

## European capitalism and the effects of agricultural commercialization on slave labor in Tunisia, 1780s–1880s

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### ABSTRACT

The paper argues that while the significance of Tunisian state economic and political reforms during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has reflected the changing patterns of the caravan slave trade in previous research, much of this research has not considered the role of slaves in the emergent Tunisian economy. Nowhere is this negligence more apparent than in the agricultural sector, which was predominantly responsible for strengthening economic growth from the late eighteenth century until its weakening as a result of encroaching European capitalism by the mid-nineteenth century. Drawing on Tunisian state population data known as the *Majba* Census and the extant economic literature, the paper addresses this gap by exploring the implications of the Tunisian state economic reforms on enslaved labor in the agricultural sector. Exploring this research gap will enable us to ascertain the extent to which enslaved labor contributed to Tunisia's burgeoning agricultural sector in a manner that has dodged academics' attention. After providing a historical context of European capital penetration and its implications on political and economic reforms from the Ottoman conquest through the Husaynid periods, the paper looks at how European capital infusion after the first quarter of the nineteenth century transformed the agricultural sector and examines the role of slave labor prior to the European capital infusion and commercialization of the agricultural sector. Using the *Majba* Census records' regional distribution of blacks in the Regency the paper sheds light on the implications of the precarious economy engendered by agricultural commercialization under the aegis of European capitalism on the structure of enslaved labor.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 March 2016  
Accepted 14 December 2016

### KEYWORDS

Slave labor; *Shwashin*; *Khammass*; European capitalism; agricultural commercialization; Tunisia; economic and political reforms

### Introduction

Before the late eighteenth century, black groups in Tunisia, both freed slaves *ma'atiq* (sing. *mu'tiq*) and black slaves with servile status, *abid* (sing. *abd*), were generally employed in agricultural labor, resulting in their concentration in the far south of the Tunisian interior. In several areas of southern Tunisia, such as Jerid and Gabes, which relied historically on cheap slave labor for subsistence agricultural production, *Shwashin* (sing. *shooshan* or *choochan*), or older freed slaves who formed part of the native-born black community, had been employed for

**Table 1.** Directional trend of Tunisian external commerce, 1782–1792.

Années	Importations	Exportation	Total	Remarques
1782	3,643,431	4,054,792	7,698,223	Une évolution assez lentes mais l'an 1786 marque une accélération du rythme
1783	3,204,886	2,316,212	5,521,098	
1784	1,840,627	3,040,225	4,880,852	
1785	2,38,835	3,523,770	5,02,605	
1786	5,312,362	3,887,677	9,200,039	
1787	7,339,092	7,725,268	15,064,667	Expansion accélérée
1791	13,024,092	10,221,238	23,295,330	Apogée de l'expansion
1792	10,100,607	12,372,737	22,473,344	

Note: Chater (1987, 175).

centuries as sharecroppers (*khammass*). The *shwashin* worked in agricultural lands for one-fifth of their harvest. In addition to the *shwashin* predominantly employed as sharecroppers, *abid* (a recent class of slaves imported into Tunisia during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) were also employed in agricultural estate and subsistence economy, drilling wells and watering date palms, among other menial work. The presence and employment of this later category of enslaved West Africans corresponded very closely with the extent of the caravan slave trade at its zenith from West and Central Sudan.

While the significance of Tunisian state economic and political reforms during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has reflected the changing patterns of the caravan slave trade in previous research, much of this research has not considered the role of slaves in the emergent Tunisian economy. Nowhere is this negligence more apparent than in the agricultural sector, which was predominantly responsible for strengthening economic growth from the late eighteenth century until its weakening as a result of encroaching European capitalism by the mid-nineteenth century. Drawing on Tunisian state population data known as the *Majba* Census and the extant economic literature, the paper addresses this gap by exploring the implications of the Tunisian state economic reforms on enslaved labor in the agricultural sector. Exploring this research gap will enable us to ascertain the extent to which enslaved labor contributed to Tunisia's burgeoning agricultural sector in a manner that has dodged academics' attention.

The paper is divided into five sections: the first section provides a historical context of European capital penetration and its implications on political and economic reforms from the Ottoman conquest through the Husaynid periods. While the second section looks at how European capital infusion after the first quarter of the nineteenth century transformed the agricultural sector, the third section examines the role of slave labor prior to the European capital infusion and commercialization of the agricultural sector. The final section uses the *Majba* Census records' regional distribution of blacks in the Regency to shed light on the implications of the precarious economy engendered by agricultural commercialization under the aegis of European capitalism on the structure of enslaved labor.

