



The group on the bank of the Niger River at Ségoukoro.

Morocco & Mali Tour: October/November 2007 Site Gazetteer

(places we visited are in **BOLD>)**

Pre-Classical Period (to AD 146)

Human settlement in both Morocco and Mali stretches back into the distant past. Although far more work is necessary to delineate events more clearly, it is highly probable that both regions were home to a distant ancestor of ours, *Homo Erectus* (Upright Man); the first hominid to spread widely to many regions of the world. By 100,000 years ago both regions were occupied by *Homo Sapiens*, hominids identical to ourselves (although we are more correctly termed *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* - Wise, Wise Man). At this time (and indeed until about 6,000 years ago) the Sahara was not the impenetrable barrier it is today as increased rainfall prompted savannah vegetation to flourish across it. This enabled widespread human settlement in what is now uninhabitable desert and it allowed more direct lines of communication between what is now Morocco and Mali. Around 15,000 years, the north African coast witnessed the arrival of a group of people who would come to be regarded as the region's indigenous people - the Berbers. While Mali remained occupied by sub-Saharan/Sudanese racial groups, the complexion of Morocco was altered with the arrival of the Berbers leading to the noticeable differences we saw in the people of both countries today.

Both regions developed agriculture and metallurgy a little later than the 'birthplace' of these skills in the Fertile Crescent. This is understandable as it took time to adapt these new-found skills to the particular climates and resource availabilities of West Africa. By 200 BC iron was in use at Old Djenné (Djennéjéno) in Mali and this marks the technological integration of West Africa into the broader Mediterranean realm.

A little earlier than this, in the eighth century BC, epic voyages of discovery originating from Tyre in present-day Lebanon brought a new people into contact with this region - the Phoenicians. While their impact was felt more keenly along the coastline of Morocco, these voyages may well have also included exploration along the coast of West Africa.

A caravan readies itself in southern Morocco before setting off for Timbuktu.





The group in front of Ait Benhaddou Kasbah, Morocco.

In Morocco, the Phoenicians settled at many places including the sites of **Essaouira** (Mogador), **Rabat/Salé** and **Casablanca** where they established trading posts for their lucrative trade in anchovy paste and other more exotic products from the interior. Little remains of the Phoenician presence in Morocco, but their legacy is clear as they constitute the first of many peoples from the east who have tried to impose their will on the very independent Berbers.

Classical Period

(146 BC - AD 681)

From the end of the fifth century BC the Phoenician city of Carthage in present day Tunisia came to control the Phoenician enclaves along the coast of Morocco. As the power and prestige of Carthage grew it was inevitable that it would come to blows with the rising star of Rome. During the second century BC, after three bitterly fought wars known as the Punic Wars (Punic being the Roman name for Phoenicians) Rome gained total control of Carthage in 146 BC. By default the Carthaginian possessions in Morocco also came under Roman control.

Initially the Romans preferred to rule at arm's length and they relied on loyal Berber kings to keep the region calm and the tribute flowing. Most notable of these kings was Juba II who ruled from Tangier (Tingis) but also used the inland city of **Volubilis** as an administrative centre. With Morocco coming under direct Roman control following the death of the Berber king Bocchus II in 33 BC, the fortunes of the town flourished and it grew to become Rome's most western provincial city.

As well as Volubilis, we also visited **Chellah** in Rabat where the remains of the Roman period city (Sala Colonia) are exposed. We saw parts of the Forum and an industrial estate but the site also once included extensive port facilities on the Bou Regreg River from where the exotic goods from the Moroccan interior were shipped to Europe.

Roman control in Morocco was always tenuous. The Berbers continued to independently hold the interior and the province was never extremely profitable for the central government. Consequently, in the late third century AD, the Roman emperor Diocletian reorganised his empire's boundaries and withdrew direct

Roman control from the region of present day Morocco. However the coastal regions and Volubilis continued much as they always had; the inhabitants practiced Christianity and inscriptions were still being carved in Latin. While the resurgent Byzantine Empire managed to hold a few strategic coastal ports in Morocco, the interior continued to be independently ruled by local Berber tribes.

