

*Echoes Across the Mediterranean, Both Modern and Mediaeval*

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I would like, first of all, to thank the Biblioteca Viva de al-Andalus for inviting me here to give this talk. I must also thank, of course, my fellow speakers, the Vice-Presidents of Foundation Paradigma Córdoba and Dr Javier Martín. Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to all of those present to hear us. It is my pleasure to present to you this evening the product of a set of archival investigations spanning four continents, a vital tool for manuscript research, and an invitation to future scholarship: the *Répertoire Analytique d'Archives sur l'Emir Abd el-Kader*. It is my hope that all of this will come as a timely reminder of a fascinating figure's continuing meaningfulness to people on all of the Mediterranean's shores.

I will begin by address with a brief biography of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī (the text's main focus), in the course of which his historical importance will be recalled afresh to those who are familiar with him, and I hope made vivid to those who are not. Having explored the value of discussing ‘Abd al-Qādir's uncommonly eventful and life-story, I shall be well-prepared to give an account of the text I am here to discuss today. It is my hope that the usefulness of this project, generously supported by the Ousseimi Foundation's *Prix de la Tolerance* (posthumously awarded to ‘Abd al-Qādir), will become perfectly apparent.

But this is not all. We must naturally be cognisant of the place in which we meet this evening: the Biblioteca Viva de al-Andalus in Cordoba, a city which was among the greatest in the world while the metropolises of Northern Europe were still in their infancy, and which thrives to this day. There are many respects in which the life and thought of ‘Abd al-Qādir relate to the history of Spain, both modern and mediaeval - some of which are hinted at by the contents of the archival resource I am here to present to you today. I will give some account of these as my talk progresses, and ultimately (I hope!) make clear not only why the study of ‘Abd al-Qādir (which this resource supports) is interesting and fruitful

for Spain and for the world at large, but more particularly for the readers of this very library.

To begin, then, at the beginning: ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī was born in the early years of the 19th century in the town of Guetna or *al-Qayṭānah* near Mascara/*al-Mu‘askar* in what is now western Algeria. His village's life centred on the *zāwīyah* or meeting-house of a major Sufi order, the *Ṭarīqah Qādiriyyah*. This was one of the most popular and influential Sufi brotherhoods in North Africa at the time, though its roots date back to the Persian ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, a celebrated jurist and mystic of eleventh-century Baghdad. The Algerian ‘Abd al-Qādir's father, Muḥyī al-Dīn, was the most senior local figure in this order, and his reputation for scholarship and piety contributed to his stature as an eminence of the region - at the same time both religious and political. Muḥyī al-Dīn's already-considerable influence exploded after the French army toppled the old Ottoman order in 1830, and plunged the former Regency of Algiers into the anarchy of a power-vacuum - which French, Moroccan, and more local figures rushed to fill...

To cut a long story somewhat short, Muḥyī al-Dīn's influence led to his son and successor ‘Abd al-Qādir's accepting the *bay‘ah* (formal allegiance) of several local tribes. This would set the young *amīr* on a course to become the pre-eminent figure resisting the incipient French conquest and colonisation of what would become *l'Algerie Francaise*. In the course of uniting the inhabitants of what we would now call Algeria, ‘Abd al-Qādir introduced numerous developments - including a standing army, modern foundries, his own mint for coinage, and a salaried and regulated judiciary, and a nascent national library. All of this has led to his being seen today as the founding father of modern Algeria, even if it would be unfair to characterise him as a nationalist in the strictest sense.

