

Tetouan, its History and Culture

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How can we explain the fact that Tetouan's unique history and culture are generally ignored despite the city's exceptionally rich cultural legacy, despite the fact that the massive documentation which exists for studying this subject during the last five centuries in Arabic, Spanish, English and French is impressive? The General Library of Tetouan is the second largest public library in Morocco,¹ the city has dozens of private libraries some of which have been catalogued, not to mention the thousands of documents of different types which many traditional Tetouani families have conserved.² Studies on the city's history and culture which were published during the period of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco between 1912 and 1956 are extremely interesting.³ These include Spanish as well as Arabic publications. They include newspapers, books, journals, etc.. of the Protectorate.

During Independence, individual publications such as the Caudernos de la Biblioteca Española de Tetuán reflect individual efforts to continue the intellectual and cultural tradition which Tetouan has known.

Another landmark in the cultural history of Tetouan has been the contribution in the field of publications on Tetouan by the Faculty of Letters at Tetouan⁴ which

¹This library consists of a section of more than 3000 sixteenth, seventh, eighteenth and twentieth century Spanish books which are extremely rich for studying themes related to the Moriscos, over two thousand Arabic manuscripts, a rare collection of Arabic and Spanish newspapers and magazines, an important collection of over 40000 photographs of Tetouan and Northern Morocco during the period of the Spanish Protectorate and a collection of almost 2000 gold and silver coins. First created as the Library of the Protectorate, the General Library of Tetouan, is presently the second largest public library in Morocco.

²The project of cataloguing private libraries of Tetouan is in the process of being carried out by the Center of Documentation and Studies on Northern Morocco which was created by the Tetouan Asmir Association and the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Tetouan. So far, over 150000 books, manuscripts and documents from more than 25 private libraries in Tetouan have been catalogued. We can now evaluate the works of exceptional Tetouani scholars like Muhammad Morer, Muhammad Dawud, Tuhami Al-Wazzani and Ahmad Rhon in a diversity of fields ranging from history to jurisprudence and literature. This project has enabled us to estimate the number of material which exists in Tetouan's private libraries, to classify these libraries into different categories according to their field of specialization, to discover some of Tetouan's most important manuscripts and to evaluate these libraries as part of the city's cultural heritage.

³These include the Spanish publications of the Francisco Franco Institute for Research and the Arabic publications of the Mawlay Mehdi Institute on a variety of themes related to Moroccan Studies. For a list of the publications of these two important research centers, see Francisco Valderrama, La acción cultural de España en Marruecos, Tetouan, 1956, pp.605-611,811-832.

⁴These include the publications of the Journal of the Spanish Library of Tetouan which was published by Guillermo Gozalbes Busto in more than 21 issues and covered a variety of themes related to Tetouan and Morocco. The publications of the Faculty of Letters at Tetouan on different aspects of the city's history and culture have also been important. The Group for Research on Morocco and Al-Andalus has greatly contributed to our understanding of Tetouan's past and present through a series of international conferences on Tetouan's history from its reconstruction by Sidi Ali Al-Mandari during the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the Spanish Protectorate in Northern Morocco in 1956. The main characteristics and objectives of this project may be summarized in the following points,

- One.) To study the history of Tetouan during the past five centuries by stressing the outstanding features of each individual phase or century. This division into four main periods would limit each period in terms of time making it easier for each possible to examine the city's history more profoundly.
- Two.) To adopt a multi-disciplinary approach which would cover different dimensions of the city's history including its political, social, economic and cultural history.
- Three.) To allow the presentation of papers in four languages, namely Arabic, English, Spanish and French in order to allow for the application of different methodologies and academic traditions.

was created before the Abdelmalek Es-Saadi University of which it is now a part of, followed by N.G.O.'s, especially the Tetouan Asmir Association⁵.

Tetouan has attracted a great general interest ever since it was classified by U.N.E.S.C.O. In conformity with the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by U.N.E.S.C.O., the city of Tetouan is inscribed on the World Heritage list as a Historic City. It is thus internationally recognized as a place of exceptional and universal value: a cultural heritage worth of preservation for the benefit of all of Mankind.

