

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

On Conserving the Mellah of Rabat, Morocco

by

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Ahmedabad, India
November 1987

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degrees of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ARCHITECTURE STUDIES

and

MASTER IN CITY PLANNING

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 1998

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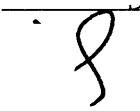
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
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
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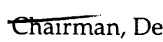
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Rabat

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the approach to urban conservation in the Jewish Quarter or Mellah in Rabat, Morocco. It addresses the complexities of conservation in a diverse society in a developing country. It explores how a view of the past affects the conservation rationale and argues for re-evaluating the approach to the past in evolving a plan. Through a comparison of the Rabat Mellah and other cases of urban conservation, the thesis will emphasize the need for both context sensitivity and integration with development strategies.

The municipality of Rabat has initiated a proposal for the rehabilitation of the Medina. Since its problems are more acute, the Mellah is treated separately. Rehabilitation and restoration of the existing urban fabric raises the issue of dealing with the past and future of this quarter. The proposal acknowledges the Mellah's historic importance but relates it neither to the restoration of the urban fabric nor to its future maintenance. Would preserving the Mellah as an irreplaceable monument best serve to represent, communicate and and maintain its historical importance and urban character? Its conservation is further complicated by the fact that, except for three families on the outskirts, its original Jewish residents no longer inhabit the Mellah. The conservation of the Mellah has to have meaning for its current residents while respecting the memory of the Jews that it was originally built for.

The patterns of change over the previous ten years are used to predict a scenario of the Mellah ten years hence, both with and without the intervention of the proposal. The case studies in this analysis highlight the necessity of including preservation within the larger urban development framework. The broader issue of imposing a universal set of values and single approach over different historic and cultural frameworks is critically discussed. Finally, an alternative set of principles is proposed and applied to a path of action for the Mellah of Rabat.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank first of all my advisors and reader in the Departments of Architecture and Urban Studies and Planning : Attilio Petruccioli who initiated my interest in the subject and sustained it throughout the course of my studies here and for his faith; John deMonchaux, whose invaluable advice kept both thesis and enthusiasm within bounds of scope, time and implementation and firmly on the ground; Larry Vale whose contribution has been no less than that of my advisors; Dr Susan Miller of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard and Dr Mohammed Naciri; Dr. Said Mouline of Rabat for being an incredible source of information - on architecture, history and jazz and a charming host; Leila Haddaoui whose patience, resourcefulness and charm helped me tremendously with fieldwork; M. Fawzi Zniber; Mr. Iraqui Ahmed; Fouzia El Azhari of AMIDEAST, Morocco for her kindness and setting an entire summer on course; the Mussomelis - Joseph, Sharon, Isaac and Alexis and the dogs - who will always remain my family in Morocco, wherever in the world they may be; Marcia and Olivier Bernicat; Albert Weizman of the Joint Distribution Committee in Casablanca; Dr. Philipp Ackermann, friend and a wonderful host; Dr Ali Amahan and Driss Dkhissi, both of the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, for their valuable and enlightening discussions; Isaac Oiknine and Ruth Attias of the American Embassy at Rabat for valuable insights into the Rabati Jewish community; also at the American Embassy, George Gaydos, Atul and Karen Keshap and the marines; Rabbi Mellul of Rabat; Jacky Kadoch and Abdelghani Beniss of Marrakech; my friend Yasmine Benhamida and her family in Casablanca for all their affection and help; Alia Bekkari; Mme. Batoul Dedrawi at the Wilaya of Rabat-Hssaine; my parents and sister Devyani and extended family, for their lasting and long distance support; everyone at MIT - my professors, Marsha Orent whom I can never thank enough, the administrative staff in the Departments of Architecture and Planning, Alberto Balestrieri and Robert Marlatt of the Aga Khan Program and all my friends - in particular, Susan, Ross and Isaac Silberberg, Ole Amundsen, Alan Jasanoff, Meenu Tewari, Sumila Gulyani, Ritu Bhatt, Andrew Grace, Rupinder Singh and Dina Freedman; and finally, the students in the HTC Ph.D. program (and Cairo) with whom we shared the Heavenly Kennel and who made the thesis semester a lot more fun.

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PREFACE

“Je ne puis te parler que des approches d’une si grande chose..” - Plato, Phaedrus

During the previous two decades, a considerable awareness of the need to conserve traditional urban environments in Islamic countries has resulted in a number of conservation initiatives - well-researched, programmed and implemented in varying degrees of completion. What do these plans seek to do and have they achieved their intentions? If not, is the problem in the intentions or in the methodology for implementation? Or in identifying the problem itself and the issues addressed? All of these originate in an approach to conservation that imparts certain values, which sets the rationale for planning for conservation.

The approach to urban conservation as it relates to traditional inner city contexts - specifically in the Islamic world as well as the plans that have emerged from this approach, are the principal concerns of this study. These concerns are explored through the examination of a particular case - the conservation of the former Jewish quarter or Mellah of Rabat, Morocco - in the wider context of the plan developed for rehabilitating the entire walled city or Medina¹. By comparing this plan and its intended and unintended likely consequences, with conservation plans for cities in similar contexts, I make a case for the consideration of change in thinking about the future of the past.

The change focuses upon integrating conservation and development into the idea of “conservation-in-use”. The process is driven by the idea of growth and change rather than preserving an image of a “past”. Community involvement, development priorities and maintenance are emphasized to create value for the built environment.

¹ *The term Medina means the traditional walled city specifically in Morocco. Otherwise, the term simply stands for ‘city’ and could refer to the old or to the new urban settlement.*

CHAPTER 1

THE ARGUMENT FOR CONSERVATION

In a world of concrete, Concorde and computers, it is vital that we preserve what remains of individuality. If everything were modern, everywhere would look pretty much the same.
-Timothy Cantell

1.1 - Why Conserve?

The built environment or physical context of a society is seen as integral to its cultural context. The built environment is valued as an anchor to counter the effects of change in the society that it contains. Physical continuity is thus, in many settings, the central purpose of conservation. The built environment, either individual buildings or parts of a city, are usually preserved to retain the qualities of a certain period in the past. This approach stems from the perception of loss that was generated by the sudden and drastic changes caused by industrialization in Western Europe. The past was valued because it was no more and would never return. Anything that was old had a value.² The past was also instrumental in defining national identity and thus, also had a symbolic significance.

Urban conservation is, thus, usually understood to mean preservation or restoration of the physical urban fabric and the monuments in it and is necessary when the present urban context bears no legible relation to the past. Either buildings or spaces or objects in the urban landscape serve the purpose of markers of time or events and to indicate this continuity. Often, however, this reconstructed ambiance is artificial - there are no longer the attendant social conditions that once made this a living fabric. The very intention of the exercise could thus be called into question.

In some settings, for example, in post-colonial

² Ref. p.24, Alois Riegl *The Modern Cult of Monuments: its Character and its Origin* (1903), *Oppositions* 25, 1984.

countries that are creating a 'new' identity, temporal continuity is not valued. Countries that had attained independence from colonial rule during the latter half of the twentieth century, found themselves at a crossroads in time. The process of breaking away from a recent past of being colonized and forging an identity for themselves led to the design of new cities and importantly, capitals. The development and growth of a city is thus, as much politically determined as it is a product of social and economic forces following their course.

Their societies, economies and newly adopted (and unfamiliar) democratic political structures, were in sharp contrast to the same conditions in the industrialized West (often former colonizers) that these countries emulated and were often compelled to trade with. Post-colonial national planning processes attempted more to reduce the economic disparities than to address a vision of development that was consonant with the country's particular problems. The additional legacy of colonial cities and town planning principles was either rejected or continued in part. When a city like Chandigarh was commissioned in India, it symbolized a nascent nation erasing its past; looking resolutely ahead and beyond the confines of a culture that was seen as a hindrance to progress.³

In contemporary growth situations, many cities barely cope with managing their growth, let alone planning for conservation. While traditional urban cores remain largely residential, they face increasing commercialization and hence, a much greater use burden that strains existing services to breaking point. The introduction of vehicular traffic has hastened the ongoing disruption of the urban fabric.

Older urban forms and their elements have rapidly lost relevance, being closely linked with an older way of life and the past, neither of

³ Khilnani, Sunil *"The Idea of India," Farrar Strauss and Giroux Inc. New York 1998*

which are now seen as desirable. Associated with this loss of physical fabric, is the disappearance of certain unique social interactions that were an integral part of their urban environments. This change to a relative uniformity is especially marked in the case of societies that were composed of discrete and diverse social and religious groups. The non-conformity between the rates of change in the social and built fabric has been traumatic.

1.2 – Conservation vs. Preservation

One of the general principles of the UNESCO recommendation of November 26, 1976⁴ states that,

At a time when there is a danger that a growing universality of building techniques and architectural forms may create a uniform environment throughout the world, the preservation of historic areas can make an outstanding contribution to maintaining and developing the cultural and social values of each nation. This can contribute to the architectural enrichment of the cultural heritage of the world.

On this premise, many traditional cities and urban districts (that were parts of larger and more recent urban agglomerations) were declared “cultural property”⁵, and depending on their individual characteristics, classified as either national or world heritage sites to be dealt with appropriately. They had to be ‘safeguarded’⁶ from any use that would destroy their unique and intrinsic attributes, on the assumption that physical preservation of a traditional urban environment⁷ was directly linked to the preservation of social and cultural values.

Conservation strategies however, have found it difficult to cope with these social continuities and discontinuities. Urban conservation is a new concept in these societies which, before colonization and the advent of the modern age, dealt remarkably well with their past in terms of the built environment. Temporal and spatial transitions were integrated so as to make these

4 pg 198, “Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas,” *Conventions and Recommendations of Unesco Concerning the Protection of the Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO, Geneva, 1985

5 Ibid. The UNESCO recommendation adopted on November 19, 1968 regarding the preservation of cultural property endangered by public or private works applies the term ‘cultural property’ to

“(a) Immovables, such as archaeological and historic or scientific sites, structures or other features of historic, scientific, artistic or architectural value, whether religious or secular, including groups of traditional structures, historic quarters in urban or rural built-up areas and the ethnological structures of previous cultures still extant in valid form...”

⁶ According to the UNESCO recommendation, adopted on November 26 1976,

(c) ‘Safeguarding’ shall be taken to mean the identification, protection, conservation, restoration, renovation, maintenance and revitalization of historic or traditional areas and their environment.”

⁷ There is a definition of historic areas including urban environments in the above recommendation.

“(a) Historic and architectural (including vernacular) areas shall be taken to mean any group of buildings, structures and open spaces including archaeological and palaeontological sites, constituting human settlements in an urban or rural environment, the cohesion and value of which, from the archeological, architectural, prehistoric, historic, aesthetic or sociocultural point of view are recognized.

Among these ‘areas’, which are very varied in nature, it is possible to distinguish the following in particular : prehistoric sites, historic towns, old urban quarters, villages and hamlets as well as homogenous monumental groups, it being understood that the latter should as a rule, be carefully preserved unchanged.

(b) The ‘environment’ shall be taken to mean the natural or man-made setting which influences the static or dynamic way these areas are perceived or which is directly linked to them in space or by social, economic or cultural ties.

⁸ ref. Alois Riegl’s essay, - “The Modern Cult of Monuments”, *Oppositions* 25, 1984.

1.3- Issues and Concerns in Urban Conservation

environments seem almost timeless. Also, the approach to the past and its value were different from that which has engendered the approach that currently drives conservation initiatives⁸.

The recent experience of urban conservation in developing countries has brought to the surface certain recurring issues and concerns – skewed development, banalization, historical distortion and a de-valuing of heritage. I briefly discuss them below.

Skewed Development - The most common issue is that of conservation versus development. Conservation is seen as restrictive, backward looking and seeking to maintain stasis. Development is seen as 'future-oriented' and hence more useful and progressive. Most importantly, it is seen as a process that can sustain itself without being constantly supported by either the government or by other institutions. One way for the past to be 'useful' and sustain itself is to engender tourism. This leads to a form of development where the built fabric, preserved as heritage, is invariably linked to tourism. Preserving buildings, groups of buildings or urban areas for tourism finally becomes an important end of the conservation strategy or the major factor to reckon with. This in turn, has had unintended consequences which, to some extent, counter the original purpose of the entire exercise. These areas are entirely dependent upon only one kind of intervention for their economic sustenance.

*Banalization*⁹ - Often, the emphasis on tourism leads to a banalization of heritage. What is often unique about a place is destroyed in the process of 'restoring' and 're-valuing' it. In her recent book, "L'Allegorie du Patrimoine", Françoise Choay cites the example of the historic city of Bruges¹⁰ that was once famous for manufacturing lace. The city is now preserved,

⁹ Choay, Françoise, "L'Allegorie du Patrimoine" Editions du Seuil, Paris 1992, p.177

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.177

and has shops that sell lace imported from HongKong. These lace shops compete for space with the little cafés and art galleries that cater to visitors, while two international hotel chains have built huge hotels in utter disregard of the existing urban scale. This is a situation in Europe but is commonly encountered in a number of heavily visited tourist destinations in many developing countries as well. There is repetition or recreation of the same images and a tourist can know, perversely enough, what to expect.

Historical Distortion - Each site needs its story (or stories). The historical aspect of a place that has the most touristic appeal is selected and is subject to considerable distortion over time - usually unintended. However, selection and historical distortion are potentially powerful tools for political use. They have been used in the past to construct national identities and entire cultural genealogies in Europe. The reason for concern occurs in societies that are dealing with religious and ethnic heterogeneity and are in political and socio-economic transition. Since conservation is mainly concerned with preservation, the consequences of emphasizing a particular group, set of events or relationships needs to be addressed with responsibility and care in order to maintain a balance.

De-valuation of Heritage - One objective of conservation is to inculcate value for heritage by treating a part of the built environment as irreplaceable and hence, special. What has usually been the consequence is that heritage is increasingly valued as a consumer item and linked to the present. The commodification of heritage is profitable, but ironically, de-values it. The question is then whether this is the change in the public's perception that was intended.

The above issues and concerns arise from a conflict of values that sets the past in opposition to the future. One problem is that of a set of values inherent in a society and how it has

traditionally, through these values, dealt with the past. The second problem is linked with the needs of that society in the present and how it resolves those in relation to the past and its traditional values and acquires new values. The third problem is the set of values that is institutionalized and which corresponds to neither the past nor the present of a society. Institutions, especially those in developing countries, that administer conservation and the legislation that relates to it, have a set of values and accompanying standards and laws. These originate in an adopted rationale that is usually unrelated to the inherent values and needs of their specific contexts¹¹.

The other set of values favors modernization and is temporary. I do not believe that this is the inherent set of values of the impoverished majority that inhabits these 'picturesque' historic urban quarters. However, their socio-economic status dictates the desire to move upwards in the social scale. They prefer what they see as symbols of progress, of modernization and images of wealthier industrialized cultures to which their current environments are in complete contrast.

The desire to emulate this affluence is expressed in many ways - through the introduction of Western style sanitary services, modern furniture and exteriors altered to project a more modernized aspect. This desire is shared by poor and affluent sections of society alike and is an accepted indicator of progress.

The question is whether these two opposing sets of values can be reconciled and the problem of conservation viewed differently. This reconciliation needs to be linked with a sense of identity - both political and cultural. Inculcating a sense of value in the residents about their traditional built environments should not be restricted to only its aesthetic. Even this is tinged with the idea of the 'picturesque' in less

¹¹ This attitude originates in late eighteenth and nineteenth century European ideas on the nature of the past and of history, that grew with the rise of nationalism.

developed and 'older' societies that are visited for just that reason. To recall the UNESCO recommendation quoted on page 9, they represent "ethnological structures of previous cultures still extant in valid form..." and this is the basis of their value as national and in some case, as world heritage.

Conservation means more than simply preservation. Its scope is wider and it does not have to mean immutability. It needs to be driven more by the idea of development - by change and movement rather than by stasis. The term 'conservation' therefore needs to include both the ideas of preservation and development that are currently in opposition to each other, within it. This may even necessitate the redefinition of both terms - the ideas of past and future and of preservation and progress.

The Amsterdam Declaration of 1975 has a term for it - *integrated conservation*. It advocates that conservation be integrated into planning instead of being dealt with on a separate basis. The two ideologies, however, remain distinct. I would take it further to suggest that planning include conservation as an integral part - that there is no future progress without a due consideration of the past.

The need to re-examine the current approach arises from a sense of unease at the observed pattern of development in the face of conservation efforts in developing countries. There is a marked divergence in attitudes to the past and to the future. The attitude to the past that is apparent in conservation efforts is a Western construct that dates from the period of colonial occupation in many of these countries. Interestingly, the sense that their past was a hindrance to progress was also of Western origin. The loss of traditional values and of a sense of cultural identity is leading many of these countries to look back at their pasts in a pattern similar to industrializing Western Europe nearly

two hundred years ago. There is though, a growing apprehension that the loss of value of cultural heritage through current modes of conservation is probably worse than losing this heritage altogether to a natural course of development.

Apart from personal experience and observation, there is also an ongoing debate in the industrialized and more affluent countries with a longer tradition of conservation about similar issues. This debate is not so much based on the question of identity as on a real questioning of the basis for action and whether the attitudes that are currently held are indeed appropriate the original purpose. I would ask further if there was any single approach or way of addressing this problem. The flexibility in conservation plans needs to be at the level of the questions asked and the statement of the problem rather than at the level of the methods employed to deal with the problem. In order to evaluate the approach of a conservation plan, I propose to examine and ask of it the following questions.

