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NOTES ON THE RIFIAN COMMUNITY OF TANGIER

David M. Hart

All Europeans in Tangier have heard of the Rif mountains, if they have not actually passed through them by car or bus on the road from Tetuan to Melilla, and most are aware that the original inhabitants of these mountains are Berbers, not Arabs. They seem, however, to be less aware of the fact that in Tangier itself there is a thriving Rifian community, and that many of the "Moors" with whom they rub shoulders in the Zoco Grande, the Zoco Chico, and even on the Boulevard Pasteur are Rifians at least by descent, if not in actual fact. These are some considerations on the social and economic life of that community. They attempt to show to what extent the Rifians who comprise it have adapted themselves to an urban environment.

The Rifians speak a dialect which is called *thamazighth* or *tharifith* by themselves, and *shilha* by the Arabs; Laoust has classified it as belonging to the Zanatiya branch of the Berber family.¹ Its domain encompasses the northernmost of the three major geographical areas of Berber Morocco, the other two being *a.* the Middle and Central Atlas, and *b.* the Grand or High Atlas and the Sus Valley. In their homeland (which, strictly speaking, includes the bloc of territory, mostly mountainous but partly open, rolling plains, running from Targuist (*Thargist*) to Melilla (*Mritab*), in Spanish Morocco, the Rifians are organized into tribes, and the *dharfiqth*, or patrilineal lineage, is the basic unit of society.² They are sedentary agriculturists, and due to the poverty and infertility of their terrain, the agriculture which they practice is barely on a subsistence level. Overpopulation is thus a problem of primary importance in the Rif, and in the past it was always met by one of two possible

◆ DAVID M. HART spent two years in Morocco, 1953-1955, on a Ford Foundation grant. The material for this paper was collected in June 1955, with the help of Hajj Muhammad Budih of Truguth, Thimsaman, the unofficial headman of Tangier's Rifian community. The Ford Foundation is not the author, owner, publisher, or proprietor of this work and is not to be understood as approving by virtue of its grant any of the statements made or views expressed therein.

1. Emilie Laoust, "Le Dialecte Berbère du Rif," *Hesperis*, 2e Trimestre, Paris, 1927, pp. 173-208.

2. For an excellent and eminently readable introduction to Rifian life and culture, see two novels by Carleton S. Coon: *Flesh of the Wild Ox* (New York, 1932) and *The Riffian* (Boston 1933). A general ethnographic account, as well as a detailed study of physical anthropology and problems of race in the Rif, may be found in Carleton S. Coon: *Tribes of the Rif*, Harvard African Studies, Vol. IX, Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass., 1931. For an ethnographic outline of the culture of one Central Rifian tribal group, see David M. Hart, "An Ethnographic Survey of the Rifian tribe of Aith Wariyaghir," *Tamuda* (*Revista de Investigaciones Marroquies*), Año II, Semestre I, Tetuan 1954, pp. 51-86.

solutions: labor migration to the richer plains of Algeria or the Moroccan Gharb for those who wished to seek work outside the Rif, and participation in an endless and sanguinary series of bloodfeuds for those who stayed at home. Even though the Rifians no longer carry rifles, the feuding spirit is still present; the Rifian is famous over all North Africa as a fighter, up to the present day. Owing to his willingness to leave his home to look for jobs in economically more favored areas, he has justly built up a reputation for himself as a hard worker. Wherever he goes, however, he remains a Rifian; no matter how poor he may be and no matter how menial his work, he is intensely proud of his Rifian origin. Outside such face-to-face relationships with members of other ethnic groups which his work may entail, his associations during non-working hours are almost entirely with people of his own kind. Many years of contact with Arabs inevitably leads to the adoption of Arabic as a second language, which with the passage of two or three generations, will have completely superseded Berber. There may also be a certain degree of assimilation, through intermarriage with the local population. Rifian origins, however, are never forgotten and the common interests of the group are continually reinforced through the arrival of new members from the Rif itself. It is these attributes, more than any others, which characterize the Rifians of Tangier.

