

***Shatibi of Algeria, Sheikh Al-Muqri Al-Mufti;
Muhammad Baba Aamar (1893 CE – 1311 AH / 1976 CE
– 1396 AH)***

شاطبي الجزائر الشيخ المقرئ المفتي: محمد بابا اعمر

(1893 م . 1311 هـ / 1976 م . 1396 هـ)

Boulmali Aimene*

Received: 19/10/2025

Accepted: 07/11/2025

Published 05/12/2025

Abstract:

Algeria endured a harsh period under French colonization while simultaneously developing its own identity. During this time, many Algerian scholars emerged, excelling in religious guidance and jurisprudence. They formed a strong defense against cultural and religious distortion. Among these scholars was Shatibi of Algeria and Sheikh Al-Muqri Mufti Muhammad Baba Amr. This research aims to introduce Muhammad Baba Amr, a distinguished twentieth-century Algerian scholar dedicated to religion and his oppressed homeland. His memory is celebrated as a pious, learned, and committed figure. He helped establish a high-level Algerian educational tradition. This tradition nurtured loyal individuals devoted to religion and country. These men endured hardships to empower Algeria. They worked tirelessly to serve their nation and people. May God have mercy on their contributions.

Keywords: Baba Amr; Mufti; Shatibi; Blida; Algeria.

* University of Algiers (1), boulmaliaymen@gmail.com

ملخص:

لقد كان من قدر الجزائر أن تعيش ردها من الزمن تحت نير الاستعمار الفرنسي المجرم؛ وفي ذات الوقت كانت الجزائر ولادة؛ فقد تزامم ميلاد الكثير من أبنائها نبغوا في مجالات عديدة ومنها مجال الإرشاد الديني والاشتغال بالفقه وعلوم الدين عامة؛ فكانوا حصنا منيعا أما المسخ الديني والثقافي لأهل الجزائر ومن هؤلاء شاطبي الجزائر؛ الشيخ المقرئ المفتي محمد بابا اعمر رحمه الله تعالى؛ فكان من الدوافع ذات الأهمية في بحثنا هذا هو الإسهام في التعريف بأحد علماء (الجزائر الأقداد) في القرن العشرين؛ ممن اهتم بدينه وبحال بلده الجزائر التي كانت تحت نير الاستعمار الفرنسي البغيض؛ مخلصين في ذات الوقت من خلال ما سنكتبه ذكرى هذا الرجل العالم الورع المناضل المؤمن بدينه وبوطنه؛ مبرزين فضله ومآثره رحمه الله تعالى؛ فهو من زمرة الرجال الذين أسسوا مدرسة جزائرية عالية المستوى تخرج الأوفياء المخلصين للدين وللوطن؛ فحاضوا دروب المشقة يحفرون أحاديث التمكين، صعدا نحو العلى حتى حفيت أقدامهم في سبيل هدفهم النبيل خدمة للبلاد والعباد؛ رحمهم الله جميعا.

كلمات مفتاحية: بابا اعمر؛ المفتي؛ الشاطبي؛ البلدة؛ الجزائر.

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Responding author: BOULMAMI Aimene , boulmaliaymen@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and with His help we seek assistance; there is no power nor strength except with Allah, the Most High, the Most Great. Blessings and peace be upon the most honorable of messengers, our master and prophet, the best of all creation, and

upon his pure and righteous family and companions, and upon his wives, the mothers of the believers, and upon those who follow them in goodness until the Day of Judgment.

One of the important motivations in our research is to contribute to introducing one of the distinguished Algerian scholars of the twentieth century; those who cared deeply about their religion and the condition of their country, Algeria, which was under the oppressive French colonial rule.

Also, one of our personal motivations is to attempt—through what we will write—to immortalize the memory of this pious, scholarly, and struggling man, faithful to his religion and homeland; highlighting some of his virtues and achievements, may Allah have mercy on him.

The lives of these men, who established a high-level Algerian school that graduated loyal and sincere individuals devoted to religion and homeland, deserve recognition; they endured hardships, carving paths of empowerment, ascending to great heights until their feet were worn out in pursuit of their noble goal of serving the country and its people; may Allah have mercy on them all.

