

## The Way to Mecca. Spanish State Sponsorship of Muslim Pilgrimage (1925-1972)

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**ABSTRACT:** The sponsorship of pilgrimage to Mecca by European colonial powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries contributed to transforming the *hajj* into the global phenomenon it is today. Spain also promoted Muslim pilgrimage from its zone of the Moroccan Protectorate, tentatively at first, and then more purposefully from 1937 onwards, continuing its sponsorship into the early 1970s, years after Morocco's independence. Intensive study of administrative documentation from the Spanish Protectorate allows the reformulation of the sponsorship's established chronology (from 1937 to 1956). It also shows the dual intent concealed behind its promotion: first, as propaganda aimed at the interior of the Moroccan territory being administered; and second, as a tool for the external promotion of a political regime in need of support to escape its international isolation. The pilgrimage's sponsorship is seen as part of the general framework of managing Muslim rituals enacted by the Spanish government to deactivate their potential mobilising capacity.

**KEYWORDS:** Islam; Morocco; Spanish Protectorate; Pilgrimage to Mecca; Control of rituals.

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**RESUMEN:** *El camino a La Meca. El patrocinio del peregrinaje musulmán por parte del Estado español (1925-1972).* - El patrocinio de la peregrinación a La Meca por parte de las potencias coloniales europeas en los siglos XIX y XX contribuyó a transformar el *hajj* en el fenómeno global que es hoy. España también promovió la peregrinación musulmana desde su zona del Protectorado marroquí, tentativamente al principio, y luego con más determinación a partir de 1937 en adelante, continuando su patrocinio a principios de la década de 1970, años después de la independencia de Marruecos. El estudio intensivo de la documentación administrativa del protectorado español permite la reformulación de la cronología establecida del patrocinio (de 1937 a 1956). También muestra la doble intención oculta detrás de su promoción: primero, como propaganda dirigida al interior del territorio marroquí que se administra y, segundo, como una herramienta para la promoción externa de un régimen político que necesita apoyo para escapar de su aislamiento internacional. El patrocinio de la peregrinación se ve como parte del marco general de gestión de los rituales musulmanes promulgados por el gobierno español para desactivar su potencial capacidad de movilización.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Islam; Marruecos; Protectorado Español; Peregrinaje a La Meca; Control de los rituales.

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## INTRODUCTION

The attempt to mould a bespoke Islam, envisioning a stable, compact order in which Muslim populations were slotted within reference frameworks that singled them out, kept them in an identity compatible with Western values, and neutralised their potential reactivity, has different readings in colonial times and today. Both readings, however, focus their efforts on galvanising the figure of the “Muslim” as a social category onto which a series of assumptions are projected that serve to place these individuals within a set of ordered references. The essentialisation of this “Muslim-ness” becomes an element that is considered both when defining Muslims’ legal status in colonial times, and when incorporating this singularity into the structures of a liberal democracy that is more or less receptive to cultural and religious plurality, as it is conceived in modern-day Europe (Moreras, 2017, pp. 13-37). The problem of this essentialisation is that it is often disrupted by other components being incorporated along with the notion of “Muslim”. These may be ethnic and based on the cultural affiliations that make up these groups’ identities, as with the category of “*moro*” (Moor) used commonly in the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco, they may be terms with evolutionary connotations such as “indigenous”, or they may be political, as is the case for European Muslims and their assimilation within foreign populations, where they find their full access to the citizenship of these countries limited.

Taking the work done in previous studies as a starting point (Moreras-Tarrés, 2013; Moreras, 2018, pp. 237-268), this text will use a specific example – Spanish state sponsorship of pilgrimage to Mecca during its colonial rule of northern Morocco – as a means of understanding the genealogy of how the category of Muslim is articulated for the purposes of political control. I have consulted the documentation of the Spanish administration in Africa in the Archivo General de la Administración (Alcalá de Henares), the Spanish National Library (Madrid) and the Library of Catalonia (Barcelona). First it must be recognised that although the study of the Spanish colonial administration in Morocco is well consolidated in the fields of history and the social sciences, studies focussing explicitly on analysing the political instrumentalization of Islam remain scarce.

The administrative documentation I have used in this work is part of the varied and uneven corpus that constitutes what Manuela Marín calls “colonial literature”, whose credibility as “source for the knowledge of the Spanish-Moroccan colonial relationship has not always been favourable” (Marín, 2015, p. 20). The propaganda component of this documentation – evident from the very promotion of the pilgrimage – distorts the description of the events, and the testimony of the Moroccan people is practically suppressed, with the exception of the grateful words of notable figures with privileged relationships with the colonial administration. But nevertheless, the documentation is essential to understanding the mechanism of making colonial knowledge (Stoler, 2002) and the

context of colonial cognitive production (Mateo Dieste and Villanova, 2013) in this period. A detailed analysis of this documentation allows us to understand the complex articulation of a colonial model which, despite wanting to claim itself to be fraternal or disinterested according to the official rhetoric (Moga, 2007), showed a high degree of improvisation and vagueness, “which caused the performance of the interventors (*interventores*) to be guided, on numerous occasions, by personal judgment” (Villanova, 2005, p. 96). This text provides an example of the interest of the leading colonial ideologue Tomás García Figueras<sup>1</sup> in convincing first the protectorate authorities and later the Spanish government to promote the pilgrimage to Mecca for the benefit of the Muslims who lived in Spanish Morocco, as other colonial powers were doing.

