

“Berber genealogy and the politics of prehistoric archaeology and craniology in French Algeria (1860s-1880s)”

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ABSTRACT

Following the conquest of Algiers and its surrounding territory by the French army in 1830, officers noted an abundance of standing stones in this region of North Africa. Although they attracted considerably less attention among their cohort than more familiar Roman monuments like triumphal arches and bridges, these prehistoric remains were similar to formations found in Brittany and other parts of France. However, the first effort to document these remains occurred in 1863, when Laurent-Charles Féraud, a French army interpreter, recorded thousands of dolmens and stone formations southwest of Constantine. Alleging that these constructions were Gallic, Féraud hypothesized the close affinity of the French, who claimed descent from the ancient Gauls, with the early inhabitants of North Africa. After Féraud's claims met with skepticism among many prehistorians, French scholars argued that these remains were constructed by the ancestors of the Berbers (Kabyles in contemporary parlance), whom they hypothesized had been dominated by a blond race of European origin. Using craniometric statistics of human remains found in the vicinity of the standing stones to propose a genealogy of the Kabyles, French administrators in Algeria thereafter suggested that their mixed origins allowed them to adapt more easily than the Arab population to French colonial governance. This case study at the intersection of prehistoric archaeology, ancient history, and craniology exposes how genealogical (and racial) classification made signal contributions to French colonial ideology and policy between the 1860s and 1880s.

FRENCH COLONIALISM AND COLONIAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ALGERIA

Since the 1980s, scholars interested in the nexus of the history of archaeology and French colonialism have noted the prominent place of ancient Roman ruins in French endeavours in Algeria from the earliest years of the conquest.² Not only did the French forcibly displace thousands of existing inhabitants from cities like Algiers from the time of their invasion in July 1830,³ but they also pillaged abundant vestiges of Roman military presence from the time of their arrival to support the practical needs of the *armée d'Afrique* and European settlers.⁴ Although many of the artistic depictions of the new North Africa colony were intended to exoticize the Algerian landscape,⁵ French officers also used historical and artistic renderings of ancient Rome to suggest their rightful tenure as the heirs of ancient Rome.⁶ Their control of the narrative and monuments of Roman archaeology allowed them to perpetuate the idea of European superiority over the Muslim inhabitants of North Africa.⁷ Amidst a war of great violence in which the civilian inhabitants of Algeria suffered enormous loss of property, livelihoods, and lives, French claims to a historical connection to ancient Roman monuments helped the conquerors exercise control over their surroundings and justify restoration of the region to European rule.

As was typical of European colonial archaeology in the Mediterranean and the Middle East in this epoch, Western Europeans dominated the resulting discourse on the origins of North Africa to the exclusion of all other voices who had a stake in ancient remains to which they were connected.⁸ Although French officers initially depended on Muslim inhabitants' input as to the location of Roman sites in insecure territories of

Algeria beyond their reach,⁹ they almost entirely excluded the largely rural-based indigenous population of Arabs and Berbers (the latter of whom French sources often referred to as Kabyles), who are estimated to have numbered about 2.5 million in the mid-1860s, from having a voice or meaningful role in interpreting the significance of the archaeological remains of Algeria.¹⁰ Rather than acknowledging the close familiarity of indigenous residents with these monuments, they discounted as primitive or dismissed existing connections of non-European populations to the Roman monuments in the landscape. Some scholars claimed that the French (as opposed to Arab and Kabyle inhabitants) were the legitimate issue of the Roman bloodline.¹¹ Indeed, French administrators, officers, and scholars used studies of the same ruins to support the benefits of imperial expansion and French historical claims to legitimate control of North African territories.¹² Scholars rarely obfuscated the fact that humanistic research was driven by colonial ambitions. It was, in fact, symptomatic of the general inability of French colonial science to question its own motives.¹³

The history of French colonial archaeology and physical anthropology in Algeria is thus an important piece of the historical reassessment of the phenomenon that Suzanne Marchand has described as the ‘antiquities rush’. This era, ushered in by Napoleonic looting of the monuments of Egypt and Rome in the last decade of the eighteenth century, normalized and legitimized the competitive looting of classical monuments and artefacts in the decades that followed.¹⁴ Differing in both scope and ideology from European exploration and colonialism of the early modern period, which brought an assortment of curiosities, natural wonders, and valuables back to the British Isles and the continent,¹⁵ archaeological and later anthropological and ethnographic research in Algeria from the

1830s supported France's future efforts to identify, claim, and govern the lands their forces dominated, conquered, or occupied. French archaeological exploration conducted in Algeria, which occurred in the midst of a particularly brutal colonial occupation, nonetheless lay the foundation for the French study of classical antiquity in the Mediterranean basin.¹⁶ Although prehistoric archaeology in Algeria was a sidebar to the dominant field of French classical archaeology, and as we will see below, was not successful in pressing its original narrative of identifying the ancient Gauls of metropolitan France with the builders of stone monuments in North Africa, it is nonetheless an important vantage point from which to see how deeply implicated archaeological research was in the war effort. As practiced by French officers, archaeological exploration offered critical ideological support for the conquest and 'pacification' of the new colony.

