



Original Research Paper



## THE BLEEDING OF THE SHEEP BREED " HAMRA "'

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### Abstract :

Because of its extent and geographical diversity, Algeria has a very rich animal heritage. Among its animals, sheep whose roots, so deep, become bogged down well beyond the Numidian period, constitute a heritage that is both natural and genetic, highly varied. However, it is mainly the two steppe breed, namely "Hamra" in the West and "Ouled Djellal" in the East, which have left their mark on the richness of this living national heritage. It should be known that in the early days of French colonization, large quantities of sheep from Algeria, stolen from different steppe regions of the country, were exported to France, but also to its colonies. However, research on this subject reveals that a strong preference for the Hamra breed has quickly seized the brokers responsible for the collection of livestock for export. Thus from 1929 until the last years of colonization, more than a million heads of sheep "Hamra" will be exported, annually, by the French colonists to the metropolis, more exactly to the port of Marseille. Embarkations were made from the port of Arzew, in the West, and the port of Algiers, for the Center and the East. Currently, to make their farms profitable, sheep owners have chosen the ovine genetic type which makes it possible to achieve the best economic and financial profits. And so it was from the time of the mechanization of the steppe and the drought of 1970 that the regression process of the ovine breed Hamra was accentuated. In fact, all the breeders of the Hamra breed who were formerly hampered by the distances and especially by the reliefs and the lack of means of transport of the cattle began to use heavy breeding rams such as the Ouled Djellal type. This led, over time, to the genetic absorption of the Hamra sheep, which occurred in favor of the Ouled Djellal breed and its crosses, which now constitute more than 65% of the national herd population. Only 20% of which are purebred. Thus, after forty years and in the absence of a policy of management of animal genetic biodiversity, the Hamra breed is now in danger of total extinction. This could be the loss of a national genetic resource but also a heritage that is more than a thousand years old. In fact, apart a few former breeders who still hold a small number of sheep descended from the Hamra breed, this Algerian sheep breed has become unknown today by the majority of young breeders. Pending the reaction of the public authorities, the association for the preservation and promotion of the Hamra breed (APPRHamra), newly created in the wilaya of Naama, engaged with the scientific community (geneticists, agronomists, veterinarians ...) a action to promote this breed and militates in for the preservation of this animal heritage dating back several centuries.

**Key words:** History, Hamra breed, sheep and preservation.

### Introduction:

Because of its size and geographical diversity, Algeria has a rich and diversified animal heritage than we think. Among its animals, sheep whose roots, so deep, are bogged down well beyond the Numidian period, constitute a heritage that is both natural and genetic, highly varied. As such, the phenotypic differentiation of sheep that inhabit Algeria is been achieved over time, this by their adaptation to the various natural ecosystems that prevail in a considerable way in the country: mountainous areas (Tell Atlas), the cereal plains, the steppes (between the Tellien Atlas and the Great Sahara), the Oases and the Saharan routes. Thus, because of this richness of biodiversity, our ancestors have adopted more than ten main sheep breeds, from generation to generation. These include the "Berber" in the mountainous areas, the Rembi in the cereal plains, the "Barbarine" for the eastern Saharan routes

