

The slave trade in Algeria during the late Ottoman era and the beginning of French colonization through archival documents

Boudjemaa Akram ¹, Benzeroual Djemaa ², Nafti Quafia ³, and Bezzalla Assia ⁴

¹ Modern and Contemporary History, University of Banta 01, Algeria

Email: Akram.Boudjemaa@Univ-Batna.Dz

² Modern and Contemporary History, University of Banta 01, Algeria

Email: Djemaa.Benzeroual@Univ-Batna.Dz

³ Modern and Contemporary History, University of Mohamed Khider Biskra, Algeria

Email: Ouafia.Nafti@Univ-Biskra.Dz

⁴ Modern and Contemporary History, University of Banta 01, Algeria

Email: Assia.Bezzalla@Gmail.Com

Abstract---Research background: This study aims to provide a historical overview of the social and economic conditions of Algeria during the late Ottoman era and the beginning of French colonization, with a focus on the enslaved class in Algerian society. We have divided this study into two sections: the conditions of the enslaved in the northern cities during the Ottoman era, and the conditions of the enslaved in southern Algeria, highlighting the main trade routes, stations, and the important products brought from sub-Saharan Africa. We then examined France's stance on the slave trade in Algeria after the colonization, including the position of the French government and the attitudes of slave traders, relying on several French archival documents. Additionally, we discussed the drawbacks and benefits of the French documentation and its historical and economic value in the history of Algeria during the 19th century. **Purpose of the article:** The purpose of the article is to address key issues, which are :How was the slave trade practiced in Algeria during the late Ottoman era?, What were the major sources of slavery in Algeria and its commercial centers?, What was the stance of French colonization towards this human trafficking? **Methods:** We employed the historical methodology, which involves gathering reliable historical sources and documents and carefully analyzing them. This requires studying the events and the historical context surrounding them, as well as analyzing the various influences and factors that affect them. As for the critical analytical approach, it relies on critically analyzing documents

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and sources to understand the events and respond to them. This includes analyzing the motivations, interests, and social, political, and economic impacts of the slavery system in Algeria, as well as the consequences that resulted from it. **Finding and value added:** Certainly, the results of the article include providing a historical overview of the social and economic conditions in Algeria at the end of the Ottoman era and the beginning of French colonization, with a specific focus on the enslaved class in Algerian society. By shedding light on this class, we can understand the social and economic circumstances they experienced and the transformations they underwent during the Ottoman period and the early stages of French colonization. This study can help shed light on the experiences of this class and the impact of political and economic systems on them. We have further elaborated on these findings in the conclusion of the article.

Keywords---Algeria, French colonialism, Ottoman period, trade, slavery, Documents and archives.

Introduction

The study of slavery in Algeria during the late Ottoman era and the beginning of French colonization is a topic with limited sources and references, especially Algerian ones. This is primarily due to the focus of Algerian sources during this period on the political and military aspects of the country, with some neglect of social topics such as slavery in Algeria during the late Ottoman era and the beginning of colonization.

However, there are some studies, mostly by French and European scholars, that have been written about slavery during this period based on the accounts of European captives who were held in Algeria and lived there for several years, particularly in the late 18th century and early 19th century. These individuals documented their lives and social conditions in their memoirs. It should be noted that many of these accounts were exaggerated and lacked objectivity, mainly authored by religious figures, Christian monks, and European traders.

It is important to note that slavery in Algeria during the late 18th and early 19th centuries was not the same as the slavery in places like Charleston, New Orleans, or Havana in the Americas. The position of enslaved individuals in North Africa was not comparable to the conditions of Black slaves on American plantations, partly due to the influence of Islam, which encouraged the fair treatment of enslaved individuals (Wolf,2009,211).

In our study, we will focus on two topics. The first topic is slavery in southern Algeria during the late Ottoman era, while the second topic is slavery in Algeria at the beginning of the French colonization. We will rely on various archival documents, as well as French and Algerian sources and academic writings.

1. Slavery in Algeria during the late Ottoman era:

regarding slavery in Algeria during the late Ottoman era, it was not a commercial activity like the one practiced by European traders in the 16th and 17th centuries, who raided the western coasts of Africa to capture and buy slaves from regions such as Ghana and Senegal, selling them in European and American markets.

