

Anthropological Explorations of French Travelers and Their Study of Epidemics in the Southwestern Algerian Region in the 19th Century AD

استكشافات أنثروبولوجية لرحالة فرنسيين ودراساتهم للأوبئة في منطقة الجنوب الغربي الجزائري خلال القرن التاسع عشر الميلادي

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Abstract:

This study addresses a set of explorations by French travelers in the southwestern Algerian region which combined social and health life in the region with a focus on their study of customs, traditions, epidemics and diseases that were widespread in the region. It highlights how these journeys combined a scientific and medical character on the one hand and colonial objectives on the other as French travelers and doctors sought to understand the social structure patterns of living and health habits of the local population.

The study also shows that the study of epidemics such as plague cholera and fever was not merely a medical concern but a tool for understanding society and controlling it as travelers linked the spread of diseases to the environment climate and cultural practices of the local population. The French occupation exploited the health situation to increase its intervention in the region.

Keywords: Southwestern Algerian Region, anthropological explorations, French Travelers, Nineteenth Century AD, Epidemics...

ملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة مجموعة من الاستكشافات التي قام بها المسافرون الفرنسيون في المنطقة الجنوبية الغربية من الجزائر، والتي جمعت بين الحياة الاجتماعية والصحية في المنطقة مع التركيز على دراساتهم للعادات والتقاليد والأوبئة والأمراض التي كانت منتشرة في المنطقة. يسلط الضوء على كيفية دمج هذه الرحلات بين الطابع العلمي والطبي من جهة والأهداف الاستعمارية من جهة أخرى، حيث سعى المسافرون والأطباء الفرنسيون إلى فهم أنماط الحياة والعادات الصحية للسكان المحليين.

تُظهر الدراسة أيضًا أن دراسة الأوبئة مثل الطاعون والكوليرا والحمى لم تكن مجرد مسألة طبية بل أداة لفهم المجتمع والسيطرة عليه، حيث ربط المسافرون انتشار الأمراض بالبيئة والمناخ والممارسات الثقافية للسكان المحليين. استغلت الاحتلال الفرنسي الوضع الصحي لزيادة تدخله في المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنطقة الجنوبية الغربية الجزائرية، الاستكشافات الأنثروبولوجية، المسافرون الفرنسيون، القرن التاسع عشر الميلادي، الأوبئة

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1.Introduction

Since the French occupation set foot in Algeria, they were thinking about how to subjugate Algeria and travel was among the means they resorted to. Travel played a

fundamental role in learning about the life of peoples and societies from several aspects especially the anthropological aspect in the nineteenth century AD.

French interest in the southwestern Algerian region was evident through the dispatch of scientific missions such as the expedition of General Cavaignac. Many French travelers were interested in studying the southwestern Algerian region not only from a geographical perspective but also from an anthropological and cultural viewpoint.

Through this study we attempt to understand the role of travelers in uncovering certain diseases and epidemics in the southwestern Algerian region and the extent of their interest in social life including customs and traditions in the nineteenth century AD.

2. Travel and Travelers

2.1 Definition of Travel

2.1.1 Linguistically:

The linguistic definition of travel came with several meanings including movement and traversing the land relocation and migration in the sense of people. It is said a man traveled when he moved a traveling man and a people who travel frequently meaning they move often.

2.1.2 Terminologically:

Travel is an achievement or an act or a direct engagement in what it means or requires crossing the barrier of distance or removing the separation between the place from which one starts and the place to which one ends and travel may be a hobby that attracts a person and satisfies their needs and travel may be a difficult and arduous accomplishment along the road between one place and another.

Travel also includes getting to know others through talking with them in various fields and among the other motives is the scientific or educational motive with the aim of acquiring more knowledge in another place in the world known for various sciences such as jurisprudence medicine engineering and others and as for political motives.

These include delegations and embassies sent by kings and rulers to their counterparts in other countries to strengthen relations and ties and there are also touristic and cultural motives which concern our research namely the desire to travel around the world and the globe and travel for its own sake and the love of movement and changing atmosphere and renewing energy through observation and enjoying adventure.

2.1.3 Definition of the Traveler

The traveler from an objective perspective is the writer the scholar the geographer and the specialist in human races and he is the witness and narrator of events and he is the primary writer who records his experience in tourism and travel and conveys it to his readers therefore the traveler is the person who travels frequently and moves between countries and documents his observations and impressions and often the traveler is an explorer or a scholar or a writer who records the details of his journeys in books or reports.

