

## **The Role of the Militaries in the Colonial Cities: Constantine and Annaba.**

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### **Abstract :**

During preceding works on the history of the town of Annaba, we had to observe some situations which appear paradoxical; the situation of the various military barracks through the city poses the problems of the logic of their establishment. Their size, importance and role do not give us sufficient indications on the logic of this establishment. This town was of great importance as the chief town of the military area and more like a citadel city from Rome than a garrison town at the time of the French colonial period: Constantine. It is only in 1916, that one can speak about the end of the conquest of Algeria. These three quarters of a century (1827/1916) were accompanied by achievements of all kinds. In its policy of war, France saw itself obliged to reinforce its armies to keep the places taken and to advance its conquest. It was thus forced to build military buildings to shelter its armies and to ensure the logistics of the conquest. French colonization, like many others, proceeded in three great phases:

- conquest
  - Safety, stability and settlement
  - Repression before and especially during the war of liberation
- These phases materialized differently in time and space:
- The military constructions distributed in the city according to the policy and needs' for the moment (Standard and strategic site of the military buildings, etc.)
  - The generated urban actions, then, were imperative to satisfy the order and the capacity soldiers (bored through the médina, dimensions of the streets, etc.)
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century civil constructions and those of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were aimed at meeting military needs (use of the géni-soldier, etc.); but subsequently also met civil needs.

Our work aims at emphasizing not it why relation, military capacity and civil capacity which seems logic, but it how and the conditions of management of this relation which allowed all the military actions or civil on the city: there laws, decrees, management of land... the..etc, and leaves even to arise matérialisation of all these military actions on the urban one. Which go until the denomination of streets and places .

## 1 Introduction

During the meetings related to the extension of the cities of Constantine and Annaba, the issue that has always been raised is about the research concerning land that can be urbanized.

All insights were systematically oriented towards Le Mansourah in Constantine and towards the area of the 19th June 1965 in Annaba, as if they were virgin lands. It was forgotten that these lands were occupied by a series of military barracks or were parts of them, and that military barracks are urban structures. The interrelationship between the civil town and the military buildings in the cities was also forgotten.

In Algeria, for instance, military barracks have always been associated with war and repression (a near past in the collective memory), and this is what has nourished the population's feeling of repulsion to these buildings. Yet, in the case of riots or natural catastrophes, the population is ready to find refuge and security from the military that come from these same military barracks. Thus this situation of proximity is welcomed.

In previous works about the history of Annaba [1] city, we can observe situations which seem rather paradoxical; the implantation of different military barracks through the city raises the issue of the logic of their implantation. Hence, in Annaba we find a military barrack in the Northern borders of the ancient town, which eventually corresponds to the Casbah of Constantine; in addition to another one on the port; as well as a commandeering post situated in Champs de Mars, and therefore a central permanent situation in the city nowadays. Has it been like that all the time? What about the setting of Constantine and Annaba situated on the peripheries?

## 2 Conquest of Towns

The conquest of the country begins with the taking of towns because this is where the military resistance to the invader is. The taking of Annaba, a much smaller city than Constantine, and not having the same function in the Ottoman regime, was different. It was first delivered by Turkish people to the French and then became a battle ground between Arabs and Turkish people, finally being redelivered to the French in April in 1832 [2].

In Annaba, the size, importance, and role of the military barracks do not provide satisfactory indications about the logic of their implantation. Hence we will make investigations on this in a much more important city: the chief-city of the military region and the one which has been a citadel war city since Rome, and then a garrison city during the French colonial period; namely Constantine. It is a city of resistance, since it resisted an embargo of seven years during the French conquest. This has justified a military implantation with the all necessary logistics: Military Barracks, hospitals, military residences, road infrastructures...etc.

The monarchy of July did not have a conquering aim. Hence in 1834 while Annaba was still under French domination, the French, in order to palliate the wishes of the army, decided to keep the possessions that had already been acquired. The General Clauzel, for the sake of giving triumph to his conquest policy, wanted to take the capital of the East Beylik: Constantine. His expedition of November 1836 completely failed.

On October 13<sup>th</sup> 1887, Constantine was occupied by the last representative of the old defeated regime [3]. This actually granted Constantine, in addition to its geo-strategic position, a particular importance in the eyes of the colonizers who made it a garrison city.

