

# ***Borders and Identity in Early Modern Maghreb: Boundary Changes of Algeria and Tunisia, 1529–1881***

ZSOLT PALOTÁS  
UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

## **Résumé**

En 1830, à l'aube de la colonisation du Maghreb, ni le fait, ni l'idée de la frontière n'étaient nouveaux dans la région. Contrairement à la colonisation de l'Afrique sub-saharienne ou au tracé des frontières du Moyen-Orient par les anglo-français, les Français, lors de leur colonisation de la partie côtière nord du Maghreb central, à savoir l'Algérie ottomane (1830) et la Tunisie ottomane (1881), se sont emparés de l'héritage que leur avaient laissé ces États. La fixation et la consolidation de la frontière étaient en grande partie le résultat des politiques coloniales et de protectorat. Cependant, l'existence de la frontière remonte à l'époque de la conquête ottomane, c'est-à-dire au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les Ottomans ont mis fin à la fragmentation politique de la région, qui a conduit au tracé des frontières entre les trois pays du Maghreb occidental, le Maroc, l'Algérie et la Tunisie. Au cours des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles, la triple division géopolitique de la région a été créée, qui existe encore de nos jours.

**Mots clés** : frontière et identité, Maghreb à l'époque moderne, Empire ottoman, Algérie française, protectorat français de Tunisie, Sahara

## **Introduction**

In 1830, at the dawn of the colonization of the Maghreb, neither the fact nor the idea of the border was new in the region. Unlike the colonization of Sub-Saharan Africa or the drawing of the borders of the Middle East by the Anglo-French,<sup>1</sup> the French, during their coloniza-

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<sup>1</sup> The *Berlin Conference* (November 15, 1884 – February 26, 1885) divided the continent of Africa among European powers and it paved the way for its colonization. After 1885, treaties often resulted in straight lines – up to 44 percent of African boundaries contained straight lines – as the mode of delimitations. LEON, Daniel de (1886), “The Conference at Berlin on the West-African Question,” *Political Science Quarterly* 1, no. 1, 103–139; BADEWA, Adeyemi Saheed (2015), “Morocco-Algeria Frontiers and Regional Cooperation in the Maghreb: A Dialectical Dilemma,” *Essays in History* 10, 148. In relation to the Middle East, the *Sykes-Picot Agreement* (May, 1916) led to the division of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into various French- and British-administered areas. Modern scholars often emphasized that this agreement created “artificial” borders in the Middle East. For example, BALI, Asli (2017), “Symposium on the Many Lives and Legacies of Sykes-Picot – Sykes-Picot and ‘Artificial’ States,” *American Journal of International Law* 110, no. 3, 115–119. On the Anglo-French policies in the Middle East in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century see FERWAGNER, Péter Ákos

tion of the northern coastal part of Central Maghreb, namely Ottoman Algeria (1830) and Tunisia (1881) took over the inheritance left to them by these states from Ottoman period.

The present essay's aim is to describe the border changes in the northern region of the Maghreb, especially today's Algeria and Tunisia, from 1529 to 1881, and in some point until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

The consolidation of the northern borders of the Western and Central Maghreb chronologically preceded the establishment of the borders between the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> It is a fact that the borders in the southern part of the Central Maghreb, that is the Sahara, were drawn more than one and a half centuries ago according to colonial considerations. However, it is important to emphasize that this did not happen as a result of classic imperialist rivalry,<sup>4</sup> but was based on the decision of the same colonial power, namely France.<sup>5</sup>

In the northern regions, the existence of the borderline can be traced back to the Middle Ages and to the time of the Ottoman conquest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was then that the region was divided into the still-existing – Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia – geopolitical divisions.

The integration of Algiers into the Ottoman Empire took place at the expense of *Ifriqiya*,<sup>6</sup> that is Tunisia in the east and Morocco in the west from 1512 to 1529. In addition, the northern borders of today's Tunisia date back to ancient times, making them one of the oldest in the world. The Tunisian region followed the Ottoman Algiers model with a significant delay in 1574. Lastly, it can be observed that over the course of the 17–19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman provinces (French Algeria from 1830) were also at war with each other and with Morocco, which resulted in the formation of the borders of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

(2021), *A modern Közél-Kelet születése 1914–1924* [The Birth of the Modern Middle East], Szeged: JATEPress.

