

The Significance of Local Archives as Cultural Heritage in Documenting the History of Algiers during the Ottoman Era.

أهمية الأرشيف المحلي كموروث حضاري في كتابة تاريخ مدينة الجزائر في الفترة العثمانية

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Abstract:

The Ottoman archive documents of all kinds, related to the city of Algiers and currently located in Algeria, have acquired special importance as a cultural heritage and constitute the primary source for writing the history of this period. They provide the historian with the original source material through which a comprehensive and accurate view of the history of Algeria in general and the city in particular can be given, according to what the scientific method requires and the objective view requires. The importance of these documents has been confirmed by the fact that the Ottoman era in Algeria was generally characterized by a lack of historical manuscript production, despite the availability of archival documents. Although these documents were rare for the 16th century AD, and few for the 17th century AD, they were numerous and varied for the 18th century AD and the early 19th century AD. This is what prompted researchers to consider them the only source for the late Ottoman era in Algeria. The importance of these documents also lies in the nature of the material they contain, the diversity of the topics they relate to, and the fields they address.

Keywords: City of Algiers, local archives, Sharia court records, treasury and beylik records.

الملخص:

إن وثائق الأرشيف العثماني بكل أنواعها، المتعلقة بمدينة الجزائر والموجودة حاليا بالجزائر، قد اكتسبت أهمية خاصة لكونها موروث حضاري وتشكل المصدر الأساسي لكتابة تاريخ هذه الفترة، فهي تقدم للمؤرخ المادة المصدرية الاصيلية والتي من خلالها يمكن إعطاء نظرة شاملة ودقيقة عن تاريخ الجزائر بصفة عامة والمدينة بصفة خاصة، وهذا حسب ما يتطلبه المنهج العلمي، وتقتضيه النظرة الموضوعية ، وقد تأكدت أهمية هذه الوثائق من كون العهد العثماني بالجزائر كان يتميز عموما بقلة الإنتاج التاريخي المخطوط مع توفر الوثائق الارشيفية، هذه الوثائق التي و ان كانت نادرة بالنسبة للقرن 16م ، وقلية بالنسبة للقرن 17م، الا انها كثيرة متنوعة بالنسبة للقرن 18م و أوائل القرن 19م ، وهذا ما دفع الباحثين الى اعتبارها المصدر الوحيد لأواخر العهد العثماني بالجزائر ، وتكمن هذه أهمية هذه الوثائق أيضا في طبيعة المادة التي تحتويها وتنوع الموضوعات التي تتصل بها و المجالات التي تتطرق لها .

الكلمات المفتاحية: مدينة الجزائر، الأرشيف المحلي، سجلات المحاكم الشرعية، سجلات بيت المال والبايلك.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Ottoman era preserved the cultural continuity of the Algerian nation within the Ottoman Caliphate. It was a distinguished era within the general context of Algerian history as it was a crucial period before the crusade and colonialist invasion. During this period, the identity of individuals was formed, and the foundations and components of the modern Algerian state were completed. It acquired a capital, borders, and administrative apparatus, in addition to establishing its foreign relations and increasing its military power. The aforementioned context requires further research to understand the events of this period and provide a clear picture

of the internal and external conditions that Algeria experienced during the Ottoman period.

2. The importance of National Archives documents:

To gain insight into Algeria's history during the Ottoman and colonial periods, it is important to examine primary sources found in local archives.

⁽¹⁾These archives play a crucial role in shaping the collective memory of modern societies, especially in smaller communities like Algiers. They serve as essential resources for knowledge development, cultural understanding, and specialized research, allowing us to investigate the detailed histories of these societies.

Acknowledging the significance of archival documents as cultural heritage, Algeria established the National Archives Center. The center's primary mission is to protect this heritage and support researchers by providing necessary financial resources and conducive research conditions.

