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An Ethnographic Study of Zellige Craftsmen

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Abstract: Zellige is a well-known traditional Moroccan craft, however, there is a gaping lack of documentation about the people who actually make it. Through this paper, I aim to address this issue through ethnographic fieldwork focused in Fes and Rabat, Morocco, through which I bring to life the stories of the workers and connecting the pieces of their knowledge and experience.

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There were so many people who contributed to the creation and accumulation of this knowledge.

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The Many Pieces of Zellige: An Ethnographic Study into the lives of modern-day Moroccan zellige craftsmen

By Ruchita Choksey



(Left) Zellige found in the wall of a home, (Right) Zellige seen at the Hassan II Mosque

Morocco has captivated travelers for years, drawing in intrigued stares from all over the world with zellige, the beautiful mosaic artwork that has a distinct Moroccan spell. Zellige is a central pillar in Moroccan crafts, with its history beginning even before the foundation of the country. This art form takes years to master and has many different aspects that combine to create beautiful brilliant patterns. The torch bearers of the craft faced a renaissance under Hassan II¹ in the 1980s, but are now reportedly facing a decline in need and demand. Moroccan craftsmen of zellige have learned how to adapt with the times from the effects of both globalization and the ever-shifting art industry. Through my research and fieldwork, I aim to

¹ The previous King of Morocco. So far in Morocco's independence there have been three kings: Mohammed V from 1957-1961, Hassan II from 1961-1999, and the current King Mohammed VI from 1999.

document and learn about the current realities of being a zellige craftsman² in modern day Morocco. There have been many changes to zellige in the past years, from the economy to globalization to the monarchy. However, even with how prevalent zellige is in Moroccan society very little is written about the workers.³ Within these seven weeks I aim to begin to weave art and anthropology to learn about the lives of these workers that can be found in every city in Morocco.

While I will in no way be able to learn everything there is to zellige and the lifestyle associated with making it, I hope to begin the process of filling the gaps and bringing the complicated mosaic of globalization, change, economy, family and zellige to life for future records. Throughout this paper I will compare what is previously documented regarding the industry and what workers from Rabat and Fes have personally believed to be their experiences from working in the field⁴. First I will briefly discuss the demographic and general background of the people interviewed, and then dive into their family relations, the effects of the monarchy, and the changes that have both happened to zellige and what the artists would like to see in the future for the industry. These craftsmen have dedicated their being to zellige, so through this paper I hope to bring recognition to the many different aspects that go into their lives.

When I tell people about my research they get confused. To give some perspective, at the time of this paper I am an undergraduate mechanical engineering student studying at a tech

² Through my fieldwork I have only encountered men doing traditional zellige, which is the focus of this paper. I have seen women paint zellige which I will briefly talk about, but the main artists discussed in this paper are all men hence the gender exclusive term.

³ While there is some work that can be found on the numerology and process of zellige, there is next to nothing available about the workers themselves.

⁴ All the interviews I arranged required the help of a translator, and is why there are little to no direct quotes in this paper but rather paraphrasing and summaries.

school in the United States. And I am doing a humanities-based research project in Morocco.

These two do not generally add up. But for me they make sense. My family always loved the arts and I am no exception; I have been dancing since I was 3 and learned a couple of musical instruments. I always loved working with my hands and tried (and enjoyed but did not succeed) in ceramics, painting, and pastels. We loved the arts and I always appreciated anyone who had the ability to create beautiful things. Personally, I never felt creative enough for the arts, and I was much too practical of a middle-schooler, so I switched my focus to another type of hands-on creation: engineering. I love engineering so much and have enjoyed my time so far, but when offered the chance to research in Morocco I accepted in a heartbeat. Little did I know just how much I would come to love this country and the ethnographic work of zellige workers.

Throughout my time researching I was able to learn about their lives, make jokes, and bypass the language barrier through pure genuine interest and kindness from both sides. I have gotten to know these workers so through this paper I will try to bring to life the quiet, sweet, charismatic, humble, talented and dedicated friends I have come to make along my journey.