* * *

The fundamental ethnic element in the Muslim population of Tangier, some 100,000 souls, is constituted by Berbers from the Rif or by their descendants. Exact figures are impossible to obtain, but an estimated 70% (or some 70,000) of the Tangier Muslims are of Rifian origin. Breaking this figure down further, we find, again, that some 70% of these Rifians belong to families long established in Tangier, and that the remaining 30% are first- and second-generation Rifians who have come in since the time of 'Abd al-Karim's war with Spain and France (1921-1926), and particularly since the drought of 1945, "The Year of Hunger," which ravaged the Rif and forced thousands of its inhabitants to go elsewhere to seek their livelihood. Thus there are two categories of Rifians in Tangier; the Old, or Arabized, and the New, who are still Berbers and relatively less acculturated.

The Old Rifians, who constitute a heavy majority of the Rifian population, are largely responsible for the formation of the present Fahs tribe, who live just outside the city limits. The Fahs, like most peoples of northern Morocco, including most of the Rifians, proper, are sedentary agriculturists. Although they all speak Arabic today and are culturally a part of the neighboring Jbala group, pure Arab and Arabo-

Berber (from the Jbala, Ghmara and other areas) ancestry accounts for only 6% and 9%, respectively, of their total ethnic composition. If we are to believe local traditions of origin, and there is little or no reason why we should not, the remaining 85% is entirely Rifian.³

The Rifian element in the Fahs dates back to the year 1684 A.D., when the then sultan, Mawlay Isma'il, imported a large number of mercenaries (although in the literature they are styled *mujabidin*) from the Rif to help drive the British occupation forces out of Tangier. Before they evacuated the town, the British destroyed it, and left it for Isma'il to rebuild. This he did, populating it with his Rifian warriors and their families.⁴ The governor of Tangier, who became their commander, gave them land in the name of the sultan on the outskirts of the city; in return for this, the Rifians did military service, and, in addition, each man received a monthly salary of 7 *mithqals*. In Tangier they were organized into a standing army called the *jaysb al-rifi*, and their duties consisted of protecting the city and of going off on punitive expeditions against the neighboring tribes of the Jbala. The *jaysb al-rifi* was divided into 21 *miyas*, each one of which was a tribal contingent (Aith Sa'id, Thimsaman, Asht Tuzin, Aith Wariyaghir, Aith Ammarth, Ibuqquyen, Gwarit,⁵ etc.) commanded by a *qaid al-miya*. Several *miyas*, number unspecified, formed a *raba*, under a *qaid al-raba*. Three *miyas* made up the *mukbazniya*, who ran special errands for the pasha or governor of Tangier and acted as his personal bodyguard. At the time of its greatest strength, nearly a century after the Rifian reoccupation, the *jaysb al-rifi* consisted of 3600 men, 2400 of whom were footsoldiers and horsemen, 500 artillerymen (commanded by a *qaid al-tubjiya*), and 700 sailors (commanded by a *ra'is al-babr*). By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, things had begun to fall off; the army no longer received a salary, although the units still existed, and by the beginning of the twentieth the artillery units were no longer functioning, and most of the sailors had become ordinary fishermen.⁶ Today, with Tangier an international city, the only trace left of its former Rifian garrison is the escort of horsemen which takes the *mindub*⁷ to the mosque on Fridays.

3. E. Michaux-Bellaire, "Tanger et sa Zone," *Villes et Tribus du Maroc*, Vol. VII, Paris 1921, p. 361.

4. Walter Fogg, "Villages, Tribal Markets and Towns: Some Considerations concerning Urban Development in the Spanish and International Zones of Morocco," *The Sociological Review*, vol. XXXII, Jan.-April 1940, London, pp. 85-107.

5. This is the plural of *Gart*, which refers to two semi-nomadic tribal groups of the Eastern Rif, Ibdharsen (1-Mtalsa) and Aith Bu Yihyi.

6. My material on the organization of the *jaysb al-rifi* is taken entirely from Michaux-Bellaire, 1921, *op. cit.*

7. There is no longer a pasha of Tangier. His successor, the *mindub*, has taken over the functions of the pasha, and also acts as the Sultan's representative in the International Zone of Tangier. The present incumbent, Si Hmid Tazi, is not a Rifian; he comes from an old family in Fez.

