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Destruction of Penon Fortress and Stabilization of Ottoman Algeria

Abstract

This study examines the aftermath of the destruction of the Penon Fortress in Algeria and its implications for the Ottoman presence in the region. The event marked a significant turning point, as the Ottoman was able to establish a stronghold and successfully counter Spanish campaigns aimed at their expulsion and the reoccupation of Algerian coastal areas. Additionally, the Ottoman achieved a consolidation of power by uniting with the Algerians under a centralized administration, following the suppression of local rebellions led by indigenous leaders.

Keywords: *Penon Fortress, Ottoman, Algeria*

Penon Kalesinin Yıkılışı ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin Cezayir'de İstikrarı Sağlaması

Öz

Cezayir'deki Penon Kalesi'nin yıkılmasının Osmanlı İmparatorluğu üzerindeki etkileri bu araştırma projesinin odak noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Bu, Osmanlı Devleti'nin kale kurmasına ve İspanyolların kendilerini Cezayir'den sürüp kıyıyı yeniden işgal etme çabalarına karşı koymasına olanak tanıdığı için bir dönüm noktası oluşturmuştur. Ayrıca Osmanlı Devleti, yerli liderlerin

önderlik ettiği yerel isyanları bastırdıktan sonra Cezayirlilerle merkezi bir yönetim altında birleşerek nüfuzlarını pekiştirdiler.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Penon Kalesi, Osmanlı, Cezayir*

Introduction

The fall of Granada led Spain to aspire to occupy the North African coast to achieve a set of goals, including spreading Christianity¹, blocking the return of Andalusians to Al-Andalus, seeking new financial resources to fund their wars in Europe, and securing their trade and communication lines in the western Mediterranean (Chaunu, 1973/1, p. 336). There were other objectives that Spain aimed to achieve through these actions.

Due to the political vacancy that Algeria experienced at the beginning of the 16th century, between 1504 and 1511, most of the coastal ports, fortresses, and cities of Algeria were occupied, such as Algiers, Oran, Ténès, Cherchell, Dellys, Béjaïa, Jijel, Collo, Honein and Annaba.

This article attempts to shed light on the liberation of the most important fortresses established by the Spaniards off the city of Algiers, placing them under their control and controlling the Algerian coast, and the resulting consequences that impacted the future of modern Algerian history.

1. Primary Data on the Ottoman presence in Algeria Before the Destruction of the Penon Fortress

It is known that the Spaniards occupied the main island opposite the city of Algiers and established a fortress known as Penon of Algiers (Piri Reis, 1973/2, p. 159). This was since the city's dignitaries declared their submission to the Spaniards after the occupation of Oran in 1509. In fact, by occupying this fortress, the Spaniards placed the city under their surveillance, preventing the locals from engaging in any maritime activity without consulting the Spaniards. On the other hand, as the locals were obliged to pay an annual tribute imposed on them based on the treaty concluded between them and the Spanish, they managed to avoid full occupation of the city, as the Spaniards contented themselves with occupying the mentioned fortress (al-Madani, 1984, p. 128; al-Mazari, 1990/1, p. 220; al-Mili, 2004/2, p. 43-44).

The historians and researchers who documented the history of Algeria during this period noted that when the locals delayed paying the imposed tribute for one reason or another, the Spanish garrison stationed in the fortress would bombard the city with its cannons (Seyfi, 1928, p. 21).

¹*The French researcher Pierre Chaunu considered the conversion of Muslims and Native Americans to Christianity to be one of the most important and noble tasks for the Church."*

Therefore, the locals experienced the bitterness of both the island's occupation and the subsequent naval blockade, as well as the bitterness of the tribute and the humiliation imposed on them by the Spaniards.

And when the people of Algiers knew about the victories of the Barbarous Brothers over the Spanish, their siege of them in Béjaïa, and their expulsion from Jijel², their spirits were emboldened, and they regained hope of liberating their city. Consequently, the people of Algiers seized the opportunity during Spain's distraction following the death of their king Ferdinand in 1516, so they violated the imposed treaty and refused to pay the tribute (al-Vazzan, 1979, p. 410). They sent a delegation to the Barbarous Brothers, inviting them to come and liberate their city from the Spanish. The Barbarous Brothers responded to the call, and the leader of Algiers, Arruj, entered the city, where he was received by the people as a hero, and they pledged their allegiance to him as their Sultan (al-Mili, 2004/2, p. 43-44).

