

## Title: Trade between High Plateau Tribes and Gourara: Insights from the 1892-1893 French Caravan Report

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### Abstract

The caravans of the Arab tribes from the High Plateaus in the Oran region traveled through all the areas and ksour (fortified villages) of the Touat region via different routes, visiting all its markets and carrying with them a variety of agricultural and livestock products produced in their territories. They returned with goods either locally produced in the Gourara region or imported into it from Sudan and Morocco. These long-standing historical trade relations between the two regions drew the attention of the colonial administration, which monitored caravan movements and prepared detailed reports covering even the smallest details of these movements—whether natural, social, or economic. These included descriptions of the routes taken, documentation of water sources, inventories of various types of wild plants and palm groves found in the gardens of different ksour, and even detailed qualitative and quantitative descriptions of goods and trade items, including their prices.

**Keywords:** Gourara, Arab tribal caravans, Touat, Hamyan, Trafi, Rezaina.

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## Introduction

The Arab tribes of the High Plateaus in the Oran region maintained commercial activity and seasonal migration with various ksour (fortified villages) in the Gourara and Touat regions since ancient times. This was done via caravans or what is known as *nej*—the nomadic tribe—until the end of the 19th century, relying on camels. This movement caught the attention of the French military authorities, who aimed to extend their influence into southern Algeria as a transit zone for their colonies in West Sudan. Detailed reports were prepared on the routes taken by these caravans, along with inventories of the natural resources available along those paths, such as water sources and vegetation. These reports also provided a detailed picture of the commercial transactions between the caravan members and the inhabitants of the various ksour in the Gourara region.

Accordingly, this paper investigates the details of the caravan movements from the southern Oran region toward Gourara, based on a report issued by the General Government of Algeria from the Arab Affairs Department of the Oran district, titled: *Report on the Caravans of the Oran Division that Traveled to Gourara in 1892-1893* (rapport sur les caravanes de la division d'Oran qui se sont rendues au Gourara en 1892-1893).<sup>2</sup>

This will be explored through the following questions:

- What are the most significant caravans that entered the Gourara territories?
- What are the main routes taken by these caravans?
- What were the most important commercial exchanges between these caravans and the inhabitants of the ksour in Gourara and Touat?

### 1) Introduction to the Document (Source of the Study):

The report was issued by the commander of the Oran district, General Détrie, on June 9, 1893. It consists of 36 pages combining texts and statistical tables. The report offers a comprehensive account of the routes taken by the various caravans and the commercial exchanges between the tribes of the interior regions of western Algeria and the various ksour and villages of the Gourara region<sup>3</sup> in southern Algeria during the end of 1892 and the beginning of 1893.

The caravans were identified as belonging to tribes scattered across the plateaus and plains, listed as follows: the Rezaina<sup>4</sup> and Beni Matar caravan from the Saida annex, Hamyan, Tafi, and Ouled Sidi Sheikh from the El Bayadh annex, Guerifil, and the Amour caravan from Ain Sefra.

The report presents its data according to the following structure: tracking the caravan's journey in terms of distances covered per day, listing the major towns, villages, and ksour passed by at each stop, and

<sup>2</sup> Gourara or Tikourarine is located north of Touat, bordered by the Western Erg to the north and northeast, Tadmaït Plateau to the south, and the eastern basin of Oued Saoura to the east. It contains the Gourara sebkha (salt flat) extending from north to south. See: Mohamed Saleh Houtia, *Touat and Azawad during the 12th and 13th centuries AH / 18th and 19th centuries AD: A Historical Study Based on Local Documents*, vol.1, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Algiers, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> They descend from the Bousmegoun area and are distributed among Rezaina Gharaba and Sharaga tribes, making a total of four groups. They descend from the companions of Sidi Maamar bin Aliya. The narrative says Rezain settled in Arabawat and had four sons: Aoun, Ahmed, Hilal, Amer; each founded a lineage. Official statistics indicate that the population of Rezaina Gharaba reached 2160 and Rezaina Sharaga 2391, all belonging to the jurisdiction of the local municipality of Yaakoubia. See: *Le gouvernement général de l'Algérie, Tableau général des trois provinces de l'Algérie au 1er janvier 1892*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Numerous local and foreign sources have addressed the history of the region, perhaps most notably Ibn Khaldun in *Al-Ibar*, Ibn Battuta in *Tuhfat al-Nazar*, and Al-Wazzan in *Description of Africa*. In the modern era, we mention the journey of Abu Salem Al-Ayyashi who passed through the area in 1662; then the officers Colonieu and Burin, who started from Djérifil (now El Bayadh) with the major Tafi caravan and reached the walls of Timimoun, which were closed, and provided very important information about the sand wall north of Gourara to the General Staff. The most important European explorer of the region was the German Gérard Rohlfs who visited in 1864 and left a valuable and precise description. See: Camille Sabatier, *Touat, Sahara et Soudan: étude géographique, politique, économique et militaire* (Touat, Sahara and Sudan: geographical, political, economic and military study), Société d'édition scientifique, Paris, 1891, pp. 1-2.

recording all available information about every location where the caravan stopped or passed through. It emphasizes descriptions of water sources, forests, and vegetation. The report then discusses the commercial exchanges between these caravans and the residents of the Gourara ksour, offering detailed accounts of these transactions, and concludes by documenting the return journey of the caravans from the south to the north.

