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Tedna's Memoirs: A Historical Study and Critical Analysis

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Abstract:
Western writings that document the conditions and events of Algerian society during the Ottoman period are abundant. These writings – produced by consuls, captives, and travelers – constitute some of the most significant sources for the study of Algeria in this historical era. This article examines one such account, The Memoirs of the French Captive Tedna, with the aim of highlighting its value as a major historical source for the Western Beylik during one of its most critical phases, namely the reign of Bey Mohammed El-Kebir. Adopting a critical and comparative historical approach, the study subjects Tedna's memoirs to close analysis, considering them as part of the broader corpus of "the Other's gaze" on Algerian society. While such narratives remain indispensable for historians, they require careful and cautious use due to the subjective perspectives and political contexts that shaped their production.

The study demonstrates that the Ottoman authorities derived considerable benefit from captives, both through the labor they performed and through the ransoms paid for their release, which contributed significantly to the state treasury. At the same time, these captives constituted a double-edged sword: through their writings, many of them described and interpreted the conditions of Algeria, thereby contributing – often unintentionally – to the exposure of the country to European ambitions. France, in particular, drew on such memoirs, including Tedna's, to identify the structural and political weaknesses of Algerian governance.

Keywords: *Tedna's Memoirs; Ottoman Algeria; Captivity Narratives; Western Beylik.*

Résumé :
Les écrits occidentaux qui rendent compte des conditions de vie et des événements de la société algérienne sous la domination ottomane sont nombreux. Ces écrits — rédigés par des consuls, des captifs et des voyageurs — constituent certaines des sources les plus importantes pour l'étude de l'Algérie à cette époque. Cet article examine l'un de ces récits, Les Mémoires de la captive française Tedna, dans le but de mettre en évidence sa valeur en tant que source historique majeure pour le beylik occidental durant l'une de ses phases les plus critiques, à savoir le règne du bey Mohammed El-Kebir. Adoptant une approche historique critique et comparative, l'étude soumet les mémoires de Tedna à une analyse approfondie, en les considérant comme faisant partie du corpus plus large du « regard de l'Autre » sur la société algérienne. Si de tels récits restent indispensables aux historiens, ils doivent être utilisés avec prudence et circonspection en raison des perspectives subjectives et des contextes politiques qui ont façonné leur production.
L'étude démontre que les autorités ottomanes tiraient un profit considérable des captifs, tant par le travail qu'ils effectuaient que par les rançons versées pour leur libération, qui contribuaient de manière significative au trésor public. Dans le même temps, ces captifs constituaient une arme à double tranchant : à travers leurs écrits, nombre d'entre eux décrivaient et interprétaient la situation en Algérie, contribuant ainsi — souvent involontairement — à exposer le pays aux ambitions européennes. La France, en particulier, s'est appuyée sur ces mémoires, y compris celles de Tedna, pour identifier les faiblesses structurelles et politiques de la gouvernance algérienne.
***Mots-clés** : Mémoires de Tedna ; Algérie ottomane ; Récits de captivité ; Beylik occidental.*

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Introduction

Owing to the nature of its relations with European powers during the modern period, Algeria was involved in a series of violent conflicts throughout nearly three centuries of Ottoman rule. These confrontations led to the capture of large numbers of European prisoners by the Ottoman authorities in Algeria. During their captivity, many of these individuals were able to observe the country closely, collect information on its territory and population, and record their experiences and perceptions. As a result, they produced a substantial corpus of descriptive writings that today constitutes a significant body of sources for the study of modern Algerian history.

The travel accounts and memoirs authored by European travelers and captives during the Ottoman era are particularly abundant and address a wide range of political, social, and cultural themes. Nevertheless, these narratives were shaped by the authors' individual perspectives, intentions, and intellectual frameworks, often reflecting subjective interpretations of Algerian society. By contrast, local Algerian writings from this period remain relatively scarce. Consequently, historians of modern Algeria are, to a large extent, compelled to rely on such foreign accounts; yet this reliance must remain critical, and their content cannot be accepted unconditionally or without careful scrutiny.

It is within this context that the present study focuses on the memoirs of the French captive Tedna, who was held by the Bey of the Western Beylik. This choice raises several fundamental questions: what were the principal themes addressed in Tedna's memoirs, and to what extent does his

representation of Algerian society correspond with that found in contemporary local sources?

By examining Tedna's memoirs, this study aims to underscore their significance for understanding Algerian society from historical, cultural, and social perspectives. These memoirs thus represent an important source not only for historians, but also for scholars in related fields such as sociology and economics. Methodologically, the study adopts a comparative and critical historical approach, combining analysis and evaluation in order to present a comprehensive reading of the memoirs and to assess their broader scholarly value.

