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## THE BEN GHADHAM REVOLT OF 1864: INTERNAL CAUSES AND THE OTTOMAN FRENCH STANCE

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### Abstract

This study examines the deep roots of Ali Ben Ghedhahem's 1864 revolt, demonstrating the role of the interaction between internal crises and external pressures in shaping the historical trajectory of the Tunisian province. It also analyzes how the deteriorating political and economic conditions of that period contributed to creating a suitable environment for the outbreak of the uprising, while closely observing the divergence of international positions between Ottoman support on the one hand, and the increasing French ambitions on the other. The study also reveals the mechanisms of French economic and political penetration and its impact on weakening the ties of dependency with the Ottoman state, culminating in an analysis of the role of international alliances and balances in directing the course of the crisis and exacerbating its political and social repercussions.

**Keywords:** Revolution of Ben Ghazahm, Tunisian Ayala, Ottoman Empire, French Intervention.

### Introduction

During the 19th century, Tunisia witnessed numerous political and social upheavals as a result of deteriorating economic conditions and increasing pressures imposed on the population by the Husseinite dynasty, particularly after the implementation of administrative and financial reforms that burdened the people with heavy taxes and levies. This led to widespread discontent among the tribes and peasants who suffered from poverty and poor living conditions, paving



## *Modern American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*

ISSN (E): 3067-8153

Volume 2, Issue 4, April, 2026

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the way for the Ben Ghedhahem Revolt of 1864, led by Ali Ben Ghedhahem, which is considered one of the most significant popular uprisings in modern Tunisian history. This revolt was not merely a local protest movement; rather, it represented a clear expression of the population's rejection of the economic and administrative policies pursued by the state, and it revealed the extent of the internal crisis the country was experiencing at that time. The revolution was also linked to foreign interventions and international conflict over Tunisia, especially by the Ottoman Empire and France, as each side tried to exploit the events to serve its political interests and strengthen its influence in the region. Hence the importance of studying the Ben Ghedhahem Revolt to understand the internal factors that contributed to its outbreak, to identify the nature of the Ottoman and French stances towards it, and to clarify the impact of internal and external factors on the development of political events in Tunisia during the nineteenth century. This research also seeks to demonstrate the extent of the revolt's influence on modern Tunisian history and to reveal the nature of the relationship between the government and the people during that period, by answering questions related to the causes of the revolt and the objectives of external powers in their positions towards it. The research problem lies in identifying the causes of the revolution, revealing the nature of the Ottoman and French positions on it, and studying the impact of economic and political conditions on the increase of French influence within Tunisia. The research hypothesis is based on the premise that the revolution was a result of internal political and financial crises. The research is divided into three sections. The first section addresses the internal conditions and foreign intervention in the Tunisian province, while the second section is dedicated to studying the course of the Ben Ghedhahem revolution of 1864. The third section examines the Ottoman and French positions on the revolution. The research relied on a group of important sources, most notably the book "The Revolution of Ben Ghadham 1864" by the historian Jean Gagnac, and the book "Ithaf Ahl al-Zaman bi-Akhbar Muluk Tunis wa-Ahd al-Aman" by the historian Ahmed Ibn Abi al-Diyaf, as well as the book "The Tunisian Question and Ottoman Politics 1881-1913" by the author Abd al-Rahman Changi, in addition to a number of modern historical studies related to the subject of the research.



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## **Section One: Internal Conditions and Foreign Intervention in the Tunisian Regency and the Causes of the Revolution**

### **First: Internal Conditions in the Tunisian Regency**

In 1864, the Tunisian government was surprised by a revolution initiated by several tribes, which within a few weeks spread throughout the entire country. One of its direct causes was the increase in taxes, but the popular anger had deeper and more far-reaching causes. The reforms influenced by European development that were introduced to the country, and the new organization of the administration and judiciary, were not all accepted by the people with satisfaction, and they clashed (Mustafa Khaznadar)

With the support of a group of notables and conservatives, some of whom belonged to the circle surrounding (the Bey), while others belonged to his family circle, he did not care about this opposition and was not affected by it, knowing that the Bey was preoccupied with matters of governance and was only interested in debauchery and immorality, so that the atmosphere was clear for Mustafa Khardadar and he was able to be the ruler by his own decree in the country after he succeeded in removing all his rivals and those who aspired to take his place, even (Hamouda Bey) the imprisoned, who was the brother of (Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey), who was the only one who could harass that minister, and death suddenly overtook him in the year 1863 AD. (Ganiage, 1965, p. 113).