2. Birth, Lineage, and Education

He is Sheikh Muhammad bin Al-Hajj Mustafa bin Muhammad bin Al-Madani bin Sheikh Baba Omar Al-Balidi (Abu Bakr bin Ahmed Boussam, 2015, p. 50); Sheikh Muhammad Baba Omar bin Al-Hajj Mustafa was born in the Al-Duwairat neighborhood in the city of Al-Wurud (Blida) on the 22nd of Muharram 1311 AH, corresponding to August 5, 1893 AD. He studied through the traditional method at the Ibn

Saadoun Mosque in the center of Blida (currently Souk Street); he obtained his first certificate (Ijazah in the Seven Mutawatir Readings), granted to him by the scholar Muhammad Abdul Hay Al-Kattani Al-Hasani Al-Idrisi Al-Fasi in the year 1339 AH. At that time, our scholar was 28 years old and was an undisputed Imam, may God have mercy on him (Rabah Khaddousi, p. 29), in Blida, where he received his first Ijazah in the seven readings, reading and teaching, granted by the Moroccan scholar Muhammad Abdul Hay Al-Kattani Al-Hasani Al-Idrisi Al-Fasi. He was under thirty years old then and was an Imam in the readings.

Sheikh Baba Omar began his religious path after seeking knowledge and mastering it as a "Bash Hizab" in his birthplace in 1919. He then moved to the Qubba Mosque, where he was appointed Imam in 1925, and later took over the imamate of the new mosque in Algiers in 1934. After that, he was appointed to the position of Mufti in the same mosque. Initially, he was a Mufti of the Hanafi school in 1940 (Rabah Khaddousi, Blida: Scholars and Writers, p. 21), then he assumed the role of Mufti according to the Maliki reference at the Great Mosque in the capital in August 1941 after the death of Sheikh Hamdan Hammoud.

3. His Descriptions and Titles

He is the Imam, the memorizer, the master of recitations; the sheikh of reciters and the illustrious of reciters; he was fully accepted; a knowledgeable, practicing scholar, a role model in the jurisprudence of reciters and the authority of reciters, the distinguished scholar, jurist, and hadith expert Muhammad Baba Amer bin Al-Hajj Mustafa, may God have mercy on him; one of

the most prominent figures produced by these lands at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century; he is the prominent personality in the field of religion, knowledge, ethics, and defending the freedom of Algeria within the framework of the noble Islamic ethics; he witnessed the blessed liberation revolution, the two world wars, and many events in Algeria during the colonial era, including the events of May 8, 1945; he was well-versed in Islamic sciences, which allowed him to ascend to the pinnacle of issuing fatwas; he was honorable; generous in companionship; a human being in every sense of the word; enhanced by his profound and absolute humility and with all people.

These qualities and virtues and others made him a spiritual father, a role model, a thinker, and a guide for his generation (in his time); and for the subsequent generations influenced by his achievements, and perhaps this session and what we are in confirms what we say; with this abundance of ethics and qualities, he transcended the borders of Algeria to the global level.

Throughout his life, especially during the liberation war, the sheikh was known for his diligent struggle to elevate the status of Islam and preserve faith and belief, and for his honorable stances in this blessed revolution.

4. His Scientific Licenses

The Sheikh obtained several licenses, which we mention as follows and can be divided into three categories according to the grantor to Sheikh Muhammad Baba Omar:

1.4 First: Granted to him by Sheikh Khadem Al-Kitab wa Al-Sunnah Muhammad Abdul Hayy Al-Kattani

1. License in the Seven Mutawatir Qur'anic Readings in the year 1339 AH

2.4 Second: Granted to him by Sheikh Qaddour Ahmed bin Al-Hajj Al-Arabi, then Mufti of Maliki jurisprudence in Blida

These eight licenses are the hope and provision of every student of knowledge in the Islamic countries, east and west, and they are the essential texts and compositions indispensable during the period of study and acquisition; they are:

2. The poem of Ibn Ashir in Maliki jurisprudence.
3. The treatise of Ibn Abi Zayd Al-Qayrawani in Maliki jurisprudence.
4. The text of Mukhtasar Khalil in Maliki jurisprudence.
5. The text of Al-Ajrumiyyah in grammar.
6. Alfiya Ibn Malik in grammar.
7. The text of Qatr Al-Nada wa Ball Al-Sada by Ibn Hisham in grammar.
8. The text of Al-Sughra by Imam Al-Sanusi.
9. The poem of Al-Sullam in logic.