<sup>2</sup> The history of contemporary border struggles in North Africa began in September–October, 1963 with the Algerian-Moroccan conflict or the so-called “Sand War” (1963–1964). FAROUN, Karen – PAUL, Jim (1976), “War in the Sahara: 1963,” *Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc. (MERIP)* no. 45, 13–16. In addition, a recent publication on today's border disputes has also been published. This writing examines the role of border regions in shaping patterns of violence since the end of the 1990s in North and West Africa. OECD/SWAC (2022), *Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa*, Paris: West African Studies, OECD Publishing, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6da6d21e-en>, Accessed January 11, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> CHENNTOUF, Tayeb (2005), “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” in *Des frontières en Afrique du XII<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 191–206. 197.

<sup>4</sup> The only exception was the formation of the Libyan borders. In the west, Libya's boundaries with Algeria and Tunisia are the result of early negotiations between French authorities in Algeria and Tunisia and Ottoman authorities in Tripoli. Italy was one of the last European powers to engage in imperial expansion in Africa in 1911. The settlement in the west was finalized through agreements in 1955 and 1956 between Libya and France. ST. JOHN, Ronald Bruce (1998), *Historical Dictionary of Libya*, Lanham, MD-London, Scarecrow Press, 7, 101.

<sup>5</sup> The French authorities determined the extent of the hinterland of the Sahara for Algeria, through which the conquest began. LACOSTE, Yves (1998), “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb: Des frontières très anciennes au sein d'un même ensemble culturel,” in GUILLAUD, Dominique – SEYSSET, M. – WALTER, Annie (eds.), *Le voyage inachevé... à Joël Bonnemaison*, Paris, Orstom, 161–167. 161–162.

<sup>6</sup> The term *Ifriqiya* or *Afriqiyya* is borrowed from the Latin *Africa*. The region included present-day Tunisia, the western part of present-day Libya, and the eastern part of present-day Algeria. TALBI, M. “Ifrikiya,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3, 1047–1050.

### Caravan routes and Political Centers in Medieval Maghreb

The Moroccan, Tunisian, and Algerian states were formed throughout history in the northern region of the Maghreb and not in the Sahara.<sup>7</sup> However, it is an undoubted fact that from the 8<sup>th</sup> until the 14–15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the trans-Saharan trade and gold routes made the Maghreb states important, in the words of Fernand Braudel, in the „world-economy”<sup>8</sup> of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>9</sup>

The trans-Saharan trade and gold routes were economically essential for the North African states.<sup>10</sup> However, for its control, these kingdoms did not have the opportunity to demarcate territories in the Sahara. The collected gold from south of the Sahara (for which salt and various goods were given in return) was brought by caravans to the Maghreb, especially to the large trading markets, for example to the “desert port” of Sijilmasa in southern Morocco and to trading cities such as Marrakesh, Fez, Tlemcen, Constantine, Tunis, Kairouan, and Ghadamès.<sup>11</sup>

These cities, founded in the Middle Ages not only ensured the transportation of gold to the Middle East and Mediterranean Europe but also formed political centers.<sup>12</sup> Over time, dynasties organized around these cities were established in the Western and Central Maghreb.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> LACOSTE, “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb,” 162.

<sup>8</sup> The French historian and leader of the Annales School himself stresses the difference between world economy and world-economy. “*The world economy is an expression applied to the whole world.*” [...] “*A world-economy only concerns a fragment of the world, an economically autonomous section.*” FRANK, Andre Gunder (1993), *World-Economies or [one] World Economy? – A Critical Reading of Braudel’s Perspective of the World*, Revised First Draft, <https://www.rrojasdatabank.info/agfrank/braudel.html>, Accessed December 15, 2022.; BRAUDEL, Fernand (1982), *Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Century. Vol. III. The Perspective of the World*, Berkeley, CA, The University of California Press, 20–21.

