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Networks of the Sacred in the Atlas: Igudar and zawya, Intercessory Repositories of pre-Saharan Morocco

Redes sagradas en el Atlas: Igudar y zawaya, depósitos de intercesión del Marruecos presahariano

Redes do sagrado no Atlas: Igudar e zawaya, repositórios de intercessão do Marrocos pré-Saaariano

Abstract | Resumen | Resumo

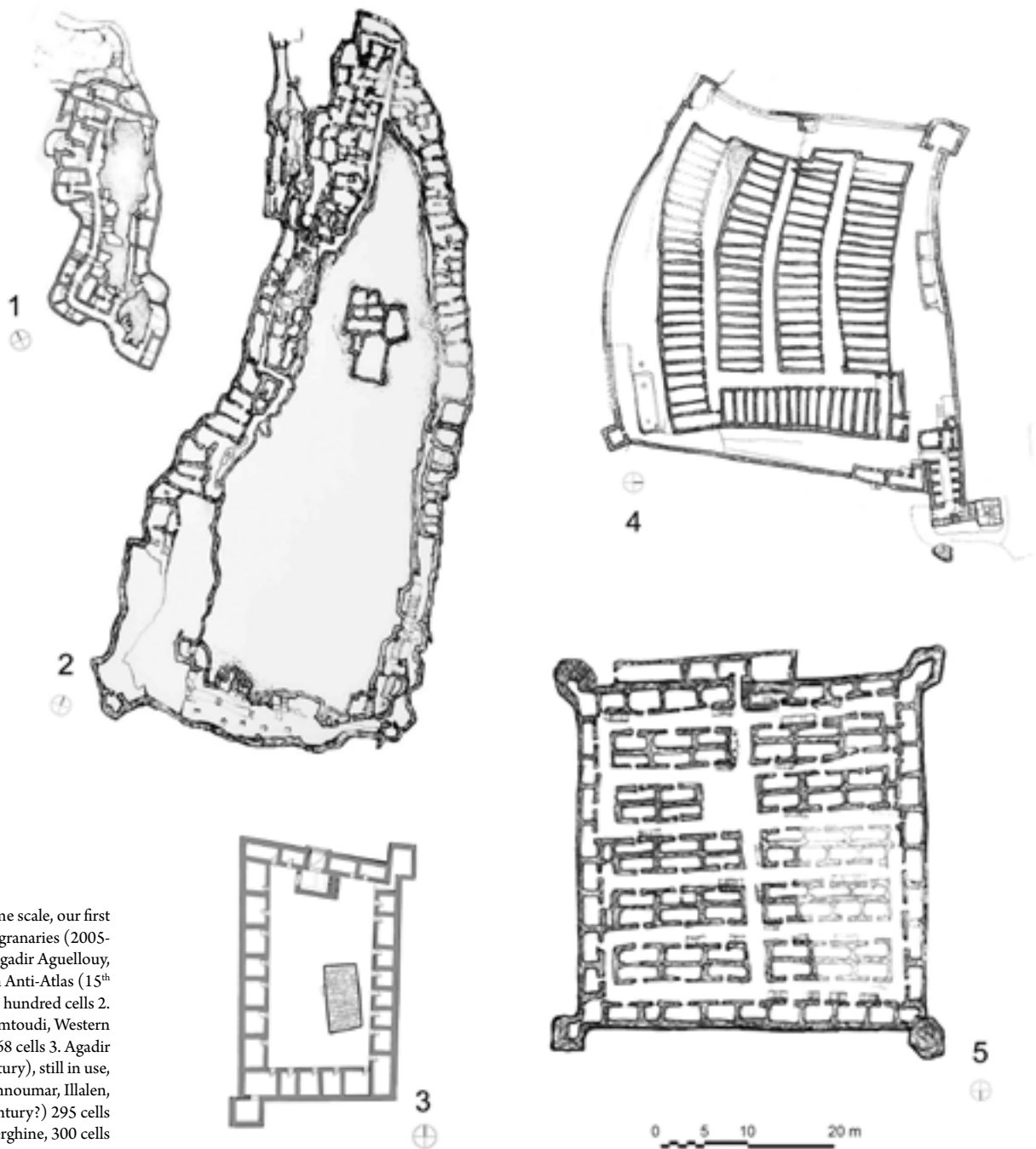
How does the collective granary (*agadir*) of the Atlas survive “modernity” when everywhere else in the Maghreb it has died out? Years of research in the Atlas (in 2000–2019, identifying 300 active, disused or ruined granaries) support the notion of there being a wider community, beyond blood ties, whose identity is affirmed by the collective institution of the sacred *agadir*. For on fixed dates each year all the tribes with an active granary bring their offerings or gifts to the southern *zawaya*, on the fringes of the Sahara, and thus renew their oaths of allegiance to the great regional saints. Over the past two decades we have been able to identify more than a hundred active granaries in the Central Atlas, the High Atlas and the Anti-Atlas, and have ourselves endeavored to restore them in an attempt to ensure the survival of this emblematic resource.

