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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dietary Practices, Food Culture, and Strategies of Subsistence in the Oued Souf Community During the Colonial Period

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Abstract

Cet article traite d'une analyse de l'impact des technologies financières (FinTech) sur le développement des This study examines dietary habits and food culture in the Oued Souf community during the colonial period, highlighting food as a central element of social life, cultural identity, and collective resilience. In a harsh desert environment marked by economic constraints and colonial pressures, the Soufi population developed adaptive nutritional practices rooted in locally available resources and long-standing traditions. The research demonstrates that cereals such as wheat and barley formed the basis of daily nourishment, particularly through traditional dishes like couscous and boudchich, while dates constituted the primary staple food of the Soufi household, consumed throughout the year and embedded in both everyday life and social customs. The article also explores the diversity of beverages consumed in Oued Souf, including tea, coffee, lagmi (fermented palm sap), and wazwaza, emphasizing their social and symbolic significance beyond mere sustenance. Furthermore, the study highlights food preservation and storage strategies as essential mechanisms for survival, notably the establishment of Dar al-Khazin (storehouses) used to safeguard provisions (al-ʿoula) against periods of scarcity and environmental uncertainty. Beyond nutritional practices, the research underscores the role of cooperation, solidarity, and communal organization in mitigating food insecurity during the colonial era. By combining historical sources, local documents, and oral testimonies, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of food in Oued Souf, situating dietary practices within broader patterns of adaptation, resistance, and continuity in Saharan societies under colonial rule.

Citation

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Introduction:

Food and beverages in human life are not the product of a specific period; rather, they are a human experience that derives its depth and importance from the interaction of peoples across space and history. They reflect human interaction with the surrounding environment and the extent of adaptation to it. Therefore, dietary habits are associated with many beliefs that embody the behavior of human societies, their civilizational characteristics, and their dietary identity. This research paper aims to shed light on the dietary habits of the Oued Souf community during the colonial period by highlighting the most important foods and beverages of the Soufi community during that time, as well as table manners and the beliefs associated with them.

1. Foods and Beverages. Foods and beverages vary across different societies and reflect the mutual influence between humans and their environment. Accordingly, the basic components of food and the types of foods and drinks differ from one society to another. The Soufi community is closely associated with its dietary identity and its components, represented by the following:

A. Basic food components. Grains: The most important of which are wheat and barley. Wheat is considered a fundamental component of the Soufi dietary system. However, the inhabitants do not cultivate it locally; instead, they import it from Tunisia (the Jerid region), Biskra, and Khenchela (1). One measure of wheat was exchanged for two measures of dates (2). Wheat represented half of Souf's purchases (3), and the quantity consumed annually was estimated at 5,000 tons, with a value of 1,000,000 francs (4). These grains were stored in large clay jars (5). Wheat was used in the preparation of many dishes, including soups and couscous, after the grains were ground (6).

Vegetables and Fruits: These include oranges, figs, grapes, apricots, carrots, watermelon, pomegranates, grapes, apples, peaches, plums, and berries. Among the most important are turnips, carrots, radishes, mustard greens, eggplant, *fakkous* (gourd), *qanawiya* (kabou and okra), cucumbers, potatoes, tomatoes, chickpeas, peas, fava beans, peppers, parsley, lettuce, celery, cowpeas, onions, garlic, and pumpkins of various types found in Oued Souf, including local varieties.

Dates:

Dates are considered one of the most important food elements consumed by the Soufi community and are indispensable in any Soufi household. If a house lacks dates, the Soufi people consider its inhabitants to be hungry. Due to the strong connection between the Soufi community and dates, proverbs were coined about them, such as: *"A house without dates weighs heavily on the heart* (7)*."*

For this reason, families in Oued Souf—especially Bedouin families—are keen to own date palms, ranging on average between 10 and 50 palm trees. It is rare to find a Soufi family that does not own some palms in one of the nearby orchards adjacent to the desert areas bordering their grazing lands.

As for urban families, the head of the household usually owns between 5 and 50 palm trees. The general average number owned by a Soufi farmer is about 20 palm trees, at a rate of 4 to 5 palm trees per family member during the 1950s. If a family owned more than 100 palm trees, its head was considered wealthy (8).

There are several types of dates, some of which are suitable for storage. Among these are:

- **Deglet Garas (Ghars):** Distinguished by its good taste and importance due to its long storage life. The region consumes about 12% of the annual production, while the remainder is sold (9).

