

PETRAMAR

Moroccan Maritime Oil Company

Abstract: In Morocco, PETRAMAR (1973-1985) was a well-known shipping oil company. A review of its existence and its early demise provides deep lessons for engineers, sailors and stakeholders. Furthermore, it provides a lot of insight regarding maritime strategy. To highlight this feature, each key question and topic has been put into context, including origin, financial arrangement, fleet, maturity and sudden demise. PETRAMAR's review however, is limited to a specific point in time. Therefore, in order to have a broader scope, I analyzed the fate of each tanker from the origin of this topic, i.e. 1926. This framing reveals the high-level skills achieved by Moroccan seafarers. The recovery of our oil tanker fleet is therefore a real hope, based on a centuries-old tradition, and further amplified by its importance for national energy security.

by Najib Cherfaoui, port and maritime expert

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A. Introduction

In the aftermath of Second World War [1939-1945], the Moroccan State learned a key lesson: in terms of energy security, fuel must be part of national production.

Thus, it was decided to provide the country with two petroleum refining plants.

For historical reasons, the first one was quickly established in Sidi Kacem (1949), with an annual production of 20,000 tonnes, subsequently increased to 250,000 tonnes.

Implementation of the second project reveals to be much more laborious. It consists in processing, as a first step, one million tonnes of crude oil per year and three million tonnes thereafter. The plant needs an area of 200 ha. Daily fresh water requirements amount to 2,000 m³. Refrigeration consumes 100,000 m³ of salt water per day. Given these considerations, Fedala site brings together the best conditions (1949). However, the case remains pending.

Ten years later (1959), having heard of this idea, the Italians (ENI) jump at the opportunity and renew the concept of an oil refinery in Fedala (Mohammedia). They assess the basic data, conclude that the project is viable and approve the financing plan; representing an investment of 75 million dirhams (1960 prices).

Consequently, from 1959 to 1985, the Italian group Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) controls the entire hydrocarbon sector through « Société Anonyme Marocaine Italienne de Raffinage » (S.A.M.I.R; 1959). ENI holds 50% of the shares; the other half going to « Bureau des études et participations industrielles » (BEPI; 1958), that is to say to the Moroccan State. In addition, the creation of S.A.M.I.R is backed by a joint venture, for a period of 25 years, with the company Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli (AGIP), an ENI group subsidiary.

Initially driving, the role of ENI group became sprawling.

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Indeed, in the wake of Marocanization (1973), the country launches several great projects, including that of a huge energy complex (Jorf Lasfar). Above all else, ENI group managers immediately see that times have changed. They understand that there are only ten years left to maintain, intensify and involve the group's interests. For this, they identify, finance and carry out the three possible expansion in oil sector: to double refining production, to build a new oil harbour in Mohammedia (Fédala), to launch a fleet of large tankers.

This last point sets up the birth certificate of PETRAMAR (Compagnie Pétrolière Maritime du Maroc).

