

CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE 19-20TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE, CASE OF THE HISTORIC CENTER OF TEBESSA IN ALGERIA

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Abstract

Like other cities in the Maghreb, Algerian cities have an architectural and urban heritage that belongs to the colonial period (19th / 20th century), and occupy an important place in the national real estate. This specific study deals with the historic center of Tebessa in Algeria, an example of a large urban and architectural stratification, the last layer dates back to 1842-1962 (period of French colonization). This legacy, however, remains unknown and ignored as heritage and it is in a state of constant degradation, despite its great heritage value. This worrisome situation of negligence prompts us to raise the following questions: How can we revalue this heritage? What is the place of colonial architecture in Algerian heritage legislation? The aim of this paper is to determine the value and importance of this heritage through a dual perspective of knowledge and recognition. Therefore, a descriptive methodology was selected to express what the land of Tebessa offers us as an architectural variety of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in terms of value and state of conservation, we crossed it with the historical sources in order to elaborate the heritagization process of this built heritage.

Keywords: Tebessa; Conservation; 19th and 20th century; Colonial heritage.

Introduction

For 132 years, the French power has made Algeria as a settlement by introducing throughout the territory a local population that has outnumbered the Algerian people [1]. Thus, the colonizer has established- giving credit to the engineers of the military urban engineering- a network of new cities and new villages across all the Algerian territory, which upset the Algerian medinas. The urban model was imported from Europe, which is radically different from the existing one.

The French power was initially geared to transforming the pre-existing cities that are usually the Medinas, by reshaping their urban structures through superimposing a new layout, thus obtaining a new frame to the image of Algiers, Constantine, Blida and Touggourt, then created new city's ex nihilo juxtaposed with the medieval or Ottoman ancestral cities such as the case for Oran and Annaba, but also by splitting and separating completely the new fabric of the former as for Mila and Ouargla [2]. In fact, French colonization has introduced regularity, symmetry and proportions into Algerian cities by applying them in the urban scale, but also in the architectural scale for buildings and architectural elements.

The city of Tebessa and its historical center, in particular, have experienced a superposition of historic frames, through witnessing several civilizations (Punic, Roman,

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Vandal, Byzantine, Muslim, Turkish and French) which have left a hoarded historical center, rich in built heritage [3-5]. Indeed, the last stratum of this site is dating from the colonial period. It was implanted on Roman ruins located inside the Byzantine wall, which bring us stratification by superposition that bequeathed us not only a particular urban layout but also architecture with ancient strata.

Like other Algerian cities, the colonial architecture of the historical center of Tebessa remains marginalized, neglected and has no type of heritage protection, despite it presents the majority of buildings in this center. This is due to the lack of awareness and the lack of recognition of the value and the architectural potential of this building because of the wistful past of colonization. Although an Algerian population inhabits it, recognizing it as heritage does not touch any mind as the pain has not yet dissipated. Nevertheless, we can notice today that the political directives are more and more oriented towards its preservation as a cultural property.

What is important to highlight in spite of this situation of precariousness and abandonment of colonial architecture is that it presents an important potential for Algeria, deserving to be recognized and preserved. How can we revalue this heritage? What role should colonial architecture play in Algerian heritage legislation?

Methodology

To determine the value and importance of this heritage through a double perspective of knowledge and recognition, we have chosen a descriptive methodology in which its main purpose is to describe and illustrate the reality of the field of our case study. This methodology provides a detailed and accurate portrait of the value of this heritage at the architectural and the urban scale through a historical approach [6] based on old maps, photos and archival documents, and to make an inventory and to determine the state of conservation of the buildings an investigation in situ was made. This study is an important step in the process of knowledge of heritage before intervening for its enhancement [7]. We also analyzed the Algerian legislation on heritage protection in order to update the lack of support for this unclassified heritage with a constant degradation in order to remedy it before it becomes too late.

Tebessa through history

Tebessa, this Algerian city located in the east of the country between the massif of Aurès and the Algerian-Tunisian borders, 600 km from Algiers, has always been subject to the greed of civilizations [1, 3-5, 8], it has an exceptional historical and cultural character given its strong urban and architectural stratification, due to the passage of several civilizations that have stayed there and which have subsequently generated a historical center rich in built heritage.

