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Southwestern Morocco, 1844-1886

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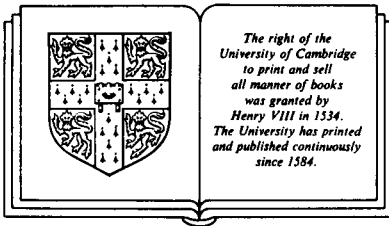
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Merchants of Essaouira
Urban society and imperialism in
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DANIEL J. SCHROETER

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON D.C.



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NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521105408

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First published 1988

This digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Schroeter, Daniel J.

Merchants of Essaouira.

(Cambridge Middle East library)

Bibliography.

Includes index.

1. Essaouira (Morocco) – Economic conditions.
2. Merchants – Morocco – Essaouira – History – 19th century.
3. Merchants – Morocco – Essaouira – History – 19th century.
4. Capitalism – Morocco – Essaouira – History – 18th century.
5. Capitalism – Morocco – Essaouira – History – 19th century.

I. Title. II. Series.

HC810.Z7E857 1987 330.964'6 87-15163

ISBN 978-0-521-32455-7 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-10540-8 paperback

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In memory of Paul Pascon and Ahmed Arrif
and my grandfather, Robert Strasser

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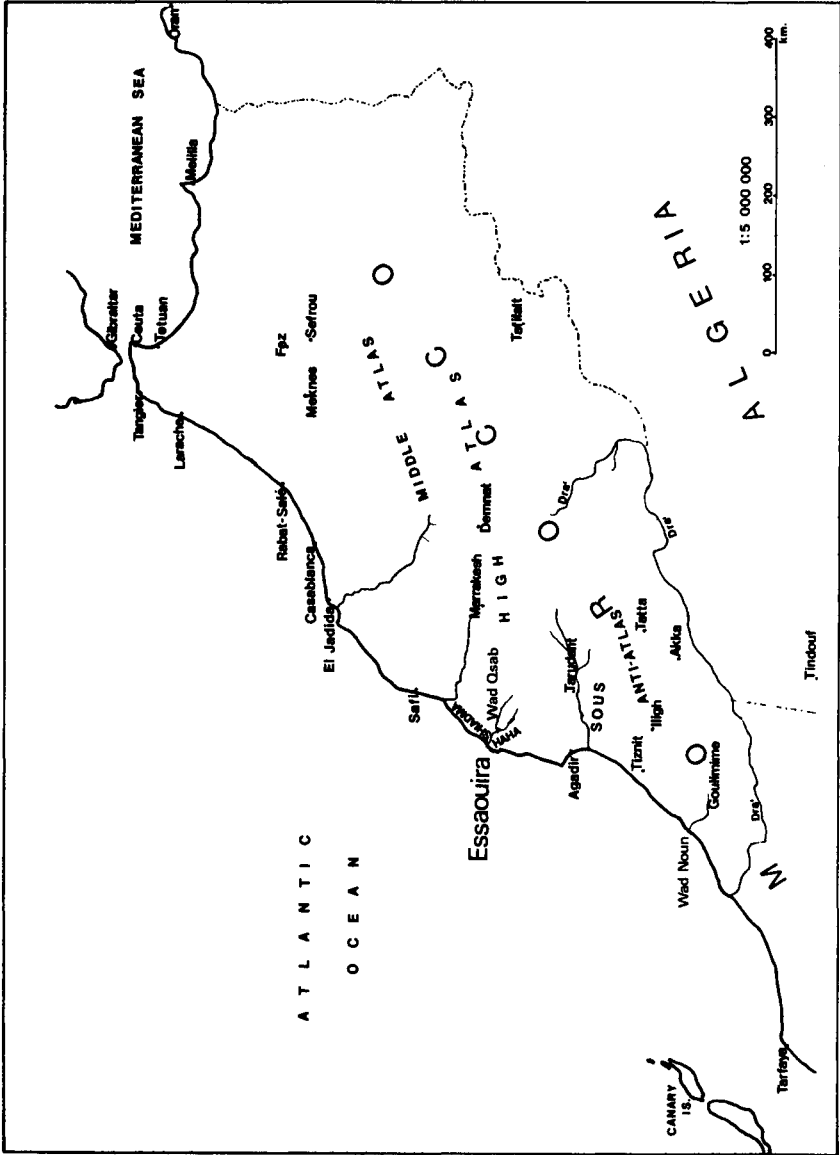
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Map 1 General map of Morocco

