

THE  
MEDITERRANEAN

A MEMOIR

PHYSICAL HISTORICAL AND NAUTICAL

BY

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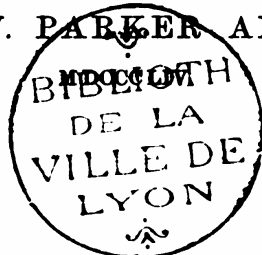
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## § 5 On The Tides of the Mediterranean

### The North Coast of Africa

pp. 90-91

Jerbah (*Meninx* and *Lotophagitis*), an excellently cultivated and rich island, separated from the mainland by a basin with two straits forming entrances, is the commencement of the Regency of Tunis, which extends from thence as far west as La Cala, or El Kal'ah, near Bona, a littoral distance of more than 570 miles. The intervening country is greatly diversified with mountains and valleys, fertile plains and arid wastes; which are blest with one of the finest climates in the world, and a remarkably productive soil. Between Jerbah and the low group called the Karkenah (*Cercina*) Isles, lies the Gulf of Khabs, or the Little Syrtis (ἡ μικρὰ Συρτις), which may once have had a communication with Es Sibkhah, or the great salt plain of the interior, covered with water to the depth of three or four feet in the winter – a probable site of the *Tritonis Palus* of Herodotus. If so, a narrow strait among chains of eminences, and liable to very variable tides, may have confounded early navigation, and rendered it, as Scylax asserts, even more dangerous than the Great Syrtis. But the dread of the ancient mariners can now be but little understood, since from various changes the Syrtis Minor of the ancients is no longer recognisable: nearly the whole remaining space now affords good anchoring ground and smooth water, the [91] bank of Karkenah preventing the sea from rolling home; and the shallows are indicated by the fishermen's palisades. In fact, from the unceasing operation of the sea in throwing up and depositing sand on a flat coast, where there is no river, torrent, or other back-water to sweep it away again, the shore must have had a continued augmentation.

The adjacent lands were abundantly fertile by nature, but, until the rule of the Carthaginians, were left without culture; for, in the words of Strabo, the ancient people of this country (the *Numides* or *Nomades*) abandoned their fields to savage beasts, to exhaust themselves by predatory warfare. The east coast of Tunis (Byzacium), though perhaps less cultivated than when it was regarded as a magazine of provisions, and dignified with the title 'Emporia,' is nevertheless abundantly fertile, and its tillage is very creditable to the Moors. The sea-board possesses several populous trading towns, and some excellent anchorages, to which numerous ships resort to take in the produce. Of these, the places in chief consideration— from Jerbah northwards—are Ghabs or Khabs (*Tacape*) Sfakus (*Taphura*), Mehadiyah or Afrikah (*Turris Hannibalis*), Lamta (*Leptis parva*), Monastir (*Haadrumentum*), Súsah (*Kabar Susis*), Ehrakliyah or Herkla (*Horrea Coeli*), Hammémét (*Aquoe calidoe*), Nabal (*Neapolis*),

Khurbah, (*Curubis*), and Calibia or Iklibiyah (*Clypea*). Some of these are of great consideration as towns in Barbary; but the principal is certainly the beautifully situated and opulent Sfakus, a place where I was most hospitably received before any Christian agent had ever been established there ; and where my operations and journeys were viewed without that alarm, and inconvenient distrust, which were so often encountered on these shores at that time.

## Tides in the Gulf of Khabs

pp. 186-187

Along the African shore the tides are distinctly traceable in some places, though imperceptible in others. Thus, at the mouth of the Tetuan river, the water rises nearly four feet on full and change, at 1<sup>h</sup> 30<sup>m</sup>, and is hardly discernible a little farther to the east. The often-cited flux and reflux at Bizerta—noticed by the younger Pliny, in his strange story of the dolphin—is caused by vaporization, the action of winds and rains, and the consequent effect on the sea; which rendered it, in Dr. Shaw's opinion, a miniature of the Strait of Gibraltar. At the Goletta of Tunis, there is a rise and fall of nearly three feet, which is so variable in its times of recurrence, that it must be ascribed to local rather than lunar causes; but towards the Lesser Syrtis, the moon's influence becomes less equivocal. Along the Karkenah and Sfakus channel the tides are fairly developed, running about a couple of knots, a rate often increasing to upwards of three, as they gather round the Gulf of Khabs; until, on passing Jerbah, they flow away to the eastward, and weaken by diffusion. This is one of the greatest latitudinal distances from Venice, and therefore increased tidal vigour might have been expected; but I was amused rather than vexed, on finding our boats lying high and dry nearly a mile from the *Burj-er-Rús*, a pyramid of human skulls just outside the castle of Jerbah, under which we had landed two or three hours before. The Mediterranean station had made us overlook the wholesome nautical rule of keeping the boats afloat; but, happily, our being left aground by a receding tide entailed none of the dreadful disasters which befel the Spaniards under Lacerda and Doria, in 1561, when the slaughter took place that supplied the Christian heads with which the *Burj-er-Rús* (*Tower of Heads*) is built. The tide rises till about 3<sup>h</sup> 10<sup>m</sup>, ranging from four to six feet, and at times even to eight; the waters around must consequently be affected in some degree by its action. Still, the great bank formed between Jerbah and Lampedusa shelves so gradually, that the great sea-swells roll in and disperse without breaking. I therefore, on several occasions, when the wind was dead towards the shore, and the waves rising, ran the *Adventure* to leeward out of the sea-swell, till we found a convenient depth for anchoring in smooth water. Had I known of this in 1816, it would have saved Lord Exmouth a world of hurry and anxiety, as well as the loss of a few anchors, when his squadron was caught by a northerly gale in Tripoli roads.

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