4.4 The Moroccan Army: Defence of a Country and its Contribution to its Civilization*
(Version française p. 196)

The geographic situation of Morocco with its twin maritime fronts, and its history, has in the past has attracted the covetous regards of numerous countries. Despite this, Morocco, a free country proud of its past, has always relied on its army to protect it from the different threats to which it has been exposed. Created the day after independence by his late Majesty Mohamed V, the Royal Armed Forces have today become a credible modern institution responsible for the defence of the kingdom and the expression of its willingness to participate in the reinforcement of peace and legality in such international arenas as Bosnia, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Liberia.

It seems opportune to take a look at the evolution of this military institution, which has always constituted a pillar in the Moroccan state. Considered in the beginning, essentially under the spiritual dimension, as a barrier against external threats and against the Islamic faith, the Moroccan army has always been a reference to which the Moroccan people expressed their attachment to their land and their self-sacrifice towards their sovereigns. Through an allegiance pact it metamorphosed progressively with the evolution of Moroccan society to gain the necessary knowledge for an instrument of defence of a modern state.

Examination of the historical dimension during certain periods, the birth of the Royal Armed Forces following Morocco’s independence, as well as some aspects of the missions which are entrusted to it today, should clarify the evolution of the Moroccan army.

1 Historic Dimension of the Moroccan Army

Born concurrently with the first Moroccan state at the time of the Idrissi dynasty, the Moroccan army has evolved progressively. It was linked on one hand to the successive dynasties, with their war concepts, determined by the geo-strategic environment of the time, and on the other by the social structure notably with respect to tribal influences. However, the Moroccan army had always been a means for the sultans to maintain their reign over a unified and pacified state.

The allegiance ceremony of Moulay Idriss the Great was barely over when, with some tribes regrouped around him, he decided to form an army from the tribes of Zenata, Houara, Ourba and Sahhadja. His son Moulay Idriss II who succeeded him, received Arab and Andalusia delegations who rallied round him in 189 Hegira (805), allowing him to assemble about five hundred knights.

During the rule of al-Moravide, the training, internal structure and roles of the army were developed. New soldiers from the Senhadja, Jazoula and Masmouda tribes joined its ranks raising its numbers to more then one hundred thousand knights.

* Traduction anglaise par John Owens, Romanel-sur-Morges.
Not only did the Moroccan army play a major role in ensuring security, and extending the boundaries of the empire to Andalusia, near and middle Maghreb and the Sahara, but also formed a shield to protect the Islamic religion from foreign invasions, thanks to its ability to dominate the south Mediterranean coast. The Naval fleet was in great demand, especially during the reign of the Al Mohads when it managed to control the Mediterranean and a large number of Islands. The victory of the Abdelmoumen fleet in 1160 marked the end of the Norman dominance in Africa.

Historical sources testify to the major role played by the Moroccan State in pressuring the continuity of Islamic presence in Andalusia and Islamic dominance in the region during the Middle Ages. It is in the same context that the call for armed support by Saladin to Almohade Yaaqoub al-Mansour should be seen, as he immediately put part of the Moroccan fleet at his disposal, favorably comparing with its European counterpart. Some go as far as to claim that the fleet made up “the first fleet of the Mediterranean basin”.

Contemporary writers have estimated the Merinid Army from between forty thousand and one hundred and forty thousand men, distinguished especially for their cavalry. For a century, this army remained one of the best in the Berber region. The great naval base was located in Sebta.

In 1511 the first permanent detachment of the Moroccan Army was created under Saadian rule. Its organization was modeled on structures from foreign armies, mainly Turkish and Spanish, and was noted for the manufacture of cannons and gunpowder.

The period of Alaouite rule is considered an important stage in the reform of the military. In fact, the Alaouite Sultan Moulay Ismael undertook the creation of an army free from tribal influence and totally dedicated to the sultan. In addition to the traditional ties of allegiance to the sultan, other membership ties were established. In this way he selected his army amongst the slaves, whom he trained and educated. When his army was ready, the sultan signed a pact with them, conforming to the recommendations outlined in the book by Imam al Boukhari, stipulating that the sultan and his army “are faithful servants of the prophet Sunna and the legislation covered in the book.”

In the military framework the Alaouites were the successors to the Saadiens. Along the commercial routes, villages and Kasbas were erected, whose functions were divided between civil activities (housing, caravan reception, and mail delivery) and other purely military activities. These 76 constructions displayed authentic architectural arts such as the arcades, highly calligraphic decorations on the walls, and distinguished warfare features.

The Boukhari Army, created by Moulay Ismail, was made up of black tribesmen and, remained devoted to the sultan. It left a great impact on the Moroccan military history, due to its structure, its organization and its constructions.

The evolution of the army throughout the governing dynasties allowed it to exert an influence on the social climate, while enriching itself through the human and cultural resources of the country and maintaining tribal integration.

As one examines the structure of the Moroccan army over time, one can see the three components having the following responsibilities:
- Guard of the sultan and palatial duties;