# THE ECONOMY OF THE TRADITIONAL CITY

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## 1.

The Arab city is, above all, a market-city. The importance of the economy and the "suq" in the formation and development of the "Muslim" city was recognized long ago by one of the first Orientalists to have devoted his attention to these problems: Louis Massignon, from his studies of Iraqi cities, proposed the notion that the Muslim city is founded on the combination of market and Great Mosque. This theme was taken up by all the major interpreters of the Orientalist school. "The suqs," wrote Sauvaget, with reference to Damascus, "…are finally the chief *raison d'être* of the agglomeration." And Eugen Wirth, on the basis of research on the Islamic, Arab or Eastern city, concluded: "The cities of the Middle East are specifically marked out by their suq, which is the main commercial quarter…The suq is, indeed, the characteristic sign and most striking distinctive feature of cities of Islamic culture."[1] While the market can hardly be regarded as the sole distinguishing feature of the Arab city, it must, nonetheless, be adjudged as representing the central element around which this city is created, organized, and developed.[2] It is clearly of importance to know the precise origin of this specific feature; and we may, perhaps, learn this from an archaeological study of the pre-Islamic Arab city.[3]

We propose here to make a study of these economic functions within a group of Arabo-Mediterranean cities, with the cities of Morocco, Iraq, and Yemen naturally included in our analysis; and we shall approach them from the viewpoint of a period that might

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[1] J. Sauvaget, "Esquisse d'une histoire de la ville de Damas," *REI* 4 (1934): 454; E. Wirth, "Villes islamiques, villes arabes, villes orientales?" in *La ville arabe dans l'Islam*, ed. A. Bouhdiba and D. Chevallier (Tunis, 1982), 197.

[2] On the general aspects of the Arab city, see A. Raymond, "The Spatial Organization of the City," in this present work.

[3] See the studies of A. al-Ansary, especially "Qaryat Dhat Kahl: Al-Fau," in *Sciences sociales et phénomènes urbains dans le monde arabe*, ed. M. Naciri and A. Raymond (Casablanca, 1997).

be designated "modern"—one that, in most cases, corresponds to the Ottoman period (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries). However, many of the characteristics we shall identify could naturally also apply to the preceding "classical" period.

## 2. *The city: production and trade*

Contrary to frequently advanced theories about the very negative role played by the city in the overall Muslim context ("parasitic" is a term heard in this connection), the city actually had a positive impact on the local, regional, or international level.

### 2.1

The countryside was a place of craft manufacture, in the context of production within family-run workshops; in Egypt, for instance, the provincial centres of the Delta, Fayyum, and Saʿid played a crucial role in the production of textiles. G. Baer notes how, out of a thousand or so villages mentioned in the major work of ʿAli Pasha Mubarak, two hundred had a local craft production.[4] Fundamentally, however, it was in the cities that more specialized production was located, in a highly varied set of fields that catered for the immediate needs not just of the city population but of that of the rural districts, too. It is estimated that, in the eighteenth century, craftsmen represented half the active population of Cairo. The "basic" crafts in question, to be found in all the large cities, were especially in the professions involving metal, wood, and leather, but they also entailed the manufacture of articles in gold and silver which were widely hoarded in the countryside. One of the most noteworthy examples of this kind of urban craft—one that no doubt played its part in catering for the domestic needs of the rural districts—was the production of articles in copper which was generally highly developed in the cities. So great was the importance of this that in Cairo it was established (its noisy character notwithstanding), in the very heart of the city: the suq of the *nahhasin* occupied the

[4] G. Baer, "Village and City," in *The Islamic Middle East*, ed. A. L. Udovitch (Princeton, 1981), 603.

northern section of the avenue of the Qasaba around which the city's economic centre was set.

In a certain number of cases, this urban production took on the character of a veritable industry producing not only a current of redistribution to the rural districts but also an outward commercial flow that made its contribution to the overall economic balance of the country. A few examples may be given.

In Tunis, the production of red caps (sheshias), encouraged at the beginning of the seventeenth century with the settlement of thousands of Andalusis expelled from Spain, was, around the end of the eighteenth century, providing employment for 300 masters and 15,000 craftsmen (fig. 1). These caps (sometimes assessed at 100,000 dozen in number) were exported to every region of the Ottoman Empire, notably to Egypt, which bought to the value of 35.4 million paras (a full third of imports coming in from the Maghreb). The city of Cairo was also a theatre for substantial textile activity: Evliya Chelebi, describing the city around 1660, estimated the number of textile craft workers there at 12,000; and surveys of the judicial court registers (*mahkama*) at the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show that around a third of the craftsmen recorded were in fact involved in the manufacture of cloths. This whole production was the source of a vigorous export trade.[5] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Nablus possessed 13 soap-making works; and part of this production—the most substantial in Palestine—was sold in Cairo, where the soap caravanserai (*khan al-sabun*) was a centre for Palestinian trade (fig. 2).[6] With regard to textiles, Aleppo was a highly active production centre: the 12,000 looms to be found there at the beginning of the nineteenth century provided for export as far as Europe. The quantities imported by Marseille had multiplied twenty-fold over the course of the eighteenth century.[7] All these examples show clearly enough how the notion of a general economic decline in the provinces of the Ottoman empire at the end of the eighteenth century sits ill with the actual reality; and that a drastic reassessment is needed in this area.

