

AUS DEN STAATEN

Aus den staaten de Barbesken

DER

From the Barbary States

BARBARESKEN

by

VON

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MIT SECHZEHN LICHTDRUCKEN UND ZWEI AUTOTYPIEN.



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Chapter XXIII

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Sfax

The only daily train, on the Gafsa-Sfax railway, leaves Gafsa at 5 o'clock in the morning. Since from here to where the station is located, as mentioned, is unfortunately 4 km distance away from the city, the car carrying me had to pick me up from the hotel before 4 o'clock, and my rising, with time differences such as time delays by unpunctual third parties taken into consideration, had to take place at 3 o'clock in the morning.

- Who would wake at to so early an hour?

The Hotel manager answered confidently: "Ma bonne!" - However I was too experienced in such things, to trust. First not this Bonne! - This somewhat faded French plant, who had helped to lay the infinitely small portions on the table with a sullen expression would certainly not find his way from the wollen covers at the right time.

And then the landlord? A faltering French! From a low education, as well as from bad manners, he had indeed in his heart no longing to be especially appealing to the "German".

Also I did not trust myself! After a day full of rapidly changing impressions and strong physical movement one not always is a master of sleep.

I decided to stay awake through the night busy-ing myself with the filling out of my diaries and with reading. Only for one hour did I throw myself dressed onto the bed.

It had been the correct thing to do! Because when, waked by the noise downstairs of the car already moving forward, I rose and opened the glass doors of my room, in order to step out ready for departure on the flat roof, here comes slurping upstairs "ma bonne," with me there, to wake me up. Supported by him, I would certainly have lost my battle. Now I advanced toward it, a master of the situation! *Toujours en vedette!* [*"Always on the attack"?*] –

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The line between Gafsa and Sfax comes to 243 km, and one accomplishes this in nine hours, in an L class [*luxury*] carriage for 27, in a 2nd class carriage for 18 francs.

The compartments were sparsely occupied; because primarily this railway serves the freight traffic. Indeed it is 40 kilometers southeast of Gafsa, in the town of Metlanj, that very significant phosphate have quite recently been found. Their occasional discoverer was a wandering army doctor on one of his excursions, who had concerned itself with mineralogy as a hobby. Now a French company, Compagnie de Phosphate, exploits these valuable treasures. After clearing a thin layer of earth, it can be worked there in an open pit in a rather easy and cheap way. The yield is significant. In the year 1899 637,000 quintals [100-kilogram units] were extracted to a total value of 1½ million francs.

The analysis of this phosphate, which has been made available to me reveals the following composition:

Calcium phosphate,	60	percent
Calcium carbonate	30	"
Calcium fluorate	3	"
Magnesium phosphate,	3 ½	"
Iron phosphate	3 ½	"

So on average there is 58-60 percent phosphoric acid. For a better and cheaper transport of the product down to the coast is the primary reason that the rail line has been built.

The landscape, which is crossed by the railway, is not without interest. First you pass through a high mountain of grotesque formation, but completely treeless. As the station of Senid is reached the desert-camp of Bedouin tents is visible, the men come to the station running, and pass into their products to the carriage, raw eggs and live chickens. They also find buyers because the prices are cheap.

In the middle of the desert, at the station Makna-hsy, I see a collection of stylish linen tents pitched, and nearby some tethered horses are saddled. The length of the halt will allow me an inspection of this camp. I find the furnishings extremely comfortable, even ostentatious. There is a special tent for the taking of meals, a special reception for visiting and for entertainment, while others serve as sleeping and dressing rooms. Carpets, couches, tables and chairs are abundant. A black cook in the kitchen tent just deals with the fitting of the meal. He also gives me the same information. [154]

The absent owner of this small portable town who is currently on an excursion are French engineers in the search for metal, who survey this area.