1. Profile of the Captive Tedna

Tedna was of French origin, born in 1758 in Beausis into a well-to-do Catholic family. Initially destined for an ecclesiastical career, he abandoned religious schooling at an early stage, finding it incompatible with his personal inclinations. Although he briefly expressed interest in military life, this experience proved short-lived, leading him to return to civilian employment as a clerk in the service of a district agent. His inclination toward travel eventually took him to Livorno, where he resided with relatives and became engaged in commercial activities (AMIRAOUI, 2005: 32).

During a maritime voyage from Málaga to Marseille aboard a Spanish vessel, Tedna was captured by Algerian corsairs. He was subsequently sold to the Bey of Mascara, Mohammed El-Kebir, who took a particular interest in him and personally supervised his education in various administrative and political matters (AMIRAOUI, 2005: 32–33). Over time, Tedna became a close companion of the Bey during his travels and was entrusted with the position of

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khaznadar (treasurer), a role that reflected the considerable confidence placed in him. Despite the Bey's firm opposition to his release, Tedna ultimately secured his freedom by arranging the payment of a ransom amounting to 2,000 pounds through the French consul, who facilitated his escape and return to France.

Following his release, Tedna entered the service of the French consul in Sicily as a clerk. He later returned to France, where he settled in his father's household and was appointed secretary within the Office of the Telegraph Commission of the National Assembly in Paris. In 1799, he was named deputy to the General Delegation of Goury, before being appointed Vice-Consul in Alexandria by Napoleon Bonaparte. After a prolonged period of diplomatic service, Tedna retired from public life in 1825.

Tedna composed his memoirs at a moment when Napoleon Bonaparte was considering a land-based military expedition against Algeria, potentially supported by tribes opposed to Ottoman authority. Written in 1802 under the title *A View of the Regency of Algiers* and addressed to Talleyrand, commander of the French forces, these memoirs offered a detailed account of corsair activity, portrayed what Tedna described as the brutality of the Regency's institutions, and advanced the argument that a terrestrial campaign would suffice to bring about the collapse of the Regency of Algiers. He further maintained that the Dey's accumulated wealth would be sufficient to finance such an expedition in its entirety (AMIRAOUI, 2004: 206).

Although this plan was not implemented during Bonaparte's rule, Tedna's memoirs nonetheless assumed strategic significance, later serving as an intellectual and

informational framework that facilitated French preparations for the occupation of Algiers in 1830.

2. A Descriptive Study of Tedna's Memoirs

Tedna composed his memoirs while residing in a hospital in Zurich, Switzerland, during a period marked by profound despair and personal disillusionment. This psychological context left a clear imprint on the text, which often takes the form of reflective confessions through which the author acknowledged what he perceived as his own errors and misjudgments. At the same time, the memoirs were written with a strategic purpose: Tedna sought to draw closer to Napoleon Bonaparte by presenting his account as a key to understanding—and ultimately controlling—the city of Algiers. Although this objective was not immediately realized, it would acquire significance in a later political context.

A strong sense of subjectivity permeates Tedna's memoirs. He consistently presents himself with pronounced self-assurance and expresses deep attachment to his religious faith and national identity—values he was unwilling to abandon despite repeated attempts by the Bey to persuade him otherwise through material incentives and social advancement. The Ottoman authorities pursued a policy of persuasion toward Christian captives, encouraging conversion to Islam by offering positions within the state alongside various privileges and rewards. Tedna explicitly refers to this policy in his memoirs, recounting how Bey Mohammed El-Kebir urged him to convert in exchange for tangible benefits, as illustrated by the following passage:"*…I swear to you that you will never regret it if you comply with my request… I will grant you a fine house as soon as you embrace*

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Islam… I will give you two splendid horses and the finest weapons, and I will guarantee you a position for as long as you live…" (AMIRAOUI, 2003: 108–109).

From a structural perspective, Tedna's memoirs reveal a degree of narrative fragmentation. In several passages, the author addresses a particular issue only to interrupt it abruptly, shift to a different subject, and later return to complete his initial line of thought. As the narrative unfolds, the reader gains the impression of overlapping and competing ideas, suggesting either the absence of sufficient time for systematic organization or the influence of the author's unsettled psychological state at the time of writing.

