



Fondation Jardin Majorelle

LES CAHIERS DU  
**MUSÉE BERBÈRE**



**CAHIER NO. II**

2013

## FOREWORD

**F**OLLOWING THE BERBER MUSEUM'S first symposium, **The Berbers in Morocco Today**, held in Marrakech on 12 May 2012, the Fondation Jardin Majorelle presented 2013's meeting on the theme: **Amazigh Knowledge and Know-how: Disappearing or Adapting?**

This year the international community and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of the Organization in October 2003. The Berber Museum participated in this global event by dedicating its second symposium to the movement for the safeguarding of the Berber cultural heritage.

Even if Amazigh knowledge and know-how sometimes manage to reinvent themselves, some do disappear. An assessment of this situation was able to be made through the contributions to the symposium. Beyond its mission of conservation, study and the transmission of Amazigh tangible heritage, it is also the responsibility of the Berber Museum to urge the need for the preservation of a threatened intangible culture.

The *Cahiers du Musée Berbère* are published in English, and also in the original language in which they were written – this year in French. This second journal brings together the contributions from the speakers at the symposium: *UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* by Cécile Duvelle; *Transmission and its drawbacks in Jemaa el-Fna Square, Marrakech* by Ahmed Skounti and Ouidad Tebbaa; *Amazigh Knowledge and Know-how: Manuscripts and Carpets* by Ali Amahan, and *Technical Culture and the Museum: the Fabric of Meaning* by Narjys El Alaoui. In addition, two documentaries were screened in the context of the symposium: Romain Simenel's *La mémoire à dos d'âne* [The Memory on the Back of a Donkey] (2008) and Thomas Ladenburger's *Al-Halqa – In the Storyteller's Circle* (2010). This publication also reports on the issues raised by these two films.

Björn Dahlström  
Curator of the Musée Berbère

CONVENTION FOR THE  
SAFEGUARDING OF INTANGIBLE  
CULTURAL HERITAGE:  
ASSESSMENT AND PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
TENTH ANNIVERSARY

CÉCILE DUVELLE

*Secretary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage  
Head of the Section of Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO*

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## CÉCILE DUVELLE

Cécile Duvelle studied cultural anthropology at the Université Paris V–René Descartes under professors Georges Balandier, Louis-Vincent Thomas and Michel Mafessolia. She focused her studies on sub-Saharan Africa: on subjects such as the spontaneous habitat in the suburbs of Dakar and its effect on traditional family structures; the role of women in the development of Gabon (where she lived for three years), and on an anthropological approach to nutrition. After coordinating the publication of the *Encyclopédie juridique de l'Afrique*, a collection of 11 volumes reviewing the legal framework since independence of the seventeen francophone African countries, Cécile Duvelle joined UNESCO in 1989 and worked for UNESCO Publications and the Culture Sector. In 1999 she joined the Office of the Director-General of UNESCO where she was responsible for following cultural questions and drafting the Director-General's speeches. Through this work, she has closely followed the processes of drafting and the reaching of agreement on several instruments relating to the cultural sector; in particular the Convention of 2003 for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Convention of 2005 for the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Cécile Duvelle has accompanied the Director-General on official visits to more than eighty countries. In October 2008 she was appointed Chief of the Intangible Heritage Section and Secretary of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

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AS THE ONLY AGENCY in the United Nations possessing a specific mandate in the cultural field, UNESCO has worked since its creation for the safeguarding of cultural heritage and for the promotion of cultural diversity as a source and resource of dialogue and development. Adopted by UNESCO in 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage is the first binding multilateral instrument adopted by the international community intended to safeguard a particularly fragile and vulnerable form of heritage, often misunderstood or even despised, since it is often mistakenly associated with obsolete folk practices. Nearly ten years after its adoption, more than 150 States have ratified it, thereby committing themselves to integrating its principles and directives into their national policies. This statement seeks to illuminate the major points and key concepts, and to complete an assessment, ten years after its adoption, of its implementation on a global level.

### **What is ‘intangible cultural heritage’?**

The definition of intangible cultural heritage given by the Convention is both specific and flexible. It establishes that intangible heritage refers to the ‘practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills [...] that communities, groups, and in some cases individuals, recognize as part of their cultural heritage’. The originality of this definition insists on the central role played by the communities and the understanding what is, for them, their own intangible heritage. No outside expert, political authority, or international jury can decide for them.

‘Transmitted from generation to generation, [it] is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity.’ It is therefore unnecessary for intangible heritage to be beautiful, original or exceptional. Every expression of intangible heritage is precious for its practitioners, and often seals their sense of belonging to their community. The notion of authenticity is not relevant either, since the process of re-creation and reinterpretation is continuous.

Finally, for the purposes of the Convention, only the intangible cultural heritage that is compatible with existing international human rights instruments as well as the requirements for mutual respect, can be taken into consideration. This means that neither the Convention nor the safeguarding of intangible heritage can be used to contravene the universal principles of human rights.

Traditions and oral expression, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage, the performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship are all domains of intangible cultural heritage. But this list, taken from Article 2.2 of the Convention, is not exhaustive and overlapping is frequent.

### **What do we need to safeguard and how?**

As emphasized in its title, the ‘safeguarding’ of intangible cultural heritage is the main objective of the Convention. The term ‘safeguarding’ refers to measures which seek to ensure the long-term viability of intangible heritage. It is particularly required of State Parties to **‘identify and define** the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in [their] territory with the participation of communities, groups, and relevant non-governmental organizations’ (Article 11). Article 12 also invites each State Party to draw up, ‘in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory’, and adds that ‘these inventories shall be regularly updated’. The aim is to establish a very concrete obligation for the State Parties.

It must be noted that the establishment of **inventories** is a fundamental work, but not without risk. If it is truly conducted according to an upward movement, it will offer not only the advantages of such documentation – namely by the registration of elements potentially in danger of extinction – but it will also have a positive effect on the viability of these elements, since it will help the communities taking part in the inventory to better perceive the importance of their heritage, reinforce their pride, and consequently increase their attachment to the practice of heritage. On the other hand, with the help of inventory work, a State can reinforce social and cultural discrimination if it ignores or neglects the intangible heritage of minorities. The risk equally exists of confusing inventory with safeguarding, and of limiting oneself to publishing works or audiovisual documents without ensuring that this documentation serves the aim of transmission and viability.

**Promotion** and **development** equally play a very positive role in safeguarding: to see one’s intangible cultural heritage promoted and recognized outside its natural space, be it on a regional, national or international level, is a source of pride for a community. This often improves the image which it has of itself and can in particular, reinforce the interest and attachment of younger generations in that respect. The other positive consequence which is, of course, the most important, is to ‘promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity’. Such is one of the principle objectives of UNESCO, enshrined in

its constitutive act, and there is no doubt that the Convention is also a powerful instrument of dialogue and the promotion of understanding, tolerance and mutual respect between cultures.

But the essential measure for the safeguarding of intangible heritage is without doubt **transmission**: putting the knowledge, skills and practices inherited from past generations at the disposal of future generations. In fact, one can say that safeguarding seeks to guarantee that these practices, representations and expressions will be performed for a long time to come. The viability of the element of intangible heritage often finds itself threatened when traditional forms of transmission are interrupted or weakened.

How can one guarantee this **viability** when it is increasingly compromised through globalization, urbanization, climate change, natural catastrophes, poverty, migrations or conflict? How can one ensure that evolutions that are accepted, even desired by communities – such as access to mass media or tourism – do not affect the viability of their intangible cultural heritage? It is a difficult question which no one can answer decisively. It must be accepted that certain aspects of intangible heritage lose their relevance and their legitimacy for a community at a point in its history. This heritage is destined to perish like all living organisms. But an intangible heritage, which seems obsolete in the eyes of some, can be practiced and transmitted by a community because it needs to maintain its sense of identity and continuity for its social well-being. It can also help it to manage its natural environment and generate revenue. Much of the knowledge of intangible heritage can be integrated into health care systems, educational systems and the management of natural resources. It is the role of the State Parties to ensure that the objectives of the Convention can fulfill their potential role in important developmental issues such as sustainability, peace and security, as well as inclusive social and economic development.

One thing is certain: **communities, groups and individuals** play a central and essential role in the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage. Without the active participation of the communities concerned and their unreserved support, measures for safeguarding could not be effective and would not ensure transmission, and thus the safeguarding of the intangible heritage at the heart of the community.

### **A Convention to mobilize efforts at national and international levels**

The Convention adopted by UNESCO in 2003 has four objectives, as stated in its first article:

- **The safeguarding** of intangible cultural heritage
- **Respect** for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned
- **Raising awareness** at local, national and international levels of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its mutual appreciation
- **International cooperation and assistance**

The Convention dedicates an entire chapter to measures to be taken by State Parties at the **national level**, asking the States to take the necessary measures to identify and safeguard the intangible cultural heritage present on their territory with the full participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations. The adoption of a general policy for safeguarding intangible heritage, the establishment of one or several bodies skilled in safeguarding, the encouragement of scientific research, education, and the awareness of the importance of this heritage and of safeguarding it, figure among the measures that States should take. They are expected to report every six years to the Intergovernmental Committee responsible for keeping up with the implementation of measures taken by the Convention to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage on their territory.

At the **international level**, the State Parties can propose for inscription elements of intangible heritage present on their territory on one of the Convention's two lists: the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

State Parties can also propose programmes, activities and national, sub-regional or regional projects for safeguarding the intangible heritage which they deem best to reflect the objectives of the Convention and which, once selected, will be inscribed on the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices and will be widely circulated and promoted.

State Parties are encouraged to collectively submit multinational applications when an element finds itself on several of their territories, or when a safeguarding project is conducted on a sub-regional scale.

Also, because international cooperation is at the heart of the Convention, and more generally, the work of UNESCO, one of the most tangible forms it takes is of international financial assistance available to State Parties, in particular the developing countries. By contributing to the Intangible Heritage Fund, through mandatory contributions as State Parties to the Convention, they allow UNESCO to dispose of sufficient financial resources to support safeguarding programmes across the entire world.

Inscriptions on the lists and the selection of the best practices of safeguarding and the granting of international assistance are carried out by an Intergovernmental Committee, composed of 24 members elected by the General Assembly of State Parties, and based on equal geographic distribution. They are subject to a certain number of criteria stipulated in the Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention.<sup>1</sup>

### **Assessment and perspectives**

As of now, more than 150 States<sup>2</sup> have ratified the Convention. Today, 298 elements<sup>3</sup> have already been inscribed on the Lists, and the enthusiasm inspired by these inscriptions shows no sign of waning, with a greater and more varied number of participating States. Fortunately however, the Convention does not limit itself to its most visible section – the inscriptions – and it has already had a significant impact on safeguarding intangible heritage on a local level. The twenty or so States that have already sent their reports<sup>4</sup> on the legislative, regulatory and institutional administration and other undertakings for the

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<sup>1</sup> To see the Operational Guidelines and the criteria for inscriptions on the lists:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00026>

<sup>2</sup> To see the list of State Parties:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00024>

<sup>3</sup> To see the elements inscribed:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011>

<sup>4</sup> To see the reports:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00460>

implementation of the Convention on the national level show that the drawing-up of inventories is operational. Certain States have introduced an extremely wide range of measures at national and local level, even if others are slower to undertake real policies for safeguarding. It is equally interesting to note the important impact that the inscriptions have been able to have on the viability and vitality of intangible cultural heritage.

If the legislative and regulatory measures that are in position to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage are examined, one question that remains barely touched concerns the laws or policies which ensure respect for the customary practices governing access to certain aspects of the intangible cultural heritage. Now this point should be seriously considered in order to respect the restriction of use on their accessibility. Not all the States seem to be fully conscious of the implications of the documentation or inventory practices in the case where a secret element is involved, or are considerate in respecting the private lives of groups of practitioners, particularly with regard to attention from the media or tourists.

Similarly, among their measures of safeguarding, numerous festivals have been organized in which the expressions of intangible cultural heritage are interpreted in public outside their socio-political contexts. The potentially negative effects of transforming specific expressions of intangible cultural heritage into public spectacles, even when they take place outside a commercial context, deserve great attention in the light of Paragraph 102 of the Operational Directives, which asks [parties] ‘to ensure that awareness-raising actions will not in consequence: (a) decontextualize or denaturalize the intangible cultural heritage manifestations or expressions concerned [and] (b) mark the communities, groups or individuals concerned as not participating in contemporary life, or harm in any way their image.’ At the last meeting in December 2012, the Committee asked UNESCO’s Secretariat to commence the process of drawing up a draft for a code of ethics concerning the appropriate character of awareness-raising measures.

Similarly, few measures seem to have been undertaken to ensure the protection of the intellectual property of the bearers of tradition. However, the implementation of the Convention – whether at the international level, in the form of applications and inscriptions, or the national level, through the inventory process – generally involves the creation of informative registrations

on the expressions, practices and representations which constitute their intangible cultural heritage. Regarding these documents in particular, it is important to ensure that communities and individuals retain the intellectual property rights to their expressions.

Community participation should also be included in the laws and regulations, but still more importantly in administrative processes. It should start with the full participation of the communities and individuals concerned, in all stages of decision-taking with regard to the safeguarding of their heritage – which is still far from being the case.

Another burning question is the often-established relationship between intangible cultural heritage and ‘national’ identity, an idea absent from the text of the Convention. Such a vision of intangible cultural heritage can have several negative consequences: ignorance and potential marginalization of intangible cultural heritage considered ‘foreign’ to a nation, but also the absence of valorization of cultural diversity in favour of a ‘national’ culture. It would doubtless be useful to reflect on a way of ensuring that the international mechanisms of the Convention, such as the lists, are not used to serve other objectives contrary to those of the Convention itself, which favours the respect and promotion of cultural diversity and international cooperation. Similarly the way in which processes like, for instance, the establishment of inventories, that can either promote respect for diversity or be twisted to promote uniformity, canonization or standardization, should be studied in detail.