The city of Tebessa dates back to the Stone Age. The dolmens, the cromlechs, the rough stones erected on the ground that exist in several mounts like that of Dyr, Osmor, and Troubia, [3], are testimonies of the human presence during this period. During the Punic period that followed around 250 BC, the city remained under Carthaginian occupation for 50 years [9]. But the most important era in the history of Tebessa is the Roman period, a very long period starting around the year 25 BC. During this time Theveste was one of the most important cities in Africa because of its natural features and its strategic position located at a junction of roads linking Carthage the capital of proconsular government and the metropolis of Africa with Lambèse, which was the seat of the military government and the camp of the Third Legion. Thus, it was the starting point of several Roman roads allowing access to all the centers inside the country and on the coast, as Cirta the capital of Numidia (Constantine) and Thysdrus (El Djem) in Tunisia [10]. This era has left indelible traces of its passage that testify to the strategic importance of Theveste like the triumphal arch of Caracalla (Fig.1), the amphitheater (Fig. 2), the Temple of Minerva (Fig. 3), which is one of the best preserved ancient monuments of

Africa, the Christian Basilica (Fig. 4), the Roman house, the oil mill of Brisgane (Fig. 5), the ruins of Tebessa Elkhalya, and many other monuments [9, 10].



Fig. 1. The triumphal arch of Caracalla



Fig. 2. The amphitheater



Fig. 3. The Temple of Minerva



Fig. 4. The Christian Basilica



Fig. 5. The oil mill of Brisgane

After the Roman era, the colonizations succeeded one another on the city of Tebessa, where the vandals that destroyed the Roman wall, as well as many other monuments, during this period Theveste became a pile of ruins. During the Byzantine period, it was restored by Solomon who conquered the whole territory, where he built walls in all the cities of his conquest [4]. Thus, the Byzantine wall of Tebessa (Fig. 6) still exists until today, because it is fairly well preserved, surrounds the core of the city and attests to this period. The Roman ruins were used for its construction.

After a short Berber-occupation, under the control of the prophetess Kahina, the Muslim conquests took possession of the city from the beginning of the 8th century and the Roman Thevest became the Muslim Tebessa [5]. Among the Muslim civilizations, which crossed the territory of Tebessa, the empire of the Khalifes, the State of the Aghlabids, the Fatimids, then the Beni Hilal, until the arrival of the Turks around 1573, they built the El Atiq Mosque, the oldest mosque in the city (Fig. 7), using the columns and capitals of Roman buildings. It is located on the road that leads to the triumphal arch of Caracalla (Cardo Maximus) [10], and it is in good conditions of conservation.

The Turks also built another mosque, that of Sidi Ben Said, and Zaouia Sidi Abderrahmane (Fig. 8). They remained in the city until the French occupied it in 1842. During this last period, which lasted 120 years, France built a considerable building stock; most of these constructions still exist until today (Fig. 9).



Fig. 6. The Byzantine walls



Fig. 7. El Atiq Mosque

In Tebessa, Decumanus and Cardo Maximus became the main axes of the colonial city; east-west main axis and north-south main axis; both have determined the direction of growth of the contemporary city. The French colonizer has created an orthogonal spatial structure in the form of a checkerboard, regularly determined by the shape of the enclosure with streets [12], squares and the location of the city gates with the assistance of engineers (Fig. 10).

The military engineers who were in charge of this mission with the help of stonecutters who came from France to these sites restored all components of the Roman city and local workers assisted them. The majority of the monuments were reused: the Roman Temple of Minerva served as a soap factory, an office assigned to the service of engineering, a courtroom for the Muslim judge, a canteen, a military circle, a prison, a church, before the construction of the Christian church and place of storage of archaeological discoveries [9, 10]. The triumphal arch of Caracalla remained the main gate of the city, the forum was replaced by the place Montebello, which will take the name of Carnot, after the assassination of this French president in 1894, and the Roman house which was one of the most important temples in this city during the Roman era was divided into two and used as a dwelling house, the ruins of the basilica were used to build the catholic church. In order to fetch water the French have restored the old aqueducts, the first is a Roman pipe that brings the waters of a source called Ain Chehla [10] the second is the Byzantine aqueduct that brings the waters of a source called Ain-El-Bled [3,10]. From the beginning of the conquest, the French repaired the Byzantine enclosure with the same stones and in the same style as one of the 14 gigantic towers [3]. This wall has four doors (Fig. 8), three of which are ancient: The Caracalla Gate, which the Arabs call Bab-el-Kedima, Solomon's Gate and Ain Chehla Gate.

