

The Algerian Treasury And Its Resources During The Ottoman Period (1519-1830)

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Abstract:

The economic history of Algeria during the modern period, specifically under Ottoman rule (1519-1830), represents a significant phase in Algeria's general history. During this period – except for perhaps the last three decades – Algeria experienced economic prosperity, with revenues exceeding expenditures, and the financial resources of the Regency being abundant and varied.

Algeria's economic foundations during the modern period were diverse and rich, with thriving economic activities due to a combination of natural factors such as diverse resources, fertile land, a moderate and varied climate, and a strategic geographical position linking continents and countries. Additionally, human factors contributed significantly, including the craftsmanship, diligence, and strong work ethic of Algerian workers, as well as interactions and influences from other civilizations, like the remnants of Andalusian culture and skilled Christian captives, who helped urban centers, especially coastal ones, to flourish.

During the modern era, Algeria's economy encompassed various activities. Agricultural production was thriving, with production methods advanced for the time, yielding plentiful outputs that not only met domestic market needs but also exceeded them. Industrial activity also diversified and generally prospered, with numerous crafts and trades spreading across cities and rural areas alike. Algerian artisans gained renown throughout Algeria, and Algerian products became known in different parts of the world.

Thanks to the abundance of agricultural products and the diversity of industrial production, coupled with Algeria's active internal and external markets, trade flourished both

domestically and internationally. Markets, shops, and trade fairs became widespread, and foreign trade occurred with numerous countries and regions, from the Maghreb countries to Africa and the Islamic East, reaching as far as Europe. Overall, Algeria's trade balance was favorable, with exports outweighing imports.

At that time, the Algerian treasury was wealthy and well-stocked, attracting the envy of other nations. Most of its resources came from maritime warfare spoils, as Algeria was a significant naval power in the western Mediterranean, competing with the world's major powers of that era. This naval strength bolstered Algeria's political stature and brought substantial financial revenues through spoils or ransom payments for Christian captives, whom foreign nations were compelled to redeem, or through tributes imposed on countries as part of peace agreements with Algeria.

Keywords: Algeria - Ottoman era - Treasury - Naval Jihad – Treasury.

Introduction:

Algeria held a distinguished position during the Ottoman era, a status owed to the state's governance policies based on principles designed for effective administration.

Under Ottoman rule, Algeria developed financial institutions that received attention across various aspects of life, including the financial apparatus. To ensure efficient management of resources, the Treasury and the Treasury House (Bayt al-Mal) were entrusted with this responsibility. The Treasury served as the foundation of the Ottoman Algerian economy.

This leads us to question:

what were the primary resources of the Algerian Treasury during the Ottoman period, and how were they utilized by the Regency?

First: The Algerian Treasury and Its Officials:

A. Definition of the Treasury:

1. Linguistically:

The term "treasury" (khazina) or "storehouse" refers to a place where items are stored. "Treasury" (khazana)

also signifies the function of the treasurer, while a "storage place" (makhzan) is where items are kept. Figuratively, a person's heart is their treasury, and the tongue serves as its keeper. As Luqman advised his son, "If your treasurer is trustworthy and your treasury secure, you will be guided in both your worldly and spiritual matters," meaning the heart and the tongue¹.

2. Terminologically:

It is the place where valuable jewels and money, whether belonging to individuals or the state, are safeguarded. In the Ottoman Empire, there were two treasuries: the Financial Treasury, or the State Treasury, known as the "Outer Treasury" or the "Ample Treasury," and the Private Treasury, which was under the Sultan's authority ².

As for the Algerian State Treasury, it consisted of arched underground chambers, accessible through a fortified door in the building where the council convened. Sixteen guards were stationed permanently at the door, seated on wooden benches. Only the treasurer (khaznaji) was authorized to enter. The treasury key was held by the Dey, who handed it to the treasurer each morning. The treasury housed golden swords, daggers, ornate rifles, jewelry, and rubies, which reverted to the state upon the death of high-ranking officials ³.

B. Supervisors of the Treasury:

The actual supervision and practical management of treasury affairs were entrusted to both the Dey and the Treasurer.

1. The Dey:

The Dey's oversight of the treasury was procedural and supervisory, focused on ensuring financial sources for the treasury, monitoring financial activities such as wage payments, approving price setting for products, addressing price manipulators, and assessing the value of the treasury's currency. Therefore, the Dey was required to attend council sessions to stay informed about treasury activities and resolve related matters ⁴.