The conquest of Algeria had as an outcome, the colonization of the whole country. The colonial policy of bringing in French people was the most efficient means of consolidating the conquest. This policy was possibly due to the support of the army, because in France, figures like Napoléon III and Jules Ferry preferred protectorates. The military conquest was followed by the establishment of a power that

was initially military with the construction of basic infrastructure that are necessary: military barracks of all kinds; hospitals; roads; etc. It was only in 1854 that civil powers were attributed control over the country [4].

The colonizing decisions since the installation of the civil regime were divided between military and civil. The free colonization, i.e., the one carried out without the intervention and the assistance of the state to settle, had to wait for the beginning of the 20th century. It is natural that the transfer was gradual and progressive without being totally complete until independence; because even though the country was conquered, the revolts never ceased. The civil colonial population's security had to therefore be insured. The three large phases of the French colonization were therefore:

- Conquest
- Security, stability, and settlement
- Repression before and especially during the liberation war

They appear differently in space as well as in time by military constructions spread in the city according to the policy and the needs of the moment. The generated urban actions had, therefore, to respond to the order and power of the army. Civil constructions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and that of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were acts on the city - not only civil ones, but also military, which also responded to civil needs.

It would be interesting to take out not the "how" of the relationship: military power and civil power that seems logical, but the "how" and the conditions of management of this relationship that allowed all military or civil actions on the city: genie-soldier, laws, decrees, ground management etc, then to find out the actualization of all military actions on the urban side that gave different faces to the two largest cities of Eastern Algeria. These actions include the naming of roads and places: La Place La mauricière, Rue Danrémont, Place d'Armes; and even the suburbs: Bugeaud, etc.

- What was the role of the French army in the building of the city at a given era? That is to say we will account, beforehand, how the military have operated on the cities of Annaba and Constantine; secondly how and in which management conditions, they have acted in relationship with the civil power, i.e., Militaries on the one hand and Civil (prefecture and municipality) on the other.
- What is the architectural expression of this conquering power, via the whole buildings as well as in the town's planning, if any?

### **3 Decomposition of towns**

It is important to note that simple decisions but which respond to military will have also contributed to giving an urban image without the need to build anything. Among them: First and with a clear aim of maintaining peace inside cities, indigenous and colonial populations have been separated since the beginning of colonialism. There are, therefore, two different forms of urban solutions.

The site's morphology as well as the one of the médina of Constantine highly contributed to this separation. Hence the Muslim and Jew populations (before the appearance of the Crémieux decree granting advantages to the Judaic populations) [5] have been confined to the perimeter of the ancient city, while the European population, however, (in newly built houses with a European style) were situated on the borders.

These battles had as a result the desertion from the city by the majority of the local population whatever their religion was, and the massive coming, since April of the same year, of foreigners in large numbers and from different origins as coral hunters. As a result French Annaba contained 6000 inhabitants among which, more than half were European, with 500 Arabs, 1000 Turkish, and one civil French. In 1897 their number rose to 33 000 Europeans (excluding pure French)[6][7] who needed

housing and protection, but from whom protection was needed too. Consequently military powers had to act and find solutions to two different situations.

The policy of borders was in fashion in France and was successful from the military point of view; it was adopted in Constantine and to a lesser degree in Annaba. Thus the first urban act keeps being a destroyer! It is true that it was destroying for reconstructing, but reconstructing with a completely different model from that already existing in the area. Opening of Facades, introduction of balconies on the road, and their use made it impassable for the introvert Algerians. The quality of traditional houses, in complete harmony with the climate and the life mode, was lost for ever since. up to today, the European model (especially the one related to that particular era in Algerian history) is still used (such as the width of balconies). These houses destroyed for ever the typical character of the medina and changed people's way of life. A certain form of architectural and social resistance appears like the moucharabieh that were later put on the European windows. Until today these balconies are unused except for drying clothes.

If in Constantine decisions were simple: Arabs and Judaists inside the medina and Europeans in houses built specially for them; the case is quite different to Annaba where there is another form of segregation. The areas are specified according to the different nationalities: St Anne area to the Maltese, Mercis area to the Spanish, Joinville area to the Italians, the modern town to the pure French (including the Corsicans) and the medina to the Arabs and Judaists (Figure 1). It would be interesting to examine how this separation between the two autochthon communities has evolved. Although it already existed before, it was directly and physically related to the places of cult of the two populations. In the médinas a Jewish area including a synagogue was totally integrated into the city. Hence the social and communal lives were without any religious segregation, and two neighbour trades could belong to two persons from different confessions. After the appearance of the Crémieux decree that raised the Judaic community to a higher status over the Muslim one; the Jews had more right to live in the ancient French houses, and to have access to new houses near synagogues; than the Muslims had in Annaba to live near their cemeteries. This separation of two populations ended the harmony and richness enjoyed in the médinas for two centuries.