In recent studies of French engagement with antiquities in Algeria, historians have placed the greatest emphasis on the period after 1870, when much of the territory was brought under civilian control and the institutions that directed and showcased archaeological and anthropological activities were formalized.¹⁷ However, there is much to be learned still from the less well-studied era that followed the revolution of 1848, when Algeria was formally incorporated into metropolitan France as the departments of Oran, Algiers, and Constantine. As noted by Osama Abi-Mershed, despite political integration, this period brought the formalization of the Office of Arab Affairs' technocratic administration and punitive powers over the non-European population of Algeria. Officers and translators in what came to be known as the Office of Arab Affairs (*Bureaux arabes*) not only controlled the main avenues of regular contact with Arabs and

Kabyles but they commandeered the colonial legislation by which the as yet poorly understood indigenous populations were governed.¹⁸

Not coincidentally, officers and translators of the *Bureaux arabes* were among the earliest contributors to discussions of prehistoric standing stones in Algeria. These studies constituted one of the few exceptions during the first fifty years of French occupation to the nearly absolute focus of French officers and scholars on prominent monuments of the Roman past. As noted by Gabriel Camps in 1961, this scholarly tradition was not anomalous but had deep roots: from at least the eighteenth century, Europeans visiting North Africa, like the eighteenth-century British cleric and antiquarian, remarked upon viewing intriguing traces of the pre-classical past.¹⁹ Those serving in the Office of Arab Affairs had significant autonomy and regular interactions with native populations, which allowed them, in turn, to interview local inhabitants about the location and significance of prehistoric sites. Their statistical training likewise offered an effective, albeit far from objective, standpoint from which to conduct ethnographical and anthropological studies on their often unwilling interviewees; as noted by Abi-Mershed,

...deep complicity with imperial domination continued to taint the intellectual engagements of the officer of Arab affairs. Even his deliberate efforts to inject colonial decision making with more realistic reflection or expectations were repeatedly circumscribed, if not overwhelmed, by the need to adhere to the cultural wish list of French imperialism. In practice, his prescriptions translated into colonial policies that tended to sidestep the local context in order to find solace in broad civilizational paradigms.²⁰

Mixing archaeological research undertaken on their own time with ethnographical data

collected in the course of their duties suggests that French officers of the *Bureaux arabes* viewed the ancient past as relevant to interventions with their Arab and Kabyle charges.

MEGALITHS AND ANCIENT GAULS IN ALGERIA

Less than a year following the conquest of Algiers, there is evidence that at least some French officers were moved to record the presence of megalithic stone formations, which were not yet known by this name, on the southern coast of the Mediterranean.²¹ One of the first to document these remains in the newly founded French colony of Algeria following the defeat of the Bey of Algiers was Captain Claude-Antoine Rozet, a member of the topographical section of the French army responsible for surveying the coast between Algiers and Oran.²² In a publication of 1833, he attributed the standing stones he observed to the west of Algiers to the ancient Gauls, who constructed similar monuments in the west of France.²³ In subsequent decades, these striking formations continued to draw the attention of French officers.²⁴ Not surprisingly, since they were reminiscent of ruins found in metropolitan France, standing stones constituted the basis of some of the earliest discussions held among the founding members of the Société archéologique de Constantine and the Société historique algérienne, which were established in Constantine in 1852 and Algiers in 1856, respectively.²⁵

There seems to have been some trepidation at this early time of moving beyond descriptions of standing stones and offering definitive explanations of their origins. Officers' inability to arrive at a consensus about the identification of the builders of these monuments was due in part to their unfamiliarity with methodological approaches used by contemporary prehistorians.²⁶ Captain Emmanuel Payen, superior commander of the

subdivision of Batna and commissioned in the Office of Arab Affairs,²⁷ likewise noted the challenges faced by military officers whose responsibilities left them insufficient time to explore the sites in question in depth. Payen himself commented on the dolmens and attributed the monuments to the indigenous inhabitants. However, rather than ascribing them to the distant past, he dated them to the relatively recent period of Roman rule.²⁸

In spring 1863, however, the British paleontologist and collector Henry Christy visited the springs of Bou-Merzoug with the guidance of Laurent-Charles Féraud, who had lived in Algeria since the age of 16 and was then serving as the interpreter for the general commander of the division of Constantine.²⁹ Situated just 35 kilometers southeast of the city of Constantine on the road to Batna, the waters of Bou-Merzoug revealed in their vicinity a remarkable number of what Féraud referred to as ancient dolmens, cromlechs, menhirs, and tumuli, using the terminology applicable to such sites in metropolitan France. Both men concluded that the monuments were of Gallic origin just as had been done by Rozet three decades earlier. (Figure 1) As the sponsor of this venture, Christy, who had long been interested in Celtic remains, spent several days at the site with the support of Féraud and four workmen. The latter helped dig among the stones and Féraud, who was enthused by this experience, made drawings of the large number of remains close to the surface.³⁰ Féraud collected some of the human remains they found on site for a future study to determine their age, sex, and race. (Figure 2) Christy subsequently donated artefacts found during these excavations to the museum recently established in Constantine.³¹

Soon after these brief excavations, Féraud made a case for the Gallic origins of the standing stones of Bou-Merzoug to the members of the Société archéologique de

