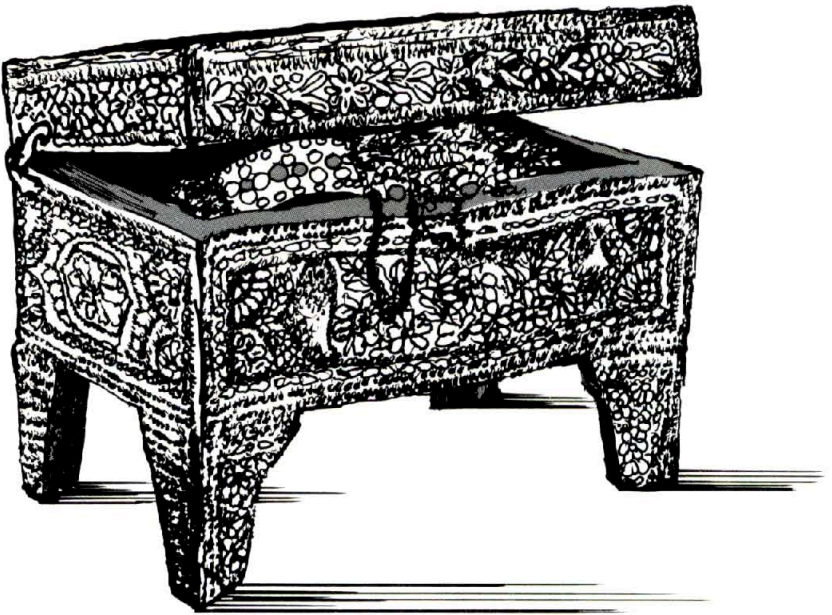


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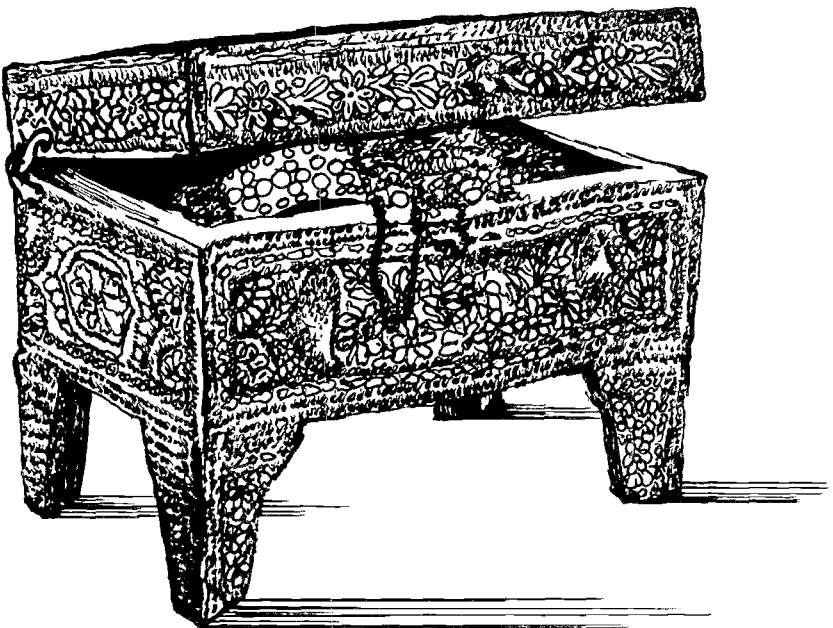
**Tunisia**  
a country study



# Tunisia

## a country study

Foreign Area Studies  
The American University  
Edited by  
Harold D. Nelson  
Research completed  
January 1986



On the cover: Jewelry box of embossed silver and enamel, representing one of the proficiencies of Tunisia's artisans

Third Edition, 1986; First Printing, 1987

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**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Tunisia : a country study.

(Area handbook series) (DA pam ; 550-89)

"Research completed January 1986."

Bibliography: pp. 313-56

Includes index.

I. Tunisia. I. Nelson, Harold D., II. American  
University (Washington, D.C.). Foreign Area Studies. III.  
Series. IV. Series: DA pam ; 550-89.  
DT245.T7955 1986 961'.1 86 3351

Headquarters, Department of the Army  
DA Pam 550-89

## Foreword

This volume is one of a continuing series of books prepared by Foreign Area Studies, The American University, under the Country Studies/Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book provides a listing of other published studies. Each book in the series deals with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its economic, national security, political, and social systems and institutions and examining the interrelationships of those systems and institutions and the ways that they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic insight and understanding of the society under observation, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal of it. The study focuses on historical antecedents and on the cultural, political, and socioeconomic characteristics that contribute to cohesion and cleavage within the society. Particular attention is given to the origins and traditions of the people who make up the society, their dominant beliefs and values, their community of interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with the national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward the social system and political order within which they live.

The contents of the book represent the views, opinions, and findings of Foreign Area Studies and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy, or decision, unless so designated by other official documentation. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Such corrections, additions, and suggestions for factual or other changes that readers may have will be welcomed for use in future new editions.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to those individuals in various international, governmental, and academic organizations who gave of their time, data, special knowledge, and authoritative perspective on Tunisia. Gratitude is also extended to members of the Foreign Area Studies support staff who contributed directly to the production of this book. These persons include Catherine L. Connor, Denise R. Barber, and Andrea T. Merrill, who edited the manuscript and the accompanying figures and tables; Harriett R. Blood and Gustavo Adolfo Mendoza, who prepared the graphics; Ernest A. Will, publications manager; Wayne W. Olsen, administrative assistant; Gilda V. Nimer and Karen Leitch, librarians; and Jesse L. Williams and Lisa C. Young, who keyboarded the manuscript. The book was indexed by Kathyne Kozak and phototypeset by Margaret Quinn.

The aesthetic touches that enhance the book's appearance are the work of Mr. Mendoza, whose illustrations appear on the cover and the title pages of the chapters. The inclusion of photographs has been made possible by the generosity of various individuals and public and private agencies. Special appreciation is extended to those persons who contributed original camera work not previously published.



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## Preface

This third edition of *Tunisia: A Country Study* replaces the second edition, which was researched and written in late 1978 and published in 1979. At the time the second edition was finished, Tunisia was at the beginning of its third decade of independence from French administrative domination. Under the charismatic leadership of President Habib Bourguiba, the young republic had gained a significant international reputation as an Arab state seeking to achieve national development goals through a pragmatic course that borrowed liberally from the concepts of free and centrally planned Western societies. Now, seven years later, the third edition views the results that have been achieved as Tunisia nears the end of its third decade of sovereignty.

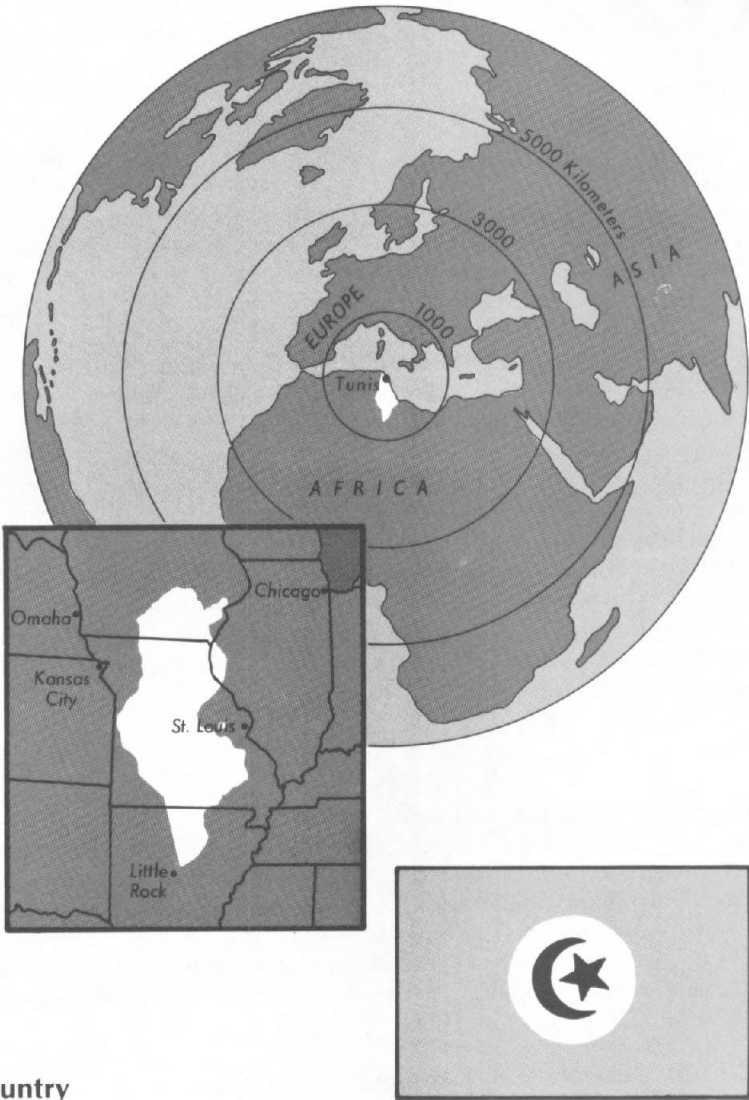
Like its predecessor, the third edition seeks to provide a compact and objective exposition of Tunisia's dominant social, economic, political, and national security institutions and, hopefully, to give the reader some appreciation of the forces involved in contemporary national life. In presenting this new study, the authors have relied primarily on official reports of governmental and international organizations, journals, newspapers, and material reflecting recent field research by scholarly authorities. Detailed information on many aspects of the society, however, was not always readily available, and gaps in the data as well as varying interpretations existed among some of the sources consulted. Where appropriate, these gaps and inconsistencies have been cited in the text. Should readers require greater detail on core area topics, the authors have noted the availability of amplifying materials in bibliographic statements at the end of each chapter. Full references to these and other sources used or considered are included in the detailed Bibliography.

The literature of Tunisia is frequently confusing because of the tendency to mix English and French transliterations of Arabic words, phrases, personal names, and place-names. For the most part, the authors of this study have attempted to reduce this confusion by adhering to the system of French transliteration, inasmuch as that is the form generally used in Tunisia, where half of the people speak French in addition to the official language, Arabic.

Arab personal names are often particularly confusing to the Western reader. A man's name includes his paternal genealogy and sometimes also indicates his family name, his tribal affiliation, and his village or region of origin. For example, a man named Abd al Rahman ibn (or ben) Qasim ibn Mohammed (or Mohamed) El (or Al) Hamma would be recognized as the son of Qasim, the grandson of Mohammed, and a native of the town of El Hamma. The man would be addressed as Mister (or his title, if any) Abd al Rahman. In spoken Arabic, names are elided, so that in this instance the name would be pronounced as if it were spelled Abdur Rahman. On many occasions the Western press spells such names as Abdel (or Abdul) Rahman, implying incorrectly that the man's first name is Abdel and that his last is Rahman. Many Arabic names, such as the one in this example, are designations of the attributes of God (Allah). *Abd al* means a slave or servant of, and *Rahman* means merciful; thus, the name literally means the slave or servant of the Merciful (God).

Where foreign and technical words and phrases have been used in this study, they have been defined briefly where they first appear in a chapter, or reference has been made to the Glossary, which is included at the back of the book for the reader's guidance. The dictionary used was *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. All measurements are presented in the metric system, which is used in Tunisia. A conversion table will assist those readers who are not familiar with metric equivalents (see table 1, Appendix).

## Country Profile



Country

**Formal Name:** Republic of Tunisia.

**Short Form:** Tunisia.

**Term for Citizens:** Tunisian(s).

**Capital:** Tunis.

**Flag:** Rectangular red field with white circular portion in center; red crescent encircles red five-point star within white center.

## **Geography**

**Size:** About 164,000 square kilometers; 1,600 kilometers of coastline.

**Topography:** Dominant natural feature Dorsale mountain chain, which extends across north-central portion of country from northeast to southwest. North of Dorsale, terrain uneven and generally mountainous except where Mejerda River, country's only major perennial stream, passes through fertile floodplain. Southward from Dorsale, region of semiarid plateaus gives way in extreme south to Tunisian portion of Sahara.

**Climate:** Mediterranean climate prevails north of Dorsale, with only moderate seasonal variation. Occasional frosts in interior, but temperatures seldom drop below freezing. Dorsale acts as rain shadow; precipitation decreases progressively, and average temperatures increase southward. Extreme diurnal variation in temperature in Sahara. Heavy morning dew supplements scanty rainfall along central portion of eastern littoral to make possible prosperous olive and cereal culture.

## **Society**

**Population:** Estimated at 7.2 million in mid-1985. Rate of natural increase about 2.6 percent annually, but substantial emigration of workers to other countries each year reduced actual rate of growth to about 2.5 percent. In 1983 number of Tunisians living abroad estimated at 300,000. In 1984 ratio of 102 males to 100 females and about 42 percent of population under age 15. Roughly 47 percent of population urban as compared with 40 percent in 1966 and 30 percent in 1956.

**Ethnic Groups and Language:** Population mixture of Arab and indigenous Berber stock. Unlike other North African countries, where Berber population clusters continue to form important ethnic minorities, arabization of Tunisian Berbers has long been virtually complete. Arabic official language, spoken by nearly all. French, however, spoken as second language by one-half of population, remains principal language of business.

**Literacy:** According to 1980 estimate, approximately 50 percent of population over age 15 considered literate. By gender, rate

about 67 percent for males and 33 percent for females; gap closing rapidly with increasing female school attendance.

**Health:** Conditions of health and sanitation improving steadily, and most of formerly serious endemic diseases eliminated or under fair degree of control. Diseases of infancy and early childhood, however, remain major hazards; more than one-half of all deaths occur among children under age five. Shortage of medical personnel of all kinds prevails, particularly in rural areas.

## **Economy**

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** In 1984 amounted to TD6.23 billion; real growth rate averaged around 7 percent in mid-1980s.

**Agriculture:** Largely traditional with small modern sector; major crops cereals, olives, olive oil, citrus fruits, potatoes, tomatoes, dates, and fish. Provided about 13 percent of GDP and 32 percent of employment in mid-1980s.

**Manufacturing:** Fast-growing sector; marked growth among those industries making textile, chemical, electrical, and mechanical products. Provides about 12 percent of GDP.

**Mining:** Petroleum dominant product followed by phosphates and natural gas. Provided about 10 percent of GDP.

**Foreign Trade:** Exports mainly petroleum, natural gas, phosphates, phosphate derivatives, textiles, and olive oil. Imports largely machinery, semifinished products, and foodstuffs. Imports exceeded exports in mid-1980s; tourism and remittances from Tunisians working abroad reduced deficit only slightly.

**Currency:** Tunisian dinar (TD—see Glossary).

**Fiscal Year:** Same as calendar year.

## **Transportation and Telecommunications**

**Roads:** Network of about 23,700 kilometers of surfaced roads; most modern segments of system in north, particularly around Tunis.

**Railroads:** About 2,150 kilometers of track reaching most of country's main urban centers and phosphate mines in southwest.

**Ports:** Major ports at Tunis, Bizerte, Sfax, Sousse, Gabès, and Sakhira.



**Airports:** International airports at Tunis, Bizerte, Monastir, Sfax, and on Jerba Island.

**Telecommunications:** Major urban centers well served by telephones and telex, including automatic international dialing; member of Intelsat and Arabsat.

## **Government and Politics**

**Government:** Republic under president, who serves as both head of state and head of government. Habib Bourguiba declared president for life in 1975 after having been elected unopposed four successive times. Day-to-day administration under Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali and Council of Ministers (cabinet), both responsible to president.

**Legislature:** Unicameral chamber of 136 deputies elected by direct suffrage for five-year term. Election to Chamber of Deputies in 1981 swept by National Front Coalition dominated by Bourguiba's Destourian Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Destourien—PSD). Chamber generally approves president's legislative program and budget without significant change.

**Legal System:** Modern legal codes adopted after independence reflect influence of both French law and sharia (sacred Islamic law). Code of Personal Status, dealing with family, marriage, and divorce, considered radical by Arab standards, notably with respect to rights of women. Three tiers of courts with original and appellate jurisdiction; judgments subject to power of annulment by highest tribunal, Court of Cassation.

**Administrative Subdivisions:** 23 governorates (provinces), each composed of several delegations, in turn divided into sectors. In 245 communes and municipalities, local self-government exercised by elected councillors, subject to review by governor.

**Politics:** Influence of PSD, only legal party between 1963 and 1981, pervasive at all levels of government. Under Constitution, Mzali in line to succeed Bourguiba, although more conservative rivals within PSD likely to contest his leadership aspirations. Three opposition groups—Movement of Socialist Democrats, Popular Unity Party, and Tunisian Communist Party—officially sanctioned but impeded in efforts to campaign against PSD. Growing Islamist movement not yet legalized as political party.

**Foreign Relations:** Officially nonaligned but oriented toward West. Rejects policies of more radical Arab states, urging moderation on Israeli-Palestinian issue and other Middle Eastern problems. Stresses solidarity among northwestern African states (Magh-

rib). Relations with United States marked by warmth, although Washington regarded as too uncritical in its support for Israel.

## **National Security**

**Armed Forces:** In 1985 armed forces, collectively known as Tunisian National Army, included army of 30,000, air force of 2,500, and navy of 2,600. Conscription for one-year tour of duty irregularly enforced for male citizens aged 20. Over 85 percent of army composed of draftees; career personnel dominated in other services.

**Major Tactical Units:** Army included two combined arms brigades (each with one armored battalion and two mechanized infantry battalions); one elite paracommando brigade; one brigade of desert troops; and reconnaissance, artillery, air defense, and engineering units. Air force maintained one fighter squadron formed in 1985, one light-attack squadron, one training unit, and one helicopter wing; inventory of about 20 combat aircraft. Naval forces included one frigate, eight fast-attack craft (six armed with surface-to-surface missiles), and several patrol vessels.

**Foreign Military Assistance:** United States major arms supplier providing bulk of armor and aircraft acquired in 1980s. France important source of equipment and training since Tunisian independence. Sweden and Italy also prominent suppliers of military equipment in 1980s.

**Defense Expenditures:** According to Tunisian government figures, appropriations for Ministry of National Defense in 1985 amounted to TD225.1 million. Of this figure, TD102.6 million allocated from current budget (9.8 percent of total) and TD122.5 million from capital budget (10.9 percent of total). Total defense costs 10.3 percent of total central government expenditures in 1985 and about 3.6 percent of GDP.

**Internal Security Forces:** All government internal security forces under authority of Ministry of Interior. Sûreté Nationale performed most urban police duties. Garde Nationale had responsibility for rural police affair and border patrol.



**Figure 1. Republic of Tunisia, 1985**

## Introduction

TUNISIA FORMS PART of the region that its early Arab conquerors called the "island of the west" (*jazirat al maghrib*)—the land between the "sea of sand" (the Sahara) and the Mediterranean Sea. According to tradition, other regional members are Morocco, Algeria, and the northwest portion of Libya known as Tripolitania, but in more recent times Mauritania has often been included. Tunisia has stood throughout history as a bridge between this Arab west (the Maghrib) and the Arab east (the Mashriq). Jutting into the Mediterranean midway between Gibraltar and the Suez, the country's north-eastern promontory commands the narrows between the African continent and Sicily that divide the great intercontinental sea into eastern and western basins. From this strategic location Tunisia has been depicted by its promoters as an important crossroads between Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.

Smallest of the Maghribi nations, Tunisia is roughly the size of the state of Missouri. Bounded on the north and the east by an extensive coastline, the small country shares its other frontiers with much larger Algeria and troublesome Libya (see fig. 1). Tunisians and their Maghribi neighbors have a common language, religion, and cultural heritage and, in large measure, a common history as well. The area has been a locus of trade and colonization almost since the beginning of recorded time. Its people are ethnically a mixture of Arab and indigenous Berber stock, but succeeding waves of Carthaginians, Romans, Spanish Muslims, Ottoman Turks, and—more recently—French and Italian settlers have had a profound effect on cultures, social structures, and values.

Independent since 1956 after 75 years as a French protectorate, Tunisia is regarded not only as the most modernized of the Arab countries but also as the most Westernized. Under the French, Tunisians were exposed to a progressive European society whose methods of government and business administration left indelible marks. Advanced plantation agriculture transformed the fertile coastal regions into export-oriented production centers. The French education system introduced foreign political concepts—most notably nationalism—to Tunisian youth. After 1934 an indigenous independence

movement, the Neo-Destour (New Constitution) Party, began active resistance to the continuation of the protectorate. The movement was led by a forceful, charismatic Tunisian named Habib Bourguiba.

The new order drew its social and political values from the Sahil, a coastal plateau region heavily influenced by its continued exposure to foreigners. In marked contrast to the more arabized remainder of the country, the Sahilian community was intensely industrious, flexible in accepting new methods, independent and rather secular in spirit, and highly cooperative. Bourguiba and the vanguard of the nationalist movement were all of Sahilian origin. After independence, rather than fashion a nation based on pride and extremism, these men sought to accustom the people to a realistic assessment of the new republic's position in the world and to a pragmatic, flexible approach to the problems of national development. Many observers believed Tunisia not only would attain its goal but also would do so through a democratic governmental system and a free society. Certainly it enjoyed a combination of advantages rarely matched in other emerging sovereign states.

From the outset Bourguiba's leadership was a major advantage. Popularly hailed as the Supreme Combatant for his role in the struggle for national independence, he had no competitors in gaining public recognition as "father of his country." Widely regarded as capable, incorruptible, progressive, and committed to a compassionate, humanistic philosophy regarding the Tunisian people, the national leader was respected—even revered—by a citizenry eager to follow his lead. A popular political party already existed as a potential vehicle for mobilizing the masses in the development effort. An efficient, uncorrupted civil service and a well-trained cadre of technicians inherited from the protectorate period stood ready to administer the new state and its modernization plans. The issue of Tunisification (replacement of foreigners by Tunisians in the civil service and the education system) and arabization (replacement of foreign languages by Arabic as the official tongue) lacked the emotional and dysfunctional impact that had accompanied similar actions in newly independent neighboring states.

Although there was some geographic sectionalism, the deep tribal or ethnic cleavages with which other North African states had to deal were largely nonexistent. Moreover, Tunisia's independence struggle had been a political maneu-

ver rather than a military encounter, and it had united the country without causing the mass destruction suffered, for example, by neighboring Algeria in its own agonizing war of independence. Particularly heartening was Tunisia's affinity for the Western cultural and social aspects of its heritage and its avowed friendship with the West, despite an official foreign policy of nonalignment.

The republican Constitution endorsed the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers; provided for regular elections; and included a bill of rights designed to protect individual freedoms. Although clearly democratic in its intent, the fundamental law permitted the president to exercise broad and unqualified executive powers within the context of a single-party state.

The political organization of Bourguiba and his fellow nationalists was renamed the Destourian Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Destourien—PSD) in 1964. A populist party active at all levels of the society, its chief functions were to rally public opinion behind government policies and to channel local reactions upward to the national leadership. The PSD's goal was to ensure national unity, which in political terms meant confining free political competition within the framework of a single party; the habit of discipline among a large and stable majority could counterpose opposition minorities while providing them with a channel for the expression of their views. Formally the party—like the government—purported to be representative and democratic, but in practice it too was subject to executive guidance that transcended statutes. From its educated elite, the loyal party membership learned to accept this seeming contradiction as an example of pragmatic flexibility.

Bourguiba, the country's first president (and its only one since his assumption of that office in 1957), became a pioneer among Arab leaders in declaring his intention to bring about social modernization within the framework of Islam, the national religion. Postindependence history has in large part been a chronicle of progress achieved in this endeavor, and the reforms attained have amounted to a social revolution in a Muslim environment.

In most countries where Muslim Arabs are predominant, the fountainhead of traditional social and political values is Islam, the religion brought to Tunisia by the Arabs in the seventh century. The word of God (Allah), revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and recorded in the Quran, provides

Muslims with an integrated structure ordering all personal, social, and political aspects of life. After Tunisian independence, however, the traditional social order, particularly as it affected the family and women, was gradually supplanted by a system based on liberal values, and the government became the leader in effecting change. Responsibility for social security and education, formerly accepted as the duty of the extended family, was assumed by the state. With varying degrees of success, religious rituals, family law, and social customs became targets of official pressure and legislation in the name of equality and productivity—values regarded as critical to the goals of modernization and national development.

Significantly, the reforms and development planning as a whole were undertaken in the name of traditional concepts. For example, two of the fundamental social values preached by Islam—obedience to authority and protection of the helpless—reappeared in the principles of “guided democracy” and state welfare fostered by the Bourguiba regime. Assuring Tunisians that only the “outmoded and obscurantist” aspects of the traditional culture were being transformed because they stood in the way of national development, Bourguiba abolished the traditional sharia courts, reformed religious education, outlawed polygyny, legalized birth control and abortion, and brought about change in the religion-based system of landholding.

In the process of carrying out Tunisia’s social revolution, the government gave great emphasis to the role of education in its design for national development. It plowed the largest single share of each annual budget into education; public school enrollments soared, and the national literacy rate advanced—particularly for women. Modern health and welfare programs also received prominent support from the government. Many of the reforms were opposed by conservatives and religious traditionalists, but modernization was seen by the Tunisian political elite as an adaptation of Islam to contemporary imperatives rather than as a denial of the religion’s basic tenets. In the mid-1980s modernization had yet to penetrate the more remote parts of the countryside, where farmers and a few nomadic communities continued to live in the relatively traditional social environment. But in the cities the process had progressed so far that there were growing signs of reaction against it.

The cost of economic development has been a heavy burden on the national economy, as typified by an education

system that provided free schooling for all Tunisians from the elementary through the university level. In 1985 about half of the country's 7.2 million people were under the age of 25—a statistic that demonstrated the scope of continuing budgetary requirements. Ironically, the economy was unable to provide jobs for the increasing number of graduates, a situation that had potentially serious political implications.

Although endowed with only a modest resource base, Tunisia achieved a remarkable record of economic progress during the 1960s and 1970s. Predominantly an agricultural country, it nonetheless made important strides toward industrialization as a result of extensive foreign aid, pragmatic planning, and little public resistance to the adoption of modern values. During the 1970s, economic growth averaged a phenomenal 7.6 percent annually, attributable to steady expansion of the hydrocarbons sector, an increase in manufacturing, and high receipts from phosphate exports and tourism. Per capita income rose substantially, earning for Tunisia the classification of a middle-income developing country, according to standards established by the World Bank (see Glossary). But when the economy became more narrowly based on petroleum in the late 1970s, a downturn in the country's prosperity was not long in coming. Foreign demand for oil weakened in the early 1980s, as did the market for phosphates, and a slump in tourism occurred as a result of economic sluggishness in potential travelers' own countries. Severe drought conditions brought poor harvests to Tunisia's agricultural sector, and food imports increased.