Tedna's memoirs were published in *Algeria in Travel and Captivity Literature: Tedna's Memoirs as a Case Study* by Professor Hamida Amiraoui, a specialist in modern and contemporary history at Emir Abdelkader University in Constantine. Professor Amiraoui reproduced the memoirs from *The African Review* and translated them from French into Arabic. The memoirs were also published in their original French version by the French scholar Marcel Emerit[1], in *The African Review*, where they appeared in two parts under the title *Mémoires de Thédenat, natif d'Uzén, Languedoc, écrites à Zurich en 1785*.

In the present study, it was therefore necessary to rely on both the Arabic and French editions due to the inaccessibility of the original manuscript, which remains unpublished and is preserved at the National Library of France in Paris.

[1]**Marcel Emerit** was a French historian and academic. He served as Director of the Historical Services of the French Army and was also a professor at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Algiers until 1962(BEN SAHRAOUI, 2018 :99).

The importance of these memoirs lies in the valuable insights they provide into Algerian social life, particularly in the interior regions of the country, far removed from the coastal cities that dominated most European travel accounts. This spatial focus distinguishes Tedna's narrative from many contemporary European sources, whether written by captives or travelers, which concentrated primarily on coastal urban societies. Moreover, the memoirs offer significant information on the personality of Bey Mohammed El-Kebir and his policies toward both the population and the tribes, as observed from an external perspective that can be critically compared with local narratives.

Among the local sources that addressed his rule are *Dalīl al-Ḥayrān wa-Anīs al-Sahrān fī Akhbār Madīnat Wahrān* by Shaykh Mohammed ibn Youssef al-Zayyani[2], *Al-Thaghr al-Jumānī fī Ibtisām al-Thaghr al-Wahrānī* by Ahmed ibn Sahnoun al-Rashidi[3], and *The Journey of Mohammed El-Kebir, Bey of the Algerian West, to the Southern Algerian Sahara* by Ibn Hattal al-Tilimsani[4].

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[2]He belonged to a scholarly family from the vicinity of Bordj Ayyash, near Mascara. He was appointed judge in the town of Bordj in 1861, and later served as a judge in the Wadi Sig region(AL-ZAYANI, 2013 :27–28).

[3]He belonged to a scholarly family; his father, Shaykh Mohammed ibn ʿAli ibn Sahnoun al-Rashidi, served as the Chief Judge of Mascara. He was also closely associated with the court of Bey Mohammed ibn ʿUthman, where he was entrusted with the education of his son ʿUthman and served as commander of his forces(IBN SAHNOUN AL-RASHIDI, 2013 :67).

[4]He served as a secretary and adviser to Mohammed El-Kebir, Bey of Oran, and acted as his envoy on external missions. He later held the same position during the reign of his son, ʿUthman, and subsequently served as secretary to Bey Mustafa ʿAbdallah al-ʿAjami, the fourth Bey of the Western Beylik(IBN HATTAL AL-TILIMSANI, 1969 :13–14).

Received: 12/06/2025 Accepted: 07/01/2026 Published: 13/04/2026

3. The Main Issues Addressed by Tedna in His Memoirs

In his memoirs, Tedna addressed a number of issues related to the modern history of Algeria. Among the most prominent are the following:

3.1. The Issue of Captives

In his memoirs, Tedna devoted considerable attention to the issue of captivity, a subject that has long occupied a central place in historical scholarship, particularly within studies of modern Algerian history and the country's external relations. This emphasis is closely linked to Algeria's position as a major maritime power in the Mediterranean, where naval warfare and corsair activity—conducted within the framework of what was contemporarily understood as maritime jihad—resulted in the capture of large numbers of Europeans aboard commercial and military vessels. Consequently, captivity emerged as a defining feature of Mediterranean interactions between Algeria and European states during the Ottoman period.

According to Tedna's account of his own experience, securing his release proved more complex and prolonged than was the case for many other captives. Bey Mohammed El-Kebir firmly opposed the payment of his ransom, having placed exceptional trust in him—trust that was rarely accorded to captives, particularly given the sensitive nature of the position of *khaznadar* (treasurer), which required unquestionable integrity and absolute confidence in the management of the state's financial affairs.

Most captives in Algeria were subjected to broadly similar conditions from the moment of their arrival until either their release or their conversion to Islam, which could lead to

subsequent integration into the state apparatus. A limited number were selected for service in the Dey's palacesuch as the captive James LeanderCathcart[5], or were assigned to serve high-ranking officials, particularly those of prominent social or political standing. This selective placement served a dual purpose: on the one hand, it ensured the payment of substantial ransoms, often deliberately set at high amounts; on the other, it allowed the authorities to benefit from the captives' professional skills and expertise. The remainder, however, were sent either to the slave markets or confined within the prisons of the Beylik.

