

History

Ksar el-Kebir is situated in the northwest of Morocco in the long river valley of the Lucus, which provides its south and west boundaries, at the centre of a large farming and cattle-raising region. Its proximity to both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, just 30 km and 90 km away, respectively, has given rise to a Mediterranean climate with Atlantic influences, very similar to the climate conditions to be found in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula. Summer temperatures are high but partly mitigated by the ocean breezes. Nowadays, the city has a population of 130,000 and is an urban commune belonging to the province of Larache. It is principally accessed from the Tangiers-Rabat-Fez road, and there are also rail links to these three cities. Traditionally, it has been subjected to constant flooding from the overflowing of the River Lucus. In recent years, the construction of the Oued el-Makhazine reservoir has not only put an end to this risk but has also substantially increased the quantity of irrigated land. The so-called *black lands* of the Lucus valley are particularly renowned for their fertility.

In prehistoric times, the area near Ksar el-Kebir was inhabited by humans, as evidenced by the primitive paintings dating from the ancient Neolithic period that have been found in caves and mountain shelters, dolmens and stone quarries not far from the city. Because of their fertility and geographical situation, the area around Ksar el-Kebir and the meanders of the lower course of the Lucus have been associated with the place in the *Far West* where mythology sinuates one of the labours performed by Hercules in his expedition to the Garden of Hesperides. The ease of communications between the Ksar el Kebir area and the nearby Lixus, which was an important site in Antiquity and is situated further downstream, where the Lucus meets the Atlantic, soon attracted to the region the most prominent cultural and economic exchanges then were already occurring on the shores of the Straits of Gibraltar. Archaeological sites near the city contain indications of a Phoenician presence, denoting the arrival of these early settlers from the Eastern Mediterranean. The present-day Ksar el-Kebir is believed to have been built on Oppidum Novum, the old fort or town in the Roman province of Mauritania Tingitana. Numerous traces of this site have been found throughout recent centuries but particularly in the 20th century when major public works were conducted, such as the creation of the Spanish Ensanche or expansion district, during the more recent extension of the drainage system and the renovation of the Great Mosque. Ceramics, coins, marble statues and various pipes have been found in the city, as well as stones bearing Roman inscriptions in the minaret of the said mosque. One of these stones bears a Greek inscription and has been associated with the Byzantine presence in Northern Morocco during the 6th century AD. The old Roman town must have survived until the decline of the Visigothic presence in the north of Africa in the 7th century. These findings, and historical records, justify the consideration of Ksar el-Kebir as one of the seven pre-Islamic cities in Morocco.

When the Idrisi dynasty introduced Islam into the Maghreb, the Muslim city developed on the former site, having been founded at the beginning of the 8th century by the Kutama tribe. Due to its strategic situation between the north and south of Morocco, and its farming and trading potential, the founders dreamed of turning it into the most important urban centre in the whole of northern Morocco. This period marked the beginning of work on the Great Mosque. The early names of the incipient city were Suq Kutama, Ksar Kutama and Ksar de Abdelkarim al-Kutami, eventually replaced by the present-day name of Ksar al-Kebir (meaning *great fortress*), which evokes its former glory. Al Bakri, an 11th-century historian in Al Andalus or Muslim Spain, refers to the place as Suq Kutama and mentions a castle situated on a hill overlooking a great river. According to the historian Al-Idrisi, who wrote at the beginning of the 12th century, the city was originally a souk or market with a number of important bazars, situated at the intersection of the roads leading from Basra to Tangiers, and from Asilah and Tchemmich (Lixus) to Fez. During the Almoravid period (11th-12th centuries), the only reference is to a place through which large military contingents passed en route to Al-Andalus. The expansion at this point of the old Idrisi mosque consolidated both its importance and function in a city with a growing population. In the Almoravid period (12th-13th centuries) families from Al-Andalus began to settle in the city. The 12th century saw the arrival in Ksar el-Kebir of Moulay Ali Boughaleb, an extremely learned man from Silves who turned the city into a centre of religious studies. Beatified in life, in death he was buried in a mausoleum outside the city, in the area known as Bab Sebta. He subsequently became the patron saint of Ksar el-Kebir. Lalla Fatima



Great Mosque.

Said Mosque.



Souika Mosque.

Sidi Yaakoub Mosque.



