

(RE)SCRIPTING A (POST)COLONIAL STREETScape:  
TUNIS' AVENUE HABIB BOURGUIBA

A Thesis

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by

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## ABSTRACT

The retrospective or “neo-colonial” 2000–2001 renovation of Tunis’ Avenue Habib Bourguiba is a compelling example of spatial scripting that recalls an environment first engineered by influential French ex-patriots in the 1860’s. Spatial scripting, in this case, describes the intentional layering of meaning upon the streetscape, the visual and performative narration of a story, and the casting of space as an emblem that both informs and illustrates, but also controls and defines within its greater socio-cultural context. On the ground it facilitates both a physical and figurative journey. In the case of this particular renovation, the expansion of sidewalks, installation of café terraces and new monumental structures, the preservation of colonialist buildings as well as the selection of vaguely traditional European styles of architecture, are highly symbolic gestures. They contribute to the generation of revenue on the street, the composition of an urban and national identity and the image of Tunis for foreign audiences. These acts place Tunis outside the traditional conception of postcolonial urbanism that assumes an opposition to colonial legacies, but well within the realm of top-down scripted urban theming or branding; concepts generally considered to be western and relatively postmodern in origin and practice.

Thorough investigation into the complex history of this highly coded streetscape demonstrates that this type of environmental storytelling is not a new phenomenon in Tunis; rather it has been occurring since French colonialists first defined the Avenue’s course a century-and-a-half ago. Expressive of the ideals espoused by an empowered few — European businessmen, consuls, colonial administrators and independent Tunisian

regimes — the site reflects their attempts to not only manage the city's form, but also mold the identities of its users and present themselves collectively to the world at large. It is the physical manifestation of an imagined Tunisois community. The following essay outlines the particular modifications made to the streetscape in the composition of a legible urban icon and indicator of Tunisia's various European, Parisian, Islamic, modern, cosmopolitan and independent socio-political and cultural faces. Factors such as transportation, tourism, international trade, domestic security and linguistics shall be considered in addition to architectural styles, planning practices, historic preservation and academic culture, as all are crucial components of the Avenue's scripted nature.

The general marginalization of Tunis within postcolonial and postmodern studies, the persistence of narrow conceptions of postcolonial urbanism and spatial scripting, as well as major impending changes to the greater city, make this work both appropriate and timely. Drawn from a wide array of historical and contemporary primary and secondary source material, ephemera and personal observation, the essay brings the city into the ongoing scholarly discourse and challenges the predominance of Algiers and Casablanca as unrivaled representatives of French colonial and postcolonial experiences in North Africa. It furthermore presents a nearly complete and well-documented portrait of the historical street, effectively captures the current state of the Avenue, and ultimately lays the foundation for further analysis that may incorporate additional material from the perspective of the Tunisian user, past and present.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native of suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Daniel E. Coslett completed his undergraduate education at Davidson College, North Carolina, in 2005, specializing in Classical Studies and Political Science. His fascination with the built environment of Tunis stems from nine months spent in residence there as a Fulbright scholar and archaeologist (2005–2006). In addition to the history of architecture and urbanism, his interests include antiquity, modernity, languages, travel, coffee, cooking, and details.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASM:	Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis (Association for the Preservation of the Tunis Medina)
EBAT:	Ecole de Beaux-Arts de Tunis (Tunis School of Fine Arts)
ITAAUT:	Institut Technologique d'Art, d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme de Tunis (Technological Institute of Art, Architecture and Urbanism of Tunis)
ENAU:	École Nationale d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme (National School of Architecture and Urbanism)
ANT:	Archives Nationales de Tunisie (National Archives of Tunisia)
TGM:	Tunis-Goulette-Marsa regional rail line
UPM:	Union pour la Méditerranée (Union for the Mediterranean)
EU:	European Union

## PREFACE

Certain terminology relating to the history of the Avenue Bourguiba requires early explanation, both because some readers may be unfamiliar with the material, and also because the wider scholarly discourse has yet to assigned definitions that are universally understood and accepted.

There being no convenient demonym in English for residents of Tunisia's capital, the French term *Tunisois* shall be used as a noun representing city residents and as an adjective in the description of things of Tunis, while "Tunisian," as is standard, shall apply to residents and items on a national scale.

Though Tunisia was technically a French "protectorate" co-governed by both France and the Bey of Tunis ("cheiftan" or "ruler") whose symbolic sovereignty was formally maintained to varying degrees at various points, rather than an outright "colony" of France from 1881 until 1956, it shall be referred to during this period as "colonial" in accordance with commonly accepted usage of the term that reflects minimal differences in actuality.

The use of the term "postcolonial," as the following text shall make clear, is not intended to represent an absolute break in the previous colonial master-subject relationship. Rather it applies to the period following the formal granting of Tunisia's independence in 1956, during which the old power hierarchy has continued to manifest itself strongly in many less overt ways.

Finally, the street studied in this paper, currently known as the "Avenue du Président Habib Bourguiba," has been called several things since its tracing in the 1860's, including the "Promenade de la Marine," the "Avenue de la Marine" and the "Avenue Jules-Ferry." In actuality it has always consisted of

both this street, as well as the much shorter and slightly narrower Avenue de France aligned at its western end. Though named differently these two segments combined create what functions as a single streetscape. Use of the term “Avenue” (with a majuscule “A”), “Avenue Bourguiba,” or other historical name where appropriate, when referencing its form should not be assumed to detach it from the Avenue de France, unless that distinction is explicitly made.

Where conventional French or English equivalents of Arabic terminology or place names exist they will be used to avoid confusion (e.g. Sfax rather than *Safaqis* and Habib Bourguiba instead of *Habib Abu Ruqaiba*). An effort has been made to maintain consistency in the transliteration of Arabic orthography, though particular spellings, when advocated by particular sources, will be maintained. For the sake of clarity and legibility, terms adopted by the English language, such as “medina,” shall also be used in place of the less familiar Arabic or French (*médina*) forms. Finally, translations from French texts, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

D. E. C.

## INTRODUCTION

*Wide highways link Tunis' Carthage International Airport to the city center and the ride between them lasts but a short ten minutes. Skirting along the shores of city's shallow lake, one catches a glimpse of a few tall buildings set amid anonymous whitewashed structures and lofty construction cranes. Barely discernable from the highway, these are the only signs that one approaches the dense core of the historic capital city. One turns right onto the grand Avenue Habib Bourguiba at its eastern end in the shadow of its monumental clock tower. The bustle of the streetscape can overwhelm even the most seasoned traveler or returning resident, as little can prepare one for the throngs of pedestrians, honking horns, and flashy storefronts so abruptly encountered. Deposited on the Avenue's wide sidewalk, one navigates through a forest of ficus trees, lampposts, Morris columns and café tables, in search of his hotel. He seeks direction from the tourists' guidebook he clutches, disoriented by the commotion of his surroundings. Having ducked onto a narrow side street the visitor scans through the few pages devoted to downtown Tunis and finds the listing for the Grand Hôtel de France just beneath the italicized phrase — Avenue Bourguiba, the Champs-Élysées of Tunis.*

The Avenue Habib Bourguiba today lies at the physical and cultural heart of an expanding and decentralizing Tunis, linking the isolated gateway of the de-walled medina to the city's seaside lake or lagoon. Tall trimmed *ficus nitida* line the Avenue's wide central allée and shield it from two lanes of traffic

on both its sides. Lateral sidewalks are again separated from vehicular traffic by a range of smaller trees and host dozens of outdoor café terraces with tables, outward-facing chairs and umbrellas. Balcony-clad buildings, many of which have been recently restored, others of which are currently enjoying such attention, tower over the void created by the airy boulevard and reinforce the streetscape's geometric precision (Figure 0.1).



Figure 0.1. Avenue Habib Bourguiba, Tunis. Aerial photograph (2007).  
(Source: Anon., “Réaménagement de l’Avenue Habib Bourguiba, Tunis,”  
*Architecture méditerranéenne: La Tunisie Moderne* (2007),  
ed. Robert F. C. Khaïat, 97.)

Boutiques, restaurants, coffee shops, theatres and hotel lobbies sit at street level along its entire length, those at its western end set beneath heavy stone arcades. Above all are offices and residences. The majority of the structures that one finds here, in this, the capital's most prestigious of public spaces, date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several,

however, are more recent additions and contribute to the street's visual complexity and historical pastiche of neoclassical, art nouveau, art deco, Modern and postmodern styles. Between trees, lampposts and café tables, matching Morris columns, trashcans and signage fill out the stone-paved ground plane. Opposite the medina's freestanding gateway arch stands a tall clock tower in the shape of a gold-capped obelisk. Set amid jets of water and rows of lofty Tunisian flags it is the visual focal point of the picturesque boulevard.

Fifty-three years of "independence" notwithstanding, one cannot help but sense a pervasive "Frenchness" along Tunis' Avenue Bourguiba. Indeed, comparison of the two boulevards in their present manifestations does reveal substantial similarity in constitution (Figure 0.2).

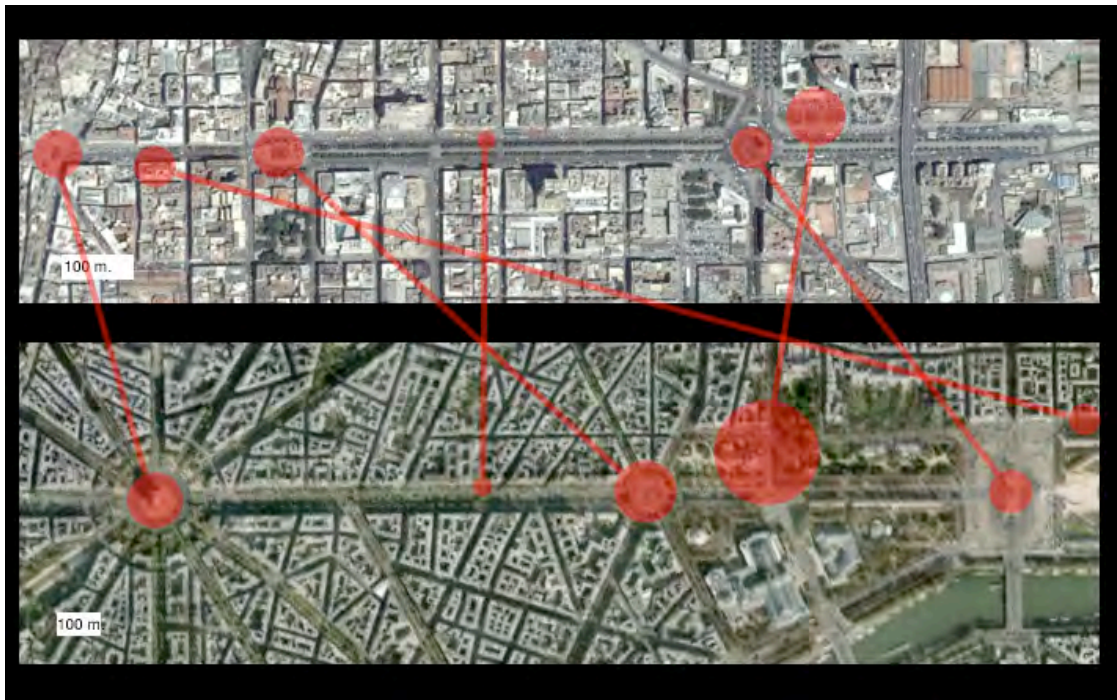


Figure 0.2. Avenue Bourguiba (top) and Champs-Élysées, Paris (bottom).  
Satellite image comparison (2008). Similar features highlighted red.  
(Source: "Google Maps," <maps.google.com>.)

The parities are not all longstanding, however, as, the Tunisois Avenue's environment has been very recently refashioned and refined by the city and national governments. Many of the Parisian-style street signs, ornate lamps and colorful awnings have been installed during the previous decade at public expense. Many of the delicate façades lining the street have been stripped, repainted and restored to their original appearances in that same time. The dynamic streetscape I first encountered five years ago seemed very intentionally crafted to reflect a cleansed view of its colonial origin. The Avenue appeared to have survived as an open-air museum to French urbanism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was inhabited by a diverse array of Tunisian and foreign café patrons, shoppers, strollers and visitors. This space in a way seemed to choreograph the actions of its users, just as the city's elite has continued to stage its appearance.

Historically an essential ingredient in the composition and enactment of urban existence, the street has been the site of public living and a highly coded space wherein one can discern much from the rituals, ideologies and complex process of negotiation between its makers and users.<sup>1</sup> A community presents its own mythological reason for its existence in the pageantry of its streets, as it speaks both to itself and to outsiders, while ideological messages are broadcast from these urban rituals, as those in power strive to legitimize their mythmaking.<sup>2</sup> Streets are thus illustrative of their contexts and are as dynamic as life itself, constantly manipulated by design and performance with

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<sup>1</sup> Zeynep Çelik, et al., "Streets and the Urban Process," in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, eds. Zeynep Çelik, et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), 448.

the shifting interests of a city's elite.<sup>3</sup> Like the rituals themselves, the concerns of the empowered change, but their history and meaning often remain "lodged in the collective memory of its streets," detectable both in physical form as well as greater social cognizance.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, from the lasting traces of the past one can read the "discourse of the street" in its anthropological, political and technical aspects.

In the essay that follows, a detailed description and analysis of the Avenue Bourguiba shall make clear the means by which Tunis' ruling class has sought to create an icon for the capital city, and therefore empire and nation, by intentionally scripting the Avenue through its physical modification. "Scripted spaces," as defined by Norman M. Klein in his popular *The Vatican to Vegas* (2004), are here conceived of as symbolically charged "walk-through or click-through environment[s]...designed to emphasize the viewer's journey — the space between — rather than the gimmicks on the wall."<sup>5</sup> Klein focuses on spaces such as Baroque churches, contemporary casino complexes, theme parks and digital landscapes of the computer age, highlighting the authors' intent and semiotics of their designs. He addresses the choreography of movement through spaces layered with meaning, applied such that the participant/spectator finds himself largely at the mercy of his contrived storytelling surroundings. Indeed, scripted spaces anticipate the progress of the users and ultimately limit their action in what he considers to be "gentle repression posing as free will."<sup>6</sup> False exits and irresistible enticements

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<sup>3</sup> Çelik, "Streets," 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Norman M. Klein, *The Vatican to Vegas: The History of Special Effects* (New York: New Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

virtually hold the trapped audience captive on this physical and figurative journey, influencing their behavior and responding little to their actions.

Of course, as from all scripted spaces, one is ultimately able to make an exit from the Avenue. Here, however, one is unable to escape the streetscape's advanced agenda, as one finds himself surrounded by its image and the pervasive socio-cultural character upon which it is founded and in turn reinforces. Klein's concept shall thus be expanded to address the crafting of spaces that are intensely coded yet less reliant on a prescribed physical path, but maintain a dynamic potency across geographic space and time. Furthermore, I shall consider a more open and diverse urban agglomeration than he does, one that includes public and private spaces, as well as those commercial, residential, religious, civic and ceremonial.

Changing powers, including European businessmen, French colonialists and independent Tunisian regimes, have used the Avenue as a tool for the education and civilization of locals, the comfort of residents, the generation of profit and the fantasy of foreign audiences and tourists. In its buildings, arcades, sidewalks and businesses, the city has sought to define itself through flexible visual and performative terms. They have scripted the Avenue as various characters and staged its form and function to reflect their will. While the Tunis medina has always captivated the minds of outsiders, its perceived disorder and backwardness have rendered it secondary to the Avenue, which remains Tunis' premier spatial emblem — the “living heart” of the capital city.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Commune de Tunis, “Hyper Centre: Avenue Habib Bourguiba,” <[http://www.commune-tunis.gov.tn/fr/visite\\_tunis\\_hypercentre.htm](http://www.commune-tunis.gov.tn/fr/visite_tunis_hypercentre.htm)>.

The source, audience and meaning of the Avenue's scripted nature, as it has changed over the course of the past century-and-a-half, shall thus be considered in light of historical space scripting, contemporary practices in place branding, heritage tourism and commercial urbanism. These ideas have received considerable attention of late and are generally considered to be western phenomena of largely postmodern cultural origin. This essay challenges this narrow conception and illustrates the historic role these practices have played in the generation of not only profit, but of national identities colonial and postcolonial. To these ends the Avenue's development shall be analyzed in three historical periods that capture its pre-colonial and colonial, early independent and contemporary exploitation by the city's managers. To the product of these architects, entrepreneurs and politicians I shall apply the labels "Parisian Colonial," "Tunisian Modern" and "Parisian Cosmopolitan" in an effort to articulate the preferred self-image they have put forward in architectural and urban form. The reinforcement of explicitly colonial-era urban environments by the Tunisian government runs counter to the general opposition to such acts throughout the postcolonial world, and the complex case of Tunis thus challenges the very nature of twenty-first-century "independence."

Civic and social identities have been expressed through architectural projects the world over, and Tunis is certainly not unique in that regard alone. Indeed, political legitimacy has frequently been sought through the creation of identities and the city remains a powerful tool for generation of a precise image, collective memory and therefore a cohesive society. As nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urban planners in Europe recognized "that a city's formal structure and material appearance could signify its civic prowess,

historical achievements, and wholeness of being,” so too did they in Tunis throughout the development of the Avenue.<sup>8</sup> Places and monuments, there as elsewhere, were expected to impart meaning and information across generations, and in turn they generated memory themselves and manipulated civic behavior.<sup>9</sup>

The degree to which the Avenue has been amended to reflect changing dominance in socio-cultural and political affairs, as well as the overt restoration of colonial imagery in a postcolonial context, however, remain noteworthy. Following a period of nationalization at independence, Tunisian authorities have intentionally restored buildings built during the French occupation, installed architecture reminiscent of Parisian structures, and reshaped the boulevard’s layout to facilitate expanded French-style café culture and *flâneurie*. It would appear that the Tunisian city and national governments claiming jurisdiction over the site have engaged in a form state-sanctioned neo-colonialism or what I shall call auto-orientalism or occidentalism. This very intentional act is testament to the pervasive power of the scripting concept as well as the current orientation of postcolonial Tunisian culture. It shall be shown that, though surprising in its self-imposition, this is not out of line with the larger historic process of urban identity formation discernable in the Avenue’s composition.

In an attempt to describe and analyze the historic and contemporary nature of the Avenue Bourguiba I shall attempt to “read” Tunis as an architectural and urban historian, but also as a sort of cultural anthropologist and geographer. Spaces are thus considered not simply as volumes “shaped

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<sup>8</sup> M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

by lived experiences,” but as Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge note, “largely symbolic entities” that are interpreted and constantly reinterpreted as they “interact with social, economic and political institutions” about them.<sup>10</sup> Spiro Kostof’s historiographic approach that considers both “urban form” and “urban function” has also proven to be a model in its blending of contextual concerns that address societal and aesthetic issues.<sup>11</sup> Architectural styles and programs are significant not in and of themselves, but in their relationship to the people that design, build, use and consume them. Thus, the essay that follows shall attempt to consider the built environment and, to the extent presently possible, its human dimension as well as associated images and ideas that transcend the physical realm.

#### The site.

The capital and principal city of the Tunisian Republic, Tunis is located on Africa’s northern coast not far from the site of ancient Carthage. It is home to over 730,000 people, though were one to expand the survey boundaries and include its burgeoning suburbs, the figure would swell to about two million, or nearly a fifth of the country’s citizenry.<sup>12</sup> Historically the residence of a sizable Tunisian Jewish and European population, of course in addition to Tunisian Muslims, today the last account for just shy of one hundred percent of its population. As the seat of national government, major industrial and commercial headquarters, educational and financial institutions, as well as

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Graham, G. J. Ashworth and J. E. Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>11</sup> Spiro Kostof, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History* (New York: Bullfinch, 1993), 9.

<sup>12</sup> 2004 census data. Institut National de la Statistique (Tunisia), “Tunis,” <[http://www.ins.nat.tn/fr/rgph2.1.commune.php?code\\_modalite=24411&Code\\_indicateur=0301007&Submit3=Envoyer](http://www.ins.nat.tn/fr/rgph2.1.commune.php?code_modalite=24411&Code_indicateur=0301007&Submit3=Envoyer)>.

innumerable tertiary services, Tunis' dominance in terms of proportional population comes as little surprise. The destination of choice for most internal migrants, the city continues to grow demographically and physically. The municipality itself had a population growth rate of just over one percent in 2004, while neighboring suburban districts ranged in growth from nearly two to four percent.<sup>13</sup>

Set back from the Mediterranean by a shallow lake (*El Bahira*, "Little Sea" or *Lac de Tunis*) on which are located outer and inner port facilities, Tunis lies between several large hills and is further bounded by two salt lakes to its west and northwest (Figure 0.3). Until the pressures stemming from increased European intervention prompted expansion beyond its walls in the nineteenth century, Tunis had remained an enclosed and fortified city (*medina* and incorporated *faubourgs*) in accordance with fairly traditional Arab urban standards since the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> The soggy plain between the medina and lakeside port, having been the site of defensive installations during the sixteenth-century Ottoman and Spanish sieges (*Nova Arx*) and several other small structures and cemeteries through the mid-nineteenth century, otherwise remained largely open prior to the foundation of the colonial *ville nouvelle* (Figure 0.4).<sup>15</sup> The "new city," centered on the arterial east-west axis formed by the Avenue Habib Bourguiba, has come to fill out the entirety of this zone and even surpassed its natural extent upon reclaimed lakeside land.

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<sup>13</sup> Institut National de la Statistique (Tunisia), "Caractéristiques démographiques de la population," <[http://www.ins.nat.tn/fr/rgph2.php?Code\\_indicateur=0302024](http://www.ins.nat.tn/fr/rgph2.php?Code_indicateur=0302024)>.

<sup>14</sup> Mohamed Sadek Messikh, *Tunis: La Mémoire* (Tunis: Editions du Layeur, 2000), 46.

<sup>15</sup> Some sources incorrectly indicate that the sea covered the plain during the medieval period, hence the name "Bab Bahr" or "Sea Gate" for the medina's easternmost portal. See for example Michael Tomkinson, *Tunisia: A Holiday Guide* (Toronto: General Publishing Company Limited, 1970), 34–35.



Figure 0.3. Greater Tunis. Satellite image (2008).  
 (Source: Based on Google Maps image.)

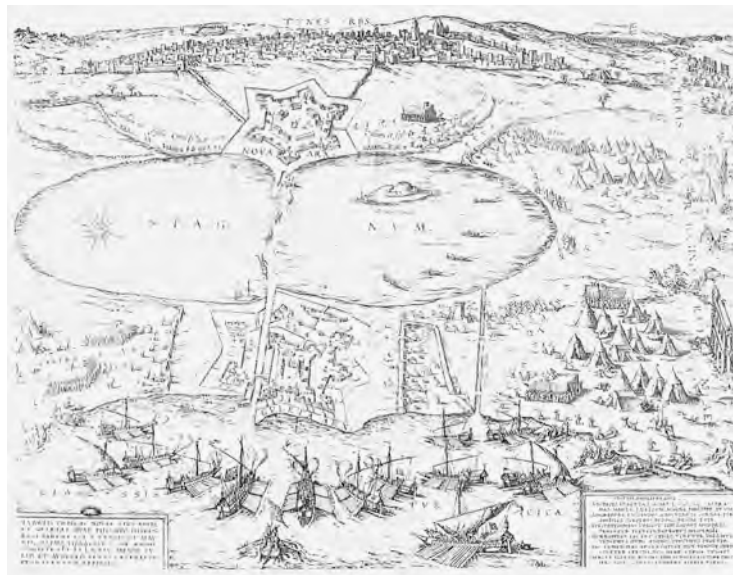


Figure 0.4. Tunis. View from the *Atlas de Braun et Hogenberg*. (1574).  
 (Source: Paul Sebag, *Tunis: Histoire d'une ville* (Paris: L'Harmanttan, 1998), unnumbered plate.)

The Avenue itself, nearly 1.4 kilometers in length, is a broad space consisting of two adjacent sections, including the western Avenue de France portion and the wider and longer Avenue Bourguiba component to the east (Figure 0.5).



Figure 0.5. Avenue Bourguiba, satellite image and plan (2008).  
(Source: Google Maps (top) and bottom based on Municipality of Tunis. *Tunis du XXI Siècle* (Tunis: Municipality of Tunis, 1994), unnumbered appendix.)

The former runs for 300 meters from the *Bab Bahr* (Sea Gate) in the what is now known as the Place de la Victoire, and is almost twenty-seven meters wide from façade to façade. The latter, approximately 1,090 meters long, is

generally about 60.5 meters in total breadth along its straight course.<sup>16</sup> The two segments are joined at an open square (currently known as the Place de l'indépendance), while the latter runs through another (currently the Place du 7 novembre) and ends at a suburban rail station near the city's inner port. The dimensions of the boulevard's lateral sidewalks and central esplanade have fluctuated through the years and shall be discussed in detail below.

#### Purpose of the essay.

This essay seeks to expand the scope (geographically, chronologically and thematically) of current scholarship on postcolonial and postmodern issues through the consultation and analysis of a broad range of source material on a very particular North African urban site. It seeks to not only demarginalize Tunisia by incorporating it into a developing postcolonial discourse still dominated by studies of Algeria, Morocco and India, but in so doing to challenge existing perceptions of both postcolonial and postmodern cultural issues with regard to the built environment. Specifically, the following essay aims to demonstrate that the creation of a particular ambiance, through spatial scripting, in public settings is a phenomenon indicative of, but not exclusive to, the western postmodern condition. Rather, as the essay shall demonstrate, the process has a history in Tunis as old as the Avenue itself. Those in power have always referenced what they considered to be the ideal, whether classical Roman, urbane Parisian, or international Modern through the alteration and installation of built structures. In ways reminiscent of today's designers that attempt to redress the destruction wrought by failed Modernist

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<sup>16</sup> Thus combined the open space of the total armature covers 7.40 hectares. Dimensions come from unnumbered plans appended to Municipality of Tunis, *Tunis du XXI Siècle* (Tunis: Municipality of Tunis, 1994).

urbanism, authorities in Tunis have been crafting a streetscape that reinforces their own views of what the city should look like, shapes how it functions, and thus who city residents are and how they act.

Additionally the essay seeks to contest a view of unanimous opposition to the colonial within postcolonial contexts by presenting the Tunisian state's recent, and compelling, retrospective renovation of the Avenue Bourguiba. Ultimately I shall attempt to create a well-informed portrait of the streetscape's history based on primary and secondary sources, as well as on-site research and observation, that minimizes the inconsistency and ambiguity found in published material on the subject. Lastly, this essay seeks to accurately present the current condition (formal and functional) of the Avenue in anticipation of what will likely be substantial changes to come with major urban projects bound to reduce the socio-cultural and symbolic supremacy of this historically iconic space.

A top-down approach shall be employed in the presentation and analysis of the site, owing to its consistently heavy-handed control and manipulation by Tunis' various administrators throughout its history. Ranging from strongly centralized to dictatorial in all but name, the city's leadership has used the site to both influence the behavior of users and to make statements about itself. This form of control from above, in addition to the site itself, therefore unites the narrative of the following essay and allows one to appreciate the trans-temporal and trans-political nature of the scripting process. Additionally, the Avenue has never been allowed to function as a product of society at large, and as such analysis from a Lefebvrian perspective seems less appropriate at the moment and a potential outgrowth of the present project. However, historians of architecture and urbanism will likely

benefit from this case study which attests to the lasting power of a particular place and the ways in which its subtly amended form and function can be molded to accommodate a diverse array of political agendas as well as cultural needs and expectations.

#### Structure of this essay.

This essay begins with a short review of published literature related to its subject provided in order to both establish its place within the discourse and provide insight into the historiographic methods used in its generation (Chapter 1). Next is an introduction to the history and concepts of nineteenth-century Parisian architecture and urbanism, outlining the context within which colonial Tunis was established (Chapter 2). Three major chapters follow that will each focus on a particular period of the Avenue's development. Each has been framed to capture a particular political phase in the city's administration, as well the scripted space crafted by the elites at that time. Major compositional elements (the roadway itself, individual squares, adjacent structures and transport infrastructure) shall be considered in each era, as shall relevant issues of political, socio-cultural and economic natures. The manners in which accomplished environmental changes reflect the scripting process as currently understood are considered at the end of each chapter, most meaningful only after the particulars have been presented. Chapter 3 focuses on the pre-colonial and colonial eras (1860–1956) during which Europeans established the Avenue and constructed an environment modeled on French precedents, the character of which I label "Parisian Colonial." The early independence era, represented by the years 1956 through 1987, is presented in Chapter 4, and therein I recount the changes made by the

Bourguiba regime towards the re-imagining of the boulevard as “Tunisian Modern.” One encounters the Avenue in its current “Parisian Cosmopolitan” incarnation in Chapter 5, which captures the years 1987 through 2009, but focuses primarily on the 2000–2001 renovation which I consider neo-colonial or occidentalist in nature. This essay concludes with a final chapter (Chapter 6) wherein remarks on the boulevard’s future in light of major urban projects designed to channel attention and capital towards Tunis’ periphery. The role of the Avenue Bourguiba as city icon may in fact be approaching its end as the city government sits poised to quickly rebrand Tunis as a world-class metropolis in association with two major Emirati developments rising both north and south of the old city. Appendices include a chart that depicts major changes made to the streetscape rendered side-by-side in identical scale, in addition to a timeline that chronicles major events in both Tunisia and Tunis, as well as on the Avenue itself.

## CHAPTER 1: ON SOURCES/LITERATURE REVIEW

Piecing together the history of Tunis' architectural and urban development has required the consultation of written and visual sources, as well as personal site investigation on several occasions. As Tunisia remains relatively marginalized within current scholarship on architectural, urban and social history, one is compelled to sort through limited historical primary and secondary documents, many of which offer limited treatment of the subject here considered, conflicting and contradictory insights, and not infrequently, reprinted data that is simply incorrect. Thus a substantial amount of effort has been put towards teasing out an historically accurate portrayal of Tunis' past from sources both of considerable breadth and specificity. To these ends, archival resources (plans, correspondence, photographs, &c.), travel literature and government documentation (French colonial and Tunisian), in addition to popular media (newspapers, postcards, &c.), interviews and secondary literature on related sites and topics have all been analyzed and cross-referenced in an effort to limit ambiguity to the highest degree possible. The resulting urban portrait, though not yet as precise as one might prefer in a few areas, is fairly comprehensive and well documented through this diverse array of source material.

Historically, Tunisia has been the subject of sporadic scholarship inspired by major events such as its occupation by France in 1881, independence in 1956 and the deposition of the country's first president in 1987. Most of these works focus on the noteworthy political and economic aspects of Tunisia's history, such as Jean Ganiage's *Les origines du protectorat Français en Tunisie* (1959), often relegating the evolution of Tunis'

architecture and central avenue to footnote if not complete obscurity. That having been said, several older volumes have considered the built environment of Tunis explicitly, such as C. H. Roger Dessort's *Histoire de la ville de Tunis* (1926). These sources, probably intended for contemporary French audiences, come not without considerable biases and tend to focus on the city's medina rather than the colonial-era *ville nouvelle*, the former having been frequently subject to orientalizing representation, the latter often described in a colonialist's self-congratulatory manner.

Tunisia as a whole has likewise received relatively little attention within contemporary French, Tunisian and Anglo publications, J. Kenneth Perkins' *History of Modern Tunisia* (2004) being a noteworthy exception to this general trend.<sup>1</sup> This text, one of relatively few written in English, focuses on the social and political aspects of the nation's past, and as such has proven to be helpful in contextualizing its built environment.

Within the disciplines of architectural and urban history, however, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt remain the primary focus of most writing on North Africa, while ever-popular India continues to captivate students of colonial and postcolonial urbanism farther abroad. Gwendolyn Wright's *Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (1991) illustrates further the peripheral placement of Tunisia within the greater scholarly discourse. A seminal work that considers intersections of modernity, politics, and experimental urbanism within the French Empire, it focuses almost exclusively on Indochina, Morocco and Madagascar. Attempting to account for all three regions of France's dominion (Asia, the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa), Wright presents Morocco as the

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Alexander's forthcoming *Tunisia* (Routledge, 2010) looks to be a promising addition to this limited comprehensive literature.

synecdoche for all North Africa — perhaps an inevitable distillation necessitated by the sheer quantity and diversity of data in such an ambitious study. Theoretical issues, such as those of cultural association and racial segregation, by Wright analyzed specifically in these countries, can and shall be considered in this essay with regard to Tunisia as well.

François Béguin's *Arabisances* (1982) is an earlier work that begins to incorporate Tunisian colonial architecture into the larger discussion of French North Africa. In considering the symbolic power of colonialist design across the region, Béguin presents the nuanced nature of arabesque forms over time among constituent nations, highlighting differences in location, intent and effectiveness. This important text includes not only Moroccan and Algerian examples, but also many from throughout Tunisia, as well as a brief section on the Avenue Bourguiba itself. Çelik's *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters* (2008) continues to redress this persistent void in western contemporary literature through its investigation of symbolic architecture in the French and Ottoman empires. Algeria and Tunisia, both Ottoman provinces before coming under the control of France in the nineteenth century, are considered as grounds for overlapping and conflicting policies and practices, and are in this book carefully presented and analyzed alongside cities in Ottoman Arabia. As in *Arabisances*, the crafting of public spaces that reflect shifting political relationships is central here, and Tunis is commendably incorporated.

In attempting to begin work towards these types of contextual urban investigation, particulars relating to the built environment of Tunisia's capital have been culled additionally from the few more comprehensive volumes on the city's history, such as Jellal Abdelkafi's *La Médina de Tunis* (1989) and

Paul Sebag's encyclopedic *Tunis: Histoire d'une ville* (1998). Additional insight has come in more recent years from select chapters in larger edited volumes and short books on the subject such as Pierre-Arnaud Barthel's *Tunis en projet(s): La fabrique d'une metropole au bord de l'eau* (2006), Serge Santelli's *Le Creuset Méditerranéen* (1995) and Justin McGuinness and Zoubeïr Mouhli's, *Tunis: 1800–1950* (2004). Continuing older trends, these newer pieces are authored primarily by French and Tunisian academics and generally in the French language. Though they tend to gloss over details such as historical events and the formal evolution of particular structures to a large degree, they do make helpful contributions to the study of very recent peripheral development projects and local preservation efforts from perspectives both foreign and domestic.

A final body of published literature one finds increasingly available in Tunisian bookstores includes quite a few volumes that appear to target tourists and those casually interested in the capital's history. Generally written or edited by locals or French individuals in French (though a few have been translated into English), these image-heavy works tend to include relatively little explanatory text, and on occasion, information that is contradicted by other established publications or archival research. Hafedh Boujmil's *A Tunisian Journey* (2008), Philippe Lamarque's *La Tunisie d'Antan* (2007) and Mohamed Sadek Messikh's *Tunis: La Mémoire* (2000) are but a few of these books that perpetuate a sense of provocative nostalgia through historic images that are unfortunately documented rather haphazardly, though at times instructive.

Focusing on the specific subject of this project, the Avenue Bourguiba itself has received some dedicated literary attention since its renovation nearly

a decade ago. Fatma Ben Becher's concise publication on the history of the Avenue Bourguiba, *Tunis: Histoire d'une Avenue* (2003) is much like the more consumer-friendly type book previously mentioned. Glossy and well illustrated, it does not address the full social, political and economic complexities surrounding this most significant urban space as much as one might like. It does, however, serve as a fair introduction to the streetscape and reflects local interest in the subject. More academic articles appearing in national newspapers and European professional journals, such as Leïlla Ammar's "Le projet d'embellissement de l'hyper centre: de l'Avenue Bourguiba" (2002), though less concerned with greater historical issues, have proven quite helpful in understanding its present form.

In great contrast to the above, several doctoral dissertations by French and Tunisian academics completed within the past decade have focused exclusively on Tunis' colonial architecture and urbanism. These indicate that serious scholarship on the subject appears to be of increasing popularity. A volume based on Pierre Signoles's 1980 dissertation ("Tunis: Evolution et fonctionnement de l'espace urbain") provides helpful information on the city's function at that time, but unfortunately deals little with its actual structural environment. Leïla Ammar (whose 2005 survey, *Histoire de l'Architecture en Tunisie*, is particularly helpful with pre-colonial material) recently completed her dissertation in Paris on the establishment of Tunisois streets during the French era. Similarly, Christophe Guidice has examined several neighborhoods of the French colonial city and the actors involved in their establishment, maintenance, and at this point, degradation. Unfortunately Ammar's "*La rue à Tunis réalités permanences, transformations, de l'espace urbain à l'espace public, 1835–1935*" (Univ. de Paris VIII-Vincennes-Saint-

Denis, 2007) and Guidice's "*La construction de Tunis « ville européenne » et ses acteurs de 1860 à 1945*" (Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2006) remain unattainable at this point. Fortunately, however, major components of these works have been published in articles elsewhere and have proven helpful in shedding light on their respective topics.

Thus, one can see that serious academic analysis of the architecture and urban history of Tunis, though relatively scant, is improving in quantity and quality, particularly in comparison to more extensive work available on cities such as Algiers and Casablanca. Focused scholarship on Tunisia's capital that does exist remains well established within French and Tunisian academia, with occasional interjections by scholars from Anglo-American perspectives. Locally-produced materials, whose intended audience appears to be tourists and casually interested readers, despite its less than ideal historiography, has been of some utility in this present undertaking.

Published information, whether primary, secondary, historic, contemporary, academic or popular, has thus been insufficient for the completion of this project that is as much about dates and plans as public usage patterns and spatial animation. Initial fieldwork that was conducted informally in Tunis in 2006 has been complemented by more focused research that was subsequently completed as a Cornell University student during the summer of 2008 and most recently on a short trip in March 2009. Extensive observation, photography and mapping, as well as archival research at the Tunisian National Archives (ANT), and interviews with preservationists and architects at the *Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis* (ASM) proved invaluable in the gathering of elusive data and the thorough documentation of the Avenue Bourguiba in its current incarnation. Postcards,

maps, brochures and other ephemera have also been collected on site and contributed to the project.

Finally, recent works by Zeynep Çelik (*Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule*, 1997), Jean Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb (*Casablanca: Colonial Myths and Architectural Ventures*, 2002) warrant specific recognition in light of the present project. These two books offer concentrated analysis of Algiers and Casablanca in a fashion yet to be effectively applied to the Tunis — a city with respectively a less violent history, less cinematic-inspired glamour, and generally less international gravitas. Having escaped violent resistance and brutal repression the likes of which others endured during World War II and the struggle for independence, Tunisians and their capital have not received the attention that Casablanca and Algiers have received. Major films such as *Casablanca* (1942) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) reflect the privileging of these two places, their general dominance of scholarly literature on colonial North African history being indicative of their sustained mythical status. Çelik, Cohen and Eleb's works reinforce the primacy of their subjects, though they do effectively deepen one's understanding of them. As well-researched architectural urban portraits, their publications do, however, represent serious work on the region's colonial built environments, and thus have proven helpful in understanding the greater context of the French Maghreb and impressive models for such a substantial study on Tunis.

Speculation as to the causes underlying Tunisia's continued marginalization remains somewhat baffling, as the problem appears to be a systemic one that relates to social and political studies of contemporary Tunisia as much as it does to historic modern Tunisia. Though Carthaginian

and Roman Tunisia have always been popular subjects, particularly for European scholars, the country remains in the shadows of developing contemporary discussion of the region despite impressive standards of living, education, and domestic stability today. Former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan's 1998 remark that Tunisia was "one of the few countries in the world that served as an international model" stands at odds with its persistent obscurity.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it has been pointed out that those in search of a national role model, following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, wherein modernization is encouraged, economic systems provide appropriately, women's rights are protected, politics are liberalizing and international dialogues are pursued, failed to recognize Tunisia as such.<sup>3</sup> Its government welcomes the study of the nation's complicated past, including the colonial period, and encourages engagement with the West and the acquisition of foreign language skills. One would imagine that in the absence of a strong postcolonial reactionary disposition, there appears to be no institutional or political reason for Tunisia's chronic anonymity.<sup>4</sup>

Just as texts on Parisian architecture and urban culture of the nineteenth century are numerous (see works by Susannah Barrows, David Harvey and Vanessa Schwartz among others), so too are works on environmental scripting, theming and branding. The latter generally focus on Western, postmodern urban centers, such as London, New York, Baltimore and Boston, giving one the impression, which I seek to counter here, that this is an exclusively contemporary, corporate and Western phenomenon as the

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<sup>2</sup> Georgie Anne Geyer, *Tunisia: Journey Through a Country that Works* (London: Stacey International, 2003), 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 and 78.

related literature seems to indicate. Norman M. Klein's *The Vatican to Vegas* (2004), as I shall, demonstrates that spatial scripting predates intensely commercialized place branding — its most recent and capitalistic outgrowth — while Françoise Chaoy's *The Invention of the Historic Monument* (1992) provides a critical perspective on the place of architectural and urban patrimony in historical and contemporary environments. Anna Klingmann's *Brandscapes* (2007), Scott A. Lukas' *The Themed Space* (2007), Michael Sorkin's *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992) and David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) all represent this major trend in contemporary thought on themed settings and globalized consumption, and each has been considered extensively in the essay that follows.

Thus much remains to be done with regard to the study of Tunis' architectural and urban history. Careful research into the city's particulars not only facilitates a richer understanding of North Africa's past and present, but also allows one to diversify the scope of literature on (post)colonial and (post)modern urban issues into non-western and historical materials. Within the context of colonial architecture studies, it seems unacceptable that so few examples (Algiers, Casablanca, Delhi, &c.) should be allowed to represent an entire field of study, the complexity of which surely surpasses the limited state of contemporary scholarship. Tunis' history is not identical to those of its colonized peers and thus is worthy of its own dedicated consideration. Furthermore the city provides a diverse array of materials for the study of contemporary issues of postcolonial and postmodern significance within a largely unexplored context. It may also facilitate the reconsideration of popular sites such as Algiers, for example. Çelik, in her comprehensive portrait of that

city (*Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*) presents it as a city defined predominantly by conflict and division between colonizer and colonized. Though surely valid, more may be still be gleaned from the situation were it to be considered in the more historically continuous manner and from a wider range of data as here done. When explored within its greater context, the close study of a particular streetscape, rather than such a large urban agglomeration, may also help one to more completely grasp the complex issues and events that have shaped the metropolis.