¿Cómo sobrevive a la “modernidad” un granero colectivo (*agadir*) en el Atlas cuando han desaparecido por el resto del Magreb? Años de investigación en el Atlas (entre 2000 y 2019, con la identificación de 300 graneros en funcionamiento, en desuso o en ruinas) respaldan la idea de que existe una comunidad amplia, más allá de los lazos de sangre, cuya identidad se afirma mediante la institución colectiva de los *igudar* sagrados. Cada año, en fechas fijas, todas las tribus con un granero en funcionamiento llevan ofrendas y regalos a las *zawaya* del sur, en los límites del Sahara, y renuevan así su juramento de fidelidad a los grandes santos regionales. En las dos últimas décadas hemos identificado más de cien graneros activos en el Atlas Medio, el Alto Atlas y el Anti-Atlas y hemos intentado restaurarlos para garantizar la supervivencia de estos recursos emblemáticos.

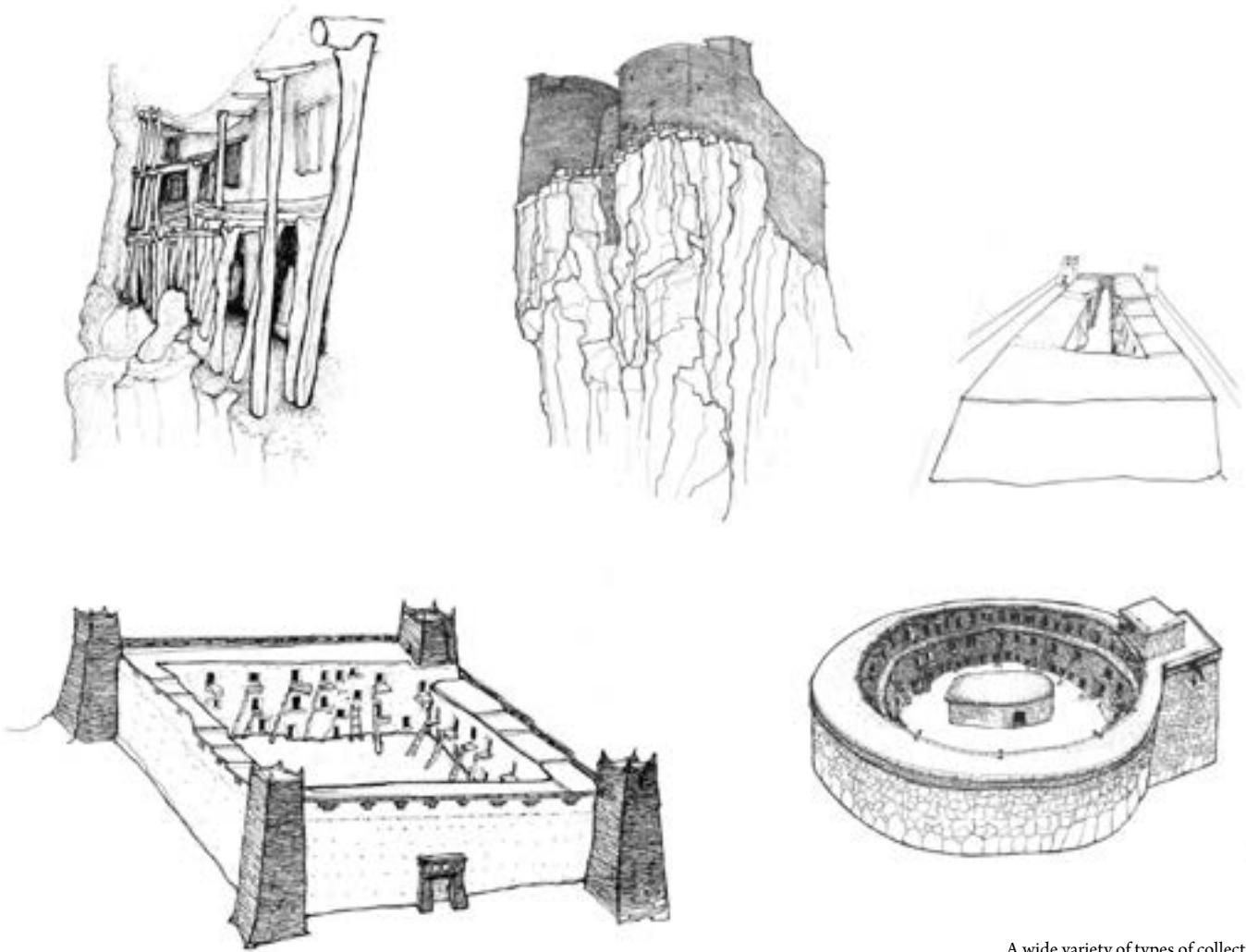
Como é que o celeiro (*agadir*) colectivo do Atlas sobrevive à “modernidade” quando ele já não existe em qualquer outro lugar de Magrebe? Anos de investigação no Atlas (entre 2000 e 2019, tendo identificado 300 celeiros activos, em desuso ou em ruínas) apoiam a noção de que existe uma comunidade mais ampla, para além dos laços de sangue, cuja identidade é afirmada pela instituição colectiva do *agadir* sagrado. Pois em datas fixas todos os anos, todas as tribos com um celeiro activo trazem as suas ofertas ou presentes para o *zawaya* do sul, à margem do Saara, e assim renovam os seus votos de fidelidade aos grandes santos regionais. Ao longo das últimas duas décadas, conseguimos identificar mais de cem celeiros activos no Atlas Central, no Alto Atlas e no Anti-Atlas, e nós mesmos tentámos restaurá-los, numa tentativa de assegurar a sobrevivência deste recurso emblemático.