It's likely that Arruj knew the Spaniards could occupy the city whenever they wished, especially since it was within the range of their cannons stationed on the walls of the Penon Fortress facing Algiers. He also knew that the fall of the city to the Spanish would grant them a dangerous strategic position, allowing them, along with their bases in Béjaïa, Oran, and the Penon, to have greater capability to suppress the emerging Islamic resistance.

On the other hand, the capture of Algiers by the Barbarous Brothers, situated strategically between Béjaïa and Oran, would facilitate their goal of weakening the Spanish presence. This would effectively separate their eastern base in Béjaïa from the western base in Oran.

For this reason, Arruj attempted to destroy the Penon Fortress immediately upon his entry into Algiers. However, the fortress's resilience and the ongoing rebellious movements that followed Arruj's arrival in Algiers prevented the achievement of this goal.

And in the years preceding the liberation of the fortress, the Spanish garrison stationed in the Penon Fortress endured great hardships due to the Spanish government's neglect of the fortress. The garrison was no longer adequately supplied with provisions and military equipment. Even though the garrison commander, Don Martín de Vargas, had requested assistance from his government when Kheir al-Din took control of Algiers, his plea was disregarded. The soldiers reached a point where they couldn't procure the necessary supplies except for what came from

²The Berber Brothers had established Jijel as a base for their operations, in addition to their base in the port of Halq al-Wadi in Tunis. It's evident that their positioning in Jijel.

Spain. They were even forced to fetch drinking water from the island of Majorca (Arıkan and Toledé, 1990, p. 144). Kheir al-Din was well aware of the hardships and difficulties that the Spanish soldiers stationed in the fortress were experiencing. He also understood that, as long as the fortress remained in Spanish hands, they could use it effectively whenever they wished. Therefore, despite the fortress's struggles, it still posed a significant threat to Algiers.

On the other hand, Kheir al-Din had a fleet of twenty ships, and his captains and naval leaders who supported him were twice that number. This meant they urgently needed a port where they could anchor instead of Djerba, which was far from Algiers. This hindered their ability to make use of it in case of a war along the central or western Algerian coast. Thus, expelling the Spanish from the Penon Fortress became a necessary inevitability dictated by the new circumstances that coincided with the Ottoman presence in Algiers.

a. Destruction of the Penon Fortress (1529)

In May 1529, Kheir al-Din sent a letter to the fortress commander, Don Martín de Vargas, urging him to evacuate the fortress and leave with his soldiers immediately. However, the fortress commander responded with refusal (al-Madani, 1984, p. 216; al-Tur, 1989, p. 86-87). Consequently, Kheir al-Din ordered cannons to be positioned towards the fortress and commenced bombardment.

The intense bombardment of the fortress lasted for twenty days, during which the Ottoman cannons managed to create several breaches in the fortress walls. Subsequently, the Ottoman sailors, supported by the local populace, launched a general attack on the fortress from all sides. As a result, they successfully stormed the fortress, killing and capturing most of the Spanish soldiers inside (Chalabi, 1911, p. 87; al-Madani, 1984, p. 216; al-Tur, 1989, p. 86-87).

After the liberation of the Penon Fortress, Kheir al-Din issued orders to destroy the fortress and level it to the ground. Those who were imprisoned in Algiers were used to transport the stones from the Temanfoust Tower, located on the opposite side of Algiers Bay³. A bridge was constructed from rocks connecting the island on which the fortress stood to the mainland, a structure that would later be known as the "Kheir al-Din Bridge." Then, Kheir al-Din ordered the small islands to be connected in a circular shape with a single opening. This led to the creation of Algiers Harbor,

