

PEYSSONNEL AND DESFONTAINES

VOYAGES

IN THE REGENCES

OF TUNIS AND ALGERIA

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Chapter IV
(pp98-135)

I left Tunis towards the beginning of July 1784. The growing season had then passed; but I hoped to be compensated for my sorrows by collecting seeds, insects and other natural products. I was at ease also to see the richest and most populous part of the kingdom, where one can find a great number of ruins and beautiful monuments which today still proclaim the ancient splendor. The bey had granted me letters of introduction for the caïds or governors of the places I was to visit, with a sufficient escort so
99 that I had nothing to fear from Arab Bedouins, always ready to rob travelers, and who would give even less grace to a Christian than to any other.

I embarked on my route about midday following the coast of the sea, from which I moved away only very seldom during the course of my voyage. The first evening after my departure, I slept a few miles beyond the baths of Mamelif [`Hammam Lif'], at the entry of a large plain which extends from north to south, between mountains of a moderate elevation where, during winter, several brooks rise to sprinkle and fertilize it. It contains three small towns. The largest is Soliman. The second is named Crombalia: this one is five miles south of Mamelif. Lastly, the third, which bears the name of Turki, is located at one mile south of Crombalia. These cities, which would better deserve the title of village, offers nothing of interest. One there finds neither ruins, nor any monument which attests to
100 their ancestry. The surroundings are sown with corn and are embellished with gardens planted with olive-trees, pomegranates, orange trees and myrtles.

Some miles beyond Turki, we entered a broad wood where the wild olive-trees, carob trees, cypresses, and yews, etc, gave us a little shade and freshness: I say a little, because the trees, in all the southernmost part of the kingdom, if one excludes the olive-tree, mainly resemble shrubs, and the pines themselves, that one sees in our forests rising to the height of 80 or 100 feet, here hardly reach 15 to 20 in elevation.

The wood of which I speak extends along the edge of the sea as far as the vicinity of Hammamet. I was no further from this city than about a mile

and half, when I diverted my route to the southwest, to see the ruins that the Arabs call Czar-el-Zeit. Shaw [footnote: Vol.. I, p. 206, tr. fr. The English traveler names this Cassir-Aseite place.] think with reason that
101 they are the ruins of ancient *Siagitana*, and, indeed, the Arabs today still call the part of the wood which borders them *Hangar-el-Siagitana*, or wood of Siagitana. I also transcribed in Hammamet two inscriptions engraved on stones which formed the door post of a house, where one reads the name of Siagitana. The owner had assured me that they had been brought from the terrain where the ruins are. Here are the inscriptions:

VICTORIAE ARMENIACAE PARTHICAR MEDICAE

AVGVSTORVM A. SACRVM CIVITAS SIAGITANA

DD. PP.

IMP. CAES. DIVI SEPTIMI SEVERI PARTH.

ARABICI ADIABETANICI MAX. BRIT. MAX.

FIL. DIVI M. ANTONINI PII GERMANICI

SARMAT. NEPOT. DIVI AELII HADRIANI

ABNEPOTI DIYI TRAIANI PAR. ET DIVI

NERVAE ADNEPOTI M. AVRELIO ANTONINO

PIO. FEL. PAR. MAX. BRIT. MAX. GERM.

MAX. IMP. III. COS IIII PP....

CIVITAS SIAGITAMORVM

DD. PP.

It was two hours after midday when I arrived at Hammamet. The
102 excessive heat to which I had been exposed during the time of the day
when it is felt most strongly, had made me suffer and had exhausted my
strength. I rested a little, then I employed the remainder of the day in
visiting the interior and surroundings of the city. It is located on the
seashore, at the point of an low and extremely narrow isthmus. When
looked at from a distance it seems that it is built in the middle of the water.
Otherwise, this city does not offer anything which deserves the attention of
the travelers. Some columns, some marble capitals taken from the ruins of
Siagitana, are the only ancient remnants that I observed there. The houses
are in flat roofed, and only have one floor as in all Barbary. The streets are
so narrow that two people can hardly walk side by side. The enclosing wall
is quite well built and may be one mile in circumference. It is seventeen
miles from Tunis to Hammamet. The surroundings have a pleasant aspect;
all the nearby countryside is covered with beautiful olive-trees which
provide the main wealth of the country. There is a big industry there in oil,
103 olives, and even barley and wheat, when the winter rains are abundant
enough to produce a rich harvest.

