Situated at the mouth of a slowly-flowing African river with traces of foam as it reaches the sea, are two magnificently white cities evoking the Thousand and One Nights: Rabat-el-Fath, or Camp of Victory, and Salé, of Barbary fame. Each reflects from its own side of the river — like two strophes of the same poem — a whiteness of terraces, of minarets, towers, walls, and their vast cemeteries like Brittany moors or carpets of grey stone strung out along the seashore. Further up the river amid a reddish landscape stands a tall, square tower, also reddish, of a mosque long since disappeared. Still further is another city, or rather the ramparts of a ruined fortress which is now only a dream, a vestige of stone among the orange trees. From white Rabat to white Salé, above the large estuary, the solitary tower and the mysterious Chella, there is the slow flight of storks morning to evening, lacing with an invisible thread these three cities of Islam, thus entwined in a tight space of whiteness, greenery and water.

Quotation from Rabat ou les Heures Marocaines— by Jérôme and Jean Tharaux, Librairie Plon, Paris.

Cover photograph: Traditional costume of a young Moroccan bride.

* In the same series
Monographs on Oriental Cities:
Algiers, April 1984 (French)
Cairo, November, 1984 (English, French)
Beijing, October, 1983 (French) and March, 1986 (English)
Rabat

Plan of the medina in Rabat. (J. Callot, La ville de Rabat jusqu’au Protectorat français, fig. 186).

Rising abruptly to a height of more than 30 metres above sea level, a steep cliff strategically overlooks the Bou-Regreg — just at the point where this river flows into the Atlantic Ocean. Centuries ago, the superior natural protection afforded by the site caught Abd el-Moumen’s eye and the founder of the Almohad dynasty had a fortress built here in 1150. This 12th-century construction, which had much in common with the Oudada casbah standing today, included a palace, a mosque and reservoirs filled by aqueduct from Ain Gheboufa. Abd el-Moumen’s settlement went by two names: Mehdiya, in memory of Mehdi Ibn Toumert, founder of the unitarian doctrine; and Ribat el-Fath, meaning Victory Camp, in honour of Ibn Toumert’s eye and the founder of the Almohad dynasty, Ibn Tumart.

Ribat El-Fath

Principally a stopover point for travellers between Marrakesh (capital of the empire) and the Straights of Gibraltar, this city was also a favourite royal residence of Yacoub el-Mansour (1184-1199) that Ribat el-Fath never attracted the numbers it was originally planned to accommodate, and centuries passed before the city of Rabat finally saw the area within its walls fill up with houses. Though technically-speaking incomplete, certain essential characteristics of the city had been established and are still in evidence today. Throughout its history, Rabat has conveyed an impression of grandeur. The city’s five kilometres of solid wall and its imposing gates are structural elements which date back centuries and have always symbolised the importance of the almohade city. The same sense of majesty is evoked by the minaret and by the vestiges of the Hassan mosque, which today shares its sacred location with the Mohamed V mausoleum, a symbol of filial piety. Built in homage to the king buried within, the mausoleum boasts extraordinary decorative detail, which represented a renaissance in traditional artisanal crafts.

Hassan’s Mosque

When Yacoub el-Mansour decided to build a monumentally proportioned mosque within the city walls, he chose as his site a plot of land to the northeast, which faced the sea and was about the same altitude as the casbah. Although never completed, the mosque was one of the most important structures in the Muslim world. It covered an area of 2.5 hectares and was laid out in rigorous symmetry along a central axis, which lead in one direction to the mihrab. At the other end of this axis sat the sumptuously decorated Tour Hassan. A minaret of imposing proportions, the Tour formed part of the northern façade and projected out into both the interior and exterior areas of the central courtyard.

