

fao Casa gazette

APRIL 2011

Philharmonic Orchestra

Roma Caput Mundi

**Letter from Cairo:
A Day at the Zoo**

**Divinités Féminines du
Panthéon romain**

Oasi di Porto

Behbud Assoc. of Pakistan

Tunisia

L'Isola di Djerba, Tunisia

Mensile - No. 04 2011 - Reg. Trib. N. 574 dell'8/10/1990

GENZIANELLA

di Patrizia Cimini

Blu delfino del cielo
piccolo genziana abbandonata amante
del difficile corso della forma
delle cose nell'asestarsi del caos
hai preso un dorso, una curva
e l'hai tenuto perdendo il branco marino
dell'appartenenza.
Amara e sola ai dirupi stai
con pochi stami e macchie verdi
opache
tinteggi l'amore alle ragazze e tu non l'hai.



fao Casa gazette

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For Advertising:
STAFF COOP OFFICE
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla - 00153 Roma
Tel: 06/57053142 or 06/57054112 - Fax 06/57297286
E-mail: FAO-STAFF-Coop@fao.org
Website: faostaffcoop.org

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Typewritten electronic contributions for the FAO CASA Gazette are welcome. These can be in English, French, Italian or Spanish - articles, poems, drawings, photographs, etc. in fact anything interesting that staff members and/or their families in Rome or the field may like to contribute. No anonymous material will be accepted, and the Editor reserves the right to choose and/or reject material that is not in keeping with the ethics of the Organization. Send contributions electronically to the Editor at jill.stevenson@fao.org or leave signed copies with the COOP Office on the ground floor of Building E. The deadline for editorial material is due on the 1st of the month preceding the date of issue.

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Philharmonic Orchestra
FAO STAFF COOP



Il maestro Daniel Montes

L'idea di un gruppo musicale che potesse nascere sull'innesto delle molteplici culture presenti nella nostra organizzazione era un sogno che coltivavo da tempo ma che mi sembrava irrealizzabile. Mancava una persona di talento che se ne facesse carico. L'incontro con il maestro Daniel Montes è stato illuminante. Solo pochissimo tempo fa parlavano insieme dell'opportunità di creare uno spazio musicale in cui giovani artisti anche non professionisti potessero esprimere la loro passione per la musica di insieme. Così abbiamo lanciato l'idea ed al nostro appello hanno risposto con entusiasmo colleghi della FAO, del WFP, insegnanti di musica e studenti del Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia. Ed in soli due mesi è nata l'Orchestra Filarmonica della FAO Staff Coop che ha cominciato a lavorare su un certo tipo di linguaggio musicale troppo spesso non adeguatamente utilizzato nel mondo dello spettacolo. La musica non è e non deve diventare merce di consumo, ma rappresentare un grande e nobile strumento di comunicazione universale, che accomuna genti diverse in un unico abbraccio. Ed in questi tempi di violenza e di turbolenze se ne ha davvero bisogno.

L'orchestra di Daniel Montes ha voluto dedicare il suo esordio al popolo della FAO con un concerto di qualità che ha riscosso consensi e grande partecipazione di pubblico.

Fare il musicista significa votarsi ad una vita di impegno, tra valigie e strumenti sempre pronti, gente nuova, posti da scoprire, esperienze da condividere, in un percorso non privo di difficoltà da affrontare. Noi vorremmo facilitare questo cammino con il nostro sostegno, perché crediamo nel valore formativo della musica,

nell'importanza della cooperazione, della solidarietà e dell'impegno, che in casi come questi vengono riaffermati e raccontati attraverso le armoniche composizioni di un gruppo di giovani talenti.



Ci auguriamo che l'Orchestra della FAO Staff Coop si arricchisca della collaborazione di nuovi artisti pronti a cogliere l'opportunità di riscrivere le pagine di uno spartito su cui poter raccontare il desiderio di sentirsi parte di un sogno collettivo. Cioè di ritrovarsi insieme per esprimere in musica i valori e le speranze di una generazione che aspira ad un futuro migliore, per credere in un mondo nuovo in cui il senso del collettivo prevalga sull'individualismo imperante. Nella dissoluzione dei valori etico-morali della nostra epoca, la società si è ripiegata in se stessa, e non sembra più riconoscere la comunità come un luogo di condivisione e di crescita individuale, né come spazio aggregativo e di scambio.

Entrare a far parte di questo gruppo significa quindi anche porsi di fronte ad una sfida, quella di ripensare a se stessi, ai propri rapporti interpersonali e sociali.

La FAO Staff Coop ringrazia tutti i giovani artisti riunitisi per dar voce alla loro passione e per regalare il proprio tempo e talento a tutti coloro che vogliono condividerne l'amore per la musica. E farà il possibile per sostenere questo progetto neonato che vuole continuare a vivere per proporre concerti di grande qualità, con l'inserimento e la collaborazione di musicisti famosi nel panorama internazionale che si sono resi disponibili a sostenere questa iniziativa ■

Enrica Romanazzo
Presidente
FAO Staff Coop

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ROMA CAPUT MUNDI

di Flavia Carbonetti



Il 21 Aprile si celebra Il Natale di Roma. Con il termine “Natale di Roma” si indicano le festività legate alla fondazione di Roma la cui data venne fissata da Varrone intorno al 753 a.c. Questa non più giovane ma eterna città celebrerà quest’anno il suo 2764 compleanno e per festeggiarla circa 50 gruppi appassionati della sua storia e provenienti non solo dall’Italia ma anche da Francia, Olanda, Polonia, Belgio, Slovenia Germania, e Bulgaria si ritroveranno Domenica 17 Aprile (anticipando di qualche giorno la data di commemorazione) al Circo Massimo per la parata storica e per rievocare, davanti alle più alte cariche istituzionali

della città, l’antica storia di Roma e le sue origini.