The gulf of Hammamet reaches inland by more than ten miles. It is
strewn with rocks and shallows which make navigation from there
dangerous, especially in the vicinity of the coast: also it is only small
commercial ships that can come in to Hammamet; and still they are
obliged moor offshore. The gulf is only sheltered against winds from the
north. Those from the east and from the southwest sometimes blow with
so much power, producing severe storms there.

I left Hammamet about the middle of the night, so as to avoid the heat
of the day, and I continued to follow the edge of the sea. After an hour of
walking, I came to a place covered in ruins whose outlines I could only see
vaguely then, because it was dark; but having had the leisure to observe
them on my return, I could only see stone heaps and old walls which
occupy a considerable extent of ground. This place is called *Labiad* or *the*
104 *White*, because is in the vicinity the white sand heaps up like snow, so that
it can be seen from a distance. A little beyond the ruins, at some distance
from the sea on the west, there is a large tower whose walls are extremely

thick. I think that in the past it was used to light fires to guide the navigators during the night. The Arabs call it Bourg-el-Menarah, Tower of the Lantern. It is a work of the Romans, as is indicated by the inscriptions engraved on the stones at the top of this tower, inscriptions that Shaw had transcribed [footnote: Vol. I, p. 207, tr. fr.]. They are no longer there today: all the upper part of the Menarah, as is seen engraved in the voyage of Shaw, was demolished by the Arabs, who take pleasure and make it even an act of religion to destroy and demolish all the old monuments, because they look to them like the work of Christians. A little further, we passed an old bridge of several arches; it appears to also be from the time of the Romans. At this point, we diverted our road towards the west, moving directly away from the sea and, after having walked during more than two
105 hours through a broad sandy plain, we arrived at the foot of the mountains where the ruins of ancient *Aphrodisium* can be found, that the Moors still today call Phradise. They are located on a type of high platform somewhat inclined on the side east. This place is surrounded by deep ravines, and is dominated to the north and south by escarpments of rocks that conceal it from sight. The ruins may be two miles and a half in circumference. Almost all the buildings are demolished; but it is easy to judge by the small number of those which have resisted the damage of time, from the beauty of the stones, the alignment and the width of the streets, that Aphrodisium was a very beautiful city. The most beautiful monument that I observed among these ruins is a large arch from 50 to 60 feet high, under which a brook of fresh water runs which has its source a little further. Its facade is decorated with four beautiful Corinthian columns, and on each side there is a niche whose top is surmounted by a broad shell carved in bas-relief. I
106 believe that the monument was used for decoration of a public fountain. By encircling the base of the mountains from east to south, I also discovered the ruins of an old port at the edge of an immense lake, which then was almost dry. It appears that the vessels entered there formerly. People of the country have told me that it was filled with water during the winter, and that, in that season, it is connected with the sea by a broad mouth that they call *Halc-el-Ouet*, Mouth of the River.

The mountains of Phradise are inhabited by Bedouin Arabs who have the reputation of being great robbers. Curiosity attracted them towards us in great number. They were told that I was one of the doctors of the bey; they did not show any bad intention towards us; several even led us and showed us the way with much kindness.

Phradise is, from its situation, one of the most beautiful places than I saw in Barbary. All the surroundings offer a host of charming landscapes: the rock rose, rosemary, lavenders, and several other scented shrubs
107 cover the mountains, while the myrtle, the mastic tree and the rose laurel shade the small valleys and the brooks.

After having visited the ruins, we walked to the south through the mountains, on a very rough path alongside deep ravines where the fear of falling with my mule made me get down and walk. We went down gradually into the plain, and at two o'clock in the afternoon, we reached Herkla: this is a small town built at the seaside, on a stony eminence that one can see from a distance. Herkla is approximately five miles to the south-east of Phradise, and eight south of Hammamet. One sees some ancient ruins there, including an old and partly demolished castle, whose walls were built solidly in beautiful stones of some size. The surroundings of Herkla produce barley, corn, durrah wheat, grapes, figs and excellent melons. The inhabitants are very insolent towards foreigners: because, in spite of the orders of the bey, which I carried with me and that I showed them, I received a very poor reception. This country is not at all defended. The
108 corsairs of Malta often withdrew near to Herkla to find shelter from the storms and to water there. I was told that they sometimes landed during the night, to [ask for help] from the caravans which come and go continually from Tunis to Sfax, which is very easy for a determined people who know the country. The corsairs of Malta are extremely feared along the coast of Barbary; they come sometimes as far as the harbor of Carthage to seize the Tunisian's boats. In the time of Ali-bey, the father of the one who rules today, during the night they burned, in the anchorage of Oporto-Farina, a great number of corsairs belonging to the regency. The Berbers don't dare attack the Maltese, at least unless they are higher in

number and in strength: because more than once they have tested their courage to their cost.