The slave trade in Algeria emerged as a result of wars between the Regency of Algeria and European powers, as well as European piracy targeting Algerian ships, which led to a significant number of European captives. Most of these captives were sailors or rural individuals who were captured during raids or detained as prisoners aboard ships.

These captives came from various social classes and groups, including nobles, wealthy landowners, ship officers, traveling bourgeois merchants, sailors, fishermen, and poor peasants.

To study this subject, we divided the conditions of slavery in Algeria into two categories:

1.1 Conditions of slavery in the northern cities:

The trade of enslaved individuals was concentrated in several coastal cities in Algeria, especially in Algiers, Oran, B jaia, and Annaba. This trade was divided into two types:

A/ European Enslaved Individuals:

European captives were brought by Algerian seafarers from Mediterranean sea raids. The number of slaves in the late 18th century was estimated to be around 25,000, with the region of Algeria alone housing between 700 to 800 enslaved individuals, mostly Christians (Michel, 1983, 154).

When the ship arrives at the port, the captives are taken to the Jnina Palace or the Emirate House for the Pasha or Dey to claim their share, which is usually between ten to twelve percent of the total number of captives. The remaining captives are then taken to the Bagnio, and the following morning they are offered for sale at a place called the Bezestan or the main market. Mornings were dedicated to examining the captives' hands, teeth, and general health.

In the evening, the captives were sold to various Pashas, and wealthy owners. Some of these owners housed their slaves in public or private Bagnio establishments located in the city of Algiers. The owners would then rent out these slaves as laborers to anyone in need, such as for unloading ships, carrying heavy loads, digging, and construction.

Craftsmen would establish workshops for their slaves, such as shoemaking, barrel-making, clothing, blankets, brooms, and more. The owners would take a percentage of their financial earnings in exchange for their protection, provision of food, and clothing (Wolf, 2009, 210-230).

The Christian captives under the Beylik were exploited in the naval service as assistants and sailors, or they were used for hard labor, public works, or exchanged with Muslim Moorish captives and Algerian captives.

Towards the end of the Ottoman era in Algeria, the number of Christian captives decreased, but they formed a distinct class due to the economic services and tasks they performed, such as working in the Bey's palace, working in orchards, and supervising taverns (Saidani, 1979, 226).

B/ Black Slave Servants:

Black slaves were concentrated in the northern cities, especially in Algiers. They were brought from the Sudanese regions through desert oases to work in households after undergoing a training period in the region of Ouargla and the villages of Wadi M'zab. Their numbers multiplied until the end of the 18th century, reaching between 2,000 and 3,500 individuals in the city of Algiers alone. Most of them worked in households, performing cleaning and laundry tasks. Some of them worked in bakeries, construction, textile work, and the production of mats and straw-based products. Additionally, some of them practiced arts such as dancing, singing, and music. The black community was overseen by a leader known as "Qaid Al-Wassafan", who received some returns from members of his community (Saidani and Bouabdelli, 1984, 100-101).

The number of black individuals in Algiers and the northern cities would fluctuate depending on the volume of trade between Algeria and Africa (ancient Sudan).

From these black individuals, branches emerged as they intermarried and settled on the outskirts of cities. They worked as laborers for the state after being liberated by their owners (Saadallah, 1988, 151). Most of these freed blacks became a working class, employed as farmers and laborers in and around the city of Algiers. Some landowners treated their slave workers harshly and looked down upon them, while others had a different attitude and treatment towards them (Saidani, 1988, 148).

1.2 Slavery Conditions in Southern Algeria:

The slave trade emerged in southern Algeria since the 16th century due to the interest of northern traders in the markets of southern Algeria, with the aim of buying slaves. This trade was concentrated in several southern cities, such as the region of Touat and Ouargla (Faraj,1977,15-16).

The people of Touat took advantage of their central location between the markets of northern Morocco and southern Sudan. Many of them worked as traders and intermediaries in the markets, dealing in the trade of slaves, henna, ivory, ostrich feathers, salt, indigo, and tropical products (Saidani and Bouabdelli,1984,102).