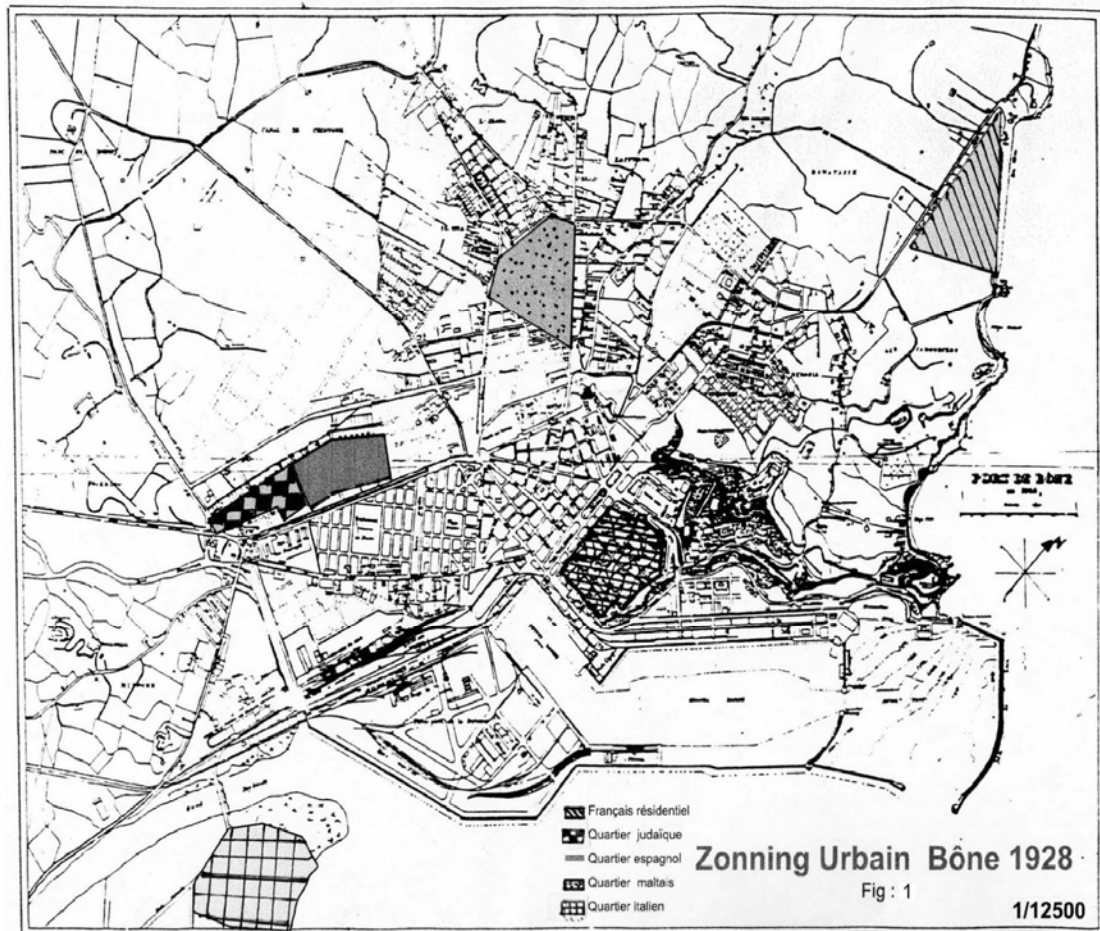


Figure 1: Bone's Urban Zoning 192

Even though this form of occupation of lands “according to original nationality” does not appear in official texts, it is actually real. The remoteness of these areas from each other reveals, according to us, a will of controlling them and thus a military power. Two important factors that played a major role in the way in which the colonial town of Constantine was built are: the specificity of its site, The Rock, did not allow any immediate extension; and the resistance of the population during the conquest. Buildings around the city were bigger and more important than in Annaba. The necessity to construct more important military buildings and official civil buildings made destruction the unique means of acquiring free land on the rocks. Whole houses disappeared: Haoumet El Messassa, Dar El Khalifa (partly destroyed during the taking of the city), etc. The City hall, town hall, municipal theatre, etc have replaced them pompously. If the French army was not the agent who performed these buildings, genie-soldiers undertook the realization of these buildings situated in town according to the military strategy.