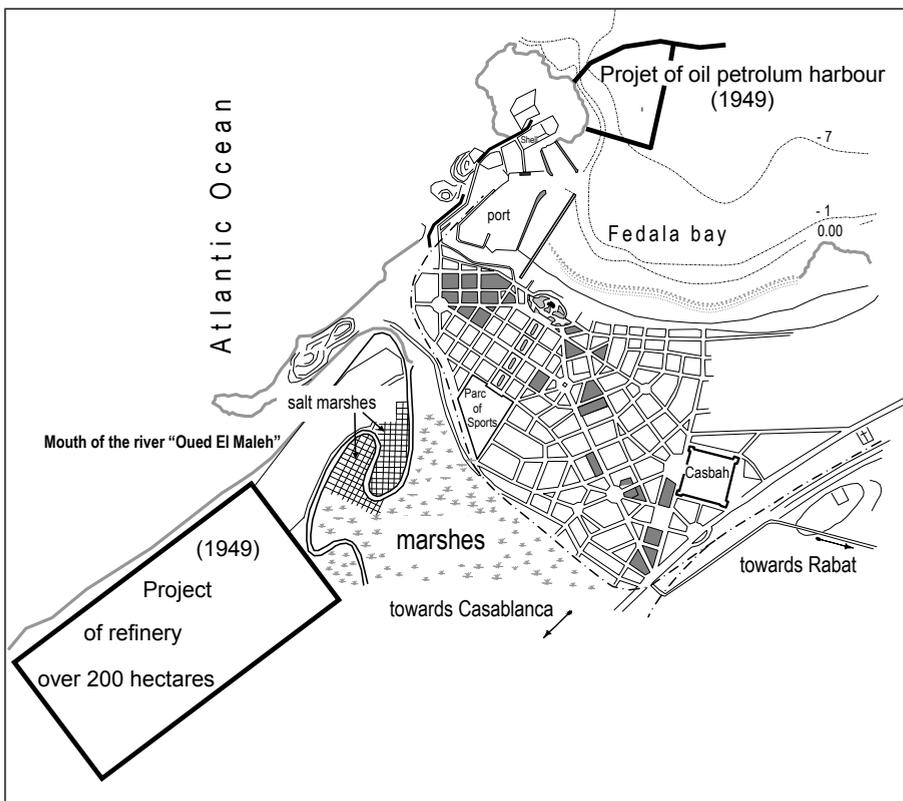


figure 1 : In the wake of the Second World War [1939-1945], the Moroccan State learned a key lesson: in terms of energy security, fuel must be part of national production. Thus, it was decided to provide the country with two oil refineries. For historical reasons, the first one was quickly established in Sidi Kacem (1949), with an annual production of 20,000 tonnes, subsequently increased to 250,000 tonnes. Implementation of the second project reveals to be much more laborious. It consists in processing, as a first step, one million tonnes of crude oil per year and three million tonnes thereafter. The plant needs an area of 200 ha. Daily fresh water requirements amount to 2,000 m³. Refrigeration consumes 100,000 m³ of salt water per day. Given these considerations, Fedala site brings together the best conditions.

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Vessels PETRAMAR [life cycle]				
	International Maritime Organization identifier	Before registration in Morocco	Under the flag of Morocco	After deletion from the Morocco register
AL IDRISSEI [1976-1986]	7365332	0	11	11
SAMIR [1977-1983]	7365344	0	7	0

figure 2 : During its existence, PETRAMAR operates two sister ships, totaling 103,092 GRT.

B. PETRAMAR (1973-1985)

PETRAMAR is created in 1973.

In the shareholding of PETRAMAR, there are equal shares (1/3) COMANAV, S.A.M.I.R and AGIP. It should be noted that the ENI group steps in, first via S.A.M.I.R, then via AGIP.

The fleet is built up by purchasing two brand-new sister ships delivered by Ancona shipyards (Italy).

Oil tanker AL IDRISSEI is bought in 1976, followed by SAMIR one year later, for an overall cost of 243 million dirhams (1981 value).

These ships will have completely different careers : In 1983, after stranding near Mohammedia, SAMIR is broken up in Spain. AL IDRISSEI is simply sold in 1986. There has never been neither fleet renewal plan nor expansion fleet plan.

During 1986, amidst the general indifference, PETRAMAR disappears from the maritime landscape.

As expected, that year, the ENI group gradually began to withdraw from the oil landscape. The result obtained is very successful: Refining capacity is doubled (1980); New port of Mohammedia is completed (1985); PETRAMAR's loans are fully repaid (1985).

At State level, the accelerated demise of PETRAMAR highlights three main questions: absence of a strategic watch; blind spot in decision making, lack of appropriate control.

I propose to put all these failures in a global vision. To this effect, in the next paragraph, I review the life cycle of each Moroccan oil tanker from the origin (1926) to 2020.

This analysis afford me to bring out the salient gaps, key dates and milestones.

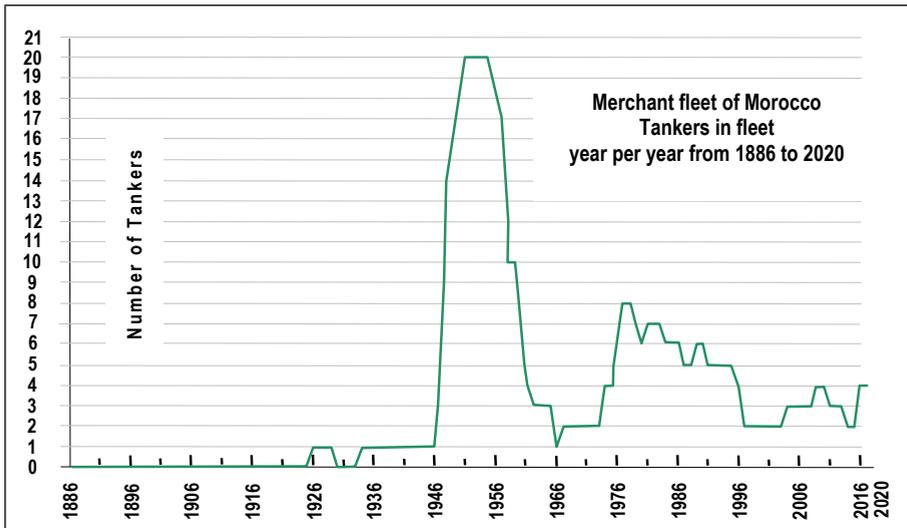


figure 3 : From the origins until 2020, the evolution of oil fleet under Moroccan flag shows a permanent robustness. After each contraction, the system comes back to life with remarkable times of prosperity, for instance in 1955 and 1977.

