

The Ex-Casino-Hotel Palace of Biskra, from Patrimonialization to Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract

As in a fairy tale, the ex-Casino-Hotel palace¹ of Biskra, presents a true copy of the architecture of the Moorish palaces of the Maghreb. Anxious to preserve the country's triumphant local colour, and to promote Saharan winter tourism during the French colonial period, the architect of historical monuments in Algeria, Albert Ballu², took care to build it in 1893. Since then, this admirable architectural work has never been classified³ despite its great artistic wealth and historical dimension. More seriously, for some years now it has been undergoing anarchic transformations which only "disfigure" its original state. De facto, the opportunity of its "patrimonialization" had become both for us⁵, urgency and an objective in order to justify today a real care and an imminent "preservation". Thus, the future "monument" will become an added value for the communities and the actors of the heritage by rehabilitating it: to serve as a new "Dar-diaf" residence for the guests⁶ and to give a second breath of life to the urban complex⁷; thus, reinforcing the identity attributes of this city and its community. This form of cultural tourism will henceforth be spatially, socially, economically and culturally linked to its territory, thus becoming a "sustainable" management of this heritage asset.

Key words: Casino hotel palace in Biskra, Heritage, Moorish architecture, Sustainable management, Winter tourism in a colonial situation.

INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, the Queen of the Ziban, Biskra, was already seen as a city with a winter tourist character, a city seductive by its singular picturesque and mild climate. This pleasant image, evoked and recounted particularly by orientalist and Arabophiles of the time (E. Fromentin, A. Dumas, A. Gide), associated with the new policy of enhancing local culture dictated by the colonial administration of Napoleon III (Béguin, 1983) will find in Biskra a fertile ground to express itself in the program of a luxurious establishment intended for the rest and the entertainment of the European high society of the time⁸ " ... the promoters of the great work of the Saharan wintering, built a Moorish palace of the most admirable architectural purity. It was named "Dar-Diaf" (guest house)"⁹. It is a hotel structure (accommodation) with all its dependencies, which from the outset will be annexed to the casino¹⁰ just begun, in an architectural continuity in harmony with their environment. Both were designed by the architect Albert Ballu, at a time when neo-Moorish was not yet the official style for public buildings in Algeria: "... in Biskra begins the road to Touggourt. It opens between the casino on the right, and the market place on the other side [...] The casino, which could be mistaken for a mosque, is a brand-new white building in the oriental style. It is a ground floor with a porch pierced by twelve arcades. An octagonal dome

¹Currently the El-Atlas Cinema & the Ridha Houhou House of Culture.

²Albert Ballu Chief architect of the historical monuments of Algeria (1889-1927) [Bibliographical selection: Ballu, A, 1923, l'archéologie algérienne de 1895 à 1915 : les rapports d'Albert Ballu publiés au " Journal officiel de la République française " de 1896 à 1916, textes rassemblés et édités par A. Gros Lambert, Paris, de Bocard].

³Recognised and listed as a work of historical, artistic or architectural interest, receiving a legal status and a label to protect and maintain it.

⁴Following our investigations on site, and comparative analysis of its current state with the original.

⁵Workshop works for the Master2 (for the State Architect Diploma), Ferhat Abbas University Setif1, Department of Architecture (2018/2019).

⁶Guests of the official bodies and scientific community; this is the accommodation part and its dependencies.

⁷We point out here the "socio-economic" and cultural impact on the urban space of Biskra (performance space, cinema, meeting, exchange and temporary exhibition, etc.).

⁸Tourism first attracted the interest of the business and intellectual communities in the colonies, which created wintering committees and tourist offices (Andrieux & Harismendy, 2011).

⁹Félix, Hautfort, " au pays des palmes - Biskra -), publisher Paul Ollendorff, Paris, 1897, pp, 112-113.

¹⁰Establishment of games, restaurants and shows, in seaside or climatic resorts (la rousse).

surmounts it. Next to it rises the luxurious Dar-Diaf Hotel [...] ... from which one can discover the entire panorama of Biskra and the oasis. From the Casino square, two trams leave: one to the old Biskra; the second one goes to Hammam-es-Salahin, a thermal station whose sulphurous waters are considered very efficient..." (Collectif, 1902). This passage already speaks of a sustainable tourism approach practiced in Biskra, between (authenticity, contextuality, mobility and a flourishing economy). (Figures 1, 2)

SETTING THE CONTEXT

In recent years, following the example of several organisations in the world, the Algerian scientific community has seen a growing interest in the heritage of its built environment, and this has become a real theoretical challenge, which is only just beginning to be taken up and whose doctrinal consequences are only just beginning to be measured, if we are to believe the number of university researchers¹¹ and cultural associations that have come to the rescue of the most remarkable works of architecture and monuments in our country¹². If this corpus is often cited in the form of laws promulgated¹³ or studies of permanent safeguarding and enhancement plans (PPSMV)¹⁴ to maintain a brand image, it remains largely insufficient on the "practical" level on the part of those responsible for heritage protection and management¹⁵. In this respect, the case of the ex-Casino hotel palace of Biskra has not gone unnoticed since it has undergone 'illicit' developments¹⁶ which have altered its value and its original state. This deplorable situation shows the failure of a management carried out only by official actors with badly defined competences (Ouagueni, 2003). This deplorable situation shows the failure of a management carried out only by official actors with poorly defined competences, causing in most cases irreversible damage, to which must be added the lack of financial resources, but



Figure 1. Group of tourists near the Palace Hotel in Biskra

above all human and technical resources, which poses the eternal difficulty of the technical qualification of institutional actors. An operation of this nature¹⁷ requires a deep field of knowledge accompanied by a system of organisation involving various actors whose efficiency is based on competence, coordination and consultation, in order to establish clear priorities and objectives.