2.2 Types of Travel

2.2.1 Scientific Travels

The motive for them is attending seminars conferences and scientific literary and artistic festivals and participating in them as humans used to travel long distances in order to visit libraries and attend gatherings and benefit from scientific councils which are considered a source of knowledge from which the traveler acquires many sciences from various sources and provides the reader with a large amount of knowledge that ensures building a cultural background.

2.2.2 Commercial Travels

2.2.3 Exploratory Travels

Exploratory travels refer to organized movement carried out by individuals or groups with the aim of discovering unknown regions or studying new natural and human phenomena.

2.3. Importance of Travels and Travelers in History

The importance of travels and travelers is framed within different elements as follows travelers contributed to documenting cultures and customs and conveyed a clear image of different peoples and their journeys provided scholars with important information about the terrain of the earth and maps and they contributed to enhancing trade and cultural exchange.

Commercial travels contributed to spreading goods and ideas among nations and in conclusion travels were and still are a means of understanding and discovering the world and travelers played an important role in documenting history and cultures and their books are an important reference in the study of geography history and anthropology.

2.4 Scientific Value of Travel

The value of travels lies in describing the historical geographical cultural and social aspects of peoples and portraying the daily life of individuals in society therefore travels had an educational value as they are among the most enriching means for the human being and for enriching his thought and reflections about himself and travel books preserved a great part of history and contributed to strengthening ties between peoples and mutual acquaintance among them as the diligent traveler does not settle in a homeland except when he returns to his homeland and describes the condition of the lands he visited so each of the peoples he traveled from or to becomes aware of the condition of other peoples.

3. The Beginnings of French Exploratory Travels in Algeria

Algeria witnessed throughout history many exploratory travels carried out by foreign powers including France which paid special attention to Algeria from the late eighteenth century until its occupation in 1830 and these travels were characterized by military scientific and economic aspects as France sought to study the nature of the country its resources and its population in preparation for invasion and colonial expansion.

3.1 The Historical Background of French Exploration of Algeria

The beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe was marked by a desire for adventure and exploration at the level of individuals and a desire for control and occupation at the level of governments and the idea of exploring the desert appeared on the horizon and learning about its conditions became necessary.

The first stages of French exploration of the Algerian desert were through translating and printing travel books written by Muslim scholars and travelers during the medieval period among the most prominent of these was the history of Ibn Khaldun 1332 1406 in which he provided important information about desert cities such as Zab Oued Righ Mزاب Ouargla Touat and Hoggar

There, Ibn Khaldou described their palaces their inhabitants their water and their trade routes and other books were also translated no less important such as The Routes and Kingdoms by Abu Ubayd al Bakri and Description of Africa by al Hasan al Wazzan and the journey of al Ayyashi and others in order to benefit from them politically and militarily in the process of invading the desert by identifying desert trade routes and tracing African rivers and for this purpose scientific and geographical societies were established which began sending exploratory missions to facilitate penetration into the desert.

3.2 Reasons for French Interest in Algeria

The reasons for French interest in Algeria are due to several fundamental causes as follows the strategic importance of Algeria as its geographical location made it a central point for controlling the Mediterranean and the economic resources represented in the fertile lands that Algeria possessed and the diversity of natural wealth as well as the positioning of ports which made it an important economic target and.

All of that led the French occupation to grant 670000 hectares free of charge to settlers and from 1880 to 1908 450000 hectares were transferred from Algerians to settlers and the protection of commercial interests as the great French interest in the Algerian desert stemmed from the major commercial activity that existed between desert cities and various countries of West Africa.

This generated huge profits for both sides so France sought to control it in order to dominate desert and Sudan trade and monitor the trade routes linking the two regions and the cultural dimension as French colonization denied the identity of the Algerian people and considered that they did not form a single nation or a homogeneous people but rather different races and scattered and conflicting tribes and the political dimension.

The idea of establishing a French empire was active during the reign of Napoleon III 1848 1870 and contributed to advancing the French colonial project in Algeria and the preparation for military invasion as France needed accurate information about Algeria before implementing its military campaign in 1830 and the commercial activity between both sides of the desert attracted the French government so it used all available means to control these vital regions starting with occupying northern Algeria and some regions in West Africa such as Senegal while seeking expansion southward toward the Algerian and African desert.

3.3 The First French Exploratory Missions

3.3.1 Early Scientific and Exploratory Missions

Since the late eighteenth century France began sending scientific exploratory missions to explore Algeria among the most prominent of which were:

3.3.1.1 The Exploratory Mission of Captain Boutin 1808

His mission was secret and was sent by order of Napoleon I as Boutin studied military sites in Algeria and drew detailed maps of ports and coastal areas and his reports confirmed the ease of invading Algeria from a military standpoint which later influenced the planning of the military campaign in 1830.

