

Outlaws in the Aurès Region through Oral Narratives: Mustapha Wassaf as a Case Study

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Abstract:

The Algerian Liberation Revolution in the Aurès did not arise fortuitously. It was preceded by resistance to repressive colonial policies, widespread poverty, and discriminatory French legislation. From 1944 onward, determined men confronted colonial rule through sabotage and armed clashes, particularly in Jebel Ahmar Khaddou, which offered them refuge. Colonial authorities called them “outlaws” or “honour bandits.” Oral testimonies and historical accounts differ over their struggle and numbers. This study examines Mustapha Wassaf, known as al-Azraq, as a representative of these Aurès fighters. As an initial historical investigation, it reconstructs the circumstances that shaped his trajectory and analyses the methods used by France to eliminate him. Drawing on historical narratives and surviving witnesses’ testimony, it clarifies his place in early armed resistance to colonial rule.

Keywords: Outlaws, Mustapha Wassaf, French colonialism, Aurès region

1. Introduction

During the colonial period, the term “outlaws” was applied to Algerians across almost the entire country from the beginning of the French occupation. The phenomenon arose from deplorable conditions, including land dispossession and the campaign against Arabic and Islam. In response, groups of committed young men rebelled against the French administration and its collaborators. Two categories emerged: civilians who revolted and sought refuge in the mountains, and men who had been forcibly conscripted into the army and subsequently deserted French barracks in Algeria. Like other regions of the country, the Aurès, and Jebel Ahmar Khaddou in particular, provided a setting for rebellion and insubordination before the outbreak of the Liberation Revolution in 1954. These groups were historically described as “honour bandits,” a label applied to those who rejected the colonial order. This study addresses one of the most prominent of these outlaws, Mustapha Wassaf, who resisted colonial policy with every means at his disposal. It therefore asks: To what extent did Mustapha Wassaf contribute to confronting French colonialism in the Aurès? To answer this question, the study adopts the historical-descriptive method and a comparative approach, contrasting events recorded in French writings with testimonies collected from mujahideen who knew him. The discussion proceeds through the geographical extent of the Aurès, the formation of the first groups known as the honour bandits, Mustapha Wassaf’s classification under French colonial law, French responses to his rebellion, his death, the conclusion, the sources and references, and the appendices.

2. The Geographical Extent of the Aurès

The Aurès differs from other regions in its climate and topography. It has a continental climate with very hot summers and rugged mountainous terrain that makes movement difficult. It consistently

served as a fortress and refuge for those who confronted French colonialism and refused submission and humiliation. Harsh living conditions compelled its inhabitants to cooperate in overcoming adversity, while also encouraging them to receive those who sought protection from colonial repression. (Kalil, 2013, p. 206)

Located in eastern Algeria, the Aurès comprises a series of mountain ranges extending from the Boutaleb Mountains and eastern Hodna in the west to the Tunisian border in the east, and from beyond Biskra in the south to the limits of Constantine in the north (Ouanas, 2011, p. 453). The Batna district included the mixed communes of Batna, its administrative centre, Arris, Biskra, Khenchela, Aïn Touta, Aïn El Ksar, and Merouana, together with their surrounding areas and various douars. Apart from Sétif, Batna was the largest district in the département of Constantine. The Aurès is a complex mountain mass with highly varied relief, linking the Tell Atlas and the Saharan Atlas. Its rocky and difficult terrain later enabled it to play a principal role in launching the Liberation Revolution (First of November Association, 1996, p. 30).

The name Aurès also designates the territory bounded by Khenchela to the north, Khenchela and Zeribet El Oued to the east, Zeribet El Oued and Biskra to the south, and Biskra and Batna to the west (Mahboub, 2018–2019, p. 8). It forms an approximate quadrilateral whose sides are about 100 kilometres long (Ouanas, 2011, p. 453). During French rule, the Aurès belonged to the département of Constantine (Mahboub, 2018–2019, p. 8). Following the outbreak of the Revolution, and for political and military reasons, the term Nememcha was added, producing the official designation Aurès-Nememcha after the Soummam Congress of 20 August 1956 (Ayada, 2017–2018).

