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The Carpet Industry in the Souf Region and French Colonial Interest: A Historical and Analytical Study of a French Report from 1919

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Abstract

This study examines the carpet industry in the Souf region during the French colonial period through an analysis of a French report entitled *The Carpet Industry in the Souf Region*, dated March 16, 1919, considering it a historical source that reflects the reality of this industry and the nature of the colonial administrative interest in it. The study aims to investigate the position of the carpet industry within local handicraft and economic activity and to identify the manifestations of colonial administrative intervention in this field, while examining the relationship between local craft traditions and attempts at training, organization, and development. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical historical approach by analyzing the content of the report and relating it to the colonial context in which it was produced. The study concludes that the carpet industry was connected to local craft traditions that were transmitted within the family before becoming the subject of institutional interest, manifested in training, the search for patterns, and the organization of certain aspects of production and marketing. The document also reveals an interaction between preserving some traditional characteristics of the carpet and reorganizing them according to a new institutional vision. The study concludes that the report represents an important source for studying the history of the carpet industry in the Souf region and for understanding one aspect of the colonial administration's approach to local traditional industries, while taking into consideration the nature of the document as a source issued by a colonial institution.

Keywords: carpet industry, Souf region, French occupation, colonial administration, traditional industries, 1919 report, economic history.

Introduction



Algeria underwent profound transformations during the French colonial period that affected various political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of life, amid the colonial administration's efforts to consolidate its control over Algerian society and organize the various fields associated with it. Colonial interest was not limited to political, military, and administrative aspects, but also extended to economic activities, crafts, and traditional industries, which became subjects of observation, study, and monitoring by various institutions and bodies affiliated with the colonial administration. Consequently, studying these activities is not limited to identifying their economic or craft-related nature, but also makes it possible to understand one aspect of colonial policy and the mechanisms through which the French administration dealt with local society and the local economy.

Within this framework, traditional industries emerge as one of the important components of the economic and social activity of Algerian society, owing to the skills, expertise, and inherited traditions associated with them, as well as their role in preserving forms of local production. These industries received attention during the colonial period, either through monitoring them and identifying their characteristics or through attempts to organize, develop, and integrate certain aspects of them into the economic and institutional frameworks established by the colonial administration.

The carpet industry in the Souf region falls within this context, as it was one of the traditional industries associated with Souf society and distinguished by its craft and artistic characteristics, while also constituting part of local economic activity. Studying this industry during the colonial period is particularly important because it makes it possible to examine the condition of one of the local crafts while, at the same time, revealing the nature of the colonial administration's interest in it and the manner in which it viewed and dealt with local traditional industry within the context of its interest in various aspects of Algerian society and economy.

The importance of the subject is further enhanced by the availability of historical documents contemporary with this period, most notably a French report entitled *The Carpet Industry in Souf*, dated March 16, 1919. The significance of this report lies in the fact that it is a direct document concerning the carpet industry in the Souf region during the French occupation and was issued by one of the actors associated with the educational and administrative institution in the region. This makes it an important source for studying how the colonial administration approached this industry and the nature of the interest it showed in it during that period.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that it does not approach the carpet industry merely as a craft and economic activity, but rather seeks to situate it within its historical colonial context by examining the nature of the French administration's interest in it and whether this interest was associated with attempts to preserve, develop, and organize the industry or whether it

formed part of a broader approach toward monitoring local economic and social activities and reorganizing them in accordance with colonial frameworks and interests. The study also highlights the value of the colonial document as a historical source, while taking into consideration its nature and the institution that issued it.

This study aims to reveal the reality of the carpet industry in the Souf region during the colonial period through the 1919 report, identify the nature of the colonial administration's interest in this industry, and highlight the various aspects addressed by the document. It also seeks to understand the position of the carpet industry within colonial interest in local economic and craft activities and to provide a critical historical reading of the report that distinguishes between the source's information and the conclusions that can be drawn from it.