For all that, nonetheless, his many years of resistance to the French proved futile, and he was driven into hiding amid the mountains of the Moroccan *Rīf*. The long-simmering suspicions of the Moroccan Sultan ‘Abd al-Raḥmān swiftly boiled into open enmity following the crushing defeat of Moroccan forces by the French army: a conflict which ‘Abd al-Qādir's presence in Morocco had partly provoked, and which resulted in the imposition of treaty obligations upon

the Sultan to deal conclusively with him. Fearing for his life as Moroccan forces surrounded his encampment while the Sultan imprisoned his emissary, ‘Abd al-Qādir promised the French army that he would give up his *jihād* in exchange for safe-passage to the eastern Mediterranean. This offer was accepted by France (in the persons of General Lamoricière and the youthful Henri d'Orléans, Duc d'Aumale and son of the King). The resultant agreement (some say 'surrender', while others bristle at the term) was immediately betrayed: ‘Abd al-Qādir was not permitted to pass unmolested towards Alexandria, after all, but was transported instead to France... He and his sizeable retinue would spend the next five years there as prisoners.

During his time in France, ‘Abd al-Qādir became something of a *cause célèbre* - both as a visible stain on French national honour among those who felt that the solemn word of the Governor-General of Algeria and the son of King Louis Philippe should have been kept, and as a hero to those who imagined him as a romantic combination of chivalrous knight and noble savage. It was the defence of French honour which the new President Louis Napoleon (soon to become Napoleon III, the last emperor of France) invoked to justify his decision to release ‘Abd al-Qādir, finally respecting the latter's persistent demands to have the terms of his original agreement with France respected. ‘Abd al-Qādir was transported to Bursa, near an Istanbul pre-occupied with the Crimean War against Russia, and began to assemble a North African emigrant community around himself. Driven from this new home by a combination of factors including a ruinous earthquake, ‘Abd al-Qādir and his followers then made their way south and east, to the city of Damascus (a city with which our current locale of Cordoba, of course, is twinned).

It was in Damascus that ‘Abd al-Qādir would once more seize the attention of the western world. When a wave of sectarian violence (tied to political and economic changes washing over an Ottoman empire undergoing multiple transitions) broke upon the ancient walls of Damascus, it was ‘Abd al-Qādir and his Algerian militia who protected many thousands of the city's Christians from ethnic cleansing. As a result of his remarkable defence of the innocent, he received accolades from countless capitals stretching from Istanbul to Washington, D.C. What the British Empire officially described as his 'great

service to the cause of humanity' led to the historical irony of a man regarded as a most infamous thorn in France's side receiving the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour...!

Meanwhile, he remained until his death in the early 1880s a highly notable figure in the Eastern Mediterranean. He was a figurehead for Arabs critical of the Ottoman administration; the patron of an immigrant North African community and friend of the Maliki Mufti of Damascus (a role resurrected by the presence of 'Abd al-Qādir and his community); an inspiration to nascent Syrian Salafism; and an honoured teacher of Islamic learning - most famously the Sufi traditions of what has been called '*waḥdat al-wujūd*'... More can be said than time permits tonight!

If I have done my job at all adequately, it should by now be clear that 'Abd al-Qādir's life is a story worthy of study. This returns me to the text I am here to present to you. Rather than producing a new and self-contained study in its own right, the intention of the Fondation Ousseimi in funding the work that resulted in this publication was, rather, to facilitate the broadest range of future scholarship. This book represents a valuable tool for any researcher interested in delving into the archival records relevant to 'Abd al-Qādir. The text contains entries organised in a fashion which makes locating and identifying specific manuscripts as easy as can be - short of wholesale digitisation and transcription. Thousands of documents spread across archives in North America, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East are indexed here, each with accompanied by a brief description of their contents and subject matter.

In the simplest possible sense, what the reader discovers upon opening this book - *prima facie* - is a list of thousands of entries, subdivided into chapters representing individual archives or libraries. The entries under each chapter-heading are themselves organised chronologically, making it easier for the reader to discover texts relevant to a specific period or episode. The specific location (both in the original and, where available, in microfilm facsimile) of each relevant document is then listed, along with a rough impression of the size of the document itself (and these run from single sheets to dozens of pages). Finally, each entry is provided with a brief note of some lines' length on its contents, further assisting the reader in narrowing down their search. These notes tend

towards the factual and the general, eschewing attempts at prejudicing the reader's impression of the text. In addition to all of this, the book contains additional practical information related to each archive concerned - ranging from opening hours to formalities of registration to access via public transport.