We are indebted to authors such as Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste (2003) for the interest in analysing the role of Islam in the development of the colonial administration during the protectorate. The official rhetoric proclaimed tacit respect for Moroccan religious and cultural singularity (Jewish as well as Islamic) as a way of showing the “fraternity” on which the colonial action was based. But, essentially, the colonial administration sought to avoid Islam becoming an active ingredient in the resistance to colonisation and opted for control of public expressions of Islamic religiosity – beginning with the figure of the Khalifa<sup>2</sup> himself as commander of the faithful (*amr al-muminin*) – which were concealed beneath the calculated image of Spain as protector of the Islamic religion. Patricia Hertel (2015) demonstrates the progressive construction of Islam as the “colonial other” in which three elements mix: the historical past relating to Islam, in which references to the Arab presence and the later *reconquista* are permanent; the experiences resulting from the Spanish penetration into Morocco and the different wars resulting from it; and the disturbance generated by the incorporation of differentialist historical prejudices synthesised around the concept of “*moro*”, a term whose use is constant, habitual and employed as an archetype of Spanish national identity. Finally, Eric Calderwood (2018) shows that the common effort by the Hispano-Moroccan political and cultural elites in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to insist on this collective past uniting Morocco and Spain ended up creating an Andalusian identity that, no matter which historical arguments were invoked, was not the product of a medieval past, but of an unequal meeting between the two societies (a narrative that continues to be exploited in recent times, in this case with a dual touristic and cultural purpose). Calderwood suggests that appealing to this common past served to explain uncomfortable alliances that were established mutually both in order to uphold the colonial administration and for Moroccan power elites to prolong their privileged status with an eye, probably, on a future in which they could embrace nationalist perspectives that would allow them to shake off the colonial yoke.

The sections that follow seek to analyse the sponsorship of the *hajj*. They reveal a new chronology that cor-

rects the 1937-1956 one established by other authors (Solà, 2001, pp. 56-61; Mateo Dieste, 2003, pp. 259-263), extending it back to 1925, the time of the first documented reports of the colonial administration proposing the need to organise the pilgrimage, and forwards to 1972, when a group of prominent figures from Western Sahara had the privilege of being the last to travel to Mecca thanks to the Spanish state.

The administrative documentation on this pilgrimage may be consulted in the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA). It is distributed irregularly across the collection on the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. The material on the 1925 to 1931 period is in Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*. Due to the number of documents containing annotations that seem to match the handwriting of Tomás García Figueras, it may be supposed that he compiled all this documentation in order to prepare his proposal for promoting pilgrimage (which will be analysed below), as it would otherwise have ended up dispersed. As well as the AGA, the documentation on sponsorship from 1937 to 1972 was consulted at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (Fondo África) and the Biblioteca de Cataluña.

### PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA IN THE COLONIAL CONTEXT (19TH-20TH CENTURIES)

Various academic publications show the growing interest in studying the sponsorship of pilgrimage to Mecca by the European colonial powers (Chantre, 2012, 2018; Chiffolleau, 2015; Kane, 2015; Slight, 2015; Ryad, 2017). The modernization of means of transport contributed not only to improving travelling conditions, which had previously taken place over land, but opened the door to making the *hajj* the global phenomenon we know today. According to Chantre (2012, pp. 89-229), the different colonial powers became active promoters of it, developing genuine “pilgrimage to Mecca policies” in which different interests converged – commercial, geostrategic and protective, both from the transmission of diseases and from political ideas that might destabilise their colonial dominions. All this patronage was clearly masked by intense propagandistic promotion in which the European states sought to appear as defenders of Islam.

France was the first country to establish this control of pilgrims leaving its colonial dominions based on health concerns, which also subsequently served to prevent the penetration of nationalist propaganda imported from the Middle East. A *dahir* (decree) on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1929 and a vizierial decree on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1929 established the conditions of pilgrimage from the French Moroccan area, with departure exclusively from Casablanca. It seemed clear that prominent Moroccans in the Spanish zone would take interest in the pilgrimage being organised from French Morocco or Algeria. The written press of the time gathered varied information on the subject (even before the 1929 decree): “Journey to Mecca. Authorization has been granted to Driss el Rifi and al Kaid of Salauí properties to make the pilgrimage to Mecca” (*La Libertad*, May

17<sup>th</sup> 1924); “H.E. Abd-el-Kader and numerous notable Moors depart for Mecca” (*El Telegrama del Rif*, March 11<sup>th</sup> 1930). In April 1929 the Spanish *Intervención General* ordered the various regional interventors<sup>3</sup> to inform them of the number of pilgrims requesting authorization to carry out the *hajj*, a figure that turns out to be very modest.<sup>4</sup>

The Spanish colonial administration in Morocco seemed to play a secondary role in this context. A memo sent by the chair of the Council of Ministers to the Spanish High Commission in Morocco on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1930, which included a reference to the Spanish consul in Tunis resolving the problems of Moroccan pilgrims in the Spanish zone starting their journeys to Mecca, changed this situation. For the first time it was proposed that “it would be convenient for this High Commissioner’s office to receive information on the pilgrimage to Mecca this coming year, on how to carry out the organization of this trip”.