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[5] A. Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire*, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1974), 1:299.

[6] B. Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 257.

[7] A. Raymond, *La ville arabe, Alep, à l'époque ottomane* (Damascus: IFD, 1998), 359–361.

2.2

The city was not simply a place of production. It was also a place of exchanges at all levels: local, regional, and international.

While village crafts were often highly active and could even produce a saleable surplus (in the textile sphere, for instance), the most specialized and sophisticated products came, beyond doubt, from the city. This point is indeed noted by Girard in the *Description de l'Egypte*: industry, he says, "is limited, in the countryside, to the arts of basic necessity and to the management of certain products from the soil that serve for daily consumption . . . The cities are always the seat of a more select industry, concerned with transforming raw materials imported from outside into objects for a more or less widespread use."[8]

It was likewise from the city that the redistribution of imported products was undertaken. The raw materials necessary for rural crafts passed through the cities first and were then redistributed in the countryside. The use of luxury products became popularized in the cities before spreading, in turn, to the countryside. In this way, the use of European draperies became widespread in Egypt, till finally, in 1767, two French merchants founded an establishment at Farshut, in Saʿid, for the sale of cloths. It was via Cairo that the use of Mocha coffee became common in the seventeenth century and spread through the country; when the café des Iles, of lesser quality but less expensive, made its appearance, this spread rapidly in the countryside: "The great and the rich," noted the French Consul in 1740, "do not make use of it. It is used in the public cafés and for the villages."[9] Research into historical ethnology would be needed to appreciate the variety of products in common use, and of implements of daily life, which were thus consumed in the countryside, and whose introduction into the land was made via the cities, thanks to the international trade of which they were the centre.

The cities, for their part, were supplied by the hinterland with foodstuffs for their consumption and raw materials for their craft. This well-known aspect of the relations between cities and countryside has been studied, with respect to the provisioning of the inhabitants of

[8] P. S. Girard, *Description de l'Egypte, Etat Moderne* (Paris, 1812), 2:1, "Mémoire sur l'agriculture, l'industrie et le commerce," 590, 617.

[9] Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants*, 1:197, 157.

Tunis and Damascus, by Paul Sebag and Antoine Abdel Nour.[10] It is not necessary to detail the variety of produce transported to the cities in this way, to feed the inhabitants and give them the means to produce. It is, though, useful to point out that this local trade exerted a considerable influence on the urban structure by virtue of the siting, on the periphery of cities, of markets where agricultural produce was stored and made available for sale, and where commercial relations between city and country were concentrated. This is a point to which we shall return in connection with the economic structure of the city.

It was the cities, obviously, that made possible the commercialization of produce and products cultivated and manufactured in the rural zones. Moreover, it happened, in the context of these relations between cities and their countrysides, that the process of production gave rise to a full-fledged cooperation involving a division of tasks. In Egypt, with regard to flax and cotton, preliminary operations up to the spinning were often carried out in rural family workshops, with the weaving then being carried out in Cairo and other provincial centres. No doubt, the same was the case in other great cities. The most noteworthy case of an association of this kind concerned the manufacture of Tunisian sheshias: the knitting of the caps was undertaken at Ariana, a suburb of Tunis; they were then sewn in Tunis; the fulling was undertaken in the workshops at Tebourba, a small town on the banks of the Mejerda; the carding took place in the suqs of Tunis; the dyeing needed a further operation in Zaghouan; then they were given their final form in the capital. Thus, there was, in this case, a constant to and fro of activity, throughout the process of manufacture, between the city and the country.

## 2.3

Most of the great Mediterranean Arab cities under consideration here were also the seats of an intensive international trade which gave them their importance and ensured their prosperity. These cities were normally sited at strategic points on the great axes of international trade: Tunis at the point where Europe joined Africa and the western Mediterranean basin was divided from the eastern; Cairo at the focal

[10] A. Abdel Nour, *Introduction à l'histoire urbaine de la Syrie ottomane* (Beirut, 1982), 217 et seq.; Paul Sebag, *Tunis au XVII^ème^ siècle* (Paris, 1989), 199, et seq.

point between the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe (via the maritime route across the Mediterranean); Aleppo at the natural point of contact between the caravan land commerce towards the East and the maritime traffic towards the heart of the Empire and towards Europe; and, finally, Mosul at a crossing point of the Tigris, where the land routes towards the East, Mesopotamia and the West all met.

These cities were the places of exchange for local and regional production, for manufactured products from Europe, and, traditionally, for exotic products: the celebrated spices imported from the East were now supplemented by Yemeni coffee which had become an item of major consumption around 1650; the oriental cloths brought from India continued to be the subject of active trade; products from the heart of Africa came via Algiers, Tunis and Cairo. Such international activity explains the power of the commercial apparatus with which these cities were endowed (caravanserais and suqs), the prosperity of the great local traders (the *tujjar*) who carried out operations there (and whose importance has only in recent years been set at its proper worth), and, also, the presence of significant colonies of western merchants. Of these last, the most active were the French and the Italians who carried on their business there and whose "nations" were installed in the *funduq*s or *khan*s (caravanserais) reserved for them.

Such diversity of function, such production destined for local and international markets, such transit activity on all levels—all these things explain the prime importance assumed by economic activities in these cities. It is easy to understand how this pre-eminence would be visibly reflected in the very spatial structure of these cities.

