

The Goletta: A Cosmopolitan Seaside Resort

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Though the history of seaside resorts has been on the agenda of socio-cultural historians for some time now, Tunisia has not had a fair share of this history, despite its incorporation in French colonial tourist circles and later into the European and international tourist networks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as its development into a popular tourist destination and a holiday market after its independence in the late 1950s. This paper is an attempt to unearth part of this history by focusing on one of the pioneering seaside resorts of Tunisia, the port town of the Goletta, more popularly known as “La Goulette” as the French put it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It traces the early development of this watering place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and analyses the factors that contributed to its growth into a popular seaside resort.

Keywords: Tunisia, Goletta, Seaside Tourism, Seaside Resort, Globalization

Introduction & Literature Review

Tourism is one of the leading industries in Tunisia today. However, and even though Tunisia was among the first locations where such tourism expanded outside Europe, there is no clear and comprehensive historical account of how this tourism developed. General histories of tourism remain Eurocentric, still mainly dominated by the British pioneering experience, and mostly concerned with the nineteenth century (Zuelow 2015). Studies of North African tourism, including Tunisia, despite the ongoing development of this region as a major tourist destination, are scant. Yet, tourism is no longer seen as a fringe activity (Walton 2009). Today, it is a wide-reaching phenomenon and plays a pivotal role in our world, socially, culturally, economically and politically (Zuelow 2015:10). Its study is part of cultural history, which has been ascendant for some time now, like the histories of sport, popular culture, entertainment and the media. These areas are growing more relevant and more popular. Above all, the sheer economic weight and cultural impact of tourism on a global stage can no longer be ignored. As a field of study, tourism is dynamic and vibrant. A great deal of work on tourism since its inception has been mostly descriptive, such as John Towner’s *Historical Geography of Recreation and Tourism in the Western World, 1540-1940*, though it does offer a good survey of tourism. Historians working on tourism, however, are striving to provide their findings with meanings wider than can be derived from studying the past for its own sake, as well as fitting them in wider thematic contexts. For that purpose, they are adapting an interdisciplinary approach to the study of tourism with borrowings from cultural studies, literature, sociology, anthropology and cultural geography. The historiography of tourism as opposed to its treatment by other disciplines is still

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in its infancy, especially with regard to the twentieth century. There are, however, some developing historiographies, especially on early tourism, as part of the extensive literature on eighteenth-century consumption and consumerism (Borsay 1989) and on the nature and development of the seaside holiday and seaside resorts especially in the nineteenth century (Walton 1983, Travis 1993). There is also work on Thomas Cook and the 'democratization' of travel (Brendon 1991). Attention was similarly paid to the relationship between transport innovation, living standards and the popularization of tourism. The rise of 'picturesque' travel and mountain tourism has generated a distinctive literature on perceptions, representations and experiences of landscape (Ousby 1990). A further debate was triggered on the issue of the presentation of 'history' in the 'heritage tourism' of museums, theme parks and restored and sanitized industrial cities. (Walton 2002:111).

Seaside tourism as a field is still partly marginalized, even though as John Walton has commented, the seaside resort, in the long term, has been 'as pervasive a [British] cultural export as football' (Walton 1997). The growth and development of seaside resorts are not sufficiently analyzed by tourism texts, other than to locate tourism within a very broad historical context, often stretching from the Greeks and Romans to beyond the industrial revolution in a sweeping overview. Alain Corbin's *The Lure of the Sea* remains the classic presentation of the sea's change and how sea bathing was popularized and became a pleasurable activity. Moreover, seaside tourism is often located within business or economic frameworks (Morgan and Pritchard 1999). It is also still mainly disconnected from the broader historiographical debates on capitalism, consumption, and modernism. This suggests that the perspective from which seaside resorts have so far been approached failed to do justice to the significant role of seaside resorts as places of early "mass" entertainment in the evolution of the tourism phenomenon. What began as a description of the Grand Tour of the European continent for sons of wealthy British families becomes the story of how the masses come to enjoy the pleasures once reserved for a special few (Withey 1997). The seaside resort had become a major type of urban settlement across not only Western Europe and the United States, but also parts of Eastern Europe before World War I. After the Second World War and particularly after the 1970s, the seaside resort became a global phenomenon.

