

Heritage Libraries in Algeria as a Pillar for the Preservation and Valorization of Documentary Heritage: The Case of the Public National Museum of Islamic Calligraphy in Tlemcen

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Abstract:

This article examines the tangible documentary heritage preserved in the Algerian Elkhizanas (heritage libraries), focusing on the role of heritage institutions in safeguarding the national documentary legacy. It takes as a case study the collection of the Public National Museum of Islamic Calligraphy in Tlemcen, aiming to explore its holdings, which include rare and valuable heritage manuscripts. Such collections have significant historical, scientific, and cultural importance. Elkhizanas and their holdings represent a living intellectual force that can support cultural activity and play a crucial role in connecting Algeria's present with its future. Their importance is further evident in the preservation of rare works across various fields of knowledge. This study seeks to promote the preservation and valorization of the national documentary heritage, arguing for the necessity of its study and protection due to its role in conserving the nation's history, intellectual life, and contributions to human knowledge. Ultimately, this work aims to help develop a balanced and comprehensive information corpus that bridges traditional and contemporary understandings of Algeria's documentary heritage.

Keywords: Heritage Libraries; Documentary Heritage; Valorization; National Museum of Islamic Calligraphy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ancient archives preserved within various public and private institutions in Algeria constitute an integral part of the community's authentic heritage throughout its long history. However, these archives have not been sufficiently brought to light-whether through scholarly writings and research, in simplified formats for the general reader, or by organizing exhibitions to showcase such documentary collections. Hence, it is necessary to reconsider the dissemination and simplification of these heritage works, as our younger generations need to be exposed to the contents of the national documentary heritage, whether in the form of manuscripts or printed works. These generations are in urgent need to examine and comprehend this heritage in order to draw from it the spirit, strength, and determination necessary for creativity and critical thinking. Today, Algeria, through cultural development, seeks to transform its scientific and cultural heritage into an active force that positively influences society and ensures continuity and connection between its present and future, by delving into the history and essence of the nation while maintaining engagement with the modern world.

The ancient heritage Elkhizanas in Algeria represent a significant scientific and intellectual legacy and are found throughout many regions of the country. These Elkhizanas house rare old paper sources, primarily manuscripts covering various fields of knowledge, which receive careful attention from those responsible for them. They played a crucial role in the advancement of the scientific and intellectual movement during a period of Algeria's long and rich history filled with knowledge and scholars. Elkhizanas served as a nurturing ground for many scholars and today stand as important heritage and cultural landmarks by preserving the documentary heritage and the historical and cultural identity of the nation. Given the distinguished historical and scientific status of Elkhizanas in preserving and valorizing the national documentary heritage, the relevant authorities accord them considerable attention by providing appropriate spaces and all

necessary means and equipment to ensure the sustainability of the treasures of printed and manuscript documents for as long as possible.

The diverse scientific heritage in Algeria also constitutes a field of knowledge for many scholars and specialists, particularly researchers in the fields of archives, libraries, history, and archaeology, as well as other disciplines. These heritage resources often attract those interested in antiquities and cultural and historical landmarks from within the country and abroad, as they are considered an essential component of the civilization and identity of the Algerian nation, and an integral part of the Arab-Islamic heritage. Based on the foregoing, a fundamental research question arises in this study: Can the heritage Elkhizanas be considered a vital shield for the preservation and valorization of the documentary heritage in Algeria? In response to this question, two primary hypotheses can be proposed in this study, which are as follows:

- ✓ The Elkhizanas contain a significant documentary legacy and thus represent an intellectual force for preserving the identity and culture of the Algerian nation.
- ✓ The authorities responsible for overseeing the heritage Elkhizanas actively work to preserve and valorize the national documentary heritage due to its importance.

2. Documentary Heritage:

While the general notion of heritage encompasses all materials, practices, and human possessions accumulated over time, documentary heritage refers to any preserved document that holds historical significance for individuals or society. This type of heritage, also called “archival heritage”^(1), refers to documentary collections housed in archival institutions, museums, associations, and heritage organizations, in addition to library holdings.