### 3. *Central activities*

The Mediterranean Arab city was marked by a high degree of centralization and by the pronounced separation that existed between, on the one hand, a centre devoted to major economic activities—and which, given the presence of the Great Mosque and of organs of power and administration, might be termed the "public" zone—and, on the other, a residential zone almost totally bereft of economic activities, and which might be regarded as "private." From the centre of the city out to the edges, activities were arranged according to their decreasing level of importance. Within this very logical organization, the various aspects of economic activity were thus correspondingly reflected, in spatial terms, in a differentiated localization.

The existence of a central zone of markets (suqs), close to the Great Mosque, has been noted by all scholars concerning themselves with the structure of the city, whether this city is termed Muslim (L. Massignon) or Eastern (E. Wirth). The zone was marked by the density of those structures, economic in nature, that were the site of large-scale trade, specialized trade and the most important craft activities.[11] On a quite different level, the presence of traders in books (*kutubiyyin*) could be explained by the proximity of the Great Mosque, the centre of teaching that brought together hundreds of students and teachers. This was the case, for instance, in Tunis (close to the Zaytuna) and in Cairo (al-Azhar).

3.1

The most lucrative activities, those giving rise to an active international trade, were often concentrated within a "covered market" which could be closed off for reasons of security. It was traditionally named the *qaysariyya*, but during the Ottoman period it was also called the *bedesten*, after the one to be found in Istanbul. The "Kisariya" of Fez, still in existence, has been the subject of a detailed study by R. Le Tourneau (fig. 3), one which is equally valid for most cities where such a structure exists. Situated between the Great Mosque of the Qarawiyyin and the sanctuary of the city's founder Moulay Idris, in the heart of the market quarter—in a particularly sensitive spot of the city (and one reserved in principle for Muslims)—it is made up of a group of parallel streets and streets crossing them at right angles, to which access was via exits equipped with gates that were closed at night—at which time the *qaysariyya*, totally deserted, was kept under observation by patrols of guards. The streets were bordered by the shops of traders practising the professions most esteemed in the city: jewellers (*sagha*), perfumers (*ʿattarin*), traders in candles (*shammaʿin*), traders in imported cloths, etc. "This market," wrote Leo Africanus at the beginning of the sixteenth century, "is a kind of small town surrounded by walls containing twelve gates around the circumference."[12] The Khan al-Khalili in Cairo was

[11] I have tackled these questions in *Grandes villes arabes à l'époque ottomane* (Paris: Sindbad, 1985). See also my contribution "Spatial Organization" in the present work. For the siting of activities in Tunis in the seventeenth century, see Sebag, *Tunis au XVII*ème *siècle*, from which I have derived frequent inspiration.

[12] R. Le Tourneau, *Fès avant le Protectorat* (Casablanca, 1949), 374–376; Jean-Léon l'Africain, *Description de l'Afrique*, ed. A. Epaulard (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1956), 198.

an assemblage of several *khan*s to which access was from two streets closed off by monumental gates dating from the Mamluk era, and within which the great international trade of Cairo was carried on. It was doubtless conceived as a *bedesten* (a term sometimes accorded it in the form *bazastan*); this is suggested by the fact that it was built in 1511 by the Mamluk sultan al-Ghuri, with Turkish traders specifically in mind.[13] *Qaysariyya* and *bedesten* are mentioned in Algiers, Damascus, Aleppo, and Baghdad.

The economic centre was likewise characterized by the presence of caravanserais where major international trade, wholesale trade, was carried on. Traders from other regions resided here, but so also did part of the local population, especially "floating" elements like soldiers. These centres were called *funduq* in North Africa (and in Tunisia *wakala*, in the form "oukala"), *wakala* and *khan* in Cairo (where *funduq* and *qaysariyya* had also been known during the Mamluk era), *khan* in Syria and Iraq, and *samsara* in Yemen (where the word *khan* had also been used). Regardless of the term and the region in question, these structures were fairly consistent in form. They were square or oblong buildings opening on to the street by means of a single, often monumental gate. They were made up of a central courtyard where animals could stand, and giving on to this were warehouses where goods could be stored, along with rooms for the merchants, perhaps on two storeys. Damascus contains a number of covered caravanserais, among them the khan As'ad Pasha (1753), an imposing structure 52 by 46 metres and containing 9 domes. This no doubt reflects an Ottoman architectural influence which can be likewise discerned in other older buildings.

The dimensions of the caravanserais reflected the scope of the commercial activity being undertaken there, but also the importance of the city. The funduq al-'Attarin in Tunis, at 625 square metres, was modest in size. Similarly, the funduq of the French in Tunis did not exceed 1,000 square metres. In Cairo the wakala Dhulfiqar (fig. 4) measured 2,625 square metres and comprised 32 warehouses and 35 rooms, but the *wakala*s of the Bulaq outer harbour were much bigger: the wakala al-Kharnub was a full 3,840 square metres. The most monumental caravanserais—and also the most finely decorated—were those in Aleppo (fig. 5). The khan al-Gumruk extended over 6,167 square metres and

[13] See S. Denoix, J.-Ch. Depaule, and M. Tuchscherer, *Le Khan al-Khalili*, 2 vols. (Cairo: IFAO, 1999).

contained 52 warehouses at ground level and 77 rooms on the first floor. The number of caravanserais in a city provides a good indication of its role as a commercial centre: 34 have been identified in Algiers, 44 in Baghdad, 35 in Mosul and 57 in Damascus, around 100 in Aleppo, but 360 in Cairo—eloquent testimony to the economic activity of this metropolis and to its paramount position in the Arab world.