¹¹Tribute must be paid to the teacher-researchers and doctoral students who have cleared the way and begun the inventory of available sources, particularly the overseas archives in Aix-en-Provence for Algeria.

¹²We mention here the architecture of the 19th-20th century in relation to our case study, other situations belonging to different historical periods are already the object of this concern.

¹³Ordinance No. 67-281 of 20 December 1967 relating to excavations and the protection of historical and natural sites and monuments & Law No. 98-04 of 22 Safar 1419, corresponding to 15 June 1998, relating to the protection of cultural heritage. Journal officiel de la République algérienne n° 44.

¹⁴Examples: Site of Tiddis, Ancient site (Hamma-Bouziane), Ksar of Guerrara and its Oasis Urban Centre, Vibantique (Guerrara). cf. Algerian Ministry of Communication and Culture, Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Sub-Directorate of Historic Monuments and Sites, 2003.

¹⁵In this regard, we cite the article by Ouagueni Yassine "Héritage at Risk", Algérie, 2002-2003.

¹⁶The term 'illicit' is used here to denote the guilt of work without scientific reasoning (without study).

¹⁷Extensive redevelopment and change of use.



Figure 2. Jouanneau-Irriera, Roger (1924), 'Hivernage Touristique'. Source : Baconnier Collection, Beatrix.

EMERGING ISSUES

The study we are about to present on one of the emblematic works of the 19th century in Biskra, can challenge us to confront the problem of the unbridgeable compromise, that of the «recognition» of a heritage of the French colonial period, which does not carry with it values recognised by all as determining its own identity (Aiche et coll., 2006). Refuted by the general public, which hardly appreciates it, this heritage presents a real anthropological richness, as it is 'a witness to the social ideas and experimental spirit of its designers and also a current experience'. (Cotinha, 2014). This architectural legacy is above all visual in our daily lives, since it occupies a large part of the landscape of our cities (Oulebsir, 2004) It is the place where exchanges and interactions between cultures have taken place and where people of all specialities have practised on different scales (Bruant et coll., 1994). In order to dispassionate the debate at the university level, we prefer to place it in a chronological axis and we will say that it is an architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries that we must learn to look at more serenely and peacefully in the sphere of universal architecture that has marked our country and the Mediterranean basin, as documentation, as material and source, but without forgetting that it was carried out massively and with extreme violence¹⁸. It was therefore necessary to leave this sphere, and to approach the colonial fact from the angle of "renewal", in order to look at this continuity of tourist practices from the said period and that of today. To this end, the classification as national heritage of the example of the Great Post Office and the Algerian galleries in Algiers is the beginning of the interest that the state has shown in this architecture; thanks to Law 98-04 of 15 June 1998, which defines the content of "heritage as the whole of immovable, movable and immaterial cultural property"¹⁹. On the ground, much remains to be done, and a simple reading of the latest statistics²⁰ of the number of classified immovable cultural properties, we realise that this advanced number of 443 is low, considering the scale of the architectural and archaeological heritage that our country conceals. There are many reasons for this low number. We hope that in the near future, in-depth studies by the institutions concerned and the academic world will shed light on the real causes of this deficiency, so that targeted actions can be taken.

OBJECTIVE

In this work we will try to show the impact of this tourist structure which has remained at the heart of the processes of valorisation of the urban territory of Biskra and as a marker of authenticity which has contributed to keep this city aesthetically attractive, so that it can at the end be classified as a "national heritage"; without however dismissing the responsibilities of some and others in the various developments and changes operated blindly. Another concern of this work is the renewal of calls for its preservation and the promotion of a tourism that we hope will boost a local economy heavily affected by the financial crisis²¹. (Figure 3)

¹⁸Demolition, mutilation and expropriation of real estate in most Algerian cities.

¹⁹Article 67: This architectural landscape of the colonial period will henceforth be considered as cultural property extended to the field of intangible heritage.

²⁰Updated on 05/09/2019, Ministry of Culture: Directorate for the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage/Database of Immovable Cultural Property (Sub-Directorate of the Inventory of Cultural Property)

²¹Amplified by the Covid 19 pandemic since December 2019.