Constantine. French officers and civilians resident in Constantine, including a significant number of interpreters, had founded the organization on the model of learned societies in metropolitan France.³² They hoped that by educating officers of the *armée d'Afrique* about the importance of antiquities and the necessity of recording and conserving ancient monuments, they could help diminish the vandalism and destruction of archaeological sites in the region caused by the French army.³³ With its focus on prehistoric remains, Féraud's report differed in subject matter from the majority of pieces in the *Recueil des notices et mémoires de la Société archéologique de la province de Constantine*, which had up till then largely concentrated on Roman antiquities and inscriptions.³⁴

Féraud's report on the Gallic origins of the megalithic remains outside of Constantine quickly became very influential among scholars of prehistory. His publication drew the attention foremost of Alexandre Bertrand, then editor of the prominent journal *Revue archéologique* in Paris and soon to be appointed director of Napoleon III's Musée gallo-romain (later the Musée des antiquités nationales) in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Bertrand, whose interests spanned from prehistory to the Frankish period, was clearly excited by Féraud's Gallic hypothesis. Rather than arguing directly for the ancient Gauls as the earliest conquerors of North Africa, however, Bertrand proposed a somewhat more subtle attribution of the stone monuments in Algeria to an unnamed race of dolmen builders that had earlier generated monuments and flints in France during the Bronze and Iron Ages.³⁵ He thus maintained, as did Féraud, that northern Europeans had conquered the ancient populations of North Africa many centuries earlier and enabled them to undergo a developmental stage similar to that of the inhabitants of Western Europe.³⁶

In 1864, surveying activities by French officers in the territories of the Oulad Abd-en-Nour tribe gave Féraud an opportunity to explore additional dolmens, including those of Kheneg on the right bank of the Roumel north of Constantine. As a sign of the growing importance of his topic, Féraud published a more comprehensive survey of this topic in Bertrand's *Revue archéologique* in 1865. In it, he briefly described the more than a thousand megalithic remains at Bou-Merzoug as well as standing stones at a number of other locations in the division of Constantine. Despite Bertrand's alternative interpretation, Féraud continued to argue forcefully in favor of the Gallic attribution of the megalithic monuments of Algeria. He also complained about the superstitious ignorance of native interlocutors, as he had done in the previous article.³⁷ Féraud's work found an immediate audience, only some of which was enthusiastic. On the basis of Féraud's claims, for instance, the historian Henri Martin, whose publications laid the groundwork for Celtic studies in France, proposed that the affinity between remains in North Africa and on the European continent stemmed from their contemporaneous origin during the period of Celtic migrations in the centuries prior to the Roman conquest.³⁸

It is important to note that the impact of Féraud's opinionated article was not restricted, however, to making a case for the Gallic origins of the Algerian megaliths. As a translator for the general commander of the division of Constantine since 1855, Féraud had access to the local library of the Office of Arab Affairs, which typically contained works related to both ancient and more recent histories of North Africa.³⁹ More importantly, he had regular contact with indigenous inhabitants in the region during his eight-year tenure. His interactions as an administrator were facilitated by his mastery by this time of not only Arabic but also the Berber language.⁴⁰ Féraud's linguistic skills and

the authority he yielded over all facets of the livelihood of local tribes, however, did not cultivate abundant respect for their culture. To reinforce his views about their inferiority, he used what was ostensibly an article on archaeology to criticize Berber customs and beliefs. Underlining the naïve and superstitious nature of Arabs and Kabyles, Féraud claimed that they attributed the monuments at Bou-Merzoug to ancient pagans (*djouhala*) and left the standing stones undisturbed mainly because they believed such sites and nearby caves to be inhabited by vampires and ogres (*el-R'oul*).⁴¹ He recounted one story he had learned from a local that related to a dolmen of gray limestone in eastern Kabylia known as *El'Aroussa* (the fiancée). He alleged that Berbers believed this monument to be the petrified remains of an incestuous couple and their wedding party, who faced divine punishment for celebrating their impious union.⁴²

While it is difficult to verify the authenticity of his account from contemporary sources, since Féraud was one of the earliest to conduct this manner of interview, he was certainly not the last to belittle indigenous relationships with what they perceived as the spirits of ancient monuments and denounce as primitive their propensity to treat these sites as sacred.⁴³ With the creation of the French Protectorate of Tunisia in 1881 and that of Morocco in 1911, French ethnographers, including most famously Edmond Doutté, conducted fieldwork in these territories and collected similar lore related to megalithic monuments.⁴⁴ They were predisposed to disrespect their interlocutors as superstitious, ignorant, fanatical and backward: primitive by comparison to their European contemporaries.⁴⁵ They also characterized much of the information they received as far inferior to what was already known in the West by the time of the Romans.⁴⁶ Some recent historical scholarship, while not nearly as biased as these early twentieth-century works,

has continued to rely uncritically on early ethnographic work that echoed Féraud's claims that Kabyle and Arab populations were uninterested in, actively dismissive of, or deeply fearful of pre-Islamic monuments.⁴⁷

We can explain the stimulus for Féraud's derisive comments by following the trajectory of his subsequent publications. After his articles on the denial of the significance of local inhabitants' familiarity and longtime interactions with ancient monuments, he published an essay on the recent history of the tribes of the region of Constantine that suggested little or no connection to these sites.⁴⁸ At this time, at least some of Féraud's contemporaries recognized the possibility of continuity of practice between the builders of these monuments and Kabyle tribes, who erected stones at cemeteries and used them at their meeting places.⁴⁹ Drawing from Ann Stoler's eloquent methodology for mapping power relations on colonial archives,⁵⁰ we may suggest that Féraud's resistance to ceding this point was inspired by his composition of an alternative French interpretation of the significance of these monuments.

