

## Necessity of Prostitution in the City of Algiers since the Beginning of French Colonization

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### Abstract:

Thanks to some experiences over time and the serious work of great administrators, prostitution, initially biblical, then hospitable and sacred, had become an unfortunate need but one that must be admitted. This social phenomenon was made legal with rigid regulations. The origin of prostitution in Algiers dates back to the 16th century. Before the arrival of the French, prostitution certainly existed there on a large scale and was regulated. In order to preserve public health, a loyal and protective administration was required. The creation in August 1930 of a health dispensary under the supervision of the police is proof of this.

**Keywords:** prostitution; regulations; Algiers; health; public; dispensary; police.

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### Introduction:

We can no longer currently ask this question: Is prostitution useful? The experience of several centuries, the serious work of the greatest administrators of all countries, who have not been able to demolish this plague of our social organization, sufficiently answer it. All have admitted that it was an unfortunate necessity to which we had to submit.

Fodere, a doctor as famous as he was a profound moralist (dictionnaire.s.m,1815:480); is obliged to end his article on the subject with the following conclusions:

1° Prostitution is an act that leads to the degradation of the physical and moral strength of the people who engage in it;

2° It is detrimental to good morals, to population, to public health by the propagation that it encourages of shameful diseases, in diseases, and, in certain cases, of several contagious diseases, which should attract upon it all severity of the laws and have it proscribed as an enemy of the social body;

3° But that, on the other hand, in cities where there is a garrison and many celibates by state or by necessity, it becomes a sort of necessary evil that one is obliged to tolerate in

order to avoid an even greater one; but that it is essential to subject it to constant provisions of guarantee towards the public, in terms of health and good order, so that it is as little harmful as possible. "

This necessity of prostitution once admitted, we see that this subject is capable of offering great interest to the observant physician, in terms of morality, legislation, public hygiene and the population.

### **ORIGIN OF PROSTITUTION, BIBLICAL PROSTITUTION.**

Grow and multiply, were the first words addressed by the Creator to the first two beings that he had just formed in his image. (Genesis, chapt.1:verse 28) It was then a question of obtaining a posterity which would ensure the empire of man; later, and in the hope of a progeny vainly awaited from his worthy companion, the virtuous Abraham (Genesis, chapter 14) had to leave her for the young Hagar, his servant; it was for the same reason that the two daughters of Lot would make their father drunk who was going to commit a double incest with them. Jacob (Genesis, Chapter 14).

.married successively, and eight days apart, his two first cousins, Lia and Rachel, and the two sisters gave him their youngest servants in turn to obtain a numerous posterity. We will limit ourselves to these quotations which we could multiply.

### **HOSPITAL PROSTITUTION:**

Among savage peoples, hospitality was practiced, and the presence of a guest was regarded as a blessing from the gods. Hence the eagerness and care he was the object of. A husband willingly gave up his bed and his wife to the guest whom the gods sent him, and the wife, docile to a custom that flattered her capricious curiosity, lent herself willingly to the most delicate act of hospitality. It is true that she was drawn to it by the hope of a present that the stranger often offered her the next day when taking leave of her; and then, could not this traveler be a god traveling in human form?

It is said that in Abyssinia this custom still exists. In North America, the girls of the Red Indian tribes celebrate the trappers who arrive with trinkets of necklaces and glass beads.

### **SACRED PROSTITUTION.**

Sacred prostitution was the continuation of this first prostitution, and priests attributed to themselves sacrifices that young nubile girls believed they were offering to the

Divinity; hence, these monstrous idols to which the virgins of India prostituted themselves. If we are to believe Herodotus, all the ladies of the immense city of Babylon came religiously to prostitute themselves, once in their life, in the temple of Venus, to a stranger who took possession of the one who suited him by invoking the goddess Mylitta, who was none other than Venus Urania.

Later, the Phoenicians sacrificed to the goddess Astarte, who had both sexes in her statues to represent both Venus and Adonis. She had twenty famous temples on the island of Cyprus; the two principal ones were those of Paphos and Amathus, where sacred prostitution was practiced on a larger scale than anywhere else.

If one wanted to question the mysteries of the festivals of Ceres, Bacchus, Venus and Priapus, one would see prostitution erected as a cult and then taking on a remarkable extension.