The Aurès was divided into several geographical sectors. To the north it was bounded by M'daourouch, Sedrata, El Guerzi, and Sétif. The southern boundary was the Constantinois Sahara, while Bordj, M'Sila, Bou Saâda, and Ouled Djellal lay to the west and the Tunisian frontier to the east. At the beginning of the Revolution, Mustapha Ben Boulaïd and his companions defined the Aurès as extending from Bordj Bou Arréridj and M'Sila in the west to the Tunisian border in the east. (Boumali, p. 76)

Most parts of the Aurès belong to Algeria's northern semi-desert zone. The Belezma Mountains lie along an oblique line at the point where the Tell Atlas and Saharan Atlas meet. Between them are northern plains (Zouzou, 2005, p. 13) and a more mountainous zone. The high plateaux situated between the two Atlas chains are essentially grazing lands, marked by cold weather and precipitation in winter and intense heat and aridity in summer (Al-Madani, 2001, pp. 15-16).

During the Liberation Revolution, the First Wilaya extended westward from Bordj Bou Arréridj to M'Sila and eastward from Sidi Salah in the north to Negrine in the south along the Tunisian frontier. Its northern boundary ran from Bordj Bou Arréridj to Sétif, including the town itself, and then followed the railway separating the Aurès from Kabylia, the historical Third Wilaya. From Sétif it continued through El Eulma, Ouled Rahmoun, Sigus, Ksar Sbahi, Sedrata, and M'daourouch, forming the boundary with northern Constantine and Souk Ahras. To the south, it stretched from M'Sila through Chott El Hodna, Barika, Bitam, Maafa, Jebel Sidi Okba, Khenguët Sidi Nadji, Zeribet El Oued, Bongar Bougcha, and southern Negrine on the Tunisian border. Before the Sixth Wilaya was created in 1958, the Aurès extended southward toward Libya and Niger. (Sedrati, p. 186) (Tita, 2014–2015, pp. 166-167)

3. Formation of the First Groups Known as the Honour Bandits

From the beginning of the colonial occupation, the Aurès witnessed numerous uprisings and the rebellion of individuals and groups against the occupier's law. Among them was the insurgent Messaoud Zelmat at the beginning of the twentieth century. After his death, his trajectory became an example for many young people in the region who resisted compulsory conscription during the Second World War and rejected legislation imposed exclusively upon Algerians. Mustapha Ben Boulaïd recognised their abilities, used their military skills, trained them, and brought them into the national movement in preparation for the Revolution (Ben Mbarek, 2022, p. 23). Belkacem Grine, long pursued by the colonial authorities, subsequently organised an armed group at Jebel Ahmar Khaddou. Born in 1924 in the village of Salat in Kimel, Grine belonged to the Chorfa established on the southern slopes of the Aurès. His parents were Bachir ben Hussein and Mabrouka bent Si Ahmed ben Lakhdar. His opposition to colonial rule developed from an early age, and after the massacres of 8 May 1945 he resolved to take up arms. In March 1952, he formed an armed group and made the Aurès Mountains the base of its operations. Colonial authorities and media portrayed Grine and his companions as outlaws or bandits and offered a reward of 100 million old French francs for his capture, dead or alive. After the outbreak of the Liberation Revolution, he took part in several armed operations against the occupation forces and died on 29 November 1954 during an assault by French paratroopers (Ghaskali, 2015, pp. 131-137). Appendix 1 reproduces an archival map showing the mountain's limits. Appendix 2 presents an administrative decision dividing the land of Ouled Ahmar Khaddou during the colonial period. Article 1 defined an area of 11,465 hectares, 51 ares, and 60 centiares. Article 2 divided it into the three douars of Ouled Rachache, Tadjmout, and Kimel. Article 3 confirmed the indigenous population's usufruct rights, while Article 4 addressed exceptions concerning public and communal land. The document records the colonial land surveys used to appropriate property from its owners and redistribute it to settlers as private holdings (Archives nationales d'outre-mer).

