

Historical studies

French Expeditions to the Algerian Sahara: Between Orientalism and Colonialism

- The Case of the M'zab Valley -

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Abstract

French interest in the Algerian Sahara, particularly the M'zab Valley, dates back to the early 18th century. This interest developed and crystallized into an intellectual Orientalist movement led by French and European explorers, military leaders, and scientific elites at the beginning of the 19th century. While appearing to be scientific and exploratory in nature, the underlying goal was to serve France's preemptive plans to extend its control over the region and occupy it. Most of the Orientalist reports and writings focused on studying the origins, ethnicities, customs, and traditions of the local population, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and examining their social and familial bonds. Additionally, these Orientalists sought to create a Frenchified elite from the local population. Orientalists like Dumas Eygun, Henri Duveyrier, and Émile Masqueray, among others, prepared secret reports that the colonial authorities used as references for military and then settler expansion in the region and the Sahara at large. This was part of the broader effort to establish a commercial and economic route connecting Algeria with the regions of Western Sudan, including Mali and Timbuktu, in search of new markets for French economic and commercial products.

Keywords: M'zab Valley, France, Algeria, Orientalism, Colonialism.

1. The Geographic Location of the M'zab Valley:

The M'zab Valley covers a total area of approximately 40,000 square kilometers. It is located on the edge of the Lower Algerian Sahara, between the oases of Laghouat to the north and Ouargla to the south. This valley was formed from a rocky plateau shaped by erosion, with an elevation ranging between 300 meters and 800 meters. The Bedouins refer to it as "*Hamada*," a term adopted by French geographers and ethnologists in the 19th century.¹

The climate of the M'zab Valley is hot and dry for most of the year, with low and irregular rainfall. During the summer, temperatures can exceed 45°C, while in the winter they can drop to as low as 5°C. The thermal amplitude is extremely high, with an average temperature of around 35°C.²

Thanks to the presence of a groundwater layer extending over approximately 50 million hectares, the local population has developed oasis-based agricultural practices over centuries. Date palm cultivation holds the highest rank in the region's agricultural activities, interspersed with orchards planted between the palm oases. This system ensures the oasis's survival during periods of drought, as the water table, located at a depth of 50 meters, is replenished by surface water infiltration, which largely depends on sudden seasonal rainfall and the rare flooding of valleys at intermittent periods throughout the year.³

The M'zab society is distinguished by its unique social, religious, economic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics, which have enabled its people to coexist with the harsh desert environment of the region. They secured water, the essence of life, by extracting it from deep underground, often requiring extensive digging over long distances and many years. This allowed them to establish their cities, fortresses, and settlements on the highlands adjacent to the valley, following an architectural model based on three fundamental elements: water, the palm grove, and the fortress (*qasr*), all situated in one location. These elements are closely linked to the organization of local society and its activities. The fortress and the palm grove are connected by an entry path extending from the beginning of the fortress to the end of the palm grove⁴. The oasis is equipped with an efficient irrigation system that ensures equal distribution of well water, which is drawn from the basin to the palm tree. This system is based on the principle of full and optimal use of both rainwater and groundwater, ensuring equal water distribution within the palm groves.⁵ This unique system led the geographer Jean Bruhnes to remark: "These are not institutions of men who deserve only the effort exerted; the relative degree of production and well-being is achieved despite the natural conditions. These are establishments of value to them—absolute perfection. They represent the best that can be imagined and achieved as a culture."⁶ The meticulous organization of the M'zab society enabled them to transform the barren desert into oases and orchards, allowing them to survive and thrive for over a thousand years.⁷

2. Mechanisms of French Colonialism to Establish Its Presence in the M'zab Valley:

French colonial authorities did not limit their occupation to Algeria's coastal regions but extended their focus to the interior and desert areas of the country. To realize this expansion, the colonial Ministry of War established a commission in 1837 that conducted comprehensive geographic and scientific explorations of Algeria. To support these explorations, the colonial authorities founded *La Revue Africaine* (The African Journal), which focused on natural sciences, archaeology, history, and ethnography, serving a strategic purpose. These efforts were also reinforced by reconnaissance missions carried out by the Saint-Simonians.⁸ Even administrative soldiers clearly reflected the spirit of surveillance and the desire to understand the native environment through exploratory work and the ethnographic approach promoted by *La Revue Africaine*. This effort was further supported by studies conducted by officers from the *Bureaux Arabes* (Arab Offices), established in 1844,⁹ which were tasked with gathering information about the local population. A significant turning point in the history of French colonialism in Algeria occurred with the abolition of the *Bureaux Arabes*, marking a shift in colonial policy. This transition entailed the replacement of military rule with civilian governance, coinciding with the establishment of the French Third Republic and the rise of the positivist school of thought.¹⁰