In the original document this paragraph is underlined in red pencil, and alongside it appears a handwritten note: “our pilgrims to Mecca have embarked in Tunis thanks to the consul’s arrangements, but henceforth journeys should be organized in our zone”. This note was written by Tomás García Figueras, a key figure in the development of the colonial administration, who at that time was the head of the Spanish-French Mixed Office in Tangier.<sup>5</sup> He was the first to promote the proposal that the Spanish should sponsor the pilgrimage.

### A NEGLECTED PROPOSAL (1925-1931)

The AGA documentation contains two documents, dated December 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> 1925, that include handwritten annotations by Tomás García Figueras. The first of these, entitled “Pilgrimage to Mecca sponsored by the government in a Spanish boat, leaving from Ceuta and Melilla”<sup>6</sup> is four pages long and analyses the pilgrimage from a political and commercial point of view. It begins by arguing that the peaceful use of this ritual’s promotion would be more effective than any military campaign, an implicit reference to the events around the Rif rebellion years earlier. Promoting the pilgrimage was therefore seen as an act of propaganda in which the testimony of the pilgrims would be used: “Spain sends people in order to show its value, and that in Morocco it enacts a genuine protectorate” (p. 2). The second document (signed by the Oficina Central de Intervención de Tétouan on December 18<sup>th</sup> 1925) defines some of the ideas presented in the previous text in greater detail, insisting that the aim of the sponsorship emerges from “the most absolute respect for religion [...]; which for our regime is one of affection and tenderness towards protégés” (p. 1). He also proposes this initiative as a way to improve the international image of the Spanish Protectorate and “demonstrate to the Muslim world that Spain is going to war merely to fight a few rebels” (p. 2).

The chair of the Spanish Council of Ministers dismissed the proposal on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1926, arguing that

carrying out this project was not recommendable given “the current state of turmoil that exists in almost all Islamic countries” and the risk of “putting the Muslims in our Moroccan zone in contact with their co-religionists in the east” (p. 1).

After the government’s refusal, the question of pilgrimage to Mecca was put on hold for a few years. It was not until May 1930 that Tomás García Figueras again raised the need to organize the trip from the Spanish Protectorate. To do this, he retrieved the note that was sent on March 29<sup>th</sup> 1930 by the Spanish consul in Tunisia, in which he reported the difficulties faced by Moroccan pilgrims setting out from the country and recommended in future years organizing the pilgrimage from the territory of the protectorate. In the memo sent by the Oficina Central de Intervención in Tétouan on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1930, it is argued that there is a need to “find out about the pilgrimage to Mecca next year, and how to organize the trip”.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the following month, the translation and interpretation service at the Oficina Central de Intervención in Melilla translated the pilgrimage regulation in force in Tunisia into Spanish and reports were requested from regional interventor’s offices about the true demand of potential pilgrims, with scant results.

Again, it was a memo issued by a consular representative in Alexandria that insisted on the need to be involved in preparations for the pilgrimage. This memo was sent from the chair of the Spanish Council of Ministers at the General Directorate of Morocco on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1930 and commented on the dispatch issued by the consul in Alexandria on May 22<sup>nd</sup> informing of the arrangements made to cover the travel expenses of two Moroccan pilgrims originally from Targuist and Senhaya travelling from Alexandria to Jeddah who had made the journey on foot from Morocco (after receiving a passport issued by the military interventor in November 1929) and who, finding themselves without resources, lived off Muslim charity. The consular missive indicates that because they lacked the economic means to guarantee their return journey, these pilgrims would be rejected by the Egyptian authorities due to the application of the 1926 International Convention of Paris, which led the consular delegate to resort to its legation’s extraordinary economic fund to ensure that these pilgrims had not made this long journey in vain. This highlights the lax control applied to individual mobility. The consul himself argued that this situation would not be repeated but suggested the authorities should “forget or ignore the restrictions on the pilgrimage to Mohammed’s Shrine envisaged in the International Convention of Paris of 1926, to which Spain has signed up”.<sup>8</sup>

García Figueras took advantage of these circumstances to continue preparing documents to promote the pilgrimage, which were sent in September to Colonel Fernando Capaz, Inspector of Intervention and Khalifian Forces in Tétouan. The note attached to this documentation includes the following statement signed by García Figueras: “when the High Commissioner returns, I want to write to him to describe the willingness of the French to organise the pilgrimage to Mecca by common agreement with the Span-

ish zone”.<sup>9</sup> It is the first time in this documentation that the possibility of organising the pilgrimage jointly with the French colonial administration is raised.