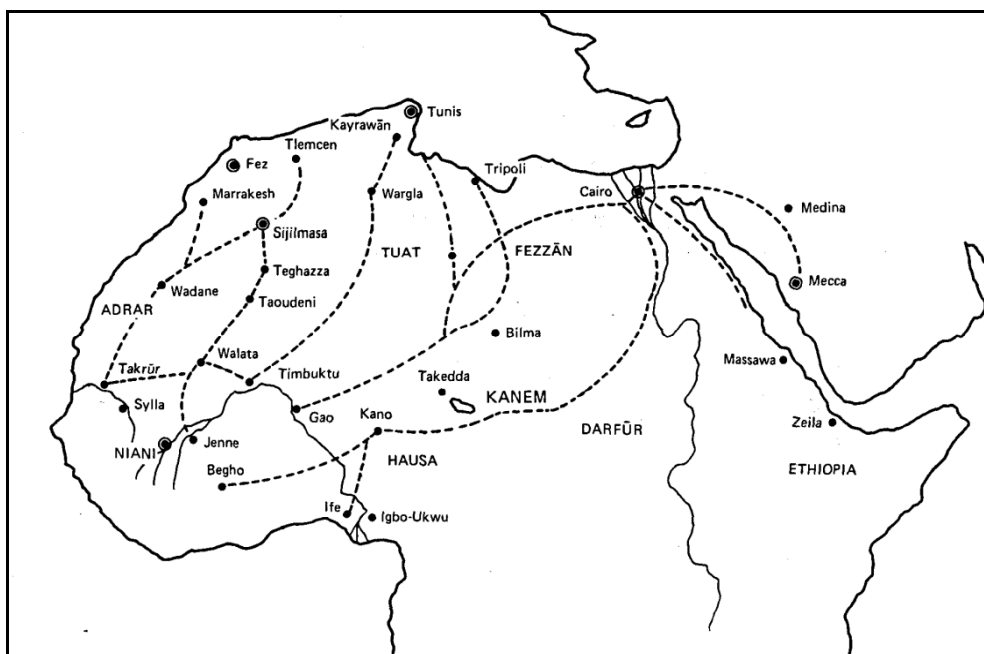
<sup>9</sup> LACOSTE, “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb,” 162. On the trans-Saharan trade see DEVISSE, Jean (1988), “Trade and trade routes in West Africa,” in ELFASI, Mohamed (ed.), *General History of Africa. Volume 3: Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*, Berkeley, CA, The University of California Press, 367–435; NIANE, D.T. (1984), “Relationships and exchanges among the different regions,” in NIANE, D.T. (ed.), *General History of Africa. Volume 4: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, Berkeley, CA, The University of California Press, 614–634.

<sup>10</sup> SAIDI, O. (1984), “The unification of the Maghrib under the Almohads,” in, NIANE, *General History of Africa. Volume 4*, 15–56. 52.

<sup>11</sup> On Sijilmasa see MESSIER, Ronald – MILLER, James (2015), *The Last Civilized Place: Sijilmasa and its Saharan Destiny*, Austin, TX, University of Texas Press.

<sup>12</sup> The foundation of Constantine even dates back to antiquity. It was founded circa 203 BC, by the Phoenicians, who called it Sewa, and later, according to Livy, Roman historian (59 BC–AD 17) it was renamed Cirta. Later, in 312 AD, Cirta became known as Constantine (*Civitas Constantina Cirtensium*). *Sites & cities that bear the name of Cirta* – <https://www.strabon.io/site/Cirta>, Accessed December 15, 2022.; Bertrand, S. (1994), “Cirta,” in *Encyclopédie berbère*, Vol. 13, 1964–1977.

<sup>13</sup> JULIEN, Charles André (1970), *History of North Africa. Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco: From the Arab Conquest to 1830*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 37–75.



Main trans-Saharan routes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (*General History of Africa*, 4, 155.)

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Almohads (1041–1230) established the unity of the entire Maghreb and Muslim Andalusia by controlling the gold routes.<sup>14</sup> After the collapse of the Almohad Empire in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the borders north of the Sahara were formed, which more or less are the northern borders of the three Maghreb states to this day.<sup>15</sup>

The Marinid dynasty (1244–1465), which succeeded the Almohads in Morocco, had a long rivalry with the city of Tlemcen. Eventually, the border which became the western border of the Ottoman Empire was drawn between the two territories in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Further east, the Ottomans took over the borders of the Hafsid dynasty which ruled from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Tunis, in order to demarcate their provinces, *ejalets/vilayets* or *sancaks* of Algiers and Tunis.<sup>16</sup>

### The Ottoman Conquest of the Maghreb and its Influences on the region

During the 1500s, the *Sublime Porte* conquered the Eastern and the Central Maghreb region step by step, first Algiers (1529), then Tripoli (1551), and last Tunis (1574). In addition, in

<sup>14</sup> SAIDI, “The unification of the Maghrib under the Almohads,” <sup>15</sup> For the Almohad Empire see JULIEN, *History of North Africa*, 104–135.

