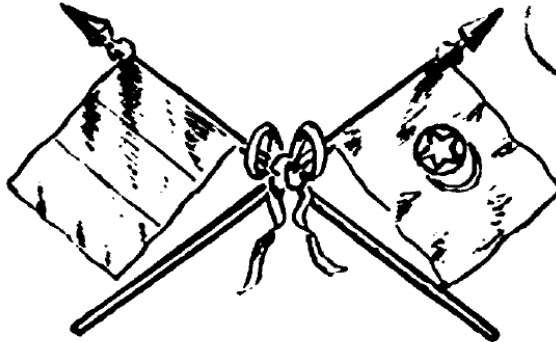


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LES PORTS TUNISIENS

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INTRODUCTION

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PARIS 1911

LES QUATRE GRANDS PORTS TUNISIENS

Concédés à des Sociétés Privées Françaises

(pp 20-22)

4° Sfax

Sfax is, after Tunis, the most important port of the Regency. Its population now exceeding 45,000 inhabitants, of whom 5,000 are Europeans, grows before our very eyes. The city is really curious in all respects, despite all the changes, all the improvements it has undergone since it was bombed by Admiral Garnault, on July 16, 1881, which was immediately followed by our occupation.

Sfax is the ancient Taparura or Taphrura of Romans, cited in the list of churches of Byzacena. The Arab writers, such as El Bekri and Edrissi, are full of praise for her beauty, and from many angles, it really deserves its reputation, especially after the disinfection, cleaning, provision of sewers and drinking water. The Arab town, with winding streets, steep slopes, is still surrounded by its characteristics fortifications, except towards the sea and the European quarter; on that side, the ramparts which stifled the town were demolished. It grows, it breathes more comfortably now on the waters offshore

The region of Sfax contrasts with the rest of Tunisia. This is no longer the Sahel, it is not even the desert. But as soon as one crosses the cultivated area, there are immense arid plains, dry, broken only by saline *sebkas*, where only alfalfa grows, the collection and use of which has become a thriving industry in the country. The suburbs of Sfax are still green and fertile; in some places vegetable crops give the appearance of a large vegetable garden. Over an area of more than 80 kilometers around the city, the countryside is covered with beautiful olive trees grown on land leased or sold by the state to individuals. This cultivation has yielded such good results that we want to continue the experiment in some more distant centers, now traversed by the railway line from Sfax to Gafsa and Metlaoui. There is no doubt that over time these efforts will be blessed and and [21] be more general. In Roman times, were not these regions covered with olive trees?

Over a width of 15 kilometers, formed by its small suburbs, Sfax hides in the fresh splendor of its gardens, away from its old ramparts opened by three very well preserved doors, including one especially, the door of the divan, surmounted by a large clock, and connecting with the *Rue de la Republique*.

The streets of the Arab city are bustling, these are the location of various trades. There is the Blacksmith's street and that of the Dyers; and these are in our opinion, the two most interesting. The souks, as in Tunis, as in Kairouan, remain the center of industry and natives commerce. The five mosques and bazaars are not in themselves particularly interesting. Sfax does a large trade in sponges, in oils, in halfa performed by several companies, including an English firm, as well as preserved fruit. The Gafsa railway which connects Sfax to the inexhaustible phosphate mines of Metlaoui, has given Sfax an extraordinary place in Tunisia's economic prosperity. It has strengthened the importance of the European city and especially justified the immense work done to make Sfax into a good port and a large port. This has now been accomplished.

A well kept French city, harmoniously proportioned, with a Catholic church, schools, new hotels, beautiful boulevards, now connects the old Arab city to the port. It is above all in the harbor that the soul, the drive and the wealth of the city is found.

The port of Sfax is located just 125 km from Sousse and therefore 275 km from Tunis.

Formerly very clogged and very inconvenient, it presented the greatest difficulty in navigation. Despite the tides which, unusually for the Mediterranean, are significant in Sfax, especially during the equinoxes, it was once impossible for larger vessels to land there. We had to anchor 3 ½ kilometers offshore. Because of the inequality of depth, as well as shallow waters, going ashore and embarking presented great difficulties.

The Concessionary Company of the ports of Tunis and Sousse therefore had to completely redo the port of Sfax, and this was not the easiest part of the project. A operations basin of 10 hectares was first dug deep to a depth [22] of 6.5 meters. A channel of the same depth was also dug to a width of 22 meters. Two docks were set up with all the modern equipment, for a length of 594 meters. Finally channels were dug sufficient for small boats leading to basins of 1200 m. for one, and 5600 m. of area for another.

Nevertheless, strictly speaking, having no port, the business of the port of Sfax has increased by a great proportion over recent years, mostly because of the exports of phosphates and olive oils. These, in 1907-1908, reached 16 million kilograms, representing a value of more than ten million francs and constituting, following previous years, a record that has already been exceeded. A statement of the resources of Sfax would be too incomplete without at least mentioning its fisheries. Two kinds of these are performed: the first, or normal fishing, by a large colony of resident Italian and Maltese fishermen; the second, or sponge fishing, is done by non-resident Greeks, who return each year and their *sacolèves* spend six months in Sfaxien waters.

The fish species most common between Sfax and the Kerkennah islands are octopus, needle fish, eels, groupers, snappers, wolf fish, gray mullet, scorpion fish, weaver fish, red mullet, dogfish, etc.

So important is sponge fishing that, by an order of the Director of Public Works of Tunisia, on 1 January 1903, a marine biology laboratory was established in Sfax, in order to determine, for the coasts of the Regency, the conditions for the reproduction and cultivation of sponges. This laboratory, for the study to be completed, was set up on stilts in the bay, in 2 feet of water at low tide, and 1200 meters from the phosphates quay (Quai des phosphates). It was protected from heavy weather by a breakwater bulwark wrapped tightly around it. Sfax is destined to become a most important fishing center and it would be hoped that our poor Breton fishermen, who complain so often, with reason, of the scarcity of fish on their shores, come swarming to these shores, now favored by both the mercy of nature and the recent works of men.

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THE TUNISIAN PORTS

INTRODUCTION

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Paris

1911