

## **Charles de Foucauld, a Missionary or a French Military Auxiliary in the Conquest of the Algerian Sahara (1901 -1916)**

شارل دي فوكو مبشر أو مساعد للجيش الفرنسي في غزو الصحراء الجزائرية  
1901 –1916

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The purpose of this article is to shed light on Charles de Foucauld's mission in the Saoura, the Tidikelt, and the Hoggar regions of Algeria between 1901 and 1916. The method of research in this article relies on collecting and comparing data from different French sources, mainly Foucauld's correspondences. This article puts into evidence the fact that Charles de Foucauld failed in his mission in converting the autochthons into Christianity. He was military by profession and actively participated in the French invasion of the Algerian Sahara, which in the end cost him his life in 1916. The findings in this article imply that much has to be reconsidered and studied in order to reveal the true history of the Algerian Sahara and the impact of the French presence there.

**KEYWORDS:** Charles de Foucauld, -Missionary, -Algerian Sahara,  
-French colonisation, -Senoussists, -World War I

ملخص:

الغرض من هذا المقال هو إلقاء الضوء على المهمة التبشيرية لشارل دي فوكو في الصحراء الجزائرية من 1901 إلى 1916. تعتمد طريقة البحث الواردة في هذه المقالة على جمع ومقارنة البيانات من مصادر فرنسية مختلفة و بشكل رئيسي مراسلات دي فوكو. يوضح هذا المقال حقيقة أن شارل دي فوكو لم يفلح في مهمته التبشيرية إذ واجهته صعوبات كثيرة و رفض قاطع لمحاولاته إدخال السكان المحليين في الدين المسيحي. لقد كانت صفته العسكرية تغلب كثيراً عن صفته التبشيرية بحيث أنه شارك بنشاط في الغزو الفرنسي للصحراء الجزائرية، والذي كلفه في النهاية حياته عام 1916. و تشير النتائج الواردة في هذا المقال إلى أن الكثير من الوقائع التاريخية يجب إعادة النظر فيها عن طريق الدراسة الأكاديمية من أجل الكشف عن التاريخ الحقيقي للصحراء الجزائرية وتأثير الوجود الفرنسي فيها

**الكلمات الدالة:** شارل دي فوكو ، التبشير ، الصحراء الجزائرية . الاستعمار الفرنسي ، السنوسين ، الحرب

العالمية الأولى

## 1. Introduction

The Saharan regions of Algeria witness nowadays an accelerated pace towards modernization, which contributes enormously to the loss of the artistic, cultural, and historical heritage of authentic local populations. Therefore, it is our duty to preserve this heritage through academic studies and transmit it to the younger and future generations. The main problem encountered when studying the culture and history of Saharan populations is the lack of written documents to be taken as viable sources for research. The documents that deal with the history of the Algerian Sahara were mainly written by either explorers or military officers in the form of reports on their exploratory missions and conquests.

Two main limitations were encountered when elaborating this article. The first is that the authors were obliged to do some translation from French to English in parallel to the research. The second was that some sources were written in a religious context, which made it

necessary to filter in the gathered information in order to supply the reader with only historical facts organised in three main themes. The first theme depicts briefly Foucauld's early life until his military expedition in Algeria and exploration of Morocco. While the second theme traces his voyage and settlement in the Saoura and his activities there, the third deals with his trip to Tamanrasset to live with the Tuareg until his death in 1916.

## **2- Charles de Foucauld before his Establishment in Beni Abbes**

Charles Eugene de Foucauld was born on September 15, 1858, in Strasbourg in a religious family. He had a pious childhood thanks to his mother who was a religiously fervent woman, and his father Francois-Eduard viscount de Foucauld de Pont-Briand, the assistant-inspector of forests. Unfortunately, for him, his mother and father died respectively on March 13, 1864, and on August 9 of the same year. Charles and his sister Marie were put in their grandfather's care M. Charles-Gabriel de Morlet who was then a retired military officer of seventy years old. Although, Charles was materially well-off, he showed signs of a psychologically disturbed child.

Orphanage had an adverse effect on the personality of the boy. He was a quick-tempered and violent that could not take a joke.( René Bazin, 1921, p.5) His grandfather sent him to Saint-Arbogast episcopal school, and then to a high school (lycee) that was run by Strasbourg dioceses priests. De Morlet moved with the children to Berne because of the war and the annexation of the Alsace and Lorraine by Germany, and in 1872, he went to live in Nancy. Charles was sent to a boarding high school, which had a negative effect on him since he lost the habit to work hard, and gradually lost his religious faith. Later he passed the baccalaureate and joined the Saint-Cyr school in Paris at the age of 17. There, he was not a model student because he was in many times on the verge of being expelled (Michel Carrouges, 1954, p.19). In others, he was requested to quit the school. There was no other alternative for him just to leave Saint-Cyr and join a military school.

