

Henri turns our heads by his amazing scholarship on the district of Sfax. I confess, with my great shame, that for me it is a revelation of an unknown Sfax and all the more touching for that!

UN TRAIT D'UNION (“A *Hyphen*”)

Today I examine the old quarter of Sfax in which I was born; also, I desire to bring it to mind it; more especially as it has practically disappeared without trace; indeed, you would seek in vain even one vestige of its past existence, a History literally swept away.

Of the few hundred houses which constituted it, not only are there none remaining; destiny is cruel: nothing remains of its score of streets and lanes, its layout, its buildings, nothing!

Of course, leaving aside the diasporiens who were born there and lived there, nobody is particularly interested in it: neither the inhabitants of the modern city, nor those of the medina because, for them, it was only a simple crossing point.

In the excellent collection of old postcards of Mme. Nicole Massed-Muzi, all the districts of Sfax are abundantly photographed and their buildings put first; as for the marine district, excluding the church, the street of the Republic, Place Carnot and graced by the proximity of the ramparts, the Rue Léonnec and Rue Jules Ferry, neither is there any memory of its mosque, synagogue, nor its beautiful consular and other grand houses, with the worked frontages of travertine, decorated stones of Dar-Chaabane, sometimes with the wooden rooms on the balconies. It is true that the photographer was to miss the retreat, what a shame! However, considering that even the dromedaries and the asses are reproduced on these old charts, why not the three fountains, its water carriers and the users? And the *ftaïri* perched on its *doukkena*, and smokers of *chicha* in traditional costume, sitting in the Turkish style in front of their *narghileh*?

Admittedly, it was somewhat unhealthy especially, and thus I knew it as a child, before the installation of running water and electricity; the earthenware jars which the water carriers filled allowed only a hasty cleaning because the invaluable liquid was to be initially used in the kitchen then the detergent and a little household... as for the toilet.... During the night oil lamps and carbide lamps reigned. During summer, the antiques residences were often invaded by bugs, epidemics of them. These blasted small beasts feared only tobacco juice; that stinks but one

scratched less! And cockroaches? maousses and mosquitos like the devil, they adored the outdated kitchens like their cousins the small cockroaches; all this small world was hidden during the day in all the dark corners, the slits, the cracks, the holes, and was crawling around during the night in all impunity.

During the winter, it was cold and especially wet because the narrowness of the lanes hindered the sun from heating the interiors; colds, influenzas, and bronchitis were not rare there, but Florio, Boccara, and Espié could offer only aspirin, spirits of turpentine, thermogene, glasses with suction cups, cotton and some mouth rinses. Fortunately, the doctors Ceccaldî, Sandor and Galéa were there to comfort, relieve, and often to cure except, alas, when tuberculosis occurred.

During the winter, therefore, it was cold and for heating in the district, there was only the brazier and its incandescent embers - Ah! That it worked well all around; Yes but, sometimes, in the middle of the night, these cooled embers, emanating carbon monoxide, were transformed into silent assassins. The *Dépêche Sfaxienne* often brought back such misfortunes.

This district, my diasporien friends, it was sufficient during our past evenings, Rue Emile Loubet, as far as the Boulevard de France, to pass it and, at once, we were there: on the left, the Maison Du Maltais and the grocer Calafatis; on the right, the tobacconist's shop of Mrs. Gully and the awning over the dispensary of the *Dépêche Sfaxienne*. Paving stones replaced the bitumen of the avenue - and, from the broad windows of large stores, to the most modest of small shops, about sixty in all, which squeezed one against the other on the short hundred and fifty meters which separated Bab-Diwan from the boulevard of France.

However, one found everything there, apart from the useless, of course: two pharmacies, Espié and Boccara, two bookshops, Muzi and Gauci, two European cafés, "Le Bar des Amis" of Ramirez" and the "Café de l'Union", Azzopardi's pork-butchery, Mr. Lévy's "Pâtisserie Royal," the ironmonger of Akedi and Kainoun, Debono's hardware store, three bazaars of Tedesco, Berrebi and Sylvia, and soda fountain of Thomas, the ice warehouse of d'Avocato, the two Sevilas, one selling wines and liquors and the other shoes, of the same Azria, hair salons of Bouny, Falzon and Younes, of the merchants of bulk fabric and detail-hosiery-clothes industry-innovations: Aïdan. Bramly, Bismuth, Chemla. The clock and watch makers, jewellers, silversmiths in great number: three Ayeds, two Chelly, two Naim, the Cohen bakery, three grocers: Abdelnaceur and Damak at Bab Diwan and Calafatis

with the other end of the street. As for the four Maurish cafés as well as the *ftairi* (traditional fried pastries), they were also located at a little distance from Bab Diwan.

