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La ville oasis du Maroc oriental

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À LA DÉCOUVERTE DE LA FAUNE
DU MAROC ORIENTAL
Itinéraires d'un naturaliste

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The Jewish Heritage of Eastern Morocco



“As is enshrined in the Kingdom’s new Constitution, the Hebrew heritage is indeed one of the time-honored components of our national identity. For this reason, I wish to call for the restoration of all the synagogues in the other Moroccan cities so that they may serve not only as places of worship, but also as forums for cultural dialogue and for the promotion of our cultural values.”

Excerpt from the Royal letter of February 13th 2013

The Jewish Heritage of Eastern Morocco

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Cover photo:

The Merinid Kasbah of Debdou, and the surrounding countryside.

(by J.-M. Porte)

Back cover, on the left:

The tomb of Sidi Yahia in Oujda, a saint revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims.

On the right:

The Sefer Torah, a scroll of biblical texts still held in the Grand Synagogue of Oujda.

(photos by M. Nachef)



His Majesty Mohammed VI
on a royal visit to the Oriental
region, October 18th 2010



A Message from H.M. The King Mohammed VI

“One of the religious contributions to our national identity”

An excerpt from a royal letter read by the head of state during the inauguration ceremony of the newly renovated Slat Alfassiine synagogue, in Fes, February 13th 2013.

“This synagogue is testimony to the richness and diversity of the Kingdom of Morocco’s spiritual heritage. Blending harmoniously with the other components of our identity, the Jewish legacy, with its rituals and specific features, has been an intrinsic part of our country’s heritage for more than three thousand years.

As is enshrined in the Kingdom’s new Constitution, the Hebrew heritage is indeed one of the time-honored components of our national identity. For this reason, I wish to call for the restoration of all the synagogues in the other Moroccan cities so that they may serve not only as places of worship, but also as forums for cultural dialogue and for the promotion of our cultural values.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Moroccan people’s cultural traditions, which are steeped in history, are rooted in our citizens’ abiding commitment to the principles of coexistence, tolerance and

concord between the various components of the nation, under the wise leadership of the Kings of the glorious Alaouite Dynasty and in keeping with the sacred mission with which the Almighty has entrusted me.

As Commander of the Faithful, I am committed to defending the faith and the community of believers, and to fulfilling my mission with respect to upholding freedom of religion for all believers in the revealed religions, including Judaism, whose followers are loyal citizens for whom I deeply care. I want to assure you that I shall continue to look after you and seek to defend the above ideals and principles.

I reiterate my deep care and consideration for your Jewish community and pray that Almighty God grant you success in your endeavors to serve the well-being of the nation.

Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuh.»

The Jewish Heritage
of Eastern Morocco



The Jewish Heritage of Eastern Morocco

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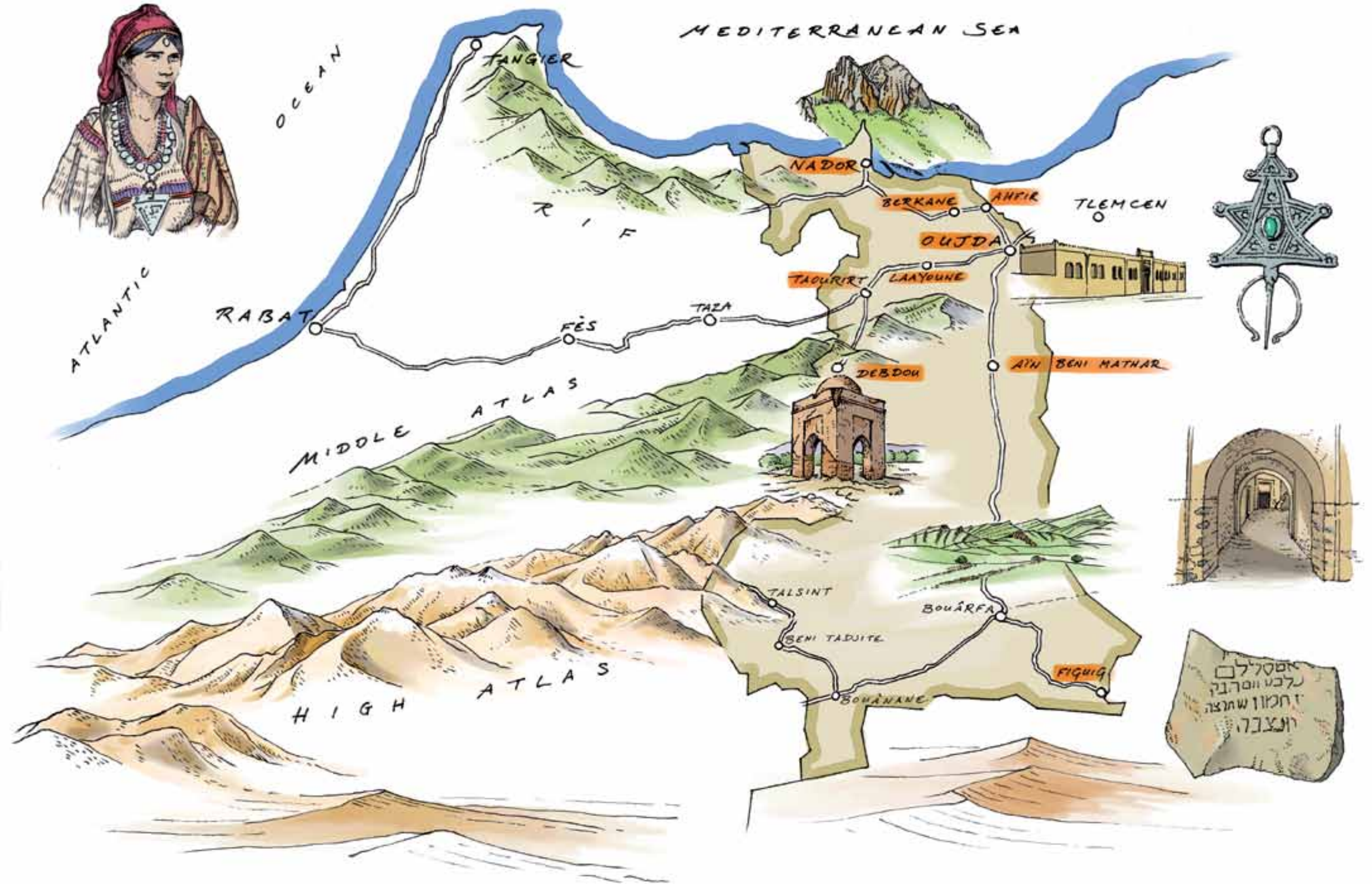


Opposite, the mausoleum of Sidi
Yahia in Oujda, who was venerated
by the Jewish and Muslim communi-
ties, as well as by Christians.



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Forward

This book is an illustrated, authentic, and enthusiastic survey of the Judeo-Moroccan cultural heritage of the Oriental region. “As is enshrined in the Kingdom’s new Constitution, the Hebrew heritage is indeed one of the time-honored components of our national identity.”* The first of its kind ever published in Morocco, this volume marks the beginning of a new encounter, a rereading of the living evidence of a common past, of which we hope to honor the highest and happiest moments. It is indeed a testament, which ponders the experience of one of the most ancient communities in the Kingdom, as well as its relation to the others.

It is also an earnest invitation to discover one of the principal centers of Judaism, which was home to generations of men, women and children, who were Moroccan, free, and proud to practice their religion in the Oriental region. In Oujda, Debdou, Figuig, and Nador, so many Jewish families lived over the centuries in perfect harmony with the neighboring Muslim population. The bonds between them have remained strong despite migration. Annual pilgrimages and the continued celebration of Mimouna, the most typically Jewish-Moroccan holiday, for example, demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between Jews and Muslims and a solidarity which was sealed over centuries of living together.

To the rhythm of rich and colorful landscapes, which illustrate the beauty so specific to the region, strong and vivid testimonies of the past will make us relive moments of true partnership, precious memories from a past worth preserving and sharing. Morocco has always drawn from its plural identities, this book is dedicated to just one of them, and certainly not the least influential.

Mohamed MBarki

* Excerpt from the royal letter of February 13th 2013, see p. 7.

The Centuries-Old History of Moroccan Jews

A Historical Review

If any community can bear witness through its own history to the acceptance of different religious groups in Muslim lands, it is certainly the Jewish community of Morocco. Since its distant beginnings, it has always benefited from a certain amount of autonomy that, despite certain difficult passages, was never taken away over the centuries. Morocco has always been a land of asylum, and coexistence, but also a land of departure, a land of return, and sometimes of conflict. These rich and diverse migratory experiences fermented a rich patchwork of customs, spoken languages, borders, religions, and finally political emancipation.

The Jewish presence in the Cherifian Kingdom is ancestral and dates back more than 2000 years. Archeological vestiges, such as tombstones, some inscribed in Hebrew, show that a Jewish community lived in the Roman city of Volubilis, not far from Meknes, in the 2nd Century, B.C.

Moreover, Jews showed a great attachment to their land through acts of resistance: Resistance first against the hegemonic attempts of the Romans, and then against the Byzantines who occupied the country the year 533. During this period, Jewish tribes actively participated in the struggle against the invaders of the Byzantine Empire. In response, the occupying forces declared Judaism illegal, and a decree was issued to convert every synagogue into a church.

The strictness of these measures was nevertheless diminished by the substantial pressure that Jews exerted.

Decorative candle holder. Volubilis, Morocco, 4th - 5th Century. Bronze. Archeology Museum of Rabat



Traditional Jewish clothing varies by region.
on the left, a wedding costume.
On the opposite page, a young woman in festive dress.
(Drawings by J. Besancenot)

The first group of non-Berbers to settle in Morocco was Jewish. What they found there was more than a simple refuge, but a truly welcoming land.

History records that in 612 and 613, the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula were heavily persecuted by the Visigoths. To escape, migratory movements were organized in hopes of reaching the Kingdom. These newcomers joined the indigenous people already there and that is how the community grew larger, progressively and in harmony with the Berber population, in such a way that a diverse population was constituted: *Berberization* of the Jews, Conversions to Judaism by Berbers... Regardless of the order in which things came about, eventually there was an interpenetration of both groups by the other.

The founding of Fes in the year 808 by Idriss II allowed the Jewish community to move into the city, to practice their religion freely, and to take part in artisanal, commercial, and financial activities. This freedom came with a legal framework: *Dhimma*, a protected status bestowed upon the community in exchange for *Jizya*, a levied tax allowing administrative, judicial, and cultural autonomy.



A prolific period was thus beginning: Fes became the administrative capital of the Kingdom, and remained a spiritual and cultural center for centuries. Talmudic sciences were taught under Rabbi Issac El-Fassi in the 9th Century, and most of all, the ideas of Maimonides, the greatest figure of medieval Mediterranean Jewish intellectual thought, took hold after the philosopher spent six years in the city between 1159 and 1165.

It is in this same period that Sijilmasa (south of the current outpost of Errachidia) was founded by the Beni-Wassul. Commerce flourished in the town, notably with Egypt and the Indies, and the Jewish community largely contributed to this economic growth. Jews enjoyed a great deal of freedom and because the free movement of goods and people was guaranteed in Sijilmasa, it quickly became an important commercial hub. Overall, there was a lot of internal migration by the Jewish population. One of the regions where Moroccan Judaism prospered most, was the Oriental region.

This region, far from the central power structure, and protected by a mountain range, attracted a large population hoping to live a more quiet life, especially in troubling times.



Alleyway in the Figuig Mellah

That is how the small town of Debdou became an exceptional Talmudic center with a reputation reaching well beyond its borders. We will have time to expand on that point later.

Moments of crisis intersect this history. The following period was more difficult. Power struggles between the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties had violent consequences for the Jewish community.

Aligned with the Almoravids, the Jewish population suffered the wrath of the Almohads, who were driven by religious radicalism and led a savage campaign of forced conversions to Islam. The *Dhimma* status was repealed.

There are however many historical documents that examine the notion of forced conversions. Often times, “conversions” were superficial in nature (limited to the *shahada*, the Muslim profession of faith), and most “converts” continued to practice their religion in secret.

The words of Maimonides are unequivocal: “*Never before was there such a marvelous persecution, the only constrain was that of the spoken word.*”

It was under the Marinid Dynasty in 1438 that the first *Mellah* (Jewish quarter) in the Kingdom was built.

Following political tensions and sectarian violence, the Sultan decided to gather the Jewish community and place it under his protection in a separate quarter by his Royal Palace in Fes al-Jdid.

The situation improved considerably under the Marinids. Many members of the community were able to climb the social ladder, and some were even appointed to eminent positions on the Sultan’s court. Others undertook important financial responsibilities.

This prosperity contrasted considerably with the cruel treatment Jews faced in Spain. In 1391, a policy of Christianization throughout the entire Iberian Peninsula gave rise to violent antisemitism and Jews were massacred in many cities: Seville, Cordoba, Madrid...

Many survivors decided to emigrate to Morocco, foreshadowing the edict expelling Jews from Spain signed on March 31st 1492 by Isabelle the 1st of Castile, known as Isabelle the Catholic, and Ferdinand II of Aragon.

This new influx was exceptionally enriching for the community already in Morocco. Profound changes took place, as much on a spiritual level as on a socio-economic level.

Gold belt buckle set (*feqron*),
with 13 sapphires and one emerald.
6,5 x 6,5 cm. Fes, 19th Century.

Two distinct ethnic groups emerged: the *Megorashim* (those expelled from Spain and Portugal) and the *Toshabim* (those whose were already well established in the Kingdom). The first group was called *rūmiyyīn* or “Europeans,” as opposed to *baldiyyīn* meaning “native or indigenous.” The evolution of relations between these two groups is worth investigating. Despite starting out with their own language, culture, and rituals, *Megorashim* and *Toshabim* progressively grew closer, resulting in mutual cultural influence.

There were a great number of rabbis and learned men among the refugee population. Their spiritual contributions were so important that they permanently altered certain aspects of rabbinical science. Their knowledge helped them join the ranks of the local community’s elite.

The role of *Nagid*, or community leader, who presided over the Jewish council, or *Maamad*, by way of ordinances and decrees, is a perfect example of how this elite was organized. The *Nagid* was most of all the intermediary between official authorities (the Sultan, *Makhzen* Arab elite, and governors...) and the community. The later were regulated by *taqqanot* (decrees) as well as *responsas*

(court orders) which applied exclusively to the Jewish community which lived throughout Morocco in an autonomous manner.

The contributions of the *Megorashim* were equally important on an economic front, and their commercial activities soon surpassed the indigenous Jews. Rooted in centuries old traditions, techniques, and know-how, they took up artisanal trades as goldsmiths, coin minters, and jewelers; The manipulation of gems and precious metals was systematically conferred to those expelled from Spain, who brought new trades with them too, such as the fabrication of gold and silver filament. Workers who specialized in this trade were called *sqalliyyin*. Bearers of the name *Kohen-Sqalli*, a common patronymic in Morocco, are considered descendants of these artisans.

To get a better idea of the predominant role played by Jews in this domain, here is a text by Leo Africanus: “Most of the metal-smiths are Jews who practice their trade in New Fes and then carry their wares to the old city for sale. (...) No Muslim may exercise the profession, since the selling of silver or gold for more money than their weight is worth is considered usury. But the Sovereigns have granted the Jews permission to continue.”



Shared Fears, Common Joys

In commerce and international trade, the position of Jewish merchants was not only predominant, but also of strategic importance for all of Morocco. The period between the 11th and 16th Centuries was difficult for the Kingdom: Territorial security was threatened by attempts at domination by the Iberian Peninsula and the control of coastal cities (Ceuta and Melilla). These hostilities were followed by fervent proselytism aimed at the “*declared enemies of the Holy Catholic Church*.” The specter of the Spanish Inquisition, which saw non-Christian “infidels” burned at the stake, loomed large in the minds of Jews and Muslims alike. Fears that the burning stakes would reach the Kingdom were high... In this uncertain atmosphere, an exceptional solidarity took root between Jews and Muslims, and a sense of belonging transcended existing social boundaries. The Battle of the Three Kings, which took place on August 4th 1578, is quite revealing. Also known as the Battle of Oued-al-Makhzen, and named after the banks of the river where it took place, it was decisive in ending the invasion of Morocco and the territorial aspirations of the King of Portugal, Sebastian I. Military operations were led by the new Sultan Abu Marwan Abd-al-Malik. The day after this victory, rabbis throughout the kingdom decided to celebrate *Purim*, a Jewish holiday commemorating miraculous deliverance from a terrible massacre.



Following these events, and for many centuries, the Moroccan state decided to confer commerce and trade almost exclusively to Jews; and They were associated with many of the Kingdom’s commercial ventures from then on, and handling all strategic shipments (weapons, naval materials). Maritime trade became central to their business. Some Jews established themselves in Gibraltar, helping to develop trade with England. Moreover, they proved to be ruthless negotiators when faced with their European counterparts, who feared them based on their reputation as the *King’s treasurers*.