Charles de Foucauld joined the Saumur cavalry school in 1878, where he led a life of abundance debauch to the point that his uncle M. Moitessier provided him with a legal adviser. Lieutenant

Foucauld's dissolute life ceased in 1880 when his regiment the 4<sup>ème</sup> *hussards* was posted in Algeria. His stay in Algeria developed in him a passion for Africa and colonial life. However, his superior officer reproached him for living with a French young woman outside of marriage and undisciplined conduct (Michel Carrouges. 1954, p.34), and thus ordered him to break off such relation or quit the regiment. Foucauld's stubborn attitude led him to disobey and quit the regiment. He retired in Evian after the Ministry put him in temporary off duty.

Foucauld decided to return to Algeria when news of Bou Amama's armed resistance reached him in the spring of 1881. He wrote to the War Ministry pleading for joining his regiment the 4<sup>ème</sup> *chasseurs* that was assigned the mission of defeating the insurrection. As his request was accepted, he travelled to Algiers to participate in the expedition in the southern region of Oran. He asserted that the expedition had a profound impact on him to the point that it had provided him with a new perspective of life. (Georges Goree, 1947)

The Arab population had a profound impression on Foucauld. Once Bou Amama was defeated, he asked for a vacation to undertake a voyage in the south of Algeria. Since his superiors refused to grant him a vacation, he handed in his resignation and settled in Algiers in order to prepare for an exploratory voyage in Morocco in 1883. He was then 24 years old. It is not clear why did Foucauld choose to explore Morocco that was still hostile to European presence, and did not explore Algeria that was under French rule? Apparently, he chose to explore Morocco because it represented for him the road less travelled by, and proposed exciting challenges. His choice could also be attributed to a military strategy that required intelligence on Morocco for possible future French invasion.

### **3- Foucauld's Conversion and Establishment in Beni Abbes**

After Morocco's exploration mission had been successfully achieved, Charles de Foucauld started preparing for an excursion, but this time in Algeria. He intended to cross the desert regions from the west starting in the region south of Oran province to reach the Chott oases and then Tunisia's beaches in the east. Before sailing to Algiers on September 14, 1885, he wrote to his friend de Vassal, who was stationed in El Golea, to provide him with two camels, two horses, and a servant for the expedition.

Foucauld's voyage started from Oran heading towards Laghouat, and later southwards to the oases of Ghardaia and Mzab. From the Mzab oasis, he continued his trip to El Golea where he met de vassal and procured fresh supplies. By the end of November 1885, he reached Ouargla and joined lieutenant Cauvet, who was then the commanding officer. After a short stay in Ouragla, he continued his trip to Touggourt, a desolate country where he spent days in the desert alone for contemplation as he advocated. From Touggourt, he headed towards the oasis of Gabes in Tunisia. Absent for four months in the desert, Foucauld sailed to France from Tunisia on January 23, 1885, where he rested for one month at Nice in the company of his relatives.

According to the testimonies of his relatives and close friends, Charles de Foucauld became more and more inclined to live in solitude and meditation that he discovered in his voyages in the desert. It is also reported that Abbot Huvelin had a great spiritual impact on him after meeting him several times around diverse discussions on religious matters (Georges Goree, 1947, p. 60). Therefore, he decided to initiate his conversion by a trip to Jerusalem in December 1888, where he visited holy places and cities. On March of the same year, he returned to Paris just to undertake visits of several churches in France for the purpose of carrying on theological studies and meditating. He became a novitiate at the Trappist monastery of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges located in the Ardèche, under the name of Brother Marie-Albéric on January 16, 1890.

Foucauld displayed his intention to leave the monastery in quest of visiting holy places and live again the adventurous life of an explorer. His superiors ordered him to join the Trappist Monastery of Staoueli in Algiers where he had to wait for further instructions on September 28, 1896. Later on October 12, he received instruction to travel to Rome to undertake theological studies for two years. He did not stay long in Rome because he was instructed, after his request, to go to Nazareth where he stayed for more than three years. He left Nazareth to stay some time in Syria where he joined the *Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur* order situated in the mountains between Alexandretta and Aleppo. By August 1900, he returned to France for a short stay then travelled to Rome but this time to ask for the permission to conduct a hermit life in a Moslem country. When permission was granted, he left France to land in Algiers in September 1901.

In Algiers, he was given the necessary clerical authorisations to establish a hermitage in the southern regions of Oran province close to the Moroccan frontier. He received the authorisation of the Governor of Algeria on October 14, and the day after, he travelled to Oran, and then headed southwards towards Ain Sefra where his ex-military mates received him.(See map p.9) After a very short stay in Ain Sefra, Foucauld started his voyage towards Beni Abbes in company of Lieutenant Huot. They reached the oasis of Taghit on October 24, and four days later (October 28, 1901) they could make out in the distance the palm trees of Beni Abbes.

