

Dave Cox in Marrakesh, Morocco, Sun. Mar. 18, 2012

To coxdavid55@hotmail.com, kmuschei@fclaw.com, delia.escalante@pcmail.maricopa.edu, mnesvig@fclaw.com, bazmoe@aol.com, rharris@fclaw.com, carriestar22@yahoo.com, matthewkauffman@hotmail.com, pmoore@azstatetaxlaw.com, colson@fclaw.com, jhanks@fclaw.com, kabr0507@gmail.com, steve_rago@yahoo.com, copperstatebldg@msn.com, willhemoon@yahoo.com, aehrenre@fclaw.com, zdk@mtaonline.net, hilaros@cox.net, dtcox@fclaw.com, stephanie.n.williams@gmail.com, planetarydweller@hotmail.com, clandestine337@aol.com, silk71520@msn.com, thomasbkinney@hotmail.com, christos@psarras.org, alain.bourret@sympatico.ca, colleen@colleensteele.com, pcomus@cox.net, donald.k.williams@gmail.com, petecambridge@comcast.net, jfrerkin@fclaw.com, lannnytnt@aol.com

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Hello everyone. I am on the road again, having started 4 days ago in Casablanca; the trip presumably will end in 3 months when I have a scheduled return flight to Arizona from Madrid. For the next three months, as usual, I will make it up as I go. I left Tucson last Wednesday, flying via Atlanta and Paris to Casablanca; total travel time, front door of home to door of hotel room, 23 ½ hours. The layover time in each airport was under 2 hours, so most of the trip was bearable. The worst part, as usual, the 4 hours of fitful "sleep" time between dinner and breakfast over the Atlantic; my back was sore and I could not find a comfortable position, probably half awakening a dozen times. When I finally awoke, the breakfast cart was beside me, I opened the shades to brilliant sunlight, and was fine from then on. This is the first time ever I have flown east across the Atlantic and had no jetlag.

I landed at the Mohammed V Airport some distance south of Casablanca at 3:30pm Thursday. After having to wait for literally the last bag to arrive at the luggage carousel (I was the last person waiting, and was by then considering what to do without my equipment), clearing customs and locating the bank machine for getting my first local currency (the Moroccan Dirham, about Dh8.45 to the dollar), I found the entrance in the airport to the underground train station and bought my ticket into Casablanca. The 35 minute train ride was nice, far better than haggling with a taxi after a day of travel. As always, I had pre-booked my first night hotel room, and this time had wisely chosen the Ibis Hotel (French chain I have previously used in Mozambique) located right outside the main train station in Casablanca. There I had a lovely small room with a view down the train tracks (it really was picturesque), a terrific bar (not easy to find in Morocco) which served generous portions of popcorn, peanuts and magnificent wrinkled aged black olives with the very pricey drinks, and a restaurant with a wonderful vegetarian buffet for dinner (not open until after 7:30pm - which compounded the problem of the very pricey drinks in the bar). There are 3 beers brewed in Morocco; Flagg and Heineken, both in tiny 8 oz bottles, watery (the Heineken is not the same as in Europe or the US), and overpriced in all bars at \$3, and Casablanca, the premier, slightly less watery beer, in 11 oz bottles, generally priced between \$5 and \$6 - beer will not be my drink of choice here. I slept soundly and woke close to my normal time a little after 5am (Moroccan time) the next morning; no jetlag

whatsoever, even after a 7 hour time zone change. After a good buffet breakfast in the same restaurant, I spent 7 hours exploring Casablanca.

The guidebooks say there is little to attract tourists in Casablanca, which basically is true; it is a large, nice, commercial city. There is one REAL attraction, however; the spectacular, awesome, and beautiful Hassan II Mosque (3rd largest mosque in the world, after only those in Mecca and Medina). It was built between 1987 and 1993 by the late King of Morocco, Hassan II, to celebrate his 60th birthday, and costing then about US \$1 billion. It is built partially out over the ocean, and is simply gigantic, holding 25,000 worshipers inside and another 80,000 in the courtyards in front. The minaret is the tallest structure in the country. Apparently 6,000 skilled stone craftsmen and another 15,000 workers worked the full 6 years in 24 hour shifts, 7 days a week, to complete the structure. It is one of just 2 mosques in Morocco open to non-Muslims, and can be visited inside only by guided tour. The medina (the old, medieval walled parts of cities) in Casablanca is tiny by comparison to that of Marrakesh and other imperial cities, but is a nice start for wandering. I walked through its alleys, continuously being forced down what I thought were wrongly directed passages, only to emerge at the far side exactly at the main entrance gate I sought. I then visited the main downtown part of Casablanca, all colonial architecture by the French mostly from the 1920s and 1930s, with a lot of "art-deco" buildings. That pretty much sums up Casablanca. For those who think there must be more, because a great movie was made using the name of the city, be aware Humphrey Bogart never set foot off a Hollywood set in filming 1942's "Casablanca". A final note involves taxi drivers. There are two types of taxis, the large mercedes "gran taxis" for shared longer distant rides, can be hired for private transport, but are expensive unless you have a group. The smaller "petit taxis" are the normal local taxis, but one must beware the many that congregate outside the big tourist attractions, hotels and train and bus stations. They try to hustle tourists, and inevitably ask for 3 to 4 times the normal rates. One quickly learns to just walk a few feet down any busy street, ignoring any taxi driver who approaches you, and flag down a passing taxi, always asking for the meter to be dropped if the cab has one.

Yesterday I took the 11:50am train south from Casablanca to Marrakesh, a 3 ½ hour ride which was pleasant enough; the scenery was pretty desolate, but not too unlike much of southern Arizona. Before leaving, I had one of many language issues based on pronunciation (French is the main language of Casablanca, though at the hotels a few speak some English); in English, I asked the Hotel Ibis desk clerk if the first class train had a toilet. He answered "Eet ees peeyoubleek". Not understanding, I questioned - "Peeyoubleek"? He responded "Yais, they twalait ees peeyoubleek". I felt like I just had had an exchange with Peter Sellers in a Pink Panther movie. Each train car did, indeed, have a small public toilet at one end.

I found a terrific small hotel (Le Caspien) in the Ville Nouvelle (new town) part of Marrakesh, which appears to be surrounded by terrific little restaurants and tea-coffee houses. I already have enjoyed sitting in a different tea-coffee house almost every day. I haven't yet learned how to order my tea without sugar added, so it carries a real wallop; today my coffee came with sugar cubes on the side - definitely better (3 double sized sugar cubes for a 3 oz cup of coffee). My room is relatively large, all tiled, great bathroom, three windows and an outside balcony looking out over the all salmon colored buildings of Marrakesh. The room's very reasonable price includes a large breakfast buffet. Yesterday I walked to a supermarket and was able to buy a