The relationship between tourism and intangible heritage is another particularly difficult question: communities, in certain cases, wish to encourage tourism because it brings economic benefits; in other cases, they prefer to hide certain secret or sacred elements from outside scrutiny; in other cases, a middle ground can be found. It is nevertheless crucial to clarify the roles of the different participants – State and communities do not necessarily share the same interests.

The activities of the owners of commercial tour operators (domestic and foreign) should also be examined attentively in the light of Paragraph 102 (e) of the Operational Directives, which reminds us that awareness-raising actions should not ‘lead to [. . .] unsustainable tourism that may put at risk the intangible cultural heritage concerned’.

### **An Urgent Matter: Reinforcing Capacities**

The importance of strengthening national capabilities to safeguard intangible cultural heritage – in particular, training government staff and NGOs in the effective implementation of the Convention – are clearly emerging from these first ten years of the life of the Convention. Numerous concepts and approaches are new to heritage practices, and numerous too are the participants, including those in developed countries, lacking the conceptual and methodological tools to ensure an effective safeguarding of the intangible heritage on their territory.

In response to this need, UNESCO has launched an ambitious programme to reinforce abilities, by working in close cooperation with the governments, civil societies and communities concerned, to ensure that the concepts and fundamental mechanisms of the Convention are understood and applied, in order to build up a critical mass of experiences and skills capable of sustaining the long-term safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.

The projects developed in the framework of this strategy – which take between 24 and 36 months for each country – support: the revision of policies and legislation; the reshaping of the institutional infrastructure in order to respond to the needs of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage; the development of inventory methods and systems; the involvement of all the interested parties, and the reinforcement of necessary skills for preparing a request for international assistance or applications to the Convention's lists. Today, more than 78 countries have benefited from it: 50 of them through an analysis of their legislative and political framework, as well as the development of inventories; 28 countries are in the process of evaluating their needs. At present, about 11 million dollars have been set aside to sustain this strategy.

The States have become much more active concerning requests for international assistance from the Fund for Intangible Cultural Heritage for safeguarding projects. (50 requests are at this moment in the process of being reviewed.) Moreover, more attention is paid to the List of Urgent Safeguarding for the 2013 cycle, and we are seeing a growing number of submissions from States, of which some have submitted applications for the first time. Africa, for

the first time, is the best-represented continent in terms of the number of States' submissions for the 2013 cycle.

Encouraging signs, which must not make us forget that the implementation of such a Convention is a very long-term project that must be anchored through structural, transversal and multidisciplinary measures, appropriate to the levels of the countries.

In this respect, one can only salute the visionary intuition of the authors of the Convention, who understood not only the importance of placing intangible cultural heritage beside other forms of heritage, but who also put communities at the centre of its creation, re-creation and safeguarding. The real issue today is that the States who have ratified it should assess the extent of the challenges of its implementation on the national level, and that they should not be overly attracted by a system of lists, which has no other aim than to promote the importance of intangible heritage and its safeguarding. The real work is, and will always remain, profoundly local.

TRANSMISSION  
AND ITS DRAWBACKS IN  
JEMAA EL-FNA SQUARE, MARRAKECH

AHMED SKOUNTI AND OUIDAD TEBBAA

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## OUIDAD TEBBAA

Ouidad Tebbaa teaches at the Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, where she runs diverse groups on the theme of Tourism and the Value of Heritage. She has been Dean of the Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines of Marrakech since 2010, and has worked for many years on the safeguarding of tangible as well as intangible heritage, through publications but also through militant work on the ground. Ouidad Tebbaa was also general secretary of the Association which worked on the recognition of the Jemaa el-Fna Square in Marrakech, Oral Heritage of Humanity, by UNESCO. Among Tebbaa's publications: *Jemaa el-Fna*, Éditions Paris Méditerranée & La croisée des chemins, 2003; *Vivre Marrakech*, collective work, in collaboration with Mohamed Sijelmassi, Éditions Oum, 2005; *La Place Jemaa el-Fna, patrimoine culturel immatériel de Marrakech, du Maroc et de l'Humanité*, bilingual: Arabic and French, in collaboration with Ahmed Skounti, Publications du Bureau de l'UNESCO, Rabat, 2006; *Jemaa el-Fna, patrimoine culturel immatériel de Marrakech, du Maroc*, co-written with Ahmed Skounti, Publication de l'UNESCO, Bureau Multipays, Rabat, 2006; *De l'immatérialité du patrimoine culturel*, under the direction of Ahmed Skounti and Ouidad Tebbaa, Publication de l'UNESCO, Bureau Multipays, Rabat, 2011.

# TRANSMISSION AND ITS DRAWBACKS IN JEMAA EL-FNA SQUARE, MARRAKECH

AHMED SKOUNTI AND OUIDAD TEBBAA

## Introduction

THE SAFEGUARDING of knowledge and know-how elements of what is commonly known as ‘tradition’, is one of the main questions being faced by humanity today. The issues involved are social and economic, as well as political and cultural. This is why safeguarding is at the centre of UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in 2003. It does not merely cover the preservation of content, the archiving of data, and the conservation of the objects and structures associated with knowledge and know-how. Even though these activities – documentation and research, for example – are needed as parts of the inventory, they are not enough. They need to be augmented by the recognition of, and validity given to, their intangible cultural heritage by the bearers so that its transmission (the passing-on of knowledge and traditional skills) can be assured.

Transmission is, therefore, to be found at the heart of every attempt to safeguard knowledge and know-how. However, having not been considered by itself for itself in its own right, it represents a sort of ‘unconsidered’ of anthropology (Berliner 2010: 8). A necessary precondition is to identify its working methods, find ways to ensure it survives, and ascertain the difficulties involved in its continuation in parallel with today’s modern methods. This is why transmission is itself a heritage to safeguard; should it decline, only exhaustive documentation would allow its guidelines to be preserved. The question of transmission is addressed, more globally, on the level of cultures. On one side, modernity and globalisation have introduced new methods of



**FIGURE I**  
Jemaa el-Fna Square, Marrakech  
Anonymous, 1926

transmission, and on the other, have led to a global interculturality. Those involved seem disoriented in a world perceived as frenetic and unsettling. This does not facilitate the continuation of ‘traditional’ procedures of transmission – quite the opposite, we are taking part in a shift further and further towards formal transmission, assured by dedicated institutions employing conventional methods of training.

In the following pages, we would like to examine these questions of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, and its corollary, transmission as found today in Marrakech’s Jemaa el-Fna Square. Proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001, and then added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008, it offers an ideal area for a study such as this. Furthermore, two studies, mainly oriented to transmission, that we have conducted there twice in six years (Skounti et Tebbaa 2006a; Skounti et Tebbaa 2012), have allowed us to draw up both an overview of the square and identify the conditions, shortcomings and prospects of this highly cross-disciplinary practice that makes up transmission.

### **Transmission**

Whoever asks about transmission asks a two-fold question. What is transmission? And what are the processes involved? This theoretical framework is necessary. It is based mainly on the input of the humanities and social sciences, in particular, anthropology, which allows us to understand what is meant by an idea as little studied as transmission, the content that it covers, as well as the methods, means and processes that the holders of intangible cultural heritage put (or don’t put) into play to pass on knowledge or know-how. It goes without saying that today, more than in the past, transmission is faced with many more difficulties which makes it more problematic: on the one hand, competition from schools and modern learning methods; then, the unprecedented expansion of the media and means of audiovisual and virtual communication; and finally, the dominance of the written word over the spoken word, are just some of these difficulties. Within this context, should ‘old-fashioned’ transmission simply adapt, or is it condemned to disappear? But first of all, what is transmission and what are the processes involved in it?



**FIGURE II**  
Monkey trainers, Jemaa el-Fna Square, Marrakech  
Anonymous, 1933

### 1. *What is transmission?*

The verb ‘to transmit’ means ‘to cause (something) to pass on from one place or person to another’ (Oxford Dictionaries); that which enables the long-lasting success, often reinterpreted, re-created or changed, of the transmitted elements. The problem of transmission was first studied in the sense of technical skills (Mauss 1989 (1950): 375). It was a question of how societies and cultures imparted to individuals particular (and not other) ways of standing, moving, working, playing, etc. The American cultural anthropological trend – founded at the start of the last century by Franz Boas and developed by, among others, Ruth Benedict, Abraham Kardiner, Alfred Louis Kroeber, Clyde Kluckhohn, Ralph Linton and Margaret Mead – was interested in learning about culture and its transmission. They asked the following fundamental questions: how is culture passed down from one generation to the next? Is there a cultural common denominator for all members of a given society? If so, what is it and how is it formed?

In their definition of culture, they insisted upon the learning and transmission of culture. Ralph Linton, for example, considered that ‘a culture is the grouping of learnt behaviour and its results, whose component pieces are shared and *transmitted* by the members of a given society’ (1977: 33). Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn followed the same path when writing that ‘culture consists of forms, and explicit and implicit models of behaviour, acquired and *transmitted* through symbols’ (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 357) (my emphasis).

One of the cultural anthropologists’ contributions to this subject was by Margaret Mead in her study on the Samoans. She attributed a key importance to the body in the transmission of culture (Mead 1930). Learning culture from birth, very soon the body constitutes a medium for transmission, an important means through which the child understands expressions and attempts to decipher language. The body will always take on this role, even a secondary one, with spoken language progressively becoming the preferred medium for the transmission of culture. The child is from then on in a cultural bath which challenges him from all sides and ends up by entirely submerging him until he no longer feels the singularity, relativity, or context of the knowledge, know-how and beliefs which have been passed on to him. So gradually the culture of a particular group forms a cultured, sexual person by leaving a distinctive

mark on them (sometimes literally: tattoos, circumcision, excision, scarification, body paint). This cultural anthropological concept of transmission was found several decades later with Clifford Geertz, who considered culture as a ‘model of meanings incarnated in the symbols which are transmitted throughout history’ (Geertz 1973: 89). This is close to transcendence, which in addition to universality and dynamism, is one of the three fundamental characteristics of culture (Herskovits 1950). At the same time, in England, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown considered that ‘the transmission of learnt ways of thinking, feeling and acting constitutes the cultural process, which is a specific trait of the social life of man’. (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 5).

More recently other approaches have examined the question of transmission. It is considered as ‘a present and underlying issue, in the majority of the anthropological debates of our times’, giving rise to a ‘cult of persistence’ (Berliner 2010: 9). This is in the wake of memory studies which have enjoyed a real revival in interest in recent years (among others, Severi 2007, Candau 2005). Transmission can be seen from different viewpoints, on the fringes between biology and psychology, between sociology and anthropology, and between history and memory. It does not appear as a smooth, linear and definitively codified movement, but as a rough, unstable and multiform process. Going still further, it can be seen as ‘a subtle dynamic, crossed with contradictions, hampered by obstacles, interference, interruptions and other things going amiss, but also capable of engendering creation or re-creation, which between them links the generations, shaping their future evolution’ (Catherine Choron-Baix, 2000, *Transmettre et perpétuer aujourd’hui* [Transmission and perpetuation today], in *Ethnologie française*, 3: 1-5).

Thus, from generation to generation, culture is continuously forming itself even as it transmits, as analysed by Marshall Sahlins (1981). It is both within individuals and transcends them. It sometimes acts without their knowledge, even though they are convinced that they have mastered and tamed it. It even offers them grounds for debate, gives the choice not to conform to what it prescribes, because its strength and survival depends on this margin of relative freedom accorded to its holders. We will see that the people involved in Jemaa el-Fna Square are placed in this completely organized margin. By removing themselves from classic socio-economic activities (commerce, trades, etc.) and usual behaviour models (ways of acting and being civilised), by adopting a frank and

sometimes 'coarse' language, they form nothing less than a *magnifying glass* on the whole of society. Therefore, transmission also supposes the durability of forms of expression and conduct on the fringe of what the majority deems acceptable. To take this even further, transmission implies non-transmission.

The content of transmitted culture often presents a relatively stable base and a setting which changes more rapidly, as much due to the action of internal factors as external ones. It has two aspects: knowledge and know-how. The first is purely intangible, propositional and theoretical, while the second, which is technical, comes under what is called in anthropology, cultural technology. Knowledge is taken in a broad sense here: it includes everything that we learn in society, from early childhood to the autumn of life. This includes the rules of conduct for ways of speaking, including techniques of the body (Marcel Mauss), table manners, and knowledge in its magical, religious, literary and scientific meanings. As for know-how, it includes the skills and knowledge required for handling tools, for design, for the production and technical processes, for the use or restoration of works, objects, instruments, or the preparation of recipes.

Another aspect relevant to the transmission of knowledge and know-how is the question of gender. Do women and men pass on their knowledge in the same way? Do they hand down everything they are meant to transmit? To whose advantage do they normally do it? Leaving to one side the transmitted content dictated by gender and moving away from the sexual division of work, the preceding questions are crucial to understanding how transmission works. On Jemaa el-Fna Square, the presence of women allows the comparative work between women and men. This comparison must take into account the fact that on the one hand, they are in the minority on the square, and on the other, that they do specific jobs (sellers of handmade wares, fortune-tellers, henna tattooists, etc.).

Finally, culture is recycling itself but doesn't reinvent itself every day. It needs time to let the people, its inventors, know how to reply to a vital question, how to react regarding a particular fact of nature, society, etc. This is due to the limits imposed by the short span of human life. To get around this problem, culture puts into play ways and means of ensuring the continuity of useful knowledge and know-how, for the continuation of the human species. And included in this is the destruction of the knowledge and know-how that have become undesirable, useless or outdated; it does this through involuntarily loss of memory or deliberate rejection.

## *2. Transmission processes*

As Carlo Severi shows, ‘the type of process used in the transmission of knowledge is usually less interesting’ (2007: 330) than the content transmitted. The transmission processes are intimately linked to the knowledge and know-how themselves; they are not isolated from the content which they transmit; they are related, and form an integral part of it. They are forged by those who transmit and are not only continually adapted to the contents, to the age or sex of the apprentice, but also affected by the context of the transmission, the master’s flair for transmission and even his mood. Because of this, transmission is detailed and contextual; it is neither codified nor ruled in the sense of a corpus of finished transmittable formulas.

