

Reçu le : 09- 02 -2025	Accepté le : 28 -03 - 2025	Publié le : 30 – 06 - 2025
------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------

**Methods of collecting Algerian documents during the colonial period from the second half of the 19th century AD:
The Algerian historical society as a model**

Méthodes de collecte de documents algériens pendant la période coloniale à partir de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle : La société historique algérienne comme modèle

SAHBI Mohamed 
Department of Documentary Sciences, Oran
University, Oran, Algeria
Email: sahbi.mohamed@univ-oran1.dz

Abstract:

In 1856, encouraged by the Ministry of War, the French colonial authorities decided to establish the *Algerian Historical Society*. Among its stated objectives was the launch of a comprehensive campaign to explore Algerian territory, aiming to collect data and information on areas under French control, as well as to extend this inquiry into regions still considered "outside control." High on the Society's agenda was the collection of documents, artifacts, numismatics, and other materials capable of shedding light on Algeria's history—from the Libyan (antiquity) era to the period of Ottoman rule. The Society's official publication, *Revue Africaine*, founded the same year, became its mouthpiece. It mandated that all documents obtained by soldiers or civilians during the campaign be collected, translated, and recorded, with explicit mention of the geographical location in which they were found.

This research focuses specifically on Algeria, examining the methods of document collection, translation, and analysis employed between 1856 and 1871—a particularly challenging period in Algeria's modern history. During this time, numerous regions resisted colonial occupation, leading to military campaigns met with fierce resistance, such as those led by Emir Abdelkader in the west and center, Ahmed Bey in the east, and revolts in Zaatcha (Biskra), Mokrani, and Awlad al-Sheikh across the country. This study seeks to answer a central question: What motivated the colonial authorities during this period to show interest in Algerian heritage in general and documentary heritage in particular? What methodology did *Revue Africaine*, as the voice of the *Algerian Historical Society*, employ in the collection and analysis of these documents? And what were the outcomes of these efforts?

The research adopts a bibliographic and analytical approach, drawing on documents published in *Revue Africaine* from its inception in 1856 through the end of the 19th century. This era witnessed unprecedented efforts to research, classify, and translate legal, military, property, and other documents by a group of officers, translators, and orientalists who were highly regarded in the academic circles of their time. One of the key findings of this study is that the campaign to describe Algeria during this period had an unspoken objective: to gain an intimate understanding of Algerian society—culturally, socially, and politically—in order to strengthen colonial control. The ultimate aim was to integrate Algeria fully into France, even to transform it into a Latin-Christian province, as envisioned by certain French thinkers such as Louis Bertrand throughout the 19th century.

Keywords: Campaign of exploration; Historical Society; Description; Algerian Documents;

Résumé:

En 1856, les autorités d'occupation françaises décidèrent, avec l'appui du ministère de la Guerre, de créer la Société historique algérienne. Parmi leurs objectifs : la préparation d'une campagne complète d'exploration du territoire algérien, visant à recueillir tout ce qui permettrait d'obtenir des données et des informations sur les zones sous leur occupation, et à l'étendre aux zones encore hors de contrôle. Parmi les éléments les plus importants inscrits à l'ordre du jour de l'association figurent des documents, des objets de collection, des pièces numismatiques et autres documents susceptibles de révéler l'histoire de l'Algérie et de la région, depuis l'époque libyenne (Antiquité) jusqu'à la domination turque.

La Société historique algérienne et son porte-parole, la Revue africaine, créée la même année, décidèrent que tous les documents en possession de soldats ou de civils impliqués dans la campagne seraient collectés, traduits et annotés, en mentionnant leur localisation géographique. Compte tenu de ce qui précède, cette recherche se limitera aux documents algériens en particulier.

En termes de mode de collecte, de traduction et de méthodes d'analyse, dans la période comprise entre les années 1856 - 1871 seulement - notons que cette campagne de description a duré cent six ans - une

période difficile dans l'histoire moderne de l'Algérie, étant donné que les campagnes de l'armée coloniale sur la plupart des villes et régions algériennes, qui ont résisté à l'occupation, ont rencontré une résistance farouche, qui a duré plus de soixante-dix ans, comme la résistance de l'émir Abdelkader à l'ouest et au centre, Ahmed Bey à l'est, Zaatcha au sud (Biskra), les Mokrani et Awlad al-Cheikh dans le reste du pays.

La question primordiale qui se pose ici est la suivante : quelles étaient les raisons qui ont poussé les « autorités coloniales » durant la période susmentionnée à s'intéresser au patrimoine algérien en général, et documentaire en particulier ? Quelle méthodologie avait été suivie par « Revue africaine », porte-parole de la « Société historique algérienne », dans la collecte et l'analyse de ces documents ? Et quels résultats avaient été obtenus ?

cette étude se basera sur l'approche biblio-analytique des documents collectés et étudiés, dès les premiers numéros de la Revue Africaine, parus en 1856 jusqu'à la fin du XIXe siècle. Cette période a été marquée par une activité sans précédent de recherche, classification et de traduction de documents juridiques, militaires, immobiliers et autres, menée par un groupe d'officiers, de traducteurs et d'orientalistes reconnus dans le monde universitaire de l'époque.

L'un des résultats les plus importants que nous avons pu atteindre dans cette recherche, est que la campagne de description de l'Algérie durant cette époque avait pour but non avoué de connaître de près la société algérienne, culturellement, socialement et politiquement, afin de faciliter aux autorités d'occupation l'extension complète de leur influence et de faire de l'Algérie une province française, voire latino-chrétienne comme l'espérait tout au long du 19ème siècle certains penseurs français, comme Louis Bertrand.

Mots clés : Campagne d'exploration; Société historique; Description; Documents algériens;

Adresse du correspondant: mohamedsahbi74@yahoo.fr

Introduction

There is no dispute that the French Revolution (1789) provided humanity with a set of enduring values—liberty, equality, and fraternity. However, like any revolutionary movement, it also paved the way for some of its proponents to commit excesses and transgressions against various peoples, both within Europe and beyond.

This intellectual and political revolution, in particular, led to the nationalization of properties belonging to religious orders, private universities, and royal palaces. As a result, vast collections of books, manuscripts, documents, antiquities, and artworks were seized from both within and outside France. This exceptional historical moment contributed significantly to the emergence of libraries, museums, and documentation centers, institutions that reflected the Revolution's principles of public participation, freedom of access to information, and equal opportunity—though these opportunities were, at the time, limited to French citizens, particularly the educated classes.