Figure 3. 1891- From the Gorges of El Kantara, Biskra, Algiers & Tunis: PLM winter circuit (Detail of the leaflet/ Biskra, Tourism, Algiers; Hugo Alési 1891-1892). Source: Pinterest.fr

METHODOLOGY

By definition, for a heritage to exist as such, it must first be the object of an operation or a process of «patrimonialisation». The latter, which represents a modality, has been the subject of several research works, which we have succeeded in synthesising thanks to the work «*l'utopie du patrimoine*» by J-F Léniaud, in which the latter explains that the patrimonialization is the result of the implementation of three fundamental criteria, namely

- The *communication* criterion: an object becomes heritage because it has a value in the collective memory of a society and symbolises a part of its history;
- The criterion of *scientificity*: an object becomes heritage because it possesses historical and artistic characteristics that are distinctive of the area in which it is located;
- The *economic & cultural* criterion: an object becomes heritage because it generates a secure cultural and economic value for the population and local communities (Léniaud, 1994).

Methodologically, we will have to show how these three fundamental criteria are presented in the case of the emblematic work of Biskra, the ex-Casino-Hotel palace, which will allow us to access this «patrimonialization», that is to say, to make the history of the social, economic and environmental facts inscribed in this work, which represent them and give them a certain consistency and a perceptible reality, visible. It is therefore to demonstrate the relationships of influence that exist between it and the cultural and tourist dynamics that once existed in the city of Biskra. Based on: firstly, documentary exploration (the archive in its multiple forms) and secondly, our in-depth investigations (survey) with our Master2 group on the spot and with the Biskrite population. This approach will serve to shed new light on its history and enrich the teaching of its period, which is currently little understood.

STATE OF PLAY

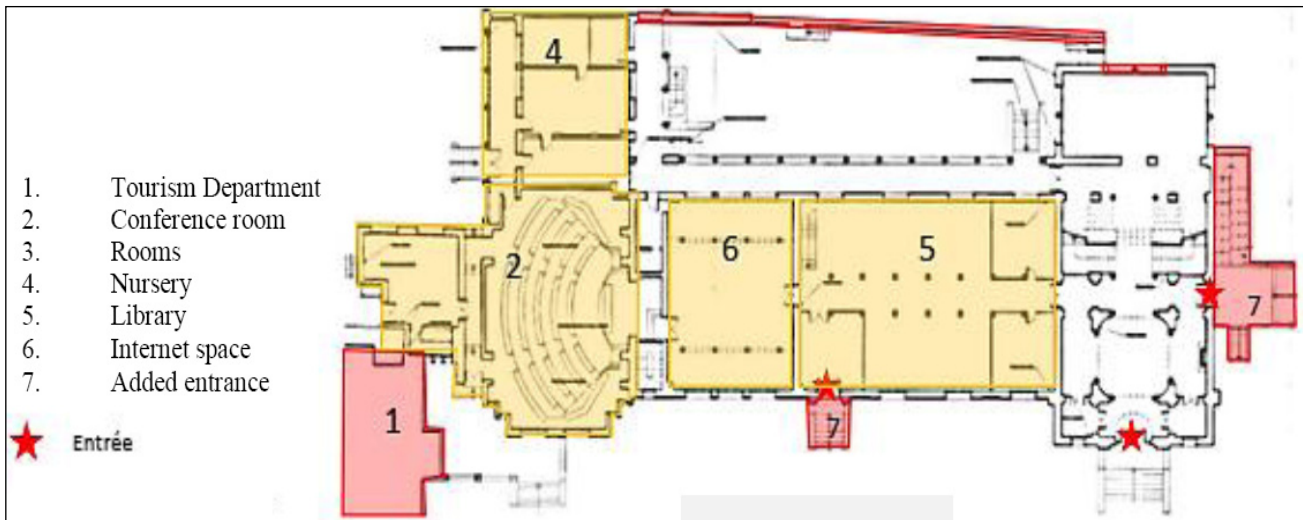
After independence, the Casino was transformed into a cinema and a little later into the Moudjahid Museum with some farcical alterations. Then, in 1974, it was the turn of the Palace Hotel to undergo other violent transformations, which consisted in making it the «headquarters of the Wilaya» by separating it from the casino. Finally, in 2006, the complex underwent an anarchic «rehabilitation» operation (without any prior study) to end up as a «House of Culture» building. (Figures 4a, 4b)

Our analysis is presented in three parts (general description; presentation of the facade elements; compositional principle/singular elements and comparison), following five levels of recognition: general characteristics of the work, constructional techniques, constituent and singular architectural elements (climatic or other), compositional principles (facade).

