

‘Silvery singing voices’

Moroccan Manchester and the Puzzle of Richard Wright

This essay is an attempt to reconstruct a little of the history of the Moroccan merchant community in Manchester, and to establish both who Wright actually was, and how his collaboration with those expatriate Fassi cotton-traders gave birth to – or perhaps simply perpetuated – the Moroccan *théière*. It will then trace, insofar as is possible, the evolution of the reputation and manufacture of ‘Wright’ silver plate down to our own day. Finally, It will look briefly at the mythology that has grown up around Richard Wright in Morocco, inhabiting as he does the odd paradox described by Abdelahad Sebti:

The history [of tea in Morocco] which is really rather brief, evokes in the collective imagination the idea of an immemorial tradition. The illusion of tea’s being rooted deep in the country’s past; but also the illusion of [Morocco’s] having been the foremost champion of the drink in the world (Sebti: Brussels, 1999, p141).

He is an intriguing emblem of the cultural entanglement of Morocco and Britain, more potent today than in his own lifetime.

One seldom drinks coffee in Morocco: it’s tea, always and everywhere. And it’s England that supplies it, as it does the samovars for making it and the gilt cups for drinking it. English ships unload large quantities of these things in the open ports, and caravans then spread them as far as the deepest inner Maghreb – Pierre Loti (Loti: 1890)

Richard Wright is one of the best-known English names in Morocco, generally believed to be the father of the silver teapot that is an instantly recognisable symbol of the country. Wright teapots, often imitations, are to be found in Moroccan antique shops, and the great silver tea-tray known as a *rayt* is said to have taken his name. Old and new Wright silver, including sugar-chests, tea-chests, coffee-pots, cake-stands and rose-water sprinklers, is found in bridal trousseaux and well-furnished homes. There is Wright porcelain, though it is uncommon; and there may be Wright fabrics. All carry Wright’s maker’s mark, a curious hybrid of Maghrebi and Latin script (fig. 7) which records in Arabic and English that it is the work of Richard Wright of Manchester.

The name Richard Wright, however, is entirely unknown in England. Curators of metalwork at the V&A and at the museums of Manchester, Birmingham and Sheffield know nothing of him: as far as the history of English silverware and silver plate is concerned, Wright might as well not have existed. It even seemed possible, at the start of this enquiry, that he was simply a fictitious character invented by Moroccan merchants to make their silverware more exotically respectable in Morocco.

In the *souqs* of Fes where silver and, above all, copper are worked, tall tales are still sometimes told of Wright as a mythical figure with more than human powers, a latter-day Wayland the Smith who has entirely eclipsed the real, rather workaday, Mr Wright of Manchester. What is 'known' in Morocco about Wright is often built on very shaky foundations. One highly (and rightly) esteemed writer on Moroccan tea states baldly that "The most famous and prestigious silver was made in Manchester by Richard Wright," an assertion which is wrong in at least two, and probably three, particulars (Lakhsassi: 1999).

The Moroccan merchant community

Wright's story is intimately wrapped up with the Moroccan community that flourished in Manchester between the 1870s and the 1930s.¹ Mostly Sunni Muslims from Fes, with a scattering of Sephardic Jews, they were cotton-traders, buying cloth in the world's biggest cotton-market for export. Sometimes it was for Morocco's domestic market, sometimes for other Fassi merchant communities around the Mediterranean and sometimes, blue-dyed with indigo, for onward trade through Jewish pedlars to the Tuareg of the south.²

Morocco began to open up to international trade in the 1820s and 1830s when the Sultan permitted some export of grain and wool; and this in turn fuelled an import trade. The terms of both were formalised by a commercial treaty with Great Britain in 1856 (Ben-Srhir: 2005, pp24-62). The most significant import was cotton cloth, but there was also a growing demand for tea: in 1825 it was a rare commodity available only to the rich, as it had been for many years, but the amount imported grew vastly throughout the century, with dramatic social impact as its price fell and it penetrated the poorer classes and the country's interior. Tea came from China and India through English firms and Mogador Jewish trading houses³ in London like Afriat with its offices in Bevis Marks, which shipped large quantities of its own *Atay Afriat* (Schroeter: 1988 pp46-50).⁴ Later in the century French and German traders offered some competition. With this growth in tea consumption came a demand for the utensils needed for making and serving what would quickly become Morocco's national beverage. This explosion in the export of tea to Morocco coincided with the establishment of the Moroccan community in Manchester.

It was a small community of merchants which shipped goods to Rabat, Tangier and Larache, the ports of Fes, as well as to Casablanca, Gibraltar and Mogador. Though it began with individual Mogador Jews, the Manchester trade became quite quickly an outpost of Fes.⁵ Albert Hourani, himself a Lebanese Mancunian, suggested that the first Moroccans arrived in Manchester in the 1830s, though the earliest recorded Moroccan trading house there is the Larache Jewish firm of Isaac Pariente, noted in 1847 (Scholes: n.d.).⁶ In 1863 the records include an Isaac Azulay (or Azulà), a forbear of the present

Counsellor to the King of Morocco, André Azoulay who was born in Mogador.⁷ The Parientes and the Azulays, like the Belishas and the Corcoses who were also a presence in Manchester, highlight the significant direct trade with Mogador, the port of Marrakech, which was a largely Jewish town with very strong British connexions⁸ and a dominant position in Morocco's overseas trade since the eighteenth century. The Jewish merchants of Mogador often held British nationality, obtained, like their bowler hats, in Gibraltar (Shakespeare: 1993).⁹

Sunni merchants of Fes, however, formed the vast bulk of the Moroccan community in Manchester arriving there from the late 1860s and 1870s onward. By the end of the century, according to Fred Halliday, there were “over a dozen Moroccan families in Manchester and the community reached at its height about thirty families and one hundred and fifty persons. Nearly all were from Fes” (Halliday: 1993, p162). The Fes merchant families were old and tentacular. John Waterbury described how they were

... enterprising, travelling and living abroad, and establishing branches of their families and interests in the major seaports of Morocco. Through a highly developed family and commercial ‘grapevine,’ imported goods would be directed on arrival to that part of Morocco where they would fetch the best price. The adaptability that these Fassis developed over years of trade experience, their contacts with Europe and the Middle East, and their own innate sense of how to defend their own interests made of them the first indigenous source of modernisation in Morocco (Waterbury: 1970, p98).

It is possible to trace, at least in outline, the growing and changing Moroccan presence in Manchester through the city's trade directories.¹⁰ These are massive things, each edition eventually in three or four volumes, with complex paginations and the almost inevitable internal contradiction of material collected over several years. But they do identify the Moroccan merchants (albeit sometimes with eccentric spellings) and they also allow them to be placed in the geography of the fast-developing city of Manchester. Some useful corroboration can also be found in census returns up to and including 1911.¹¹

The families that formed the core of the Muslim community had largely arrived by the mid-1870s. The most prominent names were Benani, Benjelloun, Benasser, Benquiran, Benabdislam, Benmessood, Benmoussa, Ben-Lamine, Ben Yakhlef (‘Benecliffe’), Guessous, Lazarac, Maquar and Tazzi: it is perhaps no wonder that the Manchester historian Louis Hayes refers to them as “the Bens” (Hayes: 1905, p214). What is striking about this list is how closely it echoes “the mainstays of the Fassi commercial community: Benjelloun, Tazi, Lazraq, Lahlou, Bennis, Bennani, Berrada, Guessous, Ben Chekroun ...” in Fes, as listed by Waterbury (Waterbury: 1970, pp99-100). This diaspora was a well-oiled machine.¹²

The Fassis tended to stick together, settling for the most part to the south of Manchester in Greenheys, Chorlton-on-Medlock and Moss Side. Although at different times they had offices in different parts of the city centre, for a long time there were two more or less

permanent clusters of Moroccan merchants' business premises. One was Chepstow Buildings at 32 Oxford Street; and the other was 2 South Street, Albert Square (now Southmill Street). Each of these buildings housed several Moroccan merchants, though the composition changed over time. At Chepstow Buildings the Benmesouds, Benquirans, Benabdislams and Benanis were concentrated; at South Street the Benjellouns, Benassers, from time to time other Benanis, Tazzis and less long-term occupants like Taleb Berrada.

Over time many of them came closer together to live in Moss Side, an area south of Manchester that had been countryside when Elizabeth Gaskell described it as recently as 1848:

Here and there an old black and white farmhouse, with its rambling out-buildings, speaks of other times and other occupations ... Here in their seasons may be seen the country business of haymaking, ploughing &c., which are such pleasant mysteries for townspeople to watch: and here the artisan, deafened with noise of tongues and engines, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life (Gaskell: 1996, p5).

By the 1880s, when the Moroccans began to move here in some numbers, the delicious sounds of rural life were in full retreat. To begin with the Fassis were spread out over this fast-changing but still semi-rural area. Soon streets of modern houses were put up for those with means who wanted to live outside the grimy atmosphere of the city centre. Moss Lane advanced eastward, Whitworth Park was laid out (opening in 1890), and the smaller streets to the south of the park were built. On Thomas Marr's 1904 *Map Showing Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford*, colour-coded for housing conditions, Parkfield Street and this part of Moss Lane East, the streets where Moroccans settled, were all coloured yellow, as "property which complies with modern by-laws" (Marr: 1904), in contrast to the dense and unhealthy housing northwards towards the city centre. Looking out across the park was a terrace of larger houses on Moss Lane between the corners of Parkfield and Playfair Streets. This provided fairly grand accommodation which would in due course house Mohammed Benjelloun (460) and his brother Ahmed (468) as well, at different times, as other prominent members of the community like the Benchekrouns, Tazis and Benanis.

