

Late 19th Century Echoes: Exploring the Correspondence of Cadi Benfettacha Al-Messaadi and His Sons.

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Abstract:

The correspondence between Judge Si Mohamed Benfettacha and his sons illustrates a depiction of a conventional family within Algerian society during the colonial period. Considering these connections, this study illuminates a clear interpretation of the resonances of Messaad as a vital component of Djelfa and Ouled Nail area at the close of the 19th century.

Through the examination of the letters, it also aims to ascertain their meanings and endeavors to explore the historical context, encompassing the sequence of events, the style of the written communication, and the key individuals with their various perspectives. In this way, the reader gains a clearer insight into the opportunities and challenges encountered by the population during that transformative era in Algeria's history.

Keywords: Cadi Benfettacha Al Messaadi; Family letters; Arabic calligraphy; 19th century.

الملخص:

إن المراسلات بين القاضي سي محمد بن فتاشة وأنجاله تصور الأسرة التقليدية في المجتمع الجزائري خلال الفترة الاستعمارية. ونظرًا لهذه الروابط، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على تفسير واضح لتأثيرات مسعد كمكون حيوي لمنطقة الجلفة وأولاد نائل في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر.

و من خلال فحص الرسائل، تهدف أيضًا إلى التأكد من معانيها وتسعى إلى استكشاف السياق التاريخي، بما في ذلك تسلسل الأحداث، وأسلوب التواصل الكتابي، والأفراد الرئيسيين مع وجهات نظرهم المختلفة. وبهذه الطريقة، يكتسب القارئ رؤية أكثر وضوحًا للفرص والتحديات التي واجهها السكان خلال تلك الحقبة التحويلية من تاريخ الجزائر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القاضي بن فتاشة المسعدي؛ رسائل العائلة؛ الخط العربي؛ القرن التاسع عشر.

1. INTRODUCTION

The letters exchanged between Judge Mohamed Benfettacha and his three sons: Al Bachir, Ben Abdullah, and Ali, from 1880 to 1891, depict the villages of Messaad and Djelfa through handwritten Arabic correspondence. Though many family archives are lost and several documents are damaged, the intact and readable documents that still exist provide valuable insights into the Ouled Nail tribe and the village society of that era. Messaad, as the correspondence will disclose once read, was a lively community in the late 19th century, rich in narratives, feelings, cultural legacy, customs, and expressions of communal and familial interaction.

The letters serve as a distinctive resource for comprehending Algerian rural society in the late 19th century and offer an illustrative perspective on a scientific family in positions of power and influence. This research highlights the importance of investigating the connections between significant individuals, geography, and events to understand the social and cultural dynamics of that time. This study mainly analyzes nine letters written between the Cadi and his sons to consider handwriting, content, and historical context. The research thus reveals new avenues for exploring the relationships and experiences of the Benfettacha family during this crucial period in a Beyond-Tell region.

2. DISCUSSION:

2.1 Background and Significance:

With its thorough documentation and wealth of historical and cultural allusions, this study acts as a model for similar investigations, drawing on actual family archives that contain letters. Through family correspondence, it will undoubtedly represent a significant advancement in revealing significant historical details in a specific region of Algeria. Family letters can be priceless repositories of knowledge and emotions that bring back memories of everyday events, vividly describing people, events, and settings. Family letters can act as keys to uncover ideas, cultural fusions, and private worries that have long been unnoticed or misinterpreted.

The significance of analyzing the letters of Mohamed Benfettacha¹ and his sons between 1880 and 1891, is manifold. After a brief presentation of these letters, the epistemological approach forwards and considers several issues, the author and addressees, their role in the preservation and transmission of memories and history, and also the vision of time and time lapse transmitted through these letters. And after all, the letters of this family should not be seen as isolated documents but as part of a much larger cultural context, woven through various enclaves of correspondence at local and global levels.

2.2 Research Objectives

Late 19th Century Echoes: Exploring the Correspondence of Cadi Benfettacha Al-Messaadi and His Sons.

The letters penned by this distinguished Cadi and his sons were crucial for understanding the everyday life of the Algerian people in the southern region at the close of the 19th century, which was little known otherwise. Nevertheless, letters from a family member in a higher position, like a rural judge, ought to be regarded as a key source of information that sheds light on the socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions of certain Algerian villages during that era. These letters provide insight into both the diverse heritage of the authors' families and the unique characteristics of the regions where the recipients live and operate.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the substance of these letters and showcase the most significant ones pertaining to the villages of Messaad and Djelfa,² along with life at the end of the 19th century. This effort has a dual purpose: to emphasize obscure historical sources and to shed light on an unfamiliar local culture in its extensive form and scope, which remains largely unrecognized both within and beyond the region and nation even today.

Consequently, The letters discuss everyday village life, education, relationships, community figures, and late 19th-century events during the era of French domination.

2.3 Methodology

The study's methodology consists of three components: an archival study, a historiographical study, and a discursive analysis. The archival study involves creating a corpus of Arabic letters from the village of Messaad, written in Arabic script with Maghrebi vernacular influences. The Maghreb, namely, is "...the countries of the Maghreb and Andalusia, that is to say the geographical area that extends from the desert of Barqa in Libya to the Ebro in Andalusia, and which has been distinguished throughout history by a mental, religious and civilizational unity..." according to the authors.³ This corpus is plural and fragmented, with various factors influencing its epistolary outcomes, such as different contexts, addressees, motives, and temporal gaps.

The historiographical study looks at how the letters were created and received. It requires auxiliary historical sources for details on the local judge's life, authority, and family, and explores family power dynamics and the letters' language.

3. Biographical Sketch of Cadi Mohamed Benfettacha

Si Mohamed Ben Al-Bachir Ben Abdulkadir (Quider) Ben Rabeh upheld his family's tradition of knowledge and jurisprudence, rooted in a lineage of "Tolbas"⁴ and Quran memorizers known as Almoravids or "Marabouts."⁵ His ancestor Si Ahmed earned the title "Al-Fatah"⁶ for his dedication to science and research. Recognized for his composed nature, elegance, humility.⁷ A passionate scholar (manuscripts, exploring lunar months), he valued education for his children.⁸ He had seven sons, and a daughter

named Reguia.⁹ As a Ksourian¹⁰ he lived in a spacious home(twelve rooms) in Rahbat of Messaad.