As has been shown by Alice Conklin, French scholars working in many scientific fields implicated in the *mission civilisatrice* employed the binary of civilization and barbarism to justify and maintain their hegemony in Algeria.⁵¹ Féraud's work in the *Bureaux arabes*, and the power relations his position entailed,⁵² cultivated his pursuit of an interpretation of the megaliths that legitimized the French control of the territories of Algeria. With his claims to ancient European presence in the region, Féraud envisioned the recent invasion by the *armée d'Afrique* as sanctioned by Algeria's prehistoric colonization by Gallic warriors. The Ministry of War no doubt had no qualms about this outlook if we may judge from Féraud's rapid rise through the ranks of the colonial

administration as the principal interpreter of the division of Constantine (1871) and the interpreter of the Governor-General in in Algiers (1872). Fellow officers in the *armée d'Afrique* and civilian archaeologists in the colony also rewarded his accomplishments by electing him to the presidency of the Société historique algérienne.⁵³

INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS ON BERBER ORIGINS?

Despite a largely positive reception among French scholars and colonial administrators, Féraud's publications sparked a vocal backlash among the rapidly growing number of European archaeologists, antiquaries, geologists, and physical anthropologists interested in the disputed evidence of an antediluvian epoch. Although Féraud enjoyed the powerful support of Bertrand, few non-French scholars of prehistory embraced his allegations of the Gallic or Celtic source of megaliths found in the French colony of Algeria. As pointed out in a devastating response by the Swiss prehistorian Frédéric Troyon, one could extrapolate on the basis of Féraud's logic that comparable finds made as far north as Scandinavia as being evidence of ancient Gallic settlement. Troyon thus urged greater precision in the attribution of megalithic remains than was the case with Féraud's Celtic hypothesis.⁵⁴ Unlike works underlining the connectivity between the Roman and French past, which were produced and consumed largely by a French audience, the pan-European nature of prehistoric studies demanded a more nuanced and less obviously self-serving explanation of the megaliths. Scholars expected a more objective view, or at least one that did not map so neatly onto French imperial ideology. Despite these criticisms, Féraud continued in subsequent years to advocate for recognition of the parallels between prehistoric remains in Algeria and their Gallic

equivalents in France.⁵⁵

In the mid- to late 1860s, prehistorians across Europe debated Féraud's thesis, with and without Bertrand's modifications. The majority linked the discovery of megaliths in Algeria to a long tradition of European ethnographical studies and linguistic scholarship that suggested the early presence of Northern Europeans in North Africa. Based upon an inscription found in Karnak, Egypt, French scholars argued that light skinned and fair-haired people had invaded Libya and Egypt at least fourteen centuries before the Common Era.⁵⁶ These arrivals mixed with the indigenous peoples, who were understood by these authors to be the ancestors of the Kabyles. According to this interpretation, the Berber peoples consisted of a blend of indigenous Libyans, northern European blonds, and a smaller proportion of Arabs. Added to this genealogy were small fractions of Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, sub-Saharan Africans, Israelites, and Turks, a heritage that attested to the numerous foreign invasions that had beset the indigenous peoples of Algeria both in the ancient and more recent past.⁵⁷ However, according to French scholars, it was entirely owing to European migrants that the ancestors of the Berbers could construct the megaliths, some of which dated to the Stone Age and others to more recent epochs.⁵⁸

It is important to note the ways in which this explanation as to why the megaliths in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco resembled those in France differed significantly from both ancient and medieval scholarship on the Berbers.⁵⁹ In the early fifth century, Augustine of Hippo used the term *Maures* (Moors) to designate the indigenous inhabitants of Mauretania in North Africa who dwelled neither in the deserts or mountains. He clearly distinguished them from the Vandal warriors who crossed the

Mediterranean in 429 CE, just a few years before his death.⁶⁰ In contrast to Augustine, the sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius identified the Maures as having descended from the Phoenicians. He and his contemporary, the Roman-African author Corippus, used the term Maures to designate ‘barbarian’ inhabitants of North Africa. He noted that their primitive lifestyles and darkly pigmented skin easily distinguished them from both Romans and Vandals.⁶¹ While we lack contemporary witnesses as to the self-perception of the Maures, Jonathan Conant has argued convincingly that they had become significantly Romanized, and to some extent Christianized, in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries. They acknowledged Byzantine rule yet maintained substantial autonomy up to the time of the Arab conquest.⁶² Medieval Arab historiography regarding Berber ancestry, by contrast, largely sought to identify them as a non-indigenous people. Most suggested Eastern origins for the Berbers, a tradition that was refuted in the fourteenth century by Ibn Khaldûn in his *History of the Berbers*.⁶³

By contrast, when European visitors arrived in the Maghreb during the eighteenth century, they made the novel assertion (given Procopius’ testimony to the contrary) to explain Kabyle ancestry as linked to the Vandals. They based these conclusions on a combination of ancient documents and their impressions of the indigenous people with whom they had presumably made fleeting contact in the loosely aligned Ottoman territories. One of the most influential scholars to write on this subject was Thomas Shaw, who took an ethnographic interest in the peoples he encountered during his thirteen-year appointment as the British consular chaplain in Algiers and travels in the region in the 1720s and early 1730s. Describing the inhabitants of the Aurès Mountains, he noted that many had lighter coloured hair, skin, and eyes than their contemporaries.