The markets (*suq*) that developed in this central zone were generally open structures where the shops occupied a section of street, a crossroad, or, more rarely, a square; this last was in fact the case in Fez, where the traders in local cloths were grouped around four small squares next to the suq al-ʿAttarin.[14] In most cases, it would seem, we are dealing with a spontaneous grouping of the shops of craftsmen and traders who practised the same profession, and who were joined in professional bodies (Cairo had no fewer than 250 of these) dealing with highly segmented activities and having an extremely restricted location. Thus, the name of a profession designated, at one and the same time, a type of professional activity, a professional body and a precise spot in the city. In consequence, a toponym could go on designating a place where the activity in question had actually long since ceased to be carried out: in the Cairo of the Ottoman period, the place known as "Fahhamin" (i.e., traders in coal, a not very lucrative activity generally found on the outskirts), in the Qasaba in the centre of Qahira, was occupied by very well-off cloth merchants. Such changes are commonly found in cities, and are a source of information as to these cities' histories.

There are many examples, too, of suqs with a distinctive architectural character, especially in the neighbourhood of the Great Mosque, where the most prosperous professions were to be found. During the first half of the seventeenth century, in the reign of Yusuf Dey, the covered suqs of Hafsid Tunis, around the Zaytuna, saw the addition of the suq al-Truk (Turkish suq)—a great covered street—and the suq al-Birka, whose six columns held the covering of the small square in question (fig. 6). The Qasabat Ridwan in Cairo, covered along a length of 50 metres, was built around 1640 by a powerful Mamluk emir; it provides the sole instance of a covered suq in Cairo (fig. 7). In sixteenth-century Aleppo, large covered suqs were built by the pashas who developed major foundations (waqf) in the central district of the Mdineh. The suq of Bahram Pasha—constructed in 1583 between a mosque and a

[14] Le Tourneau, *Fès*, 373.

*qaysariyya*, with a system of domes ensuring a link between these diverse monuments—is a fine example of these structures that are utilitarian in purpose, yet not bereft of architectural qualities distinctive to Aleppo. All these cases clearly involved major urban projects overseen by people in high political authority.

As with the caravanserais, the number of suqs varied considerably from one city to another: Cairo had 145, Aleppo 77, Baghdad, Damascus, and Algiers only around 50. Within the central zone the markets were located, broadly, in decreasing order of importance: the markets for goldsmiths and money changers (*sagha*), for spices (*'attarin*), and for cloths (*suq al-qumash*) normally occupied the area closest to the centre. The division of activities in Tunis, around the Zaytuna, is especially significant in this regard.

The basic element of these central quarters was the shop (*dukkan, hanut*), which seems to have seen little variation in type between the Middle Ages and modern times, and which can be found almost identically today from Morocco to Afghanistan. The descriptions provided by J. Sauvaget for Zangid Aleppo, by E. Lane for Ottoman Cairo, and by R. Le Tourneau for Fez at the beginning of the last century, show close agreement: a small, square building, 6 or 7 feet high (writes Lane), 3 or 4 feet wide, sometimes with a storage area. The floor of the shop is generally raised above the level of the street. A stone bench set out on to the street (*mastaba*) allows the shopkeeper to sit down. The shop is closed at night by wooden shutters whose upper part rises to form a porch and whose lower part folds to form a counter.[15] So simple and economical was the structure in question that shops were very inexpensive and could be built in rows, sometimes hundreds at a time, within the framework of pious foundations (waqf/*hubus*). In 1750, twenty or so were built in Cairo for a unit-price of 1,670 paras, whereas the cost of a *wakala* in Cairo, at that time, exceeded a million paras. Shops in markets that were erected as part of an architectural project were fitted out in a rather more spacious and elaborate fashion. The number of shops varied according to the importance of the particular city: Tunis contained 5,000 in 1860, Damascus 6,600 in 1871, Cairo very probably 20,000 in 1729.[16]

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[15] J. Sauvaget, *Alep. Essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne* (Paris, 1941), 120; E. Lane, *The Modern Egyptians* (London, 1954), 322–324; Le Tourneau, *Fès*, 315–317.

[16] Raymond, *Grandes villes arabes*, 241.

