

# The Image of Morocco in British Travel Writings

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It is a privilege and a great honour to be invited to address this eminent and highly distinguished audience and to share with you some cultural reminiscences and reflections on the common historical and literary heritage of Moroccan-British relations.

My pleasure is greater because this address is organized by The Moroccan British Society which is dedicated to enhance and develop Moroccan British friendship under the presidency of Her Highness Princess Lalla Joumala. The presence of her Majesty's Ambassador to Morocco, His Excellency Ambassador Charles Gray is evidence and a testimony for a mutual will to build on the historical friendship between the two countries to develop Moroccan-British good relations.

## **I. Introduction:**

The paper deals with the representation of Moroccan culture in British travel writings. It examines a variety of texts produced on the fringe of canonical and mainstream British literature and concerned with the description Moroccan culture and the way it was translated into English and made available to British readers.

Early travel literature played a historical and key role in spreading information about remote and faraway cultures. Before the age of aviation, television and the internet, knowledge and information about foreign cultures relied almost exclusively on oral and written accounts of adventurous travellers. The texts under consideration were mainly produced by adventurers, traders, diplomats, captives and travellers of all walks of life who happened to visit this area. Most of them are travel accounts by amateurish writers whose occasional or incidental visits to Morocco are recorded in impressionistic tales describing their experiences in the "exotic land of the Moors". British travel texts on Morocco played a key role in introducing Morocco to British readers. For centuries British writers produced scores of travel accounts which contributed to remove the veil which screened mutual knowledge and understanding between Morocco and the United Kingdom.

There is today a revival of critical interest in travel texts parallel to the rise of post-colonial theory with the recuperation of marginal and non-canonical books: We see today the paperback reissue of out-of-print and out-of-copyright travel classics. In fact there are scores of travel texts on Morocco at the British Library and elsewhere which need re-impression because they constitute a shared cultural and historical heritage of Moroccan British relations.

This image of Morocco in British travel texts is a wide subject which involves a variety of issues and considering the aims of the Moroccan British Society based on "stimulating, motivating and facilitating communication and collaboration among the peoples of the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco."<sup>1</sup> Considering these aims and considering the time constraints, I have limited myself in this presentation to some aspects of this image leaving out theoretical issues and aspects which are not relevant to our purpose today. My main objective is to show some of the aspects of Moroccan culture which retained the attention of British travellers and those which contributed to enhance the mutual understanding between the two countries.

## II- Travel as a Human Feature and as Literary Genre:

Movement is an inner feature of human life and travel is one of its most eloquent manifestations. As a human activity, travel has always implied a moving subject and by the same way a moving consciousness. Need, necessity, trade, work, business, tourism, adventure, religion and pilgrimage, or a mere whim make some of the willed and un-willed, chosen or forced reasons for human travel. Travel refers to the idea of covering and experiencing space – but it is above all an experience of otherness. Travel moves identities and cultures across territories. But if travel is defined as movement, it is also a state of mind, a psychological state of being, a disposition, a means to achieve prosperity, satisfaction, and a way to respond to a given necessity.

It is noteworthy that travel should hold a prominent place in written literature from Herodotus, Homer, Virgil and Ibn Battuta to the colonial and post-colonial uses and abuses of travel including the holy and unholy scriptures. By the sanctification of geographical spots, all religions contributed to the geographical movement of their believers between their place of living and the appointed sacred spot. All known religions have sacred spots to which pilgrimage is a devotional act.

Bacon advised travel for the education of the young and for the acquisition of experience for the adults, while Nietzsche considered that: "In order to see *much* one must learn to *look away* from one-self."<sup>2</sup> For Freud travel is an initial severance from home culture and the travel narrative becomes a plea for readmission, while the territorial passage from one zone to another, the border crossing, represents a critical moment for the identity of the mobile subject.

Travel writing is the literary genre which crosses all the geographical and cultural territories yet its own borders as a genre are undefined. Traditionally, it is a popular genre to which "anyone can have a go" as Steve Clark put it<sup>3</sup>. Travel is an experience lived away from home in a foreign territory which serves as the spacio-narratological frame for the experience when it goes on paper and becomes text. Besides the declared and the hidden intentions of the traveller in deciding to 'put to paper' his experience, the quality and value of the travel account depends on his capacity of description, on his style and literary abilities, the degree of acuteness of his observations, his past experiences, his curiosity and perseverance, his professional interests, his intellectual integrity, his cultural morality and biases, his social class and political allegiances, etc...To these we can add the historical, economic and political context under which the travel enterprise is taken. All these elements interfere in the making of the account and the cultural representation is subject to their interpretative sifting.

A traveller who writes the account of his experience is a reporter of cultural otherness. By informing about his own culture and by reporting about another territory and another culture, the traveller contributes to draw attention to the political, religious and social values of other societies.

