

"THE CHANGING MORPHOLOGY OF THE MOROCCAN MEDINA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE"

INTRODUCTION

Firs of all,I would like to thank Professor Susan Miller for inviting me to participate in this program and for the pleasure of being here today among you. As you know, Susan Miller is an eminent specialist in Morocco's history, civilisation and contemporary evolution. She has been consulting archives in Morocco, in France and in United States. Recently, her book "The voyage of Muhammad as-Saffar" gave her the opportunity of studying the medina of Tétuan in the midst of the 19 th century.

As for me, what I found most original in the Moroccan medina's evolution is the special case of Rabat's medina. And that is what I will try to present to you. I'm precisely working on this topic today, thanks to a Getty Program Grant.

It appears that in Morocco, like other arabic countries, every medina has its own specific character, from its foundation to its current evolution. However, Rabat's medina became the Kingdom's capital in 1912, under the French Protectorate. It seems to me, that Rabat's medina is an interesting case to introduce a general debate on the Moroccan medina's evolution. This debate will also concern the current status of medinas or historic centers within largers towns where they are now located.



THE INITIAL NUCEUS: THE RIBAT

The initial nucleus of Rabat's medina is the Qasba of Oudaya. This Qasba is the starting point of the urban constitution of Rabat.

In 1150, Abd el Moumen, founder of the Almohad dynasty, had a fortress built on a steep cliff affording a superior natural protection. This fortress included a palace, a mosque, reservoirs filled by an aquaduct from Aïn Gheboula. The Ribat of Abd el Moumen was mainly a place where warring defenders of the muslim faith congregated before going to Spain to battle with the Christians.

This settlement, which corresponds today to Qasba of Oudaïa, was named Ribat el Fath, meaning Victory Camp, in honour of past military successes over the Spaniards.

THE ALMOHAD CITY: 1184 TO 1199

Two long rectilinear walls, stretching over 5 kilometers protected the city to the south and west. They enclosed a 420 hectare area. There were four gates, cut into the western wall; the southern wall was served by only one gate.

Typical of Almohad walls, this was a concrete construction, rich in lime and of an exceptional solidity and resistance. Bâb er-Rouâh and the gateway to the Qasba have decoration of woven courses in a gable around a hipped arch inscribed in rectangular frame.

Within the city walls, Yacoub al Mansour, the grandson of Abd al Moumen, decided to build a monumentally proportioned mosque, on the north east part of the site. Although never completed, the mosque was one of the biggest structures in the Muslim world. It covered an area of 2,5 hectares and was laid out in rigorous symmetry along a central axis leading to the mihrab. At the other end of this axis, sat the somptuously decorated Tour Hassan, a minaret of imposing proportions, forming part of the northern facade.

The construction stopped in 1199, at Yacoub al Mansour's death, leaving both the mosque and the minaret unfinished. Ribat el Fath never attracted the numbers it was initially planned to receive, and centuries passed, before the city of Rabat filled the space within its walls with houses.



FOURTEENTH CENTURY VESTIGES

Rabat's importance greatly decreased over the course of three centuries, from the end of the Almohad reign, in the mid-thirteenth century, to the early seventeenth. Only a few monuments, from this period, the Merinid period, still exist. The most important was the Challa necropolis, built near the river, on the site of an ancient Roman settlement, Sala Colonia, beyond the Almohad walls. To reach the necropolis, one must pass through the elaborated gate of huge wall constructed by the king Aboul Hassan 'Ali in 1339. Within the necropolis, spreading over ten hectares, there are vestiges of a mosque whose minaret is adorned with zellîj. There are also zaouïas, an ablution room and several funerary rooms. Also originally built in the 14th century, Jama' al Kbîr (the great mosque) is nowadays the most important sanctuary in the medina. Serving as a landmark, its minaret can be seen from all points along the street Souïqa, a main street in the medina. Next to the great mosque was built a beautiful fountain, seqqayat Abou Inân.