He concluded that these ‘northern’ features were evidence of the occupation of the Vandals.⁶⁴ James Bruce, a Scottish wine merchant, Mediterranean traveler, and briefly consul to Algiers in the mid-1760s, voiced similar sentiments in the famous travelogue he composed in the late 1760s.⁶⁵ Written decades before Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* made it fashionable to denounce the Germanic peoples as barbaric,⁶⁶ these works contributed to the evolving understanding of Britain’s place in the world as a Protestant nation.⁶⁷

While it is indeed possible that the Kabyle inhabitants of the Aurès Mountains had been affected by Vandal presence in the fifth century, something which is difficult to assess due to the highly fragmentary archaeological and historical record of the Vandal conquest,⁶⁸ it is perhaps more important to focus on the way in which the work of Shaw and Bruce shaped the thinking of French officers and civilian archaeologists a century later. Not only did their attribution of Vandal ancestry to the Kabyles substantially alter late antique understanding that distinguished sharply between the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa and later Germanic arrivals, but it also conveniently linked the indigenous inhabitants to the alleged destroyers of Roman North Africa, a view no longer maintained by modern archaeologists.⁶⁹ Once again, scholarly interpretation of the archaeological data in the nineteenth century allowed the French to posit their own rightful presence in North Africa as opposed to that of the indigenous peoples.

In 1830, at the time of the French conquest of the Regency of Algiers, European observers initially used the term Maures to designate city-dwelling Arabs and Berbers as opposed to the Turkish, Kuloglu or Korouglis (descendants of Turkish unions with indigenous women), Kabyle (rural Berbers), Israelite (Jewish), black, and Mediterranean

(a category that might include a variety of backgrounds, including Maltese, Greek, and Armenian) residents of Algeria.⁷⁰ Édouard Lapène, a lieutenant colonel in the artillery, held that Kabyle ancestry was purportedly shaped by a series of invasions including the Philistines, Vandals, Goths, and Arabs. Despite Procopius' suggestion of substantial differences and the lack of mixing between Maures and Vandals (which could have conceivably been a later development), Lapène assumed from the light complexions of at least some of the Kabyles that this signaled the contribution of the Germanic peoples to the ethnic landscape of North Africa.⁷¹ In 1846, the British traveler Dawson Borrer, who had been granted the unusual position of being embedded in a French army column headed for the Sahara, reiterated the opinion that the Kabyles of the Aurès looked as if they were of more Germanic ancestry than Arab. He, too, attributed these features to inherited traces left by the fifth-century Vandal invasion.⁷² The oft-repeated narrative of Berber descent from the Vandals proved enduring and likewise appeared in substantially later works including the historian Charles Diehl's influential *L'Afrique byzantine* (1896).

As French tenure in Algeria wore on and the Ottoman legacy faded under the pressures of rapidly expanding military operations, however, French officers and scholars worked to document the genealogy of the groups they encountered in the colony in greater detail. They did so largely on the basis of a traditional amalgam of ancient written sources and their impressions of the physical appearance of the inhabitants of Algeria. Primary among their efforts were the increasingly fine-grained distinctions they made between the Kabyles, whom they characterized as sedentary, industrious, little changed by time, and resistant to the culture of their conquerors, and the Arabs, whom they stereotyped as foreign and fanatical nomadic invaders.⁷³ This classificatory scheme of the

population of Algeria was appealing to its authors for a variety of reasons: it digested and simplified social realities in a manner that facilitated French rule.⁷⁴

However, this standardized rubric, the basis for French hopes that the Kabyles would be more easily assimilated than Arabs into colonial society, was more difficult to apply in practice than in theory.⁷⁵ In the late 1860s, most French scholars and administrators acknowledged that they had not yet sufficiently familiarized themselves with local custom, dress, and language, to be consistently adept at distinguishing between Arab and Kabyle residents.⁷⁶ Others attributed this situation to the level of intermarriage between the two groups, which had lessened their differences.⁷⁷ The Berber people remained a particular puzzle and an object of fascination to French observers, since they were difficult to define historically and linguistically. Their physical appearance, including traits that were thought to resemble Europeans, made them even more of an enigma.⁷⁸

CRANIOLOGY AND BERBER ORIGINS

To avoid creating the impression that this research occurred within a historical vacuum, it is important to acknowledge the humanitarian catastrophe that was unfolding contemporary to the historical and archaeological debates laid out above. Not by chance, the integration of physical anthropology into more general ethnological studies of the Kabyles occurred just as French colonization and ‘pacification’ of Algeria were yielding devastating consequences for the indigenous population. As noted by the historian John Ruedy, between 1830 and 1954, more than 3 million hectares of agricultural land moved from the hands of Muslim natives to European (mainly French) colonists.⁷⁹ These actions

were largely the result of rapacious metropolitan military and administrative policies in the 1840s and 1850s that accelerated French expansion into Algerian territory and increased the rate at which civilian settlers were able to appropriate fertile lands from Arabs and Kabyles.⁸⁰ By the 1860s, these unfavourable conditions, in addition to drought, swarms of locusts and grasshoppers, a powerful earthquake and the spread of cholera, brought on a humanitarian disaster of cataclysmic proportions to the largely subsistence-level economy of Algeria's non-European inhabitants.⁸¹ The nadir of these rapidly deteriorating circumstances was the Algerian famine of 1868-69, during which scholars estimate that between 820,000 to 1,000,000 Arabs and Berbers, roughly one-third to one-half of the Muslim population in the colony, starved to death or succumbed to disease. European civilian settlers seem, by contrast, to have largely escaped the scourge of this man-made demographic catastrophe.⁸²

