

DANIEL PANZAC

# BARBARY CORSAIRS

*The End of a Legend 1800-1820*

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY VICTORIA HOBSON  
AND COMPLETED BY JOHN E. HAWKES



From 1516 to 1830, the Barbary corsairs dominated the Ottoman provinces of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. The years between 1800-1820 were crucial. Until 1805, a spectacular revival of privateering allows the author to present the men, the practices and the results gained by the privateers. From 1805 to 1814, the Maghreb states gave up a great part of privateering on behalf of transportation and seaborne trade, taking advantage of their neutrality during the Napoleonic wars. The peace in 1814 and the internal weaknesses of the regencies carried away this original attempt. After Lord Exmouth's expedition in 1816, for the first time since three centuries, the Maghreb is prohibited from any seaborne activities and under the mercy of Europe.

Barbary Corsairs: the end of a legend, 1800-1820

Daniel Panzac, Brill Academic Publishers, 2004

[http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_dyeFP5Hyc4C](http://books.google.com/books?id=_dyeFP5Hyc4C)

Chapter Two  
OF SHIPS AND MEN  
p59-60

Apart from eight cases in which the ships were fitted out by anonymous (and perhaps collective) 'individuals', the 508 others, are designated by name and number twenty-seven: thirteen of these appear only once or, rarely, twice, and can therefore be considered very occasional participants. The fourteen others were much more active; especially seven of them, because by themselves they supplied 430 of the vessels that were equipped by individuals. i.e., 83.5% of the total. These fourteen individuals belonged to two social groups that were closely connected. First of all, there were several important, merchants: Salali Bugdir, who fitted out nine ships: Mohammed Koptan eleven; and especially Ahmed and Yûnis Ben Yûnis, who equipped thirty-six corsairs. But most of the fitting out of vessels to be used for privateering was done by highly-placed people with important official functions: Mohammed Hodja, *amîn el-Tersane* (director of the arsenal) with seven ships; Ahmed Hodja, *kiaya* (governor) of Bizerta. six: Mohammed Hodja, *kiaya* of Porto-Farina, 43, Hassan N'ouira, *kaïd* of Monastir. 8, Mohammed el-Ayashi. also *kaïd* of Monastir, 31. Also found are members of the great families, like that of Mahmoud Gelluli, *kaïd* of Sfax and then Sousse, with 98 corsairs, and the Ben Ayed family - Mustafa. Regeb, *kaïd* of Djerba. and also, Mohammed—who by themselves sent 78 ships on corsair campaigns. These men, who founded their fortunes on trade and farming out taxes found privateering a profitable investment—at least until 1805. Representative was Yussuf *sâhib at-tabaa*, the bey's keeper of the seals, with 127 vessels, was the biggest owner of corsair ships in the regency.

p60 Fitting out corsair ships thus represented one branch of their activities, one likely to be abandoned if others, including maritime activities, turned out more profitable and more reliable – which is what happened from 1806 on.

All the Algerian corsairs set out from Algiers and all of those from Tripoli took to the sea from the port of Tripoli, but their Tunisian counterparts had seven different bases, Naturally Goletta—the true port of Tunis at the entrance to the lagoon – was the busiest by far, with 525 departures (75,2%) of which 182 were underwritten by the beylik, and the other 353 at the initiative of private individuals, A quarter of the departures on corsair campaigns, however, were from half a dozen other Tunisian ports: Bizerta, 13 departures. Djerba, 28, Monastir, 29, Porto-Farina, 12, Sfax, 75 and Sousse, 16. They reflect the involvement of their governors in the sphere of corsair activities: each gave preferential treatment to the city placed under his authority. The

eight ships fitted out by Hassan Nouria, *kaïd* of Monastir, set out from his own port. Out of 98 corsairs chartered by Mahmoud Gelluli, 75 were from Sfax where he was *kaïd*, 12 from Sousse, where he also became governor, and 17 from Goletta, The 13 corsair ships equipped by Regeb Ben Ayed all left from Djerba where he was *kaïd*, as did 13 others chartered by one of his relatives, Ahmed Ben Ayed.

- - -

p71 Soldiers and naval artillery under the orders of an *aga*, who had the rank of *bulukbashi*, an officer of the militia with a rank equivalent to captain, assisted by *odabashis*, noncommissioned officers, sergeants, and by *wakilal-kharj*, a kind of noncommissioned officer responsible for stores. We do not know how the soldiers were allocated aboard the ships, but we can speculate as follows: although there were many men on all types of ships, the numbers seem particularly high on the mixed ships, xebecks, feluccas and galliots: tactically nimble ships that sat low in the water, and for and for which boarding was certainly the main way, if not the only way, to seize a merchant ship. These were surely the vessels on which the largest groups of janissaries served. The high-sided ships, corvettes and especially frigates which were more tricky to manoeuvre, overcame their prey by the simple threat of opening fire, and by their great size, so that a ship under so that a ship under attack could not even contemplate resisting. Doubtless the janissaries were less numerous on these ships, because less necessary.

