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French Archive Reports and the Local History of the Algerian Revolution in Bani Wartilan, Wilaya Three

تقارير الأرشيف الفرنسي والتاريخ المحلي لثورة التحرير الجزائرية في بني ورتيلان، الولاية الثالثة

Les rapports des archives françaises et l'histoire locale de la révolution algérienne à Beni Ourtilane, Wilaya trois

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# French Archive Reports and the Local History of the Algerian Revolution in Bani Wartilan, Wilaya Three

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### Introduction

The third historical region, *Kabylia*, is considered one of the most important historical regions that contributed to the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962) in terms of the number of *mujahideen* and rebels, the strength of its army, the number of martyrs it produced, the intense presence of the French occupying army and its collaborators, the ferocity of battles and their impact, the major operations carried out against it by colonial forces, the high level of its revolutionary leaders, and the nature of the sensitive responsibilities it successfully assumed, among other factors.

However, this vast momentum of activity and effectiveness remained largely unknown due to the lack of historical writings from both the *Algerian* and *French* sides, for several reasons. The most important of these are the extent of the destruction in various areas of this historical region, the intense sweep operations that constantly targeted it, and the lack of interest from its leaders and subordinates in documenting the facts of their *jihad* and revolutionary struggle. They destroyed the documents they held to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. Additionally, the French forces and their agents engaged in burning, robbery, looting, and confiscation operations to erase and obliterate the traces of *jihad* and suppress the people of this historic region.

The writings that have emerged in recent years from both the *Algerian* and *French* sides about the realities of the *revolution* in this historical region represent a positive development, helping researchers, students, and interested individuals to learn more about the scale, nature, and significance of its contribution to the *revolution*. It is well known that there is significant conflict and disparity between the content of Algerian sources and writings, on the one hand, and French sources, on the other. Some consider the latter to be biased, falsified, and lacking credibility, arguing that reliance on them is unhelpful, as they represent the viewpoint of the enemy.

## 1. Introducing the Region of Bani Wartilan

### 1.1. Characteristics and Advantages of the Area

#### 1.1.1. Geographical and Natural Characteristics

This territory has a strategic geographic location as a transit area between three provinces: *Béjaïa*, *Bordj Bou Arréridj*, and *Sétif*. The difficulty of the routes and the complexity of the terrain have led to its isolation from the main transportation networks. Surrounded by mountains on all four sides, such as Mount *Azru Yeflan*,

*Dellaga*, and *Thaqintochth*, the average altitude of the region's plateaus and mountains ranges from 600 to 1,200 meters and is covered with forests, pine trees, and tile-roofed structures. The climate is characterized by dryness and heat in the summer and cold in the winter.

The *Bussallam* Valley, which originates from the terraces and flows near the Bay of *Béjaïa* after merging with the *Soummam* Valley, is considered the most important valley in the region. During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, tribal activity was abundant. This facilitated significant agricultural and livestock production, allowing for self-sufficiency. However, this gradually declined, negatively impacting water resources as the number of wells, springs, and fountains drastically decreased, transforming it into a semi-arid valley in the summer.

### 1.1.2. Social and Economic Characteristics

The socially conservative community has preserved the region's closed nature due to its geography. It has largely maintained its customs and traditions, upholding the principles of morality and religion. The *Amazigh* (Kabyle) language remains prevalent among the population in speech and daily interactions, with a strong tendency to study Islamic sciences and Arabic in *madrasas*, mosques, *zawiya*s, and free schools. In contrast, the use of French remained limited.

Social organization is based on absolute parental authority. The role of women in society is largely confined to child-rearing and household management. The *Third Group* body is responsible for social affairs and consists of village leaders appointed according to criteria such as age, experience, wisdom, mental clarity, and influence. Periodic meetings are held to address social issues such as disputes, inheritance, property division, marriage, divorce, and the completion of charitable projects.

The *Third Group* authority issues binding judgments based on case specifics, ranging from reconciliation and discipline to warnings, boycotts, exclusion, and expulsion. It functions as a true popular *Sharia* court, applying the provisions of Islamic law and local customs. This system helped keep the region outside colonial control, as the French army was not stationed there until the outbreak of the revolution in 1954. Previously, colonial authority was limited to local collaborators such as the *Caïd*, *Bachagha*, and *Khodja*.

### 1.1.3. Historical situation

Historically, the region has suffered—and continues to suffer—from historical injustices, like other rural mountainous areas in Algeria, despite being known for its illustrious scholars. Historical records indicate a long-standing human presence, evidenced by widespread caves and grottoes such as the Grottos of *Azru Yéflan*, *Alghar n'Bouhnif*, and *Ifri n'Bazenzen*, as well as *Amazigh* archaeological sites in *Thanourba*, *Berber*, and *Messat*. Roman archaeological sites such as *Dellaga*, *Bughrom*, *Ath Djmati*, and *Ath Muhli* are also found in the region, in addition to Islamic monuments, including *zawiya*s, shrines of revered ancestors, and historic mosques such as *Friha*, *Agulmim*, *Sidi Sadak Bukabrayn*, *Sidi Al-Hussayn w'Ano*, *Yama Taklith w'Azro*, and *Tistwa l'Awliya*.

