



A Muslim Hero: The Story of Abd el-Kader (A BOOK by ME)

A Book by Me, Firash Ututalum

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Emir Abd el-Kader was born on September 6, 1808 near Mascara, Algeria. His family would have been considered as being in the highest social class of that society. Algeria was part of the Turkish Empire. Abd el-Kader grew into a refined man who lived a simple life. He was considered religious and had a brilliant mind. In 1825 he set out with his father on a religious pilgrimage to Mecca, which is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad. There, he met with leaders in the Muslim faith and discussed various topics. These experiences molded this young Muslim leader and prepared him for his future. He returned to his homeland just before the French arrived. A year later, Abd el-Kader's father was asked to lead a campaign against the French. At a meeting in the autumn of 1832, the young son was elected Emir (translated prince or Commander of the Faithful). This is an Arabic word, a title for someone in high office. A brilliant politician, Emir Abd el-Kader was successful in uniting the tribes in the region and establishing security. His status was elevated in the eyes of the Arabs and the French. There was a period of peace interrupted by times of battles. The Emir played down his political power. He repeatedly declined the invitation to carry the title of sultan and instead concentrated on his spiritual authority. One aspect that helped him lead his nation was the ability to find and use good talent regardless of a person's faith. He employed and trusted advice from both Christians and Jews. When the peace with France ended, Abd el-Kader's warriors were effective at using guerrilla warfare for ten years. Throughout 1842, they had many victories, but truces with the French did not last. The Emir was noted for his chivalry and once released French captives simply because he did not have enough food to feed them. Throughout this time, he showed great political and military leadership so the struggle was in his favor. But, in 1842 the French armies increased their mobility and brutally suppressed the native population. The Emir lost control and crossed the border into Morocco for safety. Eventually, the Emir took up residence in Bursa (which today is Turkey) and moved to Damascus. He devoted himself to theology, philosophy and becoming a published author. In July of 1860 there was a conflict that spread to Damascus; local Druze Muslims attacked the Christian quarters killing over 3,000 innocent people. The Emir sheltered large numbers of Christians in his own house. These included the heads of several foreign consulates as well as the Sisters of Mercy. Emir Abd el-Kader's own sons were sent into the streets to offer shelter to Christians. Many survivors gave testimony later that his offering of protection was instrumental in saving their lives. Reports about Syria stressed the importance of the role of Abd el-Kader. International recognition began when the French government increased his pension and gave him the Grand Cross of the Légion d'honneur. He also received the Grand Cross of the Redeemer from Greece, the Order of the Medjidie, First Class, from Turkey, and the Order of Pius IX from the Vatican. President Abraham Lincoln sent him a pair of inlaid pistols from the United States. These pistols are now on display in an Algiers museum. Great Britain sent the Emir a gold-inlaid shotgun. The Emir Abd el-Kader inspired admiration, not only from within Algeria, but from Europeans as well, even while fighting against the French forces. The generous concern, the tender sympathy he showed to his prisoners-of-war was almost without parallel in the annals of war, and he was careful to show respect for the private religion of any captives. The town of Elkader in Iowa is named for the man the New York Times hailed as "one of the few great men of the century". The Emir Abd el-Kader died on May 26, 1883 in Damascus, Syria.

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