All this information is related to Algiers, where the janissaries constituted the majority of the armed forces. On the other hand, although it is likely that a segment of the on-board troops in Tunis came from their ranks, the rest would have come from among the local soldiers. Furthermore, we have seen that some of the owners of corsair ships of the Tunis regency lived in the provinces, particularly in Djerba, Monastir, Sousse and Sfax, where the garrisons of janissaries were small, even non-existent as in Sfax, the second corsair port of the regency. Since there were almost no Turkish janissaries left in Tripoli, its naval infantry was of entirely local origin. Like the sailors, the janissaries and soldiers on board the ships received the same pay they received on land. In 1788 the starting pay for the soldiers of the militia of Algiers was 1¾ pataque-chiques every other month; three months later the figure was doubled, and then it increased every year until it reached the highest pay of 24 *pataques* every other month. As for sailors, the attraction of serving on a corsair ship was the prospect of captures and the hope of a share in the booty.

- - -

Many things had changed for the Barbary corsairs since the last years of the eighteenth century: in particular, the possibility now open of frequenting the European ports including—and we might be tempted to say especially – the port of Malta, as is shown in the registers of their health authorities. Between 1801 and 1807, nine corsair ships, two Algerian and seven Tunisian, passed through Barcelona, and a corsair from Tripoli came to Leghorn in 1809 in order to deliver the French consul. But it was Malta that the corsairs frequented most. In fifteen years, from July 1801, the date of the reopening of the port, to February 1816, 66 North African corsair ships were registered by the Maltese health authorities: four Algerian, 38 Tunisian and 24 Tripolitan. This frequentation differed from year to year, going from nine ships in 1801 and 1810, to eight in 1804, six in 1808, five in 1809, three in 1806, then two a year from 1812 to 1815, and down to just one in 1807, 1811 and 1816. Altogether, this presence reveals the changing patterns in corsair activities that we have already described: from 1801 to 1805 there were 34 visits, and only 32 from 1806 to 1816.

The register provides details of the purposes of these stopovers for a number of the ships, shedding a little light on the practice and the pressures of corsair life. The corsair ships, which were usually fast, were used on several occasions to carry the official mail of the regencies.<sup>9</sup> But the principal reason given for the visits to the port of Malta was the need to take on supplies, especially water, cited a dozen times, and food, four times, as these ships, which were often quite cramped, usually had large crews. The ships also came to Malta when in need of repairs: on 3 November 1802, Ahmed el-Kelibi, master of a xebeck with a crew of 45 men that had set out from Sfax, dropped anchor in the port to seek repairs after sustaining damage during a storm.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Heading out from Tripoli on 31 March 108, the xebeck of the *raïs* Omar Chelly arrived in Malta on 2 April with mail for the English governor of the island. On 19 July it was the Algerian *raïs* Ibrahim's turn to bring the dispatches. N.L.M. 813-3.

<sup>10</sup> The list of departures of corsair ships from Tunis shows that on 10 October 1802, the *raïs* Ahmed el-Kelibi, commander of an eight-cannon xebeck belonging to Mahmoud Gelluli, left Sfax on a campaign with 50 men aboard. Grandchamp, *op. cit.*, 1957.

Chapter Five  
THE ECONOMIC ACTORS: THE CARRIERS  
p144-146

p144 In 1788, twelve French ships in Tunis took on board from 50 to 250 pilgrims each. for passage to Alexandria. In addition to these activities were the irregular but steady relations with Tripoli, based chiefly on the shipment of cereals in times of shortage due to poor harvests in one or another of the regencies.

The family archives of the merchants of Sfax, the major southern port, confirm this type of trade and the preeminence of the ties with Alexandria, which were far more significant than those with Smyrna and Istanbul. Sfax exported agricultural goods from its hinterland (oil, almonds, pistachios, butter and also products from its fishing industry (octopi and sponges) as well as woven goods from Kairouan. Imports were very varied: from Egypt came linen, spun cotton thread, rice and various types of fabric; Anatolia provided textiles, tobacco, iron bars, pottery, weapons. This trade, which resembles that of Tunis, but in provincial mode, illustrates the dynamism of the merchants of the city, some of whom reached national if not international stature, like the Gellulis.

Allowing for the gaps in information on the one hand, and the wide variations noted on the other, it is very difficult to estimate the overall value of the commercial activities of Tunis; but we can still hazard some hazard some figures to give an idea of the scale of business:

- Trade with the Ottoman Empire: In 1782, imports from Alexandria were estimated at 1,549,000 Tours livres (francs), and 1,050,000 in 1783: with exports at 1,500,000 livres and 1,164,000 livres, respectively. If we remember that trade with Alexandria mobilised half of the ships linking Tunis to the rest of the Ottoman Empire, we can safely double these figures. Annual imports as well as exports would therefore have come to between two and three million livres, i.e. from four to six million in total, with a reasonable average of five million.

