

Richard Hamilton has worked for the BBC World Service as a broadcast journalist since 1998, and has been a correspondent in Morocco, South Africa and Madagascar. He also reports for BBC Television, radio and online. While living in Morocco, he co-authored the *Time Out Guide to Marrakech* and has written throughout his career for magazines and newspapers such as *Conde Nast Traveller* and *The Cape Times*. He has an MA in African Studies from SOAS.

'*The Last Storytellers* succeeds brilliantly in delving down through the endless overlapping layers of Marrakech life, to reveal the extraordinary underbelly, an ancient cultural bedrock built on stories and storytelling. Through a shrewd perception of a society that can seem nothing less than baffling to the occidental mind, Richard Hamilton has triumphed where many before him have failed.'

Tahir Shah, author of The Caliph's House and In Arabian Nights

'This is a wonderfully vivid and striking collection of stories which I heartily recommend.'

Fergal Keane, BBC correspondent and author of Season of Blood

'Richard Hamilton has captured a rich, vibrant yet disappearing world. He has listened, learned and been captivated by the storytellers of Morocco, retelling some of that country's charming and spellbinding traditional stories. The tales are amusing, whimsical and leave you spellbound that you are reading stories which may soon disappear. Richard Hamilton has paid a fine and lasting tribute to Morocco's storytellers by writing down their stories for posterity ... and our enjoyment.'

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'In collecting these tales of wisdom, wonder, adventure and humour from the small and ageing group of Moroccan storytellers, Richard Hamilton has not only offered entertainment to his readers but he has also carried out a valuable form of rescue archaeology within the vanishing world of professional storytelling.'

Robert Irwin, author of The Arabian Nights: A Companion

*The Last
Storytellers*

TALES FROM THE HEART OF MOROCCO

RICHARD HAMILTON

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To my father, Tom Hamilton,
who loved Marrakech

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☪ FOREWORD ☪

Circles in the Jemaa el Fna

Barnaby Rogerson

To this day, no one really knows how the city of Marrakech won its name of ‘Marrakech’, nor why the scruffy piazza at the heart of the city is called the ‘Jemaa el Fna’.

The city first arose in 1059 as the advanced base of an empire of purified Islam forged by blue-veiled knights from the Western Sahara. For many years, it remained a circular embankment topped with thorn bushes, one of the many military marching camps built during the era of Almoravid conquest. At about the time when Duke William of Normandy was conquering Anglo-Saxon England, this camp was selected to be the regional military headquarters, for the Almoravids were having trouble with a schismatic confederation of Berber Muslims deeply entrenched in the coastal provinces. At this point, the first permanent structure was built, the Ksar el Hajar, the watch-tower of stone, which overlooked the tents of the garrison army and their corrals of camels and stables of horses. This was when it first became known as Marrakech, which seems to derive from the local slang for to ‘cross over’ and to ‘hide’. Some storytellers like to say that right from the start Marrakech was renowned for the audacity of its thieves, who would scale the garrison defences to get at the rich herds of cavalry horses within, though a more dignified version is that the name derives from the grand strategy of the Almoravid army, which was to ‘cross over’ the

barrier of the High Atlas Mountains from their Saharan homeland to make a secure base in central Morocco.

The Almoravid Emir, Abu Bakr, preferred to keep his own headquarters in the Saharan region, south of the Atlas Mountains. But he made certain that his pious and promising young cousin, Youssef ibn Tachfine, was placed in command of the Marrakech base camp. Youssef proved himself to be a brilliant general, not only subduing all of central and northern Morocco, but eventually he even took his legions across the Mediterranean to defeat the Christian Castilians at the Battle of Zallaqa. After the death of Abu Bakr in 1087, Youssef ibn Tachfine was his natural successor, ruling over an empire that now stretched from the banks of the Niger to the foothills of the Pyrenees. Marrakech was well placed to act as a centre for such a vast domain, and in the reign of Youssef's son Ali, a great circuit of walls was built to guard the magnificent series of palaces, storehouses and public buildings.

