



Ports and Transportation Routes of Tunisia

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The recent inauguration of the port of Sfax once more drew the attention to the future of our possession in North Africa. This future depends at the same time on the forts and on the transportation routes; also, those interested will read this study by a distinguished writer, to whom those colonial questions are familiar.

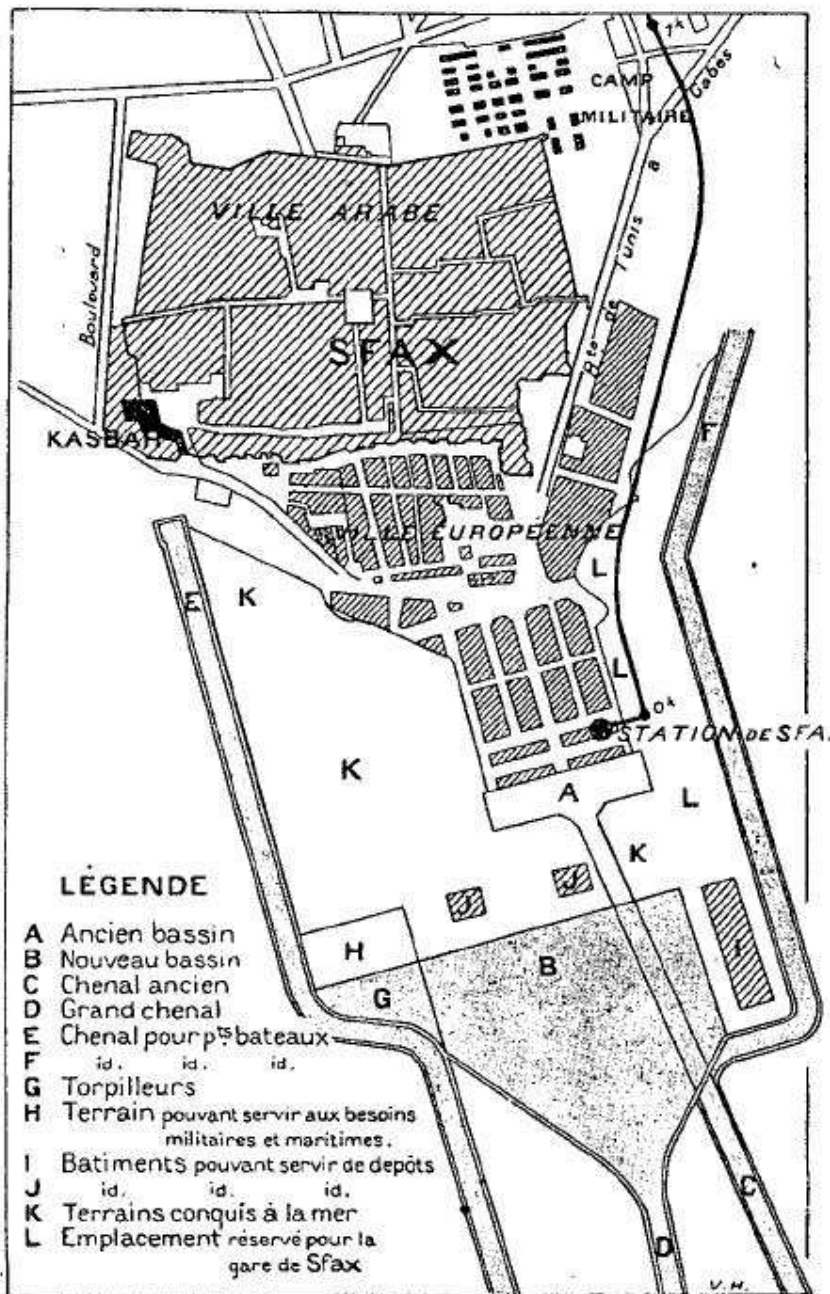
The superiority of organisms is due to the richness of their nervous and blood systems. The superiority of countries depends on their transportation routes. From this point of view, Nature was a good mother for Tunisia. See its dimensions; gulfs and capes follow one another with a harmony which allows many ports. Examine the relief of the land: here, are immense plains, there, beautiful valleys offer suitable foundations for roads. Ores and phosphates of the South, olives and fruits of the Center, vines and corns of the North, can be taken to port by easy routes...