The scholar Mohamed Al-Bashir Al-Ibrahimi (1999: 149-150) praised the region's social order, stating:

“Dakhil has not touched it since the introduction of Islam; all of this supports the protection of religion, morality, and wealth in a system with a republican orientation, implemented in each village by a group elected from the people of virtue, reason, and justice, known as the ‘minds’ or ‘trustees.’ Every Tuesday, they meet to prevent corruption and promote public welfare. The village is unfamiliar with evil and does not experience wrongdoing. There is no assault by one person against another unless it is to correct, discipline, or punish. In this regard, they have the authority to make decisions that do not contradict religious provisions and do not allow for colonial government interference.” (Al-Ibrahimi, 1999: 149-150)

He further stated:

“In these healthy villages, a healthy man marries a healthy woman, producing healthy offspring. A child grows up among the healthy and within the protective care of the whole community, shaping a model of a complete human being.” (Al-Ibrahimi, 1999: 149-150)

Despite the benefits of this social system, there are also drawbacks, such as the marginalization of women, adherence to outdated traditions and norms, the reinforcement of tribalism and deepening of tribal loyalties, and the strong influence of the natural and agricultural environment on social structures.

Economically, the region lacks substantial natural resources. It relies on livestock and farming, particularly in times of abundant rainfall. It is known for producing fruits, vegetables, and animal products such as dairy, wool, and leather. The region traded its products with neighboring areas such as the *Pharaon*, *Amizor* Valley, the *Soummam* Basin, *Ilmaine*, *Thamokra*, *Khalil*, and occasionally with larger cities like *El Eulma*, *Sétif*, *Béjaïa*, *Constantine*, and *Annaba*.

However, the pressures and transgressions of the colonial administration led to the migration of its inhabitants to Algerian cities, France, and the Levant, especially after the failure of the *Bou Baghla*, *Mokrani*, and *Sheikh Al-Haddad* uprisings, in which the region's inhabitants played a significant role. They were subjected to plunder, displacement, collective punishment, and the confiscation and destruction of their property. Many villages became abandoned ruins, and farmland turned arid. Industry and commerce remained limited to traditional crafts such as wool products (notably the *burnous*), carpets, household goods, and agricultural tools. Trade was based on bartering plant and animal products with neighboring areas, particularly fruits such as grapes, pomegranates, pears, watermelon, figs, olives, and acorns.

## 1.2. The Relationship Between Administration and the Region's History

If the economic situation of the region was difficult and negatively affected social conditions, the administrative situation was different. Some figures associated with the colonial administration emerged, such as the National Prosecutor (*l'Adjoint Indigène*), the *Caïd*, and the *Bachagha*, despite the region's geographical challenges, harsh climate, economic poverty, and social isolation. The severity of nature and the difficulties of rural life accustomed its inhabitants to patience, endurance, resilience, and a desire to overcome hardships, fostering a sense of serenity and purity of spirit. This environment encouraged deep reflection on nature and the universe.

Regarding the impact of this environment on shaping personal talents, Al-Ibrahimi states:

“The professor (referring to *Foudil Wartilani*) first opened his eyes to the towering peaks of the *Atlas* Mountains, the majestic sheep, the lush trees, the natural forests covering its landscapes, and the blessed groves of fig and olive trees forming its canopy... From all of this, he acquired the tranquility of contemplation, the strength of thought, the steadfastness of doctrine, the prestige of intellect, and the refinement of an immortal human obligation.” (Al-Ibrahimi, 1999: 150)

It should be noted that the weakness of trade, the primarily oral nature of the *Amazigh* (Kabyle) language, and a misunderstanding of some Islamic teachings were factors that hindered the region's cultural development. However, one cannot overlook the role of *zawiyas*, free schools, local markets, and religious gatherings in spreading knowledge, promoting culture, and combating myths and colonial ideologies. The region remained largely isolated and was not subjected to repression, and its scholars maintained a moderate approach.

## 1.3. Exploring the Region Under French Occupation

In executing the decision to attach *Béjaïa* to *Sétif*, the Colonial Administration deemed it necessary to connect them via a roadway. An exploratory campaign, consisting of two groups of *Zouaves* (*Zawawa*), departed from *Blida* on April 16, 1850, and headed toward *Sétif*, passing through the *Sour El-Ghozlane* area. In the latter, they were joined by the 51st Corps led by *Colonel de Lourmel*. On April 27, 1850, the expedition arrived in *Sétif*, where they remained for 13 days before leaving on May 9. They were reinforced by additional contingents of infantry, artillery, sharpshooters, and military engineers under General *de Barral's* command. They then proceeded along the route of the ancient Roman road.