Ribat El-Fath

CITY WALLS

Two long rectilinear walls meeting in an acute angle protected the city to the south and west, while the ocean and river provided natural defence along the northern and eastern boundaries. Within the enclosed 420-hectare area, a high plateau (which today overlooks Chellah) served as an optimum point from which to survey possible attacks on the city below. Cut into the western wall at fairly regular intervals were four gates: Bab el-Alou, Bab el-Had, Bab er-Rouah and a fourth which is today part of the Royal Palace. The southern wall was served by only one gate, Bab Zaar.

Typical of Almohad walls, this was a concrete construction, rich in lime and of exceptional solidity and resistance. Uniformly spaced, square towers were placed along the façade, and a walkway running along the top of the walls is hidden from view by a parapet of pyramid-shaped pinnacles. Bab er-Rouah and the gateway to the Casbah have decoration of woven courses in a gabble around a hipped arch inscribed in a rectangular frame. Like the Bab Agnaou in Marrakesh, large arches repeat and enlarge the arch of the gateway, surrounding it with a sinuous halo of sharp points; it is crowned by a wide frieze with Kufic inscriptions.1

1 “In all the world, it is hard to find more beautiful doors than those in Morocco,” Henri Terrasse in “L’art hispano-mauresque des origines du XIII ème siècle.” Publications de l’Institut des Hautes Etudes marocaines, Tome XXV, Paris, Editions G. Van Oest, 1932, p. 298.

1. “There is only one mosque larger within the Muslim world — Iraq’s Samarra mosque.” E. Levi-Provençal in “L’encyclopédie de l’Islam.”
14TH CENTURY VESTIGES

Rabat’s importance waned over the course of three centuries, from the end of the Almohad reign in the mid-13th century to the early 1600s, and only a small number of Merinid structures from this period have been uncovered.

— The most important was the Chella necropolis, built near the river, on the site of an ancient Roman village beyond the Almohad wall. To reach the necropolis, one must pass through the elaborately decorated gate of a huge wall constructed by Sultan Aboul Hassan in 1339.

— Also originally built in the 14th century, Jamma el Kebir (The Great Mosque) was rebuilt in 1882 and stands today as the medina’s most important sanctuary. Serving as a landmark, its minaret can be seen from all points along the rue Souika, a main thoroughfare in the medina. Sultan Abou Ina’s Hammam el-jid, near rue Sidi Fatah, was built during the same period as houses in the distant neighbourhood of the Great Mosque. The hammam was designed in the manner of Andalusia’s Arabian baths (Murcia, Jerez, Grenada, etc.) and consists of a relaxation area and cold, warm and hot rooms, linearly arranged. This was an organisational pattern commonly found in Roman baths.

— There is reason to believe that during the Merinid period city life was not restricted to the area immediately surrounding the casbah, but was carried on in several of the medina’s neighbourhoods which still exist today. Rabat began the most colourful chapter in its history with the influx of Andalusian refugees in the 17th century. At the same time, on an urban-planning level, the city set down the core of a spatial organisation that would last essentially unchanged until the years of the French Protectorate.

SALE-LE-NEUF

An edict pronounced by King Philippe III in December 1609 drove the Spanish Muslims (Moriscos) out of the kingdoms of Grenada, Murcia and Andalusia as well as from the city of Hornachos. Early in 1610 the evicted Hornacheros, joined by other Andalusian refugees, arrived on the right bank of the Regreg River. They settled in the casbah and staked out the northwestern corner of Almohade territory, protecting it with a new wall. Over the next few decades, Rabat (known in Europe as Sâle-le-neuf) served as the seat of the small maritime republic of Bou Regreg. The Alaouite invasion of 1666 brought this era to a close.

Sâle-le-neuf’s regularly conducted raids of Christian ships became the city’s primary means of obtaining goods and supplies, and the republic grew to be the most important seaport in Morocco. As a local activity of utmost importance, the raids figured heavily in determining both a new layout of the city and the nature of fortification projects. In fact, the city was turned around so that its main seaport was at the point where the river met the ocean, an area that was extremely well protected by the casbah’s promontory. Other defensive measures taken included the construction of windows in the Almohade towers (to shoot canons through) and the plotting of embarkation/debarcation sites at regular intervals along the river. Finally, a wall built to the south ran from a point where the river met the ocean, an area that was extremely well protected by the casbah’s promontory.

