


RESEARCH ARTICLE		Academic Knowledge Production on Cultural History in Southern Algeria: The Case of the History Department, University of Oran
	Doctor	
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Abstract	<p>Interest in the study of southern Algeria has grown in various Algerian universities. This includes departments of history, sociology, and anthropology. Southern Algeria is a rich and diverse region. It calls for in-depth research across social, political, historical, and especially cultural dimensions. This paper focuses on the cultural history of southern Algeria. It examines how this field has been addressed through academic knowledge production, taking the History Department at the University of Oran as a case study. Our main interest lies in reviewing Master's and Doctoral theses that explore the broader South of Algeria. The central question of this paper is: What academic knowledge has been produced on the cultural history of southern Algeria in the History Department of the University of Oran? What are the most significant academic works on this subject from the university? To answer this question, the research involved surveying the department's library to identify, classify, and analyze relevant theses in cultural history.</p>	
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Introduction:

Over the years, the Department of Humanities—and particularly the History Department—has shown consistent interest in southern Algeria. This includes both the southwestern and southeastern parts of the region. Among the many aspects explored, cultural history has been a major area of focus.

Several questions arise: Has cultural history been a priority in the department's research agenda? Or have political, military, social, or economic histories taken precedence? Has there been a diversity of approaches in studying the history of the South, or has the focus remained limited to a single genre?

To address these questions, it was necessary to review the academic records available in the department's library. This helped assess the volume and nature of scholarly work produced on the cultural history of southern Algeria.

1. Content of Graduate Theses on the Cultural History of Southern Algeria:

Abba El Habib Hamza: Issues of Manuscript Digitization in Algeria: The Case of Sheikh Mohamed Bay Belaalem's Zawiya Master's Thesis under the supervision of Sahbi Mohamed, 2014–2015

This study deals with the challenges of digitizing manuscripts in Algeria. Manuscripts are widely spread throughout the country, particularly in zawiya and mosques that have historically played a role in spreading cultural awareness and knowledge.

The researcher highlights how regions like Adrar are rich in zawiyas and manuscripts. These are found across its districts and municipalities, leading to an abundance of manuscripts that require preservation. The situation called for a dedicated center for manuscripts and a national project to digitize them. One such project involved the collection of Sheikh Mohamed Bay Belaalem.

The aim was to preserve these valuable materials, particularly those related to religious institutions, through digitization and documentation (Abba El Habib Hamza, 2014, p. 229).

The thesis is structured into three chapters:

Chapter One: Manuscripts and the Importance of Digitization in Documentation

This chapter presents an introduction to manuscript studies and the historical development of manuscripts, from the era of authorship to the era of digitization. It explores key concepts related to digitization, the mechanisms involved in transitioning to digital formats, and the preservation of manuscripts in digital environments. The chapter also discusses nationally funded projects supported by the state's high authorities. (Abba El Habib Hamza, 2014, pp. 31-85)

Chapter Two: Algerian Manuscripts and the National Manuscript Landscape

This chapter examines the status of manuscripts in Algeria. It outlines the geographical map of manuscript distribution across the country, the specialized centers preserving manuscripts, and the location of Algerian manuscripts in international institutions. (Abba El Habib Hamza, 2014, p. 91)

It also explores the legal framework for heritage preservation in Algeria, the role of manuscripts in heritage law, and the cultural context surrounding manuscript dissemination. This includes the contribution of cultural associations, publishing houses, and cultural events. The chapter ends with a detailed map of digitization efforts across Algeria.

(Abba El Habib Hamza, 2014, p. 116)

Chapter Three: The Manuscript Landscape in Adrar Province and the Challenges of Digitization

This chapter addresses the current condition of manuscripts in the province of Adrar and the difficulties in implementing digitization projects. It outlines the locations of manuscript preservation centers in the region and traces the history of Adrar's manuscripts across different periods.

(Abba El Habib Hamza, 2014, p. 133)

It then discusses efforts to transition manuscript collections into digital environments and focuses on the digitization challenges faced by the Mohamed Bay Belaalem Zawiya in comparison with the National Manuscript Center.

(Abba El Habib Hamza, 2014, p. 158)

Conclusion

The thesis concludes with reflections on the overall state of digitization and the importance of integrated strategies for preserving manuscript heritage.

Bibliographic Sources Used: The researcher used a variety of sources, including Arabic encyclopedias, studies on Algerian manuscripts, and specific collections from Adrar, such as those by Mohamed Belaalem. French and Arabic references were both employed.