The subjugation of the region to French colonialism hastened the destabilization of the religious landscape. This led to a process of reconfiguring Islamic knowledge, institutions, and the associated actors. This reformist approach was defined by scientific Orientalism and was articulated in the 1853 agreement. However, the pragmatism of the French authorities led them to impose new institutions while simultaneously reusing existing ones, negotiating the participation of local elites in these structures. This laid the groundwork for the annexation of the region, which took place in 1882.¹¹

The method of annexing the M'zab Valley in 1853 differed from the expansion policy in Laghouat, which relied on military intervention. Although Laghouat is located only about 180 kilometers north of the M'zab Valley, Governor General Randon avoided direct military action in the area. Instead, he sent a firm letter to the local population, describing the colonial authority in Algiers as "*the beylic*" and the M'zabis as "servants." He established a peaceful agreement, promising to protect them from the colonial authority, allegedly in exchange for an annual tribute of 45,000 francs. The agreement theoretically maintained the internal independence of the M'zabis and ensured their control over local affairs. However, the promise to respect local institutions soon faded. From 1853 onwards, France appointed assistants to the M'zab institution, which had existed since the Middle Ages and had not been interfered with by any government that the M'zabis had been subjected to, including the Ottoman provincial government. Nevertheless, the French exerted pressure on the institution, leading to significant disputes over the M'zabis' authority over their own institution.

This situation resulted in direct interventions by the French army on several occasions in the region, including the years 1855, 1857, 1860, 1863, and 1864.¹²

After the path was cleared, the colonial authorities officially annexed the region and abrogated the protection agreement beginning in 1882. The annexation declaration reaffirmed the French commitment to respect local institutions and to treat the M'zabis with special consideration. However, this commitment did not materialize in practice, as the colonial administration intervened in directing local institutions through negotiations at times and by force at others.¹³

3. The M'zab Valley:

3.1. History of the Region:

The strategic importance of the region can be understood through its historical context, particularly the Fatimid settlement that began outside the Ziban and the Jerd northward. One might assume that the goal was to control trade routes across the desert; however, at that time, Waraglan was merely a secondary point compared to the crossroads of Sijilmasa. Nevertheless, after the establishment of Sidratta, Melika, and the Karamah raid on the banks of the Wadi Miya, located a short distance from Waraglan, the oppressed Ibadi tribes were able to reclaim their lost status despite the fragmentation they experienced, thanks to the success of their trans-Saharan trade originating from the Waraglan basin.¹⁴

Historical sources that documented the Ibadis since the Middle Ages use the term "*Bani Musab*" to refer to a significant portion of the population that settled in the M'zab Valley. Ibn Khaldun, in his *History of the Berbers*, mentions Amazigh groups linked to the Zanata people, specifically the Bani Yadin, and refers to them as Musab.¹⁵ Recently, the Ibadi author Muhammad Atfich has used the term's Meccan origin "*Mizab*" to refer to his religious brethren as Bani Mizab, aiming to establish a hypothetical Meccan origin for the Ibadis or, at the very least, a sacred connection. The term "*Mizab*" does not simply refer to an ordinary water spout; rather, it alludes to the sanctuary of the main mosque in Mecca.¹⁶

The anthropologist Ibrahim Cherif refers, based on historical documents regarding the settlement in the M'zab Valley and the etymological analysis of the term by which the M'zabites call themselves "*Fi Mizab*" (People of M'zab). He provides a more realistic explanation by suggesting the Berber grammatical structure *At n zab* ("People of the Zab"). The author adds that the Zab region, located in the southern Aurès and around Biskra, is one of the original migration areas for the Ibadi population moving to the M'zab area.¹⁷ Indeed, it seems that the name M'zab is linked to the Ibadi migrations to the region¹⁸ from the East, Africa, and the Zab following the attack of the Hilalian Arab tribes in the second half of the eleventh century.¹⁹

3-2. French Missions to the M'zab Valley:

The international competition intensified, and the struggle among European colonial powers over the Sahara escalated. The French governor-general in Algeria, Marshal Randon (1851-1858), sensed the seriousness of the situation and the possibility of

losing the Algerian Sahara to other colonial forces. Therefore, he rushed to launch an extensive expansion campaign toward the southern regions of the country.

