

## The contribution of the Chaamba to popular uprisings in Southern Algeria during the nineteenth century

Dr. DINE Souria <sup>1</sup>, and Dr. SAMMARI Boubaker <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Laboratoire De l'Unité Maghrébine A Travers l'Histoire, Université d'Alger 2, Algeria.

Email: [souria.dine@univ-alger2.dz](mailto:souria.dine@univ-alger2.dz)

<sup>2</sup> Laboratoire De l'Unité Maghrébine A Travers l'Histoire, Université d'Alger 2, Algeria.

Email: [Boubaker.sammari@univ-bba.dz](mailto:Boubaker.sammari@univ-bba.dz)

**Abstract---**This research aims to highlight the significant role played by the Chaamba tribes in the popular uprisings of southern Algeria during the nineteenth century, examining their military and social contributions in resisting French expansion. The findings show that the Chaamba were a decisive force supporting most resistance movements, whether led by Sharif Muhammad ibn Abdallah, Bouchoucha, the Ouled Sidi Sheikh, or Sheikh Bouamama. The study also reveals that their support extended beyond combat to include supplying resources, providing refuge, and organizing operations, making them the first line of defense for the Sahara. The results indicate that their steadfastness delayed French penetration into the deep south for nearly half a century. The study concludes that the Chaamba's role was central to shaping the region's resistance memory and merits further research and documentation.

**Keywords---**Chaamba, Popular Resistance, Algerian Sahara, French Occupation.

### INTRODUCTION

France's colonial policy aimed at occupying the Sahara in general, and the southern regions of Algeria in particular, led to the emergence of numerous resistance movements involving most of the Saharan tribes. Among these were the Chaamba tribes, whose inhabitants played a major role in confronting the French colonizer and countering its expansion into the Algerian Sahara. Their resistance became a significant obstacle to French ambitions, prompting the colonial authorities to dispatch numerous

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explorers and spies to gather detailed information about the Chaamba and their city. The objective was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the region in order to facilitate its control.

The Chaamba led a revolutionary movement against the brutal French occupation, a movement that resonated widely throughout the region and among neighboring tribes. In response, the French imposed economic restrictions on the tribe's resources and interfered in its social and cultural affairs, seeking to suffocate and suppress the resistance. Nevertheless, the Chaamba confronted these measures with determination and valor, relying on their strength and cavalry. This phase of resistance extended roughly from 1850 to 1900.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following questions: Who were the Chaamba? What is the origin of their name? What are their main branches? And what were the most significant uprisings in which they participated during that period?

## I. THE DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION

### 1. The Origin Of The Chaamba

Various historical writings and oral traditions discuss the origins of the Chaamba tribe. According to Ibn Khaldun, the Chaamba trace their lineage back to the tribe of *Sulaim ibn Mansur ibn Ikrima al-Qaysi al-'Adnani*. They descend from the branch of *'Alaq ibn 'Amf ibn Bahtha ibn Sulaim ibn Mansur ibn Ikrima ibn Hafsa ibn Qays ibn 'Aylan ibn Mudar ibn Nizar ibn Ma'd ibn 'Adnan*. Their migration to the Maghreb occurred during the well-known westward movement (*al-taghb'ribiyya*) of the Banu Hilal, Banu Sulaym, and Ma'qil tribes. This migration took place when the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir Billah permitted them to cross the Nile and proceed to the Maghreb in the year 443 AH / 1052 CE, in order to confront the Zaydi state that had rebelled against the Fatimids. The migration was led by *Rafi' ibn Hammad*, the head of the *'Alaq ibn 'Amf* branch<sup>1</sup>.