Accordingly, the study raises the following research problem: How did the report on the carpet industry in the Souf region reflect the reality of the carpet industry in the Souf region in 1919? What was the nature of the French colonial administration's interest in this industry? And what were the implications of this interest within the context of its policy toward the economic and social aspects of Algerian society?

To answer this problem, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical historical approach by examining the report as a primary historical source, analyzing its content, classifying the information it provides concerning the carpet industry, and then relating it to the historical context in which the document was produced. This makes it possible to identify the nature of the industry on the one hand and the nature of colonial interest in it on the other, while adopting a critical reading of the source in light of its nature and the institution from which it originated.

1. The Document and the Historical Context of the Carpet Industry in the Souf Region

1.1. Identification of the Document

The document used in this study is a French report entitled **"The Carpet Industry in the Souf Region,"** dated March 16, 1919, and consisting of seven pages. The report provides varied and detailed information about the state of the carpet industry in the Souf region during that period. It addresses several topics related to this craft, including the history of the industry, the mechanisms through which its secrets were transmitted within the family, patterns, colors and motifs, weaving and training courses, raw materials and dyeing techniques, production, prices and marketing, the nature of customers, as well as the proposed vision for developing the industry and ensuring its continuity.

The report was written by Achiary, director of the El Oued School and responsible for weaving lessons. His professional position is particularly important for understanding the nature and content of the document. He was not merely an external observer of carpet production but was directly involved in training in the field of weaving, which occupies an important place in the report. Therefore, his professional position explains the clear presence of educational, technical, and productive aspects in the document and gives his observations significant source value for studying the educational and craft policies associated with the carpet industry in the Souf region, while taking into consideration his administrative position and the colonial context in which the report was produced.

The preserved copy bears at its end a statement indicating that it conforms to the original, dated August 18, 1919, and authenticated by Captain Mars, head of the El Oued annex. These information make it possible to distinguish between two levels in the handling of the document: the level of authorship and drafting, associated with Achiary, and the level of the administrative procedure concerning certification that the copy conforms to the original, associated with Captain Mars. Accordingly, attributing the content of the report to Achiary is more accurate from a documentary standpoint, whereas the appearance of Captain Mars's name at the end of the copy belongs to the administrative process of preserving the document and certifying its conformity with the original, rather than indicating that he was its author or the originator of its content.

The document derives its importance from being a primary source contemporary with the period under study. It does not merely provide general information about carpets, but also records details concerning workers and trainees, looms, production, prices, raw materials, dyeing, designs, and marketing. However, this value does not mean that it should be treated as an entirely neutral description, since the position of its author within the colonial educational institution makes it, at the same time, a document revealing the administration's view of the industry and the manner in which it sought to organize and develop it.

1.2. The Origins and Transmission of the Industry

The report begins with a historical overview of the Souf carpet industry. It states that the manufacture of high-pile carpets was introduced into the Souf region approximately 140 years earlier by a man named Ben Gherib, who was a supplier to one of the beys governing the region of Ziban, Constantine, and Collo. Following the fall of the bey, Ben Gherib left the bey's service and moved to El Oued. He subsequently settled in Guemar, where he continued to practice his craft. From that time onward, the Ben Gherib family transmitted the secrets of this industry from father to son and preserved them with great care, thereby monopolizing its practice. At that time, the Ben Gherib family consisted of 12 weavers (Achiary, 1919, p. 1).

This account reveals the nature of the industry in its traditional form, as presented by the report. Craft knowledge was transmitted within the family from one generation to another, and the secrets of the industry were associated with the producing family. Thus, the family simultaneously performed the function of preserving knowledge and that of a production unit.