In 429 the Germanic Vandals led by Genseric swept through Morocco as they made their way from Spain to Carthage. Although their name suggests otherwise, the Vandals did not destroy as they went and, in any case, their effect was transitory as the region continued to remain under local control.

Early Islamic Period (AD 681-1062)

In AD 681 Uqba Ibn Nafi led the first of several waves of Arab conquerors which, in a few years, would not only convert the majority of the Berbers to Islam but would make Morocco the most westerly of Islam's possessions (hence the Arabic name for Morocco, Maghreb Aqsa - the far west). The Arabs succeeded in evicting the remnant Byzantine settlements from the north African coast, although their direct control largely stopped at the great Islamic city of Kairouan in Tunisia. As in the period prior to the arrival of the Arabs, local Berber chiefs, although now converted to Islam, continued to control the region of Morocco although it was nominally under the control of the Umayyad dynasty based in Damascus, Syria.

Morocco was quickly integrated into the Islamic cause and by 711 the Berber general Tariq Ibn Ziyad used the country as a base for the Islamic invasion of Christian Spain (although Tariq himself was a Berber from Tunisia - not Morocco). For the next 800 years, however, Islamic forces remained in Spain and the destinies of both Morocco and Spain were to become intricately interwoven.

During the 780s the independent nature of the Moroccan people was again demonstrated when they anointed Moulay Idriss, a refugee fleeing persecution in Iraq, as their leader. With this act the Idrissid Dynasty, the first quasi-national Islamic dynasty in Morocco began, again largely independent of other, more dominant, Islamic powers (by this stage the Abbasid Dynasty based in newly-built Baghdad).

From his base in **Volubilis** Moulay Idriss contemplated the building of a new city free of the pagan and Christian connotations he felt at Volubilis. Although Moulay Idriss was murdered and buried in the town of **Moulay Idriss** before he could supervise much of the initial work, the city of **Fès** was, nevertheless, built, albeit under the auspices of his son, Moulay Idriss II who lived in **Sefrou** as the work progressed. While in Fès we wandered through the old city, **Fès el-Bali**, which owes its foundation to this ninth century work and we saw the **mausoleum** of its founder Moulay Idriss II within the narrow network of alleys that surround the great **Kairaouine Mosque**.

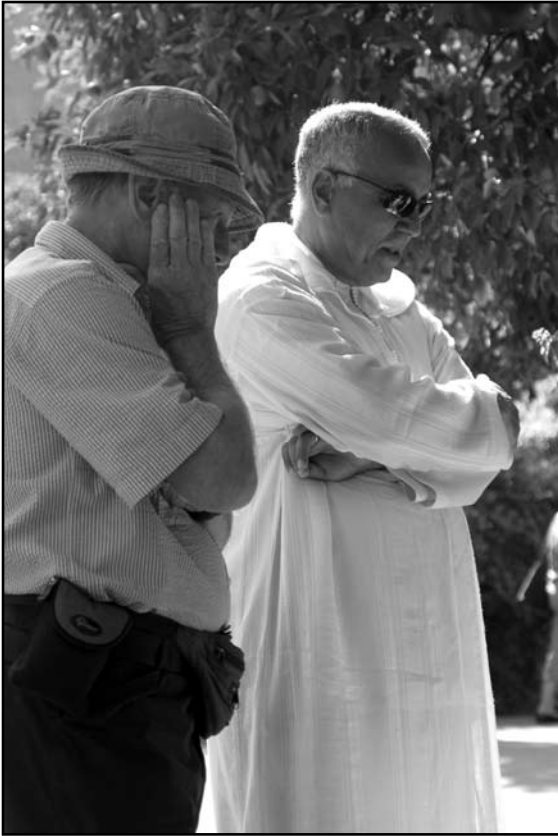
The Idrissid Dynasty was short-lived, and very quickly following the death of Moulay Idriss II, the Fès region was the only area that remained in their hands while the remainder of the country continued its time-honoured practice of tribal independence.