Si Mohamed Al Messaadi¹¹ Al Yahyaoui¹² was born in Messaad to a distinguished family with ties to a santon,¹³ well-regarded for its education and wealth. He served as a notable judge¹⁴ in the Ouled Yahia Ben Salem¹⁵ judicial district (1847-1853).¹⁶ His education began with learning the Qur'an at his family's "Mahdara," followed by studies at the Zaouia Othmania of Sidi Ali Ibn Amor,¹⁷ where he received an "Idjaza إجازة." He later taught Qur'anic sciences at the Zaouia of Sidi Uqba.¹⁸ Mohamed's journey in education included a significant influence from the martyr Musa Al-Darqawi¹⁹ during his stay in Messaad(1831-1834).²⁰ After completing his studies and passing a qualifying exam, he entered the judiciary,²¹ aligning with colonizing methods of judge selection(a circular in 1844).²² As a Cadi, Si Mohamed was a highly respected figure in Djelfa, known for his intellect and role as a distinguished judge in the Ouled Nail area,²³ earning both respect and fear from the caïds²⁴ and providing support to citizens. His vibrant character and deep thoughts in ruling (fatwas)²⁵ were influenced by his father's dedication to peace and mediation.²⁶

Si Mohamed was active in reform efforts, welcoming Emir Abdelkader in 1837,²⁷ and was a top student of Si Mussa Al-Darqawi.²⁸and may have met Moulay Al-Arabi Al-Tawil²⁹ in 1846³⁰. He received an official appointment as a judge in Messaad in June 1853,³¹ which coincided with the trial of a robber captured by the Council of Resistance³². Si Mohamed became the first Naili president of the Judicial Council in Laghouat in 1866³³ after being a member since 1855,³⁴ council disbanded over Colonel Flatters' reports.³⁵ Si Mohamed faced sanctions over various cases, such as the "Al Saffah" mosque's potential conversion, which stirred local and occupier tensions.³⁶ His academic credentials included ranking first in an exam in Algiers for the title "Bach Adel."³⁷

Si Mohamed had a profound impact on Messaad's leadership and educational legacy, resulting in numerous manuscripts. He passed away and was interred in Messaad cemetery in September 1891.³⁸

4. The Role of the Cadi in Small Communities

The Benfettacha family had a major influence on the social and political situation of the region and their letters undoubtedly provide important information on the cultural, economic and administrative characteristics of the time. Judge Benfettacha's birthplace in Messaad and his short stay in Djelfa, as well as the letters sent and received from there, are the main subject of the study. However, at the time, Si Mohammed was a well-known national figure who had significant influence over Messaad, Djelfa and Laghouat.

Situated close to Senalba mountain, Djelfa was a significant historical hub for politics and society, home to 680 diverse residents, including the Ouled Nail Khalifa.³⁹ It is where General Yussuf constructed a fort in 1852.⁴⁰ On Ras al-Jabban hill,⁴¹ near the ancient site of Demmed, which was founded by Septimius Severus,⁴² is Messaad, which is roughly 70 kilometers south of Djelfa. During his 1939–1947 archaeological work, Picard focused on Messaad's "ksar Baroud," which was famous for its rock salt used to make gunpowder.⁴³ Known as the "Garden of Ouled Nail,"⁴⁴ Messaad has been known for its diverse environment "flora and fauna"⁴⁵ since its rise late 1700s.⁴⁶ Ninety mud cottages existed in 1867,⁴⁷ but forty of them fell when it rained a lot in 1884.⁴⁸ Serving as a commercial and educational hub, Messaad's Rahba⁴⁹ included Zawiya Alkadiriya,⁵⁰ a court "Dar Al-kadi", a souk (each Sunday in 1860)⁵¹, "Al-Ras" mosque constructed in 1858⁵² and a freshwater canal "Sequia". The village's history reflects its tenacity in the face of colonial change, displaying a blend of Arab, Ottoman, and European influences.

Socially and as indicated by the documents, Si Mohamed was one of the most notable personalities in the village of Messaad during his era. He advanced rows to engage with many prominent figures that visited Messaad among whom: Emir Abdelkader, Mussa Derkaoui, and others, at intermittent times. All while remaining true to his principles as a moderate Muslim by respecting diverse perspectives. Legally, he As an esteemed and distinguished jurist, he was awarded "...the judicial authority and its status" through his appointment in 1853 by Bash Agha Ouled Nael,⁵³ who also "...commanded his sanctity, regard, position, and kindness, ensuring that his sanctity remains unblemished, and that anyone who offends him faces punishment ..."⁵⁴ Additionally, the decree of October 1, 1854, formalizes the autonomy and sovereignty of the Cadi: "The cadi is liberated from the authority of the Khalifas, Bach Aghas, Aghas, and Caïds, who can no longer levy fines on him." He gains authority. He cannot be prosecuted, either by French courts in civilian areas or by military tribunals in military zones, unless there is consent from the governor general...⁵⁵ Thus, he was recognized for his leadership and influence within this community, and it is clear that his involvement in local governance and decision-making made a difference. In an act of defiance, he established himself as a local power that could not be ignored despite the bans and suspensions; this was shown in the appointment of his oldest son, the jurist Si al-Bashir, to succeed him in 1871.⁵⁶

In tiny towns like Messaad and Djelfa, Cadi Si Mohamed played a vital role in the justice system, upholding law and order⁵⁷ while staunchly opposing the French colonial policy of "indigénat," which sustained the status of the native population.⁵⁸ He endeavored to establish administrative authority over the village, as noted in the minutes of the village council session regarding the allocation of the irrigation canal (Sequia الساقية).⁵⁹ And his choices and decrees significantly influenced the community's social

structure by advancing justice and equality,⁶⁰ as highlighted by Dr. Omar Ben Salem in his Djelfa radio show.⁶¹

Documents and contracts attest to his character not only as a reformer and notary but also as a personality who rejuvenated the desolate lands of the village valley for the advantage of his community.⁶² Cadi Benfettacha, an influential Muslim judge from Messaad, recorded significant historical happenings and shaped the cultural and religious identity of the area. In 1865,⁶³ he documented a land endowment (Waqf or Habus) for the Sheikh Ben Khamila zawiya in Rahba,⁶⁴ along with the Kitab (al-Zimam الزمام), which includes historical documents predating 1840. These documents detail the sites of the Al-Fatacha family's lands⁶⁵ and other information regarding the initial inhabitants of the region,⁶⁶ for whom he allocated inheritances to their descendants. Notwithstanding the French occupation, Benfettacha, as highlighted by Dr. Ismail Ziane,⁶⁷ upheld stability within the community via his interpretation of Islamic law⁶⁸ and grasp of local traditions.⁶⁹ His impact reached beyond religious matters, touching political and social realms, aiding the development of the nationalist movement.⁷⁰ This deed was forever captured by a village poetess in remarkably uplifting lines.⁷¹

5. Significance of Benfettacha's Personal Letters

Letters, as placed by Biber,⁷² are casual and informal oral communication genre that exhibits features such as first and second person pronouns, deletions, contractions, present tense verbs, private verbs, speech particles, and general hedges. Personal letters are intimate and informal family correspondences exchanged between individuals, often conveying personal experiences and thoughts.⁷³ "Letters such as those of Tom Peile Davis reveal the role of siblings in creating an emotional support system when separated." The correspondence of Judge Mohamed Benfettacha from the late 19th and early 20th centuries offers a distinct perspective on life in Algeria during that time. The handwritten letters in Arabic emphasize personal experiences relevant to the time and location. They concentrate on everyday life in Messaad and Djelfa, providing priceless perspectives. Inscribed on big reddish-brown vellum, the characters are presented in a distinct masculine Naskh Arabic font (Maghrebian calligraphy), which is creatively and artistically showcased.⁷⁴ These letters act as an important evidence of the region's cultural identity and literary heritage.