Regarding the number of these outlaws, the mujahid Ahmed Kada stated that they initially numbered seven. Nine others then joined them, bringing the total to sixteen, and their number rose to between twenty-five and thirty after 1950. The group of sixteen outlaws is reproduced in Appendix 3. (Djenadi, 2023, pp. 40-41)

French archival reports indicate that the Algerian People's Party supported these groups and that they operated within its organisational framework in the Aurès. The reports also reveal the colonial authorities' surveillance of the outlaws and the restrictions imposed upon them, while demonstrating the importance of the Aurès as a refuge and organisational base for the national movement before the outbreak of the Liberation Revolution. A representative French archival record is reproduced in Appendix 4 (Outlaws archival collection)

4. Mustapha Wassaf's Classification as an Outlaw under French Colonial Law

4.1 Birth and Upbringing

Mustapha Wassaf, known as al-Azraq, was born in 1926 in the village of Dermoun in the commune of Kimel in the Aurès. Dermoun Oasis lies south of Jebel Ahmar Khaddou near Zeribet El Oued. Formed by wadi floods, it extends for approximately ten kilometres along the watercourse, from Laachache and Ouled El Ghanoudj in its upper part to El Archan below, and is known for date-palm cultivation, particularly the ghars variety (Zeroual, 2019, p. 691). Mustapha came from a conservative farming family. His father was Mohamed ben Abdelhafid, his mother was Agti Mebarka

bent Salem, and his wife was Agti Hadda bent Mohamed ben Maamar. A farmer by occupation, he belonged to the Srahna group of Ouled Si Salem, which included family names such as Wassaf, Agti, Tigan, and Dhamakh. The Srahna inhabited an area extending from the Chelia Mountains in the interior of the Aurès and curving south-westward towards Jebel Ahmar Khaddou near Tkout and Ghoufi. Their territory was divided into northern Kimel and southern Kimel, the latter lying on the desert margins (Zeroual, 2019, p. 704). The weapon in his possession was known locally as a gara marikan (Personal interview).

Meriem Wassaf, daughter of Hamd ben Abdelhafid and the fighter's cousin, added that Mustapha had a sister named Hizya, who later became the second wife of Meriem's husband because Meriem had not borne children early in their marriage. The family lived in Dermoun during winter, while in summer they moved with their belongings to Jebel Gabel, so called because it faced the sun. The area comprised several localities, including Zrigta and El Oustia, the latter being a seasonal settlement of the Srahna and Chorfa. The sobriquet al-Azraq had first been applied to his father and was later given to Mustapha because of his courage and his confrontation with French colonialism. (Personal interview)

Accounts differ as to whether Mustapha married. Aïcha Brarka stated that he married Hadda Agti, who had previously been married to his uncle and was the mother of Meriem Wassaf, during the summer, although she was considerably older than he was. The testimony does not specify whether she had been widowed. Brarka explained that finding a suitable wife at the time was difficult because women were few. The couple had a child who later died. This account was corroborated by Zrigua Dhamakhi, sister of Salem Dhamakhi, and by Meriem Wassaf, who described her mother's embarrassment at marrying Mustapha because he was younger and had been raised within her family almost as a son. She nevertheless accepted the marriage and gave birth to a boy who subsequently died. (Personal interview)

Meriem further recalled that, as a young girl, she often visited her uncle's house to help her cousin Hizya with everyday domestic tasks. Hizya, Mustapha's sister, would later become the second wife of Meriem's husband. Meriem would embrace Mustapha, whom she regarded as an uncle, and addressed him as "Bes." The family avoided discussing matters concerning him in her presence for fear that children might inadvertently repeat information, because he was constantly pursued by the French colonial forces. (Personal interview)

In her testimony, Aïcha Brarka said that she knew he belonged to the Wassaf clan. He had a cousin named Salah Wassaf and a sister named Hizya, whom she met and who spoke of her brother. Mustapha had lost his parents, lived among the Srahna, was of medium or short stature and dark complexion, and carried a rifle across his chest in the prime of his youth. It was said that he married Hadda Agti, who had previously been married to his uncle and was the mother of Meriem Wassaf, and that their child died during the summer. Brarka also reported hearing that Mustapha had killed an auxiliary. He remained a fugitive until the elders of the group gathered to negotiate a settlement. She did not know the cause because elders did not discuss such matters before children. Her father, Messaoud Brarka, was one of the notables who attended the reconciliation, after which Mustapha was able to move openly despite having previously remained in hiding. (Personal interview)

4.2 Courage and Bravery

Zrigua described Mustapha as a man whose courage and intelligence became proverbial and whose shots were said never to miss their target. According to Belkacem Wassaf, reporting the testimony of

his father, Mohamed ben Mohamed Seghir Wassaf, known as Fellaq, the following incident occurred at the hamlet of Tighougha. This fortified place, used by Ouled Sidi Salem and Ouled Barouk to store food and valuable equipment, lay south of Draa Ed-Dar in northern Kimel and was guarded throughout the year. Men gathered there to collect their provisions. Ahmed Kiour owned a camel on which a raven once perched. Mustapha asked him whether he should shoot the bird. Ahmed replied that Mustapha would bear full responsibility if the camel were struck. According to the testimony, Mustapha fired and struck the bird without injuring the animal. (Testimony based on Mohamed ben Mohamed Seghir Wassaf)

