

TUNISIA

Revision questions;

- 1) Account for Tunisia's loss of autonomy.
- 2) 'The weakness of the Ottoman rule was responsible for the loss of Tunisian independence'. Discuss.
- 3) 'The treaty of Bardo of 1881 led to the French occupation of Tunisia'. Discuss.

Background to 1855;

The French conquest of Algeria was the beginning of the Tunisian end of independence. France was conscious in taking over Tunisia. They preferred to gradually infiltrate into Tunisian affairs through the use of traditional rulers instead of direct conquest.

When the French first attacked Algeria, the Bey of Tunisia thought that he could profit from this situation because to him the powers of the Dey who was his arch enemy would decline and thus take part of Algeria and add it to Tunisia. The Bey therefore entered into a treaty with France giving certain privileges to French citizens.

However as the struggle of the French with the Muslims in Algeria continued, public opinion in Tunisia favored Abdel Kader and supplied him with arms. This made the French pressures the Bey of Tunisia to burn/stop this arms supply. The influence of France in Tunisia displeased the British which tried to find a means of preventing the French from occupying the country. The British tried to persuade the Ottoman Sultan of Turkey to re-assert his rule over the land as Britain did not want to occupy the land. This made the Bey turn even more towards the French as his only protection against Turkey.

In 1835 Tunisia was under Ahmed Bey who wanted to modernize his country so that it could survive and remain independent. He therefore concentrated on having a modern army; he set up a school of military academy in 1840. In this school officers received training from European military experts. He also built a

naval base and shipyard at Porto-Farina for the purpose of modernizing the army-built by France.

Because of these schemes and for the sake of preserving independence from Turkey the Bey remained on close terms with France. He even agreed to abolish slave trade in 1842 and visited Paris. In return for hospitality he received from Paris, he agreed to remove restrictions on Jews in Tunisia and to allow the establishment of Roman Catholic schools.

In spite of his pro-French, he was careful not to let his independence fall to the French. He avoided any temptations of falling into the debt trap of European powers and money lenders. By the time of his death in 1855 he had careful financial control and management and he had increased money in the treasury and left assets amounting to 120 million francs. At the time European influence in Tunisia had not started to grow so much.

MOHAMED EL-SADEK AND THE GROWTH OF EUROPEAN INFLUENCE IN TUNISIA;

He succeeded Ahmed Bey in 1855 but was rather a different ruler from his predecessors. He saw the need to modernize his country, but he lacked financial wisdom to carry out modernization such that he was easily cheated by European money lenders. He was very extravagant in his personal dealings such that he spent large sums of money in purchasing beautiful Turkish slave girls for his pleasure. He later ran down the treasury.

During his reign European influence in his country grew steadily e.g. in 1859 he gave the French monopoly of telegraph services in Tunisia and the British were given the right to build a railway line from Tunis to Goleta. Under further European influence for the British and French consul, Sadek was not capable to resist it. Eventually he agreed and begun to make reforms.

Contribution of King Mohammed El-Sadek to the history of Tunisia,

- Invited European investors
- Modernization of Tunis
- Contracted French water engineers to supply pure water

- Introduced electric telegraph lines
- Constructed railway line from Tunis to Goleta
- Etc

However,

- He gave away Tunisian land
- He was too extravagant
- He led to bankruptcy of Tunisia
- He overtaxed the local people
- Exposed Tunisian economic potentials to the Europeans
- Corruption was rampant during his rule
- He was despotic
- Contributed to Tunisian loss of independence
- Etc.

Achievements,

1. Religious equality, this was introduced in Tunisia. The disadvantages faced by non-Muslims were removed e.g. equality before the law. These laws which were called 'the pact of security' also gave and acknowledged the right of Europeans to acquire and own property in Tunisia.
2. In 1861 he encouraged constitutional development. There was to be a representative assembly known as the 'Grand Council'. The Bey was only to act on the advice of ministers. Therefore the Bey cut down on his powers and became a constitutional monarch.
3. There was improvement in financial administration. Financial administration was improved and government expenditure was to be kept within a budget which would be presented to and discussed by the representatives on the Grand Council.
4. There were also regal reforms and the introduction of an appeal court. These reforms pleased the young Tunisians who had acquired western education.
5. He promoted education. This education supplemented the Koran schools. Primary and secondary schools were built, he imported teachers from

France and Britain and Italy. Western education led to the creation elites who were instrumental in the banking sector, judiciary, civil service and industries.