In the 18th century, traders would depart from the Touat region in trade caravans towards the city of Timbuktu, crossing the lands of the Tuareg tribes after paying a financial tribute to their leaders known as "road toll." The caravan would continue its journey, which lasted about a month and a half, covering a distance of approximately 1,200 kilometers, until it reached the city of Timbuktu. The caravan would stay there for about three months, exchanging goods and acquiring new merchandise. Then, the caravan would return through the same route, entering the Touat region through three points (Medenine, Kebili, and Ain Salah), where they would pay fees on the goods they carried, including black slaves. The slaves would be offered for sale in the markets of Touat or continue their journey to be sold in markets such as Tafilalt, Sigilmassa, and Marrakech, where they would be traded for horses, firearms, swords, dried fruits, and embroidered clothing (Faraj,1977,70-80).

1.3 The activities of slaves in the Touat society in southern Algeria in the 18th and early 19th centuries:

The wealthy elites and large landowners among the Touat community in southern Algeria in the 18th and early 19th centuries exploited black slaves after purchasing them from commercial markets. These slaves were used as laborers to cultivate their orchards and tend to their animals. The practice extended beyond the purchase of male slaves, as they also acquired concubines who bore them children. As a result of this mixing and intermarriage, a new class of Mulattoes emerged, forming part of the Touat society.

A. The slave class and their activities in southern Algeria:

The slave class constituted the fourth social class in the Touat society, which consisted of the nobility, freemen, Al-Hartani, and slaves. This class was employed by the wealthy elites and landowners, as no palace, city, or oasis in the Touat region was without them. These slaves worked in various fields such as agriculture, cultivation of orchards, date harvesting, animal herding, well and irrigation canal digging, sand carrying, and construction.

Despite the strenuous work performed by the slaves, the level of care provided for their livelihoods varied from one master to another. As for the female concubines, they were employed in the houses and palaces of wealthy families, where they worked in cleaning, raising the masters' children, fetching water, and cooking.

Many concubines married freemen, and as a result of this mixing, a new class emerged in the Touat society known as the Al-Hartani.

B. The Al-Hartani¹ class:

The Al-Hartani class is a social class that emerged from the marriage of slave concubines to free men, forming a distinct third class known as the Al-Hartani. Their numbers increased in the 18th century due to the emancipation and liberation of many concubines who were then married to freemen, and their children came to be known as the Al-Hartani. Job opportunities for them were limited, and they engaged in labor-intensive tasks that were not typically pursued by the nobility and freemen, such as tanning leather, selling meat, herding livestock, construction work, orchard cultivation, and digging wells and irrigation canals alongside the slaves.

¹ The word that combines "Al-Hurr, It means free" and "Al-Thani, He means the second " is "Al-Hartani." The local residents used to refer to them as "Al-Hartani."

Some of them owned small agricultural lands, which in some cases did not exceed a few meters. They had to purchase the necessary water for irrigation and watering their crops from the owners of wells. Due to the high costs of water, many Al-Hartani were forced to leave their lands or orchards and work for large farmers as sharecroppers, receiving a share of dates annually as compensation (Faraj, 1977, 35-56).

2. Slavery in southern Algeria at the beginning of colonization and France's stance:

2.1. Conditions of slavery in southern Algeria at the beginning of colonization:

At the start of the French colonization, the number of black slaves in Algeria was estimated to be around 10,000, according to a French archival document issued by the Ministry of War on March 25, 1847. These slaves were found in both urban areas and among tribes in the southern regions. They were engaged in various professions and labor-intensive tasks, such as being exploited by wealthy land-owning families for agricultural purposes or working for the nomadic populations and internal tribes in herding and livestock breeding.

The slave trade in Algeria during the early stages of colonization followed the same laws, systems, and customs that existed before the French occupation. Slave owners had the authority to sell slaves, whether they were men, women, or children, either individually or as a group, to a single owner. However, slaves in Algeria were distinguished by relatively humane treatment from their owners and masters. They were provided with food and clothing in exchange for fulfilling their owners' services and tasks. The treatment of slaves in Algeria was governed by laws derived from Islamic principles (Aix en Provence France-Boit N° F80/1816).

Black slaves were brought from the southern borders adjacent to the Sahara Desert, and they were often purchased by the nomadic tribes who migrated from the interior regions towards the desert each year, or by traders in the desert oases.

In Algeria, there were many slave owners who emancipated and liberated their slaves after reaching agreements with them. These agreements involved the slave working for the master for several years in exchange for eventual emancipation or receiving wages for their work until they could secure their freedom. This practice aligns with the principles outlined in Islamic teachings regarding the liberation of slaves (Aix en Provence France-Boit N° F80/1816).

