

The Influence of the Geography of the Touggourt Region on Shaping the Relationship of Rebellion against Ottoman Authority in the Late Ottoman Period

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ABSTRACT

Geographical and Natural Factors Played a Fundamental Role in Shaping the Lifestyle of the Inhabitants of Touggourt in Southeastern Algeria, within the Wadi Righ Region, and in Determining the Nature of their Relationship with the Ottoman Authorities. Those who Examine this Relationship will Find it Characterized by Rebellion and Conflict for much of the Period, particularly towards the End of Ottoman Rule, influenced Primarily by Geographical Factors.

We will Highlight the Impact of the Geography of the Touggourt Region in Determining the Nature of its Relationship with the Central Authority represented in the Beylik of the East. This Factor became a Real Influence and Paved the Way for Other Different Factors in Adopting a Policy of Rebellion and Rejection, through its Remote Location from the Seat of Power, the Difficulty of the Diverse Topography, the Unsuitable Climate, the Vast Area, the Rugged Land Routes, and So On, as well as the People of Touggourt's Commitment to Defending their Land and Soil against the Dangers Surrounding them. Faced with this Approach; The Authority had to Confront it with Many Peaceful and Non-Peaceful Means and Methods to Limit its Rebellion and Make it an Area of Influence within the Framework of the Policy of Submission and Subservience.

Keywords: Touggourt Region (Touggourt), Ottoman Authority, Rebellion, Surface Features, Location.

Introduction:

From the Moment the Ottoman Authorities Entered the Regency of Algeria; They Sought to Expand and Extend their Influence beyond the Urban Sphere of the Cities, in All Directions, and Specifically in the Desert Regions (Sahara), including the Southeastern Region of Touggourt, which it took Care of due to its Important Strategic Location and its Vital Economic Center. This is Especially True since the Central Authority was well aware of the Extent to which the Tribal Dimension and the Sheikhly (Presbyterian) Organization were Deeply Rooted in this Region. They Found it Difficult to Subdue and Contain the Touggourt Region, which was Known for the Rule of the Sultans of the Beni Djellab Family, who Entered into a Continuous and Permanent Conflict for Most of the Periods with the Beys of Eastern Algeria, especially towards the End of Ottoman Rule. Many Different Factors helped it in this; Most Notably the Geographical and Natural Factor with its Different Features and Characteristics in Being Positive for the Region and its Inhabitants, and Negative for the Authority and its Representatives, which Constituted a Real Danger to the Authority in its Presence and Continuity, and in the Lack of Security and Stability;

which Prompted it to Intervene with Many Methods and Mechanisms to Avoid its Danger, and to Make it Loyal Under its Control. In light of this; The Following Question arises: **How did the Geographical and Natural Factors Influence the Relationship of Rebellion and Rejection between the Two Parties? And What were the Repercussions of this?**

This Main Issue Encompasses Several Sub-Issues, which are As Follows:

What is the Origin of the Name Touggourt? What is its Historical Context? What is its Human Composition? What are the Geographical Characteristics and Features of the Region? What are the Most Important Activities of the Inhabitants? What are the Most Important Geographical Factors that Influence the Determination of the Relationship of Rebellion? What is the Extent of the Influence of the Rule of the Beni Djellab on the Region? And how did the Authority Confront that?

To Answer this; We Followed the Historical Method, in its Descriptive and Analytical Aspects, by Highlighting and Presenting Many Data, Facts and Events in Studying the Underlying Relationship between Power and Region from the Perspective of the Influence of Many Factors, the Basis of which is the Geographical Factor that Influences Other Factors; This Method is the Most Appropriate for this Type of Modern Historical Study.

Geographical Factors and their Impact on Shaping the Nature of the Rebellion against Ottoman Rule

■ The Remote Geographical Location:

The Location of a Tribe or Region is Considered One of the Most Distinctive and Studied Geographical Characteristics; Due to the Major Influences it has on its Relationship with the Authority. The Touggourt Region is One of the Desert (Sahara) Regions Located in the Wadi Righ Basin, far from the Headquarters of the Central Authority, i.e., the Headquarters of Dar Al-Sultan in the Capital, or the Branch from the Headquarters of the Beylik of the East, Constantine.¹ The Location is One of the Foundations and Pillars of the Power and Continuity of the Authority, and the Same applies to the Region of Touggourt. For Example; The Delayed Arrival of Military Campaigns to the Region, intended to Quell Rebellions or Collect Taxes, was a Significant Factor. One such Campaign; Led by Saleh Bey, the Governor of the Eastern Beylik, in the Year (1783 CE), traversed Long Distances from the Ziban Oases of Tolga and Zaatcha to the towns of Laghouat, such as Ain Madhi and Taghmout, finally Reaching Touggourt. The Inhabitants of Touggourt had Settled far from these Campaigns, which Facilitated their Rebellion and Uprising against the Central Authority and its Allied Tribes. This Distance, therefore, served a Positive Purpose in Facilitating the Daily Affairs of Touggourt's Residents. For Many Years; The Authorities remained Almost Absent from these Areas, which Made them Refuse and Abstain from