This sudden death, from which the Prime Minister benefited, aroused many suspicions and doubts. Many spoke of poisoning, and some even believed that the treasurer was involved (Haydar Effendi, 1964, p. 44). During that period, Tunisia was subject to the Ottoman system of governance due to the corruption of the then-governor and the exorbitant expenses and theft perpetrated by him and his entourage. The government levied taxes at a rate of 36 Tunisian riyals. During a period of high government deficits, this tax was doubled to 72 Tunisian riyals, a heavy burden on the Tunisian citizen. Since there were free men who would not accept injustice, the Ali Ben Ghedhahem revolt erupted in protest against this unjust decision to raise the exorbitant tax, igniting a wave of uprisings in Tunisia (Shaker, 2000, p. 516). The Ali Ben Ghedhahem revolt took place on March 10, 1864 in Tunisia when the tribes refused to pay the new tax. Among the parties that participated in the revolt were the Majer, Bou Ghanem and Fraichich tribes.



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The Ali Ben Ghedhahem revolt took place in all the cities of Tunisia, and the revolt lasted for two years. Ali Ben Ghedhahem is considered to have ignited the Tunisians' revolt against the oppressive rule.

**Second: Foreign intervention in the Tunisian province:**

The intervention of the Sublime Porte towards the Tunisian issue was initially political, as it was represented in diplomatic discussions and official protest telegrams between the two parties. As soon as news of the clashes between the Tunisian forces and the French reached the Ottoman state, it sent telegrams through (Asim Pasha) to the major powers to support it against the event that befell Tunisia, but it did not receive a response from them. Meanwhile, France was penetrating further into Tunisian lands, which forced the Bey to send a telegram to the Ottoman government to contain the problem (Nicola, 2000, p. 182). Immediately afterward, the Ottoman Empire dispatched its ambassadors to the capitals of the major powers to ascertain their stance on the Tunisian question. It also sent a message to France, urging them to accept the peace agreement and to enlist the support of the major powers. France accepted the offer and promised the Sublime Porte that it would study the matter, but in reality, it was merely stalling to buy time and avoid any military action against it by the Sublime Porte (Gignage, 1965, p. 55).

On May 3rd, France's response regarding the Sublime Porte's mediation to resolve the Tunisian question arrived, and it was negative. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire once again sought assistance from the major powers that had signed the Treaty of Berlin. However, the response was no different from before; this request was rejected, and the major powers merely stood by as spectators (Nicola, 2000, p. 182). After France refused peace with the Ottoman Empire and the major powers ignored the Tunisian question, the Sublime Porte decided to intervene navally in Tunisian waters to assert its control over Tunisia. The Ottoman Empire decided to send a naval fleet to Tunisia, but this idea met with both opposition and support. Therefore, the Ottoman Council of Ministers convened to formulate its policy regarding these events, deciding to send two warships instead of the entire fleet. Despite France's rejection of this plan upon hearing the news, the Porte disregarded this and prepared the two ships to sail towards Tunisia.



However, before this preparation could take place, news arrived of the signing of the treaty of May 12, 1881, between the Bey and France, causing the ships to halt their voyage (Gignage, 1965, p. 55). On the same day as the signing, Assem Pasha informed diplomatic representatives abroad that the Bey had been forced to sign the 1881 treaty, and that the Sublime Porte would protest the negative stance taken by the Great Powers regarding the Tunisian question (Nikula, 2002, p. 182). The researcher argues that France used the rebellion of the Himyar tribe on the Algerian-Tunisian border as a pretext for intervening in Tunisia, while its true objectives were to impose control over and occupy the country. This was manifested in forcing Bey Muhammad al-Sadiq to sign the Treaty of Bardo in 1881, which paved the way for subjecting Tunisia to French influence. The signing of the Treaty of La Marsa in 1883 represented a further step towards consolidating French hegemony by expanding its control over the Tunisian administration and various state affairs. The French government seized the lands of the Tunisians, and even the forests were not spared, which negatively impacted the lives of Tunisians with poverty and famine (Gignage, 1965, p. 55).

### **Third: Internal causes of the revolution:**

This revolution erupted as an inevitable consequence of numerous conditions plaguing the Tunisian Regency. The economic situation was deteriorating; agricultural production had declined, traditional industries suffered from European competition and a decline in foreign trade, and farmers were forced to sell their livestock to pay taxes. The prices of grain and other foodstuffs also soared. These factors fueled growing discontent with the country's dire circumstances, and the crisis worsened to the point where salaries for civil servants and soldiers were delayed. As a result of the increased taxes, the revolution broke out in several regions of the Tunisian Regency and, within less than a month, spread throughout the country (Sassi, 2015, p. 59). Meanwhile, boats coming from Malta were arriving loaded with English gunpowder, which the rebellious tribesmen were buying from Jewish merchants settled in the coastal cities. (Fatiha, 2019, p. 30).





