Introduction to the Second Edition

For more than fifty years after Tunisian independence in 1956, a small cadre of Western academics and steadily growing numbers of their Tunisian colleagues – historians, political scientists, economists, anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, archeologists, classicists, and others – devoted their professional lives to the study of the country, publishing works that enhanced scholarly knowledge about Tunisia, its people, and their culture. Away from academia, however, Tunisia attracted limited interest. In global corridors of power, the country mattered only rarely and fleetingly. Its essentially moderate, usually Western-oriented political and economic alignment projected an unremarkable blandness that (for good or ill) lacked the anxiety-producing component often generated among international observers and analysts by its near neighbors in the Maghrib, not to mention its more distant Middle Eastern cousins, with whom it shared centuries-old associations rooted in language, religion, and culture. Beyond the specialists, most outsiders familiar with the country knew it as a site of ancient Mediterranean civilizations or, yet more likely, as a superbly endowed and outfitted holiday setting whose proximity to Europe and established record of tranquility heightened its attraction as a venue seemingly immune to the intrusion of disruptive political, economic, and social forces. Indeed, on the strength of that image the Tunisian tourist industry became an indispensable component of the national economy. But like all such idealized constructs, this one could be undermined by realities that were more easily ignored than confronted.

Everything changed in Tunisia in January 2011, although, especially in retrospect, the revolution that erupted in that month and unleashed the "Arab Spring" had, like all such movements, deep roots. It may not have been predicted, but it was hardly astonishing. The scale of subsequent manifestations of this populist movement in Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere and the greater international implications and, therefore, journalistic coverage, of events in Cairo, Benghazi, Tripoli, Sanaa, and Manama often

displaced Tunisia from center stage as the less dramatic work of applying the gains of the revolution went forward, ultimately producing the country's first meaningful elections (to a constituent assembly). That body was dominated by al-Nahda, a party intent on the preservation of Islamic culture and tradition but also pledged to honor Tunisia's history of progressivism in key arenas and to hold a second round of a elections to a constitutionally legitimated parliament when the fundamental law was completed. While it remains too early for a definitive judgment of the outcome of Tunisia's revolution in a setting that remains fragile and prone to spasms of violence extending even to the assassinations of prominent political and civil society figures, the initial post-revolutionary sense of cautious guarded optimism that Tunisians would demonstrate the wisdom and patience needed to cultivate a democratic and consensus driven political future has eroded badly, but not vanished entirely. Only the passage of time will confirm or disprove the validity of so sanguine an assessment.

This revised and updated edition of *A History of Modern Tunisia* brings the account onward from 2004, describing, assessing, and contextualizing the extraordinary transformation the country has experienced. The same four key themes identified in the introduction to the first edition recur here, each with its emphasis altered to one degree or another by the revolution and its aftermath: (1) the search for political leadership acceptable to rulers and ruled alike; (2) the quest for something approaching consensus on the contentious question of the appropriate weight to assign to traditional beliefs and practices, including their bearing on such matters as gender or on the public function of religion, on the one hand, and on the other, on the importance of innovation, individualism, and personal liberty; (3) the management of the economy so as to foster and sustain steady and wisely distributed benefits free of the taint of corruption to the citizenry; and (4) the value of and need to encourage the country's literary and artistic heritage. Each of these themes bears powerfully on all the others. The uprising, the ouster of Ben ʿAli, the victory of al-Nahda, the contrasting and competing visions of that party's supporters and Tunisian secularists, and the frustrations of ordinary Tunisians that stemmed from the culture of corruption, favoritism, nepotism, and incompetence are illustrations of these connections, though hardly the only ones. In the artistic realm, the impact of the revolution will manifest itself more clearly as time passes. Before Ben ʿAli's removal, expressions of literary, cinematic, or artistic criticism entailed risk. In the postrevolutionary atmosphere, they are far less likely to put their creators in harm's way. Undoubtedly, many observers of and participants in the revolution, some intellectuals but others ordinary

Tunisians, are already at work on projects related to it, although few of these have, as yet, seen the light of day.