Among the members of the French expedition was Dr. *Lucien Leclerc*, who later wrote an article in the *African Journal* detailing the campaign. In this article, he accurately described the region's topography and geographic features along the road from *Sétif* to *Bani Wartilan*, which they reached on May 13. He mentioned

various mountains, including *Bouandas*, *Kandira*, *Takintoshth*, *Dira*, *Azru Yéflan*, as well as several villages such as *Ighbuliyan* (*Bani Ghaboula*), *Ath Brahm* (*Bani Brahim*), and others including *Fantikalt*, *Tighilt n'Takwine*, *Ighil Ufella*, *Alkaa Wazro*, *Ano*, *Ighil Nayt Malek*, *Tizi Wato*, *Arassa*, *Talmat*, *Aguni Katran* (Leclerc, 1850).

In the second part of his article, *Leclerc* detailed the region's geological composition, terrain characteristics, water sources, and vegetation, specifically identifying valleys such as *Boussellam*, *Harira*, *Braza*, and *Elmaine*. He also described mountainous areas, including Mount *Azru Yéflan*, Mount *Ghaboula*, and Mount *Al-Murabit Ali*. He provided insights into cultivated grains, including wheat and barley, and a variety of fruits such as figs, peaches, pomegranates, apricots, walnuts, grapes, carobs, and olives. Agricultural production was sufficient for local consumption, with olive oil being the main export due to surplus production.

*Leclerc* also noted that the *Bani Wartilan* tribe consisted of approximately 15 villages, including those previously mentioned, such as *Bouberak*, *Bani Achach*, *Igillakrem*, *Tawrirt*, *Ighaldan*, *Tirzit*, *Alghars*, *Bani Hafiz*, *Abad Alcharif*, *Amdun*, *Tiaouinins*, *Ighil Waghbala*, *Tagraynut*, and *Agamun*, each comprising around 30 houses. The houses were well-constructed, painted with white lime, and featured courtyards and upper floors. Three lime kilns were located near *Arassa* village. He also described several mosques, particularly the *Baba Hamza Mosque*, built in 1847 between Mount *Azru Yéflan* and Mount *Al-Murabit Ali*, near a water source.

The local inhabitants reported that most of them did not speak Arabic and primarily engaged in olive oil production. *Leclerc* described in detail the components and processes of traditional olive oil extraction. He mentioned that the residents of *Arassa* fled the campaign and that those of *Tirzit* refused to submit to the French, leading to a violent retaliation in which their village was attacked and burned by French forces. The French army reportedly recovered around 20 large Arabic manuscript pages from the village.

On the last night of the French stay in the region, villagers from *Tirzit* fired gunshots at the French camp, injuring a soldier. This was considered an act of retaliation for the destruction of their village. The French noted that the *Amazigh* (Kabyles) were reluctant to submit to foreign rule. *Leclerc* also recounted a conversation with a student named *Youssef bin Ghanem* in *Talmat*, during which he inquired about Arabic manuscripts for purchase. *Youssef* mentioned possessing a copy of the *Holy Quran*, but when asked to transcribe the names of *Bani Wartilan* villages in Arabic, he refused.

In the final section of his article, *Leclerc* promised to write about the *Burnous* industry in *Bani Wartilan*, which he ranked second only to the *Burnous* of *Bani Abbas* (*Ath Abbas Citadel*) in the *Soummam* Basin (Leclerc, 1861).

## 2. French Archive Reports on the Region: Content Overview

### 2.1. Contributions from Guergour: Solidarity and Tensions in 1954

Before discussing the contents of the monthly reports found in the French archives—documents that provide detailed accounts of events and developments in the *mixed municipality of Guergour* (*commune mixte du Guergour*) it is important to note that

these reports begin in January 1954. Significant information was found regarding the solidarity donations made by the inhabitants of the villages and towns of this municipality to support their affected brothers in *Chlef* and *Ténès* following the earthquake in September of that year.

This humanitarian effort coincided with the involvement of a prominent local figure residing in *Cairo*, *Sheikh Foudil Al-Wartilani*, who published an article criticizing the insufficient aid provided by the French colonial authorities to the earthquake victims. He compared this to the strong Arab solidarity demonstrated in Lebanon following a minor earthquake there, highlighting the stark contrast with French indifference toward the Algerian victims in *Chlef* and *Ténès*.

Regarding the monthly reports on the Revolution's progress since its inception in November 1954, it should be noted that this region served as a major base for both the *Algerian People's Party – Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (PPA-MTLT)* and the *Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars (AOMA)*. There was notable rivalry between these two movements, prompting the civil administrator and head of the mixed municipality, *Paul Solelis*, to compile monthly reports containing valuable insights into the psychological state of the villagers and *douars*, their concerns, reactions, and attitudes toward the colonial administration, as well as their social and religious conditions.