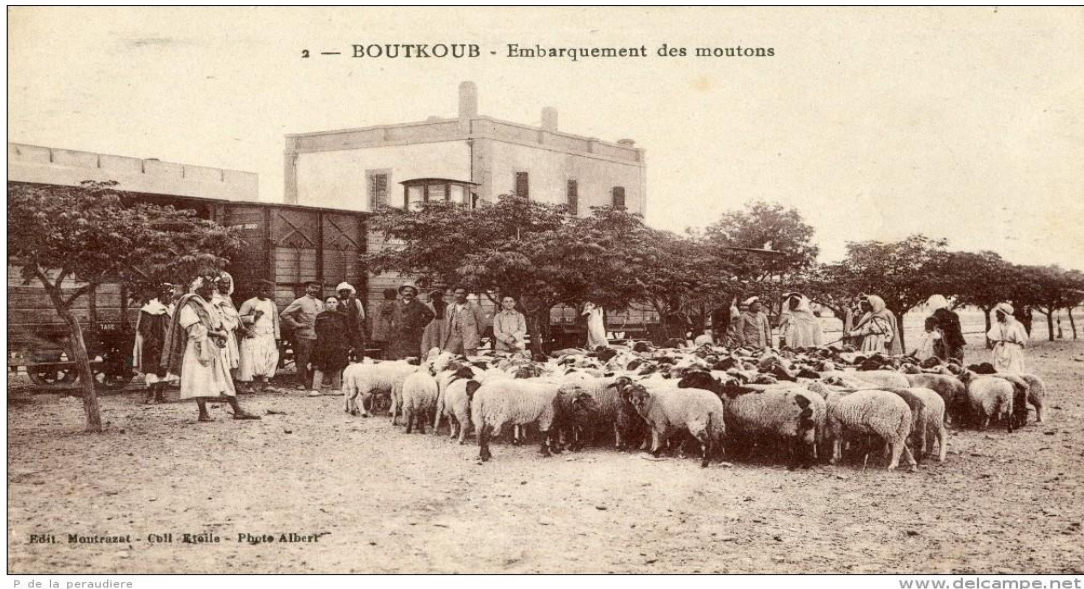
(the Souf), the "D'men" for the Oases from the West (the Saoura) and the "Sidaho" for the great Sahara. However, it is mainly the two steppe race races, namely "Hamra" in the West and "Ouled Djellal" in the East, which have left their mark on the richness of this national heritage. Living. It must be said that the aromatic plants of the Algerian steppe were for great things in the emergence of these two races, which were naturally selected, by the pastors and nomads of the steppe areas in view of their interest. economic. Moreover, these two breeds are today well characterized and standardized. However, what made the reputation of these two breeds; it is especially the organoleptic quality of their meat. Nevertheless, what many people do not know about this is the taste quality of Hamra sheep meat, which is far better than that of other sheep. In fact, the exceptional flavor of Hamra meat, unknown today by a large majority of Algerians, is due to the floristic diversity of the Algerian steppe in its western part (axis El Bayadh-Naama) compared to the East part. Moreover, an extranational study on the peculiarities of the sheep species reveals that the flora that covers the western part of the Algerian steppe has strongly affected the "gustatory" characteristic. Hamra, which is in turn "the origin of its reputation that has exceeded its area to see its meat (leg of lamb and chops) landing on the plates of Parisians, Lyonnais and Marseillais" (GUILLAUME, 2008).

### 1929-1962: FLOWERS OF MASSES " HAMRA " TO FRANCE

To go back in time, it should be known that in the early days of French colonization, large quantities of sheep from Algeria, collected from different steppe regions of the country, were exported to France, but also to its colonies. However, research on this subject reveals that "a marked preference for the Hamra breed has quickly seized the brokers responsible for the collection of livestock for export" (SAGNE, 1950). Indeed, its beef characteristics (excellent meat taste and organoleptic and good carcass conformation with small legs and rounded and thin chops) have earned a high reputation in the French markets, under the name of " little oranais ". Thus from 1929 until the last years of colonization, more than a million heads of sheep "Hamra" will be exported, annually, by the French colonists to the metropolis, more exactly to the port of Marseille. Embarkations were made from the port of Arzew, in the West, and the port of Algiers, for the Center and East, (see photos). Moreover, the sheep road of Algiers takes its name from the importance of the sheep flock conveyed, through the way which connects the square house (El Harrach currently which was the place of regrouping and sorting herds collected steppe regions) to the port of Algiers.



Sheep embarkation photos of Algerian ports to France from the link [www.delcampe.net](http://www.delcampe.net) °



Embarkation of Hamra sheep from Bougtob station to the port of Arzew (Photo taken [www.delcampe.net](http://www.delcampe.net) )

### 'Bled Laghnem' or Algeria country of the sheep

At the independence of the country, the movement of herds followed fixed routes and each nomadic tribe remained attached, sentimentally, to the genetic type of the animal which it exploited. In addition, despite the alternation of dry and rainy years, the breeders maintained the same system of breeding that was practiced, well before, by their ancestors. A system based essentially on the practice of the transhumance and the valorization of the forage resources of the different zones, this according to the seasons. However, from the technical point of view, this mode of farming, where conservatism was paramount, offered no food supplementation (cereals or concentrated foods).

In the first years after independence, sheep farming, a sector that already had a strong economic value, and in addition a social framework well attached to this ancestral wealth, has undergone significant changes. These changes eventually upset the overall scheme, dearly preserved and / or bequeathed by the ancestors. Indeed, the demographic development, the expansion of the rural exodus, the development of the means of transport, the emergence of factories of manufacture of the cattle feed and the establishment of a circuit of marketing of the alive livestock, Which flourished with the multiplication of livestock markets, were all factors that marked, negatively, of course, sheep farming during the first years of Algeria's independence. For their part, city dwellers, hostile to the rural exodus of the 60s and 70s, did not spare the morale of breeders who deserted the steppe areas. Indeed, in parallel with the decline of sheep farming, the notion of " Bled Laghnem " (sheep country) affectionately evoked by the imminent agropastoralist Algerian, Rabah Chellig, in his books and at international gatherings , is taken up in the most pejorative sense. What ended up being a blow to this socio-economic sector. It must be said that at the same time and for an economic purpose, the slogan "Australian sheep country" was proudly taken over by the Australian captaincy around the world. Thanks to this inexhaustible wealth, this country is today the real ... country of sheep.

