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Milestones in Honaïne Town
-during the Islamic Medieval Period-.

محطات من تاريخ أَهنَايْ (هُنَيْن) –خلال العصر الوسيط الإسلامي–.

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Abstract:

This study analyzes and details the importance and role of Honaïne. We have dealt with and traced through them the roots of this importance to show that the city possessed strong foundations and qualifications that made it exposed to the raids of invaders since ancient times to control its ports.

While recalling the aspects of that importance and its factors, based on the books of historians and travelers who elaborated on its description and mentioned its strategic importance. Its geographical location made it a place for the ambitions and meeting place of merchants from many countries, especially from southern Europe, which made it an important commercial, economic and military vitality.

Keywords: Honaïne; Tlemcen; Central Maghreb; Economic Relations; Port; Archaeological Monuments.

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Introduction:

Honaïne town is considered one of the most important cities in the central Maghreb because of its strategic location. In addition, its harbor is one of the main harbors in the Mediterranean Sea. The city started to be formed in ancient eras when its initial landmarks were set by Phoenician traders during the 12th century BC, and they called it "Gypsaria" or the land of gypsum. The city witnessed expansion during the Roman occupation period, when its name changed to "Artisiqua," expanding its harbor and building a formidable fortress on its western side to protect the city.

The city's port played a significant role during the Islamic conquests and throughout the medieval ages, despite the succession of many dynasties ruling the region. It made the city a leading center of trade, especially during the Banu ʿAbdel Oued and Almohad periods. It also became a refuge for those fleeing inspection courts after the fall of Andalusia in 1492 and the subsequent Reconquista wars, as well as a destination for traders coming from Europe.

The economic activities in the city of Honaïne were diverse. The cultivation of grains, vegetables, and fruits flourished. Crafts and industries expanded, and commercial markets became more active. This prosperity benefited its citizens, unlike the Bedouins living nearby. Their houses were paved with colorful tiles and mosaics, competing with the dwellings of Andalusian citizens. They had courtyards adorned with vineyards irrigated for watering.

The research problem revolves around the civilizational and military role played by the city of Honaïne. This led us to pose several questions: How did this city emerge? What were the facilitating factors behind its rise? What roles did it play on various levels? And how did this impact the political and urban aspects?

In this article, the researcher investigates the relationship existed between Honaïne town and the European countries and the other neighboring ones, its results as well as its effects. To achieve the study objectives, the researcher relied on various historical texts from different sources in order to obtain a historical image which existed between the areas and how it contributed in varying the political and economic relations.

1. Location and Name:

The city of Honaïne is located on the western coast of Algeria and serves as the gateway to Tlemcen from the sea, situated between the outlet of the Tafna river to the east and the town of Tawnat in the west[1]. It lies within a small valley near Cape Hoon[2], resembling a horseshoe pointing towards the sea[3].

The old city extends its residences towards the northeast, lying three meters below ground level. It is traversed by two valleys, the Honaïne Valley to the north and the Raq or Mssaib or Rigo Valley to the west, covering an area estimated at 320 square meters[4]. According to excavations conducted by Algerian archaeologists, the city was densely populated. They discovered several clay and copper vessels, as well as decorated tiles in reddish-brown color, along with swords[5]. The city is surrounded by walls made of locally available material called "Tabiya" to protect it from enemy raids[6].

The city of Honaïne extends along the coast at the level of Almiria[7], as described by Al- Idrīsī: **"...Similarly Al-Miriya on the opposite, which can be reached in two days..."**. It is located 30 miles (60 km) away from Tlemcen, as Al-Hasan Al-Wâzin, claimed: **"...Honaïne is thirty-four miles from Tlemcen..."[8],** Al-Idrīsī added to that stating: **'...From Honaïne to Tlemcen by land is 40 miles[9], and to Nedroma is 15 miles (30 km)** ...". **[10]**, Additionally Honaïne is 80 miles (160 km) away from Oran, and 4 miles away from El wredania.[11]

The word **"Honaïne"** in the Amazigh language means "balcony" and it has been given several names: أَهنَايْ، هَني، هُنْ، هُنَيْن and the name Honaïne is the one lasted till nowadays.[12]