3.3.2 Commercial and Economic Missions

3.3.2.1 The Commercial Mission of Pierre Gautier 1825

His mission focused on studying Algerian markets and opportunities for commercial investment for France and provided information about trade between Algeria and Europe especially regarding wheat wool and leather.

3.3.3 Military and Intelligence Missions

3.3.3.1 The Mission of General De Bourmont 1829

The mission of General De Bourmont was a military exploratory mission directly before the French invasion and an operation to test the situation as it studied the movements of Ottoman forces and defense patterns in Algiers and his reports concluded that Algerian fortifications were weak which encouraged France to begin the invasion and General De Bourmont declared in 1830 after holding a thanksgiving prayer in the courtyard of the Casbah that you have reopened with us the gate of Christianity in Africa and we hope that civilization will soon flourish in these regions where it had disappeared

3.4 French Travelers and Their Contributions to the Study of the Local Community

3.4.1 Charles de Foucauld

Although Foucauld is better known as a monk and missionary, his travels in southern Algeria provided an accurate description of the social and religious life of the local tribes. He collected information about the local language and culture and contributed to a better understanding of the cultural diversity in the region. He lived among the Tuareg for a long period and recorded precise observations about their customs and traditions.

Foucauld authored the book "The Tuareg Studies in Their Language and Culture" which is considered a major reference on the inhabitants of the region. He was interested in describing the traditional systems of governance among the Tuareg explaining their methods of decision making and conflict resolution and he focused on the relationship between the Tuareg and the desert environment and its impact on their way of life and continuous mobility.

He also conducted in depth linguistic studies on the Tuareg language where he collected and organized a linguistic lexicon of the Tuareg which later helped researchers in studying their language and culture.

In his mentioned book he also addressed the study of the social structure of the Tuareg explaining their tribal divisions and the role of women in society as he observed that women in some groups enjoy a high degree of freedom and independence compared to other desert societies.

He devoted a chapter in his book to highlight the religious life of the Tuareg where he studied their spiritual beliefs and the influence of Islam on their daily lives pointing to the existence of some practices that reflect a mixture of local traditions and Islamic teachings.

3.4.2 Eugène Fromentin

He described the southwestern Algerian region through his writings and artistic paintings as he authored his book titled "A Summer in the Desert" which is considered one of the most important texts that narrate the experience of Europeans in Algeria and he also provided accurate observations about systems of governance and relations between tribes. His paintings contributed to shaping an artistic and orientalist vision of the region as he presented images of daily life and local traditions. However, Eugène focused in his writings on the aesthetic aspects of the region and did not delve deeply into social aspects as other explorer travelers did.

3.4.3 Eugène Daumas

Daumas was interested in identifying the regions of southwestern Algeria as he explored the areas of the Amour Mountains the Ksour Mountains Boualem El Gassoul and he also explored the oasis of El Abiodh Sidi Cheikh the ksour of the Saharan Atlas and its oases including Arbouta Chellala Kebira Chellala Dahrana Ksar Bousmghoun Tiout Ain Sefra and Moghrar both upper and lower and he described those ksour and oases.

He described the tribes of Ouled Sidi Cheikh and neighboring tribes and the Hmiyan tribes and others. From Sfisifa he headed to the lands of the Dwi Meni and the regions of Touat then Timimoun until he reached Ain Salah where he identified the regions he crossed and described and classified their tribes. He stopped at each ksar describing its construction and components including the number of houses the mosque the school and existing crafts and he also addressed the tribes surrounding these ksour and counted the number of camels and horses.

4. Anthropological Contributions

French travelers provided important contributions in the field of anthropology through their detailed descriptions of the life of local populations in the southwestern Algerian region among these contributions.

The cultural description travelers provided accurate descriptions of local customs and traditions including religious rituals marriage and social organization for example Daumas surveyed the Touat region in southwestern Algeria where he counted the number of its ksour and cities and described the way of life of its inhabitants consisting of dates goat meat camel meat couscous and wheat that reaches them from the Tell region and he also described their customs traditions and religious seasons.

Linguistic studies some travelers such as Foucauld collected information about local languages which contributed to a better understanding of linguistic diversity in the region and these studies were important for understanding communication between different tribes.

Social analysis travelers studied the social organization of tribes including relations between tribes and the role of local leaders and they also described the changes that occurred in these societies as a result of the French occupation.

