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Tangier: a cultural bridge on the Strait of Gibraltar. A project proposal for the valorisation of the relationship between the old city and the harbour.

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Abstract
Tangier, founded by the Phoenician, for millennia has been located on the edge of the Old World. The city extends its arms on the Mediterranean Sea towards the Atlantic Ocean, becoming the gate of North Africa from the Strait of Gibraltar.

During the Roman Empire, Tangier was the capital of the Mauretania Tingitana, therefore the structure of the city was modified with the typical shape based on the cardo and decumanus. During the 8th century, Tangier became an Arab military outpost supporting the invasion of Spain. After the discovery of the New World, the city became for centuries an important trading center. Thus the Medina, the commercial hub of Tangier, in this context maintained the Roman military structure. Since the 15th century, under the domination of Portugal, United Kingdom, Spain and France the construction of the city walls, the bastions and the York Castle were completed; the structure of the current harbour was shaped during these centuries of wars.

The creation of a free trade zone and the consequent increase of the harbour business interrupted the historical relationship between the Old City and the sea, moving away the sea from the city and creating a coastal area with a strong criticism.

The aim of this study is to show the first result of a project proposal for the valorization of the historical town by renovating the ancient connection between the Medina and the new harbour.

Keywords: Tangier, medina, harbour.

1. Introduction

The ancient city of Tangier is located on the south coast of the Strait of Gibraltar, on the fringes of the ancient world. Founded by the Phoenician, whose tombs are still found on the northern cliff of the city, Tangier reaches the apex of its defensive system in the 17th century, when the English will repair the walls and add the bastions. During the 20th century, the creation of the free-trade zone and the consequent strong increase of commerce and foreign investments, contributed on one side to the enormous growth of its harbour, and to the other side to the decline of its relationship with the ancient city and its fortification that was no longer in line with times, no longer in "scale" with its harbor and no longer kept alive by its centuries-old defense role.

This study aims to define a project for the valorization of the bastioned waterfront of the old Tangier and its historical memory in a framework of re-conversion of the city port. The study started from an in-depth historical analysis of the evolution of the city and its defensive system since the 16th century; the results of this
analysis has been the basis for further investigations. An urban analysis has been then carried out by highlighting the critical and the valuable elements, in order to define intervention guidelines.

2. Historical evolution of the fortifications

Archaeological remains show that Tangier, located in the edges of the ancient world, probably begins its history around the 7th century BC. as a Phoenician trading post, the first civilization known to cross the columns of Hercules, the Calpé promontory (Gibraltar, European coast), and the Mount Abyla (Ceuta, African coast).

The oldest document in which the bay where Tangier is situated nowadays is mentioned, is the Peripius of Hanno the Navigator, a Carthaginian explorer of the 6th or 5th century BC (Carcopino, 1943).

The Berber chieftains called the place Tanja, tan’ga “high place”, because of the extension of the first settlements on the western hill of the bay. The Berbers were pushed out of the hills after the roman invasion (42 BC).

2.1. Roman Period

Tangier became the administrative and military capital of Mauretania Tingitana under Emperor Claudio and its port was the most important of Mauretania for the export of products to Rome.

The Romans stood for about five centuries and archaeologists have brought to light the scattered vestiges of the Roman domination up to 8 meters underground.

During the Roman period, Tangier was a garrison town, protected by walls with two gates: the Bab el-Fahs, towards the countryside, and Bab Marsa, towards the harbour. Its structure reflected the Roman castra based on the organization of two main axes: the decumanus maximus and the cardo maximus. In the case of Tangier, the cardinal points were the port and the hinterland, respectively located to the east and west of the fortified boundary. According to this orientation, the main road connecting the main gates is the decumanus, which started right at the port, crossed the forum, and led to the west door that opened onto the hinterland (Miller, 2005). During the 20th century, this street was called "Rue des Chrètiens" and more recently "Rue des Siaghins" (street of the goldsmiths). The "Rue des Siaghins" still forms the backbone of the old Tangier, a commercial axis that demonstrates a remarkable continuity of the urban shape.