## 2.2. Key Findings from the French Archive Reports

In the September 1954 report—just two months before the revolutionary uprising—the civil governor of the municipality referred to political developments in some villages, particularly concerning elections for group leaders and members. This was a strategy aimed at integrating these social organizations into the colonial legal framework by organizing elections in which candidates were nominated by influential figures such as local leaders, teachers, and members of prominent families. The goal was to ensure administrative control over these organizations and maintain close surveillance.

The report also mentioned conflicts and divisions among group members and their leaders, an attempt by the colonial authorities to weaken these organizations and undermine their credibility in the eyes of the local population.

The civil governor highlighted intense competition for the position of group leader in *Douar Ain l'Agradj* between Mr. *Žeriyati*, a candidate backed by the colonial administration, and Mr. *Achache Al-Arabi*, a candidate from the SFIO party list and head of the *Bani Achache* school. The latter actively campaigned in mosques, stirring religious sentiment and accusing *Žeriyati* of being anti-Islamic and complicit with the colonial administration. He also attempted to obstruct the elections, while *Bachagha Žeytoni*, head of the electoral office, remained silent on the matter (Solelis, 1954a).

Additionally, the report mentioned that the residents of *Douar Ain l'Agradj* and *Bani Wartilan* opened subscription lists to collect financial donations for the relief of



their affected brothers in *Chlef* and *Ténès*. Activists from the *PPA-MTLD* in the region launched a widespread campaign among the population, taking responsibility for collecting and distributing these donations to the affected families. They expressed concerns that the colonial administration would prioritize assistance to the European minorities in *Chlef* and *Ténès*, neglecting the Algerian victims. These concerns were echoed by *Sheikh Foudil Al-Wartilani* in his published article.

In the October 1954 report, the civil governor noted that young men from the *PPA-MTLD* in the *Guenzet* area (*Bani Yala*) raised financial donations for the earthquake victims. This effort was coordinated with similar donations collected by *Sheikh Said Salhi Al-Yalawi*, a prominent local activist, at the *Guenzet* Mosque. The total donations were estimated at 100,000 francs. The report also listed the names of *mujahideen* who collected additional funds in the *Harbil* area (Solelis, 1954b).

### 3. History of Revolutions

#### 3.1. Report of November 1954

In the November 1954 report, when the *Algerian Revolution* erupted, the same governor stated that after the news of the November 1 operations spread, he personally conducted several tours of villages and *douars* in his municipal region, noting the prevailing calm. He referred to the *mujahideen* and rebels who carried out the operations of November 1 as terrorists and outlaws, but he did not alleviate the fear and panic that gripped the European residents in the mixed municipal center of *Bougaa* (formerly *Lafayette*).

He added that the decision to dissolve the *PPA-MTLD* movement was suspended and announced at the mixed municipality headquarters and all its departments. As part of the preparations made by the local colonial administration to confront the revolution, he stated that seven reservists were summoned by the Commander of the Gendarmerie Division at the Harbil Hall and placed at his disposal as of November 2, 1954.

The inhabitants of *Bougaa* were expected not to respond to the call of the revolution due to the severe reprisals and repression they had suffered following the May 1945 massacres, after three Europeans were killed in the town. The governor noted that some individuals from outside the municipality had been arrested with forged documents and multiple identity cards. They were handed over for investigation. He also mentioned that the population was following the events in Algeria through the daily press, particularly focusing on developments in the *Aurès* region, and wished for the swift restoration of peace and stability in Algeria. He added that attacks, especially those at the *Pasteur* Center, raised concerns among Europeans, particularly isolated teachers in *douar* schools (Solelis, 1954c).

#### 3.2. Report of December 1954

In his December 1954 report, the Civil Governor indicated that on November 30, 1954, he sent a memorandum regarding the dissolution of the *PPA-MTLD*

movement to Messrs. *Amokrane Muhand Al-Ashashi* and *Harif Hussein* from *Bani Achache* village and *Douar Ain Lagradj*. However, they swore that they did not belong to this movement, and their activities were placed under strict surveillance.

He reiterated that the municipality and *douars* remained calm based on his field visits. He stated that he had begun compiling lists of *Goum* troops recruited from well-known families. He also mentioned the installation of Mr. *Ben Abid Masoud* as the leader of *Bani Maouche*, with his headquarters in the village of *Tagounit Ighil*, in the presence of fellow leaders and *Bachaghas* from his family and the *Ourabah* family from the *Amizour* Valley in *Béjaïa*, on December 8, 1954.

On December 28, 1954, the *Bougaa* Gendarmerie raided the homes of known nationalist activists in *Ikhlidjen* Center, leading to the arrest of one individual. A sniper squad from *Sétif* was dispatched to *Boussellam* and *Ikhlidjen*. Mr. *Botalbi Ahmed*, from *Tarfet village*, received a threatening message from *Paris*, which he forwarded to the civil governor, who, in turn, sent it to the *Béjaïa* Department. During the investigation, it was revealed that the editor of the *Harbil Citizens Bulletin* had returned to *France*, but his identity remained unknown. Consequently, all immigrants from *France* were placed under heavy surveillance (Solelis, 1954d).