The introduction to this book's first edition described an imagined journey through Tunis and its suburbs. That same journey today, with a few additional stops and an updated commentary, brings one face to face with the revolution and the new Tunisia at a number of junctures. En route to and from Tunis, the TGM tracks still pass by the presidential palace in Carthage, which, from the windows of the train, appears no different than in the past. But its 2004 residents, Zine al-'Abidine ben 'Ali and his second wife, Leila Trabelsi, departed in haste in January 2011 for the safety of exile in Saudi Arabia as the revolution reached a crescendo that doomed the dictatorship. Moncef Marzouki, a former human rights activist and long-time political foe of ben 'Ali, became the interim president after elections for a constituent assembly in October 2011 produced an agreement on the division of offices among the leaders of the most successful parties that competed in Tunisia's first free and fair elections in its history. As a matter of symbolism and national pride, Marzouki, the interim president, has retained some of the trappings of the prerevolutionary era, but as this study will show, the oppressive philosophy of governance of the former regime has given way to still-crystallizing (and not always agreed on) notions that, unlike in the past, can be publicly debated, assessed, and decided on.

When the train arrives at the Tunis-Marine station, it is only a short walk to the lower end of Avenue Bourguiba, at what was, from 1987 until 2011, the Place du 7 Novembre but has been renamed Place Bouazizi in memory of the young man whose suicide in Sidi Bouzid helped set the revolution in motion. Ironically, on the same square stands the Ministry of the Interior, the site of violent and costly clashes between regime opponents and supporters, including the forces of the Gendarmerie National, whose often brutal treatment of protesters left it feared and hated by many Tunisians and whose headquarters are on the square as well. It is, all in all, a set of highly charged reminders and symbols of the struggle that played out there and across the country.

Continuing up Avenue Bourguiba into the heart of the downtown central business district, most of the visible evidence of the turmoil that rocked these streets has been repaired or removed, although occasional graffiti-covered walls, especially on side streets off the avenue, remain as mute testimony of the violence that unfolded there during and after the revolution. Indeed, a particularly attentive observer walking toward the Bab al-Bahr at the avenue's upper end, might recognize any number of hotels, businesses, and other landmarks that featured as backdrops for the corps of

international journalists who recorded and reported the revolution in real time. Casual tourists can be forgiven for overlooking distressing aspects of the recent past in a city and country not their own, where they have come on holiday; they have no need to probe beyond the ambience, charm, and exotica of surface appearances, especially when that past is largely out of sight. But for anyone better acquainted with Tunis, a walk along Avenue Bourguiba is likely to invoke images and memories of how quickly and deeply Tunis (and the rest of the country) was plunged into violence and mayhem as never before. With that in mind, a short detour off Avenue Bourguiba to the Central Post Office presents an opportunity to carry away a physical reminder of the revolution in the form of a set of four postage stamps issued in 2011 to commemorate it, including one stamp depicting Bouazizi.

Returning to the avenue, but before entering the medina, a short walk off either the Boulevard Bab Souika or the Boulevard Bab Jazira, main thoroughfares that ring the old city, leads into the old city's residential neighborhoods. Given Tunisia's youthful population, a short stroll into any one of these is likely to lead to an elementary school that served as a polling place for the October 2011 legislative assembly elections. Now returned to their educational role, there is nothing extraordinary about them, but on Election Day, they, and thousands of other polling places across the country, symbolized something the country had never before experienced – the chance to cast a vote in a political process; to have that vote be honestly counted; and for the result of the exercise to have some influence on future developments.

If, rather than skirting the medina on the peripheral boulevards, one enters it directly from the Bab al-Bahr and continues along Rue Zaituna beyond the historic mosque, the visitor arrives at the Place de la Casbah, formally known as the Place du Gouvernement, one of the most active and important sites of the revolution. Here, in the small tree-lined square rimmed by government buildings in the architectural style of the beylical era, is the office of the prime minister. In the turbulent weeks after ben 'Ali's flight, thousands of protesters from all over Tunisia created an encampment in the square, making clear their rejection of the half-measures and dilatory diversions employed by the former president's last appointee, Muhammad Ghannushi, in dismantling the remnants of the old regime. Initially populated by students, workers, labor activists, and the impoverished and unemployed, the ranks of the self-contained community on the square were swollen by the addition of lawyers and other professionals, as well as by many middle-class Tunisians who had come to the end of their tethers and

now demanded meaningful evidence that the country's political leadership had, indeed, turned over a new leaf. They disbanded their makeshift community only when Ghannushi resigned and Beji Caid al-Sebsi replaced him and began implementing policies more closely aligned to the populist spirit of the Kasbah protests in early February. During this "occupation," government buildings on and around the square were covered with graffiti of every sort from political slogans, including the omnipresent "Ben ʿAli, Dégage!" ("Ben ʿAli, Get Lost!"), to cartoonish caricatures of the deposed president and other figures of his regime. But as the protesters departed, they scrubbed clean most of the traces of their newly discovered opportunity to express themselves fully and freely. In short order, on the Place de la Casbah, as on Avenue Bourguiba and on other thoroughfares across the capital, little evidence of this aspect of the revolution remained visible.

