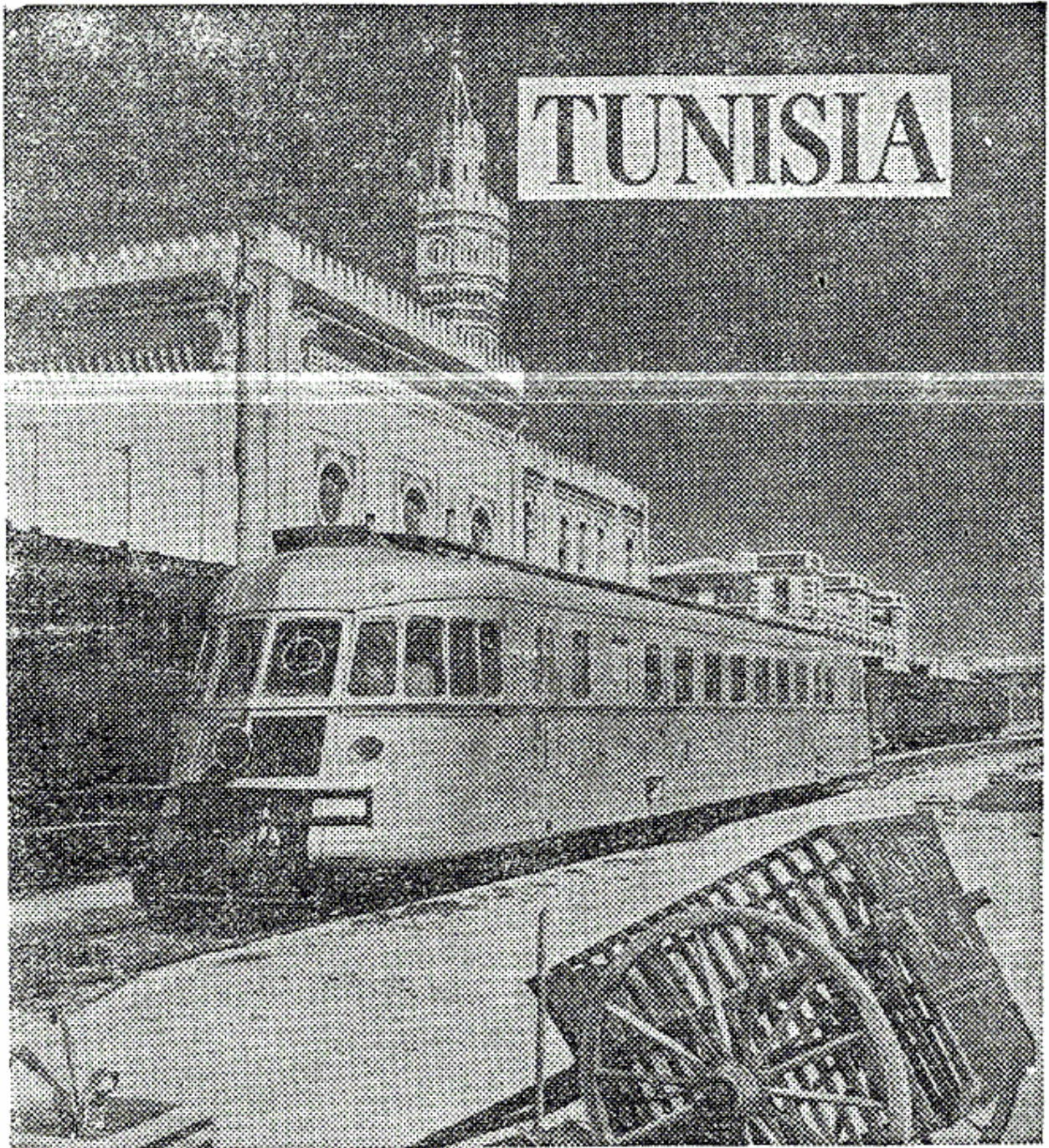


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Streamline "Ship of the Desert" in Tunis.

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TUNISIA, its fertile vineyards and olive groves clustered between the Sahara and the sea, is an African suburb of Europe. Lying across a strait from Sicily, it almost divides the Mediterranean into two great lakes.

Overnight steamers run from Trapani, Sicily, to Tunisia's capital, which has more Italian residents than all Libya.

No mere group of palm-draped oases is this warm, sunny land. Its wine and oil challenge the growers of France, Italy and Spain. Another Punic War, this time economic, is on.

After an absence of 13 years a teacher returned to Tunis, which brings the oriental life, the Moslem veil, shady souks, and peaceful mosques within honeymoon distance of European capitals.

But Tunis, no mere curiosity shop, lives in the present. At the corner of the Avenue Jules-Ferry and the Avenue de Carthage — tree-shaded Times square of the Tunisian metropolis — part of the city's 46,000 Italians watched red, white, and green flaglets mass closer on a map of Ethiopia. Representatives of the 33,000 Frenchmen of Tunis saw, behind bulletin board news flashes, German feet goose-stepping back into the Rhineland.

Down in southern Tunisia, motor trucks were rushing oil and grain to Ben Gardane, whence silent-footed camels, forgetful of "sanctions," carried provisions across the Libyan frontier toward Tripoli.