Economic studies travelers provided descriptions of economic life patterns such as pastoralism and trans Saharan trade and this information was important for understanding how local populations adapted to the harsh desert environment.

5. Anthropological Explorations in the Writings of Travelers

5.1 Research Methodologies Used by Travelers

Travelers used methods of direct observation and participation in some daily activities of the population relying on oral interviews with tribal elders and notables to understand the social and political system and they documented customs and traditions through drawings and personal notes.

5.2 Main Topics Focused on by Anthropological Studies of Travelers

- ✓ Study of social and family structures in the local community
- ✓ Analysis of religious beliefs and rituals associated with daily life
- ✓ Documentation of traditional systems of governance and forms of power distribution within tribes.

From what has been mentioned it can be concluded that the writings of these travelers and explorers were often characterized by an orientalist perspective that tended to portray the population as primitive people in need of civilization as they focused systematically on cultural differences without attempting to understand the historical factors that shaped society and some studies were used to justify French colonial expansion.

6. Epidemics and Diseases Documented by French Travelers in Southwestern Algeria During the French Colonial Period

The southwestern Algerian region which includes areas such as Bechar Adrar and Tindouf witnessed the spread of many epidemics and diseases during the French colonial period 1830 1962 due to its desert climate and the lack of health facilities the population was more vulnerable to epidemic diseases and French travelers documented these health phenomena in their reports.

The causes of the multiple diseases that were spreading in the Oran desert especially El Bayadh and the Ain Sefra sector Laghouat and Biskra were attributed by Doctor Armieux to natural climatic causes malnutrition and the difficulty of the region.

6.1 The Region of El Bayadh and the Ain Sefra Sector

In 1849 one thousand patients were recorded suffering from various diseases including typhoid fever intermittent fever and chest diseases and ten deaths were recorded at a rate of one percent and among other diseases were ulcerative gum diseases and acute diarrhea causing intestinal dehydration.

It is mentioned that French soldiers were not spared from these diseases and it is also mentioned that many of them suffered from serious illnesses between 1854 and 1857 and about 469 patients were recorded who were transferred to the hospital of Saida of whom 20 died and Doctor Armieux mentions based on the report of Doctor Esparbes that during 18 months between 1859 and 1860 175 patients were recorded including 102 cases of intermittent fever 22 cases of infectious diseases 15 respiratory diseases and 4 cases of

syphilis and it is mentioned that the hospital of El Bayadh could not accommodate the number of patients as it contained only 10 beds.

6.1.1 Plague Epidemic

6.1.1.1 Spread of Plague in Southwestern Algeria

Plague was among the epidemics that swept through the regions of southwestern Algeria especially during periods of drought and lack of nutrition and the lack of health care contributed to worsening the problem.

6.1.1.2 Testimonies of French Travelers

Testimony of the military doctor Paul Maurice who indicated in his reports of 1875 the spread of plague in the Bechar region and its devastating impact on small population groups. Testimony of the traveler Xavier Coppolani who documented during his travels in the Tindouf region in 1898 the spread of plague among nomadic populations and the difficulty of containing it.

6.1.1.3 Impact of Plague

Plague led to a decrease in population in many desert villages causing major demographic changes reports of the Military Health Service indicate the depiction of plague outbreaks in the southwest between 1899 and 1903 especially around caravans crossing the Saoura and a correspondence dated 1901 reveals that the French administration preferred isolating tribes instead of providing treatment for fear of transmitting infection to military barracks.

6.2 Cholera Epidemic

6.2.1 Spread of Cholera in the Southwest

With the scarcity of clean water sources, the southwestern Algerian region was a fertile environment for the spread of cholera especially in areas near oases.

6.2.2 Testimonies of French Travelers

Testimony of the explorer Charles de Foucauld who noted in his diaries in 1905 the spread of cholera in Adrar due to water contamination.

Testimony of Doctor Joseph Leclerc who confirmed in his medical report of 1910 that lack of health awareness contributed to the spread of cholera among the local population. Military medical reports recorded the spread of cholera during drought waves especially in the years 1867 1868 and 1905 and statistics show that the mortality rate among Algerians was much higher than among Europeans due to the absence of potable water and one document mentions that improving the health condition of the population is not a priority as long as it does not threaten the European presence.

6.2.3 Impact of Cholera

Cholera waves led to the disruption of trade between desert regions and reduced the movement of commercial caravans due to fears of infection transmission and repeated references were made to the spread of cholera and typhoid especially during drought years and reports attribute this to contamination of water sources absence of sewage networks and overcrowding in traditional settlements however colonial medical discourse attributed the spread to local customs ignoring administrative neglect.