### 3.3. January Report 1955

This report, edited by the Governor of the mixed municipality, contained extensive information. He began by mentioning that several immigrants from the villages and *douars* of the mixed municipality had returned to their hometowns from *France* for vacation. These individuals were activists and propagandists within the ranks of the *Algerian People's Party – Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (PPA-MTLD)*. The colonial administration was instructed to closely and continuously monitor them.

Although some of these individuals later returned to *France*, among them was Mr. *Madouni Al-Sharif bin Sadeq* from *Guenzet*, one of the most significant officials in the *PPA-MTLD* in the region, belonging to the *L'Ahwel* group. He was responsible for overseeing the distribution of *Algerian national literature*. His exact residence in *France* remained unknown. The report added that if any further information about his movements surfaced, it would be forwarded to the *Béjaïa* authorities. It was also noted that this individual claimed to be a carpenter who had immigrated in search of work in *France*.

The report further stated that two cultural societies aligned with the *Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars (AOMA)* were active: the first in *Ikhlidjen*, and the second in *Chria*, which had requested permission to open a school. These societies were invited to submit their legal administrative files for approval.

Rumors circulated that seven individuals were moving within *Harbil* Roundabout and the *mixed municipality of Bibans*, prompting exceptional surveillance in the area. Information was exchanged between the *Gendarmerie of Lafayette* and *Bordj Bou Arréridj*,

leading to an investigation within the *douars*. If the *Goum troops* requested by the local leadership were formed, one of them would be stationed in *Harbil*, an area considered highly nationalist due to its geographic location and the psychological state of its inhabitants (Solelis, 1955e).

### 3.4. Report of February 1955

Compiled by the same Governor, this report mainly documented surveillance of immigrants who had returned from their villages to *France*, the monitoring of the religious association in *Bani Achache*, and a failed attempt to arrest two armed individuals in *Oued El-Marsa*, a mixed municipality.

It also recorded a state of heightened alert among the residents of *northern Guergour* and recommended the formation of patrol teams to establish permanent communication between different surveillance posts and intervene quickly when necessary.

Since this area was considered a corridor for Algerian militants, whom the report labeled as terrorists, it also mentioned the concerns of both the Algerian Muslim population and the European settlers regarding the escalating conflict. The report noted that French authorities had failed to eliminate the «terrorist threat» (the revolution) in *Guergour's Aurès region*, and that a new rebellion was emerging in *Greater Kabylia* (Solelis, 1955f).

### 3.5. Report of March 1955

The civil governor began his report by discussing upcoming elections, noting that the inhabitants of his municipality showed little interest, though he did not provide specific reasons. He stated that the *Bin Abid* family was the only one involved, as one of its members was running for the position of General Councilor in the *Algerian Council*.

Discussions took place in the *Amizour Valley* between former Deputy General Councilor *Ourabah, Bin Abid Youssef*, and the retiring *Al-Bachagha Bin Abid Abdelaziz*—who was *Youssef's* uncle. The latter turned out to be exercising political influence in the area. *Youssef* mobilized support among the residents of *Guergour, Ikhlidjen*, and the *Amizour Valley*.

This electoral cycle was dominated by the *Ourabah* and *Bin Abid* families, both of whom were represented at the administrative level by several leaders.

The report also mentioned the official establishment of an *Islamic Education Association in Chria*, located within the *Harbil douars*. Despite oral and written warnings from the Governor, the association opened a school without authorization. The school was overseen by Mr. *Qasimi* from *Barika*, a supporter of a *PPA-MTLD candidate* in the *Algerian Council* elections of 1948. Holding a teaching degree from *AOMA*, he had significant influence over the local population.

The colonial administration was challenged at every opportunity. The Gendarmerie was notified but was unable to shut down the school.

The Governor added that he would send further reports on the matter and expressed hope that the administration would enforce penalties to prevent similar cases. The concern was that similar associations had recently been established in other *douars* of *Guergour*.

The report also mentioned that *Sheikh Abbas bin Sheikh Al-Hussein* from *Constantine* had visited the village of *Aguemun* in *Bani Maouche* and *Tiksrins* in the *douars* of *Thalan*/*Tinzars*. He gave lectures on child education and parenting in the presence of local Islamic association members and notable figures from *Aguemun*, *Ait Wamar*, *Al Jabiya*, and *Tiksrins*.

During his visit, he announced upcoming good news and raised 300,000 francs, which he handed over to the Islamic association (Solelis, 1955g).

### 3.6. Report of April 1955

In addition to the name, stamp, and signature of the civil governor, this report contained the number 986 on its first page, along with the official stamp of the *Communications Service of North Africa (Service des Liaisons Nord-Africaines)*, dated April 26, 1955. This indicates that the civil governor was now submitting these reports to this service for review and validation.

