



حبر أبيض  
WHITE INK



**Prof. Mohamed Afifi**

# The Ottomans and North Africa

## “Disturbing beginnings”

The beginning of the sixteenth century was characterized by a state of turmoil and instability in the length and breadth of the Mediterranean basin. In the eastern part of the Mediterranean, the Ottomans were able to impose their authority over the Levant and Egypt after the collapse of the Mamluk state. In the western part, the political situation was characterized by a noticeable fragility with the weakness of the local powers in North Africa and their struggle against each other. This was at the same time that Spain and Portugal became more ferocious in attacking the coasts of the Maghreb, after they succeeded in expelling Muslims from Andalusia and ending several centuries of Spain's Islamic history.

If we examine the map of the coasts of North Africa, we will notice that Portugal controlled the shores of Morocco, while Spain seized the shores of Algeria in the west to Tripoli in the east.

During those turbulent circumstances and the state of political instability, the role of the brothers, Aruj and Khair Al-Din Barbarossa, appeared. Historians believe that there is great disagreement about the early stages of these two brothers' lives and the circumstances that led them to become professional pirates. Some say that they are Muslims of Turkish origin, and others say that they converted to Islam at a later stage in their lives. Anyway, the brothers Aruj and Khair Al-Din benefited from the weak political situation in North Africa and were able to confront the Spanish fleet and annex important parts of the Maghreb, especially Algeria. The Barbarossa brothers also asked for the protection of the Ottoman Empire and became under its subordination, which means that North Africa would be under the subordination of the Ottoman Empire.

There is a saying prevalent in most historical references, which is the appeal of the people of Algeria and North Africa in general to the two brothers, Aruj and Khair Al-Din, in order to protect them from the attacks of the Spaniards. As a result, most of the Maghreb countries were subject to the Ottoman Empire. This saying also includes part of the truth, which is the appeal of “some” of the people of North Africa to Aruj and Khair Al-Din, but what is ignored is that there were other local powers that were not satisfied with the activities of the two brothers, Aruj and Khair Al-Din. Those local powers strongly resisted this influence.

Some mention the resistance of some Algerian tribes headed by Selim Al-Toumi to the forces of Aruj and their capture of the city of Algiers and the Castle of Penon. The governor of Tlemcen also resisted the attack of the brothers Aruj and Khair Al-Din. Even after their capture of Tlemcen, some tribes in Tlemcen allied with the Spaniards against Aruj and Khair Al-Din.

There were also local revolutions against the rule of Khair Al-Din. Among the most important of these revolutions was what was carried out by Ahmed bin Al-Qadi, who was one of the notables of Algeria, who lived in the region of Kabylia. We can add to this what the Hafsid did in Tunisia against Khair Al-Din, and what Banu Zayan did in Tlemcen in Algeria.

In Morocco, the influence of Khair Al-Din faced the influence of the Wattasid state there, but the greatest clash of Khair Al-Din in Morocco was with the Saadian state. Abu Abdullah Al-Sheikh entered into a sharp military clash with Khair Al-Din, the most important of which was what happened in the areas of Tlemcen. The Saadian state was able to confront and therefore Morocco did not enter into subordination to the Ottoman Empire.