I passed a very bad night in Herkla, in an inn which the fashion of the country calls a *Fondouk*. The following day, I left for Suse very early. We
109 skirted the shore of the sea alongside an immense sandy and uncultivated plain, where I collected seeds of a pretty and thorny nitraria with dark and thick leaves ¹.

Two hours after our departure, we
crossed the mouth of a big lake which, in the
110 rainy season, connects with the Mediterranean, and where the inhabitants of Herkla will fish when the heat evaporates the water. About a mile and a half before Suse, I drew aside from the sea shore for a distance of nearly three miles, to see the ruins of Ekouda [footnote: 1 Cowda (Shaw.); Koudiah. (L.)]. My curiosity was well poorly satisfied: I found only heaps of stones; an old castle

almost entirely demolished is the only building of which there remain some remains. Very close d' Ekouda is a small village called Hammam, inhabited by several Moorish families. I arrived at Suse around one hour after midday. The heat of the sun reflected by sands, on which I had consistently walked, made me suffer much during this day: I felt pains stinging my hands, face, and my eyelids were so swollen that I had difficulty to see. I was obliged to rest for a day and half, to regain my strength and to be in a position to continue my voyage.

The town of Suse is approximately 34 miles distant from Tunis; it is located on the eastern slope of a hill. It is one of the bigger cities of the
111 kingdom. The walls which surround it have a circumference of at least two and a half miles; they are well built, and defended by a great number of cannon pieces of different gauges. To the left of the city, very close to a marabout, there is small tower that one hardly sees and whose batteries are at sea level. They have placed there, since the last war with the

1 (p.109) Here is the description :

Nitraria tridentata.

Stalks. Furnished with long spines, curved towards the ground, from three to four feet long —

Leaves. Alternating, glaucous, whole, fleshy, wedge-shaped, supported by a very short petiole, three lines (?) broad by three to four long. —

Flowers. Small, laid out in corymbes as long as the stalks. — *Chalice*. Strong, crowned with five small teeth. — *Corolla*. Divided into five white petals, linear, rounded, open. Each flower contains

twelve or fifteen stamens a little longer than the petals. — *Filets*. Thin, a little separated. —

Anther. Very small, divided into two parts. —

Stile. Short, ending with a sharp stigma. — *Seed*.

Larger than the flower; it becomes an oval berry, red, soft, 3 'lines' (?) long ; it contains a triangular seed, elongated, furrowed on the face.

Venetians, a very large canon, which could undoubtedly greatly harm the vessels which would approach to bombard the place or to capture it.

The interior of the city does not offer anything curious. The bazaars are clean and well arched; the mosques are rather beautiful: I was told that the majority of the stones which were used to build them had been brought; from Ekouda. I also saw in Suse several columns that the Moors were using to support the corners of their houses and to decorate the facade. The number of people in the streets is so large, that one can hardly move. The inhabitants are very honest towards Christians, which undoubtedly comes from the practice that they have seeing and trading with them. In
112 Suse they manufacture many fabrics which are sold at a cheap rate; their greater defect is that they are not beaten enough. Around the city there are immense plantations of olive-trees. The French traders buy a lot of oil there, which they send to Marseilles for the soap factories. Also in Suse there is a considerable trade in wool, pottery, shoes and fabrics in the style of the country.

The gulf may be five or six miles wide; it extends, on the south, as far as Mnestir. The largest vessels can approach very close to the city; but they are exposed to all the violence of the east wind, which from time to time blows very strongly all along the coast of Barbary; Very close to the city, to the north, I saw the walls of an old port which was built in a half-moon in the middle of water. They were almost entirely demolished by the continual buffeting of the waves. I only found one inscription in Suse: even then it was so faint that I could only decipher some a few words.

Four miles south-east is Mnestir, which the French corrupt as
113 *Monastier*. This is still quite a considerable coastal town, located at the end of a spit of land which projects more than one mile into the sea. The city is surrounded by a very good wall and, from a distance, it offers a pretty view. The nearby countryside is planted with beautiful olive-trees which each year produce a wealth of olives. I have been told that navigation is dangerous in the vicinity of Mnestir, especially on the south side, because of the rocks and the shallows with which the gulf is strewn. Three hours after our departure from Mnestir, we passed the ruins of Lempta. This city,

that Shaw [footnote: 1 Tom. I, p. 237, tr. fr] takes for *Leptis Parva* of the ancients, was located on the coast, in a relatively low place.