This survey of literature on Tunis thus confirms that a study such as the following has yet to be undertaken or published. Though admittedly limited in its scope and data set (primarily due to constraints imposed by time and linguistic fluency), it provides a template for the analysis of other cities and sites, as well as a foundation for further work on Tunis and the Avenue Bourguiba.

## CHAPTER 2: PARISIAN PRECEDENTS

In order to fully appreciate the context within which colonial Tunis was planned and developed during its early years, one must be aware of nineteenth-century Paris and “the most able of a new breed of urban planners,” Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann.<sup>1</sup> One need only glance at the contemporary state of affairs in France’s prosperous capital to see very obvious correlation between the built environments of the metropole and periphery, and beyond. Indeed Haussmann’s influence surpassed even the frontiers of his nation’s empire, as by the end of his career as Prefect of Paris (1853–1870) his accomplishments had thoroughly transformed not only France’s capital but also influenced work in Tunis, Algiers, Lyon, Brussels, Istanbul and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> More particularly, one can find spaces evocative of the Champs-Élysées in Philadelphia, Buenos-Aires and Bangkok, Rivoli arcades in Algiers, Corfu, Turin and Cairo, and broad Haussmannian incisions in Algiers, Brussels and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>3</sup> Though the urban fabric of Tunis was not subject to the merciless incisions imposed upon Paris and Algiers, its creation *ex nihilo* in the midst of Haussmann’s career, and the space it became, does reflect his theoretical principles and tastes.

As Haussmann’s aesthetics have been linked to eighteenth-century neoclassicism, in particular his propensity for long vistas, monumental terminuses, uniform facades and architectural embellishment, so too can be

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<sup>1</sup> Spiro Kostof, “His Majesty’s pick: The aesthetics of destruction,” Çelik, et al., eds., *Streets*, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>3</sup> André Lortie, *Paris s’exporte* (Paris: Editions du Pavillon de l’Arsenal, Picard Editeur, 1995), 16–19.

his interest in the tree-lined boulevard.<sup>4</sup> The product of several different types of tree and street compositions, nineteenth-century landscaped boulevards brought the verdant calm of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century processional routes and promenade spaces to the more functional landscaped avenue of expanding cities during the mid-eighteenth century (Figure 2.1).

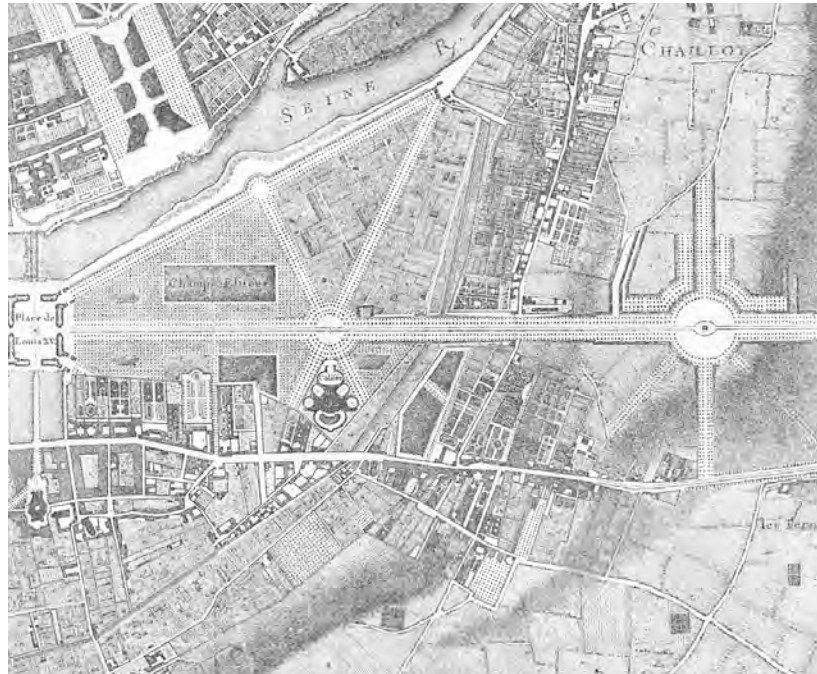


Figure 2.1. The Champs-Élysées, plan (1780).  
(Source: Christiane Corty Neave, *L'Etoile* (Paris: Le Soleil, 1966), 22.)

The development of the *grands boulevards* on the site of razed ramparts during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in addition to the installation of dedicated sidewalks during the 1830's further set the stage for Haussmann's later work.<sup>5</sup> The Porte Saint-Denis, erected as a free-standing monument by Louis XIV in 1672 on the former site of the city walls, was

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<sup>4</sup> Henry W. Lawrence, "Origins of the Tree-Lined Boulevard," *Geographical Review* 78 no. 4 (1988): 355.

<sup>5</sup> Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 18–20.

landscaped at this time and helped establish a standard for later improvement projects (Figure 2.2).<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2.2. Porte St. Denis, Paris, engraving (ca. late 19<sup>th</sup> century).  
(Source: Henry W. Lawrence, “Origins of the Tree-Lined Boulevard,”  
*Geographical Review* 78 no. 4 (1988): 345.)

Hausmann’s planting of trees in rows along major urban rights of way is therefore not without precedent, but took on a new monumentality in its consistency and wide application during the Second Empire, both when inserted into the city’s existing fabric and appended to its periphery. This landscaping provided shade, visual interest as a counterpoint to “hard” ironwork and masonry, and was believed to contribute to the overall hygienic improvement of the city (otherwise achieved through subterranean sewer services) (Figure 2.3).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence, “Origins,” 370–372.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. See also Allen B. Jacobs et al., *The Boulevard Book* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 74–81.

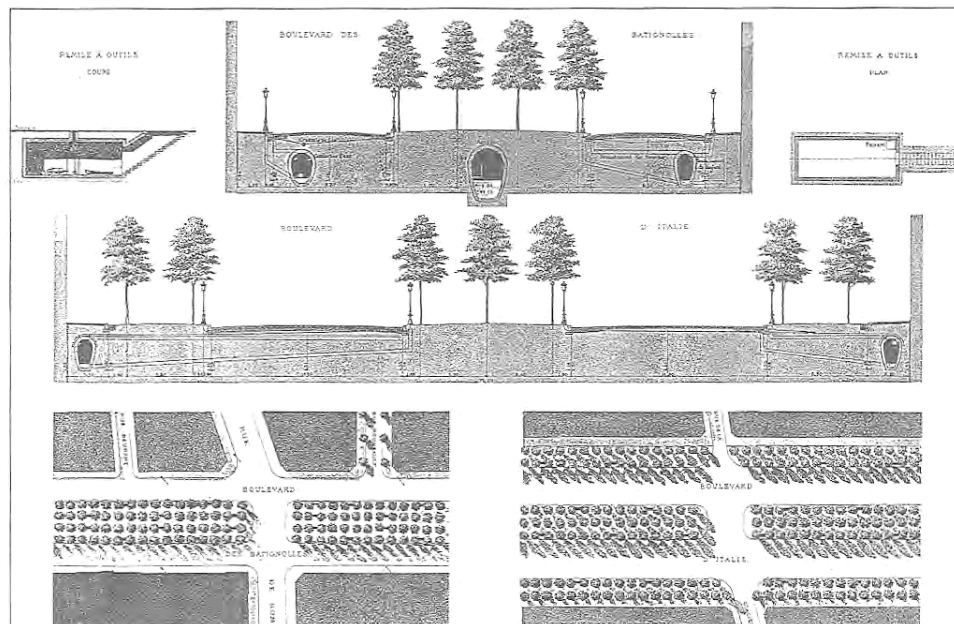


Figure 2.3. Boulevards Batignolles (top/left) and d'Italie (bottom/right), Paris. Plan and section (ca. mid 19<sup>th</sup> century).

(Source: Spiro Kostof, "His Majesty's pick: The aesthetics of destruction," in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, eds. Zeynep Çelik, et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 14.)

The façades lining his boulevards were executed in a simplified Baroque manner, complementary if not exactly uniform, and consistent in their usage of balconies, a high degree of fenestration, sloped mansard roofs and sculpted stone decoration. Ground levels were lined with shops, cafés and restaurants and fronted wide sidewalks, Morris columns, lampposts, benches and of course trees. The regularly arcaded façades of the Rue de Rivoli, begun by Napoleon I and extended by Haussmann, offer a variation on his typical "street-wall" and gained wide acclaim, housing many of the city's finest commercial establishments (Figure 2.4). The uniformity of new architecture and street furniture thus facilitated the visual and symbolic singularity of

monuments, isolated and made central within the reconfigured urban framework.



Figure 2.4. Rue de Rivoli, Paris. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Haussmann's disengagement of the Notre Dame cathedral, the Arc de Triomphe and the Tour Saint-Jacques from their accumulated surroundings are but three examples of this "fixing" and framing of historic relics as visual focal points and repositories of communal memory within the rapidly modernizing city.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, existing structures, such as the *Hôtel de Ville* and *Panthéon* joined new ones, such as train stations and the *Palais Garnier* as major nodes within the rationalized street network of the new Paris.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> Lauren M. O'Connell, "Afterlives of the Tour Saint-Jacques: Plotting the Perceptual History of an Urban Fragment," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 no. 4 (2001), 450.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Saalman, *Haussmann: Paris Transformed* (New York: George Braziller, 1971), 17 and Norma Evenson, *Paris: A Century of Change: 1878–1978* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979.), 22.

“contemplation of monuments of the past” and present was thus to be facilitated by their liberation from later accretions and thoughtful sitting.<sup>10</sup> City residents, therefore, would be able to retain a connection to their communal heritage in these sites, framed as Haussmann (and later preservation officials) saw fit, in the midst of unprecedented social, economic, and political change through which a “modern” Paris divested itself of its restrictive and unsightly inheritance.<sup>11</sup> Parts of Paris’ urban fabric were deemed expendable to these ends, the city living, having yet to be totally frozen in time as an “autonomous patrimonial object.”<sup>12</sup>

Haussmann’s boulevards had two main functions: as places to live, shop, consume and socialize in accordance with new standards of bourgeois living, and as connective corridors facilitating the efficient movement of people and goods between significant points throughout the city (Figure 2.5).<sup>13</sup> Clearly linked, these two functions made for quite a spectacular scene. Against the stolid backdrop of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and other major Haussmannian streets, one witnessed the playing out of the *fête impériale*; “everywhere joy, moneymaking, debauchery; everywhere the assurance of tomorrow’s daily bread; everywhere frenetic outbursts of vitality.”<sup>14</sup> These streets became the unrivaled theatrical or performative venue for public leisure, consumption, and the display of affluence; spaces in which “the fetish of the commodity reigned supreme,” where the fashionable ladies, dandies

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<sup>10</sup> Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, trans. Lauren M. O’Connell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, 117–121. The protection of historic monuments in France was legalized first in 1887, the statutes and process highly centralized and subsequently setting precedents for much of Europe. See *ibid.*, 96–99.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>13</sup> Saalman, *Haussmann*, 14, and Kostof, “Majesty,” 18.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “Paris Spleen,” in David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

and *flâneurs* of Baudelaire and Simmel thrived.<sup>15</sup>

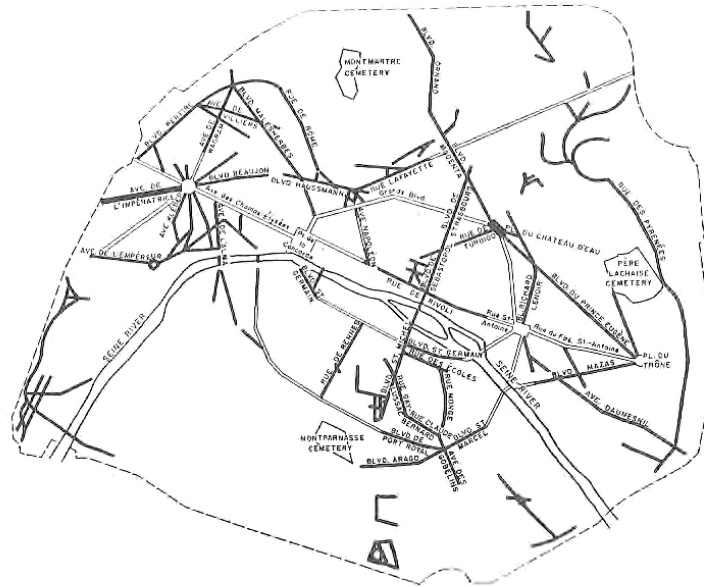


Figure 2.5. Additions to the Paris street network, 1850–1870. Plan.  
(Source: Howard Saalman, *Haussmann: Paris Transformed*  
(New York: George Braziller, 1971), fig. 15.)

Contemporary popular press and travel literature reinforced these local impressions of what Vanessa Schwartz calls a definitive “boulevard culture.”<sup>16</sup> Baedeker’s 1888 guide to Paris referred to the picturesqueness of its streets, the width of its new sidewalks and the exhilarating animation of these “outdoor living area[s] for the city” and sites of “all-day circus[es] and fair[s] accessible to everyone.”<sup>17</sup> Edmondo de Amicis, visiting from Italy in 1878, is similarly stunned by “the wide streets, the double rows of trees, the cheerful-looking houses,” the elegance of façades and the “air of pleasure” discernable in the dynamic “green open place[s]” of Paris.<sup>18</sup> The manner in which the changing

<sup>15</sup> Harvey, *Paris*, 216.

<sup>16</sup> Schwartz. *Spectacular*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Anon., *Baedeker Guide to Paris and Environs* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1888), 48.

<sup>18</sup> Edmondo de Amicis in Evenson, *Paris*, 2.

quotidian was rendered spectacular and sensational in the city's new parks, cafés, restaurants and department stores was the true indicator of urban modernity and quintessentially Parisian (Figure 2.6).<sup>19</sup>



Figure 2.6. Life on “Les Champs-Élysées.” Drawing (ca. 1860).  
(Source: Roland Pozzo di Borgo, *Les Champs-Élysées: Trois Siècles d’Histoire* (Paris: Martinière, 1997),141.)

The most “characteristic fixture” of nineteenth-century Paris, by contemporary and current consensus, was the boulevard café.<sup>20</sup> Baron Haussmann’s major urban projects inducted the masses (bourgeois and poor) into café culture by opening café spaces out onto the sidewalks of his many grand boulevards, making them “the primary theater[s] of everyday life in

<sup>19</sup> Schwartz. *Spectacular*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> François Fosca, *Histoire des Cafés de Paris* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1934), 132.

nineteenth-century France.”<sup>21</sup> The social environment his efforts facilitated broke the box of preexisting café architecture, as outdoor seating spaces would hence function as institutionalized interstitial zones wherein the pageantry and public spectacle of the time could be engaged, and not just looked at from within (Figure 2.7).

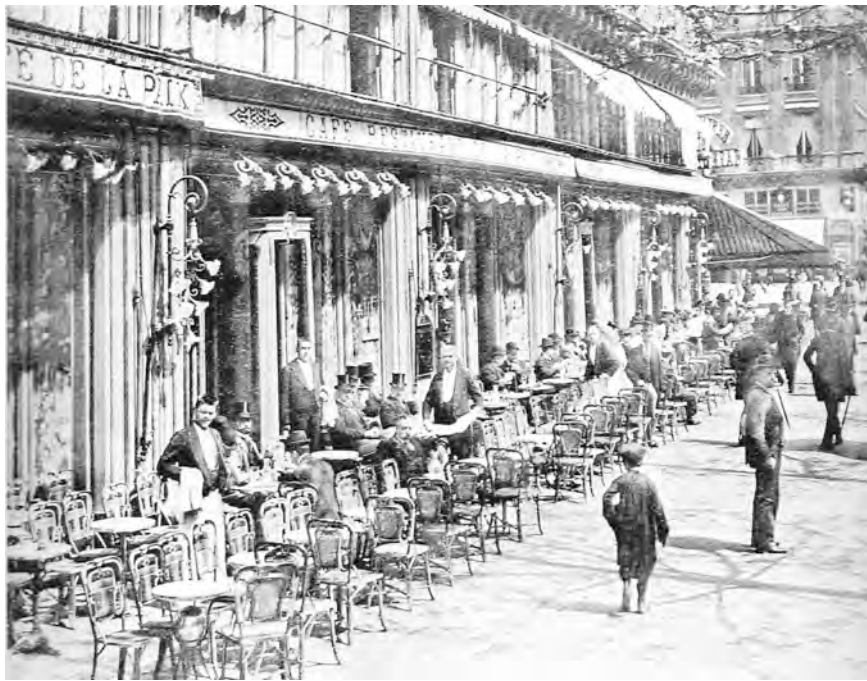


Figure 2.7. Café de la Paix, Paris. Exterior photograph (ca. 1900).  
(Source: Jean Claude Bologne, *Histoire des cafés et des cafetiers*  
(Paris: Larousse), 216.)

An 1883 Paris guide advised that the “best way to attend the spectacle...is to take your stall at the door of one of the many cafés on the boulevard[s]...and while savoring your coffee or your grog, look with your own eyes.”<sup>22</sup> People

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<sup>21</sup> Susanna I. Barrows, "Nineteenth-Century Cafés: Arenas of Everyday Life," in *Pleasures of Paris: Daumier to Picasso*, ed. Barbara Stern Shapiro (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1991), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Anon., *Paris en Poche: Guide Conty* (Paris: Maison Conty, 1883), 148, cited in Schwartz, *Spectacular*, 23.

listened to the pageantry of modern life as well. From the crowded terraces, one could hear “the spirit with which the small and big happenings of the day are recounted—urbane scandal, artistic productions, legislative discussions, financial disasters” in addition to the sounds of street life themselves.<sup>23</sup> The patron’s presence at “a reserved seat in the street, a sort of comfortable sofa-corner in the great common parlor” of Europe rendered the boundaries between audience and performer, public and private, indistinct.<sup>24</sup>

France’s turbulent history provides countless examples illustrative of scripting complexities that predate postmodernism. Though France’s entire revolutionary experience has been cited as a series of major national rebrandings (*Monarchic, Revolutionary, Imperial, Republican, &c.*), the work of Baron Haussmann during the nineteenth century stands out as one with unprecedented cultural and physical ramifications.<sup>25</sup> Industrialization, hygiene, security and transportation concerns all had clear commercial implications in his well-published accomplishments in Paris, but the “scenographic reassembly of urban components” of the city itself was as much an indicator of modernization and progressive cultural changes as an economic program.<sup>26</sup> Here, in the “first class-driven ‘theme-parking’ of a major metropolis,” the urban fabric itself was thoroughly and strategically adjusted to spur growth but also to reinvent the image of the city.<sup>27</sup> Haussmann’s iconic boulevards presented the “continuous face of middle-class jollity and frivolity” and were

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<sup>23</sup> Alexis Martin, *Paris: Promenades des 20 Arrondissements* (Paris, 1890), cited in Schwartz, *Spectacular*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Kaufman, *Paris of To-Day*, cited in Shapiro, *Pleasures*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Wally Olins, “Branding the nation — the historical context,” *Brand Management* 9 no. 4–5 (April 2002): 242–243.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 131.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* and Anna Klingmann, *Brandscapes* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 273.

designed to be gazed upon and from.<sup>28</sup> They were nothing if not stage sets for bourgeois spectacle based on consumption and radically changed socio-cultural arrangements.

Turning to the Tunisian capital, with its profound links to Paris, one sees this mix of commercial and socio-cultural interests in the actions of its elites both historically and at present. Though advertisements (still being developed) and economic concerns are of course relevant in the case of Tunis, the more socio-cultural and architectural components of the city's spatial identity are most compelling in the past decade. Recent renovations of the Avenue Bourguiba, as all have been, were clearly inspired by a desire to improve commercial performance at the city's center, but they were equally motivated by an interest in the capital's image and place within global tourist, cultural, commercial and political networks. This is not a wholly new phenomenon, as shall be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, as Haussmann's Paris served as the model of choice for his colonialist contemporaries and their successors in Tunis. The spaces they have scripted since then continue to look like those of Paris, the widely acclaimed nineteenth-century "capital of modernity," and there facilitated activity in a very similar manner, just as they still do.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sorkin, 131.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, *Paris*.

### CHAPTER 3: PARISIAN COLONIAL (1860–1956)

*Accompanied by the trumpet and drum, row upon row of smartly uniformed soldiers process in perfect unison to and from, up and down, Tunis' wide Avenue Jules-Ferry on this 14 July 1909. Streets and squares are lined with cheering crowds and hundreds of additional soldiers, gendarmes and firemen — all standing motionless at attention. The linearity of this grand choreography reflects the layout of the new city with its perpendicular roads, ranks of trimmed trees and stately façades. Only billowing French tricolors defy the pervasive rigidity on display this morning. Upon this carefully crafted urban stage awards are given before France's local Resident General and Tunisian Bey following a joint review of the assembled regiments and performances of the Marseillaise and Beylical Hymn. One might easily overlook the fact that this citywide showcase of military pomp, stunning in its complexity, scale and exactitude, has been organized ostensibly to commemorate the storming of Bastille (Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité!) rather than the triumphant mastery of a foreign people. Vive la France! (Figure 3.1)<sup>1</sup>*

From an account of the 1909 Bastille Day celebrations one can appreciate an early distillation of French dominance in Tunis during the protectorate period of occupation (1881–1956). The role of the administrative elite, their concerns and acts, the environment and ambiance they sought to

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from Çelik, *Empire*, 234–235, whose account of the day are based on *Division d'Occupation de Tunisie*, "Ordre particulier no. 8, 11 July 1909.

promote, and the audience to whom they presented themselves, can all be discerned from the events of 14 July.

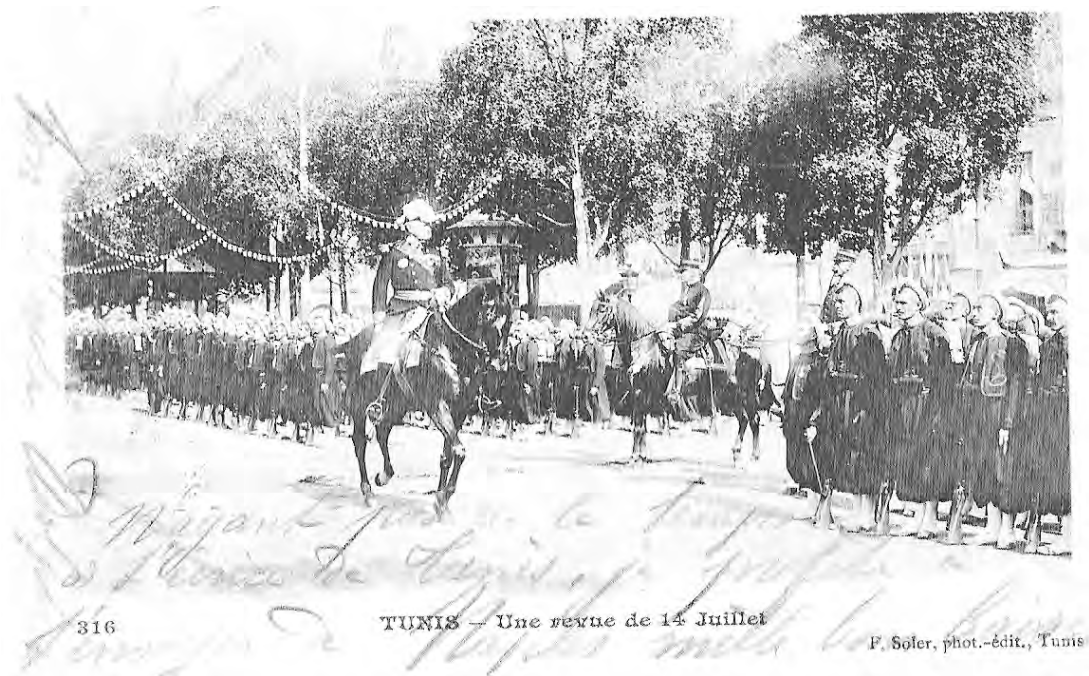


Figure 3.1. Bastille Day celebrations, Tunis. Postcard (ca. early 20<sup>th</sup> century).  
(Source: Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008), 235.)

The carefully planned parades that so animated the *ville nouvelle* made clear to all that Tunis was an orderly, powerful, and above all French, construction. Though still a relatively new city, built largely *ex nihilo*, it was firmly rooted in the traditions of western architecture and urbanism, and therefore both familiar to, and comfortable for, expatriate residents and visitors alike. In contrasting with the pre-existing medina this space further functioned as a lesson in rational urban design and civilized living. Its neoclassical façades, tree-lined sidewalks, monumental statues, public lighting and ostentatious spectacles were all individual components of the greater *mission civilatrice* and the “Parisian colonial” image promoted by the French administration. The Avenue

Jules-Ferry (before 1900 the “Avenue de la Marine”), so central to these Bastille Day ceremonies, functioned thus much like Paris’ grand Avenue des Champs-Élysées, not just on this annual holiday, but every day.

European influences upon the cityscape of Tunis predate the formal establishment of the French protectorate in 1881 by several decades. The economic and political interests of a growing expatriate mercantile community had in many ways been expressed through architecture and urban planning since the 1830’s. Consular offices, businesses, residences and Christian churches, all built to accommodate foreign newcomers, were all installed at the eastern edge of the walled medina near the *Bab Bahr* (Sea Gate) and Place de la Bourse (Figure 3.2).<sup>2</sup> The *quartier franc* thus took on a very European ambiance, its multi-story buildings hosting individuals of Maltese, Italian and French origin (Figure 3.3). Neoclassical detailing, large glazed windows and exterior balconies further distinguished these structures from the more simple, squat and internalized types that filled out the rest of the medina and its two enclosed *faubourgs*. The socio-cultural center of the city’s increasingly dominant demographic, by the 1840’s and 1850’s, was thus already shifting away from the central Zitouna mosque eastward toward the increasingly mutable periphery. Visitors who encountered this district first, having disembarking at the city’s port and crossed the low swampy plain between the water and walls, thus experienced a bifurcated Tunis even at this early stage.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> M. Marcel Gandolphe, “La vie à Tunis: 1840—1881,” in *Histoire de la ville de Tunis*, ed. C.-H. Roger Dessort (Algiers: Emile Pfister, 1926), 161.

<sup>3</sup> Jellal Abdelkafi, *La Médina de Tunis: Espace Historique* (Paris: Alif, 1989), 57.

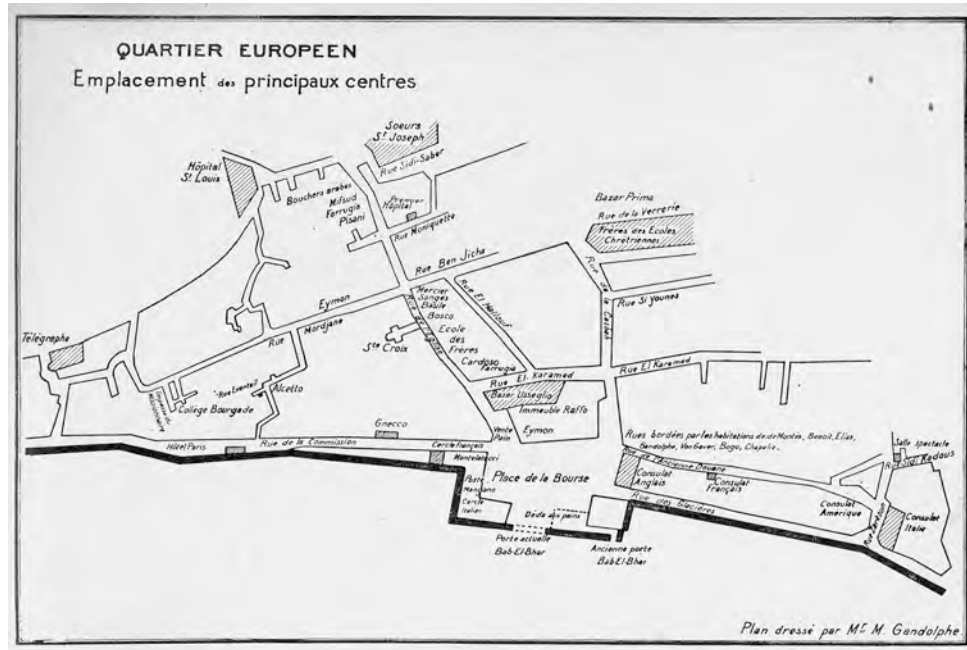


Figure 3.2. European Quarter, Tunis medina. Plan (ca. 1860).  
 (Source: C.-H. Roger Dessort, "Protectorat français," in *Histoire de la ville de Tunis*, ed. C.-H. Roger Dessort (Algiers: Emile Pfister, 1926), 184.)



Figure 3.3. Architecture on the ex-Place de la Bourse, Tunis medina.  
 Photograph (2009). Left is Raffo Building and Right is ex-British Consulate.  
 (Source: Dana Elborno.)

The reign of Ahmed Bey (1837–1855) saw substantial internal reforms that not only reinforced ties to European economic and political affairs, but also granted significant concessions to foreign interests and enterprises that further changed the way Tunis looked and functioned. Courting relationships with ambitious British and French consuls (respectively Richard Woods and Léon Roches), as well as those of Italy, this “progressive” ruler sought to bring higher education, military training and international trade more in line with western standards, and in so doing began a process that would eventually cripple the government with massive debt burdens and domestic instability and thus European dependency.<sup>4</sup> Tellingly, by 1860 France, Italy and the United Kingdom accounted for 92% of Tunisia’s trade.<sup>5</sup> Influenced undoubtedly by European systems and Ottoman *tanzimat* goals, Ahmed and his successors enacted a “dizzying succession” of westernizing reforms that included the signing of the Fundamental Pact (1857) granting foreigners the right to trade and manufacture locally and to own property, the establishment of a Municipal Council for the city of Tunis (1858), the promulgation of a written constitution (endorsed by Napoleon I in 1861) and the creation of several new government ministries.<sup>6</sup>

Through the appointed fourteen-member Tunis Municipal Council, established with the modern municipality in 1858, the city itself provided for the first time important public services, commanding jurisdiction over issues such

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<sup>4</sup> On the rivalry between France, Italy and the U.K. for power over Tunisia in the pre-protectorate period, see Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 403–436 and 521–588.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. On the complex financial situation prior to the establishment of the Protectorate, see *ibid.*, 117–216 and 287–224. On the International Financial Commission established by Europeans in Tunisia in particular, see *Ibid.*, 335–402.

<sup>6</sup> Technically Tunisia was an Ottoman possession until 1881. On *tanzimat* reforms see Çelik, *Empire*, 10–16. On the constitution of 1861, see Ganiage, *Origines*, 76–89.

as urban policing and security, street cleaning, garbage removal and traffic control. The council's first president, General Abu Abdullah Husayn, a mamluk from the north Caucasus region who came to Tunisia during the 1830's, set the tone for this new Tunisian administration. Trained in the progressive European-style Bardo military school (founded in 1840), fluent in French and Italian, and a one-time resident of Paris, he defended Islamic high culture while simultaneously and selectively advancing a reformist pro-western agenda. Though respected by Tunis' European consuls during his distinguished career, Husayn and his successors were sidestepped by Europeans who secured for themselves special privileges and power.<sup>7</sup> Indicative of France's ascendancy, a persuasive Roches was able to secure permission from the Tunisian regency to supervise the razing of Tunis' aging walls (which he deemed unstable and obsolete), to erect a new French consulate beyond the bounds of the medina and thus to initiate the development of expanded European quarters on adjacent ground (Figure 3.4).<sup>8</sup>

Thus the roots of the colonial *ville nouvelle* actually reach back beyond the signing of the Bardo Treaty, for which an incursion over the French-Algerian border into Tunisia was used as justification for annexation.<sup>9</sup> French physical entrenchment, European powers' reluctant willingness to accommodate sustained French interests in North Africa and the inability of

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<sup>7</sup> William L. Cleveland, "The Municipal Council of Tunis," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 1 (1978): 33–61. On the specifics of individual reforms and agencies, see Leïla Ammar, "La naissance de la 'voie publique' à Tunis," *Maghreb et sciences sociales* (2008): 175–197.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (New York: Cambridge, 2004), 53.

<sup>9</sup> The full text of the Bardo Treaty has been reprinted in Gaston Lionel Franco, ed. *Tunisia Faces the Future* (Paris: Le Monde Economique, 1956), 24–25.

the weakened Tunisian government to stave of imperial advances thus made the occupation of Tunisia a virtual *fait accompli* in 1881.<sup>10</sup>

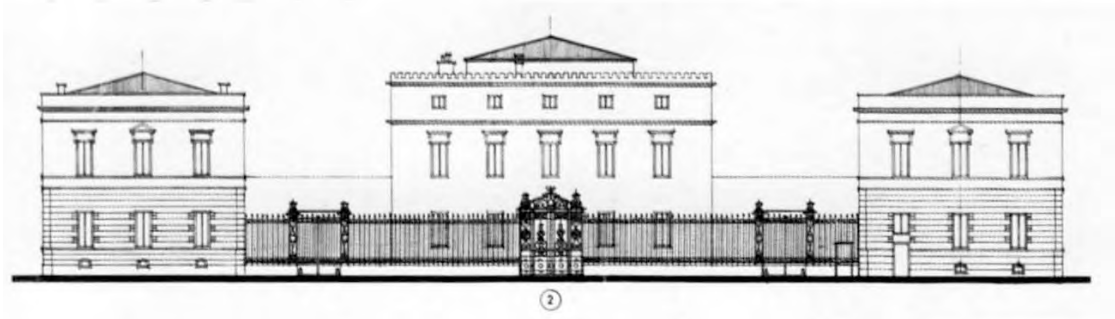


Figure 3.4. French Consulate/General Residence/Embassy, Tunis. Principal façade (constructed 1860, lateral pavilions 1890). Caillat and Colin, architects. (Source: Justin McGuiness and Zoubeir Mouhli, *Tunis: 1800–1950* (Tunis: Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis, 2004), 25.)

Following the assumption of full control of Tunisian affairs in 1883 with the signing of the La Marsa Convention (the Bey having retained domestic sovereignty through the earlier Bardo Treaty), the capital's Municipal Council was reorganized both that year and in 1885 to more directly reflect French authority in the city and country, outsiders thus assuming direct responsibility for most urban affairs, including the management of hygienic services, building regulations and security in the growing new city.<sup>11</sup> A new municipal code, promulgated in 1886, and subsequent 1889 Roadway Ordinance (which itself was highly influenced by Parisian precedents) cemented this French-dominated dynamic and French presidency of the Municipal Council. With regard to new construction and the modification of extant buildings, the Ordinance required that written permission be obtained from the Council's President, that buildings not exceed specified heights, respect the limits of

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<sup>10</sup> Perkins, *History*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Sebag, *Tunis: Histoire d'une ville* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 342.

their foundations and accommodate existing or planned streets.<sup>12</sup> Some traditional forms of governance inside the medina functioned for a few decades before their powers eventually passed to the Municipal Council.<sup>13</sup> Mayors throughout the protectorate period, though Tunisians, surely functioned within the framework established and maintained by the city's colonizers.<sup>14</sup>

So empowered, the French set out to fully realize a little slice of Paris on Africa's north coast. The centerpiece of this "manufactured space" was unquestionably the Avenue de la Marine, the status of which was upgraded from "Promenade" to reflect its infrastructural improvement.<sup>15</sup> Where there had been "nothing agreeable," only potholes and open sewage troughs just decades before, by the 1890's there was a new city rising alongside a tree-lined roadway in great contrast to the pre-colonial city to its west.<sup>16</sup>

#### The pre-colonial Tunis medina and its reception.

In terms of its physical layout and performance, the Avenue and *ville nouvelle* would quickly be considered to be diametrically opposed to the Arab medina; the latter generally mythologized and its urbanism discredited by European outsiders. This most ancient of Tunis districts remained very much a pedestrian zone, built and rebuilt to the scale of the walking resident, consumer, tradesman, pack animal, and pushed cart. Non-linear and narrow passageways and the generally indistinct urban architecture of most of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 342–343, and Ammar, "La naissance," 186–191.

<sup>13</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 289.

<sup>14</sup> For a list of past Tunisois mayors, see Portail de la Ville de Tunis, "Le Maire," <[http://www.commune-tunis.gov.tn/fr/mairie\\_conseilmunicipal\\_maire.htm](http://www.commune-tunis.gov.tn/fr/mairie_conseilmunicipal_maire.htm)>.

<sup>15</sup> Perkins, *History*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

medina were viewed to be incoherently designed and lacking all spatial organization, save the impassable division between the masculine public (markets and mosques) and feminine interior (private homes) (Figure 3.5).<sup>17</sup>



Figure 3.5. Tunis medina, central district. Plan. North is up.  
(Source: Serge Santelli, *Le Creuset Méditerranéen: Tunis* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1995), 13.)

This traditional western “Orientalist” conception of the urbane Muslim and his anarchic Islamic city as one entirely shaped only by Islamic dogma yet with “no form, no urban structure” and only “disparate quarters and elements” betrays significant cultural chauvinism and colonialist arrogance.<sup>18</sup> Remarks by early visitors and commentators in Tunis further exposed this persistently

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<sup>17</sup> François Vigier, *Housing in Tunis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1987), 27, and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: U. of California Press, 1991), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising*, 58, and Zeynep Çelik, “New approaches to the ‘Non-Western’ city,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58 no. 3 (1999): 375.

skewed interpretation and disparaging assessment of the medina's morphology and its architectural and urban character. "A thousand small torturous streets, which upon first view had not the slightest charm" greeted M. Amable Crapelet of France in 1859.<sup>19</sup> Otherwise the medina was almost universally described as polluted and lacking sufficient infrastructure, Austrian Ernest von Hesse-Wartegg's 1882 use of the labels "dirty" and "dark" being typical.<sup>20</sup> "To call the circulation routes of Tunis roads before the occupation was really to pretend – they were neither paved nor cobbled and homeowners swept trash" into them, noted M. Marcel Gandolphe in 1926.<sup>21</sup> The Beylical Palace near the casbah was described by a proud C.-H. Dessort as "one of the most lamentably banal things" he had seen, and that aside from one building (the Arabesque finance ministry offices), "in terms of public buildings of note, Tunis had nothing...before 1881."<sup>22</sup>

Though it is true that the Tunis medina lacked plumbing and covered sewer systems prior to colonization, it was certainly not haphazardly composed, nor were its structures architecturally deficient. It has become clear that the Arab city was in fact organized around the central mosque and made use of more organic paths that provided needed summer shade and winter insulation. These passageways, ranging from eight to two meters in width depending on the hierarchical significance of each, created a "coherent urban architecture, punctuated by the repetitive pattern of courtyards."<sup>23</sup> Home to

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<sup>19</sup> M. Amable Crapelet, "Voyage à Tunis, 1859," *Le Tour du Monde* (1865): 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest von Hesse-Wartegg, *Tunis: The Land and the People* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1882), 170.

<sup>21</sup> Gandolphe, "La vie," 169.

<sup>22</sup> C.-H. Roger Dessort, "Protectorat français," in Dessort, *Histoire*, 186.

<sup>23</sup> Vigier, *Housing*, 27. See also Janet L. Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City—Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 155–176 and André Raymond, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views," in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1 (1994): 3–18.

Tunisian Muslims and center of traditional economic activities (carpentry, cloth production, printing, &c.) throughout the pre-colonial and colonial eras, the medina's markets (*souks*) were arranged such that "dirty" goods requiring loud production techniques were made and sold farther from the central mosque (cabinetry, leather goods, metallurgy, &c.), while "cleaner" items were afforded closer proximity (perfume, literature, &c.).<sup>24</sup> Thus the arrangement of the medina reflected the socio-cultural values of its Muslim inhabitants, "essentially based on blood related social organization, the separation between private and public spaces, and their relation to the religious center, the main mosque."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, traditional Arab cities did not necessarily lack public institutions, rather they lacked the monumental architecture that westerners had come to see as indistinguishable from, and required by, their existence. A look at Arab literature, such as that of Tunisois Ibn Khaldoun, confirms that urban life was experienced, or at least described, in terms of its function or activity, rather than its particular location or environment.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of later, more open-minded interpretations of the space, to French colonialists the Tunis medina (like all others across North Africa) seemed more like offensive medieval quarters of Europe and worthy of similar marginalization or, in places, "correction." Tunis' medina, though not subject to the Haussmannian tactics employed in places such as Casablanca or Algiers, was certainly considered to be an inferior expression of urbanism. At first shunned and overlooked, the "real, old, Oriental city" beyond the "great bay with a stilted

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<sup>24</sup> Saoud, R. "The Impact of Islam on Urban Development in North Africa," Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization, (2004), 12  
<[www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/naurban.pdf](http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/naurban.pdf)>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising*, 59.

arch” was eventually valorized as quaint and mysterious and conceptually museumified by foreign visitors and a developing tourism industry, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>27</sup> Though the “exotic” medina, as a spectacle, became a destination it could not accommodate tourists in a fashion acceptable to most, and thus the *ville nouvelle* provided them with the requisite modern facilities and quarters from which to explore. The actual medina was not preserved or improved, its form of architecture and urbanism remaining underappreciated until colonialists in the mid-twentieth century sought inspiration for indigenous housing projects from it.

#### The establishment of the Avenue de la Marine.

Thus, it is clear that the French had planned to remain in Tunis for the foreseeable future as early as 1860, the year in which they began construction of their new consulate outside the medina. The land surrounding it was by then intended to be developed into a gridded *ville nouvelle* and the formerly waste-soiled path linking the medina to the small port refashioned into a wide tree-lined boulevard, as a partial plan dating to about 1860 indicates (Figure 3.6).<sup>28</sup> Currently held by the National Archives of Tunisia (ANT), this is perhaps the earliest modern image of the forthcoming streetscape and may be the only plan predating its actual tracing. From that document one can discern the unknown draftsman’s interest in designing a straight boulevard, the dominant feature of its breadth being its overwhelmingly arboreal nature.