But who transmits? And to whose advantage? What is the chain of transmission? Who are the participants in it and what is its context? Marie Treppe (2000) identifies some pertinent binomials: meaning (verticality and horizontality), those involved (individuals and collectives), and initiative (activity and passivity) among others. It is a question here of knowing whether the transmission is made from older to younger people, if it takes place in the family, or if the knowledge is shared between equals. It is important to ascertain the circle within which knowledge and know-how are transmitted, to know the mechanisms used in the selection of apprentices or masters, to gauge the working of these rules, eventually to be able to follow its development and preserve or strengthen the transmission. Traditionally, a large part of the passing-on of knowledge and know-how happens within the family. In Jemaa el-Fna Square, it is uncertain whether this schema has always been followed. What’s more, this depends upon the trade in question: the nature of the trades and knowledge determines whether this schema of transmission is respected or not.

If language is an essential vehicle for transmission, it is far from being the only one. Experience, or even better, personal experimentation, is fundamental. We mentioned earlier the importance of the body, tactility included, in the transmission of cultural facts. As regards the transmission of knowledge and know-how, the direct contact between master and apprentice, amongst masters and amongst apprentices, is part of the process which involves the desire to resemble or to surpass: faithfulness or differentiation. It enables gestures, postures, the procedures needed for executing tasks, the handling of tools or



**FIGURE III**  
Snake charmer, Jemaa el-Fna Square, Marrakech  
Jacques Belin, 1940

objects, or the preparation of formulas to be learned. This explains why transmission can be a conscious or unconscious act, either accepted or passed on without the individuals' knowledge. In the first case, recourse to language is indispensable; in the second, other, non-verbal, intangible means are part of the process. In both cases, recourse to meaning and memory is indispensable. To see gestures and facial expressions, to touch objects, to lend your ear, to remember words, gestures, postures, the processes for the preparation or manufacture of an object or tool, the order of phases of a ritual or episodes in a story; all this relies on an unrelenting attention when working or on unfailing memory once the work has been finished. Memory is, of course, also based on the brain's aptitude to remember, store information and its capacity to recall it when required, or at the right time. It also benefits from repetition as a mnemonic process for the embedding of information. One arrives at the point where the memory eventually functions in a quasi-mechanical way when faced with the gestures of a craftsman (*maalems*), the prowess of a juggling acrobat, the miming of a storyteller, or the movements of a dancer or musician.

Observation of the master is also important. Senses are heightened, eyes and ears are alert, capturing the master's gestures and words, memorizing them and trying a thousand times to reproduce them. Observation occurs in a defined place and time, which is why there is a time and space of transmission. The transmission time is elastic, incalculable and inalienable, unlike formal transmission, as in the case of school, for example. Here time is fractioned to the nearest second, counted, consumed, feared.

As for the spatial dimension, this refers to the space occupied by transmission, and the space in which it takes place. The training space in Jemaa el-Fna Square overflows the actual square by far. It is much more immense, witness the custom of the wandering of storytellers and snake-charmers, and the 'troubadour' acrobats or musician-singers. Peregrinations, journeys and expeditions are all part of the learning and transmission of knowledge and know-how. It is strongly recommended to 'go and see the country', to 'see with one's own eyes' the diversity of landscapes, people, products, local traditions, in short, cultures. To experience this adventure as an ordeal, particularly for the storytellers, draws a very striking parallel with the heroes of tales who must fight against ferocious enemies and daunting obstacles before reaching the much sought-after objective.



FIGURE IV  
Clown musician, 2006



FIGURE V  
'Your future is in the palm of your hand', divination calendar, 2007

The cost of transmission is another question which merits attention. It was believed (and is still sometimes believed) that transmission in traditional societies is free. Transmission is never free in the pecuniary sense, nor in the moral sense. Sharing knowledge and know-how has a price. Within families it ensures the development of the younger ones so that later on they can take care of the older ones. In the workshops or in entertainment, the apprentice contributes by increasing his master's daily revenue in return. Marie Treps (2000) is correct in writing that apprenticeship covers 'closely genealogical links and the hierarchy of ages', 'maintains a relationship of allegiance to the line and reproduces an economy of debt. The acquisition of knowledge and know-how happens through the mediation of ancestors, elders or masters to whom the legatee will be forever in debt: transmission results in reciprocal giving. This system is developed in situations of elective handovers, transfers, when the recipient shows a disposition particular to continuing a tradition'. Therefore, transmission is not free of charge, only the form of the charge changes.

Change has been visible since the break-up of traditional social structures following urbanisation and the development of industrial fabric and services. They have caused alterations in the modes, processes and centres of the transmission of knowledge and know-how. Trades and activities based on 'old-fashioned' transmission have even been disparaged and devalued by a social model which promotes formal, scholarly, codified transmission as the only social ladder offered to individuals. This has led to the weakening of the thread of tradition through the eruption of modern teaching processes and their impact on transmission: modern media, notably, introduce different reference points, different reactions which do not always adhere to the way things have been done up to now. We will see that the schooling, up to different primary and secondary levels, of those involved in activities in Jemaa el-Fna Square, has had a crucial impact on the application of their knowledge and/or knowhow. The public itself, schooled in the same proportions and to similar levels, is sensitive to new techniques of performance and reception. The assessment is that the public has changed but not the transmission and performance techniques.

Can 'traditional' or non-formal techniques continue indefinitely in spite of the changes made elsewhere in the social fabric in which the holders of knowledge and know-how are now immersed? If they are required to change,

to adapt, then how? By what means? In which structures? And whom would this involve? If formal transmission already works for trades and techniques, could it also work for the knowledge which is absolutely intangible? What about Jemaa el-Fna?

## **The transmission of intangible cultural heritage in Jemaa el-Fna Square**

### ***1. Jemaa el-Fna Square today***

Jemaa el-Fna Square is a cultural space, continuously animated by various cultural forms of expression, situated in the heart of the medina of Marrakech. It was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity before being added to the Representative List introduced by the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 2003. In all probability it goes back to the foundation of the city in the eleventh century, but it definitely existed in the seventeenth century (Tebbaa et al. 2003: 98). Situated in the confluence of the Sahara and the Mediterranean, it has always been a place for the integration of knowledge and know-how: gestures, postures, words, music, rituals. So many customs, traditions, and knowledge, have been transmitted over the centuries in a multitude of languages (Amazigh, Moroccan-Arabic dialect, classical Arabic) and in a multitude of fields (religious, secular, festive, ceremonial), each referring to a specific brotherhood, particular local roots, with lesser or greater outside influences.

The square presents a diverse repertory of oral and intangible heritage with something to the taste of everyone: storytellers at various music and trance shows, as well as snake charmers, monkey trainers, herbalists, preachers, visionaries, acrobats, magicians, fortune tellers, and much more. These activities are the expression of an art which is deployed through words, gestures, costumes, sound, etc. They are impregnated with a diffuse religiosity expressed, more formally, through the preaching of wisdom and morals.

A consequence of the richness of this oral and intangible heritage is the diversity of the geographical, social and cultural origins of those involved. In

fact Marrakech, as an imperial city, has always been a hub for neighbouring populations, be they Amazigh- or Arabic-speaking. For them, Jemaa el-Fna is a place of integration, whilst simultaneously allowing cultural specificities to live on. That is how it is with languages in which an oral literature, amongst others, is expressed – i.e. Amazigh, Darija and classical Arabic – in a fertile exchange with other languages, particularly French, Spanish and English.

Almost four hundred people are involved with entertainments, the majority of whom are male. They share an area divided between (Skounti et Tebbaa 2006b):

- (i) herbalists, henna tattoo artists, visionaries, practitioners of traditional medicine
- (ii) entertainers or *hlaïqia* who offer shows (*halqa*) of music and songs in Arabic and Amazigh, preaching, storytelling, doing acrobatics, animal training, etc.

Apart from these lively activities, the square is occupied by a number of people in the commercial sector: sellers of orange juice and dried fruit, owners and workers of refreshment stands and others. The food offered in the ‘largest open air restaurant in the country’ means visitors can taste traditional and modern Moroccan dishes, and above all, recipes from Marrakech itself, such as *tanjia* (meat prepared in an earthenware jar and cooked in the hot ashes of the hammam’s hearth).

## ***2. Knowledge and know-how on the square***

Two field surveys have meant we know a little more about the knowledge and know-how practised in Jemaa el-Fna Square (Skounti et Tebbaa 2006a and 2012). The following is intended to be a summary of them. Generally-speaking, the state of the safeguarding of activities on the square differs from one type to another. There are those that continue to be practised unabated, while others are seeing numbers of their practitioners diminish or even disappear. Certainly, UNESCO recognition has increased the status of the cultural space and its entertainers, but it has not yet enabled the creation and setting up of appropriate safekeeping measures.

For the storytellers, who made the square famous, their number is beginning to dangerously decrease; they are of a very advanced age and their activity has dwindled to the point where there is no more than one storyteller daily, for



**FIGURE VI**

With supporting evidence, a Sahraoui praises the benefits of his medicinal plants to his audience, 2006



**FIGURE VII**

The storyteller Chrif. He always performs his halqa in the presence of a bird of prey and a gazelle's skeleton, 2006



**FIGURE VIII**

Fortune-teller, 2006

only half an hour in the morning. Different factors explain this fall: the public's loss of interest, the lack of earnings, loud background noise, the change in the audience's tastes, the absence of support measures from public powers, etc. All this has weakened the practice of storytelling in the square and threatens to definitively compromise its future.

On the other hand, other activities in the square continue to be practised. The number of practitioners of some of these is even experiencing an increase when compared with the census of the study in 2006. For example, the snake charmers whose practice is directly linked to the Aïssaouas<sup>1</sup> brotherhood. Today there are in the order of 84 members, while there were only 47 in 2006. This shows that this type of show continues to attract the public even if we don't know how the knowledge and know-how linked to this practice continue to be transmitted.

There are also music, singing and dancing shows even though the musical genres do not have the same level of vitality as before. The quality of their performance, showing signs of declining knowledge and know-how, is sometimes questionable. There are herbalists who, today, rarely do the *halqa* which leaves room for an almost exclusively commercial approach. Dentists have seen their numbers reduced and, as with the water-carriers, from whom no one takes water from their goatskins any more, mainly continue to be there to be photographed by tourists in exchange for a modest sum.

Elsewhere, certain activities which had totally disappeared from the square have been revived, for example, the pigeon keepers. It is clearly an attempt to reinstate the pigeon *halqa* of the late Cherkaoui Moul Lehmam. The study did not, however, show the motivation for such a revival, nor the prospects for its success or failure.

In the past, women only had a very marginal position in Jemaa el-Fna Square. Today, their numbers are constantly increasing through two main activities: clairvoyance and henna-tattooing. This last was not previously a part of the 'traditional' activities on the square, but now it has visibly forged a position for itself. The tattooists, *naqqachat*, are awaiting the promulgation of an order authorising them to work in complete legality. However, this has not

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<sup>1</sup> A mystical-religious order founded in Meknès by Mohamed ben Aïssa (1465-1526), a mystic originating from Taroudant and nicknamed Shaykh El Kamel, the Perfect Master.

stopped them from practising it, and in large numbers.

The square brings together a multitude of other activities which are really far more commercial, such as the sellers of orange juice, snails and dried fruit who have their stands all around the square. After four or five o'clock in the afternoon, a central, rectangular-shaped area, perfectly marked out on the ground by the authorities, houses the restaurant-owners who set up their stalls in an orderly fashion. They offer all sorts of food ranging from everyday dishes to rare specialities. Until late into the night they serve national and international tourists, as well as some of the city's inhabitants.

Another aspect of working on the square is competition for the most attractive activities, economically-speaking. Rents for commercial stands are very expensive as they are so profitable, especially in the high tourist season. Finally, we should point out that there are other closely-related activities such as street vendors and beggars. Obviously, the square continues beyond its strictly-defined area: towards the souks in the heart of the medina to the north and north-east; towards the commercial streets to the south; towards the esplanade of the Koutoubia mosque to the east.

### ***3. Drawbacks of transmission***

Today the square is faced with a major paradox: at a time when intangible heritage has been recognised through the ratification by Morocco of UNESCO's Convention of 2003, it is also finding a strong lack of interest, since the chain from master to disciple, which linked the older generation to the new, seems to have been broken. The reticence, and even distaste, with which some of the participants in Jemaa el-Fna Square envisage their children succeeding them, speaks volumes about the value they (and the whole of society) place on their art. Duplicating the contempt in which they are held, certain people discourage an emerging vocation here for their children and even go so far as to forbid them from going to the square, which they consider a den of iniquity. So these 'Living Treasures' are in the most precarious position. This is especially true for the storytellers . . . In addition to being the objects of material destitution, contempt and suspicion, they feel like strangers in their own universe; dispossessed of this square of which they were once the emblem. This is why, for some years, the storytellers have renounced the very thing that established their own survival and the continuance of their art: the

transmission of their knowledge. 'Jemaa el-Fna *belia*',<sup>2</sup> the storyteller states, and when the circle of the *halqa* is broken, frustrations are aroused, and life catches up with the ones who knew, during the show, how to suspend it as the speech progressed.

Storytellers have been the greatest victims of this change. Yesterday's emblematic figures of Jemaa el-Fna Square are today confined to the periphery, practising their profession in more and more difficult conditions, their charisma no longer of any help, as it is not a case of perfecting expressions to convince the public, but of raising their voices above the deafening racket to make themselves heard.

The situation of the acrobats and snake charmers is certainly less dramatic than that of the storytellers. The transmission thread remains lively, despite the current evolution which, for an important part, is disrupting the tradition schemas.

