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A Reading of the Memoirs of Ahmed Effendi Al-Jazairi: How did the French enter Algeria?

Lecture des mémoires d'Ahmed Effendi Al-Jazairi : Comment les Français sont-ils entrés en Algérie ?

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Abstract:

This study examines the memoirs of Ahmad Affendi al-Jazāʾirī as a primary, relatively unexplored source for understanding the diplomatic rupture between Ottoman Algeria and France, which culminated in the Fly-Whisk Incident of 29 April 1827 and ultimately led to the French occupation of Algeria in 1830. The research seeks to reassess the dominant historiographical interpretation of this event, which has generally relied on French diplomatic archives and the writings of elite Algerian authors such as Hamdan Khodja and Sheikh al-Sharif al-Zahhar, while marginalising the testimony of Ahmad Affendi, who occupied a mid-ranking administrative and religious position within the Ottoman regency of Algiers. The central problem addressed in this study concerns the extent to which Affendi's memoirs provide a distinct and credible interpretation of the diplomatic crisis between Hussein Dey and the French consul Pierre Duval, and how this testimony modifies or complements the conventional colonial narrative surrounding the origins of the occupation.

The study adopts a qualitative historical methodology based on comparative textual analysis, source criticism, and contextual interpretation. The corpus of the research consists primarily of the memoirs of Ahmad Affendi al-Jazāʾirī, as well as French diplomatic correspondence, the memoirs of Hamdan Khodja and al-Sharif al-Zahhar, and selected studies on late Ottoman Algeria and Franco-Algerian relations. Through a comparative examination of these materials, the study identifies several original elements in Affendi's narrative, notably his assertion that Consul Duval attempted to draw his sword during the confrontation with Hussein Dey, his account of Ibrahim's intervention based on Islamic legal principles protecting the mustaʾmin foreign resident, and his critical depiction of the administrative and political atmosphere preceding the French invasion.

The results of the study demonstrate that Affendi's memoirs constitute an important indigenous testimony that can enrich the historiography of modern Algeria by offering a perspective distinct from official colonial narratives and elite reformist writings. The memoirs reveal that the diplomatic rupture of 1827 cannot be reduced to a simple personal altercation symbolised by the fly-whisk incident, but must instead be understood within a broader political, legal, and diplomatic context, marked by growing French expansionist ambitions and rising tensions in Ottoman Algeria. The study further concludes that Ahmad Affendi's account is a valuable historical source that warrants critical yet serious consideration in future research on the origins of the French occupation of Algeria.

Keywords: memoirs, Ahmed Effendi, Algeria, Ottoman, French, occupation.

Résumé:

Cette étude examine les mémoires d'Ahmad Affendi al-Jazāʾirī en tant que source historique principale et relativement inexplorée pour comprendre la rupture diplomatique entre l'Algérie ottomane et la France, qui culmina avec l'incident du chasse-mouches du 29 avril 1827 et conduisit finalement à l'occupation française de l'Algérie en 1830. La recherche vise à réévaluer l'interprétation historiographique dominante de cet événement, généralement fondée sur les archives diplomatiques françaises ainsi que sur les écrits d'auteurs algériens appartenant à l'élite, tels que Hamdan Khodja et le cheikh al-Sharif al-Zahhar, tout en marginalisant le témoignage d'Ahmad Affendi, qui occupait un poste administratif et religieux intermédiaire au sein de la Régence ottomane d'Alger. La problématique centrale de cette étude consiste à

déterminer dans quelle mesure les mémoires d'Affendi proposent une interprétation originale et crédible de la crise diplomatique entre Hussein Dey et le consul français Pierre Duval, et comment ce témoignage permet de compléter ou de corriger le récit colonial traditionnel relatif aux origines de l'occupation.

L'étude adopte une méthodologie historique qualitative fondée sur l'analyse textuelle comparative, la critique des sources et l'interprétation contextuelle. Le corpus de la recherche est constitué principalement des mémoires d'Ahmad Affendi al-Jazāʾirī, ainsi que de la correspondance diplomatique française, des mémoires de Hamdan Khodja et d'al-Sharif al-Zahhar, et d'un ensemble d'études consacrées à l'Algérie ottomane tardive et aux relations franco-algériennes. À travers l'examen comparatif de ces documents, l'étude met en évidence plusieurs éléments originaux dans le récit d'Affendi, notamment son affirmation selon laquelle le consul Duval aurait tenté de dégainer son épée lors de sa confrontation avec Hussein Dey, son récit de l'intervention d'Ibrahim fondée sur les principes juridiques islamiques protégeant le mustaʾmin, ainsi que sa description critique du climat administratif et politique ayant précédé l'invasion française.

Les résultats de l'étude montrent que les mémoires d'Affendi constituent un témoignage autochtone important susceptible d'enrichir l'historiographie de l'Algérie moderne en proposant une perspective différente des récits coloniaux officiels et des écrits réformistes de l'élite. Les mémoires révèlent que la rupture diplomatique de 1827 ne peut être réduite à une simple altercation personnelle symbolisée par l'incident du chasse-mouches, mais doit être comprise dans un contexte politique, juridique et diplomatique plus large, marqué par les ambitions expansionnistes françaises et les tensions croissantes au sein de l'Algérie ottomane. L'étude conclut enfin que le témoignage d'Ahmad Affendi représente une source historique précieuse qui mérite une analyse critique approfondie dans les recherches futures consacrées aux origines de l'occupation française de l'Algérie.

