

THE VANISHING BAZAARS OF THE NEAR EAST

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WITH the gradual westernization of the Middle Orient, the bazaars once so characteristic of this region are slowly disappearing. To the traveler these labyrinths of covered passageways have always offered days of delightful meanderings, opportunities to bargain for some desired rug, piece of jewelry, or nick-nack. What memories they hold! Early residents recall the turbaned dealer who sat cross-legged on the raised platform of his small stall with his goods carefully arranged beside him and invoked his blessing upon the passers-by as he invited them to consider his wares.

Buying and selling in the bazaars is an art to be learned and a pleasure to be enjoyed by both the merchant and his customer. Here, there is no rush and hurry as in our stores with their fixed prices, cash registers, and charge accounts. Buying becomes a social event in these countries which enjoy a slower tempo of existence. Coffee, tea, and cigarettes, if the transaction be of any consequence, add a touch to the mere business of buying which is well worth emulating. Woe unto the westerner who must do his shopping in a hurry! Not only must he pay more than the ordinary price but in some cases dealers have no interest in selling to one who will not pass the time of day and do the proper amount of bargaining.

Western shops with their plate-glass windows, standard wares, and machine products have gradually encroached upon the bazaars in Istanbul, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Baghdad. Year by year in Istanbul the quaint inner bazaar, the Bezeistan (Arabic *bazz*, cloth; Persian *istan*, place, marketplace) has more vacant stalls, and one by one the old bewhiskered gentlemen who remember the days of the Sultans are disappearing from their accustomed places. Occasionally other merchants, wearing hats, start up in business but their stock in trade smacks of imported factory-made ware.

In Damascus even the past two years have seen a marked change from native-made to imported machine-made goods. Impetus to this movement was undoubtedly given by the partial destruction of the bazaars during the French bombardment of the city in 1925. Foreign influence in countries under mandates and the cheapness of western goods are partly responsible for this change. Especially



↑ THE COPPER BAZAAR, BAGHDAD
THE EDGE OF THE BAZAARS, ALEPPO

in Baghdad and to some extent throughout the Near East, low price is almost the sole criteria of goods, and quality and artistry receive little consideration. One cause for this may be found in the very low wage scale but another even more important one comes from lack of experience in judging western products. A similar westernization is taking place throughout all of the Near East. The change is most marked in those countries which are nearest the sources of European influence such as the ports on the Mediterranean or which stand, like Persia, at the back door of Russia.

The bazaar is the focal point for a study of the industries and the economics of both the ancient and the modern Near East. Until the introduction of modern transportation, especially the automobile, the East had changed but little in business methods in more than two thousand years. Raw materials came by camel to the great khans of the markets. From there they passed into the hands of the artisans to be converted into figured silks, engraved brasses or embossed leather, formerly so common. The archeologist may still find in the bazaars the key to some of the mysteries constantly encountered in the excavation of ancient cities. From two-thousand-year-old Selercia near Baghdad, we recovered two bone objects shaped like large knives. At right angles to the "cutting" edge were a number of small striations. Speculation was rife as to their use but no conclusion was reached until we happened to see in the bazaar of Mosul an implement exactly like it used by a weaver to push down the threads of the belt he was making. The threads of the warp had made the small striations.

The covered bazaar doubtless owes its origin to the necessity of protecting man and goods against the glaring rays of the semi-tropical sun. In the Near East, light means heat; therefore both residences and bazaars have tiny openings which in America would leave the interior in almost total darkness. The Oriental sun, however, illuminates the long streets of the bazaars with piercing shafts of light along which the tiny motes of dust dance with bewildering quickness. During the occasional rains or in the heat of the midsummer days, curtains or other coverings are placed over the openings. In hot weather the water carrier with his huge skin of water slung over his shoulder sprinkles the streets, ostensibly to keep down the dust and to cool the atmosphere by the rapid evaporation. The most noticeable effect of his labors is the layer of slime underfoot and the increase in the already too present odors.