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Preface

The town of Essaouira, better known as Mogador to Europeans, is today a quiet, slow-paced, and relatively isolated fishing town. Most of the population of the town still resides within the *medina*, the area enclosed by ramparts which once constituted the city limits. The quaintness of the town today seems to contrast with its former position as a royal port. This is still marked by its formidable ramparts and rows of cannons which point outwards to the land and sea. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mogador was among the few places along the North African littoral (called the 'Barbary Coast' by Europeans) known to foreign traders, sailors and adventurers. Its fame rivalled that of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli.

From the 1770s through the 1870s, Essaouira was the most active seaport of Morocco. This present study is about the history of Essaouira from 1844 to 1886, the heyday of the town as an international port. These two dates mark crucial events in Moroccan history and in the life of Essaouira. In 1844, the town was bombarded by the French fleet, a punitive operation to deter Morocco from further involvement with the Algerian resistance movement along her eastern frontier. From that date on, Morocco had to recognize foreign intervention as a major factor in the life of the country. In 1886, Sultan Mawlāy al-Ḥasan embarked on an expedition to the Sous region of southwest Morocco in order to confirm Moroccan sovereignty over some of the more distant regions of the country. It was the last effort by the Moroccan government to demonstrate both to the Europeans and to the dissident tribes of the south that the royal port of Essaouira, a town closely controlled by government customs officials, was *the* port for the southern trade (see map 1).

This book is primarily concerned with the trading community of Essaouira in this period, and its relations with the Sultan, Europeans, and the regional powers of the southwest. By examining the history of a community on a local level, my aim is to discuss Moroccan society in precolonial times. What is being looked at in microcosm also reveals some of the dynamics of precolonial societies in the age of economic imperialism. The responses of the trading community of Essaouira to foreign

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penetration reflects more generally the way micro-populations reacted to European capitalist expansion.

Essaouira remained a relatively small town. Its population rose from about 10,000 in 1844, to about 18,000 in 1886. The relatively small size of Essaouira was one of the first things that attracted my attention. When I began research for my doctoral thesis at the University of Manchester, I had hoped to be able to exhaust virtually all the written documentation related to the town in the nineteenth century. This task seemed reasonable, in view of the presuppositions that historians have made about the absence of Moroccan archives. Nearly ten years later, it is now apparent that a lifetime of work would only reveal a small part of the existing material. And yet this mass of material, and the very density of its detail, makes one aware of the lacunae with which students of Moroccan history are faced. For every extant administrative letter, there are allusions to several others, for every tax register, there are lists of dozens of other account books formerly kept in the archives.

This study is based on four main types of primary sources: administrative documents and tax records of the Moroccan government, foreign consular records, descriptive accounts of foreign travellers and residents in Morocco, and the private papers of several Moroccan-Jewish merchants' firms. A recently discovered private archive, with papers from one of the principal Jewish merchant firms of Essaouira in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, has not been fully integrated into this present study. This material will be dealt with exhaustively in a separate monograph.

The kinds of documents available both circumscribe and guide this study. One of the principal sources used is the Corcos family papers. The Corcos was one of the most important merchant families in Essaouira, but no merchant house had such intimate ties with the Royal Palace in Marrakesh. More than two hundred Arabic letters sent by the Palace from 1843 to 1883 to members of the family in Essaouira have been preserved (see app. A). These letters, which span the period with which we are concerned, often provide a narrative of the events and processes discussed. The Corcos collection also includes legal documents in Hebrew and Arabic pertaining to property transfers and mortgages, notarized contracts in Hebrew, and several letters in Judeo-Arabic. I am indebted to Michel Abitbol, who first suggested I work on these documents. I was able to consult this material, thanks to the kind generosity of Georgette Corcos. Her assistance was extended in another way: through our lengthy conversations about the elite Jewish families, I have learned much about the social life of the Jews in the *casbah*.