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<sup>27</sup> Emma Burbank Ayer, *A Motor Flight Through Algeria and Tunisia* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1911), 327.

<sup>28</sup> Anon., “Portion du Plan de la Promenade de la Marine et des rues avoisinantes,” ca. 1860. National Archives of Tunisia (serie H carton 619 carton 56). See also Crapelet, “Voyage,” 23.



The narrower western portion (as early as 1863 dubbed the Avenue de France), gives on to a wider portion (labeled “Avenue de la Marine”) with double the trees, the path of the road central and aligned through each. Access roads or sidewalks separate the plantings from the city blocks at its edge, one of which is marked as the site for the forthcoming French consulate. A Christian cemetery, a café and several market buildings (*fondouks*), over which the prospective plan of the Avenue had been laid, were from this point destined for erasure from the rationalized cityscape. Early photographs, to be presented below, indicate that the actualized Avenue did not conform to this plan exactly, the arrangement of trees and allées differing substantially. As construction proceeded eastward through a series of roadway developments and public square augmentations, the Avenue matured through the colonial period.

#### The Place de la Bourse and *Bab Bahr*.

The Place de la Bourse, the early urban center of the European community, had by the 1850’s grown too crowded to accommodate the city’s increasing number of foreign residents.<sup>29</sup> With the extramural relocation of the French consulate in 1860 and subsequent dismantling of the medina’s deteriorating walls, the square became the eastern terminus of the Avenue axis. Though some sources state differently, most indicate that the *Bab Bahr* was dismantled and shifted slightly southward circa 1860 in order to anchor the Promenade de la Marine (see Figure 3.2). Pierre Colin’s 1859 map of the city provides a detailed view of the entirety of Tunis at this pivotal time and

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<sup>29</sup> Occasionally referred to in mid-nineteenth-century texts as the *Place de la Marine*. See for example the aforementioned ANT’s “Portion du Plan de la Promenade de la Marine et des rues avoisinantes.”

illustrates the nascent Promenade in alignment with a centralized *Bab Bahr* and the medina's walls before removal by 1872 (Figure 3.7).<sup>30</sup>

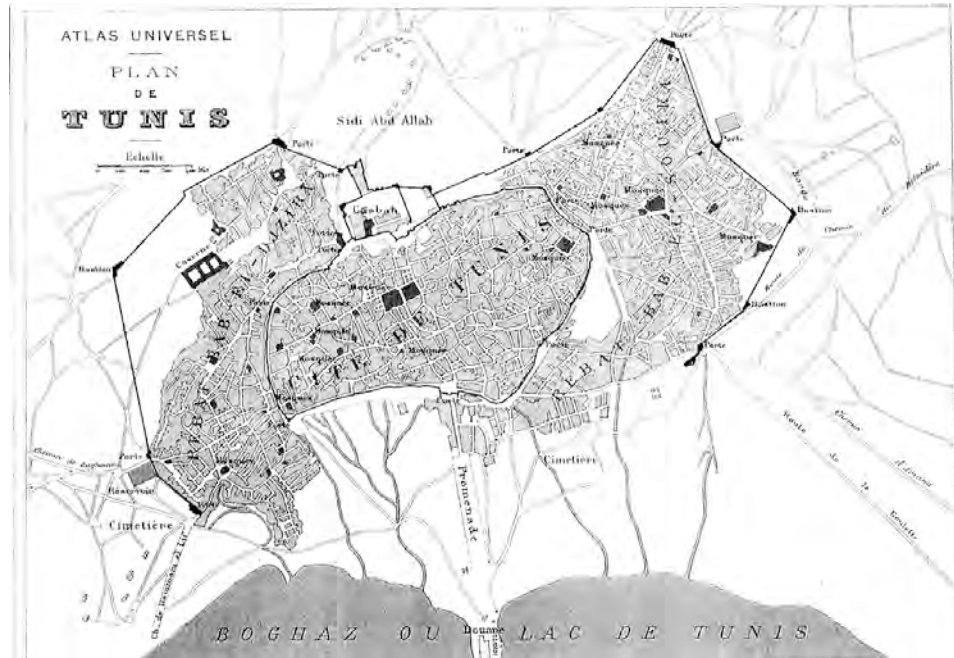


Figure 3.7. Tunis. Plan (1875) based on 1859 Colin Plan.  
(Source: Sebag, *Tunis*, unnumbered plate.)

It is clear that the ANT archival plan had yet to be actualized on the ground by this point, as neither blocks nor trees are here indicated. In both plans, however, the Place de la Bourse is clearly illustrated, as is the *Bab Bahr*, known as the “Porte de France” and frequently depicted bearing an “RF” (*République française*) cipher after 1890 (Figure 3.8).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Pellegrin contends that based on its still slightly skewed position and the age of its mortar, the gate was not moved as “legend” and others insist. See Arthur Pellegrin, “Old Tunis: The Street Names of the Arab City” (1936) in *A Tunisian Journey*, ed. Hafedh Boujmil (Tunis: Nirvana, 2008), 37, and Gandolphe, “Vie,” 158. 1872 is given as the date of media wall razing in Justin McGuinness and Zoubeir Mouhli, *Tunis: 1800–1950* (Tunis: Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis, 2004), 92.

<sup>31</sup> Pellegrin, “Old Tunis,” 36.



Figure 3.8. Porte de France, Tunis. Postcard (ca. early 20<sup>th</sup> century).  
(Source: Michel Megnin, "Vues de Tunis,"  
<[http://michel.megnin.free.fr/vt\\_rues.htm](http://michel.megnin.free.fr/vt_rues.htm)>.)

The commercial aspect of the space was further expanded by the construction of small shop buildings along the course of the old walls that addressed both the square's interior and the expanding new city beyond its bounds (see Figure 3.8). The gate thus remained hemmed in by European businesses through the 1930's, until the French-administered municipality finally expropriated the adjacent properties and razed them. Decades of negotiations, dating back as early as 1910, came to an end in 1939 when the structure was fully disengaged from its surroundings (Figure 3.9).<sup>32</sup> Since then the *Bab Bahr*/Porte de France has stood isolated in an enlarged square — thence as more an arch than a gateway (Figure 3.10).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Documents describing the expropriation process remain on file at the ANT. See, for example, correspondence contained within files on the "Porte de France" (serie M5 carton 11 dossier 422) wherein the Municipality states that it does not intend to construct 2–3 story buildings adjacent to the Porte, as was rumored at the time (1910), but rather to "liberate" (*degager*) the monument as soon as possible. 1939 is cited alone by Pellegrin, "Old Tunis," 37 as the date of the liberation and nothing at the ANT mention disengaging the gate after 1939.

<sup>33</sup> Testament to the desire for a liberated gate, a postcard (ca. 1930) acquired in Tunis in 2009 illustrates the Porte as a stand-alone structure, but upon closer inspection it is clear that the adjacent buildings have been edited out of the photo and elements of buildings from the background painted in their place.



Figure 3.9. “Dégagement de la Porte de France,” Tunis. Plan (ca. early 20<sup>th</sup> century). Highlighted buildings were expropriated by 1939. (Source: ANT, “Porte de France” (serie M5 carton 11 dossier 422).)



Figure 3.10. Porte de France and the Avenue de France. Photograph (2009). (Source: Author’s collection.)

The singularity of the venerated gateway as the square's only monument went unchallenged until the city erected a bronze statue of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie at its center on the centennial of his birth in 1925.<sup>34</sup> Following considerable debate with regard to its proper placement among architects, planners and members of the Municipal Council and clergy, it was installed behind the *Bab Bahr* at the expense of city governments throughout the country. Though initially considered, the Place de la Résidence (see below) had been deemed inappropriate in light of Lavigerie's primarily religious import. Additionally it was feared that the insertion of a tall monument there would obscure the desirably open vista along the length of the landscaped Avenue.<sup>35</sup> Brandishing both cross and Bible and wrapped in billowing cloak, Tunis's first modern archbishop was depicted in a rather aggressive posture — almost taunting from high on a pedestal, his back defiantly turned towards the city's main mosque (Figure 3.11). Gift of the French *Résident général* Lucian Saint, its presence inspired considerable resentment among Muslims and recurring debates as to its propriety and potential removal to Carthage.<sup>36</sup> In typical French fashion the visual memorialization of the Cardinal was furthered by toponym through the rechristening of the Place de la Bourse as the "Place Cardinal Lavigerie," also in 1925.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Anon., "Centenaire du Cardinal Lavigerie," *La Dépeche tunisienne*, 23 November 1925, 3. Many texts cite no date for the statue's installation (e.g. Çelik, *Empire*, 132) or provide an incorrect one (e.g. Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 68 says 1930). Similarly, photos are frequently said to predate 1925, the appearance of the statue notwithstanding.

<sup>35</sup> Conseil Municipal, Tunis, "Extrait du Registre des Délibérations: Exercice 1925, Session extraordinaire (4e Trimestre), Séance du 7 novembre 1925." National Archives of Tunisia (serie M5 carton 11 dossier 2).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. See also Joseph Cuoq, *Lavigerie, les Peres blancs et les musulmans maghrebins* (Rome: Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, 1986), 162.

<sup>37</sup> Conseil Municipal, Tunis, "Extrait du Registre des Délibérations: Exercice 1925, Session ordinaire (Quatrième Trimestre), Séance du 25 novembre 1925. Rapport du Président de la Municipalité." National Archives of Tunisia (serie M5 carton 11 dossier 2).



Figure 3.11. Place Lavignerie, Tunis medina. Postcard (ca. 1930).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

#### The Place de la Résidence.

The first European building erected outside Tunis' medina, France's new consulate marked the beginning of the *ville nouvelle* development. Designed by architect Caillat in a simple neo-classical style, the structure's crenellated façade and heavy lines represented well the imposing presence of France (see Figure 3.4). Executed by French engineer Pierre Colin in 1860–61, the core building was expanded in 1890 with the addition of two lateral pavilions that, projecting forward, created a central courtyard.<sup>38</sup> This space addressed a major public square formed by the expansion of the Avenue de la Marine beyond its narrow western segment. With the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1881 the French consular complex became the

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<sup>38</sup> McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 25, and Massimo Amodei, "Tunis 1860–1930: The Formation of a Colonial Town," *Environmental Design* no. 1 (1984): 30. Sources provided different dates for the construction of France's extramural consulate. The former states 1859, the latter 1862 without explanation. Most state 1860 and a travel account written in 1859 states that the new building was still under construction at the time and the old consulate within the medina still in use. See Crapelet, "Voyage," 23.

*Résidence générale de France*, or seat of colonial administration, and the public square before it the “Place de la Résidence.” The expansive square was initially rendered an urban oasis of sorts with the installation of palm trees and a water fountain at its center (Figure 3.12).



Figure 3.12. Place de la Résidence, Tunis. Photograph (ca. 1900).  
(Source: François Béguin, *Arabesances* (Paris: Dunod, 1983), 136.)

The configuration of the *Place* appears to have remained largely unchanged for decades.

The completion of a Roman Catholic cathedral opposite the *Résidence générale* in 1882 (on the site of an earlier Christian chapel and cemetery) complemented the existing political, commercial, and public elements of the quarter, making it the true colonial civic center of the new city (Figure 3.13). A

larger cathedral dedicated to St. Vincent de Paul, built from 1893 through 1897, replaced this earlier more humble structure.<sup>39</sup>

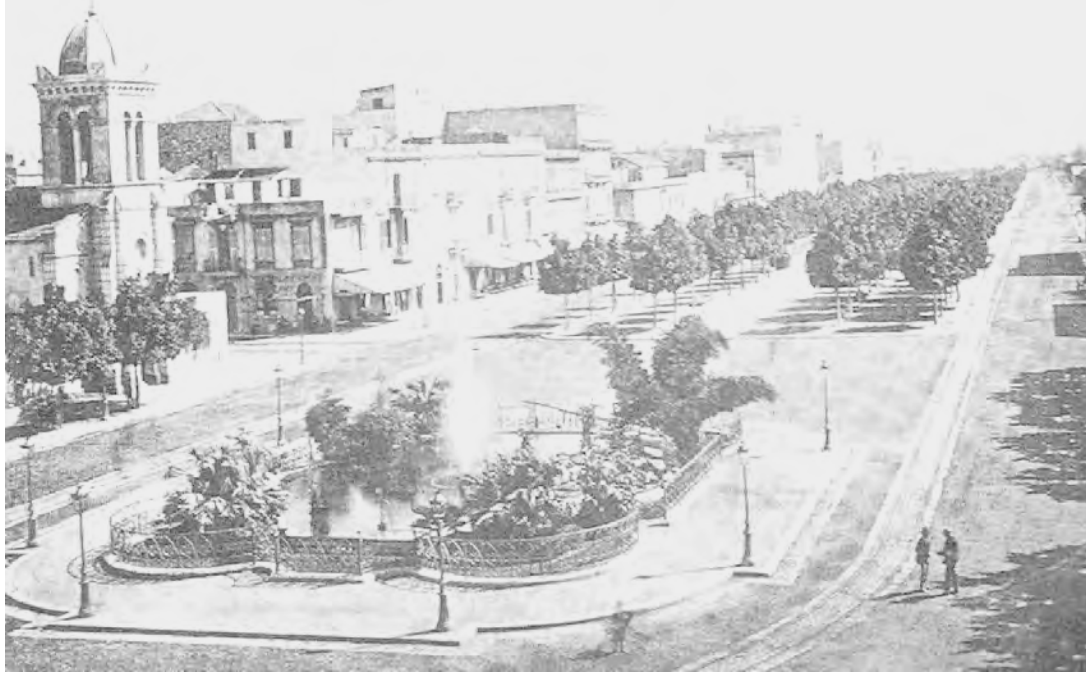


Figure 3.13. The Place de la Résidence and the first cathedral, Tunis. Photograph (ca. 1890).  
(Source: Fatma Ben Becher, *Tunis: Histoire d'une Avenue* (Tunis: Nirvana, 2003), 58.)

Its tall bell towers dominate the square below and its generally neo-Romanesque/Byzantine appearance is reminiscent of Paris' contemporaneous Sacré-Cœur Basilica (Figure 3.14). In Tunisia its significance for Christians was second only to the Cathedral of St. Louis in Carthage (constructed 1884–1890), which functioned as the seat of the archbishop of Carthage and Algiers, Primate of Africa.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The date of the first cathedral, 1882, is often incorrectly cited as that of the second and surviving structure.

<sup>40</sup> McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 26. Lavigerie was the first to hold this title as head of the Church in a combined Algeria and Tunisia. The Sacré-Cœur Basilica was constructed 1875–1914.



Figure 3.14. Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1930).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

For this period the composition brings to mind the “ideal city” as depicted in a Renaissance painting attributed to the school of Piero della Francesca, bringing together grand public and civic space, religious structures, water and refined neoclassical styling (Figure 3.15).<sup>41</sup>



Figure 3.15. Piero della Francesca, *View of an Ideal City*, ca. late 15<sup>th</sup> century.  
(Source: Jeryldene M. Wood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 117).

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<sup>41</sup> This painting is currently part of the Walters Art Museum collection in Baltimore, MD. See Jeryldene M. Wood, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapter 7.

Thus the plan of the Place de la Résidence had been established by the beginning of the twentieth century and has remained largely unchanged since then. The only feature to have been subject to significant alteration during the colonial period, following the expansion of the *Résidence générale* and completion of the second cathedral, was the square's central element. Where the fountain had stood was placed on 10 November 1943 a simple stone sarcophagus atop a carefully landscaped terrace (Figure 3.16).



Figure 3.16. Place de la Résidence and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Tunis. Photograph (ca. 1945).  
(Source: "Cartes postales de Tunisie,"  
<<http://www.profburp.com/tunisie/gal/?img=785>>.)

It contained the remains of an unidentified World War II soldier that had been selected at random by a veteran during a public ceremony and procession earlier that month in Tunis.<sup>42</sup> The stone planting beds and low iron fence that

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<sup>42</sup> The presence of the tomb escapes mention in nearly all sources pertaining to the Avenue. Particulars of the inhumation come from Philippe Arrouy of the Tunisian *Service des anciens combattants* who recounts the event as follows (without further citation): "*L'inhumation d'un soldat inconnu de la campagne de Tunisie fut décidée dès le 4 novembre 1943. Il fut choisi parmi les corps de soldats non identifiés et auparavant inhumés dans les secteurs de Bizerte,*

had previously surrounded the fountain remained in place, the latter thus recast as the enclosure of a newly sanctified parcel of civic ground. While Lavigerie's statue had been deemed too Catholic and too tall, the unobtrusive patriotic memorial was found to be acceptable. Thus, quite literally, government and God met at the center of Tunis' central square between seat of French and catholic power.

The Avenue de la Marine/Jules-Ferry roadway and its architecture.

The earliest history of the Avenue's foundation remains somewhat nebulous, as detailed documents from the period are scarce and related images of imprecise dating. Furthermore, the degree to which published plans depict the state of development at that precise time, projected arrangements, or even an idealized Tunis is inevitably somewhat indecipherable. Simple recording errors and archival omissions surely complicate matters as well.

The earliest image of the new Promenade/Avenue area to which a precise date can be attributed comes from the travel account of M. Amable Crapelet published in 1865. An engraving based on a watercolor done on site by the author in 1859, it shows groups of people strolling up and down what appears to be a dirt track across a scruffy plain outside the city walls (Figure 3.17). Paved roads, sidewalks and ficus trees do not appear in the image, nor are they mentioned in the appended description.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore reasonable to

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*Tunis et Sousse, correspondant aux principales zones de combats. Une chapelle ardente regroupant 6 corps ainsi recueillis fut installée le 10 novembre 1943 à Tunis où, le même jour, au cours d'une cérémonie regroupant les autorités civiles et militaires, Monsieur Ayello, grand mutilé de guerre, tira au sort le cercueil n° 3 parmi 6 numéros placés dans un casque de soldat. Initialement implanté sur l'actuelle place de l'Indépendance au centre de Tunis, le tombeau du soldat inconnu de la campagne de Tunisie fut transféré au cimetière de Gammarth en 1957.*" E-mail message to author, 8 April 2009. No further citation available.

<sup>43</sup> Crapelet, "Voyage," 23.

assume that although plans had likely been made to these ends, work on the ground had not yet progressed to that point by this time.



Figure 3.17. “Nouvelle Promenade de la Marine,” Tunis. Engraving (1865).  
(Source: M. Amable Crapelet, “Voyage à Tunis, 1859,”  
*Le Tour du Monde* (1865), 21.)

A photograph of unclear provenance appears to illustrate the same area from atop a building within or near the medina. Looking towards the lake across an open expanse one may be able to discern the initial tracing of the Promenade/Avenue at the left, but again no trees (Figure 3.18).



Figure 3.18. View towards lake and inner port of Tunis. Photograph (ca. 1865).  
(Source: “Port Tunis 1890,” Wikimedia Commons,  
<[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Port\\_tunis\\_1890.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Port_tunis_1890.jpg)>.)

Therefore one may ascribe a similar date to the photo and assume that the actual delineation of the roadway and installation of its landscaping must have come shortly thereafter.

The ANT's partial plan of the Avenue described above (see Figure 3.6) has been assigned a date of circa 1860 because it depicts the Raffo Building (erected in 1842), the location of the new French consulate plot (rather than the plan of the building completed in 1860–61, as is done for other structures elsewhere), and a centered *Bab Bahr* (so-labeled rather than “Porte de France” as would have been the case after 1890). It is highly unlikely that trees were planted in triple rows, as shown in the plan, and then reduced to the double ranks visible almost immediately thereafter in an undated photograph (Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.19. Promenade de la Marine, Tunis. Photograph (ca. 1870).  
(Source: Becher, *Tunis*, 22.)

Thus, the depiction of the trees in this partial plan does not reflect the landscaping as later recorded, and is thus a hypothetical image or unaccepted proposal. Here the trees appear to be quite small, perhaps not much taller

than the seventy centimeters (2.3 feet) that they were said to be upon installation.<sup>44</sup> Based on this information and a photograph of the slightly larger trees and the city's first cathedral (which stood from only 1882 through 1893), one can deduce that the Avenue was fully traced and lined with trees sometime during the 1870's (Figure 3.20).



Figure 3.20. Avenue de la Marine, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1885).

(Source: "Tunis Marine 1885,"

<[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tunis\\_marine\\_1885.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tunis_marine_1885.jpg)>.)

An 1875 city plan, based on Colin's 1859 plan, supports strengthens this hypothesis, as it does not show any sign of trees on the Promenade (see

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<sup>44</sup> S. Zaouch, "La sylviculture en Tunisie chez les indigènes," cited in *Bulletin de la Société Internationale des Amis des Arbres de Tunisie* 60 (Tunis: Imprimerie Rapide de Tunis, 1929), 105–106, cited in H. Rejeb, N. Kalti-Nabli et al., "l'Arbre et sa contribution dans la valorisation de l'image de l'espace urbain," *URBAMAG* (2007), 5.  
<<http://www.urbamag.net/document.php?id=333>>.

Figure 3.7).<sup>45</sup> Though not quite as precise as one might perhaps like, for the time being the 1870's is a far more fixed period than typical citations that vaguely attribute the foundation to "the late nineteenth century."<sup>46</sup>

Through the duration of the colonial period the Avenue's landscaping remained basically unchanged following its initial establishment.<sup>47</sup> As the land near the port was filled in and the Avenue extended eastward, so too was the central allée and double ranks of *ficus nitida* followed after World War II (Figure 3.21). As the trees matured they were trimmed annually and attained a dense geometric ribbon-like form overhead (Figure 3.22). They would quickly become prized in the city's warm climate and themselves became a key component of the city's image.<sup>48</sup> So important to the municipality were the ficus that a special underground irrigation system was installed in 1926 to maintain their verdure throughout the year.<sup>49</sup> In the Avenue de France section of the complex, the standard remained single rows of trees along the edges of a central traffic path. The exact configuration did change, however, with the adjustment of transport infrastructure. Prior to World War II it appears that trees lined a centered tramway, thus separating the track from lateral rights-of-way (Figure 3.23), while some time shortly thereafter it appears that sidewalks were extended and planted with single lines of trees as all vehicular traffic was pushed to the Avenue's center.

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<sup>45</sup> Of course there exist roughly contemporaneous plans that do indicate the presence of trees on the Promenade, such as the 1870 "Plan von Tunis" by H. von Maltzan in Sebag, *Tunis*, unnumbered plate.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 354. H. Rejeb, et al., in an article dedicated to the significance of trees in Tunis the likely relies heavily on Sebag's work, are also content with dating the Avenue's landscaping to the "end of the twentieth century." See H. Rejeb, et al., "l'Arbre," 1.

<sup>47</sup> A date for the laying of the paving on the central allée remains illusive at this point.

<sup>48</sup> H. Rejeb, et al., "l'Arbre," 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6.

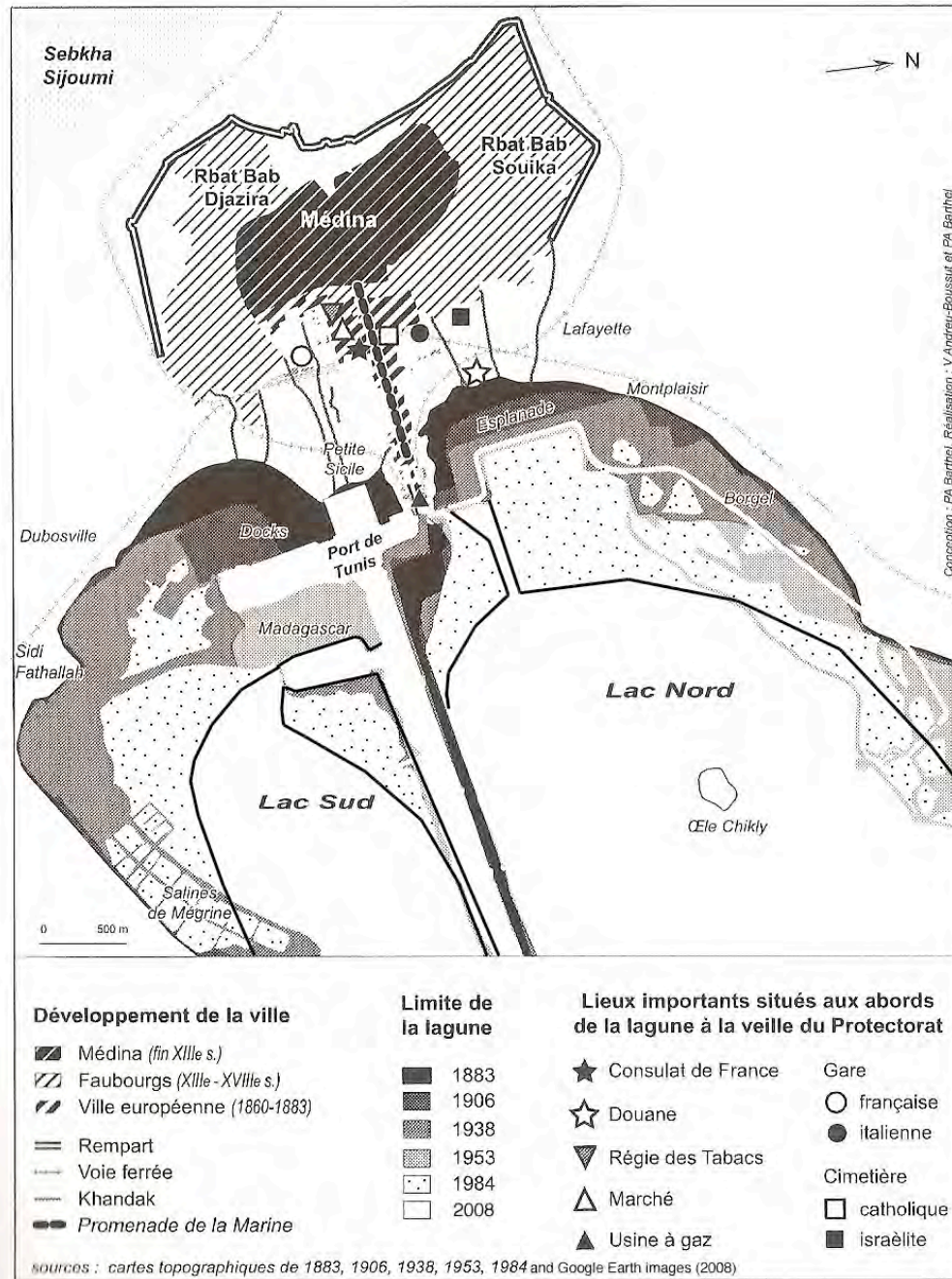


Figure 3.21. “The construction of Tunis to the detriment of the lagoon,” 1883–2008. Plan.

(Source: Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, ed. *Tunis en projet(s): La fabrique d’une métropole au bord de l’eau*. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 75. Updated by Author.)



Figure 3.22. Central Tunis. Aerial photograph (1938).  
(Source: Google Life photo archive, <<http://images.google.com/hosted/life>>.)



Figure 3.23. Avenue de France, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1910).  
(Source: Megnin, "Vues.")

Though landscaping so dominated one's experience with the Avenue's built environment, its architecture was of equal importance, as it, and it alone,

framed one's movement along relatively narrow tree-less exterior sidewalks. Construction of tall buildings that lined the boulevard began first near the medina and French consulate/residence and progressed eastward along the course of the roadway before expanded north and southward. The *ville nouvelle* in 1881, however, had only grown to encompass the land between the medina and *Résidence générale*. Visitors arriving by boat at that time would have disembarked and encountered the Avenue de la Marine stretching across land that was "completely empty through the *Maison (Résidence générale) de France*."<sup>50</sup>

An 1881 plan of the city illustrates this concentration about the Avenue de France section of the Avenue system (Figure 3.24).



Figure 3.24. Tunis. Plan (1881).  
(Source: McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 20.)

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<sup>50</sup> Gandolphe, "Vie," 176.

Further urban growth and the complete filling out of the *ville nouvelle* can be seen in successive city plans, the rate increasing only after a slow, if not “embarrassing” start (Figure 3.25).<sup>51</sup> Of the more than twenty travel accounts published by Hesse-Wartegg during the nineteenth century, his *Tunis: The Land and the People* (1882) includes an illuminating description of the nascent European “quarter of the Franks” just outside the medina:

Before the eastern gate of the town, the so-called sea-gate, is the European quarter, which, though only consisting of a few streets, is the most beautiful and most pleasant part of this old, dingy town. From the gate mentioned above, a broad and imposing street extends to the shores of the El Bahireh lake and the harbour. Fine, stately mansions, most of them built during the last few years, from this street, called the “Marina,” which almost reaches to the lake. This street contains European bazaars, large houses of business, hotels, the offices of the French Telegraph, the tobacco manufactory, the consulate with its large gardens, the European casino, and finally the cafés most frequented in the town, and it is ornamented with some shady groups of trees besides, and contains some public coffee gardens.<sup>52</sup>

From this text one can get a sense of the early development of the Avenue (here called the “Marina”) in its most western (Avenue de France) portion, in addition to a European perspective on the value of European architecture and planning practices (Figure 3.25).

Streets preceded structures eastward throughout the city, as made particularly clear in the 1906 Plan on which empty blocks far outnumber built ones (Figure 3.26). The French administration’s *Journal Officiel* records the gradual extension of the city eastward from the medina through meticulous descriptions of road construction projects as they progressed (Figure 3.27).<sup>53</sup> By the onset of the Second World War the orthogonal armature of the colonial city had spread completely across the low terrain and far northward, from the

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<sup>51</sup> Çelik, *Empire*, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Hesse-Wartegg, *Tunis*, 177.

<sup>53</sup> *Journal Officiel* entries summarized in Sebag, *Tunis*, 345–346.

Porte de France to the modernized port (completed in 1892) and north-eastward around the edge of the lake's shoreline. By 1939 the general urban ambiance that persists to this day had been crafted.<sup>54</sup>

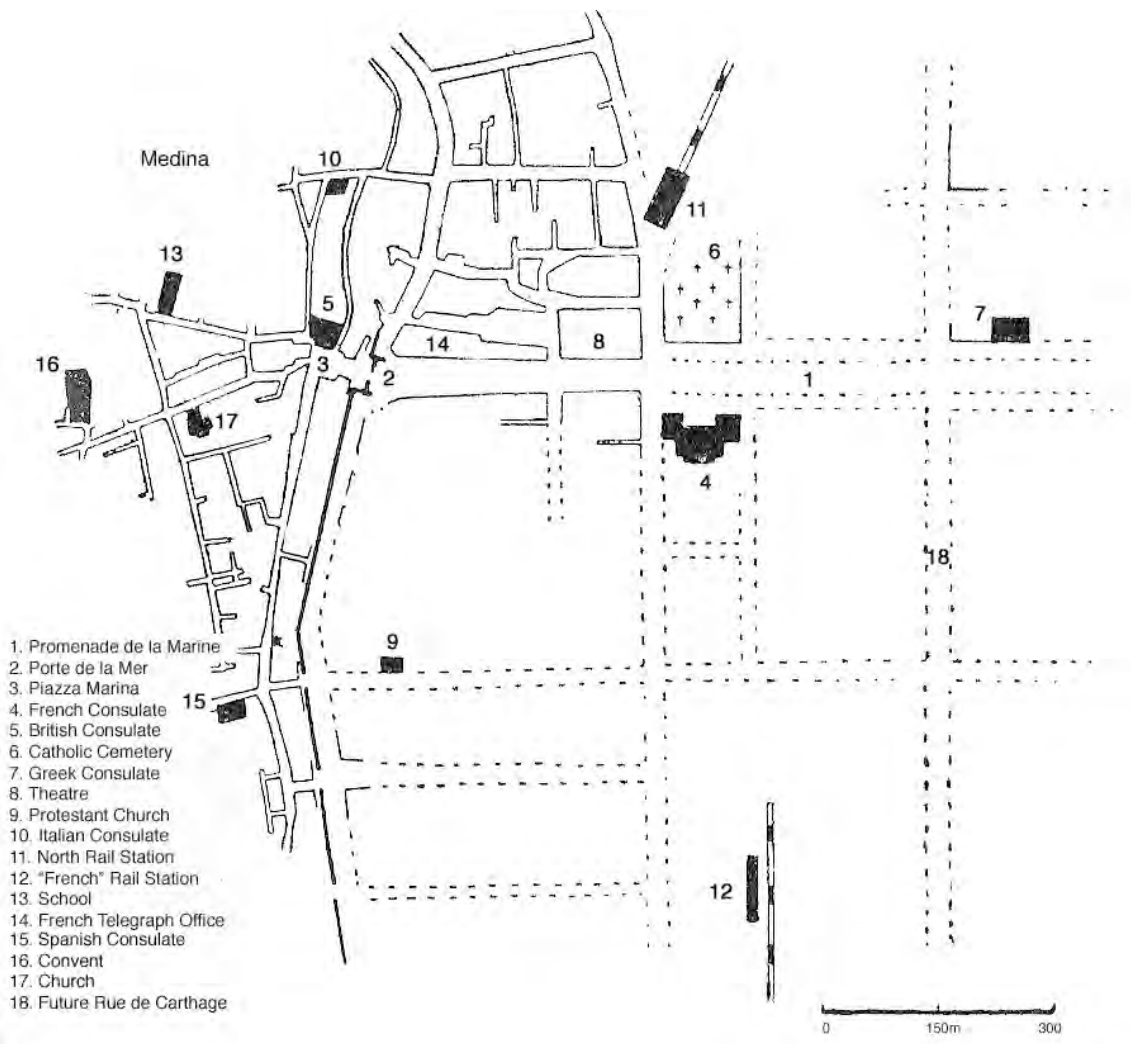


Figure 3.25. Quarter of the Franks. Plan (1878).  
 (Source: Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie*  
 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 561.)

<sup>54</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 347.

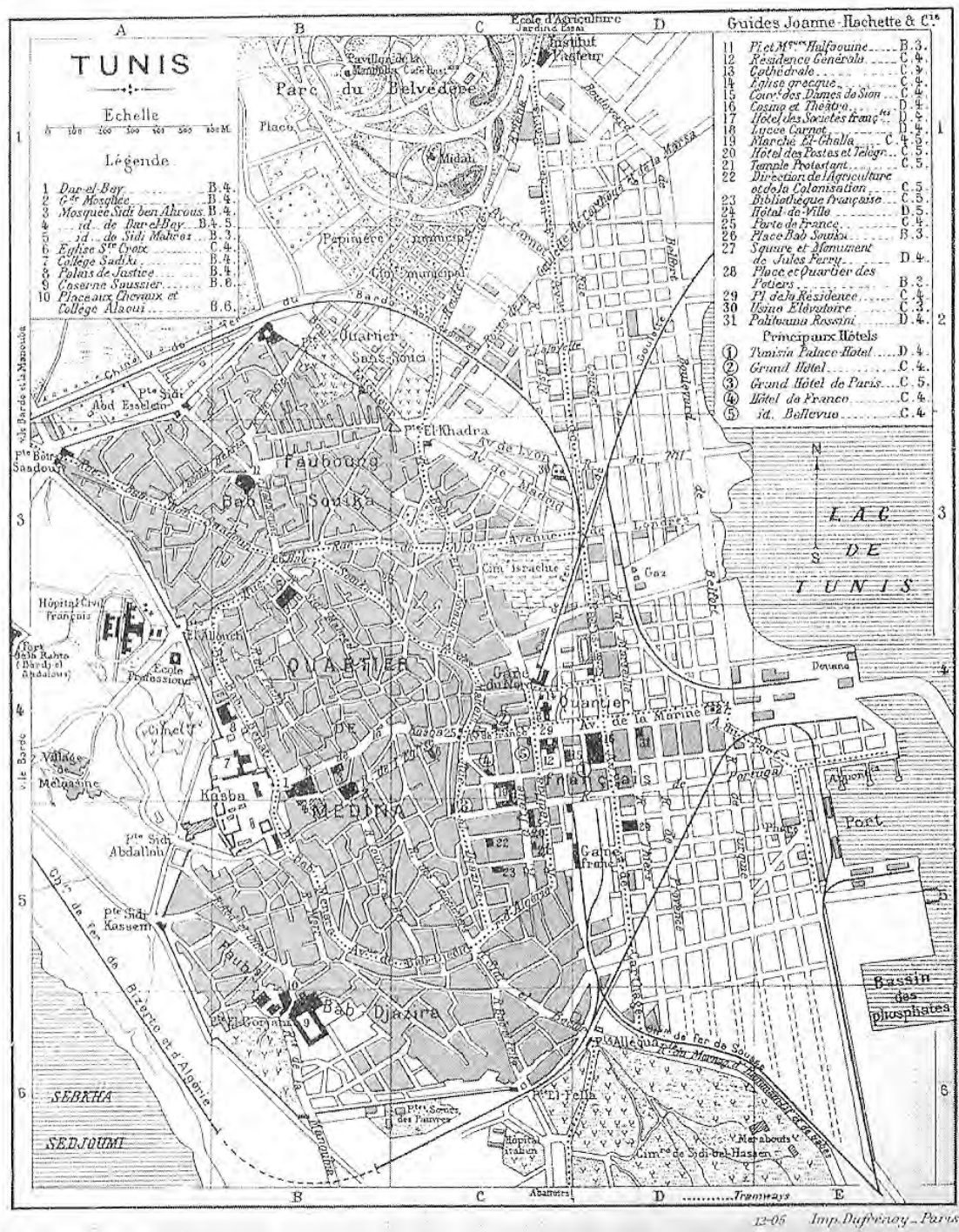


Figure 3.26. Tunis. Plan (1906).  
(Source: Sebag, *Tunis*, unnumbered plate.)

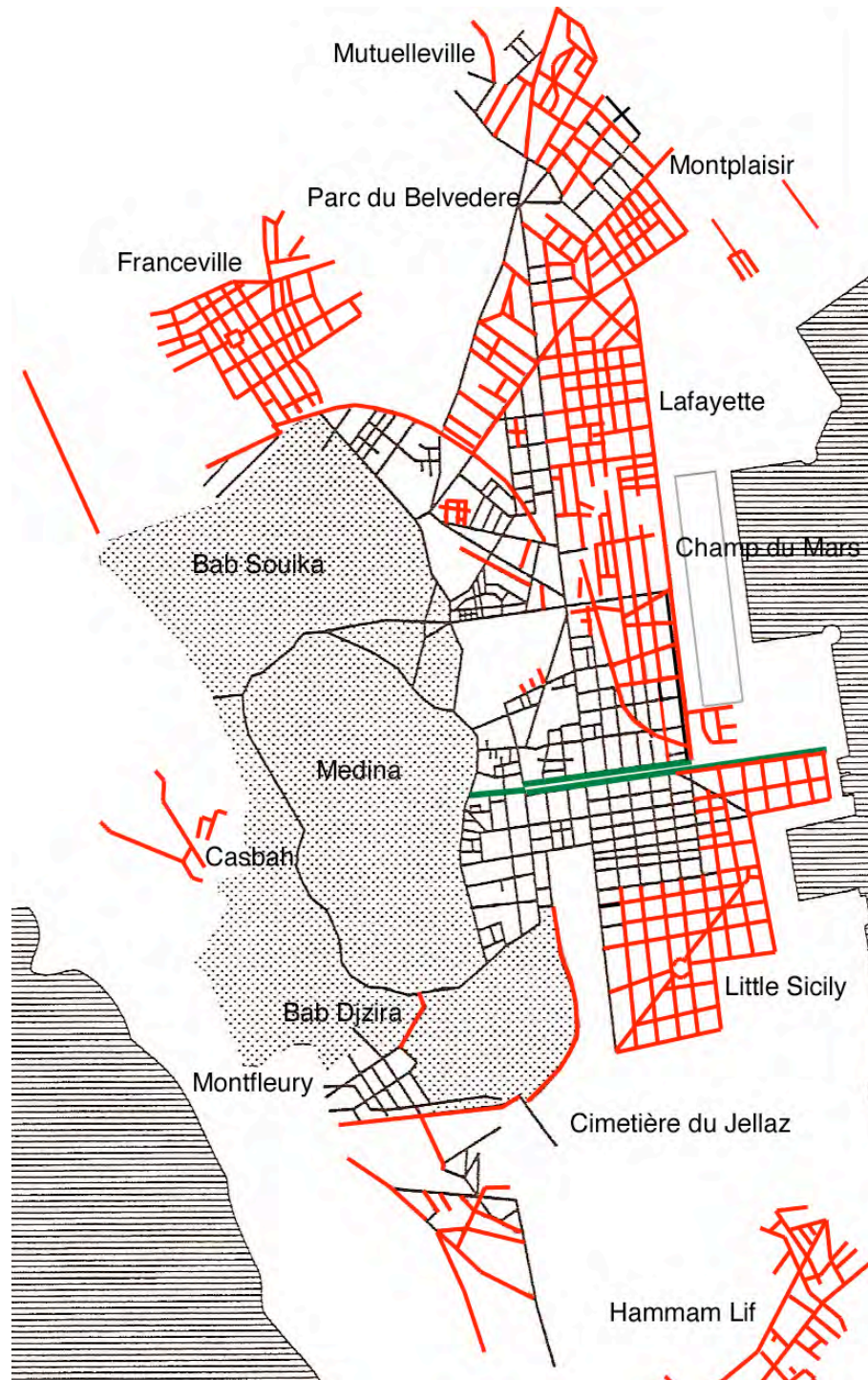


Figure 3.27. Interwar (1919–1939) road construction in Tunis. Plan. Highlighted red are new roads. The Avenue is green. (Source: Based on Sebag, *Tunis*, 439.)

Adjacent street nomenclature referred quite explicitly, and almost exclusively, to French politics and geography. By the end of the colonial era roads and avenues named after prominent nineteenth-century French statesmen Léon Roches, Charles de Gaulle, Léon Gambetta, Stéphen Pichon, as well as those named for Paris (arguably the most significant street after the Avenue), Marseille, Strasbourg, Besançon, Provence, Vesoul, Bretagne, and Normandie set the Avenue Jules-Ferry well within an imagined French topography. Classical Tunisia was acknowledged through streets named for Carthage, Rome and Amilcar, while France's colonial dominion elsewhere was referenced only through two small roads intersecting with the Avenue — Algiers and Bône (Algeria). Moving away from the Avenue similar themes persisted, as European country and city names and figures of Mediterranean antiquity dominated street signs. Though Holland, Greece and Italy Roads intersected with the Avenue, those of Portugal, Serbia, London, Athens, Naples, Skpio, Cato and Hasdrubal ran elsewhere throughout the grid.<sup>55</sup> The overall impression was that France lay at the center of a reconceived European terrain.

