New Perspectives on the Voyage of Eugène Delacroix to North Africa: Jews and Arabs Together

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What can be said that is new about Eugène Delacroix’s famous trip to Morocco in 1832 with the diplomatic envoy of the Comte de Mornay sent to finalize a treaty with Sultan Abd er-Rahman? Following on investigations of the new scholarship of the last fifteen years since the bicentennial of his birth in 1998 and particularly the work of Maurice Arama, Albert Boime, Michèle Hannoosh, Barthélemy Jobert, and Arlette Sérullaz, this essay focuses on the personal relationships, often with less well-known figures, that the French artist made during his time in North Africa. These recent studies, taken as a whole, have revealed a more nuanced image of Delacroix. Through these new perspectives it seems that, despite his Orientalism, Delacroix discovered and reconstructed « a world of tolerance » as described by Arama, which, to a certain degree, was not wholly Orientalist, despite strategic inclusions and absences, i.e. the active presence of the non-dit.

First, Delacroix discovered the Jews of North Africa, something that he hardly knew. And then he realized that they cohabitated with the Arabs. Not on equal footing of course, but they lived together according to certain limits. For example, the Jews were required to remove their shoes when they walked near a mosque, etc. Noting much of this, Delacroix transformed what he saw in North Africa through his sketches and his grand paintings. Focused on this

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personal approach, this essay will re-examine the process by which the artist transcended a purely Orientalist vision by connecting with individuals at certain moments. Through his personal relationships he confronted different cultures differently, and therefore represented them differently than did many of his contemporaries, particularly with regard to the roles of women. So, given this dynamic of personalization and co-existence, who were the principle characters of his voyage who shaped his vision both virtual and physical? These figures include Charles-Henri Delacroix, Charles de Mornay, Jacques-Denis Delaporte, William Auriol Drummond-Hay and his family, Abraham ben Chimol and his family, Mohammed ben Abou, and Victor Poirel and his family.

The Glory of the Napoleonic Vision and the Drama of the Opera

Before leaving for North Africa, Delacroix had dreamed of an «Orient imaginaire,» that is to say a vision of Napoleonic military exploits. For Delacroix the dream of the East began with the stories of Charles-Henri Delacroix (1779-1845), Delacroix’s oldest brother and a war hero in Napoleon’s armies. Thanks to the legacy of their father, the Minister of Foreign Affairs under Napoleon, the young Delacroix boys had heard the family stories of the glorious Empire. As the younger Delacroix once said, «…et si je n’ai pas vaincu pour la patrie, au moins peindrai-je pour elle…»² In the mythologies of grand armies, Eugene, like Stendhal, revered the Napoleonic glory in comparison with the monotony of their contemporary existence as they perceived it.

The voyage to North Africa in 1832 offered the artist the opportunity to recreate a Napoleonic expedition anew, something that he had dreamed of early in his youth.³ As soon as he arrived


in Morocco, he wrote, «Je suis dans ce moment comme un homme qui rêve et qui’il craint de voir lui échapper...» In his Napoleonic fantasy, Delacroix had exchanged the modern world for an «antiquité vivante.» He had found a classical world which overturned his contemporary one. Thus his understanding of the Maghreb already represented several layers of its existence and thanks to that he was able to see a world that was both changing and unchanged. In this sense, through his search for Antiquity, his Napoleonic fantasy, and his expressed doubts about French colonialism, we begin to see that his perspectives were not always strictly Orientalist in nature.

These stories of military bravery were perhaps equaled only by the nostalgia for a lost dramatic youth which Delacroix felt as a young man. Nonetheless the opportunity to recast that lot came not from the battlefield, but from the stage. Delacroix was first invited to join the expedition to Morocco by Henri Duponchel, a friend from Pierre Guérin’s atelier and later, director of the Paris Opera. Duponchel himself had been asked by his lover, the celebrated Mademoiselle Mars (Anne-Françoise Salvetat, 1779-1847), to include Delacroix. Theater compensated for an almost lost reality.

The Diplomatic Vision: The World of the «Good Consuls»

Who commanded the voyage? The Count de Mornay (1803-1878) led the expedition from January to July 1832. His French translator of Arabic was Antoine-Jerome Desgranges (who enjoyed smoking cigars with Delacroix). Desgranges was not particularly competent with the Arabic spoken in Morocco, nor could the Moroccans understand him very well either. De Mornay, ever suspicious of the locals, wanted to keep Desgranges at his side at all times, but soon after their arrival in Tangier, it was necessary to call the Jewish interpreter, Abraham ben Chimol, from the Maison de France «en cas d’urgence.» Ben Chimol’s personal participation in the sojourn was to be so vital for Delacroix.

When Delacroix arrived in Morocco he found himself in another world and wrote,

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Even when they were first received by Jacques-Denis Delaporte (1777-1861), Vice-consul at the Maison de France and translator, there were already problems. Delaporte was « dans une position très fausse» with regard to his colleagues, but he valued « l’estime de la cour de Maroc, des Maures, des juifs et les chrétiens… » Delaporte wrote, « …quoique je n’aie reçu de votre Excellence aucune instruction positive de la part que je dois prendre dans cette mission, ni sur le rôle que je dois y remplir, je veux offrir au comte de Mornay les conseils de l’expérience qui pourront aider à la réussite de sa mission… »

Delaporte received the delegation of Mornay on January 25, 1832 assisted by his wife, Angela Regini Delaporte. Delacroix enjoyed them and even made a portrait of her on the return trip to Tangier in May 1832. They all reunited on other occasions in France in 1834, 1849, and 1850. The Tangier home of the consul was especially interesting to Delacroix because of its Moorish exterior and European interior. Here in the privacy of the consulate, Madame Delaport felicitated the possibility of drawing Moorish models, something shocking to most.

