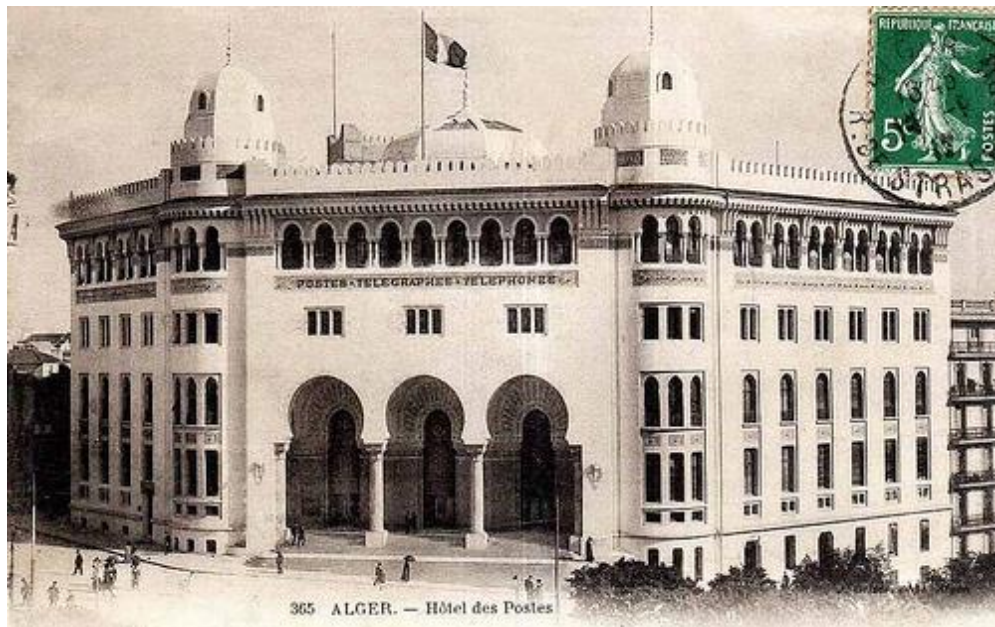


Posting Power:
**The Algiers Grande Poste and French Colonial
“Association”**



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Introduction

Tourists visiting Algiers today flock to behold the “Grande Poste” located at the heart of the city.¹ Many are drawn by the elaborate neo-Moorish architecture of the building: the horseshoe-shaped arches (also known as Moorish arches), the ornate arabesques², the white-washed façades, the domes and cupolas, the carved stalactites, the intricate lattice work, and the ornamental tiles with geometric patterns typical of Algerian vernacular design.³ But looks can be deceiving, for the iconic form and function of this city monument bespeak a turbulent history of imperialism and racist colonial policy. Constructed between 1907 and 1910 to the designs of the French General Government in Algeria’s architect, Jules Voinot, the Grande Poste’s form and function reified a transformation of French colonial rule in Algeria, and across North Africa.⁴ Thus, the Central Post Office became the symbol of colonial Algiers at the turn-of-the century, and it remains just as central a city landmark today as it did then.⁵ Following a devastating fire in 2012, the Grande Poste is now being carefully restored and converted into a

¹ Many travel agencies list the Grande Poste among the top ten tourist sights that Algiers has to offer, see for example: <http://jevisitelalgerie.com/index.php/m-sites-a-decouvrir/391-la-grande-poste-d-alger> ; <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/algeria/algers/attractions/grande-poste/a/poi-sig/457589/355067> ; https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attractions-g293718-Activities-Algiers_Algers_Province.html (accessed April 14, 2017);

² An arabesque is a vegetal ornamentation based on an underlying geometric logic that could extend infinitely, created by constantly merging and branching plant elements. Throughout history, the arabesque has only been copied or introduced into Western art on very few occasions and is associated with Islamic art and architecture. “Arabesque,” in *The Grove Encyclopaedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*, Eds. Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair (: Oxford University Press, 2009), <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780195309911.001.0001/acref-9780195309911-e-705>.

³ Georges Marçais, “L’Art Musulman en Algérie,” *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 72, No. 3 (1930): 354-369; “Islamic art and architecture.” In *World Encyclopedia*. : Philip’s, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199546091.001.0001/acref-9780199546091-e-5889>; Francis D. K. Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012), 14.

⁴ See footnote 1. René Lespès, *Alger: Étude de Géographie et d’Histoire urbaines, Thèse pour le Doctorat* (Paris : Félix Alcan, 1930), 411-12, 813.

⁵ René Lespès, *Alger: Étude de Géographie et d’Histoire urbaines, Thèse pour le Doctorat* (Paris : Félix Alcan, 1930), 411-12, 813.

museum touting the history of telecommunications in Algeria set to open to the public in 2018.⁶ The current renovation and museumification of the Grande Poste urges scholars of European imperialism in North Africa to revisit Algiers, not only to recall the place of architecture, urban planning, and telecommunications in French colonialism, but also to map the lasting effects of a shifting French colonial policy on the built environment.

The construction of the Grande Poste occurred at a moment of tremendous change in French colonial rule in Algeria. Soon after taking office as Governor General in 1903, Charles-Célestin Jonnart announced a radical new policy direction towards Algeria's indigenous populations, especially regarding their arts and culture. He proclaimed in 1904 that France had commanded the respect of Algeria's natives through the exercise of brute force, but he would work to make Algerians "love France."⁷ In taking this stance, Jonnart predated the official adoption in the French metropole of a colonial policy that struck a similar cord. In 1905, the Minister of Colonies in Paris, Étienne Clementel officially endorsed a policy of colonial "association" with indigenous peoples, signalling a departure from the earlier focus on "assimilation" of colonial subjects into Frenchman. But it was not until 1917 that the Chamber of Deputies officially got on board, resolving "to pursue ever more effectively towards the colonial peoples the generous policy of association which will continue to assure their progressive incorporation in the national unity."⁸ As Governor General of Algeria until 1911, Jonnart initiated what has been referred to as the "Arabisation" of colonial architecture and urban planning in French North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia). Most notably, a construction boom in Algiers resulted in the erection of numerous public buildings of neo-Moorish design, fittingly termed by locals and European

⁶ France 24 Heures, <http://www.france24.com/fr/20150707-algerie-alger-grande-poste-monument-musee-tourisme> (accessed April 14, 2017).

⁷ « L'œuvre de M. Jonnart, » *La Tafna : Journal de L'Arrondissement de Tlemcen*, Y22, No. 2084, 13 July, 1904 : (1), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5776221b.item>.

⁸ Cited in Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 75 (italics added).

settlers the “Jonnart style.”⁹ Indeed according to Rachid Ouahès, Jonnart effectively “defined the lines” within which these new monuments were designed.¹⁰ For Jonnart, then, France’s new policy of “association” with Algeria’s indigenous people had to be built into the form of the colony’s capital city.

Although Zeynep Celik offers the most detailed analysis of Algiers’ urban transformation under French Rule, she pays little attention to the French colonial policy shift from assimilation to association and its potential impact on the city’s built environment. Instead, Çelik contends that French colonial urban planning from 1830 through 1962 always aimed to maintain visibly distinct European and indigenous quarters.¹¹ To be sure, other previous studies of French colonial urbanism and architecture have noted a material shift in French colonial policy from assimilation to association. Gwendolyn Wright argues that this transition followed the emergence of a new culture and practice of colonial rule within the French Empire as high-ranked colonial officials began proclaiming an appreciation and respect for local indigenous cultures and traditions.¹² Paul Rabinow, likewise, notes that Jonnart pioneered a strategy of linking colonial politics to architectural style in Algeria, a strategy then put into use by the French across North Africa during the early twentieth-century.¹³

Yet, what these previous studies neglect is an extended survey of how France’s transition from a colonial policy of assimilation to one of association played out on the ground and was reified in brick and mortar in the city of Algiers – France’s most prized overseas city in the

⁹ François Béguin, *Arabisances: Décor architectural et tracé urbain en Afrique du Nord, 1830-1950* (Paris: Dunod, 1983), 2-23; Claude Lefébure, “BORELY Jules (1874-1947),” in *Dictionnaires des orientalistes en langue française*, Ed. François Pouillon (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2012), 134; Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 194.

¹⁰ Rachid Ouahès, “BALLU Albert (1849-1939),” in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes*, 50.

¹¹ Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹² Ibid., 55; Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, 192; Saïd Almi, *Urbanisme et colonisation: Présence française en Algérie* (Sprimont, Belgium: Pierre Mardaga, 2002), 62-69.

¹³ Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 311.

twentieth century.¹⁴ This transition was most visible in the design and construction of the Grande Poste. It was the most prominent of the early twentieth century neo-Moorish structures, owing to its central geographic location in Algiers and to the fact that it incorporated Islamic aesthetics in the most obvious way possible: by being surmounted by a massive minaret (see Photo 1-3). It went furthest in incorporating supposedly indigenous aesthetics out of all the new monuments constructed in the city during the first decade of the century. But the edifice's function, form, and location still retained clear French features. The Grande Poste materially embodied the shift in French colonial policy from a project of cultural assimilation, which transformed Algiers' built environment with the destruction of indigenous structures and the cloning of metropolitan French cities, toward an apparently more equal-footed partnership between French and Islamic cultures.

To chart the place of the Grande Poste in changing French colonial urban policy, a brief outline of Algiers' urban development will first provide some requisite context. This background will illustrate how the city's built environment evolved over time as French settlers and colonial authorities' attitudes changed toward Algeria's indigenous population and culture. An examination of the significance of the Post Office's geographic location, function, and architectural form will then illuminate why the Grande Poste became the symbol of the "new" Algiers at the turn-of-the-century. When taken together, the Grande Poste's location, function, and form ultimately shaped the building into a material manifestation of the rapprochement or compromise between the imperatives of French colonial rule and modernity on the one hand, and the French administration's new-found respect and appreciation for Algeria's indigenous art and architecture.

¹⁴ Henry S. Grabar, "Reclaiming the City: Changing Urban Meaning in Algiers after 1962." *Cultural Geographies* 21, no. 3 (2014): 390.

Algiers' Urban Development

After the French conquered the Kasbah (or ancient walled citadel) of Algiers in 1830, the military immediately began clearing the city's circuitous streets and demolishing its mosques and other buildings. Many houses of prayers were also expropriated and converted into army barracks. The French then attempted to reshape the Kasbah's built environment, seeking to make it into a clone of a metropolitan French city. In a way, this attempted urban transformation was the material analogue to France's colonial policy of assimilating the natives; it would have likely communicated to the indigenous inhabitants that the French would impose their rule by force. But the Kasbah's hostile hilly terrain, narrow streets, and urban density drove the French to abandon most of the medina and build a new European Algiers, what Wright calls the *ville nouvelle*, down on the flat lands to the south-west of the citadel. From the 1830s through the 1860s, the French built the Marine and Isly quarters which welcomed a large influx of European settlers. Both new districts were designed into a grid of wide orthogonal streets and boulevards, most notably the Boulevard de la République running north to south for eight kilometres.¹⁵ These two districts had several public squares, such as the Place de la République with elegant Baroque-style public buildings (including the Opera Bresson that would have been at home in any European capital), and boulevards lined with *Grands ensembles* residential apartments also

¹⁵ « Alger, La Ville Blanche, » *L'Afrique du Nord illustrée*, Y21 (New Series), No. 275, 7 Aug. 1926: 5-9, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5585959p/f11.item>.

built in a high-Baroque style. The parallel with Haussmann's Paris was evident to the eye, and, according to Jordi, deliberate.¹⁶ (See photos 4-6).