In the following months, different messages were sent between the regional interventors relating to the issue of pilgrimage, but it was in the first days of February 1931 that Tomás García Figueras sent a report to Colonel Capaz “in a personal and confidential capacity” (and stamped “secret”),<sup>10</sup> which is a copy of the documentation sent to General Jordana, the High Commissioner in Morocco. The note insists on the need to adopt provisions on the issue of pilgrimage, and wonders whether it would be convenient to reach an agreement with the French Protectorate “so any indigenous person from our zone may join the expedition organized from Casablanca if they so desire” (p. 2). The memo is accompanied by a letter (stamped “private”), addressed to General Jordana, that insists that there are security reasons for supervising the pilgrimage – to “protect these fanatical populations from the influence of the Hejaz, where King Saud is establishing himself in the name of pure religion as a symbol of an Islamic nation that could strengthen the nationalist campaign” (p. 1).<sup>11</sup> Organizing a trip that avoided entering Egypt, and in which a commissioner would participate, as well as facilitating the embarkation of “governmental indigenous people”, would contribute to “neutralizing certain influences”. A separate undated document makes a kind of summary of all procedures and information exchanges relating to the issue of pilgrimage (and again contains a handwritten title in García Figueras’s hand). Its final paragraph mentions a handwritten note from Colonel Capaz, attached to the documentation mentioning García Figueras’s proposal, which is important for understanding its purpose: “I submit some notes from this file to H.E., which I hope will return resolved by the General Delegation at some point”. In fact, the response never arrived, and everything suggests that García Figueras’s proposal was rejected again. Perhaps – along with his growing disagreement with the policies implemented by the Second Republic<sup>12</sup>– this was what motivated Tomás García Figueras to resign from the leadership of the Mixed Office and return to Jerez de la Frontera, at least until 1936, when he came back to Morocco at the express invitation of General Franco.

#### **THE BEGINNING OF SPONSORSHIP (1937-1947): FRATERNITY AGAINST “FAITHLESS MEN”**

Spanish Civil War historiography considers the uprising of the army based in Morocco to be fundamental to the initial success of the military coup. Winning the loyalty of the protectorate’s population was crucial not only in order to enlist troops, but also to avoid potential rear-guard conflicts. Hence, the High Commissioner imposed by the rebels, Colonel Juan Beigbeder, made political and symbolic gestures such as informing Khalifa Muley Hassan in advance that the uprising was going to happen and decreeing Eid al-Adha an official holiday to win the support of the Moroccan authorities. Beigbeder, an Africanist

officer with long experience in Morocco (like Franco and other rebel army officers), was well aware of the importance sponsoring pilgrimage to Mecca could acquire.<sup>13</sup> Knowing that France had been promoting it since the beginning of the 20th century, he decided to reverse the passive position held by the previous Delegation of Indigenous Affairs on the issue (at no point is García Figueras's earlier proposal mentioned)<sup>14</sup> and suggested the provisional government in Burgos should organize the pilgrimage from Ceuta. With the chartering of the motorboat *Domine* (renamed *Magreb al-Aksa*), which belonged to the shipping line Transmediterránea, the project got underway. Beigbeder organised the trip in barely two months, skilfully using the contacts established with the Moroccan authorities that had joined the rebellion. The ship was due to leave Ceuta on January 21<sup>st</sup> 1937, but the day before departure it was bombarded by a Republican plane. Despite only material damage occurring, the rebellious military authorities took advantage of this event to arouse feelings of hostility in the Muslim population towards the government of the Spanish Republic (De Madariaga, 2015, p. 348).

Beigbeder's project made no sense without an intense publicity and propaganda campaign, both to inform those potentially interested, and to develop a discourse to justify the promotion of pilgrimage. This propaganda campaign used both the Spanish and Arabic written press, broadcast news and instructions over the radio, and distributed hundreds of propaganda leaflets and posters inviting Muslims from Ceuta and Melilla to take part in the pilgrimage (Solà, 2001, p. 58). The propaganda was managed from the regional interventor's offices and *cabilas*, and *qadis* took charge of drawing up the lists of all the people interested in the pilgrimage that year. The interventors compiled the lists from the different *cabilas*, which were then sent to the Delegation of Indigenous Affairs for approval. In the case of soldiers from the regular indigenous forces, the imams from each group took responsibility for drawing up the lists, which were also sent to the interventors in order to apply for the appropriate permits.

The propagandistic purposes of organising the pilgrimage are evident from the elements repeated in subsequent editions, though with different intensity. First, colonial authorities insisted on presenting this sponsorship as a joint action between the High Commissioner of Morocco and the *Makhzen*. Hence, an official travel committee was established. A political leader (attached to the colonial administration) and a religious one (designated by the *Makhzen*) were supported by other specific officials (*qadi*, *adul*, imam and others), who were in charge of resolving situations that arose during the trip (disputes, drawing up wills and final wishes, death certificates, marriages, etc.). Secondly, importance was given to narrating the event, broadcasting news about the progress of the journey, and even producing an account of it, as the High Commissioner asked the Tetouani *faqih* Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Rahuni to do for the 1937 pilgrimage (cf. Calderwood, 2018, pp. 142-166).<sup>15</sup> Another notable fact was

that on the first trip the presence was reported of the "first Muslim consul to represent Spain abroad" (*El faro de Ceuta*, January 24<sup>th</sup> 1937): this was Mohamed Kaddur ben Amar, a close collaborator with the Delegation of Indigenous Affairs, who was named consul in Jeddah.