The resulting slowdown in growth revealed basic structural weaknesses in the economy, including substantial government subsidies for imported consumer goods. In the mid-1980s both the budget and the balance of payments current account suffered major deficits, inflation increased, and unemployment became one of Tunisia's most severe problems. The government attempted to redress its economic problems, but restrictive measures, such as reducing subsidies, increasing consumer goods prices, and freezing wages, sparked worrisome public disturbances.

In retrospect, there seems little doubt that the reforms introduced in the Tunisian society stemmed to some degree from Bourguiba's determination to neutralize long-standing conservative Muslim power. But his chosen path toward national development, modernization, and economic well-being carried with it certain inherent problems and dangers. The



emphasis on national unity, centralization of power, and efficiency undermined local contributions to the development effort. In stressing uniformity, pluralism was shunned. The result has been an inability to accept nonconformity and criticism, as well as a refusal to permit—much less accommodate—political dissent, which the regime has equated with a lack of patriotism.

Long supported by popular consensus and a Tunisian tradition of strong central government, Bourguiba has consolidated his authority over all levels of political administration and has extended his personal influence to most aspects of national life. Adopting a paternalistic attitude toward the nation, he has ruled in a manner as authoritarian as that exercised by the bey of Tunis, who preceded him in the days of the preindependence monarchy. But he has made a practice of keeping political issues before the people and of explaining government policy through press conferences and speeches.

Internal political opposition generally has been kept in bounds by adroit personnel management. The president shuffles government and party officials frequently to discourage the development of factions and eliminates those regarded as threats to the status quo. Bourguiba's perception of his role as the primary molder of national solidarity is perennial, and, ever conscious of his place in Tunisia's history, he loses no opportunity to remind his fellow citizens of their debt to him. "There is not a Tunisian," he is fond of stating, "who does not owe being a free citizen in an independent country to me."

Despite his continued active participation in the affairs of state, the Tunisian leader in early 1986 was no longer the vigorous activist he had been in an earlier era. His age officially given as 83, Bourguiba has a long history of health problems for which he has sought repeated medical attention both at home and abroad. Still recovering from a heart attack suffered in late 1984, he has reduced his official schedule accordingly. Much of the burden of executive responsibility has been assumed by Mohamed Mzali, the PSD protégé Bourguiba chose for his prime minister in 1980. Having been declared president for life by the national legislature in 1975, the aging Supreme Combatant presides over a nation that is in the process of cultural, social, economic, and political transition.

There are signs that the ailing president may no longer be capable of providing the strong-fisted leadership that once characterized his government. Social unrest has been generated by rising unemployment, particularly among the youth in urban areas. Political rivalries have arisen within the PSD, which functions mainly as the medium through which the leadership's wishes are communicated to the people. Aspiring politicians have increased their maneuvering as hopeful contenders for the government's top office once its aged incumbent passes from the scene. Unrest stemming from a reawakening of Islamist (see Glossary) fervor has raised the public issue of whether Tunisians should abandon their support of the government's Western approach to nationbuilding and return instead to the traditional principles and practices of their religion. Many observers fear that the country's unity and stability have been threatened by pro-Western and anti-Western rivalries and that if they are not contained and managed intelligently, Tunisia could become the Lebanon of North Africa. Solutions to these problems have been difficult to achieve as the country has continued to exist in a political twilight zone awaiting the end of the Bouguiba era.

January 1986

Harold D. Nelson

As noted on the title page, the authors finished research and writing in January 1986. Because of protracted problems of phototypesetting, however, preparations for printing were not completed until late 1987. During the intervening period, Tunisia experienced significant political changes. The ensuing is a brief summary of some of the more important.

In July 1986 Bourguiba dismissed Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali, the person he frequently had identified as his chosen successor (see Presidential Succession, ch. 4). In addition, Bourguiba divorced his wife, Wassila, who for a long period had exercised considerable influence and who was believed to favor a gradual loosening of political controls. During the next fifteen months, Bourguiba continued to make abrupt personnel changes. Many observers concluded that a niece of Bourguiba, Saida Sassi, and others were encouraging Bourguiba in his reluctance to delegate decisionmaking power and expand the political process.

On October 2, 1987, Bourguiba suddenly replaced the incumbent prime minister with Minister of Interior Zine al

Abidine Ben Ali, a 51-year-old former army general. On November 7 Prime Minister Ben Ali announced over Radio Tunisia that a panel of six physicians had determined that Bourguiba had "become totally incapable of fulfilling the duties of the presidency." Ben Ali stated that "in accordance with Article 57 of the Constitution, we . . . assume the presidency and the supreme command of the armed forces." The new president asserted that the time had arrived for "a republican regime that respects the institutions and provides the prerequisites for a responsible democracy." Although Ben Ali was lavish in his praise of Bourguiba's contributions to the nation, he declared that "there is no room for a life presidency, nor for an automatic succession in which the people are not involved." Ben Ali also announced that his government would propose new legislation on parties and the press so that Tunisians could participate in "political activities that truly rely on a plurality of political parties and popular organizations."

Later in the day Ben Ali assumed the chairmanship of the PSD, the third major post that Bourguiba had filled. Ben Ali appointed Hedi Baccouche, formerly minister of social affairs and director of PSD, prime minister and secretary general of the party. In interviews with foreign correspondents, the new prime minister emphasized that the new cabinet included only four ministerial changes. Observers noted one important change, however, in the designation of Mahmoud Mestiri as foreign minister. Mestiri had served in the previous cabinet as secretary of state for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; he had previously been posted as Tunisia's ambassador to Paris, Moscow, and the United Nations. Baccouche confirmed that although Ben Ali had been critical of the succession procedure by which he assumed the presidency, he intended to adhere to the provisions of the Constitution by serving until the next election, which was scheduled for 1991.

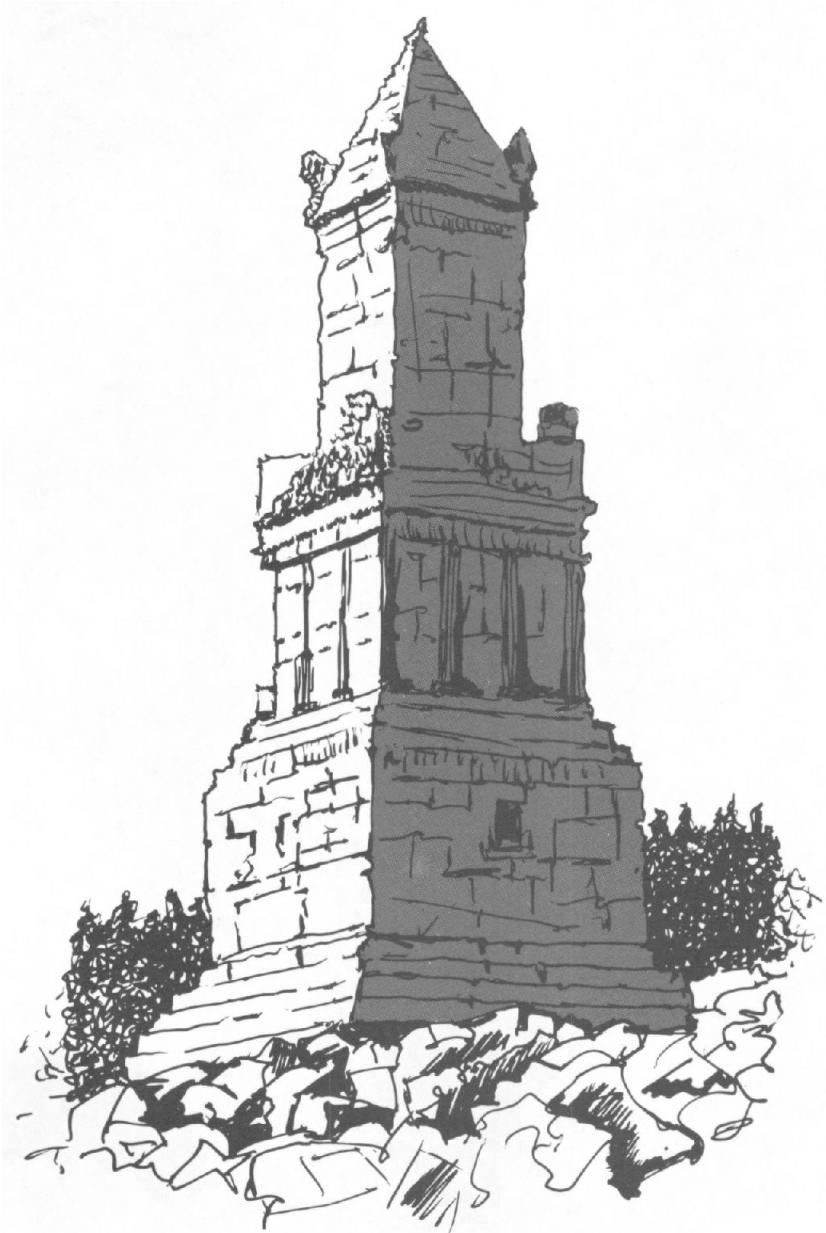
A few hours after taking power, Ben Ali announced the promotions of several military officers, including the elevation of the army chief of staff, Youssef Baraket, to general and Major General Said el Kateb to lieutenant general. A Colonel Youssef Ben Slimane reportedly also was promoted to lieutenant general, as was Idaa Netar, who became the new chief of staff of the air force, replacing a nephew of Bourguiba, who along with several other relatives and close associates of Bourguiba was placed under temporary house arrest.

President Ben Ali retained Slaheddine Baly as minister of state in charge of national defense and appointed Ali Nourdine as director general of national security, a position that Ben Ali had held in the mid-1980s (see Internal Security, ch. 5).

November 23, 1987



## Chapter 1. Historical Setting



*Punic mausoleum at Dougga built in second century B.C. as a tomb for a Numidian prince*

TUNISIA HAS A LONG and distinct history as a politically and culturally unified country despite subjection to a variety of rulers and the impulses of contrasting civilizations over a period of nearly 3,000 years. The modern state derives its name from Tunis, originally a Phoenician settlement and since the thirteenth century the country's capital and principal city. But to the Romans and later the Arabs, this relatively small region was known as *Africa*, whose name was eventually extended to the whole of the immense continent that lay beyond.

History-conscious Tunisians point to Carthage and Kairouan as the sources of their continuous development as a people and a nation. Carthage built an empire that dominated North Africa and the western Mediterranean until it fell before the might of Rome. Destroyed by its conquerors and then rebuilt as the administrative center of Roman Africa, the city of Carthage became in time the spiritual center of Latin Christianity in North Africa. Kairouan, founded in the seventh century A.D. by advancing Arab armies, is one of the holy cities of the Muslim world and the wellspring from which Arab culture flowed across North Africa.

Tunisia was once part of great medieval Berber empires and, from the sixteenth century, was an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire ruled by dynasties of Turkish beys. Tunisia was occupied by France in 1881 and remained a French protectorate for 75 years. The French impact on Tunisia was profound, imposing French institutions, leaving the imprint of French culture and technology, and creating a gallicized elite to whom leadership passed when the protectorate was ended in 1956.

The dominant factors of Tunisia's political life have been the power and personality of President Habib Bourguiba and the influence of the Destourian Socialist Party, which embodies his philosophy of government and society. Born in 1903 at Monastir in the Sahil region, Bourguiba—often referred to as the Supreme Combatant—is one of the last surviving Third World nationalist leaders who guided their countries to independence in the post-World War II era. His strength derived from his great popularity as the founder and ideological mentor of the Destourian movement. After independence he used his prestige to institutionalize presidential dominance of the governmental system and to secure for the party supremacy over most aspects of national life.

Many foreign observers regarded Bourguiba's Tunisia as a model for emerging nations attempting to build modern societies.



The republic made outstanding progress in areas of social development, particularly in education, while maintaining political stability in a one-party state. The social unrest that surfaced in the late 1970s was laid to resentment at the uneven distribution of the benefits of economic development and the persistent problem of unemployment. Political opposition focused on demands for party pluralism as an alternative to dominance by the Destourian Socialist Party. Another serious source of resistance to the regime was posed by the Islamic renewal that challenged the secularization of Tunisian society promoted by Bourguiba.

## **Early History**

The coastal regions of Tunisia shared in an early neolithic culture that was common to the whole Mediterranean littoral. Artifacts left by hunters and fishermen who excelled in making stone blades and tools are plentiful, and evidence points to the early domestication of cattle and the cultivation of crops in the area. South of the Atlas range, nomadic hunters and herders roamed a vast savanna, well watered and abounding in game, that 8,000 years ago stretched across what is now the vast desert known as the Sahara. Their culture flourished until the region began to desiccate after 4000 B.C. Scattering before the encroaching desert and invading horsemen, some of the savanna people migrated northward, where they were subsequently absorbed by the Berbers.

Linguistic evidence suggests southwestern Asia as the point from which the ancestors of the Berbers began their migration into North Africa early in the third millennium B.C. Over succeeding centuries they extended their range from Siwa in Egypt to the Niger Basin. The Berbers present a broad range of physical types, and the affinity of various groups seems based almost entirely on linguistic grounds. Berber tradition told that they were descended from two unrelated families, and modern scholars believe that the Berbers did indeed cross North Africa in two simultaneous waves—one that entered the region from the southeast after a long sojourn in Black Africa and another that took a northerly route. The Berbers were well known to classical writers. Sallust, a Roman historian and politician living in the first century B.C., described their way of life, elements of which still exist in the twentieth century.

## Carthage

Minoan seamen from Crete may have set up depots on the coast of present-day Tunisia before 2000 B.C., but it was only with the arrival of Phoenician traders, who penetrated the western Mediterranean before the twelfth century B.C., that the region entered into recorded history. Safe harbors on the African coast, equipped to service, supply, and shelter their ships, were the links in a maritime chain that reached to Spain. Tunis, Bizerte, Sousse, Monastir, and Sfax originated as Punic (see Glossary) trading posts where the merchants of Tyre (in present-day Lebanon) developed commercial relations with the Berber tribes of the interior and paid them tribute to ensure their cooperation in securing raw materials. The greatest of the Punic colonies, Carthage (Qart Hadasht, the New Town), was founded, according to tradition, in 814 B.C. by a Phoenician princess whose name has come down to Western readers through Virgil's *Aeneid* as Dido.

Carthage was governed by a mercantile oligarchy that exercised power through a senate, composed of elder statesmen, under a constitution praised by Aristotle for providing a perfect blend of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Joint executive authority was vested in two *suffetes* (consuls), chosen annually by an electorate that was also called upon to decide on difficult questions by referendum. The coastal countryside was closely settled with self-governing towns dependent on Carthage for foreign affairs and defense.

Carthaginian seamen developed a thriving trade in the Mediterranean as they contested control of the sea-lanes with the Greeks from Italy and Sicily. Settlers on the Atlantic coast bartered merchandise for gold from the western Sudan (see Glossary), in the quest of which the Carthaginian admiral Hanno made his fabled voyage to the mouth of the Senegal River. Successful merchants, seamen, and craftsmen, the Carthaginians turned to agriculture as well, raising grain and introducing the cultivation of olive trees in the region on estates that employed Berber workers.

Beyond the Punic enclaves and plantations, the Berber tribes prevailed, but the influence of Punic civilization among them was deep-seated. The Berbers displayed a remarkable gift for cultural assimilation, readily synthesizing Punic religious cults with the nature worship, magic, and holy places of folk religion and adopting the Phoenicians' Semitic language, which was still spoken by Berber farmers in the coastal countryside in the late Roman period.

## *Tunisia: A Country Study*

When the mother-city, Tyre, fell under Persian domination, the western Phoenician colonies looked for leadership to Carthage, which by the fifth century B.C. extended its hegemony along the coast of North Africa from the Atlantic Ocean to Cyrenaica as well as to Sardinia and western Sicily (see fig. 2). Carthage and its dependencies formed defensive alliances with the Berber tribes in the hinterland, from whom they regularly extracted payments of tribute. Essentially a maritime power, Carthage hired Berber mercenaries for its overseas military expeditions and imported mercenaries from abroad to man African garrisons. Carthage contended for generations against Syracuse and the other Greek city-states in Sicily and, as an ally of the Etruscans, resisted the expansion of their Greek commercial rivals in Corsica and Italy.

The growth of Carthaginian influence in Italy and commercial dominance in the western Mediterranean drew the Punic city-state into a confrontation with the emerging power of Rome in the third century B.C. Defeated in the first Punic war (264–241 B.C.), Carthage was forced to surrender its colonies in Sicily and Sardinia, but under the leadership of the Barcids—Hamilcar, Hasdrubal, and Hannibal—it rapidly built a new and larger empire in Spain to compensate for its losses. Claiming Roman interference in Carthaginian colonial affairs, Hannibal led an army of 40,000—many of them Berbers—out of Spain, crossing the Alps into Italy with a baggage train of elephants in 218 B.C. to exact revenge against Rome for previous humiliations. Hannibal remained in Italy for 16 years, defeating every army that the Romans threw against him, but his goal—the capture of Rome itself—eluded him. In the meantime, Roman forces occupied Spain, cutting him off from reinforcements and ultimately compelling him to abandon Italy by bringing the war to Africa. In 202 B.C. the Romans, under Scipio Africanus, defeated Hannibal at Zama (present-day Sidi Youssef) and dictated a harsh peace to Carthage, bringing an end to its days as a major power.

### **Berber Kingdoms**

The basic unit of social and political organization among the Berbers was the extended family, usually identified with a particular village or with traditional grazing grounds. Families in turn were bound together in the clan. An alliance of clans, often tracing their origins to a common ancestor as a symbol of unity, formed a tribe. Courts and representative assemblies guided by customs peculiar to the group functioned at each level of organization. Berber

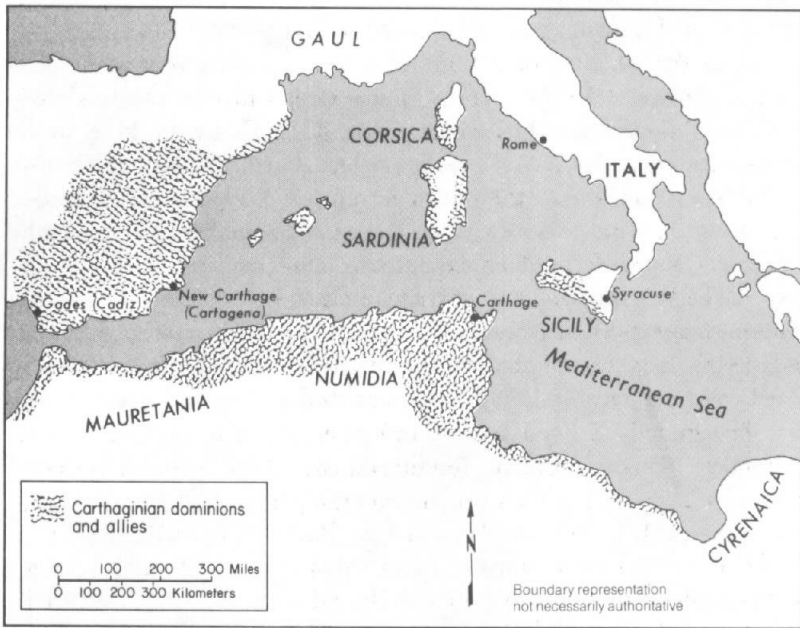


Figure 2. Carthaginian Hegemony, Fourth and Third Centuries, B.C.

folk law and government, like Berber folk religion, were highly personalized and therefore most effective at the lowest levels of their application. Ultimately, each household or tent was its own republic.

For mutual defense, kindred tribes joined in confederations, which, because war was a permanent feature of tribal life, were in time institutionalized. Some chieftains, successful in battle, established rudimentary territorial states by imposing their rule on defeated tribes and allies alike, but their kingdoms were easily fragmented, and the dynasties that they sought to found rarely survived more than a generation. By the third century B.C., however, several large, although loosely administered, Berber kingdoms had emerged behind the coastal areas controlled by Carthage. These monarchies were supported by the sedentary farmers who looked to the kings to protect them from the raids of the nomadic pastoralists. The Berber kings adapted Punic and Greek ceremonial forms to the usage of their courts, and treaties of friendship with Carthage were often sealed by a king's marriage to a woman from the family of a Carthaginian notable. The Berber kings ruled in the shadow of Carthage and later Rome, sometimes forming alliances with one or another of the great powers. After Carthage was van-

quished by Rome, they threw in their lots with factions vying for power in the Roman civil wars of the first century B.C.

One of the most illustrious of these tribal monarchs was Masinissa (ca. 240–148 B.C.), who had served with the Carthaginians in Spain. Masinissa shifted his support to Rome in time to be counted among the victor's allies when Carthage surrendered in 202 B.C. With Roman patronage he united Numidia and extended his authority from the Moulouya River to Cyrenaica, a territory he governed from his Hellenistic court at Cirta (Constantine in present-day Algeria). Numidia was divided among several heirs after Masinissa's death. Rome intervened when his grandson, Jugurtha (118–105 B.C.), attempted to revive Masinissa's Berber kingdom. Betrayed by a rival chieftain at the end of a long and exasperating war in which he pinned down large numbers of Roman troops, Jugurtha was carried away to Rome and was starved to death in the Capitol.

### **Roman Africa**

Rome dictated a hard peace to Carthage after the battle of Zama, imposing a stiff indemnity and prohibiting Carthage from making war without Roman consent. When Carthage succeeded in paying the indemnity levied against it, voices were raised in the Roman Senate warning against a revival of Carthaginian might and urging that Carthage be destroyed. Masinissa had in the meantime taken advantage of the restrictions placed on Carthage's war-making powers to invade its territory. When Carthage chose to defend itself, Rome declared war, charging a breach of the peace agreement. Carthage surrendered to a besieging Roman army in 146 B.C. Its population was dispersed, the city razed to the ground, and its earth sown with salt. Carthaginian territory was annexed by Rome and eventually organized as the province of Proconsular Africa, governed by a civilian official (proconsul) appointed annually by the Senate. Julius Caesar subsequently ordered the rebuilding of Carthage as a Roman city and the capital of the province. The royal house of Masinissa continued to rule Numidia as a Roman protectorate until 46 B.C., when Caesar deposed its king, who had sided with Pompey in the civil wars, and attached a part of it to Proconsular Africa (see fig. 3). For 400 years the province was peaceful and prosperous, part of a cosmopolitan world state whose citizens shared a common language, legal system, and Roman identity.

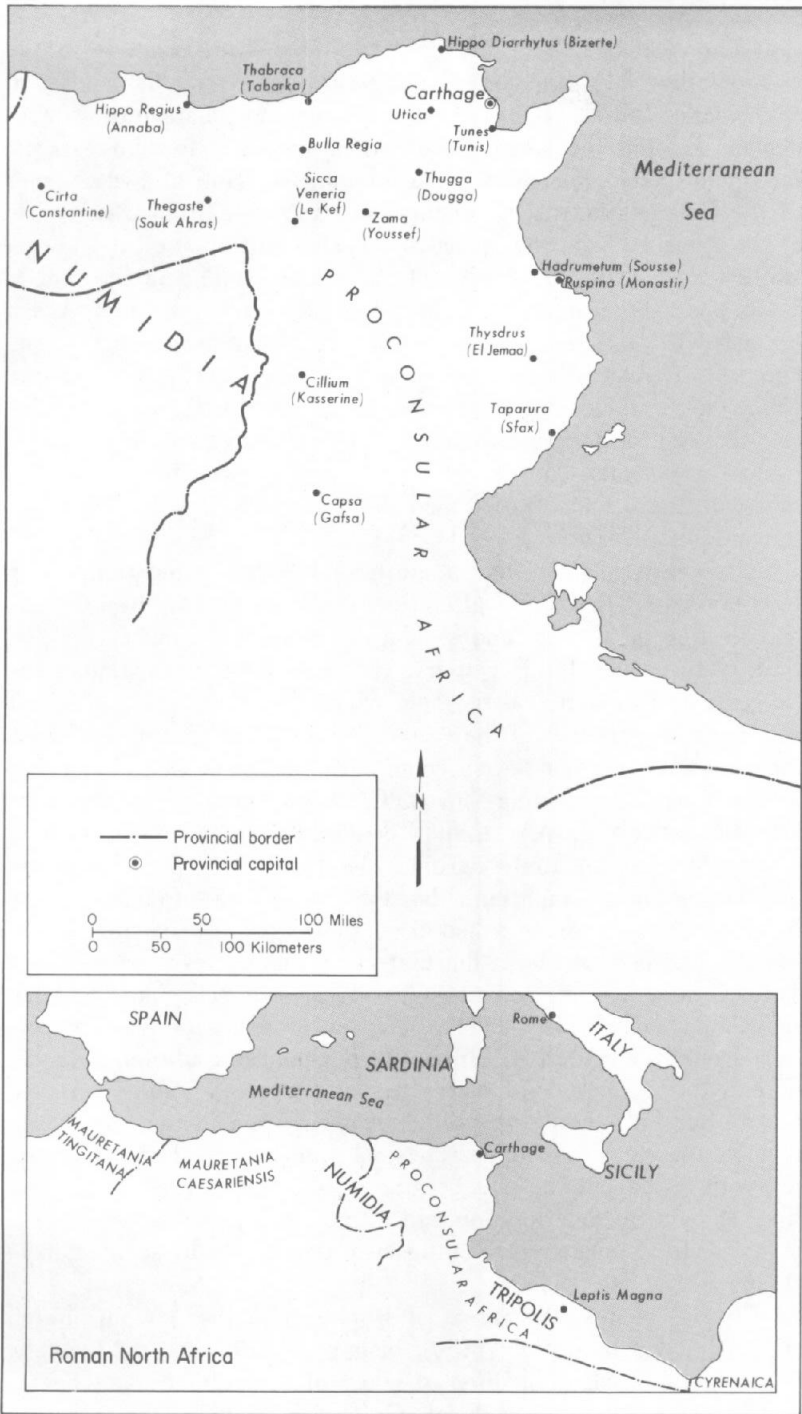


Figure 3. Proconsular Africa, Second Century A.D.