The architectural styles in which the buildings were designed along the Avenue are of course quite significant. Structural façades, as the literal faces of the Avenue, conveyed in part the aesthetic tastes, social values, political interests and technological expertise of the French colonizers. Consideration of the visual imagery here established permits one to more fully appreciate the symbolic nature of the built environment, as well as the particularly European ambiance here crafted.

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<sup>55</sup> See various plans of the city from Sebag, *Tunis*, and J. Barlier, ed., *Indicateur général par lettre alphabétique des rues, boulevards, avenues, places passages et impasse de la ville de Tunis* (Tunis: J. Barlier, 1921) <[http://profburp.com/tunis1900/rues\\_tunis/index.html](http://profburp.com/tunis1900/rues_tunis/index.html)>.

The French Consulate/*Résidence générale* and Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul each represent the public architecture of the early colonial period in Tunis (see Figures 3.4 and 3.14). The austerity of the former and monumentality of the latter make stylistic references to Roman and Byzantine pasts that are arguably as relevant to Christian France as to ancient Tunisia. Indeed neoclassicism carried considerable currency in Tunis, as both France and Tunisia were important provinces (Gaul and Africa respectively) within the sprawling empire of ancient Rome. That successor empires regularly sought legitimacy through visual association to antiquity is clear, and these two structures, in addition to the commanding arch-like postal headquarters several blocks from the Avenue can be attributed to what has been called the style of the *vainqueur* or conqueror (Figure 3.28).<sup>56</sup>



Figure 3.28. 1893 Postal headquarters, Tunis.  
Henri Saladin, architect. Photograph (2006).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

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<sup>56</sup> François Béguin, *Arabesances* (Paris: Dunod, 1983), 11.

Similarly, photos of the early Avenue show countless buildings that employ columns, pilasters, arches and pediments, all of which contribute to the space's generally conservative European ambiance. The façade of the *Magasin Général* building, erected in 1883 near the *Bab Bahr/Porte de France*, makes use of not only balconies, balustrades, pilasters and an arched pediment, but also a series of covered arcades along its street level (Figure 3.29).

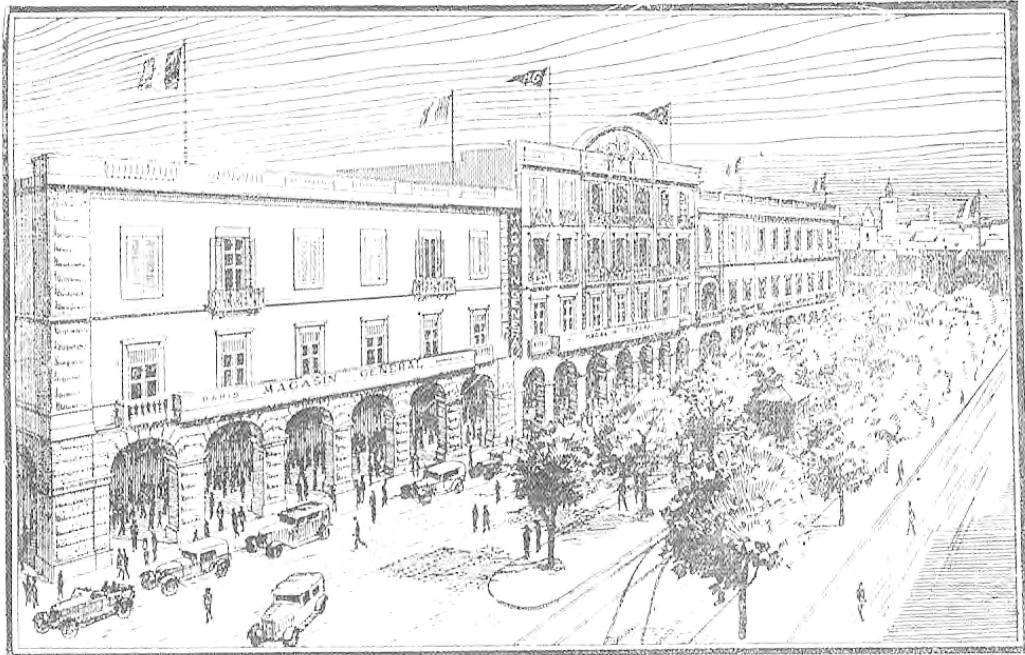


Figure 3.29. *Magasin Général* building, Tunis. Advertisement (1931).  
(Source: McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 38.)

This feature, a near direct quotation from Paris' celebrated Rue de Rivoli, was extended eastward along the Avenue de France in 1938 when the *Nationale* building was raised on the site of a smaller building at the head of the Place de la Résidence (Figure 3.30).



Figure 3.30. 1938 *Nationale* building and the Place de l'Indépendance, Tunis. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Jean-Emile Resplandy's art nouveau Municipal Theatre (1902), its adjacent casino complex (called the "Palmarium," destroyed during WWII and subsequently rebuilt identically) and the massive 1931 *Colisée* building contributed to the colonial-era pastiche of styles one encountered along the Avenue (Figures 3.31 and 3.32).<sup>57</sup> The plasticity of the theatre's confectionary-like façade, here with its relief depiction of Apollo, can be seen in countless buildings throughout the city, Italian plasterers and sculptors having been greatly employed in their production. The *Colisée's* contrasting geometric

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<sup>57</sup> On these and other buildings of the period see McGuinness et al., *Tunis*. See also Zoubeïr Mouhli. "Tunis: Vers le Coeur de la Ville: la Veine de Sauvegarde," *Architecture Méditerranéenne* (1999): n.p.



Figure 3.31. 1902 Municipal Theatre, Tunis.  
Photograph (ca. mid-20<sup>th</sup> century).  
(Source: McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 47.)



Figure 3.32. 1931 *Colisée* building, Tunis. Postcard (ca. mid-20<sup>th</sup> century).  
(Source: Authors collection.)

composition, exemplary of many Avenue buildings built during the 1930's, recalls the work of Paris' Modernist architect Michel Roux-Spitz.<sup>58</sup> Most of the Avenue's other structures fit into this general array of neoclassical, art deco, art nouveau and Modern types, and these are but a few highlights selected in order to establish the street's stylistic range during this period.

### The Place Jules-Ferry.

At the eastern extremity of the Avenue for most of the colonial era lay the Place Jules-Ferry, dedicated under the auspices of *Résident général* René Millet in 1899 (Figure 3.33).



Figure 3.33. Avenue and Place Jules-Ferry, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1905).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

With the establishment of the memorial square in honor of this most ardent of colonialist French Prime Ministers in 1900, the entire Avenue was given his

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<sup>58</sup> McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 70.

name as well. Spatial counterpoint to the Place de la Bourse/Lavigerie, this considerably grander feature hosted what was at its dedication hailed as the “first statue erected [in Tunisia] since the fall of the Roman Empire” fourteen centuries before.<sup>59</sup> Towards the expanding *ville nouvelle* Ferry confidently stared from atop a tall pedestal, at the base of which were positioned a trio of submissive Tunisians rendered in allegory (Figure 3.34).



Figure 3.34. Jules Ferry monument, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1900).  
(Source: Megnin, “Vues.”)

A woman offered to the “regenerator of Tunisia” a bundle of wheat, a resting farming gazes up in respectful admiration, and a young schoolboy instructed an Arab child how to read from an open book. Thus the colonial mission of

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<sup>59</sup> René Millet in Çelik, *Empire*, 134. Sebag, *Tunis*, 354 claims that the statue was installed in 1911, while all other sources state 1899 (Çelik, *Empire*, 233) and 1900 (the same year Sebag cites as the year that the Avenue’s name was changed to Jules-Ferry). Though he lived until 1919, his term as Resident General ended in 1900. It seems unlikely that he would have been giving such an address at the statue’s dedication in the place of the sitting head of government were it actually done in 1911. Furthermore, ANT documents cited above state that the statue was considered for “movement” in 1909, rather than installation.

France was rendered quite literally in human form — a “living translation” of the imperial *mission civilatrice*.<sup>60</sup>

Though the Avenue ran past the *Place* to the city’s port facilities, the *Place* remained its terminal feature through most of the colonial era, serving basically as a cul-de-sac at its rather anticlimactic landscaped end (Figure 3.35).



Figure 3.35. Place Jules-Ferry and port, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1910).  
(Source: Barthel, *Projet(s)*, 64.)

Warehouses and industrial structures lined the extended Avenue until the allée and ficus trees were extended with the reclamation of land and thus receding port during the interwar period (see Figure 3.21). French urbanist Victor Valensi prepared a master plan for Tunis in 1920 that attempted to reconcile the city with its waterfront through the extension of the Avenue and creation of a monumental esplanade there and along the newer north-south lakeside Avenue Gambetta (Figure 3.36). Though the “Champ de Mars” esplanade had

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<sup>60</sup> René Millet in Çelik, *Empire*, 134.

been by 1916 reclaimed from the lake and became a popular space for public socializing, Valensi's scheme for the Avenue Jules-Ferry (and the creation of a new monumental center and boulevard parallel to the north) went unexecuted.<sup>61</sup>

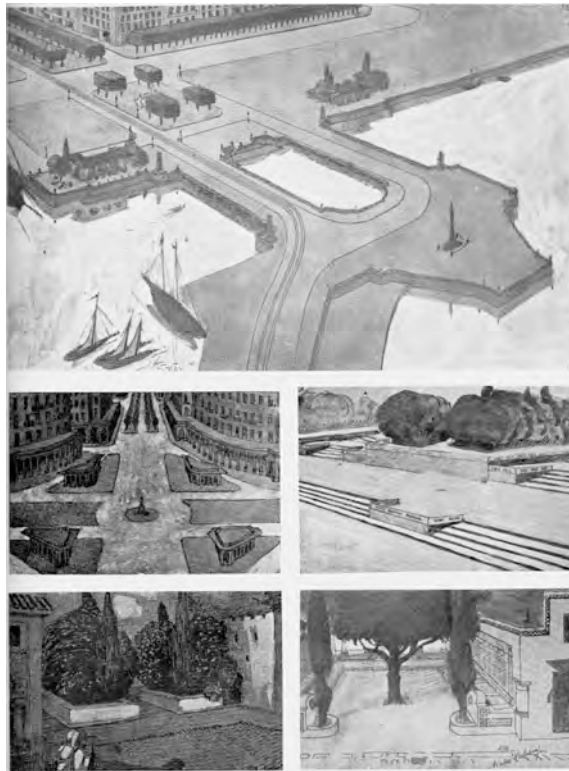


Figure 3.36. Tunis Master Plan proposals by Victory Valensi. Drawings (1920).  
(Source: Jellal Abdelkafi, *La Médina de Tunis: Espace Historique*  
(Paris: Alif, 1989), 77.)

The city and Avenue would thus maintained its ambivalent relationship with its lake through the end of the twentieth century.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> On the Avenue Gambetta and its lakeside esplanade, see Camille Mauclair, "The tranquil beauty of Tunisia," in *Tunisian Journey*, ed. Boujamil, 11 and Serge Santelli, *Le Creuset Méditerranéen: Tunis* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1995), 74–80.

<sup>62</sup> Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 74–79 and Santelli, *Creuset*, 80. On colonial-period ambivalence toward waterfront, see Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, ed. *Tunis en projet(s): La fabrique d'une métropole au bord de l'eau*. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 63–65.

### Transport on the Avenue.

Though Tunis' two main trains stations (founded before the protectorate) came to be placed just off the Avenue to the north and south, the central streetscape played host to considerable transport infrastructure during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Primarily a pedestrian zone at its foundation (hence a "promenade"), the Avenue space was eventually overlain with a complex web of urban tram and regional rail lines, carriage and bus routes (after 1930), and eventually vehicular parking spaces. Servicing these transportation networks, and particularly regional links to the northern suburbs of Carthage and La Marsa and western Bardo was the *Gare du Nord* (North Station). Tunis was linked to Algiers in via its southern station by 1880, initially known as the *Gare française*.<sup>63</sup>

Constructed by English and Italian entrepreneurs from 1872 through 1875, the Tunis-Goulette-Marsa (TGM) line originally ran from the North Station along the west coast of the Tunis lake before eventually being rerouted more directly across the lake via an elevated causeway in 1905 (Figure 3.37).<sup>64</sup> With that change came the installation of minor station facilities located on the Avenue's allée before the Municipal Theatre/Casino and east of the Place Jules-Ferry, the latter called "Tunis-Marine Station" (Figure 3.38). Otherwise horse-drawn and eventually electric trams linked the rest of the Tunis' growing *ville nouvelle* to its axial center (see Figure 3.26), the

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<sup>63</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 289–290

<sup>64</sup> Amodei, "Formation," 28–30 and Sebag, *Tunis*, 289–290 and 358. For more on suburban identities as related to the TGM line, see Mohsen Ben Hadj Salem, "A Regional Identity through a Railway Line: Tunis North Suburb and the TGM" in *Regional Architecture and Identity in the Age of Globalization vol. I*, eds. Jamal Al-Quwasmi et al. (Tunis: Center for the Study of Architecture in the Arab Region, 2008), 203–216.

development of which required the reconfiguration of several of the surviving outer-wall portals by 1909.<sup>65</sup>

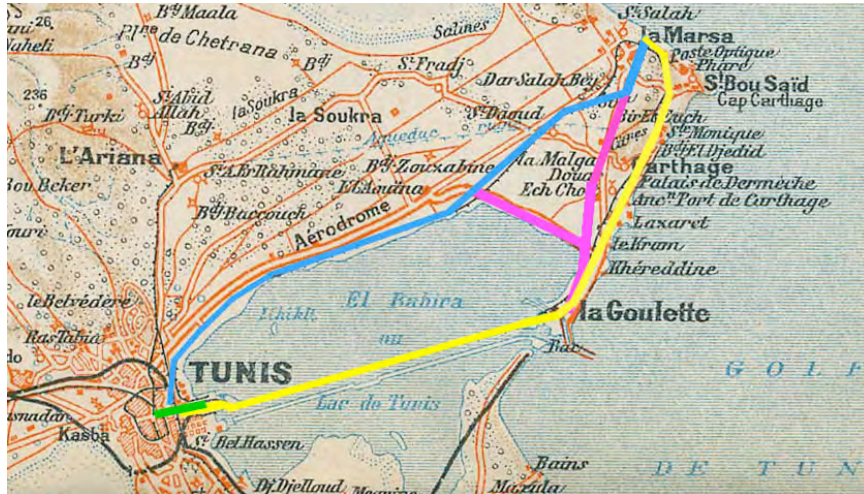


Figure 3.37. Tunis TGM suburban rail routes. Plan (1872–present).  
 Blue and pink (1872–1905). Blue and yellow (1905–1965).  
 Yellow (1965–present).

(Source: Based on “Tunis et ses environs 1937,” Wikimedia Commons, <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plan\\_Tunis\\_et\\_ses\\_environs\\_-\\_1937.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Plan_Tunis_et_ses_environs_-_1937.jpg)>.)

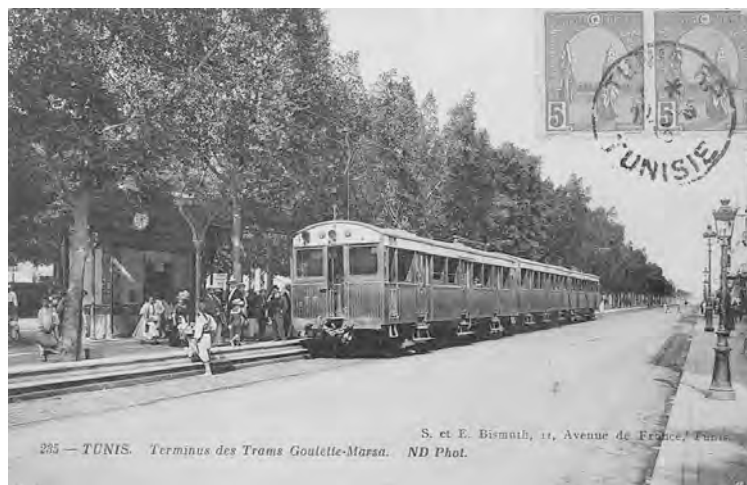


Figure 3.38. TGM terminus on the Avenue (Casino). Postcard (ca. 1910).  
 (Source: “Jules Ferry 1910,” Wikimedia Commons, <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jules\\_ferry\\_1910.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jules_ferry_1910.jpg)>.)

<sup>65</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 350.

Access to the Avenue streetscape came not only from the suburbs by TGM and national trains through the two stations, but of course by boat as well. The city's port was fully modernized and enlarged under French direction in 1892 and was separated from the expanding *ville nouvelle* by manmade land (using soil excavated in port dredging), having previously been located near the later Place Jules-Ferry.<sup>66</sup> An elongated, but underdeveloped, Avenue de la Marine directly linked it to the rest of the city in 1894.<sup>67</sup> Visitors and cargo arrived at La Goulette, the primary port and its associated settlement at the far side of the lake, and thence made their way across to Tunis via the TGM or improved canal (parallel to the causeway) to the Marine station or secondary inner city port facilities. Arrival upon the Avenue for most was thus either gained laterally from adjacent streets by foot, automobile or tram, or at port and station terminals at its eastern end through the Place Jules-Ferry.<sup>68</sup> As the collecting point for European Tunisois and tourists, the Avenue's transport infrastructure inevitably drew all to it and thus reinforced its role as the city's primary zone of socialization, consumption, and culture.

#### The Tunis medina following colonization.

Though the French had opened up the closed space of the medina through the demolition of its walls, thereby exposing its traditionally

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<sup>66</sup> Common lore tells of the lake historically reaching up to the *Bab Bahr* (Sea Gate) and thus the port being there located. Scholars have come to conclude, however, that the name comes from the gate's opening on the direction of the lake and sea, rather than its direct proximity to it. On dedication festivities related to the opening of the port in 1892, see Çelik, *Empire*, 233–234. On initial placement of the port, see Gandolphe, "La vie," 160.

<sup>67</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 357.

<sup>68</sup> Increasing private and commercial vehicular traffic during the interwar period contributed further to the development of Tunis' transportation systems, with the number of automobiles imported dramatically skyrocketing from 1,017 in 1920 to 25,975 just nineteen years later. See Sebag, *Tunis*, 474.

internalized fabric to the outside world, little else was done within. Guidelines for the creation of open plazas within the core's dense fabric were issued and conservation of historic structures was encouraged, though in actuality the concern for the latter appears to have trumped interest in the former.<sup>69</sup> Major thoroughfares that linked directly to the *ville nouvelle* were regularized to some degree by the municipality and aligned in order to facilitate connection and contact between the two zones in accordance with the 1889 Roadway Ordinance. In 1932 the city assumed responsibility for all of the medina's streets and alleys, though it would appear that little as actually changed on the ground throughout the protectorate era.<sup>70</sup> Thus the Tunisois medina was never subject to the invasive and destructive reorganization and "improvement" that other colonial cities endured. Algiers and Casablanca come to mind as cases in which the medieval core of the city was razed in part and cut through by the insertion of open squares and "modern" roadways, à la Haussmann. The medina of Algiers (usually referred to in its entirety as the "casbah"), particularly in its lower section, was ruthlessly dissected following its being taken by France in 1830. As the "trial-and-error case of French colonial urbanism," it set many precedents in imperial urban intervention that inspired significant discontent and confrontation on the ground.<sup>71</sup> So notorious were the acts of French planners in Algiers that Tunisia's colonial administration took pride in the preservation of Tunis' fetishized medina. Cognizant of the fact that "in Algiers the Casbah was *haussmannized*...it was hollowed out by large boulevards lined with [new] buildings, which have left nothing substantial from

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<sup>69</sup> Hamza Zeghlache, "The Medina as an expression of social values," (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1987), 155-156.

<sup>70</sup> Ammar, "La naissance," 189–190.

<sup>71</sup> Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1997), 7.

the Arab town,” it was instead on the site of an “unhygienic beach” that French engineers set their boulevards and buildings.<sup>72</sup> Further boasting, Resident General Millet concluded that “*Tunis la blanche* has preserved its oriental character,” and in cities throughout Tunisia, the French “have not touched the picturesque décor of their ancient cores.”<sup>73</sup> Though the medina’s streets were cleaned up and basic services installed during the colonial period, its fabric was left largely intact and remained in great contrast to the adjacent *ville nouvelle*, the latter’s primary avenue acting as a theoretical “battering ram against the old city” (Figure 3.39).<sup>74</sup>



Figure 3.39. Tunis’ medina and *ville nouvelle*. Satellite image (2008).  
(Source: Google Maps. <[www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)>.)

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<sup>72</sup> René Millet in Çelik, *Empire*, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Bechir Kenzari, “Lake Tunis, or the Concept of the Third Center,” in Yassar Elsheshtawy, ed. *Planning Middle Eastern Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 120. For more on the effects of the *ville nouvelle*’s construction upon the medina, see Maika Snider, “Architectural Identity and Social Construct: How the Imposition of the French New City Affected the Traditional Medina of Tunis,” in *Regional Architecture and Identity in the Age of Globalization vol. III*, eds. Jamal Al-Quwasmi et al. (Tunis: Center for the Study of Architecture in the Arab Region, 2008), 961–972.

## Tunis as Paris.

Little explicit evidence is at this point as to the intent of designers and planners in Tunis has been uncovered, save the 1860 ANT plan (see Figure 3.5) and comments gleaned from later documents published in 1925 relating to the installation of the Lavigerie statue. Though the landscaping of the Avenue de la Marine, as depicted in 1860, clearly recalls the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, as executed it more closely approximates the composition of somewhat less monumental tree-lined boulevards, such as the Boulevards Richard-Lenoir, Battignoles and d'Italie (Figures 3.40 and 2.3).

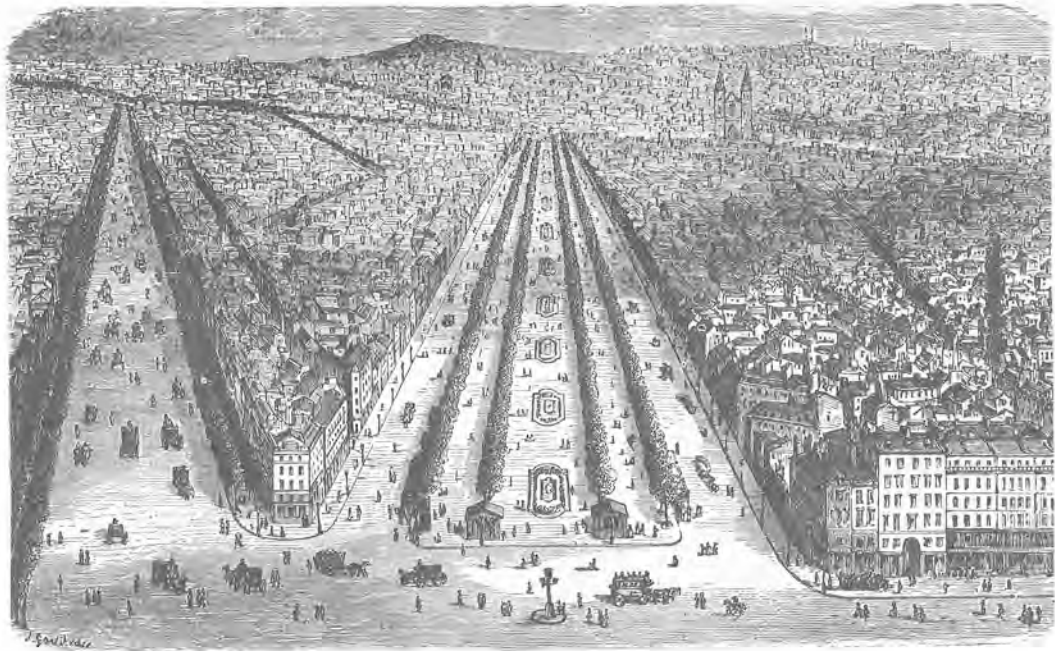


Figure 3.40. Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, Paris. Birdseye view (ca. 1865).  
(Source: Saalman, *Hausmann*, 112.)

This more generic similarity can be further seen in the installation of imported French street furniture and the planning principles espoused by colonialist authorities that valued the picturesque vista, façade consistency, geometric precision and dignified monumentality.

Concern for monumental perspectives was certainly known in Tunis as it was in Paris. The Avenue's trees were planted to both deliberately shade the street and frame one's view of the (eventually) isolated *Bab Bahr/Porte de France* from the central promenade.<sup>75</sup> When the movement of the Jules Ferry statue was proposed in 1909, the Municipal Council appears to have rejected the Place de la Résidence, not only because his accomplishments in secular governance made its placement before the cathedral of dubious propriety, but also because it would likely obscure the line of sight along the length of the spacious Avenue.<sup>76</sup> It seems that officials wanted the Porte de France to be visible, and that they preferred that the eastern end of the Avenue culminate in the elevated statue of Ferry, the port facilities offering an inadequate visual focal point at the time. An endcap was required, and a French penchant for statuary monuments combined with the administration's ambivalence towards its less than ideally scenic lakefront resulted in the closing of the perspective by means of monumental installation, as had so often been the case in Paris. Ferry thus faced the city, his back turned to the port, Mediterranean and distant Europe.<sup>77</sup>

Tunis' Avenue de la Marine did reflect elements particular to the Champs-Élysées, however. It, like Paris' grandest of ceremonial streetscapes, was built *ex nihilo* at the city's edge, rather than plowed through existing urban fabric, as were other boulevards. Furthermore, it was traced to link a monumental gateway arch, eventually isolated in Haussmannian fashion, and

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<sup>75</sup> G. Pire, "Les plantations de la ville de Tunis" in *Bulletin de la Société Internationale des Amis des Arbres de Tunisie* 61 (Tunis: Imprimerie Rapide de Tunis, 1930), 15–17 cited in H. Rejeb, et al., "l'Arbre," 6.

<sup>76</sup> Conseil Municipal, Tunis, "Extrait du Registre des Délibérations: Exercice 1925, Session extraordinaire."

<sup>77</sup> See Barthel, *Tunis en projet(s)*, 63–65.

major port/rail facilities. The renaming of the *Bab Bahr* as the Porte de France co-opted its own identity and rendered it effectively French — a monument to rationalized planning, urban order and French triumph over Tunisia. As one once emerged from the forests west of Paris to triumphantly enter the capital, so too did one proverbially leave behind the wilderness of the organic medina in passing beneath Tunis' Porte de France.

The most explicit reference to a particular structure in Paris built entirely by the French in Tunis is of course its small section of *Rivoli* arcades. The earliest section attached to the *Magasin Général* bears striking resemblance, and the later 1931 extension along the base of the *Nationale* building are unmistakable architectural paraphrases taken from the metropole (see Figures 2.4, 3.29 and 3.30).

As previously stated, evidence that planners in Tunis explicitly sought to recreate a specific street in Paris remains elusive at this point. In light of the evidence presented above, one is compelled to view their work as the creation of a basic tree-lined Parisian boulevard wherein dashes of Rivoli and the Champs-Élysées assure its distinctly Parisian ambiance. Contemporary reception and representation of the Avenue speak volumes as to the city's successful recreation of a Parisian space in form and function.

A French visitor to Tunis in 1859, commenting on the state of Promenade de la Marine's earliest development, remarked that its construction "by the care of the consul" had progressed to the point wherein it already hosted many "admirable types" of strollers comfortable acting *as French people* in an increasingly French environment.<sup>78</sup> Skipping forward in

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<sup>78</sup> Crapelet, "Voyage," 23. Such observation brings to mind the countless comments of visitors to Paris struck by the diversity of that city's citizenry. See for example, Anon. *Grand Hôtel guide de l'étranger dans Paris et ses environs* (Paris: Grand Hotel, 1877), 14.

time to 1911, Charles Géniaux felt at home upon the Avenue Jules-Ferry as though he were truly *en pleine France*.<sup>79</sup> Profoundly, Myriam Harry appreciated the French ambiance of the Avenue, sensing that “all of this seems, linked across the sea, a prolongation of our Parisian boulevards,”<sup>80</sup> while an American visitor to Tunis in 1911, Ms. Emma Burbank Ayer, stood on the Avenue Jules-Ferry and felt as though she were “on a street of real French shops [as] there was no evidence that they were in an Oriental city.”<sup>81</sup> Though Ms. Ayer describes the surrounding built environment, she seems quite preoccupied with the people about her and what they do. Her description continues as she and her husband strolled along the Avenue Jules-Ferry, “an avenue of which even Paris might be proud,” past

fine shops and cafés [that] line both sides of the avenues, the latter predominating. It was a gay and animated scene that the Two came into, being the hour when the French population turns out in full force. Moreover, it was Thursday afternoon, when the band plays there, so the avenues were thronged with pedestrians and the cafés were doing a rushing business.... Everybody was talking, everybody was laughing, it seemed, and everybody else drinking coffee, beer, or absinth at the cafés, whose little tables overflowed out into the street.<sup>82</sup>

Her account of the exciting activity along the Avenue Jules-Ferry, like so many contemporary descriptions of Paris’ public *fête imperiale*, provides meaningful insight to the very French function of the lively public space. A diverse array of men and women strolled, window-shopped, dined, and openly displayed themselves to an apparently interested society, just as they did in Paris.<sup>83</sup> Indoor/outdoor café seating, interstitial arcades, open balconies, and mixed-

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Géniaux, “l’Œuvre artistique du gouvernement tunisien,” *La Revue Bleue* (1911), 534 cited in Béguin, *Arabisances*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Myriam Harry, “la Tunisie,” in *l’Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1927), 166 cited in Béguin, *Arabisances*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Ayer, *Motor*, 325.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

use residential/commercial structures cultivated an ambivalence between public and private domains and social spectacle unlike anything in the traditional medina but very suggestive of bourgeois Parisian living.<sup>84</sup> References to cafés and café culture are not infrequent in contemporary accounts, as Tunisois establishments were said to have been of high quality during the colonial era (Figure 3.41).<sup>85</sup>



Figure 3.41. *Pâtisserie Royale*, Tunis. Advertisement (ca. 1920).  
(Source: Becher, *Tunis*, 48.)

Contemporary images further illustrate the Avenue's dynamic environment — the arcades of the Avenue de France bustling with shoppers and the shaded allée crowded with flower vendors and passers-by (Figures 3.42 and 3.43).

<sup>84</sup> Béguin, *Arabisances*, 156.

<sup>85</sup> See for example Douglas Sladen, *Carthage and Tunis, the Old and New Gates of the Orient* (London: Hutchinson, 1906), 335. See also Fatma Ben Becher, *Tunis: Histoire d'une Avenue* (Tunis: Nirvana, 2003), 48–49.



Figure 3.42. *Magasin Général* arcades, Tunis. Drawing (1911).  
(Source: Camille Mauclair, "The tranquil beauty of Tunisia," in *A Tunisian Journey*, ed. Hafedh Boujmil (Tunis: Nirvana, 2008), 15.)



Figure 3.43. Avenue Ferry *allée* and flower stalls. Photograph (ca. 1935).  
(Source: Becher, *Tunis*, 65.)

Historical accounts speak not only of the quotidian along Tunis' Avenue, but also of the particularly spectacular. Certainly it was the site of buying and selling, drinking, dining and regular socializing, but it was also city's primary stage for more elaborate events such as military, religious and other civic processions and parades.<sup>86</sup> As previously recounted, Bastille Day celebrations annually took place upon the Avenue and usually included great pomp and public display. In his 1908 text description of Tunis' festivities, Graham Petrie describes the impressive military parades, fireworks and evening illumination of the Avenue's trees and buildings "with thousands of fairy-lights and coloured lanterns" that marked the occasion.<sup>87</sup> The liberation of Tunis by Allied forces in 1943 inspired yet another opportunity for martial pageantry on the Avenue, as battalions of victorious American and British troops paraded up and down its length in a manner foreshadowing what would a year later happen on Paris' Champs-Élysées. In addition to the weekly open-air musical performances described by Ayer, *courses des garçons de cafés* beneath the Avenue's ficus canopy contributed to the Tunisois variety of the "middle-class jollity and frivolity" of Parisian public spectacle (Figure 3.44).<sup>88</sup>

That the colonial environment and culture were to be (re)fashioned into an "integral, if noncontiguous, part of the mother country" can thus be discerned from the architectural and urban projects undertaken about the Avenue, as well as its function.<sup>89</sup> As the boulevards of Paris were the symbol *par excellence* of a "modern" Paris, they were apparently perceived as such by

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<sup>86</sup> See Çelik, *Empire*, 233–234, for accounts of the public festivities related to statue unveilings and the opening of the modern port in 1893.

<sup>87</sup> Graham Petrie, *Tunis, Kairouan & Carthage* (London: William Heinemann, 1908), 105.

<sup>88</sup> Sorkin, *Variations*, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 8.

colonialists and visitors in Tunis as well.



Figure 3.44. *Courses des garçons de cafés* on the Avenue Ferry.  
Photograph (ca. mid-20<sup>th</sup> century).  
(Source: Becher, *Tunis*, 65.)

As Orientalists they undoubtedly appreciated the contrast between the “civilization and progress” made manifest in their *ville nouvelle* and what they perceived to be the incoherent “anarchy that had characterized Arab urbanization,” the latter likely reminding them of their own maligned medieval pasts.<sup>90</sup> Thus the new city functioned not only as a commercial and social space, but also as a practical exercise in theoretically “better” urbanism, that is to say orderly, hygienic and symbolically charged, reflective of the larger French imperial *mission civilatrice*, a major tenant of which was education through demonstration.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Saalman, *Hausmann*, 21 and Raymond, “Islamic City,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> The full array of France’s colonial accomplishments in Tunisia (commercial, industrial, infrastructural, social, &c.) are proudly presented in a timely volume produced by the Protectorate government published just before independence. See Anon. *Tunisia 54* (Paris: Encyclopédie mensuelle d’outre-mer, 1954).

Gaining insight as to how the Avenue was used and viewed by Tunisian locals remains challenging. For sure they frequented the space regularly, and Ms. Ayer's commentary refers to the presence of "Arab dandies" as well as other members of the "Eastern element" including "Biblical-looking patriarchs," mendicants, and "Berber porters."<sup>92</sup> Though of limited utility and hardly scientific, her account underscores the transitory nature of Tunisians' involvement in the space's dynamism. They appear to have been passing through on, or toward, public transportation, begging for money, and working in service positions in a space that ultimately was neither created for them nor practically with them in mind.<sup>93</sup>

The Avenue scripted "Parisian Colonial" within its local context.

Following the displacement of Tunis' Tunisian elites from municipal power in the early 1880's, the European administrators (including European consuls, the Resident General, the French-controlled Municipal Council, the public works ministry, &c.) assumed the role of the city's earliest spatial engineers. The space that they created reflected the streets they knew of Haussmann's Paris. As had been demonstrated, in the form of the Avenue de la Marine/Jules-Ferry one detected clear references to the Champs-Élysées, the Rue Rivoli and other major boulevards. Tunis' boulevard furthermore functioned much like its Parisian counterparts, being the commercial, social and cultural center of the colonial capital. It comforted and accommodated European expatriates and tourists, these being its primary developers, users and audience. It encouraged continued colonization through emigration from

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<sup>92</sup> Ayer, *Motor*, 326.

<sup>93</sup> Further study of the street from this perspective would be greatly advanced by a knowledge of Tunisian Arabic.

France.<sup>94</sup> It facilitated expenditure, public spectacle and entertainment, and was crafted in such a manner that its prestigious space became a valuable commodity. Finally, it “civilized” locals, just as twenty-first-century brands and spaces wield the power to entice, inform and influence attentive audiences. Indeed, all of these qualities of the Protectorate-era Avenue could be said of themed spaces as they are developed now.

The use of architectural styles popular in Paris, the French language, the foundation of cafés, restaurants and French businesses that came with the establishment of the Protectorate virtually guaranteed a Parisian ambiance during the early history of the *ville nouvelle* and Avenue streetscape. Throughout this period it seems that the sole architectural indicator that one was not 920 miles away in Paris was the inclusion of several palm trees on the Place de la Résidence. Thus, if scripting or “theming involves the use of an overarching theme...to create a holistic and integrated spatial organization of a consumer value,” than “Parisian Colonial” is certainly this period’s scripted identity for the Avenue.<sup>95</sup> If it is means by which individuals intentionally assert their identities through self-constructed images, than Tunis, through the acts of its elites and their grand Avenue, proudly declared itself distinctly Parisian and maintained itself as such until 1956.<sup>96</sup> Though the explicit intent of the city’s French designers and planners remains scantily documented, one can assess their successful recreation of a Parisian ambiance through the wide array of evidence presented above. Indeed, Douglas Sladen recognized the achievements of Tunisios designers and planners as early as 1906, stating

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<sup>94</sup> Dessort acknowledges these two attributes in 1926. See Dessort, “Protectorat,” in his *Histoire*, 185.

<sup>95</sup> Scott A. Lukas, ed., *The Themed Space: Locating Culture, Nation, and Self* (New York: Lexington, 2007), 1.

<sup>96</sup> See Klingmann, *Brandscapes*, 55.

unequivocally that “French Tunis is a little bit of Paris,” just as so many others would.<sup>97</sup>

This comes hardly as a surprise. Architects and planners in protectorate-era Tunis were largely of French origin and included locally-prolific figures such as Raphaël Guy, Jean-Emile Resplandy, Victor Valensi and Jacques Marmay.<sup>98</sup> Designers during the later period remained either French or functioned completely within the framework of French practices. Indeed, the *Ecole de Beaux-Arts de Tunis* (EBAT), founded in 1930, was established explicitly in accordance with the model developed in Paris’ famous academy. Its primary student base consisted of colonialist youths who sought an education on par with that available to their metropolitan counterparts. Though art was the original academic focus, introductory coursework in architecture soon followed. Classes were taught by French and French-trained professionals and followed French precedents in its pedagogy. Studies were based on the master-disciple system wherein a specialist supervised several gifted students in a workshop setting. Following WWII the school took a slightly more pragmatic approach and geared itself more directly towards the applied arts. Advanced architecture, however, was never fully embraced by EBAT curricula, as it was considered outside the realm of Tunisian construction techniques and indigenous capabilities. French colonials and assimilated Tunisians interested in engaging architecture and urbanism in practice appealed directly to the expertise of metropolitan France throughout

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<sup>97</sup> Sladen, *Carthage*, 335. At this early stage of the Avenue’s development in Tunis, he likens it to not only the Rue de Rivoli, but also the Rue Royale.

<sup>98</sup> For more on the early works of these French architects in Tunisia, see Santelli, *Creust*, 59–88, and Udo Kultermann, “Contemporary Arab Architecture: Architects of Algeria, Tunisia and Libya,” *MIMAR 9: Architecture in Development* (Concept Media, Ltd.) (1983): 59–65.

the colonial period.<sup>99</sup>

The establishment of institutions essentially identical to those of the mother country is a hallmark of French colonial *assimilation* policies. As the “traditional colonial doctrine of France,” (championed early on by Jules Ferry) it ultimately sought to bring the noncontiguous colony into the fold of metropolitan France through the reshaping of its society and population in its own image.<sup>100</sup> The underlying arrogance of such an approach is obvious and can be seen in not only the foundation of EBAT, but also in the planning of the entire *ville nouvelle* and the choices in architectural styles made there. French models were seen as perfect and fit to be copied and set in place wherever, without regard for local contexts. Such policies appealed to the French mind concerned with order, a fundamental belief in the potential equality of man, the ever-present interest in the dissemination French culture and the desire for uniform colonial administration. The labeling of some colonies (viz. Algeria, but not “protected” Tunisia) as parts of *France d’Outre-Mer* (“France over-seas”) succinctly expresses an assimilation theory that was applied throughout the empire, regardless of the technical master-subject relationship (“colony,” v. “protectorate”).<sup>101</sup>

Towards the first decade of the twentieth century, assimilation as a practice came under increasing scrutiny and was decried as “rigid, unscientific, and harmful.”<sup>102</sup> Deemed unfit for an increasingly diverse empire, it was supplanted by *association* as primary cultural doctrine at this time. Considered

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<sup>99</sup> The same is said of colonial-era architectural education in Algerian and Morocco. See Ali Djerbi and Abdelwahab Safi, “Teaching History of Architecture in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco: Colonialism, Independence and Globalism,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62 no. 1 (2003): 102–103.

<sup>100</sup> Betts, *Assimilation*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

to be simpler, more flexible and practical, it was endorsed by a new generation of colonialists that sought cooperation between administrators and locals.<sup>103</sup> The *mission civilatrice* was not, however, undermined by a change in approach that encouraged more respect for local culture and institutions. Rather, the policy of association attempted to “establish a certain equivalence or compensation of reciprocal services,” while “far from letting the domination weaken, this policy want[ed] to reinforce it by making it less offensive and repugnant.”<sup>104</sup> Fundamental still, the colonizer reserved the moral obligation to improve the material and cultural status of the colonized.<sup>105</sup> Thus France’s power could be prolonged, to some degree, native resistance assuaged by means of more sensitive tactics. In French “protectorates,” never intended to be an actual *part of France*, association policies resonated with particular strength, as under both circumstances more indirect colonialism necessitated cooperation.<sup>106</sup> The valorization of local institutions and adoption of more contextually sensitive architectural construction techniques and styles throughout French territories reflected this adjusted mentality.

Though the particularly Parisian form of the Avenue is perhaps not surprising in its earliest years, but the maintenance of a relatively conservative aesthetic in light of stylistic shifts that occurred elsewhere in Tunis, Tunisia and the greater French empire, is noteworthy. References to local contexts, increasingly popular after 1900 in accordance with association policies, remained largely excluded from the Avenue. Neo-Moorish and Arabesque references failed to gain the popularity which designs of generally

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>104</sup> Jules Harmond, *Domination et colonisation* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1910), 160.