1 Remnants of a fountain from merinide times and a hospital or medersa from the same period.

3 “Though the legend of ‗Sâle privaires‘ has come down through history, the expression is misleading as it suggests that the pirates were from the city that is today called Sâb. It must be understood that in the 17th century no one called the city ‗Rabat‘, but rather ‗Sâle-le-neuf‘ or ‗le-vieil.‘ I truth, the pirates were Moriscos from the left bank of the Regreg River, not citizens of Sâle-le-vieil.” J. Caille, op.cit p. 224.

4 In the 1930s, early years of the French Protectorate, Ba Tben was demolished along with a 100-metre long section of the Andalusian wall in order to construct a municip market place.
THE MEDINA

The layout of the city's 91 hectares was identical to the spatial organisation of the medina today. At that time, however, Rabat faced the maritime section of the river, an orientation which was reflected in the layout of the city's urban fabric. Two main arteries, perpendicular to one another, dictated traffic patterns: - Starting at the casbah gate and following the river, the rue des Consuls represents the economic centre of the city. This street is favoured by international concerns1 as well as by local businesses involved in harbour activity. Three main thoroughfares run parallel to the rue des Consuls, each leading to a different gate in the Andalusian wall. — Rue Souiqa connects Bab-el-Had with the rue des Consuls before continuing on to Bab-el-Bhar, or the sea gate. As the street's name implies, the Great Mosque2 is located here along with linearly grouped boutiques housed by several different types of souqs. Parallel to the rue Souiqa and forked at either end, rue Boug Roum cuts across the city from west to east, servicing centrally located residential districts which are organised around derbs (impasses). Although the organisation of the city was indeed determined by this grid, Rabat had nevertheless not developed fully inside of the Andalusian fortifications and, with the exception of the Merinid mosque, no monument had yet been constructed inside the ramparts.

1 Including French, English, Dutch, Swedish and Danish consuls, whose staffs took part in negotiations and dealt with the release of prisoners.
2 Souiqa is the diminutive of souq.
3 Whence the name Bougroun, which means "two horns."

RABAT: IMPERIAL RESIDENCE

In 1666, Alouit Dynasty founder Moulay er-rechid took possession of the Regreg River estuary. Between this time and the beginning of the 20th century Rabat underwent radical change. Modifications in the medina's urban fabric were negligible, but during the 18th and 19th centuries the construction of monuments and building extension brought to light an important aspect of the city — its role as the seat of an empire.

From the days of the first Alaouit sovereigns until Moulay Sliman's reign in the early 19th century, the city's primary activity continued to be sea raids. Hence, the importance of the casbah, especially in its new role as a makhzen fortress, and of maritime defence structures dating from this time.

It is also important to appreciate the implications of a palace and large mosque built by Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah in the late 18th century. The grandiose constructions, located in the southwestern Almohad area, are further proof of the high esteem in which sovereigns held Rabat.

The city's new "royal face" became even more obvious under Moulay Sliman, who authorised the seaside construction of the Dar El Bhar palace3 and several sanctuaries, including a mosque bearing his name at the corner of Bouiba and Souiqa streets. In addition, Moulay Sliman restored Bab El Had and Bab Chella and ordered the establishment of a mellah. This Jewish quarter at the medina's far eastern end occupied land that had once been covered by the last orchards found within the Andalusian city limits. In addition, a 4300-metre long wall was built, probably at the beginning of the 19th century, which served to extend the Almohad territory's southern boundary and followed the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The wall enclosed a total land area of more than 840 hectares.