This paper¹ seeks to show that restoring monuments that have endured for centuries involves not just fine and complex know-how in the science of restoration but also restoring the conditions enabling the emergence of vernacular buildings and their actual uses in a specific context. In such work the restoration architect must also wear the hat of an anthropologist, looking both at walls and at people. The aim is both to study the stonework, which has proved its durability, and to understand the uses and spatial practices accounting for these structures.

While these architectural monuments are indeed threatened with absorption by “modernity”, we must neither write them off as dead nor take a nostalgic, archaeological view – that of the reconstruction of a glorious past – but rather apprehend an object that is very much alive. Though the death knell of granaries was sounded in the 1930s,² they are nevertheless still in use, or at least the more accessible ones, often inside villages, and the more remote ones. A granary remains a necessity for impoverished communities where collective strength is vital to guarantee a minimum standard of living³ for these old agrarian societies of the Amazigh Mountains.



On the same scale, our first restorations of granaries (2005-2013): 1. Agadir Aguellouy, Amtoudi, Western Anti-Atlas (15th century?), one hundred cells 2. Agadir Id Issa d'Amtoudi, Western Atlas (18th century) 68 cells 3. Agadir Ait Kin (17th century), still in use, 77 cells 4. Agadir Innoumar, Illalen, Anti-Atlas. (16th century?) 295 cells 5. Agadir n'Isserghine, 300 cells



A wide variety of types of collective granaries exist from the High Atlas to the Anti-Atlas: granaries with a barred spur, granaries with a central aisle, quadrangular kasbah type granaries and circular or crown granaries. A handful of them are still in use

Although in decline, the institution of the granary endures

In the Atlas Mountains and the high pre-Saharan valleys of southern Morocco, the fear of scarcity or surprise attack formerly united communities in the face of adversity. In this land of hunger and thirst, grain was vital, and protecting it assured the group's survival. It was locked up in impregnable citadels, collective granaries called *igherm* or *agadir* (plural *igudar*), depending on the region. This is why it might be thought in these easier and more plentiful times that the institution had become obsolete, that as in the rest of North Africa granaries were dead and no more than heaps of faded stones. But on the contrary, over the past two decades we have seen more than a hundred active granaries in the Central Atlas, the High Atlas and the Anti-Atlas, and have sought where possible to restore⁴ them in an attempt to ensure the survival of this common resource, emblematic of the kingdom and of these regions.

So we must first ask how this North African institution has survived in a continent that has many forms of granary for grain (including millet). While a comparison with the granaries of the Dogon Country, of Burkina Faso or even of modern Benin is interesting, those are clan or family granaries, whereas the Atlas granary is the product of a complex collective. Thus we must be wary of deceptive similarities and trace the specific character of the collective granary, which is to be seen first and foremost as an institution for the common good. So how has the collective granary survived in Morocco when it has died out everywhere else in the Maghreb?

A sacred entity

Traditionally considered sacred places, these repositories are always surrounded by diverse practices relating to *baraka*, the proliferation of Divine Providence, which now has less to do with old agrarian cults linked to grain than with the better-known Quranic *ni'imah* (blessing) on cereals (or bread). This diffuse *baraka* is very much present in granaries. It takes the form of various spatial arrangements, ranging from a simple cell at the granary entrance to jars for

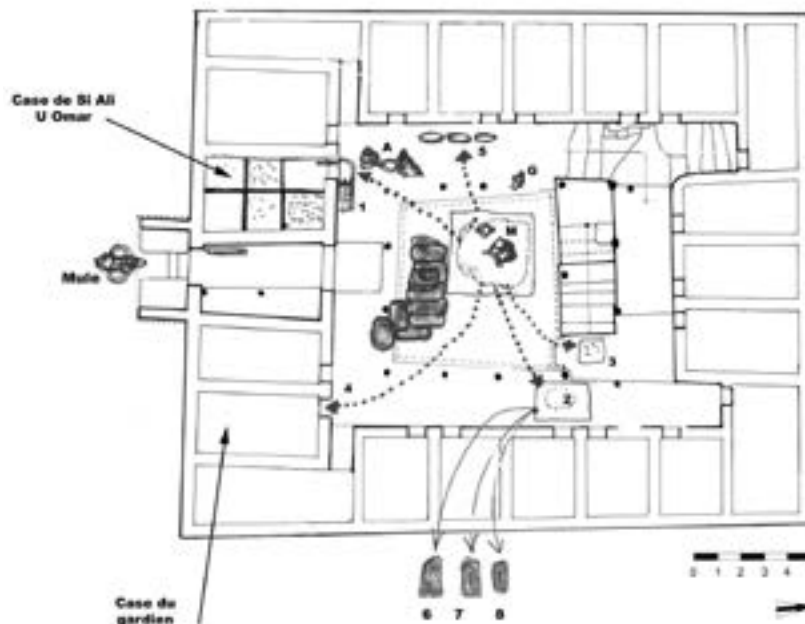
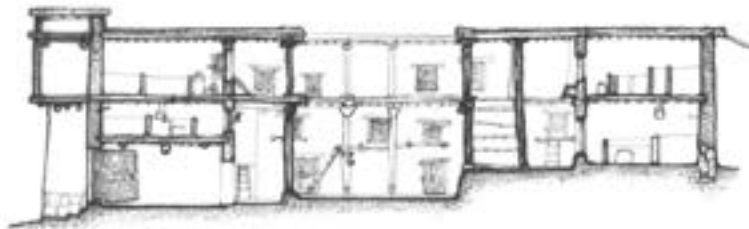
Granary embedded in the eponymous Ksar of Tiskmoudine (Tata Province), aerial photographs and photogrammetry from drone recording (M. Benssid)





