

Yahia Bouaziz and his approach to writing the Modern History of Algeria

Dr Telli Rafik*

the University of MoulayTaher -
Saida-

rafiq.telli@univ-saida.dz

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Abstract:

The historian Yahia Bouaziz has been interested in historical research since the beginning of his career. He is considered to be one of the most prominent pioneers of the Algerian historical school. His career was distinguished by his prolific production in the field of scientific research. This study highlights one of his books, entitled "A Brief History of Algeria", in which he made a great effort to write it. The study investigated the approach of Yahia Bouaziz in writing the modern history of Algeria through his book. It is an important work which has benefited the Algerian Historical Library. In his presentation of the book, Yahia Bouaziz committed himself to accuracy and honesty regarding his information as two necessary key elements to convince the recipient. He also arranged the information which made it logical and increased its proximity to the mind of the reader. Although it has some methodological gaps especially since the period studied suffers from ambiguity and impurities related to it, we seek through the study to show the importance of the book that provided us this valuable and useful information.

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Yahia Bouaziz, Historical Approach, Historical Research, Modern History of Algeria, Book.

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Introduction:

Algeria experienced through the various phases of its history a broad movement to write history. Hence, historians who have multiple orientations and cultures appeared. Algeria has produced many historians who influenced the National Library with their writings and researches, and dusted off many historical facts concerning national history. Among these historians we mention Yahia Boaziz, whose career has been marked by his prolific production in the field of scientific research. He is one of the most prominent pioneers of the Algerian historical school, and one of the main pillars in Algeria and the Arab-Islamic world. He is credited with forming many students, which in turn followed the same approach concerning seeking knowledge. This study highlights one of his books entitled "A Brief History of Algeria", by focusing on Yahia Bouaziz's approach to writing Algeria's modern history. From there, the following problems were raised: Who is Yahia Bouaziz? What is the concept of history according to him? What is the nature of the adopted approach in writing "A Brief History of Algeria?"

1. Introducing the historian Yahia Bouaziz:

YehyaBouaziz was born on Saturday, the 14th of Dhi Al-Hujja in 1347 AH, corresponding to May 27, 1927 in the village of Al-Jaafra – BordjBouArreridj Province¹. He is the eldest of his brothers. His father is Sheikh Abdul Rahman and his mother is Fatoum, the daughter of Sheikh HadiBelkacem, the son of Sheikh al-Hussein². She was born in January 1909.

¹ - Boudersaya, Bouazza. *Pioneers of the Algerian Historical School*. Dar al-Hikma. Algeria. 2010. P262.

² - Bouaziz, Algerian woman and Arab feminist reform movement. Dar al-Huda. Algeria. 2010. PP124-125.

Yahia lived in a scientifically rich, financially poor family. The income of his family was limited while there were many members. His father relied on what he gained from the imamate of the mosque, in addition to teaching the Qur'an and the principles of language³. Since his childhood, he was influenced by his social environment, which was no different from the general situation of the social environment of Algerian society. The majority at that time preferred to educate their children in the Koranic schools. This is why he memorized the Qur'an at an early age, and then was educated an authentic Arab culture by his father Sheikh Abdul Rahman⁴.

In 1947, he went to Annaba where he spent three years with Sheikh Hussein Trabelsi. Then, he was transferred by his father to Tunisia and registered his first year in Zaytouna Institution. He studied there until he received his certificate of eligibility with distinction in 1953. Furthermore, He was among the first in all Tunisia at the time, and was able to obtain a certificate of achievement in 1956, which is equivalent to the baccalaureate. Given the conditions in Algeria, especially after the outbreak of the liberation revolution, YahiaBouaziz was one of the first to join the FLN, which provided him with the conditions to complete his studies in Cairo. He joined the university in the majoring of history in 1957 to obtain a bachelor's degree in history and then return home in 1962. After the death of his father, he settled in Oran, and then joined the University of Algiers to obtain his PhD (third degree) in modern and contemporary history in October 1976, entitled "The Role of El Mokrani and Haddad families in the Revolution of 1871"⁵.

Bouaziz was a member of the Supreme Islamic Council of Algeria, a professor of history at Oran University, and a writer for the People's Newspaper and other positions he held. He died on Wednesday, November 07, 2007 in Oran at the age of 78⁶.