Foucauld reported that Beni Abbes was an oasis of seven to eight thousand palm trees situated on the left bank of the Saoura River, which is the outflow of the Oued Zousfana that joined the Oued Guir about forty (40) Km north of Beni Abbes. The latter was a fortified Ksar with only one gate populated by three ethnic groups of about 1500 people. (René Bazin ,1921, pp.200-201). The first two ethnic groups were the Abbabsa and the Ghenanma Arabs who were both free men that lived separately. While the former cultivated the land and owned the palm trees, the latter were camel drivers. The third ethnic group was essentially composed of the slaves or the Harratins who lived on the edge of the palm grove. Foucauld took into consideration such social, ethnic, and economic aspects in his making decisions and setting objectives.

Foucauld looked for the most suitable place where he could build a church. The ethnic and geographic distribution of the population in Beni Abbes was determinant in his choice of the land where to build it, which would not be in the nearby of either the Abbabsa or the Ghenanma. It was about 400 meters far from their dwellings where the slaves lived. The chosen land was about 9 hectares and cost him 1170 francs. (René Bazin, 1921, p.202). It included wild palm trees, and non-negligible water sources and ancient wells. He built a hermitage that was composed of a chapel, a room for non-Christian guests, a room as an infirmary, and a room for his residence.

Foucauld declared that he had to achieve two main objectives by settling in Beni Abbes. While the first was to provide the French soldiers with the presence of a priest whether in peace or war times, the second was to Christianise as many autochthons as possible. He started achieving the second objective by buying slaves to convert

them into Christianity, and providing food for the hungry (Georges Goree, 1947, p.142). However, it might be understood that the building of a hermitage in such a far away and inhospitable land was a sort of moral domination that was necessary for the French to accomplish their military conquest of the Saharan regions in Algeria either by pacification or conversion to Christianity to make of them reliable allies.

The slaves that Foucauld bought and converted were eight as mentioned by name in his correspondences. (Christophe Mory, 2005, p. 202). On January 9, 1902, he bought his first slave of 20 years old that he named Joseph du Sacré-Cœur. After only one month, Foucauld sent him to the *Pères Blancs* in Algiers to learn religion, which could be understood as a proof to the clergy that the south was conducive for the propagation of the Christian faith. The second slave he bought was a black young boy of 15 years old that he named Paul, and the third was a boy of four years old. Foucauld performed the first baptism on July 12, 1902, on a small black boy of four and half years that he named Marie-Joseph *Abd* Jesus Carita (the slave or servant of Jesus). On July 14, he bought the fifth and sixth slaves, who were a father and his son that he succeeded in converting and temporally naming the son as Paul. While the seventh slave was an old blind woman that he named Marie, the eighth was a boy from Touat of three years old that he bought on January 21, 1903, and baptised under the name of Pierre.

