

## Methodological Steps and Practical Tips for Choosing a Historical Research Topic.

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### Summary:

Through this research paper, we aim to outline a practical roadmap that will help guide and support students in choosing their research topic in a systematic, useful, and practical manner. This approach avoids the theoretical aspect that dominates most books on historical research methodology. Despite its importance, it requires a deep understanding in order to apply its content in the field.

The results of this brief study provide a set of methodological steps, rules, and practical tips that enable students to complete their research within the specified deadlines, provided they adhere to them and follow the implementation step by step.

**Keywords:** Historical Research; Research Methodology; Practical Tips; Choosing a Topic

### Introduction:

Choosing a historical research topic is one of the most important and challenging stages that most of our students encounter at the end of their university studies, whether at the Master's or PhD level. Many fail to develop a preliminary concept for their research project, and the student remains floundering for a considerable period without settling on a specific topic. After much effort, they eventually choose any title to complete the administrative registration procedures before the deadline. However, once they actually begin preparing their research, they encounter a series of problems that hinder their progress. This stems from a lack of understanding of the chosen topic on the one hand, and a lack of familiarity with historical research methodology on the other. These difficulties persist, leading to boredom and apathy, and often even contemplating abandoning the project altogether, as they have not made tangible progress. Yet, there are a number of methodological rules and practical tips that can make research enjoyable and successful, provided they are adhered to and implemented step by step, enabling the student to complete their research within the allotted time.

This leads us to the central question of this research paper: What methodological steps and practical advice can guide and assist students in choosing a research topic in the field of postgraduate historical studies?

This paper aims to provide a practical roadmap to guide and support students in selecting their research topics in a systematic, beneficial, and practical manner. This approach

avoids the theoretical approach that often dominates books on historical research methodology, despite its importance. It stems primarily from personal experience, as well as from numerous discussions on this topic with students and their struggles in preparing their research papers, and with fellow professors in academic seminars and workshops held in laboratories and universities dedicated to the study of historical research methodology. The methodology employed in this study is fundamentally historical, based on following a set of methods and characteristics of scientific research, or its methodology. This methodology involves: formulating a question in the researcher's mind, then defining the problem (the research title and its central issue), and refining it with clear and precise terminology that aligns with the historical method, all as quickly as possible.

### **1. The Pre-Topic Selection Stage:**

University historical research generally falls into three categories. The first is short research papers submitted during tutorials, which do not introduce new concepts but rather open new avenues for research and train students in how to handle sources and references, utilize scientific material, and analyze it. The second category is master's theses, which aim to evaluate the student's methodology and master the historical method and its tools more than to conduct groundbreaking research. Master's theses are often lengthy studies that do not necessarily require originality of the topic; the subject matter may already be studied, and some unexplored chapters can be expanded upon, or previously overlooked aspects added. The third type is the doctoral dissertation in history, which is an innovative and original research project. The more the student relies on new documents, manuscripts, or previously unknown facts and information about a specific historical event, the more distinguished and scholarly their research will be<sup>1</sup>.

Often, undergraduate students pursuing postgraduate studies in history, and even in other humanities and social sciences, lack a basic understanding of the specific topic they wish to research. If they do, it is rare. Therefore, we offer a set of tips to our students pursuing a master's or doctorate in history to help them focus their thinking and save time in successfully completing this stage quickly.

#### **a- The Student's Personal Interests:**

By the student's personal interests, we mean the topics that capture their attention and that they enjoy reading about—the topics that appeal to them. Are these historical topics of a political and military nature, such as the Umayyad and Abbasid periods of rule in medieval history, for example? Or the early stages of Ottoman rule in Algeria, its governmental system and administrative apparatus, such as the period of the Beylerbeys (1518-1659 CE) or the later period of the Deys (1671-1830 CE)? Some students are drawn to the political history of states and civilizations, or the political relations of the Ottoman Empire with European states and the chapters of conflict between them, known as the "Eastern Question," during the mid-19th century. Others might be interested in the factors that led to the rise of nations, civilizations, empires, and states throughout history, or the chapters of the Crusader religious conflict between Islamic and Christian European civilizations during the medieval and modern periods, and its consequences.

