

# JOURNAL ASIATIQUE

OU

## RECUEIL DE MÉMOIRES, D'EXTRAITS ET DE NOTICES

RELATIFS À L'HISTOIRE, À LA PHILOSOPHIE, AUX LANGUES  
ET À LA LITTÉRATURE DES PEUPLES ORIENTAUX;

RÉDIGÉ PAR MM.

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A L'IMPRIMERIE ROYALE.

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# DESCRIPTION DE L'AFRIQUE,

PAR IBN-HAUCAL;

Traduite de l'arabe par M. le baron MAC GUCKIN DE SLANE.

Description of Africa

By Ibn-Haucal

Translated from the Arabic by M. le Baron Mac Guckin de Slane

Wikipedia:

**Muḥammad Abū'l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal** (Arabic: محمد أبو القاسم بن حوقل, born in Nisibis<sup>+</sup> travelled 943-969 CE) was a 10th century Muslim writer, geographer, and chronicler. His famous work, written in 977, is called *Ṣūrat al-'Arḍ* (صورة الارض; "The face of the Earth").

(pp171-172) .

VIII.

Sfax, <sup>1</sup>سفاقس SUFAKOS.

Oils and olives are the main products **غلات** of Sfax, through which it prevails over all other cities, despite being hit in his prosperity as a result of the war. Even today sixty or seventy bushels [*kafiz*] of olives are sold for a gold coin [*dinar*]. Sfax is located on the sea and has a well sheltered port; <sup>2</sup> it is surrounded by a stone wall that has very strong iron gates, and contains several very crowded bazaars and a few buildings surrounded by walls and intended to serve as ribats <sup>3</sup>. Grapes are rare, and they bring the fruits they need from Gabes. They drink water from cisterns **مواجن**. In the quiet waters of the harbor they catch a lot of fish using a gord (or pole enclosure) from which the fish cannot escape (*once entered*). <sup>1</sup> The houses in the town are built of stone and lime. <sup>2</sup> Sfax is two days journey from Mehdiya and is under the command of a governor appointed by the sovereign (Soltan).

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Footnotes: p.171 (by the translator, Baron Mac Guckin de Slane.)

1 The name of *Sfax* or *Syphax* is also written **صفاقس**. The argument is without foundation that it derives from an Arabic word which means cucumber. It is Shaw who first gave this derivation, but the traveler knew Arabic very imperfectly, and had no idea that this name, its form, could not belong to any Arabic root. Sir Grenville Temple, writes it as **اسفقص**, a word whose spelling is entirely false, and that is not in any Arab writer. (See Excursions in the Mediterranean, vol. I, p. 141) He also reproduces the alleged derivation of names put forward by Shaw.

2 In the letter, "A port whose waters are dead: **ميت البلد مرسي**\*

3 **محارس مبنية للرباط** See Note No. 6.

Footnotes : p.172

1. Fishing is still practiced in the same way in the vicinity of Gabes. (See the voyage of Sir Grenville Temple, Vol. II, p.139)

2. I read **الجير** in place of **الجيز**. This first lesson is found in the description of Tifasch. (See below, no.77. The word **جيسر** is used by Abdallatif with the meaning that I give here.)