



## **Towards a Stylistic Characterization of the French Colonial Architecture Produced in Southern Algeria. Case Study of Public Buildings**

**Nassiba Benghida<sup>1</sup>, Leila Sriti<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Architecture, College of Architecture, Mohamed Khidher University, P.O Box: 145 RP - 07000  
Biskra - Algeria*

*<sup>2</sup>Laboratory of Design and Modeling of Forms and Environments (LaCoMoFA)*

### **Abstract**

Algeria, like the other Maghreb countries, had a long period of colonization. At independence, most Algerian cities inherited an important architectural legacy, which appears mainly at the level of public buildings and more clearly in institutional buildings to symbolize the presence, power and domination of France on the colonized Algerian territory. This architecture was expressed in a particular stylistic register based on the re-employment of architectural elements used in the local architecture and on the import of western exogenous models, whether historical or modern.

Most studies which were interested in colonial architecture in Algeria have focused on northern cities. According to these studies, the colonial architectural legacy has been identified with a set of formal characteristics concerned with the so-called neo-Moorish style (or arabisance). However, the question of the stylistic identification of the colonial architecture produced in the south of the country remains posed. Have a unique style been adopted for all Algerian territory, in this fact a Moorish one? Or was each region characterized by its own style (a local style)? Does the institutional colonial architecture produced in the south of the country admit a specific style compared to the north of the country? Can we speak about a Saharan colonial architecture?

To answer these questions, a comparative study was carried out on a corpus of some public buildings facades dating from the colonial era. The facades were selected in various regions of Algeria. The objective of the study is to identify the formal characteristics of the colonial public Saharan buildings readable in the facades and, then, comparing them with the dominant styles adopted in the institutional architecture of northern cities.

The preliminary results obtained from the morpho-stylistic analysis of the facades indicate that the neo-Moorish style that predominated in the treatment of public buildings in the north of the country differs from the style adopted in the south of the country. The analysis also identified architectural constants and variations among the major Saharan regions.

© 2018 The Authors. Published by IEREK press. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of ESSD's International Scientific Committee of Reviewers.

### **Keywords**

Colonial architecture; Algeria; Neo-Moorish; Morpho-stylistic analysis; Public buildings; Stylistic characterization

## 1. Introduction

In this work we will try to trace the history of the architectural forms of the institutional facades in Algeria used during the colonial period, especially the know-how and architectural styles of our ancestors with Eastern and North African influences under the name of Muslim identity with a well-studied and well-documented protective socio-cultural policy. This colonial policy resulting from the new styles is very much accepted by the natives because they find them similar to their vernacular architectural styles. The main purpose of this article is to find new stylistic analysis methods of the facades to facilitate the reading of any architectural style using new technological tools, and also to attract the attention and the interest of the intellectual people whatever: architects, town planners, ... or in any field. To preserve and enhance our authentic traditional or colonial architectural heritage that has been abandoned or badly consumed for a long time this mismanagement increasingly increases the degradation of this architectural heritage. We can not forget that this colonial legacy always remains a part of our memory and our history.



Figure 1. 1830 French colonization



Figure 2. 1830 French colonization



Figure 3. 1830 French colonization

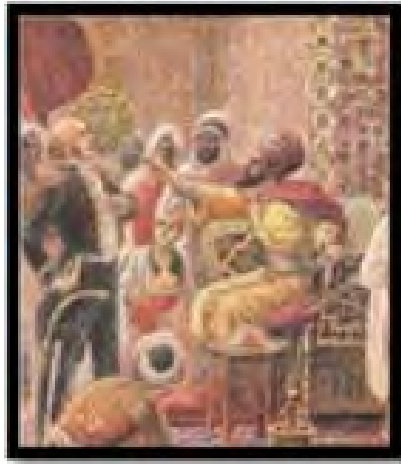


Figure 4. 1830 French colonization



Figure 5. 1962 Independence



Figure 6. 1962 Independence

## 2. Algeria and its geographic division

Algeria is located in the north of Africa on the Mediterranean coast, with an area of 2,381,741 km<sup>2</sup> is the largest country compared to other countries in Africa, the Arab world and the Mediterranean. It shares more than 6,385 km of land borders with Tunisia and Libya in the east, Niger and Mali in the south and Western Sahara and Morocco in the west.

this country is defined "Islam, Arabity and Amazighness" as fundamental components of the Algerian people and the country as "land of Islam, an integral part of the great Maghreb, an Arab country, Mediterranean and of course African".