Phileas Fogg<sup>4</sup>, Jules Verne's hero in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and Robinson Crusoe represent the metaphors epitomizing opposite aspects of travel and tourism: one represented by the hurrying traveller covering geographical and cultural

space the way a fox extensively covers territories, the other adopts the hedgehog intensive attitude to geographical space through a slow and profound digging of territory. Unable to be omniscient and omnipresent, the traveller's vision (visual and intellectual) of the country is by necessity fragmentary. All the foreign traveller can see are the bits and pieces permitted by the places he can visit, the social, political, religious institutions he can have access to, the willingness he is accepted with, the people he can meet, the information he can get and the interpretive capacity with which he renders the whole representation.

For an informative and fruitful approach to British travel accounts on Morocco no reading of these texts can ignore the above observations and considerations.

### **III. First contacts and Historical Relations:**

The first recorded official contact between Great Britain and The Empire of Morocco goes back to the early 13th. Century when King John sent an Embassy to the fourth Al-Mohad Sultan Mohamed Ennassir (1198-1213) asking for an alliance against France and help against his enemies within Britain with the promise that if his request were granted, he would embrace Islam. According to Rogers, the details of this embassy were recorded by Mathew Paris and later published and kept at Saint Alban Abbey<sup>5</sup>.

For a long period the country remained a mystery for Europe and what was known about it was tainted by legend and fantasy. In fact the first publication in a European language and fully devoted to Morocco was made in 1526 by Leo Africanus (*Description of Africa*). Visits of British traders to Morocco date from times immemorial but voyages by English vessels were first recorded in 1551. One such trip had two Moors as passengers on a ship called the *Lion of London*, an instance recorded in the correspondence of Richard Hakluyt. While the first English resident Ambassador was appointed in 1577<sup>6</sup>.

Queen Elizabeth I of England exchanged several letters with Abdel-Malik and Ahmed El-Mansour of Morocco. Later British Moroccan relations lived a period of tensions during the English occupation of Tangier from 1662 to 1684. The first Moroccan Ambassador to London, Kaid Jaudar ben Abdallah, was appointed in 1637 and the first English Consul to Morocco, Nathaniel Luke, in 1657. On his arrival to London in 1682, Kaid Mohammed Ben Haddou El Attar, Morocco's second Ambassador to Britain impressed Londoners by his exotic dress and his horsemanship, this event was immortalized by a famous painting of the Moroccan Ambassador on his horse in Hyde Park by Sir Godfrey Kneller.

Mutual interests and alliance against common enemies brought the two countries to close cooperation and what we might call today strategic cooperation for many centuries. Many treaties of peace and commercial exchange were signed between the two countries. In the 19th Century, a remarkably close British-Moroccan relationship developed under two successive British Consuls-General, Edward Drummond-Hay (1829-45) and his son Sir John Drummond-Hay (1845-86). The strong political influence of British ambassadors on Moroccan foreign policy was well established and the personality of John Drummond Hay marked Moroccan political life for almost half a century. Though the country was finally colonized by the French,

historians consider that until 1904 Morocco was part of the informal Empire of Great Britain<sup>7</sup>.

Since Morocco's independence in 1956, British-Moroccan relations have once again grown steadily in importance. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Morocco in October 1980, and His late Majesty King Hassan II paid a return visit to London in July 1987. His Royal Highness Prince Charles has visited Morocco on several occasions, most recently in 1999, to attend the funeral of the late King Hassan the Second.

It took many centuries for the two countries to know one another and to trust one another. Certainly there were periods of tension but there were much of the time long periods of mutual respect, friendship, alliances and cooperation. Britain has been a political and an economic partner for Morocco since the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and for the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was the first ally and partner during a key period of the country's history. Recorded historical facts show that towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Great Britain alone covered 52% of Morocco's exports and 56% of its imports much ahead of other European countries like Spain or France<sup>8</sup>.

Throughout the shared history between Morocco and Britain, many peace treaties were signed and British ambassadors encouraged the Moroccan Makhzen to make deep reforms to its old territory administration and trade policies especially by opening its frontiers to European commercial exchange and by modernizing its governance methods.<sup>9</sup> But this talk today is not about historical facts and political treaties, specialized history scholars have taken care of that. My talk today is about the way the two nations came to know each other through travel literature and the way travel accounts on the *Cherifian Empire* as this country was known contributed to spread knowledge about Morocco.

#### IV-British Popular Awareness of Morocco

Despite its proximity to Europe, Morocco or what Europe historically tabbed as 'Barbary' remained for many centuries, a close and unsafe area in popular British and European consciousness. Apart from the main commercial ports like Tangier, Mahdia, Mazagan, Mogador or Santa Cruz, the interior parts of the country remained closed and forbidden for non-Muslims. Historically a British traveller's adventure in Morocco starts in Tangier and most of the time ends there, some go as to reach Tetouan but few dared risking a visit to the interior parts of the country unless they are part of a diplomatic mission and under the Sultan's protection during their travel. Till the era of aviation, Tangier was the main gate of the country and the doorstep of Africa for European visitors and rare were the Europeans who could travel by themselves inside the country. The passage from Tangier to Fèz, for example, was beset with major security risks and the utmost precautions and preparations were needed to guarantee a safe arrival to the sacred city.