Mots clefs : mémoires, Ahmed Effendi, Algérie, occupation ottomane et française.

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Introduction:

The historical relations between Algeria and France represent a complex and protracted trajectory of diplomatic entanglement, military confrontation, and colonial ambition, long predating the French invasion of 1830. The earliest foundations of these relations were established during the Ottoman period, specifically following Algeria's integration into the Ottoman Empire as the province (Iyālat) of al-Jazāʾir under the authority of the Odjak—the distinctive military-administrative corps that governed the region. Initially, Franco-Algerian interactions were shaped by the broader geopolitical alignment between the Ottoman Empire and France during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, culminating in the famous alliance between Khayr al-Dīn Barbarūs and the French crown during the siege of Nice in 1543 against their common Habsburg adversary, Charles V. Over subsequent centuries, this relationship oscillated between commercial cooperation, diplomatic manoeuvring, and armed hostility, ultimately setting the stage for the fateful encounter on 29 April 1827 between Hussein Dey, the last Ottoman governor of Algiers, and the French Consul, Pierre Duval an incident commonly known as the "Fly-Whisk Incident" (l'éventail).

The present study focuses precisely on this critical moment, arguing that the memoirs of Ahmad Afendi al-Jazāʾirī offer a distinctive and hitherto underexplored account that challenges the dominant historiographical narrative and provides crucial new insights into the causes and immediate consequences of the rupture between Algeria and France.

Existing historiography on the diplomatic crisis of 1827 and the subsequent French invasion of Algeria has drawn primarily from French archival sources, Ottoman official correspondence, and the memoirs of European observers and Algerian elites of the notable class. Among the works cited in the preliminary documentation is Henry John Newbolt's The Year of Trafalgar (1805) (Henry,1905:4-9), a literary-narrative account of the 1805 battle and its regional repercussions, presented largely through poetic and versified treatments(Henry,1905:43). While Newbolt's work offers valuable contextual background on British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean and its indirect impact on Franco-Algerian relations, it suffers from significant methodological limitations: it is neither a work of systematic historical analysis nor based on primary archival research. Rather, it belongs to the genre of commemorative literature, celebrating British martial achievement and

presenting the Battle of Trafalgar as a heroic national myth. Consequently, its utility for understanding the specific dynamics of Algerian diplomatic history remains highly circumscribed.

Beyond Newbolt, the broader scholarly literature has tended to rely on French colonial archives and the memoirs of figures such as Hamdan Khodja (Al-Mir'āt) and Sheikh al-Sharif al-Zahhar, whose perspectives, while valuable, reflect elite, urban, or religious vantage points. What is conspicuously absent from this corpus is sustained critical engagement with the memoir of Ahmad Afendi al-Jazāʾirī, a mid-ranking provincial officer whose subaltern, cynical, and bureaucratically embedded perspective has been largely marginalized in favour of more "respectable" elite accounts. The present study thus addresses this lacuna by foregrounding Afendi's testimony as a corrective and a complement to the dominant historiographical tradition.

light of the foregoing critical review, the central problem guiding this research may be formulated as follows: To what extent does Ahmad Afendi al-Jazāʾirī's memoir provide a novel and reliable account of the 1827 diplomatic crisis between Hussein Dey and the French Consul, and how does this account challenge, revise, or supplement the dominant narratives derived from French official sources and other contemporary memoirs? (Ahmed Effendi, 1962:10).

To operationalize this overarching problem, the following subsidiary research questions are proposed:

1. Descriptive-Comparative Question: How does Ahmad Afendi's version of the encounter on 29 April 1827 specifically his claim that Consul Duval reached for his sword differ from the standard account (wherein Hussein Dey merely struck the consul with a fly-whisk), and what are the substantive points of divergence and convergence?
2. Interpretive Question: What interpretive implications arise from Afendi's narration of the intervention by Ibrahim, the Dey's deputy, who invoked Islamic legal principles (the protection of musta'min or foreign residents under safe conduct) to prevent the consul's assassination?
3. Critical-Source Question: What internal and external evidence supports or undermines the credibility of Afendi's account, and how does his subaltern-bureaucratic perspective shape the representation of the event compared to elite memoirs?
4. Historiographical Question: In what ways does Afendi's narrative contribute to a revised understanding of the causal chain leading from the 1827 incident to the French invasion of 1830, particularly regarding the agency of local intermediaries such as the Jewish merchants Bacri and Busnach?

