



---

# IBERIAN STRONGHOLDS IN NORTH AFRICA

---

Magistra Beatriz Aluares de la Oya  
Kingdom of Atlantia | Pennsic 50

---

<b>A Note Regarding “Berber”</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Background: Iberia on the Global Stage</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Berber Algarve: Portugal in Africa</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Plazas de Soberanía: Spain in North Africa</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Major Stronghold: Ceuta</b>	<b>8</b>
Significant Events	8
Antiquity: Phoenicia and Rome	8
6th-7th Century: From Rome to the Visigoths	8
8th-10th century: Muslim Conquest	8
11th-14th century: Muslim Rule	8
15th century: Portuguese Rule	8
16th century: Iberian Union	9
<b>Major Stronghold: Melilla</b>	<b>9</b>
Significant Events	9
Antiquity	9
Medieval to Early Modern	10
Resources	11

---

## A Note Regarding “Berber”

Throughout this class, you will notice that I have substituted the modern identity term “Amazigh” for the more historical term “Berber.” Historically, Amazigh did not refer to themselves as Berbers/Amazigh but had their own terms to refer to themselves. For example, the Kabyles use the term "Leqbayel" to refer to their own people, while the Chaouis identified themselves as "Ishawiyen" instead of Berber/Amazigh.

In Archaic Greece, βάρβαροι (*barbaroi*) “barbarians” was an onomatopoeic word to describe languages perceived as defective, as well as their speakers; *bar-bar* was an imitation of these languages. Around the beginning of Classical Greece, the term had come to be used for all foreigners and non-Greek speakers, often with negative connotations.<sup>1</sup> Greeks referred to North African tribes as *barbaroi*, along with other generalized terms, such as "Numidians," and tribal designations. Among the oldest written attestations of the word Berber is its use as an ethnonym in a document from the 1st century AD Periplus of the Erythraean Sea.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The term barbaros, "A Greek-English Lexicon" (Liddell & Scott), on Perseus". Perseus.tufts.edu. Retrieved 2023-07-26.

The Greek *barbaroi* was borrowed as the Arabic word بربرة (*barbara*) 'to babble noisily, to jabber', which was used by conquering Arabs to describe indigenous North African peoples, due to the perceived oddness of their (non-Semitic) language. This usage was the first recorded to refer to indigenous North Africans as the "Berber" collective. Though "Berber" had been used in reference to East Africans as well, it was mostly applied to Maghreb tribes in conquest narratives, and this became the dominant usage of the term.

The English term "Berber" is derived from the Arabic word *barbar*, which means both "Berber" and "barbarian." Due to this shared meaning, as well as its historical background as an exonym, the term "Berber" is commonly viewed as a pejorative by indigenous North Africans today.

While Berber is more widely known among English-speakers, its usage is a subject of debate, due to its historical background as an exonym and present equivalence with the Arabic word for "barbarian." The indigenous populations of the Maghreb region of North Africa are collectively known as Berbers or Amazigh in English.

**Amazigh** (fem. *Tamazight*, pl. *Imazighen*) is an endonym for indigenous North Africans otherwise known as "Berber." "Amazigh" is also used in English; the native language plural "Imazighen" is sometimes but not always used as well.

There have been efforts by self-identified Amazigh to popularize the term over "Berber," including in English, due to the perceived derogatory nature of the latter. The use of "Amazigh" is particularly common in Morocco, especially among Central Atlas Tamazight, Tarifit and Shilha speakers in 1980. Its usage does not replace that for more specific ethnic groups, such as Kabyle or Chaoui.