I stop this enumeration here, though very incomplete, because it would quickly become tiresome; it gives an impression of the Rue de la Republic, the principal axis of our district that I now try to locate between the two quadrilaterals of the médina and the modern city.

And initially how called your during its existence? - For the Tunisians, it was *Er Rbat, El Fondouk, Hai Bab El Bhar, Chabet Er Roumi* for Europeans: the marine district, maybe the *Quartier Franq* and undoubtedly of other names in Italian or Maltese: the street which ran from Bab-Diwan to the sea, was called Strada Réale, Rue Central before being named as above. The configuration of this district was that of a curvilinear polygon whose base, formed by the Rue Léonnec, followed by Rue Jules ferry, matched the line of the ramparts from the cereal market to the staircases of the Borj en Nar while passing by Bab-Diwan; the line of the road of Moulinville, from the Borj En Nar to the military circle constituted another side of it, then the Boulevard de France from the military circle up to the Florio pharmacy on left and the grocer Borj Olivier on right-hand side, drew its larger curvilinear coast of it, and finally its smaller side ran from the grocer Borj Olivier to the ramparts.

A unique fact in our city: our district was equipped with places of worship of the three religions Catholic, Moslem, Jew, three places justified by the presence of three communities: a Christian community grouped around Place Lavigerie near the church, a Moslem community around Bab-Diwan with a mosque Rue de la Republic, a Hebrew community occupying a larger space to the east of the Rue de la Republic with its synagogue. This overall picture should not make us forget that families of each of these three communities lived by outside of the geographical places defined above, in a scattering that religious and ethnic discrimination had never prohibited. In certain lanes: Jews, Christians and Moslems cohabited more peacefully than anywhere in the world. These people, of modest condition, lived in harmony, occupied in obtaining their daily bread and that of their families.

Although rather narrow as a whole, these streets and lanes were, contrary to those of Médina, in an almost rectilinear layout - except the street of Constantine which drew a right angle. The district of the church, to the west of the Rue de la Republic, counted four streets: of Constantine, of Malta, the church passage, a street

without name around Place Lavigerie, plus two others, more important by the trade which bordered them: the streets Léonnec and Tissot.

To the east of the Rue de la Republic extended the *Hobiza* – an Arab name for the Moor - primarily inhabited by Jews and whose axis, perpendicular to the street of the Republic, was the Rue Pasteur, from which left perpendicularly, on the left, the streets: synagogue, Hannibal, Carthage, Jerusalem, and Sinai, all leading to the street Jules Ferry, which skirted the ramparts of Bab-Diwan to Borj En Nar, whereas this same Rue Pasteur had on the right, the Rue Flatters, Rue Barthélémy, and Rue St-Hilaire which ended, always perpendicularly, at the Rue Général Chanzy. From Place Carnot the Rue Général Chanzy ran towards the Rue de la Republic and the Rue du Chacal, skirting the back of the military circle near Moulinville road. Considering the total surface of the district, Hobiza occupied easily three quarters and the last quarter the district of the church; with a similar proportion for the Place Carnot compared to the Place Lavigerie.

Some observation as to the number of their surface and heads of houses. I will speak, now, of the Place Lavigerie, of the church, the streets and the adjacent buildings. If I had previously defined it as a district, I simply did it by convenience because, like Hobiza, before 1881 it was named Hai *Bab el Bhar* and its older constructions, by the same account as those of Hobiza, had been built about 1770-1800.

I have vainly excavated my memory; I found trace neither of a kouteb there, nor of a Jewish school. The only Jewish school that I remember was located in the modern downtown, at the angle of the street Alexandre Dumas and the street Lamoricière; it was directed by Mr. Vitalis Danon. If I make an error in this topic, you need to excuse me, because I am in good faith; in the Quartier Franc of my childhood, there existed to my knowledge only one single school: that of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Appearance; one entered there by the passage of the church but the body of the building - a ground floor, two floors facing equally on the Rue de Malta and the Place Lavigerie; the community room was astride the passage of the church on the first floor supported by a slightly arched structure.

