

NOTES
ON THE
RÉGENCY OF TUNIS
BY
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108th REGIMENT

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TRIBES CONCERNED WITH SFAX

Mthalith. – The Mthalith live on the coast opposite and level with the Kerkennah Islands, of which we will not be concerned here, since no important tribe occupies them.

They are camped on the territory of Soussa, Mahadia and Sfax, relating with the rest of this last city, and are ruled by Caïd Si Mohammed El Djellouli, governor of Sfax.

The various sections composing this tribe are; Bkhalta and Ouled Nasser, in the territory of Soussa.

The Ouled Ameer, Ouled Zid, Amedna el Djouaouda, Bdarna, Mrahia, in the territory of Mahadia.

The Saadis, Agarba, Ouled Najem, Ouled Merah, Achech, in the territory of Sfax.

The Ouled Najem are divided moreover into four other groups, each ruled by a particular cheick: they are the Ouled Youcef, the Aouabed, the Arfat and the Djerabah. These groups, having a common origin, camp together and intermingled in the neighbourhoods of Sfax, with the exception however of the Djerabah which, in their capacity as marabouts, live apart. The Ouled Youcef, Aouabed and Arfat on the contrary do not have any religion; they are purely warlike, and even raiders.

In consequence of these divisions there are altogether fifteen cheicks in the Mthalith, who, being petty thieves and warriors, do not follow the precepts of any religious order, with the exception however of the Agarba and Djerabah.

In religion the first observe the principles of Sidi Aguerb, one their ancestors; they have a zaouia which bears his name and also a mokaddem.

The Djerabah, of the order of Quadria, more particularly follow the precepts of their grandfather the marabout Si Abdallah Ben bou Djarboueuh, for whom they built a zaouia in his honor.

Lastly, it is necessary also to mention amongst the Mthalith another zaouia, dito of Sidi Makhlouf, built 22 kilometers from Sfax, and surrounded by approximately ten houses.

This tribe belongs to the soff Bachia; it is brave, energetic, warlike, and can arm about 320 riders.

The Aouedna el Djerabah are the two strongest fractions.

These Arabs have many herds and hardly make any trade other than that of wool and olives; in fact they have on their territory a great number of olive-trees.

Their main market is that of Sfax.

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A great number of ruins of old castles exist, moreover, between Bordj Khédidja and Sfax, in addition to a great number of old and venerated marabouts, under the protection of which this country is placed, the white qobbas of which rise in many places.

Sfax, located in the middle of a great extent of gardens, covered with olive, almond, pistachio and fig trees, containing, in addition, some palm trees of poor quality, many grapes and a great quantity of cucumbers from which would come, it is said, its Arab name of Sfakes, one of the the most important cities of the Regency.

Its gardens all are surrounded by walls, and each one of these enclosures has its own well for irrigation and also a house where the people of the city live, during the hot season. These gardens, though widespread very all around, however leave open an area around the town.

The town is divided into two distinct parts, each separated from the other by its own enclosure, the high city, intended for the Moslems, and the low city, inhabited by the Jews and Europeans, composed solely of Maltese.

The walls of Sfax are defended by several forts or bastions armed with guns, and which bear the names of: Bordj Sidi Mansour El Hadjar, Bordj Ressay, Bordj Hanar el Casbah, Bordj Ennar, Bordj Téprana, Bordj Rbat, Bordj Setti Messaoud and Bordj el Ksar.

The city has, in addition, a kasbah; it contains also several mosques, zaouias, bazaars and schools, a catholic parish, a synagogue and a convent of the sisters of Saint-Joseph. Its population is d' approximately 9,000 inhabitants.

Sfax moreover is divided still into four districts :

1. that of Haoumet El Ksab, of the order of Chadlia, a mokaddem;
2. Haoumet Hart Snah, of the sect of Sellamia, a mokaddem;
3. Haoumet Dribel Sbat Sbahi, aissaouia, a mokaddem and a religious cheick;
4. Haoumet Setti Messaouda, of the sect of Aouamria, similar to that of Aissaouia; as they have same the religious cheick as the preceding district; they have however a distinct mokaddem.

Each one of these districts is under the special supervision of a cheick attached to the Caïd of the city. This one is mainly sof Bachia; there exist however some Hassinia in the first two districts, especially that of Haoumet El Ksab.

The city has hardly any water other than that of the wells and the cisterns, or that collected at some distance from its walls in large tanks intended to gather rainwater.

Each year they do a large trade in oils, sponges, wool, octopus, dried fish and dates from the Djerid.

From the historical point of view, Sfax does not bring to mind any particularly interesting memory. Formerly a bishopric under the name of Taphrura during the Roman period, it experienced at the time of the Arab domination the same vagaries of fortune as its neighbors Soussa, Monestir and Mahadia, and it was, along with them, subjected to various conquests by Sicilian or Spanish armies.

The tide, almost unimportant in the Mediterranean, is quite evident at this point, from Ras Capoudia as far as Tripoli.

Before continuing along the coast towards Gabès, let us first list the places located on the road from Soussa to Sfax by the inland route.

From Soussa two different roads leave in this direction, which form only one as from the small village of Bou Merdes.

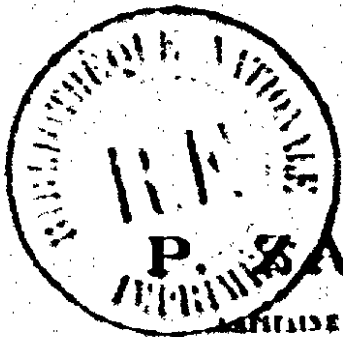
The first road passes a little to the east of Djemmel, in the south of wadi Agaril.

This is a large borough of more than 4,000 inhabitants, ruled by a khelifa of the Caïd of Soussa. Djemmel, of the soff Bachia, is composed of four various districts, whose inhabitants follow the religious order of Aissaouia. One finds there several mosques, zaouias or schools.

NOTES

sur la

RÉGENCE DE TUNIS



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