The National Archives Center houses a wealth of diverse materials, particularly those related to the Ottoman era. The documents from this time provide valuable insights into social conditions, economic activities, and cultural life in Algeria, especially focusing on Algiers from the 16th to the 19th century. These archival documents contain accurate historical information that illuminates family dynamics, societal movements, and individual behaviors, as well as economic transactions.⁽²⁾

3. Sharia Court Records in Algiers:

The city of Algiers, like many other cities under Ottoman rule, holds a valuable collection of official documents from the Ottoman period. Among these, Sharia court records stand out as crucial sources for understanding the social, administrative, cultural, and economic history of Algeria. ⁽³⁾ These documents mainly consist of civil judicial contracts that address a wide range of issues, illustrating the significant role of judges in Algiers at that time. The types of contracts found in the Sharia court records include endowment contracts, which were particularly important ⁽⁴⁾, as well as contracts related to sales and purchases, marriages, divorces, disputes, inheritance, gifts, and emancipation. ⁽⁵⁾

These Sharia court documents are organized into one hundred and fifty-four boxes, with the majority pertaining to Algiers and some to neighboring cities like Blida, El Kolea, Cherchell, Medea, and Miliana. The records span from the first half of the sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, and the predominant language used in these documents is Arabic. ⁽⁶⁾

The documents in this series reflect the role of the religious leader, specifically the city's judge, during the Ottoman period in Algeria. This judge had significant religious authority and various responsibilities that impacted many aspects of life. This is evident in the numerous and varied Sharia court documents, which showcase the breadth of his duties, including resolving disputes, handling urgent cases, managing personal status issues, and overseeing transactions related to endowments and property sales. ⁽⁷⁾

These archival materials are important for understanding the social, economic, and cultural ⁽⁸⁾ conditions in Algeria during this time. They serve as valuable resources for historians, as they provide essential information for reconstructing Algeria's Ottoman history. ⁽⁹⁾ This is particularly important because many documents have been lost or damaged after the occupation of Algiers⁽¹⁰⁾, making this collection even more significant. Additionally, the lack of organization—spatially or chronologically—adds a layer of complexity to their study, but also provides an opportunity for in-depth research into Algeria's past. ⁽¹¹⁾

Sharia court records are valuable sources of information that encompass various types of legal contracts, particularly endowment contracts. These contracts provide insights into real estate ownership, identifying major property owners, the process of transferring ownership within families, and how property is distributed across different social classes. They also offer details on the city's topography and important landmarks, such as markets and public facilities, particularly in the absence of detailed maps and descriptions from historians.

Through the study of endowment contracts, we can gather important details, including the name and profession of the endower, the types of properties endowed, their locations, the beneficiaries of the endowment, and its intended purpose. In addition to endowments, the records include sale and purchase contracts, which shed light on the commercial activities in the city, the currencies in use, and the fluctuations in prices.

Inheritance contracts present further insights into the socioeconomic status of various segments of Algerian society by detailing the wealth passed down from the deceased. This information helps us understand material life in the city, ranging from simple to luxurious living. These contracts also reveal family structures, including the size of families and the number of wives, which are important for demographic analysis.

Marriage and divorce contracts contained in these records reveal the types of dowries, prevailing social customs, and the dynamics of marital relationships. Divorce documents detail the reasons and conditions for divorce and specify which spouse initiated the request. Gift documents⁽¹²⁾ provide insights into familial relationships and the nature of significant gifts exchanged.

4. Beylik and Financial Records:

The Beylik records deal with various issues. There are about three hundred and eighty-six books distributed across thirty-six boxes. Although not in chronological order, they cover a period of more than two centuries, from the mid-seventeenth century to the second half of the nineteenth century. These books, as official records of the employees of the old Beylik administration, contain endowed properties and trusts. They relate in their entirety to economic, social, and administrative issues, as well as commercial transactions within and outside the city. A significant section of the records endowed properties to charitable institutions, primarily the Two Holy Mosques of Mecca and Medina, in addition to the Great Mosque.⁽¹³⁾ Most of these books are recorded in Arabic, while a few are in Ottoman, due to the important historical information they contain.

The other group of archives from the Ottoman period is the Treasury Records, a collection containing sixty-four records (books) numbered from one to sixty-four⁽¹⁴⁾ distributed across eleven boxes. They cover the period from the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century. Most of these records deal with estates, deaths, and inheritances, as well as with endowment revenues and expenses for the poor, property belonging to the beylik, and records of absentees and orphans under the supervision of the Treasury Supervisor, or what is known as the Treasury House. The content of these records relates to issues related to estates, deaths, heirs' rights, the Treasury's share of bequests or legacies and endowment revenues, expenses for the poor and strangers, and the trusts of absentees and orphans. These documents are distributed throughout the Ottoman era in Algeria, most of them from the appointment of Hayreddin by the Ottoman authorities to the Ottoman Navy Admiralty in the 1630s to the first years of the French occupation.⁽¹⁵⁾ Overall, the records from the Sharia courts are essential for understanding the everyday life of Algerian society, particularly during the Ottoman period, making them crucial for historical research and preservation of cultural memory.

