

*Food Crises and Savings in Central Maghreb During
The Zayyanid Period (633-962 AH/1235-1554 AD)*

الأزمات الغذائية والادخار بالمغرب الأوسط خلال

العهد الزياني (633-962هـ/1235-1554م)

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Abstract:

Achieving food security during the medieval period was a major concern for the states of the Islamic Maghreb, and the Zayyanid state was one of those countries that suffered greatly from this dilemma. It remained unable to implement an effective food policy for its population despite having agricultural resources and human potential. Despite the extensive writings and studies conducted on this period, it remains enigmatic for many researchers, especially regarding the issue of food, which often troubled the Zayyanid state. It was not a simple event, nor were its consequences temporary and fleeting; rather, it generated serious repercussions at all levels. The food shortage led to violent shocks and fractures within Zayyanid society, whether due to weak authority, external conflicts, or internal problems. All of this we will attempt to address in this article, through which we aim to study the food crises that the Zayyanid state experienced and to assess its ability to confront them:

Keywords: Food; the Zayyanid state; Central Maghreb; savings; crises.

ملخص باللغة العربية

كل لقد شكل تحقيق الغذاء خلال الفترة الوسيطة هاجسا أكبر لدويلات المغرب الإسلامي، والدولة الزيانية واحدة من هذه الدول التي عانت كثيرا من جراء هذه المعضلة، إذ ظلت عاجزة عن تحقيق سياسة غذائية ناجعة لسكانها رغم ما كانت تتوفر عليه من إمكانيات زراعية وطاقات بشرية.. إن هذه الفترة رغم ما كتب عنها وأنجز من دراسات، ما زالت غامضة للكثير من الباحثين خاصة مثل موضوع الغذاء الذي أرق في الكثير من الأحيان الدولة الزيانية، إذ لم يكن بالحدث البسيط، كما لم تكن نتائجه ظرفية و عابرة بل كانت تتولد عنه انعكاسات خطيرة على جميع المستويات ، إذ أن نقص الغذاء أدى إلى حدوث هزات وشروخ عنيفة في المجتمع الزياني، إما لضعف السلطة، أو صراع خارجي، أو لمشاكل داخلية فيها. كل ذلك سنحاول الوقوف في هذا المقال الذي نروم من خلاله إلى دراسة الأزمات الغذائية التي عرفتها الدولة الزيانية والوقوف على مدى قدرتها في مواجهتها.

كلمات مفتاحية: الغذاء؛ الدولة الزيانية؛ المغرب الأوسط؛ الادخار؛ الأزمة.

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1- Introduction:

Achieving food security has remained the greatest concern for many Maghreb countries during the medieval period, and even to this day, it continues to represent one of the main obstacles to the stability of societies and systems. We still hear about many countries in our contemporary world that are unable to implement an effective food policy for their populations, despite having agricultural resources and human capacities. This has negatively impacted the social and political conditions in many instances.

And if this is the situation of many countries today, how was the state of the Central Maghreb (Algeria) during the medieval period under the rule of the Zayyanid dynasty (633-962 AH/1235-1554 AD)? That period, despite what has been written about it and the studies conducted, remains obscure to many researchers, especially regarding the issue of food, which often troubled the Zayyanid state. It was not a simple matter, nor were its consequences temporary and fleeting; rather, it led to serious repercussions on all levels. The food shortage caused violent shocks and fractures in Zayyanid society, whether due to weak authority, external conflicts, or internal problems.

And although neighboring countries like the Far Maghreb and the Near Maghreb (Tunisia) have made significant strides in studying the food situation during the medieval period due to the preserved documents they possess, Algeria is still taking its first steps in this field due to the scarcity of sources. Moreover, most historical accounts have been lost to time, destroyed amidst the bloody conflicts that erupted between various political forces, or have been lost due to the lack of an administrative plan aimed at preserving and organizing documents.

In my research, I relied on several sources in history and geography, as well as books on legal rulings, some contemporary to the events and others later than the period under study. I also referred to recent studies that addressed the topic.

In this research, I attempted to study the following issues:

The first issue: Highlighting the agricultural potential and human resources that Middle Morocco had during the Zayyanid era.

The second issue: Monitoring the food crises that the Zayyanid Central Morocco experienced.

The third issue: examining the response of the Zayyanid authority and its confrontation of these crises.

We will not overlook a series of questions around which our research topic will revolve.