Approximately half of its length extends to the forum (nowadays it is the "Petit Socco", the Inner Market), that was the center of the Roman public life. Excavations by archaeologists (between the end of the 18th century and early 1900s) found different construction materials of the Romans, including traces of a source and its aqueduct along the Siaghins, traces of a temple along the main street of the medina (found during the building of the Spanish missionary church), a family tomb just outside the western wall adjacent to the "Paseo Cenarro" in the Marshan district, and the Roman necropolis now covered by "Boulevard Pasteur" that was called "de la Dette" and its area (Assayag, 1981).

Starting from the cardo and decumanus, a series of smaller roads parallel to both, created an
orderly lay of perpendicular paths, some of which correspond to the entrance doors. With the following dominations (Arab, Portuguese and English) the orientation of these secondary streets was partially lost.

The city walls follow almost exactly the outlines of the Roman town, extending for 2.2 km in length and enclosing an area of about 23 hectares.

Even today the Roman remains are visible not only because of the ruins of its cities, the development of riads to patio, the great Roman heritage of the Pompeian house (geometry that goes from decorations to architecture), but also in the Berber and Arabic language.

Since the half of the 5th century BC the roman Empire starts its decline. Vandals and Goths took over the roman civilization in all northern Africa, including the bay of Tangier.

2.2. Muslim Period

During the Muslim invasion of the 7th century, Tangier’s harbour main role was as a jumping-off point to Spain, where the thrust of conquest was directed in the 8th century.

Tarik Ben Ziad, appointed governor of Tangier in 711, crossed the Strait and landed first on a "jbel kebir" (great mountain) that took in fact his name: "Jbel Tarik" (Tarak mountain) or Gibraltar. Tarik sent part of his army to a place on the southwest coast of the Atlantic coast of Spain, named Tarifa, from the name of his lieutenant Tar Ben Malek. This expedition was the origin of the Muslim conquest of Spain. Thus, Tangier became an extension of the Umayyad Caliphate of Spain with capital Cordova, and it remained within the Andalusian influence during all the late medieval period.

During the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain (912-1027), Tangier was occupied by several successive dynasties, such as the Almoravids and Almohads, who embarked there for Andalusia occupying all Muslim Spain. Their construction techniques are still visible in the great imperial cities of Morocco and Andalusia, such as the Castle of Baños de la Encina (986). However, there is no document that proves their masonry activity in Tangier.

For centuries, the port of Tangier showed an increasingly military role for the Arab invaders, until the Catholic armies under King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, called the Catholic, started a slow conquest, completed in 1492 with the recapture of Granada. During the same year, the Spanish royal family issued the Decree of the Alhambra, or expulsion from their kingdom of all Jews who had not converted to Catholicism. One of the consequences was the emigration of Jewish families to Tangier, where they established a strong community that increased the commerce and welfare of the city. Tangier’s medina is one of the few actual locations where several faiths coexists peacefully.

Arab geographers al-Bakri (d. 1094) and al-Idrissi (d.1165) both mentioned the city in their writings: al-Bakri called it “Tanja al-bayda” that means “Old Tangier” or “Tanja al-bayta” that means “Tangier the white”. They both described Tangier as a city with many monuments, including a bath and an aqueduct (Roman derivation) which impressed them as the ancient face of the city. In their descriptions, they want to associate to the antiquities also their actual perception of a modern city that was characterized by active markets and busy port (Correira, 2004).

In this way, the two authors are giving a cultural description of Tangier. These three aspects, i.e. the port, the market and an old city, will survive through the centuries.

2.3. Portuguese Period

During the XV century, after several attempts, Tangier was conquered by the Portuguese under King Alfonso V, which began the Portuguese occupation (1471-1662). In the two centuries of domination there was an intense activity of trade, construction of houses, churches and convents. During the reign of Alfonso V (1438-1481), D. João II (1481-1495) and D. João III (1521-1557) interest in Renaissance architectural and military theories reached the maximum level. And it is during this period that special
attention was paid to improve the defensive system of the old city of Tangier that, like the other Portuguese strongholds, was subjected to great strengthening works of their defences described by the count of Ericeira, D. Fernando de Menezes (Correira, 2004).