This book, that is, contains all the practical information needed by a prospective researcher (professional or amateur) to gain convenient access to a vast quantity of materials of multiple provenances and manifold perspectives. It cannot claim to be exhaustive of all contemporary material on 'Abd al-Qādir, and it does not claim to be so; indeed, this resource is open about its limitations in scope and content. Yet some of its limits are not the products of practicality, but constructive results of deliberate decisions: strengths rather than weaknesses. The aim of the text I am presenting tonight has been to support future scholarship without attempting to guide or direct it towards specific themes, periods, or interpretive models. It strives for a practical flexibility born of clarity, simplicity, and restraint.

If any of those listening to my earlier brief biography of 'Abd al-Qādir were to take an interest in one element or another of the story (and more besides!), then this text would permit them to find primary documentary evidence to inform their research. From correspondences between 'Abd al-Qādir and France, or Morocco, or Britain; to disputes among French centres of power in attempting to treat with him; to records of his imprisonment; to plots and debates surrounding his eventual release; to his eventful experiences in the Eastern Mediterranean; to his efforts in gathering manuscripts; to his involvement with the Ferdinand de Lesseps and the Suez Canal Company; to his several pilgrimages in the Hejaz... and so on... This index will swiftly point researchers in the direction of abundant archives, and furnish them from the beginning with an initial body of evidence upon which to build in their own work. What it will not do is function as a substitute for original research, nor a didactic influence upon it. This resource is equally apposite for work proceeding from one range of ideological commitments as from another. It does not demand that one sympathise with 'Abd al-Qādir's various causes, explicit or inferred, nor with those with which he came into contact. It does not demand that one embrace *ab initio* any one of the multiple personas bestowed on 'Abd al-Qādir

over the generations, nor discard another. What it does put the building blocks into researchers' hands, and trust that they will put them to good use.

Having said all of this, of course, I must now ask for your understanding. While much of the value of this text rests upon its abstention from leading its readers down one avenue of interest or the other, I shall nevertheless dare to do so now, if only in spoken form. I do so, once again, in deference to our hosts this evening at the Biblioteca Viva de al-Andalus: both to further illustrate potential uses of the text I am presenting to future scholarship, and to evidence something of the manifold manner in which 'Abd al-Qādir's life connected him to the place in which we find ourselves today. And by this I mean the Biblioteca both as a product of modern Spain and as a commemoration of these lands' distinguished mediaeval heritage.

One of the potential perspectives on 'Abd al-Qādir partially illuminated by this research resource is that of his relationship with the Iberian peninsula of his day. It is clear from the archival records of British, French, and Moroccan states that 'Abd al-Qādir - while the bulk of his economic contacts with Europe were with France and Britain, via the great ports of Marseilles, Gibraltar, and Tangiers - also relied upon Spanish and Portuguese channels to keep his fledgling state supplied.

Even more crucially than this, it is clear from the documents surveyed by this study that 'Abd al-Qādir's relationship with Spain (in particular) would only become more significant in the later years of his time in North Africa. Numerous reports exist showing arms shipments supplying 'Abd al-Qādir from Spain and Portugal. They can easily be located with the help of the text I am presenting tonight. Archival evidence also attests to the presence of many dozens of Spanish volunteers among 'Abd al-Qādir's ranks, including some who helped to train his troops, to prepare his artillery for battle, and to regulate the work of his factories.

But his connection to the Iberian peninsula was not only commercial and military, it was also political... I have already indicated how precarious his position was during his final years of flight from French and Moroccan armies alike. It was at this time that his thoughts seem to have been of the Spanish exclave of Melilla, with whose governor he reportedly maintained a good

relationship. He also despatched one of his closest lieutenants (and relative through marriage) to Madrid, to plead his case before the Queen of Spain. Even when it transpired that Spain was no more prepared than Britain or the United States had been to risk the ire of France on 'Abd al-Qādir's behalf, and it was clear that he would have to reach an understanding with the French... it was under Spanish protection in Spanish territory that he would suggest the two sides meet. Again, the research resource I am here to present to you tonight provides easy access to correspondences between European agents, 'Abd al-Qādir himself, and his erstwhile friend and feigned convert to Islam Léon Roches (whom he called 'Omar'), in which these matters are broached and discussed. It is a matter of pure speculation, of course, what might have happened had the court of young Queen Isabella II decided to involve itself more forcefully in the process of the French conquest of North Africa...