2. The Treasurer (Khaznaji):

Serving as the Minister of Finance responsible for the state treasury, the Treasurer was the sole keyholder to the general treasury, and the treasury could not be opened without his presence ⁵. The Treasurer also appointed Algerian employees known as "Sabayhi," whose duties included counting money entering and exiting the treasury ⁶. The Treasurer performed his financial duties in the presence of the Dey and council members, with assistance from several clerks, including the Mukatabji, the Dafter Dey, and the Senior Foreign Agent ⁷.

C. The Resources of the Algerian Treasury During the Ottoman Era:

First – Economic Duties in the City:

These duties were numerous in the early Ottoman period, then gradually decreased and disappeared by the 18th century. However, they saw significant growth towards the end of the Ottoman period due to efforts to develop the navy and increase its military activities, especially during Europe's involvement in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The primary revenues from maritime warfare spoils were allocated to the state, which took one-fifth, with the remainder distributed among those who contributed to outfitting the ship.

These spoils came from three main sources: captured goods from ships at sea, ransoms for captives, and tributes paid by various European countries as part of formal agreements to protect their vessels. There was a fourth source: fees for docking permissions, with ships paying 50 Spanish piastres⁸, half in Spanish currency and half in dirhams, along with charges for ship repairs and shipbuilding workshops ⁹. These spoils provided a livelihood and a key driver for the Algerian economy, making it a lucrative venture according to many historians. The state received one-seventh and one-tenth of spoils, 12% from seized ships' values, and acquired all confiscated weaponry and ransom payments for European captives. For example, Spain paid an annual ransom of 60,000 piastres for 200-300 captives .

This maritime activity was largely due to the efforts of skilled and renowned sailors, such as Rais Hamidou, whose capture of a Portuguese ship brought significant profits to Algeria ¹⁰. The capture of spoils continued until 1827, covering the Regency's

financial deficits, but the campaign led by Lord Exmouth in 1816 marked an end to this prosperity ¹¹.

1. Tributes and Gifts:

These were imposed by the Algerian state on European countries trading with it in exchange for free navigation in the Mediterranean and special commercial privileges, such as customs duty reductions. This contradicts the European narrative of piracy or infringement on global trade freedom often ascribed to Algerian sailors ¹².

Toward the end of the Algerian Regency, these tributes and gifts became more of diplomatic tokens rather than significant financial contributions. They became a means for securing navigation freedoms and exclusive trade privileges ¹³. The tribute amounts varied depending on the diplomatic relations and prevailing circumstances at the time ¹⁴. Additionally, some other states were required to pay tribute on certain occasions, including the principalities of Bremen, Hanover, Prussia, and the Papal States.

Examples include:

- In 1780, Salim Agha received a gift from the Sultan consisting of 450 barrels of gunpowder, 200 rifles, 50 oars, 50 pieces of copper, 20,000 bombs, and 10 cannons.
- In 1819, Dey Hussein received cannons with all military equipment from the Ottoman Sultan as an intermediary.

2. Income from Commercial Shops and Professional Guilds:

During the Ottoman period, shops contributed a mandatory monthly amount to the treasury ¹⁵. Professional guilds also contributed to the treasury by donating various products, which could include weapons, saddles, reins, and more, all provided free of charge ¹⁶.

3. The Donush:

Every three years, the three Beys were required to bring significant amounts of money and wealth to Algiers, some of which went to the treasury, while others were allocated as gifts and financial rewards to the Regency's officials. Every six months, in spring and autumn, the Beys' deputies came to the capital to deliver the "small donush" or "dues," which acted as

a tithe from the Beys and Qayids for their subjects. The Donush served as a method for the Pasha to inspect and monitor the Beys of the three provinces and the head of Sbaou, who could either be confirmed in their positions or dismissed if there were doubts about their conduct. Donush revenues varied by province and year. The Dey's gifts and entourage expenses were estimated at 950 piastres, while the Eastern Bey's Donush in 1822 was estimated at 250,105 piastres, and the Western Bey's Donush at 302,482 francs. American Consul Shaler estimated the revenue from Bayt al-Mal in 1822 to be 262,000 dollars in taxes from the Beys and 192,800 dollars in European tributes ¹⁷.

4. Levies on Jews and Christians:

This jizya tax was imposed on non-Muslim residents, the Dhimmis, in Islamic territories in exchange for protection, security, and the preservation of their religious practices. The head of each Dhimmi community was responsible for paying this levy on behalf of their members, with the rate set at one piastre per person ¹⁸.