6.3 Smallpox Epidemic

6.3.1 Spread of Smallpox in Southwestern Algeria

Smallpox was a recurrent disease in these regions where it posed a major threat to children and the elderly vaccination records confirm that vaccination campaigns against smallpox were very limited in Moghrar and Assela and relatively more regular in El Bayadh due to the presence of a civil administration this led to high child mortality especially in rural areas.

6.3.2 Testimonies of French Travelers

Testimony of the doctor Henri Savern who recorded in 1920 high mortality rates due to the spread of smallpox in isolated desert villages.

Testimony of the French officer Jean Tillaut who mentioned in his report in 1935 that colonial authorities organized vaccination campaigns in the southwest but they were not sufficient to limit its spread.

6.3.3 Impact of Smallpox

Smallpox had a significant impact on oasis populations and nomadic groups as it caused the loss of large numbers of infants and reduced birth rates.

7. Seventh Other Diseases Spread in Southwestern Algeria

Malaria due to the presence of oases malaria was widespread especially during periods of rain and humidity.

Tuberculosis spread among the poor and inhabitants of mountainous areas due to malnutrition and harsh living conditions.

Typhoid was an endemic disease in some desert villages due to water contamination and severe outbreaks were recorded during periods of drought.

Trachoma eye infections trachoma spread among the inhabitants of southwestern Algeria due to dust and lack of hygiene leading to loss of vision among many affected individuals.

Leishmaniasis French travelers mentioned the presence of cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis known locally as Biskra boil which affected inhabitants of desert areas due to sand fly bites.

Relapsing fever the disease of relapsing fever transmitted by lice spread between 1944 and 1946 as an epidemic in North Africa where more than 20000 cases and 720 deaths were recorded in the Sahara and it is worth mentioning the discovery by Henry Foley and Edmond Sergent in Beni Ounif in 1908 of the role of lice in transmitting the disease and for the first time in the world the role of lice in human diseases.

8. Colonial Health Measures and Their Impact

Colonial authorities used medicine in confronting diseases and epidemics through penetrating Algerian society where traditional medicine was widespread and was unable to eliminate those diseases epidemics and complications resulting from natural disasters especially in the sixties of the nineteenth century and at the same time limiting infection among settlers and members of the French army present in areas of contact with Algerian inhabitants.

In order to confront infectious diseases and various epidemics and to control them the French occupation initiated a set of measures including quarantine and especially vaccination which through its practice on inhabitants in infected areas the French administration realized its social and psychological effectiveness on the population because of its political and moral impact and then used it as a means for penetration and expansion of occupation especially in internal regions.

Despite the recording of these diseases colonial health measures were not sufficient as the interest of French authorities focused mainly on protecting European settlers more than the local population and in general medical reports recorded a lack of medical equipment. Records of the Public Health Directorate confirm that vaccination campaigns against smallpox in the south were irregular and limited in scope and vaccination was often restricted to soldiers and European populations while Algerian children were left vulnerable to the disease which led to high infant mortality.

Construction of dispensaries some dispensaries were established in major cities such as Adrar and Bechar but they were not sufficient to cover the needs of the local population. Limited vaccinations despite the implementation of vaccination campaigns against smallpox they did not include all population groups which led to the continued spread of the disease.

The failure of French colonial authorities to implement health transit permits on internal and land trade in Algeria as they did with maritime and external trade was considered a major factor in the transmission and spread of infection to inland cities French authorities contributed through strengthening health structures such as hospitals and quarantine centers to combating cholera although most of these centers were primarily dedicated to French armies and military and civil personnel.

The movement of trade caravans and contact with French military centers also contributed to the transmission of infection colonial authorities treated plague as a security threat imposing strict isolation measures that often caused social and economic harm to the local population.

9. Conclusion

The studies of French travelers reveal important details about local societies in southwestern Algeria but they were often governed by an orientalist perspective serving the colonial agenda nevertheless these writings remain a valuable source for studying social and economic transformations in the region during the nineteenth century and they are an important historical document used by historians and these exploratory travels represent the birth of anthropological studies in Algeria.

The southwestern Algerian region was among the most affected areas by epidemics during the French colonial period due to environmental and health factors French travelers provided important documentation of these diseases and their impact on the population which contributes to understanding the historical health situation of the region and colonial health policies were not always effective or fair as they focused on protecting French interests more than improving the health conditions of the local population

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