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THE PIONEER OF REFORM IN AÏN BEÏDA: THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND ACTIVITIES OF SHEIKH MUHAMMAD AL-SA'ID AL-ZEMMOUSHI (1904–1960)

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ABSTRACT

This research paper sheds light on the city of Aïn Beïda in eastern Algeria by examining its geographical, social, and political dimensions, as well as its educational movement and intellectual activity. It also focuses on one of the most prominent figures of the region's reformist and educational movement, Sheikh Muhammad al-Sa'id al-Zemmoushi, highlighting his efforts to establish the foundations of independent education and promote national consciousness. Through his reformist and educational endeavors, he embodied a vivid model of the integration between the mission of a reformer and the intellectual needs and socio-cultural characteristics of his region.

KEYWORDS

Marsimini; Aïn Beïda; Harakta; Mosque-Based Education; Reform Movement; Sheikh Muhammad al-Sa'id al-Zemmoushi

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Introduction:

The city of Aïn Beïda, located in the province of Oum El Bouaghi, has long been recognized as one of Algeria's most prominent urban centers distinguished by a vibrant educational and intellectual tradition. Its geographical and social environment was not merely a passive setting; rather, it served as both a catalyst and a nurturing ground for the intellectual and educational movement that stood as a formidable barrier against the colonial policies of cultural erasure and French assimilation (Francisation). This movement was sustained through the promotion of intellectual and educational activities led by a distinguished group of scholars and reformers who devoted themselves to the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of moral values. Foremost among these figures was Sheikh Muhammad al-Sa'id al-Zemmoushi (1904–1960), whose educational and reformist endeavors exemplified the close relationship between the mission of a reformer and the intellectual needs and socio-cultural characteristics of his region. i.e the education is an interactive process between the teacher and the learner, whereby the learner is empowered with the targeted knowledge, skills, and behaviors (attitudes). Procedurally, it is the teacher's activity in interacting with the learner to enable them to learn.¹

Against this background, the present study seeks to address the following research questions: How did the geographical, social, and political conditions of Aïn Beïda shape its educational movement? What role did Sheikh Muhammad al-Sa'id al-Zemmoushi play in advancing educational reform and intellectual development in the city?

¹ Salah Ouchen, & Zedira Khammar. (2025). THE STATUS OF THE INDUCTIVE METHOD IN EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN ARABIC LANGUAGE AND SCIENCE EDUCATION. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 2(46). [https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.2\(46\).2025.3344](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.3344)

I. The Social and Political Environment and the Geographical Characteristics of the City of Aïn Beïda

1. Historical Background and Etymology

The city of Aïn Beïda, known as the capital of the Haracta tribal confederation, has long been an important urban center with deep historical roots. It is regarded as one of Algeria's most prominent cities, renowned for its rich educational and cultural heritage. According to local oral tradition, the city's name is associated with a popular legend recounting the story of Dhiab al-Hilali and his white horse, which is said to have died near a spring. Nearby lies another spring known as "Little Aïn Beïda" (Aïn Beïda al-Sughra), the history of the city dates back to the Roman period, when it was known as Marcimeni. Remains of its Roman heritage, including archaeological ruins and inscriptions engraved on stone foundations, are still preserved today in the 1 November 1954 Garden. Following the arrival of the French colonial forces, the city was conquered and occupied in 1848. It was subsequently given the official name Aïn Beïda ("White Spring"), referring to the presence of a spring of clear, white water, known in French as La Fontaine Blanche¹.

The inhabitants of the region speak the Chaoui dialect², one of the Zenati Amazigh dialects. It constitutes one of the principal branches of the Amazigh linguistic continuum and is widely spoken across eastern Algeria, extending into the Sahara and parts of Tunisia. Linguistic studies indicate that Chaoui is also spoken in several other regions, including the Central Aurès (Chechar, Aït Abdi, Ahmar Khaddou, Biskra, Aït Daoud, among others), where it is distinguished by its authenticity and linguistic conservatism, as well as the Eastern Aurès (the Nemencha, the Amamra, and other communities). It is also found in the Segnia and Harakta regions, encompassing Guelma, Souk Ahras, Annaba, Oum El Bouaghi, and Constantine. However, the use of Chaoui has declined in the latter areas due to the increasing predominance of Algerian Colloquial Arabic, particularly in urban centers, whereas it remains relatively well preserved in rural communities³.

Aïn Beïda was described as a fortified and strategically significant city, serving as a major stopover on the route linking Cirta (present-day Constantine) and Theveste (present-day Tébessa). In 439 CE, Roman control over the region came to an end with the fall of Marcimeni to the Vandals. This transition followed the peace treaty concluded in 442 CE between the Western Roman Emperor Valentinian III and the Vandal King Genseric, under which the latter gained control of half of Numidia and the provinces of Byzacena Consularis. The city subsequently remained under Vandal rule until 533 CE⁴.

During the period of the Islamic conquests, the indigenous population of Aïn Beïda belonged primarily to the Amazigh Houara tribe. Subsequently, Arab Bedouin groups from the Banu Sulaym tribe—who arrived shortly after the Banu Hilal migration—gradually integrated with the Amazigh population, adopting their customs and the Chaoui language. According to prevailing local tradition, the name Hracta is believed to derive from a Bedouin leader named Harakat. Historical written sources, however, indicate that the tribal composition of the Aurès region is among the most complex in terms of ancestry and the constituent clans that form its social fabric. The Hracta tribe is believed to have migrated from southern Algeria and settled in three principal geographical areas: Hracta of Maadher and Djerma, Sbayekh, and Hracta of Jebel Thalath. Internally, the tribe is divided into several clans traditionally traced back to the four sons of Harakat: Issa, Ammara, Makhlof, and Adwan. Although a widely circulated oral tradition traces the Hracta to the Banu Hilal, specifically the Ouled Naïl branch, historical evidence suggests a far more diverse ethnic composition, encompassing remnants of the ancient Houara tribe, groups that migrated from Morocco and Syria, branches of the Sadrata and Sanhaja tribes (including the Beni Ouajana), Maraboutic families from Constantine and Morocco, as well as remnants of the Kutama tribe.⁵

During the Ottoman period, when the Ottomans established control over Constantine in approximately the sixteenth century, they formed an alliance with the Hracta tribe and appointed the leader Ben Houmet Allah as governor of a vast territory extending from Constantine to Bona (present-day Annaba). Following his

¹Supreme Council of the Arabic Language. (2021, July). Toponymic Dictionary (Vol. 1): From Adrar (01) to Algiers (16). Klik Publications, Mohammadia, Algeria, p. 100.

²Kabouj, S. (2022). Linguistic interference between Modern Standard Arabic and Chaoui in Batna Province: The case of Ras El Ayoun. *Semiotics Journal*, 17(2), 886. Ahmed Ben Bella University of Oran 1, Algeria.

³ Aissani, B. (2024). A socio-linguistic study in the structure of the Tamazight language: The Chaoui dialect. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 21(2), 195–209. University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Sétif 2.

⁴Ibid., p. 51.

