

The history of Toponymic terminology in Algeria: The Tlemcen region as a case study.

Abderrahmane Bardadi¹

Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem- Algeria

bopop2200@gmail.com

Ilham Mekboul²

Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem- Algeria

ilhammekboul96@gmail.com

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Abstract :

This study examines the history of toponymic terms (place names) in the Tlemcen region of western, Algeria. The study is divided into two parts: theoretical part reviews the concept of toponymy and its main classifications, while providing an introductory overview of the studied region. The applied part presents a comprehensive academic glossary covering various branches of toponymy, including: oronyms (mountain names), hydronyms (water body names), agiotoponyms (names of inhabited places), and other classifications.

The study reveals the successive civilizations of the region and their clear impact on the toponymic fabric, it concludes that place names in Tlemcen constitute a living record of collective memory, reflecting the cultural diversity and cross-cultural interaction that has characterized this strategically important region throughout the ages.

Key words : Toponymy, Tlemcen, Oikonyms, Oronyms, Hydronyms, Hagiotoponyms.

Introduction :

Toponymy (the study of place names) is considered a fundamental scientific approach to exploring the history of human societies, their cultural heritage, and patterns of interaction with spatial environments. Geographic names transcend being mere spatial signifiers to become cultural texts saturated with historical, social, and linguistic meanings, reflecting humanity's perception of its environment and the nature of its relationship with it across successive temporal periods.

The Algerian province of Tlemcen constitutes a rich and distinctive research model in the field of toponymic studies, given its strategic location that has qualified it to be a point of civilizational convergence and a passage for peoples throughout the ages. The region has witnessed a diverse civilizational succession, each of which has imprinted the toponymic system with its distinctive marks, beginning with the indigenous Amazigh people, passing through the Romans and Vandals, then the Islamic conquests and successive political entities, extending to the Andalusian migrations and Ottoman rule, and finally the French colonial period and the subsequent independence phase.

The scientific value of studying Tlemcen's toponymy extends beyond the purely linguistic level to encompass intertwined historical, geographical, social, and religious dimensions. The analysis of place names enables us to trace patterns of population movement, elucidate settlement models, reveal networks of societal relations, and monitor the cultural transformations that the region has experienced across different eras. We have embarked on this study from a central problematic

question : What are the multiple toponymic layers constituting the geographical landscape of the Tlemcen region ? And what is their linguistic and historical significance ?

1. Toponymy :

Toponymy, also known as place-name studies, is a science whose name derives from Greek origins, consisting of two components : "Topos," which refers to place or land, and "Onoma," which means name. This scientific branch, which is closely linked to geography and onomastics, dedicates its efforts to studying the names of geographical locations (places). This science delves into exploring the roots of these names, seeking to understand their connotations and interpret their meanings.

Toponymy also traces the developments that have occurred to these names across different historical periods and attempts to assess their significance from both heritage and intellectual perspectives. Furthermore, this science is concerned with monitoring and analyzing the changes that occur in the linguistic structure of these names, contributing to a deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic transformations of societies¹.

We find that the French Annales School formed an important starting point for historical geography, of which toponomy is considered one of its main fields of study. In this context, Albert Dauzat presented an essential vision regarding the science of toponomy, viewing it as specializing in the study of geographical locations of various types, including cities, villages, countries, rivers, mountains, etc.

According to Albert Dauzat, toponomy, or what is known as the study of geographical place names, is fundamentally based on linguistics². This means that understanding the origins and evolution of place names requires an in-depth study of language, its history, and its development, which highlights the importance of toponomy as a link between geography, history, and linguistics, making it a valuable tool in understanding the cultural and social evolution of societies over time through studying the way people named their places and surrounding environments.

Charles Rostaing also provided a comprehensive definition of toponomy, explaining that it is the scientific field specialized in studying the origins and evolution of place names. According to him, this science is not limited to studying names only but delves into understanding their references and concepts, in addition to tracing the changes that have occurred to them over time. He thus expands the scope of toponomy to include studying the names of a diverse range of geographical locations, as he sees that this science is concerned with the names of inhabited areas such as cities and villages, as well as natural features such as mountains and rivers. This expansion in the field of study leads to the emergence of specialized branches within the science of toponomy, such as oronymy (the study of mountain names) and hydronymy (the study of water body names)³.