Thus the Aïssaoua of Jemaa el-Fna, who are still numerous, united by bloodlines which maintain both the coherence and solidarity of the groups, are today facing a major obstacle in their transmission processes: the youth are more snake charmers than snake hunters . . . They perceive hunting as being too dangerous, and only a handful of their elders are still capable of carrying out this job . . . This situation has influenced their activities as a whole due to the fact that the shortage of snakes prevents any urge to act out the ritual in its entirety, a ritual during which the snake charmer would end the reptile's life while in a trance. There is also the modern concern for the protection of animals when it comes to established cultural practices that are today considered shocking, intolerable or even illegal. In this particular case, the issue of the transmission process induces major modifications in the procedure of the ritual, and according to the Aïssaouas, it could be forever diluted. They fear that in the future there will be even more folklorization than now.

We see from these examples that in spite of the continuity of a few elders, the guardians of tradition, in Jemaa el-Fna Square, there are no guarantees for the maintenance of the transmission process. Forgetting, drawbacks and ruptures are rife. These are due to the deep changes at work on Moroccan society: a number of aspects among the most arduous of the training are

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2 In Moroccan Arabic, this term means temptation of vice; today, one would call it addiction.



**FIGURE IX**  
Berber musician and his children, 2007



**FIGURE X**  
The storyteller Layachi reading from the *Collection of Symbols and Wisdom*,  
'Kitab al maani wa alhikam', 2007

shunned by youngsters reluctant to acquire them; this is the case for snake charmers but also for acrobats. The contents themselves tend to be folklorized, and offer no more than a sort of *digest* served to a more cosmopolitan, more rushed and less contemplative public. You only have to see snake charmers and *Gnaoua* performances, for example, to be convinced of this.

So, what should be transmitted: all the contents or adapted forms relevant to the square? In fact, the continuation of Jemaa el-Fna must have two essential and imperative prerequisites: the raising of public awareness of this discredited and increasingly less-known culture, and the regeneration of a number of practices considered outmoded and obsolete by younger people today. There is only one way to create the birth of new vocations . . . for only the arrival of new generations of storytellers, jugglers, acrobats, musicians and singers, keen to feed on past skills and open themselves to the present and the future, can truly guarantee an enduring heritage. For the lack of immediate, direct transmission, this whole culture which is still alive, will be reduced, as writer Juan Goytisolo (1985) highlights, to the state of a *fossil* which will only be of interest to historians and museum curators.

### **Conclusion: the challenges of transmission, today and tomorrow**

How can we save the intangible cultural heritage of Jemaa el-Fna Square when we are helplessly witnessing the disappearance of a number of its practices and know-how? At a time when the square has benefited from international recognition as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, it is worth asking this question.

In fact, although the methods of conservation and preservation have greatly changed for tangible heritage, the question of an appropriate mechanism to guarantee the perpetuation of forms of intangible heritage is a long way from being resolved. Firstly, because we cannot safeguard everything, even at Jemaa el-Fna. The profusion of events would make such an enterprise very difficult. Aside from the variety of its forms of expression, this heritage has not remained unchanged. Its very essence is in change, modification, adaptation, disappearance, reinterpretation and re-creation. In fact, from day to day, the square's music, dance, rites, knowledge and know-how undergo transformations,

adjustments and constant evolutions. Some of these, far from being a threat, contribute to the continuity of such activities by revitalizing them.

The intangible cultural heritage of Jemaa el-Fna has therefore no other alternative: it must continue evolving, in perpetual creation, to preserve a certain equilibrium between the conservation of memory and the renewal of practices, without which it risks becoming frozen or ‘fossilized’ in the image of those songs and dances that the National Festival of Popular Arts of Marrakech has certainly contributed towards being made known, but whose creativity it has annihilated little by little, ‘folklorizing’ them in order to better adapt them to tourists’ tastes.

In fact, the issue for all the policies for safeguarding the intangible heritage in Jemaa el-Fna Square must be two-fold: on one hand, to preserve knowledge and know-how from the dangers which threaten them with extinction, but also to preserve them from all intervention and interference in the ‘natural’ process of their development.

The main risk is that – since international recognition – although the pure and simple disappearance of this heritage has lessened, instead, it has been enlisted in a ‘fossilization’ process, its preservation not as a *sustainable cultural competence*, but as a permanent ‘vestige’. By striving to save, at any price – even artificially – one or another practice, there is the risk of freezing it forever between life and death, a bit like maintaining it on a drip, when it is only right for it to be animated with life and movement.

Besides, the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* explains well that the support of communities by States should not knowingly jeopardize the identity structures of the practices and knowledge held by these same communities.<sup>3</sup> And again, it insists on the fact that the dictates of the safekeeping of heritage must coexist with the need to perpetually recreate it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Article 15: ‘Within the framework of its safeguarding activities of the intangible cultural heritage, each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, *individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management.*’

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, Article 2: ‘This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history.’

In consequence, it is important not to ask the question of the square's future uniquely in terms of conservation as one has tended too much to do since its distinction by UNESCO. Certainly, the memory of Jemaa el-Fna has to be captured through various means, and the knowledge for future generations must be clarified and dated. But the aim is not to conserve an inert memory; it is to maintain the opportunity for perpetual creativity. This will occur through safekeeping using the best practices available from around the world and through setting up a system of the Living Human Treasures sort. The Register of Best Safeguarding Practices that the 2003 Convention put into place includes examples which could serve as many sources of inspiration. On the other hand, by its very nature, the system of Living Human Treasures can only be of advantage to a limited number of entertainers who are the holders, at a very high level, of knowledge and/or know-how (Skounti 2005).

But to resolve the question of the status of these holders of the knowledge and know-how is not all. Even though they are honoured and given status conferring on them dignity and rights, can the entertainers of Jemaa el-Fna Square, who are expected to ensure the transmission of their knowledge and/or know-how to apprentices, guarantee that the 'hand-over' will not be a mechanical repetition of their heritage and incitement to blind mimicry but rather that it will be an opening up and updating of memory through forgetting or isolating certain practices? Moreover, it is only through this means of transmission, which leaves the way free for personal initiative, creativity and renewal, that the entertainers of Jemaa el-Fna will be able to take up the current challenge and allow this emblematic place, with its ancestral traditions, to endure by integrating the variability of the public, the need for change, and in short, the movement of life.

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# AMAZIGH KNOWLEDGE AND KNOW-HOW: MANUSCRIPTS AND CARPETS

ALI AMAHAN

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# AMAZIGH KNOWLEDGE AND KNOW-HOW: MANUSCRIPTS AND CARPETS

ALI AMAHAN

**T**HIS CONTRIBUTION is about the most fragile and the most difficult to preserve of Amazigh museum heritage: namely the manuscripts and carpets. Moroccan museums and libraries hold important collections, some of which are in a disturbingly vulnerable condition.

This communication is made up of two parts: one evokes Amazigh manuscripts; the other introduces know-how, particularly the carpet.

## I. AMAZIGH MANUSCRIPTS

An important aspect of Amazigh heritage is the manuscript – nowadays the least known, the least covered by the media and above all, the least preserved. Even though the first translations and publications date back to the nineteenth century, Amazigh manuscripts remained the poor relation of colonial research. The situation did not change after Independence. When I was preparing a publication, ‘Sur une notation du berbère en caractères arabes dans un fragment manuscrit inédit de 1832’ (Amahan, 1984) at the end of the 1970s, only three bibliographies were worth consulting (Luciani, 1893; Stricker, 1960, and Galand-Pernet, 1972 and 1973).

The 1980s saw a keen interest in Amazigh manuscripts, particularly in Morocco. The sudden enthusiasm for this branch of heritage has been very damaging to the manuscripts. In fact at that time, one saw both a surge in amateurish publications with their numerous unfortunate confusions, and the development of unprecedented illicit trafficking. (The manuscript of

Ibn Tounart, one of the oldest in Morocco, left the country illegally during the 1980s – this manuscript is currently conserved in the library of a great European university (Amahan, 2004, 5-14.)

In the absence of precise and serious inventories, we are not in a position to properly appreciate the importance of this heritage. In fact, at present we only have rather inaccurate information about the collections in public and private libraries. The inventories of certain collections, published in the last few years, suggest that there are only a few hundred manuscripts. The first studies undertaken of inventories, to that end, go back to the nineteenth century; for example, the first published translation of *al-Haoud* is dated 1893 (Luciani, 1893, 151-180).

The collections often contain numerous copies of well-known works such as *al-Haoud* and *Bahr al-Doumouâ* by Awzal or even *al-Mazghi* by Aznag. However, the Amazigh documents cover several branches of the knowledge of their time.

Among the main subjects dealt with in Amazigh writings, we can cite the religious field, lexicons, medicine, astronomy, mathematics . . . However, manuscripts dedicated to religious themes and lexicons make up the bulk of the known collections.

## 1. Religion

The majority of the works are dedicated to religious themes. We will look at the following three:

### a. *Prayers and praise*

This output, mostly from the brotherhoods, often testifies to the mystic fervour of the faithful, as well as their loyalty.

Texts include passages made up of prayers, praise for the Prophet and certain saintly figures, both local and national. These texts are either compositions or the translations of works in Arabic, dedicated locally, such as *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, *al-Bourda*, etc.

### b. *Books of exhortations*

The aim of this section is to highlight certain practices, grouped under the name of *bidâ'* ('heretical innovations'), that are denounced by local men of letters. Beyond their ethnographical interests, these writings illustrate a particular genre in which certain men of letters adopt a negative attitude when faced with the cultural practices of their own community

### c. *The 'Sayings of the Prophet'*

Amazigh manuscripts contain numerous anthologies of *lhadit* [*Hadith*], 'Words or Traditions of the Prophet'. In addition to the 'Traditions' inserted into different texts dedicated to ritual obligations and exhortations, two important works can be highlighted:

- the first translation of verse established by al-Madanî al-Toghmauí (nineteenth century) and entitled *Tasarout n wawal n nmbi nngħ*, 'La clef de la parole de notre Prophète' (Ms Roux 90, Boorgert, 1995, 59-60)
- the second, which is in prose, by Mokhtar al-Soussi

## 2. Lexicons

There has been a renewal of interest in this subject, particularly since the recognition of the Amazigh language and culture as important parts of the national identity.

Many authors have specialized in producing a very particular type of written work: the Amazigh lexicon, or more precisely, bilingual Arabic–Amazigh or Amazigh–Arabic lexicons. One can cite al-Marfiqi al-Tizniti Abd al-Rahman, author of *Al-Soura li al-sa 'ada*, an eighteenth-century Amazigho-Arabic lexicon, and one of the most important of its genre.

Contrary to what certain specialists have put forward (Stroomer, 2004, 22), this work is not a technical lexicon for lawyers; quite the opposite, it was created to enable Amazigh scholars to discover the Arabic language and as a result, to acquire other knowledge: ‘My objective is not aimed at the knowledge of Amazigh terms, but through them, the knowledge of their equivalents in Arabic’, states the author.

In this sense, this work has much more in common with *Lisan al-'arab* than with other Arabic-Amazigh legal lexicons like *al-Majmoû' al 'iq 'alâ mouchkil al-watâ'iq* (Afa, 2008), *Un glossaire notarial arabo-chleuh du Deren* (eighteenth century) (Afa, 2008, 162), or even lexicons produced for various usages, particularly medicinal.

Concerning *Kitâb al-'asma'* (Arabic–Amazigh lexicon), Mokhtar al-Soussi, a famous biographer of the scholars of the Souss region, takes an extract from it and indicates that it contains nineteen chapters without even mentioning its title or author. He explains that the work is made up of only six pages and is aimed at rural men of letters who establish notarial acts (Al-Soussi 1958, 164-165).

Several copies of this document exist; we possess one of them. Is it an extract or a summary of the famous lexicon by Ibn Tounart which has the same title: *Kitâb al-'asma'*? In *Sous al-'alima*, Al-Soussi says about Ibn Tounart: ‘We do not know the man; he is perhaps from this era (sixteenth century); he is [the author] of a translation of Arabic terms in Tachelhit – we have it’ (Al-Soussi, 1984, 177).

Along the same lines, the work of al-Hilâlî is worth being referred to here,

when taking account of the complexity of titles and attributions. An Arabic-Amazigh lexicon entitled *Kachf al-roumoûz* has often been attributed to him. Al-Marfiqi, who considers this lexicon to be one of his main references, cites it in the eighteenth century, under the title of *al-‘ajamiya fi kachfi asrâr al ‘arabiya* (al-Marfiqi, 1181, 2).

Could not the title, *Kachf al-roumoûz*, be a generic name, often given by Amazigh scholars to treatises on lexicons, as A. Bouzid (Bouzid, 2004, 37) highlighted so well?

### 3. Medicine

Books often include a collection of medical recipes, organized according to a thematic classification. We can cite, as examples, the book of medical recipes by al-Chawchawî, *Kitab al-attib* by al-Abaâkili, or even the one by al-Guercifi.

It should be pointed out that, in general, we only have copies, the majority of which were made several centuries after the disappearance of the author. They were often produced in different regions to that of the author. Comparison between old copies of major works, notably those of Aznag and Awzal (a copy of *Kitâb al-mazghî* dated 1675 (Amahan, 1990, 11-14) [Fig. XI], the oldest one known in our times, a copy of *al-Haoud* dated 1735 [Fig. XII] (therefore during the author’s lifetime)) and later copies of these same works, shows that the texts were often copied from memory. They include linguistic variations belonging to the dialect of the group of which the copyist is a member. By way of example, in *Kitâb al-mazghî*, the word *taytchine* ‘women’ is noted in certain copies as *taytine*. In the lexicon *Kitâb al-‘asma’*, certain copyists use the term *a’yal* for the word ‘boy’, while others use *arba* in other copies. Sometimes dissimilarities of fundamental importance can be noted.

In fact, the duality of the writing and the orality generates a dynamic which often marks the copies as much on the level of style as on that of content. This sometimes leads us to serious confusion concerning the attribution of certain texts and the identification of their author. Certain scholars themselves have not escaped this confusion, as in the case of Al-Soussi on the subject of *Kitâb al-‘asma’* and its author [*Sous al-‘alima* (177) and *Khilâl Gazzula* (t.3, 164-165)]. To my mind, the identification of the author presents a major difficulty.



