Medieval Morocco
An Empire from Africa to Spain

This major exhibition, presented by the Louvre in association with the FNM, Morocco’s national museum foundation, encourages a reassessment of the period from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, when the civilization of Western Islam was at the height of its glory, as much in terms of its artistic production as its place in history. A succession of dynasties - Almoravid, Almohad and Marinid - fashioned a cultural and political space centered on Morocco, gaining control of an empire stretching from sub-Saharan Africa to Andalusian Spain. This empire’s influence, unifying for the first time Islamic communities in the West, was felt as far away as the Near East. Bringing together nearly 300 works, the exhibition includes many of the most beautiful examples of this period’s achievements in areas such as architectural decoration, textiles, ceramics and calligraphy, illustrating this long and complex history, both essential to understanding contemporary Morocco and the very source of its modernity.

“Medieval Morocco” takes visitors on a chronological journey through the Moroccan and Andalusian cultural landscape. For each historical period, special emphasis is given to this civilization’s centers of power and influential capitals, cities of splendor and enlightenment. From Fez to Seville and stopping at Aghmat, Tinmal, Marrakech, Rabat and Córdoba along the way, the exhibition explores the major architectural projects undertaken in these cities and the works created by artists and artisans for them. Celebrated and spectacular masterpieces (such as the bell chandelier from the Qarawiyiin mosque in Fez), recent discoveries, and little-known objects all share the spotlight within this exhibition. Architectural elements (doors, capitals), sacred mosque elements (minbars, ablution fountains, manuscripts) or vestiges of everyday life (ceramics, coins) held in museums, mosques and church treasuries—all offer a fresh perspective on this region of the Islamic world until now almost entirely perceived from the vantage point of Andalusia.

The conquests of these great dynasties took them from the southern edge of the Sahara to the northern reaches of present-day Algeria and Tunisia. The exhibition recognizes this powerful civilization’s position at the center of diplomatic and trade networks, stretching from sub-Saharan Africa to the mercantile capitals of medieval Italy, from the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain to the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt. It also offers an opportunity to emphasize the historical role of Morocco as a birthplace of empires.

Exhibition curators
Chief curators: Yannick Lintz, Director, Department of Islamic Art, Musée du Louvre, Paris and Bahija Simou, Director, Royal Archives, Rabat, Morocco.
Specialist curators: Claire Déléry and Bulle Tuil-Leonetti, Musée du Louvre.
Chronology

The Idrisids (789–927)
789: Arrival of Idris I in Volubilis (near Meknes, Morocco), who founded the Idrisid dynasty, gaining the support of a local Berber tribe, who recognized him as their sovereign.
c. 801: Founding of Fez.
Second half of the 9th century: Founding of the Qarawiyyin mosque in Fez.
c. 1035: Capture of Córdoba by Almanzor.
1090–1094: Abd al-Malik III becomes the Idrisid king of al-Andalus.
1118: Zaragoza, a stronghold of the Almoravid kingdom, falls to Alfonso I of Aragon.
1121: Ibn Tumart founds the Almohad movement in his native Berber village of the Anti-Atlas, later moving to Tun mel, where he proclaims himself as mahdi (“the known and infallible imam”).
1144–1147: General discontent over the Almoravid leadership leads to a series of popular rebellions in Andalusia.

The Almoravids (1049–1147)
c. 1049: The spiritual leader Ibn Yasin gathers his followers in a riba, a retreat and fortress. They became known as the al-Murabitun (“people of the riba”) or the Almoravids, a Spanish derivative of this name.
c. 1070: Founding of Marrakech.
1090–1094: The Almoravids conquer a large portion of the Iberian peninsula by overthrowing the independent Muslim principalities known as taifas.
1118: Zaragoza, a stronghold of the Almoravid kingdom, falls to Alfonso I of Aragon.
1121: Ibn Tumart founds the Almohad movement in his native Berber village of the Anti-Atlas, later moving to Tinmel, where he proclaims himself as mahdi (“the known and infallible imam”).
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The Almohads (1147–1269)
1147: The Christians capture Almeria in Andalusia. The Almohads take control of Marrakech from the Almoravids and begin the construction of the Kutubiyya mosque.
c. 1157: Al-Mansur completes his geography of the world at the court of Roger II, the Norman king of Sicily.
1172–1198: Construction of a new, larger mosque in Seville (Andalusia) and its minaret (the Giraldal).
1195: The Almohads win a great victory over Alfonso VIII of Castile at Alarcos (Castile-La Mancha).
1196: Construction begins on the Hassan mosque in Rabat, intended to become the largest mosque after that of Mecca.
1212: Crushing defeat for the Almohads against a Christian coalition at Las Navas de Tolosa (Andalusia).
1236–1248: Ferdinand III of Castile successfully recaptures the cities of Córdoba, Murcia, Jaén and Seville.