6. He wiped out piracy on the Mediterranean Sea within the area controlled by Tunisia. By wiping away piracy trade developed because more European traders came to Tunis thus development of commerce and industry.

Failures,

1-He lacked the art of financial management. In 1863 he had fallen deeper into debts to European money lenders. There was mismanagement and embezzlement of the country's finances. A lot of money was spent in buying beautiful women and making parties. This made Sadek to borrow money from France at a very high interest rate. He borrowed 1,400,000 dollars from Messer's Oppenheim and Erlanger of Paris. The terms were so unfavorable that the Bey only received 1/7 of the total sum in cash. This situation made Tunisia bankrupt.

2-Sadek over taxed the people of Tunisia. This was necessitated by the fact that the subsequent loans were given at heavy interest, as such he had to increase the rate of taxation on his subjects. The poll tax was doubled, soldiers for the first time were also taxed, and a new tax called Majba was introduced. These taxes were unpopular and attempts to suppress them resulted into rebellions in 1864 led by Ali-Ibn Ghadhnhim who came to known as the 'Bey of the people'. The struggle to suppress this uprising plunged the Bey further into debts. By 1866 the Bey had a debt of over 41 million francs.

3-He put the financial condition of Tunisia to an alarming position. By 1869 the financial position of Tunisia could be described as being desperate. This forced the Bey to appoint an international financial commission which was to control all state expenditure and organize repayment of the debts. The commission comprised of France, Britain, and Italy. The setting up of this commission led to the erosion of Tunisian independence.

4-El- Sadek discouraged development, for example he refused to give a go ahead for an agriculture irrigation scheme that Ferdinand de Lesseps had proposed. In

1880 he also refused to grant harbor concessions to the French to use the port of Goleta. Sadek refused all these developments because he found out that his country was slowly but surely being taken by France. He looked at Turkey to save the situation by asking it to affirm to European powers that Tunisia was still part of the Ottoman Empire and Sadek was only a Governor in Tunisia. These checks irritated the French and increased their desire to be masters of Tunisia but were powerless to act in the face of the British and Italian opposition. It was Bismarck who called the Berlin Congress to decide on the issue of Tunisia that Britain and Italy gave in and hence France annexed it in 1881.

THE FRENCH OCCUPATION OF TUNISIA IN 1881.

The French decided on direct intervention, but they needed an excuse to launch the intervention. For hundreds of years, the tribes on the borders of Algeria and Tunisia had been accustomed to raiding one another. To the French therefore these raids provided suitable justification for war against Tunisia. On 30th March 1881 France attacked Tunisia under the pretext that the Krumirs from Tunisian border had raided Algeria. The French troops invaded Sadek's country and met no resistance. There was no prolonged fighting as it was in Algeria. The French did not destroy the whole of Tunisia.

By May 12th 1881 Sadek was compelled to accept and sign the treaty of Bardo and later the treaty of Al-Marsa.

In this treaty,

- France was allowed to occupy Tunisia until such a time when the two countries were satisfied that local administration could sustain law and order.
- The French assumed control of Tunisian foreign policy.
- Also the French assumed control of Tunisian financial affairs.
- The Bey was to remain head of state and enjoy French protection.

The treaty of Al-Marsa signed in 1883 June gave France control over the internal affairs of Tunisia thus establishing a protectorate over Tunisia.

France employed indirect rule in administering Tunisia. The traditional system of administration was retained and the policy of running the country on purely French lines was not adopted. However the treaty of Al- Marsa ushered in the position of a Resident-General and in fact he became the real ruler of Tunisia. The Bey remained the nominal head of state and continued to head the state and have a cabinet consisting of Prime minister and other ministers.