In the second half of the 19th century, the memory of a small, previous imperial city was resurrected when Sidi Mohammed Ben Abd er-Rahman had a new palace built on the southwestern site of the old one. The sheer number of religious monuments dating from the Alaouite dynasty (17th to 20th century) attests to their impressive architectural contribution to Rabat.4 The "new" Rabat appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, now taking the form of a single agglomeration. Most people still tended to live in the medina within the 17th-century Andalusian wall. But the imperial atmosphere, which would henceforth characterise the city, was created by monuments built in the space delimited by the 12th-century Almohad wall.

1 No longer extant.
2 "In 1906 Rabat counted six principal mosques, 33 secondary mosques and 13 zaouias, most of which were constructed in the days of the alaouite sovereigns." Jacques Caille, op.cit., p. 457.
ORGANISATIONAL PATTERNS WITHIN NEIGHBOURHOODS

Looking at a map of the medina, one notices a central zone surrounded by peripheral neighbourhoods to the west, north and east. The central zone is characterised by an irregular pattern of streets, lanes and derbs, and by residential blocks clustered around the large homes of local dignitaries.

Peripheral neighbourhoods (El Gza, Sidi Fatah, El Alou and the Mellah) are laid out along a central axis, on either side of which there is a regular pattern of parallel and perpendicular streets. This grid of streets divides the city into blocks with a depth of only two lots. Within city limits, residential areas are made up of variously sized neighbourhoods based on a development housing. In each neighbourhood, the daily life of the residents is facilitated by communally-shared services such as a bread oven, Koranic school, fountains, small businesses and, on a wider scale, a mosque, zarāwa and hammam. Even though Rabat’s medina isn’t physically separate from the rest of the city, it is marked by a distinct social cohesiveness (houma) that has grown up out of shared interests among the residents.\(^1\)

Within each houma, derbs act as meeting areas for the medina residents. The derb’s structure evolves from a local dignitary’s home, situated at the extremity of a deadend street. On either side of the derb, often named after this presiding figure, houses are built for his relatives or clients. Fundamental in architectural treatment, such as scale, atmosphere and function characterise the residential and main commercial districts. The paths of circulation which crisscross the bazaars are lined with structures that open onto the public space. Tiny streets and deadends in residential neighbourhoods, on the other hand, are characterised by blank walls of buildings constructed around inner courtyards. In this kind of organisation, the derb is in effect a kind of first-degree of separation between private residential life and the public thoroughfares. The scale drawing of the Bargach derb illustrates this type of grouping found generally throughout the urban fabric of Muslim Arab cities.

1 Problems which might arise within the houma were set by a committee of neighbourhood dignitaries, while regarding the city as a whole were the domain of ps authorities (Pacha, Khalifa, mouhtassib, cadi) assisted “chefs de corps de métier and local dignitaries” – “Réorganisation spatiale et reclassement fonctionnel médinas de Rabat-Salé” by A. Padloullan and M. Belfq published in “la revue de Géographie Marocaine,” n°5, p. 7.

THE R'BAT HOME

Architecturally speaking, each structure is comprised of residential units arranged around a courtyard, a central area which serves as the focal point of the overall ensemble of buildings. The finest homes are built around spacious central courtyards and often include two or three smaller courtyard areas, private gardens, a hammam, stables, a guest house, or servants' quarters. A good number of terraces in Rabat serve as menzahs. Courtyards are often built around a central pool or with fountains along the walls, and generally bordered by a gallery whose architectural elements may be repeated, in whole or in part, on floors above.

A Moorish influence characteristic of R'batie homes is especially apparent in decorative elements and their arrangement. Spanish motifs often adorn doorways and appear as well in setwans, arcaded vestibules that lead to the inner courtyard. The deep perspective generated in these hallways by the paving of marble squares, chiseled plaster and sculpted wood ceiling ends in a central panel of zellige tiles, chuwwaf, which is greatly emphasised by the turn of the corridor. Stone benches line either side of the corridor are separated by columns topped with pointed arches.