Once these vast quantities of materials were amassed and stored in facilities controlled by the revolutionary authorities, it became necessary to inventory, classify, and index them systematically, to ensure their accessibility and usefulness. This methodological shift, especially in relation to documents, was accompanied by the development of legislation and regulations that helped formalize the field of documentary science, refining its concepts, practices, and terminology. This process not only led to the emergence of prominent scholars and theorists in the field, but also laid the groundwork for future document-hunting campaigns in territories that would later come under French colonial rule—Algeria being a prominent example.

However, although nineteenth-century French writers and thinkers were steeped in the ideals of the French Revolution, the majority were drawn into colonial propaganda campaigns, often betraying the very principles they had defended in their books and articles (Sahbi, 2016: 1339). Among them was Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America* and *On Algeria*.

Although Tocqueville expressed discomfort with the brutal methods employed by the French occupation army—such as killing, burning, and destroying villages in both the plains and the mountains—he did not oppose the extension of French control over the entirety of Algerian territory, rather than limiting it to the northern regions. At this point, Tocqueville even began to legitimize the settlement of Algeria. His justifications were threefold:

First, on a geopolitical level, he believed France needed to affirm its status as a global power in opposition to its rival, England. Second, from his perspective, dominating Algeria

would provide France with a secure military base on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Third, and most strikingly, although Tocqueville had defended the rights of Indigenous peoples and Black Americans in the United States, he fell into the trap of colonial racism when it came to Algeria. He described the Indigenous population—that is, the Algerians—as inferior and, to some extent, “barbaric” (Le Cour Grandmaison, 2001: 12).

As for the great novelist Victor Hugo (1802–1885), author of the masterpiece *Les Misérables*, and the celebrated short story writer Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), they both went as far as Alexis de Tocqueville in their derogatory portrayal of Algerians and Arabs. They employed disgraceful epithets, imbued with hatred, racism, and a sense of superiority—epithets that the French Revolution had supposedly aimed to abolish, replacing them with ideals of brotherhood, solidarity, and liberty, grounded in the universalist vision it proclaimed.

This article seeks to explore the historical context behind the creation of the Algerian Historical Society and its official publication, the *Revue Africaine*. It examines the methodology employed by the journal in collecting various types of documents—historical, religious, legal, and others—relating to Algeria. Furthermore, it aims to shed light on the undeclared objectives of this documentation campaign, which lasted for nearly a century and sought to describe Algeria in cultural, scientific, and social terms.

The central question posed here is:

Were the practices of collecting Algerian documents and translating them into French part of a deliberate strategy from the outset—used by the *Revue Africaine* as a tool to facilitate the expansion of colonial control across Algeria?

Or were these practices simply the result of the broader nineteenth-century scientific movement, characterized by empirical research and the study of human civilizations, regardless of their geographical origin?

The truth that emerges, at least in part, is that despite the colonial context and the political motives behind the establishment of the Algerian Historical Society, it is both objective and fair to acknowledge that the scientific efforts of its teams—researchers, archaeologists, and affiliated investigators—played a foundational role in the development of historical and documentary scholarship in Algeria. These efforts contributed significantly to the institutionalization of scientific methods in educational and academic establishments throughout the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century.

To understand this subject more clearly, the study begins by analyzing the broader historical context in which Algeria found itself during this period. It raises several key questions: What motivated the colonial authorities to establish the Algerian Historical Society? What were its stated and unstated objectives? Why did it rely on a wide array of orientalist—historians, geographers, anthropologists, linguists—from diverse backgrounds? Why the focus on collecting Algerian, religious, military, real estate, and other documents? And how were these materials analyzed, interpreted, and translated in the *Revue Africaine*, which not only served as the mouthpiece of the Society, but also of the colonial governors and military leadership in Algeria at the time?

2. Algerian Historical Society: Its Establishment and Roles

2.1. Establishment

This topic was previously discussed in detail during the Eighth Scientific Symposium on Studies in the Antiquities of the Arab World in 2006 AD, through a presentation titled: *Arabic Manuscripts in Algeria* in the *African Journal*. Since the focus of this contribution is the study and analysis of Algerian documents during the second half of the 19th century AD, I think it is necessary to provide some information about the Algerian Historical Society, founded by the French occupation authorities during that period—its founding circumstances and the roles assigned to it—so as to shed light on the methods of collecting documents and the political background behind it.

Thus, with the encouragement of the highest authority in power, namely the Ministry of War in Algiers, A. Barber, along with a group of high-ranking officers in the French army and a number of French Arabists, founded the Algerian Historical Society sixteen years after the occupation of Algeria.

The decision to establish this association was made in the year 1856 AD, according to Berbrugger himself, after the experiences of periodicals and newspapers that began to be published at the beginning of the occupation failed to provide a true picture of scientific research. Berbrugger says:

“These periodicals contributed to giving glimpses of scientific research in this country, but the results reached were not tightly organized to establish the rules of real scientific research, which is what prompted us in the Algerian Historical Society to create the ‘African Journal...’” (Sahbi, 2006: 644)

Among the goals set by the Algerian Historical Society in its program was the collection, study, and publication through specialized journals of all events related to the history of Africa, with a particular focus on Algeria from the Libyan era (the ancient period) through the period of Turkish rule and the French presence. The Society embraced a broad concept of history that extended beyond political events to include languages, geography, arts, and sciences of North Africa. It employed all available means to preserve fixed historical monuments such as triumphal arches, structures, and columns, as well as mobile landmarks of historical significance. According to Article 27 regarding the management of the Society from a research perspective, it was responsible for publishing a variety of works including reports prepared by its committees, memoirs and other scholarly works, unpublished memoirs and documents found in archives or elsewhere, and selected articles from other African and Asian periodicals deemed relevant to its mission.

The membership of the Algerian Historical Society was divided into two categories: researchers and Arabists on one hand, and military personnel on the other. Among the researchers and Arabists were Adrian Berbrugger, who served as Director of the Algiers Library and Museum and Chairman of the Society; Bresnier, a professor of the Arabic language in Algeria; and Devoulx, Director of the Arab Archive at the State Properties (Domaine). The military and administrative members included Baron de Slane, chief translator in the army and attached to the military government, who acted as vice-president of the association; Marshal Count Randon, Governor General and honorary founder of the Society; and Colonel De Neveu, second vice-president. A brief examination of the roles of these members suggests that the functions of the Algerian Historical Society were driven more by military and colonial interests than by purely scientific objectives. The establishment was designed to lend a scientific character to research and studies that ultimately served colonial agendas, masking political motivations under the guise of academic inquiry and historical preservation.

