



TUNISIA

UMAYYAD ROUTE



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Project
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EUROPEAN UNION



المنظمة العربية للتربية والثقافة والعلوم
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Tunisia. Umayyad Route

1st Edition, 2016

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Umayyad Project (ENPI)

The Umayyad Route seeks to publicize the profound human, cultural, artistic and scientific relationship between East and West and the way in which the Greco-Roman legacy was passed on to Europe through al-Andalus. This route was the path along which the Arabs came to the Iberian Peninsular and Europe, but it was also a channel for the transfer of knowledge and perfectly illustrates the close collaboration between the two Cultures. Of these multiple contacts the most important things to have survived the wear and tear of history are a common cultural and artistic background, a shared history and heritage. This is the *raison d'être* of these routes, which seek to forge links and strengthen the relations between the different peoples they encompass, united by a common past.

The Umayyad Route retraces part of the journey followed by the dynasty founded by Muawiya ibn Abi Sufian from its capital in Damascus and its subsequent expansion along the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the Iberian Peninsula. The route begins therefore in the Near East before heading off along the Mediterranean across North Africa. It follows the path by which Arabic civilization came to Europe and which gave rise to the Caliphate of Cordoba, where the Hispano-Muslim civilization flourished for several centuries. The itinerary starts at its easternmost point in Jordan and Lebanon, passing through Egypt and Tunisia, with a stopover in Sicily, and ends up in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

Minaret of the
Zaytuna Mosque, Tunis



Tunisia

Situated in the heart of the southern shores of the Mediterranean, Tunisia has throughout history been a bridge between East and West, between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Firmly anchored in the Mediterranean with almost 1,300 km of coastline, the country is also rooted in the Sahara Desert, which covers almost 40% of its area. Between these two worlds the last ridges of the Atlas overlap with the fertile plains of Medjerda, the salt lakes or *chotts*, vast forests of palm trees as in Gabes, a string of historic cities and an amazing variety of landscapes, both natural and man-made.

Great Mosque
of Kairouan



History and heritage

The well-known *Hermaion of El Guettar* a tumulus formed by 4,000 flints, bones and teeth from various different mammals, was discovered at an oasis near **Gafsa**. Considered one of the oldest constructions of a religious nature in the world, it dates from 40,000 BC and is now on show at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, which through its excellent collections illustrates the long historical journey undertaken by Tunisia. It made its first thunderous entry into the history of civilizations about 3,000 years ago, when its coasts were settled by the Phoenicians. The most famous city they established, Carthage, was founded by settlers from Tyre (in modern Lebanon) in around 814 BC. According to literary tradition, it was destined to a radiant existence and a tragic end. The *Qart Hadashat*, or New City, fostered an original civilization, the Punic culture, which resulted from a cross between the Phoenicians from the East and the native Berbers. In the end this new culture ousted its original Phoenician founders, extending its commercial networks and colonies to numerous corners of the Mediterranean and even the Atlantic.



Roman bust, Carthage

Bardo Museum,
Tunis



Antonine Baths,
Carthage

The expansion of Carthage inevitably clashed with the growing power of Rome. The two powers became embroiled in three wars known as the Punic Wars, which ended with the total annihilation of Carthage in 146 BC. In spite of the devastation, the defunct metropolis continues to throw up some interesting archaeological remains, such as the *Tofet de Salambo*, a sacred area devoted to the worship of the Phoenician goddesses Tanit and Baal. Other emblematic places reveal some of the mysteries of the Punic civilization such as the Hannibal quarter in **Byrsa** and above all **Kerkouane**. The remains of this city on the sea are the only examples of Punic architecture that were not altered by subsequent civilizations.



Roman mosaic. Bardo Museum

Indeed on top of the smoking ruins of Carthage, Rome built new cities for its province of *Africa*, a fertile and prosperous grain-store that supplied wheat, wine and a highly renowned olive oil to the Imperial capital. The romanized cities were adorned with ornate monu-

The Foundation of Carthage

“As Cato pointed out in a speech to the Roman Senate, Carthage was built by a woman called Elissa from Phoenicia, at the time when king Yarbas ruled over Libya. She gave it the name ‘Carthada’, which meant ‘new city’ in Phoenician. [...] Carthage was destroyed in 146 BC, 737 years after it was founded. Later it was handed over by Cayo Graco to settlers from Italy who changed its name to Junonia, and for a time it slipped off the map due to its more modest decadent situation. Finally after 102 years had gone by during the consulate of Mark Antony and Publius Dolabella, a new Carthage re-emerged in all its splendour, a glory of the world second only to the city of Rome itself.”

Solinus, *Collection of Curiosities*.



Dougga

Colosseum. El Jem
(*Thysdrus*)

ments whose surviving traces are still impressive today, in Sbeitla (formerly *Sufetula*), Dougga (*Thugga*), Bulla Regia and El Jem (*Thysdrus*). The latter has one of the biggest amphitheatres in the Roman world. The “Rome of Africa” was covered in fine mosaics and soon be-





Old engraving of the city of Mahdia. *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1572-1617)

came home to Jewish and later Christian communities, who expanded fast in the fourth century, converting pagan temples into churches, as happened in Sbeitla and Carthage. Later, the arrival of the Vandals in the fifth century and the unsuccessful attempts at restoration of the Empire by the Byzantines between the sixth and seventh centuries ushered in a period of retreat and decline of these cities.

However, the arrival of Islam, the civilization of the *medinas*, strengthened the dense urban fabric of the old colony of *Africa*, known in Arabic as *Ifriqiya*. Conquest by the Muslim armies was far from easy, requiring almost half a century between the first expedition in 647 and the final crushing of the last pockets of Berber resistance led by the legendary queen Kahena in around 696. In order to consolidate this new regime the Arab general Uqba b. Nafi' al-Fihri founded the city of Kairouan in 670, which became a cultural and religious beacon throughout the Maghreb thanks to its Great Mosque, a masterwork of Islamic architecture and the future House of Wisdom. From then on Tunisia

Main dynasties that held power in Ifriqiya

Umayyads / Abbasids
(7th-8th centuries)

Aghlabids
(9th-early 10th centuries)

Fatimids
(10th century)

Zirids
(10th-11th centuries)

Hafsids
(13th-15th centuries)

Ottomans
(16th-19th centuries)



Susa. Qasr al-Ribat

Ifriqiya, as described by al-Bakri, the 11th century

“This country [Ifriqiya] extends from Barca, on its eastern side, to Tandjat el-Khadra (‘Tangier the Green’), at its western end. Ifriqiya extends in length from the [Mediterranean] sea to the sands that mark the beginning of the land of the Blacks. This region is made up of mountains and of vast plains of sand, which run from the East to the West.”

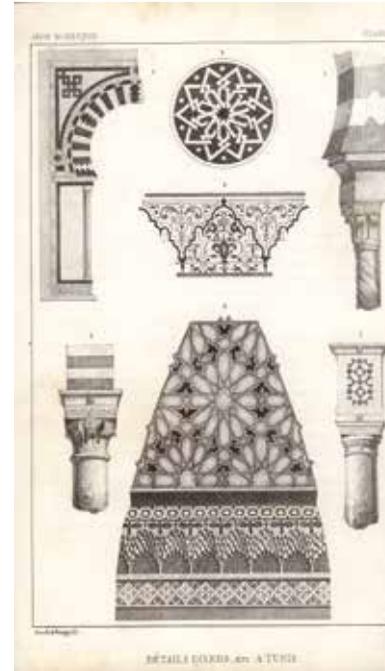
witnessed the rise and fall of various dynasties: the Aghlabid Berbers (800-909), the Fatimid Shiites (10th century), the Zirid Berbers, who re-established Sunnism (10th-11th centuries), the Moroccan Almohads, who conquered the entire Maghreb (1159-1228), the Hafsids Berbers of Tunisia (13th-15th centuries) and the Ottoman Turks and their governors (16th-19th centuries).

In addition to these historical ups and downs, the country was also subject to the devastating invasions of the Hilal Arab tribes (11th century), the incursions by Normans (12th century), Pisans, Genovese, Venetians and Spaniards (16th century) and the enriching arrival of immigrants from al-Andalus and later of Moriscos (descendants from Muslims that were forced to convert to Christianity after the period of al-Andalus came to an end. Their expulsion from Spain was decreed in the beginning of the 17th century).

The land that is now Tunisia has contributed in many ways to the enhancement of Arab Muslim civilization: the innovation in water systems for agriculture,

the boom in commerce and in the cities, participation in the scientific movement, etc. From its moments of splendour we can still enjoy today the Palace cities of **al-Abbasiyya** and **Raqqada** through some of their most sumptuous pieces on display at the **National Museum of Islamic Art**, or the defences of **Mahdia**, which became the capital city under the Fatimids in 921. The city of Tunis subsequently recovered this position and has been exercising its role as the political centre of this part of the Eastern Maghreb continuously since the 12th century under the Almohads. Its *medina* still maintains the mediaeval street pattern, the vitality of its souks and a total of 700 monuments under the shade of the minaret of the venerable **al-Zituna** (the Mosque of the Olive Tree), founded in 732. The beautiful Tunisian coastline was defended by *ribats*, fortresses with a simple austere beauty such as in **Monastir** and **Sousse**. The refined art of living is captured eternally in the *seraya* or *senya* around Tunis, recreational palaces in which gardens and buildings fuse. The presence of

Ribat of Monastir



Berber village in Takrouna and decorative details of the Tunisian architecture.
Essai sur l'architecture des Arabes et des Mores, Girault de Prangey, 1841



al-Andalus is clear in countless villages in the valleys of **Medjerda** or **Bizerta**, and in the towns of Testour, Soliman and Zaghouan, in the music, sweet dishes and certain craft traditions. The bright luminous south of the country appears little by little as we move away from the sedentary world of the *medinas*, and has its stations for caravans and exuberant palm tree forests in a criss-cross network of about 150 *ksurs* –fortified villages and grain stores - examples of the traditional architecture of the Sahel.

“The East West confrontation confirms the country’s position on the frontier: on the midline (that of the Strait of Sicily) that separates the eastern and western parts of the ‘Mare Nostrum’, Tunisia acts as a veritable hinge between the Mediterranean civilisations. It is a window facing East, while at the same time being part of the Maghreb or ‘Island of the West’. Its geographical position is one of the key factors in understanding this country, a land of crossed cultures and constant synthesis of Oriental and Occidental values.”

Alfonso de la Serna



The development of tourism in Tunisia

At the beginning of the 1960s, a few years after Tunisia gained its independence from France, the Tunisian Government decided that the tourism sector could play an important role in the economic development of the country alongside agriculture and industry. Special attention was given to this emerging sector, large tourism complexes were developed with numerous hotels by state-owned tourism companies, particularly in coastal regions such as Sousse-Monastir, Djerba-Zarzis, Nabeul-Hammamet, Tabarka-Aïn Draham and Tunis and its suburbs. Private promoters later took over from the state in the development of coastal tourism.

Many years later, it was decided to diversify what the country had to offer tourists. New tourist areas

Tunisian coast



Overview of Bulla Regia



Sahara International Festival, Douz

were created to develop tourism in the Saharan regions of Tozeur-Nefta and Médenine-Tataouine. But given that Tunisia has between 25,000 and 30,000 archaeological sites and historic monuments listed by the National Institute of Heritage, spread across all the regions of the country and often only partially exploited by the Tunisian tourism industry, interest then switched towards the promotion of the country's rich cultural heritage and the development of cultural tourism, in particular from the year 2000 onwards. Specific efforts were also made to promote the country's natural sites and develop ecological and alternative tourism, above all in the inland regions of the country which had not benefited from the services provided by both the public and private sectors in the coastal regions as a result of the boom in tourism.

However, while focusing its attention on developing these new tourism products, which also included health tourism, hunting tourism etc..., the Tunisian state is now increasingly concerned about the protection of national cultural heritage and the security of all the tourist sites and hotel establishments in the country.

UMAYYAD ROUTE



PORTUGAL
Algarve

SPAIN
Andalusia

ITALY
Sicily

TUNISIA

LEBANON

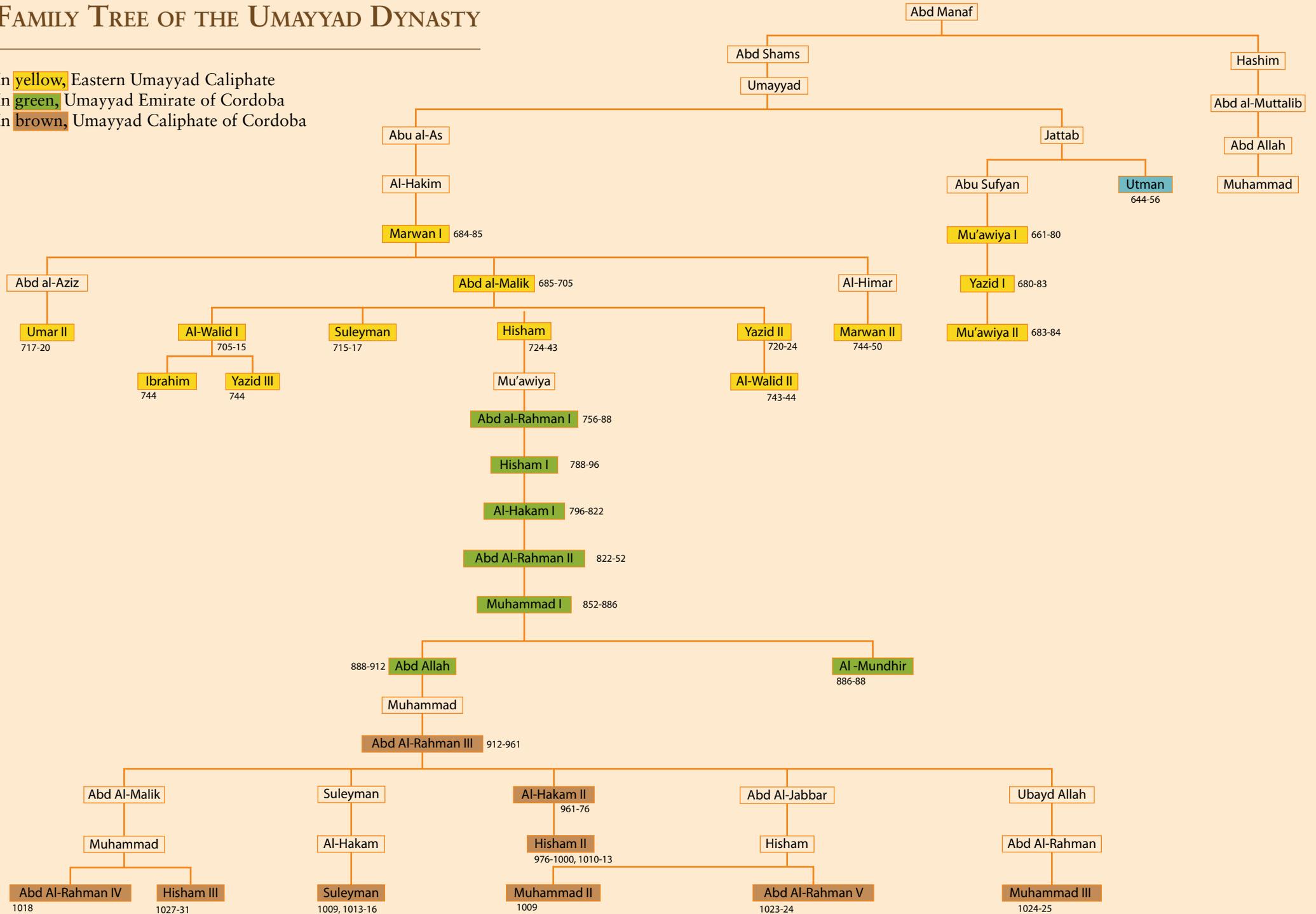
JORDAN

EGYPT



FAMILY TREE OF THE Umayyad Dynasty

In **yellow**, Eastern Umayyad Caliphate
 In **green**, Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba
 In **brown**, Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba

