

Sheikh Mohammad Abdou's visit to Algeria on 1903

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Introduction:

The visit of Sheikh Mohammed Abdou to Algiers during the summer of 1903, was particularly important; First of all, he was the most important religious figure in the Islamic world at that time; and one of the leaders of the modern renaissance, with his partner Sheikh Jamal Eddin El-Afghani, he was also a mufti in Egypt, and one of the pillars of Al-Azhar university, which represents the Islamic reference to the Sunnis across the Islamic world. Besides, he has a good reputation in the Islamic and occident circles.

The visit of Sheikh Mohammed Abdou to Algiers came in special conditions: At the end of the nineteenth century, Algeria seemed to be over, and its religious and cultural personality has vanished; Plus, its French governors on the Civil Era at the end of the nineteenth century, and their settlers allies who became the masters in Algeria worked on the implementation of their new projects on a larger scale, by reorganizing Algeria without regard to the Algerians or their religious and cultural identity according to a deliberate systematic plan.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some flexibility features appeared on the general government policy; in fact, a new political supporting climate emerged because of that, manifested In some reforms witch the Governor-General Charles Jonnart did, particularly during his second term, which extends a considerable period from 1902 to 1911, these reforms contributed on relieving pressure on the Algerians, and gave a space to cultural and reformist work, the visit of Imam Mohammed Abdou to Algeria and Tunisia¹ was very important, regardless of the colonial administration's objectives from it.

Ali Merad : “ **enseignement politique de Mohamed Abdou aux algériens** ¹
1903” in orient, no 28, 4è trim. , 1964, pp 75-123.

Mohammad Abdou and Algeria:

Sheikh Mohammed Abdou knew Algeria through El-Amir Abd El-Kader and his family, because they had special relationships, Besides, they had many correspondences with each other which included some various topics such as reformism and Pan Islamism...etc. And apparently, according to Dr Abu El-Kasem Sadullah, that Abdelkader was a member in “Al-Arwa Al-Wouthqa association”, Moreover, El-Amir and some of his sons were exited for reformism and faithful to the idea of Pan Islamism.¹

The visits of Sheikh Mohammed Abdou to Tunisia during the nineteen eighties gave him an idea about Algeria, according to the French historian Ageron Sheikh Mohammed met some Algerian students in Zeytouna University, and talked to them about Islam and Muslims in Algeria.²

The conditions of the visit:

The archival documents in Aix-En-Provence in France show some exact details about the visit, from the moment Sheikh Mohammed Abdou intended to come and visit Algeria until he left it heading to Tunisia and France, through the documents we can also discern its purposes, its importance and its effect in the reformist elite firstly, and people secondly; Furthermore, these documents allow to enrich the topic and remove the mystery witch we face in some studies about the visit.

It seems like Sheikh Mohammed Abdou started thinking of visiting Algeria at the beginning of summer 1903, because in a letter dated on 02nd June 1903 written by someone named Mohammed Ibn Mustafa³ who sent it to the governor-General in Algeria, it shows Sheikh’s intention to visit Algeria and Tunisia, he spoke about Imam Mohammed Abdou’s activities, especially the political ones, he mentioned that Mohammed Abdou was a member in Ahmed Orabi party; the writer of the letter described this party and its followers as

Abu alkassim Sadullah: **tarikh al-djazair athakafi**, dar el-gharb al-islami _¹
Beirut, Lebanon, 1998.

Ch .r. Ageron : **histoire de l’Algerie contemporaine** t2, tome2,(1870-²
1954).presse universitaire de France, 1^{er} édition, 1979, p180

-We don’t have exact information about this personality, but his correspondences ³
with the French authorities about Sheikh’s activities shows that he was close to
the French authorities and commissioned to monitor the Sheikh.

spoilers, he stated also that Mohammed Abdou has been exiled to Sham; then, he has been released and he came back to Egypt, after that, he mentioned Mohammed Abdou's cultural and scientific activity, he said that he used to write in the Egyptian newspapers about renewal and reform, he also said that he wrote about Mr. Hanotaux¹, the writer mentioned also Imam's desire to visit Tlemcen, and that he has (desert) objectives², we don't know what do those objectives mean, they might mean the activity of the armed resistance in southern Algeria, especially the south-west where resistance of Sheikh Buamama centralized, although it was in its last days.