According to the document, an electoral rally was held on April 14, 1955, organized by *Bin Abid Youssef*, a free candidate and leader of the *Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto (UDMA)*, led by *Farhat Abbas*, in support of candidate *Haffad*. This marked the first public meeting in *Bani Wartilan* and *Friha*.

During the meeting, the candidates criticized *René Mayer* for his stance following the fall of the French government of *Mendès France*. Mr. *Haffad* had previously denounced the leaders of *mixed municipalities*, asserting that his party (*UDMA*) would advocate for an *Algerian Republic* that did not exclude non-Muslim officials. The party conducted a purely political campaign, confident in its ability to gain electoral seats, expand its influence, and attract new members.

Meanwhile, the *Communist Party* nominated Mr. *Belkadi Ismail*, who anticipated receiving few votes. He also participated in the April 14 meeting, where he condemned colonialism and denounced repression in the Aurès, where the French army had violently suppressed local resistance, seizing livestock and food supplies from Algerians.

The election results were as expected. In the Arabic-speaking *douars*, where the *Bin Abid* family originated, as well as in the *Amazigh-speaking douars (Kabylia)* — including *Tigunathin*, *Ras Thala n'Itinzars*, *Bani Maouche*, and *Boussellam*—the results favored the *UDMA*.

In the *Ikhliidjen* Municipal Center, residents of *Guenzet* also supported the *UDMA*, with Mr. *Kayed*, Director of the Boys' School, campaigning for the party in *Douar Harbil* and *Ikhliidjen*.

In *Douar Ain Legraj*, *Bin Abid Youssef* was endorsed by the president of the *Douar* Melitant group in the *SFIO*, who won by a margin of 20 votes over his opponent. The total number of voters was only 305 out of 1,829 registered.

Mr. *Bin Hamidah Saleh*, a representative of the *Zawiya Taybiya* of *Constantine*, stayed in *Guergour Hammam* from April 19 to 21 with an expired license issued by the Governorate of *Constantine*, but he did not interact with the public.

Discussions among Europeans and the majority of Algerians in the *mixed municipality* centered on the escalation of armed conflict in the *Aurès* and the passage of insurgents (referred to as rebels or *mujahideen*) through neighboring areas. The local population was eager for peace (Solelis, 1955h).

### 3.7. Report of May 1955

This report confirmed the information from the March report regarding the unauthorized school run by Mr. *Kasimi Mohammed* from *N'gawes*, located in *Chria* village. The Governorate of *Constantine* issued a removal order against him.

Similar sanctions were imposed on Mr. *Abbas Lounis*, a nationalist affiliated with the *Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars (AOMA)*. He was the head of an Islamic association in *Tiksrin*, a village in the *douars* of *Ras Thala n'Itinzars*.

Additionally, Mr. *Mazouzi Ibrahim*, a teacher in *Béjaïa*, had been involved with *AOMA* at the *Guenzet mosque* since the beginning of *Ramadan*. He had also been a member of the *PPA-MTL*D committee in *Batna*, where he was placed under continuous surveillance.

The May 8 demonstrations, which included local groups, veterans, and representatives of various organizations, took place without incident. However, concerns grew over the expanding violence in the *Aurès*, the increasing number of armed rebels, and the assassination of Algerians loyal to the French administration.

The *Bandung Conference*, which issued a declaration on French colonies in *North Africa*—especially *Algeria*, was supported by several *African* and *Asian* nations. This diplomatic move alarmed French officials, as it challenged France's sovereignty and signaled its declining international standing.

The expansion of the curfew in *Constantine*, the arrival of military reinforcements, and the mobilization of reserves reassured many local populations, who saw these actions as a French commitment to restoring order. However, the formation of a *mobile rural police unit* in *Bougaa* failed to ease concerns, as the unit lacked operational vehicles (Solelis, 1955i).

### 3.8. Report of June 1955

Followers of the *Al-Alawiya Sufi movement* voluntarily suspended their activities. Concerns grew among the European population due to repeated attacks by armed groups. Public works companies hesitated to operate in isolated *douars*.

The presence of a *highly mobile French military unit* initially reassured Europeans, but its departure on June 14 for *Tazmalt* in the *Akbou mixed municipality* negatively impacted morale.

In *Frida* village (*Douar Maoklan*), two deserters from the *Algerian Sniper Regiment in Constantine* were arrested on June 2, which angered residents of *Bougaa*.

The arrest was successful due to cooperation from local civilians, led by Mr. *Taklit Ammar*, a respected nobleman and farmer. After meeting with the fugitives, he traveled 5 km to report their location to the authorities.

Following this, patrols were organized to track down other suspects. Major *Bin Abid Ahmed* detained them in his *douar*. The *mobile rural police* conducted multiple patrols to investigate unusual light signals seen across *Bougaa*. However, these were later attributed to fallen electrical wires.