However, apart from the "social" context, which may explain some of the decline in sheep farming, it should be pointed out that the drought which hit our country in 1970 accentuated the effect of these upheavals, to the point where many herders have seen their livestock numbers halved. And so, to save what remained of the breeding females, those among the breeders who cared as much for their animals as for their families, slaughtered all the lambs born during the two years following the drought, this in order to keep their ewes in a sufficient body

condition, while exceeding the scarcity. Other pastoralists, in search of rich pastures, fled the steppe to settle in Tellian areas near forests.

Along with this bleeding, the steppe areas have seen livestock prices drop dramatically in livestock markets. To remedy this "cataclysm", sheep owners have adopted the abouement out of soil to maintain their activity and thus be able to support the needs of their families. Thus, in the early 1970s, the order of ancestral breeding had been disrupted and driving off ground has become imperative. In the end, it has had an impact on the financial balance of the farmers but also on the economic management of herds. Indeed, new criteria, related to the management of the livestock, have imposed themselves on the breeders, as for example the additional expenses of the food and the low value on the market.

### ***Profit at the detriment of quality " HAMRA "***

To make their farms profitable, sheep owners have therefore chosen the ovine genetic type which makes it possible to achieve the best economic and financial profits. And so, it is from this period that the process of regression of the ovine breed Hamra was accentuated, after the fatal blow that brought to it the drought of 1970. Indeed, whereas it had like range, the steppe areas of the extreme west of Algeria, namely the region from Bougtob (El Bayadh w) to Mecheria (Naama w) with a deployment on the south of the wilayas of Saida and Tlemcen (Sebdou), there remain today only five main nuclei of Hamra in Algeria. They are limited to Ain El Hadjar (station ITELV) and Sidi Ahmed (private breeder) in the wilaya of Saida and Ain Ben Khelil in the wilaya of Naama (within a unit of the ORVO and two private breeders). Currently, of the 27 million heads, officially estimated for the national sheep herd, Hamra-like sheep numbers do not exceed 250,000 (less than 1%), while at the genetic level, no more than 1000 purebred head are listed throughout the national territory. This constitutes a risk of impending extinction of the breed.

In fact, all the breeders of the Hamra breed who were formerly hampered by the distances and especially by the reliefs and the lack of means of transport of the cattle began to use heavy breeding rams such as the Ouled Djellal type. . This led, over time and in favor of the new roads that broke the famous "wall" of the center constituted by Djelfa- Laghouat while connecting the eastern steppe (M'sila, Batna and Tébessa) has that of the West (El Bayadh, Naama, Saida and Tiaret), the genetic absorption of the Hamra sheep, which occurred in favor of the Ouled Djellal breed and its crosses, which today constitute more than 65% of the national sheep population of which only 20% are purebred.

### ***Save a heritage (natural and genetic) more than a thousand years***

Thus, after forty years and in the absence of a policy of management of animal genetic biodiversity, the Hamra breed is now in danger of total extinction. This could be the loss of a national genetic resource but also a heritage (natural and genetic) more than millennium. In fact, apart from a few former breeders who still hold a small number of sheep descended from the Hamra breed, this Algerian sheep breed has become unknown today by the majority of young breeders. But the decline is also due to extra-environmental factors. Among these factors, the main phenomenon that has increased the lack of interest of breeders towards this breed and its quantitative regression, lies in the seizure of sheep of color other than white during their transport in France. trucks. The reason, of both sanitary and legal but also security (contraband) order, is that these sheep are suspected of illegally coming from Morocco (BOUTONNET, 2015). This type of "dam" of the Hamra breed is due to the ignorance of the various national security and customs services of the phenotypic peculiarities of the different breeds of sheep making up the national sheep flock, which nevertheless prove to be a future economic force. for the country. Hence the need for the country's high command (security and customs) to launch trainings in collaboration with the agricultural services so that the elements operating in the different fields can distinguish the racial differences between the animal species specific to the country. Algeria and those of its neighbors.

As a result, the risk of disappearing the Hamra sheep breed, which, it must be emphasized, has high potential for both beef and taste, with an added capacity for milking, must challenge all those who reflect on future of our livestock and solutions for the diversification of livestock production in Algeria.

Pending the reaction of the public authorities, the association for the preservation and promotion of the Hamra race (APPRHamra), newly created in the wilaya of Naama, engaged next to the scientific community (geneticists,



agronomists, veterinarians ...) , advocates for the safeguarding of this animal heritage dating back several centuries. A heritage that, more than useful for agro-biodiversity and food security of the country, is also a component of the history of all Algeria, including the "sheep" region of the West, composed of by the wilayas of Tiaret and Saida in its northern part, and by the wilayas of Naama and El Bayadh, in its southern part. A vast region that is witnessing, so far, the first traces of animal life and the imprints of humanity, also empurpled!



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