The Roman ruins seen in present-day Tunisia attest to the civic vitality of Proconsular Africa, where populous cities and even the smaller towns, their streets laid out in characteristic grid design, enjoyed the amenities of urban life—the forum, markets, public entertainments, baths, and fountains—found in every corner of the Roman Empire. Merchants and craftsmen from many parts of the Roman world established themselves in the cities and towns, while army veterans and migrants from Italy settled in the coastal countryside; but the bulk of the population of Proconsular Africa consisted of puniced Berber farmers. Called the “granary of the empire,” Roman Africa was valued for its agricultural exports, which were Italy’s principal source of food. Slave labor was common, but on the vast imperial domains and estates acquired by Roman aristocrats, land was leased to tenants who paid taxes and rent with grain that went to feed the army and provide free bread for the dole in Rome.

Roman Africa also had a substantial Jewish population. Many Jews were deported there after the rebellions against Roman rule in Palestine in the first and second centuries A.D., but others had come with earlier Punic settlers. Converts were made among the Berbers, and in some cases whole tribes may have been Judaized.

By the beginning of the second century, Christianity had been introduced among the Jewish community and soon gained converts in the towns and among slaves. Carthage became the center of Latin Christianity in Africa, and Tertullian, a convert born there in about 150, was the first Christian theologian writing in Latin and one of the most important. By the end of the fourth century Rome’s African provinces had been thoroughly Christianized, and inroads had been made in the hinterland among the Berber tribes. The tribes sometimes converted en masse, but schismatic and heretical movements also developed, often as forms of political protest. Donatism, a heresy within the puritanical tradition, won adherents during periods of severe Roman persecution and flourished again after Christianity was officially recognized in the fourth century by the empire, in opposition to bishops accused of collaborating with the state. The sect became a vehicle for social revolt at a time of political deterioration and economic depression, and it was an example of the religious enthusiasm that would be seen again in the history of the Berbers.

It was against the threat of Donatism to the African church that Saint Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo Regius (Annaba in present-day Algeria), directed many of the sermons and books, including his autobiographical *Confessions*, whose influence on Christian thought has continued undiminished through the centu-

ries. Born in Thegaste (Souk Ahras in present-day Algeria), Saint Augustine is recognized as one of the Latin Fathers of the Church. In *The City of God* he sought to demonstrate that the future of the church was not dependent on the survival of the Roman state (or, by extension, on any secular authority), as many contemporary Christians feared it was, and thereby to prepare his people for the onslaught of the Vandals.

Invited to North Africa by a rebellious Roman official, the Vandals, a Germanic tribe, crossed from Spain in 429, seized power, and under their war leader, Gaiseric, established a kingdom that made its capital at Carthage. Although the Roman Empire eventually recognized their overlordship in much of North Africa, the Vandals confined their rule to the most economically profitable areas in Proconsular Africa. There they constituted an isolated warrior caste, concerned with collecting taxes and exploiting the land. Civil administration was left in Roman hands, but the Vandals, who were Arian Christians, vigorously attempted to destroy Roman Catholic ecclesiastical influence. From their African base they conquered Sardinia and Corsica and launched raids on Italy, sacking the city of Rome in 455. In time, however, the Vandals lost much of their warlike spirit, and their kingdom fell to the armies of Belisarius, the Byzantine general who in 533 began the reconquest of North Africa for the Roman Empire.

Effective Byzantine control in the old Roman province was restricted to the coastal area, and even there the newly walled towns, strongholds, fortified farms, and watchtowers called attention to its tenuous nature. The region's prosperity had diminished under Vandal domination. Unpopular Byzantine governors imposed burdensome taxation, while towns and public services—including the water system—were left in decay. The old Roman political and social order, disrupted by the Vandals, could not be restored, but Byzantine rule in Africa did prolong the Roman ideal of imperial unity there for another century and a half and prevented the ascendancy of the Berber nomads in the coastal region. In outlying areas neglected by the Vandals, the inhabitants had sought the protection of tribal chieftains and, having grown accustomed to their autonomy, resisted reassimilation into the imperial system, but no coherent form of political organization evolved there to take the place of Roman authority.



## **Islam and the Arabs**

By the time of his death in A.D. 632, the Prophet Muhammad and his followers had brought most of the tribes and towns of the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of the new monotheistic religion of Islam (literally, submission), which was conceived of as uniting the individual believer, the state, and the society under the omnipotent will of God. Islamic rulers therefore exercised both temporal and religious authority. Adherents of Islam were called Muslims (“those who submit” to the will of God).

Within a generation Arab armies had carried Islam north and east from Arabia in the wake of their rapid conquests and westward across North Africa as far as Tripoli. There, stiff Berber resistance slowed the Arab advance, and efforts at permanent conquest were resumed only when it became apparent that the Maghrib could be opened up as a theater of operations in the Muslim campaign against the Byzantine Empire. In 670 the Arabs surged into the Roman province of Africa (transliterated as Ifriqiya in Arabic), where their commander, Uqba ben Nafi, founded the city of Kairouan as a military base about 150 kilometers south of Byzantine-held Carthage. The selection of this encampment in the midst of a plain, separated from both the Roman cities on the coast and the mountains in Numidia, where the Berber tribes continued their stubborn resistance, was a deliberate act of policy by Uqba, who reportedly announced that he was founding a city that would serve “as a strong point for Islam until the end of time.” The name chosen for the new Arab capital, derived from the Persian word *karwan* (caravan), also suggests that Uqba was aware of the commercial possibilities of the site located at a crossroads of the trade routes.

Carthage fell in 693, but the last pockets of Byzantine resistance on the North African coast were wiped out only after the Arabs had obtained naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. The Arabs cautiously probed the western Maghrib, and in 710 the governor of Ifriqiya, Musa ibn Nusair, invaded Morocco and carried their conquests to the Atlantic. In 712 they mounted an invasion of Spain and in three years had subdued all but the mountainous regions in the extreme north. Muslim Spain (called Andalusia) and the Maghrib, which had been conquered within 50 years of the founding of Kairouan, were organized under the political and religious leadership of the Umayyad caliph of Damascus.

Arab rule in Ifriqiya—as elsewhere in the Islamic world in the eighth century—had as its ideal the establishment of political and religious unity under a caliphate (the office of the Prophet’s

successor as supreme earthly leader of Islam) governed in accord with a legal system (sharia) administered by qadis (religious judges), to which all other considerations, including tribal loyalties, were subordinated. The sharia was based primarily on the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet and was derived in part from Arab tribal and market law.

Arab rule was easily imposed on the towns, which prospered again under their new patronage, and in the coastal farming areas. People in the former valued the security that permitted them to practice their commerce and trade in peace, while the puniced farmers recognized an affinity with the Arabs to whom they looked to protect their lands against the nomadic Berber tribesmen. The Arabs abhorred the tribal Berbers as barbarians, while the Berbers often saw the Arabs only as an arrogant and brutal soldiery bent on collecting taxes. Communal and representative Berber institutions also contrasted sharply and frequently clashed with the personal and authoritarian government that the Arabs had adopted under Byzantine influence.

The Arabs formed an urban elite in Ifriqiya, where they had come originally as conquerors and missionaries, not as colonists. Their armies had traveled without women and married among the indigenous population, transmitting Arab culture and Islamic religion over an extended period to the townsmen and farmers; but conversion to Islam was also rapid among the nomadic tribes of the hinterland that stoutly resisted Arab political domination. Many Berber converts were opportunists, however, and tribes that accepted Islam under Arab pressure often abandoned it once the intimidating Arab tax collectors and slave traders had moved on. Some tribes had records of repeated apostasy and reconversion. Once established as Muslims, however, the Berbers, with their characteristic love of independence and impassioned religious temperament, shaped Islam in their own image. They embraced schismatic Muslim sects—often traditional folk religion barely disguised as Islam—as a way of breaking from Arab control with the same enthusiasm that their Christian forebears had accepted Donatism in opposition to Rome.

The heretical Kharidjite movement surfaced in Morocco as a revolt against the Arabs in 739. The Berber Kharidjites (seceders; literally, those who emerge from impropriety) proclaimed their belief that any suitable Muslim candidate could be elected caliph without regard to his race, station or descent from the Prophet. Taking a position directly paralleling that of the Donatists, the Kharidjites maintained that a sinner could no longer be a believer because faith was not possible without purity, and they thereby re-

garded all other Muslims as heretics. The attack on the Arab monopoly of the religious leadership of Islam was explicit in Kharidjite doctrine, and Berbers across the Maghrib rose in revolt in the name of religion against Arab domination. Kairouan was sacked and its mosques desecrated. In the wake of revolt, Kharidjite sectarians established a number of theocratic tribal kingdoms, most of which had short and troubled histories. The rise of the Kharidjites in the Maghrib coincided with a period of turmoil in the Arab world during which the Abbasid dynasty overthrew the Umayyads and relocated the caliphate in Baghdad.

In the countryside the ulama (Islamic scholars and teachers) of the mosques were replaced as the spiritual guides of the people by wandering holy men (*al murabitun*), or "those who have made a religious retreat" (transliterated as marabouts). The marabouts were mystics and seers, miracle workers endowed with a charisma (*baraka*), whose tradition antedated Islam in the Maghrib and was as old as religion itself among the Berbers. They were incorporated into intensely local cults of saints whose domed tombs dotted the countryside and who were venerated by Muslims and Jews alike. The marabouts had traditionally acted as arbiters in tribal disputes, and, whenever the authority of government waned in a particular locale, the people turned to them for political leadership as well as for spiritual guidance. Maghribi Islam thus took shape as a coexisting blend of the scrupulous intellectualism of the ulama and the sometimes frenzied emotionalism of the masses. In general, however, Ifriquiya was not as susceptible to the heterodoxy that characterized popular Islamic practices farther west. Two factors account for this: first, Ifriquiya came more directly under the orthodox influence of the mosques and schools of Tunis and Kairouan, and, second, its larger urban and sedentary population had been more thoroughly arabized than was the case elsewhere in the Maghrib.

### **Aghlabids**

After the Arab conquest, Ifriquiya was governed by a succession of amirs (commanders) who were subordinate to the caliph in Damascus and, after 750, in Baghdad. In 800 the caliph appointed as amir Ibrahim ibn Aghlab, who established a hereditary dynasty and ruled Ifriquiya as an autonomous state that was subject to the caliph's spiritual jurisdiction and nominally recognized him as its political suzerain. The ninth century has been described as the region's "golden age," from which it developed as a politically and culturally distinct entity within the Islamic world.



Ruins of the ancient Roman capitol at Dougga,  
Tunisia's largest and best preserved archaeological site.  
Courtesy Embassy of Tunisia, Washington

In 827 the reigning amir, Ziyat Allah, diverted the energies of the restless Arab military caste to Sicily, where rebellious subjects of the Byzantine emperor had invited Aghlabid intervention. The Arabs seized part of the island and conquered the rest piecemeal over the next 75 years. For a time they held Sardinia and gained a foothold in southern Italy as well, and in 846 Arab raiders plundered the suburbs of Rome and sacked the basilica of Saint Peter. The Aghlabids contested control of the central Mediterranean with the Byzantine Empire and played an active role in the internal politics of Italy (see fig. 4). Palermo, noted for its wealth and cosmopolitan culture as the capital of Aghlabid Sicily, was one of Europe's largest cities.

Meanwhile, in Ifriquiya the Aghlabid amirs repaired the neglected Roman irrigation system, rebuilding the country's prosperity and restoring the vitality of its cities and towns with the agricultural surplus that was produced. At the top of Ifriquiya's political and social hierarchy were the court, the military caste, and an Arab urban elite that included merchants, scholars, and government officials who had come to Kairouan and Tunis from many parts of the Islamic world. Members of the large Jewish communities that also resided in those cities held office under the amirs and engaged in commerce and the crafts. Converts to Islam often retained the positions of authority held traditionally by their families or class in Roman Africa; but a Christian community, speaking the provincial Latin dialect of Africa, lingered on in the towns until the twelfth century.

During the golden age Aghlabid patronage transformed Kairouan into the center of Maghribi religious and intellectual life. Kairouan was a great market for books in Arabic and Hebrew that had been copied by scribes. Its mosques and schools attracted pilgrims and scholars—Jewish and well as Muslim—from all parts of the Islamic world. So important was the reputation of Kairouan as a holy city that, according to custom, seven pilgrimages made there by a devout Muslim were the equivalent in merit of the required hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. The most outstanding cultural figure of the golden age was the poet-scholar Ibn Rachiq, renowned for his literary commentaries and historical works. His contemporary at Kairouan, Ibn Zeid, codified the Malikite branch of Islamic law that applied throughout the Maghrib, and more than 40 volumes on jurisprudence are attributed to him.

The Aghlabids established a tradition of intellectual excellence that survived the dynasty. In the tenth century Constantius Africanus, a Christian from Carthage knowledgeable in medicine, natural science, and astronomy, introduced Arab learning in those

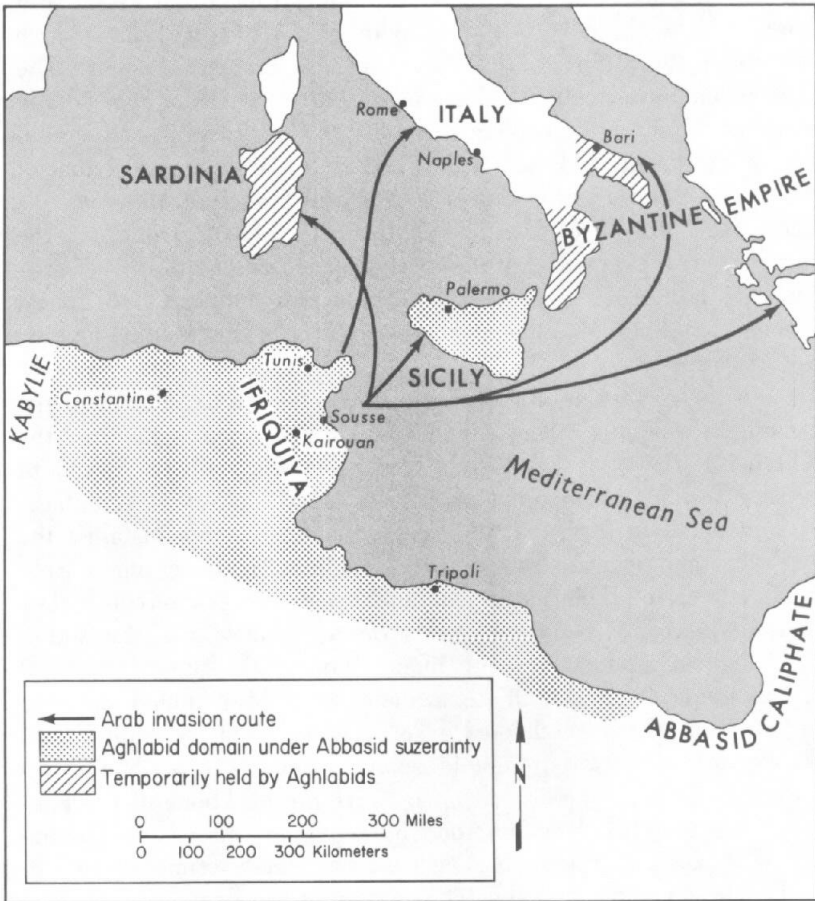


Figure 4. Aghlabid Domains, Ninth Century A.D.

fields to Europe from the Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino in Italy, where he translated works of Arabic scholarship into Latin. It was primarily through Arabic texts that classical Greek learning in science and philosophy was transmitted to the scholars of Europe over the next two centuries. The tension and interplay between the Islamic and Christian worlds—most evident on the frontiers in Sicily and Spain, where the two cultures were in constant conflict—was a major stimulus for Europe’s twelfth-century renaissance.

### Fatimids

Already in the seventh century a conflict had developed between supporters of rival claimants to the caliphate that would split Islam into two branches—the orthodox Sunni and the Shia—which continued thereafter as the basic division among Muslims. The Shia (from the so-called *Shiat Ali*, or Party of Ali) supported the claim of the direct descendants of Ali, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, whereas the Sunni favored that of Ali's rival, Muawiyah, leader of a collateral branch of Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh of Mecca, and the principle of election of the fittest from the ranks of the *shurfa* (descendants of the Prophet—literally, nobles; sing., *sharif*). The Shia had their greatest appeal among non-Arab Muslims, who were scorned by the aristocratic desert Arabs.

In the closing decade of the ninth century, a missionary of the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam, Abu Abdullah al Hussein, converted the Kutama Berbers of the Kabylie region to that militant brand of Shiism and led them on a crusade against the Sunni Aghlabids. Kairouan fell in 909, and the next year the Kutama installed the Ismaili grand master from Syria, Ubaidalla Said, as imam (religious leader) of their movement and ruler over the territory they had conquered. Recognized by his Berber followers as the Mahdi (the divinely guided one), the imam founded the Shia dynasty of the Fatimids, (named for Fatima, daughter of Muhammad and wife of Ali, from whom he claimed descent) and moved the capital from Kairouan to a coastal stronghold renamed Mahdia in his honor.

Merchants of the coastal towns were the backbone of the Fatimid state that had been founded by religious enthusiasts and imposed by Berber tribesmen. The slow but steady economic revival of Europe created a demand for goods from the East for which the ports of Ifriquiya and Fatimid Sicily were the ideal distribution centers. Trading houses in Ifriquiya opened branches in Egypt, and their merchants, some of whom ventured as far as India in search of trade goods, won a reputation for their daring. The warehouses in the ports of Ifriquiya stored and shipped out grain, drugs, spices, lacquer, and dyes, as well as *susiyyat*, the cloth woven in Ifriquiya from Egyptian flax for export back to Egypt.

Fatimid rule was harsh and intolerant, persecuting the Sunni ulama of Kairouan and the Kharidjite sectarians alike. For many years the Fatimids threatened Morocco with invasion, but eventually they turned their armies eastward toward Egypt, where in the name of religion the Berbers took their revenge on the Arabs. The Fatimids completed the conquest of Egypt from the Abbasids by

969 and moved their capital to the new city that they founded at Cairo, where they established a Shia caliphate to rival that of the Sunni caliph at Baghdad.

The Fatimids left the Maghrib to their Berber vassals, the Zirids, but the Shia regime had already begun to crumble outside Ifriqiya as factions struggled indecisively for regional supremacy. The Zirids neglected the country's economy, except to pillage it for their personal gain. Agricultural production declined, and farmers and herdsman took to brigandage. The depletion of the gold supply and the shifting of trade routes gradually depressed Ifriqiya's once thriving commerce. In an effort to hold the support of the urban Arabs, the Zirid amir, Al Moezz ibn Badis, defiantly rejected the Shia creed in 1049, broke with the Fatimids, and initiated a Berber return to Sunni orthodoxy.

In Cairo the Fatimid caliph invited beduin tribes from Arabia (known collectively as the Hilalians, who had ravaged Egypt for years) to migrate to the Maghrib and punish his rebellious vassals. The Arab nomads spread over the region, in the words of the historian Ibn Khaldun, like a "swarm of locusts," impoverishing it, destroying towns, and turning farmland into steppe. In 1057 they looted and destroyed Kairouan. Over a long period they displaced Berber farmers from their land and converted it to pasturage. Many Berbers, driven from their traditional lands, joined the Hilalians as nomads. The Hilalian impact on the Maghrib was devastating in both economic and demographic terms, altering the face and culture of the region and completing the arabization of Ifriqiya.

In the meantime, the Norman rulers of southern Italy took advantage of the Zirids' distress in North Africa to invade Sicily in 1060 and return it to Christian control. In 1134 Norman knights occupied the island of Jerba to use it as a base for attacks on the African mainland; by 1150 Roger II, Norman king of Sicily, held a string of ports and fortresses along the coast between Tunis and Tripoli and dominated the narrow straits of the central Mediterranean. Norman interests in North Africa, however, were essentially commercial rather than political, and no effort was made to extend their conquests inland.

### **Hafsids**

The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the rise in Morocco of two rival Berber tribal dynasties—the Almoravids and Almohads, both founded by religious reformers—that dominated the Maghrib and Muslim Spain for more than 200 years. The founder



of the Almohad (literally, "one who proclaims" the oneness of God) movement was a Sunni *alim*, Ibn Tumart (d. 1130), who preached a doctrine of moral regeneration through the reaffirmation of monotheism. As judge and political leader as well as spiritual director, Ibn Tumart gave the Almohads a hierarchical and theocratic centralized government, respecting but transcending the old representative tribal structure. His successor, the sultan Abd al Mumin (1130–63), subdued Morocco, extended the Muslim frontier in Spain, and by 1160 had swept eastward across the Maghrib and forced the withdrawal of the Normans—with safe passage—from their strongholds in Ifriquiya, which he added to the Almohad empire.

Abd al Mumin proclaimed a caliphate at Cordova, giving the Almohad sultan supreme religious as well as political authority within his domains, but religious reform gradually gave way to dynastic politics as the motivating force behind the movement. The Almohads had succeeded in unifying the Maghrib, but as its empire grew and the Almohad power base shifted to Spain, the dynasty became more remote from the Berber tribes that had launched it. By 1270 the Almohads in Morocco had succumbed to tribal warfare and in Spain to the steady advance to Castile.

At the eastern end of the Almohad empire the sultan left an autonomous viceroy whose office became hereditary in the line of Mohamed ben Abu Hafs (1207–21), a descendant of one of Ibn Tumart's companions. With the demise of the Almohad dynasty in Morocco, the Hafsids adopted the titles of caliph and sultan and considered themselves the Almohads' legitimate successors, keeping alive the memory of Ibn Tumart and the ideal of Maghribi unity. Their dynasty survived in Tunisia—as Ifriquiya came to be known—until the sixteenth century.

The poet-prince Abu Zakariya al Hafs (1228–49) moved his capital from Kairouan, which had never recovered from its sacking by the Hilalians, to Tunis, which then became the cultural and political capital of the country. The Hafsids' political support and Tunisia's economy were rooted in the coastal towns, while the hinterland was effectively given up to the tribes that had made their nominal submission to Tunis. The Hafsid sultans encouraged trade with Europe, forged close links with Aragon and the Italian maritime states, and dispatched embassies as far afield as the court of King Haakon of Norway.

The Maghrib and Spain, linked under the Almohads, shared a common culture—called Moorish—that transcended dynastic lines and political boundaries in creating new and unique forms of art, literature, and architecture. Its influence spread eastward from

Spain as far as Tunisia, where the return of order and prosperity made possible a second flowering of Arab culture and scholarship. Under the Hafsids the school of the Zituna Mosque in Tunis was recognized as the leading center of Islamic learning in the Maghrib, but Hafsid Tunisia's culture was essentially a phenomenon of the court, dependent on the patronage of its sultans. One of the greatest intellectual figures of the Hafsid age was Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), the historian and critic, who attempted to formulate historical laws to explain the rise and fall of dynasties in the Islamic world in his encyclopedic *Al Muqaddima*, (Prolegomena or "Introduction" to universal history), a work that remains an important source of information about early Maghribi history.

Despite commercial and diplomatic ties, Hafsid relations with the European powers eventually deteriorated. In 1270 Louis IX of France (Saint Louis) led the Eighth Crusade to Tunisia, where he died of the plague. The Aragonese intrigued in the dynasty's increasingly troubled and complex internal politics, backing rival claimants to the Hafsid throne. Marabout republics, tribal states, and the coastal enclaves seized by Andalusian and renegade Greek pirates defied the sultan's authority and by the fifteenth century had supplanted it in large parts of Tunisia. The Hafsids periodically attempted to revive the dynasty's fortunes, only to exhaust their resources in the effort; but during the Hafsid era, spanning more than 300 years, Tunisia acquired a distinctive character and defined its place within the Islamic world.

## **Ottoman Regency**

Piracy lured adventurers from around the Mediterranean to the Maghribi coastal cities and islands. Among them were two brothers, Aruj and Khair al Din, the latter known as Barbarossa (Redbeard) to Europeans. Muslims from the Greek island of Lesbos, they reached Tunisia in 1504 and sailed from Jerba Island under Hafsid patronage. In 1510, however, the brothers were invited by the maritime republic of Algiers to defend it against the Spaniards. Instead they seized Algiers and used it as a base of operations not only for piracy but also for conquests in the interior. Khair al Din subsequently recognized the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan over the territory that he controlled and was in turn appointed the sultan's regent in the Maghrib, bearing the title beylerbey (commander in chief). He was forced to abandon Algiers temporarily (1519–25) to the Hafsids, who resisted Ottoman penetration in the Maghrib, but with Turkish troops Khair al Din was

able to consolidate his position in the central Maghrib and in 1534 mounted a successful seaborne assault on Tunis.

The Hafsid sultan, Hassan, took refuge in Spain, where he sought the aid of the Habsburg king-emperor, Charles V, to restore him to his throne. Spanish troops and ships recaptured Tunis in 1535 and reinstalled Hassan. Protected by a large Spanish garrison at La Goulette, the harbor of Tunis, the Hafsids became the Muslim ally of Catholic Spain in its struggle with the Turks for supremacy in the Mediterranean, making Tunisia and the waters around it the stage for repeated conflict between the two great powers.

In 1569 a Turkish force operating out of Algiers retook Tunis, only to lose it again in 1573 to Don Juan of Austria. The next year, however, the Turks returned with a large armada and 40,000 troops, compelling the Spanish garrison to abandon Tunis. The last of the Hafsids was carried off to Constantinople, and Tunisia became a province of the Ottoman Empire, governed by the beylerbey in Algiers, with Turkish as the language of administration.

### **Pashas, Deys, and Beys**

In 1587 the Ottoman Maghrib was divided into three regencies—at Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. In Tunisia the authority of the beylerbey as regent gave way to that of a pasha (governor) appointed by the sultan for a one-year term. The regency was provided with a corps of janissaries, recruited from Anatolian peasants who were committed to a lifetime of service in Tunisia. The corps numbered 4,000 infantrymen and was organized into 40 companies, each commanded by a junior officer with the rank of dey (literally, maternal uncle). It formed a self-governing military guild, subject to its own laws, whose interests were protected by the Divan, a council of senior officers. Real power came to rest with the army, and the pasha's role was reduced to that of ceremonial head of state and figurehead representative of Ottoman suzerainty.

