

TUNISIA in Perspective

An Orientation Guide



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Chapter 1: Country Profile

Introduction

The smallest of the four North African states, collectively referred to as the *Maghreb*,¹ Tunisia is a Moslem country with a secular government. In 3,000 years of history, great empires, from the Phoenicians to the French Third Republic, have passed through and left their footprints. Barely 90 minutes by air from Rome, this land of semi-nomads and European intellectuals has experimented with democracy since its independence from France in 1956. Couched between neighboring states like Algeria, which is experiencing civil war, and Libya, a military dictatorship emerging from pariah status, Tunisia is making its way towards economic independence and internal security.



Tunisia in Facts and Figures²

Area: slightly larger than the state of Georgia

total: 163,610 sq km (101,662 sq mi)

land: 155,360 sq km (96,536 sq mi)

water: 8,250 sq km (5,126 sq mi)

Bordering countries: Algeria 965 km (600 mi); Libya 459 km (285 mi)

Population: 10,276,158

population growth rate: 0.989%

Ethnic groups: Arab 98%, European 1%, Jewish and other 1%

Religions: Muslim 98%, Christian 1%, Jewish and other 1%

Languages: Arabic (official and one of the languages of commerce), French (commerce)

Age structure:

0–14 years: 24% (male 1,270,208 / female 1,191,619)

15–64 years: 69.2% (male 3,571,228 / female 3,538,458)

65 years and over: 6.9% (male 333,801 / female 370,844)

Median age:

total: 28.3 years

male: 27.7 years

female: 28.8 years (2007 est.)

¹ The term *Maghreb* is Arabic meaning “setting” or the lands of the setting sun, i.e. west.

² Information in the Facts and Figures section is courtesy of the CIA World Factbook updated 31 May 2007. Figures are for 2007 unless otherwise noted. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>



Tunisian children

Infant mortality rate:

male: 25.75 deaths / 1,000 live births

female: 19.92 deaths / 1,000 live births

Life expectancy at birth:

male: 73.6 years

female: 77.21 years

total fertility rate: 1.73 children born / woman

Literacy: Definition – age 15 and over can read and write:

total population: 74.3%

male: 83.4%

female: 65.3% (2004 census)

Major infectious diseases:

degree of risk: intermediate

food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea and hepatitis A

vectorborne diseases: may be a significant risk in some locations during the transmission season, typically April through November

Country name:

conventional long form: Tunisian Republic

conventional short form: Tunisia

local long form: al-Jumhuriyah at-Tunisiyah

local short form: Tunis

Capital: Tunis

Administrative divisions:

24 governorates: Ariana (Aryanah), Beja (Bajah), Ben Arous (Bin 'Arus), Bizerte (Banzart), Gabes (Qabis), Gafsa (Qafsah), Jendouba (Jundubah), Kairouan (al-Qayrawan), Kasserine (al-Qasrayn), Kebili (Qibili), Kef (al -Kaf), Mahdia (al-Mahdiyah), Manouba (Manubah), Medenine (Madanin), Monastir (al-Munastir), Nabeul (Nabul), Sfax (Safaqis), Sidi Bou Zid (Sidi Bu Zayd), Siliana (Silyanah), Sousse (Susah), Tataouine (Tatawin), Tozeur (Tawzar), Tunis, Zaghwan (Zaghwan)

Independence: 20 March 1956 (from France)

National Holiday: Independence Day, 20 March (1956)

Constitution: 1 June 1959; amended 1988, 2002

Legal system:

System is based on French civil law system and Islamic law. Some judicial review of legislative acts take place in the Supreme Court during joint session.

Suffrage:

20 years of age; universal except for active duty military



Courtesy of Wikipedia
President Ben Ali

Executive branch:

chief of state: President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (since 7 November 1987)

head of government: Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi (since 17 Nov. 1999)

cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the president

elections: The president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term (no term limits).

The elections were last held on 24 October 2004; the next will occur in October 2009.

The prime minister is appointed by the president.

election results: President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali reelected for a fourth term with 94.5% of the vote

Legislative branch:

The bicameral system consists of the Chamber of Deputies or Majlis al-Nuwaab (189 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms) and the Chamber of Advisors (126 seats; 85 members elected by municipal counselors, deputies, mayors, and professional associations and trade unions; 41 members are presidential appointees; members serve six-year terms).

elections: Chamber of Deputies elections were last held on 24 October 2004 and will be held again in October 2009. Chamber of Advisors elections were last held on 3 July 2005 and will be held again in July 2011.

election results: Chamber of Deputies - seats by party - RCD 152, MDS 14, PUP 11, UDU 7, al-Tajdid 3, PSL 2; Chamber of Advisors - seats by party - RCD 71 (14 trade union seats vacant (boycotted))

Judicial branch: Court of Cassation or Cour de Cassation

Political parties:

Al-Tajdid Movement; Constitutional Democratic Rally Party (Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique) or RCD (official ruling party); Green Party for Progress or PVP; Liberal Social Party or PSL; Movement of Socialist Democrats or MDS; Popular Unity Party or PUP; Progressive Democratic Party; Unionist Democratic Union or UDU

International organization participation:

Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA); ACCT; African Development Bank (AfDB); Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD); Arab Monetary Fund (AMF); Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); African Union (AU); BSEC (observer); Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations (FAO); G-77;



International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); ICC; ICRM; International Development Association, World Bank (IDA); Islamic Development Bank (IDB); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); IFC; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC);

International Hydrographic Organization (IHO); International Labor Organization, United Nations (ILO); International Monetary Fund (IMF); International Maritime Organization (IMO); Interpol; Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, UNESCO (IOC); IOM; Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); ISO; International Telecommunications Union (ITU); ITUC; LAS; Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, World Bank (MIGA); MONUC; NAM; Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) (suspended); Organization of African States (OAS) (observer); OIC; OIF; ONUB; Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (partner); United Nations (UN); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE); United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWTO); Universal Postal Union (UPU); World Customs Organization (WCO); World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU); World Health Organization (WHO); WIPO; World Meteorological Organization (WMO); World Trade Organization (WTO)

Diplomatic representation from the U.S.:

chief of mission: Ambassador Robert F. Godec

embassy: Zone Nord-Est des Berges du Lac Nord de Tunis 1053

GDP – per capita: \$8,800 (2006 est.)

Agricultural products: olives, olive oil, grain, tomatoes, citrus fruit, sugar beets, dates, almonds, beef, dairy products

Industries: petroleum, mining (mostly phosphate and iron ore), tourism, textiles, footwear, agribusiness, beverages

Export commodities: clothing, semi-finished goods and textiles, agricultural products, mechanical goods, phosphates and chemicals, hydrocarbons

Export partners: France 32.9%, Italy 24%, Germany 8.4%, Spain 5.5%, Libya 4.5% (2005)

Import commodities: textiles, machinery and equipment, hydrocarbons, chemicals, foodstuff

Import partners: France 23.5%, Italy 20.9%, Germany 8.2%, Spain 5.1% (2005)

Military branches:

Army, Navy, Republic of Tunisia Air Force (al-Quwwat al-Jawwiya al-Jamahiriyah at-Tunisia)

Military age of service and obligation:

compulsory military service: 20 years of age

voluntary military service: 18 years of age

service obligation: 12 months

Chapter 2: Geography

Introduction

Like a wedge driven into the coastline of North Africa, Tunisia is surrounded on three sides by two large neighbors: Algeria and Libya. With an area of 163,610 sq km (101,662 sq mi) it is approximately the size of the state of Georgia.³ Its northern tip, Cap Blanc, lies at 37° latitude, and the southernmost city of Borj el-Khadra at 30° latitude, a distance of approximately 750 km (450 mi). While two-thirds of Tunisia's east fronts on the Mediterranean Sea, the widest part of the country can be measured from the Algerian Sahara in the west to the Libyan frontier town of Ras el-Jedir in the east; a distance of about 250 km (150 mi).⁴



Geographic Divisions

Tunisia parcels itself up into four distinct geographic divisions. The region to the north of the Grand Dorsal Mountains, also called the High Tell, is an extension of the Atlas Mountains of Algeria. Running from southwest to northeast, this rugged limestone and sandstone range boasts Tunisia's highest peak, Jebel Chambi at 1,544 m (5,066 ft). The valleys to the northeast of the Grand Dorsal get plenty of rainfall and have verdant pastures. Its clay soil makes fertile farmland, and the region is known as Tunisia's breadbasket. The Cap Bon peninsula, which protrudes from the coastline like a finger pointing up toward Italy, is part of this region. The country's only perennial river, the Medjerda, flows through this region to the Gulf of Tunis.

The second major division is the High Steppes area that lies south and east of the Grand Dorsal chain. It is sparsely populated. Mostly sandy and dotted with sagebrush and esparto grass, the soil is suitable for sheep and goat farming. In some places the land reaches heights of up to 460 m (1,500 ft).⁵

The third division, the Low Steppes or Sahel region, connects with the coastal plains that run from Sousse south to Sfax. Its maximum inland altitude is about 180 m (600 ft). Often called the Sahel, a name meaning in Arabic easy land or savannah, this region is the most densely populated part of Tunisia. South of Gafsa, the Sahel connects to the last of Tunisia's geographical divisions: the South. This desert region includes the salt marshes of Chott el-Jerid that lie below sea level and the oases, Tozeur and Douz, which are called the gateway to the desert. The Kerkennah Islands, 20 km (12 mi) off the coast from Sfax, belong to this region.

³ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Tunisia." 31 May 2000. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>

⁴ UniMaps.com. "Tunisia Today, Map and Information." 2005. <http://unimaps.com/tunisia/index.html>

⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Tunisia Land Relief." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-46598/Tunisia>

To the South and beyond lies the Grand Erg Oriental that stretches east to west from Algeria to Libya. The ergs, or large sand dunes, can reach heights of 300 m (1,000 ft). The Island of Jerba, just 10 km (6 mi) off the coast, is the only area of the South that is non-arid.⁶

Climate

Tunisia is geographically located in a warm temperate zone with three distinct climate belts. The north of the country and Cap Bon peninsula have a Mediterranean climate with exceptionally high rainfall levels in the mountains where up to 1,500 mm (60 in) can fall each year. The average rainfall for this zone, however, is 400 mm (16 in). The winter months from November through February can be cool and wet with daytime temperatures in Tunis averaging 11°C (52°F). The summers are hot and dry, and highs reach a maximum of 33° C (93°F).



The second climate belt lies south of the Dorsal Mountains and covers the Steppes and the Sahel coastal region. Annual rainfall here is between 100 mm–400 mm (4–6 in) per year and is adequate to support the growth of esparto grass and sagebrush. The seasonal temperatures inland are somewhat lower in the winter months, averaging 9°C (47°F) in Gafsa, for example, but higher in midsummer at 37.5°C (100°F). Mediterranean air currents moderate these temperatures somewhat on the coastal plain.⁷

The third belt, the desert climate, begins in the Sahara south of Tozeur. Annual desert rainfall here seldom exceeds 100 mm (4 in) and diurnal (day/night) temperatures fluctuate more dramatically. Daytime temperatures in July can frequently rise above 45°C (115°F) and can drop to near 0°C (32°) at night. The sirocco, or strong hot winds, from the Sahara originate here and can bring sandstorms to the north of the country.⁸

Major Cities

Tunis

The 700,000 residents of this metropolis live in a city that is more than 3,000 years old. It first appeared in ancient history as the pre-Carthaginian settlement, Tunes. Many of the buildings in the old city such as the Ez-Zeitouna University Mosque date from the late seventh century period of western Arab Islamic expansion.⁹ Others, such as the Dar-al-Bey or House of the Bey, date from the Ottoman occupation, which began in 1594. The modern city that connects with the suburbs dates from the French colonial period in the late 19th century.¹⁰

⁶ Azureva.com. “Douz, Gateway to the Sahara.” <http://www.azureva.com/gb/tunisie/magazine/douz.php3>

⁷ WTG World Travel Guide. “Tunisia Climate.”

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/283/climate/Africa/Tunisia.html>

⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. “Tunisia Climate.” 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-46600/Tunisia>

⁹ The Ez-Zeitouna University Mosque is also called the Olive Mosque. Ez-Zeitouna is Arabic for olive.

¹⁰ *A History of Modern Tunisia*. Perkins, K. J. 2004. New York. Cambridge University Press.

Sfax

With a population of almost 340,000, Sfax is Tunisia's second-largest city. Built on the site of a coastal pre-Carthaginian village Taparura, Sfax is in the heart of the olive and almond-growing region halfway between Tunis and Gabes. It is one of the main passenger stations on the North-South rail line. The port, once a haven for Barbary pirates, is home to a fishing fleet and cannery as well as a phosphate export terminal.¹¹



Aryanah

This city is most famous for its Andalusian architecture, created by the Spanish Muslims who fled the Catholic persecutions in the late 15th century. The city of 217,000 people, just north of Tunis, is a popular site for tourists in search of Andalusian architecture and artifacts. The city hosts yearly festivals of Andalusian lute music.¹²

Sousse

This coastal city of nearly 160,000 is the capital of the Sousse governate. It is situated on the Gulf of Hammamet, 100 km (60 mi) from Tunis, and was once the Carthaginian city of Hadrumetum. Known among Tunisians for its fine textiles, Sousse also produces olives, sardines, and industrial products like light machinery.¹³

Kairouan

The walled city of Kairouan, located on a rocky plateau 60 km (36 mi) west of Sousse, has a population of 160,000. It is known commercially for its carpets and rose oil, and culturally for its standing as a holy city. Prior to independence in 1956, non-Muslim travelers to Kairouan required a permit to visit the city. One of the companions of the Prophet Muhammed, Sidi Sahab is buried here and his shrine, *zawiya*, was the goal of North African pilgrims who were unable to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Grand Mosque, built in 670 CE, has the oldest minaret in the Islamic world.¹⁴

Bizerte

Situated on the northern coast, this city of nearly 130,000 is the site of the 1961 massacre of 1,000 Tunisian sailors killed in a protest against the French naval presence on Tunisian soil. It is now the largest city on the Northern Tunisia coast. The economic base of the city is oil refining and iron ore export. Even today, Bizerte is the most French of all Tunisian cities.¹⁵

¹¹ Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Sfax." 2007. <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/sfax.htm>

¹² Look Smart. Find Articles. Salloum, Habeeb. "Tunisia's Andalusian Heritage." 2000. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2242/is_1614_277/ai_64994709/pg_2

¹³ Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Sousse." 2007. <http://www.i-cias.com/e.o/sousse.htm>

¹⁴ Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Kairouan." 2007. <http://www.i-cias.com/e.o/kairouan.htm>

¹⁵ Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Sousse." 2007. <http://www.i-cias.com/e.o/bizerte.htm>

Water Resources

The rainfall and climate of Tunisia vary from south to north, making the water unevenly distributed. However, water resource management has ensured that, on average, only 57% of the water resources are used. The north has 80% of the water resources for the entire country.¹⁶ In the south, rainwater is collected in cisterns while spring water fills the cisterns in the north.



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Water cooling system in Qibili

Environmental Concerns

Tunisians in the 21st century are environmentally conscious. They have identified the most serious threats to the environment and have worked with international agencies to develop a national response to challenges to the environment. Some of the problems are related to climate and regional in nature, i.e., soil and water conservation affect the north; desertification and wind erosion affect the south. Other problems, such as coastal pollution, deforestation and overexploitation of marine resources, are a product of industrial development. The United National Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has provided broad assistance toward identifying and correcting climate related issues. Working with the Tunisian Center on Sustainable Energy and the Environment (CIEDE), they have developed courses for the national school system on environmental issues.¹⁷ National organizations like the Tunisian Network of Renewable Energy (ANER) coordinate with the UN Developmental Aid Office to design national responses to environmental threats. Their response has been effective in the reforestation projects in the highlands of the north, in soil and water conservation in the central plains, and in dune fixation in the south.¹⁸

¹⁶ FAO. Mtimet, Amor. "Tunisia." 29 July 2004.

http://www.fao.org/ag/agl/swlwpnr/reports/y_nf/z_tn/tn.htm#waterr

¹⁷ United Nations Development Program. 2007. Energy and Environment. Tunisia.

<http://www.energyandenvironment.undp.org/undp/index.cfm?module=Library&page=Document&DocumentID=6173>

¹⁸ United Nations Development Program. Tunisia: Energy and Environment-Sustainable Difference. PDF pp 1-2. <http://www.undp.org/energyandenvironment/sustainabledifference/PDFs/ArabStates/Tunisia.pdf>

Chapter 3: History

Prehistory

When Paleolithic (Early Stone Age) humans built settlements in southern Tunisia 200,000 years ago, the land was covered in forests and savannah grasses. Excavations by archaeologists in the oasis town of Kelibia have unearthed stone implements and bone tools dating from this period.¹⁹ Then, sometime after the last Ice Age c. 8000 BCE, the climate began to change. North Africa began to dry up and a desert, the Sahara, began to claim the land. It ushered in the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) period of history and human migration. Excavated remains of the Capsan culture near Gafsa document village life during this period of human settlement. This hunting culture, which also practiced human decapitation and dismemberment, produced rich artifacts such as mosaics and ornaments dating from c. 4500 BCE.²⁰

Towards the end of the Neolithic period (New Stone Age) around 2500 BCE there was a broad migration of fair-skinned peoples, probably from the northeastern shores of the Mediterranean. These migrants, later called Berbers, settled in the fertile mountain valleys of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. The name Berber derives from Greek *berberoi* meaning barbarous or non-Greek-speaking.²¹

Ancient History - The Rise of Carthage

The most prominent chapter in Tunisia's ancient history was written by the Carthaginians. They were Phoenicians who came to Africa from Tyre on the coast of Lebanon around 1100 BCE. This nation of seafaring merchants built its first African settlement, Utica, approximately 34 km (20 mi) northwest of present day Tunis. Utica was one of a chain of port outposts linking Tyre with the silver and gold mines in Numidia (Algeria) and south Spain, and with Phoenician colonies in Corsica and Sardinia.²² The name Carthage actually dates from the time of Queen Elissa (Dido) and the founding of the city of Carthage in 814 BCE. The city was adjacent to the settlement of Utica and was the center of Phoenicia's Tunisian Empire. In the seventh and sixth centuries, other Carthaginian cities sprang up in Sousse (Hadrumentum), Bizerte (Hippo Diarrhytus), and Tabarka (Thrabaka).²³



Excavations in Tunisia, Spain, Sicily and Sardinia reveal an impressive architectural tradition somewhat in the style of the Egyptians with massive temples and well-planned cities. The city of Carthage was built on a hillside with wide avenues. Many of its houses

¹⁹ Tunisia.com. Ben Salem, Makrem. "The Prehistory Period in Tunisia." 2006.

<http://www.tunisia.com/Tunisia/Culture/Tunisian-History/The-Prehistory-Period-in-Tunisia>

²⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Qafsah." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9062091>

²¹ Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Berbers." 2007. <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/berbers.htm>

²² Washington State University. Hooker, Richard. "Rome, The Punic Wars." 1996.