Morocco has always caught the wandering eyes from all over the world with zellige as a motivating factor of awe even in the 20th century. In the article “Manufacturing Exotica: Edith Wharton and Tourism in French Morocco, 1917-20” Robert Hunter includes a quote from Wharton saying that while the patterns may be repetitive “the effect upon the eye is not monotonous, for a patient artist has infinitely varied the combinations of pattern and juxtaposition of color.”⁵ Hunter goes on to explain how Edith Wharton’s articles and book

⁵ F. Robert Hunter, “Manufacturing Exotica: Edith Wharton and Tourism in French Morocco, 1917-20” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 1 (2010), accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263200903432266>

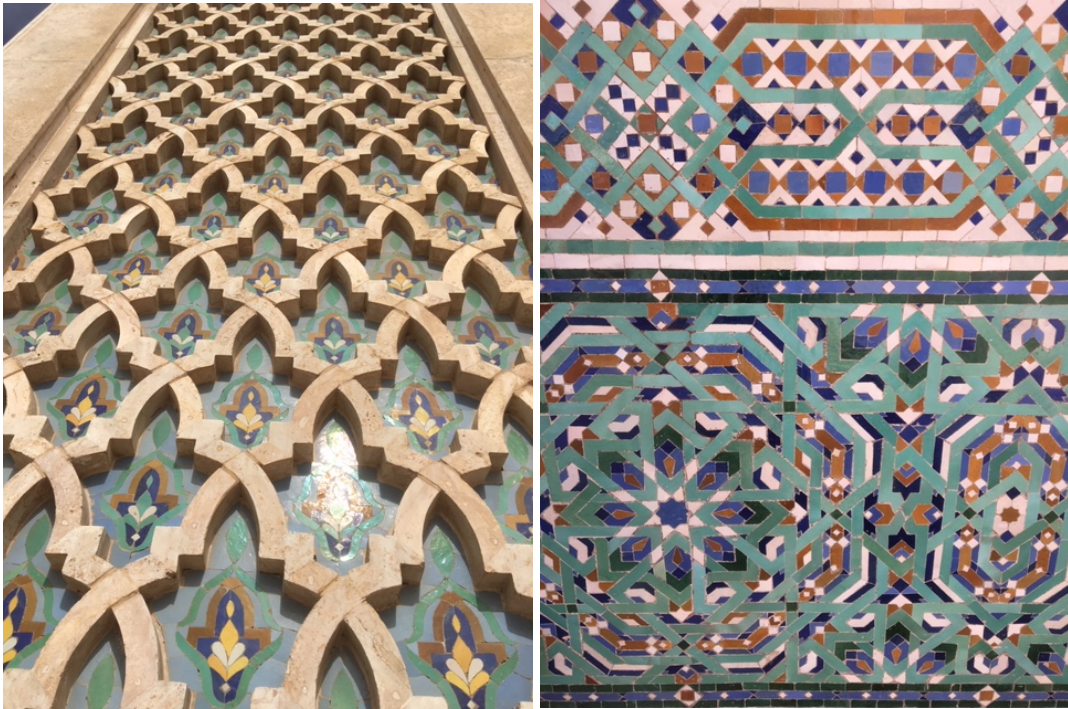
strongly influenced a lot of the tourism travel to Morocco and how she would write pages upon pages about its architecture and designs found. Edith Wharton is actually considered the person who fueled the interest and image of Morocco as her stories and articles romanticized the country as a natural place frozen in time. According to Hunter “Few previous travel writers, however, possessed the imagination, acute powers of observation, and masterful writing skills of Edith Wharton.”⁶ Wharton’s words came at a prime opportunity as the country was expanding its tourism industry, making the already beautiful descriptions immortalized as the image of Morocco.

In another article, “The Changing Face of Morocco under King Hassan II”, Jennifer Roberson talks about how Hassan II decided to use the arts to make Morocco unified and under a single image. He believed that by channeling a nationalist spirit through traditional handicrafts, Morocco would be able to knit together under a single modern identity. At the time Hassan II started his movement, which lasted from the 1960s till his death in 1999, many other countries and architects were trying to mimic a modern western approach. This made his monuments stand out even more as beautiful refreshing images of Moroccan glory. Looking back at Hassan II’s movement, Roberson notes that his first major project, the Mausoleum of Mohammed V, “... was officially hailed as one that brought about a renaissance in Moroccan art and expressed the national aspirations of the Moroccan people, as well as their leader (Mohammad V) and their native craftsmen.”⁷ Under his initiative, the zellige world flourished with grand commissions and

⁶ F. Robert Hunter, “Manufacturing Exotica: Edith Wharton and Tourism in French Morocco, 1917-20” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 1 (2010), accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263200903432266>

⁷ Jennifer Roberson, "The Changing Face of Morocco under King Hassan II." *Mediterranean Studies* 22, no. 1 (2014), accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/547158>.

interests peaked. In contrast, today these craftsmen are left trying to make their way in a world that no longer treats their craft as gold and have had to adapt and learn to navigate these new waters.