It should be noted that Dr. Yahia Bouaziz has received an Arab-Islamic formation in Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. He was refined by distinct circumstances, shared by North African countries. The conditions he lived made him saturated with parallel political knowledge. At the same time, he became an educated man with positive political morals. Moreover, he saw Algeria's future with vision and wisdom, as evidenced by his actions and works which he left behind for the Algerian generations.

2. The concept of history according to Yahia Bouaziz:

Yehya Bouaziz believes that history is not only a mere account of events and a mention of the facts in addition to the date of their occurrence, it is in his view an analysis and discussion of topics in different fields according to a chronological order⁷. He believed that history is an embodiment of the past eras so that it becomes like the present. It is the real image in which it clarifies the reasons for its renaissance and collapse, and linking the events to their causes and consequences. It is the impact of those events on the environment and morals and then issuing a general judgment on every era, and what impact it had on the general situation of the country⁸.

³ - Yahia Bouaziz, *Journey in the Space of a Lifetime or Diary of the Century*. Dar al-Basa'ir. Algeria. 2009. P145.

⁴ - Hamid Ait Habboush, Reading in the Cultural Legacy of Dr. YahiaBouaziz. *Medium Dialogue Journal* (Issue 07). 2014. P230.

⁵ -Ibid. pp230-231.

⁶ - Fares Kawan, *Algerian historians and the growth of historical awareness 1830-1996 Contribution to cultural and intellectual history*. Algeria: dissertation for doctorate in contemporary history, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Constantine. 2007. P117.

⁷ - Yahia Bouaziz. *Topics and Issues in the History of Algeria and the Arabs*. Dar Al Huda. Algeria. 2009. P04.

⁸ - Fares Kawan, op. cit. p117.

As for the history of Algeria, he considers that it is not easy but very difficult to rewrite the history of Algeria, especially from documents. He says: "It is a national demand and at the same time a huge process that requires more patience, years of research and collection of documents, finding archives inside and outside the country, and revealing interesting events and the unknown to clarify the history of Algeria.⁹ The process of writing the Algerian history still needs to be paraphrased because it has been falsified, distorted and obliterated, especially in the colonial period by the invaders, who made efforts to prove that this country was European before it was An Arab Islamic country¹⁰. Therefore, little has been written about Algeria's history when compared with the sacrifices made by the Algerian people and more, especially the glorious revolution of November.

3. The approach of Yahia Bouaziz in writing the modern history of Algeria through his work "A brief history of Algeria":

Yahia Bouaziz is one of those who have enriched historical and intellectual writing in Algeria through his many works that have varied from investigation to commentary, review and authorship. The follower of his production notes that he was very interested in the history of Algeria during different periods, beginning with the Islamic period, the modern Ottoman period, and the French colonization, both in the history of the Algerian resistance against the colonizer and in the history of the Algerian national movement and the liberation revolution. He has been able to provide the Algerian University with more than forty books on various aspects of Algerian history, as well as numerous articles he has published in many national and international journals. He gave hundreds of lectures at seminars and meetings inside the homeland and abroad. Some of them are: Revolutions in the 19th and 20th Centuries, A Brief History of Algeria, the Scholars of Thought and Culture in Guarded Algeria, the Policy of Colonial Domination and the National Movement 1830-1954, the Revolution in the Historical Third State, Algeria's International Relations with the States and Kingdoms of Europe 1500-1830, Modern Colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Ocean Islands.

In addition, he published numerous articles in several journals such as: Originality, Culture, Maghreb Historical Magazine (Tunisia) and others. Whereas in the area of investigation, we mention:

- Agha Mezzari Ben Aouda, Saad Al Saoud appearance in the news of Oran, Algeria, Spain and France to the late 19th century, the investigation and study of Yahia Bouaziz.
- Mohammed al-Saleh al-Antri, the History of Constantine, review, presentation and commentary by Yahia Bouaziz.

Here the researcher will try to present one of these works, which the historian Yahia Bouaziz provided us about the history of Modern Algeria, entitled "A Brief History of Algeria". We will focus on the nature of the approach he adopted in writing Algeria's modern history. The latter, which is considered an important work, benefited the Algerian Historical Library, as did for the scholars and students of history. It is an important reference for future generations because it tells us about the various phases and events related to the history of Algeria in different periods (ancient, intermediate, and modern) i.e. from the old period to the French occupation of Algeria in 1830.

⁹ - Yahia Bouaziz. (2009). *Struggle of Algeria through Documents*. Dar al-Basa'ir. Algeria. 2009. P06.