With this concept, Charles Rostaing presents a holistic vision of toponomy as a science that connects geography, language, and history, making it a valuable tool in understanding the cultural and social evolution of societies through studying how places are named and how these names evolve over time.

As for R. Delort, he provides a definition of toponomy that links language, geography, and human activity, stating that it is the science that studies the relationship between the names that humans have given to places and the geographical reality that these names represent, such that place names are considered linguistic symbols (signifiers) created by humans to refer to specific geographical features (signifieds)⁴.

This definition highlights the dual nature of toponymy, which combines :

- **The linguistic aspect** : studying names as linguistic units.
- **The geographical aspect** : linking these names to the physical reality they represent.

It thus emphasizes the role of humans in the naming process, making toponymy a mirror reflecting the interaction between humans and their environment, providing insightful perspectives on how societies perceive and interact with their geographical surroundings over time.

As for Ch. Rostaing, he highlights the importance of toponymy in understanding the origins and evolution of place names, while tracing the changes that have occurred to them over time. This scientific field provides an integrated understanding of how geographical nomenclatures originated and evolved.

What distinguishes Ch. Rostaing's vision is his focus on the comparative linguistic dimension in the study of toponymy, as he sees that this science allows for the study of place names in their broader linguistic context, comparing them with the mother language and other languages. This approach reveals the linguistic and cultural overlaps that are particularly manifested in place names.

With this concept, toponymy becomes a valuable tool for understanding:

- The historical evolution of languages in a given region.
- Cultural interactions between different societies.
- The impact of migrations and invasions on local language and culture.
- How spatial identity is formed over time.

This vision makes toponymy a bridge connecting linguistics, history, geography, anthropology, ethnology, cartography, dialectology, and semantics, thereby enhancing our understanding of the cultural and linguistic heritage embodied in place names.

In the field of toponymy, place names are classified into multiple categories, where each name falls within a specific semantic field of its own. This classification helps in a deeper understanding of the origins and nature of geographical names. The main categories of place names can be summarized as follows:

a. Hydronym :

The origin of the term "hydronym" is derived from two words : "Hydro," which means water, and "Onyme," which refers to name. This branch focuses on studying and analyzing the names of all geographical locations associated with water.

The scope of hydronomy includes a wide range of water features such as: springs and fountains, wells, wadis and rivers, lakes and ponds, etc⁵.

The study of hydronyms helps in understanding the historical relationship between humans and water resources in a given region, revealing the importance of water in the culture and daily life of societies. It also provides valuable insights into language evolution and environmental changes over time.

b. Oronym (Horonym):

The term "oronym" (horonym) is derived from two words : "Horos," which refers to mountain or elevation, and "Onyme," which means name. This branch is concerned with analyzing and studying the names of all places related to terrestrial topography and landforms.

The scope of oronymy includes a variety of topographical features such as : mountains, hills, plateaus, etc⁶.

The study of oronyms contributes to understanding how different societies perceive and interact with their natural environment throughout history. It also provides valuable information about the linguistic and cultural evolution of regions and reflects the relationship between humans and their surrounding nature.

c. Oronym:

The term "odonym" is derived from the Greek word "Odos," which means road, and "Onyme," which refers to name. This branch is concerned with analyzing and studying the names of various types of pathways and passages created by humans for movement.

The scope of odonymy includes the study of names of streets, roads, alleys, bridges, tunnels, etc⁷.

The study of odonyms provides valuable insights into the urban and social history of cities and communities, as it reveals the cultural, political, and social developments that urban areas have gone through over time. This study also reflects how historical figures or important events are honored through street naming and highlights changes in urban and national identity.

d. Agiotorponym:

Derived from three parts : "agio," meaning sacred or saint, "topo," referring to place, and "Onyme," meaning name. This branch is concerned with analyzing and studying the names of geographical locations that carry religious or spiritual connotations. The scope of agiotorponymy includes the study of place names related to:

Righteous saints, saints, prominent religious figures, sacred places, and shrines⁸.