As a destination and as a subject for discursive portrayal and interpretation, awareness about Morocco knew a historical development parallel to the European awareness of other geographical and cultural spaces and to the European colonial expansion. The earliest western references to Morocco oscillate between history, legend, mythology, literary fiction and fantastic travelogues. The interest in Morocco corresponds to what is generally agreed among historians and sociologists as the

beginning of what we now call the global age in the sense that it started with the 16th century geographical explorations and the colonial expeditions which followed them.

From the second half of the 16th century onwards, Moorish tales became a favorite subject in British society. This awareness took the form of the different cultural other as a popular exotic subject which fired the public imagination by the fantastic stories about Morocco. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries knew an increasing interest in Morocco as a cultural subject and as a commercial partner and a potential threat to European maritime activities. With the development of the British imperial projects, Morocco became a recommended commercial, diplomatic, tourist and exotic destination for many British citizens. According to Robin Bidwell there are sixty references to Morocco in Shakespeare but knowing that among Shakespeare's patrons were members of the Barbary Company this is not surprising.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an upsurge of travel texts on Morocco as this area started to open up, or rather, to be opened up, under the European pressure and expansion, to European visitors for different purposes and with different backgrounds. These visitors' accounts constitute an invaluable mine for ethnographical and social data about the cultural life in Morocco.

## V- Crossing to Tangier: The magic of the Straits

**The crossing** of the Straits from Gibraltar or Spain to Tangier was the occasion of the strongest feelings. There, two continents meet and feelings of the prospect of exile and the uncertainties of the unfamiliar were vividly lived. Tangier was seen not only as a town but as a whole continent. The crossing of the straits epitomises a step towards the unknown. The feeling of crossing from one continent to another was so strong that almost all British travellers who experienced the crossing for the first time rendered in mixed feelings the ritual of this 'passage obligé'.

The way Tangier was approached and encountered by its many visitors is illustrated in the many travel accounts written over centuries of crossings of the Gibraltar straits between Europe and Africa. An examination of the different discursive representations of the crossing shows the existence of a spectrum of attitudes to the encounter ranging from wonder and marvelous surprise to frustrations and cultural shocks. But if their attitudes differ none of the visitors was indifferent to this encounter with Morocco.

While crossing the Straits and approaching the African continent, the magic of the encounter with Tangier works its spell when the visitor gets the first vista of the town from his ship. The ambivalence of the feeling is quite obvious, for Finnemore:

THERE is only one city in Morocco which is quite familiar to Europeans, and that is Tangiers, lying on the other side of the Straits of Gibraltar, and only a few hours' journey from Gibraltar itself. From the sea Tangiers looks very beautiful. Its white houses with their flat roofs-dazzlingly white they look in the strong sunshine-climb the hill-side in terrace upon terrace, and the hill is crowned by a great Kasbah<sup>10</sup>.

For Sternberg the distant view of the city gave a romantic picture of his destination: "Seen from the harbor, Tangier looks as though thousands of pigeons in their snowy

whiteness had settled on the coast;”<sup>11</sup> While the military Beauclerk and even before entering the city could see no more than an image of ruins, tombs and death:

Tangiers or as the Moors call it Tangha, is but little remarkable from the sea. The similarity of the low, flat-roofed, white-washed houses, stretching one above another, like tombs, up the side of a hill, gives it a very monotonous appearance. It is situated on ground that forms a sort of amphitheatre; and on the heights to the north stands the castle, an extensive ruin, inhabited by the Basha and the storks<sup>12</sup>.

With different attitudes, travelers approaching Tangier begin by inscribing on the city their own psychological mindsets. In this sense, de Botton wrote: ‘the pleasure we derive from a journey may be depending more on the mind-set we travel with than on the destination we travel to’ Particular social and cultural ‘mindsets’ prefigure different styles of movement and the ‘sensuous geographies’ they imply; hence how places and landscapes are sensed and made sense of.<sup>13</sup>”

On arriving to Tangier, the first impression/inscription is the beginning of a process of interactive exchange between the traveler and his destination. The crossing was experienced not only as the covering of a geographical distance but also as a giant cultural step into remote otherness of another civilization. Henry Field, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century traveller expressed his first encounter with Morocco in these words:

Though it takes but three hours to come from Gibraltar to Tangier, in that brief passage one is transported into a new world. It is not only the difference in the two places, but the people themselves are different-in figure, in colour, in language and in everything<sup>14</sup> .”