C. And what now

From the origins to today, the evolution of oil fleet under Moroccan flag shows a permanent robustness. After each contraction, the system comes back to life with remarkable times of prosperity, for instance in 1955 and 1977.

More specifically, from 1886 to 2020, Morocco has flagged exactly 45 oil tankers, which corresponds to an overall gross tonnage of 180,597 tons. The first oil tanker, FEDHALA, entered the fleet in 1926. The peak of tankers in service (20) is reached from 1951 to 1955. In 1951, these twenty ships totaled 29,977 GRT. The absolute maximum annual capacity (112,961 GRT) is reached in 1977/1978 by the eight tankers SLOUGHY [1948–1978], RIF [1967–1979], SELMA [1974–1990], TODRA [1974–1995], AL IDRISSI [1976–1986], MASSIRA [1976–1995], DADÈS [1977–2001], SAMIR [1977–1983].

In 2020, Morocco has four tankers, BALEA, ANFA, TINGIS and IMRIKLY; representing a cumulative net tonnage of 6,020 tons.

This framing reveals the high-level skills achieved by Moroccan seafarers. The recovery of our oil tanker fleet is therefore a real hope, based on a centuries-old tradition, and further amplified by its importance for national energy security.

THE TWO VESSELS OF PETRAMAR

A. AL IDRISSEI [1976–1986]

Tanker built in Italy (Ancona) in 1976, sister-ship of SAMIR. Equipped with a single propeller, power 13,800 hp; speed 16 kn; draught 13.42 m; length 257; beam 37.9 m; 92,108 dwt, 51,546 GRT; 28,137 tjn. Since the launch in 1976, AL IDRISSEI is owned by « Compagnie Pétrolière Maritime du Maroc » (Petramar), specifically used to transport crude oil from the Gulf countries, via the Suez Canal ; thus, Kuwait (Menah Al Ahmadi), Abu Dhabi (Das Island), Saudi Arabia (Ras Tanura and Jeddah), Egypt (Port Said), Syria (Baniyas). In Europe, the loadings are made in Turkey (Ceyhan), Holland (Rotterdam), France (Marseille) and Italy (Augusta and Genoa). In South Africa, the link concerns Durban and Cape Town. Afterwards, AL IDRISSEI changed flags several times: Greece THISEAS (1986) and MELINA TWO (1989), Malta WORLD PEACE (1993), Honduras VICTORY (1993) and THUNDER (1994), Cyprus GLORY (1994), Malta CROSS II (1994), Cyprus STAVROS I (1995), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines VENTURER (1997). The final name VENTURER is adopted for a delivery voyage to Chittagong (Bangladesh) where demolition commenced on August 9, 1997. Let us say a word about the name of the ship: *Al Idrissi (1099-1166) is a Moroccan scientist, creator of modern geography. A visionary, he maintains that the Earth is round. He is well known for having drawn a famous world map.*

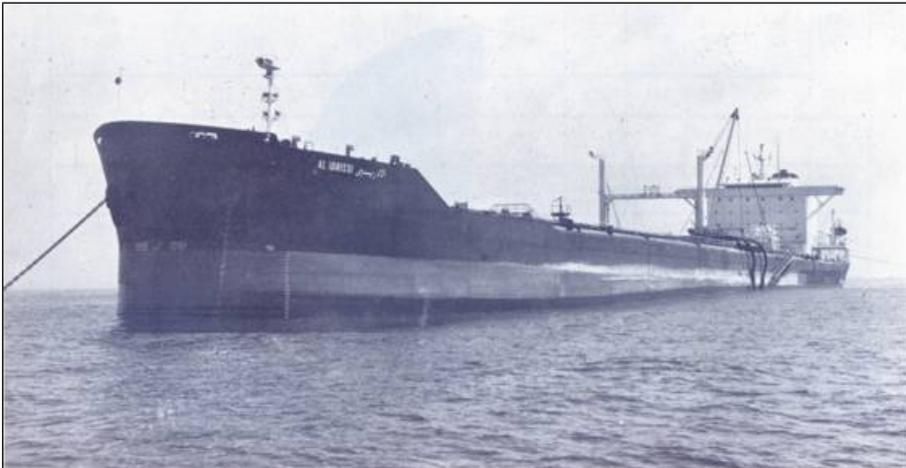


figure -4 : Tanker AL IDRISSEI (1976–1986); 51,546 tx gross tonnage, length 257 m; built in Italy (Ancona) in 1976; docked at the sea-line (Mohammedia) after the maiden trip in 1976; *photo: Cherfaoui Najib.*

