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## A HISTORY OF MODERN TUNISIA

Although a favourite destination for tourists, Tunisia is perhaps one of the least studied and least understood countries in North Africa. Situated halfway between Gibraltar and Suez, Tunisia has two windows on the Mediterranean, one opening towards Europe, the other towards the Middle East. Peoples from both regions have left their imprint on this land, although of all the legacies bestowed on Tunisia, that of the Arabs is unquestionably the most enduring. Kenneth Perkins' book, which is the first English-language history of modern Tunisia, explores these legacies as he traces and explains Tunisia's story from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. The early years from 1881 to 1956 are taken up with the inauguration and development of French colonial rule, the establishment of the nationalist movement and the struggle for independence. Perkins examines the problems that were created by colonialism and the measures undertaken by Tunisians to win their independence. He then goes on to describe the subsequent process of state-building, including the design of political and economic structures and the promotion since 1956 of a social and cultural agenda. In conclusion he reviews the years since 1987, when a new regime came to power with promises of correcting the most widely perceived faults of its predecessor. Perkins' readable and informed introduction to Tunisia will be a necessity for students of North Africa and the Middle East, and also for anyone travelling to the region who wants a more comprehensive approach than most guidebooks can offer.

KENNETH PERKINS is Professor of History at the University of South Carolina. He has worked extensively on North Africa and his research has taken him across the region. His publications include two editions of *Historical Dictionary of Tunisia* (1989, 1997) and *Tunisia: Crossroads of the Islamic and European Worlds* (1986).

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KENNETH PERKINS

*University of South Carolina*



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## *Acknowledgments*

The need to select images to illustrate this book confronted me with the pleasurable task of poring over a collection of photographs, stamps, post cards, and other miscellaneous ephemera gathered in Tunisia over the course of the past thirty-five years. It also prompted me to seek out repositories of older images. I am most grateful for the assistance of Dr. James A. Miller, director of the Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT), in locating and securing copies of pictures held by the Institut Supérieur d'Histoire du Mouvement National, as well as for his enthusiastic verbal and visual updates on the state of affairs in Tunis. I am also very much in the debt of M. Fayçal Chérif, of the Institut, who kindly arranged to provide the photographs I requested.

Keith McGraw of the Instructional Services Center of the University of South Carolina supplied the expertise needed to transform postcards, stamps, and slides into images suitable for publication, while the Department of History provided the funding to make that project possible.

A sabbatical leave in 2002–3 greatly expedited the completion of this book. My wife Margaret's appointment as a Fulbright scholar in the Department of English at Ibn Zuhr University in Agadir, Morocco, enabled us to spend the year in North Africa. Living in Morocco while writing about Tunisia may have been unorthodox, but doing so greatly enhanced my appreciation of the similarities and differences between the two countries and I am deeply grateful to Margaret for making that experience possible.



## *A political who's who of modern Tunisia*

### **Habib 'Achour (1913–)**

A union leader and champion of workers' rights. Despite a long record as a party loyalist, he was highly critical of the detrimental impact of Socialist Dustur economic policies on UGTT members in the 1970s. Jailed for a time after the 1978 riots, he resumed his union activities in 1981 but was arrested again in 1985 after attacking the government's sponsorship of a rival labor union. On his release in 1988, he eschewed further activism.

### **Ahmad Bey (1806–55)**

The tenth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1837–55. Westernizing reforms that he introduced with an eye towards protecting Tunisia from foreign encroachment proved ruinously expensive. Although few of his projects survived his death, his reign provided many future Tunisian leaders with their first experiences in international affairs.

### **Amin Bey (1879–1962)**

Nineteenth, and last, ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1943–57. He sought to maintain a good relationship with both the Neo-Dustur and the French administration after replacing the deposed Moncef Bey. Nevertheless, the independent Tunisian government, eager to eliminate a rival locus of authority, demanded his abdication as a prelude to the abolition of the monarchy.

### **'Ali Bash Hamba (1876–1918)**

A Young Tunisian activist. He founded the Association des Elèves du Collège Sadiqi in 1905, and in 1907 was a cofounder and political director of *Le Tunisien*, the first French-language newspaper published by Tunisians. After organizing a boycott of the Tunis tram system in an attempt to win equal treatment for Tunisian and European employees, he was expelled from the country in 1912 and died in exile in Istanbul.

**Zine al-ʿAbidine ben ʿAli (1936–)**

President of Tunisia since 1987. He held ambassadorial and ministerial appointments after retiring from the armed forces, then became prime minister and, with the removal of Habib Bourguiba, president. His economic policies brought improvements to the quality of most Tunisians' lives, but pledges to implement meaningful political pluralism remain unfulfilled. The regime's Islamist opposition was eradicated in the 1990s and its secular opponents have been systematically excluded from the political arena.

**Tahar ben ʿAmmar (1889–1985)**

A political figure who participated in the founding of the Dustur Party, abandoned it in favor of the Parti Réformiste, and then, as a member of the Grand Council from 1928 to 1934 and its president after World War II, eschewed any specific party affiliation. Named prime minister in 1955, he oversaw the negotiations leading first to internal autonomy and then to the termination of the protectorate.

