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**The Influence of Andalusian Architecture on the Historical Landmarks in
Tlemcen: A Descriptive Archaeological Study of the Ancient Almoravid Bath
in the City of Nedroma**

تأثير فن العمارة الأندلسية في المعالم الأثرية في تلمسان. دراسة أثرية وصفية الحمام المرابطي
القديم لمدينة ندرومة

Moustapha Merouan

Abi Bakr Belkaid University - Tlemcen

مصطفى مروان

جامعة أبي بكر بلقايد - تلمسان

mostefamarouane@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The ancient Almoravid bath in the city of Nedroma is one of the oldest historical landmarks in the city, still standing as a testament to the depth of Islamic history and the connection between the Maghreb and Andalusia. The bath was constructed next to the Almoravid Great Mosque in Nedroma, which is considered one of the oldest mosques in Algeria, alongside the Great Mosque of Algiers and the Great Mosque of Tlemcen.

In the following study, we will examine the history of the ancient Almoravid bath through historical, archaeological, and artistic lenses. We aim to highlight the influence of Moroccan-Andalusian architectural art on this structure.

Keywords: The Arab City – Andalusian Architecture – Nedroma – Features of Islamic Architecture – Almoravid Bath

الملخص:

يعتبر الحمام المرابطي القديم بمدينة ندرومة من أقدم المعالم الأثرية في المدينة ، حيث لا زال شاهدا على عمق التاريخ الإسلامي ، والارتباط بين بلاد المغرب والأندلس ، وقد شيد الحمام بجوار المسجد الجامع المرابطي في ندرومة ، الذي يعتبر من أقدم المساجد في الجزائر ، على غرار المسجد الكبير بالعاصمة ، والجامع الكبير بتلمسان .
والدراسة التالية نحاول دراسة تاريخ الحمام المرابطي القديم دراسة تاريخية وأثرية وفنية ، من خلال إبراز معالم تأثير فن العمارة المغربية الأندلسية ..
الكلمات المفتاحية : المدينة العربية - العمارة الأندلسية - ندرومة - مظاهر العمارة الإسلامية - الحمام المرابطي.

1. INTRODUCTION

Possibly, the emergence of cities is fundamentally linked to geographic locations that provide all the necessities for the establishment of human settlements.

During the 7th millennium BCE, the world witnessed the earliest human settlements in history in Jordan and Palestine (Jericho). Archaeological research has confirmed the existence of the oldest city, Eridu, around 3500 BCE, which emerged in Mesopotamia, alongside Aleppo and Mari in Syria. These cities proliferated at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE, becoming more organized and better constructed. The earliest civilizations thrived in Mesopotamia, such as the Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations.

During the 2nd millennium BCE, civilization reached the shores of the Mediterranean, giving rise to coastal cities such as Byblos and Tyre in Lebanon during the Phoenician era. These cities were primarily commercial centers, reflecting the Phoenicians' expertise in trade. Historical research indicates no significant civilization in North Africa during that time until the Phoenicians began arriving, establishing the Carthaginian civilization.

The Pharaonic civilization in Egypt played a significant role in the development and spread of urbanization, followed by the Greeks and Romans thereafter.

2. Problematic

The history of the Islamic Arab city provides a fertile ground for historical and archaeological research, influenced by the succession of civilizations and interactions among Arab-Islamic, Persian, and Byzantine

cultures.

Studying archaeological landmarks plays a crucial role in exploring this cultural and historical diversity, including both civil and religious structures such as palaces, baths, markets, and mosques.

The following problematic can be posed: What are the manifestations of Islamic architectural characteristics? What is the influence of Andalusian architectural art on urban buildings? Therefore, the ancient Almoravid bath can be considered as an architectural element influenced by Moroccan-Andalusian architectural art.

3. Nedroma city through historical sources and references

Nedroma city is one of the oldest cities in western Algeria, rich in urban heritage that bears witness to a flourishing period of Islamic history, especially during the medieval era.

The city was founded at the foot of Mount Felaoucen, stretching along the slope of this mountain at an altitude ranging from 360 meters to 470 meters.