Isma'il al-'Arab states that *"the Chaamba tribe descends from 'Alaq, from 'Amf, from Sulaim ibn Mansur, of the 'Adnani lineage. They came to North Africa with the last wave of the Hilalian migration at the beginning of the fourteenth century<sup>2</sup>."*

Dumas, relying on an account he claimed to have obtained from the Chaamba themselves, attributes their origin to the region of Oran, stating: *"The Chaamba say that they descend from a single family that settled in the Tell region, consisting of seven brothers, and that their origin is from the province of Oran."* He further adds: *"The youngest brother of the family, Thamer ibn Tulal, due to harassment from his brothers after their father's death, left with his wife, young children, and some servants, wandering southward. Soon after, his brother Zarif followed for the same reasons. The two brothers and their companions roamed between mountains and plains until they reached the valley of Metlili, where the caravan finally settled. Thamer established himself to the west, and his brother Zarif to the east. Their families grew in number, and together they founded a settlement that took the name of the spring near which they had pitched their tents<sup>3</sup>."*

Meanwhile, *Baugult* presents another version, linking the Chaamba's origin to Syria: *"In the early fourteenth century, a group of Syrian nomads known as the Awlad Madbi arrived in North Africa through the route of the last Crusade. These nomads remained for some time in the Oran region. As their organization declined, some of them migrated further south until they reached Metlili<sup>4</sup>."*

<sup>1</sup> 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Khaldūn: *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn al-musammā Dīwān al-Mubtada' wa-l-Khabar fī Tārīkh al-'Arab wa-l-Barbar wa-man 'aṣarabum min dhawī al-sha'n al-akbar*, Dār al-Fikr, Beirut – Lebanon, 1421 AH / 2000 CE, pp. 20, 94–97.

<sup>2</sup> Ismā'īl al-'Arab: *Al-Ṣaḥrā' al-Kubrā wa-Shawāṭi' nūba*, Silsilat al-Dirāsāt al-Kubrā, Al-Jazā'ir, 1982, p. 163

<sup>3</sup> Dumas, Eugène: *Le Grand Désert: Qu'itinéraire d'une caravane du Sahara au pays des Nègres*, 1848, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup> Baugault: *Metlili Berceau de CHaanba*, Paris, 1986, p. 119

This account aligns closely with that of Lieutenant D'Armagnac, who states: "In the fourteenth century CE, a group of nomadic Bedouins originating from a Syrian tribe, the *Awlad Madhi*, arrived in North Africa during the final wave of the Hilalian migrations. They remained for a long period in Oran as part of successive migration movements<sup>5</sup>."

Besage, however, attributes their origins to Yemen, describing their second wave of migration. He notes their affinity for pastoralism, their initial settlement in the highlands of the Lamur Mountains, followed by a move to the *Zawiya of Ouled Sidi Cheikh*, and later to the *Qasr of Metlil*<sup>6</sup>.

Despite these variations regarding the Chaamba's origin, most historical sources agree that they descend from the Arab tribe of Banu Sulaym, of Qaysi 'Adnani lineage. Their migration to Algeria occurred in two main branches: *Dhiab ibn Malik* and *'Awf ibn Bahtha*. From 'Awf ibn Bahtha descended *Mirdas* and *'Alaq*, from whom came *Hisn*, then *Banu Ali* and *Banu Hakim*. The Chaamba trace their lineage from Banu Hakim, and from this line branched several sub-groups, including *Ouled Saber*, *Namir*, *Jouin*, *Ziyad*, *Maq'ad*, *Mala'ib*, *Ahmed*, *Nwa*, *Mubalbil*, *Riab ibn Yahya*, and *Habib*<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 1: Key Historical Elements Shaping the Origin of the Chaamba  
Source: prepared by the researcher

## 2. The Meaning of the Term "Chaamba"

Accounts differ regarding the meaning of the name *Chaamba*. Some scholars argue that the term has Turkish roots, composed of two words: *shua'* (ray) and *naba* (news) or *ban*, meaning "a ray that appeared." This interpretation symbolizes a long-standing trait of the Chaamba tribe: generosity and hospitality. Traditionally, they would light fires to guide travelers who had lost their way, inviting them to stay and providing directions. Over time, the two words merged in usage and became the single term *Chaamba*<sup>8</sup>.