⁵ Abū 'Ubayd Allāh 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Muḥammad al-Bakrī al-Andalusī, *Al-Maghrib fī Dhikr Bilād Ifrīqiya wa al-Maghrib* (The Maghrib: An Account of the Lands of Ifriqiya and the Maghrib), ed., introd., and annotated by Hamah Allah Ould al-Salem (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1971), p. 40.

assassination, however, the region was engulfed in a series of conflicts and wars that persisted until the arrival of the French colonial forces. This prolonged instability explains the absence of substantial material evidence and architectural remains attesting to the Ottoman presence in the region, such as public buildings and other structures.¹

Following the capture of the Sidi Fredj landing site in 1830, the French colonial forces disembarked at Annaba and advanced into eastern Algeria. In the case of Aïn Beïda, the French army launched two military campaigns. The first, led by General Négrier in 1838, ended in failure due to the determined resistance of the Hracta tribe, whose population numbered approximately 28,000, including 7,000 fighters. The second—and more decisive—campaign, commanded by General Galbois in 1839, successfully subdued the Hracta resistance.²

French colonial settlement in Aïn Beïda did not begin in earnest until nine years later, when the French army occupied the city on 23 March 1848. By virtue of the Decree of 10 July 1868, the colonial settlement was elevated to the status of a commune de plein exercice (a full-function municipality), administered by a municipal council composed of nine members under the leadership of its first mayor, M. de Guioyre. During his four-year tenure as commander of the Constantine Division, General Desvaux opposed the establishment of the municipality, despite Aïn Beïda having become an important European settlement following the occupation. After his departure on 8 August 1868, his successor, General Peugeot, approved its creation. The Decree of 10 July 1868 was signed in the Emperor's absence by Empress Eugénie de Montijo, Countess of Teba (Comtesse de Téba), thereby formally separating Aïn Beïda from the administrative authority of the Hracta.³

Until the end of the French colonial period, Aïn Beïda remained a major stopover for the caravans of nomadic pastoral tribes, which drove their livestock to graze on the northern plains at the end of spring. Like many other Algerian cities, Aïn Beïda was vacated by its European inhabitants during June and July 1962, following Algeria's independence.⁴

2. Geographical and Climatic Setting

Aïn Beïda is located approximately **128 kilometres southeast of Constantine**, at the heart of the **Hracta** tribal territory. The surrounding landscape consists of vast, gently undulating plains, which are divided into **three distinct topographical slopes**:

➤ **The first slope:** Extends northwards, with its drainage flowing into Oued Charef. It originates from a ridge line that runs approximately through the centre of the Aïn Beïda district from east to west and stretches towards Oued Charef, encompassing part of the Trouche Plain (Plaine de Trouche)

➤ **The second slope:** Faces south, with its drainage flowing into the **Tarf Lakes, Guelif, and Hank el-Djemel**. It originates from the same ridge line and extends to the lake known as the **Tarf Plain (Plaine du Tarf)**.

➤ **The third slope:** Descends eastward, with its drainage flowing into **Oued Meskiana**, which subsequently joins **Oued Mellag** before continuing into **Tunisian territory**. It originates from the crest of a mountain range extending from the **southwest to the northeast**, beginning at **Djebel Tafrent** and ending at **Djebel Mesloul**, before descending towards **Oued Meskiana**.⁵

Aïn Beïda is characterized by a semi-arid climate (semi-aride), with cold winters that are occasionally accompanied by snowfall and very hot, dry summers due to its distance from the Mediterranean coast. Summer temperatures typically range from 28°C to 43°C, while winter temperatures vary between −4°C and 12°C. The city receives an average annual rainfall of approximately 400–420 mm, with higher precipitation recorded during years of major flooding. The prevailing cold winds blow from the north and northwest for approximately eight to nine months of the year, whereas the Sirocco (Le Sirocco), a hot wind originating from the south, may persist for several consecutive days, averaging 38 days annually.⁶

¹ Mokrane, op. cit., p. 51

² Ibid., p. 51.

³ Amokrane, op. cit., p. 52.

⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵ L. Charles Féraud, *Revue africaine*, no. 96 (Paris: Challamel Aîné, 1872), p. 401.

⁶ Amokrane, op. cit., pp. 55–57.

3. Demographic Development and Population

During the colonial period (1871–1954), the population of Aïn Beïda, like that of the rest of Algeria, was divided into two distinct social groups:

Indigenous population (Les autochtones): This group comprised Muslims and Jews, who constituted the local population of the Hracta and generally experienced conditions of poverty and social marginalization.

European settlers (Les colons): This group included French, Spanish, Italian, and Maltese settlers, who formed a wealthy and influential minority that dominated the sectors of commerce, agriculture, and public administration.

During the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), the city underwent significant demographic changes. The European population declined as a result of deteriorating security conditions and the repatriation of settlers to their countries of origin, while the indigenous population experienced a steady increase.¹

In the post-independence period, population growth in Aïn Beïda evolved through the following phases:

❖ 1962–1966: According to the 1966 population census, the city's population reached 30,412 inhabitants, placing Aïn Beïda among Algerian cities with populations ranging between 20,000 and 50,000.

❖ 1966–1977: The population increased from 30,412 to 42,578 inhabitants by 1977. This period was marked by the designation of Oum El Bouaghi as a provincial capital (wilaya) in 1974, a development that had a direct impact on the city's population growth.

❖ 1977–1987: By 1987, the population had exceeded 62,253 inhabitants, driven by the implementation of collective housing programmes, the construction of public infrastructure, the establishment of an industrial zone, and the development of new residential neighbourhoods, including Kahina and El Amal.²

❖ 1987–1998: This period witnessed a rapid demographic expansion, with the population rising from 62,253 to 92,197 inhabitants in 1998, representing an annual growth rate of 3.40%. This increase was primarily attributable to substantial rural-to-urban migration from neighbouring municipalities, including Rahia, El Djazia, Belaa, and Aïn Frarah, as a consequence of the insecurity associated with Algeria's Black Decade.

❖ 1998–2008: By 2008, the population had reached 115,016 inhabitants, placing Aïn Beïda among the major urban centres of eastern Algeria.

❖ 2008–2013 period: The population of Aïn Beïda was estimated at approximately 128,569 inhabitants in 2013, with a stable annual growth rate of around 2%.³

Comparative demographic data indicate the following figures: the 1966 census recorded 30,412 inhabitants, rising to 42,578 inhabitants in 1977⁴. The population reached 61,997 inhabitants in 1987, 88,290 inhabitants in 1998, 115,286 inhabitants in 2008, and 152,896 inhabitants in 2018.

The above data show that Aïn Beïda ranked first demographically at the level of Oum El Bouaghi Province (Wilaya) in the 1977 and 1987 censuses, when its population size corresponded to the ideal urban size. It maintained this leading position until the 1998 census, while the following ranks, from second to seventh, were occupied by the cities of Oum El Bouaghi, Aïn Fakroun, Aïn Kercha, Meskiana, and Souk Naâmane.⁵

Aïn Beïda is considered the most important city in eastern Algeria in terms of population size, with a total of 115,286 inhabitants according to the 2008 census. This importance is also linked to the impact of urban policies, its urban assets, and the various challenges it faces within the framework of sustainable development. The city accommodates approximately 20% of the population of Oum El Bouaghi Province, whose total population reached 621,612 inhabitants in 2008, with a population density estimated at around 2,045 inhabitants/km². This high density gives it priority in terms of development projects.

¹ Amokrane, op. cit., pp. 56–57.

² Amokrane, op. cit., pp. 57–58.

³ Djamel Raham, *Les Structures spatiales de l'Est algérien: Les maillages territoriaux...* (Constantine: Université Mentouri Constantine, 2008), p. 66.

⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵ Slim Bragdi, *Aïn Beïda: Urban Growth, the Problem of Expansion and Multiple Issues: Diagnosis, Analysis and Treatment*, Master's thesis in Urban Planning, Faculty of Earth Sciences, Geography and Urban Planning, Department of Urban Planning, Mentouri University–Constantine, 2004–2005, p. 24.

Furthermore, Aïn Beïda occupies a strategic location at the centre of the province and within the Eastern High Plateaus region. It is crossed by National Road No. 10, which connects Constantine to Tebessa, and National Road No. 80, linking Guelma to Khenchela, making it a strategic transit hub.¹

4. Administrative History and Territorial Organization

Aïn Beïda municipality was established as a full-function municipality on 23 September 1852, extending over some of the most fertile agricultural lands². At that time, it served as a colonial centre and the seat of a district (*arrondissement*) composed of six administrative commands³.

With the outbreak of the Algerian War of Liberation, Lacoste obtained from the government of Guy Mollet the decree of 28 June 1956, which introduced a comprehensive reorganization of Algeria's administrative structures. This reform abolished mixed municipalities (*communes mixtes*) and introduced the generalization of full-function municipalities (*communes de plein exercice*), while establishing provisional municipal bodies⁴.

It also led to the multiplication of districts and the reinforcement of the powers of district administrators (*chefs de daïra*). At that time, the territory corresponding to the present-day Wilaya of Oum El Bouaghi consisted of 31 municipalities distributed among three administrative centres: Aïn M'lila, Aïn Beïda, and Oum El Bouaghi⁵.

After independence, the Algerian state sought to reduce the number of municipalities at the national level, decreasing them from 1,526 municipalities to 638 municipalities in 1963. This measure was adopted due to the departure of French administrative personnel, the lack of experience among Algerian officials, and the deterioration of administrative management. The "municipal regrouping" policy also served as a financial measure aimed at reducing public expenditure.

During this regrouping process in 1963, the Aïn Beïda district (*daïra*) became responsible for the administration of the following municipalities: Aïn Babouche, Oum El Bouaghi, Meskiana, El Dhalaa, Fkirina, Brech, and Ksar Sbahi.⁶

Under the 1974 administrative reorganization, enacted by Ordinance No. 74/69 of 2 July 1974, the Wilaya of Oum El Bouaghi was established. The region had previously been part of the Wilaya of Constantine and was considered a small rural municipality; it was directly promoted to the status of a provincial capital due to its central geographical location, despite the existence of larger urban centres such as Aïn Beïda, Khenchela, and Aïn M'lila.

Following this administrative division, the Aïn Beïda district (*daïra*) was placed in charge of the municipalities of Fkirina, Meskiana, and Brech. During the 1984 territorial reorganization, Khenchela and several municipalities were separated to establish the Wilaya of Khenchela. However, Aïn Beïda was not promoted to the status of a wilaya capital and remained a district centre, supervising the municipalities of Brech, El Zarg, and Aïn Beïda.⁷

II. Educational Activity and Intellectual Movement in Aïn Beïda

Aïn Beïda witnessed a vibrant tradition of mosque-based education, which in its early stages relied primarily on voluntary teaching. The city was home to a *zāwiya* affiliated with the Tijaniyya Sufi order, as well as a mosque endowed (*waqf*) by the Ham Ali family, from which emerged the renowned Algerian poet Mohamed Laïd Al Khalifa.⁸

¹Fatima Zohra Berkani and Foued Benghadbane, "Urban Projects to Prefigure the Sustainable City—Case of the City of Aïn Beïda (Algeria)," *Civil Engineering and Architecture* (April 2017), pp. 53–54.

²Asiya Lifa, "Programmes de développement rural et leur rôle dans le développement du secteur agricole dans la wilaya d'Oum El Bouaghi (1990–2000)," *Revue de la croissance économique et de l'entrepreneuriat*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2023), pp. 98–100.

³Amokrane, op. cit., p. 59.

⁴Saleh Belhadj, *Histoire de la Révolution algérienne* (Algiers: Dar El Kitab El Hadith, 2008), p. 74.

⁵Slim Bragdi, *Aïn Beïda: Urban Growth, the Problem of Expansion and Multiple Issues: Diagnosis, Analysis and Treatment*, Master's thesis in Urban Planning, Mentouri University–Constantine, 2004–2005, p. 10.

⁶Bragdi, op. cit., p. 10.

⁷Bragdi, op. cit., p.11.

⁸The poet Mohamed Laïd Al Khalifa was born in the city of Aïn Beïda, Algeria, in 1904, where he received his early education. He later moved to Biskra, where he continued his studies under the guidance of local scholars. In 1921, he travelled to Tunisia to pursue higher studies at the University of Ez-Zitouna (Zaytuna Mosque). Upon his return to Biskra, he became actively involved in Algeria's intellectual and cultural renaissance.

In 1927, he was appointed as a teacher at the Free Islamic Youth School in Algiers, where he contributed to the establishment of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. Following the Second World War, he returned to Biskra, where the colonial

Although the city's social and cultural fabric was strongly influenced by Sufi orders and religious brotherhoods, it nevertheless maintained a solid tradition of religious learning and Islamic scholarship. Education in Aïn Beïda occupied an intermediate position between the French primary schools established for Algerian pupils and the three French-administered Islamic schools.¹

French administrative reports reveal sustained pressure from educational inspectors to reform the financial status of mosque teachers. Under the Law of 1898, teachers were classified into three grades, with annual salaries of 600, 900, and 1,200 francs, respectively. By 1906, inspectors repeatedly recommended salary increases, arguing that the existing remuneration was insufficient to support teachers and their families. In 1905, Inspector Alfred Bel proposed restructuring the profession into five salary grades², with annual wages ranging from 900 to 2,100 francs (900, 1,200, 1,500, 1,800, and 2,100 francs). In a report issued in 1908, Inspector William Marçais endorsed this proposal. This later due to lack of education and the abandonment of societal norms and traditions that aim at the benefit of the group as a whole. Here, we also note that there are several reasons or consequences of identity alienation that coincide with or are at the origin of this cause of the phenomenon of corruption within certain groups of society.³

Marçais endorsed these proposals, emphasizing that all the teachers he had inspected had requested salary increases. He argued that the minimum annual salary of 900 francs was insufficient to provide even the most basic means of subsistence, a situation that discouraged graduates of the Franco-Islamic schools from entering the teaching profession.

Consequently, Alfred Bel's proposal was renewed, calling for the financial responsibility for teachers' salaries to be transferred to the budget of the General Public Education Service of the Government-General of Algeria, rather than being financed through the budget allocated to the Islamic Religious Administration. Historically, Algerian teachers had been placed under the authority of the Mufti as religious officials, a system that educational inspectors warned would deteriorate further if the principle of the separation of religion and the state were to be implemented.⁴

Conversely, Alfred Bel argued that these teachers should, in practice, be regarded as facilitators within the public education system rather than as purely religious officials, maintaining that the nature of their teaching was not exclusively religious. This position formed part of the French colonial policy aimed at reducing the doctrinal and religious character of mosque-based education. As the culmination of these policy recommendations, the Governor-General issued a decree on 11 August 1910 transferring teachers administratively from the corps of Religious (Shar'ī) Education to that of the Higher Islamic Education Service. This measure was followed by another decree on 18 February 1914, which classified teachers into three grades

administration placed him under house arrest. He remained under these restrictions until Algeria gained independence in 1382 AH (1962 CE). He died in Batna in 1979 and was buried in Biskra.