With the occupation of the Laghouat region beginning in 1852, the colonial authorities turned their attention to the M'zab Valley, considering it one of the territories of Laghouat. Due to the region's commercial significance, the French aimed to win over the local population and their leaders, forcing them to sign a surrender treaty in 1853. Consequently, the region came under French protection, while the inhabitants retained the freedom to conduct trade, manage their own affairs, and move freely within the cities and strongholds of the tribes subject to French authority, in exchange for paying an annual tribute and allowing the free movement of French troops in the area.²⁰ Randon retained the right to intervene directly in the palaces to impose public order and protect the rights of the inhabitants of the region from the tribes under their authority, with the assistance of appointed loyal sheikhs and tribal leaders to manage the internal affairs of the local population.²¹ Thus, the agreement paved the way for direct interventions by the French army in the area.²²

As was customary for the French colonial authority to not honor its promises and agreements, the region of Wadi Mzab was annexed on November 30, 1882, and placed under military administration on December 21 of the same year. This was enacted by a decree issued by the Minister of War and Interior, which established the administrative region of Ghardaïa, justifying it by the inability of the Mzab people to suppress their internal conflicts and their failure to comply with their commitment not to assist France's enemies.²³

The competition and race among colonial empires to expand into new territories in Africa intensified by the end of the 1870s. The imposition of French protectorate over Tunisia in 1881 and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 prompted the Governor-General of Algeria, Louis Terman (1881-1891), to initiate a project for the occupation of more desert regions by annexing the Wadi Mzab area. This would serve as a launching point for implementing new expansionist projects in the Sahara.²⁴

Most historical writings and colonial works that addressed the history of Algeria diminished the civilizational role of Algerian society, linking its advancement and urbanization solely to the imposition of French dominance. Few recognized its civilization and considered it a distinct nation, such as Jacques Berque, who noted in 1962 that the Maghreb region did not emerge from nothing but continued to exist with its renaissance and civilization long before colonization. This challenged the claims made by colonial authorities and their historians regarding Algeria.²⁵

The inhabitants of the M'zab region possess certain characteristics that have allowed them to persist through the ages, such as a collective sense of belonging to a clan system, a shared lifestyle, and their connection to the Council of Scholars. The Zawiya (or Zawiya al-Azaba) is a judicial, religious, and legal institution specific to the Ibadis of the Maghreb.²⁶ This cohesion within the M'zab community made it difficult for colonial authorities to penetrate and occupy the area.²⁷ As a preliminary step, they sent exploratory and orientalist missions to the region to study the community and gain close insight into its local social structure, seeking ways to infiltrate it by gradually

introducing new customs and traditions as part of the cultural heritage of the local population. They enlisted local elites and scholars to implement their project and assert their dominance over the area, thereby defining the roles and responsibilities of local elites, which could not deviate from their established tasks, all while preserving the old institutions with partial modifications to their authorities.²⁸

To implement its expansionist project in the Sahara in general, and specifically in the M'zab region, the French colonial administration utilized numerous means, primarily exploratory and missionary missions, among which wa :

A-Eugène Daumas Mission:

It is worth noting that the interest in the M'zab region came in the context of a broader European exploration of the Sahara, particularly by the French, extending from Algeria to Timbuktu. To infiltrate the M'zab society and break through its social fabric, France dedicated all necessary financial and military resources. The findings from these missions were published in specialized scientific assemblies and in monthly and periodical journals.

As for *Eugène Daumas*, he lived in the Algerian Sahara for a long period. His first expedition took place in 1843, starting from Algiers and passing through Médéa, Berrouaghia, Boghar, the Taghia Plain, and Sidi Bouzid, located on the eastern edge of the Amour Mountains. From there, he traveled to Laghouat, and eventually to the M'zab valley region. His mission was to explore the area, study its cultural and religious heritage, as well as its social and urban fabric, aiming to use this knowledge as a foundation for infiltrating the region and gathering intelligence.²⁹

Eugène Daumas recorded his observations in his book, discussing the routes that connect the M'zab Valley with the Ouargla plain. These routes pass through Mount Mazaj, Boulouh, and Ghardaia. He described the M'zab people as a distinct group from the rest of the Algerian desert inhabitants, noting that ethnographic studies on them were entirely absent. Based on an oral account from an elderly Jewish trader in the region, Daumas mentioned that the M'zab claimed to descend from Mu'tazili and indigenous groups.³⁰ This aligns with what *Dr. Alaoua Amara* concluded in his study of the text by Ibn al-Saghir al-Maliki, which confirmed the presence of Mu'tazilis in the region, who were linked to the Wahhabis and settled there after the fall of the Rustamid Imamate in Tiaret.³¹

