

FROM KSOURIAN ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE TO NEO-MOORISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Architecture is the mirror through which we look at a society, its specific features, its culture and its identity. Among the elements that make up the image of the Algerian town of Bechar are the facades of various buildings, imposing themselves with asperity, ensuring variety and producing a listed source for the local collective memory. While some of these buildings reflect a Ksourian architectural language, a large proportion, inherited from the colonial period, are neo-Moorish in style. In fact, from the very beginning of its penetration of the national territory, French colonization attempted to reinterpret local models to create a new architectural style known as neo-Moorish.

This reinterpretation was translated into symbolic buildings, marked by the cladding of colonial facades with architectural elements borrowed from traditional Ksour nomenclature.

The buildings from the colonial era, still standing today, are not obligatory, but could be said to be distinct and attractive. This architecture from the colonial period seems to require particular attention from the various players in the town. The challenges are many, but compelling (heritage, etc.). The case in point is the deterioration of buildings in the city today.

The aim of this research project is to study and analyze buildings from the colonial era, given their historical importance and heritage value.

Keywords: Neo-Moorish architecture; Ksourian architectural language; heritage value; cultural references; city of Bechar.

INTRODUCTION

Béchar is considered to be the largest wilaya in south-west Algeria. It corresponds to part of the former department of Saoura, of which it was the capital. of which it was the capital.



Figure 1: Geographical location of the wilaya of Bechar

Colonised in 1903, Béchar has undergone prodigious transformations, particularly in terms of architecture. Proclaiming a 'civilising modernity', the architecture of the colonial era incorporated exogenous structures in '*a humanistic approach, an attempt to reinterpret the values of the traditional architectural and urban heritage in modern constructions, in short, a strong desire to Arabise the built environment*' (Foura. Y, 2011). '*The construction or even invention of a neo-Moorish style is accompanied by a reinterpretation, selection and borrowing of aesthetic and architectural features that become the vectors of an incredible identity*'. (Oulebsir. N, 1998).

Historical background :

In 1903, Béchar saw the construction of its first colonial quarter, organised in a grid pattern, with the market in the Place des Chameaux forming the meeting point between the Ksourian and European communities. This colonial fabric comprised almost identical rectangular blocks stretching as far as Place Tanezrouft, where the post office, church and town hall were located.



Figure 2: Béchar town centre. Source: People's Communal Assembly, 2010.

Architectural style :

Colonial architecture in Béchar is characterised by neo-classical and neo-Moorish styles, the latter becoming the official style for colonial public buildings. This style, the result of a blend of Western and Eastern cultures, reinterprets the values of traditional architectural heritage in modern buildings.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY :

The aim of this study is to identify the characteristics of the façades of colonial-era architecture in Béchar, using a morphological approach. The study aims to build a structural model of the façades, by analysing three symbolic public buildings designed during this period: the 1st November post office, the Pasteur primary school and the church (now the Malek mosque).

METHOD OF ANALYSIS :

In general, research methods on historic buildings are linked to the period, the region, the artistic style or the designer. Rarely are buildings analysed as masterpieces incorporating the most authentic and significant components of the style.

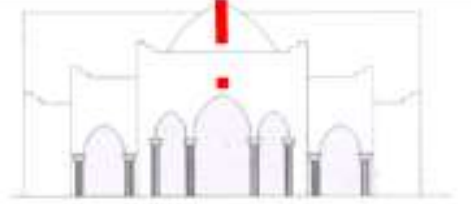
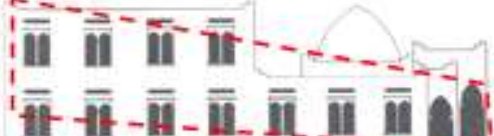
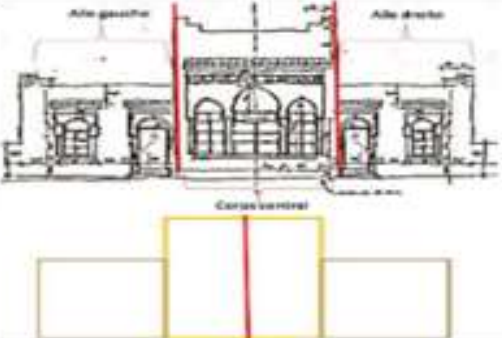
This research adopts a morphological analysis of facades in order to build a structural model, based on information gathered from the formal uses of facades. This formal approach enables coherence to be checked and data to be presented in such a way as to reveal underlying structures that are not visible to the naked eye. The aim is to acquire in-depth knowledge of a vernacular architecture that eludes traditional classifications, thus guaranteeing coherent urban renewal of the colonial town centre and the preservation of this heritage in an evolutionary perspective.

The analysis of the façade is based on the description of its components in the form of named and characteristic concrete objects (template, shapes, characteristics and locations of windows and entrances, horizontal and vertical bands, materials and colours) as well as their compositions (symmetry, hierarchy, etc.). The corpus of the study will be representative and manageable, limited to three public buildings: the post office (administrative and service building), a school (educational building) and a church (religious building), built by the colonists for their own use.

MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS STUDIED

Building no. 01: The post office

Table 1: Analysis of the post office facade. Source: authors.

The composition of the façade of the Post Office : 	
Photo of the post office	Monumentality and vertical effect
	
Horizontal effect and alignment of openings	Axuality and symmetry
	
Sidefacade	Central body
	The roof: the dome covers the building with its half-spherical shell on an octagonal drum. The Body: the proportion of the main façade is remarkable in relation to the main axis and the distance between the bays. The base: is marked by the ground level and provides a physical and visual link to the site.
	
The windows are designed with arches at the top, separated by a stucco column against the background of a wall.	
	The cornices are made with green tiles above the windows.
The arcades and acroteria are reminiscent of Ksourian Arab architecture.	The arcades and acroteria are reminiscent of Ksourian Arab architecture.

The facade of the post office is made up of three parts: a central body with two side Wings. The central body is characterized by a four-part and treated with a horseshoe arch to mark the local identity.

The post office represents classic European architecture, with regular layouts, symmetrical organisation of internal spaces and visible symmetry in the façade. The façade is structured by arcades and a vertical and horizontal layout, highlighting a central axis. The components of the façade are arranged rhythmically and homogeneously. Colonial architecture is characterised by specific features linked to the region, climate, materials and society, giving the façades of the colonial period their own identity.

Building no. 02: Pasteur Primary School

Built in 1910, the building, with its central ribbed dome, is made up of three main parts. The central part is symmetrical with the main entrance, while the other two parts, the side wings, blend harmoniously with the Rhummel gorge.

The building has a monumental entrance, accessible by stairs from the main street, and a vestibule with a porch, marked by a huge semi-circular arch framing the entrance gates. This arch is set within another arch of similar shape, decorated with poly-lobed decoration on the inside. On either side, two pilasters with pastiche capitals, leaning against the wall and decorated with a projecting accolade arch, complete the ensemble.

The ornamental treatment of the school is very rich, based on the borrowing of several local architectural elements. The façade is composed of a central body with symmetry and aligned windows. In short, the façade is designed according to a logic of proportion and equality to express harmony and balance between the component elements.

The school has a dome reminiscent of Ksourian architecture. The central dome is ribbed in eight sections, each section containing a projecting opening framed by a horseshoe arch, and rests on an octagonal drum.

Like the portals of the Ryadh in the ksar of Kenadsa in the wilaya of Béchar, the school's portal is solid, with two wooden leaves decorated with alternating nails. Its upper section is a glazed horseshoe arch decorated with cross carpentry.

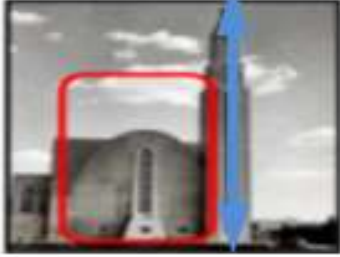
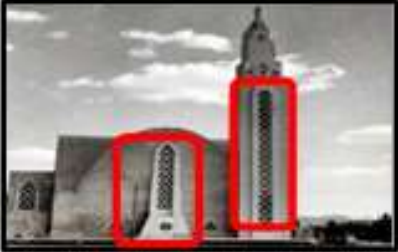
Table 2: Analysis of the facades of the Pasteur school. Source: authors.

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Main entrance	
	
Monumental entrances	Axiality, verticality and symmetry
	
	Façade latérale droite (Langage classique)
The central body: The proportion and rhythm of the main façade are marked by the following relationships: a - 4a - 8a Cladding: protects the building. Its shape and materials distinguish it from the facades. Gutters and downpipes drain off rainwater. The body: the proportion in the main façade is remarkable in relation to the main axis and the distance between bays. The basement: marks the footing and provides a physical and visual link to the land.	
Horizontal effect, Alignment of openings. (Classic language)	
	
The dome on the terrace(a dome)	The semi-circular arcade around the gallery
	
Round-arched cladding (exterior and interior windows)	Geometric layout
	
Green tiles above the windows (full length)	Acroteres, merlons and mocharabiehs (interior and exterior facades)

The style adopted for the school represents one of the earliest examples of Moorish art applied to southern Algeria. The Pasteur school is one of the masterpieces of neo-Moorish architecture inspired by local Ksour architecture. Today, the building is still used as a primary school.

Building n°. 03: The church (now the Malek mosque)

Table 3: Analysis of the church facades.

	
Symmetry -The minaret: part of the symmetry of the left and right composition.	Axiality, verticality and monumentality The Minaret is very high, with a domed structure.
	
 The Central Body: proportions and relationships in the main façade: a - 4a -8a.	 Presence of the dome, vault, columns and windows with arches at the top separated by a stucco column on the wall background.
 The Mouchrabia: in the minaret (the four façades)	

This building, designed in 1947 as a church, is now a mosque.

The main body of the building, square in shape and varying in height from 8 to 18 metres, consists of a central building adorned with four large domes, linked by a minaret at the corner. The façade of the main building is perfectly symmetrical, with a monumental entrance in carved stone comprising three horseshoe arches resting on solid columns.