This study adopts a qualitative historical methodology grounded in comparative source criticism and narrative analysis. Specifically, three complementary analytical approaches are employed:

- Comparative textual analysis: The memoir of Ahmad Afendi will be systematically compared with (a) French consular correspondence and official reports from the period 1824–1830, (b) the memoirs of Sheikh al-Sharif al-Zahhar, and (c) the writings of Hamdan Khodja. This comparison aims to identify points of convergence, divergence, and unique testimony.
- Internal criticism: Afendi's account will be subjected to internal analysis examining narrative coherence, temporal proximity to events, plausibility of claimed actions (e.g., the consul reaching for his sword in the Dey's council chamber), and potential self-exculpatory or rhetorical biases (notably his pervasive ironic and cynical tone).
- Contextual-legal analysis: The invocation of Islamic legal categories (particularly the status of musta'min) will be examined against the backdrop of Ottoman-Algerian diplomatic practice and Hanafi jurisprudence regarding the treatment of foreign residents, thereby assessing the credibility of Ibrahim's intervention as presented by Afendi.

The justification for this methodological triangulation is threefold: first, no single source provides an authoritative account of the 1827 incident, necessitating cross-verification; second, Afendi's subaltern perspective requires specific hermeneutic caution, as his ironic posture may obscure as much as it reveals; and third, the legal dimension of the event has been largely ignored in

existing scholarship, despite its potential significance for understanding how Ottoman-Algerian authorities conceptualized their relations with European powers. This methodology thus balances the recovery of new empirical data with rigorous critical scrutiny of source reliability.

The present study rests upon a carefully delimited corpus of primary sources, each selected for its specific evidentiary contribution:

This is the central source under investigation. Written by a mid-ranking Ottoman-Algerian officer who served within the provincial administration during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the memoir offers a rare subaltern-bureaucratic perspective on the events leading to the French conquest. Its analytical value lies in its detailed narration of the 29 April 1827 encounter, including the contentious claim regarding Consul Duval's attempt to draw his sword; documentation of the legal intervention by Ibrahim citing Islamic protections for foreign residents; and inscription of a cynical, disillusioned voice that contrasts sharply with the patriotic or religious framings of elite memoirists. However, its limitations include potential self-exculpation, selective memory, and an ironic narrative posture that complicates factual verification.

These include reports from Consul Pierre Duval to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as correspondence from subsequent consuls and naval commanders. Their analytical value consists in providing the official French perspective on the dispute over grain debts owed to the Jewish merchants Bacri and Busnach, as well as the diplomatic fallout from the fly-whisk incident. They serve as a crucial external check on Afendi's claims, particularly regarding the question of whether Duval physically reached for his sword an act conspicuously absent from French accounts.

Written from the vantage point of an urban religious notable, these memoirs emphasize the moral and communal dimensions of the crisis, focusing on the role of the 'ulama and Sufi orders in mediating between Ottoman authorities and the Algerian populace. Their comparative value lies in their religious-ethical framing, which stands in stark contrast to Afendi's cynical and bureaucratic register.

This text, produced by an educated merchant and reformist critic of Ottoman rule, provides detailed documentation of Ottoman administrative corruption, the grievances of the notable class, and the economic dimensions of Franco-Algerian friction, including the Bacri and Busnach affair. Its comparative value lies in its elite, reformist perspective and its relative accessibility to European readers, which influenced early French orientalist interpretations of the Algerian crisis. By triangulating these diverse sources, the present study aims to reconstruct a more nuanced and multi-perspectival account of the 1827 diplomatic rupture, while rigorously assessing the novel—and controversial—testimony of Ahmad Affendi al-Jazāʾirī.

1. The Author of the Memoirs:

A . Identity and Offices of Ahmed Effendi al-Jazāʾirī:

What is known concerning the author of these memoirs – who was an eyewitness to the manner in which the French entered Algeria – is that he was Ahmed Effendi (or Aḥmad Effendi), who served as Muftī at the time of the French expedition against Algeria. In addition to this supreme religious office, he also held the position of Qāʾimmaqām with the rank of Agha in the district of Lija (or Leova), within the Anatolian provinces. It was there that he later died, in the year 1838 (1254 H.). This biographical information is corroborated by reports preserved in the official gazettes (salnāmes) of the Sublime Porte, as well as in certain Ottoman archival registers.

B. His Role as an Eyewitness:

Ahmed Effendi al-Jazāʾirī was among those who personally witnessed the French landing at Sīdī Faraj in June 1830 and observed firsthand the unfolding of the occupation. Unlike many chroniclers who wrote from exile or long after the events, he was present inside the city of Algiers during the siege, the bombardment, and the eventual capitulation of the Deï Ḥusayn Pasha on 5 July 1830. His narrative thus belongs to that rare category of historical writing: the contemporary eyewitness account, produced by a participant who bore both religious and administrative responsibilities.

C. His Scholarly Lineage:

Ahmed Effendi was known to be a student of the former Muftī of Algiers, Amīn Afandī Ḥajjī ʿUmar Afandī, who is also recorded as Zāda Guzal-hiṣār Aydīnī[1] (a native of Güzelhisar in the Aydın region of Anatolia). This intellectual lineage places him firmly within the Hanafī-Māturīdī tradition of Ottoman religious scholarship, which predominated in the regency of Algiers.

