Research Article

INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS IN THE M'ZAB DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD: BETWEEN COLLABORATION AND CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

This article explores intercommunity relations in the M'Zab region of southern Algeria during the pre-colonial period. Known as a refuge for the Mozabites, Berber ibadites, the region boasted a unique identity with its own institutions and a history of autonomy. The Mozabites co-existed with Jews, ḥamriyas, and various nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, who were mainly Malikite and Arabic-speaking. Their interactions ranged from economic cooperation to conflict, influenced by circumstances and alliances. The study aims to clarify how the Mozabites engaged with foreigners and lived alongside them before French colonization in 1882. Relying on documentary research into demographic composition, historical roles of different groups, and existing power dynamics, along with local interviews, the paper sheds light on these complex relationships. Understanding these historical interactions is crucial for grasping the current ethnic and doctrinal conflicts in the region, including those in 2015, and highlights the importance of historical context in contemporary community relations.

Keywords: M'Zab, Pre-colonial period, Intercommunity relations, Collaboration, Conflict

Background

The geographical setting of this article is the M'Zab Valley (*Aylan*). A region of southern Algeria located in the Wilaya of Ghardaïa, 600 km from Algiers (Figure 1). The region is known as the cradle of an ethnic and doctrinal minority; Imzabiyen or Mozabites - Zénètes Berbers speaking Tumzabtet adepts of Ibadism (Ibn Khaldoun, 1999: 304).

In addition to its unique identity, institutions[1] and history, the region is also known for its exceptional built heritage (essentially the *ksour* built around the 10th century)[2], which led to its classification as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982.

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[1] The M'Zab valley is unique in having a hierarchy of religious and customary institutions that are still active today, alongside the institutions of the Republic (Gueliane, 2020).

[2] *Ksour/ksar* means a Saharan village often fortified and/or agglomerated (Gravari Barbas, 2005;

ChekhabAbudaya, 2012, 2018; Côte, 2005; Mahrour, 2011; Gueliane, 2019). In M'Zab, we record the use of the word *ayrem* to designate these ensembles. In Berber, *ayrem* means both town and fortified village (Dray, 1998; Delheure, 1984; Mercier, 1922; Capot Rey, 1953; Gueliane, 2019).
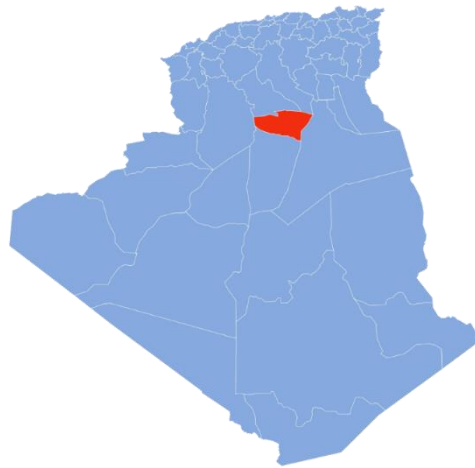

Figure 1. Geographical location of Ghardaïa, Algeria

Although the Mozabites were the founders of the *ksour*, they nevertheless shared the valley with other groups. Essentially Nomads and semi-nomads, whose presence in the M'Zab was reported by Jean Léon l'Africain from the 16th century onwards (Cherifi, 2015). Arab or Arabic-speaking tribes of Malikite rite: the Ch'anbas, the Madhabiḥs from Djbel Amour and the Banû Marzoug from Nafta (southern Tunisia). In addition to the Arab tribes, the Mozabites also brought Jews to their towns, mainly to the ksar of Ghardaïa (Figure 2). The Jews of the M'Zab are thought to have originated on the island of Djerba (Tunisia) and settled there around the 14th century. The reasons for this settlement have not been established with any certainty, but it is likely to have been due to economic considerations and trade networks, as we will come back to later (Figure 3).

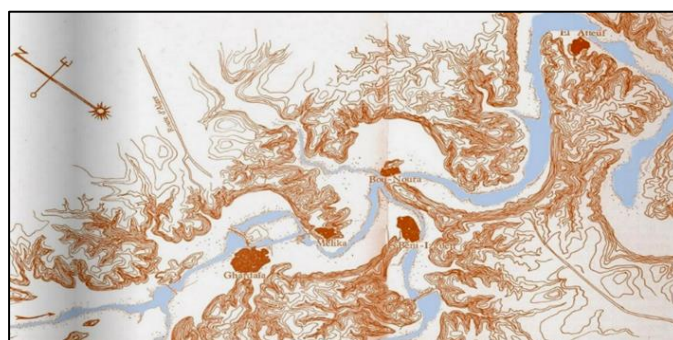*Figure 2. Aɣrem n'At Yezjen(ksar of Béni Isguen), 2016*

Figure 3. ksour of the M'Zab valley, which developed along the Oued M'Zab.From right to left: Ghardaïa Taɣardayt, Melika At Mlichet, Béni Isguen At yezjen, Bounoura At Bounour, El Attef Tajnint.

Contrary to Masqueray's (1878; 1886) image of the M'Zab as a geographical, religious and ethnic isolate in the desert, the region has always been open to other groups. The region seems to have always been open to other groups, and connected since medieval times at least, to the towns of northern Algeria, to the rest of the Ibadite archipelago and to the major poles of the Arab-Muslim world (Gueliane, 2019; Jomier, 2016; Aillet, 2012). This was achieved through migrations, trade and exchanges linking the different communities. Further east, in Tripolitania, where the Ibadites were already trading with peoples from the Lake Chad region, exchanges (mainly the slave and horse trade) integrated into more Western trade. Between the tenth and twelfth centuries, Ibadite traders from Tripoli, Ghadamès, Jarîd (southern Tunisia) and Qastiliya maintained regular trade contacts with the markets of Wargla, Zawîla, Tâdmekka and Awdaghost. Further west, reports indicate the presence of trade or missionary groups south of the Sahara.

There were also Ibadite merchants in Gao, perhaps from the latter part of the eighth century. Moreover, according to al-Zuhrî (11th century), large parts of the Saharan population, from the north of Niger to Tâdmekka and Wargla, west to Sijilmâsa and south to Zafûn, were converted to Ibadite doctrine in the 8th century. In his book on the spread of Muslim religious architecture across the Sahara, J. Schacht has shown that it was in fact the Ibadites of southern Tunisia, Wargla and M'Zab who brought the characteristic features of Muslim religious architecture across the Sahara to the Hausa, Kanuri and Fulba. It was also the Ibadites, according to Tadeusz Lewicki, who introduced Islam itself to part of sub-Saharan Africa. (Ersilia, 2002:193). And that's just outside the M'Zab. In the M'Zab, differences in lifestyle (urban/nomadic), religion and language, level of organization (existence or absence of institutions), and the history of each group have not prevented nomads, Israelites and Mozabites from living together. Although this cohabitation was essential to the economic prosperity of the ksour, it could turn into conflict.

