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The Approach of French Historians in Writing the History of Algeria during the Colonial Period

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Abstract:

From the start of their occupation in 1830, the French devoted significant effort to documenting Algeria's history across its different periods. Their approach deliberately disregarded original historical sources that recorded the Algerian people's achievements and legacy. Instead, they sought to create a narrative that legitimized the occupation while undermining the existence of the Algerian nation. To this end, the French established a historical institution that spanned multiple disciplines, focusing on thorough research, investigation, and documentation presented with academic precision.

Keywords: Historical institution; Approach; Historical research; Committees; Associations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The French historical school approached Algeria's history mainly with colonial motives. Their goal was to justify France's policies and reinforce its claim to occupy Algeria. Because of this, most French writings in the 19th century showed a clear colonial bias. They lacked objectivity and often aimed to distort and erase Algeria's national identity and history over time.

For instance, French historians intentionally downplayed the national significance of popular armed resistance movements, instead trying to attribute them to outside influences to undermine the Algerian people's struggle. This distortion didn't stop there, it extended to the national liberation movement and the revolution, with the intent of hiding the undeniable truth: that Algerians resisted French occupation from the very first moment until they regained their sovereignty.

So, this raises an important question: How did the French historical school portray Algeria's history from the start of the occupation in 1830 all the way to independence in 1962?

The colonial historical school was primarily characterized by its ideological focus, which overshadowed its scientific approach. This ideological influence dominated its work from the outset and continued to shape its direction over four generations. "Colonial ideology" refers to a framework of preconceived judgments, predetermined views, and biased interpretations of a nation's history, culture, or society. These biases steered research toward affirming such preconceptions. In practice, this ideology sought to marginalize

and minimize Algerian society, confining its portrayal to a narrow scope—not just during the colonial era but throughout its entire history (Qenan, 1988, pp. 127-128).

Between 1830 and 1880, the French historical school dedicated to Algerian studies began to take shape. In its early stages, it was not driven by professional historians but by individuals from various professional backgrounds, typically with low to moderate levels of education. The school's foundation was laid by translators, many of whom had minimal educational qualifications, and a significant portion were not of French origin. Their main task was to explore and document Algerian society, its institutions, culture, and history. Gradually, the school expanded to include military officers, particularly those focused on civil affairs, as well as administrators directly managing Algerian matters (Qenan, 1988, p. 131).

The remarkable aspect is the enduring nature of this historical perspective, which refutes Algeria's national identity and claims that no evidence of such an identity existed during France's colonisation of the nation. They asserted that Algerian national consciousness only began to materialise following the conclusion of World War I and partially ascribed this evolution to France's alleged role in cultivating this sense of identity. This viewpoint embodies the attitudes embraced by the institution across successive generations (Qenan, 1988, pp. 133-134).

This historical institution intentionally aimed to obliterate the

accomplishments and triumphs of the Algerian people throughout history, negating their existence and disputing their entitlement to a history and heritage like to that of any other nation. It exerted every effort to promote the colonial regime's political aims of obliterating Algeria's identity and subverting its foundations. By presenting purported scientific facts and arguments to refute these foundations, the school advanced the colonial administration's objective of converting a whole nation into compliant individuals (Qenan, 1988, p. 137).

Consequently, French literature on Algerian history grew multifaceted, encompassing its political, economic, social, cultural, and civilisational dimensions over several periods. Prominent works encompass Christian Courtois's From Rome to Islam, William Marçais's One Hundred Years of Research into the Past of Islamic Africa, Georges Yver's The Conquest and Occupation of Algeria, and Xavier Yacono's Algeria Since 1830, among others (Manasria, 1988, p. 191).

You could say that early French historical accounts during the occupation were mainly aimed at supporting colonial goals. They worked to downplay and erase the national spirit behind the resistance, shaping Algeria’s history in a way that justified continued colonial rule. The aim was to shape future generations who would feel disconnected from their own identity and sense of belonging.