Seen from Europe, Tangier wears an exotic and fantasized image which dispels gradually as the traveler approaches the city. And as there is much between the insubstantiality of orientalist dreams and the hard realities of Moorish life, almost all travelers are brought to reckon the tough facts of life even in the most westernized town of Morocco. On entering the city, the dreaming visitor is awakened by the harsh life-truths he meets in the streets of Tangier. This cultural shock is received differently by different writers and some sort of disillusionment is expressed with varying degrees of wonder, astonishment and frustration. A few examples will illustrate the point. Finemore described the effect of the cultural change on entering Tangier in the following passage:

.... upon entering the streets of this beautiful white city, we find ourselves in a network of narrow ... lanes lined with high blank walls. A Moorish house rarely has windows looking into the street. The first thing the Moor wishes for is privacy, and he secures this by building his house round an inner court into which the windows look: But we do not trouble at first about the houses, for the people who throng the streets are full of interest.<sup>15</sup>

In fact the people “who throng the streets” captured the attention of all who visit Morocco for the first time and most travel writers exert themselves to render the experience in exotic descriptions. Some British writers were simply charmed by

their first encounter with Morocco and started an enduring relationship with the country as a whole and with the country as a whole and with Tangier in particular. Stutfield, a retired British judge reported the experience of his encounter with Morocco in the introduction to his travel account:

In the month of November, 1881, being compelled to leave England for my health, I found myself at Tangier, on, as I imagined at the time, a flying visit of a week or ten days. The fascinations of the country, however, caused me to extend that visit to over four months, and it was succeeded by others, the second of which, in 1888, forms the chief subject of this volume<sup>16</sup>.

On entering Tangier for the first time, Stutfield described the effect of the cultural change in what seems to be a representative passage of the travel accounts portrayal of a first encounter with Moroccans:

The sense of wonderment felt by all who set foot for the first time in the place, at the sudden transition ... was not without its effect upon me as I strolled from the port, where grave, turbaned Moors sat cross-legged at the receipt of custom, up the queer, old, ill-paved street, thronged with white-robed Arabs, Jews, negroes, mulattoes, and Europeans; the motley crowd, with its strange variety of types, shades of complexion and costume, that composes the population of Tangier.<sup>17</sup>

Continuing his orientalisation of Tangier and of Morocco, Stutfield gives a typical exotic and orientalist description of a western first contact with Tangier:

The scene is familiar to all who have travelled in the East, but nowhere else is the change so rapid and complete as in Tangier, which, more Eastern than the East itself, and seemingly more remote, is yet within three hours' sail of Europe, and westwards of Piccadilly.... Here one is living not merely among relics of the past, but in the past itself, only with good hotels and modern comforts about you as well; and the Old-World, patriarchal life around one has a charm of its own, arising from a sense of tranquility and repose, which few other health resorts possess.<sup>18</sup>.

Though belonging to an orientalist tradition of depicting Tangier, this passage sums up some of the most frequent reactions to a first contact with Morocco. The other interesting element in Stutfield's description is this nostalgic yearning for cultural and religious ideals no longer possible at home.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup>, most travel accounts noted the impact of Western tourism on the Tangier and some of them had exasperated reactions at the important number of Europeans in the city. Strenberg for example found that

Tangier is not-like Fez, Elcazar, or Larache-a daughter of Allah in the true sense of the term. The scum of European barbarism obtrude on the

senses at every step. Many modern buildings ... spoil the harmony of this Arabian poem in stone.<sup>19</sup>

Tangier here is exoticized as an 'Arabian poem in stone' whose harmony is spoilt by modern buildings and European tourism. This lamentation over the passing away of an orientalist fantastic dream is in fact the reproduction of a note of nostalgic romanticism so recurrent in 19<sup>th</sup> century travel literature about Morocco. For Stutfield the problem is not limited to the nuisance caused by the waves of European tourists invading the city but by the overwhelming impact of western civilization and its technology spreading over the town and slowly erasing its exotic authenticity:

The hoof of the British tourist has not yet succeeded in effacing this impression, though the growing presence of the European is evidenced by the numerous gorgeous bazaars, villas, and hotels which are springing up all over the place.<sup>20</sup>

## VI- British Accounts of the introduction of European Technical inventions into Morocco

The Nineteenth century British travel accounts reported the first signs of the entry of European technology and 'civilization' into Morocco and how it was first felt in Tangier before spreading to the rest of the country. In 1886, Stutfield, a British traveller, complained about the growing number of tourists invading Morocco and the introduction of new technologies into the exotic country:

Mr. Cook has now annexed Tangier to his domains, and the sad spectacle of a telephone-wire stretched across the Soko and the antique walls and battlements of the town, brought home to me, on my last visit, the fact of the resistless inroads of civilization.<sup>21</sup>

In this passage Stutfield is a witness of the historical moment when the Thomas Cook travelers' cheques and its travel agencies remove travel to Morocco from the exclusive use of adventurers, classical travelers, daring traders, diplomats and missionaries to the territory of the insured travel of the leisure industry with its guided tours and pre-established programs. We witness here how the change towards modernity was spreading via Tangier from the North of the country before creeping southward to invade the rest of the country. The 'sad spectacle' of the telephone wire is in fact the tentacular instrument of European technology to bring Morocco into the global web of modernity.