### Tunisian state economic and political reforms

It would be impossible to discuss the effects of European capitalism on Tunisian economic and political reforms, especially how these reforms reflected the role of enslaved labor in the agricultural sector, without reference to earlier historical periods when the structures of these reforms were laid and during which they evolved. Of particular importance are Tunisia's

**Table 2.** Tunisian exports, 24 December 1813–1814.

Exporters	Olive oil (m)	Percentage	Wheat	Percentage
Tunisian Muslims	11,875	55.74	2280	40.24
Jews	9220	43.28	250	4.41
Europeans	206	20.6	2760	48.72
Total	21,303	99.98	5665	93.37

Source: French National Archives, No. 385, cited by Charter, K. pp. 185, 186.

position and its relationship with the Ottoman Empire, which strongly influenced both internal changes and the country's relations with Europe, the Levant, and West and Central Sudan. Tunisia became a Regency of the Ottoman Empire in 1574 with the installation of an Ottoman provincial governor. The Regency was, however, a distant outpost of the Ottoman Empire, and the lack of direct involvement in the Regency's government on the part of the Ottoman Porte led, almost immediately, to the eruption of hostility within the Turkish occupying force. In 1591, the Janissary rebelled against ill treatment on the part of their senior officers, who formed the ruling majority of the *diwan*. They were replaced by a number of junior generals called deys, each of whom headed and was supported by a faction of the regular Turkish militia. After the uprising, the governing structure of the Regency was transformed.

During the next century and a decade the province was dominated by factional infighting among the deys for control of the province (See Chérif, 1986, Vol. II, pp. 31–47). After deposing the Murad and establishing the Husaynid dynasty, Tunis became a Regency of the Ottoman Empire only in name. Although allegiance to the Porte was officially recognized, and given legitimacy through the annual payment of a tribute, real power lay with the beys. While the beys succeeded in limiting the control of the Ottoman Empire, continued factional struggles culminated in almost half a decade of civil wars between Husayn b. Ali, founder of the Husaynid dynasty, and Ali Bey I, Husayn's cousin and heir apparent to the throne (Abun-Nasr, 1987, pp. 41–61).

Long before the accession of the Husaynid dynasty, various European states had established trade relations with Tunis under Ottoman capitulation treaties, though until the late eighteenth century these were poorly developed. In part, this meager level of trade interests reflected the existence of better economic opportunities elsewhere in the Mediterranean but was also a result of extreme insecurity within the country and around its coast. Piracy, a principal source of wealth for the Ottoman regencies of Tunis, Algiers, and Tripoli, made maritime trade with and around the North African coast difficult and dangerous. Until the Ottoman occupation of Tunis and their reorganization of the Tunisian economic infrastructure, the famous Banu Hilal nomadic invasion of Tunisia in the eleventh century also diverted trans-Saharan trade away from Tunis for nearly five centuries (Boahen, 1962, pp. 349–359; Montana, 2013, pp. 19–23). By the turn of the nineteenth century, an attempt to steer the Regency away from control of Ottoman military generals from Algiers threw it into decades of factional infighting and ended with the defeat of Ali Bey's faction in 1756.

During the end of the 1780s, Hammuda Pasha and before him his father Ali Bey II (ruled 1759–1782) had embarked on a series of social, political, and economic reforms that instilled confidence among Tunisian merchants and agriculturalists (Abun-Nasr, 1982, pp. 39, 40; Kraiem, 1973, p. 49; Van der Haven, 2006, Chapter 1). When Hammuda ascended to the throne, the ruining impacts of the 'uninterrupted series of disasters, of poor harvest and [periodic] epidemics,' (Gallagher, 2002, p. 24; Limam, 1974, pp. 195, 196; Valensi, 1981, p. 720).

that hit the Regency between 1776 and 1780 and again between 1784 and 1785 was so enormous that his early rule was troubled with numerous social and economic instabilities (Kraiem, 1973, p. 70; Limam, 1981, p. 257). Besides the natural disasters, the root cause of these instabilities can be traced back to the capture of Ali Bey I (ruled 1734–1756) and his beheading in the hands of Algerian deys. Up until the reign of Ali Bey II, the Beylik was reduced in status to a tributary of the Algerian deys. After they beheaded Ali Bey I, the deys installed Mohammad Bey (1756–1759), one of Husayn b. Ali's sons. Although Mohammad managed to restore some peace, his reign lasted only three years. And besides, as a tributary to the Algerian deys his reign also suffered from constant interference of the deys in the Beylik's administration. Both Ali Bey II and his son Hammuda Pasha Bey, however, reversed this interference in the Beylik, restored the Husaynids' political independence, and strengthened its internal autonomy. If the autonomy of the Regency had to be guarded against further threats of political and natural insecurity, then to Hammuda this self-dependence could not be realized with the consequences of economic insecurity.