Another perspective, based on oral sources, claims that the tribe's sheep had curved horns called *sha'nab*, with the plural being *sha'anib*, which eventually became associated with the tribe<sup>9</sup>.

It has also been suggested that their ancestor was a Berber from the *Msonfa* group of the *Mulathtbimin*, named *Sha'bana*, and his descendants were called *Sha'bana*, later modified in pronunciation by substituting the letter *n* for *b*<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant D'armagnac: *Le Mzab et les pays CHaamba*, Edition Braconnier, 1933, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> PAUL FRANCOIS MICHEL Passager: *Metlili CHaamba (Sahara Algeria)*, Centre de Documentation Saharienne, sans date, p. 509.

<sup>7</sup> Aḥmad Tawfiq Madanī: *Tarikh al-Jazā'ir wa-Jughrafiyyatuba al-Ṭabi'iyya wa-l-Siyāsiyya wa-l-Iqtisādiyya wa-l-Ijtimā'iyya*, T5, pp. 136–137.

<sup>8</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥamid Mas'ūd bin Wulha: *Abna' al-Sh'anba wa-Marahil al-Taṭannur al-Ḥaḍari li-Bilad al-Shabka: Sukaniyyan, 'Aqa'idhiyyan wa-'Imarāniyyan*, Dār al-Ṣubḥi li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, Ghardāia, Algeria, T1, 2014, p. 60

<sup>9</sup> Sulaymān Būghlāba: *Al-Sh'anba wa-Musābamatumum fi al-Muqāwama al-Waṭaniyya (1851–1919)*, Dār al-Nashr Metlili, T1, 2007, p. 14

After examining the various accounts, the prevailing view is that the name *Chaamba* derives from the linguistic combination of the words *shua'* and *naba*, meaning “appeared” or “manifested,” reflecting the tribe’s enduring reputation for generosity and hospitality. Their poets celebrate this virtue, as one of their verses illustrates: “*I have seen a noble, generous man from the heat of battle, visited even if his dwelling lies in the most remote places. The village fires in his tents never fail to warm, even when the winds rage. When the wind opposes him, his guiding light still directs travelers and caravans safely.*”<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Their Branches

#### First Division: Chaamba of Bourzeg

The Chaamba of Bourzeg<sup>12</sup> are located in the south of the Metlili Valley and the city of Ghardaïa. They control a vast area of the desert, extending westward to the Louah and Zarqoun valleys. Their neighbors in this region include the Ouled Ya'qoub and the Dawwada, descendants of the Hilalian Riah.

The Chaamba of Metlili (Bourzeg) constitute the largest subgroup of the Chaamba in terms of population. They are divided, according to the colonial administrative classification, into three major clans: the *Ouled Alouch*, the *Ouled Abdelkader*, and the *Qasr* clan. These clans are further subdivided into smaller groups as follows:

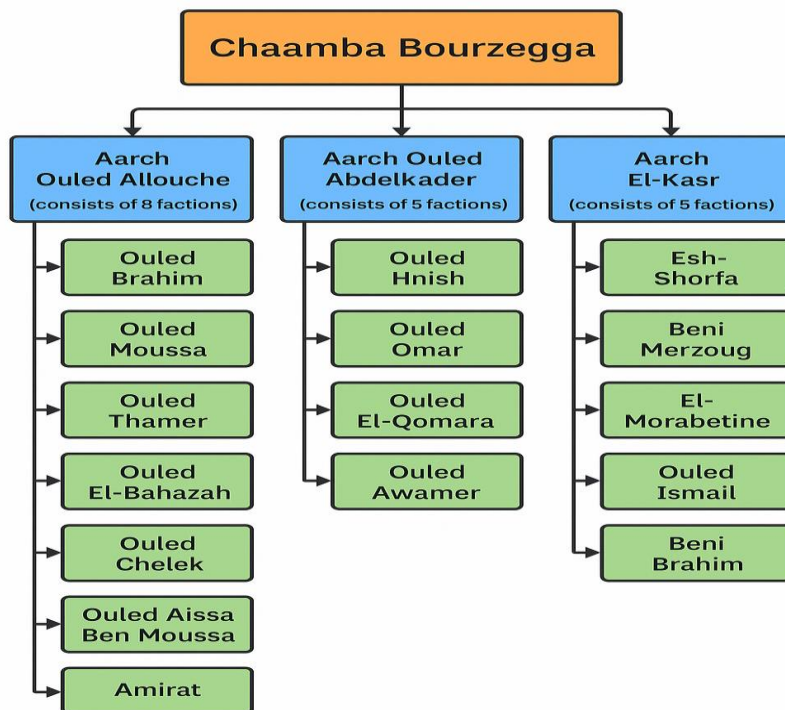


Figure 2. Organizational Structure of the Chaamba Tribes (translated diagram)

Source: Paul François Michel Passager (*Metlili des CHaambas, Sahara Algeria*, Centre de

<sup>10</sup> Ibrāhīm bin Muḥammad bin Sāsī al-‘Awāmir: *Al-Ṣunif fī Tārīkh Ṣaḥrā’ Wād Sūf*, ta’līq al-Jilālī Ibrāhīm al-‘Awāmir, al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī’, Al-Jazā’ir; al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, Tunis, 1977, pp. 373–374.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Mas‘ūd bin Wulha: *Abnā’ al-Sh‘anba wa-Maraḥil Taṭammur al-Ḥaḍari li-Bilad al-Shabka: Sukaniyyan wa-‘Aqa’idiyyan wa-‘Imarāniyyan*, T1, 2014, Metlili, Ghardaïa, p. 33

<sup>12</sup> This name is derived from their renowned leader in the desert, Bourzeg Ahmed ibn Ahmed

Documentation Saharienne, undated, p. 525), as well as Régnier Yves (*Les Chaamba sous le régime français*, Les Éditions Domat-Montchrestien, Paris, 1933, p. 7) for historical and social aspects of the tribe, and also the study by Passager P. (*Metlili des Chaamba: historical, geographical, and medical study*, In Archives of the Pasteur Institute of Algeria, T. XXXVI, N. 4, December 1958, p. 526) which addresses the historical, geographical, and medical dimensions of this group.

In addition to this, some groups from the Zouaï (descendants of the Ouled Sheikh family who migrated from L'Beyd Sidi Sheikh in the Wilaya of El Bayadh), as well as the Zanouj and others, gradually joined this tribal aggregation over time. According to Ismaïl Al-Arab: “*The Chaamba, in general, are divided into two categories or camps: one called the Sharâqa, which is progressive and open-minded, and the other called the Gharâba, which is conservative and closed. The Ouled Alouch belong to the first category, while the Ouled Abdelkader belong to the second.*”<sup>13</sup>

The following tables present the population statistics for each clan in the year 1896, as recorded by the French administration at that time<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 1: Population and Housing of the Qasr Group (1896)**

CLAN / SUBGROUP	POPULATION	HOUSES / TENTS
Al-Murabitin	459	16 houses & 35 tents
Al-Shurfa	349	11 houses & 15 tents
Beni Marzouk	302	29 houses
Beni Mzab	231	27 houses
Ouled Ismaïl	84	4 houses & 15 tents

**Table 2: Population and Housing of the Ouled Abdelkader Clan (1896)**

CLAN / SUBGROUP	POPULATION	HOUSES / TENTS
Al-Swaih	647	23 houses & 61 tents
Ouled Hanish	398	17 houses & 72 tents
Al-Qamara	391	48 houses & 71 tents
Ouled Omar	362	25 houses & 50 tents
Al-Awamer	352	49 houses & 79 tents

**Table 3: Population and Housing of the Thamer (Ouled Alouch) Clan (1896)**

CLAN / SUBGROUP	POPULATION	HOUSES / TENTS
Thamer	550	26 houses & 90 tents
Ouled Brahim	423	26 houses & 89 tents
Ouled Moussa	422	25 houses & 93 tents
Ouled Jerouda	230	20 houses & 50 tents
Al-Bhahza	146	15 houses & 32 tents
Ouled 'Issa ibn Moussa	180	22 houses & 36 tents
Al-Shalq	143	13 houses & 29 tents
Umirat	116	6 houses & 25 tents