Mount Felaoucen is considered the highest mountain in the Tlemcen region, with an altitude of approximately 1200 meters. The city faces the Mediterranean Sea, located about 6 kilometers away from it in a straight line. It is situated between two valleys: Valley of El Hamra to the east and Valley of El Demin to the west¹.

It also overlooks the fertile Mazauro Plain and is bordered to the west by the Sidi Yousha area, which is 18 kilometers away.

To the south, it is bordered by Mount

Felaoucen, and to the east, the city of Tlemcen, which is about 60 kilometers away. To the west is the city of Maghnia, approximately 35 kilometers away, and to the north, about 22 kilometers away, is Marsa Ben M'hidi.

It was situated away from the main road that connected the east to the west but was close to the port of Ghazaouet.²

Many historians have addressed the history of urban development in the Nedroma region. The earliest writings date back to the 5th century AH, in the works of the Islamic historian "Al-Bakri," in addition to the book "Description of Africa" by Hassan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan. Al-Idrisi also discussed the urban development that the region experienced during the 6th century AH.

There have also been some research and writings specializing in the history of urban development in the region, supervised by French historians and archaeologists such as René Basset in his book "Nedroma and the Traras", historian Alfred Bel in his book "Muslim Metropolis of Nedroma", as well as Marmol and Show.

However, the true history of the beginning of urbanization in the area remains ambiguous, and historians' opinions vary from one era to another. The origin of the city's name also remains contentious, as it is sometimes associated with a Berber tribe³ and at other times with a Roman name, linked to Roman presence in the region.

Our knowledge of Nedroma before the 5th and 6th centuries AH / 11th and 12th centuries AD remains generally obscure, particularly in the field of archaeological

study. Little is known about the city, for example, including the source of its name and its urban development.

What Hassan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi⁴ mentions about Nedroma is related to its founding, stating it was established by the Romans who chose a site with a similar layout and design to the city of Rome. He suggests that its name comes from the word "Ned" in the Afar language, which means "similar" as derived from the Latin word "similis", meaning "equal".

The archaeological study of the city and its region has not yielded any results indicating that Nedroma was a Roman city. The absence of any Roman remains in the area and the city suggests that it is a city newer than the Roman era. Rene Basset⁵ attempts to link the name and the city based on what Al-Yaqoubi mentioned in his book "Al-Buldan" about a city called "Flawson" inhabited by a group of Berber tribes. Basset argues that this name is derived from the name of a tribe. However, Basset himself relied on interpretation and made connections between names and other derivatives that are not explicitly clear in general.

The name of the city of Nedroma is mentioned by Al-Bakri for the first time in the 5th century AH / 11th century AD in an explicit form. He speaks not of a modern city, but rather of a city of significant economic and urban importance. He describes it as "Nedroma, in the midst of Mount Tajar, with valleys to its west and north, with pleasant plains and farms between it and the sea, ten miles away, and its coast is its port on the Wadi Masin, which forms it. Wadi Masin is plentiful in fruit, and it is a safe port with two fortresses and a well-regarded monastery, where one is

blessed. If anyone steals there or commits a sin, his punishment is not delayed.

Then Al-Bakri adds that Nedroma is a walled city with a river and orchards filled with all kinds of fruits. Thus, Al-Bakri indicates that it is a city surrounded by walls, with a secure port and two fortresses and a post for guarding, protecting the city from any surprise attacks. He also mentions that this post is blessed, suggesting that its military function has diminished, if not disappeared, as observed in both the eastern and western Islamic worlds where such posts have transformed into places of worship and pilgrimage.

It is known that the shores of the Islamic Maghreb were regularly subjected to raids by British ships, which used the Sicilian islands and ports in southern Italy as bases, in addition to some Mediterranean islands, especially in the period preceding the 4th century AH / 10th century AD, when Muslim influence in the Mediterranean Sea receded.