The aim of this article is to review the demographic composition of the M'Zab before the region was annexed in 1882. Then, to elucidate the relationships between these groups, the forms they could take, from collaboration to conflict, depending on the circumstances. Finally, we'll look at how the Mozabites "received" outsiders to their society and culture, and how they lived "alongside" them (or with them). To do this, we will rely mainly on documentary research, but also on a few interviews with the local population.

Demographic composition in *Aylan*

Before turning to the nature of the ties, both cohabitation and conflict, that have marked the different groups of the M'Zab, we will first look at its demographic composition. Essentially, before 1882, since this is the period we're most interested in, with a few chronological flashbacks to more recent periods, when it's important to clarify a particular situation. Several groups shared the space of the narrow M'Zab valley. These groups, though united today by Algerian citizenship (1962), nevertheless had a different historical path, internal evolution and structure. They have maintained links of conflict and collaboration according to circumstances, periods and interests.

The Mozabites

The Mozabites are Ksourians, hence the city dwellers of M'Zab. They constitute a distinct ethnic, religious, and linguistic group in Algeria, we cautiously use the concept of minority/minority situation.[3] On one hand, they are Zenata Berbers speaking a particular variant of Tamazight: Tamzabt. On the other hand, unlike the majority of Algerian Muslims who adhere to Sunni Islam, the Mozabites are Ibadis: a minority branch of Islam

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[3] "*Indeed, we understand minority in its experiential and political dimension, and not simply in its quantitative dimension, because, as Yannick Courtel reminds us, "minors are [...] those who are not recognized as having control over themselves and who therefore have no identity of their own.* *The identity they receive is conferred on them by those who are of age*", in a word the dominant ones" (Hajj-Moussa, Tilmatine, 2020: 139). A definition adopted with regard to the political ideology adopted by the Algerian state.

With regard to the Berber identity of the M'Zab, it is essential to clear up some of the confusion we encountered, both in the field with our interlocutors and in the literature we consulted. Indeed, contrary to the idea held by some authors (Mercier, 1922; Amat, 1888; Masqueray, 1878; Aucapitaine, 1867), the M'Zab was not populated by a mass migration of survivors of the Rustémide state or those of Sédrata [4]. The Mozabites did not come from Basra, Yemen or Oman, as some of our interlocutors have claimed. According to Brahim Cherifi, these theories were developed by colonial ethnography at the end of the 19th century, mainly following Émile Masqueray's translation of Abu Zakariya's chronicle. This translation developed the idea that the ibadization of the M'Zab was the result of a mass migration of populations fleeing Ouargla (Sédrata) and, before that, Tahert, the capital of the Rustémides [5] (*cf.* Masqueray, 1886: 202). In his *Rissalat*, Amhammed Tfayesh refers to the settlement, in the M'Zab, of mainly Berber Zenet Ibadite families from the Zab, Ouargla and Nafoussa. Tfayesh, like Ibn Khaldoun (d. 808H/1405), mentions that the M'Zab welcomed Zenet tribes whose lands were occupied by the Hilalians (Ibn Khaldoun, T.1, 1999: 49), emphasizing the cultural and social similarities between the M'Zab, the Righ and the Zab (Ibn Khaldoun, t.III, 1999: 304).

While it is highly probable that kinship links exist between the Mozabites and the populations of these regions, a view supported by Cherifi (2015: 118), none of these authors mentions the existence of massive migrations, following the fall of Tahert and Sedrata, which would be at the origin of the settlement of the M'Zab. An event that Ibn Khaldun (d. 808H/1405) would certainly not have omitted

to mention, as for him the Mozabites were Zenet Berbers from the Béni Ouacîn tribe (*cf.* Ibn Khaldoun, 1999, TIII: 304).

Ibadism [6] in the M'Zab is an indissociably religious and social doctrine that remains one of the fundamental components of the Mozabite identity. Ibadism is the last vestige of a current of Islam known as Kharidjism, and is the result of the political conflict that plagued the Muslim *khilafa* after the assassination of Othman ibn 'Affan (in 656) [7]. As a result, Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, was elected, a decision strongly contested by the Bani Umaya, under the leadership of Mu'awiya. The two clans clashed at the famous battle of ṣifine (657 on the banks of the Euphrates), until Mu'awiya asked for arbitration, which Ali accepted. But the decision was contested by some of his supporters. It was the latter who were declared kharidjites, "*i.e. those who stepped out of the ranks of the Muslims, and had to be treated as infidels*" (Merghoub, 1972: 13). Ibadism arrived in the Maghreb through "*ḥamalat al 'ilm*" missionaries from Basra, around the beginning of the 2nd/ 8th century. A first Ibadite nucleus was formed in Tripolitania with the support of the Berber Hawwâra tribe, then others converted to "Kharijism", in particular the Zanatas (Surfites) and the Nafusas (Ibadites). Berbers who had also been initiated into Ibadism in Basra returned to their homelands to teach the doctrine (Cuperly, 1973:48).

The Ibadites soon created a political entity under Abdrahman Ibn Rustum, with Tahert as its capital. Tahert became a major economic, intellectual and religious metropolis for almost 130 years. The Rustumid state extended over a vast territory and was recognized by the Ibadites of the East and Maghreb, and its influence extended to all Berber groups. It was with this

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[4] Sedrata is an ancient Saharan city located fourteen kilometers south of Ouargla (Algeria). The sandy remains of Sedrata are a place of memory of Maghrebian Ibadism (Aillet etGilotte, 2012; Prevost, 2008; Aillet, Cressier, Gilotte, 2017).

[5] Tahert (Tiaret) in Algeria was the capital of the first Ibadite state (under the Rustemids). Ibadite chroniclers presented its foundation, dated 144/761-762, as the "state of glory" before it was conquered in 909 by the Fatimids (Prevost, 2011: 53; Lewicki, 1970: 206).

[6] The subject has been extensively covered by Ibadite authors (IbenSaghir, AbûZakariyyâ' al-Wârjilânî, Abû-l-

Rabî' al-Wisyânî, Abû-l-'AbbâsAḥmad b. 'AbdAllâh al-Fursuṭâ'î or al-Darjînî and Tfayesh. Etc.), as well as by contemporary authors (Adam R Gaiser, Tadeusz Lewicki, Roberto Rubinacci, Virginie Provest, John C. Wilkinson, Valerie Hoffman, Michael Cook, Abdulrahman Al Salimi, Pierre Cuperly, Cassalanti de Motylinski, Allaoua Amara, Emile Masquery. Etc.).

[7] The third caliph of Islam, a member of the Meccan aristocracy. He belonged to the Bani Umaya clan. The latter will claim power after his death and enter into conflict with Ali Ibn Talib (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet of Islam), elected by the "saḥaba" companions.

