

TUNISIA
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WITH A PRÉFACE

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Chapter 2 (pp12-86)

Sfax

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By the extent of its walls, the number of its inhabitants, the richness of its agriculture, the extent and variety of its trade, Sfax was formerly considered the second city of the Regency.

Since the French occupation it has had to yield the place to Sousse, the importance of which has increased because it has become the seat of a military subdivision, and at the same time a point of concentration of troops.

¹³ Sfax, seen from out at sea, offers the aspect of an immense stronghold, immersed in a sea of greenery within which innumerable white spots can be seen, here and there, punctuating the view. All these white points are actually summer houses built in the Arab style and located in beautiful gardens. It is there that, come evening and their business finished, the townsmen will seek a little refreshment during the heat of summer.

History

In the writings of the ancient authors it is almost impossible to find information allowing us to establish with precision the origins of the town of Sfax. The itineraries of Ptolemy and Antonin, and the more recent table of Peutinger make clear mention of a Roman city called *Taphrura* or *Taparura*, which was located between *Usilla* to the north and *Thanæ* to the South; but the distances indicated in these old documents do not agree well with the current location of the city. It is logical, however, to suppose that Sfax is built not far from the site of the ancient Taphrura. This assumption is much more acceptable since the suburbs of the city are strewn with Roman ruins, whose best preserved vestiges are one kilometer and a half to the North-East, at the place known as *Enchir Mesrani*.

14 The modern authors also remain mute on the probable time of the foundation of the current city.

The Arab historian *Ibn-Khaldoun* (1332-1506), speaks of a governor of Sfax, named Omar, who, in 551 of the Hegira (1150 of our era), massacred all the Franks that lived in the city and whose father's throat was cut in just reprisal.

El-Bekri and *Eddrisi*, historians and Arab geographers of 12th century, in their writings, celebrate the beauty, power and wealth of Sfax at every opportunity.

Certain contemporary writers, misled by the similarity of pronunciation, have tried to find in *Sfax*, the name of the Massilian Numidian king *Syphax*. This assumption must be immediately rejected. Syphax had as a capital Cirta, modern Constantine, at some distance, as one can see, from the shores of Little Syrte [Gulf of Gabes]. If the events of his many battles against Massinissa, king of Massilian Numidia, had led Syphax this far, Titus Livius, Appian ([of Alexandria], and Polybius would have made mention of it in their detailed accounts.

Vermina, son of Syphax, after having shared in the defeat of Annibal at Zama, withdrew, it is said, to the South, to Garamantes and Lotophages. There is no possibility that, in this escape, he would have built, with his companions, a city bearing the name of his famous father.

The main reason to refute these various opinions is the following one: Syphax
15 having died in the year 201 before Christ, any city bearing his name, however small it was, would have certainly been mentioned in the various itineraries or tours of the geographers of antiquity, who lived in a later period.

One should not ask contemporary Sfaxiens, even the most educated, for information on the origins of their city. The value of History is a concept which escapes Moslems from all countries. Individually they know their age only in an approximate way; they link the time of their birth to a remarkable event which happened in the country at that time, and which their contemporaries remember: abundant rains, appearance of a comet, the advent to the throne of a Sultan or a Bey, the death of a famous marabout, etc. That is the limit, pretty much, to their knowledge of the past.

Regarding the foundation of Sfax, however, they pass on some legends that we will restrict ourselves to recording, without discussing their value.

One suggests that the city was built, about the 2nd century after the Hegira, by the son of a Sultan of Tebessa, whose name is not mentioned. Having been alienated from his father in consequence of his bad conduct, the rejected son was driven out by his father who would have said to him, banishing him from his presence: *Sfahi*, an Arab expression that one can translate as *distant son*.

The exiled son progressed to the east with his servants and slaves. Overcome with tiredness and deprivations they arrived at the edge of the sea, and not having courage
16 to continue their wandering walk any further, they resolved to establish themselves at the place where they were. Some houses were then raised to serve as shelter for them, and the son of the Sultan, now full of repentance, gave to the newborn city the name of *Sfahi*, in memory of the last words pronounced by his father. This name became later, and by euphony, *Sfaxi*.

A second tradition, undoubtedly inspired of the foundation of Carthage by Didon, suggests that Sfax had been, at a certain time, only an open village answering to the Sultan of Mahres.

This village being often the goal of incursions and depredations by the surrounding nomads, its governor, named Sfâa, one day asked the Sultan for authorization to surround it by walls, to protect it.

An ox skin was there, by chance, laid out on the ground and drying in the sun. Sfâa, to render his idea more comprehensible to his interlocutor, traced on the skin with his finger the contours of the fortifications that he wanted to build.

Then the sultan handing Sfâa a pair of scissors, would have said to him: "*Sfâa kous* (Sfâa cut!), to show me precisely the plan which you indicate with your finger." And Sfâa, seizing the instrument, would have cut off all the projections from the skin, thus tracing the profile of the future enclosure.

De *Sfâakous*, one would come *Sfakes*, from which we get *Sfax*.

17 A third version claims that the name of Sfax would come from the Arab word *Fakous*, which means cucumber, a fruit that one collects in abundance in the country.

Enclosure

The strengthened enclosure of Sfax is, indisputably, one of the best preserved examples of a Saracen structure. It forms a large quadrilateral 425 meters wide by 550 meters long, and strongly resembles the enclosure of Aigues-Mortes, which is itself only a reproduction of that of Damiette.

The walls of Sfax, entirely crenellated and built with materials coming mainly from ancient monuments, would undoubtedly not resist the attacks of modern artillery. It is nevertheless true; from the point of view of the old strategy, that they constitute an undeniably valuable defensive system.

On the whole circumference of these ramparts, of which the average height of twelve to fourteen meters defies climbing, some towers, some round, others square,

hexagonal or octagonal, are laid out according to the rules of the art, so as to leave no dead angle outside which might provide shelter from the fire of the musketry.

Other more important works, also projecting from the walls, supplement the defensive system of the city, allowing the mouths of some incredible cannons to project through their embrasures.

To begin with the *Kasbah*, located at the south-western angle of the enclosure. It is very large and has many stores and casemates. Nine pieces of average gauge can be put in a battery and sweep an arc of 225 degrees, from east to northwest by south.

Coming next, by going up from left to right, is *Bordj-Hajjar*: five embrasures; *Bordj-el-Ksar*, at the northwest saillant of the city: three embrasures. From the platform of this fort one enjoys a splendid view over the countryside. It is the best of all the positions to defend the landward front, in all directions; *Bordj-el-Djebli*, whose thirteen embrasures are so level with the platform, that it would be impossible to lay out the smallest piece of artillery; *Bordj-Messaouda*, at the northeast projection, with five embrasures; *Bordj-el-Arifa*: two embrasures; *Bordj en Nar*, at the southeast corner, with eleven embrasures, this *Bordj*, very firmly built, is most important for the defense of the sea front; *Bordj-Ressas*: six embrasures; and finally, close to the *Kasbah*, *Bordj-Drira*, in rather bad condition five embrasures.

A covered way, maintained very well, completely skirts the interior of the fortifications.

Many loopholes are placed at the height of a man, in the thickness of the walls; one reaches them, almost everywhere, by casemates opening onto the covered way, and in which the gunners can find very effective shelter.

The *battery rasante* [at sea level], named *Toprana*, located immediately at the edge of the sea, and which, on July 16, 1881, the day of the capture of Sfax, was so brilliantly dealt with by our sailors, is today almost entirely dismantled.

The defensive system that we have just described made it possible for the indigenous townsmen to baptize their city with the name of *Sfax-the-Strong*; it separates very clearly the Arab city itself, *el belâd*, from the European district, commonly called *R'bat*.

Arab city. European district.

Like all the Eastern cities, Sfax, seen from a distance, with its notched walls and the dazzling whiteness of its houses, presents itself to the eye in an extremely picturesque way.

It is not the same when one penetrates into it.

It is only narrow streets, tortuous, poorly paved, which mix, cross, entangle in an inextricable maze, and which sometimes finish abruptly in cul-de-sacs, filled with potholes and strewn with rubbish.

Some wretched shops, where craftsmen of any profession devote themselves to their industry with the most primitive tools, are embedded in the ground floor of houses
20 hermetically closed, coarsely rough-cast with lime, and timidly pierced, on the street with carefully latticed impenetrable windows.

Here and there, the dwelling of some wealthy townspeople is identified with its own entrance, and some decorative sculptures which decorate the entrance.

Rubbing elbows in the street, coming from all the points of the Mediterranean, is a population most oddly assorted.

First of all the Moor trader, with round face and chubby figure, the color of wax, with an indolent and lazy step, a rich person dressed in fabrics an irreproachable cleanliness.

Then comes an Arab of the nomadic tribes, his knotty bludgeon or stick in hand, his sabre at his side, badly wrapped in a brown wool burnous, which barely covers a long shirt of a doubtful whiteness; the negro with bare legs, letting the muscles show; the heavy and plump Jew, shoes fastened with a Birdcage [*à la Volière*], and from which white soles quite drawn, retained by full tight breeches floating to the knees, showing flabby calves of an incredible size; the Kerkennien fisherman in the original costume of his island, embellished with white wool embroideries; the Egyptian merchant with the long dress tied at the hips, Turkish slippers pointed and raised *à la poulaine* (peaked); the Maltese with the angular and darkened face; the sicilian in a brown jacket, the head covered with a bonnet falling down on his shoulders, in the Neapolitan style; the Greek sailor with the regular figure, dressed in his elegant national costume; the young
21 Levantine, European in origin but born in the country, asserting itself, without success, to present the Parisian fashion, with badly adjusted clothes; finally, further along, fittingly draped in his rags, an indigenous beggar, imploring, in the name of Allah, public charity.

If one can imagine, moreover, passing through this variegated crowd, a cloud of noisy and disheveled children, small donkeys, mules, camels loaded with goods, then one will have an idea of the animated tableau which we are impotent to render.

Two doors, insufficient for the considerable movement of the city, connect the Arab city with the outside. One, Bab-el-Diwan (Gate of the Diwan, "*council*"), opens into the European district or R'bat; the other, *Bab-el-Djebli* (Gate of the fields), is located under the bordj of the same name, and gives access in the countryside.

