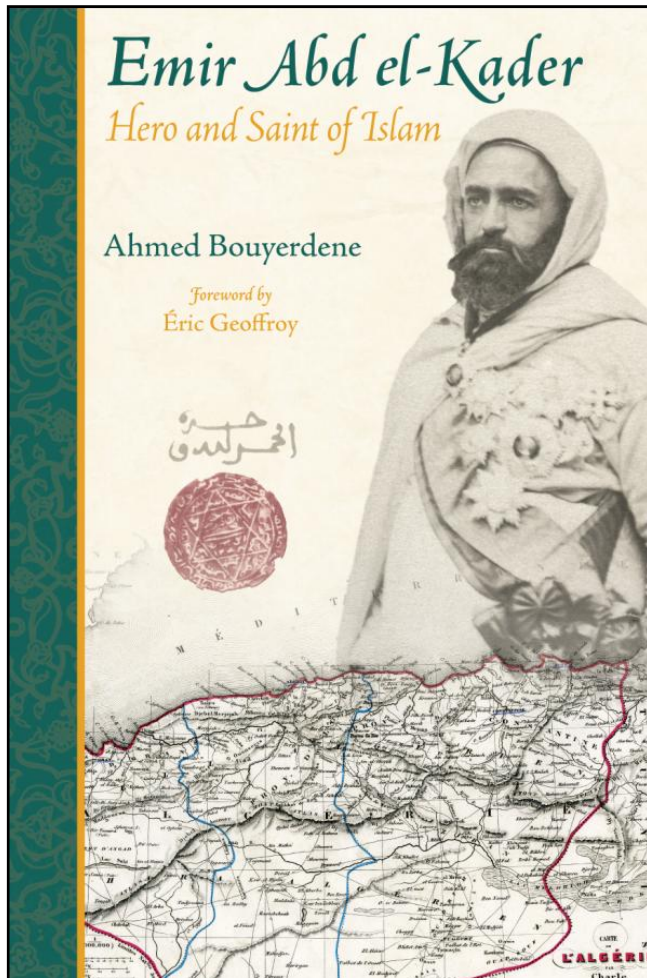




Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam

by Ahmed Bouyerdene
Foreword by Éric Geoffroy

Translated and with an Introduction by Gustavo Polit



Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam is an exceptional and fascinating biography of the great Algerian hero and Sufi Emir Abd el-Kader (c. 1807/8-1883), who was “one of the few great men of the century” (*New York Times*) and who “once filled the world with his name” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*). Such was the Emir’s popularity that, in 1846, the town of Elkader, IA was named in his honor.

Beginning with the childhood and youth of the Emir, the reader is carried along the entire course of his tumultuous life, from his idyllic early years in the almost biblical ambience of the desert, to his first battles against the colonizing French Africa Army, ending at last with his exile in Syria. In Damascus we see the hero-saint revealed once again during his rescue of some 10,000 Christians, an act that brought acclaim from such men as Abraham Lincoln and Pope Pius IX.

Throughout the biography, which contains 12 pages of beautiful illustrations, the author never lets us forget the deepest Emir: the saint and mystic whose greatness of soul and deep inner life is the true subject of this biography, and the source of the great piety, forbearance, and chivalry for which he was so justly famous and revered during his time.

This Book Features

- ❖ A comprehensive biography of the Algerian warrior and Sufi saint, Emir Abd el-Kader.
- ❖ Twelve pages of beautiful illustrations of the Emir Abd el-Kader.
- ❖ A detailed Chronology of the life of the Emir Abd el-Kader.
- ❖ A Glossary of foreign terms.
- ❖ A Foreword by Éric Geoffroy and an Introduction by Gustavo Polit.

Publication Details

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World Wisdom



Portrait of Abd el-Kader with prayer beads, by Ange Tissier, 1853



Praise for the Emir Abd el-Kader

“There are few names in the list of modern notabilities which are better known than that of the ‘Arab Napoleon,’ the warrior who, in defense of his native soil, successfully defied, during several campaigns, the whole power of France, and kept her armies in a state of almost unremitting warfare for more than fifteen years . . . [The Emir Abd el-Kader] was one of the few great men of the century.”