Inter-communal solidarity was not solely confined to the Jewish and Muslim elites. It also manifested itself as part of daily life for citizens of more humble means from both religions. Thus, in periods of drought, it was not unusual for each community to ask the other to pray for rain. Each hoping to bolster the other’s prayer... Saints from one and the other religion were venerated equally: Muslims invoked Jewish saints, Jews invoked Muslim saints ; better still, some saints were accepted as belonging to both religions. Also, Jews often called upon the Muslim blessing of *baraka*. Some even participated in the celebration of Muslim *moussems*.

There was financial solidarity as both populations were faced with exorbitant taxes, and each community lent money to the other.

The Jewish community was never directly involved in any power struggle. After the fall of the Saadian Dynasty they did not participate in the conflict that followed. A real partnership developed with various *zaouïas*, Muslim brotherhoods. For example, Sidi Ali, the head of the Illigh *zaouïa* in the Anti-Atlas, called on the Jews of Ifrane to establish trading posts in the region, as a way of consolidating his power. After taking control of Agadir and its port, he asked Jewish merchants to negotiate with their European partners, making the city a port of call for the West Indies Company, which further developed commercial activity in the region.

Indeed many *zaouïas* throughout the Kingdom called upon Jews to guarantee successful economic development in their territories.

Over the centuries a cultural identity specific to the Judeo-Moroccan community was forged. This is one of the differences between the Sephardic Jews of North Africa, and the Ashkenazi community of Europe. As Haïm Zafrani points out, “*in Muslim lands, social interactions between Jews and Muslims were not marred by the same violent hostility that defined the relationship between Jews and Christians in Ashkenazi areas, where the opportunities for assimilation were few.*” This sense of acceptance and integration was maintained by both communities even during the worst of times.



A Jewish couple,
early 20th Century

Over the centuries a bond of trust had been solidified: Jews were appointed to important positions: Merchants, negotiators, silversmiths, treasurers for the *Makhzen*, Royal advisors...

For example Samuel Sumbel was Sultan Sidi Mohammad Ben Abdallah's personal secretary in the 18th Century... This relationship set a standard that led to a perennial position. By the end of the Protectorate, several Jews had featured prominently on the national political scene. Their precursor was Leon Benzaken, PTT minister under the first government of independent Morocco. Later on there was David Tolédano, minister of housing as well as Serge Berdugo, a tourism minister turned cultural ambassador.

An Exemplary Sultan

During the Second World War, Sultan Mohammed V had the courage to resist the application of Vichy government laws on his subjects, despite pressure from colonial authorities. On the 25th anniversary of his ascension to the throne the Monarch stated in the strongest possible words: "Israelite Moroccans have the same rights and the same duties as any other Moroccans."

The feelings of protection and benevolence expressed by the Moroccan Monarch towards his Jewish community are truly exceptional.

The list of community members contributing to the development of the country would be too long to publish here. Finally, it would be impossible not to mention André Azoulay, advisor to His Majesty Mohammed VI: "The saga of Moroccan Judaism is too deeply rooted in the history of this country to disappear. In order to understand the contemporary reality, think of the million or more Moroccan Jews dispersed across many continents who, generation after generation, have fought to preserve the memory and rich complexity of their Moroccan identities."

In 1948, Moroccan Jews represented the largest such community in the Arab World, with a population of 300 000.



Marriage contract
(ketouba), between Shimon
Ben Yihya Samoun and
Sahadia Bat Rabi Yossef
Ben Adiba, Oujda, 14th day
of Eloul 5670 (1910). Every
ketouba was unique, and
was drawn up especially for
the occasion by a scribe.

When Mohammed V Opposed Vichy

Because Sultan Mohammed V had the courage to categorically refuse the application of the Vichy government's antisemitic laws on his territory during World War II, Moroccan Jews did not suffer the same tragic fate as their French coreligionists.

The Monarch's exemplary attitude came as a relief to the Jewish-Moroccan community who feared the worst in those dark times. Opposed to Resident-General Noguès, he demonstrated his relentless determination and independent spirit, when confronted with any hint of racism or antisemitism.

"The Israelites remain under my protection"

On Throne Day, 1941, The Sultan went so far as to invite Jewish dignitaries to his palace as a way of demonstrating his solidarity and support. Documents from the French Foreign Ministry office at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, specifically a telegram sent by René Touraine to Vichy on May 24th 1941, attest to this act of resistance:

***Dissidence. May 24th 1941, A.F.I. Telegram.
"Sultan of Morocco's sudden change of attitude
regarding French authority. René Touraine.***

*"The Sultan decided to publicly show his disavowal of our measures against the Jews; He waited for Throne Day to do so. It is custom during such celebrations for the Sultan to host a grand banquet and invite French officials and eminent personalities from the indigent class. For the first time, members of the Israelite community were present, and obviously given the best seats, right next to the French. The Sultan insisted on personally introducing the Israelites. When French officials expressed their astonishment, the Sultan declared :
"I in no way approve of these new antisemitic laws and I refuse to be associated with a measure I disapprove of. I wish to reiterate that, as in the past, the Israelites remain under my protection, and I refuse that any distinction whatsoever be made between my subjects."*

This sensational declaration was swiftly condemned by the French and local population."

Foreign Ministry Archives, Quai d'Orsay, Paris, War Series 1939/45,
Vichy-Morocco. File 18, Jews (General), binder 665,
diplomatic corps series (Annex D).



His Majesty Mohammed V at the podium.

Below: Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1956. After his return from exile, the Sultan receives a delegation of Moroccan Jews, presided by Grand Rabbi Shaul Danan and Rabbi Shalom Messas.

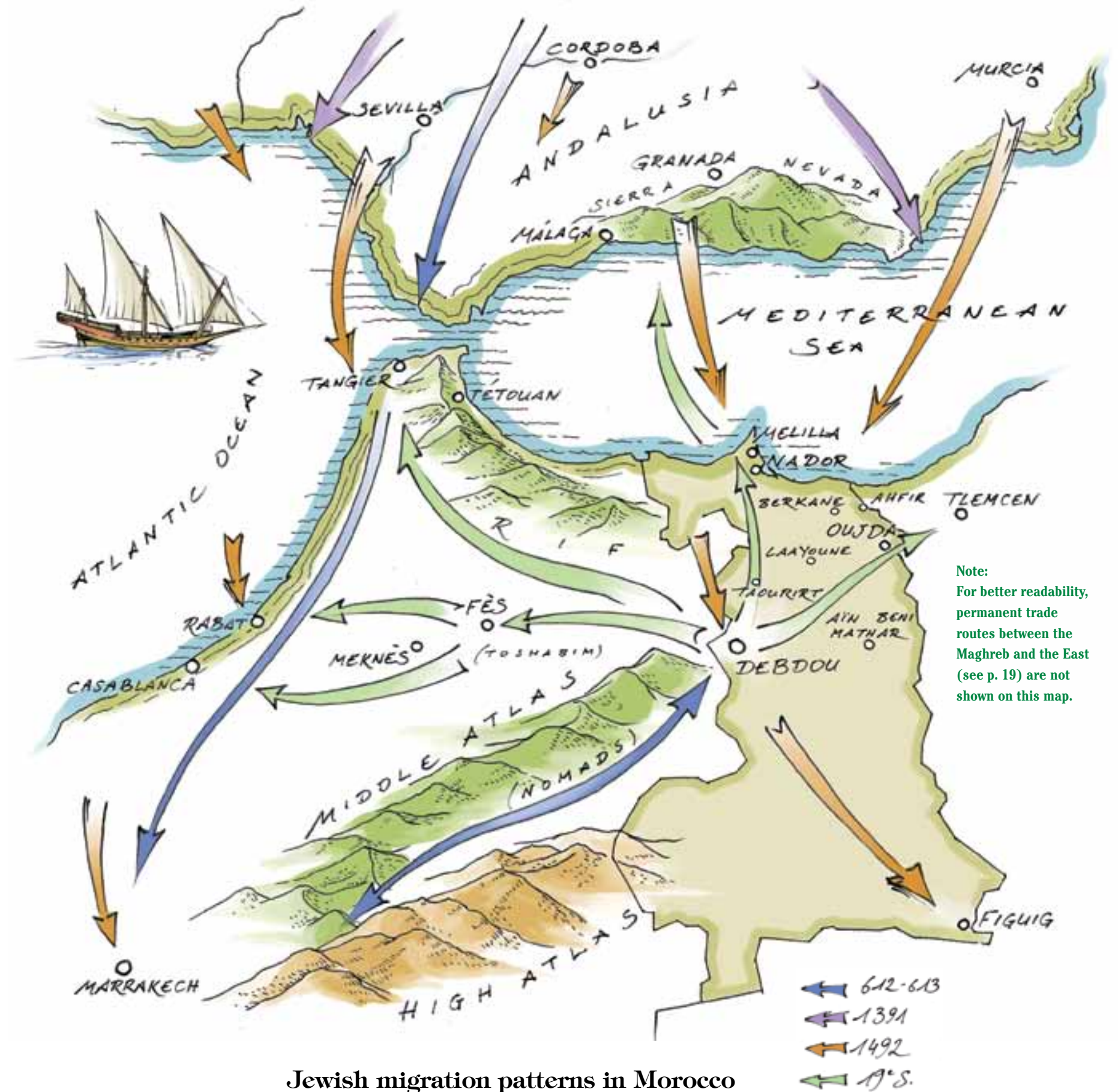
Fishing village at Trois Fouches, near Nador



An Oriental Heritage

The Oriental is the second largest region in Morocco, extending over 82 820 km², a stretch of land as big as Tunisia or Belgium, making up 11,6% of the Kingdom's total area. It is bordered by the Mediterranean to the north and the Morocco - Algeria border to the south and east.

This geographic situation has established it as a strategic North African crossroads. The eastern Rif, Beni-Snassen, and High-Atlas make up the region's principal mountain ranges. The largest river is the Moulouya which irrigates the region's high plains.



Jewish migration patterns in Morocco

Oujda, A Capital at the Crossroads of Culture



THE *MELLAH* OF OIJDA

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THE *FKIH* AND THE RABBI

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CHLOMO HACHOHEN SCALI SABBAN

P. 48



ABRAHAM
MESSAOUDA
TOUSOUL





Oujda, a City with an Exceptional Mellah

Oujda is situated in the north east of the Kingdom at the heart of the Angad plain. On top of being a regional capital, it is also an important crossroads between Morocco, North Africa, and Europe. The city is surrounded by the magnificent Beni-Snassen mountains and to the East lies Algeria, only a few kilometers away.

This strategic geographic position attracted a considerable Jewish population. Their presence in Oujda dates back to the reign of Sultan Moulay Ismael (1672-1727) as evidenced by vestiges found at the *Qbour el Yaoud* cemetery. Those early years were quiet and prosperous as a Muslim chronicler attests: “A woman and a Jew could travel from Oujda to Oued Noun without anyone asking them where they were coming from and where they were headed... In all of North Africa, not a single thief or highwayman was to be found.”

The city also attracted people from other regions in the Kingdom. A *responsum*, (rabbinical tribunal document) dating back to 1731 affirms that “*Jews from Beni Snuss*

settled in Oujda in the years of drought and famine that preceded the Sultan’s death.” Jews often migrated throughout the country, principally for socio-economic reasons.

“The Jew is one of us”

These voyages could be perilous and the threat of banditry was very real. Reports of such crimes however were quite rare, and when they did occur, help and support from the Arab population was close at hand. A certain Moses Ben Abraham Al Karsani was the victim of a highway robbery in 1732 which could have ended much worse if it hadn’t been for the intervention of a Muslim who declared that “*the Jew (Moses) is one of us, he has nothing to fear from anyone, and nothing evil shall befall him. Raising a hand against him is akin to striking our own eyes blind.*” (Judicial ruling of 1732).

It was in 1876 that the complete emancipation of Oujda’s Jewish population took place, thanks to Governor Driss Ben Yaïch who declared that henceforth that community would be under the direct authority of the Sultan, considerably improving their social standing and living conditions.

Ancestral know-how and artisanal knowledge was found in every *Mellah* in Morocco.

Following page, *The Rabbi*, by painter Théophile-Jean Delaye (1896-1970).



status. Their style of dress was closer to that of their counterparts in the other community. Men wore Turkish style cotton pants, and a white shirt called a *habaya*, and like their Muslim neighbors, they donned the typical wool *djellaba* (hooded outerwear), wore yellow *babouches* (Moroccan slippers) and covered their heads with a skull cap wrapped in a turban.

Women let their hair grow long. Young girls usually went uncovered while married women were expected to hide their hair entirely under colorful scarves. This female population was heavily involved in the manufacturing sector. Oujda has a tradition of fine textile work and special knitting techniques were passed down from mother to daughter... In this context, Jewish and Muslim women worked side by side. This was another factor in the socialization process.

A Tradition of Generosity

Rare fact: While most *Mellahs* in Morocco were closed off and insular, the same could certainly not be said about the one in Oujda, where openness to neighbors was a defining characteristic. Its houses, far from being isolated, stood aside Muslim homes. While people certainly lived separately, there was never any official border between the Jewish quarter at Ouled Amran and the rest of the city. This neighborhood was the birthplace of many prominent Oujda families, such as the Sinaceur Bellarbi, Dendane, and Larbi Meziane... who guaranteed the “protection” of at least one Jewish family respectively, as was the custom in Oujda. The two communities lived side by side as respectful and open neighbors. The architecture of Jewish houses was similar to that of Muslim homes, open onto interior courtyards. Often times a shared kitchen was used by every family in the building. Overall, this proximity played out in a peaceful atmosphere and the situation of the Jewish community in Oujda was much the same as in other cities in Morocco.

Oujda Jews were not forced, as elsewhere, to wear the obligatory black tunic which represented *Dhimma*



In his book *Tell me of Oujda*, author Jean-Louis Azencott, who was born there in 1946, evokes this cosmopolitan atmosphere: “Some Arabs lived there too, among the Jews of the Mellah, in perfect balance and mutual respect. (...) Both communities had a reputation as keen business men, and both worked in the picturesque souks, which were full of financial opportunities as well as varied and exotic merchandise.”

As another sign of reciprocal tolerance, for generations the *Mimouna* held on the last day of the Jewish Passover was celebrated by both communities in the same way: Ablution rituals, Andalusian music... Often times festivities involved both groups simultaneously.

The *Fkih* and the Rabbi

With regards to belief, certain customs were equally related. Jews and Muslims often used similar objects: The *harz*, an amulet used to ward off the evil eye, was bestowed by a *fkih* or rabbi and contained either a verse from the Qur’an or a few words in Hebrew. In cosmopolitan Oujda, the “other” became accepted as a brother.

Among the many Jewish holidays celebrated in Oujda, one of the most strictly observed was Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). A rabbi would visit each household and carry out very specific rituals: A chicken was passed around to each member of the family while prayers and benedictions were recited. It was customary to sacrifice a rooster for each man and a hen for each woman, three for each pregnant woman. The rabbi was in charge of the sacrifice. In the evening, there was a special meal of chicken soup thickened with raw egg yolks, and accompanied by a special loaf of bread.



The old Israelite School of Oujda.

Until the beginning of the 20th Century, there were three synagogues in Oujda: *Chenougha* Oulad ben Dray, *Chenougha* Oulad Ichou, and the one in El Habra. The Torahs used there often came from Debdou. In order to carry out the ritual reading, the rabbi had to place the sacred text on a balustrade between the central pillars of the synagogue. Each word was read aloud with the help of a special solid silver pointer with a small decorative hand at the tip. Rich and pious believers often paid for a new Torah to replace ones that became worn over time. Once a Torah was no longer usable it was solemnly buried in the city's Jewish cemetery. Until the beginning of the 20th Century, the Oulad el Habra corporation, presided by Youssef Azoulay, oversaw the upkeep of the cemetery, and carried out all funeral services.

In 1907, one in five inhabitants was Jewish, bringing the total to 1200 people. By 1936 the population reached 5000, and jumped again to 9000 souls in 1948. Under the

Protectorate the city became a melting pot, welcoming Algerian and Spanish Jews who quickly assimilated with the local population. A Franco-Israelite school was inaugurated in 1914. Europeans from Germany, Switzerland, Portugal, and Italy also settled in Oujda, and there was no outright form of segregation in the city: Oujda was a perfect example of urban integration and assimilation.

It must be said also that during the many national struggles for independence, Oujda's proximity to both Algeria and Spain, set it apart as a safe haven for nationalist resistance, and many Jews were very active in these movements.

As a symbol of pacific cohabitation, Jewish and Muslim communities often venerated the same saint: the marabout of Sidi Yahia remains venerated by members of both religions to this day.





Rabbi Chlomo Hacoheh Scali Sabban



One cannot speak of the Jewish community of Oujda without mentioning the name of Grand Rabbi Chlomo Hacoheh Scali Sabban. Many Muslims took part in his funeral procession in 1949. His sanctuary in the Oujda cemetery is still a place of contemplation and pilgrimage for Jews from around the world. The epitaph on his grave sheds light on the exceptional life of this saint who was born in Debdou.

*“The last of the righteous has left us,
a pious man is gone from the world!
(...)”*

Dedicating the whole of his life to Torah study, by the age of 15 his advice was solicited by sages and rabbis from distant lands. He dealt with every type of question with a wisdom and intellect worthy of Solomon. He was a leading judge and scholar by the age of 25. Championing the Torah, he was constantly on the sacred path of purity. He was called “Solomon the Wise.”

