



## **THE SISTERS OF ST. CONTEMPLATIVE IN TRIPOLI (1846-1854)**

### **Research summary**

### **Congregational Spirituality Centre, Angers, 2013**

#### **The Tripoli foundation**

The Mother House Council book gives the aim of the foundation in Tripoli:

*“Since the work of liberating slaves has not been carried out in Cairo, our Worthy Mother has thought it necessary to take it elsewhere. She therefore thought of founding a monastery in Tripoli in Barbary.”*

In September 1846, Sr. Mary Alype Richard, a French Sister who had been in Algeria, and at this point changed her name to Sr. Mary Francis Xavier, and Sr. Mary of Jesus Dubois, the Superior of this new foundation formerly known as Sr. Mary Cyr, left the Motherhouse for Tripoli. They go to Tripoli to have a view at the place but do not establish a community. They remain there while waiting for other Sisters to join them.

A letter from Sr. Mary of Jesus Dubois to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier dated from 17<sup>th</sup> September in Paris reports that they left Angers on a Wednesday, which could correspond to the 9<sup>th</sup>: she writes “The inspiration that led Your Charity to fix our departure on a Wednesday evening came indeed from God”. The “Study booklet on our Founders” (1976) gives 20<sup>th</sup> October as the departure date, while the letter quoted above proves that they were in Paris already in September.

The letter from 30<sup>th</sup> October addressed to the Sisters of St. Magdalene in Angers from Sr. Mary of Jesus mentions the installation of the community. Sr. Mary Euphrasia wished for the community to be established on the day of St. Theresa, but the day before the Sisters still had 80 miles to travel and were only half-way. A big storm had prevented them from arriving sooner.

*“We were settled by the Reverend Prefect Apostolic and the Consul of France in a very clean house where three slaves arrived on the same day as us. A solemn Mass was sung in music followed by a Te Deum after the salvation. Our Lord has been good enough to make this work very dear to all the inhabitants of Tripoli.”*

The following year, on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1847, two other Sisters left Angers for Tripoli, as mentioned by Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier in her letter of October 1847 to Sr. Mary of Jesus Dubois and Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard<sup>1</sup>: they are Sr. Mary Philomena Romano, the new Assistant from Piedmont (in Italy today), and Sr. Mary Dorothy Esseau, a French Sister who changed her name to Sr. Mary Euphrasia.

We do not know when the two Sisters of St. Magdalene arrived. They did not travel with the first group: on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1846, the Prefect and Apostolic Curate writes to Sr. Mary

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<sup>1</sup> Volume VI, letter 1190



Euphrasia to thank her for the arrival of two Sisters, Sr. Mary Alype and Sr. Mary of Jesus, proves it. Were they in the second group of travelers? It is likely, although no document specifies it.

In her letter from 26<sup>th</sup> October 1847, Sr. Mary of Jesus mentions that a Sister of St. Magdalene, Sr. Mary Euphrasia of Compassion gives writing lessons. It is very unlikely for two Sisters of St. Magdalene to have traveled alone during such a long trip by sea.

In October 1847, the community had six Sisters of whom two are Sisters of St. Magdalene.

### **The Sisters of St. Magdalene**

Why were Sisters of St. Magdalene sent to this mission? It seems that in making this decision Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier fulfilled the wish of some Sisters of St. Magdalene from Angers who hoped to be part of this new mission. This is the explanation given in the Mother House community letter from 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1848<sup>2</sup>:

*"We have not yet told you about the little Community of our dear Sisters of St. Magdalene, whose work is now joined to that of redeeming the slaves. Already, last year, we had shared with you the news of their being engaged in working with our dear missionaries, but this year, their zeal for the salvation of souls had grown still more, through prayer, and they begged our Mother for permission for two of them to be among those of our sisters who were the first to go to Tripoli. During the Octave of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, our Mother felt urged to accede to their request, and welcomed it. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, the Community Sisters went in procession to the Monastery of the Sisters of St. Magdalene. Two of the latter, in a black Habit approved by our Mother, who stood between them both, renewed their vows, adding the Promise to work for redeeming of slaves, in so far as Holy Obedience would direct them. Thus began a new religious work, because those among the young Negresses and Arabs who desired to consecrate themselves to the Lord by vow, could enter into a class of which our dear Magdalenes would be the foundation stones. For some time their constitution has been the object of deep reflection by our Mother. We have added some articles which will associate with this work. They are free to choose, some as solitary Magdalenes praying for our monasteries, others could be attached to the mission for the slaves... Thus the ground where St. Euphrasia<sup>3</sup> governed so many monasteries will be inhabited by a family which has grown and been formed under her maternal protection. In place of the Magdalene, the name Euphrasia is to be added to the other names given to our Magdalenes... They will be called: Euphrasia of<sup>4</sup>...."*

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<sup>2</sup> Mother House community letter from 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1848 quoted in the introduction to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier's letters from 1846, volume VI.

<sup>3</sup> Sr. Mary Euphrasia's patron saint was born in Istanbul (Constantinople) and chose to live in solitude in Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that articles were added to their Rules.



The Sisters of St. Magdalene wished to create a group of Consecrated girls among the former slaves. At the time, a women with a black skin could not be part of the Community of religious, hence the necessity to create another group.

A publication note referring to a letter from Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier to Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard probably from July 1853<sup>5</sup> names the Sisters in the community at this time:

- Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard, Superior
- Sr. Mary Philomena Romano, Assistant
- Sr. Mary Dorothy Esseau, known as Euphrasia.

And two French Sisters of St. Magdalene.

They are joined two months later by three other Sisters from Angers: Sr. Mary Mechtilde Flosse, the new Assistant, who changes her name to Mary Augustin, Sr. Mary Marcelle Richard and Sr. Mary Anastasia Seichel, a Maltese novice<sup>6</sup>.

### **1) Who are these Sisters of St. Magdalene?**

Sr. Mary Euphrasia never mentioned their names in her letters. She was clearly concerned about them, was worrying about their integration in the Tripoli community, and mentions them several times in her letters:

- ≈ “May our two little Sisters of St. Magdalene also be blessed<sup>7</sup>.”
- ≈ “Go out, my cherished St. Xavier, two or four times each week, you and our sisters, and also the little Sisters of St. Magdalene, to look after and to baptize hundreds of them [Arab children]... Don't be in a hurry then, about placing the grilles<sup>8</sup>. Remain free then, you can do so much good!... Goodbye my dear daughters. You and my dear Sisters of St. Magdalene are the consolation of your devoted Mother in Our Lord<sup>9</sup>.”

Following new research in the Mother House archives, the Sisters of St. Magdalene of Tripoli and their role in this mission has now become clearer. Their religious names are now no longer unknown: one was Euphrasia of St Genevieve and the other Euphrasia of

<sup>5</sup> Volume VII, letter 1408

<sup>6</sup> Publication note from Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier's letter from 28th July [1853] to Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard, volume VII, letter 1409.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard, 8th July 1848, volume VI, letter 1229

<sup>8</sup> Sr. Mary Euphrasia, on the advice of the French Consul in Tripoli, is asking the Sisters not to remain in the enclosure of the convent but to go out to meet the population and to be accepted by them.

<sup>9</sup> Letter 1410 to Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1853, volume VII.



Compassion<sup>10</sup>. According to the Mother House book of admissions for the Sisters of St. Magdalene, they are Sisters of St. Magdalene of St Genevieve Bouvet<sup>11</sup>, who made her profession on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1838, and Sisters of St. Magdalene of Compassion Terrien<sup>12</sup> who took the habit on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1838. It seems both came back to Angers when the Tripoli foundation ended.

## 2) The end of the work in Tripoli

In 1854, the house is closed as the situation is very difficult. The Catholic hierarchy not having been established as yet in Africa, the Sisters came directly under the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Releasing slaves is more difficult than expected, and even impossible. Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier is deeply concerned for the community in the year before its departure and still hopes the mission will be continued: “*You are victims, my dearly loved Children, and also our two little Sisters of St. Magdalene. But I implore you, do not abandon this work!*<sup>13</sup>”

The relevant parts of the new documents relating to the Sisters of St. Magdalene have been transcribed in the appendixes.