Over and above commercial activities linked to cloths, spices (plus coffee) and precious metals, which have been given special attention above, the centre was the scene of a considerable variety of other activities that were in general the subject of major trade. Such a case, for example, was the trade in dried fruits (*nuql*) imported from Turkey and Syria, whose market was to be found in Tunis close to the Great Mosque, and in Cairo in the Sukkariyya, at the southernmost point of the Qasaba. The *nuqliyyin* were prosperous traders. The fresh fruit markets were, by contrast, situated towards the periphery, and the sellers there were often poor fellows. Examples could be multiplied. The urban centres likewise brought together various craft activities. In many professions, in fact, the maker was also the trader in his products; there was no clear separation between the two processes of manufacture and sale. Here in these central districts were to be found professions making items for everyday use, which could be fairly luxurious. There was, for instance, a wide variety of shoes. In Tunis the *balghajiyya* were installed right alongside the traders in spices, in a privileged site; Yusuf Dey (1610–1637) built a suq for the *bashamqiyya* alongside his mosque. Most of the Cairo *qawwafin* were immediately outside Bab Zuwayla, and the emir Ridwan Bey built for them a splendid covered market that spoke volumes for the prosperity of this craft; a fair number of shoemakers were in the Khan al-Khalili, in a still more prestigious spot. The types of manufacture causing the greatest nuisance were, as we shall see, normally pushed out towards the periphery. Exceptionally, though, a craft as important as that of the coppersmiths (*nahhasin*), which provided essential kitchenware and household implements, could, despite its noisy character, be installed in the centre. This was the case with the al-Nahas suqs in Tunis and Cairo.

3.2

The greater part of the considerable commercial apparatus to be found in the great Arab cities was concentrated in these centres. In Algiers, half of the 54 suqs identified were grouped within the central district. In Cairo, out of the 348 caravanserais whose site is known, 229 were in the Qahira district (fig. 8). In Aleppo, 19 khans rose within the Mdineh district, and their overall surface area (4.4 hectares) represented almost half that of this central zone. An idea of the enormous concentration of economic activities within this central economic district may be gained from the example of Cairo, where a study of judicial court

documents (*mahkama*) enables us to locate the activity of craftsmen and traders whose fortunes are known to us by virtue of the estates they bequeathed. During the period 1776–1798, 65.5 per cent of recorded estates for Cairo as a whole concerned individuals who carried on their activities along the roadsides of the Qasaba, the major artery which crossed the Fatimid quarter of the city from north to south, and which was still, in the eighteenth century, the centre of activities. Still more significant, the amount of their estates came to 88.3 per cent of the sum total of estates for the city as a whole. This last figure perfectly demonstrates the overwhelming economic part played by the economic centre where activities and wealth were concentrated: within a zone amounting to no more than a fifteenth of the total surface area of the city was concentrated almost 90 per cent of the wealth of Cairo.[17]

The structure and dimensions of these central regions can be determined by the presence of economic structures within which major trade took place: specialized suqs and above all caravanserais. A cartography of this kind clearly demonstrates the difference in scale that existed between cities catering for local and regional areas and the great metropolises: ranging from Algiers (2 hectares), through medium-size cities—Tunis, Damascus, Mosul, to major centres—Aleppo, Baghdad—(10 hectares), and finally to the outright metropolis of Cairo (60 hectares), to which only the capital Istanbul could be compared. These economic centres were such distinctive features within the city that they were sometimes given a specific name: Rabʿ in Tunis, Qahira in Cairo, Mdineh in Aleppo.

It is hardly surprising that in cities whose irregular layout has so often been underlined by Orientalists these central regions should have been linked to the exterior by a network of streets that were (within the required limits for traffic using not cars, but restricted to the transportation of goods on animal back) relatively broad and direct. Such a network was obviously necessary for the proper functioning of the city. Tunis was linked to the main city gates set in the walls (Bab Suwayqa, Bab al-Bahr and Bab Jadid) by a network of sometimes doubled roads. The Cairo Qasaba, laid out by the Fatimids, had a width of 6 metres, and a fairly rectilinear appearance, from Bab al-Futuh in the north to Bab Zuwayla in the south. Damascus had inherited from Antiquity the Long Street (suq Midhat Pasha) joining Bab al-Jabiya to Bab Sharqi.

[17] Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants*, 1:366–367.

Finally, the Mdineh in Aleppo was crossed by a line of markets, double, triple, sometimes quadruple, following the layout of the ancient Roman road, and linking Bab Antakiya to the Citadel, passing close by the Great Mosque.

3.3

The central zones were, in general, extremely stable within the city, due to the virtually organic link that existed between the markets and the Great Mosque, and also, no doubt, to the complex links forged between the activities thus brought together in the heart of the city. This did not rule out a degree of plasticity. During periods of expansion, growth of the central economic zone was effected by overflowing into the residential zone surrounding it, the houses being replaced by suqs and caravanserais. A development of this type has been noted in the cities of Tunis, Cairo and Aleppo in the Ottoman period. For the last two, it has been possible to measure this, the surface area covered by the centre having increased from 40 to 60 hectares (with regard to Qahira) and from 6 to 11 (in the case of the Mdineh). Just one example exists of the urban centre being displaced. This is in Mosul, where the markets had been conventionally spread around the Great Mosque built by Nur al-Din in the geometric centre of the city, and where the "centre" was then displaced to the north-east in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the quarter of the major markets being set close to the Ottoman citadel and the crossing point of the Tigris (fig. 9).[18]

The markets, on the other hand, were doubtless less stable within these centres than L. Massignon suggested, when he conjured up a fixed division into professional groups—the consequence, by his interpretation, of a stagnation of techniques.[19] This statement is valid in the case of the goldsmiths (*sagha*); in Cairo, for example, we may note the permanent placement of this market, on a site adjacent to the central part of the Qasaba, from the time of the Mamluks to that of the *Description de l'Egypte*—a period of over five centuries. On a more detailed level, however, we may in fact note movements, substitutions that are consequent to another rule regarding the siting of professions:

[18] Dina Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire, Mosul* (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 202–203.