2.2. Roles of the Algerian Historical Society

Similarly to the scientific journal *Journal Asiatique*, which began publication in 1822 by the Asiatic Society, the leadership of the Algerian Historical Society decided to issue a “scientific” magazine focused specifically on the history of North Africa, and especially on Algeria, starting at the beginning of 1856. Unlike the *Journal Asiatique*, which continues to be published to this day, the African journal ceased publication as soon as Algeria gained its independence. While the declared goal of the magazine was to “become a true African historical library complementing the research carried out by European scholars on the history of Africa and the colonies,” the unstated agenda was to write the region’s history from a settler perspective, effectively depriving Algerians of their own history. This agenda was pursued through various steps evident in the studies and articles published, including the collection and analytical study of historical, social, and other documents, especially those related to ownership and expropriation.

The magazine placed significant emphasis on Roman antiquities, inscriptions, and coins to establish a link between North Africa, particularly Algeria, and Latin-Christian Europe. Many of these studies influenced the development of educational programs for the children of settlers and a privileged few Algerian children. The magazine also critically examined Islamic culture in Algeria and other Arab and Islamic regions, portraying the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the “alleged prophet” in their writings. The Ottoman presence in Algeria and the broader Islamic world was associated with ignorance, fanaticism, and chaos. Consequently, the history of Muslims in general, and Algerians in particular, was subjected to colonial revisionism. Some scholars affiliated with the African journal even highlighted Muslim captivity and imprisonment of Christians after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, noting that some Andalusian emirates were controlled by Christians. The publication consistently presented French and European civilization as a form of salvation for Algerians and Muslims in general. Furthermore, it encouraged the use of the Algerian colloquial language in literary works, notably by publishing books on pornographic subjects.

2.3. The Algerian Historical Society's Focus on Roman Antiquities and Neglect of Islamic Antiquities

It is known that the French campaign against Algeria in 1830 was, according to contemporary French literature, a disciplinary response to the political and economic upheavals France was experiencing at the time. Specifically, it was seen as a reaction to the July Revolution of 1830, which demanded the abdication of King Charles X due to worsening social and economic conditions. This revolution lasted three days in Paris and is known as *Les Trois Glorieuses*; it overthrew Charles X and brought King Louis Philippe I, Charles X's cousin, to the throne (source, accessed 03/08/22).

As conditions stabilized in Paris, French leaders began to view Algeria as a potential solution to the famines that periodically afflicted France. Algeria's vast green plains, forests, and other natural resources were seen as valuable assets, especially within the intense rivalry between the French and British empires. French historian Benjamin Stora notes:

"There were a number of scholars among the invading French army during the 1830s and 1840s who were fluent in local languages such as Arabic, Kabyle, and Chawi. This linguistic knowledge was necessary to understand and penetrate the immense territory of Algeria on military, administrative, cultural, and religious levels." (STORA, 2004: 216)

The French military's familiarity with local languages produced a wealth of written documents, sketches, and notes. These materials were invaluable during the centenary celebrations in 1930 for French colonial historians who sought to write the history of the region—particularly Algeria—based on the conviction that it was an integral part of France. They traced the French presence in Algeria back to the Roman Empire, emphasizing a Latin heritage that mythically connected North Africa to Southern Europe (STORA, 2004: 217).

With the establishment of the Algerian Historical Society, the methodology for inspecting, studying, and interpreting Algerian documents became evident. The society considered documents and relics from the Islamic and Ottoman eras as remnants of a past that needed to be erased or distorted. Instead, the focus was deliberately placed on Roman and Christian antiquities and documents.

Among the most prominent intellectual and religious figures promoting this viewpoint were the French writer and thinker Louis Bertrand (1856–1941) and Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1825–1892), a leading cleric in French Algeria. Bertrand, supported by the renowned historian Stéphane Gsell, author of *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du Nord* (Ancient History of North Africa), championed the revival and valorization of archaeological discoveries from Roman theaters and cities. Their archaeological work sought to reconnect the local population's imagination with a Latin past.

Louis Bertrand was one of the earliest theorists of "Latin Algeria" and "Latin North Africa," expressing these ideas through his colonial novels such as *Le Sang des races* (1899) and *Invasion* (1908). Among his famous statements about North African Latin heritage are: "French Africa is the Roman Africa that continues to live," and "The Arab-Islamic presence in the region, and Algeria in particular, is one of the episodes that must be forgotten." (MAZARI, 2011: 321)

Cardinal Lavigerie, upon arriving in Algeria in 1866 and rising to the rank of Cardinal of Algeria and Carthage, mandated the study of Arabic in church seminaries. Admiring Louis Bertrand, Lavigerie advocated for the Christianization of Algeria's population. He called on intellectuals to focus on Roman and Christian antiquities to support the notion of North Africa's Latin heritage. Due to his frustration with the local population's lack of response, he reportedly resorted to "buying child slaves" from neighboring African countries to convert them to Christianity.

From these two figures—and other influences not detailed here—the Algerian Historical Society developed its core methodology for handling Algerian material and intangible antiquities, which was based fundamentally on two points:

Two examples of advertising paintings that spread during the nineteenth century in "Latin" Algeria



Figure 1: Promotional photographs of Algerians amid Roman ruins; Source: <https://www.alamyimages.fr/photo-image-ruines-de-timgad-aujourd-hui-l-algerie-ville-coloniale-romaine-illustration-de-liebig-carte-de-collection-de-la-serie-demeure-83343974.html> consulted the 09/07/2022.



Figure 2: Colonial railway marketing advertisement combining Algerians and Roman ruins.
Source: <https://journals.openedition.org/nda/1613?lang=en>
Consulté le 09/07/2022

1. Focusing on everything that linked Algeria and North Africa to Latin France.
2. Neglecting, or even demolishing and erasing, every trace that suggested the region's distinctiveness, whether in historical, religious, or cultural fields.

Based on these principles, during the brutal invasions throughout the fifty years following the initial occupation in 1830 AD, widespread burning, demolition, and distortion of Arab-Islamic and other antiquities began. Historical and civil archival documents—including royal contracts and others—were falsified, initiating one of the largest appropriations of a country's cultural heritage in history. This resulted in Algeria being robbed of much of its history and cultural components.