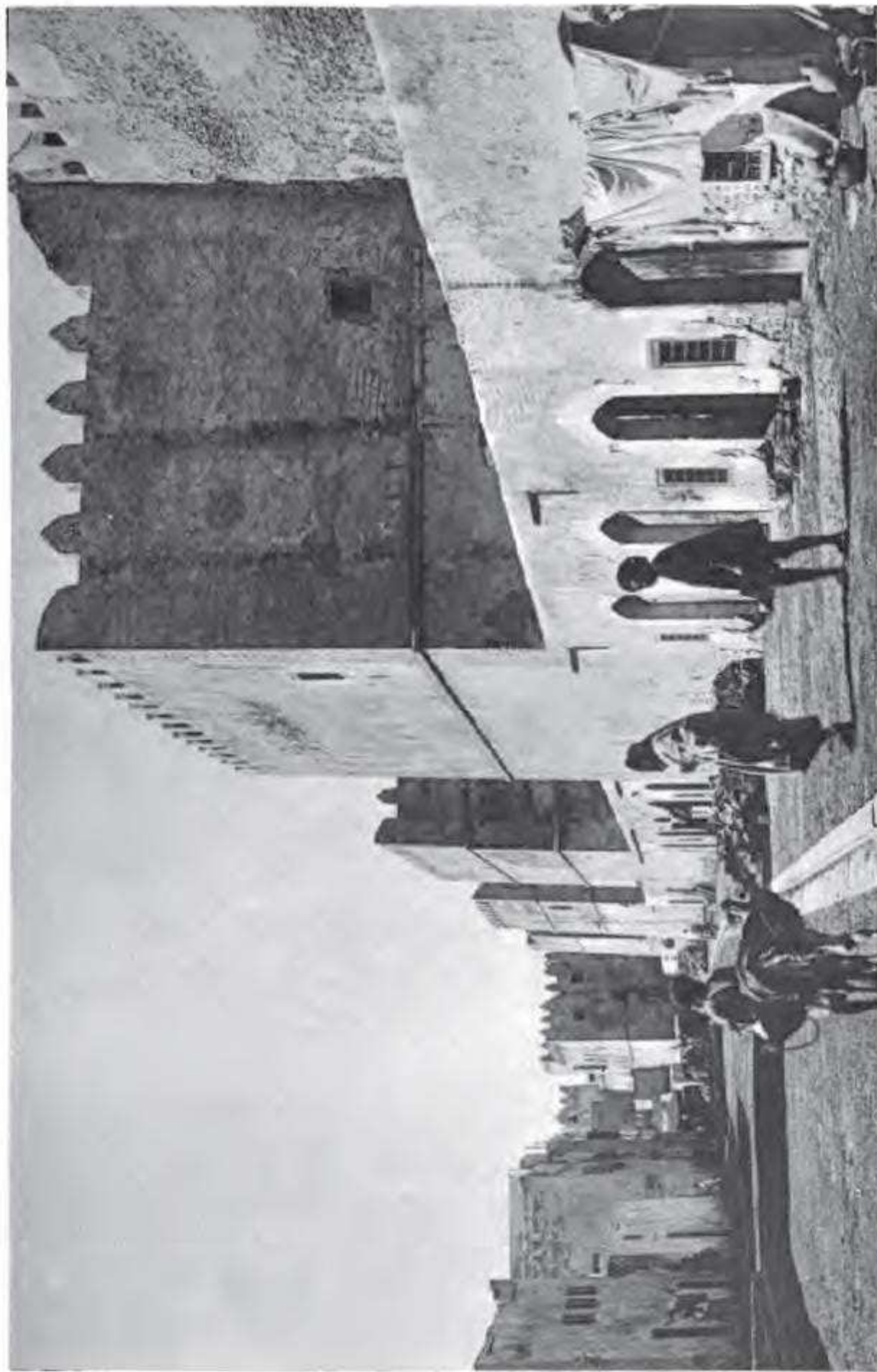
Thus, our brave explorers of the formerly dark continent have moved, albeit with more modest means.

At Mahares we approach the coast and then drive close to the blue, heaving sea to Sfax. The ozone-rich air enters into the car, desert air and sea air mixed in a cup we drink to the full

The station is located in Sfax in the modern part of the town, and on foot I went after the recommended Hotel de France, which had rather raised expectations.

I had recommendations to two gentlemen, the minister of the French Reformed Church and a physician, Dr. N., Austrian by birth, who additionally to his extensive practice at the same time represents the Vice Consulate of his home. I owe them both for information on my arrival.

The name of Sfax is derived from the Arabic word "fakous" = cucumber, which is based on the abundant vegetables. A genuine Moorish city presents itself, behind high wall reaching 60 feet, still well preserved, with towers interspersed. It alone in Tunisia resisted the invading French [This event is a separate, later chapter of this book.] in 1881 and surrendered after a three-day bombardment. Such commendable bravery cost the citizens dearly by bringing them a payment imposed by the victor to the amount of 7 million francs, a war debt that weighs heavily on the city today.



Sfax, Strassenansicht.

The well-fortified northern gate, Bab el-Behar, faces the sea. In front of it, about 50 years ago, it sat directly at the foot of the harbor's edge. Today, we meet open land, for a width of about one kilometer. This phenomenon of increasing siltation is evident around the north coast of Africa. The French used uncertain alluvial ground of this country since 1881 to build a modern city whose streets and squares marked out, and partly built on, show overall still significant gaps. This is where we find the train station, the hotels, the buildings of the civil and military administration, the officers' circle, the Market Hall, the French Reformed and the Catholic Church, a warehouse and the Customs Office. It has been to line the road through planting of date palms, which, after several years, can already benefit from some attention. [155]

Constantly the eye turns longingly back to the ancient Arab city, which has the historical interest in its design, in its narrow, winding streets, partially covered to satisfy the need of plenty of shade

The five mosques, baths, bazaars, the many coffee houses which are focal points of an active life. In general the resident Arab population is very active and talented. The recurrent dark green color is striking in the wrapping of the turbans of men, this is a sign that amongst them there are many, who perhaps can demonstrate that they possess a believable origin from the prophet, some have completed the arduous, costly and pious pilgrimage to Mecca, so the dignity of Häddschi [*Haj*]. Only these two have the right to the closely guarded privilege of the woven green of the Schechia.

