
The defensive fortifications in Tlemcen during the Zayyanid period

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Abstract:

City walls are among the most vital military structures constructed by states, reflecting their level of civilization and urban fortitude. They function as the primary line of defense that adversaries must surmount to penetrate and subjugate a city. As the quantity of Muslim antagonists escalated over time, attention to erecting walls and encapsulating cities intensified, furnishing a protective bulwark against assaults. The Muslims' emphasis on walls emanated from a desire to secure the nation, its populace, possessions, and existence. The Zayyanid state, constituting the nucleus of the central Maghreb, was steadfast in its commitment to constructing fortified ramparts. This analysis delves into the defensive fortifications in Tlemcen during the Zayyanid epoch.

Keywords: Defense; Tlemcen, Forts, Security, Walls.

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1- Introduction:

The historical city of Tlemcen is distinguished by natural attributes that augment the significance of its strategic position, conferring supplementary military importance. In addition to its pivotal location between Algiers and Morocco, and its proximity to the sea, Tlemcen served as a principal conduit for caravans and armies throughout Islamic history in the central Maghreb. It stands as one of the exceptional Algerian locales whose topography exhibits distinct features that facilitated its habitation since antiquity.

Its ancient history harkens back to the era of the Berbers and the Romans, when the city attained prosperity as a Roman colony. It later underwent intervals of decline but regained its splendor with the advent of Islam in the Maghreb, traversing the Idrisid era, and later during the Zayyanid, Marinid, and Almoravid epochs. During these periods, Tlemcen metamorphosed into a robustly fortified bastion, culminating in Almohad dominion over the entire Maghreb and becoming the Zayyanid capital.

These successive historical phases transformed Tlemcen into a fortified site. This study aims to address the following inquiries: What were the motivations for fortifying the Kingdom of Tlemcen? To what degree did the fortifications succeed in warding off threats to the city?

To resolve these questions, we employed the historical methodology by scrutinizing the city's most consequential historical stages, the fortifications erected there, and those who commissioned their construction. We also utilized a descriptive approach to delineate the defensive forts and gates they encompassed.

2-Significance of the Topic:

The import of this topic resides in the fact that fortifications The importance of this topic lies in the fact that fortifications are a pivotal architectural component in the planning of Islamic cities, embodying a paradigm of defensive

architecture. Their significance increased with the expansion of states, which magnified the risks of invasion. Defensive fortifications safeguard cities, enhance their strength, and make them arduous to breach.

Tlemcen is one of the Islamic cities whose architectural formations were subject to regulations based on Islamic law (the Qur'an and Sunnah), governing all aspects of architecture. Among these architectural features, fortifications represent a significant constituent. Jurists' rulings corroborated that fortifying and securing the means of defense is a religiously obligatory construction in Islam. Consequently, Islamic cities employed various methods to ensure security, such as walls made of mud brick or stone, trenches, fortified gates, towers, and citadels. The greater the threat a city faced, the more its defensive measures proliferated.

Although This fortification exerted conspicuous effects on myriad aspects of Islamic cities, and Tlemcen was no exception, as Islamic architecture possesses common characteristics and controls. Although the walls were deemed barriers delineating the city, this did not preclude its inhabitants from venturing to the outer precincts in search of respite and recreation, and to exploit the lands to provide the city's requirements of sustenance, raw materials, and other necessities.

Although fortification walls delineated the city's boundaries, inhabitants still ventured beyond them for respite, recreation, and the exploitation of nearby lands. These walls, towers, citadels, and forts not only secured the city but also allowed space for the movement of defenders and the supply of provisions.

While cities differed in their size and the number of walls, Tlemcen during the Zayyanid era was encircled by several robust walls, sometimes reaching up to seven layers. The construction

of these walls reflects the city's strength and security, as Tlemcen became comparable to the most eminent capitals of the Islamic Maghreb

3-The Walls of Tlemcen in the Zayyanid Period:

Tlemcen was renowned as a political, cultural, and scientific capital, home to a multitude of scholars and literary luminaries. Culture, crafts, industries, and arts flourished, rendering it one of the largest and most illustrious Moroccan centers, rivaling major cities like Kairouan¹. This status was not serendipitous, but rather the result of prodigious efforts by the Zayyanid authority to elevate the city. They commenced by protecting it with military fortifications, established for defensive purposes to safeguard subjects and property. These encompassed towers, citadels, lighthouses, trenches, ribats, forts, and walls². The Zayyanid kings, triumphantly imbued the city with a defensive character to confront external menaces³.

The credit is attributable to the strength of the city walls, which played an effectual role in facing dangers. The walls formed a barrier between affluence and penury, urban and rural areas, and served as an impenetrable dam against tempests and violent winds in the region. In addition to their defensive function, the walls had economic and health roles, representing the space around which all industries that were vexatious in smell, dust, size, or noise were situated. Tanneries were located on the eastern edge, to keep unpleasant odors away from the populace, adjacent to places of building materials such as wood, reeds, and gypsum. Tile and pottery kilns were positioned behind the northern wall, far from any residential complex. The same applied to the coppersmiths' craft within the southern side walls around Bab el-Hadid. These factors and advantages prompted rulers to allocate colossal sums for the walls' restoration and continuous support.