Delacroix was well acquainted with diplomatic world through his dear friend Félix Guillemardet (1796-1840) whose father had been Ambassador to Spain under the Directoire. In spite of the rigorous rules of this diplomatic protocol, since Delacroix had made the trip «à ses frais,» the young artist was able to circulate relatively

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7 Ibid. p. 69, note 12.
freely through the city. His first real initiator to this new and exotic culture was Edward William Auriol Drummond-Hay (1785-1845), the English consul at Tangier and his wife Louisa, their daughter Louisa Drummond-Hay Nordling (1813-1892), and their son, John Drummond-Hay (1816-1893). De Mornay, as always, was suspicious of them and warned:

« L’Angleterre a les yeux ouverts sur toutes nos démarches. Elle craint notre agrandissement sur le littoral de la Méditerranée…Vous savez à quel point la politique anglaise est habile à faire naître les occasions d’étendre le bras sur ce qui est à sa convenance en se couvrant du masque d’une officieuse médiation ».

On the other hand Delaporte described De Mornay as a man «avare et avide.» Despite this in-fighting and apparent jealousy, Delacroix, by contrast, saw these men in a different light:

«… Les bons consuls [sont] gens blasés dès longtemps sur les émotions du pays…étaient toute étonnés de mes transports d’admiration… [They live in] une maison anglaise dans toutes ses parties, offrant la nudité et aussi le confortable d’une petite maison d’Oxford Street…»

Delacroix tells us in his journal that he had toured Tangier several times with Sir Drummond-Hay and had asked him questions about Arabian horses in particular. Later in his Journal of March 2, he recalled, «Promenade avec M. Hay. Dîné chez lui le soir…» Drummond-Hay’s twenty-year old daughter, Louise, seems to have intrigued the French artist---aged thirty-three---and on February 29, 1832 he makes a confession. Once again writing to his friend Pierret, the artist admitted to «un petit amour sentimental que je file ici avec une très jolie et décente petite Anglaise.» Given the strict rules

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8 Arama, Voyage initiatique, p. 16.
regarding women in the Islamic world, and given his own personal character, Delacroix seems to have become enamored of her and even gave her a drawing signed on February 21, « Chez M. Hay le soir. Donné à sa fille le dessin de femme maure assise...»14 His first visions of the Moroccan landscape were certainly viewed from their residence where he had spent a lot of time: « la terrasse du Consul anglais. dessiné la vue de la ville de chez lui... » (such as the watercolor, «View of Tangier,» Musée du Louvre, Paris).

The son, John Drummond-Hay (1816-1893), who was sixteen years old when Delacroix visited their house in Tangier, published a book in 1844 about his own life in Morocco. In his personal account he gave descriptions of the countryside in Morocco and made a very detailed commentary on the thunderous, equestrian ritual, the *fantasia*. One can imagine that this kind of fascinating scene, viewed by Delacroix several times on the trip from Tangier to Meknes, was discussed at the house of the «good consuls,» the Drummond-Hays, even before the artist actually saw it for himself.

14 Hannoosh, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 211.
Among the Jews

But the personages the closest to Delacroix during his voyage to Morocco were a Jewish man, Abraham ben Chimol, and an Arab man, Mohammed ben Abou. These men Delacroix saw almost every day while he was in Morocco and through them he saw the exotic world around him in a much more personal way. For Delacroix the immediate effect of these personal relationships transformed or at least modified the Orientalist vision of Morocco which most Europeans embraced and which permanently affixed the Other in the exotic past.

For Delacroix, Abraham ben Chimol and his family represented the Jewish world in Morocco, a world of both the present and future, through meetings with different generations of their family, and of the past, through visits to family gravesites. Ben Chimol was the drogman at the Maison de France and held the monopoly on the leather exportation trade from Morocco. His family included his wife Saada, daughter Precidia, and daughter-in-law Rachel. His cousin David Azencourt was also a drogman attached to the Maison de France at Tangier. All the drogmen in Tangier were Jewish and constituted an elite, educated group, « Des Maures de distinction » as Delacroix called them.15

Ramadan had begun when Delacroix arrived and with everything shut down, there was precious little to do in the city of about 5,000. The first Saturday after his arrival Delacroix was cordially invited by Ben Chimol to the small family synagogue to celebrate with them Michpatim, the order given to Moses to go up on the mountain to receive the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.16 After the ceremony, the Frenchman was warmly invited to come to dinner with Ben Chimol family, and then to visit the family cemetery, beside the family tanning business, where the Jews could practice their faith in relative peace. In short Delacroix was immediately taken on as a virtual if temporary member of the Ben Chimol family. Delacroix described Ben Chimol as « Un riche Juif de Tanger, attaché au consulat [of France]…tous nos traits d’esprit…suait sang et eau pour traduire d’arabe en français et retour de français en

