

# ANNALES

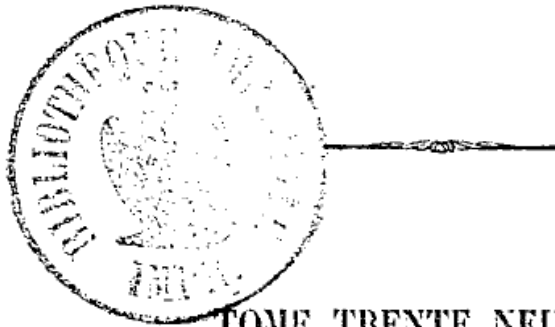
DE LA

## PROPAGATION DE LA FOI.

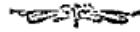
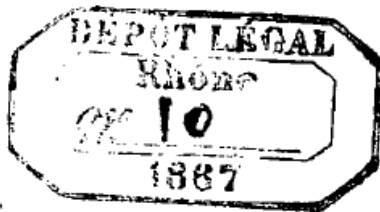
RECUEIL PÉRIODIQUE

DES LETTRES DES ÉVÊQUES ET DES MISSIONNAIRES  
DES MISSIONS DES DEUX MONDES, ET DE TOUS LES DOCUMENTS  
RELATIFS AUX MISSIONS ET A L'OEUVRE  
DE LA PROPAGATION DE LA FOI.

COLLECTION FAISANT SUITE AUX LETTRES ÉDIFIANTES.



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A LYON,  
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**AFRICAN MISSIONS.  
APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF TUNIS.**

(Continuation and end). (1).  
(p345-358)

1 See the issue of last July,  
p.267-289.

II

I. - With the abolition of piracy, in 1830, a new era starts for Christian Tunisia. There are no more prisoners to ransom, but there are European residents and merchants to maintain in the Faith -, and, if the missionaries cannot yet directly work for the conversion of the infidels, the freedom which they elsewhere enjoy in the exercise of their ministry is a kind of evangelic preparation, which will later bear its fruits. This freedom appears to be from now on sheltered from the abrupt reactions to which the whim of princes or political crises exposed it formerly. The French flag floats on the frontier of Tunisia, and its shade, which extends over the Regency, protects more than fifteen thousand Christians.

p346 “In spite of an environment which has forced the inhabitants of Tunis to completely renounce piracy, and which, by a fortunately contagious imitation, introduced into their manners and their administration some notable reforms, such is still the secret and incurable aversion against Christians inspired by their religious code, that they continue to close to them the doors of several cities and in particular of Kaïrouan, the most important of the Regency after Tunis.” (1) But the tenacity even of Moslem fanaticism seems to give more importance to the concessions of the last forty years: they are a homage paid to the influence Christian civilization. The treaty of August 8, 1830 contained a secret article by which the bey Hossein yielded in perpetuity to France a site on the ruins of Carthage, to raise

1 V. Guérin ; *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* ; 4<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 20, December 1860, p. 440.

p347 there a religious monument in the memory of the holy king Louis (2). The authorization given by the bey for the erection of a Christian vault “is so much more remarkable”, observes a writer, “in that it is a striking departure from the habits of these regions and the prejudices which are rooted there over so many centuries by the Moslem traditions. - Indeed, though the exercise of the Christian religion is not prohibited there, and that the existence of the chapels and other places devoted to Christian worship is authorized there, however the erection of all new building of this species is severely prohibited there, and up to this time the permissions were only granted for the repair of already existing buildings. Furthermore, Ahmed-Pasha-Bey refused to sell the ground intended for the

2. Here is the actual text of this article, given as it is found in the *Mémoire* of R.P. Anselme des Arcs :

« Praise to the one God, to whom everything returns! We cede in perpetuity to S.M. the King of France a site in La Malka sufficient to erect a religious monument in honor of Louis IX, at the place where the prince died. We commit ourselves to respect and to enforce respect of this monument consecrated by the King of France in the memory of one of his most illustrious ancestors. Salutations from the servant of God, Hossein-Pacha-Bey. May the Most High be favorable to him! Amen.