- What are the intentions of the plan? Are they realistic/appropriate/what they should be?
- Where and how does the plan intervene?
- Would physical conservation alone achieve the intentions of the plan?
- Does the approach achieve what it intends to do? Are there any other ways of asking questions and formulating the problem?
- How do the approach, intentions and interventions impact the formulation of a conservation approach?

The Mellahs are a physical remnant of a long Jewish urban history in Morocco that dates back to nearly two thousand years (and predates

Islam by a number of centuries), and a rich and diverse subculture which is as much Moroccan as Jewish. The Jews and Muslims in Morocco had an uneasy interdependence. The Jews being the *dhimmi*,¹² were subject to discriminatory laws but their occupation as money lenders, jewelers, metalworkers and traders in precious cloth, cosmetics and spices resulted in their being a necessary part of the population. They were also a bridge between the Muslims and Europeans and on account of trade and family contacts in European countries, frequently diplomats as well.

1.4 - The Moroccan Mellah

Mellahs are a feature of Moroccan cities after the fifteenth century. The creation of Mellahs was politically motivated. Moroccan political history was characterized by different dynasties of varying tribal origins and affiliation. These dynasties also espoused often schismatic and charismatic religious tradition. To paraphrase Jane Gerber, each dynasty, in order to gain authority and legitimacy confounded their cause with that of Islam. The often puritanical trends that this evoked led to incitement against the Jews. The foundation of the first Mellah in Fez in 1438 is attributed to discovering the tomb of Moulay Idriss (who founded Fez and is revered as a saint) in 1437 and a subsequent outbreak of religious fervor and attacks upon the Jews.

The subsequent founding of Mellahs in other Moroccan cities with a substantial Jewish population followed a similar pattern. Even then, not all Moroccan cities have Mellahs. Tangiers is an example of an important Moroccan city with a wealthy and influential Jewish community but without a Mellah. Other than the largest ones in Marrakech and Fez, where the poorest members of the Jewish community will be found, most Mellahs no longer have any Jews.

The view of the Mellah among the Jews currently living in Morocco is mixed. For some, it has

¹² The *dhimmi* are the non-Muslim subjects in a Muslim state and were accorded an inferior status, required to pay a heavy tax called the *jiziya*, and in different countries, were subjected to various forms of discrimination.

happy memories, and for others, it represents shame. There is a continuing exchange between Moroccan Jewish émigrés and their families in Morocco. There have even been those, among whom are young professionals, educated in France, who have returned to live in Morocco. This is not often the case in other Islamic countries and reaffirms current policy and the protected status of Jews under the present régime.

The problematic of the Mellah involves incorporating its history into its conservation without the presence of its former inhabitants. One aspect of this problematic is expressing its past. The other is the integration of the Mellah with the rest of the Medina and maintaining its urban character - not sanitizing it and converting it to a replica of an imagined past state.

The Mellah is one of the poorest areas of the city - arguably, the poorest - and architecturally undistinguished, despite having a different layout from other quarters in the Medina. Most houses, with the exception of a few that belonged to wealthy merchants and consular agents, are small and simply equipped. There are features that distinguish a Jewish house from a typical Muslim dwelling in the Moroccan Medina which are elaborated upon in the following chapters.

The Mellahs need to be conserved not so much for their architecture as for their symbolic and historic value. Even this sense of history is subtle. Simply recreating each and every house will not serve the purpose - however, the maintenance of the quarter as it essentially was - another quarter of the city, but still walled in - remains a possibility. It does not need to be either a tourist attraction or a gentrified enclave like the Casbah of the Oudaïas.

How do we approach the conservation of the Mellah in a manner that leads to its

- retaining its form and character?

- infrastructural improvement?
- inculcating an awareness of heritage/
history/value among its residents?

In this last point I diverge from the usual proposition that the first two automatically lead to the third. I am treating this as a separate entity and take the stand that it needs to be dealt with separately and is one of the factors that is responsible for variations in approach/ gives context specificity to an approach or plan.

In the following chapter, I deal with the history of the Jewish community, the history of the Mellah and its unique characteristics and present a case for considering it as a part of the cultural heritage of Morocco - as being Moroccan rather than Jewish, especially given the current social and political context of the country.

CHAPTER 2
THE MELLAH -
BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 - Jewish Urban History in Morocco

The Jews have been in Morocco for nearly two thousand years - since the first diaspora, and long before the advent of Islam in Morocco. Their history cannot therefore be considered separate from that of the Moroccan Muslims since a number of historic events influenced and affected both groups. Like the Muslims in Morocco, who are not ethnically homogenous, the Jews too migrated to Morocco during different periods and from different places. The principal distinction was between the *Toshavim* and *Megorashim*. The former were the 'indigenous' Jews. The latter were migrants from Spain and also called the *Sephardim*. Jewish communities across Morocco could be distinguished by their dress and customs. Not all the Jews lived in cities. There were and still are Jewish settlements in the south of Morocco, in the Atlas, that are primarily agricultural communities.

Most groups that settled in the cities were principally involved in trade and commerce. They had charge of specific functions - the minting of coins, banking, metalwork and jewelry, tanning of leather, the trade in silks and cosmetics. The trade and family contacts of the Sephardic Jews in Europe and other countries also engaged them in diplomacy.¹³ They had a special status and were allowed to travel freely between North and South - between the Saadian and Alaouite kingdoms where even the Muslim subjects of each of these kingdoms could not do so. This condition of simultaneously belonging and being the 'outsiders' ensured their indispensability both in commerce and in politics.

13. Jose Benech in his description of the Mellah in Marrakech recounts the intervention of Sir Moses Montefiore from Britain who visited Marrakech and intervened on behalf of the Jewish community there. The Sultan subsequently passed a decree or *dahir* that guaranteed the Jews greater protection. ref. "Essai d'Explication..."

Their role in trade, administration and diplomacy was especially important during the increased European presence in Morocco in the nineteenth century. In particular, in the coastal cities that had extensive trade with the Portuguese, French and British, among others, the Jews had long been a bridge between the Moroccan Muslims and the Christian countries of Europe. In fact, European (and Christian) visitors to the city were housed in the Mellah. In matters of dress and living, however, they retained their Moroccan identity and spoke Arabic.

The creation of the Mellah as an idea and a physical reality occurred during the fifteenth century. It was a product of Moroccan politics, which was characterized by dynasties where the ruler had both temporal and spiritual power. Islam in Morocco tended to follow various schismatic trends led by charismatic leaders. As pointed out in the first chapter, in order to gain legitimacy and temporal authority, these leaders allied their movements to the cause of Islam. This took the most extreme form of *jihad* or holy war against the non-believers. The Jews were the usual targets of this wrath and were frequently attacked. In fact, this became a common political ploy during times of uncertainty. The reason for the building of the Mellah in Fez was to protect the Jews from such attacks.¹⁶

For this reason, the Mellahs were not all established at the same time but depended upon the need of the hour. Also different regions were dominated by different tribes and the political equation differed in each circumstance. The last Mellahs, those of Rabat and Salé were founded in 1807 and 1806 respectively, almost four hundred years after the first Mellah. Prior to the creation of the Mellah, the Jews lived among the Muslim population of the city and were not segregated. They lived adjacent to Muslim families but the interaction between Jews and Muslims was

restricted to matters of business. Intermarriage was prohibited and there were also restrictions on dress. For example, Jewish men had to wear only black hats to distinguish them from Muslims. They also had to remove their shoes while passing a mosque and were not allowed to ride horses.

The establishment of the Alliance Israelite Universelle during the middle of the nineteenth century was an important factor in creating a new Jewish identity. Gradually and not without a great deal of opposition from religious leaders, the Moroccan Jews shifted from the use of Arabic to French and grew Westernized. These were mostly from the urban communities. During the last years of the nineteenth century, a number of Jews migrated from Morocco to South America, Canada and Palestine to seek their fortunes.

The rate of emigration was not very high, even with the creation of Israel during the mid-twentieth century. It was only after the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1967 that there was a precipitous increase in the number of Jews who left Morocco for Israel. The present regime however, has made the safety of Jews a priority and they continue to hold important political positions and are respected in society.

An interesting and related aspect is the sense of identity of Moroccan Jewish émigrés, who even in Israel, Canada or South America still consider themselves Moroccan as much as Jewish. There is a growing number of them, who return to see where their families originally came from. There are also a number of Jews who have returned from Israel to live in Morocco. This reverse movement, in addition to a few young Jewish professionals, educated in Europe who have also preferred to settle in Morocco, implies a sense of security and the presence of a living tradition.

The term "Mellah" means a salt mine in

2.2 - The Mellah of Rabat

Arabic¹⁴. The first Mellah, built in Fez in the fifteenth century, was sited on an old salt quarry.¹⁵ The name remained and is now eponymous for the Jewish quarter in a Moroccan city. The fact that the Mellah was built at a later date to accommodate the Jewish population, meant that it was usually located on the edge of the Medina and also adjacent to the palace of the ruler or the governor. (fig. 1)

The Mellah was not a ghetto like might be found in the European cities, but a quarter like others that belonged to different social groups. Moroccan cities, like others in the Islamic world, had residential quarters whose inhabitants shared a common social, ethnic or professional

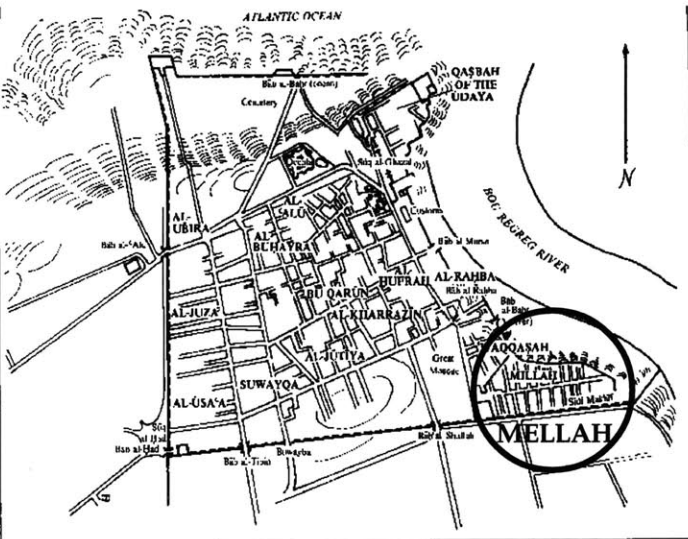
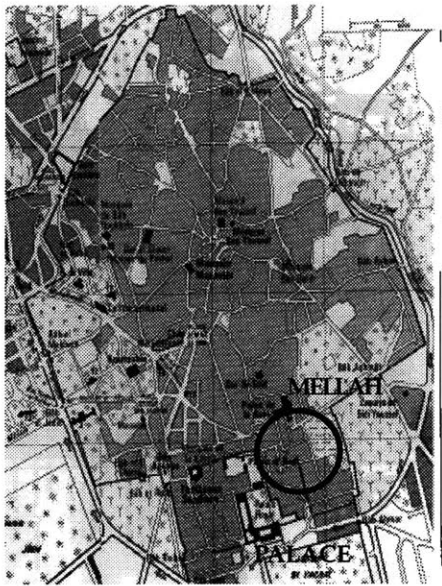
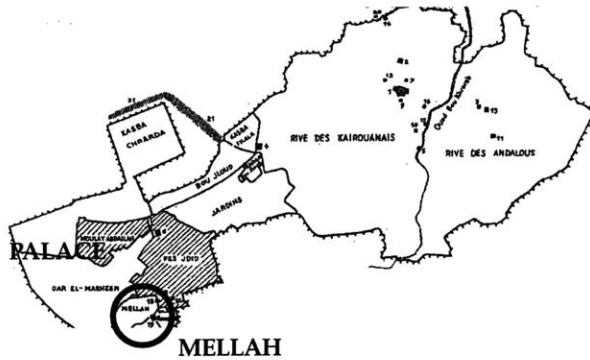


fig1. Plans of Fez, Marrakech and Rabat, showing the location of the Mellahs.

14 The Arabic term for salt is "al malh" from where the word 'Mellah' is derived.

15 Gerber, Jane - "Jewish Society in Fez 1450-1700. Studies in Communal and Economic Life", Leiden 1980, Chapter 1.

16 Koranic law enjoins upon the ruler to protect all non-Muslims in his realm, particularly the people of the Book, Jews and Christians. The Jews had more in common with the Muslims and received better treatment and a greater degree of tolerance than did the Christian minority.

17 There are ksour and rural settlements in the south of Morocco that are almost entirely Jewish.

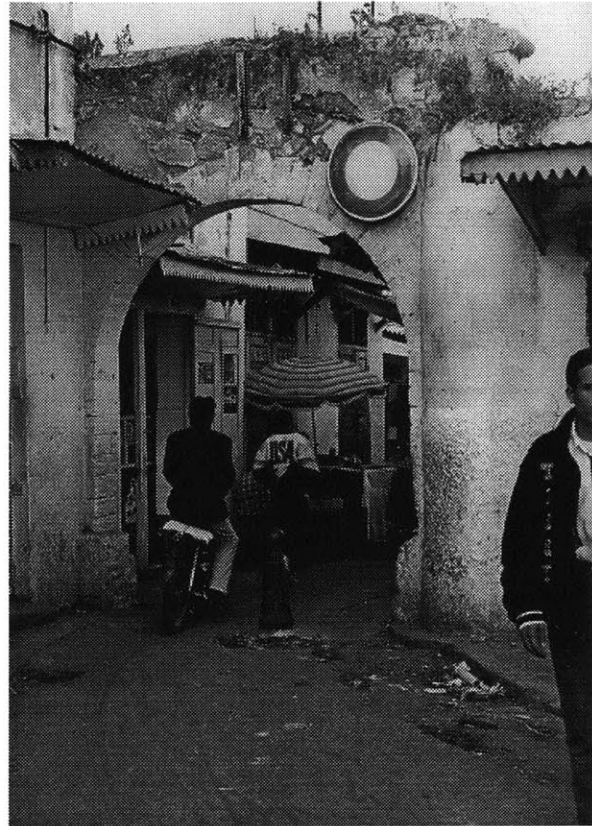
background. The Jews, despite differing social and economic status, ethnic origin and profession, had a common religious belief and were thus differentiated from the Muslim majority.¹⁷ The Mellah however, was a completely enclosed space that was locked every evening and shut off from the rest of the city.

The other quarters were Muslim and may or may not have had gates but were also clearly demarcated, either by the characteristic organization of the urban fabric itself or by the



fig. 2 Plan of the Medina showing different quarters including the Mellah

fig. 3 The gate into the Mellah.



residents or by the commercial activity associated with the quarter. (fig. 2) In Rabat, the Quartier des Oudaias¹⁸ was also a fortified walled-in citadel that took its name from a tribe of Arab origin (the Oudaias) that was expelled from Fes in 1833 by the Sultan Moulay Abd er-Rahman. It was earlier inhabited by settlers from Andalusia during the early seventeenth century who fled to Morocco after the Christian conquest and the subsequent Spanish Inquisition.

The Mellah had a gate that was opened every morning and locked at sundown. (fig. 3) The gate was needed to protect the inhabitants who were often and without warning, subjected to attacks of mob fury, pillage and violence, usually occasioned by religious fervor or some minor misdemeanor that invited a disproportionately severe reprisal. The proximity to the governor's or ruler's palace was also to protect the Jews - to either deter the attackers or if they did, to be able to send in troops as quickly as possible.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Casbah des Oudaias occupies a part of what was the original Ribat el Fath first built in 1150.

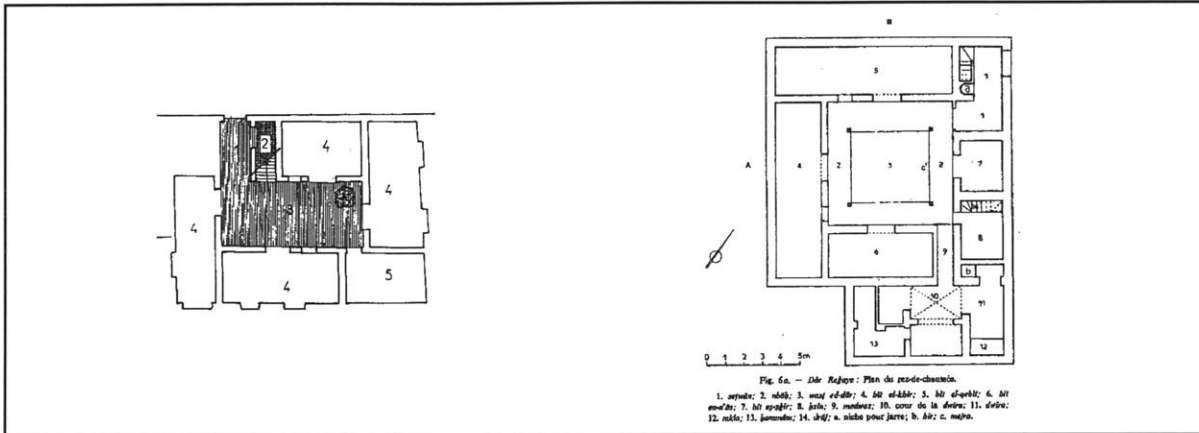


fig. 4 Plans of a Jewish house and a Muslim house in the Mellah



fig. 5 Doorway into courtyard providing direct access to the house.

19 Another reason given for the proximity of the ruler, albeit facetiously and half in truth and half in jest, was that the position of Jews as money lenders and those in charge of the minting of coins, meant that there was always an availability of ready cash for a sudden campaign. The money could either be borrowed or as usually was the case, a debilitating tax was imposed upon the Jews to cover the deficit.