Dark ink stands out vividly on sleek paper, grabbing readers' focus. Classical Algerian literature is structured effectively, with each section holding importance, "... a crisp script featuring angles that are challenging to read, yet it possesses a certain aesthetic appeal..."⁷⁵ The Maghreb script has striking angles that are attractive to look at but hard to decipher. Correspondence from Judge Benfettacha and his sons reveals the heritage and traditions of Messaad and the Ouled Nail tribe, addressing issues such as education and local economy. Mastering Arabic script and understanding its cultural background is essential for upcoming studies,⁷⁶ as the language has developed and

encompasses diverse fields of knowledge. The variety of Arabic script, particularly in the Maghrebi style, highlights its richness and intricacy,⁷⁷ necessitating practice for expertise.

Variations in Arabic script, especially in the Maghrebi style, encompass differences in dot placement and the unique depiction of specific letters, which necessitates practice for proficiency. "...The Andalusians and Moroccans initially used Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali's script in their early Qur'ans, later transitioning to the script of al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi regarding the dots and letter formations, ... diverging from him in the design of hamzat al-wasl and hamzat al-qata', as they inscribed large colored dots in two distinct hues...".⁷⁸ In Arabic, diglossia indicates that written forms significantly mirror classical norms, frequently shaped by the Qur'an.⁷⁹ The "fa" (ف) is identified by a dot beneath it, while the "qaf" (ق) features a dot positioned above. The dots of the curved "qāf" (ق) and the "nūn" (ن) are being neglected. Maghrebians omit the dots of the "ta" (ت) and "ya" (ي), along with the third dot of the "thā" (ث) or "shīn" (ش), and write them distinctly. There is also accuracy needed to write the "Ra" (ر) and the "Zay" (ز) and to carry them over to the following line. Certain other letters are overly elongated when they appear at the end of a word and constitute its foundation, such as: "sīn" (س), "shīn" (ش), "ya" (ي), "lām" (ل) ...".⁸⁰

The letters also emphasize the use of family language and styles of handwriting, displaying traditional calligraphy⁸¹ that enhances the text's decorative appeal. They express feelings and social conventions enhanced by the tactile experience of ink and scenery. Benfettachas' correspondences act as a historical record showcasing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the area, providing important insights into both language and community traditions.

5.1 Analysis of Cadi Mohamed and Sons Letters

Al-Fattacha family has a large archive of correspondences,⁸² including letters from dignitaries and friends.⁸³ Given the size of the archive, samples of letters received or sent by the judge's sons are presented to by chronological order save time and energy. The letters are 20cm long and 10 cm wide, written on a single page with marginal notes. The economy of paper is due to its absence and cost at the time. The letters do not focus on presentation or elegant language, sometimes appearing as an elegant draft due to the writer's urgency or lack of time. All letters begin with the phrase "Praise be to Allah" (الحمد لله) on the top right of the paper and "Peace be upon the Prophet Mohamed" on the left. Habitually, at the beginning of each letter they introduce salutations to the addressee(s) with much respect using the words before the names "Si" (سي) or monsieur "Al-Sayed" (السيد) or sometimes the word "Hadrat" (حضرة).

The letters collectively depict various facets of the Cadi and his sons' existence in Messaād: they express personal updates and feelings and emphasize the everyday struggles faced by the Al-Fattacha family.

Letter 1: Si Ali to his father on February 22, 1880

The letters from the family are alike, yet their artistic flair distinguishes them. The lovely writing demonstrates the skill of the author. He starts with a heartfelt salutation to his father, invokes Allah's peace and blessings for him, and describes him as a brilliant role model and an educated scholar.

Sons from distinguished local families had the opportunity to seek higher education beyond the village. Among them, Si Ali, Si Benabdullah, and Si Al Bachir stood out in science. Si Ali,⁸⁴ who gained recognition for his calligraphy and a reciter of the Holy Qur'an, learned at the zawiya and subsequently in the Medersa⁸⁵ of Algiers 1879.⁸⁶ Si Mohamed recognized his director and mentor, Hassan Ben Brihamat, as the "Sheikh of Algeria's scientific schools." In contrast to his father, he did not take on the role of a judge but worked as a secretary "Koja" خوجة for his tribe. His writing demonstrated a powerful grasp of language and diverse vocabulary. The letter contained familiar vocabulary and foreign expressions, including terms for shoes "صباط", livestock yield "khalfat خلفات"; and telegrams "dépêche" ديبيش and property "bailik" بايلك.

Even though he was educated, Si Ali omitted punctuation in his personal writing. He frequently encountered French terminology in his job and spoke about financial difficulties concerning the receipt of his scholarship. He earlier dispatched a telegram to his father regarding his requirements and his father's shoe size to craft lightweight shoes for him.

Letter 2: Si Mohamed to his sons, January 1884

The judge, although his sons are over twenty, conveys a strong bond and love for them, emphasized in his remarks through tender words. His intense urge to instruct and mentor them is evident, particularly in his interactions with their educators. He radiates pride upon receiving compliments about his son Si Ben Abdullah from the teacher, Sheikh Abulkacem Al-Hafnaoui Ghoul,⁸⁷ causing the judge to express his happiness repeatedly, "... As soon as the Sheikh's message reached me, I experienced immediate joy... by Allah, by Allah, I was thrilled with the news of your conduct and your noble deeds..."⁸⁸

Moreover, the judge's residence in the village of Messaad is depicted, highlighting its twelve rooms and various utility areas, which makes management challenging for his wife. The residence features a courtyard "الحوش", a storage space "الحانوت", a corridor "shed السقيفة", that leads to the center, and a stable "مربط الدواب". It also includes locally produced footwear referred to as "Sabat Mamlakh" صباط ملخ. The judge directs

his son to handle house repairs, which involve replacing door parts and paying the worker "Al-Rumi الرومي". In conclusion, the judge references a note "special" from ⁸⁹ his son's teacher "Sheikh", which might include a poem and some vegetables, saying, "with the first one that comes in" and wraps up by offering regards to notable residents of the village.

