

# Migrations | The life of European immigrant communities: Egypt and Tunisia | Religious life in Tunisia

In the adopted countries of European migrants, on the whole different religious communities coexisted peacefully alongside indigenous religious groups.

One consequence of mass migration was the growth of different religious communities, especially Jews and Roman Catholics. An indigenous Jewish population (the Touensa) had lived in Tunisia since pre-Christian times. In the 17th century there had been a migration of Jews from Livorno (the Grana). A new wave of European Jews migrated to Tunisia in the 19th century. Unlike Tunisian Jews, the newcomers shared the legal status of the Europeans. The presence of a small group of Christian residents in Tunisia predated mass migration. The tolerant attitude of the local ruler (the Bey) to Christianity is epitomised by the presence, in the Bey's Bardo complex, of a chapel for the few Catholics working in his service. Under the French protectorate especially, the number of Catholics and Catholic churches multiplied, and Catholic religious orders opened schools in different towns. The Greek Orthodox Christian community also grew.



**Working Number:** FR 145

**Name:** A Jewish family

**Holding Museum:** National Library of France

**Date:** 1897

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** Indigenous Tunisian Jews (Touensa) spoke Tunisian Arabic. Their food and customs were similar to those of their Muslim neighbours. However, they had a lower legal and social status: for example, they had to pay a special tax, could not bear arms, and men had to wear a black chéchia (Tunisian hat) instead of the red one reserved to Muslims.



**Working Number:** TN 033

**Name:** Tunisian torah

**Holding Museum:** -

**Date:** -

**Materials:** Paper

**Curator Justification:** Until the end of the 19th century, the Touensa (indigenous Tunisian Jews) and the Grana (Jews emigrated from Livorno to Tunisia in the 17th century) had two different grand rabbis. Later, at the suggestion of the different Jewish communities, the Bey appointed the Grand Rabbi of Tunisia to care for all the Jews of the country.



**Working Number:** TN 101

**Name:** Inside a Jewish household

**Holding Museum:** Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** Paper

**Curator Justification:**

By the mid-19th century, the Jewish community in Tunisia had 25,000–30,000 members. Traditionally, the most important centre of Jewish religious life and studies in Tunisia was the island of Jerba, considered the home of one the oldest Jewish communities in North Africa. The synagogue of Ghirba, on Jerba, was and still is a centre of pilgrimage.

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**Working Number:** IT1 133

**Name:** Bond of 100 francs issued by the Caisse Générale de Secours et de Bienfaisance Israélite de Tunis, in order to raise funds for the construction of a new synagogue in Tunis, and bought by Leone Moreno

**Holding Museum:**

**Date:** State Archives of Livorno

**Materials:** 12 November 1905

**Curator**

**Justification:** -

European Jews who migrated to Tunisia in the 19th century were mostly middle-class traders and professionals. They were socially and culturally different from indigenous Jews and followed different religious rites. Several of them supported the educational programmes of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which opened a school in Tunisia in 1878, and four others soon after.

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**Working Number:** TN 054

**Name:** The fundamental pact

**Holding Museum:** Archives Nationales

**Date:** 1857

**Materials:** Paper

**Curator**

**Justification:** In Tunisia, the 1857 Fundamental Pact proclaimed the equality of all subjects regardless of religion. The Jewish communities now acquired rights previously denied to them and other non-Muslims, including the right to own land and serve as civil servants.

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**Working Number:** TN 025

**Name:** Carthage Cathedral

**Holding Museum:** -

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** -

**Curator**

**Justification:** Christian communities had been present in Tunisia since the early Christian era, with Carthage the seat of their archbishop. In 1884, Carthage was re-established as an archdiocese, and work started on building a new cathedral. The archdiocese comprised all the parish churches of Tunisia, amounting to 50 in 1912.



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**Working Number:** TN 026

**Name:** Musée d'Enfidha

**Holding Museum:** -

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** The Roman Catholic Church of Enfidha, Tunisia, was inaugurated in 1907. It catered for a large Catholic community of European settlers, which included many peasants and sharecroppers. After 1964, when land belonging to foreigners was nationalised, most Catholics living in that area moved to Europe and the church was transformed into a museum.



**Working Number:** TN 086

**Name:** Statue of Cardinal Lavigerie

**Holding Museum:** Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** Paper

**Curator Justification:** Charles Lavigerie (1825–92) was the founder of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, better known as the White Fathers. In 1881, he was appointed apostolic administrator of Tunisia. In 1884, the Vicariate Apostolic of Tunisia was elevated to an archdiocese and he became archbishop of Carthage (the highest Catholic authority in Tunisia) and primate of Africa.



**Working Number:** TN 042

**Name:** Greek Orthodox church in Tunisia, on Rue de Rome

**Holding Museum:** -

**Date:** 1901

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** The Greek Orthodox Christians had for a long time a church in Tunis. In 1901, they built a new one dedicated to Saint George, designed by Italian architect Giuseppe Abita, in the European neighbourhood.



**Working Number:** TN 024

**Name:** Tunis Cathedral

**Holding Museum:** -

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** The Tunis Catholic community had been served by the Sainte Croix Catholic church since 1837. In the last decade of the 19th century, a

new Roman Catholic cathedral dedicated to St Vincent de Paul was erected. Between 1897 and 1913, four further churches were built in Tunis for the expanding Catholic community.



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