1 - Muhammad Al-Salih Al-Antari, A Forgotten Unique Feature in the Event of the Turks Entering Constantine and Seizing Its Homelands (History of Constantine), reviewed and introduced by: Yahya Bouaziz, Al-Ma'rifah World, Algeria, 2009 CE, p. 17. For More; See: Yahya Bouaziz, With the History of Algeria, p. 393. Also See: Arzaqi Chouitam, The End of Ottoman Rule in Algeria and the Factors of Its Collapse, 1st Edition, Arab Book House for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 2011 CE, p. 83.

Performing the Government's Demands, most notably Paying Taxes, which were Described as Having a Negative Impact on the Touggourt Community.²

The Remote Location granted the Region's Inhabitants a Degree of Autonomy in Managing their Daily Lives, not to Mention their Adherence to their Customs, Traditions, and Tribal Solidarity, as well as the Wisdom of their Sultans and Sheikhs in their Councils. This is Confirmed by (the American Consul; Schaller), who Stated that the Desert Inhabitants were Independent in Running their Affairs, and their Presence within a Tribal Way of Life further Strengthened them.³ (George Voisin) also Echoed this Sentiment, saying: "...The Sahara and the Rugged Mountains maintained their Independence". From this; It becomes Clear that the Touggourt Region is One of the Desert Areas whose Remote Location, Rugged Terrain, and the Absence of Central Authority for Much of the Year allowed it to Enjoy Autonomy in Managing its Affairs. This, in turn, posed a Threat to the Central Authority's Expansion and its Growing Influence Southward.⁴

■ The Climate:

Natural Climatic Factors Stood in the Way of the Authority and its Expansionist Goals and its Desire to Extend its Influence towards the Desert Regions, or to Eliminate their Rebellion and Make them Tribes Loyal to the Authority, and to Subdue them in Every Way so that They would be on the Side of the Tribes of the Subjects. When Discussing the Harsh or Unfavorable Climate, the Inhabitants of Touggourt, who had adapted to its Most Prominent Features as Previously Mentioned—High Temperatures, Drought, and Scarce Rainfall—were aided by it. The Beys of Eastern Algeria Faced Difficulties in Suppressing the Region's Revolts and Rebellions due to the Fluctuating Weather Conditions, including Heat, Cold, Rain, Snow, and Frost, which hampered their Military Campaigns. The Harsh Climate Provided a Safe Haven and Created an Environment Conducive to the Inhabitants Living Freely and with Dignity, away from the Interference of the Authorities. This was noted by (the German Traveler, Johann Ernst Habenstreit) in his Travelogues, who Observed the Impact of the Climate on Rebellious Regions in their Resistance to the Ruling Power.⁵ An Example of this is what We Find in the Campaign of Bey Saleh (1771-1792 CE), in the Year (1788 CE) in the Winter, which He Led Himself to Subdue the Rebellious Touggourt Region, and to Force its Sultan, Farhat bin Omar El-Djallabi (1782-1790 CE), to Acknowledge the Authority and Pledge Allegiance to it. After Traveling for a long time; He Encountered Numerous Harsh Weather Conditions, including Heavy Snow, Strong Winds, Frost, and Occasional Heavy Rain, which Prevented his Troops from Entering the City, forcing him to Stop at Many Points. Upon Reaching it; He Laid Siege

2 - Eugène Weissat, *History of the Beys of Constantine in the Turkish Era (1783-1792 CE)*, translated by: Saleh Nour, 1st Edition, Qurtuba Publishing House, Algeria, 2010 CE, p. 43.

3 - William Schaller, *Memoirs of William Schaller, American Consul in Algeria (1816-1824 CE)*, Arabization and Translation by: Ismail Al-Arabi, National Publishing and Distribution Company, Algeria, 1982 CE, p. 116.

4 - George Voisin, *l'Algérie Pour Les Algériens (Algeria for Algerians)*, Michel Lévy Fresse Éditeurs, Paris, 1861 CE, p. 25.