Archival heritage can be defined as all documents-regardless of their date, format, or medium-produced or received by any natural person or public or private institution in the course of their activities. The term archival document is often used in a more restricted sense to refer to

documents that have been preserved and archived, in contrast to active archives still in use. According to the “three ages of records” theory.

The function of the archival document in preserving heritage is to serve as the memory of the nation, the human community, the family, or the individual. Archives transmit history, culture, traditions, and values by creating organized, hierarchical, classified, described, and preserved collections for future access and use. These documents serve as recognized evidence to validate administrative actions and form a solid basis for research across various fields.

It is worth noting that the term archives may sometimes cause confusion depending on whether it is used in English or French. In English, archives usually refer to final historical records preserved over the long term, whereas records refer to current operational documents⁽²⁾.

Heritage also encompasses the outcomes and experiences of humanity in fields of science, thought, language, and other domains. Intellectual heritage consists of the contributions of past scholars, writers, and thinkers, including:

- Religious knowledge and inherited scholarly works.
- Natural sciences, such as the knowledge of early scholars and the Islamic scientific heritage in various natural science fields.
- Literary, decorative, and calligraphic arts, and related disciplines.

3. Elkhizanas Heritage:

Ancient Elkhizanas containing archival holdings, manuscripts, and rare printed books are heritage libraries established during earlier historical periods. Libraries and the heritage Elkhizanas work to preserve these works, which represent the intellectual and scholarly output of specific societies. They are usually given attention by the state and official bodies. Many private institutions also devote considerable care to their own Elkhizanas, which collect their documentary heritage, institutional memory, and scholarly activity.

Some individuals take great care in preserving old library collections, which represent their intellectual, cultural, and scientific heritage accumulated throughout their scholarly lives.

Elkhizanas are established through acquisition, collecting, purchasing, inheritance, or donations, much like other types of libraries. However, they are distinguished by being inherited through families or private entities, making them unique compared to institutional or association-run libraries. Elkhizanas represent the memory of society and have historical significance that often surpasses their scientific or individual value.

Today, heritage authorities devote extensive attention to preserving and promoting Elkhizanas, raising awareness through conferences, seminars, and lectures. In some communities, they have become historical, cultural, and even tourist landmarks, attracting visitors interested in cultural tourism.

4. Valorization of Heritage:

In common language, to “valorize” something is to appreciate or recognize its value. In the context of heritage, valorization refers to the various efforts made to restore its significance—whether after a period of neglect or simply to ensure it is recognized and integrated into contemporary life. It also means assessing its contribution to society and recognizing the efforts made for its preservation⁽³⁾.

Speaking of heritage preservation is not just about safeguarding it indefinitely without purpose, risking it becoming a burden on society. Rather, it involves actively promoting and enhancing it at cultural, touristic, and economic levels. By doing so, heritage can yield benefits that contribute to cultural and economic development. It also helps attract audiences and encourages them to discover the history and cultural landmarks of their community.

The concept of valorization also involves using all possible means to give heritage a new role in contemporary life, granting it a value beyond its historical and archaeological importance. Reintegration and enhancement bring out its worth, making valorization a necessary and beneficial activity.

5. Institutions for the Preservation of National Documentary Heritage:

5.1. National Museums:

National museums are non-profit institutions that preserve collections of historical and scientific value, both tangible and intangible, while serving the community through cultural, educational, and recreational functions. They also promote heritage tourism. Many museums specialize in particular themes or collections, such as: The Museum of the Mujahideen in the capital, the Central Museum of the National Army, established in 1984, the National Zabana Museum in Oran, founded in 1933, which holds important prehistoric and ancient collections (Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic), along with works of art and natural history specimens. These museums often include library spaces with valuable and rare documentary resources.

It also focuses on collecting various archaeological resources and historical documents. The museum was built over a large area encompassing several unified spaces arranged within a main building, the most important of which are the library space, the School of Fine Arts, and the museum's exhibition halls, all accessible through a common entrance serving the museum's various specializations⁽⁴⁾. Its importance increased with the establishment of a dedicated wing for the library as a fundamental facility within the museum space. The museum library was founded in 1985 and houses a significant collection of valuable and rare documents. It offers a variety of services, including reference services and information provision across diverse fields of knowledge, particularly in historical sciences, religions, natural sciences, arts, and architecture, catering to researchers, students, and professors. It is managed by specialized librarians with expertise in library sciences, and the library contains a collection of works in Arabic as well as publications in foreign languages, periodicals, and a large collection of maps, photographs, and old books.