The pilgrims registered and selected were given receipts that were exchanged for return travel tickets on the actual day of the journey. The interventors also facilitated currency exchange (from dirhams to pounds sterling) using the official established rates for expenses incurred in the holy places. As with the French authorities, health issues were also a constant concern when organising the *hajj*. The length of the journey meant various incidents were predicted, and frequent epidemics (plague, cholera, etc.) in the countries where the boats landed meant a care system for the pilgrims had to be set up. The journey's official committee included a health team formed of Muslim doctors and carers who accompanied the pilgrims during their stay in Mecca. Feeding the pilgrims was another of the concerns when organising the *hajj*, not only because of the number of people who had to be catered for, but also because food needed to be halal. The kitchen was staffed by Muslim cooks, and slaughterers travelled who sacrificed the livestock on board to feed the pilgrims, in addition to celebrating the feast of sacrifice.<sup>16</sup>

The culmination of this first trip is particularly significant: upon the pilgrims' return, a visit was planned to Seville and other Andalusian cities, where other prominent Muslims arriving from the protectorate joined them. Franco received the pilgrims in Seville's Alcázar. Years later, García Figueras recounted the story using one of his pseudonyms, Vial de Morla,<sup>17</sup> quoting the words of Franco himself: "at these new moments in the world, when a danger arises for all, which is the danger of faithless men, that is when all men of faith unite to fight those without it" (Vial de Morla, 1947, pp. 76-77).

The intense official propaganda could not deny the modest impact of the first trip. Mateo Dieste (2003, p. 260) refers to some pilgrims' criticisms about the care received during the journey, as reflected in the secret reports produced by the French administration in Morocco. The Delegation for Indigenous Affairs was aware that it was necessary to improve the promotion of the pilgrimage, so High Commissioner Beigbeder exploited the structure of regional interventors to ensure a higher number of enrolments for the *hajj* in subsequent years. Leaflets and posters were produced to publicise the low costs of pilgrimage. The ship given the task of performing the second and third trips (1938 and 1939) was the *Marqués de Comillas*, which was larger and more comfortable than the *Domine-Magreb al-Aksa*.

In 1939, with the civil war recently finished, organising the pilgrimage took on an even more epic tone, in which the Spanish government's great effort was emphasised: their battered post-war economy would not prevent them from sponsoring the pilgrimage and covering "those deprived of fortune, those who shared in these benefits, giving some of them completely free passage, including

travel expenses in the land of Mecca” (*ABC*, April 4th 1939).

Finally, both the pilgrims’ farewells and greetings became public commemorations that were skilfully organised by the protectorate authorities. Pilgrims were waved off in Plaza de España in Tétouan (capital of the Spanish Protectorate) by the *Makhzen* and protectorate authorities with a military parade, musical bands from the religious brotherhoods, amid flags and banners, and with a crowd that was ready to join in with the party atmosphere. Those who started the journey stopped to pray at the Sidi Saidi mosque, from where they headed to Ceuta to board the ship (*ABC*, September 27<sup>th</sup> 1949).

### THE SPONSORSHIP IS CONSOLIDATED (1949-1953): INTERNATIONAL PROMOTION

In spite of the High Commission’s preparations for the 1940 pilgrimage,<sup>18</sup> the trip had to be suspended due to the Second World War and the economic slowdown Spain suffered when its post-war period began. In 1946 an attempt was made to resume the organisation of the pilgrimage without success, and in 1947 the trip was suspended again due to the cholera epidemic declared in Egypt. None of this stopped the protectorate administration continuing its habitual practice of promoting other Muslim religious celebrations such as Eid al-Adha, when it distributed lambs and cash donations to Muslims in need (*El faro de Ceuta*, December 8<sup>th</sup> 1943).

At the end of the 1940s, Spain found itself internationally isolated due to its collaboration with the Germans and Italians in the Second World War. In 1946 the United Nations General Assembly vetoed Spain’s membership, with the Arab League abstaining from the vote. This isolation led the Franco regime to direct its diplomatic efforts towards Latin American and the Arab countries (Algora Weber, 1995; González, 2007). Again, the pilgrimage acquired a *raison d’être*, both for developing diplomatic relations and for seeking to highlight differences from other models of colonial administration.

In 1949 the pilgrimage to Mecca was resumed in a spectacular way: the journey would be made in a 32-seater aeroplane to Saudi Arabia. The pilgrims left Tétouan aerodrome, making a stop in Melilla to collect other prominent people invited by the Spanish government. The religious leader of the expedition was the delegate of the Grand Vizier of the eastern zone of the Protectorate, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Hajj Tayyib, and as civil authority they were accompanied by the regional interventor, Valentín Benéitez Cantero, who produced a report entitled *Peregrinación a La Meca. Memoria del viaje* (Tétouan, Delegación de Asuntos Indígenas, October 1949) (cf. Mateo Dieste, 2017).

The 1950s saw a new phase begin in the pilgrimage to Mecca, which coincided with the Franco regime’s consolidation, the execution of the first five-year economic development plans, and the adoption of a new role in the international sphere at the start of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> In terms of comparisons with the French colonial enterprise, the

Spanish government chose to highlight its material action in Morocco, creating infrastructure and contributing to social order, in contrast with the territory administered by the French, where the tension around Moroccan independence was beginning to emerge. Again, the figure of Lieutenant General García Valiño, High Commissioner in Morocco, was important in the renewed promotion of the idea of “Spanish-Moroccan fraternity”.

In 1950, pilgrimage by sea was resumed from Tangier – although not part of the Spanish Protectorate, it was an international area. The ship used from that point was the transatlantic vessel *Plus Ultra*, which was renovated to improve the pilgrims’ comfort, adding a prayer room, spaces for ablutions and separation between women and men, as well as a clinic staffed by Muslim doctors. A total of 250 pilgrims participated in that year’s trip (from August 18<sup>th</sup> to October 16<sup>th</sup>), among them 30 women. A significant feature of this trip was that the boat carried a donation of clothes for Arab refugees from Palestine, which was delivered to Port Said in Egypt (*ABC*, August 18th, 1950). On the 1951 trip pilgrims from the Sahara were invited for the first time.