5 - J. O. Habenstreit, *The Voyage of the German Scholar Habenstreit J. O. to Algeria, Tunisia and Tripoli*, translated, introduced and annotated by: Nāṣir Al-Dīn Sa'īdūnī, House of Islamic West, Tunisia, 1732 CE, p. 54.

to it, the Siege that Lasted Approximately (25 Days) due to the Fierce Resistance of its Inhabitants and the Strength of its Walls, built of Solid Stone.⁶

Likewise; What Happened to the Campaign of Bey Ahmed bin Abdullah, Known as Bey Ahmed the Mamluk, in the Year (1818 CE), who went out himself as the Leader of the Campaign Directed to Suppress the Rebellion of the People of Touggourt, and to Collect Taxes, also Suffered from the Difficult Weather Fluctuations, represented by the High Temperature, Sandstorms that Obscured the View, and Hot Winds Like the Sirocco in the Middle of Rough Desert Paths and Sand Dunes, which Delayed his Campaign to the Region.⁷ The Climate also Influenced the Lifestyle of the Inhabitants, who were Nomadic Bedouins, moving between Winter and Summer in Search of Water and Pasture for their Livestock and their Livelihood. This Migration was Driven by Climatic Fluctuations. During Periods of Drought and Intense Summer Heat; They would Migrate North in Search of Grazing Lands and Green Fields. In Winter; They would return to their Settlements where Water and Fodder were Available. The Authorities Often Pursued or Punished them if They Failed to Pay Taxes.⁸

■ Topographical Features:

The Surface Features, i.e., Topography, played an Important Role in Influencing the Relationship between the Authority and the Touggourt Region. The Different and Varied Surface Features had An Importance and Impact on the Rebellion of the Population; It was Known to Contain High and Low Terrain, dominated by Sand Dunes, Vast Areas, Deep Valleys and Rugged Reefs, which Created A Difficult Geographical Environment that Prevented the Authority from Controlling and Eliminating it.⁹ As for the Inhabitants; They were able to Adapt to the Living Conditions there, including Movement, Travel, and Living, enduring Hardships and Difficulties, and Practicing their Usual Activities of Grazing and Watering to Meet Daily Requirements. These Previous Topographical Features were A Refuge and An Outlet to Escape and Hide from the Anger and Cruelty of the Beys of the East and their Representatives when They Came with Military Campaigns to Collect Taxes that were A Heavy Burden and A Tiring Task for them. One of the Most Important Examples in this Regard is the Campaigns of Bey Saleh, Years (1783-1788 CE). We Find that Most of the Beys were Unable to Obtain it due to the Nature of the Lifestyle of Migration and Movement, as well as the Hiding of the Inhabitants in the Valleys, and Behind the Sand Dunes of Different Shapes and Sizes, especially the Moving Ones whose Height Ranges between (260m) and (500m). We also Find that Most of the Military Campaigns Coming from the Eastern Beylik to Touggourt were Stopped by Several Topographical Features, such as Mountain Passes and Massifs, and the Long Distance, which Led them to Stop for Several Days for the Purpose of Resting, Requesting Supplies from Nearby Places, Reorganizing, and Preparing to Continue the March.

The Rugged Geographical Environment, with its Diverse Conditions, positively Influenced the Lives of the People of Touggourt. They were Distinguished by Numerous Virtues and Noble Qualities, including

6 - Nāṣir Al-Dīn Sa'īdūnī, *Algerian Papers: Studies and Research in the History of Algeria in the Ottoman Era*, 1st Edition, House of Islamic West, Beirut, Lebanon, 2000 CE, p. 527.

7 - L. Charles Féraud, *The Sahara of Constantine*, Algiers, 1884 CE, pp. 80-81.

8 - Abdullah Al-Aroui, *Our Culture in the Light of History*, Arab Cultural Center, Beirut, Lebanon, 1992 CE, p. 40.

9 - Bouazza Boudersaya, *Hadj Ahmed Bey in Eastern Algeria: Statesman and Resistance Fighter (1830-1954 CE)*, Dar Al-Hikma, Algeria, 2010 CE, p. 21.

Strength, Health, Intelligence, Quick Wit, Patience, Resilience, and Courage. The Historian Ibn Khaldun Described them, highlighting the Strength of the Desert (Sahara) Inhabitants and their Possession of these Qualities, which He attributed to their Interaction with the Natural and Geographical Environment in all its Fluctuations. The Crucial Factor was their Distance from the Central Authority, which allowed them to Live with Freedom and Dignity in Managing their Own Affairs.¹⁰

The Inhabitants of Touggourt were also Influenced by the Tribal System, which gave it Territorial and Regional Influence that it Controlled, so; A Strong Relationship was Established between the two Parties, and it was Necessary to Defend it and protect it from External Dangers.¹¹

▪ **Land Routes and Paths:**

The Rugged Land Routes Played an Important Role in the Rebellion and Insurrection against the Ottoman Authority. Most of the Beys of Eastern Algeria, during their Military Campaigns to Collect Taxes, faced Various Difficulties in Reaching the Places of Rebellion, due to the Ruggedness of the Various Routes, which were Winding and Narrow, in addition to Being Unknown and Fraught with Dangers, and the Long Distance. This Led the Authority to Seek the Help of Some of the Loyal Tribal Horsemen from the Makhzen and the People to Know these Routes, especially in light of Some Natural Dangers such as Sandstorms and High Temperatures, or Human Dangers such as Gangs of Highwaymen, as their Arrival took Days and Months.