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state that Ibadism reached its state of glory (*imamat duhur*). When the Fatimids (in 358 /868-69) destroyed Tahert, its last Imam took refuge in the Ouargla oasis, more precisely in Sedrata, where an Ibadite community had already been established. This last Imam heralded the end of the state of glory, and Ibadism went underground - the state of secrecy (*kitman*). In the midst of a hostile world, Ibadism found refuge in small territorial enclaves: the M'Zab, the island of Djerba, the Jebal-Nafoussa[8]. With no Imamat left, and in order to survive, the sect organized itself under the authority of a clerical organization, the '*azzabas*.[9]

The earliest account of the M'Zab people's conversion to Ibadism dates back to the 11th century. It was written by the Ibadite chronicler Abu Zakariyyâ Yahya b. Abi Bakr al-Warjilânî (d. after 504/1110-1111) in his *kitabal sirawaakhbar al a'imma*.[10] According to this account it is Abd Allah Ben Muhammed Ben Abi Bakr (d440/1048-1049) who is credited with the conversion of the BanûMus'ab to Ibadism, who were previously on the mu'tazilite waṣilite doctrine. "*The sheikh [Abû AbdAllâh Ibn Bakr] used to spend the winter in Oued Righ, and would return [spend the spring] in the desert among the Béni Maç'ab, who were then Ouâcilites. He converted some of them to Ouahbism*[11]" (Masqueray, 1878:317). Brahim Cherifi explains that the missionary's work was facilitated by the intellectual affinities existing between Ibadism and Mu'tazilism, but also by the ethnic and linguistic proximity between the population of the M'Zab and the Sheikh, who was also a Zenet Berber (Cherifi, 2015: 116). Ibadism

then spread to the north and south of the Sahara thanks to trade and missionaries.[12]

The *ḥamriyas*, a minority within the Mozabite community

Within the Mozabite community itself, another "ethnic" group exists, the *ḥamriyas*, the descendants of former slaves. Mixed-race descendants of marriages between Mozabites and slaves. The M'Zab being in fact a transit market between the north of the country and Sub-Saharan Africa also "prospered" thanks to the slave trade. This group is easily identifiable by their relatively darker complexion than that of the Mozabites, and by their more slender silhouette. In the ksar of Ghardaïa, the *ḥamriyas* occupy a neighbourhood of their own. Although completely Berberized and ibadized, the *ḥomriyas* consider themselves a group apart. Indeed, referring to the conflict in Ghardaîa, one of our interviewees confirms this: "*(…) the Mozabites and the Arabs are fighting, but we have nothing to do with it, we're fine with both sides...*" (ar.). An informant from El Attef confirmed that this group is fully integrated into the various Mozabite 'achiras. In fact, it does not have its own institutions. This seems consistent with the general rule that a slave, even if freed, retains the tribal affiliation of his former master.

The same informant adds that, despite their total integration, this group nevertheless has its own traditions, way of life and festivities. Thus, they stand out as a minority within Mozabite society. Because of their mixed-race origins, the *ḥamriyas* have an inferior social

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[8]Prevost raises the antipathy of Arab authors (El Idrissi, and el Bakri) towards the Ibadites (Prevost, 2017: 140).
[9]The 'azzabas are the religious institution in the M'Zab. Each city/ksar has its own institution that shares power with the notables.
[10] A work that was translated and commented on by Emile Masqueray under the title of *Abu Zakariya's* chronicle.
[11]Not to be confused with Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism, which is a form of Salafism.
[12] While we can't go into detail here on the doctrinal differences between Sunnism and Ibadism, for the sake of understanding the rest of our work, it's worth pointing out that the ethical principles apparent from the outset in Ibadite law revealed a rigorist conception of life and faith. Sinful actions implied the loss of the state of purity and rendered the sinner unfit to participate in religious rites,

and therefore in community life. The Ibadite who committed capital sins, failed to obey divine law or took part in blameworthy innovations (*bida'a*) was deemed *kafir* (disbeliever) and therefore banned from the community of true believers. In fact, it is on the principle of *walâya* and *barâ'a* that the religious institutions of the M'Zab refer to express their solidarity, but also to apply the dreaded sanction of excommunication against Mozabites who do not conform to the *'orf* of country and doctrine. This explains the moral authority enjoyed by the traditional institutions of the M'Zab to this day. We therefore conclude that the differences between Ibadism and Sunnism are infinitely marginal and can in no way explain conflicts (an entre-soi) for doctrinal reasons (Gueliane, 2019).

status, despite the egalitarian social doctrine of Ibadism. In fact, marriages between Mozabites and ḥamriyas are very rarely contracted. One informant was keen to confirm that a clear distinction must be made between ḥamriyas and *ibarshanen* (black people), which is another group and has nothing to do with the ḥamriyas. In this work we will not dissociate the ḥamriyas from the Mozabites. We will therefore consider them as a single group. On the one hand, because of their perfect integration; a Berberization and Ibadization. On the other hand, from a historical point of view, and because of their status, this group has not been dissociated from the Mozabites.

The Arabs, or Arabic speakers

Of nomadic and semi-nomadic origin, they are made up of various Arab (or Arabic-speaking) tribes of Malikite rite. Jean Léon l'Africain report their presence in the M'Zab from the 16th century onwards (Cherifi, 2015). These are made up of different tribes and groups. The Ch'anbass are the most numerous Arab group around the M'Zab, "stretching across the northern Sahara south of the M'Zab between the two great ergs: Grand Erg Oriental to the east, Grand Erg Occidental to the west" (Ruffié & al., 1962: 355). It is probable that they descended from the Zorba, a Hilalian confederation that invaded Berberia in the 11th century (Daddi Addoun, 1990: 19; Cauneille, 1968: 20). The Ch'anbasse themselves claim descent from the BanîSulaym b. Mansûr of Medina (*Hidjâz*), who are a federation of tribes (Oussedik, 2015: 111).Thus, according to this version, they seem to have arrived "*in North Africa during the Hilalian invasions, came to settle on the square of the Ksar of Metlili[13] around the middle of the 14th century, pushing back the Zenets before them. They split into three clans at the beginning of the 15th century: the Chaambas Mouadhi moved to El Goléa, the Chaambas Bou-Rouba chose Ouargla, and only the Chaambas Berezga remained in*

Metlili; finally, some fractions settled in the north-western part of the desert, on the "piedmont" of the Atlas. Thereafter, these different groups, though sometimes quarreling among themselves, would always reconcile to fight neighboring Arab tribes: Said Otba, Laarba, Ouled Badjouda; the raid by the various Chaambas communities assembled against the nomadic Berber tribes of the northwest, carried out in 1876, has remained famous. From 1880 onwards, the Chaambas populations did not participate in any notable uprisings". (Ruffié & al., 1962: 358).

The Algerian anthropologist Ahmed Ben Naoum strictly rejects this version. According to him, the Cha'anba are far from being a fraction of the Beni Hilal or Beni Soleym. The author cites the "*Kitab el Ibar*"[14] as evidence, a reference work on the subject, which makes no mention of such a connection: "*The Cha'anba are part of the Zenata majority in this country. They have no foundational myth linking them to the 'Arabs'! They themselves were Arabized, just like the other Zenata, except that they express their culture in one of the Arabic languages that they have extensively 'Zenatized' in morphology and syntax.*" (El Watan, 2015). He also notes that they are dispersed from east to west between the Saharan Atlas and the Great Ergs, from Touggourt to Oued En-Namous.

