

# The French Settlements in Algeria in 1902: A Study through the Tunisian Archive Document No. 3214 as a Model<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examines the French settlement policy in Algeria in 1902, focusing on the detailed information provided in the Tunisian Archive Document No. 3214. The document offers an insightful account of the establishment of new settlements in Algeria, highlighting the allocation of fertile agricultural lands in the provinces of Algeria, Oran, and Constantine. It also explores the French administration's strategy to increase settler populations, enhance agricultural production, and secure raw materials for French industry. The study delves into the conditions and advantages granted to French settlers, such as land ownership policies, incentives, and assistance, while also examining the tragic consequences for the indigenous Algerian population, who lost their lands and were relegated to laborers under the settlers. By analyzing the document, this paper sheds light on the economic, social, and political impacts of the French colonial settlement and its lasting effects on Algeria. Through this archival document, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of French settlement strategies and their broader implications, paving the way for further research on Algeria's colonial history and its struggle for independence.

Keywords: French settlements, Algeria 1902, Tunisian Archive, colonial policy, land distribution, settler incentives, Algerian population, French colonialism, economic impact, historical documents, and independence struggle.

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Introduction: The French colonial administration did not delay much and immediately began, since the early years of the occupation of Algeria, a wide-ranging settlement policy. It mobilized all material and human resources to encourage European migration in order to build a demographic base that would support the French military power in Algeria. In this context, we aim to understand the French settlement policy in Algeria in 1902 through the study of document 3214 preserved in the Tunisian archives. This is a small booklet that outlines the villages offered for settlement and clarifies the propaganda, media, and support provided to the French to encourage them to migrate and settle in Algeria. This research paper will focus on the main points presented in this booklet, highlighting the support provided by the French administration and the importance and number of villages offered for settlement.

The problem we will address is: "What are the foundations, laws, and assistance that the colonial administration relied upon to ensure the success of French settlement in the proposed new villages and centers for 1902?"

To answer the posed issue, we divided our research into an introduction, conclusion, and three sections, in addition to an explanatory map. We followed the historical analytical method, relying on studying historical documents, employing them, and analyzing them in order to reach the desired results.

1.Introduction to the Document and Its Storage Location: This document is a small booklet with the number 3214, part of the historical series in the National Archives of Tunisia. It consists of thirty-five pages, in addition to a cover page and a blank page with the seal of the National Archives of Tunisia. It does not have a subject index. It was printed at the Mustapha printing press in Algiers in 1902. The cover color is light gray, with "General Government of Algeria" written in large red letters and, beneath it, in smaller black letters: "Agriculture, Trade, and Settlement." In the center of the page is the title of the booklet in large red letters: "Settlement," and beneath it in medium black letters: "Settlement and Development of New Villages for 1902." The entire cover has a map of European cities along the Mediterranean Sea and its islands, along with a map of Algeria with its three provinces, municipalities, and villages, with the new villages offered for settlement in blue.

2.Content of the Document: This booklet generally contains information about the conditions for benefiting from the villages designated exclusively for French settlers, and the assistance provided to them by the occupying administration for the year 1902. It mentions nine villages distributed across the three provinces: Algiers, Constantine, and Oran, with three villages in each province. The booklet includes ten sections, as follows:

- 3.Conditions and documents required to obtain a piece of land for settlement.
- 4.Facilitation for the transportation of immigrants.
- 5.Recommendations.
- 6.Obligations and duties of beneficiaries of settlement land.

7. Health regulations.
8. Construction work.
9. Labor and wages.
10. Animals.
11. Living conditions.
12. Specific laws.
13. Information about centers for new settlement.

