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with

MANUFACTURERS of SHOES

from TUNIS and SFAX

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The inquiry into the non-structured leather and shoe sector was carried out in 1979 at the National Institute of Statistics, by the Department of statistical surveys, with the collaboration of the Office of Scientific Research and Technique Overseas (O.R, S.T.O.M.), represented by Jaques CHARMS, economist of ORSTOM, placed at the disposal of National Institute of Statistics.

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My father was in the trade. He was a craftsman of babouches ([Turkish slippers]) ([known as] belghas), and I was with him since my childhood. At the end of a certain time, my father older, I had to take the succession and continue. And little by little, I became an owner with apprentices, exactly like my father.

I began at the age of 10 years age until with today where I am 40 years old. I worked for 5 years with my father. You know, in that time, it was work on the belgha, there were not several models, and to get into the swing of things did not require much time. Thereafter, I passed to the manufacture of shoes and other articles.

In that time, one worked on prefabricated soles: These later times, we have returned to the leather sole, but there were none on the market.

In 5 years with my father, I was partly trained. Then I remained 3 or 4 years with another craftsman, and then I was completely trained.

At that time, the work on the belgha was a purely manual traditional work from beginning to end. There was not machine. The belgha itself has been modernized: the "countra" is a kind of babouche with a different leather from that of the babouche; the seam and the shape of the soles are also different and take to some extent the shape of the shoes of today.

The production was weak: A good *qalfa* working alone put together two pairs of shoes per day, because the shoe takes time, contrary to the babouche.

Currently, there are *qalfas* who manufacture only 5 pairs per day, but almost entirely by hand, apart from the seam which is done on a machine.

Some of my workmen were trained at home; they have 9 years of experience. Others were trained elsewhere. Even after 9 years of training, one cannot say that this type would be a complete craftsman. Admittedly he can begin a pair of shoes and finish it all alone, but from time to time he finds difficulties. In general, at the end of 4 or 5 years, one can entrust work to the apprentice. At the beginning, for 2 years, he helps, he takes part in work outside of workshop (it takes courses to some extent), before becoming half-*qalfa*, then *qalfa*.

From the first week, one gives them something: At least 2 Dinars per week. You know the majority of these young people come from a working-class environment and poor, and they live outside the city. Also, if one does not give them their week, they are not able to provide for their needs like transport or snack break. Moreover, they have of other advantages: for the festivals, I give them shoes and clothing.

A half-*qalfa* comes to receive 1 D 200 per day.

The *qalfa* does not work by the day in general, he works by the pair.

When there is work, it gains up to 3 D, 2 D on average, and 1 D or 1 D 500 when he does not have much work.

The dead season begins New Year's Day and lasts 4 to 5 months. From May, work starts to move. In other words, for me, the season of work is summer. At one time one worked well, but everything has changed these last years. That is due to the shoes which did not exist before. The marketed shoes, made by factories have found a demand by the consumers, stronger than the shoes from the souk.

In winter, one works at 50%. Sometimes one stops working for 2 months and seeks other work. The young people who are tenants and recently installed, are even obliged to work in construction to provide for their family.

In general, one works by the job: When I give 20 pairs to my workman, I do not want to give him more since it is summer and everybody needs rest, it is necessary to think of that. But there are some who do overtime.

I do not discharge workmen during the dead season, because I regard them as my sons. On the other hand, others do it. For the crisis period, I reduce production and do not discharge any of my workmen. Sometimes, and according to my means, I prepare for the next season, in other words I store my production. And to avoid problems with social security, it came to me before for the workmen working by the day, I decided to accept only the piece work, except for those who are still in training. The rate of remuneration by the job is fixed according to the degree of complexity of the work: Shoes with lining are worked at a rate of 250-300 millimes a pair, and moccasins 200 millimes.

A good craftsman, with a young boy to pass the glue to him can make 20 pairs per day. But during the difficult times, one makes only 10 pairs per day (1).

1) - Previously, one used several terms to indicate quantities: The "bea" for 4 pairs of Turkish slippers and the "chroul" for 20 pairs. These terms are not used any more today, except the "chroul" but only between workmen.