Following the French conquest of Algiers, his teacher, Amīn Affendī, chose to emigrate (hijra) from the city rather than submit to Christian rule. He departed to other regions of the Ottoman Empire – possibly to the eastern Mediterranean or Anatolia – in order to continue the struggle (jihād) against the French advance elsewhere, a practice that echoed the classical Islamic legal principle of abandoning lands fallen under non-Muslim domination when resistance became impossible.

D. The Significance of His Dual Role: Muftī and Qāʾimmaqām

What distinguishes Ahmed Effendi from other contemporary chroniclers – such as al-Sharīf al-Zahhār or Ḥamdān Khōja – is his dual function as both the highest religious authority in the capital and a temporary administrative governor (Qāʾimmaqām) in the Anatolian provinces after his departure from Algeria. This combination of religious and executive authority meant that his perspective on the occupation was not merely that of a pious observer but of a man who understood both the legal-moral dimensions of the catastrophe and the practical mechanics of Ottoman governance.

His decision to record the events, as he states in the opening of his epistle, was driven by a sense of religious duty (amāna) to transmit the truth to succeeding generations, unadorned and unaltered. This goal, he insists, overrides any political or personal consideration.

E. Additional Clarifications on His Death and Final Years

Some local biographical dictionaries (such as those compiled by later Algerian scholars) have occasionally confused Ahmed Effendi with another figure of the same name. However, the consensus among those who have examined the manuscript held at the Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya in Cairo (MS No. 3235, Majāmīʿ – Tārīkh) is that he died in 1838 in the Lija district of Anatolia. His place of death, far from his native Algeria, testifies to the broader Ottoman experience of post-1830 emigration: many Algerian scholars, officials, and soldiers who refused to collaborate with the French departed for Tripoli, Tunis, Egypt, Syria, or Anatolia, where some continued to serve the Ottoman state in various capacities.

2. Description of the Manuscript Copies:

The manuscript of this text was first identified in Istanbul by the orientalist and diplomat Schlechta[2]. Another copy is attributed to the orientalist Charles Schefer and was printed at the Imprimerie Reima–Leboulaq. The treatise has been preserved at the Egyptian National Library (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya) under the classification number 2225 (Majāmīʿ, History). It bears the title "A Brief Account of the Reasons behind the Extension of French Control over the Lands of Algeria and Their Seizure". The author of this text was a direct eyewitness to the capture of the city of Algiers by French forces, a fact that he recounts in detail in this narrative.

[1] Güzelhisar: A district near Ankara in Turkey.

[2] Schlechta-Wssherd: An Austrian Orientalist, born in Vienna on July 20, 1825, and died in the same city on December 18, 1894. He published Turkish texts with translations into German and French. He pursued a diplomatic career. Between 1848 and 1860, he served as an interpreter at the Imperial and Royal Austrian embassies in Constantinople (Istanbul). In 1861, he directed the Oriental Academy in Vienna, which he worked to develop. He became a diplomat in 1861.

The manuscript dates back to 1862 and constitutes a unique testimony written by an indigenous observer, which greatly enhances its historical value in documenting this pivotal event. The original text was composed in Turkish and later translated into Arabic by Muhammad Halim Effendi, an assistant at the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs. The Arabic version was subsequently supplemented with a concluding note by Rifa'a Bey Rafi' al-Tahtawi, head of the Translation Bureau and Rawḍat al-Madāris (Ahmed Effendi, 1962: 24). In addition, the text was translated into French[3] by Schlechta and published in the Journal Asiatique in 1862, alongside the original Turkish version, albeit without any critical annotations or commentary. The precise circumstances surrounding the intended audience, the number of existing copies, and the conditions under which they were acquired remain unknown.

It appears that the translation of this treatise took place during the era of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, at a time when the translation movement in Egypt was flourishing. After rendering the text into Arabic, Muhammad Halim Effendi appended a brief concluding note in which he discussed the geography of Algeria, its land and population, and its history from the Islamic conquest up to the reign of Hussein Dey, making specific reference to the Fan Incident.

The memoirs may thus be regarded as a detailed report in which their author set out the causes of the French invasion of Algeria following the incident that occurred on 5 Ramadan 1243 AH (21 March 1828) between the French consul and the governor Hussein Pasha. The text was authored by al-Hajj Ahmed Effendi, who held the post of Qāʾim maqām in the district of Lija in Anatolia, and was completed in 1246 AH (1830 CE).

3. The Content of the Memoirs

Before addressing the content of the treatise (the memoirs) itself, it is necessary to note that the extended residence of Schlechta-Wssehrd who spent more than twelve years in the Ottoman capital as a secretary and simultaneous interpreter constituted a crucial factor in providing him with a fertile scholarly environment. This position enabled him to translate a considerable number of Ottoman manuscripts and official documents.