The first landmarks of Gypsaria were established by the Phoenician traders around the 12th century BCE as a trading station at the end of the Tafna River towards the sea, where gypsum sites are scattered, hence its renowned name[13]. The Greek geographer Ptolemy, who lived in the 2nd century CE, referred to the presence of a large amount of gypsum near Honaïne.[14]

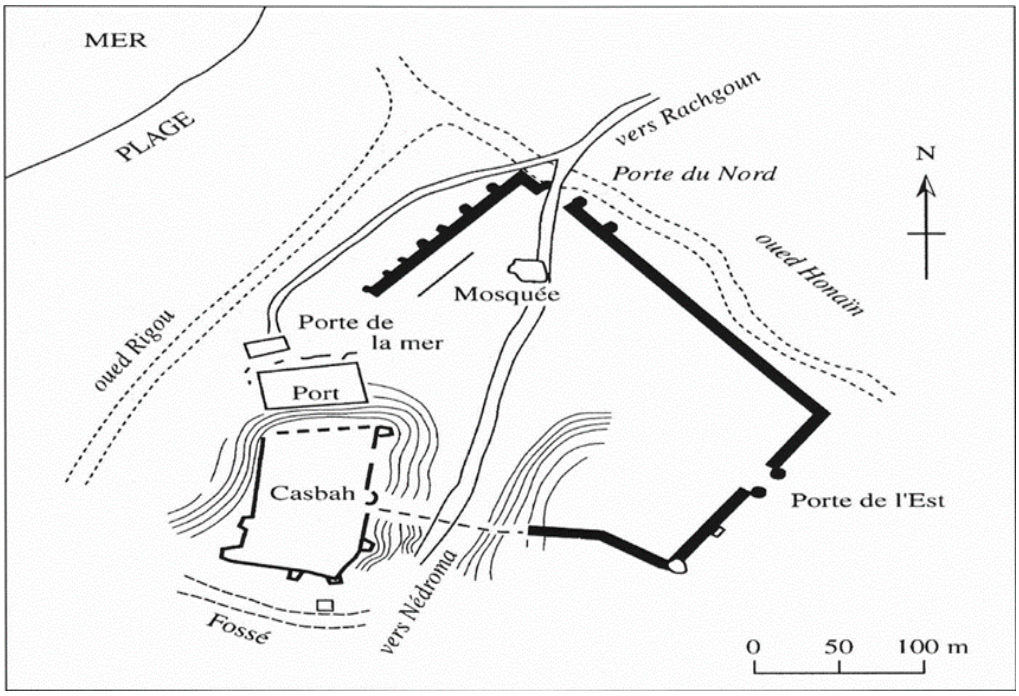
In 1856, the African Magazine conducted a study on the region of Honaïne, and the researcher who conducted the study affirmed that it was

renowned by this name due to its proximity to gypsum sites. The Greek geographer estimated the distance between Gypsaria and Seqqā (Siga) to be 23.115 meters, which is the current distance from the city of Honaïne to Arshqūn (Siga) as 22,000 meters. The distance from Wadi Mlouya to Gypsaria was estimated to be 62.874 meters, which is the current distance separating them, at 65.500 meters. Based on this data, as a historical approximation, it can be concluded that the location of Gypsaria represents the harbor of Honaïne[15].

It was named Artisiga during the Roman era, as they renovated the city and expanded its port onto the mainland by establishing an amazing fortress on the road leading to Seqqā[16], the capital of Safaqis in Arshqūn during the 5th century CE[17]. Engineers named it **ARTISIGA GYPSARIA PORTUS** and connected the port to a canal with a length of 85 meters and a width of 50 meters.[18]

Later, the city of Honaïne witnessed the Vandal presence on its coasts, after they took control of the entire North African coast and destroyed the port of Ad Ferratras (modern-day Ghazaouet) before entering Tlemcen, to eliminate Roman presence in the region amidst the ongoing conflict between them.[19]

Figure 1: plan of the City of Honaīn.



Source: Marçais, op. cit., p. 2

Comments: The plan is an illustration of the old city and its port, surrounded by valleys and the sea, and the main roads leading to it.

2. Honaïn Town during the Islamic Medieval Period:

After the Islamic conquest of the Maghreb region and the emergence of many dynasties that ruled over it, Tlemcen and its surrounding areas became an important and strategic center for completing the process of expansion towards Europe. During the reign of the Aghlabids, the port of Honaïn was mentioned for the first time following an incident involving a fugitive from Tlemcen (223 AH / 851 CE) who fled through it to Al-Andalus but was captured and killed by the police[20]. The port then became a maritime gateway for traveling and trade to Al-Andalus[21].