Moorish influences show up as well in the treatment of symmetrically-shaped inner courtyards, reflected in the pattern of openings. The superior quality of the marble, cut stone, sculpted plaster, wrought iron, and zellige covering the surfaces of the courtyard leave no question as to the importance of the role of the home. Furniture consists mainly of comfortable, pillow-strewn sofas placed around the circumference of each room. Moorish influence is quite noticeable in the rich silk embroidery work produced exclusively in Rabat. The unique patterns and colours of this embroidery bring the room's cushions, wall hangings and drapes into a wonderful harmony, which one finds as well in the trousseaux of Rabat brides, as seen on the cover.

1 Rabat's riads are much less frequented and less well-developed than those of either Fez or Marrakech.
2 Heads of households often receive late-afternoon guests in the menzeh, an open-air area which affords a splendid panoramic view of the city, but also assures privacy from neighbours.
3 There is evidence that chuwwaf appeared for the first time in late 18th-century and 19th-century homes. It is often topped by wood splayed in the form of a shell, a decoration which enhances the chuwwaf.
1. Medina of Rabat
2. New colonial city
3. Mausoleum Mohammed V and neighborhood of Hassan Tower
4. Méchour and Royal Palace
5. Administrative zone and former Résidence Générale
6. Ocean quarter
7. Habous quarter
8. Orangers quarter
9. Agdal quarter
10. Souissi quarter
11. Kdbibat quarter
12. Al Akkari quarter
13. Yacoub al Mansour quarter
14. Al Ouaas
15. Chellah
16. Youssoufia quarter
17. Mabella quarter
18. Douar Doum
19. Douar Hajja
20. Takadoum
With the establishment of the Protectorate in 1912, France's official presence in Morocco brought about some major decisions and changes in land development and urbanisation.

Hubert Lyautey, resident general and Army chief, had the Moroccan capital transferred from Fez to Rabat. He also created a modern port south of Rabat in Casablanca, and built a city north of Rabat, which was called Port Lyautey (Kenitra) until Moroccan independence. These changes caused the country's centre of gravity to move abruptly towards the Atlantic coast. Lyautey invited urban specialists to Morocco to help plan new cities for the European population. He also drew up certain regulations to deal with new urban development. These included two priorities: "the separation of European from indigenous Moroccan settlements"; and the application of the most modern urban planning principles.

As Director of the Protectorate's Architectural and Urban Services, Henri Prost oversaw the creation of ten new cities. Of these, Rabat is looked upon as his greatest achievement.

Initially, the modern city of Rabat was constructed close to the encircling ramparts of the medina, and had an area about as large as it. New Rabat occupied gardens and orchards which were located inside the Alhamad ramparts between the imperial Alaouit palace and the medina, as well as land inside and outside the Alaouit ramparts to the west — mostly destroyed in order to facilitate construction. In this zone, which is actually an area for normal extension of the medina, are a number of isolated ancient buildings and diverse monuments. Various historical monuments and a few ancient buildings can be found within this zone, which is actually an extension of the medina. Prost made a point to not only integrate, but to highlight these structural testimonies to the city's past in the plans for the new downtown area and the major administrative and residential districts.

"First we selected those sites which we felt afforded the most characteristic and most panoramic vistas. Then, gardens were planted in the areas which first entered the viewer's line of vision. We paid careful attention to visual relationships so as not to detract from magnificent perspectives such as one has when looking from the Tour Hassan out over the Bou Regreg River; from the Residence over Rabat and Sale; from the municipal centre over the indigenous quarter of the city; and from the Aguedal platform over the city's old walls." In general, the structure of the new city is based on east-west and north-south traffic patterns. The north-south axis serves to extend the medina's main arteries into the European quarter, thus creating a unique harmony between the two urban entities. As an extension of rue El Gza, avenue Dar el Maghzen (avenue Mohamed V) plays a symbolic role in the composition of the whole. In the first part of the street, near the Andalusian wall, one finds mainly apartment buildings and porticos. Then the street...
becomes more visually impressive, widening to include a row of palm trees and lined by exceptionally well-conceived and exquisitely decorated structures. Public buildings for the most part, these include the Banque du Maroc, the main post office, the appellate court, the railroad station, among others. Once past Jama Es-Sounna, the street ends finally at the Avenue des Touerga, with the Résidence Générale and administrative quarters on one side and the Sultan’s palace on the other. Although Prost must be admired for all the energy and talent he poured into achieving this urban harmony, the effect is limited nevertheless to the European section of the city. Prost’s plan neither took into account necessary development of the medina, whose zone for extension was already appropriated, nor that of the city as a whole. “As it entered the decade of the 1930s, Rabat was not prepared for what was to come: industrial development and a mass migratory trend from the countryside.”