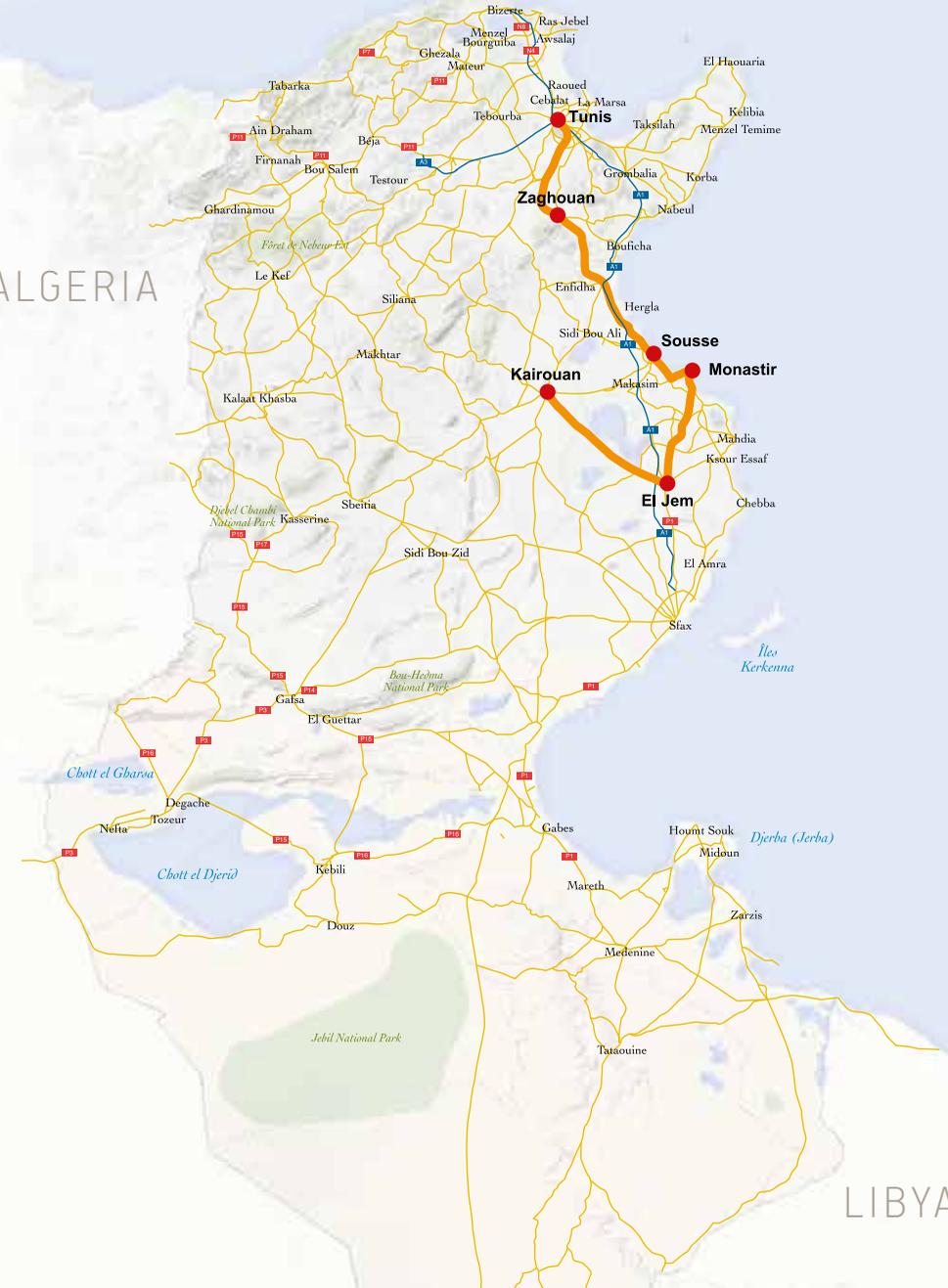


The Umayyad Route in Tunisia

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ALGERIA

LIBYA





GASTRONOMY
IN TUNISIA

Umayyad and Modern Arab Food. Gastronomy in Tunis

There are a wide variety of Arab dishes to satisfy the palette of every gourmet. Many modern dishes date back to early Islam when the most famous dish was Tharid, a favourite of the Prophet. In its simplest form, Tharid is bread crumbs soaked with meat broth, and is eaten with the hand. Many different recipes have been suggested over the years including some from the Umayyad era. Rather than going into detailed recipes of Umayyad or contemporary Abbasid food, it would perhaps be better to describe the general characteristics of recipes from these periods, noting that many of the sweet and sour dishes are no longer cooked in the Arab World. Today sugar sweetened meats are most popular in the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Here are some common ingredients of Umayyad dishes:

Tunisian pastry



Couscous
with lamb meat

- a. Meat, especially lamb, goat, chicken and fish was the main protein source in the Umayyad diet.
- b. Meat was often prepared in sweet and sour recipes. Honey, sugar, and fruit, both dried and fresh, were used generously to enhance the taste. Common examples were oranges, figs, dates, pomegranates, raisins and apricots. Lemon juice was also used.
- c. Various spices were also used.
- d. Copious amounts of nuts were also added to main dishes. In particular almonds, pistachios, pine nuts and occasionally hazelnuts were used to impart a delicious taste. This was also the case for desserts.
- e. There were many sweet dishes in this period. Honeyed pastries and dates with almonds were very common. Sugar syrup perfumed with rose water or *ma'zahr* (lemon blossom extract) was often used

as a substitute for honey. One example, *lauzeenaj*, is the precursor of modern *baklawa* (a fine-leaved pastry with pistachio filling and sugar syrup). Milk and rice puddings were also eaten with honey.

These three books offer an interesting history of Umayyad and Abbasid food and a wide selection of recipes:

- a. Lilia Zaouali, *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World. A Concise History with 174 Recipes*, Berkeley and LA, University of California Press, 2007.
- b. Nawal Nasrallah, *Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and History of the Iraqi Cuisine*, Sheffield, Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013.
- c. David Waines, *In a Caliph's Kitchen, Medieval Arabic Cooking for the Modern Gourmet*, London, Riad El Rayyes Books Ltd., 1989.

Spices used in the traditional cuisine of Tunisia



Ouzaf. Couscous with dried fish

These and perhaps other titles dealing with Ottoman cuisine offer the curious tourist an opportunity to sample some Umayyad or Islamic dishes. We believe that trying these dishes would enhance the travel experience giving tourists an added sense of history and tradition.

The traditional cuisine of Tunisia is essentially Mediterranean. The original Berber culinary traditions were supplemented with the gastronomic influences of the other Mediterranean cultures who since Phoenician times have left their mark on the country. These include the Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks and more recently Europeans. In general, Tunisian dishes are made with olive oil and are strongly spiced. A popular spicy condiment is *harissa* which is obtained from crushed red chilli peppers and is used in practically all the red sauces and has a regular place on the table next to the olive oil.

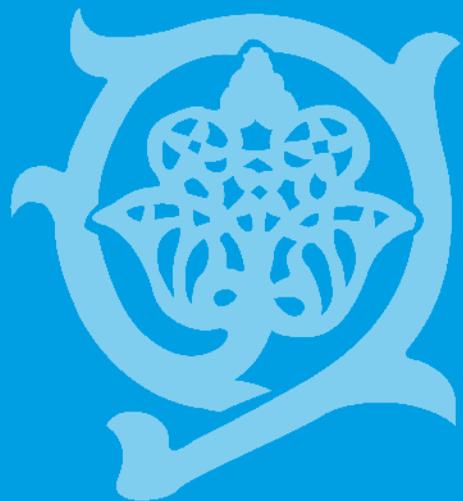


In Tunisian restaurants, the menus are quite varied: salads and briks (a very fine crepe containing egg, potato purée, tuna, onions, parsley and capers) as a starter, followed by a barley soup, then a couscous made with mutton or fish, or stews with mutton or beef and finally fruit or pastries. In the coastal regions the most popular specialities contain fish and shellfish. The inland regions also have their local culinary delights, which are often based on mutton and sometimes even on dromedary meat.

Maqroud

Kaak de Menzel
Temime

As for cakes, these vary from the *maqroud* of Kairouan to the different forms of “Turkish delight” on sale in the souks in *medinas* without mentioning finer specialities such as *baklava*, a pastry of Turkish origin, filled with almonds or hazelnuts, or *assidat zgougou* a cream made with pine-tree grains, prepared on the occasion of the holiday of the Muled (the Prophet’s birth), and finally the *bsissa*, which is a pre-grilled cereal flour, mixed with some olive oil or honey and generally served during the month of Ramadan.



ITINERARY

UMMAYYAD ROUTE

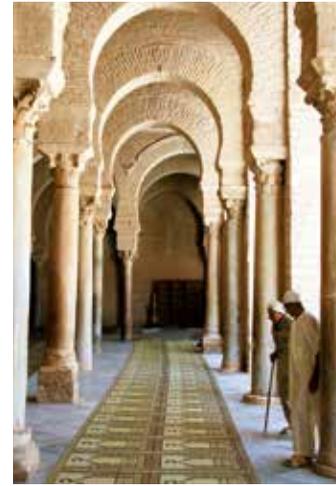


Great Mosque

In 909, the Fatimids captured the city, seizing power in Ifriqiya as a whole. These Shiite caliphs decided to found a new capital on the coast at Mahdia, and Kairouan was briefly sidelined. This situation did not last long however, because in the year 949, the Fatimids moved their capital once again, this time to Sabra al-Mansuriya, near Kairouan.

Kairouan's splendour continued until the mid 11th century when the Banu Hilal tribes sacked the city, after which it was practically abandoned, losing all its political and economic power. Since then, the city has enjoyed periods of relative importance, such as during the Hafsids dynasty, between the 13th and 16th centuries, in which numerous richly decorated monuments were built.

Kairouan was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1988.



Great Mosque

Visits

Great Mosque (Sidi Uqba Mosque)

The construction of this remarkable, massive building was ordered by Uqba Ibn Nafii in 670 AD, the year the city was founded. Nevertheless it has been extended and restored and even demolished and reconstructed on several occasions since then. Its main structure dates back to the year 836 AD, when the Aghlabid prince Ziyadat Allah I ordered it to be completely rebuilt. Practically all the subsequent dynasties added new features.



Astrolabe, Kairouan

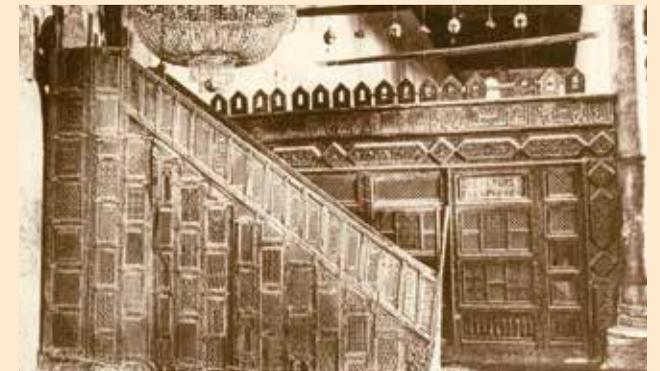
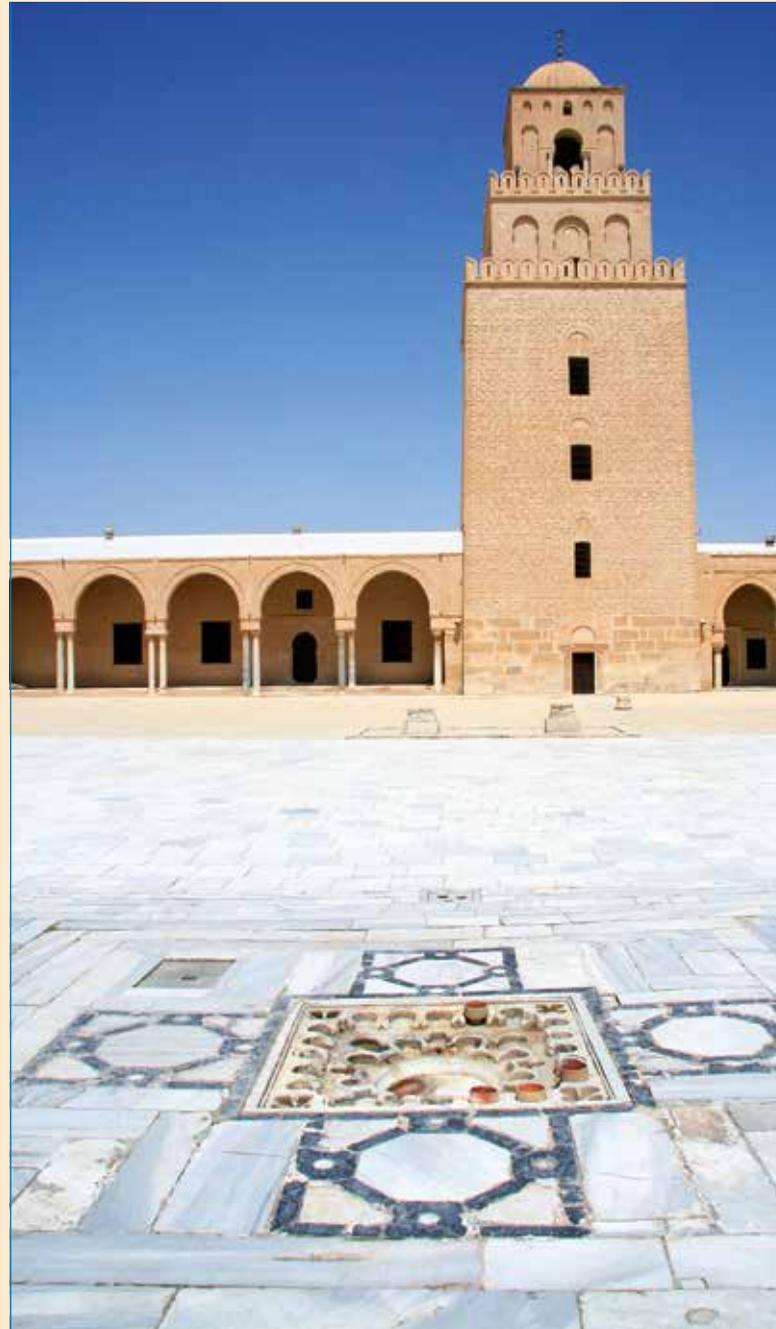
Kairouan and Raqqada, by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12th century

“Kairouan is the mother of all metropolises, the capital of this region. It is one of the most important cities in the Maghreb for its size, the importance of its population and its wealth, its general prosperity, the solidity of its buildings, the superior nature of its concerns, the profits it reaps from trade, the abundant revenues it receives in taxes, the quantity of goods it sells and the profits it earns in this way.

[...] About three miles distant stand the castles of Raqqada, so tall and so well constructed, surrounded by such numerous gardens and orchards! The Aghlabids spent the early years of their rule there and of their greatest splendour.”

The Sidi Uqba Mosque in the 11th century

“The *mihrab* of this Mosque was built for the first time by Uqba ibn Nafi‘. It was the only part of the building that was not knocked down and rebuilt by his successor Hassan ibn Nu‘man. It was he who brought two red columns there from an ancient church, which were speckled with yellow and of incomparable beauty [...]. It is said that before these columns were moved here, the ruler of Constantinople wanted to buy them for their weight in gold; the Muslims therefore hastened to transport them to the Mosque. All those that have seen them say that they are like nothing else on earth. [...] Yezîd ibn Hatem, appointed governor of l’Ifrikiya in the year 155 H (772 AD), ordered the whole mosque, with the exception of the *mihrab*, to be knocked down and rebuilt. [...] When Ziyadat Allah, the son of ‘Ibrahîm ibn el-Aghlab, came to the throne, he ordered that the whole mosque be demolished and that the *mihrab* be knocked down. Even though he was reminded that his predecessors had all refrained from touching that part of the building because ‘Uqba ibn Nafi‘ had built it; he insisted on going ahead, not wishing the new building to have the remotest trace of any construction that was not his. In order to dissuade him from this plan, one of the architects invited him to brick up the old *mihrab* between two walls, so that it could not be seen from inside the mosque. This plan was accepted and to this day the Mosque of Kairouan has remained just as Ziyadat Allah left it. The current *mihrab*, like all other things around it, is built from top to bottom in carved white marble, and covered with sculptures. Part of the decoration is in the form of inscriptions; the rest comes in arabesques in varied designs. The *mihrab* is surrounded by an extremely beautiful marble colonnade. The two red columns we mentioned earlier stand in front of the *mihrab* and support the dome. The mosque has ninety-four columns forming seventeen naves. [...] When Ibrahim, the son of Ahmed ibn al-Aghlab, came to the throne, he ordered that the naves of the mosque be lengthened and that a dome



Sidi Uqba Mosque

known as the Cobba Bab el-Behou ‘the dome of the gate of the pavilion’ be built at the end of the nave that gave on to the *mihrab*. It is surrounded by thirty-two columns of beautiful marble; on the inside it is covered with magnificent sculptures and arabesque motifs carved with admirable precision: anyone who sees it cannot help but declare that it would be impossible to find a more beautiful monument. The courtyard of the mosque, on the nave side, is covered with a carpet fifteen cubits long. The mosque has ten doors and in the eastern part, a *maqsurah* or ‘tribune’ set aside for women. This tribune is separated from the main body of the Mosque by an intricately sculpted wall, which itself is an artistic masterpiece.”