Although some captives eventually rose to official positions within the state, the initial conditions of captivity were largely uniform. Cathcart's description of captive life and the treatment he received does not differ substantially from that of other captives such as Tedna,Simon Pfeiffer[6], Wendelin Schlösser, and others who experienced periods of captivity in Algeria. These accounts collectively suggest a shared framework of captivity that transcended individual backgrounds, at least during the early stages.

The lived experience of captives nevertheless varied according to social status and the nature of the labor assigned to them. Overall, however, captivity—as described by the

[5]**Cathcart:** James Leander Cathcart, of Scottish origin, born in 1767. He traveled to America at an early age, where his father placed him under the guardianship of a relative of Captain John Cathcart. He was captured in 1785 by Algerian sailors(CATHCART, 1982 :9–17).

[6]**Simon Pfeiffer** was a German captive and surgeon. He was captured by the Janissaries while on an outing with friends near the city of Izmir and was subsequently taken to Algeria, where he spent nearly five years in captivity in the residence of the *khaznadar* (treasurer), remaining there until the French occupation of the city of Algiers(PFEIFFER, 1974 :4–6).

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captives themselveswas marked by hardship, anxiety, and deprivation. Many were reduced to begging in the streets (AMIRAOUI, 2003: 102), while others were subjected to corporal punishment, including flogging and shackling with chains, and, in certain cases, execution (CATHCART, 1982: 30). Tedna notes that punishment was imposed when captives committed offenses or errors. In the case of Simon Pfeiffer, for example, his insult to religion and the Qur'an resulted in an order by the *khaznadar* that he be flogged one hundred and fifty times, narrowly escaping execution (PFEIFFER, 1974: 31–32). Shackling was generally reserved for serious offenses or imposed temporarily when European vessels entered the port of Algiers, owing to fears of escape (CATHCART, 1982: 27).

Despite the harshness that often characterized captivity, contemporaneous observers emphasized that captives were governed by what William Shaler, the American consul in Algiers, described as a universal principle: captivity stripped individuals of legal protection and effective means of self-defense (SCHALLER, 1982: 100). At the same time, captives were permitted a limited degree of autonomy. Many engaged in small-scale commercial activities, including trade and the sale of alcoholic beverages within prison taverns, earning income that allowed them to sustain themselves and assist fellow captives. Tedna refers to one such case, noting: "...he asked me for forty coins as an advance in order to undertake a small trade in the arcades (*porche*)..." (EMERIT, 1984: 343).

In addition to commerce, captives practiced a variety of professions and crafts, such as tailoring, shoemaking, leather tanning, and the manufacture of gunpowder and cannons. They were also permitted to rent workshops from their

owners in exchange for a fixed financial payment (AICHA, 2012: 476).

A significant number of captives converted to Islam, either out of genuine conviction or in pursuit of the social and material incentives offered by the authorities. Tedna reports that Bey Mohammed El-Kebir and his wife offered him substantial sums of money, as well as marriage to two young women, in exchange for conversionoffers he ultimately refused, remaining steadfast in his faith (EMERIT, 1984: 173–174). Nevertheless, despite his refusal to convert, Tedna retained the position of *khaznadar* within the Beylik, and his opinions carried considerable weight with the Bey. Owing to the status he attained, he was able, for instance, to secure the pardon of a woman and a slave accused of adultery. Similarly, many captives—particularly those possessing skills in literacy, medicine, or the sciences—were appointed to official positions. Among them was Simon Pfeiffer, who later became the personal physician of the *khaznadar* after it was discovered that he had practiced surgery prior to his capture by the Janissaries (PFEIFFER, 1974: 26).

Among the captives were also individuals who attained official positions within the state despite not converting to Islam. A prominent example is James Leander Cathcart, who initially entered service as a laborer in the garden of the Dey's palace before gradually ascending the administrative hierarchy. By 1792, he had reached the position of Chief Secretary and subsequently emerged as a key intermediary between the United States and Algeria. His role proved decisive in the negotiation and conclusion of the peace treaty signed between the two parties on 5 September 1795 (CATHCART, 1982: 138–153).

Received: 12/06/2025 Accepted: 07/01/2026 Published: 13/04/2026

The process of securing a captive's release typically required sustained effort and repeated negotiations. In some cases, captives themselves raised the funds necessary to pay their ransom, as Tedna did (EMERIT, 1984: 342–344). In others, responsibility fell to the captive's home state, which assumed the cost of ransom payments through its consular representatives in Algiers. Additionally, certain captives were redeemed through the intervention of religious institutions entrusted with this mission and supported by the Church. Among the most prominent of these organizations were the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives and the Order of Our Lady of Mercy (KORBACHE, 2016: 190–198).