FIGURE XI  
 Parchment  
 Amazigh (Aznag) 1778 AD (1192 AH)  
 Ali Amahan Collection  
 Fine maghrebi calligraphy

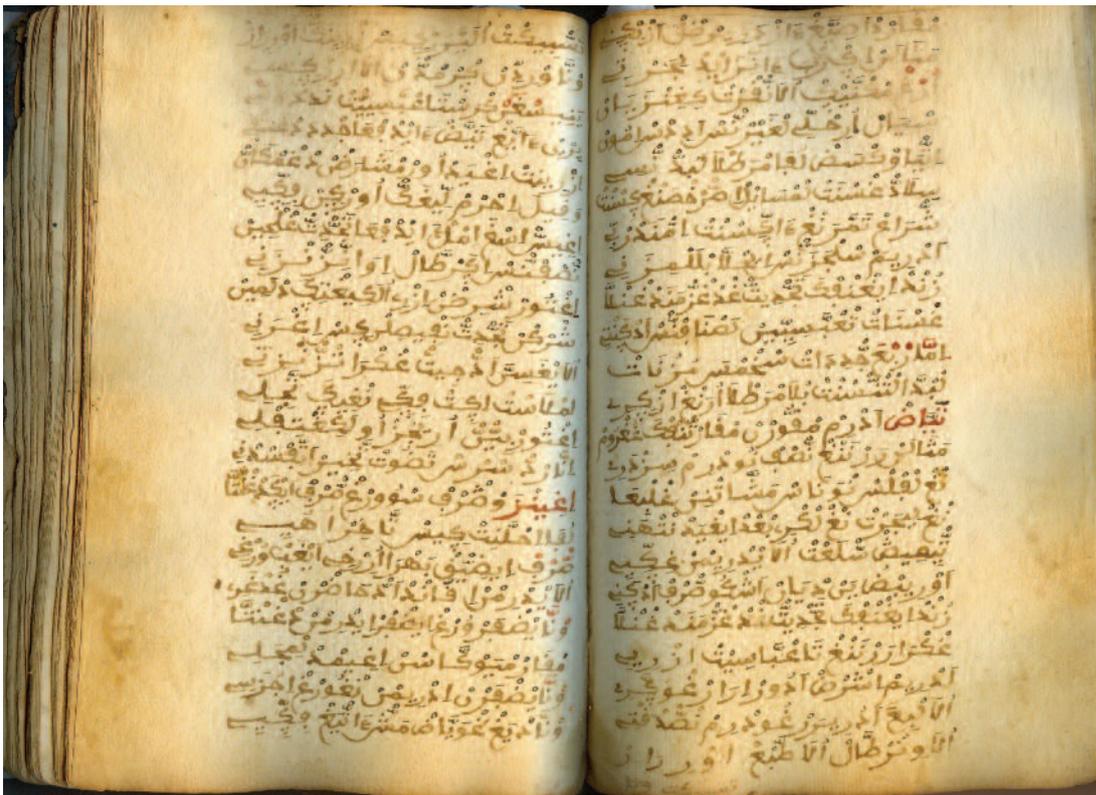


FIGURE XII

Parchment

*Al-Haoud* (Awzal), 1735 AD (1148 AH)

Ali Amahan Collection

Examination of three copies of *Kitâb al-'asma'* brings to light some differences as important as those that exist between *Kitâb al-mazghî* by Aznag and *al-Haoud* or *Bahr al-Doumoûa'* by Awzal. Are the texts entitled *Kitâb al-'asma'* copies of the same work in several versions or of different works? Is Ibn Tounart, presented by N. V. D. Boogert (Boorgert, 1995, 59), the real author of *Kitâb al-'asma'*?

The question of notation has not been adequately taken into consideration by specialists on this subject. All the same, a great many copyists try to reproduce for us the distinctiveness of the local accent (Amahan, 1980, 51). The reading of this type of text can be confronted with a field survey, carried out by researchers immersed in the milieu. This immersion is especially important as it helps to understand the subtleties of every nuance. In one of the first articles dealing with the notation of the Tamazight language in Arabic characters (Amahan, 1980), the lack of reference was criticized at the survey in question. However, in the same article the author of this critique, otherwise justified, draws up a whole list of words attributed to the Iglwa in the north, while omitting to reveal his sources. The membership of its author should, of course, be enough! In fact, the quasi-totality of the existing texts are copies. Knowledge of the cultural milieu of the copyist and his social status favours the understanding of the text and facilitates its study. Thus each copy is of particular interest not only on a lexical plane, but also on a cultural and even aesthetic level.

The aesthetic aspect of Amazigh manuscripts has never been tackled; yet, the use of Arabic letters has allowed copyists to excel in this art. We know that, over the centuries, southern Morocco has developed one of the most elegant cursive scripts in the Muslim West. The decorative motifs which characterize Amazigh art in other fields (woodwork, weaving, pottery, etc.) also adorn Amazigh texts [Fig. XIII].

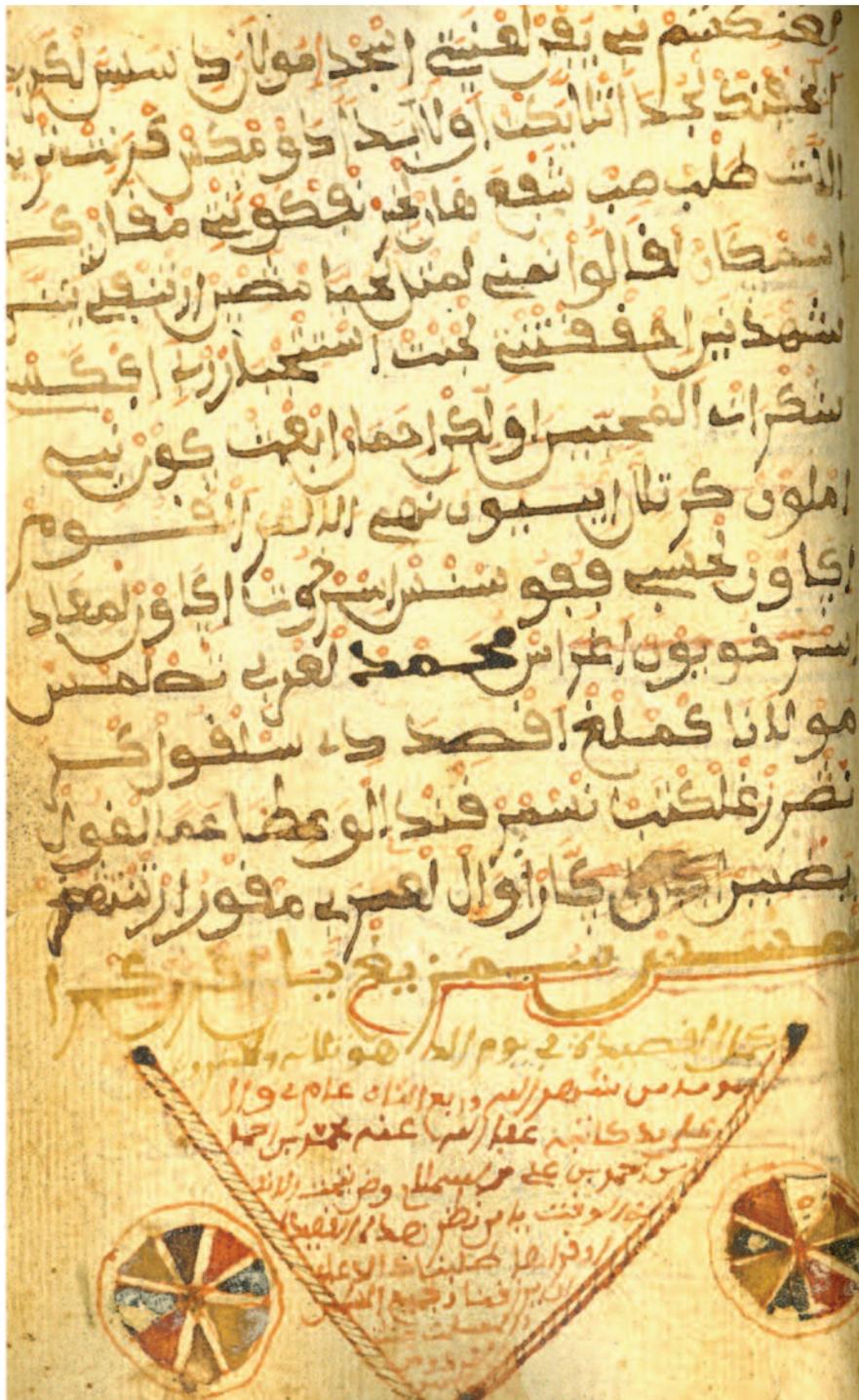


FIGURE XIII

Parchment

Final page of Sidi Saïd Ben Bourk's Qissa, 1778 AD (1192 AH)

Ali Amahan Collection

*Two ornamented wheels flank a chevron-shaped cartouche containing the name of the copyist and the date of the copy.*

## II. CARPETS

This text is a summary of ideas already expressed in other publications.

Unlike other ‘traditional’ Moroccan arts, the carpet, especially the Amazigh carpet, is one of the rare sectors of moveable heritage to have been the subject of different written works, particularly at the time of the Protectorate. It appears as one of the most representative. J. Berque tells us: ‘for a long time, the carpet has been by far the best Maghrebian object’ (Berque, 1964, 13).

The Amazigh carpet assumes primordial importance in Moroccan artistic production by virtue of its ancientness. Prosper Ricard writes: ‘Made since time immemorial (most of its motifs already existed in a great many mosaics from (Roman and Byzantine) times), it can be considered as truly native’ (Ricard, 1952, 70-71).

Elsewhere, specialist studies, such as those by Prosper Ricard (first three volumes published 1923, 1926 and 1927), are essentially concerned with the technical and economic aspects of carpets. *Le Corpus du tapis marocain*, published by P. Ricard enabled a State stamping system to be instituted – Royal Decree of 22 May 1919 – which guaranteed both the quality and specification of each type of carpet. More rarely, these writings address the historical and social dimension and the aesthetic aspect (Ricard, 1923, 1926 and 1927). The work by Abdelkebir Khatibi and myself – *Du Signe à l’Image. Le tapis marocain* (Lak International 1994) – devotes an important development to these subjects. Likewise, it approaches the question of the process of the transmission of know-how in the field of the art of the carpet (Khatibi and Amahan, 1994, 57-117).

### 1. History

The question of the origins of the Moroccan carpet is complex. Certain specialists attribute the origin of the carpets of Rabat to Turkey, and suggest a certain similarity, even a kinship, between Amazigh carpets and those produced by certain Central Asian communities from Georgia to Moudjour in Turkey) (Ricard, 1952, 52).

Elsewhere, the oldest item, in Moroccan museum collections, dates from 1787 AD (1202 AH). It is a carpet from Chiadma, conserved in the Musée des Oudaya in Rabat. However, the first historical data on the Moroccan carpet – on the excellence of its manufacture and its uses – goes back to the Marinids. In the fourteenth century, the Andalusian chronicler, Al-Noumayri, compared the carpets to flowerbeds and to *zellij* compositions in palatine halls (Ibn al-Haj al-Noumayri, 1984, 70).

The carpet is a favourite gift that foreign ambassadors take away or that dignitaries offer to their sovereign; in the fourteenth century, Amazigh carpets from the Zemmour tribe appear amongst presents offered by the sultan Abou-l-Hasân to the Mamluk ruler of Egypt, al-Nâsir (Al-Manouni, 1979, 152).

## 2. Amazigh carpet production areas and centres

Amazigh carpet production can be divided into two main groupings: one covering the Middle Atlas and eastern Morocco; the other, the High Atlas. Each group produces several types of carpets differentiated by technique, texture, colour, and composition, and therefore by aesthetic.

It is worth noting that the spatial limits of these specificities do not coincide with the linguistic frontiers of these production groups. (Each production area includes several styles). In fact, this production reveals an astonishing diversity of decorative compositions within the same region, as evidenced with the Marmoucha, the Beni Sadden, or even the Aït Ouaouzguite tribe [Fig. XIV].

The pattern is split up, depending on whether there is one longitudinal, transversal or oblique axis, or several. The geometric motifs used – lozenges, zigzags, checks, chevrons – perpetuate the decorative layouts of ancient mosaics. Patterns are taken from the floral, geometric, architectural, figurative and zoomorphic repertoires, utilize anthropomorphic representation (Beni Sadden [Fig. XV], Marmoucha), or again, resort to certain signs reminiscent of Libyco-Berber or *Tifinagh* letters, notably the z, t, m, etc. (Khatibi and Amahan, 1994, 71, 173 and 174).

With regard to the oldest carpets, the dyes are mainly of plant origin: red from the wild jujube, madder (*foua*), cochineal, or sumac (*tizgha*); blue from indigo; yellow from weld (*liroun*) or spurge laurel; black and browns from pomegranate rind and iron sulphate – this does not exclude the use of other



**FIGURE XIV**

Ait Ouaouzguite carpet, Ouarzazate region  
Twentieth century, 263 x 127 cm. Oriental knot.  
Oudayas Museum, Rabat



**FIGURE XV**  
Beni Sadden carpet, Middle Atlas  
Twentieth century, 373 x 199 cm. Oriental knot.  
Batha Museum, Fes

plant products (bark, roots and flowers) to obtain these colours. Superimposing these various dyes gives compound colours: green, orange and purple.

### 3. Rural carpets

These are made principally in Amazigh regions, apart from the Al Haouz of Marrakech. They are distinguished by their abundant geometric patterns (diamonds, rectangles, squares, lines) and revert sometimes to anthropomorphic representations (Beni Sadden).

The density of the carpet goes up to slightly more than 500 knots per square decimetre. The Berber knot is the most widely used.