Zellige of the (Left) Hand of Fatima and (Right) Pillars at Hassan II Mosque.

The history of zellige is one that is difficult to trace. The art style is native to North Africa and is generally agreed to have Moroccan origins as the oldest forms of the art have been documented there. Fragments of old zellige depictions have been found dating all the way back to the twelfth century Almohad dynasty.⁸ The repeating patterns found in zellige are a style called arabesque, which is a way to show zellige's Islamic nature. The repetition symbolizes

⁸ Ann Shafer, "No man is an island: globalisation and resilience in the Fez zillij tradition," *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 5 (2018) 758-785, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezpxy-web-p-u01.wpi.edu/doi/full/10.1080/13629387.2018.1483877>

different traits, such as peace and tranquility, depending on the pattern. The overall intricate designs themselves are passed down through the workshops. At the same time, these patterns also evolve. In “No Man is an Island: Globalisation and Resilience in the Fez zillīj tradition” Ann Shafer notes that patterns are in an ever-shifting state, stating “[...] young craftsmen are designing new patterns at a greater rate than before and that some highly complex patterns are being forgotten, but the core patterns are still memorised and have remained the staple of the trade, it seems, since its inception.”⁹

There are two main parts to creating a zellige masterpiece. The first process is preparing the tiles. All clay used for the tiles is from Morocco, making zellige 100% Moroccan-made. Workshops will either tend to have agreements with companies that sell the clay or will get a certain amount guaranteed from the government. Next, someone has to lay the clay out and prepare it so that it can be hardened into tiles. They will then cut the tiles to match what is needed for the current zellige that is being worked on. The process of cutting tiles is one that many people dedicate years towards through apprenticeships. Someone uses a model of the piece to sketch out multiples on the clay tile, and then the tile is carefully broken down a line to isolate each piece. In order to carve, the tile is leaned against a ledge that comes out of the stand they use and a pickax is used to carefully cut against the piece of tile that is touching the ledge, leading the piece to break on the line. The second part is assembling the design. The tiles must be placed next to each other in the correct placement face-down. Then, an adhesive, like concrete, is

⁹ Ann Shafer, “No man is an island: globalisation and resilience in the Fez zillīj tradition,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 5 (2018) 758-785, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezpxy-web-p-u01.wpi.edu/doi/full/10.1080/13629387.2018.1483877>

applied once the whole image is finished, binding all the tiles together.¹⁰ This part of the process is difficult because you cannot see what image you are creating; it is as if you are putting together an all-white puzzle.



(Above) Once the tiles are laid down, they are put in a frame and then cemented over.

The craftsmen of zellige get into the trade through apprenticeships that tend to last around ten years and start on average around the mid-teen years. Contrary to popular belief, most people who choose to apprentice are not doing it to keep up a family business but rather that it was the future they desired. In the past the zellige industry was considered a stable one¹¹, so dedicating one's life to a part of the zellige making process was an acceptable decision.

Previously the monarchy has tried to change the artisan sector, which has strongly impacted the zellige craft in different ways. The monarchy is trying to increase participation in

¹⁰ Ann Shafer, "No man is an island: globalisation and resilience in the Fez zillij tradition," *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 5 (2018) 758-785, accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezpxy-web-p-u01.wpi.edu/doi/full/10.1080/13629387.2018.1483877>

¹¹ It was a stable industry because of all the structures Hassan II issued, so there was always work in zellige.

handicrafts by offering free craft education¹². Through this education, the government hopes to keep traditional crafts alive while also keeping a part of the workforce in Morocco. There is also an aim to create an official label for authentic zellige places called the National Moroccan Handicraft Label. However, documentation on the true number of zellige workshops that have gone through the paperwork to get the label is hard to find. In regard to the process of making zellige, the current king Mohammed VI has pushed for more environmentally-friendly kilns, which has received a lot of backlash from zellige factories and workshops. According to the IQP report “Preservation and Progress: The Socio-Economic and Environmental Effects of Modernizing Zillij Production” from 2012 the craft has been perfected over many years so that the tiles are strong and bright. The new kilns that are being pushed by the government supposedly create lower quality tiles where the tiles “...are brittle, the colors are dull, and the glazes become rippled.”¹³ Because of the low quality tiles produced from these government-supported kilns there is much backlash from the zellige industry.