While the mission of the janissaries in Tunisia was to maintain order and collect taxes, the Barbary corsairs supplied the regency's treasury with a steady income from piracy and waged war at sea against Spain. Piracy was a highly disciplined business, calculated as an extension of overall Turkish naval strategy in the Mediterranean. Operations were conducted by the *rais* (pirate captains), who preyed on shipping and raided the European coasts of the western Mediterranean to capture and carry away hostages to

be held for ransom or as merchandise for the slave markets of North Africa. The *raïs*—many of them European renegades who had apostatized and become “Turks by profession”—were banded together in a self-regulating *taifa* (guild) to further the corporate interests of their trade and to counter the influence of the Turkish military garrison in the affairs of the regency.

Mutinies and coups were frequent, and generally the janissaries were loyal to whomever paid and fed them most regularly. In 1591 the deys staged a successful coup against their superior officers in the divan and forced the pasha, acting as regent for the sultan, to appoint their chosen leader as head of government—in which capacity he continued to bear the title of dey. The deys, their Turkish infantry reinforced by spahis (locally recruited cavalry), were secure in their control of the cities and the coastal region but relied on a civilian official, the bey, to oversee the government of the tribes and to collect taxes in the hinterland with his private army of Tunisian auxiliaries. Such was the strength in the countryside of one of these officials, the Corsican renegade Murad Bey (d. 1631), that he secured a hereditary title for his family both to the beylicate and also to the office of pasha. The political history of seventeenth-century Tunisia thus became one of the struggle between the dey, backed by the janissaries and the Turkish bureaucracy, and the bey-pasha, who increasingly came to be identified with the interests of the old Arab elite for control of the apparatus of government.

After 1666 the bey-pasha dictated the choice of the dey and gradually relieved him of his duties as head of government. The beylicate, in the meantime, had established itself as the representative of order and stability against tribal anarchy and military indiscipline. Tunisian naval units were dispatched to reinforce the Turkish navy in time of war, and the sultan as caliph was recognized as the spiritual leader of Islam; but, although it remained nominally part of the Ottoman Empire, Tunisia had in fact become an autonomous state governed by a hereditary ruling house.

By the late seventeenth century, trade had become a more important source of income than piracy. Commercial agreements were entered into with European trading partners, particularly France, and concessions for the development of trade were granted to foreign interests. Tunisia imported finished manufactured goods in exchange for a variety of commodities—grain, olive oil, dates, hides, textiles, and sponges. Tunisian hatters enjoyed a monopoly on the sale of the *shashiya*, the red fez worn throughout the Ottoman world, which they made of Spanish wool imported by Jewish merchants in Tunis.

### **Husseinids**

Continually troubled by the truculence of the janissaries and beset by unrest in the tribal areas, Tunisia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was also threatened by armed intervention from Algiers, whose dey claimed hegemony over the other autonomous Ottoman regencies in the Maghrib. In 1702 a janissary officer, Ibrahim al Sharif, murdered the bey-pasha, Murad III, together with his family, and seized control of the government in Tunis, but his regime was short-lived. Janissaries from Algeria invaded Tunisia in 1705 on the pretext of restoring legitimate government and took Ibrahim prisoner. Hussein ben Ali, an officer of Greek origin who had organized the defense of Tunis against the Algerian janissaries, assumed the title of bey with the army's backing and subsequently secured the sultan's appointment as pasha. Hussein then defied the dey of Algiers, who plotted to reinstate Ibrahim in Tunis as his puppet, and named a member of his own family to succeed him as bey-pasha. A move by the Porte (Ottoman government) to install a regent in Tunis of its own picking when Hussein died in 1715 was thwarted when religious and military leaders rallied behind the Husseinid Dynasty and the concept of Tunisian autonomy it represented.

The bey-pasha was an absolute monarch who directed the government in Tunis with the aid of a small cabinet. It was clear that he governed Tunisia for, and in the name of, the Turkish elite, who with officials recruited from the class of Mamluks (literally, slaves; non-Turkish subjects of the sultan conscripted for life into the service of the Ottoman Empire), to which Hussein belonged, monopolized positions of authority in the central government. After Hussein, title to the beylicate remained within the ruling house according to a system by which the Husseinid prince regarded best qualified to rule was designated heir apparent during the lifetime of the reigning bey. The choice of a successor was determined by the janissary officer corps, whose periodic coups in support of one or another rival Husseinid claimant were routinely legitimized in decrees issued by the Porte. A relatively strong ruler like Ali Bey (1759-82) assured the stability of his regime by acceding to the demands of the janissaries, but he also courted Arab support to counterbalance their power. Increasingly, the dynasty's policies came to reflect concern for the interests of the Arab urban elite in Tunis and the towns of the north and the Sahil.

Local government devolved on about 60 qaids (governors), appointed by the bey from Arab notables. Working beneath the qaids were approximately 2,000 sheikhs who were responsible for col-

lecting taxes and maintaining order in tribal areas and provincial towns with the aid of Arab spahis put at the qaid's disposal. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, tribal leaders commanding the loyalty of more than one-third of the bey's subjects in the highlands, steppes, and far south acted quite independently of his government's authority. Neglected as a fighting force, the army refrained from venturing into these areas to collect taxes; as state finances deteriorated, the beylicate was forced to look abroad for loans.

Whatever internal problems may have afflicted the Husseinid regime, European travelers reported that the Tunisians were the "most civilized people who inhabit the coast of the Mediterranean," superior in their politics and culture to the Algerians and given to commerce rather than to piracy. Although piracy was discouraged by the Husseinids, corsairs armed and sheltered in Tunisian ports continued to threaten trade and the security of seamen, and European maritime powers regularly paid tribute to the bey of Tunis and rulers of the other Barbary States (Morocco, Algiers, and Tripoli) to purchase immunity from attacks on their shipping. American merchant ships, no longer covered by British protection, were seized by Barbary pirates in the years that followed United States independence, and American crews were enslaved in North Africa. In 1800 the United States ratified a treaty with the bey, guaranteeing him payment of tribute in return for a promise that Tunisian-based corsairs would not molest American shipping. In 1805, however, a Tunisian mission visited Washington to modify the treaty, and the annual tribute was eliminated in return for a trade agreement. An Anglo-French fleet imposed acceptance of a protocol on Tunisia in 1818 that prohibited further arming of corsairs and the enslavement of Christians.

### **Ahmed Bey**

The French occupation of neighboring Algeria in 1830, displacing the Ottoman regency there, was not a cause for alarm in Tunisia. It was considered a temporary measure and for a time held out the promise that Husseinid princes would be called on to rule in Oran and Constantine. French annexation of Algeria four years later, coupled with the reassertion of Turkish sovereignty in Tripoli in 1837, discouraged Tunisian optimism, however. The overriding concern of Ahmed Bey (1837–55) was to avoid giving an excuse for foreign intervention in Tunisia. Slavery was completely abolished and privateering suppressed in response to Euro-

pean objections, while steps were taken to put the beylicate's sovereignty and Tunisian autonomy beyond challenge.

The key to nationbuilding was the modernization of Tunisian institutions. Reformism, however, was an elite movement, totally lacking in popular support. Lacking as well the resources to finance reform or the machinery to manage it, the political elite had no clear idea of what its goals ought to be. Without considerable success, administration was strengthened in an effort to bring all areas of the country under the control of the government in Tunis and to provide a more efficient tax collection system.

Building a modern army was seen as an appropriate and realizable starting point for the reform movement. A military academy was established at the beylical palace at Bardo to provide officers, still predominantly of Turkish background, for a 26,000-man army that was intended to stand as a symbol of Tunisia's sovereignty. The new army was modeled on the recently re-organized Turkish army and was trained by French officers. The bey's government took out large loans from French banks to pay for the military buildup.

Ahmed Bey's mentor was his prime minister and treasurer, Mustafa Khaznader, who survived the bey and served continuously as head of the Tunisian government from 1837 to 1873. A Greek by origin, he had been carried off as a small child from Khios by the Turks when they ravaged that island during the Greek war for independence. Raised as a Muslim, Mustafa Khaznader had been Ahmed Bey's companion since their boyhood together and encouraged his master in debilitating debauchery. Occupying a position of trust in the beylicate, Khaznader was an embezzler on a large scale who ultimately led Tunisia into bankruptcy and opened the door for French economic and political penetration. Encouraged by the French, he promoted an ambitious public works program and accumulated an immense personal fortune by arranging loans to pay for it at exorbitant rates of interest in collusion with French banking houses.

Despite the bolstered armed forces and reformed administration that his regime offered as evidence of its modernity, Ahmed Bey's fear that Tunisia would be swallowed up by France or Turkey dictated the content of his foreign policy. The greater the threat from France was perceived to be, the closer Tunisia drew toward its nominal suzerain, the Ottoman sultan. The more persistent Turkey's pressure on Tunisia for formal recognition of the sultan's suzerainty, the more avidly French support was cultivated.

Foreign policy was an issue that divided Turkish and Arab elites within the reform movement. France encouraged Tunisia's

assertion of its independence from the Ottoman Empire, a policy favored by the Turks in Tunis because it assured the continuance of the bey's authoritarian regime and their privileged position with it. During the same period, however, Britain backed the formal restoration of Ottoman sovereignty in Tunisia. Committed to propping up the Ottoman Empire as a barrier against Russian expansion, the British not only guaranteed its territorial integrity but also looked for opportunities to draw parts of the diffuse empire toward Constantinople and away from the influence of other European powers. Tunisia's Arab elite preferred the British approach, believing that the connection with a reformed and revitalized Ottoman Empire would promote internal reform in their own country that would extend to them greater participation in government.

Ahmed Bey pawned the family jewels to send 4,000 Tunisian troops to the Crimean War (1854–56) and to become in one stroke an ally of all the contenders for influence in his country. Tunisia was represented at the peace conference in Paris, where the Ottoman Empire agreed to further constitutional and legal reforms proposed by its European allies, Britain and France, whose consuls in Tunis picked up the theme by recommending extension of similar reforms to Tunisia “so as to be”—in the words of the British consul—“as modern as Turkey.” Tunisian reformers were receptive and saw in suggestions for the constitutional restructuring of the government a means for achieving rapid modernization and economic development. Unquestionably, however, the immediate purpose of the European consuls in proposing specific legal reforms was to make it easier for European commercial interests to function in a country where Islamic codes prohibited equal application of the law to non-Muslims engaged in business there. In this divergence of interests lay the essential contradiction in the reform movement. For the Tunisian elite, reform was necessary to maintain the country's independence. But reform and modernization also led inevitably to greater European participation in Tunisia's political and economic affairs.

### **Constitution of 1861**

In 1857 Ahmed Bey's successor, Mohamed Bey (1855–59), issued the so-called Fundamental Pact, which spelled out the principles regulating relations between the bey and his subjects and foreigners residing in Tunisia. The document, dictated to the beylicate by the French consul in Tunis, also allowed foreigners to own



property in Tunisia and guaranteed them equal protection under the law.

The Fundamental Pact paved the way for the appointment of Kherredin Pasha, a Circassian Mamluk with long service in Tunisia and the son-in-law of Mustafa Khaznader, to draw up a constitution. Promulgated by Mohamed al Sadok Bey (1859–73) in 1861, it was the first written constitution in the Islamic world. Prefaced by a declaration of rights, the constitution of 1861 provided for a limited and hereditary monarchy in which the bey served as head of state and the government was headed by the prime minister of the bey's cabinet. The government was not directly responsible to the bey, however, but to the newly established Supreme Council, consisting of 60 members chosen on a rotating basis by the bey. The Supreme Council initiated legislation, approved tax measures, supervised the military establishment, and appointed public officials. Kherredin, author of the constitution, was chosen to be the body's first president. In what was a major innovation for a Muslim country, the constitution of 1861 also created the secular Supreme Court, empowered to review decisions of the sharia courts.

The constitutional reforms responded to the demand of an urban elite whose political and economic interests they clearly favored, but they held less appeal for the rest of Tunisia. The introduction of constitutional government was associated in the popular mind with new and burdensome taxes, including levies on date and olive trees, that were more efficiently collected than in the past by guids, appointed by the Supreme Council, who were often strangers in their jurisdictions. Opponents of the constitution also objected to concessions granted by the government to European companies to operate public services. Despite constitutional restraints imposed on the executive power of the beylicate, Kherredin resigned his office in frustration over the Supreme Council's inability to check the excesses of Mustafa Khaznader.

The most serious criticism of the constitutional government came from provincial notables and tribal chiefs—the traditional leadership in the countryside—who recognized the constitution of 1861 for what it was intended to be, an attack on local and tribal autonomy that from the standpoint of the reformers was essential for the creation of a modern nation-state. Regional interests were therefore set in opposition to the influence of Tunis and the Sahil, where reform and the foreign investment it encouraged had been welcomed. Opponents of the constitution appealed over the bey to the Ottoman sultan for relief. Rising popular resentment was capped by a serious tribal rebellion that forced the suspension of

the constitution in 1864. Although Tunisia's experiment with constitutional government had failed for want of deep-rooted popular support, the modern nationalist movement was premised on the demand for the restoration of the constitution in 1861.

### **Kherredin**

Mustafa Khaznader's policies and the corruption of his government had by 1864 plunged Tunisia into an economic crisis. When money became scarce, new currency was issued that was so devalued that foreign traders refused to accept it as a medium of exchange. Devaluation depressed the export price of Tunisian grain and at the same time made it impossible for Tunisian buyers to import necessities. These difficulties were compounded by bad harvests, famine, and plague, which afflicted the country in 1867 and for several years thereafter. By 1868 Tunisia was bankrupt, and the government was unable to meet its financial commitments abroad. That same year, the bey agreed to the establishment of the International Financial Commission (IFC) in Tunis, whose members included French, British, and Italian controllers charged with reorganizing Tunisia's finances to ensure payment of the country's existing debt and to curb further expenditures. Kherredin served as the Tunisian representative on the commission.

In 1871 Tunisia reaffirmed the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan, thereby obtaining a British guarantee of its territorial integrity. Control of foreign relations was surrendered to the Porte. Although the IFC retained jurisdiction over economic affairs, absolute authority over all other internal matters was left to the bey and his ministers. Mustafa Khaznader was finally removed in 1873 from the office that he had held for over 36 years and was succeeded as prime minister by his son-in-law and long-time political rival, Kherredin.

Kherredin had begun his career in Tunisia as a soldier and, after rising rapidly in the beylicate's administration, was entrusted with diplomatic missions abroad. He was already a leader of the reform movement when chosen to draw up the constitution and, after its suspension, wrote a learned treatise dealing with the question of political and social reform in Muslim states. Positive in his expectations of what could be achieved, Kherredin was also realistic in his aims for Tunisia.

As prime minister, Kherredin faced the problem of satisfying the European powers represented on the IFC, while working to preserve Tunisia's independence and, although he was a moderniz-

er, the Muslim character of its society. Like Ahmed Bey, he was concerned with maintaining the army as a symbol of sovereignty, but he also saw the practical need for overhauling the bureaucracy. Perhaps the outstanding achievement of his regime was the founding of the Sadiki College, a secondary school with a modern curriculum intended to train candidates for the civil service.

Cooperating closely with the IFC, Kherredin introduced fiscal reforms that markedly improved Tunisia's financial position, but European opposition stymied other essential reforms. Tunisia's export trade in grain was locked into the European market system and was monopolized by French and Italian merchants. Land exploitation by foreigners, allowed after 1857, was capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive and had led to the eviction of peasants from their farmsteads, resulting in severe rural unemployment. Kherredin's efforts at agrarian reform to correct the situation drew him into conflict with entrenched European landowning interests.

Having spent his life as a professional servant of the state dependent on the bey's patronage, Kherredin was without a political base of his own in the country. As a reforming prime minister he met with opposition from the followers of Mustafa Khaznader, whom he had deprived of office, and from traditionalists who had marked him as the candidate of the Europeans. Kherredin had indeed been given a mandate by the European powers to make Tunisia safer for foreign investment, but when he appeared to be succeeding all too well in modernizing the country's political and economic structure, they cooled toward his regime and finally withdrew support. Under French pressure, Kherredin was dismissed from office in 1877 and replaced by Mustafa ben Ismail, a French puppet who compounded corruption with incompetence in office.

Kherredin was called to Constantinople, where he was made grand vizier to the Ottoman sultan, Abd al Hamid. It is one of the ironies of the history of Tunisia that a Circassian Mamluk came to be regarded as the father of Tunisian nationalism.

## **The French Protectorate**

At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Britain agreed to allow France a "free hand" in Tunisia in exchange for French acquiescence to the leasehold on Cyprus that the British had acquired from Turkey. It was accepted among the European powers that France planned to occupy Tunisia, but no excuse for French intervention presented itself until April 1881, when a punitive expedition was launched into Tunisian territory, ostensibly in pursuit of

Khumiri tribesmen who had raided across the border into Algeria. The considerable force of more than 40,000 men—which the French explained was necessary to avoid undue bloodshed—was more effectively used in overawing the Tunisian government, however, than it was in hunting down nomadic tribesmen. French cavalry advanced on Tunis while seaborne units landed in Bizerte and occupied the port, considered potentially the best naval base in North Africa but far from Khumiri country.

As French troops were poised near the capital, the French representative in Tunis confronted the bey at the Bardo Palace with a treaty, a draft of which reportedly had lain for years in the files of the French Foreign Ministry, that sanctioned the temporary military occupation of strategic points in Tunisia to put an end to disorders there. Theoretically, Tunisian sovereignty was left unimpaired, although a resident minister was posted to Tunis to represent France and to advise the bey. Sadok Bey signed the Bardo Treaty on the condition that French troops not enter the city.

Long-range French political and economic interests in Tunisia went well beyond the momentary question of frontier security. Sadok Bey's tilt toward Italy had given substance to French alarm at Italian claims to a sphere of influence in Tunisia that were based both on geography and on the presence of a well-established colony of Italian settlers in the country. The French action was understood, therefore, as preemptive intervention. In the economic sphere the French argued that Tunisia was a backward and impoverished country incapable of coping with its indebtedness.

Once the Khumiri had submitted, most of the French forces were promptly withdrawn, leaving behind only small garrisons to enforce the treaty's provisions. No sooner had the French pullout begun, however, than the bey, influenced by Mustafa ben Ismail, disavowed the treaty on the grounds that he had signed it under duress. In the belief that a show of force would bring Turkish aid, the Tunisians attacked the French garrisons. Reacting swiftly, the French invaded Tunisia for the second time in a matter of weeks, occupied Tunis, and subjected Sfax to a naval bombardment. By the end of October resistance in the north had been crushed, and in November Gabès fell to the French. In the south, however, Ali ben Khalifa, a tribal chieftain assisted by the Turks in Tripoli, held out through the winter of 1882–83. In June 1883 a humiliated Ali Bey (1882–1900) agreed to the Al Marsa Convention, which confirmed Tunisian acceptance of the Bardo Treaty and added provisions whereby “in order to facilitate to the French Government the exercise of its *protectorate* His Highness the Bey of Tunis en-

gages to make such administrative, judicial, and financial reforms as the French Government considers useful.”

Under the protectorate Tunisia was governed according to a system of dual sovereignties in which the de facto sovereignty of France was superimposed on the de jure sovereignty of the beylicate. Tunisia remained what it had been for 300 years, the “Regency of Tunis.” The preexisting form of beylical government was maintained intact, and the established political elite continued to function within it. Although the elite readily assimilated French values, Tunisian society retained its own social standards and a tradition of higher culture that were the core of the country’s sense of nationhood. The demographic impact of the protectorate was not severe in Tunisia, where European corporate development of the land rather than European settlement remained the rule.

The protectorate succeeded where Tunisian reformers had not in modernizing administration and providing Tunisia with a government that could collect taxes efficiently, ensure the rule of law applied throughout the country, and stimulate the growth of a modern economic and social service infrastructure. Fiscal affairs were rigorously supervised, and gradually Tunisia achieved financial stability and even prosperity. Railroads, port facilities, hospitals, schools, and sanitation works were constructed under French direction. Corporate investment from France created a modern agricultural sector, specializing in olive and grape production, that turned Tunisia once again into a net exporter of foodstuffs. Tunisia’s phosphate reserves were exploited and ancillary industries developed.

The standard for French administration in Tunisia was set early by Pierre Paul Cambon, resident minister from 1882 to 1885, then resident general until 1886. Cambon, who distinguished himself as a diplomat later in his career, pressed for the formal declaration of a protectorate after the breakdown of the Bardo Treaty and is credited with drafting the Al Marsa Convention, in which the term *protectorate* was used for the first time to describe the relationship between Tunisia and France. An ardent republican suspicious of the military, Cambon firmly established civilian control over the protectorate. On his recommendation, Tunisia’s foreign debt was consolidated in a single 125 million franc loan from France, which eliminated the need for the multinational IFC and, with it, direct British and Italian influence on Tunisia’s financial affairs.

Cambon, more than most of his successors, was scrupulous in observing the legal prerogatives of the bey as a sovereign monarch who had contracted with France to develop his country’s adminis-

trative institutions and economy. He was conscious that France had definite responsibilities in Tunisia beyond colonial aggrandizement. Despite the acknowledged contributions made by France in Tunisia after 1881, however, it must be recognized that they were accomplished primarily for the benefit of France—or, more specifically, to protect French investment in Tunisia—and that Europeans, not Tunisians, were the primary beneficiaries of Tunisia's economic development under the protectorate. An economic infrastructure was built that served the French markets to which Tunisian production was tied and bore little relation to the basic needs of the traditional sector of the economy to which the majority of Tunisians were restricted. Tunisian tax revenues paid for government-sponsored projects that improved transportation, marketing facilities, and utilities, but the income generated by these expenditures ultimately accrued to a handful of French-owned companies and large landowners and to French building contractors.

#### **Administration of the Protectorate**

After the Al Marsa Convention the bey continued to appoint a cabinet, but its members were named on the advice of the resident general, whose approval was required to validate every action taken by the beylical government. The resident general, who was responsible directly to the French foreign minister, was *ex officio* foreign minister in the Tunisian government, and his control over its foreign affairs was unquestioned. He was both the political representative of the French Republic in Tunisia and the protectorate's chief administrative officer, assisted in that task by a council of ministers composed of the bey's prime minister and two other Tunisian cabinet officers, as well as by 10 to 12 French department heads seconded for service in the Tunisian government. Although the bey was legally the source of all authority, the resident general, who was usually given considerable latitude by Paris in determining policy, exercised the beylical authority through a highly centralized administration operated by a staff of French bureaucrats whose influence stretched from the bey's palace to the lowest level of local government. After 1896 the Consultative Conference, a body composed of Tunisian delegates appointed by the resident general and representatives elected by French residents, was impaneled to advise the resident general on a broad range of topics, but it did not have the power either to introduce measures or to question executive actions. French legislation did not apply in

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Tunisia, although laws enacted in France were often introduced by beylical decrees.

Reformed local government followed recognizably traditional patterns but was made more systematic and became uniform in its organization in most parts of the country (see fig. 5). Five regions (provinces) were created (Tunis, Bizerte, Kef, Sousse, and Sfax) and were administered by French regional chiefs. The regions were subdivided into 19 districts, each under a French civil controller. These were further divided into the traditional qaidats and, in the countryside, shaykhats. Special status was given to 59 municipal communes that provided local government for the cities and larger towns in each district. In the south the so-called military territories came under the jurisdiction of French army area commanders, whose mission it was to keep the peace in the sparsely settled hinterland as well as to defend the ill-defined border with Turkish-controlled (and, after 1911, Italian-controlled) Tripolitania.

The functions of the qaid and shaykhs under the protectorate were unchanged—to collect taxes and maintain order in the countryside. A native gendarmerie served under the orders of the qaid, who worked closely with French police superintendents. Appointed by the bey on the recommendation of the resident general, the qaid and shaykhs were intended to be an important link between the French authorities and the rural population. French policy favored these secular officers over the ulama and the qadis, who had been indifferent, when not openly hostile, to the reform movement. Although drawn from the traditional leadership in the countryside, the shaykhs were increasingly resented as being agents of the French and became alienated from the people whom they governed.

The Tunisian court system, like the central administration and local government, was reformed and then operated under French tutelage. Sharia courts administered law affecting the personal status of Tunisians in such areas as marriage and inheritance, but, through usage, principles of the French legal code were gradually imposed on Islamic law. Laws of property in particular were modified in this manner. Decisions of the sharia courts affecting Europeans were automatically subject to review by civil magistrates, and all criminal cases were reserved for French courts. Appeals from both the sharia courts and the French courts in Tunisia were made in the first instance to the Court of Appeal in Algiers and ultimately to the Court of Cassation (French superior court of appeal) in Paris.