4.3 Rebellion and Confrontation with French Colonialism

The injustice and discriminatory laws imposed upon the population were rejected by many patriotic young men, including Mustapha Wassaf and his cousin Salah Wassaf. Salah Wassaf was born in 1928 at Draa Ed-Dar in the commune of Kimel in the Aurès. The son of Ammar and Khedouma Bahoul, he came from a modest family engaged in farming and livestock breeding. He was the brother of the mujahid Mohamed ben Ammar Wassaf and was among those who assembled in the hamlet of Ouled Moussa on the night of 1 November 1954 (Ghaskali, 2015, p. 146). Mustapha maintained close relations with Belkacem Grine. Accounts of their skills report that they used a circular mirror approximately six centimetres in diameter to select and identify targets because it reflected light. They also used a cigarette as a target and struck it with remarkable accuracy. Among their confrontations with colonial forces were the following.

First, during the clash at Koudiet El Arsan near Sidi Ali in Kimel, a French gendarmerie patrol was guided by a man identified by the initials S. A. while conducting a search operation in the forests of Kimel for insurgents. S. A. was wounded during the encounter.

Second, at Melloukha west of Ichmoul, the group clashed with French gendarmes and a number of mercenaries. (Testimony based on Mohamed ben Mohamed Seghir Wassaf)

Third, during the confrontation at Guerza, the caïd of Arris, Sebti Merchi, led an operation near the home of Azzouzi Ahmed. A gendarmerie unit surrounded Mustapha Wassaf, the folk artist Mohamed Abadallah, known as Mohamed El-Aurassi, and Belkacem Grine. According to the testimony of Oum Hani Litama, who was present, the two fighters broke the encirclement. One colonial agent was killed and the opposing force withdrew under gunfire. Nouredine Wassaf, son of the mujahid Mebarek Wassaf known as Belhiz, reported through a friend from the Azzouzi family that a large rock at the site remains known as Wassaf's Rock. Abdelrahmane ben M'hamed Wassaf also related that, after the colonial agent was killed in the Guerza encounter, Mustapha fled to the mountains above the hamlet of Arris, where the family of his cousin Mohamed ben Mohamed Salah Wassaf lived. His wife and cousin Fatima Bouhniche gave him food and care after he arrived in a severely weakened condition. Once recovered, he returned to the Kimel Mountains. Colonial forces later reached his cousin's home, arrested, tortured, and interrogated him, but he denied knowing Mustapha. (Testimony based on Mohamed ben Mohamed Seghir Wassaf)

5. French Responses to Mustapha Wassaf's Rebellion

Mustapha was an ordinary young man, deeply attached to his country and opposed to French colonialism and its violent policies. He volunteered in the service of his homeland. The colonial administration accordingly classified him among the outlaws and formed a sixty-five-man militia from loyalist units to capture him and his cousin Salah (Testimony based on Mohamed ben Mohamed Seghir Wassaf). Following the rebellion, the authorities arrested members of his group and

imprisoned them in Biskra for more than nine months in 1951. They included Djemaoui Wassaf, M'hamed ben Mohamed Salah Wassaf, Brahim ben Mohamed Wassaf, Abdallah ben Messaoud Wassaf, and Lakhdar ben Ahmed Wassaf (Personal interview).

Meriem Wassaf and Zrigua Dhamakhi, both members of the Srahna tribal community, confirmed this event. They recalled that during the period of the Garde Mobile, the French mobile police units charged with rapid intervention, riot control, and maintaining order, members of the Srahna, including Mustapha's relatives and cousins, were removed from their homes at El Oustia on Jebel Gabel and confined for several days. Their possessions were withheld to prevent them from supplying Mustapha with food and drink. He had rebelled against the French army and, when search operations intensified, escaped into the forest. Colonial forces repeatedly pursued him but failed to capture him. They arrested five relatives, including Brahim, the husband of Meriem Wassaf, Abdallah ben Messaoud Wassaf, Djemaoui Wassaf, Mohamed ben Salah, and another member identified in the testimony as Djemaoui Wassaf. (Personal communications)