Through my research, I aim to document and learn about the current realities of being a zellige craftsmen in modern day Morocco. There have been many changes to zellige in the past years, from the economy to globalization to the monarchy. However, even with how prevalent zellige is in Moroccan society, very little is written about the workers. Hopefully in these seven weeks I am able to get different perspectives and see the many pieces that make up zellige.

¹² Hamlin, Cassandra Lynne, Helei Duan, John Joseph Amante, and Mikhail Yuryevich Morozov. “Recommendations Toward Expanding the Scope of the Zellij Craft Industry,” n.d.

¹³ George Tucker Gette, Micah L. Flock, Stephen Philip Oliveira. “Preservation and Progress: The Socio-Economic and Environmental Effects of Modernizing Zillij Production”

My fieldwork was primarily located in Fes, at the Art D'Argile workshop and Poterie de Fes workshop. In addition, I also interviewed a few people in assorted local workshops in the Rabat medina. The demographic of the 10 main craftsmen¹⁴ ranged from 26 years old to 56 and were all men¹⁵. From multiple interviews and observations, I learned that there were contradictions from what was written in literature to reality, such as the worker's perspectives of the current state of the field and of the succession of zellige, which will be discussed throughout the paper. There is so much to the lives of the workers, but this paper is focusing on the general background of the interviewed workers, and then dive into how they started their path of zellige and their families. Branching outward I will talk about how they viewed the effects of the changing monarchy and the current atmosphere towards zellige, ending with the changes they want to see in the future to the field of zellige. I want to bring lives of the zellige workers out of the dark workshops and into the light.

The main Moroccan zellige industry hub is located in Fes, the old city already known for its history and crafts. All of the craftsmen I talked to, even those who were not working in Fes, were from Fes, either from being born in or by coming to the city with their family from a young age. They ranged in age from 26 to 56, with there being a concentration around the late 20s and 30s and only a couple workers in their 50s¹⁶. All the workers from the Fes workshops lived in the medina, but the exact location varied. Some lived in the old medina while others lived further on

¹⁴ Because all of the data gathered were from men and I had only seen men doing the traditional zellige jobs, I will often be using gender-exclusive language such as "craftsmen"

¹⁵ The only seen instance of women working in the zellige shop is if they painted the designs onto pottery tiles, which is not exactly zellige but rather normal ceramic work.

¹⁶ I would like to stress that this is not a general assessment of all zellige workers; it is just the demographic of the people I was able to interview.

the outskirts near where the zellige workshops were¹⁷. The majority of the workers started zellige at a young age, with the earliest starting at 7 years old and the latest at 18. Some of the workers who started at a young age first apprenticed and learned from those around them, later moving on to becoming qualified workers.

As a result of the early start to their careers, the majority of the workers had only finished some school before going into their career, and very few of them had done any jobs prior¹⁸. Half of the people interviewed had stayed in the same workshop their whole life, while the rest moved around different workshops around Fes. From the interviews, I noticed that if the workers had apprenticed in a workshop before starting to work, they were more likely to have remained in that workshop for the majority or all of their career.

There was a general agreement among the workers that if you didn't start the craft at a young age, there was no way one could eventually master it. The interviewed craftsmen had jobs at different stages of the zellige making process, from drawing the tiles, to cutting them and then to laying the tiles. They all started out by drawing the tiles and then moved to cutting them. From here, some people chose to specialize in cutting tiles and would remain in their job, while others eventually progressed to laying the tiles. Everyone worked 8 hours a day for 6 days a week¹⁹. Those whose job was cutting the pieces got paid per piece and the amount varied based on the size and complexity of the piece, whereas if you were to be laying tiles you got paid the same flat rate every week. According to the craftsman in Rabat, when he was apprenticing, he only got

¹⁷ As mentioned previously, the zellige workshops in Fes were moved from the main medina to the outer edge by the king.

¹⁸ The jobs that were done, if any, were more manual labor but still in crafts, such as tailors or shoemakers.

