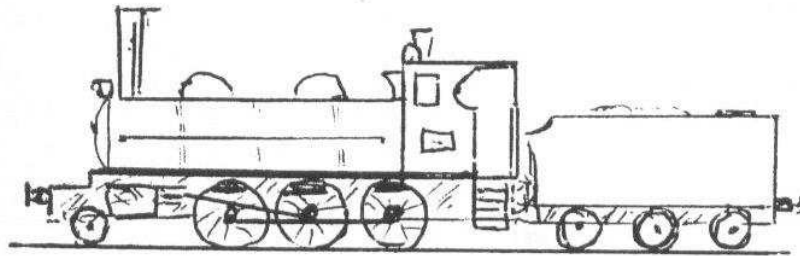


Return on the "Gourbaye"

(From Diaspora Sfaxienne 2005, p81)

In the article entitled "Mobile Mechanical Machines Seen in Sfax After the War" (Engins Mécaniques Mobiles Vus à Sfax Après la Guerre), and published in 1997 in number 31 of our annual review, I said that it was the name that the Tunisian mechanics and drivers of Sfax-Gafsa gave to the two old engines with vapor of mark "Widow Corpe" which had been given in service to handle the increase in the rail traffic in consequence of the number of ships berthing at the quays to load phosphate there.

From memory, I had drawn a road roller, one of the two steam pile driving plants, and one of the two engines in question. I give myself the pleasure of reproducing here that of this last machine.



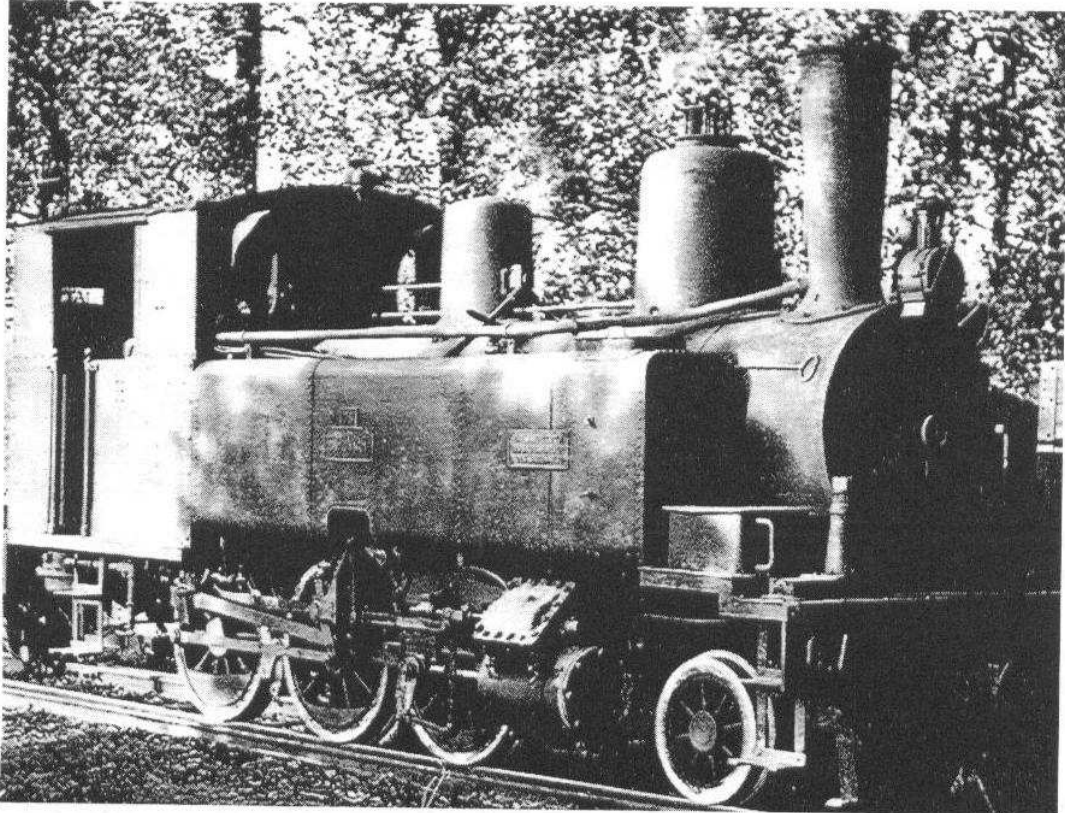
I would have been glad if some employee of Sfax-Gafsa, had had a photograph of it, and sent it to the D.S. so that I can note until where my memory was faithful. My waiting was in vain.