1- What are the agricultural resources and human capabilities in the Central Maghreb?

2- Was the impact of the food crises that affected the Middle Maghreb significant on the state's population? And what was the prevailing dietary pattern during times of food crises?

3- What are the forms of the authority's response to these food crises? And did it have an effective food policy capable of addressing food shortages?

All of that we will attempt to answer in this research, through which we aspire to rewrite the history of the Central Maghreb based on a new vision and objective criteria aimed at purifying it from the

a long time, to the extent that wheat and barley might stay in its granaries for six years, then they are taken out, planted, and they sprout" (Al-Qalqashandi, 5 D/T, 150).

The natural resources of the Zayyanid state were one of the most important factors that contributed to the wealth of this activity and made it an agriculturally rich state, self-sufficient in what its fertile lands produce, especially the plains. These plains are interspersed with passages opened by valleys. Al-Hasan al-Wazzan pointed out the fertility and richness of the plains, saying, "The plains near the coast are very productive due to their fertility, and the area adjacent to Tlemcen is all plain with some deserts, but the places there are flourishing and the region is fertile" (Al-Wazzan, 2nd ed., vol. 2, p. 10). Yahya ibn Khaldun also described the region, saying, "It is the most temperate land and the most productive between Ifriqiya and Sous al-Ala to the Maghreb al-Aqsa" (Ibn Khaldun, 1980, 1, 84). The products of these plains met the needs of the inhabitants of the central Maghreb during the Zayyanid era, who numbered more than 100,000 people. The city of Tlemcen, the capital of the state, alone had a significant population density compared to the mountainous and desert areas, around which villages and rural areas were established (André, B., et al., 1984, 114).

The plains of the Zayyani state produced significant quantities of grain (Bachari, 1994, 71, 72), such as the plains of Tafsara, located 15 miles away, and the plains of Tasala, located 20 miles away from Tlemcen, where they produced abundant quantities of good, thick-grained wheat, and the production of these areas flooded their markets, sufficient for the needs of their population, and often overproduced for internal marketing as Tlemcen, for example, consumed large amounts of the production from the plains of Tasala, and according to Al-Wazzan: 'The production of Tsala's grain alone is sufficient to supply Tlemcen with what it needs due to its abundant production' (Al-Wazzan, H, 2, 12), and Oran was known for its agricultural wealth by some ancient geographers such as Ibn Huqal, who mentioned that its yields of wheat and barley (Ibn Huqal, B/T, 431), and Al-Idrisi also mentioned that all other grains are present in it, and some of them are marketed to all horizons (Al-Idrisi, H, 1983, 210).

Wheat and barley were the staple foodstuff for the inhabitants of the Middle Maghreb during the Zayyani era, as it was their bread, and on the other hand, these two plants are easy to cultivate and can be stored. However, the situation of prosperity resulting from the abundant production of wheat and barley, which leads to food self-sufficiency, was quickly eroded by factors stronger than any measure or action to improve the situation, as weather conditions, war, siege and unrest in the Middle Maghreb during the Zayyani era were capable of causing a significant decline of wheat and barley production and thus the occurrence of food crises

2. The role of nature in the food crisis.

It is indisputable that climate has played a decisive role in the history of human societies, given the negative or positive effects of its fluctuations on society and the economy, so it received great attention among Moroccan historians and geographers, and Ibn Khaldun made it the cornerstone of his analyses of human races, their religion and their economic and social conditions (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 49)

Drought is one of the characteristics of the climate in the Middle Maghreb (Algeria) due to its location, which made some of its lands interspersed with dry and rainy years, and some sources have pointed out the importance of the element of water in human life and praised its necessity in providing food (Ibn Azari, 2013, 261), as drought may lead to damage to agricultural crops and thus the lack of sustenance and food, and the autumn rains are fundamental to the beginning of the event, and they were not the only determinant of the fate of agricultural crops. The autumn rains are considered essential to the beginning of the event, and were not the only determinant of the fate of agricultural crops, but remained linked to the spring rains, for example, 'the rain did not fall until April of the year ninety and six hundred (692 AH), so people ploughed at that time' (Ibn Abi Zarar, F., 1973). 1973 408)