The study of these documents was a first step in defining the subject of

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inquiry and research. Yet to build around these letters a more general history of the trading community of Essaouira required much more extensive research. Many of the letters are in fact only abbreviated responses to letters received, with summaries of the original letters sent. Painstaking research in the archives of the Royal Palace in Rabat revealed only a few letters actually sent by Corcos. Furthermore, Arabic letters of the period follow certain conventional styles. Descriptions are often ambiguous and relevant details are frequently absent. To impart meaning to these documents has demanded an understanding of the relationship between the correspondents and the events that they describe.

This task has been helped by the archives of the American consular agency of Mogador, recently transferred from Morocco to the diplomatic branch of the National Archives in Washington D.C. Abraham Corcos and his son Meyer served as U.S. consular agents in Essaouira for over thirty years. In addition to the correspondence between the Corcos and the consul-general in Tangier, numerous Arabic letters between the Mogador consulate and the local government of Essaouira have been preserved. Letters and documents in Spanish, French, and Judeo-Arabic concerning various local matters are also found in these consular archives. Most of the folios of letters in this collection were still sealed, and the volumes were not yet organized. I am most grateful to the helpful archivists of the National Archives for giving me the opportunity to work with this material.

I have also consulted the French and British archives of the Mogador consulates. Much work has already been accomplished in the Moroccan consular archives. Historians are particularly indebted to the voluminous study of Jean-Louis Miège (*Le Maroc et l'Europe: 1830-1894*, 4 vols., Paris, 1961-2). I have therefore concentrated more specifically on the Mogador consular archives rather than on the multi-volumed correspondence found in the general Morocco series of the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay. The staffs of both the Public Record Office and the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères were most helpful in my research.

But to study Moroccan society purely from the standpoint of foreign consulates would obviously give us an unbalanced view of Moroccan history. I have therefore turned to the official correspondence of the central government, the *makhzan*. Apart from the numerous administrative documents pertaining to Essaouira, registers of customs duties, gate and market taxes, agrarian tithes, and *makhzan* property (the 'crown lands') have provided indispensable quantitative data for this study.

The systematic organization of the archives in the Royal Palace has

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only just begun, though the existence and value of these archives was noted long ago by the Moroccan historian, Germain Ayache. His insistence on the need to use the Moroccan archives has encouraged me in my task. A new generation of historians has begun to produce studies based on these archives, to which I will refer in the following pages. My debt to the historians of Mohamed V University of Rabat will become apparent in this book. Here I would like specially to mention Abderahmane El Moudden, who was doing research in the archives at the time I was there. I am grateful for his help in guiding me through some of the material, and for later commenting on my thesis. My discussions with Tibari Bouasla, also doing research in the archives, were most helpful. Thomas Park, who was doing research on Essaouira, shared in the task of going through piles of as yet unorganized correspondence. The current work of Wilfrid Rollman in the archives of the Palace is of particular importance. As my first teacher of North African history, I owe him special thanks. I am immeasurably indebted to Monsieur Mohamed El Arbi El Khattabi, the Director of the Royal Palace Library (*al-Khizānat al-Ḥasaniyya*), who readily made available still unclassified archives. I should also like to thank the archivist, Hamid Moumou, who called to my attention many pertinent documents. I am grateful to Monsieur Abdel Wahab Benmansour, Royal Historiographer of the Direction des Archives Royales, who made numerous dossiers on Essaouira available for consultation. I should like to thank the Director of the Bibliothèque Générale, Monsieur Abdel Rahman El Fasi, for his assistance. To the numerous librarians and archivists I am especially indebted. In particular, I thank Abdelmajid Ben Youssef, who was extremely attentive to all my queries, and Mohamed El Aouene, who taught me much about the archives and libraries of Morocco.