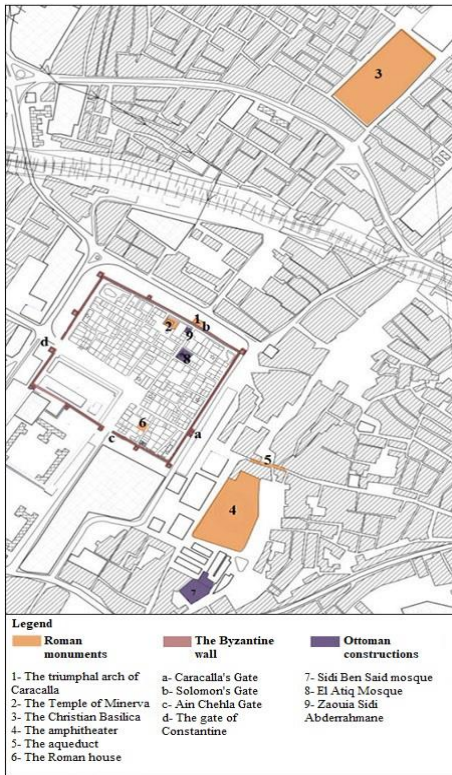


Fig. 8. Pre-colonial achievements in the historic center of Tebessa

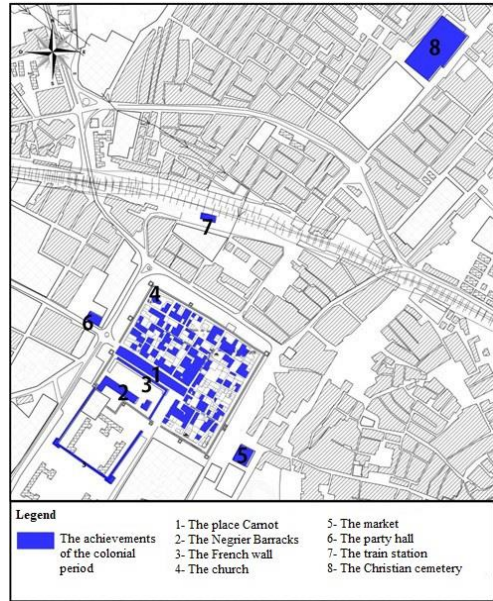


Fig. 9. The achievements of the colonial period in the historic center of Tebessa