5. Revenue from Bayt al-Mal:

The revenue from Bayt al-Mal held a prominent position within the financial organization of the Regency, with a dedicated fund in the treasury managed through three separate registers maintained by the Saiji, the Adil, and the Khoja. This significance was due to the wealth it provided, which helped cover treasury deficits. On the eve of the occupation, the Bayt al-Mal fund supplied nearly 700 francs to the treasury ¹⁹.

Bayt al-Mal derived its wealth from several primary sources:

- **Real Estate Assets:** These properties, directly owned by the Beylik, contributed a large portion of Bayt al-Mal's wealth. According to estimates for the city of Algiers, there were approximately 5,000 buildings, generating 40 million francs annually for the Regency's budget.
- **Inheritances and Deposits:** These assets reverted to Bayt al-Mal upon the death of their owners, further enriching the public treasury. Once a sum of 50,000 francs was accumulated, it would be transferred to the general treasury to cover state expenses ²⁰.
- **Revenues from Habous and Endowments:** Although these were primarily intended for charitable and social

services, they occasionally provided financial resources for Bayt al-Mal ²¹.

Second – Economic Duties in the Countryside:

The taxes and fees imposed on rural residents were diverse, with notable examples as follows:

1. Tithes and Zakat:

Tithes were taxes on wealth²², constituting direct, legally mandated taxes on private property under the actual oversight of the Beylik. Typically, the Beylik claimed only a tenth of agricultural produce ²³. However, in practice, it followed established local customs, often based on the principle of "zawija" or "jabda" ²⁴. The exact collection of tithes fell to the Tithe Commander, the Khoja al-Ma'una, or the Grain Store. The amounts collected were directed to the treasury for army salaries, aid for the poor and orphans, and judge salaries, among other expenses ²⁵.

Accordingly, the quantity of crops collected was based on estimated land productivity, not the actual harvest yield. The tithe tax was typically collected in the form of wheat and barley ²⁶. Over time, the state adjusted the zakat rate, previously set at a tenth, due to certain abuses in collection, where either the state did not fully receive its due, or collectors overcharged. Thus, the state established measures to prevent these abuses, which primarily affected farmers ²⁷.

2. Revenue and Fees from Beylik Land:

The lands owned by the Beylik formed a significant agricultural sector, impacting rural economic life. A large portion of the population relied on these lands through tenancy, wage labor, or as sharecroppers. The Beylik had acquired these lands through confiscation practices carried out by the Beys in the Beylik or by the Aghas in Dar al-Sultan, such as Ahmed Bey's confiscation of Beylik ²⁸lands. Some lands were also acquired through state purchase or inheritance without legal heirs. The term "isolation" associated with these lands refers to their original state, implying removal or abandonment.

These lands were exploited through a sharecropping system or rented out:

- A. **Sharecropping System (Direct Exploitation):** In this system, farmers worked the land on behalf of the state in return for one-fifth of the produce. The state

provided land, plows, animals, and seeds, and the sharecropper earned a respectable income estimated at 343 francs per day for his work.

- B. **Land Rental (Indirect Exploitation):** Lands were rented out for in-kind or monetary returns, which were collected by the tax collectors at the end of the year, disregarding losses caused by natural disasters. This indirect exploitation of state lands fostered ties between city and countryside, with the urban elite, especially the wealthy, acting as intermediaries between rural farmers and the state ²⁹.

3. Taxes on 'Arch Land' and Regions Outside Beylik Influence:

The primary taxes on these lands include fines, "Lazma" (special tax), "Ma'una" (assistance tax), and "Khattaya" (penalties).

- **Fines (Gharama):** Imposed on areas beyond the actual control of the Beylik, such as the desert, high plateaus, and mountainous regions like Greater Kabylia and northern Constantine, these fines served as substitutes for tithes and were paid either in cash or in kind. Typically, fines were paid in kind, usually as livestock and food products, given their availability among the local populations ³⁰.
- **Ma'una and Lazma:** These taxes were based on the principle of preserving the strength of the Islamic community by financing the military's needs for arms and animals. They were a form of land tax applicable to tribal communities under Beylik protection.

1) **Ma'una from Kabylia:** Consisting of quantities of dried figs, grains, livestock, and cash contributions, this tax was provided by the Flissa tribe (500 Boujou reals), the tribes under the Bougni command (125 reals), and the tribes aligned with the Sebaou Fort command, contributing 3,000 Boujou. Part of this tax was paid in cash, while the remainder was in the form of olive oil and dried figs.