<sup>13</sup> Ismā'īl al-'Arab, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>14</sup> Cauneille, A.: *Les Chaambas: Leur Nomadisme*, Edition du C.N.R.S, Paris, 1968, p. 39

## II -THE FRENCH OCCUPATION OF THE REGION AND THE PROTECTION TREATY WITH THE BENI M'ZAB

After the French took control of the El Oued region in 1852, they began to turn their attention to the M'zab area, exploiting the existing power struggle and the division of the Beni M'zab into two factions: the Eastern and the Western<sup>15</sup>.

Consequently, the Beni M'zab<sup>16</sup> group from Ben Rian hastened to send a written message to General Pelissier, dated December 12, 1852, in which they requested security. The General replied with a letter sent from the General Staff in El Oued on December 14, addressing the inhabitants of Ghardaïa, which consisted of: Melika, Beni Izguen, Atf, Bounoura, Bryan, and Qarara. He reminded them that the acquaintance between the two parties dated back 22 years and requested that they expel all enemies of France from their ranks and send the community leaders to Si Hamza to formally declare their submission and loyalty, as he was the French authority's representative among the Beni M'zab<sup>17</sup>.

General Pelissier did not limit his influence to Ghardaïa alone; in his reports, he emphasized the necessity of occupying it because it was one of the most important strategic centers within the French authority's reach in the south. To formalize the treaty, a delegation of the Beni M'zab, authorized by the Supreme Council of Uncle Said, set out to negotiate. The Protection Treaty was signed with Commandant Nidobrai, the governor of El Oued, on December 22, 1853<sup>18</sup>. The treaty included the following provisions:

- Recognition of French authority.
- Guarantee by France for the safe passage of their commercial caravans.
- Non-interference by France in their internal civil affairs.
- Guarantee that they would pay the designated tax to the Beylik.
- Assurance of general and lasting security, stability, and citizens' rights.
- Guarantee of French supervision over foreign goods arriving from abroad.
- Closure of markets to tribes hostile to France.

Under this treaty, M'zab became a formally recognized part of the French state, subject to an annual tax of 45,000 francs, which was shared among the seven M'zabite communities. Its agreement with the Beni M'zab, however, hindered France's ability to conduct suspicious military operations. When France realized the treaty was ineffective for controlling them, it launched an offensive against the Beni M'zab in 1882, opening the door to violent confrontations between the M'zabites and France<sup>19</sup>.

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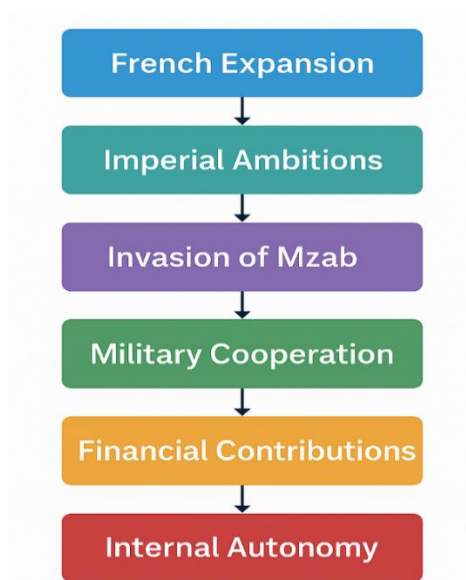
<sup>15</sup> Gean Nelia: *Ghardaïa Quatrième Mille*, Paris, sans édition, sans date, Fonds de la Bibliothèque, Centre de Documentation Saharienne, p. 58

<sup>16</sup> The Mzab people, also known as Beni Mzab, inhabit the Mzab region, which extends into the desert and is partly within it. They are traditionally engaged in trade (see Simón Pfäfffer, *Algerian Memoirs on the Eve of the Occupation*, trans. Abū al-'Ayd Dūdū, Dār Homan, Algiers, 2009, p. 125).