Letter 3: Si Mohamed to his Son Si Ali in January 1885

The content explores the life of a Cadi (judge) in Djelfa, highlighting his commercial activities and personal interests through a letter to his son dated January 1885. Djelfa served as a hub for traders, scholars, and influential figures. The Cadi communicated with his son Si Ali, sending items "... I am therefore sending you here half an ounce of silk, a piece of soap and kohl wrapped in paper inside the silk with the piece of soap..." . He expressed his interest in books, mentioning two he recently purchased, a good explanation of the "Burdah" and "Nuzhat al-Mahasin" in two parts. Book Day, or "Youm Al-kotoub," may have been a special day for book sales at the market.

The Cadi also valued local crafts, noting the significance of handmade items like the saddle-bow (Qarbous القربوس). He was passionate about learning, often gifting books to others, especially fellow Cadis(a letter in archive). The Cadi maintained strong, respectful relationships with family and the community while demonstrating humility. The letter illustrates the Cadi's dedication to trade, culture, and knowledge, reflecting his character and connections within Djelfa.

Letter 4: Si Benabdullah to His Father February 1885

The letter, despite some deterioration and unclear text, are straightforward and readable since they are crafted with minimal focus on linguistic and cognitive aspects. With this opening: "To our father, the esteemed scholar, Sharif Sidi Mohammed Benftacha, peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings. . . " Si Ben Abdullah inquired about the judge's health and, as per the family's custom, notified him that he had sent early produce (turnips) "Fal الفال". He incorporated this detail in the letter while addressing a case awaiting judgment in the Court of Algiers "La Court لاكور".

Typically, most letters include a conclusion note: Ben Abdullah asked his father about salt and tannins for preserving animal skins, which are used in the region for various purposes, including cleaning and traditional medicine. Families who raised animals used them to make important products, such as prayer mats, and (shkwa الشكوة), (ukka العكة) for food (rub الرُب), (whay L`ben اللَّيْن) preservation.

Letter 5: Si Mohamed to his son Si Al-Bachir in January 1886

As this letter was being composed, the Cadi was occupied with his responsibilities in Shallala, a village located in Tiaret, roughly 144 km northwest of Djelfa. Historical documents show that Ksar Shalala was established in the early 1800s.⁹⁰ Following the standard greetings, the Cadi spoke to his three sons and his grandson, Si Al-Bachir, who acted as a judge when required, imparting love and blessings. He let Si Al-Bachir know that he had dispatched a book titled "Burdah of Al-Busiri" by Sheikh Ashour Al-Tunisi, together with socks for ablution (جورب الوضوء wudu). This illustrated the Cadi's dedication to religious observances and motivated his sons to remain spiritually involved, even amid sickness.

The Cadi subsequently inquired about the livestock, particularly sheep and goats, and the location where the shepherd led them to pasture. He was curious whether the sheep were facing the qiblah (سافل Safel). It was observed that herders usually relocate south for improved grazing during winter and head north in summer, "... the "grands nomades" commenced their achaba following French pacification."⁹¹

Letter 6: Si Mohamed to His Sons in September 1886

The judge's letter conveys greetings to his three elder sons and his grandson Musa (1862-1925). The letter highlights the family's commitment to Islamic values and their emphasis on moral behavior. The judge sent his regards to his sons: Al-Bashir (deceased. 1891), Ben Abdullah (d. 1924), Ali (d. 1907), and grandson Musa, extending wishes for their well-being and granting them peace and mercy, "To hadrat our children and the fruit of our liver, ..." Historical documentation emphasizes the family's dedication to Islamic tenets and community customs, reinforcing their moral values.

When Si Mohamed was moved to Ksar Al-Shallala,⁹² his family advised him to refuse the position to avoid any potential complications from his legal zeal in an unfamiliar setting. He chose the position due to his bravery and acknowledged reputation: "... Thus, let it be known to you that people have already recognized me, some visually, others via sound... ." The public's support for the judge became evident when they welcomed him as soon as he began his duties, there. The judge demonstrated his legal commitment by dispatching "zakat"⁹³ and addressing tax issues concerning a tax (haq al tariq)⁹⁴ given to an authority known as the " caïd", emphasizing colonial injustices.⁹⁵ The letter mentions "lime" being send out to his sons, indicating his concern for family matters despite the physical distance. It sheds light on the judge's character, the values of his family, the challenges faced because of colonial traditions, and his continual engagement in his family's affairs.

Letter 7: Si Mohamed to Sons January 1887

The Cadi wrote to his sons using simple and casual language. This letter reveals his modest character and his struggles under colonial rule. He communicated with his sons clearly, showing his humble nature as a common man. He expressed pain due to

colonial power and the exploitation by appointed " caïds" who collected funds through penalties. In 1887, he requested to be released from service to the French general but was denied. He lived impulsively, paying off debts to trader "Al-Mzabi" and advising his sons on tax matters related to livestock "Ashour" . When census "Jarida الجريدة" time came, he sent detailed letters to caïd Ahmed Ben Al-Sharif about the animal count, emphasizing the connection between caring for animals and family, " ... if you take care of my animals, it is as if you take care of me... ." Earlier, the judge had ordered his grandson Musa to gather animals for wood, a crucial resource for survival during periods when people travelled north into the forests or south to the Dayat. Without priority, the judge commuted between Ksar Chellala and Djelfa, mainly using the bus "Boushta البوشطة" and, when it was not available, a horse. His schedule caused him to frequently miss the bus. The letter illustrates the cadi's efforts to navigate the challenges of colonialism while caring for his family and community.

Letter 8: Si Ali to his father Si Mohamed in August 1888

Similar to all family letters, this correspondence from August 1888 has no variation in format or appearance. In the correspondence, the rear of the paper is unmarked, providing the sender with sufficient room on the right side for extra details or annotations. This Messaadi academic family letter emphasizes the importance of education and reciprocal respect within the family. The family members had deep connections based on love and respect. Ali demonstrated profound respect for his father, portraying him as a revered and insightful leader, "... the finest of scholars and the most enlightened of the virtuous ... the mentor of preachers and the summoner of guides, the essence of knowledge....". The letters were carefully penned, reflecting the family's strong educational values. The Messaadi family held traditional religious values and ancestral practices in high regard. The family leader upheld discipline, and the conversations between father and son showcased their strong bond, reflecting closeness and reciprocal regard, as they "... engaged with the shepherd and entrusted salary choices to the judge... ." In general, the communication highlights the significance of education, respect, and strong familial connections in the cultural values of the Messaadi family.

Letter 9: Si Mohamed to His Sons in June 1891

Cadi Si Mohammed was a kind and humble man, who always used polite expressions such as "Hadrat حضرة" when addressing his sons throughout his life. Written three months before his death, the letter contains deep thoughts about his family and the Messaād community, and focuses on two important events: the birth of a grandson named after his late eldest son Si Al-Bachir, symbolizing the family's legacy; and the birth of his young son, Ali Ben Othman, who displayed remarkable eloquence, demonstrating the family's passion for education. The judge expressed gratitude for his

sons' early achievements, "al-Far, الفال", highlighting the emotional attachment and aspiration for their spiritual well-being. ". . . and I have received (al-Fal). May Allah grant you Paradise (Fal)." He also recounted his difficulties in obtaining the supplies he needed (finding and purchasing door parts (الوح الباب)), which highlights his sincerity⁹⁶ and his struggle for health and help. The letter ends with a warm greeting to friends and emphasizes the importance of social connections. Common themes include family ties, perseverance, and moral conduct.