Therefore, this report serves as an eyewitness account of numerous historical events with economic and social dimensions. It also stands as a geographic reference for the routes connecting the Oran High Plateaus with the desert regions to the south during the late 19th century. This paper aims to explore the journey of the southern Oran caravans toward Gourara.<sup>5</sup>

The French interest in tracking caravan movements from north to south was not limited to gathering information. It was also driven by motives such as preparing for expansion at the expense of the Touat region and bringing it under French control. Colonel Malher, in a study published in the international military journal *Revue Militaire Universelle*, titled *The Touat Question: The Means by Which France Can Extend Its Influence in the Erg Region*, wrote:

“In early November 1893, some newspapers spoke about French military invasion projects targeting Tuat... Since the end of 1892, measures considered urgent for this purpose had already begun. The first fortress was built in Hassi Inifel, followed by two others directed toward Ain Salah and Ougrout.”<sup>6</sup>

## 2) The Rezaina and Beni Matar Caravan:

This caravan consisted of (539) individuals and used (1,694) camels.<sup>7</sup> It assembled in El Kheither, from which it departed on November 24, 1892. After a journey of eight days, the caravan reached Mograr Tahtani, located within the Ain Sefra district. From this point, the caravan took the route leading to Tidmekht Oasis in the Gourara region. The journey took a total of seventeen and three-quarters (17¾) days.<sup>8</sup>

### A. The Route of the Caravan from North to South:

After a full day's journey from Mograr Tahtani, the caravan reached El Outed, a rocky area covered with *drinn*, *le baguel*, and *guetaf* plants. It also had a well with abundant and good-quality water.

After another day's travel, the caravan arrived at Zafrani. Around midday, it encountered Bir El Djerda, a well buried under sand, followed by Ghedir de Djerf El Kahal, which was dry that year. Zafrani had no water and the same vegetation as El Outed.

Then, after another full day's march, the caravan reached Zaouche, where it passed the dry Ghedir de Guetran (El Ajayez), and Bir Mansoura, which offered limited water. In general, Zaouche had a dry *ghedir* and abundant vegetation similar to the previous areas.

On the fourth day of the journey, the caravan reached a place called Gharat Ghafoul,<sup>9</sup> a sandy route within the Wadi Namous basin, from which it veered westward at Jorf Hatfal, entering the dune region. Gharat Ghafoul was characterized by the spread of *chih*, *remtz*, *drinn*, and *baguel*, with scarce or no water.

On the fifth day, the caravan reached Zemlet Mansour, a difficult path at the curve of Grin Zaia, named after a woman's grave. It had no water and the same vegetation as before. After a full day's travel, it arrived at Stheihat, a dune-covered area lacking water.

<sup>5</sup> Le colonel Malher, *la question de Touat* (The Question of Touat), Imprimerie Librairie, Paris, 1895, pp. 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> The camel is the most important means of transportation in trade relations in desert regions as well as between the desert and the hills, where complex transportation networks formed and commercial centers developed in the desert itself and in countries along its coasts. However, this commercial and transport system was destroyed with the onset of colonialism in the region. See: Ismail Al-Arabi, *The Great Desert and Its Coasts*, National Book Foundation, Algiers, 1983, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> CAOM, GGA, *Report on the caravans of the Oran division that traveled to Gourara in 1892-1893*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Qara is a term applied to elevated plateau lands above ground level.

On the seventh day, the caravan reached Sidi Brahim (*Foum El Erg*), a sandy area where the shrine of Sidi Brahim stands, surrounded by a low dune wall. The area had neither water nor vegetation.<sup>10</sup>

On the eighth day, the caravan arrived at Ras El Ma, a vast dune area with a difficult path, surrounded by the hilltops of Dayet Bou Abdallah and Nebka Ould Nabr. Water was absent, but thorny plants used for kindling were abundant.