During Reconquista (711-1492 CE) to some extent, and more extensively after Conquest of Granada (1492), Kingdoms of Castile & Portugal conquered territories and established outposts along Med, coast in Africa

1. Trade within the Med
2. Defense against Barbary pirates

## Background: Iberia on the Global Stage

1402: Castilian-backed expedition to Africa triggers colonization in the Canary Islands

Phases of conquest

1. *Conquista señorial* (aristocratic conquest)
  - a. Carried out by nobility for own gain w/o backing of Castile
    - i. Betancurian/Norman Conquest (1402-1405)
    - ii. Castilian conquest (up to 1478)
2. *Conquista realenga* (Royal conquest): 1478-1496
  - a. Gran Canaria
  - b. La Palma
  - c. Tenerife

The *Romanus Pontifex* bulls (1436 and 1455)

- Lauded Catholic King Afonso V of Portugal for battles against the Muslims
- Endorsed Portuguese military expeditions into Western Africa
- Empowered Portuguese to capture and subdue all Saracens, Turks, and other non-Christians to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery (slavery served as a natural deterrent and Christianizing influence to “barbarous” behavior among pagans)

1443: Papal bull *Rex regum* (Eugenius VI) - neutral position in dispute between Portugal and Castile over African territories

1451: Portugal conquers city of Ceuta

1479: Treaty of Alcáçovas signed between Catholic Monarchs of Castile y Aragon (Ferdinand and Isabella) and Portugal (Afonso V and Prince John of Portugal)

- Ended Castilian War of Succession
- Recognized Isabella as Queen of Castile
- Terceiras de Moura: marriage contract between Isabella Princess of Asturias(daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella I) and Afonso Prince of Portugal (grandson of Afonso V)
- War compensation from Spain to Portugal in form of dowry for Isabella
- **Division of Atlantic Ocean and overseas territories into two zones of influence**
  - Portugal: African Coast
  - Castile: Canary Islands

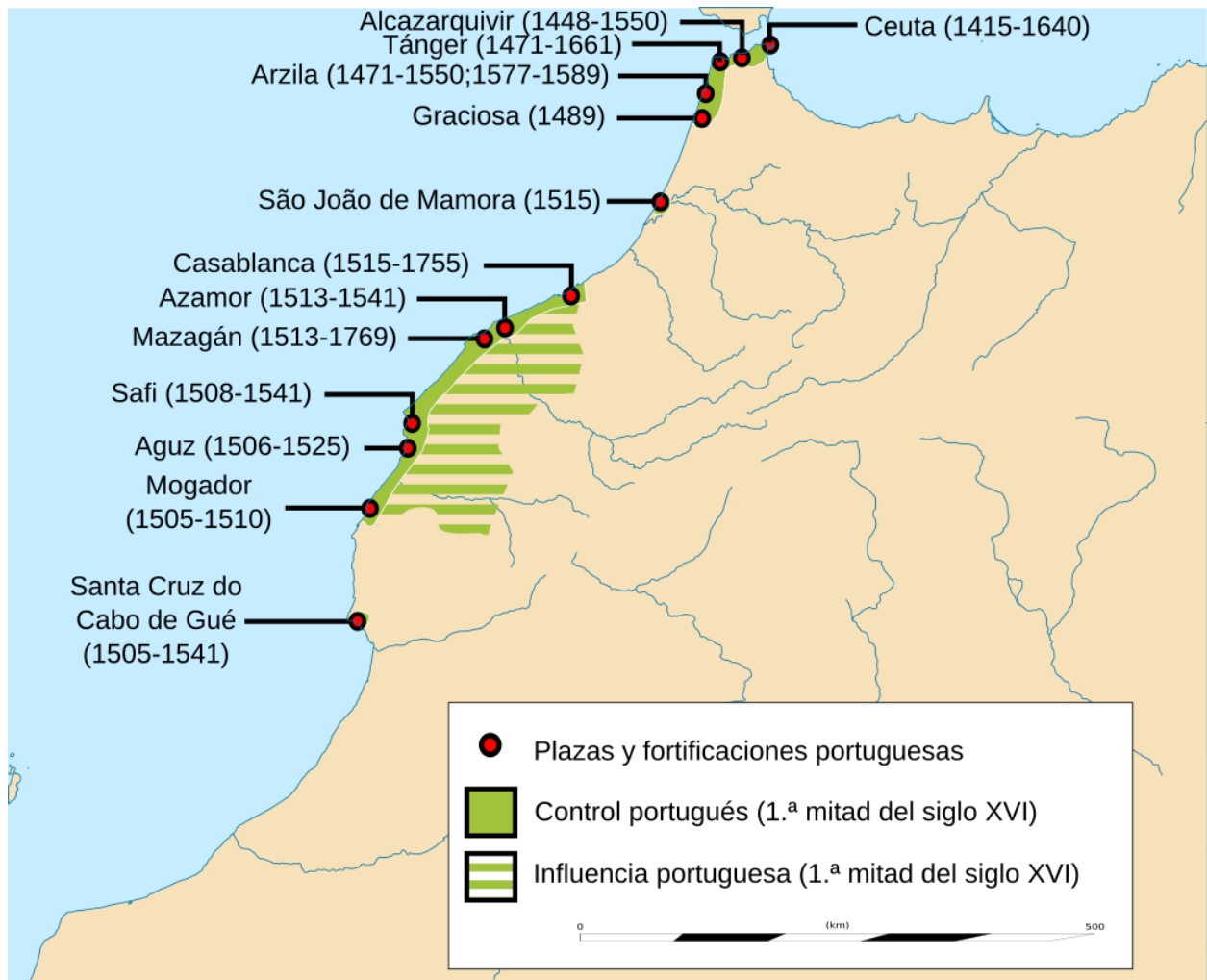
1481: Papal bull *Aeterni regis* (Pope Sixtus IV) reaffirmed Treaty of Alcáçovas