¹⁰ - Yahia Bouaziz. (1999). *with Algeria's history at national and international meetings*. University Publications. Algeria. 1999. P06.

The book is divided into two parts: the first part relates to the old and intermediate periods, and the second part is about the modern period. The book was first printed in 1965 and reprinted in 1999, 2007 and 2009, without revisions or modifications. What matters to us is the second part, which consists of 224 pages.

The introduction came in the form of a preface and a presentation for his book "A brief History of Algeria". He, on one hand, praised the Algerians and their stature in history since ancient times. He wrote this book, as he explains, based on the fact that the history of Algeria is rich in terms of historic events and heroics that are mostly unknown and obscure to Algerians and to the rest of the world. Furthermore, he said that his book is a humble personal effort prompted by his unbridled desire and the demanding need of students of different levels for a simple study to serve as a guide and reference. Yahia Bouaziz emphasizes also the need to protect and write national history and the obligatory presence of Arabic books of Algerian history, as he says: " we no longer have an excuse...and we must prepare to write our national history anew on sound foundations that derive facts from our authentic national reality," because to rewrite the history is to reconnect Algerians with their right path and revive their proud in their past. On the other hand, we notice the presence of a style that is disgruntled by the injustice that befell the Algerians during the French colonial period¹¹.

In his study, Yahia Bouaziz tackled political history without addressing the social, economic and cultural aspects, as he mentioned in the introduction of the book, saying that it was not because the former is of greater importance, but because it is the key basis of the latter ones, especially the cultural aspect that he drew a brief reference to in his book. It is worth noticing the wide stretch of time that a book of no more than 224 pages covers from 1514 to 1830. Such book cannot exhaustively tackle all aspects of the subject matter¹². Further, the information and material were gathered from different sources and references without the historian criticizing its content, relying on verbatim transmission sometimes.

The second part of the modern period, the third part of the book (Algeria during the era of the Ottoman Turks), began defining the time frame: 918 AH-1246 AH, 1514 -1830. Starting with a discussion tackled the origin of the Turks, their homeland and their efforts to stand up to the invasive European forces and protect the coasts of the Islamic Maghreb, including the Algerian coasts that were subjected to the Spanish invasions during the 16th century. He pointed out that the Spaniards occupied Algerian coastal cities and sites such as the occupation of Mers-el-Kébir in 1505, then Oran in 1509, Bejaia in 1510, Mostaganem in 1511 and Annaba in 1531. Notably, four ottoman sailors, Oruç, Hayreddin, Ilyas and Isaac that made the Mediterranean a scene of victories they had achieved against the Christians and the European pirates, and their fame spread among North Africans. They led fierce battles against the Spaniards and defeated them, as they liberated the cities that were under their control. With their appearance, Bouaziz added that the Islamic Maghreb region witnessed rapid developments, and Algeria would later become the dominant power in the Mediterranean. Thus, Algeria became a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire, and Hayreddin became its ruler by decree of the Ottoman Sultan¹³.

The historian Yahia Bouaziz referred afterwards to the phases of the Ottoman rule in Algeria, where he divided it into four periods, namely: The Beylerbey period 1518-1587; the period of the Pashas 1587-1659; the period of the Aghas 1659-1671 and the period of the Deys 1671-1830.

¹¹ - Yahia Bouaziz. *A Brief History of Algeria, Old Algeria and Middle*. Elbassai edition. Algeria. 2009. P p03-07.

¹² - Yahia Bouaziz. Op. cit. p08.

¹³ - Ibid. pp05-15.

Highlighting the various events and the historical facts related to each period until the French Campaign against Algeria in 1830¹⁴.

Starting with the first period of the Ottoman rule, the Beylerby period, he explained that it was characterised with a plethora of events. It started with the annexation of Algeria in 1518 and the appointment of Heyreddin Bayerbay over it by the Sultan; providing him with military forces, and making Algiers the capital city. The latter, appointed Ibn al-Qadi al-Ghubrini the Sultan of Mount Kuku¹⁵, ruler over Kabylia and the eastern region. This did not appeal to the Hafside and the Marinites, hence they began plotting against Hayreddin and his regime. He also mentioned that the Spaniards, on their part, organized a massive, but failed, military campaign led by Hugo de Moncade and landed in Wadi El Harrach on August 1519; they lost most their forces, weapons, and ships. He then dissects the Turkish administration in Algeria into four Bayliks (Dar al-Sultan, East Baylik, West Baylik, Titteri Baylik), where the historian makes note that Algeria began to transcend its borders and the important role that its leaders and fleets started playing in the Mediterranean. He also mentioned the salient characteristics of the era¹⁶.

