

INTRODUCTORY REPORT

The central theme of the Symposium which has brought us all here to-day is one of the major preoccupations of those on whom devolves the formidable responsibility of handing on to future generations the ancient monuments of their country and the rest of the cultural heritage of which they have received a share.

It is becoming ever clearer that the majority of those architects and town-planners who are aware of the value of man's cultural inheritance are coming to regard with ever closer attention the problems arising out of the protection of ancient villages and urban historical sites.

Let it suffice to say here, for those of our hearers who may not know what the proceedings of our organization have been so far, that already at the last ICOMOS symposium, held in Spain just over a year ago, following the 1966 symposium in Prague on the Regeneration of Urban Historical Sites, eminent specialists went into these same questions of the preservation and revival of historical centres threatened with destruction. The subject is so complex that it could not be exhausted, and for many of the countries represented at Carcères it proved of such vital interest that it was decided to bring about a further meeting, the main subject of which was to be : "Certain Particular Aspects of the Reclamation, Restoration and Appropriate Development of the Ancient North-African and Asiatic Towns of the Mediterranean Basin".

THE HISTORICAL MONUMENT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

Taken in isolation, historical monuments, like ancient archaeological sites, readily find champions more or less aware of the value of the building (or ruins) they are dealing with and perfectly prepared to provide every means in their power to have it consolidated, restored and suitably enhanced. This type of admiration, which is frequently paid to a piece of architecture either effectively or mentally isolated from

its context - and regarded by many rather in the same way as a piece of jewellery, a statue, or a capital from an isolated column - is sometimes accompanied by the hope that the (inevitably heavy) expenditure involved will bring in financial returns. A determined effort is made - and such attempts are rallying wider and wider support - to provide justification for the work of protecting and enhancing the nation's architectural and archaeological heritage by making it part of local, national or international programmes for the development of the tourist trade.

Now the average tourist will be principally responsive to the aesthetic, historical and picturesque aspects of what he is shown. Hence those in charge of the project will be tempted to give these factors such overwhelming importance that their work as a whole may be biased. For example, their restoration work will be confined to the actual building liable to attract the general public, and the site surrounding it will be disregarded. It may even happen that the rest of the site will actually be destroyed, on the pretext of "making it easier for visitors to admire the building" (as has happened in the case of the Ribat at Soussa).

We feel it would not be unhelpful, at the outset of this Symposium, to look once again into the actual concept of the historical and traditional urban unit, which, in the more specific case of the Mediterranean countries of the Islamic tradition, is the "medina".

The medina must be considered as an indivisible whole, composed of parts which are not all architectural in character, or even elements of an urban lay-out; it has a human infra-structure which explains its past and will partly determine its future.

On the strictly material level, when we are dealing with preservation and appropriate development, through reclamation, restoration of buildings, or any other improvements designed to restore its intrinsic value to the ancient town, too much stress can never be laid on the priority assigned by any enlightened town-planner to the preservation of the urban structures surrounding the monuments, which are an inseparable part of them and form their essential framework. The facts have clearly demonstrated that the disappearance of the urban fabric - or even a severe alteration of its character - means that the monument will lose its functional or cultural significance.

PROTECTION OF URBAN UNITS : LEGISLATION.

Let us just recall that Article 65 of the Athens Charter, as far back as 1933, called on the architects and town-planners who were present to envisage concerted action to secure the protection of urban units, and not of monuments alone (as in the past) by a legal code of classification. Under this heading, Tunisia has long possessed a body of legislation which, if suitably brought up to date and strictly enforced, could be a help to us in our efforts to preserve our country's medinas, and in this connection the revision and adaptation of out-of-date texts to bring them in line with present-day requirements is a priority to be undertaken, with legal assistance, by the public bodies responsible for saving these sites, so gravely imperilled to-day for the reasons we shall now rapidly examine.

CAUSES OF THE DECAY OF THE MEDINA : AN ANALYSIS.