*The Grand Rabbi, head of the Rabbinical Tribunal,
Hakham Chlomo Hacoheh Scali Sabban -
Remembering a just man is a blessing.”*

Rabbi Chlomo Hacoheh Scali Sabban's mausoleum in the Oujda cemetery.



In 1949, the funeral of Rabbi Chlomo Hacoheh Scali Sabban attracts a considerable crowd from three different communities

















Debdou, Center of Learning



A ROAD THAT LEADS NOWHERE ELSE
BY SIMON LÉVY

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DEBDOU, A SPIRITUAL FLOURISHING
ON THE MEDITERRANEAN

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“MY TRIPS TO DEBDOU
GAVE ME BACK A SENSE OF BELONGING”

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A Road That Leads Nowhere Else

Debdou is at the end of a road which leads nowhere else. It is a small town which today is left apart, unaffected by the many highways and railroads that connect the rest of eastern Morocco to Oujda and Algeria. The plateau and steppe rise suddenly to form rolling hills that reach over 1650 meters.

Beyond the hills is a relatively green zone favorable to horticulture, which stretches 40 kilometers to Moulouya. There lies Debdou, which in 1973 was still home to seven Jewish families, the last members of a once thriving community, which especially at the turn of the century, made up the majority of the town's inhabitants. Today, it is a small market town and a meeting place for pastoral tribes and hunters who go there for the abundant fowl and game found nearby.

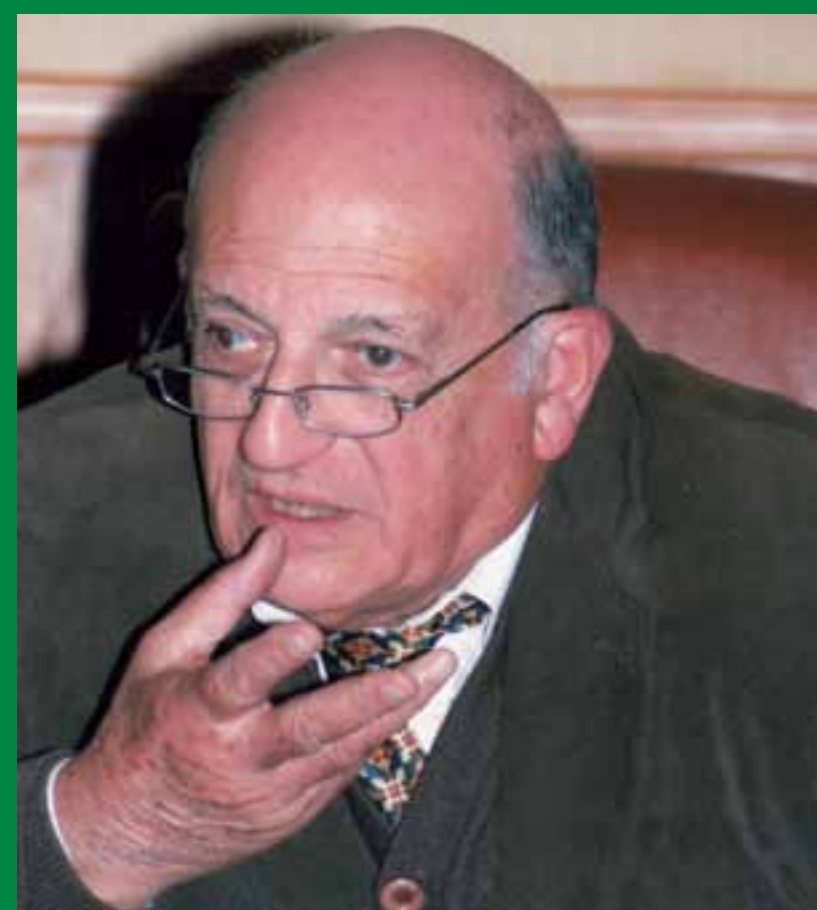
It is hard to imagine that Debdou was ever any different. But if you scour the map with the eyes of an ancient caravan traveler, it is easy to understand its advantageous position as a secure and resourceful **junction** between Taza, Fes, and Tlemcen. The trail descends the Atlas through the Moulouya valley to join the route which comes up from Tafilalt, linking the Sahara to the Mediterranean and Algeria.

This explains Debdou's commercial and political importance in the eyes of the *Makhzen* and regional powers. This position also explains how Debdou became a center of learning and culture for the Jewish community. Heavily influenced by Fez, Tafilat, and Tlemcen, it became home to the first "Sevillian" refugees from Spain in 1391.

This first wave of Spanish refugees had only a small impact on Moroccan Judaism, but the communities of Tunis, Algiers, and Tlemcen can trace some of their ancestry back to the exodus from the Kingdom of Aragon, which sparked the first great crisis of Spanish Judaism.

It is hard to trace the path followed by the *Megorashim* who ended up in Debdou. Did they go there "directly" or rather slowly, after an extended stay in Oran? Either way, there is an obvious similarity between the Jewish dialects of Debdou, Tlemcen, and Algiers.

The Jews of Debdou, or more specifically their two dominant clans, the Kohen Skalli and Ulad Marsiano (or Morsiano) were strongly attached to their roots in Seville, and until 1929, they still used the name *Sbilja* (Seville) on all *starots* (contracts). They even went as far as to



Simon Levy (1934-2011). On the right, the mythical well of Aïn Sbilya, before restoration.

symbolically name the main water well in town Aïn Sbilia. In fact, before arriving in Debdou, the Ulad Marsiano had settled in *Kasbah* el Makhzen, leading to believe that the settlement of the region by *Geros Sebiyanos* took time and happened in several stages. They assimilated with the local population in Debdou and were joined by other *Baldiyyin* families.

A massive migration then took place in the 17th Century, taking the Jews from Debdou to Dar Masaal, in the Beni-Snassen foothills. They returned in 1690 when Moulay Ismaïl destroyed their village. This community, which was very active in both local and long-distance trade, spread quickly throughout the Oriental region of Morocco: Ksabi, Missur, Utat al-Hazz, Taza, Oujda, Taourirt, Guersif, Midelt, the Rif and Melilla; Algeria too.

Finally, close ties with Tlemcen and Algeria had an influence on the Debdou dialect, and there are common loanwords from Spanish in the dialects of Oran, Oujda, and Debdou. French influences mostly came from Algeria...

Simon Lévy, Founder of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca.





Debdou, a Spiritual Flourishing on the Mediterranean

To the east of the Moulouya river lies a small little-known, ignored and forgotten town, despite its relevance as an exceptional center of learning for North African Judaism.

Located in the north east of the country, 160 km from Oujda, Debdou can be proud of its long standing tradition of hospitality. The city clings to a slope above the *Kasbah* plains, and signaling its openness to the outside world, has no walls or fortifications. It is divided into five districts: Kiadid, Oulad Abib, Oulad Youssef, Oulad Amara, and at its core the *Mellah*, which makes up the largest part of the city. Its first inhabitants were Berberphone as indicated by its toponym (*Debdou* meaning “Black Funnel” or “Mountain Pass” in Amazigh).

Before the Arab conquest in the 7th Century, the Amazigh population was joined by Jewish tribes who assimilated with the indigenous population and adapted their mountain dwelling way of life to their own, in such a way that it was hard to distinguish between the two groups, except maybe in the minute details of clothing

style. Some native inhabitants adhered to the Jewish religion, marking the beginning of a long history. In only a few centuries, Debdou became a new home for Moroccan Judaism.

It opened its arms to Jews fleeing persecution on the Iberian Peninsula. Protected by the mountains and plateaus of the Anti-Atlas, and blessed with an ex-centric geographic position, the city was less exposed to the troubles and intrigue that afflicted Fes or Marrakesh. High on the mountain side, it was a difficult target to attack. The Marinid Dynasty took note of this strategic advantage, and eager to reunite their North African empire, expanded into the Oriental region, occupying Taza in 1216. Debdou was sought after as a strategic buffer between two feuding powers: the Marinids and the Abdelwadids from Tlemcen.

Control of the city became a pretext for several confrontations between the two dynasties hoping to control the region. Later on, in the 15th and 18th Centuries, the Eastern city regained strategic importance, rebuffing the Ottoman advances on the Cherifian Kingdom.

Adobe houses in
Debdou, 1912.

On the opposite page,
Debdou today.

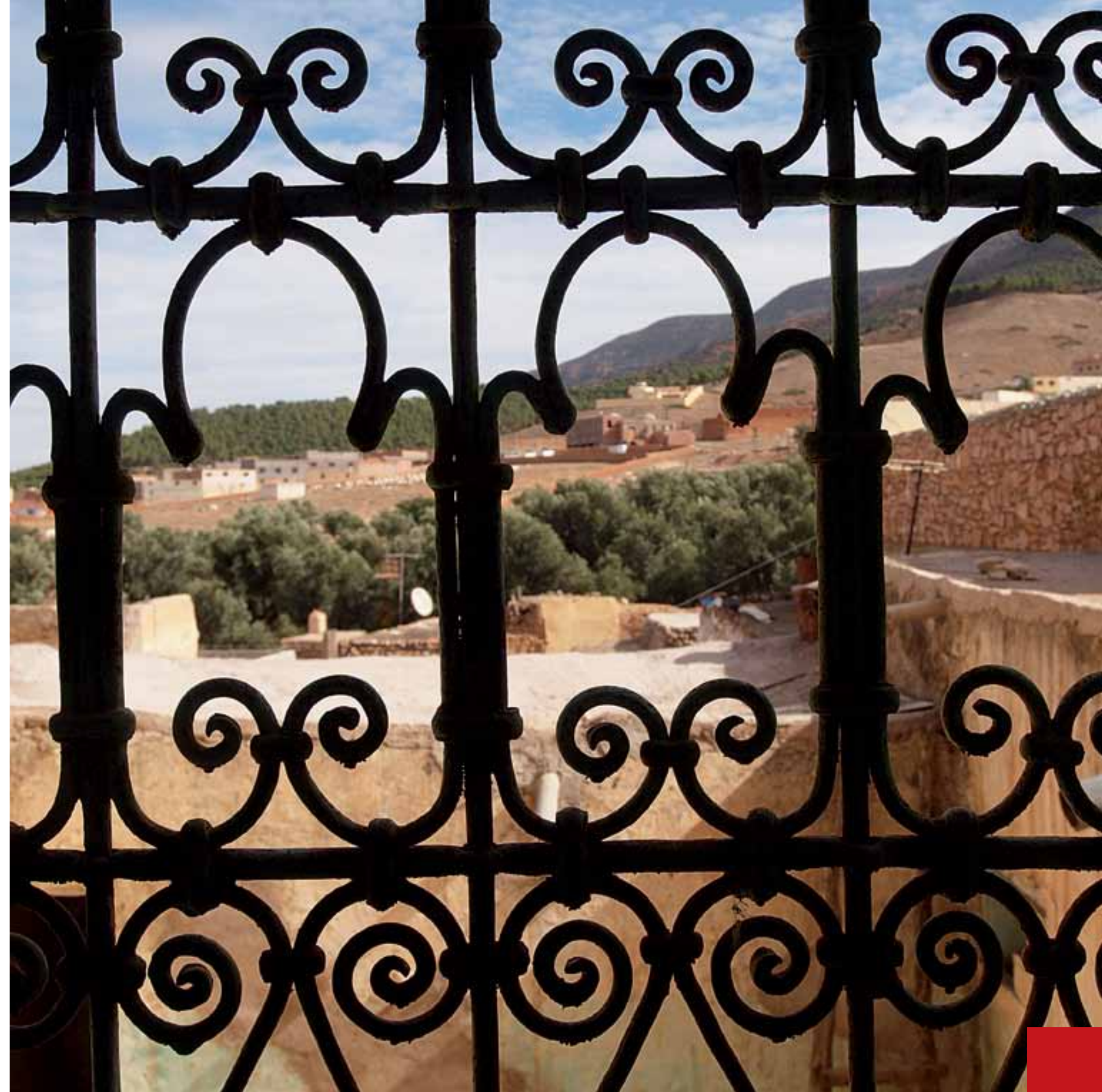


Debdou became a fortified citadel. The magnificent *Kasbah* stands as an example of the Marinid's defensive and military architecture. Built on a high flat hill top, and buttressed by a steep cliff reaching from 1140 to 1190 meters in altitude, it is surrounded by ramparts, a moat, and several watchtowers. Caves were dug in the cliff and used as shelters during conflicts. Ibn Khaldoun, undoubtedly the most famous African historian, once took shelter in Debdou and wrote of the experience: "*Several people were able to survive the assault, seeking shelter on the mountain of Debdou. The others, including myself, ran off on foot across the arid desert, leaving behind all our possessions. From there I was able to join my companions in Debdou.*" Ibn Khaldun's precious testimony offers us a glimpse of the city's independent, indomitable, and rebel spirit: "*In 1364-65, Abou Hamou entered Morocco and erupted into Debdou and its surroundings. In retaliation, Mohamed Ibn Zigdan the regional Marinid warlord, founded an independent city (...) The King of Fes recognized the independence of Debdou and its region. The chiefs of Debdou then besieged the town of Taza. Mohamed Ech*

Cheikh tried to repel them, but was unsuccessful. The King of Fes was made to give his two daughters to the sons of a Debdou governor. That was the price of peace."

More than a city, Debdou had become a Kingdom. In the 15th Century a new dynasty was born. Moussa Ibn Hammou, who was originally the leader of the local resistance movement, went on to found a dynasty and rule over Debdou for thirty years. His son Ahmed took power in 1460 and then it was the turn of his grandson Mohamed Ben Ahmed. It was this last ruler who oversaw the construction of many historical sites in the city, including Debdou's only mosque, built in an Andalusian style.

The city's architecture is characterized by a noticeable lack of ornamentation. Many houses were made using only stone and adobe. This type of construction can be found not only in the *Mellah* but throughout the region. The city's architectural heritage is enhanced by the many vestiges of the Marinid Principality, the old Jewish cemetery, the old medina, the settlements on the beautiful Gaada Plateau surrounded by magnificent mountain views...



“Debdou stayed with me”

“**M**y family is originally from Seville. We lived in Debdou over the generations, from father to son, until 1920 when my great grandfather left for what was then called Palestine. As for my grandfather, he left Debdou in 1953. My father decided to stay. Most families in Debdou are from the Cohen-Sqali tribe. The name Sqali stands as a reminder that the Jews in town were of noble lineage.

My father was a business man; a tea merchant, which meant that everyone in the family was a real tea *connoisseur*. We drank our tea without mint, that is to say pure! He also oversaw the shipment of wood for an agricultural store. He had his hand in a lot of things. My father also had a Muslim partner and there were never any problems. My mother, who was also from Debdou, was a housewife.

The Making of Traditional Bread for Pessah

One of my strongest childhood memories of Debdou is the preparation of *matzo* (flat bread) for *Pessah*, the Jewish Passover. The preparation was almost a ceremony in itself! There was a communal oven next

to the Slat Lqohana synagogue where my father went to pray. That is where women met, a month before the festivities, to prepare the bread in a traditional manner. It was a very methodical process. The women sat in a circle; the dough had to be made quickly with flour and water before it could rise. One woman would knead the dough while others poured water or pounded the mixture. The matzo was rounded and flattened before being transferred to the oven. It was like a factory chain! Everyday they made 150 to 200 matzos for each family and for all eight days of Passover. They were carried home in cardboard boxes. The matzos were almost ten centimeters in diameter. Not at all like the industrial ones you see today. For Passover we ate mutton with wild truffles from Oujda. We put the truffles in couscous too. But really the “national dish” of Debdou was stewed chickpeas. We cooked them with everything, eggs, chicken, tagines... It was almost like the equivalent of rice in China!

Another strong memory is that of Rosh Hodesh. At the beginning of every month we had to slaughter a rooster.

Debdou, Isaac Cohen speaks with the new owner of his father's shop.



The sacrifice was carried out by a rabbi. Rabbis were found everywhere in Debdou which, I will remind you, was a mostly Jewish town.

Departure... and Return

In 1956, after some time in Taourirt, we settled in Oujda. I remember that there were two Jewish schools: the Franco-Israelite School, which taught Hebrew, French and Arabic, and the Talmud-Torah School dedicated to Holy Scriptures. Classes there were held at night. We stayed in Oujda until 1965 and then we moved to Casablanca. Once I received my high school degree, I went to study medicine in Strasbourg. I stayed there from 1970 until 1983 when I

got married. My wife and I honeymooned in Morocco. Finally, we decided to continue our Moroccan adventure and move to Casablanca. A choice we certainly don't regret!

Upon returning, I completed two years of civil service in Morocco and during the thirteen years I had spent in France, I never once asked to become a naturalized citizen.

One of the first things I did after coming back was visit Debdou. I had never forgotten it. Even during my westernization, Debdou stayed with me.”

Isaac Cohen

A Jewish Family at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Father Foucauld was the first European to visit Debdou in 1885. Despite not always being kind to the local population in his accounts, he described the city as “delicious.”

“Debdou appears in the distance as a small town dominated by its minaret, full of pink houses that sit at the center of a wide valley. Prairies and gardens extend in every direction. A rocky cliff rises behind the city, crowning the Gada. I descend towards this place laughing (...) Debdou is situated in a delicious position, at the foot of a straight and flanked valley (...) No words can express the freshness of the view laid out before me. Debdou is surrounded by superb gardens: vineyards, olive groves, orchards full of figs, pomegranates and peaches which extend to the banks of the Oued.”