[19] L. Massignon, *Mission en Mésopotamie*, 2 vols. (Cairo: IFAO, 1912), 2:92.

that which specifies greater proximity to the centre for those more important and a gradually increasing distance from the centre in proportion to their lessening importance. We noted above the case of the *fahhamin*, in the Qasaba in Cairo, where traders in cloth had taken the place of traders in coal. The Cairo furriers (*farra'in*) moved from a very central settled spot in the Mamluk period (when fur had considerable importance as a symbol of accession to a certain political and military rank, and trade in it was consequently essential) to a more distant spot in the southern quarter during the Ottoman period (when the use of fur for ceremonial purposes had lost importance). By contrast, a new product like coffee immediately took a central place, given the major economic role it assumed from 1650 onwards. In 1798, the 62 caravanserais where trade in it took place were all sited in the heart of the city.

### 4. *The residential zones*

In the residential zones surrounding the central district mainly devoted to economic activities there was normally no specialized activity; only non-specialized markets (*suwayqa*), which J. Sauvaget has described in terms applicable not only to the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo, but to all great Arab cities (fig. 10). This description is worth quoting: "Each quarter thus has a suq, but on an appropriately reduced scale: the respective guilds are now represented merely by one or two shops, and the goods retailed there are most of the time limited to foodstuffs and to absolutely essential manufactured products. As such, it is…'a suq in miniature' (*suwayqa*)." R. Le Tourneau, considering the economy of the quarters of Fez, notes that the only items to be found there were those that were liable to be needed at every moment: oil, butter, honey (from the *bekkal*), fresh vegetables and fruit (from the *khdaïri*), spices and sugar (from the *'attar*), charcoal (from the *fehham*), and brooms from dwarf palms. This rudimentary provision was supplemented by ovens for bread. The Mokhiya quarter, for instance, contained two ovens and nine shops. These small establishments were usually grouped together at a crossroads or on one of the main streets of the quarter, in a spot where a larger number of potential buyers might be expected to turn up. "The moment the inhabitants of outer quarters wanted to procure goods not of a totally everyday nature (meat and fish, for example), the moment they wanted to buy an article of clothing, or have their hair

cut, they had to go to the central markets." The small concentrations of shops, known as *hawanit* ("the shops"), that were scattered through the upper city of Algiers performed the same function.[20]

Nevertheless, in the case of the greatest cities, the considerable distances that had to be covered to reach the centre led to the creation of secondary centres of activity commonly sited close to the gates of the city within the walls, beyond which the city then extended further into large suburbs. These secondary centres of activity often recalled an ancient configuration of the city. Thus, in Cairo during the Ottoman period, two of the chief exits from the Fatimid city were the scene of considerable groupings of markets. In the west, Bab al-Shaʿriyya had no fewer than 12 *wakala* (caravanserais) established beyond the walls, on the road leading to Bulaq; in the south, close to Bab Zuwayla, there were 7 *wakala* beyond the walls, at the beginning of the road leading to Fustat-Old Cairo.

### 5. *Activities on the periphery*

The rule whereby economic activities were normally graded from the centre to the periphery in a descending hierarchy explains the pushing out, towards the periphery of the city, of the least important types of crafts, of professions connected with the countryside, of those that needed very large amounts of space, and, finally, of those that were liable to be a source of nuisance to the population.[21]

The markets dealing in agricultural produce settled, logically, on the periphery of the city, for reasons of proximity and ease of transport, and also because such produce, voluminous in size but relatively small in value, needed large open spaces for its handling and storage. The markets in grain and straw normally developed on vast squares known as *ruqʿa, rahba, ʿarsa* and, in Iraq, *ʿalwa*. The grain market (*rahba*) in Algiers was situated just inside Bab ʿAzzun. One of the chief Cairo grain markets was situated beyond Bab al-Shaʿriyya, in a spot called the *ruqʿat al-qamh* (grain enclosure) or *midan al-ghalla* (grain square). There were other grain squares close to the city gates, at Rumayla, Bab

[20] J. Sauvaget, "Décrets Mamelouks de Syrie, I," *BEO* 2 (1932): 29–30, idem, "Esquisse," 452–453, idem, *Alep*, 105; Le Tourneau, *Fès*, 223–225; T. Shuval, *La ville d'Alger vers la fin du XVIII*ème *siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 1998), 207–208.

[21] On these problems, see Raymond, *Grandes villes arabes*, 189–194.

al-Luq, and Husayniyya. In Damascus the central artery of the southern suburb of Midan was lined with warehouses called *ba'ika*, buildings from 100 to 300 square metres in size where grain, wheat or straw were stored; Brigitte Marino has counted around sixty of these.[22] The siting was a logical one, on the road leading to the Hauran, a major region for agricultural produce. The markets for fruit and vegetables were likewise sited on the periphery; Tunis, through the toponym Bab al-Khadra, has preserved a memory of the vegetable sellers who were to be found round about this entrance in the northern suburb of the city (Bab Suwayqa). In Cairo, the vegetable sellers have left traces of their presence in the southern district of the city, notably with a suq al-Khudariyya in the immediate vicinity of the Ibn Tulun Mosque.