<sup>15</sup> LACOSTE, “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb,” 162.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 162–163. For the Hafsids see BRUNSCHVIG, Robert (1940, 1947), *La Berbérie orientale sous les Hafsides: Des origines à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols, Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve; JULIEN, *History of North Africa*, 140–161.

the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the adoption of the Ottoman model (bureaucracy, military and administration, etc.) also can be observed in the Maghreb states.

The central part of the region became a province of the Ottoman Empire in 1529, with Algiers as its capital. Only the region of Tunis remained from the Hafside Kingdom by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. This area followed the trajectory of Ottoman Algeria at the beginning of the century with a chronological delay. During that time period, dynastic and succession disputes and Spanish–Ottoman hostilities (1534, 1535, 1569, and 1573) played a significant issue. In 1574, Sinan Pasha/Grand Vizier (1520–1596) led an expedition against La Goletta and Tunis. Before returning to Istanbul, Sinan organized the government of Tunis loyal to the Ottomans.<sup>17</sup>



The Ottoman siege of La Goletta fortress in 1574

(National Science Foundation, BRAUN, Georg – HOGENBERG, Franz, “*Tunis and Carthage, circa 1574*,” <http://math.arizona.edu/~dido/sponsors.html> Accessed Marc 1, 2018.)

Of the Western Maghreb states, Morocco was the only one that did not become part of the Ottoman Empire. The sultanate remained independent under the leadership of the Saadian dynasty (1510–1659), which replaced the Marinids, in the 16–17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>18</sup>

From then on, the new states (this is partly also true for Morocco) had new weapons and armies, developed a new type of bureaucratic state apparatus, and had significant financial resources. All Ottoman territories in the Maghreb were governed by the beylerbeys and pashas, appointed from Istanbul. In addition, a new and standing army, namely Janissary

<sup>17</sup> JULIEN, *History of North Africa*, 282–284, 297–301.

<sup>18</sup> In general for the Saadian dynasty see *Ibid.* 220–242.

Corp appeared in each province.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the divan was also established which acted as an advisory body next to the pasha.<sup>20</sup>

The Ottoman sultans administered the newly conquered region in one unit till 1587. After that, it was divided into three major provinces or regencies.<sup>21</sup> The final geopolitical *status quo* also took shape gradually. On the one hand, the appearance and settlement of the border disputes can be observed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Algiers, Tunis, and Fez fought a series of wars with each other. On the other hand, from 1830, following the French annexation and colonization of Ottoman Algeria, the question of the border in a modern sense also appeared in the Maghreb.<sup>22</sup>

### **Borders of Algeria: the Regency of Algiers and French Algeria, 1529–1912**

As a result of a long process, the border between Morocco and the Regency of Algiers was stabilized at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1553, Salah rais, Pasha of Algiers (1552–1556) responded to successive Moroccan attacks, gathered an army, defeated the Moroccans twice, captured Tlemcen, and advanced all the way to Fez. In addition, he also intervened in the Saadian dynastic disputes – the dethroning of Mohammed al-Mahdi/ash-Shejk I (founder 1554–1557) against Ali Abu Hassun (1549–1554). After the departure of Salah rais, Mohamed I reconquered his kingdom, then besieged Tlemcen. Furthermore, he defeated Ali Abu Hassun’s army in the battle of Tadla in 1554. From that year on, the border between the two states, which was the Moulouya river, was respected on both sides for a century.<sup>23</sup>

In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Alawite sultans (1631–) revived their demands towards Tlemcen. Moulay Ismail (1672–1727) managed to briefly take control of the country as far as Tafna. In 1692, Haji Chabane, Dey of Algiers (1688–1695) defeated him in the battle of Moulouya, therefore he was forced to make peace. According to the treaty, the Moroccans and the Algerians once again recognized the Moulouya river as the border between the two states.<sup>24</sup>