There are two main groups: carpets from the Middle Atlas and eastern Morocco; and carpets from the High Atlas.

#### a. Carpets from the Middle Atlas

The Middle Atlas region presents the greatest number of styles. There are more than ten types – Zemmour, Zaïan, Aït Mguild, Aït Youssi, Aït Sadden, Marmoucha, Aït Ouarain, etc., each containing several sub-groups. The designs are geometrically inspired: lozenges, triangles, squares and checks.<sup>1</sup> Men are involved in making the carpets (as in eastern Morocco where the *reggam* (in Arabic) ‘weaver’ *anargam* (in Amazigh) does the knotting part of the carpet-making).

#### b. Carpets from the East

Carpets from the East are initially distinguished by the quality of their silky, undulating wool, the delightful texture, both tight and supple, and the skilled work. These carpets are similar to those from Jbel Amour in Algeria, due to their very large dimensions (10 metres long x 2 metres wide maximum), their colours with strong shades of red, blue and green, decorated with orange dots,

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<sup>1</sup> For carpets of the Middle Atlas (Zaïan) and eastern Morocco (Beni Bou Yah), notably: cf. Ricard, P., *Corpus des tapis marocains*, II, *Tapis du Moyen Atlas*, Pl. XXXI and LXIII; IV, *Tapis divers*, Pl. XLVIII, P. Geuthner, Paris, 1975.  
cf. Khatibi, A., and Amahan, A., *Du Signe à l'Image. Le tapis marocain*, édition Lak International, Casablanca, 1994, pp. 56 and 151.

and their tall lozenge-shaped trellises. The dominant colours are madder red and indigo blue, whose products abound in the region.

### *c. Carpets from the High Atlas*

Although carpets are made by a large number of families in the High Atlas, only certain tribes, such as the Aït Ouaouzguite, produce carpets to be sold. Since 1940, Taznakht has been the most dynamic centre in the region.

Works from this group are distinguished by the following characteristics:

- the quality of the wool and brightness of the colours (the old crops of indigo, henna and saffron)
- the Eastern knot (Ghiordes)
- a knot density varying between 400 and 700 per square decimetre
- a border and often a central medallion, suggestive of carpets from Rabat, and geometrical designs (diamonds, rectangles) similar to those produced in the Middle Atlas.

The carpet is often produced by the woman. Even if in certain regions the *reggâm* decides the composition, dyes and design of the carpet, the woman, particularly in Morocco, remains the actual designer in the domain of the carpet, and is the only holder of the know-how relative to the weaving of it. The initiation into carpet and *hanbel* (*kilim*) weaving is a tough training. For the young female apprentice it is not simply a question of assimilating technical know-how, but also of interiorizing the range of colours, register of compositions and design motifs (signs and symbols). It is only after this that the weaver is able to use the language. Allowing herself to be guided by her own inspiration, she balances the tonality of the assimilated colours and reinvents compositions from memorized motifs. Whilst making knots on the weft, the Amazigh weaver calls on her memory, to better perpetuate that of her group.

Thanks to this trick of learning and ‘writing’, she manages to restore to us the traces of a secular memory through each of her creations. The striking similarities observed between the beautiful mosaics of Volubilis and certain Berber carpets from the Middle Atlas (Aït Youssi, Beni Ouarain, etc.) are certainly not accidental. The signs that populate the surfaces of numerous Berber carpets have been engraved into the sandstone of the Atlas Mountains

for millenia. A carpet from Beni Sadden conserved in the Batha Museum in Fes is one good example. The Berber carpet is not only a work of art or utilitarian object. It is also witness to a continual fight against forgetting and the test of time in order to safeguard a memory. Through the weaving of her carpet, the Berber woman is also weaving links between the past and the future of her group, as well as between the latter and the rest of the world. A meeting-place of this memory, imagination and knowledge, the carpet can lend itself to several interpretations (Amahan, 1996, 36).

The collections in public museums in Morocco are not very important quantitatively – except for the fragmentary pieces which are examples of great value. The collections are significant because of their quality. The pieces reflect the prodigious technical and aesthetic diversity that characterizes the Amazigh carpets of Morocco.

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TECHNICAL CULTURE  
AND THE MUSEUM:  
THE FABRIC OF MEANING

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## NARJYS EL ALAOUI

Narjys El Alaoui took up anthropology after studying languages (INALCO and Paris VII) and history (Paris III and Paris VII). Three years spent with the Idaw Martini of the central Anti-Atlas, to whom she dedicated her thesis (Ph.D., École des hautes études en sciences sociales), led her to becoming interested in the Moroccan collections in the Paris museums: Musée de l'Homme; Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie; Musée Eugène Delacroix; Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, which is now the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (Mucem), where she is responsible for research for the Maghreb and Nordic countries. Narjys El Alaoui carried out numerous inventories of collections and shared experiences around exhibitions which allowed her to understand the determining role of cultural technology – on which she now bases her researches. Her interest in tangible culture led her to establish the Association Techniques rurales de Méditerranée (ATERAM) in Paris in 2007. From 2007 until 2012, Narjys El Alaoui co-presented seminars at the EHESS with François Sigaut on 'Techniques et modes de subsistance dans les sociétés pré-industrielles. *Anthropologie et histoire des techniques*'. She has participated in academic work (jury member), organized and taken part in several symposiums, congresses, seminars and reviews on eclectic themes: ritology (which she taught at Paris VIII), nutrition, tangible heritage linked to plants, oral literature, climate awareness, textiles and weaving, etc. A UNESCO consultant for the identification of potential sites for the establishment of ecomuseums and activities for generating revenues in Morocco (2009-2011), Narjys El Alaoui has furthermore made films about blood sacrifices (Morocco), the bagpipes (Tunisia) and a photographic report (Denmark). She was director and scriptwriter on her documentary project, *L'Arganier entre Héritage et Innovation*, which has been presented to the Fondation Mohamed VI pour la Recherche et la Sauvegarde de l'Arganier. Specialist in researching *in situ*, laureate of the Fondation Fyssen, she has perfected a plant-based material that she models, often with her bare hands. Since 2013, Narjys El Alaoui has lived and worked in Marseille. Among El Alaoui's publications: 'Femmes et hommes au Maghreb et en immigration. La frontière des genres en question. Études sociologiques et anthropologiques', (co-ed. scientific), Publisud, Paris, 1998; 'Paysages, usages et voyages d'*Argania spinosa* (L.) Skeels (XIe-XXe siècles)', *Jatba, Revue d'ethnobiologie* (MNHN), vol. 41 (2), 1999, pp. 45–79; *Le Soleil, la Lune et la fiancée végétale. Essai d'anthropologie des rituels. Les Idaw Martini de l'Anti-Atlas. Maroc*. Edisud, Aix-en-Provence, 2001; 'Textiles and dyes in the Anti-Atlas', in *The Fabric of Moroccan Life*, Niloo Imami Paydar and Ivo Grammet (ed.), Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2002, pp. 258–265; 'Meules et moulins du Sud marocain', in *Meules à grains. Actes du colloque international de la Ferté-sous-Jouarre*, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris/Ibis Press, Paris, 2003, pp. 51–66; 'Une presse à huile au Maroc.' *Techniques et Culture*, no. 48-49, 2007, pp. 189–218; 'Métiers à tisser suivi d'un lexique du tissage', *Encyclopédie Berbère*, fascicule XXXI, notice M99, 2011, pp. 4929–4940 (6 fig.); *Femmes et outils dans l'élaboration de l'huile d'Argan. Tradition. Innovation*. Actes du Premier Congrès International de l'Arganier (Agadir 15-17 Décembre 2011), 2013, pp. 262–269.

TECHNICAL CULTURE  
AND THE MUSEUM:  
THE FABRIC OF MEANING

NARJYS EL ALAOUI

**M**Y EXPERIENCE AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST in several Parisian museums has made me particularly aware of the importance of safeguarding the knowledge intrinsic to each piece by documenting it from its moment of acquisition and entry into the heritage. Hence the title of this communication: *The Fabric of Meaning*, which raises the fundamental question of what are we seeking to transmit – how, for what, and for whom?

Museums have a precious tool at their disposal: the inventory. Made up of descriptive index-cards of the objects, and sometimes accompanied by illustrations (sketches, drawings, photographs), this tool raises many questions. It highlights the fact that any unsigned or undated artefact, (often the case in rural societies where most of their knowledge is not written down), barely or badly documented at source, is almost lost to our understanding. As it is difficult to retrace the history of such an artefact (few archives exist), the observations reported on these cards are particularly useful, even if they give a fragmented picture of the culture.

When documentation exists, it is the result of studies conducted by ethnologists, which is obvious if one considers their academic training and motives. Conversely, objects that prove difficult to identify are rarely made by practitioners from the culture of the object. From this point of view, documentation, the indispensable substratum of collections, would gain from carefully taking into consideration the knowledge of the authors, their

development techniques and usage of artefacts. This is one of the fields of intervention for the anthropologist.

### **From inventory to invention**

The inventory plays a part in making sense of the artefact and rendering it intelligible in the here and now. Today digitized, it does, however, have its limitations which suggest a knowledge circumscribed in space and time. Ethnographic collections are not skeletons in a laboratory; the inventory cannot record cultural facts in progress. So it is more than necessary that collections should be compared with contemporary creations. From this comparatist approach, cultural characteristics are emerging about which we had no idea. For from the perspective of transmission, the artefact is not only provided to be seen, but also to be understood. Thus, unless it is decided to exhibit in the absence of resorting to lengthy representation: captions, audiovisual media, cartography, portraits, etc., the museum's raw material is knowledge, and its ability to initiate critical reflection through the collections which are preferably assembled in meaningful groups, according to the first criteria of accurate vernacular names, toponymy and dating. Thus the museum, keeper of the knowledge associated with the tangible witnesses of cultures, will continue to attract a diverse public. Fortunately, the young Musée Berbère has been able to apply comparatist logic from the start, placing the collections in groups – from local to regional – then broadening out to a multi-faceted Amazigh identity.

Having established an inventory of the knowledge in heritage's collections, the inventive approach would be: to examine that knowledge; to extract from it the affinities between specific objects, combined in a new way; to take them out of their isolated cultures, and from that understand their distinctive features. It is in crossing the universal that invention is forged. But how many museums hail the study of the universality of cultures?

### **Knowledge, meaning, collections**

The question of acquisition is dependent on the meaning that one is seeking to give to an artefact in a collection. Without the authors' knowledge, and the techniques that have generated it, an artefact deprived of revealing documentation becomes formal and loses its meaning. Not only does such an omission render the real unintelligible but, moreover, it requires effort – sometimes pointless, always considerable – in time, energy and material means, when attempting to build up information long after the acquisition of the artefact. When direct knowledge is not relayed through understanding and diffusion, it perpetuates non-sharing with the authors, making them, so to speak, non-existent on the cognitive level.

This phenomenon, unexplained by scientific motives but obviously ideological, contributes to the considerable delay in understanding, even if cultural technology is able to throw light on the acquired cultural object. Frozen in the past, of which little was known of the distant cultures that for so long defined museums and anthropology, denying the possibility of any modernity, resulting in the slowing of their potential growth, meanwhile the accumulation and storage of 'memoryless' objects persists. Poorly-documented objects create witnesses for little-known culture. So what can the object say about culture?

The knowledge (data) and understanding (assimilation of knowledge) of the authors of ethnographic collections would be assured of continuity if they gained heritage status which would be able to guarantee their identity. Museums should ask themselves about the validity of the idea that the understanding of any work is not secondary to the work itself, but indispensable to the work's identity, historical background and intelligibility. When the acquisition *in situ* is accompanied by a decent description: precise geographic location of the object; identities of the designers-consumers (personality and sensibility); work techniques; descriptions and functions – all overlapping one another in order to classify the in-tangible culture, it is a considerable asset for the identification of the object. Reinforced by appropriate documentation: bibliography, multimedia, etc., it completes the data collected from the living environment. To make the information coincide with the acquisition of the

object at the time and place of its creation during in-depth surveys, places the artefact in its environment (natural and social habitat).

The understanding of an artefact, resulting from a chain of individual or collective experiences, is the *sine qua non* condition of the representation of the other. To recognize the intrinsic qualities of a work presupposes knowing its author – meaning its environment, language and the thought, action and production systems of that nourished it. By combining anthropological criteria and aesthetic criteria (without one claiming victory over the other), our perception of the work can be broadened, reconciled and enriched. One could, at the same time, reactivate the traces kept from its previous state and revitalize its history. It is a question of realistic relevance between anthropology and aesthetics. When aesthetic feeling, which no one is entirely devoid of, questions an artefact transmuted into a (master)piece as soon it arrives in the museum, what does it teach us? Giving a prominent place to qualitative multidisciplinary approaches would anticipate the orphaned condition of the object if, from the moment it becomes a piece of heritage, it would enjoy a status comparable to any other museum piece, which is always the fact of an author.

### **Putting collections together: for whom, to what ends**

A reference museum, whose collections have witnessed history and the evolution of societies, is designed to give validity to them as regards acquisition and restitution to the public. This validation expresses itself through exhibitions which reflect a theme often inspired by social reality. This museum is not only an exhibition space, nor *a fortiori* a place of cult, no longer a huge pile of collections. A single series of objects, sometimes even a single object, can give meaning to the culture that made it. The artefact does not only illustrate an educational project. It is itself a project of cognition. It expresses exchanges with other cultures and societies over populations' movements more and more frequent between continents. New creations emerge through it. It seems to me that it is that content which one should call 'intangible heritage'.

What characterizes the museum is that it is a non-commercial space. Here, the value given to the artefact lies in its ability to transmute through understanding; in other words, to create empathy, and amplify the relationship

between the item and the viewer, through the memories coiled into the form, material, technical prowess, detail, length of time and love that is required for its creation. However, the immediate perception of the artefact does not teach us about its cognitive content. Unless you are a visionary, the dynamic – the vector of the invisible meaning of the object (knowledge, understanding, sensibility of the designers) – must be sought. This is where cultural technology<sup>1</sup> comes in: by studying the creation of artefacts in the authors' own space, it is going to attempt to make their know-how intelligible. Notions of tangibility and intangibility are thus perceived in a broad sense with both sensitive and cognitive societal components.