Al Khalifa's poetry is distinguished by its rhetorical style. His published collection, *Al-Lahīb* (The Blaze), established him as one of Algeria's foremost poets and a leading figure of the first generation of the Arab literary renaissance in the country.

¹Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1998), p. 156.

²Alfred Bel was born in the commune of Salins, France, where he completed his primary education and distinguished himself through his academic excellence. At the age of seventeen, he obtained the Baccalauréat in the sciences before moving to Algeria. Despite his young age, he began his career as an assistant teacher at a primary school in Blida, after which he was appointed to a secondary school in Oran, where he remained for five years.

Bel served as director of the Tlemcen School on three separate occasions over a period of thirty years, the first of which extended from 1905 to 1914. He also contributed actively to the activities of the Museum of Arts in Tlemcen.

³ Mounir Hafid, Abdellatif Bouroubi, & Zedira Khammar. (2025). IDENTITY ALIENATION AND CORRUPTION IN NORTH AFRICAN SOCIETIES. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 1(45). [https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.1\(45\).2025.3106](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.1(45).2025.3106)

⁴In France, the Law on Secularization (laïcisation) was enacted on 9 December 1905 to establish the complete separation of Church and State. Although the intellectual foundations of secularism can be traced back to the French Revolution of 1789, it was not until the Third Republic that this principle was fully institutionalized in 1905, following intense political debates between the French government and the Catholic Church, as well as the deterioration of relations between the French government and the Papacy.

The rapporteur of the Separation Bill justified this policy by emphasizing that the French State sought to adopt a position of religious neutrality rather than hostility toward religion, stating: « L'État français n'est pas antireligieux; il est areligieux. » ("The French State is not anti-religious; it is non-religious.")

However, the implementation of this principle was confined to Christianity within metropolitan France and was not extended to Islam in colonial Algeria. This exclusion reflected the colonial administration's determination to retain state control over Islamic institutions and religious affairs.

with annual salaries fixed at 1,800 francs for the first grade, 1,500 francs for the second, and 1,200 francs for the third.¹

Prior to 1898, mosque-based instruction followed a unified curriculum confined to the teaching of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic theology (tawhīd), primarily intended for the general public and conducted under strict administrative supervision. Following the subsequent introduction of new subjects—including Arabic literature, grammar, and arithmetic—some classes were transferred from the mosque itself to adjacent classrooms and schools, while others continued to be held within the mosque.

At that time, no officially prescribed or standardized textbooks existed, leaving considerable room for teachers' individual discretion. The colonial administration regarded this pedagogical autonomy as a form of undesirable "disorder." To restrict such discretion, the authorities introduced a standardized curriculum, prescribed official textbooks for each subject, determined the number of weekly instructional hours, distinguished between compulsory and optional courses, and instituted an annual inspection system.

These reforms were formalized through a binding decree issued by the Governor-General and designed and implemented under the supervision of Dominique Luciani², Director of Native Affairs (Affaires indigènes). In 1907, several inspectors proposed ending the monopoly of mosque-based instruction by gradually transferring these courses to classrooms attached to French primary schools, thereby initiating a long-lasting methodological integration between the two educational systems.

As part of the colonial administration's efforts to strengthen cultural supervision, an "Arabic Library for Teachers" was established in each educational centre to assist teachers in lesson preparation. Although this initiative appeared beneficial on the surface, the contents of these libraries were subject to strict official control. Their collections were acquired through regulated purchases, donations, or gifts supplied by the French authorities themselves, and a substantial proportion consisted of works authored or translated by French Orientalists. These resources were also made available to students³.

Furthermore, educational inspectors required teachers to adopt modern organizational practices, including the use of blackboards, the maintenance of attendance registers, compulsory student note-taking, and attention to professional appearance, manner of dress, tone of voice, and classroom influence. Teachers' performance was assessed not only on pedagogical competence but also on the characteristics of their students—whether they were local residents or newcomers, their proficiency in French, whether they had attended French primary schools or came directly from the general population—and on the rate at which they qualified for admission to the Franco-Islamic schools. In addition, teachers were evaluated according to the extent of their cooperation with the French colonial authorities or, conversely, their tendency toward isolation⁴.

Despite the colonial authorities' efforts to regulate and control mosque-based education, intellectual life in Aïn Beïda continued to display considerable cultural vitality. The city was home to several zāwiyas (Sufi lodges), including the 'Isāwiyya Zāwiya, headed by Muqaddam Moussaoui Hussein; the 'Alawiyya Zāwiya, under the direction of Muqaddam Aloui Taher; the Shādhiliyya Zāwiya, which had no permanent headquarters and was led by Sayghi Abdelrahman; the 'Ammāriyya Zāwiya, likewise without a permanent headquarters, directed by Muqaddam Khalifa Rabah; the Qādiriyya Zāwiya, headed by Muqaddam Hadj Saïd; and the Tijāniyya Zāwiya, under the leadership of Muqaddam Hammou Ali.⁵

¹Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, vol. 3, op. cit., pp. 157–159.

²Jean-Dominique Luciani (1851–1932) descended from a Corsican family that held a longstanding position within the French colonial administration. After completing his secondary education in the literary stream, he occupied several administrative posts in colonial Algeria. During his public service, he obtained a degree in law as well as a diploma in Arabic and Amazigh languages. He also pursued formal studies under one of the teachers at the educational institution where he was enrolled.

Luciani edited and published several classical Islamic works on Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic creed ('aqīdah), translating a number of them into French. He also showed a keen interest in both Arabic and Amazigh Algerian literature. In addition, he contributed to the adaptation of French legal regulations in Algeria to accommodate certain aspects of the religious laws governing the indigenous population. His contributions also included supporting the establishment of public Islamic libraries, promoting the publication and dissemination of Islamic heritage works in Arabic, and participating in the establishment of the Museum of Islamic Art in Algeria.

³ Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 159

⁴Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 160.

⁵ Khaled Bouhend, *The Algerian Elites, 1892–1942* (Doha, Qatar: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2020), p. 412.

The spiritual activities of the Āl Khalifa Zāwiya also played a significant role in fostering the city's cultural and intellectual life. The zāwiya was supervised by prominent scholars, including Shaykh Muḥammad al-Kāmil ibn 'Azzūz¹ and Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Nadji.

The vitality of this intellectual milieu was documented by the pioneer of the Algerian reform movement, Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ben Badis, during his visit to Aīn Beīda in 1929. During this visit, he met with a distinguished circle of scholars and men of letters, among whom was the writer and poet Shaykh Ḥassan Boulahbal.²

who was teaching at the city's mosque. Ibn Badis described the city and its activities, stating:

"The capital of the Hracta and the centre of their trade, I arrived there as a guest of the legal representative (al-wakil al-shar'i) of the city. He accommodated me in the guest house of its mosque, whose expansion and furnishing were among the achievements of this man and those who supported him from among the people of goodness and religion..."

Ibn Badis further elaborates in his historical testimony, stating:

"In this town — referring to Aīn Beīda — there is a group of scholars and men of letters, among them Shaykh al-Saīd Zammouchi, who taught voluntarily at its mosque, as well as Shaykh Ḥassan Boulahbal and Shaykh al-Taḥer ibn al-Amine... In it, a generation of educated people has emerged, prepared to seek knowledge..."³

The city also witnessed significant scholarly activity led by Sheikh Moussa Al-Arabi Al-Saighi, who continued his work on the remains of the aforementioned zawiya, alongside Judge Aboud Al-Wanissi (the brother of Sheikh Hamdan Al-Wanissi), the mosque imam Sheikh Al-Zawawi Ben Maati, as well as Sheikh Abdelrahman Ben Azzouz, the representative of the Rahmaniyya Sufi order, and Sheikh Taher Ben Al-Amin.