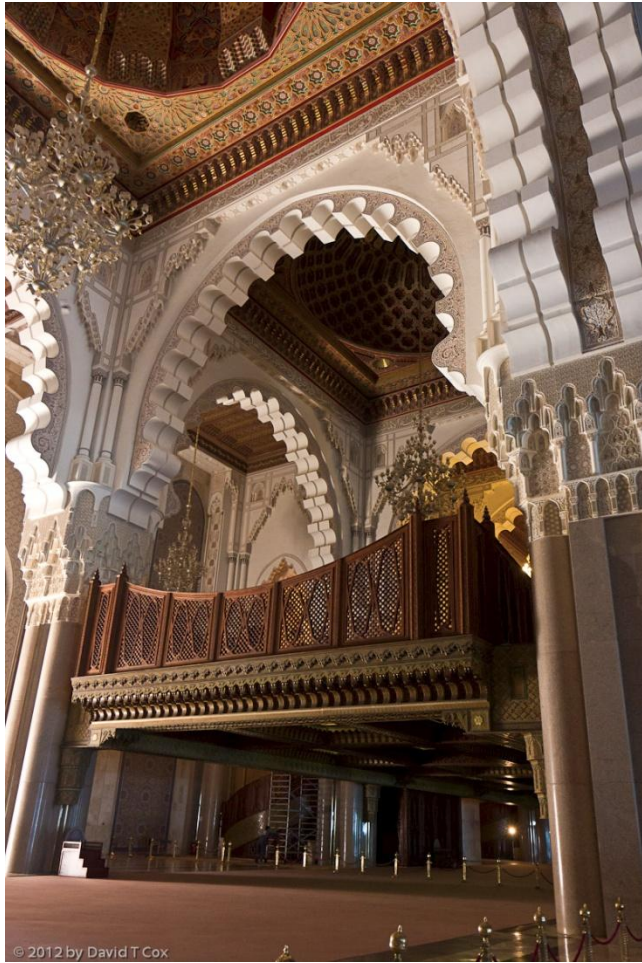
couple of bottles of Moroccan red wine at good prices (about \$5 each); the wine is actually very good, and went down smoothly last evening (- not ALL of it) as I sat on my balcony, smoking my pipe, and enjoying my favorite birds, the common swifts, which migrate from Africa to Spain to breed in the late spring; I will follow them into Spain. They are amazing aerialists, and form high speed groups screaming and chasing each other. Life is very good.

Last night for dinner I went to a small packed Italian restaurant ("Catanzaro", apparently one of the most popular restaurants in the area), for the obligatory hot bread and olives which come as soon as one is seated, followed by a pasta and wood oven pizza dish - I had no lunch - but it was still way too much. There I met a couple from Belgium who have an apartment in Marrakesh; they alternate months between Belgium and Morocco. They explained that in Belgium, the people are too strict, proper and uptight, so after a month they tire of it and need to move; in Morocco, the people are too loose and accepting of fraud and graft, and that too soon becomes tiring, which requires a return to Belgium. I did not inquire as to why they they did not search for an intermediate country. The gentleman gave me much good advice re places to visit for birds along the Atlantic coast. As an aside, to accompany his dinner he ordered a small bottle of wine which turned out to be the same wine I had enjoyed that evening on my balcony; he pronounced it "very good". He paid considerably more than I did for the same wine. This allowed me to assume that at least once in a while I get very lucky in my wine picks and judgment.

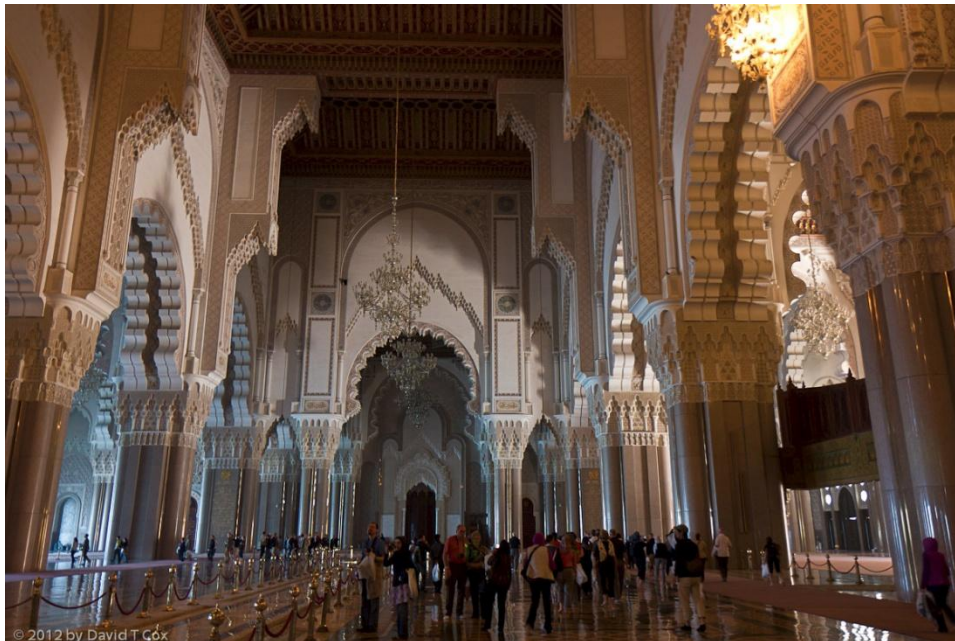
Marrakesh clearly is the top tourist destination in Morocco, mostly for its huge medina; I probably will stay in Marrakesh, or close by, for a week or two. Until later, Dave.



Casablanca seashore from Hassan II Mosque, Morocco



inside Hassan II Mosque, Casablanca, Morocco





alley, Casablanca, Morocco



Medina wall, Casablanca, Morocco



on Blvd Mohammed V,



Casablanca, Morocco
inside Medina, Casablanca, Morocco



Hassan II Mosque,



Casablanca, Morocco
Hassan II Mosque, Casablanca, Morocco



tracks from Hotel Ibis Rm 305, Casablanca, Morocco

view down railroad

Dave Cox in Marrakech, Morocco, Sun. Mar. 25, 2012

To coxdavid55@hotmail.com, kmuschei@fclaw.com, delia.escalante@pcmail.maricopa.edu, mnesvig@fclaw.com, bazmoe@aol.com, rharris@fclaw.com, carriestar22@yahoo.com, matthewkauffman@hotmail.com, pmoore@azstatetaxlaw.com, colson@fclaw.com, jhanks@fclaw.com, kabr0507@gmail.com, steve_rago@yahoo.com, copperstatebldg@msn.com, willhemoon@yahoo.com, aehrenre@fclaw.com, zdk@mtaonline.net, hilaros@cox.net, dtcox@fclaw.com, stephanie.n.williams@gmail.com, planetarydweller@hotmail.com, clandestine337@aol.com, silk71520@msn.com, thomasbkinney@hotmail.com, christos@psarras.org, alain.bourret@sympatico.ca, colleen@colleensteele.com, pcomus@cox.net, donald.k.williams@gmail.com, petecambridge@comcast.net, jfrerkin@fclaw.com, lannnytnt@aol.com
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Hello everyone. I have been a week in Marrakech now. I have stayed in the Gulez district of the Ville Nouvelle (newer French part of town), some ways west from the medina, so as to have a good room at a reasonable price, and to have good restaurants close by. I walk, however, almost daily to the medina for most of the sights, color and activity. "Medina" just refers to the medieval Muslim walled parts of the city; in the case of Marrakech, a walk around the perimeter walls would measure almost 19 kilometers. Much of the interior still consists of the medieval winding streets and alleys packed with souks (markets of stalls and shops), mosques, and thousands of people. Unfortunately, now even in the very narrowest streets and alleys motorcycles come through. It is a riot of color and craftsmen making all manner of goods. The alleys form mazes, and it is almost impossible not to get lost, often. My first day, trying to travel from a set of tombs to the nearby ruins of a palace, I walked well over a kilometer before I realized I could not be going in the right direction anymore (the alleys force turns with no way out but retreat back the way you came). A few steps later I emerged on a larger road and realized I was now, after 20 minutes, back at the tombs where I had started. I did not find those palace ruins until the next day. This is not to mean one should hire a guide - the real fun of the medina is to wander, and not to be on a tight schedule, to fully enjoy the magic of the twists and turns. One can always ask a shop keeper for directions to major landmarks.