Or topics with a military dimension, such as the major battles in the history of Islamic civilization, for example, and their profound consequences, such as the Battle of Ain Jalut

(658 AH/1260 CE), where the Muslims, under the leadership of the Mamluk army, succeeded for the first time in repelling the Mongol invasion of the Islamic world; or the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (609 AH/1212 CE), which is considered the beginning of the decline of Islamic rule in Andalusia; or the Battle of Wadi al-Makhazin between the Saadi Dynasty and Portugal (986 AH/1578 CE); or the conquest of Constantinople in (857 AH/1453 CE); or the fall of Granada in (897 AH/1492 CE), and the resulting catastrophe for the Muslims in Andalusia and their migration to North Africa, in addition to the subsequent development and agricultural and artisanal revival of many regions; or the suffering of the Moriscos under the Inquisition in Spain; or Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in (1798-1801 CE), and the resulting opening of the eyes of Europeans to the benefits of Islamic knowledge and the beginning of the colonial onslaught against it, or major and important local events such as the first conquest of Oran in 1118 AH/1708<sup>2</sup> CE and the second in 1206 AH/1792 CE.

The student's interest may be predominantly in topics of an economic nature, such as the agricultural activity of the inhabitants of cities and their suburbs, including rural and nomadic life, their farming, herding, and nomadic lifestyles, the crafts and trades of city dwellers<sup>3</sup>, overland trade caravan routes, maritime exchanges between the two shores of the Mediterranean and the impact of political relations on this, or the shift of global trade centers from the Islamic world, whose lands formed the link between China and India in the far east to Europe in the far west, and the impact even of Italian cities, which were the beneficiaries of this maritime trade or the overland Silk Road, and the shift of trade routes beyond the Mediterranean after the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope in 892 AH/1487 AD; or the European scramble for Egypt and its historical and current importance in global trade due to the completion and opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (1286 AH).

Or studies of a civilizational, social, cultural, and religious nature, such as the major population migrations in history, their causes, and their consequences, including the development and revitalization of some areas at the expense of others; or the major cultural centers of the Islamic world throughout its historical periods, such as Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads, and Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasids; Kairouan and its role in the Islamic conquests of North Africa; and Toledo, Granada, and Seville, those Andalusian cities that were very important in the history of Muslims on the European side for eight centuries (from 711 to 1492 CE); or Constantinople after its conquest in 1453 CE and its transformation into the capital of the Ottoman Empire (Istanbul); as well as Cairo during the Ayyubid and Ottoman periods. For example, the French historian André Raymond has pioneering studies on the most important cities and capitals during the Ottoman era<sup>4</sup>.

Likewise, major scientific centers with cultural reach, scientific influence, and religious impact; Such as the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Al-Azhar Mosque and its status in Egypt, Al-Zaytuna Mosque and its influence on cultural life in Tunisia, the Great Mosque of Algiers<sup>5</sup>, and the Qarawiyyin Mosque in Morocco; religious sects such as the various schools of thought and creeds; the relationship of scholars and religious elites with society and authority, and their role in supporting and legitimizing religious authority and pledging allegiance to the ruler, crown prince, and sultan; as well as their role in uniting ranks and urging jihad and mobilization during the Crusades or when the Islamic world was subjected to foreign and European attacks; as well as the role of scholars and their scholarly activity in

writing and their study circles; the jurisprudence of contemporary issues and the legal and social cases presented to them—all these are topics worthy of study and very important for understanding our historical past in all fields; the role of libraries and their spread, the paper industry, the role of scribes and calligraphers in the intellectual movement, their stance on the emergence of printing and the reason for the delay in its introduction to the Ottoman state; and the spread of Sufi lodges and their religious, cultural, social, economic, and jihadist roles.