- **Deglet Nour:** The origin of its name is "Dijla," as the people of Souf brought it from the Tigris River region. Its pronunciation later changed to *Degla*, and the word *Nour* (light) was added because of its beauty (10). It is the finest in quality in the Algerian Sahara and is sold in Europe. It represents 8% of Oued Souf's date production. In 1929, the number of Deglet Nour palms was estimated at 24,446 out of a total of 333,705 palms in the region. By the mid-twentieth century, the number of Deglet Nour palms increased until they accounted for 25% of the total palms in the region (11).

- **Nehoush:** This category includes 16 varieties, such as *Al-'Aliq*, *Amari*, and *Takroum* (12).

- **Degoul:** This category consists of several types, including *Degla Yabsa* (dry Degla) and *Msoufi*, among others (13).

Fats:
Among the most important fats is olive oil. The average Soufi individual consumes about 5 liters per year in urban areas, and about half a liter among Bedouin families (14).

Meat:
Meat forms part of the dietary customs of the Oued Souf community. It is obtained either from livestock breeding or from hunting, as Oued Souf was known for having skilled hunters (15). The community also included nomadic Bedouin tribes who relied on herding livestock in search of water and pasture. On average, Bedouin families owned about 10 camels and a total of around 30 animals consisting of sheep and goats. Meat consumption increased during religious and social occasions, and it was usually eaten grilled (16).

B. Foods

Couscous:
Couscous is considered the dish associated with the evening dinner meal (17). It is made from wheat or barley flour, or mixed with *terthouth* and *denoun*. It is rolled into small round grains, then steamed over water and moistened with oil or clarified butter. It is served with various types of sauce (*marq*) (18). Couscous is the dish with which guests are honored and is served in a wooden *qas'a* (large communal bowl) (19) or in clay and earthenware dishes (20).

They prepare *hibita* as a sauce for couscous, cooking *kabou* with salt and pepper, sometimes with meat added, especially on special occasions or when serving guests (21).

Couscous may also be prepared as *saffa*, in which it is not served with sauce but instead mixed with a blend of spices consisting of garlic, pepper, tomatoes, and onions. This mixture is combined with the couscous during the second steaming or after steaming is completed (22). Some finely chopped vegetables, cut into small cubes—such as potatoes, carrots, *kabou*, or green vegetables like *bartalaq* (23)—may be added. These are steamed and mixed with the couscous grains, olive oil, and spices to form the dish known as *saffa* (24).

Mughbar Dhahru: This consists of the *hibita* mentioned earlier, to which a small amount of barley or wheat flour is added.

Boudchich: Barley grains ground into two or three pieces, moistened with water, then steamed twice and finally moistened with oil (25).

Dchicha: Wheat or barley ground with a hand mill until each grain is broken into three or four pieces, then cooked to a flowing or soupy consistency. Due to the importance and delicious taste of this Soufi dish, a local proverb says: *"Hungry and he fell into dchicha* (26)*."*

Matabiq (Dishes) (27)**:**

Soup: Wheat or barley ground with a hand mill until the grain is divided into six or seven parts, then cooked to a liquid consistency.

Rfiss: A paste made from flour, dates, and honey (28).

Rghida: Wheat flour cooked in water into a porridge-like consistency.

Berkoukoush: Similar to couscous in its rolling process, but with larger grains. After being steamed once, it is added to the pot and becomes similar to *dchich* (29).

Marfoussa: A mixture of flour, butter, and milk. (30)

Doubara: A dish made from the cooking water of fava beans or chickpeas with pepper and sour pomegranate. If pomegranate is unavailable, vinegar is used instead, and the pepper may be green or dried.

Mella Bread: A dough made of wheat flour, stuffed with garlic, tomatoes, and some spices, and cooked in a pit in the sand. Embers are placed in the pit, after which the *mella* loaf is covered with hot sand. After some time, the sand is removed.

Eggs: Usually eaten boiled (31)

Gazelle and antelope meat: Served grilled (32)

Chicken and pigeon: Grilled and prominently served to honor guests (33)

C. Beverages

Water:
Water is considered one of the essential beverages and the basis of life. The Soufi individual relied on digging wells to secure water, though the water was not always suitable for drinking. Water was stored in a *qirba* (leather waterskin) and cooled in a ceramic vessel (34). Drinking was usually done collectively, and the drinking container was a bottle or a ceramic vessel. Drinking water from iron or silver containers was avoided (35), and the bottle was coated with tar (36).