Neither the Casino, nor the electric cars to Carthage, the Viennese lady orchestra in a cafe, nor the animated promenade along the tree-lined avenue held you for long. You want to mingle again with the lean and slippered Moslem: Berber, Bedouin, and Zlass.

Buy Jewelry in the Slave Market.

Strolling through the Porte de France at Tunis, from the European quarter of hats and shoes into the native precincts of fezzes and slippers, you enter another world. Outside is the cathedral; inside is the mosque. Outside, tables of machine-made merchandise, soliciting trade on the sidewalks; inside, tiny shops which entice possible patrons of handicrafts with the insidious hospitality of the coffee cup.

In the heart of the souks, where carved candles, bright slippers and brighter silks, mellow carpets and lustrous copperware hide the nakedness of mere holes in the wall, you seek out a little square with red and green columns, falling arches, and an optimistic array of coffee tables—the slave market.

In the former slave market of Tunis, you watch American visitors buying jewelry.

The United States was the first Christian nation to win immunity from the depredations of Barbary corsairs. The Philadelphia ran aground on the Tripolitan coast, and William Eaton made his spectacular march of 600 miles across the Libyan desert, trying to re-establish a friendly Bye *in* Tripoli.

Tripoli's name formerly appeared in the legend on the colors of the United States marines, and still is familiar in the song, "From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli."

Another point of pilgrimage is the burial place of John Howard Payne.

"Home, Sweet Home" doesn't stand translation, for the French don't write songs about their homes. They stay there.

Payne's body at last came home. On the simple monument in the cemetery of the little English Church at Tunis are these words: "In the tomb beneath this stone, the poet's remains lay buried for 50 years. On January 5, 1883, they were disinterred and taken away to his native land where they received honored and final burial in the city of Washington, June 9, 1883."

Silk Shops and Noisy Cafes.

Visit the sun-slashed soak and the shadowy shop. Here a bearded Moslem gazes at a chromo of a fair-skinned girl. There a veiled woman fingers a sequined gown, draped from a hanger shaped like the head and shoulders of a bobbed-haired blonde.

Machine-made silks hang side by side with a tapestry, hand-woven by some Zlass tribeswoman generations ago, and passed down from mother to daughter until hunger turned an heirloom into a curio.

Cafe habitués, formerly entertained by lively hips and shrill voices, now solemnly listen to the metallic falsettos of a loud-speaker like a flytrap, or a "phonon" horn shaped like a morning-glory.

Above the screeching of orange-sellers, klaxons, and street car wheels in the Place Bab Souika, camellia-white domes rise like bubbles.

Through a mere alley cluttered by the barrows of vegetable merchants and baskets of those who sell spinach, ground henna, or red pimiento dust, you return to the Place Halfaouine. There, during Ramadan, Moslems fast and sleep by day and gorge themselves by night, glimpsing naughty puppet shows or playing dominoes.

Such pleasures palling, you ride out to the Bardo museum, once the secluded women's quarters of the palace of the Beys.

Where the Bey's womenfolk lived "like birds in a gilded cage," visitors marvel at the unique treasures of this collection of Punic, Roman, Christian, and Arab art.

This priceless hoard of historic loot would disconcert a modern archaeologist, for scant records were made of the exact places and conditions where the relics of long-gone centuries were brought to light. But there they are, in breathtaking quantity and excellence.

Crops and thistles now grow *on* sites whence these ancient stones came and companion pieces of these matchless mosaics, here polished and protected, now crumble under careless feet at Dougga, Thuburbc Majus, Bulla Regia, and Sbeitla.

Sponge Diver Found Yulla's Loot.

Petrified footprints made by Rome's seven-league boots in Tunisian sands have here been marshaled in a setting of rare charm. Surely not even the chosen ladies of the Bey ever graced these halls as do the gods and goddesses in marble and bronze.

Thirty years ago a sponge diver off Mahdia came gasping to the surface, his eyes dilated with fear. In the shadowy depths he had suddenly met face to face with a mysterious monster. His sceptical comrades, forewarned, dove down. Ignorant though they were, they came up swearing secrecy. For the "monster" was part of the ancient booty which Sulla shipped home from the sack of Athens. Wrecked off Mahdia, this hand-picked art collection never reached pre-Christian Rome.

One bronze figure at Le Bardo is a replica of Praxiteles' Eros, and this love is truly blind, for the eye pits lack pupils. The original, known and described by Callistratus, is lost. And this glorious figure, rescued from the sea 20 centuries after its shipwreck, dominates a series *at* halls in which Sulla's shipload of loot is now displayed.

Sharp sand proved kinder to the Pentelic marble than the surging sea. A smooth hip, which rested for 2,000 years on a bed of sand, still has a glasslike polish. But where the water, like an acid, pitted the smooth skin, no semblance of chaste curve from shoulder to breast, over which some Greek sculptor labored with love, gave way to pock-marked decomposition.

The bronzes suffered less. Dancing dwarfs still are grotesquely amusing, and a virile figure with stormy hair reaches out to grapple an adversary with the lifelikeness of a slow-motion movie.

In what was the Bey's banquet hall, a colossal head of Jupiter, itself as tall as a woman, looks down on Neptune's cortege.

A mosaic showing the Cyclops working under the direction of Vulcan makes Polyphemus seem like a modern, pictured on a poster twice life size.