

## 'Central Market, Tunis, Tunisia' podcast

### **Leila Ammar, architecture historian at the Tunis National School of Architecture and Urban Planning**

This is the Tunis central market, *Fondouk el Ghalla* in Tunisian, which means the fruit market, and fruit includes fruit and vegetables. *El Ghalla* is everything the earth produces.

The market was built by a leading French architect, Henri Saladin, in 1891, near the main post office and the French station. It still stands in the heart of the city and is remarkable, because there is still a market – even though it is no longer a wholesale, but is now a retail market –, but there is still a large market, very similar to the old Halles covered market in Paris, which is still in the city.

### **Greengrocer at Tunis market**

Yes, it is over 100 years old.

There are photos in the archives. There are even some online. You will find them if you search for central market. You can find online how people just had stalls on the ground.

### **Leila Ammar**

The Medina Conservation Association had the opportunity and responsibility to carry out the refurbishment of the building. That involved conserving the timber structures and market halls, refurbishing the horseshoe arcades, and which has been done with the best interests at heart.

A revamping was needed as the market was rather dilapidated...

### **Customer of the Tunis market**

I think they have done a good job.

The two parts form a whole. It is well sheltered; it is well ventilated... there are no leaks.

### **Greengrocer at Tunis market**

The market was cool even on hot day. The roof was high. The upper part was well ventilated. It was very good.

Even the stalls were made out of cement.

It is not like that today. It was an easy place to work. And the aisles were wide.

It was easy to get around, and you cannot imagine how the gullies hinder the shoppers.

They added this tarp, but the sun still comes in all day. It would have been sunny if you had come in the morning. And it is the same thing when it is raining. Only the areas under the roof are protected.

They have spoiled the market and our trade as well. It was a more pleasant place before.

### **Date seller at Tunis market**

The market is fine and nicely decorated. It has been extended and is well organised. It has been well revamped.

There used to be a very dilapidated roof. Water used to leak through the ceiling. The central market is more spacious and orderly. Timber was used for part the frame, and now there is imported tiling. It is very beautiful and special.

### **Leila Ammar**

The central market is a hot spot of the urban lifestyle and daily life in Tunis. The exit came out by the *Bab el Bahar* or Seagate.

The market is a whole. The ambiance, the atmosphere, the architecture, the inner courtyards, the large timber halls cannot be disentangled from what it means today for the Tunisians, for the city dwellers and the market-goers.

### **Hamza Hayari, lemon seller at Tunis market.**

My name is Hamza Ayari. I work at the central market. We are an old family. Selling lemons is our legacy. I have continued the tradition. I get comfort from my work and my world. The central market is a good place to learn.

The central market is a melting pot of many cultures and stories.

The central market is my livelihood and it is my world.

### **Customer of the Tunis market**

This is Arabic in style, it is similar to the Medina... an Arabic style... they like arches

It is remote: it was in the south at the time of the colonisation

That is what the French built

Particularly the Arab market... they built things as Arabs would.

### **Date seller at Tunis market**

The French were inspired by the architecture of our Medina... the old town... and of Sidi Bou Saïd... like arches... and the Medina has many gates: Bab Jedid Bab Alioua, Bab Souikka Bab Mnara, Bab Jedid... arches have been used for all these entrances... Many gates and doors are still in this style. These shapes can be seen in the hammams in the Medina and the market's arcades!

### **Hamza Hayari, lemon seller at Tunis market.**

The market was built in around 1900. The ways in from the city are along arcades, which means that the engineer designed using the techniques of the Tunisian architects. Tunisian architecture is different to that

found in Algeria or Morocco... We are completely different... the architect who built the market based it on the Bab Al Bahr arch.

**Extract from the article by Leila Ammar, 'Le Fondouk al Ghalla or Tunis central market, accounts of urban planning, city dwelling and ties to the land'», *Mémoire de la terre, le marché comme interface du rural et de l'urbain*, Laboratoire LAA-LAVUE, Paris: ENSA La Villette, 2022**

'I remember my childhood and adolescence with great happiness and when my father often took us to the central market on Sundays. That invigorating walk through the outdoor market, the scents and earthy smells and the fragrances of the bouquets of herbs, pails brimming with live snails in autumn, the ceps and porcini mushrooms that are so rare today, the violets and cyclamen from Hammam-Lif, the gleaming sea of La Goulette, of Bizerte and Kélibia, the passers-by, the new faces, the exciting festive atmosphere, the way the throng and crowds went past the stalls and stores, that was a real delight and source of excitement for the children we were. In 1970s, a young porter would follow us, bent under the weight of a huge oblong esparto basket that was bigger than he was, right to our car parked in Rue du Danemark, where my father would give him a large tip, in the midst of the bird-catchers, chameleon sellers, vats of pickles cluttering up the pavement and stalls selling dates and dried figs. '

#### **Greengrocer at Tunis market**

People were pleased to come as it reminded them of outings with their parents.  
And now people only come to do their shopping.

#### **Date seller at Tunis market**

There used to be the traditional Arabic scales. All the sellers wore an apron. There were many Italians, French and foreigners. I was young and I remember a bell was rung when the market closed.

The central market had its own special and particular atmosphere and charm. The products were not as expensive as today.

There were also basket carriers and many have disappeared.

The market has not changed. It is the people who have changed. The market has not changed... life has changed... the sun rises and sets in the same places... it is us who have changed.