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At the onset of the 20th century, certain French texts arose that differentiated themselves by innovative perspectives on the history and sociology of Algeria. Prominent among these were the contributions of Charles André Julien, Pierre Bourdieu, and André Nouschi, who endeavoured to deconstruct the works of their predecessors, marked by a diminished historical consciousness. Nevertheless, these novel methodologies did not attain comparable success in the realms of publishing and academia as the works of Félix Gautier and Stéphane Gsell, for instance. In examining scientific literature and historical occurrences, we observe that certain French authors endeavoured to substantiate the presence of a colonial mentality using authoritative knowledge, whilst others sought to generate authentic knowledge employing a novel methodology. André Nouschi, a French historian, was born on December 10, 1922, in Constantine, Algeria, into a Jewish family. He was named a lecturer at the University of Tunis in 1961, and upon the establishment of the University of Nice in France, he became a professor emeritus of current history there. In 1968, he established the Mediterranean Centre for Modern and Contemporary History (CMMC) at the University of Sophia Antipolis and initiated the publication Cahiers de la Méditerranée, which concentrated on the history of North Africa, namely the histories of Tunisia and Algeria. He broadened his academic interests to encompass the history of oil exploitation in the Middle East and the Arab world, with a focus on Algeria's economic history. His thesis, overseen by his instructor Charles André Julien,

investigated the living conditions of the rural populace of Constantine from the period of occupation until 1919 (Al-Qader , 2022, pp. 50-51).

Additionally, the inaugural president of the Algerian Historical Society, "Berbrogier," asserted that French colonialism commenced the introduction of French educational, literary, and artistic systems in 1830. The government newspaper confirmed in 1832 the formation of a medical school, a benevolent association at the Mosque of Sidiya, and the initiation of a public library's creation. The advent of historical studies was also included among these educational systems (Al-Qasim, 2009, p. 13).

The French relied on three main areas of research that allowed them to cover all stages of Algeria's history in all its aspects, which were as follows:

- Publishing ancient artifacts related to Algeria.
- Establishing scientific committees and granting permits to individuals to conduct research, gather, and promote knowledge of the country's artifacts.
- Forming specialized associations, newspapers, and journals that preserve historical discoveries and care for them, while raising awareness among those interested (Al-Qasim, 2009, p. 14).

2. The Motivations for Researching Algeria's History

The French relied on several factors that shaped their approach to writing the history of Algeria, the most important of which were:

- They overcame the Algerians by force, believing that as a civilized people, they ruled over a backward nation, and as Christians, they took control of a Muslim people.
- The desire to understand a people who fell under the grip of European civilization.
- The desire for control and occupation, which could only be realized through the collection, examination, evaluation, and interpretation of written artifacts. To achieve this, the French also involved Algerian writers, such as Antar and Ibn Mubarak, who wrote about the history of Constantine, and Mohamed Ben Ali El-Tlemcani, who documented the scholars of Oran and Tlemcen under the guidance of the French official in Oran. Furthermore, translations and publications by Ibn Abi Shenab, Al-Hafnaoui, and others were carried out under the direction of French Governor-General Jonar, with support from a group of French researchers.
- The drive of scientific curiosity; during the period of Algeria's occupation, the European mind was exploring various fields of knowledge, while the Algerian Eastern mind remained stagnant and dormant.
- The emergence of the idea of differentiation and superiority among nations, where some scholars believed in the superiority of European peoples over non-European ones, advocating for the need to civilize the latter through the former.

- The religious motivation: Algeria was captured during the Crusades, after a protracted conflict spanning three centuries with Christian Europe. Consequently, emphasis was placed on Islamic studies, Sufi groups, and prominent religious leaders. The Church contributed to this movement via missionaries and their ethical and monetary assets (Al-Qasim, 2009, pp. 17-19).