Parkfield Street led south at a right angle from Moss Lane, number 468 forming the western corner, though there may not have been a way through except for pedestrians: by 1911 there was "no thoroughfare into Moss Lane East" (Census Returns, 1911).¹³ It was more modest than the line of big houses round the corner in Moss Lane: a glimpse of the contrast reaches us through the child's eyes of Abdelmejid Benjelloun, the only Moroccan to have left an account of Manchester at this time, in his memoir *Fi al-tufula* ('In Childhood,' translated into French as *Enfance Entre Deux Rives*). After his mother's death in the mid-1920s, his family moved from one of the two grand Benjelloun houses in Moss Lane East to 40 Parkfield Street, just round the corner. As he describes it, it was very different to the old house with its huge rooms and wild garden, having much more

sympathetic “small rooms and modern furniture, and the front gave onto a small, well-tended garden” (Benjelloun, n.d., p27). But it was not large. The family lived on the ground floor, where there were the drawing-room, the dining-room and the living-room; and on the upper floor were his father’s study, his bedroom and the children’s shared room (Benjelloun, n.d., p39).

The first Moroccan to move to Parkfield Street was Mohamed Ben-T[hami] Benani, who was there by 1876, living at no. 24 (Slater: 1863).¹⁴ Others followed. By 1909 the short northern stretch of the street was home to Tahy Hamzie, Hamed Benabdallah, Mohamed Zayet, Feres Ben-Lamine, Abraham Ben-Hamo, Hamed Benecliffe and Addriss Benquiran; while round the corner in Moss Lane lived the Benjelloun brothers and Hadj Madani Tazzi. It was well positioned for access to the two Moroccan commercial centres in the town: from the eastern end of Moss Lane, Oxford Road runs up the east side of Whitworth Park leading directly to Chepstow Buildings in Oxford Street and the corner of South Street, about two miles away to the north. Along it ran a tramline, and this was the usual way of getting to work, at least by the 1920s when Abdelmejid accompanied his father to the Benjelloun office in Cooper Street, just beyond the Town Hall.

It is of course hard to be sure of the status of different families, but the grander housing of the Benjelloun brothers suggests (as might be expected) that they were particularly prominent, and Louis Hayes confirms this, referring to ‘Bengelun’ (as the name was generally spelled in Manchester¹⁵) as the community leader, as early as the 1870s (Hayes: 1905, p212).¹⁶

Hayes’s ‘Bengelun’ was Taleb Benjelloun, the elder of two brothers, Taleb and Elarby.¹⁷ In 1876, according to *Slater’s Directory*, Taleb lived in Lothair Street and Elarby in Lloyd Street, both in Chorlton-on-Medlock. They kept their office – T. Bengelun & Bro – at 2 South Street. (Slater: 1876)¹⁸ Hayes describes Taleb as

A handsome man, although somewhat short in stature, but for his height he was one of the fattest men I had then come across. He seemed to carry a very mountain of adipose matter in front of him as he came paddling along the street, and swaying about from side to side; and you could not but sympathise with him as you saw him panting for breath as he slowly mounted the stairs to his office (Hayes: 1905, p212).

In their early days in the 1860s or early 1870s the Moroccans – or Moors as the Mancunians knew them, generally with respect and often affection – were gathered up by a merchant called Thomas Forshaw and used to meet at his offices in Norfolk Street. But as they learned their way about and realised that they could strike better bargains for themselves without paying Forshaw’s commission, they moved their base to Bengelun’s office. If you wanted to find a Moroccan and he was not at his own office,

You would almost always be safe in looking for and finding him at Mr Bengelun’s, where the bulk of them would be congregated together, filling the rooms to overflowing, some sitting, some

reclining, whilst others would be squatting about in eastern fashion, with their legs doubled up underneath them, and here they would hold their midday palaver. (Hayes: 1905, pp212-3)

This was where regular conclaves took place, and it was presumably what Roger Le Tourneau was referring to when he wrote that “at Manchester they had a sort of shared bureau known as ‘the Office’ where they handled their business” (Le Tourneau: 1949, p446n).¹⁹ When and how these Benjelloun brothers gave way to the next generation isn’t clear, but it was the brothers Ahmed and Mohamed, and apparently not Taleb and Elarby, who moved to Moss Side.²⁰ It may be that they were sons of one or other of the first Benjelloun brothers, but they may just as well have been cousins despatched from Fes: the families at home seem to have sent younger members to join the family firm as required (it is notable that ‘& Bro’ changes, in many cases, to ‘& Bros,’ and back again as the young men come and go). When Abdelmejid Benjelloun’s father, Taib was sent out in 1919 he was probably not, *pace* Halliday and Seddon, the son of a previous Manchester Benjelloun:²¹ his own father spoke a little English but there is no hint in his grandson’s memoir that they shared the experience of Manchester. Nonetheless, Taib moved his family first into one of the two Moss Lane houses, from where he headed the family firm. Complicating matters further, it is clear that the Manchester Benjellouns came from two different fractions of the family – the Gsaa and the Tioumi. Mohamed and Ahmed (and therefore probably Taib) seem to have belonged to the Gsaa Benjellouns, as in all probability did the brothers Taleb and Elarby (Hachim, 2012).

By 1903, Mohamed Bengelun still had the office at 2 South Street, now called M. Bengelun & Co., and still lived at 460 Moss Lane East, a few doors along from his brother (Slater: 1903).²² Round the corner in Parkfield Street the community was expanding: there were five Moroccan households²³ in 1903 and eight in 1911²⁴ (Slater 1903, 1911). It is also interesting for readers of *Fi al-tufula* to note that at no. 47 Parkfield Street, just across the street from the Benjellouns at no. 40, lived the family’s close friends, Mrs Paternos and her children, noted in *Slater* as Mrs Gertrude Patrinos. This is exactly as Benjelloun describes in *Fi al-tufula*: the Paternos family were a very important part of his English childhood, an emotional anchor in difficult times.

It would be fruitless to try to follow with too much precision the movements of the Moroccan community over the years. What we can see clearly is that Parkfield Street was its magnetic centre, and that Moss Lane East where, as well as the two Benjelloun families, Hadj Madani Tazzi (and later his son Boubker) lived at 398 and Mohamed Benchekroun at 456, was its grander and more prestigious extension (Slater: 1909).

An article in the *Manchester City News* in 1936 provides a bit of colour. A butcher from Rusholme supplied the community with *halal* Welsh mutton, slaughtered each morning to order. The unnamed Moroccan who supervised the slaughtering was also the community’s imam, and “led them to prayer every Friday, the service of which was held in a house in Parkfield Street” (Manchester Evening News: 1936).²⁵ A little further afield Moroccan

Jews, many of them from Mogador, were involved in the founding of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Cheetham Hill Road, which opened in 1874 under the presidency of Isaac David Belisha of Mogador.²⁶

Manchester's Moroccans assimilated well, without ever abandoning their Fassi way of life and personal values. In the early days they stuck to Moroccan dress in public:

When a new arrival came upon the scene he was always easily distinguishable from the rest, as he would be seen shod with Oriental slippers, to which he had been accustomed in his own country. But it was quickly realised that such footwear was not serviceable in a climate like ours, where a wet day could play sad havoc with those gay-looking slippers without any heels; so one of the first lessons to be learned by a new arrival was to get his feet encased in boots with more understanding of their nature (Hayes, 1905: p211).

As for head-gear, their habits may have persisted longer. Hayes refers to them as "the white-turbaned fraternity," though Benjelloun records that the children of Parkfield Street knew them as "les bonnets rouges" – the red hats – referring to the tarboosh that they all wore, sometimes perhaps inside their turbans (Hayes: 1905, p216; Benjelloun: n.d., p43).

Many of them became naturalised British citizens, retaining their Moroccan nationality; and almost all returned to Fes when the cotton trade collapsed in the mid-1930s. "It has never," as Waterbury put it, "been necessary to live in Fez to be Fassi." (Waterbury: 1970, p94). Their affairs are a theme running through the records of the Fes consulate for the rest of its history.²⁷ Le Tourneau is interesting on their way of life:

They left in general for long periods because the price of the sea trip made frequent comings and goings impossible. Stays abroad of six, eight, ten, even twenty years were the norm. Many of them only came back to Fes in their old age, having handed over their trading house to a son or a nephew.

Once abroad, where they were generally made welcome, they attended mostly to their business, forming good relationships with bankers and trading houses specializing in import and export. But they also took part in local life as soon as they had a reasonable command of the language. They were seen at the races, the theatre and at parties. They wore European clothes, except for their hair-styling, but they maintained at home many of the customs of their country: their furniture may have been mixed, but their food remained purely Moroccan, and they even brought over from Fes certain ingredients which couldn't be found in Europe, like dried mint. Of course they practised their religion, though at home, since no mosque had yet been built in Western Europe. Some of them brought their wives with them and some of the wives dressed in European clothes and lived like the women of their adoptive country – but when they returned to Fes they picked up, once again, their traditional way of life (Le Tourneau: 1949, pp446-7).

It was a busy, flourishing community, and in addition to the permanent residents there was a constant flow of visitors, generally described in the census records where we catch a glimpse of them, as merchants, shippers and 'foreign correspondents.'

The South Street address (no 2) was presumably where the offices described by Louis Hayes – and 'the Office' of Le Tourneau's account – were located. When Bengelun died,

notes Hayes without giving a date, “Benani” took his place as doyen of the Moroccan business community. He was “a very clever, intelligent, capable man” from Egypt, “who took quite a lead amongst them, and ... the daily meetings used to be held at his offices.”²⁸ Precisely who he was is not clear, but Bennacer Benani (aged 36 at the 1881 census) seems a possible candidate. From Egypt he may have come most recently, but the Benanis were Fassi aristocracy and their Cairo branch was another fruit of Waterbury’s grapevine.

Although the younger generation of Benjellouns may have ceded precedence for a time to the Benanis, the Benjelloun thread was unbroken: Benjellouns occupied the South Street offices from the early 1870s until at least 1903 and probably after that. By 1909 A. & M. Benjelloun had an address at 40 Cooper Street, just the other side of the Town Hall, and in 1911 they are listed only at their home addresses in Moss Lane East (Slater 1909, 1913). It is not clear that Hayes was actually right in his interpretation of the ‘succession:’ as late as 1913 Si Mohamed Benjelloun is referred to by Hamid Berdai as ‘Lamine,’ the head of the merchant community.