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During the same early period, Muslims worked on building their naval forces on one hand, while on the other hand, they constructed forts and strongholds to defend against Byzantine attacks.⁶

It is likely that the coast of central Morocco, like others, was subjected to these

attacks. The fortress mentioned by Al-Bakri was established for the protection of an urban and economic area, namely the city of Nedroma, which relied on trade starting from the ancient port of "Al-Ghazawat," formerly known as "Namur," located no more than 20 kilometers away. Caravans also traveled towards Tlemcen, approximately 60 kilometers away, or towards the distant city of Fes, about 300 kilometers away.

Al-Bakri primarily emphasizes the economic importance and status of the city, but he omits mentioning other urban features such as mosques, markets, and others. He mentions that the nearby city of Trana, located about eight miles from Nedroma, describing it as "inhabited with a market, a congregational mosque, and many orchards."⁷

About a century later, around the 6th century AH / 12th century AD, Al-Idrisi mentions in a passage describing Nedroma, indicating that the city had developed significantly since the time of Al-Bakri in the 5th century AH / 11th century AD. He states, "Nedroma is a large city, planned and prosperous, with a market, walls, situated in a fertile area with numerous farms. It has a valley running to its east, with orchards and gardens, abundant architecture, and plentiful irrigation."⁸

When we compare what Al-Bakri mentioned with what was stated in the book of Al-Idrisi, it becomes clear that there was a rapid development in the urban fabric of the city. It was populated, had numerous buildings, abundant irrigation, and a market, aspects which Al-Bakri did not previously mention.

However, Al-Idrisi himself does not

specifically mention all urban heritage such as mosques, but the development he described in terms of population, architecture, and agriculture suggests the existence of a congregational mosque, despite his focus on walls, markets, and fortifications.

It has been reported that there were around eight to eleven mosques found in the late nineteenth century⁹, according to Basset. It appears that Nedroma and the surrounding cities were connected to the historical events known to the city of Tlemcen. This means that the entire region fell under the rule of the Sifreyin Kharijites initially, and then passed to the Idrisids starting from the year 174 AH (791 AD). Suleiman ibn Abd al-Hakam ruled over it during the reign of Idris I, followed by Muhammad ibn Suleiman during the reign of Idris II.¹⁰

The Arab-Islamic city was the foundation of Arab-Islamic civilization and its reflective mirror of the extent of cultural, urban, and civilizational development.

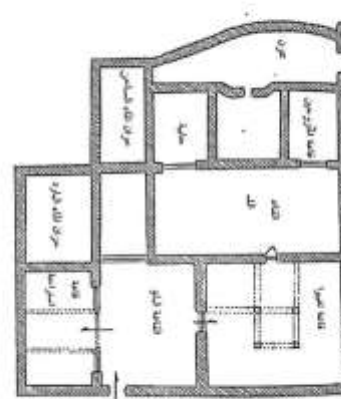
They are clearly focal points for civilizational development, serving as hubs for material and scientific reception and transmission, intellectual polarization, and spread of culture.

If this is the vital role that Arab cities play, does our scientific interest and academic effort align with it? Those studying European cities, for example, face the challenge of how to utilize the vast amount of resources, research, and studies. Meanwhile, Arab cities are still looking for someone to uncover their secrets, contrasting with research conducted by a group of specialists, mostly orientalists, focused on studying Islamic history and its

aftermath during colonial challenges, possibly adapting it to the aspirations of their authorities and administrations.¹¹

Perhaps, Nedroma is an example of that Islamic urban heritage which still suffers from neglect and potential disappearance, unlikely to survive amidst the developments affecting the region and other archaeological sites.

The covered market, which still exists, takes a rectangular shape with shops built along its edges. In the center, it is divided into several rows of tables displaying goods from artisans and represented by 05 rows. Its dimensions are 110/50 meters. Adjacent to the market was what was known as "the hotel," now referred to as the garage, where market animals were tethered and their goods stored, along with some private rooms for lodgers. This building has since been converted into a commercial center (see plan



Plan No. 12 The covered plan of the mosque built in Nedroma

number 11).

C- The Bathhouse

The history of baths dates back to ancient civilizations, with the Roman civilization distinguishing itself in this

architectural type. During Roman times, baths thrived, and craftsmen excelled in decorating and embellishing them, especially since most emperors housed baths within their palaces.