The 17 day of Sefer in the year 1246.

Done at Bardo, 8 August 1830.

The consul general and chargé d'affaires of the king,  
M. Lesseps. »

construction of this new vault, and wanted to make it a free gift to France.” (1)

1 *Tunis*, by Dr. Louis Franck, ed.. review by J.-J. Marcel (*Univers pittoresque*). Paris, Didot, 1850, p.204.

After the conquest of Algiers, many Sicilians and Maltese came with their families to establish themselves in Tunis. They there did not find any church besides that which the Capuchins had opened in a rented house in 1733. This room no longer meeting the needs of the colony, the apostolic prefect requested Mr. Deval, general consul of France, to obtain from the bey the old hospital of Trinitaires, located in the enclosure of Bab-el-Bahr (the Sea Gate). Hossein-Pasha-bey granted the place requested, by means of an annual rent of a thousand piastres (September 3, 1833) (2). It is in this hospice that the R.H. PP. Capucins reside. The chapel of Trinitaires, which had been used a few years as parish church of the Spanish nation, was insufficient - the generosity of Chevalier Raffo, private secretary of the Bey, made it possible to build a larger church, which was blessed on December 31, 1837, in the presence of the consuls of the European powers. The old station of Goulette, abandoned since the French revolution, accepted a missionary in residence in 1836. That same year, a station was founded in Souza, and, in 1841, another in Sfax.

2. One reads in the letter of concession: “We have fixed the rent at one thousand piastres a year; that what we took previously was much more; but desiring to favor you in the goal that you propose, we renounce this advantage and have consented to this that you will have the pleasure of the aforesaid place in the manner which is appropriate to you. » (*Mémoire* of R.P. Anselme des Arcs.)

II. The first development of the mission of Tunis was like the prelude another more important. On March 21, 1843, the Sovereign-Pontiff Gregoire XVI raised the prefecture of Tunis to the rank of Apostolic Vicariate, and entrusted its direction to T.-R.P, Fidèle Sutter, born in Ferrare, province of the Capuchins of Bologna (1). From the start the apostolic vicar did not have episcopal character; it received it, on September 29 of the following year, from the hands of S.E. cardinal Franzoni, prefect of Propaganda. A month later, Mgr Sutter returned to Tunis, receiving from the population an enthusiastic reception: Christians, Greeks, Jews, Moors, Arabic, burst with joy at the honor conferred on the mission in the person of its chief. The bey Ahmed-Pasha himself, flattered to see a dignitary of the Catholic church in his kingdom, did not wait long before giving testimony of his satisfaction.

1. The Apostolic Prefecture of Tunis, created in 1624 by Urbain VIII, has existed for 219 years, and had 89 prefects.

The mission, we have said, was to pay the government an annual rent of a thousand piastres, for the old hospital of Trinitaires, since 1833 the residence of the Capuchins. However, four months after the arrival of the apostolic vicar, the bey removed this royalty; moreover he granted on a purely free basis all the site of the old consulate of Spain, contiguous to the church (March 17, 1845); finally a little later (December 1850), he gave a large piece of land for the enlarging of the cemetery.

When Mgr Sutter undertook, in May 1845, the first pastoral visit of his diocese, the bey sent one of his cars of four horses, accompanied by four *hamba* (riders) on horse, and as many Arab servants to escort the bishop and his court. Order was given to the governors of the cities where Mgr Sutter was to pass, to provide

housing and food to all the caravan made up of fourteen people and twelve horses. This visit lasted one month, and embraced all the southern coast, from Soliman, located at the bottom of the gulf of Goulette, as far as Gerbi, on the Tripolitanian border. A little time after, towards the end of the year 1846, Mgr Sutter, destined for Rome for the businesses of his vicariate, had the occasion to make known to S.S. Pious the IX the generous behaviour of the bey of Tunis. The Sovereign-Pontiff, moved and encouraged, wrote to the prince a letter of thanks, dated February 10, 1847. This letter was given to the bey by the apostolic vicar, in the presence of the consular officers of France, on March 20<sup>th</sup> following. The bey received it with a great demonstration of joy, and made it his duty to answer the Pope to thank him and to ensure him of his benevolence devoted to the regard of the Christians placed under his domination (June 17, 1847). "We were delighted", he said, "that what we were able to do this for the religious people established in our state was agreeable to you and which you recognized. We did not expect less of your character and of the rise of your sentiments. Also let us constantly make all our efforts to ensure the well-being of the Christian inhabitants of our country, and particularly that of the monks and the ecclesiastical superiors."