p145 *The European Monopoly*

In 1788 around two hundred merchant ships entered and departed from the port of Tunis-Goletta, i.e. four hundred ship movements. The activity of the port of Tripoli attracted a hundred ships a year, i.e., two hundred movements. We lack satisfactory data for Algiers, but it is not unreasonable to assume that the frequentation of ships in this port was roughly the same as that of Tripoli. To these regional capitals we must add the more limited traffic in the secondary ports, such as Bona in the regency of Algiers; Bizerta, Monastir, Sousse and Sfax in the regency of

Tunis; and Misurata, Derna and Bengazi in the Tripoli regency. We can safely estimate that five hundred commercial ships stopped over every year in the ports of the Maghreb at the end of the eighteenth century. This figure concerns only large vessels on medium- or long-distance voyages, to the exclusion of the small coasters and fishing boats that also participated, within a restricted radius, in the activities of these ports.

In 1788 for Tunis, out of the 184 registered ships, 148 were French, 26 Ragusan and 10 Imperial.<sup>4</sup> According to the chancellor of the British consulate, 92 ships made a stopover in Tripoli in 1765: 46 were French, seven English, three Dutch, two Danish, one Swedish,

4 The absence of Venetian ships, which were active elsewhere, was due to the war between the Regency of Tunis and the Serene (Venetian) Republic from 1784 to 1792.

six Venetian, eighteen Ragusan, one Neapolitan, six Albanian and two Greek-Ottoman. From 1766 to 1777, the Arab merchants of Sfax chartered 103 ships. We know the flags of 61 of these: 30 were French, nine Ragusan, three Swedish, two Venetian, two English, one Spanish and five Ottoman. Although irregular, these figures reveal that the North African ports were almost exclusively frequented by European vessels, whatever their home ports or destinations. Of the numerous flags flown by the ships stopping over in the Maghreb, the French one appeared by far most frequently, representing 80.4% of the ships in Tunis in 1788, 50% in Tripoli in 1765 and 63.9% in Sfax. The second flag in order of frequency was that of the small republic of Ragusa, respectively 14.1%, 19.6% and 14.8%.

On the other hand, there is no record of any merchant ship from the Maghreb and very few Ottoman, or Levantine, vessels. None were present in Tunis, but eight were listed in Tripoli, including Albanian ones, or 8.7% of the ships, and five in Sfax, 8.2% of the total.<sup>6</sup> For a coastal region which, through its corsairs, had long exercised an attraction for and displayed its competence in maritime activities, the absence of merchant ships flying the flag of the regencies is surprising. This absence is of course the result of the North Africans choice of corsair activities over trade, for reasons already given. But if privateering prospered in the seventeenth century, it was much less profitable later, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century, when it was in the process of becoming a minor activity. The existence of substantial maritime trade in the Maghreb ought to have promote the development of a local merchant marine, but no such thing occurred, in spite of the fact that the different peace treaties and commercial agreements signed by the regencies with the European slates provided for reciprocity in the form of mutual respect for each other's ships and merchants.

p151 The most active Muslims charterers dominated the trade with the Ottoman Empire. Ahmed Bariani from Tripoli in Barbary chartered four out of five of the ships headed for Tripoli: Ahmed as-Sallâmi, from Sfax, in choosing his destinations, also favoured his birthplace. The four others who chartered ships belonged to two large families: the Ben Ayeds, natives of Djerba, Ahmed and Regeb – the chief customs officer in Tunis – chartered eleven ships, in partnership,

p152

separately, or with other merchants, with Djerba as their almost exclusive destination. Only the Ben Yûnises, Tûnis and Ahmed seemed to demonstrate a broader vision of a maritime trade extending to the whole Ottoman Empire. They alone chartered twelve ships; four of which went to Djerba, three to Tripoli (Barbary), three to Alexandria with pilgrims for Mecca, and two to Istanbul.

- - -

p158 There remains the group that will be the most important from now on. the Muslims. There are 42 names of Muslims who chartered 106 ships. As with the other groups, the great majority, 31 out of 42, appear in the records just once: five chartered two ships, one a year; only six of them, with at least three corsairs each, demonstrated sustained activity during this period.

First of all there was the bey himself, who chartered five vessels, for reasons that were sometimes diplomatic – such as the ship he sent to Algeria – but also for commercial purposes, like the ones hired for such destinations as Modon, Prevesa or Tabarka. Ahmed Ben Ali Kassem, *wâkil* (representative) of the pasha of Tripoli in Tunis, chartered three ships, two bound for Tripoli and one for Genoa. initiating the at-least partial reorientation of the trade of the Tunisian merchants. This can also be seen in a change in the activities of one of the most important personalities of the regency, Mahmoud Gelluli, kaïd of Sfax. who chartered seven ships: three bound for Alexandria, one for Barcelona, and three for Marseilles. Soliman Ben Hadj had lost interest in all but European destinations, Barcelona and especially Marseilles. The same was true of Soliman Melameli Bachamba, whose five, chartered ships went to Genoa, Marseilles, Naples and Leghorn.

