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The trans-Saharan slave trade in the context of Tunisian foreign trade in the western Mediterranean

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The paper explores effects of local Tunisian reforms and broader economic and political developments occurring in the western Mediterranean shores during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the trans-Saharan slave trade. While the scanty available literature stresses the insignificance of the trans-Saharan slave trade to Tunisia, this paper examines the complex interplay of Tunisian economic reforms and the burgeoning European commercial expansion that shaped the Tunisian economy and, in turn, the trans-Saharan slave trade. Impact of these developments was not limited to Tunisian trade with Europe and the Levant. A significant increase in trade activities between the Regency of Tunis and the African interior can be observed on a number of levels. In particular, aside from the favourable conditions arising from Hammuda Pasha's reform and economic policies, expanding European trade in Tunisia, mainly after 1788, was a major force behind a continuation and growth of the trans-Saharan slave trade which continued until outlaw in 1841. In addition to Hammuda Pasha's economic reform policies that led to the integration of the Ghadames caravan trade into burgeoning economy, trade growth between Tunisia and the African interior was further fuelled by European capital infusion in the western Mediterranean.

Keywords: Ottoman Tunisia; western Mediterranean; trans-Saharan slave trade; foreign trade

Introduction

Beginning in the late 1780s, the trans-Saharan slave trade from the African interior, while becoming a principal branch of the Regency of Tunis' network of overland trade, was typically not considered important for burgeoning European commercial expansion that stimulated agricultural production, commerce and Tunisian economy. Nearly a century prior to the late 1780s, the Muradites, who undertook the consolidation of various economic infrastructures following the Ottoman conquest of Tunisia in 1574 (along with corsair expeditions, they developed as a 'legitimate commerce' of the Ottoman province), integrated the trans-Saharan slave trade into the nascent Tunisian foreign trade. Successors of the Muradids, the Husaynids

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(1705–1957), maintained the trade via Ghadames. Until the early 1780s, however, it remained a marginal branch of the Husaynids' foreign trade.

Between 1786 and 1808, the slave trade peaked at 1300 to 1000 slaves per annum. Yet, after reaching this peak, the trade declined slightly and then grew even more, particularly during the 1830s and early 1840s, reaching levels above the previous peak. Shortly after its second peak, in April 1841, the slave traffic from Tunis across the western Mediterranean was outlawed. Four months later, in August 1841, the slave trade from the African interior was prohibited, and within less than half a decade, slavery itself was abolished throughout Tunisia (see Montana 2013).

This paper provides a broad overview of interplay between the trans-Saharan slave trade and economic and political developments underway in late eighteenth to early nineteenth century Ottoman Tunisia. Contrary to the widely held assumption that economic developments after 1500 in North and West Africa, particularly the rise of sea-borne and maritime trade, had rendered the trans-Saharan trade '... less commercially significant and more vulnerable to competition from the sea,' (Anene 1965; Anderson 1986; Chater 1987; Austen 1990) it is argued here that increased European capitalist penetration in the western Mediterranean from the late eighteenth century on had profound and dynamic implications on the Saharan slave trade.

Using a combination of secondary sources and available contemporary European travellers' accounts and memoirs in North Africa, consular official reports, and local Tunisian chronicles, the paper attempts to rehabilitate the trans-Saharan slave trade from the African interior into the directional trends and patterns of expanding Tunisian foreign trade and European capital infusion in the western Mediterranean. The paper maintains that exploring the interactions of the trans-Saharan slave trade and the economic and political changes underway reveals a much more complex and parallel relationship than existing scholarly literature assumes.

Several scholars and historians have examined the above economic and political developments and assessed their implications on Tunisian economy with Europe, the western Mediterranean and Levantine countries. A number of these scholars, however, have bracketed off the trans-Saharan slave trade from the broader implications of these economic processes and developments. This neglect has led to attributing the implications of the economic and political developments on the trans-Saharan slave trade solely to the 1846 mass emancipation of slavery under the reign of Ahmad Bey (r. 1825–1855). Within this scholarship, the close relationship between the abolition of slavery, the trans-Saharan slave trade, and the economic and political changes underway has been overlooked. By failing to take into account the Saharan slave trade, scholars have shown only a partial understanding of the dynamics of the economic and political processes shaping the Tunisian economy from the late eighteenth century onwards. In the following sections, the paper outlines the intellectual and historical contours for placing the trans-Saharan slave trade at the core of the economic and political developments shaping the Tunisian foreign trade in the period under examination.

The intellectual context

In the historiography of the modern history of the Maghreb, the effects of the major economic and political transformations underway during the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the Tunisian branch of the trans-Saharan slave trade received marginal attention. Within this historiography, the themes of 'decay', 'decadence', and 'regularity' but 'insignificance' run through the early phase of this literature, which mentions the trans-Saharan commerce as a component of North African foreign trade. In the mid-1970s, Lucette Valensi, a leading French historian on