On the ninth day, the caravan reached Hassi Hanri, known for its large dunes. Water was found at a depth of 2.5 meters—enough for people, but not for animals. Vegetation was absent. After another full day's travel, the caravan reached Hassi Aida, which was also sandy. Its water was of poor quality and unfit for drinking, and it lacked vegetation.<sup>11</sup>

On the eleventh day, the caravan reached the Ksar of Ouled Issa,<sup>12</sup> the first ksar in the Al-Aarich region. It included hundreds of close-knit families, a zawiya, and many oases. Water was abundant, supplied through an underground canal system extending about 8 km. Vegetation was plentiful and stretched for 3–4 km around the ksar. After a one-day stop, the caravan reached Douran on the thirteenth day. Here, the Beni Matar caravan separated to conduct trade in Cherouine, then returned to Ouled Issa and remained there awaiting to merge with the Hamyan caravan for the return journey north.

Meanwhile, the Rezaina caravan continued south, arriving at Deldoul,<sup>13</sup> a sandy region with dense *drinn* vegetation. Deldoul comprised seven villages, the largest with about 300 houses. It was known for its springs and gardens, which produced various vegetables.<sup>14</sup>

On the fifteenth day, the caravan reached Rabeh, a sandy plain with no vegetation, where all wells had become blocked. As a result, Rabeh had become a ruined and abandoned stop.

On the sixteenth day, the caravan reached Sbaa,<sup>15</sup> a sandy plain. The road passed through Gorbetan, a ksar with hundreds of houses, 10,000 palm trees, numerous springs and gardens. Ksar Sbaa consisted of about 300 homes built among oases, with many wells. Its dates were of poor quality.

On the seventeenth day, the caravan arrived at Tilelen, where the road followed the course of Wadi Zamran, filled with *dazmran* vegetation. After crossing a barren and sandy trail, a hill came into view

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<sup>10</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Called in the Berber dialect “Ath Issa,” it is one of the palaces of the Deldoul area. Its oasis lies on the right bank of Oued Namous, opposite the oasis of Haiha on the left bank of the same river. See: Martin AGP, *Les oasis sahariennes Gourara Touat-Tidikelt*, Imprimerie Algérienne, Algiers, 1908, p. 207.

<sup>13</sup> Deldoul involves 12 regions: Ouled Abd El-Samad, Touki, Al-Baraka, Al-Harban, Al-Mansour, Ouled Abou, Aqbour, Al-Sahla, Omran, Ouled Mahmoud, Kabarten. See: Mahfoud Ramoud, *Touat: Geography and Terminology through Local and Foreign Monographs*, Al-Hiwar Al-Fikri, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Located about 50 km south of Qasr Al-Habla, it contains two palaces: Al-Saba' and Al-Qrara. See Mohamed Saleh Houtia, previous reference, p. 31.

before reaching Tilelen, revealing the Timmi oasis,<sup>16</sup> which contained fifteen ksour.<sup>17</sup> Ksar Tilelen was significant for Gorbetan, where two paths diverged—one toward Timmi and the other toward Tamentit.<sup>18</sup> After a full day of travel on a barren sandy road, the caravan reached on its eighteenth day the eighteenth station, also the most important on the route: Tamentit, which served as a commercial hub for various goods such as dates,<sup>19</sup> Filali leather, coffee, sugar, and tea arriving from Fes.<sup>20</sup>

### B. Main Trade Exchanges:

In Tamentit, the caravan members engaged in various commercial exchanges during their fourteen-day stay before returning along the same route. Upon reaching this station—the final point of the outbound journey—the report reveals details of the goods imported into Gourara with this caravan and their value according to the Saida market price.

The merchandise was diverse, including grains like wheat and fava beans; animal products such as butter, cheese, dried meat, and wool; mineral goods like silver; and manufactured goods such as pairs of candles. The following table details the imported goods and their financial value.<sup>21</sup>

Type of Good	Quantities	Unit Price (Francs)	Amount in Francs
Metallic Currency	—	—	28,857
Piece of Wool	6,428	2.25	14,463
Double Decaliters of Wheat	3,008	5	15,040
Double Decaliters of Fava Beans	304	4.5	1,368
Kilograms of Butter	2,000	2	4,000
Kilograms of Cheese	1,965	0.60	1,179
Kilograms of Dried Meat	1,100	0.75	825
Pairs of Candles	80	1.20	96
<b>Total</b>	—	—	<b>65,828</b>

The table clearly shows the diversity of goods transported to these regions, which thereby serve as a source of supply for items that are difficult to produce locally. Most of these goods are of local origin.