³*It was formerly known by the name "Cape Matifou" and is currently known as "Borj El Bahri" (Sea Tower). There were scattered Roman rocks in that area, and Kheir al-Din harnessed the prisoners to transport those rocks for use in constructing the quay of the Algiers Harbor. After establishing their presence in Algiers, the Ottomans built a tower to monitor ship movements coming to Algiers and to guard the eastern coast of the city. It has now been converted into a museum.*

which subsequently became the base for the Algerian fleet⁴. And to ensure the protection of ships docked in the harbor, Kheir al-Din ordered the construction of a military barracks and a monitoring tower known as the "Fonar Tower" (Chalabi, 1911, p. 87; al-Madani, 1984, p. 216; al-Tur, 1989, p. 86-87). Kheir al-Din's intention behind destroying the fortress was not only to eliminate its potential use by the Spaniards for defense but also to remove any hope the Spaniards had of reclaiming it and reoccupying it (al-Madani, 1984, p. 217-218). And while Kheir al-Din was tightening the noose around the Spanish garrison in the Penon Fortress, the Spanish commander sent a plea for help to Spain. Nine Spanish warships arrived after the Turks and Algerians had successfully stormed and destroyed the fortress.

As the Spanish ships approached the Algerian coast, they couldn't find the fortress and attempted to flee. However, Kheir al-Din intercepted them with five Ottoman warships of the "qadırğa" type and seized the Spanish ships after a fierce battle. Most of the crew were killed, and 2,700 prisoners were captured and brought to Algiers (Chalabi, 1911, p. 37).

b. Results of the Liberation of the Penon Fortress

The liberation of the Penon Fortress undoubtedly marked a significant victory for the Ottomans in Algeria, perhaps one of their most important during this period. By capturing the Penon Fortress, they secured their presence in Algiers, especially after the construction of the Algiers Harbor, which served as their naval base in North Africa. This replaced the Halq al-Wadi port in Tunis, which was too distant from the military operations' theater to effectively maintain the political and military gains achieved in central and western Algeria.

Consequently, with the destruction of the Penon Fortress and the establishment of its stability in Algiers, the Ottoman naval expeditions along the western Mediterranean coast significantly increased. They emerged as a dominant naval force in the region, further solidifying their influence (Chalabi, 1911, p. 185; al-Tur, 1989, p. 87-88).

They instilled fear and terror in the hearts of Christians. and Algeria began to monitor all maritime routes in the western Mediterranean (De Grammont, 1874, p. 55; Braudel, 1928, p. 11). The raids of Algerian corsairs on Spain, Italy, and the western Mediterranean islands increased, to the point that Charles Quint faced significant difficulties in traveling from Barcelona to Naples (Belhamissi, 1972, p. 95).

⁴Until today, it continues to serve as the headquarters of the Algerian Navy.

On the other hand, the liberation of the Penon fortress had a systematic impact on the complete liberation of the central Algerian coast. And its reoccupation by the Spanish became an impossible task, as confirmed by their failed campaigns in Cherchell and Algiers after the destruction of the Penon Fortress (Chalabi, 1911, p. 185; al-Madani, 1984, p. 225).

The impact of the liberation of the Penon fortress was not limited to the inhabitants of the central Algerian coast; it extended to the eastern and western regions as well. In eastern Algeria, Berber tribes began to exert pressure on the occupying Spaniards in Béjaïa. Meanwhile, Abu Muhammad Abdullah, the brother of Abu Hamu al-Zayyani⁵, seized the opportunity presented by the destruction of the Penon fortress. He severed ties with the Spaniards and declared his allegiance to Hayreddin Barbarossan (al-Mili, 2004/3, p. 57-58).

Consequently, the Spanish occupation was confined to Béjaïa and Oran. Their only option was to organize swift military campaigns against Algerian ports, exploiting the absence or distraction of Ottoman fleet units from Algeria, as they did with their raids on Cherchell and Algiers. In addition, they incited local princes and leaders to rebel in an attempt to weaken the Ottoman presence in Algeria, hoping to one day regain the cities and fortresses they had lost.

c. Spanish Reactions to the Destruction of the Penon Fortress

A wave of fear spread among the monarchs of Europe, and they began to realize the seriousness of the Ottoman presence, which turned Algeria into an advanced base on the southwestern shore of the Mediterranean Sea (Zoubiri, 1985, p. 36-37).