The baths typically consist of three sections: an entrance section with two entrances, one internal and one external; then a section housing cold water pools known as the cold room; and finally, the hot room specifically designed to retain heat using materials such as smooth stones or marble.

The baths are considered urban amenities and among its virtues and famous scenes. Rural residents were keen to visit the baths when in the city due to their great love for them and the enjoyment of bathing in hot water. The baths play a significant social and religious role, in addition to the pleasure they provide for everyone.

The first thing that catches the visitor's eye is the façade of the bathhouse decorated with alternating medallions in black and yellow. Inside, a small entrance leads to a narrow corridor that leads to the vestibule, which is spacious and consists of four vaulted iwans (shaded spacious sitting area), each with a platform and arched niches for placing clothes. Triangular and curved corners adorn the vault, and a dome crowns the top to serve as a skylight (manara), alongside rectangular marble fountains. The dome is adorned with painted floral motifs in red and blue. On the eastern side of the vestibule, a passage leads to the middle sections through a zigzag corridor and the warm and hot interior.¹²

Each section consists of main halls surrounded by four iwans, each containing small rooms with stone basins. The main

section is topped by a dome with circular openings covered by stained glass pieces (qumariyat) and vents for steam release. The floor of the hot interior section is tiled with small stones alternating in black and yellow, arranged in intricate geometric patterns. The baths also include water storage rooms and heating stoves.¹³

The bathhouse underwent many unrecorded stages until it settled into its current form, passed down through several centuries in terms of its design, architectural engineering, materials, or in terms of purpose, and associated traditions. It is not unlikely that the idea of the bathhouse in Yemen benefited from the natural baths accessed by stairs, leading to the construction of all baths below ground level, where only the ceiling built in the form of domes is visible. These domes house rooms called "cupboards" with small openings through which light filters through stained glass, replaced with glass in modern times. The bathhouse, built primarily with black stone and topped with black basalt, maintains its heat acquired from a large furnace built underneath it in the rear. Above the furnace, there is a copper dome covered with bricks that leads to the tank (al-maghtas), the source of hot water for all bathhouse (chambers). Adjacent to it is another deep basin for cold water. Access to the bathhouse is through a comfortable stone staircase leading through a corridor to the bathhouse lobby, where reception and the dressing room (al-mukhall) and the cooling pool (al-shadhruwan) are located.

Behind the bathhouse, a passage leads to the furnace through steps that lead to a rectangular room called "al-mallat," which serves as the fuel store. Until recently, it was mostly composed of human waste collected

from the outlets of the bathhouses of the old city houses, spread out until it dried in an exposed low yard near "al-mallat," known as "al-madhha," before being burned in the furnace. The rest of the bathhouse chambers, starting with the central "sadr" flanked by two chambers, one of which is "al-ghutts" acquires its heat from the furnace's flames leaking under the specific vents that extend under the flooring and the black basalt walls. Its warmth rises from the carefully sealed exits due to its proximity to the fire source and it's the first - after purification in the "al-maghith" cabinet - that bathers visit to sweat and benefit from the hot environment before moving on to other chambers with moderate temperatures to receive bath services by the bathhouse attendants or one of their assistants who performs massages with a bag and scrubbing with soap, where bathers gather around small stone basins supplied with water from pipes extending from the "al-maghith" and the adjacent cold water basin, the buckets are often used for water transport, especially during the final shower performed in the "al-maghith" cabinet before heading out to the "mukhalla" where clothes are left under the bathhouse attendant's care who fulfills their duty of service, including those needing such assistance in exchange for fees that were once regulated by official rules unrelated to the bathhouse rental.

The fees for bathhouses and their services have increased over the years, but they have always been proportionate to the income of the general public, considering the bathhouse as a charitable institution managed by a dedicated endowment and supervised administration. This ensured the continuity of its mission, spending on maintenance, and renovation. Its income covered the services provided to bathers, their families, and the staff who inherited the

work and profession generation after generation.