Tunisian economic history in the eighteenth century, wrote that after the late eighteenth century, Tunisia became a centre for growing maritime trade, particularly with Europe, the Mediterranean and the Levant. Throughout this period, she opined, the trans-Saharan slave trade remained a regular feature of Tunisian overland commerce, but increased maritime trade across the Mediterranean superseded its importance (Valensi 1977, 43–46). Consequently, the Saharan trade was ‘static’ and ‘unimpressive’ (Valensi 1967, 1275–1276). What is more, the Saharan slave trade was privately operated by poor Ghadames merchants and did not follow the same pattern of Tunisian trade from the late eighteenth century onwards (Valensi 1977, 44). André Raymond and Lisa Anderson took a similar approach in different ways (Raymond 1953, 25–26; Anderson 1986, 59). Raymond discussed the consequences of European influence from 1816 onwards and shows how Tunisian exports of foodstuffs from the late eighteenth century onwards decreased as a result of epidemics and foreign debts. While epidemics caused crop failure (resulting in heavy taxation for overland trades), foreign debts led to unprecedented European influence, leading to the control of Tunis’s economy and the eradication of corsairs and Christian slavery in the Regency (Raymond 1953, 31). For this reason, Raymond posited, the Tunisian Saharan trade was ruined by the action undertaken by European Powers for the abolition of [Christian] slavery in Tunis (Raymond 1953, 25). According to him, European pressure against Christian slavery diverted the Saharan slave trade to Tripoli (Raymond 1953, 25). This aggressive European influence led Lisa Anderson to subscribe to the thesis that the Saharan slave trade from the African interior declined. Similar to Raymond, she argued, it reduced the Saharan slave trade to ‘a mere fraction of its earlier value’ (Anderson 1986, 59). However, while Raymond believed that trade declined as a result of direct European action against Christian slavery between 1816 and 1830, Anderson assumes that the decline of the Saharan slave trade (which she believes already lost its vitality to the trans-Atlantic trade along the West African coast) was caused by the increased European trade’s erosion of the rural economies of both Tunis and Tripoli.

Khalifa Chater, a well-established Tunisian historian of the period under study, cautioned the decadence thesis (Chater 1987, 137–141). Taking into account the response of the Saharan trade, including the inland and inter-Maghreb caravan networks, to the growth of Tunisian trade, he argues the Saharan trade adapted to the new economic milieu characterising the Mediterranean. According to Chater, owing to Tunisia’s strategic location as a transit point, it remained vibrant as liaison and transit commerce. Consequently, instead of decline, the caravan trade sustained both Tunisian and European commerce (Chater 1987, 143). Other historians such as Rachad Limam demonstrated the proliferation of the Saharan slave trade during the height of Tunisian economic growth. Limam perceived this growth as a by-product of Hammuda’s trans-Saharan trade policy (Limam 1974, 194–196, 1981, 349–357; Abun-Nasr 1982, 57–58). Limam argued that, along with the Regency’s ever-increasing trade with Europe and the Levant, Hammuda also promoted commerce with the African interior because of self-interest in the commerce (1980, 302).

Political and economic developments

Any serious attempt to examine interdependence and interaction between the trans-Saharan slave trade and the burgeoning Tunisian foreign trade will be incomplete without a closer look at changes in Tunisian state’s politics, economy, as well as vast array of unprecedented regional transformations occurring around the western Mediterranean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Domestically, the decades-long succession crisis that marked the early phase of the Husaynid dynasty – compounded by frequent encroachment by the Turkish Deys from the Regency of Algiers in Tunisian affairs – ended with the ascension to the throne

of Husayn bin Ali's eldest son, Mohammad Bey (reigned, 1756–1759). During the last years of Ali Bey I's rule, the Algerian Deys profited from internal disputes between Ali and his son. After decades of solid control of the Regency, the Deys took advantage of infighting and managed to capture and assassinate Ali Bey I. This development paved the way for the relinquishing of the throne to Husayn b. Ali's faction, which had been locked in succession crises for nearly half a century (see, e.g. Hédi Chérif [1983] on discussion of the succession crisis).

Despite the assassination of Ali Bey I and the accession to the throne of Husayn's faction, which put an end to the lingering infighting among the Husaynid ruling class, the coup d'état was aided by the Algerian Deys. Thus, ascension to the throne of Husayn's faction increased Algerian encroachments in the Regency's affairs. From Mohammad Bey's enthronement by the Algerian Deys in 1756 until his death in 1759, the Regency was nominally reduced to tribute status. In addition to an annual tribute that the Deys imposed on Tunis, Mohamed-Hédi, Chérif and other historians described this phase of the Husaynid dynasty as a period, which witnessed the Algerian Deys intrusion on Tunis's political and financial affairs. Bin Diyaf, the nineteenth-century Tunisian chronicler, concluded that by the end of Mohammad Bey's rule, the Tunisian treasury had been emptied by the Algerian Deys' frequent plunder (Limam 1980, 302–303).

Due to the circumstances of his accession to the throne, Mohammad had no choice but to succumb to the Deys' successive encroachments on Tunisian affairs. His successors, however, did not tolerate the Algerians' frequent meddling in the Regency's political and economic stability. Mohammad's rule lasted only three years. After his death in 1759, he was succeeded by his younger brother, Ali Bey II (reigned 1759–1782). Ali Bey II put an end to the Deys' intrusion in Tunis' affairs. To ensure Tunis's independence, the Bey not only embarked upon serious reforms aimed at strengthening Tunis's political independence but also at refurbishing Tunis's treasury, which had been emptied by Algerian troops and by the diversion of Tunisian trade to Algiers.

Ali Bey II's determination to strengthen Tunis' autonomy was a turning point (see Kraiem 1973 vol. 2, 49–60). Besides strengthening Tunis's political independence, the Bey introduced – by sanction of a *fatwa* issued by the Hanafite grand Mufti – a series of institutional and fiscal reforms (Julien 1970, 330–331; Abun-Nasr 1982, 39–40). For instance, the Bey commissioned the Hanafite grand Mufti, Mohamed Bayram I (d. 1800) to compose for him a treatise on governance (*siyasat al-Shar'iyat*) and fatwas to support his political and economic reforms. Among the Bey's measures designed to take advantage of European commerce in Tunis, which slowly began to increase, Ali Bey II accorded rights to coral fishing and a factory in Bizerte to a French company. Similar trade incentives were granted to Tunisian Jews, particularly the *grana*, who had been at the forefront of Tunisian foreign trade with Europe since the late seventeenth century. Furthermore, as foreign trade began to rejuvenate, Ali Bey II regulated the selling of crops before their harvest. This measure was taken to curb abusive trade practices in the Regency by European traders, mainly Genoan and Venetian merchants.

