





Place Moulay Hassan.

teak or eucalyptus wood.









































Essaouira, the old Mogador, is a harmonious city with an exceptional history: the site of Mogador / Essaouira has been devoted to maritime activities since Antiquity. In fact, the island of Mogador was one of the oldest jewels of the African coast, first attracting the attention of the Phoenicians and then the

Most of the built part of the modern-day city dates from the reconstruction undertaken in the days of Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah, between 1760 and 1764. He it was who rebuilt and enlarged the old Mogador castle (reinforced by the Saâdien king in 1629) and carried out a series of infrastructure works to create a major port, near his capital in Marrakech, to facilitate trade with Europe and America. From the outset, this port in the city of Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah incorporated a shipyard and fortifications on the maritime facades. A "regal quarter" was reserved for the sultan and the construction of the Menzeh. The only parts of this quarter that have survived to this day are the Menzeh and a section of the old gate. Mogador / Essaouira was therefore designed as a port that would be easy to control, unlike Agadir which could not be observed directly from the Menzeh. Driven by the political desire to open up trade to western countries, the sultan created a national navy and encouraged European merchants to establish branches in the city.

As vestiges of that history, Essaouira boasts an outstanding architectural heritage with unique, original characteristics. Today, the city is home to a rich heritage of hundreds of historic houses and monuments located in the two Kasbahs (old and new) and in the area known as the Medina. The beauty of this extraordinary, diverse legacy is defined by a common denominator— Mogador stone in hues ranging from yellow to grey. This stone has been present throughout the ages: in the bases of old houses, on facades adorned with handsome sculptures, in grand constructions (skalas, consuls' mansions, city gates), and in modest dwellings.

Route 1. The Maritime Facade

Much of the history and architecture of the old Mogador, nowadays Essaouira, can be discovered by admiring its famous Bab el Marsa or Harbour Gate, symbol of both the city and the shrewd judgment of Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah (1754-1790). The architecture and decorative details of this gate are unique in the whole of Morocco. It stands at the centre of a group of constructions comprising the skala or harbour bastion, the customs house and the docks, and is flanked by two square towers, forming part of the handsome stone ramparts that line the harbour. Nowadays the harbour gate seems low (10.60 x 8 m), but the apparent lack of proportion is the result of successive stone reinforcements over the years to the entrances to the docks, which are primarily used for small boats and as a loading bay.

A robust construction made of stone blocks of varying sizes, Bab el Marsa is flanked along its maritime side by two thick Doric semicolumns, perhaps an attempt to remind us of the ancient origins of Essaouira. In fact, the shape of the columns evokes the city's Phoenician and/or Roman past. The harbour group forms a small square-plan fort. Despite the European appearance of the side facing the harbour, its inner facade adopts the form of a gallery covered in the Moroccan style by a bershla (a wooden pavilion or hipped roof clad with green tiles).



adopts a west-northwest and east-southeast orientation and is built directly on

the beach. Flanking the inner harbour, it contains 20 embrasures and culminates

at the east-southeast end in a square tower surmounted by sentry boxes. On the

other side of the harbour, forming a type of continuation, a stone five-span bridge

leads to the *skala* and the remainder of the maritime ramparts. An inscription

decorates the keystone of the central arch. The bridge includes a battery with

14 embrasures on the harbour and north sides, and together with another fort

flanks the harbour *skala*. On the far side, the bridge culminates in another square tower, like the one on the opposite side. Built in stone, both towers are surmounted

by sentry boxes. This large bastion culminates in a small circular fort, Borj el

Barmil (Barrel Tower). The shipwrights worked in this part of the city and even

today ships (20 to 25 m long) are still made with ancestral techniques out of

Continuing north, our route now takes us past these maritime ramparts to

the citadel bastion or Skala of the Kasbah. A series of Moroccan-Portuguese

bastions or batteries line the maritime edge of the city. The first battery protects

the north entrance to the harbour and once had 26 cannons. The north end

culminates in a circular projection equipped with four cannons. The basement

contains several casemates—the old arsenal once used for storing artillery and

gunpowder but nowadays occupied by artists' studios. Nearby is the gate known

as Bab al Jihad, identified by the unique pattern of its handsome carved stones.

oust the Jews from the Mellah el-Kedim, their old quarter in the centre of the

Medina. The new neighbourhood was mainly reserved for the poor Jews of

Mogador, since the wealthy traders continued to live in the *Kasbah* or citadel

with the sultan's permission. This new Mellah is defined by its multi-storey houses,

mahia distilleries, mills and synagogues. In 1846, under Sultan Muley

Abderraman, another Jewish quarter was built, this time near the Bab Doukkala

gate. Nowadays, two or three synagogues and a few stone arches are all that

Leaving Bab Doukkala behind, we come to the Jewish Cemetery, which is

divided into two parts. Protected by a wall, the old cemetery exudes a special

atmosphere. (To the east lies the second Jewish cemetery, built in 1874.) It is a

magical, mysterious place with the sound of the roaring waves and the cawing

of the seagulls in the background. The oldest gravestones whose inscriptions

We now enter the Mellah or Jewish Quarter, built by Suleiman in 1804 to





a bay protected by a turned wood balustrade.

the old Portuguese churches.

