heard, occurred there, and which consisted of the sale of grain and other sorts of foodstuffs to the Christians, and of the flight of the Arab Banī ‘Āmir to the infidels and the Ḥannāsha who were [in Oran], we repeatedly spared no effort to reproach them and to condemn their behavior [when reporting this to] the People of Mazghanna.⁸⁶ We threatened and frightened the latter, warned them of the consequences, and urged and goaded them to exert an effort in order to end that abominable activity, as a result of which they feared that we would lodge a complaint against them with you or that we mount a campaign against [Oran] and deal with the matter ourselves.⁸⁷ This frightened them, so they buckled down and attacked [Oran], and it did not require them a great effort to take it, and they managed to capture all the Christianized Ḥannāsha who were there. We were delighted by this, for anything at all that saddens the infidels pleases the Muslims, and we said: “Praise and thanks be to God!” The most significant element in their victory over [those in Oran] was our relentless urging them on.

Despite all this, the People of Mazghanna envy your love for us and detest our good relations with you. By God, we eagerly desired, wished, and hoped that they would follow your example in loving us and respect our interests in their conduct, since there are two bonds uniting us: that of proximity to each other and that of Islamic brotherhood. The People of Mazghanna, however, are a people (*umma*) unto themselves, whom one can barely fathom or know what they conceal. Had they not come between us and you with their animosity and abrasive nature, we would never have cut off our relations with you.

We have just heard again of more of their activities that we cannot tolerate and that, by God, we hated to hear and cannot accept, namely that they sold grain to the Christians (May God the Exalted destroy them!) and that these enemies of Islam (*al-dīn*) have carried it back to their own shores from the port of Mostaghanem, the port and village of Oran, and some even from Mazghanna itself. These and other similar actions are disgraceful for Muslims who worship one God. If, you, as our brother and as the son of our dear friend in God see fit to reprove them for acting thus and forbid them from engaging in this, then do so, with our thanks and gratitude. However, I do doubt that they will stop doing as they have been, nor be deterred, nor heed a warning, since they do this and similar things only in pursuit of worldly gains and are indifferent to doing anything for the hereafter. Since their behavior is such, do not ignore them, but accept from them only what is right.

Our own exhortation and our warnings to them have been to no avail whatsoever, because of their nature and because their ways are deeply ingrained in them. Therefore, if we are to succeed in making them behave in a truly religious

86. According to the French merchant active in Morocco, Jean-Baptiste Estelle, when Mūlāy Ismā‘īl had raided the Oran area in 1693, the Banī ‘Āmir had moved their valuables to safety in Oran, then held by the Spanish, thus frustrating the Moroccans, “Mémoire de J.-B. Estelle,” 20 November 1695-2 April 1696, in *Les Sources Inédites de l’Histoire du Maroc, Deuxième série, Dynastie filalienne, Archives et Bibliothèques de France*, vol. 4, Pierre de Cenival ed. (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1931), 125-26.

87. Literally “that we would break out the tents” (*nukhayyim*).

manner we must compel them to do so, based on our living in the same neighborhood and our living next door and the rights that that implies. We cannot overlook what they're doing, that is engaging in contraband and then rushing to you [before we can protest] and calling on you for help. And, as soon as they feel secure from our reprisals (*muḥākaka*) against them and our condemnations of them, they go back to engaging in their usual greedy pursuits and to doing as they please. "It is true thou wilt not be able to guide every one Whom thou lovest; but Allah Guides those whom He will."⁸⁸

We reiterate to you, o most beloved and noble one, that you exert every possible effort to prepare for war against the Christians, and that you reinforce yourself with arms and with all types of provisions during this period of 11 years remaining to your truce with them. Be ready and be vigilant, since all Christians, whether your neighbors or ours, are known, from previous experience, as treacherous, cunning, and deceitful. They do not respect the promises to which they commit themselves, nor do they remain faithful to the agreements which they sign but, rather, go back on their word even after reaffirming it if they sense an opportunity, violating the conditions [of an agreement] to which they had just agreed.⁸⁹