Apart from Hayes’s oriental conclave, the only description of the Benjelloun offices comes from Abdelmajid Benjelloun’s memoir and must date from the mid-to-late 1920s, by which time they were in Cooper Street. It is a child’s eye view, and tells us little of substance, but is charmingly atmospheric.

We would go in the door, climb the stairs and stop in front of a door; my father used to open it with his key and we would go into the office. In the passage I would always cast my eye over the black letters written on the glass door – Mr T Benjelloun – which I recognized, even though I couldn’t yet read, from having seen the same letters printed on the envelopes which he used at home, for his correspondence.

Soon his English secretary would open the door, take off his overcoat and wish us good morning. He would then sit down at his desk, facing my father’s, and start work. I would sit myself next to him and start out on yet another attempt to understand what their work was all about. I used to start by taking a visual inventory of everything in the room – perhaps I’d find something there that would set me off on the right track – notebooks, files, printed sheets, plain paper, envelopes, pens and inkwells; letters, the printing-press, stamps, posters, the safe, cloth-samples and so on ... (Benjelloun: n.d., p89-90).

Taib Benjelloun left Manchester for good in about 1928, and the community dissolved within a very few years in the mid-1930s as the cotton market collapsed in the face of predatory Japanese competition. “With few exceptions, the Moroccans left Manchester abruptly” (Halliday: 1993, p175). Millie Paterno said to young Abdelmejid, “Mr Benjelloun will never leave, he has become a part of this country,” but soon the boy was counting off those who had gone: “Mr Bou Ayad, Mr Qortobi, Mr Ben Wuhud, Mr Berrada ...” and his own family followed, regretfully (Benjelloun: n.d., pp119 and 117). But it had never been plain sailing, as Hayes explains, referring to a period towards the end of the nineteenth century:

some of this white-turbaned fraternity are still to be found here, but their numbers have considerably diminished. Bad government, coupled with the demonetisation of silver have well-nigh killed once promising and prosperous trade. They were and are a class of men who, if circumstances had favoured them, were capable of developing a satisfactory business; but the government of the Sultan of Morocco was so wretchedly bad that it was impossible for them to make any headway (Hayes: 1905, p216).

Some of them were called home to act as tax-collectors for the Sultan, a call which they could not refuse. It was

a position very abhorrent to most of them, as to make an existence in such a calling after paying the Government the sum for which the taxes had been farmed to such an one, extortion, cruelty and robbery were a necessity. When these calls were made upon them they tried to get appointed as nominal agents for English firms, so that they might claim the support and protection of the English consul abroad (Hayes: 1905, p216).

“Abroad” of course in this context tended to mean Fes, and the complexities of protecting the Sultan’s tax-collectors from the whims of the Sultan’s government must have given the Fes consulate many headaches over the decades.

Interviews, though unsystematic, with a number of Moroccan families in 2014, bear out this general account. Hamid Berdai²⁹ lived in Manchester from 1913-1924: he was sent to Manchester in 1913, aged about 24, and lived at 456 Moss Lane East with the family of Mohamed ‘Kbishou’ Benchekroun, for whom he also worked at 27 Major Street. Berdai was closely associated with the family of El-Amine Benjelloun, the Si Mohamed who was the head of the community, ‘Lamine’ being a title normally given to the elected head of a trade guild or corporation (Buob: 2009, p45); and also with his brother Ahmed.

Another young Fassi, Abdelkrim ‘Amor, was called to Manchester to work with “a Mr Benjelloun,” probably at about the same time, and his father found him a bride in Fes. Their daughter, a Mme L, was born in Manchester.³⁰ Both the Berdais and Mme L had ‘origins’ stories to tell of Richard Wright. Both illustrate the elusiveness of dates and detail in family recollections: the Berdais are exceptional in having preserved a number of dated documents.

A third family whose name recurs in accounts of the Manchester community (and who have been referred to frequently) are the Benanis, a Fassi family who already had a firm foothold in Cairo. Si Abdelkrim Benani, Chamberlain of the Royal Court and Secretary to King Hassan II, told the present author that his grandfather had been a Manchester merchant. Si Abdelkrim has a rubber stamp from his grandfather’s desk, made in Manchester and another naming him in English and Arabic as Mohamed Ben Thami Benani – already mentioned as the first Moroccan resident of Parkfield Street from at least 1876 until his death, in Manchester, two years later. This family, along with the Benjellouns, was at the heart of Moroccan Manchester.

However, as is by now abundantly clear, certainty is not possible. The present author has talked to more than one Fassi Mancunian descendant about their own grandparents without emerging any surer of the grandparents' identity or precise relationship to them. This is not quite as strange as it sounds in a society in which birth certificates were introduced within the memory of some who are still alive: beyond that threshold, clarity is very hard to achieve. Accounts of Moroccan families well into living memory are essentially the oral history of a very complex web of relationships and recollections, with all the imponderable elisions and fables that that involves. No doubt more could be reconstructed of the Manchester community through rate-books and birth registries and through the records of the British Consulate at Fes where the affairs of naturalised Mancunian Moroccans and their descendants were looked after up to its closure.³¹ It will also be instructive to examine the 1921 census returns when those are released to the public in January 2022.

Richard Wright – a history

It is against this background that Richard Wright emerges from the shadows. This author has have been told firmly in Morocco that the original commission to make silver-plated teapots came to him from Taib Benjelloun; or from 'Mzalek' Tazi; or from the original Taleb Bengelun; other sources claim Hajj Mohamed Benjelloun as the originator. Stories heard at first-hand have Wright active in the 1860s and the 1940s, and even the 1960s. He worked, according to some, for Thami Pasha Glaoui; and according to others his designs were simply copies of pieces of silverware in the possession of the pasha – though neither is actually possible because Pasha Glaoui was only sixteen when Wright died, and because the designs of the teapots at go back at least to the mid-eighteenth century. The truth is that Wright has long since been detached from his historical self; and that his mythic alter ego has a perfectly well-intentioned but largely imaginary life of its own, often completely unmoored in history. So it is necessary first to identify the historical Richard Wright and to understand his part in the story of Moroccan silver. As it turns out, identifying him is not very difficult once one abandons what is nothing more than a false assumption - that he was a silversmith.³²

There is no hard evidence to tell when the Moroccan silver business in which Wright was involved actually began. It must have been well before his death in 1894, because unless he was personally responsible there is no possible reason to attach his name to it: he was not in himself famous, prestigious or glamorous. A best guess for the first Wright teapot is the period just before, or just after the Moroccan economic downturn of 1880-83. These were the decades in which the import of tea soared, after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the rapid decline of the tea-clippers: 181,151 kilograms of tea were imported into Morocco in 1876; and after a stagnant period in the early 1880s it started to climb

sharply in 1884, reaching 1,500,000 kilograms in 1902 and 2,787,000 in 1908. Meanwhile the price was falling: between 1875 and 1895 the price of a pound of tea imported into Morocco fell by 64 percent. Cheaper and coarser tea penetrated new markets among the urban and rural poor, and it seems reasonable to assume that the demand for teapots and other tea-making paraphernalia rose, broadly, in step with imports (Miège: 1957, pp377-398).

The Moroccan merchants of South Street saw the opportunity of adding silver-plated teapots to their shipments of cotton, and they seized it. The most plausible and most frequently repeated assumption is that the instigator was Taleb Benjelloun (Hayes's 'Bengelun'), and that it is probably his handwriting that is reproduced in the Wright silver-mark. Absolute certainty is impossible, but he was the head of the family in Manchester until after Wright's death in 1894 and is the most likely candidate. It is often said that the business began with re-plating worn-out teapots, because electro-plating was still unknown in Morocco, and developed from there into the manufacture of new ones. This is clearly not the case. Bringing teapots from Fes to Manchester and then despatching them to Birmingham for refurbishment before returning them to Fes could never have been an economic proposition. But in fact, as will become clear, teapots remarkably like Wright's, though in a different material, were already being exported to Morocco, and what Bengelun and his associates spotted was a way into a promising market that already existed and showed signs of explosive growth. His 'way in' was silver plate, aimed in the first instance at the middling, but not rich, tea-drinker.

He needed to find a supplier, and what he was looking for was well-priced, good quality, English silver plate rather than (at least at the beginning) the sterling silver of Moroccan imagination. It would be wrong, though, to think of it simply as a sudden, almost whimsical side-business: it was part of a broader trend, the large-scale replacement of Moroccan artisanal craftsmanship with foreign imports, which killed off many Fassi crafts, a fate from which "*dinanderie* escaped, in part, because of the emergence of a new market: that of tea and its utensils" (Buob: 2005, p55). The Fassis of Manchester were opportunistic and unsentimental: they used the 'grapevine' that Waterbury described, their commercial networks, to compete strongly and successfully with the metal-trades of their own city and others across Morocco. The sheer scale of demand floated them, and to some extent saved their artisan competitors.

The 1869 edition of *Slater's Directory* contains only one electro-plating firm, the Venetian Works, 85 miles away in Birmingham; but it also contains a full-page advertisement (fig 1) for a more interesting prospect, a tradesman called Richard Wright who did business from 92 Great Ancoats Street in Manchester (Slater: 1869). The business was a family one, established by Wright's father, another Richard, who had been born in 1799 in Ireland. Young Richard himself was born in 1840 and inherited the business by 1861 (Census Returns, 1851 and 1861).³³ The advertisement is a wonderful thing, a cornucopia of the

commodities in which he dealt, from plumbago crucibles to grindstones, London emery, sea-horse leather, 'English, Irish, Scotch, and Foreign Glues,' screws, India rubber washers, moulding shovels, dry hair felt and twisted chains ('Japanned or bright'). There is no silver mentioned in the advertisement at all because Richard Wright was not a silversmith: he was, as the advertisement describes him, a wholesale ironmonger and grindstone merchant. He employed only one man and a boy and so he certainly had no manufacturing capacity of his own. But he could turn his hand to almost anything because he didn't do the work himself – he put it out to specialist manufacturers. He took on silver-plate work from the Moroccans in exactly the same capacity, as a commission agent.