These connections with the more modern Spain of his day, however, are in some ways the least important of 'Abd al-Qādir's ties to Iberia. It is from the Middle Ages that he arguably takes his strongest Spanish influences - in times both of both war and of peace, of opposition to and defence of what Europeans continue to regard as their interests.

When we ask ourselves why it was that he had come to be in a position to seek the intercession of the Queen of Spain, or the guarantees of safe-passage of the governors of Melilla (evidence of both of which is of course to be found with the help of the text I am presenting this evening!), we must ultimately ask ourselves why it was that 'Abd al-Qādir was at war with France in the first place. There are of course many answers to this question, which we should not attempt to exhaust tonight. Of course concerns connected with simple defence - against foreign conquest and domestic chaos - were dominating factors. What we can also say in 'Abd al-Qādir's case, and which his writings make clear through their language and choices of explicit jurisprudential precedent (particularly via the *Mi'yār* compendium of al-Wansharīsī), is that the persecution of Muslims by Christian kingdoms during the *Reconquista* was a significant factor in his thinking during this period. He clearly feared suffering their same fate.

But the memory of departed al-Andalus was not only a chastening one for 'Abd al-Qādir. Rather, we find throughout his life reference after reference to a

more positive and creative Andalusian phenomenon. It was a son of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Spain who, perhaps more than any other man (with the possible exceptions of the Prophet Muhammad, the scholar-sufis al-Jīlānī and al-Ghazālī, and his own father) dominated the life of ‘Abd al-Qādir. The figure in question is Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī, known to many Sufis (including ‘Abd al-Qādir himself) as '*al-shaykh al-akbar*', 'the greatest shaykh', the best teacher. The text I am presenting tonight, naturally enough, indexes documentary evidence of ‘Abd al-Qādir's special regard for the Murcian mystic, from the collection of manuscripts to his ultimate interment at his 'greatest shaykh's' side in his mausoleum in the Damascene district of Al-Ṣāliḥīyah.

I mention ‘Abd al-Qādir's characteristic connection to Ibn al-‘Arabi not simply because of the latter's birth in *al-Andalus*, nor because his own life, like ‘Abd al-Qādir's, similarly carried him eastward, also via Anatolia, toward a final resting-place in Damascus. Rather, it is because of the signal significance Ibn al-‘Arabī has gained in discourses surrounding inter-religious respect, tolerance, and ultimately what some might call *ta‘āyyush*, *zusammenleben*, or of course *convivencia*: the practice of living-together harmoniously, of living mutually. Few discussions of peaceable relations between Muslims and others (from the days of Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great's *‘Ibādat Khānah* to innumerable university seminars in our own time) seem complete without allusion to the cosmic inclusivity of Ibn al-‘Arabī's panentheistic project of seeing God as the ultimate Ground of Being without reducing Him to Creation, of embracing all faith while holding fast to Islam, of seeing both unity *and* multiplicity, of blending poetry with prose. His writing has inspired Christian comparisons with Meister Eckhart and Nicolas Cusanus; or with the Advaita-Vedanta Hinduism of Adi Sankaracharya; or with the witty and philosophical Daoism of Chuang Tzu; and more besides. Ibn al-‘Arabī's spiritual and erotic divan, the *Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*'s, celebrated hemistich *udīnu bi-dīni al-ḥubbi*, 'My religion is the religion of love' continues to inspire both Muslims and others to an embrace of one another's symbols and ideas, and of each other.

