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THE PROCESS OF HERITIGIZATION IN MOROCCO FROM THE FRENCH PROTECTORATE TO THE INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

The paper aims to deepen the process of heritigization in Morocco by the French architects, members of the SFU, during the first half of the 20th century, focusing on the perspective and approach of Henri Prost and Albert Laprade towards local heritage. The aim is to provide a debate on tangible and intangible values in a decolonial perspective, starting from the analysis of colonial interventions, the organization of territory, habitat studies, cultural traditions, of construction and craft techniques.

Keywords

Heritigization, local heritage, cross-culture, decolonisation, French urbanism

Introduction

The revolutions, transformative shifts and big changes have wielded a profound impact on the involvement of foreign architects in various countries, leaving their marks on their urban and architectural landscapes. Examining historical instances such as the Mexican and Brazilian Revolutions in Latin America [Bresciani 2010, 187-214], as well as the modernist reforms spearheaded by the Turkish Republican government during the early 20th century [Bolca 2023], sheds light on the intricate interplay between political upheaval and its reflections on architecture and urban politics. In the wake of these revolutions, foreign architects found themselves grappling with dynamic shifts in ideologies and power structures, which consequently reframed their roles and contributions. For instance, the Mexican Revolution not only redefined societal norms but also birthed a distinctive architectural identity rooted in indigenous motifs, thereby recalibrating the need for foreign expertise. Similarly, the Brazilian Revolution invoked a sense of nationalistic pride that influenced architectural preferences, prompting foreign architects to harmonize their designs with the newfound ethos. Meanwhile, the modernist reforms in Turkey, catalyzed by the embrace of republicanism, ushered in a period of architectural modernization driven by a desire to break from Ottoman legacies. In this context, foreign architects were sought to infuse innovative paradigms, resulting in a

fusion of international architectural styles with local aspirations. These historical junctures illustrate how revolutions and monumental shifts can wield a transformative impact on the dynamics of foreign architects' involvement, forever shaping the urban and architectural heritage of nations. Examining the functional facets and the outcomes, both advantageous and disadvantageous, of state-led urban planning processes, Scott contends that revolutionary and colonial administrations share commonalities in their embrace of high-modernist attributes, manifesting an unconventional concentration of authority [Scoot 1998].

The most basic causes of colonialism are defined as spreading the power or influence of European people to overseas countries, reaching products or economic gain. As underlined by Aimé Césaire in his seminal book, the discourses to “bring civilization” used as a main justification by politics in colonized territories [Césaire 1986]. His stance on this issue was not a political, but a reflection of the ideas that local people, like himself, could express during the decolonial period.

In France, this justification trajectory of politics has slightly changed from assimilation to association in the early 20th century. With this change, colonialist authorities declared themselves as the “protector” of colonized territories by helping them for technological, industrial, intellectual and social developments with a claim on full respect to locals' traditions, values and habits [Raymond 2005]. They started to define their colonial interventions in overseas as “...an extension of mother country rather than a separated territory”. As the French historian described this period as a “theatre”, the colonizers sought to “bring modernization” to colonies through architecture and urbanism [Leprun, 1986].

The declaration of Morocco as a French Protectorate in 1911 was a perfect stage to make a visual of the new colonial trajectory which claims to be more conservationist than the French colonial past.

The responsible for the protectorate and Resident General, Marechal Lyautey, has often reiterated that their role is to safeguard rather than invade [Lyautey 1927]. The preface of the first volume of the International Colonial Congress of Paris in 1931 written by Lyautey might further explain the adopted approach:

Safeguarding of Indigenous Art, scrupulous conservation of monuments of the past, their appropriation to the needs of modern life with a constant concern for respect for traditions, search for new constructions of art appropriate to the diversity of countries, daily struggle against administrative formalisms, against arrogant routines, against the ugliness of “standard models”... [Lyautey 1932].