Similarly, the art of travelogues, encompassing works and accounts of pilgrimages, diplomatic missions, and travels throughout the ages, as well as biographies and memoirs, provides suitable research topics that can be explored using important sources and journals, such as the *African and Asian Journals* during the contemporary colonial period<sup>6</sup>. This requires proficiency in the source language, whether Arabic, Latin, Ottoman, French, English, or Spanish, along with a thorough understanding of the language, concepts, culture, and terminology of the era.

#### b- The Student's Scientific Skills:

A student's knowledge of their scientific skills is also a fundamental and crucial requirement in their academic journey. For example, someone who has previously studied in Quranic schools and traditional Quranic schools is better equipped than others to understand different types of script and read manuscripts, especially the various styles of Maghrebi script. This script was prevalent in the Islamic Maghreb region (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) for extended periods. If these skills are properly utilized, the student can choose a research topic that might involve editing a manuscript or enriching their research with archival documents and historical manuscripts related to the subject, thus enhancing the value and significance of the study.

Moreover, proficiency in foreign languages and auxiliary sciences is a crucial skill. For example, Ottoman Turkish, the language in which official correspondence and imperial decrees were written between the Ottoman Empire and its numerous provinces during the modern period, allows the student to excel if they utilize this skill and choose a topic related to the Ottoman archives, which contain a vast number of documents. Similarly, proficiency in Latin is essential for historical studies during the Middle Ages<sup>7</sup>, exploring the relationship between the Christian world and the Catholic Church with the Islamic world, or the period of the Crusades, including the Church's role and support for the Crusades directed against the Islamic East. Or other foreign languages such as English and French in the field of contemporary historical studies, such as the Algerian Revolution, and the necessity of returning to archival documents, whether those written by the Provisional Government or by the French delegation in the famous Evian Accords, which still require in-depth research and analysis of its clauses based on what was written and decided in the meetings of the two delegations during the repeated encounters that culminated in the second Evian Accords, signed on March 18, 1962.

Or, proficiency in Spanish opens up broad horizons for the student in the field of diverse Andalusian and Morisco historical studies in various fields. A large number of Arabic and Spanish documents exist in Spanish archives and libraries, as well as in the Catholic churches that led the Inquisition in Andalusia after its fall. Therefore, proficiency in ancient

and modern languages and auxiliary sciences is very important in the field of historical research<sup>8</sup>.

We have vivid examples of a group of researchers in the field of historical studies in Algeria and Tunisia, for example, but not limited to. Their mastery of many of these skills made their presence distinguished, their research serious, sober, and very useful, and their scientific production abundant in quantity and quality, such as the studies of Nassreddin Saidouni in the Ottoman era in Algeria The Sheikh of Historians, Abu al-Kacem Saad Allah, is a pioneer of contemporary historical and cultural studies in Algeria, as well as the verification of manuscripts and translation from English to Arabic and other areas of historical research, as well as Muhammad Darraj al-Malam in Turkish and Osmanli. He has access to archival documents in Turkey and Algeria, and he also has historical works about Algeria in the Ottoman period And also Shakib bin Hafri, who specializes in modern history and is familiar with a number of languages, most notably Turkish and Osmanli, and is interested in archival documents related to Algeria during the Ottoman era, and Khalifa Hamash, who is credited with issuing a number of historical indexes of archival documents, whether in the Algerian National Library or in libraries outside Algeria, thanks to his mastery of the Osmanli language and reading archival documents Abdul Jalil Al-Tamimi in Tunisia, who was able to establish a historical research center concerned with Ottoman historical studies in the Islamic Maghreb region, and his magazine *The Maghreb Historical Magazine*, which specializes in the modern and contemporary history of the Islamic Maghreb region and which began its publication fifty years ago (1974 AD), and is still ongoing today, as well as Andalusian and Moorish studies, and his knowledge of various languages and archival documents made him a very successful example in his field and specialization.