It was like this in Carthaginian times, and the Roman period. Tunisia produced; it exported; on all routes traveled the convoys of the farmers; in all the ports the merchant ships floated. Then, came the Arab invasion, the domination of the armies of Sidi-Okba in the coastal regions where the enemy galleys, fearing the inland roads with hostile troops, threw their resources in a place where the tourist asks himself, in bewilderment, why Kairouan?

And little by little, while the appetite of goats made a desert around their tents, *gourbis* and mosques of the conqueror, little by little the roads disappeared, bit by bit the ports filled with dirt. Even in this century and close to us, in spite of the gilding of civilization in the court of the Beys, Tunisia has returned to barbarism.

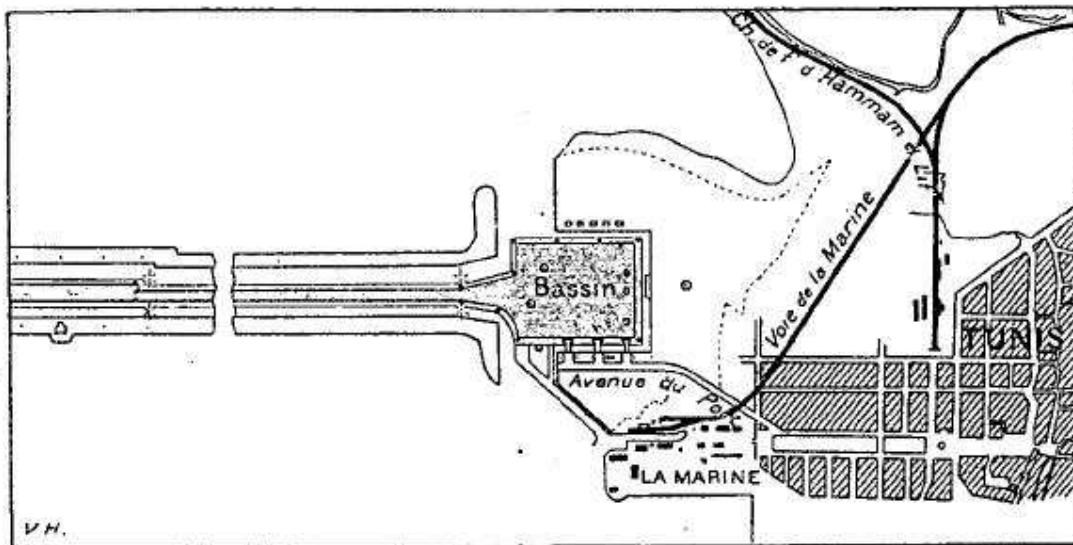
Fortunately for this country favored by nature, the French occupation sounded an alert for human energy. For fifteen years, we have achieved a really admirable work there. I know nothing, for my part, which is more comforting, more encouraging. People who are masters, in art, in policy even, or amongst philosophers, cry tears of despair by affirming the surrender of our race. Our energies will cease to exist, we are losing the sense of reality; incapable of

action, we fall asleep in a reverie; we become a decadent people, a people finished, ruined, dead, and the world apportioned tomorrow, this evening, to the German, to the Anglo-Saxons.



Oh well! No! Three times no! Such assertions, not only are impious, but insane and false. Those who, generalizing too easily their impotence, despair of us... if they would go to Tunisia, very close, the first station after Marseilles. They will see what little is done, what our energy has accomplished, that some say is dead... I am persuaded that after a few days of study the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon will seem to them a thing much less certain, and above all much less fatal. The practical genius of our rivals in the colonization of the globe