<sup>16</sup> It is one of the major Touat centers; in the 18th century, it competed for leadership with Ain Salah and Timimoun. It had markets frequented by traders from everywhere for buying and selling. It gathered diverse goods. Its most important palaces include Ouled Bouhless, Mahdiya, Mansouriya, Ouled Ibrahim, Ouled Ahmed, Ouled Issa, Ouled Ali, Ouled Oushen. See: Moulay Ahmed Al-Taheri Al-Idrisi, *Nasim Al-Nafahat min Akhbar Touat wa man biha min Al-Salihin wa Al-Ulama Al-Thiqat* (Breeze of Aromas from the News of Touat and its Pious and Trustworthy Scholars), ed. Moulay Abdullah Al-Taheri, 2010, p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> The palace is a shared geographical space comprising tribal groups of common origin with intertwined economic, social, and security interests. The palace includes one or more kasbahs and other essential facilities such as the market and the square. It is surrounded by an oasis that contains gardens, and nearby is a palm oasis, cemetery, and shrine. See: Abdullah Baba, *Social and Economic Life in Touat during the French Occupation 1900-1962 through the Records of the Sharia Court*, PhD thesis in Modern and Contemporary History, Adrar, 1439-1440 / 2018-2019, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Mentioned in many sources indicating its antiquity and importance. Its name is linked to the event of the expulsion of Jews led by Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdul Karim Al-Maghili (909 AH - 1503 AD). Its story is famous. It lies south of Timimoun adjacent to its low sebkha (below sea level), arranged with kasbahs on a rocky plateau covered with sandy and rocky layers, surrounded by gardens and palm oases. Ibn Khaldun considered Tamentit the last kasbah of Touat from the east, a city with commerce and architecture from which caravans departed toward Sudan. See: Abdul Rahman Mohamed Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab Al-Ibar wa Diwan Al-Mubtada wa Al-Khabar fi Tarikh Al-Arab wa Al-Barbar wa man 'Asarahum min Dhawi Al-Shan Al-Akbar*, vol. 7, edited by Khalil Shehadeh, reviewed by Sohail Zakar, Dar Al-Fikr, Beirut, 2001, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Martin mentions three types of dates produced in the Touat region: the first quality includes Tinkour, Ahartan, Al-Hamira, offered to guests or for export; the second quality is medium, such as Telmsou, Tinaser, Taghaza, etc.; the third quality is poor, such as Haksh, A'siyan, Adham, etc. See: Martin AGP, op. cit., p. 298.

<sup>20</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 5.

As for the goods purchased from the Gourara markets, the report presents a detailed table of these products and their financial value according to Saida market rates:<sup>22</sup>

Product Name	Quantity	Unit Price (Francs)	Amount in Francs
<i>Tinnasser</i> Dates	643	30	19,290
<i>Hamira</i> Dates	634	40	25,360
<i>Teggaza</i> Dates	437	33	14,421
<i>Tinchoud</i> Dates	110	53	5,830
Bag of <i>Hror</i>	1,300	4	5,200
Bag of Henna	1,273	3	3,819
<i>Burnous</i> (traditional cloak)	548	20	10,960
Women's Shawls	1,723	10	17,230
Various Borrowings (misc.)	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	—	—	<b>106,020</b>

The goods brought from Gourara markets to the north are varied, led by the many types of dates, followed by other goods ranging from food items and clothing to cosmetic products, etc.

The report provides a financial assessment of these trade operations and calculates the profit volume of the Rezaina caravan.

From the subtraction of the value of goods acquired from Gourara from the value of goods transported to this region—minus the losses incurred by the caravan during its return to its homeland due to an attack by bandits on January 13 in the Sidi Brahim area, which cost the caravan three riders and a sum of 31,858 Francs—the net profit of the caravan was 8,334 francs, equivalent to 13%.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Second: The Hamyan Caravan<sup>24</sup>

The report indicates that the Hamyan caravan numbered 2,157 individuals and 7,678 camels, after the Hamyan tribe had formed several groups which gathered at the departure point, namely Mograr el Tahtani (in the district of Ain Sefra). As for the departure date of the caravan, it was November 26, 1892.

#### A. Caravan Route during the First Stage:

The report divides the caravan's journey into two stages, with the first summarized in the following table:<sup>25</sup>

Date	Duration	Major Locations on Route	Notes
26/11/1892	8 hours	Mograr el Tahtani	—
27/11/— —	8 hours	El Outed	The caravan waters the camels
29/11/— —	9 hours	Rouib Errahil	No water or pasture
30/11/— —	12 hours	El Mansoura	Well with low water supply
01/12/— —	10 hours	Djorf El Atfal	The caravan waters the camels
02/12/— —	9 hours	Gharaet El Ghafoul	No water available
03/12/— —	12 hours	El Gheral	No water available
04/12/— —	8 hours	Sidi Brahim	—
05/12/— —	10 hours	Ras El Ma	—
06/12/— —	12 hours	Belgueziale	

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Among the most important Arab tribes in western Algeria (Naama, Tlemcen, Oran) are those descending from the Hamyan tribe, son of Aqba bin Yazid bin Zughba Al-Hilali. They are divided into two branches: the Trafi or Hamyan Sharaga tribe distributed in northern El Bayadh and Naama, and the Shafea or Hamyan Gharaba tribe located in Naama and Bechar. Important sub-tribes include Bakkakra, Akrama, Ouled Mansour, Ouled Sorour, Maqan, Ouled Faris, Sandan, Al-Ghayatra, Al-Maghaoulia, etc. French statistics estimated their population in the M'shiria region in 1892 at 11,995. See: *Le gouvernement général de l'Algérie*, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 7.