While historians have often stressed that Ali Bey II's role in strengthening Tunisia's political and economic prosperity in the late eighteenth century marked a turning point, these reforms did not end with his death. They laid the foundation for further political and economic progress in the Regency. Thus, in the same spirit as his father, Hammuda Pasha (r. 1782–1814), who succeeded Ali Bey II, embarked upon a series of ambitious political, military, social and economic reforms. Except for the tenth Husaynid successor, Ahmad Bey, no Husaynid statesman has been as praised as Hammuda. Historians have unanimously depicted his reign as the 'Golden Age' of Tunisia (Julien 1970, 331).

Soon after his accession to the throne, among the first steps Hammuda took was to discontinue Tunis' dependence on Algiers as a tribute state (Limam 1980, 261). Over and above the earlier reforms initiated under his father, Hammuda introduced a series of political reforms including the reduction of the number of Turkish Janissaries by replacing them with Mamluks. He introduced new ministries, led by a Prime Minister (Mustapha Khaznadar), a Minister of Finance, and a Keeper of the Seal (Sahib al-Taba). These positions were also filled by his Mamluks.

By the mid-1780s, the peace and stability brought about by Hammuda's solid social and political reforms led to the *fellahin* (peasants) producing foodstuffs that surpassed the Regency's consumption. Limam notes that during the early phase of Hammuda's rule, agricultural lands were greatly expanded (Limam 1980, 261). Thanks to his subjugation of the nomadic tribesmen, who inhabited the region inland from Sfax, and had been fervent enemies of the sedentary population of the town, Hammuda's security reforms paid off greatly (Limam 1974, 195). The Bey implemented an annual *mahalla* (military expedition), which not only defeated disloyal elements to the regime, but also imposed a hefty taxation system aimed at assuring their allegiance to the regime. His coercive measures paving the way for peace led to the abundant production of wheat, barley, and livestock. They also augmented the cultivation of olive oil, whose production expanded, providing the Regency with considerable trade benefits in the export of olive oil.

By the late 1780s, the results of Hammuda's reforms in the agricultural sector not only resulted in a bumper crop and harvest but also to an unprecedented level of economic growth. This period, which also marked the early phase of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, saw increased European commercial interests in Tunis. One of the most significant results of the unprecedented growth of Tunisian agriculture during this period was that it rejuvenated Tunisian foreign trade, particularly the export of grain and olive oil to Europe and the Levant. Yet, unlike Ali Bey II, who accorded trade concessions to European traders to promote Tunisian trade, Hammuda pursued a different economic course (Limam 1974, 195–196).

First, Hammuda revisited the existing commercial arrangements between various European states and the Regency of Tunis. Prior to his rule, many of the European merchants trading in Tunis had secured trade agreements and preferential treatment. Some of these agreements dated back to 1600 and had been granted under the Ottoman capitulation system, allowing Christian European states, mainly Genoa, Venice, France and later, Great Britain, to trade in the country. To curb the European merchants' monopoly on Tunis's burgeoning trade, Hammuda abolished existing trade agreements. At the same time, he restricted European merchants from purchasing goods directly from Tunisian *fellahin* (peasants) by introducing the system of *teskere* (Bill of Right of Export). According to this stringent trade control measure, European traders were forced to purchase *teskeres* directly from the Beylik's authorities, including the Bey himself. European merchants worked assiduously through their respective consuls to exert pressure on Hammuda to rescind the restrictive and prohibitive measures, but the Bey did not yield to pressure and upheld his strict control of the foreign trade.

Secondly, while imposing stringent trade restriction on European traders, Hammuda encouraged indigenous Tunisians to participate in Tunisia's burgeoning foreign trade by reducing their duties on goods exported to Europe to 5.5%, down from 11% *ad valorem*. Hammuda's encouragement of the traders included special preferential trade privileges accorded to local Tunisian Jews. To guarantee competitive advantage for indigenous Tunisians' participation in the foreign trade, the Bey imposed some restrictions on the Jewish merchants' monopoly of certain trade articles such as grain and olive oil (Limam 1974, 195–196). Ultimately, within a

single decade, the Bey succeeded in stamping out foreign and local Jews merchants' monopoly of Tunisian foreign trade to the advantage of the *beldi*, (local traders).

By the late 1790s, the growth of Tunisian trade economy stemming from its burgeoning agricultural production had reached an unprecedented level. One could readily agree with John Jackson, who fervently advocated for the British government and British merchants to take advantage of the Tunisian booming agricultural trade and economy in the Mediterranean in 1798:

The commerce carried on at present between the Christian states, on the northern shores of the Mediterranean and the kingdom of Tunis, is very extensive ... Tunis is the most considerable state in Barbary for commerce, and even that was but trifling, until Sidi Mustapha, late prime minister, encouraged the cultivation of corn and olives, now the two chief articles of export from that kingdom. This has served much to civilize the inhabitants, who, from a state of perpetual warfare with Christians, and often among themselves, begin now to feel the advantage of commerce; and the duties on exports, at the present form the greatest part of the Bey's revenues. (Jackson 1804, 55)

Like Jackson, many contemporary Tunisian and European writers could not emphasise enough the new pattern of economic growth that characterised the Regency – particularly towards the start of the 1780s. According to the author of *Kitab al-bashi*, an eighteenth-century Tunisian chronicler (who served under Ali Bey II and Hammuda Pasha), the Regency's 'population was growing, building programs abounded, agriculture was thriving, and the economy was prosperous, at least for the elites.' (see Gallagher 2002, 34). Even those nineteenth-century writers such as Louis Frank, Hammuda's medical aide who lived in Tunis between 1802 and 1806, and who wrote his account of Tunis in 1811, viewed Tunis in terms of its economic prosperity and its relations with North Africa, the West and Central Sudan, as similar to London, Marseilles and Amsterdam's relations with the rest of Europe as financial capitals.