And finally, there was that exceptional figure in the chartering business, Yûnis Ben Yûnis, who hired 41 ships in 21 months. Three of them were for a period of several months. which enabled him to have ships available at all times. The others went out all over the Mediterranean: five to Alexandria, six to Smyrna, one to Derna and one to Tangiers, i.e., thirteen ships serving the Islamic world. Simultaneously, one ship went to Trieste, one to Barcelona, one to Malta, one

to Mahon, four to Genoa, five to Leghorn and twelve to Marseilles: 25 ships in all, voyaging over Europe. The commercial orientations of Yûnis Ben Yûnis in the very early years of the nineteenth century — one third in contracts for the Orient, two thirds for the West, perfectly reflect the new directions of the Regency of Tunis, and of the Maghreb as a whole. Admittedly these tendencies had existed before the French Revolution, but there was a new politic: adding to their former domination of trade in the east, the merchants of the Regency of Tunis would now attempt to obtain a share of the European market.

- - -

### *Tunis*

p180 Unfortunately the information concerning Tunis is very limited, as well as disparate. In 1811, 67 ships flying the English flag arrived in the Regency of Tunis, 50 in Tunis, eleven in Sousse, five in Sfax and one in Monastir, though we do not know what ports they left from.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, 14 ships left Tunis for Europe, for the ports of the French Empire or those of allies like the Kingdom of Naples. These figures reveal the recent increase of English maritime presence in Tunisia, and the spectacular decrease of the French. Our details concerning the French come from various quarterly statistical reports on the movements of French ships in Tunis, which were sent to Paris by the French Consul in the years 1809 to 1814.

11 Public Record Office,  
London, F.O. 77

- - -

### p192 *The Regency of Tunis*

Three Tunisian ports had ongoing relations with Malta:

- *Sfax*: 22 references to food products, twelve to dates, seven to dried octopi, two to cereals and one to oil: 21 references to raw materials, including six to coal, six to wool, one to sponges and eight to a finished product, soap.
- *Sousse*: 47 references in all, of which 23 are to food products, nine to oil, six to cereals, three to beans, two to semolina and one to dates: in addition, there are 21 references to soap.
- *Tunis*: The references (88) are more numerous and more diversified. There are nine references to cattle on the hoof, then 42 to agricultural products: 16 to cereals, nine to oil, seven to beans, five to dates, to which we must add the references to hazelnuts, semolina and olives.

There are also 17 references to raw materials, seven to leather, six to wool, but also to barilla and to wax. Finally we should mention 20 references to finished products; including nine to soap, seven to hats, two to paper, one to woollen fabrics and one to angora wool shawls.

It therefore appears that Malta received a significant amount of food supplies from the Maghreb. Products from livestock farming and agriculture exported by the two regencies represented 69% of the references to cargo for the regency of Tripoli, and 55.4% for Tunisia. They furnished mainly livestock, cereals, olive oil and dates. It can be seen that the five North African ports were relatively specialised: Bengazi exported mostly livestock, oil came from Tunisia (especially Sousse), dates came particularly from Tripoli and Sfax, wheat from Tripoli and Tunis. Although raw materials – wool, wax, leather – came from almost everywhere, we should notice the importance of articles made in Tunis, especially the ‘Tunis-style hats’, and soap from Sousse. The presence of cotton, shawls, woollen fabrics and paper is finally a reminder of the role of these ports in re-exporting goods. Once again, taking advantage of international circumstances, the North African ports managed to adapt, thanks to their seamen and their entrepreneurs. The next chapter describes the vessels, their crews and voyages in detail.

## Chapter 7

p193

### THE SHIPS

We have attempted here to assess the size and composition of the commercial fleets of the Maghreb at their moment of greatest activity, the years 1808 to 1810. To produce these figures, given the total lack of overall statistics, we have made use of the sources that do exist—the registers of the health authorities of the European ports, charter contracts, records of movements in the ports, local chronicles. Considering the unevenness of the available sources, the figures presented here are likely to be closer to the reality for the fleets of Tunis and Tripoli than for those of Algiers and Morocco, which were surely much larger than we give here. In any case, we are dealing with lower-than-real figures, since a part of the shipping activity difficult to estimate is unknown to us, in particular, those ships that frequented only the ports of the Levant, and whose charters were based on oral contracts or written contracts that were not registered.

The fleets were mainly composed of fifteen types of ships. Among them are the three most widely represented, the xebecks, polaccas, and brigantines, which could serve for corsair activities as well for trade, and were in use throughout the Mediterranean. The choice of ship of the Maghrebi sailors was influenced above all by local traditions, by their different objectives, and by the availability of the vessels. It is apparent that the xebeck, with its sleek lines, its

p194 reputation for speed—admittedly at the expense of its carrying capacity, was the preferred choice of the North Africans. It is true that the xebeck served in privateering and at least a percentage of the ships aligned to shipping merchandise were converted corsairs, with somewhat reduced gunpower and much smaller crews.