The city of Tetouan was built near the Roman city of Tamuda which is situated five kilometers in the outskirts of present day Tetouan. The Medina of Tetouan flourished during the eleventh and twelfth centuries as a little town and was demolished by the Iberians during the beginning of the fifteenth century. This traditional Islamic city was rebuilt during the end of the fifteenth century by Sidi Ali Al Mandari who emigrated from the Andalusian city of Granada to escape the persecution of the Inquisition. Tetouan has continued to flourish as a dynamic center of economic, social and cultural activities where , Christians and Jews lived peacefully side by side. This city reflects a variety of cultural influences including local Moroccan, Andalusian, Ottoman and even European elements. Tetouan has contributed to enrich Moroccan history over the past five centuries.

The monuments of the Medina of Tetouan date back to the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its seven gates, narrow streets, squares, traditional houses and mosques have captured the minds of historians and artists across the world. It has constituted a source of continuous inspiration for creative minds. This original and flourishing traditional Moroccan city stands out for its distinctive features which have enriched Moroccan culture for more than five centuries.

Despite its similarities with other Medinas in Morocco and in the Islamic World, Tetouan's history stands out for its specificity. Tetouan's historical monuments reflect the city's originality while sharing the global features of other Moroccan Medinas. Compared to Tangier, the Medina of Tetouan reflects powerful Andalusian features as opposed to Tangier's predominantly European mark. This trend has been accelerated since 1777 when the European community was ordered to move to Tangier as the new diplomatic capital. Tetouan was built by Andalusian emigrants so that the foundations of its cultural heritage remain Andalusian, unlike Fez which already existed as a flourishing commercial urban centre. Thus while the Jewish Andalusian community which settled in Tetouan was able preserve its

Four.) To stress the importance of documentation in order to allow us to evaluate this aspect in its full proportions given the huge magnitude and great variety of a hitherto unexploited documentation in Arabic, Spanish, French and English for Tetouan's history over the past five centuries.

Five.) To constitute an important corpus on Tetouan's history which would enable us to orient future research on the city.

The works of these conferences have been published (Titwan fi ahad al-Himaya (1912-1956), Tetouan, 1994, 300pp.; Titwan qabla al-Himaya 1860-1912, Tetouan., Research Group for the History of Morocco and Al-Andalus, 1995, pp.400; Titwan fi al-qarn ath-thamin ashar, Tetouan, Research Group for the History of Morocco and Al-Andalus, 1995, 300 pp.; Titwan fi al-qarnayn as-sadis ashar wa as-sabi ashar, Tetouan, Research Group for the History of Morocco and Al-Andalus, 1995, 400 pp.).

⁵Tetouan Asmir Association's publications appeared between 1996 and 2000 in Arabic, Spanish and French covering a variety of themes related to Tetouan and Northern Morocco. These include publications by some of Tetouan's most eminent scholars such as the second edition of Tuhami Al-Wazzani's Az-Zawiya, Hassan Ibn Abdelwahhab's Tarikh Al-Qadaa fi Shamal Al-Maghrib ala ahd Al-Himaya, Ahmad Rhoni's Umdat Arawin fi Tarikh Tittawin and Muhammad Morer's An-Naim Al-Muqim.

religious and cultural traditions in their purest form, that which settled in Fez clashed with the previously existing Moroccan Jewish community of Fez. As opposed to Chauen, which was able to preserve its original Andalusian culture due to its geographical isolation the Rif Mountains since the end of the fifteenth century when it was built by BenRashid, Tetouan developed through the first five centuries, because it has always been a crossroad of cultures and civilizations, due to its geographical location. This is clear in the traditional social structure of Tetouani society. In an unpublished manuscript by Tetouan's historian Muhammad Dawud, entitled Families of Tetouan, the author mentions the origin of different families. These can be divided into eight categories, namely the Andalusians, Fassis, Algerians, Rifies, Jews, Christians and emigrants from different cities and regions of Morocco. It is curious that he does not mention the Jebli or Arabic speaking elements of the city's surrounding areas which have always played an essential role in the city's history. There are several possibilities for explaining this silence. The first possibility is that he refrained from mentioning this group to avoid offending Tetouani families of Jebli origin who consider themselves to be fully integrated city dwellers. The second possibility is that he parted from the premise that the essence of Tetouani society has traditionally been Jebli and the third option is that the term Riffi combines inhabitants from the Rif Mountains and the Jebli elements, because the term Rifi in Arabic literally means belonging to the rural areas.