This local scholarly vitality confirms that the French colonial administration was no longer the only actor or the sole driving force behind educational activities in the mosques and zāwiyas of the region.⁴

III. A Brief Biography of Sheikh Al-Saīd Zammouchi and His Role in the Region

The scholars and notable figures of Aīn Beīda played a prominent role in enriching Algeria's cultural and historical heritage. Their highest aspiration was embodied in educating students, enlightening minds, and spreading awareness among people tirelessly and without hesitation. Despite this abundant intellectual contribution, most of them lived in extreme poverty and passed away in very difficult financial conditions⁵.

These men made Aīn Beīda a centre from which they disseminated their knowledge and preserved their enduring teachings. It was also the same city that welcomed Emir Khaled, whose residence still stands today on 1 November Street. His memory has also been honoured through the naming of one of the city's public

¹Shaykh Muḥammad al-Kāmil ibn 'Azzūz was born in 1880 in Nefta, Tunisia, into a scholarly family of Algerian origin. He received his early education at the zāwiya of his grandfather, Muṣṭafā ibn 'Azzūz, before continuing his studies at the University of Ez-Zitouna (Zaytuna Mosque) in Tunis. In 1899, he returned to Algeria to disseminate the teachings of the Raḥmāniyya Sufi order and settled in Aīn Beīda in 1905. However, in 1907, the French colonial authorities exiled him from the city because of his growing religious influence and the impact of his public preaching.

He subsequently relocated to Souk Ahras, where he founded a zāwiya. He later returned and, in collaboration with the notables of Aīn Beīda, established a modern school dedicated to teaching the Qur'an and the Islamic sciences. The school played a significant role in preserving Algeria's national identity and educated a number of distinguished scholars, including the renowned poet Mohamed Laīd Al Khalifa. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Kāmil continued his educational and reformist mission until his death on 26 March 1929, when his automobile was struck by a train. See: Abdelkader Bouazza, "Shaykh Muḥammad al-Kāmil ibn 'Azzūz," accessed on Friday at 23:16, from the website: [Shaykh Muhammad al-Kamil ibn 'Azzūz – Al-Basa'ir](#).

²Shaykh Ḥassan Boulahbal was born in 1897 in Khenchela. He received his education at the University of Ez-Zitouna (Zaytuna Mosque) in Tunis, after which he returned to Algeria and worked as a teacher in Batna and Khenchela, where he established a school that was later closed by the French authorities. He then moved to Aīn Beīda, where he taught for seven years.

In 1931, he was appointed Mufti of Béjaïa after successfully passing an official examination, and he later became Mufti of Oran in 1941. Despite holding an official religious position, he was distinguished by his reformist tendencies and his moderate approach, seeking to reconcile the perspectives of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and the Sufi zāwiyas. He was also active in literary circles, authoring several books and a poetry collection. He died in Oran in March 1944 and was buried in the dome of Sidi El Houari.

³Abdelkader Khalifi, Boumediene Ben Adda, Hassan Boulahbal: The Poet Mufti, Abu Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ghawthi, p. 138. Accessed on Thursday at 20:39, from the website: <https://www.google.com/search?q>.

⁴Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, The Cultural History of Algeria, vol. 3, op. cit., p. 157.

⁵Al-Sharif Shanatliyya, Al-Tarika al-Maghmoura: These Men Have Left Their Mark, published on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the outbreak of the Algerian War of Liberation, Aīn Beīda, October 1989, pp. 3, 5.

gardens after him. Aïn Beïda continues to preserve the memory of many figures who served it with dedication, foremost among them Sheikh Al-Arabi Ben Qachout, who authored works on Islamic theology (tawhid) and jurisprudence (fiqh), taught in the city's various mosques, and became known for his scholarly responses to the renowned Egyptian writer Zaki Mubarak. He lived for nearly eighty years¹. Among these figures were also Sheikh Al-Massoud Ben Ali, Sheikh Ahmed Ben Naji, and Sheikh Al-Makki Ben Azzouz.²

This distinguished group also includes Sheikh Al-Akhdar Boukafaa and Sheikh Abu Al-Qasim Zinai, whose names were given to two secondary schools in the city in recognition of their contributions. It also includes Sheikh Al-Sadiq Belkebir, after whom an educational annex was named, and Sheikh Slimane Ben Mechri, who made significant contributions to the people of the region and whose name should have been given to an educational institution in acknowledgement of his efforts.³

Among these figures is also the father of the poet Mohamed Laïd Al Khalifa, who founded a mosque that remains standing to this day, as well as the martyr and teacher Zidouni Ammara, whose name was given to one of the largest streets in the city, and Sheikh Boubaker Djaballah.⁴

These educational institutions and schools would not have been able to fulfil their educational and reformist role without the presence of a group of scholars and reformers who carried the torch of knowledge and education in the city of Aïn Beïda. Among the most prominent of these figures are:

➤ **Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi:**

He is Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi Al-Saïghi, son of Muhammad Ben Belkacem and Turki Halima. He was born on March 4, 1904, in the city of Aïn Beïda⁵. He acquired knowledge from his father, particularly from his grandfather Abdelhamid Al-Saïghi. He memorized the Holy Quran at the age of thirteen and studied the fundamentals of religious sciences under the scholars and jurists of the region. His desire for further knowledge led him to migrate to Tunisia⁶, where he joined the Ez-Zitouna University.

From which he graduated in 1928⁷. Sheikh Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi was known for his voluntary efforts in spreading knowledge. He taught voluntarily at the main mosque of his hometown and had a significant presence and influence among his fellow scholars and reformers. He also contributed through initiatives aimed at guiding scholarly gatherings and organizing lessons and lectures.⁸

At the request of Sheikh Ibn Badis, Zammouchi joined the Green Mosque (Al-Jami' Al-Akhdar) in Constantine in 1931. This was his last year there before moving to Mascara, where Ibn Badis appointed him

¹ Ibid., pp. 6–7.

² He is Abu Abd Allah Muhammad Al-Makki ibn Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Azzouz Al-Sharif Al-Hassani Al-Idrisi Al-Maliki Al-Tunisi, also known as "Al-Barji," a name attributed to Burj Ibn Azzouz in the desert region of Biskra. He was of Algerian origin. Sheikh Ibn Azzouz was born in Nefta on 15 Ramadan 1270 AH (1854 CE) and died in 1334 AH (1916 CE). His mother was the daughter of Sheikh Sidi Sheikh ibn Abi Al-Qasim Al-Ibrahimi Al-Dissi. He memorized the Holy Quran under the guidance of his father, Sheikh Al-Lakhami ibn Al-Sahhi ibn Al-Saghir, at the age of eleven. He studied with Sheikh Al-Qasim Al-Khayrani, including "Sharh Sheikh Khalid Al-Azhari on Al-Ajurrumiyya." He later moved from Nefta to Tunis in 1309 AH to pursue knowledge, where he studied under prominent scholars of the Ez-Zitouna Mosque, such as Sheikh Mustafa Ridwan and Sheikh Muhammad Al-Shadhili ibn Saleh. He also established connections in Algeria with Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abi Al-Qasim Al-Sharif Al-Hassani and obtained distinguished scholarly licenses (ijazat) from renowned scholars in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, and the Two Holy Sanctuaries. Among his extensive scholarly journeys was his travel to the Hijaz, Egypt, and the Levant, where he met many prominent scholars. He later returned to Tunisia and devoted himself to teaching at the Great Ez-Zitouna Mosque. The scholar then travelled to Istanbul, where he studied the Turkish language until he mastered it and became proficient in it. He was subsequently appointed as a lecturer of Hadith at the Grand Islamic College, later known as "Dar al-Funun." Following the death of Sheikh Ismail Haqqi, the renowned Quranic exegete, the position of professor of Quranic exegesis at the college was assigned to Sheikh Ibn Azzouz.

