



Food offering
at Jemma-Elfna

MARVELOUS MAROCCO

by Samuel Sondak

The heart of Marrakech is its main square Jemma-El Fna. This unique plaza embraces a multitude of inhabitants and tourists; moreover, it possesses the characteristics not only of a market but those of a theater, circus and restaurant.

Listen to the sound of musicians, the tinkling bell of a water carrier, vendors hawking their wares, chanting storytellers, the squeals of monkeys and watch the acrobats, dancers, jugglers, sword-swallowers, fire-eaters and cobra-tamers, or offer your hand for an elaborate henna design. Last but not least, satisfy your taste buds or placate your hunger pangs from the food offerings. It is best to follow the natives with a "Kebab", which is a skewer of mutton, liver and tiny beef sausages roasted over charcoal embers placed on an open "Kesrah" (a flat, soft bread

complete surprise that the lively and colorful public place means Assembly of the Dead; however, a cruel sultan at the end of 16th century exposed the severed heads of disloyal subjects in this square. The symbol and dominating feature of the city is the magnificent Koutoubia minaret. This lofty tower, measuring 203 feet high and 40 feet square was begun in the year 1158 and completed in 1190 with its topped dome cupola. Inside the Koutoubia mosque only the original inlaid pulpit of 12th century remains but entrance to the interior is forbidden. The immense "medina (medieval section)" – protected by UNESCO – measures more than two square miles that provides other extraordinary sites to visit. In 1030 Ali-ibn-Yusuf built a mosque which began to deteriorate in the 17th century and was finally restored in the early 19th

century; however, the two-storied kiosk Kouba-al-Baroudiyin annex remained under rubble. In 1947 it was discovered about ten feet lower and represents the only original preserved building of the 11th century Almoravid dynasty. The nearby beautiful Islamic edifice Ben Yusuf Medrassa (Institute of Theology and Moslem Law) founded in the 14th century, was completely rebuilt in 1566, has in the prayer hall a 10th century marble basin decorated with heraldic beasts. Bab Agnaou a 12th century horseshoe arch which as a floral decoration with shell-shaped ornamentation and inscription in antique script is the best example of military architecture in the city.

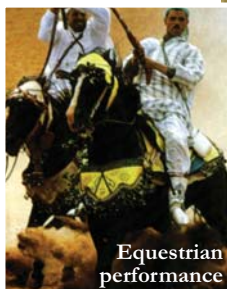
Nearby is the necropolis of the Saadian dynasty that ruled during the 16th and 17th centuries. In two pavilions with a beautiful garden and trees, there are tombs of sultans, their wives and children and more than 100 graves in the courtyard. Civil architecture was exemplified by the late 16th century magnificent Al-Badi palace that with its superb building materials and valuable marbles from Carrara Italy was dismantled at the end of the 17th century. The ruins of this edifice is now an alluring setting for the annual folklore festival and dancing. Other palaces dating from the end of the 19th century are the gaudy Bahia and Dar Si Said. The latter palace is the Museum of Moroccan Arts which exhibits the following: female clothing, kitchen utensils, bronze hammered works, jewelry, Berber arms and carpets. Walking through the



maze of "souks" (places of trade) in the "medina" amidst the throng of people through the narrow streets, is a unique experience. "Souks" are filled with just about everything:slippers, belts, copper and brass objects, jewelry, wicker, leather and wooden objects, foodstuff, embroidered, ribbons, Berber carpets, etc, etc...

The dyers "souk" is particularly striking with its cloths and colored yarn hung out to dry. A lengthy excursion to the Atlantic seaboard provided a rewarding experience. Agadir with its beautiful bay is Morocco's prominent tourist attraction. After the devastating earthquake of 1960 a new town has been built around the port with European assistance. A multitude of new hotels are currently available with construction and urban planning still in process. At a short distance from the city, the first stone was laid 32 years after the earthquake for a new "medina" and is now open for visitation.