This brief historical reminder helps us better understand why the Jews expelled from Spain decided to settle in Debdou. Here more than anywhere, one felt safe. Descended from Andalusian nobility, they were the last aristocrats of Spanish Judaism. Rabbis, scientists, and scholars sought refuge in the Oriental region of Morocco, which had a reputation far surpassing any other in the Kingdom. An ancient tradition of renaming localities upon arrival led the expelled families, mostly from Seville and Murcia, to name the well at Debdou “Aïn Sbilya,” as a reminder of their glorious past. The spring water there



is purported to have miraculous qualities. Legend goes that it first surfaced after an exiled rabbi and community leader, David Hachem prayed for water. The Jewish quarter was built around the well.

The city became home to an enlightened Judaism, bolstered by Talmudic study centers, high intellectual standards, and great moral piety. Its reputation spread through Morocco and Algeria. For the community, nostalgic of the glory days before Christian persecution, the Oriental town

became a sort of extension of the Andalusian era. What was called the golden age of Debdou had begun. The construction of a dozen synagogues attests to the strong Jewish presence in Debdou. There is a synagogue in each neighborhood. It is important to underscore that until the 20th Century, Debdou not only had the largest Jewish population in the Kingdom, but also that the population of the town itself was mostly Jewish. In fact it was the only place in Morocco where the number of Jews outweighed the number of Muslims. Jews made up more than half of the city's 4000 inhabitants.

The Dignity of Debdou

Here is a report from the director of the Universal Israelite Alliance of Fes concerning the situation of Jews during the famine that ravaged Morocco in 1897: *“The Jews of Debdou are not as poor as many others in major Moroccan cities. Many are masters of their trade and they are well established in commerce. There are many learned rabbis to be found among them. They have a lot of dignity, they have never begged; Of their peers in Fes, they have only ever asked for advice on religious matters.”* (An excerpt from Aïyn Sbilya, A New Seville in North Africa)

During the Protectorate, Debdou was an ethnic and religious melting pot, bringing together Moroccan Arabs and Berbers, Algerians, French, Spanish, and Moroccan Jews...

There was a rabbinical tribunal there, as well as a *yeshiva* (a center for studying the the Torah or Talmud) which for generations attracted a large number of students who later took up positions as *hakhamim*, expert consultants of the Talmud. The city became a major supplier of rabbis for the region and beyond. The most fervent preachers would travel the countryside from synagogue to synagogue, imparting their knowledge and reviving the faith in a way that strengthened ties with outlying elements of the community. The Debdou *yeshiva* was truly exceptional. Reputable and well organized, it remained a pillar of Judaic culture and learning for centuries. Naturally the *Makhzen* appointed a Caïd (lord) to oversee the Jews of Debdou, while a simple Cheikh was enough for most small Muslim towns.

The city specialized in the production of legal scrolls, carefully prepared by expert *sofers* (scribes) whose piety was appreciated by the faithful.

Calligraphy from Debdou, which was famous well beyond the borders of the Kingdom, was highly sought after, not only because of the exceptional know-how of local scribes, but also because high quality parchment was used.

Among the many synagogues in Debdou, one was particularly venerated. The small ancestral Dougham

synagogue, in the center of town, was fashioned in the same style as the temple of Jerusalem and housed an antique manuscript Sefer-Torah scroll. Inhabitants often went there to settle religious disputes and the sermons of the Zabaro Sefer-Torah (named after the rabbi who wrote it) heavily influenced court decisions.

In 1974, Israeli peacemaker and prime minister Yitzhak Rabin received a rare Sefer-Torah from Debdou as a gift. It was hand-written on lambskin parchment. The prime minister later entrusted the scroll to the National Museum of Israel.

Two families ruled the city: The Cohen Sqalis and the Marcianos. The first family came from Seville, and the second from Murcia. The registers of the Jewish cemetery show that the majority of Debdou's Jewish community came from these two families. The head of the Cohen Sqali, was Cheikh David Ben Hida. The grand rabbi Youssed Sabban was also a Cohen Sqali. David Ben Ako Marciano was the leader of the Marciano family. Another sign of the city's allure: Several families from the Cohen Sqali tribe, who had first settled in the prestigious city of Fes after leaving Spain, did not hesitate to relocate to the Oriental city. Nevertheless, many community members



JEWISH FAMILIES FROM DEBDOU THROUGHOUT NORTH AFRICA IN THE 19TH CENTURY.

Cities	Families
Melilla	68
Fees	60
Tlemcen	29
Oujda	17
Martemprey	17
Taurirt	15
Berguent	20
Temouchent	12
Sefrou	9
Oran and Algier	8
Nemours	8
Marhnia	7
Rahal	7
Tangier	5
Casablanca	3
TOTAL	267



The study of law.

A Shared Veneration

Another point of convergence and a perfect example of cultural symbiosis: Muslims and Jews often venerated the same saints. The discovery of a Jewish saint was often declared by a Muslim, who would announce the news to the entire community. The participation of a Muslim in this process, either by witnessing a saintly act or a moment of enlightenment, entitled him to the privilege of guarding the sanctuary.

Thus, a tradition took hold of assigning a Muslim companion to a Jewish saint, who attended to his needs, showing him loyalty and devotion. Sometimes he would be the last witness at the time of the saint's death.

The process by which a holy figure became a saint, either while still alive or after their death, is interesting on many levels. The first sign of sainthood is obviously thaumaturgy. The saint must recognize his own ability to work miracles such as healing the sick. A virtuous, ascetic life, along with good social conduct are also criteria for sainthood. That is how intensive Torah study, in the manner of the prophet Eli, was seen to lead to such a status. According to several traditions, certain saints continued their study even after death, and their spirits were heard praying in the graveyard.



The Main Saints and Sanctuaries Venerated by both Religion

- **Sidi Youssef El Hadj**, situated in the *Mellah*, lived in the 5th Century of the *Hijra* (Muslim era). He preserved women from sterility.
- **Sidi Bouknadil**, situated in the *Mellah*. The name comes from the rumors that light had been seen emanating from inside the marabout on several occasions. He is supposed to heal migraines. The afflicted who pray to him for help bring candles and incense to the shrine. He is visited by Jews and Muslims alike.
- **Sidi Mekhfi**, in Debdou. He lived in the 5th Century of the *Hijra* and earned his name (which means the mysterious one) because no one suspected his saintly status, and his miracles were only known of after his death. He is purported to protect from fever.
- **Sidi M'Hamed Sahli (Sidi Youssef)**. He lived in the 8th century of the *Hijra*. A small shrine may be found on the path from Kobine to the *Kasbah*. Visited by members of both religions, it is supposed to heal all illnesses.

- **Sidi Mohamed Ben Abderrahmane Touati**. He died about fifty years ago, leaving four sons who still live in Debdou. Very popular, he is said to heal all sorts of afflictions.

The epitaphs on the tombstones of great rabbis renowned for their saintliness, knowledge, and wisdom help remind us of the city's glorious past. Here are just a few of their names :

- **Rabbi David Hacohe Scali**. An inspired judge and Kabbalist, his teachings are highly praised in Debdou.
- **Rabbi Aharon Hacohe Sabban** led Torah study in Debdou and was a generous philanthropist.
- **Rabbi David Hacohe Bendaoud**. An exception judge and Kabbalah theorist, he taught Torah in Debdou for a long time before becoming president of the Oran Rabbinical Court.
- **Rabbi Yossef Benoughraba** nicknamed Caïd Lghaba by Muslims.

For centuries Debdou formed many illustrious rabbis who were recognized the world over for the quality of their education.



Muslim economic activity really reached its peak during the great pilgrimages to the most famous sanctuaries. Peasants sold pilgrims sacrificial animals, wood for cooking, water and supplies. This “pilgrimage economy,” so profitable to both communities, was based on trust. Muslims awaited Jewish holidays with enthusiasm.

Another path led to sainthood through dreamlike visions. For Jewish Moroccans in particular, dreams played a decisive role. One had to be able to extract and interpret the holy message: Rabbi Eliyahu dreamed of a blind woman; Rabbi Aharon Assulin appeared to a pious Jew in his sleep, and warning him of a flood, promised to save the small Jewish village.

The Dreams of a Muslim Woman from Debdou

Saints were also revealed to Muslims in their sleep. Rabbi Yshaq El-Qansi appeared to a Muslim woman who lived near the Jewish cemetery and gave her directions to his tomb. The rabbinical court ordered the construction of a shrine on the site. This shows how Muslim dreams led to the discovery of a Jewish saint...

Muslims played an important role in all economic activities related to pilgrimages and shrines. It is thanks to their cooperation that Jews could venerate their saints in all tranquility. When a shrine was located in a dangerous area, Jewish pilgrims would commission armed Muslim guards to accompany them to their destination. When shrines were only reachable by mule or donkey, the animals were often rented from Muslim peasants.

This famous photograph is often used to represent the Moroccan Jewish community. The young woman here is from Debdou.



Even today, more than 5000 Jews from around the world come to Morocco each year to pay their respects to saints venerated by their ancestors and buried in Muslim lands.

“My brother, if you be Jewish, Arab, or Muslim, we all want peace. Let me pray.”

We could not finish this chapter without mentioning the beautiful women of Debdou. People from the region often hummed along to a composition by singer Abbas Salem Erryssi. Let us sing with them now and regain the spirit which once reigned over that exceptional city:

*I had never gathered in Debdou,
Yet visiting this one time,
I met a Jewish woman.
It happened so suddenly that my spirit was shaken,
By her radiant beauty.*

*Ammar Debdou ma outtitou,
Ouhad ennouba ddatni rajli
Lih kharjat fya houdya
Ouaddat aqli oukhalatni bla bih*





“My trips to Debdou gave me back a sense of belonging”

“I left Morocco with my family in 1964. I was happy to arrive in France because I was an anxious child hoping this New world would make me happier and more confident. Even at 20, I didn’t know what to do with my summer holidays. I always liked cycling, so I bought a map of France and set off from Paris on two wheels, first to the north and then to the south, without any real reason. I passed through every town, Bordeaux, Biarritz... And then I was off to other countries: I crossed Spain and Portugal with a smile on my face. In the southern Portuguese region of Algarve, the landscape and architecture suddenly reminded me of Morocco and I hopped a ferry to visit my maternal grandfather Mr. Jacob Lévy-Provençal, in Rabat. I spent the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) there. A few years later in 1988, at the age of 32, I was still searching for my identity. I wanted to know more about my father. He was a mysterious man who often spoke about Debdou and Taourirt to our houseguests. His stories seemed baroque and exaggerated to me. But I found that a lot of my personality had come from them, even if I didn’t know why.

I’m thinking of a book that I enjoyed very much but isn’t very well known here, *Descartes is Not Moroccan*. I was obsessed with its central question: Am I from the West, or the Orient? Is there a bridge between the two? There was almost an unspoken rule about not mentioning Debdou in front of my mother’s family. They were from Rabat. When I told my father about my plans to visit the Oriental region, he made me swear never to go through with it. He explained that he had permanently renounced going back to Morocco because he felt he had in some way betrayed his Muslim friends by leaving, and was too ashamed to see them again face to face.

I swore I wouldn’t go. But I admit that in 1988, my sister Danielle and I, along with a few friends went anyway. We were afraid of breaking taboos, but eager to learn more about our past. I was struck by the beauty of the landscape, the red and pink hills, the green prairies. And I was instantly charmed by the city of Debdou, nestled in the middle a high valley. I was happy to see what my father and other Debdou Jews had seen, and to experience their physical and mental environment.

Sharing a moment: Bernard Cohen sitting at the table with his old neighbors, the Dahmani family.



Below, in the Debdou synagogue, Mr. Cohen stands in front of the teba, a pulpit used to rest the Torah. Memories of the city remain strong in the Cohen family.



Below and on the opposite page,
A moment of contemplation for the
Cohen family in the Debdou synagogue,
accompanied by their Muslim friend.



Luckily there were two Jews left in Debdou who each had their own synagogue! I went to visit one of their shops, and as I approached I heard “You, you’re a son of the Zagoury tribe, I know your family well!” A chill ran down my spine. That is what I was looking for. I finally knew where I came from.

Since that first year, I have made many more trips to the area. I have been helped along the way by the family of Aziz Laqbaqbi, his sister and Mr. Dahmani, his brother-in-law. Mr. Dahmani is a retired school teacher who taught in Debdou. He is well read, curious, pious and sincere. He always welcomes us with the greatest hospitality. I think that we share the same love for the Oriental region.

After many long talks with my parents, my brothers and my sisters, a family pilgrimage was organized in May of 2011. We went to Oujda, Melilla, Taourirt and Debdou, my father’s cities, to Rabat where my mother spent her childhood, and to Casablanca where we had all lived together.

Visiting Debdou with my father was an incredible joy for me. It was almost too much. I saw the man as I had



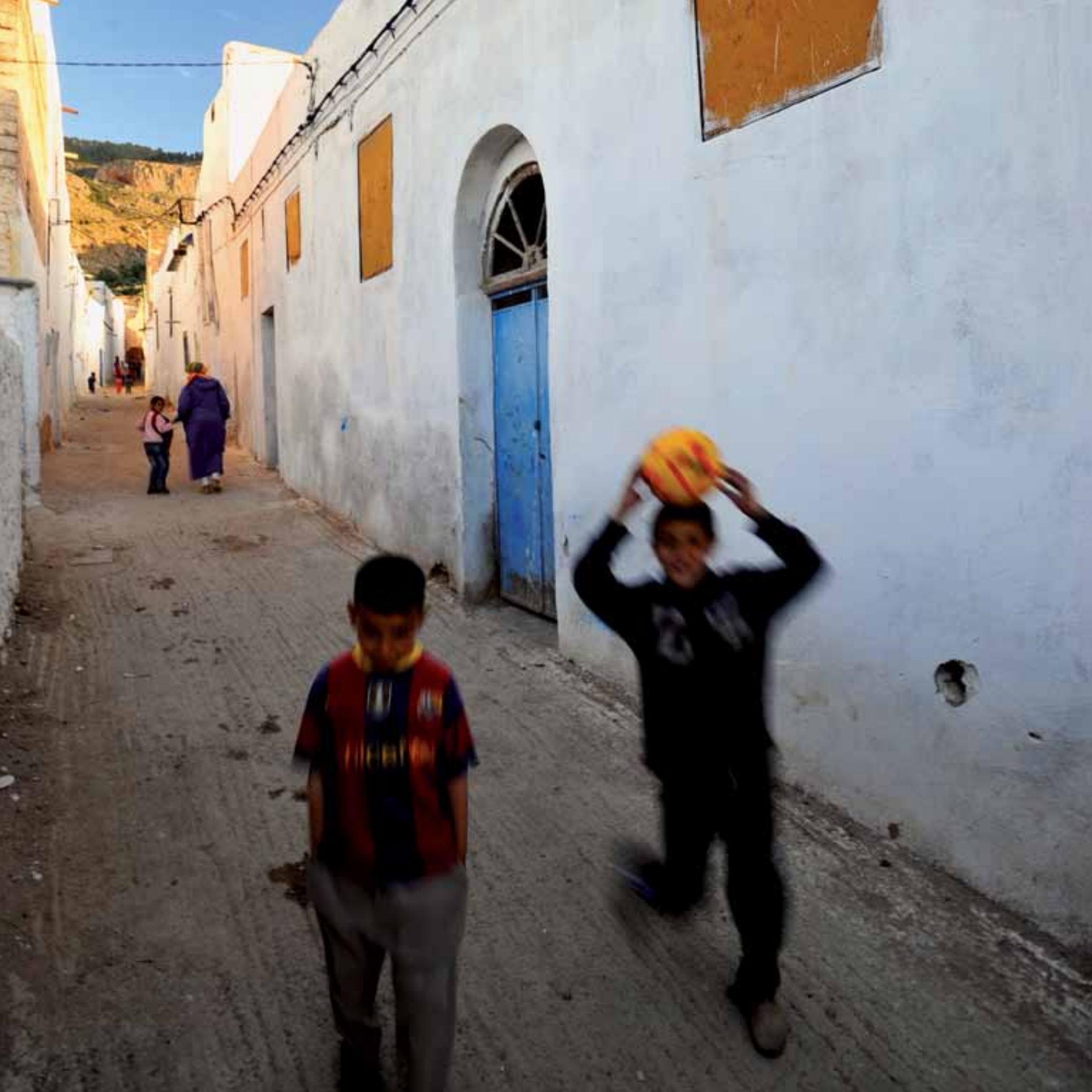
never known him before, like a fish dropped back in his aquarium. My oldest sister Annie, who had until then showed little interest in Morocco, told me after visiting Debdou that she ‘had never imagined what life must have been like for Dad, but understood now and imagined a whole new world.’

My trips to Debdou gave me back a sense of belonging, a double identity, between the world of Debdou and the world of Rabat and Casablanca I may have found my own East and West.

My thoughts go out to Isaac, Jeff Marciano, Élie, my brother Marc, Aziz, Zhor the museum director, Dahmani and the many others who help maintain the centuries old memory alive, so that future generations, searching for their past, will be able to find it.”