—*The New York Times*



Photo of Abd el-Kader, by Mayer and Pierson, 1855

Portrait of Abd el-Kader in Istanbul, by Stanislaw Chlebowski, 1866



“The most redoubtable adversary that France encountered on African soil, the man who for sixteen years of heroic battles fought for his faith and for the independence of his country, Abd el-Kader is, unquestionably, the most important personage that has arisen in the last century among the Muslim populations.”

—*Le Figaro*, French national newspaper

Praise for the Emir Abd el-Kader

“Abd el-Kader disquieted Paris and challenged all the might of France in the reign of Louis Phillipe. The history of the French conquest of Algeria is in substance the record of the conflict which Abd el-Kader waged almost single-handed against the foremost military nation of Europe.”

—*The London Times*

“Today the Christian world unites to honor in the dethroned Prince of Islam [Emir Abd el-Kader], the most unselfish of knightly warriors, risking limb and life to rescue his ancient foes, his conquerors and the conquerors of his race and his religion, from outrage and from death.”

—*The New York Times*, October 20, 1860, reporting on the Emir’s rescue of over 10,000 Christians in Damascus, Syria

“All the representatives of the Christian powers then residing in Damascus, without one single exception, had owed their lives to [Abd el-Kader]. Strange and unparalleled destiny! An Arab had thrown his guardian aegis over the outraged majesty of Europe. A descendant of the Prophet had sheltered and protected the Spouse of Christ.”

—Charles H. Churchill, biographer of the Emir

“There is broad ground of respect and friendship between Abd-el-Kader and the allies—that the cause is one of indigenous rights and liberties against foreign aggression—a cause in which he has shown himself the most heroic leader of his nation, and the true compeer of the patriot heroes of all time.”

—*The New York Daily Times*, May 15, 1854

“He had the genius to engraft on the traditionary tactics of the Arabs a regular method for fighting civilized troops, and he showed himself as careful of the stomachs of his men, and the marching powers of his columns, as the scientific general of a European army.”

—*The Fortnightly Review*, London, 1867

“His career was divided into two periods: the first was a true heroic epic; the second was a renunciation of all the tumult of the past. Judged from the standpoint of history, and aside from all the prejudices of our civilization, Abd el-Kader will appear as one of the most extraordinary men of our times.”

—*Le Temps*, Swiss daily newspaper

“Such is the history of the man for whom our town is named. A scholar, a philosopher, a lover of liberty; a champion of his religion, a born leader of men, a great soldier, a capable administrator, a persuasive orator, a chivalrous opponent; the selection was well made, and with those pioneers of seventy years ago, we do honor the Shaykh.”

—Elkader High School, Elkader, Iowa, class of 1915



Praise for the Book *Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam*

“Emir Abd el-Kader was one of the most remarkable figures in recent Islamic history, combining perfection in both the active and the contemplative life, an achievement that remains of great significance today for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The study of this figure by Bouyerdene is one of the best in the field and is likely to draw even greater attention to this hero and saint.”

—Seyyed Hossein Nasr, The George Washington University, author of *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*

“Groundbreaking, inspiring, and timely, this biography documents the life of the unsung hero of Algerian nationalism. Emir Abd el-Kader was a compassionate warrior and negotiator with the French, as well as a defender of religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire. Ahmed Bouyerdene’s scholarly yet accessible work is an eloquent testimony that religion can be a galvanizing force for the greater good, and a compulsory guide as we work toward building bridges between the Muslim world and the West.”

—Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, author of *What’s Right with Islam* and *Moving the Mountain*

“Abd el-Kader’s most renowned deed was the rescue, at great risk to his own life, of over 10,000 Christians who were under all-out onslaught from an army of Druze in Damascus in 1860, an act which attracted the warm acclaim of such figures as Abraham Lincoln, Pope Pius IX, and Napoleon III. The present book centers on Abd el-Kader’s inner life, his knowledge of Sufi mysticism, and his practice of unceasing mental prayer. This book displays the real Islam to a world whose knowledge of Islam is ‘Islamic’ terrorism.”