It's traditional workshops , glass mosaics, stone buildings, sand dunes and amphitheater recreate an authentic atmosphere. Moreover, a large portion of land has been set aside for a future artificial lake and botanical garden. Essaouira is another lovely seaside resort wich was founded by Hanno, a Carthaginian , prior to the famous Hannibal. Eventually a dye commerce was established to make use of the purple dye extracted from the morex shellfish in the nearby waters.The usage of this dye for the robes of Roman patricians gave rise to its description as the royal purple of the ancients and the common expression " Born to the purple". In the year 1508 the Portuguese conquest took place and the city was renamed "Mogador". A star of David is to be seen over an archway to the "mella" (Jewish quarter), where in 1558 they were restricted to live.. At one time the jews represented 65% of the population while currently 20 families remain and use one if the two ancient synagogues for



prayer. Some artisan shops still exist here and incised wood carvings and intarsia are exported throughout Europe.

At the fish market the air is filled with the aroma of fresh sardines being grilled by vendors.The town's fortifications are notable and some of the cannons have ornamented crowns of the Spanish kings that date from the 18th century. This site was used by the American film director Orson Welles for the shakespearean trajedy Othello. The film won the gold palm award at the Cannes film festival and the city dedicated a public square to honor Welles. In January 2004 Essaouira was bestowed the International Cultural Heritage Award by UNESCO.

Food reigns supreme, which was quite evident, starting with early breakfast at the Sofitel. A vast array of typical products were particularly outstanding such as, the ewes and goat milk cheeses, cantaloupes, nectarines, cherries and the figs - of wich 30 varieties exist in Morocco. - the most prized being "ouazane".

The memorable morning end consisted of "kab el ghaza" (gazelle horn), a sugar coated pastry crescent filled with groud almonds, honey and orange blossom oil, eaten between sips of "atai benaana" /mint tea).

The tea was poured from a copper bot by the erect waiter in a perfect cascading flow.The first dinner relished

by members of the International Federation of Journalists and Travel Writers at its 50th anniversary was offered by his Majesty King Mohamed VI. The meal took place at the hotel Mamounia with the presence of Crown Prince Moulay Rachid.

The grandiose anniverasry celebrationwas offered by "wilaya"(provincial authority) of Marrakech at Ali complex. A typical meal was served under the gigantic tent of Chez Ali. The after dinner digestive turned out to be a spellbinding spectacle known as "Fantasiya". The word "Fantasia" seems eitherSpanish or Italian but actually derives from the Arabic Fantasiya - defined as ostentation - display or exhibition to impress others.In reality, what was witnessed -in the arena of 200 yards in length - represented a display of equestrian perfection with the famed Barbe horse, a species of more than four thousand years ago. Upon hearing the group's chief first cry, the horsemen took off at a gallop while they continued to remain perfectly aligned. The next cry to arms brought the riders rising up elbow to elbow, the aiming of their rifles and then the simultaneous sounds of a trigger click are heard as the horsemen stand up in unison. The final cry to fire-ended with a volley of shots that sounded as only one firing burst.It is no small wonder that this display of color, sound and precision also entranced famous artists the likes of Delacroix and Fromentin to depict the beauty of this spectacle on canvas.

As stated above, the continuance of menu musts to guide Moroccan initiates brings to the forefront "bstila" or "pastilla". "Pastilla" consists of wafer-thin layers of pastry flakelets stuffed with a mixture of pigeon meat, almonds, hard-boiled or scrambled eggs, herbs and spices. This highly calorific specialty represents the apex of Moroccan culinary art and is extremely complicated to prepare.

The city's vast "medina", its public square, "souk", splendid architecture, inimitable cuisine and welcoming inhabitants, is a soul-stirring experience for the tourist from the dawn's glimmer of light to the sunset flare - wich leaves this meaningful message- MARRAKECH is MAGIC !!