<sup>17</sup> Ibrāhīm Miyāsī: *Al-Iḥtilāl al-Faransi li-Ṣaḥrā' al-Jazā'iriyya*, Dār Homa, Algiers, 2009, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Yūsuf bin Bākīr Ḥāj al-Sa'id: *Tārīkh Bani Mzab: Dirāsa Ijtīmā'iyya wa-Iqtisādīyya wa-Siyāsīyya*, Al-Ṭibā'a al-Sha'biyya li-l-Jaysh, Algeria, 2007, p. 98.

<sup>19</sup> Amirawi, Hamida: *Al-Siyasa al-Faransiya fi al-Sahra' al-Jazairiya 1844-*. Al-Huda: Algiers, 2009, pp. 47-48.



**Figure 3:** *Stages of the French Occupation and Key Elements of the Protection Treaty*  
**Source:** *Prepared by the researcher*

### III- THE ROLE OF THE SHAANBA IN POPULAR UPRISINGS

The rest of the population did not accept the French expansion into the region through the protection treaty, and they hastened to declare armed resistance. Most of the military forces of the city of Metlili, the Shaanba, and El-Meni'a and their surrounding oases were integrated into the forces of Sharif bin Abdullah, who posed a threat to the local inhabitants, especially since the southern Shaanba of Oran had previously participated in Emir Abdelkader's revolt, which had ended in 1848.

The French authorities sought to gain complete control over the region after their political penetration through the protection treaty with M'zab. France quickly dispatched two military units to the city of Metlili Shaanba: one led by the governor of El Oued, De Baray, and the other from El Bayadh, led by Major Niquaux. The battle ended in defeat for both units at the hands of the valiant Shaanba on November 1, 1853, just six months after the signing of the protection treaty.

Thus began the history of armed resistance led by the Shaanba rebels, which lasted nearly thirty years. France was unable to fully control the region or organize its administration and subjugate the population until 1886.

The Shaanba contributed to many resistances, including:

#### **01 – The Revolt of Sharif bin Abdullah**

This resistance spread across various parts of the Algerian Sahara and was supported by the Sanusiyya and Qadiriyya Sufi orders. Its center was the city of Ouargla, where the Qadiriyya zawiya was located in El-Rouissat. In July 1851, Muhammad bin Abdullah was proclaimed Sultan of Ouargla. On September 12, 1851, the Shaanba tribes from Metlili, along with the Shaanba of Mouazi, Makhadma, Beni Thour, and Saïd, joined him, carrying out numerous attacks on the French colonizers and their allies in El Oued, Djelfa, Touggourt, and the Tamasin oasis.

However, the inhabitants of M'zab refused to submit or join Sharif bin Abdullah's revolt in 1852. This refusal may have been largely influenced by religious or sectarian considerations or fear of French retribution<sup>20</sup>.

### **02 – The Revolt of Ben Nasser Ben Chahra**

When he declared the revolt in 1851 in the plains surrounding El Oued, the local population quickly joined him. Yet, many fled to Tunisia with Ben Chahra due to the brutal torture and persecution inflicted by the French colonizers. In 1864, the descendants of Sidi Sheikh declared a new uprising, which Ben Nasser Ben Chahra answered. He and his Shaanba followers established a camp near Metlili Shaanba, joined by the Tuaregs and Si L'ali El-Zawi, forming a formidable force that severely troubled the French occupiers<sup>21</sup>.

In response, the French besieged the rebels, blockading them by preventing all M'zabite caravans from reaching the camp, causing severe hunger. Despite this, the rebels remained resilient, attacking pro-French tribes and towns such as Ain Madi and achieving significant victories. In retaliation, the French punished the supportive Bedouins, exterminating them along with their livestock. The rebels were eventually forced to seek refuge in Tunisia again. These tragedies, including the scattering of tribes and homes across distant regions, were commemorated in poems by many, including the exiled Ouled Tayeb bin Imran Shaanbi and others who had been forced into exile in Tunisia.