—William Stoddart, author of *What Does Islam Mean in Today’s World?*

“Few figures from the last centuries can be considered as embodying the breadth and depth of a whole spiritual tradition, indeed of an entire civilization, as did the Emir Abd el-Kader. Ahmed Bouyerdene’s beautiful biography testifies to an Islam lived up to its most elevated and heroic reaches, an Islam that challenges the narrowness of too many of its fierce critics and zealots alike.”

—Patrick Laude, Georgetown University, author of *Pathways to An Inner Islam*



Full length portrait of Abd el-Kader, by
Simon Agopian, 1906

“*Abd el-Kader : Hero and Saint of Islam* is a fundamental book for both the scholar and the peace-builder. It captures the essence and the different dimensions of the life and message of Emir Abd el-Kader, and manages to present this rich personality and its heritage in an accessible way to all readers. This book benefits all actors for social change and coexistence between religious communities as it presents a vivid example of a Muslim who not only engaged in dialogue but saved thousands of Christians from massacre. It also presents to contemporary Muslims a faith-based, open, and pioneering modern interpretation of religion.”

—**Nayla Tabbara**, President and Director of Cross Cultural Studies Department, Adyan Foundation

“In this superb biography of the life and teachings of the Emir Abd el-Kader one finds brilliantly manifested the deepest ideals of the Islamic faith. It is for this reason that he continues to be regarded in our times as the Muslim hero *par excellence*—a hero in whom the most noble chivalry was combined with the metaphysical insights of a true sage, and the spiritual graces of a realized saint.”

—**Reza Shah-Kazemi**, Institute of Ismaili Studies, author of *My Mercy Encompasses All* and *The Other in the Light of the One*

“This biography of the great Algerian leader—admired in his lifetime not only by his contemporaries such as President Lincoln, but also by his foes—will help us to rediscover in our own times the true spirit of Islam and to gain a better appreciation of the meaning of the misunderstood term *jihad*, whose qualities of nobility and magnanimity in the face of strife, were exemplified by the Emir’s life.”

—**M. Ali Lakhani**, editor of *Sacred Web*, and author of *The Timeless Relevance of Traditional Wisdom*

“The Emir invalidates the theory of the ‘clash of civilizations,’ while having a foreboding of its advent. As an Abrahamic heir he warns us that humanity cannot be united, and therefore saved, except through spirituality.”

—**Éric Geoffroy**, Marc Bloch University, author of *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*

“This book is an excellent overview of the Emir’s life, spirituality, and times. In an era of widespread misunderstanding about Islam, this biography provides a refreshing portrait of a classic ‘defender of the faith’ who was as fiercely dedicated to Muslim chivalry as he was to opposing colonial occupation, and who took full responsibility for the protection of the innocent and vulnerable, no matter their religion or birthplace.”

—**Roger Gaetani**, editor of *A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar* and co-editor of *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*

“[In this book] Bouyerdene never lets readers forget his admiration for the man, but he does this without falling into hagiography; instead, he describes the life of the Emir from his origins to his final accomplishments. He does this using the vocabulary, values, and beliefs of someone who is close [to the Emir], someone who might be a disciple of Ibn Arabi’s brand of Sufism.”

—*Études*



“This wonderful and much-needed translation conveys the beauty and majesty of the original. It is an accessible and at times exhilarating account of a seemingly legendary individual. The translator’s excellent introduction situates the life of the Emir in the political crosscurrents of his time and spiritual undercurrents of Islam, demonstrating how the former never compromised the latter. Through this work, one gains a true vision of the chivalry and sanctity that defines Islam when practiced in all its depth and breadth.”