Bernard Cohen is a doctor practicing in Paris.
Excerpt from a round-table discussion on,
The Jews of Debdou, April 1st 2012

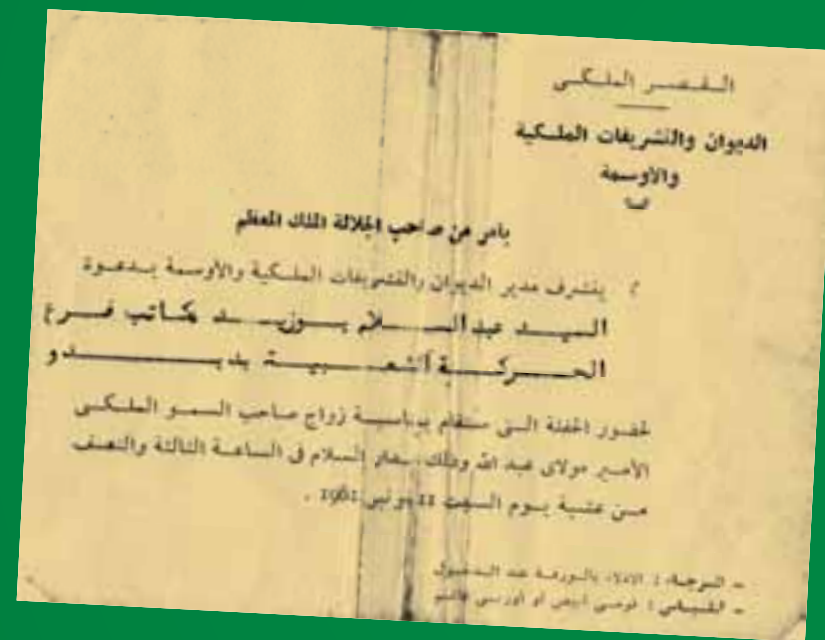




Muslim children would avoid getting spanked by hiding in their Jewish friends' homes

“I was born in Nador but I still visit Debdou regularly. My father and grandfather are from there. We come from the Oulad Bouzid tribe. They were both born in the *Kasbah*, which is next to the *Mellah*. My father worked for the Ministry of Interior and was the Caïd of Touissit, near Oujda, for some time. My grandfather was born and raised in the city, but traveled a lot in the region; he was a business man. His partner was a Jew named Marciano, who came from a rich family. My grandfather was lucky enough to meet the first prime minister of independent Morocco, M'Barek El Bekkaï, on a state visit to Taourirt.

From what I can tell from my own time in Debdou, as well as from what my father and grandfather always said, Jews were well integrated in the Oriental region. My uncle, who lived in Debdou, once told me a story which is quite telling of the total confidence which defined relations between the two communities: The Muslims in the region were heavily involved



Previous page, above, Mr. Bouzid's invitation to the Royal Palace: "By instruction of His Majesty the King, the director of Royal protocol cordially invites Mister Abdesslam Bouzid to the wedding ceremony of His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Abdellah in Dar Es Saalam, to be held on Saturday November 11th 1961 at 3:30 PM."

in commerce, and always had large sums of money on them. To avoid the risk of highway robbery, they would entrust their money to the local rabbi. Rabbi Cohen became a sort of unofficial banker for the Muslims in the region, and people would come to him to collect their money. During that long period, there were never any money problems between that rabbi and the Muslims...



There was a true feeling of camaraderie between the children of both communities. While Muslim kids avoided getting spanked by hiding out with their Jewish friends, Jewish children would sometimes visit Muslim families for dinner. Arabic was spoken by both communities. Certain Jewish children even memorized the Qur'an by heart...

In the 60s and 70s, Jews started leaving Oujda to settle in Casablanca and Fes. In the 1980s there were five or six families left in Debdou. The *Mellah* stood empty, which allowed Muslims to move in, and live as good neighbors with the remaining Jews."

Nizar Bouzidi, son of M'hamed Bouzidi, originally from Debdou and the old Caïd of Touissit





Figuiq, a Cultural Oasis



FIGUIQ AND ITS MAIN JEWISH FAMILIES P. 119



« LITTLE QARAQUIYINE »
AND THE LEARNED JEWS



THE EYE HAS FINALLY
FOUND A PLACE TO REST











Figuig and its Main Jewish Families

Located in the far south-east of the Kingdom, Figuig is a small miracle in the middle of the desert. Its oasis, palm groves, magnificent gardens, and ancestral *ksour* make it an exceptional locality, especially when one considers its arid surroundings. Figuig is a millennial city tracing its origins back to Cherif Abderrahmane Ibn Ali El-Oudghiri, a descendant of the Idrisid Dynasty who founded the fortified city of Béni Ounif. The Oudaghri ksar in the upper Figuig region owes its name to that first family. Some families still claim to be descendant from that prestigious family.

The town's population is made up partly of Berbers from the Zenata and Sanhaja tribes, who arrived in the 13th Century. Then there are the Arabs from the Jaber clan, a branch of the larger Hilali tribe. There are also members of the Chorfa and Mourabine tribes.

The architecture in Figuig is revealing of the city's rich immaterial cultural heritage: The mud brick buildings there are fashioned with an exceptional ancestral know-

how passed down from generation to generation. That is why a real effort was undertaken in the last few years to preserve the Figuig oasis and its unique architectural style. In 2011 the oasis was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The female population worked with wool, sewing and tinting different fabrics. This work continues today using ancient techniques. In 1530, the historian Leo Africanus wrote of these women from the Oriental: "Figuig with its three castles sits in the middle of the desert, about 150 miles from Sijilmasa and produces a great abundance of dates. Women there make drapes and cover that are so delicate, you would believe they were made of silk. These sell at a high price." This was a time of economic prosperity:

As Sudanese gold, jewels and salt poured in, the outpost saw a boom of commercial activity. The city was highly reputed for its *burnouses* (hooded capes made of thick wool), *djellabas*, and women's scarves.

Mud bricks to be used in a restoration project are laid out to dry. These bricks represent the distinctive building style of the Jewish community in Figuig.

“Little Qaraouiyyine” and the Learned Jews

In the area known as “little Qaraouiyyine” and among educated Jews, there was not just an ancestral know how, but a rich cultural past, which reached its apex between the 15th and 16th centuries, with the construction of the El-Maïz ksar by Ahmed Ben Moussa. It was inside this very ksar that the Sidi Abdeljebbar *zaouïa* was built. Its immense library, Dar el-Adab, functioned as a university, attracting students from every horizon. They came to study science, humanities, and religion. Under the reign of Sidi Abdeljebbar, the founder’s son, it became renowned throughout the country, and was nicknamed “little Qaraouiyyine” after the prestigious university of Fes...

Until the end of the 19th Century, this *zaouïa* welcomed students from across the Arab World. Leo Africanus confirms the high intellectual level of the era: “Men of good judgement, experts, and wise spirits are involved in commerce (...) the others enjoy the study of Letters.”

The *zaouïa* produced some exceptionally learned men: The poetic masterpiece Rouad El-Salouane (The Garden of Consolation), written by Figuig author Ibrahim ben Abdeljebbar near the end of the 17th Century, was

translated into many languages, and considered for centuries as the world’s best literary work about desert hunting techniques. The first Arabic language treatise on chemistry was written by Abou Hamid Al-Figuigui, by order of Ahmed El-Mansour, one of the greatest Sultans in Moroccan history.

The city also had a strong spiritual influence. Many saints revered in Algeria were born or studied in Figuig, the most well known being Sidi Nail, of the Ouled Nail.

Other communities contributed to the city’s radiance: the availability of water attracted a large number of Jews from Tafilalet. There was an official Israelite Community of Figuig until the middle of the 20th Century. A synagogue and two Jewish cemeteries, in Zenaga and Ouled Slimane respectively, as well as the existence of a Mellah, are evidence of a longstanding presence in the area. There were 100 Jews in Figuig in the 1950s. The community was mostly comprised of the Assouline, Benchetrit, Bensaïd, Benitah and Amsellem families who maintain strong ties with the city.

The Jewish diaspora from Figuig is quite prestigious: For example, one of the descendants of the Assouline family is the famous writer and editor Pierre Assouline, who worked for Le Monde in Paris.





A happy coincidence and a sign of hope: Both the president of the Israelite Community of Geneva, Roger Chartiel, and the president of the French Muslim Council, Mohamed Moussaoui, are originally from the Oriental region.

These families often lived a nomadic lifestyle, traveling regularly to Beni-Ounif in Algeria. Some even settled there. Influence between the two cities soon grew, as they were not yet separated by a border. The proximity was such that at the time the towns were known as Beni-Ounif of Figuig... This proximity was not just geographic but spiritual as well. For example, the rabbi in Figuig taught the Torah in Beni-Ounif. Under Rabbi Eliahou Amsellem, the Figuig community's reputation spread through the region. They were known for their high level of education and religious devotion.

There was even a communal *Chevra kadisha* for the two towns. This religious assembly oversaw funeral preparations for both communities. Last rites were strictly observed according to the Halakha, Jewish law.

The Sabbath was also a day for happy gatherings: As the holy day approached, Figuig Jews living and working in Beni Ounif would return to their hometown to take part in religious ceremonies.

The traces of Jewish life in Figuig run deep: during archeological searches carried out in 2006, a *guenizah* (synagogue annex) was unearthed, which was full of precious religious and legal documents. More than 130 documents were found under the floorboards of the prayer room. These were mostly printed pages from liturgical texts and rabbinical commentary, but fragments



Some of the more than 130 documents found in a *guenizah* during an archeological search in Figuig in 2006. They were studied at the *École pratique des hautes études* (Paris-Sorbonne).

of amulets and magical incantations were also found, along with personal letters and financial records. These records provide a wealth of information about the Jewish community in Figuig, relating major events from the 19th Century up until the 1950s. A large number of the found documents reflect a phenomenal amount of integration, showing how the community adopted the lifestyle and customs of their neighbors.

There is an illustration depicting the Mimouna, a particularly joyous celebration. The streets are more lively than usual, filled with people singing, and picnic tables covered with sweets, mint tea and *mahia* (fig liquor). A sense of equality reigned on that exceptional day..







The Eye Has Finally Found a Place to Rest



Figuig is the African oasis closest to Europe

“Coming from the desolation of the High Plateaus, the great oasis of Figuig, appears as in a dream. While the earth and stone constructions are still quite rugged, they offer a grandiose and admirably varied setting. The effect of their layout is breathtaking, especially when seen from the pass between the Zenaga and Grouz Mountains.

To the west, the Jebel Maïz falls off abruptly forming a barren slope. To the north, the Jebel Seffah extends its horizontal crests to the skyline. An atmosphere of unequaled cleanliness hangs in the air as shades of blue and pink fade into the background.

But the eye is instantly drawn to a giant blue stain on the distant ground: The sleepy palm groves. Exhausted by long days in the bright open spaces of the desert, the eye has finally found a place to rest and be refreshed.

The physical strain of travel, the nervous tension, suddenly disappears. An extraordinary feeling of well-being takes hold: Figuig is a peaceful awakening after a restless night...”

Prosper Ricard, in a text published by Hachette in 1924, prefaced by Resident-General Lyautey.





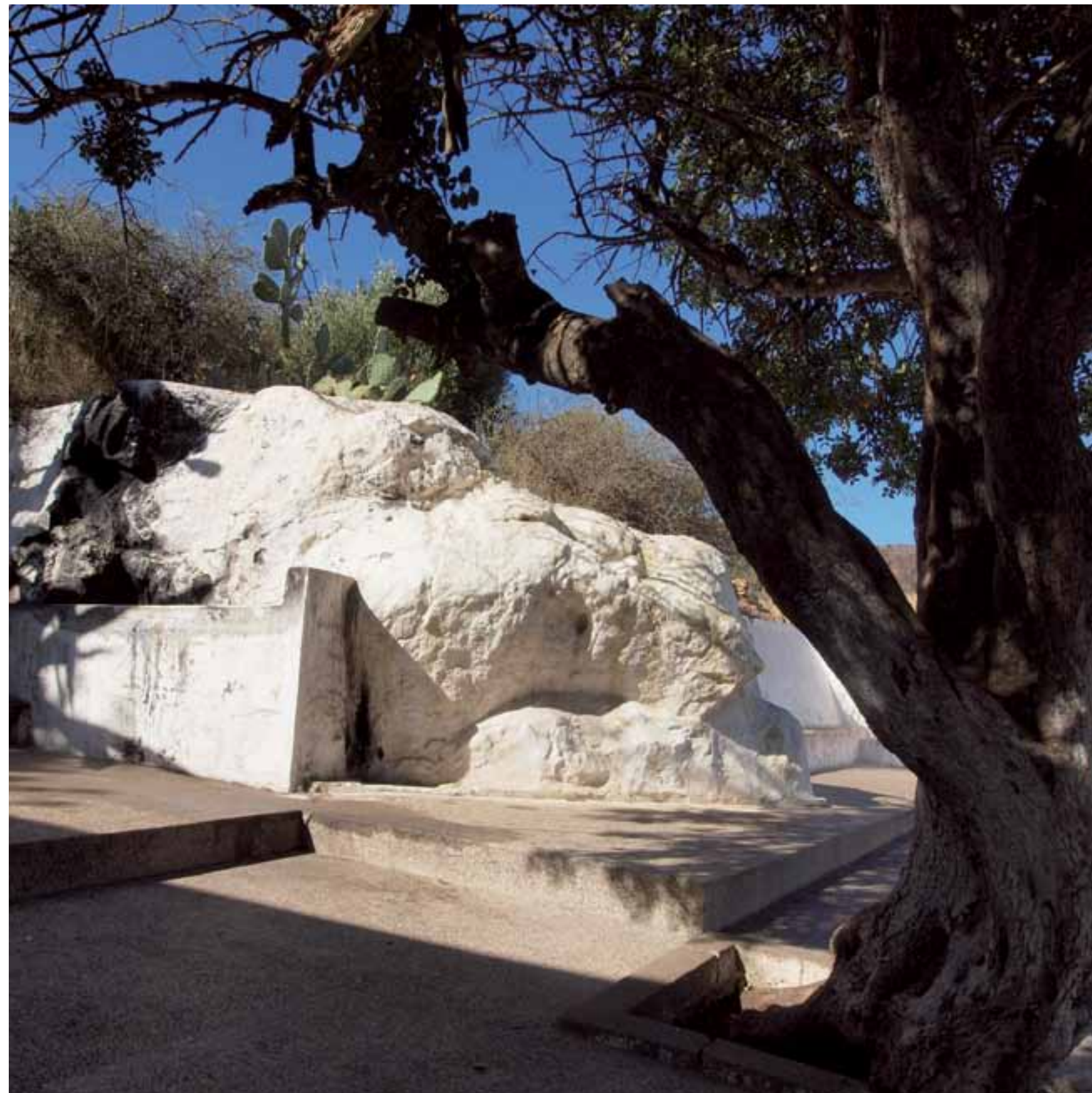












Communities and Living Space in the Oriental



Previous page,
The mausoleum of Rabbi
Saadia Adati, named
Moulay Youssef by
Muslims.
Opposite, The Spanish
coast as seen from the
mausoleum.

The Oriental region has always been a welcoming land for the Moroccan Jewish community. Far from the important centers previously mentioned, other localities were home to generations of families who lived in peace and prosperity. Members of these groups still come from every corner of the earth to visit, commemorate, and transmit the Jewish heritage of the Oriental...

Nador

Nador is a charming Mediterranean city situated on the banks of the immense Mar Chica lagoon. The city benefits greatly from its geographic proximity to Spain.

Turned to the future, Nador also has a cultured past, and welcomed many exiled Spanish Jews. This history has not been forgotten. The town hosted *Hilloula* celebrations in May of 2010. More than 220 pilgrims from Melilla came and paid homage to Rabbi Saadia Adati, equally venerated by Muslims as the saint Moulay Youssef...

Close by, the commercial port of Béni-Ansar has helped the town to develop an international outlook.





