

Rabat and Tetouan: Two *morisco* cities in the seventeenth century

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ABSTRACT: Between 1609 and 1614, Phillip III of Spain expelled the *moriscos*, descendants of Muslims who had been forcibly converted to Catholicism in 1501. These populations went largely to the Maghreb; two Moroccan urban centers that were greatly impacted by their arrival were Rabat and Tetouan. Both of these cities were beyond the reach of the Ottoman Empire, and isolated from the ruling cities of Fez and Marrakech; as such, they were relatively independent. At the time of the *morisco* arrival, both had small populations. Tetouan was a small city of Andalusí refugees who had arrived beginning in the late-fifteenth century; Rabat, while it had been of major importance under the Almohads in the twelfth century, had declined in the intervening years to the size of a village. The arrival of the *moriscos*, who numbered in the thousands, profoundly changed both of these cities in a short amount of time.

This paper will take into account the rapid changes in the physical forms of the cities of Rabat and Tetouan both before and after the arrival of the expelled *morisco* populations. I will analyze both urban form, such as the street patterns, and the architectural components, such as the mosques and houses, of these two cities. By considering both the form and elements of the two cities both before and after the *morisco* migration, in this paper I will locate the shifts in society that occurred with the arrival of this significant population of refugees.

Conference Topic: Migration and urbanism

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ROUGH DRAFT (PARTIAL)

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1502, a decade after the fall of Granada to the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, the Muslims of Spain were forcibly converted to Catholicism, in defiance of the terms of the city's capitulation. This forced conversion equaled the ontological shift of the Muslims from that of a protected, if second-, class to that of *morisco*. While the *moriscos*, having chosen conversion to departure, were in principle Catholics, they were never fully accepted within "Old Christian" society. By the early seventeenth century, the climate of intolerance towards this group was such that, despite their large numbers and their importance in both urban and rural economies, Phillip III expelled them between 1609 and 1614. This followed a series

of smaller expulsions, such as that of the *moriscos* from Granada that had come decades earlier in direct response to a 1568 uprising in the Alpujarras.

Both earlier and later expulsions, first regional and then national iterations of a xenophobic nationalism, permanently changed both the social and economic landscapes of Spain. The loss of both agricultural-productive population and tax base was one of the many factors leading to what would, in Spanish history, be considered the “crisis” of the seventeenth century. In Spanish art and architecture, this was reflected in the rise of the Baroque, in which surface treatment presides over substance: gilding obscures shoddy materials. For the monarchy, this was reflected in insufficient funds to sustain the empire: Spain lost the Netherlands in the middle of this century, and the New World was no longer a constant source of gold. For the aristocracy, this was reflected in a wealth in land holdings but a poverty of liquid assets. The Spanish city, likewise, entered a period of relative decline.

The largest quantities of expelled *moriscos* of both rural and urban origins migrated to North Africa, where their large-scale arrival rapidly transformed the existing social and built landscapes, particularly along the coasts. While in Iberia, they had been both rural and urban, their rapid arrival to North Africa was unaccompanied by an arrival of liquid assets; the edicts of expulsion, in their harshest iterations, had stripped the *moriscos* of their wealth, permitting them only the amount that would be necessary to pay for the (State-run) boats that would transport them away from Spain. Thus unable to purchase rural lands, and wholly outside the social systems through which such lands could have been acquired, the *moriscos* in North Africa were urban populations. Their large-scale, rapid arrival necessitated the growth and transformation of several cities.

2. RABAT AND TETOUAN AS MORISCO CITIES

2.1. Siting and Context

Figure 1. Map, situation of Rabat and Tetouan in the Maghreb

In what is now Morocco, Rabat and Tetouan were the two major points of absorption of the *morisco* immigrants. These cities both had and maintain easy access to the coast. Rabat is an Atlantic port city, located at the mouth of the Bou Regreg River, which provides access to the interior. Tetouan, at the continent’s north, has an attendant Mediterranean port of Martil. During the early seventeenth century, its river would have been navigable the eight kilometers from coast to city. Both of these cities were outside of the reach of the Ottoman Empire, as was the entire part of the Far Maghreb that currently constitutes Morocco. Additionally, both of these were relatively isolated from the main centers of urban power in the Far Maghreb, Fez and Marrakech. The siting of both of these cities, near the navigable coast, was fundamental in their adoption as new *morisco* centers. Additionally, their natural settings, near water and with topographic features enabling defense, were important factors in both their use by the *moriscos* and in the physical characteristics that these two cities would take.