This school, in the thirties, was among all the schools of Sfax the only one to have mixed classes, boys and girls were mixed there, with the class of small led by Sister Marie-Ange, with the class of largest led by Sister Jean de Matha; they were made up children of all origins: Greeks, Maltese, Italian, Sicilian, French, coming

from all the social classes of Sfaxienne society: daughters and sons of colonists, doctors, civil servants, tradesmen, employees, workmen; no discrimination prevailed there; work and merit were all that counted. The playground of the smaller children, about 100m², was on a terrace on the 2nd floor; that of the larger was no other than the Place Lavigerie itself because their classroom was located against bottom of the ground floor at the angle of the Place and the Rue de Malta. In connection with the place Lavigerie, it is wise to note that the door of the church originally opened there before 1881 and that the building thus turned the back on the sea from which it was separated by the enclosing wall which girdled the Quartier Franc. During the siege of Sfax, from July 6 to 16, 1881, one of the many batteries which defended the city was located between the guns of the French fleet and the church which was thus damaged by the projectiles of the attackers so consequently it was renovated in 1892; equipped with two bell-towers, the door giving on the Lavigerie place was walled and another opened facing onto the sea.

When I was a child, the Place Lavigerie, bordered on the east by the Rue de Malta, was equipped with pavements, gutters, and metal refuse boxes, was planted with palm trees and was covered with bitumen. Its quadrilateral bordered buildings of various periods, belonged to the children of the nearby buildings, which were inhabited exclusively by Christians: Risso, Cavaretta. Padovani, Désira, Di Salvo. Muscate, Deschodt, Iacono, Gili. Scicluna; however, before my birth, Valbert De Ceccaty. who did not live on the place, had a laundry there, and a Mr Hazir had an indigenous jewellery shop; a dispensary of the Union of the Women of France was installed there, which lavished care on every person who came to ask them. An odorous characteristic of this place came from the workshop of the Mifsud pork-butchery, which was of such a quality that once one smelled its perfumes, one could not avoid sinning by greediness.

The Rue de Malta was almost as long as the Rue de la Republic and parallel with this one, from the Boulevard de France; at its beginning to the right was a small triangular place with two shops: Gader Djmel, perfumer, and Ben Salem, carpet merchant; a hairdresser and the entry of the residence of Doctor Palomba, on the left a shoe-maker, Gharriani; and until the outlet on Place Lavigerie, by old residences occupied by various families: Jewish, Saada; Maltese, Spiteri; Greek, Souklanis; and the only modern building giving on the place: Gili, mortgage agent; the Rue de Malta continued, on the right, to the street Tissot with Berdah, factory agent; Arbîb, agent;

Nahmias, oils and cereals; this street, crossing the street Tissot, was going to lead to Rue Leonnec facing the ramparts.

The Place de l'Eglise left the church passage on the left of the building, and on the right of block of houses near the joinery of Michel Cordina, the buildings of the two troops of the scouts of France; lodgings of Veigy, lawyer; Elloumi, owner, and finally the school of the Sisters, at the outlet of the Place Lavigerie. The western side of this was originally a dead end inhabited by the families Saïto and Giordanella. as well as the workshop of the cycle shop of Albert and Vincent They, whose frontage gave onto the Boulevard de France at 44b. From the same side of the Place began the only road with a right angle in the whole district, the Rue de Constantine, in the angle of which the workshop of Bertolino was located: legs, balances, rockers. There lived the families Tuccio, Sfax-Gafsa; Jaoui, agent; Scavino, typewriters; two Roy families, insurance and [made T.P.] At the end of this street, buildings of the warehouses of Borg Olivier and Casaburo.