The façade of the building reflects European neo-Moorish architecture, with symmetrical and monumental elements such as the minaret and cross-shaped domes. It is characterised by the addition of arcades and axial symmetry, creating a rhythmic order in the façade. This architecture incorporates elements adapted to the local climate and society, giving the façades a specific identity.

The ornamentation is rich, using a number of local architectural elements. The main façade features windows aligned in a classical style. It combines a logic of proportion, harmony and balance. The balanced relationship between verticality and horizontality is dominated by solids rather than voids (mocharabias), reflecting the religious and spiritual style.

DISCUSSION :

The composition of facades from the colonial period in Béchar is characterised by the arcature, a symmetrical arrangement, with elements arranged rhythmically. The façades combine arcades and openings, with particular emphasis on static and circulation spaces. Colonial architecture in Béchar introduced new practices with specific compositional rules based on symmetry, alignment and folding. Morphological analysis reveals coherent dimensional relationships between elements and regular, orthogonal and arched façades.

Table 4: Architectural elements (morphological segments). Source authors

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<u>The morphological division</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Borrowing</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Origin</u>
The minaret	Aesthetic and symbolic building of worship.	Symbolising colonisation.	Square base	North African architecture
			With clock on front	Western architecture
The dome	- Stylistic enhancement of the building. - Adding light through zenithal lighting.	Exterior plastic qualities (roof coping).	Octagonal base with eight sides .	Arab-Muslim architecture
The doors	functional	-Symbol for greatness -Inspiration Ksourienne	Monumental buildings made of wood, glass and iron	Western architecture
			Under a semicircular or horseshoe arch, framed by marble colonnades and decorated in plaster .	Arab-Muslim architecture
The windows	• Functional, lighting and ventilation	Transparency and Readability	Built into the walls, they are characterised by their elongated rectangular proportions.	Western architecture
			Découpe de l'encadrement en arc Outrepasé ou par le travail du bois des persiennes	Arab-Muslim architecture
The slots	The ridge of the building	An Arabic aesthetic effect	Recovered crenellations on the acroteria of buildings	Arab-Muslim architecture
The cornice	Decorative doors and windows	An Arabic aesthetic effect	In green glazed tiles, set on reused wooden corbels above the openings in the façade.	Andalusian architecture
The gallery	Crown of the façade	.An effect Western aesthetics	The addition of timber-framed canopies covered in green tiles, Wrought-iron brackets modelled on the Andalusian window grilles, marble or wooden 'Arab-style' columns, and decorative earthenware veneer.	Western architecture
Bows	Coronation Of the façade .	A Ksourian aesthetic effect	Use of round, low, high, horseshoe, broken and horseshoe arches (Maghrebian and Ksourian)	Arab-Muslim architecture

Table 5 Decoration. Source authors

<u>Decoration</u>		
<u>The decorative element</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Origin</u>
<u>The columns</u>	In marble, stone or chiselled stucco	Moorish architecture
<u>The grids</u>	The materials used are wood	The grille was used to close off an opening while letting in air and light, and to ensure privacy, so that the outside could be seen without being seen from the inside.
<u>L'arabesque</u>	The decor is based on geometry and proportion, and is characterised by an interrupted rhythm of chimerical vegetation.	Arab-Muslim architecture.
<u>The sculptures</u>	On stone for gates, cornices and framing friezes.	North African architecture
	On marble with a variety of designs (plants, calligraphy, etc.)	Traditional Ksour architecture in Kenadsa and Bechar
	On stucco, a less expensive material	known in Spain, and transferred to the Maghreb (Bechar and Kenadsa).
<u>Calligraphy</u>	Used as sculptures on plaster, marble and wood, and even on earthenware. It is presented in the form of bands at the top of walls or large entrance doors (e.g. the post office).	Calligraphy, which developed in Arab-Muslim architecture, is due to the elegance of Arabic writing and the tendency to move away from the realistic representation of nature.
<u>Earthenware mosaics</u>	These tiles are cut according to a geometric composition designed by the artist, then assembled to form panels.	Kenadsa was a magnificent display of multicoloured glazed frameworks, earthenware mosaics and Kadoussi or Moorish zelijes.

CONCLUSION

The buildings studied share an architectural vocabulary based on principles of symmetry, unity, coherence, rhythm and proportion. The syntax of the façades is inspired by classical architecture. The materials and colours used also contribute to the composition, in keeping with the local cultural and climatic context. The architecture of the colonial period is a blend of cultures, seeking modernity through a new style known as neo-Moorish.

Les architectes de l'époque coloniale cherchaient à exprimer sur les façades des édifices une modernité inspirée des motifs décoratifs traditionnels ksouriens. Cette intention se manifestait par des panneaux centraux sur les façades, richement ornés de motifs ornementaux.

Architects in the colonial era sought to express on the façades of their buildings a modernity inspired by traditional Ksour decorative motifs. This intention was expressed through central panels on the façades, richly decorated with ornamental motifs.

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