Most of Morocco's archives still remain in private hands, located in often inaccessible places in the countryside. I am most grateful to Mustapha Naïmi of the Institut Universitaire de la Recherche Scientifique, who provided me with documents from the Bayrūk family of Goulmime, and discussed with me the history of southwestern Morocco at length. Much work has been done in the field by social scientists of the Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire-Hassan II of Rabat. The Département des Sciences Humaines of the institute provided me with both facilities and an intellectual atmosphere which was most conducive to my research. My discussions with Mohamed Naciri and Abdallah Ham-moudi have been invaluable. Most of all, I am indebted to the late Paul Pascon, who integrated me into a project in the Tazarwalt under the auspices of the Institut Agronomique and the University of Amsterdam. I was able to work extensively in the Sous and to examine the

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unpublished documents of the Bū Damī' a family of Iligh who controlled the caravan routes of the southwest. Paul Pascon's death in Mauritania, together with the sociologist, Ahmed Arrif, is a loss deeply felt by all concerned with Moroccan society. I learned a great deal from Paul Pascon about Morocco. His many new ideas, which challenged much of what has been written about Morocco – including his own publications – were just beginning to formulate at the time of his death. I hope that this book makes a contribution, in the direction that Paul Pascon was heading, by rethinking Moroccan society and history.

From a regional perspective, the people of Essaouira always took an active interest in my research. I would particularly like to thank the Abecassis family, whose door in their house of the *casbah* was always open. Both Boujemâa Lakhdar, the keeper of the Essaouira museum and *al-ustādh* al-Hadrī were always most informative about local culture. The authorities of Essaouira accommodated my research in many ways. The archives of the port and the *habous* were put at my disposal. I am particularly grateful to the *qā'id*, Aghigha Bassou, from the provincial government. Monsieur Belarbi of the Ministry of Culture was most helpful in my research. Many natives of the Essaouira 'diaspora' and their descendants, were anxious to share their knowledge and provide me with both personal documents and contacts. In particular members of the Afriat, Elmaleh, Abecassis, Corcos, and Knaffo families in Morocco, Israel, France, England, and the United States provided me with most useful information. I would here like specially to mention Messieurs Edmond Elmaleh, André Azoulay, Taïeb Amara, Samuel Levy, Shlomo Knaffo, and Haïm Zafrani. Special thanks go to Professor Haïm Zafrani, whose instruction on the complexities of Moroccan Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic has been of lasting value. Through his invitation to teach at the Université Paris VIII–Vincennes in 1984–5, I was able to continue my research on the Moroccan Jewish community.

Jews in Essaouira represented between 30 and 40 per cent of the population. But rabbinical sources for Essaouira, a city renowned for commerce rather than scholarship, are somewhat scanty. I have nonetheless found some relevant *responsa* in a few of the noted nineteenth-century works of Moroccan rabbis, and a few hagiographical texts on the Jewish saints (*ṣaddīqs*) of the town. I have also collected copies of a number of manuscripts from people with shared interests in the history of the Jews of Morocco. I thank Professor Miège, Arrik Delouya, Elias Harrus, and Victoria Ducheneaux for giving me copies of documents, photographs and other valuable information. I have learned much from Joseph Chetrit in our joint research on the Jewish community of Essaouira. Robert Attal, bibliographer and head librarian of the Ben Zvi

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Institute, and Trude Levi of the Mocatta Library assisted my research in many ways. The most important source for the Jewish community of Essaouira is found in the archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. Monsieur Georges Weill, the director of the archives, and Madame Levyne, librarian of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, have been immeasurably helpful.

To all my teachers, colleagues, and friends who helped make the writing of this book possible, I am especially grateful. I have benefited enormously from the research done jointly with Thomas Park in Morocco. His meticulous reading of my thesis, and his many new ideas about Moroccan economic history have provided me with much insight. I am grateful to Paulo De Mas, colleague in the Tazarwalt project, for his useful criticisms. The valuable comments of Michael Brett, Lucette Valensi, Edmund Burke, and Raymond Jamous on my thesis have helped me rewrite this present work. I am particularly indebted to my teachers at Manchester. C.E. Bosworth gave me much encouragement throughout the writing of my thesis. Above all, Kenneth Brown has helped many of my ideas and writings about Morocco and social history take shape. Finally, I would like to thank my wife H el ene for her understanding and support in the difficult final stages of writing.

A large part of my research was made possible thanks to the support of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Manchester, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Social Science Research Council /American Council of Learned Societies. I am most grateful for the financial assistance of these institutions. For the product of my research I am wholly responsible.