It is, after all, *active* embrace of those who differ from us that have made ‘Abd al-Qādir and al-Andalus legendary in their respective ways. It was neither a blithe cultural relativism (nor even some deep spiritual appreciation of non-



Muslims!) which won ‘Abd al-Qādir the praise of American presidents and European monarchs, of the Catholic Pope and the Ottoman Caliph. Rather, it was his lived experience with non-Muslims - culminating in his defence of the innocent in the streets of Damascus - which did that. Similarly, it is not simply the ideas (however sophisticated or otherwise) of those who once inhabited Damascus' twin of Cordoba which echo through history. Rather, it was the very fact of Jews, Muslims, and Christians *living together* which did that.

Thus continued research into both ‘Abd al-Qādir and the history of al-Andalus (naturally encouraged by the text I am presenting this evening and by the library to which I am presenting it, respectively) can offer us sources of insight into the *lived experience of people living with difference* - and with one another. Such experience presents itself to us with all the compromised complexity of human life, not the crystalline purity of abstracted theories. It is for this reason that we have not attempted to guide the reader's interpretations in this text; they will bring their own. The resource I am presenting this evening can even be used to locate evidence of ‘Abd al-Qādir behaving in mistaken or blameworthy ways, just as the annals of al-Andalus are not empty of oppression and book-burning. But if we are interested either in the truth of human events, or in their amelioration into a more peaceable and harmonious state of affairs, then we must have the courage to embrace the full gamut of lived experience.

The contemporary Muslim intellectual Tariq Ramadan, both an Oxford don and the grandson of the Muslim Brotherhood's founder Hassan al-Banna, has recently written the following, as part of his own search for a 'Philosophy of Pluralism':

'Being opposed to anti-Semitism or Islamophobia whilst living, deliberately or otherwise, at a respectable distance from Jews and Muslims is certainly an honourable intellectual stance, but basically it tells us nothing about the real personal attitudes of the human being who theoretises in that way.'

He might agree with us when we say: *living together* is the key. Both as scholars and as human beings, it is with human life that we are concerned; ideas and ideologies, models and methodologies are means to that end, not ends in themselves. Living together not only teaches us about ourselves and each other

(as Professor Ramadan rightly implies), but also permits wholly new inspirations and re-combinations. Life is always more, and more fertile, than our ideas about it can be.

Without the skill of Jewish stonemasons, the great mosque of Cordoba might not have taken its place among the finest Islamic places of worship ever built. Without the sophistication of Muslim arts and scholarship, the theological and jurisprudential triumphs of Cordoba-born Moshe Ben Maimon/Moses Maimonides might never have been written in their characteristic combination of Arabic language and Hebrew script; nor might the poetry of Judah Halevi and the so-called 'Hebrew Golden Age' have been heard, as it was until the fall of the Cordoba Caliphate. The *Summae* of St Thomas Aquinas, nonpareil of mediaeval Catholicism, would certainly have been unthinkable without the continuation of Hellenic wisdom carried out by Iberia's Muslim population - from transmitting the translations of Hārūn al-Rashīd's Baghdadi *Beit al-Ḥikmah* to creating the commentaries of Ibn Rushd/Averroes (another native of Cordoba!), whose thoughts on the relationship between philosophical reason and religious revelation fired the imagination of Europe - and arguably contributed to the intellectual revolutions of the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Our project tonight, of course, is more modest than that! But it, too, is motivated by trust in our fellows, and a faith in contributing to common life - in scholarly terms as well as anything else. And great things can come from modest beginnings, as the cultural triumphs of the *convivencia* remind us: it was upon the firm foundation laid by every little moment of living together, each curious glance, kind word, and courteous gesture, that 'the ornament of the world' would come to rest. My colleagues and I look forward to seeing how the writers of tomorrow take up the tool which we have given them and put it to their own kind of work - be that critical or hagiographic, analytic or imaginative, professional or amateur, religious or secular. We trust that this resource will permit more and finer scholarship in the future, as 'Abd al-Qādir's inspiration from al-Andalus, Ibn al-'Arabī, says in the line of poetry quoted earlier, *annā tawajjahat rakāyibuhu*: 'wheresoever its caravans might head'.

Thank you all once more for your attention, and for your time.