5.2. Archival Centers:

Archives hold great importance in the lives of individuals and nations, playing a vital role in various scientific, economic, and cultural fields. Through archives, it is possible to anticipate all administrative and scientific

matters, thereby constituting probative value. Accordingly, all administrative sectors have placed significant importance on archives by relying on archival documents for management and administrative documentation. In doing so, they collect documentary collections to build the organic memory of the institution, which is referred to as the institution's archives, although some also call it the repository⁽⁵⁾.

These documents, at the time of their creation within the unit during their initial phase, hold practical and administrative value. Administrative documents are produced during this initial phase of their lifecycle and consequently accumulate within the producing entity as a result of the development of an issue or decision-making process, through the addition of new documents and the receipt of new batches from various sources⁽⁶⁾. Subsequently, these documents transition to a later phase in which their value changes to historical significance for the originating unit. Such documents can be utilized to prepare studies and research that draw their primary material from archival information and the knowledge preserved in the archives. Furthermore, these documents aid in understanding and studying economic and political conditions, as well as in recognizing customs, traditions, and various daily life aspects such as food, clothing, housing, and other practices.

5.3. The Algerian National Library:

The Algerian National Library is considered the repository for any book, periodical, bulletin, or published document in Algeria, in accordance with Order No. 16-96 dated 16 Safar 1417 AH (July 2, 1996) related to legal deposit, and Executive Decree No. 226-99 dated 24 Jumada al-Thani 1420 AH / October 4, 1999, which specifies the conditions for implementing certain provisions of Order No. 16-96. This legislation constitutes the principal instrument enabling the Algerian National Library to fully fulfill its mission, which is to collect and preserve the national heritage for current and future generations, safeguarding the intellectual and creative heritage of the nation from damage and loss.⁽⁷⁾

We can outline the most important initiatives undertaken in this field as follows:

- Relying on awareness and sensitization policies to introduce manuscript heritage through organizing a series of visits to the manuscripts department, allowing access to the most important works and fostering a connection between all segments of society and the documentary heritage, as well as organizing scientific activities and events specifically related to documentary heritage.
- Attempting to inventory manuscript collections through their cataloging, verification, and enriching the departments concerned with the preservation and valorization of manuscripts, using technical forms specific to each library. This includes creating various administrative forms such as a rare publications evaluation form, a manuscript evaluation form, a manuscript verification request form, a manuscript digitization request form, and a technical record card for each manuscript.
- Contributing to the planning of library service development in the context of disseminating knowledge about manuscript collections.
- Providing the necessary equipment for the maintenance and restoration of manuscript heritage by establishing workshops and laboratories for imaging, preservation, and binding.
- Attempting to digitize manuscripts, as this has become one of the cultural requirements for any country, especially given the technological and modern changes that necessitate the preservation and digitization of manuscripts and their introduction to the outside world, while simultaneously undertaking the task of preserving and valorizing the manuscripts⁽⁸⁾.

5.4. The National Center for Manuscripts:

This center, specializing in the preservation of documentary heritage, is one of the most important heritage and cultural institutions. It focuses on documentary heritage as a fundamental pillar of the material heritage of Algerian society. It is a public administrative institution with legal personality and financial independence, operating under the supervision of

the Ministry of Culture. The National Center for documentary heritage was established by Executive Decree No. 06-10 dated 15 Dhu al-Hijjah 1426 AH, corresponding to January 15, 2006⁽⁹⁾. Branches of the center have also been established in several regions across the national territory to expand its scope of work, with the main center located in southern Algeria, in the Wilaya of Adrar. Regarding Contributions of the National Center within the framework of its mission and functions primarily related to the preservation and maintenance of these manuscript documents, the center undertakes a wide range of activities and functions, which can be summarized as follows⁽¹⁰⁾:

- Preserving documentary heritage using modern scientific methods
- using modern scientific methods
- General inventory preparation and classification
- Conducting scientific cataloging
- Mapping the national landscape related to documentary heritage
- Studying the components of manuscripts, including paper, ink, writing tools, and bookmaking techniques
- Integrating intellectual heritage within the economic and tourism frameworks
- Verification of the validity of these important documents by researchers and specialists.
- Highlighting local intellectual and creative capacities, especially in calligraphy, epigraphy, and ornamentation
- Providing the best and most appropriate means necessary for manuscript preservation
- Raising awareness about the importance of documentary heritage and preserving it as a cultural identity for individuals and society
- Concluding agreements and contracts with national and international organizations
- Identify and select appropriate media messages to enhance the scientific value of documentary heritage.

6. Elkhizana of the National Public Museum of Islamic Calligraphy in Tlemcen:

6.1. Introduction to the Museum and Its Function:

The museum is located in the historic city center of Tlemcen, renowned for its cultural landmarks and ancient religious architecture. The museum was established within a mosque that has a long-standing legacy of scholarship and teaching. It bears the name of one of Tlemcen's most famous scholars, Abu al-Hasan ibn Yakhlef al-Tanasi. This landmark remains a historical symbol and a distinct religious and cultural edifice, and tourist platform in Algeria. This religious space was founded during the reign of the Zayyanids in the year 696 AH (1296 AD) by Sultan Abu Said Uthman as a memorial to his brother, Prince Abu Amir Ibrahim ibn Abi Yahya Yaghmurasan ibn Zayyan. This history is inscribed on a marble plaque in Andalusian script, located at the center of the western wall of the prayer hall. The rectangular plaque details the date of this space construction, alongside additional epigraphic writings on either side of the mihrab (prayer niche). This architectural masterpiece, the mosque, suffered desecration from the onset of the colonial occupation. Beginning in 1902, the colonial authorities converted it into an archaeological museum, a status it maintained until recently. The mosque commemorates the jurist Abu al-Hasan, born in Ténès and residing in Tlemcen, who is regarded as one of the most knowledgeable, pious, and distinguished scholars of his era. He inherited the high status previously held by his brother Abu Ishaq Ibrahim in the court of the Banu Zayyan: first presiding over the judiciary and later appointed as a teacher after his brother's death. Due to his profound knowledge and jurisprudence, many students from various regions studied under his guidance⁽¹¹⁾.

This landmark underwent numerous transformations until it became a museum, especially during the colonial period. In 1849, it was converted into a Qur'anic school and experienced several incidents, including a fire in 1900 that caused damage to the wall inscriptions and ceiling. The French administration restored the roof during that period and, by order of the Minister of Fine Arts, decided to convert it into a museum. In 1902, the

French Historical Monuments Department installed an iron barrier around the mosque and transformed it into a museum of Islamic art in the city of Tlemcen. The lower part was dedicated to displaying Islamic artifacts, while the upper floor became a geology museum.

As part of the Tlemcen Islamic Capital of Culture event in 2011, the monument underwent significant restoration and rehabilitation, after which it was designated the “National Public Museum of Islamic Calligraphy” pursuant to Executive Decree No. 193-12 dated 3 Jumada II 1433AH, corresponding to April 25, 2012. The National Public Museum of Islamic Calligraphy offers a variety of activities and functions according to the program established by the team and concerned authorities, which include⁽¹²⁾:

- ✓ Organizing study days, seminars, and scientific conferences
- ✓ Conducting Arabic calligraphy workshops aimed at children
- ✓ Hosting live workshops for crafts and traditional industries that incorporate Arabic calligraphy
- ✓ Exhibitions and field trips to introduce the museum and its functions

6.2. Contents of the Islamic Calligraphy Museum’s Khizanain Tlemcen:

Elkhizana contains an important collection of precious manuscripts that have made it a focal point for researchers and visitors to the museum from across the country and beyond. The credit for the presence of such manuscript titles goes to the early founders of the collection, from which many scholars benefited in their teaching. Today, it stands as a treasure and a documentary heritage bearing historical and cultural dimensions.