Beyond individual ransoms, captives were also liberated through formal exchanges between states. This mechanism became particularly evident in relations between the United States and Algeria following the appointment of William Shaler as American consul. Shaler played a central role in the successful conclusion of a treaty whose most significant provisions included the reciprocal exchange of American captives for Algerian prisoners, without the payment of any financial compensation (KORBACHE, 2016: 96).

3.2. The Issue of *Danush*

The relationship between the three Beys and the Dey was fundamentally characterized by hierarchy and political subordination, one of its clearest manifestations being the payment of the *danush*. This levy constituted a periodic obligation imposed on the Beys and paid to the Dey as a reaffirmation of loyalty and submission. The principal form of this payment, commonly referred to as the *major danush*,

was delivered personally by the Bey every three years. During Tedna's stay in Mascara, the capital of the Western Beylik, an additional form of payment was observed in the presence of the Beylik's *khalifa*[7]. This payment, known as the *minor danush*, was made every six months (EMERIT, 1984: 175).

The *danush* was not paid uniformly across the Beyliks in terms of timing. The Bey of the Eastern Beylik customarily delivered it during the summer, whereas the Bey of the Western Beylik paid it in the autumn (AL-ZAHAR, 1980: 49). Among the inhabitants of Titteri, these payments were colloquially referred to as the "summer fine" and the "winter fine," reflecting both their seasonal character and their perceived burden (SAIDOUNI, 1979: 98).

Beyond its fiscal dimension, the *danush* functioned as a political mechanism designed to secure the Dey's favor and to renew the Bey's mandate to govern the Beylik. It consisted of an elaborate collection of gifts presented by the Bey to the Dey. When the Dey expressed satisfaction, he would send the Bey a *kaftan*, a symbolic garment that signified the confirmation and continuation of his authority. Conversely, the absence of such a gesture was understood as a clear indication of dismissal from office (CATHCART, 1982: 117).

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[7]Mohammed al-Salih al-ʿAntari defined the *khalifa* as: "the official responsible for the districts or regions of the Beylik, under whose authority the *qaids* and organized militia forces operated. He oversaw the collection of taxes and was charged with enforcing the authority of the Beylik's government over the population. He traveled twice a year to Algiers, in the spring and autumn, to deliver the *danush* to the Pasha, in cases where the Bey did not undertake the journey himself."(AL-ANTARI, 2009 :20).

Received: 12/06/2025 Accepted: 07/01/2026 Published: 13/04/2026

According to Tedna, the financial value of the *danush* at times exceeded that of regular taxation. Cathcart estimated its worth at approximately fifty mules laden with money (AMIRAOUI, 2003: 114), supplemented by forty Barbary horses and six additional mules carrying gold. These offerings were presented not only to the Dey but also to the members of the Divan, underscoring the collective political function of the *danush* as both a fiscal burden and a tool of governance (CATHCART, 1982: 116).

Upon entering the territorial boundaries of the capital, the Bey was received by the Agha of the Arabs at a locality known as Boufarik, situated between Blida and Algiers. Following the prescribed rituals of hospitality, the Bey presented his gift, after which both parties proceeded together until reaching a site known as ʿAyn al-Rabt, located approximately half an hour from the capital. At this point, the *khaznaji* formally received the Bey and escorted him, along with his entourage, to the seat of government (*Dār al-Imāra*) (AL-ZAHAR, 1980: 37–39).

The Bey's formal entry into Algiers was marked by an elaborate public ceremony, during which the city's inhabitants gathered to welcome him. As he advanced through the city, the Bey customarily scattered coins among the crowd, a gesture that reinforced both generosity and authority, until he reached the residence of the Pasha. There, he dismounted, exchanged formal greetings, and pledged allegiance through the ritual act of *bayʿa*. After remaining seated for a brief period, he departed for the residence prepared for him. On the following day, the Bey returned to present his gifts, beginning with the Dey.

According to contemporary sources, the gift offered to the Dey consisted of substantial sums of money, male and female slaves, textiles, ostrich feathers and eggs, and carpets (AL-MAZARI: 273). Al-Sharif al-Zahhar estimated the total value of these offerings at approximately twenty thousand *duros* in cash, in addition to jewelry worth nearly half that amount. The gifts further included four purebred horses, approximately thirty adult slaves and twenty younger Sudanese slaves, *ḥiyāk al-qirmiz*[8]produced in Tlemcen, *ḥiyāk al-ḥarīr al-muḥabbaba* manufactured in Fez, gold-adorned *balāghī* and *rawāḥī*, as well as gold-embroidered *shatrambiyyāt*[9]. Additional offerings comprised nearly twenty quintals of wax, an equivalent quantity of honey, and similar amounts of clarified butter and walnuts (AL-ZAHAR, 1980: 40).

