

# **The Greeks in Tunisia during the 19th century. Social adaptability, commercial enterprise and political flexibility.**

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## **Abstract**

The article discusses several aspects of the Greek community of Tunis during the 19th century. Initially, we will approach the anthropogeography of the Greek community focused on the characteristics of Greek migration in Tunisia. We will study a few demographic factors and will query why Greeks from certain geographical areas moved to Tunisia. Then we will refer to the main economic activities of the Greeks settled in Tunisia, including the operation of retail stores commerce and sponge fishery. We will define the framework through which, Greeks managed to get significant economic power and become Bey's main partners. Therefore, we will question the political status of the Greeks located in Tunisia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, analyzing their tactics and the reasons for their way of acting. Finally, we will examine the case of a few Greeks who arrived in Tunisia as enslaved in the first quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century and gradually undertook import offices in the administrative mechanism of Tunisia government, supporting in parallel the Greek community's interest.

## **The Greek community of Tunisia in the 19th century**

Political and economic conditions encouraged Greek immigration to North Africa in the early nineteenth century. The Napoleonic Wars and mainly the blockade of a substantial part of the European continent favored those who turned to risky grain trade. From the end of the 18th century the opening of fertile steppes and plains of the "New Russia," as well as the settlement policy of the Tsars, was a

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springboard for the development of the Greek merchant shipping. Wheat will, therefore, become the main commodity of Greek ships and the basic business orientation of traders from the islands of the Aegean and the Ionian Sea, the Peloponnese, and Epirus.

An important part of the Greeks who settled in Tunis in the early decades of the 19th century came from the Ionian Islands. Since, by the end of the eighteenth century, any agricultural activity in the region beyond the olive had abandoned, this practice of monoculture resulted in inadequate food, making uncertain the survival of households. At the same time, like Malta, the Ionian Islands suffered greatly during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1797, they experienced the invasion of the French army and later they were occupied by the Venetians and then by Russians. In 1814, they fell into the hands of the British, but the fact of successive wars in the Ionian Sea intensified the emigration of islands' residents. Because, from 1815 to 1864, the Ionian Islands were under the protection of the British Crown, the Ionian Greeks arrived in Tunis exploiting their British citizenship though some sought protection from France, Italy or Russia<sup>2</sup>.

Apart from those who came from various parts of Greece, including the Ionian and Aegean Islands, Crete, Cyprus and Macedonia, a part of the Greek community consisted of freedmen slaves, who were previously victims of pirates and held in various prisons of the city<sup>3</sup>. The Englishman Godfrey Feise, who was in Tunis in 1812, estimates the number of Christian prisoners in two thousand persons, adding that the number decreased significantly after the acquisition of many Sicilians and Greeks of the Ionian Islands by the British state<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, Daniel Panzac believes that Christian slaves did not exceed 600<sup>5</sup>. In 1823, we learned about the efforts of the English Consul to liberate two Greeks who were captured during the war against the Ottomans regeneration. Despite the insistence of the consul, a move that led to conflict with the Bey, both Greeks

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<sup>2</sup>Gallant, T.W., *Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity, and Power in the British Mediterranean*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, pp.6–14.

<sup>3</sup> For piracy, especially in this period, see Krandonelli, A., *Istoria tis peirateias stous mesous hronous*[History of piracy in the middle ages], Athens 1991, Vol. I.; Braudel, F., *I Mesogeios kai o mesogeiakos kosmos tin epohi tou Filippou B tis Ispanias: gegonota, politiki, anthropoi* [The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II of Spain: Facts, politics, people], trans. by Claire Mitsotaki, Vol. III, MIET, Athens 1998.

<sup>4</sup>Feise, G., *Observations on the Regency of Tunis, 1812, 1813*, manuscript no 15.417, The British Library, London, p. 9 .

<sup>5</sup>Panzac, D., *Les corsaires barbaresques: La fin d'une épopée, 1800–1820*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1999, p. 98.

remained slaves<sup>6</sup>. In the mid 19th century and particularly in 1842, Sir Thomas Reade<sup>7</sup>, General Consul of England in Tunis, began an effort to persuade Ahmed Bey to abolish slavery and to release the slaves. Eventually, slavery will be abolished in 1846, making Tunisia the first Muslim country that has made such a move.

The coexistence and interaction of people from different nationalities is the typical image that someone encountered in Tunis in the 19th century<sup>8</sup>. In the early 19th century, the population of Tunis is about 85,000 people, of which Europeans are only 1% of the total population. The demographic picture of the Greek community, until the mid-19th century, is somewhat unclear since references include either sporadic report of European consulates or voyagers testimonials who visited various cities of Tunisia. At the dawn of the 19th century, travelers like Vuillier, meet Greek fishing boats in Monastir<sup>9</sup> and Mahdia. In Mahdia, we are also informed of the existence of forty *sakoleves*<sup>10</sup> whose main occupation was sponge fishery<sup>11</sup>. However, after the recognition of the Greek state, many Greeks have redefined their business plans and decided to return home. These departures, in connection with the coincidences of plague and cholera epidemics, as well as the persecutions of 1784, led to a dramatic reduction in the number of members of the Greek community. The demographic profile of the Greek community was further worsened after the epidemic of 1818. The images someone could see in the city of Tunis are indicative of the difficulties Greek colonists faced in their daily living. Nevertheless, those Greeks who had the financial wherewithal, trying to show solidarity with the plight of their fellow countrymen. According to Poulos, Charalambos Skamnakis helped many compatriots by giving them commodities such as oil and coal<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>Pechot, L., *Histoire de L' Afrique du nord avant 1830, précédée de la géographie physique et politique de la Tunisie, de l'Algerie et du Maroc*, Cojosso, Alger 1914, p. 204.