There is also another series of registers from the treasury and the beylik, presented by French President François Mitterrand during his visit to Algeria. The National Archives has made a special index available to researchers for this series. This series complements the first part, which deals with treasury and beylik documents. It includes 133 registers

distributed across 19 boxes. We will present some examples of the beylik and House of Wealth registers related to shrines and zawiyas:

- Box 4, Register 16: Contains two documents. The first is a statement of the endowments of Sidi Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi. It is a list of his various properties, including shops, houses, and gardens, along with their monthly and annual rents for the year 1199 AH/1777 AD. The second document from this register is a list of the properties of the shrine of Sidi Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi, other than real estate, specifically the books and vessels endowed to the shrine in 1144 AH/1731 AD.

- Box 16, Register 100: This register pertains to religious institutions in Algiers, including shrines, mosques, and zawiyas. This register was compiled during the colonial period and records the endowment contracts for zawiyas, mosques, and shrines. This register also records contracts for the shrine of Omar Tansi, the shrine of Sidi Ramadan and Wali Daddah, the Zawiya of Charfa, the shrine of Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi, the Zawiya of Dar al-Qadi, the shrine of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilali, and the zawiya of Kajawa.

- Box 7, Register 41: This register covers various topics, including documents indicating the granting of loans to the agent of the shrine of Sidi Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi. As for the records of the Beylik, we find:

Register No. 314: Contains important data on the income of the zawiya of Kajawa and the monthly expenses of this zawiya for its employees for the same year.⁽¹⁶⁾

Register No. 335: This register includes a collection of data on items found in the shrine of Sidi Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi, including books and

furniture, and a statement of the property of the same shrine, including books, utensils, and other items.

Register No. 356: A register containing accounting statements related to the receipts and expenditures of the clergy and their salaries. It also mentions the rent for shops and houses ⁽¹⁷⁾

.5. Other Records :

There is another collection of photographed documents from the archives of Istanbul (the Topkapi Palace Library, the Sublime Porte Main Library, and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Library). These documents, approximately three thousand, were collected and organized by Professor Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani. Most of them relate to diplomatic relations and official correspondence between Algeria and the Caliphate headquarters in Istanbul. ⁽¹⁸⁾

6. The Condition of Documents After the French Occupation of Algeria:

Ottoman documents were destroyed and lost during the French rule of Algeria, as a result of the chaos that accompanied the French army's entry to Algiers on July 5, 1830, and the subsequent deliberate neglect of the administrative staff of the Algerian Eyalet. This behaviour by the French rulers resulted in the disappearance and loss of many official documents from the hands of their Algerian supervisors after they were dispensed. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Shortly after the French occupation, these documents attracted the attention of some historians due to their importance. Some attempted to compile indexes, including Albert Dufau in 1850, Denis in 1921, and Colomb in 1943, who appreciate them. These documents were known as the

"Arabo-Turkish Documents." After independence, there became a need to study the content of archival documents, decipher their codes, define their terminology, and compile their material into precise and specific tables and indexes, as well as photograph and organize them. This trend was reinforced by the establishment of the National Center for Historical Studies and the National Archives Foundation.

7. The role of the archive balance present in the archive role abroad in writing the history of Algeria:

Through what we touched on, we will address the problem of the importance of archives in studying the history of Algeria in the Ottoman period, and also is it possible to exploit foreign archives in studying the history of Algeria in the same period as a complement to the local archive, and in this context we recorded clear neglect of the Ottoman balance in the national archive and its exploitation will not be completely compared to what is in the western archives, especially the French where we find an archive Beyond the sea, Pax The Provence in Marseille, the French National Archives, and the Archives of the Ministry of War in Paris and the Chamber of Commerce in Marsele, knowing that there are many archive documents that are concerned with the history of modern Algeria or the Ottoman Algeria past and preserved in the role of the Arab and other European archives such as House Al -Bay in Tunisia and Abdeen in Cairo and the Royal Treasury in Rabat in Al -Aqsa Maghreb and the archive of Simencas in Spain and Spain The Vatican Archive, Malta and Italian cities, in addition to the other European.