We feel, in effect, that before we try to find those solutions to the problems of reclamation and renovation which are among the prerequisites of any revival of the traditional urban centres, we must analyse the origins of the degeneration which is going on before our very eyes, so as to be able - if feasible - to destroy the very roots the evil.

The process of decay - a decay which, if we are not careful, may become complete - set in as the result of a historical phenomenon affecting a certain number of Mediterranean states : I mean colonization.

What precisely happened ? Up to the end of the Nineteenth Century the medina was subjected to few changes on either the human or the material level; minor alterations were made to certain official monuments, and there was progressive growth, which, occurring within a firmly-rooted traditional framework, did nothing to alter the spirit of the latter but quite artlessly preserved its harmonious and uniform character.

The medina was the demesne of the "town-dwellers", who at the time formed the cream of society. The "Beldi", whether tradesman, farmer, religious dignitary or high-ranking civil servant, was the soul of the urban community, which took from him its general tone. His standard of living - which was high for the period and part of a patriarchal way of existence - was such as to make it normal for him to house his family unit in a manner in keeping with his social position. While this Symposium is in progress you will have an oppor-

tunity of visiting some of these Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century upper middleclass houses, which in those days were held to symbolize luxury of every sort.

Side by side with the houses of this town-dwelling élite, and as it were dependent on them, were to be found the modest but decent homes of those who lived in the shadow of the great families and were kept by them in exchange for domestic or other services. Even the building and upkeep of roads owed a debt to the presence of such families, which would not have deigned to use narrow alleys filled up with rubbish.

In addition to its residential buildings, the medina possessed its suks, or markets, each specialising in a given craft and quite adequately fitted out to meet the requirements of a traditional economy.

Cultural and educational institutions took the form of mosques and medersas respectively, the latter being open to none but students (themselves a privileged and honoured class of citizens). There were also the zaouias, or monumental tombs to the memory of saintly persons which also served as meeting-houses for powerful brotherhoods.

Thus, from its beginnings till the dawn of the Twentieth Century, the medina formed a homogeneous and harmonious whole suited to the habits of a certain type of urban civilisation.

And then there came the Protectorate for some, and colonization or the Mandate for the rest. The Islamic world suddenly found itself permanently - instead of sporadically, through hostilities, meetings with travellers, or trading operations, as in the past - face to face with the western world, with its fundamentally different ways of living and its methods of work and production bearing the stamp of the European industrial revolution.

During the first stage, which went on up to and during the period before the two World Wars, the two communities continued to exist side by side, without the slightest interpenetration. The European town was built and grew up opposite the medina, which looked on but made no move, and the slow and rudimentary state of communications was a further factor holding back the native-born town-dweller within the centuries-old urban surroundings he had made for himself. However, the other city, with its shopping centres offering imported manufactured goods at prices defying comparison with those charged by the local craftsmen, its newly set up industrial concerns with their new possibilities of employment, its "roofed" houses with their outward display of enviable material



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comfort, and the growing numbers of schools which were now daily draining off a whole child population all exercised their attraction; and this attraction finally triumphed.

The finishing blow was the development of more numerous and highly improved means of transport. Distances had ceased to exist.

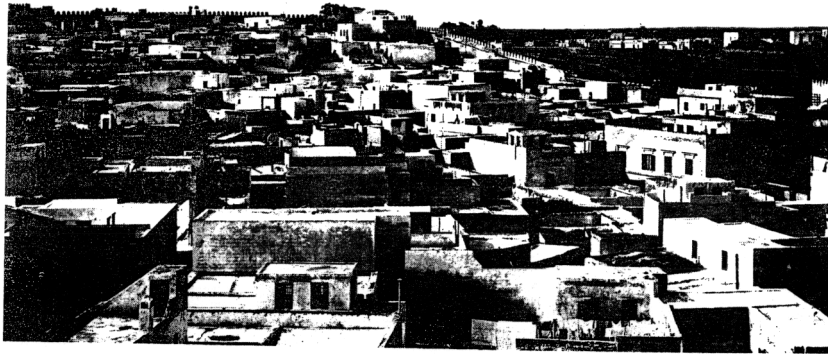
The upper middle-class pedestrian became a rare phenomenon. Ownership of a car being considered as an outward sign of wealth, it had now become a social obligation to buy one. One drove to one's daily place of business by car, and drove home again by car. From this point onwards, it had become inconvenient to live in a medina, whose streets were absolutely unsuited to driving.