<sup>7</sup>O Sir Thomas Reade(1782-1849) served as Consul from 1824 up to his death in 1849. For more, see Reade, Aelyn Lyell, *The Reades of Blackwood hill, in the parish of Horton, Staffordshire; a record of their descendants: with a full account of Dr. Johnson's ancestry, his kinsfolk and family connections*, Spottiswoode & co, London 1906.

<sup>8</sup>Paul-Henri-Benjamin Balluet,, *La Politique Francaise en Tunisie: Le Protectorat et ses origins (1854-1891)*, Paris 1902.

<sup>9</sup>Vuillier, G., *La Tunisie*, Tours A. Mame, 1896, p.164.

<sup>10</sup> Greek sailing boat with square sails.

<sup>11</sup>Vuillier, G., *La Tunisie.*, ibid, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>Kharalambis Poulos dit Lambis, *Les Hellènes*, dans Dessort (C.-H-Roger), *Histoire de la ville de Tunis*, E. Pfister, Alger. 1926, p.153.

In 1830, Christians were nearly 3,000 people, although the data are controversial because the first systematic census will take place only in 1906. The risk of incorrect estimates is intensified by the fact that even in the early years of the French protectorate, the data for non-French are incomplete<sup>13</sup>. However, incidents within and outside Tunisia will influence the demographic profile of Tunisia during 1830-1850. The fall of the Qaramanli dynasty in Tripoli of Libya in 1835 will lead many Greeks to move west and to settle in Tunis. In 1835, according to Michael Russell, the few Protestants lived in Tunis addressed to the Greek Orthodox Church to celebrate weddings, baptisms and funerals<sup>14</sup>. We even have information that, in 1844, a Greek priest makes the wedding of the daughter of the British Consul<sup>15</sup>. In 1848, according to a report of the British diplomatic mission in Tunis, we were informed of the presence of 5,800 British citizens, of whom 200 were Greeks originated from the Ionian Islands. The inhabitants of the Ionian Islands, who were deemed to be British citizens, had already taken benefit of the Treaties of 16/10/1813 and 04/17/1816, which were signed by Great Britain and Tunis government<sup>16</sup>. In the next decades, Ahmed Bey's policy to approach European powers led to a rapid demographic change in Tunisia. So, in 1842 10,000 Europeans recorded in Tunisia while in 1856 they were almost 12,000<sup>17</sup>. The constant flow of people from Europe will continue in 1867 when 15,055 Catholics reside in Tunis. Finally, in 1878, Tunis's population consisted of 1,000,000 Muslims, 35,000 Jews, 300 Greeks, 50 Protestants and 16,287 Catholics<sup>18</sup>.

From our research in the archives of the Holy Archdiocese of Carthage, where marriages and deaths records exist, we can cast additional light in the demographics of the Greeks in Tunis for the entire 19th century. As we can see in

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<sup>13</sup>Soumille, P., *Européens de Tunisie et questions religieuses (1892–1901)*, introduction of J. L. Miège, Aix-Marseille: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris 1975, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>Russell, M., *History and Present Condition of the Barbary States*, Harper & brothers, New York 1854, p. 215.

<sup>15</sup>Windler, C., *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)*, Librairie Droz, 2002, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup>Hertslet, L., *Great Britain's commercial treaties: a complete collection of the treaties and conventions, and reciprocal regulations, at present subsisting between Great Britain and foreign powers, and of the laws, decrees, and orders in council, concerning the same, so far as they relate to commerce and navigation, to the repression and abolition of the slave trade, and to the privileges and interests of the subjects of the high contracting parties*, Vol. 3, Butterworth 1829, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup>Sebag, P., *Une description de Tunis au XIXe siècle*, Cahiers de Tunisie, 6-7 (1959), p. 163.

<sup>18</sup>Sainte Marie, E., *La Tunisie chrétienne*, Lyon Bureaux des Missions Catholiques, 1878, p. 125.

Matrix 1, the birth rate is stable between 1805 and 1850, but later there is an increase of around 132%. On the one hand, this tension resulted from the improvement of living conditions in Tunis, something that is also derived from the reduction in the number of deaths in the period 1851-1880. On the other hand, it is a consequence of the increasing presence of the Greeks in the country.

<b>Period</b>	<b>Nr. Births</b>	<b>Nr. Deaths</b>
1805-1820	52	28
1821-1840	66	60
1841-1850	68	43
1851-1870	158	18
1871-1880	78	61

Matrix 1. *Demographic data of the Greek community of Tunis based on the Holy Archdiocese of Carthage's records 1805-1880*<sup>19</sup>.