Below is a summary of each section to provide a picture of the French settlement policy in 1902:

The first section, titled "Conditions and Documents Required to Obtain Land for Settlement," states that the applicant must be French, the head of a family, possess agricultural experience, and have financial means of 5000 francs or more. They must commit to residing for five years on the requested land for settlement, with priority given to large farming families. The applicant must submit a request on stamped paper, along with a certificate of criminal record, tax exemption, and proof of private property, as well as property tax certificates for landowners. Recommendations were presented to applicants in the second section, stressing the importance of believing in hard work for success. It also clarified that their travel to Algeria would only occur after they were notified of their acceptance by the provincial heads of the settlement areas. The third section, titled "Facilitations Provided for Immigrant Transportation," emphasized the need to grant ownership contracts to beneficiaries of settlement land. It stated that a family could not travel until they received a temporary ownership contract. For travel assistance, train fares for large families were reduced by half for third-class tickets, and baggage was free for every 100 kg for all family members. For those traveling by sea, there were two lines: ships departing from the ports of "Vendre" and "Marseille" to Algeria offered free transport for large families in third class. The fourth section provided recommendations to the new settlers to overcome initial difficulties or obstacles and to improve their living standards and accumulate capital. The French administration advised them to work diligently and persevere in serving their land. The fifth section, titled "Obligations and Duties of Beneficiaries of Settlement Land," specified the period within which settlers could obtain ownership contracts after residing on the allocated land with their families, which was set at three years. In return, each beneficiary paid 100 francs per hectare. A new landowner could mortgage their land before obtaining the ownership contract to secure loans for construction, farming, or buying livestock. A settler who did not comply with these conditions would have their land confiscated, and it would be sold at auction. Any expenses and fees owed by the first beneficiary or their heirs would be deducted, and if there was a deficiency, no financial compensation could be claimed. In the event of the death of the beneficiary before obtaining the final ownership contract (i.e., be-

fore three years), the land would pass to the heirs if they met the required conditions and agreed to the imposed obligations. However, heirs could waive the privilege and request its sale. One of the conditions also stipulated that no land could be sold to Algerian locals in any form until after twenty years for farm lands and ten years for domain lands. This period was calculated from the date of acquiring the ownership contract for the privilege. Sales made contrary to these laws were considered void. Furthermore, leasing the land before obtaining the ownership contract (i.e., within three years) was prohibited, and any beneficiary doing so would face penalties. The sixth section was dedicated to health regulations. The French administration warned the new settlers about the high temperatures in summer, especially in the interior regions, and advised them to always protect their heads with a light hat and avoid drinking water from unknown sources. In winter, they were urged to wear woolen clothes to protect themselves from the cold and to wrap a long, wide belt around their waist to protect their stomach and kidneys from sudden sweating while working. To protect themselves from malaria, settlers were advised not to build their homes in damp or overly humid areas close to rivers, ponds, or sewage drainage areas. They were also instructed to keep their stables clean and remove waste from their homes. To ensure their safety, they were warned not to stay outside before or after sunrise without necessity and to avoid alcohol, which weakens health, especially in hot climates.

The French administration in section seven presented construction prices per square meter, ranging from 10 to 13 francs. The daily wages for construction workers and carpenters were between 1 and 6 francs, and the daily wages for European diggers ranged from 2.5 to 3.5 francs. It was stated that these prices varied greatly depending on the location and circumstances. The new settlers were also advised to initially stick to the minimum construction standards to shelter their families and livestock and to dedicate as much effort and capital as possible to develop and cultivate their land. The French administration differentiated between locals and Europeans in terms of the wages received by laborers:

- For the locals:

- Daily wage without lunch: 1-2 francs, and per month without lunch: 30 to 50 francs.

- Harvesters earned from 15 to 32 francs per hectare.

- For Europeans:

- Daily wage without lunch: 2.5 to 4 francs, and per month without lunch: 75 to 100 francs, and with lunch: an average of 50 francs.

- Tree pruners were paid 3.5 to 4.5 francs per day.

These were average wages, and they could change depending on the region. The new settlers would find local laborers very helpful in utilizing their land, especially if they were treated fairly and not too harshly, nor overly familiarly. If their wages were paid regularly, they would work hon-

estly. Such interactions between settlers and locals would be profitable; however, if the settlers followed a different approach, it would create distrust and animosity, which would inevitably lead to a situation where both property and individuals would be at risk.