Meanwhile, prominent figures from *Bougaa* and *Draa Kʿbila* received copies of Issue 11 of *Voix du Peuple*, a clandestine publication of the *Algerian National Movement*, sent from northern *France* and the *Parisian* suburbs.

Supporters of the *PPA-MTLD* also expressed discontent by banning tobacco use. The *Thawirith Thamelalt* and *Draa* tribes were particularly affected.

During a June 21 inspection tour, the Governor (*CEPI*) observed that in *Draa* and *Chria*, Muslims loyal to *France* abstained from smoking. However, in *Guenzet*, residents still smoked in private but not in public (*Solelis, 1955j*).

## Conclusion

By examining the content of the monthly reports signed by the Civil Governor and Chairman of the *Municipality of Guergour*, covering the period from September 1954 to June 1955, which document events in the *Bani Wartilan* region and its surroundings, we reached the following conclusions and observations:

- Despite the harsh living conditions in the villages of this region and the lack of media penetration, which limited access to external news, the local population formed relief committees to collect financial donations for the victims of the *Chlef* and *Ténès* earthquake on September 9, 1954. With a magnitude of 6.7 on the Richter scale, the earthquake resulted in 1,243 Algerian deaths, destroyed over 20,000 buildings, and triggered landslides, amplifying the disaster. The solidarity and nationalist spirit of the inhabitants of this isolated rural area were evident in their response.
- Among the few regions in *Algeria* where supporters of various nationalist movements—including the *Algerian People's Party (PPA)*, the *Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (MTLD)*, the *Democratic Union of the Algerian*

*Manifesto* (UDMA), the Algerian Communist Party (PCA), and the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars (AOMA) —were present, national consciousness flourished. This resulted in growing political engagement, with increased attention to elections and political developments both locally and internationally.

- The *Harbil* region was one of the key centers of political resistance and the Revolutionary Independence Movement, due to the high number of militants and supporters within the *PPA-MTLD*. However, this historically significant area has not received sufficient academic attention. Many researchers and students have overlooked its contributions to the nationalist movement and its resistance efforts, leaving its historical role largely undocumented.
- The *Bin Abid* family, originally from *Khemis Miliana*, consisted of two branches: an Arabic-speaking branch based in *Maoclan* and a Kabyle-speaking branch in *Bani Wartilan*. It was the most prominent family in the region due to its strong political ties, producing several leaders, *Bachaghas*, and deputies. This family implemented an authoritarian policy toward the local inhabitants, closely aligning its interests with those of the colonial administration. It maintained a strong alliance with the *Ourabah* family of the *Amizour* Valley, linked through kinship and shared interests. The French archives contain numerous documents detailing the political trajectory of this family.
- It is noteworthy that revolutionary operations during this early period were relatively modest due to several factors, many of which were not mentioned in the French reports. One major reason was the confusion caused by nationalist propaganda, particularly from *Messali Hadj's* movement, which considered the region a stronghold of the revolutionary party. Additionally, the *UDMA*, the second most influential party in the area, delayed its official engagement with the revolution, while the *AOMA* did not officially join until spring 1956.
- The French reports we examined were not limited to monitoring local events in the region. They also provided valuable information on key personalities and events occurring elsewhere in *Algeria* and abroad. This was due to the presence of many Algerian migrants and militants in *France*, who frequently traveled between the two countries, maintaining constant political activity.
- During the first eight months of the revolution, the Civil Governor of *Guer gour*, as a representative of the colonial administration, systematically incorporated a propaganda element into his monthly reports. He often claimed that calm prevailed throughout his municipality, describing revolutionary activities—which he referred to as «terrorism» (*jihad*) — as being confined to the *Aurès* and *Greater Kabylia* regions. He frequently mentioned his visits to local communities but failed to provide specific



details about the time, location, or purpose of these visits. Instead, he consistently stated that the population remained peaceful, loyal to *France*, and eager for stability.

- Several factors led us to stop our analysis of these reports in June 1955, rather than extending it to March 1962. The five-year period examined witnessed significant political and military developments, during which revolutionary activities in the region intensified in both frequency and scale, directly targeting colonial forces.
- These reports contain the names of dozens of *Algerian* figures and organizations that warrant further study. We will address this in a separate research project, providing detailed biographical notes on all individuals and institutions mentioned, both *Algerian* and foreign, and offering a comparative analysis of *French* and *Algerian* historical perspectives.
- Despite their biases, inaccuracies, and overtly propagandistic nature, the French archives remain an essential resource for historians seeking accurate data on this remote, mountainous rural region. The area was home to numerous activists, politicians, intellectuals, and officials, many of whom played key administrative roles, including civil deputies, *caïds*, *Bachaghas*, municipal presidents, general councilors, and deputies in the *Algerian Assembly*. Additionally, the reports mention religious leaders, school directors, *Sufi imams*, judges, and other influential figures, all of whom deserve individual studies to better understand their contributions to the national movement.
- French archival reports are an essential source for documenting the history of the Algerian revolution in the Bani Wartilan region. However, their use must be accompanied by critical analysis to account for potential biases. This study paves the way for future research on local history and the contributions of the region's inhabitants to the Algerian revolution.