1 Fifty years later, half of the country’s urban dwellers lived in either Casablanca, Rabat or Kenitra. These three cities formed a coastal urban axis whose land area represented less than 1 percent of total Moroccan territory.

2 “Moral, economic and security factors aside, the Resident General’s motive behind this clear-cut separation was to preserve the rich heritage of Moroccan cities. Conservation of historic and religious monuments and picturesque old walls, it was hoped, would help keep alive a civilisation that was 1000-years old. This autonomy would protect the traditional face of Morocco, which would in turn serve as a reference for new city development.” Henri Prost. “Le développement de l’urbanisme dans le Protectorat du Maroc” in “L’urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays tropicaux. Communications et Rapports du Congrès International de 1931.” Edition Delavance, Paris, 1932, p. 60. Note also the creation of a Fine Arts and Historic Monuments Service in 1912 whose role was the preservation of ancient architectural complexes.

3 In 1914, architect/urbanist Henri Prost arrived in Morocco, where he stayed for more than a decade as Lyautey’s official urbanist. Prior to this appointment, he had won the Prix de Rome in 1902 and, in 1910, was a prize-winner in an international competition for the master plan of Antwerp, Belgium, a fortified city.


5 Rabat’s population in August 1913 totalled 33,620, of which 22,906 were Muslims. Cf. Maurice Rondet Saint, in “En France Africaine” Plon-Nourrit et Cie, Imprimeurs-Editeurs Paris, 1914, p. 310.

6 Among the architects associated with “L’Agence Prost” were A. Laforgue, A. Laprade, J. Marrast, Leblanc, Rigollet, etc.


8 The railroad which crosses the city from east to west is almost entirely underground.

The Habous quarter is a neighbourhood which was built starting in 1923 to house Moroccan Muslims. Like the one designed first for Casablanca by the architect A. Laprade, it was conceived and executed by the French architects Cadet and Brion as an autonomous urban entity comprised of housing and public facilities. Located on Avenue Hassan II leading towards Casablanca, the quarter was divided into three sectors, linked together by a curved and landscaped street, rue Ibn Bajah. Houses along this street are set back from it with gardens, whereas houses on other streets or dead-end lanes are constructed up to the property line; these compose the main portion of the urban layout. All dwellings have an interior courtyard and are modelled on traditional homes: long, multifunctional rooms opening directly onto the court, service rooms (kitchen, WC) near the entrance. They have hardly been modified right up to the present, except that perhaps two-thirds of the courtyards have been covered with lightweight structures (glass and steel roofs, corrugated plastic) which allow one to furnish the interior courtyard while maintaining overhead light. A mosque, a fondouk, and commercial spaces were achieved along the boulevard. The hammam and the local oven were located inside the neighbourhood. The Habous quarter is the only example in Rabat of residences conceived for Arab Muslims by a colonial architect. The houses have not been transformed very much and their architectural attributes have been adapted simply to the population’s way of life in Rabat.

