

DESCRIPTION

DE

L'AFRIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE,

PAR EL-BEKRI,

TRADUITE

PAR MAC GUCKIN DE SLANE.



PARIS.

IMPRIMERIE IMPÉRIALE.

M DCCC LIX.

ROUTE FROM CABES TO SFAX.

From Cabes one goes to AÏN EZ-ZEITOUNA “the fountain of the olive-trees”, a source of running water which runs near a stagnant sea, and which is controlled by a body of guard belonging to the administration which receives the taxes of Ifrîkiya. In the books containing the predictions (*el-hadethan*) which refer to this country, one finds allusions to Ain ez-Zeitouna.

In a poem composed by Ibn-Aakeb, making known the events which were to take place in this country, one finds the following verse:

When the army makes halt close to Ain ez-Zeitouna, the cursed events will take place there.

From there one arrives at TAOURGHA ¹, a very busy post located on the edge of the Sahel [or littoral] from Ez-Zeitouna; then one goes to GHAFEC, an area which contains a considerable population; then to SFAX, a seaboard town

⁵⁰surrounded by a wall and containing a great number of bazaars, several mosques and a *djamé*. The wall of Sfax is built out of stones and bricks. This city has baths, caravanserais, extensive suburbs, a crowd of *cosour* “country houses”, several strong forts and some ribats, located on the edge of the sea.

The most famous of these last establishments is that which bears the name of MAHRÈS-BOTOUÏA “the body of guard of Botouïa ¹”.

There is a very high minaret there, to the top of which one ascends by a staircase of one hundred sixty-six steps. The others ribats are the MAHRÈS-HÂBELA, MAHRÈS ABI-'L-GHOSN, the MAHRÈS-MACDEMAN, MAHRÈS EL-LOUZA “guardpost of the almond”, and MAHRÈS ER-RÏHANA “guardpost of

the myrtle”. Sfax is surrounded by a beautiful forest of date palms. The oil made there is exported to Egypt, the Maghreb, Sicily and Europe (*Roum*); sometimes one can buy forty arrobas of them, in measures of Cordoba, for a *mithcal* ².

² *Arrobe*, in Arabic *er-robâ*, that is to say a *quart*, weighs twentyfive pounds (“livres”) and forms a quarter of a *kintar* «quintal». The *mithcal* or *dinar* of gold can be valued at ten francs.

The port of Sfax is very busy; at low tide the ships

rest on the mud; then, when the tide comes in, they refloat ³. The traders arrive there from all sides with large

⁵¹sums of money which they use to purchase oils and other goods. In the art of making felt and giving it a shine, the inhabitants of Sfax follow the methods employed in Alexandria, but they exceed the manufacturers of that city in the excellence and quantity of their products. In the sea,

opposite Sfax, is a named island KERKINNA, which occupies the center d' EL-CASÎR ¹. It is located ten miles from Sfax, in this dead and shallow sea where the surface is never agitated. Opposite this place and with at the entrance of Casîr, a

¹ The word *casir* (*brevis*) is used here as Virgile used the equivalent in Latin, to identify the Petite Syrte and its shallow waters:

..... Très Eurus ab alto,
In brevia et Syrtes urget.
(*Æn.* lib. I, v. 110.)

high house ² has been built in the sea, at the distance of approximately forty (sic) miles from the continent. Navigators coming from Alexandria, Syria and Barca, try to recognize the center of this building; then they make the turn and from it enter

² *House* or *villa*, in Arabic *beit*. It seems to be a tower which is raised up at the extreme north of the group of islands called *Kerkinna* or *Cercinna*. This edifice is indicated by the word *Elbeit* on the Catalan map, a document which carries the date of 1375.

¹ *Taourgha* means *yellow* and *ant-hill* in the Berber language.
J. As. Extract n°11. (1858.)

¹ The Botouïa, a Berber people, live in the Moroccan Rif, but groups of them are found in several localities in northern Africa. Nowadays they are with the ancient *Arzeu*.

³ The ancient historians and geographers, Greek as well as Roman, Arab geographers and European travelers are in agreement in observing the phenomenon of the tides in the Petite Syrte [Gulf of Gabes].

waters which are well known to them. Kerkinna contains some remains of old constructions and several cisterns. As this island is very fertile, the inhabitants of Sfax send their cattle to it to feed.

ROUTE DE SFAX À CAIROUAN.

From Sfax one goes to TORFA, then to CASR-
52 RIAH³, a locality as well populated as the
preceding one; from there one follows the road as
far as in Cairouan.

3 Variant M, *Rebah*. The map of the Regency of Tunis, drawn up at the War Department, gives us *Casr-Rih* at eight miles north of Sfax.

ROUTE DE SFAX À EL-MEHDIYA.

De Sfax one goes to LEDJEM, castle of Kahena¹. This building marks the limit of SOUC EL-HOCEINI "the market of the descendants of El-Hocein", the area in which the market is held is near a large and populous borough named AROZLÈS², which has a djamê, a bath and some bazaars. This locality is included in the number of boroughs of the littoral (*Sahel*). De Ledjem one goes to EL-MEHDIYA.

1 The amphitheatre of Ledjem [El Djem] is all that remains to us of the ancient town of *Tysdrus* or *Tusdrus*. We possess a description of this monument by Desfontaines, another by Sir Grenville Temple, and a third by Dr Barth. For the history of La Kahena one can consult the *Histoire des Berbers*, tr. fr. vol. I, passim, and vol. III, p. 191 and following.

2 Variant P, *Azorles*.

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PARIS. IMPRIMERIE IMPÉRIALE.

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Description de l'Afrique septentrionale
par El-Bekri ;
traduite par Mac Guckin de Slane

Author : al-Bakrī, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz Abū 'Ubayd (1040-1094)

Translator : Mac Guckin de Slane, William (1801-1878). (Traducteur)

Description of Northern African, by El-Bekri(1040-1094),
translated by William Mac Guckin de Slane (1801-1878).

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