

L'Explorateur (The Explorer)
(Geographic and Commercial Journal)
6 July 1876

It is necessary, once and for all, to put aside our old geographical orthographies of the coast and occupy ourselves of the more or less banal remarks of people who want everyone to live with them in the remains of the past. The faulty transcriptions that we employ have the disadvantage of exposing us to the mockery of other people and, much larger, of us being unable to recognize the significance of the indigenous names, which always exist. It is true that this is not the case here, as one will see, but it is a very rare exception, which does not take anything from the value of the observation which we have just made.

Mr. de Slane already pointed out, a long time ago, in his *Description of Africa*, by Ibn Haoukâl, that the word Sfâk's, could, by its form, belong to no Arab root. Shaw, by error, believed that it derived from the word *Fakous*, which, in Arabic, means cucumber, and this heresy has been repeated too often. The wise orientalist mentions also the orthography of Sir Grenville Temple, *Asfakkes*, a form, he adds, that one does not find in any Arab writer.

For the rest, each people has transcribed the word according to the genius of its own language; the French said *Face*, *Asfaques*, *Sfakes* and *Sfax*; the Spaniards *Los Asfacos*; the Italians *Siface* (*Sifato*); the English *Sfakus* (*Sfakeus*), alternatives which come particularly from the imaginary difficulties that they believed to find in rendering the two last letters. Whatever it is, as in Arabic, the word is always written Sfâk's (accents indicating the strong letters) let us write it in the same way in French since nothing prevents this, and then ultimately it is not clear that the X is better here than the way by which one wants to represent it.

I will have other remarks to make on the orthographies of Mr. Chauvey, but I limit myself to most essential. The importance of his work must easily allow us to pass on these small questions of detail. This importance will be especially appreciated by those who realize the pitiful state of the geography of the areas bordering on Algeria.