The censuses of the Greek consulate, beyond the demographic profile of the community, give us information about the origin of the Greeks who lived in Tunis in 1879. According to the 1879 census, 86% of the Greeks resided in Tunis originate from Peloponnese and specific Arcadia (Tripoli, Mantinea, Gortynia) and Messinia (Kalamata, Methoni, Pylos, Trifilia). Of the rest, 7% comes from the Cyclades and especially Syros, and 7% from the Ionian islands, mainly Corfu and Zakynthos. In 1890, a new census carried out. This time, the percentage of the Peloponnesian remains at high levels, reaching 77%. Apart from the Ionian Islands where arrivals amounted to 3% and Syros which is estimated at 4%, most migrants originated from the islands of the northeast Aegean (Chios, Samos, Lemnos). Finally, there are few from mainland Greece, such as Volos, Athens, and Piraeus.

Apart from the anthropogeography of the Greek community, there is also information about their place of residence in Tunis. According to Poulos, before

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<sup>19</sup> Holy Archdiocese of Carthage's records (from now on H.A.C.R.), "Book A', several ecclesiastical mysteries (marriages, baptisms and deaths) between 1805 and 1874."

the arrival of the French in 1881, most Greeks lived in the old town, Medina. Specifically, in Sidi-El-Mourdjani, was the residence of Savas Siganakis (Dar El Grigui), Dimitris Papadopoulos (Dar Dimitri) and Theodore Tsetses (Dar El-Caid). In the corner of “Rue de la Verrerie” and “De la Kasbah”, in “Sabat El Grigui”, was the residence of Konstantinos Siganakis. A few meters further, in “Dar El Houha,” was the house of Marinos Marinopoulos (Dar Marini). Finally, in “Rue des Epines” was the residence of Charalambos Skamnakis (Dar Kharalambi), which later became the “Dar Garn Felfel”<sup>20</sup>.

### **Greeks’ commercial enterprise**

During the 19th century, the main economic activities of the Greeks settled in Tunisia included the operation of retail stores and commerce. As emerges from the census of the Greek consulate in 1879, more than 50% of the Greeks members ran business like groceries, coffee shops, bakeries, and patisseries. We should also include those who were allowed to sell alcohol. Merchants were almost 25% of the Greek community while there are also servants (12%) and employees (4%). Finally, there were Jews brokers and goldsmiths, originated from Corfu and Zakynthos, as well as a pharmacist<sup>21</sup>.

In the first decades of 19th century, Greeks of Tunisia used to own cafes. It is true that, in this period, cafes were the most common place for male socialization. Cafes were scattered in various parts of the city and belonged to either Turks or Tunisians. Moreover, there were shops where alcohol was served, which belonged to Greek and Maltese. As more immigrants from the Mediterranean arrived in Tunisia, taverns, hotels and motels began to proliferate<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup>Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, ibid, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup>Ministere des affaires Etrangères, *Rapport au Président de la République sur la situation de la Tunisie en 1897*, Imprimerie nationale (Paris), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup>Triulzi, A., “*Italian-Speaking Communities in Early Nineteenth Century Tunis*”, ROMM 9, 1 (1971), pp.167–77, Mohamed El Aziz Ben Achour, “*Islam et contrôle social à Tunis aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*” in *La ville arabe dans l’Islam*, ed. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba and Dominique Chevallier

In the 1830s, mostly taverns belonged to Greeks. In the mid 19th century, the trade of illegal sale of alcohol intensifies. As a result, Greek shopkeepers who affected by unfair competition accused the Sicilians and Maltese and required state intervention.

As mentioned above, the area of trade was a very profitable profession for the Greeks of Tunisia. Since at the dawn of 18th century trade was the leading sector of the Tunisian economy, Greeks created hubs in Tunis, under the constitution of broader commercial networks<sup>23</sup>. Gradually, they took control much of the trade between Tunis and eastern Mediterranean, particularly in the lucrative field of cereals, olive oil, tobacco, dried figs, liquor, silk, and purple. For instance, in the early 19th century we are informed about the presence of a Greek merchant, Elias Krasakopoulos, who lived in Tunis for many years and imported wine from Samos, via a ship that was under French protection<sup>24</sup>. Between 1835 and 1859, one of the most respectable and rich persons of Tunis was Stamatellos Maltezopoulos. Maltezopoulos, along with his family, visited his birth place Gargalianoi every year, and when he returned to Tunis, he donated many gifts, both to local Bey and his ministers. According to a letter of Ahmed Bey in 1845, we are informed that the Bey offered Maltezopoulos an extensive coastal area in Bab El Bahar for the typical price of 5000 piastres. Nevertheless, Maltezopoulos refused politely<sup>25</sup>. Greeks also had the exclusive right to trade tobacco. Specifically, George Siganakis and Apostolos Varinopoulos imported tobacco from Minor Asia and the Balkans. Another major merchant was Gregory Poulos, who originated from Filiatra. In 1862, although he was importing grapes from Peloponnese, he owned vast vineyards in several Tunisian cities such as Soukra, Marsa and Ras-Djebel. Poulos produced and bottled a kind of syrup that Arabs called *sboula*. At the same time, he established a firm with other Greeks which produced and traded delights and gum. Other prominent Greek merchants were Theodore Tsetses, George Kougioutopoulos, Dimitris Kouvopoulos and Bill Kougiteas, who were involved in the trade of salt and tobacco. In the last quarter of the 19th century, according

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(Tunis: CÉRÈS, 1982), pp.137–47.

<sup>23</sup> Charlafti, T., “Epiheirimatika diktya tis diasporas”[Commercial networks of Diaspora], *Historika*, 35 (2001), pp. 442-446.