### **03 – The Revolt of Muhammad Al-Toumi Bouchoucha (1869–1874)**

This revolt was fueled and supported primarily by the Shaanba across all their tribes. The early signs of the uprising appeared with the advance units of the rebels, who adopted hit-and-run attacks and ambushes on French army detachments and their local allies, employing a highly effective guerrilla warfare strategy that had persisted since 1853, following the French attempt to occupy the city of Metlili Shaanba.

The rebels were dubbed the “M'dakna gangs.” After numerous skirmishes, Bouchoucha arrived in Ain Salah and was pledged allegiance by the Shaanba of Mouazi in 1869. In 1870, the Shaanba of Ouargla also pledged loyalty to him, and he established his main camp in Metlili Shaanba from May 5, 1870. This camp became the nucleus for his forces, aimed at disciplining pro-French collaborators and enforcing submission.

He attacked surrounding settlements and demanded that the M'zabites submit to him, providing funds, weapons, and logistical support. The M'zabites refused and rebelled, prompting Bouchoucha to retaliate by destroying and confiscating their properties in Ouargla, which he entered on March 5, 1871, appointing Ben Chahra as their agha. He then returned to Metlili Shaanba to launch a campaign against M'zab, setting up camp there on August 28, 1871, and declared war on its inhabitants. Subsequently, he divided his army into three units and resumed raids on M'zabite towns that had resisted his authority.

The M'zabites' rationale was that anyone seeking war should confront France—the true enemy of the Algerian people—directly. In contrast, the rebels believed that internal unity, organized resistance, and coordinated financial support were essential to withstand the French occupiers. These internal divisions, deliberately exploited by the French authorities under the principle of “divide and conquer,” succeeded to a significant extent, scattering the rebels across the desert and weakening their resistance.

### **04 – The Revolt of Ouled Sidi Sheikh (1864–1881)**

Suspicion and caution dominated the relationship between the Ouled Sidi Sheikh in El Bayadh and the French, even after the appointment of Si Hamza Ould Aboubakr as the Khalifa of the Sahara. However, France quickly mobilized against the Ouled Sidi Sheikh and persecuted their followers from Metlili and El-Meni'a Shaanba for their active participation in Sharif bin Abdullah's revolt. The situation worsened due to repeated French attempts to reduce the influence of the Sheikhiyya Sufi order and its leading family, especially following the sudden death of Hamza Ould Aboubakr on August 15, 1871<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Yahi Bouaziz: *Kifaḥ al-Jazā'ir min kbilāl al-Waṭaniya*, Al-Mu'assasa al-Waṭaniya lil-Kitāb, Algiers, 1986, p. 118

<sup>21</sup> Al-Ḥājj Sa'īd Yūsuf bin Bākīr: *Op. cit.*, p. 118

<sup>22</sup> Yahi Bouaziz: *Op. cit.*, p. 169

Hamza, the leader of the Ouled Sidi Sheikh of Cheraga, had rendered significant services to France as its representative in the Sahara, fighting Sharif bin Abdullah and occupying Metlili Shaanba on behalf of the French.

After his death, France appointed his son Aboubakr Pasha Agha, who also died the same year after completing his father's role in combating and arresting Sharif bin Abdullah. France then appointed Si Suleiman bin Hamza, who, influenced by his uncle Si L'ali bin Aboubakr, initiated a revolt. This uncle played a primary role in instigating, planning, and rejecting the path of betrayal taken by his predecessors. Their center and camp were in Metlili Shaanba, where his personal guard consisted of Shaanba horsemen.

France took severe reprisals against the inhabitants of Metlili Shaanba, who bore the brunt of these brutal actions. Nevertheless, they remained steadfast and continued to support the Ouled Sidi Sheikh revolt and its insurgents, despite offers and temptations from the French colonizers to turn against the rebels and expel them from their city. The Shaanba achieved significant victories against the French occupiers.