However, the report provides a critical picture of the condition reached by the industry. It argues that contemporary artisans had lost their old traditions and that the decline of traditional memory and the desire to expand the range of patterns had led to the creation of new patterns and the imitation of others. Their contemporary carpets became a mixture of motifs and styles of diverse origins. Members of the Ben Gherib family also turned toward producing low-cost carpets, that is, those characterized by loose or widely spaced weaving and the use of low-quality wool. In addition, with the exception of certain colors, they had almost ceased using plant-based dyes that had previously been employed (Achiary, 1919, p. 1).

This assessment is important for understanding the background of administrative intervention in the report. The industry is not presented as being in a stable condition; rather, it is portrayed as an industry that had lost some of its old elements and therefore needed to rediscover its patterns and techniques. Thus, the decline described by the report became one of the justifications that, from the perspective of those responsible for the project, made reorganizing the industry and reviving its old patterns desirable.

2. Colonial Administrative Interest in and Organization of the Carpet Industry

The report states that in 1908, Lieutenant Matrat, who was then head of the El Oued annex, together with Mr. Paquet, director of the indigenous school, began considering the revival of this industry, which was in decline. A request was made to establish two weaving courses attached to the schools of El Oued and Guemar (Achiary, 1919, p. 1). Approval was granted, and responsibility for supervising these two courses was assigned to the directors of the two schools. The objectives were as follows:

1. To search for all old patterns and the best techniques.
2. To train weavers so that they would later become manufacturers and producers.

The report states that the beginnings were difficult and that the research operations were long and arduous. Nevertheless, continuous efforts ultimately succeeded, making it possible, beginning in 1914, to achieve satisfactory results (Achiary, 1919, p. 2).

The establishment of weaving courses represents the most important indicator of the colonial administration's entry into the field of carpet production in an institutional manner. The initiative was no longer limited to monitoring an existing industry; rather, an educational institution was

now searching for patterns, determining techniques, and training workers. This means that the administration sought to transfer part of the craft knowledge from the sphere of family inheritance to the sphere of organized school-based training.

The stated objective of training workers who would later become manufacturers also reveals a clear economic dimension to the project. Training was not intended merely to teach the craft for its own sake, but also to prepare people capable of continuing production. In addition, the search for old patterns reflects a cultural and artistic dimension represented by an attempt to identify a model that those responsible for the project regarded as authentic and to preserve it.

It can be argued that, as shown by the report, the administration's interest in the carpet industry proceeded along two interconnected paths: developing the industry from a technical and economic perspective, and preserving some of its traditional characteristics from an artistic perspective. Nevertheless, this conclusion should not be transformed into a claim that there was a general colonial policy unless it is confirmed by other sources. Here, it is an inference drawn from the content of the report.

3. Organization of the Carpet Industry and Production Mechanisms

3.1. Vocational Training in Weaving

The report contains a section entitled "Operation of the Weaving Workshops." It states that, because of military mobilization, the weaving instruction section in the city of El Oued was the only one that continued operating during the war. Ten trainees, aged between 14 and 18, worked there for three hours every day. They were former pupils of the school. They did not receive wages, but from time to time they received small financial incentives, and the training period lasted three years (Achiary, 1919, p. 2).

The course was financed through a municipal appropriation supplemented by a grant from the General Government. It contained three vertical looms capable of producing carpets up to three meters long. However, experience demonstrated that under good conditions it was only possible to produce a carpet measuring 1.5 × 2 meters or 2 × 3 meters (Achiary, 1919, p. 2).

The report states that the designs were unsuitable for producing smaller models and that average production ranged between 30 and 35 square meters of carpet during an eight-month academic year, while emphasizing that the educational course was not a production course (Achiary, 1919, p. 2).

These information show that the school had become an instrument for training a specialized local workforce and that the project was not intended to establish a large factory as much as, in

its initial stage, to train weavers. The combination of municipal financing and government assistance also indicates that the project enjoyed institutional support.

The report states that the carpets produced were sold at a price ranging between 60 and 65 francs per square meter and that the principal customers were tourists and passing officials of Indigenous Affairs (Achiary, 1919, p. 2).