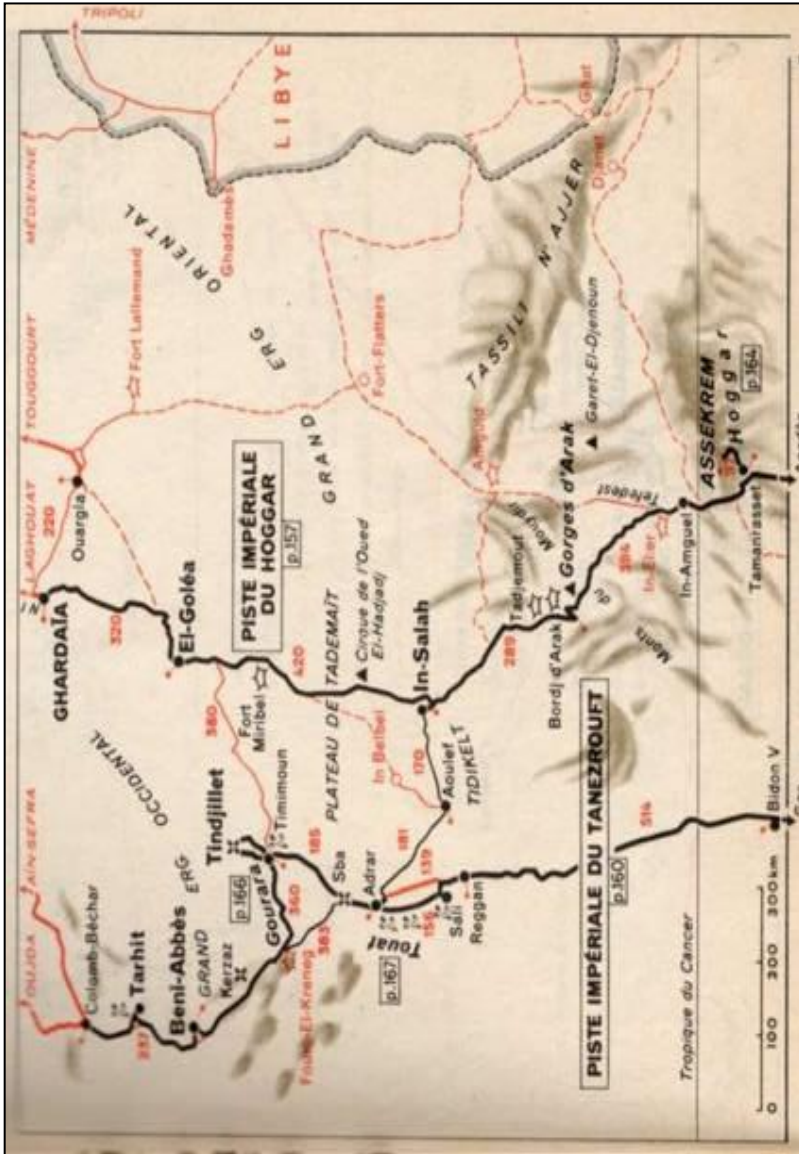
The second strategy that Foucauld adopted for the penetration of the region of Beni Abbes was to establish direct contact with the people through building a shelter and providing meals for the Saharan travelers. He intended to build a classroom to teach the children reading and writing French and the history of the Christian faith by rewarding them with some dates in the morning and cooking barely for lunch. He also focused on converting the Berbers than the Arabs because, as he advanced, they were more disposed and open to new ideas (Christophe Mory, 2005, p. 180). However, he confessed in his correspondences that he encountered many difficulties that frustrated and discouraged him in many times. Christianity was not new for the Moslems population of Beni Abbes. Through the Coranic teachings, the autochthons had sufficient knowledge of the Christian faith to constitute a barrier for their conversion.

Foucauld found attentive ears within the oppressed community of the slaves not out of strong faith in Christianity but just a means to get out of their miserable conditions. Paul was the first to quit him because he did serious transgressions as Foucauld reported. After that, Pierre wanted to go to live with his parents. In October 1903, Joseph du Sacré-Cœur, who Foucauld had sent to Algiers, accompanied the *Pères Blancs* in a trip to the Sudan, but at the first opportunity he ran away. By 1903, only the little Abd Jesus and Marie remained with him out of necessity, which was the case of all the people that accepted their conversion.

The reason for such failures, according to Foucauld, was the lack of sufficient clergy personnel that would help him to take care of the new Christians and relieve him of the manifold tasks he had to perform. He requested several times his superior Guérin to provide him with nuns and friars, but the answer was negative, which frustrated him and pushed him to think seriously of pursuing his travels to the unknown regions of the Sahara (Christophe Mory, 2005, p. 264). Apparently, Foucauld's intention was animated by his desire to return to his life of exploration and adventures, and that if he left Beni Abbes, his superiors would be obliged to send someone to take his place in the hermitage.



**Fig 1: Map of the Itinerary of Charles de Foucauld in the Algerian Sahara**



Source: Retrieved from [www.alger-roi.fr/Alger/tamanrasset/tamanrasset.ht](http://www.alger-roi.fr/Alger/tamanrasset/tamanrasset.ht)

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#### 4- Foucauld's Expeditions in the Tidikelt and the Hoggar

Foucauld's intention to leave Beni Abbes became a firm decision when his old comrade Lieutenant-Colonel Henri Laperrine visited him on March 6, 1903. Laperrine was then the commanding chief of the Saharan oases namely Gourara, Touat, and Tidikelt. (See map p.9) He had the intention of sending Foucauld to establish contact with the hostile Tuareg tribes and pave the way for the French army's penetration and establishment in the region. Foucauld's interest in visiting the Hoggar was animated by the letter that Laperrine had sent to him in which the heroic deeds of a Tuareg woman in saving the French injured soldiers during the massacre of the Flatters' Mission were passionately related. It was in this letter that Laperrine requested him to travel to the country of the Tuareg to establish contact with the various tribes and attempt a settlement in Tamanrasset.

It is evident that Laperrine exploited Foucauld's adventurous spirit and passion to spread Christianity in far and remote countries to help him familiarise the Tuareg tribes to the presence of the Europeans, and then establish cordial relationships with the warlike tribes. Laperrine acknowledged the role of Foucauld saying: '*Il a été l'agent principal de la pacification des Touareg.*' (Meaning: he was the principal agent in the pacification of the Tuareg). (Georges Gorraé, Michel Thiout, 1948, p. 298). Evidently, and without surprise, Foucauld accepted the mission. On June 24, 1903, he wrote to Guérin and M. Huvelin asking them the permission to explore the regions of Touat and Tidikelt, and to settle among the Tuareg but only for short periods so as not to neglect the hermitage in Beni Abbes. He received positive answers from M. Huvelin and Laperrine respectively on July 13, and 22, 1903; however, Guérin needed more time to decide, but eventually he gave his permission on August 29.