The trade in livestock, at once cumbersome, noisy and polluting, was likewise sited close to the gates of the cities. Even in present-day Tunis the memory is kept of squares for sheep (*rahbat al-ghanam*) and for horses (*murkad*) which have stretched, since the Hafsid period, within the city's southern suburb. In Cairo the toponymy preserves the memory of a suq al-Ghanam just outside Bab Zuwayla, the southern gate of the Fatimid city; but, from the end of the Mamluk period and under the Ottomans, at a time when the city came to stretch much further in this direction, the sheep market was on the edge of the city's southern suburb. The Cairo horse market (suq al-Khayl) was at Rumayla, a huge esplanade situated at the foot of the Citadel; this was partly on account of the space necessary for it, but also, obviously, because of the close proximity, in the palace and barracks of the Citadel, of soldiers who were the chief buyers of these mounts.

A siting on the periphery was likewise essential for a certain number of professions involved in the transformation of raw materials (reeds, palm leaves) that came in from the country; these, highly cumbersome but having a poor market value, needed a good deal of space for the manufacture of the products derived from them. This was especially the case with the rope-makers (*habbalin*) and mat-makers (*husuriyya*) whose workshops, in Cairo, were concentrated in the southern part of the city, between Rumayla and Qanatir al-Siba, in very poor quarters corresponding to the character of this craft. The Habbala quarter was one of the most wretched in Cairo.

[22] B. Marino, *Le faubourg du Mîdân à l'époque ottomane* (Damascus: IFD, 1997), 95–97.

Other products coming in from the outside were subject to the same exclusion: markets for firewood, on account of the product's cumbersome nature and the difficulty of carting it in large quantities to the interior of the city; charcoal (in Cairo this was brought by Bedouins from the Tur region in Sinai, by caravans of one to two thousand camels, and sold in markets situated close to Bab al-Nasr and Bab al-Luq); briquettes made from a kind of caked cow-dung, burned as a fuel in Egypt and sold at the suq al-Ghilla on the western edge of Cairo. Oil presses were likewise close to the city gates to facilitate the provisioning of workshops and avoid a particularly soiling raw material being transported into the city; the presses mentioned in the *Description de l'Egypte* were all situated on the western edge of the city. The distancing of "industrial" activities, especially those most unpleasant for the environment—such as ovens of all kind, on account of the smoke, dust and smells they generated—was a standard feature. In Algiers the charcoal ovens, and those for lime and plaster, were situated outside the western gate of Bab ʿAzzun. Dye-works were subject to the same exclusion on account of the soiling character of these workshops and their needs in terms of water and space.

Among those activities causing nuisance and pollution and situated close to the gates, mention should also be made of the abattoirs, the neighbourhood of which was especially unpleasant (due to passage of animals, noise, smells, the spilling of blood). The six "butcher's shops" in Cairo were situated on the edges of the city, at Husayniyya in the north, at Bab al-Luq (near which a pool bore the telling name Birkat al-Dam, or "pool of blood") and Harat al-Saqqaʾin in the west, lastly at the Lions' Bridge in the south. This is in fact characteristic of every city. It was above all the case with the tanneries (*dabbagha*, *madabigh*), which were a considerable nuisance to the neighbourhood on account of the stench for which they were responsible, and which had heavy need of water to treat the skins and of space to dry them. Their siting outside the city was thus absolutely essential, and no exception was made in this respect.

In the case of these activities on the periphery, changes in siting are often a sign of urban transformation, especially when the city's growth made necessary the distancing, towards the exterior, of an activity now integrated into the urban fabric, but with the old name nonetheless preserved—sometimes with the qualification "old" (*qadim*, *ʿatiq*)—a relic highly indicative of the city's history. Instances of this phenomenon are quite numerous. Algiers preserves a toponym "rahbat al-qadima"

(Old Grain Market), and there was a space for selling grain close to Bab ʿAzzun. In Cairo the street situated beyond Bab Zuwayla, in the full urban centre, preserved the name suq al-Ghanam al-qadim (Old Sheep Market), witness to an old siting, whereas the sheep market was, thereafter, situated on the southernmost edge of the city. In Aleppo there was a mosque "of the Old Tannery" (al-Dabbagha al-ʿatiqa) in the former tanners' quarter. The displacement of the tanneries is, it should be said, an especially interesting urban indication, since it must be interpreted as resulting from a city development compelling the transfer of the workshops in question, from a site now become an inner one towards a site outside the city. I have noted three separate transfers of this kind—in Aleppo around 1570, in Cairo around 1600, and in Tunis around 1770—which do in fact correspond to stages of major urban expansion.[23]

The location of such activities on the periphery of the city bears a character so logical that it is tempting to see in it a "spontaneous" phenomenon stemming from a natural play of variables. We cannot, though, rule out the possibility that the intervention of urban officials played some part in this organization: judges (*qadi*) and *hisba* officials (supervision of morals and superintendence of markets) were liable to take decisions in matters of this kind. The displacement of the tanneries, which assumed an especially spectacular character on account of the vast dimensions of the zone assigned to these activities, was often a process in which the highest authorities became involved. We know that, in 1552, the Ottoman sultan himself took up the problem posed by the presence of the tanneries in a central spot in Cairo, not far from Bab Zuwayla, and that he set in motion a procedure in which the Pasha of Cairo became involved, and which ended, almost half a century later, in their transfer to a place close to Bab al-Luq, the western gate of the city.[24] In Aleppo the decision probably came from a pasha of the city. As for Tunis, it was the sovereign ʿAli Bey himself who took the decision, in order to remedy the housing crisis that was becoming acute in the city.