This type of study provides valuable insights into :

- The religious and spiritual influence on local culture.
- The spread and evolution of religions in certain regions.
- The importance of religious figures in different societies.
- The relationship between geography and religious practices.

The study of agiotorponyms helps in understanding the religious and cultural history of regions and reflects how religious beliefs influence the formation of spatial and communal identity over time.

2. Overview of the Tlemcen Region :

Tlemcen is considered one of Algeria's most prominent cities with a rich heritage in scientific, cultural, and architectural fields. The succession of civilizations and states throughout the ages has contributed to enriching its diverse cultural legacy, granting it a distinguished civilizational status among Algerian cities and Islamic metropolises worldwide.

Since ancient times, Tlemcen has been a focal point of interest and inspiration for poets and artists, as well as historians, geographers, and archaeologists, who were captivated by it and documented its landmarks while celebrating its beauty from various perspectives.

2.1 Geographical Framework :

Tlemcen represents one of Algeria's provinces, situated in the far northwest of the country on the foothills of the Tell Atlas mountain range. Specifically, the city is located on the northern slope of Mount Lalla Setti (the Two Rocks), which forms the eastern extension of the Rif mountain chain running parallel to the coast from Morocco to a narrow passage near Tlemcen. This area formed the boundary between the Central and Far Maghreb, enabling Tlemcen to control the overland passage connecting the interior with the exterior⁹.

The geographer Al-Idrisi described it as follows: "Tlemcen is an ancient city fortified with a strong, well-built wall. It is a single city divided by a wall. A river flows to it from its mountains called the Two Rocks, passing east of the city with many watermills along its banks. All the surrounding farmlands are irrigated, with abundant crops and harvests, plentiful fruits, and comprehensive blessings. Its air is healthy, though it experiences much cold and snow in winter. It is a walled city on the mountainside abundant with walnut trees, and has five gates : three facing south (Bab al-Hammam, Bab Wahb, and Bab al-Khawkha), in the east Bab al-Aqaba, and in the west Bab Abi Qurra. Tlemcen is considered the capital of the Central Maghreb, teeming with markets, monuments, and mosques, including a grand mosque. It serves as a destination for African merchants and a center for scholars and hadith transmitters¹⁰.

Tlemcen has been distinguished by its unique strategic location. Since ancient times, it has been a theater for invasions and conquests, while simultaneously serving as a space for cultural and commercial exchange with other peoples, granting it paramount importance in economic, political, scholarly, and religious spheres.

2.2 Historical Framework :

Throughout history, Tlemcen has garnered extensive attention from both Arab and foreign historians who studied its various aspects. Abu Ubayd al-Bakri described it as : "An ancient royal seat and the capital of the Zenata rule, whose people are known for their righteousness among the tribes that possessed it... The other city is known as Tagrart, built by the Almoravid king Yusuf ibn Tashfin around the year 462 AH at the site of his military encampment, hence named Tagrart, which means 'camp' in the Zenata language. The construction of its wall was initiated by Sayyid Musa ibn Yusuf al-Asri ibn Abd al-Mu'min ibn Ali in 566 AH, and completed and fortified by Sayyid Abu al-Hasan ibn Sayyid Hafs ibn Abd al-Mu'min in 581 AH when the Banu Ghaniya seized Béjaïa, Algiers, and Médéa."¹¹

Sheikh al-Malili adds in the same context : "Tlemcen consists of two cities: the first is ancient, known as Agadir, founded by the Banu Yafran after Islam, and the second was established by Yusuf ibn Tashfin in 474 AH at his camp besieging Agadir, naming it Taqrart after the camp in their language."¹²

In addition to the aforementioned accounts of the city's antiquity, writer Charles Brosselard states : "It is not only the existing monuments of Tlemcen, but also the edifices still standing that arouse researchers' curiosity, as each state or kingdom that ruled the city left its imprint and the genius of its craftsmen." Furthermore, the discoveries of archaeologist G. Bleicher and the findings of Estornel in

1941 confirm human settlement in the region during prehistoric times and the Stone Age, with archaeological artifacts and stone tools found and currently displayed in the city's museums¹³.