The R'bat, built between the city and the sea, on reclaimed land, is pierced with straight streets quite well aligned. It contains approximately three hundred houses and is only populated by the Europeans and Jews.

Before the French occupation the Moslems alone had the right to remain in the Arab city. Christians and Jews were allowed to enter there during the day, for their business, but come evening, they were forced to leave before the closing of the gates. The
22 European district was itself surrounded by a wall which separated it from the sea, "*la marine*" a name generally given to the Port in the Levantines countries, which one could reach only by three exits, which were also customs posts.

Every day, at sunset (*Moghreb*), and Friday at *Asor*, or the three o'clock prayer time in the afternoon, the doors of these three exits were invariably closed and the keys carried to Caïd or Governor. Whoever let themselves be surprised, out of the R'bat, at closing time, which was announced a quarter of an hour in advance by a crier, was unrelentingly obliged to spend the night out of at home.

We are told by Mgr Buhagiar, about whom we already spoke, the following characteristic anecdote. Being curate of Sfax, he was called, one Friday evening at the end of 1879, to manage the last sacraments with an Italian lady, which resided in one of the only two houses located, at that time, out of the enclosure, on the shore even. However, the church being inside the walls, the priest, to fill the duties of his ministry, had to request of the Caïd the exceptional authorization to open the door, authorization which was refused. The Governor wishing however to be agreeable to the husband of the dying woman, who was a consul of one of the European great powers, without violating an instruction strong in honor among the fanatics of Sfax, accepted the means suggested by the P. Buhaagiar to cross the wall, on a secluded point, by climbing it with
23 the means of a ladder, and invited the guards to close their eyes on this irregularity. This is what was done.

Since the French occupation these vexations of another age no longer exist, and, in 1883, our military engineers made the memory disappear, by demolishing the walls which enclosed the European district, and using the stones that it withdrew, for the construction of comfortable huts for our troops.

Cemeteries

Overlooking the northern face of the city, and separating it from the gardens, extends a vast zone, with an average width of 800 meters, that the natives have converted into a cemetery (*Djebbana*).

The Moslems have, as with all peoples, respect for their dead, but they understand it in their own manner. Their necropolis is just a vast field burying field, opened to all who come, so that animals and people can furrow their own way, placing their feet, with the utmost unconcern, on the burials that are randomly distributed there.

When a true believer dies, his corpse is transported to a small mosque, located in the same cemetery. There it is entirely stripped of its clothing, washed according to the regulations of the Coran, its nose, mouth and ears are carefully plugged with cotton, and finally it is rolled in a new piece of white fabric, and rested, such as it is, on a 24 stretcher which the friends of the departed carry on their shoulder, as far as the place of burial. A pit, just matching the size of the deceased, is dug to approximately 80 centimetres in depth and quickly built in the interior. The body is deposited there and an elder recites some verses of the Coran; then the pit is closed, level with the ground, by covering it with broad flat stones juxtaposed, on which a thick lime mortar is spread. Lastly, the masons build in small hardcore, in the middle and in the longitudinal direction of the platform thus obtained, an edge in relief, a few centimetres in height.

During this time the assistants, squatted around the burial, smoke and discuss, while the women, a little further, cry stridently in mourning, and scratch their faces.

No funeral inscription is laid out on the tomb to recall to the survivors the name, age and time when the death occurred. The lapse of memory begins...

Only, those who belong to a powerful family or who died in the odor of holiness, have a burial really worthy of the name, as we have said previously.

The Israelite [Jewish] cemetery, carefully distant from that of the Moslems, occupies, one kilometer to the northeast of the city, a site of approximately a hectare; the burials, looked after very well, are covered with broad white marble flagstones, almost a uniform model, illustrated with inscriptions in Hebraic characters.

25 The procedure of the Jews, in their funeral ceremonies, does not differ appreciably from that employed by the sons of the Prophet. The body of the departed is however transported to the cemetery in a closed coffin, where it is only extracted for the last prayers.

The habit of the Jews is to proceed to the burial of their dead immediately upon the decease. And as this observation, made by their empirical doctors, does not always offer the desirable guarantees, it has resulted more than once from this surface examination, that they have buried, a little hastily, a cataleptic presenting all the symptoms of final death.

To the west of the city is the Catholic cemetery, a vast square of one hundred meters, with closed walls, and a more lugubrious aspect. The saline nature of the ground on which it is established does not allow any shrub, or any plant to be planted

and to develop in the burials field. - Only of the crosses of wood or stone emergent from this afflicted field, leaving a visitor with an impression of deep sadness.

Another small catholic cemetery, today closed, exists to the east, opposite Bordj-en-Nar. It is there that rest, in a disturbing lapse of memory, the corpses of the French sailors and soldiers killed at the attack of Sfax; obscure heroes the names of whom, three quarters erased, disappear on the worm-eaten crosses, planted in haste, six years ago, over their modest burial! Will France not do anything to honour the memory of these missing, dead for the Fatherland?

Gardens (Jenane).

The rich green belt of gardens of Sfax surrounds the city, to a distance which varies between eight and twelve kilometers. These gardens are, to tell the truth, only orchards, because fruit trees prevail there. They are almost all enclosed in earthen walls, built up to two or three meters, on the peak of which grow vigorous trees of prickly pear ("Barbary Figs", *Cactus mexicanus*), full of prickles, which form an insuperable barrier. The fruits which these cacti produce contain, under a thick skin, an edible interior pulp about the size of a hen's egg, which, in spite of its doubtful taste, constitutes, when ripe, almost the exclusive food of a great number of natives.

Fruit trees

One finds, in the gardens, fruit trees of any species. We give their Arab names, which will be perhaps of some use: Olive-trees (*zeitoun*) in very great number; almond trees (*louz*), producing almonds with soft hulls and others with hard hulls; pistachio trees (*festak*) and apricot trees (*mech-mech*), with excellent fruit; peach trees (*kouk*); apple trees (*teffâah*); pear trees (*anzas*); mulberry trees (*touth*); quince (*sfergel*); nectarines (*persgan*); pomegranates (*roumana*); luxuriant vines (*aneb*), of various species.

The fig tree gives two harvests: the first white ones (*kermouss*), the second violets (*bitther*). The *kermouss* are enormous and exquisite.

It is certainly these figs that Caton the Censor would have had in his toga, when, in promoting his resounding "Delenda est Carthago", he presented them to the Roman Senate, as specimens of the richness and fertility of Africa.

Here and there the caroubier (*karroub*) which, similar to the weeping willow, lets its long branches fall down to ground with a thick dark foliage, thus forming natural hedges, impenetrable to the rays of the sun.

Rarer are the palm trees (*nakla*), growing with difficulty in a soil which is not appropriate for them, and producing a hateful fruit (*blah*), intended for the camels, but of which however certain poor natives make use.

In the places where one can get l' fresh water, the orange tree (*bordgan*), the mandarin tree (*mindelina*), the lemon tree (*file*); and sometimes the banana tree (*mouuz*), give rather tasty fruits.

Lastly, and as an ornament, the cypress, the false pepper plant, the ricinus.

Vegetables

The lack of water, which is the largest wound of the country, makes market gardening very difficult. The consequences are that the vegetables (*khodra*) are rare and expensive. However, during winter, especially when it is rainy, one quite easily obtains lettuce (*kâss*); parsley (*mâadnouss*); celery (*krafeuss*) cabbage (*khroumb*); the enormous radish (*fgel*); onion (*pseul*); garlic (*thoum*); artichoke (*keurcheuf-ganaria*); the extremely large tomato (*tmatem*); carrots (*sfènnèria*), very bulky but durable; the broad bean (*foûhl*); the bean (*loubia*); the garden pea (*guerfela*), large and rare; the chick-pea (*homs*), abundant; the beet (*selk*), of which a great use is made as substitute for sorrel and spinach; l' aubergine (*bedingel*); the white zucchini (*krâ-abida*); the large yellow pumpkin (*krâ-asfra*); the white melon (*bettieh*); the water melon (*dellah*) tasty; and in great quantity; the hot red pepper (*felfel-ahmar*), the obligatory condiment of all the Arab dishes; finally, the cucumber (*fakouss*), from which Sfax, according to an already stated version, would draw its name: *Belad fakouss*, country of cucumbers.

Medicinal flowers, Plants.

The double jasmine (*thfil*), the jasmine (*yâsminn*), the rose tree (*oueurd*), and the geranium (*atarchia*), are all cultivated on a vast scale.

29 From them one distils the flowers from which one obtains sweet spirits. The fame of these perfumes was such, that formerly the Beys, in the tribute that they were in the habit of sending each year to the Sultan, did not forget to include a few ounces jasmine oil (*zit-yasminn*) and essence of pink (*aâtar*), coming from Sfax.

Next, in much reduced abundance: the carnation (*gromfel*), highly valued by the natives; the Lily of the valley; the daffodil; marjoram (*mertcheus*); lavender (*gzema*); basil (*habak*); mint (*nânâh*); rhue (*figel*); the borage (*bou-krich*); rosemary (*klil*); salicornia and other soda grasses (*rahsoul*); fennel (*besbes*); wormwood (*segeret-*

Meriem) or 'herb of Mary'; the mallow (*kobbeisa*); camomile. (*bebbounech*); the poppy (*cachcach*); the poppy (*boit-garaoun*); the elder tree (*hokka sidna-Mousa* or 'plant of Our Lord Moses'), this last being rather rare.

Seignas

To cure the lack of water, some landowners had the happy idea of having dug, at the limit of their garden, some wells giving a water that, if not perfectly soft, was at least not very brackish, to be used for watering.

A tank, in masonry; named *gebbia*, is built very close to the well; from there many
30 small irrigation channels depart, laid out according to the needs of cultivation, throughout the garden. To raise the water and to pour it in the tank, one sometimes uses earthen cups in terra cotta, summarily installed. Most often, the natives use a large leather funnel, with the capacity of approximately a hectolitre, that they plunge in the well like an ordinary bucket, and hoist by means of a cord harnessed to a draft animal, ox or camel. A cord, by a clever provision, tightens to prevent the water from leaving the nozzle of funnel, and does not allow the liquid to run out until it is returned above a small drain leading to the tank.