One thing is certain: the Cha'anba, nomadic camel herders, were skilled livestock breeders but also desert raiders. In M'Zab, their home was Metlili (40 km from Ghardaïa), a ksar founded around 1350 (Daddi Addoun, 1990: 20; Cauneille, 1968: 20; Oussedik, 2015: 114). It also appears that the Cha'anba did not occupy Metlili permanently, as they spent most of their time in the desert. This explains why, in the 1920s, part of the *ksar* of Metlili was in ruins (De Bonneval, 1929: 112-113).

The Cha'anba have a political organization. In addition to the factions associated with clans and tribes, they have a *çof*.[15] "*To summarize this*

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[13]A ksar located 30 km from Ghardaïa and occupied by the Ch'anbas-Berezga (Mercier, 1922: 33).

[14] *Kitâb al-`ibar, wadiwân al-mubtadâ' wa al-khabar*, Abderrahmane Ibn Khaldoun 1332/1406.

[15] *Çof* or *saff* is an institution observed throughout the Maghreb. "*The word saff denotes a rank, a hedge, a line, an order, an arrangement; by extension, it is used to mean*

'party.' This *latter meaning that we attribute to it today is not ancient. The use of the word dates back to the 17th century.*" He adds that: "*It refers to the gathering of all individuals who, through a shared origin, interest, needs, or political passions, have come together either for attack or defense. In this case, the word denotes partisan leagues that transcend and may contradict lineage affiliations. It is also*

organization, let's take the example of the Cha'anba of Metlili, divided into three tribes: the nomadic tribe of Ouled Alouche is divided into seven clans, with the Ouled Touameur being the most noble clan. The entire tribe belongs to the sof Gheraga. The tribe of Ouled Abdelquader, also nomadic, is divided into five clans, headed by the Ouled Hanich (Hanich is said to be the brother of Touameur). This tribe is split between the sof Cheraga and the sof Gharba. Finally, the sedentary tribe of the Ksar includes the clan of sedentary Cha'anba, the Béni-Merzoug, and four clans of foreign immigrants. This tribe is also divided between the sof Cheraga and the sof Gharba. Each clan is led by a chief appointed by the Council of Elders, the 'djemaa el Kebar.' The tribe's chief is also appointed by the tribal council of elders, and this role is generally given to the chief of the tribe's most noble clan. The roles of the tribal chief and clan chiefs include acting as a judge, an administrator, and a negotiator responsible for relations with neighboring communities. He may also potentially serve as a war leader" (Ruffié et al., 1962: 359).

Then there are the Madhabiḥs, aggregated Arabs or semi-nomads. They are Arabized Berbers from ksar el Mâya, south of Djbel 'Ammûr. They were known for their fickleness, changing allies frequently - for whoever paid better. Originally, they were mercenaries in the service of the wlâd 'Ammi 'Isâ of Ghardaïa. They settled around the town in August 1586. They were then evacuated to Daïa Ben Dahoua (after its creation by colonization in the second half of the 19th century), 8 km upstream from Ghardaïa, where they remain to this day. In his urban study of the M'Zab cities, Mercier explains why they were integrated into the Ghardaïa ksar. "The Mdabih are called by our administration, Arabs aggregated to the Mozabite town. They are half-nomads originally from the Lelmia ksar, south of the Djebel Amour, and were called by the Aoulad-Ami-Aïssa quebila. Malékite populations would never have ventured to peacefully penetrate an Abadhite town. The call came from the town itself, the aim of the Aoulad-Ammi-Aïssa being to counter their rival faction. Later, a composition intervened, a peace was cemented, the founding fractions agreed to integrate the newcomers and they were distributed among their groups; the Mozabites express this idea, saying that they entered the families: *dakhlou fil achïr*"(Mercier, 1922: 117-118).

The Banû Marzoug, originally from Nafta in southern Tunisia, were affected by drought and sought protection and refuge under the walls of Ghardaïa. Their requests were granted after forty days, and they were admitted into the city on October 29, 1429. According to Mercier, "the Béni-Merzoug are nomads from Metlili of the Chaamba; they were also incorporated into the factions, but their significance is much less considerable than that of the Mdabih. While the Mdabih now number over a thousand in Ghardaïa, the Béni-Merzoug comprise only about thirty families, so their location could not be as precise. However, around fifteen of their houses, still clustered together in the east of the city, are enough to give their group the name of the Béni-Merzoug neighbourhood" (Mercier, 1922: 118). Furthermore, in exchange for their integration into the ksar, they had to pay the *jma'a*[16] the equivalent of one *gandoura*, an outfit worn by the men of the region—for every six *gandouras* woven (thus one-sixth of their

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important to note that the term saff has never been used to denote sectarian rivalries. It has never been employed in accounts of religious conflagrations, whereas it frequently appears in accounts of political rivalries and struggles" (Cherifi, 2015: 239).

[16] Jma'a, *"the generic name for djemaa (Berberized as tajmat in Kabylia), refers in the Maghreb to extremely heterogeneous structures ranging from a sort of extended family council to genuine political organizations with complex procedures and extensive prerogatives, ranging from municipal management to the administration of criminal justice. On the eve of the colonial era, the level of development and scope of prerogatives of such institutions were linked, on the one hand, to political factors (being*

within or outside the perimeter of a state) and, on the other hand, to the lifestyle and grouping of populations. Almost informal within the framework of a small nomadic unit of camel herders, the institution had experienced considerable development in rural areas populated by sedentary farmers gathered in populous villages. Since then, the vagaries of history (and its share of military conquest, agrarian colonization, and authoritarian states) have profoundly, but also very unevenly, affected this type of institution. While they have disappeared from many regions disrupted by the multifaceted phenomena induced by European colonization (land confiscation, population displacement, impoverishment, etc.) and the advent of independent states, they have persisted in others. In regions where they still

weaving production) and defend the city alongside the Mozabites against attacks from the nomads. It was also agreed that they could not build new minarets nor organize any call to prayer other than that of the Ibadite mosque, which was open to all worshippers. The Banû Marzoug soon betrayed the Mozabites by allying with nomads who attacked Ghardaïa on March 14, 1441. This act led to their expulsion, but they were readmitted three years later (Addoun, 1990: 29-30). In addition to these three main tribes, there are the Wlad 'Attâche – 'Atâtcha – who settled in Guerrara. These are Ibadite Berbers originally from Zawwara in Libya who became Arabized and Malikites, as well as the Wlad Yahya from Zibân allied with the inhabitants of Berriane (Daddi Addoun, 1990: 20).