The fact is that these multiple groups melted to form a Tetouani homogeneous society whose members acquired a strong sense of social consciousness of pertaining to a well identified id stratified Islamic society which developed side by side along with the Jewish community, on the one hand, and the European Christian community on the other. Culturally, the three religious groups lived side by side quite harmoniously during certain periods. Their often common economic interests, similar even cross penetrating social traditions and their shared cultural heritage clearly marked the development of a multi-ethnic Tetouani society.

Tetouan's cultural heritage is not easy to identify, because of its evolutionary Nature and extended ramifications. The following factors explain this complexity:

Firstly, Tetouan's culture is composed of numerous and at times contradictory but fully integrated elements, while some elements are common to other cities of the region such as the Andalusian element, Tetouani culture strongly incorporated some elements such as the Ottoman ingredients introduced by large numbers of Algerian emigrants introduced by Algerian families which are totally absent in many Moroccan Medinas like Marrakech. This is due to the intensive Algerian emigrants to Tetouan since 1830 when the French occupied Algeria.

Secondly, Tetouan's local environment has obviously played a fundamental role in the city's cultural evolution. For example, traditional Tetouani houses are whitewashed in their external façade as opposed to plaster Fassi houses or brownish traditional houses in Marrakech. This could be explained by local environmental factors as well as by different cultural tendencies in different Moroccan cities. Tetouan's historical maritime and commercial relations with the Mediterranean European countries such as Britain, Spain and Italy explain the presence of European products in Tetouani houses ranging from English carpets and silverware from Manchester to Italian lamps and Chinese porcelain.

Thirdly, Tetouan's contact with Maghribi and Mashriqi regions has always left its mark in Tetouani culture given their common Islamic identity. Pilgrimage to Mekka, cultural missions to such areas as Palestine and Egypt reflect Tetouan's historical and cultural links to the Arab world.

Fourthly, Tetouan's capacity to assimilate a variety of cultural elements in order to produce an original local blend has enabled its culture to resist the pressure of a variety of cultural pressures while giving it the dynamism required to stimulate creative initiatives which have marked its distinctive characteristics marked by a variety of cultural elements marked by a variety of cultural elements, Tetouani culture has always been reflected its characteristic cultural features which have been clearly manifested in a variety of intellectual, artistic and cultural traditions ranging from Tetouani cuisine and Tetouani embroidery to Tetouani social traditions (dress or wedding celebrations) and intellectual works in a variety of fields including jurisprudence, literature, history, music, architecture and religious sciences)

Tetouani culture has always stood out for its capacity to integrate new cultural elements on the one hand, while evolving in order to meet new challenges on the other. Its conservative blend is reflected in its tendency to conserve its cultural heritage, but its tendency to evolve by assimilating new cultural elements explains the vitality and strength of Tetouani culture.

Furthermore, the full consciousness and even pride which Tetouanians have manifested over the centuries of their identification with Tetouani culture. At times when this culture appeared to be threatened to the point being annihilated, it has always been able to spring out and express itself with the utmost determination. The balance between destructive external elements and the purest ingredients of Tetouani culture have always ended with the decisive reaction of the latter in favour of the continuation and persistent expression of Tetouani cultural identity, a product of more than five centuries of cross cultural interaction.

Finally, Tetouan's history and culture have been readily recognised if not accepted inalienable components of the city's identity. This is clear in the internal implicit or explicit contribution of its inhabitants and in the external impression of visitors. When one generation of Tetouanis appears on the verge of collapsing, leaving Tetouani culture to face its apparently inevitable and inexplicable fatal downfall, a new generation of emigrants picks up the relais, and injects a new vitality which guarantees the permanence and continuation of the development of Tetouan's cultural heritage.