07/12/— —	8 hours	<b>El Kasri</b>	
08/12/— —	18 hours	<b>Ouled Issa</b>	

### B. The Second Stage:

Upon arrival at Ouled Issa, the Hamyan caravan stopped for two days to rest. On December 10, the caravan members split into groups and followed different routes. The first route started from Ouled Issa toward Tsabit, during which the distances were estimated in kilometers and the main stopping points of the caravan were identified.

Ouled Issa consists of two villages, each supplied with water: the eastern-western village receives water from the Erg (sand dune area), while the southern village gets water from the northeast. To the north of the ksar are dense grazing areas, where vegetation such as *boukhlala*, *edder*, retem (*le retem*), aggaia (*l'aggaia*), dzanran (*le dzanran*)<sup>26</sup> grows—plants which form key food sources for camels. The oases of the ksar contain an estimated 35,000 palm trees.

After a 25 km journey heading north-south, the caravan reached Touba, passing first by Tsefat, a small ksar with an oasis of about 15,000 palm trees and a water source flowing from the northeast. To the west lies Touba, an uninhabited point lacking water but covered with dzanran and aggaia plants. It serves as a camping site for the caravan due to the long distance from Ouled Issa.<sup>27</sup>

After traveling 35 km, the caravan reached Ouled Rached, crossing a sabkha (salt flat) with difficult terrain due to sand dunes. Ouled Rached is a large ksar with abundant palm trees and water, and it too features dzanran and aggaia vegetation.

Moutrefa and Sehla:<sup>28</sup> These are two ksars about 500 meters apart, reached after a 10 km march. Both have many palm trees, abundant water, and the same plant life. However, relations between the two ksars are strained.<sup>29</sup>

Tsabit:<sup>30</sup> Located 25 km further, Tsabit consists of seven ksars: Aryaras, Bernkan, Hamad, Al-Ayyad, Oujlan, El-Meiz, and El-Habla—the last being inhabited by shorfa (nobles), cousins of the Sultan. The many palm trees are found west of the ksars and are described as beautiful and highly valuable.

The second route runs from Ouled Issa to Toukki, a journey of about 47 km. Notable along this path are Touba and Qarat Touba, a series of hills stretching 15 km east to west. After 22 km, the caravan reaches Toukki. Along the way, it crosses the barren Dzanrania plain, then the northern shore of the sabkha, about 7 km from Touba. This sabkha is characterized by its firm depth and contains an active salt mine, though there is no water or vegetation between it and Toukki, which is part of the Deldoul group.<sup>31</sup>

Deldoul consists of a wide oasis with about 50,000 palm trees, within which are six villages arranged in a crescent from south to north, with both ends pointing east. From north to south, the villages are: Ouled Abd Mssamed, Toukki Baraka, Ouled Belfedoul, Guechtene, and Ouled Abou.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Aqaya and Al-Damran are plants eaten by camels and used by locals as fertilizer and soil cover. See: Louis Voinot, *Le Tidikelt étude sur la géographie, l'histoire et les mœurs du pays* (Tidikelt: Study of the Geography, History and Customs of the Country), Bulletin de la Société de Géographie et d'Archéologie de la Province d'Oran, vol. 29, 1909, pp. 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Located adjacent to Al-Oukrout and considered the dividing line between Tikourarine and original Touat. It is a sandy area called the villages of Al-Daghamesha, including Ouled Mahmoud, Ouled Rashid, Ouled Ali, Ouzan, Kabarten.

<sup>29</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Mentioned by Al-Hasan Al-Wazzan (d. 957 AH / 1550 AD) under the name Tesbet and considered one of the inhabited regions in the desert, containing four kasbahs and many villages. Its land produces dates and some barley. Its most important kasbahs are Aryan Al-Ras, Brinkan, Hammad, Al-Ayad, Oujlan, Al-Maiz, Al-Habla, Al-Qassabi, Bin Talha, Asba', Al-Qrara. See: Al-Hasan Al-Wazzan, *Description of Africa*, translated by Mohamed Haji, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 1983, p. 133.

<sup>31</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 10.