All this, even the great mosque that they built, was flattened by the next dynasty, the Almohads, who were ferociously jealous of the achievements of their predecessors. It was the Almohads who built the great Koutoubia mosque, whose minaret still dominates the skyline of Marrakech. An earlier attempt (whose ruins can still be seen beside the Koutoubia) was abandoned, either because it was deemed unpropitious or wrongly aligned to Mecca. It may be that it was this neglected predecessor which gave birth to the name of the square, Jemaa el Fna, the mosque that came to nothing. Certainly the earliest accounts of Marrakech mention that storytellers used to gather outside the walls of the Koutoubia. Or the name might refer to a mosque that was never completed by a Shereefian dynasty (known disrespectfully as the Saadians) that ruled over Morocco in the 16th century. This abandoned site was cleared on the orders of Sultan Moulay Ismail in the 17th century, and a market square was constructed for the use of the people. Other legends about the origins of the name Jemaa el Fna play with different translations of the Arabic, which allow them to imagine the place as a bewitched old cemetery, the 'Assembly of the Dead', or the site of the future Mosque of Eternity, which is said to await the coming of the Mahdi at the end of time. What seems certain is that for about a thousand years there have been storytellers in this place, attended by circles of amused, shocked and titillated listeners.

By daylight, the Jemaa el Fna is shockingly disappointing, like a night club in the glare of the honest morning light. It is just an irregular

patch of sun-baked and stained tarmac, filled with traditionally dressed water sellers and Gnawa singers directing their attention to busloads of day-tripping tourists burdened with sexless eyes and enormous cameras, their mouths shut as tight as their purses. At such hours you must hurry through, pausing only to buy nuts or a freshly squeezed orange juice from the line of trestle-barrows that define the edge of the square.

In the late afternoon, after an end to the siesta hours has been heralded by mid-afternoon prayers, things get a bit more entertaining as the number of immaculately dressed locals increases and as acrobats, chained monkeys, snake charmers, herbalists, henna tattooists, beggars, bag sellers and fortune tellers take up their pitches. But it is after the sunset call to prayer that the place begins to glow with a mounting pitch of animation. First the tourist population is diluted, equalled, then finally eclipsed by local Moroccans, while a splendid array of mobile kitchens fire up their grills and display their salads under lamps. Multilingual greeters call out to the passers-by in winning ways, identifying an elegantly dressed visitor from Casablanca or Fes, with a bow and a cheekily deferential 'Shereefa' or 'Malika', just as easily as they differentiate the flaxen-haired Dutch from their German and English cousins, and the better-dressed Italians from the Spanish and Portuguese. The smell of charred flesh and the smoke of burning fat now compete with pools of darkness; bright, illuminated patches of light; and a half dozen conflicting strains of music. Fortune tellers are consulted under the private camouflage of an umbrella, whilst musicians and storytellers aspire to collect together a circle of listeners. The audience enjoys the stories for themselves, slipping off into private reveries to associate the face of a wicked Vizier with that of a local policeman, or the beautiful desired princess with the face of their beloved. Yet they also relish the intensified emotion of the shared experience and reaction. In the darkness, there is also a precious sense of potential otherness here, for an evening in the Jemaa el Fna is arguably a truer experience of what it would have been like in a Roman Forum, or the outer court of the Temple at Jerusalem, than can be conjured up by any television presenter.

This sense of a preserved medievalism, along with concerns about the cover that it gave to prostitutes, pimps, pushers, purveyors of drugs and pickpockets, was nearly the death of the place. In the zeal of independence from the corrupt old protectorate regime of France in 1956, both King Mohamed V and the nationalist Istiqlal party were quick to

close the place down. The Jemaa el Fna reeked of Berber particularism, of backward-looking, ill-educated countrymen, rather than the reformist, pan-Arab internationalism and command economy that were the imagined future at that time. Marrakech had not been in the forefront of the independence struggle, unlike the northern cities of Casablanca and Fes, and indeed under the leadership of the Glaoui (a local Berber clan of power politicians) the city was seen to be a pro-French bastion. The new administrators happily ordered the transformation of the Jemaa el Fna into something modern, bleak and useful: a car park fringed with coach stations. Other cities, such as Tangier and Tetouan, suffered similar disfigurements in those utilitarian days, as scruffy but beloved marketplaces, shaded by ancient trees and overlooked by ramshackle cafés, were scrubbed out.