Amassine Granary of the Ayt Khuzama in the High Atlas in winter, when the Atlas is snowy, and in summer, when the harvests are fenced (silage barley bags)

gifts or boxes for offerings arranged inside and even, more recently, piggy banks hung in common spaces. Valuable cereal products must be treated with consistent and discreet care. The many opportunities to encourage offerings within the granary are thus linked by name to local or regional saints to whom offerings are made, often daily. When a user leaves the granary, having filled his bag for a week or a few days, he does not fail to leave a small portion for the saints. The accumulation of these regular offerings allows a substantial quantity to be amassed by the end of an agrarian cycle, for distribution to the destitute. The tutelary figures chosen and associated with these devices are supposed to activate or reactivate a beneficent *baraka* and guarantee protection for one's home against the vagaries of existence.



Plan of the granary of Tashdirt at the Ayt Tidili. The drawing shows the path of the grain, in the center of the building to the cell. The longitudinal section presents details of cell and earthen chests for grain



Measuring ritual in the granary of Tashdirt at the Ayt Tidili. The drawing shows the path of the grain to the cell, the tenth measure (of the grain or any other stored goods) is the *zakat*, the part which every Muslim is obliged to give to the needy

Baraka and ascetic saints: an active spiritual legacy

It was in these regions that the ascetic saints movement arose in the 15th and 16th centuries, giving rise to the institution of the *zawya*, the greatest of which played a major political role in Morocco as of this period (Jacques-Meunié 1982: 465–489). In the Maghreb, a *zawya* (plural *zawaya*) is the venerated and sanctified tomb of a holy man to which a mosque and Quranic teaching halls have been added. The mountain granaries are networked with the great southern *zawaya*, to which granary users pay homage every year, renewing their allegiance through gifts and sacrifices at large festive gatherings (*tayfa*, *muwassim*, *ammuggar*) where covenants considered sacred are made. Thus in the Anti-Atlas the granary is often called *zawyata*, i.e. “small *zawya*” or “little shrine”.

But above all, granaries and *zawaya* form a system that has ensured the permanence of these institutions over a large area, linked to mastery of the Tachelhit language and to the customs of

these societies of limited means, concerned with pooling scarce and complementary resources of grain. Thanks to this institution, those who produce oil or grain can exchange these fruits of the earth for the fruits of animal husbandry: meat, wool, etc. And live together in mutual understanding.

A web of gifts: networking from granaries to *zawaya*

Through an in-depth study in 1999-2006 of some twenty sites with several tribes alongside an analysis of a hundred others in remoter locations, we found that this eminently sacred institution remains alive. The *agadir* was found not to be a relic of another age, the “vital archaism” perceived by colonial theorists (Montagne 1930; Jacques-Meunié 1939), but rather a central marker of the social, territorial and symbolic organization of wide communal networks that often extend beyond the immediate local community. These granaries, once seemingly doomed, are still alive eighty years after those colonial studies. The granary was and remains a fixed place where covenants are renewed, manifested through a series of gifts involving collective rights and duties within a strict Islamic framework.

From the High Atlas to the fringes of the Moroccan Sahara, in each *agadir* of each village, just beyond the porch, before the individual chambers are reached, there is a cell, a jar or even a box reserved for a saint. This is often Sidi Mhammd Ū Ya'qūb, who in the 16th century brought his pilgrim's staff (*akuray*) to certain villages, where he would have erected or blessed a granary, and perhaps at the same time a first mosque, which in many places was associated with him.⁵

These granaries, sanctified by the great saint, still have a compartment for him, shared with the other saints⁶ of each locality. This compartment is usually placed at the entrance and has a box for offerings in the passage and an opening on the other side for emptying it. Each time food was stored or withdrawn, granary members would deposit a handful of barley (*uraw*), a measure (*tagra*) of dates or a variable portion of whatever was in store. We observed this ritual among the Iberkaken and the Illalen, though mostly in elderly users, including women. These gifted portions, called *tirba'in*, are regarded as a duty of believers within the framework of the *zakat*, the purifying legal alms which every Muslim must give to the needy.

Restoring the offering jars of the granaries of Ait Kin and Isserghine

The offering jars built directly into the passageways and entrances (*arghumi*) of collective granaries allow the collection of small daily gifts on behalf of the high tutelary figures that they are supposed to represent.