Building on these trends, the Tunisian seaside gradually managed to adapt to these developments and others related to immigration and French colonialism, and to respond to the preferences of different social strata and bundle of cultural preferences. The development of the Goletta into a popular seaside resort in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, would trigger the growth of tourism, and seaside tourism in particular. Seaside tourism would eventually become an economic and cultural force in independent Tunisia from the 1960s onwards.

Methodology

This paper focuses on certain emblematic developments and paradigmatic changes, which characterized seaside tourism growth in the seaside resort of the Goletta and in Tunisia more broadly speaking and over time. This case study illuminates seaside tourism from different perspectives and far from the restricted business/economic angle, which has so far characterized many studies on tourism, in order to stress the varied character of these developments, which require more than a single approach. It combines historical, geographical, socio-cultural, economic and political analyses of the process of development and maturity of Goletta into a popular seaside town. Some of the main perspectives and concepts borrowed by historians from sociology, anthropology, literature and cultural studies and used to define approaches, structure arguments and generate commentary, include the tourist gaze, staged authenticity, the construction of identities across national, cultural, class, and gender lines, liminality, orientalism and post-colonial studies (Walton 2005: 4).

Other perspectives consider the seaside resorts not only as geographical locations, but also as spaces with meanings and associations. Seaside resorts, just like cultural forms, have been mapped as “systems of “centers and peripheries” The peripheries are those ‘marginal’ places left behind in the modern race for progress. Similarly, research on seaside tourism focused on the politics of ‘space’ and ‘social tone’ as being central to the growth of the seaside, and Goletta as a resort was not spared those conflicts characteristic of the seaside in the process of its development.

This paper on the Goletta and its growth into a popular seaside resort in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is important on several grounds. It is the first case study of the historical development of a Tunisian seaside resort since its emergence in the late nineteenth century, which, would over time, trigger the growth of tourism, and seaside tourism in particular. Local studies of tourism are broad and mostly on mass tourism and its development as a key sector of the economy since the 1960s. They are also largely descriptive and fitted into French imperial framework (Sethom 1994, Bergaoui 2005, Zitnicki and Kazdaghli 2009). Most of these local studies relied on historical sources in French, and are therefore, limited in scope and in their capacity to view Tunisian seaside tourism from many-sided perspectives.

This paper, paradoxically, provides analysis of a whole array of sources, in English, French and in Arabic, which have not been examined by historians of Tunisian/North African tourism. These sources include some archival materials from Thomas Cook’s archives in Peterborough, which I visited last January. The paper also used travel accounts, guidebooks, diaries, and newspapers. It draws on a large corpus of secondary literature on the history of the development of tourism, and especially seaside tourism, in Western Europe and elsewhere. These sources offer a more subtle and complex view of the evolution seaside tourism in the Tunisian/North African context. The Goletta case study is original. Not only does it fill a large gap in the literature about seaside tourism in North Africa, but most importantly, it underlines key differences typical of the Tunisian

seaside experience and shows how far local conditions affect the values and approaches unique to specific places like the Goletta. In so doing, it is also intended to promote future research on a largely unexplored issue in Tunisian, North African and international historiography.

A Historical Heritage

Because of its open access to the sea, the Goletta as a port used to play a major military role in the Mediterranean for centuries. The ruins, which extend over the sea from the Goletta until the Marsa, an old seaside resort north of the Goletta, together with other resorts like Khereddine, Salamambo, ancient Carthage and SidiBou-Said, are a reminder of a long and rich history of the town. The exploration of the northern suburbs of Tunisia starts with the Goletta, and its fortress built by Charles I of Spain in 1535 for the purpose of defending Tunis. The latter would later become the capital (Ganiage 1955). This was part of a deal between the Hafside monarchy and Spain, which benefitted the Spanish at a time when the Hafside monarchy was declining. Spain signed a treaty, which gave her many privileges including the total control over the two port towns of Bizerta and the Goletta.