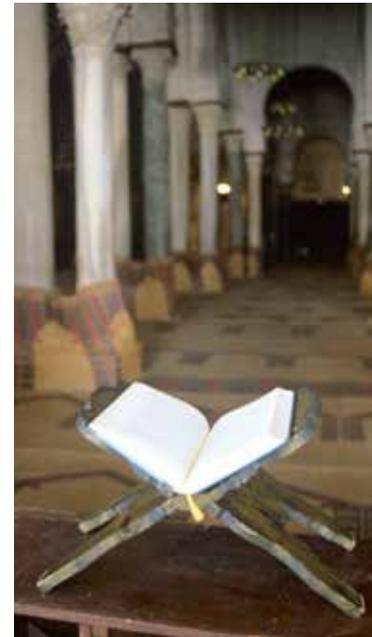
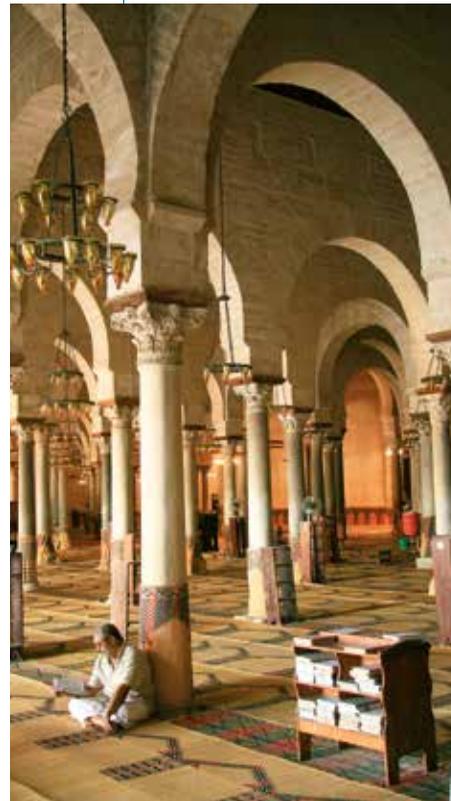
Al-Bakri, 11th century

The Great Mosque, also called the Mosque of Sidi Uqba, has six large doors which open onto the courtyard and three other doors that lead directly to the prayer hall.

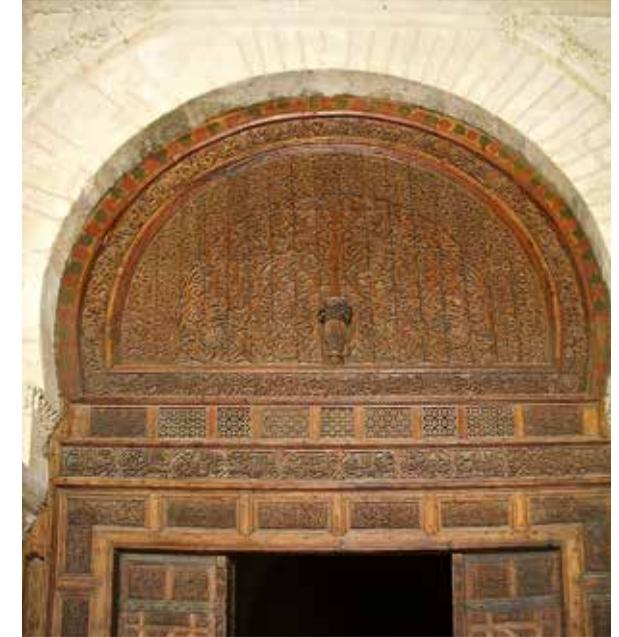
The huge courtyard occupies the centre of the mosque. It is surrounded by double galleries with marble columns brought from various ancient Roman temples.

The square minaret is around 36 metres-high, has three floors and is topped by a dome. It was used for the call to prayer and also as a watchtower. A 129-step staircase leads to the top.

Minaret and prayer hall of the Great Mosque



Prayer hall and door.
Great Mosque



The prayer hall contains a forest of granite and porphyry columns supporting capitals and arches that date back to the Roman or Byzantine period. A heavy chandelier hangs from beams over the *mihrab*, which is decorated with marble panels and tiles that were probably brought from Baghdad. At its side is the *minbar*, a pulpit carved out of wood from Mesopotamia, from which the imam delivers his sermons to the faithful.

Old image of the
minbar of the Great
Mosque

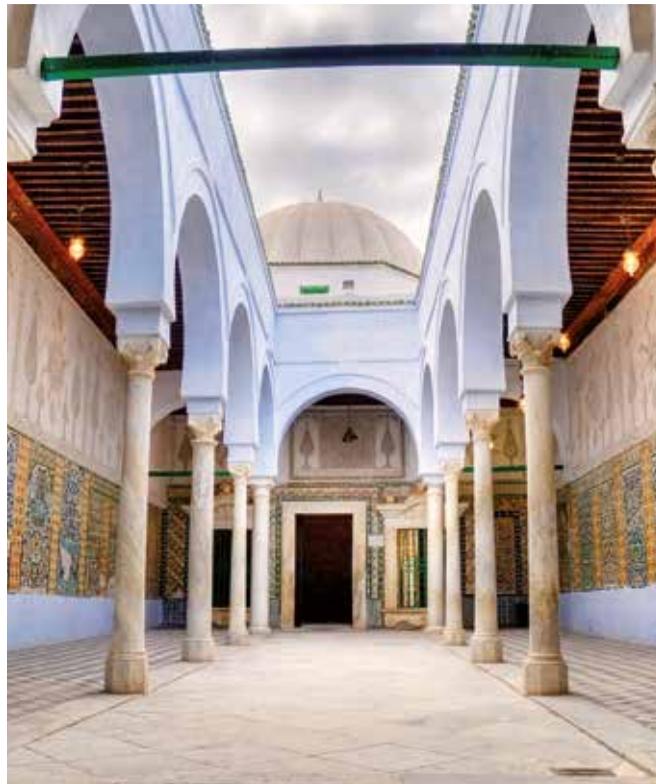


Sidi Sahbi Zawiya or Mausoleum of Abu Zomaa al-Balawi

This mausoleum was built in honour of Abu Zomaa al-Balawi, a companion of the prophet Muhammad. This building is also known as the “Mosque of the Barber” since according to legend Abu Zomaa al-Balawi was the Prophet’s barber and kept several hairs from his beard.

Although it was first constructed in the 7th century, the building we see today dates above all from the 17th century, when Hammouda Pacha (1631-1665) ordered the rebuilding of the dome, and some years later Mohamed Bey ordered the reconstruction of the whole mausoleum complex (1681-1685).

This complex is formed by different spaces: stores, apartments reserved for the Pasha, a *madrasa* and a mausoleum in the strict sense.



Mausoleum of Sidi Sahbi



Inside the Great Mosque

Who has written about Kairouan?

In the 1970s, the former Spanish ambassador Alfonso De La Serra devoted a whole chapter of his book *Images de Tunisie* to Kairouan. He described it as follows: “Kairouan is an austere city; a *medina* from the desert, where women’s veils look more rigorous, and men’s shadows appear more severe. From the innumerable mosques and *zaouias*, we expect a prophet, theologian or mystic poet to suddenly emerge at any time. Today, Kairouan is the capital city of a small governorate, with a population in the region of 50,000, about a third of the number it had in the Middle Ages. In those days it was said to be bigger than Damascus and more important than Isfahan.”

The monument has elegant architecture, quality stucco work and beautiful Turkish-style glazed tile panels with exquisite floral and geometric designs. It is characterized by a sense of harmony, in spite of the fact that it combines different styles from very different places: from the Andalusian style of the minaret (the architects who supervised the work where Andalusian –Ahmed and Mustafa al-Andalusi), to the Turkish, Byzantine and local influences, as reflected in the round arches of the porticoes of the mausoleum.

This is where the community celebrates religious ceremonies like the *Mawlid* (birth of the prophet Muhammad).



Great Mosque

Raqqada by the geographer al-Bakri, 11th century

“A town situated four miles from Kairouan, within a perimeter measuring twenty-four miles and forty cubits, most of which is taken up with gardens. There is nowhere in Ifrikiya where the air is so temperate, the zephyrs so sweet and the sun so fertile. It is said that whoever enters the town finds himself laughing and rejoicing incessantly for no apparent reason.”



Mosque of the
Three Gates

Mosque of the Three Gates

This is the second oldest monument in Kairouan after the Uqba mosque. It was built by Muhammad ibn Khairoun al-Ma'arifi, a reader of the Koran from al-Andalus who devoted his life in Kairouan to teaching and died in Sousa in 919 AD. Above the large central arch and the two side arches, there is a stone frieze in four rows crowned by an intricately carved cornice. One of the rows contains a long inscription in Kufic characters as well as geometrical and floral motifs.

This is a magnificent example of typical Islamic architecture, with its arched doorways and floral and geometrical reliefs. The minaret was added in restoration works in 1440.



Decorative detail
of the Mosque of
the Three Gates

Old water
extraction system



Bir Barouta

This 12-metre deep well, dug in 796 AD, still functions today thanks to a camel that drives a wooden wheel and channel system, which draws water from the bottom of the well. Legend has it that this well is directly connected to the sacred Zam Zam well in Mecca. Its dome dates back to the 17th century.



*Medina of
Kairouan.*
General view

Ramparts of Kairouan

The first walls of Kairouan were built in 762 AD during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur. They were rebuilt in 1052 AD, at a time when the city was still prosperous. They then measured no less than nine kilometres. Following the Hilalian invasion in around 1057, the city and its walls shrunk considerably. The current walls, built on top of those dating from the Hafsid period (13th century), were commissioned by the Husainid dynasty between 1756 and 1772 and have huge gates (*bab*, in Arabic), such as Bab ech-Chouhada, Bab el-Khoukha and Bab Tounes.



Aghlabid basins

These basins were built in 247 H / 861 AD in the semi-arid area of Kairouan by the Aghlabid Emir Ibrahim ibn Ahmad. Their impressive size made them ones of the most famous waterworks in the world at that time. They receive water from the Chrichira mountains thanks to a 36 km-long aqueduct system. The water is first collected in the smaller basin measuring 37 m in diameter, while the larger basin, built in the ninth century, has a diameter of 128 m.

Aghlabid basins

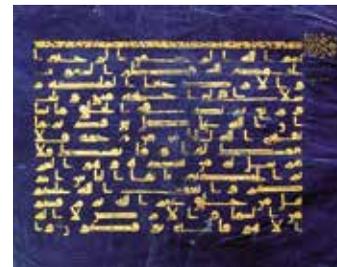


Museum of Islamic Art, Raqqada

Surroundings

Located some 9 kilometres from Kairouan, **Raqqada** is well worth a visit. It has historical remains from the Golden Age of Islam, in which the Aghlabid sultans held sway in Tunisia. A town with *hammams* (public baths), mosques and palaces once lay in the midst of sumptuous gardens. Raqqada was however destroyed during the Hilalian invasion in the 11th century. It is now home to a university, a large equestrian centre and the Museum of Islamic Art, which bears witness to the city's past splendour.

The museum also contains a large collection of Korans with superb calligraphy as well as manuscripts and documents belonging to the Library of the Great Mosque of Kairouan. One of the gems of this collection is an extract from the Koran written in gold ink on blue parchment, dating back to the 10th century. One of the rooms in the museum has a lavish collection of gold and silver coins, pottery and glassware.



Leaf from *Blue Qur'an* (Kairouan, 10th century).
Museum of Islamic Art, Raqqada

Gastronomy and handicrafts

Kairouan is famous for its semolina-based pastries made with dates or almonds, and then fried and soaked in sugar syrup. These pastries are called *maqroudh* and are on sale in shops throughout the city. They are a real delicacy to savour *in situ* or to take home after a visit to the city.

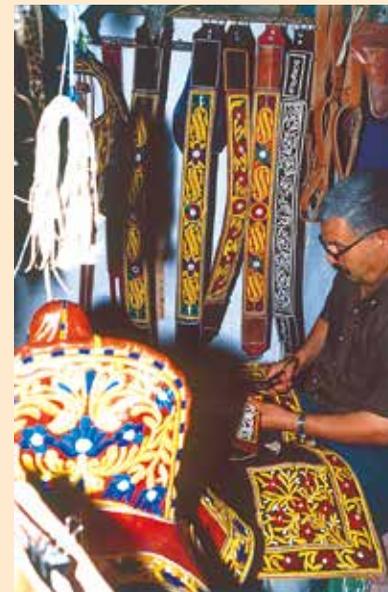
Kairouan is an important carpet-making centre. This craft has been passed down the generations from mother to daughter. The quality of the final product is measured by the density of stitches per square metre, the symmetrical perfection of the designs and motifs and the size of the carpet. There are various types including the *zarbia*, the *alloucha* and the *mergoum*. *Mergoum* carpets are famous for their Berber motifs, *zarbia* use high quality wools in brown or red tones and *alloucha* carpets are made of sheep's wool with its typical black, white and chestnut colours.



Maqroudh, traditional pastries and woman stringing peppers, in Bouhajla near Kairouan



Carpet Museum and craftsman



The Carpet Museum of Kairouan has a collection of Tunisian carpets dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century and beyond, with one from the year 1830.

Feasts

Kairouan is famous for its distinctive celebration of the anniversary of the birth of the prophet Mohammed (*mawlid*). During this feast, the whole town is festooned with multicoloured carpets. The festivities last for a whole week, at the end of which whole families go to the Sidi Sahbi Mausoleum to recite the Koran and make wishes.



Sunset in the Roman ruins of El Jem

the wealth of central Tunisia passed. This privileged position made the town an important marketplace for agricultural products, where traders and merchants gathered to bargain.

Like any prosperous city, it had an imposing amphitheatre, probably built in the early third century. This was not the first building of its kind in the city. It was preceded by two more modest amphitheatres, which are also visible today and were probably trial versions of the final product.

El Jem acquired its place in legend in the 8th century, when the Berber heroine “El Kahena” took on the newly arrived Arabs, taking refuge in the Roman amphitheatre which was transformed into a fortress. In subsequent periods in history, this massive structure was used as a bastion for those who dared rebel against their rulers. In the end there was only one solution to



View of some architectural elements of the Amphitheatre

The amphitheatre by Thomas Shaw, 1808

“Here we have several antiquities as altars with defaced inscriptions, a variety of columns, a great many trunks and arms of marble statues one of which is of the Coloss kind in armour, another is of a naked Venus in the posture and dimensions of the Medicean, both of them by good masters, but the heads are wanting.

But Jemme (Thysdrus/El Jem) is the most remarkably distinguished by the beautiful remains of a spacious amphitheatre which consisted originally of sixty four arches and four orders of columns placed one above another. The upper order which was perhaps an Attic building is most of it tumbled down. Mahomet Bey likewise in a late revolt of the Arabs who used it as a fortress blew up four of its arches from top to bottom, otherwise as to the outside at least nothing can be more entire and magnificent. In the inside likewise, the platform of the seats, with the galleries and *vomitoria* leading up to them, are still remaining. The *arena* is nearly circular; and in the centre of it, there is a deep pit or well of hewn stone, where the pillar that might support the *velum* was probably fitted.”

Travels or Observations relating to Barbary

El Kahena

El Kahena, whose name was in fact Dihya bint Thabita ibn Tifan had led the Berber resistance to the Arab conquest following the crushing defeat of the Byzantine army at the hands of Arab troops led by Hassan Ibn Nu‘man in 695 AD (76 H). She was the widow of the king of the Jerawa, a Berber tribe from the Eastern Aures mountains. She was a regent for her two sons, who were too young to reign, and she had earned this position due to her great leadership skills.

Ibn Khaldoun described Kahena as follows: “Dihya, the Amazigh horsewoman of whom history has not seen the like, rode upon her horse and covered the distance from Aures to Tripoli bearing weapons to defend the land of her ancestors.”

Histoire Générale de la Tunisie,
t. II (*Le Moyen Âge*), Tunis, 2007.

crush these rebellions, namely to partially demolish the building, as happened in 1850 when it was subjected to concentrated cannon fire.

Much weakened, El Jem became little more than a humble village built around the proud ruins of the amphitheatre and it was only recently, when demographic forces and change in Tunisian society led to increased urban development, that El Jem was granted a new lease of life.