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<sup>10</sup> See in the appendix the letters from 8<sup>th</sup> March 1850 from Sr. Mary Philomena Romano to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier and from 16<sup>th</sup> September 1851 from the two Sisters of St. Magdalene to the same.

<sup>11</sup> Born Aldégonde Bouvet in Paris on 19th February 1812, she took the habit on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1836 and died on 11th June 1895 in Angers. See her necrology in the appendix 2.

<sup>12</sup> Born Virginie Terrien in Saumur, she takes the habit at 20. According to the first volume of the Annals of the Sisters of St. Magdalene Community of Angers, she died on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1868.

<sup>13</sup> Letter 1409 to Sr. Mary Francis Xavier Richard, 28<sup>th</sup> July [1853], volume VII.



## Appendix 1

### **Letters<sup>14</sup> related to the Sisters of St. Magdalene of Tripoli**

#### **1) Letters from apostolic Sisters**

≈ Letters from Sr. Mary of Jesus Dubois to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier<sup>15</sup>

- Paris, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1846

[...] “We unite ourselves each day more intimately to the prayers of our holy Motherhouse, those of our dear collaborators, our beloved Magdalenes who are loved very tenderly by the Lord and by us, oh I am sure that they work<sup>16</sup> more than us.[...]"

- Marseille, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1846

[...] “We do not forget either our dear children on Angers, especially our dear Sisters of St. Magdalene, we will write to them as soon as we arrive in Tripoli. [...]"

- - Tripoli, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1847

[...] “Please deign my very dear Sister to recommend once more the house of the slaves to our dear Magdalenes who are also their true mothers. We join constantly our hearts and works to their prayers for us.”

[...] “Oh what a help our dear Magdalenes are to us thanks to their fasts and prayers and to the exercise of holy virtues; our enemy makes greats efforts to prevent this great work:”

- - 20<sup>th</sup> May 1847

“We unite our prayers and penances to those of our dear Sisters of St. Magdalene to obtain their liberation. It is only just that it should cost us tears and toil, since our dear Savior had to sacrifice all his blood.”

- 26<sup>th</sup> December 1847:

[...] “We have given out the assignments according to your wishes. Sister M. of St Philomena Assistant is the novice mistress; M. of St Alype is in charge of the class of sixty-five young Maltese. M. of St Euphrasia is in charge of the boarding house, Euphrasia of Compassion is giving lessons in writing and is very good at it [...] Our two Sisters of St.

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<sup>14</sup> The spelling has been modified and adapted to modern standards for reasons of reading and understanding.

<sup>15</sup> The first extracts of the letters are addressed to the Sisters of St. Magdalene in Angers.

<sup>16</sup> By the action of prayer. Here the complementarity of the two groups appears well.



*Magdalene will take possession of the house in the desert<sup>17</sup>, tomorrow the Feast of the Holy Innocents, to whom we commend the holy enterprise of the baptism of Arab children [...].*

- 6<sup>th</sup> January 1848:

*"Our two dear Sisters of St. Magdalene are also very devoted, you have communicated your zeal for the salvation of souls to them; they will do a lot of good here. [...]"*

- - 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1848

*"I believe that our dear and worthy Sister Mary of St. Philomena with Mary of St. Alype and one of our dear Magdalenes [...] would make a huge Foundation in this big city."*

- 1<sup>st</sup> May 1848:

[...] *"Our two Sisters of St. Magdalene are settling in." [...]*

- 15<sup>th</sup> May 1848:

[...] *"Mary of St Alype [...] is taking care of the baptism of young Arab children with our Sisters of St. Magdalene. [...]"*

- 15<sup>th</sup> September 1848:

[...] *"Our very zealous Euphrasia of St Genevieve is already exhausted; she is now accepting that she has a very serious illness." [...]*

- 10<sup>th</sup> [February] 1849:

[...] *"The two Sisters of St. Magdalene have had great temptations; now they are much better. Euphrasia of Compassion, who was the more upset of the two, has just assured us that she would rather die than leave Tripoli of her own will.[...]"*