3. Stages of French Colonial Writing of Algeria's History

The periods of French historical research were divided into two stages or eras: the first era, known as the era of military historians, spans from 1830 to 1880, and the second era, known as the era of specialized historians, extends from 1880 to 1954.

3.1 The Era of Military Historians (1830-1880)

Stéphane Gsell (1864-1932) designated this period as the "Old Algerian School" (Al-Qasim, 2009, p. 19). Certain historians contend that the colonial school originated prior to 1830, owing to its contributions to the historiography of Algeria and the Maghreb. This institution persisted until the early 1880s, a timeframe adjacent to the occupation of Tunisia and France's preparations for the subsequent occupation of Morocco. (Al-Qasim, 2009, pp. 22-23).

Gsell asserts that the authors documenting Algeria's economic, political, and administrative history during this era were predominantly military writers or military translators by profession. The French administration in Algeria was predominantly military from 1830 until 1871, with the exception of the years 1858-1860.

Moreover, several areas of Algeria remained under military governance until the commencement of the independence revolution Al-Qasim (2009, p. 20).

In this context, we will present the areas that French military writers focused on when writing Algeria's history during the military era, which can be summarized as follows:

3.1.1 Publishing Ancient Artifacts about Algeria

The French colonialists shown an interest in the literature pertaining to Algeria's historical narrative before the period of occupation. Since the onset of the occupation in 1830, travel literature and accounts authored by Europeans regarding Algeria during the Ottoman period have been published. The French fascination with Algeria's history heightened once it became a crucial component of the Ottoman Empire. Historical accounts of the Ottoman era in Algeria were diverse, originating from Italian, Spanish, French, Danish, British, and American sources, nations that maintained diplomatic connections and commercial interests with the Regency of Algiers throughout this period (Fachar, 2017, p. 3). Significant works encompassed compositions by Sherlo Sho, Bananti, Ronodo, Haido, and Vantordi Paradi, with written narratives of the invasions by Oruç and Khayr al-Din, translated from Arabic, and papers pertaining to Charles V's expedition against Algeria.

They referenced the writings of Arab historians and travellers, initiating the publication of these works either in part or in all,

including those by Ibn Khaldun, Al-Bakri, Al-Ayashi, and Hassan al-Wazzan (Leo Africanus), among others. Conversely, they disseminated correspondence between the Deys of Algiers and the French rulers, along with the memoirs and reports of French consuls and spies, like Dubois-Tanville, Boutan, and Kersi. They concentrated on the archives of the Marseille Chamber of Commerce and the reports from the French enterprises that succeeded one another in what was referred to as the "Fortress of France." Furthermore, they expressed interest in Ottoman records located in Algeria, many of which were lost amid the turmoil surrounding their arrival in the nation. (Qassem, 2009, p. 14).

3.1.2Establishment of Scientific Committees

The French colonisation permitted persons to do research, collect, and disseminate historical artefacts within the country. In 1837, the Ministry of War organised a group named the Scientific Exploration of Algeria, constituted on August 14, 1837. The committee mostly comprised military experts, and its technique involved these researchers travelling to Algeria for a designated duration to record their observations. The French government would finance the publication of these scientific articles, contingent to committee approval. Qassem (2005, p. 80). The committee disseminated substantial research in diverse disciplines, encompassing archaeology, natural sciences, fine arts, history, ethnology, geology, botany, minerals, mining, and others (Qassem, 2009, pp. 14-15; Hammad, 2015, p. 22). It also motivated several persons to record

local history, including dialects, thoroughfares, systems, customs, religious practices, tribal existence, and urban areas (Qassem, 2009, pp. 14-15).

The scientific committee commenced its activities in 1839, but formally began operations in 1840, with that year designated as the last date for delivering its works. Significantly, the majority of the committee members were military personnel, and several scholars involved continue to have their studies disseminated, including de Reynaud Pellissier, Carette, Daumas, Trumelet, Rinn, among others. The committee's output predominantly emphasised translation over original authorship. The principal impetus for the formation of the scientific committee was the aspiration to comprehend a populace subjugated by European civilisation (Hammad, 2015, p. 2).