<sup>24</sup> Clancy-Smith, J. A. *Mediterranean: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900*, California World History Library, Kindle Location 8922. University of California Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>25</sup> Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, *ibid*, p.155.

to the archives of the Greek community of Tunis, most of the trade of Greek merchants regards exports to the countries of the Western Mediterranean (France, Italy, Spain), and Central Europe (Germany Belgium, Switzerland, and Austria). Commodities also exported to St. Petersburg in Russia and several ports in the Black Sea, as well as ports located in northwestern Africa, such as Oran, Algiers, and Casablanca.

Apart from those Greeks who live in Tunis, we have evidence of their presence also in other cities across Tunisia. In 1887, Rae, passing through Sousse during a trip to Berber, spent the night in a hotel that belonged to a Greek, who was also the owner of a restaurant in the city<sup>26</sup>. Few days later he arrived in Sfax, where he recorded the existence of 600 Greeks. They owned thirteen fishing boats, worked in the sponge fishery field and were extremely courageous and skillful. Rae added that “two years earlier, over a hundred Greek fishing vessels operating in an area stretching from Benghazi to the Sfax”.<sup>27</sup>

The city of Sfax, due to its location on the east coast of Tunisia, was a popular destination both for Jewish and European merchants who settled in the European part of the city (Ville Européenne) around the 1800s. In the late 1860s, the total population of the city was 7,000 people, including 1,300 Jews and 700 Europeans (Maltese, French, Italians and Greeks). The important role of Sfax in the Tunisian economy came primarily from its harbor, which was a major trade center of the eastern Mediterranean. As a result, until the 1860s, the first Greeks who settled in Sfax, worked in the export sector. Although the majority was trading Tunisian olive oil and grain<sup>28</sup>, some of them were acting as resellers. After they had bought a variety of imported commodities, usually in huge quantities, they were selling them throughout Tunisia<sup>29</sup>. In Djerba Island, that was famous for its olive groves, the trade of olive oil was the main activity of the Europeans living

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<sup>26</sup>Rae, E., *The country of the Moors, A journey from Tripoli in Barbary to the City of Kairwan*, London 1877, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup>Rae, E., *The country of the Moors*, *ibid*, p.184.

<sup>28</sup>Anderson, L., *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830–1980*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ., 1986, p. 99

<sup>29</sup> “Olive oil was an increasingly important export during the nineteenth century, with much of it being shipped to the soap industry in Marseilles. This led to a shift in the centre of trade from Tunis to the ports near the olive-producing region, such as Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia and Sfax”. See more in Valensi, L., *Tunisian Peasants in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, p. 224.



on the island since the beginnings of 19th century<sup>30</sup>. Since the 1860s, Greek immigration both in Sfax and Djerba associated with sponge fishery<sup>31</sup>. As sponge fishery activity focused on the coast of North Africa, Greeks from Kalymnos, Symi, Hydra and Aigina discovered the rich and high-quality sponge beds of northern Africa, stretching from Libya up to Tunisia and the Gulf of Gabès, sponges that are considered high quality. In 1875, Greeks sponge fishers from Kalymnos Island introduced the use of fishing with “*skandalopetra*”<sup>32</sup> in the Gulf of Gabès. A few years later they will be pioneers in the use of scuba<sup>33</sup>. Aside from sponges, another endearing activity of Greek fishermen of Sfax was fishing for octopus. The sponge fishery will show an upward trend over the centuries, reaching its peak in the period between 1865 and 1912. This bloom, in the second half of the 19th century, was the result of the ignorance of the risks coming from the use of new diving equipment. Secondly, it was originated from the willingness and the needs of divers to take risks in order earn their living and get rich. The golden era in the sponge fishery motivated Greeks who gradually began to settle in Sfax and Djerba<sup>34</sup>. Consequently, in the 1880s, due to the growing Greek migration flow, most of the annual sponge fishery turnover was in the hands of the Greeks and Maltese<sup>35</sup>. If we consider that, in 1899, Greeks owned 82 vessels, while Italians had only 54 ones, we can realize the superiority of the Greeks in the specific economic field<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, A., “*Murder in Jerba: Honour, Shame and Hospitality among Maltese in Ottoman Tunisia*”, *History and Anthropology*, 15:2, 2004, p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> De Lanesan, J., *La Tunisie*, ibid, p.196.

<sup>32</sup> Skandalopetra diving dates from ancient Greece, when it was used by sponge fishermen and has been re-discovered in recent years as a free diving discipline. It consists of a variable ballast dive using a *skandalopetra* tied to a rope. A companion on a boat recovers the diver pulling the rope after the descent, always watching over from the surface.

<sup>33</sup> Kazdagli, H., “*Les Grecs de Sfax a l'heure des choix*” in *Sud-Nord: Cultures coloniales en France (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, sous la direction de Colette Zytnicki, Chantal Bordes-Benayoun, Privat SAS, Toulouse 2004, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Baedeker, K., *The Mediterranean; seaports and sea routes, including Madeira, the Canary Islands, the coast of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia*, handbook for travelers, New York 1911, p.393.

<sup>35</sup> Lambert, R., *Handbook for travelers: Algeria and Tunis*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, London 1890, p. 327.

<sup>36</sup> Ministère des affaires Etrangères, *Rapport au Président de la République sur la situation de la Tunisie en 1899*, Imprimerie nationale (Paris), p. 58.