*Our two Sisters of St. Magdalene have had great difficulty in adjusting to the climate and to the country, and have overcome everything. They are never seen making an intentional mistake. It is a great consolation. They asked us to beg you to allow them to wear a black scapular with their black costume [...]."*

- 12<sup>th</sup> March 1849:

[...] *"The Consul of France [...] gave us a piece of black cloth that will be used for the habits of our Sisters of St. Magdalene." [...]*

- 9<sup>th</sup> April 1849:

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<sup>17</sup> Does this expression, frequently used for the house of the Sisters of St. Magdalene at this time, mean that the ones in Tripoli moved, a year after the beginning of their mission, into a house of their own? The question remains unanswered.



*“We are happy to follow the Rule as perfectly as possible; all our Sisters are very fervent, even our dear Sisters of St. Magdalene who have not made a single intentional mistake for a long time.”*

≈ Postscript to the Tripoli community letter from 19<sup>th</sup> June 1851:

*“My very dear Sister<sup>18</sup> our two Sisters of St. Magdalene are paying their deep respect to you and asking you not to forget to mention them to Our Mother General and to their good Mothers of the council and chapter, and also to their dear Sisters, and would like to hear from you. Euphrasia of St Genevieve is still unwell and does not do anything; she begs her sisters to pray God to fulfill his holy Will in her. If possible she begs you not to forget them as well as all the Sisters of St. Magdalene, to whom she sends friendly greetings [...].”*

≈ Letters from Sr. Mary Philomena [Romano] to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier

- *8<sup>th</sup> March 1850:*

Following the signatures of Sr. Mary Philomena and Sr. Mary Euphrasia [Esseau], the letter bears two others:

Euphrasia of Compassion

Euphrasia of St Genevieve

Your two Sisters of St. Magdalene who will always be loyal and submitted to you.

- *Not dated:*

[...] “Mother, our two Sisters of St. Magdalene are ill, especially Euphrasia of St Genevieve, it was difficult not to make her fast on Holy Friday.”[...]

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<sup>18</sup> The addressee of the letter is not named.



≈ Letter from Sr. Mary Euphrasia [Esseau] to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier

- *13<sup>th</sup> September 1851:*

[...] “Our two dear Sisters of St. Magdalene are more and more devoted to the mission, but Euphrasia of Compassion is the only one who can work in the class. She alone has recovered; she is telling us every day that she will go mad because the children are not afraid of her.”[...]

≈ Letter from Sr. [Mechtilde<sup>19</sup> Flosse] to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier

- *31<sup>st</sup> July 1854:*

[...] “We are only three religious; the Sisters of St. Magdalene cannot stay in Tripoli after what has just been discovered<sup>20</sup> about the other. Everyone is asking for her departure.”[...]

## 2) Letters from the Sisters of St. Magdalene

≈ Letters from Srs. Euphrasia of St Genevieve and of Compassion to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier:

L.J.M.

*From our monastery of Tripoli this 16<sup>th</sup> September 1851*

*My very Honored Mother General*

*I am taking advantage of the letter our good Mother Assistant is sending you, to put in this little note, to express our deepest gratitude for the few lines you included for us in your precious letter, which was a great joy to us as it proved that you did not forget your two little Sisters of St. Magdalene of Tripoli. We also wish to express our joy that Our Lord is still keeping you close to us in love and gratitude. We would love to be able to share our dear Sisters’ joy and happiness of being near you. My cherished Mother, you do not mention your health. This allows us to hope it is good and that God will keep you with us for a long time, which will be a joy and happiness for us. We are however grieved not to hear from our good Mother Aimée of Jesus and from all our dear Sisters of St. Magdalene, this lack of news saddens us; nevertheless we are resigned to the will of God who allows this to be...*

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<sup>19</sup> The name is hardly legible.

<sup>20</sup> The letter does not say what the problem is. It could have been a behavior problem, or a refusal to obey. An undated from Euphrasia of Compassion in a confessional tone suggests it. She writes of “lack of unity” and of “rebellion”.