Aïn Beni Mathar

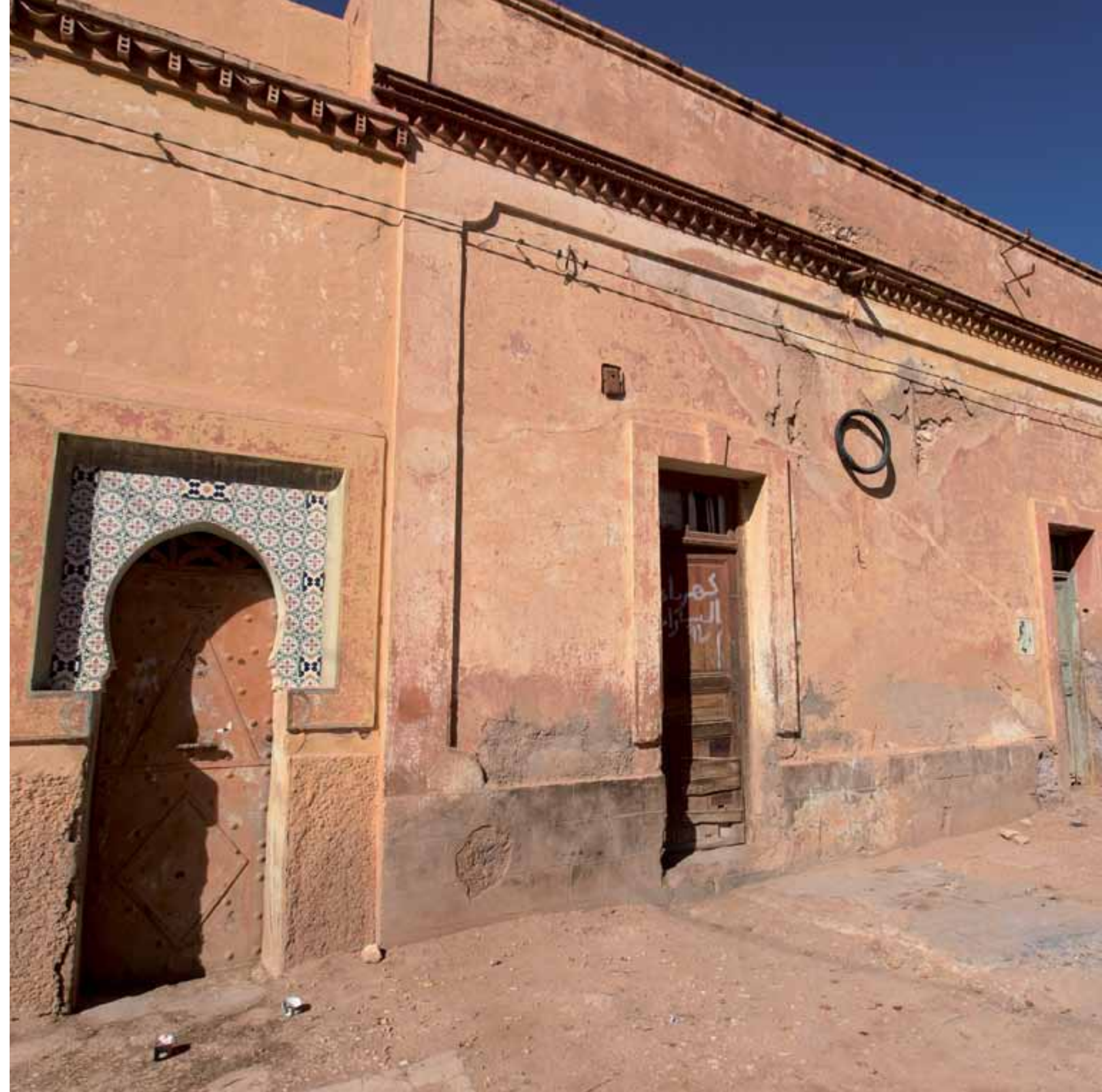
80 kilometers south of Oujda, lies the small village of Aïn Beni Mathar. Also known as Berguent, it is highly acknowledged for its “Beni Guil” mutton and lamb meat, as well as its high quality wool. This small town has a lot of history. Berguent served as a detention center for 400 European Jews During World War II. At a 2010 convention, the director of the Moroccan National Archives, Jamaa Baïda announced:

“It is a known fact that World War II was a nightmare for European Jews. But what is less known is that many of them sought refuge in North Africa, and Morocco in particular, hoping to find a way to reach safety in North

Aïn Beni Mathar, or Berguent, was sadly marked by history, despite many inhabitants efforts to alleviate the suffering of prisoners there.

America. The 1942 American blockbuster Casablanca, starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, depicts this reality, albeit in typically Hollywood fashion. Berguent was to our knowledge the only camp on Moroccan territory exclusively reserved for European Jews. A report from the International Red Cross mentions that with regards to religious practice, detainees benefited from the presence of three rabbis, each affiliated with the Jewish communities of Algeria, Debdou, and Figuig respectively.”

Conditions in these camps were very difficult. Forced labor was imposed by the authority of the Resident-General, who reported to the Vichy government. The Muslim population however was welcoming and offered assistance whenever possible. In his Washington Post best-seller of 2006 *Among the Righteous*, American historian Robert Satloff quotes “a report revealing several acts of sadistic torture perpetrated on Jewish prisoners (...) in a time when the only humane treatment came from Arab guards. He also notes that no Moroccan Jews were deported to the camp or to the extermination camps in Europe, thanks to the intervention of Sultan Mohammed V.





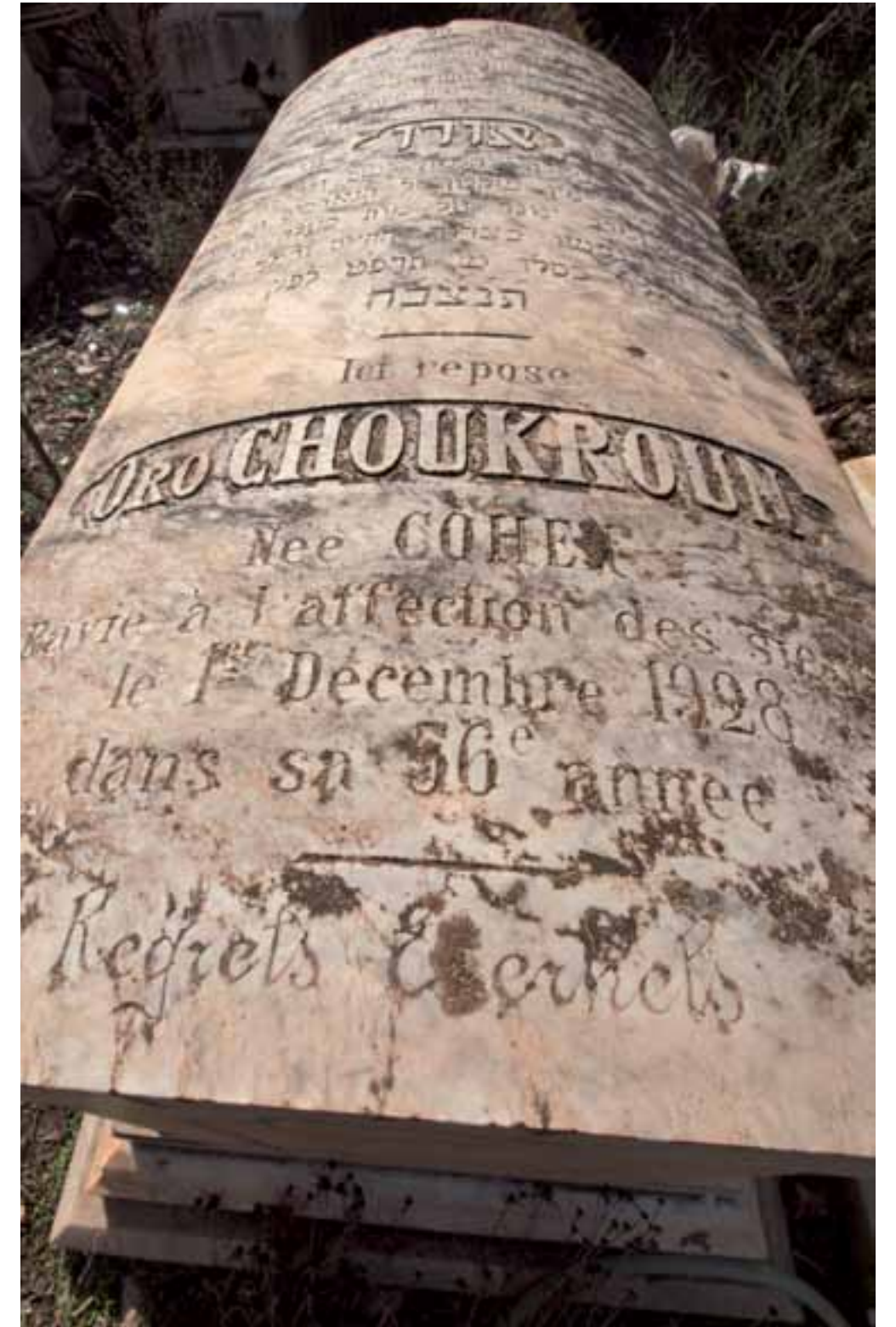
Berkane

Tombstones in Berkane attest to a Jewish presence in that city named after saint Sidi Ahmed Aberkane. Jewish families lived North of the Béni Snassen mountains until the second half of the 20th Century, and usually exercised liberal professions, which demonstrates their high level of education.

Until the 1970s, Jewish merchants traveled through the countryside buying and selling solid silver jewelry, inheritors of an ancestral tradition...



*Still remembered,
and kept close
to the heart.*







Previous page, and opposite, the impressive synagogue of Ahfir.
Below, the Jewish cemetery.

Ahfir, a Small Town with a Big Heart

Ahfir always had a well established cosmopolitan tradition. Close to Spain and Algeria, this small town in the extreme North East of the Kingdom welcomed a large **Jewish** community which lived peacefully alongside a mixed Muslim and Christian population. Mutual respect and joyful living were the norm. The *Reggada*, a traditional dance of the Beni Snassen tribe set the rhythm for many nights of partying in houses near the Jewish cemetery...

In Ahfir, no one was forgotten: Christians and Muslims had their own burial grounds. The synagogue, of a rare beauty, stands as a reminder of the considerable Jewish presence in the city.

Today many Israelis visit the place of their birth, especially the old synagogue, which tellingly is now a mosque. These visits help keep precious memories alive.







Opposite, 1927, Israelite students in kindergarten and primary school, Taourirt.
 Below, The old jewish school as it stands today.
 On the right, Mr. Cohen back in Taourirt in 2011, 40 years after first leaving Morocco.



Taourirt

West of Oujda, Taourirt and its famous Moualay Ismaïl *Kasbah* is situated at the foot of a beautiful hill, on the bank of the Oued Za River. This historic town has always been important in defending the Kingdom. In the 13th and 14th Century, its *kasbah*, a true military fortress, played a strategic role in the conflict that opposed the Marinids and the Zianids of Tlemcen. It was renovated by Sultan Moulay Ismaïl in the 17th Century. The city was also an important commercial center due to its privileged geographic

position, linking Sijilmasa to Europe, and Tlemcen to Fes. This favorable situation attracted a Jewish community which lived along with Muslims and Christians behind the military ramparts of the *Kasbah*. Until the 20th Century, there was a Jewish school there as well as a European one. There was a busy commercial district, notably around the *rue des Commerçants de tissus* (fabric district) with many Jewish shops. This street was particularly lively on Sundays. It was always market day, and Muslims from the countryside came to town for supplies.





Laayoune Sidi Mellouk

Located in the Taourirt province, on the high plains of the same name, Laayoune Sidi Mellouk is a charming urban area near the Mediterranean coast. Nicknamed the “Laayoune of the East” so as not to confuse with its Saharan cousin, The city was founded by Sultan Moulay Ismail in 1679. Its *kasbah* is a historic monument. Those who preferred to avoid larger cities came here. And there was a thriving Jewish community in the area until the 1950s. They were mostly involved in jewelry and goldsmithing.









Common Cultures

Jews and Muslims shared the same daily concerns, and faced the same difficulties related to climate, harvest cycles, and money... This proximity gave way to similar thought patterns: Culture is a magnificent example of this process.

Arab and Berber poetry, the *quisa* and *malhun*, classical Arabic compositions, Andalusian music, all the melodies of the *lahans* were to be found in the Jewish poetic tradition, even in the most distant and entrenched Mellahs of the Anti-Atlas. The parodies and lamentations that were composed and sung there were poems that borrowed from both Arab and Jewish traditions. Biblical parables were enriched with a myriad of stories that interwove Jewish legends with Muslim *quisas* (fables). The *qasidas* of Muslim poets were recited by their counterparts from the other community... Language, which is at the heart of any civilization, attests to the close proximity between the two cultures, and from Debdou to Oujda and Nador, the documented use of Arabic and Berber dialects by both communities has been long standing.

Over the centuries, from father to son, Berber speaking Jews had developed a rich oral literary tradition. In fact,

Berber was one of the principal languages spoken by the communities living in the mountains of the Moroccan Anti-Atlas. It was inseparable from the Jewish vernacular, and was used inside the home, as well as in social and economic settings. It also became a tool for communicating with other groups. Along with Hebrew, it became the language of culture and traditional learning. It was used to comment, explain, and translate sacred texts, to such an extent that certain prayers, such as the benediction of the Torah, were often times recited exclusively in Berber, as is demonstrated by the liturgical texts used during Passover (*Pessah*). Andalusian heritage, from that golden age of Moorish Spain, was a source of inspiration for Jewish poets, who appropriated the linguistic rules and grammar of the *adab*, the very foundation of Arab arts and humanities. The Eastern Sephardic communities of the Maghreb were very receptive to this heritage.

The centuries old bond of solidarity that had existed between Spain and *Maghreb Al-Aqsa* (the Furthest West), and the memories kept after a long period of intellectual stagnation, help to explain the strong link between Jewish and Arab humanities, both faithful to their Andalusian past which brought about the Hispano-Arabic poetic form.

In this way, the Muslim socio-economic environment deeply influenced Jewish poetry. Hebrew poetry was transformed through its contact with Arabic poetry. From the Middle-Ages onward, Hebrew poetry took on new forms, techniques, prosody and meter, which perfectly corresponded to the structural rules of Arabic poetry. In effect, the entirety of Arab-Andalusian classical forms, the *qasida* and *malhun*, were appropriated by Jewish poets and singers. Arab poetry and music slowly made its way into their synagogues and liturgical recitations.

The story of Our Lord Job or *Quissat Sidna Iyyub* is a prime example of the analogy between Jewish and Muslim mind-sets.

“The Story of Our Lord Job” or *Quissat Sidna Iyyub*

While Job remains a central character in the Jewish bible, the Qur’an also dedicates several verses to his story, which were often referenced by learned Muslims inspired in turn by rabbinical literature.

Indeed there exists a Judeo-Arabic version of Job’s tale, inspired as much by Jewish literature as by Arab and Islamic traditions. The legendary figure of Job, a prototypical

Bedouin prince, Satan’s campaign against him, Rahma, his devout and faithful wife, as well as Job’s suffering and the intervention of his friends, are all mentioned. Here are some of Rahma’s character traits left out of the biblical text:

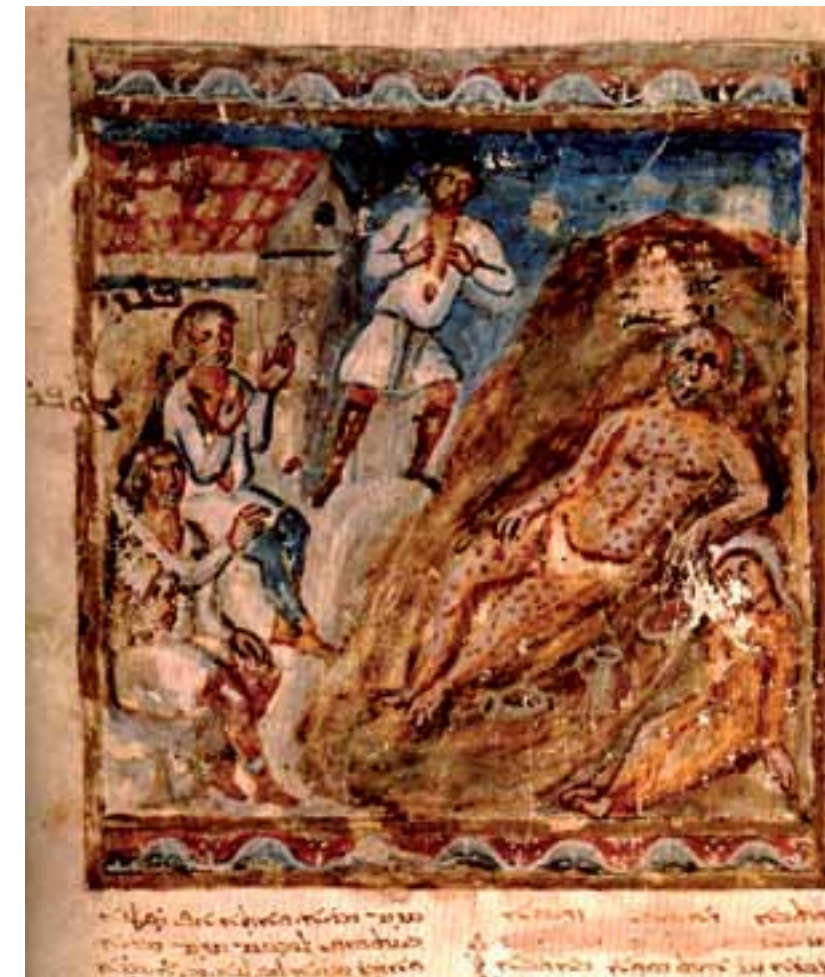
*Rahma his wife, was a noble woman,
She worked hard and gathered wood,
Or begged for mercy from Bedouin girls,
Despised, Humiliated...*

*They saw her enter, shining bright like the crescent moon.
One of them said: “Behold such splendor!
If you wish to sell me some of those curls,
I shall give you a loaf of bread and a bunch of dates”*

*Alas! I ripped out all of that beautiful hair
That the women shared and wove into braids
To fix upon their heads, but the locks
Refused to stay,
and flew away like birds.*

The testimony of Raphaël Moïse Elbaz, a XIXth Century Jewish Moroccan poet, sheds light on the proximity between these two religions and cultures. In the prologue to his *Shir Hadash* (New Song) he writes:

Syriac Bible of Paris (6th or 7th Century, Bibliothèque nationale de France). this miniature preceding *the Book of Job* brings together several scenes. Here, Job is presented naked ontop of the dunghill, covered in plague sores. On the left are his three friends, At the bottom of the scene, his wife speaks to him.