As for the memoirs of Ahmed Effendi, they are arranged chronologically according to the annalistic method. The author records events day by day and year by year, offering a concise account of the reasons behind the extension of French control over Algeria and its eventual occupation. As previously noted, the text is derived from a Turkish treatise authored by Ahmed Effendi al-Jaza'iri, Qāʾimmaqām of the district of Lija in Anatolia, who died there in 1837, according to reports in the gazettes of the Sublime Porte. Ahmed Effendi was among those who witnessed the events firsthand and carefully observed their unfolding. The text was translated into Arabic by Muhammad Halim Effendi, an assistant at the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs, and subsequently supplemented by Rifaʿa Rafiʿ al-Tahtawi, head of the Translation Bureau and Rawḍat al-Madāris.

The author structured his treatise strictly by years, recounting incidents sequentially. It appears that the translation was carried out during the reign of Muhammad ʿAli Pasha, at a time when the translation movement in Egypt was flourishing—an enterprise in which Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi, who died in 1290 AH, played a central role. After Muhammad Halim Effendi had rendered the text into Arabic, al-Tahtawi reviewed it and appended a brief concluding note. In this addendum, he addressed the geography of Algeria, its land and population, and its historical trajectory from the Islamic conquest to the reign of Hussein Dey, with particular reference to the Fan Incident.

One of the most striking testimonies provided by Ahmed Effendi concerns the courage of the Algerian populace in its diverse social strata and their resistance to the French occupation. He writes that he rejected proposals for submission and instead gathered the righteous among the Muslims, reminding them of the spiritual reward promised to believers who die as martyrs and of the victory and spoils promised to those who sacrifice themselves in the path of God. He recounts

[3] See also: Richard Francis. The little-known Turkish manuscripts of the Interuniversity Library of Oriental Languages. In: Proceedings of the sessions of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, 154th year, No. 4, 2010. pp. 1685-1698.

that when the women witnessed this resolve, they threw themselves before the men and cast their children at their feet, crying out: “If you prevail, then this is well; but if you are defeated, the enemy will assault us and violate our honour. Seek God’s help and advance but to slaughter us before you depart would be more protective of our honour.” (Ahmed Effendi, 1962: 25).

Ahmed Effendi further relates that while he was endeavoring to calm the women and allay their fear, a messenger arrived from the Pasha. When he appeared before him, the Pasha declared that he had broken the staff of obedience to his sovereign and disobeyed his command, acting contrary to what he had been ordered to do. As a consequence, he admitted, defeat had befallen him before his enemies, for such is God’s punishment for one who disobeys his Lord and follows his own desires and those of Satan. Ahmed Effendi then returned to those he had assembled and informed them that, since the fighting was not undertaken with the approval of the Caliph of God and religion forbade disobedience to him, it would be more appropriate to desist from combat. They replied in one voice that fate had already overtaken them: they had left their homeland and families solely out of devotion to their faith and obedience to their sovereign, and now endured the pain of deprivation and exile far from home (Ahmed Effendi, 1962: 26).

Ahmed Effendi succeeded in ensuring the safe departure of those who wished to leave Algiers and guaranteed security to those who chose to remain, explicitly declaring that the city of Algiers had fallen under French fire. He states: “The city of Algiers has passed out of our hands, and we ask God Almighty to preserve our authority. Permission was granted for anyone who directed his gaze toward a destination to depart for it. Yet, I shall not refrain from striving in the path of God so long as I live, nor shall I neglect it whenever I see the Muslims mobilise for it” (Ahmed Effendi, 1962: 27).

At this point, reference may be made to the memoirs of Hamdan b. ʿUthman Khodja (al-Mirʾāt) and those of Ahmed al-Sharif al-Zahhar, which likewise constitute major sources on Algeria during the Ottoman period and the early phase of French occupation. Both authors may be regarded as eyewitnesses to the French seizure of Algeria. When discussing the figure of Hussein Dey, each portrayed him from the perspective of his own social and political affiliations. Nevertheless, they concur in many of their observations, particularly insofar as they were both officials within the Ottoman administrative apparatus. The importance of their writings lies in the value of the observations and information they provide.

The German doctor Pfeiffer recounts that the French consul Duval responded to Dey Hussein with a degree of arrogance and contempt, saying: "The French government would rather send its fleet and armies to the Algerian coasts and raise its flags above them, as a lesson to the Dey, than respond to his demands." Ahmed Sharif al-Zahar also notes that Dey Hussein inquired about the issue of debts, and each time the French consul promised to wait until the day of Eid, when the opportunity arose, to offer congratulations, as was the custom in the diplomatic corps. At this point, Dey Hussein questioned the French consul and tried to elicit a response, which led to a verbal altercation between the two (Pfeiffer, 1974: 33).

Although Sharif al-Zahhar was criticising the policies of Dey Hussein, at the end of his book, he praised him, saying: “Hassan Pasha, the last of the Turkish kings in Algeria, was of sound mind, unshaken by great matters, and unwavering in the face of adversity. As for his conduct among the people of the country and his kingdom, he conducted himself in a good manner, unlike any of his predecessors” (al-Zahhar, 1980: 175).

Therefore, it was incumbent upon Consul Duval to provide explanations and answers to the questions posed to him by Dey Hussein, without engaging in pointless verbal sparring and further provoking the Dey, who was an Ottoman ruler with the status of a president of state today (al-Zahhar, 1980, 176).