Rabat, one of Morocco’s imperial cities under the twelfth-century Almohads, was between the late twelfth and the early seventeenth centuries in decline. By the time of

the *morisco* arrival, it was observed (by, for example, Leo Africanus¹) to, functionally, behave as a village rather than a city. The small population by the time of the *morisco* immigration is in stark contrast to that presumed to have been served by the mosque pertaining to the Hassan tower (suma^t Hassan.) In addition to this monumental contribution to the Rabat skyline, the twelfth-century Almohads left several other interventions to the built landscape that, during the time of the *moriscos*, were re-interpreted in the formation of a new city. These structures, largely defensive, comprise a system of walls that enclose today's *medina* in addition to the colonial-era center city and the *mishwar*, or palace compound. Additionally, on a forty-meter-high outcropping of rock at the mouth of the Bou Regreg, the Almohads constructed a fortified *casbah*, the door of which is one of the masterpieces of Almohad art and architecture. The *casbah*, on a site neighboring former Almoravid infrastructure,² was a major site from which the expansion of the Almohad Empire through sea-based warfare was waged. The defensive walls surrounding the entire city were expansive³ and provided the protection of a vast tract of land.

Figure 2. Map: Rabat's Casbah, The City's Walls, and the Siting of Salé

On the Eastern bank of the Bou Regreg River, the city of Salé was, at the time of the *morisco* arrival, the dominant city at the river's mouth. While it was not in constant contact with Fez or Marrakech, it was important to the surrounding agricultural area, and had some families of wealth. The coastal tribes, historically, relegated to fishing rather than agriculture or intra-Africa trade, were less powerful than those in the interior. The rising importance of the coastal cities through the sixteenth century, however, due largely to Spain and Portugal's interest in colonizing ports, led to the rising importance of Salé. The arrival of the *moriscos* served to create a large rival presence on the river's Western bank: this population's choice of Rabat as a new city for its settlement was not entirely autonomous. Prior to the *morisco* expulsion, the qa'id of Salé had been requested to allow Andalusi immigrant families to settle there. Refused, they instead sought permission to settle the western bank of the river.

After the *morisco* arrival, three distinct populations existed in three fortified enclosures lining the banks of the Bou Regreg. First, the *slaouis*, based in Salé, were the indigenous urban population. Second, the *moriscos* were based in the *medina* of Rabat. Third, the *Hornachos*, the expulsees of the village of Hornachos in Extremadura controlled the *casbah*. These three populations, which existed in great tension (the *Hornachos* and the *moriscos* were in a state of near-constant civil war for the first twenty or so years after the expulsion) ultimately intervened in the built environment to create what I consider a post-expulsion Andalusi city in the Maghreb. While these populations did not work together cooperatively, the needs of each population vis-a-vis the others, and its attendant spatial interventions, were the agents of production of Rabat as a *morisco* city. Before the *morisco* arrival, the major

¹ Africanus, Leo. Description de l'Afrique. (complete citation and quotation needed.)

² The Almoravid remains have been discovered within the past year; to date, no publications that I know of addressing the exact plan and function of the Almoravid remains next to the *casbah*.

³ I will insert the exact dimensions, construction techniques, etc. here.

physical characteristic of the city, dating to the Almoravid period, was its defensive nature.