The personal benevolence of the bey Ahmed was never contradicted; it is continued with its two successors, Mohammed-Bey (1855-1859), and Mahommed-Es-Sedak, reigning today. A painful circumstance, the appearance of the cholera in Tunis in 1850, was served to strengthen these good relations. While the frightened muphtis (*muftis*) gave up the city, the capucin monks remained at their station to assist those with cholera, and more than once one saw them carrying the victims of the plague to their last residence themselves. Touched with such an amount of devotion, the bey decorated the apostolic vicar with his Order of Nichan (1).

New Christian stations were founded at several points in the Regency: in Gerby (1847), Medhia (1848), Biserte (1851), Oporto-Farina (1853), and Monastir (1862).

III. - To succeed in making known the situation of Catholicism in the apostolic vicariate of Tunis, we will say a word about each of the nine stations or parishes now established on the coast of Tunisia, from the Algerian border as far as the Tripolitanian border. We will follow the chronological order of the foundations.

1° Tunis (ancient Tunes). - In the capital of the Regency the mission has a church and four chapels. The church is that which was raised in haste in 1837, but very recently repaired, consolidated, extended, to always meet the needs of the growing number of Christians who today form a parish of 11,500 hearts. This parish is served by eight missionaries and four priests born in the country.

The Brothers belonging to the Christian doctrines have been in Tunis since the month of October 1855. They have two establishments there: one, in the old consulate of Denmark, where they receive the poor children free; the other, for the children of European traders and wealthy families, in the old residence of the

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1. Mgr Sutter received a decoration of the first class. His general secretary (R. P. Anselme des Arcs) and his personal secretary each received the medal of officer, and the brother attached to his person received the decoration of chevalier.

Capucins (1735-1833), which has become that of the Brothers. Last January, there were in the two schools 300 pupils of different races and religions; the Brothers are ten in number, they work alongside two secular teachers. - The education of girls is entrusted to the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of the Apparition. These Nuns have also a small hospital in Tunis where they collect lost children.

p352 Some attempts at Protestant missions have been made in Tunis; none has succeeded. In 1829, under the protection of the London Bible Society, some ministers were established in the city; they were withdrawn in 1846. The following year, they were replaced by Scots ministers who opened a temple and two schools; in 1850, mission, temple, schools, all were abandoned (1).

The bey resides at Bardo, a vast palace flanked with towers and bastions, located two kilometers to the North-West of the city. There are 200 catholics there who are obliged to go to the parish of Tunis, because they do not have a suitable room for the exercise of worship. On a projection of the coast twelve kilometers to the north of Tunis, which still nowadays bears the name of Cape Carthage, the ruins of the former rival of Rome are spread out. It is there, in the center of these ruins, on the top of the hill where the citadel of Byrsa had sat, that a site was granted to France, on August 8, 1830, to perpetuate the memory of the last exploits and death of Saint Louis.

1. *Les Missions chrétiennes*, by Marshall, trans. by L. de Waziers ; vol. 1, p. 484-85.

p353 Ten years later, King Louis-Philippe set up at his own expense there a commemorative vault. It was blessed towards the end of the year 1841, and, on August 25, 1845, Mgr Sutter made the solemn dedication of it. The monument is isolated from any dwelling, and this loneliness "still adds to the majesty of the memories for which it is consecrated. One sees around its modest enclosure only some poor tents of camel hair, where some wandering shepherds seek an relief from the heat of the African sun. One must congratulate the architect for having, in the construction of this simultaneously French and Berber-esque monument, been able to merge some details of Arab art in the forms of the Gothic architecture (1)."