Tunisia found itself at the core of a long struggle between the Ottomans on the one hand and the Spanish on the other, over the control of the Mediterranean. The Spanish would be defeated by the Ottomans in 1574. With the Ottoman victory, the Hafside dynasty was over and the Spanish presence in Tunisia was terminated. The fortress is the major remnant of forty years of Spanish rule. It was later extended when the Ottomans took over. As a port, the Goletta grew in the seventeenth century, when the Moors, the Moslems excluded from Spain after the fall of Grenada in 1492, gave support to the navy in response to their exclusion from Spain. The Goletta is also historically known for its prison, popularly known as the Karraka. It is the Spanish fortress or castle, which the Ottomans converted into a jail, where many Christian captives, including famous ones like Saint Vincent de Paul, a French Roman catholic priest, were imprisoned.

A Key Commercial Port

From serving as the greatest commercial and military depot of his highness, the Tunisian ruler, the Bey, boasting solid fortifications against naval attacks (Blaquiere 1813:159), the Goletta developed into “the Glasgow of the Mahomedan powers,” (Ormsby 1864:230). It was the port of the first commercial city of Barbary combining trade and manufactures. This was due to the Goletta’s highly strategic location underlined by all those who mostly came by sea, including royal guests, travelers, consuls, merchants, military officers, sailors and many other visitors. This important location lies in the very meaning of the name of the town. “The Goletta’ in Italian, “La Goulette” in French and “Halq El-Oued” in Arabic”. It was the Arabs who gave it the name of “Halq El-Oued”

literally meaning the “throat of the river”, when they first came in the eighth century. A small throat-shaped canal linked the salted lake to the sea and gave the Goletta its name. On each side of the canal is a tongue of land; that on the North reaches out and joins the hills of Carthage, the one on the south stretches on in the direction of the town of Zoughan, and widens out near the village of Radis. On each side of the canal upon this double tongue of land, is built the Goletta. It is naturally divided into two parts, which communicate with each other by two bridges. The northern part is the Goletta proper, with the town, the fortress, the battery and the royal bathing house; the southern part consists of the palace of the Tunisian ruler, the prison, the arsenal and the old and new docks (Perry 1869:405). The Goletta is about ten miles to the Northeast of Tunis and sat on a narrow spit of land adjacent to a channel connecting the lake to the Mediterranean. This geography was important because it served as a shelter to the capital from the open sea (Clancy-Smith 2012:23). It is worth noting that the Goletta has always been a fishing port attracting fishermen and amateurs one can see around the port all year, regardless of the weather conditions.

Until the late nineteenth century, the Goletta was the central port of Tunisia. All the vessels belonging to nations with which the regency of Tunis had treaties of “commerce and peace” unloaded there. The Goletta was open to men and goods from many countries, especially the British, the French, the Dutch and mostly the Italians who brought goods from Leghorn (Manai 2016). The port prospered commercially in the early nineteenth century when colonial goods such as sugar and cotton imported by the British into the Mediterranean, started to transit through the Goletta.(Clancy-Smith 2012:34). It was also the seat of the Ministry of Marine and of the Tunisian fleet (Hesse-Wartegg 1882:190).

A Watering Place

In addition to being the harbor of the capital, the Goletta developed into a favourite watering place for Moorish notables from the nineteenth century onwards. Royal patronage gave the Goletta the edge and helped it outdistance all the towns, which sprouted on the coastlines. This started when Mohamed Essadek Bey (1859-1882), the twelfth Husseinite family ruler of the Ottoman regency, who built a large villa on the seashore for himself and another one for his harem. He was soon followed by some of his court ministers, military officers and a number of Tunisian *grande*s, who liked the place (Perry 1869:406). Over time, many Tunisian notables settled down in the Goletta and the area extending to the Marsa in the North, thus transforming the northern suburbs of Tunis into favourite seaside towns. It was the Goletta that set the tone.