Tea:
Tea—known as *atay*, *shahi*, *jami*, and *jahy*—included several types: white (the finest), green, grayish, black, yellow, and red. All of these fall under the general category of *khishaf*, from which the green variety was cultivated locally, though it was not widely consumed. Tea was believed to purify the voice, relieve blockages, eliminate jaundice, and ease urinary retention; however, excessive consumption was considered harmful (37). The consumption of tea in Oued Souf dates back to the late nineteenth century. Initially, its spread was limited and confined to merchants. The first person to use it in Tekesbet for trade was a merchant who had contacts with the people of Fez (in Morocco). By 1910, tea had spread among the general population and became part of the social customs of the Oued Souf community (38). It became the region's primary beverage, surpassing all others. No social gathering was without it, and it was prepared according to social traditions that created an atmosphere of conviviality and enjoyment for those invited to drink it near the fire over which it was prepared (39).

Coffee:
The exact date of coffee's introduction to Oued Souf is not known, but it had been consumed long before the French colonial period (40. Some French travelers, including Victor Largeau and Zakon, mentioned drinking coffee there in the nineteenth century (41). Coffee consumption did not usually exceed two cups per day among well-off families (42). Arabic coffee was served to guests (43), and there were coffee sellers in the neighborhoods of Souf. Coffee and sugar were imported from Biskra (44).

Lagmi:
Lagmi is a drink extracted from the date palm when it reaches the stage of ceasing date production. The sap flows from the palm for two to three months, and a single palm produces about 16 liters per day. Lagmi has a sweet taste and is drunk fresh; if left for a long period, it turns into an intoxicating substance (45)

Wazwaza:
Wazwaza is a sweet-tasting beverage made from a date extract and various herbs. It is usually consumed in summer to quench thirst. A mixture of herbs—such as *qantus*, rose, cinnamon, rosemary, thyme, *qritfa*, *silk jbir*, cloves, coriander, caraway, and others—is placed in a perforated cloth bag. The herbs are infused with water in a *qirba* (a large bag made of goat skin) hung on a *hammara*. The mixture is left for a week to remove the sharp taste of the herbs, after which the extract, known as *"the bride of wazwaza,"* is strained and set aside. Another perforated cloth bag containing dates is then added, water is poured over it, and after a full day the extract is filtered to produce *wazwaza*. The dates are replaced daily, while the herb bag continues to be used throughout the entire period (46).

3. Main Meals and Their Times: The Oued Souf community عادةً consumed three meals a day: breakfast in the morning upon waking, lunch at midday, and dinner at night.

Breakfast was simple and usually consisted of a few dates. Over time, coffee and tea became preferred, along with a piece of homemade bread (47). As for the Bedouins, they drank milk in the morning; the milk was milked from goats that same morning and boiled. Some well-off residents also consumed eggs (48).

As for lunch, the people of Souf generally did not cook food; instead, they sufficed with a few dates and drank milk if available, or water. During the midday rest (*qaylula*), Soufis might eat some *dchicha*, *radhkha*, *fakkous* (49), watermelon (*della'*), or *doubara* (50). Hence the Soufi proverb: *"A date, some milk, and dchicha cool one down,"* meaning that the Soufi suffices with dates and milk when they are abundant in the autumn season (51). Since the Soufi individual considers dates the staple food, another proverb says: *"Dchicha is not real sustenance, even if it reaches wild herbs* (52)*."*
They might also eat some bread stuffed with cooked tomatoes, onions, and spices. The poorest segment of society contented itself with dates accompanied by a small amount of water or chopped peppers mixed with tomatoes and spices—known as *radhkha* or *marsa*—sometimes followed by some fava beans (53).

The diet of nomadic Bedouins in the Soufi community was limited mainly to dates and milk. They might also have some meat (54) from the sheep they herded in the desert, and their diet could vary with grilled gazelle or rabbit. They used dried meat and *rfiss* (55). During travel and migration, the Soufi Bedouin's food consisted of provisions carried in saddlebags. During rest periods, they prepared *mella* bread and *terfas* (a type of sweet potato). They resisted thirst by sucking *lu'lu'iya* (pink spring flowers), grilled *shershman* (a type of sand fish) after slaughtering, gutting, washing, salting, and grilling it, and drank tea sweetened with sugar at night (56).