Gardens thus laid out for irrigation are called *Seignas*. It is quite obvious that it is those that produce best vegetables, and in greater number.

Also cultivated there are corn (*k'tania asfra*), sorghum (*bida*), turnip (*left*), alfalfa (*fossah*), and a kind of canary plant giving a seed called *droh*.

Houesas

Such is the name given to the immense fields of olive-trees, unfenced, which, from the north of the city as far as the west, extend for an average distance of twelve new kilometers, the zone, already extensive, of the gardens of Sfax.

31 The houesas are maintained, by the natives, with a solicitude which indicates real agricultural knowledge amongst them. Trees, extremely judiciously planted in staggered rows, emerge from a ground plowed carefully each year, with any parasitic grass being removed.

The nature of the ground appears to be perfectly appropriate for the development of the olive-tree. As the winter and the beginning of spring is rainy, the output is considerable; the branches literally fold under the weight of the fruit with which they are charged, and the forty indigenous oil mills that Sfax has become insufficient to crush all the harvest.

Unfortunately the miserly sky opens its beneficial cataracts too seldom, and one can hardly count on one good harvest in three years. The Sfaxien oil mills, as with anything in the domain of their industry, are installed in an extremely primitive way. The result is that superb, fatty and fleshy olives that are the equal of the best fruit of Provence or Italy, give, once crushed, only oils of a poor taste and a doubtful aspect.

Moreover, the residues or oil cakes, withdrawn from the presses, are far from having dispensed all their liquid, and remain impregnated with oil, to the enormous proportion of approximately 20 percent. Also the traders of Marseilles hasten to buy, on rather good terms, all these oil cakes that they process again, and from which they still obtain, in very remunerative quantities, excellent oils for soaps.

32 A great industrialist, Mr. Deiss, who in the South of France already has some important oil mills, has founded recently in Sousse, a large factory for the treatment of the indigenous oil cakes with carbon bisulphide, and also for the extraction of edible unrefined olive oils and the manufacture of soaps.

This project certainly anticipates a great future, and an establishment similar, created in Sfax, would be ensured of the same success.

Around the city, and especially on the territories belonging to the wandering tribes, they also cultivate barley (*châïr*) and corn (*kaméh*). The harvest of these cereals remains, like that of olives, dependent on the intensity of the rains, true wealth that the farmer calls in all his wishes, in the daily prayers that he addresses to Allah.

Fresh water

The town of Sfax is entirely deprived of drinking water. Neither river, nor source, nor well, exists to provide it, in a permanent way, with the essential liquid.

33 Only the one who has traveled these dry regions, who has suffered from thirst all along the road, under the rays of an brilliant sun, and who, upon arriving at the halt, did not find anything for refreshment except water, sometimes nauseous and muddy, from the single well met in that day, only that one can truly give an account of the priceless value that a little good water can have at a given time; that one only, once returned to our cities, can experience this curious feeling of quasi-regret, upon seeing such an amount of good and beautiful water to spouting, in long streams, in the elegant basins of our public fountains, to fall down in cascades or limpid sheets in basins always filled, and finally to lose themselves fruitlessly under the ground, through some ignored conduit.

The ground, the sand even of these burned areas, contains, in a latent state, a considerable vegetative power. When a simple storm suddenly bursts, one sees

emerging, as if by magic, from a ground that up to that point was arid and bare, a light carpet of greenery, soon punctuated here and there by timid buds, small and lovely, and surprised by the chance which gave birth to them. But the sun is not long in reappearing, relentless, little by little absorbing the last traces of moisture. And the poor plants, after having proven by a hasty flowering their immense desire to live, themselves dry out and die, in the same place where other plants will try to recommence, against this sky of fire, an unequal and sterile fight.

Cisterns

The question of water must have worried, from time immemorial, the people which were successively established in this part of Africa.

It is difficult in Tunisia, to travel a few kilometers, without walking on the ruins of the
34 old Roman civilization. However the vestiges that one most commonly meets are arched cisterns, intended to receive rainwater. The majority of them are still in a surprising state of conservation, due to the extraordinary solidity of the famous cement with which the interior of their walls is covered, and which enabled them to traverse the ages without suffering too much from the insults of time.

Today, as in the time of the Phoenicians or Romans, the cisterns respond to a need.

Each house of the Arab city is equipped with one. Water is collected from the sky, conducted from the terraces by earthenware or terra cotta pipes juxtaposed.

The size of the cisterns is obviously proportional to that of the houses. They are, however, calculated so as to store a provision of water sufficient for three years, for all the domestic needs.

We have already mentioned that one can not count on more than one rainy year in three.

Nasria

One kilometer to the north of Bab-el-Djebli is a vast site, of approximately two hectares, with closed walls, where cisterns are dug in the ground -597- each with an average capacity of fifteen cubic meters. This is what they call *Nasria*.

Around the narrow opening of each tank is built, in the shape of wide basin, a
35 surface in masonry as impermeable as possible, on which the rain water runs before entering the cistern. Each surface being joined with its neighbors, the whole offers the

aspect of an immense concrete surface, with various undulations, bored with holes that are surrounded by a small curbstone.

A simple calculation shows that filling the cisterns can only be achieved if a minimum of 450 millimetres of rain falls, an enormous quantity for the country. Nasria, before the French occupation, was a reserve of water in the event of food shortage. The single door giving access to it was closed, and the key deposited with the Governor. Today, the Nasria is opened to all who come, few or no precautions are taken for the conservation of the terraces which crack on all sides, and which thus lose their principal quality, their impermeability, allowing the ground to absorb, without benefit, a good part of the fallen water.

Fesguias

About fifteen kilometers from the city, to the North-West, there is a solid mass of hills, from which spring various wadis or rivers, generally dry, but which are transformed into torrents when a storm or abundant rains fall in the area; one of these wadis reaches the sea very close to Sfax.

However, a local tradition teaches us that approximately two centuries ago, an
36 important character, whose name has not come down to us, conceived the generous idea of collecting the water of this wadi to thus equip the city with an appreciable reserve of the precious liquid.

Inspired by the Roman method, to put its project into execution, he established in the bed of the torrent, a barrage which brought water loaded with soil and sand to a first tank where a good part of the muddy material settled. Once full, this basin poured a much less muddy liquid into a second tank, which in its turn got rid of its last impurities, before going on to fill the principal tank definitively.

This is the ingenious assembly of constructions that are called *Fesguia*.

Two of these fesguias, each having a capacity of fifteen to twenty thousand cubic meters, are located 1,800 meters to the West of the city.

In spite of their imposing proportions, they barely contain, in their current condition, a provision of water hardly sufficient for a few months.

These immense basins being open to the sky, evaporation during the summer is great; moreover, they are very badly maintained, and are too seldom emptied of the soil and sand which fill them, decreasing their volume by as much, and never purged of the hideous amphibians which there swarm in myriads, to the point of rendering the water almost undrinkable, even by animals.

37 The Fesguias and Nasria are thus works of public utility, due to the initiative and philanthropy of generous givers. They are classified, as with all creations of the same kind, amongst the important group of properties called *Habbous*, which, not forming part of the public domain itself, escape direct monitoring by the Government.

Habbous

The habbous properties are pious legacies, made with a humane and philanthropic aim, by charitable believers, jealous to attract, after their death, the favours of Allah.

A silver income, guaranteed by part of the fortune of the donor, is always attached by this one, to the perpetual maintenance of its foundation.

This manner of making the property is employed frequently in all the Moslem countries, and the number of the donations increases little by little so much, that the need has been felt for creating in each Muslim State, a Grand Council charged with collecting the amount of the incomes that have been declared habbous, and to proceed, in accordance with the wishes of the givers, with their equitable distribution.

However, formerly, the functions the administrator of the habbous never failed to bring happiness to those which were invested with it. Having arrived without fortune in the Council, their devoted manner of life - and especially intelligent - of managing the 38 inheritance of the poor seemed to bring on them, in a particular way, the blessings of Heaven. One soon saw their moderation changing into comfort, and their comfort into a richness which continued, little by little, increasing.

The Grand Council of Habbous of the Regency, which sits in Tunis, designates to represent it, in each city, one of the religious leaders known as *Mokaddems*, who have full powers to manage, to exploit, to lease and even to exchange any habbous property entrusted to them. They only establish, in their own way, its output, the expenses which its maintenance has caused, and consequently the sum remaining available.

Mokaddems today appear to continue the tradition of their predecessors and to enjoy, in their turn, of the same celestial favours. Few of them have remained poor.

The Administration of Habbous, an impenetrable mystery, has accepted, without too many apprehensions, the recent decision which allows the Head office of Tunisian finances to exert a right of control over its operations.

It worries more about the logical proposal, put forth by certain municipalities, to substitute, in each city, a simple municipal commission to replace the brotherhood of Mokaddems. It is quite certain that if this was accepted, the powerful Council would see with terror the pledges escaping it, along with the right to manage them.

The Habbous de Sfax collects, annually, approximately a sum of a hundred
39 thousand piastres (60,000 francs), which should largely suffice for the maintenance of the Fesguias, Nasria and the walls of the city, for which it is specifically intended.

Chaâbouny wells

A wealthy Sfaxien landowner, Sidi Chaâbouny, whose descendants still exist, excavated, last century, near his immense garden located six kilometers to the West of the city, two wells that provide pilgrims and travelers with excellent water, though a little magnesian. Established on an inexhaustible layer, these wells constitute, today, the sole source of water sufficient, in any season, for the needs of the garrison and those of the inhabitants of the European city, which, as one knows, do not have a specific cistern available to them.

Sfax has a veritable army of water merchants. Each one of them pushes in front of him one of those unhappy small donkeys [lit. *bourricots*], so maltreated, so stiff with exhaustion, and traverses the streets shouting his wares; *el mâ! el mâ! water! water!*

A small bourricot carries a load of four porous earthenware jars, each one having a capacity of eight or nine liters.

When Nasria and Fesguias contain water, the full earthenware jar costs a carroube, or four centimes.