In this context, Hammuda was determined to maintain the Husaynids' political independence from the deys and to outlive the economic insecurities imposed on the Beylik by the half century of civil wars, compounded by effects of the recurrent plagues. He embarked on serious and ambitious institutional reforms in the social, administrative, military, and commercial spheres (Limam, 1974; pp. 195, 196). Within two years of his accession, these ambitious reforms began to show signs of change, especially toward peace and stability. In line with the early Husaynid religio-political tradition, and after consulting with several of his ministers, Hammuda reformed the land taxation and grant system and introduced new *jibaya* (taxation) and *lqta* (land grants) as his means toward reversing economic insecurity. These tough measures were justified as necessary, and like his predecessors, in order to prevent the local notables from gaining the largest agricultural estates, the bey commissioned the *Majlis al-Shari'* (Sharia Council for Judicial Ordinance), particularly, the Hanafite Mufti, Mohammad Bayram I, to compose for him a treatise on *siyasat shar'iyya*, thus justifying his physical reforms in religious terms (Kraiem, 1973, pp. 49–60). These reforms (carried more widely than those of any previous Husaynid ruler), also touched on the *makhzan* (central administration). In order to curb the Algerian deys' further encroachments into Beylik affairs, Hammuda reduced the size of the full-fledged Turkish troops in the central administration (Raymond, 1953). Similarly, Hammuda used merciless methods against the lawless tribesmen scattered across the interior in order to curb their disruptions of social and economic security. Until 1807, the reforms initiated by Hammuda brought unparalleled stability and instilled confidence not only in the bey's ambitious political and economic outlook, but its impact on his subjects was even greater (Stanley, 1786, pp. 11, 12).

Without a doubt, the unparalleled stability brought about by Hammuda Pasha's reforms was foundational. Internally, it launched a new phase of reforms and led to a sudden growth in the Regency's agriculture and trade. Nowhere are the results of this transformation more noteworthy than in the cereal and olive cultivation and trade. Up until the late 1780s, the cultivation of foodstuffs, such as grain, wheat, and barley, which had been the main staple in the Regency's production, suffered due to a combination of political instability and a series of uninterrupted natural disasters. Yet, by 1784, not only was the cultivation of wheat, grain, and barley revitalized, but the reforms also precipitated a sudden boom in the cultivation of these products to a point of surplus. This is evident, for example, in the Sahel and the southern regions around Sfax where the cultivation of these products increased markedly.

Zouari (1990) wrote that during the early phase of Hammuda reforms, given incentives and resources to the fellah (peasants) and large agricultural estate proprietors that 'agricultural lands around Sfax were expanded from little more than one kilometers from the town walls to more than seven kilometers' (p. 126). Remarkably, the bey's merciless methods of controlling the tribes also proved beneficial to the increase in agricultural production. The Methalith tribe, which inhabited the region inland from Sfax, once die-hard enemies of the townsfolk, stopped their lawlessness. Increasingly, the enforcement of the bey's policies provided peace and suitable environment during the production wheat, barley, and livestock increased markedly. When he was in the Regency in 1808, MacGill (1811) could witness the positive effects of the bey's reforms in agricultural production, and he remarked that 'in a plentiful year, the state of Tunis is computed to produce 480,000 caffis of wheat; and [with the] encouragement given its cultivation, ten times that quantity might be produced' (pp. 120–123).

Another remarkable agricultural product for which production increased markedly was the olive, which was grown principally in the Sahel, particularly in Sousse and the regions around Sfax. Unlike wheat, grain, and barley, olive oil had been in great demand in Europe. Hammuda encouraged the cultivation of olive trees and provided the resources for olive oil production, which led to a considerable expansion of production, making the Regency, by the 1810s, a major exporter of olive oil to Europe. The bulk of the olive oil was exported across the Mediterranean to Marseilles, Genoa, and Italy (Valensi, 1981, pp. 722, 723).