To demonstrate their credibility, one of his first actions was to establish the Service of Antiquities, Fine Art, and Historical Monuments (*Service des Antiquités, Beaux-Art et Monuments Historiques*) directed by Maurice Tranchant de Lunel. The main aim of the Service was two folds: to identify and classify the Moroccan monuments to be protected, and to undertake archaeological excavations [Tranchant de Lunel 1924]. In parallel to this initiative, Lyautey sought to approach French intellectuals by aiming to modernize

the territory according to the most advanced architectural and urbanism principles. In 1914, through his contact George Risler, Lyautey invited Henri Prost to form and direct the Special Service of Architecture and Urbanism in Morocco (*Service Spéciale d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme au Maroc*) [Cohen and Eleb 2004]. As a Beaux-Art architect who carries a strong interest in developing modern criteria of urbanism, Prost created a team composed of French architects and engineers. This team worked in parallel for many cities in Morocco. In line with the mentioned above colonialist desires, Prost and his team were asked to combine modern urbanism principles by framing the conservationist approach for local values. The prepared urban plans were signed by Prost and the long-term realization process continued until the 1930s in such cities: Fez, Marrakesh, Meknes, Rabat, and Casablanca.

Accordingly, this paper will frame the overall heritagization perspective of French actors in Morocco during the interwar period. However, the main concentration will be the working principles, ideas, and project results of Henri Prost and Albert Laprade through the case study of Rabat.

The search for local engagement in the heritagization process

under the French interventions in Morocco, the heritage-led decisions were significant on two scales: architectural projects and urban plans. The common concern of both scales was to understand how to engage with locals in such a complex political structure. On the one hand, urban plans should deal with the conservation of historic city centers so-called *medina*. On the other hand, new buildings should have been constructed according to the latest technological developments and modernist principles. The team formed by Prost was aware of the different social and cultural structure of the locals that affects their daily life, religious habits, and traditions [Wright 1991; Cohen 2014]. Given the colonialist discourses that said it wouldn't interfere with these local values, Prost's team first sought to get familiar with them by staying many years and working directly on the site. Indeed, Prost's assignment was reasoned by his recent mission in İstanbul where he engaged with the daily life of a Muslim community. According to the President of *Musée Social*, George Risler, Prost was a perfect candidate to find a solution for urban planning in Morocco because of his travel to İstanbul and his survey analysis of Haghia Sophia and its surroundings.

However, many other architects who have interests in non-European territories and/or who desire to learn more about different artistic features were involved into Prost's team such as Jean-Claude-Nicolas Forestier, the conservator of walks in Paris, invited especially to conduct a study in Morocco on the land reserves for the creation of parks and public gardens in the cities of the Protectorate, Albert Laprade, Joseph Marrast, and August Perret [Royer, 1965]. Moreover, many painters and artists who traveled to the Middle East as a soldier during the war period were selected to collaborate with the team such as Maurice Pillet or Jean Gallotti [Mylène 1926].

The urban plans signed by Prost were mainly developed as extension plans rather than conservation plans [Bertoni, 2000]. The cities were planned with a poly-centered

approach based on a holistic separation of old/new settlements. The criteria of this approach were defined as leaving un-touched the medina by constructing new settlements, creating a road connection between them, and separating each other with a green belt [Prost 1932; Wright 1991].

Among Prost's team, Albert Laprade was the prominent name who searches for a way to make new buildings "similar" to the local architecture of Morocco [Culot Lambarichs 2007]. Since the early 20th century, he worked as a young collaborator and friend of Prost and after collaborating with him in the design process of the Hagia Sophia survey, Laprade followed Prost to Morocco. He particularly analyzed the existing structure of medina, architectural styles of buildings, and inner circulations of the floor plans [Barré 2016]. The input of "separation" in urban plans was relevant for the architectural projects in a different way. This time, the gender notion of the Muslim community differentiated the architectural style. In this perspective, the principal façades of the buildings in the *medina* were totally covered with walls without any opening windows or balconies. Only one access was given with a door to the inner courtyard of the building to control the interaction of foreigners on the street and Muslim women in the residential houses. Laprade combined this logic with the European-style architectural projects that he prepared for the public buildings in Morocco [Pabois and Toulrier 2006]. This combination was also related to the French attempt to mark a new identity in the colonial territories. On the one hand, the desire to make French architecture visible played a crucial role in the projects. On the other hand, the need for local appreciation directed them to



1: General view of Rabat in 1920s, in Underi ja Tuğlase Kirjanduskeskus. https://www.europeana.eu/it/item/401/item_SMPHCC2PAK67LQSIVKGES3NTJHKLRIIC [august 2023].

penetrate the local structure, styles, and/or colors into the newly constructed buildings. In particular, façade designs demonstrated this integration with the usage of green glazed tiles and Islamic ornaments.