During this leg, the Hamyan caravan would have visited a large number of Gourara towns. The following table shows the various tribal groups and the main ksars in which they conducted trade:<sup>32</sup>

Tribe Name	Total	Ksars Where Each Tribe Traded
Bekkakra	6	Bernkan, Oujlan, Ougroute, Tarmine, Charouine, Baraka
Ouled Mansoura	2	Oujlan, Timy
Akrama	2	Bernkan, Timy
Beni Metref	2	Bernkan, Bouda
Ouled Serour	123	Ougroute, Timy, Hamaou
Sendan	2	Jedaira, Talmine
Ouled Farès	3	El-Meiz, El-Habla, Timy
Ouled Ahmed	12	M'darfa, Deldoul
Mghawlia	2	Charouine, Ougroute
—	2	El-Meiz
Ouled Mubarak	1	Moutrefa
Ouled Toumi	1	Boudi
Mekan	1	Timy
Ouled Massoud	123	Deldoul, Ouled Rached, Sebla

On January 1, 1893, the trading operations of the Hamyan caravan concluded. All members gathered again at Ouled Issa, from where the return journey began. They arrived at Moqrar el Tahtani around January 10, 1893, at which point each group departed toward its original homeland.

### C. Main Commercial Transactions

The report provides detailed data on the commercial transactions carried out by the Hamyan caravan in the Gourara region, structured in the following tables:

*Table 1 - Goods Transported to Gourara and Their Value (Based on the Market Prices in El-Méchia)<sup>33</sup>*

Commodity	Quantity	Unit Price (francs)	Total Value (francs)
Sheep	1314	15	19,710
Wheat (decaliter)	6540	3	19,620
Barley (decaliter)	420	1.5	630
Fava beans	128	3	384
Wool (fleece)	19000	1.25	23,750
Sheep ghee (2 kg)	1247	2	2,494
Cheese (decaliter)	1335	5	6,675
Dried meat	428	4	1,712
Oil	15	40	600
Butter	750	26	19,500
Cash	—	—	54,885.5
Pepper (kg)	120	5	600

- **Total value of goods:** 101,920.50 francs
- **Cash:** 54,885.50 Francs
- **Overall Total:** 156,805.50 Francs

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 12.



From this table, it is evident that the majority of transported goods comprised agricultural food products, followed by animal-based foodstuffs, highlighting the importance of this provisioning for the region, especially for items that are not locally produced.

Table 2 - Goods Transported from Gourara to Hamyan Tribal Lands<sup>34</sup>

Commodity	Quantity	Unit Price (francs)	Total Value (francs)
Tinchoud Dates	200	80	16,000
Hamira Dates	1975	55	108,629
Tigaza Dates	910	45	40,950
Tin Rasser White Dates	1670	50	83,500
Spices (number of sacks)	200	3	600
Dates for camels	500	0.50	250
Henna	5	150	750

• **Total: 250,675 francs**

#### 4. The Trafi Caravan<sup>35</sup>

This caravan was affiliated with the mixed municipality of El Bayadh (formerly Giréville), within the broader administrative scope of the colonial command. The caravan consisted of 1,074 individuals and 2,933 camels. It assembled and departed from El-Mengoub, heading towards Timimoun,<sup>36</sup> departing on 20 December 1892 and returning on 20 February 1893.

##### A. Caravan Route

• After departing El-Mengoub, the caravan traveled 55 km to El-Gharidat, where it camped. The main fodder plants at this stop were *Rqiq*, *Raq*, *El-Melfet*, *El-Khaddam*, and *Arfaj*. No water was available at this station.

• The second stage covered 70 km to El-Ma'mia / El-Mahraq El-Kebir. The road was rocky and crossed three valleys known as *Demkhat*. Eventually, the caravan reached Khalwa of Sidi Sheikh, known for its lakes (*dayas*). Upon reaching three converging lakes, the path led to Mehriqat Ouled Sidi El-Hadj Ahmed. The terrain became increasingly rocky, and the only viable route was through three deep lakes, each 5-6 km wide. The vegetation included *Rqiq*, *Alma*, and *Der'n*, with limited water, though there were deep underground sources.<sup>37</sup>

• The third stage was 60 km to the landmark Qarat En-Na'am (Ostrich Hill), reached via *Foum Ez-Zaggag*, *Daya Redab Aicha*, and *Es-Sattihah*, a mixed terrain of rock and sand. The caravan camped at Qarat En-Na'am, with vegetation similar to previous locations.

• After a further 50 km, the caravan reached Merkh Plateau, where it camped at Thniyat Sidi Slimane. The vegetation remained the same, but water was again absent.<sup>38</sup>

The fifth stage covered 30 km to the landmark Hammami, a critical point as it marked the entry into the Erg (great sand dunes) region. Navigating these dunes required the caravan to be under the leadership of a knowledgeable guide. The remaining 150 km to Timimoun included stops at: Daya Ramadiya, El Merita,

<sup>34</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> A branch of the major Hamyan tribe, representing Hamyan Sharaga belonging to the El Bayadh region according to the 1845 treaty provisions: Ouled Ziyad Al-Taraf, Ouled Abdul Karim, Ouled Maala, Ouled Sorour, and Akrama. See: Dr. Wateau, *To Serve the History of the Hamyans and the Region They Currently Occupy*, 1914, Timimoun, June 15, 1914, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Described by Al-Hajj Ibn Al-Din Al-Aghwati as "a large city open to visitors, with no walls, its houses close together, built of mud and brick, with busy markets. Its inhabitants are a mix of different ethnic groups, including white and red-skinned people." See: Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, *Research and Opinions on the History of Algeria*, vol. 2, 2nd edition, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 1990, p. 257.