## 2. Conditions for Choosing a Research Topic:

There is a set of conditions that must be met in successful scientific research and that the student must adhere to, the most important of which are:

### a. The Novelty and Originality of the Topic:

The topic must be new and original and make a real contribution to scientific research, new not only in its title but also in its content, i.e. a new addition to historical knowledge<sup>9</sup>. If a topic is chosen that has previous treatment, then the research is supposed to target a new contribution that has not been treated in previous research. Here, the new points targeted by the research must be determined accurately and objectively in the justifications for the choice, the goal of the study, and the research plan that the student prepares as a project for their topic<sup>10</sup>.

### b. Desire for the Topic:

Love of the subject is a basic condition and it is preferable not to impose it on the part of the professor or the constituent party because love of the subject is the motivation that makes the student endure the fatigue and perhaps the hardship of traveling inside or outside the country in order to obtain the scientific material that may be available in some corners or archives or libraries and closets of some families and households, far from his place of residence; Attachment to the topic also makes the student accomplish it better because a person is creative in any work he loves<sup>11</sup>, so it is preferable that the research topic not be imposed on the student by the scientific committee that undertakes its formation Or by the

supervising professor, and it would be preferable for there to be consultation between students and professors in this regard if there are specific topics imposed by the specialization or the direction of the laboratory that is responsible for opening postgraduate projects, whether it is a master's or doctorate, There should be scientific sessions with students to discuss the topics to be researched and to deepen their understanding of their details so that students can ask their questions and inquiries about these topics before the process of distributing the research topics to the students. Then, based on these sessions and discussions, students can choose a topic from among those topics offered for research and study.

The more a particular topic receives special passion and attention from the student and not from other topics, the more this will be an effective motivation for his scientific energies and an engine for him to continue his studies and follow them with great care and overcome the difficulties he faces during the preparation of the research and until it is completed in the required manner. However, if a specific topic is imposed on the student and you are not familiar with its details, in this case he must adapt to the topic and begin researching, and with the passage of time, the required familiarity and comfort will occur<sup>12</sup>.

c. Determine the Temporal and Spatial Framework of the Topic:

The student's good choice of the research title is evident by specifying the title accurately, concisely, and clearly, and specifying the temporal and spatial period to be studied, meaning a precise topic in time and place, and not a general, loose, ambiguous, or unclear topic<sup>13</sup>.

d. Availability of Scientific Materials:

The first step in the process of choosing a topic is to verify the possibility of obtaining the required information in a timely manner. There is no point in choosing a specific topic that does not have sufficient sources, references, or data that can be obtained promptly. Therefore, the student must conduct a comprehensive survey about the information and its source. The locations of their locations are official or civil bodies, Arab or foreign periodicals, and other sources of information such as catalogs and indexes<sup>14</sup> located at the level of college libraries or located in the National and University Library in Algiers and the national and even state archives, or indexes located at the level of libraries of some zawiya libraries<sup>15</sup>, and the student relies on his personal efforts to review the concerned parties in the various departments. As well as familiarity with the scientific theses written on the topic to be discussed<sup>16</sup>, and the extent of the student's ability to travel if the scientific material is not available in the sources in his country<sup>17</sup>, it may be archival documents and records dating back to the Ottoman era found, for example, in the Turkish archives, or information dating back to the colonial period found in the French archives, or religious studies based on church documents that require travel to Italy or Spain. Or very important manuscripts, copies of which are distributed to several libraries outside the country<sup>18</sup>.

e. The Student's Ability and Readiness to Research:

The problem at hand must be to the best of the student's ability in terms of his special circumstances, his material and intellectual capabilities, the languages he is fluent in, the auxiliary sciences he has studied and is prepared to study and which are necessary for his research, and the extent of his ability to obtain the necessary sources and move between national and foreign archives.