In another letter written by Mr. De LA Bouliniere the French consul in Egypt, to Foreign Affairs Minister Delcassé in 16th June 1903 , shows that the Mufti of Egypt Imam Mohammed Abdou has a desire of visiting Algeria and Tunisia, the consul showed his agreement on the visit and he urged his country's authorities to accept.³

Sheikh Mohammed Abdou started his visit to Algeria from France in the summer of 1903⁴, according to Ageron; the Sheikh arrived to Algeria on 27th August 1903 after being awarded the license access to Algeria from the French authorities.

The Sheikh was under control, many detectives monitored him and wrote reports about him, Dr. Ahmed Sari said that the visit was confidential, whether for fear of inciting the French authorities against him, and that was obvious because Al-Manar magazine and its owner Rashid Ridha concealed the visit⁵, or the French authorities that didn't want to formalize the visit, but Dr. sari's opinion seems strange, because Sheikh Mohammed Abdou received an official permission to visit Algeria, and the documents are teeming with the reports which prove that, in another hand, Al-Manar newspaper paved the way for the visit with an article entitled "France and Algeria" on 4th April 1903; namely, five months before the visit, the

-**Hanotaux Gabriel**: he's a French historian and orientalist, he was born in 1853¹ in France, he's famous of his articles and works against Islam, he wrote many articles and books against Islam and Muslims, he died in 1940.

-Archives A O M H series.²

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Ageron : **op.cit**, p180⁴

Dr. Ahmed Sari : « **the news about Mohammed Abdou's visit to Algeria**⁵ **Constantine** » Journal of Arts and Humanities, Constantine university, 2nd issue, March 2003, p16.

article included few advices to the French authorities to be kind with the Muslims in their colonies in order to secure their reaction.¹

His residence and activities in Algeria through the documents:

According to the documents, Sheikh Mohammed Abdou arrived to Algeria on 27th august 1903; in a report dated on 29th august; namely, two days after he arrived, it was issued from the indigenous services in Algiers and numbered 12922, it speaks about the arrival of Sheikh Mohammed Abdou to Al-waha Hotel where he's supposed to stay; then, it speaks about his biography; for instance, Sheikh Abdou represents the savant in the minds of Algerians and that is a very significant title in the eyes of the Algerian people, because he represents the religious reference. In addition, the report said that the sheikh may have belonged to the Freemasonry; moreover, the report stated his meeting with the notables and savants of Algiers in 28th August, he particularly mentioned Mustafa Ben el-hadj Lakhal and his son, the Municipal Counselor in Mustafa's municipality; then, he met the mufti Ibn Zakour in his office, After that, he turned toward Al-Masmaka mosque to meet mufti Bouguendoura, the report says also that Mustafa Ben Lakhel has been offered a special house to stay in instead of the hotel; furthermore, sheikh Mohammed Abdou wanted to stay for eight days, and he met some notables such as Ben Siam.

In another report numbered 13099 and dated on 1st September 1903, issued from the same services, speaks about the Sheikh's decision to stay in Lakhal's house, and also about his courtesy visit to the general government's headquarters, however, the report stated that on Sunday morning Sheikh Abdou didn't leave his residence but he kept receiving visitors, it mentioned also that he received over 450 visitors, who came whether for compliment or for benefiting from his huge knowledge in Islamic jurisprudence ; additionally, there is a sign in the report that Mohammed Abdou has renounced visiting Tlemcen which he has already intended to visit.

The third report numbered 13128 and issued in 2nd September 1903, emerges the queries services continuation in monitoring every move sheikh Mohammed does in Algeria, it was mentioned in the same report that Mustafa Ben el-hadj Lakhal held a dinner banquet for

Al-Manar: 4th April 1903, p79-80.¹

Algeria's guest, it was attended by a huge number of notables and religious civic figures from Algiers and suburbs, and they are:

the mufti of Al-Hanafia Ahmed oueld Al-Qadi, M.Kamal, Bourkayeb Hamdane, Bourkayeb Ahmed, Bouderra Amar, Hadj Mousa, Bouderra (lawyer), Ali Mouhoub, Tayeb Ben Adad, Al-djidjeli (merchant), Brizel (officer), Mohammed Ben Tayeb (translator), Ali Torsado (officer), Omar and Ahmed Brihmat, Boulouk Bachi Ali (doctor), Omar Ben guellati, Habib Ben guellatietc.