At dinner, the Soufi community did not consume dates; instead, meals were based on grains, such as couscous, *dchicha*, *mhammasa* (toasted grains), and *'asida* (porridge) (57).

As for young children, their diet relied on flour made from Deglet Nour dates mixed with roasted chickpeas and a small amount of sugar, dissolved in milk and water, and served in the form of a soup (58).

The Soufi community, in its dietary system, was closely linked to what the land and climate produced in terms of vegetables and fruits, as well as to the livestock—especially sheep—that it raised. Hence the Soufi proverb: *"Livelihood lies between the crop and the udder."* Accordingly, life in the Oued Souf community was very simple; the life of the Soufi individual in general, and of the Bedouin in particular, was marked by great simplicity.

3. Table Manners and Traditions: Eating gatherings were usually very simple and communal, taking place in a circular sitting arrangement around the meal. Utensils were used collectively. Among the social customs associated with the dining table was the separation of women from men, as the people of Souf were known for modesty. A woman would

not eat in front of her husband, and this was a source of pride for her. Women also favored men in food portions, offering them the larger share of food and meat. One of the main places used for eating was the *sbat*. The utensils used were made of wood or clay, including the *qas'a* (large communal bowl), *mah* (mortar), and ladles. Water was drunk from a *qammina* (bottle) or a clay earthenware vessel.

It was customary for the Soufi individual to begin eating and drinking with the *basmala* (invocation of God's name) before starting a meal or drink. Eating was often accompanied by light conversation and discussion. Food was eaten with the hands or with ladles made of wood (59). The meal was placed directly on the ground, or on a piece of cloth or a mat made of *halfa* grass, depending on each family's customs. Among the traditions associated with the Prophetic Sunnah at the dining table was *"honoring the vessel."* If the food was liquid, such as *dchicha* or soup, the vessel was honored by wiping it with a finger and licking it with the tongue. After finishing the meal, hands were washed using water and soap.

What we observe is that everyday life in the Oued Souf community was characterized by simplicity, as noted by Ibn Khaldun. However, some French travelers portrayed this simplicity from a condescending perspective, among them Zakon, without taking into account the differences between European society and Soufi society, as well as the cultural environments of each. When he attended a banquet (*daifa*) prepared for him by the Khalifa of Oued Souf in Kouinine, he recounts:
"He sat with the Khalifa and the interpreter on the ground, on a magnificent carpet of thick wool made in the Arab style, in an uncomfortable position. We ate from a communal dish, each person taking according to his need, since there was no use of individual plates. The vessel for drinking water was also communal, and there was no use of knives; when the interpreter wanted to divide the grilled chicken, he used his fingers (60)."
In his view, drinking water from a communal vessel was a vulgar practice that aroused his disapproval, especially since the vessel exuded the smell of a he-goat. This was not strange in Oued Souf, as goatskin was used to make the *qulla*, the barrel (*qirba*) (61), and the *qammina*, which were the primary drinking vessels there (62).

5. Some Beliefs Associated with Food: Dietary taste is a cultural domain shaped by religious prohibitions and social customs (63). For this reason, food is surrounded by many beliefs in all societies, and the Oued Souf community was no exception. Food—especially that in which wheat constituted one of its most important basic elements—held great sanctity among the people of Souf. Consequently, women were careful not to let grains fall on the ground, as wheat was associated with God's blessings. For this reason, couscous was called *"the blessing"* (*al-ni'ma*), as reflected in the Soufi proverb: *"Ululations fill the dome, and not a single grain of the blessing is wasted.* (64) *"* Food was regarded as a great blessing that should not be squandered; thus, a Soufi person would pick up a piece of bread found thrown on the ground and remove it from the road (65).

This sanctity of wheat and its derivatives is found in most regions of Algeria, where foods made from grains—such as couscous, bread, or *kesra*—enjoy great reverence in Algerian society. It is also present across the Maghrebi world, for example in Morocco and Tunisia, which reflects mutual influence shaped by geographic proximity. The sanctity of wheat-based food is linked to practices deeply rooted in history and still present today, as grains (wheat and barley) have been associated in the Algerian and Maghrebi collective imagination with scarcity and famine. Algerians even elevated wheat to the level of worship (66), as illustrated by the following verses:

O wheat, fair in color,
From your satiety there is no excess.
You are the sustenance of every poor person;
Through you come prayer and devotion.