The Mellah contained the entire Jewish population of the city and was thus more crowded than the other quarters, since there was no scope for its expansion if the Jews increased in number. It was marked by a sparseness and simplicity - the walls were whitewashed, doors sometimes colored in blue and ochre (on ceremonial occasions) and the floors were mostly of beaten earth. One reason could be that the Jews being the bankers and money lenders in addition to being the religious minority, were subject to sudden, punitive and debilitating taxes. The fact that the quarter was often pillaged also meant that the inhabitants of the Mellah, even those of modest means, did not want to display any signs of wealth. Those that were rich did have impressive houses with lavishly furnished and decorated interiors.

In plan and in general aspect, the houses in the Mellah were like any others in the rest of the Medina and were usually two to three stories high. (fig. 4) There was a central courtyard with rooms around it. The courtyard houses are typical in their construction and material and overall layout and similar to those elsewhere in the Medina. However, there are features in their layout and decoration that distinguish them from houses traditionally occupied by Muslim families.

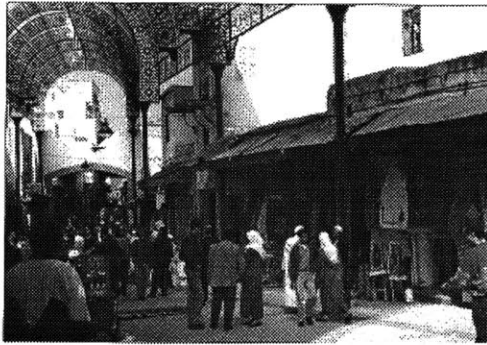


fig. 6 A balcony in the Rue des Consuls - 1900 and 1998



fig. 7 Covered balcony in the Mellah

²⁰ The shallow bath below the stairs to the house and close to the entrance has been referred to as the mikvah - used for ritual ablutions, by some people. However, the requirement that there be flowing (and living or spring) water in the mikvah would make this near impossible given the poor infrastructure, and lack of space in the Mellah.

The entrances to these houses are direct and open into the *wust-ed-dar* or courtyard. (fig. 5) They also had windows opening out onto the street at the lowest level. The entrances and windows both give direct visual access into the house. One inference from this is that the rules of privacy for the Moroccan Jewish house were not the same as those for the Muslims. Another reason for this openness could have been that there were often more than one family that lived in a single house, due to overcrowding. Whether there was an influx of refugees or whether the population of the Mellah increased in normal course, the Jews had nowhere else to go. Keeping the door open allowed easy access to a greater number of persons and also increased the ventilation within the house.

In houses that were occupied by more than one family, there are usually two entrances adjacent to each other. One entrance opened into the house at the street level. The other entrance opened to a flight of stairs that led up to the house or houses above. There was usually a bath²⁰ (called a *Tabila*) and toilet immediately at the entrance and below the stairs. (refer figure 4) The reason for its location could be that it was shared by all the families living in the building and hence locating it near an entrance meant that they could be used without disturbing the family on the ground floor.

These houses also had balconies that overlooked the main street as well as the alleys. In fact, it is the balconies on buildings along the Rue des Consuls that are testimony to this area being formerly inhabited by the Jews. (figures 6, 7) After occupation by Muslim families, these balconies have been increasingly covered and made a part of the interior or demolished outright. The cultural mores of a Muslim population do not allow for such access to the exterior. The balconies however, provide lively relief to an otherwise simple architecture.

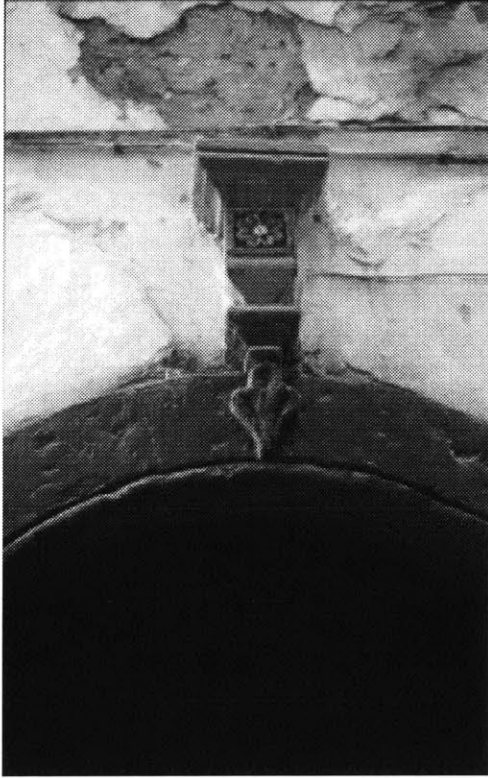


fig. 8 Motif on a doorway in the Mellah



fig.9 Courtyard of the Mellah synagogue

In addition to these distinctive features of their layout and elements, there are decorative elements on the doorways that identify the doorway as belonging to a Jewish household. (fig. 8) These have remained since they do not disturb the way of life of the new occupants and also mean nothing to them.

There were formerly three synagogues in the Mellah²¹. Currently there is one that still functions - the Bet Ha-Knesset Rabbi Shalom Azhawi. It is located immediately within the Bab Diouna and abuts the Muraille Andalouse on one side. It also had the residence of the rabbi within its precincts but during a recent restoration during the last decade, the plan has been modified (refer Appendix I). Where there was a residence is now a courtyard with an arcade and a small shrine, kitchen and room for storage. (fig. 9) A bath has been added at the entrance to

21. Zack Joel "The Synagogues of Morocco" - World Monuments Fund, Jewish Heritage Society, New York, 1995

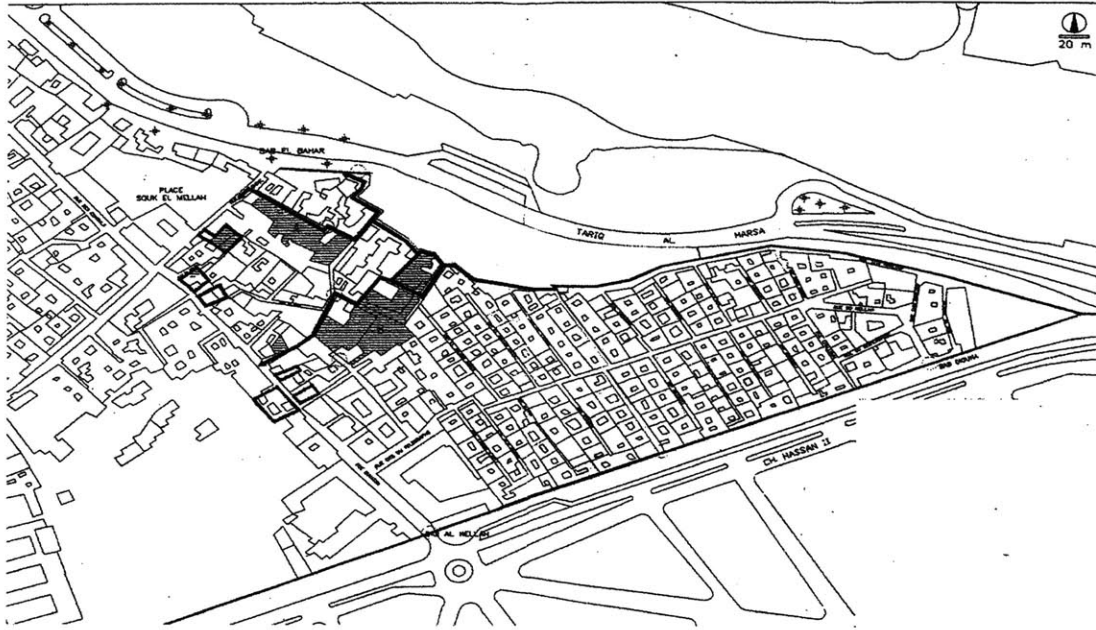


fig. 10 The plan of the Mellah of Rabat

the synagogue at one end of the long courtyard at the other end of the which is a large space that contains an oven and leads into the women's gallery.

The Rabat Mellah is more recent than those of Fez, Marrakech, Meknes and even Salé across the BouRegreg estuary. It was built as a concerted one-time effort between 1806 and 1807, when the Sultan Moulay Slimane ordered its creation to house the Jewish population of Rabat. The Mellah was built on the site of fruit orchards between the Muraille Andalouse and the Medina (fig. 10). This was the only site available in the Medina that was within its walls and separating as well as protecting the Jews was a matter of political significance for the Sultan at the time.²²

Prior to 1806, the Jews lived in the Medina - mostly in the area around the Rue des Consuls, but were not isolated from the Muslim population of the city. The presence, in this quarter, of the consulates of the various European countries that had trade relations with Morocco also testifies to the presence of a number of diplomats in addition to wealthy traders among the Jews of Rabat - since political

²² Since the founding of the first Mellah of Fez, the creation of a Mellah has been the result of a period of political uncertainty for the ruler. The protection of the Jews was also a test of the ruler's power and a way of attacking the Sultan or challenging his authority was to attack the Mellah. Also refer J. Goulven, "Les Mellahs de Rabat-Salé" Paris 1927.

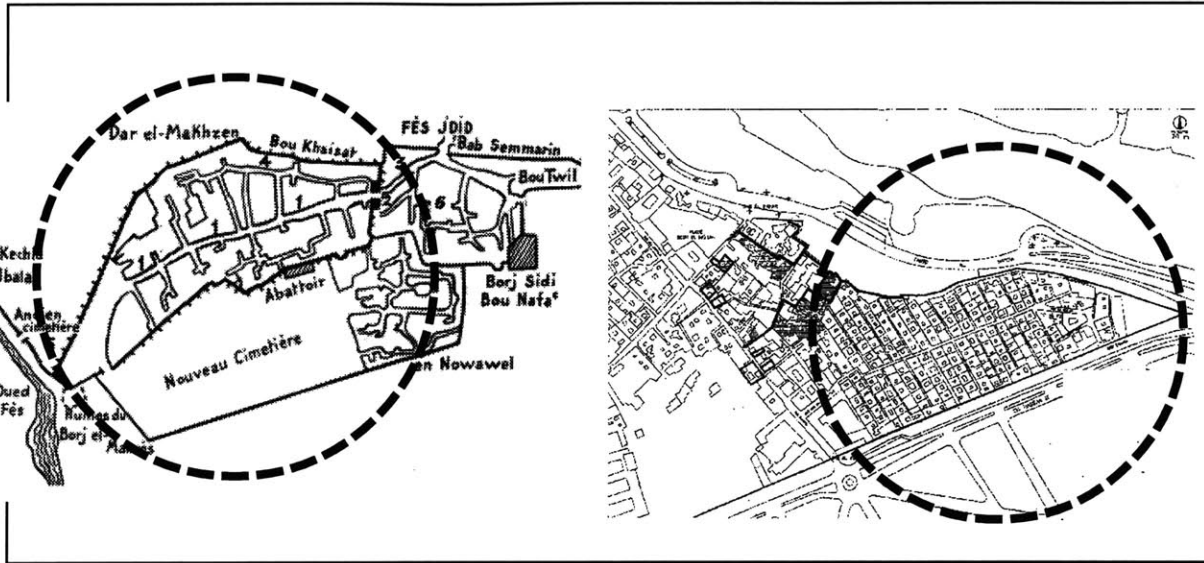


fig.11 Plans of the Mellahs of Fez and Rabat



ig.12 Aerial photograph of Rabat showing the difference between the pattern of streets in the Mellah and the rest of the Medina

23 J. Caille, "La Ville de Rabat..."

24 There are widely varying figures for the total population of Rabat and the percentage of Jews thereof. Graberg de Hemso cites a figure of 27,000 persons of which 7,000 were Jewish - to Arlett's estimate (given by the British consular agent) of a total of 24,000 and about the same number of Jews, i.e., 7,000. The American lieutenant Washington records a total of 18,000 and 3,000 Jews in Rabat and the figures by the French vice consul are a total of 60,000 inhabitants for both Rabat and Salé, of which the Jews number 6,000.(ibid.)

and trading interests were closely allied.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Rabat was an important center of commerce, rivaled only by Fez. This was also the time when Rabat became an imperial city. Sultan Moulay Abd-er-Rahman made Rabat his residence briefly during the mid-nineteenth century²³. At this time, the Jewish population can be estimated to be approximately 3,000²⁴. Between 1859 and 1900, there was no appreciable increase in the number of Jews in the Mellah. Any in-migration was offset by the Jews who left, during the final years of the nineteenth century for North and South America to seek their fortune.

That the Mellah was planned is apparent in its regular layout - smaller straight streets that radiate from a central spine or the Rue de Mellah (fig. 11). These are clearly distinct from the winding streets found in other parts of the regular urban fabric of the Medina, which grew over time as an organic form. The aerial photograph (fig. 12) clearly brings out the difference in the texture of the fabric. The wall that separates the Mellah from the Medina is still visible at the entrance from the Rue Oukassa, although the gate that was in it no longer exists -

there are traces of the hinges on the walls that once supported it.

Recreating the ambience of the Mellah from the book by Goulven²⁵ and a conversation with Rabbi Mellul, the chief Rabbi of Rabat, who lived fifty years of his life in the Mellah - it was densely populated with a very simple and spare aspect. During the French Protectorate and following the establishment of the colonial city of Rabat outside the walls of the Medina, many Jews began to move out of the Mellah. They initially shifted across the Muraille Andalouse and the present Avenue Hassan II to the area that, was later called the New Mellah.²⁶ A number of them also moved to the suburbs and to Casablanca. Along with this outward movement from the Mellah was a corresponding movement of Jews into Rabat from other interior regions in Morocco.

The houses were small and the pattern of occupation of the new inhabitants followed that of the old. That is, there was more than one household to a residential unit, which was in itself not very large. The pattern of occupation reinforced itself - what followed was an increasing densification, further subdivision with a greater demand for low cost housing and consequent degradation because of the ownership structure. The houses were mostly owned by absentee landlords who rented out the houses to the largest number of families or small businesses.

The Mellah never had a good level of infrastructure to begin with and the population overload worsened the situation. In addition, the location ensured its literal and figurative marginalization with respect to the development of the Medina. The consequences of this neglect are glaringly visible - a deterioration in basic services, the built fabric and the overall quality of life, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

2.3 - The Cultural Significance of the Mellah

²⁵ J. Goulven, *“Les Mellahs de Rabat-Salé”*, Paris 1927
²⁶ *le Nouveau Mellah*

Moroccan culture and identity today is an amalgam of influences from the early Punic settlements, the Romans, the Berbers, Arabs, the various Jewish communities that came here over the centuries and finally, in the last major wave of immigrations, the Andalusian refugees - both Jewish and Muslim - whose influence is strongly felt in Northern Morocco and Moroccan urban architecture.

The Mellahs of Fez, Meknes, Marrakech and Tetouan are far larger than those of Rabat and Salé. They are older as well. The Mellah of Fez has a number of beautiful traditional houses and also a rich history of savants and was home for a number of years to the great Andalusian physician and philosopher, Maimonides. The Mellah of Marrakech has a similar history. Both these Mellahs also have a number of Jewish inhabitants, mostly poor, who continue to live there. There are a number of Jews who live in Morocco that consider it their home and have made a conscious decision to not migrate elsewhere. The role of Jewish communities is not something that is visible or tangible but nevertheless, is a part of the Moroccan history.

While the Mellahs are rightly perceived as an integral part of the Medina, they are also special. Given the long and diverse history of the Moroccan Jews who were as much Moroccan as Jewish²⁷, in my opinion, there needs to be a concerted effort at its recognition and commemoration. The treatment of the historic urban fabric in this quarter therefore, should take the dual history of the Mellah into account in order to achieve this. The conservation of the Mellahs, however, should be part of an overall conservation of the Medinas or walled cities - not a separate exercise in itself.

The Mellahs do not need to be romanticized - not that any influence in Moroccan culture needs to -

27 Deshen, Shlomo - the reference to Moroccan Jewry and to certain aspects of the culture of this group that are uniquely Moroccan and shared between the Muslims and the Jews in Morocco. And how these patterns, rituals have been re-created in other places that these Jews have migrated to and the nature of their transformation in turn.

or treated as a specially "Jewish" part of the town like a living museum, but their past should be a part of their future development in a manner that inculcates in their residents, Jewish or Muslim, a sense of a Moroccan identity - all that the country is today because of all its inhabitants, present and former.

3.1 - Locational Advantages, Problems and Potential

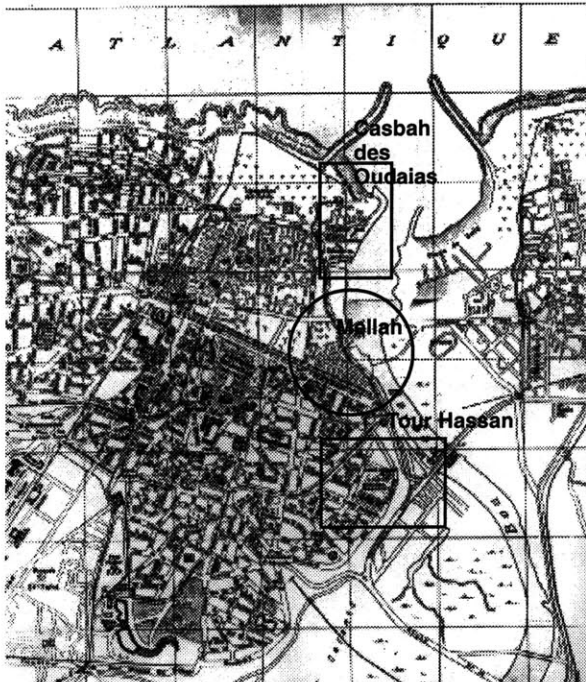


fig. 13 Map of Rabat showing the principal tourist locations in relation to the Mellah.