Moulay Ali Boughaleb Mausoleum.

Lalla Fatima Andalousia Mausoleum.



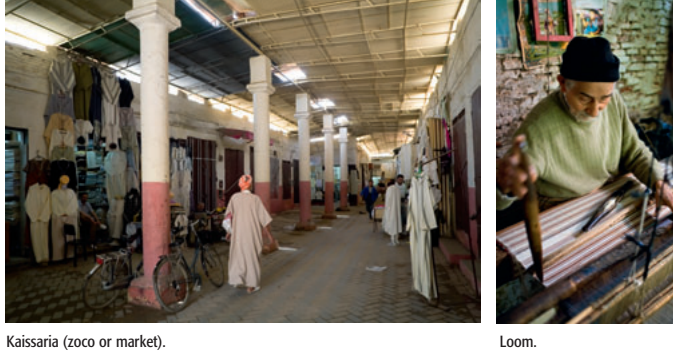
Rmk House.

Ouda House.



Houssein House.

Bakali House.



Katsaria (zoo or market).

Loom.



Tannery.

Fondouk Nekuria.



Remains of the almohad city wall.

Sacred Heart Church.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



Facade of the ancient spanish military camp.



The city in 1883. Comisión de Estado Mayor. Cambro de Comer, Industria y Navegació de Barcelona.



Dwellings near Sidi Bouahmed (top) and Said Mosque. Colour photograph, first half of the 20th century. Library and Archives of Tetouan.

(c. 1488-1554), at the end of the 15th century the inhabitants of Ksar el-Kebir could only cultivate the land within a 6-km radius of the city due to the hostility of the Portuguese in Asilah. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the city was raided and sacked on several occasions, usually managing however to thwart all military intentions. The most traumatic occasion of this type was the unfortunate adventure of King Sebastian I of Portugal, which was the city's most important historical event and had a great impact on European politics. On 4 August 1578, the Battle of Ksar el-Kebir or Oued el-Makhazen was waged by the River Makhazen, north of the city, resulting in the death of the Portuguese king along with the sultan Abd al-Malik and the sultan he himself had deposed, his nephew Al-Mutawakkil. The battle was won by the younger brother of Abd al-Malik, Moulay Ahmed, who was proclaimed sultan on the battle field and adopted the name Al-Mansour, the Victorious, as well as Eddabbih, the Golden. It was this Al-Mansour who consolidated the Saadi dynasty from the south of the country and gained genuine independence for Morocco from European and Turkish interference. The city experienced a new but short-lived heyday in the 17th century under the reign of the khadir Ghaylane, who ruled over most of the north of Morocco. In Ksar el-Kebir he built his palace, the Dar Ghaylane, in the district of Bab el-Oued. However, his confrontations with the Alaouite sultans Moulay Rashid and Moulay Ismail ended in defeat. Because of the loyalty it had showed him, the city was razed to the ground in the mid-17th century and the walls destroyed, never to be rebuilt. During the time that the Al-Riffi governors dominated the north of Morocco (17th-18th centuries), the city was subjected to numerous acts of humiliation and injustice, leading to the fall of this family originally from the Rif region and established in Tangiers) following the Battle of Al-Minzah in 1745, which was fought on the outskirts of Ksar el-Kebir and resulted in the defeat of Ahmed Al-Riffi by the sultan Moulay Abdellah.

In 1911 Ksar el-Kebir became part of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco (1911-1956). At this point a vast detachment of the Spanish army was stationed in the area, which together with the arrival of immigrants from Spain gave rise to the growth of the population and the construction of a new city near the old *madina*. This period concluded in 1956, during the reign of King Mohamed V, who became sovereign ruler of the country. Subsequently, throughout the second half of the 20th century, the city evolved in keeping with transformations in its infrastructure and the modernisation of its traditional economy.