Dates also held great importance. The people of Souf believed that a house without dates meant its inhabitants were hungry, and they expressed this in proverbs and popular poetry. One proverb says: *"A house without dates weighs heavily on the heart,"* implying disdain for a household devoid of dates (67).

Women also believed that swallowing date pits contributed to weight gain (68), which was a standard of beauty in Soufi society at that time. This dietary belief was not limited to the Soufi community alone but was also present in southern Tunisia, particularly in the Tunisian Jerid region (69).

As for tea, although its consumption was initially limited, it eventually became part of Soufi dietary customs. The Soufi individual believed that tea provided energy due to the physical effort exerted in herding or agricultural work, especially in digging the *ghout* (70). It was also believed to relieve headaches and improve mood. Consequently, tea consumption increased among the Soufi population during the first half of the twentieth century until it became an integral part of Soufi food culture and a companion of evening social gatherings (71).

Meat was also associated with numerous beliefs, particularly in traditional medicine and ritual practices. Thus, despite the prohibition of dog meat, it appears in practice under the pretext of "healing," as it was believed to protect against prevalent fevers. De Faureh observed that this belief allowed people to find justification to bypass the laws of their religion (72). The belief in sacrifice—slaughtering animals and consuming their meat—was also present in the rituals of *Bouhras* and *Baba Merzoug* (73).

Because hospitality carries a form of sanctity derived from religious belief, notables, the wealthy, and the poor alike in Oued Souf competed in preparing food for guests. Whenever a stranger arrived at a village or hamlet, its inhabitants would vie for the honor of hosting him. People considered the host to be fortunate, and this care and attention shown to guests and strangers led to the belief that the guest is "God's messenger" or "God's guest."

5. Storage and Preservation of Food and Beverages: The Oued Souf community lived under difficult economic conditions and therefore relied on *al-'oula*—the storage of the family's provisions—in the *Dar al-Khazin* (storehouse). The key to the storehouse was kept by the head of the family. Women avoided freely handling food supplies out of fear of waste and extravagance, as these provisions were extremely important in a society marked by poverty and hardship. No family member was allowed to manage the stored supplies independently without permission (74).

Among the most important items stored by the Soufi people were dates. Dates are harvested in autumn, but the people of Souf consume them throughout the year. The average amount stored by a Soufi family reached about 80 kilograms of dates per year (75). Among the types of dates commonly stored was *ghars*. Ghars dates were preserved in *batayin*, where they were pressed until they became compact so that no air could pass between the date fruits; they were later removed for consumption using a sharp iron tool (76). Deglet Nour dates were preserved in the same way and were called *malbouza*, so named because the date fruits became tightly stuck together (77). Dates were also stored in *khabiyas* (large storage jars).

As for dry foodstuffs, they were kept in bags woven from braided goatskin and in *mazawid* made of tanned leather. The average stored food supplies amounted to about 40 kilograms of wheat and 6 kilograms of barley (78).

Water was stored in the *qirba*, a container made from goatskin. The skin was taken, turned inside out, tanned with tar, and softened with butter. The openings at the legs were tied shut, while the neck of the animal formed the opening of the *qirba*, which could hold between 25 and 30 liters (79).

Soufi families also preserved many cooking ingredients. Meat was dried with salt and some spices until it became *qadid* (dried meat). Red peppers were dried by exposing them to air, either spread on a dry cloth or threaded on a string using a needle to form a cluster (80). Before use, the dried peppers were soaked in water for several days (81).

6. Dietary Customs During Celebrations, Occasions, and Hardships

A. During Celebrations and Occasions

Marriage:

Wedding celebrations in the Souf region lasted an entire week. The people of Souf showed solidarity and cooperation, each contributing what they could to prepare provisions for the wedding days—whether by offering gifts such as sheep,

vegetables, and grains, or by helping in the preparation of food. For this reason, the first day of the celebration was called *"al-raḥā"* (the millstone day), because on this day women prepared the wedding provisions by grinding wheat with hand mills (82), with the participation of relatives and neighbors. On the second day, *al-ʿiṭriyya* (gifts) were presented to the bride's family, including a sheep, vegetables, and fruits, in order to help them prepare the wedding banquet. When the groom's family arrived, they were served tea. On the third day, the lunch meal (referred to as breakfast) was prepared and served to relatives and neighbors. During this period, the newlyweds were not allowed to eat in front of one another; they were expected to appear as though they avoided eating (83).