Before World War I the French army routinely stationed about 25,000 men, including units of the Foreign Legion, in Tun-

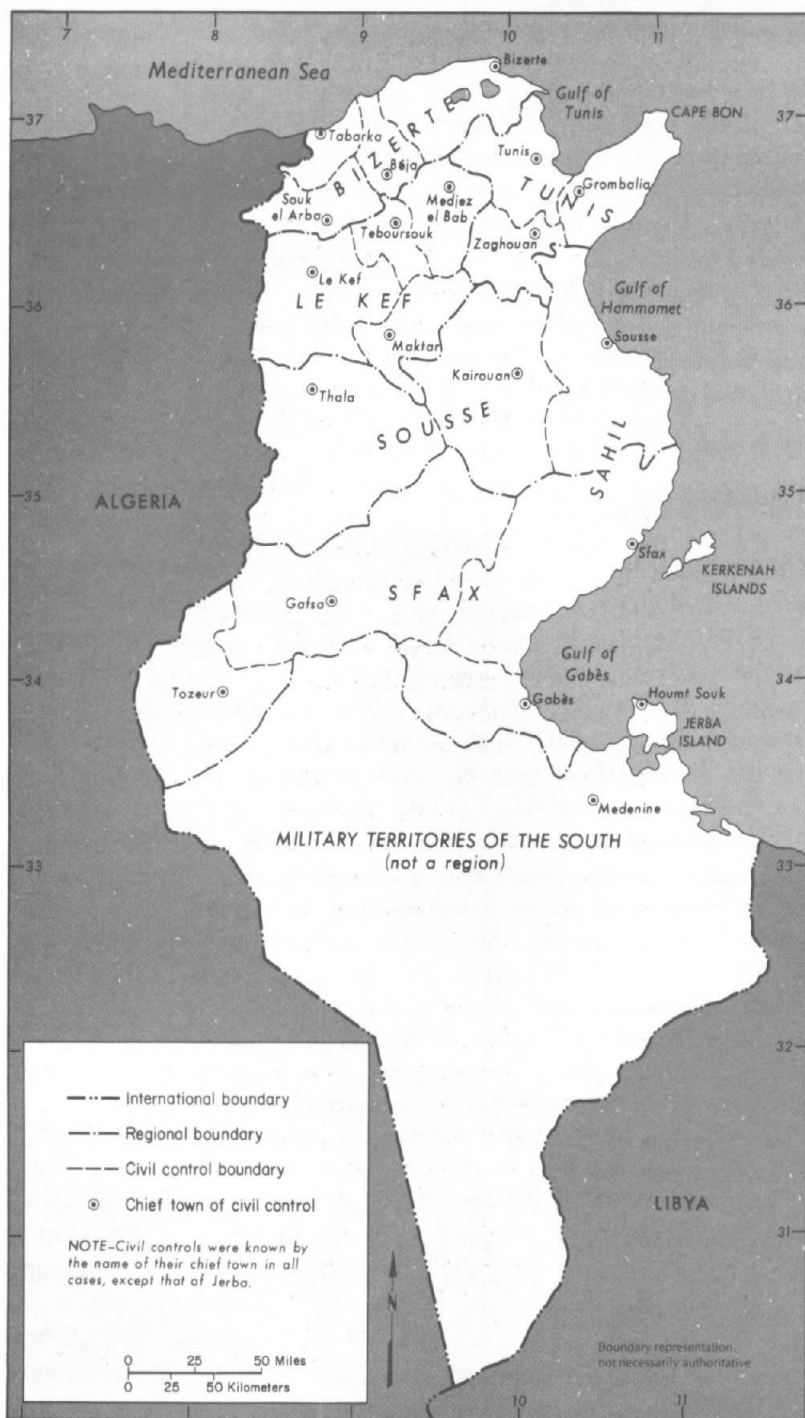


Figure 5. Tunisia under the French Protectorate, 1881-1956



sia. Tunisians as well as all French citizens resident in Tunisia were subject to French military service, although in practice few Tunisians were called because volunteers were so plentiful. Tunisian infantry regiments—*tirailleurs* (riflemen)—and mounted spahis served under French officers as part of the regular French army in Tunisia and in various parts of the French colonial empire. The bey's own French-trained "army" numbered only about 600 men and was employed for ceremonial purposes. Bizerte was developed as a major French naval base strategically located at the narrows of the Mediterranean. Observers testified that possession of Bizerte alone would have made the Tunisian protectorate worthwhile.

### Economic and Social Development

Traditional patterns of landholding in Tunisia were collective. No individual title existed for *arch* (tribal land), which was considered the inalienable property of the tribe as a whole. It did not have definite boundaries but might expand in size or shift location as the needs of the tribe, the climate, or the condition of the land changed. Under other kinds of tenure, more common in the north and in the Sahil, land was the collective possession of a family or a village. Extended use was proof of ownership, and continued use was necessary to retain it. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, about one-third of Tunisia's most productive farmland, concentrated in grain-growing areas, was *habus*—property held in perpetuity by religious institutions as endowments to maintain mosques and shrines and to support public welfare and religious education.

The bey derived part of his income from beylical or crown lands, extensive tracts acquired over the years by conquest and confiscation that, according to Muslim law, belonged to the state and passed by right to whomever ruled it. Large estates were also assigned to Turkish families and to members of the government in clientage from the bey. Beylical land was also assigned to landholders on long-term leases.

As the government's financial situation worsened in the 1850s and 1860s, beylical land was sold for ready cash and converted to freehold. The growth of a class of peasant proprietors who could operate above the subsistence level on the land that they purchased was paralleled by the increase of a rural proletariat, which had been disposed of the land confiscated by the bey to be put on sale. In 1859 sale of land to Europeans was made legal. In some cases Tunisian farmers saw their traditional lands sequestered and sold

to French-owned companies whose managers in turn hired them as laborers.

The famine and cholera epidemic that struck Tunisia in 1868 hit hardest in the most populous and productive areas. The countryside lay empty where fields had been abandoned and villages deserted. The population in marginal areas reverted to nomadism, while others fled the country. The demographic impact was devastating: Tunisia's population, estimated at 1.6 million in 1867, stood at only 900,000 in 1881 and showed no marked growth as late as 1890.

French buyers took advantage of Tunisia's distress and the beylicate's bankruptcy to acquire land abandoned during the plague years, including them in the growing European-operated modern agricultural sector that specialized in olive and grape production for export. As a result of investment by French-owned companies, France had established its economic domination over Tunisia years before the protectorate imposed political control as well.

French law recognized only individual ownership of a property, a practice that was at variance with Tunisian traditions of collective holdings. Because so much Tunisian land could not be alienated from its collective ownership under Muslim law, a legal framework was constructed through which European landowners could ensure their title to property that they had acquired. In 1885 the beylicate published a decree requiring registration of titles to land. An application for a title was then advertised. If it was not claimed by another party within a given period, the applicant received undisputed title to the property in question. Challenges to an application were considered by a mixed tribunal of Tunisian and French magistrates. The latter formed the majority on the tribunal, which usually decided in favor of European applicants. Tunisians also took advantage of the new law, however, to lay claim to tribal and other collectively held land.

By 1892 more than one-fifth of Tunisia's arable land, concentrated in the north, was French owned, but 90 percent of it was in the hands of only 16 landowners and companies engaged in capital-intensive agriculture. Less than 10 percent of the French residents were engaged in farming. In 1897 a fund was established to pay the cost of settling French colons (colonists), and the next year the beylicate allowed *habus* land to be put on the market. But, despite inducements offered by the French government and by private colonization societies in France, there was no rush of colons to Tunisia as there had been to Algeria.

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More than 10,000 Italians lived in Tunisia in 1881 as compared with fewer than 4,000 French residents, and they remained the largest ethnic group within the European community throughout the period of the protectorate. By 1901 the size of the European community had increased to approximately 130,000, of which two-thirds was Italian and among which were included a large number of Maltese. The Europeans were occupationally differentiated: the Italians, mostly Sicilians, were blue-collar workers, public utilities workers, or small farmers. The Maltese, who were British subjects, were the proverbial shopkeepers. Tunisians rubbed shoulders constantly with these Europeans, confronted them in the marketplace, and competed with them for jobs. Shut out from the social and economic advantages that were reserved for French citizens, the Italians were held in contempt by both the Tunisians and the French. Except for members of the elite, Tunisians seldom had contact with the French—the administrators, supervisors, managers, and owners—and even the elite did not meet them on a social level.

Traditional education in Tunisia was highly developed before 1881, and the school of the Zituna Mosque in Tunis was recognized as one of the leading centers of classical Islamic studies. Under the protectorate the French residency continued to emphasize education, patronizing the Zituna Mosque school and the Muslim schools as well as Kherredin's Sadiki College. The latter was accredited as a lycée and set the standard for a bilingual, bi-cultural school system, offering instruction to a mixed student body, that was extended throughout the country. Many Tunisian graduates of these schools went on to complete their education in France. Within a generation a class of well-educated, gallicized Tunisians—the *évolués* (literally, the evolved ones)—had been created that formed a new social elite among their countrymen. Strongly influenced by French culture and political attitudes—and particularly attracted by a Cartesian, or rationalistic, inquiry, which was alien to the Islamic tradition—they nonetheless became the core of a highly motivated nationalist movement.

### **Rise of Nationalism**

Tunisian nationalism was elitist in its origins and was rooted in the schools rather than in a popular mass movement. After 1881 Kherredin's disciples at the Sadiki College continued their emphasis on political and economic modernization, which could be accomplished under French auspices, they urged, without Tunisi-

sians either approving the protectorate or openly attacking France. The nationalists in the schools initially reacted to the particular form of the protectorate that excluded Tunisians from full participation in their own government, but they stopped short of advocating a break with France. Ali Bash Hambak, an intellectual leader of graduates of the Sadiki College, argued for the selective adoption of Western scientific rationalism not only for political reform but for reinvigorating Tunisia's Arabic and Islamic culture as well. In 1896, however, Bashir Sfar, a member of Hambak's circle, broke with him and established the revivalist Khalduniya Institute, named in honor of Ibn Khaldun, which was dedicated to restricting the influence of French culture and restoring traditional Arab-Islamic culture in its pure form. Both Hambak's group from the bilingual Sadiki College and Sfar's followers at the Khalduniya Institute were eventually associated with the embryonic nationalist movement, providing it with public platforms and with an influx of articulate converts. Subsidized by the French residency, as were other Islamic institutions, the Khalduniya Institute undertook to give instruction in modern subjects to graduates of the Zituna Mosque school to enable them to compete for positions in the civil service and to enter the professions.

In 1908 the Hambak and Sfar factions reunited to form a nationalist political organization, the Young Tunisians. They were a small group, interested in efficiency rather than representative government, whose newspaper, *Le Tunisien*, was aimed at convincing liberal French readers that the Tunisian elite was capable of taking over a greater share of responsibility for the country's management. Proud of their education and accomplishments, their liberal politics, and their competence in French, they were conscious of their distinct Tunisian nationality. But popular feeling responded to bread-and-butter issues. To broaden their appeal, the Young Tunisians became involved in a labor dispute in 1912 that focused on obtaining jobs for Tunisians in the public transportation system reserved for Italians. Implicated in the rioting that resulted, the Young Tunisians were disbanded, and many of their leaders were sent into exile. Despite growing discontent with the protectorate and residual pro-Turkish feeling, more than 60,000 Tunisians served in the French army during World War I, and many more tens of thousands were recruited for work in France.

Postwar Tunisian nationalism drew its inspiration as much from the French liberal thought imbibed at the schools as from the pan-Arab movement and the native traditions of Kherredin. Nationalist activists gravitated toward the Destour (literally, Constitution) Party, founded in 1920 by Abdelaziz al Thalibi, a graduate of

the Zituna Mosque school who had been one of the leaders of the Young Tunisians exiled in 1912. Typically, they came from the traditional elite—Turks from Tunis, civil servants, businessmen, merchants, and professionals—who were social conservatives and economic liberals. The Destour Party, from the start, was consciously urban and middle class in its orientation, standing aloof from working-class movements and holding few ties to the countryside. Although the nationalist movement was also Muslim in character, it met with the antipathy of the ulama as well as with the court party around the bey. The French made the error of overrating the party's importance, attempting to link it at one time with the Communists, and thereby contributed to Thalibi's prestige as a nationalist leader.

Although Thalibi denounced the protectorate, he did not propose severing Tunisia's links with France completely but advocated a formal association between the two sovereign states. In collaboration with Ahmed Saqqa, he wrote *La Tunisie martyre*, a book published in Paris in 1921 that served as the party's manifesto. It was the seminal work of Tunisian nationalist political literature. Thalibi held that there was a viable Tunisian state, capable of modernization under its own constitution, before the French occupation and that France, whose political ideals were admired, had betrayed its own liberal values in depriving Tunisia of its independence. He looked to the Fundamental Pact and the constitution of 1861 as the basis of which Tunisian independence could be restored.

The Destourian reform program was gradualist, and, in order to reassure the French, Thalibi reiterated that the party was not revolutionary in its aims. In fact, time and events caused the Destourians to modify Kherredin's constitution. They called for a deliberative assembly composed of both Tunisian and European representatives elected by universal suffrage. The bey's government was to be responsible to the assembly, which would have complete control over finances. Basic freedoms were to be guaranteed, and education was to be compulsory within a bilingual school system. More immediately, the Destourians, whose constituency included many civil servants, demanded appointment of Tunisians to the government positions that they were capable of filling and "equal pay for equal work" with their French colleagues.

The French residency used both the carrot and the stick in its response to the demands of the Destour Party. Minor reforms were quickly instituted to pacify Tunisian sentiment, and the Ministry of Justice was opened to Tunisian applicants; but repressive measures were taken against the most outspoken of the nationalists, and restrictions were imposed on political activities. Nasir Bey (1906–

22), provoked by the French crackdown, threatened to abdicate in solidarity with the nationalists. In 1922 the residency acquiesced further in the formation of the Grand Council, which replaced the Consultative Conference and gave Tunisians a greater voice in government, together with local councils that duplicated its work at the regional level.

Hardly comparable to the legislature envisioned by the Destourians, the Grand Council was composed of two sections—one Tunisian, elected indirectly through the regional councils, and the other European, whose delegates were elected directly or took their seats as representatives of the Chamber of Commerce. Voting by section rather than by individual delegates ensured the preponderance of the European section. To become effective, actions recommended by the Grand Council had to be ratified by the resident general, who also cast the deciding vote in case of split decisions. A mixed committee from the Grand Council was also selected to join the cabinet in its deliberations. The resident general prepared the budget in consultation with the Grand Council, but the government was in no way responsible to it for its actions.

The reform package, intended by the French to mollify nationalist sentiment and to disarm support for the Destour Party, was capped in 1923 by an offer to grant French citizenship to Tunisians who qualified by education or service. The nationalists, as well as members of the bey's entourage and religious leaders, were incensed at the insensitivity of the proposal, which was recognized as an infringement of Tunisian sovereignty. To become French citizens, Muslims in Tunisia were required to accept the full jurisdiction of the French legal code, including laws affecting personal status, and to reject the competence of the religious courts. Because of the unitary nature of Islam, this meant, in effect, that a Muslim had to renounce his religion. Few Tunisians applied for French citizenship, and those who did—for the most part *évolués* who were part of the French administration—were ostracized by the Muslim community at large.

The palliative offered by minimal reform failed to stall the nationalist movement. The Destourians' demand for implementation of their full constitutional program increased in intensity during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The economic depression, which fell heavily on Tunisia, served as a catalyst for political activism. Although it had been nonviolent in its origins, the party now took Tunisian discontent into the streets. The residency was harried by strikes and by demonstrations that were put down with severity by the French police. In 1933 the resident general ordered the disbanding of the Destour Party.

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Leadership of the nationalist movement was already passing to a new generation of French-educated Tunisians, more at ease in French than in Arabic, who crystallized ideas of national identity and populism, which the old leadership had been unable and unwilling to do, and who adopted tactics that emphasized constant activism and violent resistance to the protectorate. Younger members of the Destour Party had argued that nationalism, to be effective against the French, had to break loose from its traditional power base among the urban elite and mobilize mass support. Among the more impatient of the party activists were Mahmoud Materi, Tahar Sfar, and a lawyer named Habib Bourguiba. They came from the Sahil, an area less affected by European landholdings than the north, more North African in character, and less cosmopolitan than Tunis. But they were more Westernized than the older Destourian leaders and lacked their strong religious sympathies. All had been educated at the Sadiki College and in France, where they had been profoundly influenced by the ideas of the intellectual left. In 1934 Bourguiba and his colleagues formed the Neo-Destour Party and called in the pages of their newspaper, *La Voix du Tunisien*, for responsible constitutional government. Like the old Destourians, they advocated the creation of a legislature representing Tunisians and Europeans on an equal basis and an end to the protectorate. Although supporting the beylicate as a necessary expedient during the hoped-for transition to independence, they looked forward to the establishment of a Tunisian republic.

Support for the Neo-Destour Party came from artisans, shopkeepers, and peasant proprietors, who in the midst of the depression of the 1930s were more interested in maintaining their standard of living than in expelling French, as well as from students and members of the professional class who had backed the old Destourians. The new party's cadres were highly disciplined and organized in cells throughout the country. Working relations were formed with student, labor, and agricultural organizations. French authorities and the colons were terrified by the appeal and effectiveness of the new nationalist party, and its organizers, including Bourguiba, were arrested and jailed. But the Neo-Destour Party cells continued to function underground and to recruit new members.

The victory of the Popular Front in France in 1936 and the formation of a left-wing government under Léon Blum held out hope to the Tunisian nationalists, who redoubled agitation for political and economic reforms and abolition of the despised citizenship law. Released from prison, Bourguiba resumed leadership of the Neo-Destour Party. Faced with opposition within the nationalist

movement from a revived moderate Destour Party, Bourguiba's party became more radical, promoting labor unrest, work stoppages, and demonstrations through the summer of 1937. Blum's government fell after 15 months in power, having achieved little in the way of reaching a settlement in Tunisia, except to have aroused nationalist anticipation of reform. The colons, who had become increasingly defensive as they saw their privileged position threatened, petitioned the new government in Paris to take effective action against the nationalist demonstrations. On April 9, 1938—commemorated in Tunisia as Martyrs' Day—122 Tunisians were killed in nationalist-inspired rioting. The nationalist parties were outlawed once again, and Bourguiba was arrested.

### **France and Italy**

The "Tunisian question" had remained alive as an issue in Italy after 1881. Although Italy reluctantly acquiesced to the French occupation of Tunisia, a country that it also coveted, Italian public figures periodically gave voice to a lingering resentment of France for having "cheated" them of Tunisia. Complaints by Italian settlers against the French administration were a continuing irritant in relations between France and Italy, but Italians retained a special position in Tunisia, operating a separate school system sponsored by the Italian government. Italy's occupation of Libya in 1911 gave it a common colonial border with the French in Tunisia. France and Italy were allies in World War I, but relations steadily deteriorated after the rise of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy in 1922. Italian settlers in Tunisia came to be viewed as a potential security threat.

Legislation in 1921 provided that all Europeans born after that date in Tunisia would automatically have French nationality. Protests were lodged by both Italy and Britain against compulsory naturalization, which would entail liability for conscription, and in 1923 the British put the matter before the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague. The court found that Tunisian-born children of British subjects—the Maltese—would be entitled to reject French nationality, although that right could not be applied to succeeding generations. Some Italians, made uneasy by the rise of fascism in their homeland, voluntarily sought and received French citizenship, however. As a result, the 1924–25 period marked the point at which for the first time French citizens accounted for more than half of the European community in Tunisia, numbering nearly 200,000. Italians were also under economic



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pressure to become French citizens, which made them eligible for better pay—particularly in public utilities, where many of them were employed.

In 1935 Mussolini, who was anxious to ensure French noninvolvement in his Ethiopian campaign, agreed to a treaty proposed by French premier Pierre Laval that would have gradually rescinded the special legal status of Italians in Tunisia and phased out their autonomous school system. The treaty also determined that after a 30-year transitional period, all Tunisian-born offspring of Italian parents would become French citizens. It is doubtful if Mussolini, who at that time already had reason to anticipate a radical alteration of the balance of power in Europe, considered these concessions to be permanently binding.

While on tour in Libya two years later, Mussolini proclaimed himself the “Sword of Islam” and offered Italy as the protector of Muslims under French and British rule. Italy became more reckless in putting forward its claim to Tunisia—as well as in citing its irredentist aspirations for Corsica and Nice—and in 1938 openly denounced the French protectorate. Frightened at the prospect of an Italian invasion, Tunisians rallied behind France as Europe moved toward war, and they demonstrated their support on the occasion of French premier Edouard Daladier’s visit to Tunis in January 1939.

### **World War II**

After the fall of France in June 1940, Tunisia’s border with Libya and the large naval base at Bizerte were demilitarized. Tunisian ports and airfields were used, however, to give logistical support to Axis forces in Libya. The French colons were generally sympathetic to the Vichy regime, and Mussolini’s Fascists had for years been building areas of support in the Italian community. Shortly after the French surrender, a pro-Vichy naval officer was appointed resident general in Tunis and given broad responsibilities for defense.

Allied landings in Algeria and Morocco in November 1942, code-named Operation Torch, had as an objective the speedy occupation of Tunisia, with the cooperation of French authorities and armed forces there. Admiral Jean Darlan, the French high commissioner in North Africa, who had initially offered resistance to the landings, ordered a cease-fire when word reached him that the Germans had moved into Vichy-controlled France, and he surrendered Algiers to Allied commander Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisen-

hower. In Tunis the resident general hesitated to act on Darlan's orders and awaited confirmation from Vichy. His delay allowed quick-moving German forces to relieve the French garrisons and occupy key positions in Tunisia ahead of the Allies.

American airborne units took Gafsa in mid-November, but Allied attempts to mount a concentrated drive on Tunis before German reinforcements could be introduced failed. Allied air and naval power cut off supplies to the Axis forces by sea, but between December 1942 and March 1943 more than 40,000 German and Italian troops were ferried by air from Sicily to Tunisia. Supported at one point during the campaign by an estimated one-quarter of the total German tactical air force, they held nine American, British, and Free French divisions along a line that stretched from the north coast down the spine of the Eastern Dorsale to the desert, while 14 divisions of General (later Field Marshal) Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps retreated westward across Libya and into Tunisia before the advancing British Eighth Army (see fig. 6).

In January Rommel hurled an armored attack at the untried United States II Corps and broke through at the strategic Kasserine Pass, throwing Allied forces to his rear offbalance while the Afrika Korps prepared to defend the Mareth Line in the south. The Mareth Line was a 35-kilometer-long defense system constructed by the French before the war against the threat of an Italian invasion. When frontal assaults against the Axis positions were turned back, Eighth Army commander Bernard Montgomery sent the New Zealand Division on a wide end run around the German defenses, attacking through the narrow defile at Djebel Tebaga and compelling General Jürgen von Armin, who had succeeded the ailing Rommel in command of the Afrika Korps, to abandon the Mareth Line in March. Early in April, units of II Corps advancing from the west linked up with the Eighth Army at the Wadi al Akarit. Von Armin's skillful withdrawal, however, saved the bulk of his army to take up the defense of Tunis along a new line at Enfidaville. The Enfidaville front held firm, but at the end of April the Allies opened an offensive from the west. On May 7 the British took Tunis and II Corps entered Bizerte, trapping tens of thousands of Axis troops between their pincers. Meanwhile, a British sweep through Cape Bon cut off the remaining Germans and Italians facing the Eighth Army at Enfidaville. Axis resistance in Tunisia ceased on May 13, and the North African phase of the war was brought to a close. Fewer than 700 of the 250,000 German and Italian troops engaged in the battle of Tunisia escaped death or capture. Control of air bases in Tunisia and the naval facility at

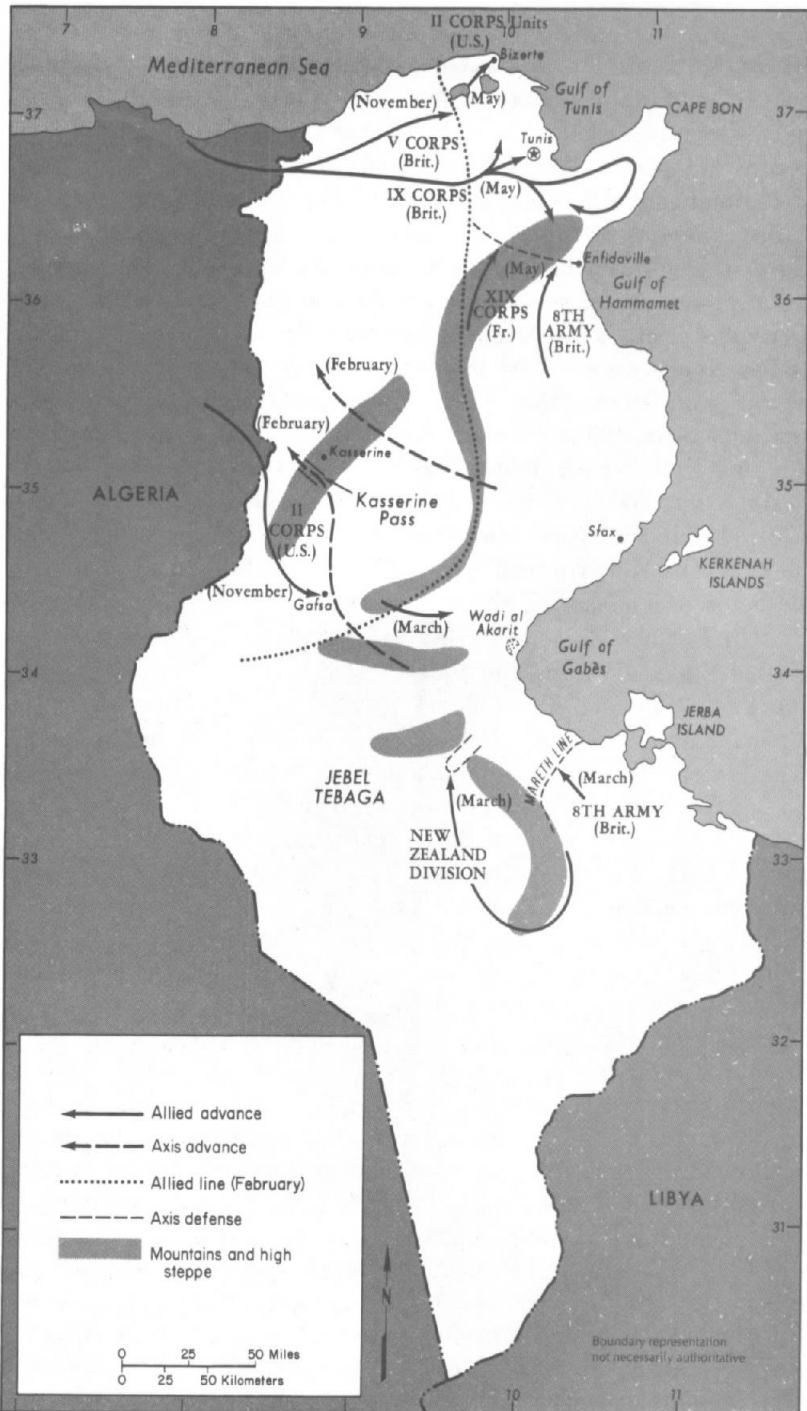


Figure 6. The Battle for Tunisia, November 1942 to May 1943

Bizerte was crucial to the success of the subsequent Allied invasion of Sicily and the mainland of Italy.

## **Bourguiba's Tunisia**

When it was dissolved for the second time in 1938, the Neo-Destour Party had an active membership of approximately 100,000. Its underground activities were directed after Bourguiba's imprisonment by an executive committee, the Political Bureau. Some nationalists at the lower level of party echelons urged support for Germany in 1939, contending that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," but their enthusiasm for the Axis waned when Italy, which had annexationist designs on Tunisia, entered the war shortly before the fall of France. More significant, Bourguiba had spoken from prison in favor of cooperation with France from the outset of the war. He continued to oppose collaboration after the French defeat in 1940, when he was transferred to a more secure prison facility in Marseilles by the Vichy regime. The Germans freed Bourguiba after the Allied landings in North Africa, lionized him and other nationalist leaders in Rome, where they were brought for talks, and then repatriated him to Axis-occupied Tunisia.