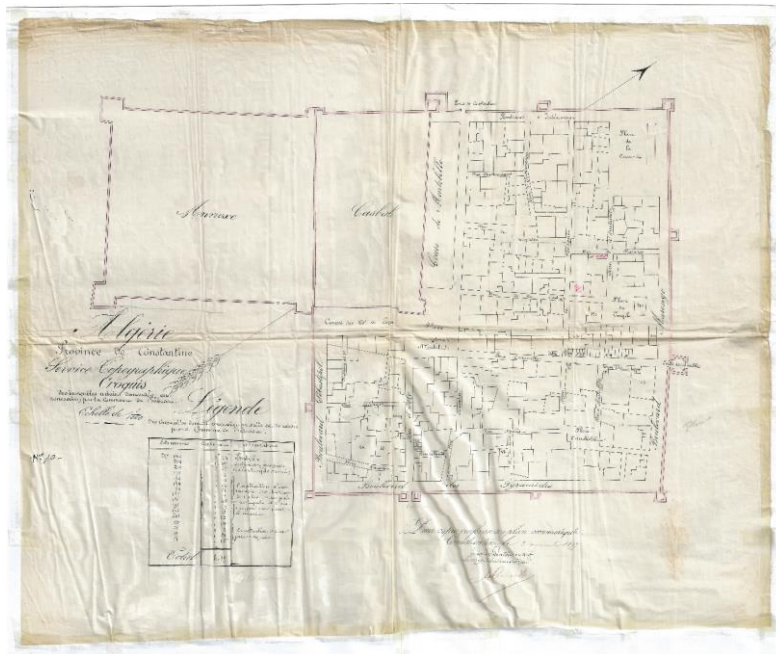


Fig. 10. The historic center of Tebessa during the colonial period, Archives of Cadastre of Tebessa

The fourth gate was created in 1863 by the French to ensure the continuation of the road from Constantine to the place Carnot, it is the gate of Constantine, however, in 1959, it was dismantled and stored near the old hospital, and then they have created a road that surrounds this inside of the wall. While respecting the Roman fabric, the soldiers of the engineers began to build military buildings in the first place before building a large number of colonial houses, which replaced the old constructions of the native population [3]. The Negrier Barracks, formerly known as the «Fort of the Casbah», was built for the superior commander, it was the nerve center of the city. It was converted into a hospital and is so far today. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city began to spread out of the Byzantine wall, creating new neighborhoods and suburbs and "Tebessa came out of ruins again" [3].

Results and Discussions

Architectural production of the colonial city of Tebessa

Similar to the other Algerian cities, the French power has built various civilian equipment in Tebessa: a church, a town hall, a hotel, a market, a party hall currently used as a cinema, a post office, a girls' school and a boys' school, as well as new houses of a European style. Two types of houses have been built in Tebessa, in intramuros all houses are a street-side gable (Fig. 11) with a spatial organization characterized by the typology of the house with a corridor with a double alignment of rooms, in the extramuros we notice the existence of the two types: the houses with veranda and the houses with a street-side gable [13].

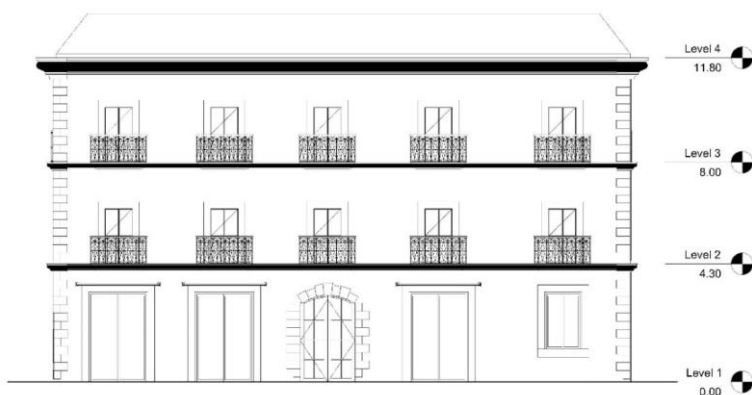










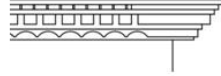




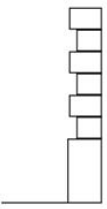

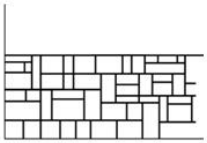

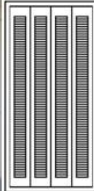



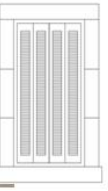

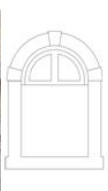
Fig. 11. Facade of a colonial house (a street-side gable) in the historic center of Tebessa

The colonial house in Tebessa is usually built of stone or rarely made of brick related with mortar, commonly covered with a tiled roof with two or four sloping sides. The houses generally have a ground floor and one floor, and the higher ones do not exceed two floors. Their facades are geometrical with a weak decoration, symmetrical with respect to a central axis that passes through the entrance door, with a rhythm in the openings (Fig. 11). The bays without jambs are of two types, either straight or arched, and for bays with jambs either flat or arched.