The narrow streets are crowded with people of every imaginable rank and condition of life. The water seller or purveyor of sweet drinks clangs his cups together as he calls his wares. The elaborate fountain strapped to his back is polished to mirrorlike perfection. From a small refrigerator mounted on wheels, another pedlar dispenses colored ices. Throughout the bazaar in odd corners are itinerant pedlars of oranges and visiting Bedouins with bright colored baskets or brilliant kileems. A tinkle of bells warns of the approach of a string of heavily laden donkeys, plodding along with downcast heads and eyes. The responsibility for avoiding these animals rests on the pedestrian, few of whom care to repeat the experience of being struck from behind by a donkey whose paniers are full of several hundredweight of sand. A patch of sunlight always attracts a beggar who sits nodding in the warmth with begging bowl conveniently placed to receive alms. As the call to prayer echoes through the bazaar, the more devout hurry to the mosque while others who cannot leave their shops cease business transactions for the moment. After lunch, especially in the hot summer, the shops are nearly all deserted, and the few merchants who remain are usually found stretched out in the back of the booth snoring loudly.

Periodically the stalls of the merchants are interrupted by a short passage leading to the courtyard of a great khan. Here is where the wholesale business of the Orient is done. The yard is piled high with bales of goods among which scurry the porters, appearing and reappearing amid the apparent confusion. Around the courtyard are the offices in which business is conducted. The interior of the khan, cut and crisscrossed with the piercing beams of light which but dimly reveal its dingy interior, from the street seems veritably a portion of another world.

As in medieval Europe, the various members of the same trade are grouped together in the same portion of the bazaar. From a distance can be heard the workers in copper and brass as they beat their metals into vessels of every conceivable size and shape. For the people of the Orient, both rich and poor, and also to a large extent for the European colony, copper remains the material for kettles and cooking pots. These are beaten by hand from the sheet metal and then wiped with tin inside and out. When after many months of service this tinning is worn away, the vessels are taken to a special shop where they are reheated and the tin again applied.



THE KNIFE MAKER IN THE IRON BAZAAR, ALEPPO
THE BASKET MAKERS, ALEPPO

The larger kettles are cleaned by a man who stands on the interior and rotates the vessel in a bed of wet sand. As in all the shops of the metal workers, the great double bellows, fastened to the roof, are operated by small apprentices, tiny elves with blackened faces who dart hither and thither—when the master is watching them.

One of the most clever of the metal workers is the *tinikije* who converts five gallon gasoline cans into every conceivable object imaginable, from lanterns to sprinkling cans, from cups to kerosene pumps. For carrying water a collar is soldered around an opening in the top of the gasoline tin, and a metal cover is made to fit this collar.

Near-by are seen the shops of the iron workers, where smoke of countless fires have blackened the interior to a Stygian darkness. Keys, ornamental iron work, wagon fittings or other parts are to be had here if the master of the forge can be found, and a satisfactory price arranged. As with most work which is specially commanded, a sum roughly equivalent to the cost of the materials must be paid in advance. A drawn plan is unknown and many a time we have seized the sledge and tongs in desperation to show what was needed. If a wooden model can be made or a sample secured, the smith will turn out excellent copies at a very small cost. A drawing which shows a top, side, section, and elevation of an object will invariably produce four separate objects while the poor benighted unfortunate who produced a drawing of a tapered piece with six cross sections, received seven pieces of metal.

Further along, the food bazaars display delicacies in profusion to the shoppers, for in season no markets in the world offer more delicious fruits and vegetables than these Near Eastern cities. Figs, dates, oranges, lemons, grapes, and bananas are perhaps the most common of the fruits, while vegetables vary according to the particular locality. Egg plant in shapes unfamiliar to the American eye, as well as kusa or vegetable marrow, is utilized by the common people for their daily dishes, especially for dolma and mahshi. Rice takes the place of potatoes in the diet of the majority of the population. Before many of the booths hang round wire baskets filled with eggs of uncertain age. With modern transportation facilities, meats of all kinds are available in the larger cities although lamb and mutton are most commonly found in the bazaars. There even the essentials of sanitation have not yet penetrated, and meats are usu-

ally black with flies or brilliant orange from clouds of fierce meat-eating wasps whose bite is said to be fatal to man especially when it is received on the temple. In the country districts "lamb" is apparently any animal deliberately killed and not dead of old age. Sheep and goats are to be found everywhere, along the dusty roads or in the busy streets. Chickens, ducks, and turkeys are sold alive by the itinerant merchant who ties their legs and squats behind them as he calls his wares. For anyone who has strayed from the beaten paths, chickens, eggs, and mutton form the staple diet, and long-time dwellers there seldom survive the ordeal without a slight abhorrence of these foods.