Reading the plans

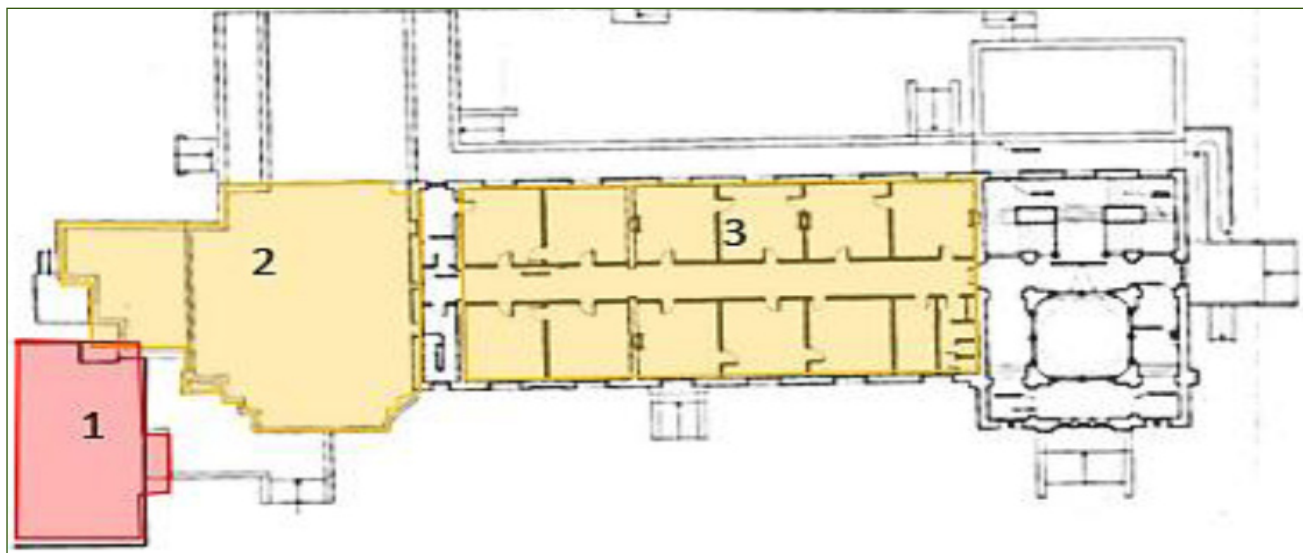
This «House of Culture» is organised in a linear pattern on two levels with a basement. The entrance area, marked by a hall surmounted by a magnificent dome, participates, along with the gallery opening onto the interior courtyard, in the distribution of the immense space on the ground floor. On the first floor, this same distribution is carried out through a corridor originally leading to the guest rooms, which have been transformed into administrative offices.

(Figures 5, 6a, 6b, 6c)



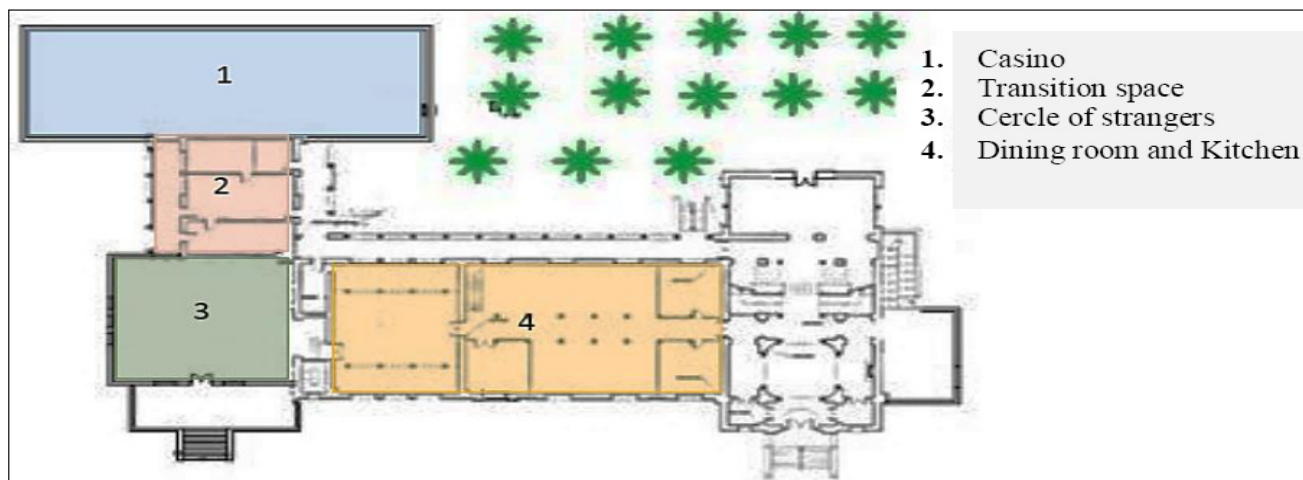
Hotel palace

Figure 6a. Condition of the ground floor modified Source: Author (2019)



Hotel palace

Figure 6b. Condition of the first floor modified. Source: Author (2019)



Casino

Figure 6c. Reconstituted state Source: Author (2019)

Analytical study

Starting with the analysis of our iconographic sources which, beyond the illustration, have been of active use, providing us with detailed information rarely accessible through the written word, making them a source of understanding and effective analysis. Secondly, the archive and written documentation (books, articles, theses, etc.) provided us with the historical knowledge component. Furthermore, the displacement, observation and analysis on site of the two emblematic buildings in their urban environment, then the cross-referencing between the documents in our possession, proved to be an important and even demanding necessity; the result, against all expectations, was fruitful. We were able to: on the one hand, make a comparison between the existing state and the original state in order to detect the transformations and additions made and; on the other hand, to make a hypothetical reconstitution of the original plan of the Casino hotel palace as it was conceived at the beginning. (Table 1)

Additions

- Addition of «access» on the main (North) and lateral (West) sides.
- Addition of a building volume (tourism department).
- Addition of an opaque wall to the south which obstructs what was once a panoramic view of the palm grove.
- Addition of openings.