The facades are mounted on the basements of stone to make the separation between the soil and the body of the facade. In order to treat the junctions between the orthogonal walls, the builders have used angle chains, which, in addition to their aesthetic role, have a structural role. Indeed, there are two types of corner chain: right and half-harp. The facades are finished with a crowning cornice, there are several types in Tebessa, including the canal tile cornice, the solid brick cornice that varies depending on the position of the bricks and the number of seats, the composite cornice, and the cornice in filling, and to make the separation between the floors there is usually a separation cornice [11].

As for the constructive typology of the colonial house in Tebessa is represented by a vertical structure in mortar-bound stones, with two types of floors in the majority of buildings either vaulted floor (Table 1) in IPN metallic and brick, with a mortar compression screed, or a simple colonial floor whose IPN are the same with the same distances between axes, what changes is the use of the brick in a horizontal line, the table 1 shows the architectural and constructive elements of the colonial architecture in Tebessa.

Table 1. Architectural and constructive elements of the colonial architecture in Tebessa

			
Tiled roof with two and four sloping sides		Vaulted floor	
Crowning Cornice			
			
			
Canal tile cornice	Solid brick cornice (serrated cornice)	Composite cornice	Cornice in filling
Angle chains			
			
Right corner chain		Half-harp corner chain	
Stone Basements			
			
Openings			
			
			
Straight window without jamb	Arched door without jamb	Window with flat jamb	Window with arched jamb

Colonial architecture, a heritage in danger

After independence, Algeria experienced a massive departure of the Europeans, who left a large housing stock, most of which are dwellings, which became the vacant property of the state, inhabited by Algerians. Moreover, the Algerian state promulgated the law 81.01 of February 07, 1981, which authorized the transfer of the lodgings to the tenants. This situation marked a negative change in the state of conservation of these buildings, especially in the absence of strict urban regulations that manage interventions on colonial architecture. This has accentuated the phenomenon of degradation of these constructions, to which are added the various physical, chemical, mechanical, or biological degradations over time [13, 14].

Faced with houses characterized by an outward-looking spatial organization built for a European social stratum, the new occupants made various transformations to readapt the houses to their way of life. They have therefore reshaped the buildings by making external, internal or structural modifications, without any reference to the original typological specifics. The resulted changes are related to spatial organization, by either adding or removing partitions, doors, and windows (Fig. 12). Sometimes for family size constraints, extensions on the verandahs or in other cases, one or more floors have been added to the detriment of tiled roofs (Fig. 13). Sometimes the consolidation of the house was done with a new supporting structure whose material is not compatible with the original.



Fig. 12. The bad situation of the colonial constructions, suppression of a window



Fig. 13. Spatio-functional mutations, the addition of a floor

These constructions have undergone other economic changes, like the other historical centers in Algeria. That of Tebessa has metamorphosed gradually due to the decline of the residential function and the emergence of the commercial function. The occupants opted for the transformation of the ground floor in part or all into a commercial local/premises, going as far as the total demolition of the building to build a new one for commercial use. This has led to a gradual decrease in the number of colonial buildings, which now represent only 167 buildings (51.48% of the total buildings of the historical center)

On the other hand, some smaller streets contain examples of damaged original colonial buildings occupied either by tenants who refuse to maintain them or by low-income owners who are unable to maintain or rehabilitate them, this has accelerated their deterioration.

With the exception of public facilities, the dwellings are in a perturbing situation of degradation, we find 25.15% of the buildings in an acceptable state, 45.51% in an average state, while 29.34% are in an altered state (Fig. 14), and this reflects the total disinterest of citizens and officials in this legacy.