Meriem continued that Mustapha discussed with his cousins the demand that he surrender, but refused to submit to French colonial authority and said that he would act as he saw fit. He maintained close ties with Belkacem Grine. The elders advised him to remain vigilant, trust no one, and be as wary as a fierce wolf. He then disappeared, and it was said that he had gone in search of weapons. France laid several traps without success. Meriem recalled that he visited them secretly wearing a traditional burnous fitted with ammunition. He appeared to have escaped from a confrontation, yet returned unharmed and had instilled fear among the French. (Personal interview)

6. His Death

According to the oral testimonies of the mujahideen, Mustapha died on 3 September 1951. France had repeatedly offered money and administrative positions to anyone who disclosed his whereabouts or delivered him alive. The account identifies a close childhood friend by the initials Q. S. and another person by the initials Q. B., but the narrative does not clearly distinguish their respective roles at every stage. It relates that, during a secret night visit to an area known as Oum Ed-Dhamkha or Foum Ed-Dhamkha in Dermoun, Kimel, Mustapha was not initially found and that one of the individuals stayed with a relative. After the long journey, Mustapha was invited to rest. The oral account states that he was attacked while resting and died at the scene. It then identifies Q. B. as the person who went to the village dwellings, called out repeatedly, and notified the French forces of Mustapha Wassaf's death. One testimony reports that a French officer, astonished by the event, reproached the inhabitants for having killed one of their strongest men. Mustapha's relatives, who had been detained in the mountains, were released and received the news with profound shock. The colonial authorities reportedly gave the person responsible a measure of barley as a reward. Other accounts state that the reward was a burnous, although money or the position of caïd had allegedly been promised. According to the testimony, the promise was not honoured because the colonial authorities had sought to capture Mustapha alive for interrogation and torture.

The news caused widespread distress in the village, where the incident was viewed as another means by which France had sown division within the same social group. Wise elders nevertheless calmed the situation despite attempts by Mustapha's relatives to take revenge (Personal interview). He was buried in Dermoun (Personal communication).

An account of his strength and courage relates that a settler had established a nursery in Dermoun. When he learned that the French authorities were trying to kill the man known as al-Azraq, he offered

to strike him with an axe. In local memory, however, Mustapha was protected by divine power and the weapon did not fulfil its intended purpose. (Personal interview)

After his death, verses of popular poetry were composed in his memory and recited by Meriem Wassaf and Zrigua Dhamakhi. The oral wording is first transliterated, followed by a cautious interpretive translation:

Mustapha ya al-sandid, al-kashni fi al-raqba wa-al-khatem fi al-yad

Interpretive translation: Mustapha, the courageous man, with the cartridge belt around his neck and the ring on his hand

Mustapha ya al-sandid, al-sa'a fi al-yad wa-al-rfal al-jadid

Interpretive translation: Mustapha, the courageous man, with the watch on his wrist and the new rifle

Mustapha ya al-sandid, al-mahzma safra wa-al-rfal jadid

Interpretive translation: Mustapha, the courageous man, with the yellow belt and the new rifle

Mustapha ya al-wali, lafrizi laz'ar wa-al-rihab mali

Interpretive translation: Mustapha, the revered man; the literal meaning of the remaining dialectal wording is uncertain in the oral version

Jana khabru ma' al-dahwiyya, ihzni ya Hadda wa-ya Hizya, 'ala Stouf qallab al-goumiya

Interpretive translation: News reached us in the forenoon; grieve, Hadda and Hizya, for Stouf, who confronted the goumiers

Taken together, these verses express Mustapha Wassaf's courage and strength. The same image emerges from the testimonies of the mujahideen, who agreed that he was one of Algeria's brave men and that he fought for his homeland until his final moments.

7. CONCLUSION

French colonial rule pursued numerous violent and coercive policies against the Algerian people, especially in the Aurès, where the first groups committed to armed struggle were formed. The colonial administration labelled them outlaws in order to conceal the violence inflicted upon the population. Colonial injustice and arrogance led young men to reject this condition and choose life in the wilderness and mountains rather than submit. Among the most prominent was Mustapha Wassaf, who defended his country courageously and became one of the renowned men of Dermoun and Algeria. He resisted colonial forces despite repeated attempts to arrest him, but eventually fell victim to colonial machinations. The Liberation Revolution later benefited considerably from the experience and military abilities accumulated by such men. Meanwhile, the colonial administration continued to punish their social groups and families through detention centres and collective camps and relied on local auxiliaries to trace and eliminate them, as occurred in the case of Mustapha Wassaf.