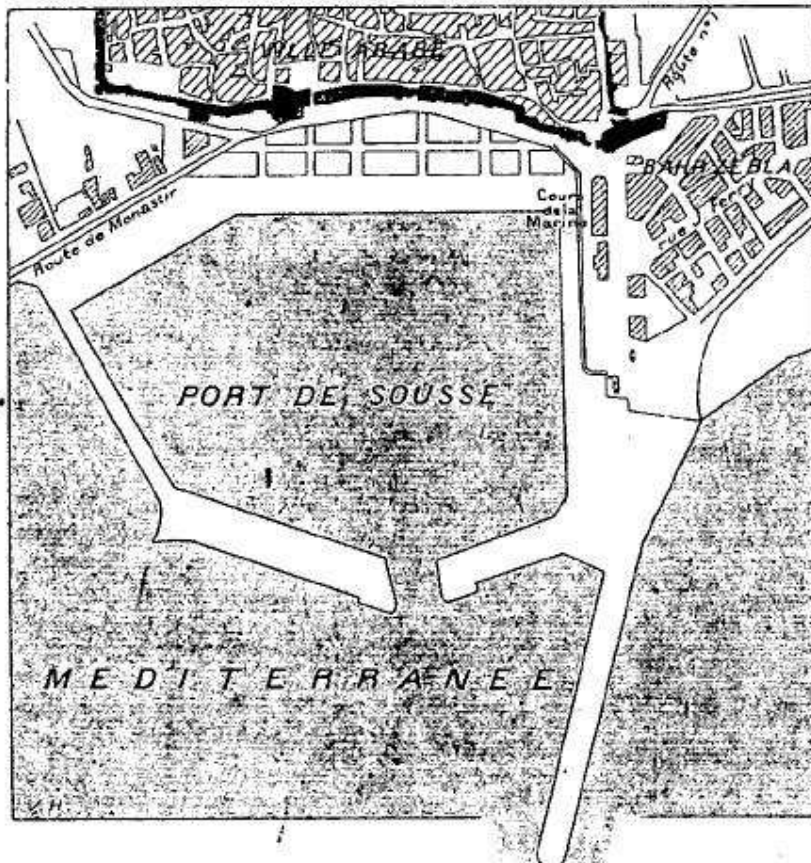
(rivals a long time extremely happy, I know it... but tomorrow will be perhaps from this point of view more French than English) always affirmed itself in the establishment of transportation routes. As a commercial colonizer, in order to sell its goods and to receive raw materials for his industry in payment, the English wanted and have, everywhere, already, the ports, railroads and roads necessary to for transactions. Eh well! I do not believe that one can quote one of its colonies where this program was filled more quickly or better than it was it in Tunisia, by us, by the French! Yesterday, one could read in a newspaper of the Protectorate, in the *Dépêche Tunisienne*, that on July 1, 1894 at June 1, 1897, the French engineers who direct the service of the construction of the Bone-Guelma Company established exactly 230 kilometers 110 meters of railways with ballast, sheds and buildings, that is to say one kilometer in less than five days. The figure has its eloquence. The figure and the fact. I myself could give an account during the voyage that, on the invitation of Mr. Rene Millet, resident general of France in Tunis, I made in this country with the representatives of the principal newspapers of Paris, at the time of the inauguration of the new port of Sfax.



At the time of the establishment of the protectorate, the Regency only had economic tools of most modest. It had four kilometers of paved roads, from Tunis to Bardo. The Bône-Guelma Company had just built the rail line from Tunis to Ghardimaou, and the Rubattino Company has developed the small lines from Tunis to Bardo, Marsa and to La Goulette.

As for the ports, the beylical administration had left them in an almost complete abandonment. Some quays without depth had been established in Bizerte, in Porto-Farīna, in La Goulette, Sousse and Sfax. But they were unusable. Nothing existed that resembled the beautiful ports of the Roman time. There was nothing any more but more or less open

roads. Today, Tunisia counts: 16 open ports; 46 lighthouses and fires; 1 500 kilometers of roads with 107 bridges; and nearly 700 kilometers of railroads; as for the indigenous tracks, they were improved everywhere. It is appropriate, moreover, to specify the meaning of the word 'track.' In Tunisia, it does not indicate (except in certain areas of Khroumirie) anything like the mule tracks of Algeria, or the tracks of the pedestrians of Niger, Congo...