In a letter to a French officer, Colonel Lucien-François de Montagnac, it was revealed that Algerian archives and wooden artworks were often used as fuel for campfires:

“...Everything must be taken and plundered without distinction of age or gender: Grass must no longer grow where the French army has set foot [...]. This is how you should wage war on the Arabs: Kill all the men up to fifteen years of age, take all the women and children, load them up and send them to the Marquesas Islands or elsewhere...” (ARNOULET, 1892: 1)

Methods of collecting Algerian documents during the colonial period from the second half of the 19th century AD: The Algerian historical society as model.

With this “civilized” method, the French occupation and the Algerian Historical Society succeeded in eliminating an important part of Algeria’s cultural history through brutal colonialism, rather than protection—as was the case in Tunisia or Morocco. This provides an answer to the question often asked: Why are the antiquities in Algeria predominantly Roman and Christian rather than Islamic?

Islamic Monuments in Algeria: Between Demolition and Appropriation

According to nineteenth-century French writers and historians, only twenty years after the French occupation of Algeria in general—and Algiers in particular—the city’s features began to change significantly due to seizure, demolition, and obliteration.

In an 1897 article in *African Magazine*, French writer Aumerat reported that by 1832 AD, the occupying state and European settlers had taken over most real estate in Algiers and its suburbs, including buildings, palaces, and gardens that had belonged to Muslims in 1830 AD.

A census of real estate properties ordered by General Clausel in October 1830 showed that within the walls of Algiers alone, there were more than 8,000 properties divided into four types (AUMERAT, 1898: 324):

Type I: Called *baylik*, meaning state property, seized at the beginning of the occupation.

Type II: Treasury property, including movable and immovable assets without heirs or confiscated for various reasons, which the state, represented by *Al-Khaznaji*, sold at public auction.

Type III: Properties of private individuals from the general public, including residential and commercial buildings, baths, gardens, etc.

Type IV: Institutional properties such as mosques, *habous* (endowments), schools, zawiya headquarters, and others.

Each type of property had its own documentation. Over the fifty years following the occupation, followers of the Algerian Historical Society collected, classified, and studied these documents. Some remain preserved at the National Archives Center in Algiers and other archive departments in Oran or Constantine, but most were destroyed or transferred to France after independence.

The census recorded 103 mosques in the capital (AUMERAT, 1898: 325), including 14 mosques following the Hanafi school (adhered to by the Turks) and 89 following the Maliki school, which was predominant among the local Arab and Amazigh populations. However, according to a recent study by French historian Isabelle Grangaud, the number of mosques in Algiers in 1830 was 122. By 1862, only 21 of these mosques remained standing (Grangaud, 2017).

A significant number of mosques were demolished to make way for roads, hospitals, and other colonial infrastructure. Others were converted for different uses, such as the ancient Ketshawa Mosque (Figures 3 and 4), built in 1612 and expanded in 1794, which the colonial authorities transformed into a church during the occupation.

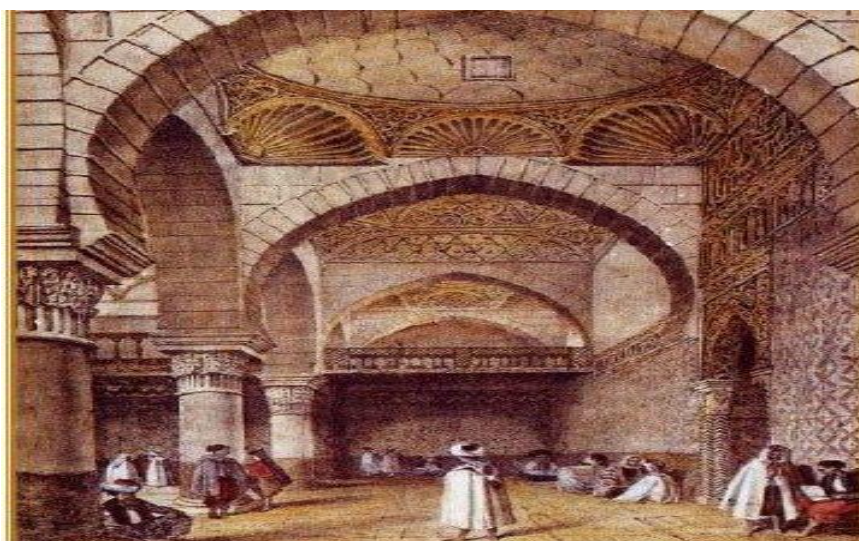


Figure 3: Ketshawa Mosque from the inside before 183.

Source:

The Casbah Post <https://www.thecasbahpost.com/ketchaoua->



Figure 4: Ketchawa Mosque in Algiers after independence.

Source:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=mosqu%C3%A9+de+ketchaoua+apres+l%27independance&client=firefox-a> Consulted 31/03/2023.

Algiers, the capital, was not the only Algerian city to witness the demolition and transformation of its antiquities; this destruction extended to many other cities across Algeria. For instance, the city of Tlemcen experienced significant obliteration, demolition, and appropriation of its historic heritage.

A prime example of this is the Tashfin School in Tlemcen, which vividly illustrates the cultural losses inflicted by the French occupation. Founded by the Zayani Sultan Abu Tashfin bin Abi Hammou I during the local Zayani rule (1235 AD–1545 AD), the school was situated in the heart of Tlemcen, then the capital of the Central Maghreb (Algeria) (SHARKI, 2007: 455). However, its architecture was completely destroyed in 1872 AD following a decision by the colonial administration, justified on the grounds that the structure was incompatible with the new urban plan imposed by the colonial authorities. The site was replaced by the current municipal hall (SHARQUI, 2007: 456).

This destruction occurred despite opposition from some local residents and Europeans, including the architect Edmond Duthoit (1837–1889), who was horrified by the demolition of one of the city’s most distinguished cultural landmarks.

The Tashfin School stood out—according to some scholars—from other Islamic Western schools due to its unique architectural and decorative features, which made it an exceptional model in the history of architecture and art in the Islamic West (OULMI, 2021: 944). This distinction is evidenced by surviving examples of *zellige* tilework (paintings 4 and 6), which still bear witness to the aesthetic and artistic richness of Tlemcen’s architecture during that period.



Figure 5: Gate arch. Source: OULMI, “The Tashfin School in the Zayaniyya City of Tlemcen,” <https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/176766>.