“After the horrible and tragic destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which almost led to our demise, in atonement for our sins, when the muses stricken with grief were silenced, and inspiration returned to God who had first bestowed it, the “wise men” of Spain began using new poetic

techniques, and writing plays in the manner of craftsmen and able artisans, submitting themselves to the authority and established order of the laws of prosody... Thus conforming to the poetic sciences taught to them by the Arabs... They enriched our liturgy.”

Despite differences that it would be useless to deny, which led in their own way to the development of rich and distinctive communities, one can say that the era was marked by a truly symbiotic cultural environment.

In other words, Jewish culture was another form, an alter-ego of the dominant Arab Muslim culture.

The infamous artistic trend of Orientalism which came about in the XIX Century propagated the mythical figure of the Oriental Jew. The West, attracted by this exotic “other” became fascinated by the communities on the other side of the Mediterranean.

The synagogue, the cemetery, the Sabbath, the dances, dazzling costumes and fasting ceremonies, fascinated Europeans searching for inspiration. They admired these men and women who, seemingly lacking prejudice, were able to enter into intimate dialogue with the Muslim cultures that surrounded them.



Over the course of the 19th century, explorers and ethnographers came to discover these communities who lived among the Berbers. This was a source of information for European Jews who knew little of their Oriental counterparts' ancestral customs... The Jewish Wedding, Delacroix's masterpiece depicts this fascination with the Orient...

On February 21st 1832, Delacroix was invited to a Jewish wedding in Morocco. The painter vividly renders his impressions of this Judeo-Moorish event, and doesn't forget to show the Muslim guests.

THE MAIN JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Rosh Hashanah: Marks the new year of the Hebrew calendar which follows a lunar cycle and is dependant on the position of the moon, sun, and earth.

Pessah and Mimouna: Pessah, the Jewish Passover, commemorates the emancipation of the Hebrew people from slavery. Along with Shavuot and Sukkot, it is one of the pilgrimage holidays. Its last day is marked by the typically Judeo-Moroccan celebration of Mimouna.

Shavuot : Celebrates God giving the Torah to the Jewish people.

Sukkot : Feast of the Tabernacles, it recalls the time when Israelites lived in huts and tents made of branches and reeds while they wandered the desert. This holiday magnifies God's protection of his people.

Hanukkah: Commemorates the victory against the Greek army which invaded the land of Israel in the time of the 2nd Jewish Temple, which stood in the wake of Alexander the Great's empire.

Purim: Celebrates the decisive intervention of Queen Ester who saved the Jewish people from a plot by the powerful Persian vizir Haman.

Hilloula : A celebration of memorable Jewish saints, carried out much in the same way as Muslim *moussems*.

Jewish Holidays and Muslim Neighbors

If cultural similarities between the two communities are plain to see, the same goes for religious practices as well. The sensitive and privileged world of belief was also a platform for mutual understanding. Jewish holidays were known and understood by Muslims to such an extent that some festivities became typically Judeo-Moroccan celebrations..

Jewish Passover

Passover or *Pessah*, celebrates the Hebrew people's deliverance from slavery in Pharaoh's Egypt. This event is one of the most important in the history of the Jewish people. It is remembered in many liturgical texts, notably in the recitation of the *Haggadah*, which relates the exodus from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. In Morocco this passage was exclusively recited in Arabic:

"Thus God divided the sea into twelve paths, when our ancestors left Egypt, with the guidance of our Master and Prophet Moses, son of Amram, when he saved them and delivered them from hard labor and gave them freedom. This is how he will save us and deliver us from this exile, for the love of our Lord Almighty."

Again, one must keep in mind the remarkable fact that this community was completely assimilated in its adopted country: There was even a Berber version of the *Haggadah*, translated from the traditional Hebrew text. There are also copies in Judeo-Arabic and Old Castilian. This text helps us trace certain linguistic and cultural tradition. That it was composed and recited in Amazigh during such high holidays demonstrates that Berber was the main language of Judeo-Maghrebi culture.

Below is a part of this liturgical text as recorded by Haïm Zafrani and Paulette Galand-Pernet, followed by an English translation. It relates important information about the suffering endured by the Jewish people.

*s tarula ay s neffagh gh masêr.ayddegh
n ughrum ur imtinn da ttecan
lewaldin nnegh gh maser.kullu mad yagh
laz iddu ad itec, mad yagh fad iddu
ad isu.asegg°as ddegh gh tmazirt ddegh ;
imal gh bit lmekdes.*

*We escaped from Egypt. Because they were on the run,
our ancestors were made to eat unleavened bread. That
all who are hungry may now eat, and all who are thirsty*

*now drink their fill!
This year we are in this country; Next year in Jerusalem.*

*man nhya i yîd ddegh man kull iydan ?
kullu y idan ur da ntduwaz awd yut tikkelt,
îd ddegh snat tikkal.*

*Why is this night different from all other nights?
On all other nights we are not accustomed to soaking
our food. This night we do it twice.*

*kullu îdan nekk°ni da ntteca wenna
y imtenn negh ur imtinn, îd ddegh wadda ur imtinn.*

*On all other nights we are used to eating anything we
like, leavened or unleavened. This night we eat only
unleavened bread.*

*kullu îdan nekk°ni da ntteca, nsu, swa
negh°zdem swa negg°en, îd ddegh akk° negh°zdam.*

*kullu w îtan nekk°ni da ntteca aydda nufa l lex°dêrt, îd
ddegh, lmarur.*

*On all other nights we eat and drink sitting up or
reclining. On this night we do it reclining.*



On all other nights we eat what ever vegetables we can find. On this night we eat only bitter ones.

*ixeddamen ay nga i peràu g° masêr. issufgh agh rebbi
nnegh dinnagh s ufus n ddrà, s ufus ikuwan. mur ur agh
issufgh rebbi lwaldin*

*When we were in Egypt, we were Pharaoh's slaves.
He delivered us. If Our Lord had not saved our parents...*

*nnegh gh masêr, nsul nekk°ni d isirran
nnegh ixeddamen nga i peràu gh masêr.
waxxa nla làkel, nla lfehemt,
waxxa nssen turat, laz m nnegh an nàawed
gh ufugh n masêr. kullu mad d isgudiy n ad d iàaud
gh ufugh n masêr, tannit waddagh ituskar.*

*From Egypt we would still be there with our children,
slaves of the Pharaoh. Even if we were endowed
with knowledge, even if we knew the Torah, it is He
who delivered us from Egypt. Anyone who recites the
story of exodus, may he be praised."*

Pessah was accompanied by set rules and customs: Matzo bread was meticulously prepared, walls were re-

plastered, dishes washed, utensils replaced. Everything had to be brand new for the holy Seder dinner, the paschal ritual when the story of that miraculous escape from Egypt was retold and transmitted to future generations. In Morocco, Passover was followed by a truly symbiotic festival, bringing together both Muslims and Jews: *Mimouna*.

For Mimouna, nothing is better than Muslim bread.

Lalla Mimouna, a saint revered by both groups for her ability to restore fertility, success and happiness, was central to the festivities. The holiday of the same name is specific to the Moroccan environment and is one of the strongest bonds between Jews and Muslims in the Kingdom.

Passover ended with great celebrations and partying. After a week dedicated to the suffering of the Jewish people under slavery, it was necessary to celebrate life, abundance and happiness. Muslims were privileged guests and partners during these parties. The first leavened bread eaten in a Jewish home after Passover was traditionally offered by Muslim neighbors. Mimouna nights were exceptional events: Houses were decorated with fresh plants and tables were set with platters of fish, dairy, spices, barley, and pure olive oil to be shared with Muslim friends.





Blessing

Jewish families have not forgotten the Kingdom. Opposite, 2011 in Taourirt, Isaac Cohen returns to the city of his birth after 40 years. Here, he blesses his wife during Mimouna celebrations. This tradition is celebrated around the world, everywhere with a Moroccan Jewish population.



The spring at Debdou, at the turn of the 20th Century.

Following page, a tradition of hospitality in Morocco dictates that the first leavened bread introduced into a Jewish home for Mimouna comes as a gift from Muslim neighbors.

Doors were opened to family and friends, regardless of their background... First came the ritual mixing of leavened dough. The dough, or *khmira*, was placed on an earthenware platter and pieces of gold, silver, and jewelry were hidden in the mixture. Men recited incantations in Hebrew, Arabic and Spanish. There were carnivals in the streets. Jews dressed in Muslim clothes and paraded wearing fezzes, red *chechias*, *djellabas* or babouches... The festivities went on long into the night... The next day, people would take trips to the sea, or the countryside, and picnic on the grass. Ritual stops were made before the crossing of any river or body of water. Rituals involving water are common in both religions, and Muslims considered Jewish reverence for water on this day to be *baraka*, a divine blessing which would bring rain and a bountiful harvest in the coming year.

It was not uncommon for Jewish families to be invited over by Muslims to accomplish their ritual purifications.

The importance given by both religions to sources of water took on a sacred meaning during this time. Holy wells were visited, and people bathed in and drank holy water to cure illness or purify the body. The spring of Sidi Yahia, which supplies the city of Oujda with water, owes



its name to the saint R. Yahya Ben-Dossa, a Spanish rabbi who first came to Morocco in the 14th Century. Legend has it that he scratched the surface of the earth and water started to flow. He was thus able to complete his last ritual bath.



Besides its historical dimension, this festival also took on a local flavor. It demonstrated the community's willingness to identify as Moroccans, and accept the hospitality of that land they called home for more than two thousand years. A vector of integration and sociability, without distinction of creed or ethnicity, Mimouna was a moment of symbiosis and peaceful coexistence on Moroccan soil. This unique festival lives on: As the Moroccan Jewish community spread throughout the world, it took Mimouna with it. In Israel it is practically a national holiday..

Shavuot, the gift of the Torah

Shavuot takes place on the sixth day of Sivan, which corresponds depending on the year, to sometime in May or June of the Gregorian calendar. It commemorates the laws of the Torah and the revelation on Mount Sinai which established God's union with the Israelites. During the first night, *lilt al-qraya*, *tiqquns* are read which call for the restoration of celestial harmony. Select passages from the Bible, Mishnah and Zohar were also recited.



Kabbalist influences of the Issac Luria school are evident in North Africa as well as the customs of the *Safed* in Palestine.

The day following Tikkun is the first day of Shavuot. A symbolically charged ritual takes place: The *Kettubah*, a rabbinical marriage contract is read, in which all the duties and mutual obligations of a married couple are spelled out. This ritual symbolizes God's union with Israel. This is a deeply allegorical ceremony and God is evoked as "a future husband" of "Virgin Israel..." Examples of this are found in the libraries of every educated and religious man in North Africa. In Morocco the reading of the *Kettubah* was followed by a second day of festivities. Again, as with mimouna, folk ceremonies involving water were quite popular, and were heavily influenced by the Muslim Moroccan surroundings. Ansa, the summer solstice festival, marked the end of the agricultural season and the beginning of summer. Swimming and bathing were "the main event."

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur, “the Day of Atonement” in Hebrew, or Day of Forgiveness, is one of the most important holidays of the Jewish calendar. Celebrated on the tenth day of Tishri, by Jews the world over, it marks the culmination of a ten or fourteen day period of repentance (depending on whether it coincides with Rosh Hashanah or the month of Eloul).

Traditionally prayers were made for the Royal family during Yom Kippur. The exceptional solicitude of the Alaouite Throne towards the community was often expressed and recognized on that day.

This holiday is characterized by the suspension of all work, ritual fasting, liturgical chanting, continual prayers and other solemn rituals.

According to Nina Banon: “The fast of kippur begins during daylight hours and ends the following evening. On such an occasion as many chickens were sacrificed as there were members of the household. A rooster for each man, and a hen for each woman. The chicken was later prepared using specific religious recipes.

Kippur bread was prepared using almonds. The fast was broken at the dinner table which was covered in different kinds of cake, coffee, milk and mint tea. The day after Yom Kippur, lunch would be a chicken and olive tajine followed by beraniya (a special eggplant dish).”

In 1959, Crown Prince Moulay Hassan honors the Casablanca Yom Kippur celebrations with his presence. Around him are Meyer Obadia, Léon Benzaquen, ex PTT minister, as well as Haj Ahmed Bargach the governor of Casablanca, and many other prominent Jews.





In Morocco, people from every social class celebrated Sukkot, also known as Aid Nwala. Tents, huts, and cabins were meticulously set-up for the occasion.

Sukkot, or the Feast of the Tabernacles

One of the three pilgrimage festivals in the Bible is that of the Tabernacle, also called the Feast of the booths (Sukkot). It starts on the fifteenth day of Tishri, the first month of the religious year, and five days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It lasts seven days, and commemorates the time when Israelites lived in tents and were lost in the desert, searching for the promised land.

In remembrance of that journey, Sukkot is characterized by the building of outdoor reed huts where meals are shared. *S'chach* (foliage and building materials) are bought from local merchants and each family builds their

own booth where they shake the *lulav*, a special bouquet composed for the occasion: palm leaves, branches of mirth, sage and cedar. The new and temporary house is also furnished with pillows to rest and eat the 14 ritual meals scheduled over the seven holy days.

Prayers of thanksgiving were addressed to God asking for fertile soil, since Sukkot also corresponds to the beginning of Harvest. On the eve of the seventh day, a vigil was held followed by a night of reading and contemplation punctuated by liturgical recitations of the *Tiqqun* imploring the restoration of universal harmony. The influence of the 16th Century Safed school of Kabbalah is manifest.

Smihath Torah, "rejoicing in the Torah" marks the end of Sukkot. This last day is joyful and celebratory and includes singing and the throwing of candy. In Morocco, all levels of society celebrate Sukkot, also called *Aid Nwala*, or "Tent Holiday."



As in all celebrations of Divine Law, it was a time for intensive Torah study. A new sacred scroll was inaugurated ceremoniously: After the dedication, a special meal, the *Sefer*, is brought from the home of the generous donor who paid for the new Torah to his synagogue. A procession of rabbis and community leaders would cross the Jewish quarter singing in the local dialect. In many respects this ceremony resembles local wedding practices...At the end

of the holy week, Sukkot booths were dismantled and set alight as bonfires. Men and children would jump over the burning embers praying and singing incantations. These practices are carried out by the Berbers of the High and Anti-Atlas, under the name *Taberyanut*.

The solstice period was marked by the lighting of bonfires in the fields. Aromatics such as thyme were added to the flames and everyone would jump through the fire seven times. These rites are also reminiscent of orthodox Muslim pilgrimage practices, such as the *tawaf* (ritual circling of the Kaaba) ; and the Jewish *haqqabotor* and Islamic *tachyi*’ (circular processions around the grave of a pious man).

Rosh Hashanah

The Jewish New Year is also considered humanity’s judgment day. It takes place over the first two days of *Tishri*, in September or October of the Gregorian calendar. During this period of spiritual contemplation, people are expected to reflect on their past mistakes before the Day of Repentance, Yom Kippur. The most important ritual associated with this holiday is the blowing of the *shofar*, a ram’s-horn trumpet. Different rhythms elevate consciousness and signal the intent to repent.

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights

This holiday is celebrated on the 25th of Kislev, which corresponds depending on the year, to the months of November or December. It lasts eight days. *Hanukkah* marks the military victory of the Maccabees, and symbolizes the spiritual resistance of Judaism in the face of Greek assimilation. According to tradition, people celebrate what is known as the “miracle of the replenished oil” which took place in the year 164 B.C. A day’s worth of oil is said to have burned for 8 days. Since then, a *menorah* (nine branch candelabra) is lit every year. A candle known as a *shamash* is used to light the eight others. The festival also has typical foods and songs depending on the local environment. Because the miracle involved oil, fried foods are particularly popular. Famously *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiot* (Israeli doughnuts) are prepared. In Morocco it was customary to eat sweet beignets (*sfenj*) prepared with oil and wheat flour. These were often shared with neighbors or given to the poor. Children typically played with a *dreidel* or spinning top.





On the left, the scroll of Esther, being read for Purim.

Opposite, a pilgrim of the diaspora revisiting his past at a fantasia. These festivities coincide with Purim in certain regions.



In the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the Greeks, hoping to impose their religion, had outlawed Torah study. Circumventing the law, children pretended to play with their dreidels to evade Greek patrols. Each of the four sides of the top is inscribed with a Hebrew letter: *Nun, Gimel, He, Shin*. These letters put together signify “a great miracle has occurred here on Earth.”

Purim, the *Book of Esther* is read in Moroccan Arabic.

Here again the religious and historical elements are inflected with local customs. The festival commemorates the saving of Persian Jews by Queen Ester after she unveiled a plot against the Hebrew people by her vizir, Haman. In the collective imaginary, Haman has become a symbol of evil.