The track is broad most of the time; as it is not exactly a paved road, it widens of right and left when the "arabas" make it impracticable. Then when through time, rain and heat, goats and dust, the ruts are filled, the track takes again its primitive layout. One year one passes on the right, another on the left, then one returns to the middle. The track oscillates. It is an economic way of maintenance and construction which was certainly more appropriate for the beylicale administration than the methods of our "Highways Departments." And still the service of Tunisian Public Works was seen to be particularly economical, especially with regard to its roads. You speak about a paved road in France, which costs the large price of 30 000 francs a kilometer to maintain. In Tunis, there are good roads built at 9 000 francs initially, plus 6 000 francs the kilometer. Thus the network, whose importance is considerable, represents only one capital outlay of approximately 15 million to which the annual costs of maintenance do not exceed 600 000 francs.

This same concern for the good use of the public finances has presided over the establishment of the railways. We hear well... I do not speak about what is called in Tunis the French network, which includes the 220 kilometers of normal line from Tunis to the Algerian border with the branch from Bridge of Trajan to Beja and the line of Tunis with Hammam Lif, nor that of the 34 kilometers of Italian from Tunis to Bardo, Marsa and La Goulette. That was done before the protectorate, in a time when the financial arrangements offered much elasticity.

The construction of the Tunisian network itself, under the administration of protectorate has been more economical. This network includes a length of over 415 kilometers, the line has a standard gauge from Djedeida to Bizerte, and the lines with gauge of one meter from Tunis to Zaghouan; Tunis to Sousse (with branch at Menzel Bou-Zalfa and Nabeul); Sousse to Kairouan and Sousse to Moknine.

In this journal reserved more specifically to geography, the voyages and the study of the globe offer the picturesque and attractive side of science, the economic considerations do not have, and that is natural, even fortunate, more than a limited place. But from time to time, as rare as possible, the reader reassures himself, especially after brilliant tables have been made of a country - as is the case for Tunisia - it is not useless to show why this country lives and grows. Eh well! judicious, careful, employment of finances on public works in this country is the essential reason why. At the time when the railroads and ports sidetrack capital in the development of our colonies, it is useful to demonstrate how Tunisia has solved it in a very satisfactory way from all points of view.

Wanting to show how much the management of the new lines is advantageous for the Tunisian State, I let the word of the engineer that I see emblazon his work on the inauguration with the port of Sfax, to M. de Pages. "From the point of view of the establishment, the Tunisian State provides to the Company the grounds which it needs; this one built the lines according to a contract fixed in advance. This price does not exceed 50 000 francs per kilometer for the lines a 1 meter gauge. The company is completely reimbursed by the State, but is contracted to put in reserve for the major repairs and the maintenance of track the savings which it would realize in execution by the difference of the real cost price with the fixed price.

"From the point of view of the exploitation, the Company does not receive any advance or Tunisian State grant; but it establishes an account where the expenses are calculated contractually per kilometer according to the formula $1\ 500 + \frac{1}{2}R$ indicating the gross earnings and not being able to go down below 3 000 francs. The deficiencies are

supported by the Company, but the surpluses, if some occur, are used with the group that produced them, with simple interest to 4 60 %. This operated refunding, the surplus of the gross earnings on the fixed price of exploitation is deposited with the State until competition of the amount of the interest at the rate of 4 60 % of the initial capital. These having been withdrawn, if surpluses still remain, they are shared between the State and the Company "

It is thanks to these wise combinations that, without annoying the French Parliament, exhausting opinion, extending the arguments, the Tunisian network expands in a practical manner. At the celebrations of Sfax, the three ministers invited by the general Resident, Ms. Boucher, Minister of Commerce, Darlan, Minister of Justice, and Cochery, Minister of Finance, placed the first stone solemnly (why doesn't one say the first *rail*?) for the railroad which next year will connect the port of Sfax to the areas of phosphate production of Gafsa. Currently, the administration is occupied in "setting up" under the same conditions the railroad of Kef which will make those rich phosphate areas exploitable also.

Roads and railroads ensure the interior circulation of a country. External circulation depends on the ports. The excellence of these two complementary circulations, in a naturally rich State with a labour force, infallibly leads the State to prosperity. Political economy is not an infallible science. Economists are mistaken sometimes. But they have correctly established some laws from experience which today one can truly call laws. It is so in the case that which I have just exposed.

