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The Ottomans in Tunisia

The assassination of Kairouan and even more!!

If there is a worthy description of Kairouan, the city of science and a beacon of jurisprudence in North Africa, it is that it is the gift of the companion Uqba bin Nafi to Tunisia and the peoples of Africa and Andalusia later. Yes, Kairouan is of paramount importance, and perhaps it was the first scientific base that later established the Andalusian Renaissance.

Before the Ottomans assassinated it after their occupation of Tunisia in 1574 AD, Kairouan was famous and of great importance and took upon itself to be a beacon of religious science and jurisprudence in the center of North Africa. Kairouan attained that precious mission in Arab and Islamic history because of its middle geographical location between Al-Azhar and the Two Holy Mosques in the east, and between the Maghreb and Andalusia in the west.

What is also surprising is that Kairouan, which was founded at an early stage in the Islamic history by the leader Uqba bin Nafi in 50 AH, to be a rear military base for the Islamic armies heading towards Algeria, Morocco and Europe after that, played a massive cultural, religious and jurisprudential role no less important than its original role. It became the first jurisprudence and religious school in North Africa.

Kairouan remained away from any political conflicts for about a thousand years, performing its functions, spreading its sciences, guarding the Arabic language in Africa, and hosting students of science from everywhere, until the Ottoman occupation came, which turned into a moral and social catastrophe not only for Tunisia, but also for Libya and Algeria in particular.

The Turks did not deal with those Arab countries with good morals, but rather sent groups of criminal pirates who were accustomed to looting and thefts to occupy them.

Beginning in 1533 AD, Turkish pirates tried to occupy Tunisia. They succeeded sometimes and failed at other times, and this remained until 1574 AD. During that period, the pirates destroyed Tunisia's beautiful landmarks and its pursuit of science and the arts, and Tunisia turned into a miserable country that was unable to make its way to the future.

Aruj Pasha, his brothers and the Ottomans entered Tunisia and North Africa as a whole in the dark ages and then handed over Tunisia and Algeria to the French and Libya to the Italians in suspicious deals intended to save the Ottoman rule.

Because of the foolishness of the Turks and their political stupidity, they did not save their Ottoman rule and did not let those Arab countries decide their fate, but rather transferred them from their occupation to another European occupation.

The Turks usually rule the countries they control with advanced military forces and garrisons and then work with some local collaborators. Hence, they entrench Turkish elements who are integrated into the societies but are later soon prepared to rule on their behalf and have permanent loyalty to the Sultan in Istanbul.

They achieved all this in Tunisia. After three decades of skirmishes between the Ottoman occupier and the local population, the Janissaries were finally able to impose colonialism using weapons and massacres. Since 1574, the Ottomans began to use influence and power until they made Tunisia a miserable country. Perhaps their most obvious crime was the decline of the role of Kairouan. The Turks were fully aware that Kairouan was an Arab beacon, and therefore they were keen to extinguish it and the entire Maghreb after it.

The Turks imposed a purely Ottoman system of government and used only the Turkish element or the so-called white slaves, who were from Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria. They enslaved them and turned them into workers for the benefit of the Turkish element. They rejected the Arabs and kept them completely away from leadership positions and public offices, except for a small number, and they were in secure and not very important places.

This was marked a miserable and dark period in Tunisia's history that lasted for nearly four centuries and resulted in a cultural backwardness and intellectual stagnation that made Tunisia and Kairouan lose their deserved position. Despite Tunisia's maritime location and being mediated by Libya and Egypt on one side, and Algeria and Morocco on the other, none of the Ottomans took advantage of this commercial and maritime advantage in favor of Tunisia. Rather, the Ottomans were keen to benefit from Tunisia, collect money, drain the local population, and separate them from their Arab and Maghreb dimensions.

Now, Tunisia bears the consequences of that forced ruin as a result of the hateful occupation that easily handed Tunisia over to the French, who followed the same policy of the Ottoman occupation.