Urban Development

In 1883 Spanish military engineers drew up a map of Ksar el-Kebir and a physical description of the city. By this time, the city was clearly differentiated into two districts of a similar size: Bab el-Oued in the south, and Chriaia in the north, with the Sidi Bouahmed souk between them. Bab el-Oued (River Gate) is both the closest to the Lucus and the oldest of the two districts, being already well established in the late Idrisi period (8th-10th centuries) and home to the Great Mosque, the present-day appearance of which corresponds to alterations conducted in the Almohad period. Situated nearby are the tanneries, several of the city's famous textile mills, the remains of the old Ghaylane palace, and the Sidi Raiss and Lalla Fatima Andalousia sanctuaries. Meanwhile, the space between this district and the Sidi Bouahmed souk is occupied by the Jewish quarter (Al-Mellah), the old silk market and numerous guesthouses. The Chriaia district emerged much later, around the 16th century, on slightly higher land, therefore being much better protected from the waters of the Lucus, which periodically flooded the city. The principal features of this district are the Said, Sidi Yaakoub and Souika mosques, and the urban space known as Mers Square. Although parts of the old Almohad wall that once surrounded both districts were still visible during this period, hardly any of this structure has survived to this day, the foundations being buried beneath four metres of accumulated deposits from the Lucus. This is therefore a city that has been rebuilt on several occasions throughout the ages as a result of flooding from the river. The land outside the *madina* was occupied by orchards, particularly in the southwest area stretching down to the river. Both the city and the orchards were wedged between a series of water courses and streams that drained this plain along with the Lucus.

The urban interventions of the early 20th century—which impacted on a city that had by then acquired a population of 15,000—had a dual purpose: military and civilian. The territorial control demanded by the strategic situation of Ksar el-Kebir, on the French Protectorate border, led in 1911 to the construction of a large military camp and major infrastructure works. As the first barracks went up, accompanied by housing for officers in the Hara district, work commenced on the Tangiers-Fez railway, with a stop at Ksar el-Kebir to facilitate connections with the port at Larache, the Kerma bridge over the Lucus, and improvements on the roads to Tangiers and Larache. These operations necessitated the demolition of the little that remained of the Almohad wall. The military engineers behind all these works also embarked on the projects for the Civilian Hospital, the Abattoir and the drains for the barracks, all conducted between 1911 and 1920. This period coincided with considerable population growth due to the influx of numerous peasants from the region, attracted by the greater safety afforded by

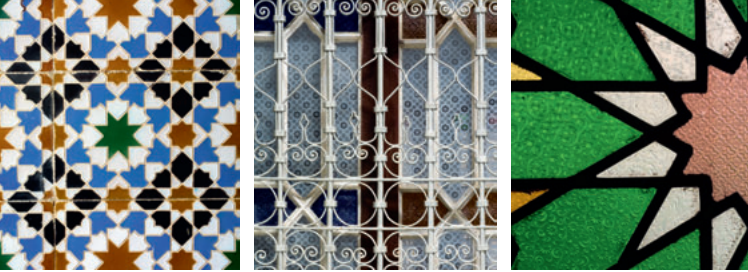


River Lucus.

the city and the arrival of the Spanish. At the outset, therefore, civilian action was virtually non-existent with the military being responsible for most of the initiatives. In fact, it was only at the beginning of the 1920s that the first works commenced on the city's water supply and drainage system, along with the construction of a Catholic cemetery, a health centre and the first Spanish schools. The main driving force behind urban development was the consul Isidro de las Cagigas, who in 1923 took it upon himself to plan the layout of the city, dispensing with both architects and engineers. His plans contemplated expansion areas north and west of the existing city (the origin of the present-day districts of Marche Verte and El Andalous, respectively), near the railway station and the access roads to the city, on publicly-owned space (*majzen*) situated on high ground to afford greater protection from flooding. These areas were connected by the Sidi Bouahleb boulevard, which commenced at the west end of the Sidi Bouahmed souk (Moulay Mehdi Square) and ran northwards to meet the east road to Larache. This new avenue, plus the East Circular (20 August Avenue) that ran parallel to the railway and became the main road to Tangiers and Rabat, were the city's major ring roads, interconnected by the Sidi Bouahmed souk. The spaces between the two avenues and the old city limits were organised on the basis of a transitional urban plan, following the demolition of the city wall, articulated around closed blocks of residential buildings and, on the east side in particular, souks and markets. A different style of urban plan was drawn up for the larger outlying expansion areas, based on garden-fronted semi-detached housing, as in the case of the Scrinia district (1926), producing a type of hybrid

between the expansion and garden-city morphologies. This characteristic is unique to the city, although the urban connections established by Sidi Bouahleb Av. and Moulay Mehdi Square bear a certain resemblance to the functions of Liberation Square in Larache and Feddan Square in Tetouan. Urban interventions also impacted on the interior of the *madina*, leading to the refurbishment of the Sidi Raiss, Sidi Bouahleb and Lalla Fatima