Al-Wazzan mentions that the lack of rain during the spring rainy period, which is known to the farmers as the neck of the year, caused the lack of wheat yield in the villages (Al-Wazzan, H, 1, 81). One year of drought rarely resulted in famine, because people used to face the drought with what they had saved, but if it lasted for two years, it would inevitably lead to a food crisis, and if it lasted for three years, it would inevitably be a catastrophe. But if two years of drought succeed each other, this inevitably leads to a food crisis, and if the drought lasts for three years, this is inevitably a disaster, as supplies and savings run out, and Ibn Khaldun was alerted to this fact and expressed it by saying: 'The nature of the world in the abundance and scarcity of rain is different, and the rain strengthens and weakens, decreases and increases, and the crops, fruits and udders depend on its proportion, but people are confident in their times by monopoly, and if the monopoly is lost, people expect famine...'. (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 302).

Excessive rainfall prevented ploughing, sowing and sinking of the soil and crops, and hurricanes destroyed many agricultural crops, as happened in 776 AH/1373 AD. Yahya bin Khaldun describes the famine that occurred in Tlemcen during this year: 'It was caused by a great hurricane, which destroyed the summer crops of Tlemcen' (bin Khaldun, J., 1910, 2, 11).

It is clear from the above that natural factors such as droughts, floods and hurricanes contributed greatly to the food crisis in central Morocco, and in many cases famine, which is why the inhabitants of central Morocco during this period were keen to store supplies and foodstuffs in the many cisterns and tanks contained in their homes.

As for wars and sieges, they also had a severe impact on the population of the Central Maghreb during the Bani Zayyan era. The repeated attacks of the Marinid king Abu Ya'qub Yusuf on Tlemcen at the end of the 7th century AH/13 AD and his determination in the long siege that lasted for about nine years made the population live in a difficult situation, as people consumed their money and savings and their conditions were difficult. A difficult situation, where people consumed their money and savings and narrowed their conditions, so that more people died of hunger than by killing, so the population suffered for lack of time, and the number of deaths of the population of Tlemcen, as indicated by texts, due to the lack of food, reached about 120,000 people in 1859 (Brosselard ch, 132,) This is evidence that the city was emptied of its population, which numbered more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand at the

very least (Filali, A, 2002, 257. However, it is worth noting that as soon as the wars and sieges ended, the population returned to work in the agricultural sector to increase production and eliminate the food crisis.

3- Food crises:

During the rule of Bani Zayyan, Central Morocco experienced several food crises as a result of the aforementioned reasons, including but not limited to

3-1- Food crisis in 698 AH/1298 AD:

As a result of the siege imposed on Tlemcen by the Marinid Sultan Yusuf ibn Ya'qub during the reign of its ruler, Uthman ibn Yaghmurasan, which lasted for nearly eight years, food, grain and other facilities were depleted beyond the limits of customs, and due to the severe lack of food, the people of Tlemcen were forced to eat carrion, cats and the remains of the dead (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 73). During this siege, the Marinids ordered the killing of anyone who brought goods or foodstuffs to Tlemcen, which resulted in the population being affected by the lack of food by depleting the stores, and many died as a result of this siege caused by the Marinid siege, Tlemcen was in a dire situation as a result of this siege, which paralysed its economic movement, as trade caravans were prevented from entering or leaving it, and Abul Abbas al-Nasiri mentioned: 'Tlemcen was living in a miserable state due to this siege imposed on it, which paralysed its entire economic movement. The Marinid king placed guard posts at its gates and promised to punish anyone who differs from it gently or sneaks into it with food.' (Al-Nasiri, S, 3, 90.) This unjust siege imposed by the Marinids on Tlemcen caused food shortages and the death of people, and increased the troubles of the Zabani state.

3-2- - Food crisis in 693 AH/1293 AD:

This crisis resulted from the drought that hit the Central Maghreb during this period, killing many people, and the price of wheat was 10 dirhams per tonne and 6 ounces of flour was 6 dirhams (Ibn Khaldun, J., 1903, 2, 93). The year 693 AH/1293 AD left its mark on all levels of life in the Middle Maghreb, perhaps most notably at the social level, where the population shortage was most prominent, and it is worth noting that there are no figures that can provide us with the number of deaths resulting from the lack of time. (Khalili, B, 2016, 285)

3-3- - Food Crisis (688-697 AH/1289-1297 AD):

Historical sources do not mention the occurrence of this crisis except for al-Abdari, who passed through Tlemcen in 688 AH/1289 AD, spoke of its conditions in terms that suggest it was in dire straits, and even mentions a drought when he says: 'Then we reached the city of Tlemcen and found it to be a country that had been devastated by the time and the events of the past. The people of Malikish, which is part of Tlemcen, were unable to offer hospitality to a group of pilgrims who passed through, as a result of the food crisis caused by the shortage of time.' (Al-Abdari, B, 1968, 24) This is also evidenced by Al-Abdari's account of the inability of the people of Malikish, which is part of Tlemcen, to offer hospitality to a group of pilgrims who passed through them as a result of the food crisis caused by the shortage of time.