All decrees were issued by the Bey and the Prime Minister issued central government orders. But the Resident-General had a lot of powers including the power to approve all the judicial, financial, and administrative reforms and as well as the right to act as Foreign minister.

All the high posts in the government were headed by Frenchmen. The provincial administration was left to the Tunisians until 1884 when civil superintendents came in without whose approval no important decisions could be taken. These were the officers who now supervised the collection of taxes, advised the administration on public works and monitor the local leader's political activities.

WHY DID FRANCE CONQUER TUNISIA?

Tunisia was part of the Ottoman Empire but after its decline European powers wanted to a share and Tunisia could not survive. The following factors explain the reasons for French occupation of Tunisia.

- The French occupation of Algeria
- Krumir rebels activities
- Berlin congress of 1878
- Encouragement of Bismarck
- Italian threat in Tunisia
- Era of scramble
- Economic potentials of Tunisia
- Good climate
- Strategic location; located along the Mediterranean sea
- Internal weaknesses of Tunisia
- Weakness of Mohammed El-Sadek

- The treaty of Bardo
- Etc
- I) The presence of rebels –Krumirs in Tunisia and Morocco after the French occupation of Algeria. Rebels led by Abdel Kader used Tunisia to attack the French in Algeria e.g. in 1873 Krumirs attacked the French. The French accused the Bey of encouraging such attacks.
- II) The treat from the Ottoman Turks and the support the British gave them, the British were not happy with the French occupation of Algeria. They started to persuade the Sultan of Turkey to re-assert his rule over Tunisia.
- III) The financial position of Tunisia under Mohammed El-Sadek. He had borrowed a lot of money from the French, British and Italians and in 1871 issued a decree confirming Tunisia as part of the Ottoman Empire to evade payment of debts.
- IV) Increased European influence in Tunisia during Mohammed El-Sdek’s rule. For example the French were given monopoly of telegraphic services while the British got the right to build a railway line from Tunis to Goleta.
- V) The Bey’s attempt to introduce a European type of constitution and failure to implement it stimulated French protests and from the young educated Tunisians under the Destour party. Constitutional reforms made all equal before the law of which the whites did not approve of.
- VI) Over taxation to pay European loans led to a rebellion by Ali- Ibn- Ghalhahim. Suppressing this rebellion cost the Bey dearly and attracted European attention.
- VII) The Bey’s refusal to accept Ferdinand-de-Lesseps’ irrigation scheme proposals and the 1880 refusal to grant labor concessions to the French to use the port of Goleta.
- VIII) French nationalists like Gambetta of the Republican Party advocated for French imperial expansion after 1870-71 and between 1880-85 Jules Ferry also supported it.
- IX) The ever increasing Italian threats and the population of Italian investors in Tunisia, in addition investors dreamt of reviving their North African Roman Empire. This stimulated other countries particularly France.

- X) The Berlin congress of 1878. In this congress Bismarck encouraged the French to take over the Tunisia. Britain and Italy supported the French to colonize Tunisia by occupying its parts to reduce France's of 1870-71.
- XI) The French settlers in Tunisia had increased in numbers and France wanted this part of Africa to use it to control the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea in order to control the trade through Suez Canal and control the sea pirates.
- XII) Tunisia's relationship with Italy forced the French to act quickly e.g. the Italian companies succeeded in reviving control over the Tunis-Goleta railway at the expense of the French, the visit by El-Sadek's brother to Sicily to meet the Italian King in 1881 compounded the matter and made France to act quickly.
- XIII) The economic potentials of North Africa attracted the French to occupy Tunisia.
- XIV) The strategic location of Tunisia and the proximity to Europe.
- XV) Formation of the commission of debts. This was to see to it that Tunisia pays back the loans.
- XVI) It was the era of scramble and partition of Africa; therefore Tunisia could not survive the wave.
- XVII) The treaty of Bardo supplemented by the convention of Al-Marsa in 1883 sealed the independence of Tunisia. Tunisia became a French protectorate.