Yet, internal divisions, deliberately exploited by the French, gradually weakened the revolt. The uprising ultimately concluded in the city of Brizina with a truce signed by Si Eddine bin Hamza on May 20, 1883.

### **05 – The Revolt of Sheikh Bouamama (1881–1905)**

The revolt led by Sheikh Bouamama saw strong participation from the local population, who suffered more than three hundred martyrs in addition to significant material losses. The Shaanba had a dedicated unit within Sheikh Bouamama's<sup>23</sup> army, and the inhabitants of Metlili Shaanba contributed to funding the revolt by imposing a tax on palm trees and sheep.

Sheikh Bouamama strengthened his ties with Metlili through intermarriage with the Shaanba, creating a strong bond and aligning them with the Bouamama Sufi order, which represented a radical departure from the previous Boushikha order by adopting a jihadi and resistance-oriented approach. This shift came in response to the negative reputation that the Boushikha order had gained under previous leaders.

Initially, this jihadi line was highly effective, exhausting the French forces and inflicting several defeats. However, it suffered periods of decline and weakness due to negotiations with Morocco and other parties, as well as disputes over army leadership. France seized the opportunity to punish the inhabitants of Metlili Shaanba in order to weaken the resistance, cutting down their palm trees, filling in their wells, and killing their livestock. This year became known as the "*Year of the Second Hollow*" (1883)<sup>24</sup>.

During this period, Sheikh Bouamama was forced to negotiate with the French army to secure the safety of his followers and the members of his order, who were subjected to confiscation and persecution. However, these negotiations were rejected by the Shaanba rebels of Metlili, who urged Sheikh Bouamama not to accept a truce with the French.

Despite repeated calls, Sheikh Bouamama proceeded with a truce with the French occupiers. In response, a group of Shaanba Metlili fighters continued to resist the French, forming guerrilla bands that exhausted the colonizers and inflicted significant losses. This forced Sheikh Bouamama to write to the French military governor of El-Meni'a, who had established a military post there in 1891, formally distancing himself from these rebellious fighters<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Zawzū: *Thawrat Bu 'ammāma, Algiers, al-Shirkā al-Waṭaniya lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī'*, 1983, Vol. 2, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Ibrāhīm Miyāsī: *Tawṣū' al-Isti'mār al-Faransi fi al-Janūb al-Gharbi al-Jazā'iri, Algiers, al-Mathaf al-Waṭani lil-Mujāhid*, 1996, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Zawzū: *Op. cit.*, p. 79



**Figure 4:** *Main Roles of the Shaamba in Regional Popular Uprisings*  
**Source:** *Designed and prepared by the researcher*

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Chaamba tribes were far more than desert communities accustomed to nomadic life; they constituted a significant social and military force that profoundly shaped events in southern Algeria during the nineteenth century. They actively contributed to the various popular uprisings that erupted in the region, whether by resisting the early stages of French expansion or by supporting subsequent revolts led by Sharif Muhammad ibn Abdallah, Bouchoucha, the Ouled Sidi Sheikh, and Sheikh Bouamama. Their involvement was not limited to armed struggle alone; it extended to logistical and financial support, as well as providing refuge and manpower—making them a cornerstone of Saharan resistance to colonial penetration.

Historical evidence further reveals that the Chaamba's geographical position, social structure, and deeply rooted values of solidarity, loyalty, and protection of home and tribe were key factors in their ability to confront French strategies for decades. Despite the colonial authorities' persistent attempts to dismantle their unity, deplete their resources, and weaken their resistance through harsh punitive measures, the Chaamba remained steadfast in their determination to defend their land and identity.

In conclusion, the role played by the Chaamba tribes during this pivotal period of Algerian history was neither marginal nor incidental; rather, it was a decisive factor that delayed French control over the depths of the Sahara for nearly half a century. This contribution warrants further study and scholarly attention as a tribute to their sacrifices and as a means to firmly anchor their legacy within the broader narrative of Algeria's national resistance.

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