<sup>105</sup> Betts, *Assimilation*, 123.

<sup>106</sup> Lyautey’s Morocco, and of course Tunisia, were primary examples of such in North Africa. See Ibid., 126–132.

neoclassical, art nouveau, art deco and eventually Modern, styles did. Buildings such as the Justice Ministry (1902) and General Treasury (1921) thus reflect North African architecture (admittedly through the eyes of their French designers) in a manner unknown on the Avenue Jules-Ferry, where styles remained thoroughly in the vein of assimilation (Figures 3.45 and 3.46).<sup>107</sup> Representative of the high achievement of metropolitan France and its facilitation of universal progress through emulation of the capital (intentional or otherwise), Avenue architecture did not adopt the more contextually-inspired embellishments seen even elsewhere on other colonial cities' major boulevards, such as Rabat's Avenue Muhammad V (ex-Avenue Dar al-Maghzan).<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, even where breakthroughs in the "most advanced modern architecture and urbanism in North Africa" of the 1940's and 1950's existed, they were being developed not in the capital's center on its most celebrated Avenue, but rather in northern suburbs or more obscure southern cities, towns and villages.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, neoclassical, art deco, art nouveau and early Parisian Modern remained the predominant personalities of the Avenue's mature appearance through the dawn of independence. The overall effect was an intentional pastiche of undeniably Parisian styles reminiscent of the eclecticism known today in postmodern themed spaces.

The Avenue Jules-Ferry thus became the premier symbol of Tunis leading up to and throughout the seventy-five years of French occupation.

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<sup>107</sup> Béguin, *Arabisances*, 11.

<sup>108</sup> Gwendolyn Wright. "Rabat: Boulevard Muhammad V," in Çelik et al., eds., *Streets*, 225–234.

<sup>109</sup> Kidder Smith, "Report from Tunisia," *Architectural Forum* 93 (July 1950): 18. For more on Tunisia's postwar modernist architecture, see Kenzari, "Perchoir," and Leïla Ammar, *Histoire de l'Architecture en Tunisie* (Tunis: Agence MIM, 2005), 232–234.



Figure 3.45. Justice Ministry building, Tunis.  
Emile Resplandy, architect. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)



Figure 3.46. General Treasury building, Tunis. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

It served as the visual metonym *par excellence* and was almost always depicted as emblematic of the French city itself.<sup>110</sup> Its architecture, its monuments, its trees and the things that happened in the shadows of each contributed to the local representation of Paris, that is to say French notions of modernity, capitalism, hygiene, rational urbanism and public spectacle.

The mature colonial streetscape was thus a space through which one moved and experienced this particular Parisian nature, just as did officials on public holidays such as Bastille Day. As individuals generally arrived on the Avenue at its terminal port facilities or were deposited on its curb by the TGM, they proceeded up its length towards the Place de la Résidence and the medina beyond, past built tributes to the heroes of the mimicked metropole (Ferry, the unknown soldier and Lavignerie) and streets memorializing French cities and regions. En route, one experienced the resolution of the desolate industrial ambiance of the eastern port district into one of lively cafés and stately structures, the culmination of which was the broad Place de la Résidence, French headquarters and towering cathedral. A contraction of space to the west confined one to covered arcades more in scale with the adjacent medina enhances the grandeur of the ceremonial center and set off the liberated Porte de France and its irregular square. Here the rigid linearity of the precisely planned *ville nouvelle* yielded to the museumified medina, its fabric having exposed and arrested in time by the removal of walls, infrastructural neglect and Orientalist interpretations of its form and function.

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<sup>110</sup> Illustrative of this phenomenon, the caption to a full page aerial photo of the Avenue appears in a 1943 edition of *National Geographic* reads “White City of Apartments and Palm-shaded Boulevards is Tunis — Goal of Allied Armies” and goes on to refer to the Avenue as the city’s “Broadway.” Unknown author and article title, *National Geographic* (1943): 114.

The narrow Avenue de France section of the street provided the necessary physical and semiotic decrescendo necessitated by the unquestionable social, cultural and political supremacy of the Avenue. Between the wilderness of the sea and Islamic city thus thrived the French city, its central Avenue writ with the achievements, standards and ideals of its French masters.

#### CHAPTER 4: TUNISIAN MODERN (1956–1987)

*Tunis is flooding this first day of June, 1955. The streets sit not beneath water, however, but rather a pulsating sea of jubilant Tunisian people. It seems that nearly all of the city's local population has turned out the welcome Habib Bourguiba on his return from exile. In their hands they wield Tunisian flags and in his he holds an agreement guaranteeing limited semi-rule for his anxious country. Bourguiba's arrival beneath a rising sun seems to foretell the dawning of a new era for Tunisia. He is escorted in triumphant procession through the streets of the capital and along the Avenue Jules-Ferry as onlookers, so densely packed in places that they can barely raise their arms overhead, spontaneously break into revolutionary song while women ululate joyfully. Members of his bodyguard, so overcome by the excitement, momentarily forget their duties as they too nearly smother him in unbridled embrace. Though at this time he advocates limited sovereignty rather than full autonomy, unmistakable momentum towards total liberation builds and here at this moment manifests itself in the public ecstasy of the "other."<sup>1</sup> Indépendance! Indépendance (Figure 4.1)!<sup>2</sup>*

In the description above one can sense the future of Tunis' principal avenue, at the cusp of independence still the city's premier social and

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from Anon., "Exiled Hero's Tunis Triumph," *Life* 38, 20 June 1955, 47–51, and Norma Salem, *Habib Bourguiba, Islam and the Creation of Tunisia* (Dover, NH: Croom Helm, 1984), 130–131.

<sup>2</sup> This slogan was actually chanted in 1946 at a gathering of Tunisians disbanded by French authorities. See Tayeb Chenntouf, "The horn and North Africa" in *Africa Since 1935*, Ali A. Mazrui and Christophe Wondji, eds. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 54.

ceremonial gathering place. At this moment Tunisians assumed control of the space through its usage for their own purposes and presented their own identity, just as they would soon do formally following independence.

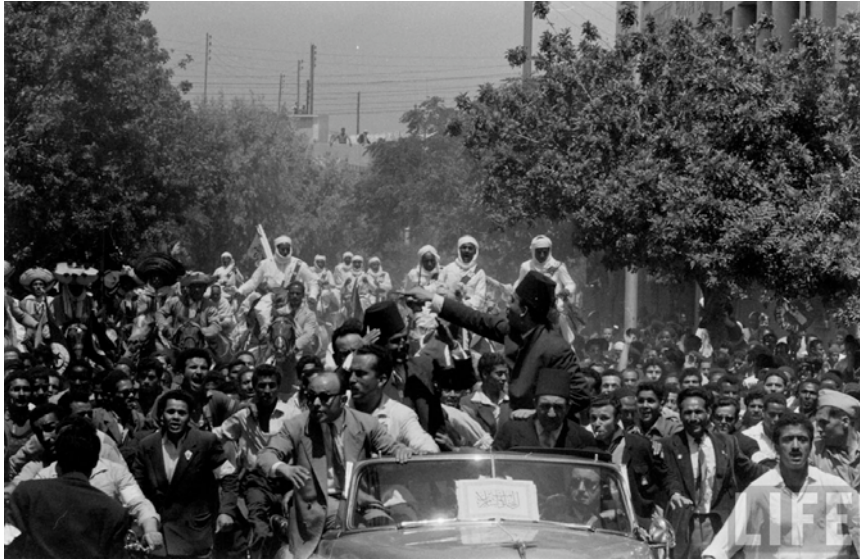


Figure 4.1. Habib Bourguiba's Tunis parade, 01 June 1955. Photograph.  
(Source: Google Life photo archive, <<http://images.google.com/hosted/life>>.)

The adoration of Bourguiba witnessed here quickly resolved into his taking all but complete control of the country, not only in terms of politics and policy, but in social and cultural affairs as well. His drive to modernize the nation and assert its French-flavored independence had tangible effects on the form and function of the Avenue soon to bear his name — largely by his will scripted as “Tunisian Modern.” Bourguiba’s deposition and succession by then Prime Minister Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in 1987 marks the end of the period studied in the present chapter; the form of the city and Avenue changing considerably with the conclusion of the Bourguiba era. Furthermore, as both Presidents would exert significant influence upon the streetscape’s development in very different socio-political contexts they are appropriately considered separately.

## Tunisian Independence.

The French Republic granted independence to Tunisia on 20 March 1956, the events leading up to its proclamation having proceeded quickly over the course of the few years prior. Tunisia's nationalist movement had existed since the beginning of the twentieth century, but gained significant momentum following the Second World War. The appointment of a hard-line Resident General by the Vichy regime and the accession of an activist Bey (quickly deposed by France) during the war years contributed to the resistance otherwise facilitated by the obvious hardships imposed by Nazi invasion, occupation and eventual defeat by Allied forces in 1943. Members of the vocal Neo-Dustur party, including Salah ben Yusuf and Habib Bourguiba, endured repression by the French and repeated exile through the 1940's and early 1950's, while increased calls for self-rule and occasional acts of violence (particularly by the *Main rouge* organization) punctuated the tense debate.

As early as 1943 Charles de Gaulle had recognized the "outmoded" nature of direct rule in Tunisia and advocated movement "towards making the administration of Tunisia a Tunisian administration."<sup>3</sup> It quickly became clear however that independence outright was not initially anticipated. Several different forms of shared sovereignty were discussed with varying degrees of commitment from all sides of the issue, culminating in July 1954 in the successful negotiation of the internal autonomy conventions. By the terms of this agreement France repealed the 1883 La Marsa Convention and reverted to the simpler 1881 Bardo Treaty arrangement, where by it maintained control of Tunisia's foreign affairs and defense alone. The French living in Tunisia retained the majority of their judicial, commercial and religious rights as well,

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<sup>3</sup> Charles de Gaulle quoted in Perkins, *History*, 109.

and they planned to cede policing powers to Tunisians within two year's time.<sup>4</sup> Bourguiba, the charismatic president of the powerful Neo-Dustur party and de facto leader of the Tunisian people, accepted the terms of the agreement as a framework for necessarily-incremental steps toward Tunisian self-governance. French defeat in Indochina, rebellion in Algeria and opposition to decolonization in France made greater concessions impossible, he maintained upon his triumphant return from France on 01 June 1955. Though complete independence had not been officially discussed, to many in Tunis it likely seemed an inevitable result of such excitement and concession from Paris.

France released Morocco from its "protectorate" status in early March 1956, eager to focus its attention and resources on subduing the bloody rebellion in neighboring Algeria. Bourguiba seized the moment and demanded the same from an embattled and humiliated France. Within weeks Tunisian independence was "solemnly acknowledged" in Paris and all remaining colonial conventions nullified.<sup>5</sup> Tunisia was declared the free *Royaume de Tunisie*, a constitutional monarchy under the restyled "King of Tunisia" and Prime Minister Bourguiba. Short-lived, the kingdom was abolished the following year and Tunisia declared a republic — the *République tunisienne* — and Bourguiba made its first president.<sup>6</sup> Beloved leader of what amounted to a "presidential monarchy," Bourguiba cultivated his role as national patriarch, teacher and disciplinarian, fashioning a formidable cult of personality without delay.<sup>7</sup> The passing of several laws relating to the status of Islam, women,

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<sup>4</sup> The full texts of the 1955 Conventions have been reprinted in Franco, *Tunisia*, 172–204. They are discussed at length throughout this publication.

<sup>5</sup> "Protocol Agreement Between France and Tunisia Signed March 20, 1956" reprinted in *ibid.*, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Perkins, *History*, chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

education and the French language made clear the “modern” path upon which Tunisia’s savvy French-trained president planned to embark.<sup>8</sup> Islam was subjugated to a secular state and secularized society. Women were guaranteed equality and an unprecedented degree of personal freedom. Education was heavily funded and French maintained as a primary language of instruction alongside Arabic. Liberal economic policies that followed a failed attempt at socialism facilitated impressive prosperity. Thus Bourguiba, made “President for Life” in 1975, largely dispensed with “outmoded traditions” and supervised his country’s ascent to the realm of modern, sovereign and generally pro-western nation-state.<sup>9</sup>

#### Independence and Tunis.

Though the independence protocols signed on 20 March 1956 guaranteed the basic rights of Europeans residing in Tunisia, most promptly quit the country. Tunis itself, on the eve of independence home to 361,700 Muslims, 38,900 Tunisian Jews and 160,500 Europeans, underwent major demographic changes as the growing population shifted about the city following the exodus of both “foreign” and Tunisian Jewish residents.<sup>10</sup> The Arab bourgeoisie of the medina laid claim to the largely depopulated *ville nouvelle*, opening up space in the city’s historic core for the accommodation of

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<sup>8</sup> On Bourguiba’s charismatic personality and speaking style, see Salem, *Bourguiba*, 17. On the “Franco-Arab” training of Neo-Dustur party officials see *Ibid.*, 102. On the confluence of both, see Charles Micaud, *Tunisia: The Politics of Modernization* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 80–88.

<sup>9</sup> Perkins, *History*, 140. On the social changes instituted by Bourguiba’s regime, see Micaud, *Politics*, 140–167.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics are for Greater Tunis and compiled from Sebag, *Tunis*, 501–519. Central Tunis was composed of 258,500 Muslims, 32,000 Tunisian Jews and 119,500 Europeans (almost 60% French). *Ibid.* By 1970 Europeans and Jews in Tunis accounted for roughly 10% of what they had been in 1956. *Ibid.*, 608–615.

growing numbers of immigrants from rural Tunisia.<sup>11</sup> This redistribution had very real effects on the built environment of the medina, the structures of which were frequently subdivided and neglected by less wealthy occupants in what became a process of “oukalisation” (*oukala* refers to overcrowded and unsafe housing).<sup>12</sup> Changes in the *ville nouvelle* consisted primarily of the renaming of streets within the “Arabicized” city.<sup>13</sup> One could perhaps see the fruition of the *mission civilatrice* at this very moment; Tunisians being modernized not only by their esteemed President, but also by the built environment that they appropriated, inhabited and maintained. Indeed, the Avenue remained at the socio-cultural center of early republican Tunis and though its basic morphology remained unchanged, individual components were subject to minor alteration, removal, substitution and name change, as the newly empowered elite recast the space to suit their emerging self-image.

#### The Place Lavigerie.

At the point of juncture between the medina and *ville nouvelle*, the Place Lavigerie and its provocative monument to the Catholic prelate were the focus of immediate concern after independence. The statue, source of considerable controversy since its installation in 1925, was removed by Tunisian authorities in agreement with the archbishop late at night during Ramadan of 1956. Despite its significance, the act appears to have generated little comment by the press at the time.<sup>14</sup> The square was promptly renamed in

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<sup>11</sup> Pierre Signoles, Amor Belhedi et al., “Tunis: Evolution et Fonctionnement de l’Espace Urbain” in *Urbanisation, Réseaux Urbains, Régionalisation au Maghreb* 6. (Tours: CNRS Editions, 1980), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Perkins, *History*, 627.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 629.

<sup>14</sup> Cuoq, *Lavigerie*, 162. Accounts from Catholic priests who participated in the statue’s removal state that the size and weight of the bronze statue made its dismantling more difficult

honor of the return of Bourguiba from exile in France, as recounted above, and again in typical European fashion (named by date rather than historical figure) became the *Place de la Victoire du 01 juin 1955*.<sup>15</sup>

#### The Place de la Résidence.

Christians in Tunisia were permitted the right to continue practicing their faith following independence. An agreement between the government and the Vatican, dated 9 July 1964 assured the rights of Catholics provided they restrict services to the interiors of the buildings they would be allowed to keep, all the while maintaining an inconspicuous presence.<sup>16</sup> The cathedral on the Place de la Résidence, its bell towers silenced, became the chief church of the nation following the decommissioning of the St. Louis cathedral in Carthage. The imposing *Résidence* générale of France was yet again recast, this time as the French embassy at the heart of a foreign capital. Appropriately the tomb of the unknown French soldier at its center removed to the French war cemetery in suburban Gammarth in 1957.<sup>17</sup> This feature would not be replaced with another until 1978 when, “in appreciation of his thoughtful contributions, the President Habib Bourguiba ordered the establishment of [a] statue” commemorating the life and achievements of medieval philosopher,

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than expected and thus more time-consuming. Evidently it was not fully disengaged from the square until after sunrise. Eyewitness account from David Bond, *Père blanc*, Tunis, “Statue,” e-mail message to author, 30 March 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Further details pertaining to the physical alteration of the square at this moment remain obscure at this time.

<sup>16</sup> Conférence Olivaint de Belgique, *La Tunisie dix ans après* (Brussels: Conférence Olivaint de Belgique, 1966), 311–312. See also Cuoq, *Lavigerie*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Lillian Craig, *Cemeteries and Memories: the Second World War in Tunisia* (Oxford: Michael Tomkinson Publishing, 2007), 79.

astronomer, historian, theologian, mathematician and Tunisois native Ibn Khaldoun (Figure 4.2).<sup>18</sup>



Figure 4.2. Ibn Khaldoun statue, Place de l'Indépendance. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

The general landscaping and ornate iron fencing, dating at least to the 1880's, was again maintained. The site of all of this, the old Place de la Résidence, was accordingly designated the *Place de l'indépendance* in 1956.

#### The Avenue Bourguiba and its architecture.

The particularly ironic nature of the charged Place de l'indépendance, as the confluence of so many apparently contradictory symbols and references — French government, independence, Catholicism and Islam —

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<sup>18</sup> Quote taken from plaque on the back of the statue's base in March 2009 and translated by Khalid Hadeed at Cornell University, March 2009.

was further compounded by the concomitant renaming of the Avenue Jules-Ferry in honor of the nation's ruling president Habib Bourguiba. The shorter Avenue de France section was left as such. Thus, the semiotic complexity of the entire boulevard was heightened even further by the addition of new names to old, secular Bourguiba to persistent France, characters living and those long deceased.

The configuration of the Avenue's heavy ficus canopy remained generally consistent through the early independence period. Trees at its eastern end, however, remained considerably shabbier due to their more recent installation and subsequent neglect during the years leading to independence, during which the attention of the colonial administration lay elsewhere (see Figure 3.22). Efforts to rehabilitate struggling and misaligned trees began in 1968 with a revived regimen of hydration, fertilization and trimming. That said, the aged specimens showed considerable wear during this period and the pristine effect of the allée's picturesque landscaping faded.<sup>19</sup>

Existing buildings on the Avenue changed little with independence, the physical form of most simply accommodating new users, owners and functions. Still, several major structures went up during these decades that did have considerable effects on the Avenue's ambiance. Two tall hotels joined the ranks of the Avenue's façade and challenged both its conservative Parisian character and relatively humble scale.<sup>20</sup> The Hotel Africa (originally the Meridian Africa), sheathed in a shiny striped curtain wall and rendered with

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<sup>19</sup> H. Rejeb, et al., "l'Arbre," 6–8.

<sup>20</sup> The construction date for what is now the Interior Ministry comes from Béguin, *Arabisances*, 135, though several of the other dates he provides have been contradicted by other sources.

modernist simplicity, opened in 1971 after five years of construction (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3. Hotel Africa, Tunis. Postcard (ca. 1980).  
(Source: Cartorama, “Hotel Africa Tunis,”  
<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cartorama/2327659368/>>.)

Designed by Greek architect J. U. Kyriacopoulos, its twenty-three stories included restaurants, bars, shops, a pool, a cinema and a penthouse-level nightclub.<sup>21</sup> Its size and luxurious appointment contrasted significantly with the older establishments huddled around its base. One of the first major architectural achievements of the postcolonial government, the building dominated the Tunis skyline for nearly thirty years, having overtaken the cathedral as the city’s tallest structure.<sup>22</sup> Opposite the Africa and slightly to the west, the Hotel de Deux Avenues (later the El Hana International) opened in

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<sup>21</sup> Kultermann, “Contemporary,” 63 credits Kyriacopoulos with the design of the hotel.

<sup>22</sup> S. Elhouar and M. Mhiri, “Rehabilitation of the Hotel Africa building,” *WIT Transactions on the Built Environment* 83 (2005): 621–630. Béguin, *Arabesances*, gives an incorrect date (1970) for the building on 134, while Sebag, *Tunis*, 638 provides no specific date.

1976.<sup>23</sup> Wrapped in horizontal bands of alternating dark and light cladding, the structure is less “modern” in appearance than the Africa, but similarly novel in its scale and amenities (restaurants, café, rooftop bar, &c.) (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4. Hotel Deux Avenues/El Hana International. Postcard (ca. 1980).  
(Source: Author’s collection.)

Its placement, set back from the Avenue, added to its unique presence on the boulevard.

#### The Place Jules-Ferry transformed.

The Avenue’s east end, anchored by the Place Jules-Ferry since 1900, witnessed considerable modification during the early independence and Bourguiba eras, perhaps more than any other segment. Needless to say, the monument to one of France’s most ardent colonizers was immediately deemed inappropriate and removed. Traces of the square remained for several years, as its internal components were cleared away to make room for

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<sup>23</sup> Béguin, *Arabisances*, 134 (dates elsewhere unreliable). Sebag, *Tunis*, 639 provides no specific date, nor do others.

parking facilities within the bounds of the old square's perimeter landscaping (Figure 4.5). The space's reabsorption into the fabric of the Avenue allée had occurred by 1972, though the diminutive stature of the inserted ficus hardly masked the space's previous shape (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.5. Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Aerial photograph (1960). Looking west. Note ex-Place Jules-Ferry as a car park at center. (Source: Becher, *Tunis*, 72–73.)



Figure 4.6. Place d'Afrique, Tunis. Aerial photograph (1972). Note infill of ex-Place Jules Ferry. (Source: Becher, *Tunis*, 67.)

By this same time increased automobile traffic had necessitated roadway improvements that again privileged the intersection just to its east (*Avenue Mohammad V/ex-Avenue Gambetta* and *Avenue Bourguiba*) and transformed it again into an infrastructural node of symbolic import. Where only a small mid-lane island had been in 1960 (see Figure 4.5) by 1972 there was a large oval feature boarded by flags. The *Place d'Afrique* thus remained until 1977 when it was again enlarged and redecorated with the further improvement of adjacent streets. To the street that bore his name, the newly honored “President for Life” honored himself with the addition of a large equestrian statue on a tall marble podium (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7. Habib Bourguiba equestrian statue. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author’s collection.)

Dressed in western attire and a Tunisian red felt cap (*chechia*), he was depicted riding towards the city, his hand raised as if in triumphant benediction.

### Transport on the Avenue.

Significant growth in Tunis' population during the early years of independence necessitated changes in the city's transportation networks. Buses replaced the TGM's northern line in 1965, limiting its course to the lake causeway alone (see Figure 3.37), which had been joined by an express autoroute in 1956.<sup>24</sup> In 1955 there had been a mere thirteen buses passing through the city's streets, and by 1975 there were 406.<sup>25</sup> This, coupled with major increases in private automobile ownership and taxi usage during the same time resulted in spectacular traffic congestion and right-of-way saturation throughout the *ville nouvelle* and along the Avenue by 1980 (Figure 4.8).

On the Avenue Bourguiba itself, tram tracks had been removed by 1952, the space for which was quickly filled by cars and buses. Further modification to the TGM system changed the streetscape during the early 1970's when the station at the Avenue Bourguiba's eastern end was pushed from just behind the Place Jules-Ferry/Afrique to the road's terminus by the port.<sup>26</sup>

### The Tunisois medina and suburbs.

The redistribution of the Tunisois population and significant levels of immigration from rural Tunisia during this period altered the form and function of the medina through "oukalisation" as discussed above.

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<sup>24</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 642.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 641.

<sup>26</sup> Béguin, *Arabisances*, 134. For precise placement of the TGM station before relocation, see Tomkinson, *Tunisia*, 34.

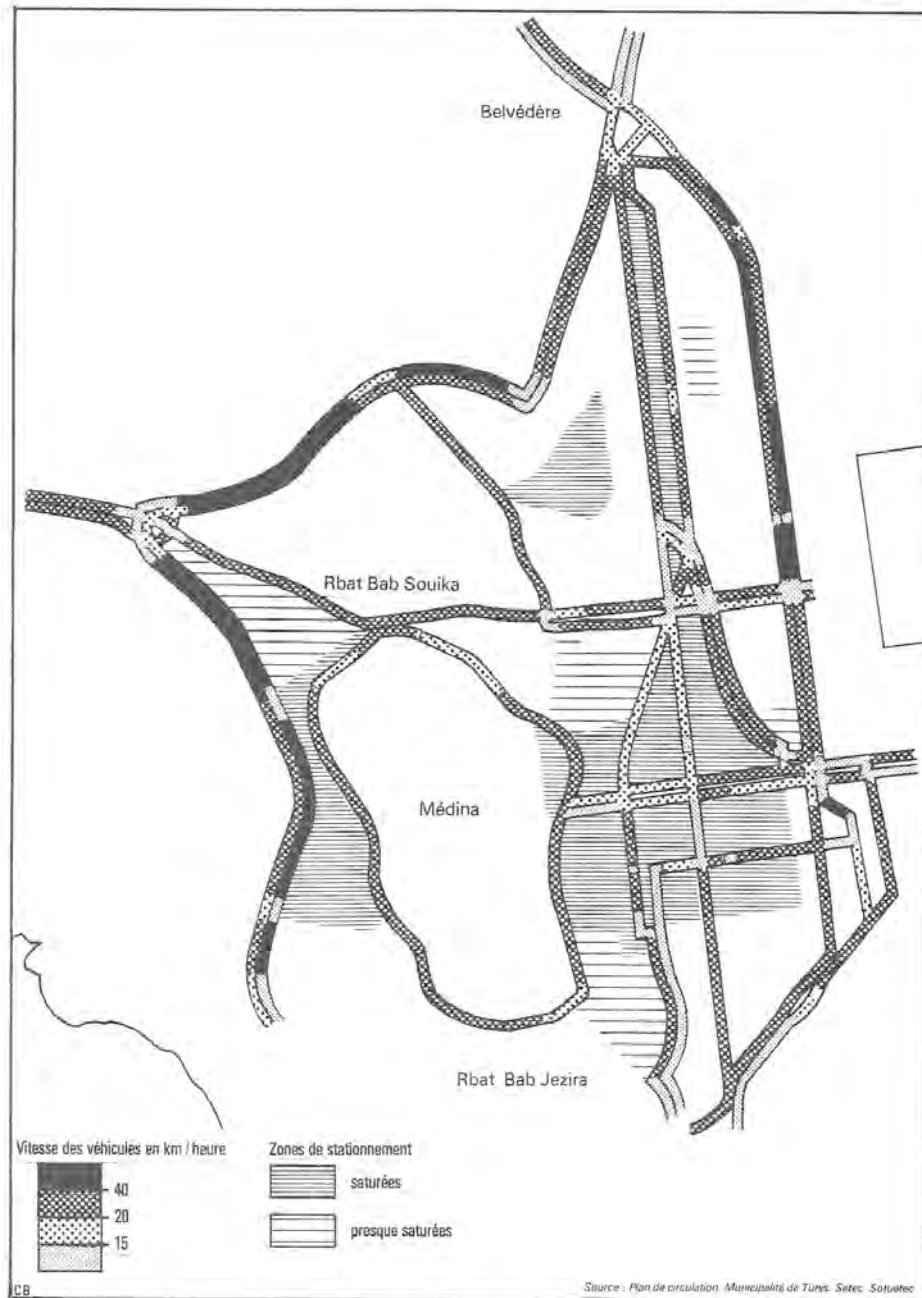


Figure 4.8. Vehicle speed and right-of-way saturation, Tunis. Plan (1989).  
 (Source: Pierre Signoles, Amor Belhedi et al., "Tunis: Evolution et Fonctionnement de l'Espace Urbain" in *Urbanisation, Réseaux Urbains, Régionalisation au Maghreb* 6. (Tours: CNRS Editions, 1980), 209.)

Neglect of structural maintenance and a sustained focus on the improvement of the “modern” city resulted in the unfortunate deterioration of the medina’s important architectural heritage. So expendable in the minds of the city’s planning elite, the historic core of the city was considered for major alteration first in 1958 and again in 1978. Reminiscent of tactics endorsed by Haussmann, Robert Moses and Corbusier elsewhere, the earlier proposal involved the destruction of a huge swath of the old city and the creation of a multilane roadway lined with tall building blocks directly through the heart of the medina (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9. 1958 Tunis medina proposal. Birdseye view drawing.  
Note Avenue and isolated *Bab Bahr* at top. Looking east.  
(Source: Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 115.)

Bisecting the historic core, this route would have tied the *ville nouvelle* to the western casbah district, site of several national government offices. Fortunately this plan was abandoned. Twenty years later a similar intervention was briefly considered that would have again extended the Avenue

Bourguiba's axis westward at the immeasurable expense of the medina's invaluable fabric (Figure 4.10).<sup>27</sup>

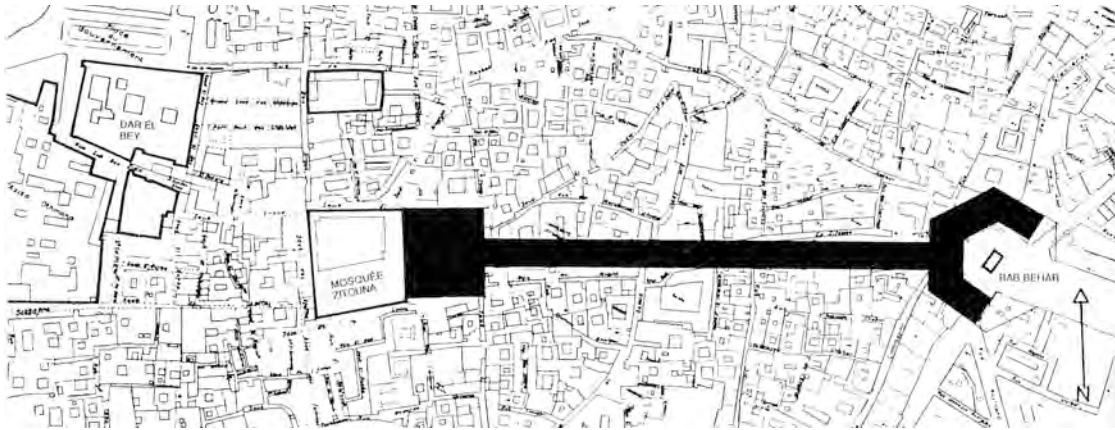


Figure 4.10. 1978 Tunis medina proposal. Plan.  
Highlighted area was to be cleared. Note *Bab Bahr* at right.  
(Source: Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 160.)

Work by the city's *Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis* (ASM), founded in 1967, and the medina's inscription upon UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1979 have contributed to the revalorization, preservation and reconstruction of various parts of the space.<sup>28</sup>

Greater Tunis accommodated increased population through considerable expansion during the early independence and Bourguiba years. Northern and southern boundaries were pushed farther from the city center, continuing a trend dating to the World War II era. The construction of highways

<sup>27</sup> Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 114–115 and 159–160.

<sup>28</sup> "Medina of Tunis," UNESCO World Heritage List, <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/36>>. The ASM was the first organization of its type founded in the Arab world. On the early work of the city and ASM, primarily limited to façade "restoration," see Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 158. On the well-documented ASM reconstruction of the medina's Hafsia and Bab Souika districts, see Santelli, *Creuset*, 92–104. See also Nadir Boumaza, "l'Emergence d'acteurs intermédiaires de l'urbanisme au maghreb: l'exemple de la sauvegarde des médinas de Fès et de Tunis" in *l'Urbain dans le Monde Arabe*, ed. Pierre Signoles et al. (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1999), 201–216, and Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis, "ASM Tunis," <<http://www.asmtunis.com/>>.



became more populous, its citizens found themselves increasingly distant from the Avenue Bourguiba, the relevance of which was increasingly obscured by both overgrown ficus and sprawling suburban apartment blocks.

#### Tourism and the Avenue Habib Bourguiba.

That which primarily distinguished the function of the Avenue during the period studied in the present chapter from its earlier history is the more overt presence of institutionalized tourism facilities and its presentation to foreign audiences. It remained the social and commercial center of Tunis, though its trees grew somewhat shabby in places. Postcolonial residents of the *ville nouvelle*, at least initially less concerned with public promenading, used the allée's considerably less picturesque walkway more as a shaded path to the distant TGM station rather than a place for social lingering. The replacement of some cafés and small shops by banks and commercial headquarters contributed further to the less pristine French nature of the Avenue.<sup>32</sup> The Avenue was in a way modernizing through the development of larger commercial institutions at the expense of what may have been seen as urban extravagances in light of the many pressing issues requiring attention at the time. The *ville nouvelle* and its central axis remained the most expensive land in the burgeoning city in 1979, the cost of construction in most of the district almost double that of the medina and older northern suburbs and as much as twenty-three times that of the newer quarters to the far north (Figure 4.12).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> H. Rejeb, et al., "l'Arbre," 6–8.

<sup>33</sup> Signoles, *Tunis*, 22.

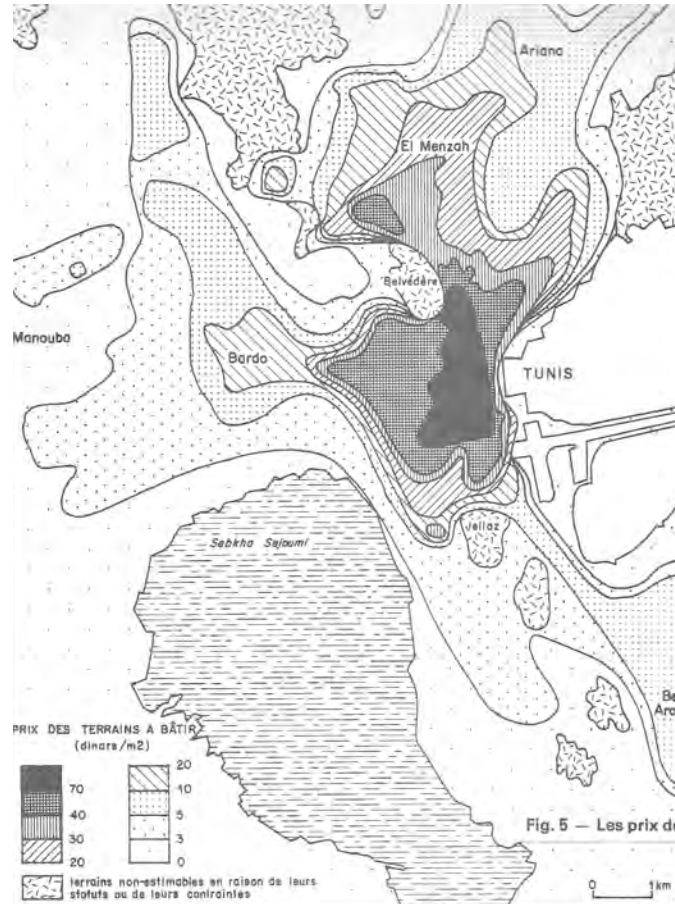


Figure 4.12. Cost of land for construction, Tunis. Plan (1980).  
(Source: Signoles, *Tunis*, 22.)

Tertiary commercial establishments remained densely clustered about the Avenue in 1979 before eventually being drawn northward during the decades that followed (Figure 4.13).<sup>34</sup> Some degree of physical degradation and commercial emigration notwithstanding, the Avenue was still in 1989 perceived to be “without a doubt the most beautiful inheritance of the protectorate period in terms of spatial organization” and of unsurpassed quality.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.



Figure 4.13. Tertiary establishments in central Tunis. Plan (1980).  
Single dots represent single establishments.  
(Source: Signoles, *Tunis*, 114.)

Tourism, of limited success during the colonial period, experienced a dramatic increase in the years immediately following independence. A priority of the new government, the tourist industry provided significant income for the state and individuals, provided jobs for those directly involved and those in supportive roles, while also facilitating construction projects and establishing an independent Tunisian presence on the world stage. Profit was the main motivation, however, of the National Tourism Office (established in 1957) and was successfully generated. In 1957 the Tunisian government made the

equivalent of US \$146 in tourism revenue per citizen, as opposed to the two thousand garnered by the US and seven hundred by France.<sup>36</sup> Increased revenue from tourism accounted for a fifth of the state's income from the mid-1960's through 1973 and the work of the national *Société Hôtelière et Touristique* and private investors successfully accommodated steadily growing numbers of visitors.<sup>37</sup> In 1961 Tunisia hosted 46,110 tourists. In 1975 the number had commendably reached 1,103,800.<sup>38</sup> The capital city, point of departure for visits to the ruins of Carthage, the Bardo Museum and the medina, had had twenty-two hotels in 1961 and almost tripled its offerings to 59 by 1975.<sup>39</sup> Large hotels, such as the Deux Avenues/El Hana International and Africa, in addition to the peripheral Tunis Hilton (1964) and Hôtel du Lac (1972), brought Tunis' hospitality facilities up to expected modern international standards and welcomed guests (primarily European) to appropriately modern international-styled quarters.<sup>40</sup>

The architecture profession in early independent Tunisia.

The international flavor of Tunis architecture following independence in 1956 fits well within the local context of the profession at the time. With independence EBAT was placed under the jurisdiction first of the Secretariat of State for National Education, and then in 1961 under the Secretariat of State for Cultural Affairs. The latter assured that the school's "orientation was to

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<sup>36</sup> M. Bergaoui, *Tourisme et Voyages en Tunisie: Les Temps des Pionniers 1956–1973* (Tunis: Simpact, 2003), 27.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, *History*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 666–667.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 667. Tunisia accounted for 47.5% of the nation's beds in 1961 but only 11.4% in 1975, owing to faster and more substantial hotel construction in the country's coastal resort areas south of Tunis. *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> For more on the early tourism industry in mid-century Tunisia, see Bergaoui, *Tourisme*.

depend largely on the political choices of the country, that is, it would be influenced by a certain definition of ‘progress’ inspired by models from ‘advanced’ countries.”<sup>41</sup> Alignment with French fine arts programs was thus “only natural” at the time.<sup>42</sup> Volunteers from the American Peace Corps assisted, in 1966, with the creation of a dedicated architecture department within EBAT, the six-year post-baccalaureate program of which addressed issues of art and architectural history within the framework of a course called “Problems of the Environment” that incorporated elements of local classical and Islamic patrimony. Major restructuring of EBAT came in 1973 with a change of its name. The new Institut d’Art, d’Architecture et d’Urbanisme de Tunis (ITAAUT) maintained the union of plastic and architectural arts, but redirected its focus towards the training of secondary school instructors. The history of architecture was affirmed as a foundational discipline within architectural studies by 1979, and local traditions gained currency in the wake of international financial crises that called into question the supremacy and applicability of Western models.<sup>43</sup> The training of architects and urban planners, as well as the dissemination of related research became the purpose of academy at this time. Architecture and urbanism acquired its own university in 1995 with the foundation of the Ecole Nationale d’Architecture et d’Urbanisme (ENAU), being divorced from the plastic arts by the national Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Djerbi and Safi, “Teaching,” 105.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> For more on particular programs that addressed vernacular architecture, see Ali Djerbi, “The Teaching of Architectural Patrimony at the Institut Technologique d’Art, d’Architecture et d’Urbanisme de Tunis,” in *Architectural Education in the Islamic World*, ed. Ahmet Evin (Singapore: Concept Media, Ltd., 1986), 192–193.

<sup>44</sup> Djerbi and Safi, “Teaching,” 105.

Despite the “lively intellectual and ideological activity” of ITAAUT during the 1970’s and 1980’s, international architects continued to dominate the field in Tunisia and French influences remained quite strong.<sup>45</sup> Professional firms from the United States (Architects Collaborative), Italy (Ludovico Quaroni) and Denmark (Bo and Wohlert) joined French architects such as Jaques Marmay, Oliver-Clement Cacoub and Serge Santelli in the designing of major commissions such as government offices, tourist facilities and housing projects throughout the country. Few Tunisian architects could compete with hired internationals through the 1980’s, Ezzedine Ben-Gadha being a notable exception. Even Ben-Gadha operated in a fashion “clearly within the limits of the earlier French architectural vocabulary.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Santelli, born in France in 1944, educated there and in the US (with Louis I. Kahn) and later employed as a professor at ITAAUT, identified in 1981 the “Tunisification” of local architecture through the widespread use of arcades, cupolas, columns and colored tiles.<sup>47</sup> Despite a concern for the rediscovery of a unique Tunisian identity, “picturesque effects” that covered façades remained an indication of local architects’ continued dependence on “language [that] operate[s] as a cosmetic decoration within spatial configurations the remain[ed] essentially European.”<sup>48</sup> Though the work of Tunisian architect Tarek Ben Miled (educated in Venice, Italy) offered a noteworthy alternative approach that fused local architectural history and composition, European biases remained quite pronounced in a discipline still dominated by foreign professionals and locally conducted in the French language.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Kultermann, “Contemporary,” 63.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Serge Santelli, “Miman 2” interview (1981) quoted in Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 64.

Avenue adjustments and Tunis scripted “Tunisian Modern.”

Thus the Avenue’s image during the period studied in the present chapter, on a most basic level, changed little in comparison to its earlier history. The liberated city inherited a mature and functional streetscape. It remained a wide, tree-lined dynamic and symbolically charged public space at the heart of the capital and accommodated shifting commercial trends. The Avenue’s heritage was generally maintained, cleansed of its most offensive elements while it underwent “Tunisification” through the addition of local and international modern components.<sup>50</sup>

The removal of Tunis’ colonial monuments and renaming of its streets and squares comes as no surprise. Similar acts occurred in other postcolonial cities, such as Algiers. There too the historical personalities of French political and military pasts were erased from maps and street signs, replaced with heroes of North African and Islamic history, in addition to dates of local significance.<sup>51</sup> Thus, in Tunis the Place Lavignerie became the Place de la Victoire du 1 juin 1955, the Avenue Jules-Ferry the Avenue Bourguiba, the Place de la Résidence the Place de l’indépendance, and the Place Jules-Ferry the Place d’Afrique.<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere in the city, further indicative of Bourguiba’s interests in reengaging the African continent, part of London Avenue was renamed Ghana Avenue and Avenue Gambetta became Avenue Mohammad V (in honor of Morocco’s king).<sup>53</sup> That said, the Avenue’s of France, Paris, Marseille, Charles de Gaulle and Jean Jaurès all escaped

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<sup>50</sup> “Tunisification” taken from Conférence Olivaint de Belgique, *Tunisie*, 322.