## **Greeks' political status**

Due to the significant contribution of the Greeks to the import and export trade of Tunisia, the Greek state realized the necessity for the establishment of diplomatic representation in the city of Tunis through the institution of the consulate. Historically, the primary role of the consulate was to promote trade relations between the home and the host country. Moreover, the consulate was responsible for creating the appropriate framework to promote and protect the rights of the permanent or temporary citizens residing in the host country. Despite the fact that Greek-Tunisian unofficial bilateral relations date back in the first half of the 19th century, a variety of obstacles hindered the establishment of a Greek consulate in Tunis. The reasons for this delay resulted mainly from the Greek national liberation that was ongoing and the frequent disputes between Greeks and the Ottoman Porte. Though Tunisia was a semi-autonomous status, its foreign policy was affected by the Ottoman authorities. As a result, every Greek effort to establish a consulate in this country of North Africa had to overcome a few difficulties.

Although the Greek state was officially recognized by the Porte in 1832, the official Tunisian authorities refused to acknowledge the members of the Greek community as citizens of the new state and as a result, they were opposed to accepting Greek consulate in their country. Furthermore, since some of the Greeks who lived in Tunis originated from areas that were still territories of the Ottoman Empire, as Asia Minor, Macedonia, and some Aegean islands, they were considered as Ottoman subjects. This fact deprived the Greek State of the opportunity to "embrace" these non-citizens since such action lacked legal basis. Another reason for the inability of the Greek state to establish diplomatic representation in a country where Greeks were so active was European countries' policy. English and Russian consulate in Tunisia used to attract persons from third countries. The majority of Greeks fled to Russian consular protection, not only

because of their common religious identity but mostly because of the great influence of the Russian consul Charles Nyssen<sup>37</sup>.

This peculiar legal status made many Greeks apply for citizenship and protection to the European consulates, which were located in Tunisia. This strategy also emerged both from legal and economic reasons. Being French, British or citizens of another European country, they could either ensure protection, especially on issues related to justice or take advantage of the capitulations system. Since the majority of the Greeks were merchants, this flexibility was necessary for carrying out commercial activities. This tactic will continue until the establishment of Greek consulate. Greeks, however, asked for European consulates' protection and other reasons. In 1830, when Greece proclaimed its independence, the Greeks who wished to return to their country addressed to the Consul of France, Mathieu de Lesseps, to obtain the necessary passport (*teskera*). Others sought the intervention of the European consuls to regain their freedom or to seek legal protection for Penal Code matters<sup>38</sup>. Another contentious issue that will urge Greeks to seek for the European consuls' protection was the repayment of loans granted to Tunisians since only through the political pressure of the European consulates they could claim for their money.

Although the Greek consulate in Tunis typically established in 1853<sup>39</sup>, the Greeks continued to belong to the political jurisdiction of the Sultan until 1860. This politic resulted from their resolution not to cause any misunderstandings to the Tunisian authorities that would lead to a change in their attitude towards Greek community. However, during the presence of Khaznadar in the Tunisian government, Greek community adapted its policy and made an attempt to connect with the Greek state. Actually, in this period, the establishment procedure of diplomatic relations between Athens and Tunis intensified. Specifically in 1868, Spiridon Logiotidis, Consul of the Greek state in Chios, took the initiative to send a letter to Mustapha Khaznadar so as to remind him of the need to establish

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<sup>37</sup> Carlino Nyssen was of Dutch origin and served as Russia Consul between 1826 and 1886. See in Poulos, K., "*Les Hellène*", *ibid*, p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> In 1844, the French Consul Lagau Guizot demanded the sentence of the person who murdered Dimitris. Although Dimitris was Greek, he was a French citizen. Letter of November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1844. See in Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie. Les Grecs de Tunisie: du Millet-i-rum à l'assimilation française (XVII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, pp.449-476, Bulletin de la Direction de l'agriculture, du commerce et de la colonisation, 11<sup>e</sup> année, n° 42, 1<sup>er</sup> trimestre 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Government Gazette of Greek State (from now on G.G.G.S.) Nr. 46/31-12-1853. Peri organismou ton proxenikon arhon [About the organization of consular authorities].

bilateral relations between Tunisia and the Kingdom of Greece. The Consul referred to the philhellenic feelings of Khaznadar and tried to persuade him taking advantage of a Greek from Chios named Michael Koutsoudis, who had trade relations with Tunis government and knew Khaznadar in person<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, Mustapha Khaznadar did not respond to Logiotidis' letter. Probably the serious issues related to the economic situation of Tunisia that occurred this period did not allow Khaznadar to deal with this issue.

The first official representative of Greek kingdom will settle in Tunis, shortly before the establishment of the French protectorate, although there is a controversy regarding the exact year of his placement. According to Kazdaghli, who relies on the correspondence of the first Greek consul to the Tunisian authorities, the Greek consulate established in August 1880. Kazdaghli also lists one letter of the Tunisian state to Athens, dated February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1881, which is the formal recognition of the Greek consulate thus recognizing its institutional role in the protection of Greek citizens<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, Poulos regards that the Greek consulate established in 1878<sup>42</sup>. M. Iskomakos was the first consul and remained in his position until 1884 while serving as president of the Greek consular court judging Greek citizens who involved in penal issues. The fact that the first official census of the Greeks of Tunisia undertaken by the Greek Consul in Tunis in 1879 indicates that consulate's operating year is 1878. At this point, it should be noted that the Greek consular court, apart from Iskomakos, consisted of G. Siganakis, G. Kougioutopoulos, the interpreter G. Manidakis and Nick Halkias, who was Mustapha Khaznadar's nephew<sup>43</sup>.