Bourguiba anticipated the Allied victory in the European war and swung his support behind the Free French. An instinctive liberal, he expressed confidence that "the whole of France, once liberated from the Nazi yoke, would not forget . . . her true friends, those who stood by her in the days of trial." Once the Free French were established in Tunisia, Bourguiba, together with Musif Bey (1926-43), proposed a gradual evolution toward internal autonomy for the country. Ignored by French authorities, Bourguiba appealed to the British and Americans to bring influence to bear on Free French leader Charles de Gaulle to grant political reform in Tunisia. Through the United States consul in Tunis, Hooker Doolittle, who had advocated United States support for Tunisian independence, Bourguiba made direct contact with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Late in 1943 Musif Bey was deposed by the French on the pretext that he had collaborated with the enemy. Fearing that similar charges would be leveled against him, Bourguiba spent the years until 1950 pleading the case of Tunisian independence in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.

Agitation for political reform continued to mount in Bourguiba's absence as Tahar Ben Ammar, moderate president of the Tunisian section of the Grand Council, joined a group of 80 "nota-

bles" to petition the French government for internal autonomy. In 1946 an autonomous trade union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Général des Travailleurs Tunisiens—UGTT), backed by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), broke away from the communist-dominated French labor organization. Led by a onetime trolley driver, Ferhat Hached, the UGTT cooperated closely with the Neo-Destour Party in efforts to redefine Tunisia's relationship with France.

### **Toward Independence**

In 1950 Prime Minister Mohamed Shanniq formed a new government, one that for the first time since the Al Marsa Convention had a Tunisian majority in the cabinet. Salah Ben Youssef, the Neo-Destour secretary general, joined the government as minister of justice, but it was Bourguiba who went to Paris to lay before the French government a program for independence that included provisions to create a national legislature and emphasized demands for civil rights. The Tunisian proposal also insisted on maintaining cultural, economic, and military ties with France. The French government refused out of hand to give up direct participation by French officials in the Tunisian government, but Foreign Minister Maurice Schuman confirmed that a newly appointed resident general "had been given the task of leading Tunisia to independence."

The residency offered only minor reforms, all of them eventually rejected by the nationalists. Terrorist groups directed attacks against French authorities and colons, who in turn formed counter-terrorist vigilante units. The residency retaliated with a crackdown on all nationalists, including moderates as well as those extremists who had engaged in terrorist activities. In January 1952 the French demanded that Al Amin Bey (1943–57) dismiss Shanniq as prime minister and, when the bey refused to comply, arrested Bourguiba, Shanniq, and most of his ministers. Ben Youssef, however, escaped the French net and fled to Egypt, where he fell increasingly under the influence of the pan-Arab nationalism of Gamal Abdul Nasser. In exile, Ben Youssef became a vocal exponent of violent revolution.

The arrests intensified nationalist bitterness toward the protectorate and produced two years of terrorist violence, rioting, and strikes. The UGTT's Hached, a voice of moderation, was murdered by colon vigilantes, who thereby cut off a valuable channel for dialogue between the nationalists and the residency. Meanwhile, France's ability to cope with the growing unrest was compromised

by its own political instability that had brought down five governments in two years and had left the country without a government for more than three months during that period. Tunisia, however, was a minor concern in Paris when compared with the debacle in Indochina in the spring of 1954.

Early in 1954 Bourguiba was released from prison to negotiate with French premier Pierre Mendès-France. The nationalists and the French government were still deadlocked between Tunisian demands for full independence and the French plan, which called for internal autonomy despite vigorous objections from the colons. But Bourguiba showed a willingness to accept what France was prepared to offer while pressing for further concessions. In July Mendès-France, who had just concluded the dismantling of the French colonial empire in Indochina, flew to Tunis and issued the dramatic Declaration of Carthage, which recognized Tunisia's internal autonomy. The French preferred to have leaders of the old Destour Party guide the new semi-independent country, but continuing violence persuaded them to bring in Bourguiba, who made it clear that he accepted autonomy only as the first step toward full independence. Although he functioned as the power behind the new government, he refused to take part in it formally while the French presence remained.

The next major step toward the fulfillment of Bourguiba's demand for full independence came in June 1955, when French premier Edgar Faure and Tunisian premier Tahar Ben Ammar signed a series of agreements in Paris. The six agreements covered internal administration, status of residents, judicial reform, administrative and technical cooperation, cultural relations, and economic and financial relations. The most significant aspect of the agreements was the abrogation of Article I of the Al Marsa Convention of 1883, which gave the French resident general control over internal government. However, the Bardo Treaty of 1881, by which France obtained responsibility for Tunisia's foreign affairs and defense, remained in force.

Bourguiba endorsed the agreements as part of his pragmatic strategy for achieving independence with measured steps, but Ben Youssef, a close collaborator for many years, broke with him on the issue. Ben Youssef, who had returned to Tunisia, and the left-wing faction supporting him held out for immediate independence and contested Bourguiba's leadership of the Neo-Destour Party. When the party congress backed Bourguiba's gradualist policy, Ben Youssef returned to Cairo to lead an opposition movement from exile. Guerrilla units loyal to him conducted military operations against both the French and the new Tunisian government.

The agreements, as they affected relations between the bey as monarch and the French government, required certain changes in Tunisia's governmental structure. By decree in September 1955, Al Amin Bey reaffirmed his absolute power but agreed to accept the advice of his prime minister, who was the president of the Council of Ministers (cabinet). While legislative and executive power remained formally in the hands of the bey, in effect the decree required the bey to have the approval of the full Council of Ministers before issuing a law. It also authorized elections for a constituent assembly and gave that assembly the right to establish the form of government that it chose for Tunisia.

The bey, aware of the threat to the monarch posed by a popularly elected assembly that was likely to be republican in its sympathies, was pressured into signing the decree for the Constituent Assembly by Bourguiba, who threatened to expose the bey's request that the French remain in Tunisia. Shortly thereafter the bey ratified Bourguiba's electoral law, which provided for voting for party lists rather than for individual candidates. The law meant that party headquarters would select the candidates and that party lists would sweep the elections, although some effort was made to represent other interests in the assembly by consultation with labor, professional, and farmer organizations and by formation of the so-called National Front.

### **Independent Tunisia**

An agreement between France and Morocco early in 1956 indicated that Morocco, which had been a French protectorate since 1912, would soon gain complete independence, and it was hoped that the forthcoming election of the Constituent Assembly would provide a means for pressing Tunisia's case for independence. On March 20, 1956, the patience of the Neo-Destour Party leaders was rewarded by the signing of a protocol that abrogated the Bardo Treaty of 1881 and recognized Tunisia as an independent state. The portfolios of the two ministries vacated by French officials—foreign affairs and defense—were taken by Bourguiba.

With independence the Neo-Destour Party, which had been jarred by the dissent from Ben Youssef's faction, faced the problem of consolidating its leadership and replacing the struggle for national independence with the building of national consensus as the party's primary goal. Expelled from the party for his opposition to Bourguiba, Ben Youssef organized a leftist opposition party that continued the guerrilla war against the Neo-Destour government.

The crisis ended only when a French military operation forced the Youssefists to lay down their arms in June, three months after independence. Ben Youssef, who had earlier been condemned to death in absentia for having plotted against Bourguiba's life, was assassinated in Frankfurt in 1961.

On March 25, 1956, some 84 percent of the registered voters went to the polls to elect candidates of the National Front, who were for the most part members of the Neo-Destour Party, to the Constituent Assembly. Bourguiba was elected president of the assembly by acclamation at its first session held two weeks later, and Ahmed Ben Salah was elected vice president. The assembly then divided its 98 members into a number of committees, each charged with drafting a part of the new constitution. Within a week Article I had been unanimously adopted. It declared Tunisia to be a free, independent, sovereign state, with Islam its official religion and Arabic its official language. On April 15 the bey called on Bourguiba to form the new government.

Independence and the election of the Constituent Assembly left the constitutional base of the Tunisian government as it had been at the time of the decree of September 1955: The bey promulgated laws as decrees with the unanimous consent of his Council of Ministers. The Western-educated leaders of the Neo-Destour Party were instinctive republicans who had little affection for the beylicate, and they were far from satisfied with this arrangement. The aged Al Amin Bey himself did not command much respect. He had increasingly withdrawn from public activity as the nationalists took charge of Tunisian politics after the 1955 conventions so that he counted little as a political force, and the ostentatious living of members of his family further detracted from his reputation. In July 1957 the Constituent Assembly, which had authority to determine the form of government, unanimously voted to depose the bey and abolish the monarchy, declaring Tunisia a republic. Bourguiba was named president of the republic and given the bey's full executive and legislative powers as head of state until the assembly could produce a constitution.

During the two years of his provisional presidency, Bourguiba promulgated by executive decree a number of far-reaching reforms that fulfilled—and went beyond—the promises made by the Neo-Destour Party before independence. The Party had been a secular nationalist movement, and, although it had not rejected traditional Islam, its program had not invited the participation of religious leaders. Once in power Bourguiba set about to eliminate religious regulations and customs that were considered “obsolete” in a modern country. Religious courts were abolished, even though this





President Habib Bourguiba,  
Tunisia's Supreme Combatant  
Courtesy Embassy of Tunisia,  
Washington

meant the forced retirement of many socially prominent judges. Laws governing marriage and the status of women were revised, giving Tunisian women legal rights comparable to those pertaining in France. At a later date, abortion and birth control were legalized. The Zituna Mosque school was absorbed into the new University of Tunis, which was to be the showplace of Tunisia's modernization. The *habus* system of landholding was abolished and agrarian reform instituted. A personal status law required all births and deaths to be registered and required each Tunisian national to adopt a surname, a rationalization that even the French had not proposed, thus reducing the confusion of names common in traditional Arab society. In his zeal for reform, however, Bourguiba occasionally appeared to overstep the bounds of propriety in a Muslim society. He was compelled by popular resistance, for instance, to relax his public effort to push a 1961 recommendation that Tunisians abandon fasting during Ramadan, a practice that is one of the traditional five pillars of Islam.

Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly committees had revised the draft of the constitution along lines that would make Tunisia a presidential republic. The crisis generated by the French bombardment of Algerian rebel positions inside Tunisia in 1958 interrupted plenary discussions in the assembly, providing Bourguiba with the

necessary time to consolidate his power and shape an answer to the crucial constitutional question—that of the relationship between the executive powers of the president and the legislative powers of the new National Assembly. When the Constitution was finally promulgated on June 1, 1959, its most striking feature was the strong position accorded the president of the republic, an office that critics charged had been tailored expressly for Bourguiba.

### **Relations with France**

In spite of its many links with the West, independent Tunisia was fundamentally nonaligned in its foreign policy. Tunisia attached great importance to its membership in the United Nations (UN). Although it sought to increase economic cooperation in the Maghrib and was a member of the League of Arab States (Arab League), the Bourguiba regime was intensely suspicious of appeals for Arab unity and avoided a close identification with regional blocs. After independence Tunisia retained its closest ties with France.

More than 3,000 French officials remained behind in Tunisia to assist in the transition to independence. French nationals were sent to give technical assistance and to staff schools and medical facilities. The French armed forces retained bases in Tunisia, and the status of French-owned businesses and property remained unchanged.

Despite his working relationship with France, Bourguiba simultaneously lent his support to Algerian nationalists whose war of liberation had broken out only a few months after Tunisia was granted its independence. The Algerian government-in-exile had headquarters in Tunis, and about 25,000 Algerian rebel troops were based in sanctuaries inside Tunisia. Tens of thousands of Algerian refugees fled to Tunisia to escape the war. In 1957 France halted economic assistance and arms deliveries to Tunisia, and the French army constructed a heavily patrolled system of electrified barbed-wire fences—known as the Morice Line—along the Algerian border with Tunisia to discourage infiltration from Tunisian sanctuaries.

In February 1958 French aircraft bombed the Tunisian border town of Saqiyat Sidi Youssef, which the Algerians reportedly used as a base of operations. The popular reaction to the incident among Tunisians was intense, and French troops in Tunisia were confined to their bases. Tensions were eased a few months later after de Gaulle came to power in France, and the two govern-

ments agreed in June that French troops would be withdrawn gradually from all areas except the base at Bizerte.

For a time, French-Tunisian relations ran smoothly, despite the continuing war in Algeria. In 1959 the customs union between the two countries was abolished, but Tunisia was allowed preferential tariffs and remained in the Franc Zone. Tunisia also pursued associated status in the European Economic Community (EEC) with French backing. Over the objections of the Algerian nationalists, Tunisia allowed a French-owned pipeline to be constructed across the country to transport Algerian oil. In early 1961 Bourguiba met with de Gaulle in France to discuss a variety of topics, including Algeria and the status of Bizerte.

As French-Algerian negotiations moved toward acceptance of Algerian independence, however, Bourguiba apparently became concerned that Tunisia would be charged with softness for having allowed French forces to remain on its territory during the hostilities. He took the occasion of a French move to extend the runways of the military airfield at Bizerte to call for complete French withdrawal. Popular demonstrations were staged throughout the country to echo his demand, and a number of French nationals were arrested. Then, in July 1961, Tunisian irregulars attacked the base at Bizerte and fired on French aircraft. Reinforcements were flown in, and the French launched a counterattack that threw back the Tunisians, leaving about 1,000 of them dead. In the meantime, Tunisian "volunteers" had moved against the French post at Garet al Hamel in the Algerian Sahara, 15 kilometers south of Tunisia's extreme southern limits, intending to extend the country's claims in that region.

The French-Tunisian dispute was submitted to a special session of the UN General Assembly, which in August adopted a resolution recognizing Tunisia's right to demand the French withdrawal from Bizerte and called on France and Tunisia to enter immediately into negotiations. France refused to participate in the General Assembly debate; however, later in 1962 talks began on all outstanding questions troubling relations between the two countries. The atmosphere was eased by a voluntary French undertaking, completed in October 1963, to evacuate Bizerte. Negotiations led to an agreement that permitted the takeover of French-owned land with compensation from Tunisia and a guarantee for the protection of French citizens resident in Tunisia and of French investments there. France, in turn, consented to a large loan to finance Tunisian development.

Unexpectedly, however, on the next anniversary of the Bardo Treaty (May 12, 1964), Bourguiba, standing before the table on

which that treaty had been signed in 1881, announced that henceforward lands usable for farming could be held only by physical persons, i.e., not companies or corporations, of Tunisian nationality. This new law affected approximately 275,000 hectares owned by French nationals, including much of the best farmland in the country, which was nationalized without indemnity. Its enactment set off an exodus of Europeans, many of whom had been born in Tunisia. The French government reacted promptly by canceling the development loan, suspending technical assistance, and subjecting Tunisian imports to strict quotas. Only gradually were relations normalized and close French-Tunisian ties restored.

### **Destourian Socialism: Tunisia in the 1960s**

A motion was introduced at the 1955 party congress supporting the principle of economic planning, without identifying the form it was to take. The next year, however, Ben Salah, speaking as head of the UGTT, formally advocated centralized state economic planning as the basic approach for Tunisia's development effort. Bourguiba promptly rejected the idea, perhaps on the grounds that he would have to delegate too much authority to the planning agency that it envisioned, and Ben Salah was forced from the union leadership. Despite Bourguiba's opposition to centralized planning, the issue remained the subject of debate within party circles.

The economic sluggishness of the late 1950s convinced many in the party and the government of the need for long-term planning on pragmatic grounds. By 1960 the UGTT had revived its campaign for centralized state economic planning. Proponents of the scheme eventually succeeded in persuading Bourguiba that state planning offered a solution to the country's outstanding problems, and on the basis of the president's decision an entirely new course was set for its economic development. In January 1961 Ben Salah was appointed to the government as minister of state in charge of the newly created planning department. Later in the year Bourguiba formally introduced "Destourian socialism," announcing that the state would assume an interventionist role in economic affairs. Ben Salah's concept of socialism, however, proved to be much more comprehensive and far-reaching than that outlined by the president.

In the months that followed his appointment, Ben Salah increased the areas of economic activity subject to centralized plan-

ning, and as the influence of his ministry expanded, his political power became second only to that of Bourguiba.

Ben Salah's rise to prominence coincided with the apparent decline of the Neo-Destour Party's influence as a mass movement. Popular support for the regime was grounded on Bourguiba's immense personal prestige rather than on the guidance of the party. Meanwhile, within the party itself the president's handling of the Bizerte crisis had caused some important figures to question his judgment and leadership. Consequently, Bourguiba came to lean on Ben Salah for support and reassurance, and Ben Salah in turn infused the party with what passed for a dynamic ideology. Bourguiba's reliance on him increased after a plot to assassinate the president was uncovered in 1962. Youssefists and Communists were implicated in the plot, leading to the proscription of the Tunisian Communist Party (Parti Communiste Tunisien—PCT) and the discrediting of the political opposition on Ben Salah's left. By the mid-1960s Ben Salah was widely spoken of as the ailing Bourguiba's obvious successor.

Ben Salah's planning goals anticipated augmented state control of the economy and the elimination of all foreign participation. The process of economic "decolonization" included isolating the country not only from foreign investments but also from imports. Under the planning scheme, agriculture was regarded as the priority sector and was expected to satisfy the bulk of domestic food demand. Raw material exports, led by phosphates, would be relied on to earn foreign exchange for reinvestment in development. Although discouraging foreign investment, Tunisia sought and received grants and loans from multilateral sources for development projects from the United States and other countries as well as unilateral aid that financed programs in education, health care, energy, irrigation, and transportation.

From its inception, Ben Salah's brand of centralized planning, which carried with it the implicit threat of state control of the economy, was inimical to landowning and business interests that still carried some weight in the party. Attempts by Bourguiba to foster open discussion of proposed reform measures within the party broke down in the backlash of the Bizerte crisis. With a deft sense of timing, however, Bourguiba announced a major reorganization of the party in 1963 that was designed to improve the dialogue between the national leadership and local and regional branches in preparation for the next party congress, the first to be held in more than five years. Convened in October 1964, the Congress of Destiny, as it was advertised, endorsed centralized state planning and approved Destourian socialism as the party's official



Small craft along a wharf at the port of Bizerte

ideology, attempting to reconcile Bourguiba's political ethics with Ben Salah's collectivism. In keeping with its new image, the congress voted to rename the party the Destourian Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Destourien—PSD). In November, running unopposed under its banner, Bourguiba was elected to a second term as president.

While Ben Salah tightened his control over economic policy and consolidated his position in the PSD, Bourguiba turned his attention to foreign affairs and attempted to use his prestige on the international scene as a moderate Arab leader to promote a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question. In April 1965 he proposed an Arab reconciliation with Israel, in return for which Israel would allow the return of refugees and would cede territory for the creation of a Palestinian Arab state on the basis of the 1947 UN plan. Although Israel welcomed the opportunity for direct negotiations with concerned Arab states, it rejected the 18-year-old plan

for a settlement on the grounds that it was not relevant to contemporary conditions in the region. Meanwhile, Egypt and Syria denounced Bourguiba for breaking ranks with Arab solidarity by recommending a course of action that would have implied recognition of Israel. Tunisia kept a low profile officially during the Arab-Israeli June 1967 War, although rioting in Tunis was directed against Jewish residents, and the United States and British embassies were attacked by mobs. The following year, Tunisia broke relations with Syria after Damascus had condemned Bourguiba for his conciliatory attitude toward Israel. The Tunisian government also cited contacts between Syrian agents and radical groups in Tunisia as evidence of attempted subversion.

The Tunisian government had initiated agricultural cooperatives, using former *habus* land, as early as 1956. These cooperatives coexisted alongside a private sector that included peasant smallholders as well as large-scale farm proprietors. Under Ban Salah's direction, the program was enlarged by adding communal property sequestered by the government and again in 1964 to include foreign-owned land that was nationalized that year. Individual farmers, mostly smallholders, had also been allowed to buy expropriated land put up for sale by the government, but as more and more property was brought into the public sector, it became clear that the cooperative system would be developed at the expense of private ownership.

By 1968 agricultural production had fallen drastically in the public sector, in large measure as a result of unrealistic planning, incompetent management, and a reluctance among farmers to join the cooperatives. The structural failure of the cooperative system was compounded by drought conditions and a series of extremely poor harvests. Negative reports from the World Bank (see Glossary), highly critical of the planning program and cooperative system, further embarrassed the regime. Resentment in liberal circles within the party over Ben Salah's continued accumulation of power came to a head when Ahmed Mestiri resigned abruptly as defense minister to protest his policy of collectivization. Mestiri, who had held important cabinet, party, and diplomatic posts, was at the time considered one of the most promising of a new generation of leaders—including Ben Salah and Mohamed Masmoudi—and was a member of the party's governing Political Bureau. Although carefully explaining his withdrawal in terms of an objection to the methods by which current policies were applied rather than to their substance, Mestiri also suggested that the PSD was not being true to its own principles in pursuing collectivization. After his resignation he was expelled from the party.

Ben Salah reacted to opposition from party liberals by attempting to broaden his already extensive bureaucratic authority and accelerating plans for collectivization. In January 1969 he announced the organization of the National Union of Cooperatives, a superagency that consolidated all aspects of the cooperative sector under his immediate control. Because the cooperative system had been so successful, he argued, it would be extended under the agency's guidance from 1 million hectares to 4 million by collectivizing private landholdings, particularly in the Sahil, where opposition to his policies had been most pronounced. Some observers argued that the agency's establishment was an act of desperation on Ben Salah's part, representing a last-ditch effort to ensure the survival of the cooperative system. Others have pointed out, however, that he was strengthening his bureaucratic power base, from which he managed the greater part of the Tunisian economy, in order to eliminate his opponents. Bourguiba, who was ill at the time, was not in a position to block Ben Salah's moves, even if he disapproved of them.

During the spring and summer of 1969, violent demonstrations against collectivization broke out in the Sahil, where large landholders and peasants alike organized to resist the confiscation of their land. Stocks of sheep and cattle were halved as farmers slaughtered their animals or smuggled them into Algeria rather than turn them over to the state farms. It was their determined resistance to collectivization—more than the opposition of liberal politicians or Bourguiba's ultimate intervention—that led to Ben Salah's removal from the planning ministry. In September Ben Salah was transferred during a cabinet reshuffle to the education ministry, a shift that marked the end of the collectivist experiment and was correctly interpreted as the beginning of Ben Salah's political downfall.

### **Intraparty Politics in the 1970s**

The turmoil caused in the countryside by collectivization and the serious divisions that were developing within the PSD over Ben Salah's role had compelled Bourguiba to reassert his authority over political decisionmaking. His action responded in part to warnings from veteran politicians who were concerned that public faith in Bourguiba's judgment would be compromised as much by his failure to control Ben Salah as by the support he had given to the minister's unpopular policies. Bourguiba also had reason to worry that Ben Salah's bureaucratic empire had become so extensive that



it posed a threat to the presidency itself. Bahi Ladgham, who as general coordinator of state affairs had presided over the executive office during the frequent periods when Bourguiba was indisposed by illness, announced that a change in the government's political and economic orientation was required "if catastrophe is to be averted." The edifice of centralized state planning and control of the economy, of which Ben Salah had been the architect, was dismantled virtually overnight.

In November 1969 Bourguiba was elected to a third term as president. Before leaving for prolonged medical treatment abroad, he appointed Ladgham to the newly created post of prime minister and head of government. Ben Salah was left out of the government in the cabinet reorganization that followed, was deprived of his party post, and finally was expelled from the PSD. He was later arrested and in June 1970 was convicted of abuse of power and mismanagement of funds after a long trial at which peasants were brought in to describe the hardships caused by collectivization. In his own defense Ben Salah testified that he had only tried to interpret the president's directions and to implement a policy that had originated with him. The judgment of the court was that Ben Salah had misled Bourguiba with "false statistics" and had concealed from him the discontent aroused by the land program in the countryside. Although it was not proved that he had plotted to take over the government, the implication that such a plan existed was strong. Acknowledging the extent of the power base Ben Salah had constructed, Bourguiba boasted that "without me no one would have been able to rid the country of him." The court sentenced Ben Salah to 10 years of hard labor. In 1973, however, Ben Salah, presumably with assistance from supporters still highly placed in the government, escaped from prison and fled to exile in France, where he remained an outspoken critic of Bourguiba and the focus of left-wing opposition to the regime.

Bourguiba regrouped his support in the liberal wing of the party, which had opposed Ben Salah. Mestiri was rehabilitated, and when Ladgham formed a new government in June 1970, he was named interior minister and given responsibility for internal security. Hedi Nouira, formerly director of the National Bank, accepted the portfolio for economic affairs in the same government. Ladgham soon became involved in mediating the cease-fire in Jordan between the forces of King Hussein and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Consequently, he was replaced as prime minister by Nouira, whose emphasis on economic liberalization would characterize government policy in the 1970s.

Most of those who had opposed Ben Salah could be classified as economic liberals who, like Nouira, favored a return to private-sector initiative in economic development and the lifting of restrictions on trade and investment. Some, like Mestiri, who had championed economic liberalization, also subscribed to liberalization of the political system, by which they had initially meant greater democracy within the PSD rather than political pluralism. And they were encouraged when Bourguiba spoke publicly of the need for democratization of the political process. Addressing this question, an advisory committee chaired by Mestiri proposed a constitutional amendment in October 1970 that would have allowed for a government led by a prime minister who was responsible to the National Assembly. Nouira submitted the proposal to the legislature, but when no action was taken on it, Mestiri demanded that a party congress be called to take up the matter of constitutional reform, including the sensitive issue of the presidential succession.

Citing the delay in setting a date for a party congress, Mestiri offered his resignation in June 1971 from both the government and the party. Bourguiba, who had been undergoing medical treatment abroad during most of the time that the debate on the constitutional questions was taking place, refused to accept Mestiri's resignations and convinced him that liberalization of the political system was on his agenda and would proceed.

An October date was eventually set for the party congress, at which Mestiri was expected to play a leading role. Just before it was convened, however, Nouira appointed several officials to posts in Mestiri's interior ministry without prior consultation with the minister. The action was considered to be a calculated provocation, and when Mestiri took the bait and complained, Bourguiba dismissed him. The defense minister, Hasib Ben Ammar, resigned in protest. Despite this prelude, the liberal faction at first appeared successful in gaining concessions at the party congress. When the central committee was elected, Ladgham and Mestiri finished first and second, respectively, in the voting. Ladgham's compromise proposal carried, deferring discussion of the constitutional amendment on parliamentary responsibility in exchange for an agreement on enlarged popular participation in the election of party officials. Against Bourguiba's wishes, the congress formally recommended that presidential succession be based on an open vote of the party.