The Algerian territory can be divided into three parts: 1- the coastal part which is in contact with the Mediterranean Sea on a strip of about 1600 km with a width of 60 to 190 km. 2- the inner part between the coastal part and the Sahara defined by parallel mountainous assemblies the Atlantic atlas and the Saharan atlas oriented south-west/north-east approaching at their end and between which are inserted plains and high plateaus. 3- The Saharan part which represents the much of the Algerian territory more than 80% of the surface of Algeria about 2 000 000 km<sup>2</sup> its main landforms are reg (stony expanses), erg (dunes) and south the Hoggar massif and the plateau Tassili and finally the oases that are disappearing because of aridity.

### 3. The administrative division of Algeria

Algeria is divided into six regions, three appalling regions the countries of north are: the North-East, the Center and the North-West, and the other three appalling regions include southern countries: the Lower Sahara, the central Sahara and the Western Sahara. These regions are divided into 48 wilaya. Wilaya constitutes an administrative district, a kind of prefecture. The wilayas of the south still attract the interest of the people either in relation to the natural wealth of the Saharan territory with its nomadic population like the Tuaregs which attract the tourists and the researchers to the different domains. As well as a great industrial wealth such as the production oil and gas and of course for its important geographical position that allowed the transit of South Africa to Europe and even to Asia.