Birth of al-Maghreb al-Aqsa (789–927)
The exhibition opens in the region of al-Maghreb al-Aqsa (“the farthest land of the setting sun”) after its conquest by Arab troops, following the arrival in 789 of a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Idris I. Establishing his settlement in the former Roman colony of Volubilis, he quickly gives rise to a genuinely independent kingdom, that of the Idrisids. Urbanization is well under way during this period in the western Maghreb, reflected in the founding of Fez, which has remained a spiritual and cultural capital of Morocco into the present day. Surviving material evidence is extremely limited and includes silver coins and one of the masterpieces of this first section of the exhibition, the minbar from the Andalous mosque. The new kingdom emerges against the backdrop of a complex regional reality, as evidenced by its coexistence with the kingdom of Sijilmasa in the south, which dominates the gold trade.

The Almoravids: The First amazigh (berber) Empire (1049–1147)
The decline of the Idrisid dynasty in the mid-tenth century sets the stage for the advent of the Almoravids in the middle of the next century. Arising from a nomadic confederation of Berber tribes originating in the northern reaches of Mauritania, their reformist movement is staunchly Sunni in religious conviction and closely identified with the Maliki school of law. It is through military conquests that these men with veiled faces rapidly begin to redraw the map of Western Islam, constituting, for the first time in the region, an empire extending southward to the Sahara and northward to the Iberian peninsula. They thus control caravan routes, illustrated in the exhibition by a stele from Almeria discovered in Gao and by the Tidjikja treasury (Mauritania). The Almoravids govern their vast empire from Marrakech, a new capital founded in 1070, whose majesty is conveyed in the exhibition through autochromes. Major decoration projects focusing on the Qarawiyyin mosque in Fez, (especially a monumental pair of sculpted bronze doors), bear witness to Almoravid piety.
The luxury items produced by important workshops in Islamic Spain, particularly those at Almeria, travel the length and breadth of the empire, later resurfacing within certain church treasuries, such as the Chasuble of Saint Exuperius at the shrine church of Saint Sernin in Toulouse, exceptionally presented in the exhibition in its entirety.

The new galleries of the Louvre’s Department of Islamic Art opened to the public on September 22, 2012 and welcomed nearly two million visitors in their first year. Some 3,000 works are displayed in an exhibition area of about 3,000 square meters, spanning three continents (from Spain to India) and thirteen centuries (from the 7th to the 19th).
The Marinids (1269–1465)
1245: The Marinids conquer western Morocco, then under Hafsid rule.
1248: The Marinids seize Fez from the Almohads.
1269: With their capture of Marrakech, the Marinids bring the Almohad dynasty to its end.
1276: Founding of the new Fez (Fez el-Jdid) by the Marinid sultan Abu Yusuf.
1298: Construction of the siege town al-Mansura, outside the walls of Tlemcen.
1303: Relations are initiated between the Marinids and the Mamluks (Egypt) by ambassadors.
1326: The Moroccan scholar Ibn Battuta begins a journey of 24 years to the farthest reaches of the Islamic world.
1333: Marinid troops retake Gibraltar from the Castilians.
1339: Renovation and completion of the royal necropolis at Chella.
1340: Battle of Rio Salado, where expeditionary Marinid troops from Morocco having joined forces with a Granadan Nasrid army are defeated by a Christian coalition.
1350–1355: Construction of the Bou Inania medersa in Fez.
1375: Ibn Khaldun begins writing the Muqaddimah, a philosophy of history and theory of society.
1465: End of the Marinid dynasty and start of a period of political polarization in the Maghreb.

The Almohads: Between Unitarianism and amazigh (berber) Identity (c. 1116–1269)
In the second half of the twelfth century, as central power begins to disintegrate, the people rise up against the Almoravids guided by spiritual leaders calling for religious reform. One of these leaders, Ibn Tumart, proclaims himself as the community’s new guide, its mahdi: he quickly manages to unite the Berber tribes of southern Morocco around a new unitarian dogma. The Almohads, their Spanish name derived from al-Muwaḥḥidūn (“proclaimers of the unity of God”), set off to conquer the Almoravid empire, which they would expand as far as present-day Libya, imposing their dogma on this entire territory. The exhibition features a manuscript signed by the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, a key witness of this period, who was eventually forced into exile. The centralized empire created by the Almohads is structured around three capitals, Marrakech and Seville, but also Rabat, which they establish to commemorate their campaign of jihad in the Iberian peninsula and their victory at Alarcos. The various documents exchanged between Pisa and the Almohad authorities of Tunis shown in the exhibition give clues to the heights reached by the economy during this period.
Almohad ideology is based on a complex propaganda system involving a new visual culture, in which calligraphy holds an importance unprecedented in its history and where certain motifs, such as the lion, acquire new symbolic weight. For the first time, the Berber identity, conveyed in particular through the language of the people, becomes the focus of political affirmation.