The medina has many sites. Among the mosques, the most famous is the Koutoubia Mosque, with its 12th century minaret which set the style for many later minarets including the "Giralda" which now serves as the bell tower for the Seville Cathedral (unfortunately, non-Muslims cannot enter the mosques in Morocco). Close by the mosque is the main central plaza of the medina, called the Jamaa al Fna, meaning "assembly of the dead," apparently for the mid-11th century executions which took place here. The plaza now is a multisided huge area covered with paving stone, and a World Heritage Site. In it, especially towards evening, are all manner of entertainers, musicians, food sellers, gaudy water sellers, and snake charmers. The 16th century Badi Palace is the ruins of a huge palace entertainment area, the walls of which now serve for many white stork nests. The written accounts of the original opening disclose that Sultan Ahmed el-Mansour asked his court jester what he thought of the palace. The response - "It will make a beautiful ruin someday." The 16th century Saadian Tombs nearby are the final resting place of Sultan Mansour, together with dozens of other close officials and wives; in the early 17th century the Sultan's successor walled off the tombs to keep them "out of mind", and they only were rediscovered by aerial photographs in the early 20th Century, and a passage to them reopened. The gorgeous 19th century Mnebhi Palace now houses the Musee Marrakech, with mostly 20th

century art and beautiful Fez ceramics. The Ali Ben Youseff Medersa was a 14th century Koranic learning center, still in operation in the 19th century, once the largest in north Africa, and has the fine carved wood ceilings, decorated walls and tile work, and is perhaps the best structure in the Marrakech medina. Close by is the 12th Century Koubba shrine, the only remaining structure of the early Almoravids in whose architectural style much of the Spanish "Moorish" architecture was constructed. For me, nothing here really quite compares with the Moorish palaces in Granada and Sevilla, Spain, but much nevertheless is beautiful. I have included photos of all, I believe, of the above.

One cause for constant vigilance in Morocco is traffic; cars are bad enough and own the roads. But cars are not even a close second to the danger of the swarms of small motorbikes. The cars sort of stay on the right side of the road, usually stop at red lights, and usually go the correct way on one way streets. The motorbikes follow no rules whatsoever. At every red light, as the cars in front stop, the motorbikes shoot onto the wrong side of the road to pass all the stopped cars and either stop in the crosswalk in front of all the cars, in order to get a head start when the light turn green, or else go whizzing through the red light with effort displayed only to avoid accidents with cross traffic. As a pedestrian, trying to cross busy streets takes nerves of steel. It is amazing and aggravating to have a green light for the pedestrian crossing, to be in the crosswalk, to have all cars stopped both ways, and to then have 2 or 3 wheel motorbikes, coming down the wrong side of the street, beeping at you as they plow through the red light. The motorbikes also love going the wrong way on one-way streets, and where ever traffic is backed up or slow they will take to the sidewalks. I am thinking of getting a long walking stick, and a little cycling mirror, which sticks on my glasses, to see behind me; I leave it to your imagination as to how one might employ such a stick when a motorbike comes from behind on the sidewalk (I already have envisioned half a dozen satisfactory scenarios).

Another cause for vigilance is the presence of "patisseries" (fine pastry/candy shops) on every other corner of the Ville Nouvelle. They make dozens of types of bite size gooey, or crunchy, or chocolaty, or baklava-y, or nutty, or various combinations of the foregoing, little sweets. I can vouch on personal knowledge that it is not possible to just walk past these shops for more than two days in a row, no matter how well intentioned; once you commit the irreversible error of entry, it is not possible to leave without purchasing an assortment (there are soooo many kinds), which will last for days. Personally, I believe there should be a law requiring these shops to keep the shutters drawn so the weak cannot see what is for sale.

Speaking of food, I have sampled a number of little eateries close by, and can assure all I cannot lose weight while here. I have found wood-fired pizzas better than any I have had in the US, wonderful meats and stews cooked in the tajines (small covered pottery pots in which your personal dish is cooked), and - OH, or AH, the brochettes with all manner of chicken, beef, lamb, and sausage. Terrific fresh salads, with loads of tomatoes and cucumbers. All meals start with the on-table warm bread loaves and olives of every type imaginable (occasionally you have to prompt the waiter to bring these). And always the bottles of olive oil, often with spices (hot) or aromatic herbs.

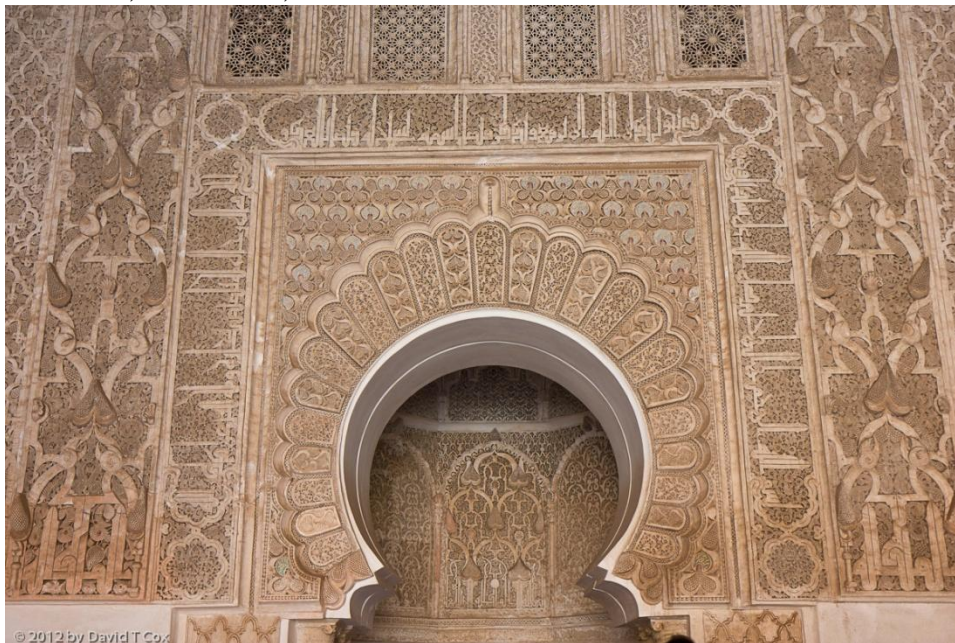
I spent part of four days this week researching and speaking to travel experts on how to see the High Atlas and Anti Atlas Mountains, with several famous valley gorges, and the sand dunes of

the Sahara Desert, all of which lie to the east of Marrakech extending to the border of Algeria. Although I originally had planned on trying to visit the area by public transportation, or perhaps even by rented car, I became convinced, due to the many sites (especially the Kasbahs, old mud brick cities and fortresses) which are off road, as are the gorges and some wildlife sites, that I would need to hire a driver-guide and a good four-wheel drive vehicle to really do the area justice. I have booked a private tour, which I helped customize, for the next 6 days, leaving early tomorrow and returning to Marrakech at the end of the week. The tour is, of course, priced well above my normal budget, but this is the most important part of Morocco for me. Hope to have many photos and adventures to report upon my return. Later. Dave