Apart from the consulate in Tunis, the Greek authorities established a second one in 1882 in the city of Sfax<sup>44</sup>. The increasing presence of Greeks in the area, due to the bloom of sponge fishery, made the Greek state ensure the economic interests of migrants. Because of the coexistence of Greeks, Italians and Maltese in the same professional field, the competition was very intense. This competition, however, leads several times the countries of origin of the

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<sup>40</sup>Letter of November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1868 written by Spyridon Logiotidis. See more in Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie.*, ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie.*, ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, ibid, p. 153.

<sup>43</sup>Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, ibid., p. 153.

<sup>44</sup>G.G.G.S., Nr. 123/1-10-1882.

communities above in conflicts violating the interstate agreements that were signed to adjust the fishing areas. Therefore, to provide assistance to the Greek community of Sfax, Greek state decided to proceed with the establishment of the local consulate. Moreover, from the very beginning, the Greek consulate in Tunis will take action by appointing consular officials in major port cities of the country such as Bizerte, Sousse, and Monastir<sup>45</sup>.

As we have seen previously, the large volume of commodities handled by the Tunisian ports attracted numerous Greek merchants, who found fertile ground and took advantage of the economic circumstances that were presented. As a result, the main task of consular officials was to protect Greek trade issues and to provide them with the necessary facilities both during their stay and their cooperation with the Tunisian authorities. Things will not change when the French protectorate established in the summer of 1881. On the contrary, the Greek diplomatic authorities will gradually thicken its dealer network by placing officers in more Tunisian cities. For instance officials settled in Gabès<sup>46</sup> and Mahdia<sup>47</sup>, and they were responsible for regular reporting to the consulate in Tunis. In 1888, the Greek consulate in Tunis will be upgraded to General consulate<sup>48</sup>.

The local offices set up by the Greek consulate did not only staffed by Greeks. Consular officers usually flanked by two Tunisians acting as debts assistant. However, Tunisians had prior approval from the authority of the Protectorate. Through this process, the French Protectorate began gradually to give samples of the policy that would follow against foreign communities of Tunisia in the coming years. A policy of strict control aimed at limiting the flexibility and thus the autonomy of other European consular authorities. Towards this direction, the French Protectorate issued the law of April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1883 which abolished the consular courts that till then were responsible for judging European citizens. In this way, French justice expanded to all residents of Tunisia<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup>Letter of 28/1/1881 towards the manager of the Greek Consulate. See Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie*. *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>Letter of 6/4/1883, towards the Greek agent in Gabes. See Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie*. *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>Letter of 8/8/1883, towards the Greek agent in Mahdia. See in Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie*. *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>G.G.G.S., Nr. 69/06-03-1888.

<sup>49</sup>Mahjoubi, A., *L'établissement du Protectorat fran, ais en Tunisie*, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Tunis, 1977, p. 176.

## Greek officials in Tunisian government

From the beginning of the formation of the Greek community in Tunisia, the majority of Greeks were Ottoman citizens, since they originated from areas that belonged to the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the religious discrimination existed in Ottoman era, Greeks were members of the Christian millet and belonged to the religious jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Greek community was represented by a sheikh and later, after the sign of Adrianople Treaty in 1827, Greeks also had a *kadi* for legal issues. According to historical sources, the last sheikh was Theodore Tsetses<sup>50</sup>.

Among the Ottomans citizens who lived in Tunis, it is true that Greeks, although they were not numerous, have benefited from the generosity and protection of the rulers of Husaynid dynasty since they enjoyed significant autonomy in religious and community issues. Indeed, the reign of Ahmed Bey (1837-1855) was marked by several initiatives for the benefit of the Greeks of Tunisia. According to Ibn Abi Dhiyf, who lived in Bey's palace, ruler's policy for Christians primarily reflects the economic interests of the regency<sup>51</sup>. It should be added that the measures taken for the Christians, who were established in Tunis, was often the result of repeated complaints from representatives of the European powers<sup>52</sup>. However, as far as Greeks, whose community numbered two hundred and fifty people, according to eyewitnesses, it was an act for a religious group rather than the result of external pressure<sup>53</sup>. The Tunisian authorities continued their favorable disposition towards the Greeks, especially in religious matters. At the end of 1863, Mohamed Sadok Bey (1859-1882), donated a plot of land to the Greek community through *enzel*<sup>54</sup> status, to enlarge their cemetery and to erect a

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<sup>50</sup>Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, ibid., p. 153.

<sup>51</sup>Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie*. ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Chater, K., *Dépendance et mutations précoloniales : la Régence de Tunis de 1815 à 1857*, Publ. de l'Université de Tunis, 1984, p. 524.

<sup>53</sup>Dunant, H., *Notice sur la Régence de Tunis*, Genève, 1858, réédition de la S.T.D. Tunis 1975, p. 233 and Ganiage, J., *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie, 1861-1881*, M.T.E. 1968, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> According to the terms of the transaction *enzel*, the area or the property that had been leased would yield indefinitely an annuity to the previous owner. Because of *enzel*, the tenant or his heirs

church. The transaction took place between the Minister of the Tunisian government, Mustafa Khaznadar, and the Greek representative Elias Manidakis<sup>55</sup>.