It is thus with joy that I could consult the book "The Small Trains at our Place" (Les Petits Trains de Chez Nous) published in 1997 by MM. Claude Wagner and Jean-Louis Poggi with editions MDM, that Mr. Jacques Cagnieul agreed to lend to me whom I thank warmly. This book counts all the French railway companies that have exploited branch lines often using metric gauge tracks (spacing of one meter between the two rails), as was the case for Sfax-Gafsa and the CFT between Tunis and Sfax. Until 1925 it was the reign of the steam engines. Those had in general three driving axles coupled by rods. Sometimes one provided them with an additional carrying axle, either at the front, or the rear. One had therefore three types of standards (030, 130 and 031) to characterize them.

The first satisfaction for me: I had drawn the "Gourbaye" as being one 130 saying, to be honest, that it could have been a very different combination. This book shows photographs of engines of the Corpet design of the type 031 or 030 of a weight of

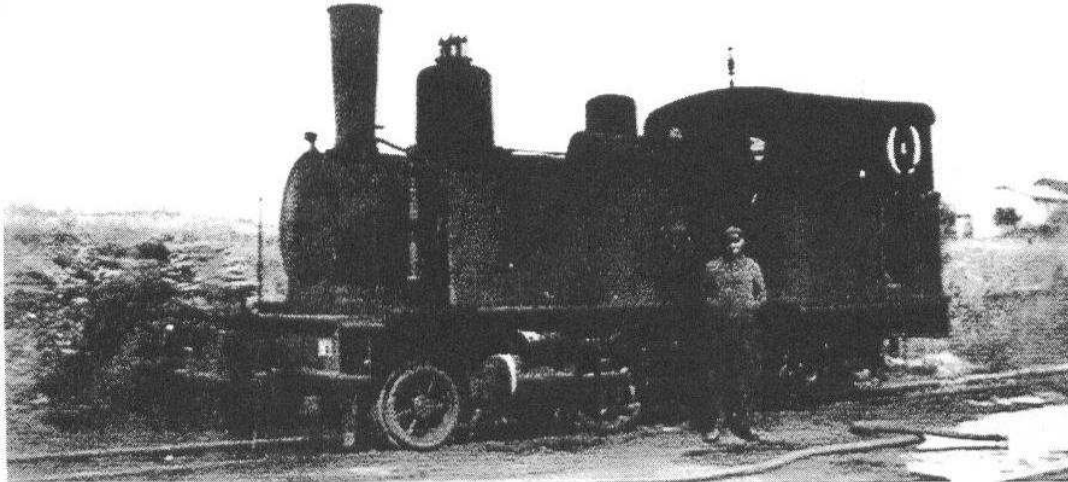
approximately 14 tons, built between 1890 and 1896, and others, heavier (16 to 20 tons) built between 1912 and 1926, all used on metric gauge tracks.

With regard to the 130, the photographs of the book represent Corpet-Louvet engines, heavier and built between 1913 and 1915. I present below the 130T No 75, called "Gesponsart", which circulated on the old network of the departmental railroads in the Ardennes where its use for the transport of beets lasted until 1961. Photography dates from October 14, 1956.