But during a drought, when the water carrier must go, with his animal, to supply
40 himself at the wells of Chaâbouny, thus making, under a blazing sun, a total journey of thirteen kilometers, the water becomes immediately more expensive, and the whole load is worth one piastre, (0 Fr. 60).

This obligation to buy water at such a high price is a heavily burden for the European families, who only use it with a parsimonious economy, a liquid so dearly bought.

The ships which visit the port of Sfax also experience an severe difficulty in supplying themselves with fresh water. To the exorbitant price that they pay is added the time, often considerable, that it is necessary to waste to transfer the water, earthenware jar by earthenware jar, into the containers on the ship.

Artesian water.

By what precedes, one can see how significant the question of water is in Sfax.

If the wells of Chaâbouny disappear or are, from the ill will of some fanatic, temporarily, made unsuitable for consumption, then the garrison is fatally obliged, so as

not to die of thirst, to evacuate the city. If an insurrection occurs, and most of our troops will immediately have to cut a path through to the above-named wells, to occupy them militarily to ensure that they do not fall into the hands from the rebels, and to cover the road which leads there to ensure the safety of the communications.

41 For this reason it is into research into Artesian water, in the immediate vicinity of the city, that the Government must place all its efforts. A drilling undertaken to this end, in June 1886, so far only gave conclusive results. It is advisable to pursue this unremittingly and without being discouraged by surveys which, in the event of success, will have as a consequence first to improve the conditions of existence of a large fraction of the population, and also to considerably increase the wealth of a country already so full of vitality.

Population

One can only estimate roughly the total for the Moorish population of Sfax. The Public Records office does not exist among the Moslems, and it is materially impossible, if not to decree it, at least to establish it. The disciples of the Prophet are too heedless, too indolent, too fanatic to appreciate the value of an institution which would not seem to them, all things considered, only a simple means of enquiry, used to ascertain what occurs amongst them.

However, by tradition, religion even, their house is also tightly closed today, as was, formerly, the impenetrable *gynaecium* [‘women’s quarters] of the Greeks. Moreover, as they have not repugnance in cheating the tax department, and to keep for themselves, as much as they can, the payment of the poll tax, the *medjba*, which is imposed on them, from this point of view, any census would be designed obstruct them.

42 The various sections of the European and Jewish population are easier to determine. They also do not have a census, but their social state being very different from that of the natives, statistics are possible.

One can allow, as being close to the truth, the following estimate:

Arab city and gardens	25,000
Jews	2,300
Maltese	725
European suburb	
Italians	375
French	85
Greeks	85
English	10
Total	28,530

This figure does not include the civil servants, nor the garrison: that is to say 1,200 people.

It is appropriate to add, to the preceding evaluation, a floating population of 1,000 fishermen of various nationalities, mainly Greeks and Sicilians.

Which gives, in round numbers, a total of 30,000 people.

Moors

The name of Moors, which one commonly gives to all the natives of the Barbary coasts, does not have a well defined etymology.

Some derive it from the Phoenician *Mouérym*, which is applied to Westerners, the people furthest away from the Levant.

43 Others find in it the Greek word *Mauros*, bronzed, swarthy, who has brown skin, from where comes the old name of Mauritania, given to the African provinces of which we occupy ourselves.

Let us announce finally the Arab root *Ghrrarb*, Occident, Western, from where comes the word *Moghreb*, which, still nowadays among Moslems, more particularly indicates Morocco, the western country par excellence, whose inhabitants are called *Moghreby*, an Arab word which has been 'Frenchified' under the term *Maugrébins* [in English, *Maghrebians*].

In Sfax, as in all the other cities of Regency, the Moor or townsman, has none of the proud, bold, quarrelsome character, that certain authors are ready to allot to the Arab, undoubtedly confusing him with the Berber with the warlike instincts of our Kabylie.

The dominant note, particular with Tunisian traders, appears to be the narrowly mercantile spirit.

The emanations a ground formerly Phoenician and Punic seem to have impregnated them with this genius of trade, of which Carthage was for so a long time the opulent queen.

But this genius is there transformed in a sadder way, thanks, undoubtedly, to their daily contact with the Jews, whom they scorn, but from whom they appear to have borrowed the commercial habits particular to people of this race.

Whoever has had the occasion to enter the shop of a Moor to make the smallest purchase, could recognize this duplicity which pushes the merchant to mislead, as
44 much as he can, regarding the quality of the goods sold, to make the old pass for new, to skillfully dissimulate any evidence of depreciation of an object, and to offer if finally, with an astonishing aplomb, at a price ten times higher than its true value.

Then there is the endless bargaining, hypocritical complaints, during which Allah is often taken as witness, - *Ou Rabbi!* - declarations, gestures, oaths, always accompanied by cunningly dissimulated expressions of the eyes, when pierced to the point of malice.

Generally the novice bargainer, little aware of the habits of the country, allows himself to be attracted, convinced, obtaining a reduction of half, and after having paid four times the price for an article, goes off persuaded that he made an excellent deal.

The Inhabitants of Sfax, *Sfaxi* as they call themselves, pass for having a fanaticism quite superior to that of the other Moslems of the Regency.

This sentiment which is sometimes a virtue, since it is based on the worship of the religion of the ancestors and on love of the fatherland, assumes warlike qualities, which agree poorly with the spirit of the mercenary attitude which we have just depicted.

It has been noted that the insurrection of 1881 was not fomented by Sfaxiens, but well rather submitted to by them. The chief of the insurrectionists, Ali-Ben-Khalifat, actually commanded some bands of nomadic Arabs, from the surrounding tribes, that
45 the vibrant word of Holy War had only half persuaded, if the idea of plunder had not come to surround this word with an attractive halo.

The townsmen of Sfax feared the insurrectionists more than they disapproved of them; they only fought with them by force, and, not being able to stop the insurrectionary movement, which would have perhaps turned against them and their properties, they tried to direct it, so as not to have to suffer from it.

Local fanaticism is thus, we believe, more apparent than real. It appears to be restricted to scrupulously prohibit entry of the mosques or other religious establishments, to any *Roumy* [foreigner] or Christian, any *Youddy* or Jew, and also to show, by a great abuse, the green turban.

Everyone one knows that green is the sacred color of Mahomet, and that the turban of this nuance is exclusively, reserved to the hadji, that is to say to the believers who have piously achieved the voyage to Mecca, and made the five prescribed ablutions in the venerated enclosure of the Kaâbah.

However, in Sfax, a good half of the indigenous population has the head covered with the devoted turban, and one would be greatly mistaken if it was supposed that all of those had really touched the soil of the Holy City.

The green turban seems to be transmitted by heritage, and if it is proven that someone, in the family, previously made the pious pilgrimage, his descendants or close relations believe themselves sanctified at the same time, and authorized to carry the beloved color of the Prophet.

46 Beside the defects characteristic of Sfaxiens, which we believed we have brought to light, it is advisable to emphasize the very real qualities of which they are gifted. More active and harder workers than the Orientals have the habit of being, they succeed in giving to their trade an indisputable importance, and the courtesy that they bring to their transactions, however interested they are, does no little to support this commercial development.

They also practise, to a high degree, the virtues of hospitality, and when they open the doors of their residence to a foreigner, their instinctive avarice changes into an excessive generosity, mixed with ostentation; nothing is too good for the guest, and the house is plundered for the best reception.

The general habits of the Moslems have too often been described for it to be necessary to outline them again.

It should however be noticed that amongst Sfaxiens, passion for women seems less marked than elsewhere. Many of them have only one wife; it results from this that their family is made up on a more solid basis, that the woman enjoys in their eyes a greater consideration, and that the bonds of a reciprocal affection more appears to link them more tightly.

Jews

We would not like, in the study of manners which will follow, to raise valid
47 susceptibilities nor moreover to provide a weapon to those for which the name of Jew is only equivalent to a definition. We have no intention of relating the character of the Jews of Europe, that we do not know, with that of the Jews of the east, of which we know too much.

It is therefore only of the latter that we want to speak, and we are convinced that all those who have spent some time in the Levantine countries, will recognize the accuracy of our observations.

For the rest, authorized writers, the missionary Shaw, Doctor Louis Franck, d'Avezac, etc, have expressed, a long time before us, some appreciations which we do nothing but supplement.

For the Jews of the east the fatherland does not exist; they know of no other region than where chance has placed them and where their interest maintains them.

Coming without knowing from the four corners of the world, to an unspecified land, they are not long in grouping, uniting, joining forces. A rabbi puts himself at their head, armed with the Talmud which he explains and comments on; he teaches them that the God of Israel and Jacob shakes with joy at each material or moral damage inflicted on

the Philistines, and that the best places, in the Heavenly Jerusalem, will be reserved for those who have piously passed their lives in enriching themselves at the expense of those rejected by Jehovah.

Soon an admirable discipline is established between them; they set their heart on
48 the country where they are gathered and get on for the best to exploit it, the most powerful coming to the help of the most timid.

At one time persecuted and banished from this old Europe that they try today to reconquer, the sons of Israel regain ground in all the states of Islam, where they quickly experience a considerable development. The Moslems display a supreme contempt with regard to the Jews. *Youddi, Ben Youddi, Jew, son of a Jew*, are the greatest insults that they can utter. But the Levantine Jew can philosophically bow his head under the weight of this reprobation, certain as he is, that at the psychological moment when the Arab will call upon his usurious talents, he will be able to catch up with, in good piastres, more than he believes to have lost in estimation.

These people that do not know any manner of tool, neither carry a rifle, nor bend to the earth to cultivate it, detest manufacture, industry, creative work; he only knows commerce, the display and fruitless peddling; the Levantine Jew, who is the best second-hand dealer in the universe, makes himself a salesman, retailer, broker, as elsewhere one becomes a craftsman. Where there are twenty shops for on craftsman, and ten times more merchants than would be necessary.

The one who does not have the means to commit himself to the commerce for his own account, and who could not find employment with his co-religionists, becomes worthless for the community. He then calls upon the protection of the rabbi who can
49 almost always place him, preferably in the house of a Christian.

Every European trader must, in the interest of its trade, accept as a *sensale*, or broker, the Jew which the chief of the congregation proposes to him. If by misfortune he refused this interested support, the refractory tradesman would have against him the coalition of the whole Synagogue, and he would see soon his businesses going downhill.