The scholars and intellectuals who lived in Tlemcen and its environs deserve great credit for the flourishing of the scientific, intellectual, and cultural movement in general. Tlemcen's intellectual movement was nourished by two essential sources : the Andalusian stream and the Eastern stream... Academic achievement deepened and borrowing expanded, and diverse intellectual currents proliferated in the minds of Tlemcen's elite. Debates and discussions, both oral and written, multiplied between Tlemcen's scholars and others. Consequently, both traditional and rational sciences developed, and Tlemcen scholars emerged, distinguished by their depth of thought and vast learning, making serious contributions to the scientific renaissance and intellectual movement in the metropolises of the Maghreb, Andalusia, and the East¹⁴.

3. Applied study-toponymic inventory of the Tlemcen region :

3.1 Oikonyms : Names of villages and inhabited places :

Oikonyms constitute the largest part of the toponymic material in the Tlemcen region, reflecting the diversity of linguistic and civilizational origins that have succeeded in the area.

toponym	Linguistic origin	Meaning/significance	location	source
Tlemcen	Amazigh	From "Tilmsan" meaning springs or water sources	Main city	Marçais, 1903
Mansoura	Arabic	The victorious, the victorious city (built by the marinids)	3km west of tlemcen	Bel, 1938
Nedroma	Amazigh	From "Nedroma" name of an Amazigh tribe	70km north west of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Maghnia	Latin/roman	Believed to be from roman "magnus"	75km north west of Tlemcen	Leschi, 1957
Sebdou	Amazigh	from "tasbedout" meaning lion	26km south of Tlemcen	Foucauld, 1960
Remchi	Amazigh	From "Remch" name of an Amazigh clan	50km south of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Benisaf	Arabic	Name d'after the Benisaf tribe	Northern coast	Marçais, 1913
Ouled Mimoun	Arabic	Named after the tribe's ancestor or "Mimoun"	15km south of Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
El Azail	Arabic	From "Azl" meaning isolation or seclusion	East of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892

Hennaya	Arabic	Plural of "hennaya" meaning bend	West of Tlemcen	Douttè, 1914
El Ghazaouet	Arabic	Reference to raids or military campaigns	South of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Kalaà El Oulya	Arabic	The high fortress	Near Tlemcen	Brosselard, 1859
Fellaoucene	Amazigh	From "fellawn" meaning agriculture and farming	40km south of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Sebra	Arabic	From "sabr" meaning patience, or a type of plant	35km north of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Sidi Djillali	Arabic-religious	Named after the saint	20km south west of Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Terny	Amazigh	From "tirni" meaning highlands	65km south west of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
El Abadla	Arabic	Named after Beni Abdullah or the worshippers	North or Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Bouhanifia	Arabic	From "Abu hanifa" proper name	25km east of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Azials	Amazigh	From "azil" meaning good or pleasant	South of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
El Gor	Arabic	From "Gor" meaning depression	Near Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Beni Snous	Amazigh	Name d'after the Beni Snous Amazigh tribe	65km south west of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Ain Tallout	Amazigh	From "tallout" meaning spring or source	12km north of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Beni Ouarsous	Amazigh	Named after the Ouarsous tribe	North west of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Sebaa chioukh	Arabic	Name d'after seven saints	30km east of Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
El Ghazouaana	Arabic	From "Ghazou" raid or campaing	South of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Beni Bohdel	Amazigh	Name d'after the Bohde i tribe	North of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Tianet	Amazigh	From "tit" meaning water spring	25km northe ast	Basset, 1901

			of Tlemcen	
El Merdja	Arabic	Diminutive of "marj" green pasture	20km east of Tlemcen	Doutté, 1914
Beni Semeil	Amazigh	Named after an Amazigh tribe	40km south of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960

3.2 Hydronyms : Names of waters (wadis, springs, wells) :

Water occupies special importance in the Tlemcen region, and this is reflected in the richness of the hydronymic layer. The region is characterized by an abundance of springs and water sources, making water a central element in daily life and collective imagination.