*My very Honored Mother General we are still on the cross, our Good Mothers are all quite ill as well as myself; all three of us are stricken by the same illness, without any hope of recovering. My dear Mother it would be impossible to stay silent and not come and lay our great grief at your motherly heart. Seeing that our three names are mentioned in your very precious letter, but that you remain silent regarding our dear Mother makes us sad, it would be impossible to explain how much we cried over it, because in spite of her great resignation she has not been able to hide the suffering it caused. My dear Mother, this has made us all sad because the union and charity among us is such that we have only one heart. And how could we not, my very good Mother, have grieved when we saw the pain of our good Mother Assistant! She alone has been our consoling angel in these moments of trial, in these days of suffering and distress that we have had to face in Tripoli. She has known how to console us, and I dare say that without her we would have yielded many times to the temptations of despair that have arisen in our souls. But she has been a consoling angel to us by making us gather once again the courage that was about to leave us, and by the peaceful words she spoke to us. And even now my dear Mother despite her distress, she does not leave our bedsides, but forgets herself to provide the care required by our cruel illness, saying that it is what our Very Honored Mother General would do if we were fortunate enough to have her among us. Ah! My Very Worthy Mother, it would be impossible to describe her zeal, her devotion, and how much this good Mother is attached to you and to the congregation. She is a true saint and is following the spirit of God and yours in all things. Allow us in a few words to say she does all she can to make us forget the pain of exile. Forgive me, Very Honored Mother, for talking to you for so long, but I am only following the feelings you have always taught us to have for all our good Mothers, the one of gratitude, the duty of which we like to fulfill. I will also say my Dear Mother that God has given us a good Father whose untiring zeal consoles us and helps us with his advice to walk the path of religious perfection. I am finishing my Very Honored Mother by begging you to bless us and I kiss your blessed hand; and am in the profoundest of respects in the divine hearts of Jesus and Mary, My Very Honored Mother, your unworthy but obedient and devoted daughter,*

*Euphrasia of St Genevieve and of Compassion<sup>21</sup>*

*G.B.B.*

*My Very Honored Mother, we come kneeling to you to ask for a favor, that you allow us to raise our veils, as not being cloistered, we are obliged to speak even to men with our faces uncovered, and it pains us, but we are submitting to your will.*

*Please give, my Very Honored Mother, our deep respect to all our good Mothers in the Council and Chapter, to Mother Aimée of Jesus, Mother St Philippe and Mother St Vincent, and tell our dear Sisters of St. Magdalene that we always love them.*

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<sup>21</sup> It seems Euphrasia of St Genevieve also signed for Euphrasia of Compassion.



[Not dated]:

[...]<sup>22</sup> having only one wish which is to give our entire life to these poor souls; it is very easy to instruct them in this country as they have no religion. We would be very happy if we were called to go by obedience; we would fly there to console and lighten your heart, and we ourselves would die in peace, because we do not want to die without having accomplished this cherished work of yours which is also ours.

Forgive me for this long letter my dear Mother. I am finishing it by prostrating myself at your feet to kiss your blessed hand and to ask for your blessing for all your daughters of Tripoli, and I remain, very worthy and very honored Mother in the divine hearts of Jesus and Mary, with the deepest respect,

Your very humble and obedient  
All devoted and unworthy daughter  
Euphrasia of St Genevieve and Sister  
Euphrasia of Compassion.

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<sup>22</sup> The beginning of the letter is missing.



## Appendix 2 **Necrology of Sr. Magdalene (or Euphrasia) of Saint Genevieve Bouvet<sup>23</sup>**

MAGDALENE OF SAINT GENEVIEVE BOUVET one of the oldest branches of the foundation of our dear solitaries.

This good Magdalene who expired on June 11<sup>th</sup> was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1812 to the Bourbon Palace, her parents being servants to the Prince of Condé<sup>24</sup>; her mother having died when she was still young her father placed her as a boarder with the Religious of the Refuge at Versailles. On leaving there she lived but a short time in the world till she asked admission into the community of Magdalenes then in its infancy. M<sup>elle</sup> de la Salle her patroness recommended her to M<sup>me</sup> la comtesse d'Andigné who accepted with all her heart this new child and gave her on the day of reception her own baptismal name Genevieve.