¹⁹ They could either take Friday, which is the holy day for Muslims, or Sunday off.

around 5 dirham a week, and once he started officially working it became 60 dirham per week. Later in 1986-87 when he was a more polished worker, he started earning 60 dirham per day²⁰. All of these different workers are mixed together and create a friendly dynamic in the workshops.

To be a professional in zellige you have to know the theory behind the craft. All of the workers know the names of every piece in a work of zellige along with the names of the different patterns and colors. Every piece has a different name originating from Andalusia²¹ so in the beginning a lot of the training in the craft goes towards learning the history and details. In zellige there are many meanings from numerology in Islam. For example, a lot of stars will have 5 points to represent the 5 pillars of Islam, or 8 sided images for the 8 gates of paradise. There is also symbolism through color, like green for Islam and fertility, white for purity and innocence, black for the mystery of life, blue for the sky and freedom, and yellow for gold and wealth.

The time and dedication put towards learning and working in zellige affects another large aspect of Moroccan life: family. Whether directly or indirectly, family plays a large role in the lives of zellige workers. Out of 10 of the interviewees, 7 artisans started doing zellige because of their parents. Since they started young, they were either taken out of school and brought to the workshop by the parents or they saw their parents working and decided to follow in their footsteps. The ones who were pushed into zellige did not seem to have many complaints about their career, but they did seem to think that zellige was the only thing they could be good at. In

²⁰ These number reflect this worker's salary in the 1980s, I do not have any exact number for the current salary of a zellige worker nor do I know how much it has adjust for inflation.

²¹ Andalusia and Morocco have strong historical ties; the age where Andalusia was controlled by Arabs is considered a Golden Age as there was large transferred of knowledge between Muslims, Christians, and Jews and many important documents were created that we still use today.

contrast, the workers who choose to do zellige or who followed a parent or sibling felt freer and more often would say that they would switch jobs if/when they got bored of zellige. All of the workers liked zellige though, and multiple said they were very happy to be working in zellige and in their respective studios. The majority of the workers helped to contribute to their family's income, and a lot were the main source of income in their family. If they were unmarried, the workers tended to contribute towards their parents and sibling's combined income, while if married contributed towards their nuclear family.

Even though the majority of the workers came to be working in zellige from family, all but one of them said they don't want their children to follow in their footsteps. This is a drastic change from the past and what was written in previous literature. Zellige workshops used to have many children and were places where you could see generations of workers. If someone had documented the workshops 5-10 years ago, they would look much different then how they do now. Some of the workers argued that there isn't as much money in zellige as there was in the past. The previous king was an avid advocate of zellige, and many workers felt that contributed to why they made more money in the past²². Others said that the industry is on the decline and is not a promising future. One worker said that if his future children decided they wanted to do zellige he wouldn't be opposed, but he would prefer if after some time they switched their career into something more sustainable. All of the workers agreed that they wanted their children to study first, and most of them wanted their children to stay in school to get a good education. From this notion and the feeling of low confidence in some of the workers, I am tempted to argue that while all of them love their job, they also hold some slight resentment towards their

²² The relations to the monarchy and the zellige industry and impact will be discussed in future details in a following paragraph.

lack of formal education and want to make sure that their children are not put in the same position.

The Moroccan monarchy's influence stretches all over the country, but it has a surprisingly strong effect on zellige. Hassan II was an avid supporter of handicrafts, and he especially loved zellige²³. He created many infrastructure projects and made sure that every project had traditional Moroccan decoration. The Hassan II Mosque is a brilliant example of how zellige is used everywhere in buildings as it decorates the walls, fountains, and floors in the outside and inside of the mosque. The mosque is Hassan II's capstone project, and through his work there were a hundreds of jobs for zellige craftsmen. On the other hand, according to articles, the current king Mohammed VI does not have the same passion for handicrafts, and is pushing for the zellige workshops to change how they use their kilns to make them more environmentally friendly. This has received a lot of criticism as the change has decreased the quality of zellige produced. When questioned about any noticeable changes from the transition in the monarchy, around half of the workers claimed to have noticed no difference in their work and atmosphere of zellige, however the other half had very strong opinions and noticed an influential change in their work lives²⁴. The owner of one of the workshops was so passionate that he interrupted one of the interviews to say his opinion on how the king has changed zellige.