This sacred prostitution is still in use among many Indian peoples whose civilization is not very advanced, and we recently read, in a *Statistic of Mahe*, an article on the customs of the Malabars, where it is said: "Their morals are far from pure, sensual pleasures accompany them wherever they go. They hear music and dances that are very lascivious, especially at night when they have a festival in their pagodas, where there are places intended for secret pleasures; one sees on the chariots of their places, as well as on the walls of their temples, paintings that represent mysterious scenes. It seems that this is due to their religion.

## **LEGAL PROSTITUTION,**

In the learned publication which is being made at this moment, under the name of Pierre Dufour, a multitude of examples are mentioned which establish this type of prostitution, and it is added, page 132. (Dufour,2022:132)

"The prostitution which existed in all the temples of Athens, at the time when Solon gave laws to the Athenians, certainly invited the legislator to establish legal prostitution. He saw the priests and the altars enriched with the product of the consecrated women who were only sold to foreigners. It was naturally thought to procure the same benefits to the State and by the same means by making them serve at the same time the pleasures of Athenian youth and the security of honest women. He therefore founded, as an establishment of public utility, a large dicitery in which the slaves bought with the funds of the State and maintained at its expense, levied a daily tribute on the vices of the population, and worked with impudence to increase the revenues of the republic. "

## **Proscription of prostitution**

Solon made at the same time very rigid regulations to organize this part of the public services, and very severe laws punished all infractions. Women who engaged in prostitution were generally despised slaves for their shameful trade, and in Rome, female citizens who prostituted themselves lost this status. Under Domitian, they were declared incapable of inheriting and receiving legacies.

This legislation was preserved by almost all the Christian emperors.

Each king of the first race had three or four wives called queens and a greater number of concubines (Felibien and Lobineau, 1725:346). Charlemagne, however, tried to eradicate public debauchery, by publishing an ordinance which banished prostitutes from both cities and villages.

In some countries, and later, prostitutes were also proscribed. In 1521, a magistrate of Strasbourg expelled them from the city, and finally all the privileged houses of debauchery were suppressed in 1540; but little by little they regained a foothold in the city, and multiplied so much that in 1684 it was ordered that they be publicly driven out, that they be whipped by the executioner if they re-entered the city, and even that their noses be cut off.

These harsh penalties prove that attempts have sometimes been made to oppose a barrier to the invasion of this immoral spectacle; however, it has been necessary to give in everywhere and legalize prostitution in the interest of good order and health. We have originally seen prostitution to have its motives: hospitality and religion; but for a long time now, the honorable causes that determine it are no longer there, and it must be attributed to laziness, poverty, greed, domestic sorrows or mistreatment

Parent-Duchatelet, in one of his curious tables, finds only 90 prostitutes out of 5,183 who could have given an admissible excuse for practicing this infamous profession. (Duchatelet, 1837:100) I thought I should make this short digression on the necessity of prostitution, its origin and its causes, before arriving at the particular subject that I want to treat here: *Prostitution in the city of Algiers since the conquest*. •

### **ORIGIN OF PROSTITUTION IN ALGIERS:**

There are so few works on the Regency of Algiers before the conquest of the French in 1830, that it has not been possible for us to make a complete history of African prostitution before this period. However, through much research, we have managed to discover that it already existed in Algiers in 1612. Father Don Diego De-Haedo, who published, in Spanish, a *Topography and a History of Algiers*, gave us some rather curious details on this subject. "The third vice and sin," he says, "is lust, which the Algerians make such great use of, that they regard it as having to make their happiness in this world and in the other. According to the doctrine of Mahomet, simple fornication

is not a sin, and women of bad character are so numerous (although among them the brothels are not tolerated and there are none), that the Moors themselves say that there is no woman in Algiers who does not prostitute herself, not only to the Turks and the Moors, but also to the Christians whom they obsess with their importunities and whom they go to seek in their own houses, without fear of death, or that they will be thrown into the sea as is the custom. These facts are confirmed by another book published in 1671 (De – Haedo, 1612: 38).