toponym	Linguistic origin	Meaning/significance	location	Source
Oued tafna	Amazigh	From "tafna" Amazigh name	North of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Oued Es-Safsaf	Arabic	Name d'after willow trees	Crosses Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Oued El Abid	Arabic	From "Abd" or name d'after a tribe	West of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Oued Chourffa	Arabic	From "sharif" for religious lineage	East of Tlemcen	Brosse lard, 1859
Oued Isser	Amazigh	From "yser" in Amazigh	North west of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Ain Fezza	Arabic	From "fazz" meaning jump (for strong water flow)	North of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Ain Hout	Arabic	Named after the presence of fish	Near Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Ain El Hout	Arabic	Named for fish in the water	Multiple locations	Doutté, 1914
Ain El Oulja	Arabic	From "walaj" meaning entry	South of Tlemcen	Bel, 1938
Ain Nehala	Arabic	Named after bees and beekeeping	Near Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Ain El Kebira	Arabic	Description of the spring's size	North of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Ain Ben Amar	Arabic	Named after person "Ibn Amar"	West of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Oued Ez-Zit oune	Arabic	Named after olivetrees	South of Tlemcen	Leschi, 1957
Oued Taghit	Amazigh-Arabic	From "taghit" meaning dam or barrier	North west of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960

Ain El Ghoraba	Arabic	Named after crow bird	East of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Ain Tèmouchent	Amazigh	From "tamouchent" meaning place of buffalo	East of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Oued El Hammam	Arabic	Named after pigeons	Multiple locations	Marçais, 1903
Ain Es-Safra	Arabic	Reference to water or soil color	South of Tlemcen	Foucauld, 1952
Oued Sekkak	Amazigh	Ancient Amazigh name	North of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Ain El Ghorab	Arabic	Named after the bird	Near Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Oued Sahsah	Arabic	From "Sahsah" flat barrenland	South west of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Ain Beni Aad	Arabic	Named after Beni Aad tribe	North east of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Oued Boumèdine	Arabic	Named after the saint	East of Tlemcen	Bel, 1938
Ain El Karma	Arabic	Named after vineyard cultivation	15km north of Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Oued Takou brarirt	Amazigh	Ancient Amazigh name	West of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Ain Zerga	Arabic	Description of blue water color	Near Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Oued El Feratiche	Arabic	From "fertasa" type of bird	North of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Ain El Oulia	Arabic	From "uluw" height	East of Tlemcen	Douttè, 1914
Oued Er-Raml	Arabic	Named after sands	South of Tlemcen	Leschi, 1957
Ain El Qassaba	Arabic	Named after butchery profession	Central Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913

3.3 Oronyms : Names of Mountains and Heights :

Toponym	Linguistic Origin	Meaning/ Significance	Location	Source
Tlemcen en Mountains	Amazigh	Named after the city	North of tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Traras Mountains	Amazigh	From "Tararat" meaning high place	North ern coast	Camps, 1960
Lalla Setti	Arabic-Amazigh	Named after pious woman	Near Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007

Djebel Tenouchfi	Amazigh	Ancient Amazigh name	North west of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Djebel Fellaoucene	Amazigh	From "fellawn" agriculture	South of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Djebel El Asel	Arabic	Named after abundance of bees and honey	East of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Tazegha	Amazigh	From "azegha" meaning narrow passage	Near Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
Djebel El Ouahch	Arabic	From "wahch" meaning decoration	North of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Djebel Bouziane	Arabic	Named after person "Bouziane"	West of Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Gourna	Amazigh-Arabic	From "el gorn" meaning pointed peak	North of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Djebel El Kehal	Arabic	Reference to dark rock color	Near Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Djebel Tghalimet	Amazigh	Amazigh name meaning camel	South of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Tizi	Amazigh	From "Tizi" meaning mountain pass	Multiple locations	Basset, 1901
Djebel El Hamri	Arabic	Named after red color	East of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Djebel Zarzour	Amazigh	Amazigh name	West of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Djebel Sabra	Arabic	From "sabr" thorny plant	North of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Djebel El Abbad	Arabic	Named after worshippers and sufis	East of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Adrar	Amazigh	From "adrar" meaning mountain	Multiple locations	Basset, 1901
Djebel Azag	Amazigh	Ancient Amazigh name	South west of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Djebel Marouane	Arabic	Named after person or tribe	North east of Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970