Yassine Chaïbi: The Political Thought of Sheikh Al-Maghili of Tlemcen and His Reformist Mission in Touat and Western Sudan (870-909 AH / 1465-1503 CE)

Supervised by: Djahida Boujemaa (Master's Thesis, 2006-2007)

This thesis examines the political ideas of Sheikh Al-Maghili of Tlemcen. It focuses on his reformist call in the regions of Touat and Western Sudan. The study explores his contributions to Islamic political theory and royal ethics, as found in both his printed and manuscript works.

The researcher explains that Al-Maghili called for the spread of Islamic belief, the reform of religious practices and traditions, the teaching of the Arabic language, the dissemination of Maliki jurisprudence, the Qadiriyya Sufi order, and spiritual education. He also aimed to address and change the social and political conditions in these regions. (Chaibi Yassine, 2007)

Structure of the Study:

Introduction

Chapter One: Biography of Al-Maghili and the Conditions of His Time

- Section One: A biographical account of Al-Maghili (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 9)
- Section Two: Historical context of his time (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 27)

Chapter Two: Al-Maghili's Political Thought

- Section One: Issues related to the caliphate (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 42)
- Section Two: Ethics and royal etiquette (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 51)
- Section Three: Foundations of the Islamic state (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 66)

Chapter Three: Al-Maghili's Reformist Mission in Touat and the Western Sudan

- Analysis of the socio-political conditions in Touat and the Sudanese region (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 96)
- His reformist mission in both regions (Chaibi Yassine, 2007, p. 136)

Conclusion

Sources and Manuscripts Used:

1. Genealogy Scroll of Al-Maghili, preserved in the library of Sheikh Chari Tayeb bin Abdullah Al-Balabali, Koussam, Timi Municipality, Adrar Province (unlisted manuscript).
2. Zemam Foggara Ajdalloun, an original manuscript from the same library.
3. Al-Kunti, Mohamed bin Al-Mukhtar Al-Kabir (9th-15th centuries): "At-Tara'iq wa At-Tala'id fi Manaqib Ash-Sheikhain Al-Walida wa Al-Walid", photographic copy housed in the same collection.
4. Letter on Governance, photographic copy, Sheikh Chari Tayeb's collection.
5. Refutation of the Mu'tazila, photographic copy in the private library of Dr. Mabrouk Al-Masri, African University, Adrar Province.
6. A Letter to Every Muslim Man and Woman, photographic copy from the same private collection.
7. Muslims Must Refrain from What Breaks the Covenant with Ahl al-Dhimma, photographic copy from the same archive.
8. Misbah Al-Arwah fi Usul Al-Falah, photographic copy in Sheikh Chari Tayeb's library, Koussam, Timi Municipality, Adrar.

Printed Sources

1. Ibn al-Ahmar, Ismail (d. 807 AH / 1909 CE):
The History of the Zayyanid State in Tlemcen, edited by Hani Salama, Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 1st edition, 2001.

2. Rawdat al-Nasrin fi Dawlat Bani Marin, edited by Abd al-Wahhab bin Mansur, Rabat: Royal Printing House, 3rd edition, 2003.
3. Al-Asadi, Muhammad bin Khalil:
Al-Tasir wa al-Itibar wa al-Tahrir wa al-Ikhtibar fima Yajib min Husn al-Tadbir wa al-Tasarruf wa al-Ikhtiyar, edited by Abd al-Qadir Ahmad Tulaymat, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1st edition, 1968.
4. Al-Ahwazi, Abu al-Husayn (d. 436 AH / 1044 CE):
Al-Fara'id wa al-Qala'id, study and edition by Ihsan al-Thamari, Beirut: Ibn Hazm - Dar al-Rari, 1st edition, 2006.

The study also relies on other printed works and references in both Arabic and French.

Mohamed Berchane: Social, Economic, and Cultural Life in the Béchar Region (1903–1962)

Supervised by: Abdelmajid Ben Naamia, 2012–2013 (Doctoral Thesis)

According to the researcher, this study addresses the economic, social, and particularly the cultural conditions of the Béchar region. This aligns with the focus of the current paper, which is cultural history. The period under investigation spans from 1903 until 1962, i.e., from the early 20th century to independence.