The Rifian footsoldier has long since become the simple Fahsi farmer, who, dressed in white turban and knee-length Jbala-style *jillab*, comes into the Suq al-Barra (Zoco Grande) every Sunday and Thursday with his produce.

Aside from the Fahs proper, over half of the most important families of the city of Tangier are also of Rifian origin. Michaux-Bellaire lists 42 prominent Muslim families, of which 24 were once Rifians. The most prominent of these, the Ulad 'Abd al-Sadaq, are from Thimsaman, and have provided Tangier with most of its pashas since the end of the seventeenth century. A number of other urban families have produced qaid, mukhaznis and other assorted officers of the *jaysh al-rifi*, in considerable abundance. These families too, of course, have long been Arabized.

The New Rifians, making up the remaining 30% of Tangier's Rifian population, are the recent arrivals, first-, or at the most, second-generation Rifians who are largely unassimilated by the locals, and who speak *thamazighth* among themselves. This group, numbering some 25,000 to 30,000 souls, serves to maintain a high rate of contact between the Old Rifians and their kinsmen in the Rif. Incentives for Rifians to come to Tangier have always been provided just as much by the fact that they may have already had family and kin there as by the opportunity for work. Although the Rifian population of Tangier may be characterized as a permanent rather than a temporary one, the Rifians in town living there all year round, many, particularly the more recent arrivals, still own property in their own tribes and must thus keep in touch with their kinsmen back home. Not a few, too, who work in Tangier, return to the Rif for major festivals such as the '*Id al-Kabir*, if they still have close relatives there. Contact with the homeland has, therefore, never been lost.

As to tribal affiliations, the Old Rifians are made up, primarily, of people from Thimsaman, after which come the tribes of Aith Wariyaghir, Asht Tuzin, Ibuqquyen, Aith 'Ammarth and Igzinnayen, with a sprinkling of Eastern Rifians: Aith Sa'id, Aith Urishik, Iqar 'ayen, and Ibdharsen. This estimate is based both on my own field notes for the urban families and on Michaux-Bellaire's data for the Fahs. Among the New Rifians, Aith Wariyaghir is the tribal group which predominates, followed by Ibuqquyen, Asht Tuzin, Thimsaman, Aith Yittuft, Aith 'Ammarth, Iqar 'ayen, Aith Sa'id and Bani Bu Frah, in more or less that order. The great majority of these arrived in Tangier, more than half-starved and on foot, after the terrible drought of 1945, when Barbara Hutton is reported to have set up a soup kitchen for them. When, after the post-war boom, a trade recession hit Tangier in 1951, many individuals of this group returned to the Rif, but more stayed, held on by the fact that they had steady jobs.

It may be seen from the foregoing that among both Old and New Rifians, tribal elements from the Central Rif occupy first place in point of population, Thimsaman leading in the former group and Aith Wariyaghir in the latter. Among the New Rifians, people from Igzinnayen are conspicuous by their absence; even in the past, however, in times when border restrictions did not exist, they tended to gravitate more toward Fez, where, in the village of L-Mta, just outside the city, there is a colony of some 2,000 expatriates from the village of Iharrushen.

The Old Rifians are concentrated in three sections of Tangier: Msalla (which contains the greatest number of them, mostly Thimsamanis), Agla, and that part of Tanja al-Baliya adjacent to the Villa Harris, though there are some, mostly Wariyaghris, in Jama'a al-Muqra, Bu Khashkhash and Dar Barud. The Post-Drought Rifians live largely in Wad Ahardan (named for the Ulad Ahardan of Thimsaman, one of the richest families of Tangier) and in Bani Makada. There is no ward division operative along tribal lines, and members of all the above-mentioned tribes live scattered throughout these two *barríos*.