The Lack of Knowledge of the Routes and their Difficulty Hindered the Arrival of Military Campaigns to Suppress Revolutions and Rebellions; the Population is also Well Aware of the Entrances and Exits of these Routes.¹²

One of the Most Important Examples of these Routes and Paths is what We Find in the Campaign of Bey Saleh in the Year (1788 CE), who Embarked on a Long Trip from Tolga to Bouchegroun and then Zaatcha in the Ziban Region, i.e. the Current Oases of Biskra, to Make his Way towards Wadi El-Djedi and then Sidi Khalil, and He arrived after A Trip that Lasted (18 Days), during which He Suffered from Many Problems, including those related to the Scarcity of Water, and the Dense Sandstorms that Obscured the Landmarks of the Road.¹³

These Campaigns were also Costly, both Financially and in terms of Resources, as They Lasted for Months and Weeks, placing A Heavy Burden on the Treasury. Consequently; The Beys, the Campaign Leaders, were Forced to Rely on the Ottoman Military Base Located in Biskra, the Capital of the Zab Region. This Base Consisted of Military Outposts and Stations, which Included Fortified Towers Equipped with Cannons. These towers were Used to Suppress Rebellions and Uprisings by the Desert Tribes or to Support Military Campaigns Arriving from the Eastern Beylik. Some Historical Accounts

10 - Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun, The Book of History of Lessons and the Collection of Beginnings and Ends in the Days of the Arabs, Persians, and Berbers and Those Who Lived Among Them of the Greatest Authority (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction), Investigation by: Ali Abdul Wahid Wafi, Cairo, 1965 CE, pp. 126-127. For more, see: Hassan Al-Saati, Bedouins and Urbans According to Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Thaqafa Magazine (The Culture Journal)*, Issue: 78, Algeria, 1983 CE, p. 31.

11 - Muhammad Najib Boutaleb, The Tunisian Tribe Between Change and Stability: The South from Tribal Integration to National Integration, Sociology Series, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tunisia, 2009 CE, p. 84.

12 - William Schaller, Memoirs of William Schaller, American Consul in Algeria (1816-1824 CE), Op. Cit., p. 29.

13 - Nāṣir Al-Dīn Saʿīdūnī, Algerian Papers, Ibid., p. 243.

Indicate that, according to Commander Ibrahim; The Base was Fortified with Two Towers Containing (18 Cannons).¹⁴

Conclusion:

It is Clear from the Foregoing that the Touggourt Region was able to Influence Historical Events and Developments during the Late Ottoman Period by Attempting to Destabilize the Central Authority and Extend its Influence and Control Over the Desert Regions. The Region's Unique and Vital Strategic Location granted it Regional Power, Prestige, Influence, and Significant Economic Weight. The Region enjoyed a Degree of Autonomy and Freedom in Managing its Affairs Under the Authority of the Beni Djellab, largely Independent of the Central Government. This Autonomy was Characterized by Frequent Rebellions and Acts of Defiance in all their Forms, primarily due to Geographical Factors. The Region's Remoteness from the Eyes of the Central Authority and its Representatives, its Rugged Terrain of Sand Dunes, Valleys, Vast Expanses, the Harsh and Hot Climate, Difficult Terrain, and Numerous Valleys and Ravines, all contributed to this. The Touggourt Society was Characterized by Cohesion, Solidarity, and Unity in the Face of Danger, and in Protecting its Land and Soil. Moreover; The Touggourt Life is Based on Freedom, Living with Dignity, and Refusing to Submit, which Made it Difficult for the Beys of the East to Subdue it and Ensure its Allegiance. What is Said about the Rebellion of the Touggourt Region, and in Some Other Regions of the Regency of Algeria, especially towards the End of the Rule, is that it Weakened the Power of the Authority, increased its Failure and Decline, and more than that; Made It An Easy Prey for the French Occupation in the Year (1830 CE), then the City of Touggourt, which was Subject to French Colonialism in (November 1854 CE), which Fell after it Experienced Conflicts Over the Rule, the Weakness of the Beni Djellab Family, and the Rebellion of the Tribes Subject to it, in addition to the Interventions of the Bouakkaz and Ibn Qana (Ben Gana) Families in the Rule, which Led to the End of the Beni Djellab Rule, and the Beginning of French Control Over the Region.

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14 - Emerit M., Un Astronome Français à Alger en 1729 CE, in R.A, No. 84, 1940 CE, p. 25.

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