—**Joseph Lumbard**, Brandeis University, editor of *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*

“The author has accomplished a difficult and admirable work, giving us a balanced view of this great man who was at once an outstanding and chivalrous warrior and strategist, a leader of men, a hero, a man of profound learning, and a mystic and saint of the highest order. All these facets of the Emir come before the reader’s view, but at the same time, the author never loses sight of the essential: it is the virtues and the inner life of the spirit, which in this soul have precedence over all else and stamp the outward life to such an extent that even his enemies became his admirers because they perceived his extraordinary quality. Above all, the Emir is this fascinating combination of hero and mystic, this extraordinary combination of immense courage, magnanimity, and holiness that recalls the Prophets.”

—**Gustavo Polit**, translator of *Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam*, from the Introduction

“The human dimensions of this great man have never before been better portrayed than as we see him here, as an exemplar of incorruptibility and as a follower of Sufism [mystical Islam]. [Abd el-Kader], who was recognized as the Commander of the Faithful and who was a political and military leader, was praised even by his opponents. He never deviated from his pious belief in Islam, and was constantly in quest of the Absolute. Although he was very open to the world and understood the idea of progress, [the Emir] chose for himself a constant inner spiritual quest. He opted for reflection rather than passive submission to dogmatic law, preferring throughout his life an esoteric [spiritual] path. . . . This permits us to better understand everything that created the reputation of the man during his lifetime, such as the ‘aura’ about him, and this adds luster to the historical memory of the man: his temperate judgments, the fairness and goodness of his decisions, his propensity for mercy, and his love for all mankind.”

—*Tribune Bulletin Côte d’Azur*

“In 1841, a French priest went to the camp of Abd el-Kader to negotiate the release of prisoners. The Algerian leader saw his cross and asked about the Christ and the Trinity. . . . Several hours later, they had to stop because the interpreter was exhausted. Sometime later, when the Emir was about to leave for Mecca, he considered passing through Rome in the hope of a conversation with the Pope. Abd el-Kader is one of the most fascinating figures of the nineteenth century. Born in 1808, he was first a war leader in Algeria, and then later a man of peace in the Middle East. Abd el-Kader was certainly not only a politician. In this biography, Ahmed Bouyerdene shows that throughout his entire life the core of [the Emir] was [his inner life as] a mystic. This is the ‘harmony of opposites,’ to use the words of Victor Hugo. One of the attractions of this smart and original book are the cultural roundtrips [that we the readers experience] between the two shores of the Mediterranean.”

—*Historia*

“Until his surrender on December 24, 1847, the Emir Abd el-Kader was the soul of Arab resistance to the French occupation of Algeria. His concept of that resistance was that it should be not only military but also spiritual. Born in 1808, the Emir had been raised in the Sufi tradition, a mystical interpretation of Islam. . . . Without the [colonialist] intrusion of the West, [the Emir] probably would never have taken up arms. Nonetheless, he knew how to extract philosophical and religious lessons from this clash, and although these add less to his legend as the Emir-warrior, they have made him the apostle of a particular humanism that is analyzed [in this book] by Ahmed Bouyerdene, one of the major specialists on the Emir. As the protector of the Christians of Damascus, who were threatened with a pogrom in 1860, Abd el-Kader believed in peace to men of good will, not submission by force.”

—*Luxemburger Wort*

“I certify that [this] book . . . published by Ahmed Bouyerdene represents a new perspective in the field of the research about the meaning of the life of Emir Abd el-Kader. It is the first book which analyses all the life of the Algerian hero, from the point of view of his spiritual link to the Muslim mystics. And I attest that this book is much appreciated in Algeria by the specialists and by the Emir Abdelkader foundation.”