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## Section Two

### **First: The course of the Ben Ghadham revolution in 1864:**

The revolution began when the Tunisian people refused to pay taxes, also due to poverty, injustice, and the new unjust laws and rulings. The people did not stop at not paying taxes, but extended to attacking the property and everything owned by the ruler of Tunisia because of his injustice. They succeeded in looting what the ruler owned, and as a result, chaos spread throughout Tunisia, with each tribe attacking on its own. However, the ruler of Tunisia, through his soldiers and military, attacked the Tunisian revolutionaries for two years (Haydar Effendi, 1864, p. 48). After the tribes continued fighting and resisting the army of the Bey of Tunis, each tribe avoided the instructions of Ali Ben Ghedhahem because they were not actually under the command of their leader, Ali Ben Ghedhahem. They united under a banner, and as a result, the Tunisian tribes, and because of this weakness, the Tunisian government forces, with the help of the Europeans, were able to survive the suppression of the Tunisian revolution in 1866 and the arrest of the revolutionary leader Ali Ben Ghedhahem, who died in the prison of Halq al-Wadi in 1867 (al-Tamimi, 1977, p. 66). In May 1864, Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey was unable to enjoy his usual outing with his entourage in the city of Halq al-Wadi. His royal tranquility was disturbed by telegrams and news arriving from his governors and aides scattered throughout the west and south of the kingdom, the land of the Arabs, tribes, and peasants. It reached the Bey's council that a horseman from the Majer tribe, literate and skilled in oratory, was gathering tribes and clans around him and inciting them to refuse to pay taxes. His name was Ali ibn Ghadham, and his followers had begun to call him "the Bey of the Nation" (al-Tamimi, 1977, 67). In late 1863, the Bey decided to increase the poll tax from 36 to 72 riyals. He desperately needed funds for his palaces, his entourage, and his luxuries, and he ignored the timid voices close to him that warned of the tribes' anger, as they had nothing left to offer him but their tents and meager provisions. Ultimately, the Bey succumbed to the adage, "When the Arabs have much wealth, their condition worsens," and through the heavy tax burden, he quelled their power and curbed their rebellion. Far from the center of power in the capital, the tribes of the highlands, the central regions, and the northwest were stockpiling gunpowder, forging alliances and agreements, and gathering for feasts, thus



## *Modern American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*

ISSN (E): 3067-8153

Volume 2, Issue 4, April, 2026

Website: [usajournals.org](http://usajournals.org)

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initiating the largest rebellion in modern Tunisian history. The Bey, through his power, and Ali ibn Ghadham, through his incitement, succeeded in uniting the tribes and suppressing their grudges and resentments, which would later resurface (Haydar Effendi, 1864, p. 69). The document reveals that the Bey's decision to double the poll tax in late 1863 was one of the direct causes of Ali Ben Ghedhahem's revolt in 1864. This decision came amidst deteriorating economic and living conditions that burdened the Tunisian tribes. The text also highlights the authorities' disregard for warnings about the repercussions of this tax policy, relying instead on increased taxes as a means of controlling the tribes and weakening their capacity for rebellion. Conversely, this approach contributed to unifying the various tribes and overcoming their traditional differences, thus providing a broad social base for the revolutionary movement and leading to one of the most significant uprisings in modern Tunisian history. The 1864 revolution was born in a nomadic world exhausted by years of drought, the greed of the Makhzen (government), and the burden of taxation and tax collectors. It was joined by a vast mass of those harmed by the unjust tax system: the downtrodden tribal masses, the notables of the clans, sheikhs, and religious figures. Beginning in April 1864, the tax rebellion spread to villages and inland and coastal cities, such as Sfax, Sousse, Mahdia, and Monastir. With the exception of Tunis, the capital, the movement became a widespread social phenomenon throughout the kingdom, joined by an urban population that included the city poor, notables, small artisans, and merchants (Haydar Effendi, 1864, p. 56). During the reign of Grand Vizier Mustafa Khaznadar, everything that moved within the kingdom was subject to taxation, including individuals, sheep, cattle, mules, camels, singers, musicians, and prostitutes. Salt, tobacco, candles, and hides were also taxed. The people paid, the Bey spent, and the Mamluks amassed enormous wealth. However, when the tribal front, led by Ali ibn Ghadham, refused to pay taxes, expelled the tax collectors, and besieged the officials and governors, panic spread through the Bey's council, and the movement took on a more violent and determined character. (Al-Diyaf, 1964, p. 27).