The Jews of M'Zab, Udayn n waghlan

The M'Zab also saw the establishment of a Jewish community, mainly in the ksar of Ghardaïa. According to the Ibadite version, the Jews of the M'Zab originated on the island of Djerba (Tunisia) and settled around the 14th century (Mercier, 1922: 119). This hypothesis is supported by Sarah Stein (2014), who explains that the Jews of the M'Zab are "outsiders": they arrived in the region at the end of the Middle Ages, and only owed their local roots to the benevolence of their Ibadite hosts. [17] According to Huguet (1902), "*Ammi Saïd brought with him a Jewish family from Djerba, which he settled in Ghardaïa; from my personal research, it seems more established that the first nucleus, made up of some fifteen Israelites, came from Ouargla following the first Abadhites to the Mzab, settled with them and grew from strength to strength. Shortly afterwards, other Jews arrived from Tripolitania, Morocco and northern Barbary, giving rise to seven fractions. At the end of the 15th century, there were still people professing Judaism in Touat, and in 1492, the year in which the Jews were expelled from Spain, the Touat synagogue was destroyed and a price was put on their heads. They were due to return soon; however, during the difficult period they had to*

endure, many of them had, in all probability, to seek refuge in the Mzab". (Huguet, 1902: 560).

According to Jewish tradition, the first Jews of M'Zab "came from Cairo, led by Rabbi Daoud Sellam, long before the time of 'Ammï Saïd, who, according to this version, did not arrive in M'Zab until the early 17th century. Regardless, the presence of Jews in M'Zab is attested by responsa dating from the second half of the 17th century. Many Jews of M'Zab also claim a Spanish origin, prior to their passage through Morocco (Fez, Figuig). Some recognize Mouchi Sebano from Algiers as their eponymous ancestor; others claim to originate from the Oued Righ and Tripolitania, while others assert they are descendants of refugees from Touat, who came after the catastrophe that ended the prosperous communities of that region towards the end of the 15th century (*cf.* works of John Hunwick). The phrase uttered by some Jews at the end of the Passover vigil, 'Next year in Tamentit,' indeed seems to confirm a Touat origin. This heterogeneous nature of the Jewish demography of Ghardaïa contrasts with the conclusions of anthropologist C.L. Briggs, who indicates a great homogeneity of type (particularly an extremely low cephalic index and a distinctly 'non-Jewish' appearance), which he explains by excessive endogamy" (Pessah, 2016).

The Jews of M'Zab, due to their remoteness and isolation, have maintained a very vibrant Jewish tradition. Like those of southern Tunisia, Djerba, and the Moroccan Atlas, they have notably resisted the Westernization introduced by colonization. "*This can be explained by geographical, cultural, and historical reasons. Unlike the Judaism of the coastal plains, ports, and cities, it lived in relative isolation at the gates of the desert, in a hostile region that only the hard work of man has managed to develop*" (Freddy, 1979: 167).

As with their origins, the reasons for the settlement of Jews in M'Zab are not definitively established. It is likely that economic considerations and trade networks played a role, this will be revisited in the following pages. In 1883, the number of Jews in M'Zab was 422 in

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operate, their influence, prerogatives, and dynamism vary widely" (Mahé, 2011).

[17]See :Llyod Cabot Briggs, Norina Lami Guede, *No more for ever : A Saharan Jewish town*, Harvard University, Cambridge (Ma), 1964

Ghardaïa, 130 in Guerrara, and 186 in Berriane (Amat, 1888: 226). The official census of 1896 recorded 841 Jews in Ghardaïa and 34 in Guerrara (Huguet, 1902: 559), and in 1921, their number was 1,400 (Mercier, 1922: 38). This number continued to decline until it reached 1,000 in 1960 (Pessah, 2016). In 1962, the last Jewish families were evacuated to France just a few months before Algeria's independence (Freddy, 1984). It is important to know that the Jews of M'Zab were the only ones not affected by the Crémieux Decree.[18] Indeed, "*The decree of October 24, 1870, on the citizenship of Israelites*" *preceded the annexation of M'Zab territories in 1882. Thus, under the principles set forth by the 1870 decree, the Jews of M'Zab could not be considered French citizens and* **therefore retained their personal Mosaic status. The Jews of M'Zab remained excluded from French citizenship** *until independence, which posed serious issues again in 1962 when it had to be decided whether they were French or Algerian*" (Blévis, 2012; Stein, 2014; Warscheid, 2015). It was only on June 13, 1962, three months after the ceasefire and twenty days before the self-determination referendum, that this population gained full French citizenship (Stein, 2016).

Relations Between Different Groups in the M'Zab Valley

Relations Between Mozabites and Jews

The Mozabites (Ibadites) and the Jews share several characteristic traits. Both are religious minorities, generally oppressed by the Sunni majority. This situation led to self-isolation and withdrawal. The Ibadites, for instance, isolated themselves in geographic enclaves such as Djerba and the M'Zab. This, in turn, led them to preserve (jealously) their laws,

traditions, and institutions. This conservatism did not prevent them from adapting to the harshest (political, natural, economic) conditions. Both groups have a tendency towards urban living and commerce. The Jews were specialized in certain economic fields, making them indispensable to the cities of M'Zab. In Ghardaïa, for example, Jews occupied well-defined trades such as jewelers, armorsmiths, tanners, and cobblers. They were also metal founders, engravers, and some were carders and tinworkers, but precious metal work was their primary occupation. These trades were looked down upon by the Mozabites for religious and, especially, social prestige reasons (Mercier, 1922: 126; Coÿne, 1879: 18; Brunschvig, 1962). Comparing this list of trades with those recorded in 1960, it is evident that, aside from jewelry, Jews no longer monopolized any other profession and that there were no Jews among blacksmiths, tanners, masons, plasterers, weavers, barbers, painters, cobblers, or embroiderers. However, they owned 39 shops (compared to 337 owned by the Mozabites). Briggs mentions a few tailors, carpenters, transporters, tax collectors, and accounting employees among the Jews. There were also tinworkers and Jewish midwives (*qâblât*), but the clientele for the latter was mainly Jewish and Arab women, as Mozabites refrained from using professional midwives (Pessah, 2016). Like the Mozabites, the Jews of M'Zab also conducted trade outside the valley, primarily in Oued Righ. It is worth noting that this Jewish community was not isolated but had connections with Jewish communities in Melika, Guerrara, Berriane (which were smaller than that of Ghardaïa), Laghouat, and Touggourt. The Jews of M'Zab did not own gardens in the palm groves and could not have them, according to

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[18] Given their special status during colonization, the Jews of the M'Zab, like the Arabs and Mozabites, had their political and civic rights restricted by their "Mosaic personal status". As a result, segregation measures widened the gap with their co-religionists in the North. Introduced in Algeria in 1845, the consistorial system was not applied in the Mzab. Community affairs were managed by a Jewish Jma'a, created in the wake of the occupation in 1882 and presided over by a "head of the Jewish nation". Disputes relating to inheritance, marriage and family law were settled before a rabbinical court according to the rules of "Mosaic law". This "indigenization" of the Jews of

the M'Zab proved protective during the events of the Second World War. While in the North, anti-Semitic laws and decrees passed between 1940 and 1942 deprived the Jewish population of their most basic civil rights, and many Jews were locked up in internment camps in the Sahara, the Mzab community more or less escaped persecution by the Vichy regime. The reaffirmation of the Indigénat regime by the Fourth Republic in 1947, which, according to the author, marked a real turning point insofar as it amplified the emigration of Jews from the Mzab to Palestine/Israel (Warscheid, 2015).

their agreements with the Mozabites (Coÿne, 1879: 18).