Her profession took place in 1838 and since that time she aided by every means in her power her superiors, and edified, by a humble mortified life her sisters whom she loved; she often entertained them with accounts of the commencement of the Mother House, and in these histories the goodness of our Mother Foundress, M. de Neuville, and M<sup>me</sup> d'Andigné, was ever brought to the front.

Surrounded by the care of her mistress and often visited by the Rev. Chaplain, this good ancient Magdalene who was named ADEGONDE in baptism, died at the age of 83 years fifty-nine of which she spent with our Magdalenes.

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<sup>23</sup> Published in the Congregational Bulletin number 9 from June 1895, p. 45. Although her mission in Tripoli is not mentioned in this text, she is only Sister of Saint Magdalene whose name and date of profession match the Sr. Euphrasia of Saint Genevieve spoken of in the letters quoted in the previous pages.

<sup>24</sup> The house of Condé was related to the royal house of Bourbon whose members were Kings of France from 1589 to 1792 and then from 1815 to 1830.



### Appendix 3

#### Letter from the Sisters in Tripoli to the Sisters of St. Magdalen in Angers

From our Monastery in Tripoli, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1846

The Gospel is announced to the poor. Our Lord  
Our very honored and dear children and Sisters in J.C.

The very active part that your love for Our Lord made you take in this work of liberation of the slaves gives you the right to the rewards and merits of this amiable and divine mission. We work with our divine Savior, he is with us, we receive each day tokens of his protection that can be read as an equal number of miracles. We have been filled with graces and favors in spite of our great unworthiness, and we firmly hope that, with the help and support of your fervent prayers as well as of your humble life joined to God, this house that is wholly consecrated to Him is going to be expanded for His Glory and the salute of an infinity of souls.

He had the joy of arriving on the day of St. Theresa who has secured this favor for her dear daughters from the Carmel, but this great saint wanted us to put literally into practice her motto: "To suffer or to die", because we have had to weather the most awful storm which lasted for 48 hours. The rumble of the thunder merged with the noise of the hurricane which, after having long joggled with our ship pushed her all of a sudden in the port of Tripoli to the great astonishment of everyone. Five days later, on the day of the Divine Heart of Jesus, we were settled by the Reverend Prefect Apostolic and the Consul of France in a very clean house where three slaves arrived on the same day as us. A solemn Mass was sung in music followed by a Te Deum after the salvation. Our Lord has been good enough to make this work very dear to all the inhabitants of Tripoli. Each day a few slaves come to us, we already have 12 of them, all young and very docile. Our house will be full in a few days, because it is quite small and cannot welcome more than 30.

When these dear children come to us, they are wearing wretched rags full of vermin. We have a white cloth dress and a long veil of blue cloth ready for them. This is the habit of the Most Holy Mother that many Arab families have kept. It is impossible to find a more desolate country. There has never been the slightest glimmer of education. A great number of Christians [were] slaves themselves in this place once. Each caravan carried several hundreds of slaves who were then transported to Alexandria, Constantinople and Cairo. They are suffering extreme abuses on the way. The weakest usually die before reaching their destination. St. Vincent of Paul was a captive in this city for many years, because his great charity made him sell himself to save the son of a poor widow. There is in this country no industry nor commerce, and although the supplies are very low-priced, most people starve. We see poor little Arab girls pick a few barley seeds from the ground before eating them greedily. For them a small piece of bread is a splendid feast. They usually eat beans with ? but



soaked in water. Now that our door is open to them, we only have to pray that our divine Shepherd will train this fold. He came with us to search and call his flock [...] also touch their heart and make them hear his sweet voice. We ask you to always join your poor and affectionate mothers in Tripoli by prayers and good works, they who are counting on you and are forever with a great affection in the Sacred Hearts and Jesus and Mary

Your very humble and unworthy Sisters  
in Our Lord M. of Jesus M. of St. Alype<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Sr. Mary of Jesus and M. of St. Alype to the Sisters of St. Magdalene, archives of the Motherhouse. M. of Jesus had promised in the letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> October from Marseille to write to the Sisters of St. Magdalene.