The thesis highlights aspects of cultural life in Béchar, including education, traditions, and local customs. It also explores the colonial settlement process and the intellectual engagement surrounding it. The city of Béchar witnessed the coexistence of two distinct communities—differing in religion, customs, education, and labor practices. The French controlled both central and local administrative institutions across many areas. (Berchane Mohamed, 2013)

Structure of the Thesis:

Part One: Social Life in the Béchar Region (1903–1962)

- **Chapter One:** Social organization
- **Chapter Two:** Colonial policy (Berchane Mohamed, 2013, p. 100)
- **Chapter Three:** Social transformations in Béchar (Berchane Mohamed, 2013, p. 158)

Part Two: Economic Life in the Béchar Region (1903–1956)

- **Chapter One:** Economic conditions before colonization
- **Chapter Two:** Trade and transportation (Berchane Mohamed, 2013, pp. 229–311)
- **Chapter Three:** Economic transformations in Béchar

Part Three: Cultural Life in the Béchar Region (1903–1956)

- **Chapter One:** Cultural reality before colonization (Berchane Mohamed, 2013, p. 328)
- **Chapter Two:** The educational movement (Berchane Mohamed, 2013, pp. 360–399)
- **Chapter Three:** Cultural production (Berchane Mohamed, 2013, pp. 400–441)

Conclusion

Regarding the use of archival material and sources, the study relied on the French overseas archives.

A RCHIVE ANOM AIX-EN -PROVENCE France

Archive indigènes

-Série 24H251, territoire d'Aïne Sefra Affaire indigènes Colomb Bechar janvier 1927.

-série 24H251, territoire d'Aïne Sefra affaire indigènes Colomb Bechar 24 avril 1942 colonel

-série 23H84, mai d'ouvrier indigènes Colomb Bechar le 8 mars 1941.

-série 23H83, état sanitaire général, Alger le 31 mars 1941.
 -bulletin et rapport hebdomadaire de renseignement.
 -série 15H28 rapport mensuel Colomb Bechar 8/3/1941
 Série 15H29 rapport hebdomadaire du 3 septembre 1950 au octobre 1950.
 -série 15 H37 rapport mensuel gouverneur général de l'Algérie territoire du sud d Aine Sefra affaire indigène 20 juillet 1946.
 -série 16H37 Bulletin hebdomadaire de renseignement sur la situation politique de l'annexe des affaires indigènes de Colomb Bechar 15/07/1944.
 -série 23H83 Bulletin de quinzaine politique économique pour la période 15 au 31 août 1941 état sanitaire général .Alger 15/09/1941
 -In addition to the Nantes Archives.
 Archive de B D IC Nantes France
 -f884/1707 le recensement en Algérie Annales colonial 30/12/1926
 -f844/1707 la population de l'Algérie en 1931 annales colonial 20-12/1937
 F844/1707 depeche coloniale 18/9/1929 l'enseignement des indigènes algérien le programme d'écoles
 Alongside the Oran Archives.:
 -Document algériens série social N8/8/1946
 -Document algériens série monographie N8/2/1950
 -Document algériens série économique N19,10/3/1956
 -Document algériens l'assistance médicale sociale dans le territoire de sud N 29 avril 1953 .

In addition to the Bécharr provincial archives, the research also made use of judicial and regional reports, as well as correspondence from the Governor General and the Mayor of Bécharr. The study also drew on Arabic-language sources, scholarly articles, and academic theses.

Mustafa Atika

**The Mujahid Moulay Brahim, Commander Abdelwahab: His Life and Struggle (1925–1969)
 Commander of the Third Zone, Fifth Wilaya**

Supervised by: Mohamed Mowafek, 2010–2011 (Master's Thesis)

This study explores the life of a revolutionary and political figure during the colonial era. The researcher relies on personal testimonies and interviews with fellow combatants and resistance fighters from the Wilaya of El Bayadh. The focus is on one of the prominent figures of the fifth Wilaya, which corresponds to the southwestern region of El Bayadh. (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 279)

The Research is Divided into Four Chapters:

Chapter One: Moulay's Life Before the Revolution (1925–1954) (Mustafa Atika, 2011, pp. 10–50)

- Birth, early life, education, social and economic background
- Political activity before 1954
- Political context and his involvement in political activism (1947–1954)

Chapter Two:

Moulay Brahim Before Leading the Third Zone (1945–1958)

- His role in Section 15 (1955–1957)
- His joining of the revolution and contributions to arms acquisition
- His participation in the Battle of Chouabir (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 83)
- His reaction to the martyrdom of Bouchrit and the Ammaradi rebellion
- His activities in the Third Subdivision of the Eighth Zone (1957–1958)

- Moulay as head of communications and intelligence
- Moulay as commander of the Third Subdivision
- His support for the creation of the Ninth Zone and his journey to Morocco (1958)

Chapter Three:

Moulay Brahim as Commander of the Third Zone (1958–1962)