6- Conclusion

Correspondence from families in late 19th-century Algeria showcases a profound blend of individual feelings and cultural identity, serving as both historical documentation and sincere expressions. These letters uncover the intricate tapestry of family connections, societal influences, and life under colonial rule. They act as reminders of human resilience, showcasing how love and duty transcend challenges. These vibrant accounts bring history to life, revealing the aspirations, struggles, and joys of individuals navigating a complex world. The balance of emotion and artistry in these writings deepens our understanding of Algerian literature and provokes reflection on universal themes of connection and belonging.

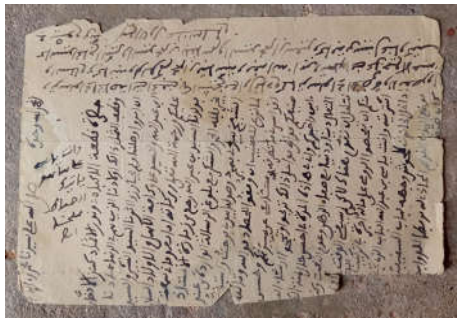
The Benfettachas' letters undoubtedly offered insight into social interactions in a part of the Ouled Nail region during the late 19th century, shedding light on personal experiences and cultural context. These letters served as a significant historical document, enhancing our understanding of the social structures and relationships of that era. By engaging with these stories, we gained a richer insight into diverse human experiences and their continuous influence on our world. These "echoes" highlight the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and reconstructing a more inclusive narrative. The letters encourage contemplation of societal values and strengthens community bonds. Local dialects and references help maintain cultural identity. Examining personal letters is essential for comprehending social and cultural dynamics. Future initiatives should aim at safeguarding the narratives of families from other neglected villages in Algeria's history. Maintaining these stories enriches our collective memory and fosters a greater understanding of cultural verb and different traditions, ensuring that these voices resonate throughout time.

7. REFERENCES:

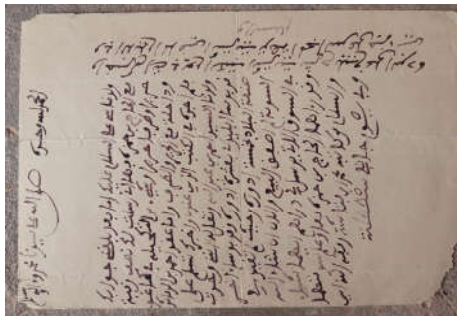
A- Primary Sources: Cadi Benfettacha and Sons Copies of Letters.



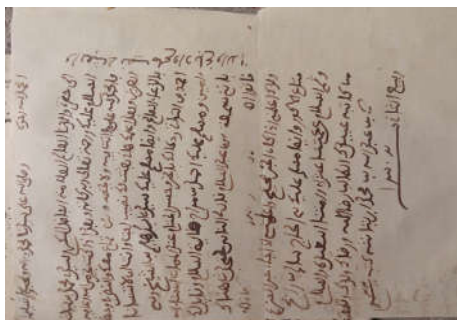
1. Si Ali to his father
on February 22, 1880



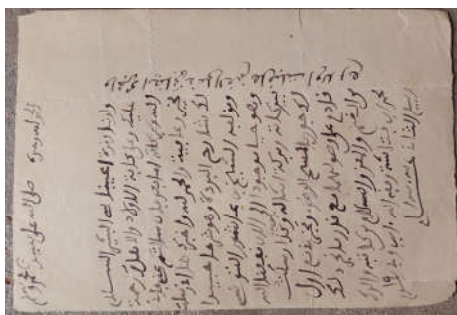
2. Si Mohamed to his sons,
January 1884



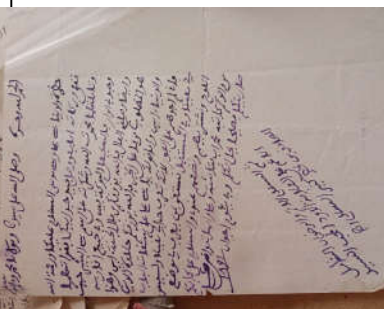
3. Si Mohamed to his Son
Si Ali in January 1885



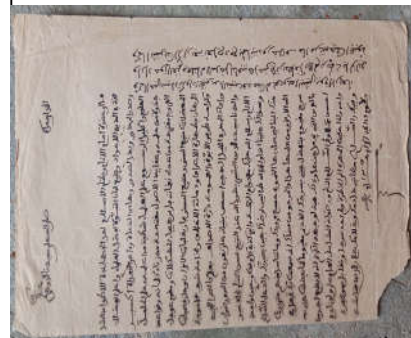
4. Si Benabdullah to His
Father February 1885



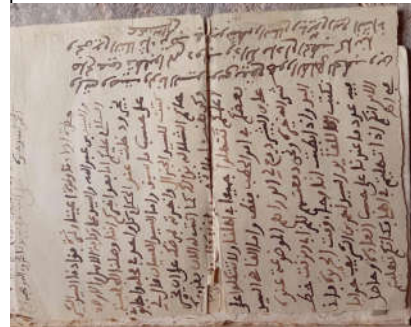
5. Si Mohamed to his son
Si Al-Bachir in January
1886



9. Si Mohamed to His
Sons in June 1891



8. Si Ali to his father Si
Mohammed in August 1888



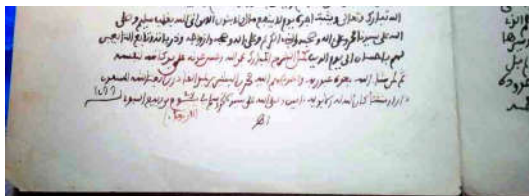
7. Si Mohamed to Sons
January 1887



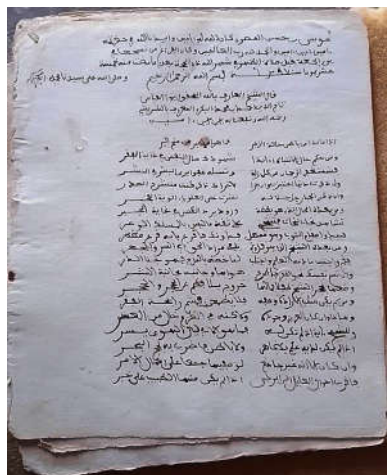
6. Si Mohamed to His Sons
in September 1886

Late 19th Century Echoes: Exploring the Correspondence of Cadi Benfettacha Al-Messaadi and His Sons.