Andalusiya sanctuaries, the Sidi Hazmiri and Aljama mosques, including the *madrasa* or school attached to the latter, the tanneries and other buildings. The actions undertaken by Isidro de las Cagigas corresponded to the need to accommodate the large population that had recently settled in the city and the new influx expected to occur as a result of the planned encouragement of farming and cattle-raising in the area once the railway was up and running. The urban development plans drawn up in 1935 and 1948 were based on the guidelines contained in the Cagigas Plan, but adopted a new approach. The 1935 Plan contemplated a greater hierarchisation of the road network and improved treatment of the urban limits via the creation of public spaces and sports grounds; the 1948 Plan, drawn up by a team led by Pedro Muguruza, contained a land-use proposal clearly differentiated by the activities to be undertaken in the city, as well as residential expansion areas in the north and southwest, and an industrial area on the other side of the railway line. High-rise buildings were promoted in the expansion areas destined for the European population, while the areas designated for the Muslim population tended to favour single-family housing with either a vegetable or ornamental garden. Meanwhile, the aesthetic guidelines contained in the 1948 Plan gave rise to the arcades visible on the Mohamed V Avenue, which have much in common with those to be found in Tetouan and, to a lesser extent, in Chefchaouen.



Ornamental details.

Architecture

The Spanish architecture built in Ksar el-Kebir during the first half of the 20th century reflected the influence of the successive styles. Hence, a first period of "Neo-Arabic" architecture developed in the military city by military engineers in buildings such as the Hall of Flags (1919), with input from craftsmen from Fez and Marrakech, gave way to the eclectic styles introduced by architects such as Carlos Ovilo in his first Schools (1917), the Health Centre (1918) and the General Post Office (1924). Subsequently, José Larrucea designed the Ben Khaldoun school (1926), which adopts a certain region style, while buildings such as the former Intervención or Audit Office (1926), the Sacred Heart Church (1931) and the Sidi Bouahmed school (1934) denote a distinct transition towards a moderate Rationalism. The immediately subsequent period was characterised by the work of Francisco Herranz with his Pavilions in the military city and the Medical Centre where Rationalism gains a greater foothold.

Nevertheless, the souk was the most dominant feature in the city, being one of the most important in the north of Morocco both in terms of the quantity and variety of the stalls. In fact, it was the intense activity conducted in the souk that gave rise to the construction of two interesting buildings: the Central Market and the Grain Market. The first, a single-storey reinforced concrete edifice built in 1932 near Moulay Mehdi Square, features a vernacular decorative repertoire on a highly functional ground plan with an interesting window composition on the façade. The second is a work by Fernando Chueca Góttia from 1953. Again, this is a single-storey edifice but triangular in shape, with chamfered corners where exterior galleries with semi-circular arches strike a dialogue with the architecture developed thirty years earlier in the same area, Sidi Bouahmed.

In addition to the religious works mentioned earlier, the architecture in the traditional city that we see today is marked by a special typology: the textile mills. These are single or double-storey buildings in which the working areas are located in galleries around a central courtyard, each craftsman occupying a single module. Meanwhile, houses such as Bakali, Ouda, Houssein and Rmkik, of recent construction, are good examples of traditional dwellings articulated around one or two courtyards, sometimes with gardens. Other works of interest in the *madina* are the guesthouses, the tanneries, the old silk market, urban spaces such as Dioneane Street and Souk Sghir Square in the Bab el-Oued district, and the squares Jamaa Saïda, Mers, Sidi Yaakoub and Souika in the Chriaia district. As a result of the close relationship between Ksar el-Kebir and its agrarian vicinity, by the mid-20th century the city was surrounded, especially on its east side, by numerous shantytowns erected to cater for the rural exodus. The urban development process of the second half of that century concentrated on the gradual urbanisation of these enclaves, accomplished via the subdivision of the land into privately-owned and developed plots. This activity was particularly intense during the 1970s following the construction of the Oued el-Makhazine reservoir to irrigate the fertile land around the city. In the final 30 years of the last century, the quantity of developed land in Ksar el-Kebir tripled.



Ksar el-Kebir

An architectural plan

