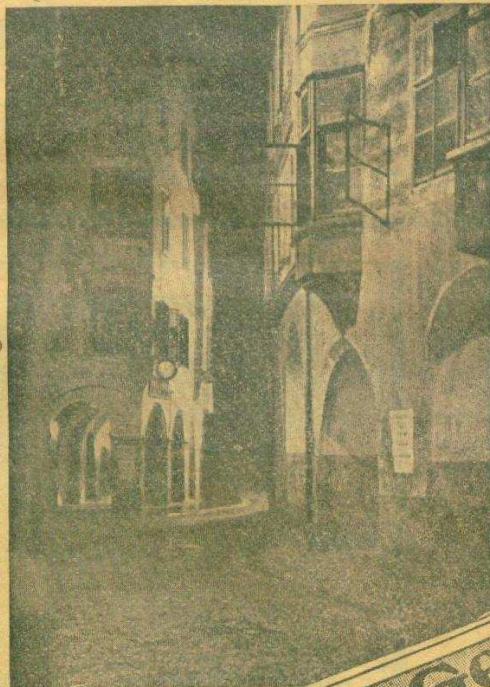


TOERISME

HALFMAANDELIJKSCH ORGAAN
VAN DEN VLAAMSCHEN TOERISTENBOND
VEREENIGING ZONDER WINSTBEJAG
PAARDENMARKT 70. ANTWERPEN

DE TIENDE JAARGANG 16 NOVEMBER 1934 N^o 22



Gevaert
HET KWALITEITSMERK

OOK 'S AVONDS
goede foto's !
thuis onder de lamp
op straat bij lantaarnlicht
op feestjes bij feestverlichting



Rolfilm
Kleinbeeldfilm

De GEVAERT PANCHROMOSA Film is ultra-gevoelig & panchromatisch
GEVAERT PHOTO-PRODUCTEN, N.V. Oude God (Antwerpen)

SFAKS

REFLECTIONS AND VOTING.

SFAKS is after Tunis the main city of Tunisia. She lies on the Mediterranean, where the Gulf of Gabes begins. This gulf is bounded to the north by the Kerkennah Islands, known for their sponge fishermen, and south by the infamous Djerba, the island of the legendary Lotophagen where Odusseus drifted. Sfaks is located opposite the former islands and in old books and atlases is usually listed as "Sfakes" or "Sfakès" (the same ending as for Gabès, Maharès and Ghadames), the inhabitants were baptized "Sfakiotes", but now seem to prefer being called "Sfaxiens." I do not know why and leave that philosophical bone of contention lying for competent experts on place names to gnaw on.

At present the city has a 100 to 125,000 inhabitants, which in North Africa may be called quite respectable. About four fifths are natives: mainly Arabs, but also many Jews (in Tunis, there are 30,000 out of 200,000) and negroes. The dominant foreigners are not the French as in Algeria, but the Italians, as also throughout Tunisia.

Sfaks, a "chef-lieu de control civil" (chief place for the Civil Control department) is a beautiful city with brand new European buildings in a neo-Arabian style, very comfortable to visit, so that as the Venetian, which also has Oriental motifs incorporated in Gothic palaces. There are also Western public and private buildings, as far as the interior and the arrangement is concerned, but with a marked Arabian stamp, mostly pleasant, but now and then sometimes unfortunate, so the "cachet" appears as an ugly mask. It usually provides arabiseeren with arches, columns and ornaments in the facades. If one thinks of the real Arab houses, completely closed to the outside, but inside, around the open courtyard or "patio", spreading their wealth on display, then the European may be seen as a series of garments inside out, sometimes, and as such, comical and appalling. Or better, as in the middle of open and closed books.

That will not completely prevent the appearance of the new city being very attractive. It also helps the construction of streets, squares and parks to excel together. The new city hall I find to be a masterpiece of simplicity and playfulness in its successful adaptation: it's almost a symbol of the marriage of Western with Oriental, of European features with Arabic. Only a civil one, you know! And happy for ever? Now, that's a [836] marriage! From the platform of the tower in the shape of a minaret, one has a lovely view of the town and beyond to the sea where some ships seem stuck. Not far away the pretty and grand "Hotel des Oliviers" stands out from the greenery and flowers, in front of the square, surrounded by a double row of palm trees. Painted brightly white, just as if it came from a box, with round arched windows, heavy balconies, not too close together, Arab borders, it seems to me, are a "modèle du genre" – of the kind mentioned above - not overloaded, sober, impressive, stylish.