Through examining these works and touring the exhibition hall, any visitor can clearly perceive the central role that Elkhizana plays within the museum. The team responsible for these collections, along with the supervising authorities, has undertaken the task of organizing Elkhizana by arranging its holdings in an orderly bibliographic list under the title Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Museum of Islamic Calligraphy in order to preserve them and make them accessible to the public.

The process of description, or cataloguing, was limited to the basic bibliographic elements of these manuscript books. It included the

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authorship and title information, the name of the copyist, the year of copying, the subject of the document or book, and a concise summary of the contents and specializations of the manuscript books. It also recorded, in brief, the opening and closing lines of the text.

It can thus be said that the description process fulfilled all that could be mentioned in the cataloguing of Arabic manuscript books, with the data for these books presented exactly as indicated in the bibliographic guide specific to the museum's Elkhizana, as follows:

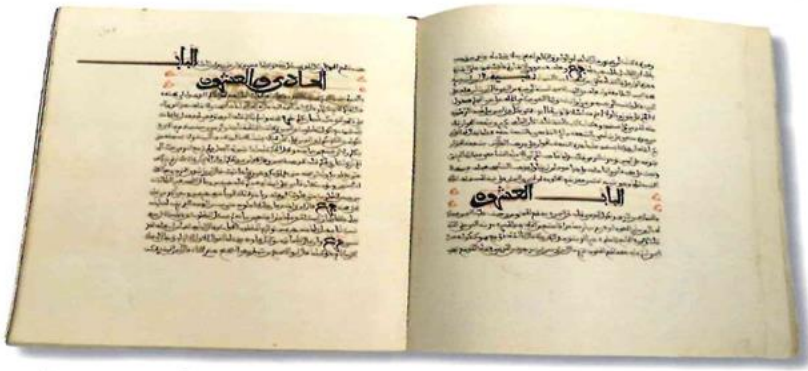


Figure 01: Manuscript of *Tabṣirat al-Ḥukkām fī Uṣūl al-Aqḍiyawa Minhāj al-Aḥkām*. Author: *Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Alī*, known as *Ibn Farḥūn al-Ya‘marī al-Madanī*.

Copyist: *Muḥammad ibn al-Dīn al-Turābī*

Subject of the Manuscript: *Judicial Rulings*

Source: *Catalogue of Manuscripts of the Museum of Islamic Calligraphy*

Elkhizana houses an important collection of rare and precious works in various branches of knowledge, which attract the attention of the public and researchers-whether historians, editors of manuscripts, or specialists in other fields of knowledge. These works can serve as primary sources and reference materials for scholars. Below, we present examples of this valuable documentary heritage as listed in the printed catalogue available to

the public, arranged according to the titles' alphabetical order in the guide, as follows⁽¹³⁾:

- Al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyah / Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī.
- Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ and Al-Qābūs al-Wasīṭ / Abū Tāhir Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb ibn Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Fīrūzābādī al-Shīrāzī.
- Tuḥfat al-Itqān wa-l-Iḥkām fi Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Ḥukkām, Volume One/ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Mayyārah.
- Al-Taṣrīḥ bi-Maḍmūn al-Tawḍīḥ / Khālīd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Azhārī .

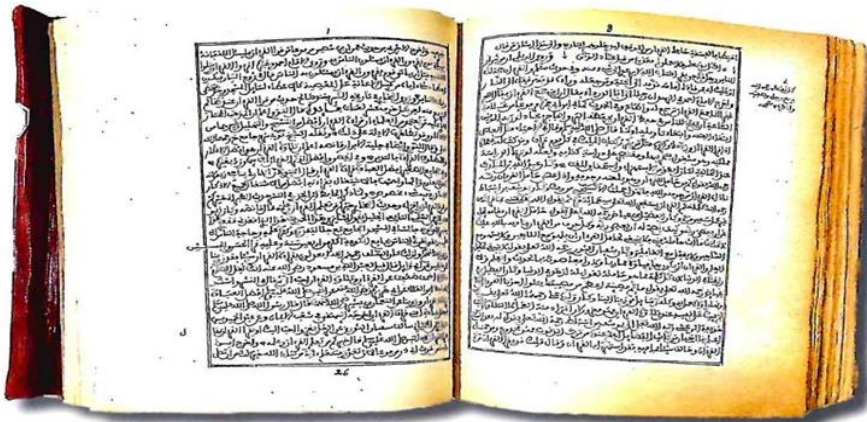


Figure 02: Manuscript of Al-Ta'liq al-Fatih min Muwaṭṭa' Mālik (First Half).