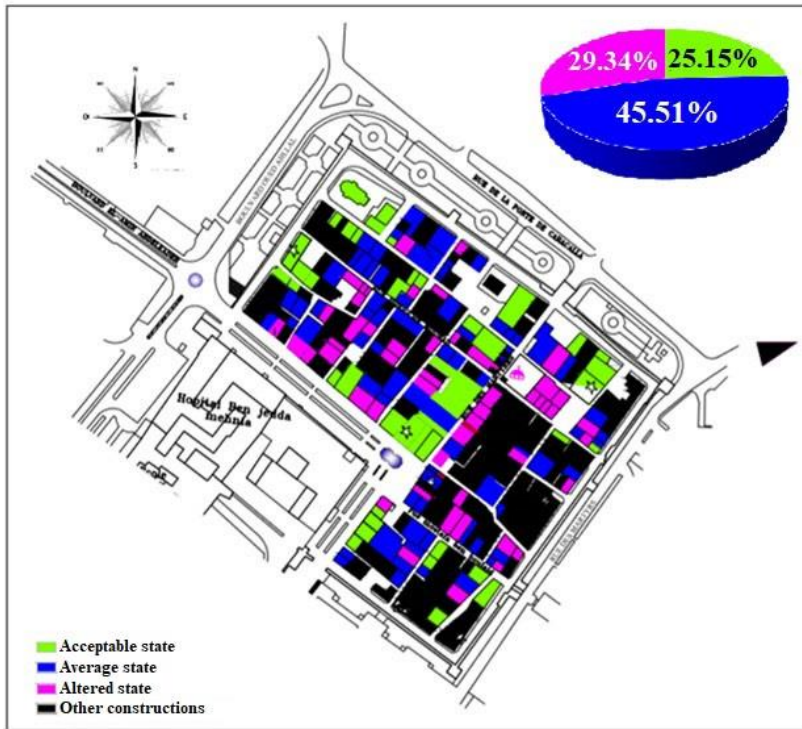


Fig.14. The built heritage state in Tebessa historical center

This architecture dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries is a fragile architectural and cultural wealth and non-renewable. Its protection is a crucial step to ensure its continuity. It is in this perspective that great architects defended the continuity between the old and the new. Also, according to Alvar Aalto "Life encloses equally tradition and new creation. It is unfair to throw the tradition in the garbage saying that the old is obsolete and that it should be replaced by new. Continuity is an indispensable element in the life of humanity. Ancient cities can be in perfect harmony with modern planning ... "[15]. Without recognition of its value, and without a conservation policy that knows how to reduce the risk of irreversible loss of this heritage, these constructions slowly fade away.

The reality and the place of colonial heritage in the Algerian legislation

Between heritage that needs to be revalued and architecture confused with a painful past, the attitudes of both citizens and legislators towards the colonial heritage remain ambiguous, because of a pain that persists in our days despite the time spent, so the colonial heritage continues to deteriorate. In fact, Algerian legislation has also played a major role in this situation. Since independence, the discourses of heritagization and heritage protection have only been interested in other pre-colonial legacies: ancient, medieval and Islamic, and it has only begun since the last decade [6, 16-19].

After independence, Algeria retained the legislative framework inherited from the French in the protection of the built heritage, in its provisions not contrary to national sovereignty; such as the law N° 62/157 of December 31, 1962 which takes again its French counterpart of May 02, 1930 having for object to reorganize the protection of the natural monuments and the sites of artistic, historical, scientific, legendary or picturesque character [16].

During this period, the architecture inherited from the colonial era was an exclusive property of the state, and it was not considered "cultural property" representing a national

interest from the point of view of history, art or archaeology. This law is followed by Ordinance 67/281 of 20 December 1967 on excavations and the protection of historical monuments and sites; it is the first law that defines the bases of the policy of protection and enhancement of the national heritage.

On 7 February 1981, Algeria had authorized the transfer of the colonial dwellings to the tenants through the Law 81.01, which changed the legal status of the buildings that became private property, giving free rein to non-regulatory interventions resulting in a negative change in the state of these constructions. We are witnessing a gradual decrease in the number due to demolition operations as a result to the absence of clear and precise urban regulations that manage the various operations in the older urban centers belonging to the colonial period.

On 15 June 1998, The Law 98-04 on the Protection of Cultural Heritage was promulgated, This law allowed the protection of all cultural heritage, including the recent heritage of the architecture inherited from the colonial period, and from that moment Algeria began to classify sites and monuments that date back to the colonial period as a recent heritage[14, 16], however the number remains very low, and on all rankings since independence, only 37 monuments and historic sites have been classified as national heritage which has a rate of 09.79%.