Quest’anno, inoltre, si festeggiano i 1800 anni dalla morte dell’ Imperatore Settimio Severo che nel 197 d.c. reclutò per le sue campagne partiche tre nuove legioni (la I, la II e la III Partica). La II Partica fu insediata in un castrum in muratura ad Albano ed è proprio ad Albano Laziale che il Gruppo di rievocazione storica II Legione Partica Severiana (Legio Secunda Parthica Severiana Albana – L.II P.S.) da ormai 9 anni riporta in vita gli usi e costumi di questa legione. L.II P.S. è l’unico Gruppo in Italia ad insistere sul proprio

accampamento storico, accampamento fondato da Settimio Severo nel 202 d.c. A tutt'oggi si possono ancora ammirare i resti dell'accampamento "Castra Albana", la Porta Praetoria, i Cisternoni per il rifornimento di acqua e l'Anfiteatro risalente al III secolo.

Fervono i preparativi per la rievocazione storica del 17 Aprile 2011 in onore del Natale di Roma ed il Dott. Roberto Alessandrini "Vexillifer" (Vessillifero) della L.II P.S. ha gentilmente offerto di aiutarci a capire quanto impegno e studio sono necessari per offrire al pubblico una parentesi della vita del mondo militare e civile dell'antica Roma.

"Ricostruire la tecnologia romana è un'operazione difficile perché sono pochi i manufatti rinvenuti ed i testi a noi pervenuti sull'argomento; la conoscenza pratica era trasmessa per via orale e gran parte di essa si è persa con il crollo dell'Impero e la caduta della sua civiltà. Interessandoci del mondo militare romano a cavallo tra il secondo ed il terzo secolo, periodo dell'Imperatore Settimio Severo, noi riproduciamo il più fedelmente possibile scudi, pila da lancio, archi con frecce e faretre, calcei, caligae, manufatti in cuoio e vestiario di vario



genere verificando se il metodo da noi applicato, tratto dalle fonti antiche e formulato dagli studi, ci permette di ottenere prodotti fedeli sia nell'aspetto che nella funzionalità. Tutto questo lavoro di studio, artigianato ed esercitazioni, si concreta in maniera evidente negli eventi di rievocazione storica dove ogni gruppo presenta il frutto del proprio impegno offrendo al pubblico conferenze, dimostrazioni artigianali, scene di vita passata ed esercitazioni militari dimostrative. La nostra passione per le legioni di Roma nasce dal fatto che sono state lo strumento d'espansione della cultura e della civiltà romana che ha portato ai popoli conquistati anche le opere dell'ingegneria e del diritto; ecco l'importanza delle legioni nell'Impero."

Appuntamento dunque a domenica **17 Aprile** a Circo Massimo dove dalle ore 10h30 fino a pomeriggio inoltrato, grazie all'impegno dei Gruppi di rievocazione storica, potremmo viaggiare a ritroso nel tempo e rivivere gli usi ed i costumi della vita passata di questa unica e nobile città; **ROMA CAPUT MUNDI**■

Si ringrazia il Dott. Roberto Alessandrini per la sua disponibilità e le fotografie.



Letter from Cairo: 'A day at the zoo'

by Peter Steele

Cairo is desperately short of open space. Sure, you can find it but, typically, you need to pay to get there – parks, forts, riverboats and the tops of buildings. The sky and the vista of the Nile from the bridges offer one kind of open space, but this is not practical picnic country for families. For almost 150 years the Cairo Zoo has provided a real alternative – originally for the rich, but latterly captured and owned by the popular masses. The animals, paradoxically, have become the main losers.



Suspension bridge. The elegance of an original design that provided the world's first animal viewing platform; and from none other than Gustave Eiffel (of Paris tower fame).

A zoo represents 'urban development'

Opened on 1 March 1891, Cairo Zoo oozes historical heritage; from the main entrance gate opposite Cairo University – built in the style of an ancient Egyptian gateway (high, heavy masonry pillars and imposing presence) – to the Victoriana of the gardens, cages and compounds in which the animals are housed. This is a gem of a zoo spreading over more than 30 hectares, and providing a green oasis in the middle of the largest city in Africa. It is, quite literally, surrounded by modern high rise, thundering traffic and more than 20 million town's people. At the weekend the gardens are full of families – adults and kids,

kicking balls around, listening to their radios and tucking into picnic baskets; at times of festivals the grounds are heaving with people – standing room only.

The large collective signs at the points where the wide tree-lined pathways meet remind you of Singapore – where everything is forbidden; imposing red circles with diagonal lines that prohibit you from ... (*you name it – its forbidden*). This includes using the grassed areas, entering the animal's cages to take pictures, kicking balls around and, particularly, from feeding the animals. *But more on that one later.* Typical Carienes – all

(continued on page 12)



Time after time

There are forms of co-operation that almost become a new tradition

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DE BESI - DI GIACOMO

(continued from page 10)



Petting animals. Wild or simply tame; but there must be an element of danger in petting hyenas, jackals or lions. Sometimes people are sneaked into the cages for an up-close picture with the lions and other cats.

the prohibitions are cheerfully ignored.

Recreational treasure

For an introduction, walk the shaded pathways. Forget the time warp of a zoo that should be consigned to the history books, and appreciate the botany of the gardens. This is an imposing park of heritage trees from just about everywhere; and identified with large signs in Arabic and English. The trees shade out the heat of the day and provide a repository for the hundreds, if not thousands (even hundreds of thousands) of people here at the weekend. For Cairo Zoo is heritage in the offing; and heritage moreover that is available to everyman and his family. *And valuable real estate too.*

When you earn less than US\$250/month (and the vast majority of city people do), have a family to raise and provide for and live in a tenement building that looks like a left-over from a war zone, escape to the local park is one of the few things the family can do together of a weekend. The middle classes have their shooting clubs, recreational facilities and more in the city; and the richer people have a

summer home in the desert 50 km out of Cairo or even on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea or the Red Sea. The poor, quite literally, have nowhere to go.

