

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

In: The Message. 16.9.1943.

Cities in the News. Tunis.

Mann, Klaus

1943-09-16

Nutzungsbedingungen

Bei zahlreichen Dokumenten auf monacensia-digital.de sind die Urheberrechte bereits abgelaufen. Sie sind gemeinfrei und dürfen ohne weitere Rücksprache mit der Monacensia weiterverwendet werden.

Bei den Dokumenten, bei denen noch Urheberrechte bestehen, müssen für eine Weiterverwendung stets die Rechteinhaber*innen angefragt werden sowie eine Publikationsgenehmigung der Monacensia eingeholt werden. Das Zitatrecht bleibt hiervon unberührt.

Zur Erteilung einer Publikationserlaubnis wenden Sie sich bitte an:

Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus

Literaturarchiv

Adresse: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München

E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

Terms of use

The copyrights for numerous documents on monacensia-digital.de have already expired. They are in the public domain and may be reused without further consultation with Monacensia. In the case of documents for which copyrights still exist, the copyright holders must always be contacted for further use and publication permission must be obtained from the Monacensia. The right to quote under copyright law remains unaffected by this. To obtain permission for publication, please contact:

Monacensia im Hildebrandhaus:

Literaturarchiv

Address: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München

E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

CITIES IN THE NEWS TUNIS

By T/S KLAUS MANN.

When the war is won and the boys come home, there will be a lot of story-telling. They witness stunning events and marvelous scenes, these days—our observant lads from the small towns in the Middle West, the Southern farms, the New England villages, the California ranches. They will be able to entertain their wide-eyed pals and parents with wondrous tales about life in China and the East Indies, in Sicily and Australia, Iceland and Morocco. It will be quite a thrill for the mothers, sweethearts, grandfathers and kid brothers to listen to the yarns of the fellows who have seen action abroad—in the Tunisian campaign, for instance.

Of course, their reports are likely to be as grim and gruesome as were their experiences; there is nothing sweet and romantic about modern warfare, no matter where it takes place. But there are days of rest, furloughs, leisurely weekends—even for the busiest officer and the most hard-working dough-boy. Some of the men may have spent their days off in the city of Tunis. They will tell you how wonderful Tunis is.

My memories of Tunis are imbued with the savor of the Arabian Nights—that spicy, irresistible fragrance of musk and rose oil, almonds, Turkish coffee, dirt, grilled mutton with too much garlic, dusty silk robes, rich, exotic pastry, sweet tobacco, sweet wine, myrrh and blood. Tunis has all these smells, which are fused, in its incomparable atmosphere, with a delicate but penetrating touch of Parisian perfume—a tender suggestion of "Mille Fleurs" (the Thousand Flowers of the Boulevards) wafted into the land of the Thousand-and-One Nights.

The French element and the Arabian match surprisingly well. There seems to be some kind of natural affinity between these two ancient cultures: both the Moorish and the Gallic are refined, chivalrous, sensual and serene. That is, perhaps, why the French have so well succeeded in getting along with the Mohammedan natives—much more so than the irritable, vain Italians. The French have no racial prejudices. They are adaptable and tolerant, cleverly diplomatic, for all their commercial shrewdness and occasional cruelty.

In Tunis, many racial and cultural ingredients are intermingled. There are traces of a distant past when the city was under Numidian, Phoenician and Roman influences—superseded, more recently, by the Turkish rule. Of its present population (219,578 in 1936) not quite one half consists of native Moslems. After them, the Italians (56,000) represent the largest national minority—compared with 43,000 French and 27,000 Jewish citizens. Yet Tunis, in its appearance and way of life, is clearly a French-Arabian city.

The French style and the Arabian traditions seem to be perfectly blended, to become one entity, although the European quarter is neatly separated from the native district. You saunter along the boulevards of the French area—bright and spacious squares and avenues with fountains, palm trees, cafe terraces, well-kept stores and sumptuous hotels. This could be any of the prosperous places in the South of France—Nice or Perpignan. There are bars and music halls, public offices (Tunis is the capital of the French protectorate of Tunisia), hospitals, a public library, a Roman Catholic cathedral. It's all very clean, wealthy, representative.

But somehow you sense, in the midst of this conventional set-up, the proximity of something different—something strange and alluring. The Mediterranean breeze

carries mysterious messages from the "Ville Arabe," the Arabian city—odors, noises, bits of nostalgic music. You pass through a gate—a picturesque Moorish portal—and suddenly find yourself in a bewitched and exotic world, a fairy-tale scenery.

These are the "Souks," the business and social center of the Arabian area—a labyrinth of narrow streets, many of them half-dark, tent-like covered; teeming with bearded men in long, colorful garments, veiled women, dark-eyed and dirty children. How fascinating to watch the bustle and scurry in these shadowy bazaars where the gaudy junk literally flows from the cave-like stores over the pavement. The salesmen praise with unflagging eloquence their fanciful, dubious goods—perfumes, candies, mantles, shawls, jewelry, assorted products of Moroccan leather. The dogged persistence and intensity of their recitals is entertaining like a vaudeville act. One has a wonderful time lingering in the sultry twilight of their establishments—admiring the rich display of Oriental luxuries; sipping that aromatic concoction called Cafe Turque, offered gratis to you. Sure enough, you are expected to buy something. But if you don't, the talkative merchant is helpless. What can he do if you declare—after having enjoyed yourself—that, unfortunately, you forgot your money, and, anyhow, have no time to stick around any longer. He will curse you, hurl maledictions; but it doesn't hurt; on the contrary, it seems to belong to the show as a violent, dramatic finale.

It's great fun to roam through the Arabian district—dominated by the elegant, massive domes of the mosques (the Mohammedan temples) and by the stately palace from where the Bey of Tunis rules his country under French protection. There is always something to look at, to smell, to listen to; there is always life—the at once intense and easy-going life of the Orient. It's not difficult to make friends with the Arabs, or at least to spend a few hours in their stimulating company. As for the women, they are of course taboo—except those who may respond to American cash and are willing, under circumstances, to lift their veils a little.

If you get tired of the spectacle which is Tunis, you may make an excursion, about 10 miles northeast, along the coast, to the ruins of ancient Carthage. The astounding thing about this monument is the complete absence of all monumental features. There is actually nothing left of the city which used to be one of the powerful centers of antique civilization. Some broken pillars and vases, some fragile tools and weapons, museum pieces, melancholy tokens of sunken splendor and forgotten glory—that is all that remains.

Yes, the Roman legions—conquering Carthage more than two thousand years ago—did a terribly thorough job. Their work of destruction was completed by the centuries. This is merciless; it withers, corrodes, pulverizes what we meant to be the perennial memorial of our greatness.

Have a good look at these decaying stones! It will make you feel humble and pensive to listen to their silent message. It tells us that our triumphs and monuments may prove as transient as this dead metropolis facing gloomily the unchangeable, ever-blue Mediterranean Sea.

At cruising speed, a Flying Fortress consumes 250 gallons of high octane gasoline in one hour.

The United Nations began World War 11 with 54,000,000 tons of shipping.

Sept. 16