Not surprisingly, a number of historians have devoted systematic attention to the major economic changes discussed above. In examining the scholarly literature, one sees numerous examples of glorifying terms such as 'l'âge d'or de la Tunisie précoloniale,' (Chérif 1970, 719; Kraiem 1973, Vol. I, 52). 'Shanghai of the Mediterranean,' (Gallagher 2002, 33) and 'Apogée de l'expansion' (Chater 1984, 175) to define the late eighteenth-century Tunisia. Others have interpreted these developments as heralding 'the high point of [Tunisian] independence and wealth before European pressures in the nineteenth century deprived the state of major revenue resources and led to its "detachment" from its hinterland' (Hunter 1986, 24).

Valensi has documented the pattern of Tunisian exports and imports during the late eighteenth century through an analysis of the ratio of regional and inter-state trade. Valensi, for instance, repeatedly emphasised that in the late eighteenth century, 'Tunisia was one of the countries that fed Europe'. She concluded that many of the exports of grain, dried vegetables, and other less important foodstuffs to France, Malta and Italy during this period came from Tunisia (Valensi 1981, 722). Valensi's claims are attested to by the French consular authorities in Tunis in the 1780s, who themselves were involved in Tunisian foreign trade. Writing during the height of France's importation of foodstuffs from Tunis, the French consular records at the time attributed this to a

simultaneous poor harvest in Europe and the abundance of crops in the Kingdom of Tunis ... [This] led a throng of ships to the port of Tunis which in less than four years, had become the richest and most commercially active of the Levant. (Gallagher 2002, 35)

By 1808, Thomas MacGill, an English merchant, found that 'trade of [Tunis] on the coast of Barbary has ... declined considerably'. As well as Hammuda's stringent economic policies and the plague of 1804–1805, MacGill attributed the decay in Tunis's trade to political factors,

particularly Hammuda's wars within 1807–1808. Despite this, MacGill noted that this trade which 'was at a former period much more extensive and lucrative', was still 'worthy of attention' (MacGill 1811, 120–123).

Tunisian trade continued to thrive – though only intermittently – due to the results of the 1804–1805 plague and certainly due to Hammuda's lingering wars with Algiers. Soon after his death, the state of economic affluence characterising his reign ended. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, Tunisia, like most non-European states, could not escape the political and economic consequences arising from the end of the Napoleonic and the Revolutionary Wars that shook continental Europe to its foundation.

After 1798, as was the case in the North African states of Algiers, Tripoli and Morocco, Britain and France's preoccupation with the Napoleonic Wars and the balance of power in the Mediterranean opened up avenues of profit for Tunisian corsairs. Between 1798 and 1814, the number of corsair campaigns organised by the Tunisian state, while never reaching the scale they had during their apex in the seventeenth century, nonetheless reached alarming rates targeting series of Mediterranean islands such as Sicily and Sardinia.

In 1814, the Napoleonic Wars came to an end. Like the Regencies of Algiers and Tripoli, the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1814 marked a major shift in the power politics of Tunis's relations with Europe. A few months after the Napoleonic Wars ended, European countries had gathered at the Congress of Vienna to look at the political and economic consequences of the wars in continental Europe. Among the many goals of the Congress was to find solutions not only for the growing European nationalism that resulted from the Napoleonic Wars, but also to address concerns surrounding Europe's Industrial Revolution, which occurred after the 1760s and led to the profound transformation of methods of commodity production. It reached its peak during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Advancement in industrial and production methods helped Europe's population to boom. So did improvements in various industrial sectors, which forced Europeans to look beyond Europe for colonies. By 1815, many European states were searching if not for colonies, then at least for outlets for trade.

The abolition of the slave trade and slavery was also an issue at the Congress of Vienna. Here, it must be stressed that by 1814, a number of the European powers that gathered at the Congress, such as Denmark and Great Britain, had already outlawed the slave trade in their colonies – Denmark in 1792 and Britain in 1807. In fact, it was in the same year as the Congress that the Dutch abolished the slave trade. Clearly, promotion of 'legitimate commerce' – a direct result of the Industrial Revolution – was a major factor in the decision to abolish the slave trade. Several reasons have also been cited, including humanitarianism ideals and the European Enlightenment. Not surprisingly, since Europe perceived corsair activity and piracy as hindrances to its trade interests in the Mediterranean, their termination was considered a prerequisite for legitimate commerce. During the Napoleonic Wars, the USA had already complained that the corsair campaigns in North Africa were injurious to their commerce.

A year after the congress, Europe dispatched Admiral Lord Exmouth with a naval fleet to suppress the corsair activity and piracy in North Africa. By April 1816, only a month after he had forced the rulers of Algiers and Tripoli to free Christian captives, Exmouth headed to Tunis. Mahmud Bey (reigned 1814–1824) could not but follow the examples of the Deys of Algiers. With British and European naval fleets anchored at Tunis Bay and ready to bombard the city, Mahmud complied with all of Exmouth's conditions, notably terminating the corsair campaigns and freeing every Christian captive in the Regency.