Figure 3. Map, Tetouan, Siting

Tetouan, near the Mediterranean, was a city that had been destroyed in the fourteenth century and was re-founded at the end of the fifteenth century, by Andalusian refugees for whom life under Catholic rule after the fall of Granada held no appeal. While the city was founded before the forced conversion of the Muslims and the shift from Muslim to *morisco* in Spain, the abolition of Islam in Spain was a major reason for its growth. The city, located on sloping topography next to the river that led to the city of Martil, was founded by Sidi el-Mandri as a casbah. This casbah, however, was small in scale, and the city's bounds rapidly exceeded its borders. At the time of the *morisco* arrival, the city had no monumental defensive walls. The city's street pattern, before the *morisco* immigration, was a meandering one. The *Andalusis* who ruled Tetouan in the sixteenth century were well-to-do members of merchant classes with political clout. These populations, who left Iberia in the century before the expulsion, had been at liberty to sell their real estate in Spain and to migrate to North Africa with their material wealth relatively intact; the *moriscos* that followed them a century later were not so fortunate.

2.2. The Expulsion as an Agent of Urban Change

This paper is concerned with the changes in the urbanism and architecture of the two cities in today's Morocco that received the largest quantities of *morisco* immigrants as a result of the expulsion. The extent to which cities changed in the region of both Iberia and the Maghreb, however, can best be considered by first taking into account the losses that Spain suffered from this expulsion. In addition to the economic downturn in the country in the seventeenth century, due to loss of sheer numbers of population, which eroded both tax base and agricultural employees, the country suffered from the loss of accumulated cultural knowledge.

In Granada, for example, the city's mid-sixteenth-century laws had stipulated that a certain percentage of those in the building trades, particularly in the area of structural woodwork, be *moriscos*. It is through that population that the tradition of *artesonado* ceilings had been carried on. This construction technique, which originated in Islamic architecture, had in the centuries of the Reconquista been quickly adopted and adapted by the conquering Catholic populations: it was used in both religious structures, such as churches, and in private, stately homes. The expulsion of the *moriscos* ultimately erased it as a practice in Spain. Outside of the building trades, many of the expelled *moriscos* had been silk producers and merchants: the silk industry in Rabat, for example, was the direct result of the transferal of this population.

Figure 4. Illustration, Artesonado Ceiling

The de-densification of the city of Granada as a result of the *morisco* expulsion occasioned drastic change for the city: in the parish of San Salvador, for instance, the number of *vecinos*, or heads of household, declined from 800 to 200.⁴ At the same

⁴ Vincent, Bernard. Citation pending.

time that the city was contracting in terms of population, its area was growing: the new populations that were brought in from outside of Andalucía preferred to live in the flatter part of the city, west of the Albaicín that had housed so many of the *moriscos*. As a result, the city was plagued with a glut of abandoned houses; the documents of the king's *hacienda* (roughly: estate) cite "casas caidas" (fallen houses) among the real property that was sold to the highest bidder. The near-abandonment of a major part of the city is testament to the expelled *morisco* population's size.

The number of refugees was significant enough to cause large-scale change at the points of arrival within a relatively short period of time. The existing cities were not sufficient in size to house the new populations, and the cities expanded rapidly, with different street patterns and uses than had been previously found there. Having been stripped of their real wealth, the *moriscos* in both Rabat and Tetouan formed an important economy of piracy that depended upon extensive contact with other nations. The architecture and urbanism of both of these cities during the *morisco* decades reflected this new economy.

The buildings that were constructed in these two cities during the time of rapid growth were neither an imitation of those that had been left behind nor the replication of the extant forms in the receiving cities. Instead, what emerged was a vernacular building vocabulary of both individual structure and the city as a whole that re-defined these two cities. The component elements of these cities: streets, mosques, houses, hammams, defensive structures, and fountains, formed a coherent whole. The mosques that were produced in the early decades of the seventeenth century, particularly those with documented dates of construction, such as those in Tetouan, are united by their characteristics in relation to the city and the surrounding landscape. The individual buildings themselves, however, are not of particular architectural note in terms of structural technique or building materials used. Their importance is located in their interaction with the pre-existing structures and city pattern. Structurally, in both cities, they are vernacular buildings.

These buildings, largely undocumented through records of sale or construction, illustrate the evolution in these two cities from pre-*morisco* to *morisco*. In the case of Rabat, the previous street pattern survived in the Almohad monumental structures and a series of fountains and two building façades, in addition to hammams, from the Merinid era (in the 14th century.) The interventions made by the *moriscos*, keeping these features of the city intact, constitute a functional *morisco* city. That the *moriscos* did not remove (to our knowledge) any of the previous remaining structures is in itself notable: the defensive mechanisms of the city served their needs, and the structural and civic elements of hammams and fountains were easily re-used.