Then came the European ambassadors, consul-generals, consuls, and merchants encouraged by Mustapha Khaznadar (1837-18730), the infamous Tunisian prime minister, who possessed a lot of property in the strip of land between the Goletta and Carthage (Hesse-Wartegg 1882:191) known today as the Northern suburbs of Tunis. Khaznadar had villas, shady woods and glass-houses built and sold them at high prices. In doing so, he gave the area a

snobbish aristocratic and bourgeois social tone, which characterized the area for long. According to Wartegg, Khaznadar used to make 200,000 francs of profit a year from the Goletta alone (Hesse-Wartegg 1882:192). Similarly, he built a pier similar to those in English seaside resorts. It was called the “Rondo” and became the core of social life and recreation in the town. Khaznadar built also a restaurant, but no cafes and hotels. He clearly did not want competitors and refused to let the Goletta and the neighbouring districts be associated with what was perceived as vulgar aspects of popular culture like cafes.

The seaside had for long been associated with notions of triviality and with vulgarity and rowdiness. Dozens of bathing machines were erected to help bathers change their clothes next to the water, but most importantly, to keep women out of sight. The sexual associations of undressing and unscheduled bodily display on the liminal zone of the beach were part of these long-standing assumptions on the triviality of the seaside culture (Walton 2002: 111). Khaznadar’s aim was to hire his villas for a growing number of local and foreign notables attracted by the Goletta and its environs, but also by a growing cultural fashion, the seaside holiday. For that purpose, he did not encourage the building of hotels, inns or lodging houses. He could indeed be considered a pioneer leisure entrepreneur thanks to whom the Goletta and the whole northern suburbs of the capital Tunis then would gradually thrive into ‘respectable’ watering places.

The bourgeois social tone the Northern suburbs of Tunis starting with the Goletta first took did not necessarily discourage ordinary people from coming to the Goletta with tents and provisions and camping on the beach, a cultural form to which Tunisians had long been accustomed. With the coming of the summer heats, which usually started in June, Tunisians, who lived in Tunis and the interior parts of the country, but not far from the seashore, used to take to the sea, a tradition on which many visitors to the regency remarked. Tunisians have always had a close relationship with the sea (Fantar 1997) to such an extent that they dedicated one day every year to celebrate it. The “Ausso” festival in mid-summer is a festival dedicated to Neptune, the God of the sea, and consisted in bathing in the sea. It was thought that bathing would bring luck. All over the regency, Tunisians took to the sea and celebrated the event. The Goletta became for a few days a central point of attraction and thousands of Moorish, Arab and Berber families took their way to the Goletta.

Long before the festival, jugglers, snake charmers, dervishes, music bands, narrators of fairy tales and dancers made the necessary preparations and erected tents, stalls and even movable cafes on the shore, to provide amusements to the sea bathers, who indulged in all sorts of revels (Hesse-Wartegg 1882:194). The festival was part of a traditional cultural form, which Tunisians had been celebrating for long and was, therefore, part, of their popular culture. This, of course, poses a major question on how far, as often assumed (Pimlott 1947, Walton 1992, Walvin 1978) was the seaside holiday or break actually an English invention.

European Immigration

The population of the Goletta consisted mostly of Arabs, Moors and Turks until the second half of the nineteenth century. There were some wealthy Jewish merchants from Tuscany as well as other Italians captured by Tunisian corsairs on the Mediterranean. The Goletta Jewish community is the oldest Jewish community in Tunisia. Its roots can be traced back to the Jews who left Jerusalem about five centuries earlier. Some Maltese and Italians started to come by the mid-century. The first Italians, who turned up in numbers were fishermen from Trapani, a Sicilian town. These used to stop in the small island of Pantelleria, thirty five kilometers from the Tunisian coasts, before reaching them. Some gradually settled down in the Goletta with their boats and were soon joined by others from Syracuse.