Figure 6: *The facade of the western gate.*

Source: OULMI, “The Tashfin School in the Zayaniyya City of Tlemcen,” <https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/176766>.

This French architect was able to obtain a license from the colonial authorities. Part of its mosaics was transferred to the Tlemcen Museum and the Algiers Museum, and another part of the beautiful artifacts to the Louvre Museum, but these pieces soon returned to Algeria after the governor’s decision enabled the pieces to be returned to North Africa, specifically to the Algiers Museum, Stephane Gsel (AMARA, 2010: 39). What is interesting about the matter, some say, is that when one of the French officers decided to demolish the landmark, he ordered the tiles and ornate marble to be transferred to the Louvre Museum in Paris, saying: “Her beauty does not suit Arabs.”

3. The Algerian Documents Under Study

The document collection movement in Algeria during the second half of the 19th century AD—that is, from the founding of the “Algerian Historical Society” in 1856 AD to the beginning of the twentieth century, and even until 1930, the date of the French celebration of the century of occupation—witnessed significant geographic expansion. This coincided with the occupation of Algerian cities and villages, during which everything that fell into the hands of French officers was seized, including documents, manuscripts, jewelry, etc.

Over time, the Historical Society and other “scientific” societies affiliated with it, such as the “geographical” and “archaeological” societies, gained access to techniques and methods of study and investigation. This enabled them to obtain information essential for continuing the occupation and plundering, especially concerning buildings, real estate, lands, and more.

This refers to the time period, but in terms of terminology, the documents discussed in this paper are archival materials written on paper that were in the possession of state institutions at the time (baylik), or owned by mosques, families, and individuals, as previously mentioned. Regarding the documents themselves, or the research material (corpus), it includes the documents collected and studied in the publication of the Algerian Historical Society, which is the *African Journal*.

The publication and printing of the *African Journal* (*Revue Africaine*) lasted for one hundred and six years, with four hundred and seventy-one issues. Its materials covered everything related to history in its broad sense: antiquities, geography, languages, etc. However, the largest portion was dedicated to antiquities, documents, manuscripts, collectibles, and similar subjects (SAHBI, 2013: 106).

The documents that fell into the hands of French officers, correspondents, and soldiers were placed in the Algerian Library since its founding in 1835 AD, until archival centers were opened in Algerian cities such as Algiers, Oran, and Constantine throughout the nineteenth century.

As for the methods of compiling these documents, after they reached the scientific body of the Historical Society, its scientific council—also the scientific council of the *African Journal*, its mouthpiece—studied the documents and accompanying reports written by correspondents. They revised, corrected, criticized, and translated the documents. Some of these scholars were well known and played a major role throughout the nineteenth century in the fields of investigation, study, and cataloging of manuscripts and manuscript documents.

4. Methods of Collecting Documents

Analytical Statistical Approach:

The methods of collecting documents of all kinds by the agents of the Algerian Historical Society, which was headed for the first time by Adrian Berbrugger, did not differ from the methods of collecting everything that would contribute to extending control over the cities and villages of Algeria at that time. These documents, collectibles, and manuscripts were among the most important sources through which the history of Algeria was rewritten—specifically according to the view formulated by advocates of the Latinization of the region and the return of Christianity to its homeland. This later led to the establishment of teaching programs and educational policy in Algeria throughout more than a century of French presence in the region. This is also the reason that has made it difficult for French colonialists until now to consider Algeria as non-French, as advocates of “French Algeria” still nostalgically remember that time and have not yet understood that Algeria is Arab, Berber, and Muslim.

In general, the documents collected by the Algerian Historical Society [For more information, see Mohamed Sahbi, “The Sansimonists and the campaign to describe Algeria as ‘René Basset’ as a model.” *Studies in the Antiquities of the Arab World*, https://cguaa.journals.ekb.eg/article_29654_1b260afc732fbe5a8797e3b2d126e563.pdf. Accessed 05/05/24.] and studied within the issues of the *African Journal* are roughly divided into three sections:

First Section:

It includes contracts; property contracts, goodwill contracts, and documents related to buildings and real estate properties in general, which were mostly among the documents that the French occupation was keen to obtain.

Second Section:

It includes political and military documents of all kinds, maps, etc.

Third Section:

Legal and religious documents in general, such as fatwas and others.

4.1. Firstly: Building and Real Estate Documents

The documents related to buildings owned by Algerians are very numerous. These documents were carefully monitored, arranged, and studied with the intent of giving them a legal character, ultimately facilitating the stripping of property rights from the inhabitants of cities, especially Algiers.

One significant example is a contract of fame (Acte de notoriété) in favor of the Turkish leader Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Farab, dated to the third third of the year 1025 AH (early December 1616 AD) (Bresnier, 1856/57: 400). This contract was translated and analyzed by the orientalist L. G. Bresnier and reveals that the Hamma area in Constantine had become a desolate forest.

Adrian Berbrugger, president of the Historical Society and founder of the Algiers Library and Museum, commented on this document, stating: “It is a very important historical document that confirms what was written by the Spanish Haedo about the conditions of Constantine during his journey in those years.” Berbrugger’s keen interest in the contract reflects his attempt to provide a historical justification for the colonial authorities’ policy to “nationalize” the properties of Turkish commanders and princes, considering these properties—as belonging to the beyliks (the state) and their collaborators—as rightfully under the control of the current authority.

Another important document is a title deed for a building later used by the French army as barracks, known as the “Macaron” barracks (Devouls, 1858/59: 142). This contract dates back to Shawwal 1011 AH (March 14–23, 1603 AD) and includes detailed descriptions of the building’s area, floors, and rooms. It also indicates that the building was constructed by Ali Pasha. Upon further study, Arabist A. Devouls identified this Ali Pasha as Ali Al-Alj, known as Al-Fartas, a former Christian convert to Islam who ruled between 976 and 979 AH.

A document from the archives of the Constantine City Administration (Ferand, 1868: 124) details the conditions of Constantine’s mosques and their endowments, including statistics.