As to the linguistic picture, it has already been stated that the Old Rifians speak Arabic exclusively, while the New retain their Berber speech. Nevertheless, we must point out that even among the New Rifians, *thamazighth* begins to assume less and less importance with the second generation, and has almost completely died out by the third. Even first-generation Rifians learn Arabic, and most speak it passably if not well. Many of the younger ones, in addition, speak fluent (if not always grammatically correct) Spanish, adequate French, and even a few essential phrases of English. It may be noted that, by and large, the capability of the Rifian to learn one or more foreign languages is far greater than that of the Moroccan Arab. It has to be, because no one but he himself knows *thamazighth*, and no one but a professional Berberist is willing to take the time and trouble to master its numerous complexities.

Regarding the division of labor within the Rifian community, the Thimsamanis engage primarily in agriculture and gardening. A good many of them are day laborers, while a number of others are businessmen on a small scale. There are even some big businessmen, import-export merchants for the most part, and it is from this group that the spokesmen for the Tangier Rifians, such as the Hajj Muhammad Budih, without whose help this paper would not have been written, are drawn. These Thimsamani businessmen are the Rifian intellectuals of Tangier and the unofficial headmen of the community.

The people of Aith Wariyaghir also number a few businessmen in their ranks, but notably less so than the Thimsamanis; the Wariyaghris

are principally farmers, gardeners and day laborers. The rest, particularly the Post-Drought Rifians, are largely day laborers also, and the nature of their jobs may be anything from construction workers and porters at the docks to night watchmen for RCA, Mackay Radio and the Voice of America. In addition, Rifians may be found in the following professions: masons, carpenters, fishermen, tailors (largely Thimsamanis and Wariyaghris),⁸ taxi drivers,⁹ truck drivers,¹⁰ legation and consulate *shaushes*,¹¹ waiters, cooks and bartenders.¹² Indeed, the proprietor of the Mat 'am Hammadi, the best Moroccan restaurant in Tangier, is a native of the village of Thifarwin in Aith Bu Ayyash (Aith Wariyaghir), as is his wife. His children, however, speak only Arabic.

Unlike the situation which obtains among the Rifian workers in Algeria, there are no special contractors of Rifian labor in Tangier. Furthermore, the jobs, like the personnel, are permanent and turnovers are slight. In Algeria, on the other hand, the whole pattern of labor migration has an entirely seasonal character: when one crop of workers returns to the Rif, another takes its place, and the labor contractor, himself a Rifian, is always able to provide fresh hands on the farms of the French colons.¹³

By and large, the Tangier Rifians, by their own standards, live fairly well. The great majority are married and have their own little houses, most of which have two rooms, although the number of rooms, naturally, depends both upon the size of the family and the income of its head. They eat wheat bread, not barley bread as in the Rif, and during Ramadan the women bake Rifian *bartitas* (unsweetened pancakes), which are then sold in the Suq al-Barra.

The dress of both men and women is indistinguishable, for the most part, from that of city Arabs. Men's wear consists, as often as not of fezzes, *jillabs* of European cloth rather than of homespun, neckties and French shoes. One looks in vain for the white turbans, heavy wool *jillabs*

8. In the case of the Wariyaghris, these must undoubtedly be natives of the village of T'akkiyen, as no tailor in that tribe comes from anywhere else.

9. One of the most prominent of the Rifian taxi drivers is a man from Aith 'Ammarth, who, with his sons, owns and operates a small fleet of taxis out of the Avenida de Espana, near the public beach.

10. Muhsn Mzyan Hmid, the son of a former *qa'id* of one of 'Abd al-Karim's *barkas* in Turirth (southern mountain Aith Wariyaghir), came to Tangier in 1947, got married there to a woman from Asht Tuzin, and now drives a beer truck down to Casablanca and Sidi Slimane and back, twice a week.

11. A *shaush* is a splendidly uniformed doorman who sits on a stuffed hassock in front of the legation door and announces visitors. In the American Legation in Tangier, one of the *shaushes* is known as al-Rifi; although he speaks only Arabic, no Berber, he has a red beard and looks remarkably Rifian. By descent, he is a Thimsamani.

12. In Tetuan, the bartender of the Hotel Dersa is from Thimsaman, and the bartender in the Cafe Continental is a Wariyaghri from Aith Hadifa.