By 1830, this show of European political and military prowess had not only successfully freed the Mediterranean from corsair activity and piracy, but had also paved the way for a new econ-

omic and political environment dominated by Europe in the Mediterranean. These developments also triggered a downturn in the Regency of Tunis's thriving economy. Thus compared to the period from the mid-1780s to 1814 – the 'Golden Age' of Tunisian trade economy – during which Hammuda Pasha solidly regulated European commercial practices in the Regency, after 1816 his successors were deprived of the ability to control European traders. The years between 1816 and 1830 ushered in a period of growing European political influence over the successive Beys. During this period, the Husaynid Beys witnessed aggressive exploitative behaviour on the part of European merchants who exacted economic concessions from them whenever possible. As Woodford puts it:

Th[is] moment marks the establishment of the consuls as a political force in Tunis, stemming not just from their direct influence on the Bey, but also from their peculiar civil status and judicial rights over their countrymen and protégés, to the exclusion of the local courts. The consuls were nominally the representatives of European government, but these were without exception too distant to have any influence on the day-to-day decisions consuls had to make. As their power increased, so also did their tendency to make independent political decisions, backed by the financial clout of their compatriots. (Woodford 1990, 123)

To illustrate the implications of this European dominance, Raymond has shown that after 1816, Tunisian foreign trade, which was estimated at 5,000,000 francs (imports) and 5,300,00 francs (exports) in 1788 had declined significantly to only 2,200,00 (exports). Interestingly, this decline in Tunisian foreign trade was matched by flourishing European imports to Tunisia worth 8,100,000 francs (see Raymond 1953).

What is startling about this imbalance in the Tunisian trade during this period is not only the great increase of imported European goods into the Regency, which surpassed Tunisian exports by over three times, but also, as Raymond and others have demonstrated, the fact that a significant proportion of the flourishing European imports into the Regency were contraband. According to Raymond, of the 8,100,000 francs in imports, there were up to 2,000,000 francs in imports worth being classified as 'illegal Tunisian trade economy after 1816, this phenomenon of increased illegal trade is unsurprising'. As Ganiage's masterly documentation of European migration to Tunis has demonstrated, unforeseen political and economic developments after 1816 had major European demographic implications in Tunis (1960).

Quite apart from the clear effects of the end of the Napoleonic Wars on the Tunisian political economy, many historians have stressed the role of internal Tunisian factors as contributing in the downturn of the economy. Soon after Hammuda's death in 1814 (after a rule of 33 years), political disequilibrium between Hammuda's successors was cited as a hindrance to stability. By the 1820s, the situation had worsened because of the 1818–1820 plague, which caused famine and disrupted agricultural production.

Fiscal reforms also compounded the situation. Soon after 1816, the Regency was deprived of its regular revenues previously obtained through taxes levied on corsair campaigns, overland trans-Saharan slave trade and thriving commerce with Europe and the Levant. By 1827, Hussein Bey (r. 1824–1835), who had tried to steer Tunis out of its continuing economic crisis, resorted to the finance minister, Shakir Sahib el-Tabà, a Georgian Mamluk, in an attempt to remedy the situation by an earnest programme encouraging agricultural production. In particular, as the value of the Regency's exports in primary products had declined, and hence instead of grain, barley and wheat, Hussein promoted the cultivation of olive oil, even though its price had fallen from a high 30 francs in 1820 to only 8.75 francs in 1827–1828.

As a result, the production of olive oil, which had reached 10,000 hectolitres during the eighteenth century, was increased to over 50,000 in 1817. Then, by 1827, it had risen to 76,000 hec-

tolitres. To strengthen his efforts at fiscal reforms, Hussein reversed Ali Bey II's policy of banning the sale of crops before their harvest. Even though this measure was calculated to ensure his *de facto* monopoly on the trade, by selling oil to European merchants himself, particularly the French, in 'advance payments and cash loans,' (Valensi 1981, 722–723) only a year after its peak oil production failed to series of plagues. The lifting of the ban on pre-harvest sales proved catastrophic because it instituted the beginning of the Tunisian Beys' indebtedness to European foreign capitalists.

Whither implications on the trans-Saharan slave trade

Effects of the political and economic developments discussed above from the late eighteenth century onwards had major implications on the pace, the scale and broadening scope of the trans-Saharan slave trade. Beginning of the late eighteenth century, the slave trade had not only become the principal branch of the Regency of Tunis' network of inland trade, but an important medium for the increased and the expanding European commercial capitalism in the western shore of Mediterranean basin. Prior to the eighteenth century and even earlier, the trans-Saharan slave trade had been severed and disrupted as a result of the Hilali invasion of Ifriqiyya (Medieval Tunisia) at the turn of the eleventh century. As a result of political instability caused by the Hilali invasion, the slave trade between Tunisian and western and central Sudan was diverted westwards towards Morocco. In addition to political instability arising from the invasion, caravans were subject to sectarian banditry. Kharijites attacks on trade caravans between Gabès and Tripoli proved detrimental and with the exception of irregular diplomatic envoys between the Hafsid state and the rulers of Borno, regular trade operations were severed and came to a halt. Until Ottomans' occupation of the Regency in 1575 and its tight control, even the Hafsids who aspired to control the trans-Saharan slave trade as an extension of their diplomatic relations with the rulers of Borno in the central Sudan could not provide the security requisite needed for caravans' safe operations. In the aftermath of the Ottomans occupation and pacification, especially in the south-western parts of the interior where the Kharijites and other local tribes disrupting the trade were based, the trans-Saharan trade was revived and integrated into the Regency's nascent coastal economy.