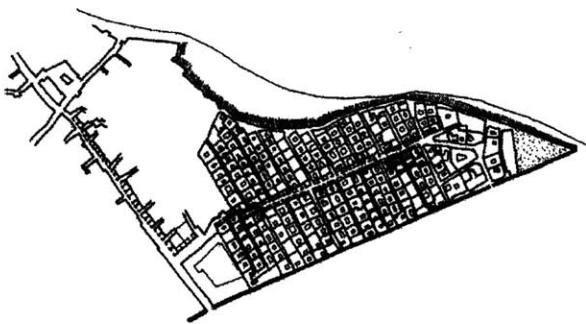


fig. 14 Plan of the Mellah

The Mellah is uniquely located with respect to the Medina, the new colonial city of Rabat and Salé across the BouRegreg estuary. (fig. 13) It has two gates at either end. One gate, the Bab al-Mallah, leads from the Avenue Hassan II into the Rue Oukassa that ends in the Rue des Consuls which is the main shopping street of the Medina. The other gate is the Bab Diouna, next to the Borj Sidi Makhoulouf. The Bab Diouna leads into the Mellah and overlooks the junction of the Avenue Hassan II with the road linking the Tour Hassan and the Casbah des Oudaias, two of the principal tourist attractions of Rabat. Across the Avenue Hassan II and close to the Rue du Mellah is also the central bus terminus of Rabat. The area around the Mellah if not the Mellah itself, is thus easily accessible.

The Mellah still retains its original physical layout. (fig. 14) The central spine or the Rue du Mellah has alleys that branch out from it on either side. The alleys perpendicular to the Muraille Andalouse are dead ends with the exception of one where the wall has been recently breached to create a doorway. The streets along the wall overlooking the Bouregreg river are not all dead ends - some of them open into the narrow alley that runs along the cliff.

The Mellah is closed to vehicular traffic, which ironically, has preserved it from the depredations of modern development and the new city across



fig.15 Street behind the Bab Diouna

the Muraille Andalouse. The portion that is immediately within the Bab Diouna is accessible to cars and the buildings that are around the small square inside the gate have all been modernized. (fig. 15) The Mellah has not however, been preserved from the decay caused by overcrowding and the pressures of poverty.

The historical separation of the Mellah from the Medina, in addition to the crowding that it had to bear, ensured its scrupulous maintenance by its Jewish inhabitants. The departure of the Jews was gradual at first. The 1967 war between Egypt and Israel precipitated the exodus and within three years there were less than ten percent of the original number of inhabitants left. There was a corresponding influx of Muslims into the Mellah.

The physical separation (there was a dividing wall with a gate that could be locked) and location maintained the literal and figurative marginalization of the quarter. Unlike the Rue des Consuls and neighboring Rue Souweika, it was of little economic or tourist interest. Although very lively commercially, the numerous little shops serve a local clientele, including the stalls that sell fresh produce. It is also difficult to access, being closed to vehicular traffic and open only at the two ends of the Rue du Mellah.

The Rue du Mellah is narrow. Uncluttered and empty, it will hold four persons walking side by side. It is lined with two and three storied residential buildings. Most of them have shops at the street level and apartments above them. The shops are restricted to the main spine and



fig.16 The Rue du Mellah on a weekday afternoon. With a typical morning crowd the street cannot be seen for everything else on it.



fig. 17 The dead-end street is named after the family Ben Attar

not to the alleys that branch off it. The shops mostly sell meat, groceries, spices, jewellery, tobacco and fruit and there are small tailoring establishments and hole-in-the-wall cafés that line the street.

In addition to these, each day, the Rue du Mellah contends with a second row of informal vending establishments on either side of the street.

(fig. 16) These are right on the street and with them, there is barely enough room for one person to walk through. Besides those passing through the street, there are people standing and bargaining with the vegetable and fruit vendors ensuring a sinuous and strained journey down the street even if unencumbered by a bag of groceries.

The cheapest fresh produce in all of Rabat is found here - a pointer to the socio-economic status of its inhabitants. The inhabitants of the Mellah today are mostly rural migrants to the city - largely therefore, tenants and poor.

Accommodation is inexpensive in this quarter in addition to its being the most densely populated part of the Medina.

House types are no longer homogenous. A number of the traditional courtyard houses were, even during their occupation by Jews, used by more than one family to a house. Since the Mellah was the only place that the Jews could live in, this was the only way that a disproportionately large number of families (around 3,000 individuals in all during the early twentieth century) could be housed within it. Today, the Mellah is more densely occupied than when only the Jews lived within its walls.



fig.18 Interior of the synagogue Bet Ha-Knesset Rabbi Shalom Azhawi in the Mellah

There is little memory of the former inhabitants of the Mellah - the Jewish population of Rabat. The main street of the quarter bears its name and some of the alleys that branch outwards from it that still are named after prominent members of the Jewish community.(fig. 17) The names are evocative of the diverse elements that made up the Jewish population in the city.²⁸ In 1960, the Jews still formed 74 percent of the population of the Mellah. By 1971, following the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967, the number had dropped sharply to 4.9 percent of the total population. There are now three remaining Jewish families that live on the edge of the Mellah, inside the Bab Diouna.

Behind these houses is a functioning synagogue that has been restored during the last decade, the Bet Ha-Knesset Rabbi Shalom Azhawi. (fig. 18) This synagogue is still visited and is a center of pilgrimage for a number of visitors who come from outside Rabat and the country to visit it.²⁹ There are a number of Jewish families who live in the area immediately across the Mellah in the new city, which for this reason was called the Nouveau Mellah or new Mellah. The Centre de la Communauté Israelite and the new synagogue are also located there.

3.2 - Patterns of Change - Past and Present

²⁸ Haim Zafrani's book and the reference to the common Jewish names found in Morocco - and how their origin could be traced from them. References to Spain, North Africa among others

²⁹ The Moroccan tradition (also seen in other countries in North Africa) of worshipping saints is common to Jewish and Muslim communities alike. In fact there are saints that are venerated by both communities as holy men with especial spiritual power regardless of their religion. The tradition of saint-veneration, pilgrimage and celebration of their death is similar to that observed in India, where the shrines of certain Sufi saints are visited by people of all sects.

I use three parameters used to describe the physical changes in the Mellah over the last ten years - population, immovable property and housing occupancy and infrastructure and how each of these relates to the overall built environment. These, with the economy, form the factors that are likely to be affected by the rehabilitation of the Mellah. The figures cited are

all taken from municipal records and from the rehabilitation proposal of the municipality of Rabat.

Population - Population densities have increased from about 1300 persons per hectare in 1988 to over 1400 persons per hectare currently. This has been a pattern of steady growth since 1960, when there were 995 persons per hectare. In 1971, there were 1180 persons per hectare. The total area of the Mellah is about 9 hectares or 13 percent of the total area of the Medina. That the Mellah contains about a quarter of the Medina's population, constitutes a serious burden on the available housing and infrastructure. This kind of density has repercussions not merely on the infrastructure, but also on hygiene and the general quality of life.

The overcrowding leaves little place for recreational area or public space. In fact, a major change in the built environment of the Mellah relates to this aspect as well as to the quality of life in the Mellah when it was occupied by the Jews. Partly because of a lack of space within the houses and partly because of the presence of a single large community, the street acted as a community space. The population of the Mellah came out into the Rue de Mellah at sundown, perhaps after the gates were locked.

Presently, the street is overcrowded with vendors and pedestrians during the day. At night, the families prefer to remain indoors. The street is empty. Perhaps it is due to the increased number of commercial establishments along the street that are closed at sundown. Houses no longer open directly onto the Rue de Mellah.

Immovable Property and Housing Occupancy - The population growth and demand for housing has led to a subdivision of properties, increasing the burden on the infrastructure and the degradation of immovable property. The average household size is 5.31 persons as compared to the figure of 4.55 for the Medina. The number of households per single residential unit is 2.03 as compared to 1.36 in the Medina. The number of persons per residential unit is 10.8 in the Mellah to only 6.19 in the Medina. The number of residential units per building is nearly twice that for the Medina - 3.05 to 1.6. Finally, there are 2.68 persons per room in the Mellah to 1.83 for the Medina. The statistics are alarming, even if we understand what lies behind the numbers.

The fact that even this level of housing has takers, gives little incentive to the landlord to upgrade their property. Most inhabitants of the Mellah - 76.5 percent of the total - are tenants. Owners comprise 21.5 percent of the residents of the Mellah. The rented units are usually smaller than those occupied by their owners - about 42 percent of rented units have 2 rooms, 20 percent 3 rooms, 20 percent only one room, 14 percent 4 rooms and 4 percent have 5 or more rooms.

Of the owner-occupied units, 36 percent have 3 rooms, 29 have 4 rooms, and about the same percentage comprise 5 or more rooms.

According to the 1994 report of a survey commissioned by the Municipality of Rabat-Hssaine, traditional³⁰ houses form about 18 percent, what is called "neo-traditional" 53 percent, modern houses, 19 percent and those of mixed style form 10 percent of all the houses.

30 The term traditional could be taken to mean houses that date from the time the Mellah was built. The newer, "neo-traditional" houses follow a traditional layout and have the same principal elements as the older houses, only they have been built during the early years of the twentieth century. This classification is thus based on the outwardly apparent architectural style and details. Even the modern houses are still built around courtyards, these being necessary for light and ventilation and also for the lifestyle of the inhabitants. The materials of construction however, are more recent than those of the neo-traditional houses.

The majority of tenants are not long-time occupants - they live in the Mellah for as long as it takes them to find better accommodation and jobs. This may be a few months to a few years. They then move either to a better quarter in the Medina itself or out to the suburbs. The average age of the inhabitants further confirms this trend. The majority, about 63.6 percent, is between 20 and 59 years of age.

This pattern of occupancy has, over time, occasioned a slow decay and degradation of the immovable property, some repairs where absolutely necessary and an air of neglect, even if there is a great deal of activity, life and bustle in the quarter. The repairs are usually without regard for the existing building material or the aesthetic and are incompatible both structurally and visually. Worse still, this structural incompatibility leads to further damage and cracks.³¹

The classification of the condition of the buildings is pessimistic - 57 percent of the buildings are in a passable state of maintenance, 26 percent are in poor condition and 6 percent are ruined. Only 11 percent are in good condition. Each year there are a few buildings that collapse. If the situation continues to remain what it is, there could be serious and life threatening consequences for the residents of many of these buildings in a short while.

31 Due to differing expansion quotients of the materials used in the repairs, for example, something as simple as cement instead of lime plaster, create further cracks and eventually, the plaster itself gets detached from the wall. The use of iron instead of more expensive and unavailable wood is also a case in point. In the sea air of Rabat, and the Mellah borders the estuary, the iron rusts, is itself weakened and in turn adversely affects the rest of the structure.

Infrastructure - The level of infrastructure is also poor. The basic services are of three categories - electricity, potable water and toilets. Most services are shared or common to a number of households. Of the total number of households

that have potable water, 56 percent of the total number share a drinking water source; 29 percent have a shared source of electricity; and 41 percent share the toilet.

The addition of water connections in an effort to 'modernize' the habitations, has another series of problems in its wake. This is a problem similar to that seen in Fez, where the improper installation of water pipes and leakage from them has adversely affected the construction of the old houses. The pipes are installed externally, since it is less expensive. Since they are badly installed, they often leak. The leakage of pipes above the ground, however, is not as damaging as that caused by pipes underground. The water penetrates the subsoil and affects the building foundations. The subsoil of Rabat being closely packed sand, the result is a slow sinking of the substrate and of the buildings with it. The sinking, in turn, leads to further cracks and structural damage. This is in addition to the lack of proper sanitation or maintenance.

3.3 - Prognosis

Quoting the above statistics and simply extrapolating to obtain more numbers what has passed earlier would mean nothing. Extrapolating on a pattern of change given past trends in some aspects and present trends with other aspects, is what I have used to construct a brief prognosis.

Without a conservation plan and given the pattern of change observed over the past decade, the future of the Mellah seems bleak. With the current rate of degradation of buildings and the overloaded infrastructure, it is a matter of time

before most properties fall into a ruined state. This in turn, would necessitate their total demolition and the owners would either sell or build anew. The buildings would most certainly not follow the traditional model, given the associations with the past, poverty and backwardness. The 'modern' constructions would be fitted with running water, toilets and electricity - and therefore, be rented out, if they were, at a higher cost.

Depending on the zoning, the uses would include more commercial space for shops and offices - leading to a pressure to introduce vehicular traffic into the streets. What would cause a problem is the Muraille Andalouse itself. It is protected³² and therefore will remain a barrier to the Mellah opening up to the Avenue Hassan II and the modern city that lies beyond it. There is limited parking outside the Muraille Andalouse, and the majority of the vehicles brought into the Mellah would be mopeds that are small and do not occupy space, but will result in noise and smoke pollution and make the already narrow streets impossible to negotiate for pedestrians.

There may be fewer residents in the Mellah, but the density of occupants during the daytime may not decrease significantly given an increase in commercial use and hence, in visitors to the quarter. The destruction of the traditional houses may result in their replacement by taller buildings that take full advantage of the floor area allowed them by the building codes. The principal design consideration would be profit - resulting in popular current styles. Given the

32 Lyautey ordered that the entire Medina including the wall be conserved for the future patrimony for the Moroccans. To quote from Janet Abu-Lughod's book, he wanted development for the French and development for the Moroccans, but separately. (get exact reference here -) Only the French had the right to break this rule - part of the Medina wall was pulled down in 193_ to build a municipal market on the site of an earlier market for horses.

location of the Mellah and its contiguity with the modern city beyond the wall, there would be attempts at emulating the architecture of the more recent buildings and to upgrade its image, even if largely invisible behind the wall.

The result would be a haphazard and incoherent hybrid that bears no temporal, spatial or stylistic relation to its immediate context (assuming that the Medina will continue to remain what it currently is). Although I am not arguing for a forced aesthetic, there is certainly a value to the more human scale and character of traditional elements as well as their references to a Moroccan identity that arises from a way of life and a building tradition that is uniquely adapted to it and to the climate. What would be left if things took their unguided course would result in a constructed 'maquette' identity for touristic consumption and subject to sectarian interpretation, depending upon the need of the political climate.

The municipality of Rabat has, with the collaboration of the cities of Lisbon and Marseilles (twin cities to Rabat) and the European Union, initiated a plan for the rehabilitation of the entire Medina and, within the ambit of the same plan, of the Mellah. The reason is that the Mellah is considered a unique part of the Medina by virtue of its history and place in the urban schema and is in addition, in desperate need of this kind of amelioration. The plan is a long term scheme that visualizes an overall improvement in the physical structure and the incorporation of tourist activity as an active component in improving the status of the

housing and the commercial activities that the Medina currently houses.

One of the objectives of this plan, besides the upgradation of the facilities and a general improvement in the condition of the built environment, is to attract a class of residents that makes the conscious choice to live in a restored "traditional" environment, in brief, a gentrification of the Mellah. This is what has happened in the Casbah des Oudaias - it is now inhabited by artists and wealthy Europeans who have restored their houses and live in a re-created 'past' ambiance.

The 'rehabilitated' Mellah would certainly look better, frozen in whatever historic period is determined by the authorities as best expressing Moroccan identity and heritage - but like the Casbah des Oudaias, be kept alive through artifice³³. In fact, it would be paradoxical if there is actually a separation and closure that is sought to retain the increased value of this space. The marginality of the Mellah with respect to the rest of the Medina may in fact, be a positive factor. However, since the wall cannot be touched, the Mellah will be always considered a part of the Medina and the association with it will not be entirely lost. The Mellah, although poor and in a state of neglect, is lively.

Either way, with or without the rehabilitation plan, the future development of the Mellah will result in completely changing its urban quality and the character of the fabric, to its detriment. Each of these scenarios is sufficiently alarming. A living fabric should be capable of absorbing change and transforming itself. Conservation of

³³ Choay, Françoise "L'Allegorie du Patrimoine", Editions du Seuil, Paris 1992, p. 174

urban areas should therefore integrate the past, present and future. This can only happen if we approach each of these through change which is the only way that they can exist together.

The greatest cities are not those that have been frozen for all time - for it is the evolution and change and the manner in which it occurs that makes these cities great and the unique living environments that they are. This is true for a traditional Islamic city. These cities have not always been the way that they are imagined to be - at the end of the nineteenth century, which is when most restoration would think it fit to stop. All time prior to then would be considered to not matter, unless it was the 'authentic' restoration of a monument.³⁴

34 Authenticity is often loosely determined and more often than not, if the details of a particular style or period are unclear can result in a pastiche that only does injustice to the original.

CHAPTER 4

CONSERVING THE MELLAH

“An oak, that grows from a small plant to a large tree, is still the same oak; tho’ be not one particle of matter, or figure of its parts the same’

- David Hume, “Treatise of Human Nature, Bk I, Pt 4, sect. 6, 1:538

In this chapter, the rehabilitation of the Mellah that has been proposed by the municipal authorities is examined for its feasibility in the light of the problems, changes and characteristics of the Mellah discussed in the previous chapter. The comparison with conservation plans selected as examples of good practice helps to emphasize the issues of context specificity and an appropriate rather than generalized treatment for the various issues. The need to rethink the approach to history and consequently, planning for the conservation of a traditional urban fabric is set within the ongoing critical discourse in the field of heritage conservation as well as recent planning efforts in the regeneration of urban neighborhoods

4.1 - The Municipal Rehabilitation Proposal

The proposal is a long term scheme that visualizes an overall improvement in the physical structure. The principal features of the plan are the improvement of infrastructure, repair and restoration of ruined built structures or those in poor condition, a reduction of population density and an eventual replacement of the present inhabitants by a more affluent section of the population who, it is hoped will better maintain the quarter.