The Marassa neighbourhood was erected during the period between the two World Wars — at the same time the colonial city was rising — on land outside the medina’s walls, to the west near the Almohad ramparts of the 12th century. View of a narrow street in the Habous quarter. Photograph: C. Wohlhuter.
Flanked on the north by both a Muslim and an ancient Christian cemetery, formerly opposite Bal el Alou, and on the southwest by the Jewish cemetery, the Marassa covers some 2 hectares. The land was not expropriated yet benefitted because of its geographical location from the water mains, sewers, and electricity established by Prost’s master plan. Thus, the houses that were constructed progressively by the owners of the orchards found there (three families residing in the medina, including the Marassa family) or by new purchasers of lots sold at the time, began the nucleus of the future quarter. The size and shape of the blocks had already been determined by the street layout of the new colonial city. Whether it is modest houses or vast residences, their size (influenced by the arrangement of the blocks) nevertheless resembles the dimensions of houses in the medina. The same applies to the disposition of different elements of houses in Marassa; combinations of a main house, with a kitchen and other separate facilities (hammam and storerooms), and interior gardens (riad) each having its own importance and own entry, are to be found. Each of the dwellings is centred around an interior courtyard and rises generally one or two storeys. The arrangement of rooms on the ground floor, their characteristics and decorative motifs are also identical to those residences of the medina. The special nature of the Marassa quarter lies in the references to communitarian aspects of conception and of space-use at an urban scale (it included 200 households in 1971). Moreover, it is also perceptible in the semi-private collective services, by the presence of a small mosque, a Koranic school, bread oven, grocery stores, etc. While it has these similarities with the medina, Marassa is nonetheless different because of the historical dimensions of its creation. Among these the most striking is the width of the streets and the numerous windows onto this public space, thereby allowing people to see into the houses. Another new quality is the use of reinforced cement for roof terraces. This type of covering is sometimes coupled with a false ceiling and exposed beams, which is normally associated with a reception room (bit el-kbir). But the main result of using this technique is apparent in the inner courtyards where there are no longer any pillars or arcades. Such elements, previously employed to carry the weight of upstairs rooms, have disappeared because metal reinforcing has replaced the wood in roofing systems. The fact that identical architectural principles in both the medina and Marassa have endured, as well as such things as the integration of the blocks in another type of urban system, or the use of new techniques and materials, allows one to see the evolution of older architectural themes into viable entities, precisely because collective behaviour has adapted them to current needs. It is for this very reason that Marassa neighbourhood illustrates a dynamic social life: clients and builders alike are loyal to the traditions of housing in Rabat and they are willing to integrate and benefit from contemporary technology at the same time.
has become a widespread response by a growing urban population. Ministerial departments concerned with the situation are anxious to integrate these illegal structures into the existing urban fabric. After reviewing the problems posed by these neighbourhoods, as well as the needs specific to them, authorities have set out to improve housing conditions in areas of Rabat such as Douar Haja.

HOUSING POLICY SINCE MOROCCAN INDEPENDENCE

Since Morocco’s independence, much attention has been focused on halting the spread of poor urban housing. But, in spite of the commendable effort put forth by local authorities, only a relatively small step has been taken towards controlling the problem. In 1973, mounting needs and dangerously slowed urban and rural development finally forced the implementation of a five-year plan, which took a hard look at potential economic and social repercussions of the existing housing situation.

Henceforth, new measures were taken and plans enacted which took into account the different socio-economic conditions of families in need of housing. Among the most important responses to the problem was the creation of a Ministry of Housing, Urbanisation and Environment, a National Trust for the Purchase and Development of Land, and Regional Planning and Construction Offices.

A three-year plan, drawn up in 1978, followed up and improved upon previous action taken to curb poor housing development. Most importantly, this phase introduced new intervention strategies which got to the heart of the shantytown and illegal housing situations. A new plan of action was implemented and carried out with the cooperation of international organisations such as I.B.R.D. and A.I.D.

Now the task at hand was to discourage the marginalisation process of spontaneously built peripheral urban housing. Keeping relocation to a minimum, it was necessary to help the population legally obtain housing on already-occupied property, to assure that existing neighbourhods were equipped with at least basic utilities, to make available technical assistance and self-help building loans for masonry construction, to build religious and socio-educational structures and to provide commercial zones as potential sources of employment.