These brokers, thanks to their real talent for acquiring foreign languages, and thanks also to their subtle sense of smell for good operations to be tried, sometimes render very real services to the houses which employ them. They are the necessary intermediaries between Europeans and the natives; it is them that buy, sell, pay, collect, always with a commission proportional to the importance of the transaction, commission that they are paid, generally, by the salesman as well as by the purchaser.

In Tunisia, the Jews are able, by an extremely curious process, to create real rights on any property belonging to foreign people within their congregation. And here is how:

The Jew who, the earliest in date, can rent the garden or the house of a non-Jew, hastens to record, with the rabbi, his title as first occupant; then he announces in the Synagogue that he claims this house or this garden as a perpetual right, called *Ousaka*, of which he determines himself the annual share.

50 From then on, no other Jew can succeed the first occupant as a tenant, if he does not beforehand pay the annual right of *Ousaka* to the latter.

No example exists of a Jew who has tried to withdraw himself from the payment of this royalty, devoted in this way, than an *ousaka* negotiates and sells as the equal to the best document of title. If he was tempted to do it, the recalcitrant Jew would quickly be recalled to order by its co-religionists, a penalty able to go as far as excommunication would strike him, and, banished from the Synagogue, it would not be long before all Israel would assemble against him.

For the rest *ousaka* is not, for the Jews, a weapon with double edge which can be turned over against them; it is, actually, from the owner that this tax is taken, because this is what occurs. The subsequent tenants do not want to spend, in total, that is to say rent and *ousaka* included, a sum higher than that which the first occupant paid, as rent alone. Also, they can only offer to the owner, as rent, this last sum decreased by the value of *ousaka* that they, will have to pay another share.

The income for a property is thus immediately depreciated, without the one to whom it belongs being able to react against this strange process. The only resource which remains to him, to escape this tax with which the sons of Israel have stuck him, is to rent his building only to Christians or Moslems. But is this always possible in a country
51 where the Jewish population constitutes a large fraction of the total population? The owner is obliged, generally, to resign himself to a loss, rather than to leave his building unoccupied for several years.

The Jews of Sfax appear more united, more disciplined than elsewhere.

The Rabbi exerts on them an absolute authority, and whereas one notes an excessive relaxation in the manners of the female Jews in Tunis, who deliver themselves in great numbers to prostitution under the interested eyes of their parents, in Sfax, their irreproachable control recalls the virtue and prudence of Sarah and Ruth.

Formerly insulted, maltreated and sometimes robbed by the Arabs, the sons of Israel underwent all these humiliations with a resignation that explains their pusillanimity. Today they enjoy the most perfect safety and can devote themselves to their usurious operations without fear.

They observe with a specific exactitude the regulations of their religion. Saturdays, the Sabbath day, and throughout all their many festivals, they close their shops, and in spite of their great love of lucre, they scrupulously avoid being involved in anything that,

near or far, could resemble commerce. Covered with their most beautiful clothes, they walk, visit, after having filled precisely, at the Synagogue, their religious duties.

52 The Jews do not marry, except between co-religionists and very early; it generally results from it that the husbands have between them very close bonds of consanguinity; such is undoubtedly the cause of these diseases, scrofule, elephantiasis, etc, resulting from a defect of the blood, of which they frequently carry the too visible traces.

With the Jews, as with the Moslems; the beauty of the woman lies plumpness. The larger a young girl is, and more she is appreciated; a crowd of applicants dispute the happiness of marrying her.

Also, it is with a jealous care that the mothers commit to equip their daughters, with a view to marriage, from this exaggerated opulence of the form which gives them a step so unsightly heavy, and which their almost indecent costume emphasizes still more. This is composed of pants sticking on thick and fleshy legs, a light fabric blouse, which goes down a little lower than the kidneys, and covers in its vertical folds a formless cluster of flesh, or the contours of the throat are lost in the soft rotundity of the other parts of the body. From a hairstyle formed into a peak, like a horn, on the top of the head, falls a *Sassari*, a sort of burnous in fine silk and wool fabric, in which they wrap themselves. The Jews have, moreover, the practice to fit, as sandals, very small varnished shoes; these oblige them to walk almost on the point of the foot; which
53 causes unsightly swinging of the body, which contributes to weigh down the advantage, if it is possible, of their step already so inelegant.

It is only by artificial processes of fattening that they are able to give the young Jews the girth of which they are so proud. During the two months preceding the marriage, one treats them with floury and starchy foods that they are made to absorb in great quantity, by isolating them in an obscure room, and by sleep prolonged as long as possible.

They are also made to eat meat of a young dog, which has, it is said, special properties to increase plumpness.

The Levantine Jews believe in marvels to the equal of the Arabs, and are, like them, superstitious. The *evil eye*, - the *jettatura* of the Italians, - is what they fear most. To preserve themselves they paint in red an open hand on the door of their house; they hang on the walls of their rooms, either a pair of horns, or a fish tail dried in the sun, and they carry on them, in the form of amulets, representations of these various objects in precious metal.

The majority of them hope to finish their days in Jerusalem; and one quite often sees old folks, men and women, saying an permanent good-bye to their family, and not from fear to board, without hope of return, but for Palestine which they regard as their homeland.

The number of Jews in Sfax has a marked tendency to increase. The *Ghetto* or
54 district in which they are most particularly grouped, has become too small to contain
them all, and they have started to invade the Arab city which was formerly so rigorously
prohibited to them.

A single synagogue, served by a single rabbi, is enough for the moment for the
exercise of their worship.

Europeans.

At the time of the Berber rule, several Europeans, that various chances had led to
Sfax, were living in the country and had had descendants there. Their children, by the
force of things, had been constrained to marry amongst themselves, and the
generations following one another, in this almost ignored ground corner where the
arrival of new colonists was extremely rare, gave rise to them being European only in
name, while they have neither the tastes, nor the habits, the needs, or the aspirations of
the inhabitants of old Europe.

Those of Europeans origin are divided into several families, having between them
all the close family relationships, which result from the successive crossings.
Disproportionate unions from the point of view of age are rather frequent. They are
explained by the restricted number of women or young girls, able to contract marriage at
any given moment. Which is why, between individuals, some attachments are
sometimes extremely curious: one widower, that we knew, became the father-in-law of
his brother-in-law, and consequently grandfather of his nephews; another, by marrying
55 the niece of his son-in-law, becomes in his turn the nephew of this son-in-law, etc. The
examples abound.

What results from this is that no European of Sfax has a well determined nationality,
and that is understood. Let us permit an example: if to an English father and an Italian
mother is born a child who marries, in his turn, a Spaniard, to which European nation
would the children belong that come from this last union, and those from the following
unions?

L' idea of homeland becomes, consequently, perfectly theoretical; each one can, to
his liking, choose the one which is appropriate for him, that he has never seen, he will
never touch its soil, and towards which he recognizes only purely platonic obligations.
Also, it is not rare to see, in the same family, two brothers availing themselves of
different nationalities.

The old Europeans of Sfax, of all Tunisia we should say, are thus by their character,
their spirit, their tendencies, very comparable to the Levantines of Turkey, Syria, or

Egypt, that have so often been described to us. Their true homeland is the place where all their interests are concentrated, where they are born, where they live, where they die.

It is this population, where the Italian element predominates, that the French occupation has surprised, and perhaps disturbed.

By skilful exploitation of the procedures employed in the former corrupt administration, each one had tried to mark out a situation in this new homeland, to
56 create interests there. The sons had continued the tradition of the fathers, and most of them had succeeded. This is what explains their concern, at the time of our intervention in the affairs of the Regency.

Fearing to be threatened in their often excessive privileges, in their properties, whose titles were generally badly established, perhaps pushed by pressure from outside, it is only with a barely suppressed hostility, that the Europeans of Sfax have accommodated us, after the takeover by force which led the city to fall into our hands, and after the bombardment that we know (1). The protests, complaints, requests for allowances abounded.

The natives, deeply sickened at the taking of Sfax - the Strong one, as they named it – and almost ruined by the heavy war indemnity with which they were struck (2), followed, with an lively interest, badly disguised under their grand air of supreme indifference, the moral fight which was engaged against us. Skilfully pushed by a foreign, well-known consul in the country, they were made the accomplices of certain claims, which could cause us the most serious embarrassments.

(1) 15-16 July 1881.
(2) 10,000,000 Tunisian piastres, or 6,000,000 francs.

This is where the indisputable skill of our first Resident-Général (1), was affirmed;
57 who knew, with the talent from which we reap fruits today, to level all the difficulties, to reconcile all the interests.

Little by little relieved from their fears, largely compensated for their losses, supported in their business, thanks to the great commercial impulse of which they were the first to be profited, the Europeans of Sfax, even the irreconcilable ones, were not long in seeing with a less hostile eye, the new order of things established.

(1) M. Paul Cambon, who administered the Protectorate from 2 April 1882 to the end of December 1886, today ambassador of France in Madrid.

A better knowledge of our character and our intentions, along with daily contact with the officers of our army who imported, over there, the traditions of cheerfulness and courtesy of our dear France, succeeded quite quickly in eliminating the last hindrances existing against us. One can say that today we no longer have a systematic hostility to fear. The future will convince the remainder, if it is conducted as wisely as the past.

A prejudice, which is met unfortunately too often in France, consists in believing that Europeans encountered overseas have a suspect origin. It is advisable to protest strongly against this perfectly false opinion, which is based, all in all, only on the extreme loathing which the French feel on going abroad, however fortunate he is.

58 It is indeed necessary not to confuse traders who, from father to son, have been established in the country, with the mercenary vagabonds without morality, - French for the majority, have the courage to say it, - which follow the armies on campaign to exploit them, which establish themselves temporarily in a city where they practice the shadiest trades, and disappear all at once, as they came, without warning, to further go benefiting from their shady industry.

We have known, and we count amongst our friends, many of these old Europeans who are, moreover, excellent fathers, very accessible, very gracious and very hospitable. It should be recognized, however, that the perpetual contact with the Jews and the Moors, has given them certain defects borrowed from these two races. Their excessive jealousy pushes them, in particular, to hide their feelings as much as they can. But, since the occupation, this irrational background of brutality tends more and more to disappear.