Within less than a decade of Hammuda Pasha's accession, the cascading effects of his reforms and the Regency's self-sustaining growth in agricultural production led to a remarkable flourishing of foreign trade. Maritime and overland trade peaked and the Regency's trade with Europe and the Levant quickly reached levels incomparable to levels before 1782. Valensi and Chater's study of exports and imports between the Regency and Europe and the Levant during the decade following 1782 shows a startling pattern of uninterrupted growth of the Regency's trade (Chater, 1984, p. 175; Valensi, 1963, p. 72). As can be seen in Table 1, Chater's presentation of this startling pattern of growth of the Regency's trade shows a gradual 'take-off' between 1782 and 1786. By the early 1790s, this take-off accelerated markedly and thus within a decade, by 1791–1792, reached its apogee (Chater, 1984, p. 175).

Undoubtedly, the increased agricultural production made the local Muslim merchants profitability from the new context of the Regency's trade all the more incentive. But since the trade in agricultural products had been a chief monopoly by Europeans and the local Jewish merchants, to enhance the local Muslims' merchant's ability to compete in the external commerce, Hammuda reduced the tariff, previously, imposed on the local Muslim merchants exports to Europe and the Levant. Prior to his reign, tariff imposed on the indigenous Muslim merchants export was 11%. With the objective of encouraging them to compete against Europeans monopoly of the external trade, Hammuda reduced the tariff to 5%. At the same time the above tariff-reduction given to the local Muslim merchants were not without regulations. Rather than trade freely, the bey regulated the local Muslim merchants from dealing directly with the foreign European merchants (Limam, 1974, p. 196). Nonetheless, by the 1813, as Chater has eloquently demonstrated (Table 2), the benefits obtained by the local Muslim merchants through Hammuda's encouragement were so effective that, except in the foodstuff, the local Muslim merchants share of trade with Europe and the Levant increased considerably.

European merchants were exempted from this control commercial policy. Compared to the local Tunisians Muslim merchants, effects of this policy were rather more critical. Throughout the Barbary coasts, Tunis had been the hub for many of these European merchants. Of all the Barbary states, it harbored the largest European merchants, numbering some hundreds before the explosion of the population of these merchants after the 1830s. MacGill, who was in Tunis during the 1808 attested to the importance of Tunisian trade to Europe and wrote that ‘trade of Tunis [was] the most respectable of any on the Barbary.’ But what really made Tunis respectably place for trade was the trade capitulations that these European merchants, particularly, the English, French, Genoese, Venetians enjoyed privileges since the second half of the seventeenth century. Hammuda’s autocracy did not make life easy for these European merchants. The bey discontinued the above-mentioned trade privileges, thus eroding the preferential arrangements that came with them. Without exception all the European merchants were displeased by this unpopular measure. One of the results of this controlled policy was that it pushed the European merchants and their consuls alike to the forefront of competition against one another in order to obtain the bey’s concessions in trade. MacGill and several European writers on the European trade in Tunis deplored Hammuda Pasha harsh economic measures as ‘ruinous’ and injurious to European commerce (MacGill, 1811, p. 148).

The erosion of the ancient trade privileges was not the sole Hammuda Pasha’s harsh economic policies that injured European commerce. Just as he regulated the local Muslim merchants’ ability to deal directly with the European merchants, the bey’s introduced, a *Teskeres* system (permits of right of export issued by the Beylic). Without this document, which is transferable like bank notes or bills of the exchange, no European merchant can export any goods from the Regency. The deliberate imposition of the *teskeres* system, clearly intended to concentrate Tunisian foreign trade in his hands displeased the European merchants, especially since they now forced to apply for the *teskeres* directly from the bey or through his official agents (MacGill, 1811, p. 195). MacGill wrote that those who suffered the most from this protectionism and autocratic measures with combination of the corsair wars as well as the Regency’s war with Venice in 1784 and Algiers 1807–1808 were mostly the French and Italian commerce. Thus out of eight French *funduks* (merchants residence) that had been active in the Tunisian commerce from the 1781, MacGill observed that by 1808 only two *funduks*

do as much business as one of the former did in month; and of the Italian establishments, we find one or two Genoese remaining, which do little else than keep wine cellars, to supply to Christians and slaves. Any little commerce which is now carried on with the opposite coast of Europe, is carried on by Moors, Jews, or the Christian subjects of the Bey. (MacGill, 1811, p. 195)