He proceeded to address the Pasha era, which extends from 1587 to 1659, stating the reasons for the change from the previous regime (i.e. the Beylerby), and then referring later to the prominent events of the era, including: the tension in the Algerian-French relations, the dispute with Tunisia, the conflict that broke out between the Janissaries and the Rayas sect, and internal strifes and the rise of revolutions such as: the kouloughlis revolution in 1633 where the city of Algiers was attacked due to the governors' inability to pay the soldiers¹⁷.

He goes on to talk about the Aghas era, which extends from 1659 to 1659, highlighting first the characteristics of this system and its most important events, then refers to the greed of the British that led attacks on Algeria since 1699 through attacking boats in the middle of the Mediterranean, and wreaking havoc in the city of Bejaia in 1671¹⁸.

The writer, Yahia Bouaziz, continues to tackle the last era, the Deys era, that extends from 1671-1830. Concerning the internal situation, he refers to the independence of Algeria from the Ottoman Empire, which had no involvement in this coup d'état and that was unable to prevent it. The Sultan could not but issue firmans agreeing to inaugurate Deys appointed by the Divan and appoint next to it the Pasha that wields no real power. He then included a subtitle "Algeria's relations with its neighbours in Morocco, Tunisia and Tripoli", followed by another one that tackles the fight of the Spanish presence in Oran and Mers-el-Kébir. He later examines the Algerian-American relations and states that it was not just Europe that was hostile towards Algeria, but also the United States, that tried to get involved in the conflict and sought to form a European-American alliance against Algeria.

He adopted the same method while reviewing the phases of Turkish rule and its systems in Algeria, referring to the peace negotiations between Algeria and Spain and the terms of the peace treaty that was concluded through the correspondence of the Dey Muhammad Osman Pasha 1780-1787, in addition to the various European campaigns that Algeria was subjected to, such as: the failed Danish naval raid in 1770, the failed campaign of Officer Aureli in 1775¹⁹. Concluding ly, the

¹⁴ - Ibid. pp16-55.

¹⁵ - Ibid. p16.

¹⁶ - Ibid. pp16-23.

¹⁷ - Yahia Bouaziz. Op. cit. pp32-37.

¹⁸ - Ibid. pp39-41.

¹⁹ - Ibid. pp42-54.

writer Yahia Bouaziz addressed the issue of the Algerian-French relations from the first treaty in 1270 during the reign of King Philip III to the French campaign against Algeria in 1830.

Despite the large number of books written by Yahia Bouaziz, he does not rely on one specific method in his studies and writings. He uses a different method for each book. He used, in this book, the historical- descriptive-analytical method, a clear plan, and an organised approach. He also made a list of references arranged systematically, and an index of the book's topics, which was placed at the end of the book to facilitate its navigation, where he was contented with mentioning the titles of the book and did not divide it into sections. In turn, he divided the two part book into three chapters: chapter one, dedicated to Old Algeria; chapter two, dedicated to Middle Algeria; and chapter three, dedicated to the modern period²⁰.

The historian made a logical arrangement of his thoughts, as he does not develop a new idea unless he finishes the one at hand, which makes it easier for readers to follow and understand, specifically in such complex and intertwined historical events such as the Algerian-French relations under The Ottoman rule (pp. 85 - p. 118). We notice an exhaustive recounting of facts and events²¹. Simultaneously, in many more instances, the historian doesn't detail events, for example, his narration of the Ottoman rule phases; the Bayerbey era p.p. 16- p.p.22 and the Aghas era p.p. 39 - p.p. 41, where he structured his thoughts and information in simple, easy, and fun language to read²².

Yahia Bouaziz's reliance on archival documents, which are considered as a source of information in writing history, is apparent in preparing his book, namely Spanish documents which proved difficult to translate into Arabic. It should be noted that the researcher hardly has a book or an essay devoid of documents of the like, which gives his scientific product originality and creativity. This was not an easy task given the fact that writing history based on documents in his view is hard and expensive that requires much patience and perseverance. He further continues to state the reasons for such view and says: " the majority of these documents are either destroyed or require a time consuming search, in addition to long and joint efforts within the framework of working groups, and under the supervision of an official body, such as higher institutes, universities, research units, and national centres. This is due to the fact that personal effort cannot meet the purpose and does not respond to the urgent process, the magnitude of the effort required and the task at hand²³.