Once it is understood that Wright was an ironmonger taking commissions to be placed with specialist silver-makers, and not himself a silversmith, the whole business becomes clearer. It was one among many lines of business run out of 92 Great Ancoats Street, and not necessarily even a very important one, initially at least. Having become the principal at the age of twenty, he advertised in *Slater* in 1863, 1869 and 1867 (his father had appeared in 1853). He ran his ironmonger's business with apparent success for more than twenty years. By 1882 however he was in financial difficulties and underwent a 'Liquidation by Arrangement or Composition with Creditors' (London Gazette: 1882).³⁴ This provides a possible date for the silver business to have passed out of his hands, the sale of the brand in 1882 realising some ready cash; and suggests in turn that the silver-plate business dates back to the late 1870s. However, voluntary liquidation does not seem to have ended his business career, because in 1887 he is listed again in *Slater's* as a wholesale ironmonger trading from Dale Street, with a smaller and less extravagant, but wholly recognizable, advertisement (Slater 1887).³⁵ He seems to have salvaged the business, but nothing more is known about him until in early 1894 he died at his home at Gransmoor, worth £2,957. Probate was granted a few weeks later to Frederick and Thomas Wright, his sons: his will instructs that Frederick is to take over the ironmongery business on behalf of the family (Will of Richard Wright, 1894).

If this is the correct Richard Wright, and I have little doubt that it is, he was not the master-silversmith of Moroccan imagination, but a clever jack-of-all-trades who knew how to put together a good commission business for foreign customers wishing to export British metalwork. But before crediting him with undue originality, it is important to be clear where the idea for, and the design of, the teapot came from.

It has been seductively suggested, albeit with reservations, that the 'traditional' Moroccan teapot, with its fat little belly and its majestic, tall domed lid, was cooked up on a Manchester drawing-board, perhaps between Wright and Benjelloun (Rogerson: 1997). This is certainly not the case. The design was in no sense original, having been produced in almost identical form in England for a century and a half. It is a classic 'pyriform' or pear-shaped teapot, sometimes called (well after the fact) a 'Queen Anne' teapot. It was the dominant design of silver teapot in the 1710s and 1720s giving way after that date to a

more spherical ‘ball’ design. But crucially, as the silversmiths moved on, the pewterers of London, after a brief flirtation with pewter ‘ball’ teapots in the 1720s, themselves settled on the pear-shaped pot in the 1730s. They continued to make them in this shape for the rest of the century and well into the next, but with one change that is highly relevant to the ‘Moroccan’ teapot: at the end of the 1760s, the low dome lid was replaced by the high dome “double-stepped” lid that is instantly recognizable as ‘Moroccan.’ So the ‘Wright design’ was actually a copy – and quite how literal a copy is clear from examples like the Townsend & Compton pewter teapot made in about 1800 (fig. 2).

It seems that this design was already popular in Morocco. One of the most popular brands of teapot in Fes was the pewter *théière mouche*, or ‘fly teapot,’ and it is still (as will become clear below) talked of today. This is a puzzling name, until one happens upon the fact that there was a London pewterer family in the very early days of pewter teapots, called the Flys. Martha and William Fly were successful pewterers, but their son Timothy seems to have been the family’s greatest success. He worked in Whitechapel and his work carried, as had his parents’, the ‘touch,’ the pewterer’s mark, of a fly. Timothy Fly was in business from about 1712 until his death in 1744, becoming Master of the Pewterers’ Company in 1739. Among other pewter goods he seems to have made teapots for export to North America and North Africa (Ricketts: 2018).³⁶ There is of course no possibility that the *théières mouche* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were actual Fly teapots in more than a tiny number of cases; but it seems that enough of the originals had been sold and been well regarded for the Fly touchmark to be ruthlessly copied and used to validate later locally made pewter work. It is a fate curiously reminiscent of Wright’s.

The Townsend & Compton teapot has a wooden handle, a feature which was replaced in the early nineteenth century by a cast metal one, often painted, or japanned, black to represent wood. Wright used a metal handle into which he incorporated a pair of bone grommets to insulate the metal handle from heat, and these are an easily-spotted distinguishing feature of Wright teapots, both genuine and good imitation: other, cheaper imitation teapots made in Morocco frequently incorporate the grommets but, instead of making them of bone, cast them into the metal of the handle so that they echo the form while performing no insulating function whatsoever.³⁷ However, they were not an innovation: bone grommets were also used by English pewterers long before Benjelloun first met Richard Wright. It seems that when Taleb Benjelloun walked into the Great Ancoats Street shop he may very well have had a pewter teapot in his bag and enquired as to whether Mr Wright could arrange to produce something very similar in silver plate.

The firm which Wright approached to make the teapots for him was Barker Brothers of Birmingham, the pioneers in England of the electroplating process. Electro-plating involved laying down a layer of silver on a base usually, from 1832 onwards, of ‘nickel silver’ (also known as argentann or alpaca). Wright was the middleman and perhaps the financing partner, and his name was stamped onto each piece, in English and Arabic: *Hadha*

amal at-tajir Richard Wright bi-Manchester ('This is the work of the merchant, Richard Wright, at Manchester'). It is important to note in this context the choice of words: Wright is described as *tajir*, a merchant, not *sa'igh al-fidda*, a silversmith, and this makes very clear that his role was not, as is widely believed in Morocco, that of maker.

When in 1991 the Historical Manuscripts Commission visited the archives of Barker Ellis Silver Co Ltd, the successor company to Barker Brothers, the oldest series of continuous records they found were order books for silverware going back to 1885, which would undoubtedly have shed light on the early years of the business.³⁸ Sadly, and reprehensibly, the Barker's archives were destroyed in the early twenty-first century despite their listing by the HMC. It seems likely, though, that the whole Moroccan export business passed to Barkers either on Wright's death or after his voluntary liquidation in 1882. And it is at least imaginable that Wright's financial difficulties that year were caused by over-commitment to the Moroccan trade, undermined by the Moroccan economic crisis of the early 1880s - a crisis triggered by aggressive pressure for tariff reform from the British and other European governments, egged on by Chambers of Commerce amongst which Manchester's was prominent.

The actual nature of the business itself is puzzling. It is generally accepted that it began with teapots and expanded into the magnificent panoply of *rayts*, kettles, samovars, cake-stands and perfume-shakers that every even moderately well-to-do Moroccan household still possesses. Wright tea and sugar-boxes are fairly common in antique shops; so too are *rayts* and occasionally coffee pots. It seems logical to imagine a steady diversification into some of these related, silver-plated, objects; and as the Wright brand gained traction, a slower expansion into more expensive luxury versions of the staple tea products as well as porcelain tea-cups and perhaps fabrics.³⁹ But it is hard to follow this development, not least because so much of the more expensive 'Wright' production is inaccessible, in the homes and palaces of the very wealthy.

At the lower end of the market there is no real indication of the scale of counterfeiting, but it was large: many, and perhaps most, of the 'Wright' articles for sale in Moroccan antique shops are probably fakes of one kind or another. It is interesting, though, to reflect on what a 'fake' means in this context: it is a statement about the commercial ownership of a brand, not about the article itself, which can be of high or low quality. The idea is quite piquant, of a fourth or fifth degree 'fake' imitating the work of a British company which used the name of a long-dead ironmonger to promote tea equipment that in its 'genuine' form had been imported in vast quantities to drive Moroccan craftsmen out of business. And more piquant still if the original design was pirated from contemporary pewter-ware designs that were already popular, and probably already themselves being 'counterfeited,' in Morocco.

The ownership of the business passed from the middleman to the supplier, neither of them a limited company. Barker Brothers took over Richard Wright's supply arrangement with the Moroccans, in which he was by now simply taking a commission. I have suggested that this transfer probably took place between 1882 and 1894. What Barkers paid for was the brand, the bilingual stamp that appears on the bottom of all Wright silverware, real and fake, from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. The fact that it was worth buying suggests that it added considerable value to the silver made for export – and that Wright silver already had a reputation which created and sustained the value of the mark. Barker Brothers itself prospered and went through a series of transformations, moving to new works in Birmingham in 1903 and becoming a limited company (Barker Brothers Silversmiths Ltd) in 1907, and it developed the Moroccan business energetically.

The silver-plate itself offers small clues. All the Wright objects handled in the market in Morocco by the present author had serial numbers (a four-digit number beneath the Wright mark), and none had a Barker's silver-plate hallmark. The serial numbers clearly relate to a Barker's catalogue, and reference was made to a partial photocopy of such a catalogue which I believe is the only survival from the destroyed Barker Ellis archives.⁴⁰ On various pages there are dates, ranging from 1910 to 1925, hand-written next to pictures. These suggest that those pages at least (the earlier part of the catalogue) date from the last years of the original business. In fact it seems reasonable to infer that the whole business began with the mass-market in teapots and moved upscale – from what one informant called “three-star” to “four-star” silverware; and that this move took place after Barker Brothers' takeover of the Moroccan business from Richard Wright. It seems that “three-star” work was much copied in Morocco, even to the point of imitating the serial numbers (as witness the universal use of ‘7475’ on all examples of all types of teapot found in the Moroccan market, though Barker Brothers clearly allocated each model its own number in a four-digit series beginning ‘76’);⁴¹ and that “four-star” work came after the Barker Brothers takeover. The BBSCo mark dates from after the incorporation of 1907, but Barker Brothers did not use their own mark. They were selling to Wright for onward sale to Fassi merchants in Manchester and his mark was the crucial testimonial to quality. In the first incarnation of the business, from perhaps 1880 to 1925, Wright's was all that appeared on the silver: the BBSCo mark joined it only after the business was restarted for the first time in the 1960s.