Aside from the great mosque, near the street Sidi Fatah, Hammâm ej-Jdîd, was built during the same period. The hammâm was designed in the manner of Andalusia's Arabian baths, inspired by the roman baths. During this period, city life was not restricted to the area surrounding the Qasba, and was carried on in several neighbourhoods, which still exist today, in the present medina. In the seventeenth century, Rabat began the most animated period in its history, with the influx of the last wave of Andalusian refugees. At the same time, on a urban-planning level, the city set down the core of a spatial organisation that would last until the beginning of the French Protectorate.

THE ANDALUSIAN CITY

In 1609, Spanish muslims (Moriscos) were driven out of Granada, Murcia and Andalusia's Kingdoms, as well as of the city of Hornachos. The evicted Hornacheros, joined by other Andalusian refugees, arrived on the left bank of the Bou Regreg river. They settled in the Qasba and in the north western corner of Almohad territory, protecting it with a new wall.



Over the next few decades, Rabat (known in Europe as Salé-le-Neuf) became the seat of the small maritime republic of Bou Regreg. The Alaouite arrival in 1666 ended this era.

Conducting raids of Christian ships became the city's primary means of obtaining goods and supplies. The republic grew to be the most important seaport in Morocco.

A new wall, built to the south, completed several defensive measures.

THE MEDINA

The city area covered about one hundred hectares and its layout corresponded exactly to the spatial organisation of the medina today. At that time, Rabat was oriented toward the river port.

Two main arteries, perpendicular to one another, dictated traffic patterns.

- The Rue des Consuls, starting at Souq el Ghzel, near the Qasba gate, and following the river, represented the economic center of the city. This street was lined with the establishments of foreign consuls, as well as with local businesses involved in harbour activity.

- The Rue Souïqa, connected Bâb el Had with the Rue des Consuls, before continuing on the bâb el bhâr, or the sea-gate. The great mosque, and different types of souqs are located there.

Thus, the organization of the city was indeed already determined by this articulation. But Rabat still had not yet developed fully inside the Andalousian fortifications.

The Jewish neighbourhood was located at the end of the market street, or Rue des Consuls. And some houses extended to the next neighbourhood called El Bhira.

In 1807, King Moulay Slimân ordered the construction of a Jewish quarter, a Mellah, at the Medina's far eastern end. A Jewish cemetery as well as a Christian cemetery were located near the medina, next to Bâb el Alou.

Royal palaces, built in Rabat during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, added the characteristics of imperial residence to the city. Thus, Rabat appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, with its basic configuration ready, to serve as a receptacle for the colonial city.

"MOOTH-EATEN", HERITAGE AND MODERNITY

With the establishment of the Protectorate in 1912, France's official presence in Morocco brought about some major decisions and changes in land development and urbanization.

Hubert Lyautey, Resident general and army chief had transferred the Moroccan capital from Fes to Rabat and decided the creation of a modern port in Casablanca.

In Rabat, in less than one year, from 1912 to 1913, the European population grew from seven hundred to seven thousands inhabitants. Until then, la Rue des Consuls had contained the foreign population in the Medina.

But the rapid growth of this population led to the transformation and europeanization of some neighbourhoods in the Medina. Most notably in several places: Boulevard el Alou (building of hotels, restaurants, pubs, etc.) and at El Ous'a, or the Horse Market (building of the Municipal Market) in the south of the Medina.

In Rabat, as well as in other medinas, Lyautey imposed very strict regulations to stop European settlement in the Medina: what he used to call "mitage" or "becoming moth-eaten".

He wanted to avoid an European destructive influence on the Medina. He wanted also to plan its rebirth, to preserve and restore its heritage.