The departure of Mestiri and other liberal ministers left Nouira in a commanding, although not entirely uncontested, position as head of government. Bourguiba placed increasing confidence in the prime minister's management of the government and deferred more and more decisionmaking responsibility to him. Inci-



President Habib Bourguiba (right) and Prime Minister Hedi Nouira at Monastir in 1974. Courtesy Embassy of Tunisia, Washington

dents occurred, however, that indicated that other ministers were competing for access to the ailing president. Bourguiba also seemed to suffer periodic lapses in judgment, during which he made ill-advised departures from his usually levelheaded approach to foreign policy. In July 1973, for instance, Bourguiba called on King Hussein to abdicate his throne in order to convert Jordan into a Palestinian state. Jordan severed relations with Tunisia for a time in protest. In 1972 Bourguiba had brushed aside Libyan leader Muammar al Qadhaafi's overtures for a Maghribi union. At the conclusion of a subsequent meeting in Tunis in June 1974, however, Bourguiba and his Libyan guest announced agreement on a plan for the federation of their two countries. Nouira, who was out of the country at the time of the meeting, rushed home to take control of the situation, and the agreement was formally disavowed by the Tunisian government. The foreign minister, Mohamed Mas-moudi, whom Nouira considered a potential political rival, was summarily dismissed from the government for his role in influencing Bourguiba to agree to the Libyan union in the prime minister's absence. Relations between the two countries soured after the episode, and Libya was thereafter regarded by Tunisia as the primary threat to its security.

Bourguiba seemed once more in charge at the September 1974 party congress. He blamed the excesses of the previous party gathering on those whom he said had mistakenly believed he was "about to die and that the presidency would soon be vacant." Ignoring a renewed appeal by liberals for direct election of his successor, the president declared that he had "now come back in full strength and in very good health to be at the helm of this congress, which is to adopt resolutions to put matters in order." The congress dutifully approved a plan put before it whereby the prime minister, appointed by the president, would automatically succeed to the presidency in case of the demise or permanent disability of the incumbent. Bourguiba thereby confirmed Nouria as his heir apparent. In November Bourguiba was elected to a fourth term as president, running unopposed. The following May the National Assembly unanimously approved a constitutional amendment naming him president for life.

### **Economic Liberalization**

If those who had looked for political liberalization were disappointed by the outcome of the 1971 party congress, others who had limited their expectations for reform to economic liberalization came away satisfied. The congress endorsed the measures that had been taken to reverse Ben Salah's collectivization policy. Although it reaffirmed Tunisia's official commitment to maintaining a mixed economy that included a significant cooperative sector, party delegates also approved previously enacted legislation that had decisively shifted emphasis from the public to the private sector in order to generate economic development. Among those measures had been the lifting of restrictions on trade and foreign investment. Priority was also shifted away from raw materials to agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing as the chief sources of foreign earnings.

The first and most important step in the program of economic liberalization, however, had been the liquidation of state farms. Nearly 300,000 hectares of collectivized farmland were scheduled for redistribution to smallholders. *Habus* land taken by the state was returned to the original benefactors, and additional property remaining in the public sector was rented to large landholders. Agricultural production, which was regarded as the prime element in increasing economic growth, rose 70 percent in value in the first half of the 1970s, stimulated by improved marketing, modernization of equipment, and good harvests.

Although agriculture prospered as a sector, serious contradictions also developed. Increased production was accounted for primarily by larger, increasingly mechanized holdings that provided fruit and vegetables for export. Smallholdings proved inefficient and uneconomic for producing cash crops, and peasant owners reverted to subsistence farming and production for local markets. A pattern soon developed in which peasants, who lacked capital for tools, animals, and seeds, sold their small plots to larger landholders and either migrated to the cities or hired out as farmworkers. Tunisia enjoyed a favorable balance of trade in agricultural goods in the early 1970s, but its farm production, geared to export markets, was unable to keep pace with the growth in domestic demand for foodstuffs. Overall output fell sharply in the late 1970s, largely as a result of drought conditions. Furthermore, Tunisia's export-oriented agriculture was highly susceptible to fluctuations in the West European markets that it supplied. Because of the deterioration of trade and poor harvests, by 1980 imported foodstuffs were almost twice the value of cash-crop exports.

Tunisia's industrial base had been small before the turnabout in economic orientation in 1969. Under the new policy, foreign companies and other potential investors were offered generous tax advantages to locate in the country. A liberal trade environment also allowed them to import capital equipment duty free. Later legislation sought to generate domestic investment as well. This policy contributed to significant growth in the industrial sector during the 1970s, especially in assembly plants for reexports, food processing, textiles, and leather goods. The tourist industry, which owed more than any other sector to foreign participation attracted by liberal incentives, accounted for 20 percent of all foreign exchange earnings by 1980. During the same period, however, the cost of capital goods for manufacturing and tourism, imported under liberalized trade policies, exceeded returns for exports and services from those sectors.

### **Opposition and Unrest**

Social and political discontent, in reaction to the failure to achieve political liberalization and to the social costs of economic liberalization, became increasingly apparent during the 1970s. Particularly evident was dissension on the part of students and organized labor. By the mid-1970s, student demonstrations and strikes protesting education policies and official interference in student governmental bodies had become annual events. Left-wing groups,

which won control of student government away from the PSD, also organized students to join trade unionists in their strike actions.

One of the advantages that Tunisia offered to prospective investors was a plentiful supply of cheap labor. Likewise, one of the aims of economic liberalization was to encourage the development of industrial and service sectors that would stimulate new jobs in areas where unemployment had been intractable. But rapid growth in these sectors did not cut into unemployment as deeply as expected, and the low wages paid those who were employed lagged behind rises in the cost of living. Unemployment and demands for higher pay were the major causes of labor unrest, which in the 1970s found sympathizers among the urban working class swollen by migrants from rural areas and among jobless youths.

The unrest grew in intensity in 1976 when textile and metal workers were joined by public sector employees in utilities, transportation, hospitals, and the postal service in a strike over wage demands that had not been sanctioned by the UGTT. Habib Achour, who was a high-ranking PSD official as well as leader of the trade unions, was caught in a dilemma: the government expected the UGTT to enforce the labor peace necessary for economic development to proceed undisturbed, and at the same time militants in the unions pressured him to demand wage and employment policies more favorable to workers. Achour condemned wildcat strikes led by the militants, but he was also publicly critical of the government's policies.

Prime Minister Nouria was anxious to ensure the UGTT's cooperation in controlling labor costs during the five-year development plan that began in 1977. Achour had initially approved a social pact under which periodic wage revisions were tied to increased productivity as well as to the cost of living. Union militants, however, refused to recognize Achour's authority to commit them to the social pact, and wildcat strikes continued in various parts of the country throughout the year. In October an illegal strike by workers at Qasr Hellal turned violent, and the army was called in to break it. The incident at Qasr Hellal marked the first time since independence that the military was deployed to quell a civil disturbance. Although the UGTT had not sanctioned the strike, Achour nonetheless condemned the government's use of the army against workers. Other critics of the regime, including Mes-tiri, Masmoudi, and Ben Salah, all publicly supported the UGTT in its widening dispute with the government.

When regime critics took up the cause of the unions, the dispute between the government and labor went beyond bread-and-butter economic issues and became political in character. Labor

unrest thereafter was more than a threat to the government's economic program. The UGTT had a power base that was separate from the party, and its opposition was viewed as a direct challenge to the government's authority. Relations were further strained when a threat was made against Achour's life.

Nouira's cabinet was divided on how to deal with the UGTT. When the interior minister, Taher Belkhodja, came out in favor of conciliation with the union, he was removed from office. Shortly afterward, six fellow cabinet ministers resigned to protest his dismissal. Those appointed to replace them supported sterner action to force the UGTT into compliance with government policy.

Tension mounted after the UGTT's national council meeting on January 10, 1978, adopted a resolution critical of certain economic liberalization initiatives and alleging that Nouira's government was oriented toward the "consolidation of a capitalist class" whose interests were linked to those of "foreign exploiting capital." The same day that the UGTT issued its attack on the government, Achour resigned from the PSD Political Bureau and Central Committee, although not from the party itself. He explained that his action indicated disagreement only with the current government, to which the government responded that an unrepresentative radical minority had taken control of the UGTT.

The long anticipated confrontation between the government and the UGTT occurred two weeks later on January 26, when a general strike was called as a demonstration against the government to protest the arrest of a union official and attacks on union offices. It was estimated unofficially that 150 people were killed when strikers and their supporters clashed with police, soldiers, and PSD militia on what became known as Black Thursday. The scale of violence was unprecedented in the history of independent Tunisia. A state of emergency was declared, and hundreds were arrested, including Achour and virtually the entire leadership of the UGTT.

The government characterized the Black Thursday strike as a calculated attempt to incite rebellion against the state. Earlier contacts between UGTT officials and Qadhaafi were cited as proof of Libyan involvement. Achour was convicted on charges of sedition and sentenced to 10 years of hard labor. Progovernment appointees were subsequently installed on a new union executive council.

During the 1970s several political organizations surfaced and were openly critical of Bourguiba and the PSD and hostile to the government. In 1973 Ben Salah consolidated noncommunist, left-wing opposition in the Movement of Popular Unity (Mouvement d'Unité Populaire—MUP), which was organized in exile in Paris.

An internal branch also operated in Tunisia. The MUP's program advocated a socialist economy and called for the formation of a transitional government that would organize free parliamentary elections. In contrast, the outlawed PCT was small, never numbered more than a few hundred active members at home and abroad, but it exercised an influence disproportionate to its size in student circles. The PCT and the MUP were believed by the government to have collaborated in events leading up to the Black Thursday incident.

Early in 1977 a large number of liberal dissidents, including Mestiri and several other former cabinet ministers, appealed to Bourguiba to halt the deterioration of civil liberties in Tunisia and called for the convocation of a national conference for the same purpose. The proposal was couched in such a way as to allow the president to distance himself from the actions of the Nouira government. The conference was banned by authorities, but in October Mestiri proposed a National Pact to be signed by representatives of all political tendencies working within the constitutional system that would guarantee freedom of political activity. The preamble of the pact, to which Ben Salah gave his qualified support, was highly critical of the one-party system and recommended movement toward political pluralism. Prime Minister Nouira emphatically rejected the pact and attacked the liberals for what he termed their negative attitude. Lacking a positive response from the government, Mestiri formed the Movement of Social Democrats (*Mouvement des Democrates Sociales—MDS*) as a liberal opposition group in June 1978.

An area of serious concern for the regime was the emergence of political groups rooted in an Islamic revivalist movement that condemned the regime's secularism and attributed a decline in traditional values and moral standards to Western influence. The most important of these groups was the Islamic Tendency Movement (*Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique—MTI*). The MTI was committed to the establishment of an Islamic state, integrating all aspects of national life in conformity with Islamic law and custom, and it fused religious zeal with a program of economic reform. At its inception, religious revivalism was almost exclusively a student movement that had its base of support at the University of Tunis, where in the early 1980s the MTI had wrested control of student government bodies and organizations from previously dominant left-wing groups (see *Religious Life*, ch. 2; *Opposition Groups*, ch. 4).

In January 1980 about 50 Tunisian insurgents, trained and armed in Libya, seized the police barracks at Gafsa. The attack co-



incided with the anniversary of the Black Thursday strike, and it was apparently intended to spark a nationwide uprising to bring down the government. Gafsa was a stronghold of the militant mineworkers' union, and its economy was heavily dependent on remittances from Tunisian workers in Libya. Some locals joined the insurgents in resisting army and police units that retook the area after three days of bloody fighting. All of the insurgents were killed or captured in the engagement. Thirteen of those captured were subsequently sentenced to death and executed. France sent military assistance to Tunisia, and French naval units demonstrated off Jerba Island to discourage Libyan intervention (see International Security Concerns, ch. 5).

### **Toward Pluralism**

In February 1980 Prime Minister Nouira was incapacitated by a stroke, and Bourguiba turned to Mohamed Mzali, the minister of education, to serve as acting prime minister. Mzali, a moderate, was named prime minister when it became apparent that Nouira would not be able to resume his duties, and in December he was authorized by the president to make changes in the cabinet that strengthened the hand of party liberals. Two of the new ministers had been among those purged from the party during the 1970s. The next month the PSD rescinded the expulsion of some former party and government officials who had crossed over into the liberal opposition. Although Achour remained under house arrest, other union leaders, jailed after Black Thursday, were released from prison. The apparent shift in the attitude of the government deflated the opposition, and Mzali's openly conciliatory policy toward the dissidents persuaded many disaffected liberals and trade unionists to seek reinstatement in the PSD (see Interest Groups, ch. 4).

An extraordinary congress of the PSD was summoned in April 1981 to approve a move toward political pluralism. Opposition parties, including the MDS and the MUP, were given permission to participate in the next election, although full legal status was withheld from them. The long-standing ban on the PCT was also lifted, but the MTI and other Islamic groups were explicitly excluded from the political process. Likewise, Islamic political leaders who had been imprisoned were not included in the amnesty granted to the trade union leaders. Bourguiba himself explained that the Islamic groups were committed to using religion for political ends, contrary to the secular nature of Tunisian political institutions dictated by the Constitution.

Tunisia's first multiparty elections were scheduled for November 1, 1981. In preparation for the campaign, the PSD and the UGTT put a seal on the reconciliation between the party and the trade unions by agreeing to present candidates as partners on a coalition slate, called the National Front, and issuing a joint election manifesto. In previous elections, union nominees had been included on the PSD list. Just before the November election Achour was released from house arrest and was restored to the leadership of the UGTT.

Despite the options offered on the ballot in the November election, the National Front gained 95 percent of the total vote and won all 136 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, as the national legislature was redesignated. Mestiri's MDS, winning about 3 percent of the vote, led other opposition parties. Ben Salah, who had been denied amnesty, dismissed the election as a "maneuver designed to reduce pluralism to a simple election operation." From Paris he held out for nothing less than power-sharing with the other parties, but he was unsuccessful in persuading the internal branch of the MUP to boycott the election. Mzali, regarded as Bourguiba's appointed successor, formed a new government, and in the months after the election the prime minister pushed for greater liberalization both in politics and in the economy (see *The 1981 Election: Opposition Parties Sanctioned*, ch. 4).

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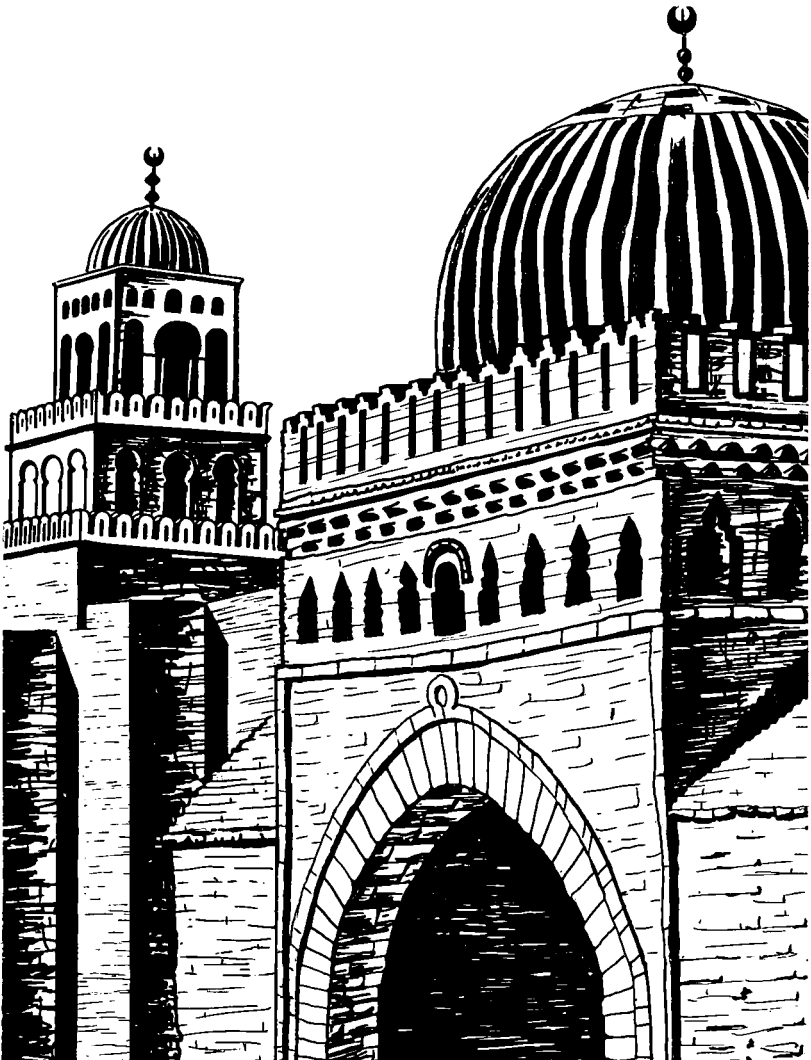
The history of Tunisia can be profitably studied, particularly for the preprotectorate period, as part of the general history of the Maghrib. Jamil M. Abun-Nasr's *A History of the Maghrib* is the most accessible narrative survey available in English of Maghribi history from earliest times to the present. Abdallah Laroui's *The History of the Maghrib* is a critical interpretive work recommended to readers with some background in the history of the region. Charles-André Julien's *History of North Africa*, edited and extensively revised by Roger Le Tourneau, provides a clear, scholarly treatment of Tunisian history up to 1830. Julien's *L'Afrique du Nord en marche* brings the coverage up to independence. The late medieval period is the subject of Robert Brunschvig's *La Berbérie orientale sous les Hafsides des origines à la fin du XV siècle*. Leon Carl Brown's *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 1837-1855* views the period during which Tunisia made its initial attempt to come to grips with the influence of Europe, and Lucette Valensi's *On the*

## *Tunisia: A Country Study*

*Eve of Colonialism* tries to demonstrate that Tunisia and neighboring Algeria possessed viable political institutions that were disrupted by French intervention. David C. Gordon's *North Africa's French Legacy* is a study of the intellectual conflict posed by the French presence. Jacques Berque's *French North Africa: The Maghrib Between Two World Wars* covers social and cultural developments during the interwar period.

Tunisia was for a time a popular area of research by American scholars, who in the 1960s saw it as an example of a single-party state that was successfully modernizing its political and economic institutions by means of an indigenous brand of socialism. Their research, however, has not been updated to take into account the failure of the socialist experiment there. Surveys of Tunisian history and postprotectorate policies from that period include Dwight L. Lings's brief *Tunisia from Protectorate to Republic*, Clement Henry Moore's *Tunisia since Independence*, and Wilfrid Knapp's *Tunisia*, all of which are dated. Among more recent scholarship in English is Norma Salem's revisionist biography *Habib Bourguiba, Islam, and the Creation of Tunisia*, published in 1984. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography).

## Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment



*Sidi Uqba mosque in Kairouan*

TUNISIA IN THE MID-1980s had the appearance of a society in transition from one set of guiding principles to another. To a noticeable degree, it was also increasingly divided against itself, pitting those devoted to modernization along Western lines against those favoring a more traditional society in conformity with Islamic norms and precepts. The middle class and governing elite—mostly urban, relatively well-off economically, and successful professionally—had fared well during the years since independence in 1956. French-educated and West European-oriented, this class was well-represented in government circles. The lower classes lived in rural areas and villages or in slums surrounding major cities. Considerably poorer than the middle class and composed of subsistence farmers, herders, and the unemployed, the lower classes were less receptive to Westernization and were oriented more toward the Arab world and Islam.

The upper classes had controlled the nature and direction of the Tunisian society since independence, but over the past few years they had come under strong challenge from their more tradition-minded countrymen. In the mid-1980s the future course of the nation and society was not at all clear. What seemed certain, however, was a new emphasis on indigenous Muslim norms and values together with a movement to restructure the society along those lines at the expense of Western-inspired ideals and life-styles.

Tunisia, like its neighbors Algeria and Morocco, had a high rate of population growth. While the rate was substantially lower than it had been a decade or more earlier, population control remained a major problem that affected all aspects of national life. It slowed socioeconomic development, stimulated internal and external migration, produced high rates of unemployment, and caused shortages in housing, educational facilities, and health services. The demographic situation, while serious, was more encouraging than elsewhere in the Maghrib because of a well-established family planning program, rising marriage ages among the young, and a growing awareness of the advantages of smaller families.

A majority of the population were under the age of 25 and posed a challenge to the government in terms of their impact on housing, education, and employment. Many young people found themselves without employment or the opportunity for social advancement and had become frustrated and resentful of the wealth and status of the middle class. They were also questioning the value of the elite's modernization policies. These discontented youth, particularly the educated among them, were instead finding in Islam and Tunisian identity an alternative to the West European-inspired values of the upper classes. They were also joining or-

ganizations opposed to the government and were becoming more inclined to reject the contemporary social order.

The nuclear family continued to gain in popularity at the expense of the patriarchal extended family of the past. This trend was especially significant in that it favored lowered birth rates and improvement in the status of women. Over the last 30 years women had been granted legal rights and protections in matters of family law and had taken advantage of educational opportunities in order to move out of the home and into the workplace and even the political arena. It was not always easy to exercise the new freedoms or to assume different roles, however, because women's emancipation offended deeply held beliefs about the proper place and behavior of females in a male-dominated Islamic society, even one as receptive to change as that of Tunisia. As part of the recent popularization of Islamic precepts, some younger women were returning to traditional dress or attempting in other ways to conform to the more normative standards of Muslim behavior.

In the mid-1980s Tunisia remained in many ways a moderate, socially progressive state virtually unique among its Muslim contemporaries. Its society was homogenous and possessed a high degree of ethnic and cultural unity. The governing elite had in the past demonstrated its capacity to recognize problems and to devise solutions to meet them. The challenge in the 1980s from the young, the Islamists, and the have-nots indicated that the elite's resilience and convictions would continue to be put to the test as the country prepared for an uncertain future.

## **Physical Setting**

Together with Algeria, Morocco, and the northwestern portion of Libya known historically as Tripolitania, Tunisia is part of the Maghrib (see Glossary), a region in which fertile coastal lands give way to the great Atlas mountain chain of North Africa and, finally, to the interior expanses of the Sahara (see fig. 7). Tunisia has an area of approximately 164,000 square kilometers and a coastline of about 1,600 kilometers indented by the gulfs of Tunis, Hammamet, and Gabès.

The Atlas mountain system, which begins in southwestern Morocco, terminates in northeastern Tunisia. Most of northern Tunisia is mountainous, but elevations average less than 300 meters and rarely exceed 1,000 meters. The Atlas Mountains in Algeria and Morocco, however, reach much higher elevations.

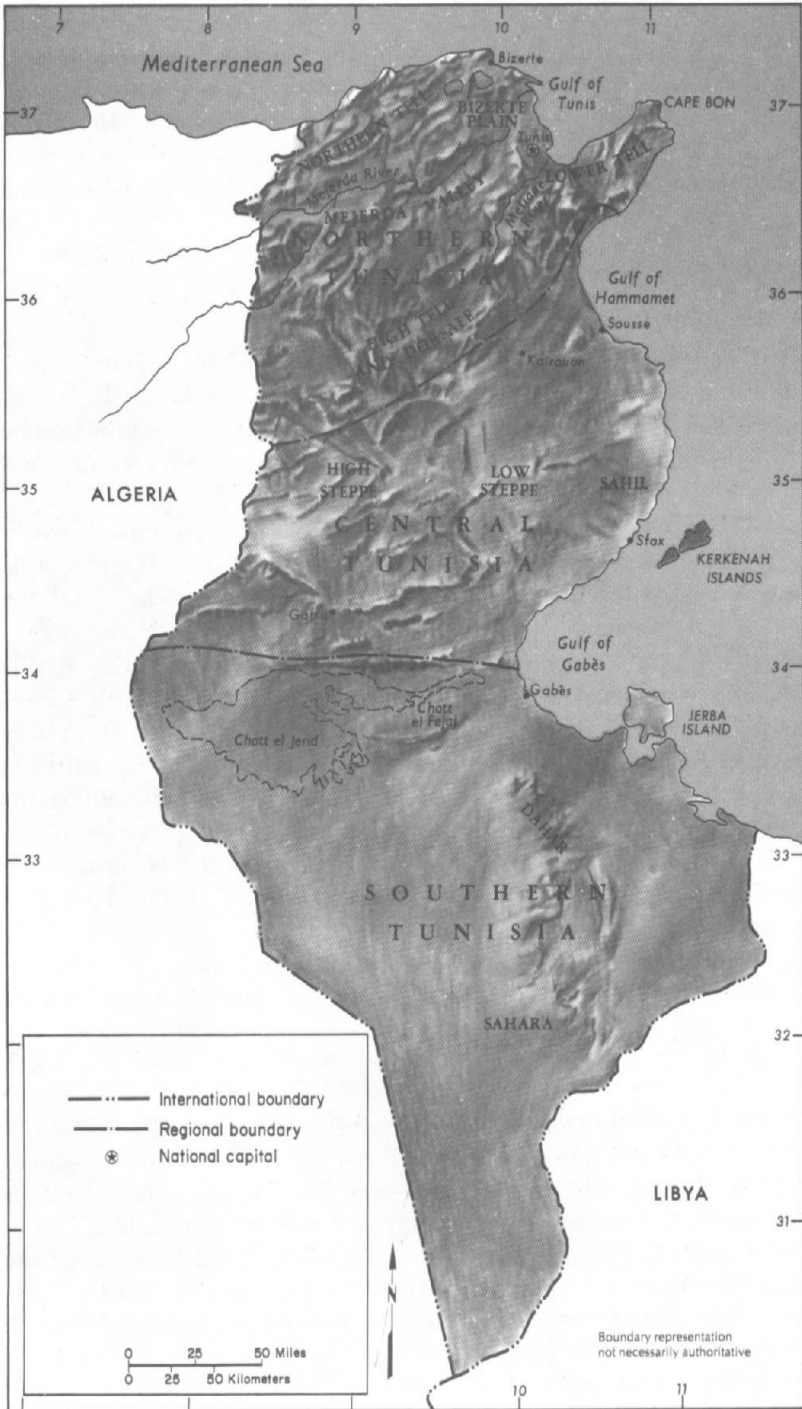


Figure 7. Terrain and Drainage



The principal mountain chain, the Dorsale, slants northeastward across the country and plunges into the sea at Cape Bon, an area famed among early Mediterranean navigators. The Dorsale is cut by several transverse depressions, among them the Kasserine Pass, which figured significantly in the battle for Tunisia during World War II.