While following the Rue de Malta, from Place Lavigerie towards the ramparts, one arrived initially at Rue Tissot and then Rue Leonnec. Rue Tissot left the street of the Republic, perpendicular to it and ended at the cereal market; perfectly cosmopolitan, no ethnic group dominated there; two bakeries could be found there: Zanoii and Chemla; two cheap restaurants, Triki and Soutourou; a pasta factory, Centonze; a bar, Mme. Bussutil; an oil tradesman, Ali Trabelsi; two traders of colonial products, Naïm and Setbon; the Sebag printing works; two shoe-makers, Barone and Capello; a hairdressing salon, Celentance; a tailor, Vella; a furniture specialist, Madar; a store of electric supplies, Essellemi; five dealers in drapery, fabrics & hosiery, three of them being Aïdan, Berrchi, and Zanzouri; a Tunisian restaurant: Hassan Karabiba. I should note that Micie, Rene, & Albert Aïdan, sons of a tradesman of this Rue Tissot formed an integral part of the *Ragazzi* in Place Lavigerie where all Catholics stayed.

Beyond the Rue Tissot, parallel with it, and skirting the ramparts between the grain market and Bab-Diwan, Rue Leonnec was as cosmopolitan as Rue Tissot, particularly its inhabitants though not by its tradesmen of whom the great majority were Tunisian (Jews or Moslems).

Attached to the ramparts, wedged between the towers, similar to long hallways squeezed in the small buildings, provided with the same door openings, were several dozen trades of all kinds: fruits, fresh vegetables, dry vegetables,

spices, eggs, breads, meats, soft drinks, Moorish coffees, snack bars for laborers, small forges, repairers of [*kab-kab*], sellers of small traditional kitchen tools, warehouses of earthenware jars and gargoulettes, etc., etc... Whereas on the other side of the street, Jews and Moslems shared the bulk of the sales. Four cereal merchants: Allouche, Guez, Saïd, Nahmias; a wholesaler of fresh produce, Triki; the Saada hardware store; a shoe-maker, Liscia; an ironworker, Ankri; two tinsmiths, M'sihid and Zanzouri; and an aerated water producer:

Maybe it would be good to recall that when running water was installed in the whole district, it was, to my knowledge, the Jewish tinsmiths who did the installation; then as the lead pipes had for the annoying practice of leaking, similarly, to make them look good, one often called upon them for repairs.

But before continuing in this diagrammatic description of the district with the undoubtedly tiresome itemization of its trade, I would like one moment to consider the obvious disparity, sometimes shocking for the eye, which existed between the masonries, often abutting one against another, some equipped with all the attributes of comfort, the others, of poverty.

Contrary to the buildings of the modern city, with impeccable geometry and unquestionable aesthetics, in spite of the differences in style the blocks of houses of the old quarter were generally only conglomerates of constructions of all styles and all ages, welded together without much preoccupation in alignment; with recesses, edges, disparities in height, sometimes cubic, sometimes parallel, sometimes curvilinear, in short, to which anarchy only a few rectangular alleys attenuate the disorder. However, the quasi-uniform whiteness of their walls, and the glare of the helping sun, made one forget the ravages of time and the sobriety of the architecture. Seen from the top of a building, the roof of the church for example, on which I ventured sometimes, except for the hour of the abbots' breviary, there appeared an impressive number of terraces equipped with wash-houses, dispensing detergents, suspended as they float in the breeze like white flags or multicoloured banners.

On this panorama of layered terraces, with or without dry stone walls or balustrades, lived clandestinely, thanks to human generosity, a population of waif-like, starving and begging cats. Throughout my childhood, I received them regularly in my bed; they were affectionate and soft but covered with chips which, for a reason that I am unaware of, irritated my skin conscientiously. Let us not leave the terraces

without me evoking in some way the part which they played in the electrification of the district during the Thirties. They paid the price, however unaesthetic, of modernity. Good-bye to clear horizons! As far as the eye could see there was a scattering of posts, supports, metal relays from which emerged short horizontal stems mounted with insulators of porcelain, green and white, on which were fastened wires running in parallel networks supplying each hearth, over the streets and lanes, black objects on the primary blue of the sky; a profusion of wire and cables suspended above the heads from one side of the street to the other; it was ugly but undoubtedly essential; the electricity fee rendering the oil lamps with often smoky wicks now unnecessary, but especially also physical effort, because, consequently, the current would operate machines in the workshops, joineries, flour mills, oil mills and in the factories.