Beginning in the 1860s, some high-ranked colonial officials, including Emperor Napoleon III himself, began criticizing the rampant demolition of indigenous architecture and art in Algiers that had been ongoing since 1830. Upon visiting the city in 1865, Napoleon was so shocked by how much of the original citadel had disappeared, that he ordered a halt on all further destruction of the Kasbah.¹⁷ But this abrupt stop to any further demolition of indigenous Algiers did not alter the apparent contempt French city planners, architects and European settlers in general felt for indigenous art and architecture. For decades longer, French colonial urban planners and architects continued building new residential and commercial districts in Algiers whose grid street-plans, wide boulevards, infrastructure systems, and buildings made them closely resemble French metropolitan cities. Indeed in the mid-1880s, the General Government managed to wrest control of the extensive land surrounding Algiers' city walls from the military. After demolishing the walls, the General Government developed two newer districts of Algiers, Mustapha and Agha, to the south-west of the Isly Quarter. These two districts continued the Europeanization of Algiers' built environment, and they also accommodated the growing migration southwards of European settlers leaving the old citadel and the Isly Quarter.¹⁸

To be sure, the stark contrast between the built environments of the Kasbah, where most of the indigenous inhabitants of Algiers lived, and the European lower city – in terms of their different streetscapes, infrastructure, sewers and other hygiene systems, and levels of amenities including plumbing, electricity, ventilation and lighting – would have helped the French to

¹⁶ Çelik, *Urban Forms*, 26, 29-35, 37, 39-40, 58-59 ; Karim Hadjri and Mohamed Osmani, "The Spatial Development and Urban Transformation of Colonial and Postcolonial Algiers," in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, Ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32; Jean-Jacques Jordi, « Alger 1830-1930 ou une certaine idée de la construction de la France, » *Méditerranée* 89, no. 2-3 (1998): 30-31, DOI: 10.3406/medit.1998.3045; Graber, "Reclaiming the City," 392-94.

¹⁷ Çelik, *Urban Forms*, 37-39; Rabinow, *French Modern*, 311; Benjamin, *Oriental Aesthetics*, 192-95..

¹⁸ Çelik, *Urban Forms*, 65-68; Lespès, *Alger*, 409-12, 529-31.

maintain a visible difference between themselves and those they ruled. No consulted source, however, speaks to whether the French General Government deliberately cultivated this material difference between the European and indigenous districts of Algiers, and whether it did so with the aim of buttressing its colonial rule over Algiers and Algeria. Nonetheless, historians working on colonial urbanism in other contexts have argued that constructing a material difference in brick and mortar between the built environments of the colonizer and colonized served to demonstrate the former's superiority.¹⁹ In this way, architecture and urban planning reified the colonial discourse of "la mission civilisatrice" which the French professed to be a justification for their right to rule over their Empire's colonized populations.²⁰ Yet the colonial discourse of difference gained such a powerful currency precisely because it simultaneously held out the promise of incorporation and assimilation to the colonized people, an inherent contradiction of empire which Ann Stoler and Fred Cooper highlight.²¹ As in these other colonial milieus, the French General Government probably shared this general motivation of both reifying difference and encouraging incorporation in its urban planning projects in Algiers.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, some European inhabitants of Algeria began criticizing French architectural modernity which dominated most of the capital's urban landscape. In 1907, French North Africa's leading illustrated newspaper reported on an exhibit of indigenous Algerian art taking place in Algiers. The author rejoiced at what they observed to

¹⁹ Ambe Njoh, "Urban Planning as a Tool of Power and Social Control in Colonial Africa," *Planning Perspectives* 24, no. 3(2009): 307-8; Fassil Demissie, *Colonial Architecture and Urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and Contested Histories* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 1, 5; Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), 12, 14-17.

²⁰ Jules Ferry, *Discours sur la colonisation*, 28 July 1885 : "Il y a un second point que je dois aborder... : c'est le côté humanitaire et civilisateur de la question... Les races supérieures ont un droit vis-à-vis des races inférieures. Je dis qu'il y a pour elles un droit parce qu'il y a un devoir pour elles. Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures." English Translation : « There is a second point I must address... : it is the humanitarian and civilising dimension of the [colonial expansion] question... Superior races have a right over inferior races. I say that the former have a right because they have a duty. The superior have a duty to civilise the inferior races." Cited online: <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/histoire/grands-moments-d-eloquence/jules-ferry-28-juillet-1885>; <http://lewebpedagogique.com/histoire/documents/jules-ferry-discours-sur-la-colonisation-28-juillet-1885/>.

²¹ Frederic Cooper & Ann Stoler (Eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 3-4, 7-9, 34.

be a growing appreciation among European settlers for Algeria's indigenous culture. Until then, the article noted that most colonists had held all indigenous art and architecture in contempt. But that had now changed. The article declared: "We [Europeans] recognized that too much picturesque [architecture] had been sacrificed in our city [of Algiers] to fanatics of the straight line," which probably referred to French city planners' construction of wide orthogonal boulevards on the ruins of the Kasbah's narrow and exotic winding streets. The author attributed this new and welcome attitude among Algeria's European population to Governor Jonnart personally. According to the newspaper, Jonnart had initiated and was resolutely leading the new movement of European settlers to preserve and revive Algeria's indigenous "oriental" art and architecture. Jonnart, the article mused, was restoring "some of its [Algiers'] original charm which we [Europeans] have foolishly stripped her of due to our successive demolitions."²² Indeed, Jonnart pushed the French General Government to formulate policies and invest resources that promoted Algeria's unique cultural identity, as he and other French colonial administrators understood it. In 1908, Jonnart created a "Office of Indigenous Arts" which he tasked with documenting, photographing, and cataloguing traditional local art forms, architectural designs, and handicrafts from across the country.²³ Jonnart also oversaw the establishment of more *médersas*²⁴ and the opening of museums and exhibits showcasing indigenous Algerian art to European settlers, including for example the Exhibition of Muslim Art held in Algiers in 1905 on the sidelines of the Congress of Orientalists. Perhaps most importantly, Jonnart enlisted Jules Voinot and Henri Petit to design a whole crop of neo-Moorish monuments for Algiers' new urban centre, including the: Grande Poste, New Prefecture,

²² « Les Arts Indigènes. L'Exposition de la Médersa, » *L'Illustration Algérienne*, Y2, No. 8, 19 Jan. 1907 : 4, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57931829/f8.item>.

²³ Alain de Pommereau, "RICARD Prosper (1874-1952)" in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes*, 198-99.

²⁴ Medersas were traditional Quranic schools that trained the indigenous Islamic elite for positions in the administration, magistracy, and religious orders.

Alhambra Theatre, new medersa in Algiers, and head office of the local newspaper, *La Dépêche Algérienne*.²⁵ (See photos 7-10) This construction of prominent public buildings that incorporated some obviously identifiable Islamic aesthetics such as Arabic calligraphy decorating interior walls, geometric patterns, arabesques, and Moorish arches transformed the built environment of Algiers' European districts. Such a change in the capital city's urban space reflected the French colonial administration's new-found respect for Algerians' distinct indigenous identity (as understood by the French) that replaced the administration's former assimilationist impulse.

The Post Office's Location

The Grande Poste quickly became the symbol of turn-of-the-century Algiers partly because it stood at the heart of the city's new administrative and commercial hub. The Post Office overshadowed the city's new central intersection where five straight roads and boulevards converged into Algiers' grandest gardened promenade, the *boulevard Laferrière* built in the 1890s. (Photo 11-12) This street was the widest Haussmannesque boulevard in Algiers, measuring seventy-two metres across, as it led up from the port to the palace of the General Government.²⁶ (Map 2) Besides its geographic centrality, the Post Office also came to represent contemporary Algiers as it was one of the most evident material incarnations – in its location, function, and form – of the colonial administration's new policy of association between the French settler and indigenous populations of Algeria.

The Grande Poste was built virtually on the border between the old *intra muros* Algiers (that is the Kasbah and the Marine Quarter) and the new European districts of the city. The Post Office's intersection thus formed the interlocking link physically connecting Algiers' newer and

²⁵ Almi, *Urbanisme et colonisation*, 63, 69, 77.

²⁶ Hadjri & Osmani, "Spatial Development", 37-38; Jordi, "Alger de 1830 à 1930," 32.

pre-dominantly European neighbourhoods, in both population and urban form, to the older parts of the city and the Kasbah, the indigenous quarters of Algiers. (Maps 1-2) Ever since the French had undertaken their first modifications of Algiers' urban order, and began building European districts in the lower south-western flats of the city, the indigenous population fled the area, migrating either to the upper parts of the Kasbah or into the rural environs.²⁷ At the same time the European population migrated in the opposite direction; they moved southward, leaving the Kasbah and Marine Quarter to settle in the Isly Quarter, Mustapha, and Agha during the 1880s and 1890s. According to demographic censuses, those inhabitants classified as indigenous Algerians accounted for seventy-two percent of the Kasbah's population in 1901, seventy-five in 1911, and seventy-eight by 1921.²⁸ In contrast by 1926, a full eighty-eight percent of the Isly Quarter's inhabitants were French by origin or naturalization, while less than five percent were indigenous Algerians. In Mustapha, only fourteen percent of residents were native Algerians, while seventy-seven percent were French and the rest were from other European populations, notably Spaniards and Italians. Consequently, the Grande Poste represented a kind of geographical compromise that straddled the two distinct urban worlds of indigenous and European Algiers, bringing them together into one central intersection and its main edifice.

The Central Post Office's Function

In addition to geographically straddling European and indigenous Algiers, the Post Office's function and form married the imperatives of French modernity and colonial rule with the administration's budding appreciation for Islamic tradition and culture under Governor Jonnart.

²⁷ Hadjri & Osmani, "Spatial Development," 32.

²⁸ Lespès, *Alger*, 405-06, 253, 526.

In practical terms, the network of post, telegraph, and telegram (P.T.T.) services established by the French across Algeria in 1867 facilitated French rule over the territory.²⁹ The Grande Poste of Algiers also helped the French General Government to symbolically assert the particularly modern nature of its power and presence in Algeria. The General Government's and the Postal Administration's construction of the new Post Office in Algiers was a key component of colonial administrators' desire to make the city into the capital of French North Africa. During the 1880s and early 1890s, the Quai d'Orsay (the metropolitan government in Paris), colonial administrators, and European settlers all began speaking of Algiers as the "capital of North Africa."³⁰ Until the 1880s, Algiers had remained a rather insignificant military and trading outpost within the French Empire. The French now sought to make the town into a booming commercial port city linking the metropolitan hexagon to France *outré-mer*.³¹ In the eyes of contemporary French settlers and colonial administrators, post offices were just as central public monuments and spaces as a city's prefecture, town-hall, library, market square, bank, and church. In fact, in 1906 and 1909 respectively, a colonial newspaper's guide to the Algerian city of Oran and the General Government of Algeria's Finance Department classified post offices among the major public landmarks that all colonial cities needed and deserved.³² In 1902, colonial newspapers indicated that European inhabitants across Algeria considered a grand-looking post office a necessary and signature marker of any colonial town claiming to be a

²⁹ Paul Robiquet (Avocat au Conseil d'État et à la Cour de Cassation), *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry. Élection de Jules Ferry au Sénat. Rapport au Sénat sur le Gouvernement de l'Algérie* (Paris : Armand Colin & C^{ie}, 1898), 298, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62160907/f312>.

³⁰ « Les Obsèques de M. J. Voinot, » *L'Afrique du Nord illustrée: Journal hebdomadaire d'actualités nord-africaines : Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc*, Y8, No. 238, 5 Jul. 1913 : 9, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5561480k/f18.item>; "Bougie-Djидjelli-Robertville. Les Autobus," *L'Impartial*, Y22, No. 1070, 26 Mar. 1911 : N.P., <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5784627v/f2.item>.

³¹ Çelik, *Urban Forms*, 67; Lespès, *Alger*, 406; Hadjri & Osmani, "Spatial Development," 38.

³² Gouvernement Général de l'Algérie (G.G.), *Délégations Financières, Session de Mai 1909* (Alger : Imprimerie Administrative Victor Heintz, 1909), 301, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5866388t/f1097.item>; « Guide D'Oran, » *Revue Mondaine (Oranaise)*, Y4, No. 148, 18 Feb. 1906 : 7, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5498370m/f7.item>.

“magnificent city.”³³ Gwendolyn Wright’s study of French colonial urbanism in Indochina, found that French colonists there equally considered post office buildings an important “cultural emblem” of France. Along with lavish opera houses and terraced cafés, post offices symbolized French modernity and commerce.³⁴ Likewise, the Grande Poste’s commanding presence in the new commercial centre of Algiers projected an image of French modernity to all observers, both European and indigenous alike, which befitted the city that claimed to be the capital of North Africa.