The gift presented to the *khaznaji* amounted to approximately two thousand *duros*, or slightly less, accompanied by furniture, jewelry, horses, and slaves, as well as *ḥiyāk qirmiz*, silk textiles, *burnūs* cloaks, wax, honey, and rice. The gift offered to the *khūjat al-khayl* was estimated at roughly half the value of that presented to the *khaznaji*, while the *wakīl al-ḥarj* received an equivalent offering. By contrast, the gift allocated to the *wakīl bayt al-māl* was comparatively more modest than those presented to the other officials (AL-ZAHAR, 1980: 40–45).

Once the presentation of gifts had been completed, the Divan convened to deliberate. If the Bey's conduct and offerings were deemed satisfactory, the Dey would transmit,

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[8]**Qirmiz (Crimson):** A red-colored substance that develops on trees and is subsequently dried; it was used as a dye for wool(AL-ZAHAR, 1980 :58).

[9]**Shatrambiyyāt:** Square-shaped, embroidered cushions used for reclining or support while seated(AL-ZAHAR, 1980 :58).

Received: 12/06/2025 Accepted: 07/01/2026 Published: 13/04/2026

through his chief official, the *kaftan* symbolizing the renewal and continuation of the Bey's mandate. The absence of this symbolic gesture, however, constituted an unequivocal signal of dismissal and the termination of the Bey's authority (CATHCART, 1982: 117).

3.3. Customs and Traditions

Tedna devoted particular attention to the customs and traditions he observed within Algerian society, especially in the Western Beylik, with a notable focus on practices related to betrothal and marriage. According to his account, when a young man expressed the intention to marry, one prevailing social expectation was that he should not have had any prior direct acquaintance with the prospective bride (AMIRAOUI, 2003: 89).

The selection of potential brides took place through socially sanctioned spaces that structured gender interaction. Public bathhouses (*ḥammāmāt*), which served as primary sites for women's social gatherings, played a central role in this process, functioning as spaces where women could observe and evaluate one another. Alternatively, rooftops constituted another means of indirect visibility, as women moved across adjoining terraces, allowing men to see them[10]. without direct

[10]It should be noted that the movement of women across rooftops during that period was not intended, as Tedna suggested, to allow men to see them. Rather, women customarily avoided moving through public streets and instead traveled across rooftops, a practice which, incidentally, drew attention to them and made them visible to men. This clarification underscores the need for a critical reading of Tedna's account and highlights the interpretive limitations inherent in external narratives of Algerian social practices.

interaction. Preliminary marriage arrangements were often initiated or informally agreed upon within the setting of the bathhouses, underscoring their importance as key social institutions in the regulation of marital practices (BAHRI: 460).

Marriage in Algerian society was also commonly arranged through mediation. An elderly woman customarily acted as an intermediary between the two families involved in the prospective union, moving from house to house to inquire about girls who had reached marriageable age (BAHRI: 461). During this period, the age of female maturity was generally considered to range between twelve and thirteen years (SPENCER, 2006: 116), reflecting social norms specific to the historical and cultural context of the time.

Once a match was agreed upon, the groom negotiated with the bride's family over the *mahr* (dower). Tedna interpreted this practice as reducing women to commodities subject to purchase and exchange. Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the Islamic legal and moral conception of the *mahr*, through which Islam sought to confer dignity and protection upon women by establishing it as an essential condition of a valid marriage. This dimension is notably absent from Tedna's account, revealing the limitations of his interpretive framework. The marriage contract was concluded before a judge through a legal procedure known as *al-fātiḥa* or *al-ʿaqd al-sharʿī* (EMERIT, 1984: 332–333).In addition to the *mahr*, the groom provided the bride with a range of material goods, including two kaftansone lined with fur—four pairs of bracelets, two enslaved Sudanese maidservants, and approximately four quintals of wool. He was also required to commit to the payment of a deferred dower (*muʾakhkhar al-*

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ṣadāq), which served as a further financial safeguard for the wife.