But if the district benefited in light, it also faced the arrival of sound; the first radio sets made a triumphal entry in the Moorish cafés, which, liberally equipped with loudspeakers, broadcast from morning to evening, songs of the artists in vogue; thus the district could taste with the musical genius of Oum Kalthoum and Abdelwaheb. In this, the Moorish cafés of our quarter were the precursors of modern "sound systems" which flood us with music in the shopping malls, great areas, the restaurants and even the hairdressing salons.

To the west of the street of the Republic lived a large Jewish majority population, which explains the establishment of a synagogue. However, according to some of my Jewish friends, this religious unit would have covered three groups of people of different origins, namely: the Djerbiens, Jews coming from the Middle-East well before the Arab conquest of 12th (sic: actually 8th) century; those of Spain, emptied of Moslems at the time of the "Reconquista" by Isabelle the Catholic; and lastly the Livournais, the most recent emigration. What could explain the cultural differences that you could observe while crossing *Hobiza*, certain women were equipped in the Eastern style, and conversed in Arabic with a light lisp, the others, dressed with European clothes, spoke variously Arabic or French and others, Arabic, French and Italian; in the same way for the men there were also differences of social status between its three groups: the poorest, the comfortable, and finally some rich? I have heard it said but as for my part I have never traded except with humble craftsmen, I couldn't confirm it.

The most animated and commercial street was Rue Pasteur; it begin at the top from the Rue de la Republic and ran perpendicularly to finished at the tower of

Borj en Nar. There were six grocers there: Vangel, Tai'eb, Perez, Hay Laïdi, Bouhnik, Pariente; merchants of flours and semolinas: Saadoun, Cohen, Chelly, Sesportes; a wine and liquor merchant, Farrugia; those for the trades of appetite; seven tailors: D' Ancona, Berrebi, Azria, Cohen, Kritikos, Lahmi; the cosmopolitanism of these honourable craftsmen makes one think that their customers were also cosmopolitan; seven cycle workshops, Fak-Fak, Piro, Abdelhadi, Azria, Gargouri, Hassan,Zouri; four shoe-makers, Saadoun Miale, Gafsou, Azria; three hairdressers: M'saïD, Cordina, Tartour; a drapery hosiery, Khaïat; four carpenter-cabinetmakers, Fak-Fak, Ben Slama, Di-Paolo, Gamrasni. All the way to the end of Rue Pasteur, close to the tribunal court of the Driba, was the Gamrasni garage.

From Rue Pasteur and perpendicular to it, projected streets of which six led to Rue Jules Ferry which skirted the ramparts from Bab-Diwan to the Borj en Nar, whereas the two others, longer, went the opposite direction and finished at Rue Général Chanzy, the last street of the district before the boulevard of France.

Some of these listed names, Rue de Sinai, Rue de Jerusalem, Rue d'Algiers, Rue Hannibal, Rue de Synagogue, do not give any idea of the real image of the commercial activity which reigned there; a multitude of mechanics, grill rooms, pastry makers, anonymous because they were usually tiny, contributed to give to these popular places an atmosphere of permanent self-indulgence, a revenge of the unfortunate on the rich; the foods accessible to the smallest purses were always exquisite and both children and adults of the modest families which came there, found delights for their palates and satisfaction in their stomachs. Someone who has never tasted the exquisiteness of these specialties can little understand the Eastern sensuality from which they come. In addition to these culinary trades, humble craftsmen worked in rudimentary workshops, to the great satisfaction of the people of these lanes. For my part, I have two wooden chairs, resulting from one of these workshops; they are sixty years old: intact in all their skilful design, they could still be useful after ten generations. It was a very young carpenter of Hobiza who made them, named Maurice Hania; I make a point here of greeting his art.

We return now to our nomenclature, Rue de Synagogue; two grocers, Bouhnik and Taktouk; a cycle workshop, Scordino.

To the right of the Rue Synagogue, on the other side of Rue Pasteur, on the Rue Flatters were grouped a significant number of food merchants and, apparently,

a flour mill, which were prosperous and highly respected on the street. Azria colonial products; Berrebī, flours and semolinas; Darmon of St Julien, colonial products; Hannoun and Khaïat, colonial products; Khaïat, cereals; M'sihid, oils; Nāïin, colonial products; Saada, flours and semolinas. Saadoun, oils, cereals & almonds; Vella, oils and cereals. Zarrouck and Co, oils and cereals.