The presence of French ladies, arriving in Sfax to join their husbands, civil servants or officers, has strongly contributed to change the narrow current of ideas, and Europeans have ended up understanding that there is no longer any reason to maintain their former stupid jealousy. Also, a good number of them have decided to open their house, timidly at first, then very broadly. Traditional French courtesy was not long in
59 dissolving all their fears, and today relations are established on the basis of great cordiality.

The banners of nine powers (1) float in the European city, on the house of that many consular agents, foreign for the majority to the nation that they represent, and of which several do not have even one subject to protect. This title of Consul was very sought after before the abolition of the capitulations; they were bargained for in the chancelleries of Tunis, and one often paid very dearly, because of the enormous privileges which were attached. Today it has lost almost all its importance, and no longer has anything but a purely honorary value.

1) England, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Belgique, Spain, United States, Greece, Italy, Sweden and Norway.

The old Europeans of Sfax usually speak Arabic, Italian and French. They have, moreover, broken with the character, uses and sensitivity of the natives, whom they serve as commission agents for the loading of their goods, and for the flow of those to Europe.

Constantly on the lookout for a good transaction to be realized, it is only thanks to their perfect knowledge of the people and the things, that they managed to put together their fortune. They do not limit the extent of their business transactions to the city; they often circulate amongst the most distant tribes, which they visit, traversing the country in complete safety.

60 Few new colonists could, we believe, compete with them on the specialist field of business with the natives; the newcomers would not have this intimate knowledge of the country, which is an absolutely essential condition of success.

Maltese

Alongside these various types of the Sfaxien population, which we have just reviewed, the Maltese form, themselves, a extremely curious type to study.

Just as the island in which they originate is located in the middle of the space which separates the coasts of Europe from those of Barbary, in the same way the Maltese seem to be placed in the middle, to be used as a link between the Berber race and the Latin race.

Dyed bronze, with a dark and lively eye, flattened nose, thick and fleshy lips, slightly frizzy hair covering a low forehead, limbs with strongly marked muscles, all in him indicates a doubtless Berber origin.

For the rest, a legend runs, in the Tunisian Sahel, that the Maltese would be the descendants of a portion of the ancient tribe of Ouled Saïd which emigrated, at one time and for undetermined reasons, to this isolated rock of Malta which has undergone, since historical times, so many tribulations. The Maltese language itself, that modern British pressure has not succeed in modifying, takes part of the various idioms spoken on two
61 sides of the Mediterranean, It is a patois in which Arabic forms the basis, and in which one recognizes some Greek words, some Italian expressions and sometimes German. There existed formerly, they say, an alphabet specific to this language, the use of which fell so much into disuse, under the oppressive reign of the Knights, that today it is entirely lost.

The spoken language is enough, otherwise, for the commercial transactions of these generally illiterate people.

When, by chance, the need is felt to communicate in writing, the educated Maltese makes indifferent use of the Arabic alphabet or the Latin alphabet; the orthography of the words consequently becomes arbitrary, and the writer chooses to employ the letters which conform best to the pronunciation.

Lastly, traits of characteristic habits which supplements the resemblance, the Malteses are as fanatic Christians as the Arabs are fanatic Moslems; their superstitions, as those of sons of the Prophet, do not know limits; their excessive religious enthusiasm sometimes reaches the limits of tolerance.

The Malteses are extraordinarily prolific. Their island, which is hardly more than eight leagues (8 x 4 kilometers) long by four broad, is proportionally seven or eight times more populated than France, and moreover its only products do not provide enough food for a quarter of its inhabitants.

Malta is, in effect, just a sterile agglomeration of limestone rocks, barely covered
62 here and there by a thin layer of humus, allowing some cultivation.

In spite of this aridity, one finds in the island a good number of pleasant gardens, eloquent witnesses of the surprising activity and rare perseverance of the islanders, since the majority were established artificially, with topsoil brought, at great pain, from Sicily.

Many people (1) successively occupied the island, the inhabitants were always treated as a conquered people. And, strangely, perhaps

1. Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandales and Goths, Greeks of the later Empire, Arabs, Normans, Germans, Spaniards, Knights of Rhodes, Knights of Malta, French, English,

unique in the history of the nations, the Maltese

have ever had a proper political existence. Since the most remote times, they participated in all the battles which had as their objective the possession of their unhappy country, without the result being able to interest them much, since, all in all, it the only consequence for them was to change masters. Always resigned, they never tried, by a supreme effort, to capture a little independence, to shake off the yoke of control under which they were constantly maintained.

In spite of the extreme poverty of the ground on which she lives, in spite of the oppression of which she always suffered, the Maltese population increased early in
63 amazing proportions; the island soon became unable, not only to nourish, but even to contain its children. The least fortunate had to resign themselves to going to seek, on other beaches, the means of providing for their existence and that of their family. Because of this affinity with the races which we emphasized, the current of emigration carried them, quite naturally, to the Berbers. The similarity of the language, the great practice of the Maltese to yield to the requirements of authority and their undeniable qualities as workers, made them immediately well accepted among the Moors, to which they rendered service. Soon remunerated for their efforts and their sorrows, the present became for them less precarious and the future was not slow in smiling upon them. While preserving, at the bottom of their hearts, the memory of the absent precious island, they accustomed themselves, to regard the landing which they lived as their

homeland, they raised their children there with the cherished hope to lead them later, after having made their fortune, back to their country, over there! ...

And their number always increased on these shores of the African continent, where they are found from the extremities of Morocco as far as the borders of Egypt.

Active, industrious, after work, stiff with fatigue, extremely sober, in Tunisia the Maltese constitute the core of the population most easily assimilated. They are, as we have said, very religious and hold in great honor all the external practices of the
64 Catholic worship; special services are devotedly followed by them, and are daily celebrated in the church, with their sole intent.

One of the greatest figures of the contemporary episcopate is, indisputably, the eminent French cardinal who now holds, between his hands, the destinies of the Christian church of Africa. An apostle who at the same time has the conviction of a great patriot, Mgr. Lavigerie; in its influence has, little by little, substituted, in Tunisia, the French influence for the Italian influence, by replacing the Italian clergy with excellent French priests; these have, at least, over their predecessors, the advantage of being able to make our language penetrate the foreign catholic populations.

A true flash of genius of the skilful prelate was, in 1885, to have the title of Bishop granted by the Holy See to the Father Buhagiar, Maltese in origin, then priest of Sfax, where he was very popular.

By thus rewarding this priest for the great services that he had rendered to the Religion, the Cardinal obtained at one stroke and without effort, the vacancy of an important priest which he entrusted, a few months later, to one of our more sympathetic French archpriests; at the same time, he attached irrevocably the heart of all the Maltese population, flattered in addition beyond measure with the great honor made to its former Pastor.

France, which the Maltese continue to regard as the *Protector of the Eastern Catholic Churches*, has certainly benefited from this grateful veneration, devoted to the eminent chief of African Christendom.

65 The Maltese women, not very pretty, are generally rather well made; they have preserved, in Tunisia, the most curious part of their national clothing, the *faldetta*. It is a kind of large black silk mantle, which almost entirely wraps them; a stiff cap surmounts it, similar enough in form to a *capot de cabriolet* [the hood of a car]; they cover their head with it, and seen from a distance under this not very gracious getup, they appear to be dressed in the severe uniform of some monastic order.

Almost all the Maltese of Sfax devote themselves to maritime professions: some are fishermen, others are sailors or owners of boats of passage, being large sailing barges

used for the transit of goods; the wealthiest running shops of marine equipment and provisioning for the ships, ship-chandlers; some, finally, are manufacturers of boats.

It is in Sfax that the only two naval shipyards existing in Tunisia are established. Both belong to Maltese.

The majority of the fishing boats in the Gulf of Gabes come from these building sites, which have the equipment sufficient for the construction of boats of a size reaching sometimes as much as thirty tons.

Somewhat rudimentary as is the knowledge of these Maltese, in naval architecture, the processes that they employ do not exclude either elegance of line, nor solidity of the whole. The gauges which they all use are similar in form, and the finished boats differ only in their dimensions. Wood of the olive-tree, very abundant in the country, is invariably employed for the establishment of the frame. The manufacturers compensate for their ignorance in the art of bending wood by a solid assembly, in three parts, of the frames composing the carcass, and it is with a real skill that they choose, to this end, those branches with a natural curve that will be able to give them the best use.

All in all, this very flourishing industry of marine construction deserves to be encouraged and is entitled to all the solicitude of the Government.

Various institutions and Services

Sfax is equipped with a Catholic church currently served by a French archpriest and a Maltese vicar. Badly damaged by the bombardment of 1881, this church was rebuilt immediately afterwards and considerably enlarged with the care of its former priest, Father Buhagiar, today bishop coadjutor of Malta.

Adjacent is a school of boys, directed by four Marist brothers, and a school of girls maintained by an equal number sisters belonging to the order of Saint-Joseph of the Apparition. Brothers and nuns have a deep devotion and charity. All are French, and the principles of our language that they inculcate in the young children of all nationalities, entrusted to their care, are the surest means, perhaps, to establish our influence in the spirit of the young generation.

A Arab-French school, set up nearly three years ago in the indigenous city, contributes to the same goal. The children of all religions are admitted there and we believe it is called to a great future.

Sfax has, additionally, in the legal realm: a district court, with extended scope, a police station and a squad of gendarmerie; in the civilian realm: a Vice-consul of France, who is at the same time Civil Controller, a Department of Customs and a Department of Public works; in the maritime realm: a port Harbour office, an agency of

the Transatlantic Company and an agency of the Italian Navigation Company of Florio-Rubattino; in the military realm: a battalion of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, a section of artillery, some engineers and the administration; in the whole garrison a thousand; men, commanded by a lieutenant-colonel. Let us recall that French post offices have been established, since 1848, in the Regency. Also by the care of our Government an aerial electric telegraph was installed there a few years later.

The Tunisian authorities of the city include: a Caïd or Governor, his Khalifat or Lieutenant, a Cadi, a Bach-Mufti and two Mufti. The Caïd of the large tribe of the Methellit, whose territories extend a long way around the suburbs from Sfax, also resides in this locality.