Envisaged are improvements to the physical fabric of the Mellah, its connection to the rest of

the Medina and to the city outside the walls and thereby to the main tourist poles of the city (refer fig. 13) - the Quartier des Oudaïas, la Tour Hassan and the Rue des Consuls. The association with tourist activity is hoped to actively contribute to the improvement of the status of the housing and the commercial activities that the Medina currently houses.

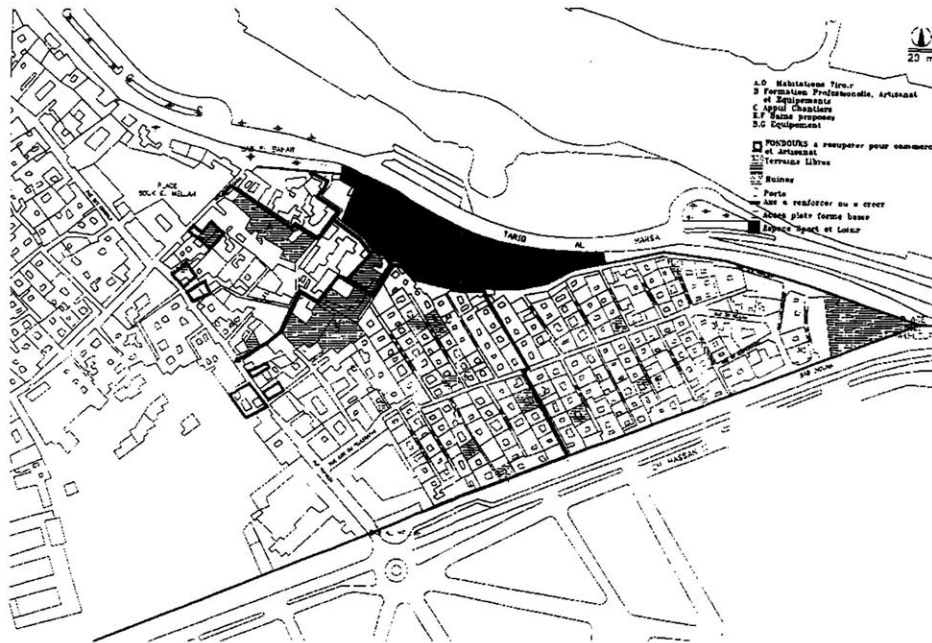


fig. 19 Plan for the proposed rehabilitation of the Mellah and the adjacent Taneries.

There is also a plan to develop the quarter adjacent to the Mellah called Les Taneries (fig. 19). There are no longer any tanneries in this quarter, but it contains a number of fondouks or inns that are in a ruined condition. These are now occupied by small repair establishments or squatter settlements.

The design solution proposed by the municipal authorities in conjunction with a local architect proposes adaptive re-use and some new construction to rehabilitate the urban fabric. The plan suggests a combination of residential and commercial uses with some related institutional

buildings in this zone. The former fondouks will be converted into workshops for artisans and have workspaces as well as commercial outlets and a crafts museum.

This scheme is aimed at keeping traditional crafts alive and supporting the craftsmen by association with tourist activity. A proposed hotel on the site next to these ateliers will provide tourist accommodation within the Medina. Crafts and tourism are interrelated and thus more likely to succeed in the objective of economic revitalization of this area. Some low cost housing has also been proposed in the Tanéries in addition to the hotel and the craft workshops. The housing is in separate blocks and not integrated either with the development next to it or with the traditional housing in the surrounding urban fabric. However, its provision also reflects a continual need to house migrants into the city.

Thus, the Mellah as the center of the planned linkage between the Rue des Consuls, the Casbah des Oudaïas and the Tour Hassan should benefit both from the adjacency of the Tanéries and from the secondary commercial activity generated by the presence of tourists and visitors to it. What the design solution does not address is the question of architectural style, the form of the surrounding urban context. This is due to the fact that there are no guidelines for either individual buildings or urban areas. The absence of guidelines can lead to entirely inappropriate design interventions of which the partially implemented scheme for the Rue des Consuls is an example.



figs. 20, 21 Different roofing treatments for the Rue des Consuls

35 As a port, Rabat was not the best on the Moroccan coast due to the shallow Bouregreg estuary, that ships easily ran aground in. Entry was limited for this reason and this feature was exploited by the Salé corsairs to make their getaway, since the pursuing ships were reluctant to follow them into this stretch of water.

The Rue des Consuls is the main commercial street of the Medina and the most highly frequented by tourists and visitors. Both the street and the quarter around it have a rich and interesting history that is related to the development of Rabat during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a small fortified citadel into the second capital of the Sultan. Being a port,³⁵ the consulates of a number of European nations that traded with Morocco were located here. France, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Portugal all had a presence in the city.

The Rue des Consuls ran along the edge of the estuary and the port and was near all the warehouses. It was also the area of the Medina where the Jews formerly lived before the creation of the Mellah. In fact, this is attested to by houses that still bear remains of elements only found in Moroccan Jewish houses, like balconies (refer figure 6). A recent design intervention for the Rue des Consuls takes little note of this history. In fact, the consulates that were located along this street are still plaques on the wall.

However, the problem is stated as having to define the street and emphasize its unique character. This has been done through dividing it into four sections, that sell different kinds of crafts and roofing them differently to make each section distinct from the others. (figs. 20,21) The street has been re-paved in a star pattern and a central shallow channel put into the paving to drain run-off. The roofing ranges from a contemporary interpretation of the traditional bamboo strip matting that very effectively shades the Rue Souweika to arched iron trusses covered



fig. 22 The oldest bank building in Rabat on the Rue des Consuls, cut in half by the covered street.

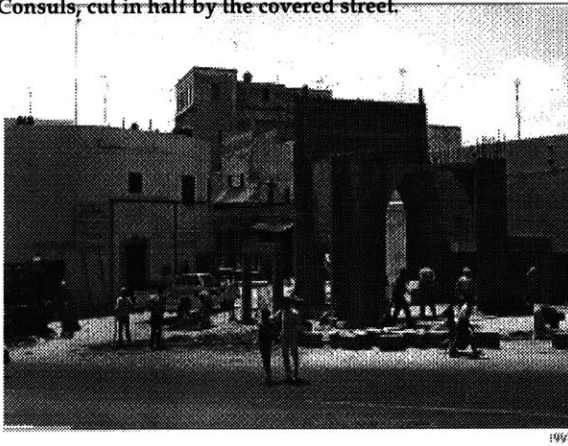


fig. 23 The gate of the Casbah des Oudaïas

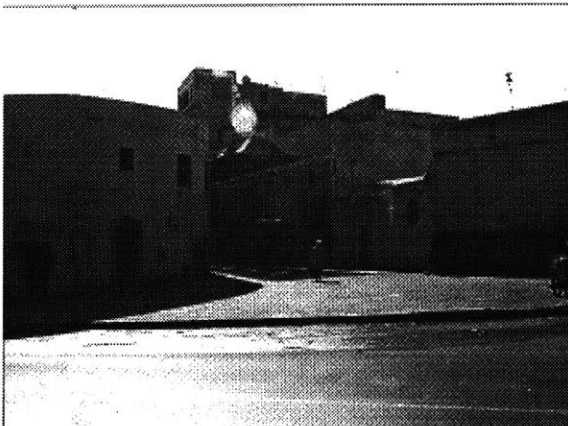


fig.24 The entry to the Rue des Consuls with and without the controversial concrete gate that faced the Oudaïas gate.

with plexiglass that are out of scale with the narrow street.

Each section is entered through an arched gateway that signifies entry into a quarter. The contemporary interpretations are expensive and in no way contribute to the revival or support of traditional craft or building techniques. With all the commercial activity taking place on either side of the street, so many elements seem unnecessary.



Another problem is that the lower roofing elements divide the building facades and block the view from the upper stories to the street below. (fig. 22). A reinforced concrete gateway was then proposed at the beginning of the street in order to mark its entrance and to provide a visual counterpoint to the beautiful gate of the Casbah des Oudaïas that faces it.(fig. 23) The arch was built and later pulled down after a prominent architect published his protest. (fig. 24)

The course of this project is illustrative of the underlying conflict between the principles of development and those of conservation (as both are currently defined). The character of the Rue

des Consuls is definitely emphasized but it has lost its architectural and urban context. It is only a passage defined by shops on either side and the roofing above that lets in or keeps skylight out at will.

The references to the historic are in decoration and individual elements. For example, the flooring pattern on the renewed paving is composed of a central line of twelve pointed stars at intervals and inlaid in red stone. The stars are seen in the magnificent ceramic zelliges on the walls of traditional buildings and popularly considered an "Islamic" and hence appropriate pattern. At times, the use of these decorative star motifs on otherwise modern glass clad buildings is all that places them in a physical context.

There is not only a lack of any definite vision for the development of the Medina but a disregard for historic patterns of growth and change. Until these patterns are studied and understood, it is premature to talk of heritage conservation or of any development strategy. In the context of the Mellah, the problem becomes all the more pressing since it is not only a part of the Medina but has its own unique history. There are more issues than the ones acknowledged by the current rehabilitation proposal. Without the consideration of these issues, the plan will not achieve its stated objectives.

4.2 - Additional Issues and Concerns in Evaluating the Proposal

While the Mellah is not an obvious tourist destination (perhaps a very limited and select group may visit it for personal reasons), it does not mean that it will not suffer from the same

problems in dealing with its past. It may suffer from them to a lesser extent, but the Mellah could easily, with the wrong intentions, be subjected to historic distortion, banalization and de-valuation of its intrinsic value. This is without directly admitting tourism into the idea of its development.

While improving infrastructure and the housing stock are important components of any plan, they alone cannot be carried out to achieve the plan intentions without duly considering the following unanswered questions:

- the history of the Mellah and its effect on the actual restoration;
 - the structure of land tenure ;
 - gentrification and issues of social equity;
 - who bears the costs;
 - implementation agencies and mechanisms ;
- and
- the sustainability of the entire process with reference to its future growth and achieving a development equilibrium.

These concerns, while not quantifiable, have a bearing upon the approach and the consequent self regenerating capacity of the urban fabric that any conservation plan should result in. Of direct relevance to the conservation of the Mellah, they are important to the evaluation of any conservation plan. The proper identification of these concerns indicate the appropriate realms of intervention and the methods of realizing the intentions of the plan.

History is a major reason for the importance of the Mellah but finds no mention in the proposal for rehabilitation neither is there any elaboration

upon how this historic character will be dealt with. This begs the question of the history itself, its presentation and understanding. The assumption is that a selective restoration of buildings and an improvement in the infrastructure will be enough to achieve this end. If this historic character is to be retained, the next question is whether it is determined by the character of the buildings alone or by its residents. Is the historic value based upon age or upon the quarter's original occupants being a unique group within the city?

The change in the occupation of the Mellah with the replacement of its former Jewish inhabitants by Muslims has meant a change in the way of life³⁶ and cultural and religious mores to which the houses have been modified and adapted. However, the changes to the basic layout and to the individual elements are more a function of the increased occupancy than of a fundamental difference in lifestyle.

Even the Jewish families that still live in the Mellah have introduced changes to the buildings that they occupy. These changes, interestingly, are mainly due to modernizing the houses and their infrastructure and to the change in lifestyle caused by these factors. The building that one Jewish family lived in was itself built in 1935. Its recent date was a matter of great pride to the owners. The value ascribed to newness has to be taken into account while planning for restoration.

The provision for restoration seems to be only on the basis of age value and that too of selected buildings. Age value alone can be a tenuous

36 Religious practice and ritual apart, Moroccan Jewish or Muslim families are a part of the same social and historic context. At the main synagogue, the Shabbat service was in Hebrew and sermon in Arabic. A large number of Jewish families in Morocco still speak Arabic, though the younger generation now studies and speaks French.

basis for restoration since it needs to be decided that a certain style be chosen as 'authentic' or representative of 'old' or traditional housing in the Mellah and all reconstruction or restoration done accordingly. The other difficulty lies in the lack of adequate documentation for each house as it was - either originally or during this selected historic period. Further, there was change in the buildings of the Mellah even during its occupation by the Jewish community.

While there is a mention of the restoration of ruined buildings or those in poor condition, it is not clear whether the restoration will be carried out according to any design guidelines or if the design guidelines exist at all. While it is necessary to identify significant buildings within the quarter and to restore them, it is equally important to retain the character of the entire fabric. Even if a ruined building is restored, the question will arise as to which style or period it should be restored to. Since the layout and subsequent form of the traditional house were a function of its use and type of occupation, any change in the latter would mean a change in the physical aspect of the house. This brings us back to the question of the purpose of the exercise - whether it is focused upon the appearance of the physical fabric or its larger function.

The conservation plan for Zanzibar dealt with the entire Stone Town. The problem was the continued relevance of the town and urban fabric in the face of modernization and development. The urban fabric was undergoing a slow process of decay as a result of a flight of population out of the old walled town. Revitalisation and

restoration were the main priorities along with the familiar problem of upgrading an old and inadequate infrastructure that was contributing to the degradation of the physical fabric.

The plan called for a comprehensive study of the social economic, legal and institutional structure in addition to a detailed survey of the buildings in the town. The principal questions asked after the study regarded the problems that the historic area of the town was likely to face in the future; and how its development could be made "a part of a process for balanced and sustainable growth for Zanzibar's entire urban area?"³⁷

The population was unlikely to increase, unlike the case in the Medina and Mellah of Rabat. The town center was the destination of goods and the main commercial outlet and also provided services for the surrounding areas that lacked them. The pressure on the town center was thus different from that on the Rabat Medina which is self contained in terms of its population and services for them. The pressure is more internal from the increasing population and its overdependence on a limited and crumbling infrastructure.

An earlier plan developed by a Chinese team had proposed two separate centers outside the town to reduce dependence on the Stone Town's infrastructure. The Stone Town would be come a residential and tourist area and the accompanying conversion of institutional buildings to uses that would support tourism and an apparently more affluent population. The main problem with this plan was one of resources. The other problem was that the

³⁷ p.117, "Zanzibar : A Plan for the Historic Stone Town" the Aga Khan Trust for Culture - Historic Cities Support Programme, 1996.

development would be skewed with tourist activities and the ancillary infrastructure taking precedence over developing and improving residential structures - for obvious commercial reasons. The congestion would not be lessened, but increased with an undesirable change in the character of the Stone Town.

The approach of the new plan was more realistic and based upon a study of patterns of living and change. A mix of residential, commercial and institutional uses that already existed was seen as a better mechanism for retaining the character of the town. The continued use of the built fabric and important buildings in it would remain controlled thus ensuring a more effective and lasting conservation than merely restoring the building shells with no relevance to their use. More important, the historic importance of the town as the hub of the urban settlement is preserved without having to resort to forced or external measures.

This is also a better way of dealing with the history of the town. There is change and adaptation but not a complete rupture with earlier patterns. The new evolves constantly from what has gone immediately before. This is also a process that is generated from within rather than imposed from without. I will refer to this approach in the context of sustainable growth later in this discussion.

This approach to the past that focuses on patterns of change is a possibility when dealing with the Mellah. While there has been a loss of the group that originally gave this quarter its *raison d'être*, the replacement of the Jews by a

Muslim population still ensures a cultural continuity within a much broader ambit. We need to draw clues from this broader cultural continuity in dealing with the conservation approach and actual strategies.

There are no monumental or significant structures to serve as memorials except for one synagogue that remains of the three originally in the Mellah. The synagogue is still used and has been restored by the community during the last ten years and is likely to remain in continuous use. The houses have been altered and adapted but not fundamentally. By this I mean that their layouts still retain the traditional courtyard pattern. This is a feature of a traditional Moroccan house, whether Muslim or Jewish.

The modifications that have been made are both because of the need to modernize and because of the changed occupancy of the Mellah. The changed occupancy has led to a further subdivision of the houses and also to a modification of certain building elements. These changes have been discussed in the previous chapter. The streets and alleys are still named after prominent members of the Jewish community when they occupied the Mellah and should be left untouched.

The pattern of occupancy and change in use of buildings and space, should generate the clues to dealing with the built fabric. There needs to be a set of broad guidelines that governs use of materials, dimensional requirements and an appropriate handling of building elements that are important to the specific character of the built fabric. However, this strategy needs to be

accompanied by the easy and inexpensive availability of craftsmen and labor. It would be a greater incentive to continuing in the established pattern than any regulatory or punitive measures.

A practical measure in conjunction with the guidelines and one with long term implications, would be to set up a detailed inventory of building techniques and solutions for small repairs and additions - that is in the format of a directory and based upon traditional construction and craft techniques. This would serve the dual purpose of maintaining the form and character of the Mellah's built fabric in continuity. The construction reference manual³⁸, in tandem with a reduction of the bureaucracy that the house owner has to pass through before being allowed to undertake any alterations or repairs, needs serious consideration at the level of the institutional framework. This is a measure that can serve in the conservation of the Medina as well.

Gentrification is another valid concern and has been the usual consequence of the physical preservation of urban areas. The municipal rehabilitation proposal for the Rabat Mellah sees an eventual displacement of persons out into what are called "zones d'accueil"³⁹ till improvements are carried out in the Mellah. The subsequent increase in the value of property would result in either tenancy or ownership that provides better maintenance. The Mellah's proximity to the commercial strip outside the walls in the new city and to the major tourist attractions, in addition to the new Tanéries, is

38 Marconi, Paolo "Il Restauro e l'Architetto", Saggi Marsilio, Venice 1993

39 During the conservation of the historic core of Bologna in Italy, there were large scale structural improvements and reconstructions that had to be carried out. The inhabitants of these buildings had to be rehoused while the repairs and restructuring was underway. The areas where they were temporarily accommodated were the equivalent of these "zones d'accueil". It is difficult to find an English equivalent of the term itself and I therefore use it in the original French. In the case of Rabat, the zones d'accueil would also serve to house migrants from the rural areas once the Mellah inhabitants have been rehoused in the improved quarter.

expected to draw more affluent residents to this quarter. This will serve the dual purpose of better maintenance and reducing the present density of the Mellah to at least that of the rest of the Medina⁴⁰.