The growth of the cultural industry cannot fail in the missions of knowledge which make up the dynamic of museums: to conserve, protect, upkeep, distribute and enrich the cognitive heritage of the collections in all the richness of their authenticity. When the understanding of know-how bases the ability to project itself into the future and the aptitude to ensure innovation, this dynamic will force us to understand the importance of an inventory of heritage, initiated *in situ* by the professionals who devote themselves, not only to the study of finished artefacts, but also to the processes which led to their existence by watching over the transmission of information to present and future generations. This also means having a policy suited to research, without which the artefact is not of great interest to anthropology, which works on the human-environment link and the topicality of facts observed, analysed and returned.

### **Conservation, transmission**

One will agree that all culture is defined through the work tools in the environment of the group that produces and develops it. But sometimes knowledge disappears with the tools and its authors and one must resolve oneself to ignoring it, for there are some things that we will probably never know about. When the interactions between culture's poles of production (authors) and reception (public) cease to be consistent with the general context

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<sup>1</sup> Social science which takes techniques as its subject.

of usage, and even with the realities of the users' internal and external environments; when they are no longer synchronous with the requirements of the moment, they slowly fall into disuse. As with all civilizations, as with all peoples, they have their evolution, peak, their obsolescence. Thus, to give an account of the historicity and the transmission to the work of a culture, one must accept this intrinsic change of direction for every living culture. But is it about the disappearance of knowledge, or rather its non-transmission through writing, and whose vitality could have been maintained, reduced, even moved? When transmission is broken, one notices attempts to appropriate the traditions particular to an important culture by groups or people from outside its tradition who are trying to innovate. When memory is transmitted, the affected knowledge gives rise to a revivification from which everybody can draw their inspiration beyond the social groups or people who started them. This also applies to the life of ideas which cultural institutions try to show. By being concerned about relaying what exists (knowledge and their authors) by professionals in the 'field', the institutions play their role as a bridge between the witnesses of culture and the public.

In technographics, the transmission of knowledge expands in concentric circles. It takes shape through the observation of technical facts, nourished by dialogue with the interlocutor-authors – as far as possible from a personal experience – followed by the description of the stages in the operating chain (structure or sector)<sup>2</sup> and of their setting up, then from the analysis of data brought to light through similar events (comparative study) taken in a context which is either nearby or faraway, which all together make their diffusion possible. Contextualized from an anthropological perspective, it reveals an ambivalence linked to safeguarding the heritage appropriate to the non-scriptural tradition of the actor-witnesses of history. How can the processes of memorization and organization of knowledge expressed through cultural practices (artistic, ritual, craftsmanship, playfulness, etc.) be validated which show combinatorial mathematics and which, however, elude appreciation? How can these prominent and sustainable intergenerational transmission processes be valued? Rather than focusing on the know-how which has been

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<sup>2</sup> A succession of sequences which aim for an expected and renewed outcome..

abandoned or has disappeared, let us study the fertile dynamics of technical aspects of work.

Finally, one can see a peculiarity inherent in the nature of museums and collections. Rural Amazigh societies are made up of populations of agriculturalists/livestock-breeders/fishermen, whose diversity of realizations, carried out to a degree of proven creativity, has particularly fascinated museums and collectors worldwide. There is not, however, one single (eco)museum dedicated to agriculture, animal husbandry or fishing; their respective tangible culture; the knowledge of their communities: relationship with the environment, living conditions, contemporary tools and know-how, which hinders the work and highlights the distance between tangible culture and museums of tangible culture *in vivo*.

### **The difficulties of notions and their translations in multilingual societies**

The broadening or the setting up of cooperation founded on dialogue and exchange with the users would allow the diversification of points of view on concepts which are still blurred and ambiguous such as: heritage, culture, objects, techniques, know-how, inheritance, traditions and transmission. To build variations around these notions of representation induces the cohabitation of the authors' listening (technicians of in-tangible culture) and their action on the matter. What words do we know in Amazigh dialects? Such a statement leads to more questions. What do we know about the in-tangible Amazigh cultures and their transmission processes? What heritage can be transmitted if the knowledge is lacking? By asking myself this question first, I am aware that it could discourage the small number of anthropologists in the field from being interested in technography<sup>3</sup>, an area hardly-initiated in Morocco.

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<sup>3</sup> Study of cultural techniques, founded on the observation, description and analysis of technical practices in their communities, based on testimonies and transcribed experiences.

### **Culture in heritage: knowledge and innovation**

A museum is more likely to acquire objects marked by the memory-imprint of their users. The dominance of commonly-used and worn objects speaks for itself as the relationship of the legitimization of the museum, preserver of the past. However, the nostalgia for ‘origins’ is not exclusive to us. Just as artistic and industrial production is developed more and more, everywhere in the world, artefacts continue to be created. Our annoyance would come from learning that certain artisanal objects of good craftsmanship had declined or had ceased to be, due to a lack of demand or endogenous and exogenous social requirements, etc. By ceasing to be kept up, these creations have made room for manufactured items whose new materials, untravelled through time, without a patina acquired by age, could hold surprises; while impoverished techniques – without either continuous reinvestment by the traditional authors or receiving internal innovation – have ceased here, while springing up there. To that we could add the growth of the production of artefacts in urban areas. However, arts and crafts as well as design: product design and industrial design – through looking at changes in practice and being inspired by skilful craft traditions – are innovating and carrying on, here and there.

Let us rest assured. Craftsmen from Morocco continue to surprise us through the vitality of their technical and aesthetic accomplishments, reminding us that many artefacts used to be ordered from craftsmen, as is still the case today. If manufactured objects flood our living spaces without capturing our emotions, then there is something in craftsmen’s objects, something inexplicable, and it is precisely in this crack, this margin, this blur, essential to our emotions, that the museum, the artist and the anthropologist nourish themselves. It is up to them to ‘translate’ the link between the communities and the artefacts in order to restore the meaning of the hidden, not lost, emotion and which could come from the technique. Creation, the aesthetic quality of a work (object, tool, instrument, machine, etc.), also come out of the technique.

### **The in-tangible heritage**

Tangible culture and intangible culture are two expressions of the same cognitive process in play, in a practice acquired through training, and fortified through shared experience. One can only transmit what one has learned and experienced. It is around these issues that the high points of transmission revolve. Germ of the perception of a work (visual, audio, gustative, olfactory, tactile) and intrinsic know-how, these expressions are part of both the tangible (material expression of the culture) and the intangible (knowledge, understanding, transmission). By wondering how to conserve in-tangible heritage, we are also questioning the transmission to the living by those who fertilized and nurtured it in a specific environment and over a long period. Culture and heritage only have meaning when enriched by the authors and actors concerned.

At a time when the issues of technological change affect visual anthropology, what will remain of the understanding of cultural practices if the material support and its contents were to disappear one after another, or together, no longer enabling transmission? What will survive of the intangible heritage other than what has been rooted since time immemorial in the person or group heirs who have inherited it? Out of this question springs that of the issues of prolonging heritages and the reliability of the digital medium for diffusion, which cannot guarantee long-term conservation. It is an essential question if one undertakes to conserve and restore them when, at the same, the archiving process disrupts our memory and creative capacity.

### **The in-tangibility of beauty**

Beauty, it is said, is in the eye of the beholder. What tangible Amazigh culture reveals: these are self-expressions suggested by familiar everyday or ritual objects, where the aesthetic feeling (harmonious volumes, appropriate materials, decorations, colours and shapes) and specific techniques continue to exist with the environment and internal sociability. Useful and significant on the social plane, they attest to a tenacious aesthetic search. It is a useless design

if a glance questions the intimacy of its beauty and technical prowess, when both craftsman and commissioner share a common memory.

In Amazigh culture, beauty is germinated in the feminine space. It shows differently the plural expressions of its identity, self-respect and desire for the other. In the public space, where women's knowledge has been called in to satisfy important exogenous or experts' demands, these codified values gradually detached themselves from reciprocity, traditional celebrations and responsiveness – from which they were closely linked until then, to produce the expected effect of an artefact of little-known culture. It follows that the (re)cognition of intangible codes of beauty, an eminently social quality, ceases to operate if the exchange of sensitive and fundamental values is no longer allowed, leaving the way free for the market.

The market has enabled women to perform tasks intended for global markets and not weave social links with the *alter ego*. Scrambling the order even before tradition was technically known, appreciated and then safeguarded; trade, in breaking the intrinsic beauty of original designs, cedes the object to anonymous acquirers and to their discourses deciding on the attribution of what is beautiful or not. However, the market value of the artefacts has simultaneously forced its being set aside on behalf its 'rightful owners', thus enabling them to deal with their essential needs (those who have visited active collective granaries in villages can testify to this). It stresses that the inherent beauty of that which is useful — distinguished from the value imposed by the market, and conveyed by male commerce, organising and defining the artefact regarding this value, to fluctuating operational modes — reminds us of its universality, as shown by the presence of Berber collections the world over.

'Beauty' (that which pleases) works when an artefact triggers an intense pleasure which awakens the causality of a perceived harmony. In this sense, the transmission of aesthetics comes under environmental, mental, cultural, social and individual coincidences. To change one or other of these coincidences would serve as a prelude to stagnation, extinction, or ideally, innovation capable of holding inspiration and new work. This is why the question of the relationship between technique (material germs of the aesthetic) and the aesthetic would benefit from being rehabilitated into the universal heritage: common heritage to all human beings, but also forms of self-expression specific to each culture.

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LA MÉMOIRE À DOS D'ÂNE  
[THE MEMORY ON THE BACK OF A DONKEY]

Documentary film directed by

ROMAIN SIMENEL

at the workshop Le Cinéma des ethnologues, 2008, 28 min.

*Darija and Tachelhite, French subtitles.*

## ROMAIN SIMENEL

Romain Simenel is an ethnologist, and researcher at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD). Since 2002, he has been conducting field research in the Moroccan South. Having spent two years with the Ait Ba'amran tribe in the mountains in the hinterland of Sidni Ifni, his work has shed light on certain important features of the way of life and thinking of these Berber-speaking communities: the primacy of the stranger in local and family history; devaluation of native-ness; territory where the frontier is the centre; ways of making sanctuaries of the forests (*agdal*). The results of this first work were collected in his publication, *L'origine est aux frontières*, published by CNRS. Currently working at the Faculté Mohamed V de Rabat in the Laboratoire Mediter, Romain Simenel's latest research is concerned with forms of transmission between children of the Tachelhit language, of Arabic writing, of bee-keeping, and lastly with the practice of rock carving. He is a member of the scientific team that took part in the creation of the Jardin Majorelle's Berber Museum. Publications by Simenel: *L'origine est aux frontières. Les Aït Ba'amran, un exil en terre d'arganiers* (Sud Maroc). Paris: Editions CNRS – Maison des sciences de l'homme, coll. Les chemins de l'ethnologie, 2010, 328pp; 'Comment domestiquer une forêt sans les hommes? Une ethnoécologie historique des forêts d'arganiers du Sud-Ouest marocain.' *Techniques & Culture*, 56, 2011, pp. 224-247; 'Le livre comme trésor. Le traitement des manuscrits dans le Sud marocain.' *Terrain*, 59, 2012, pp. 52-69; 'La construction de l'autochtonie au Maroc: des tribus indigènes au paysans amazighs', with M. Aderghal, *Espace, Populations, Sociétés*, 2012-1: 59-72; 'Derrière les combats, un conflit religieux: Un trésor de la culture islamique est en péril', with M. Meddeb and L. Westerhoff, *Le Monde*, 23 April 2013, p.17.

LA MÉMOIRE À DOS D'ÂNE  
[THE MEMORY ON THE BACK OF A DONKEY]

ROMAIN SIMENEL

**F**ILMED TEN YEARS AGO in the region of Sidi Ifni, more precisely near Mirleft, *La mémoire à dos d'âne* was the result of my encounter with one of the most charismatic people of the Ait B'amran tribe, called Ta'achro, but whom everybody spoke of by the respectful name of 'paternal uncle'. Uncle Mbark was one of the last great Berber poets of the Moroccan south. This old man, a former caravaner, having guided numerous herds of camels from the Sahara to Marrakech, had put the history of his region and Morocco into verse, with great inspiration. He alone embodied all the ambiguity of the status of poetry and memory of the local history of this society whose members were afraid of him. Indeed, his words were perceived as a menace, likely to rekindle old quarrels that everyone had tried to forget. A tortured and ambiguous relationship, tinged with respect, affront and provocation, was established between the society and the poet: the young boys didn't hesitate to mock him from a distance, or even throw stones at him when he was performing his prayer, he would provoke the crowd with insults of a vulgarity which he alone had the nerve to utter.

In all of the Souss region, only a handful of men still practice this art of oral tradition today. Often very old, many of the poets are former shepherds or caravaners, men who have never broken the link with driving flocks or herds. Their poetry presents the prophets of religion from Solomon to Mohamed, and the great figures of local history, be they saints or tribal chiefs. It speaks of spiritual wisdom, heroic gestures, forays and feelings, while backing up the verses with metaphors about the typical products of the region like argan oil, honey or

the pomegranate. Poetry in the south of Morocco conveys social and spiritual truths in a more elegant style than everyday language. Nevertheless, the art of the poets is judged to be less perfect than the word of the Koran, which is considered to be the original poetic work. Thus the poetry is intermediate between divine perfection and human triviality, and this is particularly why this art is both indispensable and dangerous in the eyes of society.

To bring such a set of problems to the screen, it was decided that the film would follow Uncle Mbark during his pilgrimage on a donkey to the *moussem*, a large annual market organized around the tomb of the most important saint of the coastal region. Uncle Mbark was the guide as he had been all his life.