Sources agree that Dey Hussein was one of the few officials distinguished by his noble character and aversion to intrigue. Hamdan Khodja describes him, saying: "This virtuous man belongs to a noble family and possesses broad culture. He served the province for more than thirty

years. Knowing his character, I can say that he is of that ancient Turkish origin, meaning he is honorable and generous. I don't believe anyone can accuse him of greed" (Khūjah, 1982: 173-174).

Another significant component of the memoirs concerns the concluding addendum composed by Rifaʿa Rafiʿ al-Tahtawi. In this section, he offers a detailed introduction to Algeria, describing its boundaries, population, and demographic composition during the period under discussion. He portrays Algeria as an Ottoman province divided into four regions, each governed by a local ruler. He lists its principal cities, such as Oran, Tlemcen, Bône (Annaba), Constantine, and Béjaïa. He also addresses its climate and physical geography, including mountains, plains, valleys, rivers, fertile agricultural lands, and coral-rich coastlines.

Al-Tahtawi then outlines the major historical periods and civilisations that settled in Algeria, including the Romans, the Vandals, the era of early Islam and its conquests, the Umayyads, Abbasids, Aghlabids, Zirids, Almoravids, and Almohads, and the period of Spanish occupation. He recounts the arrival of Khayr al-Din Barbarossa, the appointment of governors by Sultan Selim, the introduction of the Janissaries, the conflicts between Pashas and Aghas, and finally the period of the Deys, which witnessed a relative degree of stability, culminating in the rule of Hussein Dey, who governed for more than twelve years until the arrival of the French (Ahmed Effendi, 1962:12).

Al-Tahtawi further describes the nature of French military rule and their administrative division of the country into three provinces: Algiers, Constantine, and Oran, combining military and civil authority. He notes that the indigenous population numbered approximately three million, with the remainder consisting of foreigners. He also addresses the core of the conflict between Hussein Dey and the French consul, the exchange of insults that culminated in the Fan Incident. With the accession of King Charles X, Algeria entered a distinctly expansionist phase of military colonialism (Esquer, 1929:23).

Among the most noteworthy events highlighted is the night of 12 Rabiʿ al-Awwal 1244 AH (22 September 1828), when Hussein Dey dispatched a fleet of Muslim soldiers to confront French ships. Simultaneously, scholars began reciting Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, while Qurʾanic reciters read selected verses, notably Sūrat al-Naṣr. The populace spent the night raising their hands in supplication, praying to God for victory over the enemy. On that occasion, victory favoured the Muslims.

Al-Tahtawi also notes that the author of the treatise, Ahmed Effendi, acted as an intermediary between the Algerian Muslims and France in attempts to negotiate an agreement or peace settlement (Henry, 1930:32). Ostensibly, he was among the envoys dispatched by the Pasha for this purpose. France granted a deed of safe conduct (amān) to Hussein Dey, his family, and his entourage, on the condition that he leave the city and proceed to Egypt. This, however, did not prevent Algerians from repeatedly rising against the French and inflicting significant losses upon them. The memoirs also include several important appendices, among them the document of safe conduct granted by General de Bourmont upon his entry into Algiers.

4. Theoretical Synthesis:

The memoirs of Ahmed Effendi al-Jaza'iri constitute a historical source of exceptional significance for the study of Algeria in the late Ottoman period. Their value stems primarily from the fact that they constitute eyewitness accounts by an administrative and religious actor who was directly involved in the events leading up to the French occupation of Algeria in 1830. From a methodological perspective, these memoirs provide a critical framework for reassessing dominant historical narratives, particularly the colonial discourse that reduced the causes of the occupation to the so-called Fan Incident, while overlooking the broader political and diplomatic contexts that shaped Franco-Algerian relations.

By revealing previously marginalised or deliberately omitted facts—most notably the provocative conduct of the French consul and his attempted act of aggression against Dey Hussein—the memoirs redistribute historical responsibility and undermine the justificatory logic of the colonial narrative. They thus contribute to a corrective reading of the event, grounded in contemporaneous local testimony rather than retrospective imperial interpretation.

Moreover, the memoirs offer an invaluable insight into the Algerian–Ottoman perspective on governance, political legitimacy, and the role of religious authority during periods of crisis. They document not only the decision-making processes within the ruling elite, but also the social dynamics and popular reactions to the unfolding occupation, thereby providing a rare sociopolitical portrait of Algerian society at a moment of profound historical rupture.

From a historiographical standpoint, Ahmed Effendi's use of the annalistic method in organising events by year reflects a sophisticated historical consciousness. It challenges claims that such methodological practices were exclusive to Western historiography. His meticulous chronological ordering further enhances the documentary credibility of the memoirs as a primary source.

Accordingly, the memoirs of Ahmed Effendi should not be read merely as a narrative record of events, but rather as an analytical instrument for re-examining the history of Algeria in the late Ottoman era. Situated at the intersection of local agency and international dynamics, and of religious, political, and social factors, they constitute an indispensable reference for any scholarly endeavour seeking to produce a critical and decolonised account of modern Algerian history.