The 1952 and 1953 trips were those that took most pilgrims: 500 on the first and 532 on the second, of whom 120 were women.<sup>20</sup> The press followed these journeys closely, reporting on their progress and any events; even NO-DO, one of the regime’s largest propaganda instruments, dedicated graphic reports to it in 1951, 1952 and later on in 1966.<sup>21</sup>

As was now habitual, both the departure and arrival of the pilgrims were singular opportunities for signalling the brotherhood between the Spanish and Moroccan authorities. The speech welcoming the pilgrims made by High Commissioner García Valona on September 24<sup>th</sup> 1953 represents the essence of this desire to convert pilgrimage sponsorship into a tool of dissemination at international level, of the respectful task of protecting Moroccan society performed by the Spanish authorities: “you have also fulfilled the high purpose that I set for you of being a spiritual embassy for the Zone of Morocco protected by Spain to the Arab countries of the Middle East, for whom we feel real sympathy and whose problems interest us. When the serious news of what was happening in part of the Moroccan empire reached all corners of the world, a contrasting example also reached them which reflected the most complete and absolute peace in the zone protected by Spain” (*África*, no. 142, October 1953, p. 504).

This may have been one of the last events at which this “Spanish-Moroccan fraternity” was acted out. It had already begun to languish and dissolve – if it had ever had any solidity at all – in the face of the rise of the Moroccan nationalist movements that would achieve independence in 1956. The pilgrimage was not organized in 1954 and 1955 and, paradoxically, in June 1956 the Moroccan authorities organized the pilgrimage to Mecca by chartering the Cabo de Hornos ship from the Spanish shipping line Transmediterránea. The Spanish press published the preparations for the trip,<sup>22</sup> reporting that the ship would depart from Casablanca and would carry “1,450 pilgrims

from various regions of Morocco. So there will be a great farewell. For its part, Israel has announced that it will not oppose the passage of Moroccan pilgrims to Mecca but will provide all kinds of facilities” (*La Vanguardia*, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1957). The new Moroccan authorities reproduced Spain’s model of pilgrimage organization. Control of the symbolic capital of promoting the *hajj* was once again recognised by the newly independent *Makhzen*.

### THE END OF SPONSORSHIP (1966-1972): THE COLONIAL APOGEE

We now enter a little-known phase of Spanish government pilgrimage promotion: that carried out by the Franco regime to take prominent figures to Mecca from the Spanish provinces of Ifni and the Sahara.<sup>23</sup> A decade after Morocco’s independence, the Franco regime was resisting the loss of its colonial dominions, despite them now being the last remnants of a finished colonial dream. In March 1966, the press reported the arrival of 40 pilgrims in Madrid to begin their journey to Mecca with Spanish government sponsorship. The front-page image of these pilgrims waiting in Palma de Mallorca airport to board a plane to Mecca in a national newspaper like *ABC* (March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1966) was, by itself, a unique testimony to the regime’s determination to continue promoting this trip.

Both Ifni and the Sahara were territories claimed by Morocco after its independence. The new Alaouite state wrote to the United Nations to complain about Spain’s “illegal retention” of Ifni and Sahara. In 1966, reports by the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization urged Spain to decolonise these zones, despite giving a very positive evaluation of the “existing religious freedom, (...) the Spanish state’s aid for mosques and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca” (*ABC*, August 18<sup>th</sup> 1966, p. 25).<sup>24</sup> In fact, the Spanish government, via the General Directorate of African Territories and Provinces, approved various extraordinary budgets dedicated to covering the expenses of the pilgrimage from Ifni (1966: 362,145 pesetas; 1967: 827,302 pesetas) and the Sahara (1971: 6,000,000 pesetas; 1972: 7,807,646 pesetas).<sup>25</sup>

In this period a significant change of register occurred in relation to the treatment of these pilgrims: while in other eras “Muslim friends” and “indigenous people” were spoken of, from this point on the term “Spanish Muslims” began to be used – explicit recognition of their condition as nationals. The official media again echoed this recognition, along with the resulting gratitude, and “their pride in feeling Spanish, members of Spanish society, a title they showed off on their pilgrimage and before the other nations of the world congregated in Mecca” (*África*, no. 293, May 1966, p. 268).

The images produced by the regime again show the paternalistic image of grateful subjects before authorities unable to make old colonial laurels green again. The pictures (shown by NO-DO),<sup>26</sup> which show the pilgrims being received at the Palace of El Pardo in 1966 by the already elderly General Francisco Franco and the Minister of the Interior, Luis Carrero Blanco, are the staging of an

already-finished project whose end the regime resisted accepting. The old rhetoric sounds hollow when, in *Africa* magazine of March 1972 (no. 363, “Excited reception for Muslim pilgrims”) it is said “they did it, and they will do it on further occasions, as Spain, friend of the Muslim peoples, respects their beliefs and supports their tradition”.