The street that attracts the most attention is the Mhaesch-el heddädin, i.e. the Street of the Blacksmith, its double row of two-storey houses with the shop below, where muscular figures of Arab men, grouped around the fire, here in this hot sand, a doubly troublesome craft. The upper floors face the road in a continuous series of open balconies, giving shade to those below. A genuine house of the Orient, which usually remain close to the street, such an uncommon construction, in this top floor lives the family of the man working below.

The striking appearance of this picturesque street was the reason that an exact replica of it was incorporated into the Paris exhibition.

When Dr. N., who was in the Hotel de France ate with me, invited me to an evening going through the Arab town, we concluded this promenade by a break in an Arab coffee-house. It was located under one of the beautiful arched galleries of the bazaars. From the high arch color-drenched carpets hung, which, like doorways, each end looking like a castle. Built right into the side wall was a chapel-like depression, that seemed to suggest a Gothic ceiling of an ancient Christian prayer room. But as the same self-contained environment may have once been Arab, it cannot be proven. [HERE]

Brightly polished hanging lanterns lit more than necessary the most picturesque working space. This is for the inmates. After the day's work they gather here: workers, merchants, scholars, bathed and then dressed in snow-white robes. The tanned features contrasting against such white raiment. The groups casual and even more handsome here, the finely woven straw mats [156] spread out. Some smoking, others playing chess,

the third quiet consultation. But all full of innate dignity and very considerate of the stranger.

In later times, when I traveled in Germany, accompanied by my Arab servant, it was the same, where skin color as well as costume marked them as Orientals, often as an object not only of attention, but have become verbal attacks, by which he was molested by words and gestures on the street as within premises.

I happen to like, on numerous journeys through the Orient, nothing so much as costumes and faces in the same way as I appear clearly to be from Hesse.

Which side will now focus more on education? - Dr N. from a wide practice among Arab families, gave me the most interesting information about the life and feelings of this race, which I completed by observing detailed images, and that image obtained by this growth in knowledge lost none of its luminosity.

The hours slide by. For the next morning we arranged for a ride through the oasis in the dogcart of the doctor and his escort. This oasis is a garland of gardens, which surround the city on three sides. Its diameter may be 8 km. Any wealthy citizen moves here for the summer months, to his country house, and even the beggar is riding on his ass out with his pots and pans and establishes himself there under some olive trees his little encampment.

But the citrus, the carob, fig, palm trees, which I saw here achieve far from the juicy freshness of its siblings remembered in Gafsa, or even in Gabes. The whole system is artificial and is maintained by artificial means. No running water nourishes the roots here. From deep wells, of which every garden needs at least one, by means of a [Göpelwerkes] the water is lifted into a reservoir and from there spread throughout the garden. It is easy to understand that here the power, quite apart from the larger money and effort, must be more economical than in the areas of flowing water.

We returned to the oasis with an Alsatian who serves a self-brewed lager and also offers cold dishes for sale. A welcome German-style breakfast under the palms. The host, speaking a common German, was in 1871 unhappy with the changed political situation. Now he was happy with us but the growing strength and acquired fame of our people. The population of the city of Sfax is growing: Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg * [*Tunis: Country and People, by Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg. Vienna 1882, p. 206], who traveled to Tunisia before 1881, gives it as 10-12000; [157] I estimated it at 45,000. Trade is undoubtedly growing and their population boasts of their hard work, enterprise, thrift and coming prosperity. In the year 1900 3,017 ships called at the local port one and the total exports had a value of 7,780,719 francs.

The main subject of this export is the above-mentioned phosphate. I saw it under a protective roof, stored loosely in high mountains on the quay, three in the port Negroes carried the dusty gray mass in baskets to ships flying the German flag and poured them with no further packing into the hold. One thousand kilograms (one ton) of phosphate in Sfax has in the price of 26-28 francs, in the past years were 167,000 tons were shipped.

A second main object of the export is the sponges, which are caught in the Gulf of Gabes, or the small Sirte. Five or six, mostly French, Italian and Greek companies operate

this fishery by piece workers. These sponges of varying size and quality, are all dark brown in color from the deep. Their white color is obtained artificially by sun bleaching with the addition of nitric acid.

In 1900 in Sfax 123,000 kg purified sponges were valued at 1.47 million francs, for export. Additionally, these are an export: Esparto grass, olive oil and skins.

Of this brisk trade Germany has, unfortunately, only a very small share. Of those 3,017 ships, which pulled in to the port of Sfax in 1900, only twelve were German. Import was done on them to the value of only 19,996 francs,* representing a significant export, namely:

Skins	590	kg
Sponges	1,219	“
Cords of 43 Esparto grass	43,200	“
Phosphate	15,398,000	“

Dr. N., who is also the Austrian Vice Consul and whose friendly communication I thank for these numbers, is convinced that the increase of these German imports would be quite possible. The lack of a German consulate is more to be regretted in this town, while the other European powers, and also the smaller States, Greece, Holland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, have a consulate here.

* Namely: Porcelain and Glass for 488 Fr. Cotton fabrics for 1337,Fr.; other fabrics for 925 Fr., hides, leather, footwear 235 Fr., metals, crude, for 180 Fr., metals, processed , for 3,889 Fr., other products for 908 Fr.