According to *Eugène Daumas*, the leaders and wealthy individuals among the M'zab were in constant contact with the pastoral tribes controlling trade routes leading to Timbuktu and the Sudan. Despite an old animosity between them and the Arabs, their relationship was masked by mutual economic interests in the desert. In his deep analysis of M'zab society, Daumas described their clothing as distinct from that of the Arabs. He also delved into their religious and social traditions, particularly in marriage, and went as far as to describe the structure of their family life. He stated, "The son can only see his mother, and a man cannot see his sister-in-law. The women veil themselves when they leave their homes. An adulterer is stoned, and their partner pays a high fine, receives 500 lashes, and is exiled from the country."³²

In discussing the key cities inhabited by the M'zab people, Daumas mentioned Ghardaia, Melika, Bounoura, Beni Isguen, El Atteuf, Berriane, and Guerrara. Among the most notable tribes within this union, he listed the Amour, Ouled Sidi Cheikh, Ouled Ziad, Ouled Nail, Mekhadma, and Chaamba. Regarding their goods and trade products, they were sourced from Tunisia via Algiers. This central point shaped Daumas' journey, where he noted: "It is likely that as our numbers grow, direct reports with the first region of the desert will increase. The more secure our routes become compared to those of Tunisia, the more we will monopolize all trade." The French authorities' goal was clear: to hinder Emir Abdelkader's Algerian resistance by forging alliances with the M'zab tribes and obstructing their submission to his authority.³³

B-Henri Duveyrier's Expeditions

When Henri Duveyrier published his book *Les Touareg du Nord* (*The Tuareg of the North*) in 1864, his reputation soared, and he was awarded the grand gold medal by the *Société de Géographie de Paris*. He was celebrated that same year, though the book faced criticism two decades later for painting an ideological image of the Tuareg. The perception of the Sahara began to shift after 1864, as it came to be seen as a direct and growing threat to the continuation of French presence in the Algerian desert.³⁴

In 1859, Henri Duveyrier departed from the oasis of Biskra at the start of his journey, driven by a deep passion for exploring distant lands. Émery de Villemain confirmed that Duveyrier's expedition was a mission assigned to him by the Saint-Simonian family. Duveyrier had already shown an early interest in exploring the Algerian desert during his adolescence. In 1857, he embarked on a trial expedition to the edges of the desert, accompanied by a guide under the supervision of Saint-Simonian³⁵ Oscar MacCarthy, who later assisted Charles de Foucauld in his exploration of Morocco.³⁶

Henri Duveyrier arrived in Laghouat, where he had the opportunity to interact with the Tuareg people. This came after a year of preparation in London under the supervision of Heinrich Barth. Furthermore, Duveyrier's aspirations aligned with those of Marshal Randon, the Governor-General of Algeria from 1852 to 1858. Randon had been actively exploring the Algerian Sahara and had high hopes for establishing trans-Saharan trade. His goal was to attract caravans coming from Sudan, either through Morocco or the Tripoli region, to Algeria.³⁷

It appears that Duveyrier's journey was influenced by the intersection of two factors: the old interest of the Saint-Simonian movement in the Sahara and the growing concern after Algeria established trade relations with Sudan through the desert. After a year, he stopped at the area of Wadi Mzab and Touat, which served as an agricultural production center and a passage for traders entering Sudan and the Mediterranean Sea. He then ventured into the Ahaggar region. Duveyrier's explorations encompassed geography, climate, minerals, plants and animals, the customs and ethnic affiliations of the Mozabites, their religion and languages, their history, commercial relations, and their political status.³⁸

E- The Journey of Émile Masqueray:

In 1885, Émile Masqueray defended his thesis at the Sorbonne University on the formation of cities among settled populations in Algeria, which was published the following year and dedicated to Paul Bert. In the same year, he presented a complementary thesis in Latin titled *De Aurasio monte*, concerning the Aurès region in ancient times. A rereading of Masqueray provides an opportunity to discover a colonial perspective, as his testimony regarding his archaeological campaigns in the Aurès was republished by linguist Ould Brahim, who dedicated his thesis to Émile Masqueray and Berber linguistic studies. Several works were published in the *Berber Studies and Documents Journal*, which has established itself since its inception in 1986 as one of the most important Berber scientific journals. Thus, Émile Masqueray played a significant role through his works in Algeria in the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁹

In his comprehensive study that included the cities of the Kabylie region and the M'zab, Émile Masqueray reached several conclusions and observations, among which is that the Kabyle community differs from the M'zab community, particularly regarding the primary reasons for establishing M'zab cities. He noted that these cities were formed around religious affiliations, which he referred to as the five sacred cities: Ghardaïa, Beni Izguen, Melika, Bounoura, and El-Attaf. He adds that the portion he provided regarding the M'zab region is more accurate than those of his predecessors, due to the meanings that certain Arabic words take on according to the residents who received them, as well as the shared spirit that drives their interests, which Émile Masqueray termed the "*Pentagonal Union*." This concept simultaneously carried colonial ideologies by promoting colonial theses regarding the period of Islamic presence in the region, which he described as one of the most violent and bloodiest periods for the population.⁴⁰

His stay in the M'zab Valley lasted for nearly three months, during which he visited the main cities and engaged with religious scholars to obtain Arabic manuscripts of historical and legal significance. He encountered difficulties in negotiations due to the collusion of some of the sheikhs. However, he succeeded in acquiring copies of the most intriguing works, including the history of *Abu Zakariya al-Warglani* (published in Algiers in 1879), the book of classes (Classes of Scholars), and the biography of Al-Chamakhi. These texts allowed him to understand Ibadhi legislation and contributed to his translation of the Ibadhi manuscript heritage, enriching the historical, geographical, social, ethnological, and linguistic knowledge of the inhabitants of North Africa.⁴¹

During his journey to the Algerian Sahara, Masqueray clarified the role of the scholars of the M'zab Valley in promoting knowledge, preserving Ibadhi books and libraries, and encouraging their acquisition. He also described the condition of the Ibadhi community in the M'zab Valley, along with its religious and social organizations.⁴² It is important to note that his work in the field of translation was fueled by the colonial administration's goal of dismantling and destabilizing the social fabric and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the M'zabi community. Consequently, this aimed to find appropriate methods for managing the conditions faced by the Algerian people.

However, despite these efforts, such studies failed to achieve their objective of separating religion from politics.⁴³

4- Results of the French Exploratory Missions in the Region: Ideological Orientalism and Colonialism

From the outset, it became clear that the goal of the exploratory missions was to facilitate the direct military administration's access to the region. Thanks to the military personnel dispatched and the Orientalists assigned to explore the area, officers from the Department of Indigenous Affairs were appointed to lead the Arab offices, which helped consolidate colonialism and advance its military operations in the region. The M'zab Valley, which had not previously been part of the state's territories, underwent profound changes following negotiations between the administration and local elites.⁴⁴

In the face of these challenges, the M'zab people resorted to the 1853 agreement, demanding strict compliance with it, interpreting it as a treaty of protection. Its annexation was not approved by the French Parliament, creating a formal imbalance that the M'zab exploited, turning it into a political issue and a means of identity until 1948, when they demanded special treatment and justified the idea that the region did not belong to the French thesis that considered Algeria to be French.⁴⁵

During the administrative division of the region in December 1882, the French army established the Ghardaïa district, which included the M'zab Valley, Ouargla, and the Chaamba region of Metlili. This arrangement was practical, as the last three groups retained their old organizational structures to some extent. Given the distances that needed to be covered and the weak demographic presence of the French, the colonial power could not impose itself without the help of local elites in southern Algeria. Dominance transactions took place, during which local elites accepted foreign domination in exchange for symbolic compensations, secondary positions in the administration, privileges, or areas of influence.⁴⁶

The colonial dominance led by French emissaries in the region went through several stages, including the selection of a local leader known as the head of the community or the council presidents. The community proposed three names, from which the administration chose one to oversee public affairs, local police, taxes, water management, market regulation, and public assistance. The leader governed the community, but the presence of the French military administration in the region limited their powers, making their role resemble that of a municipal council. Here, the significant exploratory and investigative work provided by Émile Masqueray to his authorities becomes evident, as it enabled them to occupy the region and impose their influence upon it.⁴⁷

The same observation applies to the explorers preceding or contemporaneous with him; throughout the colonial period, the French authority relied on local elites, who negotiated their participation. The powers transferred to the indigenous leaders were extensive, and the consequences of the alliance between the administration and the elites were significant, especially for women and populations who, whether

landowners, Jews, or enslaved, held a lower status in the eyes of the Ibadi community. The Crémieux Decree of 1870, which granted French citizenship to Algerian Jews, was not implemented in the M'zab region. While the annexation was partially justified by the desire to abolish the slave trade, enslaved populations in the area suffered due to the annexation, leading to the continuation of the slave trade. Since the 1853 agreement, the authorities chose to turn a blind eye to the trafficking and slavery practiced in the region to ensure the continuation of their presence and influence there.⁴⁸

5- French Expeditions and Colonial Service:

From the early years of French colonization, the majority of regions in Algeria underwent profound changes aimed at controlling the territories entered by French emissaries. One of the primary priorities was the systematic structuring of the discoveries made by these emissaries and the dissemination of this information. For this purpose, entire scientific institutions were established, with the main goal of distorting the existing structures to allow for the establishment and "securing" of French military forces and settlers.⁴⁹

Thus, in the context of French expeditions, their research included uncovering Latin origins and promoting the classical values conveyed by Roman architecture. The colonial power advanced in all matters concerning the care of historical sites and monuments, starting with those from the Roman era and later those related to the Islamic period. Since 1840, scientific missions introduced the concept of architectural heritage to Algeria, along with methods for its development and preservation. Up until 1842, Amable Ravaud, a pioneer of scientific exploration in Algeria, promoted 13 archaeological sites in the country.⁵⁰

To ensure the dynamism of their economic sphere, French traders financed the activities of the Mazabite reformists and made their communication and transportation networks available to them. This allows us to understand the role that religious scholars played in the economic success of the Mazabite community and in solidifying France's dominance over international trade. Scholars delivered discourses on the economy and participated in fostering a Mazabite entrepreneurial spirit during the colonial period. Therefore, the alliance between traders and reformist scholars was based on an exchange that can be characterized as the economic capital of the former in return for the cultural and symbolic capital of the latter.⁵¹

The French presence in the M'zab Valley, reinforced by exploratory missions, was characterized by a dual military and scientific rationale. Orientalists contributed to the establishment of a structural axis through the desert extending to Tuat, Tidikelt, Gourara, and Hoggar, culminating in what resembled a truce in the Tindouf area in 1934, despite most of the desert being under control from 1910 to 1915.

In addition, the results of the discovery of the region by Orientalists, archaeologists, and military leaders simultaneously contributed to the precise demarcation of borders, creating a balance between the "Sudanese" forces coming from French West Africa (AOF) in the south and the Meharist forces from the north. This restructured the

existing competition between these armed entities, one under the Ministry of the Interior (the Algerian Meharists) and the other from the Ministry of Colonies.

Following the discovery of the region's wealth, its geographical, natural, and economic qualifications, and knowledge of its trade routes and the controlling Ibadi Mozabite communities, France directed all of this in favor of its economy. It also fabricated some differences between the Chaâmbas and the Mozabites. The works of the Orientalists through their missions and explorations resulted in tribal divisions between Arabs and Amazigh,⁵² which served the French administration. Consequently, the commercial activities in Timbuktu, Tademek, Gao, Ghadames, Ghat, Morocco, and Tunisia were directed to benefit the French market, particularly in the area of imports that featured the production of dates, ropes, and livestock such as sheep and camels.⁵³

These exchanges predominantly occur with northern Algeria and may extend to Morocco and Tunisia, as it serves as the main route for trade with France and foreign countries. The caravan movement also plays a significant role in revitalizing trade in these regions, especially in the areas of Tuat, Gourara, and Tidikelt, as well as towards Central Africa. Once control was established over the Algerian desert, including the M'zab Valley, the exchange of goods shifted from cash transactions in silver to the French franc. This transition opened avenues for speculation and smuggling on the part of traders in the M'zab region.⁵⁴

Conclusion:

In conclusion, our research has led us to several important points. The efforts exerted by the colonial administration in Algeria through ethnographic work surpassed those aimed at military campaigns. The control map of the M'zab Valley did not merely encompass its geographical boundaries; rather, the French colonial scheme clearly extended to all of North Africa within the framework of the French Empire. Once this plan was established, several exploratory and orientalist teams were formed under the guise of disseminating knowledge. However, in reality, these efforts were merely an infiltration into the fabric of the M'zab community to divide its social unity and facilitate the control and subjugation of its inhabitants.

This was evident following the results of the surveys and missions conducted by Dumas Ejan, Henri Duvivier, and Émile Mascara, which concluded that the M'zab community was homogeneous in its tribal structure and socially unified, with considerable commercial wealth. Consequently, the French administration absorbed the Chaâmbas tribes, established the Meharest unit, and redirected the gold trade—indeed, the entire desert trade—for the benefit of the French economy, after enabling the actual presence of the French military administration in the region through Arab offices.