Depending on the affordability of the properties in the Mellah, the displaced tenants will choose to return or live elsewhere. The mechanics of the transfer to the zones d'accueil and the possibilities of the current residents making the choice to return or to leave are not clear.

Assuming that one of the plan objectives is to reduce the population density in the rehabilitated Mellah, it is also necessary to think about alternative accommodation outside of the bidonvilles that they will end up living in. There is also a larger question of social equity that most poor urban areas need to deal with and this is important in the case of the Mellah as well.

One of the basic considerations that the Amsterdam Declaration of 1975 emphasizes is that

(T)he rehabilitation of old areas should be conceived and carried out in such a way as to ensure that, where possible, this does not necessitate a major change in the social composition of the residents, all sections of the society should share in the benefits of restoration financed by public funds.

The idea of public financing could also do with some modification - some private investment and a financial stake in the upgradation of their property would ensure a continued habitation of these areas by the former residents. A choice needs to be offered to the residents - to stay on or move out, with the provision of alternative accommodation or incentives that help the poor find suitable places to live in. In the case of

40 The population density would have to be reduced to at least that of the Medina, which is nearly half of the present density of the Mellah.

Rabat, they would otherwise move to the bidonvilles around the city in order to afford living close to their place of work⁴¹.

The extreme poverty seen in the Mellah needs to be and not moved out elsewhere by shifting out poorer residents. Nor is gentrification necessarily the solution to conserving the physical urban fabric. Resulting from preservation, it implies a certain rigidity, a lack of change and would only result in a mummification or an embalming of sorts. The urban fabric needs to be flexible and responsive to the needs of a diverse and changing social and religious composition. The flexibility would also ensure its continued relevance in the face of change. This is in accordance with one of the recommendations of the Amsterdam Declaration referred to above,

that the conservation of ancient buildings helps to economize resources and combat waste, one of the major preoccupations of present-day society.

This idea of resource conservation is important in thinking about development alternatives, especially in societies that are still in a state of transition from one set of values to another.

A more productive and resource-efficient way of dealing with rehabilitation would be a greater public involvement. Giving the residents of the Mellah a stake in their development through actual financial participation would better serve to address the issue of ameliorating urban decay and retain the inhabitants. This would also mean a greater flexibility with funds and not have the responsible government agency bear all the cost

⁴¹ Abu-Lughod, Janet "Rabat - Urban Apartheid in Morocco", Princeton 1980

of the entire project. The issue of cost, incidentally is a principal reason why the rehabilitation proposal has been hanging fire and not moved to the stage of becoming full-fledged plan.

This leads us to the issue of institutional structure and responsibility. Who will take up what aspects of the plan? Does the plan take into account the existing institutional structure or are its intentions outside its scope and hopes to generate the methods or tools to achieve its aims? The latter is a risk, especially when the costs involved are high. Since we are primarily focusing on poorer economies in this discussion, it is all the more important that a plan take the existing institutional framework into account before suggesting any strategies for conservation or future growth.

Very often, institutions that carry out conservation are created after the approach has been decided. There is a dissonance between the values adopted by the institution and those of the society that it aims at influencing. The one-sided participation that results has higher costs and leaves less room for creative and low cost solutions that ordinary persons are able to participate in.

In Rabat, it is the Rabat Hssaine division of the Municipal Corporation that will be responsible for carrying out the rehabilitation, when it is finally realized. There is no special provision for this kind of task within the municipal corporation. The perception of the institution by the ordinary residents is also important to note. Dissociation from the authorities can be a



fig. 25 Plan of the Hafsia Quarter, Tunis



fig. 26 The Hafsia Quarter in Tunis - street view and detail showing adapted traditional element

42 The Association Sauvegarde de la Medina of Tunis is composed of a design and construction unit, a financial and administrative unit and employs a team of craftsmen.

43 Traditional architectural and urban elements were used - balconies with trellised ironwork, color on doorways and whitewashed houses characterize buildings. The use of proportions, street widths and other traditional urban design elements ensure a sense of continuity with the contiguous urban quarters.

positive factor. It also generates local initiative.

The case of the Hafsia quarter in Tunis was similar to the extent that it was also the old Jewish quarter. Where it differed was that it had been abandoned when the Jews moved out into more affluent areas or migrated abroad. The buildings were ruined and restoration was out of the question. The ASM - Association Sauvegarde de la Medina⁴² - made the decision to rebuild the quarter and to provide low-cost housing in it. The new housing was not strictly on the traditional model, but employed some traditional elements.⁴³ (figs. 25, 26) The construction used contemporary methods and materials but was to the scale of its larger urban context.

There was also a planned reinsertion and revival of economic activity in the quarter that was designed to primarily serve local needs. The Mellah of Rabat is different in the sense that it is still inhabited and contains a great deal of economic activity. Whether this level of economic activity was originally a part of the Mellah or not, it is essential to the life in the quarter. The decision that needs to be made is whether to retain the present social mix in the Mellah or not. This question has broader implications for the future life of traditional cities that co-exist with their modern extensions.

In order for the urban structure to retain its relevance, it needs residential and commercial activity that fits. The rehabilitation plan for the Mellah is not clear on the issue of commercial activity either. It probably assumes that in due course, the commercial activity will change its character to suit its inhabitants.

Conservation unlike preservation, should be an ongoing process. This implies what Françoise Choay refers to as 'maintenance'. A continuous process of change is also implicit, in keeping with the argument that the urban fabric needs to be constantly evolving in order to remain relevant. The conserved urban fabric should thus be able to sustain itself but not through either tourism or through an "own and operate" effort on the part of the government.⁴⁴

Both plans for the Hafsia quarter in Tunis and the Stone Town of Zanzibar include future development that is not dependent upon tourism unlike so many preserved parts of urban fabric elsewhere in the world. They also take into account the relationship of the urban fabric with the rest of the city. The growth and development of the part is thus seen as linked to and interdependent on the whole. This is an approach that is more linked to real needs as well as to actual resource availability. It is more likely to be flexible and responsive to local needs and the situation.

The proposal for the Mellah does mention the integration of the quarter with the rest of the city beyond the walls. However, the integration is in the context of tourism development in adjacent areas both within the city and immediately outside the walls. The replacement of the poorer inhabitants of the Mellah by more affluent residents and the reduction in population density resulting from an increase in property values, is seen as vital to its maintenance. The rehabilitation proposal however, does not give any idea of the density that it hopes to achieve in

⁴⁴ Refer Stefano Bianca, Chapter 2, pp. 13-32, in J. Mark Schuster, ed "Preserving the Built Heritage – Tools for Implementation", University Press of New England, Hanover, 1997

relation to the infrastructural improvements suggested or proposed. It could be the same as that of the Medina currently or some other figure. There is no determinant to establish an optimal level of occupancy that is proportional to the infrastructure.

The reason that the idea of sustainable growth is important for the Mellah is that it could be a pointer to a development approach for the rest of the Medina so that the walled city need not be an isolated but protected entity. The Medina is alive economically and does not suffer from an exodus of its inhabitants. It is the reverse that is true.

The challenge here is to retain its character and to improve the condition of its building stock while avoiding turning it into a gentrified enclave and a larger appendage to the Casbah des Oudaïas and the tourist industry.

4.3 - Re-evaluating the Approach

The Italian urbanist, Giovannoni held that the conservation of traditional quarters and urban centers and their integration into the present (and the future) was not possible unless they were compatible with the larger urban scale and its morphology. However, the types and scale of interventions need to be carefully considered.

These traditional fabrics are fragile and dependent on a complex web of subtle social and economic interactions. While they have a resilience to changes in function and form, these have been incremental and not traumatic as with those caused by the sudden transition to modernity.

This integration of form and function is behind the study of patterns of change to determine the

capacity of the fabric for adaptation and mutation. Introducing transportation networks that are the basis for modern cities into them would tear the fabric apart irreversibly. Instead, interventions that bridge past and present uses could ease the transition. These consist of uses that impact the built environment in similar ways to the previous social, economic and institutional networks that it harbored. The difference is that this approach to conservation is based upon change and not upon a recreation of an imagined or actual past, however authentic.

The mellah is both monument and setting in that it contains a unique memory of a community and its history. It is also a part of a larger urban fabric and itself has the same character. It has the mnemonic qualities of the monument but as part of the city, bears witness to change and is changed in its turn. Thus the problem of its conservation has an inherent duality. The approach to conserving the Mellah should come out of the consideration of this duality. Thus a conservation plan, either existing or proposed, can be evaluated on the basis of whether it respects these two and the methods by which both factors become part of an integration into its future development.

The municipal rehabilitation proposal for the Mellah, is progressive in that it advocates its development and integration with the new city. There is, however, no need to introduce any new commercial activity - it is already alive and vibrant, if not too much so. There is also no need to reintroduce people into the quarter either - it suffers from an overpopulation. The proposed

interventions largely concern infrastructure improvements. While these are in themselves necessary and good, the manner in which they are incorporated into the built fabric is linked with the problems of restoration and the expression of the history of the quarter in its buildings. There needs to be an attitude to the historical prior to dealing with the infrastructure and buildings.

The expression of history does not have to state the obvious and announce that this quarter once harbored the Rabati Jews. It is implicit in the form and individual buildings and the layout of the Mellah. An important aspect of the expression of the Mellah's historic importance or value, is communicating it to its residents first and then to visitors. This however, will not work unless the needs of the present inhabitants are respected as well. The uniqueness of the quarter therefore could be a feature to emphasize in its development. That the Mellah is like any other section of the Medina but different, might be a clue to its physical rehabilitation.

With physical restoration or rehabilitation, we have to take cognizance of the inhabitants' needs and their capacity to contribute to this process. An intervention that is carried from without costs more in financial and social terms and would not be self-sustaining. Community participation is thus necessary at the beginning of the process and any institutional provisions have to take this into account.

Related to the issue of community participation and local institutions, is that of the crafts and building traditions used in carrying out this task.

The *moallems* or builders who are trained in traditional techniques still exist and their skills could be used on a regular basis at the local level by the residents instead of having to rely upon an architect or upon more recent building materials and techniques which may not be compatible with the older materials and the forms that they generate. This might be less expensive, more lasting, and in the long run, a better solution to the problem of maintenance and adaptation of the old to the contemporary.

The approach is context specific and is drawn from the particular demands of the situation. This is the basis for the approach to urban conservation as well, since each place and city is different and unique. The similarities may warrant like methods, but the problem is never the same. The problematic of the conservation of the Mellah includes a historical aspect that is not clear and distinct like a specific event or related to an individual. It is one that is found in many diverse societies and especially those still in a state of transition to modernity and searching at the same time, for their own identities. The inclusion of change into the Mellah's conservation is ironically, the only way of keeping its memories and the sense of continuity.

CHAPTER 5

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

"The spectacle, being the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is in effect a false consciousness of time."

- Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle.

5.1 - Redefining the Problem

This chapter takes the problem of urban conservation beyond the context of the Mellah into more fundamental concerns that cross other geographic and cultural contexts. The setting for a discussion of the complexities of this problem is the ongoing critical reappraisal of the aims of conservation and preservation of heritage by David Lowenthal and Françoise Choay. The inadequacy of current conservation policies and practices calls the necessity of a universal attitude into question and to rephrase the Venice Charter, the framework of culture and traditions needs to come before the principles of conservation and plan formulation. With this in mind, I suggest an alternative set of principles and a set of strategies derived from these principles which apply specifically to the situation of the Mellah.

The Venice Charter was the first document to include the urban or rural setting within the scope of preservation. They were emphasized as monuments and once classified as such, to be treated accordingly. Their principal function was as historical evidence and thus commemorative. If we accept that a monument has a particular commemorative function or is historical evidence, then it must be, according to the Charter, preserved as it is - unchanged to the extent that we can establish an authentic character or negatively affect its meaning.

The urban fabric also contains the ordinary and the quotidian and at the moment of preservation or establishment of its significance, is the result

of many years of change and transformation. It is the continuous (or discontinuous) transformation that has in fact, given to the fabric its particular character. To treat the urban fabric as a monument would negate this ability to evolve, which is its essence. A number of initiatives that aim to conserve either parts of the urban fabric or entire cities have required that the urban form remain unchanged and also its individual buildings.

While providing valuable evidence of how we once lived, this has resulted in an appreciation of its façades rather than its functioning. The preservation of the visual experience then becomes central to defining the problem and preparing a solution. In order that the preserved fabric be then 'socially useful' and seen by the maximum number of people, it becomes an object of cultural tourism. Even when not subjected to tourism, the visual parameter dominates any conservation action. The restoration is an effort at authenticity, which further locks it into a single period of time.

Conservation is mainly driven by preservation - as mentioned before, the past is not incorporated as a living component of the present except by artifice. The emphasis on the visual directs what should be done with the built environment. Visual appreciation is opposed to really experiencing a place or environment. It is recreated in some image that is frozen in time and no longer subject to change, either within itself or in relation to what happens around it.

The link with tourism as a principal means of sustaining this 'frozen' or recreated environment ties in very well with the idea of the historic as artifact. While cultural tourism may be the best way of making monuments socially 'useful', it is usually detrimental in the case of entire urban areas or historic cities. The entire city or part of it is converted into a setting and the culture that is portrayed is then a travesty. This is seen in the

case of Fez - one of the most famous examples of a World Heritage Site. An entire city was to be preserved for posterity as a cultural artefact.

The problem stated was that change and modernization would destroy the valuable urban fabric that was the repository of a culture and tradition. Implicit in this argument is the view of a culture that does not change or evolve and that the preservation of the urban fabric would preserve the culture as well. Both are static and objects - immutable and on view forever⁴⁵. This attitude to the past is a legacy of French colonialism - they would take care of Morocco's past while leaving them the future. This is a view that is now institutionalized sometimes to the extent of being utopian and unrealistic.

The prevention of any sort of changes in Fez in order to preserve it has been worse than allowing for selective improvements and adaptations. The steady deterioration of infrastructure and the inadequacy of the facilities for the population within the Medina has negatively affected the built fabric. Since nothing can be done unless it is a complicated and expensive measure of restoration that the government can no longer afford, only a steady and overall deterioration can result. There is no maintenance of the built heritage, which if things continue on the present course may become quite literally, a thing of the past. This is ironically, the reverse of the original intention of the conservation plan.

Since the urban fabric is subject to change and should be in order that it stay alive and continuously relevant, more attention needs to be paid to its treatment and conservation. A living city is a monument since it has a mnemonic function. However, its mnemonic function is not the same as that of an intentional monument⁴⁶. Therefore, to apply the same values as for a monument to it, and to take the same kind of conservation action on it, will finally not achieve the desired intention of keeping it alive.

⁴⁵ refer the *Loi Malraux*, Choay, 1992.

⁴⁶ refer Riegl's classification, p.23, "The Modern Cult of Monuments", *Oppositions* 25, 1984

What about areas that are not architecturally significant but create the urban fabric that is prized for its character? This is a point that is partially relevant to the approach to the Rabat Mellah as it is to any other quarter or section of a traditional city. Preservation alone will not stand for conservation in this case. Like the oak tree, it is subject to change but remains what it essentially is. That should be the end of conservation. We need to therefore think of an approach that is more likely to achieve this end.

The goals of conservation are the usual victims of generalization which the universal approach to heritage espouses. I hold that these goals differ in each specific context and only very broadly, at the level of rhetoric, hold true for all situations. We should be more aware of our past in a given in any situation, but what that past is and how it relates to the present is not something that all contexts share.

5.2 - The Importance of Context

It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and be laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan *within the framework of its own culture and traditions.*
(italics mine)

- The Venice Charter, 1964

The preamble of the Venice Charter contains an inherent contradiction. The fact that these principles also are products of a cultural framework - one that values the past in a certain manner. Another culture may not and depending upon the forces of history that it has been subject to, find greater value in what is new. The process of living with their history may be a continuous one with little distinction between past and present.

This problematic is more significant in the case of traditional urban fabrics than with monuments.

It is here that there is a real conflict between preserving a sort of status quo and the more dynamic forces of development. It is also here that the difference in the principles of one set of cultural values and another remain unresolved and only lead to chaos. Therefore, taking into account a country's framework of culture and tradition may necessitate re-examining the principles of conservation that are based on certain notions of heritage that resulted from historic conditions in industrialized Europe.

Also in societies that are by their nature diverse and composed of different ethnic and religious groups, the use of urban space is subject to different social, economic and spatial dynamics. One group may no longer live in an area and its occupancy by another may bring about alterations in the fabric caused by a different style of living. The Rabat Mellah is a case in point. The quarter is now inhabited by a Muslim instead of a Jewish population⁴⁷.

This change, in addition to an increase in density, has effected modifications to the houses to suit the community's way of life. However, this replacement is not a simple transfer of ownership from one community to another. The tenure and ownership is mixed, necessitating a fine-grained observation of each group of cases in order to plan for a solution.