In this context, the Algerian historian Abu al-Qasim Saadallah mentioned some of the members of the committee and their areas of expertise, which they worked on to write the history of Algeria. These areas included the following:

- **Adrian Berbrugger**: He was the curator of the public library of Algiers, in his capacity as an antiquarian.
- **Carret**: He was an officer in the army, in his role as a specialist in ancient geography.
- **Colonel de Nouveau**: He was an officer in the army, specializing in physical geography.

- **Onventnan**: A graduate of the Polytechnic School, specializing in ethnography.
- **Quyon**: A military surgeon, in his capacity as a doctor and physiologist.
- **Belisier de I'Yno**: An officer in the army, specializing in modern history, systems, and customs.
- **Warnier**: A military surgeon who was a reserve member tasked with statistics and population research.
- **Bouvier**: He was assigned to agriculture.

Colonel Bory de Saint-Vincent, an army officer, chaired the committee and was a member of the French Institute. The committee encompassed the following specializations: landscapes, antiquities, geography, painting, zoology, botany, ethnography, physiology and medicine, entomology, textiles and artworks, history and systems, minerals and mining, architecture, geology, natural history, physics and climatology, statistics and demographic research, health and population diseases, and the creation of human patterns (drawings) (Qasim S., 2005, pages 81-82).

3.1.3Formation of Specialized Associations

Colonialism focused on the creation of specialist groups and the establishment of newspapers and magazines that documented historical findings, safeguarded them, and disseminated them to interested audiences. The occupation commenced on June 26, 1830,

with the inception of the first colonial newspaper, L'Enseignant Algérien. It concentrated on administrative decisions and pronouncements, as well as local history, news pertaining to Muslims, and the actions of the local populace. In 1839, the El-Akhbar newspaper was established, emphasizing historical study alongside its political and news reporting functions. In 1847, the Le Missionnaire newspaper was published, focusing on local news, albeit with a limited scope (Qasim, 2009, p. 15). Furthermore, organizations emerged throughout with the objective of disseminating journals and research on Algeria's history. The following are enumerated below.

- **Constantine Archaeological Association:** it was established in 1852, resulting in the proliferation of specialist journals in historical and archaeological research. In its inaugural year, the society issued a calendar titled Annuaire, which subsequently evolved into a compilation known as Recueil, encompassing studies and observations pertinent to the region's history.
- **Algerian Historical Association:** It was established under the directive of Governor-General Randon in Algiers in 1856. This group published La Revue Africaine, which, after over a century, became an essential reference for those studying the history of Algeria during its numerous epochs.
- **Oran Archaeological Association**: Established in 1878, it issued a bulletin featuring research and studies on the history of Algeria (Qasim, 2009, pages 15-16). The research and studies conducted

by military scholars, particularly oral sources and personal testimony, established a basis for subsequent historians in their publications and studies about all aspects of Algerian history (Qasim S., 2009, p. 22).

3.2 The Era of Specialist Historians 1880-1954

In 1880, legislation was enacted to establish higher education institutions in Algeria. In 1909, thirty years later, it was established as the University of Algiers. This signified the commencement of a new epoch in the documentation of Algeria's history by the French (Qasim, 2009, p. 23). This era was marked by a reduction in military troops, supplanted by specialists, researchers, and professional historians. The research has been broadened to encompass the complete history of North Africa, specifically covering Tunisia and Morocco. A notable advantage of this institution was the researchers' reputation for seriousness and rigor, which resulted in diversity and increased productivity over time (Hamal, 2015, p. 24).