- Colonial strategy in the Third Zone (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 158)
- French military strategy in the region
- Revolutionary strategy in the Third Zone
- Political and military organization
- Formation of the Zone 3 Commando Unit
- Confronting efforts to divide the Sahara and organizing the revolution in the Erg region
- Establishment of military purification committees
- Response to the colonial electoral policies (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 177)

Chapter Four:

Moulay Brahim After Independence: Roles and Positions

- His roles and political stance (1962–1965)
- His view on the ceasefire agreement and the negotiation process (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 181)
- His position during the 1962 summer crisis
- His role in negotiations between the political bureau and Wilaya IV in the summer of 1962
- Membership in the first Constituent Assembly
- Participation in the Sand War (October 1963) (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 199)
- His stance on the execution of Mohamed Chaabani
- Membership in the Central Committee and the National Council (September 20, 1964)
- His position and fate following the events of June 19, 1965
- His view of the June 19, 1965 events (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 205)
- His perspective on the policies of Houari Boumediene
- His view on the rule of Chadli Bendjedid (Mustafa Atika, 2011, p. 211)
- His resignation from the National Liberation Front (FLN)
- His death

Conclusion

Regarding the Use of Archives:

The study made extensive use of...

Centre nationale des archive CNA :

-CNA boîte 0116 situations générales du territoire du sud sociale économique et politique 1938-1939

-CNA boîte 0406 rapports mensuels sur la situation économique de territoire de sud 1951.

CNA boîte 0932 correspondance relative aux affaire sahariennes du sud 1946-1955.

The Directorate of Archives of Oran Province

Direction d'archive de la wilaya d'Oran ;

-DAWO rapport mensuel sur l'activité musulmane Oran 1937-1951boîte pb 201

-DAWO rapport mensuel sur l'activité musulmane de département d'Oran préfecture d'Oran slnt pb201.

-N 65 20/02/1946

N 116 20/02/ET 20MARS 1947.

-DAWO L activité indigènes dans le département d'Oran préfecture d'Oran sidu bp201.

DAWO L activité indigènes dans le département d'Oran préfecture d'Oran.

In addition to other sources, the study also relied on official publications from the Directorate of Mujahideen in El Bayadh Province, documents from the Organization of Mujahideen, and annexed reports on the events of the Algerian Liberation War in Ghardaia Province. The National Center for Algerian Studies was also consulted, along with various French-language sources, theses, and references in both Arabic and French.

Abdallah Bekkouche

The Social Reality of Algerian Sahara Society During the Colonial Period (1852-1914)

Supervised by: Fatiha Saâfou, 2022-2023 (Doctoral Thesis)

In his dissertation, the researcher seeks to present a historical overview of society in the Algerian Sahara. He begins with the geographical explorations of early European observers and proceeds through the period of French colonial occupation. The study explores local resistance movements, both in the southeast and southwest regions, with a focus on the leaders of these areas. It also analyzes the political structure, as well as the social and economic life of Saharan communities.

As for cultural life, the study highlights the community's deep commitment to national identity and Islamic values, despite the pressures of French cultural influence. This was especially evident in the maintenance of traditional Islamic education.

(Bekkouche Abdallah, 2023, p. 265)

The Study Is Divided Into a Preliminary Section and Four Main Chapters

Preliminary Chapter: The Algerian Sahara and French Exploration Missions (1830-1914)

- The current geographic structure of the Sahara
- French exploratory missions in the region (Bekkouche, 2023, pp. 2-33)

Chapter One: The Political Context of Saharan Society (1852-1914)

- French occupation and local resistance (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 56)
- Arab offices in the south (1852-1914)
- Administrative and financial organization in the south (1902-1914) (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 74)

Chapter Two:

The Social Structure of Saharan Communities (1852-1914)

- Social composition by region (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 85)
- Population structure and demographics
- The role and status of women
- Public health conditions (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 111)
- Common diseases, epidemics, and traditional healing methods
- Aspects of colonial approaches to southern society

Chapter Three: Economic Life in the Algerian Sahara (1852-1914)

- Local economic activities
- French economic projects in the south (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 129)
- The impact of colonial economic policies

- Disruption of trade and trans-Saharan caravans
- Groundwater exploitation
- Migration patterns (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 164)

Chapter Four: Cultural Life in the Sahara (1852–1914)

- French cultural policy in the region (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 171)
- French missionary activity in the south
- French educational policies (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 186)
- Local cultural expressions
- Arabic education in Saharan communities (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 186)
- Cultural customs and traditions as seen in French writings
- Notable Saharan scholars and their works
- Statistical analysis of followers of Sufi orders (Bekkouche, 2023, p. 207)

Conclusion

Regarding the use of sources, the study relied on the following:

-ARCHIVE :

-ANA

SERIE E fonds du GGA1840-1962

SOUS SERIE 5 E direction du territoire du sud 1870-1962

-boite N496 expose de la situation générale de territoire du sud de l'Algérie 1903-1941.