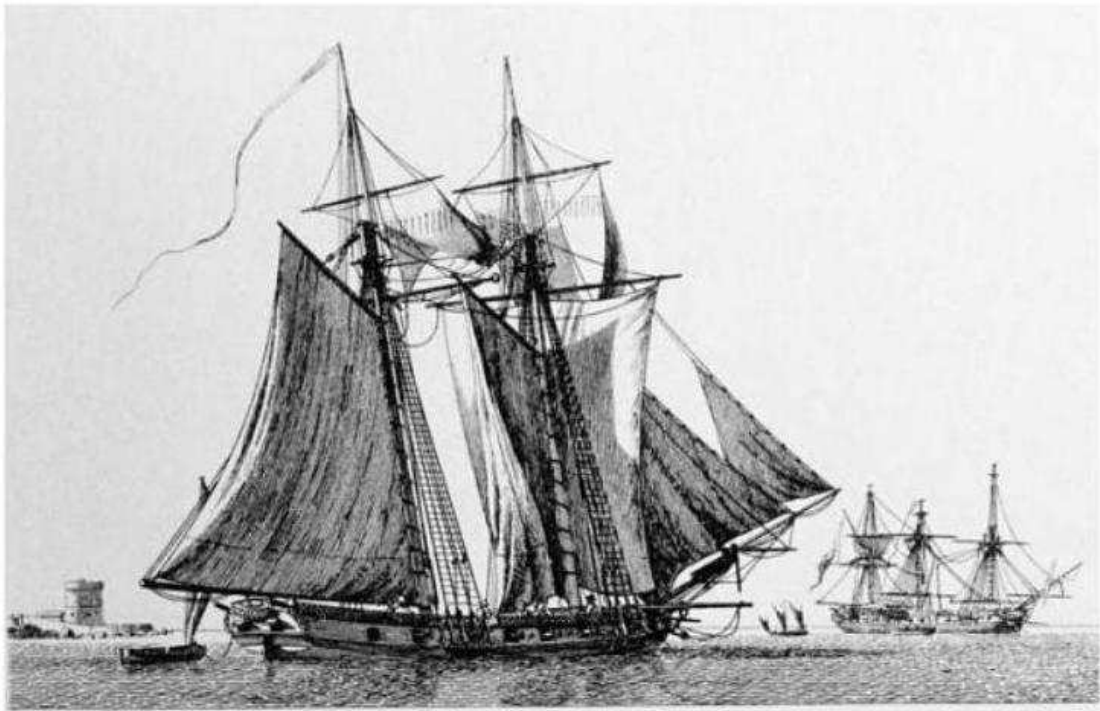
*The Maghrebi commercial fleets (1808-1810)*

Type	Total	Morocco	Algiers	Tunis	Tripoli
Bombard	3			2	1
Brigantine	19	3	2	11	3
Xebeck	40	8	3	17	12
Chitia	2				2
Corvette	2		1		1
Cutter I	1			1	
Felucca	2		2		
Schooner	8	1	3	4	
Martingana	1			1	
Pink	4	1	3		
Polacca	39	2	6	14	17
Sander	1			1	
Sereau	3	2	1		
Tartan	5	1	1	1	2
Trabacolo	4			1	3
Vessel	6		2	4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>42</b>

The *rais* Küтчük Ali Arnaout commanded a twelve-cannon brig that carried a crew of 60 when it set out on a corsair campaign. In 1809 its outfitter, the beylik of Tunis, entrusted it with a commercial mission, probably to the Levant, with its crew reduced to 25 and its artillery down to eight cannons. Hassan Morali was the captain of a 14-cannon polacca with a crew that numbered 60 men when he was on campaign but only 35 when he shipped merchandise from Tunis to Marseilles in October 1809. And there was Soliman Arnaout, who went to *Civitavecchia* on 17 September 1813 with an 18-cannon xebeck and a crew of only 25. when he would have taken at least a hundred for privateering.

Other ships in use were acquired through the numerous captures brought off by the corsairs, which, as we have seen, formed a significant trade in itself. On 21 December 1805, Mahmoud p200 Gelluli, *kaïd* of Sfax and Sousse, through his agent Abraham Setbon, sold a captured Neapolitan polacca to Captain Lichiardopulo, a Russian of obvious Greek origin. On the First of February 1806, he sold a captured Neapolitan xebeck to a Sicilian captain, and on 15 June of the same year, he sold another xebeck that had been captured by one of his ships to an Ottoman, Niccolo