Below the Rue de Synagogue, Rue Hannibal, no matter how short it was, sheltered several trades, qamongst others four shoe-makers, Berrebi, Barrebi, Nizard and Zribi; another Zribi sold supplies for shoe manufacture; there was also a third Berrebi, a public writer; a factory of oils and Nahmias soaps, a Sroure refreshment bar; and finally Allouche, director of the newspaper "Le Réveil Juif."

On the right of Rue Hannibal on the other side of the Rue Pasteur, was the Rue Barthelemy St. Hilaire, less commercial, it still sheltered a pasta factory, a soap factory, a wholesale fabric warehouse; another miller, Cohen a tapestry maker for furniture pieces, Ben David. As for the Rue Carthage, Rue Algiers and Rue Sinai, no trade was located there; only the Rue de Jerusalem, which sheltered the Masliah hardware store.

Rue Jules Ferry was located at the feet of the ramparts between Bab Diwan and Borj en Nar; as with the Rue Léonnec to which it was an extension, it presented, adjoining the ramparts and squeezed between the towers, the same low buildings in the shape of hallways which sheltered a similar number of small traders identical to those in Rue Léonnec. On its right side, were found two grocers, Ankri and Louzoun; the Ayed butchery; Cammareri, wine merchant, the Berrebi café; the Slimane joinery; the cycle workshops of Ayed and Rekik; a vegetable tar merchant, Tagina; the glaziery and painting shop of Tréménos. At the other end of the district, past Rue Pasteur, if one ignores Rue Flatters, or Rue Barthélémy St Hilaire, one arrives Rue Général Chanzy which connects Place Carnot with Rue de la Republic; the Lopez and Fils establishments: wines, liquors, cycles, and motor bikes held an important place in addition to the trade of oils and cereals of Khaïat, Lernannet and Calo.

To the south-east of the old quarter extended a large, shaded place, equipped with benches, and quite modern in spite of the marabout who was established there, the Place Carnot.

Of all the "intramural" quarter in 1881, Place Carnot is without doubt the place that has undergone the most modification; between 1881 and 1930 a hotel had been built there, the station hotel of Mrs. Audibert, a village hall which one called Adelphe,

after the name of the association which brought it to life, a level platform for an open-air cinema, later the cinéma Royal and Pathé joined together. Two craftsmen could be found there, namely the Baklouti joinery and the forge of Ben Giaouï; two doctors had their residence there, Larché and Galéa: an artist-painter, Gjnetti; traders of olive oil, cereals, almonds, dates, wools, sponges, namely, Azria, Bessis, Bouhnik, Cohen, Guez, Jacquemart, Salah as well as the offices of the Zaghdoun soap factory. Place Carnot opened mainly onto Hobiza, though the Tunis road and the boulevard of France emerged there, in addition to the street Général Chanzy, the smallest street of the district, named the Rue Chacal, was wedged between the military circle and the body of an old building.

Having arrived at the end of this work, some names come back to me in memory - Revol, Gilarès, Dreyfus, Espic, Foti - that I did not find in the nomenclature but which were useful to me, and undoubtedly I omitted to quote other names; that I hope I will be forgiven for, it is quite difficult to remember all.

If it were relatively easy for me to redraw the topography of this old quarter and to restore, as accurately as possible, the tradesmen, craftsmen, workshops, printing works and factories, it appears infinitely more difficult for me at present to restore the movement, activity, environment, the smells, flavours, in a word: life itself! In this cosmopolitan pool mixed in a continuous divine activity, in a permanent brew, all possible examples of the populations of our good city.

This effervescent crucible where workmen, Bedouins, townsmen, islanders, beggars, merchants middle-class, working, sailors, carters, camel drivers, donkey-drivers, employees, owners, Europeans, officials, civil servants, railwaymen, soldiers, men, women, children, tellers of good stories, gypsies, white, brown, black, formed a sparkling mosaic, changing, unpredictable in its diversity of costume, of the appearance of their headgear, shoes, languages, behaviors which would stagger anyone who had to make a precise inventory of it. A variegated crowd through which bicycles, carts, carriages, tractor-drawn sleds, pulled, pushed, asses loaded like donkeys, mules drawing on their bit, cut through a path in the middle of warnings, injunctions, calls, tinklings of bells, chimes... How to restore by words of the sentences this soup?