1. *Tunis*, by J.-J. Marcel ; p. 204.

The hill where the chapel of Saint Louis is raised is only with one kilometer from the sea, "so that from ten miles on the open sea the Christian sailor can greet the gilded cross which surmounts the cupola and reflects the pure rays of the African sun. From terraces which surround the enclosure of the chapel, the view over an immense circle sees only ruins, half buried marble columns, remains of tumulary stones including a great number built to receive the tombs of martyrs, as the coarsely carved palms attest, some monograms of Christ, fragments of Latin inscriptions (2)."

2. "In the galleries of the chapel one sees a marble tablet 60 centimeters wide and 25 centimeters high, carrying simply these three words: VICTORIA IN PACE ; on the left of the inscription a monogram of Christ is carved and on the right a palm; clear indications that this identifies the tomb of a martyr. » (*Mémoire* of R. P. Anselme des Arcs).

2°La Goulette. - This is the port of Tunis. Its name comes from the small channel (*goletta=gullet*) which puts the sea in communication with the lake, at the end of which the capital of the Regency is located. In 1769, the Tunisian government having transferred its maritime arsenal from Oporto-Farina to Goulette, the

apostolic prefect established a station on this last point to ensure the religious services. It remained until the French revolution, which, by removing the religious orders, weakened all the catholic missions.

p354 Restored in 1836, after a few years the station of La Goulette needed a larger chapel to hold the population of the city and the sailors of the trading vessels. In January 1848, the apostolic vicar asked, through the mediation of the French Consul, for a piece of land where he could build a church and a house of residence. The bey Ahmed hastened to accede to the request, and on March 19 following Mgr Sutter was able to bless the first stone of the new church, which was placed in the name of Saint Fidèle of Sigmaringue. For lack of resources, only a part of the church was built at first; it was finished in June 1866, and blessed in the presence of the chargé d' affaires of France in Tunis, the consul of La Goulette and a large group of inhabitants.

“The Catholics of Goulette still lack a suitable cemetery. For a century, they have only a marshy ground, located out of the north gate, on the shore of the lake, so that, at time of the rains, it is almost entirely surrounded by water. The moisture of the ground prevents a surrounding wall from being raised there. There is no Christian sign to indicate that here the children of the Church rest. Moreover, this cemetery is exposed to profanation, either on the part of the Moslems, or even by animals. Lastly, it is a receptacle rubbish.

Crews of the European vessels never wanted to bury their dead there; they prefer to carry them to the hill of Saint-Louis of Carthage (1).

p355 There are 1,300 Catholics at La Goulette, plus two missionaries and an indigenous priest. The Sisters of Saint-Joseph direct two schools, and, since 1855, a small hospital for the poor patients.

1 *Mémoire* of R. P. Anselme des Arcs.

3° Souza. – Around the year 1836, some families, originating in Malta, Italy and France, and recently arrived at Tunis, went to establish themselves in Souza, one of the most important cities of the Regency and which makes a big business in oil. In less than a month there was a Christian population of several hundred people. The apostolic prefect sent to it, at the beginning of November, a missionary who opened a chapel in a rented Moorish house. The French Consul then obtained for perpetual rent a house belonging to the government. An allowance of 2,000 francs, made by the Work for the Propagation of the Faith, enabled a chapel to be constructed more appropriate for the number of the catholics; it was opened for worship on July 28, 1839. But this chapel is no longer sufficient; another has been begun, but work goes slowly due to lack of resources.

The parish of Souza has 700 catholics, a missionary, and two schools held by the Sisters of Saint-Joseph.

4° Sfax (ancient Taphrura). – A seaport and commercial town where a Catholic parish was founded in 1841. At first a mauresque house was rented which had to be used at the same time as chapel and residence for the missionary. In 1846, the bey gave to the mission some land on which a church and a residence were

built, and later a house intended for the Sisters of Saint-Joseph and their two schools.

p356 The Catholic population of Sfax is 680.