### Appendix 5

### Letter from the Consul of France in Tripoli to Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier

GENERAL CONSUL OF FRANCE

IN

TRIPOLI

of Barbaria

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Tripoli, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1853

Madam,

Since my arrival in Tripoli I have, as the Representative of France, taken an active interest in the virtuous daughters sent in this barbarous coast by your religious zeal and your eminent charity to endeavor to spread the gentle lights of Christianity. Who indeed could not esteem, like and even admire the noble creatures who, condemning themselves to a long exile, submitted to the hardest privations, exhausted by a work beyond their physical strength, pursue courageously the work of charity to which they have devoted themselves? But while admiring the instruments and aim of this work I firstly disapprove of its application in this country and secondly deplore the lack of means at the disposal of these poor religious. Let me explain:

The purpose of the work of the Good Shepherd Sisters sent to Tripoli is to buy back young black slaves, to convert them to the Catholic Faith as well as to offer a refuge to repentant women.

All people who, like me and better than me, know the Muslims, their ways of life and their religion, can guarantee that proselytism towards them brings contrary results to the aim fixed by the pious souls who want to spread the law of Christ. The Muslims very little apply the morals recommended in all religions and hold on to theirs perhaps more than any other people. For them, religion is fanaticism; and any attempt which could indicate to them a wish to convert them or their brothers to another faith arouses their religious feelings; with such attempts one would find among those rather mild Muslims today the descendants of these sectarians fanatics of Mohammed. By giving them good examples, by penetrating in their midst without instilling the least distrust in them, by proving to them that the Christians are better than the Muslims, we can hope after many years to bring them to acknowledge the superiority of our divine creed.

As to the refuge to give to the poor women whose shameful profession is admitted by our civilization in our society, there are none in Tripoli.



Therefore the special mission of the Ladies of the Good Shepherd cannot take place in this regency.

Faced with these impossibilities which your dear religious have been able to witness, Madam the Superior General, what step has their charity made them take? They have given their time to educating the little Christian girls in this city. They have doubtless made much good but could achieve much more were their conditions improved.

First of all they do not have the necessary resources for decent and proper accommodation and food. To support themselves they have to work at night, because their days are dedicated to prayer and to the instruction and supervision of almost 60 little girls, barely half of them being able to pay a retribution of 1,60 francs per month. Secondly, they are not enough. They are only three constantly living in a dark and unhealthy house, without any place in which to go for a walk, they are really threatened by consumption.

These poor girls were hoping for the arrival of a few Sisters; they at least expected to hear from you, Madam the Superior. When nothing came they had a moment of discouragement and thought of going to beg their Mother for an organization able to conclude their pious mission. The Apostolic Prefect has not been able to grant them their wish, for reasons which I have been obliged to acknowledge as right. But we promised them that we would write to you, Madam the Superior, to tell you frankly of their painful situation.

To sum up, here are what I believe to be the main conditions necessary to ensure the success of this Congregation:

1. Above all, the necessary funds to rent or buy a house that could be repaired and adapted to the uses of a Monastery need to be found.
2. There should be 8 Sisters, of which 2 should be French.
3. Among these 8 Sisters, 2, wearing a black habit, should visit the sick as well as have some practical knowledge of surgery and medicine
4. Education and care should be given by the religious to the sick and the little local girls regardless of their origin or religion.

Based on these conditions, the Good Shepherd Monastery in Tripoli would grow with chances of great success. The moral and material support of the Apostolic Prefect and the Representative of France would guarantee this success; But to be honest with you, I could not support this work to the Government of His Imperial Majesty<sup>26</sup> if it does not meet the conditions that I briefly listed above.

The health and peace of your daughters demand a quick reply, Madam the Superior General, please do not make them wait for this comfort and be assured of the profound respect with which I have the honor to be

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<sup>26</sup> Napoleon III, Emperor of the French since December 1852.



Your very humble

And very obedient servant

(Signed) Léon Rocher<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Archives of the Motherhouse – Ref. EC-1.