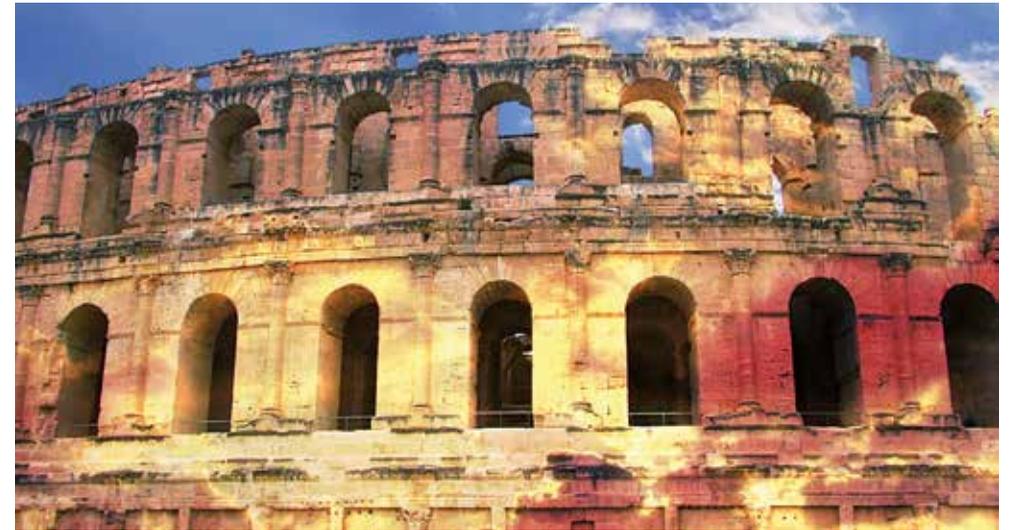
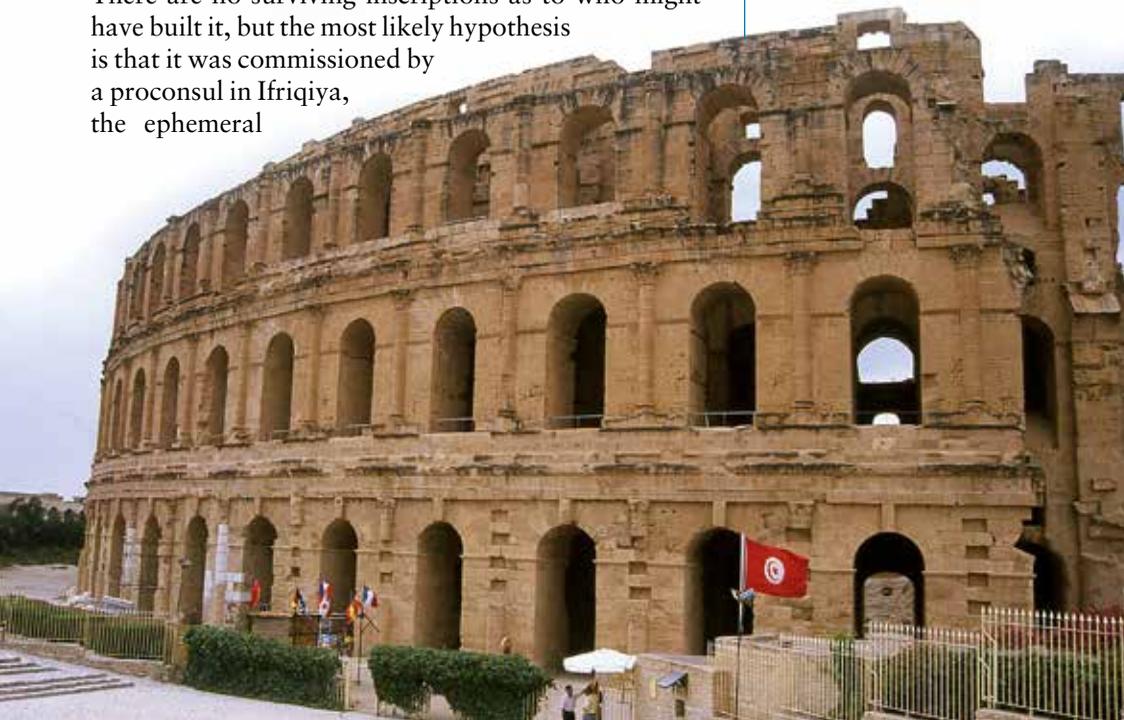
Visits

The Amphitheatre

This huge, elliptically shaped amphitheatre is 148 m long by 122 m wide and has a 427 m perimeter. Though smaller than the Coliseum in Rome, it was the third largest amphitheatre in the Roman world, ahead of those in Arles, Nimes or Verona.

There are no surviving inscriptions as to who might have built it, but the most likely hypothesis is that it was commissioned by a proconsul in Ifriqiya, the ephemeral

Exterior
of the Amphitheatre



emperor Gordian I (r. 238 AD), an ostentatious patron of letters, the arts and sport, and an enthusiastic supporter of the games.

The collections of mosaics at the El Jem Museum and the Bardo National Museum in Tunis give us an insight into the sort of games and spectacles that were put on in these arenas: gladiatorial combat was popular but the highlights of the games were the fights between wild animals, such as lions and leopards.

On October 26th 1979, the El Jem amphitheatre was declared a World Heritage Site by Unesco.

Scenes from various famous films such as *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and *Gladiator* were filmed there.

There is another smaller amphitheatre on the other side of the road to Sfax. Before its great amphitheatre was built, Thysdrus had two smaller ones. The first appears to date from when Julius Caesar disembarked in Africa (1st century BC). The second dates from the Flavian era (circa 69-96 AD). The older of the two was carved directly out of the rock and the second amphitheatre was built on top of it.



The Roman villas

Excavations have uncovered thirty villas belonging to wealthy citizens. The most beautiful, the “Villa Africa”, belonged to an eminent patrician and its 3,000 m² have been restored to their full splendour. It is probably the most lavish home so far discovered in Roman Africa.

Ancien Roman villa



Mosaic of an ancient Roman house

These villas are paved with colourful mosaics, usually with mythological motifs, and were built around an inner courtyard with a garden surrounded by a colonnaded gallery. Some of these mosaics have been transferred to the El Jem Museum, while others remain *in situ*.

Remains of a Roman villa



The Museum

The El Jem Museum has a remarkable collection of mosaics from El Jem and the surrounding area. In the main room below the gallery the visitor can admire the famous mosaic of Orpheus enchanting the animals. Other scenes show a procession in honour of Dionysus, a tiger attacking two wild asses and a lion devouring a wild boar.

Exhibition of mosaics in the El Jem Museum



Nerea walking with a winged hippocampus. El Jem Museum

Festival of Symphonic Music of El Jem

Gastronomy and handicrafts

Like all Tunisian cities, El Jem offers visitors the chance to savour a huge variety of authentic dishes, and in particular its typical couscous, served with *mechouia* salad (peppers, garlic, onion and grilled tomatoes, sprinkled with olive oil). Visitors to El Jem can also enjoy typical local breads and pastries.

Roman heritage is now perpetuated in a very active cottage industry. The coliseum is surrounded by craft workshops producing friezes, paintings and furniture that imitate the ancient mosaics. Also of note is the El Jem Mergoum, a typical carpet with beautiful designs.

Festivals

This exceptional site was selected for the International Festival of Symphonic Music. Every summer since 1985, the amphitheatre has been hosting symphony concerts by renowned international orchestras, whose music is enhanced by perfect acoustics under magical starry skies.



Monastir



- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Bourguiba Mausoleum | 8. Governorate |
| 2. Ribat | 9. Market |
| 3. Great Mosque | 10. Palace of Sciences |
| 4. Cemetery | 11. City Hall |
| 5. Petit Ribat de Sidi Dhoub | 12. Marina |
| 6. Bourguiba Mosque | 📍 Tourist information |
| 7. Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions | |

Known in Roman times as Ruspina, Monastir became very important during the reign of the Aghlabids in the 8th and 9th centuries. During this relatively short period, the dynasty founded by Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab ushered in a golden era that lasted for about a century. Under the Aghlabids, a series of fortifications were built to defend the independence of the country and protect Islam. Of these chains of military fortifications, only one, the Ribat, still stands today as a witness to its prestigious past.

Monastir was not only important for military reasons. From the 11th century onwards, and particularly after the decline of Kairouan, it became a holy city to which pilgrims flocked.

View of Monastir



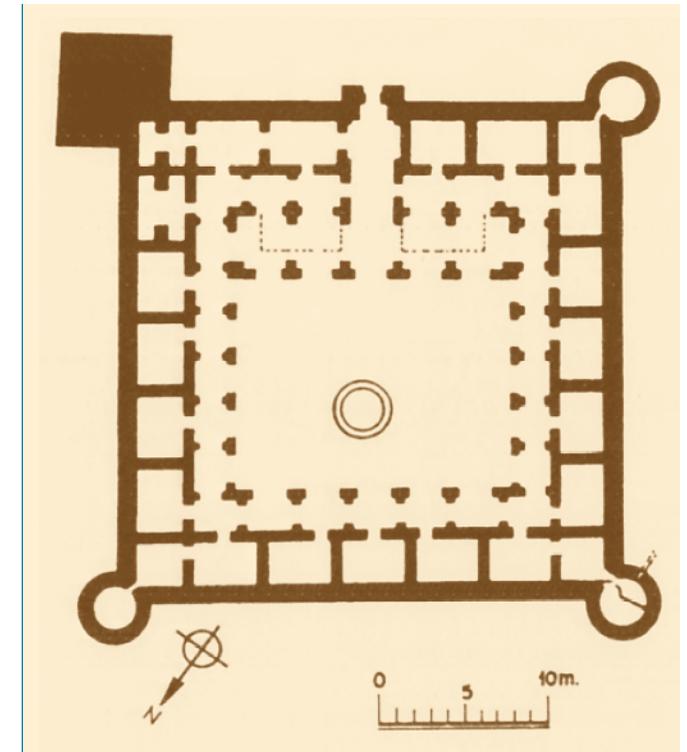
Monastir is also known as the birthplace of president Habib Bourguiba, who devoted a large part of his life to ensuring the independence and modernization of the country.

Visits

The Ribat

The Ribat of Monastir was built in 796 AD/180 H by the Abbasid governor Harthama ibn A'yun. It is one of the oldest, most worshipped monuments in Ifriqiya. In his book *Images of Tunisia* the former ambassador Alfonso de La Serna wrote about the Ribat of Monas-

Inside the Ribat
with minaret in the
background



Plan Ribat of
Monastir. Lézine,
1956

tir: “We used to call it the ‘door of paradise’, because anyone who spent three nights on sentry duty guarding its walls would have earned a place in heaven.”

The Ribat, built with ochre stone, still stands as a massive, powerful silhouette crowned by a watchtower. Originally a defensive fortress and a place of monastic seclusion, today the Ribat reflects the majesty of one of history’s great shrines.

Nowadays the Ribat is a museum with an interesting collection that includes manuscripts, Fatimid glassware, Abbasid ceramics, gold and silver coins and a superb Arab astrolabe made in a workshop in Cordoba in 927 AD. A carved piece of ivory from the Umayyad period is also worth seeing.



Visitors inside the Ribat

The Ribat has also been used as a location for some world class films by eminent directors and producers, such as Zeffirelli, Tarek Ben Ammar and others. It is also the venue for events at the International Festival of Monastir featuring music and drama performances from all over the world.

The Ribats

Ribats are Islamic fortresses with military and religious functions. They are usually located on frontiers. The most important ribats in North Africa are those in Monastir and Sousse, which were built during the Aghlabid period.

Description of Monastir by al-Bakri, 11th century

“It is said that the great castle at Monastir was built in the year 180 H (796-797 AD) by Harthama ibn A‘yun. [...] Monastir has rooms, cells, Persian-style windmills and many water cisterns. On the first floor above the ground, there is a mosque where a sheikh was in permanent residence, full of virtues and of merit, who was responsible for the government of the community. This building serves as lodgings for a company of holy men and marabouts who have left their families and friends to lock themselves away there to live apart from the world. It is a vast, very high fortress, which contains a substantial residential district. In the centre of the residential area, there is another very large fortress that is full of houses, mosques and castles with many floors. In the middle of the fort there is a large square decorated with solidly constructed tall pavilions around which the women who wish to devote themselves to worship gather. [...] One finds [in this stronghold] a large number of baths. Once the people of Kairouan sent large sums of money there and alms in vast amounts. In the district of al-Monastir there is an immense salt-flat, which supplies ships with cargoes of salt for export to other countries. Around al-Monastir there are five *mabris* (forts) built with great solidity and inhabited by devout people.”

Tower and defensive walls



Description by Leo Africanus, 16th century

“Monastir is an old city built by the Romans on the seashore some 12 miles from Susa. It is surrounded by forts and high walls inside which the houses are also very well made. [...] Outside Monastir there are a large number of properties planted with fruit trees with apricots, figs, apples, pomegranates and endless olives.”

General Description of Africa



The Great Mosque of Monastir

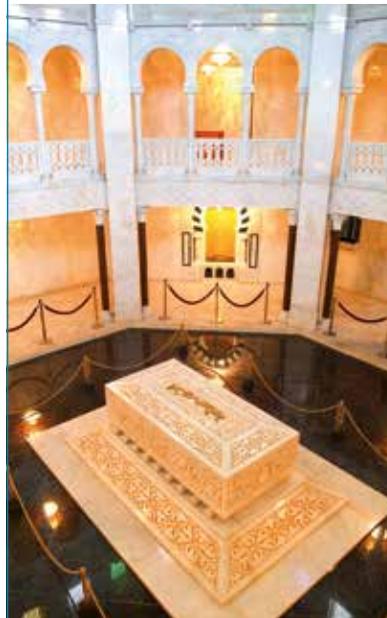
Somewhat smaller than the imposing Ribat opposite, the Grand Mosque was built in the 9th century and enlarged in the 11th century. The pillars in the prayer-hall are of special interest: some are cruciform and others are decorated with ancient capitals. Also built from ochre stone, this important monument is characterized by its sober architecture.

Habib Bourguiba Mausoleum

This is where former president Habib Bourguiba was buried after his death on April 6th 2000 at the age of 96. The Mausoleum was built in 1963 and enlarged in 1978. Its architecture resembles that of the El Aqsa Mosque with its golden dome. This magnificent mausoleum is flanked by two 25m-high minarets.

The Great Mosque next to the Ribat of Monastir

Inside view of the Habib Bourguiba Mausoleum



Mausoleum of Habib Bourguiba

Habib Bourguiba museum

This museum is located in the former presidential palace of Skanès (on the outskirts of Monastir). It was inaugurated quite recently (2013), some two years after the revolution of 14th January 2011. It contains personal items from the Presidential Palace in Carthage that once belonged to Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's first president, together with photo albums, recordings and fragments of his speeches, archive documents, his Mercedes car and one of his bronze equestrian statues.

Habib Bourguiba

Born on August 3rd, 1903 at Monastir in the Tunisian Sahel, Habib Bourguiba was a brilliant student at the Sadiki Middle School and the Carnot High School in Tunis from 1917 to 1924. After obtaining his high school diploma, he went to Paris where he studied Law and Political Sciences from 1924 to 1927. In 1927, he returned to Tunis with a Bachelor's Degree in Law and a Diploma in Political Sciences. He joined the Bar and worked as a lawyer while writing for three years on the newspaper *La Voix du Tunisien*. In 1932 he founded a new newspaper called *L'Action tunisienne*, which he used effectively in the fight against the French colonial presence in Tunisia. He and other members of the young team from his newspaper soon reached the Executive Committee of Destour, the Tunisian Constitutional Liberal Party established in 1920



Mausoleum of
Habib Bourguiba

by Abdelaziz Thaalbi. On March 2nd 1934, Habib Bourguiba organized a Destour Party Congress in Ksar Hellal, which ended with the party splitting and Habib Bourguiba and his companions creating a new party called Néo-Destour. The leaders of Néo-Destour launched an anti-colonial campaign that was much more intense and more radical than that espoused by their former colleagues in the “Vieux-Destour”. These actions were repressed by the colonial power and led to what is known as the “first test”, in which Habib Bourguiba and his companions were arrested and exiled to Borj Le Boeuf in the extreme south of Tunisia from 1934 to 1936. After their release in 1936, Bourguiba and the other leaders of the Néo-Destour relaunched the political fight leading to the bloody confrontations of April 9th 1938, when the people of Tunis rose up against the French colonial forces. Bourguiba and the other leaders of the Néo-Destour were again arrested and deported to France in what became known as the “second test” which lasted from 1938 to 1943.

After his release, Bourguiba visited various countries in the Middle East before returning to Tunisia in 1947 to take up the fight again. He was arrested and deported again from 1952 to 1955 within what it's called the “third test”, which culminated in France granting Tunisia internal autonomy and finally full independence in 1956. Habib Bourguiba became the first president of the Tunisian Republic, proclaimed after the abolition of the monarchy in 1957. During the first years of his presidency he led an audacious policy of reforms that produced, the democratization of education, women's liberation and the generalization of health services. He remained president of the Tunisian Republic until 1987, when at an advanced age he was deposed by the prime minister general Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who himself fell from power in the revolution of January 14th 2011. Habib Bourguiba died on April 6th 2000 at the age of 96 and was buried in his home town of Monastir in the mausoleum that bears his name.