**Ahmed ben Salah (1926–)**

A political activist and labor organizer. Named minister of planning in 1961, he was given the task of developing the postcolonial economy. His efforts to bring agriculture under state control provoked strong criticisms that, coupled with accusations of corruption and mismanagement, led to his dismissal and arrest in 1969. He formed the Mouvement de l'Unité Populaire while in exile after 1973 and returned to Tunisia in 1988.

**Salah ben Yusuf (1920–1961)**

A Neo-Dustur militant who challenged Habib Bourguiba for control of the party on the eve of independence. Critical of Bourguiba's willingness to compromise with the French and of his secular orientation and his disdain for pan-Arabism, he precipitated an open revolt that was subdued only with French assistance. He left the country in 1956 but continued to attack Bourguiba from Cairo until his assassination.

**Habib Bourguiba (1903–2000)**

Nationalist leader, cofounder of the Neo-Dustur Party, first prime minister of independent Tunisia, and president of the country from 1958 until his removal for health reasons in 1987. His pragmatic strategies for ending French rule dominated the anticolonial movement, while his aggressively modernist and staunchly secularist philosophy shaped policy making in the postcolonial state.

**Paul Cambon (1843–1924)**

The French resident general, 1882–6. As France's first chief executive in Tunisia, he oversaw the implementation of reforms agreed to in the treaty establishing the protectorate. His decision to maintain the appearance of beylical sovereignty while reserving real power for himself and a small cadre of French administrators established a pattern that became the norm for his successors.

**Rashid Ghannushi (1941–)**

Founder in 1979 of the Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI), a society dedicated to the restoration of Islamic values. He was imprisoned twice in the closing years of the Bourguiba era, but was freed in 1988 as President ben 'Ali sought to improve relations with Islamic groups. When the government banned his Renaissance Party from standing in the 1989 elections, however, he went into exile. Accused of orchestrating a 1992 wave of violence, he was convicted (*in absentia*) of conspiring to overthrow the government.

**Hassan Guellaty (1880–1966)**

A Young Tunisian activist expelled from the country for his role in the 1912 Tunis tram boycott. Returning after World War I, he broke with his former colleagues who established the Dustur Party and, in 1921, organized the less militant Parti Réformiste. French liberals hailed his moderate philosophy, but it found little support among Tunisians and the party quickly withered away.

**Farhat Hached (1913–1952)**

A labor organizer and founder of the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) in 1945. By mobilizing workers in support of Neo-Dustur political objectives, he added clout to the party's demands and earned the animus of French settlers and administrators. His assassination gave the nationalist movement a prominent martyr and touched off a spate of violence throughout the country.

**Khair al-Din al-Tunsi (ca. 1822–1890)**

A statesman who held a series of offices until his self-imposed exile to Europe in 1862 as a result of differences with Mustafa Khaznadar. Returning to Tunisia in 1869, he advocated reforms designed to forge a strong, just, and responsible state, many of which he implemented after becoming chief minister in 1873. When associates of Khaznadar drove him from office in 1877, he went to the Ottoman Empire.

**Charles-Martial Lavigerie (1825–1892)**

A Catholic clergyman who espoused the spread of Christianity along with French political control in North Africa. The White Fathers, a missionary order he founded in 1868, helped advance French interests in Tunisia even before the protectorate. Named cardinal-archbishop of Carthage and Algiers in 1882, he advocated harmonious Church–state relations in the interest of strengthening France's position in Tunisia.

**Louis Macheul (1848–1922)**

Director of public education, 1883–1908. Convinced that education held the key to viable relations between the races, he organized a Franco-Arab school system blending elements from both cultures. Despite the opposition of many settlers, he remained a strong proponent of educational opportunities for Tunisian students throughout his service in the protectorate.

**Ahmed Mestiri (1928–)**

A Socialist Dustur politician ousted from the party in 1974 after calling for institutional checks on the power of the president and greater transparency in the transaction of party business. He then founded the Mouvement des Démocrates Sociales (MDS), which he led through several undistinguished legislative election campaigns between its official recognition as a political party in 1983 and his retirement from political life in 1992.

**M'hammed 'Ali (ca. 1888–1928)**

A labor organizer and Dustur Party militant. In 1924, he organized the Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (CGTT), believing that the promotion of social and economic justice for the working class would broaden the party's bourgeois base. But the Dustur turned its back on the CGTT in 1925 when a series of strikes raised concerns that repressive measures directed against the union might also be applied to the party.

**René Millet (1849–1919)**

The French resident general, 1894–1900. Sympathetic with the Young Tunisians' aspirations to act as interlocutors between their countrymen and the West, he supported their educational undertakings and provided government subsidies for their publications. French settlers pressured him to refrain from these practices and ultimately lobbied successfully for his dismissal.

**Moncef Bey (1881–1948)**

The eighteenth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1942–3. With prominent Neo-Dustur Party figures in jail or in exile because of anti-French activity

before World War II, he presented himself as a nationalist spokesperson. He maintained only formally correct relations with German officials during their occupation of Tunisia (1942–3), but his nationalist sympathies alarmed the French and they forced him to abdicate on their return.