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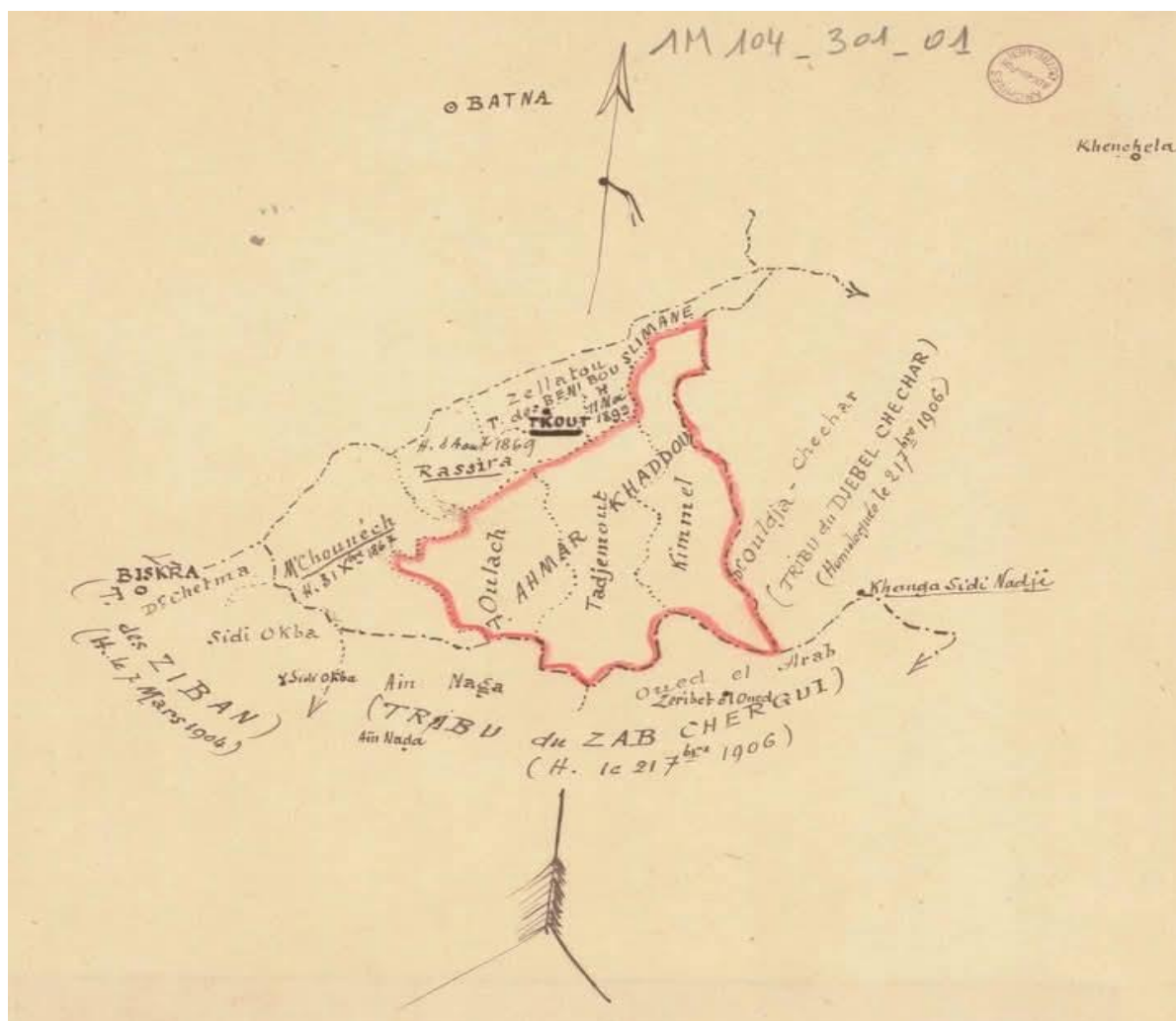
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9. Appendices

Appendix 1. Archival Map of Jebel Ahmar Khaddou



Source: Archival map reproduced in the original Arabic article.