### 3. How to Choose a Research Topic:

The first problem facing a graduate student in history is choosing a research topic. Based on the student's aforementioned skills and adherence to the most important conditions in choosing the topic, the student can choose a topic, and this choice must be made with the utmost precision. The more successful the choice, the more problems will be overcome at the beginning. In order to help the student in this regard, simplify the matter, and move away from the theoretical methodology, we provide him with a shortcut to working with the aforementioned considerations that suffice the purpose and achieve the goal quickly, which is represented in the following steps.

#### a. Initial (Rapid) Reading Stage:

The initial quick and survey reading stage is very important at the beginning of every research; whether it is a graduation thesis, university research, a book reading card, or an analysis of historical texts among the directed works given to the doctor during the academic year; this initial stage, which is represented by a survey reading on a topic according to the interests and skills of the student, is indispensable, and the website of the Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP)<sup>19</sup> is often considered one of the best scientific platforms and banks affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which was launched in 2018. It provides researchers with a large number of peer-reviewed articles by specialized professors and graduate students who have studied numerous scientific topics in most fields and historical eras.

All the researcher has to do is register in it and then access this portal, which enables him to download a large number of articles on various historical topics; It is a concise and focused research; After downloading it, the researcher reads it quickly until he understands the topic in general and stops at the details that have been indicated as not being studied; Or which needs to be expanded and delved into based on the emergence of new developments in the subject, such as archival documents that have been quarantined and have become available to researchers, or finding part of a manuscript that was missing, or an original copy of a historical manuscript that was previously investigated based on non-original copies, or topics that have not received their due study, or old works and manuscripts that have not been well investigated, so they can be re-researched.

The student chooses one of these topics and adjusts it initially; He extracts the titles of the main sources and important references from the list of sources and references that is attached at the end of each published article, and it is simple work and does not take effort, transfer, or a long time. It is one of the advantages of the technological media currently in use, which saves effort, time, fatigue and money, especially in the early stages of research, which require understanding the subject first and its needs. These are recommendations that are often mentioned at the conclusion of research, articles, and even university theses, which are referred to during the research and at its end.

The topic is not a single title at the beginning, but rather a group of questions that the student may ask when he is in the stage of preparing his regular research during his years of study or his historical readings of sources, or questions that are asked while attending the standards lectures, or a specific problem raised by one of the professors, whether in the lectures or while presenting the research in the directed works classes. Often, lengthy

discussions are raised about some obscure historical issues, or which require in-depth research, and here the smart student can record such issues and choose one of them when he has the opportunity to complete postgraduate studies.

It is also considered a historical index carried out by some professors and students at their universities, where topics studied from independence to the present time are counted, for example in medieval, modern, or contemporary history (the revolution)<sup>20</sup>, or the index of Professor Khalifa Hamash in the Ottoman era; It is of great benefit, and referring to it provides the student with a preliminary basis that helps him adjust the title of his research or choose one of the records or documents that he referred to to be the subject of research, and this is after consulting some specialized professors so that the matter is easier and better.

When the student is guided to a topic and has made progress in the initial reading on it, which may take from one to three months, the student can then give an appropriate title. The title must be familiar with the temporal and spatial framework and carry an aesthetic that attracts the reader and the scientific committee that will be responsible for approving the topics proposed for the research. The student should avoid loose topics and titles with long historical eras. Rather, the title should be precise and carry within it the problem of the topic. The original researcher is the one who knows how to choose the real problem<sup>21</sup>, by defining the period studied (the spatial and temporal framework); by using vocabulary that clarifies this, such as "from to" or "between the year of the beginning or the century and the year of the end" or "during" or "amidst." Or a big title, which is the basic problem, and under it a small title, which is considered the sub-problem, such as: *Crafts and Craftsmen in the City of Algiers during the 12th Century AH/18th century CE, a Social and Economic Approach* or *Leaders of the Algerian National Movement after World War I and Their Position on Colonial Politics, Messali al-Hajj and Farhat Abbas as a Model*, or *Political Relations between Algeria and Tunisia during the 12th Century AH/18th Century CE, Political-military Study* or *Algeria in the 12th century AH/18th century CE through the Maghreb journeys, the journeys of Abu al-Kacem al-Zayani and Hussein al-Wartilani as an Example, a Comparative Study*, or *the Islamic world during the 10th century AH/16th century AD, between the Conquest of Constantinople and the Fall of Granada, a Study of Causes and Results*. Adjusting the geographical and spatial space is very important, and often if the title is accompanied by a problem that comes directly under the title, this is better because within the thesis this problem will turn into one or two main chapters in the subject and the subject of the study will become clear from the beginning and through its main title, as it also makes it easier for the student to identify sub-problems in the introduction.