This approach is particularly clear in many projects he realizes during his Moroccan stay, especially in Rabat, where he works with Prost at the landscaping plan and then at the General Residence (Fig. 1).

The case of Rabat: From the landscaping plan to the General Residence

The development plan for Rabat, finally drawn up in 1916 by Prost, was based on the division of the city into differentiated zones according to their destination and density: the reserve of free land, intended for extension areas and parks; the construction operations with drawers, adapted to the urban dynamic; finally, the regulation of the width of the avenues promenades and other ways of communication according to the height of buildings, the form of subdivisions and the typology of constructions. There was, as a draft plan of 1915 shows, the establishment on the ground of industrial and military new areas and neighborhoods of pleasure, trade and housing. The native quarter that corresponds at the ancient medina was preserved and its historical monuments, mosques and gardens restored [Lyautey 1928]. To resolve the difficult relationship between the medinas and the new cities, which must be separated, as Lyautey wishes, but also attached to each other, in their reciprocal interest, by great arteries, Prost takes again the concept of green belt already used in 1910 in its project to extend the city of Antwerp. By thus isolating the ancient medina in a green script while threatening the views that one can have on them from the “modern” city he realizes «a kind of staging of *mise en scene* not free of theater» [Moine 1999]. Thus, exploiting the exceptional topographical situation that Rabat offered with the ocean, very beautiful cemeteries, a burial of white houses in steps with, from here, from the loggias towards the south and minarets, a belt of fawn ramparts and in the foreground, orange gardens, with on the right the ruins of the great mosque and the Hassan tower and below the estuary of the beautiful river, with, on the other bank, the pretty sister town of Salé [Laprade 1928], Prost has preserved with three park forming three cones of views, the beautiful panorama formed by the two white cities of Rabat and Salé, bordered by the estuary of the great river and the ocean [Laprade 1928]. In this way it inaugurates also a new method of urban planning, based on the protection of the landscape [Cohen and Eleb 2004].

Laprade actively participates in this enterprise/operation by drawing in 1916 the plan of the General Residence, a major project for the representation of the French presence in Morocco, since it includes not only all the administrative and military services of the protectorate, but also the residential villa, the particular dwelling, Lyautey’s office and reception, all installed in a high point of the city, like an administrative garden city of “pavilions drowned in greenery” [Hodebert 2016].

According to Prost, the first difficulty of the project was to be on the scale of the landscape and to take into account both the surrounding small villas and the vegetation,

very sparse, formed of fig trees three/four meters high, giving the impression of a large landscape when it was actually very small. This is the reason why the residence was divided in small elements in harmony with the site, instead of appearing as a single block, which would display its superb by dominating the environment and proudly cutting with the local architecture. The second difficulty consisted in “being modest”, as the Lyautey asked, without however “appearing poor”. Was therefore chosen to the facades were, like the planes, an alloy of an architecture arranged for our needs as Europeans but decorated by the indigenous labour whose art is still very much alive although frozen in definitive forms for centuries [Prost, 1932].

In order to escape from the French monumentality and not to create break with the local way of building, Laprade was inspired by certain typologies derived from the vernacular (sober, white facades pierced with bays of various shapes and sizes), using local materials and decor elements borrowed from the interior architecture of Moroccan palaces. Reflecting Lyautey’s policy, the exterior appearance of the general residence is deliberately modest [Cohen and Eleb 2004].

The General residence of Rabat (Fig. 2), which Laprade left in construction because of his final return to Paris in 1919, appears as «an architectural emblem of the French colonial era and more specifically of Lyautey’s policy in Morocco» [Cohen, Eleb, 2004]. The project testifies the current style that the young French architects, members of the SFU tried to implement in the protectorate: a modern architecture adapted to the new construction programs, sober and simple in its appearance, willingly relying on typologies



2: General Residence of Rabat in 1920s, in Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 401_Muuseumid, https://www.europeana.eu/it/item/401/item_BRWFJW5N6YW5KB3DOWFHQIB37UUBNTRX [august 2023].

and decorative elements specifically Moroccan to ensure continuity with the buildings of the past. Laprade, by using green glazed tiles, zelliges, lime walls, Hispano-Moorish pointed openings, patios, fountains and mosaic earthenware paving, responded to the wishes of the General: express the relationship of mutual esteem and influence between France and Morocco.