The early stages of the revolution were relatively successful in selecting its local enemies. Tax collectors, Bey officials, governors, and aghas were persecuted, and their livelihoods and wealth were plundered in all the rebellious villages and



towns. Some were besieged until they died, while others escaped secretly by ship. Before reaching the city of El Kef, Agha Farhat, the city's governor, and the Ouled Wanifa were killed. In Thala, the Majer tribe besieged the Bey's governor, Larbi Ben Ammar El Bekouch, who took refuge in his tower and perished along with his family and horsemen (Diyaf, 1964, p. 29). The rebellious crowds forced the governor of Gabes to open his treasuries and return the tax money to its rightful owners, and compelled him to leave the city. In Kairouan, the governor was deposed and replaced by the revolutionaries. In the coastal villages and towns, the tax collectors and officials were dismissed, and green flags were raised as a sign of loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan, not to the Bey (Al-Diyaf, 1964, p. 29). Tribes everywhere were reclaiming what had been plundered from them. The rebels told the governor of Kairouan, after looting his stores and tearing up the tax records, "You did not feed us from your own wealth, nor from your father's; it is our wealth, which God has enabled us to seize." The tribal leader, Ali ibn Ghadham, was setting limits on looting and plundering, promoting a new morality for the revolution based on respecting people's livelihoods and ensuring the safety of trade caravans. He was attempting to dispel the specter of banditry from the movement and unite the oppressed against their common enemy: the Bey's officials and his cronies. Unable to enforce his new tax measures, the Husseinite ruler was forced to rescind them. On April 21, 1864, he sent a letter to the tribes informing them of the reinstatement of the old tax rate of 36 riyals. Meanwhile, his chief minister, Mustafa Khaznadar, was looking for ways to divide the tribes, scatter their unity, and exhaust the movement with promises and compromises, at a time when the tribal gatherings were getting closer to the center of power in the capital and waiting for the time to clash with the Bey's soldiers (Al-Diyaf, 1964, p. 30). The 1864 revolution is intertwined in the collective memory with the image of Ali Ben Ghedhahem, a figure imbued with emotional weight and a heavy legacy laden with dreams and disappointments. The revolution, to some extent, resembles its leader; they share a similar fervor, hope, humility, confusion, narrow-mindedness, and a yearning for an old world whose conditions the modernization of the Bey and the reformist elite failed to alter. Isn't the revolution this strange alchemy born of anxiety and fear for life and destiny? It drew sustenance from its tribal, Bedouin, religious, and moral symbols. In this sense,





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it resembles the world in which Ali Ben Ghedhahem grew up and from which he acquired his political, national, and social consciousness. Born in 1814 in the steppes of the central-western region, Ben Ghedhahem belonged to the Ouled Messahel clan of the Majer tribe, and his family heritage is not without its paradoxes. He is the grandson of Ammar al-Masahli, who led the 1812 rebellion, and he is also a descendant of a Makhzen family that served the Husseinite authority since the middle of the 18th century. The families of Ibn Sharifa and al-Farajniya from the Awlad Masahil monopolized the institution of the Sheikhdом within the Awlad Mahni throne since the middle of the 18th century, and were linked to the Makhzen since this period and obtained important privileges, perhaps the least of which was tax exemption, in return for their role in policing the area and subjecting the Awlad Mahni to the demands of the state and obeying it (Ganiage, 1965, p. 21). Within a tribal environment steeped in oral tradition and storytelling, Ali ibn Ghadham acquired some literacy skills thanks to his father, Muhammad ibn Ghadham, who served as a judge over the Majer tribes. Ali ibn Ghadham worked as a scribe for al-Arabi al-Sahili, the governor of Majer, and grew up in a religious, Bedouin milieu deeply connected to Sufi orders. Some sources indicate that he was the head of the Tijaniyya order in his region, within a tribal society that revered horsemen and weapons. Ibn Ghadham was a respected knight among his people, and the Tunisian historian Azhar al-Majri aptly stated that Ibn Ghadham combined the wisdom of saints with the blood of warriors (al-Tamimi, 1997, p. 20). This tribal prestige and his distinguished religious and scholarly standing made Ali ibn Ghadham relatable to other tribes, particularly his former adversaries, such as the Hamama and Jlass tribes. Its author added to it the ability to construct a narrative of struggle that united a Bedouin society torn apart by the wounds of raids and plunder. He used to tell them: The wall that assures us that we are oppressed (Al-Diyaf 1964, p. 114). Taxation was the most brutal form of injustice, and justice could only be achieved by reducing it and preventing tax collectors from seizing everything. It was also the most powerful framework within which the Husseinite dynasty and the Mamluks maintained their dominance over local society. Tribal society had accumulated a tragic experience with the Makhzen state apparatus and failed to assimilate the modernization measures initiated by the Husseinite dynasty since the 1830s, not



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ISSN (E): 3067-8153

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Website: [usajournals.org](http://usajournals.org)