The studies produced during this period illustrate the extent to which historical writing was subordinate to colonialism, or the degree of the historian's subjectivity influenced by national interests. The literature of this period sought to legitimize colonialism and historical accounts, thereby facilitating its success and perpetuation (Qasim, 2009, p. 24). The studies conducted during this period demonstrate the subordination of historical writing to colonialism and the extent to which the historian's subjectivity was shaped by national objectives. The literature of this period aimed to validate colonialism and

historical accounts, therefore enabling its triumph and continuation (Qasim, 2009).

The school offered a varied array of specializations, encompassing language, literature, art, folklore, archaeology, ethnography, and history. This institution received endorsement from progressive organizations throughout Europe, resulting in Algiers being chosen as the venue for the 14th International Congress of Orientalists, convened in April 1905 (Hamal, 2015, p. 24).

During this period, notable university professors included Mr. Masqueray, who lacked a specific specialization; René Basset, an expert in linguistic studies and local dialects; Doutté, who concentrated on social research; Georges Yver, who examined the history of colonization; Stéphane Gsell, who focused on ancient North African history; Imbert, who analyzed the social and economic conditions of the local populace during the French colonial era; and Yacono, who addressed matters pertaining to colonization and Arab offices. In addition, several researchers in France itself took an interest in the history of North Africa, such as Charles-André Julien, the author of *History of North Africa*, and Manceau, the author of *The Literary History*. The classic French school in comparative literature was one of the most distinguished colonial institutions and a pivotal movement in the discipline. It was the inaugural institution of its sort globally, originating in France during the late 19th century. It sustained its preeminence as the exclusive methodology in the domain

of comparative literature until the mid-20th century. Prominent individuals associated with this institution include Jean-Marie Carré, Marius-François Guyard, and Paul Van Tieghem (Bekadi, 2019, pp. 8-10).

During this period, institutions were established to assist these historians in publishing their studies across various fields and specializations. Examples of such institutions include the following:

- **Historical Monuments Service:** Established in Algiers in 1880, it revived Roman ruins in the cities of Djemila and Timgad.
- **North African Committee:** Founded in Paris in 1883, its mission was to collect documents, scripts, and archaeological inscriptions.
- **Algerian Committee:** Established in 1910 during Governor Jonnart's tenure, it was tasked with publishing the correspondence and memoirs of French officials in Algeria and their relations with the local population. As part of this project, the correspondences of Clauzel, Rovigo, Faureuil, and D'Erlon, as well as the works of Boutin, were published.

During Jonnart's tenure, steps were implemented to promote Islamic studies. Muhammad Ben Abi Shneb published the journey narratives of Ibn Ammar and Al-Wartilani, along with critical editions of historical texts including ‘Unwan Al-Dirayah by Al-Ghubrini, Al-Bustan by Ibn Maryam, and Bughyat Al-Ruwwad by Ibn Khaldun... (Qasim ,2009, p. 25).

4. Examples of French Writings on the History of Algeria

during the Colonial Period

4.1 The Algerian Annals - *Les Annales Algériennes*

A French publication created and published by Officer Pélissier, printed at the Military Press in Paris and the Bastide Press in Algiers. This event is documented on the journal's cover as occurring in October 1854 (Reynaud, 1854, p. 7).

The journal consists of three volumes segmented into 43 chapters, totaling around 1,600 pages. It documents the history of Algeria from the onset of occupation until 1854. An examination of its index indicates that it encompassed a range of subjects from this era, including political, economic, social, and cultural matters. The document culminates with an appendix featuring several essays on customs and religion in North Africa, the topic of Christianity, Algeria post-Abdelkader's downfall, and the condition of trade and industry in Algeria subsequent to the occupation. The magazine functions as an extensive archive of material pertinent to Algerian history (Reynaud, 1854, p. 7).

The Annals magazine underwent variations in publishing due to the security circumstances in Algeria during this time. Initially published in 1836, it was subsequently halted with the fall of Constantine in 1837. It recommenced publishing and persisted until 1839, before ceasing once more, before reemerging in 1847 and continuing until 1854. The resumption took place as the situation clarified and the events were comprehended more thoroughly, as noted

by Pélissier (Reynaud, 1854, p. 7).