In section eight, the book provided the prices of animals:

- Oxen: Pair: 100-300 francs, single ox: 60 to 90 francs.
- Cattle: 60-100 francs per cow.
- Sheep: 10-16 francs.
- Arab goats: 10-15 francs.
- Maltese goats: 50-100 francs.
- Pigs: 40-50 francs.
- Horses: 150-300 francs.
- Arab mules: 200-400 francs.
- Arab donkeys: 15-30 francs.

Algerian animals were generally smaller than French animals, and their prices were low in summer, but they increased by 20 to 40% in winter, from November to the end of March, which is when the pastures were more abundant.

Section nine, titled: "Conditions of Material Life and Prices of Basic Goods in Algeria," stated that the prices of basic materials in Algeria were the same as in France, except for minor differences resulting from the distance of distribution centers or transportation difficulties. This included sugar, dried vegetables, candles, fabrics, clothes, and shoes. However, the prices of milk, butter, cheese, and potatoes were more expensive in France. On the other hand, local meat (from Algeria), poultry, eggs, and tobacco were cheaper than in France. Below are the prices of basic consumer goods in Algeria:

- Good bread: 40 centimes/kg
- Home-made bread: 30-35 centimes/kg
- Wine: 15-45 centimes/liter
- Beef: 1.20 francs/kg
- Veal: 1.20 francs/kg
- Mutton: 1.40 francs/kg
- Lamb: 1.40 francs/kg
- Pair of poultry: 2-3 francs
- Pair of geese: 8 francs
- Potatoes: 11-12 francs/100kg
- 12 eggs: 0.3 francs
- Wheat flour: 40-50 centimes/kg

- Flour (semolina): 31 francs per large bag
- Bran: 11-12 francs/100kg
- Rice: 50-60 centimes/kg
- Beans: 40 centimes/kg
- Dried chickpeas: 40 centimes/kg
- Lentils: 50 centimes/kg
- Sugar: 3.1 francs/kg
- Wax: 65 centimes for a 500g box
- Wooden matchsticks: 90 centimes/10 boxes
- Regular tobacco: 1.2-2 francs per pound, depending on quality

Section ten set out the legal and tax provisions, the most important of which were:

- Agricultural land granted to new settlers was exempt from taxes for ten years, starting from the date of acquisition.

- Agricultural engineers in the provinces were responsible for the new settlers in residential areas, providing them with the necessary information, goods, and supplies to exploit their land.

- All information about the climate, soil nature, major agricultural crops, industrial crops, afforestation, agricultural tools, livestock, assembly stations, national wealth, and building materials would be made available to the new settlers. To encourage them, annual grants and rewards would be given to settlers who settled in Algeria and managed their land well, and they were expected to be role models for other settlers.

The last section, titled "Special Instructions for Each New Settlement or New Center," stated:

- Applications from candidates must specify the center – settlement – area, and province they prefer, and the administration would try to fulfill their wishes as much as possible within available resources.

It then listed the new settlements for 1902, which were nine settlements distributed across the major provinces of Algeria: Algiers, Oran, and Constantine:

1. Settlements of the Algiers Province:

- Center (Hanteau) now called "Zabouja," Chlef Province.
- Center (Voltaire) now called "Ain El-Chikh," Chlef Province.
- Center (Borély-la-Sapie) now called "Aouamri."

2- Settlements of Oran Province:

- Center (Rochambeau) now called "Mazaraou," Sidi Bel Abbès Province.
- Center (Ain-Tindamine) still retains the same name, a municipality belonging to Sidi Bel Abbès Province.
- Center (Prévost-Parodol) now called "Mcherrah Safa," Tiaret Province.

### 3- Settlements of Constantine Province:

- Center (Bernelle) now called "Wadi El-Maa," Batna Province.
- Center (Corneille) now called "Marouane," Batna Province.
- Center (Canrobert) now a municipality of "Oum El Bouaghi."