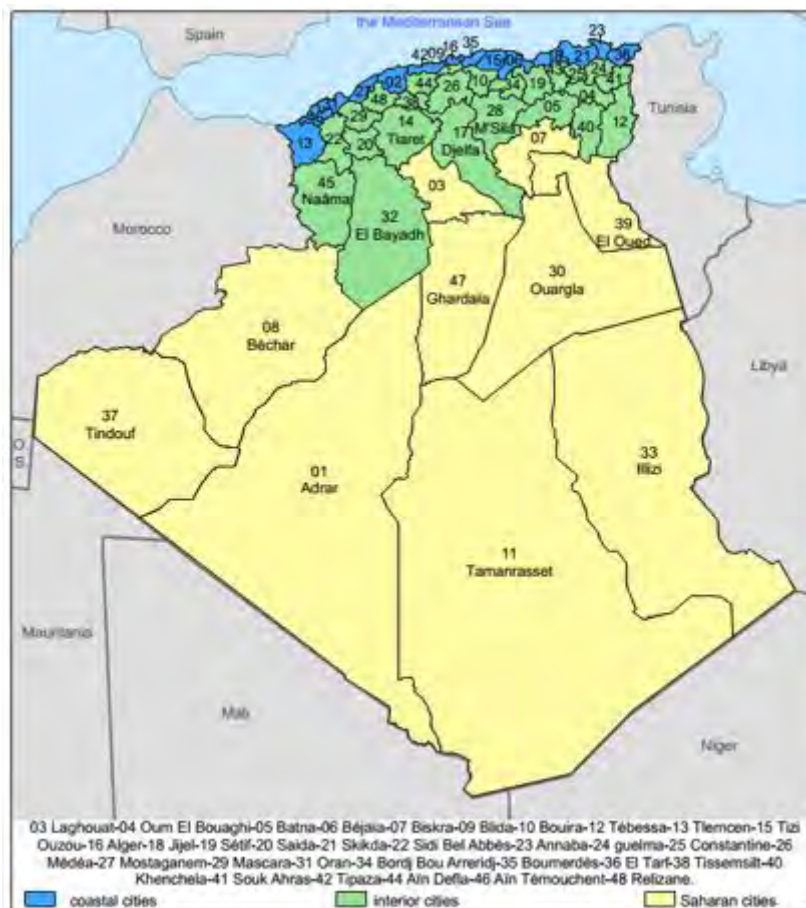


Figure 7. Map of the geographical division of Algeria. Source: authors

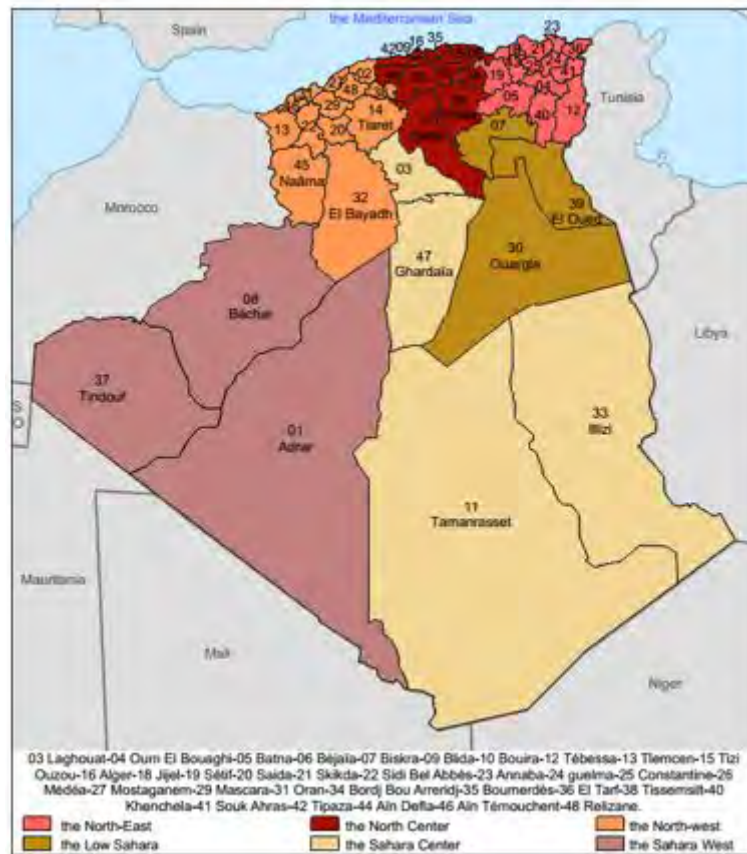


Figure 8. Administrative map of Algeria. Source: authors

#### 4. The formal characteristics of neo-Moorish architecture and sources of inspiration

The neo-Moorish style, also called "arabisation", appeared in Algiers at the turn of the 20th century. Governor General Charles Celestin Jonnart imposes this new style inspired by Arab and Islamic architecture, to ally the local powers.

Among the essential formal elements that characterize this style, we can cite a few: the cubic minaret, the diamond network panels, the monumental doors, the dome, the carved balustrade, stucco, the moucharabieh, the coronation with merlons, the calligraphy, the arches, the decoration of faience (the arabesque and the mosaic), the use of the green tile, etc.

#### 5. The confirmation of the neo-Moorish style at the level of institutional colonial facades in the northern Algerian country

When analyzing the character of colonial architecture in Algeria, one is led to note that the first achievements of the military phase designed according to the style of the winner are commonplace achievements and have nothing to compare with the constructions left on the same soil by the Muslims and it was not accepted by the natives.

Neo-Moresque or the protective style appears in the second political and economic phase that emerged from the twentieth century. The latter was well accepted by the natives.

We have selected some remarkable public buildings designed in the northern Algerian country during the colonial era from the Far East to the Far West.



1- The north-east



Figure 9. Constantine



Figure 10. Annaba

2- The north center



Figure 11. Tipaza



Figure 12. Alger

3- The north-west



Figure 13. Tlemcen



Figure 14. Oran

Figures (9,10,11,12,13,14) Some public buildings in the north of Algeria dating from the colonial era.

source : [www.gallica.fr](http://www.gallica.fr)

Most of the formal characteristics of neo-Moorish architecture are present at the facades of the public buildings of northern Algeria because these buildings are made according to a similar program that inspires more and more architectural elements specific to buildings such as the minaret, ... etc. all under the direction of the Governor General and to satisfy the public demand, so we can conclude and confirm that this colonial architecture was designed according to the Style: neo-Moorish.