4.1.1 Introduction to the Owner of the Magazine

Pélissier: Edmond Pélissier de Reynaud was born on January 1, 1798, in Tournon-sur-Rhône, France, into a noble family. His father was Jean François, and his mother was Ursule Jeanne Henriette. Pélissier lived in Algeria from 1830 to 1842. He began his career as an officer in charge of military affairs before being appointed head of Arab affairs. He later became a member of the scientific committee established in 1839 to conduct scientific exploration of Algeria. Pélissier also worked in the French consular services in Tunisia and Tripoli (Reynaud, 1854, p. 7).

4.1.2 Field of Writing in the Algerian Annals Magazine

As for the writing in the magazine, Pélissier mentioned that his wish behind this work was to produce a periodic journal that would be published annually or biennially. Each issue would contain two main sections:

- **The first section:** would consist of articles on Algerian history.
- **The second section:** would include articles and documents that serve as responses to the questions raised about the first section. Pélissier likely intended to interact with readers, who would undoubtedly pose questions. The goal he sought to achieve with this work was to "historize the magnificent colonization," as he described it.

Pélissier indicated that his work was founded on three primary sources. This was attributable to the dearth and lack of knowledge, as colonization had not yet fully established itself, hindering his ability to collect extensive data. Furthermore, literature concerning Algeria and its colonial movement had not yet commenced. Consequently, the sources upon which he depended were:

- His personal memoirs as an eyewitness or participant in events up until 1841.
- Information obtained from reports provided by those working in the field, such as military officers or individuals assigned to implement the projects and laws of the colonial settlement administration in Algeria.
- Official documents issued by the French government and various government departments, which were regularly sent to him due to the sensitive and prominent positions he held (Reynaud, 1854, p7)

4.1.3Emir Abdelkader and the Issue of French Prisoners in the Algerian Annals Magazine:

The subject of prisoners of war is addressed in Les Annales Algériennes, specifically with the French soldiers seized by Emir Abdelkader and executed one night in April. The journal states that 260 French soldiers, comprising both enlisted personnel and officers, were killed. The men were restrained and segregated into tiny factions, subsequently executed by the regular infantry under the

Emir's command. The publication characterized this act as abhorrent and shameful (Reynaud, 1854, p. 212).

Numerous French research indicate that the Emir personally commanded the brutal execution of the so-called "unfortunate" detainees. This is frequently ascribed to the Emir's despair and his incapacity to confront the French army, prompting him to undertake this deed as an act of vengeance, swayed by rumors. Pellissier observes that the official inquiry by the French government determined that the Emir was culpable, having issued the commands and directives to execute the slaughter of the French prisoners. This followed the dissemination of allegations regarding the French executing Algerian detainees (Léon, 1865, pp. 252-253).

Fallet concurs, asserting that the Emir commanded this action, resulting in the prisoner count rising to approximately 300, excluding the officers. Notwithstanding the attempts by the Emir's associates to assign culpability to his assistant and successor, Mustafa ibn Tami, the accountability remained ascribed to the Emir (Fallet, 1854, pp. 173-174).

The Annales Algériennes periodical refrains from attributing blame on Emir Abdelkader in this context. Pélissier notes in a footnote that people close to the Emir felt Ibn Tami acted independently, without awaiting the Emir's directives, so exonerating the Emir from blame. Pélissier was one of the initial advocates for Emir Abdelkader, elucidating the exact sequence of events (Reynaud, 1854, p. 212).

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Can we ask about Emir Abdelkader's role in this issue and the extent of his involvement?