13. See David M. Hart and José R. Erola, "Un Caso Típico de Movimiento Migratorio: La Emigración Golondrina Rifeña," MSS, to be published in *Tamuda (Revista de Investigaciones Marroquies)*, Tetuan.

and esparto grass sandals so characteristic of the tribesman from the mountain of Aith Wariyaghir. The mountaineer's wife or daughter, who in the Rif would wear a bright yellow tunic and a headkerchief held in place by a cord of black silk threads caught up together and intertwined with her braids, with the long thread-ends hanging down her back, is, in Tangier, enveloped in a *haik* or in a woman's *jillab*, and wears a veil that she would never wear at home. The people of the Fahs wear the clothing of countrymen, but it is the Jbala rather than the Rifian model which they follow: short, knee-length *jillabs* (which actually originated in the Rif but are no longer worn there), and round-toed babouches rather than sandals. The costume of the Fahsi women shows even more strikingly the Jbalan influence: wide brimmed, Mexican-style straw sombreros, striped skirts, and leather leggings.

Although, as I said, the majority of the Tangier Rifians are by their own admission fairly well off, there is a segment of the Post-Drought group which is economically less fortunate. These are mostly youths in their teens, who make a precarious living selling used American and European clothing (which they buy in bulk), vegetables, fruits, flowers and all manner of other small articles, in the Suq al-Barra. Most of the "Moors" whom one sees in the Zoco Grande who wear straw hats and old European clothes (because they are too poor to afford *jillabs*) are Rifians of this type. They come from all the Rifian tribes, although Iqar 'ayen and Aith Sa 'id appear to be the best represented. Then, up on the Boulevard Pasteur, constantly nagging tourists and residents alike, are the newspaper boys and the shoeshine boys, most of whom are also Post-Drought Rifians. Many of the shoeshine boys, almost all of whom are from Ibuqquyen, at one time plied their trade in Villa Sanjurjo before finding greener pastures in Tangier, where a shoeshine costs one peseta more. Among the newsboys, there is a sprinkling of individuals from Aith Wariyaghir. All the Rifian boys of this category live huddled up together in tiny rooms in the native town, with some six or seven to a room and all paying the rent jointly. In the relations of this group with the other Rifians of Tangier, we may gain an idea of the unity and solidarity which characterizes the Rifian community. The richer Rifians make a practice of giving money or credit to the poorer ones, and always try to help them if they are in trouble, the kind of trouble which Rifians may get into in Tangier ranging from family squabbles to differences of opinion with the authorities in the *mindubiya*.

As to property and land tenure, most of the arable land in the Tangier Zone belongs to the Old Rifians, this land having been allotted by the pasha of Tangier to the members of the *jaysb al-rifi* in the name of Mawlay Isma'il. Plots of land in the Fahs were originally divided up as

follows: a *qaid raba* received an area equivalent to 10 oxteams' worth of plowing, a *qaid miya* one equivalent to 4 oxteams' worth, a *mqaddim* one equivalent to 2, a horseman one equivalent to 1, and a foot-soldier one equivalent to one-half.¹⁴ The pasha also had a register, called *kunnash al-jaysb*, drawn up, and upon it the plots were inscribed with the names of their beneficiaries.¹⁵ As the tribe of Thimsaman has always achieved the greatest degree of ethnic predominance within the structure of the Old Rifian group, the Thimsamanis have always owned the most land, the Wariyaghri coming next. Degree of wealth adheres to the same pattern: the Thimsamani businessmen are the richest Rifians in Tangier, followed by the rest of the Thimsamanis, and then by the Wariyaghri. The Old Group is, in general, considerably wealthier than the new, owing to a far longer period of participation in Tangier's commercial activities. Almost all the New Rifians, and even some of the Old, however, continue to retain a hold on the property which they inherited from their fathers in their tribes of origin.