- Reaffirmed Castilian possessions in Canary Islands
  - Canary Islands
- granted all lands south of Canary Islands to Portugal - including all acquisitions made “by Christian powers” in Africa and the East Indies

1492: Columbus expedition

1494: Treaty of Tordesillas

## The Berber Algarve: Portugal in Africa



1415: Conquest of Ceuta by King João I

Viewed as holy Crusade by Pope Martin V but brought no economic value to Portugal (trade moved to other cities almost immediately)

1437: King Duarte attempted to take Tangier (failed)

1458: Afonso V takes Ksar es-Seghir - first major Portuguese expansion in N. Africa

Afonso = first Portuguese king known as “King of Portugal and of the Algarves on this side and beyond the sea in Africa”

1468: João II seized El Jadida; destroys pirate base at Anfa

1470: João II seized Safi

Both cities along Portuguese route down Western coast of N Africa towards Guinea

1471: Portugal takes Arcila and Tangier (lost Tangier shortly after)

Manuel I continued major Portuguese incursions into Morocco

- Agadir (c. 1505-1541)
- Essaouira (1506-1510)
- Azemmour (1513)

1515: Anfa recaptured, refortified, and eventually renamed “Casa Branca” (Casablanca)

By the time of João III, Portuguese empire spread around the globe - N African settlements were economically unstable and militarily unsustainable

1541: Agadir falls to Prince Moulay Muhammad (Saadi Sultanate)

Portugal also loses Safi & Azamor

1550: also lost Ksar es-Seghir & Arcila

1577: Sebastian I of Portugal retakes Arcila

1589: Arcila taken by Almanzor (Saadi Sultanate) - this event heralded the end of Portuguese expansion in Africa

1580-1640: end of independent Portuguese state in N. Africa

## The Plazas de Soberanía: Spain in North Africa

Sp.: “strongholds of sovereignty”



The plazas de soberanía, plus Ceuta (with Perejil Island) and Melilla on the mainland, and Alboran Island 50 km north of the coast

**Plazas de soberanía:** Spanish overseas minor territories

- scattered along the Mediterranean coast bordering Morocco
- or that are closer to Africa than to Europe

- and have belonged to Spain since 1492-1556

After the end of the Reconquista in Spain, the Catholic Monarchs turned their attention across the Strait of Gibraltar with the intention of extending the Reconquista into Morocco