<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ROME/PUNICWAR.HTM>

²³ *Tunisia, 4th Edition* [p. 23]. Hole, Abigail and Daniel Robinson. 2004. Oakland, CA. Lonely Planet Publication.

had five floors along with cisterns, gardens, and paving mosaics. The ramparts of the city were 24 km (15 mi) in length and its port facilities were capable of accommodating a maritime and naval fleet of up to 220 ships.²⁴ The Carthaginians inherited many gods from their Phoenician ancestors but the most important ones were Baal Hammon (male), Tanit (female), and Eshum (male).²⁵ Some scholars believe that Baal Hammon accepted child sacrifice in the form of burnt offerings. However, the remains of more than 6,000 children who died or were killed in infancy cannot be clearly ascribed to sacrifice.²⁶



© Gary Deham
View of modern Carthage

Carthage was the foremost power in North Africa from 800 BCE to after 300 BCE, a period of more than five hundred years. By 600 BCE, the fledgling Roman Republic was expanding north to the Alps and south through Italy. Carthage's influence in the Mediterranean region and its presence in Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily was challenged by Rome whose consuls had their eyes on the Carthaginian trade empire. Near the end of the third century BCE, the Roman Empire clashed with the Carthaginian-Phoenician Empire, called by the Romans *Poeni* for the Punic language they spoke. This conflict led to the first of the Punic Wars.²⁷

The First Punic War

The First Punic War, 264–241 BCE, concentrated almost entirely on the island of Sicily. The Romans, who had a foothold in the coastal cities of the north, laid siege to the Carthaginian trade settlements along the southern coast. After initial losses, Carthaginian forces under Hamilcar attempted to reverse the tide of defeat by using their navy. After nearly twenty-five years of protracted land and naval conflict, the Romans decimated Hamilcar's fleet in the Battle of the Aegates Islands (241 BCE) and occupied Carthage's front yard: Sicily. The Carthaginians signed a peace treaty, forfeited their settlements in Sicily and agreed to pay reparations.²⁸

As early as 238 BCE, the Carthaginians began to fortify their settlements in Corsica, Sardinia, and on the Spanish coast. The humiliation of Hamilcar passed on to his two sons, Hannibal and Hasdrubal, who spent fifteen years constructing a Carthaginian bulwark, Nova Carthago or New Carthage, in Central Spain. Their plan was to launch an expeditionary force from Spain into Rome. An earlier treaty with Rome confined Carthaginian settlement in Rome to a line below the Ebro River in Spain. A Roman enclave, Saguntum, just inside the line of demarcation was the flash point for a new conflict. When Hamilcar was assassinated in 222 BCE, his son, Hannibal, became

²⁴Adventures of Tunisia. Kjeilen, Tore. "Carthage, Punic Port."

<http://lexicorient.com/tunisia/carthage01.htm>

²⁵About.com. Decker, Roy. "Carthaginian Religion [p. 2]." 2002.

http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/uc_decker_carthrel2.htm

²⁶Encyclopedia Phoenicia. "Child Sacrifice?" <http://phoenicia.org/childsacrifice.html>

²⁷Washington State University. Hooker, Richard. "Rome, The Punic Wars." 1996.

<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ROME/PUNICWAR.HTM>

²⁸Encyclopedia of the Orient. Kjeilen, Tore. "Punic Wars." 2007. http://lexicorient.com/e.o/punic_wr.htm

Rome's greatest threat. Hannibal quickly laid siege to Saguntum and after nearly a year made it a part of Nova Carthago.

The Second Punic War

The Second Punic War (218–202 BCE) had begun. Knowing his navy was no match for the Roman fleet, Hannibal set out with an expeditionary force consisting of 16,000 men led by his brother, Hadrubal. He had 80,000 infantry under his command plus 12,000 Numidian and Iberian cavalry, and several hundred elephants. With his back secure, he marched north over the Pyrenees. As he marched through southern France the Celtic tribes joined him against the Romans. Very soon Hannibal was stalled at the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. Then, after a decade of brilliantly staged battles and tactical maneuvers, the Carthaginian advance was finally arrested in North Italy in 205 BCE. Hannibal was unable to advance on Rome.



© 2007 clipart.com
Naval battles in the Punic War

In the interim, a daring newcomer, Scipio Africanus, was appointed proconsul and charged with defending Rome. Scipio led a force to retake the Roman territory in Spain and to cut off Hannibal's supply lines. From there he took the battle to the coast of Africa in 204 BCE and in 202 defeated Hannibal at the Battle of Zama, south of Tunis. From this point onwards Rome controlled the Mediterranean and North Africa. Carthage had become a dependent state.²⁹

The Third Punic War

Weakened and demoralized, the Carthaginians were forbidden to wage war on any of Rome's allies. The neighboring Numidians, through their leader Masinissa, had become vassals of Rome. Keen on aggrandizement, they used their position to antagonize their Carthaginian neighbors. When Carthage retaliated against Numidia in 149 BC, the short lived Third Punic War began. The Romans descended on Carthage in 148 BCE and systematically defeated all of their cities. The victor, Scipio Aemilianus, grandson of Scipio Africanus, reported the motto of his grandfather's protector, Cato, to the Roman Senate: *carthago delenda est*, Carthage is (to be) decimated. By 146 BCE, the Romans had burnt the settlements, destroyed the farms and enslaved the people of Carthage. For several hundred years North Africans would enjoy Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome.³⁰

So thorough was the Roman destruction of Carthage and its artifacts that a reconstruction of the Punic civilization is only possible from accounts in Greek and Roman historical texts.

The Roman Era

²⁹ Washington State University. Hooker, Richard. "Rome, The Punic Wars." 1996.
<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ROME/PUNICWAR.HTM>

³⁰ About.com. Gill, N.S. "Punic War III." 2003.
<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/punicwars/a/thirdpunicwar.htm>

In the century following the fall of Carthage, Rome was busy settling claims against old allies in North Africa. Among them were the Numidians who were deeply involved in Rome's civil war. Rome was also well on its way toward a transition from republic to empire. However, before North Africa could become a Roman province under the new empire, Numidian Berber leaders allied to the republicans Pompey and Scipio had to be



Bronze statue of Gaius Julius Caesar

neutralized. Julius Caesar landed near Sousse in 46 BCE and marched to Thapsus where Pompey's forces were sheltered by the Numidian king, Juba I. They were defeated and Caesar returned a victor to Rome taking with him Juba's four year old son, Juba II.³¹ The boy was raised by Octavius and following his marriage to Marc Antony's daughter, returned to Africa to govern the Roman province for fifty years.

In the early days of the Empire, Roman colonial expansion in North Africa was swift. Carthage itself was rebuilt and became the capital of Roman Tripolitania, a colony that by 200 CE stretched from Morocco to Libya. The ruins of Roman towns in Tunisia like Bardo, Sbeitla, Dougga, El Djem, and Bulla Regia are proof of the advanced state of Rome's city planning.³² Roman North Africa was a major player in affairs of the Empire. Christianity, a force which historians and philosophers like Augustine identify with the weakening of Rome, was well established in North Africa in the third century. This was fully 100 years before Constantine became the first emperor to legalize Christianity in 313 CE.³³ The philosopher and early church father, St. Augustine, was born in Numidia and became leader of the Donatist Christian movement there before moving to Rome.³⁴

North Africa was linked yet one more time to affairs in Rome. In 426 CE, Gaiseric, leader of the Vandals of Northern Europe occupied Carthage and subjugated Roman colonies. Using Carthage as their base, the Vandals invaded Spain. In 455 CE they marched into the city of Rome. After the death of Gaiseric in 477 the influence of the Vandals quickly dissipated. Likewise, Emperor Justinian's Byzantine Empire (527–656 CE), which filled the vacuum in the Mediterranean left by Rome, was short lived. By the year 646 the Islamic era in Tunisia had begun.

The Coming of Islam

Arab conquerors began to arrive in several waves of western expansion as early as 646 CE. Kairouan was founded in 670 CE by Uqba ibn Nafi and became a base for further western campaigns. Work on the Grand Mosque also dates from this period. With the fall of Carthage in 698 CE, Latin influence in North Africa came to an end. The Islamization

³¹ Livius. Lendering, Jona. "Gaius Julius Caesar." <http://www.livius.org/caa-can/caesar/caesar07.html>

³² *Tunisia, 4th Edition* [p. 132, 139, 147, 153]. Hole, Abigail and Daniel Robinson. 2004. Oakland, CA. Lonely Planet Publication.

³³ Thinkquest Library. Ancient Civilizations. "Christianity in Rome." 2000. <http://library.thinkquest.org/C004203/religion/religion04.htm>

³⁴ Macrohistory-Prehistory to the 21st Century. Smitha, Frank. "Augustine Influences Christianity." 1998. <http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch25.htm>

and Arabization of North Africa that ensued mirrored historical events in Arabia and proceeded in several stages over the next 500 years.

The short-lived Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus brought the new Berber converts in *Ifriqiya* (Africa) under Sunni doctrinal control. The rapid westward advance of Islam from its home in Arabia brought with it the Arabic language and the need for religious instruction. The Olive University, Ez-Zeitouna, in the old city of Tunis was the first center in Tunisia to provide this education.

The first waves of conquerors from Arabia were Sunni Arabs who were envoys of the Umayyad Caliphate. Its Caliphs were all from the Banu Umayyah clan of Mecca's Koreish tribe and close friends of the Prophet Muhammad. Basically they believed, as Sunni Moslems do today, that an orthodox believer should follow both the Quran and the *sunna* or traditions of the Prophet. Their creed was simple. A Moslem was obligated to five things: 1) observe the month of fasting, *siyam*; 2) pay a charity tax, *zakat*; 3) perform pilgrimage once in a lifetime, *hajj*; 4) observe the five daily prayers, *salat*; and 5) declare that there is one God and Muhammad is his last prophet, *shahada*.³⁵

In 750 CE, the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus came to an end, but its ideas were already firmly entrenched in Tunis and as far west as Cordoba, Spain. A new and more tolerant Sunni doctrine emerged from the new Abbasid Caliphate in Bagdad. This caliphate lasted five-hundred years until 1258, but during its reign several schisms or splits took place, each of which made its way to *Ifriqiya* (Africa).