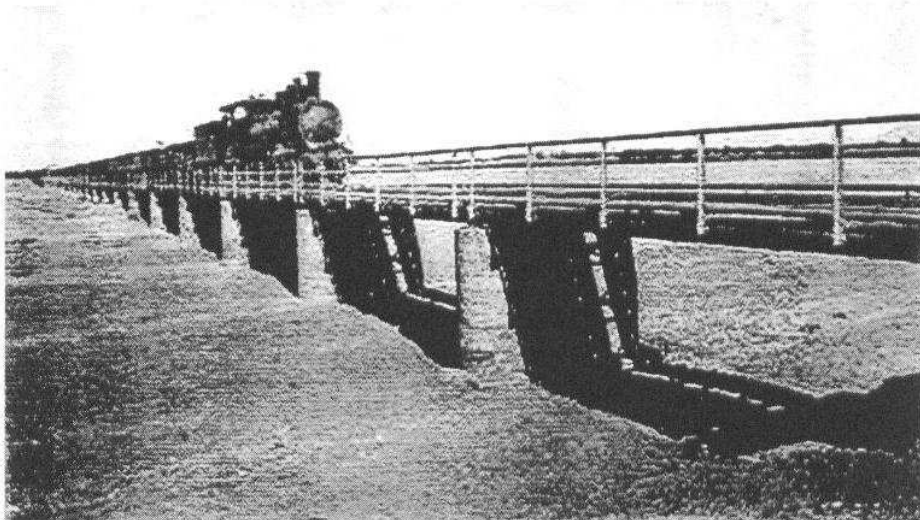


If one compares this photograph with that of my drawing, one notes some similarities and some differences more or less important. The chimney is very high, and there are two bosses on the body of the engine, between the chimney and the cabin. I concede you that I attached the same importance to the dome of vapor catch, containing the regulator, (the one closer to the chimney), as to the sand box. In fact the first is higher and a little larger than the second. One sees a pipe going from the cabin to the base of the chimney. It was to be probably used for the evacuation of excess vapor, going up along the chimney, but from the other side than on my drawing. This 130 has the water tanks on the sides, coal being stored behind the cabin, from where the appellation 130T.

The same applied to this other which, equipped with air brakes, has two cylindrical tanks at the top of the side water compartments, and a compressor, visible at the front, named "little horse" (petit cheval) by people of the trade.

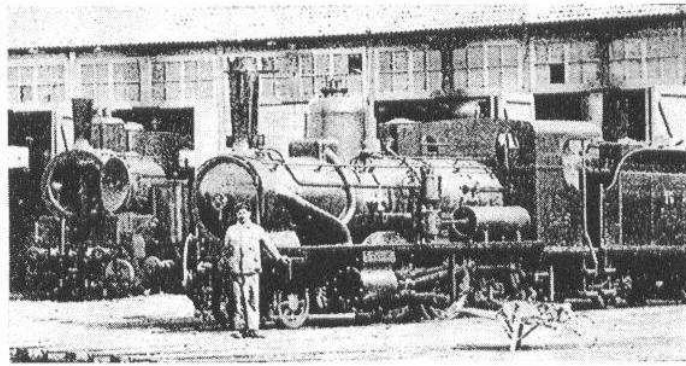


This was not the case for the "Gourbaye" which was harnessed with a tender. However was it only a tender? It is a large water cistern with, in its center, a small excavation where its coal was put. In Tunisia water was rarer than in France, and the line between Sfax and the mines of Metlaoui and Redeyef, much longer than those usually worked by the trains on the French secondary networks. It was thus necessary to be able to store much more water, hence the necessity of a tender.



This is what is confirmed by the reproduction above, of an old postcard, sold during September, for more than 25 euros through Internet bids (not to me). It represents the bridge

of railroad spanning the Baïech wadi at the entrance to Gafsa. One distinguishes an engine there resembling in many points that from my drawing, not having side water tanks, but attached to a tender. But one does not see the wheels and it is not the "Gourbaye" of my memories! The true one is that of this photo caught in front of the rotunda of the warehouse of Sfax in about 1925-1930. It is truly a 130, and is equipped with Westinghouse air brakes, the "*petit cheval*" being quite visible at the level of the second carrying axle. Mrs. Fortier, whom I thank well warmly, communicated this photograph to me although I regarded this article as finished. I thus added some lines to this paragraph, without changing a iota of the two following.



The question of the manufacturer of the first engines of Sfax-Gafsa arises now. On the cabin of both that I saw operating with the entry "low speed", the plate indicated "Veuve Corpet" (even if in my memory the final T had disappeared). The introduction of the line between Sfax and Gafsa going back to 1898, the photograph of the postcard above, must date between 1902 and 1910 from the view of the postmarks which I could raise on the old postcards of Sfax in my possession. The engine was obviously built earlier. On the photograph of an engine 031 of 1890, one reads on the plate L Corpet, manufacturer in Paris, the address being illegible. From 1913 one finds also name Corpet-Louvet.

Had there been at the end of the 19th century an L. Corpet, whose widow had taken the succession at the head of the factory? Would it thereafter have merged with one called Louvet? It would be necessary to be able to look further into the question, which for me is currently out of question because I have other centers of interest. The fact remains that if somebody had a photograph of one of the two Corpet engines, or of any other steam engine of Sfax-Gafsa, or of the vapor "bells" which were used to insert the piles for the foundations of the buildings in Sfax, I would take them. If one sends them to me at home in Toulouse (see my address on the 2004 directory of the D.S.), I commit myself turning over them to their owner, within the shortest possible time, after having scanned them. (Thank you

Christian Attard.) These and those who already entrusted me can attest that I always kept to this commitment.

Toulouse, November 2004. G Bacquet