In 2012–2013, a double restoration project was made possible by the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, via the United States embassy in Morocco, for the granaries of Ait Kin (Idaw Nadif) and Isserghine (Feijja) in the province of Tata. The argument that convinced the committees was that each granary was still active and that saving it, as well as extending the building's life, would allow the preservation of precious intangible practices. They had very different configurations and social contexts – an earthen mountain granary, some three centuries old, and a large oasis granary built of rubble masonry and probably much older.

We had known about these granaries for some time, and knew also how offerings functioned in them. At Ait Kin these had been given up by contemporary practice rejecting such almsgiving. But in restoring the entrance we cleared and restored the boxes as they had been, guided by clues left in the stonework and by constant advice from local elders who became our “assistants”.

In the case of Isserghine, the granary was completely ruined when I found it. But I had photographs from 1974⁷ and 2002. At the time of the restoration, the part for offerings had all but gone, and would probably have been overlooked by restorers unfamiliar with the specific practice of daily almsgiving.

Once the idea had been discussed with the local community (the villagers, representatives of local associations and the more motivated workers, in the presence of the authorities), evidence from photographic archives and recognizable elements in the masonry were compared. Then we invited the village potters, Brahim Ouaabach and Ahmed Saber (aged 63 and 65 respectively) to take measurements with a view to making similar jars (as the bases of the old jars were still in place).

Our detailed knowledge of the collective granaries of the Moroccan Atlas made us cautious with the information we were given: it was probably a late form of the granary, different from the early order previously described. We needed to call on the testimony of the elders. The elders told us of the harsh rule of the Glaoui⁸, so we cross-checked in terms of dates. The last guardians of the granary, it seems, appropriated certain chambers to live in with their families. Mrs Ijja ben Lhoucine Azekri (of the Afous Id Hamou lineage) was the daughter of the two last generations of guardians, as well as the oldest of the women and the maternal aunt of Ahmed Id Malek (Afous Id Malk), one of the keenest workers. Their social status was indicated by their having no choice of dwelling but the granary. We then called on local religious figures to help us understand how the offerings were organized. The information was fragmentary but it helped us to apprehend a localized geography of the sacred that had been partly lost but which was partly revived for this project. There seemed now to be confusion as to the chambers of the saints, no longer nominative but plural, as in all granaries where the use of gifts has declined.

Finally, before restoring the jars, we surveyed them with the village elders and then examined the saints' chambers so as to restore their exact names and to better understand how they worked in Isserghine. This allowed us to grasp another non-visible process: how the compartments were emptied even as they were steadily being filled.⁹

This exciting session of returning to the sources took much time, care and discussion, and by the end all the workers wishing to participate (as their daily working hours were over) were fascinated by this historical reconstruction. Some years later, at their own initiative, they assembled various objects to create a kind of museum, which they also maintained without outside financial support. They said it was the restoration that prompted this quest for origins.

Isserghine's granary, before and after the reconstitution of the jars





Isserghine's granary, the new donation jars reconstituted with the help of the residents of the village

Forms of measurement in these granaries

We can compare the wooden or metal objects used to measure alms, still in use in some granaries today, with other recognized measures, linked to practices that are relatively ancient in Morocco but preserved in these granaries.

Some objects are carved from a single block of wood, such as among the Ait Tidili, where they are called *tagra* and are passed down from guardian to guardian.

There are also recent urban measures made of steel, still used for the precise counting of grains stored in the granary.

Measuring instruments preserved in museums are most often from the Saadian period, inspired by the practice of the Prophet himself. Fashioned in hammered brass, they are engraved with epigraphs¹⁰. Designed to bless the measurements made during the counting of the *zakat* of legal alms with Quranic inscriptions, these measurements evoke the distribution by the Sultan, head of the believers, of the manna of Divine Providence at the feast closing the fast of Ramadan. This practice was reproduced until recent times (1950s–60s) in all the great families of the imperial cities of the kingdom. These measures, or *mudd*, are made of copper in the Anti-Atlas of the Idaw Ukensouss tribe – ornamented objects on which a Quranic inscription was once said to have appeared of its own accord. The same inscription can be found on the porches of some of these granaries (Naji 2006: 91-95).

Bit-lmakhazin: from the *agadir* to the Makhzen as provider of the common good

The sociologist Paul Pascon said in a famous article that every tribal group united in “a political association between lineages, founded on socio-economic needs: the relationship between man and soil, between human exertion and an area's ecological resources with a given level of technology. This association can be a mere temporary alliance, a covenant for the use of pasture, a good neighborliness agreement for the use of a resource, a loose multifunctional confederation, a closer federation based on consensus (unanimity), or a union of lineages institutionalizing authorities. We should note the existence of tribal states in south-west Morocco where the *igudar* were more

Ancient models for measuring *mudd* almsgiving, in hammered brass, preserved in the Batha Museum (Fez), on which are engraved the blessings of use. Above, the left one dated AH 1209 / AD 1795 and the right one dated AH 980 / July 1572 (both from the *Catalogue du Maroc des Empires*, Louvre). Below, the measures of the mountains, made of wood with metal circles and elegantly forged handles, and other recent urban measures in steel





