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978-1-107-02407-6 - A History of Modern Tunisia: Second Edition

Kenneth Perkins

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A HISTORY OF MODERN TUNISIA

SECOND EDITION

Kenneth Perkins's second edition of *A History of Modern Tunisia*, updated with a new chapter, carries the history of this country from 2004 to the present, with particular emphasis on the Tunisian revolution of 2011 – the first critical event of that year's Arab Spring and the inspiration for similar populist movements across the Arab world. After providing an overview of Tunisia in the years preceding the inauguration of a French protectorate in 1881, the book examines the impact of colonialism on the country, with particular attention to the evolution of a nationalist movement that secured the termination of the protectorate in 1956. Its analysis of the first three decades of Tunisian independence, during which the leaders of the anticolonial struggle consolidated political power, formulated a series of economic strategies, and promoted a social and cultural agenda calculated to modernize both state and society, assesses the challenges that they faced and the degree of success they achieved. The final chapter brings the book up to the present, examining the 2011 revolution and Tunisia's part in the Arab Spring. No other English-language study of Tunisia offers as sweeping a time frame or as comprehensive a history of this nation.

KENNETH PERKINS is an emeritus professor of history at the University of South Carolina. A frequent traveler to the Middle East and North Africa, Dr. Perkins has conducted scholarly research in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, France, the United Kingdom, and Sudan. He is the author of *Qaids, Captains, and Colons: French Military Administration in the Colonial Maghrib, 1844–1934*; *Port Sudan: The Evolution of a Colonial City*; *Tunisia: Crossroads of the Islamic and European Worlds*; *A History of Modern Tunisia* (2004); and two editions of the *Historical Dictionary of Tunisia*; as well as of numerous articles, book chapters, book reviews, and encyclopedia entries.

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*To Rebecca and Durham,
who I look forward to introducing to Tunisia*

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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, postcards, and other miscellaneous ephemera gathered in Tunisia over the course of the past forty years. It also prompted me to seek out repositories of older images. I am most grateful for the assistance of Dr. James A. Miller, former director of the Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT), in locating and securing copies of photographs held by the Institut Supérieur d'Histoire du Mouvement National. I am also very much in the debt of M. Fayçal Chérif, of the institute, who kindly arranged to provide the photographs I requested and especially to Dr. Faouzi Mahfoudi, the institute's director, for permission to use those images again in this second edition.

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A sabbatical leave in 2002–2003 expedited the completion of the first edition 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.

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A Political Who's Who of Modern Tunisia

'Achour, Habib (1913–1999)

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 Union Général des Travailleurs Tunisiens (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 (1806–1855)

Tenth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1837 to 1855. Westernizing reforms that he introduced with an eye toward 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 to 1957. 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.

Bash Hamba, 'Ali (1876–1918)

Young Tunisian activist. He founded the Association des Anciens 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.

Ben 'Ali, Zine al-'Abidine (1936–)

President of Tunisia, 1987 to 2011. He held ambassadorial and ministerial appointments after retiring from the armed forces, becoming 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 were never fulfilled. The regime's Islamist opposition was eradicated in the 1990s and its secular opponents systematically excluded from meaningful roles in the political arena. Widespread accusations of graft, bribery, nepotism, and other forms of corruption marred his last decade in office and culminated in his and Leila Trabelsi, his intensely disliked spouse's, departure for exile in Saudi Arabia.

Ben 'Ammar, Tahar (1889–1985)

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

Ben Jaafar, Mustafa (1940–)

Opposition political leader and human rights activist of the post-Bourguiba era. Working in Tunis as a physician in the 1970s, he helped create the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH; Tunisian League of Human Rights), the nation's first such organization. In 1994, he founded the Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL; Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberty), which was not legalized until 2002 but then was one of the few opposition parties allowed under ben 'Ali. Ben Jaafar attempted to run against the president in the 2009 elections, but his candidacy was disallowed. Following the revolution, he served briefly as minister of health but was most active in preparing a new party, Ettakatol (the Bloc), for the constituent assembly elections. As a result of the party's relative success, he became the assembly's president in December 2011.

Ben Salah, Ahmad (1926–)

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 (MUP) while in exile after 1973 and briefly returned to Tunisia in 1988 after Bourguiba's removal. Failing to secure authorization for the MUP, however, he resumed his exile until 2000. The party finally achieved legal status only after the revolution, but it then fared poorly in the 2011 constituent assembly elections.

Ben Yusuf, Salah (1920–1961)

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, 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.

Bouazizi, Mohamed (1984–2011)

Street vendor from Sidi Bouzid in the economically depressed interior of the country. In personal economic distress and believing himself the victim of harassment by local police and other officials, he doused himself with gasoline and struck a match in December 2010 as a dramatic public protest of his situation and that of many of his contemporaries. Bouazizi died of his self-inflicted injuries a few weeks later in a Tunis hospital. He became an icon of the revolution that ultimately brought down the Ben 'Ali regime and that many Tunisians believed his death had launched. The revolution would almost certainly have occurred with or without his suicide, but there can be no doubt that his gesture of futility epitomized the anger and frustration of other young Tunisians who took to the streets in its wake.

Bourguiba, Habib (1903–2000)

Nationalist leader, cofounder of the Neo-Dustur Party, first prime minister of independent Tunisia, and president of the country from 1957 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.

Cambon, Paul (1843–1924)

French resident general, 1882 to 1886. 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.