Koutoubia Mosque

in medina, Marrakech, Morocco



Medersa Ben

Youssef, medina, Marakech, Morocco



Medersa Ben

Youssef, medina, Marakech, Morocco



medina spices, Mar



Koubba Ba'adiyn,
Almoravid 12th C, medina, Marrakech, Morocco



photographer before
paintings by artist Ahmed Louardiri, Mnebhi Palace, Musee Marrakech, medina, Morocco



© 2012 by David T Cox

necklace from Anti-

Atlas, Mnebhi Palace, Musee Marrakech, medina, Morocco



© 2012 by David T Cox

medina, Marrakech,



Morocco © 2012 by David T Cox

medina,

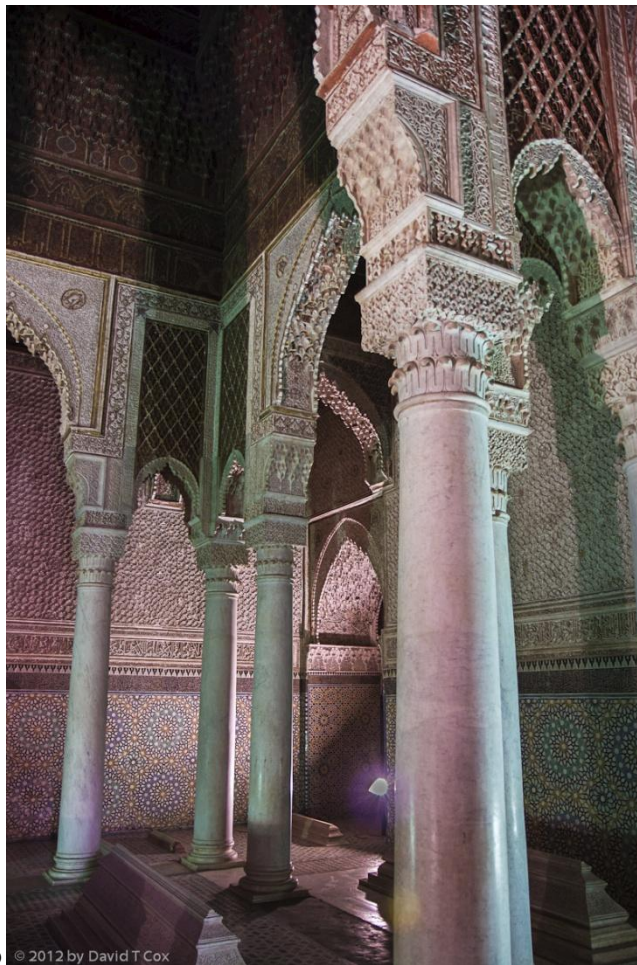


Marrakech, Morocco © 2012 by David T Cox

medina brass ware



Badia Palace,



medina, Marrakech, Morocco

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Tomb of

Saadian Sultan Ahmed al-Mansour, 1603, medina, Marrakech, Morocco

• Dave Cox Report on Trip to Erg Chebbi, Morocco, Mon. April 2, 2012

To coxdavid55@hotmail.com, kmuschei@fclaw.com, delia.escalante@pcmail.maricopa.edu, mnesvig@fclaw.com, bazmoe@aol.com, rharris@fclaw.com, carriestar22@yahoo.com, matthewkauffman@hotmail.com, pmoore@azstatetaxlaw.com, colson@fclaw.com, jhanks@fclaw.com, kabr0507@gmail.com, steve_rago@yahoo.com, copperstatebldg@msn.com, willhemoon@yahoo.com, aehrenre@fclaw.com, zdk@mtaonline.net, hilaros@cox.net, dtcox@fclaw.com, stephanie.n.williams@gmail.com, planetarydweller@hotmail.com, clandestine337@aol.com, silk71520@msn.com, thomasbkinney@hotmail.com, christos@psarras.org, alain.bourret@sympatico.ca, colleen@colleensteele.com, pcomus@cox.net, donald.k.williams@gmail.com, petecambridge@comcast.net, jfrerkin@fclaw.com, lannnytnt@aol.com

Hello everyone. The last week has been packed with activity and sites. I arranged for a private tour with English speaking driver/guide, Abdoul, and a Toyota diesel 4X4 to cross the High Atlas Mountains and follow several ancient caravan routes, visiting the old "kasbahs" (fortified multi-story mud brick houses or palaces) and Ksour (Ksar singular; huge fortified mud brick cities of interconnected kasbahs), through which the caravans traveled, along the palm filled oasis and river valleys east of the mountains; then across the increasingly arid desert, famous for pre-Cambrian fossils (think 400 million year old trilobites) to the western Sahara and the huge sand dunes of Erg Chebbi.

We left early last Monday, and the first day crossed the High Atlas through the Tizi n'Tichka pass at 2,200 meters, with the 4,000 meter snow covered peaks around us. The mountains are extraordinarily rugged, mostly stone with little vegetation except in marginal river valleys lower down. From the pass we took a rough road loop through several valleys with a number of famous and eye-catching Ksour (the entire ancient fortified cities, mostly now deserted ruins, made up of the mud brick multistoried-many-roomed kasbahs; every house and wall is interconnected, with narrow alley/streets passing like mazes through and interconnecting all into one city). Probably the most famous Ksar is the old caravan stop, 11th century Ait Benhaddou; you may not know the name, but this has been used as a major site for the filming of many movies, starting with "Jesus of Nazareth", "Sodom & Gomorrah", "Lawrence of Arabia", "Jewel of the Nile" and "Gladiator". I have included a photo of Ait Benhaddou along with those of many other Ksour, some of which also have been used as movie settings. We passed the first night in Ouarzazate, the "Oualllywood" of Morocco, with 3 movie studios, recently filming "Alexander".

Day two we drove through the Rose Valley, known for being filled with roses, though unfortunately not yet in bloom, and many ksour, then took off-road tracks through harsh rock desert where the occasional nomads still live in caves for the winter months (they move higher in the summer). Finally we entered and drove up the palm filled Dades River Valley, filled with Ksour, and up to the Dades Gorge. We drove back out for the night staying at Boumalne, a small town on the edge of Vallee des Oiseaux (Valley of the Birds), known for a number of rare desert birds. The next morning I had arranged for a local "nature" guide to lead us in 4-wheeling through the rough desert looking for whatever birds may be there for the discovery. We found and I got some photos of over 15 species, but, unfortunately, our "guide" did not know the birds (he started the morning proclaiming the kestrel to be a golden eagle; this he followed by showing no knowledge of the many species of larks we saw, misidentifying the common red-rumped wheatear as the rare mourning wheatear, and failing to identify the trumpeter finches even as finches - WOW, was he disappointing). Fortunately, with the photos I was able to identify all with my bird guide

book, and some help from a group of British birders we met. We spent the afternoon driving into the Toudra Gorge, where I had a tiny simple room with a balcony overlooking the spectacular entrance to the gorge and river valley. I spent some time there walking through the river-side valley and the next morning completely through the gorge, where the river had flooded and shut off access to two major hotels on the far side (I still am surprised at the number of places with no means of crossing flowing water - I am told that heavy rains are sufficiently rare that the people just wait for the water to recede).