3.4 Third: It was granted to him by Sheikh Qaddour Al-Amin (the first Imam of the Great Mosque in Algiers).

10. Ijazah in the Prophetic Hadith.

4.4 Fourth: It was granted to him by Sheikh the interpreter, author of "Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir," Muhammad Al-Tahir ibn Ashur, the Tunisian Al-Hasani.

11. Ijazah in the narration of the Prophetic Hadith.

4 The Reciting Sheikh

Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amar was one of the distinguished specialists in Quranic recitations (both Murattal and Mujawwad); this elevated his status and spread his reputation throughout the Islamic world, surpassing national boundaries to achieve international recognition in his time despite the hardships and sufferings endured by the people of Algeria under the hateful, decadent French colonial oppression.

The late Sheikh had many recitations that carefully observed the rules of recitation; his recitations were very moving with a beautiful voice that captivates hearts. Some of them are published on YouTube for those who wish to listen to the Holy Quran in the voice of Sheikh Baba Amar, may God have mercy on him, such as Surah Al-Qasas and Surah Al-Ankabut.

Moreover, Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amar was passionate about Algerian Andalusian music, possessing extensive knowledge of its origins, types, and maqamat (musical modes). This knowledge helped him master Tajweed and gave his recitations a distinctive character, and he had a good voice (Abu Bakr bin Ahmed Bousam, 2015, p. 50).

5 His journey to Hajj

The Sheikh performed Hajj to the House of God as the head of the Hajj delegation in the year 1367 AH / 1948 AD by sea on a ship. He said on this journey a famous saying directed especially to the pilgrims, as he was the guide and leader of this delegation. He said, may God have mercy on him: "Traveling to Hajj is not like other travels; rather, as it has been said, it is

arriving in the presence of the Worshipped and standing in the arena of generosity."

6 The Hospitable Sheikh, may God have mercy on him

Many scholars and righteous people frequently visit Algeria during their journeys east or west, heading for Hajj from Mauritania or the Maghreb, or heading to Mauritania or the Maghreb from Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and other countries of the Arab East. Sheikh Abu Abdali recounts that the Mufti of Algeria, Muhammad Baba Amr, used to welcome them in Algeria during their pilgrimage and would host them at his place both on their way there and back. Sheikh Boualam Ould Rways assisted him in all this. Abu Abdali also adds that a member of the Mauritanian delegation once tried to print the journey of some of his relatives and gifted a copy to Sheikh Baba Amr Muhammad. Abu Abdali was among those who also gathered with them at the Mufti Baba Amr Muhammad's place, including writers and scholars, many of whom documented their pilgrimage journey (Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, p. 577).

7 Tasks and Positions Held

First: Some appointments and tasks assigned before independence (Rabah Khaddousi, Blida: Scholars and Writers, p. 21)

1. Appointed as a preacher at the Bin Saadoun Mosque in Blida in 1919.
2. Appointed as an imam at the Old Qubba Mosque in the capital in 1925.
3. Appointed as an imam at the New Mosque in Algiers in 1940.

4. Appointed as Mufti of Algerian lands at the Great Mosque in the capital in 1941.

In addition to all this, the mosques of Algeria bear witness to his presence through the lessons and sermons he delivered; as well as his scholarly presence as a teacher of the Noble Prophetic Hadith at the Institute of Higher Islamic Studies affiliated with higher education at that time, which was called the Winter Palace; located next to the Ketchaoua Mosque in the capital.