During the first decades of the Ottoman rule and control of the interior, inland trading networks connecting the new Deylik (now Ottoman Muradite post) with the western and central Sudan by way of Ghadames slowly gained traction. The scanty and sporadic available evidence points to a gradual resumption of trade activities in the hinterland. These trade activities continued unabated till the fourth decade of the Husaynid Dynasty founded in 1705. Thanks to the economic policies of the Muradites ruler, Hammuda Pasha el-Muradite, who accorded the monopoly of the slave trade to Ghadames diasporan merchants in Tunis, by the early part of the sixteenth century, the trans-Saharan trade had become a regular branch of the regency's foreign trade. The Pasha's successor, Yusuf Dey (r. 1610–1637) consolidated the revival and integration of the slave trade and built *suq el-Berka*, (Tunis Slave Market) for the sole sale of black slaves. However, as Valensi rightly notes, until the eighteenth century, compared to overall volume of Tunisian foreign trade with Levant and across the Mediterranean, the slave trade remained a marginal branch of the foreign trade.

During the aftermath of the civil war that ravaged the Husaynid Dynasty, sources related to this period document political relationship between the Husaynid and the rulers of the central Sudan. The outcome of this relationship as Ibn Abi Diyaf and contemporary accounts reported culminated in enlistment of slave soldiers called *bawaba* or palace guards from the very cultural

zone where the Hafids had conducted diplomatic relationship with the rulers of Borno in the central Sudan. Writing during the middle of the civil war, Thomas Shaw, a well-known British clergyman who visited Tunis from Algiers in 1727, reported that the infighting between the Husayniyya and the Bashiyya factions of the Husaynid Dynasty had negative impact of the trans-Saharan slave trade and economic activities in the Regency as a whole. This prolonged civil war, which was exacerbated by Algerian janissaries intervention in favour of the Husayniyya faction, did not end until the late 1750s.

After the end of the civil war, Hammuda Pasha ushered in reforms that established the Regency as a major trade destination, as attested by Jackson in the previous section. Thus, with the return of political and economic stability, commercial relations between Tunisia and west and central Sudan resumed at a much greater pace than before. The most noticeable example of the trade resumption came four years, in 1786, following the start of Hammuda Pasha's rule. During this period, the slave trade increased abruptly and within less than a decade of Hammuda's rule, reached its apogee. Not surprisingly, this increase coincided with the climax of Tunisia's economic affluence discussed in the previous section. Throughout the late eighteenth to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, although with occasional interruptions, the extant evidence suggest that this increased momentum of the slave trade did indeed continue well into the first half of the nineteenth century. This increased pattern of the slave trade contests the statist view that the trans-Saharan slave remained marginal throughout eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, this increased trend highlights the slave trade's interaction and interdependence with the pattern of growth and declines occurring in Tunisia's foreign trade.

Early evidence of the increased trends of the slave trade and its interaction with the ebbs and flows of Tunisia foreign trade came a few years after Miss Tully's report of the active trade between the rulers of Tunisia and the central Sudan. In 1789, Robert Traill, the British Consul General in Tunis, writing to the British Commerce Secretary also came to a similar and even more promising conclusion about the level of trade interaction between Tunisia and the western and central Sudan. In the first of his several reports, which he wrote upon request from the British Government to obtain intelligence information about the level of Tunisian foreign trade, and especially its share of the trans-Saharan slave trade with the African interior, Traill revealed that the scope of the trade was expansive as the Ghadames merchants who conducted the trade penetrated deep across the Sahara into Yorubaland near the Atlantic coast of West Africa. The report showing the importance of the slave trade as a sector of Tunisian foreign trade also documents its interaction with the above economic and political developments underway, especially during the reign of Hammuda Pasha.

According to Traill's reports, the interaction and interdependence with the above economic developments is evident through the scope, the pace, and shifting pattern of the slave trade. For instance, Traill's reports showed that in 1789, Arab merchants conducting the Saharan slave trade between Ghadames and the African interior 'generally' procured 1000–1300 slaves per annum. Traill noted that 'the greatest part of this [quantity ... to the amount of one thousand [were re-exported] yearly into the Dominion of Tunis.' (FO 77/3; Hallett 1964, 79; Limam 1980, 303; Limam 1981, 350). Despite this voluminous scale, he noted that in some years, when caravans were not 'considerable', slaves imported to Tunis did not arrive at half that number. Consequently, about only 'one hundred or one hundred and fifty' slaves reached Tunis (Hallett 1964, 81–84). Over a decade later, Louis Frank provided another impressive statistical account of the Tunisian Saharan slave trade. Frank estimated that, at the time he resided, between 1802 and 1806, in the Regency, Ghadamissiyah caravans 'frequently' imported between 1000 and 1200 slaves per annum to Tunis. Like Traill, Frank noted the irregularity of the trade, observing

that, in some years, only around 200 slaves entered Tunis (1851, 116–117). Contrary to Traill's report and Frank's account of the voluminous scale of the slave trade, Thomas MacGill, one of the most notable European writers in the early nineteenth-century Tunis, reported that three 'caravans of Gdamsi' linking Tunisia with the African interior frequented Tunis annually. His account – one of the best reports on Tunisian foreign trade – indicates that some of the Ghadames caravans he observed in Tunis brought around 200 slaves (1811, 148).

Despite the available evidence indicating a continuation and growth of the slave trade, the paucity of data on the slave trade when compared to other branches of Tunisian foreign trade has encouraged some scholars to assert that it does not suffice as a basis for sustained academic inquiry. As a result, with few exceptions, Tunisian and North African economic historians have not included the Saharan commerce in mainstream economic history. For example, Mark Dyer, who set out in the late 1970s to 'explore the role of Tunis as a market for trans-Saharan trade and a home for trans-Saharan merchants', assumed – after the preliminary phase of his research – that Saharan trade to Tunisia from the late eighteenth century on was insignificant. Dyer's main reasons for shifting the focus of his study are noteworthy:

As I have become more familiar with Tunisian economic history, it became apparent that trans-Saharan trade was of little overall importance in that country, and that Tunis was merely a host to visiting traders from Ghadames rather than home of active trans-Saharan merchants.' As a result, I shifted the emphasis of the dissertation to western Libya, a region that was more directly involved in Saharan trade and more strongly influenced by it. (1978, vii–viii)

For the same reasons that discouraged Dyer from examining the Tunisian Saharan slave trade, Chedli Sehili, a Tunisian researcher whose proposal for his *doctorat d'état* thesis (under Prof. Abdeljelil Temimi) sought to investigate Tunisian economic relations with Tripoli and West and Central Sudan, also abandoned his project (1986).