The fourth day we drove through the increasingly rugged desert toward Erg Chebbi, the great sand dunes of the western Sahara on the border of Algeria. We had increasing problems with travel across normally bone-dry desert washes. The very late rains were the heaviest in many years, and washed out many roads and flooded the un-bridged crossings. For each of the last 3 days we crossed a number of flooded areas where only the big trucks and high 4X4 vehicles could make it. Many people were stranded at various crossings for hours or days. On the main road half way to Merzouga we encountered some 4-wheel drive tourist vehicles returning, and were informed the main road was completely impassable. We had to turn back and try an alternate route. I voted to go north and around through Er-Rachidia, but Abdoul chose to go south through Alnif. We wasted 3 hours in backtracking, and then found the road almost closed just before Merzouga; we barely made it across a flowing wash in the lifted vehicle. At our destination we heard the main highway down from Er-Rachidia was completely closed also - only the southerly and least used of the 3 routes into Erg Chebbi was passable that day, and only to high-clearance vehicles. A number of tourists were stranded both within and without Merzouga that day.

We stayed in a small auberge about 4 kilometers north from the start of the big dunes (I was the only guest that night). The first evening I was driven to the edge of the dunes, and hiked some small distance up some of the smaller ridgelines for photos and to see the sunset. That evening under very clear skies, I found myself pointing out the 3 visible planets, and a number of constellations to the owner and staff of the auberge, and Abdoul. I was pretty astonished that they knew so little about the night sky (as well as so little about the local desert birds). At 5am the next morning I rode a camel over an hour across the sands to the large dunes and watched the sunrise. From Merzouga we returned across the then slightly less swollen flowing washes to Alnif, which claims the title of "trilobite capital of the world". Indeed, the eastern desert of Morocco all is an ancient seabed, including strata from 200 to 600 million years ago. This period covers all pre-Cambrian life, and here hundreds (perhaps thousands) of species of trilobites and other ancient sea creatures have left fossil remains. I spent a couple hours around Alnif shops marveling at the fossils, and finally bought a little stone with two lovely (apparently common species) trilobites, from a geologist/fossil -hunter/vendor who was just in Tucson this winter for the International Gem Show (the largest such show on the planet for wholesalers who sell and buy gems, fossils and meteorites from almost every country on earth).

We spent the final evening in the most inspiring stop of the trip, in Auberge Chez Yacob, located inside the spectacular Ksar Tamnougalt, in the Draa Valley. My room had a window to see out of the 1 meter thick mud brick walls. The terrace where I ate and sat overlooked on all sides the ruins of the Ksar and the miles of palmeraie (palm oasis) lining the Draa Valley and river. It could not have been a more eye-catching setting. The final day, after visiting the Taourirt Kasbah in Ouarzazate, a site also used in numerous movies, which 5 days earlier had been closed, we drove back over the very rugged Anti Atlas and High Atlas Mountains, returning to Marrakech.

The mid-day and evening meals were uniformly delicious. Practically every meal was a form of dish called a tajine; the tajine is a shallow fired clay bowl with lip and high chimney lid in which are placed whatever meats and veggies one wishes. It is cooked over fire, where the chicken or beef, normally at the bottom, gets seared, while the veggies are literally stacked around like the wood in a boy scout's merit badge camp fire. Often many subtle spices are added which form a savory broth to be sopped up with the "khoobz" (bread).

I am planning on traveling by train, either tomorrow or Wednesday, to Rabat, the capital of Morocco. There I plan to spend a few days mostly to visit the archaeological museum which contains the artifacts recovered from the Carthaginian and Roman ruins at Volubilis, which I will visit later from Meknes. Later. Dave

Dave Cox Report on Trip to Erg Chebbi, Morocco, Mon. April 2, 2012





Cream-coloured Courser, Vallee des Oiseaux,



Morocco © 2012 by David T Cox

Kasbah view in Dades Gorge Valley,



Morocco © 2012 by David T Cox

chicken tajine, Riad Ourzazate, Morocco

photographer w raisin-



Ait Benhaddou,

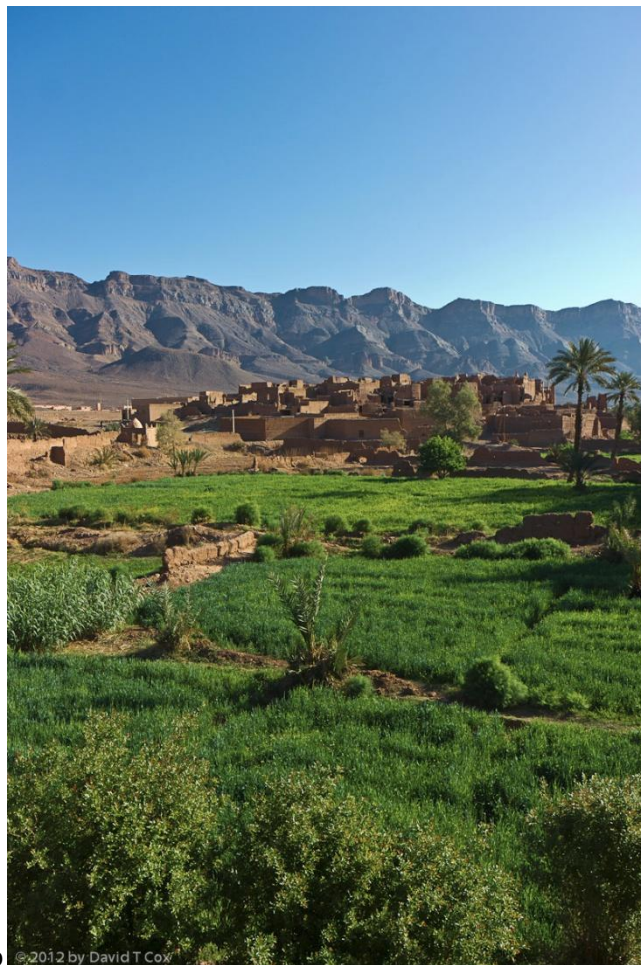


Morocco

Tamdaght Kasbah, Morocco



Photographer & guide Abdoul, near



Tizi n'Tichka, Morocco
Draa Valley, near Agdz, Morocco

Ksar NE of Tamnougalt,



© 2012 by David T Cox Ksar Tamnougalt & palmeraie from terrace Chez Jacob, Draa Valley, near Agdz, Morocco



© 2012 by David T Cox



Erg Chebbi dunes, Morocco
crossing, Tenerhir, Morocco

Flooded river

• Dave Cox in Azrou, Morocco, Thurs. Apr. 12, 2012

To coxdavid55@hotmail.com, kmuschei@fclaw.com, delia.escalante@pcmail.maricopa.edu, mnesvig@fclaw.com, bazmoe@aol.com, rharris@fclaw.com, carriestar22@yahoo.com, matthewkauffman@hotmail.com, pmoore@azstatetaxlaw.com, colson@fclaw.com, jhanks@fclaw.com, kabr0507@gmail.com, steve_rago@yahoo.com, copperstatebldg@msn.com, willhemoon@yahoo.com, aehrenre@fclaw.com, zdk@mtaonline.net, hilaros@cox.net, dtcox@fclaw.com, stephanie.n.williams@gmail.com, planetarydweller@hotmail.com, clandestine337@aol.com, silk71520@msn.com, thomasbkinney@hotmail.com, christos@psarras.org, alain.bourret@sympatico.ca, colleen@colleensteele.com, pcomus@cox.net, donald.k.williams@gmail.com, petecambridge@comcast.net, jfrerkin@fclaw.com, lannnytnt@aol.com

Hello everyone. I traveled by train on Wednesday a week ago from Marrakech to Rabat, the capital of the country, which lies on the Atlantic coast. The trains are a fine way to travel between the major cities; first class is reasonably comfortable and relatively inexpensive, permits use of a bathroom (most of which have the hole running straight down to the tracks), and the trains are almost always right on

time.