The city seems to be experiencing just such a moment now. At a time when Tetouan appeared to be forgotten by members of its society, abandoned by Western tourists who have shown a preference for the old and newly developed havens, bypassed by visitors from the most remote regions of Morocco who only visit Tetouan for its beaches, black market or as a temporary station towards or coming from Europe, UNESCO has proclaimed the Medina of Tetouan as a World Cultural Heritage.

This will necessarily reverse the present trend in favour of the conservation of this cultural heritage of Mankind. The apparently local cultural specificity of the city will be sought by intellectuals and artists from around the world.

Yet this trend will not occur overnight, nor will it take place without heavy sacrifices. The following changes seem to be beginning to happen.

Firstly, the total neglect of Tetouan as a World Cultural Heritage is beginning to give ground to the growing consciousness of the public as an important cultural station. Cultural guide's are being prepared for publication by different Ministries through individual initiatives, without any co-ordination or previous agreements of collaboration. Projects which are meant to revitalise the city are being prepared by more than one Ministry ranging from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Habitat. A CD-ROM of Tetouan, A World Cultural Heritage has been produced by

the Tetouan Asmir Association.⁶ Identical expositions of the greatest magnitude have been organised by Spanish and Moroccan cultural, political and financial institutions.⁷ Tetouan's profound culture has suddenly started moving, despite the moribund attitude of under qualified stagnant bureaucrats who have been designated as the official defenders of the city's intellectual and cultural heritage.

Secondly, the terrible problems which have paralysed the city's economic and cultural progress and prosperity are gigantic, but they are now beginning to be addressed. There is the legislative obstacle, the economic crisis, the corruption disease, the negative social attitudes, preconceptions and modes of behaviour as well as the indifference of different central ministerial departments and local institutions towards Tetouan's most urgent problems. A combination of internal and external factors which appeared to contribute to the continuation of a permanent deadlock have begun to break, setting Tetouan's cultural world heritage free and enabling it to burst out vigorously. Tetouan's past splendour is now more evident. Its future must surpass its present hibernation, but for this to happen, the city's rich culture and history must be publicised and exploited as the city's most precious capital for its economic development on the basis of cultural tourism.

Politically, Tetouan's history may be considered to have constituted a fragile balance between the need to both attack and to defend the city against external elements, especially Spanish and Portuguese Christian maritime ships, the desire to preserve the city's autonomous flourishing economy and culture in the midst of an often hostile local environment and the obligation to obey a powerful central government following Morocco's unification by Mawlay Ismail since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The city's policy has always been determined by global developments in the Mediterranean region.

Tetouan's culture has really developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This culture is interesting because it englobes numerous spheres which are different, but complementary and in some ways interrelated. The intellectual production of Tetouani scholars stands out strongly. Before discussing some of its main features, I would like to point out to two fundamental factors which have stimulated this trend up to the mid-twentieth century. The first is that the city's cultural heritage, its geographical situation which has attracted a variety of different cultural trends which have been incorporated into its cultural traditions, the permanent concern for education by Tetouanis, the traditional contact of Tetouani scholars with scholars in other parts of Morocco, the Middle East or Europe and the contribution of exceptional Tetouani intellectual figures to the intellectual and cultural development new cultural trends in Tetouan have together contributed to the development of an interesting local culture with universal implications, which has not yet been studied in all its proportions. The second important factor which has contributed to the full development of culture in Tetouan is the proclamation of the city as the political capital of the Spanish Protectorate in Northern Morocco and the Sahara. During this period, Moroccan traditional scholars and nationalists alike reacted to the presence of

⁶This cultural CDROM is the first of its kind on a Moroccan Medina and covers a diversity of cultural themes including Tetouan's history during the past five centuries, a detailed cultural map of the Medina, images of its narrow streets, squares, traditional houses, museums, mosques, towers, city walls, manuscripts, eminent personalities, music, traditional arts and paintings.

⁷The latest expositions include one on Almoravid Seville and another one on the Spanish artist and painter of the Medina of Tetouan, Mariano Bertuchi.

the newly introduced Spanish culture by stimulating and promoting their own culture with a new vigour and enthusiasm.