The above-stated reasons, which discouraged scholarly attempts to examine the Tunisian branch of Saharan commerce, have other noteworthy implications amongst scholars interested in 'counting the uncountable' (see Austen, 1979). For example, based on the sporadic statistical data from Traill's (1788), Frank's (1851) and MacGill's (1811) accounts of the size of the slave trade to Tunisia, Ralph Austen estimated that the total quota of the Tunisian share of the slave trade between 1700 and 1900 averaged 125,000. Using mainly sporadic data on the size of the slave trade indicated by Traill, Frank and MacGill, Austen suggests that between late 1780s and 1814, the annual average number of slaves imported to Tunis was about 700–800. In developing his estimates of the Tunisian share of the slave trade, Austen relied on a meticulous method of calculations and quantitative assessments of sources known to him on the trans-Saharan slave trade. While a few scholars dispute his estimates, unlike the Atlantic slave trade, relying on rough estimates in order to comprehend the directional trend of the slave trade is unavoidable (Wright 2002, 57).

During the late eighteenth century, the economic reforms undertaken by Tunisian state officials to take advantage of the expanding European trade led to a greater reorganisation of the Ghadames caravan trade. Therefore, this overall trade policy – pursued by the Tunisian state – integrated both the overland and inland branches of the burgeoning Tunisian trade. This integration, indeed, promoted a liaison between the caravan trade and expanding European commerce, especially after 1787. As Chater and others have shown, during this period, Tunisian imports and exports between Europe and the Levant grew. Similarly, these major economic developments influenced the Ghadames caravan slave trade. This development had a bearing on the increased frequency of Ghadames caravans entering Tunis from the interior.

When compared to previous periods before late 1788 and early 1789, the Traill report presupposes that 1788 and 1789, in particular, marked the height of the Ghadames caravan trade since its reintegration into the expanding Tunisian foreign trade. This height of the trade, indeed, is illustrated by the frequency of Ghadames caravans, especially their sudden leap between 1788 and 1789. Until 1788, the annual average number of Ghadames caravans entering Tunis was between one to three caravans. By the early 1789, Traill noted that 'there [we]re five or six yearly caravans'. Despite Valensi's belief that from the early eighteenth century on, the Ghadames caravan trade was static and unimpressive, increases in the number of caravans would suggest that, indeed, the Ghadames caravan trade adapted to the economic transformation that occurred from 1786 on, and, like the Regency's foreign trade in general, it enjoyed marked progress.

Apparently, the continuing trend of the Ghadames caravan trade's growth was further illustrated in Frank's estimate that at his time, the annual average number of slaves imported by the caravans amounted to between 1000 and 1200 slaves. Yet again, his estimate suggests that the annual average of slaves imported to Tunis stayed, consistently, at the same level or even increased after the late 1780s, especially if one considers that not the whole of the 1000–1300 slaves Traill reported did reach Tunis.

Besides the frequency of the Ghadames caravan and the scale of its slave trade, a noted diversification in secondary trade articles became evident. While slaves, gold dust, leather products and ivory had a long history as chief staples of the caravan trade, a number of secondary trade articles burst upon the scene from the late 1780s and began to assume more significance. However, they did not become as important as slaves. Especially noteworthy in this period were senna and ostrich feathers, which were re-exported in large quantities across the Mediterranean to European destinations, particularly to the Italian cities of Leghorn, Venice, and Genoa. Prior to the reign of Hammuda Pasha, these articles were not a major component of the Ghadames trade.

In 1789, after listing senna, gold dust, ostrich feathers and a few elephant teeth as the principal articles of commerce, Traill noted that 'the most considerable article of all these was senna'. Until the late 1780s, senna, a bush plant whose leaves were widely used in Europe for papermaking and other industrial purposes had not been a significant part of the Ghadames caravan trade to the Regency. However, from the late 1780s until the early 1840s, it did become a principal import of the Ghadames caravan trade. According to Traill, when entering the Regency from the African interior, Ghadames merchants brought up to 3100 weight of cantaar of senna to Jerba, which being the first place the Ghadames caravan stopped after returning from the interior in the Regency. There, they were forced by the Ben Ayeds Caidat family controlling the south-western route of the caravan trade to dispose of at least two-thirds of the quantity to the governor of Jerba. Again, like Tunis, Jerba was an important commercial entrepôt for Jews and European merchants trading with Malta and other Italian cities such as Leghorn, Venice and Genoa. Jewish merchants monopolized the island's trade and shipped the bulk of the senna that was retained in Jerba to Italy. Traill stated that, indeed senna was of little use in Tunis and was generally sold for about £3.10–£4 Sterling per 100 weight and shipped to Europe. It is unclear if the gold dust, which he said seldom amounts to the value of £500 sterling was also re-exported to Europe. In addition to senna, trade in other trans-Saharan products such as ostrich feathers flourished. Ostrich feathers, used in the textile industry, did not become a well-known article until the late 1780s, with their increased re-exportation to European destinations across the Mediterranean. Traill noted that in early 1789, ostrich feathers were of little value and were sold at £5–£6 pounds sterling per skin. Between 1789 and 1808, however, they saw enormous growth as a result of continuous expansion of European trade in the Regency. While Frank described ostrich feathers as the main trade article of Ghadamisyyah caravan trade 'après la vent des

esclaves noires', because of their value to the European commerce, Jackson divided them into three main classes according to their weight and quality.