Urbanism and fortifications of the Portuguese overseas Empire were affected by the transformations happening in all Europe due to the development of the artillery. Since the mid-XV century, Tangier was therefore part of this process of modification thanks to some Portuguese mestres who had already worked for the kingdom, abroad and sometimes in Italy, such as João Castilho or Miguel Arruda, who studied the Tangier site and assessed the best defensive system on the basis of the orographic and strategic features of the ancient city.

Between 1565 and 1566 two Italian technicians, Tommaso Benedetto from Pesaro and Pompeo Arditi, were sent to Africa to complete and adapt the Portuguese fortifications. It is believed that they were among the workers present in Tangier and Ceuta for the adaptation of fortifications (Finizio, 2006).

The fortifications a la moderna in the Tangier Qaçba are composed by towers and polygonal bastions (typical of the last decades of the XVI century): the west Tower at Bâb el-Qaçba (later called Peterbourgh during the future English domination), the south-west Irish Tower in front of Jewish cemetery, the south-east Tower near Bâb Dâr ed-Debâgh.

The fortification of Tangier has an irregular geometric conformation like the fortifications built in the overseas territories of the 16th century, which contributed to a difficult translation of the geometric model. This is due to the need of adapting the new construction to the site and to the pre-existing (buildings, old walls). The perimeter of the walls of Tangier is therefore partially built on the declivity of the north side that faces the sea.

2.4. English Period

From 1662 to 1684, Tangier became an English domain as part of the wedding dowry of Catherine of Braganza to King Charles II of England. The English crown considered Tangier as a strategic and privileged location, an important trading centre. Peterbourgh, the English governor of Tangier reinforced the existing fortifications with artillery and new bastions, built 14 fortresses adjacent to the walls. The west walls were doubled on the second half of their length, along the south direction. This was done by means of a wall that was connected to the Irish Tower. Near Siaghins Street and the actual Bâb el-Fahç was built a fortress, called Katerine Fort. Lord Middleton restored a structure known just as “The Castle” (Upper Castle), a late-gothic castle that was situated inside the Qaçba. “The Castle” was connected through the walls to “York Castle”, also recuperated and yet visible on the north-east edge of the perimeter of the Medina. During 1663, Sir Hugh Cholmley and M. Shere began to build from the lower side of pre-existent York Castle, located upon the sea, a 43 meter-long breakwater in direction East, this structure was 34 meters wide and 6 meters over the sea, but it was never completed (Michaux-Bellaire, 1921). The port of Tangier in 1674 was extremely busy, indeed it could contain up to fifty units of boats together, becoming the commercial port between two seas and two continents. The English Crown intended Tangier to be a vital link in the Naval Empire as a point of resupply for its Mediterranean fleet. There are very few official
documents about the Tangier fortifications system during the end of the 17th century, and more in general also about the previous centuries. Among the few most important documents arrived to us, one important mention is for the artist of Bologna Leonardo de’ Ferrari, who in the Atlas of Heliche (1650-1655) drew a map of the city of Tangier that shows the military fortification with the bastions before the English domain. Sir Bernard de Gomme was the Flemish military engineer who carried out the construction of the bastioned citadel, current Qaçba (Saunders, 2004).

Another document of relevance for the period of the English domination, was the one produced by the Bohemian artist Wenceslaus Hollar, who in 1669 made a series of engravings showing the main features of the city, its walls and fortifications, its gates and main streets.

In 1684, after 4 years of incessant attacks by the Sultan Mulay Ismael of the Alawi dynasty and its troops, the English decided to abandon Tangier. Before leaving they destroyed all the military installations, the bastions, the houses and the not yet completed breakwater. Nothing remained of all the military buildings constructed during 200 years of foreign domination. Probably, nothing except the foundations of the bastions, towers and walls of the old Tangier. These foundations could be studied by means of comparative relief, in order to understand the construction technique and hence the historical period. The layout of the new quay built in the first decades of the 20th century follows that of the English breakwater.

The way Tangier was rebuilt since the end of the 19th century by its Moroccan conquerors determined its future character. The Sultan Mawlay al-Hassan I decided to rebuild the fortifications surrounding Tangier’s port: this was done by engineers trained in European building arts, among which is known Zubayr Sîrij (Miller and Bertagnin, 2010).