2) **Bey's Gift (Dhayfat al-Bey):** This tax funded the Pasha's personal needs, collected every six months, with contributions from local populations, which provided the Beylik of Titteri alone with 248,000 Boujou annually.

3) Bashara (Good News Tax): This was a ceremonial offering to the Beylik on occasions such as the Bey's appointment or reappointment or other joyful events.

4) Horse Contribution (Khayl al-Ra'iyā): This contribution, primarily from western tribal regions, required communities to provide horses for cavalry and transport, replacing horses lost in state service

³¹.

Third – The State of the Algerian Treasury:

A. Treasury Expenditures:

The treasury of the Regency had various areas of expenditure, including soldier wages, salaries for state employees, gifts sent to the Two Holy Mosques, payments and gifts to Istanbul, as well as charitable and social services, or the construction of public buildings.

1. Military Wages:

A significant portion of the treasury's funds was allocated to military expenses, including monthly salaries, bonuses, and emergency grants. Monthly wages were disbursed every two lunar months and paid in the months of Muharram, Jumada al-Awwal, Rajab, Ramadan, and Dhu al-Qi'dah, except on Fridays. Agha al-Malyeen led the wage distribution ceremony and had authority in place of the Dey for this occasion in the general council session. Officers were paid in the council hall, while naval soldiers received wages in their barracks at the port.

In addition to wages, temporary bonuses were awarded to boost morale, especially during foreign attacks or internal revolts, with each soldier typically receiving five "Mawzunat" as a bonus. Additional allowances were also provided to calm unrest during revolts, famines, or foreign invasions, and to encourage soldiers to enlist in military service in the provinces. Furthermore, soldiers enjoyed special economic benefits, such as reduced prices on food supplies ³².

Contemporary documents indicate a total of 11,897 soldiers, distributed across 424 units, with 2,545 unable to fulfill military duties due to illness, particularly tuberculosis. The number of soldiers declined due to reduced maritime activities and rising disease and rebellion. Promotions were based on service duration, which determined eligibility for ranks. At times,

military wages were suddenly increased for political purposes. Some soldiers became officers by lottery, such as Mohammed bin Mohammed of Battalion No. 28. Janissaries retired upon reaching pension age, and if they died before retirement, their wages were kept in Bayt al-Mal.

2. Salaries of Employees and Workers:

The treasury covered only a small number of salaries, primarily for religious, cultural, and judicial staff, workers in naval workshops and construction, and servants attached to the Dey's palace and government offices. The legislative register shows that the Hanafi Mufti received eighty Sa'imas per month, while the Maliki Mufti and judge each received fifty, and the Head of the Nobles received thirty. Records reveal variable monthly salaries for officials: the preacher earned 5.15 reals, the teacher 25.7 reals, and the imam 5.1 reals. Cultural workers, such as prayer leaders, received gifts and incentives during holidays and additional support from students' families, enabling them to live modestly. According to early occupation estimates by Sid Emery, each teacher received fourteen francs per child annually.

Naval workshop workers and construction contributors were paid based on established rates: every new ship launch earned each worker 100 reals, and the captain also received 100 reals. Daily laborers in house construction earned five "Flomen," and palace servants received gifts in lieu of wages, with the Dey's captains earning 100 Algerian coins. Auxiliary services generated substantial income, unlike workers in naval workshops and cultural and judicial fields.

3. Expenditures from Bayt al-Mal:

Bayt al-Mal operated as a charitable institution, focusing on managing assets belonging to orphans and absentee owners. It also contributed to state expenses, including gifts during seasons and holidays for the Dey, senior officers, and palace servants; distributing charity to the poor; supporting poverty relief; and using a portion of its funds to free Muslim captives held in Christian lands ³³.

4. Contributions of Waqf (Endowments) to Charitable Expenses:

Islamic institutions stemming from waqf foundations included:

- 1) **Sabīl al-Khayrāt Foundation:** Managed by an official known as the Sheikh al-Nāzir, with agents overseeing its assets. This foundation funded the construction, maintenance, and repair of mosques and religious schools (zawiyas) and paid salaries to students tasked with Quran recitation in mosques, such as the New Mosque, Saffir Mosque, and Dar al-Qadi Mosque.
- 2) **Endowments of Saints and Murabitīn:** Supervised by the Wakīl al-Murabitīn, these endowments were used for the upkeep of shrines for saints, whose numbers and revenues from their endowments had grown substantially.
- 3) **Other Endowments:** These included religious properties specific to Andalusian descendants, which emerged after the construction of the Andalusian Mosque in Algiers in 1033 AH. This endowment generated an estimated annual income of 5,000 francs, distributed among certain families, including those with Tunisian connections.