You pay less than two US cents equivalent to get in; and the same price once in the park if you want to visit the reptile house, the elephant/camel enclosure, the museum and the children's playground. You also pay more to ride the dodgem cars. Dodgem cars? Like a scene out of a 1930s movie, the world's oldest dodgem car ride is stacked in the park alongside the animals in their cages. But this is the key to what it's all about.

Exotica in the support of people

The Cairo Zoo and its sad little population of exotic animals are there to provide entertainment for the people. And if this means feeding the animals, generally abusing them with cat-calling and shouting, poking them with sticks to make them move (*and, my best image of the day – a small kid all by himself spraying white play foam from an aerosol can into a monkey cage*) – then this is

the price that you pay for living in a city that is literally bursting at the seams.

And it's not as if feeding the animals crisps, fruit, biscuits and similar was out-of-the-ordinary; it was more a way-of-life for both visitors and residents alike. The animals in open enclosures follow you along the walls begging pathetically. Keepers at strategic locations – meaning those in charge of interesting or active animals – kept handfuls of lettuce leaves, a bucketful of small fish or whatever the host animal likes, and a forked stick more than a metre long on hand. Children and their parents queued to let little Fatima or Ahmed hold the stick and poke food at the zebra, monkeys, ostrich and others under the control of the keeper. Small notes changed hands. How else do you make a reasonable living?

Cages imprisonment

And it's not as if the animals could escape the attention of the public and force-feeding, living in cages the size of your living room or smaller. For this is the classic zoo of old – green painted steel cages with rickety roofs, narrow walk barrier between people and the bars and nowhere for the inmate to shift out of the public eye. Well, the hippo had a green water pool, but it looked like the outflow from a septic tank and smelled little better. Other hippos segregated away from the pool were standing under showers of water. It was a *very* hot day. The hippos had a hole in fence through which the kids could feed them. Perhaps the biggest crowd that day was around the sea lion enclosure where a large pussy-cat of an animal – all whiskers and black nose – was stuffing itself on small stick-held fish; every bit the circus performer.

Not that you needed reminding about cats, for the zoo was over-run with feral cats. Cats were everywhere; clearing up the edible trash left by the picnicking fraternity, but also nipping into the cages to steal from the inmates – well, the slow ones. None in the monkey cages of course.

Major breeding facility

In its hey day, the zoo was a beacon of development, and you can still get a glimpse of this from the scientific infrastructure sprinkled around the park of laboratories, breeding cages and similar. Walk through into these sectors, however, and decline and neglect is the only pervading image of the modern day. This, unfortunately, is typical of the park everywhere. Once home to reputed 20 000 animals and birds at the peak of its fame, the Cairo Zoo now has less than 6 000 inhabitants; numbers which continue to fall.

The avian population suffered seriously at the peak of the avian flu pandemic five years earlier. H5N1 virus was diagnosed and large numbers of birds died, with most of the others put down as a precautionary measure.

Land values versus people

Originally built for the private collection of Khedive Ismail, the zoo was quickly taken into public ownership to cover state-owned debts, and garden land fronting on to the Nile was sold off to become large private homes for the rich. As land values increased, so the original buildings were replaced with others of ever-increasing height thus creating that haven of space and greenness so lacking in the centre. But even this is now under pressure from the land exploiters; and they have the welfare of the animals as a firm bargaining chip – and this notwithstanding the heritage nature of the park. Everyone remembers coming here as a child; and hopes that the tradition will continue. The park is accessible, central and cheap; what more can the community demand? *A park without animals, for example?*

This is a reality in the offing, however, given the rundown nature of the park. Follow the 'visitors reviews' on any webpage; and register the complaints made on behalf of the animals – harassment, lack of space, lack of consideration, inadequate care and housing, cruelty and more. But this is to project mainly a western viewpoint; this is not London, Frankfurt or New York. This is a poor-man's



Zoo entrance. Like something from a Hollywood movie this is a tinsel-town copy; and a throwback to the origins of Ancient Egypt as seen through the lens of a camera. Takes a nice picture but you need to ignore the crowds, snack stalls and hidden ticket offices with their attendant touts – and the traffic, trash, noise and exhaust gases.

recreation facility that happens to house the remnants of what was once a leading zoological facility by the international standards of the early Twentieth century. In 2007 the zoo celebrated 3.4 million visitors – all local and all seeking to escape into the fantasy of television images of wild life, much of which once roamed freely across their country.

Paying for development; reality of modern cities

In 2004 the Cairo Zoo was expelled from membership of the World Association of Zoos & Aquariums (WAZA) because it failed to pay its annual dues but, and more importantly, it also failed to meet the basic standards required of membership (and had not implemented earlier recommendations for improving them). But herein is the conundrum facing the zoo and all similar public-funded facilities in low-income countries the world-over. With limited public budget and dependency upon ticketing, there is simply no surplus available for investing in facilities or animals; funds simply keep pace with minimum running costs. And then too there is the value of the land beneath the zoo.

Proposals have been made to relocate the zoo out-of-Cairo; to provide improved management and conditions for the animals. But this will take it out of reach of the majority poor – they will need to bus there and back, and this will cost more and both people and zoo will eventually lose out as the heritage trees are taken down and one more city block is shifted skywards.