The Birth of a New Child: During labor, seven *ʿabābid* (small rolls) made from *ghars* dates mixed with oil were prepared for the woman. These were shaped like fingers and swallowed without chewing to help her in delivering the baby. A porridge made of flour (*ʿasida*) was also prepared for the woman in labor to ease childbirth. Before the birth, the father prepared one liter of olive oil, a quarter measure of wheat, and three shares of meat. If the newborn was male, the woman received all the prepared food; if the newborn was female, she received two shares of meat. The meat was prepared grilled to help her recover her strength and stimulate milk production (84). Congratulators also presented the mother with pigeons and eggs as gifts on the occasion of the newborn, and they themselves ate the porridge (85).

ʿAshura:

ʿAshura is considered one of the holidays celebrated by the Soufi people. In the days preceding ʿAshura, the people of Souf would slaughter a sheep or a camel and distribute the meat to the poor; this was called *al-nafaqa*. Women in households prepared some of the well-known Soufi dishes, such as *berkoukoush*, *dchicha*, and couscous. Those whom God had blessed with greater means also prepared *shakhshoukha*. People then distributed the food (86).

The Prophet's Birthday (Mawlid al-Nabawi al-Sharif): On the morning of the Prophet's Birthday, women prepared *ʿasida* (porridge) and brought the food to the mosques, where men recited poems and religious praises. The food was then eaten and shared among them. Among the customs of Souf on this day was the performance of what was known as *al-fadila*, which involved slaughtering a sheep and distributing it as charity to the poor and needy (87).

Ramadan:

Before the arrival of the month of Ramadan, the people prepared certain foods such as fava beans, caraway, oils, and others in order to prepare the Ramadan table. During Ramadan, people would break their fast with simple foods such as dates, *dchicha*, couscous, and milk. As for the *suhoor* meal, a man would go around waking people for *suhoor*, repeating the phrase: *"Wake up, lady, don't sleep without it."* The *suhoor* meal was very simple and usually consisted of *dchicha* or some couscous, and therefore did not reflect the level of physical effort exerted by the Soufi individual in hard labor. Among the dietary customs associated with this month was the slaughtering of a sheep on the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*) and distributing it to the poor and needy (88).

B. During Hardships

During the colonial period, the Oued Souf community was exposed to several natural disasters that affected date harvests and led to shortages of food supplies, making the population vulnerable to famine. This was due to several factors, including climatic conditions—especially prolonged droughts—and locust invasions that destroyed crops. Among the years in which the people of Souf suffered most were the drought years, particularly among the Bedouins, during the period from 1937 to 1947, as well as poor date seasons. The year 1946 was even called *"the year of al-saysh."* Souf also witnessed locust invasions in several seasons, such as the spring of 1930, 1932, 1933, and August 1945 (89).

Date palms were also affected by certain pests, such as *taqnit*, which causes date fruits to dry out, or when dates became *khamouri* due to heavy rainfall, causing them to rot. This occurred in what was known as the "first khamouri year" in 1885 and the second in 1887. As a result, inhabitants were forced to rely on wheat and barley brought by supply caravans for their food (90).

With rising food prices due to political conditions—especially during the First and Second World Wars—alongside limited incomes and harsh living conditions, poor families suffered severe hardship. They awaited their share of coffee and tea, in addition to rationed goods, particularly during the Second World War. These goods were distributed in limited quantities using special vouchers (*bon*), determined by the *qaid* or the tribal chief. Hardship continued after the Second World War, and in 1947 the quantities of goods distributed per person were as follows:

- Sugar: 800 grams
- Pasta: 600 grams
- Soap: 200 grams
- Pepper: 100 grams
- Couscous: 100 grams

The people of Souf faced these hardships and adapted to reality. In years of locust invasions, people went out in groups to hunt and collect locusts in sacks and sell them in the market. Locusts were considered a favored food in times of poor date harvests; they were cooked in water and salt and then dried (91).

Among the manifestations of mutual aid and solidarity to support those in need was *al-nafāqa*, which consisted of a slaughtered sheep, goat, or young camel shared among neighbors and friends (92). Religious lodges (*zāwiyas*) also played an important social role, serving as a form of hospitality service by feeding travelers, students of knowledge, the needy, the sick, and refugees. Women played a major role in preparing food as voluntary work that embodied the values of solidarity and mutual support in Soufi society.