Transformations

- The foreigners' circle transformed into a conference room.
- The transitional space between the casino & the palace hotel transformed into a children's crèche.
- The two main spaces on the ground floor facing the main façade to the north have been transformed into a library & internet room.
- The guest rooms on the first floor have been converted into offices.

Stylistic Study

By analysing Albert Ballu's work as an architect during the period from 1884 to 1886, one quickly realises the influence that Ottoman architecture had on his projects, particularly in the building of the ex-Casino hotel palace in Biskra. One finds practically the same architectural elements used in Algiers, in the residences of the Ottoman nobility such as «Dar Aziza» and «Dar Day», or places of worship such as Masdjid Sidi Abderrahmane and the Cathedral of Algiers. (Table 2)

Table 1. Comparative table (Analytical)

Observation	Current status	Original state
Addition of an earthenware panel at the portico of the main entrance of the Palace Hotel		
Addition of a tiled panel at the portico of the main entrance to the Casino		








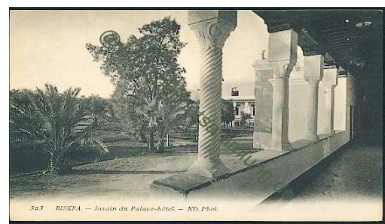


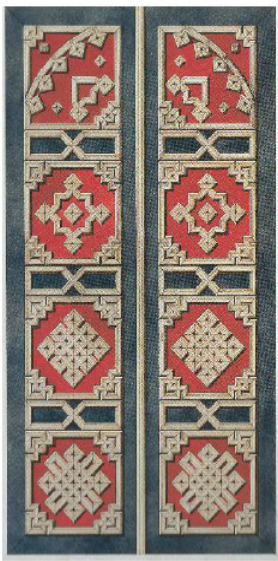
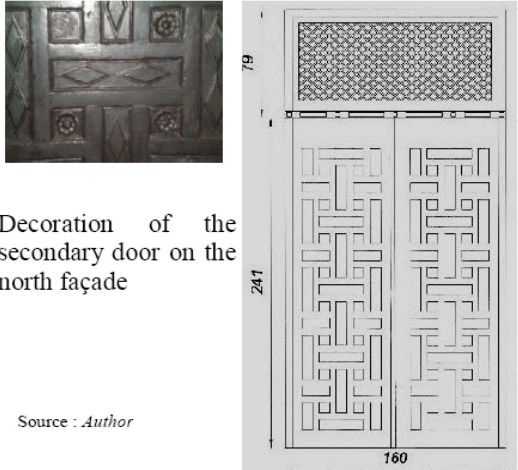


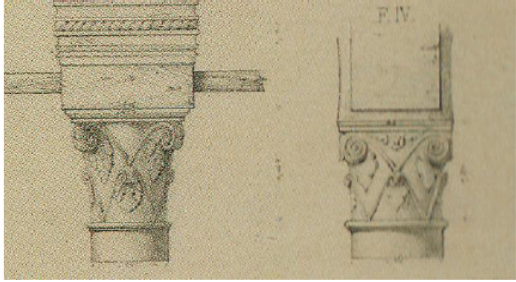


<p>The substitution (addition) of the volume and space of what was a «Tea dancing room» into a conference room</p>		
<p>Removal of openings on this gable front</p>		
<p>Removal of openings in the gables of the façade & part of the volume of the crèche added</p>		
<p>Removal of what was a garden in this area & the addition of a dividing wall between the buildings (Casino/Hotel)</p>		


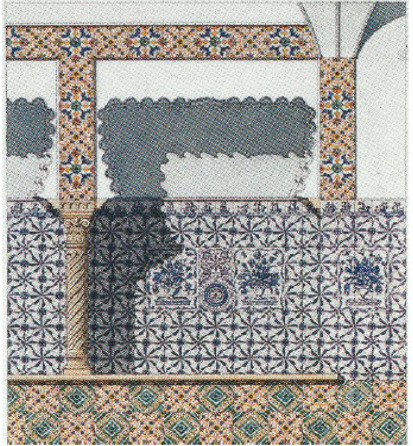

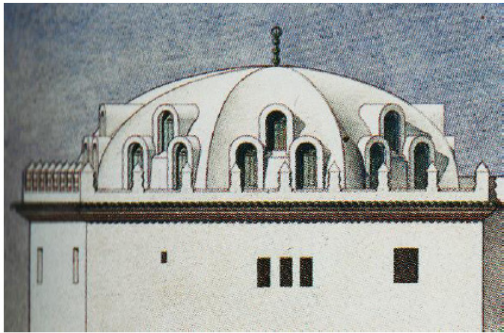
Table 2. Partial table of stylistic analysis (Sonship) at the Ex-Hotel