Nadia Abu El-Haj has deftly observed how humanistic and scientific disciplines have historically complemented one another and enabled nations to refine national history and identity from a variety of perspectives.⁸³ In the case of Algeria, the increasingly statistical and bureaucratic approach to governance effectively allowed metropolitan authorities and scholars to claim objectivity at the same time they masked or ignored certain features of the unpalatable realities they had helped create.⁸⁴ Indeed, from the late 1860s, French anthropologists used Algeria as a sort of open laboratory in which they analyzed the health and reproduction rates of indigenous peoples and assessed the challenges that Europeans' faced in their acclimitization to the North African colony. They hoped to elicit information that would help settlers adapt successfully to their new surroundings.⁸⁵

Important to these studies was the development of morphological categories that they might use to measure physical distinctions between the Arab and Kabyle populations.⁸⁶ Besides measuring the skulls of living Arabs and Berbers,⁸⁷ they also undertook research aimed at understanding the origins of the populations of Algeria, a project that, as we have seen, was previously conducted mainly on the basis of historical and archaeological sources. While authorities did not agree on the precise origins and sub-categories of their subjects, they were confident that identifying differences in the characteristics of Arabs and Kabyles would help the French attain the submission of the Algerian colony more quickly.⁸⁸ As noted by Paul Topinard, recognizing Kabyle characteristics was critical since, as a more sedentary people than the nomadic Arabs, they were effectively the future work force of the colony.⁸⁹ Even if, as some argued, the Kabyles could not be construed as a race due to the extent to which they had mixed with other peoples, French scholars believed that racial classification using scientific methods and language had the potential to solidify the until-then elusive categories of inhabitants necessary to the efficacy of the bureaucracies developing around the *armée d'Afrique* and colonial rule more generally.⁹⁰ Ethnographic research, now backed by craniological studies, thus laid the groundwork for both French historical claims and practical methods to gain mastery of the Algerian territory.

European 'discovery' of the megaliths was key to the advancement of these discussions. As evidenced by Féraud's explorations in 1863, Algerian standing stones were often found together with human skeletal remains. During the latter part of the decade, by which time French officers and scholars had attributed the construction of the megaliths to the ancestors of the Berbers and physical anthropology had emerged as an

influential discipline, attention shifted to studying these bones for additional evidence about Kabyle ancestry. Rather than the almost exclusive focus on ancient texts and archaeological artefacts that had dominated previous research on the origins of the Kabyles, this skeletal data called for the classificatory approach of zoologists and physical anthropologists. These remains quickly became integral to the identification of the origins of the inhabitants of Algeria.

Scholars in metropolitan France and Algeria took their cue from race scientists such as Armand de Quatrefages at the Museum d'histoire naturelle in Paris and Paul Broca and Paul Topinard at the Société d'anthropologie de Paris, respectively. These authors blended morphological statistics with tribal genealogy elicited from classical historical and literary accounts and inscriptions. They encouraged archaeological enthusiasts to expand their horizons beyond monuments and incorporate measurements derived from skeletal remains into their research. French officers, just like administrators and scholars, were attracted, moreover, by what they characterized as more scientific and objective methods for the identification of race among the populations that constructed these sites.⁹¹ These fields of inquiry had advanced sufficiently by the 1860s to give practitioners greater confidence than decades earlier, when Jean Guyon, head surgeon of the *armée d'Afrique*, had examined prehistoric human remains found at Ras Aconater in 1846 but declined to link them to a specific population.⁹²

General Léon Faidherbe, who was serving in the 1860s as the commander of the subdivision of Bône (modern Annaba) and was elected as the president of the Académie d'Hippone in the same city, was one of the first officers to undertake a study of megaliths that incorporated the formal examination of skeletal remains. In July and October 1867,

excavations he conducted at the prehistoric site of Roknia, thermal waters located southeast of Constantine in the vicinity of Guelma, yielded more than 3,000 graves. Influenced by the work of A. Letouneux, who found Féraud's Celtic argument unconvincing and pointed instead to the indigenous origins of the megaliths,⁹³ Faidherbe attributed these finds to the ancient Libyan ancestors of the Kabyles (and more specifically the Berber tribe of the Chaouïa). In addition to collecting the dimensions of ancient skulls, Faidherbe measured the heads of Berber volunteers among his soldiers then serving as *tirailleurs* in the infantry of the *armée d'Afrique*.⁹⁴ On this basis, a comparative method likewise used in metropolitan France by Broca and others,⁹⁵ he argued that the Kabyles were more pure in this early period than they were under French occupation. This perspective highlighted the esteem with which Faidherbe held the ancient Libyans as compared to contemporary Kabyles, whom he believed had mixed over the centuries with a succession of the region's conquerors. Faidherbe nonetheless still praised the Kabyles as being more reliable soldiers than their Arab counterparts.