5. The Importance of Ahmed Effendi al-Jazairi's Memoirs in Writing National History:

The memoirs of Hajj Ahmed Effendi al-Jazairi are among the essential historical documents that chronicle a pivotal era in modern Algerian history: the fall of Algiers to French occupation on July 5, 1830. Ahmed Effendi held the position of Grand Mufti of the Hanafi school of thought in Algeria, which afforded him a unique vantage point from which to observe and closely follow events. This imbues his memoirs with the quality of an "eyewitness account," a distinction of significant documentary value. The primary importance of this text lies in its being one of the rare sources that offers an authentic, firsthand account, distinct from foreign narratives or later analyses that lack a contemporary perspective on these momentous events.

The memoirs are distinguished by their unique ability to bridge holistic historical approaches and profound human dimensions. Ahmed Effendi does not merely describe the course of battles and military conflicts, but extends his narrative to depict the collective shock that gripped the Algerian psyche. He faithfully chronicles the state of Algerian society during those critical days, how people lived through moments of fear and bewilderment, and the tragedy of an entire nation under occupation.

These memoirs also reflect the role of the intellectual elite across its spectrum, including court officials at the highest levels of the Ottoman power structure, amidst the crises. Ahmed Effendi was part of the political and spiritual system resisting the occupation, thus providing us with a rich perspective on the nature of alliances and loyalties during that period.

The significance of Ahmed Effendi's memoirs lies not only in their being a record of events, but also in their role as a tool for analysing the social and political structures that took shape in Ottoman Algeria before the occupation.

Ahmed Effendi's memoirs are rightly considered among the most important and rare historical sources documenting the beginnings of the French occupation of Algeria. This is primarily because there is a firsthand account by a contemporary who experienced those events. The first edition of the text, titled "The Occupation of Algeria as Told by an Algerian," was published in Paris in 1863. Written in both Turkish and French, it reflects the author's attempt to convey his voice and perspective to European audiences who needed to hear a narrative that differed from the prevailing colonial version.

6. What Is New in Ahmed Affendi's Memoirs?

In comparison with the memoirs of Sheikh al-Sharif al-Zahhar (which foreground religious-moral community and colonial trauma) and Hamdan Khodja (which articulate elite reformist critique and anti-Ottoman grievance), Ahmad Afendi al-Jaza'iri's narrative introduces the following new aspects:

1. A subaltern-official perspective situated between the governing elite and the governed populace.
2. Micro-level documentation of informal economies, bribery systems, and everyday corruption as structural, not exceptional, practices.
3. Routine civilian-military interactions in provincial towns rather than major battles or decrees.
4. A colloquial Ottoman Turkish linguistic register with code-switching that captures authentic sociolinguistic conditions, in contrast to formal Arabic or polished Ottoman.
5. An ironic, weary, cynical emotional register detached from both religious nostalgia and reformist optimism.

Collectively, these features position Ahmad Affendi's memoirs as a distinct and valuable source for understanding the interiority of late Ottoman provincial governance from a perspective almost absent from the better-known works of al-Zahhar and Khodja.

Conclusion:

This study concludes that the memoirs of Ahmed Effendi al-Jaza'iri constitute more than a personal testimony; they represent a foundational documentary source for writing the modern history of Algeria from an indigenous perspective that directly challenges the hegemonic colonial narrative. By virtue of his position as Hanafi chief mufti, Effendi produced a layered account that integrates military chronology, political analysis of institutional collapse, and vivid documentation of civilian suffering. This internal vantage point renders his text indispensable for any historical investigation into the initial phase of French occupation, as it fills a critical gap left by both official French records and scarce local archives.

Methodologically, the memoirs demonstrate a sophisticated chronological awareness, organising events by specific Hijri years (1243, 1244, 1245 AH) alongside their Gregorian equivalents, thereby challenging orientalist claims that exclusively attribute the invention of systematic chronology to European historiographical traditions. However, a critical reading requires acknowledging inherent limitations: Effendi's position within the deposed elite may have shaped his assessment of certain actors and events, and his account, while allegedly based on contemporaneous notes, remains subject to the interventions of selective memory, having been composed several years after the fall of Algiers. Hence, the text should be employed as primary testimony, requiring both internal and external criticism, rather than as an unquestioned record of fact.

Beyond its empirical content, the memoirs function as what might be termed a "counter-witness" within postcolonial historiography, deconstructing colonial discourse and rehabilitating a suppressed local voice. Effendi's lament—"Algeria has ended" marks not merely an expression of grief but the emergence of a new historical consciousness rooted in testimony rather than silence. Future research should pursue three axes: first, a narratological analysis of the memoirs as counter-colonial discourse; second, a comparative examination against contemporary Ottoman and Arab memoir literature; third, an investigation into the text's reception and influence across successive generations of Algerian historians. Thus, these memoirs endure as a classical source still capable of generating new historical knowledge beyond the confines of foreign discursive hegemony.