In the bathhouse, there were several roles filled by different individuals. There was the "attendant" or "bathhouse manager," the "masseur" responsible for massages, the "cleaner" overseeing cleanliness, the "fire tender" maintaining the fire, and the "water carrier" supplying hot or cold water to customers. Decoration and beautification services often required the presence of a barber or beautician. In women's bathhouses, there was the "hairstylist" who styled hair, applied henna, and decorated the eyes with kohl, as well as performed facial treatments. Additionally, there was the "guard" responsible for safeguarding bathers' belongings and clothing. It appears that a considerable number of these roles existed in each bathhouse, with Cairo's bathhouses reportedly employing up to seventy workers. The study of Islamic medicine would be incomplete without mentioning the bathhouse, which played a significant role in public health in Islamic society.¹⁴

The bathhouse was known among the Greeks and Romans before the Arabs, but it was primarily limited to the wealthy classes for leisure and entertainment. However, Muslims developed the use of bathhouses in terms of purpose and structure by introducing water networks through lead or zinc pipes into houses, bathhouses, and mosques. The book "Industries of the Arabs" includes illustrations and maps of water networks in some Islamic capitals. It is well-known that Arab chemists invented soap and produced colored and scented varieties. Each bathhouse typically had a specialized masseur and another for hand and foot care, alongside a barber for haircuts, often

accompanied by a popular eatery nearby. During the third century Hijri (955 CE), it was estimated that Baghdad alone had around ten thousand bathhouses, with Andalusian cities having multiples of this number. Dr. Stanow and Zekb mention that in 1556 CE, Philip II of Spain issued strict legislation prohibiting Muslims from practicing their religious rituals and speaking Arabic. He also ordered the destruction of public bathhouses in Spanish cities due to the abundance of water resources flowing from the mountains. Since then, anyone visiting a bathhouse or showing interest in hygiene¹⁵ was suspected of secretly practicing Islam and could be brought before the inquisition court.

Thus, Islamic teachings emphasizing purity and cleanliness played a significant role in the development of the concept of public baths, making them one of the duties of public service in the state, akin to mosques, schools, hospitals, and libraries.

The antique Bath in Ndruma city is considered one of the oldest baths in Algeria, dating back to the Almoravid dynasty era between 1095 and 1147 CE. Located in the heart of the old city, in the Terbia neighborhood behind the Great Almoravid Mosque, it has been classified as a national monument since 1912. It underwent restoration in 2003 and reopened its doors to the city's residents, maintaining its distinctive features typical of Islamic Arab baths found in most Islamic Arab cities, as evidenced by its architectural plan.

Architectural description of Antique Hammam

A- The entrance:

What distinguishes the entrance is the

wooden door. The structure is arched, and the height of the door is about two meters, sloping downward through approximately ten steps. Refer to the diagram for details.

B- Reception Hall:

This is the hall immediately following the entrance. What distinguishes it are two columns, each measuring one meter and eighty centimeters (1.80m) ended with two capitals.

C- Resting Hall:

This is a small hall opposite the cold hall, measuring two and a half meters by five and a half meters (2.5m x 5.5m). It is typically used for resting after bathing and is equipped with chairs or even sofas where customers can recline.

D- Cold Hall:

Following the reception hall through a small door, also known as the Fregedarium. It is used for changing clothes and is square-shaped with dimensions of nine meters by nine meters (9m x 9m). It is centered by four columns, each measuring one meter and eighty centimeters (1.80m), capped with capitals. The ceiling is covered by a perforated dome that allows light to pass through, thus illuminating the hall. There are eight of these arches along the walls. The hall is surrounded by stone benches for seating, with a small paved area at the bottom of the dome that receives more light due to the vertical light above it. It is used for grooming or shaving. The hot hall is rectangular with dimensions of four meters by nine meters (4m x 9m). It is surrounded by stone benches for seating and connected to the cold hall through a small door. The floor is paved with rocks.

On the left, we find the bridal hall, a small hall used during ceremonies where grooms bathe before weddings. Its dimensions are two meters by four meters (2m x 4m). The entrance is arched, and it includes seating areas.

In the corner of the hot hall, there are two cisterns (jabiyat). A “jabiya” refers to a tank or reservoir filled with both cold and hot water. In the right corner, we find the cistern for cold water, which is square-shaped, matching the gate overseeing it. The capacity of the cistern is over one thousand liters (1000 liters), and it is connected through a pipe to the heating hall.