16 Arama, Voyage initiatoire, pp. 122-123.
arabe, des phrases de parfaite satisfaction, d’estime mutuelle… »

Nonetheless, De Mornay remained suspicious of Ben Chimol who effectively replaced Desgranges. De Mornay complained,

« J’était à peine arrivé à Tanger que j’avais reçu la réclamation du négociant Abraham Benchimol. Il m’a remis en outre une note que j’ai l’honneur de faire passer à Votre Excellence. J’ai examiné attentivement ses registres et ses droits, je crois tout incontestable… La position de cet homme et sa conduite recente mérite quelque intérêt. Dernièrement sa position d’interprète du consulat l’a mis à même de connaître les difficultés survenues entre la France et le Maroc et, malgré les instances réitérées de ses créanciers, il s’est toujours refusé à faire aucune démarche vis-à-vis de l’empereur, pour ne pas entraver les négociations. »

Delacroix had a decidedly different view given the open door chez les Ben Chimols which conveniently included the possibility of drawing some « compliant » Jewish models.

Delacroix was also invited to a Jewish wedding (February 21) at the home of Abraham which was only short distance from the Maison de France. The ritual, which was to last a minimum of seven days, he sketched in ethnographic details which included Moors, Jews, and Christians. But the final painting by Delacroix represents only Ben Chimol (in a black burnous), Ben Abou, Azencourt, and Pascha, among others. Curiously enough, De Mornay and Desgranges were present at the wedding, but were carefully eliminated from the final painting. Delacroix empathized with the Jewish hosts who had been so welcoming from the very beginning and wrote, «…chez les juifs qui vivent sous de dures contraintes dont l’effet est de resserrer entre eux les liens qui les unissent et de conserver plus de force à leurs traditions antiques, les grands événements de la vie sont marqués par des actes extérieurs qui se rattachent aux usages les plus anciens.»

Furthermore he describes visiting a Jewish cemetery which, contrary to the stereotype of the « Juifs réputés impurs », he found to be a place of peace and respected sanctuary,

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17 Ibid., p. 117.
18 Ibid.
« On côtoie dans ce lieu le cimetière des Juifs, dernier asile où leur dépouille, du moins, n’est point inquiétée...la forme de ces tombes est différente dans chacun de ces endroits, quoiqu’elles soient toutes semblables dans chaque localité. Elles n’offrent aucun signe particulier...Cette nudité, cette uniformité impose le respect...l’idée de leur isolement... »

Elsewhere the artist writes,

« ...ce qu’il faut dire à leur louange c’est qu’une position si contrainte et si malheureuse ne fait que renforcer entre eux ce lien puissant qui fait encore l’unité de cette singulière nation, toujours si vivante au milieu des ruines de ses tyrans et de ses persécuteurs. Placé hors de la loi commune chez ces maîtres jaloux, le juif retrouve une patrie sous son toit et au milieu de sa famille... »

Clearly his sympathies were engaged by these personal encounters and histories. On March 3, 1832 the French expedition departed Tangier and set out for Meknes. In route the painter seems to have been more at ease in the company of the Jews and Arabs who assisted the delegation. While his principal hosts in Tangier were Delaporte, Drummond-Hay, and Ben Chimol, on the voyage to Meknes he was also often in the company of Mohammed ben Abou, the stern commander of the Moroccan cavalry. And upon his arrival in Meknes, Delacroix was welcomed to the house of Raphael Menahem Ha-Sarfati, the rabbi of Meknes, whose portrait was drawn by the artist. There Delacroix celebrated Pourim, an episode in the Old Testament story of Esther and Mordecai which in 1850 became the subject of a now lost painting. At the request of the Emperor, a special group of Jewish musicians was sent to the Sarfati house. At first Delacroix did not like the new sounds---«Dans la musique qu’Abou nous fit faire il étudiait sur nos figures l’effet de la surprise...»---and he found them to be «fatigants.» In critiques of Delacroix’s painting, The Jewish Musicians of Mogador (1843?, Musée du Louvre, Paris) inspired by this encounter, Théophile Thoré and Théophile Gautier described

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20 Ibid., p. 293.
21 Ibid., p. 288.
22 Arama, Voyage initiatique, p. 146, note 12.
the exotic scene in visual and acoustical terms. But Delacroix saw things quite differently observing in his Journal, « C’est pitié de voir ces jolies Juives posant partout leur pieds nus et mignons et portant à la main leurs petits mules rouges… » and « Sujétion des juifs et cependant vivent en bonne intelligence avec les Maures… » In an article which he published ten years later, he commented again with a sympathetic tone when he spoke of,

« Les pauvre juifs, comme on le pense, sont les premières et les plus constantes victimes de ces exactions [the absolute authority of the kaids]. Aussi cachent-ils avec grand soin leur richesse sous l’extérieur le plus simple… »

When he returned from Meknes, he was once again welcomed in the homes of his Jewish friends. There was also an exceptional reception on April 29 with a startling commemorative page written by Jamila Bouzalgo (circled in red) in Judeo-Spanish (Delacroix signed it in Latin) in a « global » spirit as a souvenir of the evening. While De Mornay always complained about Ben Chimol, Delacroix sided with the Jews and protested against their restrictions. He noted,

« Ils ne pouvaient aller que pieds nus sous peine de bastonnades. Leurs femmes ne sont pas le moins du monde affranchies de ces dures conditions…Il faut que ces charmantes créatures se déchaussent toutes les fois… »

For him they were “les perles d’Eden,” a perception perhaps equally Orientalist, but clearly more empathetic.