An example of this was in the south of Morocco at the town of **Sijilmassa**, far from the influence of the Idrissid Dynasty. This town, on the northern fringes of the Sahara where **Rissani** now stands, became an important entrepot for the cross-Saharan trade that linked **Morocco** and **Mali**. As in subsequent centuries, this trade carried European/Moroccan goods south, along with blocks of salt that were picked up at the desolate mid-Saharan site of Toudenni. On reaching the Djennéjéno on the Bani River in Mali, these goods were traded for gold, slaves, skins and ivory before the merchants began their arduous trip back to Morocco.

The Almoravid Dynasty (AD 1062 - 1147)

Tribal independence came to an abrupt halt in 1062 with the arrival of the Almoravids, the first indigenous Berber dynasty to rule Morocco, although the leaders of the Almoravids came not from Morocco but from Mauritania further to the south.

These desert Berbers had grown rich from trade with the Empire of Ghana that controlled much of present day Senegal, Guinea and western **Mali**. Eventually the Almoravids were to incorporate the Empire of Ghana and begin the conversion of sub-Saharan peoples to Islam but first they managed to use a mixture of



Hassan and Jim at the Bahia Palace, Marrakesh.

religious orthodoxy and military might to bring much of present day Morocco and Spain under their control. The Almoravids' great achievement was the foundation of **Marrakesh** just to the north of the High Atlas Mountains which they ringed with impressive red-coloured walls. We saw the remains of their mosque on the site of the **Koutoubia Mosque**, walked through their gates and passed by one of their great gardens - the **Aguedal Garden**.

The Almohad Dynasty (AD 1147 - 1269)

Although the Almoravids rose to supremacy preaching a strict adherence to Islam, the dynasty quickly succumbed to the luxuries of power, especially when exposed to the wealth of Andalusia. This set the scene for a new group, the Almohads who were based in the High Atlas Mountains, to sweep down and wrest power from the Almoravids. The Almohads initially adopted **Marrakesh** as their capital but under the rule of their great king Yacoub al-Mansour, **Rabat** was rebuilt as their capital; making this the third Imperial city following Fès and Marrakesh. The Almohads did not neglect the other Moroccan

cities, however, as the **Koutoubia Mosque** in Marrakesh dates to this time, as does the large basin in the centre of the **Menara Gardens** that we strolled around. It is in Rabat however that the finest examples of Almohad architecture survives because here is the unfinished minaret now called the **Hassan Tower** and the beautiful gate, **Bab Oudaia**, which gives access to the Almohad period **Kasbah des Oudaïas**. Large stretches of the Almohad city wall also survives in Rabat; we noted one particularly fine section near the modern **Royal Palace**.

While the Almohads were ruling in Morocco, the hegemony of sub-Saharan West Africa passed to the Kingdom of Mali following the disintegration of the Empire of Ghana. The Kingdom of Mali was established following 1235 by the legendary king Sundiata Keita who began a series of conquests which would see all of present day Mali and many surrounding countries united under his rule. As major trading centres, both **Timbuktu** (which had been founded in 1106) and **Djenné** (which had been established as a new settlement separate from Djennéjéno by this time) also came under the control of the Malian Empire. The Malian Empire was instrumental in spreading Islam to eastern Mali and to other regions beyond.

The Merinid and Watiasid Dynasties (AD 1269 - 1524)

In Mali this was a time of great prosperity as the gold trade enabled its rulers to amass huge fortunes. A notable example was the pilgrimage to Mecca of the Malian king Mansa Musa which, on the way, brought so much gold to Cairo that the price of the metal slumped for years afterwards. This was the high point of **Timbuktu**, seen in the 1350s by the great Moroccan traveller Ibn Battutah, and the foundation of myths concerning the wealth of this city that would persist into the twentieth century.