Rabat is a fairly clean modern city. One very attractive feature I was anticipating was the wealth of restaurants surrounding my hotel, the Balima. The feature I didn't anticipate was that almost all closed after lunch, and did not open for dinner until 7:30; anyone who knows me well knows I like to eat around 6pm - most of the better class restaurants, therefore, remained unknown to me. My room had a balcony overlooking the legislature. Every afternoon, groups of protesters marched down the main street and crowded around the gates of the building singing chants. The best explanation I could get from the desk clerk was that they were the unemployed protesting their unemployment. As most of the marchers were wearing the same colored hats, and were well organized, I tended more to believe they were some type of special union or government labor.

Rabat had two special features which drew me there. First, the presence of the only archaeology museum in the country. It is surprisingly small, but does contain the Roman bronzes from the ruins of Volubilis (see below), and also a very tiny collection of Phoenician pottery and bronze (which predates the Romans). Rabat also has the old walled city, now known as the "Chellah", but for a millennium known as Sala Colonia; it was originally Phoenician, then a Roman center on the ancient seaport. Finally, it became an Islamic center before the entire city was moved to the north banks of the river, now known as Sale. The ruins are enhanced by the presence of a large colony of nesting white storks, all of which have young in the nests now. Both parents tend the nest, and whenever one returns from feeding, both raise their heads and "clack" their beaks; so the visit to the site is accompanied by almost constant stork clacking.

From Rabat I traveled on by train to the imperial city of Meknes, which owes its existence to Sultan Moulay Ismail. Most of the monuments in the city were built by the Sultan in the late 17th to early 18th century. He also solidified control of much of what is today Morocco, and successfully expelled most foreign intrusion. He built his imperial city using the plundered resources from nearby Volubilis, the Roman city. He was notorious, even in the Europe of the time, for his tyrannical excesses. He commenced his rule with the display of 400 heads of chieftains in Fez. He killed all of his brothers and half brothers who did not immediately commit to him. He carried a weighted mace with which he would smash in heads of construction workers to ensure the attention of the rest. He is known for commenting that his subjects were "rats in a basket which you must keep shaking or they will gnaw their way out". Apparently 30,000 people died under his rule, not counting any deaths from the many military exploits. So - is he "Stalinized?"; Of course not. This is Morocco. Today he is enshrined in his mausoleum and revered, even considered saintly by some. Go figure. Almost all of his construction has gone to ruins.

Nearby Volubilis is the site for the major Roman presence in Northwest Africa. Originally Carthaginian from the 3rd C BC, the Romans occupied it for the first 3 centuries AD. It continued as a major city until the founder of the first Arab Islamic dynasty, Moulay Idriss, moved his capital to a nearby hill in the 8th C. The site is extensive, sitting on a ridge line over the valley, and was important to Rome for both olive oil and as a major marshalling location for the collection and shipping of Africa's wild animals to Rome for its circuses. Unfortunately, not much of the site is standing, no small thanks to Moulay Ismail (see above) who plundered much of the marble and other site materials. It is known for its myriad of Roman mosaics still in place in many of the residential quarters, and mostly on account of these is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Very unfortunately, although roped off so people don't walk on them, all mosaics are now completely uncovered and open to nature, and cleaned by sweeping when water and dirt collects. Needless to say, they are rapidly deteriorating. One well described one can no longer be made out. What a shame - I thought part of gaining the grant of UNESCO World Heritage status was the commitment by the country to protect the site.

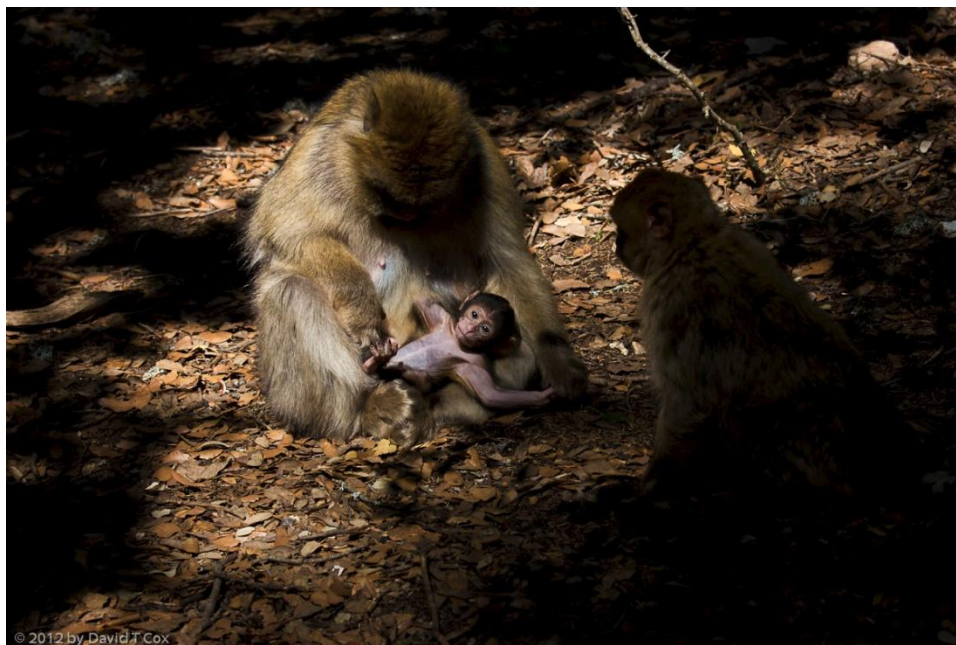
From Meknes I traveled yesterday by "gran taxi" to Azrou in the Middle Atlas Mtns. Gran taxis are the common means of public transport between cities, and universally are old diesel Mercedes sedans, which

have established "taxi stations" (just staging points) in each town from which and to which they travel. They have "callers" shouting out the destination for each taxi, to direct the travelers, and they leave when they have the requisite 6 passengers, 4 in the back, 2 in the front with the driver. They are much faster, and tend to leave more frequently, than buses. They also can be hired privately for trips or just for sightseeing (which is how I traveled to Volubilis). I paid for 2 places on the trip to Azrou so as not to be with 4 people in the back (women sit in the front - my taxi turned out to have all women but for me).