The city walls date back to periods antecedent to the Zayyanid era, The Almoravids constructed a wall of bricks and stones around Agadir, The same was true for Tagraret, but Abd

al-Mu'min ibn Ali al-Muwahhid removed its walls after it refused to submit to him for two years, After the emergence of the Banu Ghaniya threat, he re-fortified the city.

The Zayyanid state sultans paid heed to this matter, including Sultan Yaghmurasan, who in 668 AH/1269 CE ordered the construction of towering walls near Bab Kechout, It should be noted that the Marinids razed the city walls, but the Zayyanid kings always took care to repair them, especially on the western side, where approximately six complete, high, and double walls were built, topped by towers and supported by forts.

The walls mentioned by historians, such as Al -Bakri and Al -Yaqoubi, were multiplied, and Al -Bakri mentioned it, and he said: 'The city of Tlemcen is a walled city at the foot of the mountain of walnut tree and has five doors.'⁴

Al -Yaqoubi mentioned that "the great city famous for Morocco, which is called Tlemcen and has a wall of stones and is behind another wall of stones".

Ibn Hawqal also indicated that it is a 'eternal city and has a living and lively rivers on it and fruits, and it has a wall of immunized fortresses

Idrisi said 'is that Tlemcen is an eternal city and has a fortified wall of the trust, which is two cities in one separated by a wall'⁵.

This is for Arab researchers. As for the Western researchers, we find Carbajal, Marmol, as this researcher described the walls of the city by saying, "The walls of the city are beautiful and tight, fortified, well -fortified with zodiac and have five main doors"⁶.

As for hanrich maltizen, it states that the shape of the old city can be easily tracked, which is an almost regular square

surrounded by an Arab wall, and there is a new wall built in 1845⁷.

The researchers, George and William Marce, shared that the city of Tlemcen has seven walls and seven walls, but its residents do not sleep during the day or night⁸

Today, only some remnants of these walls remain on the eastern side of the city, surrounding the Christian cemetery extending on the southern and eastern sides, and other walls on the southern side (near the state security center), as well as on the northeastern side (east and south of Agadir). There are also walls that run through the city center, interspersed with the urban fabric.

4-The Towers:

Most of the towers have vanished, with only the Saffarin tower at Bab el-Hadid remaining, which has retained its name unlike the others. Filali, Abdel-Aziz alluded to approximately three towers: Burj Fashash on the bank of the Metchkana River, Burj al-Tahuna located south of the city, and Burj Imama in the northwest⁹, in addition to the towers of the Al-Mansourah district. Field observation revealed that eight towers still exist in the area, different from their original layout due to natural and human factors. Some are situated in the southeastern part of the city, while others are found in the northeastern part (Agadir area). There is a square-shaped tower in the northeastern direction near Sidi El Daoudi, which has been incorporated into one of the modern houses.

The facade of Bab al-Aqaba overlooks the northeastern side, The tower is preceded by a wall whose facade faces north, about 4 meters away, with a length of 10 meters, Other towers have been identified close to this one on the southern side. Before reaching them, one must pass through a house that separates the way. Adjacent to the rear facade of this house is the first tower, which has a passage with a domed roof and an arched door at its end. Its incomplete facade overlooks the north. On the same path, there is another tower on an area estimated at 53 m,

with its facade facing east towards the Metchkana River. The length of its side is 7.15 m, and the protrusion of one side from the wall is 7 m. The other side could not be measured due to an accumulated soil barrier.

The third tower is located on the same path, 32 m away from the previous one, with a length of 8 m. This tower has very large cracks caused by collapses on the rear side. The last tower is 25 m away from it.

5-The Gates:

Gates are considered one of the most crucial features of the Islamic city, serving as its lifeblood due to the social, political, economic, and commercial relations they establish between the city's residents and those of other areas. They are vital indicators of the city, as these architectural formations facilitate the entry and exit of people without crowding¹⁰.

Tlemcen is one of the Islamic cities, that possessed this characteristic, with several gates opened in its walls, but it is exceedingly arduous to ascertain their names and locations.

The same applies to Bab Sidi El Haloui, which is the gate of the zawiya (Bab Zawiya Sidi El Haloui) and may be the same as Bab Ali and Bab Zir. Most likely, Bab al-Rawah is none other than Bab Abi Qarah, as it is the sole gate in Agadir located to the west.

All of these gates were mentioned by the authors, but their locations are difficult to determine due to changes in the city's urban fabric. Green gardens were supplanted by reinforced concrete and chaotic urbanization, and most monuments such as walls and towers were destroyed, with the gates disappearing along with them. Their entrances and exits became unknown, and their corners narrate tales of their ruin.

Today, only four of these gates remain: Bab al-Qarmadin, Bab al-Khamis, Bab al-Khawkha, and Bab al-Rawah.

6-Conclusion:

The forts in Tlemcen possess immense historical import, playing a decisive role in the country's chronicle, Many date back to the Zayyanid period and were employed as defensive structures to protect against assaults, especially from the neighboring Marinids and Hafsids. The forts were distinguished by the loftiness and solidity of their walls, constructed of rammed earth, which augmented their resistance. However, the role of the Zayyanid forts was not limited to defense; they also had other functions, including controlling air currents and moderating the weather. One of the other prominent functions was social, as the walls in Tlemcen demarcated the boundary between two lifestyles: the urban pattern prevailing inside the wall and the rural pattern outside it. There was also an industrial function, with the locations of polluting and vexatious industries, such as tanning, or those causing noise, dust, or smoke, situated outside the city walls.

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