By 1335 Songhay, centred on Gao to the east of Timbuktu, split from the Malian Empire although the western core remained strong. In 1337 Mansa Musa exchanged ambassadors with the Marinid Dynasty of Morocco cementing ties between the two countries that had been fostered by the trade that flowed between **Timbuktu** and **Sijilmassa**. However, by the second half of the fifteenth century, the Songhay Empire had subsumed the Malian Empire bringing this trade under its own control.

In Morocco we saw many splendid examples of Marinid architecture. Most beautiful was the **Bou Inania Medersa** in Fès and its contemporary in **Meknès**. Also dating to this period are the religious buildings and walls at **Chellah** in Rabat, the El-Attarine Medersa in Fès (closed for restoration during our visit), the entire **Fès el-Jidid** (New Fès) that we walked through and the **Mellah** or Jewish Quarter at **Sefrou**.



Aliesse and Mariama at Timbuktu, Mali.

In 1472, after a comparatively long rule (in Moroccan terms), power passed from the Marinids to the Watasids who controlled the country for a little under one hundred years. The Watasids continued many of the notable innovations of the Marinids (the establishment of religious schools, the foundation of Jewish Quarters, the organisation of a workable civil service), but regrettably, they also continued some of the negatives of the Marinid Dynasty such as allowing the establishment of European outposts on Moroccan soil.

The Sa'adian Dynasty (AD 1524 - 1660)

With disorganisation rife among the Watasids, people turned to an Arab tribe that had based itself in the Drâa Valley in the south of Morocco. These rulers of the Sa'adian Dynasty took it as their primary task to rid Morocco of the foreign enclaves that had manifested themselves in the previous century. After a decisive victory at the Battle of the Three Kings in 1578, the Sa'adians went on to capture many of the European enclaves, most notably the Portuguese settlement at Agadir. Not satisfied with consolidating power in Morocco, the Sa'adians launched an ambitious attack across the Sahara that culminated in 1591 with the capture of both **Timbuktu** and **Djenné** and resulted in the disintegration of the Songhay Empire.

In **Marrakesh** we saw the wonderfully decorated **Sa'adian tombs** and the **Ali ben Youssef Medersa**, and while we were in **Rabat** and **Salé** we remembered that, for all their strength, the Sa'adians failed to control this area that established itself as the independent Republic of Bou Regreg; the infamous home of the Sallee Rovers who carried their piracy as far as the shores of Great Britain.

The Alouwite Dynasty (AD 1660 - Present)

While we in **Rissani** we saw the mausoleum of the founder of the Alouwite Dynasty, **Moulay Ali Cherif** and this reinforced the fact that it was in the Tafilalt region that this dynasty of Arab ancestry had its origins. The best known of the early Alouwite kings, however, is **Moulay Ismail** who made **Meknès** his imperial capital. There we saw many monuments dating to this powerful king's reign from the never-ending **city walls**, the massive **granaries** and **stables**, the beautiful city gate, **Bab Mansour** and the exquisitely decorated **Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail**.

Elsewhere in Morocco we saw many monuments dating to the reigns of subsequent Alouwite rulers such as the outstanding **Amerhidil Kasbah** in **Skoura**, the large Kasbah at **Aït Benhaddou** and the more recent **Taourirt Kasbah** at **Ouarzazate**. We also had a chance to see how the ruling class lived during this period with a visit to the nineteenth century **Palace Bahia** in Marrakesh and the beautifully restored **Fondouk el-Nejjarine** in Fès that dates to the eighteenth century.

In Mali we had a very pleasant (apart from the kids...) excursion to **Ségoukoro**, which, in the eighteenth century, was the centre of Mali's last empire prior to colonisation that thrived on its participation in the slave trade.

Back in Morocco, as well as visiting the current Royal Palace at **Rabat**, we also saw the outside of the Royal Palaces in **Fès** and **Casablanca**. Our appreciation of the continuing role of the Alouwite Dynasty came across the country when we saw the people's loyalty to the present king, Mohammed VI.

Ben Churcher