

Through support from the Alan Jones fund, I am delighted to be able to say that I stayed in Rabat, the modern and quite lovely capital of Morocco for three weeks. There, I completed a one-on-one advanced Arabic course at the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning, a quaint yet stunning language institute tucked away at the edge of Rabat's labyrinthic medina. The fund meant that I could afford these one-on-one classes, something which has been invaluable for going into my final year of a French and Arabic degree.

As many people in Morocco, particularly in the capital, Rabat, speak French, I was able to practice my Arabic in the classroom as well as both languages on a more day-to-day basis. While Moroccan Arabic is known for its difficulty around the Middle East for even native Arabic speakers, a healthy mixture of words I picked up in the dialect with Modern Standard Arabic and French meant that I was able to communicate with others quite comfortably. My year abroad in Tunisia also helped with this, as I had gotten used to mixing French with both dialectical and formal Arabic there; Tunisian Arabic is also more similar to Moroccan Arabic than other regional dialects.

In Rabat, I lived with two other Arabists from other colleges, and one of the smaller – yet still surprisingly useful – habits we had was to play card games in Arabic. Our favourite, Dobble, involves rapidly naming different things that appear on cards; doing this in Arabic was surprisingly useful for our vocabulary, as it forced us to learn vocabulary we probably never would have learnt otherwise! This game also featured constantly on our weekend trips around the country, where we would spend entire evenings on the floor of our hotel room playing Dobble.



*1- my friends and I at a viewpoint in the Atlas Mountains*

The night before our first weekend away, the devastating earthquake hit Morocco. Fortunately, as Rabat is around 4 hours away from Marrakesh, the city nearest the epicentre, damage in Rabat was minimal; that being said, we all certainly felt it, and rushed out of our accommodation into an open area opposite where we were staying. It would be a lie to say that the experience was not frightening, but we were mostly grateful that Rabat seemed fine afterwards. That evening, as news reports were slow and we were only able to find information from Twitter, we went to sleep not in the slightest aware of the destruction and loss of life the earthquake caused in the rural parts of the Atlas Mountains. The following morning, as news of the disaster hit the UK, we awoke to many missed calls and “breaking news” notifications on our phones – it was only then that we realised how devastating this earthquake had been. Although this earthquake shocked us, Morocco, and the world, and although it is certainly something I hope not to experience again, the rest of our time in Morocco was much more positive.

Weekends were spent travelling to another part of the country. The first weekend, for example, was spent in the very north of the country in Tangier, where the Cave of Hercules – a cave legendary for its importance in the myths of both Heracles and Hercules – are located. On the second weekend, we went to a part of the Atlas Mountains famed for its wildlife and nature just south of Fez. As both one of my friends and I love wildlife spotting and birdwatching, this weekend was fantastic, with us seeing endangered Barbary macaques, eagles, hare, and many other bird species I would struggle to name. The final weekend involved quite a lot of travel, and so I did it solo. A four-hour train followed by a four-and-a-half-hour bus took me from Rabat to the UNESCO-listed Amazigh village of Ait ben Haddou.



*2- the best photo I got of a Barbary macaque near Ifrane national park*



*3- a view of the magnificent Amazigh village of Ait ben Haddou*

I am extraordinarily grateful to the Alan Jones fund and to Pembroke College for their financial support which led me to be able to afford this educational and cultural opportunity in Morocco.

Joshua Kirkhope-Arkley

French and Arabic

Pembroke College