Foucauld started his trip to the Touat as urged by Laperrine on January 13, 1904, by joining a military convoy of fifty soldiers, 2<sup>e</sup> *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, commanded by Lieutenant Yvart that headed to Adrar. On the way, Foucauld noted the places where the convoy halted to spend the night, and the little Ksours that he visited, the location of the wells, palm groves, and the distance covered. After eighteen days, on February 1, the convoy reached Adrar where Foucauld met Major Laperrine. Immediately after his arrival in Adrar, Foucauld transformed a chamber that Laperrine had offered him into a

small chapel. His intention was to establish as many hospices as possible wherever he set foot (René Bazin, 1921, p 282).

Foucauld's stay in Adrar was a good opportunity for him to learn about the Tuareg mainly what concerned their socio-ethnic composition and political organisation. He learnt that the Tuareg were composed of six fractions namely Azedjers, Kel-Oui, Hoggar, Taïtoq, Iforas, and IUemedén (René Bazin, 1921, p 282). At the time when he arrived in the Hoggar region, he found that the Iforas, the Taïtoq, and the Hoggar warlike tribes had already submitted to the French army, which facilitated his task of travelling safely in the region and settling in Tamanrasset.

The first stage in Foucauld's trip to reach Tamanrasset was to join In Salah in which he stayed just for 36 hours, and then reached the Ksar of Tit where he met the Marabout Caïd Sidi Ali. From Tit, he arrived at Akabli on February 20, 1904, with the company of Lieutenant Besset. The first thing he did was to meet Sargent Brun, who was commanding the Aoulef Saharan detachment. The next day of his visit that lasted for more than three weeks, he started learning the Tamacheq (The Tamahaq or Tamacheq is the spoken language, but the Tifinar is the written one from a man that acquired the language during his multiple voyages in the Tuareg region. In fact, Foucauld was waiting for Laperrine to come to Akabli in order to join him in his tour of inspection.

Laperrine intended to travel from Akabli to Timbuktu and then return back through the Adrar and the Hoggar where Foucauld intended to stay. However, on March 6, Laperrine abandoned his mission at the wells of Timiaouin because he was forced to turn back by a French military column composed of 25 Sudanese infantrymen and 10 Kenata auxiliaries commanded by two French officers that headed north from Timbuktu (René Bazin, 1921, p 288). It was a troop from the French Niger colony, which considered such territories depending administratively to the government in Timbuktu and not to that of Algiers.

Major Laperrine changed direction of the convoy by heading towards Tin Zaouaten so that he could meet some Tuareg chiefs. The next step in the itinerary of the convoy was Aseksen where it was joined on June 12, 1904, by a detachment from the Tidikelt Company commanded by Lieutenant Roussel. The latter had orders to march

towards the Hoggar and stay for three months with the Tuareg. On the other hand, Laperrine intended to reach In Salah, which put Foucauld in a dilemma to decide whether to join Roussel and accomplish his mission or travel with Laperrine and postpone his visit to the Tuareg.

On June 14, Foucauld joined Roussel's convoy with Laperrine's permission. Roussel's convoy crossed unknown regions following an itinerary that took into account the location of wells and grazing lands. However, when it reached Tazerouk village on August 3, 1904, lieutenant Roussel decided that it was time to return to In Salah (Antoine Chatelard, 2002, 207). This decision perturbed Foucauld's plan to visit Tamanrasset because he found himself obliged to return to In Salah on September 20. After a very short halt in In Salah, Foucauld decided to traverse the Tidikelt, the Touat, and the Gourara in order to reach Ghardaia. During his stay in Ghardaia that lasted for six weeks from November 12, Foucauld met his superior Guérin to whom he handed over the translation of four Gospels in Tuareg Language (Antoine Chatelard, 2002, p.214).

After he rested in Ghardaia, Foucauld's decided to go back to Beni Abbes through El-Golea, which he entered on January 1, 1905. At El-Golea, he met his friend and companion Laperrine, who was about to travel to Adrar two days later. It was an opportunity for Foucauld to reach Beni Abbes in so good company. He arrived at Beni Abbes on January 24, and reopened his hermitage. However, it did not take long for Foucauld to receive proposition to settle among the Tuareg as the first priest and approximately the only one that could speak and write their language.