There were continuous Moroccan attacks on Algiers in 1693, 1694, 1696, 1700, 1701, 1703, and 1707. All of these assaults ended with a Moroccan defeat and the area up to the Moulouya river remained again under the rule of Algiers for more than a hundred years.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Sultan Moulay Sliman/Suleiman (1792–1822) organized an expedition to capture the Algerian city of Oujda. The Bey of Oran did not make any defense preparations and offered no resistance, which led to the fact that Oujda was inte-

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<sup>19</sup> Jean Pignon, a French historian estimated that the Tunisian janissary garrison numbered 3000 and 4000 which was divided into units of 100 under junior officers called *deys* between 1590 and 1650. PIGNON, Jean (1956), “La milice des janissaires de Tunis au temps des Deys 1590–1650,” *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* 4, 3<sup>ème</sup> trim, no. 15, 301–326.

<sup>20</sup> COLIN, G. S. “Diwan,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2, 332.

<sup>21</sup> JULIEN, *History of North Africa*, 301–302.

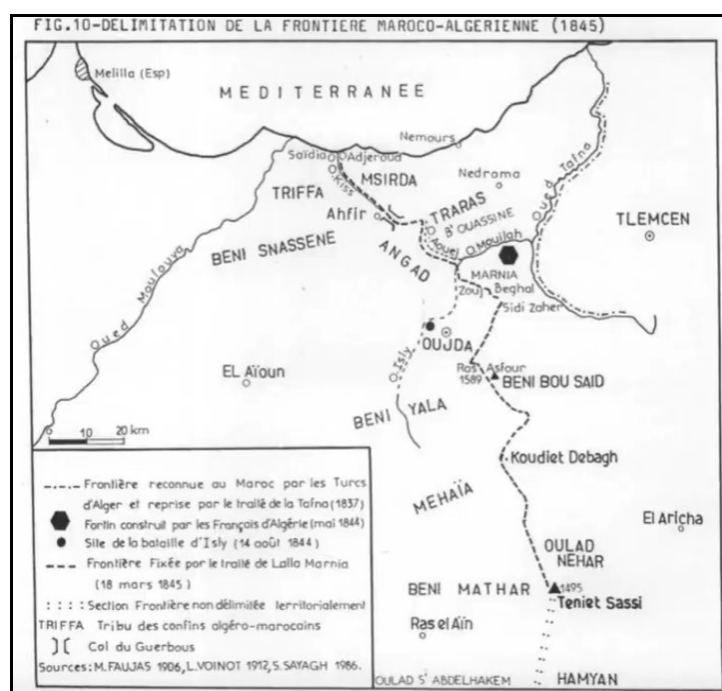
<sup>22</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 196.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 204.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

grated into the Kingdom of Morocco in 1795. The border was fixed at the Oued Kiss river instead of the Moulouya river.<sup>25</sup>

The resistance of Emir Abd el-Kader<sup>26</sup> (1832–1847) who used the Moroccan territories as a refuge in 1831 after the French annexation of Algeria, indirectly contributed to the Moroccan–French war of August 1844.<sup>27</sup> The conflict ended after the battle of Isly (14 August 1844) with the defeat of Morocco and the peace signed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 1844 in Tangier.<sup>28</sup> The treaty was followed by the *Convention of Lalla Maghnia*, signed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1845.<sup>29</sup> This accord was the first colonial treaty in North Africa and it fixed the borders of French Algeria and Morocco.<sup>30</sup>



Change of borders between Morocco and French Algeria, 1845

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 204–205.

<sup>26</sup> Abdelkader, also spelled Abd el-Kader or Abdul-Qadir (1808–1883) was a military and religious leader who founded the Algerian state and led the Algerians in their 19th-century struggle against French domination (1840–1846). BROWER, Benjamin Claude (2011), “The Amir ‘Abd Al-Qâdir and the ‘Good War’ in Algeria, 1832–1847,” *Studia Islamica* 106, no. 2, 169–195.