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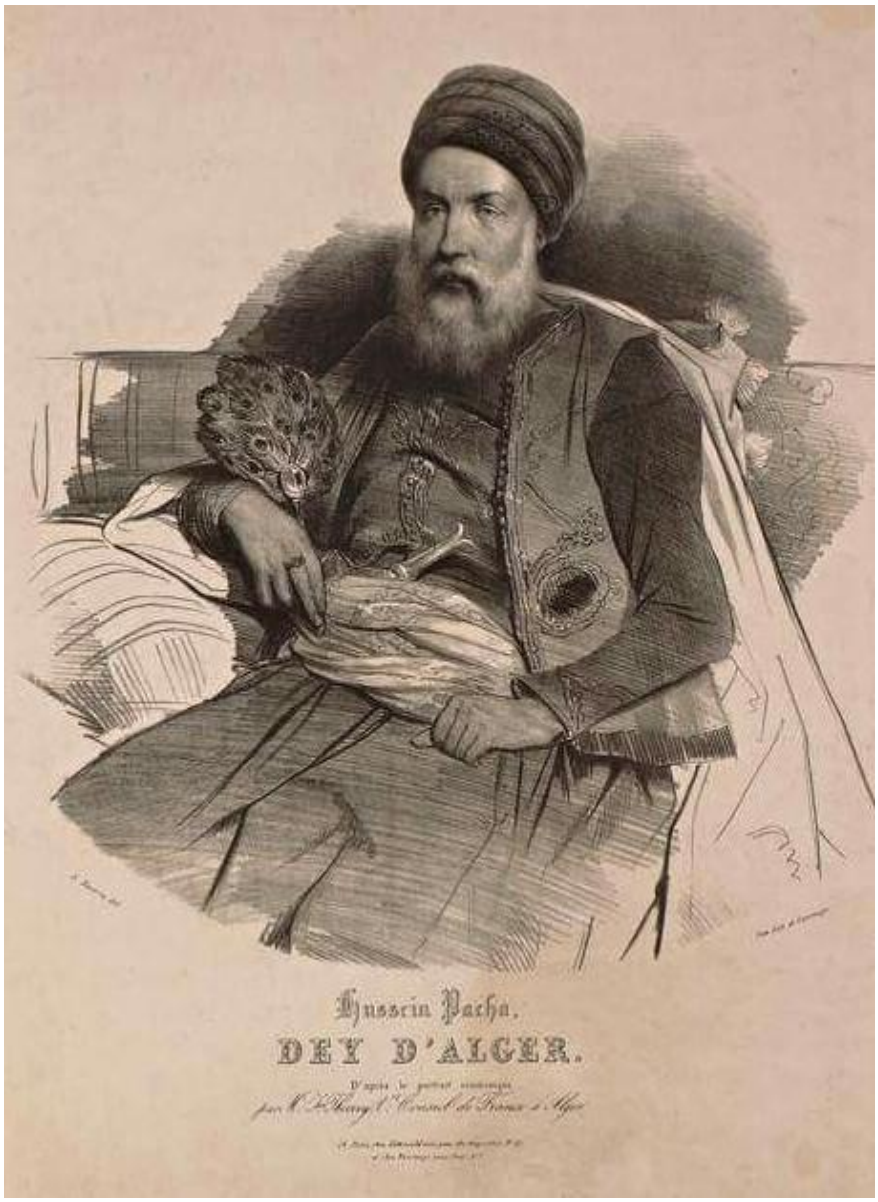
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Study appendices

Figure01:
An illustration of the Dey of Algiers: Hussein Pasha



Source: Al-Jazā'irī Aḥmed. (1962). Kayfa dakhala al-Faransīyūn al-Jazā'ir, tq: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, D. Ṭ,. Bayrūt, Lubnān : Dār al-Kitāb al-jadīd.

Figure 02:
An illustration of the Dey of Algiers: Hussein Pasha with the French Consul Duval



Source: Al-Jazā'irī Aḥmad. (1962). Kayfa dakhala al-Faransīyūn al-Jazā'ir, tq : Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, D. Ṭ,. Bayrūt, Lubnān : Dār al-Kitāb al-jadīd.

Figure 03 :
Schlechta-Wssehrd. (1863). La prise d'Alger racontée par un Algérien (Hadji Ahmed-Effendi). Journal asiatique. Imp Impériale. Paris.

ارتكاب ايدوب كفّارك رئيسلرينه رجايه كيدوب بيك
پولينتقه ايله الندن بر بتنتی الوب كيدنلری منع ايتمم
استدكلری محلّه كتسونلر طورانلری غدر ايتمم عرض
ووقارلريله طورسونلر واذان محمّديه اوقنسون نهی ايتمم
ديو وبو بتنتی‌يه سائر دولك قونسلوسلرينه شهادت
مهرنی باصديروب كتورب اللرينه تسلم ايدوب جزايير
كيتدی ايسه پادشاهمز صاغ اولسون هرنربه نظر ايتسه
جزايردن معمور متين اوجاق اولور ديو تسلّيلر ويروب
بوطرفه كلانلرايله برابر كلدم يغه بر يرده جهاد اولور
ايسه يغه كيدرم يغه كيدرم تاكه اخر عمرة قدر جهاددن
منقطع اولم انشاء الله تعالى

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