Small restaurants are certain to be found near the food markets or at the edge of the bazaar. Before the door the slowly turning vertical spit sends forth its call to all hungry passers-by. Behind the spitted mutton, now a rich brown, are the small horizontal trays with glowing charcoal. Meat is cut in thin slices from the outside only and the remainder left to brown again. Much of the food is prepared near the front of the shop. Here are great tinned copper kettles filled with dolma made of stuffed kusa, tomatoes, or grape leaves. Bowls of leben, glass jars of various sorts of pickles, as well as quantities of pastry are always in evidence.

Especially in Damascus, sweetmeat stalls abound in delicacies. Lacom or Turkish paste is a universal favorite. There are great trays of pastry—pastry made of hundreds of tissue thin sheets and covered with a heavy sugar sirup, and pastry made into thread-like bits which give to the whole the appearance of excelsior are but two of the delicious varieties. Damascus is also famous for its candied fruits. Pastries are especially popular at the celebration ending the long fast of Rammadan when every shop in the bazaar carries many sweets made only at this time.

Bread, ever the staff of life, has a variety of forms, for each section of the Near East makes its own special kind. In Syria it is about the size of a salad plate and consists of two sides with a hollow center, while in Iraq it is usually a single flap about one fourth inch thick. In many places bread is made in great sheets no thicker than blotting paper. Among the poorer classes, bread serves in lieu of plate and table service, and extraordinary dexterity is displayed in eating with a curved piece of bread. With bread, olives, and dates, goat's milk cheese takes its place as one of the most com-



BEANS AND SUGAR, RIHANIE
A NEW DRESS FROM THE RIHANIE BAZAAR

mon foods. Great stacks of small white bundles of cheese are usually accompanied by bowls of leben or yourt, so commonly mentioned by travelers as "sour curds."

The moment the shopper enters the bazaar, especially the food section, the basket boys begin to plague his life until a boy is employed to carry the purchases in a large basket hung on his arm or slung across his back. These "waleds" of the bazaar know all the passing gossip and could give their employers a surprising amount of information about themselves. Once hired, they never forget their benefactor and invoke all the blessings of Allah upon his head in an effort to win his good graces.

The spice bazaar which usually adjoins the food bazaar is re-dolent with all the odors which one associates with visions of the East. Here all manner of spices, herbs, and chemicals are sold to the housewife, merchant, and chemist alike. Salt and sugar may be purchased. The sugar is hung in festoons around the entrance in huge cones wrapped in blue paper. Most of these cone-shaped sugar loaves come from Holland. A small adz, usually of brass, elaborately decorated and occasionally inset with a steel blade is used to break up these flinty sugar loaves into usable size. In this bazaar are also matches, for the most part in boxes of the small safety type. Flint and steel may also be obtained in the spice bazaar as well as *titūn*, a plant, not tobacco, used in water pipes.

Before the depression days, Iraq was an important market for second-hand clothes. Great bales of cast-off apparel were sold in the Baghdad bazaar where people of the country came to bargain for them. The desert folk who worked on the various excavations presented a comical appearance as a result of combining a ladies' evening coat or a frock coat with Bedouin undergarments. Fortunately this trade has largely ended, owing to the fluctuation in exchange and the ready market in America for second-hand clothing. Shops which deal in such clothing usually sell everything imaginable: household goods, bits of glassware, tinned copper kettles, samovars, and plain junk.

Especially in the ten years following the Great War, in Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, second-hand shops presented an astonishing appearance. There practically anything necessary for mankind could be obtained from a railroad train to an airplane. Some houses for archeological expeditions were entirely constructed of materials purchased in such stores.

There is no hobby quite so fascinating as searching for oriental rugs, and while the tourist who is pressed for time goes to the large stores where the rugs are selected and priced accordingly, there is great sport to be had hunting them in out-of-the-way corners of the bazaars. If one has been searching for some particular variety, the appearance of such a rug on the market will quickly bring a rumor to the ear of the prospective purchaser. Usually the quality of the rug is greatly exaggerated but often some totally unexpected treasure is uncovered as the dealer turns over the piles of rugs. Rugs take space to store, and they are often concealed in a back room off the bazaar or on the second story. In a prominent place are kept the coarse inexpensive rugs, brightly colored kileems and kis-kileems, as well as the Mosul or Zakho strip rugs. These rather ordinary products of the oriental looms are sold to those who wish bright colors at an inexpensive price. The more choice values are piled at one side or even stored in a separate room to be brought out on demand or for especially favored customers. Old residents speak of those now almost forgotten days when certain merchants sold their goods on the basis of cost to themselves plus ten percent profit. Nowadays it behooves the purchaser, as well as the merchant, to know the tricks of the trade, the aniline dye, the acid bath, or rotten warp.