The series of dates written into the catalogue ends in 1925. The imposition of prohibitive tariffs on English imports by the French protectorate gradually squeezed Barker Brothers' out of the market during the 1920s, and they ceased to manufacture for export to Morocco. This coincided with the decline of the Moroccan community in Manchester and the return of almost all Mancunian Moroccans to Fes. The Barker Brothers' catalogue takes the form of a scrap-book and seems to be a document that was kept current from the first years of the twentieth century until 1925 or so and then revived in the 1960s when

photographs from a much more modern printed catalogue were pasted in. Its page after page of luxury silver goods are testimony to a product-line aimed at the middle and upper classes, for whom Wright silverware was – and to a great extent still is – an indispensable household accoutrement and an element in the respectable bride’s trousseau. The portion of the catalogue that has been made available to the present author includes no fewer than 97 discrete items.

But there is more. Many Moroccan accounts represent Wright’s silver as a luxury trade which spun off into cheaper imitations; I suspect, though, that the truth is the other way round. There are stories of teapots and other elements of the traditional Wright tea-service made in gold and even crystal, as well as of sterling silver (I have only seen examples of the last and am quite sceptical as to the former). Some accounts optimistically maintain that the originals were copies of pieces designed and commissioned by Thami Pasha el-Glaoui (1879-1956), the fabulously wealthy Pasha of Marrakech who collected and commissioned much valuable tea paraphernalia. Much, though by no means all, of the Wright work in wealthier Moroccan homes today is in ‘argent massif,’ or solid silver. The royal palace is said to have been a major long-term customer, and I have been told by a relative of King Mohamed VI that “His Majesty would never dream of drinking tea unless from a Richard Wright *théière*.” But although luxury items like this were clearly made, it seems likely that they were made much later. By the 1960s when production was restarted, Barker Ellis was positioning itself as a luxury brand with markets as much in the Persian Gulf as in North Africa: many of the richer products probably date from half a century, rather than a century and more, ago. They certainly did make one-off commissions in solid silver at this period, though these were far from being the staple line.⁴²

One way or another, the brand has become associated closely with quality and luxury. It clearly rested on the reputation that Manchester had in Morocco as the acme of fine craftsmanship. This association had already been long in place by the 1920s, when Abdelmajid Benjelloun records, according to Fred Halliday, that the word *manatshistir* had an almost magical reputation for quality and that among its most prized products were machine-woven carpets and ‘Sheffield’ silver. Since the silver came, as he says, from another city than Manchester (the quotation is, despite apparent attribution, actually unsourced and possibly spurious - and anyway I suspect that Sheffield is an error for Birmingham) the reputation of Manchester clearly cast a warm and positive glow over much that was British, as far as Moroccans were concerned.⁴³ This is confirmed by a visit to the Rabat *mdina* today, where poor quality local teapots are for sale under brands including *Royal Skott*, *Manchester* and *Royal Mbachire, Manchester*.

By the 1920s Richard Wright was a quarter of a century dead, but his name lived on in various ways. At some point in the 1920s, Barkers ceased to make silver for the Moroccan market, and during the last war its Birmingham works was destroyed by German bombing. By the 1960s it had been through various corporate transformations and merged with Ellis

& Co (Birmingham) Ltd to become the Barker Ellis Silversmiths Company: at about this time it resumed trading with Morocco. One Barker Ellis employee (ca. 1975-2002)⁴⁴ reported that the company “produced a range of teapots, mint tea boxes, trays, kettles, tables, incense burners, all in heavy gauge copper, some parts in pewter or nickel, every item was hand-chased by Hassell & Hughes – they both used to be Barker Ellis employees – every item was silver-plated and bore the Manchester mark in English and Arabic.” He added, “It’s possible that the Barkers link with Wright goes back to the early 1960s; we had links in Beirut . . .” He was unaware of the longer-term continuity going back well into the previous century.

During this period Abdellah Benjelloun, a Casablanca jeweller and silver dealer from the same extended Fassi family, became interested in reviving the manufacture of Wright silverware, and in about 1985, looking for a British silver firm to partner, he approached Barker Ellis. In doing so, he was quite unaware of the fact that they were the original manufacturers of Wright silverware and describes his amazement and delight when shown a store-room “piled high with Richard Wright silver.”⁴⁵ There was still at this point no Wright manufacturing going on at Barker Ellis, but it was revived again under the direction of Brian Lapworth, the works manager, using the original dies which were still in the firm’s possession, and Abdellah Benjelloun became the company’s Moroccan agent. In the course of the company’s next crisis, it was bought out of receivership by Gordon MacDougall in 1990, and sales to Morocco continued through Abdellah Benjelloun “and through two other retailers.”⁴⁶ Mr McDougall reports that

We occasionally made solid silver special items or large tea urns, but almost all the items were silver plated on copper, or hard soldered brass which could be heated. I remember that all our teapots had a hawk knob. All our items were significantly better quality than the items made locally in Morocco, but we often saw locally made copies of Richard Wright teapots.⁴⁷

In 2002 Barker Ellis was bought by C J Vander Silversmiths of Sheffield, and many of the Wright dies were destroyed and others sold to the British Silverware Company, despite an attempt by Abdellah Benjelloun to buy them. C J Vander went into liquidation in 2007, and at this point Abdelleh Benjelloun succeeded in buying the Richard Wright trademark.

Richard Wright – the myth

The other dimension in which Richard Wright lives on is the mythical. My informant in the Fess *souqs* was Hamza El-Fasiki, a young artist, metal-worker and scholar who comes of an old *dinandier*, or coppersmith, family of Fes. It became clear that amongst the *dinandiers* and silversmiths of Fes, Richard Wright is still a live topic of conversation, though who he was and when he lived are largely immaterial to the stories told.

Wright is closely associated in Fassi popular lore with the metal alloy called *sbika*. This substance is slightly mysterious, and it is very hard to get a Fassi to define it precisely, though the *Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary* translates it unequivocally as pewter (Doniach 1972). It is said to have been used in the past for making whole objects, but since becoming hugely expensive⁴⁸ to have been used only for soldering together parts made of other metals. Pewter is “an alloy consisting mostly of tin which has been mixed with small amounts of other metals such as copper, lead or antimony to harden it and make it more durable,” (Pewter Society, n.d.) and is at least very closely related, if not identical, to *sbika*, which is said to be made of nickel, lead and tin. Any confusion is made worse by the fact that in French both tin and pewter are translated as *étain*.

When Richard Wright died, as I was told by an informant in the Kerachfiyin funduq, the supply of *sbika*, which had always come from Manchester and which Wright controlled personally, dried up completely, causing a major crisis in the Seffarine; and Fes was saved only by alternative supplies being eventually located in Malaysia (which is indeed a major producer of tin). The date of this alleged crisis is unclear, but it must have been sixty or seventy years after the death of the old ironmonger. This is a wonderfully garbled story, and a further detail may help a little in explaining it: the Fassi craftsmen habitually add ‘lead’ to the *sbika*, which perhaps makes sense now that it is primarily used for solder, and a common source of the ‘lead’ is said to be the melting down of old ‘lead’ (presumably pewter) teapots from England. The best of these are the *théières mouches*, or ‘fly teapots,’ already encountered as English exports of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, originating perhaps in the work of master pewterer Timothy Fly of Whitechapel, or his parents William and Martha Fly.

‘Fly teapots’ are a curious counterpoint to Wright’s. The design of these teapots, or at least their later avatars (fig 4), is another unequivocally clear model for ‘Moroccan’ teapots, long before Taleb Benjelloun pulled an example out his bag at Great Ancoats Street. Interestingly, Carl Ricketts, an expert on pewter history, is clear that the fly ‘touch’ in fig 4, on the base of the teapot, is probably not the touch of a member of the Fly family (of whom there is no record in the business after Timothy Fly’s death in 1744), but an English or local imitator. As early as the later eighteenth century the pewterers of London and Fes seem to have been counterfeiting these highly rated teapots using a version of the Fly touch. It is richly appropriate that some of these pewter teapots ended their working lives melted back into *sbika*, the substance that another Englishman, Richard Wright, was thought to invest with semi-magical qualities; and that Wright hovers possessively over the recycling process.

The whole story is best not interrogated too closely for hard fact, but illustrates perfectly the archetypal role of Richard Wright as the source of the ingredient that is vital for the prosperity of the Fassi metal industries; and his timelessness, unharnessed to the dates of his actual, mortal, life. The trilateral root *sin-ba-kaf* forms the basis of much Arabic

metallurgical and metal-working vocabulary: *sbaka* means to smelt or cast; *sabbak* is a metal-founder; *sabika* an ingot and *masbak* a foundry (Wehr 1974). By becoming in folklore the master of *sbika*, Wright was himself transmuted into a powerful patron saint of the Fassi metal trades.

Manchester itself has a numinous presence in the Moroccan imagination as the home of Richard Wright. A man called Salem Benjelloun is said to have set off from Fes in the 1960s on a quest in search of the source of Wright silverware. He found Wright's factory in Manchester and was allowed to work there for a week, during which time he produced ten *dara desouani* silver tea-stands. His work-rate was about double that of native Mancunian silversmiths, and he was told to slow down; but he either couldn't, or he wouldn't, and he was sent home in disgrace to Fes. It is clear here that Manchester (where there had never been a Wright silver factory), more than six decades after Richard Wright's death, is a kind of fairy destination, a place outside time and space to which heroes travel to perform mythic deeds. The story is a quest narrative, straight from a fairy tale, though it lacks the resonant ending of triumph or disaster.

But in case one is tempted to think of stories like this purely as simplistic distortions of fact into myth, here is another, superficially more factual, told by Abderrahman Lakhsassi:

When I was a student in Manchester in 1980, a Moroccan friend came there with his business associates to buy a grain-processing mill. I acted as his English translator. Outside of business, the only thing that interested him in Manchester was a Richard Wright tea set. After a series of phone calls I was informed that the factory had closed down a long time ago. When we returned to London a friend of mine wanted to show them some of the famous places ... My friend from Morocco was simply not interested unless a Richard Wright factory by miracle could be found in London (Lakhsassi: 1999, p172).

Here again, the factory in Manchester which never existed has become a real, though vanished or occluded, place, and the production in Birmingham that really did revive in the 1960s and continue to the end of the century, has transcended fact to become a source, if not of fairy gold, then of fairy silver.