It has been destroyed completely: nothing remains except pieces of stones which occupy an area of a thousand and a half of circumference. One mile south of Lempta is the village of Touboulbe, pleasantly located on a slope which dominates the sea. There are also ruins in the vicinity. At a little distance beyond Touboulbe we entered a large sandy plain where I
114 experience the strongest heat that I ever felt: my thermometer, placed on the sand, rose to 45 degrees. I arrived at the ruins of Dimess overcome with tiredness, along with my traveling companions. Fortunately we met an Arab there who showed us some fig trees in the shade of which we rested for some time. He brought us some extremely bad water; I drank it with as much pleasure as if it had been excellent, finding myself very happy, because I was extremely tormented with thirst and our supply was finished.

The ruins of Dimess ¹, which is the ancient Thapsus, are about a half-mile away from the sea. They occupy a considerable area at the edge of a large sandy and arid
115 plain. One sees many heaps and scattered stones there, old walls, several underground vaults. To the west of the ruins there are twenty-five cisterns located parallel beside each other. Each one is approximately a hundred steps long and five or six broad; their vertical height was approximately eight or ten feet. The vaults are almost all collapsed; only the side walls remain in their entirety; some vestiges of the aqueduct which led water to it can be found, with difficulty. In Dimess the most remarkable feature that I found is a large mole which projects more than a hundred step into the sea: it is an extremely solid work, built from stones of various sizes, and cemented together with mortar that is as hard as the stones. The water has nevertheless undermined it imperceptibly, and even detached some very large stones in many places, and especially towards the point.

¹ Colonel Lapie, who, to make these maps, has borrowed from Shaw, writes the name of this town as Demas, in the English way; but it must be pronounced Dimess.

Four miles south of Dimess, is the small town of Africa, that the Arabs also call El-Mehedia, located in a place relatively low above the sea. I did not dare to enter, because it is considered holy by the Moslems: I was afraid of being insulted by the rabble there. I saw some ruins from a

distance which I was told were those of an old port. Around Africa there
116 are some very large plantations of olive-trees, the most beautiful and best
cultivated that I have seen in Africa.

All the part of the coast that extends from Suse as far as seven or eight
miles beyond El-Mehedia is indisputably the most fertile of the kingdom: it
produces an abundance of olives, wheat, barley, durra (sorghum), and
corn. For a few years now they have also cultivated indigo and cotton; but
not yet in enough quantity to be able to make an overseas trade of it. It
would be difficult to find a region more fertile, and which was at the same
time amenable to a cultivation as varied as that of which I speak.

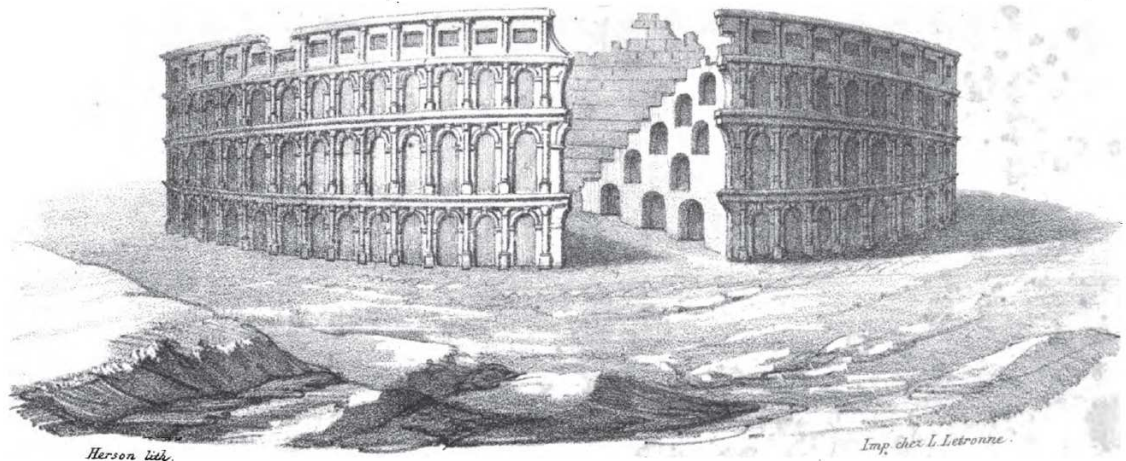
The corn and the durra (sorghum), that are cultivated widely in the
southernmost part of the kingdom, are usually sown in April. One is often
obliged to sprinkle them, from the time when the seed is sown until the
time of harvest. To do this, the Arabs dig wells in the vicinity of the fields:
because streams are extremely rare in all these regions. They use camels
117 or mules to raise the water, with large leather buckets attached to the end
of a cord which passes over a mobile pulley, suspended from two large
poles placed obliquely at each side of the well, so that they will cross a few
feet above the opening. The camel or mule, in moving away from the well,
lifts the buckets filled with water, and when the animal approaches, they go
down to the bottom of the well by their own weight. The Moors still use a
very simple means for the same purpose. A camel turns a wheel placed
over the well. While turning, it rotates a continuous cord around which are
attached, at equal distances, earthenware vases which will unceasingly
draw the water, to pour it into a tank from where it is distributed by different
conduits leading into the cultivated fields. Almost all the water along the
coast is brackish, and the inhabitants of the cities only drink water from
cisterns. From that, one can well imagine what value is placed on a source
of fresh and pure water in a country where it is so rare to find, and where
118 the use of any fermented liquor is rigorously prohibited by religion and the
law.