<sup>27</sup> For the Moroccan–French relations after 1830 see BENNISON, Amira (2002), *Jihad and its Interpretations in Pre-Colonial Morocco: State-Society Relations during the French Conquest of Algeria*, London–New York, NY, Routledge, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> CLERCQ, M. de (1865), *Recueil des traités de la France. Tome 5: 1843–1849*, Paris, Amyot, 200–203; DELLAL, Abou-el-Kacim (2016), “Tableau géographique de la frontière de l’Algérie,” *Revue académique des études humaines et sociales*, 16–23. 17.

<sup>29</sup> CLERCQ, *Recueil des traités*, 271–275.; DELLAL, “Tableau géographique de la frontière de l’Algérie,” 18.

<sup>30</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 197.

Aristide de La Ruë (1795–1872),<sup>31</sup> a French soldier, politician, and count, strongly emphasized that the convention was not just an agreement about territorial limits. In view of the fact that the contracting powers recognized the right of the French to „pursue Abd el-Kader even into the interior of the Moroccan desert.”<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the *Maghnia Convention* and the *Treaty of Tangier* preserved the boundaries of the Regency of Algiers that existed before 1830. “*The boundary between the possessions of His Majesty the Emperor of France and His Majesty the Emperor of Morocco shall remain fixed from Turkish rule in accordance with the situation then recognized by the Government of Morocco. [...] a new agreement can have no other basis than the clause of the Treaty of Tangier, which puts us [French] in the place of the Turks.*”<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the border made sense only in the case of habitable and cultivable land. Article 4 stated that “*In the Sahara (desert), there is no territorial limit to be established between the two countries, since the land is not plowed and only serves as pasture for the Arabs [Berbers] of the two Empires who come to camp there to find the pastures and waters they need. The two Sovereigns will exercise as they see fit all the plenitude of their rights over their respective subjects in the Sahara.*”<sup>34</sup>

Article 6 also stated that beyond Teniet Sidi-Sassi „as for the country which is to the south of the *kessours* [actually Ksour, meaning fortified town, Arabic term for “castle” in the Maghreb] of the two Governments, since there is no water, as it is uninhabitable, and as it is the desert properly so called, the delimitation would be superfluous.”<sup>35</sup>

Among the deficiencies of the agreement is the fact that the resistance led by Abd el-Kader continued. The concept of the border interpreted as a precise and defined line has not fully developed either.<sup>36</sup>

From a perspective, it can be said that the *Treaty of 1901* and *1902* recognized the rights of France over the Sahara. Furthermore, on the 21st of May, 1912, the administrative border between Morocco and Algeria, the so-called Varnier Line, from Figuig to Tiberiatiene was drawn.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Aristide Isidore Jean-Marie de La Ruë entered the service early and owed his rapid advancement mainly to the numerous diplomatic missions with which he was charged in Germany, Spain, Italy, Russia, the Caucasus, Crimea, Constantinople, Morocco, and Algeria. He was Director of Algerian Affairs at the Ministry of War from November 1845 to March 1848. ROBERT Adolphe – COUGNY Gaston – BOURLOTON, Edgar (1891), *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, Tome 3. (Fes–Lav), Paris, Bourloton, 610.

<sup>32</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 197.

<sup>33</sup> CLERCQ, *Recueil des traités, Treaty of Tangier*, Article 5, 202; *Convention of Lalla Maghnia*, Article 1, 272.

<sup>34</sup> CLERCQ, *Recueil des traités, Convention of Lalla Maghnia*, Article 4, 274.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 274–275.

<sup>36</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 199.

<sup>37</sup> BADEWA, “Morocco-Algeria Frontiers,” 149–150.; PENNELL, C. R. (2000), *Morocco since 1830. A History*, New York, NY, New York University Press, 4–5; DELLAL, “Tableau géographique de la frontière de l’Algérie,” 18–19.