Thus, "*although the two communities maintained essentially functional ties, each needing the other but not establishing gratuitous friendly relations, even as they made efforts to keep a certain distance, it remains that mutual influence is profound*" (Freddy, 1979: 167). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that although the Jews occupied a space reserved for them (a Jewish neighbourhood, or *Mellâh, zgaglihoud*), they lived in houses identical to those of the Mozabites. They wore sarwals and *chachiyas* similar to those of the Mozabites, creating a closely related human landscape.

Before the annexation of 1882, the social and legal status of the Jews was that of "People of the Book" or "protected" under Islam (Mercier, 1922: 119)[19], or "*dhimmis*." This was a contract by which the Muslim community granted hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions, provided that the Jews respected the dominance of Islam. Concerning the relationships between the *dhimmis* and the Ibadites, Virginie Prevost (2007) notes that the *Kharijites* (in this case, the Ibadites) generally maintained good relations with Christians and Jews. This seems to support the idea that it was the Mozabites themselves who invited the Jews to M'Zab. Thus, given their status, a set of rights and prohibitions was imposed on them by the Kanouns of M'Zab.[20]

Just like the rest of the communities, they were given a neighborhood, a cemetery and a synagogue (with complete freedom to worship). The latter did not have their own clothes, a common practice to distinguish Jews with a color; or clothing. In fact, the Jews of the M'Zab wore the "indigenous" garment, saroual, gandoura, burnous and chéchia (Huguet, 1902: 561). So they shared the same type of habitat and clothing as the rest of the valley's inhabitants. Like Mozabite women, Jewish women were forbidden to expatriate, travel or reside outside the M'Zab. This system was put in place to prevent families from settling permanently in the Tell, where life was more peaceful than in the dry (and hostile) M'Zab valley (Figure 4). So, with women (and therefore children) forbidden to leave the valley, the men were obliged to return to the M'Zab[21] every time. Jews were not allowed to acquire arable land (Mercier, 1922: 119). They were obliged to pay (like the Arabs) a capitation tax, which guaranteed them the protection of the Mozabites. The Jewish community was obliged to pay an annual fee to the Ghardaïa assembly of notables (this obligation also existed in Berriane and Guerrara). They were also excluded from participating in *the niẓâm el yaqaḍa*[22] night watch. They were also required to provide bags of date pits to plug gaps in the event of a defection from the Salem Ou-Aïssa dam. The Jews were forbidden to use the Muslims' wells; two special wells, dug by themselves, were reserved for

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[19]**Kleinknecht**, *les juifs du M'Zab,* https://www.judaicalgeria.com/pages/les-juifs-du-mzab.html

[20]Kanoun, or the itifaqats, are "legal" texts produced on the basis of a consensus of the *'azzabas* and the *jma'a*, or more precisely "*reports of consensual decisions*" (Oussedik, 2007: 23). They therefore have religious and customary legitimacy and have the force of law. These texts deal with varied subjects, from the simplest, codification of marriages and the bride's trousseau – to the most complex – thefts, rapes and murders.

[21] See: Salhi Mohamed Brahim, 2006, "*Society and religion in Algeria in the 20th century: Ibadhite reformism, between modernization and conservation*" in Insaniyat, no 31, p. 33-61, DOI: 10.4000/insaniyat.969

[22] The *niẓāmelyaqāḍa* [vigilance system] is a practice documented from the Ottoman Regency period in Algiers, with some tracing its origins back to the founding of the cities of M'Zab. It was essentially a form of local police responsible for the internal protection of the cities, both

against outsiders and among the different Mozabite clans. Currently, the vigilance system involves organizing several groups of men (about ten men per group) and dispersing them across the various neighborhoods of the Mozabite cities. The guard starts right after the last night prayer (*'isha*), around 10 p.m., and continues until dawn (*el fajr*, around 5 a.m.).

Admission conditions into this community police vary from one city to another. An informant from Ghardaïa explains that, in his city, the guard is mandatory for every married man. Each person registers on a list and joins a group, he can choose the group he prefers to be with his friends, adjusting his guard shifts according to his availability. If a member of the group is absent, another person substitutes for him, and the absent member will make up the service on another day of the week. During their shifts, families provide food and tea to the guards as a sign of gratitude. The goal of the niẓāmelyaqāḍa is to oversee the neighborhoods, protecting both property and residents (Gueliane, 2019).

them. They also had their own slaughter-houses.

If any of its rules were transgressed, they were obliged to pay fines set by the *jma'a* - this applied to all occupants of the ksar without exception. Finally, disputes between Ibadites and Jews were brought before the '*azzabas*.

Conflicts between Jews, on the other hand, were handled within their own communities. Like the Mozabites and Arabs, Jews obeyed their rabbis (Mercier, 1922: 132). The latter had representatives on the council of notables (as in the town of Ghardaïa).

Figure 4. To this day, the stones used to mark the Israelite tribe (other Arab, and Mozabite tribes) are cast at the headquarters of the notables of ksar Ghardaïa. This is located in the center of the town's market and was synonymous with the parliament that managed the ksar's affairs. The number of stones was proportional to the size of the tribes. Thus, the Israelites had one stone, the Madhabiḥs three stones, the BanûMarzoug one stone and the Mozabites sixteen (16) stones.

Mozabites/Arabs

Like the Jews, the Arabs integrated into the ksar were assigned very specific activities. Working the land in the oases was carried out by "so-called agglomerated Arabs": *Madhabiḥs*, *Attatcha*, *Debbaba* (Oussedik, 2015:113). The latter were farmers and breeders alongside the Mozabites. The nomadic Cha'anba were warriors, and the Mozabites called on their services to protect their trade caravans to the Tell. Mercier describes in detail what a Mozabite must offer the Nomad in order to obtain his protection (Mercier, 1922: 106-107). On this last point, we'd like to point out that the M'Zab occupies a strategic position in the Saharan routes. Roads under the name of the products and beings that came from the South, the "salt roads", the "gold roads", the "slave roads", but various goods took the route in the opposite direction. The caravan trade was a source of

income for all. The region's central location lent itself to this activity. When conditions changed, they mostly resorted to temporary emigration. It has long been known that the Sahara is, and has been, an area of intense commercial activity; indeed, it has been an area of material, cultural and spiritual exchange between North and South Africa for centuries. For centuries, slaves and goods were transported, along with cultural models and religious beliefs, to the Mediterranean via trans-Saharan routes." (Oussedik, 2015: 113). Thus, Mozabite activities have also taken place towards the Tell, according to various sources, since the 14th century (Gueliane, 2019; Jomier, 2016; Cherifi, 2015). So we can't overlook the place held by the Cha'anbas nomads in the evolution of this Mozabite trade, although their presence in the ksour was not always welcome.[23]