 <p>Decoration of the main door on the north façade</p> <p>Source : <i>Author</i></p> 	<p>Sonship Decoration of the door of the stands, Djamaa el Djedid (Algiers). A. Ballu</p> <p>Source : <i>A. Koumas & C.</i></p> 
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 <p>Decoration of the secondary door on the north façade</p> <p>Source : Author</p>	<p>Sonship Decoration of the big door of the Museum of Algiers (Algiers). A. Ballu</p> <p>Source : A. Koumas & C.</p> 
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 <p>Column with capital, including: - Spiral-shaped shaft</p> <p>Source : Author</p>	 <p>Sonship Was treated with parallelogram shapes. Courtyard capital of the Caserne des Janissaires, Constantine. Raised by A. Ravoisié</p>
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<p>Column with capital, including: - Spiral-shaped shaft; - Fut composed of two parts (smooth & hexagonal)</p> <p>Source : Author</p> 	<p>Sonship: - Composed of two smooth & hexagonal parts. Capitals Gallery of the RDC Mosque sidi Abderrahmane (Algiers). A. Ballu - Fut in form Spiral patio dar Aziza (Algiers). A. Ballu</p> <p>Source : A. Koumas & C.</p> 
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<p>Arc Algérois</p>  <p>Source : Author</p>	<p>Sonship Arc Algérois, vestibule of the museum of (Algiers). A. Ballu</p>  <p>Source : A. Koumas & C.</p>
 <p>Dome resting on an openwork drum Eight horseshoe-arched windows</p>	 <p>Sonship Lucarne coupole sisi Abderrahmane. (Algiers). A. Ballu</p>

This confirms the fruit of the work of his predecessor Edmond Duthoit in the establishment of an «ornamental» repertoire integrating constructive or decorative elements inspired by the different architectural currents prior to the colonial era (Bacha, 2011) creating an unprecedented and favourable framework for the beginning of the recognition and identification of the most significant works that have marked the history of architecture in Algeria.

Reinterpretation of a 'Bustling' Local Architecture

Until the end of the 19th century, 'classical architecture of European origin was [...] the official architecture of the French Empire in Algeria'. (Deluz, 1988) Until the end of the 19th century, "classical architecture of European origin was [...] the official architecture of the French Empire in Algeria", this tendency will see a progressive relaxation in favour of a new proponent of "orientalism" and expression of local culture. We are not going to call up the history of this artistic trend, and the factors that contributed to its emergence, which is not our place to detail here; but rather to use it as a reminder, to help us detect the beginnings of this new trend that the facades of the ex-Casino-Hotel palace of Biskra, seem to interpret as a strong identity index of the city " *The dissemination of a neo-style requires beforehand the study of the original architecture. Travelling architects have therefore endeavoured to retrace the evolution of Muslim architecture and to distinguish the different styles (Egyptian, Moorish, Ottoman or Persian)*". (Decléty, 2003a).

Thanks to the craze for orientalism at that time, many artists and architects wanted to explore this exotic and phantasmagorical universe. Among the leaders of this trend in Algeria was the Orientalist Edmond Duthoit²². He undertook his first mission in 1872, where he set himself the objective of identifying and surveying pre-colonial architecture, mainly the Arab monuments of Tlemcen, with an in-depth analysis (Oulebsir, 2004). By combining his own reflection with his knowledge at the School of Fine Arts directed by his master Viollet-le- Duc²³, the student E.

²²Duthoit, Edmond Clément Marie Louis (1837-1889). Appointed to explore Algeria and study the monuments of Roman, but especially Arab, civilisation. (Oulebsir, 2004)

²³His immense work includes his interventions in favour of monumental heritage, his writings, thanks to which art history gradually became a science, and finally his theoretical reflections which contributed to orienting architectural creation towards a new path by abandoning the historicist tradition. (Jean-Michel, s. d.)

Duthoit had thus succeeded in building up an «ornamental» repertoire inspired by local traditions and culture, the basis of which was derived from elementary geometry, creating a new trend known as «architectural orientalism». It was ultimately to be used to revive the architectural crisis in the metropolis. (Figures 7a, 7b)

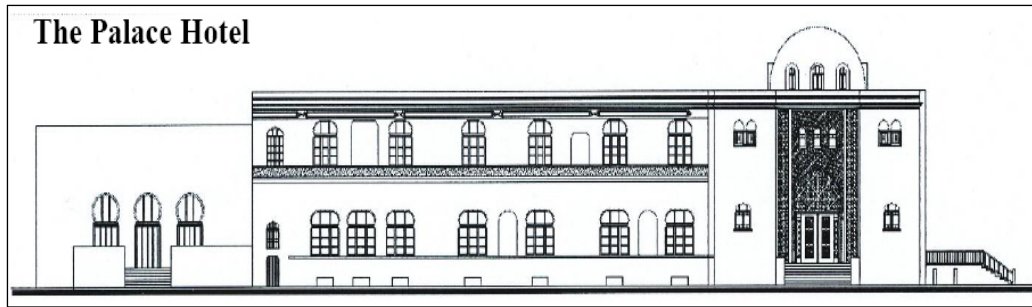


Figure 7a. Main north façade Source: Archive Municipality of Biskra (2019)



Figure 7b. Axonometric View Source: Anonymous

The growing interest in this architecture, woven by “the encyclopaedic spirit inherited from the Enlightenment, from which emerges a historical discourse on the history of art, as well as the romantic spirit opened up by the new century, pushes them to invest in new fields of knowledge”. (Decléty, 2003b). From the 1830s onwards, the Moorish style began to cover a good part of the recreational establishments (baths, casinos, pavilions), thanks in part to the private investors of the colonial society in search of profits, who were involved in the promotion of tourism. An effervescence of orientalist style constructions was born throughout the western world, and it was adopted and demanded as a “fashion” by the social clientele of the resorts; using a heavy architectural veneer drawn from the referents of Arab traditions (Algeria & Andalusia) and exploiting the exotic image of the South, with the aim of attracting European travellers and tourists “the architectural referent is selected from local architecture in order to create an identity, but the tourist’s view remains primordial in this construction”. (Jarrassé, 2013).