The book also provided detailed information about the nine new settlement centers, including their location, area, number of allocations, services, and markets available in the mixed districts and municipalities close to these centers. In addition, a map illustrating the location and boundaries of each center was included. As a sample of these settlements, the first center, formerly called Hanteau (now Zabouja), was chosen for study:

- Area: The area of "Hanteau" is estimated at 1579 hectares, with abundant forests and an elevation of 450 meters above sea level.
- Location: Located in the district of Oléansville (now Chlef), 45 km away, it is attached to the mixed municipality of Ténès on the Rabelais road (now the district of Ain Merane) towards Oued Moussa. It is 35 km from Ténès, 7 km from Flattres (now Benaïria), and 21 km from Trois Palmiers (now Bouzegza).
- Number of allocated plots: 33 plots, each with an average area ranging from 35 to 40 hectares. Additionally, there are 255 hectares of domain land designated for the livestock of new settlers.
- Agricultural information: Wheat, barley, beans, vegetables, fruits, and afforestation are cultivated.
- Livestock: Cattle, sheep, and goats are raised.
- Mixed municipality headquarters: Ténès
- Justice: Ténès
- Nearby post office: Falter (Benaïria)
- Nearby station: Oléansville (Chlef), nearby port: Ténès, market on Thursdays in Falter (Benaïria)
- Car service: Trois Palmiers (Bouzegza)
- School: Will be established in "Hanteau" (Zabouja)
- Healthcare services: Provided by a doctor in Ténès
- Clinic: To be completed as soon as possible in "Hanteau"
- Services available in the Oléansville district (Chlef), with a population of 12,500 people:
  - First-class court, military barracks, hospital, grain shop, nursery, significant market on Saturdays, railway station from Algiers to Oran.
- Services available in Ténès, with a population of 4,449 people:

- Small sea port, military barracks, hospital, coastal shipping services with other ports on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Trade in livestock, grain, and fruits is available.

Map showing the geographical location of the new settlement center Hanteau (now Zabouja).

Source: National Tunisian Archives, Historical Series Documents, Document No. 3214, p. 16.

#### C- Criticism and Analysis:

Upon careful reading of the contents of this booklet, we notice that the new settlement centers of 1902 were aimed at the French only, specifically targeting farmers who were heads of households, honest, and had small to medium-sized capital. In other words, they were not poor, destitute, or homeless. The French administration provided them with significant facilitation and assistance to migrate and settle in Algeria, such as discounts on train tickets (up to half-price) and free passage on ships departing from the ports of Fendre and Marseille.

The occupation administration also facilitated the settlers or new beneficiaries obtaining land ownership contracts by paying a symbolic amount of 100 francs per hectare after utilizing the land for three years. This meant that the settlers would earn this amount through working the land. Additionally, they would not pay taxes for ten years from the date of receiving the land concession. They could also mortgage the land to obtain means of production or livestock, and the ownership of the land would pass to the heirs even before obtaining the land ownership contract. In return, the sale of land to the locals was absolutely prohibited in any form until twenty years had passed from the date of receiving the land.

This booklet provided the new settlers with information about the climate in Algeria, its variability, their health and safety conditions, and how to deal with the locals and make proper use of them. It also presented the wages of laborers in construction and agriculture for Europeans, which were twice as high compared to the wages of the locals. This reflects the racism in the French administration's dealings with Algerian people.

The book listed the prices of animals raised in Algeria, such as cattle, sheep, and goats, as well as the prices of essential foodstuffs in Algeria, stating that they did not differ from those in France, such as the prices of meat, vegetables, dry grains, flour, bread, coffee, sugar, and more.

The French administration also provided the new settlers with specialized agricultural engineers to assist them in utilizing their land and raising livestock. They also promised to provide all the necessary information about the new settlement, production tools, building materials, etc., and to encourage them to work and settle in Algeria, offering prizes and gifts to the best investors of their land.

What is noteworthy about the nine new centers or settlements is that they were distributed across the three major provinces: Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, with each province allocated three centers. Each center was presented with detailed information regarding its location, area, climate, services, and nearby facilities. All these centers were part of mixed municipalities, and they

were all fertile agricultural plains, such as the plain of Ain Zabouja, where the Hanteau settlement was established.

