

Morocco as seen by Belgian painters in the 19th century

Before the 20th century, Morocco was a land unfamiliar to Westerners, fascinating for its riches and mysteries, and feared for the age-old power of its dynasties and the supposed savagery of its tribes. Western diplomatic missions, accompanied by artists, were confined to Tangier and the surrounding area, the only "known" part of the country.

After Eugène Delacroix in 1832, several painters were able to bring back impressions of this mysterious land. These images were often stereotyped, in line with the fashion for Orientalism and the fascination with antiquity that was in vogue in Europe.

Belgian artists also made use of these representations of *al-Maghrib al-Aqsa* (the westernmost region) and gradually revealed a country that was indeed Oriental, but increasingly far removed from preconceived ideas, a place with fascinating populations, traditions and landscapes.