Appendix 2. Administrative Decision on the Division of Ouled Ahmar Khaddou Lands

ARRÊTE :

ARTICLE PREMIER. — Le territoire de la tribu de *O'Ahmar Khaddou* commune indigène de *Kheuch* département de *Constantine* comprenant une superficie approximative de *Cent quarante six mille cinq cent quinze hectares* (146515 h 60 a " c) est délimité conformément aux indications contenues dans le procès-verbal de délimitation de tribu ci-dessus visé.

ARTICLE 2. — Le territoire de la tribu est réparti comme il suit conformément aux indications contenues dans le procès-verbal de délimitation de douar et autres documents ci-dessus visés entre les *trois* douars ci-après désignés.

NOMS DES DOUARS	Population (nombre d'habitants)	GROUPES DOMANIAUX		Immeubles affectés à des services communaux	Groupe de propriété privée	Groupe de propriété collective	Domaine public	Immeubles contestés	TOTAL
		Forêts	Autres Immeubles						
<i>Oulach</i>	1989	163,44,00	5,113,08,30	18,84,20	32,00,31,00	"	1,60,30,30	"	153,200,00,00
<i>Cadjemout</i>	1456	2745,72,00	3,163,73,10	8,17,70	37,246,50,10	"	327,24,10	"	48511,42,00
<i>Kimmel</i>	2247	12,196,48,30	3,055,30,50	10,35,30	39,233,33,20	"	208,70,70	"	51704,18,00
TOTAUX.....	5692	18,105,64,30	16,463,06,90	37,35,30	112,683,44,30	"	1,025,59,20	"	146515,60,00

Alger, Imp. - Oural.

ARTICLE 3. — Sont réservés, tels qu'ils sont énoncés aux procès verbaux de délimitation des trois douars, les droits d'usage exercés par les indigènes sur les forêts domaniales de leurs douars respectifs formant les groupes domaniaux.
N°1 du douar d'Oulach, d'une superficie de ... 163.44.00
N°1 du douar de Cadjemout, d'une superficie de ... 2745.72.00
N°1 du douar de Kimmel, d'une superficie de ... 12.196.48.30

Article 4. — Sont réservés, sans toutefois constituer une servitude, mais à titre précaire et révocable de la part de l'Etat, propriétés de l'Etat, les tels qu'ils sont énoncés dans les procès verbaux de la Commission Administrative du 20 Octobre 1894, les

Source: Archives nationales d'outre-mer [French Overseas Archives].

Appendix 3. Group of Sixteen Outlaws



Source: Ben Mbarek (2022), previously cited.

Appendix 4. French Archival Testimony Record

document annexe n° 2

AUDITION DE TÉMOIN

Un ou plusieurs cent-composants: Trois... Deux Mars...

A... heures du...

Par devant Nous... CAYSSONNE et Commissaire CRU...
 ...commissaire d'Officier de Police Judiciaire...
 ...secrétaire de Monsieur le Procureur de la République de...
 M... Greffier et de M...

Interprète qualifié et assermenté.

A comparu le témoin ci-après, auquel nous avons donné connaissance des faits et circonstances sur lesquels il est appelé à fournir des renseignements. Après avoir représenté...

A lui donné, il a prêté serment de dire toute la vérité, rien que la vérité.

Interrogé par Nous sur ses nom, prénoms, âge, profession et domicile, s'il est domestique, parent ou allié des parties, le dit témoin a répondu et fait sa déclaration hors la présence de... ainsi qu'il suit:

Je me nomme...

Âgé de...

demeurant à ZELLATOU... département de...
 ...parent... allié... au service de... localité... de... victime...

Disons que cette audition a été faite en présence de...
CAYSSONNE Dilligent, Inspecteur MARCHAND de la...
 Judiciaire, Gendarme MOLINA de la brigade d'...

Nous trouvons... en vertu de...
 condition physique et lui demandons si il lui est possible de nous donner quelques renseignements sur la manière dont il est entré dans le banditisme. Il nous répond...
 bien entendu, il n'y a aucune raison pour que je ne...
 dise pas comment je suis devenu un bandit et pourquoi...
 Je suis resté...

Je me suis joint aux bandits vers...
 fin de l'année 1950 ou au début de 1951, sur la demande...
 de mon parent ZELMATI Messagier qui s'est adressé à moi...
 en disant qu'il avait besoin de mon aide dans la montagne.