ROUTE 3. Domestic Heritage



given over to two large halls. With its clean lines and pure materials, the building

conveys a sense of great simplicity, although the prayer hall and the entrance

halls are beautifully decorated. The ground-floor rooms are organised around

The Kasbah is also home to the «Portuguese Church», situated next to the

south gate of the Medina bastion or skala. A large edifice, it was built by the

first European traders who settled in the city. It has an ornate stone-carved main

entrance, flanked by two pilasters culminating in capitals, which is set into the

rear wall of a line of ramparts and is crowned by a pointed-arch window, the

only one of its type in Essaouira. The building is organised around a central

courtyard and comprises three storeys. The ground floor is given over to a series

of old storerooms, which open on to a gallery with stone columns. The middle

floor is occupied by the prayer hall, oriented east-west, and what were once

guest rooms. The old belfry, a cylindrical tower culminating in a dome, rises

from the terrace level. The curved tiles of the roof are strongly reminiscent of

These two monuments—the synagogue and the church—are an eloquent

testimony of the coexistence of different religions in Essaouira, a situation which

contributed greatly to the city's economic and cultural development. This

The domestic architecture in Essaouira can best be appreciated by exploring the

old Kasbah or citadel. This was the seat of power, where the Dar el Majzen or

governor's palace was situated. The old citadel or *Kasbah kadima* was where the

authorities, dignitaries, consuls and most important traders built their lavish homes.

Notice, for example, the former residence of Mulay Driss, the cousin of Sultan

Sidi Mohammed Ben Abadallah, the Cadí or Caid residence, and the mansions

where the European consuls lived. The favourite neighbourhood of wealthy traders

and consular agents (from Denmark, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain,

In 1780 it boasted 12 trading establishments. The consulates were built

according to the king's dictates. The first one, the Consulate of Denmark, was

buildings evidencing both Moroccan and European features.

etc.), the Kasbah offers a rich variety of domestic architecture.

narmonious combination of cultures is reflected in the architecture, with many







of its size and architecture.

the butchers (Jewish and Muslim).

a handsome silver sword or an English teapot.



inns and zagüías (a type of religious fraternity or place of spiritual gathering).

In a small city like Essaouira, this market is exceptionally impressive in terms

comprises several handsome monuments. It is accessed via a grand semicircular-

arched gate with carved keystones. The gate opens on to the continuation of

Haddada Street, which finishes at the Doukkala Gate. The market is a square,

open-air space surrounded by galleries with semicircular arches on stone

columns. Weavers once occupied the shops that opened on to the galleries

flanking both sides of the street. There are several adjacent souks, each

specialising in a particular product: the antique market (*Jutiya*), the wool market

(Souk Ghzel), the square where different grains are sold, the salt market and

Souk Idid is therefore divided into several heterogeneous spaces organised,

as in the traditional way, by trade: Souk Katane (fabrics), Souk Khiyatine

(tailors), Souk Jezara Muslimin (Muslim butchers), Souk Jezara Yahud (Jewish

butchers), Souk Khaibiya (kebab makers), Souk Aqqa (argan oil and dates),

etc. The Souk Ohwangiya—literally, the cafe owners' market—is particularly

fascinating. After all, it was because of the growing trade in products such as

tea, coffee and sugar that the people of Essaouira developed the custom of

gathering daily at a cafe to chat over a cup of tea or coffee. The antique market

has traditionally attracted the most visitors, who have described it as a busy,

colourful fair devoted to rare and second-hand objects, old furniture and hand-

made items with different sorts of inlays. It was a place where one might find

Meanwhile, the most expensive or luxury items (jewels and fine cloth) were

sold in the jewellery market or *qaissariya*. The silversmiths and money changers

needed enclosed, safe places in which to ply their trade. Situated at the heart

of the Medina, near the main mosque, the Mogador jewellery market was

reserved for the manufacture and sale of jewels, and possibly the minting of

coins. In the past these trades were practised by Jews. Hand-made jewellery

was a highly prosperous business in the 19th century. The trans-Saharan trade,

conducted by caravans of camels, brought copious amounts of gold dust and

give rise to a unique style of silver and goldware known as dag souiri, characterised by clean, simple lines and forms and the use of filigree openwork.