Even within the same country or cultural context, there are differences. The problems of one Mellah in Morocco may not be the same as those of another. For example, the Mellah in Marrakech is still inhabited by a number of Jewish families who are in greater proportion to the Muslim families than in Rabat. It is also ten times its size in area and the second oldest Mellah after Fez dating from the sixteenth century. Its spatial layout and occupation by the two communities is also different from that of Rabat, as is its relation to the old and new cities and its economic component. Hence, apart from

47 Although there are still three Jewish families and one working synagogue in the Mellah, it is necessary to note that all of them are located now immediately inside the Bab Diouna, an area that is on the edge of the Mellah and considered by its residents to not be a part of it.

the broad issue of Jewish history in Morocco, the specifics of the community's or the city's history, the patterns of change in social, economic and built environments would all need to be considered in order to frame a particular problem and then its solution. The case studies cited of the inner city of Bologna, the Hafsia quarter of Tunis, the Stone Town of Zanzibar, and Fez could be all read as the same problem – that of the physical degradation of the inner city and hence, the need to restore it to an original state, whatever that may be.

Internationally, conservation is at the level of organizations which are based in the West and whose principles were formulated to their needs and context. At the national level, in a number of countries that are signatories to various agreements on the issue, conservation is the exclusive preserve of institutions that are usually manned by the elite and a centralized bureaucracy. At both levels, there is an autocracy that operates, which in its present form does not yield itself to a more 'bottom up' approach. There is the necessity of having more flexible institutional structures that are closer to the constituencies directly affected by conservation policies and strategies. These institutions should originate in the local framework of culture and tradition. They are more attuned to the specific needs and value systems of their societies.

5.3 Conservation-in-use

Generated from the above discussion, I propose a set of guiding principles for what I shall refer to as "conservation-in-use." This term describes a process of continuous self-renewal of urban fabric that builds upon its innate characteristics to adapt to present and future change. It is similar to the traditional process of urban growth. These principles are broad and have as their basis the reverse of the statement cited from the Venice Charter. They derive from the nature of the specific and are adaptable to individual

contexts with modifications.

These principles take into account the different constituencies that influence the urban fabric- the residents, business, administration and professionals. Their interests and the particular needs of the urban quarter under consideration will determine the strategies that evolve from the principles. I outline the principles below and later, suggest a set of strategies derived from them as a possible approach for the Mellah.

Principle 1: Generating and Maintaining Value

Valuing the urban fabric for its innate characteristics is crucial to its continued relevance. To a great extent, the perception of its value is dependent upon the lifestyle that the urban fabric is associated with. With the increasing emulation of “progressive” Western modes of living, older urban environments have steadily lost value as desirable living space. They were primarily designed around residential use and community life and should continue to be so used.

The community of current residents, landowners and tenants, need to be aware of the unique qualities of their built environment and lifestyle. This is not to say that a life without basic amenities is superior. The provision of basic services needs to be made considering the logic and carrying capacity of the traditional architecture. A sense of community also means a sense of identity with the precinct. This should be transformed through improvements partly engendered by the inhabitants that they may have a sense of pride in their work and strive to maintain it. The constituencies that might show interest in this principle are the residents themselves, the businesses located in the area, the municipal authorities (and the city).

Engendering this sense of community, is however, a task that needs initiative and consistent support from the authorities. This

initiative needs to be primarily political, from the Mayor or the municipality. Also a commitment from these authorities to a genuine interest in the community backed up by concrete action can go a long way in building enthusiasm and dispelling the sense of hopelessness that is usually found in these circumstances.

In the case of the Mellah, this would be a good principle through which to generate a strategy of building community awareness of the uniqueness of the quarter, its form, historic importance and central location. In the long run, once the community is stabilized, it will be instrumental in the future maintenance and conservation of the urban fabric. The primary constituencies that could be persuaded on this principle are *residents* and particularly the *owners, local businesses, the municipality* and the city in general which benefits from an improved image. A sense of community at the scale of the quarter and a sense of pride in inhabiting it is created through conscious choice.

Principle 2: Institution and Community Building

The second principle follows from generating and maintaining value. Community and institution building is a concrete expression of the sense of community. It is a mechanism to vest power in the residents and involve them in the decision-making and administrative process. The institutions formed at the level of individual quarters could form a larger institution that represents the entire city. This would of course, depend upon the scale of the city and its population; the institutional structures and the social composition of the quarters and city.

This institution should comprise of representatives of the owners and tenants; local businesses; municipal officials; a technical and design support team; and a financial and administrative unit. While this composition is a

general suggestion, the individual situation may warrant a variation in the constituent members as well as the relationships between them and the functions of the institution itself.

The interested constituencies would be the residents - both *tenants and owners* - whose rights and responsibilities are a joint concern of the community, and who have a stake in the formation and functioning of the institution; *local businesses*, who benefit by the positive environment; *municipal officials* through a reduction of the administrative and financial burden; and the *traditional craftsmen*, who are assured the continuation of their skills and trade. All constituencies benefit directly or indirectly from the reduction of the bureaucratic process. This is a long term strategy that will sustain the conservation-in-use, whether the individuals in the constituencies change or not. An important part of this is the organization of resources and their management for the entire community.

Principle 3: Resource Circulation

The principle of resource circulation involves (a) financial resources - these could be from various sources. Contributions of the community could be proportional to the rents paid or area occupied. Other contributions to the common fund could be from the municipality for the repair and maintenance of common infrastructure. There could be private sponsors, either on a permanent basis, or for a short term such as the restoration or repair of a significant building. The maintenance of the quarter would be carried out through this fund which is administered by members of the quarter itself.

(b) building resources - The building stock as well as the materials and techniques are treated as a resource that needs to be conserved. Using the building stock and materials and techniques as a resource implies a circulation in the figurative sense. A compendium of structural and design elements, changes in the built form

and design alternatives based upon all of these would form a source of reference and the resource that can be used to create infinite variations. The resultant visual and structural continuity is from a continued use of material and techniques that would otherwise become obsolete. The living environment is the end of this investment.

The principal beneficiaries of resource circulation will be the residents of the quarters and the technical support professionals who are directly involved in the maintenance of the buildings. There is an assured source of employment for masons trained in traditional techniques and for the continued need for these skills. The municipal officials will benefit from the reduced financial expectations and load and the business in the quarter, indirectly from the the overall environment.

The financial resources generated to maintain the area could be pooled into a fund that is composed of contributions from the community and from the municipality as well as private donors or sponsors who could be approached for major refurbishing or restoration of buildings or sites significant to the larger community. There is additional publicity for the sponsor, who could be given the incentive of tax benefits for participation in this kind of investment.

Principle 4: Retaining the Resilience of the Urban Fabric

The character of the urban fabric is partly its ability to adapt to change. The formal elements of this fabric are emphasized as what distinguishes it from its urban matrix and gives it value. The identification of these essential elements is necessary in order to guide the development process within limits that are set by anticipating future changes. The changes in the future are based upon observing the pattern of change in the past.

The set of design alternatives created could be a useful basis for regulation. The community could participate in issues of adding and changes to the individual buildings and how these affect the larger fabric. This process is not unlike that in traditional Islamic cities where if a person wished to make an addition to his house, he first needed the consent of all his neighbors that it would have no adverse effects.

The beneficiaries will be mainly the *residents* (through image and the common fund); *local businesses* and the *municipal authority* (both benefit indirectly from the image); *technical professionals* (whose livelihood will depend upon maintaining the fabric). The retention of traditional building form will attract a self selecting set of residents and ensure a continuation of social interaction.

5.4 Heritage is Not History

The traditional city is also the repository of the past and the culture of that society expressed in built form. The single solution of preservation recommended for extremely diverse physical, social and cultural contexts – not to mention the economic, political and institutional structures, seems either naïve or insensitive, with the intention itself being a matter of debate.

Preservation claims to protect the history or heritage that is endangered by modernization. The problem with this approach is its view of the past or of history converted into heritage. To paraphrase David Lowenthal, heritage is not history. It is important to make the distinction between the two. Heritage contains the idea of cultural property - of the artefact that is owned, has value and needs to be safeguarded. Its expression is through different representative objects. History, on the other hand is a dynamic process and constantly in evolution.

It is relevant to ask whether at all and to what extent history as a process is addressed in the

generation of a conservation plan and how much of it is conveyed to the viewer⁴⁸? Does a reconstruction convey any meaning to the inhabitant and to the observer other than simply 'a past' whose connection with the present is obscured by the restoration? Often, what is old is good simply because it belongs to a time past.

Another danger is in the fragmentation of the past. There is the distant past confused with myth that becomes the basis for constructing identities. The dual demands of cultural tourism and the presentation of a national identity often results in simplistic explanations and the creation of images for universal understanding or consumption. More often than not, the result is a distortion of history.

There is however, the need for a story without which history is a dry collection of facts – and is never communicated to the ordinary reader. Telling a story or suggesting its possibilities is part of the purpose of conservation. Around the conserved monument is built a story about the past. Sometimes there is not one story but a multiplicity of them, each with its layers of meaning. Thus conservation also requires an interpretation of the past and of history. Here the view of history becomes important - whether it is seen as disparate events, each with its significance or as a continuing process (in which case the story is never fully told).

In what ways can history be used to plan for change and not for stasis? The past has value, not simply because it can never be again. This originates from a linear notion of time, and the idea of discontinuities that relates time or history as discrete segments. It is necessary to convey the past as a continuum of which the present is an integral part and product, rather than a single period that gratifies a current political need.

In developing countries that are grappling with issues of a diverse population and development

⁴⁸ refer Lowenthal's 'museum perspectives' and quoting Roy Worskett, on "historic towns as 'pictures' somehow divorced from the reality of everyday life", "The Past is a Foreign Country", Cambridge 1985., p.405.

choices as well as the creation of identity, the past – as in the case of nineteenth century Europe – becomes important in forging a distinction for themselves. If this is the case in industrialized countries, in the developing world, governments

have to mediate between traditionalist and modernist goals. The desire to affirm continuity with a pre-colonial heritage and to 'restore' non-Western traditions often conflicts with an equally urgent need to demonstrate that the new country and its people have long been 'modern'. But whichever kind of past triumphs, it must be of ancient vintage.⁴⁹

The important and necessary question that still remains to be asked is who is conservation for.

Especially in the case of a living urban fabric that needs to incorporate change for its continued existence, like the Mellah, this is a question that is important in formulating an approach. What are the benefits of conservation and is it really an idea that is so new to non-Western cultures? This seems a paradox that the various 'Oriental' cultures that are considered static have, in fact, been able to absorb and adapt to change in a manner that did not affect their identities. It was not in the physical that this identity reposed but in their capacity to change. It is this capacity to change and resilience that is ironically being destroyed by the universally adopted conservation principles.

The term conservation is used interchangeably with preservation, which compounds the conflict between old and new and their uneasy mutual juxtaposition. Camillo Sitte's argument about the acceptance of change into the planning of a modernizing city, could be extended to deal with the contiguities of old and new. His view of the propedeutic value of the old or traditional city could be valuable for more than its aesthetic lessons⁵⁰. It could be 'useful' to study patterns of adaptation and change, so that its integration into the present is less self-conscious. The usual

49 *Ibid.* p. 336

50 refer Choay, Françoise, "L'Allegorie du Patrimoine", *Editions du Seuil. Paris 1992 ps.142 – 143.*

manner of integrating past and present is through adaptive reuse.

This is a sufficiently broad functional umbrella under which we can include both the inclusion of new and compatible uses as well as the modification of traditional uses. While this is not a new concept, and has been carried out in numerous instances, it needs to correspond both to its immediate context and also to the scale of its urban matrix. As Lowenthal remarks,

survivals adapted to new uses are equally set apart from present day things, their anachronisms highlighted, their antiqueness emphasized, the obsolescences of their original use underscored. Whether museumized or readapted, the preserved past is strongly differentiated from the everyday milieu.⁵¹

Addressing whom conservation is for, also helps in defining the problem in a more apposite way. Conservation is usually interpreted as the safeguarding of a heritage as an object for the masses by those who 'know better.'

5.5 - Lessons from the Mellah of Rabat

As important as the past is, it is also important to respect the present inhabitants' needs. The problem is complicated by the fact that they are mostly poor tenants and migrants, who need to be considered separately in how they use the space, the buildings and the infrastructure. A general diagnosis of the ills of the Mellah can only result in a general and coarse-grained solution. In order to work with property and infrastructure improvement, it is important to note the pattern of tenancy, the movement of migrants in and out of the Mellah, the ownership structure and the actual needs of the inhabitants and their development priorities.

To preserve the Mellah as it supposedly was (or should have been) would be meaningless and distort the history of the Jewish community by implying that this is where they lived in a

⁵¹ Lowenthal David, *"The Past is a Foreign Country"*, Cambridge 1985, p.405.

Moroccan city for all time. The Mellah and the idea of living in a gated, walled off quarter brings out reactions as opposed as shame and nostalgia among Moroccan Jews today. However, this is the only trace that we have of the Jewish community's existence in the traditional city.

As for Mellahs in the rest of Morocco, each has its own history and characteristics that are spatially and historically different from other Mellahs. The history of the cities that these Mellahs are in, is related to their history and physical form. The problem of their conservation cannot be considered as being unique to the Mellah alone, but has to be integrated with the conservation and development of the city that it is in.

The problem is finally one of ensuring the life of an urban quarter with a unique history, which is also a part of the old city and related to the new city. The memory of the former inhabitants needs to be retained in the spirit of the fabric of the Mellah and of the Jews in Morocco. The Mellah is similar to the rest of the urban fabric, yet has its distinct characteristics – both are indisputably Moroccan.

Following from the principles of 'conservation-in-use' suggested earlier in this chapter, a set of strategies is proposed for the conservation and continued survival of the Mellah of Rabat.

(a) Residents' Support and Awareness

The support of the Mellah residents is an important factor in any future conservation action and needs to be therefore consolidated. An initiative endorsed by the mayor could provide the necessary impetus to generate a sense of community among a diverse group composed of absentee landlords, owners who do live in the Mellah, tenants - both long term and short term migrants, local businesses and informal vending establishments. The last are seen with the short term migrants, as the first

group to be displaced from the Mellah. This will be necessary to create a stability in order to then build an institution. The local shopowners also need to be included. Some of them are residents of the Mellah, others rent space there. The awareness building initiative could be taken up by either the municipality or by a non-governmental organization.

(b) Institution Building

The sense of community can be given form through an institution comprised of the constituencies with an interest in the Mellah. An initiative from the Mayor could provide the necessary impetus and could be co-ordinated with the involvement of a special program through the municipality. This may be a difficult task as the ownership of properties is mixed and some buildings have multiple owners. Obtaining the participation and commitment of absentee owners will be difficult.

The challenge lies in deciding the composition of the association and the relationships between the constituents of the association. There should also be some accountability vested in the residents. The municipality could have representation or liaison with the community members depending upon the level of commitment needed from them. The ideal institution would be composed of representatives of the residents - both owners and tenants; the municipality; a team of design and technical support professionals, including masons trained in traditional techniques; and local businesses in the Mellah.

(c) Reducing Population Density

The density of the Mellah needs to be reduced from 1100 persons per hectare to 530 persons per hectare. The reduction is steep and will require the active participation and consent of the residents. Existing data on ownership of properties and tenancy as well as patterns of occupation by migrants, need to be analyzed in order to set the process in motion. The 'de-

densification' has to be accompanied by the provision of alternative accommodation for those ousted. This will be a long term process with larger policy implications concerning rural migrants and housing provision in the future.

(d) Alternative Accommodation

As mentioned above, this is part of a larger policy of housing for migrants and is a long term strategy. However, traditional forms of building and masons could be employed in the design and construction of alternative housing or through self help schemes instead of the dreary apartment blocks which exist, for example, in the Douar Debbagh area south of the Medina. The rehousing of those displaced from the Hafsia quarter where different alternative plans were drawn up in consultation with potential residents. The inhabitants of the Hafsia quarter made the choice to move out to alternative housing or stay on. This would be a good example to draw from. The other alternative is that the poorer displaced persons move to the bidonvilles.

(e) Financing and Technical Support

The government could seek financial support from various sources, public and private. The present proposal for the rehabilitation of the Mellah has this hurdle to cross. Perhaps, like in the case of Ahmedabad, India, where the sponsorship of private enterprise was invited for both slum rehabilitation and city revitalization schemes, the municipality could look for private participation from local entrepreneurs in the task of rehabilitation. One incentive could be in the form of tax cuts to the extent of work undertaken or contributions. This would, however, have to be co-ordinated with the community organization in the Mellah.

The financing for repairs and reconstruction work could be through low interest loans. The buildings themselves are in some cases, jointly owned. Besides, given the complicated situation

with multiple tenants and absentee landlords, some arrangement would have to be made that gave the tenants some degree of autonomy to carry out improvements to infrastructure and to the building itself. They could be given loans at a low interest to carry out repairs needed, say to a leaking roof or toilet. The improvements need to be carried out in consultation with a technical support office to ensure that the repairs are carried out properly and will not damage the building in any way. The technical office would carry in addition, an inventory of problems and techniques to address them.

(f) Inventory of Elements, Changes and Design Alternatives

There already exists a detailed inventory of the problems that plague the buildings in the Mellah and their existing condition. What is needed is a classification of different building types, elements and the changes that have been made to them over the past years. The inventory should be based upon the typological process to ensure that a logic of building is established. This could then serve as the basis for creating a set of design alternatives to be followed in the future. A schema for the process of change over time in the urban fabric is illustrated in the Appendix.

The design alternatives could range from the scale of the entire building to its details. These alternatives could also include ways of incorporating improvements in the infrastructure which is often a delicate operation, given the fragile condition of the older houses. The design alternatives could be in the form of a Conservation Atlas. This study would ultimately lead to establishing detailed design guidelines for future building activity in the Mellah.