Visibly, the old town had fallen from favour. The comfortably-off families started to move into the modern town, where they built themselves villas in the style recently introduced by the Europeans. There were, indeed, some - particularly in the provincial medinas - who still hesitated to break completely with their traditional background and so held on; these, to justify their choice in the eyes of their acquaintance who had decided to move out, while at the same time making their contribution to the modernization of ways of living, introduced disastrous innovations. The aim in view was to bring the rational, functional and conventionally comfortable in at all costs, though the Setting was one which, unlike modern urban surroundings, was ill-suited to such conceptions.

In other cases the family's old home was turned into an apartment house. To make as much profit as possible, the owner would not hesitate to put up large numbers of partitions, so as to make as many rooms as he could, often letting these out to big families.

In both cases, the internal structure of the houses was utterly and inalterably upset. Further, the outside walls of the houses, which were in fact protected by law, were so transformed as to change the whole aspect of the street, whose unity was destroyed.

Even more severely hit by the brutal transformation of commercial activity brought about by colonization were the suks, which remained the sector reserved for trading in the traditional manner. Here the decay was due to two basic causes, one of which was the introduction into the medina of modern industrial products, the other being the habit of displaying goods in shop-windows, which was felt to be an absolute necessity, and which dealt a death-blow to the open-fronted booths



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which used to give the quarter arm.

Since the acquisition of independence, the decay of the ancient cities of the ex-colonies has gone on at a rate which has increased to a dizzy extent. The experts consider that unless immediate and large-scale action is taken the medinas as such will have ceased to exist within a score of years at most.

We shall now make an attempt to show the general way in which this process - predominantly one engendered by man himself - has come about. We shall view the problem with all due objectivity, and - with our hearers' kind permission - from a self-critical angle.

With the large-scale departure of the European populations, a very considerable amount of living accommodation of all categories became vacant, while simultaneously jobs became available at all levels. There were thus two poles of attraction which now helped to a large extent to empty the medinas of their last-remaining native inhabitants.

One of the very first priorities on the government's town-planning programme (in Tunisia, at least; I should be interested to know what has happened in this connection up to now in the neighbouring countries represented here) was christened : "Operation No More Mud-Huts" ("Dégourbification"). The aim was the progressive abolition of our "shack towns", which had grown up on the borders of the big cities and in the countryside. In the latter instances the operation was generally a success, but in the towns the results were more uneven; what happened was that, despite the enormous efforts made, buildings to re-house the population from the shacks and huts could not go up at the slightly exaggerated speed at which the demolitions were carried out, and matters were made more difficult by the excessively high birthrate of the urban areas. Thus in the case of Tunis the reclamation of the outskirts of the town was carried out to the detriment of its centre, or fundamental nucleus.

While the rich families from the medina were moving across into the European residential districts, whose original inhabitants had now left, the old town was gradually becoming invaded by streams of people from the huts and shacks. Simultaneously, a phenomenon was occurring which is general throughout the world but more marked still in the developing countries; this was the irresistible attraction of the capital for the under-privileged populations of rural districts or smaller towns. There was thus a continuous influx of homeless people devoid of resources, and these under-developed groups, with their activity in society ill-defined and a galloping birth-

rate found in the medina a convenient haven of refuge.

This is the Number One problem now facing the town-planners working on the Tunis medina : the ancient town has now a population whose roots are elsewhere and which is not adapted to the surroundings it found there when it arrived.