Besides the presence of an impressive Post Office building, the Grande Poste in Algiers also represented French modernity because the monument was outfitted with the newest technological innovations and machinery, much of which was conspicuous to the visitor’s eye.³⁵ The monument had electric lighting and all its equipment was powered by self-produced electricity, including the mechanism of its massive exterior clock. During the building’s construction which was closely followed by all Algérois newspapers, the Postal Administration installed a complex underground system of telegraph and telephone cables. The Postal Administration also built an underground canal network for accessing clean water and ensuring proper ventilation of the Post Office’s interior chambers (both where the public transacted its business and where staff worked behind the scenes). The ventilation mechanism was rather sophisticated for its day; the construction crew dug out caves under the *rue de Constantine* into which they placed five-hundred metre volume tanks that captured, stored, and compressed air, then pumping it into the Post Office’s Central Hall and other chambers.³⁶ According to a

³³ « Faits Algériens. Province d’ Alger. Hotel des postes., » *La Croix de l’Algérie et de la Tunisie*, Y9, No. 820, 29 Jun. 1902 : 2, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55884787/f1.item>. « La Poste, » *Le Progrès (Mascara)*, Y16, No. 1213, 23 Oct. 1909 : N.P., <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54674020/f2.item>.

³⁴ Wright, *Politics of Design*, 78.

³⁵ « Les Travaux de la Nouvelle Poste d’ Alger : L’ Installation des Premiers Services, » *L’ Afrique du Nord illustrée*, Y4, No. 125, 4 Sept. 1909 : 3.

³⁶ « Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger, » *L’ Illustration Algérienne*, Y2, No. 50, 9 Nov. 1907 : 3-5. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5731089k/f9.item>. « Échos. Une Horloge monstre, » *Annales africaines: Revue*

newspaper's peek preview into the soon-to-be-finished Grande Poste, every aspect of the building had been designed to maximise "ventilation, hygiene, and comfort."³⁷ This concern with maximising public health and hygiene, particularly through proper water sanitation, ventilation and lighting was central to contemporary European standards of modernity developing both at home and in the colonies at the turn-of-the-century.³⁸ All these various features, from electricity to ventilation, therefore made the Grande Poste a material assertion of France's advanced modern standing and superior technological know-how.

The development of a territory-wide postal network across French North Africa was one of the four priorities of Governor Jonnart's thorough modernization plan along with the construction of new schools, protection of forests, and building of new roads and railways.³⁹ In 1908, the General Government invested massively in public works projects to improve commercial ports, open new schools and hospitals, reforest barren terrains, irrigate agricultural lands, treat waterbeds, construct new roads and rail-lines, and expand and improve P.T.T. services.⁴⁰ Every year during the first three decades of the twentieth-century, multiple new schools and P.T.T. offices opened in towns and cities across Algeria, including in Bône,

hebdomadaire de l'Afrique du Nord (Alger), Y16, No. 13, 27 Mar. 1909: 195,
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57024228/f7.item>.

³⁷ « Les Travaux de la Nouvelle Poste d'Alger : L'Installation des Premiers Services, » 4.

³⁸ For more information on the central role of public health and hygiene in the European and American. construction of modernity in the colonial world, see : Anne Marcovich, "French Colonial Medicine and Colonial Rule: Algeria and Indochina," in *Disease, Medicine, and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion*, Ed. Roy M. MacLeod and Milton James Lewis (New York; London: Routledge, 1988); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Robert Peckham and David M. Pomfret (Eds.), *Imperial Contagions: Medicine, Hygiene, and Cultures of Planning in Asia* (Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

³⁹ Charles Jonnart, *Discours de M. Jonnart, Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie au banquet du Conseil général de Constantine, 6 March 1908* (Alger : Imprimerie Administrative Victor Heintz, 1908), 6,
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5727119v/f21.item>.

⁴⁰ G.G., *Délégations Financières, Session de Mai 1909*, 65.

Tlemcen, Mascara, and Oran.⁴¹ In 1908 alone, eighteen new P.T.T. centres were built in the country, and as of 1 January 1909, Algiers counted nearly one hundred of its own post offices.⁴²

Besides projecting an image of modernity, the dense web of postal, telegraph, and telegram services spread across French North Africa constituted one of the General Government's chief technologies of rule. The Grande Poste in Algiers became the hub that supported this entire communications network. During the first two decades of the twentieth century at least, all telephone and telegraph cables criss-crossing French North Africa converged at the Grand Poste in Algiers. This Post Office was also the end-point of all the French *métropole*'s telephone and telegraph cables running into North Africa. Thus, the Algiers Grande Poste played a crucial role in facilitating France's administrative management and control over Algeria, as well as its extraction of economic resources and its promotion of commerce.⁴³

Christopher Bayly's study of the British Raj in India has demonstrated the vital importance of an effective communications infrastructure for colonizers to maintain their rule in the face of resistance from the colonized population. Bayly's book convincingly showed that the Rebellion or Mutiny of 1857 almost successfully ousted the British because their poor communications infrastructure was outperformed by the Indians' messenger networks. Consequently, after 1857, the British heavily invested in building up a dense intelligence and surveillance apparatus that depended upon a new communications infrastructure.⁴⁴ Bayly then suggested that the British managed to hold on to India for nearly another century largely due to their sophisticated communications network. Likewise in colonial Algeria, the French administration used its P.T.T. offices and networks to maintain French rule over the territory. Minutes from a meeting of the

⁴¹ G.G., *Délégations Financières, Session de Mai 1908* (Alger : Imprimerie Administrative Victor Heintz, 1908), 5-6, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5602188r/f5.item>.

⁴² Ibid., *Délégations Financières...Mai 1909*, 78-79.

⁴³ « Les Travaux de la Nouvelle Poste d'Alger : L'Installation des Premiers Services, » 3.

⁴⁴ Christopher A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

General Government in May 1909 reveal that the Postal Administration in Algeria was tied to colonial surveillance and policing across the country. The Postal Administration tasked some of its employees to monitor incoming and outgoing mail, supposedly looking for any information that might betray plans of indigenous resistance or reveal other threats to French colonial rule. At the same time, intelligence agents in Algeria depended on the national network of P.T.T. services for their exchange and storage of internal communications.⁴⁵ Hence the building of the new Post Office in Algiers, which was at the apex of the communications infrastructure in French North Africa, was an essential strategic tool for the French to exercise and protect their colonial power.

At the same time, P.T.T. services proved crucial to the General Government and European capitalists' ambitions to cash in on colonialism's economic benefits in Algeria. Post, telegraph, and telephone networks facilitated the extraction of natural resources and labour from the territory and its native inhabitants. In 1911, a French-language newspaper of Algeria's Djidjelli region expressed great delight at the opening of the new Central Post Office in Algiers. The article remarked that P.T.T. services provided the requisite communication technologies for the territory's "economic development."⁴⁶ This fact likely explains why Jonnart's administration allocated the largest portion of its 1908 budget (or 982,500 francs) to the maintenance and expansion of Algeria's postal service. It was during this same year that the General Government decided to help the Postal Administration build its new Central Post Office in Algiers.⁴⁷ Just that year, the General Government's Finance Department discovered that all its spending on P.T.T. services had proved successful because it had increased the facility of commercial and financial transactions, which had in turn spurred greater economic growth.⁴⁸ In other words, the Finance

⁴⁵ G.G., *Délégations Financières...Mai 1909*, 188.

⁴⁶ "Bougie-Djidjelli-Robertville. Les Autobus," *L'Impartial*, Y22, No. 1070, 26 Mar. 1911 : N.P.

⁴⁷ G.G., *Délégations Financières, Session de Mai 1907* (Alger : Imprimerie Administrative Victor Heintz, 1907), 17, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5602187b/f3.item>.

⁴⁸ G.G., *Délégations Financière...Mai 1908*, 6; Charles Jonnart, *Discours...Conseil général de Constantine*, 17.

Department considered the purpose and value of P.T.T. services to lie solely in the economic benefits they generated.

The French colonial administration's construction of the new Algiers Post Office was largely driven by, and then also furthered the colonial imperative of extracting an economic surplus from Algeria. Gwendolyn Wright reminds us that French elites became attracted to colonialism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries partly because of the opportunities colonies promised for economic gain.⁴⁹ In the first decade of the twentieth century, the demand for P.T.T. services in Algiers exploded, coming mostly from European merchants and financiers. The "Pour les colons" (*For the settlers*) section of a local newspaper noted that its "public" – thus probably referring to the European inhabitants of the new districts of Algiers, especially businesspeople – were impatiently demanding a new post office. The article reported that as commerce expanded in Algeria, the existing P.T.T. offices had become over-saturated. As a result, the newspaper reported that the Algerian Chamber of Commerce was complaining to the General Government that its interests and the profit margins of its members were suffering.⁵⁰ This booming demand for more P.T.T. services from colonial entrepreneurs hoping to turn a profit from the commercial activities of the expanding port of Algiers seems to have been the decisive factor that convinced the General Government to build a new Post Office in the capital. The General Government wanted to satisfy all the needs of what was becoming a "large, rich, and enterprising [or commercial] city."⁵¹ Whereas the city's existing Post Office could only serve two thousand users at its maximal capacity, the Grande Poste served ten thousand subscribers when it first opened.⁵² The evidence, thus, suggests that the Grande Poste was

⁴⁹ Wright, *Politics of Design*, 3.

⁵⁰ « Pour les Colons : Le public mécontent, » *Annales Africaines*, Y15, No. 4 (New Series), 25 Jan. 1908 : 50, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57024013/f6.item>.

⁵¹ « Les Travaux de la Nouvelle Poste d'Alger : L'Installation des Premiers Services, » 3.

⁵² « Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger, » *L'Illustration Algérienne*, Y2, No. 50, 9 Nov. 1907 : 4.

primarily constructed for European merchants; the indigenous inhabitants of Algiers were not the main targeted audience.

Overall, the symbolic and functional purpose of the Grande Poste as a marker of French modernity, a technology of rule, and a facilitator of economic gain made the monument very much a French building. The Grande Poste was built primarily to serve the European population of Algiers and further the French colonial administration's aims: aims of projecting an image of France's advanced modern standing, securing control over Algerian territory, and extracting profits. The General Government and Postal Administration did not build the Grande Poste to serve the needs or objectives of indigenous Algerians. Consequently, the Grande Poste's function on its own did not embody France's new colonial policy of association. But when the Post Office's function is added to its location and architectural form, the Grande Poste becomes the built environment's analogue to the French colonial policy shift from assimilation to association.

The Grande Poste's Hybrid Form

When Jonnart articulated his new policy vis-à-vis Algeria's natives in 1904, he declared his intention to make the indigenous population "love and respect France" by its own volition, not under the duress of force or the intimidating watch of the "gendarmes."⁵³ To this end, the architectural form and design of the new Post Office in Algiers incorporated indigenous aesthetics while also projecting an impressive image of France's capacity and power. Both strategies might have earned Algerians' respect, albeit through different means – the first through the seduction of being respected by the French and the latter through the inspiration of awe. This deduction must remain speculative, however, for lack of sources on the indigenous population's reception of the building prevent any certain conclusions.

⁵³ « L'œuvre de M. Jonnart, » *La Tafna*, Y22, No. 2084, 13 July, 1904 : N.P. (1).

Like its location, the Grande Poste's form certainly straddled indigenous and European Algiers. The Post Office's impressive scale and lavish design likely communicated the French colonial administration's power and superiority to all onlookers, both settlers and natives. A report on the architectural model of the Post Office in Voinot's workshop confirmed that he intended an "immense" dome to crown the building and a "gigantic minaret of 70 meters" to rise above it. The Grande Poste's minaret would thereby tower above Algiers' streetscape, and its clock would be visible from all parts of the city, both at night and during the day. The minaret would be more than twice as tall as the thirty-metre high one of the Great Mosque in the Kasbah, Algiers' oldest mosque dating from the late-eleventh century.⁵⁴ That the Post Office's imitation minaret, which did not call Muslims to prayer, was to rise far above that of Algiers' most ancient mosque's may have sent the message to observers, deliberately or not, that French commerce and modernity trumped the imperatives of Islam, the religion of most indigenous Algerians. In addition to the Post Office's minaret, there is more evidence that onlookers were impressed by the sheer size and scale of the building. A member of the Algiers Municipal Council referred to the Central Post Office as a "colossus," while newspapers described the new landmark as an "imposing mass."⁵⁵ Moreover, from the viewpoint of many locals, the Post Office's "mass of neo-Moorish stone literally crushed the little *Dépêche Algérienne*" and some other adjacent buildings. Contemporary photos certainly show that, even without its minaret, the Post Office dominated both its intersection and, to some extent, the Algiers city-scape.⁵⁶ (Photos 11-12)

In addition to the Grande Poste's imposing scale, the building's exterior façade and its Central Hall where the public entered and transacted its business were fashioned in a grand

⁵⁴ Marçais, *L'Art Musulman*, 361.