An equally challenging, but more pragmatic approach has recently been proposed by government and vested in decision-making by the Ministry of Agriculture – to privatize the zoo; and if not permanently, then on long-term contractual basis. The jury remain out on this particular option, but the risks are real that the social quality of the zoo will eventually lose out to commercial interests and higher entrance and visitor fees; and as the zoo fails to make the profits required, the land speculators will hover in the background.

Should you be in Egypt during the next period, take time out to appreciate this little haven of Nineteenth century Cairo before it becomes lost ■



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Divinités Féminines du Panthéon romain

de Flavia Carbonetti

Au mois de Novembre 1996 le Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Rome accorde, au quartier général de la FAO à Rome, en dépôt temporaire, deux reproductions par moulage, en plâtre: la Déesse Minerve-Victoire Ailée de Ostie et le bas relief de l'Ara Pacis Augustae, représentant la Déesse Tellus (ou Tellus Mater). Ces deux pièces archéologiques provenant du Musée de la Civilisation Romaine de Rome, parmi leurs attributions, protègent et représentent symboliquement la nature et l'agriculture.



Minerve-Victoire ailée.
Photo credit: FAO/Giulio Napolitano

La reproduction de la Statue de Minerve-Victoire Ailée se trouve à l'entrée du bâtiment B de la FAO alors que la statue originale se trouve où elle a été découverte, à Ostie le port antique destiné à l'approvisionnement de Rome. A côté de l'entrée de la ville d'Ostie tout de suite après la Porta Romana se trouve une grande place dominée par un Nymphée Monumentale, un lieu où s'arrêtaient les voyageurs avant d'entrer dans la ville. La statue de Minerve-Victoire Ailée placée à la droite du Nymphée Monumentale gardait l'entrée de la ville. L'Empereur Domitien, dernier représentant de la dynastie des Flaviens, régna de 81 à 96 DC et donna une grande impulsion au culte de Minerve, Déesse romaine identifiée à l'Athéna hellénique, et vénérée avec Jupiter et Junon dans le temple le plus important de la ville de Rome, temple construit sur le sommet principal du *Capitolium*. Les attributs de Minerve étaient en grande partie analogues à ceux de la Déesse grecque Athéna. Déesse de la sagesse et de l'intelligence elle présidait tous les arts et les inventions (également de technologie agricole). Comme Divinité guerrière elle représentait la bravoure réfléchie et les combats justes. Elle n'aimait pas les batailles inutiles; au contraire elle était heureuse quand elle pouvait faire cesser une querelle ou lorsqu'elle pouvait soutenir le droit par des moyens pacifiques et elle était inclinée à la clémence. Cependant une fois engagée dans la bataille elle n'était jamais vaincue. Déesse des arbres (l'olivier). Selon la légende la plus connue, Minerve serait sortie toute armée et casquée du crane de Jupiter en poussant son cri de guerre. Le bouclier orné de la tête de Méduse, la lance d'or, l'olivier, et la Victoire Ailée sont ses attributs. Les fêtes religieuses en l'honneur de Minerve (les Quinquatries) étaient célébrées le 19 mars, jour présumé de la naissance de la Déesse.

Minerve-Victoire Ailée

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Minerve-Victoire ailée.
Photo credit: FAO/Giulio Napolitano

Tellus ou Tellus Mater



Tellus ou Tellus Mater. Photo credit: FAO/Giulio Napolitano

A l'entrée du bâtiment A de la FAO, se trouve la reproduction du très beau bas relief de l'Ara Pacis représentant la Déesse Tellus ou Tellus Mater, la terre nourricière. L'Ara Pacis Augustae, « l'Autel de la Paix d'Auguste » (13-9 AC) est un monument, symbole tangible de la paix offerte au monde par l'Empereur Auguste et illustre clairement le message politique du régime. En effet, il associe des scènes contemporaines tel un cortège de cérémonie, à des évocations de la « mythologie » propre à Rome: Enée et les Pénates, Romulus et Remus à la personification de Rome et de la Terre Mère. Les Romains considéraient la terre, Tellus, comme la mère universelle de tous les êtres. Tellus Mater est souvent représentée sous la forme d'une femme jeune, d'aspect imposant, assise sur un trône, voilée et drapée, entourée d'animaux domestiques ou bien, comme dans le panneau de l'Ara Pacis, la Déesse est assise voilée et couronnée de fleurs et de fruits et ayant dans son giron une grappe de raisins et de grenades. Elle est entourée d'un bœuf et d'un mouton et sur ses genoux deux enfants dont un attire son regard en lui présentant une pomme. Sur ses côtés on aperçoit deux jeunes nymphes (*Aurae velificantes*), une assise sur un dragon marin, l'autre sur un cygne symbolisant respectivement les vents propices de la mer et de la terre. Le paysage possède des éléments allégoriques: à gauche il est fluvial avec des roseaux et de l'eau qui jaillit d'un vase (*oinochoe*), au centre il est rocheux avec des fleurs et des animaux et à droite il est marin. Donc les éléments, eau, air et terre se conjuguent ainsi pour créer tous les êtres. La fête de Forcidia, dédiée à Tellus était célébrée le 15 avril. La Déesse de l'agriculture Cérès était souvent associée à la préexistante Déesse Tellus et Publio Omero les appelaient «Mères des Moissons».

Ces deux représentations du monde du divin de l'ancienne Rome, placées aux entrées des principaux bâtiments du quartier général de la FAO, accueillent tous les jours employés et visiteurs. Leur présence tend à nous rappeler quotidiennement les liens étroits entre le monde spirituel et la nature où l'homme joue le rôle d'intermédiaire ■

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OASI DI PORTO

by Jill Stevenson



Some time ago I joined a very interesting tour to the Roman ruins of the Porto di Ostia/Fiumicino, organized by the FAO Staff Coop.