Regarding marriage regulations, the Tangier Rifians are almost entirely endogamous, a Rifian man almost inevitably marrying a Rifian woman. There are, however, frequent exogamous marriages between men of one tribe and women of another,¹⁶ *within* the Rifian community, because the concept of the tribe has, outside the Rif itself, largely lost its meaning. This is true, by the same token, of all activities and institutions which involve participation on a tribal level: bloodfeuds, *lifuf* (moiety) alliances, truces, and wars. In Tangier, therefore, all the members of the Rifian community are united by virtue of the fact that they are *Rifians*, and on this level endogamy is firmly maintained. It is very rare for a Rifian, man or woman, to marry an Arab, whom the Rifian considers to be far beneath him. Inter-marriage with Susis, although both are Berbers, is unknown, the Rifian despising the Susi as a small-time shop-keeper, almost on a level with the Indian and the Jew, but perhaps, at the same time, being jealous of him for his commercial success. Thus Rifian genes are kept almost completely pure, even if Rifian speech is expendable.

As to marriage ceremonial, the Old Rifians have long since lost the custom of their fathers of putting the arc (*r-qubbath*) made of two intertwined pieces of grapevine around the head of the bride before she is taken to the groom's house. Most of the women of the Old Rifian group,

14. Michaux-Bellaire, *op. cit.*, 1921, p. 376.

15. Michaux-Bellaire, *op. cit.*, 1921, p. 96.

16. There are many instances of men from Aith Wariyaghri marrying women from Thimsaman, and at least one instance, known to me personally (see footnote 12), of a man from Aith Wariyaghri married to a woman from Asht Tuzin.

because they now speak Arabic, have forgotten how to sing the time-honored Berber refrain of *Ayara la buya*, which is chanted by the unmarried girls, who accompany themselves on tambourines, at every wedding in the Rif. The New Rifian, however, continue to maintain these customs if the girls know how to sing this song and to improvise the necessary couplets; otherwise they fall into disuse. Marriage rites, in general, tend to become more and more like those of city Arabs, with the passage of time and increased residence in Tangier.

The Tangier Rifian community has no true political organization; there is neither a *shaykh* nor a *mqaddim*, such representation as the community has being entirely unofficial and coming from one of the rich Thimsamani mercantile families.

There are no special holidays or feasts observed other than the usual Islamic ones. The Tangier Rifians are apt to attend the Friday service in the Mosque of the Susis, as though it were their own; but there are many, too, who merely go to the mosque which serves the ward they live in. As in the Rif itself, few are members of religious brotherhoods; those who are belong primarily to the Darqawa order, which has a large *zawiya* in Tangier and is represented in Aith Wariyaghir as well.

Aside from providing them with the regular Qur'anic instruction from the *fadib* in the mosque, well-to-do Rifians have in recent years increasingly tended to send their sons to both the Spanish and the American schools. Enrollment in the French Lycée appears to be slight.

* * *

In summation, the conclusions which may be drawn from the above data are as follows: Although the Rifians of Tangier are spread out in more or less discreet aggregates all over town and all over the International Zone, and although there is a sharp linguistic division between the Old Rifians and the New ones, they can nevertheless be said to constitute a true community. This is so because all of them possess a common origin, maintain common interests, adhere to endogamy as a preferred marriage pattern, and keep ingroup friction to a minimum through a well developed system of mutual aid. The New Rifians, in addition, function as an effective link between the Old and their tribal homelands in the Rif. Although tribal identifications as such have lost much of their force, their place has been taken by an ethnic identification as *Rifians*, in contradistinction to Arabs or Susis. This is a factor which has fostered and bolstered community pride to a markedly ethnocentric degree. Even if an ethnic division of labor does not appear sharply defined, most of the jobs which the Rifians engage in have one point in common: they involve

physical exertion, and the Rifian is not afraid of hard work. Indeed, he looks down upon Arabs and Jbala for shirking it. In his attitude toward work he has been most able and willing to adapt himself to the conditions of an urban environment, but at the same time he has not become acculturated to the point of losing his ethnic identity. If anything, the reverse. He is a Rifian and will remain one. As such, he should be judged according to his own lights and appreciated on his own merits as an interesting and valuable member not only of his own community, but of the Community of Tangier in general.



THE CITY OF TANGIER

(see page 153)