The Marinids: The March of Symbolism and the Return to Fez (1269–1465)
Several military debacles in Andalusia during the early years of the thirteenth century sound the death knell for the Almohad empire, which soon splinters into rival factions. In al-Maghreb al-Aqsa, it is the Berber tribe of the Marinids that brings a definitive end to the Almohad caliphate in 1269 with the conquest of Marrakech. Although not motivated by any specific desire for religious renewal, this dynasty also finds its ideals on a complex propaganda system, grounded in particular in Sufism and Sharifism, making the Malikí school of Sunni Islam the official faith. The new dynasty naturally takes control of Fez, which is symbolically reinvested as the city founded by the Idrisids and as a religious center, while also serving as the Marinid capital. The city is soon filled with many medersas, higher schools of Islamic learning that train the kingdom’s elite, all opulently decorated. A new ideal of the pious sovereign appears, embodied by the royal necropolis of Chella. Harboring dreams of resurrecting the Mediterranean empire of their predecessors, the Marinid sultans maintain a network of relations with Christian kingdoms, from Aragon to France, but also with fellow Muslims, including the Nasrids in Grenada, the Ziyaniids in Tlemcen, the Hafids in Tunis, and the Mamluks in Cairo. Reaching its zenith in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, this period also contains the ingredients for its own demise, with the arrival of the Black Death in the east and the unstoppable advance of the Christians in the north. At the same time, mysticism and Sharifism enjoy a resurgence that paves the way for the rise of the Saadians.

Visitor information
Hours
Open daily except Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and until 9:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.
Admission fees
“Medieval Morocco” exhibition only: €13
Permanent collections + “Medieval Morocco” exhibition: €16 before 6 p.m., €12 after 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays
Free admission for youths under 18, EU residents under 26, teachers holding the “Pass Education”, the unemployed, and holders of the “Louvres Familles”, “Louvres Jeunes”, “Louvres Professionnels” or “Amis du Louvre” cards at all times, and for all visitors the first Sunday of each month.
Further information: +33 (0)1 40 20 53 17 / www.louvre.fr

Related events and publications

Publications

Exhibition catalogue

*Le Maroc médiéval. Un empire de l’Afrique à l’Espagne*

Exhibition album

*Le Maroc médiéval. Un empire de l’Afrique à l’Espagne*
Co-published by Edition Hazan and Musée du Louvre Editions. 48 pages, 50 illustrations, €8.

In the auditorium

**Introduction to the exhibition**
Monday, October 27, 2014 at 12:30 p.m.
by Yannick Lintz, Claire Déléry and Bulle Tuil-Leonetti, Musée du Louvre.

**Recent archaeological discoveries**
Wednesday, November 19, 2014 at 12:30 p.m.
Chella, A Living Site

**Lecture series**

*Medieval Morocco: Cultures, Memories, Identities* (all lectures in French unless otherwise indicated)

Monday, October 20, 2014 at 6:30 p.m.
Sijilmasa from the 8th to the 14th Century: A Moroccan Gateway to Relations Across the Sahara
by François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar, Université de Toulouse II – Le Mirail.

Monday, October 27, 2014
Post-medieval Mysticism and Sharifism (Speaker to be confirmed)

Monday, November 3, 2014 at 6:30 p.m.
Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406)
by Abdesselam Cheddadi, Université Mohammed V (to be confirmed) and Gabriel Martinez-Gros, Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre-La-Défense (Paris X Nanterre).
This lecture will be followed by the reading of a selection of texts by Ibn Khaldun.

Monday, November 10, 2014 (Title and speaker to be confirmed)

Monday, November 17, 2014 at 6:30 p.m.
Maimonides and his Commentary: Intellectual and Geographical Journeys by Aviad Stollman, National Library of Israel (in English).

**Round table: Restoration and Cultural Heritage**
Monday, December 1, 2014 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Reading

Ibn Khaldun, or the First Historical Overview of Morocco (in French)
Monday, November 3, 2014 at 8:30 p.m.

Concert by Touria Hadraoui and her band
Saturday, November 29, 2014 at 8 p.m.

Conversation with Touria Hadraoui, including filmed documents exploring her artistic universe and the melhoun tradition.
Sunday, November 30, 2014 at 4 p.m.

Bouchra Ouizguen presents Madame Plaza
Tuesday, December 16 and Thursday, December 18 at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m., Galerie Médicis
With Bouchra Ouizguen and three Aïta performers.

Film series curated by the writer-director Nabil Ayouch
Friday, October 31, 2014 at 8 p.m.
Ali Zaoua, prince de la rue by Nabil Ayouch.
Morocco/France/Belgium, 2001, 98 min. Screening introduced by Nabil Ayouch.

Saturday, November 1 at 4 p.m.
Les Chevaux de Dieu by Nabil Ayouch.
Morocco/France/Belgium, 2013, 115 min., based on the novel Les Étoiles de Sidi Moumen by Mahi Binebine. Screening followed by a discussion with the painter and writer Mahi Binebine.

Sunday, November 2, 2014 at 3 p.m.
My Land by Nabil Ayouch.

at 6 p.m.

Films on Moroccan art / Documentaries
In October and November 2014
Screenings in the audiovisual room under the Pyramid and in the auditorium.

Animated films for younger visitors
Wednesday, November 26, 2014 at 3 p.m.
For families and community center groups

Thursday, November 27, 2014 at 2:30 p.m.
For school groups