In Spain, Emperor Charles Quint was consumed by anger when learning of the destruction of the Penon fortress, the killing and capture of all its defenders, and the defeat of the Spanish expedition sent to support the fortress (Abdelkader, 1934, p. 77-79)⁶. The raids carried out by Ottoman naval forces, with the support of local residents and Andalusian migrants, increased along the coasts of Spain, Italy, the Balearic Islands, and other Mediterranean islands. The people of those coasts found themselves suffocated by complaints and grievances against their king, Charles Quint,

⁵The Spanish had appointed Abu Muhammad Abdullah, the brother of Abu Hamu al-Zayyani, as the ruler of Tlemcen following the death of Aruj.

⁶The chronicles of the expeditions recount that Charles Quint became so infuriated upon hearing about the fall of the Béjaïa fortress that he started tearing at his own hair and throwing dirt upon himself. He even took out a dagger, intending to end his own life out of extreme rage.

due to the actions of the people of Algiers⁷. They demanded their urgent security and the security of their coasts⁸.

As for the remaining Spanish garrisons in Béjaïa and Oran, they lived in constant fear, especially after Abdallah the New Sultan of Tlemcen cut off their supplies and declared his allegiance to the Ottomans. These garrisons endured extreme hunger and fear, as their supplies were now routed through Spain, often arriving late or not at all (De La Primaudaie, 1875, p. 6).

In an attempt to mitigate the shock of the fall of the Penon fortress, Charles Quint ordered several precautionary measures to confront the new situation. He seized the opportunity of the peace treaty he had concluded with France to redirect his campaign towards Algeria (De La Primaudaie, 1875, p. 6). Among the most significant provisions of these measures were:

1. Sending a fleet of forty warships to Algeria in the year 1530, a year after the liberation of the Penon fortress (al-Madani, 1984, p. 225).⁹ He appointed the famous Genoese sailor Andrea Doria as its commander (al-TUR, 1989, p. 94).¹⁰

The Spanish preparations reached the ears of Khair ad-Din Barbarossa, who prepared 35 ships in the port of Algiers and awaited the appearance of the Spanish fleet. However, the Spanish campaign diverted towards the fortress of Cherchell instead of heading to Algiers, where they initiated a military landing operation in its harbor¹¹ and launched a large-scale attack (al-Madani, 1984, p. 225). The Ottoman garrison assigned to guard the fortress, alongside the Andalusian migrants and locals, defended against the attack by firing cannon shells from its walls at the Spanish fleet. Then, unexpectedly, the Inquishariyya battalion merged with the Spanish forces in a sudden assault that caught the Spanish off guard, forcing them to retreat. The determination of the Ottoman defenders, coupled with news of Khayr al-Din's imminent arrival with his fleet to support the

⁷An anonymous manuscript titled "Al-Muhkamah" was translated from Turkish to Arabic and exists in two copies at the National Library of Algeria, numbered 1100. Another version of it is appended to the book "Ghazawat 'Uruj wa Khayr al-Din" prior to its reference. Note: The context does not provide further information on the content of the manuscript "Al-Muhkamah."

⁸The expeditions, p 77-78.

⁹This was also indicated by al-Tur, while Professor al-Madani pointed out that the campaign consisted of twenty ships.

¹⁰Andrea Doria, a renowned Genoese sailor, was born around 1498. In his early youth, he served as a governor for the Pope. He later joined the Genoese fleet in 1513 and then worked for the French fleet. Thanks to his maritime skills, Andrea Doria achieved several victories against the Spanish fleet. He also engaged in piracy for personal gain, accumulating considerable wealth. Andrea Doria is considered the greatest sailor in the Christian world of the 16th century. When he led the campaign against Cherchell, he was 62 years old.

¹¹The Spanish chose to attack Cherchell to avoid encountering Khayr al-Din's forces stationed in Algiers, and because Cherchell was close to the city of Algiers, merely 120 kilometers away. Additionally, Aruj Rayis had recently rebuilt its fortress and established a shipbuilding factory there for warships.

defenders, hastened the Spanish campaign's collapse and withdrawal from Spain, leaving behind 1500 dead and 640 prisoners (al-Madani, 1984, p. 95-96).

The Ottomans' victory over the Spanish in Cherchell had the effect of strengthening locals' ties to them and increasing their faith in the Ottomans' ability to defend them from Spanish aggression. As a result, their influence extended to Tlemcen, where the inhabitants were also looking for salvation from the Spanish occupation they suffered under their own sovereign (al-Madani, 1984, p. 225).