Last guardians (*aduwab, atuwab, amin, lamîn*) of collective granaries. Top left to right: Fakhour, Magdaz, Tashdirt, Ait Tidili, Agadir n'Tizza, Iberkaken, Agadir Tachakoucht, Amassine, High Atlas and Anti-Atlas. Below, guardian of Atogha (Ayt Tinider) (S. Naji and D. Goeury)

than fortress-refuges, where they supported a public treasury and collective projects (e.g. *medersa*, irrigation networks)” (Pascon 1979: 105-119). We know that this form of territorial administration of a community exchequer was the inspiration for the Makhzen¹¹ or “central government”: it is from this institution for the common good that religious and executive authorities developed. The Sultanate in Morocco was thus heir to the institution of the *agadir*, as described by Prof. Ahmed Toufiq, who emphasizes the etymological link and historically connects the *agadir* and the Makhzen, particularly as of the Almohad dynasty (Toufiq 1976: 35). The twin connotations of granaries, the historical value of any site rooted far back in time in the eyes of communities and the sacredness of these places, testify to the significance of a codified institution that remains active.

So each grain stored in the sacred community granary helped to provide for the event of a crisis of subsistence in the community. In cities, following this model, the large granaries of the Makhzen made it possible to respond to a shortage of grain and to prevent a crisis or famine. By allowing the preservation of social well-being based on mutual aid, these ancient Berber institutions have persisted to the present day in two forms: collective granaries, and authorities aware of social responsibility.



Agadir n'Uguellouy, Western Anti-Atlas, before and after the restoration of 2016

The *Zawya* of Imi n'Tatelt

The *Zawya* of Imi n'Tatelt, a *zawya* monastery of the 15th-century Jazulite movement, shut away and little known as compared to other *zawaya* (Tamgroute, Illigh, Tamesloht, etc.), gives us a glimpse of a symbolic and economic arrangement with a large network of granaries linked to one or more prominent shrines. In the *müssems* (the great festivals held in spring), this *zawya* still attracts a large number of pilgrims from neighboring communities and also from hundreds of miles away. The eastern Anti-Atlas, an insecure and rural land, without regular open-air markets, once needed annual or seasonal fairs at which complementary regions could trade. We know that these fairs were associated with large religious gatherings, which were themselves intimately linked to the figures of regional saints who once drew large crowds.

Agadir n'Uguellouy, Western Anti-Atlas, just after the restoration of 2016, photograph by drone (M. Bessid)



These votive fairs, generally held by a large *zawya*, soon became part of trans-Saharan trade, from its heyday in the medieval period to its decline at the end of the 19th century. Spiritual benefits, pious visits to the marabout tomb and material profit from trade were the driving forces behind these gatherings which, at Imi n'Tatelt, succeeded one another, highlighting the complementary needs of pilgrims..

The granary-*zawya* system

Every year in the spring, offerings are gathered and taken to the village of Imi n'Tatelt, where the saint settled nearly five centuries ago. In mid-April (by the Julian calendar) the place becomes the scene of a series of ceremonies called *Tayfa n'ibril*, during which the saint's great *zawya* (tomb-mosque) collects all these gifts, which are then immediately redistributed to pilgrims, who come in droves. The village, usually of two thousand souls, triples in size.

This circulation of gifts seems very much like a system based around *baraka* (Mauss's "total social fact"), as shown first by the network of village granaries and then by the network of tribes, gathered en masse around the *zawya* of Imi n'Tatelt (Eastern Anti-Atlas).

Today, as in the past, promises are kept, as the saint's mystical testament predicted with astonishing precision. Little is asked for, but the number of affiliated communities is such that the offerings are plentiful. This *zawya* thus functions as a huge store, a repository for gifts in kind from all the tribes bound by oath. This singular network may be called a "granary system", through which part of the food produced in these regions circulates as symbolic offerings, making granaries indispensable.

All these processes of evoking or reviving the sacred through which both material and intangible offerings circulate were extremely interesting to observe in their relationship with the *zawaya*, i.e. with the saints embodied therein, though certain practices are increasingly criticized in the name of a purifying orthodoxy that is also tending to do away with many sacred places in the mountains of present-day Morocco.

Current evolution of the secular institution of the collective granary

If we accept the definition of "institution" as a social organization generating duties and rights, then an institution is a normative tool forming a legal system at the service of a community and able to impose itself as a source of authority. Institutions control human behavior and channel it in a particular direction. They disseminate a moral order consisting of rules and values that are known and given, assimilated and self-evident.

Recently the rules have been evolving, polarized by the institutions of religion on the one hand and of heritage on the other according to a logic of rupture, resulting in an erasure of memory and a rewriting of individual and collective practice. These two entities (*agadir* and *zawya*), overlapping

Agadir n'Uguellouy, Western Anti-Atlas, restoration works in progress





One of the largest tribal granaries in the region it dominates, Adkhss n'Arfalen, originally ruined, was restored with the population in 2019-20 (D. Goeur)

and complementary, are personified institutions, since they are based on the known entity of a localized mystical figure to whom precise rituals linked to the agrarian rhythm are attached.