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- (9) We also point out two important studies on the establishment of Arab offices and their role in managing the natives: M. Victor Foucher, "The Arab Offices in Algeria," *Library of the Colon*, Schiller Printing, Paris, 1858 ; Yacono Xavier, "The Arab Offices and the Evolution of Indigenous Lifestyles in the West of the Tell Algerois (Dahra, Chélif, Ouarsenis, Sersou)," Paris, 1953.
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- (11) Ernest Carette, "Scientific Exploration. Historical and Geographical Sciences. Volume II, Research on the Geography and Trade of Southern Algeria," Paris, Royal Printing, 1844, p. 249.
- (12) Charles Amat, "The M'zab and the M'zabites," Paris, 1888, pp. 21-27.
- (13) Ibid, pp. 156-157.
- (14) Even in the Ismaili texts, especially the later ones, the mention of "a man" and "two men" is associated with trade, and all narratives regarding the Mahdi's stay in Sijilmassa refer to the merchant's status. This is inferred from what was said to Al-Yasa ibn Mudarar that "a distinguished man from the great merchants of the East has entered your country." Imad al-Din al-Qurashi, *The Eyes of News and the Arts in the Virtues of the Pure Imams*, edited by Mustafa Ghaleb, Dar al-Andalus, 2nd ed., 1984, p. 158.
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- (17) Chérifi B., 2003 – *Etudes d'anthropologie historique et culturelle sur le Mzab*, thèse de doctorat d'anthropologie, Université de Paris VIII-Saint-Denis, p. 207.
- (18) The primary factor for their migration to M'zab, "a man" and "Sidrata," is the Fatimid military campaign that overthrew their capital, Tihert. Additionally, the emergence of a new domain for the migrating Ibadi tribes, especially the Zenata, confirms the flexibility of the Bedouin system and its ability to adapt to geographical and political conditions, as evidenced by the archaeological excavations that revealed the system of palace architecture. For more information, see: Mohamed Meouak, *The Ibadite Communities of North Sahara in the Middle Ages, in Ibadism in Medieval Islamic Societies: Models and Interaction*, edited by Cyrille Aillet, University Institute of France, 2018.
- (19) Brahim Chérifi, op. cit., p. 210.
- (20) Belhaj Nasser, "The French Control over the M'zab Valley Area between 1853-1882," *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 1, June 2020, pp. 350-351.
- (21) Camille Rousset, *The Conquest of Algeria 1841-1857*, vol. 2, Plon Publishing, Paris, 1889, p. 327.
- (22) Kheira Bachar, "The M'zab Valley: Urban Mutations and Socio-Environmental Concerns," *Insaniyat*, no. 91, 2021, pp. 45-76.