Jules-René Bourguignat, a naturalist whose work mainly focused on mollusks, passed through Algeria in 1868. He was inspired by ongoing discussions to pursue research on the ancestors of the Berber peoples. With Faidherbe's permission to explore Roknia with the benefit of an escort and soldiers for the undertaking, Bourguignat spent just two brief days at Roknia. He nonetheless managed to excavate as many as 28 dolmens in this short time.⁹⁶ He noted on the basis of the measurements he made of the small number of cranial remains found at the site that the main constituency buried at Roknia consisted of Kabyles. Importantly, he also noted that this Berber population was supplemented by a certain number of graves of Aryans from the north (*Arias*), blacks

from sub-Saharan Africa, individuals of mixed race, and Egyptians. The graves suggested to him that the Kabyle tribe buried at Roknia maintained contact with communities in both Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, Bourguignat attributed the largest graves to Aryans of European origin, and on this basis argued that these powerful individuals from the north were likely to have dominated the Kabyles.⁹⁷

In 1873, Jean-André-Napoléon Périer, originally a member of the 1839 expedition sent by the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres to Algeria, entered the debate. He reiterated on the basis of both written sources and craniological studies that the blond hair of the Kabyles suggested the important role in North Africa of unnamed northern invaders who had arrived approximately 1400 years before the Common Era. He credited them with the unique responsibility for constructing the dolmens of North Africa.⁹⁸ In Paris, Paul Broca's synthesis of these discussions likewise reiterated that the monuments of the dolmen-builders were immigrants from Europe by 1400 BCE, the date to which it was thought that the megaliths could be ascribed.⁹⁹

Paul Topinard noted in 1874 that the number of reliably provenanced Arab and Berber skulls on hand for study in Paris was small.¹⁰⁰ By 1882, the quantity had only increased to 34 sample Berber skulls.¹⁰¹ (Figure 3) Despite this minimal number of samples, Broca was confident about his identification of the Berbers as a dolichocephalic or long-headed race. They thus exhibited characteristics similar to those of the Germanic peoples of northern Europe (though it did mean that they were distinct from those descended from the ancient Gauls, who were thought to have brachycephalic – rounded – skulls.) Broca recorded their average cephalic index as 74.63.¹⁰² Control of the documentation and interpretation of the Kabyle past, at least for French purposes,

allowed Périer, Broca, Topinard, Bourguignat, and others, to confirm craniometrically the legacy of a series of foreign conquests over the indigenous population that had already been established by ancient historians. Unsurprisingly, few European contemporaries complained about the circular manner in which the French had effectively naturalized contemporary northern occupation and rule of the Kabyle residents of Algeria through reference to the ancient past.¹⁰³ Enshrined in the metropolitan institution that controlled the narrative of human origins in France, Berber skeletal remains were displayed in a vitrine in the Galerie anthropologique of the Muséum d'histoire naturelle in Paris from at least 1898.¹⁰⁴

As has been noted by Noël Coye, craniological studies did not cause a complete rupture in the former Celtic debate. Within five years of Féraud's first publication on Bou-Merzoug, the introduction of ethnographic classification with strong racial tones into the debate eliminated overt claims for the Celtic origins of the North African megaliths yet effectively subsumed the European origin story Féraud had advanced. Claims to European dominance of the native inhabitants of Algeria from the earliest times remained a central feature of these analyses: prehistorians almost universally agreed that the dolmens were built or at least conceived of by European ancestors who intermarried with, yet also controlled the Kabyles.¹⁰⁵ This research also had practical implications beyond charting ancient genealogies. Prehistorians, physical anthropologists, and physicians were interested in this information since they believed they could learn from the successful example of these early European settlers how modern European settlers might adapt more easily to the challenging climate and dangerous microbes found in Algeria.¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION: KABYLE MYTH AND THE ASSIMILATORY POLITICS OF FRENCH RULE

Although French arguments claiming the Vandal or Gallic origins of the Kabyles never fully disappeared, and echoes of each were still heard in the 1880s and 1890s, the genealogy that alleged partial European ancestry of the Berber peoples won out in the end. This narrative, which survived into the mid-twentieth century, hypothesized that the indigenous inhabitants of Algeria had a lineage close to a millennium and a half earlier than the Roman imperial period. From the French perspective, Berber descent in part from northern Aryans represented an improvement in the relative merit of the Kabyles' place in history. According to the tenets of the 'Kabyle myth', which was widely embraced by French authorities, including those employed in the *Bureaux arabes* in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Kabyles represented better candidates for co-existence in the French colony than the Arabs since they lacked the alleged fanaticism of the latter.¹⁰⁷ Although *métissage* was not perceived as a positive characteristic by most physical anthropologists of the last third of the nineteenth century (except, perhaps, with respect to French mixed origins), optimists suggested that the alleged affinities between the French and the Kabyles made the latter's assimilation into European Christian society a greater certainty than that of the Arabs, who were relative newcomers to North Africa in the seventh century.¹⁰⁸ Prehistoric studies, and particularly those that related to ethnographic and racial classification of the indigenous inhabitants, were thus potent (if unrealistic) ideological tools for the officers of the *Bureaux arabes* who administered to the Muslim population of Algeria until 1870.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, French accounts of Berber origins assumed not only that the