In Morocco it was custom to read the Book of Ester in Hebrew at the local synagogue, and then again in Arabic at home, so that women and children unfamiliar with the language of the Bible could understand its meaning. What’s more, Moroccan Jews celebrated other Purims related to their history in the Kingdom (The most significant is the Purim of Oued al-Makhzen, or Three Kings battle of 1578).

These were days of immense celebration: The Mellahs were more lively than usual, dinner tables were meticulously set, *mahia*, a home made alcohol flowed freely, and ordinary meals turned into real feasts. Exceptionally gambling was authorized, and everyone felt lucky. This festival, a magnificent example of religion taking on a local flavor, was celebrated in much the same way until the French Protectorate.

A Jewish woman preparing *mahia* (moonshine).

On the right,
Tzedakah (work of charity) in honor
of Rabbi Shimo Bar Yo'hay (1930).



Here is a translation from Judeo-Arabic of a poem by Juda Halevi, a poet and philosopher who lived during the golden age of Andalusia. This *Mi-kamokha* (*Who is like you* in Hebrew) is a liturgical piece that was read in synagogues on the Saturday morning before Purim. The author relates the story of Ester in his own words:

This was in the time of Ashtschir (Ahasuerus), who ruled over dukes and princes, more exalted than any king or monarch. God gave him victory. Ester's courtesans told her of the event : "We heard a cry, like the cry of an ostrich lost in the desert ; Mordecai had passed, covered in burlap, we do not know what has happened to him since. O you the most beautiful of women, green branch of Anemone, what is your request? Everything is yours, we are at your mercy."

She answered: " Beckon the King, that he may come with that one-eyed Haman to the feast I have prepared in His honor."

The Hilloula

Tragic, unpredictable, yet certain, death is associated with mourning, the recognition of the definitive loss of a loved one, a separation with no possibility of return. The deceased leave their relatives in infinite and intimate suffering.

One exception to this constant is the Hilloula, a joyous celebration surrounding the death of Jewish saints.

This celebration takes place on the 33rd day of the Omer period, which separates Passover and Shavuot. During these austere days several strict rules are observed. No marriage contracts are signed, no music is played, and no one cuts their hair. Hilloula interrupts this morbid atmosphere. Why?



Hilloula in Morocco



Hilloula of Rabbi Raphaél Enqawa, the patron saint of Rabat-Salé.

The term 'hilloula' comes from the Judeo-Aramaic root HLL meaning "a cry of joy and fear." Hilloula is a time when the faithful gather at the tombs of the *Tsaddikim* (just men) on the anniversary of their disappearance. Come from all over the world, many pilgrims also commemorate the lives of saints from throughout the Kingdom. Nina Banon describes a night of Moroccan Hilloula: "Pilgrims recite psalms and prayers under the lights of oil lamps which honor the saints. The stark lighting accentuates the emotional impact of each new song. One feels overcome

by unknown forces, liberated by the powerful incantations of prayer. In the wave of human exaltation, voices cry out which reaffirm the saint's presence. The saint has appeared: "There he is! Ha houa ja!" The entire crowd is taken up in this momentum of exhilaration. Braises are lit and pilgrims overcome with an unknown power jump over the flames while the singing and dancing grows louder. Money flows endlessly... it will be donated to the Israelite community of Morocco whose members organized the *Hilloulot* in the different lands where saints are buried."



Hillouas are still celebrated today, which shows how deeply Jewish traditions are rooted in Morocco.

Hilloula of Rabbi Isaac Abehsira in Gourrama.



Hilloula of Rabbi David Umushi in Agoim, near Ouarzazate.

Hilloula of Rabbi Amran Bendiwan, in Ouazzane.

Grand Rabbi Isaac Cohen-Sqali
lived in Debdou in the beginning of the 20th Century.



According to Kabbalists, the forty nine days of Omer symbolize the path taken from the impurity of slavery, to the purity of divine revelation in the Sinai. Grand Rabbi Shimo Bar Yo'hay is said to have died on that day and supposedly made many secret revelations to his disciples before he passed. Hilloula is an Aramaic term which connotes celebration, particularly a wedding. Over time it came to designate the anniversary of a rabbi or spiritual leader's passing.

To understand this unsettling association between death and celebration, one must remember that as in other religious traditions, death is part of the divine life cycle, and only marks the passage from one world to the next. Indeed, the Book of Job mentions "death as the gathering place of the living."

The death of holy men, far from symbolizing a definitive separation, constitutes the first stage of their mystical union with God. This explains the festive nature of Hilloula: Death is part of life, the final test of a soul's readiness to reunite with God.

This tradition of visiting holy grave sites with prepared meals and flasks of water which are left overnight to be

consumed the next morning, is common to both Jews and Muslims. Here again the importance of water in these rituals is manifest.

People who felt sick sometimes spent the night by the grave of their venerated saint, hoping to be cured. Women would light candles on the tombs of lost loved ones... This dialogue between the living and the dead is probably one of the most beautiful spiritual moments in Islam and Judaism.

SHABBAT

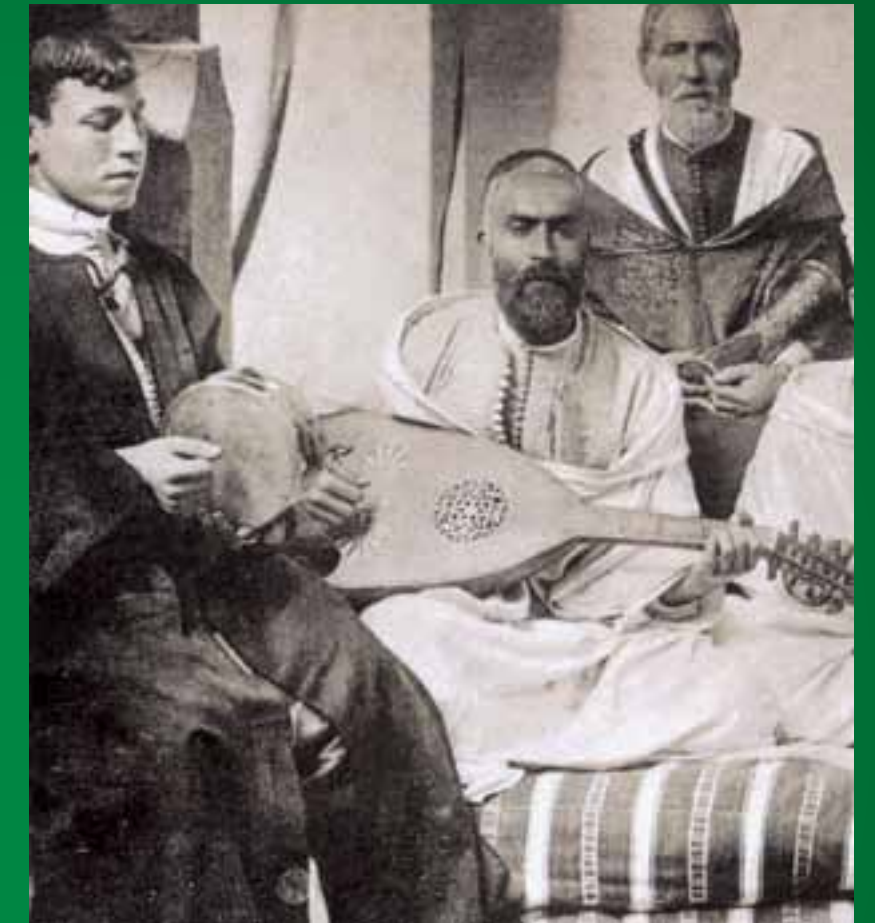
"Shabbat is like Christmas Eve every week" says Simon Lévy, the founder of the Jewish Moroccan Museum.

The day of rest, on the seventh day of the week, starts every Friday night and continues until sundown on Saturday. Sunday is traditionally the first day of the week according to the Hebrew calendar. All work is strictly prohibited. According to the Exodus: "*Remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy.*"

Tradition has it that on this day, everyone has an extra soul which helps repel the forces of evil. In Morocco, men wear the *tallith*, a prayer shawl which offers protection from evil.

The philosopher Maimonides suggested the importance of "*washing one's face, hands, and feet with hot water... wrapping oneself in a tallith and waiting in prayer and meditation for the spirit of Shabbat, as if one was expecting the visit of a king.*" For Moroccan Jews, the main dish is *dafina* or *skhina*. Its preparation is directly linked to the religious context of Shabbat.

Because cooking is strictly forbidden on the day of rest, women start preparations before sundown on Friday and let the pot simmer over low heat for



several hours, giving the dish a distinctive flavor. It is usually composed of beef, potatoes, chickpeas, and wheat.

Another Moroccan specificity: On the eve of the Sabbath, Andalusian music enthusiasts would gather and sing God's glory until the early hours of the morning. Traditional psalms and canticles dedicated to Solomon were recited, as well as poetic works, both modern and ancient, all accompanied with Arab musical techniques.

Communities also embarked on pilgrimages twice a year to commemorate their saints. These were deeply religious events, which were very joyful. *Qasaïds* were sung about the saint's life, miraculous interventions, and prophetic visions... These festivities mixed the sacred and profane, and were comparable to Muslim moussems. Much like *zaouiïas*, Jewish shrines were architecturally quite elaborate. The most important Hilloula in Morocco is dedicated to Rabbi Amrane Ben Diwane.

The trip to the Hilloula shrine was a moment of joy in itself. Travel usually took place in the springtime, and was usually interrupted by roadside picnics. Families would mingle, relax, joke around, and meditate, perhaps on the following words the Book of Exodus: "And the great men of each generation must die to make way for their successors..." At night people would set up tents, wander in the streets, receive guests. Feasts were prepared, sheep were sacrificed and roasted... This was a far cry from the mournful and somber Christian tradition of All Saint's Day..

Jewelry and Gold-Smithing, Tradition and Innovation

Contrary to popular belief, the profession of jeweler did not originate in cities. Artisans were often grouped in

rural villages or dispersed in small workshops. One must underline the Jewish jeweler's contribution to Moroccan culture: On top of preserving particularly effective and ancient techniques inherited from the Andalusian period, Jewish artists often invented new methods of production which quickly spread throughout the Kingdom. It is in the furthest reaches of the country, notably in the South and in the mountains of the Oriental region that ancient Jewish and Berber techniques were best preserved. The main characteristic of this style is the choice of metal :

The Moroccan countryside was only moderately fond of gold jewelry, mostly because the financial resources of the mountain dwelling population were much more modest than those of the city. The main choice was silver.

Secondly, this rural style of jewelry making is composed of two distinct and well known techniques: molding and enameling.

Molded jewelry was crafted by Jewish artisans who traveled the country following nomadic tribesmen. Jewelry came in all shapes and sizes: necklaces, bracelets, large ear-rings. There were also circular brooches that were pinned to women's clothing.



Techniques were passed down throughout the centuries. Opposite, Jewish artisan-jewelers in a rural setting (1935).



Another characteristic of this jewelry: The presence of very fine chains and metal fringe work attached to necklaces and ear-rings. Small leaves of silver flattened into many different shapes hang from the end of these chains: hands, crescents, discs, anthropomorphic silhouettes... Evidence suggests that these practices date back to antiquity, and these pendants are often reminiscent of works from the bronze and iron ages. This style never completely disappeared, and can be seen in many Byzantine works.

This ancient craft dates back to the origins of North African Jewry.

Enamel work on the other hand, is much more varied. Its originality resides, obviously, in its complex technique. Filaments are soldered together to form beautiful arabesques. Each production center used different elements to cast alloys, meaning that color and consistency vary greatly depending on the region.



Historically this style of jewelry making was developed in Europe, notably in the Visigoth Kingdom of the Middle-Ages. This leads us to believe that it was first brought to the Oriental region by those expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, where Jewish and Arab artisans had maintained and perfected the techniques used in its production.



Foreign to North Africa, enamel work was introduced from Spain in the 16th Century. This technique reached rural areas and was perpetuated in Berber country even as fashions changed in the far less conservative urban centers of the Kingdom.

This is how an oriental technique, which originated in Northern Iran, traveled through the plains of Germanic Europe, and survived for centuries in Iberia, was finally introduced to North Africa in the modern age. As Henriette Camps-Fabrer wrote : «By their technique and their majesty, these jewels remain, even now in the 21st Century, artifacts from the Middle-Ages, that are now authentically Berber.»



The *kessoua el k'bir*, a typical Jewish Moroccan wedding dress, is still worn during traditional ceremonies.



Solange Sets the Table

Night is nearly upon us. It is time to light the candles. First the one in the dining room, which in a few moments will welcome an extended family. Solange takes one last look at the table in a quasi professional manner. 'Superb' she thinks to herself, not without a hint of pride. A brand new table cloth, white porcelain dishes decorated with delicately painted ladybugs. She thinks her mother's silverware seems a little old fashioned, but she admits to herself that the set is quite chic.

Everything is ready. The *dafina* has been simmering on its electric plate since this morning. A myriad of salads are kept cool in the fridge. There are so many simple but traditional crudités, that the whole table will be full, giving off that wonderful impression of abundance, so necessary to Shabbat celebrations. This Friday night, everything is perfect. Solange decides to relax for a few minutes in her favorite chair. Calm and alone, keeping a vigilant eye on the sumptuous dinner table, she hopes that this Shabbat will be particularly joyous. Solange decides to smoke her last cigarette before nightfall. Once she lights the first candle, she won't be allowed to anymore. Standing on her balcony, waiting for the sky to change colors, and the stars to come out, Solange thinks about which

wine to serve her guests. She has two Moroccan wines. Her sister-in-law Colette will no doubt judge her based on which one she chooses. She decides to display her prosperity.

She will also put on her most beautiful jewelry and a silk corsage over her dress. Never mind the jealous looks. Her husband will soon be home from the synagogue and she should be ready to greet him. First the lights, the candles, that beautiful religious signal of Jewish women: shabbat has arrived.

Tomorrow the ceremony will repeat itself. Men will come home from the synagogue. Then, with everyone gathered around the table, wine will be blessed, soft and delicious Shabbat bread will be shared, and each will receive their small blessed piece. We'll eat a bit of salad tomorrow, because tonight the *dafina* will be so filling: wheat, rice, meat chosen with care, small and round potatoes softly caramelized... But tomorrow is another day. And another ceremony.

Like every Friday when three stars start to shine in the sky, Solange's house will be clean and festive, taking on the soft golden hue of a slow burning candle.

Valérie Morales-Attias



During the Havdalah, Shabbat prayers, candles and herbal essences (here lemons) are traditionally lit. The head of the household blesses the wine.







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The editor

Abdelkader Retnani



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138 and 139. *Rabbi Eliahou Amsellem, a true guide for the Jewish community of Figuig, lived in this house until the end of his days. This great man had refused to ever leave Morocco.* Photo by Michel Nachef.
140 and 141. *Stone and metal meet.* Photos by Michel Nachef.
142. *Provisions.* Photo by Michel Nachef.

143. *The walls of the city.* Photo by Michel Nachef.
144 and 145. Photos by Michel Nachef.
146-147. *A view of Nador from the top of Mount Gourougou* Photo by Michel Aymerich.
148. Photo by Jean-Marc Porte.
149 to 151. Photos by Michel Nachef.
152-153. Photo by Michel Aymerich.
154 and 155. Photos Michel Nachef.
156-157. *The Moulouya, the largest river in the Oriental.* Photo by Michel Aymerich.
158. On the left, a photo from the private collection of Maurice Arama. On the right, a photo by Michel Nachef.
159. A Photo from Bernard Cohen's family archives.
160 and 161. Photos by Michel Nachef.
162-163 and 164-165. *The Béni-Snassen mountains.* Photo by Jean-Marc Porte.
166. *Hanukkah lamp.* Photo from the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca.
169. Photo from the Bibliothèque nationale de France. D.R.
170. Photo from the RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/Jean-Gilles Berizzi. D.R.
173. *A nomad camp near Abou Lekhal.* Photo by Jean-Marc Porte.
175. Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
176-177. Photos from Bernard Cohen's family archives.
178. Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
179. Photos by Maurice Arama.
181. Photo by Maradji.
182. Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
183. Photo from the Gérard Silvain collection.

185. *Hanukkah lamps.* Photo from the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca.
186. Photo from the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca.
187. Photo archives familiales de Bernard Cohen.
188. Photo courtoisie de Raymond Vézina et Mineko Suzuki, Montréal.
189. Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
190 to 193. Photos from the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca.
195. *Bijouterie judéo-berbère : bracelet (nbala), argent, 1920.* Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
196. Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
197. *Bijouterie judéo-berbère* Photos from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
198 and 199. Photos from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
201. A Photo from Bernard Cohen's family archives.
202. Courtesy of Raymond Vézina and Mineko Suzuki, Montreal.
203. Photo D.R.
204 and 205. *Portraits by painter Théophile-Jean Delaye (1896-1970).* © La Croisée des Chemins.
206. *Judeo-Berber jewelery: bracelet (nbala), silver and enamel, 1910.* Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
208. *Judeo-Berber jewelery: necklace with 5 inlaid plaques (detail) ; silver inlay and beads, 1930.* Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.
210. *Judeo-Berber jewelery: tiboukaria (detail), ear rings with inlaid silver, 1920.* Photo from the Center for Judeo-Moroccan Culture, Brussels.