I moved away from the coast a little beyond Africa, to go to the ruins of
El-Gem, which are approximately eight miles away towards the west. I
traveled during the night, under a beautiful moonlight, and arrived at El-

Gem at four o'clock in the morning. I spent one day whole there, in order to visit the ruins at leisure.

119 El-Gem is a sizeable village located in the middle of an immense plain, 55 miles to the south of Tunis, and 15 miles north of Sfax; it appears that it is the ancient Thysdrus. This place is famous for its beautiful amphitheatre, which still remains almost in its entirety. It is a vast building in the form of an oval, that is believed to have been built by one of Gordians of Africa. Its greater diameter is 180 paces and smallest 150, including the thickness of the walls. If one does the subtraction to calculate the interior dimensions, then there will be 120 paces for the largest and the smallest diameter will be 90. The walls rise to approximately 110 feet; they are divided into three levels, and at each level there are two large interior galleries which make the tour of the amphitheatre in parallel. It is pierced by 240 windows laid out in four rows, and separated from each other by a column. The seats were arranged circularly in steps, from arena to the top of the building, in a way that it could contain an immense quantity of spectators. Below the walls there are large arched underground chambers, undoubtedly containing the animals intended for the engagements; perhaps they were used at the same time as rest areas for the gladiators. In the center of the arena one sees a large circular hole: I would believe that it supported the foot of the awning. The amphitheatre d' El-Gem is the most beautiful ancient monument that I have yet seen in Barbary, and it appears worthy to me of all of the magnificence and the genius of the Romans. In El-Gem one often finds medals and antiques; I was told that English travelers had in the past taken very beautiful marble statues from there. I bought a small white marble head of Diane; she is beautiful in form; but the figure is spoiled a little.

In the original the picture
is opposite page 118



AMPHITHEATRE D'EL-JEM.

Hauteur 120 pieds. Diamètre 400.

120 The ruins of the old city are about a mile distant from the amphitheatre; all the buildings have been entirely demolished. The surroundings of El-Gem are fruitful in olives, corn and the various fruits of the country. The Arabs of these regions were formerly great robbers; but the good discipline of the governor of Sfax has put an end to their armed robberies. It often happens in Barbary that the Arabs rob the travelers, but at least is it rather rare they commit assassinations. The Regencies have established a law which is very good to prevent such disorders: when a man was assassinated and the culprit cannot be discovered, then all the neighbors of the place where the assassination was done are made to pay forty or fifty thousand piastres. If this law is not in accordance with the full rigor of justice, at least it is an excellent means to contain the Arabs, and to commit them to take care about their conduct in turn: because the punishment which reaches the purse is for them the cruelest of all.