⁵⁵ Algiers Municipal Council, "Conseil Municipal, Session Extraordinaire, 5 June 1908," Annex to the *Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville d'Alger*, 20 Jun 1908 : 109-16, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55687742/f7.item>.

⁵⁶ "FLÉCHETTES. Effacement," *Annales africaines*, Y17, No. 19, 7 May 1910: 225, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57040940/f13.item>.

design that would have impressed visitors. A local newspaper described the new Post Office as a “mysterious palace [...] grandiose in every way” with its “domes of a brilliant white.”⁵⁷ Other French Algerian newspapers and the Algiers Municipal Council considered the building, which was just beginning to be constructed, “magnificent,” “luxurious,” and “sumptuous.”⁵⁸ The extremely ornate Central Hall particularly awed visitors, such as Henri Klein, a French teacher native of Oran. The Hall’s “superbly decorated” domed ceiling was thirteen-meters high, supported by beautiful granite columns and walls with complex ornamentations reminiscent of the Moors’ majestic Alhambra Palace in Grenada, Spain.⁵⁹ Kim Dovey’s analysis of the intersection between power and urbanism tells us that buildings of massive scale and opulence intimidate passers-by and visitors and project authority. Regardless of Voinot’s and the Postal Administration’s intentions, the Grande Poste’s impressive form would likely have been interpreted by many onlookers as a sign of the French colonial administration’s “superior resources and technological know-how.”⁶⁰

Probably in yet another display of the French colonial administration’s capacity and authority, the Algiers Municipal Council instructed the Postal Administration to install “the world’s biggest clock” on the Post Office. This clock measured six meters and fifty centimetres in diameter and was to be mounted on the exterior of the Grande Poste’s minaret.⁶¹ (1-3) With a sophisticated electrical and lighting mechanism, the clock was supposed to be visible from all angles in Algiers. The massive timepiece helped entrepreneurs and bankers make a profit in Algiers, and also furthered an agenda of the French colonial administration. All passers-by could

⁵⁷ « Les Travaux de la Nouvelle Poste d’Alger : L’Installation des Premiers Services, » 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; “Les Arts Indigènes, » 4-5; Algiers Municipal Council, “Session Extraordinaire, 5 June 1908,” 115; « Alger, le 7 Mars 1914 : L’ Hôtel des Travaux Publics, » *Les Travaux : Organe des Travaux Publics et Particuliers on Algérie, en Tunisie et au Maroc*, Y7, No. 199, 7 Mar. 1914 : 1, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6376246d/f1.item>.

⁵⁹ « Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger, » *L’Illustration Algérienne*, Y2, No. 50, 9 Nov. 1907 : 3-5; Klein cited online : <http://algeroisementvotre.free.fr/site1000/alger01/alger032.html>.

⁶⁰ Dovey, *Framing Places*, 12, 14-17.

⁶¹ Algiers Municipal Council, “Conseil Municipal, Session Extraordinaire, 23 April 1909,” Annex to the *Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville d’Alger*, 5 Mai 1909 : 87, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55689985>.

see the minaret-*cum*-clock tower which in turn prompted them to ensure they were properly managing their time to stay as productive as possible. When the minaret had to be dismantled only a year or so after the Post Office opened, many locals deplored the disappearance of the clock. The public complained that the clock had been very valuable as it showed passers-by how much time they had to leisurely “muse” in the *rue d’Isly* during their breaks until their next scheduled business rendezvous or task.⁶² Reading between the lines then, the clock especially served a need of European settlers working in Algiers’ business sector who enjoyed a significant degree of autonomous control over their time. The clock would probably not have been valuable to most of the city’s indigenous inhabitants, the majority of whom worked in the port following orders.⁶³ In addition, the clock displayed Paris meridian time, the global rival to the British Empire’s Greenwich Mean Time. By displaying Paris time, the French colonial administration used the Post Office to further integrate Algiers and its port into the rhythms of the economic, political, social, and cultural life of metropolitan France.

The Grande Poste’s architectural form combined imposing scale, elegance, and a massive clock-tower-minaret to impress onlookers and further other imperatives of the French colonial administration. At the same time, Voinot and the Postal Administration went to great lengths to incorporate a plethora of Islamic ornamentations in the Grande Poste’s architectural design, including “fine Arab indentations” decorating the building’s façade and Central Hall.⁶⁴ The Algiers Municipal Council backed this incorporation of indigenous aesthetics: a councillor outlined in 1907 just as the first plans for the Grande Poste were being drafted, that the addition of a minaret was “by no means an exaggeration, but rather the indispensable complement of the

⁶² « La nouvelle horloge de l’Hôtel des Postes, » *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée*, Y15 (New Series), No. 32, Saturday, 10 Jan. 1920 : 7, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5583215g/f15.image>.

⁶³ Lespès, *Alger*, 405-06, 526.

⁶⁴ « Faits Algériens. Province d’Alger. Le nouvel hôtel des Postes, » N.P..

[neo-Moorish] style adopted for the entire building.”⁶⁵ Moreover, the Postal Administration worked to ensure that the building retained the integrity of its Islamic appearance when renovations were needed. When a new clock was built in 1920 to replace the original, the Postal Administration ensured the replacement was framed in a pattern of the “purest Arabic art” that would in no way compromise the Post Office’s “Moorish” character.⁶⁶ (Photo 19-20)

Besides the minaret, the Central Hall showcased the most striking features of Islamic art and architecture. Just like the inside mosques, contemporary photos of the Hall show that every visible surface – including the floors, walls, supportive Moorish arches, pillars, and ceilings – were decorated with complex and overlapping vegetal or geometric motifs (usually polygons, circles, and stars) on tiles and carved woodwork, leaving no blank spaces on any surface.⁶⁷ (Photos 13-16) Muslim Algerians would have undoubtedly noticed how the Central Hall’s interior thereby conformed to the decorative standards of their culture’s sacred spaces. Voinot and the other architects may have believed that such an observation would make Muslim Algerians feel more at home in the Grande Poste than in Algiers’ Baroque-style public buildings. Indigenous visitors to the Post Office might have felt as though the French were now paying respect to their Islamic identity and culture.

Equally reminiscent of mosque architecture, the Grande Poste had whitened exterior walls and Arabic calligraphy engraved on the Central Hall’s interior. The Central Hall’s walls were also decorated with stucco arabesques, one of the most signature patterns of Islamic art.⁶⁸ The incorporation of such obviously Islamic décor would neither have gone unnoticed to European

⁶⁵ Algiers Municipal Council, “Conseil Municipal, Session Extraordinaire, 31 Oct. 1907,” Annex to the *Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville d’Alger*, 5 Nov. 1907 : 199, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5569547s>.

⁶⁶ « La nouvelle horloge de l’Hôtel des Postes, » 7.

⁶⁷ “Ornament and pattern,” in *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780195309911.001.0001/acref-9780195309911-e-705>.

⁶⁸ « Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger, » 3-5; « Alger, La Ville Blanche, » 5-7; Bloom & Blair (Eds.), “Ornament and pattern.”

observers. Several French newspapers believed the monument closely resembled a mosque, so likely most European inhabitants in Algiers would have had the same impression.⁶⁹ The incorporation of Islamic aesthetics in the architectural form of one of Algiers' most prominent public monuments and in one of France's cultural emblems in the colonies, a grand Post Office, unsettled some European inhabitants. Several French settlers expressed virulent disgust at the Grande Poste's "neo-mauresque [Moorish]" architectural form which "M. Jonnart's had plan inspired." They pejoratively dubbed it the "barbaro-mauresque" or "neo-grotesque" style.⁷⁰ The Grande Poste's form certainly represented a radical departure in French colonial architecture – just as radical a change as the concurrent departure in French colonial policy away from assimilation. The incorporation of Islamic aesthetics, evidently instructed by Jonnart at some level, was in fact one of the main strategies his administration deployed to cultivate Algerians' respect and love for France. At the same time, the Grande Poste's resemblance to a mosque and its neo-Moorish style may have signalled to European settlers that the French colonial administration now approved of, and even valued selected aspects of native Algerian culture and identity. It is perhaps for this reason that some French inhabitants of Algiers expressed such contempt for the new Post Office's neo-Moorish style and architectural form. Rachid Ouahès, in fact, goes as far as to surmise that it was resistance from French settlers that had triggered the Postal Administration to dismantle the minaret after it had crowned the Grande Poste for less than two years.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "A Alger: L'Hôtel des Postes," *Annales africaines*, Y16, No. 41, 9 Oct. 1909 : 546. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57038664/f10.item>.

⁷⁰ "FLÉCHETTES. Hôtel des Postes," *Annales africaines*, Y16, No. 36 (New Series), 4 Sept. 1909 : 490. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5703826m/f14.item>; "Rasement des mosquées d'Alger," *Annales africaines*, Y18, No. 19 (New Series), 4 Mar. 1911 : 104. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5704170x/f14.item>.

⁷¹ Rachid Ouahès, « VOINOT, Jules, » in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes*, 969 . One local newspaper reported that the Postal Administration had officially cited fears of an earthquake as its main reason, but the newspaper expressed great scepticism. Fears of an earthquake would have been present during the minaret's construction, so some other factor must have incited the Postal Administration to amputate the Grande Poste's minaret. "Carnet du Passant. Le

In sum, including Islamic features in the Grande Poste's form served as a material analogue to the French government's new policy of colonial association. Association ultimately aimed to integrate Algerians into the French national unity, just as the Grande Poste integrated supposedly Algerian aesthetics into an otherwise functionally and symbolically French building.⁷² Indeed, it is important to note that the style and form of the monument also retained a distinctive French flare. For instance, the "oriental doors" at the Grande Poste's main entrance were outfitted with "windows *à la française*" and light was supposed to stream in from the roof just like in the Panthéon, the secular temple to the French republic in Paris.⁷³ Such a stylistic marriage of French and Islamic architectural features gestured at the colonial administration's new pursuit of association between European settlers and indigenous Algerians.

Conclusion

During Governor Jonnart's administration in Algeria, some European settlers judged that France's self-declared shift from a colonial policy of assimilation to one of association was disingenuous. One critic noted that the incorporation of apparently Islamic aesthetics in many of Algiers' new buildings, that is the city's neo-Moorish public monuments, fell short of representing a true association between the French and indigenous Algerians. If the French General Government was seeking to show that it genuinely appreciated and respected Algeria's indigenous identities, traditions, and cultures, then this critic contended that Jonnart's administration should protect the few ancient mosques still standing in Algiers that the French had not yet destroyed but had plans to. In other words, this critic considered the neo-Moorish

Minaret...circoncis, » *Annales africaines*, Y17, No. 42, 15 Oct. 1910 : 494.

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5703779d/f12.item>.

⁷² See footnote nine. The Chamber of Deputies in Paris officially resolved in 1917 "to pursue ever more effectively towards the colonial peoples the generous policy of *association* which will continue to assure their progressive incorporation in the national unity." (italics added) Cited in Wright, *Politics of Design*, 75.

⁷³ "Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger," *L'Illustration Algérienne*, 3-5; "A Alger: L'Hôtel des Postes," *Annales africaines*, Y16, No. 41, 9 Oct. 1909 : 546.

architectural style Jonnart promoted, and of which the Grande Poste was its finest incarnation, a “satire” of true indigenous Algerian art.⁷⁴

To be sure, this critic rightly understood that the Grande Poste and the other neo-Moorish buildings erected in turn-of-the-century Algiers materially embodied the colonial administration’s stated shift toward a policy of association. France’s departure from its assimilationist treatment of Algerians during the nineteenth century did not mean, however, that the balance of power between the colonizers and colonized had meaningfully changed. The Grande Poste’s architectural form that incorporated many Islamic aesthetics, and its location that straddled the indigenous and European districts of Algiers certainly made the building appear to be colonial urbanism’s analogue to a new, more equal-footed partnership between the colonized and colonizer. As a material manifestation of the French shift from assimilation to association, the Grande Poste more accurately reflected a change in the French colonial administration’s strategy for securing its rule. Ultimately the policies of assimilation and association seem to have shared a similar objective: to incorporate Algerians into the French “national unity.” Association certainly did not mean an end to colonial rule. Indeed, Jonnart had begun his governorship with the declaration that he intended to cultivate love and respect for France among Algeria’s natives, who had previously been taught to fear the French under duress.⁷⁵ This objective referred to association, and it would serve to buttress the colonial relationship between France and Algeria, albeit through more seductive means than forcible assimilation. It is, therefore, no surprise that the Grande Poste’s function, symbolic presence, and the design of some of its form furthered the imperatives of French colonial rule and commerce, and projected an impressive image of French modernity. Even if the Grande Poste resembled a mosque, the building was no less a tool of French colonial power in Algeria.