Les gens du mouvement (P.F.A.)...
 eux aussi insisté au cours des réunions dans lesquelles...
 discutent de religion, de politique et surtout de l'argent...
 apporter aux bandits au nom de la politique au nom de la...
 religion.

Ce sont en effet les chefs P.F.A. et leurs...
 représentants des douars, notamment les Kabyles réfugiés...
 dans l'Algérie qui organisent la vie des bandits, leur...
 taillement, leur sécurité, leur armement et décident de...
 l'aide que tous doivent leur apporter, c'est également...
 P.F.A. qui dicte aux bandits les sanctions qui doivent...

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Source: Archives nationales d'outre-mer [French Overseas Archives].

Appendix 4 continued

être appliquées à ceux qui se montrent des adversaires du mouvement ou qui sont trop fidèles à l'Administration.

Le P.P.A. existe dans les AURES depuis une vingtaine d'années mais il n'y avait pas d'organisation, il y avait quelques éléments nationalistes tels que : BELLAGOUN Messaoud, ALOU Messaoud et quelques autres.

A la suite du soulèvement de 1945, des Kabyles sont venus se réfugier dans la région de CHEMORAH et ont commencé à faire de la propagande, ils sont venus par la suite à FOUM TOUB, puis ensuite dans les douars Ichmoul et OUED LABIOD où ils ont recruté le noyau qui était chargé de former le mouvement P.P.A. dans les AURES. Ils sont restés au moins deux ans chez les Touaba, surtout à Ichmoul avant de venir dans le douar ZELLATOU où ils ont été introduits par l'intermédiaire de BELLAGOUN Messaoud qui a demandé que nous fassions passer les querelles de tribus après l'intérêt de la Nation Arabe.

Nous lui demandons de nous préciser la situation du mouvement P.P.A. actuellement dans les AURES et les relations entretenues avec les bandits. Il nous répond : "En ce qui concerne l'AURES, je peux vous dire que le chef qui commande est le nommé GUUN Messaoud. Pour les douars Ichmoul, Yabous, Chelia, Bellagou etc. Kear Chemorah, le chef est le nommé GHARMASSI Tahar ben Mouichi dit Quinichi Tahar" armurier clandestin au douar Ichmoul, sur BISKHA il y a d'autres chefs que je ne connais pas.

Celui qui dirige le mouvement dans les deux grands secteurs que je viens de vous indiquer se nomme BOULOU Si Mostepha.

Pour la région de l'AURES que je connais mieux que celle de FOUM TOUB, ceux qui viennent après BELLAGOUN Messaoud qui travaillent en étroite collaboration avec lui, s'occupent des affaires en son absence sont des Kabyles. Actuellement il y en a trois qui sont :

DADA Mabrouk - qui serait le fils d'un caïd et tient le maquis en 1945. Il vit surtout avec CHERCHOUB Saddok.

DADA Saïd vivait avec AISSI Mekki, passe pour très courageux et est tué avec BERHAIL Hocine et DADA Ahmed.

Ces deux hommes vivent aux alentours de Si annar.

M.D. Mahmoud se fait appeler également Si annar. Il a une balafre à la joue, deux dents en or à la mâchoire supérieure, il ne parle pas kabyle et est originaire de la région de SELHATA. Son pays est Da. Il n'est pas toujours dans les AURES, il vient quelquefois pour séjours assez longs mais il vit souvent à CHEMORAH, chez un talibé originaire du douar ZELLATOU, fraction Meradssa. Cet homme est âgé de 35 ans et il est boiteux, il tient une épicerie à CHEMORAH.

Ce Dada Mahmoud est âgé d'une trentaine d'années. Il est beau garçon et parle très bien le français, d'ailleurs tous les kabyles qui viennent dans les AURES parlent très bien le français et ne se servent que de cette langue pour parler entre eux.

Pour la région, sous les ordres de BOULOU Si Mostepha, il y a des hommes qui commandent des petits groupes de 10 ou 15 personnes. Pour la partie entre ARRIS et le CHELIA, ces hommes sont nommés :

Ali ben Chaouch, BEKACEMI Si Mohammed chérif de TIFEL, ACHOUH Ounis ben abdelbaki, BENDEHRA Brahim, BENMOU Ahmed, ...

Source: Archives nationales d'outre-mer [French Overseas Archives].