121 The land surrounding El-Gem contains much salpetre: the people of the country said they obtain it at up to eighteen pounds per quintal [a quintal was 100 pounds – “livres,” in French]. This is their process. With bricks or stones they build a circular pit in the shape of well, three or four feet in diameter and an equal depth. This pit is pierced with an opening low at one side by where it connects with another smaller cavity dug lower than the opening in question. At the bottom of the large pit they put several stones on which they stretch some small tree branches, or the leaves and

the stems of esparto in the form of a carpet. After having thrown in the saltpetre impregnated earth, mixed with straw cut into small pieces, they pour water on it on several occasions over two or three days; it dissolves the salt of nitre [nitrate] and deposit it in the lower cavity. They put this water in boilers, and, after it has released, by boiling, the foreign bodies that it contained, they put it in a different vessel and let it cool; then the saltpetre crystallizes and attaches to the walls of the vessel. Since it is not yet quite pure after this operation, it is boiled a second time and even a third, always in a fresh water, after which it becomes as white and as well crystallized as that of France. They make gunpowder from it which is much less than valued that of Europe, because in effect it does not have as much force.

I left El-Gem very early in the morning to return to Sfax. We walked for eight or nine hours through a large uncultivated and uninhabited plain, where one finds here and there some thickets of olive-trees the majority of which fall from being overripe. Sometimes they are used as rest by the nomadic Arabs that it would be dangerous to meet, if one was not well armed and in sufficient number to put up a fight.

Sfax is a very large commercial city located at the edge of the Little Syrte, in a flat and sandy location: it is prettiest of the kingdom, and the only one whose streets are paved. It is encircled by a high wall very well built. The inhabitants are more civilized there than anywhere else. They live in comfortably and peacefully enjoy the fruit of their industry, an appreciable blessing and quite rare in Barbary, which they owe to the
123 kindness and the justice of their governor. The richest citizens pass part of the year in their gardens, where they have very pleasant country houses. One can put their number at more than 8,000

The countryside of Sfax produces barley, durra (sorghum), corn, figs, grapes, good pistachios, water melons in abundance and the best melons in all Barbary. Trade goes on there, in oil, barille [a soda ash plant, or *saltwort*], sponges that are fished in the Kerkines islands, wools almost as fine and as valued as those of Spain. Unfortunately the sheep are prone from time to time to diseases which cause great numbers to perish. These diseases usually reign in autumn and at the beginning of winter. People of

the country believe they are caused by digestive defects: indeed, in this season, the countryside is absolutely arid, and no one has any food but a little straw to give them.

124 The saltwort traded in Sfax grows along the edge of the sea. The Arabs identify it vaguely into seven or eight different plants that they confuse, all or partly. These plants are *Salicornia Fructicosa*, *Salicornia Herbacea*, *Salsola Kali*, with another species of this kind which is unknown to me, *Atriplex Halimus*, *Artiplex portulacoïdes*, *Mesembrianthemum Lopticum* and *Zigophillum Simplex*, very common in these regions. They let these plants dry by two thirds after having cut them, then they pile them up in pits dug in the ground and they set them fire; the salt which is released from the plants falls to the bottom from the pit, and comes together in a solid mass.

In Sfax they manufacture the most valued and most beautiful fabrics in all Barbary. They are fine and are sold at a cheap rate. The only defect that one can reproach them with is of not being a tight enough weave. They also build a great number of boats which carry trade along the coast, and some small corsairs which will cross to the coasts of Italy, where they sometimes make rich prizes. There is no other city in the kingdom that has as much industry as Sfax. The inhabitants are gentle and extremely polite towards foreigners. The governor, in particular, gave me many marks of friendship; I can even say that he made a pleasure of anticipating all my
125 wishes, and that this is the man from whom I received the most courtesies since I came to Barbary. In the vicinity of Sfax I collected the seeds of several rare plants. I also dried the branches of a pretty shrub which is similar to *Chrysocoma*, and whose leaves and flowers emit a very pleasant odor.

The rains in these regions only fall during winter; they are brought there by the north winds. As in all Barbary, the water of the wells is bitter and brackish, and one only drinks from the cistern. The countryside of Sfax is sandy, and the heat would be excessive without a breeze which comes up every morning about nine o'clock, and which lasts part of the afternoon.