2. As for the second measure, it was taken after the Spanish campaign against Cherchell failed. It involved launching another campaign to occupy the port of Hounein, which was an important maritime outlet for the Zayyanid state due to its proximity to Tlemcen. The Zayyanid state used this port as a trading center with European kingdoms (al-Vazzan, 1979, p. 380).

The occupation of the Hounein port aimed to encircle Algeria from the west and east, in addition to depriving Tlemcen of its last remaining maritime outlet, all in an effort to pressure its ruler, Abdallah, who was loyal to Khayr al-Din, to reconsider his allegiance (De La Primaudaie, 1875, p. 56-60).

Thus, in 1531, the Spanish commander, D. Álvaro de Bazán, received orders to attack the city and occupy its port, which was only guarded by a small Zayyanid garrison. The Spanish fleet, consisting of 11 warships and 2 military transports, anchored before the city's harbor, where they managed to occupy both the harbor and the city after a desperate defense attempted by the locals, who lacked competent leadership and a strong army (al-Madani, 1984, p. 237).

Cardinal Ximenes wrote a letter to Emperor Charles Quint, explaining to him the details of the city's occupation on September 11, 1531, and highlighting its significance. His letter stated:

"Those familiar with the region confirmed to us the utmost importance of the city of Hounein and its harbor. Hounein is a fortified town with strong walls and a formidable fortress. It's only 12 stages away from Tlemcen. This holds tremendous significance for our commercial activities that we can exchange with the Arabs. Possessing the city of Hounein is particularly advantageous for keeping the sovereignty of Tlemcen under our control. The ruler won't think of attacking us when he sees we have secured the regions within our new borders and fortified ourselves in them."

After describing how the city was captured, as mentioned previously, he goes on to say:

"The city was not prepared for this attack, and not all its defenders were present. This facilitated our progress. The operation did not cost us much, as the number of casualties among our men did not exceed forty, with about a hundred wounded." (al-Madani, 1984, p. 236-238).

Despite the fall of Hounein and its fortress, the inhabitants of the interior regions imposed a strict siege on the Spanish garrison that settled in the city for its protection. The garrison was unable to venture further inland to secure their supply needs. The situation for the Spanish soldiers stationed there, who didn't regularly receive support from Spain, became dire. They couldn't stay in the city for more than three years before they were forced to evacuate it in December 1534 after causing significant damage to it (al-Madani, 1984, p. 238-239).

As for the Spanish aspiration to impose the allegiance of the Zayyanid Sultan on them, they succeeded in it. As soon as they took control of Hounein, the Sultan declared his rebellion against Khayr al-Din. Khayr al-Din personally led his forces to discipline him and bring him back to obedience. Khayr al-Din had no difficulty quashing the rebellion and arresting Prince Abdullah. After the intervention of scholars and dignitaries, Khayr al-Din pardoned him but compelled him to pay a fine of thirty thousand pieces of gold (al-TUR, 1989, p. 98).

3. The third step the Emperor thought about taking to eliminate the Ottoman presence in Algeria was to lead a large campaign himself, spearheaded by Charles-Quint, to recapture the city of Algiers (al-TUR, 1989, p. 51). This campaign became well-known in modern Algerian history as the "Charles-Quint Campaign on Algiers" (al-TUR, 1989, p. 95-110). This campaign was delayed due to significant political developments until the year 1541. However, this campaign ended with a resounding defeat for the Spanish, which prompted the king to abandon his throne and withdraw to one of the monasteries until his death (Darradj, 2010, p. 208).¹²

Conclusion

Throughout this study and regarding its results, as well as the political developments that Algeria experienced after the destruction of the Penon Fortress, we can consider this big event as the actual start of the Ottoman existence in Algeria, because they could install themselves there and face effectively all the Spanish campaigns that were aiming at expelling them from Algeria and re-occupying its coasts, as well as the uniting of the Ottomans with the Algerians under one central administration after they had been able to eliminate the rebellions that were carried by local leaders.

¹²It's said that Charles Lequin threw his crown on the ground due to the failure of his campaign and his survival with great difficulty.

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