<sup>51</sup> See Çelik, *Forms*, 183, and Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.

<sup>52</sup> Sebag, *Tunis*, 626–627.

<sup>53</sup> On Bourguiba’s stance toward Africa, see Conférence Olivaint de Belgique, *Tunisie*, 333–342.

reclassification, their associations deemed relevant still, or at least sufficiently non-controversial at the time.

The equestrian tribute to Bourguiba installed on the Place d’Afrique strikes one as quite compelling in that representation of individuals through statuary, let alone on horseback, is a very classic European (viz. non-Arab) trope. Jules Ferry, who had previously just stood there, appears to have been outdone by a Europeanized Bourguiba (*chechia* notwithstanding). One cannot help but think immediately of equestrian statues of Europe’s historic figures such as ancient Rome’s Marcus Aurelius and Louis XV from Paris’ Place de la Concorde (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.14. Place de la Concorde and equestrian statue of Louis XV, Paris. Engraving (ca. 1770).  
(Source: Pozzo di Borgo, *Champs-Elysées*, 72.)

More relevant in the context of the imperial French maghreb, the statue of France’s Marshal Bugeaud installed upon Algiers’ *Place d’Armes* comes to mind (Figure 4.15).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This statue was subsequently replaced with one of early Algerian resistance leader Abdelkadir. See Çelik, *Forms*, 183.



Figure 4.15. Place d'Armes, Algiers. Photograph (ca. 1857).  
Left is the statue of Duc d'Orléans and right is the Mosque el-Djedid.  
(Source: Çelik, *Empire*, 118.)

Thus the statue of Bourguiba follows in a long line of western monument making. The particular composition of this effigy reflects Bourguiba's strong personality and perhaps his arrogance, as well as the complexity of the spatial semiotics of the period. Thus at this time one can discern both passive ties to France, maintained through *not* renaming or removing something, and active ones, manifest in the intentional installation of an element reminiscent of French or European precedents, in addition to entirely new elements.

Though the space clearly reflected its French foundation, the spatial script at this time was intended to read both Tunisian and Modern. To see that, one need only look at the monuments and two major structures erected on the Avenue during 1960's and 1970's, the sleek aesthetics of latter braking definitively form their French-built predecessors or recognizable Parisian

models. Tunisian banknotes printed in 1972 also testify to this blending of Tunisian and Modern and the importance of Tunis' new hotels. The half-dinar bill thus depicted in an aerial view from above the medina, the minaret of the Zitouna Mosque, the Avenue, the port and prominently the city's highest peak — the Hotel Africa tower (in addition to Bourguiba himself) (Figure 4.16).



Figure 4.16. ½ Tunisian Dinar banknote (1972).  
 (Source: “Tunisia ½ Dinar 1972,” Banknotes.com,  
 <<http://www.banknotes.com/tn66.htm>>.)

The presence of the Hotel Africa upset the visual dominance of the cathedral's mute bell towers and thus complicated the boulevard's orderliness as a hierarchically composed processional route for users arriving at the eastern port and relocated TGM station. The arrival of more individuals laterally, approaching along tree-lined streets from rail stations to the north and south in addition to the northern airport, also challenged the linear

perspective and experience of the earlier symbolic crescendo on the Avenue. The removal of the Lavignerie statue and insertion of Ibn Khaldoun on the renamed Place de l'indépendance recalibrated the religious tenor of the streetscape without otherwise further upsetting the rest of the Avenue's preserved, but renamed, fabric. Progress up the Avenue's rescripted streetscape, focused now between an equestrian Bourguiba and the medina, was thus less rigidly prescribed during this period, but no less symbolically charged — a "Tunisian Modern" agglomeration with pervasively tangible Parisian undertones.

During this period the Avenue's audience was no longer limited to the city's foreign contingent, nor was its purpose their comfort. Rather, the Avenue was "Tunisified" and internationalized; pitched to audiences abroad as an attractive destination and testament to the city's social, cultural and historical cachet. Political issues relating to Tunisia's predictable stance on the Algerian War and France's naval garrison at Bizerte (maintained until 1963) strained diplomatic relations between Tunisia and its former master, but cultural issues were a different story. No radical disassociation from France and French culture was undertaken by an administration trained within the French system and sympathetic to its liberal, modern and thus attractive, socio-cultural traits.<sup>55</sup> Modern in many ways still meant French, and at the time Tunis laid claim to the modernism that had been imposed upon them. These tangible associations with France served as one of the foundations of independent Tunisian culture, much like the Avenue they inherited was the foundation of a

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<sup>55</sup> On early Tuniso-French relations, see Conférence Olivaint de Belgique, *Tunisie*, 318–326 and Perkins, *History*, 142.

space that they would refashion in transcendence, but not abandonment, of their colonial past.

Tunis presented itself once again as a sovereign city on 20 March 1956, amidst the public euphoria that began in the first of June 1955, with Bourguiba's return. No longer an institutionalized subsidiary of the French imperial capital, the city strove to maximize its appeal to the greater world and legitimize its identity. Under the strong leadership of President Bourguiba his eponymous Avenue was molded into a "Modern Tunisian" space with obvious Parisian overtones — a packaged pastiche of (some) things Tunis had been, was and strove to be. This rescripting was done to facilitate consumption, attract investors and tourists, and to legitimize Tunisia's place within the concert of nations. It was done to marginalize the most offensive signs of colonial oppression and to valorize the indigenous, prosperous and optimistic. In these ways the acts of Tunis' elites (primarily the President of the Republic) bear striking resemblance to those of later brand managers and postmodern urbanists, most of whom are inspired by similar cultural and commercial interests.

## CHAPTER 5: PARISIAN COSMOPOLITAN (2000–2009)

*His private airplane landed only a short while ago and already the guest of honor walks down the Avenue Bourguiba amidst throngs of cheering Tunisians and assembled dignitaries. Proudly escorted by Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia's second President since independence over fifty years ago, Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife enjoy a festive welcome celebration on the city's showcase boulevard this 28 April 2008. It would seem that the capital has come to a complete standstill as the city honors France's leader through a meticulously choreographed sequence of events. As the two presidents make their way along the parade route they pass performers of traditional music, members of the military in full regalia and ranks of Tunisian citizens wielding French and Tunisian flags, portraits of the respective heads of state and statements of transnational goodwill. Shaking many hands along the way, Sarkozy comes not as conqueror or liberator, but as diplomatic equal, the impressive exuberance of his reception notwithstanding. Heads of state are not always so excitedly received. Vive l'amitié tuniso-française!*<sup>1</sup> (Figure 5.1).

The Avenue Habib Bourguiba, in this its final stage of historical development, underwent the most significant and comprehensive facelift it has known since its foundation during the 1860's. Its gradual decline during the 1980's and 1990's, due to congestion, pollution and the decentralization of the expanding city, in addition to the current regime's interests in historic

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from report in Véronique Rigolet, "Visite d'Etat de Nicolas Sarkozy," *Radio France Internationale*, 28 April 2008, <[http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/100/article\\_65571.asp](http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/100/article_65571.asp)>.

preservation and image projection, precipitated the Avenue's complete rehabilitation in 2000–2001.



Figure 5.1. 2008 State visit of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. In Tunis on the Avenue Bourguiba (28 April 2008). Photographs. (Source: Daily Life, <<http://www.daylife.com/photo/03E47xe0UR8fE>> and <<http://www.daylife.com/photo/06kN6ilag00uY/tunis>>.)

Long since known as Tunis' Champs-Elysées, similarities that have always been present to one degree or another have come to be more fully pronounced, and its designation as such remains constant in both popular and professional/scholarly literature.<sup>2</sup> These most recent changes to the Avenue, particularly compelling within a postcolonial context wherein one would expect to see the city distance itself from its colonial past, have warranted the labeling of its new spatial script "Parisian Cosmopolitan." Here the image of the Avenue, controlled largely by Bourguiba's successor Ben Ali since his 1987 ascendance, is intended to appeal again to local and foreign audiences, to facilitate consumption and to illustrate the city's modern, international, and distinctly French character through direct state intervention.

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<sup>2</sup> The Avenue is referred to as the "Champs-Elysées of Tunis" in Jean-Claude Klotchkoff, *La Tunisie aujourd'hui* (Paris: Les Editions du Jaguar, 2005), 106 and McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 22 (published by the Tunisian ASM). Common reference to the Champs-Elysées is also acknowledged in Leïla Ammar, "Le projet d'embellissement de l'hypercentre: de l'Avenue Bourguiba," *Archibat* 5 (2002), 46.

Habib Bourguiba's governance of Tunisia came to an end on 7 November 1987, the date on which then-Prime Minister Zine el Abidine Ben Ali assumed the Presidency of the Republic. Empowered by a constitutional clause permitting the removal of the executive in the case of illness or mental incapacity, Ben Ali freed Tunisia from Bourguiba's increasingly out of touch and repressive policies. Tunisians largely recognized the infirmity of their once beloved patriarch and welcomed the "historic change" promised by their new leader.<sup>3</sup> Since the *changement* Ben Ali has pursued the continued secularization of Tunisian society, economic development and integration into world markets, as well as improvements in healthcare, education and infrastructure, all the while institutionalizing his mastery of the state through heavy policing and constitutional amendment.<sup>4</sup> The Avenue Bourguiba, appropriately, has remained the principal stage for the government's presentation of the city image it prefers. The Ben Ali administration has thus gone to great lengths to style a streetscape that reflects its professed interests in tolerance, liberalism and cultural sophistication, the reality of its relatively closed autocracy notwithstanding.

#### The Avenue Bourguiba during Ben Ali's early years.

Just as Bourguiba had removed monuments to past regimes he deemed to be offensive or irrelevant following independence, Ben Ali cleansed the Avenue. Public reaction to Bourguiba's deposition mirrored its response to the removal of his equestrian statue by Ben Ali in 1988.<sup>5</sup> Weary of the former's late-stage administration, Tunisians welcomed political change and accepted

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<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *History*, 185.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 185–212. Presidential term limits were removed by constitutional referendum in 2002.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

the requisite architectural alterations. Probably mindful of his predecessor's historical significance and arguably distasteful arrogance, Ben Ali left his mark but stopped short of renaming the Avenue or issuing currency bearing his own portrait. Having relegated the equestrian statue to peripheral obscurity in a neglected park space in La Goulette (Figure 5.2), he made the Place d'Afrique the "Place du 7 novembre 1987."



Figure 5.2. Equestrian statue of Bourguiba in La Goulette. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

At its center he set a clock on four columns and arches, symbolic of the passing of time and socio-political progress endorsed by the new President (Figure 5.3). A prominent "7" sat in the place of the "6."<sup>6</sup> The choice of a clock,

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<sup>6</sup> Numbers in Tunisia, since the colonial period, have consistently been rendered in the Latin form as opposed to the Eastern Arabic numerals used elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. The symbolism of the "7" was reinforced throughout the country in *changement* monuments that used formal "7" motifs, identically named squares and images of sevens on political propaganda and national currency.

such a potent emblem of the European imperial streetscape and rationalization of time, seems not terribly inappropriate for a context still so intimately tied to its colonial past.



Figure 5.3. First *Changement* clock, Place du 7 novembre, Tunis (1987–2000). Photograph.  
(Source: “Horloge Tunis,” Wikimedia Commons, <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Horloge\\_Tunis.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/Horloge_Tunis.jpg)>.)

Street names and other changes to the Avenue’s symbolic elements made since independence appear to have remained unaltered by Ben Ali during the early years of his presidency.

Nonetheless considerable changes did come to the Avenue Bourguiba prior to its 2000–2001 renovation in the form of transport infrastructure upgrades. The Avenue de la République, intersecting with the Avenue Bourguiba just east of the Place 7 novembre, was upgraded to regional

highway status in the early 1990's and around 1995 was accordingly directed over the Avenue by means of a concrete viaduct (Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4. Avenue de la République/Z4 viaduct over the Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

This heavy incursion not only interrupted the Avenue's visual openness, but also necessitated that pedestrians and cars pass through the dark and dingy space beneath its cantilevered structure. At grade-level, the overlaying of Tunis' urban light-rail network (misleadingly called the *métro léger*) during the late 1980's and early 1990's further complicated the Avenue's traffic situation.<sup>7</sup> Budget constraints prevented the construction of tunnels beneath the Avenue, as initially proposed, and instead tracks were once again laid across it in

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<sup>7</sup> With the opening of the *métro* the old North Station, on what was renamed the "Place de la République," (which may or may not have been in service until then) was converted into a major hub of the new light rail system.

several places. Though station facilities were not placed upon the Avenue, save in conjunction with the TGM station at the port, the metro lines did help integrate the boulevard with the city's more distant zones.<sup>8</sup> Expanded to include five functional lines by 1997, it failed to alleviate the city's chronic congestion problems, as private car ownership continued to increase, fueled by rising incomes and private tastes that favored their usage. In 1994 there were sixty cars owned per 1,000 residents, as compared to eighty in 1999 and ninety in 2001.<sup>9</sup> Cars, buses, metro trams, taxis and pedestrians, had made the Avenue a chaotic and crowded thoroughfare by the twentieth-century's end.

Despite the congestion, the Avenue Bourguiba retained a diverse array of stores, banks, offices, dining establishments and other assorted business during this period (Figure 5.5).<sup>10</sup> It appears as though it continued to function largely as it did in decades past. Its primacy as the Tunis' single center of culture and commerce, however, was challenged by lakeside developments as the city struggled to claim new territory at closer proximity to the center and exploit its neglected lakeside frontage. Thus, concern for sustained urban viability within a context of globalization inspired the government's undertaking of the *Projet du Lac* in the late 1980's. Large-scale environmental cleanup preceded dredging and land reclamation in both the north and south sections of the bisected lake. Segments of the northern lakeshore (*Berges du Lac*) were developed and inhabited during the 1990's with great fanfare.

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<sup>8</sup> Taoufik Belhareth, *Les Transports en Commun et la Ville* (Tunis: n.p., 1984), 254–256.

<sup>9</sup> Xavier Godard, "Some lessons from the LRT," *Transportation Research. Part A, Policy and practice* 41 no. 10 (2007): 896.

<sup>10</sup> See Municipality of Tunis. *Tunis du XXI Siècle* (Tunis: Municipality of Tunis, 1994).

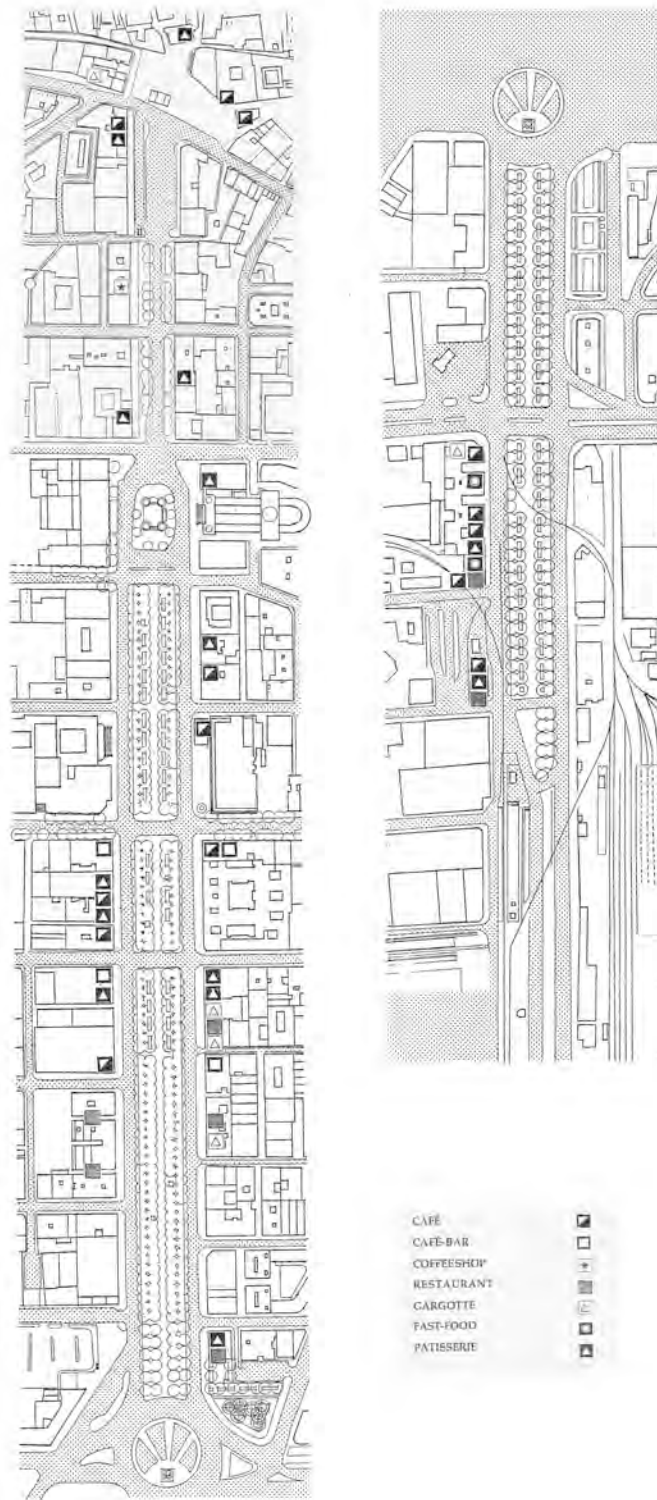


Figure 5.5. Avenue Bourguiba food service establishments. Plan (1994).  
 West is up. Bottom left links to top right.  
 (Source: Municipality of Tunis, *XIX siècle*, unnumbered appendix.)

This third center consists of leisure facilities, residences, office buildings and commercial outlets, all arranged in a sort of beaux-arts or New Urbanist fashion (Figure 5.6).<sup>11</sup>



Figure 5.6. Berges du Lac, Tunis. Master Plan (ca. 2000).  
(Source: Leïla Ammar, *Histoire de l'Architecture en Tunisie* (Tunis: Agence MIM, 2005), plate 85.)

The project even includes what amounts to vapid references to the Avenue Bourguiba's allée and arcade typologies (Figure 5.7). Deemed a success by the government and public, this new "city" rose, and rises still, on the resurrected lagoon "somehow turning its back on the old medina and European city."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Kenzari, "Lake Tunis." See Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, "Les berges du lac Tunis: une nouvelle frontière dans la ville," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 73 (2006), <<http://cdlm.revues.org/index1513.html>>, for a breakdown of all the particular business and offices, by type, that have located here as of 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 125. See also Leïla Ammar, *Histoire de l'Architecture en Tunisie* (Tunis: Agence MIM, 2005), 244 and Plate 85 and Barthel, *Projet(s)*. The southern lakeshores are currently being prepared for development in the very near future.



Figure 5.7. Berges du Lac, Tunis. Central boulevard (left) and arcades (right).  
Photographs (2006).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

#### Remaking the Avenue Bourguiba, 2000–2001.

The published goals of the 2000–2001 Avenue renovation were “to revamp public space, to reassert the value of the city’s modern buildings and urban fabric...and to facilitate activity downtown.”<sup>13</sup> Need for such a major project was born of the “shortfall between the image of the Avenue and its reality,” as illustrated by the deterioration of the street’s architecture, its crowding by parked cars and the obstruction of views by an overabundance of mismatching kiosks, lamps and other street furniture.<sup>14</sup> Thus, President Ben Ali, the Municipality of Tunis (lead by a mayor that he appoints and a Municipal Council dominated by his political party), the Interior Ministry and the ASM set out to “guarantee a strong image of public space and to assure its conviviality and attractiveness.”<sup>15</sup> It was decided that through the restructuring of sidewalks and the central pedestrian mall, the reorganization of street

<sup>13</sup> Ammar, “Le projet,” 46.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. On the Municipal Council and its current composition (60 members, 48 of which are members of the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally party), see Portail de la Ville de Tunis, “Le Conseil Municipal,”

<[http://www.communetunis.gov.tn/fr/mairie\\_conseilmunicipal\\_elus.htm](http://www.communetunis.gov.tn/fr/mairie_conseilmunicipal_elus.htm)>.

activities and the rehabilitation of squares and historic façades, the Avenue's lost prestige could be regained.

It is worth noting that Paris's Champs-Élysées, having suffered from similar crowding, clutter and deterioration during the 1980's was extensively restored, reconfigured and reinaugurated in 1994. Access roads running parallel to the central right-of-way were reclaimed in the extension of sidewalks and the planting of over two hundred additional trees in double ranks amidst enlarged café terraces (Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8. Champs-Élysées sidewalk, Paris. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Underground parking garages were carved out beneath the boulevard to accommodate the six hundred lost street-level spaces. Architectural “homogenization” of street façades was undertaken through restoration projects up and down its length, and the presence of street furniture, having

been harmonized, was reduced to levels deemed necessary but not excessive.<sup>16</sup>

Back in Tunis the ASM, in an expert advisory role, spent two years studying the situation and ultimately drafted two plans for the future Avenue (Figure 5.9).

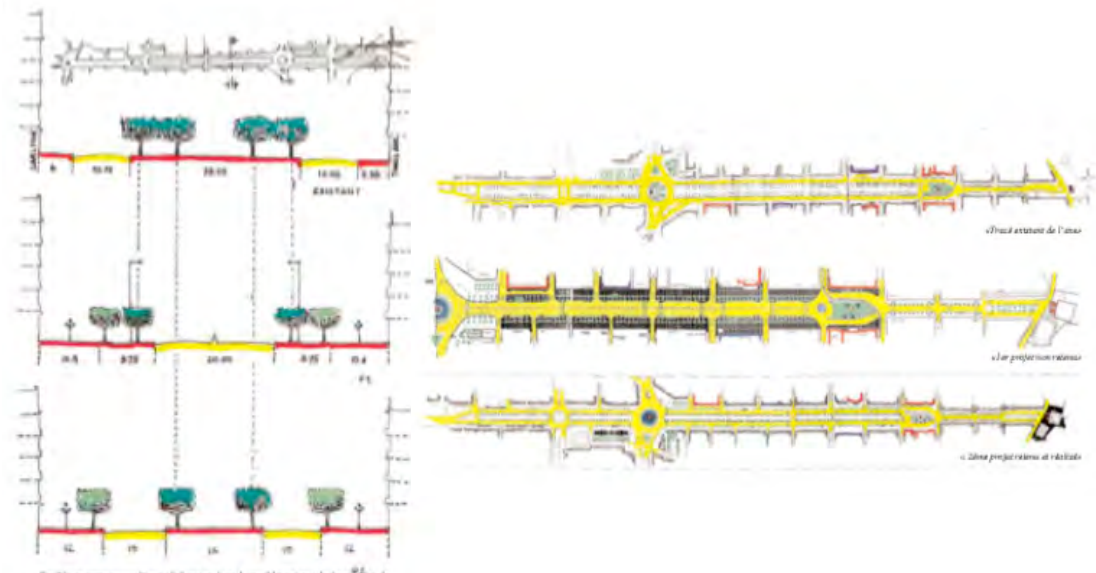


Figure 5.9. 2000–2001 Avenue Bourguiba renovation proposals. Sections (left) and plans (right). In each set top was extant, middle was “Champs-Élysées” concept and bottom was selected option. (Source: Leïla Ammar, “Le projet d’embellissement de l’hyper centre: de l’Avenue Bourguiba,” *Archibat 5* (2002): 48.)

The first consisted of the complete removal of Avenue’s allée and the transplanting of its interior rank of ficus to the widened outer sidewalks. The relocation of traffic to the center of the boulevard in this fashion would have mirrored the post-1994 configuration of Paris’ Champs-Élysées quite literally, as double rows of trees would have shaded lateral pedestrian zones and more

<sup>16</sup> Roland Pozzo di Borgo, *Les Champs-Élysées: Trois Siècles d’Histoire* (Paris: Martinière, 1997), 340.

openly framed the street's terminal monuments. It would have also required very substantial reworking of the street's infrastructure, including the displacement of landscaping, roadways, the *métro*, sidewalks, electrical, gas, and sewer lines. The proposal's substantial changes, cost and logistical complication garnered its disapproval by the public, professionals and city authorities alike.<sup>17</sup>

#### The Avenue and its architecture.

The second plan prepared by the ASM, ultimately chosen by Ben Ali and subsequently realized, required considerably less drastic restructuring of the entire streetscape. The central allée was reduced in width (from twenty-nine meters to sixteen) while lateral sidewalks were doubled (from six to twelve meters) (Figure 5.10). Though the outer rows of ficus were supposed to simply be moved from the allée to the edge of these new sidewalks, the relative stature of the trees there now suggests that most did not survive the move. Many were consequently replaced with considerably smaller and cylindrically pruned specimens (Figure 5.11).<sup>18</sup> Though many favored the replacement of the ficus with more transparent flowering jacaranda like those of adjacent avenues, the former were kept in order to maintain continuity with historical landscaping (and presumably limit expenditure).<sup>19</sup> This new configuration and the adjustments to the subterranean power and sewer systems it necessitated cost the city approximately \$1.4 million US.<sup>20</sup> Other project components remained consistent across the two proposals.

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<sup>17</sup> Ammar, "Le projet," 46.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 46–49. Many of the displaced trees can still be found in a lakeside "Mediterranean Park" north of the city center, their boxy shape betraying their former placement.

<sup>19</sup> Rejeb et al., "l'Arbre," 10.

<sup>20</sup> Faïka Béjaoui, architect-urbanist, ASM-Tunis. On-site conversation, 11 March 2009.

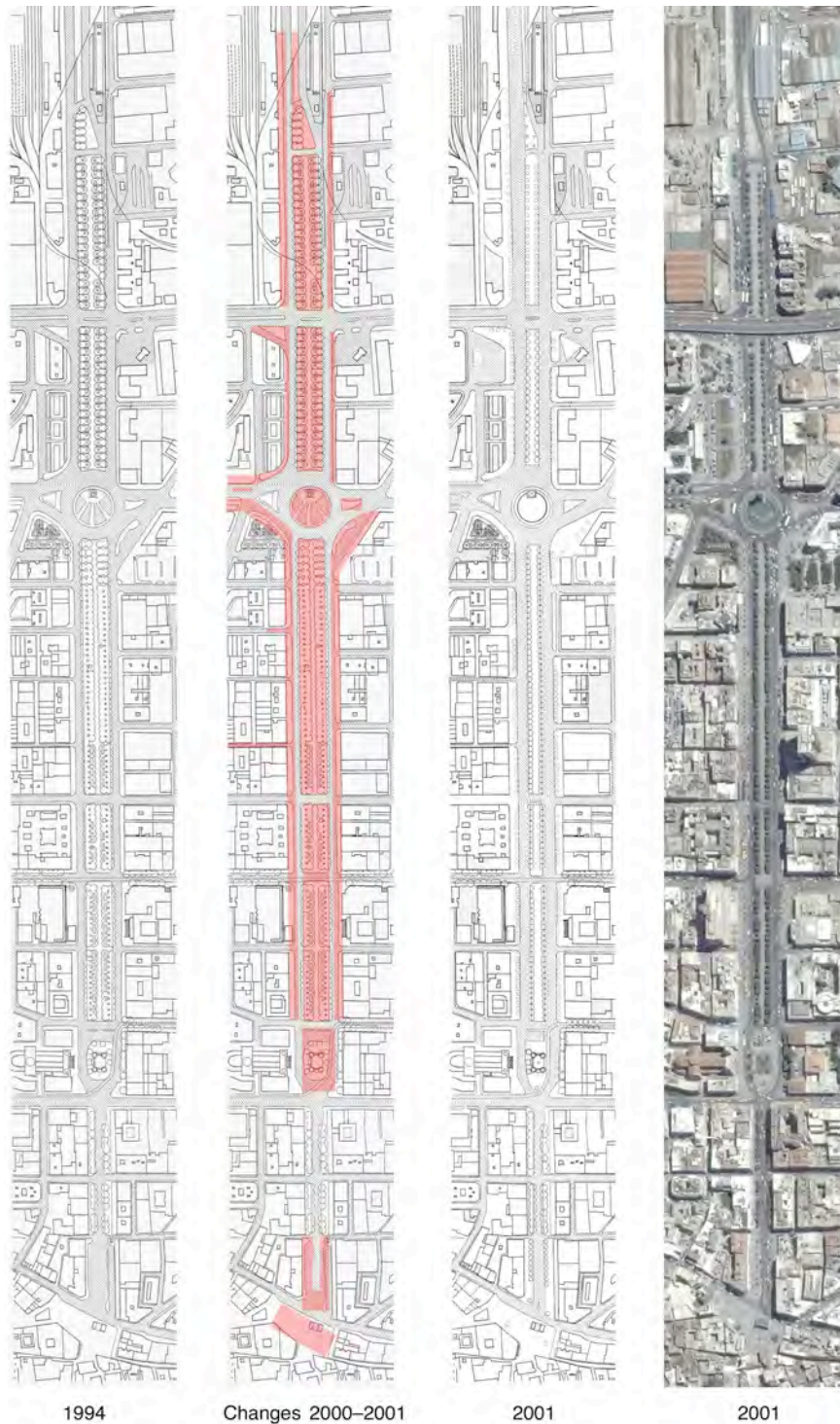


Figure 5.10. 2000–2001 Avenue Bourguiba renovation project. Plans. North is left. Changes between 1994 and 2001 highlighted red. (Source: Based on Municipality of Tunis, *XIX siècle*, unnumbered appendix and on-site observation.)



Figure 5.11. Avenue Bourguiba at Avenue de Paris, Tunis.  
Aerial photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

They included the renovation of the Avenue's most significant façades, new granite paving for sidewalks, harmonization of street furniture and the installation of four hundred lamps and twenty Morris columns, the removal of all kiosks from the allée and the grouping of redesigned flower stalls at the TGM end of the street.<sup>21</sup> Lyre-model lamps, modeled on those dating to 1900 and installed by the French in front of the Municipal Theatre, were manufactured in France and imported for the project (Figure 5.12).

Architectural renovations of the Avenue's historic structures were supervised directly by the ASM. Local, national, and foreign investments funded only façade rehabilitation (and on occasion restoration of several ground floors), being too limited to do much else. The buildings selected

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<sup>21</sup> Ammar, "Le projet," 49–50.

included the 1902 Municipal Theatre (Figure 5.13), the 1902 Rossini Palace cinema (Figure 5.14), the 1931 *Colisée* and several others.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 5.12. Iron lamps installed during the 2000–2001 renovation (left) and protectorate-era Municipal Theatre models (right). Drawings. (Source: McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 37.)



Figure 5.13. 1902 Municipal Theatre following 2000–2001 restoration. Photograph (2005). (Source: Author’s collection.)

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<sup>22</sup> On architectural restoration, see McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 46–49 and 80–83, Ammar, “Le projet,” 52–53 and Becher, *Tunis*, 77–100. The interior of Resplandy’s Municipal Theatre was fully refurbished 2001-2003 in conjunction with its centennial.



Figure 5.14. Rossini Palace cinema following 2000–2001 restoration.  
Photograph (2005).  
(Source: McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 46.)

The Hotel Africa, purchased in 2000 by the El Mouradi corporation and by it completely overhauled in conjunction with the Avenue project, added a touch of metallic modernism to an otherwise distilled nostalgia (Figure 5.15).<sup>23</sup>



Figure 5.15. Renovated Hotel Africa, Tunis. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

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<sup>23</sup> See Elhouar, "Rehabilitation."

Buildings that were deemed “without a doubt decayed or unrepresentative” were demolished and replaced with structures that based on the “interesting and significant architectural elements” contributed to the desired “coherent urban landscape.”<sup>24</sup> Examples of these substitute postmodern structures include the vaguely neoclassical Café Panorama and new Claridge, the latter of which is an abstracted reflection of its predecessor (Figures 5.16 and 5.17).



Figure 5.16. Café Panorama, Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Photograph (2006).  
(Source: Rodney Collins.)

The street beside the Claridge (Pierre de Coubertin Street), as was the case with several blocks of Marseille Street farther west, were pedestrianized and similarly outfitted with granite walks and iron lamps, thus extending the Avenue’s space northward into the city’s grid.

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<sup>24</sup> Ammar, “Le projet,” 53. Documentation of the details pertaining to the razed/replaced structures (estimated to be three) has so far remained unattainable.



Figure 5.17. The new Claridge Building, Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

#### The Avenue's squares.

ASM proposals for the Place de la Victoire and the westernmost section of the Avenue de France, which included the installation of additional landscaping, fountains on the Place and a central tree-lined esplanade (reminiscent of earlier configurations) over underground parking facilities on the avenue, went unexecuted (Figure 5.18).<sup>25</sup> On the square, trees, shrubs, planters and geometric paving, dating at least from the late 1980's, however, were for the most part removed. The complex traffic pattern and islands along this section of the avenue, visible in photos dating to 1989 (and somewhat

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<sup>25</sup> Mouhli, "Vers," n.p. Very similar parking facilities exist under the Champs-Élysées and were refurbished during a major overhaul of the avenue in 1993. See Pozzo di Borgo, *Champs-Élysées*, 338–339.

simplified by 1994), were regularized with widened sidewalks, ficus trees and central vehicular rights of way (Figures 5.19 and 5.10).<sup>26</sup>

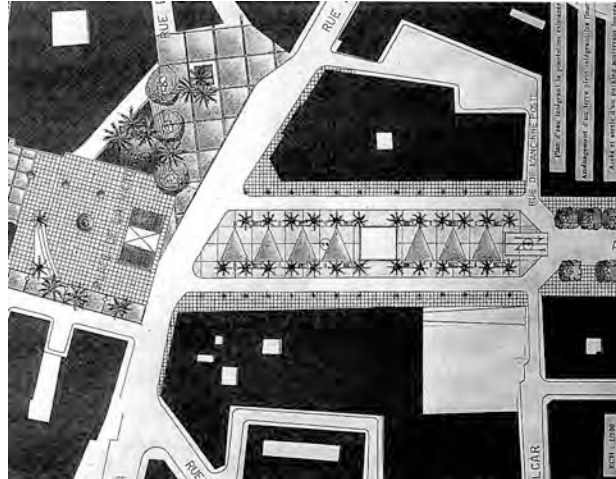


Figure 5.18. ASM proposal for the Avenue de France, Tunis. Plan (1999).  
(Source: Zoubeïr. “Tunis: Vers le Coeur de la Ville: la Veine de Sauvegarde.”  
*Architecture Méditerranéenne* (1999): unnumbered appendix.)



Figure 5.19. Place de la Victoire, Tunis. Aerial photograph (ca. 1989).  
(Source: Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 178.)

<sup>26</sup> Abdelkafi, *Médina*, 178, and Jacques Fontaine and Pierre Gresser, *Tunisie: Carrefour des civilisations* (Paris: ACR Edition Internationale, 2000), 157.

Added at the center of the Place de la Victoire, however, was plumbing that, when operational, shoots jets of water into the air from below grade (Figure 5.20). Otherwise several palms in a few planters are all that remain of the old landscaping, and the square is now dominated by lamps, café tables and chairs.



Figure 5.20. Place de la Victoire, Tunis. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Dana Elborno.)

The Place de l'indépendance underwent no significant changes during this period, save repaving and the carving out of a small parking lot at its eastern edge. The iron fence and stone-lined planting beds, installed during the last decades of the nineteenth century (see Figure 3.12) remain in place, the former having been subjected to countless coats of paint. Two significant additions to the space in recent years have been large placards on the square

in front of the cathedral and ministry of women's, family and children's affairs. Usually featuring an image of the President or other propaganda, they have contributed a contemporary political element since its erection circa 2005 (Figure 5.21).



Figure 5.21. Political billboard, Place de l'Indépendance, Tunis. Photograph (2009). Text reads "Standing by the promise for the sake of Tunisia." (Source: Author's collection and K. Hadid's translation.)

A sign at the southeastern corner of the square, modeled on Paris' iconic green and blue placards, appears to be relatively new and may well date to the recent renovation (Figure 5.22). It therefore matches the older colonial-era signs found along the Avenue (and in the medina) and further complicates the semiotics of this charged space.



Figure 5.22. Place de l'Indépendance sign, Tunis. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

At this time major work was done at the Place 7 novembre that totally transformed its scale and symbolism. This reinvention was commissioned by Ben Ali and not a part of the ASM plans. The first clock, a tall obelisk-shaped tower was erected at the center of the circular space dating to the 1977 statue scheme. Soaring over thirty-seven meters in height, it is topped with a clock and golden pyramidal cap (Figure 5.23).



Figure 5.23. New *Changement* clock tower, Place du 7 novembre, Tunis. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Dana Elborn.)

Set above a musical fountain and reflecting pool of thirty-five meters in diameter, its bronze skin has been laser cut with a traditional *moucharabieh* pattern, the details of which are particularly visible when illuminated from within at night (Figure 5.24).



Figure 5.24. New *Changement* clock tower, *moucharabieh* detail. Photograph (2009). Note addition of “Christmas” lights to exterior. (Source: Author’s collection.)

The presence of water and the astrolabe-like shape of the clock’s face are said to be representative of Arab culture as well. The highly technical nature of its fabrication and function (executed in conjunction with French and Spanish firms) are said to be reflections of modernity.<sup>27</sup> No account for its apparently Egyptian profile has been published, as the details of its Presidential

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<sup>27</sup> Anon., “Aménagement de la Place du 7 novembre de Tunis,” *Architecture méditerranéenne: La Tunisie Moderne* (2007): 98–99. The ASM had nothing to do with this component of the Avenue project.

commission and designer Med Habib Hassairi's inspiration remain obscure. Its authorization by Ben Ali in honor of the third millennium and the progress made since the *changement* is explained on a dedicatory plaque at its base, the text of which appears solely in Arabic.<sup>28</sup> The tower provides a focal point the likes of which the Avenue has never known and obscures the unimpressive image of the Avenue's eastern terminus, now as ever devoid of monumentality (and mature ficus) (Figure 5.25).



Figure 5.25. The eastern end of the Avenue and TGM terminal, Tunis.  
Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Current transport conditions on the Avenue.

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<sup>28</sup> "With permission of His Eminence the President of the Republic Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, this tower was erected upon the blessings of God in September 2001 in the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1987 Square in commemoration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium and in acknowledgement on the part of the city of Tunis for what it has witnessed in renewal, preparation, and adornment since the Change (*changement*)."  
Translated by Khalid Hadeed at Cornell University, March 2009.

Aside from the lateral shifting of traffic lanes along the Avenue's length, little has changed since the installation of the *métro léger* and autoroute viaduct during the early 1990's. For all the talk of addressing congestion issues on the Avenue, traffic lanes were not actually widened nor was parking forbidden (at least not since 2004), as had been suggested by early proposals for the rehabilitation plan. Thus there remain two lanes of traffic flow alongside one clogged with parked vehicles. Large garages have recently been constructed near the Avenue that may or may not alleviate some of the pressure on the street, as may planned extensions of the city's *métro* and the development of a new regional rail (RFR) network south of the Avenue on the site of the southern (itself a replacement of the old "Gare française") (Figure 5.26).<sup>29</sup>

#### The Avenue's contemporary function.

Due to the regrettable inaccessibility of literature from the perspective of local users, secondary material and observations will have to suffice in the analysis of the space and forming of conclusions. The 2000–2001 renovation of the Avenue appears to have been successful, though more so in some respects than in others. Surely the restored façades look beautiful and create a generally harmonious street wall, while the thinned landscaping in the allée affords a "rapport with the sky" more attractive than the long "corridor of shadow" effect that had developed since the 1980's.<sup>30</sup> Extended sidewalks host an increased number of popular cafés at which a single espresso can

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<sup>29</sup> On the future of public transportation in Tunis, see Salem Miladi, "Projet des reseaux de transport en commun dans le Grand Tunis (Powerpoint)" (2008), <[www.euromedina.org/bibliotheque\\_fichiers/Skhirat\\_Atelier2\\_GaidaMajhoub.pdf](http://www.euromedina.org/bibliotheque_fichiers/Skhirat_Atelier2_GaidaMajhoub.pdf)>

<sup>30</sup> Rejeb et al., "l'Arbre," 12.

cost as much as eight times what it would just several blocks off the Avenue Bourguiba (Figures 5.27 and 5.28).<sup>31</sup>

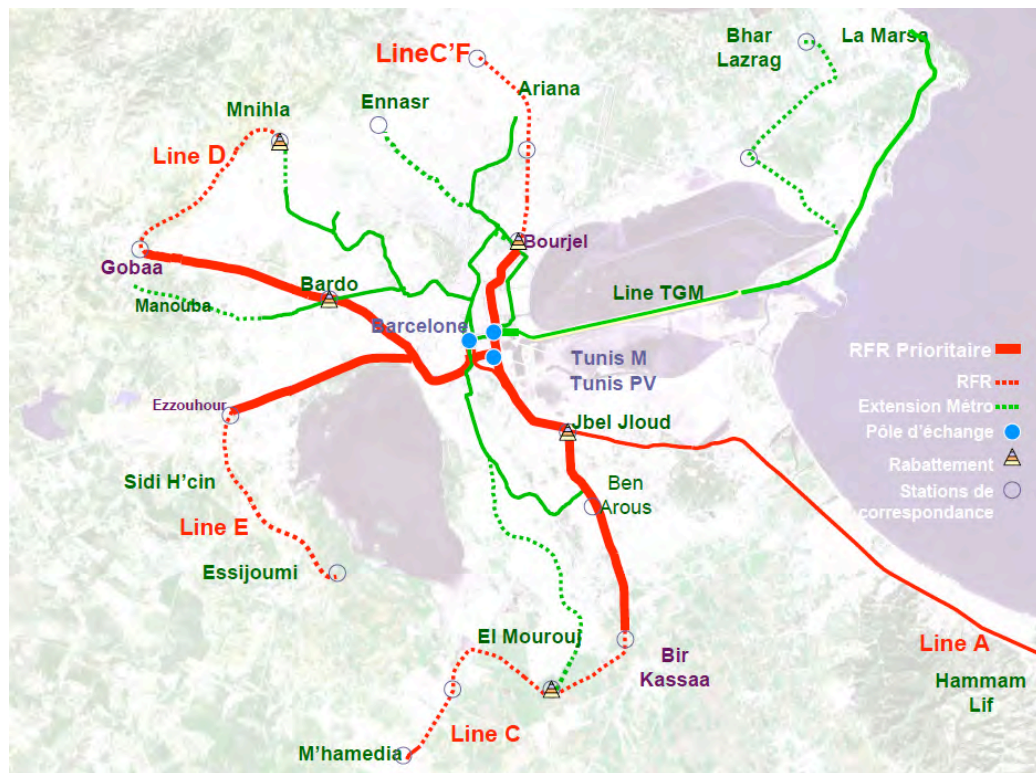


Figure 5.26. Public transit expansion proposals. Plan (2002). Red are RFR lines. Green are *métro*. Dotted green are *métro* extensions. (Source: Salem Miladi, “Projet des reseaux de transport en commun dans le Grand Tunis (Powerpoint),” (2008), <[www.euromedina.org/bibliotheque\\_fichiers/Skhirat\\_Atelier2\\_GaidaMajhoub.pdf](http://www.euromedina.org/bibliotheque_fichiers/Skhirat_Atelier2_GaidaMajhoub.pdf)>.)