Under the auspices of the World Bank, the first experimental application of this new strategy was carried out in an area south of Rabat, where 60,000 people live in the shantytowns of Douam, Haja and Maadid.

RABAT’S URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Rabat’s Urban Development Plan or P.D.U. (Projet de Développement Urbain) addresses the overall situation created by spontaneously built peripheral urban housing, including that on the hillsides south of Rabat along the Regrag River valley in Douar Doum, Douar Maadid and Douar Haja. In 1978 the area counted nearly 12,000 housing units. Douar Haja, a result of self-help construction, is a good example of the sort of spontaneously built projects which have arisen over the last few decades. The neighbourhood grew up out of necessity around private property holdings and lots bought by individuals. As the area developed, its resident directed their attention towards establishing mosque hamma, tendas, bread ovens, Koranic schools and other communal services for the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood spreads out over a hillside serviced by an irrigation network which is laid out along the steepest inclines of the slope. Streets run parallel to one another, following the high curves of the hillside, and divide the land into rectangular blocks which accommodate numerous pairs of house back to back. These notes a striking homogeneity between the system of streets and the arrangement of land plots. The plot, each about eight to ten metres square, are systematically arranged in a repetitive pattern which give rise to a manifestly rational urban character. Though constructions may have from three to five storeys, the height remains uniform from one house to the next. Facades lined up along the streets achieve remarkable continuity in the arrangement of their windows and first-floor ledges.

A uniform spatial organisation within the home starts with rooms grouped around a 20 to 30-square metre central area and continues this pattern at level above the courtyard, which is really an open space covered partially by glass bricks which let sunlight penetrate the façade. Streets run parallel to each other, following the high curves of the hillside. Streets run parallel to each other, following the high curves of the hillside. Streets run parallel to each other, following the high curves of the hillside. Streets run parallel to each other, following the high curves of the hillside. Streets run parallel to each other, following the high curves of the hillside.

The renovations carried on in the neighbourhood included repairing and improving utilities, increase and better commercial installations, self-renovation of homes by inhabitants with technical assistance, an attempt to relocate nearly 900 families (mostly from Douam) in neighbouring areas. The new building sited the “Butte,” is located between Douam and Haja and is 90 metres wide. The tens of dwellings which are able to evolve into a structure. Each core unit is walled off from the other and consists of a main living room, corner kitchen, toilet, covering a total area of 60, 70 or 80 squar metres. Within the project area, more than 100 hectares were zoned for independent businesses in order to provide work for interested citizens.

At a cost of nearly 140 million dirhams, this pil project represented the first involvement of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Moroccan urban affairs. The project, carried on over the course of five years, met most of its original objectives. Thus, it was instrumental in redefining general policies of urban renewal as well as offering solutions to specific problems of housing in Rabat. The findings of this experimental project were used as a basis for a large-scale improvement programme for spontaneously built peripheral housing. Major projects are currently underway in four other Moroccan cities.
Overall plan of Douar Hajja.

View of a street in Douar Hajja.

General view of Douar Hajja.

General view of Douar Hajja.

General view of Douar Hajja.

General view of Douar Hajja.

Plots and sections of houses in Douar Hajja. Drawings by Labib, B. Tournet, I. Velwart.

Courtyard of a house, Douar Hajja.
From left to right and from bottom to top.

Bargach Palace: ceiling of the gallery around the courtyard.
House in derb Bargach.
House in derb Souissi: central fountain.
Decoration of entrances to houses.
Bargach Palace: a zellige panel with a geometric composition.
House in derb Pirou: inner courtyard.
Dar Hamidou Bennani: detail of a ceramic mural decoration.
Interior view of a room in the Marassa quarter.
Mohammed V's mausoleum: floral motif done with zellige tiles.

Editors of the supplement: Said Mouline and Serge Santelli.
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