

Migrations / The life of European immigrant communities: Egypt and Tunisia

Before the establishment of French and British protectorates over Tunisia and Egypt respectively, some European countries had negotiated with the local governments the right to run their own state institutions, such as schools and hospitals. Many of these institutions survived even under the protectorates. In part, thus, immigrants associated with their compatriots in the context of institutions that were extensions of their home countries. At the same time, immigrants generated a variety of organisations that developed from the bottom up, such as workers' friendly societies, trade unions or cultural associations. Moreover, immigrants also gave life to a vibrant press, enriching the cultural life of Tunisia and Egypt. Religious institutions and organisations also contributed in shaping the collective life of immigrants.



Working Number: IT1 093
Name: The Court Martial at the Palace of Justice
Holding Museum: Vallicelliana Library
Date: 1882
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Following anti-foreigner rioting, the British fleet bombed Alexandria on 11 July 1882, and two days later British troops occupied the city. Fearing for the security of the Suez Canal, the British government sent 30,000 soldiers and 40 warships to Egypt. Although formally independent, Egypt effectively became a British protectorate.



Working Number: GR 029
Name: Lesson at the Benaki Orphanage in Alexandria Egypt
Holding Museum: Benaki Museum
Date: 1888–1921
Materials: Photograph
Curator Justification: Among the foreign communities resident in Egypt, the Greeks formed the largest contingent. First attracted by the employment opportunities arising during the days of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha and his immediate successors in the early 19th century, their number rose to around 100,000 by the late 1920s.



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 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: TN 085
Name: Treaty of the French Protectorate, 12 May 1881

Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie
Date: 1881
Materials: Paper
Curator Justification: In 1881, French military intervention in Tunisia forced the local ruler, the Bey of Tunis, to sign the Treaty of Bardo, granting France a protectorate over the country. Nominally, the Tunisian government remained in place, but it operated under French supervision. The Bey's decrees required the approval of the French authorities. The Treaty also gave France the power to run foreign policy on behalf of Tunisia.



Working Number: IT1 118
Name: The female surgery division of the Italian hospital in Tunis
Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)
Date: First years of the 20th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: In 1890, the Italian community in Tunisia set up the first Italian hospital initially in a rented building. In 1900, the hospital moved to a new facility and in 1907 took the name Ospedale Giuseppe Garibaldi.



Working Number: IT1 116
Name: The Students' Benevolent Fund of the Società Dante Alighieri
Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)
Date: First years of the 20th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Italian community in Tunisia included not only wealthy entrepreneurs, professionals and merchants, but also impoverished labourers, the unemployed and other destitute individuals. Some of the wealthy immigrants set up benevolent organisations to care for the poor members of their community.



Working Number: IT1 120
Name: Italian Workers Friendly Society (Tunis)
Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)
Date: First years of the 20th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Common in Italy since the mid-19th century, workers' friendly societies soon also flourished in Tunisia and other countries of immigration. In the absence of public welfare, friendly societies helped members to cope with hardship due to illness, accident, unemployment or death. Members regularly paid a fee and received help in case of need.



Working Number: IT2 074
Name: L.A. Balboni, The Italians in the Egyptian Civilization of the XIX Century, Alexandria, Egypt, 1906; title page
Holding Museum: Private collection
Date:

Materials: 1906

Curator Justification: -

This book, intended to celebrate the role played by the Italian community in Egypt, was published on the occasion of the 1906 Milan International Exhibition, when the Italian government encouraged Italian communities abroad to make their activities known to the Italian and international public.



Working Number: IT1 108

Name: Gold to the country from the [Italian] colony in Tunisia

Holding Museum: State Archives of Livorno

Date: Tunis, 1917

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Italians in Tunisia supported Italy's war effort during World War I in different ways, including donating their items of gold. Most dramatically, they supported it by serving as soldiers; over 1,200 of them lost their lives while fighting in Europe.



Working Number: FR 153

Name: Le Petit Tunisien. Voice for French interests and communities in Tunisia.

Holding Museum:

National Library of France

Date:

21 July 1889

Materials:

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Curator Justification:

With the increasing influx of European migrants into the southern Mediterranean, their cultural and political traditions travelled with them and soon made themselves felt in their adopted countries. This French newspaper was aimed at the different European communities living in Tunisia under the French Protectorate.



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.



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 025

Name:

Carthage Cathedral

Holding Museum:

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Date:

19th century

Materials:

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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.

**Working Number:**

TN 042

Name:

Greek Orthodox church in Tunisia, on Rue de Rome

Holding Museum:

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Date:

1901

Materials:

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Curator Justification:

The Greek Orthodox Christians had long had a place of worship in Tunis. In 1901, they built a new church, dedicated to Saint George, in the European neighbourhood. It was designed by the Italian architect Giuseppe Abita.