### **Geographic Regions**

Tunisia is divided into three major geographic regions, determined in part by topography and the quality of the soils and in particular by the incidence of rainfall, which decreases progressively from north to south. The regions are northern, central, and southern Tunisia.

The Dorsale mountains form a rain shadow separating northern Tunisia from the remainder of the country. Rainfall tends to be heavier north of this mountain barrier, soils are richer, and the countryside is more heavily populated.

Northern Tunisia is a generally mountainous region and is sometimes referred to as the Tell, a term peculiar to North Africa. It is generally defined as a heavily populated area of high ground located close to the Mediterranean Sea. The region is bisected from east to west by the Mejerda River and is divided into subregions made up of the Mejerda Valley and the several portions of the Tell. Rising in the mountains of eastern Algeria, the Mejerda River flows eastward and discharges into the Gulf of Tunis. Its valley contains Tunisia's best farmland.

Comprising less than one-fourth of the national territory, northern Tunisia is a generally prosperous region. It was heavily settled and exploited by the French, and its physical characteristics resemble those of southern Europe more than those of North Africa.

South of the Dorsale lies central Tunisia, a region of generally poor soils and scanty rainfall. Its interior consists of a predominantly pastoral area made up of the High Steppes and the Low Steppes, the former occurring at greater elevations near the Algerian border. The term *steppes* was used by the French to define the semiarid interior highlands of North Africa, and the area has little in common with the better known steppes of Central Asia than its name.

The steppe subregions of central Tunisia have scanty natural vegetation and are used for pasturage and the marginal cultivation of cereals. Eastward the Low Steppes give way to a littoral known



Sand dunes surround an oasis in the Sahara of southern Tunisia

as the Sahil, an Arabic term meaning coast or shore. Rainfall is not appreciably heavier there, but heavy dew has made possible the intensive cultivation of olive and other tree crops, and there is considerable cereal production. The Sahil is customarily regarded as including Jerba Island and the Kerkenah Islands in the Gulf of Gabès. Jerba Island has been heavily populated since antiquity.

Southward from the steppes, the arid expanses that constitute southern Tunisia commence with an area where elevations are lower and where the landscape is marked by numerous chotts (salt marches, sometimes known as *shatts*) that lie below sea level. On higher ground around these depressions are various oasis settlements and valuable groves of date palms. Farther to the south, the land rises to form the plateaus and occasional eroded hills that make up the Tunisian portion of the Sahara. Fringed by lagoons and salt flats, the narrow gravelly coast of this region formed the traditional access route to the Maghrib from the east. The coast is

sparsely settled, and the interior is almost totally empty except for a few nomads and inhabitants of oases that occur along a line of springs at the foot of an interior escarpment.

### **Climate and Hydrology**

The most significant natural features that influence the climate are the Mediterranean Sea, which moderates climate conditions; the Atlas mountains; and the Sahara with its hot and dry sirocco winds, which blow northward over much of the country. A Mediterranean climate is characteristic of the northern coastal zone. Temperatures are higher in the interior and the south. Seasonal changes are moderate, although humidity increases in winter. In the desert, enormous diurnal changes are registered, the thermometer plummeting after dusk. Even in the coldest winter months the freezing point is reached only at high elevations in the interior. Winter nights are damp and chilly, however. Tunis is at about the same latitude as San Francisco, and its more expensive new homes are equipped with central heating.

Most of the precipitation occurs during the rainy season, between December and March. Tunisia is generally less favored than the other Maghribi countries with respect to rainfall, and agriculture is heavily dependent on the irregular climatic conditions. In central Tunisia in particular, droughts are frequent, and a two-month-long drought means the loss of 30 to 50 percent of the crops. In the north, in contrast, the Mejerda River is subject to frequent flooding. Rainfall decreases from north to south, ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 millimeters annually in the northwest highlands near the Algerian frontier to less than 100 millimeters in the southern portion of the Sahara zone. The 400-millimeter and 200-millimeter rainfall zones extend between east and west, roughly corresponding to the northern and southern limits of central Tunisia, respectively.

The Mejerda River is the country's only major perennial stream. Other watercourses are seasonal, and the volume of flow even in the Mejerda in June and July is less than one-twelfth of that in February, thus minimizing the river's potential as a source of hydroelectric power.

In the central Tunisian steppes, occasional watercourses flow southward out of the Dorsale after heavy rains but evaporate in salt flats without reaching tidewater. The Chott el Jerid, the largest of southern Tunisia's salt lakes, is dry during half of the year but is flooded to form a shallow salt lake during the winter months.

Even intermittent streams are rare in the Sahara, but rich artesian sources make possible numerous fertile oases. In a large part of the region slightly brackish but usable water from enormous aquifers can be brought to the surfaces, but at prohibitive cost.

### **Vegetation**

True Mediterranean vegetation is found only in northern Tunisia, where the mountains were once abundantly forested, principally in cork, oak, and pine. Cork production, tree felling for firewood and charcoal, and clearing of land for agriculture have severely depleted the reserves, however, and have brought about widespread erosion.

There is no continuous ground cover in central Tunisia. Esparto grass grows on the steppes, and there are occasional jujube trees, members of the blackthorn family. Meager forests of pine and helm oak are found on the approaches to the Dorsale mountains, and red juniper grows at higher elevations elsewhere in the region. In the Sahil almost all of the land has been cleared.

Southern Tunisia is largely devoid of vegetation, except where date palms and planted crops grow around oases. Saharan species, such as acacia and saltbush, enter the natural pattern, however, and at higher levels of the desert occasional patches of scrub grass provide meager food for camels.

### **Population**

In mid-1985 it was estimated that Tunisia's population totaled some 7.2 million. Based upon projections from the 1984 census that counted over 6.9 million Tunisians, this figure indicates that the population had nearly doubled in the three decades since 3.8 million were counted at the time of independence. Since the 1956 census—the last conducted by the French—the Tunisian government has counted the national population in the general censuses of 1966, 1975, and 1984. Although the fertility rate fell significantly—especially in the 1966–75 period—Tunisia's rate of natural increase (crude birth rate minus crude death rate) remained nearly constant, i.e., in the region of 2.6 or 2.7 percent each year between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. During this period, the crude birth rate fell 22 percent to 32.9 births for every 1,000 Tunisians. At the same time, however, improved health services

and nutrition led to a simultaneous decline in the crude death rate from 15.2 to 7.3 deaths for every 1,000 Tunisians.

The 1984 census indicated that there were about 102 males to every 100 females in the population. Improving health conditions that lowered maternal death rates and changing social patterns were believed to have contributed to a decline in female mortality since 1966, when the census indicated that there were 104 males to every 100 females. The change between the 1966 and 1984 figures, however, had taken place by the mid-1970s. Some observers attributed the lack of change after that time to a stagnation in economic and social progress, whereas others thought that the census procedure might have resulted in undercounting women.

The population in the early 1980s was a young one in which some 42 percent of all Tunisians were under the age of 15. Although this figure was slightly lower than it had been in previous years, it was far higher than the level of 23 percent under the age of 15 that existed in Western Europe and North America, a level that Tunisian planners hoped eventually to reach. The large proportion of people too young to earn a living placed a burden on those in the economically active age brackets. Moreover, the youthful age structure of the national population built into the society significant momentum for future growth. Thus, even if the future rate of natural increase declined, the large number of Tunisians who had not yet reached childbearing age and the small number of older Tunisians who might be expected to die sooner ensured that the number of births would continue to far outstrip the number of deaths for at least another generation.

Although the country's natural rate of increase was about 2.6 percent annually in the 1975-84 period, emigration of Tunisians to other countries made the overall growth rate somewhat less. Between 1975 and 1984 the annual rate of population growth averaged 2.5 percent. This reflected a decrease in net emigration over the 1966-75 span, when net population growth averaged only 2.3 percent per annum, significantly less than the 2.7 percent annual rate of natural increase during that time.

Emigration had been a major factor in Tunisia's population dynamics since independence. At first, the largest number of emigrants consisted of European residents, the great majority of whom left in the 1950s and 1960s. The census figures showed that the number of foreign residents declined from over 341,000 in 1956 to fewer than 67,000 in 1966 and to under 38,000 in 1975. Tunisia's Jewish community has all but disappeared because of emigration (see *The Peoples of Tunisia*, this ch.).

Large numbers of Muslims have also emigrated, most of them to seek temporary employment abroad. In the 1966–75 period, some 19,000 Tunisians emigrated each year, but the flow of migrants slackened after the mid-1970s as changing economic conditions reduced the demand for labor abroad. In 1983 it was estimated that 300,000 Tunisians were living in foreign countries, down from 350,000 in 1979. Much of the outflow went to Western Europe, where in 1981 some 180,000 Tunisians resided in France alone. Large numbers also went to neighboring Libya to seek employment in an economy that had benefited from the oil price rises of the 1970s. Because many of the Tunisians in Libya traveled without documentation, their actual number was not known. Estimates ranged as high as 200,000 in the 1970s, but in early 1985 there were thought to be roughly 90,000 to 100,000 Tunisians living there. The expulsion of some 25,000 of them later that year resulted in a major crisis between the two countries (see Foreign Relations, ch. 4; International Security Concerns, ch. 5).

Most of the country's cities and its densest rural populations were in the northeastern coastal lowlands and the Sahil (see table 2, Appendix). This zone, comprising less than 20 percent of the country's territory, contained over one-half of its inhabitants in 1984. The remainder of the country, often referred to generally as the "interior," was for the most part rural and scantily populated. A single exception was the governorate of Kairouan, which in 1975 was one of the most heavily populated. Its ancient capital city was established in the seventh century A.D. as an armed camp and transport center, and it early became an important center of Muslim culture (see Islam and the Arabs, ch. 1).

The prevailing pattern of rural settlement varied by region, although in all parts of the country most of the sedentary population lived in nuclear villages rather than on farms. The rural population of northern Tunisia usually lived on large, mechanized farms (operated either collectively or individually) or on small ones. The big farms, most of them former properties of the European colonists, were found in the lower Mejerda Valley and in the coastal lowlands. The rest of the region was made up of mountainous terrain where small farm villages were scattered on the mountainsides and in the valleys.

In the steppes of central Tunisia the scanty population made a meager livelihood from tending livestock and from farming. The Sahil consisted of closely arrayed farm villages given over to olive growing and other tree culture. The farms in the area were already so heavily concentrated at the beginning of the protectorate period

that the French and Italian colonists found little land available for the taking and consequently settled elsewhere.

The bulk of the population of southern Tunisia was clustered in the palm-grove oases surrounding the salt lakes in the pre-Saharan zone. In the Sahara a few populated oases were scattered in the higher elevations (Dahar), southeast of Gabès. The Sahara was the land of the nomads, but beginning in the 1960s drought, overgrazing of the scanty sources of pasturage, declining demand for camels, and declining trade opportunities progressively reduced nomadism. At the same time, the government encouraged the settling of nomads on artificial oases in a process that began with the sinking of a well and took shape through the erecting of fences and the planting of date palms or crops. The process of cultivation, however, remained repugnant to many nomads, and some chose the alternative of urban migration.

According to the 1984 census, urban residents made up 47 percent of the national population. Substantially unchanged since 1975, this figure compared with 40 percent in 1966 and 30 percent in 1956. Urban localities were generally defined as administrative communes with populations of 2,000 or more inhabitants. Growth of the cities and towns quickened during the years after independence with the increasing migration of country people. Between 1966 and 1975 the urban population sector increased annually at a rate of about 4.2 percent as compared with 0.5 percent in the countryside, but this narrowed to 3.0 and 2.0 percent, respectively, in the ensuing nine-year period.

Some migration took place between rural localities, most frequently from a depressed agricultural zone in the interior to a more prosperous one in the coastal area. Most of the movement, however, has led into the cities and towns. Poverty, underemployment at home, excitement, and job prospects in the cities have motivated the migrants. A majority of the migrants have been young men traveling alone; all but a few returned from time to time to their villages of origin, and many married local women. Ultimately they might return permanently to their villages or relocate their families in their new urban homes.

The pattern of urban settlement was one of a few cities and a great many large and small towns. Only Tunis had more than 500,000 inhabitants, and in 1984 Sfax was the only other city with more than 100,000 (see table 3, Appendix). A total of 31 communes had a population of more than 25,000.

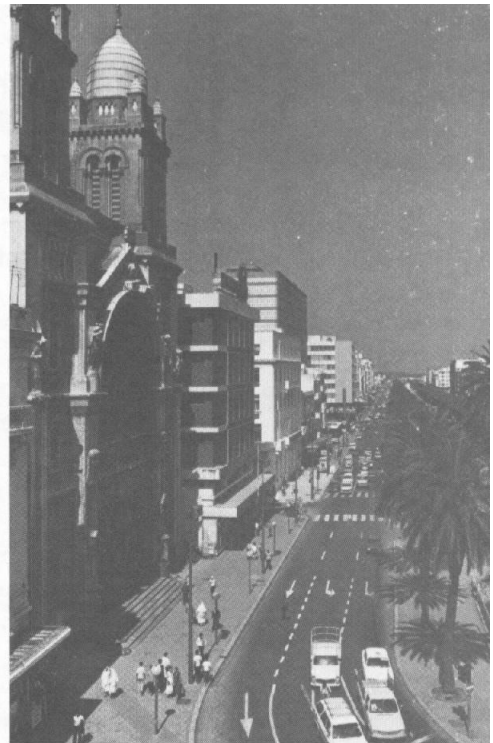
Tunis was a magnet for migrants. It had the best schools and the only really good hospitals. The country's best-trained government and private-sector workers resided in it, and its factories con-



Tunis, the national capital.  
Courtesy Embassy of Tunisia, Washington



Minaret of the Sidi  
Ben Arous Mosque in Tunis  
and the Medina (background)



Avenue Bourguiba in the  
center of Tunis; Roman  
Catholic Cathedral on left



tributed one-half of the national industrial output. Even the prosperous Sahil had contributed its share of migrants to Tunis.

The metropolitan zone of the city of Tunis extends far beyond the limits of the city itself. The district of Tunis, in which the city is located, had nearly 1.4 million inhabitants in 1984, over 90 percent of whom were urban dwellers. The pattern of settlement in Tunis was uneven. In the mid-1980s it was estimated that one-third of the population was crammed into the medina, the oldest part of the city. One-third resided in correspondingly crowded *gourbivilles*, the squatter settlements of urban migrants scattered around the urban periphery, and the remaining one-third lived for the most part in the spacious *ville nouvelle*, the new city built by the French colonists.

## **Ethnic Groups and Languages**

### **The Peoples of Tunisia**

Modern-day Tunisians are a mixture of Berber and Arab stock. The Berbers, the indigenous people of North Africa, have no generic name for themselves. The Romans called them *barbari*, or "barbarians," the term applied to those peoples who lived outside the framework of Greco-Roman civilization and from which the designation *Berber* probably comes. Of stocky physique and having a high incidence of light hair and blue eyes, the Berbers are Caucasians akin to other Mediterranean peoples.

The Arab component of the society was introduced during the conquests of the seventh, the eleventh, and succeeding centuries. Racially, the Arabs brought a slender build, dark eyes and hair, and darker skin to the community from which most modern Tunisians are descended. The Berbers quickly accepted the religion, language, and culture of the invaders and intermarried with them. In modern times most Tunisians claim Arab ancestry, speak Arabic, profess Islam, and find only traces of Berber culture in their lives.

In this respect Tunisia contrasts with Algeria and Morocco, where in the 1980s people still ethnically identifiable as Berbers made up substantial minorities of the population. The relative completeness, as well as the early date, of the arabization of the Tunisian Berbers may have been in part because most of the Berbers occupied a relatively compact geographical area. It may also have

been because long before the coming of the Arabs, the Berbers had undergone a substantial degree of assimilation under the Carthaginians and the Romans. In the 1980s small Berber communities were still found on the island of Jerba, in a few villages and oases on the edge of the Sahara, in highlands along the Libyan border, and in the mountainous northwestern corner of the country. The Berbers numbered about 180,000, or less than 3 percent of the total population, of which less than one-half had retained their native Berber speech.

The Arab-Berber population is dispersed over the whole country. Subtle racial distinctions, however, are discernible: the coastal and northern peoples tend to have the stocky Berber physique, while those of the inland and southern regions where Arab concentration has been highest are slender and darker skinned. Cultural differences are also noticeable between inhabitants of the coastal region and those of the hinterland. Since the time of the Phoenicians, Tunisia has had a sedentary coastal civilization and a nomadic interior populace (see *Early History*, ch. 1). The Arab invasions increased the cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the population but sharpened this ancient division, which remains visible in the form of dialects, in the sedentary versus the nomadic life, and in the rate of acceptance of modernization in the two areas.

Since the end of the Arab invasion the ethnic composition of the population has changed little. Black Africans, once widely used as household slaves and concubines, have affected the composition of the population only slightly, although skin color ranges from bronze to black in the southern oases. In the fifteenth century the Tunisian population received an infusion of Spanish blood with the expulsion of the Muslims from Spain. Inter-marriage between Tunisians and Balkan peoples, Greeks, Turks, and European Christians made a significant social and commercial impact on the coastal society but did little to alter the Arab-Berber population as a whole. With the disappearance of these foreign elements, their characteristics have diffused in the ethnic majority.

Jews, indigenous and foreign born, were once far more numerous in Tunisia. Their numbers have declined steadily over the last few decades, from about 86,000 at the time of independence in 1956 to some 60,000 in 1966, to perhaps 5,000 in the early 1980s. About 2,500 still reside in Tunis, and others live in Zarzis and elsewhere in Tunisia; but probably the most interesting enclaves are the tiny communities on Jerba Island. Numbering about 1,200 in the early 1980s, the Jews of Jerba were one of the last remnants of once extensive Jewish communities that were scattered across the Maghrib. Most of them were merchants or skilled

crafts-people. They have lived according to age-old cultural traditions and have preserved a form of theocratic republican government under the tutelage of a leading rabbi.

Both Tunisian and foreign-born Jews left in large numbers at national independence and have continued to do so in smaller numbers in response to tensions arising from events in the Middle East. At the time of the Arab-Israeli June 1967 War, anti-Jewish demonstrations in Tunis resulted in heavy damage to the principal synagogue. Rioting in three southern towns occurred in 1982 after the murder of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and two Jerban Jews were killed when anti-Jewish sentiment again ran high in late 1985 in the wake of an Israeli bombing raid on Palestinian headquarters south of Tunis (see International Security Concerns, ch. 5).

Throughout the years of the protectorate the population included a large number of Europeans, French and Italians predominating. The two groups were sociologically distinct, the French constituting a well-to-do elite and the bulk of the Italians consisting of working-class people from southern Italy and Sicily. In 1956 the European colony totaled more than 341,000 people, the majority of whom were French.

During the first two years after independence about one-half of the Europeans departed, but their departure was less hurried than that from Morocco and Algeria. For a time the new government continued to employ more than 3,000 former French officials and a great many schoolteachers, and the replacement of French bureaucrats and business leaders was generally orderly. By 1966, however, the census showed that the population included only 66,834 foreigners, of whom only 32,520 were not Arabs. The size of the non-Tunisian population in the early 1980s was estimated at about 50,000, but some sources placed it significantly below that.

### **Language and the Society**

Arabic is the official language of Tunisia and in its North African Maghribi form constitutes the native language of virtually the entire population. Berber, the indigenous tongue, is spoken by substantial ethnic minorities in Algeria and Morocco, but in Tunisia only about 1 percent of the population use it as their mother tongue. Berber speakers, who numbered about 70,000 in the mid-1980s, occupy villages on the edge of the desert in such areas as Sened, Matmata, Jerba Island, and Nefusa on the Libyan border. They also inhabit the oasis of Ghadames. Half of the population

speaks French as a second language, and many French-educated Tunisians find themselves more at ease with French than with Arabic. French has declined somewhat in both usage and status since independence. Although it is widely used in government, education, and commerce, it is no longer an official language, as it was before independence.

The apparent simplicity of language-use patterns is illusory. While Berber and French can be clearly identified, Tunisian Arabic is not a single language but rather a complex of different forms and dialects. Arabic is a Semitic tongue related to Amharic, Aramaic, and Hebrew. The predominant language throughout North Africa and the Middle East, it was introduced by Arab invaders and conquerors in the seventh, eleventh, and succeeding centuries (see *Islam and the Arabs*, ch. 1). Written Arabic is psychologically and sociologically important as the vehicle of Islam and Arab culture and as the link with other Arab countries.

Four varieties of Arabic are in use in Tunisia: classical, modern literary (or modern standard), colloquial (or dialectal), and intermediary (or "educated"). The classical Arabic of the Quran is the basis of Arabic and the model of linguistic perfection, according to orthodox Islamic precepts. It is the vehicle of a vast historical, literary, and religious heritage, and individuals with a knowledge of classical Arabic can converse with their counterparts throughout the Middle East. Classical Arabic is employed for religious purposes or sometimes for literary or rhetorical emphasis.

Modern literary Arabic is a derivation and simplification of classical Arabic in wide use throughout the Middle East in newspapers, magazines, and government communiqués. In Tunisia modern literary Arabic is the official language of the mass media, formal government documents, and literature and is taught in the schools. For most Tunisians, however, it is a language as foreign as French, knowledge of which comes through education, especially in its written form. As a consequence, the form of Tunisian Arabic known as intermediary enjoys much wider popularity. A mixture of modern literary and colloquial Arabic, intermediary Arabic is increasingly employed by the media, the bureaucracy, and intellectuals.

The popular dialects that make up colloquial Arabic occur in bewildering variety. They vary from village to village, although for the most part they are mutually intelligible within Tunisia. One of these dialects is called Franco-Arabic. A high-level dialect into which numerous specialized French terms and turns of speech have been woven, it is most commonly used by students, government officials, and professionals. The urban and coastal dialects resemble those spoken in other North African cities and are closest to classi-

cal Arabic. Dialects of the interior differ more substantially from the classical and have relatively low prestige. They are heavily infused with Berber words, particularly place-names taken from Berber terms for flora, fauna, and tools.

In all Maghribi countries since independence, language and language policy have commanded a great deal of attention as a result of the colonial experience. The French sought to undermine Arabic and to impose French in their North African colonies as one way of "civilizing" the population and of isolating it from the larger Arabic-speaking world. As a reaction to this policy, independent governments in the Maghrib have sought to restore Arabic to the status and level of usage it enjoyed before the colonial era through policies that have aimed at the gradual substitution of Arabic for French. Known as arabization, this effort has entailed an official commitment to the use of modern literary Arabic in the media, education, and government administration at the same time that French has continued to be widely used. Compared with Algeria or Morocco, the issue has been somewhat less emotionally charged in Tunisia, where President Habib Bourguiba has decided upon only partial arabization and upon the retention of French as an integral component of Tunisian identity.

The pace of arabization has been gradual, but it has faced the same problems as elsewhere in the Maghrib—too few trained teachers and a lack of teaching materials, resistance on the part of the French-educated elite, and the difference between modern literary Arabic and the colloquial Arabic spoken by a majority of the population. Nonetheless, by the mid-1980s arabization had begun to make a significant impact. In the education sector, Arabic was the language of instruction in primary schools, and French was introduced as a second language in the third year. On the secondary level, students could choose a bilingual option in which subjects such as history and philosophy were taught in Arabic while mathematics and the sciences were taught in French. At the University of Tunis, the only university in the country, French remained the chief medium of instruction; only in the faculties of theology, law, and Arabic language and literature was Arabic dominant.

Arabic was increasingly used in public administration and in most government ministries (especially the Ministry of Justice), and proficiency in modern literary Arabic was a requirement for employment in the government. Even so, French was widely employed in both oral and written communications in most ministries and was essential in the fields of science, technology, and medicine. A similar situation applied in the armed forces. Although they had been completely arabized, there was a marked preference for



*Artisans loading camels with pottery produced on Jerba Island*

French among the members of the officer corps, some of whom had been educated in France. Arabic was also making inroads in commerce and business, once the exclusive domain of French.

More important than either the education system or the bureaucracy in promoting modern literary Arabic were radio and television. Because of this, French programming on government-controlled radio and television networks had declined over the last two decades while programming in Arabic, modern literary as well as colloquial, had increased. Current figures were roughly 60 percent Arabic and 40 percent French, with locally produced programs almost completely in Arabic. In addition to general programming, literacy campaigns employing radio and television had been designed to increase competence in modern literary Arabic among adults without access to formal instruction.

In Tunisia as elsewhere in the Maghrib, the degree and pace of arabization have been debated extensively. Aside from the seeming remoteness of modern literary Arabic, another obstacle to rapid

arabization has been the cost of language substitution. This has meant that however committed planners might be to the policy, it has had to be a gradual one, and individual steps have required a decade or more to be implemented. This certainly has been true in Tunisia, where arabization was not yet an accepted national goal.

Whatever the obstacles, other factors may prove decisive to the success of arabization over the long run. Because of the departure of most of the French-speaking community, lessened emphasis upon French in the schools, and a general repression of French throughout the society, school-age youth have had fewer opportunities to speak French. The consequence has been a decline in proficiency in that language. At the same time, the upsurge in emphasis on Islam and Muslim culture, the inflow of funds from wealthy Arab countries, and the presence in Tunis of international institutions such as the League of Arab States (Arab League) have created a demand for Tunisians trained in a standard form of Arabic. The situation has produced a change in attitude toward learning modern literary Arabic based on cultural as well as economic grounds. In the mid-1980s developments such as these favored the continuation of arabization in Tunisia and could lead to pressures for intensifying the pace and scope of the program beyond what the Bourguiba government had envisioned.

## **The Social System**

Throughout North Africa the population originally was made up of tribes, the basic unit of social organization for both Berbers and Arabs. In the 1980s a number of tribes were still to be found in rural parts of Algeria and Morocco, but in Tunisia they had all but disappeared. The foreign influences that had made the Tunisian society a cosmopolitan one at an early date had operated also to break down tribal organization, and under the French administration a deliberate and at least partially successful effort was made to bring the primarily nomadic tribal people into the mainstream of national life. Tribal shaykhs were made civil servants, and tribespeople were encouraged or coerced into becoming sedentary farmers.

Soon after independence the remaining tribal lands were nationalized. In the 1980s a few tribes and remnants of tribes were still to be found in the more remote central and southern parts of the country, but the tribal system, as a significant element in the Tunisian social complex, had given way to more modern forms of organization.