Here, the relationship between training, production, and the market becomes apparent. Even though the workshop was educational, what it produced entered the sphere of commercial exchange. Consequently, the school was directly connected to the economic dimension of the industry, rather than being concerned solely with technical training.

3.2. Raw Materials and Their Preparation Stages

The report states that wool, together with goat hair, was purchased from the El Oued market. All processing operations were carried out in the weaving workshop by workers from the indigenous population. They washed, sorted, combed, and spun the wool using their tools. Afterward, the grease was removed from the spun wool, and it was dyed by the person responsible for the course in a small dyeing facility next to the weaving workshop (Achiary, 1919, p. 4).

These information reveal the continued reliance on local labor in essential stages of preparing the raw material, while the school intervened more directly in the dyeing process. This shows that the colonial project was not based on eliminating local skills, but on incorporating them into a new, more organized educational and technical framework.

The purchase of wool and goat hair from the El Oued market also demonstrates that the industry was connected to the local economy through a market that supplied the materials necessary for production. This is an important element in studying the extent of the carpet industry's integration into Souf society.

3.3. A Project for Organizing Carpet Production and Marketing

The report then turns to the future of the enterprise and emphasizes that the matter concerns implementing the utilitarian objective of the work. It proposes settling a number of workers who had already been trained in their homes, six of them, for example, during the first year, provided that the Indigenous Provident Society (*Société Indigène de Prévoyance*, SIP), referred to in the report as a lending institution, would provide them with the necessary tools and that they would be given a certain quantity of wool (Achiary, 1919, p. 5). This point requires precise adherence to the terminology used in the original document, as it refers to the institution designated in the French report by the term Indigenous Provident Society. Such precision is particularly important

because the nature of the institution and its role in financing workers constitute part of understanding the proposed mechanism for organizing production. It should be noted that the Indigenous Provident Society were established pursuant to the Law of April 14, 1893, and constituted institutions for providing assistance, advances, and mutual aid loans (Lecoq, 1903, p. 52).

The report states that the prepared quantity of wool would be dyed within the families in a collective dyeing facility according to specified formulas, and that a local worker from El Oued had been trained for this purpose at the Dyeing School in Algiers. The workers would also work according to the approved patterns supplied to them (Achiary, 1919, pp. 5–6). The organization would purchase the first batch of carpets produced in this manner and sell them, then use the money recovered to purchase the supplies necessary for a second batch, and so on, with the assurance that the price would be calculated in such a way as to provide the workers with sufficient wages (Achiary, 1919, p. 6).

This project represents the clearest example of the transformation of carpet production from a traditional craft into an organized economic activity. The project includes the trained worker, raw materials and tools, dyeing, patterns, production, followed by marketing and reinvestment of the proceeds.

Through this organization, one of the practical objectives of colonial interest in the industry can be understood: making production more regular and connecting it to the market while ensuring continued supervision and guidance. The administration did not merely train the worker; it also established a vision of what he would produce, how he would produce it, how he would obtain his materials, and how the product would be sold.

The report does not state that this project was part of an overall colonial economic policy. Therefore, the claim that the objective was to economically exploit the industry should be presented in the final research as a hypothesis requiring support from other documents. What is established by the report is the desire to develop the industry, organize its production, and ensure the marketing of its products.

4. Artistic and Technical Characteristics of Souf Carpets

4.1. Carpet Structure and Colors

The report describes the carpet as a type of knotted carpet, of the style known as the “buckwheat knot,” and indicates that it is not a luxury carpet but a floor covering made of thick wool with large knots. The warp and the border are made of a mixture of wool and goat hair (Achiary, 1919, p. 3).

As for the classical model, its background is red and contains a central motif surrounded by a well-designed border with decorative bands separated by red bands. The carpet is also made with a blue background, in which case the central motif becomes red, while the decorative bands remain separated by red bands. In brief, the report identifies two background colors: red and blue, and three secondary colors: yellow, black, and white. The latter two colors are used primarily to highlight the designs (Achiary, 1919, p. 3).