Conversely, a survey of the shifting nature of European goods exported from the Regency of Tunis into the African interior also points to the diversification of Ghadames caravan trade goods. This trend can be seen clearly in the European products destined for retail in the African interior, particularly following the increased trade's interaction between the European and the Ghadames caravan trade after 1788. In 1799, Jackson, for instance, noted that in return for ostrich feathers, ivory, senna and gold dust, European goods that the Ghadames merchants took back to the African interior mainly consisted of 'coarse woollen, firearms, gunpowder, watches, and hard-ware'. Compared to the period before the late 1780s, Jackson was among the earlier writers explicitly to list firearms and gunpowder as among the European hardware re-exported from Tunis to the African interior. Throughout the previous period leading to the 1790s, firearms are hardly discernible in the extant Europeans account of European goods exported from Tunis to the African interior. Overall, the above-noted diversification of secondary trade goods was a by-product of the increasing interaction between the Ghadames caravan trade and the expanding European trade in the Regency.

Conclusion

While the economic and political developments occurring from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century have stirred a burgeoning academic interest and have led scholars to conjure up a plethora of paradigms to explain the implications of these developments on the Regency's economic, political, and social history, this scholarship has done little to integrate the trans-Saharan slave trade into these studies. Except for selectively noting the 1846 much-celebrated abolition of slavery as an outcome of Ahmad Bey's modernisation and reform scheme, most scholars have bracketed off the Saharan slave trade from the implications of the above-discussed broader historical developments. One readily sees this discounting of the Saharan trade from implications of these developments in Anderson's fine comparative study of Tunisia and Libya. In pointing to the effects of these developments on transformation processes in Tunisia and Libya, she reinforces the thesis that stressed – as has already been indicated – that in the period after 1500, the trans-Saharan trade was 'more vulnerable to competition from the sea' and therefore 'insignificant'. Anderson concludes that:

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the garrison-states of Tunisia and Libya had seen their resources from international trade erode. During the course of the eighteenth century, the value of the caravan trade declined as European traders along the western coast of Africa diverted the trade in gold and slaves – the major commodities of trans-Saharan commerce – to Atlantic Ocean ports. Although commerce remained important, and trans-Saharan trade would revive briefly in Libya late in the century, by then the caravan was a mere fraction of its earlier value. (Anderson 1986, 59)

This paper has argued, instead, that in order to understand the varying trends characterising the Tunisian trans-Saharan slave trade, the slave trade has to be studied within the broader context of Tunisian political and economic development underway. Over the past decades, many historians and political scientists have examined the implications of the above transformations as signalling a watershed moment. The periods following 1786, defined as the 'Golden Age' of Tunisia, and the aftermath of 1816, which saw European capitalist domination of the Mediterranean, have shaped modern Tunisian history.

As of 1786, the fluctuations and changes in the Ghadames caravan trade were consistent with the broader patterns of Tunisian trade with Europe, the Mediterranean and the Levant. The sources examined between 1786 and 1808 demonstrate a steady flow of Ghadames caravans

as well as slaves into the Regency. During the course of the early 1780s, as they did with Europe, the Mediterranean and the Levant, the Tunisian Beys recognised the importance of trade with the west and central Sudan. In addition to the systematic importation of Sudanese gold to replenish the Tunisian treasury, the Beys regulated the Ghadames slave trade, leading to its integration into the network of inland and foreign trade that blossomed after 1786. In the few decades following the end of the civil war that disrupted economic activities in the Regency, Robert Traill wrote a detailed official report showing how the number of Ghadames regular caravans entering Tunis fluctuated from three to between five and six yearly caravans. The available contemporary accounts, both Tunisian and European, suggest that up until 1786, in an average year, the number of regular caravans was only two. Clearly, this increased in the number of the caravans makes 1788 and 1789, the same period in which Tunisian exports and imports flourished, an exceptional time for the slave trade.

Thus, the paper has emphasised the implications of the political and economic developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century-Tunisia and the western Mediterranean on the trans-Saharan slave trade. From the early eighteenth century, the Ghadames caravan trade, which conducted the slave trade between Tunisia and the African interior, had been a marginal branch of Tunisian foreign trade. Despite the slave trade common depiction as insignificant, the political and economic developments processes that occurred after 1782 affected the dynamics of the trans-Saharan slave trade. It needs to be stressed that, in spite of the compounded economic effects of the civil war on the Ghadames caravans entering Tunis, after the end of the war and following the resumption of political and economic stability, the trans-Saharan slave trade enjoyed significant growth in scope, pace and scale.

The growth in scope and the scale of the trans-Saharan slave trade was particularly pronounced between 1786 and 1788. As shown above, this growth paralleled the growth of the Tunisian foreign trade with the Levant and western Mediterranean. After the end of the civil war, the solid economic and commercial reforms that Hammuda Pasha implemented led to the flourishing of the Ghadames caravan slave trade, especially in the last few years that followed the trade's reorganisation and its integration into the Regency's foreign trade. Then, from 1789 until 1808, increased European trade in Tunis further boosted the growth of the Ghadames caravan trade. The far-reaching implications of the increased European trade on the Ghadames caravan trade can be discerned, first, in the increased number of its caravans entering Tunis, mainly between 1788 and 1789. Similar to the effects of Hammuda Pasha's economic reforms, these developments signalled a turning point for the trans-Saharan slave trade, just as it did for Tunisian external trade. This is especially evident when trans-Saharan slave trade in this period is compared to that of the early part of the eighteenth century, a time that Valensi describes as static and unspectacular.

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