Indeed, classical institution theory normally distinguishes between “personified” institutions and “thing” institutions. The working of the former rests on a degree of communion among members. The latter involves the formal norms and rules of a more abstract entity (language, money, law, etc.). Thus the *agadir* and the *zawya* should be seen as personified institutions in that they are oriented towards social goals and above all are tangible and can be appropriated: they have a face. In the personified *agadir* and *zawya* institutions there is a real articulation between the ordinary daily economy and an economy of salvation, linked to the sacred, whereas a thing-institution lacks this link and deals with the everyday. A thing-institution, on the other hand, like heritage or religion, can detach itself from location. Thus religion and heritage participate directly in globalization, whereas institutions like the *agadir* and *zawya* remain rooted in a place and in their associated practices.

As a result, those involved in the practices observed around the *agadir*, and especially the *zawya*, are now torn between divergent logics. These personified institutions that once had an overall coherence are suddenly a locus of tension. They are tending to decline, losing the economic and symbolic weight that once made it possible to create social ties or foster the common good. Their buildings are gradually being de-institutionalized. Traditional Islamic religious practices are deprecated by a “new” Islam (Roy 2004: 121-122) that cuts any link between faith and local traditions by devaluing inherited practices in favor of a direct and immediate relationship between the believer and Mecca via the satellite dish and the charter flight, while buildings and ceremonies are absorbed by the designation “universal cultural heritage”.

Igudar and *zawya* thus illustrate the spatial and societal transformations of pre-Saharan Morocco. Places of collective memory, they are now integrated in the great worldwide Islamic movement affirming or reaffirming the unique character of an *umma* (a community of Muslim believers) which can, thanks to the media, widely disseminate a unity of practice and belief that is often averse to local custom. On top of this are social pressures challenging traditional forms of religion. But in these isolated places, particularities of popular culture subsist or are reshaped in the name of an Islamic or even global order. The challenge now is to gauge the degree of



Granary of Ifri Imadiden, Sirwa, in 1948 (D. Jacques-Meunié), and before and during its restoration in 2018-19 (D. Goeury)

participation and acceptance on the part of local people. Indeed, local Muslims sometimes feel downgraded – or on the contrary, increased in value – by these new dynamics. It remains to be seen whether the phenomenon will result in the coming decade in an institutionalization of the heritage of these places or in further dispossession and relegation, where the disappearance of a set of intangible yet powerfully symbolic practices could at the same time lead to a fading away of these deeply rooted places carrying on such particular practices.

Conclusion

While *igadur* and *zawaya* have thus remained sacred entities, repositories and providers of the common good, both are also living institutions of the rural Morocco of yesterday and today that continue to assure daily survival and salvation in a life to come. Above all, granaries and *zawaya* form a system that has allowed the continuity of these institutions over time. Our study of these very much living practices opposes the theory of the granary as a “vital archaism”. Without each community’s granary, without the renewal of the oath (*'ahd*), the rejoicings at the *tayfa* of Imi n’Tatelt would cease. While the tribes are no longer threatened by famine or war, they nevertheless continue to fill the community granary and to honor the regional saints by setting aside part of their harvest. This suggests that economic theories appraising the utility of granaries fall short and that it is other, less explicit reasons that link groups together over the long term. The *agadir-zawaya* system supports the notion of a wider community, beyond the ties of blood, whose identity is affirmed through a sacred covenant.

So now in the early 21st century, the institution of the *zawaya* is under pressure from new forms of religion and heritage. Deeply territorialized between the Atlas and the Sahara, the *zawaya* is no longer seen by believers as a necessary link between Mecca and local piety. And its cultural specificity makes it suspect in the eyes of certain believers who judge it potentially deviant.

The *zawaya* can also be asserted to be a place of memory evoking political issues. The Imi n’Tatelt site, built up around a personified institution bringing together religion, politics and economics, is now torn between religion and heritage by divergent logics allowing in particular the descendants of slaves to be enfranchised from the Chorfas lineage (the saint’s descendants). But does a context of the weakening of the religious dimension in favor of a new heritage dimension not change what is involved for granary users? The social bond, formerly established by the traditional institutions of the *agadir* or the *zawaya*, seems neutralized by a vision of Islam that devalues certain forms of mutual assistance. Thus many clerics are now trying to remove outward signs of the sacred expressed too strongly in the *agadir* and around the tombs of venerated saints, and may even participate in their destruction. A heritage approach also overrides traditional practices and empties the institution of its *raison d’être*: while leaving the walls intact, it nevertheless lastingly undermines the original purpose of the *agadir* and *zawaya*.

Thus, though any renewal of these places must draw upon distant history, it will also involve more contemporary questions. What is at issue today is essentially both a dwindling of traditional practices and, paradoxically, a true renewal. The sacredness of granaries has been gradually replaced by a new sacrality, that of the “intentional monument”, opening the door to a heritage approach as classically conceived of in Europe. Practices are tending to evolve into what is recognizable as the cult of monuments, i.e. heritage emptied of its practices of use and now largely identified with modernity. The places remain the same but their use changes.

May this vitality not disappear into the nothingness of folklorization with the introduction of mass tourism to these high places of Atlas culture, or with a restoration of their materiality without apprehending the complex social fabric that underlies them. A practical ethic should be established to prevent the loss of these ways of apprehending the common good that are the granaries of the Atlas. Defending an architecture of the common good means engaging with the architectural object by focusing on its social foundation and on its peculiar uses and spatial practices in order to understand it and to restore it accordingly, and not just its walls.