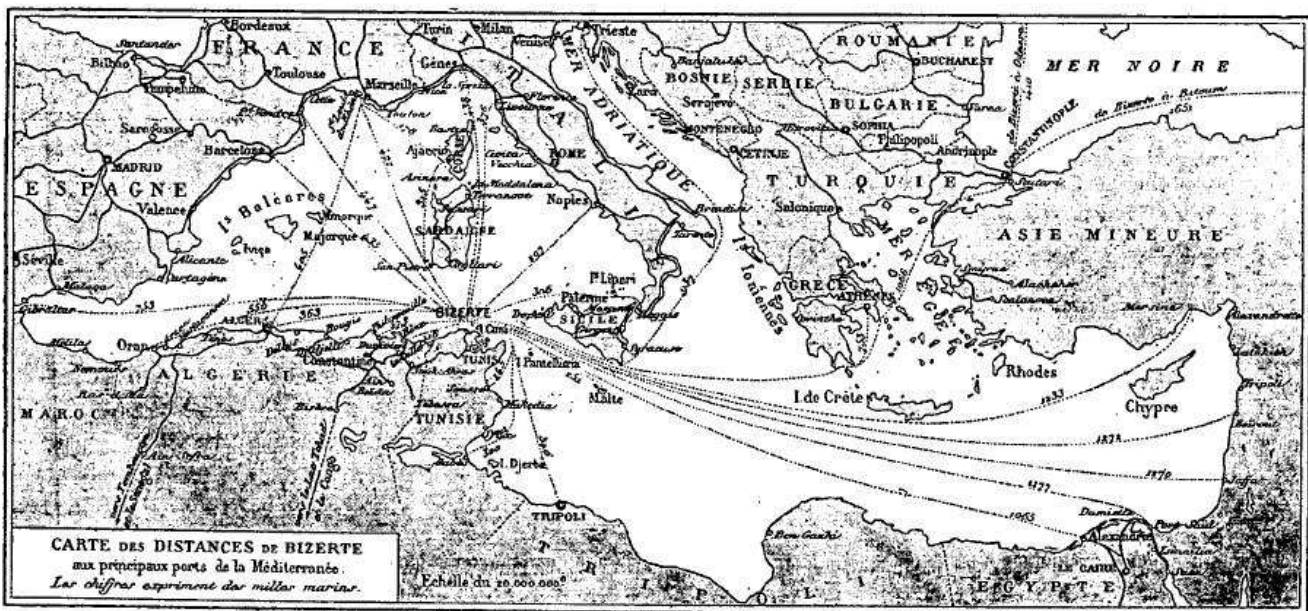
Tunisia, we saw above, did not have so to speak enough ports at the time when the French administration took possession of the country. Today it counts sixteen of them that are open for trade. These sixteen ports, say the official documents, represent an annual movement of approximately 3 800 000 tons from the register, of which 1 880 000 belong are French, 1 440 000 Italian and 83 000 Tunisian.

I will give some details only on the four large ports, Bizerte, Tunis, Sousse and Sfax. It will be enough to list the twelve others: Tabarka (sardine and anchovy): Oporto-Farina; Kelibia; Nabeul; Hammamat; Monastir; Mehedia; Kerkenna; Skira; Gabès; Jerba and Zarzis. These twelve small ports will never have, I believe, considerable importance. It is not the same for the four others. It is enough to visit them, even quickly, to realize this.

Bizerte, appears to be one of the most marvellous maritime stations. Six million was enough to open it to the largest ships, by a convenient channel, an immense lake, deep water, where all the naval fleets of the world could find a sure anchorage. This lake is a small inland sea. One of the largest steamers of the maritime Transport, the *Marshal-Bugeaud*, took us there, and, seeing these admirable interior roads, of protection and so easy

accesses, we all wonder why a great maritime nation such as France did not decide to use all the resources which it has there for its fleets. How many of other nations would be happy to have a similar "basin" 12 kilometers in diameter on deep seas and could, certainly, use it! The navy and military engineering made all the necessary studies; plans of an arsenal in the heart of the lake, in Sidi Saïd, near to kilometer 12 of the railway, and the defensive works at the entrance of the port, all these plans are ready; all the administration wishes is that it would be put into action... and it is a miserable question of money which stops it all!