²³ Jennifer Roberson, "The Changing Face of Morocco under King Hassan II." *Mediterranean Studies* 22, no. 1 (2014), accessed November 13, 2019, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/547158>.

²⁴ Talking about the monarchy can be a sensitive subject, so it is possible that the reason some of the workers claimed to notice no difference is because of the red line. However, based off of body language and interactions I do not feel this was the case with the people I interviewed.

Of the people who saw a noticeable change in the monarchy, the majority said there has been a change for the worse. One of the owners complained about the mandate to change the kilns, saying how the kilns normally use oils from olive pits and the switch to propane is actually worse for the environment and that it has made the zellige tiles weaker. The owner also mentioned how Hassan II didn't allow for people to bring in crafts from different countries, in an effort to keep the art industry purely Moroccan, thriving, and away from any counterfeit creations. From his point of view, Mohammed VI doesn't care as much about the Moroccan art industry and that is why there are people from different countries selling woodwork or weaving crafts as "Moroccan made" in Morocco. The worker had past experiences where people who are not Moroccan will copy an art style, such as weaving or woodworking, and pass it off as authentically "Moroccan". Another worker mentioned how in Hassan II's reign, all large construction projects had a mandatory amount of zellige. For example, if you had x amount of concrete square footage in a building you needed to include y amount of zellige in order to give the craftsmen business and keep the industry running. This is why in riads or large houses if there are two saloons one of them must be decorated in traditional Moroccan design, which often includes zellige. There were a few people who believe that Mohammed VI is working towards making the field more professional and continuing the work of his father, however this point of view is vastly overshadowed. The monarchy is trying to change its global image but in doing so is pushing the traditions and opinions of its crafts people to the margins instead of hearing their voices.

Towards the end of the interviews one of the workers made an intriguing and simple argument; Hassan II's enthusiasm for the craft and culture simply influenced other people to buy it, either to impress or fit in. Mohammed VI is merely not as interested, and therefore society will

not think as much about zellige unless it peaks their own interests. A lot of the younger workers didn't notice a change between the kings when asked, confirming my theory that the younger generation won't care or notice as much the effect of the monarchy because they were not in the industry for long enough before the change. Most of the workers who noticed any change were also more exposed to the business aspect, either by their position or by being older and more involved in the studio. Therefore, another reason why some workers might not have noticed is simply because, at their position, the ripple effect of the monarchy just does not reach them.

With the craft of zellige being older than Morocco itself, there have been subtle changes through the years, either in the work, the people, or the industry as globalization becomes a major international player. Globalization tends to change the way something's original purpose was and tries to make businesses international players. Originally, zellige was mainly used to decorate floors, fountains and walls. However, trends change and people are no longer buying as much larger scale zellige but rather smaller items like tables and moving fountains, which were something never even thought of in traditional times. One worker said that is because all the buildings already have zellige, so only new construction and remodeled buildings are the only buildings to possibly request zellige work. The lack of new construction projects is a big factor that affects the industry, as zellige is mainly seen in buildings. The workshops with the contacts to hotel companies do not feel as affected, since many hotels like to include a slight Moroccan feel. The lack of large projects and introduction to smaller pieces have even more direct economic impact. For the most part, zellige craftsmen get paid per piece, so according to an owner "more pieces more money". Since the desired works have become smaller, the designs used for the tables are often very intricate. Some studios have tried to embrace the changing world and use technology to plan out projects, using modeling software to see how a certain

design would fit into the desired model or area. This intersection of technology and crafts is a growing global field and some of the workshops have clearly been taking notes.

Globalization has affected more of the business end of zellige, changing the way it is sold or found. Many cooperatives and workshops have started to maintain an online presence as the world goes global, giving the option to buy all kinds of zellige work from around the world. While one owner says that most of his sales are still in person, another worker claimed he made many commissions from different countries who adore Moroccan zellige, like the United Arab Emirates. He also argued that Moroccans are not the ones buying zellige as often anymore. Another workshop said that more tourists buy zellige than Moroccans and they will request designs and have them shipped back to their respective home countries. It will be interesting to see how the industry continues to shift and change, and maybe find another documentation 5 years from now with more changes.

The actual workers in zellige have changed as well. There are not as many young children starting to learn zellige whereas in the past groups of children in the workshops were very common. As a whole there are not as many people learning the craft, decreasing the overall population and as a result, the skill level of those left seem higher as they are the only options. Some of the older workers commented on this aftereffect saying that the skill level has decreased. One even claimed that someone with a quarter of the skill previously needed to become a master of the craft can nowadays pass as a professional.