The film is made up of two parts:

The first part covers the length of the progression made from Uncle's house to the holy site beside the sea; a progression along which the old man relates the history of the countryside they are passing through to his two companions, a youth from his village and myself. The more the journey unfurls, the more the landscape changes, the more the uncle plunges us into the maze of the words of local history. In this part, the film stresses in a humorous way, the palpable gap between the ignorance of the two youths and the knowledge of the old poet.

The second part takes place at the *moussem*, the large religious market, where one discovers another side to Uncle Mbark. In contact with the crowd and in the sacred arena, mocked by the youngest pilgrims, the uncle becomes provocative, insulting and irritable when faced with the lack of respect that he perceives in the men and children of today. The film brings to the fore this intimate tension between the crowd and the poet, for it is significant from the point of view of society with regard to the mastery of the word and history.

Because he had never decided to put an end to his poetic travelling and descend from his mount, it was his loyal donkey itself who, one fine morning, brought back his mortal remains to the door of his house. Guardians of society's memory, from which they are able to reveal the smallest of secrets by using a clear language in competition with the word of God, the Berber poets of the Moroccan south are simultaneously charismatic figures of society and men relegated to its margins.



**FIGURE XVI**

Uncle Mbark, still from *La Mémoire à dos d'âne*

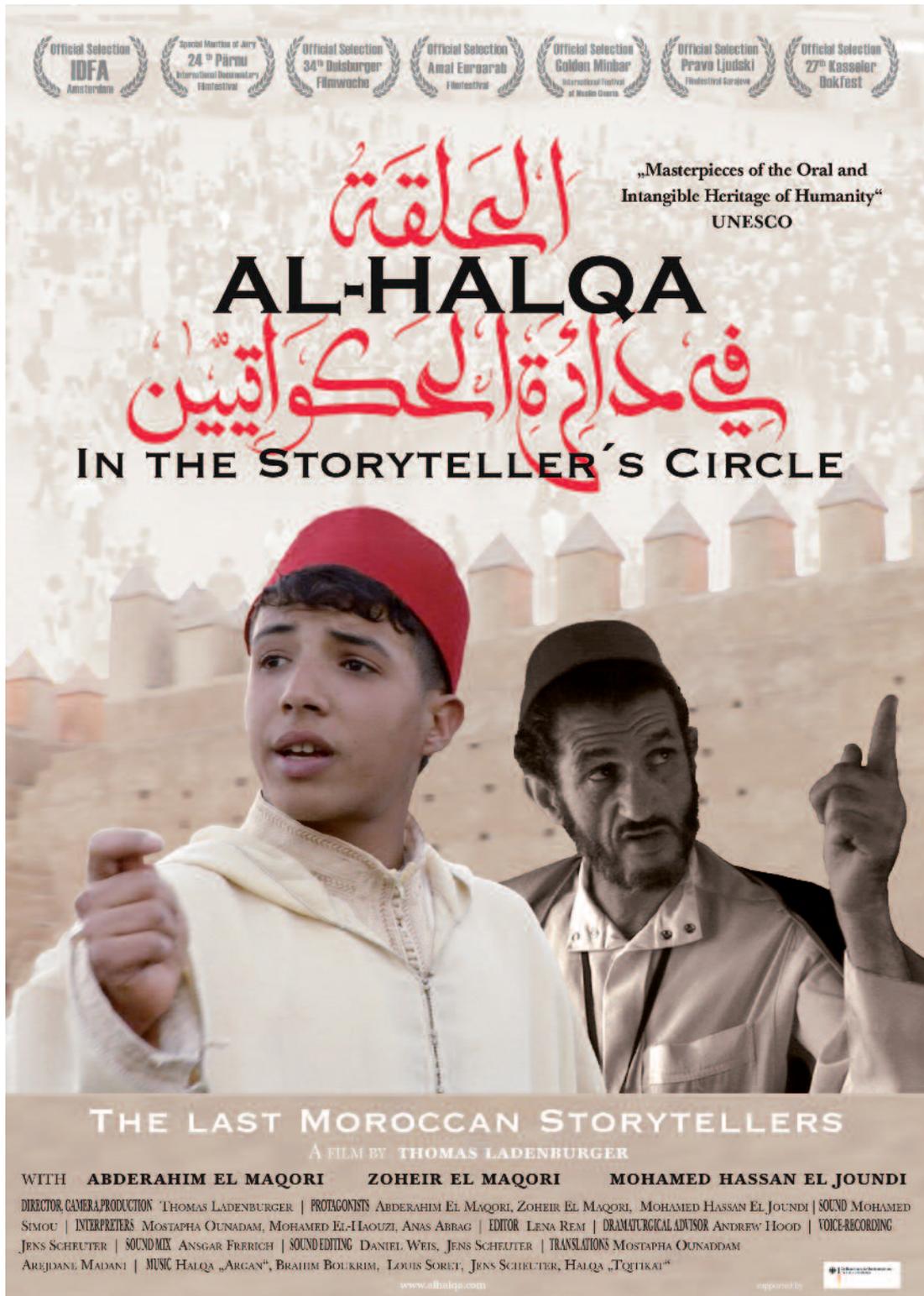


FIGURE XVII

Poster for *Al-Halqa – In the Storyteller's Circle*.

## AL-HALQA IN THE STORYTELLER'S CIRCLE

Documentary film directed by  
THOMAS LADENBURGER  
2010, 90 min.  
*Arabic with subtitles*

*The film was completed in 2010 with the support of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien).*

*At the heart of the film is the question of transmission and culture of the storytellers in Jemaa el-Fna Square in Marrakech. Abderahim El Maqori, one of the square's storytellers, teaches his son, Zohair, how to master a dying trade.*

## HUMAN CIRCLES IN THE JEMAA EL-FNA SQUARE, MARRAKECH

THOMAS LADENBURGER

Jemaa el-Fna, 'Square of the Hanged Men', in Marrakech p. 85

*Al-Halqa* – Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity p. 86

Cultural identity p. 88

The *halqa*, ancient theatrical form p. 88

Competition with mass media p. 89

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## THOMAS LADENBURGER

Since 2004, Thomas Ladenburger has been conducting a study on the *halqas* of the Jemaa el-Fna Square in Marrakech. Thomas Ladenburger began his studies at the San Francisco Art Institute, and then attended the Kassel School of Art (Kunsthochschule Kassel) and the Berlin University of the Arts (Universität der Künste Berlin). In 2010, he directed *Al-Halqa – In the Storyteller's Circle*, a documentary film shown at film festivals world wide. In 2011, he conceived an interactive kinetic sculpture – a transposition of the Jemaa el-Fna Square to the House of World Cultures (Haus der Kulturen der Welt) in Berlin. Ladenburger is now working on creating an internet platform, a virtual museum of the Jemaa el-Fna Square, which will be on-line by the end of 2014. Thomas Ladenburger lives and works in Berlin.

HUMAN CIRCLES  
IN THE JEMAA EL-FNA SQUARE,  
MARRAKECH

THOMAS LADENBURGER

*Jemaa el-Fna: “ . . . agora, theatrical performance, point of convergence: open and diverse space, forum of knowledge, peasants, shepherds, tradesmen, soldiers, traders come from the bus terminals, from the taxi ranks, from the half-asleep carriages: melted into the idle mass, lost in the contemplation of collective effervescence: carried away into the atmosphere of pleasure and freedom, in a hesitant and faltering movement: immediate contact between strangers, social pressures forgotten, identification through laughter or prayer, temporary refuge from the institutions, the joyous equality of bodies.”*

Juan Goytisolo, *Makbara*

**Jemaa el-Fna, ‘Square of the Hanged Men’, in Marrakech**

**I**N MARRAKECH, in the several-centuries-old Jemaa el-Fna Square, locals and tourists, curious and simple passers-by, meet up every day to admire the performances of the *halaiqi*, to let themselves be transported by the entertainment presented by these dancers, singers, acrobats and storytellers. Jemaa el-Fna Square is a theatre of fabulous and varied circus acts that change daily (gymnastics, dance, song, recitations, magic, fortune-telling). This veritable mosaic of traditions is now deservedly inscribed on the list of ‘UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’.

### ***Al-Halqa – Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity***

It is well known that cultural wealth and diversity are not only evident in writing, traditional masterpieces, archeological sites and monumental architecture – they also express themselves in numerous lively and ephemeral forms of expression like music, poetry, dance and song.

To safeguard and protect these forms of intangible culture is the ambition of UNESCO's programme: Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Dance, music, song, stories, ritual medicine, the art of meteorology, astrology, etc. – all in a state of perpetual evolution – are the trades of the square's performers, themselves repositories of knowledge through orality and gestures, and which it is incumbent on them to transmit in their own turn to future generations.

Without succumbing to great pessimism, however, it can be said that this chain of transmission of knowledge has been weakened and there is now a threat that it will be broken. It is because of this that UNESCO's programme of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage found its *raison d'être*.

The performative traditions and techniques are mainly dependent on oral and gestural forms of transmission. That they should be documented using modern recording techniques entails, in practice, a transformation sensitive to this heritage. In other words, faced with the media, these ancestral transmissions are 'brought to life' in a new way by all the current participants – performers, spectators, recorders. The ethnologist and film-maker Jean Rouch was the first to document this phenomenon of transformation through media. He also noted the end of the myth of the 'filming-observer', substituting it with the phrase, 'observer-actor', as he also had an influence on his environment.

In 2001, Jemaa el-Fna Square in Marrakech was declared world intangible heritage of humanity. In this square, unchanged for more than a thousand years, storytellers, acrobats, musicians, and poets are to be found every day. Traditionally, until the start of modern times, all these performers would have been recognized in Europe as 'itinerant entertainers', their role being to



**FIGURE XVIII**  
Storyteller, Jemaa el-Fna Square, Marrakech  
Anonymous, 1926

give pleasure, through their skill and performances, to an ever-changing, enthusiastic and marvelling public.

The division of the space created by the spectators and performers – the circle formed by the curious and passers-by around the heart of the performance – is called the *halqa*.

On this huge, lively square of Jemaa el-Fna, ancient and vital remnants of the intangible arts, flowing from several streams, converge. It is a veritable reception basin, a concentration of the oral and gestural traditions that once stretched right across Morocco. They have survived here the longest, more or less without interruption.

### **Cultural identity**

The *halqa* is more than a simple entertainment or spectacle, it is also a way of building cultural identity. The immediate seduction, the game put into play by the storyteller and his audience, the osmotic exchange he establishes with the spectators, also aim to inform, communicate news and instruct the population through tales and fables of a moral character.

At a time when the spectators only heard long after, and only bit by bit, about events that had happened in faraway countries, the storyteller would take on the role of messenger, conveyor of knowledge, and act as a relay for mythological, historical, intimate and religious tales.

### **The *halqa*, ancient theatrical form**

One could describe the *halqa* as ancient theatre: the spectators gather around the performer like a vibrant, moving, circular ‘architecture’. The shape of the ‘circus’ – literally the *circle* – which comes down to us from Antiquity, is the most precise term to describe the *halqa*. Theatre as well as the circus are forms of an authentic European cultural expression for which there is no equivalent in Maghrebi culture. For this reason, Jorge Luis Borges mentions the difficulties encountered by Averroës when translating Aristotle’s *Poetics* in *Averroës’s Search* (*El Aleph*, 1949-1952, Emecé Editores). In fact, the concepts of comedy and

tragedy, as well as theatre, were unknown to the Arabs of that time.

The ancestral themes that overlap in these stories reveal the collective soul of the Maghreb, its moral virtues and value systems (division of roles between men and women, etc.).

### **Competition with mass media**

The skills of these virtuoso entertainers, with their rich speech and expressionist gestures, are on the verge of disappearing. Jemaa el-Fna Square has seen rapid changes over the last five years. Beside the cyber-café there are now salons de thé and cafés with giant screens, which show Hollywood and Bollywood films for the price of a drink. The black market in copied DVDs from the entire world is a common practice.

Confronted with the blinding fascination that electronic media exerts, and faced with the apparent ease in obtaining these globalized spectacles which are passively consumed, the entertainers, acrobats, dancers, storytellers and magicians don't have an easy task.

The storyteller, in particular, who works in a different environment, expects of himself and his audience a time frame that is impossible to condense or shorten. The time taken to recite a tale is not like zapping. Each story involves a series of parables with multiple references, its content can only be understood if one continually listens again, becomes convinced by it, and the spectators discuss it with each other.

Rare today are the storytellers who have mastered the scope of this art, this vast repertoire passed down through the generations. They are usually of an advanced age. The young are not willing to learn this profession of 'working in the performing arts' with no protection status, and with prospects that are hardly promising.

### **The *Al-Halqa* project**

The *Al-Halqa* project consists of a documentary film, an interactive kinetic installation and a collection of digital files. It reinterprets these spectacles through audiovisual technology, enabling them to be reseen. The installation provides a veritable, virtual revitalization. The project is not designed to be nostalgic, nor is this threatened heritage meant to be saved just ‘for us’, it is about sharing the performative vitality of the *halaiqi* and placing them under a new light.

In 2011, an interactive kinetic installation was shown at the House of World Cultures in Berlin (Haus der Kulturen der Welt). As a multimedia materialization of the Jemaa el-Fna Square, it transferred the rich, intangible knowledge of the *halaiqi* (storytellers) to a virtual square.

The virtual museum of the Jemaa el-Fna Square is the most recent component of this project. The intangible heritage that has survived up until now is, in part, documented through different media – while knowing that the recording, the documentary process, always involves an alteration of reality, both intangible and palpable. The issue here is not to artificially preserve these arts – this culture will not let itself be preserved like deep-frozen cells in a laboratory – but more to document and reveal the process of transformation of this endangered culture.

It is hardly likely that we will succeed in blocking the progressive disappearance of these ancestral arts. To imagine to be able to perpetuate them by means of a simple recording cannot go further without problematic issues arising. Nevertheless, it is unjustifiable that a masterpiece of intangible culture should not be considered with as much esteem and respect as that given long ago to tangible cultural goods.

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