They began by rebuilding the citadel Qaçba and converting it into the centerpiece of a system of urban defence. Completely enclosed by a wall with gates on three of its four sides, the Qaçba was the seat of power and a city itself. It had its own water source, its own mosque and oratories, and a residential quarter for soldiers, prisons, a treasury house, a court of justice, a palace of the sultan, the house of the governor - “Domus Praefecti” - and a parade ground. The Qaçba became the sultan’s headquarters.

Between the late 17th century and early 18th century again Morocco opened up trade with Europe, so the main subject of diplomatic relations was no longer the ransom of captives captured by Moroccan pirates but the encouragement of commercial businesses. Because of its strategic position of proximity to
Europe and surrounded by the sea, the sultan decided to build all the foreign embassies in Tangier. In this way, by keeping them far from the hinterland, the sultan sought to keep them unharmed.

With the arrival of the diplomacy the port of Tangier changed image and function: besides the increased commercial exchanges the city opened to the International community, becoming a cultural hub. At the same time, the military face of the city started to decline. In 1880 the International Conference on the Consular Protection System in Madrid was promoted by the Sultan and brought together 13 European countries. In 1912, however, Morocco accepted the division into French and Spanish protectorates. In this context, Tangier in practice gained an international strategic importance for those countries that either aimed to maintain their power in Africa or keep an external, but near, eye on Europe. Thus, surrounded by the Spanish protectorate, Tangier became an International city in 1925. It was governed by a commission composed of representatives from the major European countries and the United States.

3. Urban Analysis

The urban analysis is aimed at studying the area between the Medina of Tangier and its harbour. This study started with the project of reconversion of the port under the direction of Sapt, Société d’Aménagement du Port de Tanger, whose main objective is to expand cruise-tourist activity and artisanal fishing, the main driving factors of the local and national economy. This study is carried out in the framework of the Program “Urban mobility and the sustainable development of the Mediterranean area” according to the guidelines of the Blue Plan and of the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy 2016-2025. The study started with the analysis of the road system, the individuation of the main and secondary streets and their influence on the traffic level.

The major change started during the second half of the 20th century, with the mechanization and the creation of the free-trade zone. After centuries of deep connection, the port progressively closed, getting far from the Medina with its fortifications.

The construction in 2007, about 40 km east from Tangier and on the Mediterranean coast, of the new commercial port of Tangier Med has reduced the heavy traffic in the city and allowed the port of the historic city of Tangier to be reconverted.

Tangier has values associated with its strategic geographic position in relation to the Strait of Gibraltar, at the crossroads between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, with a seafront and a hillside. The hilly topographical configuration, mostly in the central part, with hills facing the coast. This factor, however, is limiting for land use and road orientation. Overall, traffic generated by the urban project is about 2,800 vehicles per hour. Compared with traffic entering and exiting in peak season from the project area (about 4,200 vehicles/h), this represents an increase in demand for 66% of traffic. Car flows are mostly concentrated in the summer, affecting the operation of the city and traffic during the summer linked to ferry and coaster ships. The traffic analysis has shown these results: Pedestrian mobility 56%; Light vehicles 27%; Taxi 12%; Bus 4-5%. The evolution of automotive transit traffic, if not controlled, represents a significant risk within the accessibility project. This factor goes along with the strong demographic development that has occurred in recent years: 950,000 inhabitants with a density of 4,800 ab/km2. The urbanization rate has increased in recent decades: 48.5% in 1982, 55.9% in 1994 and 57.5% in 2004. The prefecture of Tangier records an urbanization rate of 90.5%. In 2010, an Atlantic Coastline, called Cornice, was built. This road starts from the harbor in the west direction and follows the northern promenade of the city, opening the front of the Medina by creating a perimeter passage. For almost a century the Medina was embedded in the "cul de sac" of the port area, and detonated from the car park and halls that concealed the view. The frame also reduces the traffic of vehicles lurking the city center by deviating the traffic from the harbor (hinge function) directly to the main road.
axes of the west Atlantic coast (direction Rabat) and the east Mediterranean coast (direction Ceuta and Tetouan).