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only because these measures were alien to its customs and ancient symbols, but also because they did not improve its living conditions. A feeling arose that the Bedouin community had paid the price of modernization with its sweat, land, and meager earnings. Therefore, some of the slogans of the revolution contradicted the modernization measures. In addition to the high-priority demands regarding taxation, the list of demands included the abolition of the new judicial councils, the suspension of the 1861 constitution, and the reinstatement of the slave trade. Clearly, these demands aligned with the interests of tribal and urban notables and some merchants whose symbolic and economic privileges had been diminished by the new measures. However, they also reflected a tribal society that internalized the distortion and injustice of the new change. Traditional structures were being undermined, and the Arabs were deprived of positions of power, equality, access to justice, and representation in the Grand Council, while the wealth flowed to the Mamluks. (Al-Diyaf, 1964, p. 120). The new reforms were a boon to the Mamluks and a source of suffering for the tribes. This gave rise to the contradiction between the center and the periphery. However, the revolution and its leader were on a path that could collapse the moment they lost the ability to follow the path of destruction and renewal. Ibn Ghadham sought justice within his own old world and did not look beyond it. He expected intercession and justice from a ruler whose face grew more hideous and brutal the more he touched his coffers (Al-Diyaf, 1964, p. 134). Despite the consensus the revolution fostered around the Arab leader, Ali Ben Ghedhahem, he did not become, in the eyes of his supporters, a viable alternative to the throne. Sadok Bey still enjoyed legitimacy as long as he promised to reduce taxes, reform his administrative apparatus, and reopen his council to tribal grievances. This perspective, which failed to grasp that the Bey was worthless without the tax revenue, would determine the fate of the revolution. It would enter a downward spiral, clinging to its old principles, a spiral that would ultimately lead to tragic and painful ends for all who had embraced the revolution, without exception. This time, the Bey would be just in his application of collective punishment (Ganyage 1965, p. 21). The revolutionaries and their leaders did not opt for direct military confrontation, despite the significant weakness of the state's repressive apparatus. Instead, they preferred to wait on the outskirts of the capital, anticipating the Bey's troops. This



gave the Grand Vizier, Mustafa Khaznadar, an opportunity to maneuver and push through fragile and vague compromises. The tribes accepted a flawed mediation represented by the Sufi orders, embodied in Sheikh Mustafa bin Azzouz, leader of the Rahmaniyya order, despite the long-standing and implicit alliance between some Sufi sheikhs and the Husseinite throne. Among the broad list of collective demands, the leader of the revolution, Ali bin Ghadham, put forward some specific demands: the appointment of his brother, Abd al-Nabi, as governor of Majer, the appointment of some tribal leaders as sheikhs in their regions, and, most specifically, the demand for the Henchir al-Rouhiyya estate. Sources indicate that bin Ghadham demanded it in order to establish a zawiya (Sufi lodge) affiliated with the Tijaniyya order (Haydar Effendi, 1864, p. 44). Through this document, the researcher observes that the leaders of Ali bin Ghadham's revolution did not opt for a direct military confrontation with the Husseinite authority, despite the weakness of the state apparatus. Instead, they preferred to employ political pressure and await the authority's initiative, which allowed the government the opportunity to contain the crisis through negotiations and mediation. The document also highlights the influential role of Sufi orders, particularly the Rahmaniyya order, in mediating between the two sides, reflecting the status of religious institutions in Tunisian political and social life at the time. Furthermore, the demands put forth by Ali Ben Ghedhahem indicate the interplay between the general dimensions of the revolution—namely, the rejection of fiscal and administrative policies—and local and personal interests related to consolidating the influence of certain tribal and religious leaders. This reflects the complexity of the movement's objectives and the diverse motivations of its participants. In contrast, the Bey made general promises to reverse the unjust tax measures, appoint local officials, and grant amnesty to the rebels, declaring in July 1864 that the conflict had ended with a peace agreement. Meanwhile, most tribes joined the harvest season, and the leader of the revolution settled for a dubious truce that caused him to lose a significant portion of his symbolic standing among his followers. Simultaneously, the Grand Vizier, through his agents and informants, spread the false news of the allocation of the Henchir Rouhia estate to Ali Ben Ghedhahem, and divisions began to fester within the tribal ranks. The old tribal rivalries inherited from the conflict between the Bey