This very broad analysis of the situation brings us back once again to the idea of a traditional or historical urban centre considered as a whole, i.e. a town-planner's unit inhabited by a community of human beings, the behaviour of the latter exerting a decisive influence on the former.

It is in the light of this analysis that the course to be adopted must be traced out. We sincerely trust, not that this Symposium will bring us ready-made solutions to problems which are common to us all, but that the experiments carried out by some of us here may inspire the others.

PROBLEMS OF RECLAMATION AND RENOVATION.

We should thus like the reclamation and renovation of ancient towns, which is the basic subject of our meeting, to be treated, if possible, under the following different headings :

- a) Sanitation and material renovation
 - b) Social rehabilitation
 - c) Commercial renovation
 - d) Renovation and rectification of building design
- a) Sanitation and material renovation.

In the most seriously affected areas, the unhealthy living conditions and the lack of the most elementary comfort (in terms of contemporary housing standards) are such that a minimum programme of sanitation will need to be carried out. At the same time it would be feasible to choose a limited sector for a pilot urban renovation scheme, and if this succeeds it will show that the medina, if suitable improvements are made in it to allow for the needs of modern life, without any impingement on its traditional atmosphere, is not just a place which can be lived in, but a pleasant one. This point of view was given in a recent UNESCO report, from which we quote the following : "It may be hoped that - as has occurred in Paris - a certain sort of snobbery will before long bring back into fashion those very ancient quarters of the town which, in the midst of the general bustle and ordinariness of things, have retained their calm and originality".

The Association for the Preservation of the Medina, which is represented by Mr. El Kafi, has drawn up a programme with this same aim in view, and we have asked him to be kind enough to give an account of it.

The purely technical problems connected with the adaptation of buildings to suit present-day housing standards can, it would appear, be solved provided the architect uses his imagination. To avoid altering the facade, invisible skylights can be designed for lighting and ventilation purposes; similarly, electrical installations - which so spoil some of our medinas - should be hidden.

In certain cases, it will be found necessary actually to carry out demolition work, either because the buildings are so ancient as to be hopeless ruins, or else for the purpose of creating a void into which air may penetrate, where otherwise - in a strictly limited area - complete airlessness would preclude renovation. But naturally in this field the greatest caution must be exerted and demolition must be resorted to only if the work of renovation absolutely requires it.

b) Social rehabilitation.

Side by side with the task of material renovation and development, it is obviously essential to undertake that of social rehabilitation. This aspect of the problem - which in fact is preoccupying not only our city councillors but also the authorities in charge of sanitation, public health services, social affairs and young people's welfare - is a fundamental one.

The municipal authorities are very well aware of the urgency of the need to take action, with the collaboration of all the public bodies concerned. Experience has already shown that any campaign for cleaner streets or cleaner outside walls is bound to fail unless it goes hand in hand with full-scale measures to re-educate the masses forming the population of the medina with regard to their basic ways of living. A more expensive but more radical alternative is to accelerate the building of flats at low rents outside the ancient town. Present government policy has this in view and this is all to the good, though one wonders whether building will keep up with the rate of population increase.

c) Commercial renovation.

By "commercial renovation" we mean the working out of schemes capable of reconciling the genuine requirements of trade with the nature of the sector traditionally engaged in it.



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Mausolée Sidi Saheb à Kairouan

We feel that it would be an extreme - and only transitional - measure if all modern products were banished from the medina in order to preserve the purely "hand-made" atmosphere of the suks. It would be in contradiction with the principle of full-scale action to keep the city-dweller - whom it is primarily desired to bring back there - inside the medina. Further, if it is concerned with nothing but the products of craftwork, trade in the ancient city will continue to be somewhat artificial in character and almost exclusively reserved for tourists. If we were logical, we would at the same time prohibit any rival sale of the same articles in the modern city.