The city expanded far from the borders of the Medina due to a saturation of the city center, moving away from the sea and shattering the proportionate, once-in-between relationship between a town community within the walls of the Medina and its harbor. In this context of strong expansion, the walls and its bastions have been neglected.

Unique example of a correct management of the historical architectural heritage is the restoration of the bastion Borj al-Hajoui, located near the port on the east side of the Medina and adjacent to the Bab (gate) Marsa.

The interior spaces are now hosting cultural-artistic events, and the coverage is now recuperated to its original function of an exploitable panoramic terrace facing the harbour. However, though this is a remarkable intervention on the defensive structure, in the opinion of the authors it misses a global strategy of complete valorization of the ancient city and its ancient relationship with its "sea of the Strait".

4. Intervention guidelines

The study aims to define a strategy for the redevelopment of the historical heritage of Tangier. The intervention guidelines are therefore designed on one side to minimize as much as possible social diseases generated by the urban modifications, and on the other side to catalyze social activities respecting and valorizing local traditions of the *intra* and *extra moenia* citizens. The project will not force families to be evicted, because the intervention area is over the city (construction of an aerial ropeway) and under the city (restoration of an ancient tunnel). These guidelines can be summarized as follows:

1. Reorganization of long road traffic on the main road running between the Medina and the harbour: Avenue Mohammed VI. To overexpose the car traffic and immunity of pedestrians, an open underground passage should be realized to convey all the flow of cars.

In this way, the coastal area can be released from the intense traffic (especially during the summer) and the danger of coexistence of cars and pedestrians. Therefore, public parking lots will also be transferred underground.

2. After the work of the restoration of the walls of the Medina and the reopening of its walled doors, it will enable: (1) to refurbish the bastions facing the eastern side of the Medina in front of the port: Borj Dar al-Baroud, Borj es-Salam, Borj Charrat, Borj al-Hayoui; (2) to exploit again the ancient pedestrian access to Medina. It will then be possible to restore the underground connection between the renovated customhouse and the palace that houses the Qaçba’s Museum.

3. Giving back to the city the continuity of pedestrian paths between the Medina and the harbour. The about 10ha area between the city walls and the harbour that will be freed from the vehicle traffic, will become a large urban park. It will have a profound effect on the life quality of the citizens, who will find themselves in an intermediate and immediate position. The park will be an every-day gathering area for families, with a playground for kids, an area for organized events, restorations and cafes such as revisited cafelitos.
4. The basin of the historic part of the port will be extended to the Medina with the aim of reconstructing the historical relationship between the walls and the gates of the Portuguese fortification and the gate of the customhouse.

5. In order to safeguard the historic Waterfront, which has just been restored, project interventions are not planned above the country plan, in order not to conceal the walls of the Medina.

6. Restoration of York Castle (Palace Vidal) at the northeast corner of the fortified citadel of Qaçba may offer great opportunities. Inside it will host a museum of the Tangier fortifications. The aim of this museum is to let citizens and tourists meet the cultural heritage of the city.

7. It is important to preserve the historic value of the Medina and re-connect it to its port by means of an aerial ropeway: this will be an important link between the "high city" and the port. At the same time, it will overcome a significant altitude difference: 53 meters altitude at the Faro’s square ("des Paresseux") and 54 meters at the north door of the Qaçba (Bab el Bar).

The air transport system will benefit from collective transport, being nothing more than an extension of pedestrian crossings. It will offer, in the respect of the environment, a panoramic view of the medina and its fortifications, the new marina and the bay of Tangier.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that re-connecting the port with the fortified city of Tangier is a must in order not to lose centuries of cultural heritage. This will be obtained by breaking the critic values and defining an intervention strategy to preserve its valuable features and valorize its attractive potential, its orography, its waterfront and the historic urban landscape. The major beneficiaries of this project will be the citizens (all year round) that will be reconnected to the waterfront, and the tourists (during the peak season). People will be guided by new, lighter, urban ways represented by the ropeway over the city and the underground pedestrian Medina tunnel.

References