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[23] Ersilia Francesca (2002: 193) highlights that the choice of commercial activity is not random. Indeed, the Ibadite communities, originating from North Africa and Oman,

combined remarkable entrepreneurial success with religious austerity, in a manner comparable to what Max

This dependence led the nomads, who until then had been excluded from the city laws reserved only for Ksourians (and therefore from municipal citizenship), to settle closer and closer to their patrons, around the towns of the M'Zab. On the other hand, despite their services, nomad/citizen relations could take a violent turn. Indeed, nomads, unlike Jews, were seen as a source of internal unrest, given their involvement in the city's political conflicts, looters and destroyers in times of crisis or drought. In the 14th century, the Ch'anbas laid siege to the city of Ghardaïa, a siege that was only lifted thanks to the intervention of Béni Isguen (Daddi Addoun, 1990).

Thus, cohabitation between Mozabites and Arabs could take three different forms. The first case is that of towns that strictly refused any settlement of foreigners, such as Béni Isguen, which still has a homogeneous population to this day. This is due to the town's political stability: the Béni Isguen clans were able to find more diplomatic solutions to their political conflicts, both because of the presence of a religious elite with moral authority that was never challenged, and because of the presence of a trading bourgeoisie concerned with stability and peace, which were essential to preserve its economic interests. Conflicts were hardly beneficial to their business. In addition, it seems that the presence of a third neutral '*arsh*, At Yedder, who acted as arbitrator in the event of conflict, played an important role [24], as the other towns had only two 'arsh each vying for political power in the city.

The mediating role of the 'arshd' At Yedder is exactly in line with Gellner's analysis of the role played by marabouts in conflicts between

secularists in the Moroccan Atlas[25]. This historical particularity of the town of Béni Isguen has made it the only town in the M'Zab to have been able to maintain the continuity of these three 'arsh 'roush. To this day, the '*arsh-'roush* still own houses and flags, and organize annual meetings, as one of Béni Isguen's notables explained to us. Political conflicts led to the destruction and banishment of the 'arsh as an institution in the rest of the M'Zab towns.

This situation meant that the various Yezguenis clans never had to resort to Arab mercenariesn, the Nomadsn, to resolve their internal issues. Despite this stability, the notables of this city observed, through the situation in Ghardaïa, what ethnic diversity can lead to. The Nomads, being involved in the internal affairs of the city of Ghardaïa, were held responsible for the insecurity in the valley. As a preventive measure, Béni Isguen established strict legislation to prohibit any interaction with non-Mozabites and non-Ibadites. For example:

- The 1776 agreement stipulates: "*An individual who does not profess the Ibadite doctrine cannot own property in the city (…) It was also decided that whenever a foreigner inherits any property, the value of that property, as assessed by an expert, will be refunded to them. Under no circumstances will they be permitted to reside in the city as a tenant or in any other capacity.*" (Morand, 1903: 27). This agreement invokes the right of preemption (*shefa'a*) exercised by the community.
- The 1848 agreement: "*The Azzaba and laypeople decided to forbid granting asylum to foreigners.*" (Cherifi, 2015: 189).

Weber analyzed in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Weber, 2004).

[24] The *'arsh* is the alliance of several factions for political interests, essentially a kind of political party, in order to gain power within the city assembly.

[25] The originality of Gellner's conception lies mainly in the central role it attributes to the mediation of sacred lineages in conflicts between secular groups: drawing on their religious prestige, pacifism, and baraka (spiritual blessings), the marabouts and "saints" manage to attain a position of moral authority that prevents minor conflicts between lineages, through the mechanism of segmentary solidarities, from escalating to larger units (villages, tribes, etc.). Gellner aims to demonstrate how, within the

segmentary social system of rural Maghreb, the lineages, caught in a whirlpool of violence exchanges, welcomed pacifying marabouts among them to temper their conflicts: this role could only be fulfilled by religious lineages, excluding all others. The pacifying marabouts are grouped into lineages that enjoy a form of spatial and structural extraterritoriality relative to the segmentary system. Indeed, they are often located in settlements at the borders of several neighboring tribes' territories, and in order to maintain their functions and preserve their status, they must avoid engaging in the divisions and conflicts that constantly pit the tribes of "secular" people against each other (Mahé, 1998: 55).

- The 1871 agreement: "*This agreement prohibits any nomad living in a tent from settling in the city. No alliances should be made with foreigners; those who marry a foreign woman must leave the city.*" (Cherifi, 2015).
- Finally, the 1879 agreement: "*This agreement prohibits the inhabitants of Béni Isguen from selling/buying weapons to foreigners (both urban and nomadic). It also forbids gathering with foreigners without permission from traditional institutions.*" (Cherifi, 2015). This last agreement was established following the Randon agreement (1853) with the colonial administration, which included a clause obliging the Mozabites not to sell weapons and powder in their markets, under penalty of military intervention by the colonial administration. This intervention soon occurred with the annexation of the M'Zab in 1882

The second case involves cities that have accepted the settlement of foreigners, such as Ghardaïa. This city called upon foreign populations to ensure its economic growth, integrating Jews, the Banû Marzoug, the Ch'anbas, and the Madhabiḥs. Each group occupied a district in the city (*cf.* Figure 5). The integration of Arab tribes also had political and military motives. The Banû Marzoug and the Madhabiḥs settled around Ghardaïa at the beginning of the 17th century and became indispensable as warriors for one of the city's *saff*, the At Baslimane, to counter the attacks of the rival *saff*, the At 'Ammi 'Issa, who were allied with the Cha'anbas nomads. The frequency of these unpredictable conflicts led the various *saff* to keep the nomads close to the city to facilitate their intervention if needed (Cherifi, 2015: 182). Gradually, these nomadic groups began to abandon their encampments near the city to settle there and own some houses. Their entry into the city resulted in their increasingly close involvement in its conflicts, to the point of becoming essential in maintaining the balance of power between the antagonistic *saff*. Cherifi (2015) confirms that local sources from the M'Zab indicate the involvement of the nomads in the internal struggles of the Mozabite clans as early as the late 17th century. This is also supported by agreements dating from the 18th and 19th centuries (Figure 5).
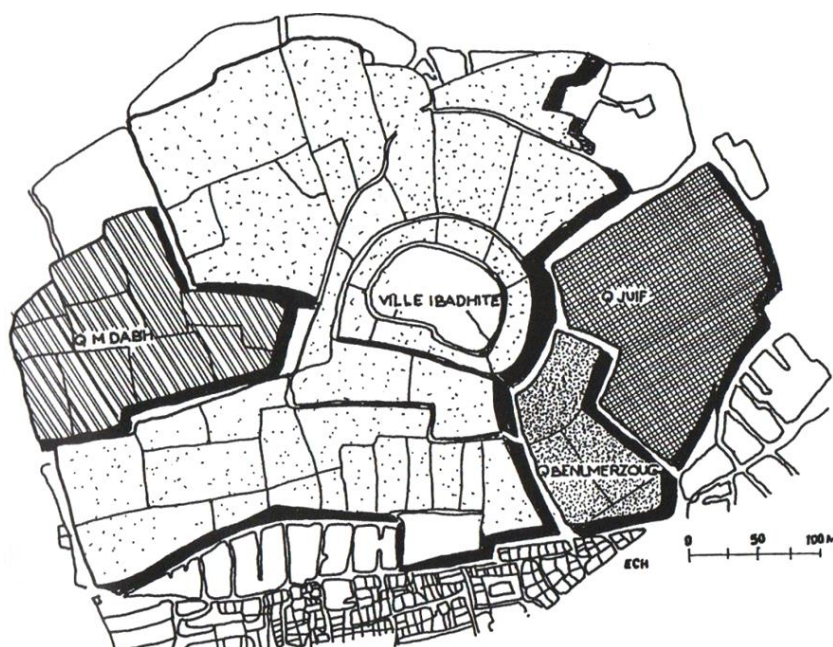