Author: Abū 'Abd Allāh Sīdī Muḥammad Abī al-Madanī Jannūn

Copyist: Aḥmad ibn al-Ma'mūn al-Ḥasanī al-Bulghithī

Subject of the Manuscript: Prophetic Ḥadīth.

Source: Catalogue of the Private Elkhizana of the Museum of Islamic Calligraphy

7. Proposals for Supporting the Preservation and Valorization of Documentary Heritage

Through the presentation of the preceding examples, we seek to draw the attention of the authorities concerned with the protection of national heritage in general and documentary heritage in particular and to offer certain proposals and measures for the care of Elkhizanas and rare collections of manuscript books and old printed works, by employing all appropriate means and mechanisms for this purpose. It is incumbent upon

those responsible for these libraries-whether librarians, interested specialists, or authorities-to strengthen ways of familiarizing themselves with the national documentary heritage through the following:

- ✓ Reviewing the measures related to the protection of heritage in general, and documentary heritage in particular, by re-examining the institutions and locations where documentary heritage is preserved, establishing bodies responsible for safeguarding this type of heritage, and determining the means of utilizing and employing it for scientific, cultural, touristic, and other purposes.
- ✓ Making use of UNESCO's recommendations and resolutions concerning the protection of heritage in its various fields.
- ✓ Digitizing the national documentary heritage and supporting digitization projects in the field of manuscripts while preserving the original copies. This aims to facilitate use, prevent damage to the original document, and ensure its preservation. It also includes the widespread provision of digital catalogues for libraries and Elkhizanas in both the public and private sectors, as well as making digital catalogues available through web pages to publicize the holdings of these collections and serve the public. Such measures would reduce access costs, minimize effort, and save time in consulting documentary heritage.
- ✓ Working to mobilize specialized human resources in the field of libraries, particularly in matters related to the preservation and restoration of documentary heritage.
- ✓ Developing and expanding channels and means of promoting awareness of documentary and historical heritage, disseminating it among the Algerian public, and enhancing institutions at the level of local and regional communities-particularly libraries, archival institutions, media outlets, schools, and institutes.

8. CONCLUSION:

Today, heritage in all its dimensions has come to represent a living force that exerts a positive influence on scientific and cultural activity and on various sectors. It ensures continuity and cohesion between the present and the future. At the same time, there must be an awareness of the reality that there is stagnation in the understanding of diverse forms of heritage. On this basis, societies today seek to achieve balance by restoring due recognition to the ancient national heritage, rich in its potential and esteemed in its place among the world's human heritage.

This study has sought to highlight the importance of the heritage Elkhizanas with which Algeria abounds, as a fundamental pillar for the valorization of documentary heritage in many national centers and institutions.

In light of the foregoing, it has become essential to safeguard the landmarks of Algeria's national heritage, including the heritage Elkhizanas, at all levels, in a manner that contributes to the protection of the documentary legacy that embodies the elements and components of societal culture and human history. It should be noted that these documentary collections of rare manuscripts form part of the national identity and entity, and represent some of the most significant cultural and civilizational landmarks. From this standpoint, it is important to highlight the responsibility that rests upon the bodies, authorities, and supervisory entities entrusted with the national documentary heritage. They must mobilize all material and moral resources, and provide the necessary facilities for heritage centers and institutions, including museums, libraries, and archival centers. An example of this is Elkhizana of the National Public Museum of Islamic Calligraphy in Tlemcen, which serves as a pillar for safeguarding and protecting the documentary legacy to ensure its transmission to future generations. Moreover, the relevant authority should employ modern protective means, including tools and technological methods, such as supporting digitization projects and encouraging heritage and documentary institutions to establish virtual exhibitions to promote the heritage Elkhizanas and the documentary heritage in general.

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