2.2. The French government's stance on the slave trade:

The idea of abolishing slavery in France dates back to 1789 after the success of the French Revolution. France issued a declaration proclaiming equality among all races and the abolition of the exploitation of one human being by another. However, the National Assembly soon issued a resolution in 1793 stating that such decisions did not apply to French colonies outside of Europe. This led to several slave revolts, such as the Haitian Revolution in the French colony of Saint Domingue.

After Napoleon Bonaparte came to power, he issued an independent constitution for the island of Saint Domingue and enacted a decree prohibiting the slave trade. This marked the end of the slave trade in French possessions. The abolition of slavery was further confirmed at the Second Congress of Paris in 1815 (Riad, 1965, 81).

After France's occupation of Algeria in 1830, it was discovered that the slave trade was monopolized by Jewish traders, particularly in the northern cities. France insisted on issuing a statement prohibiting the practice of this trade in Algeria and in all territories where the French flag was flown because French laws forbid the exploitation of one human being by another. In 1847, several laws were enacted to prohibit the slave trade, based on several key points:

1. The issuance of a law banning the slave trade in Algeria and prohibiting the sale or importation of slaves into Algeria.

2. The French government declared the emancipation of slaves in Algeria after reaching agreements with their owners.
3. French and European individuals present in Algeria were subject to laws prohibiting the slave trade.
4. Jewish individuals in Algeria were prohibited from engaging in the slave trade or purchasing slaves.
5. The sale of slaves in public markets in Algeria, whether in cities with civilian administration or those with military administration, was prohibited.
6. The shipping of slaves from Algerian ports for sale outside of Algeria was prohibited.
7. Slaves in civilian and military areas in Algeria were allowed to join and appeal to French authorities in exchange for their emancipation from their owners.
8. France worked to encourage the liberation of slaves in Algeria by providing financial assistance from the state for their emancipation and manumission (Aix en Provence France-Boit N° F80/1816).

From these laws, it can be inferred that France, after its occupation of Algeria, banned the slave trade and enacted several laws to prevent it and punish those who did not comply with its decisions.

2.3. The stance of slave traders towards French laws:

In France, the announcement of laws prohibiting the slave trade dealt a significant blow to slave traders. However, many French slave traders refused to halt their lucrative business activities. They continued to transport slaves from Portuguese-owned properties in France until 1864 when Napoleon III issued a new decree abolishing the trade. Despite this, the slave trade persisted through smuggling for another 15 years (Riad,1965,81).

In Algeria, France prohibited Algerian traders from importing and exporting slaves, particularly targeting Jewish traders who had gained control over the foreign slave trade. However, it's worth noting that the enforcement of these laws might have varied in practice.

In the southern regions of the Algerian Sahara and oases, traders involved in the slave trade gradually abandoned it in the vast desert and Sudan regions. This shift was mainly due to a decline in demand for slaves and the fact that the trade had been prohibited in Algeria.

It's important to acknowledge that the enforcement and impact of these laws on slave traders were not uniform across all regions and individuals. Socioeconomic factors, cultural dynamics, and regional variations could have influenced the response and resistance of slave traders to the French laws (Aix en Provence France-Boit N° F80/1816).

3. Critique and evaluation of the French document:

3.1. Positives of the French document:

- This document serves as an important source among the historical documents found in the French archives, specifically the Overseas Archives, regarding slavery, the slave trade, and related laws in Algeria during the early stages of colonization. It is one of the few historical documents available on this subject.
- The document sheds light on France's stance towards the slave trade in Algeria and throughout its colonial territories in the 19th century.
- The document includes some of the laws imposed by France on Algerians to prohibit the slave trade.
- This document serves as evidence of how France exploited slaves in order to emancipate them in exchange for future colonial services and interests.