While visiting this site, I had the tantalizing view of a carriage pulled by two horses walking along the side of a lake on the other side of a fence.

I managed to obtain information on this and finally visited this site with my two sisters who were over from England last month.

It is at Porto, Fiumicino and is called "Oasi di Porto" and it is the ancient port built by Trajan, and an extremely

interesting place to visit. A guide is present for the whole tour and first of all provides information on the history of this man-made lake/port and then accompanies you around part of the lake/port pointing out the various species of birds and trees, etc. all observed from the carriage drawn by two beautiful horses – a truly wonderful way to appreciate nature. Only part of the lake is accessible as the rest is privately owned. We saw the small herd of deer which inhabit the area and an abundance of Cormorants and some Heron.

Interestingly, it should be noted that when flying out from Fiumicino you can even see it from the air, as the port is

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hexagonal and can't be missed.

The history of the site:

The Lake (or port) was built by Emperor Trajan in 98-117 b.c. to substitute the original port built by Claudio which was open to the sea where sand banks built up and therefore was not usable. This 33 - acre site was important to Imperial Rome for unloading ships, for warehouses, ship repairs and, most important, it was connected to the River Tiber by a man-made canal. In medieval times the area became a swamp and was mosquito infested.

This whole area was purchased by Principe Alessandro Torlonia in 1836, but it was Principe Giovanni Torlonia who cleaned up the area and excavated the Roman ruins which had been completely covered by invasive undergrowth. This area now belongs to the Torlonia's successor, the Sforza Cesarini family, who made this area and

lake a Naturalistic Oasis in 1993.

This lake has become an important place for migratory water birds and over 130 species of birds have been recorded there.

The Oasis is open from October to May on Thursdays and Sundays. For those interested in visiting this Oasis the website is www.oasidiporto.it



PAKISTAN COLLECTION

The FAO Staff Coop has received two "Thank You" letters from the "Behbud Association of Pakistan" for a total of € 2,100.00 which is the final amount collected raised by FAO staff, one of which is shown here below.



Date: 12-3-2011

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Tunisia

by Souad Anane

Tunisia is the northernmost country of Africa. It is the smallest country of the Maghreb region with 165 000 square kilometres and its population is estimated at over 10 500 000. It has 1 300 kilometres of beautiful Mediterranean coastline (North and East borders of the country). The South is home for the golden sand dunes of the Sahara Desert and the North is the land of the Atlas mountains and fertile plains. The country has several beautiful islands.

The first known inhabitants of Tunisia were Berber tribes who started several settlements along the coastline and in 814 B.C. Queen Dido founded the city of Carthage. Phoenicians brought with them their culture, religion and commercial know-how. Their main gods were Baal and Tanit a simple female figure with extended arms and long dress.



Carthage rose to power and became the most important civilization of the western Mediterranean. Several wars (the Punic wars) took place between Phoenicians and Romans until 149 B.C. (Battle of Carthage) when the Romans conquered Carthage.

Under the Romans, Tunisia, the Province of Africa, was Latinized and Christianized and became the granaries of Rome. Several

Roman emperors were born in the Province of Africa. The Romans built several towns in this Province, with theatres, temples, baths, fora, a colosseum, villas with wonderful mosaics, etc.

During the Fifth century A.D. Tunisia was occupied by the Vandals coming from central Europe (Hungary today), then by the Byzantines in the Sixth century. Around the end of the Seventh century and beginning of the Eighth century, Tunisia was conquered by Arab Muslims who founded the city of Kairouan, the oldest sanctuary of the western Islamic world and a masterpiece of Islamic art and architecture.

Tunisia prospered in the Ninth century, agriculture flourished with extensive irrigation installations and new court cities were built (Al-Abassiya 809 A.D. and Raqada 877 A.D.). Successive Muslim dynasties (Aghlabids, Fatimids, Zirids, Hafsids and others) ruled the country (called Ifriqiya at that time) and had to face Berber rebellions for several decades.

The capital city of the country changed from Kairouan, to Mahdia then to Tunis which became the permanent capital. The coasts were held briefly by the Normans of Sicily in the Twelfth century then the Berber Hafsids took over (1230-1574 A.D.) and established fruitful commercial relationships with several Christian Mediterranean states. In the late Sixteenth century, the coast was dominated by pirates. Spain seized many coastal cities that were recovered by the Ottoman Empire and in 1705, the Turkish Husseinite dynasty was established and dominated the country.

In 1881, the French conquered Tunisia and declared the French Protectorate in 1883

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over the objection of Italy. Under the French colonization, European settlements were actively encouraged and land distributed to settlers; the number of French colonists grew from 34 000 in 1906 to 144 000 in 1945. In 1910, there were 105 000 Italians settled in Tunisia.

Tunisia became independent in 1956 and declared a republic in 1957 with Habib Bourguiba as president; in 1987, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali assumed the presidency. Accused of corruption and dictatorship, he was thrown out in January 2011 after a peaceful revolution and flew into exile together with his family and relatives; a new era of democracy started.

Tunisian economy is diverse: Agriculture, mining, manufacturing, petroleum products and tourism. In 2009, over 370 000 people were employed in the tourism sector.

Despite its relatively small size Tunisia has great environmental diversity and its climate is temperate. From North to South, tourists may visit Tabarka (North west of the country) with its beautiful beaches and cliffs. Tabarka was founded by the Phoenicians and became an important commercial port under the Romans. Not very far from Tabarka in the mountain area, Ain Draham attracts hunting lovers as the region is rich with game such as wild boar.

Tourists travelling from Northwest to Northeast along the Coral Coast will discover Bizerte (founded in the Tenth century B.C. by the Phoenicians) with its natural harbour, nice corniche, Andalusian quarters with vaulted streets and old nailed doors and its Spanish fort. The rocky coastline near Raf-Raf is recommended for lovers of underwater fishing.