Fortunately, soon after this decision, King Mohamed V was giving a dinner for Eleanor Roosevelt in the nearby Mamounia Hotel. Eleanor was a reformer and a New Deal modernist herself, the widow of President Roosevelt, who had done much privately to support King Mohamed as a young man. The king noticed that his honoured guest had quickly dispatched her dinner so that she could have plenty of time to stroll down to the Jemaa el Fna to catch some of its nightly magic. When Eleanor was informed that the Jemaa el Fna was now no more than a car park, she was greatly distressed. So the king promised her that by the time she next returned to Marrakech, the Jemaa el Fna would be restored to its old animation. Or so the story goes ... for there are many variations, such as one that can be told to an English audience, which features Sir Winston Churchill (who did indeed love the city).

Now a more enlightened generation of city planners are falling over themselves to create some of the magic of the Jemaa el Fna in cities all over the world. You only have to stroll through the piazza of London's Covent Garden, or onto the sloping pavement outside the Pompidou Centre in the heart of Paris, through Palace Square during the White Nights festival of St Petersburg, or up the Royal Mile during the Edinburgh Festival to identify these god-daughters of the Jemaa el Fna. Yet in the square itself, like some awful twist of fate, the craft of storytelling is dying out, as the last masters grow feeble, and their audience moves off to other circles, other entertainments. As I was once told in Marrakech, when an old storyteller dies, a whole library burns. It is fortunate, therefore, that someone with the imagination and patience

of Richard Hamilton is at hand to catch some of this tradition as it falls into the abyss of the forgotten. Let us pray that this book is no more than a bridge to a continuing tradition, and that it will help inspire a new generation of apprentices to learn the craft of storytelling and continue the enchantment.

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This book was compiled over three years from 2006 when I first visited Morocco, until my most recent trip towards the end of 2009. Early on I was very fortunate to meet Ahmed Tija, who works as an official tour guide in Marrakech and speaks Berber, Arabic, its Moroccan dialect *Darija*, English and several other European languages. Many years ago, Ahmed carried out extensive research and drew the illustrations for Gavin Maxwell's *Lords of the Atlas*, which remains one of the great historical books about Morocco.

I recorded the tales from the five storytellers we met, who spoke in *Darija*. Every few minutes we would stop them momentarily while Ahmed provided an on-the-spot translation, which I also recorded. I then polished the stories up when I was back in London, improving the English where necessary as well as the general narrative flow. On occasion, I would take the liberty of adding a touch more colour or flesh on the bones, but while I allowed myself this element of poetic license, I always tried to stay true to the original plots. This is not meant to be a comprehensive and exhaustive collection of Moroccan stories, as I am sure that there are hundreds more out there with almost infinite variations and permutations.

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Introduction



On a clear, crisp day in September 1940, four French teenagers, Marcel, Jacques, Georges and Simon, together with Marcel's dog Robot, were exploring the hills and woodland near the village of Montignac in the Dordogne. They came upon a tree that had been felled by the wind, and when they climbed onto it they saw a large hole gaping beneath its roots. Being curious, they crept inside to see how deep it went and discovered a series of caves. They did not know it, but they had stumbled upon what was to be one of the greatest archaeological finds of all time. The Lascaux Caves contain stunningly evocative paintings of animals, including extinct creatures like the auroch, and appear to depict hunting scenes. The paintings are thought to be 17,000 years old; although some scholars think they could date back to around 25000 BC. The cave paintings are probably our earliest recorded evidence of storytelling.

Throughout history, mankind had a hunger for stories. 'A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species *Homo Sapiens*,' wrote the American novelist Reynolds Price, 'it is second in necessity after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home,' he said, 'almost none in silence.'

We all love stories. As babies we are sung lullabies, as children we are told fairy tales, and as adults we devour movies, dramas, books and

TV programmes. When people die, as my father did recently, all that we have left are our memories, the stories that we have constructed of them. As a fairly reserved person, I have longed to be a great storyteller myself and have always envied those raconteurs who can hold a dinner party audience in the palm of their hands. In the end, almost everything is a story. The simplest phrase or sentence, 'the cat sat on the mat', is a story. Stories are at the core of our being. Our lives are narratives, the news consists of plots and intrigues, we follow sports like soap operas, and the history of religion and of this planet is a story. In times of turmoil and crisis, as the world has just gone through, we look to the past for reassurance and a story to cling to.

Of course, there are no records that tell us when storytelling first began, but we can assume that it is almost as old as language itself. Some historians think language appeared around 40,000 or 50,000 years ago, while others believe it was more than a million. Since the first written documents appear much later, around 3500 BC, in fragments from Mesopotamia, purely oral communication, or 'primary orality' as the cultural historian Walter Ong calls it, is at least ten times older than that of writing. And far from being 'old hat', the oral tradition is much more pervasive than we might at first think. A study in the 1970s found that out of 3,000 languages spoken in the world, only 78 had written alphabets.