Farther afield, however, vestiges of the revolution's destructive physical impact linger – the burned-out shell of a villa belonging to a Trabelsi family member on the road just beyond downtown La Marsa; the incinerated and now riotously painted hulk of a sports car of similar provenance somewhat incongruously displayed in front of the Carthage Museum (the former Basilica of St. Louis IX) on the Byrsa Hill as an objet d'art; or scores of similar "ruins" all over the country left as reminders of the excesses that helped bring on the revolution.

From the Bab Saadoun station of the regional light-rail system, located not far from the Place de la Casbah in the northwestern precincts of the medina, a ride of only a few stops to the Bardo station on the Place de l'Assemblé Constitutionelle (the once and future Place de l'Assemblée Nationale after the election of a permanent legislative body, scheduled for 2013) also evokes the revolution and its aftermath. The Chamber of Deputies has long convened in the former beylical palace in a wing adjacent to the National Museum, with its unrivaled collection of Roman-era mosaics; the Constituent Assembly has held its deliberations in the same venue since its inauguration in December 2011. Thus, it is there that postrevolutionary Tunisia has been taking shape.

Introduction to the First Edition

For the attentive traveler, a ride on the TGM – the Tunis, La Goulette, and La Marsa, a light railway linking Tunis with a string of suburbs along the Gulf of Tunis – can become an extraordinary trip through the country's history and culture. Not far from the end of the line in La Marsa are the remains of a sixteenth-century palace where Tunisia's rulers passed the summer months to avail themselves of the sea breezes and where, in 1882, the reigning bey signed the document establishing a French protectorate over his country. A mile down the tracks, the train reaches Sidi Bou Said, a village that welcomed Muslims fleeing from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and that has been, for many years, a favorite haunt of local and European artists. The Museum of Traditional Music and Musical Instruments, located in what was the home of Baron Rudolphe d'Erlanger (1872–1932), honors the work of this French scholar who spent years helping Tunisian musicians preserve the Andalusian melodies and techniques brought to "Sidi Bou" by their refugee forefathers.

The next six TGM stops, spread out over two or three miles, are all in Carthage. Two bear the names of the ancient city's most famous father and son, Amilcar and Hannibal. Down the hill from the Amilcar station is a hotel built in the early days of the campaign to attract European tourists to the newly independent country's beaches. A few hundred yards west of the station, a World War II military cemetery – one of many British, French, German, and US burial grounds scattered across Tunisia along the battle lines of 1942 and 1943 – memorializes the men who fought in North Africa and shelters the remains of almost three thousand American soldiers.

Just before pulling into the Hannibal station, passengers catch glimpses of Roman Carthage on either side of the railway. Toward the Gulf of Tunis sprawl the Antonine Baths, now an archeological park encompassing the vestiges of a complex of buildings commanding stunning views across the gulf to the Cap Bon peninsula. On the opposite side of the train lies an excavated neighborhood of Roman villas. The station between Amilcar and

Hannibal, Présidence, is close to the official residence of the president of the republic. Perhaps few commuters making their way to or from jobs in Tunis give a second thought to this juxtaposition, but it has no doubt reassured Habib Bourguiba and Zine al-ʿAbidine ben ʿAli, the only two chief executives since 1956, to dwell within the symbolic embrace of two such stalwarts of the Tunisian past.

Still another Carthage station, Byrsa, derives its name from the hill where the Carthage acropolis stood and where, by Virgil's anachronistic account, Queen Dido entertained the travel-weary Aeneas. After France established its protectorate over Tunisia, the Catholic Church erected the Cathedral of St. Louis atop the hill to commemorate the saint-king whose ill-fated thirteenth-century crusade foundered on the shores below. From the Byrsa station, an easy walk leads to the twin seaports of Punic Carthage, one for the city's merchant fleet, the other for its warships. A similar walk from the Salammbo station (named for the daughter of Amilcar who also provided Gustave Flaubert, one of many nineteenth-century European writers entranced by Tunisia, with the title for his 1862 novel) ends at the Tophet, a sanctuary at which, some scholars believe, child sacrifices were meant to appease the Carthaginian gods.