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24 Ibid., p. 308.
25 Ibid., p. 312.
27 Arama, Voyage initiatique, pp. 122-123.
28 Beaumont-Maillet et al., op. cit., p. 146.
Maurice Arama has brilliantly pointed out that in Delacroix’s painting, *A Street in Tangier* (1832, Albright-Knox Gallery), represents a world of unexpected tolerance revealed in the scene identified by Arama as a street in Tangier and not Meknes. The scene includes a Ríian (an indigenous Berber in white burnous), an Arab at the door, and a Jewess and her child at the extreme left. As Arama has documented, the polygonal star is similar to one found in Tangier (i.e. the Hindu Star of Lakshmi, with its eight forms of riches). The model for the Ríian was a bodyguard at the Consulate of France and the woman (Preciada) was the wife of Abraham ben Chimol. The presence of the child unambiguously establishes the proper moral standing of the barefooted woman. Arama has shown that Delacroix would never portray a Jewish woman alone instead representing her

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29 Arama, *Voyage initiatique*, p. 102.
in fact as a very discreet lady and not a woman of the street. In short the painting, as Arama unveils it, represents a utopian world or at least one of some tolerance (Rifian-Arab-Jew-Hindu).

Delacroix wrote to Henri Duponchel on February 23, « Les juives sont très-bien aussi et leur costume est très-pittoresque. J’ai assisté à plusieurs cérémonies; il y a à faire des tableaux à chaque coin de rue.» Later he dedicated one of his sketchbooks – now found in Chantilly – to Jewish women. In these details of the everyday life of the Jews of Morocco and the relationship between the Jews and the Arabs he reconstructed a vision of the Jews of the Orient just as he would for Arabs of North Africa. In both instances, he would do this primarily through personal relationships. But there remained a daunting challenge for him with the Arabs: there was no or little access to Arab women!

Kaid Sidi Mohammed ben Abou ben Abdelmalek (c. 1775?-1858?) was the commander of the Moroccan cavalry who was the overseer of the French expedition from Tangier to Meknes where they were to have an official audience with the Sultan. This three-month expedition required 200 soldiers armed to the teeth and was comprised of both French and Moroccan delegations. After their departure for Meknes, it seems that Delacroix was constantly in the presence of the Kaid. The artist made more images of Ben Abou than of any other single person on the entire trip, a witness to the hours and respect which Delacroix reserved for him. At the very least there are some eight paintings and nine prints, watercolors, and drawings which include the Kaid!

Twelve years after the voyage to Morocco Delacroix recalled his old traveling companion and likened the Kaid and his men to ancient Romans, « Les soldats à cheval ressemblant aux soldats romains. Kaïd de 15, kaïd de 50 etc. » In his horsemanship and behavior the Kaid was a true warrior who always carried a sabre with a square handle. Delacroix continued, «la beauté de Ben Abou dans les courses...Renverse toutes nos idées modernes d’un guerrier. Le général chez nous a une tenue du plus calme. Une petite épée qu’il

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ne tire jamais... »\textsuperscript{32} There are constant references to Ben Abou in Delacroix’s journals from the trip and, tellingly, many of these stories were repeated in his much later \textit{Souvenirs} including, « L’aventure de Ben Abou dans la course…Son humeur au camp…Le dîner avec Abou et l’envie de rire…»\textsuperscript{33} Not surprisingly, Drummond-Hay also described the Kaid as if he were a soldier of the army of ancient Rome:

« ...he was about six feet three in height, and of a Herculean frame...His features were very marked; a prominent Roman nose and massive jaw, with eyes like a lion; his shaggy locks hung beneath his turban over each ear. The general expression of this countenance was that of a stern tyrant, but in conversation with those he liked, he face beamed with good humour, and he had a pleasant, kind manner…very intelligent, and not a fanatic… »\textsuperscript{34}

To be sure, there were language difficulties between Delacroix and Ben Abou because the official translator, Antoine Desgranges, was not capable of understanding nor trusting the Kaid. One also doubts that the Kaid spoke much French given that he could not pronounce the name « Delacroix » even after having written it on a piece of paper.\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, the challenge of verbal communication did not keep the soldier and the artist from meeting almost daily, even during those first days in Tangier.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{34} Drummond-Hay (J.), \textit{A Memoir of Sir John Drummond-Hay}, J. Murray, London, 1896, pp. 185-186.
\textsuperscript{35} Hannoosh, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. I, p. 228.
It is probable that the painting of the Arab in the Cemetery was intended as an homage to Ben Abou and his family. Under the title, *Guerrier près d’un tombeau*, it was refused at the Salon de 1839. Nonetheless, in addition to physical resemblances, the inclusion of the special square-handled saber that Ben Abou carried, and the fact that Delacroix listed the painting in the 1840s as *Ben-Abou auprès d’un tombeau*, there are other reasons to believe that this is Ben Abou at his family tomb. The Kaid seems likely to have shown the family tomb to his French visitor given the large number of Moorish cemeteries the artist describes. It is possible that the scene represents a site dedicated to one of Ben Abou’s ancestors who had been killed by the British under King Charles II. The sacred site, called «Mujahidin» or «Warriors of the Faith», was only two miles outside

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of Tangier. This quiet painting, which witnesses to the tradition of the single isolated tomb (so different from those of the Jews), marked a sharp contrast with the fanaticism of *The Convulsionnaires of Tangier* (1838, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis) which Delacroix had observed while hiding in an attic overlooking the riotous street and later painted.