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and the Hussein Pasha resurfaced, and the Khazendar apparatus intensified its efforts to buy the loyalty of tribal notables and sheikhs, rekindle old animosities, and devise plans to overthrow the leaders of the revolution once their supporters had abandoned them (Ganyage, 1965, p. 55). While the tribes had settled for peace and negotiations in August 1864, the revolution remained more deeply entrenched in the coastal villages and towns. This coast, which the authorities had successfully isolated, would pay the price of the rebellion with the lives of its own people. The revolutionary leadership seemed to lack coordination with the other villages and towns, and its vision for the revolution's outcome was somewhat tied to a narrow, tribal perspective, which, according to Valence-Losat, rendered its victory impossible. Soon after, the Bey would renege on his promises and send his armies into the cities and tribes weakened by internal strife. Ali Ben Ghedhahem would awaken to the pain of having been lulled into complacency by his superiors and spiritual leaders, and he would attempt to reorganize the revolutionary ranks and incite the tribes to return to the battlefields. But it seems that his call did not penetrate the thick wall that the Hussein throne had built with ancient social stones made from the dough of customs, loyalty, corners, intercession, moderation, compliance with the chiefs, blood brothers, and tribal prejudices... This mythical and ancient world that Ibn Ghadham dreamed of making less miserable and more just so that it could withstand the will of injustice and uprooting, is the same world that would lead him to his death, with his blood sought inside and outside the borders of the kingdom, then a prisoner in the prisons of the Beys facing the ordeal of death far from his family and clan (Al-Dhayyaf, 1964, p. 115).

### **Second: The position of the Hussein Sultanate:**

The Husseinite policy was stubbornly aimed at extinguishing the last embers of the revolution and silencing the tribes, villages, and cities forever. Therefore, the machinery of repression mercilessly targeted crops, tents, livestock, money, women, children, the elderly, and anything that still possessed a shred of value that could be extorted or exploited. Every inch of land touched by the flames of revolution had to be destroyed. Thus, the notables, sheikhs, and horsemen of the tribes, villages, and cities were brought in chains to the capital, without exception,



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Website: [usajournals.org](http://usajournals.org)

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and their livelihoods were confiscated, for the palace was driven not only by a desire for revenge but also by a desperate thirst for the remaining wealth. From his palace balcony, the Bey ordered the flogging of hundreds of prisoners; some died before the executioner could finish counting them, while others were thrown into the hellish prisons and the cold, desolate towers of the Bey's palace (Al-Tawil, 1992, p. 36). The leader of the revolution, Ali bin Ghadham, surrendered to the Husseinite throne in March 1866. Ben Ghedhahem had no idea that a man named Mohamed El-Eid Tijani, whose features and voice bore the marks of the righteous saints, would hand him over without hesitation to the Bey. Ben Ghedhahem's price was a few tears the sheikh shed for his followers, and a great deal of gratitude and favor from the one enthroned. The Pasha Hanba and the Bey orchestrated the final spectacle of humiliation for Ali Ben Ghedhahem in the square of Bardo. The chained warrior was insulted, spat upon by the Makhzen (government officials), the rabble, and others without any trade. The old woman of the Beys scorned him and mocked him: "You who want to be our master? He replied, still imbued with the fury of a warrior and the bitter disappointment of a righteous man: "Why didn't you come to me while I was on horseback? If I come to you myself, then you will have no honor in that case." (Dermon, 1954, p. 16) In late 1866, Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey regained his composure and serenity, and headed with his royal entourage towards the city of Halq al-Wadi, to enjoy its air and sea, carrying with him the leader of the revolution bound in chains, to throw him into the Halq al-Wadi prison (al-Karaka) which was close to his sight. Ibn Ghadhahm was not destined to escape the torments of prison, and he passed away in October 1867 (al-Diyaf, 1964, p. 93). The departure of Ibn Ghadham symbolically signaled the failure of the revolution and the victory of the Husseinite throne. The rebellious tribes and villages would face the ordeal of repression, plunder, and displacement. The authorities would rebuild their military strongholds using the people's resources, and militarization would spread throughout the kingdom to terrorize the population and deter them from returning. Meanwhile, the pens and swords of history would work to impose a singular narrative of the revolution, and the stories of the revolutionaries would be written by their enemies or those wary of them, as they were denied their right to speak for numerous reasons. However, collective memory would maintain a unique





vigilance—the vigilance of the oppressed and subjugated against injustice and tyranny—and the narrative of the revolution and the life of its leader would be passed down orally through generations, despite the lack of complete knowledge of what had transpired. (Nicola, 2002, p. 182).

### **Third: The Results of the Internal Revolution:**

The Ben Ghedhahem revolution resulted in several consequences that led Tunisia to a new stage of internal developments and external ambitions. Among these was the state of bankruptcy that befell the country as a result of the war reparations imposed on the rebellious tribes. Matters were exacerbated by the drought that struck the country, which led to a decline in the financial revenues that the Tunisian government used to collect. During the revolution, foreign trade weakened, and the scarcity of agricultural crops had a significant impact on the decline of foreign currency, which of course affected the state budget in the years following the revolution (Al-Harithi, 2007, p. 94). This revolution also opened the door for European intervention in the internal affairs of the Tunisian state, especially by France, England, and Italy. Each country sought to play a role that suited its interests and orientations. These countries wanted to exploit the state of destruction and chaos that led to the suspension of the constitution and the cessation of the work of the municipal councils, and as a result, famines and serious diseases spread (Sassi, 2015, p. 61).