## **5- Foucauld's Establishment in the Hoggar**

It was under the invitation of the newly promoted lieutenant colonel Laperrine that Foucauld considered seriously his establishment in the Hoggar. He wrote two letters on April 1 and 8, 1905, in which he proposed to Foucauld to join Captain Dinaux in In Salah, who intended to travel across the Ahnet, the Adrar, the Iforas, and the Aïr, by the beginning of May. (Georges Gorrée, 1947, 181). Therefore, he started his journey to join Dinaux on May 3, by heading towards Adrar accompanied by Paul. Three days later, he met Captain Dinaux near a well in the region of Touat.

When Foucauld joined Captain Dinaux, he found in his company four French civilians namely M. E. Gautier, who was an explorer and a geographer, the geologist M. Chudeau, M. Pierre Mille a writer and journalist by trade, and M. Étiennot who was an inspector in mission on behalf of the Post and Telegraph. The interpreter of the convoy was M. Benhazera. In anticipation to meet Moussa ag Amastane, the Hoggar tribe Amenokal (Chief), Dinaux sent a messenger to inform him of the convoy's itinerary and the possible meeting place, and three days later, Moussa arrived at the camp. After Dinaux's request, he agreed on Foucauld's settlement in the Hoggar and even proposed to offer any possible help to facilitate his stay. The convoy travelled together for fifteen days, but then came the time for separation. While Moussa detached from the convoy to travel in his own direction, M. E. Gautier and Pierre Mille were escorted by three Iforas Touaregs to traverse the Sahara southwards to attain Gao, then Timbuktu, and later sail back to France after visiting the Senegal. Captain Dinaux continued towards the Hoggar high plateau with the rest of the convoy. The latter entered Tamanrasset valley after 28 days.

Foucauld chose to settle in Tamanrasset because it was situated in the heart of the Hoggar region and the Dag-Rali tribe, the chief of which Foucauld became a close friend (Georges Gorée, 1947, p. 307). There, he built a house, a chapel, and cultivated a garden. The house he built was in fact a chapel that looked like a corridor of about 6 meters long and about 1.75 m large. Then, he manufactured a small hut of reed in which he could sleep and work until the autumn of 1906. He undertook a demographic study of the various tribes that populated the Hoggar. He reported that there were 7 principal groups of which three dwelled in the north Tamanrasset namely the Ahaggar (10000 people), the Ajjer (3000 people) and Taitok (800 people). Charles de Foucauld, 2005, p. 76). These three groups were administered by the French government in Algiers and the direct commanding officer in InSalah. The other four groups were the Touregs of Adrar, the Air, Ioullemmeden, Kel Geres that lived south of Tamanrasset and administered by the Afrique Occidentale Française Administration in Timbuktu. He also reported that Tamanrasset was a village of about 60 inhabitants, and estimated that the diverse tribes of Kel Ahaggar counted between 800 and 900 families. On the other hand, the Iforas counted at least 2000 families. (René bazin, 1921, p. 314)

Such groups of tribes were obliged to adopt the transhumance mode of life because of the hot summer. They settled in the far Sudanese clement regions. They also undertake commercial exchanges in the markets of the Tidikelt, Rhât, and Ghadamès, and transported salt from the famous mines of Taoudéni to Timbuktu. These tribes constituted a confederation commanded by an elected chief, the Amenokal chosen from the nobles. Each tribe obeyed to an Amrar who is to be considered as the vassal of the Amenokal. At the time when Foucauld was building his hermitage in Tamanrasset, the Amenokal was Moussa ag Amastane that signed a peace treaty and friendship with the French in 1904 in In-Salah. This treaty helped Foucauld greatly to settle in friendly regions and conduct studies without being disturbed. Therefore, he immediately started the translation of the bible in Tuareg but needed help. He learnt the language from a Haratin in Tamanrasset named Abden Nebi by paying him 20 centimes for each lesson. He was also aided by his friend Motylinski, who spent with him three months from June 3, 1906, to study the Tamacheq grammar and lexis, and translation to French.

Foucauld felt the need to travel north visit Guerin. At the beginning of September, Foucauld and Motylinski travelled north to reach El Golea through Beni Abbes. Foucauld left Motylinski at El Golea and travelled to Ghardaia, and then to Biskra. Then, he headed north to spend some time at Maison-Carre with the company of Guerin who ordered him to separate from Paul.( René Bazin, 1921, 328). This separation would be explained by the fact that a friar named Michel, who spent three years within a Zouave regiment in Africa, displayed a firm intention to accompany Foucauld in the Hoggar.

The two men started their journey southwards from Oran by train to reach Colomb-Béchar. Then they travelled to Beni Abbes escorted by a convoy composed of six Goumier commanded by a sergeant. After three days, they reached Beni Abbes where they rested for some days. On December 27, 1906, they continued their voyage towards Tamanrasset with the company of French officers. However, when they arrived in In Salah, Michel renounced to follow Foucauld in his mission because he suffered from extreme fatigue (Christophe Mory, p. 191). They stayed together in In Salah for three months, and on March 10, 1907, Michel headed north on his way back to Algiers.