⁷⁴ “Rasement des mosquées d’Alger,” *Annales africaines*, 104.

⁷⁵ « L’œuvre de M. Jonnart, » *La Tafna : Journal de L’Arrondissement de Tlemcen*, N.P. (1).

With its obvious roots in Algeria's French colonial past, it might be confounding to see that the Grande Poste today is a popular landmark among Algerians. The building is apparently loved by many Algérois and the Algerian government; at the very least they consider the Grande Poste important and meaningful enough to be meticulously preserved for future generations. It is striking that after gaining independence in 1962, Algerians should have embraced the Grande Poste, the symbol of French colonial Algiers at the turn of the twentieth century, while they sought to erase many of the other physical traces the French had left on Algiers' built environment. Indeed, the Municipality of Algiers renamed all the city's streets, replacing metropolitan French designations for Arabic names. The Boulevard Laferrière on which the Grande Poste stands is now the Boulevard Med Khemisti, and the former Boulevard de la République became the Boulevard Zighoud Youcef.⁷⁶ As all the European inhabitants of Algeria fled the country in 1962 under the threat of violence, native Algerians reclaimed and occupied the entire capital city's urban space. Muslim Algerians appropriated as their own spaces they had either been explicitly forbidden from venturing into or not dared ever enter, including the private apartments of French settlers, European cafés and theatres in the centre of town, the new prefecture by Jules Voinot, and the buildings of the French General Government.⁷⁷ Algerians then transformed much of the city's built environment that had formerly served as a tool of French colonial power, maintaining and reifying the difference between the colonizer and colonized.

Although the new national government and local Algerians did appropriate the Grande Poste as their own, they did so in a very different way to how they had reclaimed the city's streetscape,

⁷⁶ Grabar, "Reclaiming the City," 390-91.

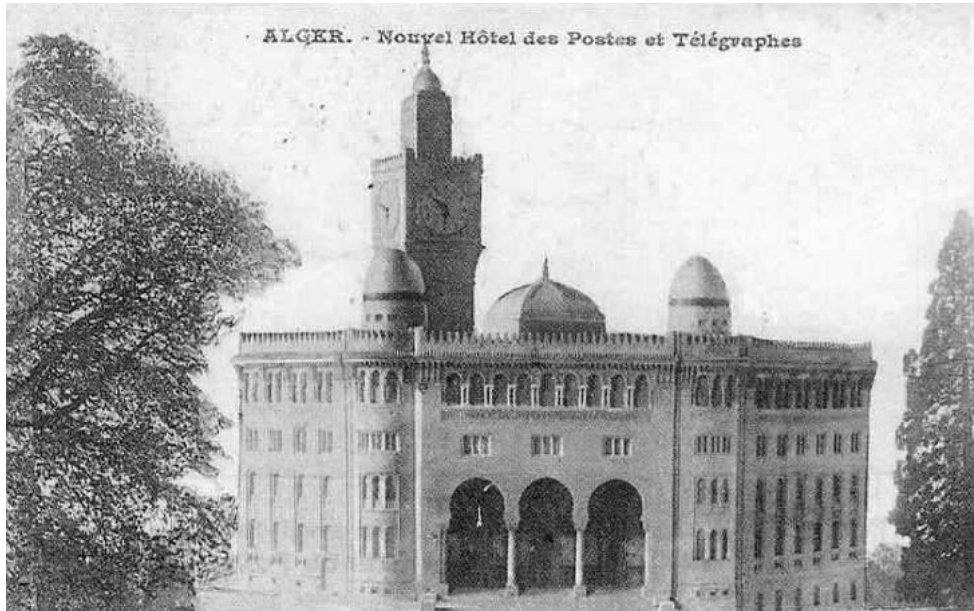
⁷⁷ Grabar, "Reclaiming the City."

cafés and other spaces. The paragon of French colonial urbanism's turn toward neo-Moorish architecture remained remarkably unaltered. After 1962, the Grande Poste continued to operate as Algeria's central post office until the fire of 2012; it was the head office of post-colonial Algeria's national postal administration, *Algérie Poste*, whose name was mounted on the front of the building in massive Arabic calligraphy (see Photo 21) Besides this addition, however, the Grande Poste's architectural form, both on the exterior and interior, seems not to have changed at all since its French colonial days. And the building is now currently being refurbished to preserve its original state as conceived by Jules Voinot for many future generations of Algerians to behold and experience. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Grande Poste's hybrid architectural form made it more likely than any other built manifestation of French colonialism in Algeria to be embraced by indigenous Algerians.

Appendix 1: Photos

Photos 1-3 : The Grande Poste with Minaret.

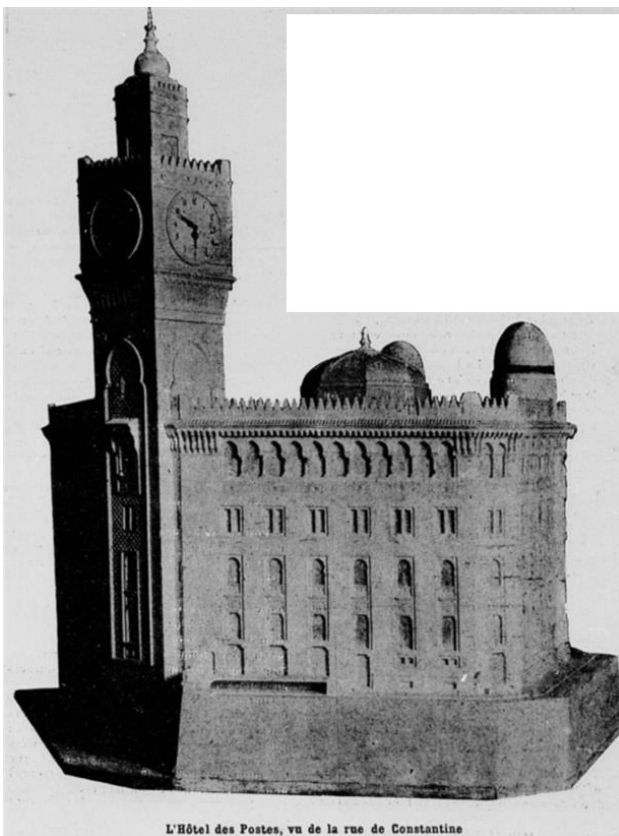
Photos of the building's architectural model taken from different angles, circa 1907



Source: Post Card, « Alger – Nouvel Hôtel des Postes et Télégraphes. » Retrieved online from :

<http://algeroisementvotre.free.fr/site1000/alger01/alger032.html>

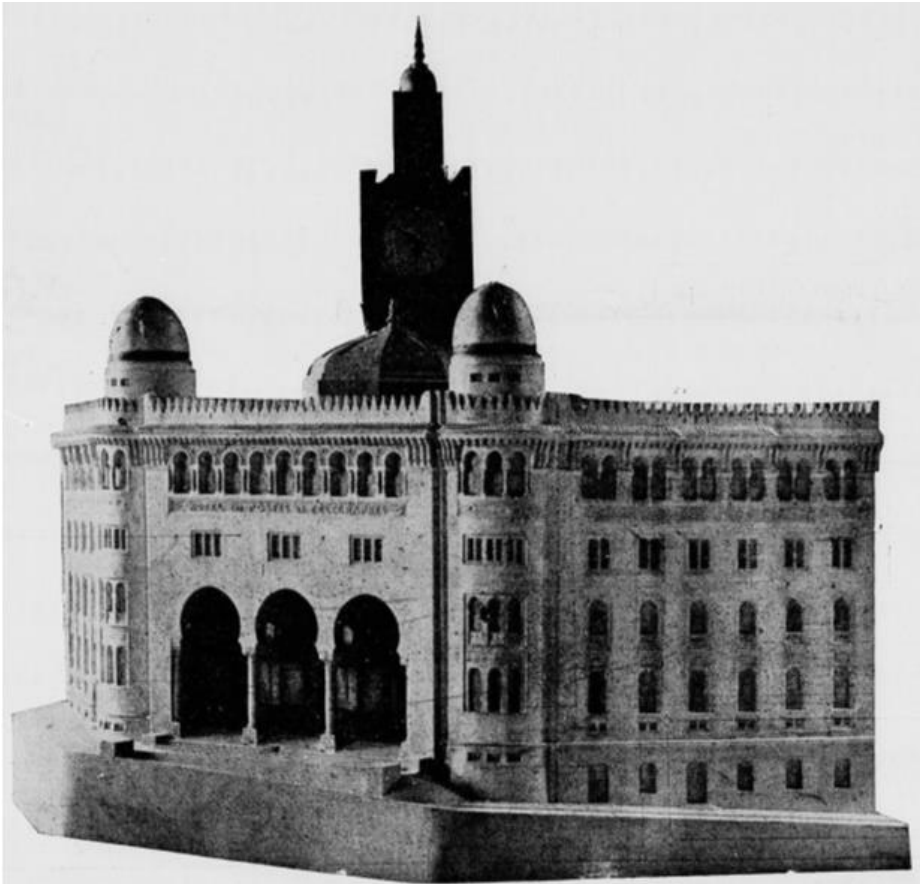
Back View (rue de Constantine)



Source: « Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger, »
L'Illustration Algérienne, Tunisienne et Marocaine, Y2, No.
50, 9 November 1907 : 4,

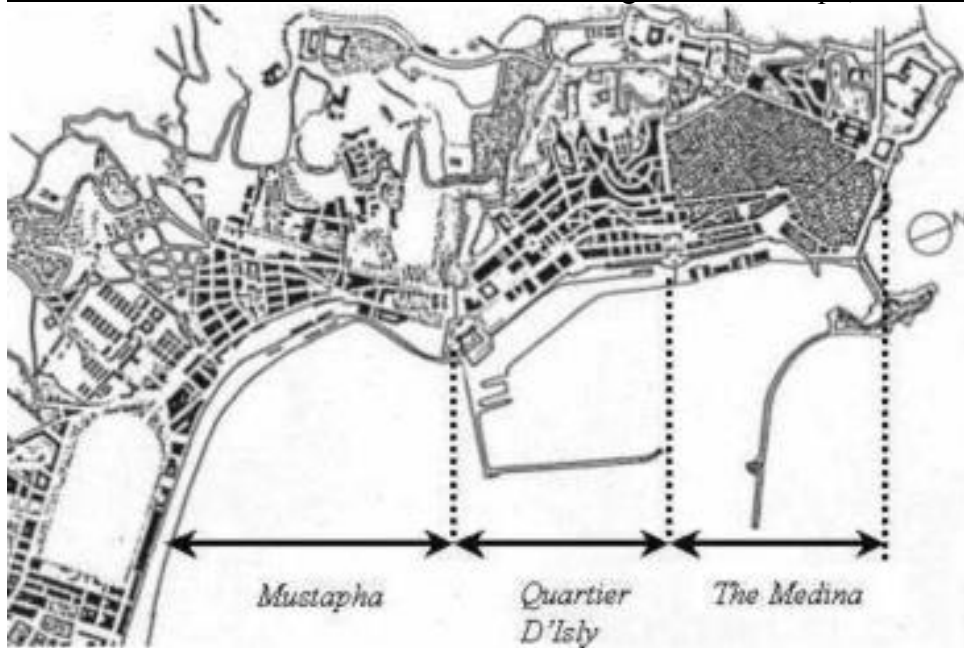
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5731089k/f9.item.>

Front Angle of *rue d'Isly* and *boulevard Laferrière*



Source: Photos Berthoud, « Le Futur Hôtel des Postes d'Alger, » (Photo), *L'Illustration Algérienne, Tunisienne et Marocaine*, Y2, No. 50, 9 Nov. 1907 : ix (Front Cover), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5731089k/f9.item>.

Photo 4: The Contrast between New and Old Algiers' Streetscape, circa 1895



Source: Hadjri and Osmani, "Spatial Development and Urban Transformation," 37.

Photo 5, European Algiers: *Place de la République* with the Opera Bresson (on the right hand-side, in the foreground), circa 1899



Source: « Place de la république, Algiers, Algeria, » (ca. 1899), Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog, Call No. LOT 13420, no. 16 [item] [P&P], <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001697812/>.