A few stops farther on is a station named for Khair al-Din Barbarossa, the sixteenth-century corsair captain whose ships struck fear into the hearts of European sailors – or perhaps for Khair al-Din al-Tunsi, the reform-minded prime minister of the nineteenth century who lived in France for a decade and believed that Tunisia had much to learn about the modern world from the nations of Europe. Inasmuch as the station is on the outskirts of La Goulette, the port from which both Khair al-Dins sailed on their quite different missions, the ambiguity seems appropriate enough.

Situated on the Gulf of Tunis where a break in the coastline provides a passage into the shallow Lake of Tunis – the gullet to which its name refers – La Goulette served for centuries as the port of Tunis. In keeping with its maritime links around the Mediterranean, the city had a cosmopolitan air and, even after independence, remained one of the most ethnically and religiously mixed communities in the country. The TGM passes beneath the massive battlements of the fortress erected in 1535 by the Spanish Hapsburgs to consolidate their conquest of the region. Down the street along the structure's southern wall, far enough away to be difficult to distinguish clearly, is an equestrian statue of Habib Bourguiba that once stood in downtown Tunis but was moved to this less visible location at the end of his presidency in 1987. Leaving La Goulette, the railway tracks turn westward to cross the lake on a causeway built by the Tunis Tram Company

in 1905 to replace the longer route along the western shore of the lake which had been laid out by the Italian concessionaires who constructed and initially operated the line in the early 1870s. Arriving at the Tunis-Marine station after a run of some fifty minutes and fifteen miles, the train has passed by sites associated with three millennia of history.

A leisurely walk of an hour or two after exiting the TGM terminus builds upon the ride's introduction to Tunisian history. Just beyond the turnstiles is the main east–west thoroughfare of the "new" city, built in the nineteenth century on the mudflats bordering the lake to accommodate a European quarter outside the walls of the Arab city, the medina. A massive clock tower overlooks the busy Place du 7 Novembre 1987, named in honor of the "Historic Change" of that date when ben ʿAli replaced the ailing Bourguiba as president after the latter had dominated the Tunisian political scene for more than half a century. Before the "Historic Change," the centerpiece of the square was the statue of Bourguiba now consigned to La Goulette.

Nevertheless, the avenue still bears the name of the ex-president. A wide central mall, with towering shade trees on both sides, divides the traffic along the length of the boulevard, creating a pleasant pedestrian space rendered visually attractive and odoriferous by the profusion of flower stalls and the ubiquitous men and boys selling jasmine nosegays. Some three hundred yards up Avenue Bourguiba from the TGM station is the National Theater. Built in the early twentieth century as part of an entertainment center for European settlers that also included a casino, it became the home of Tunisian drama troupes whose productions fueled nationalist sentiments even as they elevated the level of cultural life. Two blocks farther on loom the most powerful symbols of seventy-five years of French colonial rule: the Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul and, directly opposite, the Embassy of France which, before independence, was the seat of the resident general and headquarters of the protectorate administration. Between them, in the median of Avenue Bourguiba, is a statue of the renowned fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Khaldoun, a native of Tunisia. The main point of contact between the downtown business district and the medina lies just slightly more than a hundred yards farther west.

Only a few vestiges of the gates that once pierced the medina's walls remain. By far the best known is the Bab al-Bahr, or Gate of the Sea, which offered the most direct access to the lake. Today, it is more commonly known as the Porte de France. Just inside the gate is the embassy of the United Kingdom, where Her Majesty's consuls once schemed against their French and Italian counterparts in the competition to draw Tunisia into the European orbit. Nearby are the neighborhoods of "Little Malta," a quarter