The city witnessed destruction and devastation during the reign of Abu al-Qasim ibn Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi al-Fāṭīmī when his commander, Misur al-Fata, rebelled against him and captured it in 935 CE. To renew its urban

structure, the sheikh of the Meknassa tribe, ʿAbdul Hameed ibn ʿAsal, implemented an Islamic architectural style[22].

It was renovated in the year 557 AH by the Koumia tribe[23] and flourished during the reign of 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Ali. It experienced significant activity, becoming a strategic and military base that provided support. 'Abd al-Mu'min established a fortified castle that still stands today and renovated its port, making Honaïne a vital strategic and military location[24]. Some suggest that its construction in the Islamic architectural style occurred during the Almoravid period, and it reached its zenith during the reign of the Zayyanid dynasty, becoming a crucial link between the north and the south.[25]

Al-Hasan al-Wāzzin confirms this by saying: **"Honaïne is a small city built by the Africans, and it is remarkably elegant. It has a port guarded by two towers, each facing a direction, and it is surrounded by high, well-constructed walls, especially on the side facing the sea. The inhabitants of Honaïne in ancient times were noble and honorable."[26]**

As for the geographer Yāqūt al-Hamawī, **" Honaïne is a district on the coast of Tlemcen in the land of Maghreb[27], and it was ruled by 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Ali, the ruler of Maghreb."** And the Salawi defines it as**: "... Honaïne is a fortress with a desired harbor surrounded by many orchards...[28]"**

Al-Bakrī described it saying, **"... it is on a good, intended anchorage and the most advanced male forts are orchards and batons and are inhabited by a tribe called Komiya..."[29].**

It was then described by Al-Idrīsī **"... a small, good city towards the sea with elaborate fence and markets...."[30],** and the geographer Hamidi defined it **as "...Honaïne is a city in Maghreb on the sea north of Tlemcen and is near Nedroma..."**[31]

Moulai Belhmissi describes it as: **"...Soft, gentle, neither big nor small, beautiful in sight, nestled between two mountains, between sea and trees..." [32].**

3. Importance and Roles of Honaïne Town:

a. Commercial Importance:

The harbor of Honaïne played a significant role in strengthening and enhancing the naval and commercial fleet of the city, especially Tlemcen, which is 12 stages away. Initially, it was just a small fortress, then it evolved into a small port, and eventually, in the 6th century AH / 12th century AD, it became a small city. This port was constructed between rocks with a width of 8 and a half meters, which allowed it the opportunity to secure and accommodate ships, whether large or small. It was fortified from both sides with two strong towers to protect it from enemy raids.[33]

The development of the port and the expansion of urbanization in the city led to a demographic shift, where the city became populated with traders and artisans. It became renowned for tailoring clothes and cotton fabrics, especially after the settlement of Italian and Genoese communities in its region[34], who arrived with Venetian ships, particularly after the Spanish occupation of Oran and the large port.[35]

The port served as the main maritime route and supplier in transporting goods between the Central Maghreb and the Christian republics, especially the Catalans who established good relations with it. It welcomed a significant number of merchants from Venice, Barcelona, Florence, and Catalonia to pursue their commercial activities, where the Jews played a vital role in these relationships.[36]

Many factors contributed to this, firstly the strategic location and the encouragement of rulers and sultans for economic life. Also, the presence of storage facilities for imported goods[37], and facilities such as hotels and inns played an active role in stimulating commercial activity[38]. In Tlemcen, there were the Shamain Hotel and the Genoese Merchants' Hotel, as well as churches built nearby for Christians and Nestorians.[39]