As early as 1889, the colonial administration recommended the use of an architectural language that conveyed popular expression²⁴ and conveyed an image of «benevolence» of a France that cared about traditions, in order to win the sympathy of the natives (Béguin, 1983). It is in this context that the architect of the historical monuments of Algeria, Albert Ballu, successor to his colleague E. Duthoit, will implement the project of the «French Heritage». Duthoit, will implement the project of the ex-Casino-Hotel palace of Biskra. Designed in the image of the establishments of the beginning of the English resort in Cannes, which moreover, will give on this occasion the name of «Saharan Nice» to its city Biskra, by offering a field of study of a new process of sustainable and Saharan winter «tourism» in Algeria²⁵.

²⁴In an article by Edmond Douité which appeared in the African review No. 50 in 1906.

²⁵Among the original features offered by the manager of the palace hotel to his clients was the organisation of winter caravan-camping trips which gave tourists an idea of what the nomadic life could be like in the middle of the dunes and steppes. On the other hand, the casino: this large house opened its doors to all the local festivals, especially to the school festival which closed the year’s festivities before the hot weather. (Muller, s. d.)

The Façade as Architectural Heritage

Camillo Sitte²⁶ in his book «The Art of Building Cities» sees that the main aesthetic concern of a building lies in the way the façade defines the limits of a space and the way it is seen from that same space (Sitte, 1890) and thus it becomes that essential element of composition that creates the harmony and aesthetics of its surroundings. Inaugurated at the same time as the casino, in the southern part of the new town next to the squares and luxury villas, the famous Biskra Palace Hotel had very quickly woven this same relationship of complicity with its environment, accentuating its note of orientalism. Its main façade to the north is a melody played on a classical rhythm of Moorish architectural elements²⁷; this new and daring appearance (in relation to its historical context), charged with a spirit of conciliation, translates the beginning of an ideological concern²⁸ recommending the use of an architectural language close to the country's traditions and popular expression, based on the work already initiated earlier by E. Duthoit. It is composed of three parts: a base (seven steps high along the entire length of the building); the full façade (composed of two floors and pierced by a variety of openings); and the crown (composed of the dome that tops the main entrance). (Figures 8a, 8b)

A word on the construction technique & material used: Referring to this period of history and the various in situ investigation visits, the recorded construction system is indeed that of load-bearing walls in hollow brick with vaulted boards. On the other hand, the most commonly used materials, mainly for decoration, are wood, plaster, tile and ceramic. A white plaster covers the building, given the hot climate of the Sahara, which marks a certain soft contrast in harmony with the landscape against the backdrop of the palm grove.

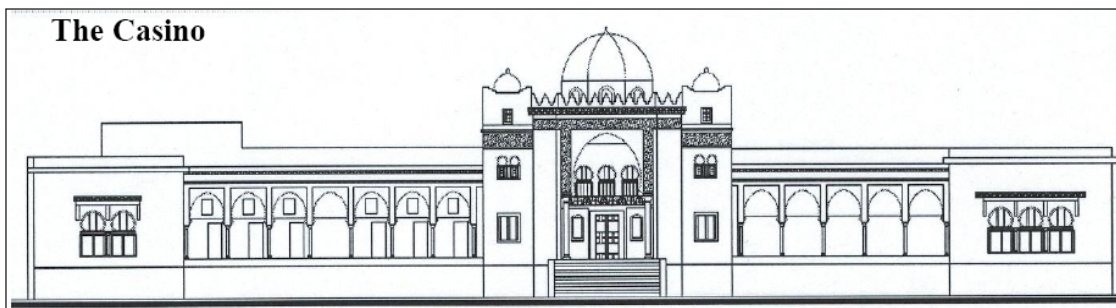


Figure 8a. North facade. Source: Archive Municipality of Biskra (2019)



Figure 8b: Axonometric View. Source: Anonymus

²⁶A Viennese architect and art historian, he is considered one of the founding fathers of the culturalist trend in urban planning. His main work, "The Art of Building Cities" (1889) offers a rereading of the urban history of European cities. Giovanni FUSCO "L'analyse des espaces publics - les places", University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis, 2012.

²⁷It is the way in which they are combined that gives them a characteristic architectural character; among the most commonly used elements are arches in all their configurations, domes, supports, namely pillars and columns.

