HISTORICAL PROFILES / Tunisia

Tunisia at the heart of the Mediterranean between Orient and Occident

Situated at the confluence of the seas of the Mediterranean, since ancient times Tunisia has been a land of encounters and exchange between the eastern and western Mediterranean, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Under the reign of Hammuda Pasha Bey (1782–1814), the Regency of Tunis was treated as an equal trading partner by European powers. By the end of Napoleonic Wars, however, a radical change occurred in these relationships, largely due to growing technological superiority on the north shore of the Mediterranean. Thus, in May 1881, Tunisia became a French Protectorate. The early 20th century saw Tunisia, especially its social structures and traditional economy, in a deep crisis. The Protectorate generated new debates within Tunisian society.



Portrait of Hammouda Pacha Bey

19th century



Palais de la Rose

18th–19th centuries



Privateer ship flags

19th century



Carte du royaume de Tunis

1727

Imperialism as an obstacle to a renaissance

At the dawn of modern times, the former, ancient Hafsid Ifriqiya, now an Ottoman province, opens up vis-à-vis the Ottoman Orient and the European Occident. This is a time when, as the power of the central government in Istanbul is crumbling and the authority of the Turkish metropolis is weakening, the dynasty of the Husaynid beys in the Regency of Tunis is consolidated. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the Husaynid beys act as both reformers and builders. Tunis, the capital of the regency, now secure, saw an influx of European commerce: Italian, Genoese, Leghorn Jews ... then English and French ... settled there. But the regency fanned once again the greed of possessive European powers, France in particular.



Sahib el-Tabaa Mosque

17th–18th centuries



Palais Kasr el-Said

18th–19th centuries



Table

19th century



Treaty of Bardo

12 mai 1881

From Ottoman suzerainty to French domination

During the 19th century, the power of the beys, who were aware of the dangers the Europeans posed, operated in favour of a policy of reforms: Ahmad Pasha Bey by modernising the army and abolishing slavery, while Muhammad Pasha Bey adopted the Fundamental Pact in 1857, one of the first declarations of human rights, followed by the Constitution of 1861. Finally, the changes implemented by the great reformer Khayr al-Din (1897–1969) touched both national institutions and the economy. But this policy of reforms, far from moderinising the country, finally led to its ruin. In the aftermath of the French Protectorate, popular resistance was on the rise; the elite weaved relationships with the population suffering this scourge of the 20th century, namely colonisation, and this in particular in the Arab world. On 1 April 1920, the first Tunisian political party was founded: the Tunisian Constitutional Liberal Party “Le Destour”.



Painting of Ahmed Pacha Bey

19th century



Le général Khaireddine (painting)

1852



École Sadiki

1875



L'École de la Rue du Pacha (inside the classroom)

1861