The report pointed to a serious discussion took place in the evening on freedom of thought , between sheikh Abdou and Ahmed Ben Brihmat, who was one of the notables of Algiers and distinguished of his extensive experience in European culture, also of his good relationship with the French authorities in Algiers, the report mentioned that Brihmat was unlike the other Sheikh's visitors because he discussed on political issues and tried through his questions to spur Sheikh Abdou to express his opinion on the issues of the Ottoman Califate and to compare between the policies of France and great Britain in there colonies ...etc, while khoja Al-Kamal's son who was an adopter of Sheikh's thoughts and a rep of his method in Algeria replying brihmat until he described him as a infidel (*kafir*).¹

In the same meeting, Sheikh Mohammed spoke about his relation with the Freemasonry considering that he denied joining it, and mentioned that in his time, joining the Freemasonry was not a sin, just before recognizing its purposes. Sheikh Abdou visited the Hanafi and Maliki courts and checked their registers; moreover, it was mentioned in the report that Lakhel sent a letter to the mufti of Oran in which he asked him to come and meet the Sheikh, but he apologized for special circumstances.²

The fourth report dated on 3rd September 1903 and numbered 13166, it's about Sheikh Mohammed Abdou's visit to The Observatory Center in Bouzareah, where he took few souvenir pictures, and he was accompanied by Sheikh Abd El-Halim Ben Smaia. Apparently, Sheikh Abdou expressed his objection to attend the Orientalists conference that should be convened later in Algeria. The report also indicates that during his discussions he criticized the policy of the

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Khedive in Egypt as well as the policy of the Ottoman Sultan. Another report dated on 4th September 1903, numbered 13213 points to the dispute between the Sheikh and Brihmat which continued through another banquet hosted by the retired officer guellati who is a friend of Brihmat and also one of the notables; in addition, the report mentioned the visit of the mufti of Kolea (*alouanoughi Boumezrag*) to Sheikh Abdou.¹

The next report numbered 13408 and issued on 7th September 1903, by the indigenous services department of Algiers, the report's writer said that Sheikh Mohammed Abdou departed from Algiers to Constantine by the train on 6th September 1903, a lot of clergy and notables were there to bid farewell him, the report stated that Mohammed Abdou stayed in Constantine for few days and he's going to Tunisia, after that, he resolves to go to France in order to visit his sick brother in Montpellier hospital, the report also accentuated that through Sheikh Mohammed's conversations with the Algerians, he recommended them to learn French which is famous in the other countries; moreover, he said that if someone wants to be cultured; he should become skilled in French, furthermore, he allowed hairdressing on the French way and he said that there's nothing to forbid it in the Quran.²

The report shows that Sheikh Abdou's ideas aroused confusion, doubt and astonishment in the Algerians' minds, likewise, it pointed to a religious meeting at Lakhal Mosque included Sheikh Abdou and nearly 200 people and also members of the Moroccan delegation who were in Algeria, the Sheikh have also received a huge number of family M'barek of Kolea, it was mentioned that he rarely meets the Mufti of Maliki and that he intends to return to Algeria soon because the Algerian people were magnanimous to him.³

The visit effect on the reformist activity in Algeria:

According to Dr. Abu Al-Kasim Sadullah and "Le Temps" newspaper, sheikh Mohammed Abdou found out that there's some adopters of his thoughts in Algeria, the most important adopters are three reformers; they are: Mohammed Ibn Al-Khouja nicknamed Moustafa Al-kamal, Abd El-Halim Ben Smaia and Omar Ben

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kaddour, how could the thoughts of Mohammed Abdou reach to Algeria?

The sources indicate the important role which Al-Manar magazine played, if that was true; we think that there's some other reasons contributed in the formation of this group (adopters of sheikh's thoughts) before Al-Manar, like "Al-Arwa Al-Wouthqa magazine" which most the Algerians read passionately.

The reformers have called for non-exposure to France in the magazine so as the French authorities don't prevent its entry to Algeria, as they said: "it is the extending of life for us, so if it's gone, we're gone"¹, Al-Manar magazine owner said that Sheikh Abdou achieved his objectives of the visit and he summarized that in three points:

- 1- Perseverance in learning.
- 2- Perseverance in earning in lawful ways and frugality in living.
- 3- Making peace with the government and do not work in politics.²

His recent idea "making peace with the government and do not work in politics" represents sheikh's new tendency after he separated with his partner Sheikh Jamal Eddin Al-afghani, this idea had some resentment expressed by Professor Mohammed Guennanech after he talked about the suffering of the Algerians and their desperate fight and all the tribulations they faced, he said: "All this did not affect these fighters who did not yield to the power or admit to the accomplished fact until they received an oriental leader, people were waiting for him to increase the spirit of resistance in them and guide them to the path of freedom but he came as a colonist calling for pacification and leave the politics, as they don't deserve to live"³, the reaction of Mr. Guennanech is normal, because he studied in People's Party, so, he certainly hates the colonialism, in our opinion this is a political and emotional situation rather than historic situation.