once filled with immigrants from that island, who enjoyed British protection, and the mellah, which once housed the Jewish population. One of two streets plunging into the medina from the Porte de France is Rue Jamʿa Zaituna (Zaituna Mosque Street). It slopes gently uphill past an astounding variety of shops, many of them now specializing in items favored by tourists, to end at the main portal of the mosque. Built in the eighth century, Zaituna served not only as a place of worship but also as the premier educational institution in Tunisia. Even after modern secular schools began to usurp that role in the nineteenth century, the mosque constituted the locus of Muslim intellectual life until its teaching functions were transferred to a faculty of theology and religious sciences at the University of Tunis in the 1960s. The winding streets and alleys around Zaituna offer numerous diversions, as the mosque is surrounded by the highest quality souks, or markets, in the city. Perfumes, spices, books, jewelry, and fine fabrics create a riot of colors and blend of aromas that set the precincts of the mosque apart as a unique environment. Not far from Zaituna, toward the southern edge of the medina, is the Tourbet al-Bey, which houses the tombs of the monarchs of the Husainid Dynasty (1705–1957).

A second major street traversing the medina from the Porte de France passes close by the mosque but ends at the center of secular, rather than religious, authority in the medina, the Casbah. The former palace of the ruler, the Dar al-Bey, now houses the prime minister's office, while buildings containing other government offices line the Place du Gouvernement at the western edge of the medina. Across the busy avenue that hems in the old city in the absence of its walls is the Collège Sadiqi. This still-functioning legacy of Khair al-Din al-Tunsi endowed the sons of the Tunisian bourgeoisie with modern secondary educations and served as a veritable nursery of generations of nationalist leaders.

The final leg of this journey through Tunisian history entails a walk along the perimeter of the medina to the Bab Souika neighborhood, a thirteenth-century suburb of the medina, and from there to the Bab al-Khadra station of the Tunis Metro, a tram system begun in the 1980s to relieve urban traffic congestion and connect the city with its northern, western, and southern suburbs. Line Four, the western route, makes a stop at Le Bardo, the beylical palace where the 1881 treaty, giving France special rights in Tunisia and paving the way for the protectorate, was signed. The National Assembly now occupies a portion of the palace, its entry flanked by soldiers dressed in ceremonial uniforms of the nineteenth century. Other wings of the palace house a world-class museum exhibiting an array of Tunisian artifacts but best known for its collection of mosaics, many from

Carthage, others from sites elsewhere in Tunisia: Dougga, El-Djem, Thurburbo Majus, and Bulla Regia. Some experts rate the Bardo holdings as the finest collection of Roman-era mosaics in the world. In a country where layers of history blend so seamlessly, it seems fitting that their twenty-first century home be in a royal palace begun in the fourteenth century.

As extraordinary as is the historical richness and diversity observed in the less than twenty-mile trip between La Marsa and Le Bardo, it is by no means unique to the region of Tunis. Although the entire country is only slightly larger than the American state of Florida, equally short journeys of similar diversity could readily be undertaken in such other urban centers as Sousse, Mahdia, Sfax, Gafsa, Kairouan, or Bizerte; among the towns and villages of the Majerda Valley west of the capital; or in Jarid oases of the southwest. How has it happened that the historical experience of what is now Tunisia has unfolded with such density and with so many traces of different cultures?

The southern curve of the African coastline at the Cap Bon peninsula has given Tunisia two windows on the Mediterranean Sea, one opening toward Europe, the other toward the Middle East. Since antiquity, this situation made it easy for peoples from both regions – Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Turks, Spaniards, Italians, Maltese, British, and French – to enter, and often take control of, the region. Its name has varied with time – Carthage, Africa (or, in its Arabized form, Ifriqiya), Tunisia – as its population has repeatedly absorbed waves of new arrivals from throughout the Mediterranean basin, all of them leaving their cultural imprints on the landscape and its inhabitants. But of all the rich legacies bestowed on Tunisia, that of the Arabs has unquestionably proven the most profound and enduring. The language, faith, and culture that the Arabs brought to the Maghrib ("the west," which to them meant all the lands beyond the Nile Valley) almost fourteen centuries ago have forged the innermost identity of the region's people ever since.

Nonetheless, the scant eighty-mile width of the Sicilian Channel separating island from Cap Bon has assured the ready transmission of European influences as well. The rulers of the Mediterranean's northern shores sometimes competed with their counterparts in Tunisia for mastery of the lands bordering the sea. More commonly, however, they imposed their political and economic will on northern Africa, absorbing it into the Roman, and much later the French, empires. Only on rare occasions, such as at the height of the Carthaginian era in the sixth century BCE or during the rule of the Aghlabid Dynasty in the ninth century CE, did political entities based in what later became Tunisia turn the tables and make European territory their own.