In obedience to a similar logic, activities concerning travel were generally arranged close to the gates. The very broad range of profes-

[23] A. Raymond, "Le déplacement des tanneries à Alep, au Caire et à Tunis," *Revue d'Histoire Maghrébine*, 1977; reprinted in Raymond, *La ville arabe, Alep*, 128–37.

[24] Topkapi Library, KK 888, fol. 324 r., no. 1407. This document was kindly communicated to me by Professor G. Veinstein, to whom I express my heartfelt thanks.

sions involved (trade in saddle and pack animals, professions involving leather, harness, implements for encampment, foodstuffs) were of interest to caravaneers and their customers (including pilgrims undertaking the *hajj*), and, also, to members of the ruling caste. Beneath the Citadel in Cairo, where resided thousands of soldiers and Mamluks—and a place also frequented by pilgrims preparing their journey to Mecca—the great esplanade of Rumayla brought together traders in tents (*khiyamiyyin*), saddlers (*baradi'iyya*) and all kinds of professions, likewise traders in foodstuffs indispensable for extended journeys, military expeditions or pilgrimage. J. Sauvaget describes the assemblage of markets that had developed outside the north-east gate of the city of Aleppo within the walls, and which had preserved, as its main function, the equipping and victualling of caravans; it involved saddlers, smiths, tent-makers, stores of foodstuffs. This assemblage of activities had developed in the Mamluk period, the quarter retaining the name of the village of Banqusa, which had been absorbed by the expansion of the city beyond the walls. In the Ottoman period these activities developed along the whole length of the road leading to Bab Qarliq, about a kilometre further to the northeast.[25]

The extensive dimensions of the cities, and the active nature of the exchanges taking place where urban territory and the countryside joined, had led to the development, close to the gates, of trade and craft agglomerations whose diversity was effectively a smaller-scale reproduction of that of the central districts, but with a very pronounced rural character. This was the case with the Rumayla district of Cairo. In Damascus, J. Sauvaget has described the process whereby there was a migration of activities, formerly located in the city, towards the district located "beneath the Citadel" (Taht al-Qal'a). It was a comparable process, we may suppose, that brought about, in Mosul, the displacement of economic activities located around the Great Mosque towards a district endowed with a double crucial advantage: the proximity of the citadel set up by the Ottomans along the Tigris, and the presence of a crossing point over the river. In Aleppo such extensions had been effected from Bab Nayrab, where populations of peasant and Bedouin origin had settled.

[25] Sauvaget, *Alep*, 175, 228–230.

## 6. *Conclusions*

Study of the cities shows (as Louis Massignon so emphatically noted) the degree to which their economic functions contributed to their organization. The spatial structure of these cities owes much to the organization of the economic life that unfolded there; in certain respects one might say it is the product of this organization. In some extreme cases, the market district even played an intermediary role between forces that might have risked threatening the overall unity of the city—we are thinking here of a city like Antioch, divided between religious and ethnic communities (Turkish Sunnis, Christians, Alawis) for whom the market district provided a geographical space accessible to every community (even if the commercial space was itself the subject of inter-community division).

Arab cities were the theatre of highly diversified economic activities, designed not simply to satisfy the population's daily needs but to nourish a regional and international trade. Europe, which had not yet acquired, in this sphere, the supremacy it would enjoy in the nineteenth century, received manufactured products such as cloths from the lands of the Maghreb and the Mashriq. In the absence of reliable statistics, the very structure of the city supplies valuable information about economic activities, by the variety it reveals with regard to specialized, lucrative activities which had their place in the urban centres, and everyday, non-lucrative activities, which developed some way off. The vitality of the urban centres, and their development in the modern period, provide an interesting indication of the maintenance of a general economic activity not exclusively geared towards the production of items for common use. There seems, then, no justification at all for the verdict of irremediable economic decline, on the verge of the nineteenth century that has so often been pronounced by the Orientalists.

It is not any truer to say that the cities played an exclusively negative role in their relations with their rural environment. As the producer of manufactured goods needed by the countryside, as the consumer of agricultural produce and of raw materials necessary for its crafts, as the redistributors both of imported products and of goods produced by the countryside, the city was intimately bound up with the rural space surrounding it. It is unreasonable, then, to speak—as has so often been done, notably by J. Weulersse, in connection with Syrian cities[26]—of

[26] J. Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche-Orient* (Paris, 1946).

"parasitism," of an exploitation of the countryside by the city. There are rather, in reality, the signs of normal co-existence and cooperation with regard to two complementary entities. This complementarity has been perfectly described by A. H. Hourani: "The village needed the town; but the town could not exist without the food produced by the peasant and delivered to the urban market, whether for sale or in payment of taxes. The basic unit of Near Eastern society was the "agro-city," the urban conglomeration together with the rural hinterland from which it drew its food and to which it sold part at least of its manufactures."[27]

[27] A. H. Hourani, "The Islamic City in the Light of Recent Research," in *The Islamic City*, ed. A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern (Oxford, 1970), 16.