5° Gerbi or Jerba. - The island of Gerbi forms the eastern point of the Regency; it is actually located on the coast of the Pachalik of Tripoli, and was formerly the seat of a bishop of the province of Tripolitania. In the island there are 250 Catholics, a missionary and a chapel, the station was founded in 1847.

All the travellers who visited Gerbi speak of a tower, from four to five meters high, formed entirely of skulls and human bones. This is the origin of this ossuary. - Don Alvarez de Sande, lieutenant of the duke of Medina-Coeli, viceroy of Sicily for Philippe II, was trapped by the Turks in the small fortress of Gerbi, in 1560. It only had with him a handful of men. After several weeks of cruel deprivations, the Spaniards resolved to throw themselves in desperation on the enemy lines, to win the day and gain the shore. But they all perished crushed by the number. In commemorating their victory, the Turks raised the funeral trophy that one could still see twenty years ago.

On the return of his pastoral visit to the island of Gerbi in 1845, Mgr Sutter addressed himself to Mr. de Lagau, French Consul in Tunis, and Mr. Raffo, to represent to the bey that it was not dignified of his government to allow this monument of hatred against the Christians to remain. The order given to destroy the tower was carried out only three years later, in 1848. The P. Gaetano de Ferrare collected these glorious remains piously, and buried them in the small Catholic cemetery located at the seashore. Among the bones, the missionary found a small crucifix of ivory very well preserved, that he deposited temporarily p357 in the vault, and, when he went to Rome, in September of the following year (1849), he offered this crucifix to the Sovereign-Pontiff, who was happy to accept the homage.

6° Medhia. - To the north of Sfax, the small town of Medhia is, inhabited by 215 Catholics. The establishment of a missionary and a chapel dates from the month of August 1848. In 1862, the government of Tunis granted to the mission a store originally built by a French trader to serve as a warehouse. A vault was made of it.

7° Biserte (ancient Hippo-Zaritus). - There are a hundred Christian residents, not counting those who come during the good season for fishing of coral. This point of the coast was for a long time, as we have seen, an object of concern of the missionaries, but it had been abandoned at the end of last century. In 1850, a missionary was established there who had to rent a house to transform it into a chapel.

8° Oporto-Farina. - This station, removed like the preceding one at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, could not be reopened until 1853. The chapel is still established in a private house which one must wish with the generosity of the bey. The Catholics, approximately 80, are almost all Maltese or Tabarquins; in this number some

families of Resgibel are included, a small village located at the edge of the sea and not very from from Oporto-Farina.

9° Monastir. - The station of Monastir, started in 1862, is twelve miles from Souza; 220 Christians are counted there.

In addition to these nine stations, there exist, at several points in Tunisia, groups  
p358 of catholics who are not numerous enough that one can yet think of giving them resident missionaries.

Here is, as of January 1, 1867, the statistical table of the vicariate of Tunis: Catholics, 15,553; heretics or schismatics, 325 (300 Greeks, 25 Protestants); infidels, 2,400,000 (2,000,000 of Moslems, 400,000 Jews); - 22 missionaries, including 5 natives; 9 churches and 4 chapels.

At the time of the creation of the Vicariate of Tunis, not yet a quarter of a century ago, the Regency hardly had 3,000 catholics; today this number has more than quintupled. Thus little by little Christianity establishes itself in this land on which the crescent reigned formerly as an absolute power. The Moslem prejudices begin to be erased; traditional hatreds fall, and with them barriers that up to that point were held to be insuperable; finally, more than the other States of the Barbary coast, Tunisia seeks to put itself in communication with Christian Europe. Although these concessions and these aspirations are rather political than religious, they however constitute a real progress, which facilitates the action of the Church and allows us to hope that we perhaps approach a time when the prayer of Saint Louis dying under the walls of Tunis will be fully accomplished.

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Annales  
de la  
Propagation de la For  
Tome Trente-Neuvième  
A Lyon  
1867

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