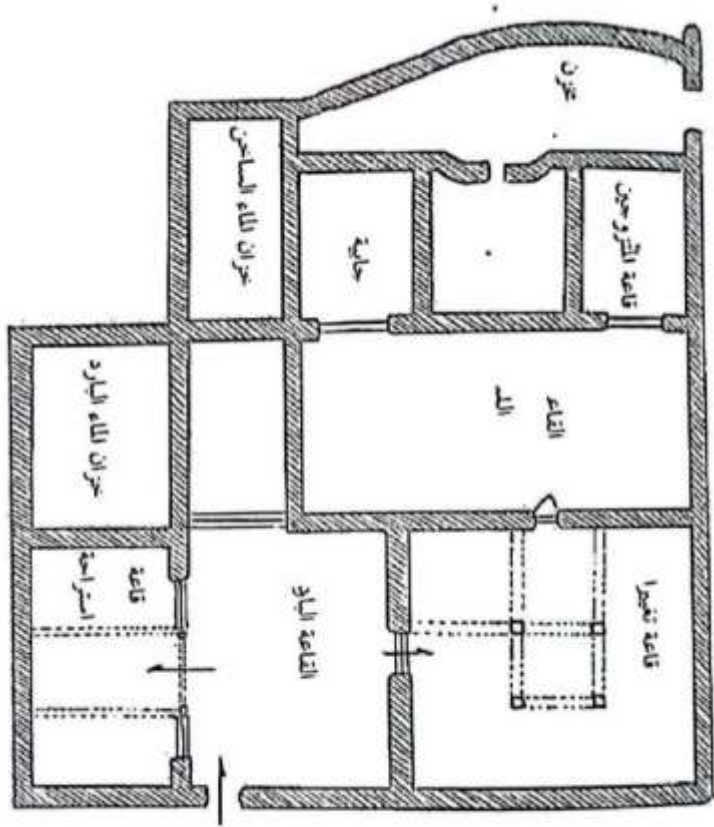
As for the hot cistern, it is located in the left corner of the hot hall, also a square-shaped tank. However, the gate overseeing it is arched, perhaps distinguishing it from the cold water cistern.

The hot hall is covered by a cone-shaped roof, with dimensions matching those of the hall itself and a diameter of approximately one meter (1m). It is perforated with a series of circular glass openings that allow daylight to pass through.

The heating hall has its own entrance and is designated for the bath attendants. It is rectangular in shape with dimensions of twelve meters by six meters (12m x 6m). It is less luxurious than the previously mentioned halls and includes a large tank for cold water on the left. In the center, there is an iron water tank standing about 1.5 meters high on rock supports. Directly below it, there is currently a diesel-operated furnace, but there is still a wing dedicated to storing firewood, which was the traditional fuel source for the bath.

3. CONCLUSION

The ancient Almohad bathhouse in Nedroma remains an architectural landmark witnessing a historical era marked by the flourishing of Maghrebian-Andalusian architectural style, similar to the adjacent Almohad mosque. However, the signs of deterioration affecting several archaeological sites urgently highlight the risk, necessitating consideration for its restoration and preservation from collapse and decay. Encouragement of researchers and enthusiasts to explore and excavate its facets is also imperative.