Investigating historical sources reveals that Emir Abdelkader is not characterized as a figure who mistreats prisoners or exhibits ruthlessness towards them. According to Sharif Sahli, "The prisoners arrived at the emir's camps with preconceived notions of the Algerians' brutality, and they were astonished to be met with kindness and exceptional care." For certain individuals, this was challenging to accept" (Sharif, 2008, p. 108). In addition, Bernard, a captive of the Emir, also remarks on the favorable treatment, asserting: "... however, I must emphasize that we were not mistreated in any manner." He states, "Rather than exhibiting hostility, they provided each of us with pieces of bread" (Karl, 2005, pp. 29-31).

The Emir further posits that the escape attempt of one soldier is a normal act, one that anyone yearning for freedom would undertake. Conversely, prison guards penalize inmates who endeavor to escape, and those who seek to break free from confinement encounter severe repercussions (Al-Sharif, 2008, p. 50). On the other hand, Lalla Zahra personally attended to the inmates, caring for them in a manner unparalleled by any mother of a prince or king globally. In her care, she would gently admonish them with tenderness and compassion, indicating that they were the cause of the worsening circumstances. She garnered significant admiration from Europeans. Abu al-Aid Dodo cites a German tourist who remarked, "Numerous Europeans

who encountered her expressed profound admiration..." Her empathy for the ill and impoverished garnered her the affection of all the unfortunate and troubled" (Al-Aid, Doss, p. 104).

The prince condemned the execution of prisoners, while promoting their capture for the advantage of the army overall. In reply to a soldier's inquiry regarding the reward for catching a Frenchman, the prince stated: "Duro," and when the soldier inquired further about a decapitated head, the prince answered: "25 strokes on the soles of the feet." The same source asserts that the Algerians subjected prisoners to severe treatment, perceiving them as barbaric, and that encountering them on the road constituted the utmost suffering, as they would murder and strip them of their garments, seizing their possessions. The source additionally notes grievances on the insufficiency and inferior quality of sustenance, which comprised solely barley bread accompanied by little amounts of viscous and disagreeable oil (Adolphe, 1849, pp. 38-39).

The assertions in this source on the mistreatment of inmates are unequivocally spurious, considering the multitude of sources that provide contrary information. The food situation was undeniably problematic during certain periods, when even the prince's soldiers faced difficulties in obtaining adequate sustenance, as he noted in his discussion with Churchill. Consequently, the prince's treatment of the inmates exhibited the highest degree of kindness. The execution of the prisoners, as noted in the Annals, did take place; however, it cannot be ascribed to the prince's duty under any circumstances.

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4.2 The African Journal

4.2.1 Introducing the Journal

The African Journal (La Revue Africaine) was founded by the Algerian Historical Society in 1856. The periodical concentrated on the compilation and documentation of all aspects pertaining to the history of Algeria (Zarrouk, 2017, p. 133). Originally published bi-monthly, it shifted to a quarterly publishing schedule beginning with issue 190, which was printed in the third quarter of 1888. Publication was temporarily suspended during World War I (1914-1918) owing to security concerns. The journal measured 24 cm in physical dimension, containing between 8 and 100 pages (Naïli, 2009, p. 55). The official language was French, with exceptions in the humanities and social sciences. The texts encompassed languages like Latin, Berber, Greek, Spanish, German, and Italian (Lahmar, The Image of Algerian Society in La Revue Africaine 1856-1962, 2011, p. 145).

4.2.2 Introducing the Journal Owner

Marshal Randon the Governor-General of Algeria, Randon, was the founder and honorary president of *La Revue Africaine*, while Mr. Adrien Berbrugger served as its actual director (Naïli, 2009, p. 55).

4.2.3 Writing field in the African Journal

The journal concentrated on the examination of Algeria's cultural legacy and discussed occurrences pertaining to popular resistances and insurrections. The objective was to assemble books

and articles that chronicle the history of North Africa broadly, with a specific focus on Algeria, from antiquity through the Ottoman period until the onset of French colonization (Berbrugger, 1865, p. 13).