²⁸Before it became a political orientation in favour of local heritage, this infatuation was the result of a set of factors that originated in metropolitan France as early as 1850, a date marked by an abundance of economic growth, scientific progress, industrial development and major urban development projects by Baron Haussmann and his "breakthroughs" in Paris, and, finally, the dynamic of the architects who "restored" monuments under the authority of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. Napoleon III was fascinated by all of this and could not remain indifferent, opting for a return to the sources which motivated a certain sensitivity to "Moorish" forms and the preservation of buildings from the pre-colonial period.(Oulebsir, 2004)

A summary table has enabled us to reveal the «stylistic» trend and to indicate the most common and recurrent elements of our work, dictated by the architectural and constructive rules of the period specific to the geography of southern Algeria. This reading is characterised by the influence of borrowed architectural, decorative and ornamental elements (a varied typology of openings, arches, columns and capitals), building materials (stone, sculpted wood, ceramics, marble, tiles, etc.) and domes. (Figure 9)

TOURISM & HERITAGE, COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE WORK OF THE FORMER CASINO HOTEL PALACE

If the term «heritage» has always referred to «*all assets from the past that can be catalogued for the purpose of conservation and preservation*» (Cotinha, 2014) Today, with the profound socio-economic changes in our society and the rapid pace of cultural and social practices, this notion must take on an adapted interpretation, open to the future. This is what a majority of contemporary authors and researchers who have studied the question of heritage have explained to us “... *this desire for heritage as a response to the economic, political, social and cultural crises that the world is going through today*”. (Fournier et coll., 2012). In the vast majority of situations, tourism is considered to be a primary “argument” for the protection and enhancement of historic properties, as it is likely to generate significant economic benefits for both the community and the local authorities , an economic regeneration factor²⁹ (Greffe, 2000). To extrapolate this approach, we would say that it is thanks to tourism that the “heritage” of certain countries such as Greece, Egypt or Italy has been proven. Furthermore, one question may challenge us at this stage of the work: how can we ensure that this heritage and tourism are both at the service of each other? We believe that the answer today must inevitably include the principles of “sustainable development”. (Cotinha, 2014). In the case of the ex-Casino-Hotel palace, the latter has been able to master this relationship since its construction by ensuring an economic surplus value of its territory (tourist and cultural activities) through its variety of uses, which were highly coveted at the time, and its attractive architectural palette, both of which were able to be exported to create a current of sympathy in the international tourist world. It also succeeded in protecting a certain authenticity, playing on both the affirmation of an anchorage in the Biskrit past and an avant-garde positioning in an “innovative” contextual architectural language (Bonard & Felli, 2008) which would later become known as the “neo-Moorish” style.



Figure 9. Study of the Main Door of the Church of Notre-Dame de Barbières in Albert (Edmond Duthoit)
Source: National Library of France (BnF)

RESULTS

In the end, we came to the conclusion that this architectural work should be the object of an operation of patrimonialisation (its classification among the monuments to be protected and maintained), after having confirmed that it represents a part of the collective memory of the Biskrit society and symbolises a part of its history; that it enjoys an inestimable artistic richness (architectural stamp, noble materials, identity reference, etc.) and finally, that it is and will always be as in the past a vector of the economic and cultural activity of its city Biskra and its territory.) and finally, that it is and will always be, as in the past, a vector of the economic and cultural activity of its city Biskra and its territory.

²⁹ In this respect, the example of archaeological sites such as Timgad, Djemila and Tipaza remains a sure asset for their cities, especially during the month of heritage.

CONCLUSION

We have come to the conclusion that the exceptional value of this establishment, «the ex-Casino Hotel palace of Biskra», is a witness of a tradition, of architectural and technical documents, linked to historical, cultural, artistic and social events. The interactions between the colonial experience and local realities have been a perfect stimulus in the recognition and evaluation of this extraordinary local know-how, to deserve to be classified as «national heritage». For this reason, it was enough to observe the interior and exterior of this complex to realise the variety and richness of its repertoire, which has constantly served as a springboard for a multitude of public building typologies recognised as icons of «neo-Moorish» architecture in the Maghreb as well as in Europe; because of their homogeneity and aesthetic unity, but also because they have illustrated and served a national feeling³⁰.

The development of this historical and socio-cultural asset, which has become a «heritage», has been replaced by an economic development often linked to «tourism», which in the past has promoted an authenticity specific to this part of the south of the country. Its rehabilitation will reinforce the identity attributes of its city Biskra and at the same time promote a form of «sustainable» tourism, which will be spatially, socially, culturally and economically affiliated to its territory³¹.

This work is proof that this type of heritage is now a challenge for both the inhabitants and the local authorities, which will undoubtedly legitimise the long-awaited initiative for its 'classification' at the national level, and then for its actual management. Finally, as a line of research to be developed, we are launching an appeal for the setting up of an inventory (in the form of a research programme) for the public buildings of southern Algeria, belonging to the French colonial period, in order to establish a repertoire of this unknown heritage.

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³⁰The use of a vocabulary drawn from Algerian heritage in favour of a new architecture at the dawn of the twentieth century has been the subject of several research studies, including those of our colleague Nabila Oulebsir in 2003; to express a desire to assert the political identity of French Algeria, and thus distinguish itself from that of the metropolis (Bacha, 2011).

³¹To serve again as a residence "Dar-diaf" for the guests of the official bodies and scientific communities; this is the accommodation part and its dependencies, which include hotel, café-restaurant, exhibition; circle and theatre/or cinema.

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