These descriptions reveal a specific conception of the artistic identity of Souf carpets as those responsible for the project sought to reproduce them. The selection of colors, the central motif, and the decorative bands was no longer merely an artistic description, but became part of a model taught to weavers and reproduced.

The report confirms that the choice of color was not arbitrary, but based on two principles: approaching as closely as possible the finest shades of the old colors known in the country and returning to the simple elements possessed by the ancient artists. The report criticizes the introduction of composite colors, such as green, purple, orange, and bright, glowing colors, arguing that ancient artists did not possess this rich palette, but created beautiful objects using only a few elements (Achiary, 1919, p. 3). This indicates that the concept of authenticity in the report was associated with simplicity of colors and that those responsible for the project did not merely seek to increase production, but rather to produce a specific carpet model according to their conception of its original characteristics.

4.2. Patterns and Motifs

The report states that the designs were copied from the oldest carpets that could be found in the country and that research into the designs was one of the greatest concerns of the teachers responsible for the courses. They were careful not to invent, because they believed that Westerners did not have the same conception of design as Easterners. They therefore simply wanted to find the old type of Souf carpet (Achiary, 1919, p. 3).

After many attempts and errors, they arrived at a model that they considered the only type that could be reconstructed. The report states that in the East, each artist had a particular type associated with his family, which was reproduced from one generation to another and from which the family made its livelihood. Therefore, according to the report, it was not surprising that in the market into which weaving had been introduced by a single individual, there was only one particular type associated with him (Achiary, 1919, p. 3).

The report adds that those responsible for the project adhered to this model at that time, while acknowledging that commercial necessities might later lead artisans to adopt other types alongside the first type, which would retain its purity (Achiary, 1919, p. 3).

One of the most important consequences of institutional intervention in the industry can be seen here: the transformation of the traditional model into a model capable of being documented, taught, and recorded. Knowledge that had been transmitted from one generation to another within the family became an object of research by teachers and was subsequently drawn, recorded, and reproduced.

The report states that the patterns came from the Souf region and had been converted into weaving diagrams in the Souf region. They were also registered and approved by the competent academic authority in Algiers. The drawing office of the Department of Artistic Education Inspection would only reproduce several copies according to the needs of future artisans (Achiary, 1919, p. 4).

This reveals the transition of local motifs from the sphere of craft practice to the sphere of institutional documentation. The educational authority did not merely observe the model; it also contributed to fixing, registering, and reproducing it, thereby transforming it into an educational and productive model that could be distributed to artisans.

4.3. Dyeing Techniques

The report states that the issue of dyes was the subject of debate among the various parties interested in it and that the discussion continued for five years. The question was whether natural dyes should be retained at any cost or whether a small number of carefully selected synthetic dyes should be adopted. Experience resolved this issue in favor of the latter option (Achiary, 1919, p. 5).

The report points to progress in dye chemistry and to the existence of a small number of excellent alizarin colors, an artificial red dye, most of which, according to the report, was manufactured by German factories. These products were seriously tested first at the Dyeing School in Algiers and then in El Oued. The report considered them compatible with the region's water and stated that their results were much better than those obtained with natural dyes, particularly in terms of resistance to light (Achiary, 1919, p. 5).

The issue of dyes reveals an attempt to introduce modern technical knowledge into a traditional local industry. The matter was no longer related solely to preserving natural dyeing; rather, quality, resistance, and compatibility with the region's water became criteria for evaluating dyes. This is consistent with the objective of improving the product and making it more marketable.

The author of the report hopes that French or Allied chemical factories will be able to supply such good dyes, since it was no longer possible to obtain supplies from Germany because of the circumstances of the war (Achiary, 1919, p. 5).

This paragraph also reveals the connection between the carpet industry and the economic context of the First World War, as the materials used in the local industry became connected to European factories and to trade and supply conditions among the belligerent countries.

