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Biography

**Emir Abd el-Kader: Hero and Saint of Islam**
Ahmed Bouyerdene
Gustavo Polit, translator
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His bravery and chivalry in war would garner the admiration of even his enemies, but his strength of character and spirituality would extend that admiration to the whole world. The Emir Abd el-Kader rose to prominence in the 1830s as the Commander of the Faithful in the war with France in Algeria. His world-wide acclaim would come later in life, though, when he saved thousands of Christians from being massacred in Damascus, Syria, in 1860.

Bouyerdene, a specialist on the Emir Abd el-Kader and author of two books and several articles about him in France, introduces those unfamiliar with the Emir to a man who was charismatic and strong in his leadership, able to bring together diverse forces to reach a common goal, but also humble, curious, and deeply spiritual. He spent his early life studying Islam in the religious institution of his father, but was thrust into the world of politics when jihad was declared on the invading French. After that war he returned to the spiritual life that he had envisioned for himself since childhood, vowing to stay out of politics. But when tensions between religious groups led to a massacre of Christians in 1860, the Emir felt it his “sacred duty” to stand against it. Among the thousands he saved were heads of the French, Russian, Greek, and American consulates, earning him gratitude and honors from around the world.

Through these experiences he found himself believing that men of all faiths were simply “children of two different mothers, but of the same father.” He believed that despite the differences in religious practice, there was but one God, and all religions could be unified in that belief while simultaneously respecting and tolerating their differences.

This book was originally written in French and presented as an academic thesis by Bouyerdene. The English translation, by Gustavo Polit, pulls many of the original footnotes into the text in order to make for smoother reading by a new audience. Those with an interest in historical figures with an international impact as well as those wanting to learn about Islam will

find this book to be highly informative. While some works on the Emir have focused on a part of his eclectic character, Bouyerdene gives a well-rounded look at the man himself, not just the hero and saint. As Abd el-Kader once said, “I have not made the events: it is the events that have made me what I have been.”

*Christine Canfield*