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## Abstract

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This study presents the monthly reports produced by Civil Governor Paul Solelis, the mayor of the mixed municipality of Guergour (commune mixte du guergour), which currently encompasses the Bani Wartilan district in northwest Sétif province and adjacent areas in Béjaïa, Bordj Bou Arréridj, and M'sila. Strategically located and characterized by complex topography, this region was a key site of battles, ambushes, and military operations. It also served as a safe haven for Colonel Amirouche, the commander of Wilaya III, and his close aides.

The study examines the political and military significance of this region, which was part of the third historical Wilaya, and introduces the content of the French archival reports documenting local political events, such as elections and administrative policies. The reports reveal the colonial authorities' preventive strategies to curb local support for the Algerian Revolution, including the use of disinformation campaigns to discredit revolutionaries and mujahideen both locally and internationally.

Furthermore, this study partially assesses the credibility and reliability of these French reports as historical sources for reconstructing the history of the revolution in Wilaya III, particularly given the scarcity of written Algerian sources from this region.

## Keywords

French archival reports, Algerian Revolution history, third historical Wilaya, Bani Wartilan region, Guergour mixed municipality

## ملخص

تناول هذه الدراسة عرض التقارير الشهرية التي أعدها المحافظ المدني بول سوليلي، عمدة بلدية قرقور المختلطة، والتي تشمل اليوم إقليم دائرة بني ورتيلان في شمال غرب ولاية سطيف، إلى جانب المناطق المجاورة من ولايات بجاية، وبرج بوعريريج، والمسييلة. تعد هذه المنطقة استراتيجية بسبب تضاريسها الوعرة، وكانت مسرحاً لمعارك وكماثن وعمليات عسكرية، فضلاً عن كونها ملاذاً آمناً للعقيد عميروش، قائد الولاية الثالثة، ومساعديه.

تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الأهمية السياسية والعسكرية لهذه المنطقة، التي كانت جزءاً من الولاية التاريخية الثالثة، من خلال تقديم محتوى تقارير الأرشيف الفرنسي التي وثقت الأحداث السياسية المحلية، مثل الانتخابات والإجراءات الإدارية. تكشف هذه التقارير عن استراتيجيات السلطات الاستعمارية الوقائية لمنع السكان من الانضمام إلى الثورة الجزائرية، بما في ذلك حملات التضليل والدعاية الموجهة لتشويه صورة الثوار والمجاهدين على المستويين المحلي والدولي.

علاوة على ذلك، تقيم الدراسة جزئياً مدى مصداقية هذه التقارير الفرنسية وموثوقيتها كمصادر تاريخية لتوثيق تاريخ الثورة الجزائرية في الولاية الثالثة، خاصة في ظل ندرة المصادر الجزائرية المكتوبة التي توثق الأحداث في هذه المنطقة.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

تقارير الأرشيف الفرنسي، تاريخ الثورة الجزائرية، الولاية التاريخية الثالثة، منطقة بني ورتيلان، بلدية قرقور المختلطة

## Résumé

Cette étude présente les rapports mensuels rédigés par Paul Solelis, gouverneur civil et maire de la commune mixte de Guergour, qui couvre aujourd'hui le territoire de Beni Wartilan au nord-ouest de la wilaya de Sétif, ainsi que les zones avoisinantes des wilayas de Béjaïa, Bordj Bou Arréridj et M'sila. Cette région, d'une importance stratégique et marquée par un relief accidenté, fut le théâtre de nombreuses batailles, embuscades et opérations militaires. Elle servit également de refuge pour le colonel Amirouche, commandant de la Wilaya III, et ses proches collaborateurs.

L'étude met en lumière l'importance politique et militaire de cette région, qui faisait partie de la troisième Wilaya historique, à travers une introduction des rapports d'archives françaises documentant des événements politiques locaux, notamment les élections et les politiques administratives coloniales. Ces rapports révèlent les stratégies préventives des autorités coloniales pour freiner le soutien populaire à la Révolution algérienne, y compris la propagande et les campagnes de désinformation visant à discréditer les révolutionnaires et moudjahidines tant sur le plan local qu'international.

En outre, cette étude évalue partiellement la crédibilité et la fiabilité de ces rapports français en tant que sources historiques pour reconstituer l'histoire de la révolution dans la Wilaya III, en particulier face à la rareté des sources écrites algériennes couvrant cette région.

Mots-clés

Rapports d'archives françaises, histoire de la Révolution algérienne, troisième Wilaya historique, région de Beni Ourtilane, commune mixte de Guergour