© David Weekly
Grand Mosque in Kairouan

In 800 CE, the Berber Emir Ibrahim Al-Aghlab embraced the Abbasid ideas and introduced them to Tunis and Kairouan. For awhile his followers, the Aghlabids, ruled North Africa during a period that has come to be called a Golden Age for its contributions in art, architecture, and literature. It was also a period when there were affluent communities of Christians and Jews in Tunis and Kairouan.³⁶

In the tenth century, yet another manifestation of Islam, Shi'a, reached Tunis in the shape of the Fatimid Dynasty. It derived its name from Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. She was the wife of Ali, a companion and distant relative of Muhammad, whose grandsons were martyred in the Battle of Karbala, Iraq in 680 CE. Ali and his grandsons are regarded as near saints in Shi'a Islam. Shi'a Moslems, then as today, have been regarded as heretics by Sunnis for their veneration of Ali and his grandsons Hassan and Hussein.³⁷

Each Arab invasion from the east and Berber invasion from the west added yet another layer of doctrine and cultural influence to Tunisian history. In the eleventh century the

³⁵ PBS. Islam: Empire of Faith. "The Five Pillars." <http://www.pbs.org/empires/islam/faithpillars.html>

³⁶ Al Islam. "Aghlabids." <http://dictionary.al-islam.com/Eng/Dicts/SelDict.asp?Lang=Eng&DI=30&Theme=46>

³⁷ Encyclopedia of the Orient. "Fatimids." <http://i-cias.com/e.o/fatimids.htm>

Beni Hilal bedouins from Egypt invaded from the east; in the twelfth century the Almohads from Morocco in the west. With them came their leader, Abu Zakariyya, who in 1229 founded the last of the great North African dynasties: The Hafsids. While Jerusalem and the Levant were caught up in the crusades, Tunis was a cultural and commercial center. During the 300 year rule of the Hafsids, trade with European states flourished and Tunis absorbed many of the Jews and Moslems who had been expelled during the Catholic reconquest of Spain. When the Ottoman Turkish Empire invaded Tunis in the late 15th century, the Hafsid dynasty was in decline and the European Middle Ages had come to an end.³⁸

Turkish Rule

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Mediterranean Sea belonged to the two great empires: Spain and the Ottoman Turks. In a tug of war, the two powers briefly fought for control of Tunis. By 1574, the Turks had won. Sultan Murad III in Constantinople sent his cadre of administrators to the North African coast. For the next 400 years, the Barbary state of Tunisia had a Turkish *bey* or appointed governor, and regional *deys*, elected junior officers.³⁹ The Turks were principally interested in collecting taxes; the local government was run by the Caïds or tax collectors.

The French Protectorate

As France's colonial empire in Africa grew, North African ports, two days by sea from Marseilles, acquired a strategic importance. In the guise of protecting North African commercial agreements, the French seized Algeria, which lost its independence in 1830. Similar moves, disguised as protecting commercial ties and securing mounting debts with France, brought a French force of 36,000 to Tunis in 1881. Under the Treaty of Bardo, Tunisia became a French Protectorate.⁴⁰ Yet, one difference separated Algeria from Tunisia. The colony of Algeria went on to become an overseas *department* or state with seats in the French National Assembly, whereas Tunisia remained a French protectorate until its independence in 1956.

The *Bey* remained nominally as a religious leader, but real authority rested with the ministers appointed by the French Colonial Office under the auspices of Jules Ferry, the architect of colonial policy. The French wisely avoided land confiscations and appropriation of mosques. Arabic remained the official language of the country, but Tunisia was well within the sphere of francophone North Africa.⁴¹

³⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Hafsid Dynasty." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9038760/Hafsid-Dynasty>

³⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Tunisia: History and Government." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/ebi/article-209113>

⁴⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "The Treaty of Bardo." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9013341/Treaty-of-Bardo-211177.hook>

⁴¹ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Tunisia The Protectorate (1881 – 1956)." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-46621/Tunisia>

By November of 1881 all of Tunisia had been occupied. Jules Ferry's three part vision for France's colonies: economy, culture, politics, was implemented in Tunisia.⁴²

⁴³ The French strove to create a model of colonial development to rival that of Britain. They reformed the economy and regulated finance and banking. They built schools to promote education and hospitals to eradicate typhus and cholera. The infrastructure, i.e., roads, ports and railways, dates from this period as well. However, in the end, French and British colonies had to yield to independence movements by the middle of the twentieth century.



© 2007 clipart.com
French pilot in Bizerte, early 20th Century

Barely a generation after the imposition of a French protectorate, resistance to the French occupation of Tunisia began to appear. Tunisian intellectuals, educated in France, joined forces with Islamic fundamentalists in 1907 to form the Young Tunisians Movement to protest the marginalization of Tunisians and the brutal French occupation. Radicalized by the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911, they staged a strike to support tramway workers in 1912. The colonial authorities moved quickly to declare a state of emergency. Leaders of the movement were arrested and exiled. Further publication of the nationalist journal, *Le Tunisien*, was forbidden. The movement was driven underground until after the First World War; a war in which many Tunisians fought for France.⁴⁴

In the waning days of World War I, Tunisian liberals and reformers clung to U.S. President Wilson's "The Fourteen Points," the twelfth of which said that subjects of the Ottoman Empire should have self-determination. Yet, at the post war Conference of Versailles, this subject was never discussed. The victorious powers, principally Britain and France, proceeded to divide the Ottoman possessions. The Tunisians who expected autonomy if not direct independence were disappointed, but not discouraged. Members of the disbanded Young Tunisians regrouped, a generation older and wiser, and formed a movement called Destour.⁴⁵ In the same year, 1920, a nationalist trade union movement was founded, *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT) or General Union of Tunisian Workers. Destour and UGTT demanded democratic reforms from the French; leaders of both were imprisoned. The Destour party was officially disbanded by the French in 1925.⁴⁶

⁴² Jules Ferry was the French Prime Minister in late 19th century and architect of the colonial empire.

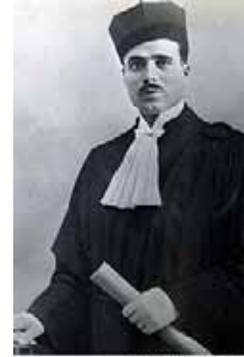
⁴³ Internet Modern History Sourcebook. Halsall, Paul. "Jules Ferry (1832-1893). July 1998
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1884ferry.html>

⁴⁴ Answers.com. Britannica Concise Encyclopedia. "Young Tunisians."
<http://www.answers.com/topic/young-tunisiens>

⁴⁵ *Destour* is Arabic for "constitution."

⁴⁶ MSN Encarta. "Tunisia." http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761568505_7/Tunisia.html

In the economic turmoil and depression of the 1930s, new life was breathed into the Destour movement by a young French-educated lawyer, Habib Bourguiba, in 1934. The new party Neo-Destour, or New Constitutional party, followed a secular and modernist line and supported the working classes. In the same year, Bourguiba was placed under house arrest in Monastir and forbidden from engaging in political activity. In 1938, the French government under Blum banned the party, arrested its leaders and declared a state of emergency. Bourguiba was imprisoned in France. When war broke out and France was occupied, the Vichy Government put pressure on Tunisian nationalists to support Axis powers. Bourguiba, by then a leader of pre-independence politics and freed by the fascists in 1943, wisely made independence a precondition for nationalist support of the Axis powers. Lacking that, he sided with the allies and prophesied their victory over the Fascists.⁴⁷



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Habib Bourguiba

The decade that followed the Second World War saw a rebirth of Neo-Destour aspirations and militancy. Bourguiba was not forgotten by the people nor was he forgiven by the French for his persistence. A degree of compromise between the two fronts was achieved when Salah Ben Youssef, a pan-Arabist leader in the Neo-Destour, was brought into the colonial government in 1950. The concord was short lived, however, and two years later a change of colonial officials brought the hard-line militarist, Jean de Hautecloque, to Tunis as political resident. He ordered the dissolution of Ben Youssef's government and the rest of Bourguiba's followers. Bourguiba was sent into exile in 1952. Extremist French settlers began to revolt against the Neo-Destour and UGTT activism. In the violence that ensued, Farhat Hached, leader of the UGTT union was assassinated. As the situation deteriorated, the frustrated French Premier Mendes France spoke out for conditional independence. In 1954, France opened negotiations with Bourguiba aimed at creating a transition to independence.⁴⁸

Independence

In June 1955, an interim independence agreement was signed and permitted Tunisians to form a government. The political crises and independence movements in Morocco and Algeria accelerated French endorsement of the Tunisian proposal. Full independence from France came on March 20, 1956. In the following month, Neo-Destour and Bourguiba won the popular elections and claimed every seat in the Chamber of Deputies. Technically, Bourguiba did not become the Prime Minister until the following year when the nominal post of Turkish *Bey* was abolished. He then became the President of the State of Tunisia. Technically, Tunisia became a Republic on July 29, 1957, the following year.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Portland Community College. Holmström, Mary. "Tunisia." February 2007.
<http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/Tunisia Fact Sheet.htm>

⁴⁸ *A History of Modern Tunisia* [p. 105-130]. Perkins, K.J. (2004). New York. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁹ HistoryWorld. "History of Tunisia."
<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac93>

Although all provisions of the Constitution were not totally ratified until 1959, a revolutionary law was promulgated in 1956: the Personal Status Code (PSC). This law largely benefited women and purported to guarantee gender equity and equal rights. It emancipated women by abolishing polygamy and providing a legal framework for divorce that could be initiated by either married party.⁵⁰ The Constitution, when it was fully ratified, provided for a thoroughly modern state with all the institutions of a mid-twentieth-century infrastructure: universal education, medical care, and social services.⁵¹

As the head of Tunisia's sole political party, Bourguiba presided over a protracted period of relative peace with his North African neighbors. The platform of the RCD, or Constitutional Democratic Rally, as Destour was now known, was socialist in domestic issues. In foreign policy, the RCD was never antagonistic toward American or European policies of the period. Tunisia, under Bourguiba, was one of the most liberal of Arab countries. In 1974, the Chamber of Deputies appointed him President for Life.