b. Careful Reading Stage:

Then comes the stage of careful reading after choosing a specific topic; and in this stage he re-reads all the articles, references and even university theses that are related to the topic of his research until he understands the topic on the one hand, as well as knowing the sources that are related to his topic on the other hand; then he moves on to search for historical sources that are very important in his research and may be available on the Internet and can be downloaded; Or in one of the clubs that include professors and research students inside or outside the country, which are usually clubs of great benefit that provide the researcher with some very important sources and books, and they may be archival documents

in different places, libraries or archives, so the researcher can know their locations and then determine the extent of access to them or assign one of the professors who frequent these archives to photograph some documents for him; All these steps are very important in the beginning.

Through this careful reading of sources, articles, and references, the researcher can initially adjust the title and research plan. This careful and sober reading of articles, references, university theses, and sources also allows the researcher to understand the topic, encompass its parts and draw up a research plan, and take an idea about the elements around which the scientific material is available and the titles whose scientific material is scarce and therefore can be combined with other titles to avoid falling into unbalanced research chapters in the future. So we point out and emphasize the necessity and importance of this stage, which will spare the student in the future many problems because he discovered them early, making it easier for him to deal with them. At this stage, he may notice the need to change or update the topic if he discovers that the scientific material about it is very scarce, and thus he changes the topic early before it is controlled and registered administratively at his university level, because changing the research topic first wastes time, which is considered the most valuable element in the research, and also requires complex procedures and holding scientific councils to discuss the matter, and the researcher's request to change his topic may be rejected. It is also required that the change be during the second year of research. If the student exceeds this period and wants to change the subject, his request will be rejected, and he will continue to flounder with research whose material is scarce, non-existent, or difficult to obtain. With the passage of time and the student's failure to progress in his research, a feeling of boredom and an urgent desire to stop are generated.

Therefore, the stage of careful reading of sources, references, and even university theses and articles is considered one of the most important stages that the student should go through at the beginning of their research journey. This stage may avoid many problems and difficulties that the student may encounter if he adjusts his subject and covers a long research period and time in it, then discovers the scarcity of scientific material or its current unavailability, or his inability to access it and benefit from it. Unfortunately, these are problems and obstacles that many students suffer from, and often some professors teach at the university; and they were unable to complete their research, and often the lack of scientific material and haste in choosing the topic from the beginning is the main reason, as these are most of the obstacles that may appear later and make many students stop completing their research projects. It can be avoided with little effort and time at first, but it is very useful later.

At this stage, if the title is correct, the student can start writing down the scientific material from important sources on cards or notebooks, which he will return to later during editing in order to save time and benefit from carefully reading the sources and references that he has read. He may record some information from some sources and be forced to change the research topic, so he does not regret that, as it is not a waste of time, as some believe. Rather, it can later be used in research papers or scientific articles for publication or participation in scientific forums.

c. The Deductive, Inductive, Analytical Reading Stage:

This is the stage where the student has settled on a specific title, defined its temporal and spatial framework, drawn up at least a preliminary plan, and registered administratively with this title. Here begins the deductive reading stage, which means reading the sources and references in order, analyzing their ideas, critiquing them both explicitly and implicitly, and comparing them with what is mentioned in other sources. This is done according to the research plan and the importance of the sources and references. It is not necessary to start with the first chapter, as the researcher can begin with the chapter he likes and is closest to him, and this allows him to stimulate his appetite for the research. This reading enables the student to extract the basic ideas for each element of the research and its parts. It also enables him to analyze the ideas and compare them with what is mentioned about them in other sources. Here, the student's and the researcher's general linguistic proficiency becomes apparent, as well as his attention to some historical facts that only become apparent through analytical, deductive reading, and his attempt to arrange ideas and information, presenting some of them in relation to others.

During this stage, the student begins collecting the research material and transcribing it onto cards. It is best to organize their work in notebooks, with each chapter's cards recorded in a separate notebook to prevent loss. Alternatively, if the cards are separate sheets, they can be stored in plastic folders of a specific color, with the cards themselves being the same color. For example, the chapter covering political and military events should have red cards and matching folders, the economic chapter green cards, the social chapter blue cards, the cultural chapter yellow cards, and so on. The student might think that the abundance of colors and organization is unnecessary and a waste of time. However, I say from experience that when a researcher delves deeply into their research, and after a period of time that can sometimes be lengthy depending on the circumstances of each study and the researcher, the papers accumulate and become disorganized. Losing any research card can lead to wasted time and ideas, and the research process becomes stressful and distracting for the researcher.

This is a skill that depends on the student's proficiency and their mastery of the tools of historical research. This skill doesn't come from nowhere, but rather from years of conducting historical research, analyzing texts, and developing reading cards for numerous sources throughout the student's studies. All of this ultimately equips the student with the tools of historical research and improves their ability to use them effectively. Here, I emphasize the importance of conducting research and developing reading cards for sources, especially, and avoiding the easy option of relying on readily available or hastily prepared research papers. The undergraduate years are a period of training and practice in conducting research; originality and novelty are not required. It is simply a training phase. All the effort the student puts in during this period results in a solid academic and methodological foundation that will facilitate their later studies, particularly at the postgraduate level, allowing them to delve into historical research with greater ease.

We emphasize here the necessity of dedicating oneself fully to research and striving to devote as much time as possible to it. The secret to the success of any research lies in the researcher's commitment to its completion, especially given the abundance of distractions today, such as social media and numerous smartphone applications. Therefore, anyone wishing to complete their research should minimize their phone use, or ideally, abstain from it

altogether during the research period except when necessary. They should also disable all time-wasting applications like Facebook, as well as avoid lengthy phone calls, particularly for female students, as these often involve unproductive conversations and represent a significant waste of time.

#### **4. Developing a preliminary research plan (initial research outline):**

- Writing a request from the student to the supervisor for approval of supervision and the research plan.
- Research title.
- Defining the research problem and its hypotheses, i.e., the sub-issues.
- Identifying the reasons for choosing the research topic.
- Research objectives.
- The significance of the research.
- The temporal and spatial scope of the topic.
- The research structure (chapters, sections, subsections, and subheadings).
- A list of the most important sources and references<sup>22</sup>.

#### **5. Failure to find a specific topic:**

Everything mentioned above applies to a student who has independently arrived at a research topic. But what if the student hasn't settled on a topic and remains uncertain about what to choose as time runs out? In this case, it's best to contact their professors, especially those in the relevant field, and ask for their assistance. Professors are often aware of topics that haven't been thoroughly researched or that require further exploration and additional insights.

Furthermore, a serious student who attends master's thesis defenses at the end of the year, or even doctoral defenses, can greatly benefit from the discussions with research students and the valuable insights offered by the examining committee. These insights can highlight several topics that haven't been explored or require deeper investigation. The student simply needs to jot down these observations in a notebook and then consult with experienced professors about specific topics that require intensive research. This will undoubtedly help them find what they're looking for and save time in selecting a suitable research topic<sup>23</sup>.