<sup>31</sup> For example a single espresso at the Hotel Africa’s café costs 2.4 DT (\$1.81 US), 1.2 DT at the Café de Paris and a mere 0.3 DT (\$0.23 US) at the Café des Cinq Etoiles on the Avenue de Paris to the north near the Place de la République. (Prices noted in March 2009).



Figure 5.27. Café establishments and outdoor terraces (highlighted red), Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Plan (1994 and 2009). East is up. (Source: Based on Municipality of Tunis, *XIX siècle*, unnumbered appendix and on-site observation.)



Figure 5.28. Outdoor café seating on the Avenue Bourguiba. Photograph (2005).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Many linger and watch passers-by from outward-turned chairs on these burgeoning outdoor café terraces — the pride of many and almost always cited by Tunisians as the primary indicator of the Avenue's newfound attractive vitality.<sup>32</sup> Many have retained their Francophone names, which include the Cafés de Paris, Champs-Élysées and l'Univers (whose Arabic names often remain transliterations of French originals). Furthermore, a diverse array of businesses that includes not only cafés, restaurants and hotels, but also clothing stores, bookshops and pharmacies, appears to thrive in the renovated context (Figure 5.29).

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<sup>32</sup> Conversations with Faïka Béjaoui and Zoubeïr Mouhli at the Tunis ASM in March 2009 and June 2008, respectively, confirmed this.

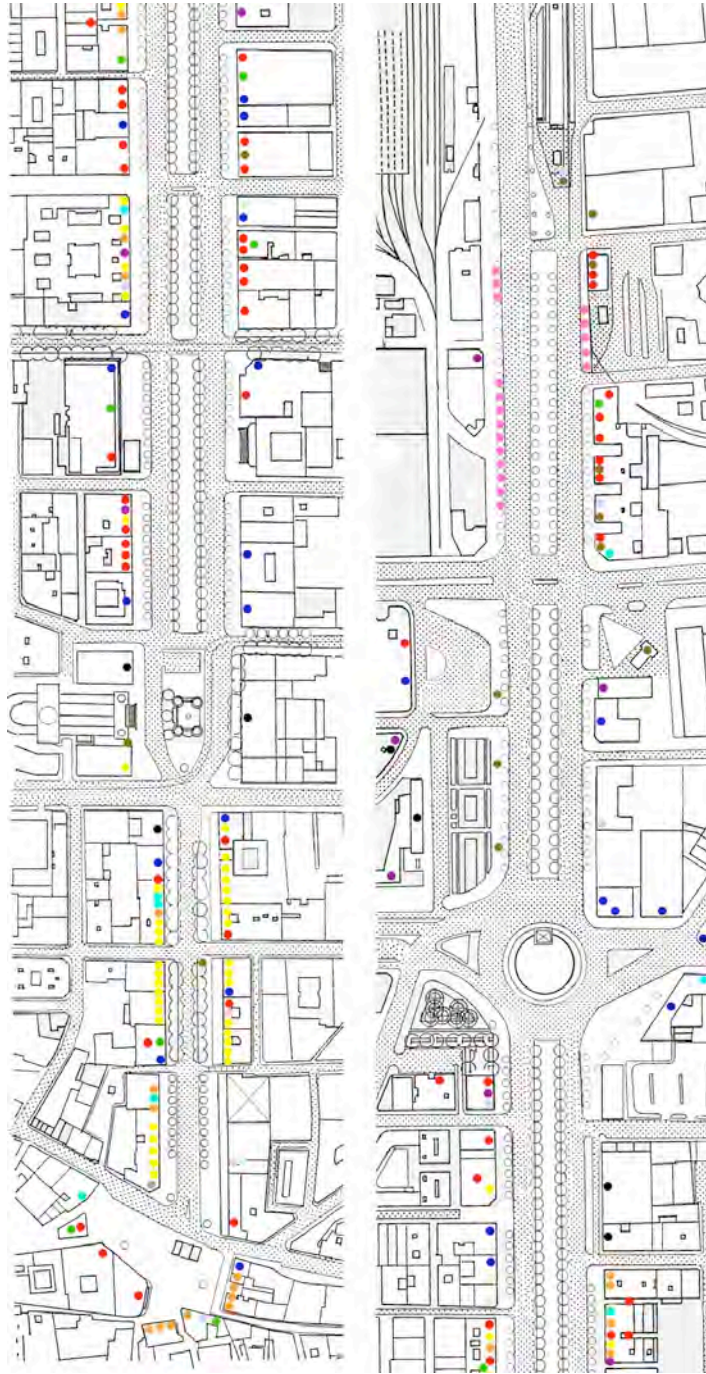


Figure 5.29. Business distribution by type, Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Plan (March 2009). Red = dining/café/bakery. Yellow = clothing. Blue = financial services. Orange = jewelry and gifts. Pink = flowers. East is up. Bottom right connects to top left. (Source: Map based on Municipality of Tunis, *XIX siècle*, unnumbered appendix and on-site observation.)

Users of the Avenue are of course both local and foreign. Certain stores and cafés cater to local clientele (e.g. the Cafés de Paris and l'Univers), while others more for tourists (e.g. the grand hotel cafés). Locals and domestic tourists, however, dominate on the street and make use of nearly all the facilities provided on the Avenue. It is not uncommon to find Tunisians proudly having personal photos taken from within the allée; intentionally composed in such a fashion that the tower looms behind them, as observed in March 2009. This consumption of the tower seems appropriate, given that for Tunisians its symbolism probably carries more weight, despite the apparent obscurity of its obelisk reference, than it would with foreign visitors who are probably less familiar with local history and politics (and unable to read its dedicatory inscription).

The space is animated throughout the day and into the evening, particularly in warmer months, on national holidays and during Ramadan. It does, however become the exclusive domain of younger men during the later hours throughout the year, the steps of the Municipal Theatre and café terraces being popular congregation spots after hours, weather permitting. That said, by the latest hours of the night the streetscape is largely deserted, again, summer holidays notwithstanding.

Still the city's premier space for public spectacle, the Avenue Bourguiba remains the stage of choice for (occasional and highly policed/controlled) rallies and parades and has been the set (and title) for at least one major Tunisian film in recent years (Figure 5.30).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> 7, *Avenue Habib Bourguiba* a.k.a. *Cinecittà* by Ibrahim Letaïef (2008), an action/comedy film set in Tunis, was filmed on location in 2008 and heavily advertised on site in early 2009. In the film the Place was used in a deliberate reference to Rome's Trevi Fountain in an homage to Fellini's 1960 *La Dolce Vita*. See "Cinecittà: le site officiel [sic] du film de Ibrahim Letaïef," <<http://www.cinecitta-lefilm.com/>>.



Figure 5.30. 7, Avenue Habib Bourguiba or Cinecittà (2008) by Ibrahim Letaïef. Advertisement. Note clock tower in background. (Source: “Cinecittà,” Cinecittà: le site officiel [sic] du film de Ibrahim Letaïef, <<http://www.cinecitta-lefilm.com/>>.)

Several visits since 2004 have confirmed the presence of musical performers, healthcare initiative information booths, artists, children playing soccer and crews taping what appear to be television commercials, at different times. Of course there are almost always flocks of tourists, blasé shoppers, cheerful children, smartly dressed professionals, men and women (the latter usually unveiled and in western attire) coming and going to varying degrees of engagement. All of these characters “perform” in a built environment that has at times been imbued with a sense of visual excitement. Evening illumination of the obelisk-tower, water features, and other special holiday lighting displays increase the spectacular nature of the monumentalized streetscape (Figure 5.31).



Figure 5.31. Nighttime on the Place du 7 novembre, Tunis.  
Postcard (ca. 2001).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Where the “new” Avenue Bourguiba fails to inspire and facilitate urban spontaneity and public creativity is in its excessive cleanliness or packaging. Strolling down the its purified allée one encounters little of visual or performative interest, all variation having been removed during the renovation process (Figure 5.32). Amidst the boulevard's 417 lampposts, 497 ficus trees, twenty-six palms, twelve post boxes and eleven Morris columns one sees little else, save billboards and other advertisements (Figure 5.33).<sup>34</sup> Though recent photos exist that illustrate benches in the allée, none are to be found today.<sup>35</sup> A mere three remain on the Place de l'indépendance.

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<sup>34</sup> All counted on site by author in March 2009. Lamp total does not include the tallest posts that are unobtrusive, plain and reach far above the pedestrian level. It would appear that the installation of new Morris columns, as planned for by the ASM, never happened.

<sup>35</sup> See Becher, *Tunis*, 95. Faïka Béjaoui, in the previously cited 11 March 2009 conversation, said that benches were removed after the renovation due to vandalism.



Figure 5.32. Avenue Bourgubia, Tunis.  
Central allée looking east. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Dana Elborno.)



Figure 5.33. Billboards on the Place du 7 novembre, Tunis.  
Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

Flower stalls, once dispersed throughout the Avenue (see Figure 3.43), have been relegated to the far bleak end of the Avenue near the TGM station (Figure 5.34).



Figure 5.34. Flower kiosks on the Avenue Bourguiba's east end, Tunis. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

At the expense of general animation they have been so grouped for the convenience of commuters and the maintenance of cleanliness and order on the street.<sup>36</sup> Permanent kiosks from which newspapers, cigarettes and even key copies, were once sold have been significantly reduced in number (to five). Surviving ones remain concentrated on the sidewalks along the western Avenue de France section of the street, leaving the majority of the sidewalks relatively barren, save for the omnipresent café table and chair.

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<sup>36</sup> According to Faïka Béjaoui, 11 March 2009 conversation, it was thought that delivery trucks and floral waste would sully the Avenue were stalls dispersed throughout.

Furthermore, high levels of policing and surveillance, in accordance with the general state of affairs in contemporary Tunisia, effectively guarantee the suppression of truly spontaneous activity on the Avenue.<sup>37</sup> The omnipresence of authorities (uniformed and plainclothes) and numerous video cameras are hard to overlook. As previously mentioned, large group gatherings are for the most part discouraged and thus rare. When they do occur they are carefully managed and supervised.<sup>38</sup> Though small groups of children are allowed to play soccer on the Place de la Victoire, cheering adult soccer fans (excited but hardly dangerous) are routinely directed away from the Avenue by armed police on match days.<sup>39</sup> One can imagine locals feeling somewhat ill at ease under such controlled circumstances and authorities anxious to allow true spontaneity that they fear may jeopardize their positions of power or make for controversial publicity. It is therefore difficult to fully appreciate the nature of socio-cultural dynamism this refashioned or “rebranded” built environment was ostensibly intended to facilitate.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporary spatial branding and themeing conceptualized.

A brand is not just something one buys; it is something one buys *into*. It is much less tangible than a physical item. It is an “aura of meaning,” an idea and an image.<sup>41</sup> Individuals chose to engage a particular brand in order to

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<sup>37</sup> Ben Ali’s early reform promises have in recent decades yielded to the suppression of open democracy, political Islamist organizations and ultimately any and all forms of opposition. See Christopher Alexander, “Back from the Democratic Brink: Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia,” *Middle East Report* no. 205 (1997): 34–38.

<sup>38</sup> For images of a rally in support of Gaza, that was surprisingly held on the Avenue (15 January 2009) see Anon., “Daylife,” <<http://www.daylife.com/photo/07xA6DAeU7cEM/tunis>>.

<sup>39</sup> The author has encountered this on many occasions, most recently on 9 March 2009.

<sup>40</sup> On the contemporary political situation and western powers’ tacit acceptance of the undemocratic status quo, see Powel, “Stability.”

<sup>41</sup> Klingmann, *Brandscapes*, 55.

share in the symbolic meaning that transcends its physicality or utility. One does not just own an iPod and listen to music. One is an Apple *person* and as such personifies the Apple lifestyle.

As cities and nations have struggled in recent decades to attract the attention and capital of multinational companies, tourists and potential inhabitants, they have come to apply corporate practices to places themselves: to compose not only images and ads, but also buildings and streets to maximize the profitability of a specific geographic entity. The well-crafted brand of a district, city or country has thus become crucial in establishing a marketable identity amidst globalized homogeneity, but also contributes to a sense of shared socio-cultural significance on site.<sup>42</sup> It is the most contemporary form of deliberate spatial scripting, a highly capitalistic outgrowth an established semiotic practice.

In developing a comprehensive plan that considers what a place looks like (that which is emphasized and that which is obscured) and what happens there (that which is encouraged and that which is forbidden) governments, developers, and architects assert a representation of their preferred selves and establish relative arrangements of people, cities and states within larger social systems. These symbolically amended spaces become commodities themselves, subject to the application of flashy slogans and logos that function in tandem with the material embodiment of the ideas they represent (Figure 5.35). In Denmark, for example, the capital is said to be “not only ‘Open for You,’” but also “Open for Tourists, Business, Investments, Events, Experiences, Alternatives” — a concept captured in a mark intended to

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

“strongly position...Copenhagen in the increasingly intense competition among the capitals of Europe to attract tourists and international business.”<sup>43</sup>



Figure 5.35. “cOPENhagen” Copenhagen city brand. Logo (2009).  
(Source: Brand Copenhagen, “About the Brand,”  
<<http://www.opencopenhagen.com/Open/inEnglish.aspx>>.)

Like an individual or product, a place, and therefore a people, can be *modern, international, uniquely local, or dynamic*, and can be rendered or re-rendered to look, feel and function in that very specific fashion. Brand managers, who may be designers, architects, businessmen or politicians, exploit the essence of a place, whether real or imagined, to these ends. In so doing they can recast history, engineer social actions, and even deceive. They can also facilitate intrapersonal interaction, revitalize struggling urban economies and help nations come to terms with, or forget, difficult pasts. In an age of unfettered communication and consumption, a corporate-style brand identity can be a nation’s face to the world, and peripheral states may rely more heavily on overt publicity campaigns than others.<sup>44</sup> All of this may be done to increase tourism, investment and profit, but also to influence public behavior and craft national identities. City brand thus have economic and

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<sup>43</sup> Brand Copenhagen. “About the Brand.”  
<<http://www.opencopenhagen.com/Open/inEnglish.aspx>>.

<sup>44</sup> See the *Journal of Brand Management* 9 no. 4 (2002) special edition on nation branding for relevant case studies.

cultural functions, internal and external ones that relate to locals and visitors, as well as image- and structure-based dimensions.<sup>45</sup>

Themed spaces, whether at Disney World, Las Vegas or the South Street Seaport in New York, demonstrate that theming, as the core of a spatial brand, is at its foundation an act of simulation and frequently retrospective. This simulation is “created through the use of architecture, technology, and human performance” that transports visitors and consumers to distant places and choreographed pasts of dubious or decontextualized veracity.<sup>46</sup> “Eclecticism, historical quotation, ornamentation and the diversification of surfaces,” in addition to the production of urban spectacle, are the particular postmodern means through which designers express themselves in an age of post-Fordist production and capitalism, international travel and instant communication.<sup>47</sup> Resulting “urbanoid environments,” in which private commercial zones appear and act like public spaces, blur public and private realms.<sup>48</sup> Brand managers adjust existing topographies to create unified environments and “simulated landscapes of exotic and imaginary terrains” as backdrops for the consumption of luxury goods and tertiary services that heighten the “commodity’s power of seduction.”<sup>49</sup> “Unified” need not imply visual consistency in the Modernist sense, but rather regularity in historicist elements or aesthetic diversity itself — a “unity of disunity.”<sup>50</sup> These alterations can include the installation of shopping malls, iconic architecture and

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<sup>45</sup> Klingmann, *Brandscapes*, 274.

<sup>46</sup> Lukas, *Themed*, 8 and 59.

<sup>47</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989), 66 and Edward Relph, *Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 142.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Goldberger, “The rise of the private city,” in *Breaking Away*, ed. Julia Vitullo-Martin (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1996), 141.

<sup>49</sup> Sorkin, *Variations*, 200.

<sup>50</sup> Relph, *Modern*, 259.

spectacular public events, as well as uniform street furniture. Where more substantial interventions are not possible, selections are often made from a standardized “kit of parts,” which includes “old fashioned” street signs, lamps and benches each with an innate authority based on its implied historicity (Figure 5.36).



Figure 5.36. Main Street lamppost, Trumansburg, NY. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author’s collection.)

Thus instant historical ambiance comes by means of this generic “catalogue heritization” in cities large and small.<sup>51</sup> The aura of the antique sells, regardless of its actual authenticity or appropriateness. Its ubiquity is telling and formal components often well-divorced from function and local context, reproduced for its semiotic potency and “pure imageability.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Graham et al., *Geography*, 217.

<sup>52</sup> Sorkin, *Variations*, xiv.

The current Avenue brand in its domestic context.

As said above, it is not uncommon to find the Avenue referenced as the “Champs-Élysées of Tunis.” The precise origin of this metaphor remains obscure. Despite the resistance to the idea as expressed by professionals at the ASM in conversation, it holds currency now more than ever, though as they suggested it may be an oversimplification of the situation and perhaps not the explicit intention of designers and planners during the recent renovation.<sup>53</sup> Striking parallels in both form and function remain, however, and certainly warrant consideration (see Figure 0.2). Just in surveying the streetscapes, one encounters a matching of elements in Paris and Tunis, some of which are perhaps coincidental and others so similar that one struggles to disassociate them. To the Arc de Triomphe there is the *Bab Bahr*. To the ranks of trimmed plane trees in Paris there are the Tunisois ficus that now similarly shade similarly widened sidewalks. In both there are the capitals’ most prestigious buildings, ample café terraces, iron lamps, civic monuments and statues, parks that straddle sections of each. To the gold-caped Luxor obelisk in the Place de la Concorde there is now the gold-caped tower in the Place du 7 novembre (itself in a way dedicated to socio-political harmony). The former honors Egypt’s Ramses II in its hieroglyphics, the latter Tunisia’s monarch-president in its placement and dedication. The apparent correspondence in this final link is quite compelling (Figure 5.37).

That said, the initial ASM plan that would have refashioned Tunis’ Avenue in almost direct emulation of the Champs-Élysées was discarded.

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<sup>53</sup> Conversations with Faïka Béjaoui and Zoubeir Mouhli, Tunis ASM in March 2009 and June 2008 respectively. The metaphor was printed in the ASM’s publication, McGuinness et al., *Tunis*, 22, however.

Reasons for its abandonment included its costliness and drastic break from history rather than its obvious tie to Paris' most celebrated way.



Figure 5.37. Avenues Bourguiba (left) and Champs-Élysées (right).  
Photographs (2006, left, and 2009, right).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

That architects and urbanists at the ASM would deny an explicit copying of the Champs-Élysées within a postcolonial context is hardly surprising, and it is not the intent of the present project to contradict them. Rather, the end result of their labors appears in many ways to reflect the form and function of the Champs-Élysées (and its 1994 renovation), intentionally or subconsciously, and that is the compelling point. “Parisian Cosmopolitan” has been chosen as the marketed “brand” identity of the Avenue space due to its renewed resemblance to Parisian models, as well as its enhanced international air.

The cosmopolitan air about the current Avenue Bourguiba comes largely from its function, though the globalism invoked by the renovated Hotel Africa remains noteworthy. The recent opening of Italy's United Colors of Benetton store in the new Claridge building's mini-mall (and its factory in the south), the Avenue's first major international chain, contributes to this cosmopolitan ambiance otherwise facilitated by the ever-increasing presence of foreign tourists and tourism facilities on the Avenue.<sup>54</sup> Tunisia has sought to engage the greater world economy since the 1980's through international pacts and investment deals.

The Avenue's Benetton is a tangible result of the substantial economic and travel ties that still link Tunisia to Europe. Following Tunisia's ratification of a commercial deal linking its economy to the European Union (EU) in 1995 (the Euromediterranean Partnership), within which economic, political and socio-cultural cooperation was envisioned, it has further integrated itself as a participant in the European Neighborhood Policy and a member of the developing *Union pour la Méditerranée* (UPM).<sup>55</sup> The latter initiated by French President Nicholas Sarkozy in 2008, the union unites all member states of the EU with all other countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea in varying degrees of political and economic accord.<sup>56</sup> France, Italy and Germany are all heavily represented in trade levels and vacationing visitors (Figure 5.38).

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<sup>54</sup> Ironically, chain stores have recently opened on the Champs-Élysées as well, there causing quite a bit of controversy as they are considered problematic. See Elaine Sciolino, "Megastores March Up Avenue, and Paris Takes to Barricades" *New York Times* (31 January 2007), <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/31/world/europe/31paris.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/31/world/europe/31paris.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)>.

<sup>55</sup> On the Euromediterranean Partnership, see Patrick Holden, "Security, power or profit? The economic diplomacy of the US and the EU in North Africa," *Journal of North African Studies* 14 no. 1 (March 2009): 21–22.

<sup>56</sup> Libya remains an "observer" rather than an active participant. See Agence France Presse, "Mediterranean union launched with Mideast peace hopes," 13 July 2008, <<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5izRK5FibgFbZQ4wW7XxueUTsH4wQ>>.

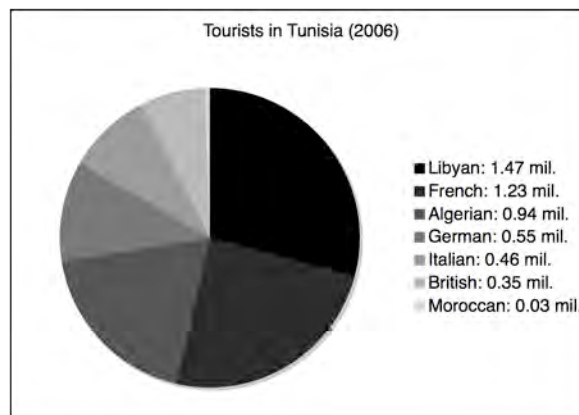
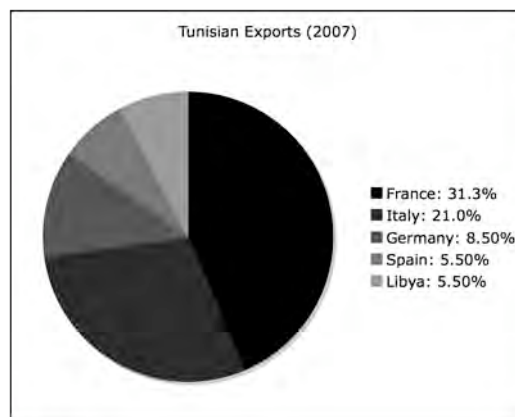
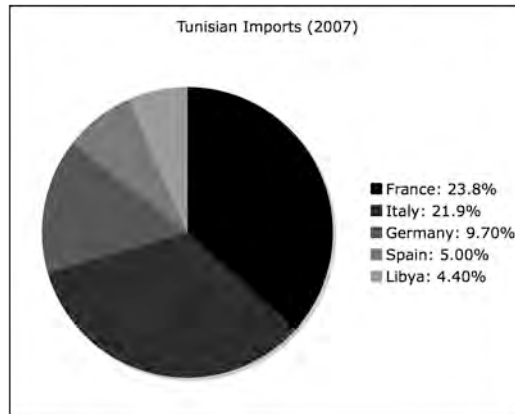


Figure 5.38. Trade and Tourism in Tunisia. Charts (2008).  
 (Source: Data from Central Intelligence Agency (US), "World Factbook: Tunisia," <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/TS.html>> and Mohamed Bouamoud, "Radioscopie du tourisme tunisien 2003-2006 (1/2)," Webmanagercenter, <<http://www.webmanagercenter.com.tn/management/article.php?id=35380/>>.)

Tunisia's former colonial master still outperforms all other trade partners and European tourists.<sup>57</sup> France invests heavily in the Tunisian economy, contributing ninety-two million euros in 2006 alone (Figure 5.39).<sup>58</sup>

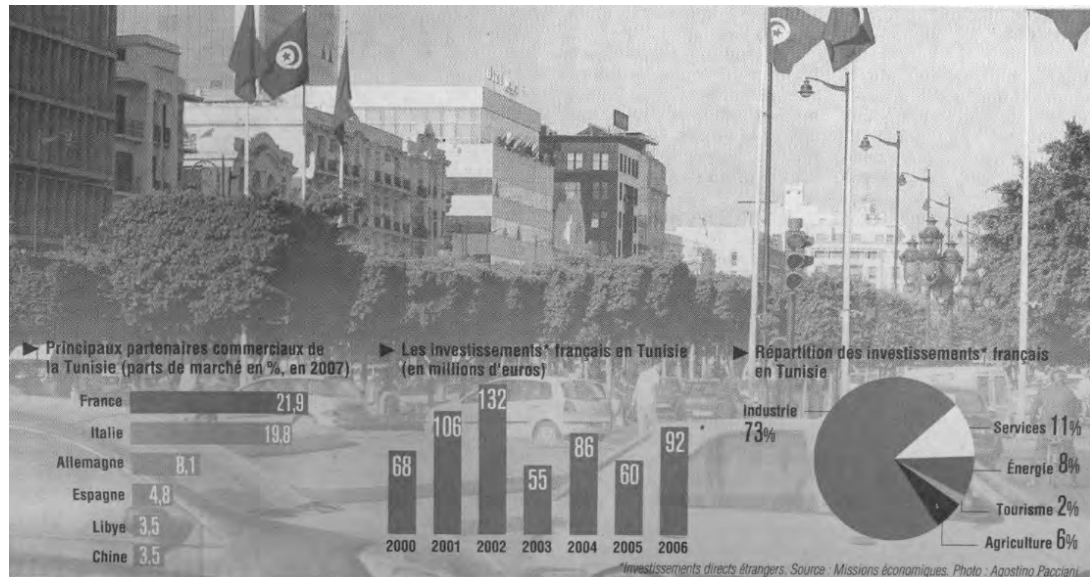


Figure 5.39. French investment in Tunisia. *Le Figaro* image (2008). Note the image of the Avenue Bourguiba in the background. (Source: Arielle Thedrel, “La Tunisie mise sur Paris pour s’arrimer à l’Europe,” *Le Figaro*, 28 April 2008, 5.)

American and European investments have been ostensibly tied to security concerns, a shared belief that economic reform benefits internal development that ultimately reduces support for domestic and transnational extremism. Concerns for stability outweigh those of socio-cultural, commercial and political changes, each of which has become a means to an end, rather

<sup>57</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (US), “World Factbook: Tunisia,” <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/TS.html>>, and Mohamed Bouamoud, “Radioscopie du tourisme tunisien 2003-2006 (1/2),” Webmanagercenter, <<http://www.webmanagercenter.com.tn/management/article.php?id=35380/>>.

<sup>58</sup> Arielle Thedrel, “La Tunisie mise sur Paris pour s’arrimer à l’Europe,” *Le Figaro*, 28 April 2008, 5.

than a singular goal.<sup>59</sup> Although Tunisia remains traditionally within the sphere of European, and particularly French, economic assistance, American involvement has increased in the past decade. A Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, ratified between the US and Tunisia in 2002, has sought to encourage “the liberalization of trade and investment by consulting on bilateral trade and investment issues,” while direct funding comes from USAID, the post September 11th Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and Millennium Challenge Account sources.<sup>60</sup> Programs related to job creation, education, healthcare, women’s empowerment, human rights and economic liberalization are supported with local, regional, and thus international, stability in mind.<sup>61</sup> Political liberalization and democratic reforms, considered by both the US and EU to be major contributors to regional stabilization (and components of the above mentioned initiatives), have in Tunisia been generally downplayed. There western powers seem to have “shifted their focus to maintaining stability through the status quo rather than to risk the unpredictable outcomes of political reform.”<sup>62</sup>

For a government keen on garnering foreign investment from these sources and others, tourism remains a major concern. To these ends the state has consciously sought to define the Tunisia as a “sun-and-sand European Mediterranean” destination rather than an Arab or Islamic one, wherein the Avenue represents a counterpoint of cultural and civic splendor appropriate for such a locale.<sup>63</sup> The setting of the national tourism ministry’s offices on the

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<sup>59</sup> Holden, “Security,” 11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 and 19.

<sup>61</sup> For more on the three sources of direct American investment, see *ibid.*, 19–21.

<sup>62</sup> Brieg Tomos Powel, “The stability syndrome: US and EU democracy promotion in Tunisia,” *Journal of North African Studies* 14 no. 1 (March 2009): 57.

<sup>63</sup> Robert A. Poirier and Stephen Wright, “The Political Economy of Tourism in Tunisia,”

Avenue speaks to the boulevard's lasting relevance in that constructed vision, as does the prominence afforded the Avenue on its brochures (Figure 5.40).<sup>64</sup>



Figure 5.40. “Tunis and its Medina,” official city tourism guide. Brochure cover (2009). (Source: Author’s collection.)

Recalling the stated goals of the 2000–2001 renovation project, the “shortfall between the image of the Avenue and its reality” has been mitigated through physical rebranding and subsequent photographic presentation to nonnative audiences.<sup>65</sup> The success of the Avenue image and its commodification is

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*Journal of Modern African Studies* 31, no. 1 (1993): 155. See also Jean Chapoutot, “La politique touristique de la Tunisie à l’heure de la mondialisation,” in *l’Urbain Dans le Monde Arabe*, Signoles, Pierre et al., eds. (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1999), 163–183.

<sup>64</sup> It is not uncommon to find Tunisians proudly having personal photos taken from within the allée; intentionally composed in such a fashion that the tower looms behind them, as observed in March 2009. This consumption of the tower seems appropriate, given that for Tunisians its symbolism probably carries more weight than it would with foreign visitors who are probably less familiar with local history and politics (and unable to read its dedicatory inscription).

<sup>65</sup> Ammar, “Le projet,” 46.

further demonstrated by its presence on packaged candies sold in the Tunis-Carthage airport's duty-free shop (Figure 5.41).<sup>66</sup>



Figure 5.41. Tunisian candies on sale in the duty-free shop, Carthage International Airport. Box label (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

This nostalgic rebranding of the Avenue Bourguiba immediately strikes one as somewhat odd given the country's history. Indeed, the “archetypical postcolonial scenario,” wherein colonialist or “white” heritage is generally marginalized or destroyed, remains the norm in most settings with similar histories.<sup>67</sup> Private sector developments that capitalize on quaint colonial themes are not unprecedented,<sup>68</sup> but the total endorsement of such an explicit

<sup>66</sup> Spotted by the author in March 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Graham, *Heritage*, 116.

<sup>68</sup> See Tim Edensor and Uma Kothari, “Sweetening Colonialism: A Mauritian-Themed Resort,” in D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren, eds. *Architecture and Tourism* (New York: Berg, 2004), 189–206.

branding by governments at local and national levels seems quite rare.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, the simultaneous commodification of the medina (as a timeless traditional North African city) and the Avenue (as the center of the *ville nouvelle*) in a compelling way perpetuate the old bifurcated image of the capital, the population's homogeneity notwithstanding. The literature of contemporary Japan and India have prompted ongoing analysis of "auto-orientalism" as a perpetuation of "essentialist" approaches to one's own culture in a postcolonial context.<sup>70</sup> In each of these examples, Japanese and Indian authors represent their respective cultures in a fashion that reinforces persistent Western conceptions of their identities, emphasizing "cultural homogeneity and historical continuity" in the case of the former and exoticism in the latter.<sup>71</sup> This discourse, developing within the sociological discipline and Asian contexts, has of yet to really be applied with vigor to the realms of architectural history and the postcolonial Mediterranean. Capitalism and tourism explain these aspects of Avenue Bourguiba situation in part, but fail to account for the full complexities of domestic cultural issues that this project touches upon.

One would be remiss to ignore the greater process of cultural and linguistic "Arabization" within which this most recent rebranding has occurred. Language has always played a major role in the definition of one's identity, and the imposition of French upon Tunisians during the nineteenth century generated the expected resistance among many politicians in the postcolonial period. Even Bourguiba, a man generally sympathetic to French values and

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<sup>69</sup> Cuba's "Old Havana" is another example of such a compelling project. See D. Medina Lasansky, "Tourist geographies: remapping old Habana" in *ibid.*, 165–186.

<sup>70</sup> Syed Farid Alatas, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science* (London: Sage, 2006), 109.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

whose views are often summarized by his description of the *hijab* as “that odious rag,” espoused plans to significantly Arabize Tunisia’s educational system.<sup>72</sup> While his tenure failed to accomplish such a substantial task, Ben Ali, whose 1988 National Pact identified Arabization as a “pressing civilizational requirement,” has made limited progress.<sup>73</sup> Through the Pact the regime expressed a commitment to “transforming modernity into a popular asset” and asserted independence from, though not necessarily exclusion of, French cultural and linguistic influences.<sup>74</sup> Policies that favor the supplanting of French by Arabic as the language of instruction in primary education and in the fields of mathematics and the sciences since the late 1990’s are indicative of Ben Ali’s valorization of the singular (legal) national language, further exemplified by the inscription on his *changement* tower (but arguably not its form). A contentious issue always, the place of French remains heavily debated, as it remains the language of the country’s business and technology sectors, its system of higher education, and to a large degree the tongue of its elite citizenry. These elites advocate bilingualism and biculturalism still, and often make arguments that seem to have changed little from those of their colonial- and Bourguiba-era predecessors. The claim that French facilitates “access, through the European language-of-state, to modern Western culture in the broadest sense, and, in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Tunisia’s educational apparatus as a whole

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<sup>72</sup> Habib Bourguiba, speech delivered on 1 October 1957 as quoted in *La Femme Tunisienne* (Secrétariat d’Etat à l’Information, 1960) in Clement Henry Moore, *Tunisia Since Independence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965), 55.

<sup>73</sup> National Pact (1988), quoted in Mohamed Daoud, “The language situation in Tunisia,” in *Language Planning and Policy in Africa*, ed. Robert B. Kaplan, Richard B. Baldauf, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007), 282.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 280, and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 116.

(still itself largely based on the inherited French system), according to the Minister of Higher Education, encourages the study of Tunisia's past, including its colonial experience and historical interactions with Europe.<sup>76</sup> Thus internal resistance, and to an extent convenience, have ensured the maintenance of French in the media, in the schools, in commercial circles and on the streets of Tunisia (Figure 5.42).<sup>77</sup>

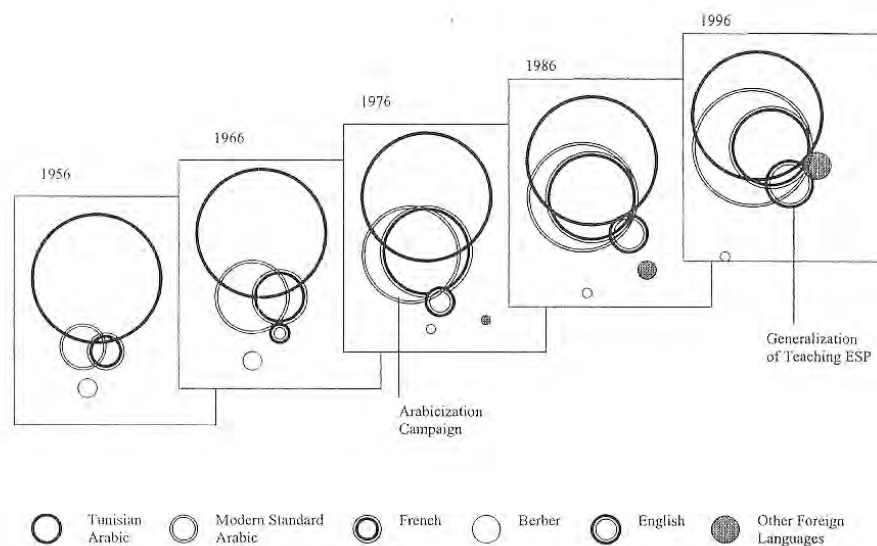


Figure 5.42. Evolution of the language situation in Tunisia. Chart (2007). (Source: Mohamed Daoud, "The language situation in Tunisia," in *Language Planning and Policy in Africa*, ed. Robert B. Kaplan, Richard B. Baldauf, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007), 41.)

Ben Ali's dedication to all things French has clearly not abated either, it would seem. On the occasion of Tunisia's forty-fifth anniversary of independence from France, President Ben Ali recognized the place of Arabic

<sup>76</sup> Geyer, *Country*, 32. Jules Ferry, as Minister of Public Instruction in the 1880's, is credited with having established the modern French system, which remains highly centralized, largely public and secular. Degrees in higher education, in both Tunisia and France, (despite ongoing reforms) include the *licence*, *maîtrise* and the *doctorat*. See H. D. Lewis *The French Education System* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

<sup>77</sup> English, increasingly perceived to be of less limited international relevance, has become more attractive to Tunisians, though it has yet to attain anything even remotely close to the popularity still enjoyed by French. See Daoud, "Language," 295–301.

as the national language and its role in the shaping of young Tunisians personalities, but he went on to promote the mastery of foreign languages, and French in particular. This, he claimed, remained an “important link to a civilization to which (Tunisians) are united by ancestral historical relations.”<sup>78</sup> The contemporary significance of trade and tourism between Tunisia and France has been considered above. Add to it the deference accorded to the French language and culture by the country’s leadership and architecture academy, and it seems fitting that the President and ASM — the Avenue Bourguiba’s current brand managers — would produce an image so apparently neo-colonialist in nature.

Within the realm of architecture and urbanism, an enduring predilection for French history and styles comes as little surprise. Architectural education in Tunisia remains well within the shadow cast by the colonial system as established in 1930. ENAU’s objectives, established with its foundation in 1995, were

to promote knowledge and nurture architectural research in order to build and enhance the students' artistic and scholarly capacities; to integrate the human and social dimensions of the built environment with technological progress in architecture and related disciplines; to work toward the development of an architectural aesthetic that reconciles Tunisia's Arab, Muslim, and Mediterranean cultural heritage with the requirements of modernity and the latest developments in contemporary architecture; and to contribute to environmental preservation, improvement of the quality of life, and the rejuvenation of architectural and urban culture in the country.<sup>79</sup>

Increased acknowledgement of Arab and Islamic patrimony through institutionalized research projects and coursework notwithstanding, instruction at ENAU is still carried out entirely in the French language and historical

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<sup>78</sup> Zine al Abidine Ben Ali, speech in honor of Tunisia’s 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence, 20 March 2001. Quoted in Daoud, “Language,” 299.

<sup>79</sup>Djerbi and Safi, “Teaching,” 105–106.

models are primarily drawn from European and American contexts. Though the third year course of the four-year program is ostensibly focuses on Islamic art and architecture, its coverage of material extends “little beyond the reductive contents of a chapter on Islamic art and architecture one would find in textbooks of the colonial period,” focusing only on the most “mainstream” of monuments.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, France remains the destination of choice for architects in training. The resulting system “ultimately marginaliz(es) the urban realities of Tunisia and draw(s) a reductive world picture” in a manner reminiscent of Eurocentric colonial-era pedagogy.<sup>81</sup> Designers currently in positions of power remain the products of this system, either trained within it or in France.<sup>82</sup> A truly independent Tunisian identity in architecture, of local origin, seems far from inevitable in light of the current academic and professional environment.

Ben Ali’s dedication to all things French has clearly not abated either, it would seem. On the occasion of Tunisia’s forty-fifth anniversary of independence from France, President Ben Ali recognized the place of Arabic as the national language and its role in the shaping of young Tunisians personalities, but he went on to the promote the mastery of foreign languages, and French in particular. This, he claimed, remained an “important link to a civilization to which (Tunisians) are united by ancestral historical relations.”<sup>83</sup> The contemporary significance of trade and tourism between Tunisia and France has been considered above. Add to it the deference accorded to the

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>82</sup> For example, Faïka Béjaoui at the ASM received her first graduate degree from Tunis’ ITAAUT (1982) and subsequently a Master of Advanced Studies (French “DEA”) in urban geography at Tours.

<sup>83</sup> Zine al Abidine Ben Ali, speech in honor of Tunisia’s 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence, 20 March 2001. Quoted in Daoud, “Language,” 299.

French language and culture by the country's leadership and architecture academy, and it seems fitting that the President and ASM — the Avenue Bourguiba's current brand managers — would produce an image so apparently neo-colonialist in nature.

One may be inclined to dismiss much of what has been attributed to a contemporary Tunisian identity based largely on French precedent as an inevitable continuation of an entrenched past. Perhaps the restored Avenue, which looks and feels so Parisian, is merely what it is because what physically remains has always been essentially a Parisian streetscape. Perhaps Tunisians are simply dealing with the detritus of French colonialism, and restoring it makes more sense than razing it. Surely obliterating the entire avenue and outlawing the French language are possible options, but they would obviously be impractical. Indeed, some locals have adopted the perspective that “it is our heritage here.”<sup>84</sup> Instead of total “Arabization” (probably not impossible in an authoritarian state) architects appear to do the opposite, even on sites wherein nothing of the Protectorate's architecture survives.