## 6. Morpho-stylistic analysis of institutional colonial facades in southern Algeria

This analysis consists of a thorough knowledge of the history of architecture and its formal characteristics to make a good reading of any facade to analyze, this knowledge will also identify and identify the originality of the styles used.

From our historical architectural baggage we will analyze and release the formal characteristics of Saharan public colonial architecture with the search for architectural elements of neo-Moorish style.

1- The low Sahara

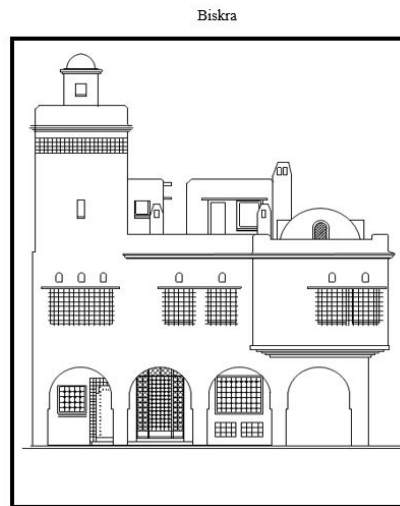


Figure 15. The BNA bank Source: the authors

The existence of the architectural elements of neo-Moorish architecture such as: the cupola, the minaret, the arches, and the faience decoration.

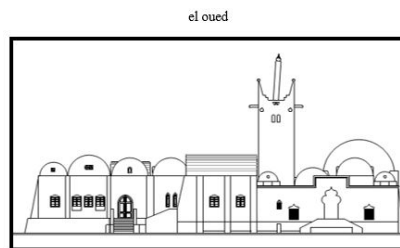


Figure 16. Transatlantic hotel Source: the authors

The existence of architectural elements of neo-Moorish architecture such as: the cupola, the minaret, with the dominance of the local stamp more domes and vaults.

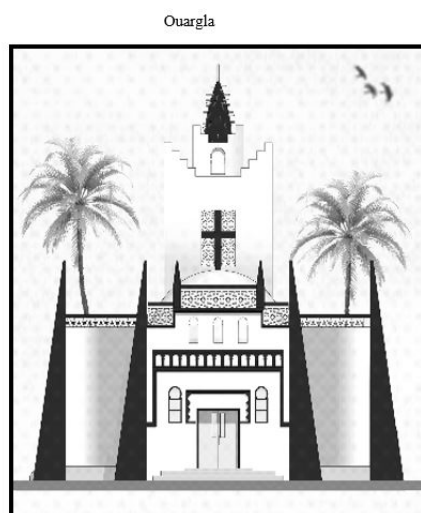


Figure 17. Museum

The existence of the architectural elements of neo-Sudanese architecture such as: the counter-fort, the heavy conical shape, the monumentality and the use of colors from the nuances of natural clay.



The Sahara centre

Laghouat



Figure 18. Nurse

The existence of the architectural elements of neo-Moorish architecture such as: the cupola, the minaret, the arches, and the faience decoration.

Ghardaia



Figure 19. School

The existence of the architectural elements of the architecture MOZABITE which is characterized by: simplicity, purism, sobriety and its trapezoidal minaret.

Illizi



Figure 20. An Ophthalmological dispensary

Tamanrasset



Figure 21. Bank

The Sahara west

Bechar



Figure 22.

The existence of the architectural elements of the neo-Moorish architecture such as: the cupola, the minaret, with the local character that manifests itself especially at the level of Saharian decorative motifs such as the triangle.

Ttindouf



Figure 23.

Adrar



Figure 24. The hotel of the red oasis

The diversity of Saharan architecture in Algeria influences the French to design a variant and unique colonial architecture, this architecture was inspired by the traditional Algerian Saharan architecture and the other sub-Saharan African and more specifically the Sudanese Saharan architecture of the large Sudan currently Mali, This architecture was very developed by the French.

## 7. Results of the morpho-stylistic analysis of the Saharan colonial public facades

The preliminary results obtained from the morpho-stylistic analysis of the facades indicate that the neo-Moorish style that prevailed in the treatment of public buildings in northern Algeria differs from that adopted in the south of the country.