### **Third Section: The Ottoman-French Stance on the Revolution**

#### **First: The Ottoman Stance:**

The Ottoman state paid great attention to the events in Tunisia. From the outset of the revolution, it sent a delegate to Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey, requesting that he deal with the revolutionaries with restraint and not give any opportunity for foreign intervention, especially from France, which was waiting for an opportunity to implement its plans in Tunisia (Al-Harithi, 2007, p. 90). The Sublime Porte's intervention in the Tunisian issue was initially political, consisting of diplomatic discussions and official protest telegrams between the two sides. As soon as news arrived of the clashes between Tunisian and French forces, the Ottoman state sent telegrams through Asim Pasha to the major powers



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seeking their support against the event that had befallen Tunisia. However, it did not receive a response from them. Meanwhile, France was further encroaching on Tunisian territory, which forced the Bey to send a telegram to the Ottoman government to contain the problem (Niquila, 2002, p. 182). Immediately afterward, the Ottoman state dispatched its ambassadors to the capitals of the major powers to ascertain their stance on the Tunisian problem. It also sent a message to France to accept the peace agreement and contacted the major powers to secure their participation. France accepted and promised the Sublime Porte that it would study the matter, but in reality, it was merely stalling to buy time and avoid any military action against it by the Sublime Porte (Geniag, 1965, p. 55). When the Bey realized the danger of this revolution, he attempted to gain the support of the Ottoman state. He sent a letter to the Ottoman government with the state's representative, Khayr al-Din Effendi, who had come to Tunisia to gather information about the revolution. In the letter, he praised the Ottoman state and explained the developments that had occurred among the revolutionaries in central Tunisia and the eastern coastal regions of the country. He thanked the Ottoman government for its support in condemning the revolution, which he believed would weaken the country's internal front and give European powers, especially France, the opportunity to intervene in Tunisia's internal affairs (Al-Harithi, 2007, p. 91). The letter also included a statement that the Ottoman government had come to Tunisia to investigate the situation and praised the Ottoman state. Khayr ad-Din Pasha provided Muhammad as-Sadiq Bey with a set of instructions from the Ottoman government, stressing the need to increase ties between the Ottoman state and Tunisia and to consider Tunisia as part of the Ottoman state's possessions so that foreign powers would not extend their ambitions to it. In order for these ties to be strengthened, it is necessary to return to the previous ties that bind Tunisia and the Ottoman state, which are summarized in minting currency in the name of the Sultan and praying for him on the pulpits. In return, the Bey of Tunisia has independence in managing the military, political and legal provinces. In addition, the Bey has the right to request a firman if he is appointed directly by the Sultan (same source, p. 93).



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### **Secondly: The French Position on the Revolution:**

After France refused peace with the Ottoman Empire and the major powers ignored the Tunisian issue, the Sublime Porte refrained from any naval intervention in Tunisian waters, thus confirming Tunisia's subservience to it. France succeeded in influencing the Beys of Tunis, drawing them away from their ties to the Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, it sought to increase its economic and political influence to secure its claim to Tunisia over other competing powers, particularly Britain and Italy. France's role during the Ben Ghedhahem Revolution had a significant impact on the rapprochement between Tunisia and the Ottoman Empire. However, this rapprochement became less effective, especially as France began seriously considering increasing its influence in Tunisia as a prelude to placing it under a protectorate (Al-Harithi, 2007, p. 95). The Ottoman Empire decided to send a naval fleet to Tunisia. However, this idea met with both opposition and support. Consequently, the Ottoman Council of Ministers convened to formulate its policy regarding the events, ultimately deciding to send two warships instead of the entire fleet. Despite France's rejection of this idea upon hearing the news, the Porte disregarded it and prepared the two ships to set sail for Tunisia. However, before this preparation could take place, news arrived of the signing of the treaty of May 12, 1881, between the Bey and France, causing the ships to halt their voyage (Gignage, 1965, p. 55). On the same day of the signing, Assem Pasha informed diplomatic representatives abroad that the Bey had been forced to sign the 1881 treaty and that the Sublime Porte would protest the negative stance adopted by the Great Powers regarding the Tunisian question. From what we have explained, we can conclude that the social conditions in Tunisia after the protectorate were deplorable, especially since France deliberately strengthened its settlers at the expense of the local population (Nicola, 2002, p. 182).