1496: Spain secures Canary Islands off coast of Morocco

1497: conquers Melilla on African mainland

1505: conquers Cazaza and Merz El Kebir

1508-1510: massive expansion of territories to include:

- 1508: Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera
- 1509: Oran
- 1510: Algiers
- 1510: Bejaia
- 1510: Tripoli
- 1510: Coastal Libya

Fearing Spanish success, Oruç Reis, Sultan of Algiers, carries out series of attacks against Spanish territories in Andalucia, Valencia, Alicante

1516: Ferdinand I dies; Oruç Reis takes Algiers and expels Spanish

Emperor Charles V attempts to retake Algiers

1518: Oruç killed at Tlemcen by Spanish forces

Oruç's brother, Hayreddin Barbarossa makes Algiers vassal of Ottoman Empire, thus securing protection from Spain

1580: Phillip II assumes thrones of Spain and Portugal - at this point, all Spanish possessions in N. Africa had been lost except for Melilla, Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, and Oran-Mers El Kébir

1610: Phillip regains Larache (1610) and La Mámora (1614); however, rise of Alaouite dynasty signals rapid collapse of Spanish sovereignty in Africa

# Major Stronghold: Ceuta

## Significant Events

### Antiquity: Phoenicia and Rome

1st millennium BCE: Phoenicians establish outpost

146 BCE: Carthage destroyed (Third Punic War); northwest African settlements left to Numidia and Mauretania

46 BCE: Battle of Thapsus; Caesar and heirs begin annexing N. Africa directly as Roman provinces

40 CE: Ptolemy of Mauretania assassinated by Caligula; kingdom seized

42 CE: Claudius reorganizes Mauretania and places Septem in colony of Tingitana

425 CE: Roman North Africa overrun by Vandals

### 6th-7th Century: From Rome to the Visigoths

533-534 CE: Justinian reconquers Vandal kingdoms

533 CE: Belisarius makes Septem a westernmost outpost of the Byzantine Empire  
Eventual retrenchment left Septem isolated

ca. Early 7th c. CE: Septem pays homage to Visigothic Kingdoms in Iberia

### 8th-10th century: Muslim Conquest

710 CE: End of Islamic conquest of Maghreb

Amazigh converts to Islam take control of Sebta

740 CE: Sebta destroyed during revolt against Umayyad caliphate

9th c. CE: Sebta resettled by Mâjakas, chief of the Majkasa Amazigh tribe

931 CE: descendants of Mâjakas in favor of Abd ar-Rahman III, the Umayyad ruler of Córdoba.

### 11th-14th century: Muslim Rule

1031 CE: Caliphate of Córdoba falls

1084 CE: Ceuta and Muslim Iberia ruled by Almoravid Amazigh

1147 CE: Almohads conquer region

1232 CE: Tunisian Hafsids conquest

1249 CE: Hafsids expelled by inhabitants of Ceuta

1387 CE: Ceuta conquered by Fes (aided by Kingdom of Aragon)

### 15th century: Portuguese Rule

12 August 1415: Conquest of Ceuta by King John I of Portugal



1415 to 1437: Pedro de Meneses the first governor of Ceuta  
1433-1437: Ceuta among possessions of Duarte, King of Portugal (son of John I)  
Ceuta quickly became a burden on the Portuguese economy - trans-Saharan rerouted to Tangiers, which had split from Ceuta and left area useless  
1437: Encouraged by his brothers, Duarte launched attack on Marinid sultanate  
Battle of Tangier, led by Henry the Navigator, resulted in total disaster  
Ceuta was to be returned to the Marinids in exchange for safe passage for Portuguese military out of Northern Africa - Henry reneged and maintained possession of Ceuta  
1458: Ceuta consolidated with Ksar es-Seghir  
1471: Ceuta and Kasr-es-Seghir consolidated with Tangier  
1479: Ceuta recognized as Portuguese possession by Treaty of [Alcáçovas](#)  
1494: Ceuta recognized as Portuguese possession in the Treaty of Tordesillas  
1540s: Portuguese begin building Royal Walls of Ceuta