Marriage contracts often included conditions stipulated by the woman herself, among them a clause prohibiting the husband from taking another wife or keeping a concubine (*umm walad*) without her consent (BEN HAMMADOUCHE, 2011: 239). The husband was likewise legally bound to provide appropriate care and maintenance for his wife, and failure to fulfill these obligations entitled her to seek judicial dissolution of the marriage. In cases involving children, custody was divided in accordance with prevailing legal norms: sons remained under the guardianship of the father, while daughters were placed in the care of the mother. Tedna expressed astonishment at this arrangement, particularly at the idea of a mother relinquishing custody of her sons, drawing a comparison with Christian maternal ideals. This comparison illustrates the extent to which his cultural and religious background shaped his interpretation of Algerian family practices, thereby highlighting the inherent subjectivity and cultural bias present in his narrative (EMERIT, 1984: 332–333).

Prior to the wedding day, the bride customarily invited the women of the city to a *henna* ceremony, a festive event marked by ululations (*zaghārīd*) and the firing of gunpowder. According to established custom, the bride was carried on the back of a robust woman and seated on a chair, where her hand was adorned with henna by an elderly woman. A gold coin was placed in her right hand as a symbolic gesture intended to bring good fortune (BAHRI: 464).

On the wedding day itself, food was prepared for the guests, with a clear spatial separation maintained between

men and women. The women gathered to accompany the bride until the arrival of the groom, while the marriage ceremony took place in the house of the bride's father. Following the completion of the wedding, the husband escorted his wife to their marital residence (AMIRAOUI, 2003: 90). Ibn Hamadoush further notes that it was customary for the bride's father to provide accommodation for the newly married couple for a specified period without charging rent, a practice that underscores the familial dimension of marriage in Algerian society (BEN HAMMADOUCHE, 2011: 242).

Among the religious practices observed by Tedna was prayer, which he recognized as a central pillar of Islamic life. He noted the strong attachment of Algerian society to religious observance and its commitment to performing prayers regularly and at prescribed times. Ablution preceded prayer and involved the washing of the feet, hands, and face, while a full ritual purification (*ghusl*) was performed when individuals believed themselves to be in a state of ritual impurity[11]. Tedna further remarked that worshippers oriented themselves toward what he described as the direction of sunrise during prayer—an observation that reflects his personal interpretation rather than a precise understanding of Islamic ritual practice.

Tedna also described burial rites in the society of Mascara, noting that the deceased was washed with scented water, shrouded, and buried in a moderately deep grave sprinkled with water prior to interment. He claimed that a written note containing a supplication or a request for intercession

[11]What Tedna referred to in this context corresponds to the *major ritual purification* (*ghusl*). In Islamic practice, a Muslim who is in a state of *janāba* is required to perform a full ritual bath in order for the prayer to be considered valid

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addressed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was placed beneath the head of the deceased before the grave was covered with stones and sand (EMERIT, 1984: 334).

4. Historical Inaccuracies in Tedna's Memoirs

In his memoirs, the captive Tedna presented a variety of accounts concerning the Ottoman authorities and the policies they pursued toward Algerian society. He also described numerous social and religious practices, at times expressing approval while at other moments offering sharp condemnation. Embedded within these observations, however, are several historical inaccuracies that necessitate careful scrutiny. Consequently, any reliance on Tedna's memoirs for the reconstruction of Algerian society during this period requires a high degree of critical awareness and methodological caution, as their content cannot be accepted uncritically or at face value.

One of the most problematic accounts concerns religious practices related to burial rites. Tedna claimed that, prior to the closure of the grave, a written note containing a recommendation or a request for intercession addressed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was placed beneath the head of the deceased. This assertion stands in direct contradiction to established Islamic doctrine and normative Muslim burial practices. No evidence of such a custom exists in the time of the Prophet's Companions, nor in subsequent Islamic periods. Moreover, Tedna's claim finds no support in the corpus of prophetic biography (*sīra*), in the two canonical collections of ḥadīth—*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*—or in contemporary sources from the period of his presence in Algeria, whether authored by local scholars or

European observers. This absence is particularly significant given the meticulous attention paid by European writers of the time to social customs and ritual practices. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that this element of Tedna's account reflects either a misunderstanding or an imaginative reconstruction rather than an established social reality.

Tedna's treatment of funerary practices is further marked by notable omissions and interpretive bias. He made no reference to the funeral prayer (*ṣalāt al-janāza*), a central component of Islamic burial rites, an omission that may be attributed either to oversight or to deliberate exclusion. He also described the conduct of the deceased's family prior to burial, asserting that they proceeded to eat after shrouding the body, thereby implying a lack of emotional sensitivity and concern. This portrayal is reinforced by his claim that "the deceased is forgotten less than five hours after burial" (EMERIT, 1984: 333–334). Such statements reflect not an objective observation of social behavior, but rather an interpretive framework shaped by cultural preconceptions and value judgments.