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, after 1862, the Kingdom of Italy began to take a deep interest in the future of Tunisia¹. In 1868, a Tunisian-Italian treaty was signed, thus opening the door for regular Italian immigration to the regency. When the country went bankrupt one year later, a triple control was established over Tunisian finances with Italians, British and French controllers (El Houssi 2012). Most of the new Italian comers following these key dates were artisans, miners and day labourers. This massive immigration movement was part of an attempt from a gradually growing Italian community in Tunis to organize itself and counterbalance the French attempts to penetrate Tunisia after having colonized Algiers in 1830. An Italian school was built in 1821, followed by typography in 1829 and an Italian newspaper in 1838. A massive wave of Italian immigrants followed the signature of the treaty, many of whom settled in the Goletta, hence transforming the socio-economic and cultural structure of the town over the long run. In 1870, there were 25,000 Italians. In the 1926 census, that number reached 89,216, most of whom chose the Goletta as a place of residence (Zytnicki 2004:47).

This Italian population of the Goletta, most of which was wretched when it first came and keen on escaping poverty, would give birth to the so-called "small Sicily", a part of the town where this significant Italian community resided and would have implications for the growth of the Goletta as a town and a popular seaside resort. The Italian community would found their Chamber of commerce in 1884, the Banca Siciliana, the *Unione*, a daily newspaper, and many other socio-cultural institutions and facilities designed for the community such as schools, theatres, cinemas and hospitals (DeMontety 1937).

The Goletta Italians lived peacefully and interacted with the native Tunisians in the town to such an extent that both communities intermarried. Nevertheless, though it was highly associated with this important Italian community, the Goletta remained above all a cultural mosaic of Arabs, Moors, Jews, Maltese, and French, who contributed in a variety of ways to its cosmopolitanism and its development into a successful watering place. It was sometimes hard to distinguish between all these races and cultures, which developed a lingua franca to interact between

¹ Encyclopedia Britannica (2010).

each other. Needless to say, the Italian language had an enormous impact on the Tunisian dialect over time.

This is not to suggest that everything was smoothly operating in the Goletta. The cosmopolitanism, which characterized the resort, was not without its inner struggles. This increasingly bustling and thriving town witnessed regular struggles and jealousies over jobs and resources, which could lead to contention and violence. The Goletta was highly prosperous in summer; in winter, however, like most seaside resorts, the economy slackened, commercial activities around the beach lessened, and communal competition and tensions intensified. That is how the Goletta developed at one stage of its growth this 'nasty' character of a resort reputed for drinking and fighting, which by the way, was characteristic of many "working-class" and popular resorts all over Europe and elsewhere. Teaming all aspects of seaside society, especially in its early stages, was not easy. Sue Farrant has focused on the importance of the "integrative social role" of the pioneering seaside resorts thanks to the homogeneity of terraced housing facades, which helped to promote integration (Farrant 1980:3).

Peter Borsay, however, pointed out the importance of leisure towns as centres for social competition and as expressed through lifestyles and consumption patterns (Borsay 1977), while Walton argued that the role of local authorities in mediating between conflicting interest groups and cultural preferences, negotiating the balance between hedonism and convention, freedom and security was crucial to the forging of resort identities and their adaptation or resistance to changing times and markets (Walton 2002:118). This aspect did not prevent the Goletta from remaining a popular cosmopolitan seaside place. Not only that, but also many visitors to the Goletta found pleasure in this space of promiscuity, where leisure interacted with risk and even "danger" sometimes. With the arrival of a lower middle-class and working-class presence in the Goletta, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social mixing inevitably led to bursts of conflict, but these did not affect the overall socio-cultural harmony that existed in the Goletta.