Figure 5. Spatial distribution of different communities in the Ghardaïa ksar. Source: Benyoucef, 1992

Faced with such a situation, the '*azzabaset* assemblies of notables adopted a series of conventions to confine the nomads to the outskirts of the city; to limit their numbers and expel others in order to minimize their influence. The pretext for these conventions was public order, motivated by political motives (Cherifi, 2015: 183). Among the texts dealing with the presence of foreigners in the city of Ghardaïa, we also found the following:

- A convention from the early 17th century states: "*Azzaba and Djemaa deliberated on the measures to take to reduce harm and prevent the inhabitants of the city from being disturbed. (...) They decided to sell the houses of the Malikites built after the prohibition decision and to reserve for them only those that were constructed before this decision, to be rented out to them and to each other*" (Cherifi, 2015: 183).

- The confederate convention of 1726: "*If he is an Arab, even if he has married a local woman, he cannot settle in one of the cities. If an Arab dies in one of the cities, his heirs are allowed to come and collect his inheritance without being able to settle in the city. If this Arab has a partner in the city, he must have the inheritance valued and take his share, leaving the share of his partner*" (Cherifi, 2015: 184).

- A convention from July 1731: "*The Azzaba and Djemaa gathered and decided to impose a penalty on anyone who introduces a Malikite into the city. (...) They then established that as punishment for those who house a Malikite in the city, they will be forcefully expelled*" (Cherifi, 2015: 185).

- The convention of November 1776: "*Seeing that it was difficult to expel the Malikites and other Arabs from the houses they owned due to their long occupation, they decided to allow those who wished to convert them into open stores for storing goods without being able to live in them, or sell them to Ibadites at the price they desired (...) Any subsequent acquisition will be void and the seller, the drafter of the deed, and the witnesses will be condemned by the Azzaba and the Djemaa (...) They also decided that anyone who becomes the owner of a house or store through inheritance from a leader of an Ibadite will receive the value in money and will be required to sell it unless there is an Ibadite co-heir*" (Cherifi, 2015: 186).

- The convention of April 1795: "*It was decided that no Malikite could ever buy a property in the city (...) As for the M'Dabih, those who have been maintained in their property will remain there or their heir, but they may only sell it to the people of the city*" (Cherifi, 2015: 187).

Finally, some towns made alliances with nomads, as in the case of Melika, which signed a treaty with the Ch'anbas of Metlili following which the two towns reciprocally integrated notable members of their respective groups: ten Mozabite families from Melika settled in Métlili, just as ten Cha'anbas families from Metlili settled in Melika (Benyoucef, 1992: 177). Although this version is retained in the region's collective oral memory, it remains contested by some authors, such as Cherifi, since no itifaqne mentions this agreement between Melika and Métlili.

Conclusion

The M'Zab Valley was a place of coexistence among different groups: Arab tribes, Jews, and Ibadites. The relationships between these groups were primarily regulated by the economic and political interests that each group could derive from the others.

The various conventions mentioned earlier attest to the Mozabites' strict control over the demographic situation in their cities. They only sparingly granted citizenship rights to foreigners. Moreover, not only were the nomads perceived as foreigners, but relations with them were, at best, clientelist, and at worst, based on domination/submission. The relationship between Mozabites and Jews was different from that with the nomads, mainly because the Jews were never involved in the internal conflicts of the Mozabite clans, unlike the nomadic tribes, which acted as mercenaries for the various Mozabite clans.

This means that we can speak in this case of a "foreign policy" rather than mere diversity or coexistence. Foreigners were integrated into

the life of the *"'achiras" (tribal fractions) of the M'Zab Valley in a logic of measured inclusion. The traditional Mozabite organization assigned statuses and positions to all these groups. It is important to note that this control was not limited to "non-Mozabites.*" The Mozabites themselves were governed by strict norms despite their freedom of movement. A Mozabite could leave one city to settle in another, but he would lose the "municipal citizenship" of the first and no longer be a member of his original fraction. Instead, he would need to integrate into an 'achira in the host city and adopt the name "*nazil*," derived from the Arabic verb *nazala/*annex, which is used to describe a person who does not belong to the founding families of a city but is instead "*açil/* native of the city" In this way, he managed to maintain his rights and fulfill his duties as a citizen in his new city. This illustrates that, despite the unity of the cities in the pentapolis, each operated as an autonomous city-state and could thus assert control over its population without reverting to the confederation.

Finally, we believe that a study of the historical relationships between the different groups in the valley is essential to understanding the current situation in the M'Zab. Indeed, it is worth noting that the post-colonial period (1962) was marked by a series of violent confrontations between Mozabites and Arabs. The latter see space as a means or tool for creating a history and a memory for themselves, and thus for appropriating the town. A city from which they have been excluded for too long. The Mozabites, in a minority situation, see control of the city's space as an existential issue, and view the expansion of Arab neighborhoods with great concern. This situation has repeatedly given rise to conflicts between Mozabites and non-Mozabites, which are ostensibly ethnic and doctrinal in nature. Conflicts of this kind, the reasons for which are often derisory and banal, paint a rather suggestive picture of the troubled situation between the two communities. A simple neighborhood dispute can turn into a bloodbath. This is what happened during the most recent events in Ghardaïa between 2013 and 2015, which resulted in heavy human (25 deaths) and material damage (Oussedik, 2015; Gueliane, 2019). Hence the importance of an in-depth historical study of intercommunity relations in the M'Zab, which will certainly shed light on the issues at stake in the regio.

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