3-4- Food crisis in 776 AH/1374:

As a result of a great famine in Tlemcen, the commercial caravans stopped supplying, and the prices of what was found of strength rose above the usual until they became astronomical, and Yahya ibn Khaldun described the distress of this city by saying: 'The year seventy-six seventy and seven hundred, may Allah be pleased to seal it, included a severe famine in which people ate each other because of a wind with a hurricane that destroyed its crops and animals, and Allah rules without interrupting His judgement.' (Ibn Khaldun, 2, 1903, 326) What indicates that this food crisis that affected Morocco during this period is the interest of a large number of sources in mentioning it, as well as the books of nazl and manaqibs, which are not accustomed to mentioning the time of food shortage, mentioned this specific crisis chronologically without other food crises that struck the central Morocco, as Ibn Qunfadh mentions it saying: 'In this year there was a great famine in Morocco, and the devastation was widespread' (Ibn Qunfadh, Q, 1965, 149), in addition to referring to some of its manifestations in one of his nawaz, which was asked by the jurist Abu Abdul Aziz al-Bajai (d. 747 AH/1346 AD) without mentioning any details about this famine that caused the death of many inhabitants of Central Morocco. (Ibn Qunfadh, Q, 1965, 121)

4- The prevailing dietary pattern during food crises:

Times of food crisis require people to strive to secure food, and due to the high demand for food commodities, their prices rise and they are scarce in the markets, thus creating an imbalance in the dietary pattern that the population is accustomed to in times of famine. It is indisputable that in times of food crises and shortages, people resorted to consuming their stocks of food that they had stored in underground storage tanks, such as wheat, barley, spelt, and even preservable meat, which they called 'qadid' (Ibn Maryam, 1986, p. 306), and it is unfortunate that the sources did not the most important foods that people ate in times of food shortages, with the exception of Al-Wazzan's mention of Sultan Al-Zayani's diet during the shortage of food in Tlemcen during the Marinid siege, stating that his diet 'was a mixture of meat, whole barley grains, lemon leaves and other trees to increase his size' (Al-Wazzan, H, 2, 18).

Ibn Khaldun says of the food crisis resulting from the famine that ravaged Tlemcen during the Marinid siege, 'They even claimed that they ate the remains of dead human beings' (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 112). Yahya Ibn Khaldun also adds that people ate each other in the famine that swept across central Morocco in 776 AH/1347 AD, saying, 'This was a severe famine in which people ate each other' (Ibn Khaldun, I, 1980, 95). (Ibn Khaldun, I, 1980, 95) In addition to dead meat, people consumed some animals that are forbidden to eat during difficult times in their lives, such as the people of Tlemcen who ate cats, rats, snakes, frogs, dogs, cow skins and scorpions, and there is no doubt that these foods harmed people and made them vulnerable to many deadly diseases and epidemics (Al-Saadawi, A, 1995, 121).

5- Efforts of the Zayaniya Authority to overcome food crises:

The food shortage crisis in Central Moroccan society produced social behaviours among its members that clearly expressed social cohesion and solidarity among them, so that the processes of solidarity were one of the most prominent features that characterised Central Morocco during the Zayyani era. The role of authority in society at the time of the food crisis stemmed from the Zayyani Sultan's desire to consolidate the pillars of his king, in order to obtain the legitimacy of rule, based on the loyalty of the subjects, which requires him to stand by them in times of distress and consider their conditions when hunger or disease strikes.

Sources have referred to some of the efforts of the Zayyan sultans in devising techniques that enabled them to keep foodstuffs for a long time, thus achieving self-sufficiency for the state, and the subjects also practised the process of storage

6- Zayania Power and Savings:

The Zayyan authority resorted to stockpiling food in order to avoid any emergency and to face the periodic food crises that the Middle Maghreb needed, Ibn Khaldun says: ' People are confident in their sustenance by monopolising (hoarding)' (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 302)

* **Warehouses:** During the food crisis that hit Tlemcen in 776 AH/1374 AD, the Zayyan Sultan Abu Tashfin 'opened the agricultural pits and allowed them to be sold to the people after lowering their price, which was required by the great famine, in order to show mercy to the people and preserve the order of their lives' (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 302).