Delacroix also leaves us his commentary on the Arab cemeteries which he sees very differently from the Jewish cemeteries. In his *Souvenirs* he explains,

« Le vendredi, nous voyions…les femmes…strictement voilées, visiter les tombeaux dans la campagne…ces dames se servaient de ce pretext pour conduire très habilement certaines intrigues où la dévotion n’avait point de part. On serait presque tenté de dire, pour les excuser, que la vue de ces tombeaux n’a rien de funèbre et inspire plutôt des idées riantes. »

Drummond-Hay (father) and Ben Abou knew each other through diplomatic exchanges of course, but their real friendship grew out of their mutual love of horses. When Sir John Drummond-Hay (son) composed his own memoirs in 1896, he devoted a chapter to «Benabu» *sic* in which he included a letter that he had written to his sister (Louisa?) in December 1857. In this letter he spoke of his older Moroccan friend who had fallen on hard times. Drummond-Hay recounts a story that when Ben Abou had been arrested by some political rivals, the old warrior even asked his English friend for help.

The most dramatic events which Delacroix shared on the trip with Ben Abou took place near Alcassar El Kebir. Delacroix wrote on March 7: « Passé la soirée avec Abou dans notre tente. Conversation sur les chevaux. » And then on March 8, the « …jeux de poudre sans fin… Un homme perce la foule des soldats et vient tirer à notre nez. Il est saisi par Abou. Sa fureur…Mon effroi. Nous courrons. Le sabre était déjà tiré, etc. » And then on March 10 at El-Arba

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de Sidi Eisa Bellasen: « Fait une visite à Ben-Abou….Il nous a dit que l’empereur courait q[ue] fois la poudre…»\textsuperscript{42} Evoking the Napoleonic vision which had preceded the voyage, they crossed the Sébou river:

« Le caïd ; turban à la mamelouk…Un des chefs dans une course étant arrivé jusqu’à nous, Abou s’est mis au devant de lui et l’homme lui a déchiré un peu son manteau. Arrivé au campement, Abou a déchiré en pièces son manteau, voulant plutôt le brûler que de permettre que qui que ce soit pût en profiter. On lui a aussi cassé sa pipe. Il était furieux… »\textsuperscript{43}

On March 22 having arrived at Meknes he wrote, « Le général en chef de la cavalerie, accroupi devant la porte des écuries… » And then he speaks yet another time of Ben Abou during the return trip to Tangier on April 8: « Abou a dîné avec nous. »\textsuperscript{44} The next day he gives a description of the ritual of the offering of milk which would become the subject of his painting, \textit{The Offering of Milk to the Kaid} (1837, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes): « Le lait offert par les femmes…D’abord le lait aux porte-drapeaux qui ont trempé le bout du doigt. Ensuite au kaïd et aux soldats… »\textsuperscript{45} and again near Tangier on April 12: «Plus près de la ville, les enfants sont venus complimenter Abou, qui les interrogeait et leur donnait de l’argent.»\textsuperscript{46} On April 28 back in Tangier Delacroix writes, « Abou, le général qui nous a conduits, était l’autre jour assis sur le pas même de la porte… » and then begins a detailed analysis of what he sees as cultural differences:

« Ils doivent concevoir difficilement l’esprit brouillon des chrétiens et leur inquiétude qui les porte aux nouveautés. Nous nous apercevons de mille choses qui manquent à ces gens-ci. Leur ignorance fait leur calme et leur bonheur ; nous-mêmes sommes nous à bout de ce qu’une civilisation plus avancée peut produire ?
Ils sont plus près de la nature de mille manières…Aussi

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 233.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 234.
la beauté s’unit à tout ce qu’ils font. Nous autres dans nos corsets,...nous faisons pitié. La grâce se venge de notre science. »

Seemingly consumed by these new ideas embodied in the personage of Ben Abou, Delacroix returns to this scene several times in his *Journal*, his *Correspondance*, and in his later *Souvenirs*. But Delacroix also recognized the humanity of Ben Abou in finding his faults and weaknesses above all with women. Delacroix noted:

« Les femmes sont pour eux des espèces d’animaux… La condition de la femme dans ce pays, comme dans tous les pays orientaux, est très inférieure à celle des hommes. Cependant ils sont susceptibles d’amour. Je me rappelle la mélancolie que ressentait un des domestiques qui nous avait accompagnés à Meknez, de se trouver séparé de sa femme. Le kâid Ben Abou lui-même, comme nous l’avons fait remarquer paraissait singulièrement épris de la femme que l’empereur lui avait donnée à Meknez et qu’il ramenait avec lui… Cependant après notre retour de Meknez, nous entendîmes dire par la ville que la femme d’Abou avait été fort courroucée et fort désespérée de l’intrusion de sa rivale. Peut-être même sa jalousie était-elle même augmentée par la circonstance qu’elle avait fixé quelque temps l’auguste chef des croyants, circonstance qui pour nous n’avait rien de piquant, et peut-être était-ce la seule qui aux yeux de Ben Abou fit pencher la balance en sa faveur. »