In the amazing story of human evolution, Homo Sapiens connected vocal noises such as grunts, yelps and shrieks until they became crude sentences, thus creating language and enabling people to convey ideas to each other. Some imaginative people in the tribe perhaps began using these words to describe events that happened to them; a hunt, for example. They became the bards, griots, raconteurs, chroniclers, minstrels and fabulists: the storytellers, who would enter people's minds, creating images, emotions, worlds and experiences, both real and imagined, tapping into our innate impulse to dream. Anthropologists suggest that storytelling is one of several factors which define our humanity. Only humans tell stories.

Stories were used to convey the cumulative wisdom of early societies. They recorded the deeds of ancestors for future generations, but were also used to settle disputes, to satisfy a need for entertainment and escapism, and above all, to communicate experiences to others. Tales were also a way of explaining the inexplicable: to make sense of frightening

or confusing events such as storms, earthquakes, floods and tidal waves. The 'God of the gaps' theory suggests religion is a means to fill in the blanks of human understanding.

Although storytelling is one of mankind's greatest achievements, ironically it may have begun as an excuse for failure, according to the Canadian writer James Foster Robinson:

Did a primitive hunter tell his family how he fought off a terrible animal that stole his kill, adding a little imaginative detail to convince his hungry family that he did all he could, but was foiled by cruel fate?

As families settled and took up agriculture, farms grew into hamlets, villages into towns, and towns into cities. With the rise of cities came the first paid storytellers, whom the Iraqi novelist Mahmoud Saeed believes emerged in Mesopotamia hundreds of thousands of years ago, thus making it one of mankind's oldest professions.

The earliest surviving story is the epic Gilgamesh, from Mesopotamia, which dates back to around 2000 BC. It is a collection of Sumerian legends about the mythological hero-king Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu.

The earliest forms of storytelling were oral, but combined with gestures and expressions. Australian aborigines painted symbols from stories on cave walls to help the storyteller remember the tale. The story was then told using a mixture of oral narrative, music, rock art and dance. More transient media, such as sand, leaves and carvings on tree barks, were also used to record stories. Some of the most important rock art in North Africa was discovered in the 19th century in the Figuig Mountains, on Morocco's desolate north-eastern border with Algeria. Dating back to around 9500 BC, the stick-like engravings on the cave walls reveal images of men and beasts such as big cats, antelopes and rhinos. Sadly, modern researchers have been prevented from finding out more about these caves because of the long-standing animosity between Morocco and Algeria, and the more immediate obstacles of land mines along the frontier.

The same pattern is seen in China and India, with ancient stories written down long after they were first composed. Common themes, such as catastrophic floods or creation myths, emerged across the different

civilizations. In the Americas, the culture of the Native Americans carried on through stories told over campfires at powwows. The American mythologist Joseph Campbell stated that the appearance of similar tales across the world is evidence that the stories had spread widely, long before they were written down.

The oldest known written record of the art of storytelling itself can be found in the ancient Egyptian text known as the Westcar Papyrus, thought to date back to around 2500 BC. The papyrus refers to a cycle of five stories told by the sons of the Pharaoh Cheops (who built the great pyramid in Giza), telling tales of marvels performed by *marabouts* and magicians.

As far as the storytelling tradition in the Islamic world is concerned, legend has it that one of the prophet Mohamed's contemporaries was a man called Khurafa, who was abducted by djinns. When he came back from this strange ordeal, he proceeded to go around telling stories about it to disbelieving listeners. The historian Robert Irwin says Khurafa allegedly gave his name to the Arabic word for fable, although Irwin thinks it is more likely to have been the other way round, the storyteller being invented to provide an etymology for the word.

Irwin believes storytelling in the Middle East had both religious and secular origins. Besides the preachers in the mosques, he says, there were also popular storytellers, or *qussas*, who told religious stories, which included apocryphal pre-Islamic legends. They were frowned upon by the orthodox scholars and eventually moved out of the mosques and into the marketplaces. From that time on, they were looked down on as little more than beggars, a stigma which has been attached to storytellers ever since. The art of storytelling in the Islamic world can trace its secular roots back to comic theatre from the Roman and Greek period, according to the classicist B.E. Perry. Irwin says the word *hikaya* means story in Arabic, but originally meant mimicry, as the early *hikayati* (storytellers) were mimics who could not only imitate different people's accents, but also the sounds of animals and even natural disasters. Eventually the mimic element faded away.