### Borders of Tunisia: the Regency of Tunis, 1574–1881

The Algerian–Tunisian and Tunisian–Libyan (the Regency of Tripoli) border posed fewer difficulties than the Algerian–Moroccan border. The establishment of borders was the subject of only two disputes between the Regency of Tunis and Algiers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The first treaty that defined the border was signed in 1614. The border between the two states was then the Oued el Serrat river.<sup>38</sup> Fifteen years later, the agreement was questioned by the bordering Tunisia tribes and their leader, Taib Ben Chenouf of Kef. They invaded the area, and established a military station on the river. War then broke out, during which the Tunisian army was defeated on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 1628. The peace treaty was entirely aimed at demarcating the border.<sup>39</sup>

According to the agreement of 1628, the border was still the Oued el Serrat in the southern part of the region. Furthermore, the military post that the Tunisians built on the river had to be demolished. In addition, the border was marked by the Oued Mellègue river in the west. Jebel el Ahireche, Keloub el Tiran, and Jebel Hafa became part of the line, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. Lastly, neither power could refer to their subjects crossing the border anymore. Consequently, they became subjects of the government to which they migrated.<sup>40</sup>

The first delimitation between the Regency of Tunis and French Algeria took place in three stages. In 1835 Louis Philippe I (1830–1848) gave instructions for a peace agreement with Ahmed I Bey of Tunis (1837–1855). Since the negotiations did not lead to an agreement, France unilaterally decided that “*on the seaward side, only Cap Roux and the mountain range descending inland can be the border*”.<sup>41</sup>

In 1843 (following the bey’s instruction from 1841), a Joint Delimitation Committee was established. Next, an issue arose regarding fixing the border east or west of Tabarka.

The *Convention of 1852* distinguished the Tellian zone, the Kef zone in El Hammam, the zone between Jebel Ghorra and fīj al Monahed. South of this point, the delimitation became more uncertain because of the desert.<sup>42</sup>

After the establishment of the French protectorate in Tunisia in 1881, between 1888 and 1898, joint committees managed the settlement of the Mediterranean border. This was ratified by decree in September 1901.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 205.; MOALLA, Asma (2005), *The Regency of Tunis and the Ottoman Porte, 1777–1814. Army and Government of a North-African Eyâlet at the End of the Eighteenth Century*, London – New York, NY, Routledge, 18.

<sup>39</sup> MOUILLARD, L. (1895), “Etablissement des Turcs en Afrique et en Tunisie,” *Revue Tunisienne* 2, 358–375. 559.; SLIM, Hédi – MAHJOUBI, Ammar – BELKHODJA, Khaled – ENNABLI, Abdelmajid (2003), *Histoire générale de la Tunisie, vol. III, Les Temps modernes*, Tunis, Sud Éditions, 53–54.; FAUCON, Narcisse (1893), *La Tunisie depuis l’occupation française: histoire et colonisation*, Tome I, Paris, A. Challamel, 141.

<sup>40</sup> MOUILLARD, “Etablissement des Turcs en Afrique et en Tunisie,” 560.; CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 205; FAUCON, *La Tunisie*, 141.; BACHROUCH, Taoufik (1977), *Formation sociale barbaresque et pouvoir à Tunis au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Tunis, Publications de l’Université, 162–163.

<sup>41</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 200.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

The final Tunisian–Libyan border came into force at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1794 expedition of Hammuda II, Pasha Bey (1782–1814) annexed Djerba Island to the Regency of Tunis. The border itself was defined in the treaty concluded in 1815.<sup>44</sup> After that, the frontiers between the three Regencies remained unchanged for the whole of the Ottoman period.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the south, Yusuf Karamanli, Pasha of Tripoli (1766–1838), also recognized his authority over Ghadamès in 1840.<sup>46</sup>



Hammuda II, Pasha Bey

In 1881, at the beginning of the French protectorate of Tunisia, a neutral zone was established between Libya and Tunisia to avoid contact and conflict between the Ottomans and the French. In 1886 and 1892, a draft was drawn up that specifically demarcated the two areas.<sup>47</sup> Decisively, the Tunisian–Libyan border was also the main theme of the *Tripoli Agreement/Convention* signed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, 1910, between the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V (1909–1918) and Muhammad al-Nasir Bey of Tunisia (1906–1922). The border was drawn from Ras Adjedir, located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, to Gharet el

<sup>44</sup> FAUCON, *La Tunisie*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> MOALLA, *The Regency of Tunis*, 18, 52.

<sup>46</sup> CHENNTOUF, “La dynamique de la frontière au Maghreb,” 205.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 200.

Hamel mountain, thirteen kilometers south of Ghadamès. In the south, the border passes at an equal distance between Djeneien–Ghadamès and Naleut–Ghadamès.<sup>48</sup>

The delimitation and consolidation of the Saharan borders took place later. The intention was to create a single block of territories that became legally French.