But all that is new. However beautiful, it's nothing compared to the actual, the Arab Sfaks, the native city. What is Pera-Galata compared with Istanbul, however modern, however clean, however comfortable the former may be if one compares it with the latter?

Stamboul is Turkey, which is the East, which is enchanting, which is why they come. Pera-Galata, could be Brussels, Paris or whatever you want, with all that is in it, and where you might as well stay at home. So too here. Sfaks and Sfaks!

The "Rue de la République" is the appropriate transition from the old to the new Sfaks, or, let me just say, from the false to true. An ideal transition anyway. It is gradual. And in that way there will be understanding, I would say friendship, between Europe and Africa. The number of windows in the fronts of houses decreases the loggias, here and there, seem more tightly closed. You feel that you for something unknown and unexpected, moving, something simultaneously alluring and oppressive. Mysterious. The swarm of people are in the majority natives, by far, including many children, it is plain to see. In the background is the gate with its ornate clock and behind, the windowless white walls, sometimes with crenels as points of lances or knives, and above it the bright-blue sky, the sky of Africa. And under the blue and white colors, vivid, the yelling crowd and the blaring colors of the colorful traditional costume,.

It falls on you physically, it gets to you, you're already in a different world. There is a different civilization, a very different breed: the East, Islam, Africa. Which is so unfamiliar to us.

Instinctively, while I proceed reverently into the unknown, I thought of "L'Atlantide" by Pierre Benoit, the epic of the desert. Fatal fascination and overwhelming desire. I only knew two things about Sfaks which greatly attracted me; the story of "l'Atlantide" begins in the officer's circle in Sfaks, and Monseigneur Lavigerie was paraded in triumph by Arabs in Sfaks. The first is fantasy, the second history. But they complement each other so well, like trees and flowers in a park. The trees remain, the flowers perish. And yet, if there were no flowers, no fantasy? ... I just saw the humble Catholic church on the corner of the street. That reminded me immediately of Mgr. Lavigerie, the founder of the White Fathers. Currently I sighed: the need to eradicate Islam, Muhammad overcome? Can or will it ever be? Should the whole Sahara never be fruitful? And yet, drop after drop of water penetrates the stone ...

Once in the dark, under the cool gate, is a feeling in you as if you entered a sacred art: at once you are in the full, unadulterated Moghreb. Now Europe and all Western civilization are far away, on the other side of the sea! We found the last traces of it in the Rue de la République yet - French markings (eg: Au Gagne-petit, Tailleur, Hairdresser), here and there a gramophone, where Arabs were ranged on benches (the one played a melancholy, monotonous Arabic melody, another turned "The Italian in Algiers", in a third I recognized the fascinating "Im Hafen von Port Said" by Armandola) - all is here radically erased, like all vegetation from the [837] immense sand desert, already a good one hundred kilometers southward from here .*

The Sfaks of the natives, completely walled, as indeed all Eastern cities, is indeed one of the most picturesque and unspoilt, typical of the entire Arabian realm, not impressive, though already so corrupted, Algier the White, not so vast as Tunis the White (also !), not so charming at the coast as Sousse or Tripoli, or holy, free from all Europeans as the notorious still intact, perhaps too fanatical Kairoan. Sfaks has no equal to the Hassan

Tower of Rabat in Morocco, not even minarets like those of Tunis, Marrakech, Sidi Okba and other Moghrebian cities, no famous mosques in its Kasbahs, no palaces of the dey or bey, no El Bardo. No, everything is modest, quieter, wilder yes. Sfaks is already half-Saharan and thoroughly African.

And that is precisely the peculiarity, the attraction of Sfaks: the Arab is picturesque, the Moslem is pure one hundred percent. Streets? Alleys are run by each other as in a real maze, and whose homes have never bothered to have a perimeter line. Houses? Large and small white stone blocks, uneven dice, beside being put, as if uncertainly by a child's hand, so that the reverse side with the least features - doors and windows - is turned towards the street. Doors and windows? A heavy wooden panel, fitted with large iron nails, sometimes with a knocker, for a door, and then somewhere in the wall one or two small holes, truly loopholes, for windows. Walls? Large, uneven, rough pieces of dried mud, with humps and bumps, cracks and scratches, plastered and treated with calcium, where whole blocks of loose and fallen, and during that year. As if the traces of the bombardment and the assault of the French troops in July 1881 have not been removed.