The Little Syrte may be thirty miles wide; it extends from Capoudia as far as island of Djerba. The sea has little depth throughout the extent of the

Syrte, and the shore is almost at sea level. Navigation there is not sure, because of the sand banks with which the gulf is strewn; the commercial ships which come to Sfax are obliged to moor one mile away from the shore, although they have no shelter against the winds. They are there nevertheless in safety: the shallow depth of the Syrte ensures that the sea there is never violently agitated, even by the most impetuous winds. There are incoming and outgoing tides in small Syrte. I had infinite sorrows to obtain from the governor permission to measure the tides; and even then I could not obtain the precision which I wished: rumors of the imminent arrival of the Venetians had thrown terror in all the country, and it was necessary to take many precautions to avoid being discovered. Afterwards many entreaties, the governor granted me a man in his confidence with whom I measured the water. On July 20, at midday, it is around this hour that the tide is at its highest point, I planted a pole in the sea, close to the anchors of a boat. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the water had decreased by five feet two inches. On August first, the day of the new moon, I planted the same pole that I had previously used into the sea for a second time, and, about six o'clock hours, the water had risen seven feet and a few inches. I have been told that, at the time of the equinoxes, they rise as much as nine feet, and that the tides were even larger in the vicinity of the island of Djerba, 24 miles to the south of Sfax. I could not know as precisely as I had wished the moment of the day when the tide is at its highest point; I can however be sure that it is about midday. It is quite constant, from after these observations, that there is a very marked rise and fall in the Little Syrte [footnote: This fact is already mentioned by Strabon, XVII, 15, p. 834, Ed. Casaubon. (Note of Desfont.)], although it is hardly felt 25 miles further north. People of the country can benefit from it to catch fish: they put trays on the sand, in the lowest places where the water recedes the most slowly. The fish come with sea water, and, when it is recedes, the trays prevent them from following the course of the water.

To the east of Sfax, about eight miles away, there are two small islands close to each other, named Kerkines, of which largest may have six to seven miles in circumference. These islands are relatively low above the surface of the sea; they can nevertheless be seen from Sfax when the

horizon is clear. They produce olives, barley, poor quality dates, because the heat is not enough strong to mature them. The inhabitants of these islands are dressed differently from other Arabs. They fish for sponges, very common around their territory. To do this, they make use of long poles fixed with an iron hook, by the means of which they detach them from the rocks to which they adhere. When one draws them from the water, they are covered with a fine and transparent film, and it is a curious spectacle to see as all their parts are moving. They hide them in manure or under the ground for a few days, in order to kill the small animals which are in them. Then they wash them to release the foreign bodies, and to make them lose the odor that they exhale. As they are sold by weight, often, after
129 having cleaned them, they replace some of the sand in order to make them heavier; but this trickery is easy to discover [footnote: It is, however, not less used because of that; one finds proof of it in almost all sponges of lower quality.].

Following the edges of the Syrte on the west, one arrives at the ruins of Tina [footnote: Thaine or Thaini. (Sw. L.)] approximately three miles distant from Sfax. These ruins occupy a rather wide space in a place of small hills. They offers nothing of interest: the inhabitants of Sfax removed the most beautiful stones from them to build their houses. There is, close to Tina, an old port where the sea no longer comes today. The Arabs believe that the Maltese originated in this place.

During my stay in Sfax, I was still to see the ruins of Inschla [footnote: Inshilla or Inchilla. (Sw. L.)] ; these are five miles northeast of Sfax. There is nothing remarkable to be seen except a large building in the form of a square, internally supported by 24 beautiful white marble columns veined
130 in blue, on one of which I saw a cross in low relief. The surroundings of Inschla are inhabited by Bedouins who appear extremely miserable. To the north of Inschla, at a little distance, is the small village called Gibiniana, around which can be seen beautiful plantations of olive-trees.

The rhus [sumac] with leaves of hawthorn grows in abundance along the edges of the Syrte, and in all the southernmost part of the kingdom. Its bark has the property to dye in red; the Arabs trade it. They eat also the

fruit of this tree when it is ripe; it is also used to make a kind of *limone* which they drink with pleasure.

You know, Sir, that Lotophages formerly lived along the edges of the Syrtes, and that these people were thus named because they ate the fruit of the *lotus* [footnote: Voy. Strabon, XVII, 15, p. 834.]. I would have rather wished to be able to discover this interesting tree; but, despite all the research that I made to recognize it, I could not succeed. Descriptions that I read in some old authors that I have in my the hands, are too vague for
131 one to know which tree they were speaking of, nor even to which order of plants it belongs. Shaw thinks that the lotus is a wild species of jujube tree

that the Arabs call *sidra*¹, which grows along the Syrtes and in all the southernmost part of the kingdom of Tunis. If this shrub is the *lotus*, it is quite necessary that its fruit is as delicious as Pliny says: *Lotus tam dulci ibi cibo ut nomen terræ gentis dederit, nimis hospitali advenarum oblivione patrîæ* [footnote: Plin. XIII, 22, Ed.