As a savvy political pragmatist, Bourguiba successfully navigated through several political challenges in the 1970s that were inspired by Tunisia's neighbor, Ghadaffi. The failure of Ghadaffi to establish the Great Arab Maghreb, a super state comprised of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauretania, may be ascribed to foot-dragging on the part of Bourguiba who was always slow to sign on to Libyan political innovation. However, when the economy began to lag behind political promises in the late 1970s, opposition parties, such as the Popular Union, Democratic Socialists, and Islamic Tendency, began to surface. Opposition to the aging president surfaced during the bread riots of 1984, when thousands were arrested and hundreds killed in public demonstration. Price increases were rescinded and calm briefly returned to the country.⁵²

Tunisia's Second President: Ben Ali

In the months following the Israeli air strikes on the PLO Headquarters in Tunis in 1985, it appeared to some that Bourguiba lacked the flexibility to deal with challenges to his government. After a series of erratic dismissals in 1987, General Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the Prime Minister and Interior Minister, decided to replace the nearly senile Bourguiba on medical grounds. This replacement took place on November 7, 1987. The 81-year-old Bourguiba retired to his family estate in Monastir. Most citizens welcomed the move and in a general election two years later with six parties participating, Ben Ali won an overwhelming majority of the votes. Ten years later, in October 1999, he won with 99.4 percent of the vote.⁵³

Stability in Tunisia under Ben Ali has come at a high price. Human rights and political and religious freedom have largely been campaign slogans, but not political realities. Some estimates put the number of political prisoners imprisoned in the early 1990s at 8,000. Following the Gulf War in August, 1991, a plot by the Hizb al-Nahda, or Islamic

⁵⁰ Answers.com. Mideast & N. Africa Encyclopedia. "Tunisia: Personal Status Code." 2004. <http://www.answers.com/topic/tunisia-personal-status-code>

⁵¹ Bourguiba.com. "Biography." <http://www.bourguiba.com/pages/biography.aspx>

⁵² Encyclopedia of the Nations. "Tunisia: Political Background."

<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/World-Leaders-2003/Tunisia-POLITICAL-BACKGROUND.html>

⁵³ *A History of Modern Tunisia* [p. 175-76]. Perkins, K.J. (2004). New York. Cambridge University Press.

Renaissance Party, to stage a coup was foiled. There were massive arrests and several ranking military officers were implicated. Several hundred were given jail sentences for their subversive activities.⁵⁴

The Ben Ali government has survived largely because of its success in sustaining economic development and renewal of the infrastructure. To Ben Ali's credit was the awarding of "Economic Area" status by the European Union (EU) in 1995. It was conferred on Tunisia as the first Arab nation in the Mediterranean Basin with that status, based on a record of mutually favorable trade accords. In addition to boosting exports, it permits Tunisians to work in the agricultural sector of EU countries.⁵⁵

Recent Events

Opposition to Ben Ali in recent years has not subsided, but is definitely underground.

International human rights organizations are in agreement about the state of political freedoms. Following torture and open persecution of journalists and human rights activists by state security officials in 2001, Amnesty International condemned the Ben Ali government for its disregard of human rights.⁵⁶ Similar outcries followed the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Tunisia. Human Rights Watch spoke of the intolerance of dissent and abuse of basic human freedoms by the Tunisian government.⁵⁷



Official seal of Tunisia

Ben Ali's image as a champion of economic development is likely to be bolstered by political and economic developments in 2006 and 2007. Like his predecessor, he is an outspoken supporter of popular Arab causes. In the past year, his government has repeatedly declared solidarity with Lebanese government forces who seek to rein in Hizbollah's power. At the same time, the government has avoided criticism of U.S. foreign policy in Iraq. The office of the President was the recipient of well-planned political collateral on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Republic Day.⁵⁸ Ben Ali's address coincided with the announcement of multiple awards in the area of energy sector development, in the form of major oil concessions and refinery contracts. Several days prior to the address, he announced an amnesty for political prisoners.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Le monde diplomatique. Labidi, Kamel. "Tunisia: Independent but Not Free." March 2006. <http://mondediplo.com/2006/03/04tunisia>

⁵⁵ Encyclopedia of the Nations. "Tunisia: History." <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Tunisia-HISTORY.html>

⁵⁶ Amnesty International Report 2001. "Tunisia." <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2001.nsf/webmepcountries/TUNISIA>

⁵⁷ Human Rights News. The World Summit on the Information Society. "Dispatch from Tunis: The Civil Society Summit That Wasn't." 2004. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/11/14/tunisi12026.htm>

⁵⁸ Tunisia Online News. "Speech by President Zine al-Abidine." 25 July 2007. <http://www.tunisiaonlinenews.com/jul-07/250707.htm>

⁵⁹ Tunisia Online News. "President Ben Ali Grants an amnesty to a number of prisoners." 24 July 2007. <http://www.tunisiaonlinenews.com/jul-07/240707-1.htm>

Timeline of Tunisian History, 1100 BCE—2007

1100 BCE - Phoenicians migrate from Tyre, Lebanon to the north Tunisian coast.

814 BCE - City of Carthage is founded by Queen Elissa Dido.

264–214 BCE - First Punic War results in Carthaginians being expelled from Sicily.

218–202 BCE - Second Punic War brings about the defeat of Hannibal in the Alps.

149–146 BCE - Third Punic War causes destruction of Carthaginian Empire and the city of Carthage.

46 BCE - Julius Caesar lands in Africa, defeats Pompey's forces, and rebuilds Carthage.

200 CE - Roman Colony of Tripolitania extends from Morocco to Libya.

426 CE - The Vandals from northern Europe briefly occupy Carthage.

527–656 - Byzantine forces of Emperor Justinian occupy Carthage for more than a century.

646 - First wave of Arab conquerors arrives in Tunisia.

670 - The Umayyad Caliphate begins in Damascus. Tunis and Kairouan follow its lead.

750 - The Umayyad Caliphate is replaced by the Abbasid Caliphate in Bagdad that lasts for 500 years.

800–900 - The Golden Century of Muslim civilization begins under the Aghlabids in Tunis.

900–1229 - The Fatimids introduce Shi'a Islam into Tunisia.

1229 - The Hafsid Dynasty turns Tunisia into a trading nation with European partners.

1574 - Ottoman Turks drive Spanish troops out of Tunis. Tunisia is made a regency with a governing bey.

1881 - France occupies Tunisia, leaving the bey as a nominal ruler. A seventy year protectorate is established.

1934 - Habib Bourguiba founds the Neo-Destour party.

1938 - Bourguiba is arrested and taken to prison in France.

1943 - Vichy government frees Bourguiba. He returns to Tunisia.

1952 - Bourguiba goes into exile in Cairo to prepare for last drive toward independence.

1956 March 20 - Tunisia acquires full independence from France. Habib Bourguiba becomes the first president and serves for 31 years.

1957 July 29 - Tunisia officially becomes the Republic of Tunisia.

1974 - The Tunisian Chamber of Deputies makes Bourguiba President for Life.

1981 July - Bourguiba approves the formation of opposition political parties.

1982 August 30 - Yasser Arafat and the PLO Fatah leadership flee Lebanon and take up exile residence in Tunis. They return to Palestine in 1994.

1983 March 19 - Algeria and Tunisia sign a twenty-year Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

1984 April - Bread Riots erupt in Tunis as a result of the doubling of bread prices. Central government finally rescinds price increases.

1985 October 1 - Israel launches air strikes against the PLO Headquarters in Tunis. 70 people are killed.

1987 October 1 - After thirty-one years as beneficent dictator, President Bourguiba is removed in a bloodless coup. Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, former army general and interior minister becomes president.

1988 April 28 - Abu Jihad (Khalid Wazir), PLO figure, is assassinated in front of his home in Tunis by Israeli commandos for his support of the Intifada (Palestinian Resistance).

1991 March 20 - Tunisia supports the U.S.-led alliance in the first Gulf War, but does not contribute land forces. Internal resistance to this support leads to major demonstrations.

1991 August 15 - Government foils a plot by Hizb al-Nahda, Party of Rebirth, to install an Islamic state. Several members of military are arrested.

1992 August 21 - A court sentences 265 members of the Islamist Rebirth Political Party to jail for alleged subversive activities.

1994 March - President Ben Ali is reelected to another five year term with 99 percent of the vote.

1995 - Tunisia becomes the first North African state to be integrated into the European Economic Area (EEA).

1999 October 24 - Ben Ali is reelected for another five year term.

2000 February 20 - New petroleum law, "Hydrocarbon Code," comes into effect, limiting state participation in energy development and opening the door to direct foreign investment.

2001 September 29 - Amnesty International's trial observers attending the human rights trial of prominent Tunisians are assaulted by officers of state security service.

2002 April 11 - Nineteen people are killed in a bomb blast at a synagogue in Jerba, marking the first major act of violence in Tunisia since Israel attacked in 1985.

2002 May - Constitution is changed to permit the president to serve until the age of 75.

2003 January 30 - Military court sentences three alleged al-Qaeda defendants to nine years in prison for their participation in bomb blast on Jerba Synagogue in 2002. Another 30 defendants are sentenced in absentia.

2004 October 24 - Ben Ali is confirmed in office for yet another five-year term. This is his fourth term. Constitutional limit is three terms.

2005 November 16–18 - Tunisia hosts the World Summit on the Information Society amid massive condemnation by human rights organizations for the country's role in suppressing free speech and media freedom.