In the final painting of the key moment of the diplomatic expedition, the official meeting with the Sultan, Delacroix shows the Sultan Moulay Abd-er-Rahman at Meknes with Ben Abou and two ministers. The painting is perhaps an ironic example of Delacroix’s technique of direct observation and the imaginative elevation of his subject. Apparently with Delacroix’s permission, the exhibition catalogue boldly declares,

« Le tableau reproduit exactement le cérémonial d’une audience à laquelle l’auteur a assisté, en mars 1832...A la droite de l’Empereur sont deux des ses ministres...Le personnage le plus en avant, et qui tourne le dos au spectateur,

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est le Kaïd Mohammed ben-Abou, un des chefs militaires les plus considérés… »

In the sketch of the scene from 1832-33 (Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon) the images of Ben Chimol and Ben Abou are shown together with the French as they were when they shared in the joyful co-habitation in the ritual depicted in *The Jewish Wedding* (1841, Musée du Louvre, Paris). But in both of the final paintings, the French presence has been eliminated revealing a sad truth: this cultural harmony, whatever its imbalances, would not last forever.

**The Power of the French Colonial Vision: Victor Poirel at Algiers**

For the second stage of their voyage to North Africa the French delegation was received in Algiers from June 25 to June 28, 1832 by Léopold-Victor Poirel (1804-1881), the chief royal engineer of the port there and «amateur de peinture.» Two years after the visit Poirel married Lisinka Poirel (1808-1885), an artist and former student of Delacroix. A scholar as well as engineer, Victor Poirel later wrote *Mémoire sur le travaux à la mer…* in 1841 and *Essai sur…Machiavel…* in 1869; and *Pour nos écoliers: poésies* published posthumously in 1907. Another former student of Delacroix, Charles Cournault (1815-1904), an artist and later conservator at the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Nancy, visited Algeria in 1840 and 1843. In his will Delacroix bequeathed Cournault «deux coffres du Maroc, et tous les objets d’Algérie…» Cournault gives a titillating, but suspicious report on Delacroix’s visit with Poirel to more secret places and things in Algeria:

« …Pour la première fois, il pénètre dans un univers réservé: celui de femmes algériennes…Le monde, qu’il a découvert au Maroc et que ses croquis fixent, est essentiellement masculin et guerrier, virile en un mot…Mais passant du Maroc à l’Algérie, Delacroix franchit en même temps une subtile frontière qui va inverser tous les signes… »


Cournault continues,

« [Delacroix], désireux de visiter l’intérieur d’une maison où il pût dessiner des femmes mauresques, ce qu’il n’avait pu faire à Tanger où il n’avait pénétré que chez les israélites, pria M. Poirel de lui en faciliter les moyens. On fit venir le chaouch de la direction, sorte de factotum qui remplit l’office d’huissier près des administrations. Après de longs pourparlers, M. Poirel obtint de lui qu’il conduirait, clandestinement, Eugène Delacroix dans sa propre maison. »

Cournault reported that with the husband and Poirel, Delacroix crossed through «‘un couloir obscur’au bout duquel s’ouvre, inattendu et baignant dans une lumière presque irréelle, le harem proprement dit. Là, des femmes et des enfants l’attendent ‘au milieu d’un amas de soie et d’or.’ La épouse de l’ancien raïs, jeune et jolie, est assise devant un narguilé…»

Delacroix, according to Poirel as written by Cournault, was «enivré du spectacle.» The artist then made several quick drawings with «une fébrilité de la main, une ivresse du regard…» and recorded the names of the women in the scene. Arama dismisses the salacious reporting of this representation of these «Dames» as sensationalism or worse and gives more detailed evidence about Delacroix’s host, Sid Abdallah, a Minister of the Algerian Navy and not a pirate, as has been mistakenly repeated for many years. All of this supposedly happened on June 26, 1832 and was enabled by the iron-fisted power of colonial authority and this former corsaire (?) or «un renégat»…that is to say a Muslim who had been a Christian. Several critiques of the final painting praised «la peinture pure.» But Balzac and Baudelaire (1846) found other more disturbing things: «Ce petit poème d’intérieur, plein de repos et de silence…exhale, je ne sais quel haut parfum de mauvais lieu…la tristesse…»

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52 Djebar, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.
53 Ibid., p. 17.
54 Arama, *Voyage initiatiqute*, pp. 263 ff.
As did Delaporte and his wife, Victor Poirel and his wife Lisinka met Delacroix again much later in Paris. Surely there were many retellings of this extraordinary and secretly dreamlike vision in the interior of the Muslim world. Or was it that? Was Delacroix duped by an untrustworthy ex-pirate who brought the Frenchman to a low-class house of prostitution which included his own wife? Or was it prejudiced authors who later orientalized the depiction of these women into «a harem»? What can we believe about Sid Abdallah? How can we know?57

Ten years later, The Jewish Wedding was commissioned by the Count Maison, a military colonel who then refused to accept the painting. The booklet of the Salon of 1841 explained the scene in the following way:

« Les Maures et les Juifs sont confondus. La mariée est enfermée dans des appartements intérieurs, tandis qu’on se réjouit dans le reste de la maison. Des Maures de distinctions donnent de l’argent pour des musiciens qui jouent de leurs instruments et chantent sans discontinuer le jour et la nuit; les femmes sont les seules qui prennent part à la danse… »58

The notations in Delacroix’s sketchbooks on February 21, 1832 were fragmented and impressionistically peppered with observations. And then in the Magasin pittoresque (January 1842) the artist wrote more flowingly:

« Dans la cour de la maison se presse une foule immense; les galéries supérieures, les chambres, les escaliers, sont livrés aux invités, qui se composent de presque toute la ville. A l’une de ces noces, où j’allai comme tout le monde, je trouvai le passage sur la rue et l’intérieur de la cour tellement encombrés, que j’eus toutes les peines du monde à pénétrer… »59

What is most telling is that here again, as in the final painting of The Sultan of Morocco (1845, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse) the Frenchmen, including De Mornay, who were present at the ceremony,

have been erased from the scene! Another *non-dit*! Given that there were Arabs and Jews assembled here together and that Delacroix had been so warmly welcomed by Ben Chimol and instructed by Ben Abou, one sees, according to Albert Boime, a dialectic between romantic exoticism and realism. Here in *The Jewish Wedding* is found a ritualized space (the choice of the husband is made by the father), a domesticated space, whereas by contrast, *The Women of Algiers* (1834, Musée du Louvre, Paris) represents a space secretly, but perhaps mythically penetrated and sexualized; one location constructed as a space of harmony and the other a forbidden space! The wedding scene is a space shared by Jews and Arabs, but divided according to gender. The ambiances (unlike the sketches) are idealized and, according to Boime, the painter places himself in the role of the astonished, but slightly condescending scribe who regards the «lascivious» movements of the female dancer with surprise due to the Orientalist presumption of such «mauvais goût» from the European point of view.  

Nevertheless Delacroix is welcomed there by Ben Chimol almost as part of the family. By contrast, for *The Women of Algiers* it was necessary to call upon the brute force of the French colonial power---which remains invisible---in order to enter. According to Boime, Delacroix, as a «foreign flaneur,» observed and understood at least some of the colonial problems and sympathized with the Arabs and the Jews whom he had met, but at the same time he clearly maintained his masculine, European perspective. *The Women of Algiers* thus is completely different from *The Jewish Wedding* thanks to and because of the artist’s personal relationships. The access and entry offered by Victor Poirel and the French administration, the colonial power, could indeed force open the door to secret rituals, but it was hardly «une porte ouverte»!

**The Vision of the Year 1845**

A decade later these worlds had been turned upside down. In the painting *The Sultan of Morocco*, we see the Sultan leaving his palace at Meknes surrounded by his guards and chief officers. Why

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did Delacroix return in 1841 to his memories of Morocco some ten years or so after his voyage and after his utopian scene, *A Street in Tangier* of 1832? At that time in the early 1830s, kind messages and lavish gifts had been presented from Louis Philippe to Moulay Abd-er-Rahman who returned the favor. But in the 1840s along with returning to the *fantasia* paintings, Delacroix begins to reflect on his experiences in North Africa and « la prison de marbre » as he called Meknes. He could show the *The Jewish Wedding* in 1841 as a scene of tolerance and harmony only by eliminating the Frenchmen who attended the wedding at Ben Chimol’s home, but soon even that construction of a tolerant vision, which had been so ideally represented by *A Street in Tangier* in 1832, was not longer possible in the unsettled context of the 1840s. During the interim there is a long list of confrontations between France and North Africa including the taking of Algiers in 1830, the seizing of the *smalah* of the revered Arab resistance leader, Abd el-Kader (May 16, 1843), the bombardment of Tangier (August 6, 1844), the victory of the French at the Battle of Isly (August 14, 1844), the bombardment of Mogador (August 15, 1844), and the demeaning spectacle of the captured tent of the Prince du Maroc in the Tuileries (a subject painted by Karl Girardet in 1845). French forces under the command of General Bugeaud were in hot pursuit of Abd el-Kader by 1842 and eventually captured him in 1847. Personally for Delacroix, the year of 1845 also marked the sad moments that he lost his brother, Charles Delacroix, and his friend, Drummond-Hay, and his own degenerating health obliged him to take the hydrotherapeutic treatments at Eaux-Bonnes in southwestern France.

And so for many reasons, one can understand that he returned to his subject, *The Sultan of Morocco*, completely disillusioned by the events of the period. In his *Souvenirs* he wrote again in fragmented notations: « Plus j’ai vu les hommes plus je les ai trouvés pareils dans tous les pays... »

Most of the contemporary critics focused on the colors of the painting, but Eugène Pelletan was struck by the representation of Ben Abou:

« Les personnages du premier plan sont exécutés avec un grand sentiment du dessin […] Mohammed Ben Abou […]

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peut être comparé, comme pose et comme style, aux plus belles figures des grands maîtres...»

However, beyond these color effects, the painting represents an image of power. As one art historian has described it, the Sultan is presented as « the very image of the implacable hostility of an entire culture... » The Sultan is presented as a warrior framed with elements of stability and power. At the Salon of 1845, Delacroix’s painting, a symbolic testament to Moroccan power, was placed in the Salon Carré of the Louvre directly opposite an image of colonial subjugation, *The Taking of the Smala of Abd-el Kader* by Horace Vernet. Soon after the Salon exhibition the painting of the Sultan was exiled to a monastery in Toulouse far from the French capital. Curiously, Delacroix remarked: « Il est bien vrai que ‘l’Empereur du Maroc’ ira à Toulouse; peut-être y est-il déjà. Je ne sais qui a motivé cette décision dont je me réjouis sincèrement. » Why?