In reality, this book summarizes the French colonial settlement policy in Algeria for the year 1902, and it shows that it was a purely agricultural settlement designed for the French. It presents the settlement in a positive light, highlighting the benefits that French settlers would gain while ignoring the negatives and the consequences for the local Algerians.

However, the French regarded settlement as one of France's most important achievements in Algeria, given the farms that were established, the dams that were built, and the roads that were paved. In reality, though, these were all designed to serve the settlers. The Algerians, who were displaced or had their lands confiscated to make room for the settlers, were not considered. The colonial administration seized fertile agricultural lands from the locals through various means and false pretexts, distributing them to the new settler-owners. Some of these pretexts included:

- Claiming that the Algerians were lazy and did not work, turning their lands into waste-lands, and thus the French administration had to transfer them to settlers to rejuvenate them.
- The locals did not own land title deeds, and the administration also confiscated waqf lands.
- Anyone who participated in a revolution against the French government would have their land confiscated.
- The 1848 constitution declared Algeria an integral part of French territory and promised that it would be placed under the laws of the mother country, thus making all land in Algeria French-owned.

Through these methods and others, the French authorities seized vast areas of fertile agricultural land. According to statistics, the land distributed to settlers, which had been confiscated from rural inhabitants between 1840 and 1950, amounted to 20,703,000 hectares, all of which were fertile lands.

At the beginning of the French occupation, most of the inhabitants of Algeria were engaged in agriculture and livestock breeding. With the loss of their lands, the majority of the population became unemployed and suffered from poverty, unemployment, and homelessness. The decline in livestock breeding affected the locals' diet, which relied on meat and milk, and farmers became laborers on settlers' farms after losing their means of production. Consequently, a large migration of locals took place, either to cities, remote mountainous regions, or abroad in search of work. The loss of waqf lands had devastating consequences for the religious and educational institutions that were supported by them, such as zaouias, mosques, students, teachers, and administrators. This led to the spread of ignorance, illiteracy, and unemployment.

In all cases, the settlement policy required the seizure of fertile lands from the Algerians and their redistribution to settlers, in order to increase their numbers in the cities and countryside and to control the production and export of the most important agricultural products, as well as to dom-

inate the commercial sector. The goal of the French administration from settlement was for Algeria to become an important source of raw materials needed by French industry at low prices and to become a market for French trade.

Conclusion: This book presented a clear picture of the French settlement policy in Algeria in 1902, and the large areas allocated for the establishment of new settlements, estimated to be thousands of hectares of fertile agricultural land in the most famous plains of Algeria across the three provinces: Algeria, Oran, and Constantine. It also described the facilities and assistance provided for bringing new settlers to these centers. Through the pages of this book, we can see the bright image of French settlement in Algeria, especially when it clarifies that the goal of settlement is to serve the land and exploit it in the best possible way.

However, when we question the source of those lands, we encounter a real tragedy for the Algerian farmer, who lost his livelihood and became a sharecropper or laborer on his own land for the benefit of the European settler. He did not integrate with him due to religious and cultural reasons, and the settler did not accept him, nor did he absorb his European civilization. The settler's view of the locals was always a condescending one.

The real goal of settlement in Algeria was to settle the French in the country to create a defensive force, reduce occupying forces, while simultaneously increasing agricultural production to supply settlers from Algeria.

In the end, we say that the study of settlement in Algeria remains important because the history of settlement represents the history of modern and contemporary Algeria, and it paves the way for studying the national movements and the Liberation Revolution in Algeria, especially if these studies are based on historical archival documents. An example of this is the book under study, which provided us with valuable information about French settlement in 1902, and other equally important information in the economic field such as the prices of goods and services. In the geographical field, we became acquainted with the names of villages and cities during the French era, the available roads and transportation at that time, and the available health services and facilities such as education and postal services in municipalities and districts, among others. All of this information can be used in other research and studies as it is a primary source and provides a realistic image that benefits researchers in these fields.

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