<sup>37</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Qasr Sidi Mansour, Qasr Ouled Ayyash (a major exchange point for wool and sheep in return for dates used as camel fodder, and a water replenishment site), Qasba, finally arriving at Timimoun, where the caravan split into various sub-groups to conduct trade across the region, the process unfolds as follows:

- Members of the caravan from the Drarga, Ouled Maala, Ouled Serour, and Akrama head to the Kasr (village) of Timi.
- The Ouled Ziyad Sharqa go to Tsabit and Al-Matrafah.
- The Ouled Ziyad Gharaba and the Arabawat head to the Kasr of Bouda.<sup>39</sup>
- The Ouled Abdel Karim and Ouled Sidi Ahmed Ben Al-Majdoub go to the Kasr of Ouled Saïd.<sup>40</sup>

The rest of the caravan residing in Timimoun heads toward Touat following the routes below:

- From Timimoun to Belgazi - 40 km
- From Belgazi to Deldoul - 40 km
- From Deldoul to Rabah - 35 km
- From Rabah to Sebaa - 50 km
- From Sebaa to Timi - 50 km

### Section B: Major Commercial Operations

#### B – Major Commercial Operations:

Regarding the details of commercial transactions, the following table outlines the materials transported by the Trafi caravan to Gourara.<sup>41</sup>

Materials	Money	Pepper	Meat	Fat	Cheese	Butter	Wool	Wheat	Sheep	Monetary Value
Quantities	5,500f	20	95	46	80	99	499	171	703	
Unit Prices (F)	=	90	85	40	80	60	70	100	22	
Value in Francs	5,500	1,800	8,075	1840	6,400	5,940	34,930	17,100	15,466	<b>97,051</b>

As for the goods acquired from Gourara by the Trafi caravan, they are summarized in the table below:<sup>42</sup>

Item	Quantity	Price in Géryville (F)	Value in Francs
Tenchoud	93	90	8,370
Hamira	821	70	57,470
Tinnasser	711	60	42,660
Tinjal	853	60	51,180
Dekla	66	50	3,300
Mixed Dates	57	60	3,420
Ghrara Baskets	54	50	2,700
Baskets	82	10	820
Spice Baskets	376	5	1,880
Camels	353	5	1,765
Nets	839	0.25	208.25

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Battuta mentioned in his travel that “We arrived at Bouda, one of the largest villages of Touat, its lands are sands and sebkhas.” See: Ibn Battuta Muhammad bin Abdullah, *Tuhfat Al-Nazar fi Gharayib Al-Amsar wa Aja'ib Al-Asfar* (The Gift of Sight on the Wonders of Cities and Marvels of Journeys), vol. 2, Commercial Library, Egypt, p. 210.

<sup>40</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

Baskets	81	0.25	20.28
Plates	446	0.25	1,450
Sedaris	868	0.50	434
Haïk	10	1.50	15
Tobacco Leaves	80	12.50	964
Total Value			<b>178,176.65</b>

The caravan's profit was estimated at 7,632.55 francs.

Its reception was favorable, and no incidents occurred during its entire stay.

Trade Exchange Bases in both Gourara and Touat were as follows:

- 3 Ghraras <sup>43</sup> from Tigaza in exchange for butter
- 20 fleece pieces (toisons) for one load of dates
- 98 plates or 75 baskets exchanged for 4 handfuls of soft wheat flour
- Camel belt for a quantity of meat
- Henna container <sup>44</sup> exchanged for a wheat container
- 3 spice jars for 1 cheese jar
- 6 containers of fodder dates for 1 container of wheat
- 10 containers of dates for 1 container of beans
- Large ewe for one load of dates
- Medium ewe for half a load of dates <sup>45</sup>

#### 5 - The Amour Caravan: <sup>46</sup>

This caravan was administratively affiliated with the Ain Sefra subdivision, consisting of 226 individuals and 841 camels. It gathered at Mechrar El-Tahtani, departed on November 21, 1892, and returned on January 7, 1893.

Its route mirrored that of the Trafi and Hamyan caravans, reaching the ksour of Gourara after a 10-day journey, passing through:

- Talmim, El-Heyha, Charouine, Daghmessa, Timimoun, Ouakrouat, and Tsabit <sup>47</sup>

After concluding its trade, the caravan regrouped on December 26 at Hassi Aïda, north of Ouled Aïssa, to begin the return. At El-Wated, the caravan split up as groups returned to their respective homelands.