#### **Conclusion:**

From the foregoing, we conclude that choosing a graduation thesis topic in history, whether for a Master's or PhD, is neither difficult nor impossible, provided the student patiently and deliberately follows the methodological steps we have outlined. Before rushing to finalize the thesis title and register it administratively, the student must thoroughly familiarize themselves with the topic, read extensively about it, and consult with experienced professors in the field. This is of great benefit, preventing the student from wasting time and becoming distracted later.

Furthermore, it enables the student to identify significant gaps in the basic scientific material of their research early on, or to determine if their topic has already been studied and thoroughly researched. In such cases, it becomes necessary to quickly change the topic, thus avoiding wasted time. Moreover, the initial readings conducted on the topic, even if it has been changed, will broaden the students' scientific understanding, and they will undoubtedly benefit from what they have read throughout their research journey. The currently available

scientific and technological platforms, most notably the "Algerian Scientific Journal Platform" (ASJP), have contributed to serving scientific research in all disciplines, including history, by providing hundreds of ready-made, peer-reviewed, and published articles and research papers. All the researcher has to do is download and read them. This is one of the advantages of modern technology, which has delivered information to the researcher at home without the trouble of searching or traveling to distant places, with the costs of travel and accommodation. Today, thanks to technology, research has become easier and faster than before, which encourages researchers, students, and professors to complete and continue their research and submit it within the specified deadlines.

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### **Endnotes:**

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<sup>2</sup> Ruqaya al-Sharif, *Contemporary Algerian Sources for the First Conquest of Oran (1118 AH/1708 CE) and the Second (1206 AH/1792 CE)* (Algeria: Dar Kawkab al-'Uloom, 2021).

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- <sup>5</sup> Naïma Bouhamchouch, *The Great Mosque of Algiers during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries through Endowment Documents* (University of Algiers, 2013–2014).
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- <sup>8</sup> Hassan Othman, *The Methodology of Historical Research*, 8th ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’aref, n.d.), 25.
- <sup>9</sup> Layla al-Sabbagh, *A Study in Historical Research Methodology* (n.p., n.d.), 146.
- <sup>10</sup> Marwan Abdul Majeed Ibrahim, *Foundations of Scientific Research for Preparing University Theses*, 1st ed. (Amman: Al-Warraq Foundation, 2000), 85.
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- <sup>12</sup> Muhammad al-‘Arabi Ma’resh, *Student’s Guide to Historical Research and Presentation Methodology*, 1st ed. (Algeria: National Association of Youth Cadres in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, 1997), 13.
- <sup>13</sup> Hallaq, *Methods of Thought*, 165.
- <sup>14</sup> Alaa Amara and Mouloud Aouimer, *Half a Century of Historical Research at the Algerian University (1962–1912)* (Constantine: Faculty of Arts and Islamic Civilization Publications, 2013–2014).
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- <sup>16</sup> Marwan Abdul Majeed Ibrahim, *Foundations of Scientific Research*, 87.
- <sup>17</sup> Hallaq, *Methods of Thought*, 167.
- <sup>18</sup> al-Sabbagh, *A Study in Historical Research Methodology*, 147.
- <sup>19</sup> Rumaysa Sadous and Abdelmalek Ben Sabti, “The Algerian Platform for Scientific Journals (ASJP) and Its Role in Promoting University Scientific Publishing,” *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (June 2020): 238–262.
- <sup>20</sup> Amara and Aouimer, *Half a Century of Historical Research*.
- <sup>21</sup> al-Sabbagh, *A Study in Historical Research Methodology*, 143.
- <sup>22</sup> Hallaq, *Methods of Thought*, 169.
- <sup>23</sup> Ayman Abu al-Rous, *How to Write a Successful Research Paper? 25 Steps for Preparing Research Papers and University Theses* (n.p., n.d.), 38.