³ Muhammad Al-Khidr Hussein, Encyclopedia of the Complete Works of Imam Muhammad Al-Khidr Hussein, vol. 22, 1st ed. (Syria–Lebanon–Kuwait, 2010), p. 30.

⁴ Al-Sharif Shanatliyya, op. cit., pp. 7–8.

⁵ Ben Abdelmoumen Ibrahim, "The Reformist Work and National Struggle of Sheikh Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi in the Algerian National Movement: A Biography and Career (1904–1960)," *Algerian Historical Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2, University of M'sila (Algeria), December 23, 2023, p. 314.

⁶ Samir Samarad, op. cit., p. 64.

⁷ Samir Samarad, op. cit., pp. 64–65.

⁸ Ammar Talbi, Athar Ibn Badis, vol. 2, part 2, Algerian Company, Algeria, 1997, pp. 304–305.

to spread the principles of the reformist movement¹. He was then appointed as a teacher at the Free School of Mascara in the Baba Ali district, where he lived in a house belonging to the school.²

He succeeded in attracting even followers of Sufi orders, particularly Sheikh Chentouf from the Darqawiyya order. In return, Sheikh Zammouchi committed himself to the duty of religious and social awareness-raising. He also supported the students of this school and worked to raise public awareness, especially since he had been honoured with inaugurating the school³.

He was the director, teacher, preacher, and guide of its school. He was also among the figures who contributed to the establishment of the school, played a prominent role in supporting it, and assisted its students in their education.⁴

By the year 1934, reformist education in Mascara had witnessed remarkable success, particularly in the educational and pedagogical fields, exceeding the expectations set by the Association. The free school had begun to attract 75 students, whose ages ranged between seven and twelve years. Sheikh Al-Saïd then sent the first educational mission to the Ez-Zitouna Mosque in Tunis, which included three students: "Hussein Gaid," "Hussein Bouabza," and "Miloud Bouziane."⁵

Due to the transformation that occurred after the arrival of Zammouchi, especially following the activities of the Youth Club, which had become a cradle of the reformist movement and attracted many supporters and advocates, people gathered around the movement and decided to build a mosque and a school. The project consisted of a large hall where the five daily prayers were performed and where lessons of preaching and guidance were held, along with two furnished classrooms equipped to receive students.

The French administration considered this development a threat and issued an urgent decision to suspend Arabic lessons in the two classrooms, separate the students from them, and exile Sheikh Zammouchi to El Harrach in Algiers, where he was placed under house arrest. Through the efforts of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and the reformists of Mascara, education at the school resumed; however, Sheikh Zammouchi was not allowed to return to it.

After spending more than two months in exile, he was permitted to settle in Oran, where, in 1944, he was appointed as a representative of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and as director of Al-Falah

¹ Samir Samarad, op. cit., pp. 64–68.

² Born in the city of Mascara on 07 July 1925, Sheikh Muhammad Chentouf was the head of the Sidi Ibn Abdallah Zawiya. He was raised in an Arab-Islamic environment by his maternal grandfather, Sheikh Chaouch Muhammad, who took care of his upbringing after the death of his father. He memorized the Holy Quran in Al-Qalaa and received the foundations of Arabic language and Islamic jurisprudence. He then moved to the city of Chlef, where he continued his studies in jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, Hadith, and Arabic under Sheikh Al-Jilali Ben Abdelhakim.

After the death of his grandfather, may God have mercy on him, Sheikh Muhammad Chentouf settled in Relizane, where he stayed at its zawiya and served as the imam for Friday prayers and the five daily prayers. In this city, in 1940, he met the hero Colonel Amirouche, with whom he established close relations. With the outbreak of the Algerian War of Liberation, Sheikh Chentouf joined its ranks until he was arrested by the colonial authorities in Relizane. After his release, he left the city and settled in Oran, where he continued his militant activities within the ranks of the National Liberation Front (FLN) until Algeria gained independence. Afterwards, Sheikh Chentouf worked as a teacher and became a student at the University of Oran, where he pursued studies at the Faculty of Law. After obtaining his bachelor's degree, he joined the staff of the Ministry of Justice until his retirement. He also worked as a notary in Tighennif, in the province of Mascara, and headed the zawiya of his ancestors. See: Salah Muayyad, *The Sufi Orders in Algeria*, Dar Al-Buraq, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, pp. 488–489.

³ Samir Samarad, op. cit., pp. 65–68

⁴ Lahcen Jaaker, *The National Movement in Mascara (1930–1954)*, Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Civilization, Department of History, University of Oran, 2008–2009, p. 100.

⁵ Fateh Tahari and Mohamed Belhadj, "The Liberationist Tendency of Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi through His Political and Cultural Activities in Western Algeria (1904–1960)," *Algerian Journal of Manuscripts*, vol. 19, special issue, University of Oran 1 Ahmed Ben Bella, August 2023, pp. 252–253.

School¹. Attention then turned toward building a free mosque where people could gather for prayers, lessons, preaching, and guidance.²

When the massacres of 8 May 1945, committed by the French colonial authorities against the Algerian people, took place, Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi was among the first to provide assistance to the orphans of Sétif and Kherrata. He transported them to Oran and distributed them among charitable and benevolent families.

He was accompanied by Mrs. Kheira Ben Daoud³, who gathered 45 children aged between four and twelve years before returning with them by train to Oran. She continued her humanitarian mission by caring for them and placing them with Oranian families who welcomed them as their own children, allowing them to grow up surrounded by love, care, and security after colonialism had attempted to deprive them even of their childhood.

She also contributed from her own funds to the establishment of a clinic for treating Algerians in the Medina Jdida district, at a time when the French colonial authorities prevented Algerians from receiving treatment at “Plateau” Hospital, now known as Dr. Ben Zarjeb Hospital, where healthcare services were reserved exclusively for French settlers.⁴

Following the establishment of the Mouloudia Oran Club in the El Hamri district in 1946, Saïd Zammouchi attended as a representative of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama to officially announce the resumption of the club’s activities.⁵

In 1947, with the establishment of Al-Falah Mosque on the first floor of one of the largest streets in the Medina Jdida district, while the ground floor was allocated for the construction of school classrooms, an inauguration ceremony was held for the mosque. The opening ceremony was attended by Sheikh Al-Bashir Al-Ibrahimi and Al-Arabi Al-Tibsi.

Zammouchi also established Al-Hayat School in Gambetta, Al-Majd School in Sidi El Houari, Al-Irshad School in El Madioni district, and Al-Tawhid School in Mers El Kebir. He gained widespread recognition, and he was invited everywhere to deliver his lessons and sermons. As a result, fifty schools were established in western Algeria, along with around twenty independent mosques and clubs. Zammouchi attended the inauguration ceremonies of most of them.