Here is what Emmanuel d'Aranda recounts: (D'Aranda, 1665: 228)

"Women are not scrupulous in front of Christian slaves; for they say that they are blind; but they are remarkable for their bad inclinations; because notwithstanding that their husbands, with all sorts of diligence, try to keep their wives and daughters in the house, they invent a thousand subtleties to bathe to make visits, or under the pretext of devotion to visit a marabout or santon; and then abandon themselves, when they find the opportunity, to all those they meet, be they rogues, bastards, sodomites." He adds in another place (D'Aranda, 1665: 237): "Some slaves earned a lot of money; but as we usually see that time and money are the ruin of men, they lost it with women and wine." These interesting facts, cited by two reliable authors who lived in Algiers for a long time, demonstrate irrefutably that prostitution already existed there in the sixteenth century; we have not been able to go back to a date earlier than this.

### **PROSTITUTION BEFORE: 1850.**

We arrive, without intermediary, at the years which preceded the arrival of the French on African soil. Prostitution certainly existed there on a large scale and was regulated. ' And first of all we know that the married janissaries all had concubines, in addition to the four wives which are permitted to every Muslim, according to the Koran. But as they lost a large part of their advantages by marrying, they almost all remained single and lived with public girls, with whom they spent half their time indulging in all kinds of debauchery. Furthermore, they were all given to pedophiles. Captain Rozel estimated at 3,000 the number of prostitutes who existed in Algiers when we arrived. There were Moors, Arabs, and Negresses, but there were no authorized Jews. Prostitutes were confined in private houses and divided into various classes, each of which had its own prices; they could not go out without the permission of the mezouar. This was the grand bailiff or lieutenant general of the police; he was called mezouar or mizouar, and he was specially charged with the supervision of women who made a living from prostitution.

### **PROSTITUTION AFTER :1830**

. The French found prostitution established in Algiers and throughout the Regency subject to the despotic rules of the mezonars. This supervision continued for some time; but as soon as the country was taken possession of and in the presence of sufficiently numerous troops, it was felt that, in the interest of the health of the soldiers and of the newcomers attracted to Algiers by the hope of making their fortune there, prostitution had to be regulated. If we open the register of deliberations of the Administrative Commission of the dispensary of Algiers, we find there on the date of December 6, 1837 a remarkable Report by Mr. Antie, elected and approved on December 29, 1837, where we read the following in the history of the decrees on prostitution in Africa. An order of August 11, 1830 created a health dispensary under the supervision of the police.

All girls were required to register there and provide themselves with a booklet. They were obliged to report once a week to the dispensary and to pay the accounting officer a monthly fee of 5 francs. By order of March 27, 1831, the dispensary was placed under the authority of the mayor; but the tax continued to be collected by the police commissioner. An order of June 12 following placed the girls and the dispensary under the supervision of the mayor. The need to put an end to the abuses resulting from the measure by which the collection had been entrusted to the subordinate agents of the police, led to the decree of July 11, 1831, by which Mr. Loarby was made the successful bidder, for the sum of 1,860 francs per month. On September 29, a new decree was issued which, based on the concession of Mr. Loarby, granted the farm to Mr. Mehemet, for 1,980 francs per month. On June 5, 1832, a concession was made to Mr. Loarby, for 1,188 francs per month, and the tax was raised to 1,140 francs per month.

On July 30, 1834 and until August 1, 1835, the fee was raised to 9 francs and increased by the monthly payment of a sum of 1,666 francs. 80c. to Mr. Ba.Ire, with the option of collecting for his own benefit the amount of fines imposed by the police commissioner, of bringing the girls together twice a month, and of demanding 10 francs for parties outside and 5 francs for parties in the city.

On August 3, 1835, the concession was again granted to Balre for 2,250 francs per month. The right of the girls to be visited at home began, for 3 francs per visit payable to the doctor.

On November 28, 1835 appeared an element which placed under the surveillance of the Police Commissioner all the prostitutes, and settled or definitively summarized all the obligations which were imposed either on the girls, or on the agents charged with supervising them.

This decree is the only one which presents a complete system of organization. Here is the content of this decree:

We, Civil Intendant of the French possessions in the North of Africa;

In view of articles 10 and 46 of title I of the law of July 19-27, 1791, etc.;

We, Civil Intendant of the French possessions in the North of Africa;

Having regard to Articles 10 and 46 of Title I of the law of 19-27 July 1791, etc.;

Considering that experience has made it necessary to revise the regulations in force concerning public girls; have decided and do decide as follows:

### **ON REGISTRATION.**

ARTICLE 1. Any girl notoriously given over to prostitution will be registered by the Police Commissioner, head of the Central Office, in a register kept for this purpose at the said office.