He was also confirmed in his attendance at official activities as the official Mufti; for example, in an article written by Bouchouchi about the opening of the Ben Aknoun school in 1954, which was a dual school combining Eastern and modern [European] tastes; succeeding the Tha'alabiya school at that time; the new school was dedicated to girls [currently Amara Rashid High School in Ben Aknoun]; which opened with about 400 students. According to Bouchouchi, the school was inaugurated by the Governor-General [Roger Léonard] in the presence of the new director Ahmed Ben Zakri as well as the presence of Abderrahmane Farès, president of the Algerian Council [local parliament]; in addition to Mufti Mohamed Baba Amar (Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, p. 449)

Secondly: Some appointments and tasks assigned after independence (Rabah Khaddousi, Blida: Scholars and Writers, p. 21)

Sheikh Mohamed Baba Amer received several positions and responsibilities after independence, including:

1. He was appointed in the Ministry of Indigenous Education and Religious Affairs to participate multiple times in

- Quran recitation forums; he also chaired Quran Tajweed competitions on several occasions.
2. He was assigned by the same ministry to teach Quranic recitations in imam training institutes; some graduating classes were named after him in honor of his memory and as a tribute to him, may God have mercy on him (The Sheikh Mohamed Baba Amer Batch).
 3. He was a member of the Quran manuscript review committee.
 4. He had a weekly radio segment titled "Religious Talk."

8 Writings and Contributions of the Sheikh

The Sheikh was one who nurtured and built men with his thought and awareness, especially since he lived through the presence of the French colonizer on our lands and witnessed serious events of crimes and mass exterminations of entire villages and hamlets; he invested, but his investment, may God have mercy on him, was in men. In addition to his sessions, scientific lessons, radio broadcasts, and participation as a judge in Quranic competitions; I did not find, upon a quick search, any written works of Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amer except what Abu Al-Qasim Saad mentioned when he pointed out that Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amer transferred the message [The Radiant Flower Regarding What Happened in Algeria When the Soldiers of the Infidels Invaded It] (Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, p. 340); which he translated into Arabic. It is a message written by Ibn Ruqayya by order of Bey Muhammad bin Othman in the year 1194 AH, containing several important events and news about the Pashas of Algeria and their activities. Mr. Rousseau also translated it into French in 1841 AD; it spans fifty pages in praise of the Turks (Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, p. 340).

9 Sheikh Zarrouk (Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, p. 105) was the teacher of Sheikh Baba Omar, may God have mercy on them both.

At that time, Inspector Distan prepared a report on Sheikh Zarrouk, the teacher in the city of Blida, stating that Sheikh Zarrouk's teaching was adequate but its impact was limited. The report noted that among his students at that time was a young man aged twenty named Mohamed Baba Omar. Sheikh Zarrouk received criticism from this inspector regarding his traditional teaching method, as he did not use the blackboard or any of the modern methods available then; rather, he taught in the traditional way. Despite this, he remained in his position until 1914, when he was succeeded by Sheikh Qallal Al-Manour, a graduate of the French Algiers School of Sharia (Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, p. 105)

10 The Ijazah of Sheikh Muhammad Kato, may God have mercy on him

Among what I have read is that the scholar Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amer granted Sheikh Muhammad Kato [may God have mercy on them both] authorization in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim and in the Muwatta of Imam Malik; and among what is stated in this ijazah, which reflects the humility of the scholars:

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and prayers and peace be upon the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him and his family, and thereafter:

The servant who acknowledges his weakness and shortcomings, a captive of his sin, seeking refuge in his Lord,

Muhammad bin Mustafa bin Muhammad bin al-Madani bin Sheikh Baba Amer, says: Our brother in God, adhering to the Sunnah of the Messenger of God [peace and blessings be upon him], the noble follower of the Book of God Almighty, the insightful jurist, the upright and honest scholar, Sayyid Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Hajj al-Saeed Kato has accompanied me many times and stayed with me for long blessed and happy periods. I have heard from him the recitation of Sahih al-Bukhari, and I have reviewed his precise recitation and excellent performance, his keenness and brilliance. May God protect and bless him, and grant him the best of conduct and leadership. He requested from the humble servant to connect his sanad (chain of transmission) through the path of ijazah, trusting in my good disposition and perfection, believing that this humble servant is worthy in this field. May God fulfill for us and for him what we hope for from the Most Generous, the Exalted...) Written on the 28th of Jumada al-Awwal in the year 1392 AH.