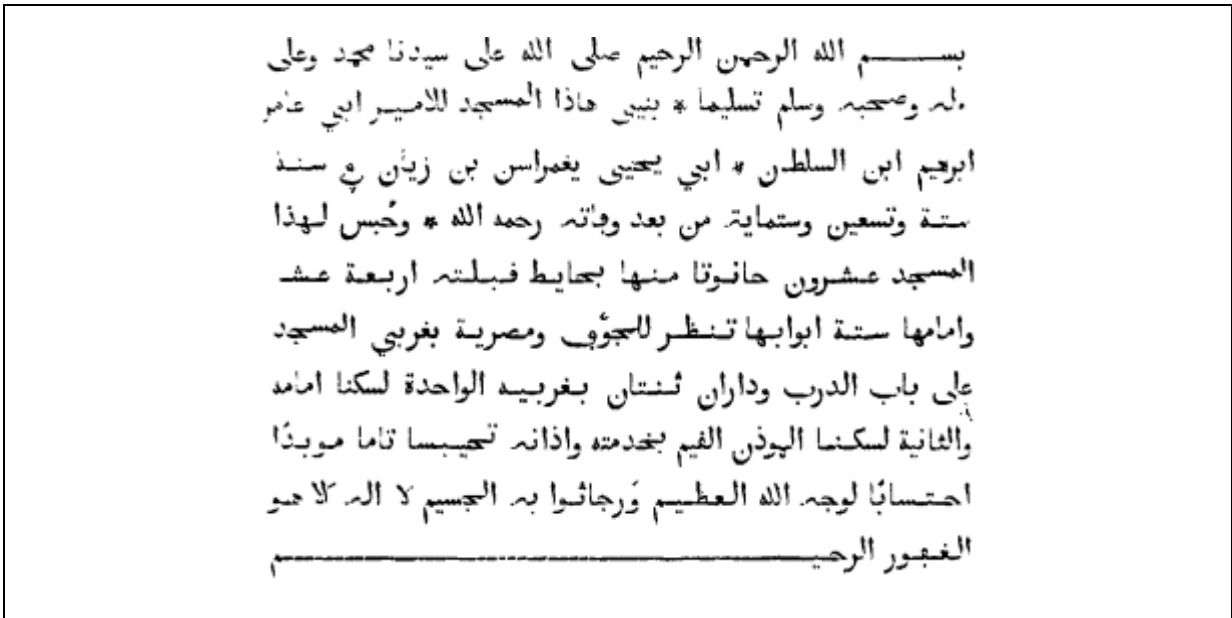
Methods of collecting Algerian documents during the colonial period from the second half of the 19th century AD: The Algerian historical society as model.

This two-page document dates back to the era of Salih Bey (1771–1791 AD), bears the signatures of Mufti Si Muhammad Ibn al-Mawhib and Mufti Si Ahmed Ibn Jalloul, and features Salih Bey’s seal with the inscription: Abdo Saleh Bey bin Mustafa, dated 1185 AH.

Ownership contracts for houses converted into barracks and military areas are also documented (Devouls, 1858/59: 140). For example, an ownership contract for the Bab Azoun barracks in Algiers, dated Rabi’ al-Awwal 1008 AH (October 11–20, 1599 AD), indicates that the building was known as the Janissary House during the Ottoman era. Initially owned by Prince Ibrahim Al-Khaznaji, the property later passed through various owners, including Mustafa bin Muhammad, Ibrahim Al-Khaznaji’s tax agent, and Mustafa bin Mustafa Agha Al-Sabais (Spahis, or knights).

Finally, contracts for the establishment and construction of mosques and zawiyas are also recorded (Devouls, 1870: 280). For instance, the Zawiya Al-Abbasi and Abdul Rahim Mosque are documented through two contracts:

- The first, signed by the Hanafi judge of Algiers at the end of Rabi’ al-Awwal 1089 AH (May 13–22, 1678 AD), stipulates the establishment of the mosque by Sayyid Mustafa bin Muhammad al-Andalusi, known as Ibn Krumba.
- The second, dating back to 926 AH (1519–1520 AD), refers to the zawiya’s old name—Zawiya Sidi Issa bin Lahcen—and its later renaming to Abu al-Abbas (Ahmad bin Salem al-Abbasi al-Sharif). The judge’s name who sealed this contract was not mentioned (see Figure 7).



Mosque Abou lhasan document
Source : S.A, *Les inscriptions arabes,Revue Africaine, V3, 1858,162-163.*

4.2. Secondly: Historical Documents

The Algerian Historical Society staff collected and studied various documents with the aim of identifying the most important material aspects of Algerian history at that time.

One such document concerns the events of the Beylik of Oran. It was written by one of Bey Hassan’s secretaries and later discovered and translated into French by the Arabist Alphonse Rousseau (ROUSSEAU, 1856: 399). This document sheds light on the Ottoman period in Algeria, specifically on the local history of the Beylik of Oran region, a topic highlighted by Berbrugger.

Another notable document is a map of the city of Algiers from 1541 AD (BERBRUGER, 1856: 506). It was found by Louis Besse, likely a correspondent of the Historical Society. This map dates back to the era of King Charles V, during his attempts to conquer Algiers.

A military document titled “Wachah elkataeb” (The Phalangist Sash) (BERBRUGER, 1864: 98) is attributed to Emir Abdel Kader. The document was studied by the orientalist Berbrugger and is considered an exact French translation by an unnamed French Mozarab officer. Its original text was published in Constantine under the care of Colonel Boissonnet, and it was preserved in the Library of Algiers.

In the same study, Berbrugger mentions another intriguingly titled document: "Arab Legion Monitoring". These documents reflect the association's effort during 1865-1871 to understand the Algerians and their military leaders, especially Emir Abdelkader, aiming to track the uprisings—such as the Al-Mokrani revolt—that surged across Algeria during this period.

Another significant historical document is "The Bright Flower" (DEVOULS JR, 1858: 437), originally written in Ottoman Turkish and translated into Arabic by Muhammad bin Mustafa. It was subsequently translated into French by Devouls JR. This six-page document discusses Count Alexander O'Reilly's campaign against Algeria in 1775 AD. O'Reilly, born in Ireland around 1735, served in the Austrian, French, and Spanish armies. This document represents an official Turkish account in circulation at the time and is dated 11 Jumada al-Thani 1194 AH (1780 AD).

There is a historical record of a meeting of consuls from Spain, Denmark, and the United States in Algiers during the 1830 invasion, dated April 30, 1830 AD. Signed by the Spanish consul, this document details the consuls' efforts to protect their interests amid local unrest. Noticing the hostility and disrespect from Algiers' residents, they purchased a building called Ben Talib Park to shelter themselves and their families.

4.3. Thirdly: Legal and Religious Documents (Fatwas and Permits)

This section focuses on legal and religious documents related to ownership, Islamic law, and permits.