Mesopotamia continued to be the centre of storytelling, with the profession enjoying great popularity in the 8th century, during the Abbasid period. At this time, religious leaders and politicians tried to ban the storytellers. But the Caliph Harun al-Rashid was unconvinced by their arguments and allowed the practice to flourish.

Shortly after this, the great story collection *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, or *One Thousand and One Nights*, appeared, probably in the 9th century. The stories from ancient Baghdad were translated into the world's major languages, fuelling a fanciful love affair with all that was thought to be exotic about the Orient.

Perhaps what has always fascinated people is that *Alf Layla wa-Layla* is a collection of stories within a story, that of Scheherazade, who told 1001 tales to save herself and others from her bloodthirsty husband, King Shahriyar:

When they were alone, Scheherazade addressed Dinarzade thus: 'My dear sister; I want your help in a very important affair. My father is going to take me to the palace, to celebrate my marriage with the Sultan. When his Highness receives me, I shall beg him, as a last favour, to let you sleep in our chamber, so that I may have your company during the last night I am alive. If, as I hope, he grants me my wish, be sure that you wake me an hour before the dawn, and speak to me in these words: "My sister, if you are not asleep, I beg you, before the sun rises, to tell me one of your charming stories." Then I shall begin, and I hope by this means to deliver the people from the terror that reigns over them.'

Abdessalam el Hakouni, professor of literature at the University of Mohamed V in Rabat, says the tale of Scheherazade is a parable about the power of storytelling:

The moral is that one should not yield to tyranny. You should use your imagination, be calm and think of love rather than hate, hope rather than despair. If Scheherazade could save her neck for one thousand and one nights, that would be long enough for the king to forget his vengeance. But the key was not a physical weapon. Scheherazade had nothing; only good stories to tell and the ability to tell them well. The lesson is that, if you want to survive, you better have a good story to tell.

Stories continued to play a role in medieval Europe, too. 1066 is the most well-known date in British history, and the Battle of Hastings is its most famous conflict. Historians believe that a minstrel, Ivo Taillefer, recited the epic poem the *Song of Roland* to the advancing

Normans troops, while Harold's Anglo-Saxon warriors knew the Old English heroic poem *Beowulf*.

Storytelling in Morocco probably dates back well before the Arab invasion of North Africa in the 7th century and was already deeply ingrained in the pre-existing Berber culture, the language of which was primarily oral.

The Berbers, or *Imazighen* (men of the land), settled in the area thousands of years ago and at one time controlled most of the land between Morocco and Egypt. For Berbers, telling stories and singing songs were important parts of their daily life and religious rituals. Before the arrival of the Arabs and the establishment of the great imperial cities of Fes, Rabat, Meknes and Marrakech, storytellers would travel from village to village and from marketplace to marketplace telling people about different ways of life in other regions, providing a window onto the world, like an early form of news media. Indeed, the Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo, who lives in Marrakech, says that all great literature appears to have sprung out of marketplaces.

A more sophisticated and professional type of storyteller probably emerged with the construction of settlements that followed the Arab conquest of the Maghreb and Andalusia, which brought with it the rich pantheon of stories from the Middle East.

Of the imperial cities, Fes is the oldest, founded in 789 AD by Idris I. It is likely that here, in this majestic metropolis, Morocco's first paid storytellers, or *hlaykia*, started plying their trade. They would work near the gates of the medieval city, and often their stories were accompanied by music. But in these early years, their existence was precarious, and they would supplement their income by selling magic trinkets, talismans and potions.

It is thought that the storytelling tradition in Marrakech dates back to the first centuries after the founding of the city by the Almoravids, in 1070. The first written mention of storytelling comes from the 17th century, from the theologian El Hassan Al Youssi:

I arrived in Marrakech in the year 1060 (of the Muslim calendar or 1650 BC).

There I found myself one day in a grand esplanade where I heard the chants of praise to the Prophet. Then I took my place in an imposing circle, which consisted of curious onlookers who listened to an old man. He told them comic stories.