### Effects of European capital intervention on the agricultural sector

As mentioned above, in order to protect the agricultural sector and regulate foreign trade gains, Hammuda Pasha instituted a series of policies to curb the sale of crops to European merchants before harvest. Soon after his death in 1814, succession struggles caused economic and political instability in the Regency (Chérif, 1970, pp. 718, 719). This was exacerbated by outbreaks of plague in 1818–1820. Agricultural production that had boomed during his reign declined, and famine spread while diminishing state revenue exacerbated economic problems (Valensi, 1977, p. 68). After 1816 the Regency was deprived of revenues previously levied on overland trade with the Levant and from corsair campaigns, although the overland caravan trade with sub-Saharan Africa continued, so the authorities attempted to cover

losses in maritime revenues by taxing the caravans at higher levels. Husayn Bey (reigned 1824–1835) sought to steer Tunis out of its economic crisis by appointing Shakir Sahib al-Taba'a, a Georgian mamluk, to develop a program that encouraged agricultural production (Valensi, 1977, p. 68). By this time the value of Regency grain exports (barley and wheat) had declined seriously, but instead of reviving production of these crops, Husayn decided to promote the cultivation of olive trees, even though the price of olive oil had fallen from a high of 30 francs in 1820 to only 8.75 francs in 1827–1828 (Chérif, 1970, p. 725). In addition, Husayn reversed Hammuda Pasha's policy of banning the sale of crops before harvest (Valensi, 1970, pp. 321–336; 1977, p. 69). This measure had originally been introduced to ensure his de facto monopoly of trade, so that his agents could sell oil to European merchants, particularly the French, for advance payment and cash loans for his personal profit (Montana, 2003, p. 113; Valensi, 1981, pp. 722, 723).

It must be stressed that these measures taken by Husayn only compounded the economic problems, to the advantage of European merchants. Despite the rigid policies previously instituted to curb abusive European trade practices, during the last years of Hammuda Pasha's rule, several members of his own inner circle came under pressure from European merchants due to debts arising from their advanced sale of export permits for agricultural products (Valensi, 1981, p. 723). Worse still, with the plagues and crop failures in the decades since Hammuda's death, these state officials were compelled to reimburse the advanced payments at exorbitant rates (Anderson, 1986, p. 101; Valensi, 1981, p. 723). By the middle of the nineteenth century pressure from the European merchants and their governments forced the Regency to open the countryside, particularly the North and the Sahel regions, to foreign merchants (Anderson, 1986, p. 102). As they had done with the beylical ruling class, European merchants loaned capital while influential landowning Tunisians provided local labor to ensure the cultivation of agricultural products needed in Europe. Thus, between the 1830s and the 1860s, as the number of Europeans increased so did their political and economic clout. Throughout this period various Europeans competing for economic interests exploited the weakness and vulnerability of the beys to their own advantage (Valensi, 1981, p. 723). Contrary to the policies put in place by Hammuda Pasha, European firms contracted with local brokers by continuing to make advanced cash payments mostly to olive oil growers. The growers, mostly the beylical establishment themselves and a number of influential governors, especially those of the Sahel and the North, acted as intermediaries between European merchants and the local agricultural sector (Anderson, 1986, p. 102; Hunter, 1993, pp. 62, 63; Valensi, 1977, pp. 227, 228).

A few decades following Hammuda Pasha's death, the infusion of European capital into the Regency resulted in a significant reorientation of the agricultural sector. For instance, the northern cereal-growing areas suitable for cash crops farming and the olive trees that dominated the Sahel and Sfax regions were incorporated into a cash crop-style economy with far-reaching consequences both for the agricultural sector and the labor system (Anderson, 1986, p. 102). Several factors contributed to this new trend. Through pressure from the European merchants and their consuls, in 1863 the Regency gave Europeans the right to own real property. Large European companies, which had been deeply involved in the Regency's foreign trade and had been behind these concessions, acquired massive tract of lands. Among them, the Société Marseillaise de Crédit and the Compagnie des Batignolles invested in areas well suited for expansion of agriculture. These companies and wealthy European merchants alike bought lands known as *hanashirs* from wealthy Tunisians. Thus,

**Table 3.** Enslaved groups according to the *Majba* Tax Census.

Enslaved group	Number of	Cumulative percent (%)
<i>Shwashin</i>	228	20.3
<i>Abid</i>	757	65.5
Foreign-born	22	2.0
<i>Muwalladun</i> (Mulattos)	103	9.2
<i>Muwalladun</i> Ajam (non-Arab-speaking Mullattos)	11	1.0
Total	1121	11

Source: Registres fiscaux et administrative [*Majba* Tax Census records] R.F. No. 819, 1856–1860.

by the time of the establishment of the protectorate in 1881, it is estimated that Europeans held between 1000 and 100,000 hectares (MacKen, 1972, pp. 216, 217).