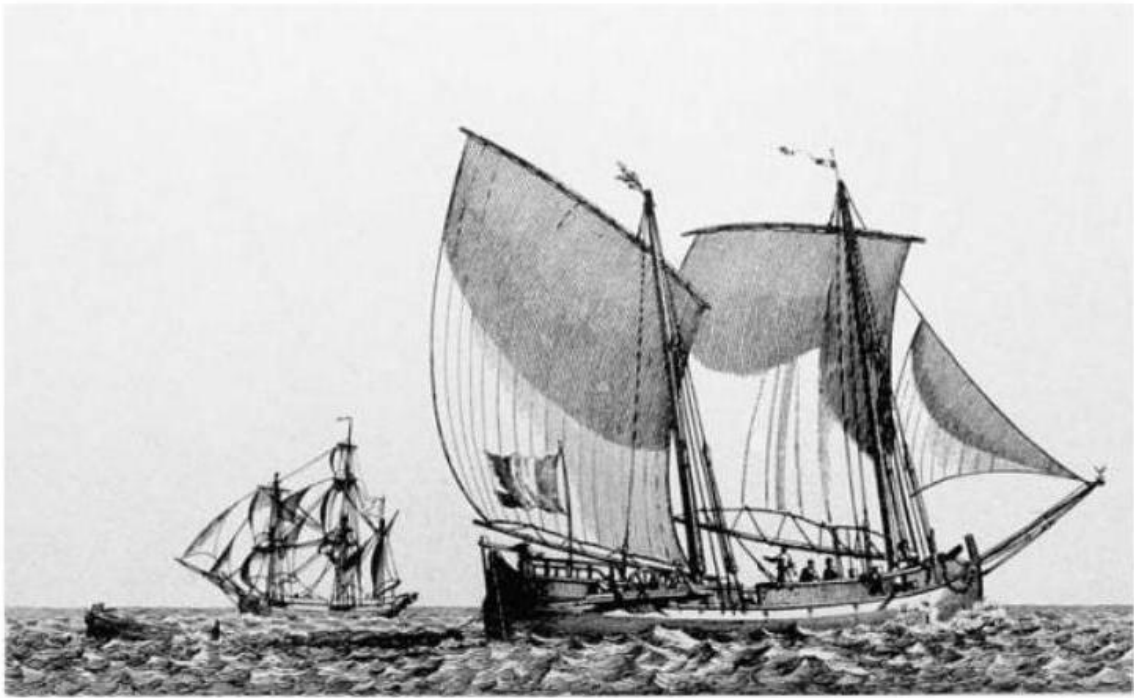
Crissico, also a Greek. And there are other examples: in the single year, 1809, Yûnis Ben Yûnis, on April First, bought a polacca from two Greeks; on 2 May, he sold a Genoese brig to Mohammed Hodja in Porto-Farina, and on 14 August, he bought an American brigantine from its captain. In addition, we know that he also owned another brigantine, for which he hired a *direttore* on 9 September of the same year. Herein lies the explanation for the lack of freshness of the Tunisian fleet and those of the other regencies of the Maghreb.



5. Schooner at anchor  
(Baugean, *Collection de toutes les espèces de bâtiments*)



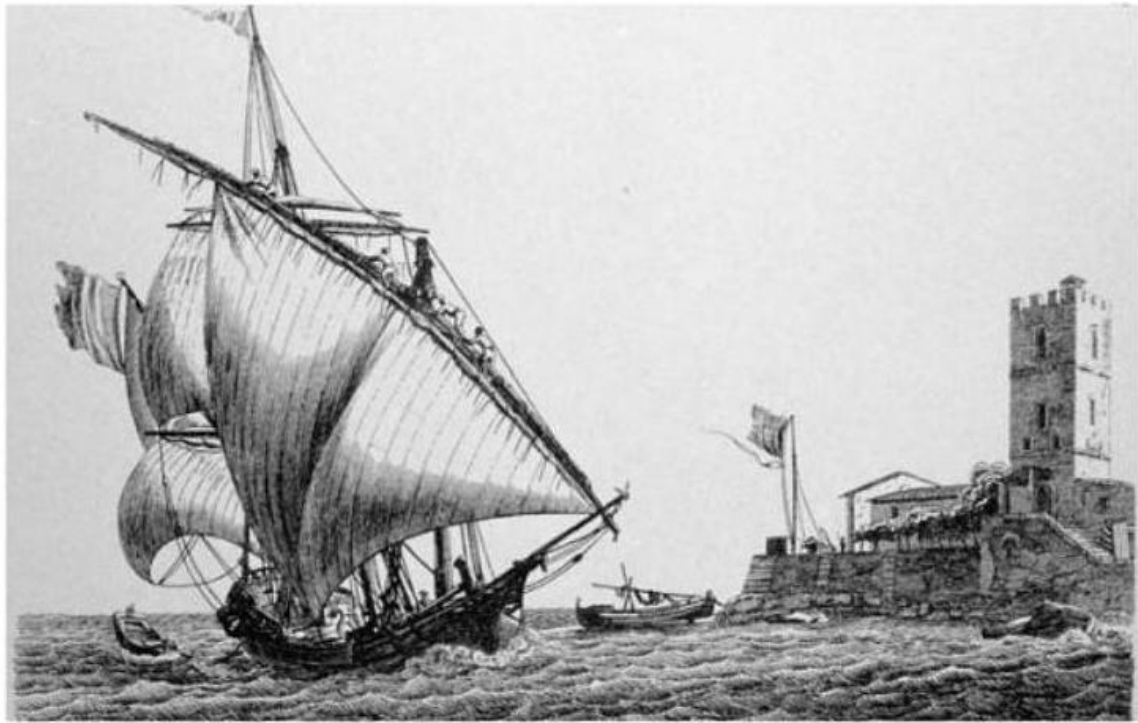
6. Front view of a half-galley  
(Baugean, *Collection de toutes les espèces de bâtiments*)