If Stutfield's remarks about the telephone were made in 1886, six years earlier another traveller was the historical witness of the first telephone experiment in Fèz. In 1880, a British diplomatic mission under Sir John Drummond Hay visited Fèz and as was usual at the time brought government gifts to Sultan Mouley Hassan (1873-1984). The British government's gifts to the Sultan were no other than the first telephone and the first heliograph prototypes ever to be experimented in Morocco along with other new European inventions. In his account of the mission, Trotter reports:

Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1880.



Today had been appointed for the exhibition of the scientific instruments to his Majesty. The telephone had been got into pretty good working order between the two tents on the grass walks of the garden, and one heliograph was to be sent out to a hill overlooking the palace, while the other was to be worked from the palace enclosure.<sup>22</sup>

The experiments of the 'scientific instruments' worked perfectly well to the amazement of the Sultan and his ministers. The British delegation made also a demonstration of a camera to the Sultan who admired the device but refused to be photographed on that occasion though he allowed the opportunity for one of his ministers. To impress the Sultan and the court dignitaries, the British delegation experimented also a phonograph in front of incredulous and dumbfounded Moors. Though all these instruments were experimented for the first time in Fèz, it remains that the most important device was the telephone which symbolized the netting of Fèz and Morocco into the entanglement of complex European and global relations.

The new inventions which puzzled the court of Fèz were not the only devices which entered the country with the British travellers; other simpler yet culturally significant devices –directly and indirectly- accompanied the British visitors to Fèz.

Trotter did not only attend the entry and the first experiments of the new British inventions in Fèz but the eye-witness of the entry of some European cultural habits into the daily life of some Fassi houses. On the occasion of the visit of the British diplomatic mission to Morocco in 1880, Sidi Mohamed Belmokhtar, The Sultan's Grand vizier invited the members of the delegation to a dinner reception in his palace on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1880. Trotter who attended that dinner reported that:

The Vizier had prepared a table for us with chairs, knives and forks; the latter implements were unpacked in our presence from a large plate-chest specially procured from Paris for this and similar occasions hereafter, and their use was explained to the slaves of our host, who had never seen anything of the sort before.<sup>23</sup>

In this and similar instances, the reader is exposed to testimonies which appear on the outset as minor and trivial but which bear deep meanings as they testify to the palpable historical moments of Moroccan cultural and social mutations so vividly portrayed by British travellers. But the British did not bring only forks and knives to Moroccan tables but they also brought ...potatoes. In an interesting passage Trotter revealed how until 1880 the Fassi and perhaps all Moroccans did not know potatoes. This British visitor tells us that:

.... kaid Maclean<sup>24</sup> ... has got a large and very good garden, in which among other edibles he grows potatoes. This vegetable is *unknown here*, but although he has given them to several Moors to try, they, curiously enough, have not accepted his offer of seed for themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Potatoes are now as common in Morocco as in any European country but this and the other instances mentioned above, despite their ephemeral appearances, are vivid portrayals of an important transitional period in Moroccan cultural and social mutations as triggered by British- Moroccan encounters.

## VII-British Travellers and Moroccan women on Terraces

The Moorish woman and the Harem make a recurrent topic in British travel accounts on Morocco. Historically and culturally, home privacy was a sacred feature of Moroccan life; in towns and imperial cities, a man is traditionally jealous and secretive about his spouse(s) and would not refer to his wife by name but euphemistically as 'my house' or 'my children'. The meaning of the Arabic word *sakan* or dwelling means 'calm', 'peaceful' and 'quiet' and as Leila Ahmed put it, this term 'expresses the Islamic concept of a man's right to a haven of inviolable privacy, forbidden to and guarded from intrusion by other men.'<sup>26</sup> This cultural concept found its architectural expression in the building of the urban house where the women's apartments are generally distanced from the more common parts where guests are received. This architecture is found in big houses and residences of the wealthy upper class and in palaces. As a private and forbidden space, few occasions were given to these visitors to see the interiors of houses and to describe the inner parts of a Moorish home.