Histoire Générale de la Tunisie, t. IV [L'époque Contemporaine (1881-1956)], Tunis, 2010.

Surroundings

Its position on the south of the Gulf of Hammamet, its proximity to some of the best beaches in the country and the fact that it has some of the country's best tourism infrastructure make Monastir an excellent place to visit, not only because of its famous Ribat, but also because of its surrounding area with beautiful beaches and wonderful historic sites...

Skanes

5 kilometers north-east of Monastir, Skanes is today a beautiful holiday resort known for its first class golf courses, sandy beaches, crystal blue sea and five-star hotels, amid palm trees and olive groves, distinguished by their architecture that mixes Moorish motifs and modern designs. Tourists from all over the world as well as local Tunisians flock there for relaxation, sports and for the chance to savour Tunisian cuisine and to bargain for local goods.

Beaches in
Monastir



Msaken

According to tradition, Msaken was founded by descendants of the Prophet's family during the Hafsid era (13-15th centuries). Around 27 kilometres west of Monastir, Msaken is famous for its important olive oil business. The collectivisation policy in the sixties led to huge emigration to Europe and the money sent home by emigrant workers made an important contribution to the town's development, boosting sectors such as housing, commerce and the sale of second-hand car parts. The town is now a busy economic hub.

Lemta

This charming fishing village about 17 km from Monastir was founded by the Phoenicians, well before Carthage, in the 13th century BC and flourished under Roman rule, when it was called Leptis Minor. After the fall of Carthage in 146 BC, the Romans awarded Lemta "Free City" status. Every year, in May, the city holds the *Bsissa* festival, in which some 60 varieties of *Bsissa* (ground cereals, served raw or grilled and dressed with olive oil) are on show. The town is also an important textile centre.

Excavation works are being conducted in the ancient Roman city of Leptis Minor as part of international cooperation.

Ksar Hellal

Around 21 kilometres south of Monastir, this town is famous for the founding, on March 2nd 1934, of the Néo-Destour party, which led the struggle for the independence of Tunisia.

Ksar Hellal is best known for its busy textile industry. The city is also known for several key dishes, in particular the *osbane* couscous (couscous served with stuffed tripe), and the salty fish couscous served with raisins and onions on the Aid El Fitr holiday (marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan).

Gastronomy and handicrafts

The typical dishes of Monastir include couscous with *shirkaw*, a small fish caught just off the coast, in particular during the summer season. These kinds of dishes are not normally served in the city's restaurants but you can find couscous dishes with steamed and well peppered fish together with other traditional dishes such as lamb couscous, *kammounia* (meat stew spiced in cumin), *mermez* (tomato sauce with lamb or beef, chickpeas and onions), some grilled fish, roasted lamb or veal chops and *mloukhia*, a green sauce with a powder made from jute leaves with some meat or veal tripe.

The most typical craft in the Monastir region is cotton-weaving, in particular at Ksar Hellal. Wool weaving survives too especially in rural areas in spite of the disappearance of numerous craft workshops. Typical products include wool blankets, burnouses and multi-coloured veils called *b'rems*. Pottery also remains popular, in particular at Moknine (around 20 km south from Monastir) where they make functional

Museum of Arts
& Traditions of
Monastir



earthenware ceramics without the coloured motifs seen in Nabeul or in Djerba, such as jugs for keeping water cool and jars for storing oil. Carpet weaving is also popular in the Monastir region in particular in Ksibet El Mediouni, where it is generally a family business. A carpet market overseen by the National Handicrafts Office is held there every week.

Festivals

Monastir is famous for its International Festival which is held every summer inside the Ribat and stages a variety of international shows offering different forms of music, theatre and cinema. This festival was created in 1963 and celebrated its 42nd edition in 2015.

Monastir is also the venue each summer for the International University Theatre Festival, which in 2015 reached its 16th edition. Student theatre companies from Tunisia and 11 other Arabic countries attended the 2015 edition of this festival taking part in the workshops and debates exchanging academic experiences about theatre.

Two other festivals are also organized in Monastir: The International Festival of Andalusian Music and the International Arts Festival.

Sousse



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Great Mosque | 8. Mausoleum of Sidi Bouraoui |
| 2. Ribat | 9. Catacombs |
| 3. Zaouia Zakkak | 10. Gare |
| 4. Kasbah / Archaeological Museum | 11. Sidi Ali Ammar Mosque |
| 5. Bouftata Mosque | |
| 6. Qubba bin el-Qhaoui | |
| 7. Sofra | i Tourist information |



Ceramic tiles

View of the Great Mosque and the port of Sousse



Sousse was founded by the Phoenicians around the end of the 10th century BC, shortly after the foundation of Utica in the 12th century and before that of Carthage in 814 BC. The Phoenicians developed a busy trading port, which they called Hadrumetun, which became one of the most dynamic and most prosperous cities in the Carthaginian Empire.

After the Punic wars and the destruction of Carthage by the Romans in 146 BC, Hadrumetun, like other Carthaginian cities, fell under Roman rule. During the reign of Caesar Augustus and above all that of Trajan (1st, 2nd centuries AD), it became one of the busiest, richest cities on the south coast of the Mediterranean. Under the reign of Diocletian (3rd century AD), it became the capital of Byzacena, a province which at that time covered the centre of modern Tunisia.

After a century under the Vandals, in 535 AD it fell to the Byzantines, who renamed it Justinianopolis in honour of the emperor Justinian. In around 650 AD, the city was conquered by the Arabs who gave it its present name, Sousse. Under the Aghlabids it became the seaport for their capital Kairouan, a period in which several monuments were built such as the Ribat. After the decline of the city under the Fatimids, who founded a new capital in Mahdia, Sousse rose again in the 11th century under the Zirids, a short-lived revival that ended with the invasion of the Hilalians, who destroyed the whole country. After this, Sousse underwent successive periods of revival and decline under the Almohads, the Hafsids, the Normans of Sicily and the Spaniards. From the 16th century, under Turkish domination, Sousse became a den of privateers committing acts of piracy

Overview of Sousse



Sousse Street

Description of Sousse by Ibn Hawqal (10th century)

“The town of Sousse lies between the Peninsula and Mahdia. It is pleasant, prosperous and fertile, and lies right next to the sea. It has a well-fortified wall. It has water from natural springs and there are only a few cisterns. The cantons to which it is linked are in a satisfying, flourishing state. Its inhabitants are refined and they are above all peaceful people. It is a sea port and the town has beautiful markets, caravanserais and superb baths. It is one stage from Kairouan.”

Commerce in Sousse in the 12th century by al-Idrisi

“Sousse is a well-populated town where lots of business is done. Travellers flock there from all over and export things that cannot be found anywhere else such as clothes, turbans with the name of the town or other priceless goods. There are many well-stocked markets.”

Inside the medina





Ribat of Sousse

on the Mediterranean Sea, for which it earned reprisals from the European states. This situation continued until the establishment of the French Protectorate in Tunisia in 1881.

Sousse enjoyed a new lease of life at the beginning of the 20th century, which was later interrupted by the bombing and severe damage it suffered during World War II. Sousse then became one of the focal points in the fight against French colonialism, which culminated in the independence of Tunisia in 1956. Since then, Sousse has played an important role in the construction of the new Tunisian State and as the third city in the country after Tunis and Sfax, it is one of the main centres of economic, social and cultural development, fuelled to a large extent by tourism. This is one of the reasons why the Tunisians call it “The Pearl of the Sahel”.



Architectural detail of Sousse

Inside the Ribat

Visits

The Ribat

This military and religious fortress dates back to the eighth century. The watch tower was built in 821 AD by the Aghlabid Emir Ziyadat Allah ibn Ibrahim (Abu al-Abbas). The building is constructed of stone and has a square floor-plan measuring 40 x 40 metres. Its walls are 8.5 metres tall and it has various towers, the most striking of which is a beautiful circular minaret, which was probably inspired by Abbasid designs. The master-mason responsible for the building work was Masrur, a slave freed by the emir Ziyadat Allah.

In 1968, the Ribat was restored to its original state. ambassador Alfonso De La Serna describes it as follows: “The Ribat of Sousse, probably the oldest in North Africa, is a huge building that is both beautiful and simple. It has straight severe lines and massive architecture. Located a few steps from the Grand Mosque, it easily catches the visitor’s eye. [...] This perfect, solidly built structure is consequently easily defended from all sides. The tower overlooking and dominating the seashore gives the impression of great height”.





Interior and door of
the Great Mosque



The Great Mosque

It was built by the Aghlabid emir Abu l-Abbas Muhammad in 851 AD. Its rough stone walls are crowned with merlons and have large round towers at the corners, making it look like a fortress. In fact, it was part of the city's defensive system, together with the Ribat and the city walls. Curiously it has no minaret, although the faithful are called to prayer from a tower in the north-west corner. A few years ago it was successfully restored.



Archaeological
Museum

The Kasbah

The Kasbah was built in the 9th century, although it has been restored on various occasions since then. It is home to various important monuments, including the imposing Khalef tower, built by the Aghlabids in 859 AD. This tower is 30 metres high and from the top visitors have an excellent panoramic view of the entire city and its hinterland. It was initially built for defensive purposes, because the coast was easy to survey from the top. Located inside the Kasbah, the Museum is home to a beautiful collection of Roman mosaics and to Punic steles exhibited in a pretty garden.

The Kasbah is situated in the north-east corner of the city walls around Sousse, which were built about the same time

Mausoleum of Sidi Bouraoui

Not far from the *Rue Des Aghlabides* in Sousse there is a *zawiya*, which also houses the mausoleum of the *marabout* Sidi Bouraoui, who is widely worshipped in Sousse and has been the patron saint of the city since the 16th century. The façade of the mausoleum dates back to the Ottoman period and it also has a prayer-room which is open to visitors.

The Kasbah,
old medieval
fortification



The Bouftata Mosque

In the old city, not far from the southern gate, we come to the Bouftata mosque which was built in the year 840 AD and therefore predates the Great Mosque of Sousse. The only surviving feature of this initial construction however is a prayer-hall and an inscription in Kufic characters with the date of construction.

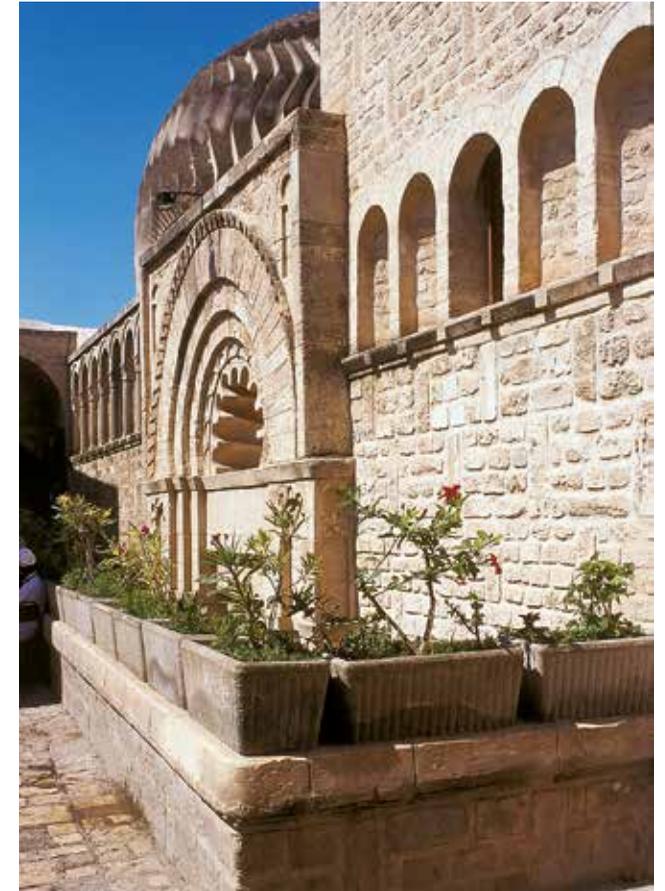
The Sidi Ali Ammar Mosque

We do not know exactly when this mosque (or oratory) was built, but it probably dates from the Zirid period (10th-11th centuries). Its façade is decorated by flat-bottomed niches and others in the shape of a *mihrab*.

The Catacombs

These were dug underneath the city around 2 kilometres from the centre. They extend over five kilometres and contain 240 burial galleries, which were used between the second and fourth centuries AD. They are well preserved and make an interesting addition to the city's historic treasures.

Catacombs



Qubba Bin El-Qhaoui

Qubba Bin El-Qhaoui

Near the souks of Sousse, in the Rue Bin El Qhaoui we come to the Qubba Bin El-Qhaoui, a mausoleum from the 11th century, which has a dome with grooves in zig-zag formation which resembles the dome of the *mihrab* in the Great Mosque of Fes. A *wikala* or caravanserai was added to this building in the 17th or 18th century and it was used as an inn until the 1960s. Nowadays, it hosts the El Kobba Museum.

The *medina* of Sousse is also famous for its lively *souks*, where visitors can discover all kinds of traditional crafts.

Surroundings

Hamam Sousse is a charming resort with lovely sandy beaches and luxurious hotels. It is very lively on Fridays when its weekly market is held. In summer it hosts the el Kantaoui Festival.

Ken, 20 km north of Sousse, is an important craft centre, where one can buy beautiful pieces in glass, fabric, wood etc.

Hergla is a fishing port dating back to the Roman period located about 39 kilometres north of Sousse. Its most impressive monument is the Sidi Bou Mendil mosque, which dominates the town and was built in

Port el-Kantaoui



Takrouna



the 13th century on top of an old *marabut* (tomb) from the 10th century, in which Sidi Bou Mendil was buried. Hergla is mainly famous for its esparto products.

Enfida is a small town located approximately 50 kilometres northwest of Sousse that holds a lively market on Sundays. It also boasts an interesting Archaeological Museum located in the old church that shows wonderful mosaics from the nearby site of Upenna.

A typical ancient Berber village, Takrouna (around 55 kilometres north from Sousse) is perched on top of a hill, at an altitude of 200 metres, and grew up around the mausoleum of Sidi Abdelkader.

Gastronomy and handicrafts

In terms of cuisine the Sousse region is best known for its widely varying couscous dishes. The best example is its couscous with fish, in which the fish is cooked in a special sauce made with green vegetables, chickpeas and beans. Couscous is also made with mutton sometimes garnished with chopped lamb meatballs. On the occasion of the Hijri New Year, they make the *ras el am* couscous, with mutton cold cuts, a dried meat that is often leftover from the feast of Aid al-Adha, together with beans and raisins. *Ratatouilles* are also popular in the Sousse Region, typically consisting of green or dried vegetables cooked in olive oil. We should also mention the *tbikhat al-lift*, *ratatouille* which is prepared from a mixture of leaves from turnips or beets and chard with chickpeas and beans. You may also find the *marqat qraa* which is made with pumpkins, hot peppers, lamb cold cuts and chickpeas.

These traditional dishes are made by local people at home and are not always available in restaurants, which generally specialize in fish dishes. All sorts of grilled fishes are available, the most popular of which are grouper, wolf-fish, sea bream, red mullet, sole and mullet. Various sorts of shellfish are also on offer such as shrimps, mussels, squids, octopuses, etc...

As in Tunis, the handicraft sector in Sousse, which was once very prosperous in particular in the souks and in the villages around Sousse, is currently in crisis, due in



Souks



Dolls with traditional clothes

particular to the fast growth of the tertiary sector in the region. Several old guilds have disappeared. The only remaining souks with workshops are those selling jewellery and fabrics, the others were invaded by souvenir shops selling a variety of finished products such as leather slippers, copper dishes, pottery, carpets, traditional clothes for men and women, etc.



Shops near the Great Mosque

Festivals

A large scale cultural event known as the Aoussou Carnival is held in Sousse every summer to celebrate the sea and its products, with the participation of Tunisian and international folk dance troupes.

Sousse is also famous for its International Summer Festival featuring renowned music and theatre troupes. The International Festival of Sousse celebrates the diversity of Tunisian culture and history, and its relationship with other cultures around the world. It includes performances of local music and theatre.

Zaghouan



Located some 50 km from Tunis, the steep, narrow streets of the city of Zaghouan stretch along the slopes of the majestic Mount Zaghouan, which is 1,295 metres high. Formerly called Ziqua, Zaghouan is believed to have been a Libyque colony well before being conquered by the Phoenicians. In Roman times, Ziqua supplied fresh water to the capital Carthage via a long aqueduct measuring 132 kilometres. The Roman presence is also confirmed by the Triumphal Arch. Another interesting building is the mausoleum of Sidi Ali Azouz, the town's patron saint, a building with a beautiful dome and tiled walls in the heart of the town centre.