Ghannushi, Muhammad (1941–)

In 1999, after Ghannushi had served effectively for several years as minister of international cooperation and foreign investment, ben 'Ali named him prime minister. For the most part, Ghannushi steered clear of the egregious scandals of the last years of the dictatorship, but he was nonetheless tainted by his close association with the dictator and his entourage. Inevitably, as the president's last selection as head of government, he became a target of protesters' antipathy during the 2011 revolution. Ghannushi made a bid to assume the presidency when ben 'Ali fled, but his ambitions were thwarted by other political elites and he continued as prime minister. His efforts to form a national unity government after the revolution were not well received by the many citizens who resented the continuing presence in it of former leaders of the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) and the prime minister's apparent affinity with many of them. Failing to assuage his increasingly vocal critics, Ghannushi resigned from office in late February, paving the way for a more stable interim government led by Beji Caid al-Sebsi as prime minister.

Ghannushi, Rashid (1941–)

A founder in 1979 of the Mouvement de la Tendence 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. After the government banned his al-Nahda (Renaissance) Party from standing in the 1989 elections, he went into exile, settling in England. Subsequently, the Tunisian authorities accused him of orchestrating a wave of violence for which he was convicted (in absentia) of conspiring to overthrow the government. He returned to Tunisia after the revolution and worked to revive al-Nahda, which he led through its victory in the constituent assembly elections in 2011. Thereafter, he officially stepped aside, but retained considerable weight in party councils as the spiritual leader.

Guellaty, Hassan (1880–1966)

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.

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[More information](#)**Hached, Farhat (1913–1952)**

Labor organizer and founder of the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) in 1946. 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.

Jebali, Hammadi (1949–)

An engineer by training, Jebali was drawn to the Islamic Tendency Movement in the early 1980s. He became the editor of al-Nahda's newspaper, *al-Fajr (Dawn)*, in the early 1990s and was convicted later in the decade of involvement in plots to overthrow the ben 'Ali government. He was imprisoned until 2006, when he benefited from a general amnesty and resumed his activities in Islamic circles. With the legalization of al-Nahda after the revolution, he became one of the party's leading spokespersons and, after its victory in the constituent assembly elections of 2011, the nation's prime minister. He resigned in February 2013, amid the most serious public demonstrations since the revolution, when his party colleagues rejected his proposal to create a national unity government intended to address the deep anxiety felt across virtually the entire political spectrum following the assassination of the leftist politician Shukri Belaid.

Khair al-Din al-Tunsi (ca. 1822–1890)

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.

Lavigerie, Charles-Martial (1825–1892)

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.

Macheul, Louis (1848–1922)

Director of public education, 1883 to 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.

Marzouki, Moncef (1945–)

Political and human rights activist of the post-Bourguiba era. In 2001, he founded a new center-left and secular party, the Congrès pour la République (CPR; Congress of the Republic), which failed to gain legal status. He directed the party from self-imposed exile until the revolution in 2011. The CPR's showing in the constituent assembly elections in 2011 led to his selection by that body as the interim president of the republic, pending legislative elections to be held the following year.

Mestiri, Ahmad (1925–)

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)

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.

Millet, René (1849–1919)

French resident general, 1894 to 1900. Sympathetic to 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)

Eighteenth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1942 and 1943. With prominent Neo-Dustur Party figures in jail or in exile because of their 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 (1942–1943), but his nationalist sympathies alarmed the French and they forced him to abdicate on their return.

Muhammad Bey (1811–1859)

Eleventh ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1855 to 1859. By distancing himself from many of Ahmad Bey's policies, he hoped to lower government expenditures. To protect their interests in Tunisia, Great Britain and France pressured him to implement judicial reforms and accept substantial foreign investment in the country.

Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey (1814–1882)

Twelfth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1859 to 1882. Ill-conceived development projects and bureaucratic corruption marked his reign, producing 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.

Mustafa Khaznadar (1817–1878)

Frequent 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 spurred by higher taxes, he fell from power in 1873 while attempting to play the country's creditors off against each other.

Mzali, Muhammad (1925–2010)

Prime minister, 1980 to 1986. 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)

Fifteenth ruler of the Husainid Dynasty, 1906 to 1922. 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.

Nouira, Hedi (1911–1993)

Neo-Dustur politician. He served as director of the Tunisian Central Bank from 1958 to 1970, then as prime minister until 1980. His main task in that office was to foster a recovery from the disarray brought on by Ahmad 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.

Peyrouton, Marcel (1887–1983)

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.

Roches, Léon (1809–1901)

French consul general in Tunis, 1855 to 1863. Charged with strengthening French influence in Tunisia, Roches formed close personal relationships with the beys that 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.

Saint, Lucien (1867–1938)

French resident general, 1921 to 1929. 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.

al-Sebsi, Beji Caid (1926–)

Politician and bureaucrat whose lengthy career began in 1956 as an adviser to Habib Bourguiba. Later appointments included numerous ministerial and subministerial postings and ambassadorships. His reputation as a Dusturian stalwart amenable to modest reform (though not inclined to take the lead in advocating change) enabled him to become the prime minister when Muhammad Ghannushi, the last holder of that office under ben 'Ali, resigned in February 2011, having proven unable to form a government acceptable to the revolutionaries. Al-Sebsi filled the office until the constituent assembly elections in October 2011, after which he resigned to enable the assembly to designate his successor.

Sfar, Bashir (1865–1917)

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 Council 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.

Tha'albi, 'Abd al-'Aziz (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 anticolonial struggle.

Wood, Richard (1806–1900)

British consul general in Tunis, 1855 to 1879. 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.