Tafraoute	Amazigh	From "afrau" cave or grotto	West of Tlemcen	Basset, 1901
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3.4 Hagiotoponyms : Names of Shrines and Saints :

Hagiotoponyms occupy an important place in the Tlemcen region, which has historically been known as a major Sufi center. These names reflect the spiritual and religious depth of the region and the great social status of saints in local culture.

Toponym	Linguistic origin	Meaning/ Significance	Location	Source
Sidi Boumediene	Arabic	Named after saint Abu Madyan Shuayb	East of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Sidi El Halwi	Arabic	Named after saint Abu Abdullah Mohammed El Halwi	Central Tlemcen	Bel, 1938
Sidi Bel Hassan	Arabic	Named after the pious saint Hassan	Near Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Sidi Yacoub	Arabic	Named after the pious saint Yacoub	North of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Sidi Senoussi	Arabic	Named after Mohammed Ben Youssef Senoussi	Central Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Sidi Ouariach	Arabic-Amazigh	Named after the pious saint	West of Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Sidi Djilali	Arabic	Named after saint Abdel-Kader Djilani	South of Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Lalla Setti	Amazigh-Arabic	Named after pious woman saint	East of Tlemcen	Doutté, 1914
Sidi Bouamama	Arabic	Named after the pious saint	South west of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Sidi Daoud	Arabic	Named after saint of David's lineage	Near Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Sidi Brahim	Arabic	Named after the pious saint	North of Tlemcen	Brosselard, 1859
Sidi Said	Arabic	Named after the pious saint	Central Tlemcen	Bel, 1938

Sidi Boubekr	Arabic	Named after saint Abu Bakr	East of Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Lalla El Abbasia	Arabic	Named after a woman saint from Beni Abbas	Near Tlemcen	Doutté, 1914
Sidi Tahar	Arabic	Named after the pioussaint	West of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Sidi Abdel Kader	Arabic	Named after several saints with this name	Multiple locations	Trumelet, 1892
Sidi Omar	Arabic	Named after the pioussaint	South of Tlemcen	Bruno, 1970
Sidi El Yemeni	Arabic	Named after a saint of Yemeni origin	Near Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Lalla Khadija	Arabic	Named after a pious woman saint	North of Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Sidi Ben Adda	Arabic	Named after the pioussaint	East of Tlemcen	Doutté, 1914
Sidi Yahia	Arabic	Named after the pioussaint	North west of Tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Sidi El Aribi	Arabic	Named after saint of Arab lineage	South of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903
Sidi M'hamed Ben Ali	Arabic	Named after the pioussaint	Near Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Lalla El Mansoura	Arabic	Named after a pious woman saint	West of Tlemcen	Doutté, 1914
Sidi Ouriache	Arabic	Named after the poussaint	East of Tlemcen	Bel, 1938
Sidi El Djaber	Arabic	Named after the saint "consoler"	North of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1913
Sidi Hadj Aissa	Amazigh-Arabic	Saint's name of Amazigh origin	South west of Tlemcen	Camps, 1960
Lalla El Ghorbia	Arabic	Named after a woman saint from Morocco	Near Tlemcen	Gendre, 2007
Sidi Moujahid	Arabic	Named after the warrior saint	North of tlemcen	Trumelet, 1892
Sidi Brahim	Arabic	Corruption of Ibrahim	East of Tlemcen	Marçais, 1903

Research Conclusion :

Civilizational Plurality and Historical Accumulation :

Tlemcen represents a living model of civilizational coexistence, having witnessed the succession of multiple civilizations including Amazigh, Roman, Arab-Islamic, Andalusian, and Ottoman. Each civilizational layer left its toponymic imprints without completely erasing previous layers, reflecting the local community's ability to absorb new influences while preserving ancient heritage. This historical accumulation has made the Tlemcen toponymic landscape a living document narrating the story of thousands of years of civilizational interaction.