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I have 2 young people who do the cutting with the blades, another does the openwork for the moccasins. Another assists the dressmaker on the sewing machine. Those which do the cutting have a determined quantity to cut up, and then they return home.

One then passes the leather to the machine to make it fine, and then brings it back for the adhesive. Then the founder assembles it on the soles, that is to say on the forms; the following day, it removes it, passing it to the sprayer for completion. Before packing the shoes, one checks them, one checks that there are no defects, then they are finally put in the box.

When I entrust 20 pairs to the founder, that is not to say that I must recover them the very same day: He can make half and finish the remainder of it the next day.

The founder paid by the job can earn 2 D per day, and can attain 3 D depending on the effort he makes. For the one who does the cutting, there is a convention: an agreement is made on a price for 40 pairs, he does them and each one for himself.

For me, piece work reduces the difficulties of the trade.

Leather is often missing: The production of the tannery in Manouba is insufficient. And if, and this happens, the leather is not of good quality (1st choice), and especially if it is bad work that they do at the tannery (perforated skins, leather lacking flexibility...). Sometimes, one loses a third of the bought quantity. The first choice is sold to the large factories, because they do quality work; and the 3rd and 4th are sold to the souks. The leather traders do not want to buy 1st choice because it is expensive and that is reflected in the price of the shoe. Admittedly one is tired of working with this kind of leather which requires an effort to produce a good pair of shoes, but one is obliged to accept it since we do not have the choice. In spite of that, the prices do not stop increasing: The 3rd choice which cost 720 millimes, is currently 850 millimes, and the 4th choice, the worst is sold at 720 millimes.

Currently, there is "salba" on the market.

But sometimes the quality of the adhesive leaves something to be desired.

The polish is of bad quality, and often one buys 2 or 3 bottles that one must reject: Instead of giving a black color to the shoe, it gives it a blue color. Even the white is not satisfactory. It is "SIFCOL" that produce it.

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For the soles, there can be shortages, especially with regard to the soles for ladies, but one can resolve the situation by changing the model.

I have customers who come from Tunis Friday, Saturday and Sunday: They buy from 20 to 40 pairs. They are retail tradesmen who have shops in the capital. I also have tradesmen from Sfax who buy only 10 to 20 pairs, and who renew their orders when they are exhausted.

For the crisis period, I obtain raw material on credit. God thank you, I have a good reputation with all the leather tradesmen. Thus I can have the quantity for which I ask, I store it waiting for the Aïd Es Seghir, when all will be regulated. And it is the same thing with the salesmen of shoes by retail: If one of my customers only has part of the regular sum, I provided him with the quantity the he asks for, and he will pay later.

I am not always bound to the same kind of articles: In winter, I decrease the production of shoes, and I manufacture of other articles for women, such as bechmeks and sabots. I can say that my production varies according to the season and the demand.

There are several reasons for competition on prices:

1) - The craftsmen who do not have the means cannot continue, and they find it impossible to settle their debts with regard to the tradesmen, workmen, the rent, etc... Then, when one is in crisis, he is obliged to sell the same article as you, at a low price of 200 millimes. It is in this way that the prices are slashed.

2) - Workmen who are not well trained and who have 2 years of work in the trade, open on their account during the good seasons with a capital of 200D. And once the season is finished and the marketing becomes increasingly weak, they decrease their day by day production, until they have eaten their capital. At this moment, they return to work by the day or by the job with the permanently installed craftsmen.

3) - There are manufacturers of shoes who are not well trained: they produce the same article as a good craftsman, but there is always a difference. I noticed that here in my workshop, between my various workmen. Being given that the finished shoe is not the same, one can sell them at different prices.

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The persons in charge done a lot to solve some of these problems but their attempts have led to nothing. The only solution, in my opinion, is that a craftsman who does not have the means must not work on his account, nor the one who is not well trained in the trade. It is better that he works with another craftsman rather than lose what he saved, while looking for profit.