### 16th century: Iberian Union

1578: King Sebastian of Portugal died at the Battle of Alcácer Quibir (Battle of Three Kings)  
1580: Portuguese Succession Crisis  
1581: Phillip II of Spain crowned Phillip I of Portugal  
1580-1640: large influx of Spanish settlers to Ceuta  
1640: Portuguese Restoration War - Ceuta is only Portuguese possession that allies with Spain  
1668: Afonso VI of Portugal cedes Ceuta to Carlos II of Spain (Treaty of Lisbon)

## Major Stronghold: Melilla

### Significant Events

#### Antiquity

*Rusadir* - Phoenician colony on trade route between Phoenicia and Strait of Gibraltar  
Called *Rusaddir* (Rome) or *Russadeiron* (Greece)

146 BCE: Carthage defeated in Punic Wars - Rusadir passes into control of Mauretania  
40 CE: Ptolemy of Mauretania assassinated by Caligula; kingdom seized  
42 CE: Claudius reorganizes territories and places Rusadir in colony of Mauretania Tingitana  
46 CE: *Rusaddir* made a colony of Rome  
3rd century CE: Rusadir fully Christianized, prosperous  
4th century CE: Rusadir was the principal port for the Mauro-Roman kingdom  
425 CE: Roman North Africa overrun by Vandals  
429: Gaiseric, King of the Vandals, crossed from Iberia to Tingis (Tangier)  
430: Vandal conquest of Rusadir - Rusadir becomes possession of Amazigh rebellion and part of Amazigh kingdom of Altava

533: Belisarius regains Roman control of N. Africa

614: Rusadir conquered by Visigothic general Suintila

Early 7th century CE: Christian bishop with seat in Rusadir

By 700, Rusadir was conquered by Musa ibn Nusayr on behalf of the Umayyad Caliphate

c. 890: repopulated with Amazigh - then known as Melilla/Malila/Amlil

926-927: seized by Andalusian army on behalf of Abd al-Rahman III, emir (soon-to-be Caliph) of Córdoba

### Medieval to Early Modern

1492: Ferdinand and Isabella complete conquest of Nasrid kingdom of Granada

Secretary Hernando de Zafra sends agents to investigate state of Iberian colonies in N. Africa, intending to expand territories

1494: locals rejected authority of Sultan of Fez; pledged loyalty to Catholic Monarchs

Treaty of Tordesillas places Melilla and Cazaza (Portuguese territory) under control of Castile

1496

1497: Melilla seized by Juan Alfonso Pérez de Guzmán y Afán de Ribera, 3rd Duke of Medina Sidonia

Spanish monarchy almost immediately distracted by Italian Wars against France and conquest of "New World"

1498: House of Medina Sidonia compelled to station garrison in Melilla and provide city with supplies and money

1506: Annexed by Castile

1556: Duke of Medina Sidonia relinquishes control of Melilla

## Resources

Barton, Kelleher, and Zaldívar (2022). *Constructing Iberian Identities, 1000-1700*. Turnhout, Belgium. ISBN: 978-2-5035-9630-3.

Block, Adeli (2019). "Respecting Identity: Amazigh Versus Berber". *Society for Linguistic Anthropology*. 2019-09-23. Retrieved 2023-7-26.  
<https://www.linguisticanthropology.org/blog/2019/09/23/respecting-identity-amazigh-versus-berber/>

Fiolhais, Franco, and Paiva (2021). *The Global History of Portugal: from prehistory to the modern world*. Sussex Academic Press. ISBN: 978-1-7897-6104-7.

Naylor, Phillip Chiviges (2009). *North Africa: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. University of Texas Press. ISBN: 978-0-2927-1922-4.

Rouighi, Ramzi (2019). *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib*. University of Pennsylvania Press. ISBN: 978-0-8122-5130-2.