During his stay in In Salah, Foucauld worked on different projects. He started building a small house in In Salah with the help of the Tuareg named Ben Messis. He had already finished a book on Tuareg grammar and French-Tuareg lexis that he asked Laperrine to publish under a name other than his. He accompanied military detachments in their tours to meet the various Tuareg tribes. On March 8, 1907, Foucauld and Ben Messis accompanied Captain Dinaux that intended to traverse the Adrar and the Hoggar. It was at Dourit, some 100 Km south of Timiaouin, that Foucauld had the idea of paying for every Tuareg poetry brought to him, which helped him collect a great number of poems (René Bazin, p.345). At the end of this tour of inspection, the convoy returned to In Salah, from which Foucauld headed towards Tamanrasset.

Tamanrasset became strategic for the French expansion in the Sahara after Foucauld succeeded in establishing good relationships with the autochthons and building a small chapel. He managed to give a good image on the French to the Tuareg that displayed distrust and suspicion of foreigners. This was Foucauld's mission because in the summer of 1908, the military administration decided to send a detachment to the Hoggar with the mission to build a fort some 50 km from Tamanrasset. Laperrine wanted to call it 'Fort Foucauld,' but after Foucauld's refusal, he named it 'Fort Motylinski.'

By 1908, Foucauld had spent seven years in the desert. Therefore, he decided to pay a visit to his relatives in France. He landed in France on February 17, 1909, and stayed there for just 20 days. On March 27, he arrived in Beni Abbes, and then travelled to Tamanrasset where he found that the soldiers of Fort Motylinski and his Harratin friends extended his hermitage.

The following years until the break out of the First World War in 1914, Foucauld had three main tasks (Rene Bazin, 1921, p. 393). The first task was to take notes of his observations whether military, geographic, or socio-cultural and delivered them to Colonel Laperrine, who reported in his correspondences that Foucauld's notes were of great importance to his expeditions. The second task was to establish further contacts with the autochthons to tame them so that the French military would find only friendly populations. The third task was devoted to his religious practices and studies mainly when he settled in the Asekrem on July 5, 1911, by building a hermitage in the

mountain region called the Koudiat. He reported that he had established good relationships with the population, and intended to stay in the Asekrem for one year, but in December, he was obliged to return to Tamanrasset.

Foucauld returned to Tamanrasset because he received news of the war that broke out between the Italians and the Tripolitans. He assured that the Tuareg were not interested in world troubles, but only in tending their camel herds, crops, and trade.(René Bazin, 1921, p.397). It was improbable that the holy war advocated by Turks would reach the Sahara. However, in 1911, the population in Tamanrasset was in appalling misery because of the drought that prevailed for nearly 20 months. The population was starving as the crops were bad, which would have made every Moslem Tuareg receptive to anti-French calls and sentiments. Therefore, Foucauld made great efforts to maintain the local population and surrounding tribes faithful to the French.

## **6- The First World War and Foucauld's Death in 1916**

Times of serenity and peace ended for Foucauld when news of the break out of the First World War reached him in 1914. He feared that the Turks, who sided with Germany, would urge Tripolitan Senoussists to turn allied tribes against the French in the Hoggar (Marcel Nadeau Marcel Nadeau , 2004, pp 7-8). It was evident for the French that the Tuareg tribes were Moslems having strong religious and political bonds with the Senoussists, and consequently would respond to the call to wage a holy war against the infidels. Foucauld was invited to live in Fort Motylinski but he refused and remained in his hermitage in Tamanrasset.

The south of Tripolitania was in the throes of the War from February 20, 1915. The French forts established in the Hoggar started to undergo the war turmoil because armed bands recruited by the Senoussists started to penetrate in the French territories. A military detachment of more than 200 soldiers from Fort Motylinski was dispatched under the command of Saint-Léger to prevent revolted bands to trespass the borders (Georges Gorrée, 1947, p. 296). By November 19, 1915, the mail from the Azdjer did not arrive because the Senoussists attacked the Dehibat French post in Tunisia. It did not



take long for the troubles to reach the French posts of Djanet and the Hoggar.

The French fort of Djanet was besieged on April 11, 1916, by 1000 Senoussists armed with canons and machine guns (René Bazin; 1921, p. 436). It was reported that the small garrison of 50 soldiers resisted for 18 days, but in the end after serious casualties, the French soldiers were obliged to retreat. With the fall of Djanet fort, the Senoussists could march freely towards Tamanrasset.