The close relations between the Greek community and the Tunisian Bey will be strengthened through Greek state's policy in the last quarter of the 19th century. The Greek government, considering the offer of Tunisian authorities to the Greeks of Tunisia, will commemorate general Mustafa, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, with the Grand Cross of the second battalion of the Savior on 04/05/1880<sup>56</sup>. In response to this action, Tunisian state would bestow medal to several Greek officers and diplomats<sup>57</sup>.

The favourable attitude of the Tunisian government towards Greeks strengthened in the mid-19th century. Then, Islamized Greeks from Chios came to Tunisia and, after they had gradually acquired senior positions in the political mechanism of the country, they offered their help to the Greek community<sup>58</sup>. For these Greeks from Chios, Charalambos Poulos wrote: "In 1821, during the Greek war of independence, the bloody suppression of the Turks caused the horrific massacres of Chios. Many Greeks, after they had been arrested and imprisoned were transferred in Tunisia. Among them, a few children led to Bardo<sup>59</sup> and were converted to Islam, creating an aristocracy of officials. The local Bey gave them important government positions to disable the jealousy between families born in Tunisia. The next decades, these Islamized Greeks acquired wealth and power."<sup>60</sup> Poulos also refers to another Greek from Chios, Mohamed Khaznadar, who became Prime Minister of Tunisia (21/7/1877-24/8/1878 and 12/9/1881-10/1882).

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and beneficiaries could sell or mortgage the property but he had to continue deliver the annuity to the owner. It is worth noting that estate granted to the terms enzel, cannot be expropriated.

<sup>55</sup>Kazdaghli, H., *Communautés méditerranéennes de Tunisie*, ibid.

<sup>56</sup>G.G.G.S. Nr. 66/ 6-6-1880.

<sup>57</sup> Major I. Botsaris, adjutant of the king, awarded with the medal of the Order of Nisan Iftichar b class. A. Sailer, the conductor of the garrison of Athens, awarded with the medal of the Order of Nisan Iftichar d order. Major I. Papadiamantopoulos, aide to king, awarded with the medal of the Order of Nisan Iftichar and Alexander Grigoriadis, Secretary of State Department, with the medal of the Order of Nisan Iftichar.G.G.G.S. Nr. 66/ 6-6-1880 και G.G.G.S. Nr.70/20-6-1880.

<sup>58</sup>As Eugenia Stravelakis states "There were many Chians inside palace. Xydas was a Şeyhülislam and he had so much money that could cover whole Chios Island with pearls". Eugenia also met George Koumarianos, Sourias, Lagadousis and Martoulas. Some of them were pashas with great influence on Tunis Bey. Vios, St., *I sfagi tis Chiou is to stoma tou Chiakou Laou [The massacre of Chios according to oral history of Chian people]*, Eleftherias print, Chios 1922, pp. 103-104.

<sup>59</sup> Le Bardo is a Tunisian city west of Tunis. Built by the Hafsids dynasty in the 15th century, Bardo became a residence of the Tunis court in the 18th century. With the arrival of Husseinite beys, Bardo became a political, intellectual and religious center.

<sup>60</sup> Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, ibid, σ. 152.

Mohamed Khaznadar also brought his mother in Tunisia and when she died was buried at the Greek Orthodox Cemetery<sup>61</sup>. In addition to, according to the Greek community archives, it comes out that Mohamed paid an amount of money to the local Greek Church so as to conduct a memorial service for his mother<sup>62</sup>.

However, the most famous Greek emerged as a prominent member of the Tunisian government was Mustapha Khaznadar<sup>63</sup>. George Stravelakis, as his Greek name was, was born in 1817 in Kardamyla of Chios. His fate was similar to thousands of his compatriots after the massacre of Chios in 1822<sup>64</sup>. After he had been arrested, along with his brother John and his mother Irene transferred initially in Smyrna. Although his mother remained in Smyrne, the two brothers were sold and taken to Constantinople. In 1823, the children were sold again to a Tunisian dealer, Ben Abdesslem, who sent them as a gift to Hussein Bey. Hussein Bey introduced the young Mamluk<sup>65</sup>, George Stravelakis, who was renamed Mustapha, in the social circle of his nephew Ahmed, while his brother John was named Ahmed. John Stravelakis, whose full name was Ahmed Amir Liwa al-Khiyala, will be promoted to cavalry officer and will die in a plague epidemic in 1849. He was sent to the western part of the country to prevent the people come into the city Tunis during an effort to limit the expanded thereby epidemic<sup>66</sup>.

Although George Stravelakis retained memories of his Greek origin, he embraced Islam and completely forgot his native language. From the outset, Ahmed Bey chose him to be his personal secretary and advisor and then promoted

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<sup>61</sup> Poulos, K., *Les Hellènes*, *ibid.*, σ. 155.

<sup>62</sup> A.H.C.R., "Church book starts from 19/11/1864 and includes revenues and expenses". According to book registries of 6/1/1865 and 12/12/1865, "Mohamed offered 2000 riyals for his mother Loula".

<sup>63</sup> Khaznadar (<treasurer). For more see Papanastasopoulou, B.- Ade Hasan El Koki, *Moustapha Khaznadar. Politic and Economic Role in Tunisia's history during 19<sup>th</sup> century (1837-1878)*, ed. Mohamed El Azhar El Gharbi, University of Tunis, Department of Social Anthropology, 2007-2008.

