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.” 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. 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.

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

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 Sa’id 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 ‘Ali Pasha Mubarak, two hundred had a local craft production. 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

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