- **Ahmed Bey's resistance:** Cirta-Constantine. Expéditions et Prise de Constantine (1836-1837) dapres les documents laisses par M.M Berbrugger.

Watbled released an article offering a geographical and historical description of the Constantine region, along with an introduction to Ahmed Bey and his plans to resist the French. He also recounted the movements of the French army toward the region. The specifics of this opposition were documented in Volume 14 (1896, pages. 200-457), Volume 15 (1897, p. 7), and Volume 32 (1888, p. 196) (Berbrugger, 1865, pp. 86-196).

- **The History of the Occupation of Skikda, El Kala and its Surroundings, entitled: Documents pour servir a Philippeville** Féraud, an individual who experienced these events through his affiliation with the French army, released this article. He detailed the occurrences of the French occupation of these regions, recounting the specifics of the occupation and the resistance encountered by the French army. He recognized the fervor of the popular resistance and the valor and courage of its heroes (Naïli, 2009, p. 65).

4.2.4 The African Journal's Interest in the Algerian Desert

La Revue Africaine took an interest in southern Algeria in

general, with articles titled "The Sahara." The journal dedicated several articles to various regions of the south, including Laghouat, Ain Madi, Ouargla, Adrar, Biskra, and others. Some examples include the following:

- Berbrugger, les Romain dans le sud de L'Algérie haute plateaux et Sahara du centr, tom2, 1857, pp276-294.
- Berbrugger, Observation archéologiques sur les Oasis de méridionales du Sahara algérienne, tom2, 1857, pp295-300
- Coyne, le Sahara du l'ouest étude étude géographique sur l'Adrar et a partie du Sahara, tom 34, 1890, pp. 43-54 (Zarrouk, 2017, p. 136).

French literature also examined the tribal system in the Algerian Sahara and the process by which tribe members select their leader. Georges Voisin stated: "The tribe members select a leader to represent them, who must possess wisdom and courage." This method was widespread during the Ottoman Empire in inaccessible regions that eluded the central authority in urban places" (Voisin, 1861, p. 67).

5. CONCLUSION

French historical writing was not about creating honest, well-researched academic knowledge. Instead, it acted as a colonial tool designed mainly to justify and support colonial rule.

French historical studies aimed to distort Algeria's national history and suppress its identity, fostering feelings of cultural inferiority and weakening the sense of belonging. This was a

deliberate effort to extinguish the spirit of resistance and make colonization appear unavoidable.

The French colonial school significantly endeavored to collect information and insights into Algerian society in several facets of life, with the objective of reinforcing its dominion over Algeria and North Africa at large. Its concentration extended beyond Algeria; after establishing its foundations, it also directed its attention to the histories of Tunisia and Morocco, aiming to gain domination over North Africa.

Their studies extended beyond inquiry and exploration to include the distortion and falsification of facts, as well as questioning their legitimacy, especially about the Islamic and Ottoman eras. Stéphane Gazal asserted that historical accounts from the Islamic period were flawed due to the absence of adequate and contemporary documentation. He contended that academics could identify only a limited number of late, unverified occurrences and certain recordings of events; nonetheless, these were linked to military systems and lacked objectivity.

The French school sought to misrepresent the Ottoman Empire's role in Algeria by asserting that the Ottoman Caliphate mistreated Christians in the eyalet and that the Ottoman empire colonized Algeria, so degrading its citizens. It also exhibited historical inaccuracies on several characters, like Emir Abdelkader, who has been well documented by French historians, particularly in the Algerian chronicles over multiple editions. They sought to besmirch his reputation before the international community about the matter of

260 French prisoners, including soldiers and officers, whom he purportedly executed. Nonetheless, accounts and oral testimonies from French detainees refute this assertion.

French historical accounts of Algeria are often seen as biased works shaped by colonial ideology. They involved twisting facts, falsifying details, and hiding the truth, falling short of the honesty that good academic history requires. So, anyone who studies these writings should remember this and read them with a critical mindset, not just take them at face value.

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