

Silver Production in Sijilmâsa (Morocco) during Medieval Times

SANDRINE BARON^{1*}, MUSTAPHA SOUHASSOU² AND
FRANCOIS-XAVIER FAUVELLE¹

¹ CNRS, University of Toulouse, TRACES laboratory, France
(*correspondence : sbaron@univ-tlse2.fr)

² Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taroudant, University of Ibn
Zohr, Morocco

A wide exchange network took place across the Sahara Desert from the 7th century AD on. This Trans-Saharan trade linked Maghreb with West Africa. One consequence of these activities was the flourishing of entrepot cities established on both sides of the Sahara. Among them, Sijilmâsa (in the south-east of Morocco) was one of the most important and certainly the most famous. According to the Arabic texts, between the 8th and the 15th centuries, this city was a crossroads for caravans of camels crossing the Sahara and one of the most important gold and silver monetary workshop [1]. If gold was known for coming from West Africa, silver is unanswered. Archaeological evidences about this (silver-) mining and (silver and gold) workshop activity have remained elusive. However, some non-ferrous slags, dated to around the 10th century, have recently been recovered by a French-Moroccan team who conducts excavations there. This significant discovery can reshape the questions of how the local mining resources contributed to the economic wealth generated by long- distance trade.

By the mean of i) systematic geological survey on deposits mentioned in some Arabic texts [2], ii) lead isotopes measured on slags and ores, and iii) petrographic and mineralogical studies on slags, we highlight an isotopic link between Sijilmâsa's slags and its hinterland which is a tangible proof of regional silver metal production.

Thus, this city had other sources of wealth and was able to regulate the monetary currency by silver addition in gold coins, as demonstrated by several elemental compositions of Sijilmâsa's gold coins [1].

[1] Roux, C. et Guerra, M. F. (2000). *Revue d'Archéométrie* **24**, 39-52. [2] Rosenberger, B. (1970). *Revue de Géographie du Maroc*, **18**, 59-101 et 71-107.