2.3. Rabat: Its Streets and Buildings

In the case of Rabat, this new city was an ocean-oriented, highly defensive structure. Its streets are rectilinear and occasionally orthogonal. Several main streets occur: the Boqeron, or main market street, Taht el-Hammam, and Souiqa (I am using the modern street names here) are the three main East-West streets, and run roughly parallel to each other, as well as to the coastline. Qanasil, the street of the Consuls, runs perpendicular these, and serves to connect the main *bab* of the casbah rocessionally in the direction of the Hassan tower. Souiqa and Qanasil are thought to have been remnants of the Almohad era.

The street pattern, while rectilinear, is not a grid: instead, the main streets delineate neighborhoods which, in turn, are filled with smaller-scale impasses. The area in which wealthy families lived, particularly, was composed of alleyways in which each

family controlled an impasse. The names of those short, blind streets persist to this day, and serve to locate the prominent Andalusí immigrant families into the built landscape of the Rabat medina. It is through toponym, rather than archive that we must locate the history of buildings in this *morisco* city. These buildings, as are others in the city of Rabat, are constructed of masonry of local stone rather than brick, as was common in other Moroccan cities. These buildings' doors show direct Andalusí influence: the metalwork is similar to that used in southern Spain, and the entry into these houses is, typically, into a courtyard that is not visible from the open doorway.

Figure 5. A Diagrammatic Analysis of the Rabat Street Grid, with Almoravid, Almohad, and Merinid Elements Indicated

2.4. The *Morisco* Wall: A Monumental *Morisco* Intervention to the City?

One of the major interventions to the city, said to have been made by the *moriscos* after their arrival, and documented in a prisoner's 1611 map of the city, is what is today known as the *Andalusí* wall. This wall, which is today the limiting element between the *medina* and the colonial-era *ville nouvelle*, is a stone, rubble, and occasional brick masonry that replicates, at a smaller scale, the style and construction techniques of the monumental Almohad walls. This structure served, presumably, to provide an elevated level of defense for the new population, much smaller than the Almohad-era population and in need of a defensive structure. The need for defense was a result of the economic system of piracy that the Andalusí immigrants had introduced. The system was based as much on the trade and capture of goods as of captives for ransom.

Figure 6. Location, the Andalusí Wall

Figure 7. Detail, Andalusí Wall

This particular structure and its relationship to the city as a whole are important to an interpretation of the *moriscos'* collective urban *modus operandi*. First, I would like to raise a doubt as to its construction in the first two years of the *moriscos'* arrival to Rabat. The 1611 map documents a completed wall: I have found no documentation concerning its commission or construction, however. No official correspondence comments as to the newness of this particular wall. To fully assess the wall's date of construction, lab analyses would have to be carried out. Unfortunately, however, the wall has suffered many interventions, the most recent of which (completed in this past year) has covered the entire masonry wall with a mortar intended, presumably, to resemble *terre pisée*. The wall, pierced with eight towers along its length, is of varied construction material and quality. The towers, consisting of different cuts of stone and inconsistent in their finishes, were no doubt posterior additions in some cases. If the wall was indeed built by the *moriscos*, it can provide important data for the study of Rabat, in addition to that provided by its material qualities and location. At the time of the *morisco* settlement, within this new, interior wall were tracts of planting area. The city was not saturated in terms of population, and danger, whether real or imagined, may have been interpreted as being close enough to this interior wall such as to justify agriculturally productive planting within its borders. Alternately, it is possible that the empty, arable spaces were provided to accommodate for foreseen growth to the city's population. While there are no documents specifying whether or not the wall was constructed by the Andalusí *morisco* population, the density with which the new

populations settled, and the use of part of the intramural land for agriculture, are telling as to this society's need for defense.