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Notes on usage

For North Africa, purism seems inappropriate for spelling and transliteration. During the colonial period, Arabic and Berber were rendered from the colloquial pronunciation into French. Much literature on North Africa uses French spelling. For the English reader, French orthography can be problematic. But it would have been equally confusing to adopt a purely classical system of transliteration for all Arabic and Hebrew names. For most proper names and terms, I have used the system found in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, with the exception of eliding the definite article for sun letters. Hebrew transliteration has been adapted to the corresponding Arabic pronunciation.

For those words not transliterated from classical Arabic, a number of general guidelines have been followed. Words commonly known in English appear without diacritics. Terms which are specific to Morocco sometimes appear transliterated from the colloquial. The classical form is used for most names of persons, except when the name appears in its colloquial form in the text, or when the name is specific to Morocco. The European spelling is given for commonly known Jewish names. A number of words which are sufficiently well known from the French literature will appear in French. Values in pound sterling, Spanish piastres or hard dollars, and French francs are indicated, respectively, by £, \$, and f. The five franc coin (the French *riyāl*) is represented by 5f. For the major cities, English spelling is used. For names of medium-sized places, I have sometimes used the French spelling. For most political divisions and tribes, a classical transliteration is used. However, for names of Berber tribes, French spelling is used for the prefix (Aït and Ida). Wad is used for wadi (lit., *wādī*, coll. *wād*, Fr. *oued*).

In chapter notes names which occur frequently are shortened or are referred to by their popular name (e.g., Bannīs for Muḥammad b. al-Madanī Bannīs, Bū ‘Ashrīn for the *wazīr* aṭ-Ṭayyib b. al-Yamānī, Hay for Sir John Drummond Hay, etc.). It should be noted that for the K.H. archives, there are not yet reference codes available. Similarly, the folios in N.A., Record Group 84, for the Mogador Consulate have not yet been assigned reference codes.

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Translations from Arabic and Hebrew attempt to be as literal as possible, but some formal terminology has been replaced. For example, the honorific title ‘*mawlānā*’, literally ‘our master’, has been translated as ‘the Sultan’. To help clarify meaning, words not found in the original text are added in square brackets.

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Abbreviations

- A.E. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris (C.C.C. – Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale; C.P. – Correspondance Politique; M.D. – Memoires et Documents)
- A.I.U. Archives de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris
- A.J. Anglo-Jewish Archives, London
- A.N. Archives Nationales, Paris and Aix-en-Provence
- A.N., S.O.M. Archives Nationales, Section Outre-Mer, Paris
- B.A. Bayrūk Archives, documents of the Bayrūk family, Goulimime
- B.A.I.U.* *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*
- B.D. Archives of the Bū Damī'a family, Iligh, Tazarwalt
- B.G. Bibliothèque Générale (al-Khizānat al-Āmma), Rabat
- B.L. British Library, London
- B.N. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
- B.S.G.* *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, Paris
- C.A. Corcos Archives, documents of the Corcos archives, Jerusalem
- C.A.H.J.P. Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem
- C.H.E.A.M. Centre des Hautes Etudes sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Moderne
- D.A.R. Direction des Archives Royales (Mudīriyya al-Wathā'iq al-Malikiyya), Rabat
- E.I.*¹ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st edn
- F.O. Records of the Foreign Office, Public Record Office, London
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Chronology

‘Alawid Sultans Of Morocco: 1757–1894

Muḥammad III	1757–1790
al-Yazīd	1790–1792
Sulaymān	1792–1822
‘Abd ar-Raḥmān	1822–1859
Muḥammad IV	1859–1873
al-Ḥasan I	1873–1894

Qā’ids Of Essaouira: 1830–1895*

‘Abd al-Khāliq Ash‘āsh	1830–1833
‘Allāl az-Zamrānī	1833–1842
al-‘Arabī aṭ-Ṭarrīs	1842–1854
Muḥammad Ibn Zākūr	1858–1859
‘Abd al-Karīm ar-Razīnī	1859
al-‘Arabī al-‘Aṭṭār	1859–1860
‘Abd al Qādir al-‘Aṭṭar†	1860–1861
al-Mahdī Ibn al-Mashāwrī	1861–1868
‘Amāra Ibn ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣādiq	1868–1883
ar-Ragrāgī ad-Dawbilālī	1883–1895

*Also called governor (‘*āmil*) and pasha (*bāshā*)

†Acting *qā’id* and brother of above