Sometimes customers ask me why my prices are raised in comparison to this or that. But these craftsmen who do bad work and who sell their production at a low price in reality, they are people who do not know the secrets of the trade. Because to make a work badly finished is to lose a customer, and once the customer has done that, he will not return any more. [HERE]

I have 3 workmen: 3 founders, and 3 young boys; a dressmaker who works only 2 hours per day, and if necessary a cutter who also works by the job.

We are not in competition with the industrialists, because they have a better production than ours, and moreover, they sell expensive.

The industrialists import the raw materials, such as adhesive, leather, etc. Therefore their production is in demand. On the other hand, we are obliged to use the raw materials which are on the market... Personally, I think of changing trades. The customer who buys a shoe produced by a craftsman which will not last 2 or 3 months, will not return there, knowing that large industries for the manufacture of shoes do not cease to appear day after day, and for the consumer who comes upon a bad craftsman, all the craftsmen of the souk do the same work as the who who cheated them. If there was an organization of the trade, and everyone made good work, there would not be anything to complain about: A pair of shoes from us is sold at 3 D, and the same article from a factory is sold at 4 D 600 to 4 D 900. [HERE]

These bad craftsmen are numerous - This year, several left FOR Libya, others changed trade, to become taxi drivers, snack salesmen, etc... As I have already explained to you, during the good season, several return to work, and once the season is finished, they will leave as they are accustomed.

The persons in charge of the souk know these parasites of the trade well, and if they wanted to take measures against them, they could. I would prefer, and I would wish that in the future no workman can open a shop without to having passed a test at the end of which those interested would obtain a certificate of their professional capacity which will enable him to work under good conditions.

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I think in myself of the customer who works in a house building enterprise and who has 4 or 5 kids, when he comes to buy a pair of shoes which wear out at the end of a week or 10 days, that makes me sick at heart for their good.

There is something which you are unaware of. It is that female articles such as "chlakas" and men's sandals are worked with sky. Sky does not last. In the souk, it is used in 50% of cases or more, even though it does not hold. The customer does not know it: There is can be 10% of people who can tell the difference between sky and leather. The sky has its price, but it is not strong. One can repair leather sandals, whereas sky tears.

The customer always expects to pay 200 or 300 millimes at least for one pair of sandals, because for the majority, it belongs to working classes. They say: that fixes me for today, but they forget that these sandals do not last more than 10 days. As they pay 400 millimes only, they are not interested in the quality of work or the raw material. The tradesman shows the customer sandals of 2 D and 1 D 200, and the customer chooses the last because they are less expensive.

The price of leather increases from one day to the next. The "craute" which is a lower quality of leather and which cost 270 millimes, these days reaches 500 millimes and more - the price has gone up 100%.

A bie (a foot) does not make it possible to make a good shoe. A good shoe must be made from 1 bie + 70, 1 bie + 80 or 1 bie + 90, according to the models. The "bie" fact 20 cm² and a bie of 3rd choice costs 350 millimes. The 1st choice is 950 millimes. Sometimes, one uses 2 "bie" for a pair of shoes. The raw material is expensive, and the owner loses several times in business.

A skin makes around 25 to 37 bie. Personally, I buy 1 or 2 packages according to the need. Some buy a skin, of others a half-skin and so on... The raw material is obtained from the tradesmen, and we can choose what is appropriate to us.

In this room, I was associated with another craftsman, currently I am alone. I pay 700 D of rent per annum (ground floor and first floor). [It is actually a traditional house around a court, entirely given over to work, and giving onto the street by a corridor at the bottom of which is an anteroom and the entry door: This is therefore a workshop found inside a dwelling house, and invisible from outside. Then the investigator puts a spontaneous question which at first sight can appear awkward for the interlocutor, but this kind of question can sometimes advance an investigation and have positive effects].

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- You are a "harraka" ? (a clandestine "casseur").

- Personally, I am not in agreement with the term of " harraka". This is a craftsman like the others, who knows his work from beginning to end, but he does this work hastily: for example, it assembles today a shoe on the form, and it removes it the following day. In a general way, the "harraka" is a craftsman who does not have financial means and who produces very quickly. This is not in the sense where he does not know the trade.

(To place this craftsman, one will indicate that he produces in quantity, and packs his production in cartons which carry the inscription: Shoes X.)