For those interested in ornithology, the Djebel, Lake and Ichkeul Natural Park will satisfy the most demanding bird lovers.

Not far from Bizerte, tourists will find Utique, the oldest Phoenician trading

station in North Africa. Founded on a prehistoric site in the year 1101 B.C., Utique is some 300 years older than Carthage. It became the capital of “Provincia Africa”; it is the place where Cato, Caesar’s adversary, committed suicide. Its museum has a collection of Carthaginian steles, Greek pottery, Roman busts, amphora and oil lamps. The “House of Cascade” preserved its marble pavings and mosaics as well as several fountains with particularly attractive decorations.



South to Tabarka and Ain Draham there are large plains that produce most of Tunisia’s wheat and other agriculture products. Bulla Regia is a Roman city with imposing ruins scattered everywhere in the plain: baths, theatre, forum, temple, villas with wonderful mosaics. According to historians earthquakes or the heat explain underground buildings in Bulla Regia.

Founded in 1609 A.D. Testour is a typically Andalusian city built on the ancient Roman town of Tichilla by Moorish refugees from Spain. Dougga is another Roman city (Thugga), the kingdom of those who love history and antiquity. It is located at an altitude of 600 metres and stretches over 25 hectares. The ruins of ancient Thugga may be considered the biggest in Tunisia with theatres, temples, baths and a capitol.

The Cap Bon is another beautiful region, a promontory jutting out towards Italy at 140 Km from Sicily. The peninsula of Cap Bon

has been the scene of Mediterranean invasions, notably from Italy.

Sidi Daoud is a little fishing village traditionally devoted to tuna fishing. Kekouane is a Carthaginian town famous for the manufacture of purple dye. Kelibia is one of Tunisia's lovely fishing ports. A beautiful fortress dominates the towns surroundings with majesty. Nabeul is a seaside resort with lovely sandy beaches. It is famous for hand painted ceramics, distilling perfumes, lace and basket making. Hammamet is famous for its beautiful beaches and lovely old town. The Cap Bon has many other cities such as Dar Chaabane, Benikhiar, Korba, Korbous and Soliman.

Tunis, the capital of Tunisia is located in the Northeast, between the Coral Coast and the Cap Bon. Of small importance during the Carthaginian period, it replaced Kairouan as the Capital of Tunisia towards the end of the Ninth century. In 1270, "Saint Louis" attempted to conquer it without success and died in Carthage. Tunis was conquered by Khayr Addin Pasha (Barbarossa) in 1534 who proclaimed the downfall of the Hafsid dynasty.

Tunis, a modern city, has a beautiful old Medina with a big Bazar and lovely markets, old palaces and houses, mosques and a museum (Le Bardo) famous for its Roman mosaics. Tunis northern coast, with Carthage, Sidi Bou Said, La Marsa and

Gammarth, has luxury hotels along beautiful beaches.

The main cities of central Tunisia are Sousse and Monastir on the Coast, Kairouan West. Going South along the coast there is the beautiful city of Mahdia with a Roman Colosseum close by, the Eldjem Colosseum.

Sfax is the biggest city of the South and is second only to Tunis. Driving south along the East coast and passing by several small localities, the tourist may visit Gabes then continue towards Zarzis with its beautiful beaches and resorts.

The famous island of Djerba is around 50 Km south of Zarzis. Djerba is one of the rare places in Tunisia where a Berber language is still spoken. Djerba has lovely sandy beaches, many luxury hotels as well as simple inns. It has three museums, many mosques to visit and typical village markets.

The Southwest region with Kebili, Douz, Tozeur, Nefta and the mountain oasis is enchanting; sandy dunes, salty lakes, oasis and ksours are worth visiting.

Tunisia has several airports from North to South, good roads, excellent hotels and varied handicraft for shopping lovers. The official language is Arabic, French is the second language and many Tunisians speak English, German, Italian or Spanish ■

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L'isola di Djerba – Tunisia

by Edith Mahabir*

Djerba per dimenticare, Djerba per rinascere: il mito di Djerba ... Partiamo da lontano, partiamo dal mito.

Lotophagitis è il nome con cui l'isola era conosciuta nell'antichità; Djerba è l'isola dove, nell'Odissea, Ulisse e i suoi compagni incontrano il popolo dei Lotofagi. Alcuni tra i compagni di Ulisse, imitando gli abitanti del luogo, si cibano del fiore di loto e perdono il ricordo della loro vita passata. Così, mentre Ulisse torna preoccupato alle navi per ripartire in fretta, dalle menti dei compagni rimasti sull'isola sfumano via ansie e preoccupazioni, pensieri sul futuro e carichi di responsabilità.



Djerba per dimenticare

Per gli antichi Egizi il loto era simbolo di rinascita, resurrezione, luce, speranza e salvezza. Ecco perché appare in molte scene di cerimonie e il gesto di consegnare il loto era un gesto sacro. Nell'aspirare il profumo del loto si coniugano il piacere e la magia della rinascita. Il sole nasce perché otto divinità fecondano il fiore primordiale. I fiori del loto crescono fuori dell'acqua, aprono i petali al mattino e li chiudono la sera e forse è questo che ha ispirato il mito del loto primordiale nelle acque primordiali da cui, come da una culla, il sole nasce ogni mattina.

Djerba la dolce

Uno sguardo panoramico dell'isola: il paesaggio, la vegetazione e le città.