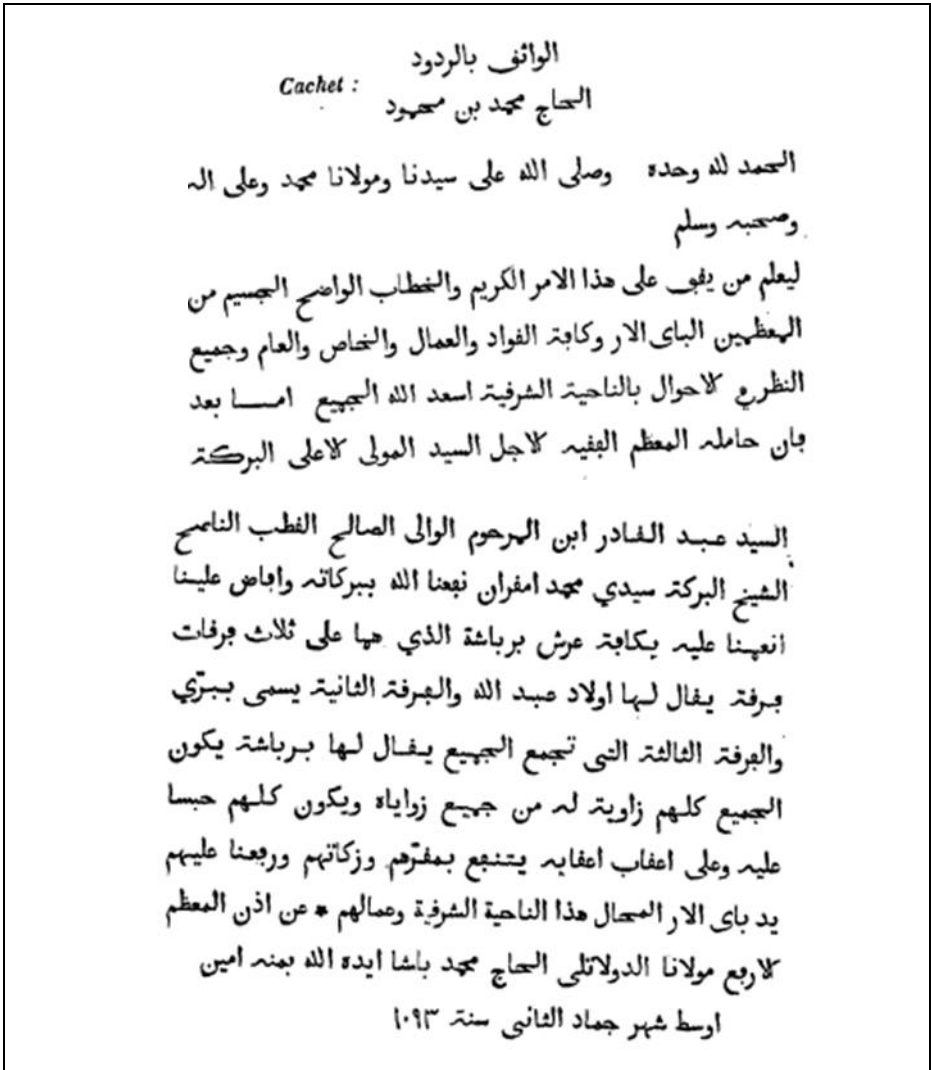
A key article entitled "La question de la propriété jugée par les docteurs de la communauté musulmane" ("The issue of ownership from the point of view of Islamic law") by orientalist E. Vayssettes (VAYSSETTES, 1865: 58) discusses the Maliki doctrine in Algeria. It highlights its role in the social and political life of Algerians, especially concerning land and building ownership and the application of Islamic law principles.

Among these are documents translated and commented on by the judge of Cordoba, Ibn Hamdis. The first is an Arabic text from 1252 AH / 1797 AD bearing the seal of Sheikh Muhammad al-Makki, the judge of Mila. The second, also in Arabic, bears the seal of the Maliki judge of Constantine, Sheikh Al-Hafsi bin Mashur Marzaqa, dated 1789 AD. All these documents revolve around ownership transfers between individuals or institutions, particularly regarding ownership that is unclaimed or ownerless.

Another legal document from 1252 AH / 1863 AD discusses Christian conversion to Islam. It records the testimony of a Christian named Yarkov Alnosco who renounced Christianity and embraced Islam before a Hanafi court in Algiers, with details recorded by the judge and witnesses (BRESNIER, 1863: 352). This document was translated and commented on by the orientalist Bresnier.

The section also includes a document on the "balcony corner" (original document) studied by Albert Devouls under the title "Religious buildings in ancient Algeria" ("Les édifices religieux de l'ancien Alger") dating to 1021 AH / 1612-1613 AD, signed by Dey Muhammad ibn Bakdash ibn Ali. Another original document about the founding of the Ketchawa Mosque dates from the same year but lacks a signature or seal (DEVOULS, 1868: 105).

A license document issued to Si Abd al-Qadir bin Muhammad Amqran is signed and sealed by Hajj Muhammad Pasha al-Triki in Jumada al-Thani 1093 AH / June 1682 AD (DEVOULS, 1868: 384). Hajj Muhammad Pasha al-Triki, ruling between 1661 and 1681 AD, was the first governor of Algiers chosen by the Janissaries. The license extended the holder's control over the Barbasha tribe and its clans.



Source : FERAUD Ch. Exploitation des forêts de la Kabasta, Revue. A, journal of work of the Algerian historical society, Algiers: Bastide, Libraire éditeur, vol.12, No.71, 1868, 384.

Conclusion

In conclusion of this presentation concerning the documents—whether political or religious—supervised by the Algerian Historical Society under the auspices of the French occupation authorities, several key points emerge. The association translated, studied, analyzed, and published more than seventy topics related to Algerian documents within a relatively short period of fifteen years, spanning from its founding in 1856 until 1871, the year of the notable armed popular uprisings by Algerians, occurring over forty years after the initial military invasion.

Across ninety issues of the *African Magazine*, the official publication of the society, no fewer than seventy studies focused on the translation and critical examination of Algerian documents, representing over 75 percent of the total published works during that timeframe. The subjects addressed largely concerned documents from the Ottoman period, with particular attention to architectural heritage, including buildings, palaces, and endowment (waqf) lands. A significant portion of these documents related to structures that colonial authorities subsequently demolished, repurposed, or altered—such as mosques and zawiya headquarters that were widespread in Algerian cities during that era, often replaced by military barracks or converted for other uses.