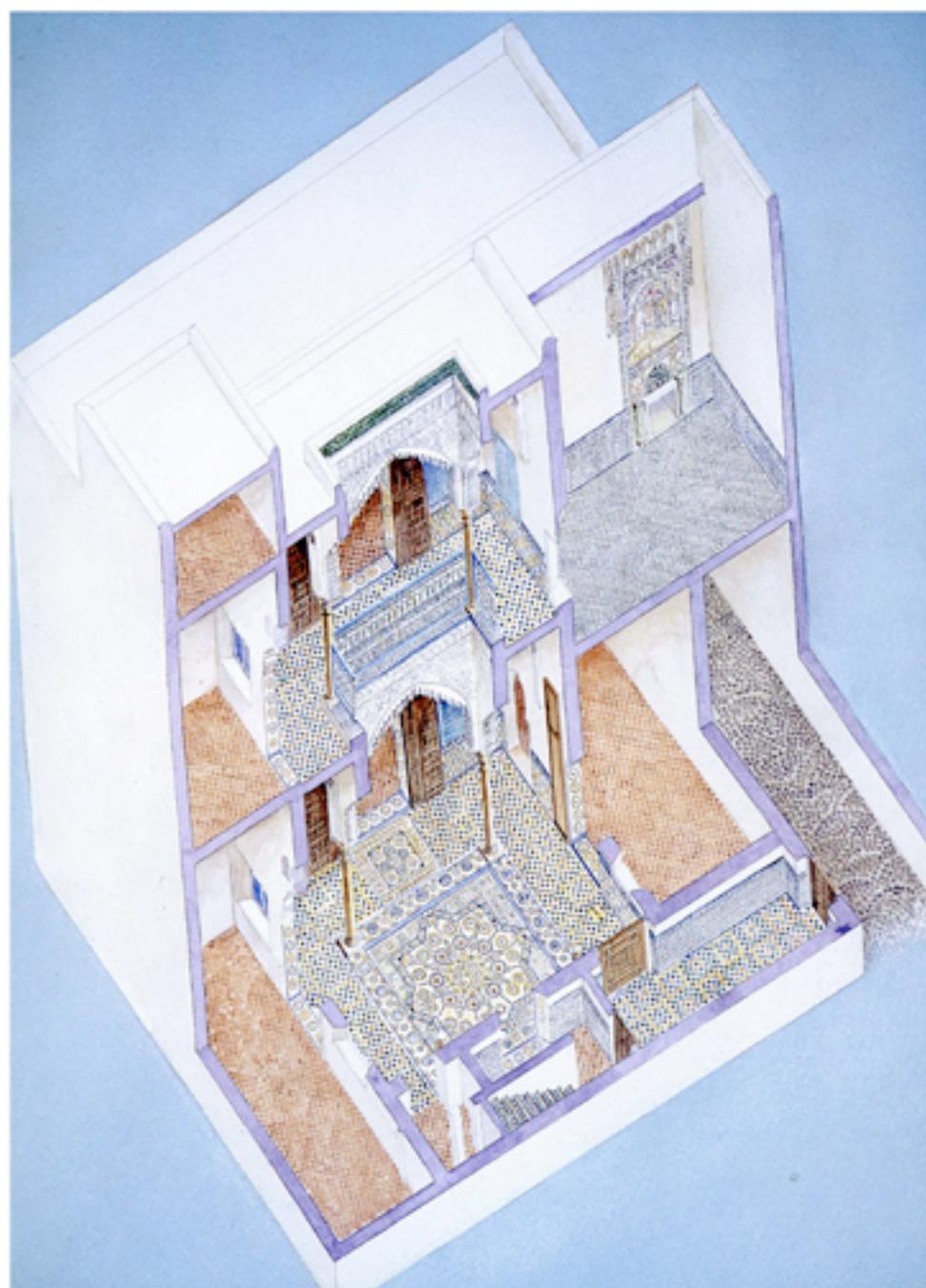
To protect it was the mission of the Fine-arts and Monuments Service. This office was created in november 1912, only six months after the Protectorate was established. This office was first supervised by Tranchant de Lunel, an architect, painter and artist very close friend to Lyautey until 1923.