These institutions collectively participated in indirect financial contributions, earning them a distinguished status among charitable expenditure outlets.

5. Gifts to the Two Holy Mosques:

Contributions to the Two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina represented a form of financial support allocated for educational and cultural services, distributed among prominent figures and benefiting certain rulers and the needy. The Agent of the Awqāf of the Two Holy Mosques in Algeria was responsible for sending these gifts on behalf of the Dey of Algiers to the rulers of the holy places. In 1830, colonial authorities estimated the assets associated with the holy mosques to number 1,558, generating an annual revenue of approximately 4,322,270 francs, which supported expenses for the Two Holy Mosques.

6. Exchanged Gifts Between Algiers and Istanbul (Sublime Porte):

The gifts sent from Algiers to Istanbul symbolized the connection between the Algerian Regency and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire, in turn, reinforced the Regency's military and economic infrastructure by providing weapons and ships, especially during the later period of Ottoman rule. Ottoman gifts positively impacted Algeria's defensive

capabilities, aiding in its international presence. In exchange, Algiers sent tangible gifts to obtain military aid.

7. Public Facilities Expenditures:

Public facilities were not a major financial burden on the state treasury, unlike other institutions, despite their varied areas and numerous branches. These facilities encompassed all cultural, religious, architectural, and economic establishments.

Fourth – Circulating Currency:

Currency is a fundamental pillar of any sovereign state recognized internationally. During the Ottoman era, the Algerian state placed significant importance on currency, using a variety of both local and foreign coins. Algeria had two mints during the Ottoman period: one in Tlemcen, which ceased operations in the early 17th century, and another in the Kasr al-Janina, later relocated to the Kasbah in the late Ottoman period ³⁴.

A. Local Currency: Local currency types were classified according to the metal used. Silver currency was primarily based on the "rial boujou," gold currency was centered around the "sultani," and copper currency was led by the "kharouba" ³⁵.

B. Foreign Currency: Spanish currency was prominent due to maritime spoils and the Andalusian community, with most transactions involving bags of Spanish coins, including the "doblon" and "diouni." Other foreign currencies included the Moroccan "douka" and "mawzuma," as well as the Moroccan "sultani" and "fils." Tunisian coins were also in circulation, such as the "Tunisian sultani," "Tunisian rial," and "kharouba," along with remnants of Zayyanid coins, known as "zabani gold."

Fifth – French Aspirations for the Algerian Treasury:

The wealth of the Algerian treasury aroused the ambitions and schemes of European countries, influenced by the biased reports of their consuls. This influence played a role in determining the fate of the Algerian Regency. Consequently, Mr. Emery conducted a study linking the treasury issue to the French occupation, titled "The Treasury of the Kasbah: The Master Key to the Algerian Campaign" ³⁶.

Upon hearing of Algeria's wealth and aiming to escape their debts to Algeria, which had become insistent on repayment,

the French harbored the belief that Algeria was rich with piracy goods, oriental treasures, African gold, and slaves. These perceptions fueled their desire to seize its wealth. There were even disputes among the French regarding what was plundered from the Algerian treasury, prompting Commander Bourmont to address the issue. Accusations were directed at de Bourmont, Charles X, and Louis Philippe, while officers and soldiers blamed each other, leading the press and various reports—both public and confidential—to expose the issue surrounding the treasury.

The French campaign seized the treasury and appropriated Algerian state funds for further aggressive actions against Algerians. The looting extended beyond the treasury, affecting various sectors across the country³⁷.

Conclusion:

Based on the above, we reached several conclusions:

- 1) The Algerian treasury was rich in wealth and funds due to the diversity of its revenues and sources, primarily maritime spoils and taxes, which had a significant impact on the economic life of the Regency.
- 2) Multiple factors contributed to financial instability toward the end of the Ottoman period, as Algeria experienced a shift in its income balance due to the decline in maritime warfare spoils. This led the ruling authority to reinforce tax policies, particularly in rural areas.
- 3) The substantial wealth of the treasury incited European, especially French, ambitions and schemes.
- 4) The Algerian state adopted austerity policies to safeguard the treasury's wealth from internal and external disruptions.

ENDNOTES

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