Another aspect of the problem is that any trading activity, if it is not to become semi-paralyzed, must develop in accordance with government policy in the sector concerned. Thus in the case in point, for example, in Tunisia, the cooperative movement has attained such proportions that not to join it would be to swim against the tide. Hence we feel it is the duty of our town-planners to work out the means of incorporating the cooperative system into the urban background of the medina, for which it would in fact be a revitalizing and regenerating influence. We are raising the question here, because we feel strongly about it, and we should like to know the feelings on the subject of the experts who have done us the honour of being our guests for these few days.

We feel it is perfectly feasible to transform a whole suk into a retail cooperative, by introducing a few minor internal alterations. Obviously, the advertising methods generally adopted in modern urban society (i.e. neon signs and window-displays), must be ruthlessly prohibited. Individual cooperative stores belonging to the suk could easily do their advertising in the modern city by means of special display windows in much-frequented public places. (These could be let into the columns of the "Arcades" in Tunis in the manner adopted in the Paris Métro stations).

We should also like to recall that the success of a cooperative scheme will not depend on the system used for displaying the goods or on the amount of neon used, but will depend on the spirit in which the scheme itself is carried out. A cooperative is the embodiment of a new conception of methods of working and trading. This has nothing to do with ultra-modern premises (the aspect of which is frequently misleading), or with brilliant shop-windows.

Renovation and rectification of building design : Here we wish to stress the need for any town-planners or architects who are not familiar with restoration problems and tend to look with amusement on the desperate attempts of their colleagues, wor-

king on historical monuments or on the medina to save what appears to be an infinitesimal fraction of the national heritage, to think about the question all over again.

A town privileged to possess a centre of historical interest must consider it not as a "foreign body", or else as a poor relation or an anachronistic universe of no apparent utility - or at best as something which could make a museum to which to attract foreigners - but as an integral part of itself. As Professor Ostrowsky reminded us at the Carcerès symposium; "the duty of the town-planner thus consists in trying to find solutions enabling historical units to remain as far as possible unspoiled, while at the same time providing them with Conversely, we feel that the architects responsible for planning the modern quarters of the city should allow - particularly when working out proportions on the basis of volume - for the presence of the ancient historical and traditional quarters.

More than one architect has already tried to use modern means of expression to produce effects similar to those obtained by the builders of ancient towns. The most recent example - Habitat 67, shown at the International Exhibition in Montreal - reminds one irresistibly, though it is perpendicular and not horizontal, of the unit constituted by the medina.

I feel that, to avoid a conflict (which would be detrimental for both sides) between the two urban areas, the one of which bears so strongly the imprint of the past, while the other is suffering from the dizzy Process of modernization, a means must be found at this present stage of reconciling the two in the light of the new ideas.

I shall have the opportunity of showing you an experiment in this direction made by one of our architects, who, when called on to re-design the ruined front of an ancient shop in the very centre of the Sfax medina, chose a resolutely modern solution. Personally I am not at all opposed to the incorporation of a modern building into an ancient urban setting with a character which is highly personal, provided there is harmony. I am, on the contrary, convinced that the resources of architecture and of modern technical progress must be exploited to suit the existent city "landscape", and that a style must thus be created which will be inspired by tradition (in this case, that of Arab architecture) but will not confine itself within a rigid formalism no longer related to any authentic reality.

I do not, however, conceal from myself the fact that in countries like ours, which do not yet possess architects genuinely trained to act as renovators of traditional urban cen-

tres, no steps should be undertaken without the greatest of prudence and any action in the medina must be strictly supervised by the authorities in charge of Historical Monuments.

The somewhat hurried way in which our Symposium was prepared and the recent disturbances in European postal services have prevented me from having a precise picture of the particular problems which speakers wish to bring up.

I trust that some of our own problems will be the same as those of our colleagues and will provide a subject for helpful and constructive discussions.

I wish to thank you for listening to me and I trust our Symposium will be a success.

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archaeological Sites

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