Photo 6: Comparing the former *Boulevard de la république* in Algiers and the *rue de Rivoli*, one of the hallmark streets of Haussmann's Paris



The streets of Algiers were designed to recall those of the French cities of the Métropole. Top, the Rue Abane Ramdane in Algiers. (Author's photo, July 2011.) Bottom, the Rue de Rivoli in Paris. (Kopp Corentin, Flickr, Creative Commons.).

Source: Graber, "Reclaiming the City," 393.

Photo 7: The New Prefecture (*Nouvelle Préfecture*) on the *boulevard de la République* facing the seafront, designed by Jules Voinot, circa 1917.



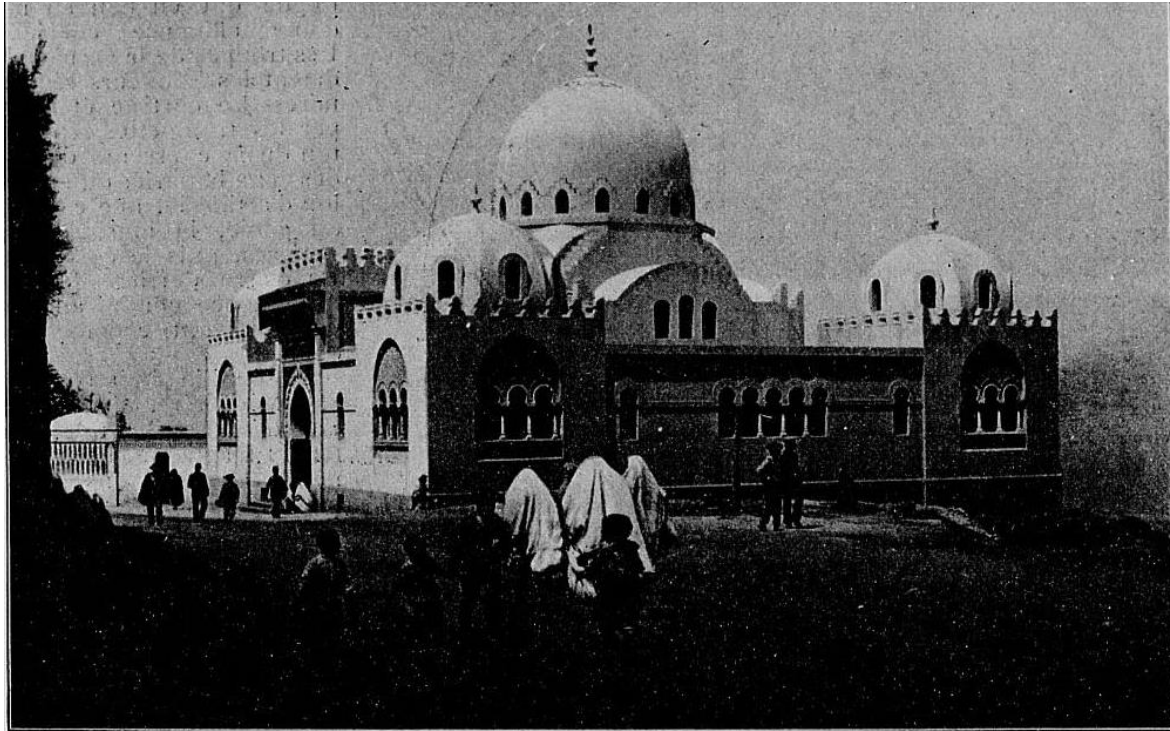
Source : <http://www.ebay.fr/itm/331915595934?rmvSB=true> (accessed 21 April 2017)

Photo 8: *La Dépêche Algérienne*'s head office by the Henri Petit (built between 1904-1906) with the Grande Poste behind.



Source: Collection Idéale P.S. "157 Alger – « La Dépêche Algérienne » et l'Hôtel des Postes," (Date of Publication : After October 1910. Retrieved online from : <http://jeanyvesthorrignac.fr/AlbumAlger/Alger%20-%20Periode%20francaise/Alger%201830%20a%201962/slides/La%20Depeche%20Algerienne.html>)

Photo 9: The New Médersa by Henri-Louis Paul Petit built in 1904.⁷⁸



La Médersa d'Alger, dont les plans sont dus à l'architecte Petit

Source: "Les Arts Indigènes. L'Exposition de la Médersa," *L'Illustration Algérienne, Tunisienne et Marocaine*, 2nd Year, No. 8, 19 January 1907 : 4, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k57931829/>

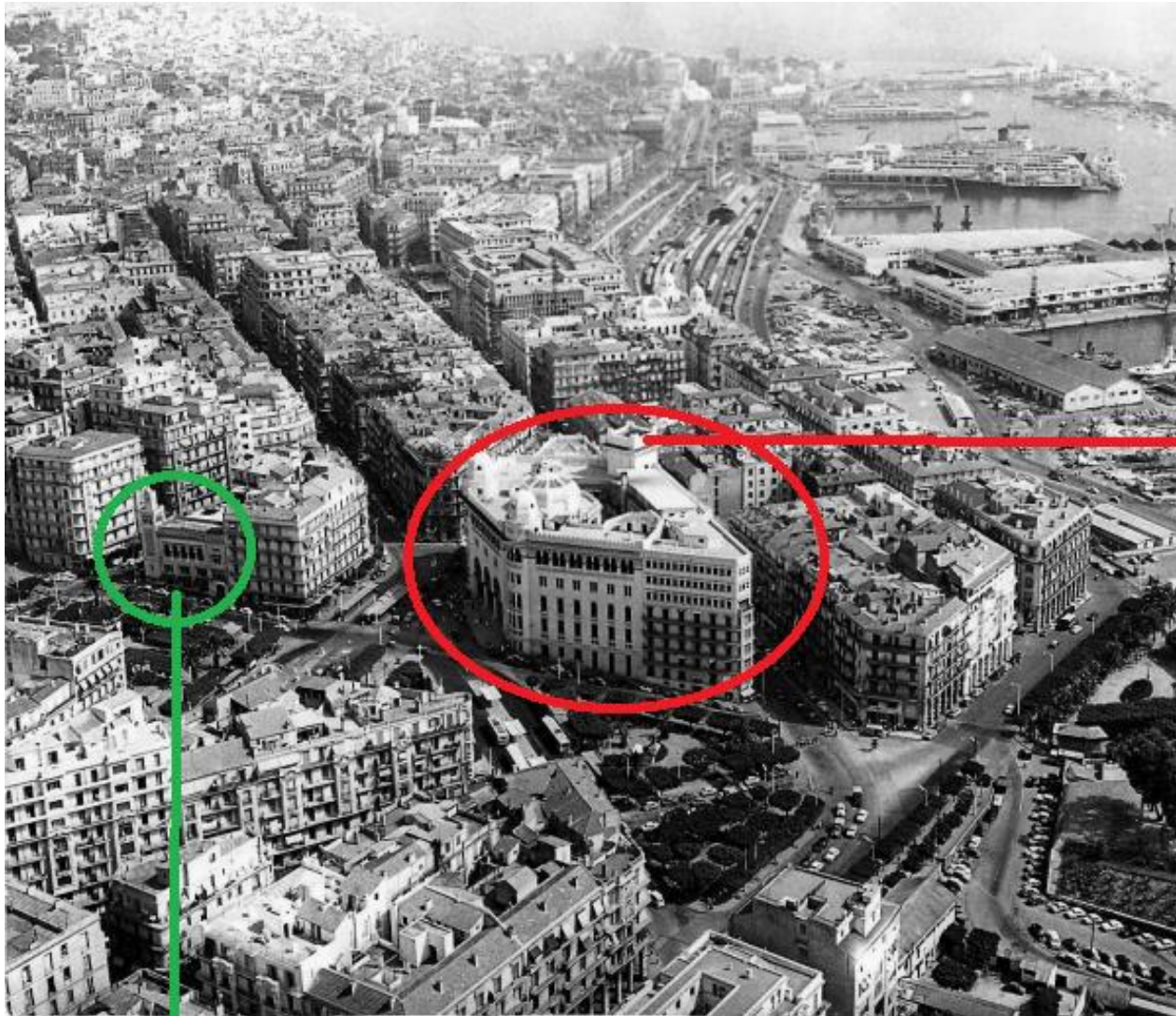
Photo 10: The *Petit Théâtre de l'Alhambra* by Jules Voinot, circa 1910-1920 [?]

⁷⁸ Petit was a one of the most prominent French architects, trained at the *École nationale des Beaux-Arts* in Paris and then appointed the official architect of the General Government in Algeria. Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 194-195.



Source : Collection Idéale P.S., « 373. – Alger – L’Alhambra – Vue extérieure, » (Date of Publication Unknown).
Retrieved online from : http://alger-roi.fr/Alger/theatres/pages/36_alhambra373_venis.htm.

Photo 11: Aerial shot of the main intersection of the *Boulevard Laferrière*, *Rue d'Isly*, and *Rue de Constantine*. (Grande Poste is circled in red).



Base of the
original minaret
that was
removed.

La Dépêche Algérienne hotel built by
French architect, Henri Petit, in a neo-
Mauresque style.

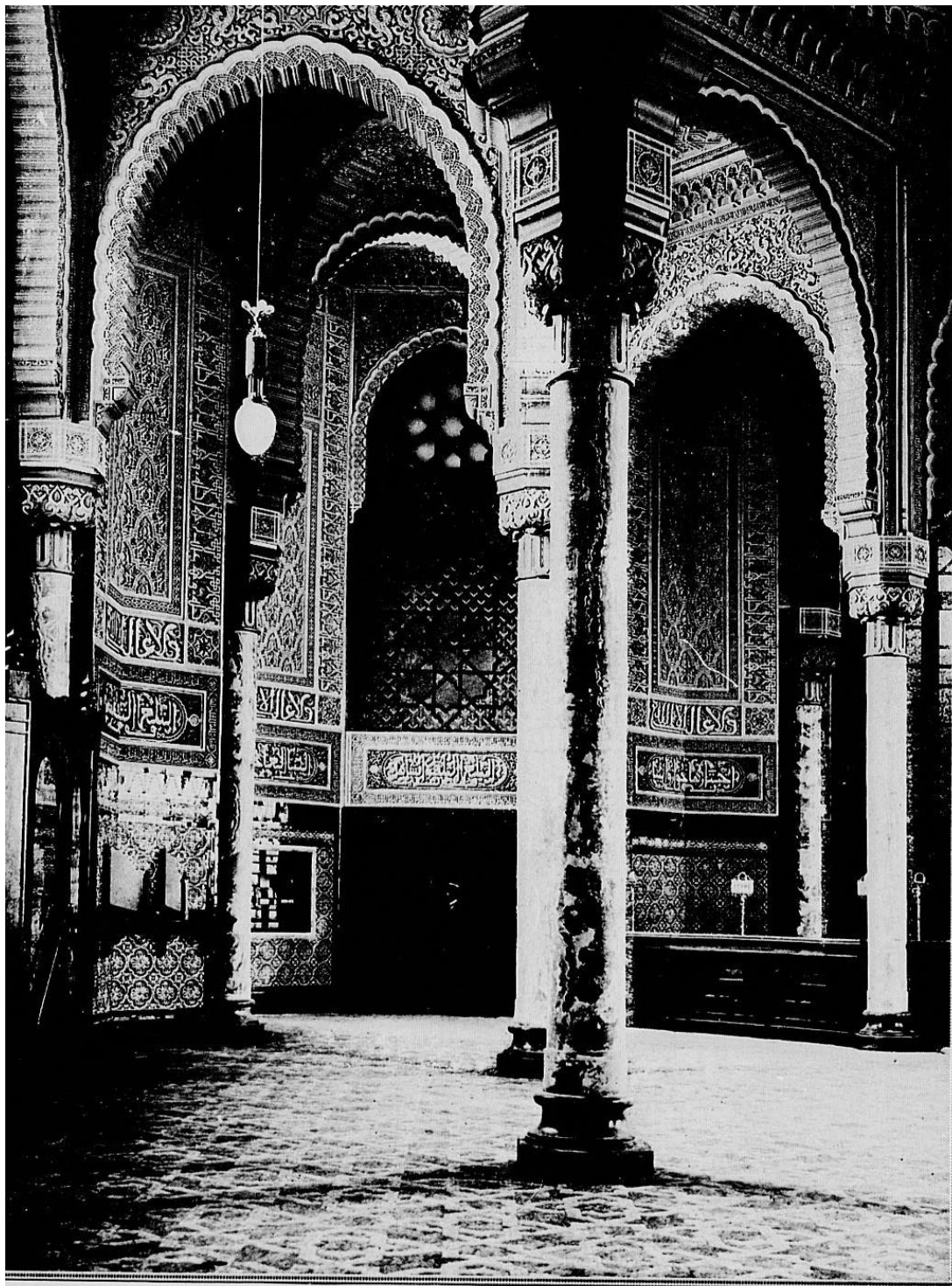
Source: <http://www.pressealgerie.fr/news/100-photos-de-lalgerie-tres-ancienne/> (accessed 18 February 2017)