Azrou is at the heart of the Middle Atlas, known for its cedar forests and alpine feel. It also is one of the best places to find the famous (at least to me since childhood) Barbary Apes, which actually are macaques (properly named Barbary Macaques). With the weather forecast for 5 days of possible rain, to start today (it is raining now), upon arrival in Azrou yesterday I immediately set about seeking information to locate some "Barbary Apes", and then sought a private gran taxi to take me into the cedar forests above Azrou - by 2:30 I was in the forest and photographing Barbary Macaques. We found them easily, because the place I went is a popular picnic area for the local population, in the heart of the cedars, and the picnicking families love to feed the macaques, which in turn love to hang around for the freebies. This practice is outlawed in most countries for good reason, the animals lose all fear of humans, and can then be very dangerous. Here the practice did allow me quickly to locate the animals.

I have continued to eat well - perhaps because the "better" restaurants are closed until after 7:30pm. I just look for any little Moroccan restaurant which is packed with all locals at 6pm. The soup almost always is a large steaming bowl of minestrone, and a variety of tagines and brochettes are always available, as are salads, with the requisite bread and olives. Cost for 3 courses and a bottle of water usually about 5 or 6 dollars US. Although there are many foreign tourists about, I never have to share "my" restaurants with them (I assume they wait to eat until 7:30).

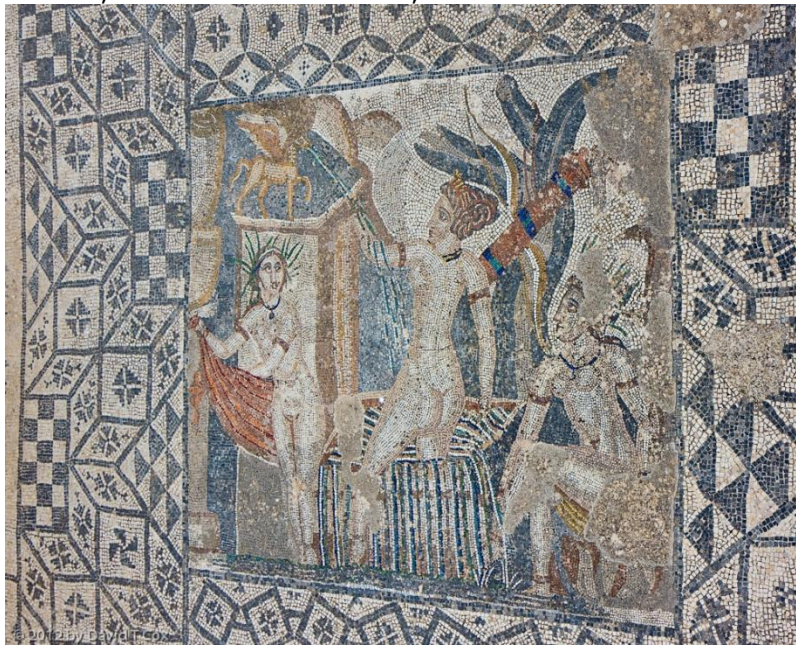
From Azrou I assume I will travel within a day or two to Fez, the oldest and greatest living medieval medina city. Later, Dave



© 2012 by David J Cox Barbary "Ape", a macaque, Cedres Gouraud, cedar forest above Azrou, Morocco



Barbary "Ape", a macaque, Cedres Gouraud, cedar forest above Azrou, Morocco



Mosaic - Diana Bathing, House of Venus, Volubilis, Morocco



Orpheus Myth, House of Orpheus, Volubilis, Morocco

Roman ruins, Volubilis, Morocco





white stork, Chellah, Rabat, Morocco



Colonia, Chellah, Rabat, Morocco

Roman ruins at Sala



main gate (14th C) of



Chellah, Rabat, Morocco
Mohammed V Mausoleum & Tour Hassan, Rabat, Morocco

mounted guard for



Tour Hassan minaret,



12th C, Rabat, Morocco
Kasbah de Oudaïas from river front, Rabat, Morocco



© 2012 by David T Cox
Museum Archaeology, Morocco

bronze bust Bacchus, Roman, Volubilis, Rabat

• Dave Cox in Tangier, Morocco, Apr. 22, 2012

[Photos](#) | 3:56 AM

To coxdavid55@hotmail.com, kmuschei@fclaw.com, delia.escalante@pcmail.maricopa.edu, mnesvig@fclaw.com, bazmoe@aol.com, rharris@fclaw.com, carriestar22@yahoo.com, matthewkauffman@hotmail.com, pmoore@azstatetaxlaw.com, colson@fclaw.com, jhanks@fclaw.com, kabr0507@gmail.com, steve_rago@yahoo.com, copperstatebldg@msn.com, willhemoon@yahoo.com, aehrenre@fclaw.com, zdk@mtaonline.net, hilaros@cox.net, dtcox@fclaw.com, stephanie.n.williams@gmail.com, planetarydweller@hotmail.com, clandestine337@aol.com, silk71520@msn.com, thomasbkinney@hotmail.com, christos@psarras.org, alain.bourret@sympatico.ca, colleen@colleensteele.com, pcomus@cox.net, donald.k.williams@gmail.com, petecambridge@comcast.net, jfrerkin@fclaw.com, lannnytnt@aol.com
Hotmail

Hello everyone. I last wrote from the cedar forests of the Middle Atlas Mountains of Azrou, where it snowed my last night. I took a gran taxi (shared taxi - I paid for 3 seats to have the rear seat with just one other person) through the snowy passes around Ifrane and down to Fes, where I spent 6 days. Fes is the first and oldest of the imperial cities of the Islamic Sultans, and is reputed to have the oldest living medina (old walled city) in the Islamic world. It originated under the first imperial dynasty (Idriss I) in the late 8th century, and much of the central part of the medina has been in place for a millennium. As with the medina in Marrakech, the passageways all are very narrow, and wind and wrap themselves into an unmappable maze. The medina contains two medersa, Koranic schools, both of which date from the 14th century, with the splendid tile and plaster work and carved cedar wood ceilings and doors. And everywhere, in all the medinas, are the innumerable cats, young and old, tolerated by all but belonging to no one.

As usual, I chose to stay in the ville nouveaux, the newer early 20th century French quarter of Fes, with cheaper modern hotels, restaurants and alcohol; the medina is essentially alcohol free except in a handful of the best riads (private houses turned into guest lodgings). In Fes I managed to cross paths with my brother, his wife and another couple who just had arrived in Morocco 3 days earlier. We spent a full day exploring the medina together.

My favorite part, which always will be the Fes medina I remember, was the Chouara Tannery, an area used exclusively for cleaning, tanning and dyeing leather from sheep and goat skins. All those who work there are members of a private hereditary guild, and the work has been passed from father to son for centuries. Outsiders are not allowed in the guild's tanning area itself, and most tourists content themselves with views from some overlooking stores. My first day I was a little pushy and got a sort of private tour with a guild "guard" on the edges of the rooms surrounding the dye and tanning vats, with looks into private rooms where the skins are cleaned and scraped. With my brother and friends we got the same guard to repeat and embellish the private tour a few days later. The entire area is extremely colorful with the dye vats, and smelly from the hundreds of wet and raw skins which have been worked there continually for many lifetimes. The tanning and dye vats are huge tubs, dozens built side by side, lined with tile to hold the liquid dyes and tanning fluids (made using pigeon droppings which produces the ammonia to cure the leather). Fresh skins are constantly brought in on donkey backs. The entire area is an assault on the nose and eyes.