Boite N 618 statistique financière de l'Algérie du nord et territoire du sud 1919alger

-AWC :

SERIE A E Mœurs et coutume

AP 075

LOI du 24/12/1902

DECRET DU 14/08/1905

In addition, the study drew on other publications and references in Arabic and French.

2. Analysis of Historical Genres in Academic Knowledge Production on the Cultural History of Southern Algeria (Selected Examples):

The History Department at the University of Oran has shown varying degrees of interest in the cultural history of the South. The emphasis has often remained on military and economic history. This focus arises partly from students of southern origin and partly from university faculty guiding higher-degree research with regional interests.

Among the military-oriented studies, one example is Mohamed Bermaki's thesis *The French Army in the Algerian Sahara (1954–1962)*. It examines the structure of French land, air, and military police forces stationed in the Sahara. It also discusses key military outposts such as Hamaçir and Rigan. (Bermaki Mohamed, 2010, p. 14; p. 53)

Another example is Mohamed Ben Qaitoun's work, *The French Settlement Project in the Ain Sefra Military District (1887–1914)*. The study details the mechanisms and objectives of colonial settlement. It describes differences in approaches by officers appointed by the Governor-General and the reactions of local residents to military orders (Ben Qaitoun Mohamed, 2015, p. 171)

Library Science and Archive Studies:

For instance, the section of Library Science has shown interest in regional manuscript collections in Adrar, Touat, and the public reading libraries of Béchar, Adrar, and Biskra.

French colonial research has also contributed significantly to scholarship on southern culture. Studies published in *La Revue Africaine*, with an anthropological tone and colonial objectives, addressed southern cultural life—especially in the Oran region. One such topic is the Diwan Sidi Bilal as a prevalent cultural form in Ain Sefra and Béchar. (Salamati Abd al-Qadir & Rahiár Ahmed, 2022, p. 90)

This Diwan has roots in African Islamic culture. It was associated historically with slave trade caravans from the Sudan region. (Salamati Abd al-Qadir & Rahiár Ahmed, 2022, p. 91)

In the Oran-South region, the Diwan was known locally as the Ahl al-Quraba or Grraba, referring to their residence near the Gorbi quarter. This group was overseen by the sons of Sidi Bilal, with youth collectors raising funds for ritual sacrifices during gatherings. (Salamati Abd al-Qadir & Rahiár Ahmed, 2022, p. 93)

French colonial campaigns also introduced knowledge of southwestern Saharan heritage. Notable military expeditions include those led by French commanders Du, Bertrand, Letull, and the first Serviers campaign. (Salamati Abd al-Qadir, 2022, p. 38–39)

Scholars outside colonial archives also preserved southern cultural heritage. For example, historian Khalifi Abd al-Qadir's book *Maghrebi Cultural Heritage (Ain Sefra Region as Model)* was published in Oran in 2006. (Khalifi Saïd, 2020, p. 650)

He explains the tribal system, or *filqa*, a collective system governed by tribal norms under the leadership of a Sheikh (Khalifi Saïd, 2020, p. 651)

Cultural heritage also supported resilience under French rule. Local institutions such as Quranic schools, mosques, and *zawiyas*—like the Touat region's *Zawiya*—played central roles in anti-colonial resistance. (Larbas Nabila, 2022, p. 158–162)

Everyday cultural diversity is evident in traditional dress—women's garments like the bright *melhfa*, and men's attire—as described by Ahlam Nuqat and Hassan Dwaas in 2024. This also extends to the region of Bou Saada, known for its specific traditional jewelry. (Ahlam Nuqat & Hassan Dwaas, 2024, p. 654)

Conclusion:

The academic knowledge produced by the History Department at the University of Oran regarding the cultural history of southern Algeria exists in varied but acceptable quantities. This is largely due to the interest of history professors in the region and the nature of postgraduate research projects available within the department. Additionally, the interest of students, especially those of southern Saharan origin, plays an important role. It is worth noting that scholars at other universities also maintain an academic focus on the cultural history of the South.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this research. The research was conducted independently, and there are no financial or personal relationships that could influence the findings or interpretations presented herein.

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