The TGM Railway

The railways have always had an impact on the growth of seaside towns all over the world starting from Britain and the early seaside resorts like Blackpool, Brighton and Margate from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Walton 1992). According to the *Illustrated North Africa* (1932), the turning point in the growth of the Goletta as a popular seaside resort was the establishment of the TGM, the light railway, which linked Tunis to the Goletta and the resort of Marsa (TGM) in 1875. The TGM made access to the Goletta cheaper and faster. Half an hour now separated the Goletta from Tunis with nine trains a day running between Tunis and the capital from 6.00 a.m to 7.15 p.m in summer (Cook 1908:338) and running until midnight in the early twentieth century. The TGM was originally constructed by an English company, but when the company decided to leave the regency, a struggle emerged between the French Bone-Guelma and the Italian

Rubattino companies for its possession. The company was put to auction in the Vice-chancellor's chamber in London and finally adjudged to the Italian company for the sum of 165,000 pounds (Playfair 1887:282).

What mostly attracted Tunisians and others to the Goletta was sea bathing and the breeze. In summer, the number of visitors was estimated at 10,000 a day and more (Perry 1896:406). In 1905, new electric sections designed to replace the former steam railroad were set up. The government made an arrangement with the Tunis Traction company to have the lines changed to the electric system. This was carried out by the Paris Thomson-Houston firm, and the government wished to profit by the jetty which had been laid across the Tunis Lake so as to use it for the line as far as the Goletta and thus run in a straight path. The object of the new line was to enable the population of the capital to reach the seashore easily and rapidly. It was also expected that the northern suburban region starting from the Goletta would be much more developed by the use of the electric line (*Scientific Traction* 1909:464). As a result, the Goletta kept expanding north to such an extent, that it generated three districts or quarters with a railway station for each, the Old Goletta, the old part of the town, the New Goletta, a modern residential quarter of the town with beautiful buildings built in front of the sea. Soon a casino was also erected on the pier and into the sea. The Goletta-Casino was then born and the Goletta became the most appreciated beach for Tunisians and visitors.

Intercommunal Intercourse

The popularity of the Goletta as a seaside town was equally motivated by the intercultural interactions, which used to characterize the resort. Until very recently, The Goletta has been depicted as a town of cross-cultural intercourse, which Ferid Boughedir's movie "A summer in La Goulette" faithfully portrayed in 1994. The movie is about a residue of this intercultural landscape, which started to take shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and reflected the extent to which the Goletta was culturally diverse, open and friendly. These elements of cultural openness and cohesion were mostly displayed during the annual festival to honour the virgin "Santa Maria de Trapani" in mid-August. This tradition was transplanted from Sicily before the advent of the French protectorate in 1881. A Christian ritual brought about by Sicilian fishermen to the Goletta exclusively. This ritual coincided with a Tunisian tradition, which consisted in celebrating the end of summer bathing and the procession of Sidi Cherif, a Tunisian saint, when the religious orders went around the town and interpreted liturgical songs to the glory of Allah, his prophet and saints. In a similar vein, the Christian ritual, started when the Sicilian fishermen took the statue of the Virgin Mary from Saint-Augustan church into a procession around the town followed by a benediction until it reached the beach, served as an indicator that the sea will be generous the following season. Fishermen, disciples and many other visitors from the Goletta and other parts of Tunis either followed the procession in the town or waited

for the statue on the beach. The two traditions then naturally fused and the different communities of Christians, Muslims and Jews celebrated their rituals together in a socio-culturally intercommunal conviviality. These religious celebrations were in addition opportunities for communal amusements in a town, which increasingly built its reputation for being a popular seaside resort. The “culture of sociability”, which appeared in the Goletta as Clancy-Smith referred to it (Clancy-Smith 2012:288), became one of the major assets of the Goletta in the process of its growth into a seaside town.