Overview of
Zaghouan



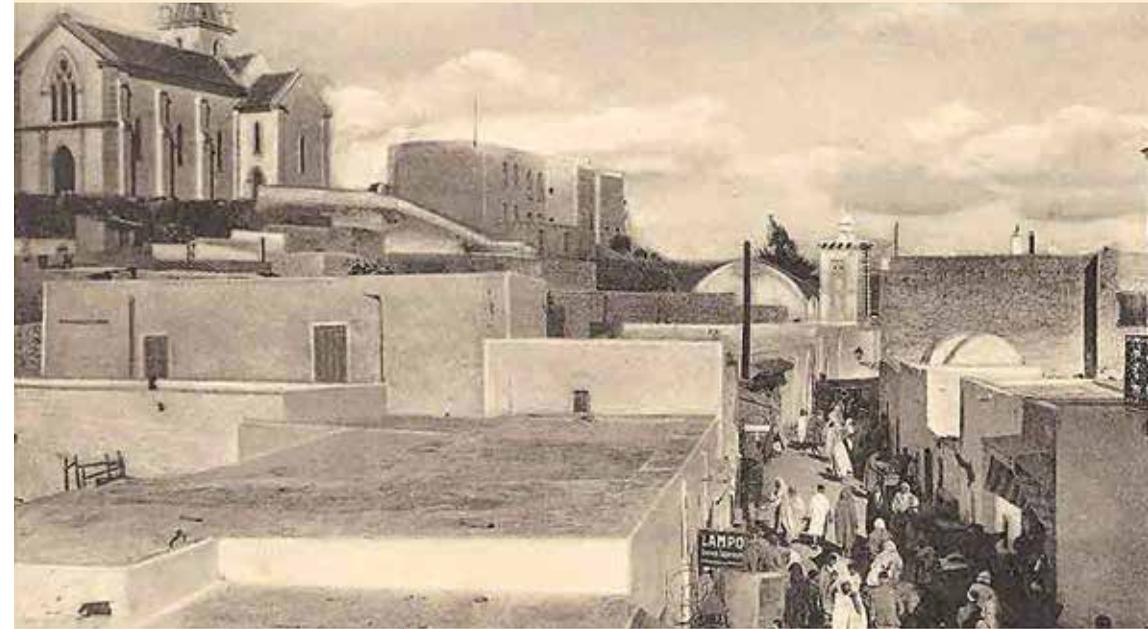


Huge numbers of *moriscos* fleeing Spain in the 17th century took refuge here and even today their presence can still be felt in the streets of Zaghouan.

The city is famous for its springs and its best-known attraction is called the “Water Temple”.

Traditional architecture

Old photograph of the Mausoleum of Sidi Ali Azouz



View of Zaghouan by 1900

“Mount Zaghouan rises up between Tunis and Kairouan. It is very high and the ships on the sea use it to guide themselves because it is tall and reaches up towards the heavens. It is the mountain with most water. It is fertile, cultivated and prosperous. Certain parts of it are inhabited by devout Muslims who live apart from their brothers.”

Al-Idrisi, 12th century

“There is a very high, very cold mountain about thirty miles south-east of the capital called Zagoan. [...] In ancient times, when the Romans ruled Africa, Zagoan was inhabited. Numerous castles and villages had been built on the summit, the sides and at the foot of this mountain, which today lie completely in ruins. These include an abundance of ancient remains with archaic inscriptions in Latin. [...] Water from Zagoan was conducted all the way to Carthage and the aqueduct can still be seen today.”

Leo the African, early 16th century



Roman ruins of the
Water Temple

Visits

The Water Temple

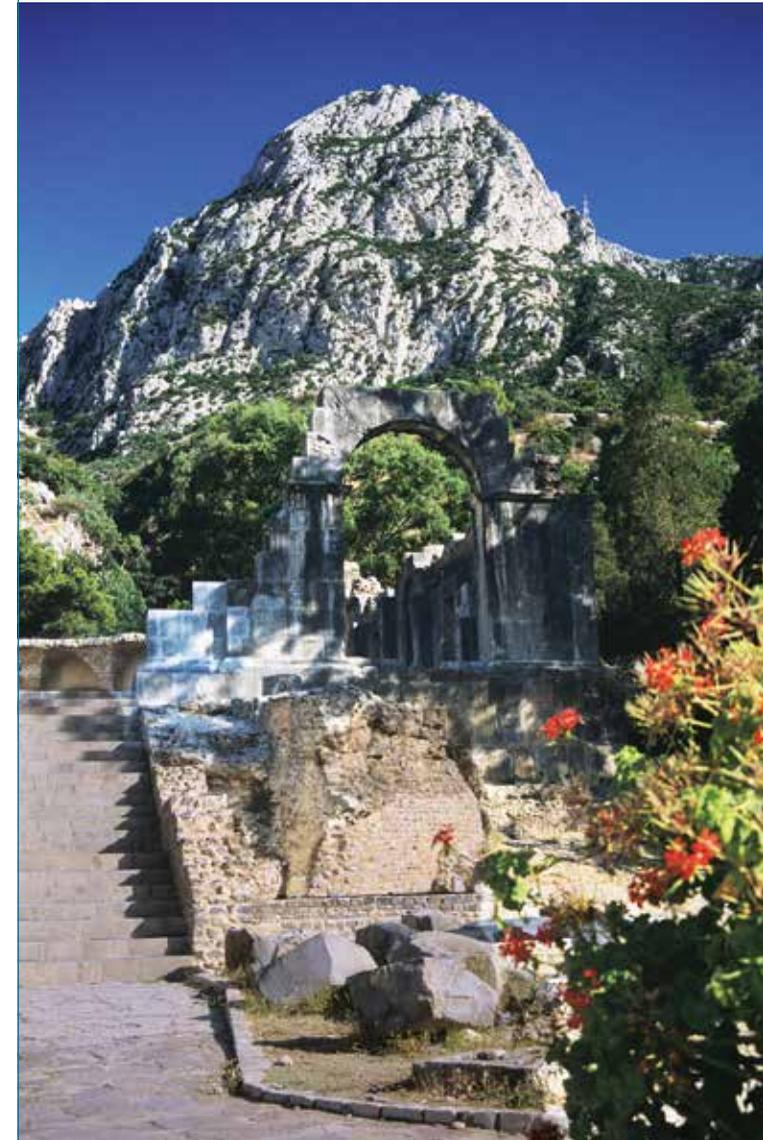
The Water Temple lies about two kilometres from the centre of Zaghouan at the foot of Mount Zaghouan. Originally it was a nymphaeum over a large spring. The fact that the Romans built a temple on top of a water source in this luxuriant setting on the side of Mount Zaghouan illustrates just how important water was for them, even to the point of worshipping it. The Temple was part of the complex system that supplied the city of Carthage with much-needed fresh water via aqueducts. At the time it was built, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD) Carthage was in the midst of a five-year drought.

The Water Temple

Drawing of the Water
Temple in 19th century



The Water Temple also reflects the grandeur of Roman architecture. It is semi-circular in shape and is embellished with 12 niches housing statues symbolizing the twelve months of the year. It has a large basin in the shape of an “eight” that filtered the water, before letting it pass through to the aqueduct.



The Aqueduct

The aqueduct was commissioned by emperor Hadrian and for a time it was named after him. It was 132 km long, including the main part from Zaghouan to Carthage (90.43 km), which was complemented with an additional upstream section, called Ain Jougar, which was just over 40 km long. It is thought to be the longest, most outstanding aqueduct in the Roman world, supplying an estimated thirty million litres of water a day. Its most spectacular part is near Oued Meliane (Meliane River). The aqueduct spanned the river thanks to a double bridge that was 126 metres long and 24 metres high. It then went underground to reappear again above ground near Tunis, from which it reached the Malga cisterns in Carthage. Neglected by the Vandals, the aqueducts were restored by the Hafsid caliph al-Moustansar Billah in the 13th century.

Views of the Roman aqueduct of Zaghouan to Carthage



Roman aqueduct

Triumphal Arch

This Roman arch situated in the centre of the modern city is the only surviving feature of the ancient Roman city of Ziqua.

Zawiya of Sidi Ali Azouz

The *zawiya* of Sidi Ali Azouz, patron saint of Zaghouan, is at the top of the hill on which the town is situated. Built in the 19th century, its most striking feature is its green ceramic-covered dome.



Ruins of
Thuburbo Majus

Surroundings

Thuburbo Majus

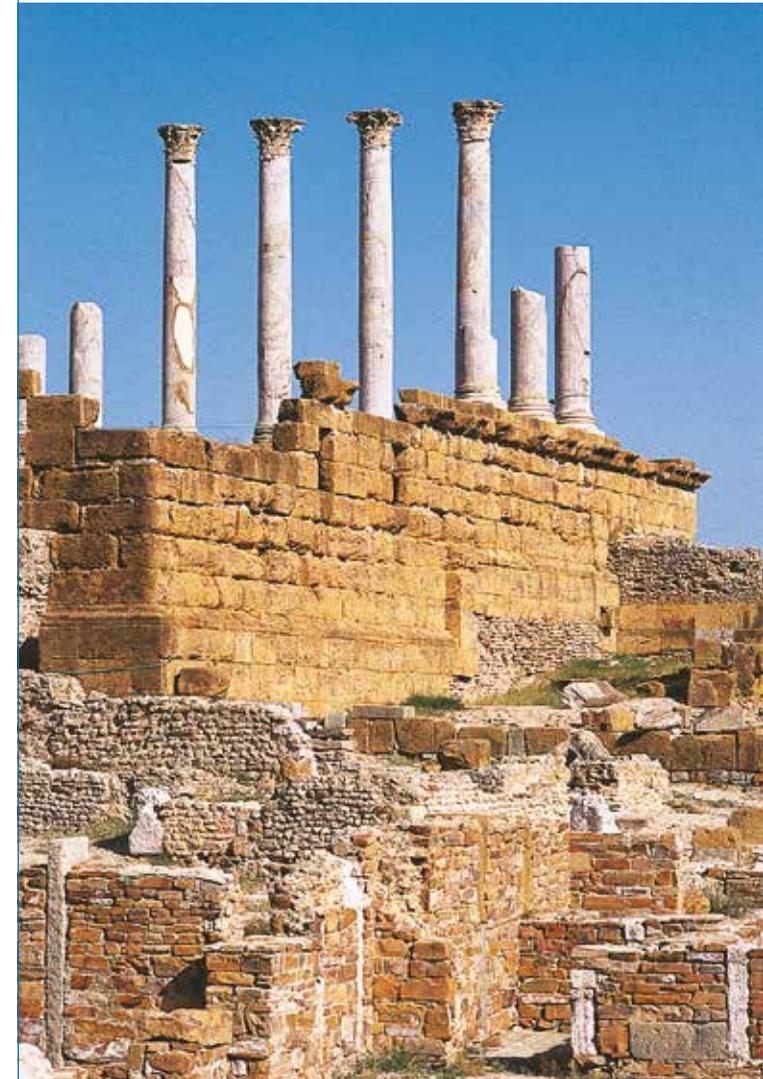
About 30 kilometres west of Zaghouan, the city of Thuburbo Majus was founded by the Romans in around 27 AD near a previous Punic settlement. In the year 128 AD, the emperor Adrian granted it *municipium* status and in 188 AD Commodus named it a *colonia*. Its most prosperous period was between 150 and 250 AD. Today Thuburbo Majus is one of the most beautiful archaeological sites in Tunisia. Its various treasures include the Roman houses paved with elaborate exquisite mosaics, the hot baths for winter and summer with the famous Petronii Palestra (named after the man who donated the building to the

Old Capitol columns,
Thuburbo Majus



Decorative detail of
the Roman city of
Thuburbo Majus

city), the Capitol Temple (which has a podium with four Corinthian columns), the series of markets with the remains of shops, the temple dedicated to Mercury, the Temple of Baal with its imposing gate, the Temple of Saturn, which is about 15 metres high with columns surrounding the temple site, the Temple of Caelestis, the Roman forum which stands back to back to the Capitol, the triumphal arches, the amphitheatre and the Roman cisterns that lie beneath it.



Uthina (Oudna)

On the road between Zaghuan and Tunis, around 30 kilometres north of Zaghuan, the archaeological site of Uthina has impressive Roman buildings. Uthina was originally a Punic settlement before it was progressively romanized. Typical features of a Roman colony include an amphitheatre, a capitol temple, thermal baths, cisterns, an aqueduct and Roman houses. The houses are spacious and many of their mosaics can be seen at

Amphitheater of the Roman city of Uthina



Views of the Capitol, Uthina



the Bardo Museum in Tunis: Orpheus charming wild animals with his lyre, a Dionysian parade, Dionysus giving vine-stock to the king of Athens, and scenes of everyday life. The capitol temple in Uthina is one of the largest capitol buildings in Roman Africa, standing on three superimposed levels with subterranean galleries.



Roman baths,
Uthina

Zriba

Hot springs located about 33 kilometres east of Zaghouan. The houses in this old Berber village cling to the mountainside. A steep alley crisscrossed by a flight of stairs leads to the old quarter where you can admire the small but beautiful mausoleum of Sidi Abdelkader.

Jeradou

Less than five kilometres from Zriba, Jeradou is a fortified village on top of a rocky hill from which there are superb views all the way to the sea. Entrance to the village is through a very beautiful vaulted gate.

Gastronomy and handicrafts

The Moriscos who came here from Spain during the 17th century had a strong influence on local culture and agriculture. They developed the cultivation of the *nessri* flower (rosehip), whose distillation is celebrated with a traditional festival. Rosehip water is used in local pastries (called *kaak warqa*, a kind of round cake, usually stuffed with almonds and flavoured with rosehip water), which are highly recommended by connoisseurs.

The city of Zaghouan was once famous for manufacture of the *fez* (a hat - usually red), the *balgha* (heelless leather slippers) and *mergoums* (typical multi-coloured carpets), which over time have become symbols of the city.

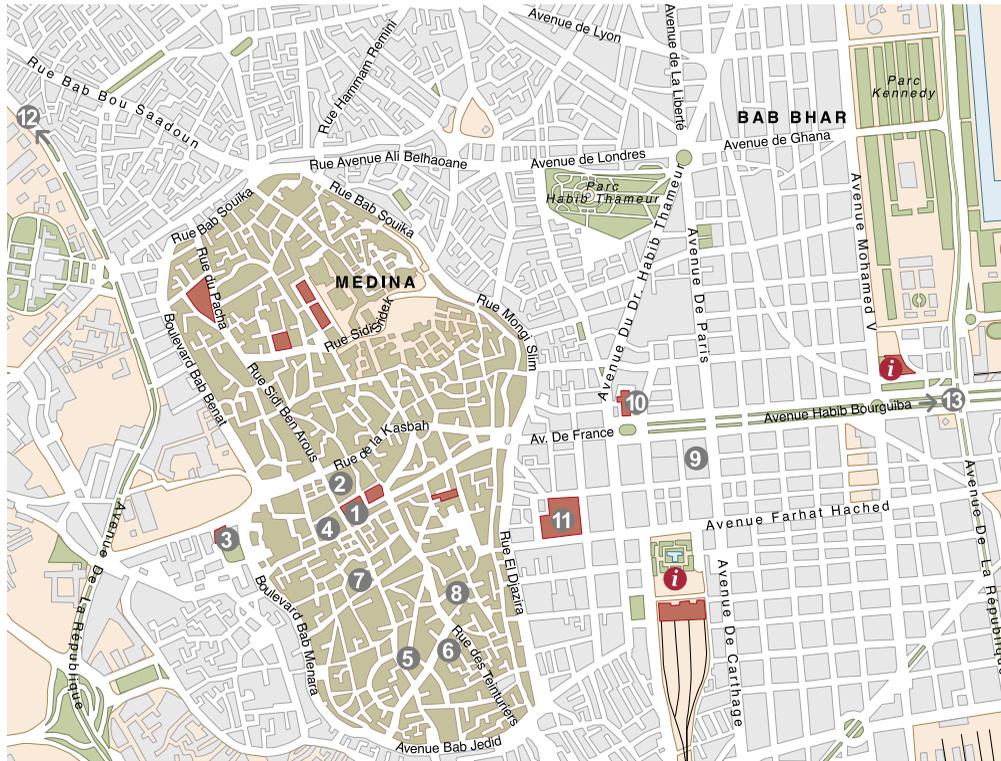
Zaghouan is also famous for its countless little restaurants serving succulent grilled meat (lamb barbecue).

Festivals

In addition to the Nessri festival, Zaghouan also organizes an annual *kharja*, a festival of mystical songs in homage to Sidi Ali Azzouz, the patron saint of the city. The *kharja* involves a procession led by the “Azzouzia” brotherhood which starts in front of the Sidi Ali Azzouz Mausoleum before heading towards the *medina* of the town, where a *hadhra* (*sufi* chants) is presented in the evening.