5. Economic, Social, and Cultural Dimensions

5.1. Economic Value and Marketing

The report emphasizes that before expanding any industry, its ability to sell its products must be ensured. It then confirms that the success of the Souf carpet is beyond doubt because it had proved itself at various exhibitions, including Algiers and Lyon. It also states that the weaving courses were unable to meet the numerous orders they received (Achiary, 1919, p. 6).

The report adds that the authorities responsible for artistic education in Algeria had, before the war, guaranteed outlets for the products, but the war disrupted everything, making it necessary to resume activity as quickly as possible (Achiary, 1919, p. 6).

The economic value of the carpet appears clearly here. The report links the success of the industry to its ability to reach markets and exhibitions and does not consider production an end in itself. This confirms that the project to develop the industry was directly linked to marketing.

The reference to the Lyon exhibition alongside Algiers reveals a conception that went beyond the local market, as the Souf carpet was presented as a product capable of reaching exhibition spaces outside the region and thus acquiring broader commercial value.

5.2. Social, Cultural, and Artistic Value

At its conclusion, the report emphasizes that the wool carpet deserves to be known and appreciated and that, by its nature, dimensions, design, and color, it is a very beautiful upholstery carpet with undeniable artistic value. It also considers it one of the purest carpets of Algeria, if not the purest, in terms of design (Achiary, 1919, p. 6).

On the final page, it describes it as distinguished by its simple structure, the sobriety and harmony of its colors, and associates it with the Orient, considering simplicity of design to be one of the characteristics of the finest Eastern works and making simplicity the secret of beauty (Achiary, 1919, p. 7).

Economically, the carpet appears in the report as a product with a price, customers, orders, exhibitions, and marketing outlets.

Socially, the industry is associated with the family, workers, and trainees. Knowledge was transmitted within the Ben Gherib family, while training later became available within the school, after which the report proposed returning workers to production in their homes.

Culturally and artistically, the carpet is associated with old patterns, colors, motifs, and traditions. Thus, in the report's view, the value of the carpet was not linked solely to its colonial function, but also to characteristics that were regarded as distinctive of its artistic identity.

However, these aesthetic assessments should be attributed to the author of the report, because they reflect his artistic and cultural view of the carpet and should not be transformed into definitive objective judgments about its artistic value.

6. Significance of Colonial Interest in the Carpet Industry

6.1. Objectives of Colonial Interest

All the information contained in the report reveal several practical objectives associated with the French colonial administration's interest in the carpet industry. The first was to revive an industry that the report considered to be in decline by searching for old patterns and the best techniques. The second was to train a specialized local workforce through weaving courses. The third was to organize production by providing tools, materials, and patterns. The fourth was to improve quality, particularly in the field of dyeing. The fifth was to ensure the marketing of products and connect them with exhibitions and markets.

Another objective also appears to have been the preservation of a particular model of the Souf carpet. The administration did not seek to increase production arbitrarily; rather, it was careful to determine the patterns, colors, and techniques that should be used. Thus, economic development was associated with an attempt to control the artistic form of the product.

From a historical perspective, this interest can be interpreted as reflecting the administration's view of traditional industry as a field that could be organized and economically developed by transforming it into a productive and marketable activity while preserving certain elements of its local character. However, this interpretation remains an inference from the content of the report and is not a direct statement by the administration that it sought to exploit the carpet industry.

The financial dimension evident in the proposed project should also not be overlooked. It links workers to a lending body that provides tools and raw materials, followed by a mechanism for marketing production and reinvesting the proceeds in a new production cycle. This reflects an integrated economic conception for organizing the craft, but it is not in itself sufficient to prove that the ultimate purpose was to subject artisans to the colonial financial system or transform

the industry into an activity dependent upon it. Such a conclusion requires comparison of the report with other financial and administrative documents.