In addition to the administrative and financial problems that plagued Tunisia, causing it to lose control of the country, Europeans, particularly the French, exploited the financial crisis. European companies offered loans to the Tunisian government at high interest rates, some reaching 13%. This penetration wasn't limited to loans, most of which were granted to the French; the majority of the country's foreign trade fell into French hands, whose numbers were steadily



increasing (Al-Harithi, 2007, p. 96). The Tunisian government's entanglement in European debts, whether owed to individuals or governments, led to an accumulation of these debts. The Tunisian government's inability to repay them prompted creditors to demand immediate repayment. Faced with these demands, the Tunisian government was forced to reach an agreement with the creditor governments to form a joint financial committee. This committee was tasked with overseeing Tunisian revenues and allocating half of them to the public debt. Naturally, this decision had a significant impact, leading to the interference of committee members in Tunisia's internal affairs, which evolved into a symbol of control over the country's economy (Al-Jamal, 1997, p. 294). It is clear from the foregoing that France used the rebellion of the Himyar tribe on the Algerian-Tunisian border as a pretext for intervening in Tunisian affairs, while from the outset it sought to impose its control over the country and occupy it. This was embodied in forcing Bey Muhammad al-Sadiq to sign the Treaty of Bardo in 1881 (Gignage, 1965, p. 55), which formed the legal basis for the French presence in Tunisia. The signing of the Treaty of La Marsa also represented another step towards consolidating French hegemony, as it allowed France to expand its influence and tighten its control over the Tunisian administration and various state institutions.

### **Third: The International Dimensions of the Revolution:**

A study of the international dimensions of Ali Ben Ghedhahem's revolution reveals the nature of the overlap between internal factors and external interventions. It shows how the revolution transformed from a local movement into an issue with regional and international dimensions, contributing to the deepening of foreign influence in Tunisia and paving the way for the escalation of European intervention in its affairs during the following decades (al-Tunisi, 1972, pp. 85–90). International rivalry was also clearly evident in the roles that countries with interests in Tunisia sought to play during the revolution. French intervention had a significant impact on strengthening Tunisian-Ottoman relations, particularly through the role of Haydar Effendi in calming the situation and convincing the Bey not to trust France, which was seeking to expand its colonial influence in the country. Conversely, the roles of both Britain and Italy



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were focused on preserving their interests and preventing France from gaining sole control over Tunisia (Al-Harithi, 2007, p. 94).

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the Ben Ghedhahem Revolt of 1864 was one of the most significant political and social events in Tunisia during the 19th century. It was not a product of a temporary circumstance or a fleeting incident, but rather the culmination of a long accumulation of internal crises that plagued Tunisian society at the time. The deteriorating economic conditions and the increasing taxes and levies imposed by the Husseinite dynasty burdened the population, particularly the tribes and farmers, leading to widespread poverty and discontent across all segments of society. Furthermore, weak governance and growing foreign influence exacerbated the instability within the country, creating fertile ground for the outbreak of the revolt led by Ali Ben Ghedhahem.

The course of the revolt revealed the extent of popular rejection of the financial and administrative policies pursued by the ruling authority. Initially, the rebels managed to forge a degree of unity among the tribes to confront the government and demand redress for grievances. However, the weakness of the military organization, the strength of the ruling power, and internal divisions contributed to the revolt's decline and eventual demise after numerous confrontations. However, the revolution left a clear mark on Tunisian political life, as it highlighted the seriousness of the internal situation and the widening gap between the government and the people. On another level, the revolution demonstrated the importance of Tunisia's location to external powers, particularly the Ottoman Empire and France, as each party dealt with the events according to its political and strategic interests. The Ottoman Empire sought to maintain its connection to Tunisia and strengthen its influence within the province, while France saw the unrest as an opportunity to expand its intervention and advance its interests in the region. This reflects the nature of the international competition that Tunisia was experiencing at that time. Furthermore, the study of the Ben Ghedhahem Revolution confirms that internal crises often pave the way for foreign intervention, especially when state institutions weaken and the suffering of the population intensifies. Therefore, this revolution is not merely a historical event





confined to a specific time period, but rather an important example for understanding the nature of the political and social transformations that Tunisia witnessed during the nineteenth century, and the extent to which internal and external factors influenced the country's future. Based on the foregoing, it can be said that the Ben Ghedhahem uprising was a genuine expression of the suffering of the Tunisian people and their desire to confront injustice and improve their conditions. It also revealed the fragility of the political situation in the Tunisian province under increasing foreign pressure. Therefore, this uprising remains a significant milestone in modern Tunisian history, given its political and social implications that reflect the nature of the period preceding the imposition of the French protectorate on the country

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