Goods transported to Gourara were valued at 28,487 francs, consisting of the same materials as previous caravans. Reported profit: 10,368 francs. <sup>48</sup>

#### 6 - The Ouled Sidi Cheikh Charaga Caravan: <sup>49</sup>

This caravan included 185 individuals with 735 camels, gathering at Sidi El-Hadj Eddine and departing on December 10, 1892. Return date: February 10, 1893.

The route is divided into two phases:

<sup>43</sup> A large load bag suitable for storing grains, wool, and hair made from wool and hair. Martin mentions that a "gharara" equals 35 Zeguen (bags) or three Qasaa'. See: Martin AGP, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> A bag made from sheep or goat skin, used for storing food such as flour, dates, wheat, etc.

<sup>45</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> One of the Adnanite Arab tribes from the descendants of Omar and Abdul Manaf bin Hilal. Their territory during Ibn Khaldun's time extended between Mount Aurès in the east to Mount Amour, which is named after them near El-Hadna. They are currently spread across Laghouat, Biskra, and Naama. See: tribusalgeriennes.wordpress.com/le 14/05/2025 :23:02.

<sup>47</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

<sup>48</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> They trace their lineage to the Rightly Guided Caliph Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq (may God be pleased with him) and are distributed in El Bayadh, the High Plateaus, El Meniaa, and near the Moroccan border. Branches include Ouled Sidi Yaakoub, Ouled Sidi Al-Arabi, Ouled Abdul Karim, etc. See: Mohamed Suleiman Al-Tayeb, *Encyclopedia of Arab Tribes: Field and Historical Research*, vol. 1, 2001, p. 154.

Phase 1: From the starting point to Karn Esh-Shouf, broken into 12 stages, each separated by 40 km, covered in a day. Notable stations:

- Bab El-Ajjaj, El-Mzayer, Oued Rtamiya, El-Hassi El-Mer, Nazah Farraj, Faijat Umm Essif, Faijat El-Hajj Mohamed<sup>50</sup>

This section is characterized by scarce water sources and uniform vegetation.

Phase 2: From Tabelkouza to Matârfa in the ksour region of Gourara, passing through:

- Oued Ghar, Nakhlat Ennous, Bedriane, Timimoun, Tawriste, Belghazi, Matârfa

Goods transported to Gourara were valued at 31,837 francs, while imported goods from Gourara amounted to 34,378 francs.

The net profit was 541 francs, after deducting 2,000 francs due to the loss of 25 camels.<sup>51</sup>

### Conclusion:

From the content presented in this report, several multidimensional conclusions can be drawn:

- The report constitutes an important document for tracking the movement of Arab caravans in the Oran sector toward the regions of Gourara and Touat, providing precise information on caravan composition, departure points and dates, as well as details about their return journeys.
- Camels were the principal means of transportation between the High Plateaus of the Oran sector and the Gourara region, with these caravans employing a total of 14,881 camels.
- Winter was the most favorable season for caravan movement toward the south, as the southern climate was more suitable for the tribes' livestock. These caravans would only return to their original homelands at the onset of spring, when climatic conditions improved and pastures began to regenerate, before preparing for a second movement northward during summer toward the Tellian regions and coastal areas—forming a continuous cycle of life for these tribes.
- Among the geographic data provided is a detailed description of routes, including key rest stops, water sources, and the vegetation available along the way. Although the caravans' destination was Gourara, they followed different routes, indicating a multiplicity of paths leading to the region.
- The report presents valuable information about the ksour (fortified villages) of the Gourara region, including the number of settlements and the plant and water resources available there.
- The commercial data was of particular interest to the report's compiler, who provided detailed accounts of goods transported to and from Gourara, as well as the rules governing trade exchanges and the profits generated by caravan owners—likely with the aim of subjecting them to various forms of taxation.
- Trade exchanges were primarily conducted via barter, with both parties relying on established valuation criteria. In total, the value of goods exported to Gourara reached 380,008.50 francs, while the imported goods were valued at 610,654.50 francs, generating net profits of 189,438 francs. The profit distribution by caravan was as follows:
  - Hamyan caravan: 59%
  - Trafi caravan: 89%
  - Ouled Sidi Cheikh Charaga caravan: 15%
  - Amour caravan: 36%
- The caravan journeys between northern tribes and Gourara served as a social and economic link between the two regions.
- The colonial administration, by accompanying the caravans, was able to gather detailed information on the routes leading to Gourara, in preparation for a future invasion of the Touat region and

<sup>50</sup> CAOM, GGA, op. cit., pp. 21-24.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-27.

its incorporation into colonial control—justified by accusations that Touat was obstructing trade with Western Sudan.

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