In the absence of access to the interior of Moorish homes, Fèz terraces offered a unique opportunity to see Fassi women in one of their exclusive spaces. As a substitute for the closed and forbidden Harem, the terraces give the possibility of stealing a gaze at those women from neighbouring roofs. This is the subterfuge used by many travellers to observe Fassi women unveiled. Monbard was one of these. He allocated pages to Fèz terraces and illustrated his account with beautiful sketches of those unveiled women on their roofs: 'Nothing is more interesting, more curiously original, than the sight of these roofs swarming with people, this feminine life manifesting itself without constraint on this multitude of terraces, exuberant with spirit, mirth,, animation.'<sup>27</sup> He found that most women were 'astonishingly graceful, unconsciously provoking'.<sup>28</sup> He described them as handsome with 'a proud, savage, attractive beauty'. As to their activities on the roofs, Monbard gives this vivid description of the scene:

The terraces are crowded with women, some reeling on carpets, others promenading in groups, a few sitting with dangling feet on the ledges of the walls, chatting with their neighbours on the opposite side of the street. They pass in endless succession from house to house, from terrace to terrace; they throw flying bridges from one side of the street to the other; they escalate roofs and climb with a cat-like agility short ladders placed against low walls. And in this amusing gymnastic, sudden gusts of winds, indiscreet freaks of dress, disclose now and again a fine bosom, a pretty arched foot, a marvellously shaped leg, and occasionally something more.<sup>29</sup>

One may go on citing examples of situations in specific spaces with distinctive exotic attraction which retained the attention of the British travellers to Morocco but what is interesting about all this is the choice of focus on certain aspects of Moroccan culture which did not necessarily retain the attention of local writers.

## VIII-The walled city between legend and reality

### ▪ The city as legend

Textual representation of the Moroccan city by European travel writers took different forms and adopted different strategies to come to terms with the multi-faceted manifestations of Moorish urban space. Many texts took over old popular stories and texts about the mythological and legendary origins of the Moroccan cities and sometimes reproduced them to enhance the exotic dimension of their discourse about otherness. In this sense, historical matter, popular lore and legend became the media for reading the “city-in-time” and a way for interpreting its cultural and anthropological realities.

In her *Saints and Sorcerers*, Nina Epton perpetuates the legend of Tiznit and argues that the women of Tiznit are beautiful and « many of them are said to follow the profession once exercised by the lady who gave the town its name<sup>30</sup>”. According to Epton, Tiznit was a prostitute of great charm converted by a holy man to saintly life and as “Virtue does not necessarily mean the absence of love”, the holy man married Tiznit and together “they wandered through the desert”. After the death of the holy man, Tiznit lived alone in a tent and:

One day bandits rode up to molest her while she was at her prayers. Furious at being coldly repelled by an unarmed woman, the leader struck her with his lance. Blood flowed from the mortal wound and when it touched the sand, a fountain sprang miraculously between two palm trees. The town eventually built on this spot was named Tiznit in honour of the Saint<sup>31</sup>.

It must be noted here that the story of Tiznit echoes in some aspects the famous story of Rabeâ Al-Adaouiya, another prostitute turned Saint and Sufi who became famous for her pious poetry in the Arab world.<sup>32</sup> However the portrayal of the legend is permeated by the insertions and comments of the author about the legendary genesis of the town as a medium for cultural evaluation. Far from a neutral description of a Moorish town, Epton’s text makes oblique comments which betray a partisan attitude against the women of Tiznit.. The legend is thus used to stereotype Moorish morality and an old fairyland story about the town serves to categorize the women of Tiznit and to confirm what the author considers as their low morality.

El-Ksar El-Kebir is another Moorish city with a legendary origin. Arthur Leared visited the city in 1879 and reported “the story about the foundation of this town”. While on a hunting expedition, Sultan Almansour (XVIth c.) lost his way and

...was entertained incognito by a poor fisherman, in whose hut he passed the night. The Sultan was so well pleased, that he bestowed upon the fisherman some royal buildings, situated not far off. These buildings having been enclosed within a wall, soon took the form of a town, to which the name of Alcassar el Kebir, or, the Great Palace, was given<sup>33</sup>.

The story here is akin to the fairy tales where some magic instrumentality brings happy encounters between the poor wood-cutter, shepherd or fisherman with the good hearted prince, princess or king. The outcome of these happy meetings is sometimes the bestowing of royal munificence on the poor lucky man whose good fortune atones for the misery of his lot. This tale about El-Ksar El-kebir serves not only to perpetuate a legend but also to exoticize the origin of the town. This exoticization which serves the aesthetic aims of the travel tale is also a reduction of the hard physical reality of the town and its human dimension to a mere enjoyable fairy tale ; it is a form of literary appropriation of otherness as cultural space.

#### ▪ **Walls and other Boundaries**

European travellers to Morocco were fascinated by the imperial cities in general and by certain spatio-cultural themes in particular within that urban space. British travel writers saw the Moroccan city as a closed entity surrounded by strong walls and protected by gates that close at night. For many centuries it was very difficult for British and European travellers to cross the country's frontier and those who entered the country had to undergo another checking at the city gate; once they enter the city, the European travellers found themselves confined to narrow streets and windowless and blind walls and even those of them lucky enough to be invited into Moorish houses were bound to meet only half the society, that is, the male population since the other half was physically veiled or confined in harems away from the curious eyes of male travellers. This feeling was portrayed by Arthur Leared who visited Fez in 1879: 'what astonished us most of all was the extreme narrowness of the streets in which the private houses were situated. Nothing more dismal or cheerless could be imagined than such narrow chasms between high windowless walls<sup>34</sup>.'