Laprade planned also the internal patios and gardens that surround the Rabat residence villa. In order to take advantage of the superb views offered by the residence, perched on the highest hill in the vicinity, he draws, towards the medina and the ocean, a vast outdoor reception garden which, in the extension of the large living room, is set in terraces decorated with geometrical beds arranged around an axis of symmetry in the “French style”, and he creates on the other side towards the ruins of Chellah, a more secret rose garden, surrounded by pines, massive pomegranates and red geranium, and vegetable garden planted with orange trees, lemon trees, mandarin and prickly fig trees, extending to the 12th century almihade rampart. By composing these differences but both regular, Laprade intertwines many french and moorish features: it marries the symmetry and the points of view with the great perspectives and terraces that embrace the natural relief of the land. This double influence also appears in the plantations, which meld the colours and fragrances of local essences (parasol pines, cypress and hibiscus trees) with vegetal evocative of the Cote Azur (jasmine, *volubilis*, geraniums and bouganvilliers).

Conclusion

In the process of heritagization in Morocco by French architects, members of the SFU during the first half of the 20th century, the theme of the separation between indigenous and colony colonial city it's the most controversial and it has been much discussed by many authors [Lughod 1980; Rivet 1988]. The intent behind this division was not rooted in segregation, but rather aimed to establish a holistic safeguarding of indigenous society, embracing both its people and architectural structures. This approach emerged from a genuine aspiration to honor the distinct lifestyles of these two communities. However, J. A. Lughod (1980) studies, that have analysed present problems of “urban apartheid” in Rabat, tracing them back to Lyautey's days, showed a critical view of zoning regulation which generated qualitative spatial organisation differentiating collective units according to ethnic cleavage. Nevertheless, as Lughod clarify well, it's important underline in this case the different between “racism” and “racist politic”. The Protectorat policy was certainly patronising and authoritarian, based in part on racist premises for the main intention on separate clearly the “indigenous city” from the “european city”, (it was apparently for cultural and hygienic reasons), but not racist as such Lughod [1980]. More recently, after the decolonialism, the results of this separation was harshly criticized for creating total segregation of European and non-European community [Nightingale, 2012]. Chattopadhyay argues that colonial architecture, while impacting local heritage values adversely, concurrently gave rise to architectural masterpieces that enhanced the region's aesthetic appeal. In other words, the implementations and

heritage-led decisions yielded arguable outcomes, yet, the era marked its identity by opening new implications for the period [Chattopadhyay 2019].

The interplay between political upheaval, foreign architects, and urban development has revealed a complex tapestry of transformation and adaptation which have directly affected the heritagization process of the countries in global scale. The involvement of foreign architects in post-revolutionary contexts showcases the delicate dance between innovation and tradition, where architects like Henri Prost and Albert Laprade skillfully navigated the tensions between colonial authority, local values, and modernist principles.

The colonial trajectory shifted from assimilation to association, as seen in the case of French intervention in Morocco, where conservationist ideals intertwined with modernization efforts. The nuanced approaches of architects like Laprade, who sought to blend indigenous elements with contemporary designs, exemplify the intricacies of merging foreign architectural expertise with local cultural sensibilities. This delicate balance sought to preserve heritage while also propagating new identities.

Rabat, with its General Residence as a symbolic emblem, reflects the culmination of these efforts. Laprade's fusion of French and Moorish influences, evident in both architectural form and landscape design, underscores the aspiration to foster mutual respect and influence between France and Morocco.

These historical accounts underline the dynamic interplay between revolutionary change, foreign architectural intervention, and the preservation of cultural heritage. They remind that architecture is not merely a physical manifestation but also a narrative woven with political, cultural, and societal threads, forever shaping the urban fabric and architectural heritage of nations.

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