The Souk Jdid or new market is situated half-way along Haddada and













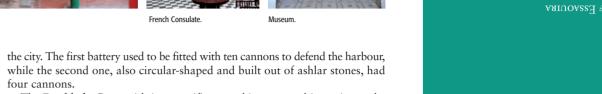






into a craft centre.













ROUTE 5. The Medina

The Medina lies north of the citadel and is so large that it is divided into different quarters which once had gates that were locked every night. The names of the different quarters make reference to the origin of their inhabitants: Ahl Agadir, Chbanat, Buakher, Ibala and Beni Antal. Ahl Agadir is thought to be the oldest quarter in the Medina. Wealthy Christian and Jewish merchants from Agadir and the south settled in this quarter, granted to them by Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah after the harbour was built in 1764. Some of these Berber traders from the Souss Valley, both Jewish and Muslim, were excellent jewellers and the filigree patterns of their jewels were similar to the ones fashioned by Andalusian silversmiths. An art known as *dag souiri* emerged in the workshops of the city's jewellery market. The Ahl Agadir ramparts are accessed from Souk Haddada via a vaulted passage, formerly known as Kus Ben Attar, a long street where the traders and some of the local jewellers had their mansions. In fact, certain streets or sections of ramparts were small quarters or residential areas where each mansion (dar el kebira or riad) was adjoined by a small adjacent house known as the duiriya, which was reserved for single men and/or the servants,

storerooms and stoves. The Ahl Agadir quarter boasts many monuments. The oldest is the Sidi Abdeddavem Mausoleum, Nearby is the Lala Azouna Mausoleum, nowadavs a masyid (mosque). The tomb of Sidi Abdeddayem is surrounded by a squareplan wall with battlements but without the typical dome that these burial places usually feature. Situated on the same street is the Ahl Agadir Mosque. The minaret rises above a covered street and, as such, is an identifying feature of this quarter. It is also unusual in that the courtyard is not surrounded by arcaded galleries, as in other mosques, but is more reminiscent of a domestic courtvard. In fact, the mosque occupies a former private residence. This quarter is also where the city's most popular zagüías are located: Tuhamia, Rahala, el Iazulia... The *zaguías* of Essaouira are a type of private club, usually housed in a spacious residence, where religion and conviviality blend in perfect harmony.

The long street known as Souk Oaqqa constitutes the main thoroughfare and leads to many other parts of the city. The caravans from Timbuktu would enter the city via the Marrakech Gate, wind their way along Souk Oaqqa and finally arrive at Souk Jdid or the new market.

The Beni Antar district by the sea was where the pirates and privateers who European renegades who converted—to varying degrees—to Islam and helped between the sea and the harbour. The Rahala Quarter was where the nomads

while the second one, also circular-shaped and built out of ashlar stones, had The Doukkala Gate, with its magnificent architecture and imposing scale, is the jewel in this route. A vast, robust arch made of stone masonry, it was

cemeteries, Christian and Jewish, which hug the coastline. Continuing on to the Marrakech Gate, it is worth pausing at the Marrakech Bastion, the oldest fortification on the terrestrial flank. An imposing circularshaped battery fitted with ten or more cannons, it kept guard over every road leading to the Medina and over the entire harbour. It has a diameter of 35 m and a surface area of 980 sq m. The interior of the tower was once used as a magazine but is now an art gallery. Its solid stone structure consists of a double outer wall connected to a central area (an 8-metre diameter tower) by a line of vaulted alcoves which divided the space into 11 identical chambers opening on to a continuous gallery. The inscriptions on the jambs around the openings

confirm the date of the monument and the name of the master builder who

participated in its construction. The adjoining barracks have now been turned

once surmounted by four cannons and marked the end of this flank. The gate

opened on to the road leading to the Doukkala region. Nearby lie the two

The tour of the fortifications ends at the gate known as Bab el Menzeh. A three-span arch, it is surmounted by a long room, now a gallery, from where the women in the regal entourage would watch the public events held in the esplanade in front of the Mexuar, such as audiences with the sultan and theatrical performances. Here, at the end of the route, notice as well the old entrance to the new citadel, a handsome semicircular-arched gateway. Two six-point stars with the famous rose of Mogador at the centre adorn the corners of the Moorish frame around the arch. A circular medallion bears the date of construction— 1287 (1870 in the Gregorian calendar)—the same year that the works that had begun in this part of the city in 1863 finally ended.

ROUTE 7. The New Kasbah or Citadel

A new neighbourhood emerged in the 19th century. The new citadel or Kasbah Jdid was begun in 1863 to relieve the shortage of buildings and warehouses for the traders' goods, which had gradually taken over the old citadel area and rectangular and organised around a square courtyard with a gallery defined by Nowadays the storage areas in this building have been turned into an art gallery. Haddada. They have magnificent high doors and their stone cladding displays