Within a few years after the establishment of the protectorate, a scheme of agricultural commercialization triggered by the beys' indebtedness to the Europeans and their capital infusion led to a series of radical developments in the agricultural sector. Although agriculture in Tunisia had been widely practiced, the country had plenty of unused arable lands. For instance, at the beginning of the protectorate, of the country's four million hectares of arable lands, only one-quarter or one million hectares, was cultivated. Among the regions most cultivated was the coastal area stretching from the Sahel to Sfax, of which about 170,000 hectares were covered with olive trees, and about half of the cultivated land was in wheat and barley, with a few thousand hectares allocated to growing fruits and vegetables (MacKen, 1972, pp. 204, 205). Soon after France took full control of the Regency as protectorate, the above regions suitable for cash crops farming attracted massive agricultural commercialization. The impact of this scheme was felt beyond the reorientation of the agricultural sector. As will be shown below, existing forms of free labor and labor practices in the agricultural sector were significantly affected by the new cash crops style economy introduced as a result.

### Slave labor in agriculture before the Tunisian economic reforms

While it is well known that enslaved black Africans sent across the Sahara had been employed for domestic chores by the upper and middle classes in North Africa (Clancy-Smith, 2011, p. 115), plenty of evidence points to their increased usage in the agricultural sector. Before the era of the above-discussed economic reforms and the agricultural developments, enslaved black groups (with the exception of foreign-born slaves) outlined in Table 3 had been integral to the labor procurement and production process in the agricultural sector. As Mohamed Talbi has demonstrated, as early as the ninth century, slaves had been used as the primary source of labor for agricultural production, a role which they continued to occupy, he argued, well beyond the abolition of slavery in 1846 (Talbi, 1981, pp. 217, 218). Like Talbi, a number of scholars have highlighted the role of enslaved groups as pivotal to the oases agriculture (Bédoucha, 1984, pp. 93–95; Bou-Talib, 1999, pp. 392–396; Larguèche, 1999, p. 402; Valensi, 1967, p. 1267; Zawadoski, 1942, pp. 146–156). Before the mid-nineteenth century, though, there are little quantitative data available to measure the scale of the enslaved and freed slaves' employment in the agricultural sector. Despite this lacuna, using qualitative analysis several scholars have maintained that the existence of slaves throughout the Regency's history has been bound up with laboring in the agricultural sector. Thus, when Yves Lacoste discounted the role of slaves in North Africa, arguing that slaves hardly participated in economic life at all (Lacoste, 1966, p. 37), Talbi rebuffed this claim and argued, in



turn, that the role of slaves in the economy of Ifriqiyya was of capital importance (Talbi, 1981, pp. 214, 215). Up until the late nineteenth century when the French colonial administration reformed the labor practices in the agricultural sector, studies pioneered by Lucette Valensi also reveal that owners of large and modest agricultural estates both used slaves as a source of cheap labor for mass production (Barth, 1849, p. 27; Valensi, 1967, p. 1267).

Throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, while slave groups formed part of the labor force in agricultural production, much of the labor was primarily derived from *shwashin* largely concentrated in the southern part of the Regency (Bédoucha, 1984, p. 82; Bou-Talib, 1999, p. 394). The *shwashin*, an older generation of freed slaves, are considered freed blacks but not *ahrar* (the free members of Tunisian Arab and Berber society). The term has mostly been used in Tunisia and Libya to refer to blacks whose social status lay between (slaves) and *ahrar* (freemen). Socially speaking, the *shwashin* are considered intermediate class citizens and represent the confluence of these two different categories in Tunisian society. That is, they are free blacks of ex-slave status who became dependents or clients of their former masters either by means of manumission and continuous attachment to their former masters or adoption by rich agricultural families. In this sense, they are distinct from *abid*, those considered servile slaves with no clientele relationship with their masters. The *shwashin* are found throughout the South, particularly around Jerba, Gabes, Jerid, Nefzawa, Mednine, and Tataouine (Juwayli, 1994, pp. 49, 56, 57). Historically, each of these areas had been a major confluence for the caravan slave trade that exported slaves, among other products, throughout Tunisian history. A number of cities in the South including Kebili, Jerba, and Douiret (Tataouine) had also been major markets for slaves from the sub-Saharan regions. From these markets slaves were redistributed throughout the regency. The existence of this historical legacy of slavery in the region and its proximity to the Sahara may well explain the large presence of both ancient freed slaves classified as *shwashin* and the recent slaves designated in the *Majba* Census records as *abid*, meaning slaves (Temimi, 1994, pp. 41–47; Valensi, 1977, pp. 43–46). The latter were literally a recent category of slaves who had been imported into Tunisia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What distinguishes *shwashin* from the recent slaves is that in all the southern and central regions of Tunisia, the *shwashin* were incorporated into the fabric and social organization of southern Tunisia. As an ancient category of freed slaves, and unlike the recent class of slaves, the *shwashin*, who were far more integrated into local society, enjoyed kinship relations typified by patron–client relations, resulting in the position they occupy within the stratum of economic production. This relationship provided mutual benefits, ensuring their livelihood and protection vis-à-vis their former masters, with whom they identified.