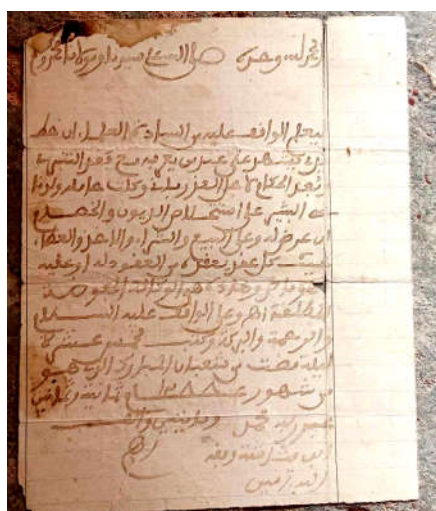
B- APPENDIX:



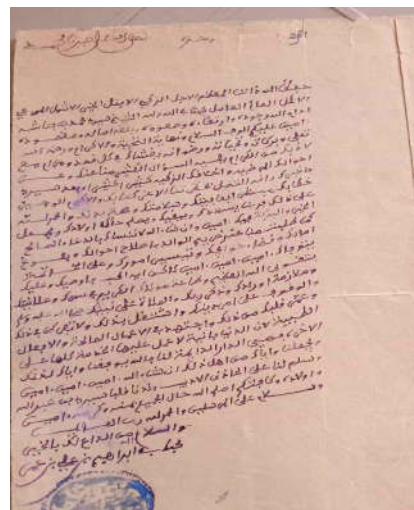
**App.1. Si Mohamed Al Messaadi
1860.**



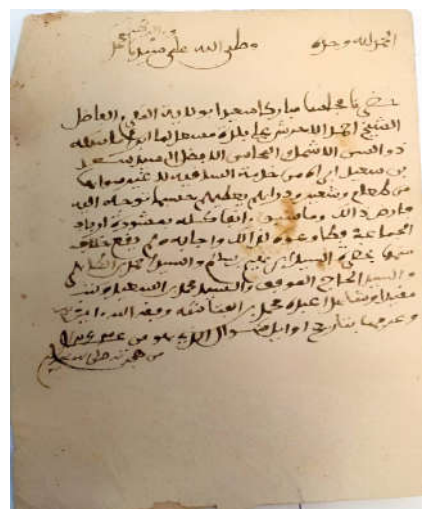
**App.3. Derkaoui's document
dated 1832.**



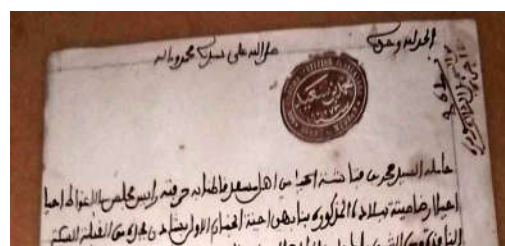
**App.4. A written assignment
from the judge to his son, Si
Al-Bachir, in the year 1871.**



**App.2. Letter from Sheikh of
Zaouiya of Tolga**



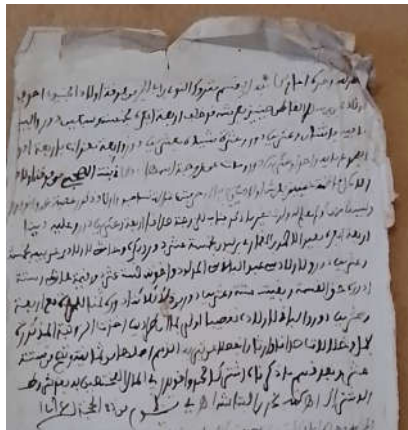
**App.5. Minutes of the
village council meeting
regarding the management**



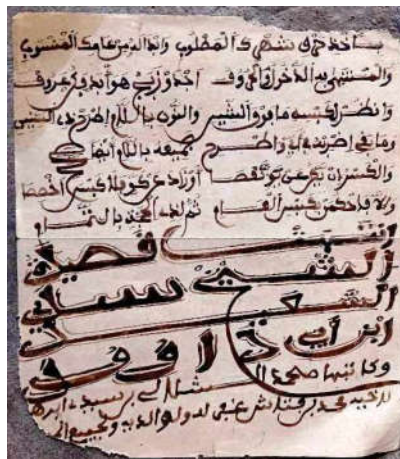
**App 6. Contract for the dead lands
reclaimed by the judge in the valley
of the village.**



App.7. Endowment of the properties of Si Ben Azzouz Ben Ayash



App.8. Division of Al-Naoui Ben Belkheir Al-Yahyaoui estate in 1858.



App.9. A letter from Si Mohamed Al-Shalali Ben Si Ibrahim to Si Mohamed.

C- Secondary Sources: Texts and scientific articles related to the topic.

¹ In some French documents, the name of the Cadi is spelled in various ways.: Si Mohammed ben Fattacha, Ben fettacha, Ben Fettah, Benfettoha.

² A lot of information and landmarks in the judge and sons' letters about Djelfa were mentioned in addition to Messaad throughout this presentation.

³ عمر آفا و محمد المغراوي, "الخط المغربي تاريخ و واقع و آفاق", مطبعة النجاح الجديدة-الدار البيضاء, الطبعة الاولى 2007.

⁴ FRANOM36_GGA01ii_263_0066

⁵ Journal officiel de l'Algérie, 31 mai 1935, 453.

⁶ In another ANOM archive dated 1847, we come across the word "Mefticha" to refer to the name of Judge Si Mohammed, which may undoubtedly be a mistake.

⁷ Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), cote d'archive: GGA01ii 263, p: 66.

⁸ For example, he named his son after the Sheikh of the Tolga Zawiya, Si Ali Ben Othman, and he named his eldest son's grandson Si Al-Bachir after the martyr Si Musa Ben Hassan al-Darqawi, and he named his grandson of Si Ben Abdullah after Si al-Hafnawi.

⁹ Si Mohammed left a will before Judge of Mesaad village in 1889.

¹⁰ Messaad was referred to as "Ksar" in reference to the ancient small village. Its inhabitants were known as "Ksours," while those who later joined or resided outside the "Ksar" from the same tribes were identified by their tribal names. Ksours denotes the inhabitants of the Ksar.

¹¹ See Appendix 1. Being originally from Messaad, the nickname of "Al-Messaadi" stuck to him and mentioned in a contract of one of his properties in 1867 by the Cadi; as well as he himself mentioned it in his manuscripts.

¹² Same source FRANOM36_GGA01ii_263_0066

¹³ The term "santon" refers to a Muslim ascetic or a monument containing the tomb of a Muslim saint.

¹⁴ FRANOM36_GGA50ii_240_0064.