Despite the fraught political and social context of this difficult period in Algeria’s history and the colonial motivations behind the creation of this so-called “scientific” association, it is undeniable that the work conducted by French orientalist through the Algerian Historical Society contributed substantially to the establishment of rigorous scientific methods in document investigation, classification, and translation. These methodological advances equipped Algerian and other scholars with research techniques applicable across various disciplines, including history and anthropology.

However, this scholarly work cannot be divorced from its political context. The research primarily served the interests and objectives of the military authorities who ruled Algeria for 132 years. The efforts of orientalist such as Baron de Slane and Albert Devoulx were characterized by a quasi-policing approach, aimed at gathering and annotating data to aid French military leaders in maintaining control and suppressing continued uprisings throughout the 19th century. Particularly, real estate documents were exploited as crucial instruments in the colonial seizure of habous (endowment) lands and other properties, weaponized to displace Algerian owners and facilitate European settlement. This was part of a broader strategy to transform Algeria into a French province, fulfilling the imperial ambitions of colonial ideologues such as Bertrand Louis. While the Algerian Historical Society's scientific contributions to the study of Algerian documents were significant, they were simultaneously instrumentalized as tools of colonial domination.

Bibliography

Studies (books and articles)

1. AMARA, F. Z. (2010). amārḥ , fāṭima al-zahirā', «al-madāris al-ta'limiḥ bitlmisān ḥilāl al-qarinīn(8-9h./14-15m)». (Educational Schools in Tlemcen during the Two Centuries (8-9 AH/14-15 AD). [Master's Thesis unpublished]. University of Oran.
2. ARNOULET, F. (1892). Charles Lavigerie, mémoire d'Afrique du nord. *Biographies*. http://www.memoireafriquedunord.net/biog/biog06_Lavigerie.htm.
3. AUMERAT, J.F. (1897). « La propriété urbaine à Alger ». *Revue Africaine*, (41) , 321- 330.
4. AUMERAT, J.F. (1897/1898). «La propriété urbaine à Alger ». *Revue Africaine*, (42), 168-201.
5. BERBRUGGER, A. (1864). «Ouichahel-kataib». *Revue Africaine*, (08, 43) , 98-103.
6. BERBRUGGER A. (1865). «Les consuls pendant la conquête de 1830». *Revue Africaine*, (09,49), 57-60.
7. BRESNIER L.-J. (1856). «Époque de l'établissement des turcs à Constantine ». *Revue Africaine*, (1, 06), 399-402.
8. BRESNIER, L.J. (1863). «Texte d'un acte d'adjuration». *Revue Africaine*, (07, 41), 351-352.
9. DEVOULS A. (1858/59). « Les casernes de Janissaires à Alger». *Revue Africaine*, (3, 14), 132-150.
10. DEVOULS A. (1870). « les édifices religieux de l'ancien Alger ». *Revue Africaine*, (14, 68), 166-192.
11. DEVOULS A. (1870). « les édifices religieux de l'ancien Alger ». *Revue Africaine*, (81), 280-292.
12. DEVOULS Fils. (1858). « Ezzohar ennaira" la fleur brillante ». *Revue Africaine* , (03, 18), 436-440
13. FERAUD Ch. (1868). «Exploitation des forêts de la Kabasta ». *Revue Africaine*, (12,71) , 38
14. Lionel, J. «Le saccage des Français». Algérie: Données historiques et conséquences linguistiques. <https://www.axl.cefan.ulaval.ca/afrique/algerie-2Histoire.htm>
15. MAZARI, K. (2011). «Le Mythe De La Latinité Dans L'algérie Coloniale Et Post-Coloniale Louis Bertrand Et Sa Postérité Academia ». *Algerian academic institutions* , 319-328. https://www.academia.edu/32957866/Le_mythe_de_la_latinit%C3%A9.in_lAlg%C3%A9rie_coloniale_et_postcoloniale.
16. OULMI, M. L. (2021). «The Tashfiniyah School in Tlemcen, The Jewel of Zayani Art». *Qabas Journal for Human and Social Studies*, (5,2). <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticle/482/5/2/176766>. «Plan d'Alger en 1541». (1861). *Revue Africaine*, (06, 5) , 506.
17. ROUSSEAU A. (1856). «Chronique de Beilik d'Oran ». *Revue Africaine*, (01, 1), 143.
18. SAHBI, M. (2006). «al-maḥṭūṭāt al-'arabya fī al-ḡazā'ir fī al-maḡalḥ al-āfirīqya : dirāsh iḥṣā'ih bīblūgrāfiḥ». (Arabic manuscripts in Algeria in the African Journal: Bibliographic statistical study». In the book of the ninth conference for the General Union of Arab Archaeologists, Arab Council for Graduate Studies, 644-645.
19. SAHBI, M. (2013). «The African Magazine: Statistical-bibliographic study: For Arabic Manuscripts». *Mediterranean Dialogue Magazine*, (4, 1) 105-122 <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/17137>.
20. SHARQUI, Al-Rizqi. (2007). šārqi, al-'rīzqi. « al-'mādīrāsh al-'ttāšīfiniā bīmādīnt tīlīmīsān al-'zīwānīā (āstāqrā' ū ī'ādī bīnā' limuḥllfāthā al-''atarya) », *dirāsāt fī atār al-'waṭan al-'arabī*. (The Tashfin School in the Zayaniyya City of Tlemcen (Extrapolation and Reconstruction of its Archaeological Remains) ». *Studies in the Antiquities of the Arab World* 9, Cairo:Arab Council for Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research of the Association of Arab Universities, 455. <https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/cguua.2007.38550>.
21. STORA, B. 2004«L'Histoire de l'Algérie, sources, problèmes, écritures ». *Inssaniyat*, (25-26), 215-224. <https://journals.openedition.org/insaniyat/6476>.
22. VAYSETTES, E. (1863). « La question de la propriété jugée par les docteurs de la loi musulmane». *Revue Africaine*. (7,41) , 352-356.

Methods of collecting Algerian documents during the colonial period from the second half of the 19th century AD: The Algerian historical society as model.

Newspapers

1. GRANDMAISON, L, O.(2001, 06/12) « Quand Tocqueville légitimait les boucheries » . *Le monde diplomatique*.
https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2001/06/LE_COUR_GRANDMAISON/1706

Dictionaries

1. « Monarchie de Juillet ».
https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/monarchie_de_Juillet/126252