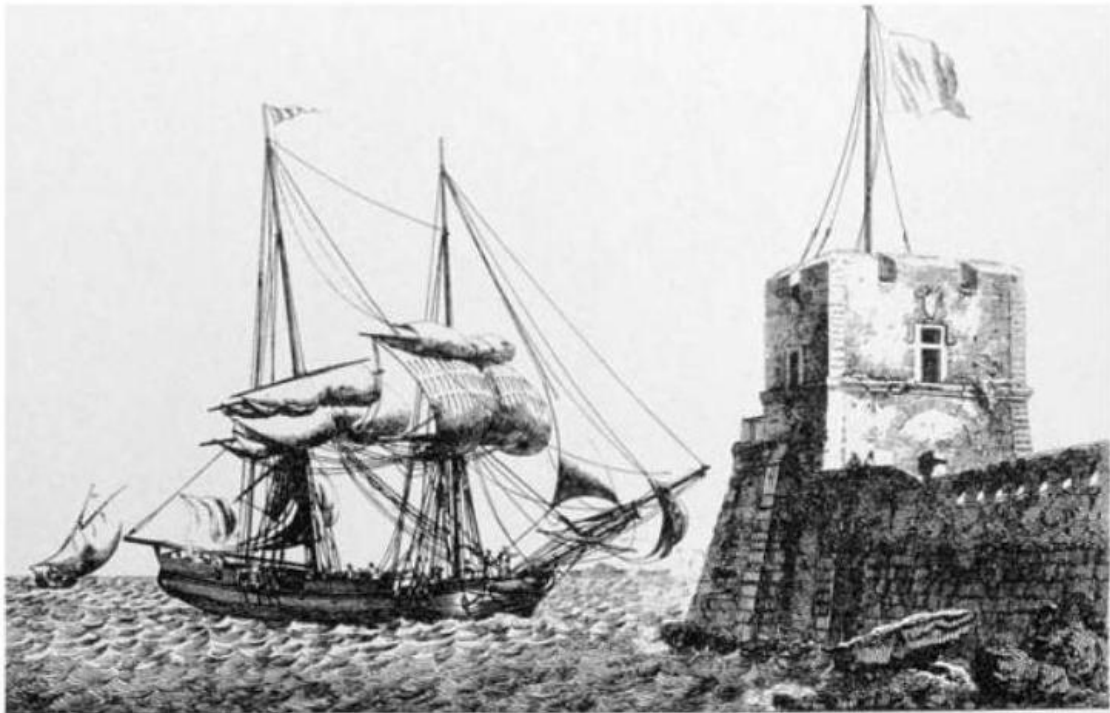
11. Trabacolo  
(Baugean, *Collection de toutes les espèces de bâtiments*)



12. Neapolitan tartan  
(Baugean, *Collection de toutes les espèces de bâtiments*)



13. Provencal bark  
(Baugean, *Collection de toutes les espèces de bâtiments*)



14. French merchant brigantine  
(Baugean, *Collection de toutes les espèces de bâtiments*)

The particular trail that characterised the activity of the Al-Faqih Hassans was caution. They diversified their activities, took risks with a certain amount of money in corsair campaigns, preferred maritime trade, but did not neglect to offer loans at interest. Above all, they spread out the risks, never alone in chartering a ship, acting only with partners, and investing their capital in limited quantities as can be seen in the contract concerning a voyage to Tunisia in October 1810. They had commercial relations with Jews and Muslims alike, and their field of activity was mainly limited to the Ottoman Empire: Tunisia, Alexandria and Smyrna. The economic upheavals in the Mediterranean, the new possibilities offered, seem not to have affected them. This continuity recalls the practices of the merchants of Sfax, neighbours of Tripoli, so well depicted in Ali Zouari's description of their routines! The correspondence of the merchants from Sfax provides information about their business methods, which was clearly just like that of the Al-Faqihs. An extract from a letter of Ali Ben Tazaït written in Alexandria and dated 23 April 1806, addressed to Hadj Mahfûz Maqnî in Sfax, gives us a glimpse into the commercial practices common to both.

You are not unaware of the fact that we sent you, under the supervision of your nephews Sidi Ahmad and Sidi Muhammad, and of Sidi al hadj Uthman Bakkar, 625 *kailas* of wheat at the price of 5¼ *qirshes* and 6 *fiddas* per unit, as well as 1,000 bowls at the price of 68 *qirshes*, and a case of merchandise. The total cost was 4,530 *qirshes*, which we will send you from Sma-'il Sgayyar, to deduct 100 *mahbubs* and arrange to send them to our brother Sa'ban b. Tazaït, and to credit the balance to the accounts of our blessed association [ ... ]

We contracted to send you 120 bundles with Sa'id b. al hadj Zikri. In fact, I have not yet done this. Fear not, if God permits, they will arrive as soon as we have found a supercargo. We inform you that salt is much in demand in our markets these days. If you have an opportunity to find a ship in Sfax, rent it, load it with salt and send it without delay. At the present moment, salt costs 70 *paras* per *kaila* here. If, with a little luck, this operation is willed for us by God, I will not fail to notify you immediately of the arrival of your ship. In the opposite case, send us, as soon as possible, either a batch of fezes from Tunis, or a batch of shawls from Djerba.