Tetouani scholars have excelled and innovated in numerous fields of specialisation including history, literature, jurisprudence, art and music. The following constitute some of Tetouan's outstanding cultural features :

Firstly, in the field of history, historians of Tetouan or Morocco include Skirej, Ahmad Rhoni, Muhammad Daoud, Touhami Al-Wazzani and M'hammad Abdeslam Benaboud.⁸ Even a jurist and literary figure like Ahmed Morer wrote an interesting but unpublished history of Morocco during the thirties. Together, these works reflect Tetouan's privileged place in the history of Moroccan historiography. Each of these works stands out for specific reasons. For example, Muhammad Daoud's fifteen volume history of Tetouan entitled Tarikh Titwan is not only important as historical writing, but also as an impressive corpus of hitherto unpublished private and official documents, particularly for nineteenth century Moroccan history.⁹ Touhami Al-Wazzani's third volume of his history of Morocco entitled Tarikh Al-Maghrib is one of the rare historical works which studies the history of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco from 1912 to 1956 and stands out for having been published during the period of the Protectorate.¹⁰ Muhammad Morer's history of Morocco stands out as a history of Morocco which was written during the thirties to be a high school text book, but the author was unable to publish it.

Secondly, Tetouani jurists have published important works. Some of Tetouan's most eminent jurists include Ahmed Rhoni, Muhammad Afailal and Ahmed Morer. Rhoni has left thousands of verdicts or fatwas from the early part of the twentieth century.¹¹ Sidi Muhammad Afailal is the author of an interesting social and juridical document which he wrote in the name of Tetouan's ulema during the thirties in order to criticize negative anti-Islamic social traditions like overspending in weddings.¹² Other jurists like Larbi Khatib have left an important juridical private library. Muhammad Morer who was a prolific author published his classical work on Islamic verdicts published in two volumes under the title, Al Ahkam As-Samiya fi l Mahakim Al-Islamiya.¹³

Thirdly, literature is another field in which Tetouanis have contributed to in different literary genres. In the field of poetry, Sidi Mfedal Afailal who was a

⁸Some of these works have been published by the Tetouan Asmir Association as part of its project to publish the works of eminent Tetouani figures.(see for example, Ahmed Rhoni, Umdat Ar-Rawin fi Tarikh Tittawin, vol.1, ed. by Dr. Jaafar Benelhaj Soulami, Tangier, Publications of the Tetouan Asjmir Association and the Faculty of Letters at Tetoun, 1998; Tumami Al-Wazzani, As-Zawiya, 2nd ed., ed. by Abdelaziz Saoud, Tangier, Publications of the Centre for Documentation and Research on Northern Morocco, 1999.

⁹Dawud is also the author of other historical works related to Tetouan or Morocco such as an unpublished unique social history of Tetouani families entitled A'ilat Titwan in three volumes which Mrs. Hasna Dawud has edited and hopes to publish soon.

¹⁰Touhami Al-Wazzani, Tarikh Al-Maghrib, vol.3, Tetouan, 1940, pp.129-285.

¹¹Ahmad Rhoni's documents have been conserved by his daughter Mrs. Fatima Rhoni and will be edited and published by Dr. Muhammad Miftah.

¹²This work is in fact a manifesto of Tetouan's 'ulama' in protest against overspending on social ceremonies and was signed by over twenty eminent figures such as Muhammad Dawud, Muhammad Morer and Muhammad Mekki Naciri.(Sidi Muhammad Afailal, Tanbih Al-Akyas li-l-Iqtisadi fi-l-Mala'imi wa-l-Aaras, Tetouan, Dispress, 1976,pp.123-128).

Muhammad Morer who was one of the most distinguished jurists and literary figures of his times was a prolific ¹³ writer. Over twenty manuscripts of his publications in such diverse fields as biographical dictionaries, mysticism, history, law, literature and hisba may be found in his library. (See for example Muhammad Morer, Kitab Al-Abhath As-Samiya fi Al-Mahakim Al-Islamiya, 2vols., Tetouan, 1955). This is an important work on the Islamic court as an institution. The first volume of his biographical dictionary of Northern Morocco has been published recently (Muhammad Morer, Ana'im Al-Muqim..., ed. by Ahmed Morer and Dr. Jaafar Benelhaj Soulami, Tangier, Publications of the Tetouan Asmir Association, 2000)

contemporary figure of the War of Tetouan in 1860 was the first to refer to Tetouan as the white dove in verse.¹⁴

Muhammad Seffar's travel account to Paris which has been published in Arabic and translated into English is one of the most exquisite Moroccan travel accounts.¹⁵

Another original literary genre where Tetouani scholars have excelled is letters. The letters exchanged between Skirej, Bachir Afailal, Muhammad Morer and others have not been published, but they have been conserved in private libraries.