Tunis



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Great Mosque of Zitouna | 8. Dar Othman Dey |
| 2. Hammouda Pasha Mosque | 9. Municipal Theatre |
| 3. Kasbah Mosque | 10. Cathedral |
| 4. Youssef Dey Mosque | 11. Central Market |
| 5. Tourbet El Bey | 12. To Bardo National Museum |
| 6. Arts and Popular Traditions Museum of Dar Ben Abdallah | 13. To La Goulette, Carthage and La Marsa |
| 7. Dar Hussein |  Tourist Information |

Tunis was first mentioned as a Phoenician trading port for merchants and seamen back in the fourth century BC. It was a crossroads of maritime and land routes between Libya and Central Africa to the south. It was destroyed during the Third Punic War (149-146 BC) for supporting its neighbour Carthage. Rebuilt later by the Romans, it was used as a place for billeting their soldiers and mercenaries. Christianised, it became the seat of a bishop, while remaining a small town in the shadow of Carthage, its legendary neighbour.

In 698 AD, Hassan ibn al-Nu'man, at the head of the Muslim troops, invaded Carthage and made Tunis, located at the bottom end of a secluded inlet, his naval base in the western Mediterranean. Power was exercised by governors appointed by the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus and later by the Abbasids of Baghdad.

"Tunes in Africa",
engraving of D. Meisner
(1626-1627)





Overview of Tunis by
1900

In 800 AD, the emir Ibrahim Ibn Aglab, appointed by the caliph Harun ar-Rashid, established an independent dynastic power within the Abbasid Caliphate, while maintaining links with the central government in Baghdad. This dynasty lasted until the beginning of the 10th century. Meanwhile the city of Tunis continued to live in the shadow of the capital Kairouan.

Over the next two and a half centuries, Tunis was ruled by the Fatimids, the Zirids and even briefly as an independent principality under the Banu Khurasan. In the twelfth century the Almohad dynasty of Morocco began to unify North Africa and in 1159 AD they installed Abu Hafs in Tunisia, who soon broke away to create his own dynasty. He chose Tunis as his capital,



Street of the
Andalusian district
and view of the
medina and the
Great Mosque



distancing himself from his Almohad overlords. For more than three centuries the Hafsid dynasty ruled over a kingdom stretching from Fez in the west to Libya in the east.

Peace and prosperity ensued. The Christian kingdoms opened embassies in the city, which had a cosmopolitan population. The Andalusians arriving from Spain brought their expertise in agriculture and settled in the *medina* and in the area around the city. Crafts and trades (fez, ceramics, weaving, copper work, etc.) flourished. The prosperity of *Ifriqiya* (Tunisia) aroused the interest and envy of the two great powers of the Mediterranean: the Spaniards and the Ottomans.

Tunis (16th century),
Civitates Orbis Terrarum



In 1534, the sultan of Constantinople tried to topple the Hafsid dynasty and took the city of Tunis. The Spaniards reacted in 1535 despatching Charles V to the area with an army of 30,000 men and 400 ships, who soon restored the Hafsids to power. Not for long however, as in 1574 the city was taken by the Ottomans.

Under the rule of the Deys and then that of the Beys, the capital Tunis found a new lease of life and its open, cosmopolitan and industrious population increased. Economic activities were diversified and existing traditional industries expanded. Foreign trade increased thanks to the arrival of Jewish and Italian merchants. This era of prosperity saw the construction of both lavish palaces and important public buildings.

In the 19th century, an increasing number of Europeans, particularly French, settled in Tunis. France established a protectorate system over the country from 1881 to 1956. During this period, there was a huge European colony (French, Italian, Maltese) in Tunis, where half the population was of European origin. The city expanded and new districts and neighbourhoods were created



Medina of Tunis

Avenue Habib Bourguiba



Tunis bay

Tunis developed very fast during the French Protectorate, which proved a turning point in its history. The city quickly spread beyond its walls and was divided into a traditional Arab-populated old town, or *medina*, and a “European” city populated by immigrants, with a different structure from that of the traditional *medina* and equipped with public amenities, such as water supply, natural gas and electricity networks, transport services linking the adjacent suburbs to the city centre, and other public infrastructure. This was accompanied by the introduction of modern industries and new forms of urban life.

After the country’s independence in 1956, Tunis consolidated its position as the nation’s capital, with the establishment of the Tunisian Constitution which stated that the Chamber of Deputies and the Presidency of the Republic must have their seat in Tunis and its suburbs. In a very short time, the city was rapidly transformed.

Always looking to the future and well-connected with the outside world thanks to modern communications networks, Tunis has become a hub of political life, a financial centre and an important meeting place, as reflected by its modern conference halls, luxury hotels, banking institutions and leisure facilities. In addition to all this, Tunis also boasts a multitude of fascinating historical and cultural sites.



Visits

The Medina of Tunis

Declared part of World Heritage by UNESCO, the old city, or *medina* of Tunis, which contains over 700 historical buildings, extends west of the modern city, as an extension of the wide Avenue Bourguiba and Avenue de France.

In contrast to the large open spaces in the modern city, the *medina* is a closed crowded world, which seems, at first glance, to be made up of endless inextricable labyrinths.



Zawiyya of Sidi Brahim Riahi

The *medina* has many masterpieces of Islamic architecture, such as mosques (*Jamaa*), palaces (*Dar*), Koranic schools (*Madrasas*), mausoleums (*Turba*)... It has several entrances, the most obvious of which is at the end of the Avenue de France, from the Place de la Victoire, in the centre of which is the ancient *Bab Bhar* or Sea Gate.

The Great Mosque of Zitouna

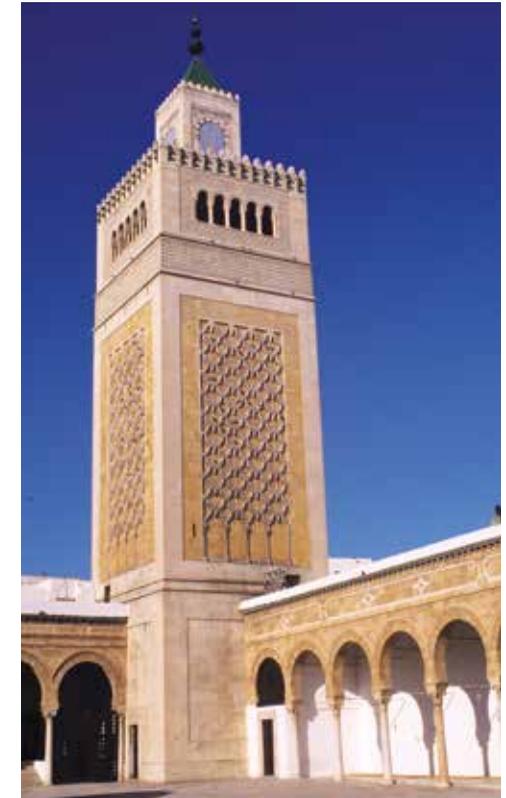
This Mosque was founded in 732 AD by the Umayyad governor of Tunis, Ubayd Allah ibn al-Habhab, but according to different sources it was the Ghassanid General Hassan ibn Nu'man who reinstated this ancient place of prayer in 698 AD and ordered the building of the monument from 704 AD.

It is thought to have been erected on the ruins of a pre-existing Christian basilica from Byzantine times. The Great Mosque of Zitouna ("olive tree" in Arabic), which is in the heart of the *medina* was rebuilt several times, especially during the reign of the Aghlabid Emir Ibrahim ibn Ahmad (856-863 AD). The prayer hall, which has 184 columns, is topped by a Zirid-style cupola (ninth century), supported by a drum where the niches and stones offer a beautiful harmony of colours.

Courtyard of the Great Mosque of Zitouna



Dome and minaret of the Great Mosque



The library was created in the fifteenth century and a colonnaded gallery was later added to the eastern façade. In the seventeenth century, the Turks built the colonnade in the courtyard and the 44 metre-high, Hispano-Moorish style minaret was erected in 1834.

Originally, the Zitouna Mosque was both a religious and political centre. Later it was used exclusively for religious purposes, becoming a great point of reference in the Muslim world, teaching Islamic law and theology. Today, it continues its religious education and believers gather there for ritual prayers.

The Souks

The area around the Great Mosque is made up of a network of covered streets lined with shops and workshops grouped together according to their particular speciality. Most of them were built in the thirteenth century.

North of the Zitouna mosque is the Souk El Attarine, known for its essences and perfumes. Next to it is the Souk Ech-Chaouachya where they make *fez* hats. Adjacent to El Attarine there are two other souks: Souk El Kmach which is noted for its fabrics, and Souk El Birka, which is home to embroiderers and jewellers. The other souks include Souk El Leffa, for all kinds of carpets, blankets and other woven goods; Souk Es-Sarragine, specializing in leather goods; Souk En Nhas (copper), Es Sabbaghine (dyeing) and Souk El Grana, which was occupied by Jewish merchants, for all kinds of clothing and blankets.

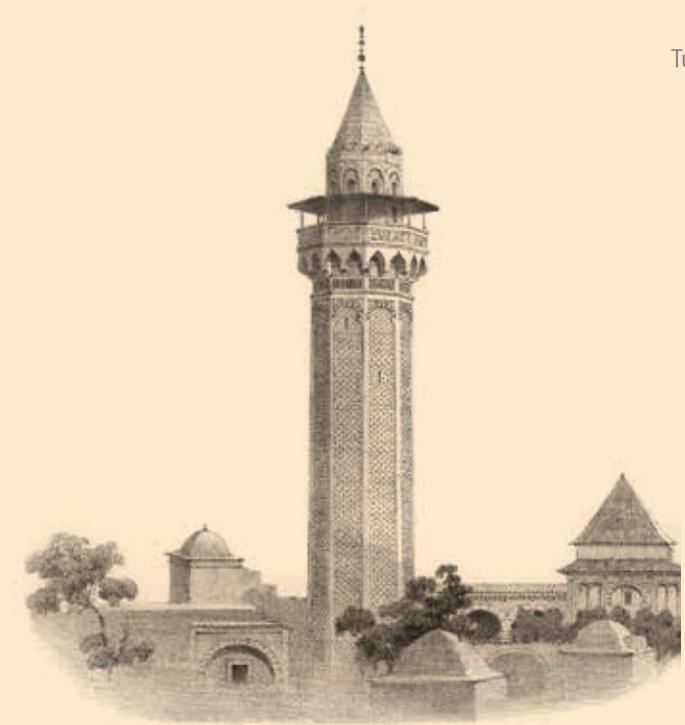


Souks



Hammouda Pasha Mosque

This hanafi mosque was founded by Hammouda Pasha in 1655. It is characterized by its elegance and originality, reflected by its symmetry, archways and superb octagonal minaret.



Hanafi School

The Hanafi School is one of the four schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam along with Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. It is the least rigid of these schools. In Tunisia it is the official school together with the Maliki school.

Hammouda Pasha Bey (r. 1631-1659)

Hammouda Bey, of Corsican origin by his father Mourad the first, the founder of the Muradid dynasty, was already allied to the great families of Tunis when he rose to power, after he married one of the granddaughters of Othman Dey. He led several victorious campaigns against rebellious tribes inside the country and brought order to the whole country.

He held court in his luxurious Bardo palace to which he invited the great personalities, the scholars and the men of letters of the country.

In 1659 the "Sublime Porte" granted him the status of Pasha and in the same year he decided to relinquish his functions and withdraw from public life. Before he retired, he ensured that beylical authority was passed on to his descendants, establishing a system by which power was shared between his three sons. Hammouda Pasha Bey died a few years later in April, 1666.

Histoire générale de la Tunisie,
t. III [*Les Temps Modernes (1534-1881)*], 2008.



Youssef Dey Mosque or Sidi Youssef Mosque

It was built by the sovereign Youssef Dey in 1616 (see page 119), and has its own particular wealth of style and perspective. Like the Hammouda Pasha Mosque, it has an octagonal minaret, one of the characteristic elements of Ottoman architecture.

The Gates of Tunis

The first five gates of Tunis were opened in the 11th century, which until then had only one gap in the city wall. Later, at the end of the Hafsid period in the 15th century, the city was expanded and a second perimeter wall was built with seven gates namely: Bab Bhar, Bab Carthagène, Bab Souika, Bab Bnet, Bab Menara, Bab Jedid and Bab El Jazira.



Old view of Sidi Ben Ziad Street and Sidi Youssef minaret



Bab Bhar
(The Sea Gate)

In the 18th century, during the reign of Hammouda Pacha, large building works were performed and the walls were reconstructed, and the resulting two main suburbs or *r bats* were named after the gates: the aforementioned Rbat Bab Souika, which contained the gates of Bab El Khadra, Bab Sidi Abdesselem, Bab Bou Saadoun, Bab El Aquas and Bab El Alouj, and the *r bat* Bab El Jazira, which had the gates of Bab Alioua, Bab el Fellah, Bab El Gorjani, Bab Sidi Qacem and Bab Sidi Abdallah.

Most of these gates have now disappeared along with the walls through which they passed to make way for grand modern boulevards. All we have today are the remains of the Gates of Bab Bhar, Bab El Khadra, Bab Jedid and Bab Saadoun.

The Arts and Popular Traditions Museum of Dar Ben Abdallah

Situated in the southern section of the *medina* is the site of the Arts and Popular Traditions Museum of Dar Ben Abdallah, where everyday life in 19th century Tunis is re-enacted. In the four rooms around the courtyard there is an interesting exhibit about 19th century Tunis bourgeois families. Their domestic life is depicted through different household objects from the period, such as dresses, embroidery, weaving, wedding accessories and other fineries. Children's toys and clothes are also on display in one of the rooms.



Museum of Dar
Ben Abdallah

Tunis by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12th century

“Tunis is a beautiful city, surrounded on all sides by fields of wheat and barley, the most important cereals produced there and the main commodity traded between the inhabitants and the Arab nomads. From our times, this town is full of goods and highly populated. [...] People from near and far found refuge there. It is enclosed by a solid bank of earth and has three gates. [...] Tunis is very ancient, and was once very strong and in ancient chronicles bore the name of Tarshish. When the Muslims captured it, they reconstructed it and gave it a new name.”

Tourbet El Bey

This mausoleum houses the tombs of the Husseinite Beys from the 18th to the 20th centuries. It is a large architectural complex with various courtyards and lavish halls with the tombs of kings from the Husseinite dynasty, and members of their family, viziers etc. This type of building was first introduced to Tunisia by the Turks and this particular mausoleum was built during the government of Ali Bey II (1759-1782).

Dar El Bey



Dar Othman Dey

This is one of the oldest, most luxurious palaces in the Medina of Tunis. It was commissioned by Othman Dey, who lived there from 1594 until his death in 1610. It has an imposing black and white marble façade in Hafsid style and interior decoration with multi-coloured ceramic tiles and fine coffered ceilings.

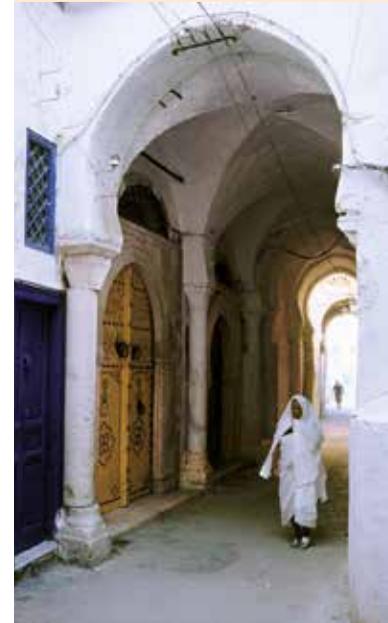


Antique images
of Dar Hussein

Dar Hussein

Built during the 18th century, this grand palace belonged to Ismaïl Kahia, the secretary of Ali Bey II (1759-1782). It was restored during the 19th century and in 1858 became the seat of the first municipal council of the city of Tunis chaired at that time by general Hussein, which is why since then the palace has borne his name and that of “Dar El ‘Achra”, (House of the Ten) after the ten members of the municipal council. During the French Protectorate Dar Hussein was the seat of the French military command in Tunisia.

This residence which has clear Andalusian, Turkish and Italian influences in its architectural design consists of three essential parts: a luxurious part reserved for the lords which is now the Dar El Islam museum; a second part reserved for their illustrious guests, which is today the offices of the National Institute of Heritage (formerly known as the National Institute of Archaeology and Art); and a third part reserved for palace servants and domestic staff.



Andalusian district,
medina of Tunis

Youssef Dey (r. 1610-1637)

A former *janissaire* (soldier) in the service of his predecessor Othman Dey who married him to his own daughter, Youssef Dey was in power for almost thirty years during which he strengthened his authority by consolidating the western and southeast borders of the country. To this end, in 1614 he fixed the exact position of the western border of the country with his neighbours the Turks of Algiers and recaptured Djerba Island from the pashalik of Tripoli.