Really fine antique rugs have for the most part vanished to markets abroad where they command a higher price than the occasional traveler can afford to pay. Some very fine rugs are now produced in Persia, utilizing ancient designs, fine wools, and excellent workmanship. Time alone will tell whether the new dyes will gradually fade to pleasing and harmonious shades as did the old vegetable colors. Certainly they do not run like the inferior aniline dyes used a few years ago.

The gold and silver bazaars are usually housed in some large enclosure which can be securely locked on days when the bazaar is closed. Here in small booths the workers sit quietly with their simple tools which consist of a small alcohol lamp and blow torch, a tiny charcoal fire and a few drills, pliers, and tongs. Their supply of material is generally small for the bulk of their business is done to order. The samples of their workmanship and stock in trade are usually piled hit or miss in a small glass show case. There one may find bits of Bedouin jewelry and occasionally pieces of the old wheat-



A WEAVER, ALEPPO
A LEATHER STALL, RIHANIE

seed chain although really fine examples are very scarce. With the fall in the price of silver in the past few years, these markets were flooded with Bedouin trinkets which had been exchanged by the ladies of the desert for gold. Today these craftsmen are as accomplished as they were in the heyday of artistic development, but they fail to produce really first-class work because they lack clever designers. There are no such artists as those who once made the famed Persian miniatures and likewise the sketches for the metal workers. The artizans of today are highly skilled and can copy any objects given them with great accuracy, but this will never result in original productions. It is the proud boast of the Amara workers of Baghdad that they can copy in inlaid silver any photograph the customer desires. Would that some friend of man might furnish them with a new view of the Arch of Ctesiphon, the loaded camel, and the boat on the Tigris! Nevertheless, these men now produce almost the only hand work of any note in the city of Baghdad.

Gold and silver are also used in conjunction with other metals, chiefly brass, as in the factories at Damascus, where they are wrought into trays, boxes, and vases. Here the quality of the work, which is now produced almost solely for the tourist trade, has fallen so low that we were unable to locate in the city one artizan who could produce really first-class work such as was common twenty-five years ago. Work in these factories is done under the modern industrial system, employing designers and craftsmen to execute the work with the firm taking charge of the sale and distribution of the finished goods.

Legislation against wearing native garments has had a deleterious effect on the production of local fabrics. In Persia where beautiful camel's hair cloth was woven for abas, the compulsory introduction of western clothes has practically destroyed this industry. Other countries have realized that local cloth weaving was in danger and have attempted to encourage these native trades. Turkey has lately made a successful attempt to stimulate the production of silk goods within her boundaries. With her factories at Brusa and her prohibition of imported silks, materials of unusual beauty have been developed. Syria, without similar protection, has seen the destruction of the silk producing industry in the face of artificial silk. Imported silks from India and Japan fill the silk stalls of many of the bazaars, and there, too, are the Manchester cottons in many

colors. The Oriental lady though entirely garbed in black outer garments has a love of bright and gay colors. Of late the looms of Aleppo are again producing good fabrics in successful competition with imported ones by the use of mixtures of cotton and rayon. Special fabrics, used in abas for winter and summer wear, and belts of bright red are still made, especially in Aleppo and Mosul. In the latter city and in the bazaars of Zakho are to be found the brilliant watered linens which are woven for Kurdish suits. There real craftsmanship exists, for this material is sometimes as fine as handkerchief linen. Special designs are interwoven so that when the cloth is made into costumes, spots of color will be suitably placed on the pockets. All of the spinning and weaving is done in the homes. Thread is made almost entirely by the women while the men weave the larger part of the cloth. The looms are located at ground level, and the warp shifted from below by the feet of the worker who sits in a small pit. Looms, shuttles, and other equipment are all hand made. The watered effect is produced by subjecting the dampened linen to heavy pressure.