This same elasticity of time and place is found in personal accounts too. One informant interviewed in Morocco, an elderly woman whose father had been sent to Manchester to work with a Mr Benjelloun, maintained that it was her father who had prompted Wright to start making teapots for Morocco; and that Wright had made a miniature silver tea-set for her niece. Stretching every possibility of date to the extreme, the niece can hardly have been born less than 40 years after Wright died; and there is no reason anyway to think that Wright himself made a teapot, large or small, in his entire life. Furthermore the father, equally clearly, can scarcely have been born when the first Richard Wright teapot was made at Barker Brothers' Paradise Street works in Birmingham.

This is not to impugn anyone's veracity. What it demonstrates is the way mythical figures gather about them a vortex of qualities, attributions and stories which suck in the memories

of others. The little girl did have a miniature silver tea set; and it may perfectly well have been commissioned from an English silversmith. Her father (or grandfather) was very likely involved in the Moroccan business of exporting Wright teapots. But in a culture that is still significantly oral, and in which the supernatural comes closer to the edges of daily life than it does in Britain, Wright is the unquestioned repository for orphaned stories about tea, and silver (as well as *sbika*), that need a home.

In 1958, Nina Epton wrote that

... silver tea-kettles from Manchester found their way all over Morocco, from the proud houses of the bourgeois Moors to the tents of the haughty Berber chiefs. If they could only speak to us with their silvery singing voices, what stories they could tell, these exiled, exported tea-kettles! What long journeys they have had to endure, tightly packed to the panting sides of mules and donkeys, stumbling through deserts and rugged mountain passes. A long Chleuh poem from the south extols the 'good tea from London.' Yes, we [i.e. the British] introduced the tea-drinking custom to Morocco. It must be the best and most enduring service we have rendered to that country to date. (Epton: 1958, p99)

This dour old Mancunian ironmonger did not expect to become the patron saint of Moroccan tea-drinking, or of Anglo-Moroccan cultural relations; but he has long since been transformed into a larger-than-life hero; and his soot-blackened, rain-sodden Manchester into a hidden city of dreams. He inhabits, to return to the comment of Abdelahad Sebti's with which I began, the "dimension of immemorial tradition and collective illusion," (Sebti: 1999, p141) and nothing could, or should, dislodge him from that strange, evanescent kingdom.

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RICHARD WRIGHT,
92 GT. ANCOATS STREET,
MANCHESTER,
WHOLESALE IRONMONGER,
GRINDSTONE MERCHANT, &c.

AGENT FOR
PLUMBAGO CRUCIBLES,

For Brass and Malleable Iron Founders.

GRINDSTONES,

For Engineers, Machinists, Tool Makers, Spindle Makers, Paper Makers, File and Logwood Grinders, Tobacco Manufacturers, and various other purposes, any size from 6in. to 9ft. diameter.

GRINDSTONE TROUGHS, for Hand or Power, various sizes.

SEA-HORSE LEATHER, LONDON EMERY,

Ground Glass, Emery & Glass Cloth, Glass Paper, Emery Strickles, Fish Skins.

ENGLISH, IRISH, SCOTCH, AND FOREIGN GLUES.

NETTLEFOLD & CHAMBERLAIN'S TAPER POINTED SCREWS.

COACH SCREWS, BOLTS & NUTS, WASHERS,

WROUGHT and CUT NAILS, of every description.

IRON AND COPPER RIVETS,

Gas and Steam Tubes, Steam Valves and Taps, Steam Joint Cement, India Rubber Washers, Packing for Glands and Stuffing Boxes, Files, Vices, Anvils, Forges, Bellows.

Furnace, Locomotive, and Gravel Shovels,

MOULDERS' SHOVELS AND SPADES,

RIDDLES, SIEVES, GALVANIZED IRON BUCKETS,

Crane Chains, Twisted Chains (Japanned or Bright), Rivetted Machine Chains, Ratchet Braces, Lifting Jacks, Steel Hammers.

VARIOUS FITTINGS FOR MACHINERY IN EARTHENWARE AND GLASS.

Differential Pulley Blocks, on various systems. Asphalte Roofing and Dry Hair Felt, Morticing Machines, for hard and soft wood.

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Fig. 1. Richard Wright's display advertisement in Slater's Directory, 1869



Fig. 2. A pewter teapot, ca. 1800, by Townsend & Compton of London: its similarity to the 'traditional' teapot of Morocco is obvious and unmistakable. Photograph by kind permission of ©Carl Ricketts



Fig. 3. A 'Richard Wright' teapot, probably a local copy, date unknown. Author's photograph



Fig. 4. Pewter teapot, date unknown. It is a copy of an early eighteenth century teapot made by Timothy Fly of London for export, probably to North Africa. A version, almost certainly pirated, of Fly's touch mark at top left, suggesting that this is the original 'théière mouche'. Photograph by kind permission of © Carl Ricketts



Fig. 5. Timothy Fly's pewter touch mark London early 18th century. Photograph by kind permission of © John Bank

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard Wright". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Fig. 6. Richard Wright's signature, from his 1894 will



*Fig. 7 Richard Wright's maker's mark, probably a local rendering
Author's photograph*

Extracts from the Censuses of 1851-1911 for Moroccan residents of Parkfield Street, Moss Lane East and other parts of Manchester

There are no persons in the **1851** or **1861** census marked as having been born in Morocco (though Isaac Azulay and his wife Fanny, both British subjects, were listed at 104 Brunswick Street in 1861). The first such entries appear in 1871. Note that transcriptions, apart from the occasional egregious correction (*Elarbi* for *Stanley* Bouaid, for example, or *Egyptian Merchant* for *Egg Fustian Merchant*) are as taken down by census enumerators and are not therefore consistent. The censuses for **1871**, **1881**, **1891**, **1901** and **1911** have been used; but that for **1921** is restricted until 2022 and **1931** has been destroyed.

1871

2 Hastings St	Dris Benani [35]	Merchant	b Morocco
4 Hastings St	Hadj Lahlou [35]	Merchant,	b Morocco
	[? Louila] Lahlou [22]	Wife	b Egypt
94 Exeter St	Taleb Benjiluin [33]	Merchant	b Fes
	Rachel Bensolia ¹ [26]	Housekeeper	b Ramsgate
49 Ducie Grove	Hadge Guessus [41]	Manufacturer	b Arabia

1881

160 Lloyd St	Larbi Bengelun [34]	Merchant	b Morocco
	Rachel Bengelun [30]	Housekeeper	b Ramsgate
	Dris Berada [50]	Merchant	b Morocco
56 Park Lane	Soliman [?] Anselem [46]	Watchmaker	b Morocco
	Rebecca [?] Anselem [43]	Wife	b Morocco
	and 8 children		b Manchester
133 York St	Solomon [?] Garson [53]	Merchant	b Morocco
	Donna [?] Garson [47]	Wife	b Morocco
	6 children		b Gib, Mor, Spn
33a Grafton St	Abdelmegid Tazzi [35]	Spice Merchant	b Fes Morocco
	Helena Tazzi [19]	Wife	b Constantinople
40 Derby St	Taher Benani [26]	Shipper	b Morocco
8 Lothair St	Benassa Benani [36]	Cotton merchant	b Morocco

¹ Rachel, born in Ramsgate, maiden name probably O'Neill, appears in subsequent returns as Rachel Bengelun, and was a member of the household of various Benjellouns until her death in 1916 (BMD).

	Merjoula Benani [24]	Wife	b Morocco
	Abdelkader Benani [2]	Son	b Manchester
	Abdelkrim Benani [2 mo]	Son	b Manchester
	[H]adj Moh. Benani [37]	Brother	b Morocco
131 Oxford St	Abdslam Benani [18]	Boarder	b France
Moss Villas	Dris² Benani [56]	Merchant	b Fes
Moss Lane East	Hagea Sealli (Board) [56]	Merchant	b Fes
11 Parkfield St	Hadj M Ganoon [36]	Shipper	b Morocco
	Adija Ganoon [18]	Wife	b Cairo, Egypt
	Absalom ³ Ganoon [1 mo]	Son	b Manchester
	Taleb Lazarac [30]	Shipper	b Morocco
	Fatoom Lazarac [17]	Wife	b Egypt
29 Parkfield St	Mohamed Hallaby [38]	Syrian Merchant	b Damascus
51 Parkfield St	Taleb Berada (Lodg) [53]	Egyptian Merchant	b Morocco
63 Parkfield St	Hadj Lehluk [50]	Egyptian Merchant	b Morocco
	Fatima Lehluk [30]	Wife	b Abyssinia
	Mohamed Lehluk [20]	Son	b Morocco

1891

110 Rumford St	Ahmed Bengeliun [24]	Shipper	b Morocco
	Rachel O'Neill [44]	Housekeeper	b Ramsgate
7 Parkfield St	Mohamed Benani [50]	Shipper	b Fes
	Fatheyar Benani [22]	[Wife]	b Fes
	Azeza Benani [1]	[Daughter]	b Manchester
	Mohamed Guessus [35]	Shipper	b Fes
	Fathma Guessus [22]	[Wife]	b Fes
40 Parkfield St	Taleb Lazarac [40]	Shipper	b Fes
	Barkha Lazarac [30]	Wife	b Fes
	Hamedi [7]	Son	b Manchester
	Moh. McQuor⁴ [25]	Cousin, Shipper	b Fes
	Azuz Benquiran [46]	Boarder, Shipper	b Fes
	Beraka Benquiran [25]	[Wife]	b Fes

² Or Geis

³ Possibly a mishearing of Abdslam.

⁴ Presumably an attempt at Maquar.