B. SAMIR [1977–1983]

Oil tanker built in Italy (Ancona) in 1977, sister ship of AL IDRISSEI; equipped with a single propeller; powered by a Fiat engine of 13,800 hp; speed 16 kn; draught 13.42 m; length 257 m, beam 37.9 m; 92,108 dwt; 51,546 GRT and net tonnage 28,137 tx. At the launch, SAMIR (Morocco), owned by « Compagnie Pétrolière Maritime du Maroc » (Petramar), is used to transport crude oil from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf; thus, Kuwait (Menah Al Ahmadi), Dubai, Saudi Arabia (Ras Tanura, Ras Al Khafji and Jeddah), Egypt (Ras Shukeir), Syria (Baniyas). Thereafter, the geographic distribution becomes broader. The Far East link concerns Malaysia (Port Dickson). For America, there is Port Corpus Christi (Texas). Episodic Loadings are also done in France (Marseille), Italy (Augusta), South Africa (Cape Town). In 1980, SAMIR is served by 38 sailors, under Captain Jacob orders.



figure -5 : Tanker SAMIR (1977–1983); 51,546 tx gross tonnage, length 257 m; built in Italy (Ancona) in 1977; *photo: Malcolm Cranfield.*

On November 4, 1982, docked at the sea-line of Mohammedia harbour (Morocco), SAMIR has already unloaded 60,000 tonnes of crude oil. Due to bad weather, the vessel is returned to anchorage awaiting a lull. Moussa Ben Aissa is the boatswain (bosco). He is a seasoned sailor. It's night. From his cabin, he notices that the ship is striking the ground. He warns the captain. The situation is serious. There is emergency for returning to open sea. The captain ignores Ben Aissa's alert.

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The gusts of wind are strong. The anchor slides on the bottom. The ship drifts and runs aground on the rocks [33° 43' 42" North, 7° 20' 48" West]. The alarm is activated. The crew is rescued by helicopter.

The refloating is entrusted to Smit Tak (Netherlands), who teamed up with a Portuguese tug.

There is a breach in the hull, accurately in the machinery compartment. By luck, the tanks are not affected ; but there are still 20,000 tons of oil on board. The machines are submerged under 6 m of water. Obstructing the breach is not an option. However, it is possible to prevent water from entering. To do this, the compartment concerned must be sealed. Then pressurized air is injected.

On November 26, 1982, the vessel is put back afloat ; the towing towards Cadiz is immediately accomplished.

Not far from the port of Cadiz, during the approach maneuvers, an unmarked wreck tears the hull from the bow to the stern. The damage is getting worse. The repair requires \$ 6 million. At the end of the works, the ship is still not navigable. There is a high risk. In strange ways, the sale is concluded for \$ 1 million. The scrap dealers in Valencia begin demolition on May 4, 1983.

Let's back to the tearing of the hull. This sea event occurred during towage. It is well-known that responsibility for an assistance operation always rests with the tug. Thus, the towing company should have been involved by Comanav. What has not been done. It can therefore be said that Comanav's legal department made a big mistake. To avoid any innuendo, I say no more.

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Morocco Oil Ships: From the beginning to 2020

