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" Patrimonia "



A la découverte du patrimoine historique, architectural et culturel

# *The Kasbah in Mazara del Vallo*



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# ABSTRACT

## *“A multi-faceted people”* *The Kasbah and the Tunisian district*



Mazara del Vallo, home to the oldest Tunisian community in Italy in the Kasbah, is a linguistic laboratory of extraordinary interest. Arrived in the late 1960s to work in the fishing industry, Tunisian immigrants have shared their life with the people of Mazara del Vallo for half a century, in a peaceful coexistence, but not without problems. The Tunisian and Sicilian dialect merges with Italian and French in the linguistic production of speakers who, through this complex repertoire, give voice to a polyphonic identity, able to embrace both sides of the Mediterranean and evoke its extraordinary historical and cultural richness.

## MAZARA DEL VALLO

MAZARA DEL VALLO C is an Italian commune of 51,449 inhabitants in the province of Trapani, Sicily Located on the Mediterranean Sea, at the mouth of the river Mäzaro, it is less than 200 km from the Tunisian coast of Africa North. The old historic center contains many monumental churches, some of which date back to the 11th century.

Thanks to its position, Mazara was one of the most important cities in Sicily throughout the Middle Ages. Four ethnic groups (Latinos, Greeks, Muslims and Jews) have lived in the city, creating four distinct neighbourhoods: Saint Francis, Saint John, Giudecca and Xitta. The first district, that of St. Francis, the Islamic par excellence, today The Kasbah can still be admired here. Thanks to the help of the municipal administration, Tunisians have refurbished their houses, embellished the facades, alleys and majolicas squares.

The term "Kasbah" comes from the Arabic Kasbah meaning "citadel, fortress", to indicate a fortified center, a building surrounded by defensive walls, often crossed by narrow houses overlooking private homes.



The "song of the muezzin" attracts attention, not just prayer. For a few minutes he meets, overlaps and merges with Christian Phomelia. We are in the heart of the Casbah of Mazara del Vallo, in the heart of the Mediterranean mosaic ".  
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## Sicilianized Tunisians

In Mazara del Vallo, the call to prayer straddles the Christian homily and involves the inhabitants and passers-by. For a few minutes, East and West are contaminated to the point of confusion. Mosque and church, adjacent, are located in the heart of the old Arab district, where the first Tunisians settled and where they continue to live. This is a peculiarity of Mazara. It is, perhaps, the only place in all the rest of Italy where there is a call to prayer. The life of the little Sicilian city, yesterday as today, is related to fishing, an art transmitted from father to son. At the end of the 1960s, the demand for labor in the fishing industry attracted thousands of unemployed Maghreb.

“ En Tunisie, nous vivons par la pêche, la plupart des immigrants qui sont arrivés en Sicile ont travaillé en mer et ont fait le travail qu'ils savaient faire. Les nouvelles générations, instruites, espèrent de nouvelles possibilités d'emploi. Hassine T. 28, originaire de Mahdia, est l'une des jeunes qui, après l'école, a trouvé un emploi. « Je suis allé à l'école hôtelière et je travaille dans un restaurant depuis onze ans. Ce métier m'a permis de me faire beaucoup d'amitiés, notamment avec les habitants de Mazara. Maintenant, je passe plus de temps avec eux qu'avec mes compatriotes. Grâce à mon éducation, j'ai pu m'intégrer et j'ai aussi une copine Mazarese”



Inter-culturalism is evident in some meeting places between immigrants and natives. The most famous example is that of a Tunisian restaurant located in the Casbah, run by women from a North African family, is a symbol of women's economic emancipation. The owner arrives in Mazara in 1974.

“After the wedding, my husband and I moved here. When I arrived, I did not know anyone, but here I found a family. She speaks in Sicilian dialect, as he remembers how the idea of the restaurant came from. A few years ago, when my husband had severe paralysis, I decided to open this business. It was difficult, but I am proud because it is a point of aggregation between different cultures, "she confesses. Mother of four, she says she feels perfectly integrated. "My children born and raised in Sicily, when they go to Tunisia, feel like strangers because all their friends are here. Compared to their fathers, second- and third-generation youth are more likely to share spaces and a situation with their Sicilian peers.” (from a true story)



Mazara del Vallo is home to around 3,000 immigrants, mainly from the Maghreb, who has been employed for more than 25 years in fishing, agriculture and handicrafts activities in the city. They reside mainly in the historic city center of the typically Arab footprint. Tunisian immigration to Sicily started towards the late 1970s.

Despite the Norman transformation, the city still retains many distinctive features of the Arab-Berber culture. The most obvious sign is the Islamic print of the road to the ancient Arab city called Kasbah: alleys, small and winding streets that leave many yards, where accesses to homes are open.

*Muezzin\*: personne chargée de l'appel à la prière aux fidèles*