### **Borders and Identity in Western and Central Maghreb**

How can the relative permanence of the northern borders of the Maghreb, above presented be explained? According to Yves Lacoste, the political and cultural characteristics of this part of the Arab world must be taken into account.

Politically, a significant part of the Maghreb formed the provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the early modern period. In addition, from 1830 France, without any other European rival extended its influence on the region.

On the other hand, in contrast to the eastern Arab countries in the Mashrek region, where various rites and interpretations of Islam still compete with each other (e.g. Shia minorities confronting the Sunni Orthodox), the Maghreb has been characterized by a high degree of religious homogeneity for nearly nine centuries since the Fatimid era (909–1171).<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, due to the predominance of Arabic, the Mashrek is linguistically absolutely homogeneous, while the Maghreb is characterized by the significant survival of Berber dialects. To this day, we can distinguish Berber-speaking regions, such as the Greater Kabylia and the Aurès regions of Algeria, or most of the mountains and highlands of Morocco. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Berber language was widespread, with the exception of Tunisia, where Arabization was decisive.<sup>50</sup> However, even in the case of Tunisia, various aspects of Berber traditions – eating habits (couscous), clothing (burnous), and oral literature – form the cultural basis of the entire Maghreb region. It is a fact, that “Arabs”, in the sense of Arabic speakers, are actually more or less Arabized Berbers in the Maghreb and not Arabs from Arabia.<sup>51</sup>

Since Berber remained an unwritten language, each new dynasty and ruling class had to have a state apparatus whose officials could of course write in Arabic and later in Ottoman-Turkish. However, each new dynasty – in order to defeat the previous dynasty, take control of the large trading cities, etc. – also had to rely on the fighting potential of the Berber tribes.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the Maghreb dynasties formed an Arab–Berber or Ottoman state apparatus: the Berbers performed the military tasks, while the Arabs and Ottomans performed the intellectual and commercial tasks.

<sup>48</sup> *Convention Tunisie-Lybie 19 mai 1910* – <http://www.habib-bourguiba.net/convention-tunisie-lybie-19-mai-1910/>, Accessed January 11, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> LACOSTE, “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb,” 163.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> For the „myth of Arab conquest” see LACOSTE, Yves (2017), *Ibn Khaldun and The Myth of “Arab Invasion”* – <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3293-ibn-khaldun-and-the-myth-of-arab-invasion>, Accessed January 11, 2023.

<sup>52</sup> LACOSTE, “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb,” 164. For example, the Fatimids ended the rule of the Aglabids with the help of the Berber tribes in 909.

Large trading cities and political centers, as above presented in connection with the caravan routes, are also very stable elements of the historical geography of the Maghreb. Unlike Europe and many other countries, where the political center took over the material goods (grain, livestock, and minerals) from the countryside, the Maghreb was characterized by an inverted relationship for a long time. The centers of the states were stops on the gold routes, where the wealth provided by international trade was distributed among the allied tribes. These cities continued to survive after the end of the gold routes through the Western Sahara and the Maghreb in the late Middle Ages.<sup>53</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, fixing and consolidating the border of the Western and Central Maghreb was largely the result of French colonial and protectorate policies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the existence of the border can be traced back to the Middle Ages and the time of the Ottoman conquest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the relative stability of the northern borders of the Maghreb can also be explained on the one hand by political and on the other hand by cultural factors.

In relation to the above-presented border disputes and settlements – Morocco–Algeria, Algeria–Tunisia, Tunisia–Libya – three conclusions can be drawn. First, there was no relatively significant border change during early modern times compared to the conditions of the Middle Ages and the 16<sup>th</sup> century – the geopolitical situation and condition of the region remained substantially unchanged. Furthermore, controversial issues only arose in connection with the northern territories and not with the Saharan region in early times. Finally, major disputes only arose at the frontiers of empires – Morocco–Ottoman Empire, Morocco–French Algeria, French Algeria–Ottoman Empire, French Tunisia–Ottoman Empire – in Early Modern Times.

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<sup>53</sup> LACOSTE, “Originalité géopolitique du Maghreb,” 164–165.