11 The Boldness of the Sheikh and the Algerian Cause

Sheikh Mohamed Baba Amar was a bold and honorable supporter of the revolution, detesting the hateful French colonialism; in 1956, he, along with a group of Algerian scholars and notables, issued an open letter to the French authorities condemning the repression and persecution in all its forms against innocent people, including killing, displacement, imprisonment, and pursuit, which the Algerian people were enduring at the time. The letter clarified that the solution lies in negotiating with the representatives of the Algerian people, the National Liberation Front. In August 1958, General de Gaulle summoned him and received him at the Élysée Palace in Paris,

where the Sheikh reiterated the statement made in the 1956 letter, saying: "The only solution to stop the war in Algeria is to open negotiations with the representatives of the National Liberation Front." (Rabah Khaddousi, Blida: Scholars and Writers, p. 21)

This letter, which was published in Algeria, France, Tunisia, and Morocco at the time, sparked significant controversy within French political circles and was featured in the newspaper *Le Monde* on November 11, 1956.

Moreover, throughout his life, especially during the liberation revolution, the sheikh was known for his relentless struggle to elevate the status of Islam, preserve faith and belief, and for his honorable stances during this blessed revolution.

He strongly opposed what the colonial authorities at the time wanted regarding Algerian Muslim women; he published his views on this subject in one of the French newspapers in Algeria issued on February 8 and 9, 1959; and it was published in the press columns, responding to the French authorities who were trying to issue new "modern" laws for family and personal status.

The sheikh was and will remain a role model for generations in courage, truthfulness in speech, and sincerity. May God have mercy on Sheikh Baba Amr and grant him paradise (Abdelkader Hamdawi, November 20, 2019).

He also opened the doors of the Great Mosque wide open to the fighters of the glorious November Revolution; he housed them in his office and even hid weapons and medicines intended for them there, which made him a target of searches by the

French colonial authority (Abu Bakr bin Ahmed Bousam, 2015, p. 51).

12 The Sheikh and His Support for Just Causes and His Humanitarian Stances

Researcher Qarig Hassan mentions that Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amer had several humanitarian stances and supported just causes around the world, including his participation in the Committee for the Defense of Palestine alongside a number of scholars, headed by Sheikh Al-Tayeb Al-Aqbi in 1949.

Among the other stances he was known for was his participation in conferences for dialogue between the heavenly religions and his objection to the sentencing of Ahmed Zbana and his companion Abdelkader Faraj, but fate decreed that the sentence be carried out. Many freedom fighters also testified to Sheikh Muhammad Baba Amer hiding weapons in the mosque and many of them in his house, as previously mentioned; this is evidence of his contribution, may God have mercy on him, to the blessed liberation revolution for the sake of securing freedom and independence for Algeria. The researcher adds that the Sheikh participated in the ceremonies for the repatriation of the remains of Emir Abdelkader on July 6, 1966 (Qarig Hassan, 2017-01-08).

13 Death

Sheikh Baba Amar lived for 85 years, a life full of activity, vitality, and defending the sanctities of religion and the homeland; after a life rich with achievements, jihad, sacrifice, giving, and religious work to fortify the Algerian identity and its foundations against the hateful colonial distortion. The spirit of

the Sheikh departed to its Creator in Algeria on the blessed Eid al-Adha, Thursday, the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah 1396 AH, corresponding to December 12, 1976 AD. He was buried the following day (Friday) in the Sidi M'hamed cemetery in the capital on December 13, 1976, the first day of Tashreeq. May God have mercy on him abundantly and reward him on our behalf, on behalf of Algeria and Islam, with the best reward for a knowledgeable, active, and striving scholar who devoted himself to the cause of God and the homeland with all he had, both soul and wealth (Rabah Khaddousi, Blida: Scholars and Writers, p. 22).

4. CONCLUSION

This was a fragrant biography of one of Algeria's notable men, whose memory we are rightfully obliged to honor and whose life story we must present to the generations to follow in their footsteps in serving the country and its people; this is an act of loyalty to them, may God have mercy on them. Perhaps what I recommend in these lines as guidance to our esteemed jurists and imams, especially, is to draw inspiration from the life of this man and to apply some of his achievements to the current reality. In the biographies of the great, there are solutions to our life problems and answers to many questions. The lives of these men, who established a high-level Algerian school that graduated the loyal and devoted to religion and homeland, endured hardships and carved paths of empowerment, ascending towards greatness until their feet were worn in pursuit of their noble goal of serving the country and its people. May God have mercy on them all.

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