Perhaps it would be wiser to limit the attempt by describing the course of only one day. The district whose electric power station stresses its night song; in the

distance, a train whistles; some of the cats are squabbling; four o'clock sounds; in the disappearing night rises a separate call, that of the muezzin; the dawn pierces. Five o'clock. Bab Diwan wakes up. The itinerant salesmen frame the two doors; in their pots smokes the burnt *chorba* (a lentil soup): chick-peas or broad beans with cumin simmer in their odorous soup: the morning passers by will be offered some presently; in a nearby *hanout* is prepared a delicious pulp: the *chahleb*. On the nearby palm trees the sparrows quarrel incessantly; high on the terraces, the cocks bawl.

Five thirty; the morning angélus sounds from the bell-tower of the church; the first rays of the sun caress the crenelated tops of the walls; on the paving stones the iron wheels of the first carts squeak; an odor of heated oil wafts in the fresh air of the morning: the *ftairi* is already at work; the poor wooden carts leave the médina loaded with vegetables or fruits and equipped with the inevitable Roberval balance; next, their owners will loudly praise the quality and the price of their goods; at some corners of streets, labourers draped in wool are squatted, like angular stones: in front of them, baskets filled with eggs.

At the entrance of the mosque, close to the door, the faithful perform their ablutions in a basin laid out for this purpose; others drink together from the wall tap; from the top of the minaret, a voice invites to the prayer: "Allah is the greatest" - "prayer is better than sleep" - "... enter into happiness." The air is scented with roasted coffee, hot bread, fritters and mint tea. A municipal employee does busies himself along the pavement: he goes, stops, turns, lifts a lid, opens a valve... and a clear stream of water starts to run along the gutter.

Little by little, the shops open, canopies are deployed, the goods delivered, the squares, stalls, displays, are furnished: sides of meat, baskets (lit: *théories*) of wriggling fish, large bags of dry vegetables, small bags of coloured spices, garlands of piments, of dried octopuses, bread pyramids: barley, semolina, flour, blackish, streaked, flat, round-offs, twisted. The district flourishes well its mundane foods.

Seven thirty; the crowd is dense; some do their shopping, go, come, look at, sniff, weigh up, discuss, haggle over, buy; little by little the baskets fill; others are restored consuming *ftairs*, snacks, *chorba*, *chahleb*, pastry, by drinking tea, coffee, lemonade, legmi, lemonade, orgeat; the cafés abound in customers, streets are full of people in a hurry: employees, workmen, dockers, cleaning ladies (and men), schoolboys, students; the shoeshine children, the boys selling cigarettes at piece-

rates walking around in search of customers. Across this crowd of pedestrians, a horde of cyclists penetrates with great reinforcement of bells; slowly clearing a passage for heavy carriages loaded with boles of wood, carts, bags, of biscuits (lit: *scourtins*) or *zebbila*; the atmosphere is noisy; cries, calls, warnings, animated discussions, bargaining without end, secret discussions, loud exchanges of greetings, sad conversations, objurgations and... sometimes even... insults! Thus the life of the district goes on, sound and scent.

But already the tiled fronts of the snack bars, midday couscous and tajines, offer themselves to customers. These are never disappointed by it because these humble restaurateurs, experienced cooks and honest tradesmen have the complete satisfaction of their customers at heart; it seems that on their premises - Jewish and Moslem joined together - a performance of sacred duty.

The day has passed; the evening descends; in the streets, after the incoming tide of morning, it retreats in the evening and, with it, other scents, are a prelude to other flavours: merguez, skewers, chops, *bric*, grills, salads and to conclude, zlabia, baklaoua, makroud, montecao, runnels of honey; because in this ancient quarter populated by modest people, the uncertainty of the tomorrow inflames the refined taste as a salute to the blessings of the present. The privilege of our district, nowhere in the modern city can offer such a culinary symphony, and for good reason, where physical safety reigns, imagination is not the prime virtue. And then wasn't the East from time immemorial the cradle of perfumes and refined taste?

The stars scintillate in the velvet of the sky. From the top of the minaret a last call develops, the sixth. It is the night; the power station stresses its rhythmic song; some part, some cats quarrel; at a distance, a train whistles; Bab-Diwan chimes out the hours. - Everywhere PEACE

Henri CALZARELLI