### CONCLUSIONS

This text has analysed the interest shown by the Spanish state in sponsoring the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, just as other colonial powers did. The documentation analysed has served to substantially modify the chronology of this interest and to show that, contrary to the established historiography, it was not limited to the 1937-1956 period, but ran from 1925 to 1972. This has allowed a series of stages to be established in which to contextualize the involvement of the Spanish government in this sponsorship. The organization of the pilgrimage began to take shape in a hesitant way. First proposed by Tomás García Figueras, the government of the Second Republic showed little interest and it was taken up again by the military authorities in the middle of the Spanish Civil War. It was consolidated during the 1940s and 1950s and, after the independence of Morocco in 1956, it moved to the territory of the Sahara, which remained under Spanish control, becoming a pale postcolonial glimmer of a regime determined to survive in a changing world.

The analysis of the documentation in the AGA shows more than the simple fact that this sponsorship was developed for propaganda purposes, or to obtain the support of the Moroccans in the protectorate after the military uprising. There are other highly significant elements related to both the functioning of the colonial administration of Moroccan territory and political use for international agendas.

The fact that from 1925 to 1931 Tomás García Figueras was personally involved in demonstrating to the Spanish government the advantages of promoting pilgrimage from the Spanish Protectorate area was one more example of the prominent role personal initiative played in the colonial administration (Villanova, 2006). By studying the organization of the pilgrimage in Tunisia, and going so far as to suggest co-organizing it jointly with the French, García Figueras stated that it would substantially improve Spain’s international standing. It is evident that his proposal, in a context in which the pacification of the Moroccan territory was still very recent, did not receive the support of a Spanish government that was highly sensitive to everything that happened in the protectorate. The advent of the Second Republic and the changes planned for the colonial-military complex in Morocco put an end to García Figueras’ plans and even led to his temporary abandonment of Morocco.

When in 1937 the High Commissioner, Colonel Juan Beigbeder, organized the first trip from Ceuta to Mecca, Tomás García Figueras could see how his idea could finally materialize. Destined to become one of the main co-

lonial ideologues, he used the bombing of the ship by a Republican plane to influence the assumed “brotherhood among men of faith”, which would characterize the rhetoric of the rebel army during the Spanish Civil War: “Muslim brothers, this affront cannot but strengthen even more, if possible, the bonds of brotherhood that unite us, and together we will fight to save civilization from the danger that threatens it” (quoted by De Madrigal, 2015, p. 348).

From that point on, promoting the pilgrimage was one of the many ways the colonial administration sought to demonstrate its fraternal disposition towards its Moroccan protégés. But these actions also sought to monitor the exercise of collective religious practice that, after the apparent protection of the religious singularity and the institutions of Moroccan civil and religious authority, emulated the attitude of other competing colonial powers (Moreras, 2018). Spain’s major difference in this field was the past of Al-Andalus. All the “dreamy rhetoric” (Moga, 2007) deployed by colonial propaganda appealed to the secular link between Spain and Morocco. In fact, as Calderwood has pointed out (2018), it was used by Spain to model its own particular vision of what Islam would be in Morocco, which it understood as closely linked to the Andalusian past. There are numerous examples of the links between past and present being exploited, such as the reception General Franco offered to pilgrims on the first trip to Mecca in 1937 at the Alcázar in Seville.

But in addition to this double dimension of propaganda and ritual control, the promotion of pilgrimage also became an instrument with which to recover a certain prestige in the international context. The interest of the Franco regime in making pilgrimage a form of promoting Spain abroad is an undeniable fact, and formed part of the framework of fraternity with Arab countries that the Franco regime chose as a way of breaking its international isolation. Once colonial rule of northern Morocco ended, the Spanish government continued to endeavour to continue this “protective fraternity” with the territories of Ifni and Sahara. The apparent contradiction of a supposedly Catholic military regime promoting a collective Islamic ritual ended up being positively acknowledged by the United Nations as a notable policy of recognising religious freedom in 1966. Doubtless, the propaganda drive to show the continuation of pilgrimage sponsorship after Morocco’s independence contrasts with the real impact achieved, at a time when no other former colonial power had continued to carry out this practice. The purely testimonial nature of promoting the pilgrimage of a few notable Sahrawi’s, which the Spanish media portrayed as “Spanish Muslims” (see *ABC* March 18<sup>th</sup> 1966), and the footage produced by the regime’s propaganda, was not enough to preserve the colonial lustre of previous years.

In summary, the promotion of the pilgrimage to Mecca by the Muslims of the Spanish Protectorate must be understood as more than just an “eccentricity” of General Franco and the Africanist military. It was a unique episode that, more than representing yet another example of colonial rhetoric, of a forced brotherhood motivated by

the Civil War, showed the government’s desire to project itself in the international context, compete with other colonial powers and improve its external image.