Similarly, the adoption of synthetic dyes instead of natural dyes should not automatically be interpreted as an attempt to create dependence on French chemical factories. The report primarily justifies the choice on the basis of the quality of the dyes, their resistance to light, and their compatibility with the region's water. It also notes that some of the best dyes were German and that wartime conditions prevented access to them. Therefore, the economic and technical dimension is clear in the document, whereas the conclusion concerning industrial dependency requires additional evidence.

6.2. Preservation and Organization of Traditions

The report reveals a complex relationship between preserving tradition and reshaping it. On the one hand, those responsible for the project emphasize the need to search for old patterns, avoid invention, preserve simple colors, and adhere to the model considered old and authentic. On the other hand, the process of preservation itself became carried out through the school and the administration through research, recording, drawing, teaching, and reproduction.

Here lies one of the most important historical observations that can be drawn from the report. The administration was not merely a guardian of an existing tradition; it also participated in determining which model should be regarded as traditional. Thus, the transmission of heritage moved from family inheritance alone to an institutional process involving the teacher, the administration, and the artisan.

Consequently, preserving heritage in this case was not separate from reorganizing it. Once a particular model is selected, registered, its colors determined, and taught to weavers, the tradition itself becomes subject to a process of selection and organization. This is an important point when using the report to study the history of Souf carpets.

6.3. The Social Dimension of the Carpet Industry

The project's interest was not limited to the final product, but extended to the people responsible for production. The report mentions the trainees and their ages, discusses workers who would become manufacturers, and then proposes enabling some of them to work in their homes and supplying them with tools and wool.

This indicates that intervention in the industry also involved organizing the workforce itself. The worker became an object of training, guidance, and supervision, and then part of a production and marketing system. The return to home-based production also means that the project

attempted to combine institutional training with the continuation of production within the family.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the carpet industry constituted a field of interaction between the colonial institution and the local community: the school provided training and guidance, the administration provided the framework and support, local workers carried out the stages of production, while the organizing body undertook the marketing of the production.

7. A Critical Reading of the Colonial Report as a Historical Source and Its Significance

7.1. The Report between Information and the Colonial Perspective

Despite the importance of the report, its nature requires that it be approached with caution. It was written by Achiary, director of the El Oued School and responsible for weaving lessons. Therefore, his perspective was directly connected to the educational and technical project that existed at the school.

The report does not necessarily represent the voice of local weavers or craft families. Rather, it primarily presents the perspective of an educational and administrative institution toward the industry. Consequently, the judgments it makes concerning the decline of traditions, the quality of patterns, the beauty of colors, or the superiority of synthetic dyes should be treated as positions held by the author of the document and those responsible for the project.

The importance of criticism is also evident in the fact that the report uses colonial administrative language, such as describing workers as members of the indigenous population. This terminology reflects the administrative context in which the document was produced and should not become, in the analysis of the research, a neutral description of the local community.

7.2. Terminological Accuracy in Dealing with the Document

Critical reading also requires maintaining the terminology used by the report itself, because replacing the original term with a similar term may alter the meaning of the information. Such precision is particularly important in historical studies based on a single document, because an administrative or economic term may carry a specific institutional meaning. Therefore, adhering to the wording of the original document and then interpreting its role within its context is safer than replacing it with a similar term and subsequently building conclusions upon it.

7.3. The Limits and Historical Significance of the Document

The significance of the report lies not only in the information it provides about the carpet, but also in the fact that it reveals the nature of the relationship between the colonial administration and local crafts. It shows how an industry that had been associated with family and craft inheritance moved into a field in which the school and administration contributed to its study, organization, teaching, and marketing.

At the same time, the report should not be regarded as a complete picture of the carpet industry in the Souf region in 1919. It focuses on aspects that were of interest to the educational and administrative project and does not necessarily provide a comprehensive description of all weavers, families, markets, and craft practices in the region. Nor does it directly convey the views of local artisans regarding the administration's intervention in their industry.