Some travel accounts taint their descriptions with an exotic dimension which removes physicality from the other and the social world of the other becomes an inner journey and an unreal experience. David Spurr defines this approach as one of the controlling modes of authority used by colonial discourse<sup>35</sup> and calls it insubstantialization or what he termed "**seeing as in a dream**". Along these lines, an anonymous visitor to Tetuan wrote: "In walking through the town it seemed as if I were surrounded by everyday scenes and characters reproduced from the pages of the Arabian Nights"; the visitor goes on describing the people he meets as immaterial beings not belonging to the physical world but to be found only in the Thousand and One Nights. Our author meets the story teller, the barber and blood letter, the dentist shaving the head of a pensive Moor, women going to the baths with slaves and finally the famous hunchback of The Nights. The city space becomes thus an exotic scene peopled by unreal characters out of space and out of time. In contrast to these dreamy attitudes, the reactions to the physical urban reality of the Moorish Medina were characterized by wonder and admiration

sometimes, rejection at other times and even a feeling of suffocation in some cases as in the example quoted above from Arthur Leared.

## IX-HOSPITALITY and FRIENDSHIP

Most travel accounts under consideration bring instances where they did partake of Moorish hospitality and they all acknowledge that hospitality. Buffa was "most kindly and hospitably" received by the Governor of Laraiche<sup>36</sup>. This generosity was not found only in the higher class of society but was more usual and more frequently met with in the lower classes. On his 1839 trip to Laraiche John Drummond Hay enjoyed this generosity and hospitality of the Sheikh of the villages on his way. On one occasion he wrote: "We had scarcely picketed our tents, when four men presented themselves, bearing a mona<sup>37</sup> of sheep, fowls, barley, etc which were laid at our feet on the part of the Hakkem as a provision for the night, and enough there was for five times the number of our little party'.<sup>38</sup> But this bountiful 'mona' was not limited to the ambassador since on the same occasion as Hay himself said: "a miserable infidel of a Jew arrived here, and a mona of bread and a fowl was sent him by our lord."<sup>39</sup>

Friendship and faithfulness to it are aspects of Moorish character which struck the 19th-century British travellers as noteworthy. Most travellers made what could have been -at least on the part of the Moors- lasting friendships. Sometimes when the visit was over, the leave taking was emotional and even in tears. It was usual to walk part of the way -a mile or two- with the traveller before leave-taking. After such an emotional experience, Beauclerk wrote:

It may be said of the Moors, that though they are an uneducated people, there are among them many of a very superior order, who are possessed of delicate sense of politeness, and a suavity of manners, rarely equalled even in the polished circles of Europe. Their ideas of friendship are firm and constant, and their honour unquestionable<sup>40</sup>

The extent of Moorish friendship and generosity reach levels unknown to the British travellers. Beauclerk reported how on one occasion a Dr. Brown, whom the author was accompanying, incautiously admired the Haik of fleecy work worn by Hamet Ben Hassan, a Kaid in Marrakech and how the Kaid immediately took off the Haik and offered it to the doctor without hesitation. And 'It was in vain the doctor declared he would not accept it, for the poor fellow said that to refuse his offer would be to refuse his friendship',<sup>41</sup>

John Drummond Hay, that old friend of Morocco, experienced Moorish friendship early in his career. In 1839 and while he was camping in the country with a party of Moorish hunters in a wilderness beset by all sorts of dangers, he wrote:

... my supper party [meaning his Moroccan companions] were as wild a set as could well have been collected together. Yet I felt safe among them, since I had often broken the bread of friendship, and shared with them in their toils and pleasures of the chase: in fact, they looked on me as a brother-sportsman; and, I believe, would have laid down their lives rather than a hair of my head should be injured.<sup>42</sup>

This feeling of security which is warranted by the friendship tie between Hay and his friends is a recurrent instance in many travel accounts. On his retirement in 1886, Sir John Drummond-Hay wrote that he would never forget the kindness of Moroccans, and went on to list a number of the Sultan's officials whom he counted as personal friends. Sultan Moulay Hassan replied that he regarded Hay as a sincere friend and said that his departure caused great sorrow.

## X- CONCLUSION:

In this paper, I have tried to highlight some cultural and historical aspects of Moroccan culture as portrayed in British travel texts. The aspects I limited myself to in this presentation give but a tiny glimpse about the varied issues and rich possibilities that can be offered by these texts for an understanding of Moroccan British contacts and relations. The aim was also to show how through a long period of Moroccan British relations, travel texts contributed to bring the peoples of the two nations to know one other, to understand one other and to trust one other. The paper aimed also to draw attention to an important and rich body of British texts on Morocco which has not been fully explored for a better understanding of the common cultural heritage shared by Morocco and the United Kingdom. But if these texts played the historical role I have mentioned, this should not make us forget their original aesthetic purpose: they were written to give pleasure and to be enjoyed ...and enjoyed they were! Through them Morocco gave pleasure to a large British readership. But if language and availability barriers have kept these texts away from Moroccans, things have changed today and Moroccan students and researchers enjoy reading them and drawing the greatest pleasure from them.