Plan No. 12: Horizontal plan of the antique bathhouse in Nedroma

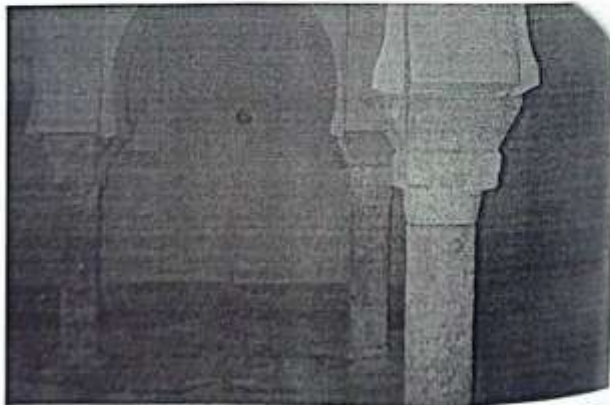


Plate No. 30 Reception Hall of the Antique Bathhouse

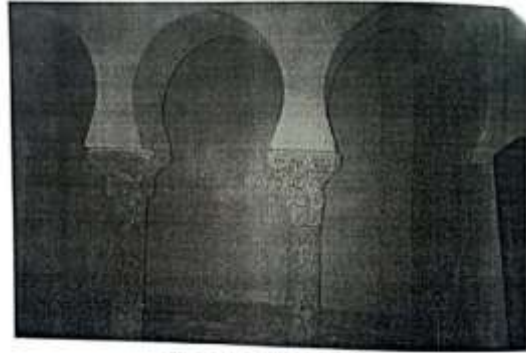


Plate Number 31: Interior Hall of the Mosque of the Prophet

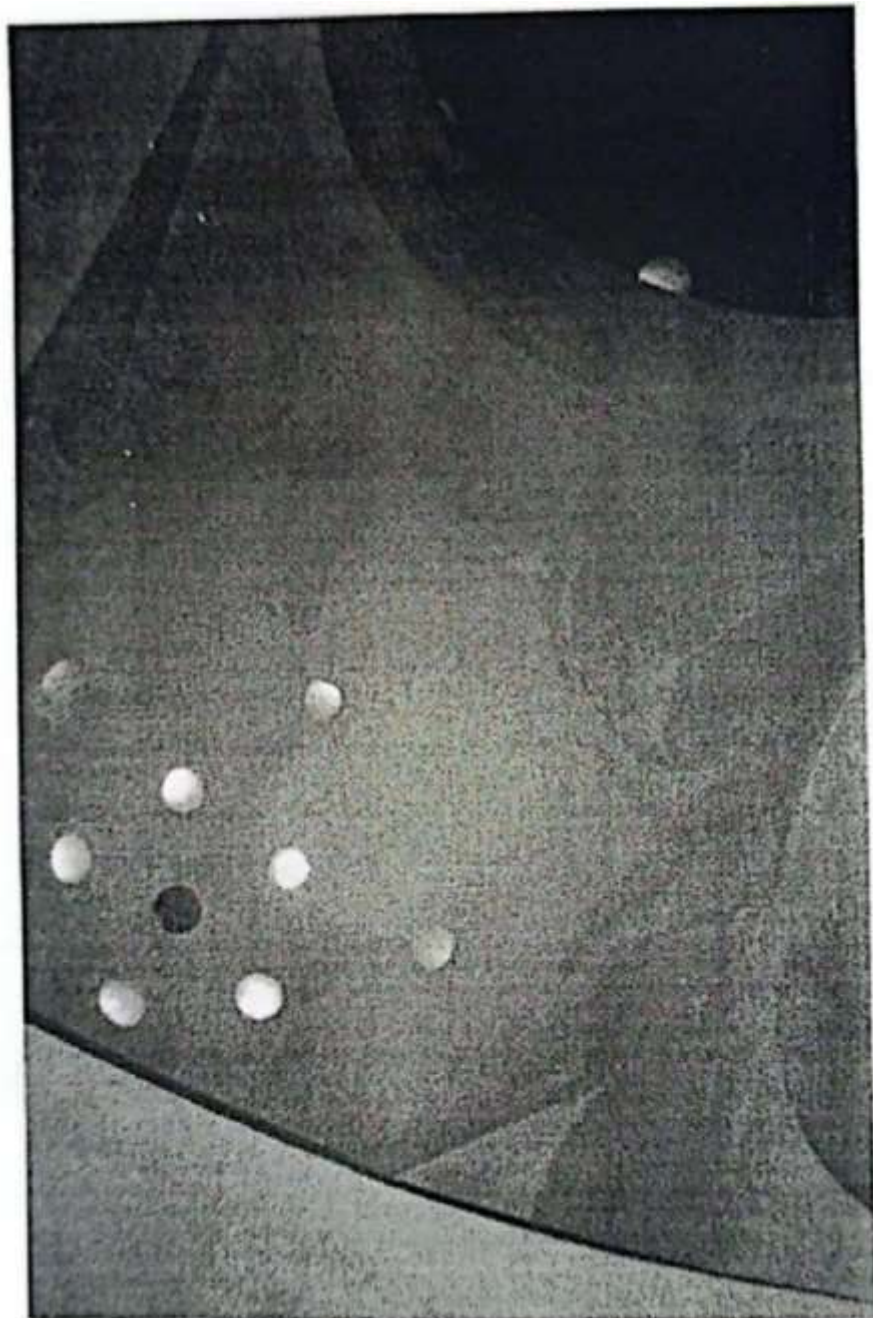


Plate Number 32: General View of the Dome Overlooking the Resting Hall

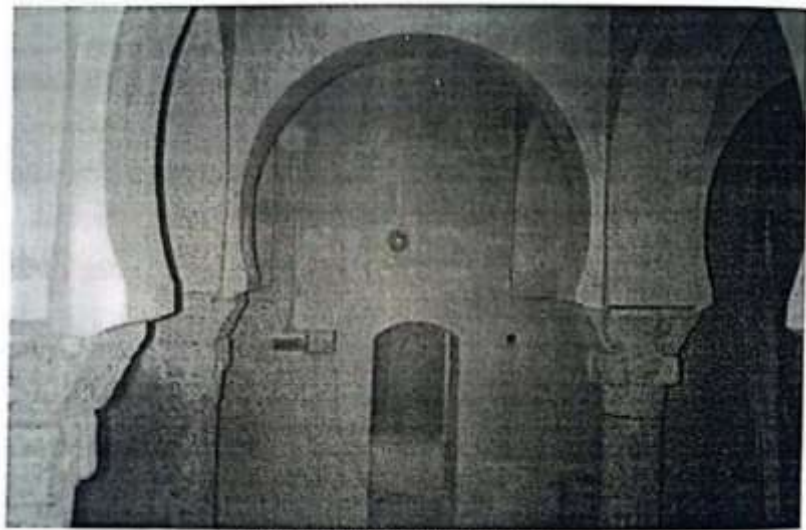


Plate Number 53: The Cold Hall in the antique Bathhouse

¹⁴ Joudat Abdel Karim Youssef, *Economic and Social Conditions in Central Maghreb During the Third and Fourth Centuries AH*, University press, p. 122.

¹⁵ *Al Riyadh Newspaper*, November 15, 2003, Issue Number 12565.

¹ Dr. Anissa Barkat: *Nedroma City through the Ages - Proceedings of the First Historical Forum on the History of Nedroma City and its Surroundings*, p. 02.

² Marie-Anne Prenant-Thuumelin, *Algerian Annals of Geography*. No. 4, Nedrema, 1968, p. 21.

³ Al-Hassan ibn Mohammed Al-Wazzan, *Description of Africa - Translated from French by Mohammed Hajji and Mohammed Al-Akhdar*, House press of Islamic Maghreb, 1st edition, Beirut, 1983, p. 13.

⁴ The same source, pp. 14-13.

⁵ Basset (U), *Nedroma and the Traras*, Published by the School of Letters of Algiers, Paris, 1901, pp. 5-7.

⁶ Al-Bakri (Abu Ubaid): *Al-Maghreb in the Mention of the Countries of Africa and Al-Maghreb*. Published in Paris 1965 by Maison d'Oeuvre, p. 80.

⁷ Al-Bakri, the previous source, page 80.

⁸ Al-Bakri, the previous source, p. 80

⁹ Al-Idrisi: *The Arab Maghreb*, from the book *Excursion for the Enthusiast*, edited by Muhammad Haj Sadiq, Published by university press, Algiers 1983. p. 190.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 08.

¹¹ Jamal Hamdan: *The Arab City*. Institute of Arab World Studies, 1964, p. 01

¹² Atallah Dihin: *History of Algeria - Part 3 - 4* - p. 364.

¹³ Ahmed Salami, *Al Riyadh Newspaper*, November 15, 2003, Issue 12565.