Avant-garde laws in the field of classification and restauration of historical monuments were created by this "dream-team". The first site to be classified and restaured in Morocco was the Qasba des Oudaïa in Rabat. In 1917, despite the first world war, a project designed by Tranchant de Lunel, including a garden, inspired by hispanic-moorish arts, and museums was inaugurated in the Qasba des Oudaïa.

Lyautey drew up some regulations to deal with the new urban development:

"The separation of European from indogenous Moroccan settlements" and "the application of the most modern urban planning principles".

He invited talented urban specialist to Morocco, Henri Prost, who directed an other "dream-team" composed by famous architects as such as Albert



ORGANISATIONNEL PATTERNS WITHIN NEIGHBOURHOODS

Let's look at this basic configuration.

The Medina was divided in several "houma" or neighbourhoods. These houma were social units which, formerly, expressed common interests among residents. In each neighbourhood, the daily life of the residents was facilitated by communally-shared services, such as bread-oven, coranic school, fountain, small businesses, etc.

Some neighbourhoods, like the Qasba, El Oubira or the Mellah, for example, are physically separate units. But others, like Bouqroun, El Bhira, Sidi Fateh, for example, are hard to define spatially. Because different commercial, residential or artcraft production areas are mixed together. Thus, reading their urban limits is particularly hard.

Every houma includes several derbs, which represent social subunit of the medina. The derb's structure evolves from a local dignitary's home, situated at the extremity of a dead end street. The derb was often named after this presiding figure.

THE RBATI HOME

Architectural patterns of the rbat house were roughly similar to those of Moroccan Medina houses. The courtyard was the central area which served as the focal point of the overall ensemble of buildings. In Rabat, as well as in other medinas, delightful riads, or gardens within the house, have almost completely disappeared. Only a few houses of the 18th century remain today and magnificent houses of the 19th century are often seriously damaged.

Construction with stone was one of the characteristics of the Rbati house. The same stone was used in minarets and urban gates as well as in houses: tender lime stone, easy to cut. This stone is abundantly present on the banks of the Bou Regreg river.

Stone gave to the houses a special balance in the proportions, it added grace and harmony to the light columns, topped by porticos, decorated with alternated arches.

Moorish influences were also quite noticeable in interior decoration and furniture giving a specific atmosphere to the Rbati house.



Laprade, Adrien Laforgue, J. Marrast, etc. Henri Prost oversaw the creation of ten new cities. Rabat is looked upon as Prost's greatest achievement.

The modern city of Rabat was constructed close to the encircling remparts of the Medina. In this zone, various historical monuments and a few ancient buildings can be found. Prost made a point to not only integrate but also highlight these structural testimonies to the city's past in his plans for the new downtown area and the major administrative and residential districts.

The Protectorate's general urban planning and public building creation had nothing to do with French colonial practices in Algeria nor in Tunisia. Nothing to do either with baroque excesses in the "fin de siècle" mode.

A few examples that you are looking at express the creation of a new urban art. Urban patterns are based on zoning principles. Distinct autonomous zones, with different functions, articulate within the city. The Medina is only one of these zones. On a architectural level, public buildings were successfully and freely inspired by the medina's city scape. The medina's characteristics had longly been observed and studied by great architects such as Albert Laprade, Jean Gallotti, etc.

On one hand, the Medina offered a rich repertory of local atmosphere, such as blending between external sobriety and rich, refined density of interiors (worked enlightenments, moucharabiehs, riads, gardens, domes, courtyards, green tiles, noble local materials such as marble or painted wood). This "architecture métissée" or "cross-bred architecture" completely served the colonial citie's modern plan.

On the other hand, the medina stood still motionless in its heritage role, within its walls that were classified historical monuments. Population density has progressively grown. Except some rare individual restorations, the Medina is sadly neglected and left to its own fate, swinging between folklore and crumbling ruins.

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