Al Youssi described the melange of Moroccan life at that time: a Fassi (a citizen of Fes), a Marrakchi, an Arab, a Berber and a man from the Draa valley were each invited to describe the dishes of their region in their own idiom and dialect. Then, as now, Marrakech was a meeting place for the diverse citizens of Morocco, with their different ethnicities and languages, urban and rural, from mountains and oases, who would find themselves flung together in the settlement. It is undoubtedly this cultural mix that gives Marrakech its colour and creative dynamism, and its stories their vibrancy.

When I first arrived in Marrakech as the BBC's correspondent in Morocco, in 2006, it felt more like 1006; it seemed to be somewhere that had not changed for a thousand years. Even today a strange cast of characters who would not look out of place in Scheherazade's *One Thousand and One Nights* peoples the city. There are rich and poor, merchants and mad men, beggars and thieves, travellers and tarts, hustlers and holy men, dark-eyed beauties and disfigured cripples, and they all swirl around the giant plug hole that is the main square of Marrakech.

The Jemaa el Fna has been Marrakech's marketplace, sacred space, cultural crucible, melting pot and meeting point for centuries. Looking down from one of the multi-tiered cafés, it looks like an intricate Moorish mosaic. Before the city was built, Marrakech started simply as an oasis in the desert, a watering hole for camels, until it became a crossroads at which travelling caravans could find food and shelter, and swap stories with fellow travellers. Some would be heading east on the pilgrimage to Mecca, others would be taking salt from Timbuktu to Europe and still others heading deep into sub-Saharan Africa. Despite a few recent misguided incarnations, such as a car park and bus stop, the square has largely survived as a place of high and lowbrow entertainment ever since. *Jemaa el Fna* is thought to mean 'Assembly of the Dead' (although there are several other explanations as well), but it is one of the most truly alive places on earth. It is a throbbing mass of humanity that is constantly in flux, yet remains the same, a living testament to the Moroccan proverb that 'everything is possible, but nothing is certain.'

All human life is here. By day, you can be heckled by orange juice sellers, pestered by men with Barbary apes on their backs or women trying to squeeze tubes of henna onto your palms. If you escape their

clutches and manage to slither past the snake charmers, the herbalists clad in blue Tuareg robes selling medicinal plants and aphrodisiacal powders, fortune tellers, fire eaters and scribes, you will probably be approached for a photo opportunity by a water carrier in his wide-brimmed hat. The continual sound track to this incessant invasion of the senses is provided by Gnawa musicians, dressed in blue, wearing skull caps decorated with tassels and cowrie shells. If nothing else, you have to admire their stamina, as they constantly play reed pipes, bang drums and shake their *krakeb*, a type of castanet. The thumping beat can be heard for miles.

By night, the square transforms itself into the world's biggest al fresco restaurant as hundreds of stall holders set up their fare of kebabs, seafood and salad, enticing tourists with cheeky phrases like, 'lovely jubbly'. As night descends, the moon rises above the majestic Koutoubia mosque, smoke ascends from the stalls, the drums continue their slightly Satanic beat, the crowds thicken, and you feel you are being swept up in some sort of Dionysian ritual.

Jemaa el Fna is an open space for street performers. There are musicians, acrobats and actors who play out farces and mini-dramas, but it is not sophisticated theatre. There is a man who attaches two rubber flip-flops to his ears, pretending to be a rabbit, while another shouts abuse at him and whacks him with a plastic stick. There are troubadours like Abdelhakim Khabzaoui, who has been performing his peculiar song and dance routine for more than 50 years. His nickname is '*Il est jolie*' ('He is pretty'). Beneath a pair of dark sunglasses, his nose scrunches, his lips pout and his mouth gurns. As crowds of young Moroccans watch, sometimes bent double in convulsions of laughter, he sings, shakes a tambourine and makes vaguely homophobic jokes, all the time wiggling his hips to the accompaniment of a trio of elderly musicians.

Competing with all this mayhem are the *hlaykia*, who have been reciting their tales here for perhaps 1,000 years – an unbroken oral tradition that is as ancient as the Atlas Mountains that tower above Marrakech.

When I first heard about these old men who told stories amid the cacophony of the square, I was fascinated and intrigued, immediately wanting to find out more about these strange beings who seemed to have come from another time and space. Here, in the 21st century, were men who were passing on ancient knowledge, wisdom and entertainment in the most profound and yet simplest of ways. Like a ritual from