¹⁵ Si Mohammed may have been appointed by Caliph Ahmed ben Salem. The Oulad Yahya ben Salem and Oulad Saad ben Salem were under the Aghaliks of the Sahara led by Agha Yahya ben Amer and Caliph Ahmed Ben Salem before colonialists cut ties in June 1851. FRANOM36_GGA81ii_001_0035)

¹⁶ FRANOM36_GGA50ii_270_0049.

¹⁷ See Appendix 2. A letter from Sheikh of Tolga Zaoui to Si Mohamed

¹⁸ الأخضر عالب، الحركة الإصلاحية في مناطق أولاد نايل منطقة مسعد أنموذجا 1928-1956، دار خيال، 2022، ص. 34.

¹⁹ See Appendix 3. Si Musa Derkaoui's document found in the family archive dated 1832.

²⁰ Trumelet, Corneille, L'Algérie légendaire, Librairie Adolphe Jourdan, Alger, 1892, P307

²¹ A verbal testimony by Imam Si Mohamed Bakria in a meeting.

²² FRANOM36_GGA50ii_012_0003.

²³ الدكتور اسماعيل زيان، تاريخ القضاء والمجالس الشرعية بمنطقة الجلفة خلال القرن التاسع عشر، بحث في الأرشيف الفرنسي والمحلي، مجلة العلوم القانونية والاجتماعية لجامعة الجلفة، المجلد 9 - العدد 1، 1 مارس 2024، 385 <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/241458>

²⁴ The influence of the judge and the avoidance of conflict with him by the local authority are clearly evident in some of the family archive letters.

²⁵ As an example An old man's death coinciding with his grandson's raised a dispute among heirs about who died first and who would inherit. Cadi Benfettacha resolved the issue, preventing a major clash between two families..

²⁶ This role has been confirmed by some of the most prominent figures of the A'arch of Ouled Toaba, to which one of the two characters belong.

²⁷ المسعود بن سالم، "قصيدة تنشر لأول مرة للقاضي سي محمد بن فتاشة (1790-1891!!)", الجلفة انفو، الجلفة 2023، https://www.djelfainfo.dz/ar/mag_cult/141875.html

²⁸ المقاومة الشعبية في بلاد أولاد نائل - مقاومة الحاج موسى بن الحسن المدني الدرقاوي 1831 - 1849، الجلفة انفو 2017، 280.

²⁹ د. المسعود بن سالم، توبونيميا مقاومة الأمير عبد القادر في بلاد أولاد نايل (1836-1847)، الجلفة انفو، الجلفة 2023، https://www.djelfainfo.dz/ar/homme_histoire/141845.html

³⁰ د. بن سالم المسعود، "القاضي سي المصطفى بن دلماجة"، خيمة التراث الشعبي بالجلفة، الجلفة 2022 <https://turath.djelfainfo.dz/4250.html>

³¹ A handwritten document signed in the name of Bachagha Ouled Nail Mohamed Cherif Belahrech on 19 Ramadan 1269, holding his seal which was dated 1266 (1850).

³² د. إسماعيل زيان، نسخ المصاحف بمنطقة الجلفة خلال القرن التاسع عشر، قراءة في رسالة مخطوطة متبادلة بين مدرسي القرآن بزوايا الجلفة، مجلة المعيار، مجلد: 27 عدد: 5 (رت 74)، 2023،

05

³³ Al-Mubashir newspaper, January 22, 1866.

³⁴ Bulletin officiel des actes du gouvernement /Ministère de la Guerre, Algérie n° 494. Arrêté du 30 novembre 1855, article n°1

³⁵ Revue d'École d'Anthropologie de Paris, Volumes 16 à 17, Félix Alcan, Editeurs, Paris 6, 1906, p 376

³⁶ Si Mohammed first grandson Si Al Bachir (1891-1973) confirmed the Cadi's position and role in many occasions to his family and entourage.

³⁷ FRANOM36_GGA01ii_019_0008

³⁸ More than a hundred rows prayed over his body, and eighty tolba read the Holy Quran over him after they followed his funeral procession to the cemetery.

³⁹ Louis Piesse, "Itinéraire historique et descriptif de l'Algérie, comprenant le Tell et le Sahara (1815-189.)", PARIS Librairie de L. Hachette ET 1862.142, p 345-347.

⁴⁰ Louis Jean Max Reuss, "À travers l'Algérie", Librairie General de Vulgarisation, Paris, 1884.

⁴¹ It was mentioned by the writer (Emile Masqueray) in his book (Memories and Visions of Africa) - printed in 1894 AD - who said that "the mosque was built on the grave of one of the righteous" in one of the French documents dated in 1882 AD, which says that the mosque was built in 1858 AD, in which the full name of the mosque was mentioned: "Ras al-Jabban" - or cemetery - meaning the head of the cemetery. Some locals thought those graves in and in the area north of the mosque were of Ouled Zaid tribe.

⁴² P. Trouset, "Messad/Castellum Dimmidi(Antiquité)", Encyclopédie berbère, 2010, p4898-4902.

⁴³ Moniteur algérien: journal officiel de la colonie : annonces légales, judiciaires, administratives, commerciales et maritimes 5 fevrier 1856 p 3. Si Al-Bachir, the cadi's father was among those who used to make the gunpowder By extracting saltpeter from the soil of this site and sell it in the area around.

⁴⁴ Joanne Adolphe, "Dictionnaire géographique, administratif, postal, statistique, archéologique, etc., de la France, de l'Algérie et des colonies....", Volume 2, M-Z /1869, p 2481

⁴⁵ A part of the region aside the oued was named after " Shaden", (the baby of the deer) which their bleat could be heard every evening.

⁴⁶ د. المسعود بن سالم, "قصور بلاد أولاد نايل بين الماضي والحاضر ... قصور حاضرة مسعد", الجلفة انفور, الجلفة, 2017. https://www.djelfainfo.dz/ar/homme_histoire/10905.html

⁴⁷ Bérard Victor, "Indicateur général de l'Algérie:description géographique, statistique et historique de chacune des localités des trois provinces" (3e édition) 1867, p307.

⁴⁸ The newspaper Akhbar, journal de l'Algérie, 1884.

⁴⁹ أعمال الندوة الثانية حول "توثيق التراث الشعبي لمنطقة الجلفة" (من الجمع الى النشر) تكريما للشاعر الشعبي الكبير ابو بكر بن صولة", المكتبة الرئيسية للمطالعة العمومية المجاهد جمال الدين بن ساعد و الجلفة انفور، ماي 2023، ص 333.

⁵⁰ محمد رضا هلوب، "تاريخ مسعد من عصور ما قبل التاريخ إلى العصر العثماني"، المجلد الأول 1، ومضة للنشر والتوزيع والترجمة، 2022. ص 409-410

⁵¹ M. Marius Outrey, "Dictionnaire de Toutes les Localites de L'Algerie", Imprimerie Alger Dubos Freres, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1860, p122.

⁵² ANOM (archives nationales d'outre-mer), Registre de la mairie de Titterie, 1882.