68 A military hospital of one hundred beds was recently built. Very spacious and perfectly arranged, it occupies, however, a site considered unhealthy.

The camp of the troops is located to the North of the city. The soldiers are rather comfortably placed there in masonry cabins. One reaches the camp by a broad avenue called "Avenue de France", which they have vainly tried to embellish by planting trees of various varieties. None of these tests have succeeded, the ground being too saturated with sea salt.

No monument worthy to attract the curiosity of the traveler exists in Sfax. Only the Grand Mosque, of which the single minaret, entirely deprived of style, dominates the surrounding houses, would be interesting to visit. Built with ancient materials coming from the surrounding Roman posts, Taphrura, Thenæ, and Usilla, it would undoubtedly succeed in attracting the attention of the archaeologists, and would allow them may be to extract from history part of its secrets. Unfortunately entry is rigorously prohibited to Christians, and it is only from the exterior, by the open windows, that one can see the forest of marble columns which are used as pillars.

A great number of other mosques, quite inferior in dimensions, are erected at various points in the city, and must, with without doubt, also contain archaeological treasures. The most curious is that of the "Aïssaouia," located in the street of the Post
69 office; it's not that its architecture presents anything prominent, quite to the contrary; but it is there that the bizarre characters, whose wild frolicking has so often been described, devote themselves to their crazy contortions during their strange ceremonies. It is also prohibited to enter there; but by the wide open doors, the passer by can embrace a glance of the odd scenes which unfold there.

Harbor and port

Few places on the Mediterranean coast of Africa, are so marvelously protected by nature, and also completely sheltered from the perfidies of the sea, as the roads of Sfax. The strongest gales raise neither waves nor swell, and ships of any tonnage, constantly motionless, can, in complete safety, rest on their anchors in the strongest part of the storm. Only a kind of lapping, often quite strong and still awkward for the small boats, brought by the wind, disturbs the serenity of water.

Entirely surrounded by land and sandbanks, the Kerkennahs to the east, the coast firm to the north and west, these roads are like a vast lake, of which single notch, seven miles in width, opens to the South.

And as, in this direction; the coasts of the continent, located about fifty miles away; inflect boldly towards the east, one can understand without difficulty that the sea waters, raised by the power of a south wind, however impetuous is it, do not have in front of
70 them the space necessary to transform themselves into deep waves; to give rise to these frightening breakers, which sometimes burst into open bays and exert their devastations there.

While it often happens, in the other ports of Regency, that bad weather entirely prevents communication between the land and the ships, in Sfax, on the contrary, there is no fear of this possibility; and if the operations of a ship are sometimes disturbed and delayed, at least they always remain possible.

But nothing is perfect on the earth. Alongside the appreciable advantage that we have just emphasized, comes the enormous disadvantage of the distance at which the ships have to drop anchor. Indeed, a broad bank of grass and silt extends very far out in front of the city, and any ship with a draught of five meters must seek its mooring at more than three thousand meters from the quays.

Everyone knows that the phenomenon of the tide, while so regular and imposing in the Ocean, is minimal in the Mediterranean. Curiously, two areas make an exception to this rule: the Adriatic and the Little Syrte. The range of the tide, which exceeds 2 meters at Gabes and Djerbah, is not less than 1.80m in Sfax, at time of the new and full moons, or syzygies [planetary alignments]. When water is low, the high bank mentioned constitutes a serious obstacle to the ease of communications: it becomes accessible to
71 only the smallest boats, which alone have some chance of reaching the beaches of the city without problems, but not without some effort,. As for the large barges loaded with goods, they are forced to wait until the reverse phenomenon is produced, and the tide has risen to fullest.

This natural obstacle is extremely prejudicial to the trade of a city as important as Sfax. It had been the first obstacle to be removed. It was done by establishing, by dredging in a soft sea bed, an easy route from the city to the harbor, and to remove, around the channel thus dug, the tall spongy grasses which in a few years developed remarkably quickly on the sandbanks. When concluded, this not very expensive work, with a light repair of the old quays, had largely restored to the port of Sfax what it had been missing.

The engineers of Regency have preferred to establish in front of the city, a vast and expensive esplanade, finished side broad by a very solid wall of quay, in concrete blocks. Our incompetence enables us to discuss neither the value, nor the utility of this work which presents itself, from the start, as an extremely tempting aspect.

If, as is rumored briefly, there was the intention there to prepare the site of a new city, we hope that the future does not hold unpleasant surprises for the authors of this design. It does not seem to us that the town of Sfax can, for many years, develop
70 sufficiently to cover all this immense space reclaimed from the water:

If we judge it by the new Customs building that has just built on the sea front of the esplanade, and whose foundations had to be established on strongly beaten piles, the future owners of the land will be exposed to grave disappointment if they want, in their turn, to construct buildings there. These new grounds were only obtained artificially, by bringing onto a layer of muddy marl, approximately three meters thick, some fine sand borrowed from the closest beach. Their consistency being low, like that of all the earth brought in, their resistance, from the point of view of construction, thus remains problematic. Foundations there could be firmly established only by pushing them to a depth which will probably multiply the cost of building by ten.

This is why, without us to bringing up the severe judgments that we intended to present on the new port of Sfax, we fear that it does not justify the hopes there was every right to expect from it, from the point of view of investment.

For the rest, work of the same kind, undertaken in the other ports of Regency, has experience the most unexpected and annoying hitches.

The quay of Sousse, so comfortably improved, is no longer accessible today by the winds from the east, because of the enormous undertow that it causes and which
73 endangers the boats; the superb wharf of Monastier fills with sand at an astonishing speed; the pier of Mehdià was destroyed six months after its laborious construction, by a very ordinary strong gale; and the wharf at Djerbah, carefully established on screw foundation piles, in an always calm water, is appreciably higher than the quay that it is charged to serve.

Trade.

Sfax is the center of a very important and varied export trade. The table below summarizes the principal articles:

Oil d' olive	Kilogr.	2,000,000
Soap	id.	80,000
Oil cakes.	id.	4,000,000
Sponges	id.	80,000
Octopuses	id.	30,000
Wool fabrics	id.	12,000
Dates	id.	200,000
Esparto manufacture, ropes.	id.	1,200,000
Almonds.	id.	60,000
Pistachios	id.	8,000
Alfa	id.	10,000,000
Barley	id.	2,000,000
Corn	id.	500,000
Various seeds, cumin.	id.	5,000
Tease	id.	40,000

These figures represent the average of the five last years.

74 We emphasized, previously, the significant role that oil and its derivatives, oil cakes and soaps, hold in the general trade of Sfax; this importance can only increase, because the houses or fields of olive-trees have a marked tendency to develop and expand even further the opulent belt of gardens which surrounds the city. And if the natives, thanks to the European consuls, manage to improve their process of handling olives, the output of future harvests will not be long in exceeding all hopes.

We will treat, in a special chapter, the interesting question of the fishing of sponges and octopus, whose commercial center is established in Sfax itself.

Wools and Fabrics.

Everyone knows by reputation the wool known recognized as from Tunis, so appreciated around Europe. The sheep which provides it belong to this species so curiously characterized by the broad tail which hangs slack like an apron, on the rear legs of the animal.

The wool of Tunis includes two qualities: the sheared wool, *Gzezza*, is the most valued, which comes, almost all in one piece, from shearing the sides and back of the ewe; and *Bou-Nettouf*, wool coming in small flakes, obtained by mowing, a piece at a time, the parts of the animal where the scissors cannot operate freely.

75 The wool is exported either still with its grease, or washed. It is, as we have said, extremely beautiful; and it is easy to be convinced by examining the manufactured fabrics of Tunisian production.

The light *burnous*, the soft *harams*, the *batanaïas* with bright colors from the Djerid and Djerbah, the marvellous carpets of Kairouan, so richly detailed, the *houezras* of Sfax, in dark colours and so tight a weave that they become impermeable equivalent to the best rubber, the *frechias* of Djerbah, with the unique multicolored stripes, etc, all these products of the local industry demonstrate to whoever looks at them attentively, the perfect quality of the raw material employed for the clothing industry.

Unfortunately, for a few years now, the Arabs of the nomadic tribes, with the goal of lucre, have taken to the practice of sanding the fleeces that they intend for export, to make them heavier. In acting in this way they do not realize of the damage that they are doing to themselves, and they should urgently be made to understand that what they gain in weight they lose in quality, and they risk, in the long run, the wool of Tunis losing the honorable place that it occupies in the European markets.

Another reason for the depreciation of the wools, which would be easy to avoid, is the introduction of goats into the herds of sheep. It is, in fact, experienced that whenever one leaves goats in contact with ewes, the wool of those becomes harder and
76 loses its beauty. What is the cause of this phenomenon? It is difficult to decide in this respect; it is always the case that the shepherds of France avoid, as much as possible, bringing goats and ewes together in the pastures.

Dates

In November, December and January, a great export of dates takes place in Sfax, the dates coming from the immense and remote Djerid, (1) of which this fruit constitutes the single source of wealth and whose most important centers are the famous oases of *Tozeur* and *Nefta*. The dates are classified in two principal qualities: *horra*, a little hard, with a dry and wrinkled skin, does not preserve well, and the *degla*, beautiful dates, fatty, golden, transparent, and with an incomparable savour. The dates arrive at Sfax by caravans of from 40 to 60 camels; each one of them

(1) The Djerid is situated in the southwest of Tunisia, in the region of the Sahara.

carrying two large baskets or bunches, called *zembils*; in which the bundles are placed in bulk, and which can contain, together, approximately two hundred kilograms.

If one considers that the *deгла* is a soft fruit, syrupy, *jealous*, according to the commercial and Arab expression, that to come from the Djerid to Sfax it must cross a distance of at least 250 kilometers, that the caravans take from eight to ten days for the 77 journey, that the *zembils* are unloaded every evening from the camels, and are reloaded every morning, one can understand the deplorable state in which the goods arrive at their destination. The date, following this repeated handling, is packed, crushed, leaking, loses its limpidity and its transparency, is reduced to a soft paste, especially when it is packed at the bottom of the *zembils*, or carried against the sides of the animal.