The sketch shows which work was carried out for the port proper. "They consisted mainly in the dredging of a channel with a maximum width of 64 meters, intended to connect the depths of 9 meters to the 9 meters deep waters of Lake Bizerte, which communicated previously with the sea only by one small sinuous outfall without much depth. Two jetties of 1 000 meters each one protect the entrance of the channel and enclose an outer harbour with a surface of 75 hectares; they have depths of 13 meters, and leave between them a free passage of 400 meters width."



This work was carried out from 1889 to 1895 by a concessionary company. It cost more than six million francs. They were remunerated at a fixed price by a State grant fixed at five million, by the concession of grounds and the monopoly of the fisheries of the lake. It is another company, which, as with that of the railroads, was in charge of the completion and the installation of the three ports of Tunis, Sousse and Sfax.

Tunis is located nine kilometers from the sea, on the edge of a lake inaccessible to the ships. Until 1893, the boats stopped at the small port of La Goulette, linked with at the city by a railroad.

In 1887, Regency decided a first expenditure of 13 500 000 fr., thanks to which the important work could be done that the official documents of the public work management number as follows: "a channel which connects the sea to the channel dug in the mudflats of the Lac de Tunis. - a 513 meters length northern pier protecting the depth of 6 meters. - a 596 meters length southern pier. - a connecting channel of 2 000 metres. - a basin of 6 hectares dug to a depth of 2.50m at La Goulette. - a ship channel of 8 kilometers dug to a depth of 6.50m with a maximum of 30 meters of width; the banks are faced; in the middle of the length is found a 500 meters long hangar. - a basin in Tunis, 300 meters broad and 400 meters long, 6.50m deep." The completion of this port, that is to say, the construction of 600 meters of quay walls, the installation of the quay levels and the installation of the equipment, the whole at a cost of 3 500 000 francs, was almost ready - realized last April little, at the time of the Tunisian festivals.

Thus equipped, the port of Tunis is prosperous. The last annual statistics give an annual movement of 270 000 tons of goods and 50 000 passengers. The port of Sousse would undoubtedly reach such a prosperity with difficulty. But the future still looks good. We saw it in "construction," at the fixed date, in November 1898, it will be "decked out".

Then instead of wetting, as yesterday, in an open roadstead 800 meters from the customs, the ships will find a basin of thirteen hectares, provided with 600 meters quay 6.50m deep.

The port of Sfax, at which "baptism" the three ministers referred to above assisted, with all the civil servants of the Tunisian state and three bishops, has as a characteristic, like that of Tunis, in the abundance of dredging. The old port, formerly practicable only for the flat-bottomed craft of the pirates of Kerkenna, had a basin of approximately one hectare with a depth of 2.50m below low tide and provided with 200 meters of quay. A narrow channel gave access to it. However, on the day of the inauguration, moored at the quay, were six large steamers and a battleship of the navy, without counting hundreds of coasters and boats of every nature... All fit easily in a basin of 10 hectares, provided with 600 meters of quays with a depth of 6.50m. A 3 kilometers long channel marked out and open at low tide gives the large ships easy access to the basin. When the *Marshal-Bugeaud* entered, the channel beacons were reinforced by a double chain of boats from Kerkennah, whose crews rendered in their own manner "the honors" to the representatives of the French Government.

This "manner" was not without color, a naval fantasia, could one say, in seeing on each boat groups of musicians in festival clothes, and standards that some servants waved while the commanders made the powder speak. Formerly, undoubtedly, such were the

marine processions which received the victorious pirates... The movement of the Tunisian ports, thanks to the land routes which serve them, is different today. Honest steamers, steamers and peaceful sailing ships come there to carry goods and to take products... It is and it will be perhaps more prosaic and less brilliant than formerly. But I did not see, in my voyage, anybody who complained. On the contrary! And these happy results, I repeat, one owes them to the French. Mr. Rene Millet continues in this country a project which one can compare successfully to all the similar English projects.

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