The author of this letter, a merchant from Djerba established in Alexandria. was in partnership with a merchant from Sfax who had returned to his native city after having lived in Egypt and Anatolia. The two men sent each other merchandise, informed each other of the trends and needs of the local markets and sent instructions about transferring funds on behalf of other merchants. Indeed, most of these men were simultaneously members of several

associations. with several partners. This trade proved to be very lucrative. The partnership between Ali Ben Tazït and al-Hadj Mahfûz Maqnî, established in August 1803 with an initial capitalization of 1,600 *qirshes* was interrupted in June 1809 after the death of al-Hadj Mahfûz Maqnî. The accounts drawn up at this time show that the initial capital of 1,600 *qirshes* had risen to 14,686 *qirshes* in six years, a fine gross result. These merchants, who were careful and no doubt kept to their working methods, made considerable profits in spite of everything. Their fortunes were substantial without, of course, equalling those of the powerful Egyptian merchants.<sup>4</sup>

- - -

p238      *The Family*

This was the basic social structure,, which we find in all the religious groups and which conditioned the very existence of these men as well as their activities. All the merchants we have just introduced did not work alone, but in association with their fathers, brothers, sons, brothers-in-law, uncles, nephews, etc. For these men, direct family ties alone seemed sufficient to establish the reputation for reliability that that was indispensable to their profession. The family character—even the hereditary character—of their trade was another common feature of these merchants: all followed in the footsteps of their fathers, who had initiated them into the business by brining them into partnership, a fact confirmed by the several genealogical details that we have for certain families. We saw Joseph Cohen-Bacri, son of Michel, who himself was a merchant, enter into partnership first with his brothers, then with Naftali Busnach once he became his brother-in-law, before establishing a partnership with his sons and nephews. The situation was similar for the Gelluli family. Mahmoud Gelluli (1750/55-1839) succeeded his father Bakkar as *kaid* of Sfax in 1782, and became *kaid* of Sousse in 1801. Important customs official and major outfitter of corsair ships, he was engaged in big business, like his father before him, who had begun in around I 770. He formed a partnership, gradually handing over his activities and functions to his descendants, his sons Farhat, Hassan, Hussein and Mohammed, and Mohammed's son Bakkar II. From 1766 to 1833 the most important merchants in Sfax, representing 61 people, belonged to just nine families. While we find no merchant working on his own, two families had more than ten members associated with the family business: the an-Nûris with eleven and the Sallâmîs with seventeen!

In the Maghreb at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, being a member of a community had different meanings, depending on whether the person in question was a Muslim or a Jew. In the case of the Muslims, the individual and his family were members of the principal religious group, which had a crushing demographic, political and religious dominance in the country. For a Jew, membership of his religious group meant being p248 integrated into a community that was in the extreme minority, primarily and whose members had a socially-inferior status. On the other hand, only their integration into this community provided the Jews with a recognised social framework, legal protection, and the possibility of engaging officially in a professional activity. To be an Arab merchant in the regency of Tunis was by itself a relatively insignificant indication of a person's standing. The merchant's membership in a community was therefore determined according to two different criteria that were also, to a certain degree, complementary. The first becomes apparent in the choice of associates at the time of the creation of limited partnerships or simply whenever a ship was chartered. An examination of the company contracts of the merchants of Sfax provides an excellent example of this. All the merchants or members of merchant families who invested in these contracts were Muslim. The idea of bringing a Jew into partnership could only have been out of the question to them: but it is true that the Jewish community in Sfax was very small, consisting of only a hundred families. The situation was the same in Tunis, however, where there were many Jews, and where they were active in the economic life of the city. The second criterion was geographic: to the membership of a religious group was added one's hometown. For example, the partnership contract established in Sfax in December 1802 by Hadj Mahfûz Maqni includes the names of his associates and the sums they entrusted to him on the eve of his departure for the Levant. Of the fifteen people who raised 16,250 Tunisian piastres, thirteen were from Sfax and their capital represented 15,650 piastres, or 96.3% of the total.

This marked preference for their fellow believers from the same city is also seen in the charter contracts. An examination of the available contracts for Tunis covering the period from 1799 to 1815 reveals that 160 were drawn up by Muslims; forty containing indications of the presence of one or two partners. Two of these contracts were made out in the name of two Turks, Ahmed Aga and Ahmed Bacha, who had Greek partners, from Crete like themselves. A third contract however, consisted of a Muslim, Ahmed Constantini, who chartered a ship in partnership with an Italian and a Jew. All the other contracts involved exclusively Tunisian Muslims.