1901

5 Parkfield St	Hadj H Elhadgwy [45]	Shipper	b Fes nat UK
	Mohamed Zaiet [30]	Shipping clerk	b Fez
7 Parkfield St	Abd E Elhalouin [55]	Shipper	b Fes
	Mbarka Elhalouin [20]	Wife	b Soudan
	Nafisa Elhalouin [3]	Daughter	b Manchester
	Mohammed [5 mo]	Son	b Manchester
9 Parkfield St	Moh. Benchokroun [35]	Shipper	b Morocco
	Elmuchir Benchekroun [28]	Wife	b Fes
	Hamed [12]	Son	b Morocco
.	Hidush [7]	daughter	b Morocco
.	Hamed Benani [45]	Boarder, Shipper	b Fes
11 Parkfield St	Hadj M Maquar [40]	Shipper	b Fes
	Mesquina Maquar [25]	Wife	b Fes
	Omar Maquar [7]	Son	b Fes
	Tayeb Maquar [3]	Son	b Manchester
	Mohamed Maquar [1]	Son	b Manchester
13 Parkfield St	F Ben-Lamine [32]	Merchant	b Fes
	Rahma Ben-Lamine [19]	Wife	b Fes
	Mohamed El Cohen [29]	Shipper	b Fes
	Fotoma El Cohen [20]	Wife	b Soudan
	Saadiya El Cohen [1]	Daughter	b Melilla, Mor
17 Parkfield St	Moh. Benjelun [37]	Shipper	b Fes
	Amber Benjelun [32]	Wife	b Fes

1911

12 Parkfield St	Moh. Ziat [42]	Shipper	b Fes, nat UK
	Batoun Ziat [34]	Wife (15 yrs)	b Fes
	Ayesha Ziat [5]	Daughter	b Manchester
	Mohamed Ziat [4]	Son	b Manchester
	Khadush Ziat [2]	Daughter	b Manchester
	Saada Ganouieh [25]	Servant	b Fes
13 Parkfield St	Boobker BenLamine [26]	Shipper	b Morocco
17 Parkfield St	Abdelkader Benhamo [38]	Shipper	b Fes
	Yasmin Benhamo [26]	Wife (8 yrs)	b Fes
23 Parkfield St	Driss Benyakhleffe [31]	Shipper	b Fes
	Fatima Benyakhleffe [27]	Wife (10 yrs)	b Fes

	Mohamed Benyakhleffe [7]	Son	b Manchester
	Fatima Benyakhleffe [8]	Daughter	b Manchester
398 Moss Lane E	Elarbi Boayed	(Absent, Blackpool)	
456 Moss Lane E	Moh. Benchekroun [45]	Shipper	b Fes
	Masuda Benchekroun [32]	Wife (9 yrs)	b Fes
	Galia Dahalia [35]	Servant	b Dukala, Mor
	Amber Abdiah [24]	Servant	b Abda, Mor
460 Moss Lane E	"Family away in Blackpool"		
464 Moss Lane E	Not found. (In Blackpool)		
8 Lansdowne, Claremont, Blackpool	Moh. Bengelun [38]	Shipper	b Fes
	Mabraka Bengelun [27]	Wife (7 yrs)	b Mahrami, Mor
	Ahmed Bengelun [44]	M Shipper	b Fes
	Rachel Bengelun [55]	Widow	b Ramsgate
	Driss Benabdallah [30]	M Shipper	b Fes nat UK
	Johara Benabdallah [25]	Wife (8 years)	b Abda, Mor
	Moh. Benabdallah [6]	Son	b Manchester
	Ritah Benabdallah [4]	Daughter	b Manchester
	Alarbi Bouaid [47]	M Shipper	b Fes
	Kassin Elaraki [28]	For'n Corresp	b Fes
	Ahmed Elgnaouie [27]	For'n Corresp	b Fes
	Aldamjid Aksly [64]	For'n Corresp	b Fes

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¹ The best, though very brief, account of the community is in Fred Halliday, *The Millet of Manchester: Arab Merchants and Cotton Trade*, BRISMES vol 19, no 2 (1993) pp159-176. A later unpublished paper by Mohammed Siddique Seddon, *The Moroccan Cotton Traders of Manchester 1830-1930* (I am grateful to Dr Seddon for sight of this) was given at a conference in 2009 but adds little of much significance to Halliday as far as the subject of my essay is concerned. There may also exist a paper, said to have been delivered by Dr Myriam Cherti to a conference in Essaouira in 2010, entitled *Moroccan Jewish and Muslim Traders of Manchester (18th and 19th centuries)*; but oddly this does not appear among the published conference papers (*La Bienvenue et l'Adieu*, three volumes, Rabat: CIME, 2012), and I have been unable to establish whether it was actually delivered. A short paper by Dr Cherti in *L'Economia* (no. 7, 2012) and a background section in her *Paradoxes of Social Capital*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2008) pp75-77 are essentially derivative of Hayes, Halliday and Benjelloun and add little, if anything, to them.

² The Jewish Museum in Manchester has a fine collection of large wood-block stamps belonging to Jewish merchants, with which the outside of their bales of cotton cloth were stamped in indigo before shipping to Mogador, Rabat or Larache.

³ The great Jewish traders of Mogador, providing many of the Sultan's privileged *tujjar*, merchants who effectively ruled the town, were the Corcos, Afriat, Coriat, Knafo, Pinto and Elmaleh families; though the influence of the *tujjar* and the predominance of Mogador in Moroccan trade were in decline by the mid-19th century.

⁴ I shall refer to it throughout this essay for consistency's sake as Mogador rather than Essaouira, but the two names, Portuguese and *darija*, are interchangeable.

⁵ The central role of Fes in cotton importing is illustrated by a nice etymology. The dress trousers, heavy with frogging and brocade, worn under a man's best dishdasha are called *qandresa*, a word which may sound Moroccan but which is in fact constructed around the name of a French cotton exporting company called *André SA* (i.e. Société Anonyme, or 'Ltd.') to which the rest of Morocco has blithely restored the initial *qaf* that Fassis, like Cairenes, notoriously drop and which 'obviously' needed to be put back where it belonged. *Si non è vero, è ben trovato*.

⁶ The Parientes were a Jewish family settled in Larache since the 16th century. Isaac Pariente is the first Moroccan to appear in *Scholes's Manchester Foreign Merchants*, an annual list of resident foreign merchants which was discontinued in 1870.

⁷ Isaac Azulay is also recorded in the 1861 census, living at 104 Brunswick Street in Chorlton-on-Medlock with his wife Fanny.

⁸ In 1880 the US Consul in Tangier reported, after a long analysis of the demand for cotton stuffs, that in Mogador 'there is also a moderate sale for plated ware, teapots, trays, wood-burners, scent bottles, pewter teapots, brass and copper kettles and other classes of hardware; but this trade is rather limited.' *Consular reports: Commerce, Manufactures etc.*, volume 4. US Bureau of Commerce, Washington DC 1880, p684

⁹ 'A certain foreign gentleman wanted, ironically, to know if Mogador belonged to the Sultan or to Queen Victoria. The response, with hand on heart, was *Bijujhum ya senor - to both, sir.*' (Shakespeare: 1993), which tells of a journey to Mogador in search of traces of Leslie Hore Belisha and the port's Jewish past.

¹⁰ Slightly differing titles over the century, variants on *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Manchester and Salford*.

¹¹ The census returns are useful, but abominably transcribed. *Fez* is often written, incomprehensibly, *Key*; and one unfortunate *Egyptian merchant* is transmogrified into an *Egg Fustian Merchant*. Actual names are often an even greater puzzle: nothing in the transcriptions can be accepted without checking back to the manuscript returns. Checked extracts of Moroccan entries from these returns are appended to this essay.

¹² There are various accounts of the community, not easily reconcilable. Le Tourneau (Le Tourneau: 1949, p446) notes Manchester as the pre-eminent overseas colony of Fassi merchants and lists the following ‘grands commerçants’ as living in Manchester in 1904: ‘Ben Khalef (Mohammed Ben Yakhlef), Mefdhel ben A’iat (Mfeddel Bou’Ayad), El Hadj Ben Nacer ben Nani (el-Hajj Bennaser Benani), the son of Si Mohammed Qesous ben Bou Beker (Si Mohammed Gesoous b. Bou Bker), Ahmed ben Jelloul (Ahmed Ben Jelloun), Si Mohammed Jelloul (Si Mohammed Ben Jelloun),’ to whom he adds from another source Si ‘Abd el-Ghani Kabbaj. The 1936 *Manchester City News* article (Manchester City News: 1936), which lists Canoon, Elhadjwy, Mahdani Tazi, Lazarak, Guesus, Benabdelsh, Benchocron, Benquiran and Boeyed, dates from 30 years after Le Tourneau and is a later snapshot, though many names are recognizable (some dimly). Some of them overlap with the names in Slater’s directories and some don’t, but the Benjellouns are ever-present. Louis Hayes (Hayes: 1905, p215) writes that ‘these Moors came from various quarters; Tangiers, Mogadore, Larache, Casablanca, Fez, etc.’ and lists them: ‘Luarzazi, Elofer, Benquiran, Lehlul, Benabsalom, Dris and Benassi Benani. Benani and Tassi were two of the most usual names amongst them ... then there were names such as Guessus, Lushi, Meecoe, Bomar Larashe, Benabdislam, and Benmassoud ... The Bens were prolific as the sons of many ancestors. Where there were several of the same surname they were recognised by some personal peculiarity. For instance one man was called Big Tassi on account of his almost gigantic proportions ... there was also Black Tassi, so called from his swarthy complexion, as keen as a knife and as sharp as a needle, but I am afraid that his heart partook of the nature of his complexion [or Meecoe who started well, but whose purse eventually] did not prove long enough for its purpose, and Mr Meecoe’s light-hearted pleasantries could not convert themselves into bank notes, or even dollars which with wool was the usual mode of remittance, and so the creditors had to whistle for their money ...’ What is clear is that compiling a definitive list presents almost insuperable challenges.

¹³ Parkfield Street ran north-south, joining Moss Lane East in the middle of the south side of Whitworth Park, and it was around this junction that the Moroccans were concentrated. Today only a short fragment of the street survives at the north end, the rest having disappeared under modern student housing.

¹⁴ He is identified only as ‘Mohamed Ben T Benani’ in the register entry of his death in 1878 but is probably the Mohamed Ben Thami Benani who had the rubber stamp (see below) made, and who was Si Abdelkrim Benani’s grandfather (Slater: 1863)

¹⁵ And elsewhere: the Fes consulate records also used this spelling, apart from the occasional *Bengelun*.