2006 December 20 - Libya and Tunisia announce that as of 1 January 2007 they will lift restrictions on the trade, currency, and free passage of citizens across their mutual border.

2007 June 27 - Tunisia announces the award of multibillion dollar contracts with Shell Oil and Qatar State Oil for the exploration and drilling of offshore wells and construction of North Africa's largest refinery near Gulf of Gabes.

Chapter 4: Economy

Introduction

Unlike its two larger neighbors, Algeria and Libya, Tunisia does not have large deposits of gas and oil to generate economic surpluses. Yet, it has a strong economy that is anchored in industrial diversity and political stability. Social programs to control population expansion, provide quality education, and guarantee an acceptable standard of living nurture a dynamic work force. The average annual growth rate of 4.5% with a simultaneous 2% inflation rate are certain indicators of an economy in growth.⁶⁰

Resources

Tunisia's natural resources are mostly mineral in nature due to climate issues such as low average rainfall and poor soil composition. The most abundant of these resources is petroleum and natural gas, which together accounted for 4% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2005. The second most abundant resource is phosphates with a proven reserve of more than 100 million tons. Three mines, Metlaoui, Redjet, and Monlares, supply phosphates for fertilizer export, which accounted for 2% of the GDP in the same year.⁶¹

In addition to these, mines in the northern mountains near the Algerian border yielded 206,000 metric tons of iron ore. During the same period, 216,823 tons of lead and zinc ore were also milled.⁶²

Agriculture

The agriculture sector supplies most of Tunisia's food and employs roughly a third of its workforce.⁶³ The most productive areas include the green belt north of the Dorsal mountain chain and the Cap Bon region. However, the irrigated oases of the south and the coastal olive groves account for a large part of local and export sales. Tunisia is one of the world's largest producers of olive oil. Cash crops include wheat, barley, grapes, olives, citrus fruits, and dates. Marketable produce includes tomatoes, potatoes, sugar beets, melons, artichokes, and almonds. Some cotton is cultivated in the plains and is used to supply the textile industry. Irrigation is provided by the government in areas where water is scarce and where production potential merits the construction of an irrigation system. The National Agriculture Development Bank provides funds for



⁶⁰ BUYUSA.GOV. U.S. Commercial Service. "Tunisia Market Overview." http://www.buyusa.gov/tunisia/en/market_overview.html

⁶¹ United States Geological Survey. 2005 Minerals Yearbook. Mobbs, Philip. "The Mineral Industry of Tunisia [p. 2]." <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2005/tsmyb05.pdf>

⁶² United States Geological Survey. 2005 Minerals Yearbook. Mobbs, Philip. "The Mineral Industry of Tunisia [p. 5]." <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2005/tsmyb05.pdf>

⁶³ The Columbia Gazetteer of the World Online. Columbia University Press. "Tunisia." 2005. <http://www.columbiagazetteer.org/public/Tunisia.html>

agricultural development projects.⁶⁴

Industry

The industrial sector of this rapidly developing African nation is diverse and in 2004 comprised 5,468 manufacturing entities of ten or more employees. The principal sectors included: textiles and clothing (38%), food processing (17%), mechanical and metal works (9%), and ceramics, glass, and building materials, ceramics and glass (8%). The remaining 28% of factories consisted of electrical, chemical, wood/cork, and leather goods. The total value of manufactured goods for the same period was 24.8 million dinars (USD 19.465 million). This factor increased from 19.3 million dinars for the year 2000, an annual growth rate of 6.5%.⁶⁵ Over 70% of these manufactured goods are for the European export market, which, after tourism, provides a major source of foreign currency.

Tourism

With over 1,200 km (745 miles) of coastline, numerous historic towns, museums and archeological sites, opportunities for tourists abound in the northernmost country of Africa. The tourism industry accounts for the major source of foreign currency. Currently, about 6.4 million tourists visit Tunisia each year. In the first half of 2006, tourism proceeds resulted in USD 750 million income, an increase of 5.8% from the same period in 2005.⁶⁶ The moderate southern Mediterranean climate and the proximity to Europe attract many tourists. The majority (58.9%) of Tunisia's tourists come from EU countries.⁶⁷ Leaders in the tourism industry point out that the impact of the terror attack in Jerba in 2002 was short-lived. However, the continuing "war on terror" has depressed tourism as a whole since 2001.



© Lee Vah Cheng
The Amphitheater at El Jem

Banking and Investment

Banking and finance entered a new phase when Ben Ali assumed power in 1987. Acting on recommendations of the World Trade Organization (WTO), of which Tunisia is a founding member, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the new president inaugurated new fiscal policy. Over the past twenty years Ben Ali has steered economic development in the direction of greater privatization of industry and less state control of investment.⁶⁸ The transition from the socialism of the Bourguiba era to the foreign investment and privatization of Ben Ali has been slow but steady. The Central Bank no longer functions as a development bank, but rather

⁶⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Tunisia: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing." 2007.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-46610/Tunisia>

⁶⁵ Tunisian Industry Portal. Industry Promotion Agency. "Industry Overview." February 2005.
<http://www.tunisianindustry.nat.tn/en/doc.asp?mcat=3&mrub=23>

⁶⁶ Euromonitor International. "Travel and Tourism in Tunisia." April 2007.
http://www.euromonitor.com/Travel_And_Tourism_in_Tunisia

⁶⁷ Tunisiaonline.com "Tourism." <http://www.tunisiaonline.com/tourism/tourism2.html>

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. "Background Note: Tunisia." June 2007.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5439.htm>

promotes a three-point policy: reducing inflation, strengthening foreign exchange and investments, and improving credit allocations.⁶⁹

Tunisia's Central Bank regulates domestic banks and those branches of foreign banks that have been chartered to operate in the country. The list of foreign banks is modest, but includes Citi



Bank USA, Standard Chartered Bank of the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HKSB). The dinar, which currently stands at around 1.0 USD = 1.28097 TND, is a fairly stable currency, but is not yet traded freely on world currency markets. Currency conversions involving the import of foreign currencies are tightly controlled. The dinar may not be commercially exported from the country. At the end of 2005, Tunisia had approximately USD 4.25 billion in foreign currency reserves. Inflation for the same period was at 2%, but average annual growth stood at 4.5%.⁷⁰

The country is a member of all major United Nations developmental and economic organizations. These include: the World Trade organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Development Agency (IDA), and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In addition, investment opportunities in Tunisia have improved steadily over the years. A stock market, Bourse de Tunis, was created in 1969 under tight investment regulation. This was liberalized in 1995 when the Money Market was introduced. Currently there are about 50 stock companies trading on the market and 25% of total market capitalization is held by foreign investors.⁷¹ Likewise, shares in ten select Tunisian financial institutions trade on the Toronto Stock Exchange. Barriers to overseas investment in Tunisian industry have been largely removed. Currently 70% of foreign investment is in the energy production sector, i.e., gas and petroleum.⁷²

Trade

Tunisia's principal trade partner is the EU with 79% of its exports going to that country in 2005. The total value of these exports was €6.2 billion, at current rates about USD 8.46 billion. Imports from EU countries for the same period totaled €8.2 billion (USD 11.18). This generated a negative trade balance of €1.3 billion (USD 1.77 billion). Two bilateral agreements will ensure that this relationship with the EU will remain durable: the EU Association Agreement and the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership. These bilateral agreements, both signed in 1995, virtually eliminated import tariffs for both partners and provide for the creation of a Mediterranean Free Trade Zone by the year 2010.⁷³

Tunisia's second major trade partner is its neighbor, Libya. Exports to Libya exceeded USD 50 million and consisted principally of agricultural products. Although imports

⁶⁹ ANIMA. Country Perspectives. "Tunisia. Finance & Banking System." 2003.
http://www.animaweb.org/pays_tunisie_financesbanques_en.php

⁷⁰ BUYUSA.GOV. U.S. Commercial Service. "Tunisia: Market Overview."
http://www.buyusa.gov/tunisia/en/market_overview.html

⁷¹ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Tunisia." June 2007.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5439.htm>

⁷² Finance Maps of the World. "Tunisia Stock Exchange." <http://finance.mapsofworld.com/stock-market/tunisia-stock-exchange.html>

⁷³ European Commission. Trade Issues. "Bilateral Trade Relations: Tunisia."
http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/countries/tunisia/index_en.htm

from China equaled only 2.9% of all imports in 2005, trade with that country has doubled in the ten year period from 1995 to 2005. The United States is no longer one of Tunisia's trade partners and the Tunisian market is seen as a challenge to U.S. businesses. In 2005, U.S. exports to Tunisia amounted to USD 319.3 million.⁷⁴

Energy

Current estimates of Tunisia's proven energy reserves exceed 300 million barrels of oil and 2.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. At current levels of production and sustained prudent use they should provide several decades of profitable commercial exploitation. The largest of Tunisia's oil production fields is El-Borma in the far south, near the border with Algeria. Other oil and gas exploration regions include the central coast and offshore regions that are currently in the initial mining phase.⁷⁵ Natural gas produced in Tunisia at present is dependent on pipeline distribution, since no liquefaction facility exists. Developmental plans call for the construction of a moderate-sized liquefaction plant to be constructed along the central coast in proximity to gas production facilities.