We do not advise you or any Muslim to place any confidence in [the Christians'] promises, even if they repeat and confirm them, and to not be deceived or pay any attention to what they say since that is always followed by deception, and especially given all the aggression perpetrated by those nations (May God destroy them all!), all of which can be understood from their pressure and their hostility. We are certain that you granted them this period of truce, of which only a portion remains, only in order for you to be able to complete your preparations [for war] and to grant the Muslims a respite until its resumption, and not because of defeatism or weariness. May God the Praised and Exalted aid you and us, and may your and my good works and the jihad in His path never cease being active.

In short, o beloved, son of our brother in God, you really must listen to our counsel with your mind and your heart and understand our guidance and exhortation to you and embrace it and internalize it, and consider it as advice that Muslims are required to provide ...⁹⁰

88. Qur'an, 28 (56).

89. Literally "demolishing the conditions after having built them."

90. The manuscript copy ends abruptly here.

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العنوان: رسالة غير منشورة من السلطان المولى إسماعيل إلى السلطان أحمد الثالث: حلقة في العلاقات المغربية الجزائرية

العثمانية

الملخص: تقترح هذه المساهمة، نصا وترجمة وتحليلا لرسالة غميسة وجهها حاكم المغرب المولى إسماعيل إلى السلطان العثماني أحمد الثالث، باعتبارها إضافة أساسية إلى وثائقنا الأرشيفية المحدودة من الجانب المغربي لهذه الحقبة التاريخية. وعلى الرغم من أن العلاقات المغربية العثمانية كانت قد استقرت بحلول أوائل القرن الثامن عشر، إلا أن العلاقات المغربية مع الجزائر، التابعة اسمياً للباب العالي، ظلت متوترة، كما توضحه مضامين هذه الرسالة، كما تسلط الوثيقة ذاتها الضوء على مصالح الأطراف الثلاثة المعنية وأهدافها. وعلى وجه التحديد، تركز هذه الرسالة، التي لم يسبق نشرها من قبل، على شكاوى المغرب من تداعيات الأنشطة الجزائرية التي أعاققت الحصار المغربي لمدينة سبتة المحتلة، مما يمثل عنصراً أساسياً في السياسة الدفاعية والخارجية للمغرب، حيث سعى المولى إسماعيل إلى الحصول على مساندة من الباب العالي للتدخل والتأثير على السياسة الجزائرية، وفي الوقت نفسه أصر على نيل الاعتراف من قِبَل الباب العالي بهيمنة المغرب في المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المغرب، العثمانيون، الجزائر، سبتة، المولى إسماعيل.

Titre: Une lettre de Mūlāy Ismā'īl au sultan Aḥmed III: un épisode des relations maroco-algéro-ottomanes

Résumé: Cette contribution présente le texte, la traduction et l'analyse d'une lettre inédite du souverain marocain Mūlāy Ismā'īl au sultan ottoman Aḥmed III, et conforte notre documentation archivistique limitée du côté marocain pour cette période. Bien que les relations maroco-ottomanes se soient stabilisées au début du XVIII^{ème} siècle, les relations marocaines avec l'Algérie, nominalement subordonnée à la Porte, sont restées tendues, comme l'illustre cette lettre, qui met en évidence les intérêts et les objectifs des trois parties concernées. Plus précisément, cette lettre, qui n'avait pas été éditée auparavant, se concentre sur les griefs du Maroc concernant les activités algériennes qui entravaient le siège marocain de Ceuta, un élément clé de la défense et de la politique étrangère du Maroc, Mūlāy Ismā'īl cherchant l'intervention de la Porte pour influencer la politique algérienne, tout en insistant sur la reconnaissance par la Porte de la prédominance du Maroc dans la région.

Mots-clés: Maroc, Ottomans, Algérie, Ceuta, Mūlāy Ismā'īl.