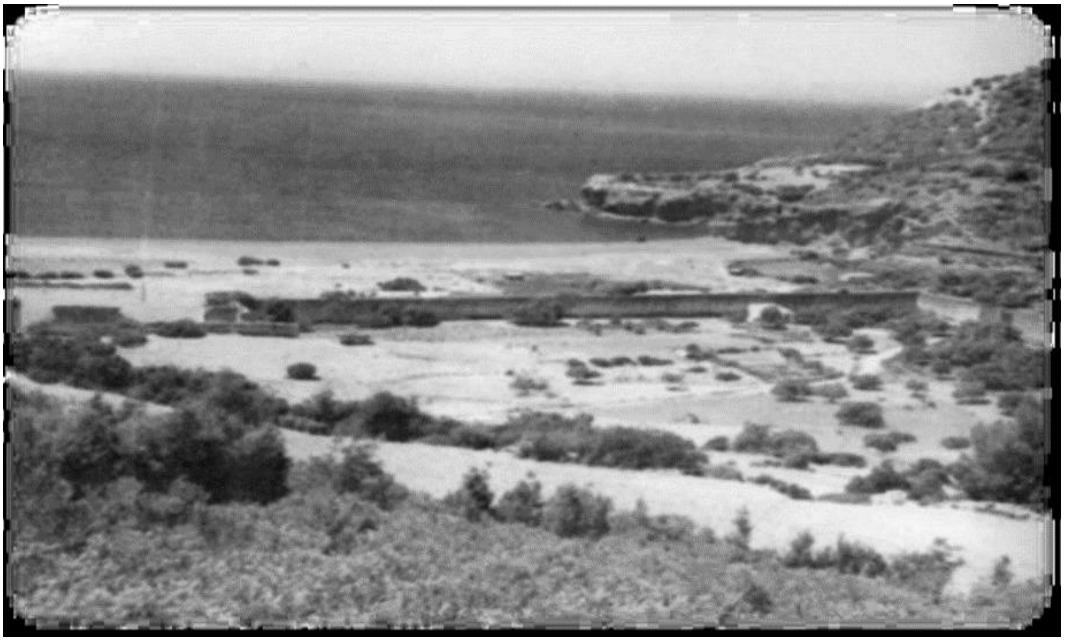
Trade began to expand in the 5th century AH / 11th century CE, experiencing prosperity in the 6th century AH / 12th century CE and further growth in the periods that followed the rule of the Banu ʿAbd al-Wad[40]. They relied on it for their commercial activities due to its proximity to their capital[41]. The port of Honaïne exported grains, oils, and dried figs to Almeria[42],

wool and cotton to Majorca and southern Europe[43], as well as some animals such as horses and falcons, wax, honey, oil, slaves, textiles, and spices.[44]

The harbor acted as a mediator and a link between the north (Christian republics) and the south. These imported goods surpassed the markets of Tlemcen to be exported to the desert, especially to Western Sudan.[45]

Tlemcen also imported grains from Maghreb and Italian cities during years of famine[46], as well as saffron, amber, musk, Sudanese lily, black musk, leather, ivory[47], silk, and linen from France and the Netherlands[48]. Additionally, it became a haven for Muslims fleeing from Andalusia, especially after the fall of Oran into the hands of the Spanish in 1509 CE[49]. However, its maritime activity declined after being subjected to Spanish attacks, with its walls and towers being destroyed, and its dwellings burned.[50]

Figure 2: Photograph of the old port of Honaīn.



Source: Abderrahmane Khalifa, op. cit., p27.