All that exists from an archive regarding the history of Algeria in the Ottoman period in the role of European archives, it does not exceed documents related to diplomatic relations, peace treaties, navigation and commercial exchanges in addition to customs privileges. It is characterized by superficiality, abbreviation, and brevity, and this is considered a reason for resorting to researchers to the printed and published books that relied on what the consuls, prisoners, ambassadors, diplomats, merchants, travelers, and the envoys of European countries to Algeria started from Hydewa and doctor Shaw in addition to the monk Dan, Dubir, Dolkroa, Sanson, Dabville, Fay, Gasbar, Dancor, Baysoura. Bhutan, Tanville, Darnda, Pantor de Paradi, etc., and to what was collected by some Arab and foreign historians.

Anyone who touched on the historical events that concern the history of Algeria in the Ottoman period from registration and collection, he must return to some important sources such as Hamdan Khoja, Pelisi, Gnti, the role of Bossi, Rosie, Astrazi, Roban, Flandall, Vero, Donni, Ren, Douma, Tromli, Plante, Morsi, Weissat, Mason, Askir, Emiri, Evier, Colom, Bouyi and Yakono ... etc.

The archive documents existing abroad, despite their importance, do not help us with historical information through which we can give an accurate look at the historical reality of Algeria in the Ottoman period, but on the contrary and through circumstantial and objective considerations, it forces the researcher to reformulate events through a superficial view, and this confirms to us the scientific importance of Algerian archives and the return to it is necessary for an innovative historical writing and a correct objective

perception Integrated, which provided us with various information about all aspects that have remained for a mysterious and unlimited period of time despite their importance, such as financial transactions of all kinds and also aspects of economic, military and even administrative activity in addition to a study of the demographic reality and the state of the population and the most important population sects, i.e. the city's population and rural residents, and the development of intellectual, cultural and social life.

These documents, i.e., the deposits of the Algerian archives, which were known as the Arab -Turkish documents, remained important in writing the history of Algeria, as this importance was inspired by historians of the past periods and some of them tried to put indexes for them like the archive governor after the occupation of the Pir Dofu, Deni and Columb, but in return this importance raised the virtue of foreigners, especially the French, as they sought to marginalize the period before the occupation by encouraging them to rely on foreign writings And even European archives.

The local archive documents are the first sources in writing the history of the city of Algeria in particular and Algeria in general, and the raw material and the basic material for all researchers interested in writing the history of Algeria in the Ottoman period in all aspects of life expresses, and this is all based on proper reading and i'tikaaf and analyzing a proper analysis after identifying its content and this is not easy nor is it easy.

8. Conclusion :

In conclusion, it is evident that local archival documents serve as an indispensable resource for comprehending the multifaceted social, economic, administrative, and cultural dynamics of Algiers during the

Ottoman era. The rigorous process of reading and analyzing these documents presents considerable challenges; however, the insights they provide are invaluable. The archival material from the Ottoman period offers researchers a nuanced understanding of life in Algiers, surpassing the limitations of traditional sources. These conventional references cannot adequately substitute for the primary data found within the Ottoman documentary archive at the National Archives Center, which remains critical for a holistic study of the period.

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¹⁰ Mustafa Ahmed bin Hamoush, *Islamic Urban Jurisprudence through the Algerian Ottoman Archives 1549/1830 CE, Based on Sultan Orders and Sharia Court Contracts*, Center for Islamic Research and Studies and Heritage Revival, 1st ed., Dubai, 2000, p. 15.

¹¹ The same series is preserved in the French archives in Marseille, Archives Beyond the Sea, titled Series Z. See:

- Mustafa bin Hamoush, *Urban Jurisprudence*, ibid., p. 17.

¹² Aisha Ghattas, *Sharia Court Records and Their Importance in the Study of Economic and Social History*, *Insaniyat Magazine*, op. cit., pp. 72-78.

¹³ Nasser al-Din Saiduni, *The Status of Archival Sources*, *Moroccan Historical Magazine*, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁴ Nasser al-Din Saiduni, *Algerian Papers*, op. cit., p. 390. () Also known as the overseer of the inheritance affairs of the Makhzen, this position existed before the Ottomans arrived in Algeria. His task was to inventory and monitor the estates of all deceased persons who did not leave a male heir, and those whose absence was prolonged were considered dead, as was the case with prisoners who had been held captive for a long time. The deceased could not be buried without permission from the Bait al-Malji, and the estate was not divided except in his presence, whereupon the Bait al-Mal institution distributed the estate.

¹⁵ Mustafa Ahmed bin Hamoush, *Jurisprudence Islamic Urbanism*, previous reference, p. 15

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