In addition, there is not only a unique style but there are several styles that characterize the vast Saharan territory. Based on this analysis, we have found some constants and observed variations between the main Saharan regions.

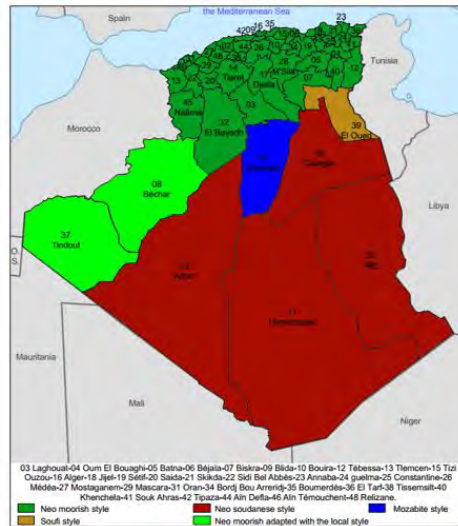


Figure 25. Stylistic map of Algeria Source: the authors

The constants: the existence of the architectural elements of the neo-Moorish style as the cupolas and the bow.

Stylistic variations

The Saharan territory can be divided into five stylistic regions:

1- The neo-Moorish style that resembles the neo-Moorish found in northern Algeria

2-The Sufi style that characterizes the architecture of El Oued, we find that

All villages are similar, but all have their own stamp

And their particular characteristics that are manifested by the use of vaults and cupolas.

3-The Mozabite style that characterizes the architecture of Ghardaia, which is characterized by: simplicity, purism, sobriety, and its trapezoidal minaret.

4-The Neo-Moorish Saharan style which is characterized by its local aspect inspired by traditional architecture, architectural elements found at the ksour level.

5-The Neo-Sudanese style which is characterized by the use of: against strong, the heavy conical shape, the monumentality, the use and the nuance of the colors of the natural clay used. This stylistic appearance at the level of most Saharan cities and especially the sub-Saharan cities is shown by one reason: there was not a strong civilization because the majority of peoples who occupied the Sahara are nomads, and the France has succeeded in imposing this style to fix the population of nomadism towards sedentarization must be occupied and provide security to live in prestige and without claim.

## 8. Conclusion

We can conclude that the most dominant style and which defines the Saharan institutional architecture in relation to the surface of the Saharan territory is the Neo-Sudanese style, so we take as an example the city of Ouargla, the former capital of Oasis territory.

### Sudanese Ouargla

Ouargla was the capital of the oasis territory, twice as large as France. This modern city has become an administrative city par excellence, thanks to the institutional colonial architecture Ouargla carries a unique and original architectural style called the carbillet stylistic creation style to expose them to colonial exhibitions it is a cross between several traditional styles including the Arabic style, the Berber style, and the Sudanese style inspired Sudanese mosques with a specific touch that is the use of the sign of Tanmit modified by the colonel carbillet. All this with a more modern design and realization with the help of a local workforce to keep the Saharan architecture. This architectural genius helps the success of the French colonial city in the desert. Colonel Carbetti regretted the imagination and the thought of creation according to exogenous styles like neo-classical Baroque because he saw that it will not work with the local architectural identity and it will result a heterogeneous colonial city and not homogeneous. He tried to design the new without shaving the old one. It's the best synthesis between the traditional and the modern.



Figure 26. Country of the African Sub-Sahara



Figure 27. Entrance portico of the Pink Market of Bamako (postcard, 1929)



Figure 28. Decoration of a native door the sign of Tanit



Figure 29. Portrait du colonel carbillet



Figure 30. La porte carbillet à Ouargla source: archive of white fathers of ksar deouargla

## 9. References

Béguin, F. (1983). *Arabisances: Décor architectural et tracé urbain en Afrique du Nord 1830-1950*. Paris: Dunod.

Hammouda-Kalloum, K. (n.d.). Urban architecture to adrar, imposed model or aesthetic sought? An architecture that does not say its name. *Archimag*. Retrieved from [www.archimag.com](http://www.archimag.com)

National Archives of Overseas Aix en Provence Marseille

The archive of the popular municipal assemblies (APC) of some Saharan cities.