Djerba la dolce, perla del Mediterraneo, isola dell'oblio, oasi di pace, terra di sogni, questi sono alcuni appellativi da cui si intuisce il fascino di questa isola che, a partire da Ulisse e i suoi compagni, ha sempre sedotto chi decide di visitarla. Sarà per la bellezza del paesaggio, con le lunghe spiagge di sabbia bianca e fine, sarà per le dune e le palme che parlano d'Africa e di deserto e la distinguono dalle tante isole del Mediterraneo, sarà per il mare azzurro e per il cielo chiaro che si staglia dalle case bianche e le fa risaltare, sarà per l'ospitalità degli abitanti, per il cibo saporito, per la sua storia ricca di mito e di fascino che traspare dai racconti dei marinai quando parlano di Ulisse, di Calypso e del corsaro Dragut: una cosa è certa: questa è un'isola che incanta.

Djerba, si può scrivere anche Jerba, è un'isola piatta di 614 km quadrati situata di fronte alla costa meridionale della Tunisia e non lontano dal confine con la Libia. E' collegata al continente da un ponte romano a sud-est lungo 6 km. Conta più di 145 000 abitanti, per lo più di origine berbera.

Coperta di alberi e fiori, l'isola è di fatto una grande oasi: più di un milione di palme da dattero e 700 000 ulivi alcuni vecchi di 3 000 anni. 133 km di costa lambita dalle acque cristalline e accarezzata da dolci brezze e all'interno, innaffiati da 2 700 pozzi, spuntano piccoli campi di albicocchi, fichi, limoni, mandarini, uva, arance e melograni: solo l'appassionato di mitologia in cerca del famoso loto rimarrà deluso: sulla isola non ce ne sono.

* Le informazioni sono tratte dal sito ufficiale Google su Djerba e Tunisia.

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 Aut. n. 115 del 28 Giugno 1999

Appaiono qui e là, tra i campi, raggruppate in piccoli villaggi o isolate, delle case di un bianco da togliere il respiro che le fa sembrare gioielli luccicanti gettati con noncuranza su un tappeto di velluto verde. Sono i tipici *menzels* e con le loro cupole tonde, i giardini interni puliti e lussureggianti, il candore accecante interrotto solo da decorazioni di ferro che sembrano merletti color del cielo, costituiscono un gioiello architettonico che contribuisce non poco al fascino del luogo. Sull'isola vi sono anche 200 piccole moschee le più antiche delle quali furono costruite come fortezze per difendersi dagli invasori.

Nel periodo romano e fenicio l'isola si chiamava **Meninx**, come il suo capoluogo le cui rovine si trovano nei pressi del ponte romano che unisce l'isola alla terraferma. Dopo la conquista musulmana Djerba divenne il luogo di rifugio della setta islamica **Ibadita** che tuttora esiste solo su questa isola. Nel Medioevo gli abitanti resistettero ai potenti dominatori del mediterraneo europeo e dal XII al XVI secolo combatterono incessantemente soprattutto contro gli spagnoli ma occasionalmente anche contro i re uniti della cristianità.



Houmt-Souk, che significa mercato, con una popolazione di 45 000 persone, è oggi la capitale dell'isola e uno dei centri urbani più pittoreschi della Tunisia. E' una città ben tenuta e luminosa che si sviluppa intorno all'area del souk dove si può trovare una

quantità e varietà impressionante di prodotti d'artigianato locale: abiti tradizionali, coperte realizzate come ai tempi di Annibale, gioielli d'oro e d'argento dalle lavorazioni artigianali, articoli di pelle, stuoie di paglia, ceramiche e terracotta.

In città due luoghi che vale senz'altro la pena visitare sono: il Museo del Folklore e dell'Arte Popolare, dove sono esibiti costumi e gioielli tradizionali, e la Fortezza storica di **BorJ el-Kebir**, una cittadella araba del XV secolo. Da queste parti il corsaro Dragut sorprese la flotta spagnola nel 1560 e la sconfisse. Molti turisti sono colpiti dalla targa che ricorda il luogo dove si ergeva la torre di teste o **Bordj-er-Rious**, una piramide costruita dai turchi con i crani dei 5.000 spagnoli uccisi nella battaglia. Il macabro monumento rimase sul luogo fino alla metà del XIX secolo, quando le ossa vennero trasferite nel cimitero cristiano di **Houmt-Souk**.



A parte la capitale, che rimane difficile da eguagliare, ogni altra cittadina dell'isola è nota per qualche produzione artigianale speciale o perché è un luogo di importanza storica. **Ajiim**, che è collegata da un traghetto con la terraferma, è famosa per la pesca delle spugne; **El-May** ha un mercato pieno di colori; a **Fatou** si producono cestini finemente intrecciati a mano; **Guellala** è un centro di produzione artigianale di ceramica e porcellana dai tempi di re Mida; La **Ghirba**

è nota per la sua sinagoga, una delle più antiche e famose del mondo e per il monastero annesso le cui fondamenta furono gettate nel 584 a.c. Sinagoga e monastero testimoniano della presenza sull'isola di una minoranza ebraica che la abita da secoli o addirittura millenni. **Mahbounine** è famosa per i suoi giardini; **Midoun** è celebre per le danze Gougou e **Sedouikech** è nota per le museruole di cammello fatte a mano, i cestini da pesca e cappelli di paglia.

Appunti di Viaggio a Djerba

Clima: Sulla costa è di tipo mediterraneo, mite e piacevole tutto l'anno. Avvicinandosi al deserto diventa più secco con temperature diurne elevate e notti fresche. Le temperature estive a Djerba oscillano tra i 25° C e 38 °C. Le temperature invernali tra 18° C e 24° C.

Abbigliamento: Si consiglia un abbigliamento sportivo, informale, da mare. Indispensabili: cappello, occhiali da sole, creme protettive. Per la sera è bene portare un maglioncino o uno scialle. Chi opta per i tour all'interno dovrà essere munito di abiti pratici e scarpe comode.