Often times, when someone starts working in zellige they stay in this career path for a very long time, even possibly their entire career. Even though all of the workers said they really liked zellige, there is always room for improvement. A zellige workshop tends to be set up as a big space, with the workers who draw and cut the tiles lining the walls. Each cutter has a stone stand that they place their mint tea cup and tiles, along with a ledge attached that helps them cut. Those who lay the tiles take up large round spaces in the middle, enough for the creations to come to life. Surprisingly, none of the workers had any complaints about the working conditions. From an outsider's point of view, sitting on the ground, often concrete, for 8 hours a day seems like uncomfortable work, but all of the workers mentioned how sitting in the certain position they were was part of the process and a necessary skill.



(Above) A typical Zellige workshop with the cutters around the edge and those laying tiles in the center.

Two artists mentioned how they would like to see more creativity in zellige. Zellige patterns do not change much throughout each year, with the exception of one new pattern made per year. The workers felt like every new pattern was a step in the right direction, but more creativity could also benefit the craft. On the other hand, some people were also scared of

potential changes, and said that if anything else changed with zellige it would go downhill, leading towards hopes that nothing would change in the industry.

There were more serious concerns uncovered through the interviews. One of the zellige workers who worked in the local Rabat shop talked about how there are people who lack skill but still get more commissions. They talked about how someone could be an amateur but if they dressed well and had a nice car then they would network and more people would buy from them, and how people would judge them [the workers] based off of how they look instead of skill. The lack of commissions affects living conditions and livelihood, so the workers wish there was a way for credit to be given where it is due and for justice to be served. This is an issue that effects a lot of Moroccans; in many fields looks and connections carry more weight than skill, and this is a big issue that needs to be addressed on a national level²⁵.

Another prominent issue was the lack of paperwork in the zellige trade. The workers do not receive contracts, so if they are sick then they just miss work and don't get paid. There is no security or insurance, and this is a huge source of worry since the amount of work depends on the commissions, which means it is not very stable. Two of the workers said how they hoped that there could be government guidelines to help them have stability and security through rules and guidelines for the industry to follow in terms of workers' contracts. This was a repeated theme as many workers answered by saying they would like papers and stability. In many craft industries having contracts is not common, but the industries in Morocco, particularly zellige, are already

²⁵ This issue is what the official crafts label is trying to fix, however there needs to be both more information known about the label and a larger push from the government and workshops for the legitimacy and prestige it holds.

systematic, so having legal papers made and followed would not alter the workday greatly and would provide more security for the workers and maybe even the company.

Zellige is a quietly integral part of the Moroccan handicraft heritage. It is part the mosques, schools, houses, and monuments and is such a staple that any building or room without zellige automatically seems off-kilter. The quiet, beautiful presence of zellige contrasts the noisy bustling workshops, with the clinking of ceramics and metal with a fine layer of ceramic dust covering everything, the slight smell of the ever present mint tea that each worker has, and the small pockets of quiet space where the tiles are being placed. This is where it is made. These workers are continuing a legacy that was birthed in Morocco and is one of the most patriotic crafts in the country. Yet these workers are often forgotten or marginalized (quite literally in the terms of Fes where the workshops were pushed to move to the edge of the medina). I hope that through this paper you were able to get a glimpse into the very human, very complex lives that these workers live and how strongly zellige effects their lives. It is important to see these people now, not just because they are people but also because of how much the industry is changing. If someone had done similar research during Hassan II's rule, or when the Hassan II Mosque was being built the workshops would look much different than they are now. In 5 more years who knows how globalization and the tides of time will change the lives of the workers. Hopefully changes like having official documents and contracts, or having more artisans being recognized for their work instead of image will come to pass and that the industry will prosper. Over the last 7 weeks spent researching coupled with multiple trips to workshops I have been graced with seeing a slice of life from these workers who took the time out of their work to answer multiple questions for the sake of a strange small foreign girl's research paper. I have gotten to know these craftsmen, having even eaten lunch with one of their families', and I can only hope to have

done them justice through this paper. This paper could be taken to inspire, to create understanding, to be informative, or even to create change; all I hope is that in the end you remember the human.

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