Figure 8. 1611 Map of Rabat, with Andalusi Wall

Figure 9. Comparison Slide: Andalusi and Almohad Walls

2.5. Tetouan: Building and City in the *Morisco* Era

In Tetouan, too, the relationship between building and city is important to an interpretation of the *morisco* era. In Tetouan, during the *morisco* expansion, there were no defensive walls: the city depended on topography, as well as the relative blindness of exterior structures, for defense. This city, after its first century, consisted of meandering streets: the *morisco* arrival, particularly in the ^oUyun ("The Springs") neighborhood, generated a contrasting, linear cityscape. In an area with sloping topography, the main street of this neighborhood negotiates a straight line away from the city's core. This neighborhood grew linearly: three mosques, built before 1650, were, according to Muhammad Dawud's eight-volume *Tarikh Tetouan* (The History of Tetouan) built in order. These mosques, El-Msimdi, El-^oUyun, and El-Jadida ("The New,") narrate a progression of the settling of the population from the 1620s to the 1640s. In addition to the main street on which these mosques are located, side streets, which ascend and descend from the larger street, show rectilinearity and the resolution of the problems of an extremely uneven site.

Figure 10. Map of Tetouan, with El-^oUyun Indicated, and the City's Linear Development in this *Morisco* Neighborhood Indicated

Figure 11. Plan, El-^oUyun Mosque

Figure 12. Photograph, Exterior, El-^oUyun Mosque

The mosques themselves are not striking for their architectural features: they are small-scale structures comparable in size to the private homes surrounding them. Their minarets, also not monumental in scale, are unreliable sources of the form of these same structures in the seventeenth century, as the radical change in the shape of one, through enlargement, was documented in the nineteenth century. Their role in the city's fabric was, largely, one of place-holding: the mosques, as well as numerous small saint's shrines, defined the streets of the neighborhood. The frequency with which these structures are found lends a fine grain to the city, and historically would have ensured against the closing or privatization of access alleys to these sites. Both mosques and shrines along the main street have wooden coverings over the street in front of their entrances. The street is made to serve the role of interior space: the soffits of the coverings are decorated in a manner reminiscent of *artesonado* ceiling decorations.

What is particularly interesting about these structures, however, is their social role. The system of *habous/waqf*, a highly regulated system of land trusts, was extant in seventeenth-century *morisco* Tetouan. The mosque of El-^oUyun, the only one of the three along this main street for which land trust documents dating to the seventeenth century survive, is an interesting case. Lands both in its immediate vicinity as well as in other parts of the city are deeded to it: the mosque was allocated social allegiance, even by those who owned land outside of what would presumably be its jurisdiction. This mosque was, then, not a neighborhood mosque but an indicator as to the larger-scale organization of this society. During the time of these mosques' construction, there was no congregational Friday mosque in the city (*masjid jam'a*.) One would not

be constructed until the late eighteenth century. We need to remember that the *moriscos* who constructed these religious buildings had not themselves been stripped of their religion. Instead, it had been at four or five generations' remove that this had occurred. These populations in the early seventeenth century, then, had no physical, prescriptive model for their buildings of worship. The mosques in Tetouan were physically derived from the model of a private house rather than from that of a congregational mosque.

CONCLUSION

Both Rabat and Tetouan, the two cities in modern Morocco that absorbed the highest quantities of *morisco* immigrants as a result of their expulsion from Spain, changed physically as a result of this large-scale migration. In both cases, the buildings constructed during the period of *morisco* domination, before the 1666 rise of the Alawite dynasty, are small-scale interventions into the built landscape. These interventions, of a vernacular character and of local materials, are significant for their definition of urban form, their articulation of the needs of that society at the moment immediately following the migration, and their difference from the previously-existing forms on those sites. In both cases, the street patterns created by the *moriscos* were in contrast to the extant elements. This contrast articulates the difference in the needs of the new population from that of the previous inhabitants.

Cities that have changed, whether through the loss of population or through its acquisition, as a result of forced migration, are worthy of academic study. Because the shifts that occur are more rapid than they would be through natural urban growth or decline, the elements constructed by new populations can be interpreted as a reflection of the immigrant society's spatial needs and values at the moment of migration.