(g) Design Guidelines

The setting up of design guidelines should run in tandem with the inventory of elements, design alternatives and techniques for future development and maintenance. The design

alternatives and techniques should be based upon an observation of changes in the past and what was likely to occur in the future. This would result in a more realistic set of guidelines. Each owner could be given an expansion quota within which any additions to the buildings and changes to the infrastructure could be made. This has to be realistic considering the fragility of the physical fabric and the possibilities of maintenance. Zoning laws could establish floor area limits, beyond which no expansion could be allowed. The changes should, in addition, be subject to design review as suggested in the principle of retaining the character of the built fabric.

(h) Shared Infrastructure and Municipal Responsibility

Any improvements to the infrastructure that serves the entire Mellah should be the financial responsibility of the municipality. There could be a very creative involvement of private enterprise in this task, which is long term and costly. This would also be an image building exercise for the municipality and help with building a future working relationship with the residents of the Mellah.

(i) Maintenance and Value Building

The proximity and ease in dealing with an institution that is 'of' the Mellah would make for better maintenance of the quarter. The creation of value is continuous. This is also one way of approaching the history of the Mellah. Instead of a self-conscious reproduction of elements, the special features of the fabric that are a resultant of its past are retained as distinguishing features of the Mellah.

Maintenance and value building is also linked to avoiding the process of gentrification. The main street of the Mellah should remain closed to vehicular traffic in order to maintain the quality of the environment. The street vendors will

leave as a result of higher rents that the rehabilitation process will and should result in. It is hoped that the greater space on the street for pedestrians and residents of the quarter will regenerate the community life that was a feature of the Mellah when the Jews lived there. There is no doubt, a different social interaction among Muslim families, but this does not mean a complete loss of public activity in a residential quarter.

This set of strategies is not seen as restricted to the Mellah alone. The entire Medina suffers from the same problems as does the Mellah, only they are not as acute. If the Mellah is rehabilitated as a part of the city that is now distinguished as a vital and well maintained community, even if relatively poor, it is out of a choice to be so. This could then enthuse the residents of other quarters to take up similar action and result in a Medina that will always remain a distinct part of Rabat, without being forced to be distinct against its will.

**NOTES ON THE TYPOLOGICAL
PROCESS AND CHANGE**

The fabric of the Mellah, although laid out in a more linear mode than the rest of the Medina is formed from the same units or house types. It is thus still an integral part of it and the changes in built form can be assumed to follow the traditionally observed patterns. The following is a conjectural reconstruction of the process of change. It is important to state at the outset that change is continuous and the three stages illustrated represent "snapshots" during the process. The three stages in the transformation of types are based upon observations in Attilio Petruccioli's "After Amnesia-Learning from the Islamic Mediterranean Fabric."

First Phase

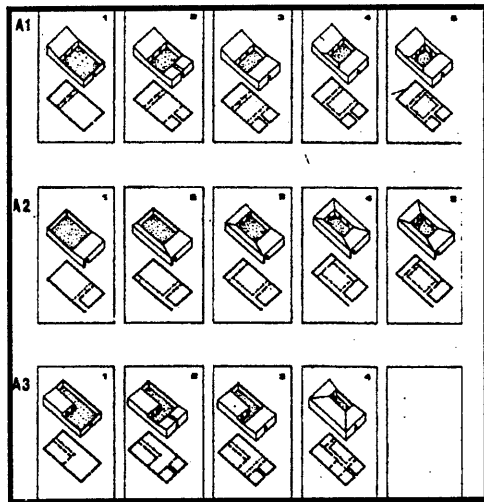


Figure 27. Types A1,A2,A3 based upon access into the house through the courtyard.

The first stage consists of the main street of the Mellah that governs its layout and runs from the Rue Oukassa to the Borj Sidi Makhoulf. Alleys branch out from this spine at regular intervals to the boundary walls of the quarter. The courtyards all face south and there are three basic house types - A1, A2, and A3. (Figure 27, 28) Each house is entered differently - through the courtyard directly, through the courtyard laterally or through the main body of the built portion of the house.

From a reading of the dimensions of the flanking houses, the street was originally wider than its present dimension and has been encroached upon. Also, the main street (the Rue du Mellah) was originally straight and not forked as it is presently. The houses on the edge of the cliff to the north were probably added later as the population of the Mellah grew. This was however, only during the early years of the twentieth century, since the population remained stable (around 3,000 persons) for about a century. The houses were both large and small, depending upon the economic status of their inhabitants. The houses on the smaller streets also follow the same basic type with a built portion at the north end of the plot and the courtyard to the south. The later expansion and addition of rooms within the plot during what is termed the secondary phase follows the same basic logic. The courtyard is retained and the south side remains unbuilt.

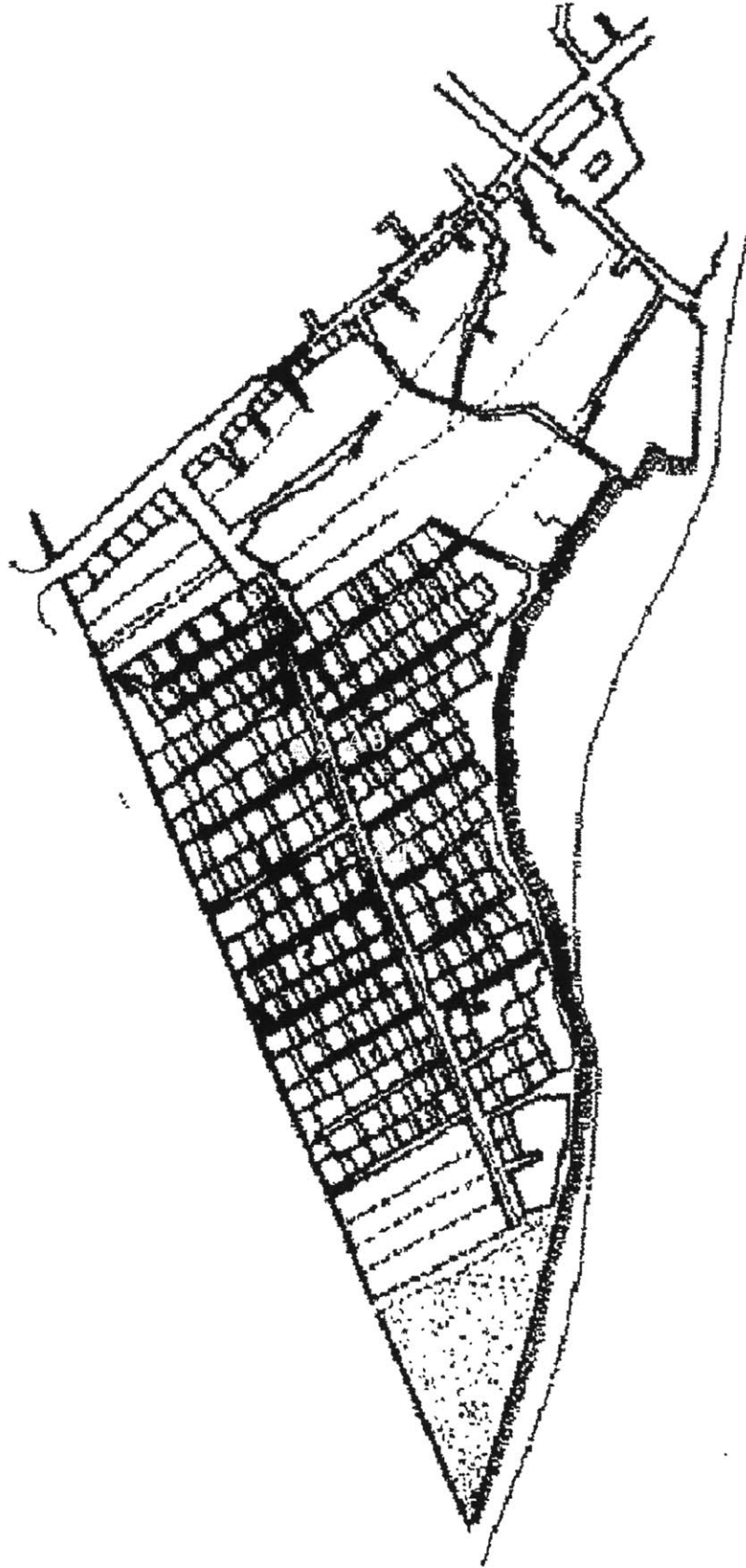


fig. 28. The basic house types A1,A2,A3 seen in the Mellah FIRST IMPLANT

Second Phase

The secondary implant is accompanied by the addition of shops along the main street - termed as "tabernization" by Petruccioli in his book cited earlier. Here we see an addition to the houses on the south side of the Rue du Mellah. These houses add another room to the north wall. The houses on the opposite side add a room within their plot boundaries. The dimensions indicate a single room width on this side of the street and not a double width. There could be an expansion onto the second level with the addition of rooms above the ground floor. (figure 29,30)

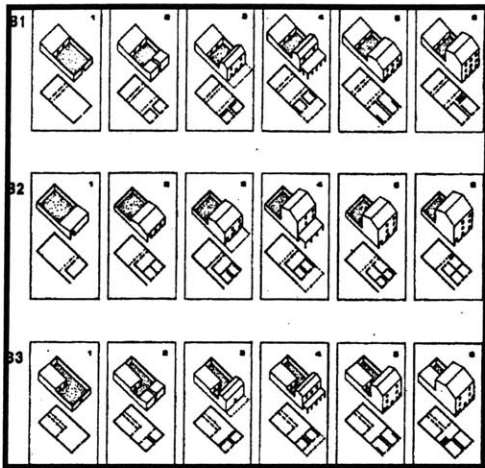


Figure 29. This stage shows how shops are added on to the building. The addition follows the basic types A1, A2, A3 established in figure 27. (refer Petruccioli, Attilio, "After Amnesia...")

The area towards the river, the Borj Sidi Makhoulouf, is still open area at this stage, probably a vestige of the orchards that once occupied the side. There are by now paths and transformation of the original tissue along the edge of the Taneries where the Rue des Consuls meets the Rue Souweika - both areas of principal commercial activity, where the Jews of the Mellah also worked. An old path is seen retained by the built fabric that breaks its symmetry around it.

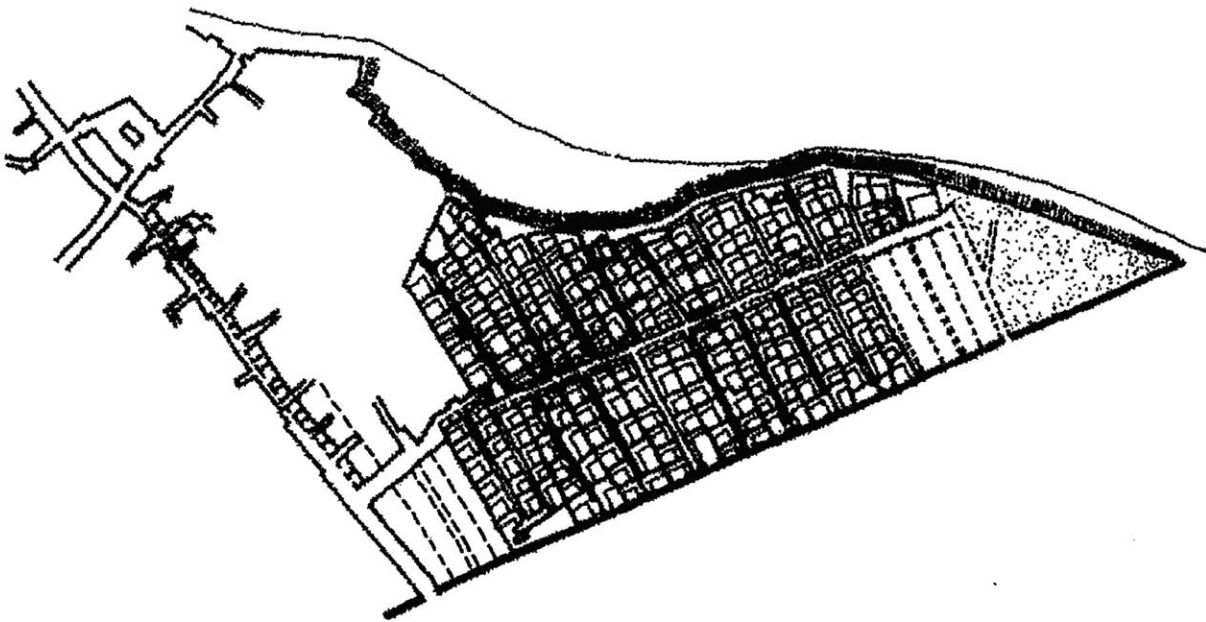


fig. 30 The street is encroached upon on its south side and shops are added as shown along both its edges. There could also be the additional construction of houses along the wall of the cliff. **SECONDARY IMPLANT**

Third Phase

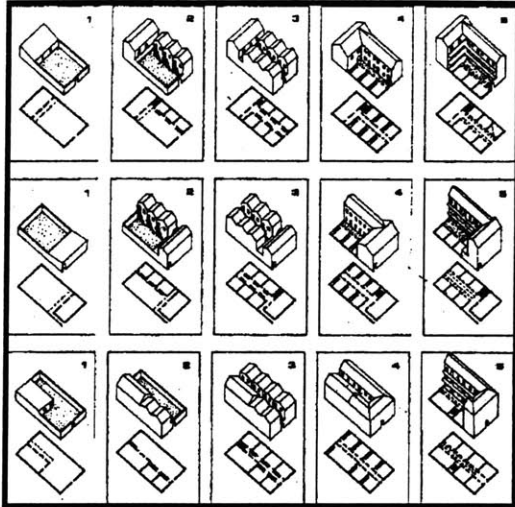


Figure 31. This diagram shows the process of "insulization" or addition of vertical levels and the subdivision of the structure.

The third phase is the last stage of change in the Mellah. There is "insulization" (refer Petruccioli, "After Amnesia...") or the addition of levels vertically to accommodate an increase in population after the 1930's that grows steadily thereafter at a rate of a 1,000 persons per decade. The last part of the Mellah, towards the Bab Diouna at the Sidi Makhoulf end, is built. The houses date from the 1930's on and are modern in their exterior aspect. This part of the Mellah, unlike the rest, is open to vehicular traffic and looks like the portion outside the walls. There is a fork in the Rue du Mellah that brings easier access to the Bab Diouna. We can see from the plans of the houses that there is the presence of two grids that interlock in the center. (figure 31,32)

The purpose of this study of change is to guide future building in the Mellah, whether new or restoration or repair of the older structures.

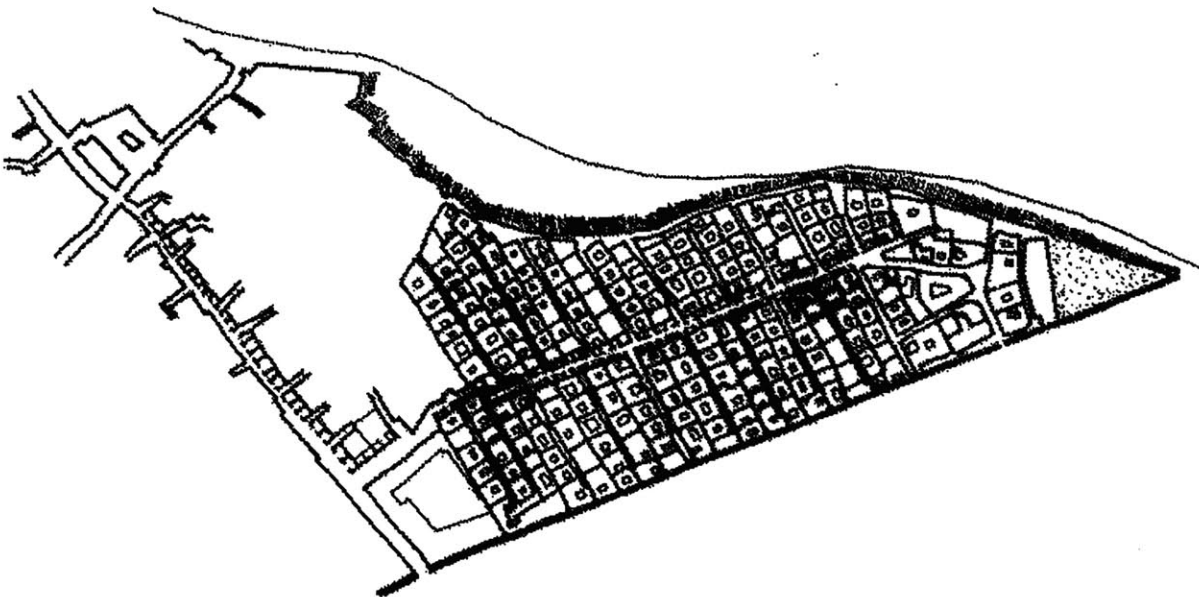


fig. 32 The last stage of change shows the process of subdivision which follows the logic of the earlier form. The Borj Sidi Makhoulf area is also built up with an additional municipal market. The last stage of growth of the house types shows a gradual filling in on all sides, leaving the courtyard, smaller but still intact. THIRD IMPLANT

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Figure 2, 13. Tourist Map of Rabat

Figure 4, Said Mouline, Lotfi Hanini

Figure 6, 12, 22, 24 Said Mouline

Figure 10 Municipality of Rabat Hssaine

Figure 11, 14 Municipality of Rabat Hssaine (Plan of Mellah)

Figure 19 Ahmed Iraqui

Figures 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 28,30,32, Minakshi S. Mani

Figures 25, 26, Association Sauvegarde de la Medina de Tunis

Figures 27,29,31, Attilio Petruccioli