¹⁶ Hayes’s stories are very hard to date within the range of 1840 (his title) to 1905 (his publication), but this appears to be early and may be from the late 1860s or (perhaps more likely) the early 1870s.

¹⁷ Elarby was born in 1847 (1881 census), but Taleb’s date of birth is unknown.

¹⁸ There was also another office at 21 Cooper Street.

¹⁹ The sentence is in French: the phrase in inverted commas is in English.

²⁰ The younger pair of brothers were born in 1867 (Mohamed) and 1873 (Ahmed) in Fes. They were on holiday together in Blackpool at the time of the 1911 census, with Mohamed’s wife Mabraka (born 1884); Ahmed was single, but his housekeeper, Rachel Benjelloun, a widow born in Ramsgate in 1856, was on holiday with them: she had also been Elarby Bengelun’s housekeeper at Lloyd Street in 1881, and so was clearly a member of the family, the English widow of another Bengelun (she died in 1916). In the same boarding house were the family of Driss Benabdallah and his wife Johara, with their children Mohamed and Ritah, and four more Fassi merchants, alone but of the party: Alarby Bouaid, Kassin Elaraki, Ahmed Elgnouie and Aldjamid Aksly. Blackpool and the North Wales coast were favourite holiday destinations. Hamid Berdai’s wartime identity book, issued by Manchester police, has at least ten registration stamps from Caernarvonshire and Denbighshire police. And in 1917 Johara Benabdallah died, aged 30, at Conway while on holiday.

²¹ His name is nowhere given in his son’s book (only his initial, T), but this information comes from Prof. Wa’il Benjelloun, former President of Université Mohamed V at Rabat.

²² There was also a Mohamed ‘Penjelun’ at 17 Parkfield Street who may be the same Mohamed Benjelloun as landlord, and (in 1895) a Hamid Benjelloun at 47 Grafton Street. The latter may well have been a Tioumi.

²³ Azus Benquiran, Hamzie Tahry, Feres Ben-Lamine, Mohamed Guessus and Taleb Lazarac.

²⁴ Azus Benkiran (no 7), Hamzie Tahry (9), Hamed Benabdallah (10), Mohammed Guessus (12), Feres Ben-Lamine (13), Abdelkadir Ben-Hamo (17), Hamed Benecliffe (23) and Taleb Lazarac (46).

²⁵ The article *Special Wives Bought in Slave Market; Wore Red Fez; Always Had Umbrellas; Never in Court* (Manchester City News: 1936) is quoted at length in (Fred Halliday: 1993).

²⁶ Now the Manchester Jewish Museum. I visited it in 2013 with André Azoulay, Counsellor to the King of Morocco and he, on getting out of the taxi, exclaimed in amazement “But this is *my* synagogue!” It turns out that, architecturally, it is a close though slightly smaller copy of the synagogue which Mr Azoulay had attended as a boy in Mogador, his native city. Belisha was the grandfather of Leslie Hore Belisha, British Minister of War and as Home Secretary commissioner of the Belisha Beacon..

²⁷ A skim of the Fes consulate records yields the following (very much not exhaustive) list of naturalisations: Abdulmaged Tazzi (1877), Taleb Bengelun (1880), Hadj Benasher Elofer (1881), Tahar Benani (1885), Hadj Hassan Elhajwy (1889), Taleb Lazarac (1894), Mohamed Guessus (1897), Driss Benabdallah (1909) and Elarbi Benjelloun with his wife Habiba (1933). A note from 1872 records that Mohamed Benani was applying to add his son to his own previous naturalisation: this Mohamed was perhaps Mohamed Ben Thami Benani. Children born in Britain acquired nationality by birth, but wives were often it seems left out (thus Driss Benabdallah was naturalised British, his children Ritah and Mohamed British by birth, but his wife Johara seems not to have been naturalised). In some cases this may reflect the custom described in the *Manchester Evening News* (1936):

‘The womenfolk [were] mostly black women, some of whom had been previously purchased in the slave market, married and brought to England, as it was considered ‘infra dig’ to bring one of the real white wives to England ...’ Many of the merchants had Fassi wives; but a certain number married Egyptians, often very much younger than themselves, and others had wives from ‘Soudan’ or – if Moroccan – from Abda and Dukala.

²⁸ The Benani described by Hayes may have come to Manchester from Egypt, but he was certainly Fassi and his family was one of those prominent merchant families of Fes who made up a colony about 1,500 strong in Cairo.

²⁹ Interview with his grandson, Amin Nejjari and his sons Abdelmajid and Abdelwahab Berdai in Rabat, 18th April 2014. They were kind enough to give me a photograph and a copy of Hamid Berdai’s wartime police identity book, which shows him – like many of the Moroccans – to have taken short summer holidays by the sea in Lysfaen, Old Colwyn and Conway.

³⁰ Conversation between Abdellah Benjelloun and Mrs L in January 2014, reported to me by the former.

³¹ A former consular employee said to me with admirable but frustrating discretion that by far the most interesting part of her job had been dealing with the files of the old Fassi families with British nationality.

³² All sorts of imaginary backgrounds are credited to Wright, for example by Noufissa Kessar Raji, in (Raji: 2003) who writes of ‘un tisserand anglaise, amateur de l’argenterie, nommé Richard Wright’ – ‘an English weaver, lover of silverware ...’

³³ The 1851 census records the Wright family at 92 Great Ancoats Street, consisting of Richard senior, his wife Susannah and six children, including three sons of whom Richard junior, aged 11, was the second. By 1861 Richard junior was the head of family, now aged 20 and himself married to a wife called Jane, though as yet without children. They were still at 92 Great Ancoats Street, and he is described as an ironmonger employing one man and a boy.

³⁴ (London Gazette: 1882) identifies the subject as Richard Wright of Gransmoor, Fairfield, ‘carrying on business at 63 Dale-street, and formerly at 85, Piccadilly, both in the city of Manchester, as an ironmonger, and also at Tamworth-street, Openshaw, as a Brewer.’ Dale Street runs just behind 85 Piccadilly and both are close to Great Ancoats Street. Again, the identification is very convincing indeed, without being absolutely watertight.

³⁵ This advertisement is the same, in content and wording, though in condensed form, as the larger display advertisement of more prosperous days. It identifies Richard Wright of Great Ancoats Street with Richard Wright of Dale Street, though his residence in 1887 is given as Park House, Heaton Chapel.

³⁶ I owe thanks to John Bank, owner of the site www.pewterbank.com, for much generous help and advice on English pewter; and to Carl Ricketts for much more help and advice - and to both for permission to use images..

³⁷ Making necessary the odd little embroidered cloth cones with which Moroccan users of teapots are obliged to this day to hold them, to avoid burning their fingers.

³⁸ The HMC report, by N. James, is referenced GB-800819-Barker. All records were apparently destroyed either when C J Vander took over the company (2002) or when it went into liquidation (2007), though one volume of silver patterns remains in private hands. Abdelleh Benjelloun (personal information to the present author) saw these company records at Barker Ellis and tells me that there was considerable Wright business on the books by 1885; and that large and very opulent orders through middlemen then and later appeared to be for the palace.

³⁹ Mohamed Abdelillah Belghazi, Director of the Belghazi Museum at Bouknabel, told me of the existence of Wright-branded luxury fabrics, though I have not myself seen them.

⁴⁰ The original, in the possession of Mr Abdelleh Benjelloun, is a photograph album, with black pages and a spiral binding. There are photographs pasted in and serial numbers written in white ink on the black page of the album; or in black on the photograph itself. In a small number of cases the pictures have been cut from a professionally designed and printed catalogue (‘Printed in Japan’) and these pages have numbers designed into the photographs themselves: all these are low three-digit numbers preceded by a zero, ranging from 0140 to 0160, with eleven numbers (and therefore items) missing from the series. They clearly date from later than the main contents of the album, and very likely from the 1960s.

⁴¹ Without going into too much detail, cross-referencing the objects in my possession, three plain 1½ pint teapots (7475 X, X and R), one plain 2 pint teapot (7475), a 1½ pint *sarafiyya* teapot (7475), a coffee pot (7448), a sugar-box (8954) and a tea-box (9153H), with the catalogue yields only two exact matches: a tea-box (9153) and a sugar-box (8954). On the other hand all my teapots, of various sizes and designs, carry the same number (7475) with different suffixed letters: these coincide exactly with none in the catalogue, all teapots there having different serial numbers in the 7600 range. The only design match, a 1½ pint *sarafiyya*, is numbered 7665 in the catalogue, as against the ubiquitous 7475 on my example.

⁴² Personal information from Gordon McDougall.

⁴³ This reference is a puzzle: quoted by Fred Halliday (*op. cit.* p164) as ‘Abd al-Majid Bin Jillun, the author of *Fi al-Tufula*, reported that ...’ but he gives no actual page reference and I find no trace of such a comment in Benjelloun’s *Fi al-Tufula*, at least in the French translation. If it is from another work by the same author, it is unsourced. The reference recurs derivatively elsewhere (see for example Myriam Cherti, 2008 and 2012) but is never page-referenced and is clearly taken from Halliday, not Benjelloun. However, as an observation it is entirely plausible; though I suspect that *Sheffield* (which had nothing to do with the production of Wright silverware for export) has in some way been conflated with, or substituted for, *Birmingham* in the sinuously invisible and unmoored history of this slightly mysterious quotation.

⁴⁴ Eddie Reynolds, personal communication with the present author.

⁴⁵ Personal communication with the present author.

⁴⁶ Information from Gordon McDougall, May 2020. One of the retailers was, I believe, Francel in Rabat's Allel ben Abdellah Street. There was also a perhaps slightly dubious retail trade through Gibraltar, from where individual traders brought the silver through Tangier and Ceuta to the market at Fnidaq on the Moroccan side of the Ceuta frontier.

⁴⁷ Personal communication to the present author.

⁴⁸ Why it should be thought so expensive is unclear: in 2014 a baguette of sbika about the size of a stick of sealing wax cost 6-7 dirhams.