¹ This article is taken from our doctoral thesis in social anthropology and ethnology entitled *Les entrepôts de la baraka : du grenier collectif à la Zawya* (École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2008) defended before the historian A. Toufiq (Minister of Islamic Affairs), H. Claudot-Awad, F. Sigaut, and T. Yacine, a jury chaired by A. Berque. It has been published in forms such as articles and illustrated books. A summary of it was entitled “Fils de saints contre fils d’esclaves” (Sons of saints versus sons of slaves) (2011). It forms the last part of our thesis.

² When discovered by the colonial school, these granaries seemed an “outdated” institution, a throwback to centuries ago, fragile and doomed to disappear (cf. R. Montagne, *L’agadir des Ikounka*, Paris, Alcan, 1930). And yet in the Atlas Mountains, almost a century later, many granaries are still active, albeit in decline.

³ Growing grain and storing it in such a way as to always have some, whatever the uncertainties of life or the vagaries of weather, owning animals that provide milk or meat, and providing them with fodder from the granary in midwinter.

⁴ In order to understand the dynamics of these regions of transhumance and crop-farming between the Atlas and the Sahara, we have done more than 25 months’ research in various locations. Our inventory lists nearly 300 active, disused or ruined granaries. We have been able to restore a good dozen of them, from Aguellouy d’Amtoudi in 2004 to the very beautiful granaries of the Feijja or Sirwa more recently; see “Sauvetage des *igudar*, greniers collectifs de l’Atlas. Naissance d’une démarche participative autour de communs, 2001–2018” in our book *Architectures du bien commun: pour une éthique de la préservation*, Geneva, MétisPresses, 2019, pp. 77–93.

⁵ *Shajara (Arbre généalogique) wa Waçiyya siriya (et testament mystique de) Sidi Abû ʿAbdellah Mhammed Ū Yaʿqûb*, Imi n’Tatelt, d’après la copie conforme datée de 1191 Hégire (1777), prétendant reproduire mot pour mot l’acte rédigé en 962 (1555) à la mort du Saint, d’après la copie conforme établie en 1313 Hégire (1896), copie conforme datée de 1345 Hégire (1927), 104x36 (recto), rouleau manuscrit original conservé dans un étui en aluminium, fonds privé. *Waçiyya (testament mystique de) Sidi Abû ʿAbdellah Mhammed Ū Yaʿqûb*, Imi n’Tatelt, d’après la copie conforme datée de Chawwâl 1311 Hégire (1894), prétendant reproduire mot pour mot l’acte rédigé en 962 (1555) à la mort du Saint, copie conforme datée de 1342 Hégire (1924), 42x23 (recto-verso), photocopie d’après un manuscrit perdu, fonds privé.

⁶ For southern communities, allegiance to a saint is never exclusive. A saint is worshipped not alone but with others. Thus one enjoys a range of benefits. This onomastic constellation participates in the place’s sacred aura and confers an identity rooted in a set of mental representations through lineages of names that have become talismanic.

⁷ Marie-Rose Rabaté, a retired researcher, when told of the restoration, very kindly sent me these from Paris.

⁸ A notorious local potentate who taxed communities during colonization.

⁹ She also told us that, once installed, the jars were pierced with “mouths”, which were closed up with a broken piece of pottery that could be removed when the jar was full in order for it to be emptied from the bottom.

¹⁰ One of the oldest extant models dates from AH 980 / July 1572 [Saadian period] Fez, Batha Museum, inv. 4714.87/2097, mentioned and transcribed in its entirety in the *Catalogue du Maroc des Empires for the exhibition at the Louvre* (Paris, 2014) and the Mohammed VI Museum (Rabat, 2016). It mentions the main links of the *isnad* as recorded by scrupulous Sufi monarchs.

¹¹ The French *magasin* and the Spanish *almacén* come from the Arabic *makhâzin*, whose common meanings refer back to the idea of a “store”. The word *makhzen* has a particular meaning in Morocco, where it is a synonym for government, and in particular the exchequer. *Bit el-khazin* (or *makhzen*) originally designated the place where grain was deposited under the responsibility of a body of officials. The term would indeed have referred back to the “treasuries of the Moroccan Muslim community when it established itself for the first time, with the great Berber dynasties of the Almohads and Almoravids”, as E. Michaux-Bellaire says in the article “Makhzen”, in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, 1st edition, volume III, pp. 131–135, Leiden, Brill, 1936.

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Biography | Biografía | Biografia

Salima Naji

Salima graduated in architecture at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture (ENSA Paris-La Villette) and took a PhD in social anthropology at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) in Paris. She is involved in many projects for protecting oasis heritage. She set up a practice in Morocco in 2004 in order to offer a building alternative favoring technologies involving basic and sustainably sourced materials, with an innovative approach respectful of the environment. Her practice involves scientific activity in many international research and action programs engaging with sustainability and the deep relationship between societies and their environment. She has been a member of the scientific committee of the Jardin Majorelle Berber Museum (Marrakech) since its creation in 2011 and is currently working in the field of cultural mediation and heritage transmission. A Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2017), she has published many works on architecture.