ART. 2, 3, 4, 5. On the manner of making this registration

### **ON THE SANITARY SERVICE.**

ART. 6. From next October 1st, all public women will be required to have themselves visited twice a month and at fifteen-day intervals to have their state of health certified.

ART. 7. This visit will take place at the dispensary. However, public women who wish to have themselves visited at home may obtain the option by paying an extraordinary fee of 3 francs per visit, in the form of fees, in favor of the doctor.

ART. 8, 9, 10. On the keeping of the register of visits.

- ART. 11. Public girls visited at the dispensary and recognized as suffering from venereal diseases will be retained in this establishment to be immediately put into treatment. As for those who are visited at home and who are in the same situation, they will be taken to the dispensary under the care of the Police Commissioner.

### **ON COLLECTION.**

ART. 12. To cover the expenses resulting from both the visit and the treatment of public women, there will be paid for and by each of these women: at the time of the visit, a fee of 5 francs, or 10 francs per month.

ART. 13 and U. On the method of collection of this tax by the treasurer of the dispensary.

### **GENERAL PROVISIONS.**

ART. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; Concerning the exhibition of cards, changes of address, etc.

ART. 20. It is expressly forbidden for all prostitutes to perform, to wander in the streets after ten o'clock in the evening and to call directly or indirectly to passers-by, either during the day or at night, at the doors, at the windows, in the streets, squares, promenades or public paths.

ART. 21. They are expressly forbidden to enter the barracks or guardhouses; to receive or to have at their homes soldiers after retirement, and even to be elsewhere in their company.

ART. 22. No prostitute may, either, leave the city to go to the surrounding tribes, without written permission from the Commissioner of Police, head of the Central Office; the same permission will be necessary for them to go to the festivals which would be given in the evening inside or outside the city.

ART. 23. Regulations.

ART. 24. The fee to be paid for each of the girls whose request will be made remains fixed, for the exterior, at 10 francs, and for the interior, at 5 francs.

ART. 25 and 26. Regulations.

Algiers, September 26, 1836,

The Civil Intendant,

LEPASQUIER,

On April 18, 1836, Mr. Germont, central police commissioner, reported to Mr. the Civil Intendant a decrease of more than 4,000 francs in the receipts, and he did not hesitate to attribute the cause to a method which consisted of entrusting the collection to three or four independent persons.

Mr. Germont also pointed out the scandal of these collections, the dishonorable interpretations that resulted from them for those who were in charge of them; finally the inconvenience of maintaining a very large staff for this service. In a report of October 3, 1836, Mr. Meardi, doctor of the dispensary, also pointed out numerous abuses that had been perpetuated under the administration of the farmers, one of whom paid, in fines, the sum of 6,000 francs. So many abuses, so many exactions having aroused the attention of the higher authority, Mr. Maziau, head of the Accounting Office at the Civil Intendance, prepared a regulation full of useful ideas and which we have to regret that the application was not made. Things remained in this state until the formation of the Commission.

According to the verification of the registers, we find traces of the disorder of the writings, the accounts, etc.

**police.**

complete irregularity: for the cards, the home visits, the collections and the visits to the dispensary. (*Here are some examples which will find a place in our work.*)

Mr. Margot, called into the Commission and questioned, replied: "I knew, it is true, that agents under my orders were prevaricating, but I was never able to discover anything.

Police officer Baruch makes the most complete confessions and says that Mr. Margot himself had received, for his personal account, from 10 to 60 francs per ball.

From January 1 to October 2, 1837, 19,917 francs were received from 448 girls.

There is a huge error here; for by subtracting from the 448 girls, 148 for non-values or cessation, subtracting again the sums coming from music permits, festivals and balls, there would still remain 300 girls who, at 10 francs per month, must produce, as officer Baruch has advanced, 30,000 francs instead of 19,917.

*(The following are the details of the personnel, the food and the accounting of the dispensary in 1837, which we give elsewhere.)*

### Conclusion:

The institution of public girls is a plague of our social organization, an unfortunate necessity to which we must submit; but the number of these women is so disproportionate in Algiers, that poverty will doubtless destroy even those whom poverty has led there, and when we consider that there are more than 300 of them for 25,000 inhabitants, while Paris has only 4,000 for 900,000 inhabitants, it is permissible to hope that with a loyal and protective administration we will bring many back to duty, at the same time as we will be able to preserve public health.

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