Thus, the value of the report lies in its dual character. It is a source of information about the carpet industry in the Souf region and, at the same time, a source for studying the colonial administration's view of local traditional industry and the way in which it intervened in its organization and development.

Conclusion

The report on the carpet industry in the Souf region reveals multiple aspects of the carpet industry in the Souf region during the period immediately preceding 1919. It addresses the history of the industry, the Ben Gherib family, weaving courses, the organization of the workshop, trainees, looms, production, prices, raw materials, dyes, patterns, and motifs, and then presents a future project for organizing production and marketing it.

The study demonstrates that, at this stage, the Souf carpet industry stood at a point between local tradition and institutional intervention. According to the report, the industry was originally associated with family inheritance, as demonstrated by the Ben Gherib family, but it subsequently became the subject of training within schools, the search for old patterns, the organization of techniques, the testing of dyes, and consideration of production and marketing.

French colonial administrative interest in the industry appears through a series of concrete measures: establishing weaving courses, financing them, training weavers, searching for and registering old patterns, organizing dyeing, providing materials and tools, and then developing a plan for marketing production. This indicates that, for the administration, the carpet had become more than merely a local craft; it had become an activity that could be developed and organized and connected to the market.

The objectives of this interest can be inferred from the content of the report as developing the industry, training the workforce, improving quality, preserving a specific traditional model, and

ensuring the marketing of production. The mechanism for financing workers and providing tools and wool, followed by recovering the proceeds and reinvesting them, also reveals an attempt to establish an organized production cycle. However, these information alone are insufficient to conclude that France sought to financially subordinate artisans or directly exploit the industry economically, since such conclusions go beyond what the report explicitly states and require comparison with other documents.

The issue of dyes also reveals the interaction of technical and economic dimensions with the circumstances of the First World War. The report favored synthetic dyes on the basis of testing results, quality, and resistance, while at the same time pointing to the difficulty of obtaining German dyes because of the war. Therefore, interpreting this choice merely as a means of creating dependence on French factories would go beyond what the document demonstrates. What is established is the introduction of a new dyeing technique and the linking of the local industry to a broader network of European production and trade.

The document reveals an important paradox: the administration sought to preserve the old model while simultaneously reorganizing the manner in which this model was transmitted and produced. It moved from family memory and craft practice to schooling, drawing, recording, teaching, and supervision. Thus, the preservation of heritage was not a neutral process; rather, it was accompanied by the selection and definition of what was considered authentic and worthy of preservation.

From an economic perspective, the carpet appears as a product with a price, customers, exhibitions, orders, and marketing outlets, while from a social perspective, it appears as an activity associated with the family, workers, and trainees. From an artistic and cultural perspective, the report linked its value to simplicity of design, the sobriety and harmony of colors, and old patterns.

The significance of the document also lies in the position of its author. Achiary was not an external observer but the director of the El Oued School and responsible for weaving lessons, making the report a direct witness to the training and organization project associated with the educational institution. As for the certificate stating that the copy was a *copie conforme*, dated August 18, 1919, and authenticated by Captain Mars, head of the El Oued annex, it clarifies the administrative process through which the copy was preserved without altering the attribution of the report's content to its author, Achiary.

Accordingly, Achiary's report represents an important source for studying the history of the carpet industry in the Souf region during the early twentieth century, not only because it preserves information about the industry's techniques, production, and marketing, but also

because it reveals a historical moment in which the colonial administration began incorporating this local industry into an institutional framework combining education, technology, production, marketing, and the preservation of the traditional model. At the same time, its scholarly value increases when it is read critically, distinguishing between the facts recorded by the source, the judgments made by its author, and the conclusions that the researcher can construct in light of the document and by comparing it with other sources.

Source

-Achiary. (1919, March 16). *Industrie du tapis au souf* [Report]. Archives du Musée du Moudjahid d'El Oued, unnumbered document.

-Lecoq, J. (1903). Les sociétés indigènes de prévoyance, de secours et de prêts mutuels. A. Pedone.