Tunis' new *Hôtel de Ville* (city hall), opened in 2000, is an example of just such a thing. On the site of the long-lost casbah and razed French military barracks, the massive structure was designed by Tunisian architect W. Ben Mahmoud. Its “monumental façade,” rendered in pink marble and glass, is adorned with horseshoe arches, ornate latticework and interlaced *sebka* patterns (Figure 5.43). Its pastiche and scale strike one as very reminiscent of

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<sup>84</sup> Faïka Béjaoui, 11 March 2009 conversation.

colonialist *arabisations* and the (arguably patronizing) architecture of later association period.<sup>85</sup>



Figure 5.43. Tunis City Hall, W. Ben Mahmoud, architect. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

The use of a very public front on an otherwise French building in plan and purpose, its ornate but generic decoration and setting within a open lamppost-filled square, betray an undeniable French pedigree where one need not have necessarily been crafted. Similarly, the inclusion of traditional enclosed balconies, stretched on what are essentially western high-rise apartment blocks in Tunis and Sfax, illustrates again the subjecting of a sensitivity to the local patrimony to modernity via “contemporary programs and forms, volumes, and architectonic elements” (Figure 5.44).<sup>86</sup> In both examples the products of

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<sup>85</sup> Santelli, *Creuset*, 102

<sup>86</sup> Ammar, *Histoire*, 252 and 241.

local architects appear to be quite “French arabesque” in execution, and neither had anything to do with modifying extant structures.



Figure 5.44. Arabesque apartment blocks on Tunis’ edge. Photograph (2008).  
(Source: Author’s collection.)

In exercising the luxury of choice in postmodern practice they have opted to elevate traditional design elements, as did the imperial French, upon imported foundations.<sup>87</sup> Reminiscent of colonial-era discussions of hybridity, Ammar, professor at the state architecture institute, calls the resulting amalgam of forms “Tunisianité,” much like architect Santelli did in the “Tunisification” comments cited in the previous chapter.<sup>88</sup>

In what could be a long list of such structures, ENAU’s campus in suburban Sidi Bou Saïd, wherein an ostensibly European/French school takes

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<sup>87</sup> Latifa M. Wafa, “Post-Modern Architecture and the Respect of the Past in Contemporary Arab Architecture: A Mean for Survival and Revival in the Era of Globalization,” in Al-Quwasmī et al., eds., *Regional vol. I*, 1385–1397, does not seem to address a colonial interpretation of postmodernism that may be of relevance.

<sup>88</sup> Ammar, *Histoire*, 252.

on the dressings of a pseudo-Arabic architecture, is a particularly poignant example of this phenomenon (Figure 5.45).



Figure 5.45. ENAU, Tunis. Principal façade. Photograph (ca. 2000).  
(Source: “ENAU,” Groupe Studi, <[http://www.studi.com.tn/site/publish/images/image\\_gallerie/4\\_cons/Education/max/enau.jpg](http://www.studi.com.tn/site/publish/images/image_gallerie/4_cons/Education/max/enau.jpg)>.)

An institution originally founded by French colonialists, taught in line with European and French methods in the French language in row upon row of modern classrooms and studios, is here housed behind horseshoe-shaped portal, beneath a whitewashed dome and layered arcades.<sup>89</sup>

The Avenue’s “Parisian Colonial” place brand.

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<sup>89</sup> For more on the ENAU campus by Wassim Ben Mahmoud and subsequent additions, see Mohamed Sadok Chaieb, “Extension de l’Ecole Nationale d’Architecture et d’Urbanisme de Tunis,” *Archi-Mag* <<http://www.archi-mag.com/enau.php>>.

In any renovation decisions are made as to what shall and shall not be designated as heritage. These are inherently political decisions, particularly in a setting in which political authorities exert as much influence as they do in Tunis. Buildings and cultural sites, so acclaimed, are not only inherited artifacts, but also actors within their environment – empowered by the “popular meanings and official sanctions ascribed to them.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore the selection of particular sites and their incorporation into the politically authorized realm of official identity construction, even if it is just “their heritage” now, not only recognizes their perceived value but changes it through the process of valorization. Thus the selection of French colonial buildings for restoration by the ASM and the installation of street furniture and monuments reminiscent of Parisian prototypes by Tunisia’s current regime reflect official sanction of Parisian-type architecture and culture, the streetscape having been somewhat depoliticized through the removal of only the strongest of French colonialist landmarks at independence. To simply reduce the changes to a particular affinity for French culture, however, would be naïve. As before, tourism, international trade and politics and academic infrastructure play important roles as well in the process of decision-making.

The recent renovation of the Avenue Bourguiba clearly satisfies many of the criteria for the sort of spatial branding undertaken in places such as New York or Boston. Like the American projects Paul Goldberger describes, it is “intimately tied to consumerism, to entertainment, and to popular culture,” and “seeks to provide a measured, controlled, organized kind of city experience.”<sup>91</sup> The creative production and spontaneity of “real” urban spaces has been

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<sup>90</sup> Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 35.

<sup>91</sup> Goldberger, “Rise,” 147.

sacrificed by brand managers to the fabrication of a cohesive and clean image of what they feel the Avenue ought to look like and how they would prefer it perform. The power, intensity and disorder have been cleansed from the repackaged and commodified streetscape.<sup>92</sup> Stylistic pastiche has been reinforced through restoration of historical façades and the insertion of postmodern pieces, while traces of historical accumulation on the street level (mismatching signage, lamps &c.) have been removed. As elsewhere in the western world, the “valorization” of historical monuments [here] has come in the form of “fantastical reconstructions, arbitrary destructions, and restorations that fail to announce themselves” on the ground.<sup>93</sup> Finally, one’s interaction with the highly staged environment has been prescribed by the removal benches and kiosks and the redistribution of flower stalls, just as it is monitored by vigilant authorities that want people to buy things, walk, drink coffee and inevitably maintain a lucrative connection to France.

To borrow the title of Charles Moore’s 1997 essay, in order to experience this pristine branded environment “you have to pay for the public life.”<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the use of tax revenue for the renovation does not even guarantee a Tunisian a seat, as there are but three benches along the entire 1.4-kilometer length of the Avenue. Were more than nine people interested in sitting down along the Avenue at any given moment, they would have to literally sit down on the curb or buy something at a café to access privatized seating. The preservation of architectural heritage was of course a concern of the ASM, but the 2000–2001 project seems motivated by economic concerns

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>93</sup> Choay, *Invention*, 145.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Moore, “You have to pay for the public life,” *Lotus International* no. 95 (1997): 100–117.

above all else. National and municipal interests in maintaining a competitive advantage for Tunis inspired the project's major consideration of international tourism. The restored Avenue (and particularly its café culture) is a source of pride for the government and Tunisois citizenry, but also sold to foreign audiences. Though the latter probably come to see the medina and nearby museums and beaches rather than the old *ville nouvelle*, they need to be comfortably accommodated in an appropriately dignified setting, just as was the case during earlier periods. That visitors invest in the city and country, whether in buying a coffee or funding a factory, is the ultimate objective. Consumption is thus facilitated, encouraged and celebrated in this proto-“urbanoid environment.”<sup>95</sup>

For sure the 2000–2001 Avenue rebranding is not quite as sophisticated or technically advanced as might be the case in New York's South Street Seaport or Baltimore's Inner Harbor. The “hybrid synergies” developed in such examples, including “shopertainment, eatertainment, and edutainment,” are yet fully matured in Tunis.<sup>96</sup> They are likely on their way however, as they have sprung up in more touristy locations elsewhere in Tunisia, such as resort city Hammamet.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, a consistent and catchy brand logo or advertisement campaign for Tunis has yet to be designed as it has in Copenhagen or Amsterdam (see Figure 5.35), though it has been so far accomplished at a basic national level by Tunisia's Ministry of Tourism (see Figure 5.40). This branding will likely be developed in the near future also, as

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<sup>95</sup> Goldberger, “Rise,” 146.

<sup>96</sup> John Hannigan, *Fantasy City* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 89.

<sup>97</sup> See the Médina Méditerranée site in Hammamet's Yasmine district. See Médina Méditerranée, “Médina Méditerranée,” <<http://www.mediterranea.com>>, and Tarek Ben Miled, “Médina Méditerranée, Yasmine Hammamet,” *Architecture méditerranéenne*, 201–205.

the tourism ministry and President have pledged commitment to large-scale promotional work.<sup>98</sup>

The Avenue Bourguiba is thus clearly a branded space recalling Klein's scripted spaces concept. While physical progress along the rescripted Avenue maintains its linearity as prescribed by the organization of its streets, access now comes from the port, TGM terminal, nearby train stations, the northern airport, *métro* stops, highways and adjacent parking garages. The semiotics of the permeable streetscape, as presented above, remain highly complex and tied to the history of the city, as well as its future as foreseen by its managers. The tall clock tower on the Place du 7 novembre asserts a vertical dominance that in a way counters the presence of the Africa and International/El Hana towers, as well as those in adjacent projects under development. In its vaguely Parisian form it represents not only the ascendancy of Ben Ali, but also the lasting influence of French theories of design and planning. Though the Avenue and its clock can be physically left behind, its popular image, symbolic potency and the socio-cultural aspects of Tunisian identity that it embodies are harder to escape.

The choice of the Avenue Bourguiba as the primary site for the 2008 state reception of French President Sarkozy seems quite appropriate in light of the contemporary socio-cultural, political and architectural contexts. Sarkozy came to discuss, among other things, the UPM and France's investment in French language education in Tunisia.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly he was afforded quite the

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<sup>98</sup> Anon., "Tunisie - Tourisme: Les mesures présidentielles pour la relance du secteur," Webmanagercenter, <<http://www.webmanagercenter.com.tn/management/article.php?id=70688>>.

<sup>99</sup> Nicholas Sarkozy, "State visit to Tunisia – Interview given by M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic, to the Tunisian "Le Temps" newspaper (excerpts)," 28 April 2008, French

show on the capital's premier public stage—a source of pride for an administration (and arguably a country) apparently eager to demonstrate its lasting bond with its former master. As if the restored colonialist buildings, imported lamp posts, Parisian-style cafés, isolated monuments and bilingual signage were not enough, the animation of the built environment by cheering crowds, fluttering French flags and musical performances would have made the point clear. France and Tunisia remain closely linked, and Tunis' brand managers have gone to great lengths to make this fact abundantly clear on the Avenue Bourguiba. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2008 their nostalgic tendencies fused with the space's long branding history and diplomatic pageantry in what remains a compelling display of self-imposed neo-colonial spectacle, otherwise documented in the Avenue's renovated form.

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Embassy in the United Kingdom, <<http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Sarkozy-s-State-visit-to,10538.html>>.

## CHAPTER 6: THE FUTURE OF TUNIS AND THE AVENUE BOURGUIBA

Restoration of several historic façades was underway in March 2009 and it appeared at the time that businesses on the Avenue were generally doing well. There do remain several plots of open land at the Avenue's eastern end, as well as a several underutilized structures that may still yet be redeveloped. The improvement of this persistently derelict zone will likely happen, but not before the completion of major infrastructural works going on there at the moment. Indeed, considerable construction goes on all over Tunis and the city anticipates substantial growth in the coming decades (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1. Anticipated urban grown in Tunis. Plan (2008).

Light red marks “short term” grown, while dark indicated “long term” or 2016.

A = medina. B= Sports City. C = Mediterranean Gate. D = Berges du Lac.

(Source: République tunisienne. “Plan Directeur Regional du Transport dans le Grand Tunis” (Powerpoint) <[www.euromedina.org/bibliotheque\\_fichiers/Doc\\_transports\\_tunisie1.pdf](http://www.euromedina.org/bibliotheque_fichiers/Doc_transports_tunisie1.pdf)>.)

To accommodate this major urban expansion, Tunisia's government has begun work to double the width of the Z4 highway through the construction of an additional viaduct adjacent to the existing one. To make way for this important north-south link, the demolition of several early twentieth-century structures is on the horizon (Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2. Construction of the Z4 extension north of the Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis. Photograph (2009).  
(Source: Author's collection.)

The matrix of the Avenue will therefore be directly affected by the advancing bypass, though exactly how remains to be seen. Plans for the Avenue Bourguiba space beneath the viaducts, already unpleasant, remain unclear (see Figure 5.4). Less physically direct, however, will be the challenges presented by several huge development projects currently underway on the lake's northern and southern shores. The implications for the Avenue

Bourguiba, and indeed the entire city of Tunis as it is currently known, are inestimable.

The *Berges du Lac* development north of the city center has been considered previously as an example of the city’s interest in maintaining a competitive edge and the full exploitation of its waterfront setting. The earliest of Tunis’ major lakeside developments, it appears relatively minor in comparison to the projects just now underway. Adjacent to the northern *Berges du Lac* zone, construction began in 2008 on the Emirati-funded “Tunis Sports City” project (see Figure 6.1). It is slated to include residences of all types (villas, condominiums and high-rises), two stadiums, hotels, office towers, shopping malls, a golf course, athletic training facilities and schools, dispersed about a network of islands, canals and parks (Figures 6.3 and 6.4).



Figure 6.3. Tunis Sports City. Master Plan (2008).  
(Source: Sports Cities International, “Tunis Sports City: Project Overview,”  
<[http://www.sportcitiesinternational.com/english/projects\\_tunis\\_projectoverview.html](http://www.sportcitiesinternational.com/english/projects_tunis_projectoverview.html)>.)



Figure 6.4. Tunis Sports City. Central area with island “medina” quarter at left. Model aerial view.  
(Source: Sports Cities International, “Tunis Sports City: Project Overview,” <[http://www.sportcitiesinternational.com/english/projects\\_tunis\\_projectoverview.html](http://www.sportcitiesinternational.com/english/projects_tunis_projectoverview.html)>.)

This “city within a city” promises to be a unique “sports themed real estate community which fosters healthy living in a vibrant and energetic atmosphere.”<sup>1</sup> Aspiring Tunisian athletes will benefit from the Olympic-class facilities here. Covering 257 hectares of reclaimed land, it will cost foreign investors \$5 billion US and take up to eight years to complete.<sup>2</sup>

The architecture of the Sports City is far more imposing than anything in Tunis at the moment, but pales in comparison to the 1,976-hectare Mediterranean Gate project on the lake’s southern shore (see Figure 6.1). Stunningly huge, it is also funded by investors from the United Arab Emirates.

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<sup>1</sup> Sports Cities International, “Tunis Sports City: Project Overview,” <[http://www.sportcitiesinternational.com/english/projects\\_tunis\\_projectoverview.html](http://www.sportcitiesinternational.com/english/projects_tunis_projectoverview.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> Agence Tunis Afrique Presse, “Construction of Tunis Sports City kickstarted,” <[http://www.tap.info.tn/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=18853&Itemid=155](http://www.tap.info.tn/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18853&Itemid=155)>.

Costing \$25 billion US, the undertaking will consist of yet more malls, entertainment facilities, outdoor promenades, offices, a golf course and pleasure craft harbor (following the conversion of the underutilized inner industrial port facility) when completed in 2028. (Figure 6.5).

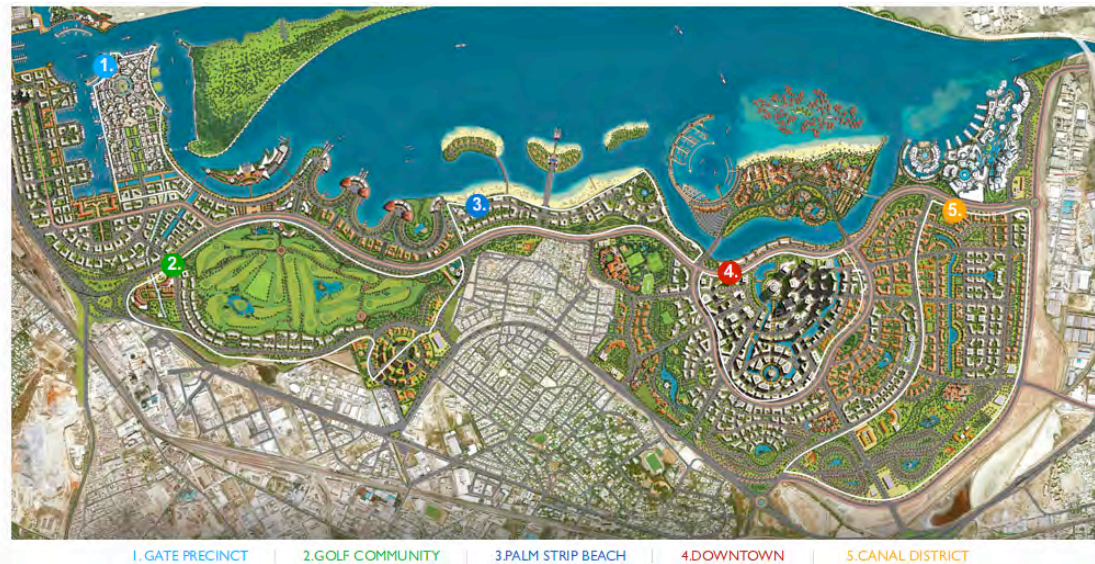


Figure 6.5. Mediterranean Gate, Tunis. Master Plan (2008).  
(Source: Sama Dubai, “Mediterranean Gate, The Dawn of a New Mediterranean,” <<http://www.mediterraneangate.com/>>.)

The daytime population is expected to be 450,000, or roughly a quarter of greater Tunis’ current total.<sup>3</sup> Another meta-city, Mediterranean Gate will be divided into five distinctive zones, including a “beach” district, golf district, canal district and downtown. The downtown area, touted to “become the most prestigious address in Tunis,” will radiate from the central Dubai Towers (Figure 6.6).<sup>4</sup> Among this cluster of skyscrapers the “glittering centerpiece” will

<sup>3</sup> Sama-ECH, “Mediterranean Gate, Tunis, Tunisia,” <<http://www.sama-ech.com/our-projects/mediterranean-gate-tunis-tunisia/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Sama Dubai, “Mediterranean Gate, The Dawn of a New Mediterranean,” <<http://www.mediterraneangate.com/>>.

be the tallest building in Africa, a tapered glass and steel pinnacle — a brazen “new landmark for the city.”<sup>5</sup>



Figure 6.6. Mediterranean Gate, Tunis.  
Downtown and Dubai Towers. Model aerial view.  
(Source: Sama Dubai, “Mediterranean Gate, The Dawn of a New  
Mediterranean,” <<http://www.mediterraneangate.com/>>.)

Whereas the unprecedented nature of this architecture in Tunis is stunning, that of the project’s “Gate Precinct” is shockingly unoriginal and for the present purposes quite compelling. Renderings of this sector’s central area depict a pastiche of Tunis’ colonial architectural heritage, though rearranged and juxtaposed, entirely recognizable as such (Figure 6.7). This new “cultural heart of Tunis” will include a new opera house, boutiques, art galleries and a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. A stylized image of the downtown skyline is used as the project logo.

panoply of upscale residential quarters, all within what appear to be replications of buildings from the Avenue Bourguiba.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 6.7. Mediterranean Gate, Tunis. Gate Precinct.  
Model streetscape view.  
(Source: Sama Dubai, “Mediterranean Gate, The Dawn of a New  
Mediterranean,” <<http://www.mediterraneangate.com/>>.)

It is hardly a challenge to make out the Place de la Victoire’s Raffo building and former British consulate, as well as the arcaded *Magasin Général* building and others. Rows of trees and Parisian lampposts complete the effect. In fact, were a copy of the *Bab Bahr* added, this could easily be the Avenue de France itself (see Figures 5.19 and 3.26). The Avenue Bourguiba has been rebranded so successfully that here it is re-presented and its image further copied and commodified. Though this precinct is clearly (though not explicitly) branded “Tunis *ville nouvelle*,” the union of skyscrapers, reproduced medina *souks* and Avenue Bourguiba-type architecture is intended to create an overall space

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the Mediterranean Gate project, see Anon., “Une cité high tech du troisième millénaire,” *Architecture méditerranéenne: La Tunisie Moderne* (2007), 58–59.

within which “rich tradition and modern spirits soar.”<sup>7</sup> Could this *not* be said for Tunis now?

Both mega-projects are textbook examples of the postmodern branded space as previously discussed. Little has been done to obscure the hedonism and total thematic packaging of these adjunct cities. To the contrary, each privately funded development wants to be a capitalist monument made of monuments. The Mediterranean Gate development in particular is heralded explicitly as “a new Mediterranean icon” composed of individual architectural icons, both old and new.<sup>8</sup> Further elaboration with regard to the theming complexities of these projects lies beyond the scope of the present essay. Suffice it to say that the departure of businesses and other institutions from the Avenue Bourguiba following the opening of the earliest *Berges du Lac* zone that occurred (e.g. the British consulate) will likely continue, though probably on an unprecedented scale.<sup>9</sup> That the Avenue could retain its cultural and commercial significance in the shadow of such striking towers in a massively decentralized Tunis seems doubtful. As the imposition of the French colonial *ville nouvelle* supplanted the old medina’s primacy in the nineteenth century, so too may these new Emirati *villes nouvelles* sap the life of the Avenue Bourguiba in the twenty-first.

The dedication of President Ben Ali to the success of the renovated Avenue Bourguiba appears dubious, as he personally approved these projects despite strong objection from local architects and urbanists at the ASM and

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<sup>7</sup> Sama Dubai, “Mediterranean Gate.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The British consulate had commanded a prime position on the Place de la Victoire since the mid-seventeenth century (the reign of Charles I) before moving to *Berges du Lac* in 2004. See Trustees of St. George’s Church, Tunis, *At Home in Carthage: the British in Tunisia* (Tunis: Orchid Press, 1992).

elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> His endorsement of what has been described as postmodern “American” or “Anglo-Saxon” urbanism that will so obviously affect the rest of Tunis (in potentially good and bad ways), not only demonstrates the immense power he wields, but shows the allure of well packaged and lucrative spaces.<sup>11</sup> These endorsed projects jeopardize the sustainability of the Avenue considerably. It further complicates the issues of identity construction and external influences, in that the administration appears keen to accept input from elsewhere in the western world and the Middle East, not just from Europe and France. It accepts globalized norms of spatial design, consumerism and social interaction, perhaps more so than the city’s reluctant socio-cultural elite in the architectural community. Thus, the limits of Tunis’ hybrid “Tunisianité” are challenged, and the nation’s cultural identity may yet be ill prepared to accommodate such radical shifts and mega projects.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Faïka Béjaoui during the previously cited March 2009 conversation.

<sup>11</sup> See Pierre-Arnaud Barthel, “Faire du ‘grand projet’ au Maghreb: l’Exemple des fronts d’eau (Casablanca et Tunis),” *Géocarrefour* 83 no. 1 (2008): 25–34.

<sup>12</sup> Ammar, *Histoire*, 252. The current world economic downturn appears to have slowed, but not halted, construction work on both lake projects, said Faïka Béjaoui in the previously cited March 2009 conversation.

## CONCLUSION

*Before we reveal anything in conversation, we assert ourselves through a self-constructed image: 'this is who I am; I am not like that. I connect with these; I don't relate to those others.'*

(Anna Klingman, *Brandscapes*, 2007)<sup>1</sup>

The history of Tunis' Avenue Bourguiba clearly demonstrates confidence in the power of the built environment to directly influence the acts and values of people on the part of the city's changing elites as well as its direct reflection of their particular sense of self and desired identity. The empowered have consistently recognized the social, political and economic facets of the explicit spatial scripting practices and used them to their respective advantages in providing comfort for residents, profit for businesses, enticements for visitors and a national face to the greater world. Whether colonial, early independent or contemporary leaders, these space scripters have promulgated several nuanced images of the Avenue that reflect these particular interests and goals for the various audiences whom they addressed during the past century and-a-half.

Tunis' French colonial administration sought to fashion a space reminiscent of the metropole they knew, and thus designed a streetscape that appeared and functioned very much like the fashionable boulevards of Haussmann's Paris. On the "Parisian Colonial" Avenue Jules-Ferry they socialized, bought, sold and "civilized" comfortably in the shade of trimmed

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<sup>1</sup> Klingmann, *Brandscapes*, 56.

trees and European façades. Habib Bourguiba, keen to claim the space for liberated Tunisians after 1956, supervised its amendment over the course of his thirty years in office. Exerting almost authoritarian control of the country and capital, he replaced colonialist monuments and approved architectural additions suited to his own personality and ideas concerning the appropriate cultural values for Tunisia. This French-trained administration, largely supportive of French civilization, maintained the Avenue Bourguiba's basic structure and internationalized its image through the application of a "Tunisian Modern" themed architecture and tourist facilities. In so doing he addressed his people and the world beyond as leader of a sovereign state through the eponymous avenue. Tunisia's second president has continued the trend of leaving his own personal mark on the Avenue before totally renovating its entire course at the turn of the century. Previously distressed by encroaching cars, aging trees and urban decentralization, the space's "boulevard culture" has enjoyed a noteworthy renaissance since 2001. The "Parisian Cosmopolitan" place brand of Ben Ali and the ASM successfully facilitates increased consumption in a familiar, clean and controlled postmodern environment, and in so doing reflects an enduring communion with France, foreign investors and visitors.

At each stage of its development the Avenue has thus functioned as a material manifestation of the dynamic "imagined community" of the Tunisian nation.<sup>2</sup> That is to say that as empowered residents of Tunisia (whether French colonialists or independent Tunisians) have imagined and constructed an image of themselves as a part of the larger groups to which they feel an affinity, they have codified space appropriately. French civilization has

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, *Imagined*, 5–7.

consistently been a major source of identity, but in more recent decades so too has been the greater Arab region, abstract international modernity and now apparently American-style urbanism. The resulting amalgam of identities creates and reflects both a psychological and physical “Tunisianité.” Thus, to appreciate a conception of what exactly “Tunisian” means, or at least what national elites *want* it to mean, one can consider the built environment of their emblematic avenue. The semiotic codes in its details are immensely informative.

Recalling Norman Klein’s conception of scripted spaces, one is ultimately struck by the intense layering of symbolism upon the Avenue streetscape and the processional quality of one’s experience upon it. Indeed, processions and parades of a military, religious and political nature have occurred there throughout its history, as demonstrated by the anecdotes beginning several of the preceding chapters. Otherwise, the placement of transit infrastructure has reinforced the processional nature of individual visitors’ experiences. To accommodate this movement, French planners crafted a space of precise linearity, maintaining a keen interest in its visual composition. As one made their way from its eastern to western end, he passed from industrial obscurity through commercial, residential, civic and ceremonial spaces along a choreographed route marked by monuments in street names, statues and grand edifices. The cathedral, seat of French colonial administration and square between functioned as highpoints in the streetscape before it narrowed in its approach to the medina. Urban life in nineteenth-century Tunis was rendered as public life, just as it was in nineteenth-century Paris. Subsequent modifications to the Avenue have perpetuated this type of sociability in adjusted physical form. Performative

success has varied though, particularly in light of strict policing since independence that limits the degree of dynamism possible on the street.

The potency of the Avenue's unique *lieux de mémoire*, or repositories of communal memory, is inescapable, as individual elements are selected, preserved, amended and fabricated anew. The precise meanings of Avenue components change through a process of top-down valorization that sanctions some and modifies others, while at their core they remain indelibly European and French in nature — a phenomenon made all the more apparent in the most recent “occidentalizing” renovation of the Avenue wherein “auto-orientalizing” practices seem to reinforce the old colonial dichotomy of the Tunisois urban fabric.

As Pierre Nora has observed, “memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events.”<sup>3</sup> On the Avenue, the particular events that have there occurred are yet totally forgotten, but a particular mode of remembrance remains tangible. The (re)scripting of the streetscape reflects a way of seeing things and an interpretation of events’ meanings as imagined through the eyes of progressive leadership that appears to downplay the controversies, hardships and political realities of the past. Preferred is a more positive, sociable, tolerant and cosmopolitan image of a city ultimately strengthened by memories of its history that manifest themselves physically on the branded street today. Napoleon III facilitated the Parisian “architectural promenade,” wherein the boulevard acted as a “memory walk through the historic monuments and grandiose architectural façades that represented the heroic accomplishments and communal responsibilities of his directorship.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nora, “Between,” 22.

<sup>4</sup> Boyer, *Collective*, 14.

Like their contemporary nineteenth-century urban theorists, he and Haussmann believed that a city's form and appearance not only represented its achievements and metropolitan competency, but also that it was the duty of particular places and monuments to "transfer meaning and knowledge across generations," to "general memory and inscribe civic conduct."<sup>5</sup> In Paris they pursued policies to these ends. Across the sea in Tunis, French colonial administrators, Bourguiba and Ben Ali have followed in the footsteps of the Emperor and his Prefect, and it would seem they have done so with consistent intent, though perhaps at times subconsciously. The contemporary attenuation of particular historic elements in the promulgation of this pictorialized, or somewhat generic pseudo-Parisian, vision is therefore not unprecedented. It is surprising only in its postcolonial persistence.

The hallmarks of spatial scripting, generally confined to the western postmodern world by contemporary scholarship, are thus discernible throughout the entire history of the Avenue Bourguiba. Stylistic pastiche, iconic architecture, celebrated consumption, performative control, environmental packaging, captivating spectacle and creative imagery all exist in Potsdammer Platz, the South Street Seaport and Tunis' Avenue too. Each appears to have been more designed than planned. Such was the case in Tunis during the 1960's outside the bounds of western world, and so it remains. Hence the study of spatial scripting and postcolonial urbanism and place branding would benefit from a more comprehensive interpretation that incorporates a wider chronological and geographic terrain. This project has attempted to do just that and therefore contributes to what will hopefully become a more expansive

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 17.

dialogue on the related issues in contexts that are currently undergoing swift and substantial change.

Certainly the French founded *villes nouvelles* and tree-lined boulevards throughout the empire, in Algiers, Casablanca and Rabat among other cities.<sup>6</sup> The consistency with which the image of Tunis' specimen has been refashioned as both a tool for local identity creation and tourism generation throughout its history is noteworthy. The reinforcement and commodification of a Parisian ambiance by the postcolonial state, whether intentionally or subconsciously, makes the neo-colonial Avenue in Tunis a unique case worthy of this comprehensive study. It furthermore challenges the predominance of cities such as Algiers and Casablanca, whose (post)colonial experiences have been different, within the developing scholarly discourse on Francophone North Africa. A diversity of case studies, as the diversity of material underlying this one on Tunis does, strengthens the entire field of historic architectural and urban studies. Tunis' central boulevard has provided a point of departure for the study of the city and country, just as it serves as an avenue for a more comprehensive understanding of the region beyond.

This project, of course, has its limitations. Those imposed by time and the author's facility with French but not Arabic, have been the most significant. Were more time available, access to additional archives in both Tunisia (particularly those of the Tunis Municipality and the National Documentation Centre) and France (particularly the *Centre des archives d'Outre-Mer* in Aix-en-Provence) would undoubtedly provide invaluable resources. These would likely contribute to the definitive resolution of many remaining questions as to the precise dates, funding sources, and debates surrounding particular

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<sup>6</sup> See Wright, "Rabat," in Çelik et al., eds., *Streets*, 225–234.

Avenue changes (many of which have been footnoted). While the Tunisian National Archives collection did prove quite helpful to these ends, its collection is largely confined to the colonial era. The common use of French in Tunis and the Francophone nature of the professional and academic fields of architecture and urbanism notwithstanding, improved Tunisian Arabic language skills (a dialect really only taught in Tunisia) would obviously facilitate significant increases in research opportunities.

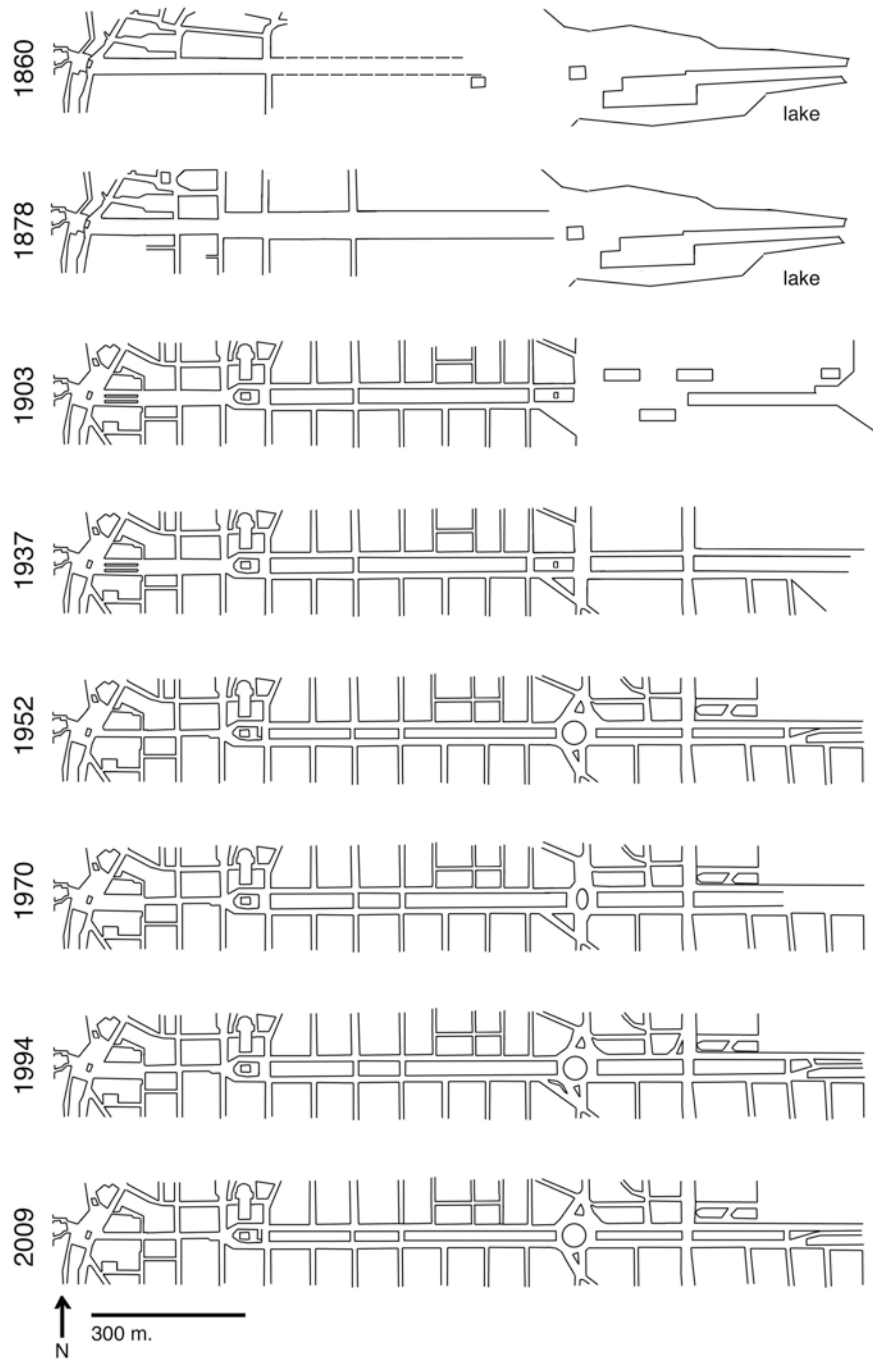
A top-down approach has been used here, both because it seems appropriate given the entrenched autocratic nature of design and planning in Tunis, but also because the inaccessibility of Arabic material largely necessitates it. Indeed, the project does privilege the archive over the local's individual experience. While surviving historic material is almost universally preserved in French, the ability to communicate in the local's principal language would allow one to expand this project to incorporate more on the use of the Avenue by the Tunisian masses, the city's overwhelmingly dominant demographic since independence. Incorporation of this native perspective, both historical and contemporary, might allow for one to study not only the ways in which Tunisians view their Avenue Bourguiba, but also how they challenge the imposition of the street's formal and functional aspects (architectural program, symbolism, &c.) upon them. Further consideration of political, commercial and touristic affairs (from a French and Tunisian point of view) would also strengthen the project in its future.

It is the hope of the author, however, that this present work shall facilitate and inspire additional scholarship on the city and region, and also challenge existing interpretations of postcolonial Francophone North Africa.

Tunis and its Avenue Bourguiba, having here been brought somewhat from obscurity and into the developing academic discourse, provide ample material that suggests current interpretations of the region remain limited by research that focuses on colonial Algeria and Morocco, but also makes little room for consideration of non-confrontational relationships between former colonizer and colonized after “independence.” Furthermore, the built environment, when viewed across time and political situation, informs considerably and should therefore be subject to greater scrutiny and analysis within the field of (post)colonial studies. As has been shown here, non-western contexts offer compelling sites for consideration of post-modern urbanism and spatial scripting and branding practices as well. Having established the complex history of the Avenue site, this project has begun these processes and laid a foundation for such new work within an environment that for the most part has been overlooked, until now.

## APPENDIX A

The formal development of Tunis' Avenue de la Marine/Jules-Ferry/Bourguiba.  
(Drawn from various sources including  
Figures 3.2, 3.7, 3.21, 3.24, 3.25, 3.26, 4.5, 4.6, 5.11, 5.19 and Sebag, *Tunis*.)



## APPENDIX B

The following is a working contextual timeline prepared during the research of this project, provided to assist the reader keep things in order and gain greater perspective on events outside the capital.

### TIMELINE

*Tunis' Promenade/Avenue de la Marine/Ferry/Bourguiba*

Tunis/ian Events	Promenade/Avenue Events and Components	Source
	1842. Raïfo building constructed 1848. Bab Bahr renovated (?)	(Abdelkafi, <i>Médina</i> , 57)
1858. Municipality est.	<b>1860</b> 1860. Fr. con. erected, Med. walls razed, Ava. est, Pla moved	(Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 342) (McGuinness, <i>Tunis</i> , 92)
1872. Pub. gas lighting	<b>1870</b> 1872. TGM (in early incarnation) inaugurated 1878. Ave tramway opens	(McGuinness, <i>Tunis</i> , 92) (Becher, 26)
1881. Protectorate est. 1883. 1 <sup>st</sup> Municip. code	<b>1880</b> 1882. 1 <sup>st</sup> Cathedral erected 1883. Magasin Général erected	(Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 349) (McGuinness, <i>Tunis</i> , 92)
	<b>1890</b>	
	1892. Modern port completed	(McGuinness, <i>Tunis</i> , 92)
	1897. 2nd Cathedral completed (93–97)	(Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 349)
	<b>1900</b> 1900. Avenue de la Marine ➔ Avenue Jules Ferry, statue 1902. Municip., Rossini Theas. & Palmarium constructed	(Çelik, <i>Empire</i> , 134) (Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 348) (McGuinness, <i>Tunis</i> , 37)
1902. 1 <sup>st</sup> pub. elec.	1907. Raïfo building addition (Pl. Bourse/Victoire)	(McGuinness, <i>Tunis</i> , 89)
	<b>1910</b>	
1914. WWI begins		
1918. WWI ends		
	<b>1920</b>	
	1925. Lavigerie statue erected on Pl. de la Bourse 1926. Carlton Hotel erected	
	<b>1930</b> 1931. La Colisée erected 1932. l'Hotel Claridge erected	(Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 441) (Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 441)
	<b>1930</b>	
	1938. La Nationale erected	(Sebag, <i>Tunis</i> , 441)
1939. WWII begins	1939. Porte de France "liberated" from surrounding structures	
1942. Axes take Tunis	<b>1940</b>	

1943. Allies take Tunis	1943. Tomb of Unknown Soldier dedicated	(Ph. Arrouy, e-mail)
1945. WWII ends		
	<b>1950</b> 1950. Interior Ministry Bldg. erected	(Ammar, <i>Histoire</i> , 235)
1954. Franco-Algerian War		
1956. Independence	1956. Ave. J. Ferry ➔ Avenue H. Bourguiba	
1957. Republic est.	Ferry and Lavigerie statues removed	(Cuoq, <i>Lavigerie</i> , 162)
	Express route over lake	(Abdelkafi, <i>Médina</i> , 145)
	1957. Unknown Soldier tomb to Gammarth	(Craig, 79)
	<b>1960</b>	
1962. Algerian Indep.		
1963. French quit Bizerte		
1964. Vatican agreement.	1966. Hotel Africa construction begun	(Cuoq, <i>Lavigerie</i> , 160)
		(Elhouar, "Rehab," 622)
1967. ASM founded		
	<b>1970</b> 1970. TGM Station Ave. de la République ➔ Port end	(Beguin, <i>Arab.</i> , 134)
	1971. Hotel Africa opened	(Elhouar, "Rehab," 622)
1972. Hotel du Lac opens		
1975. Bourguiba Pres. for life	1976. Hotel Des Deux Avenues/El Hana erected?	(Beguin, <i>Arab.</i> , 134)
	1977. Equestrian statue of Bourguiba installed	(Beguin, <i>Arab.</i> , 134)
	1978. Ibn Khaldoun installed Pl. de l'Indépendance	
1979. Arab Lge. to Tunis		
	<b>1980</b>	
1982. PLO to Tunis		
1983. SPLT founded		
1985. Berges du Lac I started		(Kenzari, "Lake," 125)
1987. <i>Le changement</i>	1988. Equestrian statue of Bourguiba ➔ La Goulette	
	1989. Métro line 2 (North, Ariana) opens across Avenue	(Transtu website)
	<b>1990</b> 1990. Métro line 3 (NW, Ibn Khaldoun) opens across Avenue	
	1995. Z4 Viaduct over Avenue constructed	(Mun. Tunis, <i>XXI siècle</i> )
1995. EU agreement		
1997. Hôtel de V. started		(Kenzari, "Lake," 123)
1999. B du L II started		(Kenzari, "Lake," 126)
2000. Bourguiba died	<b>2000</b> 2000. Ave restoration began	(Becher, <i>Tunis</i> , 113)
2001. Med. Games Tunis	2001. Ave restoration completed	(Becher, <i>Tunis</i> , 113)
	2006. New Claridge completed	
2008. Med. Gate began	2008. Second Z4 viaduct begun	
	<b>2010</b>	

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