Fourthly, music, especially Andalusian music, has always been highly developed in Tetouan. The Kunnash Al-Hayik At-Titwani has been edited by Malik Bennouna lately¹⁶ This is one of the earliest and most important compilations of Andalusian music in Morocco. The name of Abdesadak Shqara stands out as one of the most prominent masters of Andalusian music in Morocco.

Haj M'hammad Bennouna was an original composer and literary figure whose recordings combining Andalusian music and flamenco stand out for their originality.

Fifthly, art in a variety of forms is one of the most highly developed forms of expression in Tetouani culture.

Sixthly, political literature is an integral part of Tetouan's cultural legacy. This city's political contribution has been important. The Torres family archives consist of more than 20,000 documents which have been distributed among several libraries.¹⁷ These include nineteenth and twentieth century documents pertaining to Haj Mohamed Torres, Haj Ahmed and Abdelkhalaq Torres.

Other important documents belong to the Bricha and Erzini families. The Erszini documents are political as well as commercial and are kept in the library of Mr Abdelqader Erzini at Tangier.

Seventh, Jewish sources are fundamental for examining Tetouani culture given the importance of the Jewish community for studying the history and culture of Tetouan. These include religious, musical, literary and juridical sources.

Eighth, the Christian European, especially Spanish sources are equally rich to the history and culture of Tetouan. The General Library of Tetouan is excellent for studying the Spanish contribution to Tetouan at numerous levels.

Ninth, it is necessary in order to form a complete picture of Tetouan's history and culture to study documentation on Tetouan abroad given the importance of the city's historical links with Europe on the one hand and the Mashriq on the other.

A complete evaluation of the sources for the history and culture of Tetouan is difficult to carry out for the following reasons :

First of all, this documentation is scattered in different places including private libraries, public libraries and official institutions.

¹⁴Some of the most beautiful verses on Tetouan have been reproduced by Muhammad Dawud in his Tarikh Titwan. Yet this work is most important as an essential source for the history of Tetouan and also as a landmark in the development in historiography in Tetouan.

¹⁵The Arabic edition is preceded by an Arabic translation of Susan Miller's important study of this travel account. Seffar, Muhammad, Sudfat Al-Liqa' ma'a Jadid, Rihlat As-Saffar Ila Faransa 1846-1845, ed. by Susan Miller and Khalid Benshir, Rabat, Publications of the Faculty of Letters at Rabat, 1995, pp.7-88.

¹⁶Al-Hayik At-Titwani, Kunnash Al-Hayik, ed. By Malik Bennouna, Rabat, Publications of the Royal Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco, 1999.

¹⁷Most of the Torres family documents may be found in the General Library of Tetouan and Abdelkhalaq Torres' private library. They belonged to Haj Muhammad Torres, Haj Ahmed Torres and Abdelkhalaq Torres. They include a variety of documents ranging from correspondence with Sultan Mawlay Hassan 1st during the nineteenth century to Abdelkhalaq Torres' documents related to the activities of his Party of Nationalist Reforms which he founded in 1935.

Secondly, much of this documentation is not classified or catalogued thus making it difficult to identify.

Thirdly, the fact that this documentation exists in Arabic as well as in a variety of other languages makes it difficult for many scholars to study all the documentation that they need for their particular subjects of interest related to Tetouan.

Fourthly, much of this documentation is inaccessible to researches, but the real problem is the non existence of serious qualified researchers.

Finally, Tetouan's history and culture is interesting to study not only because it reflects such a rich variety of cultural blends, but also because it continues to thrive and will hopefully continue to do so in the future.