Current U.S. Department of Energy global statistics report the following on electricity generation for Tunisia. There are three major sources for generating electrical energy: thermal (fossil fuel), hydroelectric, geothermal/solar. Thermal plants account for the major source of generation at 11.476 Bkwh,⁷⁶ hydroelectric at 0.164 Bkwh, and geothermal/solar at 0.033 Bkwh. The total for all sources equaled 11.676 Bkwh in 2003. Domestic and industrial consumption for the same period amounted to 10.845.⁷⁷

Transportation

Tunisia's network of rail and roadways is sufficiently dense to provide good links with all parts of the country as well as with regional neighbors and global sectors.⁷⁸ The national rail system currently consists of 2,153 km (1,338 mi) of standard and narrow gauge track, with a link to Libya in the planning stage. The system of motorways is made up of 19,232 km of roads (11,950 mi), of which two thirds has paved surfacing. There is a merchant and passenger fleet consisting of nine ships that operate out of the five major ports: Tunis La Goulette, Bizerte, Sousse, Sfax, and Gabes. In addition to land and water links, Tunisia has 31 airports of which eleven can accommodate wide-body aircraft. The smaller airports are serviced by the domestic flights of the national flag carrier, Tunis Air.⁷⁹



Passenger train in Nabul

⁷⁴ BUYUSA.GOV. U.S. Commercial Service. "Tunisia: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-46613/Tunisia> Market Overview." http://www.buyusa.gov/tunisia/en/market_overview.html

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Energy. Country Analysis Briefs. "Arab Maghreb Union: Tunisia." 19 February 2004. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/tunisia.html>

⁷⁶ Bkwh = billion kilowatt hours

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of Energy. Tunisia Energy Production. 2003. http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/world/country/cntry_TS.html

⁷⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Tunisia Transportation and Telecommunications." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-46613/Tunisia>

⁷⁹ CIA World FactBook. "Tunisia. 19 July 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>

Standard of Living

In reviewing the quality and availability of commodities and services available as reflected by the 2004 National Census, one can see that the standard of living in Tunisia is above average for a developing country in Africa. At present, 97.3% of homes have electricity and 92.6% access to a clean drinking water system. These figures represent a ten-fold increase in the period since independence. In addition, 90.2% of households have televisions for which 23% have satellite dishes. By African standards, the number of households that have telephones is high: 38.7%. Likewise, ownership of cars is a significant index of living standard. 20% of Tunisian homes have a car.⁸⁰ There are available statistics on internet use, but it is also considered to be well above the average for Africa. Heavily filtered broadband and dial-up internet access is regulated by the Tunisian Internet Agency, which provides home service for a 10 Dinar (USD 128) connection fee. More than 10% of all sites are censored or blocked for “suitability” issues, i.e., national security, political, or pornographic factors.⁸¹



© The Week
The market in Tunis

Business Outlook

In the opinion of the major international research bodies, the economic outlook in general remains mostly positive. Key economic indicators buttress this conclusion. A real economic growth of 4.25% as a function of the GDP is a positive indicator of stability. Nonetheless, the annual per capita income of USD 3,000 plus a double digit unemployment rate are troublesome signs. However, the current economic outlook could change dramatically in the near future in light of energy development contracts that have been awarded to develop offshore oil and gas fields. The IMF has recommended policy reforms in several areas that are likely to enhance the business climate: tax reform to encourage more private and foreign investment, liberalizing the labor market, and strengthening the banking and financial sector.⁸²

⁸⁰ Tunisiaonline.com. “Society.” <http://www.tunisiaonline.com/society/index.html>

⁸¹ Opennetinitiative.net. “Internet Filtering in Tunisia 2005: A Country Study.” <http://www.opennetinitiative.net/studies/tunisia/>

⁸² International Monetary Fund. “Statement by IMF Staff Mission to Tunisia.” 4 January 2006. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2006/pr0601.htm>

Chapter 5 – Society

Ethnic Groups

All but one percent of Tunisia's 10 million inhabitants are Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims. The descendents of the invaders and great civilizations of the past have long since been assimilated into one culture. This is also true of the Berbers who came from the Atlas Mountains regions of Algeria and Morocco. They settled in the far south and in the hills near the Algerian border. With the exception of a handful of elderly *schelha*⁸³ speakers in border villages of the south, the Berber language is not spoken in Tunisia. Traces of the Berber past can be seen in place names like Guermessa and Chenini, and in the rich artifacts that are produced in these regions. Another ethnic group that exists as a trace culture today is the Jews of Jerba. Once a lively colony of Sephardic Jews, most migrated to the state of Israel in the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁴

Religion

The one percent of the population that does not belong to mainstream Sunni Islam consists of Muslim Sufi dervish mystics and Christians. There are also a small Jewish community in Tunis and on the island of Jerba, as well as a small group of intellectuals who identify themselves as atheists. Together these groups number about 25,000.⁸⁵ The Constitution of 1959 guarantees freedom of religious choice to all Tunisians. However, in practice, descendents of Muslim families who identify themselves with other faiths are stigmatized.



© Alvaro Lopez
Djerba's Synagogue

Islam is one of the principal world religions and one of the three faiths that has emerged from the holy lands of the Middle East. Its holy book is the Qur'an, which followers believe was revealed to the last of the prophets, Mohammad, in the late 7th century CE. Mainstream or Sunni Muslims adhere to the *sunna* (teachings) and *hadith* (sayings) of Mohammad, who is held to be the last of the prophets that followed in the monotheistic tradition of Abraham (Ibrahim). The faith teaches charity, observance of prayer, fasting, and ethical conduct. Followers are asked to perform a pilgrimage, if possible, to Mecca, the birthplace of Mohammad and the location of the holiest of Islamic sites, the Kaaba.

An important aspect of religious life in Tunisia concerns the role of maraboutism in popular religious belief. The *marabouts* of North Africa were saint-like Muslims from all periods of the Maghreb's Muslim past. Tunisia has more *marabouts* than Algeria or Morocco. Each *marabout* in his lifetime was divinely endowed with some special quality. Some were healers who performed miracles and conferred blessings on supplicants, others were sages or holy warriors. The earliest like Sidi Sahbi in Kairouan, the barber of the prophet Muhammad, date from the late seventh century. The names given to the

⁸³ *Schelha* is the Berber word for Berber language, pronounced "shell-ha"

⁸⁴ Countries and Their Cultures. "Tunisia: Demography." <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Tunisia.html>

⁸⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Tunisia: International Religious Freedom Report 2004." 15 September 2004. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35509.htm>

marabouts after their death begin with the Arabic word *Sidi*, a derivative of *sa'idi* meaning my lord or master. The grave sanctuaries or *zawiya* of *marabouts* can be found in both urban and rural areas all over Tunisia. They are scenes of popular pilgrimage and local festivals which are forbidden to outsiders and non-Muslims. The veneration of *marabouts* gained impetus under the Hafsid dynasty beginning in the 12th century. Today, devout believers come individually or in groups seeking *baraka* or divine blessings or healing from infirmity. The oasis of Tozeur is reputed to be the burial site of more than 100 *marabouts*. Only a few of their *zawiya* have survived the desert sands.⁸⁶

Gender Issues

Tunisia is unique in the Arab Middle East for its stand on issues of gender equity for women. Women are generally freer and more independent in Tunisia than in other North African and Islamic states. Although nominally an Islamic country, the Personal Status Code (PSC) of 1956 has replaced the ancient *Shari'a* courts of Islamic law. Many of the social freedoms that women enjoy are anchored in this piece of legislation, which was promulgated to reduce gender inequalities.



© Jonak Smith
Women in Tunis

While liberalizing marriage and divorce law, the PSC abolished polygamy and the Islamic practice of men having up to four wives. Alimony and child support regulations are enforced and discrimination against women in public life is punishable.⁸⁷ The climate surrounding the PSC has also reinforced gender equity in education, employment, civil rights, and in political representation. There is no specific law forbidding female genital mutilation (FGM) since the practice is not indigenous to Tunisia. The practice is virtually nonexistent among Tunisians other than in small communities of sub-Saharan refugees living in Tunisia.

Holidays

The official calendar of Tunisia lists 12 holidays of which four are religious in nature. Since Islamic festivals are usually timed according to the lunar calendar and sightings of the moon, their Gregorian dates vary from year to year. The lunar year is roughly thirteen days shorter than the solar calendar. Religious holidays are simultaneously bank holidays.

The first of the religious holidays is Hegire, which commemorates the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca with his followers to Medina. The next of the Islamic holidays is Moulded or the birthday of the Prophet. The last two holidays are Eid al-Fitr at the end of the fasting month, Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice that comes during the month of pilgrimages, or Hajj. Visitors should note that although the weekend in Tunisia is Saturday and Sunday, Friday is the Muslim holy day.

⁸⁶ Sacredsites.com. Places of Peace and Power. Kairouan, Tunisia.
<http://www.sacredsites.com/africa/tunisia/kairouan.html>

⁸⁷ Answers.com. Mideast and N. Africa Encyclopedia. Charrad, Mounira. "Tunisia: Personal Status Code." 2004. <http://www.answers.com/topic/tunisia-personal-status-code>

The list of secular holidays shows that Tunisia celebrates all segments of its population. It begins with the January 1 New Year holiday. Following that, Independence Day is on 20 March, followed by Youth Day on 21 March. The Martyrs who fought for independence from France are honored on 9 April. Along with the rest of the world, Tunisia honors its workers on Labor Day, 1 May. Republic Day is observed on 25 July. The last two holidays are Womens' Day on 15 August, and New Era Day on 7 November. The latter celebrates the Accession of President Ben Ali to office.⁸⁸

Traditional Dress

A visitor to the capital city, Tunis, is not likely to see young urban Tunisians wearing traditional dress. Yet, a trip to one of the many regional folk festivals would show proud Tunisians in their traditional dress. For a man, this consists of a white *jellaba* (white robe) over which a dark short vest is worn in warmer months or a dark brown *bernous* (robe) made of wool or in some cases camel hair. The *chechia*, a round, burgundy-colored felt cap with a black tassel emerging from the top, is the mandatory head covering for men. Women dress colorfully for family occasions, but when in public, the traditional dress code calls for them to wear long black robes, *sisfari*, covering the arms, legs, and a *ha'ik* covering the head. However, women in urban areas often wear western clothing and do not veil themselves.⁸⁹