A Popular Seaside Resort

«Vers la Goulette-Casino, toute la population afflue, et Le dimanche, la plage grouille dans un internationalisme remarquable. Maltais, Juifs, Italiens, Arabes, Français, se coudoient, s’embrassent, s’dressent mille sourires, et échafaudent mille combinaisons pour passer le temps.»

«Towards the Goletta-Casino, all the population headed, and ... on Sunday, the beach is crowded in a remarkable internationalism. Maltese, Jews, Italians, Arabs, French, rubbed shoulders, kissed one another, sent one another a thousand smile, and devised a thousand scheme to spend the time.»

It was in such terms that the *Illustrated Tunisia* described life in the Goletta in 1930 (*Illustrated Tunisia* 1936). By then, the Goletta ceased to be the seaside resort of the native and European notables and grandees. Its social tone changed into a more popular one, catering to a much larger, multiracial, multicultural and more modest clientele. The number of day-trippers to the Goletta in summer doubled, then tripled and took larger dimensions, spilling over into the neighbouring resorts of Kherredine and the Kram to the North. Everywhere, there was plenty of life and activity. Dozens of fish restaurants, tasty Jewish cuisine, the casino, shops selling sandwiches and salted potato and the famous sellers of ‘glibettes’ or salted sunflower, who walked around the town and the beach to sell their much appreciated product. All these cultural forms and practices made the reputation of the Goletta. Wemyss Reid depicted French officers sitting in crowds drinking and smoking under the trees in front of the cafes, while troops of Arabs and Jews, dressed in all the colours of the rainbow walked around (Reid 1882:55).

The Goletta kept flourishing and thriving with more business houses, hotels, inns and lodging houses. There developed, like Walton’s “Blackpool ladies” the practice of renting houses and flats by the locals during the summer, which became a main source of livelihood for the villagers and contributed to the growth of the economy of the Goletta as a seaside destination. “La promenade des flaneurs” or wanderers’ promenade, a three-hundred-meter-long street adjacent to the beach and separating the public place in the Goletta from Prime minister Kherredine’s palace in neighbouring Kherredine, became one of the dearest places for youth, dandies and families, who kept walking in both directions and enjoyed the sight of the sea and European battleships anchored at the port of the Goletta (Giffard 1881).

Around the pier, summer days and nights in the Goletta were vivid and animated and popular amusements were diverse. Artists produced daily and played oriental music; restaurants were full with people seeking the seafood couscous and the “completpoisson”, the Goletta’s most popular local dishes; men led easy and unconstrained lives and many youth used to spend the summer in a bathing machine sleeping there as well; excursions were undertaken in carriages or on donkeys in the town or to the neighbouring watering places, and many rest on the sand to converse and consume (Hesse-Wartegg 1882:194). The Goletta nights were converted into days, and popular amusements evolved around the sea, the pier and the promenade. The Goletta was and still is reputed for its fish restaurants. It is the only seaside resort in the world, which boasts more than one hundred restaurants, with one street devoted to them. A fish festival is also celebrated every year and attracts about 100, 000 visitors.

French Colonialism and the Development of Seaside Tourism

The development of the Goletta as a popular seaside resort had some separate local roots from the ones associated with England, where the first seaside resorts such as Southport, Lytham, Morecambe and many others first appeared (Segreto Manera Pohl 2009:3). The fashion then spread to Normandy and South-West France, Germany and parts of Scandinavia, the Spanish Atlantic, then to the Mediterranean (Walton 1983). Yet, seaside holidays and tourism in the Goletta first and in Tunisia more generally over time, were undoubtedly encouraged by the phenomenon and ‘benefitted’ in a sense from French colonialism (Zytnicki 2016:19). The French policy of settlement, which started as soon as the French were in Tunis, encouraged many French people, not without some reluctance at the beginning, to settle down as residents in Tunisia (Bergaoui 2005:41). The occupation of Algiers by the French in 1830 made the French more comfortable in the implementation of their colonial policies in Tunisia. The promotion of tourism became part of these policies, which were largely supported by the champions of the annexation of the protectorate and who wanted to make Tunisia an integral part of the metropole.