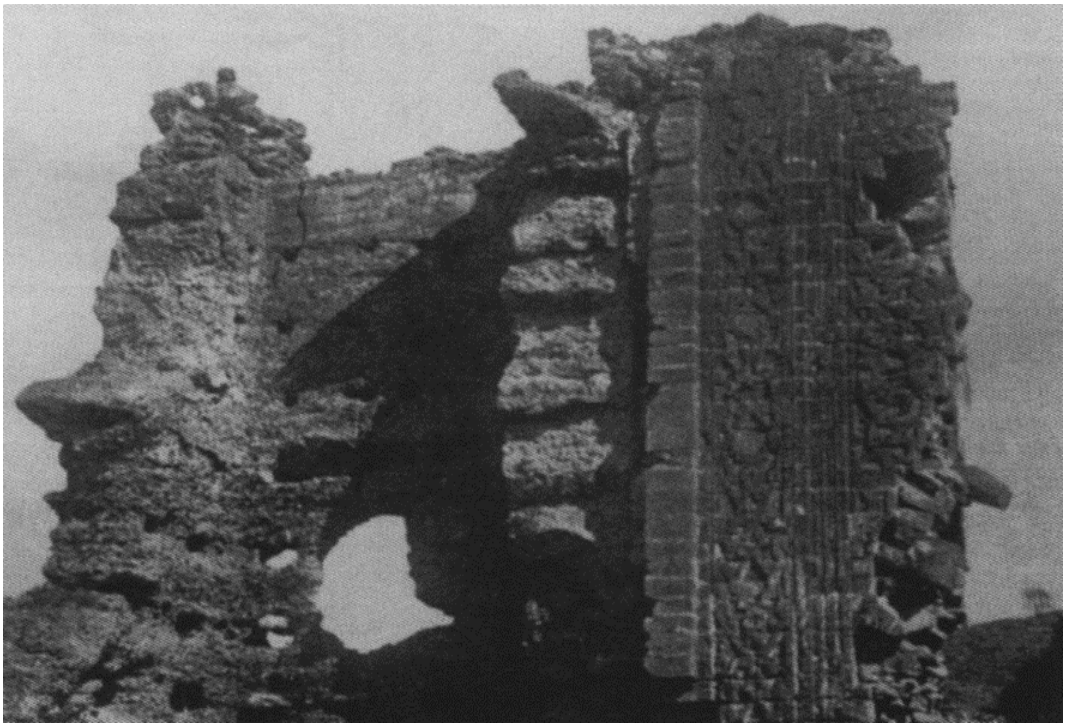
Comments: A picture of the old port of Honaīn, and the roles it has played since its inception.

b. Military Importance:

The city occupies a naturally fortified location due to its proximity to the trara mountain range, and it also has roads connecting it to the cities of Tlemcen, Nedroma, and Oujda, Defensive walls were built by 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Ali to protect it, it still stands today, punctuated by several gates such as: Bab Al-Bahr, Bab Al-Sunun, Bab Al-Saniya and the western gate.[51]

It is equipped whit watchtowers such as the Nouna tower, the tower adjacent to the shrine of Sīdī Ibrāhīm Al Abli, and the Awlad ʻAmar Tower.[52]

Figure 3: Photograph of the ancient Wall of Honaïne.



Source: Marçais, op. cit., p 2.

Comments: A picture of the ancient Wall of the city of Honaīn that surrounded the old city from all four sides.

c. Cultural Importance:

Honaïne witnessed significant cultural activity, especially ahter the construction of its ancient mosque during the period of Abū l-Hasan al-Marīnī's invasion of the city in 736 AH / 1355 AD[53]. It was aslo visited by served notable figures, sheikhs, jurists, Sufis, and judges, such as Saʿīd al-ʻAqbanī, who served as its judge[54], Abu ʻAbd llāh Muhammed al-Maqqarī[55] and Sidi Ahmed al- Ghoumâri[56], Other judges who served in the city of Honain included Abu ʻAli al- Sabati and Sidi ʻAli bin Yaḫlef, while Ibrahim al- Abli was a military officer there.[57]

Its port also served as a passage for ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn Ḫaldūn who traveled through it twice to Andalusia in762 AH / 1372 AD, and then was received there for the second time in776 AH / 1376 AD[58].

Conclusion:

From what have been mentioned earlier and what we have inferred, we can draw the following results:

Honaïne is A historical city known since the time of the time of the phoenicians; this demonstrates its dual role, both military and commercial, as urbanization flourished within it, bearing witness to its advancements during the Islamic medieval period, especially during the reign of the Zayyanid dynasty. It served a significant strategic role as both a naval and commercial base.

Honaïne managed to establish a distinct commercial hub, capitalizing on its strategic location and the region's need for a production and transit center. Its port transformed into a fortified military center and a trade gateway to Europe and the traders of Sub-Saharan Africa.

These caravans passing through it were able to transport cultural aspects within their cargo, fostering political and cultural relationships. When commercial relations declined, these relationships were affected, as it had maritime relations with Mediterranean ports, especially Almeria.

The city's activities were diverse, reflecting the prosperity of its inhabitants. Its architecture ranged from civilian to military and scientific. Scholars and elders flocked to it, and the remnants of its walls and towers still bear witness to its illustrious history.

Economic prosperity and scientific advancement made it vulnerable to invasions. It fell into the hands of the Marinids intermittently, experiencing destruction and expansion. Sultan Abū l-Hasan al-Marīnī's established the ancient mosque during one of these expansions. Towards the end of the medieval period, it faced attacks from the Spanish after the Reconquista wars.

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