— **Henri Teissier**, Archbishop emeritus of Algiers

“In [these] well-written and easy to read pages, Ahmed Bouyerdene recounts the life of this Muslim Arab who was originally from Algeria and who throughout his life felt called to a life dedicated to study and prayer. [The Emir was a person] who was able to attain to a measure of holiness or a state of ‘proximity to God’ despite having to take on the terrible challenges which were imposed on him by his era. The war of resistance against the French Army, captivity, exile, and the inter-communal massacres of 1860 in Damascus were the challenges that confronted him. However, following the example of the great Ibn Arabi (as a model disciple, exegete, and editor), he was able to find in the Sufi practices of Islam a path of humanism and modernity, of unity between human beings, and of tolerance between religions.

“For the first time some light is shed—from the interior, so to speak—on this life of challenges, paradoxes, and contradictions, some of which went as far as to qualify as treasons. Yet, this life was of a person who had ‘submitted’ himself to God, a person to whom all people seemed to follow in their own ways the quest for ‘true Religion.’ This biography is much more than a book of history, it is an initiation into the progress of a spiritual adept, of a man who ‘belongs to the ages,’ and of a figure of universal significance. There is no better way than this to answer those unscrupulous religious figures who utilize Islam for the purposes of their political battles, or to quell the terrified minds that demonize Islam in order to avoid having to look for the real causes of the wars between nations. I would like to add that reading this book is greatly facilitated by an excellent utilization of notes, a chronology, a glossary, and a bibliography.”

—**Michel Levallois**, President of the Society of Saint-Simonian Studies

“Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam provides a fine biography of an Algerian Islamic Sufi leader who was a warrior and negotiator with the French who also defended the religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire. He personally rescued over 10,000 Christians who were under onslaught from an army in Damascus in 1860, and his many achievements as well as his Sufi mystic contemplations are revealed in a focus on el-Kader's inner life and mental practices. Any interested in a different focus on an Islamic figure will find this compelling.”

—**Midwest Book Review**, James A. Cox

World Wisdom



About the Author



AHMED BOUYERDENE was born in Algeria in 1967, but was raised from infancy in France; he has both Algerian and French nationality. He is an independent researcher in history and a specialist on the Emir Abd el-Kader. Bouyerdene completed his PhD on the life of Abd el-Kader at the Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, France, and has since published two books and several articles on the Emir in his native French, including *Abd el-Kader, l'harmonie des contraires* (le Seuil, 2008, 2012) and *Abd el-Kader par ses contemporains* (Ibis Press, 2008). Bouyerdene has also attended conferences around the world to present papers on the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the Emir. This is his first work to be translated into English. Bouyerdene lives in the Savoy region of France.

About the Author of the Foreword



ÉRIC GEOFFROY is a scholar, translator, educator, and writer who is Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Strasbourg, France. He also teaches at the Open University of Catalonia, at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium), and at the International Institute of Islamic Thought (Paris). Dr. Geoffroy specializes in Islam and its mystical dimension, Sufism, often focusing on aspects of sainthood. Among others areas, his research also extends to comparative mysticism, and to issues of spirituality in the contemporary world (e.g. spirituality and globalization; spirituality and ecology, etc.).

To date, Éric Geoffroy has had seven books published. In addition he has published numerous articles in journals on Islamic studies but also in some magazines such as *Le Monde des Religions*, *Le Point Hors Série*, and *La Vie*. He has contributed some fifteen articles to the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd and 3rd editions), and others to key reference books such as *Les voies d'Allah*, *Dictionnaire critique de l'ésotérisme*, and *Dictionnaire du Coran*. Dr. Geoffroy is the official consultant on Islam for the French dictionary *Le Petit Larousse*.

About the Translator and Author of the Introduction

GUSTAVO POLIT is a professional translator fluent in English, French, and Spanish. He studied Arabic at Indiana University where he received both his B.A. in Religious Studies and M.A. in Near Eastern Languages and Literature. He has rendered several traditionalist works from French into English, including *The Transfiguration of Man* (World Wisdom, 1995) and *The Eye of the Heart* (World Wisdom, 1997) by Frithjof Schuon, and *Sacred Royalty: From the Pharaoh to the Most Christian King* (Matheson Trust, 2011) by Jean Hani. Polit lives in Puerta Vallarta, Mexico.