Deep Amazigh Roots :

The study reveals a strong presence of the Amazigh layer in Tlemcen's toponymy, particularly in mountain and highland names which are clearly dominated by the Amazigh language. Names of major natural landmarks such as mountains and principal valleys retained the oldest language, which aligns with the toponymic principle that natural geographical names preserve the most ancient linguistic layers. This confirms the historical depth of the Amazigh presence in the region and testifies to the continuity of Amazigh culture across ages despite successive political and civilizational changes.

Arab-Islamic Dominance and Its Profound Impact :

The Islamic conquest marked a fundamental turning point in Tlemcen's toponymic landscape, as the Arab-Islamic layer added large numbers of new names and renamed many ancient sites. Arab dominance appears particularly in religious place names and human settlements, reflecting the profound influence of Islamic civilization in shaping the region's cultural geography. Linguistic Arabization was accompanied by extensive toponymic Arabization that extended to include various aspects of social, economic, and religious life.

The Distinctive Spiritual and Sufi Dimension :

Tlemcen is characterized by an exceptional density of hagiography related to saints and righteous figures, reflecting its historical status as an important Sufi center in the Islamic Maghreb. Shrines and zawiyyas were not merely religious sites but formed social and economic centers around which local life was organized, where markets, celebrations, and seasonal gatherings were held. This distinctive spiritual dimension made Tlemcen the "City of Saints" and gave its geography a sacred character clearly reflected in place names bearing the names of saints and righteous figures.

Limited Roman Influence Despite Long Rule :

Despite centuries of Roman rule, Roman toponymic influence appears extremely limited in Tlemcen. This indicates that the Roman layer was superficial and did not penetrate deeply into daily popular usage, unlike the Amazigh and Arab-Islamic layers which integrated into the fabric of local society. This may be attributed to the Roman presence being primarily administrative and military without deep cultural and linguistic penetration into local society.

Collective Memory's Resistance to Colonial Erasure :

French colonialism failed to erase traditional names despite systematic attempts to impose French designations on streets, squares, and places. Local residents retained original names in their daily usage and transmitted them orally across generations, reflecting a form of cultural and symbolic

resistance. This phenomenon confirms the strong deep connection between identity and place, showing that toponymy is not merely geographical markers but a living part of collective consciousness that cannot be erased by force.

Toponymy as a Multidimensional Archive :

The research proves that place names in Tlemcen carry valuable information about multiple dimensions of community life. Historically, names preserve memories of events and different temporal periods. Economically, they reflect prevailing agricultural and craft activities such as olive and grape cultivation and beekeeping. Socially, they reveal the tribal and familial structure that organized traditional society. Environmentally, names accurately describe natural resources and geographical characteristics of areas. Finally, they reflect the religious dimension of beliefs and spiritual practices that formed a fundamental part of local culture.

Urgent Need to Preserve Toponymic Heritage :

Toponymic heritage today faces real threats in the age of globalization and rapid modernization. Oral knowledge among elders about the origins of names and their meanings is gradually disappearing without adequate documentation, necessitating an urgent need for scientific documentation and institutional protection. Loss of these names means losing part of the collective memory and cultural history of the region, therefore preserving toponymy becomes a national and cultural duty.

Toponymy and National Identity :

Place names form an integral part of cultural and national identity, connecting generations to their historical roots and preserving the spirit and memory of place. Protecting toponymy means protecting collective memory and civilizational belonging in the face of rapid transformations that may lead to rupture with the past. In an age of accelerating change, toponymy becomes a vital link connecting present to past and ensuring the continuity of cultural identity across generations.

Final Summary :

Tlemcen's toponymy constitutes a living archive narrating the story of a region that was and remains a meeting point of civilizations and a passage for peoples. These are not merely names on a map, but rather cultural texts carrying the memory of thousands of years of human interaction with place and with others. Each name carries a story, each story preserves a memory, and each memory forms part of the collective identity that defines and distinguishes Tlemcen as a city of exceptional civilizational heritage.

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