Genevieve Bedoucha, for instance, has examined group relations between the *shwashin* and *ahrar* (freeborn blacks) and distinguishes the *shwashin* from *abid* according to their occupational status. According to Bedoucha, unlike *abid*, the *shwashin* were classified according to the local socioeconomic structure as *khammass*, meaning that they were sharecroppers working in the oasis harvesting dates and other agricultural products for one-fifth of the harvest (Bédoucha, 1984, pp. 93–95; Valensi, 1977, p. 30). The other four-fifths went to the farm owners. Although, the term *Khammass* is a generic term and refers to tenant farmers who receive a one-fifth share for their agricultural labor, in the Jerid and other parts of southern Tunisia the term came to be applied synonymously to *shwashin*. In Jerid as in many parts of southern Tunisia, *khammass* usually consisted of units of family and were attached to Tunisian aristocratic or agricultural landlords. While male adults of the *khammass* were

**Table 4.** Ration of *shwashin* and *abid* settlements and labor as *khammass* by region.

	North	South	Central	West	Northwest	Sahel	
<i>Shwashin</i>	14	78	17	16	0	0	125
<i>Abid</i>	271	168	19	16	10	273	757
Total							82

Source: Registres fiscaux et administrative [Tax Census records] R.F. No. 819, 1856–1860.

employed in agriculture, their wives and children were employed as domestic servants. Thus, while the caravan slave trade fueled the region with recent slaves' imports throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of whom were also evidently employed in the oasis and the large agricultural estates across the South, the use of *khammass* to designate slave labor in the agricultural sector only applied to *shwashin* (Bédoucha, 1984, p. 94; Valensi, 1977, p. 30).

### Effects of commercial agriculture on the enslaved and clientele mode of production

It is estimated that by the middle of the 1860s, over 12 thousand Europeans, the bulk of whom were poor working class from Italy, Malta, and France, were living in the Regency (Anderson, 1986, p. 100). Despite the availability of these cheap workers from the European working class, European financiers and landowners in the commercial agricultural sector preferred to tap the local labor. Prior to the commercialization of agriculture and the surge in the cash crop economy, the primary source of labor in the cereal- and grain-producing North and the olive oil-producing areas around the Sahel had been the peasantry obtained through a contract farming system known as *magharisah* and *khanashira* (MacKen, 1972, pp. 216–222). With the increased commercialization of agriculture, the *khammass* system, previously confined and predominant in the southern part of Tunisia was now incorporated into the new precarious cash economy in the Sahel and the North. As the census data reveal, the *shwashin*, who had functioned predominantly as *khammass* and had been largely concentrated in the South, began to be noticed in several districts and principalities mostly in the North and the Sahel (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819, 800, 1017, 1853–1860). During this period, the Regency also began to attract seasonal workers from neighboring Fezzan, Ourgla, and Saharan groups classified in the census record as foreign born. As indicated in Table 3, like *muwaddun*, the number of foreign migrants and seasonal laborers was few (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819).

Now fully integrated into the cash crop economy, by the mid-1870s and under pressure from European landowners, the *khammass* system was regulated and codified by the Tunisian Prime Minister Khayr al-Din (Anderson, 1986, p. 103; Valensi, 1985, p. 108). The codification of the *khammass* system was intended to resolve a growing conflict between landowners and sharecroppers caused by the increased indebtedness of these laborers, sometimes to peasants or olive oil brokers who employed them. As a result of this new law, the *khammass* was to remain with his patron for the duration of his contract, usually this covered staying for a whole cycle or season from planting to harvest. This was also done to ensure immobility of the *khammass* (Anderson, 1986, pp. 103, 104; MacKen, 1972, pp. 239–241; Valensi, 1985, pp. 108, 109).