Once returned in Sfax, the *couffes* have their contents removed; the importing trader must then carry out the first sorting, and separate the fruit reduced to a paste from that which has preserved its appetizing appearance. This last is the only one which can be advantageously exported. From this operation a waste approximately twenty percent is the result, which, to tell the truth, is not entirely lost, when they succeed in selling it on the spot for local consumption.

The dates are dispatched of Sfax in cases of 5, 10, 25 and 50 kilograms to traders in Marseilles and Trieste, who in their turn direct them, to the main cities of the two continents.

Finally the date arrives at its destination, Paris, Moscow, or New York. There, new preparation. These poor tasty fruits which so dislike movement, light and finger contact, are unpacked a second time. One by one the dates are washed and wiped, to erase any trace of this film with which they are covered, after all the touching, transport, and 78 repeated squashing. They are then laid out symmetrically, for retail sale, into elegant boxes of 500 to 1,500 grams.

This last handling is, in its turn, the cause of a loss of ten to fifteen percent, which constitutes on the whole, for the export of a fruit in good condition, from the Djerid, a final waste of thirty to thirty-five percent:

If the South of Tunisia were better known, if the French capital were more daring, there would be an excellent investment to realize. For success, what would be necessary? Filling the small boxes of 500 to 1,500 grams on the same spot as they are produced, in the oases of the Djerid, of which we will come to speak, and to dispatch them, all ready, in the trade flow.

Esparto manufacture

This is the term used, in Sfax, for the ropes and cords, known as *filets*, braided with grass so well known under the name of esparto, (*Lygeum spartum*). The industry of Esparto manufacture is very local; it occupies most of the population of the Kerkennah islands, about which we will speak further.

The esparto employed is a particular variety, *halfa mahboula* (esparto folle), which is easier to steep and especially to braid than the ordinary commercial esparto. One collects it in June, July and August, mainly in the hills of Aghareb, 15 kilometers to the southwest of Sfax,

79 The cords are dispatched in tightly compressed balls. It is Marseilles which seems to have the monopoly of this article. However, at certain times, the Arab trade to Alexandria Egypt takes all the cords at prices that Marseilles cannot match. The coarse thread is sold for 145 francs a tonne; the cord, or fine net, sells for 180 to 190 francs. These prices are subject to abrupt fluctuations, however, depending upon the strength of demand.

The esparto ropes are very valued by the majority of the sailors who know them. They have the benefit of being lighter than the same in hemp, also lasting a long time and especially being much less expensive. The sea water, far from deteriorating them, appears to increase their resistance, and if they did not have the disadvantage lack of elasticity, being at risk of breaking under the strain of an abrupt shock, it is to be supposed that the ships of a high tonnage would not hesitate to adopt them.

Almonds, Pistachios.

The gardens of Sfax provide two qualities of almonds: those with tough hulls which are sold for 14 to 17 francs for 50 kilog. and those with tender hulls which are worth from 25 to 28 francs. As for the pistachios, which enjoy a deserved reputation, their price oscillates between 2 francs and 2.50 Fr. a kilogram. Unfortunately the production of this sought after fruit is not regular, and it happens too often that the harvest fails.

Esparto

The modern industry knew to take such a great benefit from this rustic grass, and to apply it to so many uses, that though it was ignored for some years, and almost unknown, this plant constitutes today a true wealth for the country which produces it.

Esparto, (*halfa* in Arabic), grows spontaneously on certain dry, arid and land considered barren. Perhaps we do not yet know precisely its origin nor its mode of reproduction. One can pull it up at any time, without it appearing inconvenienced about it.

In the vast extent of country which reaches from the south of Kairouan as far as the basin of the Chotts, that is to say a million hectares, esparto is found, if not in great abundance, then at least in sufficient quantity to ensure the existence of some nomadic tribes which wander in this territory. It is mainly in the range of Djebel Bou Hedma, located between Skhira, about which we will speak later, and the oasis of Gafsa, that the precious textile is found in more numerous tufts.

The Franco-English Company for the Exploitation of Esparto

The Tunisian trade in esparto, free in Tunisia, until 1885, was centralized in the town of Sfax, because of its relative proximity to the places of production. The
81 transactions improved each year, and the nomads, benefiting from established competition among the traders, were energetic in their search for this grass, since they were able to sell it at a handsome price. They were for a long time accustomed to make their way to Sfax, where they received 'good hard piastres', and where they brought back, to the douar [nomadic village tent], provisions and a multitude of small objects which increased their wellbeing. The general trade of the city thereby benefited from these constant exchanges.

However, in 1885, the *alfatiers* of Sfax learned to their surprise, that the monopoly for the trade of esparto had been granted to a recently formed Company, going under the name of *Franco-English Company for the Exploitation of Tunisian Esparto*, a company of which everyone, in Tunisia, now knows the debatable origins that we prefer to overlook.

According to the demarcation plan of its concession, a plan drawn up under conditions that it is advisable not to describe, the privilege of this company extended over close to a million hectares, approximately a third of the total surface area of the Regency!

The esparto merchants, threatened with rapid ruin, obliged to dismiss abruptly the armed operations and small employees for whom they had provided a living, and partly

(1) M. Massicault, Resident General of France, in Tunis, taking into consideration the pleas which were raised from all heads, understanding the discredit that the nebulous limitation of 1885 has cast on the Government, and the deplorable results which resulted from the fiscal and economic point of view, strongly, moreover, the failure of performance, by the Company, of the principal effects of its treaty of concession, has rendered by the Bey, (31 July 1887), a decree withdrawing from the Franco-English Company a privilege so disastrous in its consequences.

Public opinion fully endorses this act of justice and sound policy

sustained by public opinion, believed, wrongly or rightly, that they had found certain irregularities in the activities of the Company. They unionized and brought a lawsuit
82 against Franco-English, about of which all the newspapers spoke and, which a strong resolution of the Government finally seems to have disentangled. (1)

The emotion produced in Sfax had a considerable repercussion among the tribes, especially in those of Mehedbas which lives in the plateaus the richest in esparto.

The Arabs, accustomed for many centuries to regard anything that the ground produces on the territories where they camp, as belonging to their community, felt threatened in their turn. They understood that with a monopoly bringing the suppression of competition, a considerable fall was going to occur on the purchase price of the esparto. Aroused, perhaps, by the councils of certain interested people, they viewed with a poor eye this invasion from abroad, and only accepted by force the new order of things.

83 From this time disorder reigned amongst the tribes, they murmured under the tent, the elders held council, poorly concealing their resentment against those who had affected something that they regard as a secular right, long furtive looks were thrown on their rifles...

Before 1885, Sfax exported annually from ten to eleven thousand tons of esparto, at an average price of 85 francs.

The export duties being set at 92 piastres and a half (13.50 Fr.), per ton, the Treasury received 135,000 francs.

Barley, Corn, Various Articles.

The export of cereals varies, of course, with the abundance of the harvest. There have been dry years where, the corn being in short supply, it was necessary to import some from Sicily. For the rest, considering the shortage of water, the cultivation of grains has little success in the Sfax area. The figures which we give are the best proof of it.

In addition to the various food products that we review and which are the object of external transactions, the local industry remains rather active. Many weaving looms produce, at very moderate prices, fabrics which would certainly be appreciated in France, if they were better known. We will restrict ourselves to citing *Fouta*, a kind of loincloths of a blue color, with yellow and red silk stripes; and *Bechkir*, large cotton towels, which could advantageously compete with the best fabric sponges from our
84 manufactures. Sfax also manufactures, in great quantity, these yellow or red shoes, generally known as *babouches*, which all the Oriental people have adopted.

Imports

It has been noticed that European civilization asserts itself, in the new countries, by an excessive importation of strong liquors and fermented drinks. Tunisia could not escape this rule, which the Customs receipts have, for a long time, officially recognized.

To speak only about Sfax, the number of dubious establishments enhanced with the name of café, have multiplied tenfold since the occupation.

And what a cafés and what drinks! The liquors that are purchased there, at a maximum price of ten centimes a glass, will kill more effectively the unhappy ones that make use of it, than the balls of the enemy or the fevers aroused in the brain, by the relentless sun. More than anybody our soldiers are directly exposed to this contagion: the practices begun in the village engage them, the reasonableness of the prices attracts them, some contemptible girls, no longer ladies beyond being of the female gender, excite them, and the subtle poison frequently imbibed, the easy but often dangerous pleasures, is not long in achieving its disastrous work! Oh that the doctors were consulted.

Except with regard to alcohols, France only occupy a secondary role in the general movement of the import trade: coal, crude or wrought iron, hardware comes from
85 England, via Malta; wood arrives directly from Norway or Trieste; stones for construction are dispatched from Sicily; and Germany floods the country...with fancy goods!

English fabric.

Africa in general, and Tunisia in particular, consumes an enormous quantity of this material, of calicot, a lower quality, known under the name of Manchester fabric, which is sold at a very low price. Why will our manufacturers not try to compete with England on this article, a competition which wouldn't be long in becoming profitable?

Admittedly, our spinning mills are not up to par for the quality of these fabrics; unfortunately their high price does not allow them to flow to the Eastern countries. The French industry, we know, has always experienced an invincible loathing to introducing into the flow of trade, shoddy goods, intentionally badly manufactured.

The English have no such decency, but worse, hastening to profit, at our cost, from our honesty. The native, as is well known, is seldom struck by the quality of a product, while the good market always attracts him. Why, then, try to go up this current?

Let us therefore banish our scruples and not hesitate to engage, against the foreigner, a battle from now on located on the economic territory. Let us be always

honest and frank, as our fathers, but for all that, let us not neglect our private interests which, united, are after only those of France. And since a good market is desired, let us transform some of our manufacturing tools in order to produce one. Success is certain.

EN TUNISIE
LE
GOLFE DE GABÈS
EN 1888

PAR
DR FERNAND LAFITTE ET JEAN SERVONNET

AVEC UNE LETTER-PRÉFACE

DE

M. LE VICE-AMIRAL JURIEN DE LA GRAVIÈRE

Membre de l'Académie Française
Et de l'Académie des Sciences

PARIS

1888