Cucina: Protagonisti assoluti sono la carne ovina (tra l'altro molto economica) e il pesce. Famosissimo il couscous di semola che si accompagna a tutti i tipi di pietanza. Il brik a base di pasta sfoglia e l'insalata mechouia con pomodori e peperoni sono antipasti così come tutti gli stuzzichini che vi saranno offerti appena vi sedete al ristorante: pane fresco e salse, sardine, olive, peperoni verdi arrostiti, harissa (salsa di peperoncini). I peperoncini vengono cresciuti ovunque, è facile vederli essiccare al ciglio della strada, e non sorprende che siano contenuti in molti piatti. Altri piatti tipici sono la chachouka a base di verdure con uovo e la tajine, un soufflé preparato con carne, formaggio e legumi. Le spezie, il cumino in particolare, sono molto usate in cucina. La frutta è buona. Il primo posto spetta ai datteri, una vera specialità. I dessert sono dolcissimi. Il vino è buono, soprattutto il bianco. Le

bevande tipiche sono il the alla menta e il caffè preparato alla turca. Si consiglia di bere solo acqua imbottigliata.

Acquisti: Girare tra i mercati è in sé un'esperienza estetica. Chi volesse acquistare, poi, non avrebbe che l'imbarazzo della scelta tra i vari prodotti dell'artigianato tunisino: tappeti, abiti tipici (Gandoura, Djellaba, Burnus) alcuni finemente ricamati, in cotone e in seta, monili in argento e pietre dure, coralli, oggetti tradizionali berberi, oggetti in rame e ottone, vasi di terracotta, soprammobili e utensili lavorati in legno, borse di pelle, pantofole e babbucce.

Fotografia: E' opportuno fare una buona scorta prima di partire. Va tenuto presente che, come in tutti i paesi musulmani, le donne potrebbero non gradire di venire fotografate.



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Mance: Molto gradite. Il servizio negli alberghi migliora con le mance e conviene tenere a portata di mano la moneta spicciola ■

Tunisian brik



Ingredients

- 2 medium sweet potatoes
- 2 dried red chillies
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon, plus a little extra
- 2 spring onions, trimmed and finely chopped
- 6 sheets of filo pastry
- a bunch of fresh watercress
- a bunch of fresh flat-leaf parsley, leaves picked
- 3 lemons, 1 juiced, 2 cut in half
- a pinch of ground cumin
- 1½ teaspoons coriander seeds
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 150 gr butter
- 1 red onion, finely sliced
- a bunch of fresh mint, leaves picked
- 4 tablespoons natural yoghurt
- extra virgin olive oil

Method

Preheat your oven to 200°C/400°F/gas 6. Wash the sweet potatoes and bake them, in their skins, in the preheated oven until cooked and soft. Allow to cool (leaving the oven on), then peel and mash them. Bash up 1 teaspoon of the coriander seeds and the chillies in a pestle and mortar. Stir with the cinnamon into the mashed sweet potato and season well. Fold the spring onions and beaten egg into the mashed potato.

Gently melt the butter in a pan. Bash up the remaining coriander seeds. Brush a sheet of filo with some melted butter and sprinkle with a pinch of ground cinnamon and a little of the ground coriander. Cover with the second sheet, and brush and sprinkle as before. Repeat for the third sheet. With a sharp knife, cut the stacked filo sheets into two 15 cm squares.

Working quickly to prevent the pastry from drying, do the same with the remaining filo sheets. You should now have four squares of filo. Place a generous tablespoon of the sweet potato mixture in the centre of each square and spread out slightly. Brush the edges of each square with water and fold in half, corner to corner, to make a triangle. Press down at the edges to seal. Brush both sides of each triangle with the rest of the melted butter, place on a baking tray and bake in the preheated oven until light brown - this will take about 10 minutes.

Mix the red onion with the watercress, mint and parsley. Mix the yogurt with the lemon juice, a glug of olive oil and the cumin. Dress the salad with the yoghurt dressing and serve with the hot filo brik and the lemon halves. Makes 4 servings ■

Petits Fours

by I.M. Smart

A **petit four** (plural **petits fours**) is a small sweet item (confection) generally eaten at the end of a meal (for example, with coffee) or served as part of dessert. The name is from the French *petit four*, meaning “small oven”.

Petits fours were traditionally made during the cooling process of coal powered, brick ovens in the 18th century. This was due to coal’s high burning temperature, relative to wood, and its expense at the time. Wasting the heat produced was not an option.

There are two different categories of petits fours. *Petits fours secs* (*sec* meaning “dry”) include a variety of small desserts, such as special dainty biscuits, baked meringues, macarons, and puff pastries. *Petits fours glacés* (*glacé* meaning “iced”) are iced or decorated in some way, such as tiny cakes covered in fondant or glacé icing, small éclairs, and tartlets. In a French patisserie, assorted small desserts are usually called *mignardises*, while hard, buttery biscuits are called *petit fours*.

There are also *petits fours salés* (*salé* meaning “salted” or “savoury”), which are bite-sized salted appetizers usually served as part of cocktail parties or buffets.

The recipe below is truly delicious and, according to Ann, quite simple to make. Try it! The Truffles are scrumptious!

Truffles

by Ann Dehlin

Ingredients:

150 grammes dark chocolate

1 dl fresh cream

2 fresh eggs (**it is absolutely essential for the eggs to be fresh**)

Unsweetened cocoa powder

“Petits fours” papers

In a heavy saucepan, over low heat, melt:

150 g. dark chocolate

1 dl. fresh cream

When melted, remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in

2 fresh egg yolks

Chill the mixture for 2-3 hours or until firm.

Shape into balls with 2 teaspoons, roll in

unsweetened cocoa powder, and place in “petits fours” papers. Store in fridge.





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