Food

The Tunisian kitchen is southern Mediterranean and reminiscent of southern Italian and French cuisine. Common ingredients include tomatoes, onions, seafood, and chicken or lamb. One North African ingredient is indispensable for Tunisians: *harissa*. This is a paste made of finely milled hot chili peppers spiced with garlic and diluted with olive oil. The national dish, *Couscous*, is made with semolina grains and vegetables, which can be combined with various meat stews: chicken, lamb, or seafood. A good second national dish is *tajine*, a casserole made of meat, chicken or lamb, and vegetables like potato, onions, tomatoes, and *kousa* (green squash). The Tunisian kitchen also produces delicious pastries such as dates filled with colored almond paste and *brik*, a wafer thin pastry filled with egg or cheese, or almond paste.⁹⁰



Health

The composite public health care system of Tunisia is an outgrowth of the National Social Security Fund to which employers and employees both make contributions. Through a network of urban and rural clinics the government ensures comprehensive, non-discriminatory care for all. The Fund includes benefits for maternity, old age, the 1960s and has lowered the birth rate from seven to three children per woman is also

⁸⁸ World Travel Guide. "Tunisia Public Holidays." http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/283/public_holidays/Africa/Tunisia.html

⁸⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica. "Tunisia: Daily Life and Social Customs." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-93667/Tunisia>

⁹⁰ University of New Hampshire. "The Cultural Cuisine Courier [p. 1–2]." <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/Carroll/docs/NCAfrica.pdf>

administered by this health care system.⁹¹ Private health care is available outside the national insurance scheme and both expatriates and wealthier Tunisians seek care in private clinics and hospitals. Recently, foreign medical practitioners have been licensed to perform cosmetic surgery in Tunisia.

Education

The Ministry of National Education oversees the policies and curriculum of all schools, public and private. Public education, which receives more than 20 percent of the national budget, is free from elementary school through the university level. However attendance is compulsory only until age 16. A three-year vocational training program is open to students in the secondary track who elect industrial or technical training. Higher education boasts 13 national universities with programs of study in all fields and two vocational institutes. Tunisian graduates are valued in the rest of the Arab world.

The language of instruction in primary schools, for which attendance reaches 95.1 percent, is Arabic. The language of instruction for secondary schools, where attendance drops to about 75 percent, is both Arabic and either French or English.⁹² Before independence, French was the language of school instruction. Since independence, Tunisian schools have shifted from a francophone second language curriculum to an English curriculum, with British English as the choice of language. Students attend classes six days a week for nine months each year. Tunisian secondary school diplomas are generally equivalent to those of European countries.⁹³

Sport

The national sport of Tunisia is soccer (or football, as it is locally known) and each city or region has its own team. Matches tend to take place early Sunday afternoon, and cafes with sidewalk televisions are usually jammed. The national team, the Eagles of Carthage, is a fierce competitor in African Cup matches and the Arab Football League. Tunisia has qualified for World Cup matches as well. Handball and rugby football have been gaining popularity in recent years. In 2005, Tunisia hosted the World Cup Handball matches.⁹⁴



© David Weekly
Neighborhood game of football

Arts

Tunisians of the 21st century balance an interest in the arts of Europe and Asia with a cultivation of their own indigenous art forms, which the government wholeheartedly endorses and underwrites. International festivals like the annual Testour Festival of Malouf Music and Monastir's Theater and Poetry Festival attract large numbers of foreign tourists and artists. The international festivals also showcase the works of famous

⁹¹ Republic of Tunisia. "Tunisian National Social Funds." 2001. <http://www.cnss.nat.tn/en/home.asp>

⁹² New Africa. Versi, Anver. "Celebrating 45 Dynamic Years." March 2001. http://www.africasia.com/archive/na/01_11/tunisia_anniv.htm

⁹³ Tunisiaonline. "Education." <http://www.tunisiaonline.com/society/society3.html>

⁹⁴ Tunisia.com "Tunisia Sport." 2006. <http://www.tunisia.com/Tunisia/Culture/Tunisia-Sport>

Tunisian artists like the poet of the revolution, Abu'l Qassem al-Chabbi, and the famous contemporary singer composer, Saber al-Rubai.⁹⁵

The greatness of Tunisian Islamic architecture can be seen in classical mosques and public buildings. The typical Tunisian house, concrete with whitewash stucco, inevitably has a blue or aquamarine door. A Tunisian proverb says that a blue gate stands at the threshold of paradise. Indigenous art can be found in the shops of traditional artisans like the potters and tile makers of Cap Bon or the silversmiths of the medina (old city) of Tunis. There are the craftsmen of Sidi Bou Said who make the famed domed birdcages. In addition, the carpet weavers of Kairouan have woven rich wool carpets for centuries.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Magharebia. Aoun, Nour. "Tunisian Artist Saber Sings Rai." 10 July 2007. http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2007/07/10/feature-03

⁹⁶ Tunisietourisme.com. "Tunisian Specialities [p. 1–11]." <http://www.tunisietourisme.com.tn/guide-e/attractions/artisanat.pdf>

Chapter 6 – A Perspective

U.S.–Tunisia Relations

Since Tunisia's independence in 1957, the United States has been a partner in Tunisia's economic and political development. With a vision of Tunisia's geopolitical importance as a North African and Middle Eastern country, Congress approved a USAID loan program in the same year. This aid continued until "graduation" in 1994 when it was assumed that Tunisia had achieved economic self-sustainability. Over the same period, other developmental initiatives, the Bilateral Double Tax Avoidance Agreement in 1989 and the Bilateral Investment Treaty in 1990 were implemented. As part of a comprehensive U.S.–North African program, the U.S. provided USD 4 million in 2001 under the United States North African Economic Partnership (USNAEP). Aid under this program and under Middle East Partnership for Investment (MEPI) in 2003 was contingent upon progress in economic and civil society reforms.⁹⁷



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Secretary of State and President Ben Ali

Also in 2003, the Bush administration announced a ten year, long-range strategic program that would facilitate economic integration and political development in the Middle East. Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA), as it was called, identified 20 entities, all Arabic-speaking countries from Morocco to the Arab Gulf and the Levantine states plus Israel. As a prerequisite, each country was to be peaceful, prepared for economic reform, and was not to engage in any type of economic boycott of Israel. Progress towards MEFTA was further contingent upon completion of several successive steps: membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO); ratification of Trade Investment Framework Agreements (TIFA); ratification of Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT); and finally, completion of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). As of December 2006, only five of the countries have attained the FTA status: Oman, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, and Israel.

A sixth, the United Arab Emirates, is pending.⁹⁸ Of the remaining states, six, including Tunisia, are stalled in the BIT phase. Congress has reservations about Jordan based on sweat-shop labor conditions and both Egypt and Tunisia have been identified by the U.S. State Department as having serious human rights problems.⁹⁹ Given the bilateral trade success of the European Union (EU), Tunisia's preferential status within the EU, and the likelihood of a robust EU Mediterranean Free Trade Zone as early as 2008, the prognosis for continued success in U.S. economic and foreign policy initiatives in Tunisia may be in jeopardy.

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. "Background Notes: Tunisia." June 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5439.htm>

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State. Fact Sheet. "Middle East Free Trade Area Initiative: Promoting and Developing and Economic Reform in the Middle East." 22 June 2006. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/2006/68237.htm>

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. "Background Notes: Tunisia." June 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5439.htm>

Future relations with the United States rest to a great extent upon the internal policies of the Ben Ali government. When the Ben Ali government came to power, opposition political parties were officially recognized and their democratic participation was assured. However, Ben Ali was unable to deliver on the promise of democratization. Tunisia progressively lapsed into repression as a response to its failures to deliver prosperity and stability. Opposition party members and orthodox Islamic religious groups have been persecuted, imprisoned, and tortured.¹⁰⁰ Current estimates place the numbers of significant political prisoners at more than 2,000.¹⁰¹ In 2003, Human Rights Watch issued a broad report detailing government abuses of human rights.¹⁰² This was followed by an exposé in 2004 by the Tunisia Human Rights League entitled “Media Under Surveillance,” which laid bare the government’s iron control of all organs of public information including the Internet. In a similar move, Reporters Without Borders further documented serious infringements of press and information, despite the choice of Tunisia as the venue for the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).¹⁰³

Looking Forward

Heretofore, the presidency of Ben Ali has been sustained by modest economic successes. His excesses have been tolerated and overlooked by some. The General Trade Union’s voice (UGTT), which has been an accurate mirror of popular sentiment and a supporter of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) since the early days of Bourguiba, is no longer the sole voice of political thinking. The Communist Party of Tunisian Workers (PCOT) and the Marxist student movement have made gains in securing popular support in spite of being, or perhaps because of their being, persecuted. Several other parties, e.g., Social Democrats (MSD), Popular Unity (MUP), Renaissance Islamic Party, and Renewal Party (ME) all militate for popular support.



The likelihood of terrorist activities of the sort that took place on the Island of Jerba in April, 2002 is difficult to divine, but given the presence of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the country and the unresolved Middle East–Palestinian conflict, future terrorist activities can not be discounted. In order to secure a stable future Tunisia needs to do three things. First, it needs to provide for a peaceful power transfer for an aging president. Next, it has to permit opposition political parties to engage in open political debate as part of the democratic reforms of its civil society. Last, it must ensure economic prosperity for its population.

¹⁰⁰ *Democratization*, Vol. 9, Issue 5. Sadiki, Larbi. “Political Liberalization in Bin Ali’s Tunisia: Façade Government [p. 122–141].” 2002.

¹⁰¹ Derechos.org. “Human Rights in Tunisia.” <http://www.derechos.org/human-rights/mena/tunisia.html>

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch. World Report 2003. “Tunisia.” <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k3/mideast8.html>

¹⁰³ Reporters Sans Frontieres. “Tunisia Report 2005.” http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=13314