

The Historical Representation of Algeria:

Concerning al-Amīr ‘Abdal-Qādir al-Jazā’irī

Year: 2008

Place of fieldwork: France, Britain, Algeria

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Research background

The object of this study was the discourse regarding al-Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā’irī (1807/8–83, ‘Abd al-Qādir hereafter), a nineteenth-century leader of jihad against the French invasion. ‘Abd al-Qādir has been considered the father of the modern Algerian state. In France, however, he is mainly referred to in terms of a spiritual aspect.

Research purpose

The purpose of this research was to clarify the process of the transfiguration of the discourse regarding ‘Abd al-Qādir from the following three aspects: (i) the representation in France, (ii) the representation in Algeria, and (iii) the current connection between Algeria and France.

Method

The study procedure consisted of document research and field research. In France, the research was carried out on 9–11 and 19–30 January, in Britain it was carried out on 13–18 January, and in Algeria it was carried out on 31 January–8 February, in visiting his traces (Figure 1, 2 Appendix).

Results and achievements of fieldwork

(1) Document research

There were many useful documents that assisted in the analysis of his image as it related to the international situation of Europeans and to Middle Eastern politics. These documents included his correspondence, such as that relating to the negotiations with French army officers (18MIOM36–37, National Archives of Overseas in Aix-en-Provence), and that with the French King and the provisional government following the surrender (18MIOM57). The British National Archives contained a document regarding his descendent who held a principal role in the Algerian Nationalism Movement (FO141–819–13).

(2) Modern representation

In France

In the Amboise Palace, where he was detained from 1848–52, a cemetery of his followers was located in the yard (elected 23 June, 2005, Photo 1). References to him in French history were few or were projected by the notion of the colonial occupation (Photo 2).

In Algeria

Many places showed great interest in this main figure of national history (Mu‘askar: Photo 3, Miliyāna: Photo4, 5). Tlemcen (Tilimsān) was designated as the Capital of Islamic Culture 2011 and an international conference on ‘Abd al-Qādir will be held in January 2012. We expect to see a new reconsideration of him in concurrence with the major upswing trend related to Arab–Islamic cultural heritage¹.

Reflection and future perspective

The actual situation related to the representations of ‘Abd al-Qādir was confirmed in France and Algeria in this research. In the future, I would like to clarify the image of the connection between the two countries in terms of the subject of discourse related to him crossing the binary model.

¹ In the research in Algeria, I would like to acknowledge the help of Professor Abdelmadjid Boudjella of Tlemcen University and Professor Tlemcani Benyoucef of Algiers University, among many others.

Appendix

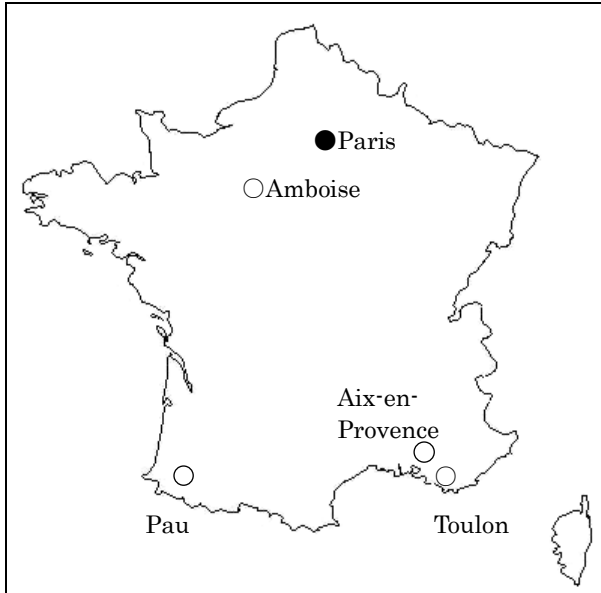


Figure 1: Fieldwork in France



(Photo 1) The cemetery of his followers (at Amboise)



(Photo 2) A portrait of 'Abd al-Qādir (at Amboise)

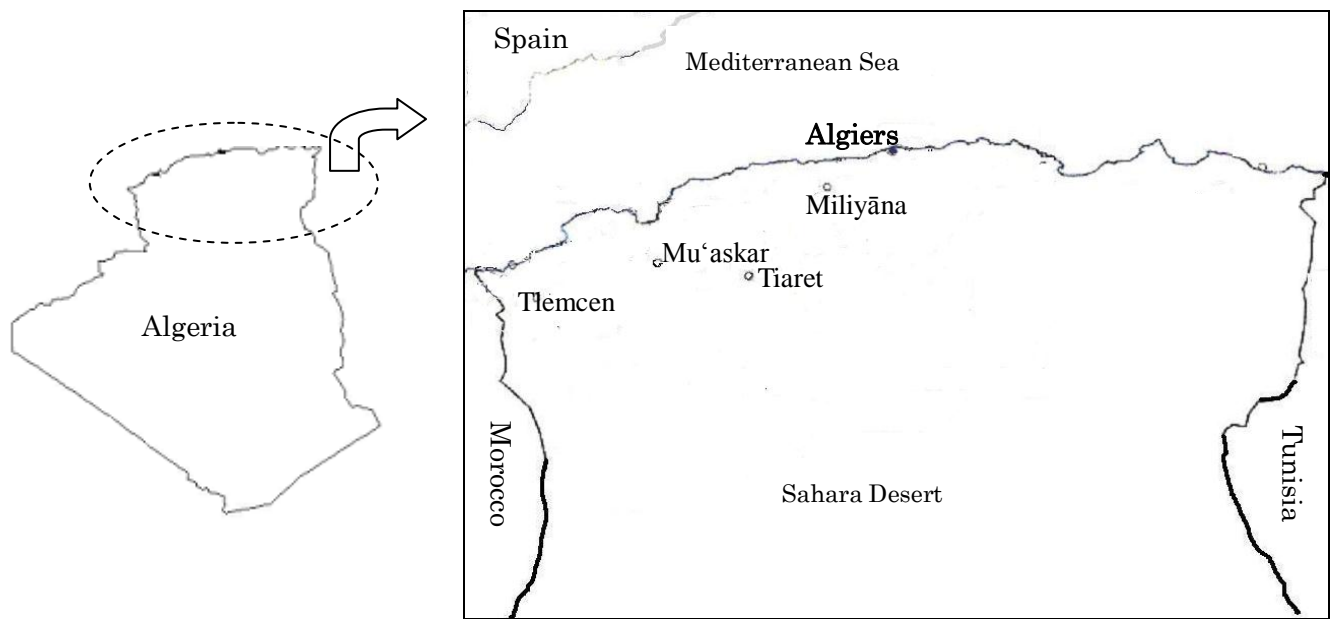


Figure 2: Fieldwork in Algeria



← (Photo 3) 'Abd al-Qādir declaring combat (at Mu'askar)



← (Photo 4)
Museum
exhibition
showing his army
uniform (at
Miliyāna)



(Photo 5) →
Factory (at
Miliyāna)