He also imposed order throughout the whole country, which allowed the economy to develop. The state coffers were enlarged thanks to both taxation and the considerable revenues reaped from piracy in the Mediterranean Sea.

These additional resources allowed Youssef Dey to maintain sufficient armed forces to strengthen his power and to leave his mark on the city with numerous buildings, such as the Hanafi Mosque which bears his name, new souks in Tunis, *midhas* (ablution rooms) in mosques and public fountains. He also restored the Bab Benat district and the Hafsid aqueduct to supply water to the Turkish residences in the capital.

Histoire générale de la Tunisie,
t. III [*Les Temps Modernes (1534-1881)*], 2008.





The Municipal
Theatre

The Municipal Theatre

This beautiful building on the Avenue Bourguiba was built in Art Nouveau style in 1902. It is the most important venue for cultural events throughout the year.

In the modern city there are numerous buildings representing the different cultures that have settled in the city. These include the Grand Cathedral (or Saint Vincent de Paul Cathedral) which was built in 1882, one year after the French Protectorate began. It is located on the main street, the Avenue Habib Bourguiba, facing the

statue of Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406), one of the greatest medieval Arab historians, born in Tunis into a family of Andalusian emigrants. The modern city also hosts a Greek Orthodox church, a Russian Orthodox church, a grand synagogue and the Numismatics Museum.

Cathedral,
Habib Bourguiba
Avenue



Surroundings

La Goulette

This is a popular summer resort, some 10 km north of the capital. In ancient times, the town was best known for its fortress built during the Spanish conquest led by Charles V, around 1535. The fortress was later demolished and rebuilt by the Turks when they conquered the town in 1574. La Goulette is now one of the most frequented resorts in the capital. It is also well known for its restaurants where fish dishes are popular. Jewish menus are also served since the town has long

Spanish plane of the
fortress of La Goulette
(16th century),
Civitates Orbis Terrarum



Fortress of
La Goulette

been home to a sizeable Jewish community. Previously, the port of La Goulette welcomed merchants, fishermen and sailors, but since the creation of the modern commercial harbour of Radès on the other side of the channel in 1987, the port of La Goulette no longer receives passenger ships and in particular cruise ships, although it remains a fishing port.



Carthage

Carthage, which according to Greek and Roman sources was founded by queen Dido in 814 BC, has given its name to many cities around the world. The name of Carthage is familiar to all and conjures up a civilization which, for many centuries, ruled over vast areas of the known world. Carthage, located around 14 kilometres north-east of Tunis, is a must-see for any foreign visitor. The Punic and Roman ruins today bear witness to the great civilizations that once inhabited this mythical city, illustrated most eloquently by the Antonine Baths and the Roman Amphitheatre, which since the 1960s has been the venue of Tunisia's best-known and most highly regarded International Summer Festival.

The major known sites of ancient Carthage include the Byrsa Acropolis, the Punic ports, the Punic tophet, the Basilicas, the Antonine Baths, the Roman Cisterns of Malga, the Roman Villas, the Paleo-Christian Museum, the Carthage National Museum,...

Byrsa Hill, Carthage



Ruins of Carthage

You can also visit the remarkable Cathedral of St. Louis on the hill overlooking Carthage: it was built in the 1890s on the exact spot where the French king Louis IX died in 1270. Today the cathedral has been transformed into the Carthage Acropolium where the International Festival of Classical Music is held every October.

Carthage is also home to the Dar El Hout Oceanographic Museum, whose well-stocked aquariums have an important, widely varied collection of marine animals which is a popular attraction for visitors and especially for the youngest members of the family.

Antonine Baths



Carthage by al-Idrisi (12th century) and al-Bakri (11th century)

“In the times when Carthage was flourishing, she was one of the most famous of all cities due to her magnificent buildings, which testify to her power. Today one can see, scattered around the city, the vestiges of Roman constructions such as the theatre, which is unparalleled in size and capacity because it is circular in shape and composed of about fifty arcades, which point towards the sky and each one covers a space of over thirty hand-spans.” (Al-Idrisi)



Mosaic of
Carthage



Map of Tunis and
surroundings. Alain
Manesson, 1719



“It is said that Carthage was defeated by queen Didon, a contemporary of David [the father of Solomon], and that between the foundation of this city and that of the city of Rome there was a gap of seventy-two years. Anyone who comes to Carthage every day of their lives and devotes himself solely to looking around will discover a new marvel every day that he had previously not remarked upon. This town is situated so close to the sea that the walls are washed by the waves. The wall around it is 14,000 cubits long.” (Al-Bakri)

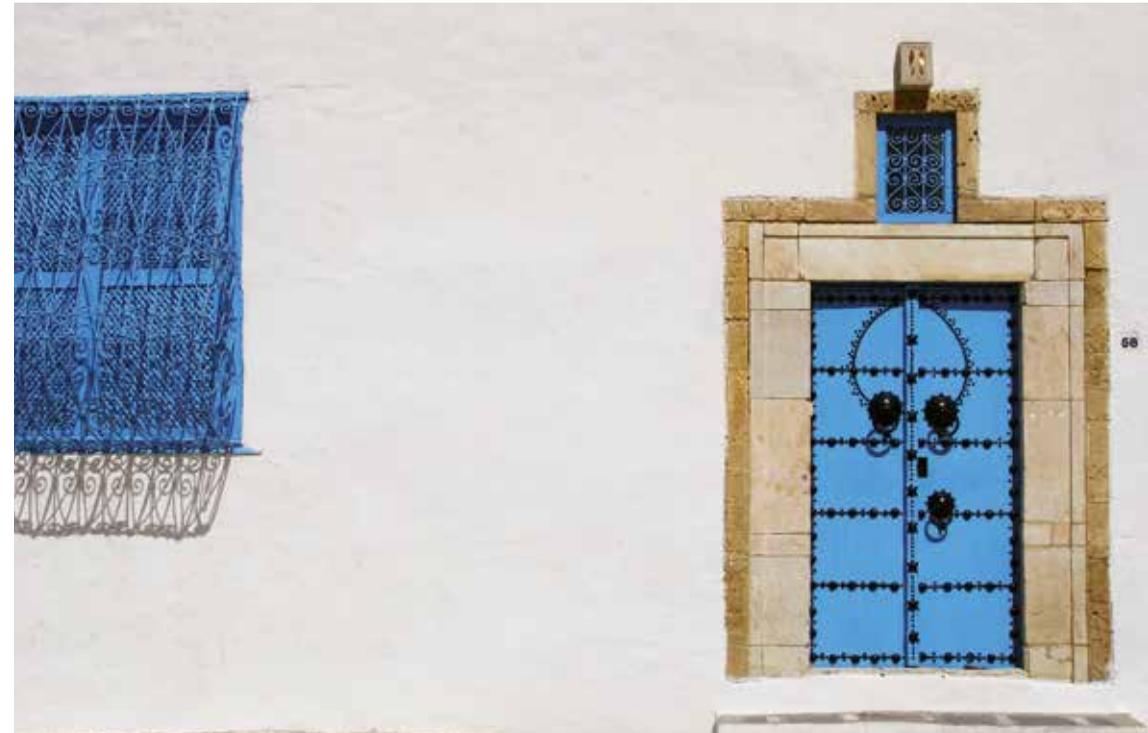


Courtyard of Sidi Bou Said Mausoleum

Sidi Bou Said

This small, charming village, situated on top of a hill overlooking the Bay of Tunis, owes its name to a *sufi* mystic named Abou Sa'id El-Beji (12-13th centuries), who for many years chose this village as his place of meditation. It is easily distinguished by its blue and white colours, for which the French painter Baron d'Erlanger

Overview of Sidi Bou Said



Typical street of Sidi Bou Said

is responsible. He managed to convince the *bey* to issue a decree (issued on August, the 28th, 1915) making the use of these two colours obligatory. The Baron's palace, built on the side of the hill overlooking the sea, offers a harmonious mixture of Andalusian, Ottoman and Islamic architecture. It is today considered part of Tunisian national heritage and has recently been transformed into





Night views

the prestigious Museum of Mediterranean Music and a Centre for Musical Research.

Every year, around mid-August, the village hosts a ritual procession called *al-kharja*, in which locals carry multi-coloured flags of the old Turkish army and gigantic banners representing the different *sufi* denominations, accompanied by the sound of *mezoued* (bagpipes), *bendir* (big round drums), religious hymns and *sufi* chants.

Sidi Bou Saïd blue

In Sidi Bou Saïd the houses have blue doors and windows and white walls. This is because a rich painter, Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger built a palace in this village in Morisco-Maghrebian style and wanted to protect this style of construction in the whole of the village. In his work "Images of Tunisia", ambassador Alfonso de La Serna tells the story of the Sidi Bou Saïd blue as follows: "Thanks to his influential position in the country, the baron d'Erlanger obtained from the Tunisian government the drafting and publication on August 28th 1915 of a decree forbidding all constructions that were not in accordance with traditional design, including any modifications of the façades that altered the local style. All doors and windows had to be painted blue, with the result that this clear indigo came to be known here today as "Sidi Bou Saïd blue".



Traditional door and window of Sidi Bou Saïd



La Marsa

This beautiful resort owes its fame to the *beys*, who chose it as their summer residence. The main local attraction is the Café Saf-Saf with its typically Tunisian cuisine and *malouf* music.



La Marsa

Gammarth

After the country's independence, Gammarth, originally a small fishing village adjacent to La Marsa, became a modern resort with many world-class hotels and restaurants and pristine, luxurious white villas laid out along beautiful beaches.

Denden

Once an agricultural village, Denden was progressively integrated into the city of Tunis. It has several royal palaces, including the Zarrouk Palace, which now hosts cultural and musical events during the Denden Festival each summer. A craft village was also built in Denden to promote Tunisian handicraft.



Huntress Diana, mosaic from Uthica (2nd century AD). Bardo Archaeological Museum and Courtyard of "Petit Palais", Bardo National Museum

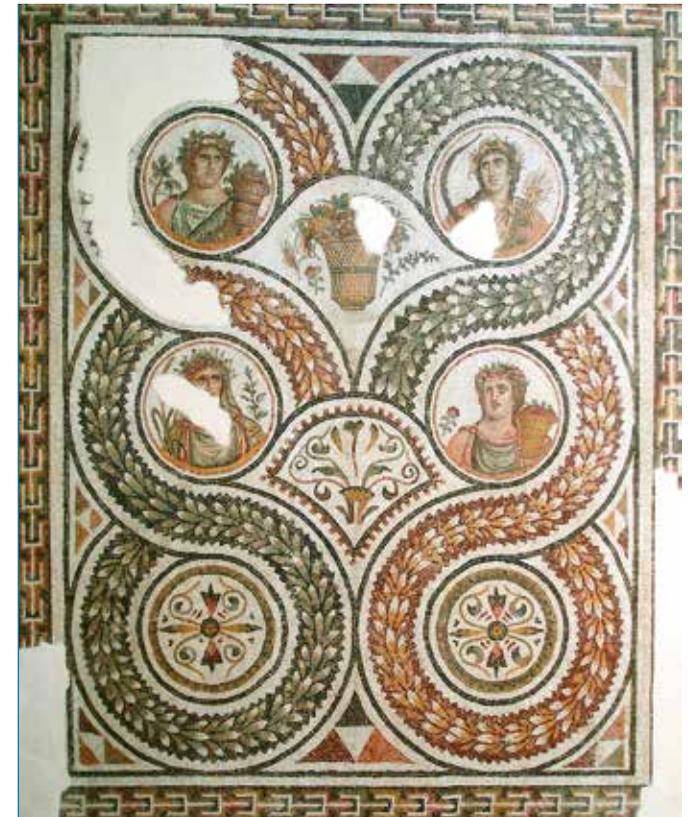
Le Bardo

Located around 5 kilometres west of Tunis, this ancient residence of the *beys* is today the seat of the Tunisian Parliament (Chamber of Deputies) and the Bardo National Museum. It lent its name to the Treaty of Bardo, signed in 1881 in nearby Ksar Said, which placed Tunisia under the French Protectorate.

Antique image of the residence of the *beys*.



Bardo Palace, Girault de Prangey, 1841



The Bardo National Museum has many different departments. Recently refitted and restructured, it boasts one of the largest collections of Roman mosaics in the world, with more than six hundred mosaics on display. Together, they form an open-air encyclopaedia about Roman life in North Africa, North African beliefs and mythology... Finely crafted, these mosaics are in a perfect state of preservation and come from different sites from all over the country. The best known mosaics are those portraying the poet Virgil, Neptune's Triumph, the Cyclops, Ulysses and Aphrodite.

Hammam Lif

Some 15 km south of Tunis, Hammam Lif, which was called Naro in the Punic period, was originally the site of a warm healing spring and spa, with waters that welled up from the depths of Mount Boukornine. For a long time Hammam Lif was a winter residence for the *bey* of Tunis.

Mount Boukornine, with its two peaks, was dedicated to Baal, the god known as Saturn to the Romans. The ruins of an altar and of steles for making offerings still exist today.

In Hammam Lif there are various well organized eco-tourism activities such as hiking through the Mount Boukornine National Park.



Map of the Tunisian coast with the ports of Bizerte and Tunis by Piri Reis, 17th century. Walters Art Museum

La Manouba

This town is home to luxurious palaces that once belonged to the *bey's* ministers. There are about twenty of them, built in the 19th century in the middle of beautiful orchards, according to the typical model for Italian palaces but with strong Andalusian influences. The best known include Kobbet En Nhas, built by Mustapha Bey, Dar Rustum, built by general Rustum, which is today the seat of the Governorate of La Manouba, and Ksar el-Warda (Palace of the Rose), which is now home to the National Military Museum. La Manouba is also known for its university campus.

Gastronomy and handicrafts

When the residents of the *medina* left to set up home in the new districts of the city and the new towns around Tunis, they took many of their traditional specialities with them. Some of these specialities can still be found in the numerous restaurants in the souks of Tunis ranging from starters such as Tunisian salad, *méchouia* salad or *briks* and a soup made with barley and fish, and main dishes such as couscous in various forms (with mutton or with fish such as grouper) as well as grilled dishes such as *merguez* sausage, lamb chops or fish. The meal would not be complete without a dessert with seasonal fruits or without trying some local pastries and a mint or pine-nut tea.

Within the context of a capital city, Tunis, with so much history and such a fascinating urban fabric, it is not surprising that a creative, dynamic and attractive craft sector has developed and thrived.

There are several thousands craftsmen working in Tunis today who are divided into different guilds the

Shop in the souk of Tunis and restaurant in the *medina*



best known of which are the jewellery-makers, the wrought-iron workers, the braziers, the silk and *hayek* (traditional garment) weavers, the makers of perfumes and essential oils, the leather-workers, the *chechia* hat-makers, etc.

The *chechia* is a red hat of Andalusian origin, (from Toledo according to ambassador Alfonso De La Serna), which was made by prosperous craftsmen for centuries and continues to be made today in the souk in Tunis that bears its name, the souk Ech-Chaouachia, which adjoins the Palace of Government (formerly Dar El Bey). The production of the *chechia* has however fallen sharply over recent decades as has craft production in Tunis in general. Craft products today are generally sold in retail stalls in the souks in the Medina, Sidi Bou Saïd's village, which was where the first birdcages with windows in the form of *moucharabiehs* were made, the craft village in Denden, which is near the National Office of Handicrafts, the state institution that oversees craft production in Tunisia, and of course the shops recently fitted out in the Bardo Museum and the Dar Ben Abdallah Museum.

Festivals

Tunis hosts several festivals such as:

The Medina Festival, which is held every year during the holy month of Ramadan, and includes a variety of popular and traditional music concerts, dance, poetry, Koran-reciting competitions and religious processions.

The JCC (the Carthage Cinematographic Days) Festival, which is held every two years in Tunis as a showcase for the cinema of sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world, establishes bridges for dialogue between the North and South, and offers an opportunity for film-makers and cinema lovers to meet.

The JTC (The Carthage Theatre Days): This Festival is also held every two years, alternating with the JCC Fes-

tival, and offers theatre companies from sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world the chance to perform and compete.

The International Festival of Carthage, which is organized every summer in the Roman Theatre in Carthage.

The October Classical Music Festival of Carthage, which is held every year in the Acropolium of Carthage, which was once the Cathedral of Saint Louis.

Music

Tunis has some of the most prestigious musical institutions in the country. A good example is the Rachidia Troupe, which was founded in 1934 at the instigation of Mustapha Sfar. Its aim was to safeguard Tunisian musical heritage, and in particular to promote it amongst the younger generations through new creations inspired by authentic Andalusian music. The Troupe first performed in 1935 at the Tunis Municipal Theatre.

Tunis Festival



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