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<sup>1</sup> Her Highness Princess Lalla Joumala, President of the *Moroccan British Society*, Editorial, *Moroccan British Society Newsletter*, n°1, Feb. 2005

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Translated with an introduction by R. J. Hollingdale, 1969, Middlesex , Penguin Classics, p.174

<sup>3</sup> Steve Clark (Editor), *Travel Writing and Empire* , Z books, London, 1999, p.1

<sup>4</sup> Jules Verne's hero in *Around The World in Eighty Days* published in 1873. Phileas Fogg betted £20 000 in a challenge for a speedy touring of the globe. The travel came to epitomize quick traveling and made the story one of the bestsellers of French and world literature.

<sup>5</sup> See P.G.Rogers, *A History of Anglo-Moroccan Relations to 1900*, London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, pp.1-5

<sup>6</sup> Margaret and Robin Bidwell, *Morocco*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), p. XII

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<sup>7</sup> See Khalid Bensghir, *Britania Wa Ichkaliate Al-Islah Fi Al-Maghrib 1886-1904*, Rabat:Phediprint, 2003. p.12

<sup>8</sup> Statistics of diplomatic report about Morocco realized by Ambassador West Ridgeway in 1893. Source: Khlid Bensghir, Op.cit.

<sup>9</sup> Ambassadors William Kirby Green (1886-1892) and Charles Euan Smith (1892) worked hard to that effect.

<sup>10</sup> Finnemore, John, *Morocco*, London 1908, p.14

<sup>11</sup> Sternberg, Adalbert, *The Barbarians of Morocco*, Duffield Co. Editor, 1909, London, p.10

<sup>12</sup> Beauclerk, Captain G. *Journey to Morocco*, London, 1928. p.11

<sup>13</sup> Botton, De A. *The Art of Travel*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2002. p.242

<sup>14</sup> Field, Henry, *The Barbary Coast*, London. 1893, p.26

<sup>15</sup> Finnemore, Op. cit. p. 14

<sup>16</sup> Stutfield, Hugh E. M., *El Maghreb: 1200 Miles Ride through Morocco*, London, 1886. p. 1

<sup>17</sup> Stutfield, Op. cit. pp. 1-2

<sup>18</sup> Id. p.2

<sup>19</sup> Sternberg, Op . cit. p.10. The author goes on : ‘Is it not strikingly remarkable that a town only two hours distance from Gibraltar, on the great trade water-way of the world, should have, preserved for 2,000 years a civilization now existing in Europe only under the lava and ashes of Vesuvius?’

<sup>20</sup> Stutfield, op. cit. p.2

<sup>21</sup> Stutfield, Hugh E. M., *El Maghreb: 1200 Miles Ride through Morocco*, London, 1886. p.2

<sup>22</sup> Trotter, Philip Durham, *Our Mission to the Court of Morocco in 1880 Under Sir John Drummond Hay*, Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1881, p. 139

<sup>23</sup> Trotter, p. 130

<sup>24</sup> Harry Aubrey de Vere Maclean was born in Chatham, Kent, in 1848 and died in Tangier in 1920 where he is buried. Maclean spent 43 years in Morocco, as

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commander of the Sultan Moulay Hassan I army. He was a trusted adviser of successive Sultans and an unofficial agent for the British Government.

<sup>25</sup> Trotter, p.113

<sup>26</sup> Ahmed, Leila, *Women and Gender in Islam : Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1992, pp : 116-117

<sup>27</sup> Monbard, *Among the Moors*, London, 1894. p.204

<sup>28</sup> Id.

<sup>29</sup> Monbard 203

<sup>30</sup> Epton, Nina, *Saints and Sorcerers: A Moroccan Journey*, London, 1958, p. 186.

<sup>31</sup> Epton, Nina, *Saints and Sorcerers: A Moroccan Journey*, London, 1958, p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> Rabeâ Al-Adaouiya, whose Sufi life was put into a film, lived in Bassora (Iraq) in the VIIIth century, she died in 752 A.D.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Leared, *A Visit to the Court of Morocco*, London. 1879, **pp.** 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Leared, *A Visit to The Court of Morocco*, London, 1879, p. 54

<sup>35</sup> See Spurr, David, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> John Buffa, *Travels through the Empire of Morocco*, London 1810

<sup>37</sup> A gift of food for travellers.

<sup>38</sup> Hay, John Drummond, pp.23-24

<sup>39</sup> Id.p.24

<sup>40</sup> Beauclerck. p.102

<sup>41</sup> Id. p.247

<sup>42</sup> Hay, op.cit. p.12