The audience with the Sultan was the great official event of the voyage. But during the decades which followed the political relations between the two countries had changed and the painting realized in 1845 (thirteen years later) was greatly modified from the original description. It was no longer possible for Delacroix to « reproduit exactement » the spectacle despite his description in the Salon catalogue. As in the *The Jewish Wedding*, the French are no longer included. Despite yet another French diplomatic delegation being sent to Morocco in 1835, the hostilities between France and North Africa had exploded. As several scholars have shown, the French, who are included in the sketch (Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon) at the side of their former allies, are eliminated from the final work, another example of the control of the Salon under Louis-Philippe. Equally disturbing is the fact that Abraham ben Chimol is no longer included in the painting or the catalogue because there is no longer any reason to have a translator to communicate the message to and from the

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French delegation. Of the artist’s closest traveling companions, only Ben Abou remains.

There is another telling body of evidence marking these shifting alliances. Delacroix loved the great equestrian spectacle, the Arab _fantasia_, whose changing role in the history of colonization of North Africa was initially seen as symbolic of French frustrations with the powerful Arab resistance. However, after 1845 in this changed context, the _fantasia_ could be viewed as a sign of colonial dominance over a powerful enemy. In fact paintings of the _fantasia_ made by Delacroix were not shown publically in Paris except for one single time before 1845; nonetheless, he and others showed many examples of this scene in the years following, in other words, after the surrender of Kader...yet another form of strategic absence, or _non-dit_. Delacroix had a great knowledge of the Arabian horses thanks to his friends Drummond-Hay et Ben Abou. But he had an equally grand knowledge of the Salon politics of Louis Philippe also, thanks in part to the salons of the “bons consuls” and the campfires of Ben Abou and the home of Ben Chimol. That is a subject for another time and place.\(^{67}\)

**Vaudevillian Vision in the Tuileries**

The imperialist fantasies of Louis Philippe included a public exhibition of the captured spoils from the conflicts in North Africa. Delacroix was devastated and disgusted by the vaudeville-like display of the tent of the Prince of Morocco (along with the royal parasol) in the Tuileries. This humiliating public display, complete with advertising posters and souvenirs, came just at the time when the artist got word of the death of Drummond-Hay which he read about in the obituary published in the _Magasin pittoresque_. According to Arama, with the painting of Sultan Delacroix reconstructed a vision of Morocco and North Africa to rebuke these demeaning exhibitions of the culture of the Mahgreb and to condemn what the artist called

the «susceptibilité nationale» in an article in *Magasin pittoresque.*

One can say that this brief study of the personnages of the voyage permits us to question in new ways how to consider the images so quickly made, sketched, drawn while on horseback along the desert routes or while sitting at a campsite, in the journals which Delacroix carried in his saddlebags. Despite the friendship between Arabs and Jews and the French artist, and even with the translations by Ben Chimol, communication was sometimes difficult, perhaps above all when it concerned specialized questions about equestrian equipment or the objects and rituals of weddings and funerals. It would seem that these men often communicated more easily with gestures, with drawings on paper and in the sand, and even with actual demonstrations during the months that Delacroix spent in Morocco. It is not difficult to imagine that some of the drawings by Delacroix were quickly rendered, awkward, but passionate and personal exchanges of information about the cohabitation of Arab and Jewish cultures.

How then does one represent an enemy who was once claimed as an ally? Here again we see the dialectic between realistic documentation and romantic exoticism, the detailed reporting of what Delacroix saw, or at least thought he saw, and the erasure of any reference to the diplomatic mission. Despite his reputation for being melancholic, closed-minded, self-absorbed, and sometimes isolated (« Je mène une vie sauvage, et vois personne »---he once wrote to his friend George Sand around September 25, 1845), the effect and importance of face to face relationships for him is evident in terms of his encounters with other cultures. Despite his tendency to see markers of ethnicity, he remained loyal to both Ben Abou and Ben Chimol. But the question remains: Within the context of Orientalism, what then is the importance of human contact for the integration of cultures? And how can those of us in the West better understand the Arab world as we re-envision the Jewish and Arab world in Morocco and *vice-versa*? A very important question and one even posed in other terms by Jimmy Carter to Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin as they talked of their grandchildren in 1978.

And that brings us to our conclusions. Through the recent

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scholarship on the work of Delacroix, we have been able to re-envision our perceptions of the world of North Africa through Delacroix’s series of revisions: 1. From his brother and friends, the romantic military dream, 2. From the diplomats, the protocol of official intermediaries, 3. From Abraham ben Chimol, the open door of the Jews, 4. From Mohammed ben Abou, the Arabian horses and Antiquity; and 5. From Victor Poirel, the colonial power…all points of human contact which have the power to transport us not simply to exotic visions of the Other, but to a more empathetic understanding of one another as embodied by Nelson Mandela. Perhaps Rome is no longer in Rome, but humanity is always in humanity, or else we may be only dreaming of a world of tolerance.