⁵³ A document found in the family archive on the appointment of Si Mohamed as a judge for the village of Mesaad in 1853 AD.

⁵⁴ الدكتور اسماعيل زيان، نفس المصدر <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/241458>

⁵⁵ E. Lourdaud, Muslim Justice in Algeria, Typographie and Lithography, A. Bouyer 23, Bab Azzoun, Algeria, 1884, pp. 85-86

⁵⁶ See Appendix 4. The power of attorney, which the judge wrote in his own hand in 1871 during his punishment, is in the family archives. He took the initiative to fill the void and serve the interests of his family and his citizens, openly defying the colonizer.

⁵⁷ Dr. Omar Bensalem same source, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdZcrVgfeZk>

⁵⁸ French subjects under the 'indigénat' law lost most of their political freedoms and rights. The native is a person born in the country, while the indigenous person has lived there since its settlement.

⁵⁹ See Appendix 5. This document, considered as the first administrative one was found in Al-Zawiya Al-Qadiriya, is the minutes of a village council meeting (1828-1847) that included senior village officials discussing the management of Al-Sakia.

⁶⁰ أبو القاسم سعد الله، تاريخ الجزائر الثقافي، دار البصائر للنشر والتوزيع، م ج 4، 2007، ص 429

⁶¹ Dr. Omar Ben Salem, same source.

⁶² Appendix 6. Contract for the dead lands reclaimed by the judge in the valley of the village to provide work for farmers and food.

⁶³ د. إسماعيل زيان، نسخ المصاحف بمنطقة الجلفة خلال القرن التاسع عشر، قراءة في رسالة مخطوطة متبادلة بين مدرسي القرآن بزوايا الجلفة، مجلة المعيار، مجلد: 27 عدد: 5 (رت 74)، 2023، 32.

⁶⁴ See Appendix 7. Endowment of the properties of sheikh Zaouia Khomila Si Ben Azzouz Ben Ayash.

⁶⁵. All that remains is a record of the division of the property of one of his relatives between his father, Al-Bashir, and his uncle, Ahmed, on the one hand, and the woman's husband, on the other.

⁶⁶ See Appendix 8. Division of Al-Naoui Ben Belkheir Al-Yahyaoui estate in 1858.

⁶⁷ same source, Ziane Ismail . Dr: <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/241458>

⁶⁸ Dr. Omar Ben Salem, same source.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdZcrVgfeZk>

⁶⁹ Dr. Omar Ben Salem, same source
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdZcrVgfeZk>.

⁷⁰ Benallègue, A. "The Role of the Cadi in the Algerian Countryside during the 19th Century." *Journal of North African Studies*, 20(3) ,2015, 456-472.

⁷¹ Dr. Omar Ben Salem, same source.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdZcrVgfeZk>

⁷² Douglas Biber, "Variation Across Speech and Writing", Cambridge University Press, 1988, p205.

⁷³ Douglas Biber, "Variation Across Speech and Writing", Cambridge University Press, 1988, p205.

⁷⁴ عمر آفا، و محمد المغراوي، الخط المغربي، تاريخ واقع وآفاق (المجلد 1)، مطبعة النجاح الجديدة الدار البيضاء، 2007م، ص 55
⁷⁵ عبد الفتاح عبادة، انتشار الخط العربي في العالم الشرقي والعالم الغربي. المطبعة الهندية مصر، 1915م، ص 79

⁷⁶ N. Venkata rao, S.Sastry, N.Chakravarthy, Kalyanchakravarthi P, "Optical character recognition technique algorithms, *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology*", Vol.83. No.2, 2016.

⁷⁷ عفيف بهنسي، الخط العربي، أصوله، نهضته، انتشاره، ط1، دار الفكر، دمشق، 1974، ص 09
د. محمد الحاكم بن عون، "من اسرار الخط المغربي"، المجلة الجزائرية للمخطوطات، جامعة وهران 1،
المجلد 18 العدد 2 سبتمبر 2022، ص 260

⁷⁹ أحمد بن نعمان، "كيف صارت الجزائر مسلمة عربية"، دار الامة قسنطينة، الطبعة الثانية، 1998، ص 59

⁸⁰ كرزيقة علي، "المظاهر الفنية في المخطوطات التواتية، الخط المغربي أنموذجا"، المجلد: 22 العدد: 04
، 2019 ص 427

⁸¹ We found a letter from Abu Al Abbas Ben Abdullah Ben Thamer Al Bousaadi, a skilled calligrapher and writer, sent to Judge Si Mohamed. He expressed his happiness at receiving a copy of his manuscript to rewrite it in his own artistic way.

⁸² The majority of family archives dating back to before 1870, such as letters, contracts, and manuscripts, have been lost, and only a handful of pages from the record book of Judge "Al-Zammam" have been discovered.

⁸³ See Appendix9. As a sample, a letter from the famous jurist Si Mohammed Al-Shalali Ben Si Ibrahim.

⁸⁴ The reasons for their death were unclear. He was with the tribe's caïd, on a mission to Ghardaia. Si Ali was found dead in the Khan's room, praying. They were buried in Al-Atf cemetery, Ghardaia.

⁸⁵ For more information about the Medersa, see: Rinn Louis, Note sur l'instruction publique musulmane en Algérie, 1882

⁸⁶ Si Ali Admittance in Medersa of Algiers. FRANOM36_GGA01ii_217_0009.

⁸⁷ Al-Hafnawi was the mufti and teacher at the Algiers Medersa (Si Ben Abdullah teacher). He was also a writer in Al-Mubacher newspaper.

⁸⁸ Repetition " By Allah, By Allah " is a powerful rhetoric technique to emphasize the points and help it stick in the readers's minds.

⁸⁹ "Rumi" refers to non-Arabs, based on the language "Rumiya". It can mean any foreign worker, as many settled in the city.

⁹⁰ د. المسعود بن سالم, "قصر الشلالة ... إبنة قصر زينية", الجلفة انفو, الجلفة, 2022, https://www.djelfainfo.dz/ar/homme_histoire/13486.html

⁹¹ Wolfgang Trautmann, "The nomads of Algeria under French rule: a study of social and economic change", Journal of Historical Geography, 15, 2 (1989) 126-138

⁹² At that time, it was customary for a newly appointed official to convene the local notables before taking on his responsibilities and starting his tasks.

⁹³ The Cadi was known to pay only what he was due of according to the norms of Shari'a.

⁹⁴ It is not known the purpose of this tax and whether it was intended for the passage of individuals or cattle, or both.

⁹⁵ د/ كريم ولد النبية, "القياد في نظام الإدارة الاستعمارية التواطؤ، التعسف والخيانة (1867-1962)", مجلة القرطاس, قسم العلوم الانسانية جامعة سيدي بلعباس, العدد الثاني جانفي 2015

⁹⁶ FRANOM36_GGA01ii_263_0066