<sup>64</sup> For the events of his captivity and his final transfer in Tunisia there are two historic sources. The first is the testimony of Chatziefgenias Stravelakis, the bride of the third brother of George Stravelakis, Constanti, who escaped the massacre and remained in Chios. The second testimony comes from a note of Mustapha Khaznadar's son, Mohamed, in narrative Mustapha Khaznadar himself. For more see Vios, St., *I sfagi tis Chiou is to stoma tou Chiakou Laou*, *ibid.*, pp. 94-99 and Kolakis, I., *Mustapha Khaznadar i Georgios Stefani Stravelakis i Halikias (1817 - 26 Iouliou 1878) – Apo ta arxeia kai tin proforiki paradosi tis Chiou* [Mustapha Khaznadar or Georgios Stefani Stravelakis or Halikias (1817 – July 26 1878)], Chiaki gnomi (electronic newspaper), June 2011 (9/6/2011, 16/6/2011, 23/6/2011).

<sup>65</sup> The Mamluks were the militias of slaves, who often managed to get power and to become officials in Islamic states. See Brown, L. C., *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 1837-1855*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1974, pp. 41-53.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, L. C., *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey*, *ibid.*, p. 51.



him as treasurer of state finance department (*khaznadar*). In 1837, at the age of 20, Mustapha Khaznadar managed to reach the highest level of the state hierarchy, where he remained for the next 36 years. Demonstrating intelligence and adaptability he managed to overcome even Beys themselves. As General Duchesne de Bellecourt states in September 1865, “Mustafa Khaznadar was the absolute ruler of the country.”

In the foreign affairs field, it can be seen that Mustafa Khaznadar followed a wavering policy. His decisions balanced between France and Great Britain’s desires to control Tunisia and his efforts to preserve country’s independence. As far as his domestic politics, Khaznadar was responsible for the formation of the first Tunisian constitution. Nevertheless, his economic mismanagement was responsible for Tunisia’s bankruptcy, which led to Khaznadar’s dismissal. Having accepted the charges and pleaded guilty in 1873, he was deprived of all his titles, was arrested and was placed under house arrest in his palace in Tunis with the final category of removing 80 million francs from state funds. Although he died isolated and hated by all on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1878, was buried with honours in Tourbet El Bey as a member of the Prince family<sup>67</sup>.

Mustafa Khaznadar, throughout his presence in the political scene of Tunisia, was in contact with his relatives in Greece. Eugenia Stravelaki testimonies the search of Constantis by his brothers Mustapha and Ahmed around 1844 and later the visit of Constanti Stravelakis in Tunisia to see his brothers between 1844 and 1849. She also states another visit of Stravelakis family members in Tunisia between 1861 and 1862-63<sup>68</sup>. From the Tunisian sources, we also informed that Mustapha Khaznadar had sent 10,000 riyals to his nephews from Chios, to study in Paris<sup>69</sup>.

Mustapha Khaznadar did not help only his relatives but also the Greek community in Tunis. In 1864, he donated an area of 9,905 square meters where the church of St. George is now located, in order Greeks to extend their cemetery. Although the Tunisian government had expropriated a land owned by the Greek

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<sup>67</sup>Today in Tunis there are still descendants of Mustapha Khaznadar. They are descendants of Khaznadar’s son, Hasan. For details see Kolakis, I., *Mustapha Khaznadar*, ibid.

<sup>68</sup>“At the age of 61 I went to Tunis with my husband Labrinos, son of Constanti, and his brothers and stayed for almost two years”. See Vios, St., *I sfagi tis Chiou is to stoma tou Chiakou Laou*, ibid, p. 102.

<sup>69</sup> Gallagher, N.E., *Medicine and Power in Tunisia, 1780-1900*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 75.

community to build a railway station, only after the intervention of Khaznadar and an explanatory letter of the English Consul Richard Wood, Mouchir Mohamed Es Sadok Pasha granted the above-mentioned area as compensation to the community. The agreement signed on 25/5/1864 at the presence of Xavier Mancardi and Edouard Vickring, representatives of the Italian railways in Tunis and Elias Manidakis, representative of the Greek community. The relevant decree issued, justified the decision of the Tunisian government and was addressed to the Consulate General of the Netherlands, representing the interests of several Europeans, such as Elias Manidakis. The valuable interference of Khaznadar helped the Greek community not only to acquire an extensive area to be used as a cemetery but also to build later the magnificent church of St. George as well as various edifices that, up today, are a valuable source of income for the Greek community of Tunis. Having recognized Khaznadar's contribution to his compatriots, the Greek community of Tunis decided in the early 20th century to place an honorary inscription in the Community cultural center, near the church of St. George<sup>70</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The Greek community, having completed more than two centuries of presence in Tunisia, took advantage of the commercial enterprise of its members and showed great adaptability throughout the 19th century. Having emerged in a major economic factor of the country, followed a flexible policy to safeguard the interests of its members. In a period when bilateral relations between Tunisia and Greek kingdom were complicated, Greeks of Tunisia managed to win Bey's favour. Certainly, one can note the significant participation of many Islamized Greeks from Chios, who after they had emerged as influential persons in the Tunisian government, they ensured the interests of their fellow countrymen and contributed to the economic empowerment of the Greek community.

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<sup>70</sup> The inscription, which created by Fumaro-an Italian artist, was placed on 1/9/1917.

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