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## ARCHIVES CONSULTED

Spanish National Library. Africa section  
Library of Catalonia  
Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), AFR., Alcalá de Henares  
AGA, AFR, Box 81/665. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*  
AGA, AFR, Box 81/2428. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones a La Meca.*  
AGA, AFR, Box 81/2431. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones a La Meca.*

## NOTES

- 1 Tomás García Figueras (1892-1981) was one of the most significant figures in the Spanish colonial administration. He was an interventor in the cabilas of Beni Aros and Sumata, a regional interventor in Larache, and head of the Spanish-French Mixed Office in Tangier. He was Secretary General of the High Commissioner and Delegate for Indigenous Affairs (1952-1956). After the independence of Morocco, he was mayor of Jerez de la Frontera (1958-1965).
- 2 The *Khalifa* was the highest Moroccan authority in the Spanish Protectorate, and was delegated by the Sultan.
- 3 The *interventores* represented the cornerstone of the organization of the Spanish Protectorate (Villanova, 2006), being the officials assigned to the field to supervise the various aspects of the colonial administration. In the words of the Africanist jurist and political scientist José María Cordero Torres, the intervention consisted of “supervising the use of authority by indigenous hierarchies” (quoted by Villanova, 2005, p. 95) and extending the “indirect rule” model applied by the Spanish state. The *interventores* provided abundant information about Moroccan society, despite the fact that it was full of empirical errors, prejudices and simplifications (Mateo Dieste and Villanova, 2013, p. 613).
- 4 According to the headquarters of each interventor’s office the numbers were: Melilla (77), Larache (15) and Villa Sanjurjo (33). In Tétouan and Chefchaouen no travelling permits were requested. Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*. These pilgrimages occur within the framework of military control of the territory, which was not achieved until 1927.
- 5 The Oficina Mixta de Información Hispano-Francesa analysed the documentation arriving in both zones of the protectorate in order to avoid the circulation of nationalist ideas.
- 6 With the subtitle “The pilgrimage from the political point of view”, Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*.
- 7 Notification addressed by the Oficina Central de Intervención in Tétouan to the Council of Ministers-General Directorate of Mo-

- rocco, May 12th 1930. Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*.
- 8 Communication sent by the Oficina Central de Intervención in Tétouan to the Council of Ministers-General Directorate of Morocco, July 10th 1930. Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*.
  - 9 Notification sent by Tomás García Figueras to Colonel Fernando Capaz, September 25th 1930. Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*.
  - 10 Notification sent by Tomás García Figueras to Colonel Fernando Capaz, February 5th 1931. Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*.
  - 11 Notification addressed to General Jordana by Tomas García Figueras, with the subject "Pilgrimage to Mecca". February 5, 1931. Box 81/665, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones*.
  - 12 The application of the decree of June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1931 in which the Republican government reorganized the military presence in Morocco, reducing the number of officers, led many officers to return to Spain, and García Figueras's resignation from the military.
  - 13 Maria Rosa De Madariaga (2015, pp. 345-364) analyzes Beigbeder's role in promoting the idea of the "sentimental protectorate", which would have its most significant expression in the sponsorship of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Beigbeder represents the profile of the military man who turned his "morphobia" into "morphophilia" (Velasco de Castro, 2014), adapting to the new political circumstances derived from the civil war in order to win the support of Moroccan society for the military revolt against the Spanish Republic.
  - 14 In his work, García Figueras seems to have got over the rejection of his initial proposal for sponsoring the pilgrimage: "without hesitation or doubt: the first expedition of pilgrims to Mecca was, simply, perfect" (García Figueras, 1939, p. 293).
  - 15 Ahmad al-Rahuni, *Al-Rihla al-makkiya*. Tétouan: Instituto General Franco para la Investigación Hispanoárabe, 1941. A copy of this work is in the Library of Catalonia and includes an interesting photo album with 22 pictures.
  - 16 See Box 81/2428, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones a La Meca*.
  - 17 I am grateful to Professor Eloy Martín Corrales (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) for revealing this author's true identity.
  - 18 See Box 81/2431, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones a La Meca*.
  - 19 Significant milestones were the signing of the Concordat with the Vatican (August 27th 1953), the Pact of Madrid (also in 1953), which launched Spain-United States relations, and Spain joining the UN in 1955.
  - 20 See Box 81/2432, AFR, AGA. *Legajo: Peregrinaciones a La Meca*. A copy of the *Informe General del Peregrinaje de 1953* can be found in the Africa section of the Spanish National Library, along with an extensive photo album.
  - 21 "Peregrinos musulmanes", NO-DO, newsreel no. 503-B, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1952 (<http://www.rtve.es/filmoteca/no-do/not-503/1469613/>). "Peregrinación de españoles a La Meca. Musulmanes de Ifni y Sahara invitados por el gobierno", NO-DO, newsreel no. 1211-A, March 21st 1966 (<http://www.rtve.es/filmoteca/no-do/not-1211/1477150/>).
  - 22 "Sultan Mohamed V chaired a working session with several Cabinet ministers, including Foreign Minister Ahmed Balfrech, in which he discussed the trip to be made soon by the transatlantic liner "Cabo de Hornos" with Moroccan pilgrims to Mecca" (*La Vanguardia*, May 22, 1957).
  - 23 For a historical perspective on the colonization of Western Sahara, see Diego Aguirre (1988).
  - 24 The United Nations report is expressed in these terms: "There is religious freedom. Mosques have been built at the expenses of the Spanish State, which also pays the salaries of the *fakis* and professors of the Koran. Each year, the Administration sponsors the Saharan Moslems' pilgrimage to Mecca". *Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* (Document A/6300/REV.1. United Nations. General Assembly-Twenty-first Session-Annexes), p. 601.
  - 25 Boletín Oficial del Estado (State official newsletter): August 6th 1966; November 20, 1967; December 8th 1971; January 31th 1973.
  - 26 "Franco recibe a los peregrinos musulmanes a La Meca" NO-DO, newsreel no. 1216-C, April 25th 1966 (<http://www.rtve.es/filmoteca/no-do/not-1216/1474217/>).

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