Social lives were therefore transformed and then formed according to military, and then political decisions and thus two completely different new faces were given to Constantine and Annaba. In addition to the purely military buildings, we have military actions on the civil buildings, and on the political occupation of lands and civil buildings, that had many consequences on social life. Ramparts of Annaba city, from which we have only a vestige as well as the city's gates were also demolished. This destruction program had only one aim: The project of Napoléon III: the construction of a new border line of ramparts.

## 4 The fate of sacred places

Other military acts had many effects on the social life of the population, among which was the destruction or transformation of mosques and massadjeds. In Annaba many mosques or massadjeds had offensive fates and a large part of the cultural heritage was completely lost. The most horrifying acts of this army campaign against religious places, with disastrous effects on the Muslim community were:

- The transformation of “Djamaa Er-Soltane”, converted by the Italian population into a cabaret.
- The total destruction of “Djamaa Es-Soltane” where the library was the richest one in the city and where the land served as a setting for the construction of a primary school.
- A military barrack destroyed during a raid in W.W.II was built on the land devoted to “Djamaa Sidi El Tahar El Bahri”, which had been destroyed during this army campaign.
- “Djamaa El Kasbah” of Constantine was destroyed and its land served as a setting to the Casbah casern, the military Jail still there today.
- “Djamaa El bey” of Annaba was transformed into a military Hospital; not a war hospital as we would be tempted to believe, but a hospital that was operational for over a century.
- The transformation of “massadjid Bab El Mkabir, Sidi Fadl” and “Djamaa Bir Djarada” into public houses. Their setting in the “Arab Area” and the problems that stemmed from them drove many families to move from their houses and to settle elsewhere if they had the means. Otherwise they constructed huts in the slums of “Mahaffer” (both the destructions and the rural exodus being due to repression in the countries). [8][9]

Examples of this kind are numerous. Annaba lost three quarters of its Muslim religious places. The religious repression automatically caused physical acts in the cities. The Muslim cemetery of Annaba was not safe from this destructive and transformational period. Despite the fact that it contained some beautiful mausoleums, it was destroyed in order to build a railroad leading to the ancient port of Seybouse for transporting mining products. It is true that a new cemetery, on a similarly beautiful site, was given to the Muslims, but from a Muslim himself. This is why we find a particularity to the tombs of Zeghouane: a neat European influence in the tombs’ style whether in their form (disappearance of stairs...), dimensions (raising of heights, growth of tombs) or decoration (quasi-total disappearance of mach-had of Ottoman type, appearance of floral decoration and dedications engraved in French, most of the time at the expense of Koran verses or post mortem wishes, etc). We notice, therefore a very expressive transformation of cemeteries in this city much more Europeanized than its neighbour where resistance is expressed beyond death. Many mausoleums of Saints in the city neighbourhood (places of pilgrimage and devotion premises) disappeared. Today we mostly find these only in old narratives and ancient songs describing their beauty.

## 5 Conclusion

The aims of the French occupation were different in the case of Constantine and Annaba. Constantine was made into a garrison city that allowed the conquest and control of Eastern Algeria; while Annaba became the pole city of departure for resources destined for the metropolis (the first exporting port in Algeria and the first mining port in the Mediterranean sea) as well as a city of pleasure. However, both definitely efficient and amazingly simple military acts, because they did not take into account any prejudice or moral or physical constraint, whether for living persons or for the dead, or for the quality of the buildings.

These military barracks, therefore, are still rejected by the population in spite of the departure of the colonizers, because they carry the symbol of a whole life of repression. The médinas, by their names of places that resisted to more than a century of colonization, keep, like a living being, the memory of mutilations and grafts that they went through: suffering marked in their current physical condition.

The military were not only principal actors of conquest, but were also tools, and then elements of colonization. After being enrolled for some time in the army, some benefited from the French nationality by being given some hectares of arable lands and/or a house. The role of the military in the building of the colonial French city in Algeria starts and ends with the colonization.

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