The stalls of the leather workers are gay with bright colored materials and decorated with their finished products. In spite of an almost universal prohibition of arms, revolver holsters and heavy cartridge belts with pockets for clips of military cartridges form one of the principle stocks in trade. Leather is dyed red, yellow, or green. The bright red slippers made in Baghdad are one of the few products of that city which find their way across the desert. Quirts and saddles are also to be had in all the stalls, and western luggage is copied with fair results. The major difficulty with local leather is its inadequate tanning which leaves the finished product with the resiliency of rubber, an especially undesirable feature in trunk straps! In Mosul small stone axes exactly similar to those called "prehistoric" by the dealer in antiquities are used for tooling decorations in dampened leather. Here, as everywhere else in the bazaar, blue glass beads are used for decoration and protection against the evil eye. They dangle from the windshield of your car, from the ear of the weary donkey, or from the neck of the newly arrived infant.

Pottery is likely to be sold by many of the stalls which deal in household goods. Rows of sherbas (porous, unglazed drinking jugs) are suspended by the neck around the entrance to the booth. In



THE SIERBA VENDER, BAGHDAD
A CARPENTER AND LATHE, BAGHDAD

Syria these jugs are furnished with a small side spout from which every Syrian becomes expert in drinking without touching his lips to the vessel. This refinement is unknown in modern Mesopotamia, although it was in use there two thousand years ago. Near the edge of the bazaar or not far from it may be found the potter's kiln. The best grades of pottery are made from clay found in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This is brought in and prepared by small boys in a dimly lighted back room of the establishment. The clay is given to the potter in the form of a long cylinder, the size varying with the vessel to be thrown. The wheel which the potters now use is operated by the foot. The potter sits at his task, kicking the lower wheel which thus turns the upper one upon which the clay is thrown. In Iraq the pottery is finished with the wet hand, and only occasionally is a rather poor green glaze applied. After a pot has been completed, it is removed from the wheel with the aid of a piece of string and taken by one of the small boys to the courtyard to dry in the sun.

The kilns are large irregular brick structures which are fired with whatever is available. One of the reasons for the superiority of the Mesopotamian pottery is the quick and very hot fire obtained from the camel thorn which the women gather in great quantities for this purpose. In Aleppo where neither wood nor thorn are available, city refuse is burned with rather poor results as regards both fire and pottery. Fine pottery is seldom made, although in Syria not far from Beirut, a German war veteran is now making a ware which can hardly be distinguished from examples of the best Roman period.

The stalls of the woodworkers almost invariably take a similar pattern in every bazaar. Wood is stored in the rear and the front is occupied by a lathe. This is operated by a bow and leather thong just as many of the carpenter's tools. The left hand of the worker manipulates the bow while the right holds the chisel which is steadied near the point of contact with the work by the toes of one foot. Furniture of all sorts is made. If some model or picture is available really creditable work is done. The chief defects come from improper seasoning of the wood, which causes warping, and from poor gluing and joining, which often result in the furniture falling apart. Drills are made of a square steel rod flattened at one end and ground to a "V"-shaped cutting edge. These are rotated with the bow and



THE POTTER AND HIS WHEEL, BAGHDAD
A KILN IN ALEPPO

cord. Saws which are imported, always cut on the pulling stroke rather than the pushing one as in America. Most of the work which would be done in America in a mill, such as doors, windows, and trim, is made very satisfactorily in the Near East by hand.

Not all bazaars occupy permanent quarters in a large city. In the vicinity of Aleppo there is a traveling bazaar held on a regular schedule, one day in Aleppo, one in Antioch, one in Rihanie, and so on throughout the week. Itinerant venders of cloth, household necessities, or farming tools go out from Aleppo to display their wares in the crowded market places of the smaller cities. In villages such as Rihanie only a minimum of business is done throughout the week, partly because many articles are not available, and partly because prices are much higher than on bazaar days when competition forces closer bargaining. In addition to the professional traders, farmers bring in much produce from countryside villages. Men and women tramp the larger part of the night to arrive early in the morning, for the market is over and visitors homeward bound before the heat of the noonday sun becomes oppressive.

The Near Eastern bazaars, whose origin goes back into the dim past, are rapidly disappearing. Change has come upon the unchanging East. In the vanishing bazaar, the archeologist, the historian, and the economist alike may find clues to much that perplexes them in ancient records. Tomorrow the opportunity will be gone.