### **Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey (1814–1882)**

The twelfth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1859–82. Ill-conceived development projects and bureaucratic corruption marked his reign and produced substantial indebtedness. The inability to repay loans from abroad led to the formation of an international commission to oversee Tunisia's finances. The subsequent collapse of a movement of political and economic reform spearheaded by his prime minister paved the way for the French invasion of 1881.

### **Muhammad Bey (1811–1859)**

The eleventh ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1855–9. By distancing himself from many of Ahmad Bey's policies, he hoped to lower government expenditures. To protect their interests in Tunisia, Britain and France pressured him to implement judicial reforms and accept substantial foreign investment in the country.

### **Mustafa Khaznadar (1817–1878)**

Frequently chief minister of the beys from the 1850s to the 1870s. He amassed a personal fortune, much of it from collaborating with Europeans anxious to do business in Tunisia. Widely despised for saddling the country with crippling debts and brutally repressing a rebellion triggered by higher taxes, he fell from power in 1873 while attempting to play the country's creditors off against each other.

### **Muhammad Mzali (1925–)**

Prime minister, 1980–6. His introduction of reforms promoting a more open, plural political environment antagonized conservatives within his own Socialist Dustur Party, while his inability to stimulate the depressed economy alienated Tunisians of the middle and lower classes. When influential critics persuaded President Bourguiba to dismiss him in 1986, he left the country to avoid further political and legal reprisals.

### **Nasir Bey (1855–1922)**

The fifteenth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1906–22. He tried to pressure the French to negotiate with the newly formed Dustur Party in 1922 by threatening to abdicate if the party's demands were not addressed. He backed down when Resident General Lucien Saint surrounded the beylical

palace with French troops, making it clear that he would not respond to such threats.

### **Hedi Nouira (1911–1993)**

Neo-Dustur politician. He served as director of the Central Bank of Tunisia from 1958 to 1970, then as prime minister until 1980. His main task while in office was to foster a recovery from the disarray brought on by Ahmed ben Salah's experiments in socialist planning. An economic liberal, he promoted private enterprise and sought out foreign investment, but also left in place many state enterprises created in the previous decade.

### **Marcel Peyrouton (1887–1983)**

The French resident general from 1933 to 1936. Hoping to aggravate differences within the nationalist movement and to marginalize its more radical elements, he opened his administration with an offer to lift a ban on the Dustur Party if it disavowed the views of its most militant younger members. When the latter formed the Neo-Dustur Party in 1934, he ordered their arrest and set about attempting to destroy the new party.

### **Léon Roches (1809–1901)**

The French consul general in Tunis, 1855–63. Charged with strengthening French influence in Tunisia, Roches formed close personal relationships with the beys who facilitated his advocacy of pro-French policies. Just prior to the end of his assignment, he arranged with a Parisian bank for the Tunisian government's first international loan.

### **Lucien Saint (1867–1938)**

The French resident general, 1921–9. Assuming office amid the most articulate and organized opposition to the protectorate since its creation, he rejected the key demands of the Dustur Party, intimidated the bey into distancing himself from the nationalists, and severely restricted journalistic and political activity. Beneath a surface calm, Tunisian resentment of French rule rose significantly during his administration.

### **Bashir Sfar (1865–1917)**

An activist in the Young Tunisian movement. His education at the Collège Sadiqi led to positions in the protectorate administration. He resigned as director of the Habus administration in 1898 in a protest over French use of lands designated as religious trusts. A decade later, his continuing criticism of the protectorate resulted in his reassignment far from the capital, severely diminishing his influence.

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**ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Thaʿalbi (ca. 1875–1944)**

Leader of the Dustur Party from its founding in 1920 until his death. Fearful that a wave of repression would follow the party's opposition to French reform proposals, he fled Tunisia in 1923 and did not return until 1937. In the interim, a new generation of activists had taken control of the nationalist movement. When his efforts to reassert himself foundered, the Dustur remained on the margin of the anti-colonial struggle.

**Richard Wood (1806–1900)**

The British consul general in Tunis, 1855–79. His work in safeguarding the interests of British subjects and in promoting investments enhancing the British presence there sparked a long-running rivalry with his French counterparts that was further aggravated by his campaign to tie Tunisia more closely to the Ottoman Empire.

## *Note on spelling and transliteration*

Where conventional European forms exist for Tunisian place-names, these have been used in preference to the technically more precise, but decidedly less familiar, formal transliterations of the Arabic. Thus, “Sfax” appears in place of “Safaqis,” “Kairouan” rather than “Qairawan,” and “Sousse,” not “Susa.” By the same token, spellings of personal names of political figures that have attained general recognition in Western languages have also been adopted: “Habib Bourguiba” rather than “Habib Abu Ruqaiba,” for example. The same rule of thumb applies for Arabic words that appear in standard English dictionaries. Inasmuch as nonspecialists are likely to find orthographic symbols confusing and specialists readily recognize names and words without them, only the symbol “c” to represent the Arabic letter “*‘ain*” and an apostrophe (’) to represent the glottal stop *hamza* have been utilized.





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