In the part of town known as the "new" medina is the old Jewish quarter, the Mellah, which was home to a large population of Jews from the 14th century, when the new Sultan protected them (positioning the Jews between the old medina, containing the Sultan's adversaries, and himself). Most of the Jews emigrated to Israel in the second half of the 20th century, and only a handful remain. The old Jewish cemetery is a quiet place of blazingly white graves.

Thursday I took the train from Fes north to Tangier, on the Straits of Gibraltar. From the Terrassie des Paresseux, the overlook just a few steps up from my hotel, one can gaze across the straits to the southern coast of Spain and the Rock of Gibraltar. Tangier became an "international" zone for the first half of the 20th century, lasting until 1956, and fully half its population then was foreign. It became famous as a center for spies during the world wars, for banking institutions doing what was illegal elsewhere, for a number of poets and writers, the

"beat" generation, and outrageous gay (and straight) brothels and bars (think Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Tennessee Williams, who wrote "Cat On A Hot Tin Roof" here). By the 1960s, the Moroccan government took over and "cleaned" up the city; the banks and foreigners left, but the thieves, hustlers and drugs remained. Although for the last 15 years development has poured in to really clean up the city for tourism, it is easy to find the underbelly of the old city still; It is the most unsavory city of Morocco I have visited, and still has more hustlers than anywhere else. A large number of young men just hang out. My first afternoon out on the overlook, just by the famous Cafe de Paris, I watched a 20 something pickpocket go into the jacket pocket of a woman; I warned her and chased the miscreant out of the area. Afterwards, I did some soul-searching. Unemployment among young men in Morocco is around 45%; undoubtedly it is considerably higher in Tangier. I always have believed with sufficient motivation and willingness to hard work, one can succeed - and during this "always believed" period I always have had reasonable access to education and to employment levels over 90%. Imagining myself born in Tangier to a poor family, I found new empathy for, though not quite acquiescence to, the hustlers and pickpockets.

I have bought my ticket to travel Monday on the "fast" ferry, a catamaran, across the straits from Tangier to Tarifa, Spain (Africa to Europe by catamaran). Thus ends my Morocco travel, almost 6 weeks after I started. I have included just a few photos. For those interested, in the group picture my brother and his wife (Ira & Debbie) are on my left (right side of picture), and friends Chuck & Jane are on my right. Later. Dave



dates, Fes medina,

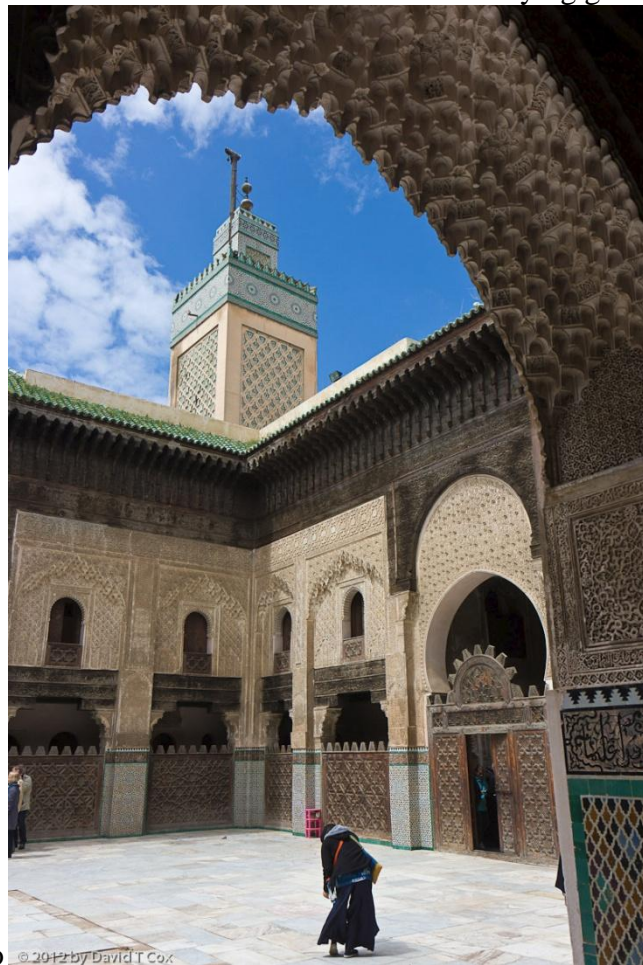


Morocco
Place Seffarine, medina. Fes, Morocco

vendor,



buying goats-sheep,



Place Seffarine, Fes medina, Morocco
Medersa Bou Inania, Merenid mid 14th C, Fes medina, Morocco



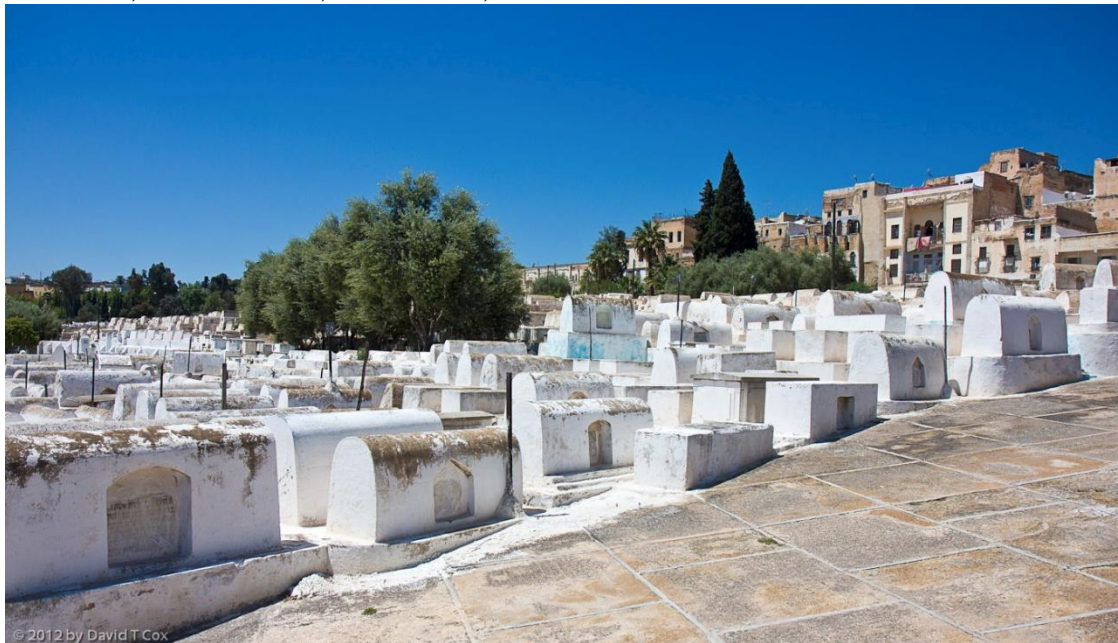
cats in medina,



Tangier, Morocco
Chouara Tannery, Fes medina, Morocco



© 2012 by David T Cox Chuck, Jane, Dave, Deb & Ira, Dar Seffarine, Fes medina, Morocco



© 2012 by David T Cox Jewish cemetery, Fes Mellah, Morocco