In the craftsmen's quarter the houses are decrepit workshops, opening along the whole street, usually with an upper floor, with a balcony. If I may say balcony for the projecting poles with a few boards on them, and crookedly askew. The same for the balustrade and the outside railing. How does it hold together, may Allah know. Everywhere in front of the workshops hang colored cloths and rags, acting like awnings. They hang stretched over the streets in every color. Here and there dried up and scorched straw or long grass overhangs above a facade, looking similar to a lion's mane. Elsewhere a braid of reeds over the streets, like a giant net. They serve as a canopy, dirty and splendid, hanging above, in order to temper the sun. And they create such a strange impression as you step on the bright squares around which the light and shade play, intense sunlight and ink-black stripes of shadow, the image conjured up by that curtain stretched over the heads on the street. They are "shining tiles". Earlier, as I mentioned lions-mane, the thought came to me of them, the sight of everything, of a wilderness, of the "bush", wild men and wild animals ..

Without realizing you find yourself sailing into the souks. Here it is heaven compared to the artisans' quarter which seemed like a burning hell, with the volcanoes in the "Rue des Forgeron." Apropos, I forgot to say that all the practitioners of the same craft live and work in the same street: the coppersmiths, the saddlers and leather workers, jewelers, etc., appear everywhere in the East and elsewhere. The souks of Sfaks now rival that of Tunis in terms of richness and variety of merchandise on display, size of sale rooms, or better buy "and going", and the importance of the commercial transactions.

How fresh it is below the arched passageway, in many places covered with blue faience tiles creating the most beautiful curving arabesques. That cold color further increases [838] the freshness of the place, so it seems. What a luxury for the eye: the brightly colored fabrics, carpets, colored leather stools, ornate saddles for horses and camels, the shiny brass, Arabian jewels with stones and corals, brocade, and even more! There is no impression of more *goerbi* and tents, of misery and barbarism, but a body of

beauty and enjoyment only the East can give wealth and abundance, even of ingenuity, of genius. Our sense of smell that was so tortured when we went wandering through the "*rue de l'Alimentation*", because of the the stench of slaughterhouses, of common cooking ovens, the exhalation of waste of boiling grease and rotting vegetables to endure, is here treated to a fragrant banquet of the most diverse perfumes, and get free samples to enjoy the renowned Tunisian rose oil, which is sold by the gram. And all the people - from where did all these people come? – that teeming babble, draped in their colorful costumes! Bright white *burnous* are in the lead: which renders the brown faces of the "Sfaxiens" more true. Many also wear a kind of brown wool coat and peculiar trousers, fastened to the legs with a low cap or bag hanging from behind. That causes laughter, but it is restrained. It should not be. Most heads are crowned with bright garnet-red sjesjia (*chechia*), here and there a turban, spotless-white, impeccably wrapped to head somewhere for a Kadi or Kaiden, even a green turban is there. His happy porter has been to Mecca. Everyone shuffles around in "*babouches*", the rich have gold and silver thread embroidered artistically. Rarely a *Haïke*, wrapped around the head so that only the woman's dark eyes are visible. A woman is rarely seen on the streets, her place is at home or in the mosque. Her appearance is therefore acting very secretive, we think of Sjeherazade or Fatma. A dream or a ghost?

Here and there also the ebony face of a black man, probably the child or grandchild of a slave-driven here, or Jew with a thick leather belt around ... Variety enough! These people are in harmony with the varied mix of colorful merchandise, who by their dress alone were inspired to produce rich carpets, as the first carpet weavers of Kairoean, it seems, were the beautiful flowers in the gardens around their city, in the spring.

I never forget that young Arab - he was wealthy - who in his shop after I had bought a silken shawl, smiling he stretched out his hand, a bright, elegant, feminine hand with rings on the fingers. He was a beautiful young man with immaculate toilet. But he had such an gentlemanly air as of a grand seigneur, half proud but half also of engaging friendliness, a sense of inferiority that I could not shake off of me and I involuntarily thought of the "grandezza" of the Spanish nobles that might have been learned from the Moors of Cordoba and Granada. Perhaps he was descended from the caliph Alhambra Alkazar built. Or does the "*Rue des Andalous*" in Tunis carry no memory of him sometimes?

DENDERMONDE

ALFONS LAMBRECHT.