Photo 12 : Panorama of the *boulevard Laferrière* as it would look in 1910 (Architectural Model)



Source: « Un nouvel Hôtel des Postes à Alger, » *L'Illustration Algérienne, Tunisienne et Marocaine*, Y2, No. 50, 9 Nov. 1907 : 5. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5731089k/f9.item..>

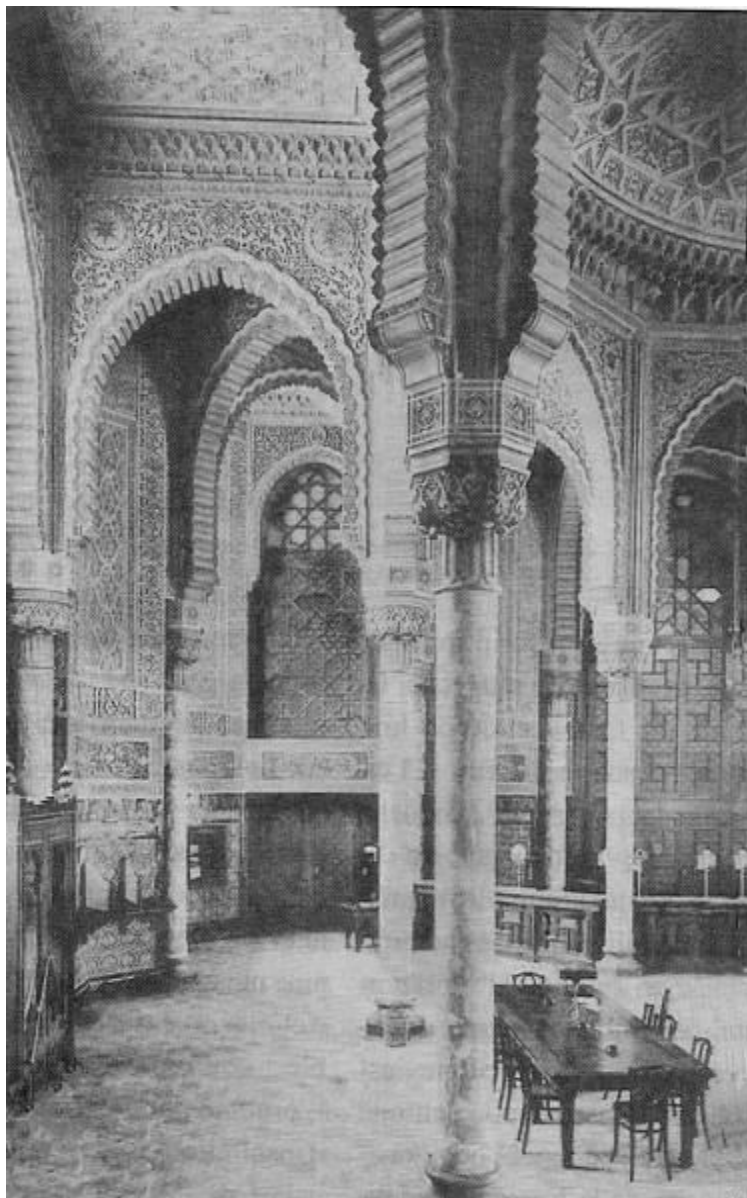
Photos 13-16: Interior of the Grande Poste's Central Hall



L'Hôtel des Postes d'Alger. — Le Hall Central.

Photo Besson.

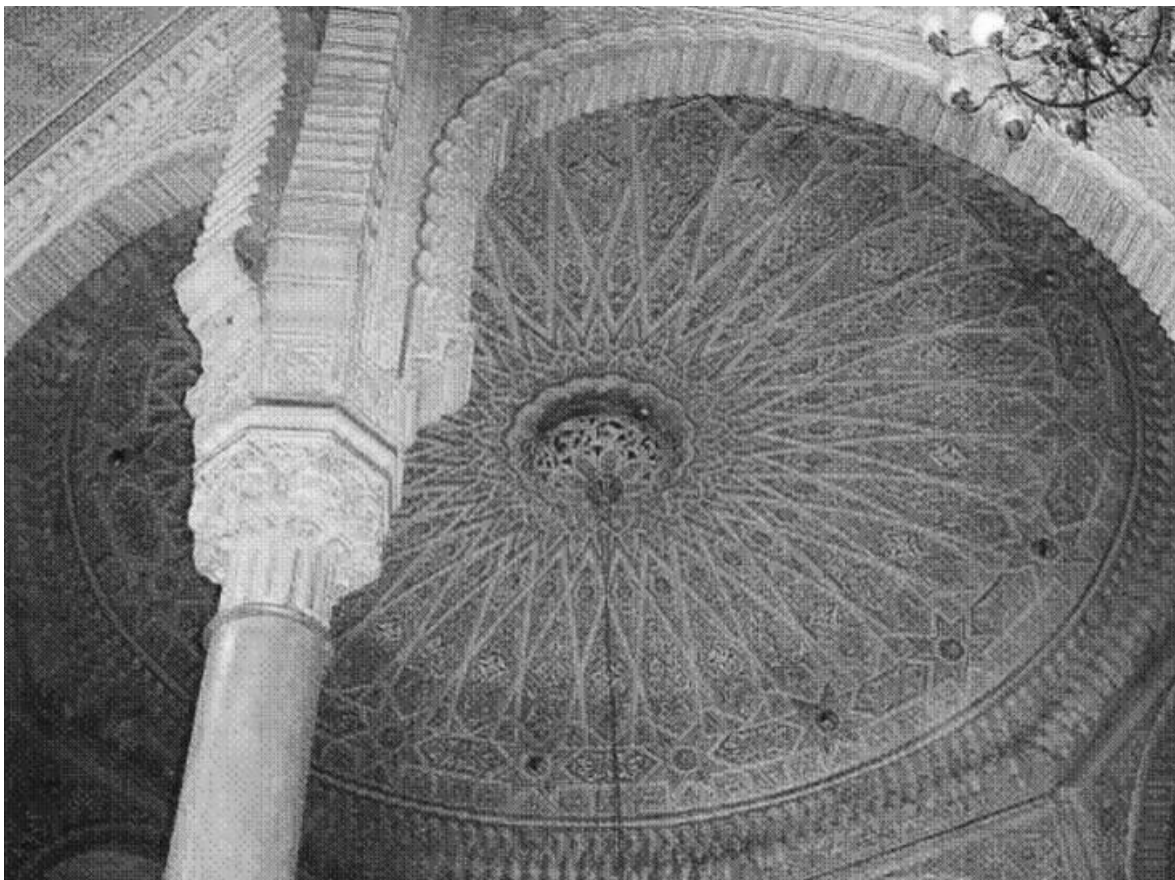
Source: Photos Besson, "L'Algérie, Pays de Tourisme," *L'Afrique du Nord illustrée*, Y9, No. 286, 6 June 1914: 2, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55857256/f8.item>.



Source : circa 1911-1920 [?], <http://algeroisementvotre.free.fr/site1000/alger01/alger032.html> (accessed 17 February 2017)

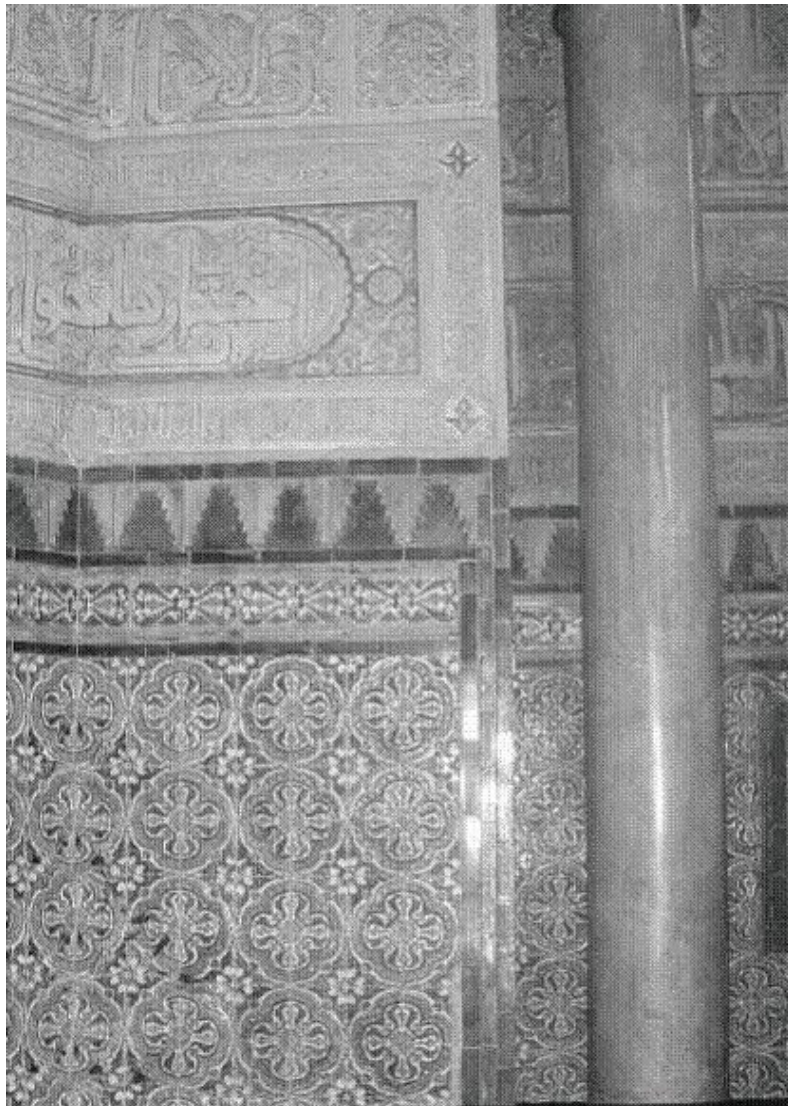


Source: circa 2012, <http://jevisitelalgerie.com/index.php/m-sites-a-decouvrir/391-la-grande-poste-d-alger> (accessed 21 April 2017)



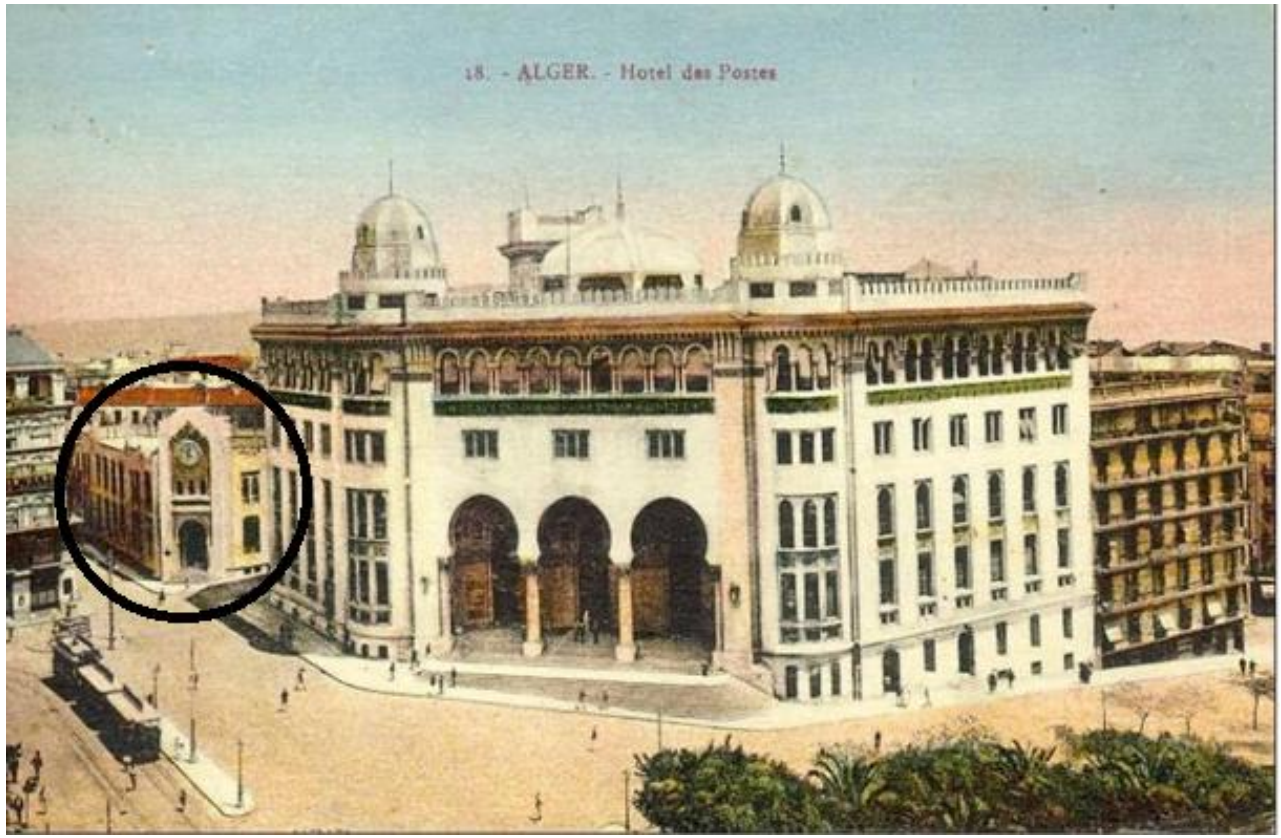
Source: Ceiling of the Central Hall, circa 1910, <http://algeroisementvotre.free.fr/site1000/alger01/alger032.html>
(accessed 1 March 2017)