Like most tourist resorts, which witnessed a gradual transformation since the late nineteenth century, the Goletta indirectly profited from informal factors, which stimulated the growth of tourism in Tunisia, as well as the policies put forward by the French colonial authorities to encourage tourism. In 1891, the Touring Club of France (TCF), whose aim was to promote all forms of tourism by managing space for leisure purposes, was founded. From 1896, the club started to show an interest in Tunis and appointed delegates to represent it and follow its guidelines (Bacha 2009:160). In 1904, the TCF established the Committee for Picturesque Sites and Monuments with the objective to unearth monuments and sites for tourists to see and to keep making the necessary improvements likely to facilitate access to them and preserve them (Bacha 2009:161). During the same year, 1904, the committee extended its activities to North Africa and especially Tunisia, where it developed a

partnership with a local cultural organization, the Carthage Institute, a sort of academy of arts and sciences established in 1894. In 1910, the Committee for Tourism in Algeria and Tunisia was established (Bacha 2009:161).

This committee aimed at making Algeria and Tunisia appealing as potential tourist destinations, which may encourage more tourists to come to the region. In Tunisia, this committee, also called the Algerian-Tunisian Committee, worked in collaboration with the Committee of Tunis and Tunisia as a Winter Resort, the first official tourist body set up by the French colonial authorities in 1903. Together, both committees put forward a scheme for developing cultural tourism with special focus on Tunisian heritage. The Northern suburbs of Tunis starting from the Goletta to ancient Carthage a few kilometers away were at the heart of this project. In addition, the Goletta had a good share in the information campaign, which the committee launched through its office in Tunis to facilitate the trip to Tunisia for the French and eventually convince them to settle down. This settlement policy apparently led to a non-negligible flow of French tourists eager to visit the regency and discover how it compared to the Atlas Colonial Illustré (Illustrated Colonial Atlas 1903). Some would settle down for sure, others would come for shorter visits. The Goletta, and more generally the northern suburbs of Tunis, became favourite seaside areas for many would-be French residents, whose numbers kept increasing over the years.

Conclusion

It seems that the Goletta, the small port-town a few kilometres from Tunis the capital, had the adequate natural attributes to rise as the first popular seaside resort in Tunisia. These attributes or their identification with enjoyment, were a mix of old Tunisian traditional cultural forms and imported ones associated with the development of the seaside holiday as a major leisure form in Victorian England, then in some European countries before being exported to other parts of the world. The Goletta gradually managed to embrace a significant part of the panorama of attractions associated with a fashionable seaside town. It boasted a nice seafront, a pier, a promenade, diverse seaside entertainments, tasty informal seaside food and above all, a culturally mixed and open community. This is not to neglect other factors such as royal patronage, which triggered the rise of the Goletta as a seaside town together with bourgeois entrepreneurship, which transformed the destiny and social tone of the town over time. The railways, together with the social and financial innovations put forward by the communities and leisure entrepreneurs, were key players in the conversion of the Goletta. Like most seaside resorts in Tunisia and elsewhere, emulation and social competition stimulated the expansion of the Goletta as a popular seaside resort. By the 1930s, the town matured into a popular seaside resort capable of catering to different social classes and tastes and for a rapidly growing holiday market. Even though it has not joined major internationally reputed European and other seaside towns, including Tunisian ones, such as the seaside towns of Hammamet, Sousse and the island of Jerba, it remained one of

the most popular seaside areas for Tunisians regardless of class and taste. The Goletta case study shows that seaside tourism was not solely the result of the democratization of the cultural forms of English and later European elites, but had its own and unique roots which cannot be bound together in a linear concept or perspective.

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