He also delivered sermons in Beni H’Diel. Due to the mosque’s limited capacity for gatherings, he was forced to give his lessons in the olive and orange garden. His lesson focused on preaching, encouraging charitable deeds, and urging people to accelerate the completion of the school’s construction. The attendees praised the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and its active members and asked the scholar not to deprive them of such enlightening initiatives that guided them on the right path.

In Sebdou, Sheikh Zammouchi began his lesson by interpreting the Quranic verse: “It was not for the people of Madinah and those around them of the Bedouins to remain behind the Messenger of Allah...”⁶ His style was clear and accessible.⁷

As he also visited the city of Ghazaouet, Sheikh Mohamed Al-Qobti described Sheikh Zammouchi’s visit, stating: “During these days, the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama sent the great scholar and experienced preacher, Sheikh Saïd Zammouchi, to the province of Oran, so that he could connect with its

¹ Al-Falah School was established in 1935 on the initiative of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, which sent Sheikh Saïd Zammouchi to Oran to supervise the educational project. This initiative came in response to an urgent need at the time, as the Arabic language was almost absent, and religious education was suffering from distortions due to the spread of superstitions and foreign practices.

From its early beginnings, the school sought to promote the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic sciences within a reformist project aimed at purifying religion from impurities and rebuilding the Algerian identity on solid scientific and cultural foundations.

See: Mohamed Lakhal, “Al-Falah School in Oran... A Beacon of Reform and a Living Memory of the National Movement,” <https://elmakal.dz>.

² Samir Samarad, op. cit., p. 68.

³ Mohamed Abbas, “Today We Opened a School... Tomorrow We Will Open Algeria...,” *Echorouk Online*, accessed Tuesday, 21 July 2026, at 15:32, from the website: <https://www.echoroukonline.com/>

⁴ Mohamed Lakhal, “By Taking in the Orphans of the Eighth of May Massacres... Kheira Bent Ben Daoud Creates Humanitarian History,” accessed Tuesday, 21 July 2026, at 17:01, from the website: <https://elmakal.dz/2026/05/08/>

⁵ Mohamed Abbas, “Today We Opened a School... Tomorrow We Will Open Algeria...,” *Echorouk Online*, accessed Tuesday, 21 July 2026, at 15:32, from the website: <https://www.echoroukonline.com/>

⁶ The Holy Quran, Surah At-Tawbah, verse 120.

⁷ Belkacem Rouak, “At Dar Al-Hadith School,” *Al-Basa’ir*, Second Series, no. 191, Algeria, 26 May 1952, pp. 69–70.

branches, inspect their activities, and communicate with the people as well. Through this mission, the Association did a great service to its nation by sending this devoted and zealous figure, whose faith and sincerity we know, as well as his eloquence in speech, his vast knowledge, his intelligence, and his commitment to truth...

He began by interpreting the words of Allah Almighty: ‘O you who have believed, what is [the matter] with you that when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allah...’ until ‘And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people.’¹ He spent two hours explaining the verse, then concluded his lesson with supplications from the Quran.

That evening, in response to the request of the people of Ouled Ziri, Zammouchi accompanied the Association to the village, where he delivered a valuable lesson in the village mosque on the saying: ‘The wise person is the one who holds himself accountable and works for what comes after death.’ In this lesson, he demonstrated eloquence of expression and the power of rhetoric no less impressive than his lesson at the Ghazaouet Mosque.’²

On Sunday, 11 May, a conference was held at Dar Al-Hadith School in Tlemcen, bringing together the directors of the Arab free schools of the Oran district to examine important matters concerning the directors and teachers of these schools affiliated with the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. The conference was chaired by Al-Arabi Al-Tebessi, Head of the Education Committee and President of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama.

Because of his other commitments and the necessity of attending the directors' conferences in the districts of Algiers and Constantine, Al-Tebessi departed on Monday morning at 9:30 a.m.³ for Algiers. The conference therefore continued under the chairmanship of Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi, President of the District Office of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and its respected administrative member. After a brief presentation of all the important issues and an exchange of views, the participants reached several important and beneficial resolutions concerning education and moral upbringing. These resolutions were intended to illuminate the path of Arabism and Islam in Algeria, the rising Arab nation. By unanimous agreement, responsibility for communicating and implementing these resolutions was entrusted to the Higher Education Committee through Sheikh Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi, President of the Conference.

Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi continued delivering his sermons and lessons. With the establishment of Aisha School, a school dedicated to Muslim girls, he delivered a lesson during the women's inauguration ceremony held on Sunday, 11 May. The subject of his lesson was the Quranic verse: “And it is not your wealth or your children that bring you nearer to Us in rank...”⁴

He spoke for two full hours, during which he addressed the topic in depth. The women in attendance showed neither fatigue nor boredom, remaining attentive throughout his discourse⁵. He then delivered a lesson to the men based on the Quranic verse: “What is [the matter] with you that, when you are told, ‘Go forth in the cause of Allah,’ you cling heavily to the earth?”⁶

Sheikh Zammouchi also delivered lessons and sermons in the city of Brégu, particularly after the period of stagnation, apathy, and moral and psychological decline that the city had experienced. Consequently, the leaders of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama devoted special attention to the city, and visits by reformist scholars became increasingly frequent.

With the opening of the school, Brégu became a fertile center for the Arabic language and Islam, as well as a meeting place for independent scholars. Among those who visited were Sheikh Mohamed Al-Madjaji and Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi, who delivered a lesson on the Quranic verse: “**And Abraham instructed his sons [to do the same], and so did Jacob...**”⁷

¹ The Holy Quran, Surah At-Tawbah, verse 38.

² Belkacem Rouak, “At Dar Al-Hadith School,” Al-Basa’ir, Second Series, no. 191, Algeria, 26 May 1952, pp. 70–71.

³ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴ The Holy Quran, Surah Saba’, verse 37.

⁵ Zuleikha Ibrahim Othman, “The Opening Ceremony of Aisha School for Women in Tlemcen,” Al-Basa’ir, Second Series, no. 192, Algeria, 2 June 1952, p. 99.

⁶ Hamza Boukoucha, “The First Arabic School for Muslim Women: Aisha School in Tlemcen,” Al-Basa’ir, Second Series, no. 191, Algeria, 26 May 1952, p. 92.

⁷ The Holy Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 132.

Owing to his eloquent style of preaching, Zammouchi succeeded in uprooting the seeds of doubt, cowardice, defeatism, and hypocrisy from the hearts of those in attendance.¹

Western Algeria (the Oran district) witnessed an intensive reformist and enlightenment movement led by the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. In this context, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi played a prominent role as the district representative of the Association.

This activity began with the establishment of the first school in the city of Nedroma in 1949, which was inaugurated in September of the same year in the presence of the President of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, who named it “Abdelmoumen School.”

The inauguration activities commenced on Friday with the arrival of Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi, who delivered a Quranic lesson at the mosque of the newly established school. On the following morning, a women's gathering was held, during which the Sheikh also gave a lecture, and substantial donations were collected.²

With the establishment of the El Bayadh School, Al-Basa'ir newspaper wrote:

“...We are pleased to give our brethren the good news that the construction of the school has been completed, and nothing remains except its furnishing and preparation. The celebration of its opening to the children of the people will take place in the near future, God willing. This is neither difficult for God nor for the men who formed the branch of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama in El Bayadh. If El Bayadh prospers, there can be no doubt about the prosperity of the entire Western Sahara, for El Bayadh is its محور around which it revolves and its gateway through which it is entered. And success comes only from Allah.”³

On Saturday, in December 1952, Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi arrived in the town of El Bayadh (Géryville), where he was welcomed by the Hamitou family and hosted in their distinguished residence. The following day, at around ten o'clock in the morning, the school premises were filled with attendees. Sheikh El-Hadj Ouahfs stepped onto the platform and opened the session with a recitation from the Holy Quran.