Photos 17-18 Close-Up of the Interior Wall of Grande Poste's Central Hall



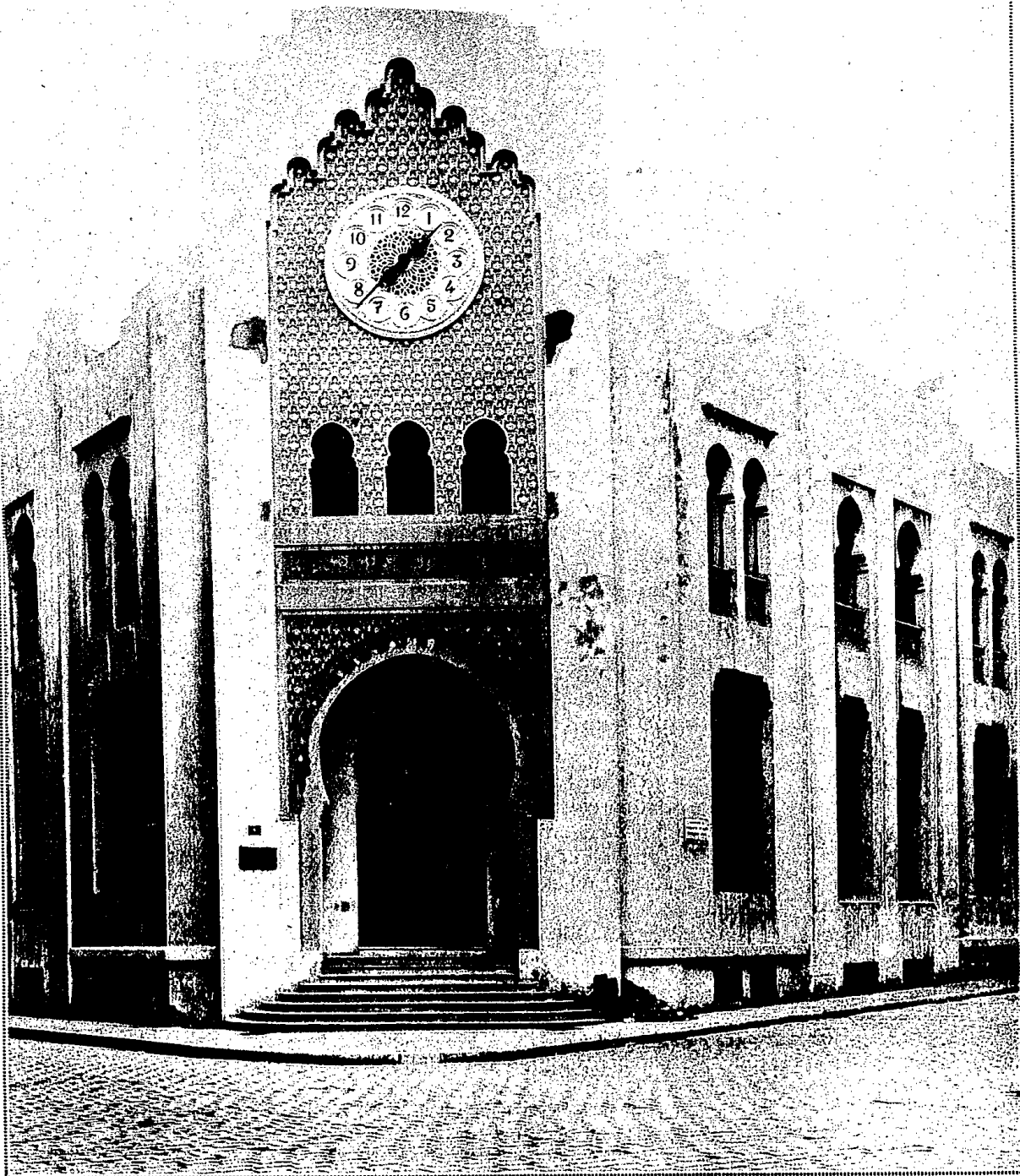
Source: <http://algeroisementvotre.free.fr/site1000/alger01/alger032.html> (accessed 3 March 2017)

Photo 19 : New Clock Appended to the Grande Poste (circled in black), circa 1920s



Source: <http://www.vitamedz.org/photos/166/02-166735-alger-hotel-des-postes.jpg> (accessed 22 March 2017)

Photo 20: New Clock of the Grande Poste Office, 1920



La nouvelle horloge de l'Hôtel des Postes.

Photo. Besson.

Source: Photos Besson, « La nouvelle horloge de l'Hôtel des Postes, » *L'Afrique du Nord illustrée*, Y15 (New Series), No. 32, Saturday, 10 Jan. 1920 : 7, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5583215g/f15.image>.

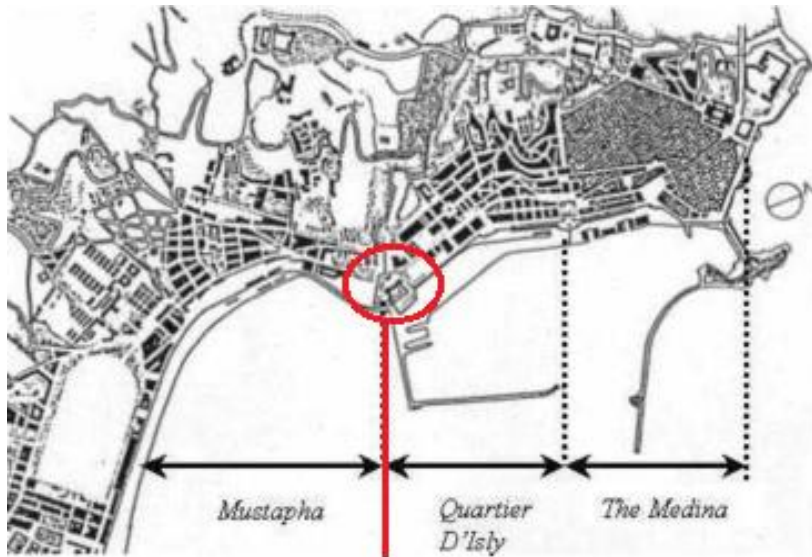
Photo 21: The Grande Poste in Algiers Today, circa 2000[?]



Source: <https://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-s/02/dc/89/f1/la-grande-poste-d-alger.jpg> (accessed 1 March 2017)

Appendix 2 : Maps

Map 1: The Grande Poste's Location – Algiers' New Urban Centre



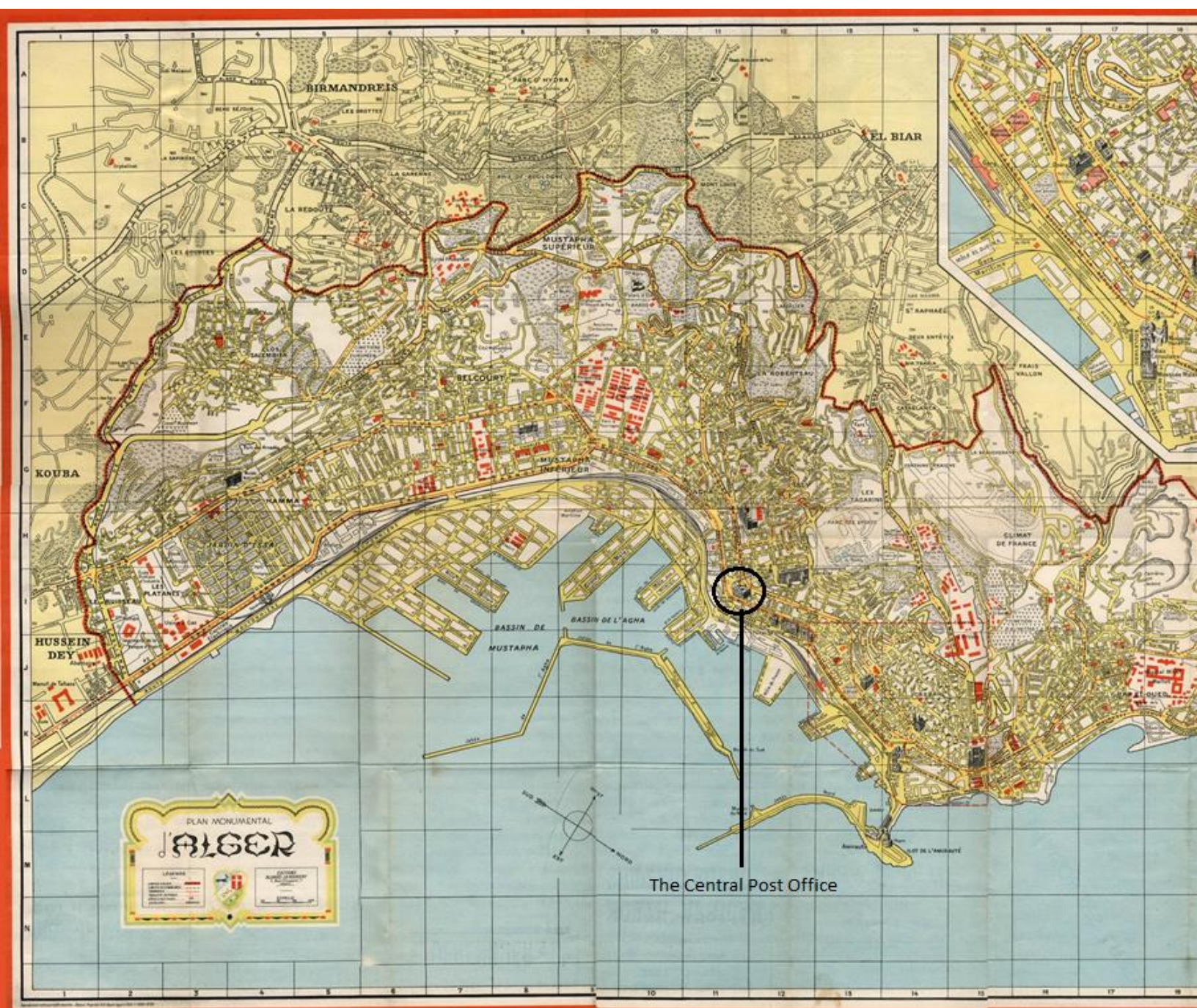
**New commercial urban centre of
Algiers where the Central P.T.T. was
built.**

Source: Hadjri and Osmani, "Spatial Development and Urban Transformation," 37.

Map 2: City of Algiers, circa 1930 (for original map, see below)



Map 3: The City of Algiers, circa 1930



Source (for Maps 2-3): <http://ekladata.com/Mj27mdtOIpoq54iFqGBI8JV0iCo/planalger-wm-large.jpg> (accessed 18 February 2017)