Abu Al-Kasem Sadullah: **research in the Arabic history**, Dar El-Gharb Al-¹
Islami, Beirut Lebanon, p1, 2003, p166.

Rachid Redha : *Al-Manar* magazine, 1903.²

Mohammed Guennanech : **Al-mawakif essayya bayna al-watanya**, sned, ³
Algeria, p59.

Sheikh Abdou chose for reform the prolific, calm way, he saw making peace with the government very advantageous in order to not obstruct the reform efforts, maybe he was a victim of the French policy's lies and the indigenous services and all the Algerians who followed them.

Sheikh Abdou's visit has several dimensions cannot devoid of political action in the long term, where Sheikh's reform objectives converged in this outlying country with the France objectives of the visit, Dr. Abu El-Kasim Sadullah summarized that in two points:

International: quoted in the opposition of the bidding to Pan Islamism which Sultan Abdulhamid chose its slogan, so sheikh Abdou has been chosen to divert attention.

National: quoted in weakening the role of the religious brotherhoods' in the scope of a new policy aims for taming the religious brotherhoods.¹

Sheikh Abdou explained the meaning of Surat Al-Asr in Mr. Lakhal's mosque in El-Hamma, some people understood that it indicates a commitment not to interfere in politics and interest in faith and patience, and we have the explanation in Al-Manar newspaper, Sheikh extracted from it endless wisdoms², his followers kept reading it in tribunes.

In Sheikh's conversation with Ben Smaia, he focused on the Arabic language in Algeria, he said: "we see that being skilled in Arabic is the connector of this straight religious"³, he seemed touched because his eyes got tearful although he tried not to show it.

Sheikh Abdou touched the Algerians by his reply to the French historian Hanotaux because of his assault to Islam and Pan Islamism in 1900, he said: "if the French nation as whole converted to Islam, the first of them is Mr. Hanotaux, and if it deals to non-French as what we see in Algeria and Madagascar, would it beg from residents of its colonies to tend it and not seize the opportunity of revolution"⁴. However, the French historian Charles Andre Julien has another view, as he said: "In 1904, sheikh Abdou's passage didn't arouse

Sadullah : **Tarikh Al-djazayer Ethaqafi**, p587.¹

Look to the tafsir of surat Al-Asr, in **Al-Manar Magazine**.1903.²

Al-Mahdi Bouabdelli: **Djawaneb Madjhoula Min Zeyarat sheikh Abdou Ila** ³

Eldjazayer.1903 Al-Asala, May 1978, p81.

Dr.Lohalled Berj : **Aldjazayer fi Kitabat Mohammed Abdou**, Al-Asala52, ⁴
December 1977,p15.

special attention, the Mufti spoke in front of a small crowd at a small mosque of Belcour neighborhood, apparently, no one thought that this savant was the leader of the political, religious, cultural Islamic Renaissance except in Constantine where some bright ideas opened on the effects of the East.¹

Despite a degree of historical truth in this judgment considering that Algeria has been far from its civilization and away from its Arabic-Islamic entity because of the colonialism abominable policy and deportation of scientists and reformers, so, there is an exaggeration in reducing the value of the visit, that's because there was a considerable group of the Algerians who were savants, teachers, notables and merchants, they venerated Sheikh Abdou, visited him and listened to his advices, in fact, the reports prepared by police and the indigenous services points to thousands of visitors who visited Sheikh Mohammed Abdou in Moustafa Lekhal's house and in all the mosques which Sheikh taught in, if we add to this the secrecy of the visit and the supervision imposed on people, we can say without exaggeration that the visit attained its purposes.²

Conclusion:

No matter what the historians say about the visit, it was an important step for the reformist movement, it added all it could in the method of the movement, moreover, it contributed in the development of the reformist party; so, the visit cannot be seen outside events then.

Charles Andre Julian: ***l'Afrique du nord en marche***, translated by El-Mendji ¹
Salim and others. Eddar etunisia for publish, Algeria, p1, 1976, p125.
Archives A O M serie H²