- (23) Al-Jaadi Ridwan, "The Missionary Medicine in M'zab in the Late 19th Century and Early 20th Century and the Residents' Stance Toward It," *Journal of Historical Research*, vol. 8, no. 1, June 2024, p. 461.
- (24) Muhammad Belil, "The Resistance of Algerians to the Policy of Colonial Expansion in the Southeast of Algeria 1850-1918 - Through Archival Documents," *Rawa'id Journal for Research and Studies*, no. 2, 2017, pp. 16-17.
- (25) Jacques Berque, "The Cities of Islam," *Review of the Muslim Worlds and the Mediterranean*, vol. 107-110, 2005, pp. 483-500.
- (26) The Azzaba system is one of the most important religious and social systems unique to the Mozabite community. It is a religious and customary authority with a distinctive character, established by Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Farsita al-Nafusi. The terms Azzaba system, circle, authority, and council are all used interchangeably in references to describe the phases of development of the Azzaba system, which has succeeded in transforming the Mozabite community into a unified micro-family with shared concerns and interests. This unique structure was described by researcher Edward Kous, who stated: "The Azzaba is a customary authority that has existed in the M'zab region for a long time; it is a comprehensive social system that oversees the affairs of the community in various aspects of social, economic, religious, cultural, educational, and awareness-raising life." For more information, see: Hachani Ahmed, *The Azzaba System and Its Role in Ensuring Social Cohesion of the Ibadhi Community in the M'zab Valley*, *Rawaef Journal for Research and Studies*, No. 9, December 2020, p. 83.
- (27) The perception of Algeria evolved according to the French colonial project. During the early years of the invasion, this project was not entirely accurate, which explains the colonizer's relative freedom of spirit in the early studies. In 1830, Algeria was not well known in France. Starting in 1837, the Ministry of War was established, a commission that undertook scientific exploration of Algeria focusing on natural sciences, archaeology, history, and ethnography of the country. These studies had a clear objective: to serve colonial interests, especially since Algeria at that time lacked academic historians. For more information on the topic, see: Jacques Cantier, *Algeria in the Light of History: An Example of the Evolution of Colonial Historiography*, *Cahier d'Histoire Immédiate*, 1994, vol. 6, 2014, pp. 29-55.
- (28) Mebrouk Ghriss, *French Colonial Schemes to Divide Algeria and the Role of Popular Cohesion in Foiling Them, 1956-1962*, *Journal of Social and Human Sciences*, vol. 23, no. 1, June 2022, pp. 728-729.
- (29) Mustafa Ben Waz, *The French Perspective on the Algerian Sahara: Eugène Daumas as a Model*, *Journal of Historical and Archaeological Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2020, p. 249.
- (30) The sources addressing the issue of the Mu'tazilite school in Central Maghreb do not provide an exact date for the entry of Mu'tazilite figures into the region. However, it is certain that there was contact during the lifetime of their leader, Wasil ibn Ata, which can be attributed to the activities of the Ibadhi Khawarij in the first quarter of the second century AH, in the form of preachers sent by Wasil himself, among whom was Abdullah ibn al-Harith. See: Zayan Fatima, *The Role of the Mu'tazilites in Intellectual Development in Central Maghreb*, *Anthropological Journal of Religions*, vol. 19, no. 2, June 2023, p. 337.
- (31) Allaoua Amara, *Ibadism and the Malikization of Central Maghreb: A Study of a Long and Complex Process (4th-12th Century)*, p. 332.
- (32) Eugène Daumas, *The Algerian Sahara: Geographic, Statistical, and Historical Studies*, Paris, 1845, p. 55.
- (33) Ibid, p. 69.
- (34) Dominique Casajus, *Journal of a Journey in the Province of Algiers by Henri Duveyrier*, Saints Calus Edition, 2006, p. 6.
- (35) The establishment of a French colony in Algeria was a long and complex process. For the French colonial authorities, from the landing of their troops in Algiers in 1830 until the centenary of colonization in 1930, this process was accompanied by numerous political and military developments in Algeria, which became a stage for open social experiments based on the theories of socialists and communists initiated by Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier. These intellectual movements aimed to explain and interpret the theory of human settlement and the organization of labor. The contribution of the Saint-Simonian doctrines, in particular, was not merely theoretical; it provided an opportunity to establish new companies and labor organizations following France's occupation of Algeria in 1830. See: Mohammed Rahmoun, *The Contribution of the Saint-Simonians to Colonial Establishment in Algeria*, *Review of the History of Techniques*, V-1, 2016-2018.
- (36) Dominique Casajus, *Henri Duveyrier and the Desert of the Saint-Simonians, Comparative Ethnologies*, Center for Comparative Studies and Research in Ethnology, Montpellier, III, 2004, pp. 7-14.
- (37) Henri Duveyrier, *Journey in the Land of Beni Mezab*, 1859, pp. 178-179.
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- (39) Charles Guittard, *Emile Masqueray and Algeria: The Perspective of a Humanist Historian on 14th Century Algeria, for a History of Archaeology from the 18th Century to 1945*, Ausonius Editions, 2019, pp. 393-399.
- (40) Emile Masqueray, *Formation of Cities Among the Sedentary Populations of Algeria (Kabyles of Djurdjura, Caouia of the Aurès, Beni Mezab)*, thesis presented at the Faculty of Letters in Paris, Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1886, pp. 173-174.
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- (42) Hilali Hanifi, *Sources of Historical Knowledge on the Ibadi Heritage in Algeria in the Works of the French Arabist Emile Masqueray: A Bibliographic Study*, *Journal of Human and Social Sciences Research*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2021, p. 314.
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- (50) Amable Ravoisie, *Scientific Exploration of Algeria*, Volumes I and II. Librairie de Furmin, Didot Frères, Paris, 1866. The National Library of Têlémly in Algiers preserves a copy of this valuable document.
- (51) Bernard Fusulier, *The Concept of Ethos, Sociological and Anthropological Research*, 42/1, 2011, pp. 97-110.
- (52) The issue raised regarding the division between Arabs and Berbers in the Maghreb indicates multiple questions, with the central point being the identity issue of who the Berbers are. The determinants of this answer rely on a critical period in this problematic context, which is the Arab conquest. The definition of Berbers has always been confronted with their Arab counterparts, which is why it is necessary to separate from ideological biases. This topic has been discussed with several influential anthropologists and historians on the international stage, including Gabriel Camps, who demonstrated that Berbers are the majority and the indigenous population of North Africa. For more information, see: Jamel Zanati, *Algeria Through Its Languages and Identities: The History of a Repeated Failure*, in *Political Languages*, no. 74, 2004.
- (53) Ali Bensaad, *Ouargla: From the Old Trans-Saharan Port to the Metropolis*, *Berber Encyclopedia*, vol. 36, 2013, pp. 5899-5911.
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