Death:

Neighbors and relatives would cook food for the family of the deceased as an expression of solidarity in their grief (93). On the third day after death, a meal known as the *"dinner of the deceased"* was prepared, most often consisting of couscous cooked with a vegetable sauce and lamb meat. It was usually prepared by and for the poor and needy (94).

Conclusion:

Through this research paper, we conclude the following:

- The Soufi individual relied in his diet on what the desert environment produced; therefore, dates were the staple food and enjoyed great sanctity within the Soufi family.
- Despite the harsh natural conditions of the desert environment, the Oued Souf community was able to adapt to them and exploit some of their characteristics in storing and preserving food.
- Food in the Oued Souf community was associated with many beliefs that gave it a distinct identity.
- The Oued Souf community was characterized by solidarity and mutual support during many hardships and crises through the distribution of food, one manifestation of which was *al-nafāqa*.

Endnotes:

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19. Maréchal Dumas, Mœurs et coutumes de l'Algérie: Tell–Kabylie–Sahara, Librairie de La Hachette et Cie, Paris, 1853, pp. 257–258.
20. Ibrahim bin Al-Sassi Al-Awamer, previous source, p. 93.
21. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935), at 5:00 p.m. on 28 August 2022, at her home in Oued Souf, Algeria.
22. Maréchal Dumas, op. cit., pp. 257–258.
23. Ibrahim bin Al-Sassi Al-Awamer, previous source, p. 92.
24. Ibid., p. 94.
25. Bartalaq: its scientific name is purslane (Portulaca oleracea).
26. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935), at 5:00 p.m. on 28 August 2022, at her home in Oued Souf, Algeria.
27. Ibrahim bin Al-Sassi Al-Awamer, previous source, p. 93.
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47. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935), Al-Rguiba, dated 10/09/2022, El Oued, Algeria.
48. Ibid.
49. Gaston Coffey, Notes on Souf and the Soufa People, trans. Abdelkader Mihi, 1st ed., Al-Rimal Printing Press, El Oued, 2016, p. 94.
50. Ibid., p. 136.
51. Radhkha or Marsa: chopped tomatoes mixed with peppers.
52. Ibrahim bin Al-Sassi Al-Awamer, previous source, p. 92.
53. Mohamed Al-Saleh bin Ali, 1,500 Proverbs and Popular Sayings..., previous reference, p. 24.
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55. Othman Zaghb, previous reference, p. 157.
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58. Henri de Faureh, previous source, pp. 140–141.
59. Gaston Coffey, previous source, p. 95.
60. Othman Zaghb, previous reference, p. 158.
61. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935 in El Oued), on 13 August 2022, at her home in El Oued.
62. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935 in El Oued), on 13 August 2022, at her home in El Oued.
63. A condescending and mocking view of the drinking waterskin is found in Tromely's account, where he mentions that the goatskin waterskin, despite being tarred, gives the water a foul odor unacceptable even to horses and mules. He often saw horses refuse to drink or place their muzzles in the water vessel, even though they had not drunk for a full day. An Arabic proverb says: "Drink from the mouth of a snake, but do not drink from the mouth of a waterskin." See: S. Tromely, previous source, p. 266.
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66. [1] Mohamed Al-Saleh bin Ali, 1,500 Proverbs and Popular Sayings..., previous reference, p. 40..
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68. Ahlam Satah, "The Sanctity of Food in Algerian Society during the 19th Century: A Historical–Anthropological Approach," Journal of the Anthropology of Religions, vol. 16, no. 2, 15/06/2020, pp. 738–740.
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70. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935 in El Oued), on 13 August 2022, at her home in El Oued.

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72. Interview with Fatima Meshri (born in 1935 in El Oued), on 13 August 2022, at her home in El Oued.
73. Claude Bataillon, previous source, p. 147.
74. Henri de Faureh, previous source, p. 170
75. A carnival whose ceremonies are held on 15 August, during which a large effigy is prepared and carried by a group of young men through the city's streets and alleys while chanting: "Bouhras, remover of misfortune." See Henri de Faureh, previous source, p. 177.
76. Baba Merzoug: a form of folklore performed by Black communities in Oued Souf, resembling a hadra ritual. See Capt. Roger Leselle, Les Noirs du Souf, supplements to the Bulletin de Liaison Saharienne, 3rd quarter, 1957, p. 58.
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78. Henri Duveyrier, previous source, p. 151.
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