Measures were taken for the safeguard of both Tamanrasset and Fort Motylinski. Sentinels were posted at five strategic points to notify the fort of enemy movements. In the beginning of 1916, Foucauld planned and supervised the construction of a small fort on the opposite ledge of Oued Tamanrasset not far from the hermitage. When the construction ended on June 23, he installed his quarters in this small fort, which had at each angle a bastion with aiming slits. The walls were 2 meters thick and 5 meters high, with only one very low door (René Bazin, 1921, pp. 440-441). Foucauld also fortified his hermitage by installing aiming slits that he compared with those of the churches of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. He accepted to store 6 cartridge boxes and 30 Gras rifles in his hermitage ((Marcel Nadeau Marcel Nadeau , 2004, p 37). However, with all these measures, the Senoussist danger was still eminent.

The Senoussists in the Fezzan were led by Si Mohamed Laabed, who was a religious chief that assembled and united the Azdjer Tuaregs. He occupied Rhât after the Italians abandoned it leaving behind provisions, arms, and ammunition. The Senoussist attacks obliged the commander of Fort Motylinski to send military detachment to protect the autochthons and to set off in pursuit of the bands coming from Tripolitania. In many occasions, Fort Motylinski was incapable of protecting Foucauld and the population in Tamanrasset.

Charles de Foucauld was killed on December 1, 1916, at night. His servant Paul, who was living in the village, narrated the details of his death. That night, it happened that Foucauld was alone in the small fort when a band by a band of about 20 raiders attempted to enter Tamanrasset stealthily with the objective to take him hostage and plunder the small fort. Paul reported that among the raiders, there were some Tuareg Azdjers, who were helped by some men from

Hoggar Ait-Lohen, some Tuareg Harratins that joined the Holy War, and a farmer named El Madani from Amsel (René Bazin, 1921, p.453).

The stratagem of the raiders was to get Foucauld out of the small fort without resistance and without alerting the soldiers that were in the fort. They used El Madani that Foucauld knew well to open the door to him. When Foucauld opened the door, the raiders seized and tied him. While two armed guards with rifles stood next to him, the others took hold of the diverse objects in the small fort (hermitage), and evidently, they were very delighted with the acquired rifles and ammunition.

Paul reported that suddenly one of the sentinels in the fort gave the alarm and three raiders run towards the place where the sound came. Immediately after, a gun battle broke out. In the mist of the battle, one of the guards that watched Foucauld shot him in the head killing him instantly (René Bazin, 1921, p.455). The raiders left Tamanrasset leaving the dead body without mutilating it. The next day, Paul and other villagers buried him along with the two Meharists that the raiders killed as they intended to travel to In-Salah by night.

The official reports written by the French officers advanced reasons for the death of Foucauld. The fact that Foucauld hid arms and ammunition in his fortified hermitage incited the Tuareg raiders to attack him. They knew that Foucauld gave alms to the autochthons, which would have displayed him as a rich man that hid a treasure in his hermitage. The third reason was that the raiders knew that fort Motylinski was reduced to a small number of soldiers, which encouraged them to commit their raid easily and without fear of immediate reprisals.

The question of the death of Charles de Foucauld remains unanswered. The Tuareg raiders obtained what they wanted, so why did they kill him? It could be advanced that the reason was simply fatality. The Tuareg that guarded him might have panicked when he heard the shootings and fired his rifle inadvertently as he was aiming to Foucauld's head. On the other hand, it might be advanced that his assailants intentionally killed him because they saw in him an opponent that should be eliminated.

In the aftermath of Foucauld's death, the officers of the Arab Bureau of Beni Abbes were given the task to safeguard the hermitage. They kept the gardener Ahmed Ben Ahmed to take care of it in return of regular wage received from the French Government in Algiers. The small fort of Tamanrasset was also well maintained and in good repair and used as accommodation for the commanding lieutenant. However, the hermitage of In-Salah and the mountain shed of Koudiat were devastated.

## **7- Conclusion**

In conclusion, Charles de Foucauld never forgot that he was a soldier although he became a priest. His involvement in the colonization of the Sahara was of great importance since his notes and observations cleared the way for the military to infiltrate hostile regions and deal with distrustful tribes. The French officials and military officers provided all necessary means to help him because they considered his enterprise as primordial for the extension of the French influence in the south of Algeria especially in the Hoggar and surrounding regions. Whenever the French officers needed to establish friendly relationships with the autochthons that they could not conquer by arms, they sent him because a lonely man would never arouse fear and suspicion of the local populations. In his correspondences, de Foucauld displayed a dream in which all the populations in North and West Africa were under French military domination and converted to Christianity.

Foucauld was profoundly committed to his country's colonization schemes and projects. The fact that he accepted to store arms and ammunition in his hermitage proves that the soldier was still there even though he was a priest that repudiated violence and the killing of human beings. The death of Charles de Foucauld could be attributed to his involvement in the efforts undertaken to expand the French Empire in Africa.

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