1 See. Shaw, Vol. I, p. 292 etc.. The inhabitants of Sfax sell the fruit from *Sidra* in the public market. They say that it nourishes them [autrefois]. They eat this fruit and make lemonade from it. This small tree is found in almost all the plains which neighbor the desert, and in those between Sfax and Tunis. (Note of Desfontaines.)

Hardi.]. There is on the edges of the desert, and particularly in the Gerid, another species of jujube tree with broad leaves whose fruit is larger and has a taste more pleasant than that of the *sidra*, and that may have a better claim to be the *lotus*, according to what was said by Pliny. Perhaps it
132 will be possible for me to shed some light on this subject when I am within range to research in the various old authors who mentioned this tree so precious and so interesting to know¹. It is quite difficult to imagine that the species no longer exists in regions where it had been so prolific formerly.

1 The Records of the ACademy of Sciences (Les Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences) include a curious work of Desfontaines on the *Lotus* and the Lotophages ; we will provide it following the description of his voyage.

The island of Gerba is approximately twenty-four miles to the southwest of Sfax. I could find

no favorable occasion to go there. I have been told that it is very fertile, and that the people who live there have a rather pleasant life. This island is still subject to the regency of Tunis. I have also formed the project; to go as far as Gâbes, on the border of the kingdom of Tripoli. The governor of Sfax assured me that this voyage was dangerous, because the Arabs of these

regions are untamed and extremely wretched. The season of the plants being passed, I determined without much sorrow to give up my intention.

133 I requested from Arab travelers the names and the distances from the places which are between Sfax and Tripoli: I gives the list here. I left for Tunis the 8th of August, and arrived there the 18th of the same month, quite tired from the excessive heats that I had experience during the course of my voyage.

Names and distances from the cities, villages and ruins which are found along the coast, from Tunis as far as Gabes, on the border of the kingdom of Tripoli, in Barbary.

Common miles.

Tunis.

(The Réamur scale is 4/5 of Celsius.)

3 Mamelif, hot baths at 32° Réamur . (32° Réamur would be 40° Celsius.)

2 Soliman, city.

3 Crombalia, not very considerable city.

1 Turki, small town.

4 Czar el Zeit, ruins of the ancient *Siagitana*.

1 Hammamet, coastal town.

1 Labiad, ruins.

1 Menarah, large tower built by the Romans.

3 Phradise, very beautiful distant ruins about 4 miles the sea; this is the ancient *Aphrodisium*.

5 Herkla, a large village with ruins, perhaps ancient Hadrumetum.

134 7 Ekouda, ruins.

½ Hammam, small village.

1 Suse, maritime big city.

1½ Aouin Sahalin, a small village about a mile from the sea.

2 Mnestir, considerable city.

1 Krounis, small village at some distance from the sea.

½ Xiba, small village.

½ Lempta, expansive ruins; this is *Leptis Parva* of old.

½ Saieba, village.

- ½ Bou-a-Jear, village with ruins, one mile from the sea.
 1 Touboulbe, village, ruins.
 1 Bratta, village at some distance from the coast.
 1 Dimess, wide ruins; this is the ancient Thapsus.
 3 Africa, small town.
 8 El-Gem, village about 8 miles west of Africa, a place famous for its beautiful amphitheatre; this is the ancient Thysdrus.
 10 Salletto, ruins.
 3 Elalia, considerable ruins; this is the ancient Achola.
 2 Soursef, village approximately 2 miles from the sea.
 2 Capoule, the ancient *Caput-Vada*.
 2 Menainesch, village.
 2 Gibiniana, village two miles from the sea.
 1 Inschla, considerable ruins; this is the old *Usilla*.
 5 Sfax, large maritime city.
 3 Tina, expansive ruins; this is the Thenae of old.

Names and distances between places, a list which was given to me by an Arab traveler.

Miles.

- Tina.
 5 Méheress, small village.
 7 Wodran, river; it dries up in summer.
 3 Sidi Medeb, marabout.
 7 Metouinia, village.
 3 Mentzel, village. There is a river which passes between Mentzel and Ziara, which does not dry up in summer. It takes its source about two miles to the west, close to an inhabited place named *Chenini*.
 ½ Ziara village.
 7 Hammam, hot baths, ruins,
 1 Zarat, village.
 6 Gegim, village.
- Gâbbes {

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TOME SECOND.

PARIS ,

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