Afterwards, Sheikh Boualem Abdelbaki, Director of the Relizane School, delivered a warm welcoming address to those present and apologized for the absence of Sheikh Al-Arabi Al-Tebessi. Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi then took the podium and delivered an eloquent speech in which he spoke about the struggle of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama and the tremendous services it rendered to the Algerian people, services whose true worth could only be appreciated by “men who have been true to the covenant they made with Allah.”⁴

Continuing these efforts, Al-Irshad School was inaugurated in Sebdou under the direction of Sheikh Al-Akhdar Ben El Ghouini, while the local branch was chaired by Allal Achouar⁵. On the morning of Sunday, 27 September 1953, Al-Saïd Zammouchi welcomed the visiting delegations at the entrance of the school alongside the local committee.

At exactly 10:30 a.m., the procession departed from the residence of Mohamed Kermouche and headed towards the school, where Zammouchi delivered an address introducing Professor Al-Sultani, highlighting his scholarly and reformist standing, and presenting an overview of the reform movement in Sebdou.⁶

Only a few weeks later, the city of Mascara witnessed another celebratory occasion following the inauguration of Emir Abdelkader School. On the evening of Saturday, 17 October 1953, those in attendance performed the Maghrib prayer in the school courtyard, after which Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi delivered a lesson interpreting the Quranic verse: **“And [mention] when Abraham was tested by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them...”** Following the address delivered by Professor Tawfiq Al-Madani, Zammouchi proceeded to organize and assign those responsible for collecting donations.⁷

¹ Anonymous, “Brégu Joins the Caravan of Knowledge,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 215, Algeria, 6 February 1953, p. 8.

² Anonymous, “The Glorious Day of Nedroma,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 279, Algeria, 16 July 1954, p. 8.

³ Boualem Abdelbaki, “The Establishment of El Bayadh School,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 203, Algeria, 6 October 1952, p. 183.

⁴ Abdallah Qarfi, “The Celebration of the Opening of El Bayadh School,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 212, Algeria, 9 January 1953, p. 2.

⁵ Bey Ahmed, “The Celebration of Al-Irshad School in Sebdou,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 206, Algeria, 3 November 1952, p. 8.

⁶ Anonymous, “Sebdou Celebrates the Opening of Its School,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 245, Algeria, p. 8.

⁷ Anonymous, “Mascara Celebrates the Inauguration of Emir Abdelkader School,” Al-Basa'ir, Second Series, no. 245, Algeria, October 1953, pp. 3–6.

In the same context, it was decided to inaugurate a mosque and a school in Oued Rhiou on Sunday, 1 November 1953. Owing to the large gathering at the mosque, Sheikh Zammouchi was requested to deliver a lesson on Saturday evening after the Maghrib prayer, interpreting the Quranic verse:

“The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day...” (Quran 9:18).

He was followed by Sheikh Omar Al-Biskri, who delivered another lesson after the Isha prayer. On Sunday morning at nine o'clock, the procession advanced in orderly ranks, led by Professor Tawfiq Al-Madani, Sheikh Zammouchi, the teachers of the schools of the Oran district, and representatives from the city of El Asnam. Zammouchi then introduced Professor Al-Madani to deliver his address, after which the collection of donations from benefactors commenced immediately.¹

With the expansion of this reformist activity, the French colonial administration pursued a policy of restriction and interference in Islamic affairs, as well as attacks against independent scholars. This was evident in the cases of Professor Abdelwahab Ben Mansour and Sheikh Al-Saïd Zammouchi, who was subjected to humiliation and degradation by the governor of El Menia, who also dispersed the people around him and intimidated them.

The Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama condemned these practices, questioning the position of the French government and the Algerian administration regarding these violations, which contradicted the principles of justice and equality between religions². A strong protest telegram was also sent to the Governor General and the Governor of the Oran district against the governor of Nedroma for his interference during Eid al-Fitr and his prevention of one of the independent scholars and local inhabitants from performing the Eid prayer outside the city.³

With the outbreak of the Algerian War of Liberation, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi was among the first to participate in and encourage others to join the revolutionary movement. He was arrested in 1956 and subjected to severe forms of torture for three months in unknown locations. He was later transferred to Oran Central Prison and was not released until he had lost more than 30 kilograms of his weight.

Following his release, officials of the National Liberation Front ordered him to leave Oran immediately to avoid assassination by the terrorist organization “La Main Rouge” (The Red Hand). He was then secretly transferred to the Moroccan city of Oujda by the National Liberation Army.

The Sheikh remained in Oujda until his death on 19 December 1960, where he was buried. Among those who carried his coffin were Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Ahmed Medeghri. In accordance with his will to have his remains returned to his homeland, his family returned to Oran on 4 July 1962, and his remains were transported by train from Oujda on 5 July 1964. Upon arrival, the coffin was placed in Al-Falah School, which he had founded and where he had worked, in the presence of a large gathering of citizens, before being transferred for burial in Ain Beida Cemetery in Oran.⁴

Conclusions:

- The strategic location of Ain Beida, serving as a link between the East and the South, made it a first line of defense against the early French colonial campaigns, particularly after the attempts of marginalization and demographic transformation imposed by the colonial authorities following the subjugation of the region in 1848.

- Ain Beida succeeded in preserving its Arab-Islamic identity in the face of the colonial policies of “Francization” and the attempts to strip education and religious institutions of their doctrinal character. The local Qur’anic schools (kuttab), zawiyas, and religious endowments (awqaf), alongside the visits of scholars and reformers, most notably Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, played a significant role in this preservation.

Sheikh Muhammad Al-Saïd Zammouchi represents a prominent example of a reformer who profoundly influenced the educational and social life of the region. His role extended beyond the management and establishment of free schools; he also served as the district representative of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama, an educator, and a humanitarian supporter of the orphans affected by the massacres of 8 May 1945.

¹ A. Gh., “A House of Allah Is Being Built,” *Al-Basa’ir*, Second Series, no. 248, Algeria, November 1953, pp. 4–8.

² Al-Arabi Al-Tebessi, “The Governor of Nedroma Prevents Muslims from Performing the Eid Prayer Behind the Independent Scholars,” *Al-Basa’ir*, Second Series, no. 196, Algeria, 21 July 1952, pp. 1–2.

³ Al-Arabi Al-Tebessi, “Protest Telegram,” *Al-Basa’ir*, Second Series, no. 196, Algeria, 21 July 1952, p. 1.

⁴ Al-Arabi Al-Tebessi, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

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Appendix 1: Map Showing the Administrative Boundaries of Ain Beida Municipality¹



¹ The Toponymic Dictionary, op. cit., p. 100.

Appendix 2: Photographs of the Roman ruins located in 1 November Park in the city of Ain Beida.¹



¹ Ain Beida: Location and History. Accessed on Sunday, 19 July 2026, at 14:00, from the website .
<https://ainbeidahistoire.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.com>

Appendix 3: Photograph of Sheikh Mohamed Saïd Zemouchi.



Appendix 4: Photograph of the primary school named after Sheikh Mohamed Saïd Zemouchi.¹



¹ Photographed by the researcher on Monday, 20 July 2026, at 18:00, in the city of Aïn Beïda, Oum El Bouaghi Province.