Obviously, under this new labor arrangement, not all was rosy for the *khammass* (Valensi, 1985, p. 108). The sense of security, which had traditionally been attached to his labor in the traditional form, was replaced with a total sense of insecurity and precarity. According to the provisions of the new regulation, his life and labor were precariously bound with the fate of his contract with the absentee landowner or the broker with whom he entered into the contract, which he must fulfill. With this new arrangement, his labor was also strictly regulated by the state. In the case of the *khammass* from the enslaved groups listed in Table 3, the state appointed special tax officials designated as *caid al-abid* or slave officials, whose mandate was to levy a head tax on each individual. These officials put pressure on peasants and middlemen who employed enslaved *khammass* to pay their taxes (Temimi, 1994, p. 41). What made this labor system even more precarious was that in bad years when the harvest was poor, a *khammass* could receive only a fraction of his one-fifth share, which his contract entailed. Access to land for subsistence farming tied to the clientele-mode of production existed in some parts of these areas, but it was not guaranteed. Under the new arrangements in the northern and Sahel cereal and olive oil-producing regions, these privileges gradually eroded over time.

What does the above commercialization of agriculture and the regulation of the *khammass* system mean for enslaved labor? An examination and analysis of register number 819 of the census data compiled in 1856, as part of the taxation scheme on agricultural farmlands is very revealing. This register contains 1121 individuals from the following six regions: South, North, Northwest, Sahel, West, and Central (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819). Slave groups listed in the register came from several districts and principalities each overseen by state officials designated as *caid al-abid*, meaning slave-tax officials (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819). According to this register, up to 228 individuals, that is, about 20%, were the *shwashin* who had been predominately associated with subsistence oases agriculture in the South. Of this number, over 50% were listed as settled in the olive oil-producing region of Sahel (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819). Next to the Sahel, the register suggests that a significant number of about 78 *shwashin* were settled in their original area of concentration in the South (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819). Apart from these two regions, 17 *shwashin* were listed as settled in the central region stretching from Sfax to Kairouan, which was also noted for olive tree cultivation, whereas the remaining 16 individuals were listed as resident in the West (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819). See Table 4.

For their part, while they have not historically been labeled *khammass* though they were integral to the subsistence and rural agricultural production, the census shows that *abid*, more than *shwashin*, provided the bulk of the labor force in the North and Sahel cereal and olive oil-producing regions. According to the register, of the 1121 individuals contained in the census record, 67.5% comprising 757 individuals were classified as *abid*. The bulk of these individuals were almost evenly distributed between the two main regions where commercial and cash crops agriculture were heavily concentrated. The Sahel recorded 273 *abids*; the North had 271 (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819). Up to 168 *abids* were also attached to districts and principalities in the South where slave labor continued to play a major role in the agricultural sector of the oases and subsistence economy as well. The central region including Sfax where the cultivation of olive trees was important recorded only 19 whereas the West and Northwest recorded 16 and 10 *abids* (Registres fiscaux et administratif, No. 819).

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to shed light on the overlooked implications of Tunisian state economic and political reforms driven by European capital infusion in the western Mediterranean during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the evidence gleaned from the *Majba* Tax records suggests, the regional distribution of enslaved groups listed in the census data strongly indicates that their settlement and employment in southern Tunisia and the Sahel and northern regions where the cash crop style of commercial agriculture flourished reflected their sharecropping roles that are yet to be recognized and acknowledged. As state commercialized agriculture took hold after the 1830s, the labor structure of the clientele-mode of production, which enabled both the *shwashin*, for instance, and their former masters equally to enjoy the fruits of the labor arrangements, was severely affected. Instead of employment in the oases agriculture, many were drawn to the cereal-growing areas of the North and the Sahel olive-dominated cash crop economy.

What is also evident from this register about the distribution and the settlement pattern of the enslaved groups, particularly the *shawshin* and *abid*, is that as rural agriculture succumbed to changes that came about as the result of European capitalism, both the nature of the work and the status the enslaved groups previously enjoyed through the clientele-mode of production became precarious, and the security attached to their previous mode of labor eroded.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Northern Illinois University for financial support that enabled me to write this paper during my sabbatical leave. The paper is based on the *Majba* Census records from Tunisian National Archives originally collected for the project on “The Muslim Diaspora in the Era of the Slave Route” coordinated by the York/UNESCO Nigerian Hinterland Project and directed by Prof. Paul E. Lovejoy at York University, Toronto (Canada).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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