These warehouses played a great role in alleviating the afflicted when famines occurred due to the lack of food, and the culture of saving became one of the main priorities for the Zayaniya state, so that they were not affected by the siege imposed on them by Abu al-Hassan al-Marini again, as they had enough stocks to overcome this, as they had meat and fat liquids, wheat and barley (Filali, 1, 254).

*Mers: A group of cisterns, located in a farming area, surrounded by an impenetrable wall with a locked door. The advantage of these cisterns is that they preserve grain for a long time, as in the case of Tlemcen and Constantine, for which Al-Idrisi testified and admired 'the wheat lives in its cisterns for a hundred years without spoiling' (Al-Idrisi, 1, 1983, 256). (Al-Idrisi, 1983, 256). The Zayyani sultans adopted the policy of storing grain in cisterns as a first step to eliminate the phenomenon of food shortages, as evidenced by the Zayyani Sultan Yaghmurasan bin Zayyan (633- 681 AH/1235-1282 AD) bought produce from farmers to store it in cisterns for the time of need (Abdelrazak, B, 2002, 173) in times of siege or food shortages. Sultan Abu Hamou Moussa I (708-718 AH/1308-1318 AD) also obtained a tenth of the production in the eastern regions and sent it to the forts near Tlemcen to put it in tombs and store it for times of war and food shortages (Khalili, 2016, 285). Sultan Abu Hamou Moussa II (760-791 AH/1395-1389 AD) worked to improve the conditions of the vulnerable and the poor, we see this clearly in the will he drafted for his son and crown prince to gain the trust of the subjects: ' If it is a time of drought, famine and famine, be kind to them in storehouses and majabi, be kind to their weak

and needy, and favour them with what you have saved for their hardships in times of prosperity from their benefits... This is the total well-being of your state and the general welfare of your subjects' (Abu Hamou, 1379 AH/1862 AD, 87). Sultan Abu Hamo's attempt was seen as an important step in opening up farmland to those in need.

***Sponsorship and Savings:**

Through successive years of food crises, Moroccans gained great experience in saving the surplus of the fat years to face the lean years, and this habit became so ingrained in the society of the Middle Maghreb that a man would save two years' worth of wheat grain and go to the market early to buy his food for fear of losing something from his savings' (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 86).

The culture of saving and using cisterns to store food was widespread in Middle Maghreb society: 'No one neglects his own sustenance and the sustenance of his house for a month or a year. No one neglects the sustenance of himself or his household for a month or a year' (Ibn Khaldun, J., 1903, 2, 326). The sources have done well to mention such measures that entered the popular culture, and the use of the cistern became a prominent habit in every family of this society, and even the laws of this period did not overlook this, as Al-Mazouni mentioned a large number of issues that refer to disputes between individuals because their cisterns were usurped, infringed and damaged, as evidence confirming the importance of the cistern in the lives of the members of the Central Maghreb society.

The inhabitants of the Central Maghreb also resorted to storing foodstuffs in kasbahs, a warehouse used by tribes for this purpose, for example, the kasbah of Tlemcen stored grains. (Ibn Khaldun, 1990, 337).

The most important methods of saving and preparing foodstuffs for storage are frying meat, fat, fish, drying and preserving fruits and vegetables, and refrigeration was adopted to preserve them, by placing them in wells or cold houses, and this was addressed in detail in books on agriculture, food and cooking, but these food reserves are exhausted if the crisis lasts for more than a year, or political unrest occurs, as these stores are a target for warriors.

7- Conclusion :

It can be said from the above that the Zayyani state was able during the period in which it ruled the Central Maghreb, which extended for more than three centuries, that it had an effective policy to achieve self-sufficiency for its population, and this is shown by the process of storing and saving foodstuffs that it brought out to the population during sieges, political crises or climatic conditions to sell them at reasonable prices in the markets, but it is worth noting that the blockades, wars and climate in Central Maghreb directly contributed to the occurrence of many food crises that the state managed to deal with thanks to the expertise it had.

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