3.2. Negatives of the French document:

Despite the apparent positives of this French document, such as the abolition of slavery and the exploitation of humans in Algeria, it also represents a condemnation of the French state, which used this law to gain the favor of the lower classes and the poor by emancipating them in exchange for their

allegiance to the French authority and working for its interests. Some of the negatives of this document are as follows:

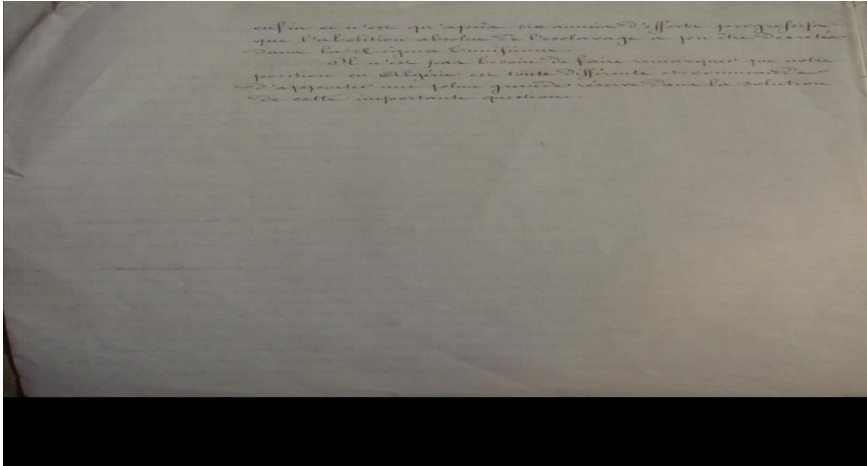
- The French aim in issuing the law to abolish slavery in Algeria was to gain the loyalty of the Black population, especially those living on the borders of Mali and Niger, in order to exploit them and rely on them as a military force in France's expansion in the Saharan region. This information was mentioned by the military translator M. Djabari, a Tunisian translator of Algerian origin, who worked with the French army in the late 19th century as a translator for several years and participated in several French campaigns in the Saharan region and Central Africa. He mentioned in his book "Les Survivants de la Mission Flatters" that France issued the law abolishing slavery in order to exploit and rely on the Black population as a human military force in the French army's expansions in the Saharan region and Central Africa, as the Blacks of the Sahara considered the Tuaregs their masters. For France to expand in Tuareg lands, it needed to create division between the Tuaregs and the Blacks in the Sahara region in order to penetrate it and reach Timbuktu and Chad (**A.O.M Boite N° 1H 85,1890-1896**).
- This document, found in the archives, is fragmented and provides only positive information about the issuance of laws and the prohibition of the slave trade on some pages. However, the supportive pages were removed, indicating the presence of information that condemns French policy in Algeria.
- The aim of issuing the law prohibiting the slave trade in Algeria was to disrupt social stability between classes that was established during the Ottoman era.
- This French document did not serve the slaves, nor did they gain their freedom. Instead, it subjected the entire Algerian population, across all their social classes and regions, to French colonization, which exploited the law abolishing slavery in the name of justice and the spread of Western European civilization to the Algerians for over 132 years.

Despite the negatives of the French document, it remains a source of Algerian history concerning the slave trade. However, it has some shortcomings as it focuses on the legal aspect and neglects the social and economic aspects. Despite these limitations, this document is considered one of the sources related to the history of the slave trade and the French laws imposed to prohibit it in North Africa.

Conclusion

After studying the history of slavery in Algeria in the 18th and 19th centuries, we attempted to summarize the development of this trade until the French colonization. Through this work, we derived several conclusions that can be summarized as follows:

- The slave trade in Algeria during the Ottoman era was divided into two types: Christian slaves who were concentrated in northern cities like Algiers and Oran, and Black slaves whose trade was centered in southern Algeria and the Sahara.
- Christian captives were brought as spoils of war between the Regency of Algiers and European kingdoms, while Black slaves were brought from West Sudan and the Sahara through trade caravans.
- The activities of Black slaves in northern cities included agriculture, domestic work, construction, weaving, mat-making, and more. In southern Algeria, their activities included herding, orchard farming, well-digging, date harvesting, sand carrying, and construction.
- A new social class emerged in southern Algeria due to the intermarriage between enslaved individuals and free people, known as the Harataniyyin.
- After the French colonization, France found the slave and servitude trade being exploited by Jewish traders.
- France issued several laws to prohibit the slave trade in Algeria with the aim of abolishing slavery in all its colonies. However, they exploited the Algerian people of all social classes, considering them as slaves subjected to their laws. France seized their economic wealth and enslaved them as cheap labor to extract these resources. They also utilized the Algerian human resources as soldiers in the French army to serve their colonial expansion.



les archives d'autre mer d'Aix en Provence France-Boit N° F80/1816 Esclavage.

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