The city of Tebessa has a large number of colonial monuments with an architectural, aesthetic and cultural quality that deserves to be classified, but no colonial monument is classified as national heritage. Of the 21 buildings and sites listed, there are 9 prehistoric sites, 9 monuments and ancient sites and 3 natural sites.

In effect, despite the promulgation of Executive Decree 16-55 of 1 February 2016 identifying the conditions and methods of intervention on the old urban fabrics, the majority of unclassified colonial centers suffer from a colossal deficit in terms of maintenance and rehabilitation, and are in a very advanced degradation situation, so the interventions of the authority or the citizens to rehabilitate these centers were very rarely held, without any strategy being restricted to some punctual operations.

Conclusion

As a representation of a marginalization, a lack of knowledge and otherness, the colonial architecture presents nevertheless an important stage in the history of Algeria. It is represented by innumerable cities of large and medium size and villages with a specific architectural and urban heritage endowed with invaluable characteristics, values and typologies that contribute to the urban image and have great potential for the country.

The city of Tebessa is deemed as other Algerian cities in which it has inherited a considerable real estate dating from the colonial period. Its urban fabric represents a particular urban model in Algeria thanks to its historical hoarding. Indeed, the superposition of the city was made on the remains and the ruins of the Roman stratum. The architecture presents a specific lexicon, rich and diversified, with a great architectural, cultural and aesthetic value. However, the observation in situ allows us to notice that this architecture is in a worrying situation, altered by several factors, such as the wear of the time, the bad exploitation, and especially the bad interventions by the occupants. It is apparent that the awareness of the value and the historical and architectural potentialities that it holds is not yet recognized, either by citizens or by public authorities.

Algerian legislation also played its indirect role in this situation, because of insufficient legal framework and well below the reality on the ground, because until 1998, colonial architecture was poorly perceived and it was not considered as a cultural property, so it has no lesser type of heritage protection, and it has undergone various spatio-functional mutations which have negatively affected the state of these constructions, but from 1998 this heritage has experienced a major step forward in terms of recognition as a national cultural asset, through

the law 04-98 relative to the protection of cultural heritage, which presents the reference of the Algerian heritage legislation currently.

Despite the inauguration of this law, and despite the richness and variety of architectural and urban production of the colonial era, the number of recent heritage classifications including the colonial heritage remains very low compared to other heritages, and on the whole of the rankings carried out, we count only 37 monuments and historical sites dating from the colonial time were classified as national heritage, presenting a rate of 09.79%, this figure is far from covering all the buildings and the colonial sites that punctuate the Algerian cities and deserve to be classified. Actually, the city of Tébessa is one of the cities that has no monument or classified colonial site, although it counts a large number of colonial monuments endowed with architectural, aesthetic, and cultural quality that deserves to be classified.

It is also notorious that the sites and monuments that date back to the colonial period, but unclassified, suffer from a total disinterest from the citizens and the public authorities, and the practices of rehabilitation and maintenance of this heritage are almost insignificant, so in order to take in charge this heritage, regulations must be considered as manageable, flexible and non-static, frozen or petrified elements that can be redesigned and modified over time in order to be in tune with the new requirements [7], therefore, it would be appropriate to revise our legislation and especially the laws that specifically govern the various intervention operations, they must be adapted to the reality on the ground to take into account unclassified sites threatened with alteration and disappearance but which have a great heritage, historical and cultural potential, like the colonial heritage of Tébessa; which presents, not only an architectural richness, but also an example of a particular urban stratification in Algeria forming a historical entity that is difficult to be detached, this case study is a representative example of the state of degradation and marginalization of this heritage through the national territory.

This architecture, which dates back to French colonization, is a fragile and non-renewable architectural and cultural wealth. All dwellings, public and private facilities, urban centers and villages of colonization, these places of memory are testimonies of an important stage of our history, but which is too often misunderstood.

Nowadays the patrimonial recognition of this inheritance is an essential step in order to undertake the classification then the protection to ensure its continuity. To do this, it is necessary to adopt a specific inventory for urban centers dating back to the colonial period, to monitor their conservation status for a preservation operation.

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