He also relied on the letters sent between Algeria and Spain that showed the reality of the diplomatic relations between the two countries in the late 18th century. They mostly revolved around reconciliation and the subsequent process of recreating bonds of cooperation between the two parties, solving issues related to economic activity and commercial exchange in the Mediterranean, contain piracy, and solve the issue of prisoners in both countries. The letters contain official correspondences between the Deys of Algeria Muhammad Othman Pasha, then Hassan Pasha with the Kings of Spain, Carlos III, then Carlos IV, or their spokesmen. These correspondences clarify many points, such as the important role played by Hassan Wakil Al-Haraj in reaching a peace treaty with Spain and the salient events related to it, which terms, approximately 25 in total, were enumerated by the historian²⁴.

²⁰ - Ibid. pp219-224.

²¹ - Ibid. pp85-118.

²² - Yahia Bouaziz. Op. cit. pp16-23.

²³ - Yahia Bouaziz. *The Right-Wing Movement in the Algerian National Movement*. University press. Algeria. 1991. Pp07-08.

²⁴ - Yahia Bouaziz. *The Spanish-Algerian Correspondence in the Archive of National History in Madrid*. University press. Algeria. 1993. Pp37-38.

He attempted to explore the historical events since the ascension of Dey Muhammad Othman Pasha, who ruled Algeria from 1766 to his conclusion of peace in 1786, during which he was keen on scrutinizing the historical narrative, labouring to give a logical explanation for these events, and embodying the ruler's standing point in his analyses. His investigations incorporated material from other resources so as to build the research on strong bases. His aim from this is to conduct his research with clear scientific integrity.

It is worth mentioning that the historian Yahia Bouaziz faced manifold methodological problems, as he did not follow the modern method of marginalization in many cases. We may notice the inconsistency in information documentation in which there are instances where it is present and instances where it is absent, for examples, pp. 05 - pp. 59, and pp. 85 - pp. 133.

The apparent abundance of resources in the list of references demonstrates the efforts exerted by the historian. The references were multidisciplinary and multilingual, namely Arabic and French. We should note, however, that some of the scientific materials, especially foreign documents that he used were not mentioned in the references list. Regarding the categorization of the latter, he did not separate the list of sources from the bibliography.

Concerning the appendices that Yahia Bouaziz provided in his book "A brief history of Algeria", we notice that it followed the same layout of the book. For instance, the first appendix tackled the fleet of Dar al-Jihad, Western Algeria, through exploring the start of the Maghreb fleet and Navy, and its development during the medieval Islamic era, the types of ships of the Algerian fleet, its crews and commanders, the most famous sea Ra'ais and the role of the navy in defending Islamic countries. Same goes for the remaining appendices, he did not include, for example, the maps, documents, and letters that he used in the book, and only included some maps after he tackled the Baylerbey era in pp. 24 -pp. 29. He also neglected the book's conclusion, which came in the form of a set of results he found after the conducted research. However, he was committed to the accurate and truthful statement of facts and information in his book, considering they are key factors in convincing the reader. He made also a deliberate logical arrangement of the information to make the latter fathomable. Due to his strict adherence to scientific methodology and objectivity in his writings, he was appointed a member of the Ministerial School Authorship Committee in 1963, where he was among the first historians to use the academic approach²⁵ (Khadoussi, 2012, p. 488).

4. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the historian Yahia Bouaziz has exerted a great effort in writing this book, despite its methodological shortcomings. The timeframe he studied, the modern period, is especially hard because it is obscure and suffers wrong retelling of history. This research thus aims to demonstrate the importance of this book especially that it was written in the post independence period, 1965. In a time where the Algerian educational institution lacked books that is the product of Algerians. Yahia Bouaziz is one of offspring of the Algerian University, where he devoted his life for science and left a plethora of scientific material about our history during different periods of time, which made him a symbol and exemplary figure.

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²⁵ - Rabah Khadoussi, *The Encyclopaedia of Algerian Writers and Scientists*. Algeria. 2012. P488.

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- Hamid Ait Habboush, Reading in the Cultural Legacy of Dr. YahiaBouaziz. *Medium Dialogue Journal* (Issue 07). 2014.