N° order	Name/years into fleet [entry, exit]	Owner	GRT
1	FEDHALA [1926–1929]	Compagnie Marocaine de Transports Maritimes	522
2	MELUSINE [1934–1953]	Compagnie Marocaine de Transports Maritimes	466
3	ASTRÉE [1947–1959]	Compagnie des Transports Maritimes de Pétrole	496
4	EL AFRIT [1947–1959]	Compagnie Marocaine de Transports Maritimes	632
5	MARHABA [1947–1957]	Société d'Armement de Navires Citernes	633
6	TAMELELT [1947–1957]	Fret Maroc	630
7	CIRCÉ [1948–1965]	Le Quellec & Co	484
8	MAROCAIN [1948–1951]	Compagnie d'Armement de Navires Citernes	632
9	PHRYNÉ [1948–1965]	Le Quellec & Co	484
10	PINARD [1948–1951]	Société Nord Africaine d'Armement	403
11	SEID [1948–1956]	Cargos Fruitières Chérifiens	401
12	SLOUGHY [1948–1978]	La Navale Chérifienne	649
13	TAROUDANT [1948–1953]	Compagnie Chérifienne d'Armement et de Transport	630
14	TENSIFT [1948–1952]	Société Nord Africaine d'Armement	1 059
15	TIZNIT [1948–1954]	Compagnie Chérifienne d'Armement et de Transport	403
16	ROCHES NOIRES N°1 [1949–1959]	Compagnie Marocaine de Transports Maritimes	206
17	STILBÉ [1949–1960]	Le Quellec & Co	484
18	DADÈS [1950–1961]	Compagnie Marocaine de Transports Maritimes	323
19	MARNA [1950–1959]	Compañía Marroquí de Navegación	720
20	CARMEN [1951–1955]	Fret Maroc	484
21	TINA [1951–1957]	Compagnie Générale d'Armement Maritime	632
22	AGUEDAL [1952–1957]	Compagnie d'Armement du Maghreb	680
23	MENARA [1952–1955]	Compagnie d'Armement Pétrolier du Maghreb	10 627
24	TERESA [1953–1957]	Fret Maroc	632
25	FRIMAU [1954–1957]	Fret Maroc	2 186
26	MARIA AUGUSTA [1954–1960]	Naviera Marroqui SL	540
27	SOUSSANE [1955–1957]	Fret Maroc	8 054
28	RIF [1967–1979]	Shell du Maroc/Mobil-Oil Maroc	731
29	SELMA [1974–1990]	Société de Navigation Maghrébine	1 596
30	TODRA [1974–1995]	Société Shell du Maroc	1 599
31	AL IDRISSE [1976–1986]	PETRAMAR	51 546
32	MASSIRA [1976–1995]	Générale Maritime	1 599
33	DADÈS [1977–2001]	Société de Cabotage Pétrolier	3 695
34	SAMIR [1977–1983]	PETRAMAR	51 546
35	MASSA [1978–2006]	Société de Cabotage Pétrolier	4 485
36	ASNI [1981–1991]	Société Marocaine des Pétroles Mory	299
37	TARIK [1989–1996]	Tarik Navigation	1 318
38	AL WAHDA [1992–2010]	Société de Cabotage Pétrolier	4 176
39	ADRAR [2002–2009]	La Marocaine de Cabotage	1 599
40	ANFA [2004–2017]	Société de Cabotage Pétrolier	5 281
41	ITRI [2009–2012]	La Marocaine de Cabotage	4 094
42	TINGIS [2010–2017]	Société de Cabotage Pétrolier	4 471
43	ADRAR/SILVER [2013–2013]	La Marocaine de Cabotage	4 401
44	BALEA [2016–]	Sertego	493
45	IMRIKLY [2016–]	Atlas Sahara	3 576

figure 6 : From 1886 to 2020, exactly 45 tankers have been registered under the Moroccan flag. Operating system is flexible; if necessary, the walls of the tanks are optionally covered with paraffin.

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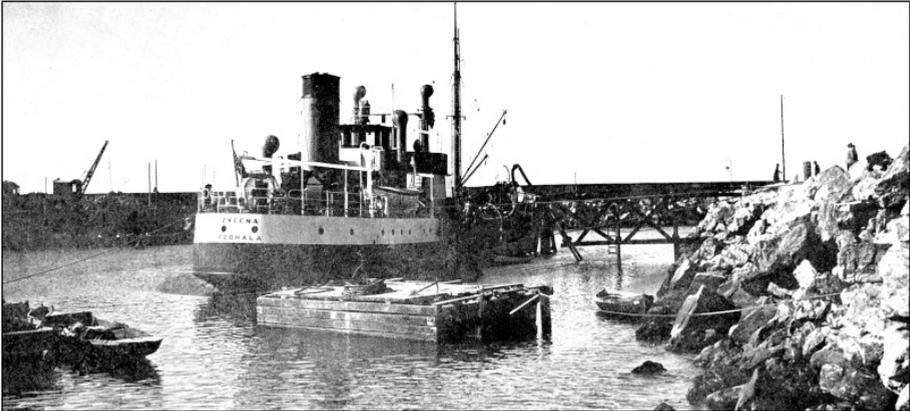


figure 7 : First tanker under Moroccan flag; purchased brand-new, the ship FEDHALA owned by the « Compagnie Marocaine des Transports Maritimes », during unloading operation (1926) at the port of Fédala (Mohammedia); built at the Chantiers Navals Français (Blainville); length 49 m, gross tonnage 522 tx; 600 hp engine; (photo: Helderline Shell Tanker).

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