More broadly, Tedna's representation of Algerian society was frequently structured through implicit comparison with his own European cultural and religious norms. When discussing Algerian women, for example, he contrasted their behavior—particularly in matters of child custody following divorce—with that of European women, whom he portrayed as morally superior. These comparisons reveal an underlying attempt to diminish Algerian society, which Tedna himself repeatedly characterized as "barbarian." Such language underscores the ethnocentric assumptions that informed his narrative and shaped his interpretation of social practices.

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Tedna also reported that he maintained a personal library and claimed that the inhabitants of western Algeria were astonished by the number of books it contained. He further asserted that the number of educated individuals in Mascara did not exceed one hundred (EMERIT, 1984: 180–181). This claim, however, invites serious critical reassessment. Under Ottoman rule—and particularly during the governorship of Bey Mohammed El-Kebir—Mascara witnessed a notable expansion of educational and religious institutions. The Bey actively patronized scholars and students, founding two madrasas, one in Mascara and another in Oran (AL-MAZARI: 295). The latter was described by the author of *al-Thaghr al-Jumānī fī Ibtisām al-Thaghr al-Wahrānī* as an institution from whose very walls "learning was on the verge of bursting forth," and it was endowed with an adjacent mosque library (*khizānat kutub*) (IBN SAHNOUN AL-RASHIDI, 2013: 136). In light of this institutional landscape, Tedna's numerical estimate appears exaggerated and inconsistent with the documented scale of educational activity in the region.

Tedna further claimed that during his military campaigns, Bey Mohammed El-Kebir confiscated everything that came into his possession, including women (EMERIT, 1984: 182). While such practices were not unknown under Ottoman administration—as evidenced by the conduct of Bey Mohammed ibn ʿUthman, known as Boukabous, who seized property and took women and children captive during his expedition against the ʿArīb tribes (BEN ABDELKADER, 1974: 100–101)—Tedna's generalization requires contextualization.

Indeed, the testimony of Ibn al-Hattal al-Tilimsani, the official scribe of Bey Mohammed El-Kebir, presents a

markedly different narrative. According to Ibn al-Hattal, despite conducting numerous campaigns against rebellious tribes, the Bey demonstrated a deliberate concern for preserving the dignity of women. During the siege of the tribes of Jabal Rashid, he explicitly ordered his troops not to harm women nor to seize any part of their clothing, emphasizing the protection of honor. He also instructed that the elderly and children be spared, motivated by considerations of compassion and restraint (IBN HATTAL AL-TILIMSANI, 1969: 47).

This account is corroborated by the author of *al-Thaghr al-Jumānī*, who reported that when Bey Mohammed El-Kebir launched a campaign against ʿAyn Madi following its refusal to pay the imposed taxes, he initially gathered the women and children but ultimately granted clemency after the inhabitants agreed to fulfill their fiscal obligations (IBN SAHNOUN AL-RASHIDI, 2013: 147).

A similar pattern emerges in the Bey's expedition against the tribes of the Laghouat region, undertaken after they violated an agreement and refused to pay the annual levy. Although the campaign was initially severe and nearly resulted in their annihilation, the intervention of religious scholars led to the granting of pardon once the allied tribes had dispersed. Clemency was extended on the condition that the annual tax be paid and that hostages be provided from among the sons of tribal notables as guarantees. Captives were taken, with the exception of those who were ransomed by their families (IBN HATTAL AL-TILIMSANI, 1969: 54–67).

Taken together, these contrasting accounts demonstrate the necessity of contextual and comparative analysis when assessing Tedna's memoirs. While they remain a valuable source, their content must be evaluated alongside local

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narratives and documentary evidence in order to distinguish between factual observation, cultural misunderstanding, and ideological bias.

Conclusions

- Tedna's memoirs constitute an important source for the study of modern Algerian history, as they provide firsthand testimony on the social and economic conditions of the western regions of Algeria at the end of the eighteenth century—areas that received little attention from European travelers and historians due to their distance from the coast, which was the primary focus of European interest.
- Although captives' memoirs are considered significant primary sources for the study of modern Algerian history, researchers must approach the information derived from them with caution. This is due to the fact that their authors were often captives whose writings were strongly influenced by subjectivity and hostility toward the Ottomans and Muslims, shaped by the broader context of conflict between Islam and Christianity at the time.
- The Ottoman Turks benefited from captives both through the labor they performed and through the ransoms paid for their release, which contributed to the enrichment of the state treasury. However, captives also constituted a double-edged sword: many of them documented and depicted the conditions of Algeria in their writings, thereby exposing the country

to European ambitions. European powers drew on such memoirs—among them Tedna's—to identify Algeria's vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

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