

Migrations | The life of European immigrant communities: Egypt and Tunisia | Leisure activities

In the cities with extensive immigrant communities, cultural and leisure associations soon sprang up to cater for their entertainment and provide a focus for social interaction.

In the life of immigrant communities, leisure activities played an important role in preserving cultural identity and group solidarity. When they met in family gatherings or for a drink in smart hotels, or when they watched a theatre performance together, immigrants were not only having a good time: they were also preserving and reasserting ties with their kin and compatriots. Such networks helped immigrants to cope with the challenges they met in their adopted countries. At the same time, places for socialising were also sites for cultural interchange. During the 19th century – thanks to the initiative of European immigrants in Tunisia, and under the impulse of the Khedive in Egypt – several theatres and concert halls opened where international troupes, ballets and orchestra companies performed for the European immigrants and the local elite.



Working Number: IT1 119

Name: The Italian Politeama Rossini theatre in Tunis, inaugurated in 1903

Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)

Date: 1903–06

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The Italian community in Tunisia established its first theatre in Tunis as early as 1826 and several others in the following decades. The Politeama Rossini, inaugurated in 1903, was famous for its grand performances of the great classic operas.



Working Number: TN 032

Name: Municipal theatre

Holding Museum: -

Date: 1902

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The Art Nouveau Municipal Theatre in Tunis was built by the French architect Resplandy and inaugurated in 1902. It hosted performances of dramas, tragedies, comedies and operas. Meanwhile, the city's Casino Municipal (1902) specialised in operetta and variety and the Casino du Belvédère (1901) was dedicated to music hall performances.



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Working Number: IT1 008

Name: Organ Made in Tunis by the Italian Firm Cesare Trionfo and Exhibited in Milan

Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)

Date: 1906

Materials: -

Curator

Justification: This musical instrument provides a material example of dialogue between European and indigenous North African and Arab cultures. Typologically part of the European musical tradition, it was made in Tunis by an Italian immigrant who decorated it with Arab-style ornaments.



Working Number: FR 146

Name: Illustrated dictionary of Tunisia: the people and things of Tunisia

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1912

Materials: -

Curator

Justification: At the top of the page, one can see the advertisement of the shop of the Italian immigrant Cesare Trionfo, selling pianos, harmoniums and other musical instruments from 1 rue de l'Italie, Tunis.



Working Number: TN 036

Name: Hôtel Majestic

Holding Museum: -

Date: Late 19th – early 20th centuries

Materials: -

Curator

Justification: Built in 1914, the Majestic Hotel in Tunis was a meeting place for the colonial elite. About a decade earlier, another Western-style imposing hotel had opened in town, the Tunisia Palace. The former with 200 rooms, and the latter with 150, such hotels testify to the increasing number of tourists and travellers in Tunis.



Working Number: GR 027

Name: Family gathering in Alexandria

Holding Museum: Benaki Museum

Date: 1889

Materials: Photo B/W

Curator Justification: Family gatherings helped immigrants to reaffirm and consolidate kin solidarity, which in turn provided crucial support when facing the difficulties of a new and alien environment. Religious festivals, marriages, births and other life-cycle events provided opportunities for extended families to get together and strengthen their ties.



Working Number: ET1 075

Name: Opera House, 1869

Holding Museum: Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Date: 1869

Materials: -

Curator Justification: In 1869, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Suez Canal, Khedive Ismail had a Western-style opera house built. Known as the Khedivial (Royal) Opera House, it was designed by two Italian architects, Avoscani and Rossi.



Working Number: ET1 087

Name: Alexandria Sporting Club

Holding Museum: Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Date: -

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The Alexandria Sporting Club was founded in 1890 and was one of the oldest clubs in Egypt. Established as a horse racing and social club, from around 1920 it also included a golf course. In colonial times, Egyptians were not admitted. The Club still exists today.



Working Number: GR 028

Name: Antonis Benakis at the Sporting Club in Alexandria

Holding Museum: Benaki Museum

Date: 1888–1920

Materials: Photograph

Curator Justification: The Alexandria Sporting Club was a meeting place for the European elite in Egypt.