Berbers (and Algeria in general) had no history before their arrival,¹¹⁰ but they also assumed the general inferiority of the Kabyles' indigenous ancestors. They underlined the Kabyles' debt to foreign northern invaders from Europe for their most creative impulses even in deep antiquity. As was assumed true of monuments and antiquities found elsewhere in Africa that did not fit degrading stereotypes of African capacities,¹¹¹ European scholars envisioned the dolmens as a northern import that could not possibly have had indigenous origins. We should thus be deeply suspicious of the ease with which colonial observers explained local finds through analogies to European sites. Although dependent upon indigenous interlocutors for information about remote sites, French officers-turned-archaeologists in the mid-nineteenth century, just like more recent scholars, were inordinately dismissive of natives' interactions with these sites.¹¹² In the end, discredit of indigenous knowledge and capabilities, married to poorly evidenced claims of prehistoric European invasions, allowed French scientists to disassociate Kabyles from both these important ancient monuments and the territories in which they were located.¹¹³

In the post-colonial archaeology in Algeria, scholars have firmly rejected the contention that ancient innovation among the ancestors of the Berbers lay in the admixture of northern peoples and indigenous populations of North Africa.¹¹⁴ Confident identification of Berber origins is likewise no longer the case among European scholars, and there remains significant uncertainty about even the basic details of Berber ancestry. Evidence of linguistic uniformity points to a rapid spread of the Berber language west of the Nile between 2500 and 2000 BCE.¹¹⁵ Recent studies of the dolmens of Algeria and Tunisia, by contrast, have suggested affinities with those found in Bronze Age Malta and

Sicily. While it is likely that there was regular traffic of small groups of people across the Mediterranean, no evidence exists of large-scale migration in either direction.¹¹⁶

Naturally, these questions remain important in post-colonial Algeria, where for decades studies of the Kabyles were neglected as a consequence of the National Liberation Front's (FLN) efforts to subsume Berber identity within a united Arabized nation. After this repressive policy ignited a rebellion known as the Berber Spring in 1980, an uprising that was brutally crushed that same year, Algeria saw increased political activism and scholarship on behalf of pan-Berberism, which linked itself to the Amazigh transnational community.¹¹⁷ In this context, one wonders what role the prehistoric dolmens of Algeria will come to play in the future: will they become a monumental witness to the heritage of the indigenous people? It is indeed possible to think that the megaliths of the Maghreb, once manipulated on behalf of colonial science, will once again take on new life as a potent symbol of the independent and ancient heritage of the Berber people.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure One – Laurent-Charles Féraud's depiction of a dolmen surrounded by a ring of standing stones at Bou-Merzoug. Féraud, op. cit. (30).

Figure Two – Féraud's artistic rendering of human remains found beneath a dolmen at Bou-Merzoug. Féraud, op. cit (30).

Figure Three – Depiction of a skull of a Kabyle in the atlas of *Crania ethnica*.

Quatrefages and Hamy, op. cit. (99), vol. 2, figure XC.

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⁹² Jean-Louis-Généviève Guyon, 'Note sur des tombeaux d'origine inconnue situés à Ras Aconater entre Alger et Sidi Ferruch', *Comptes rendues hebdomadaires des séances de l'Académie des sciences* (26 novembre 1846), pp. 816-18.

⁹³ A. Letourneux, 'Sur les monuments funéraires de l'Algérie orientale', *Archiv für anthropologie* (1867), 2, pp. 307-20.

⁹⁴ Faidherbe thereafter donated some of the ancient skulls and skeletal material he uncovered to the Musée de Bône. Faidherbe, op. cit. (91), pp. 18-20; 59-65.

⁹⁵ Bonnie Effros, 'Anthropology and Ancestry in Nineteenth-Century France: Craniometric Profiles of Merovingian-Period Populations', in Walter Pohl and Mathias Mehofer (eds.), *Archäologie der Identität, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 17, Vienna: Institut für Mittelalterforschung: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010, pp. 233-44.

⁹⁶ Jules-René Bourguignat, *Souvenirs d'une exploration scientifique dans le nord de l'Afrique. Histoire des monuments mégalithiques de Roknia, près d'Hammam-Meskhoutin*, Paris: Challamel aîné, 1868-1870, pp. 5-7; 22-23. Camps, op. cit. (19), pp. 17-19.

⁹⁷ Bourguignat, op. cit. (96), pp. 56-58.

⁹⁸ Périer, op. cit. (78), pp. 11-14.

⁹⁹ Paul Broca, 'Dolmens et hommes blonds de la Lybie', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de l'homme* (1869), 2^e série, no. 7, pp. 341-344. Paul Broca, 'Les peuples blonds et les monuments mégalithiques dans l'Afrique septentrionale. Les Vandales en Afrique', *Revue d'anthropologie* (1876), 5, pp. 393-404.

¹⁰⁰ Topinard, op. cit. (49), pp. 53.

¹⁰¹ Armand de Quatrefages and Ernest-Théodore Hamy, *Crania ethnica : les crânes des races humaines :*

décrits et figurés d'après les collections du Muséum d'histoire naturelle de Paris, de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris et les principales collections de la France et de l'étranger 2 vols., Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils. 1882, vol. 1, pp. 508-510; vol. 2, figure XC.

¹⁰² Paul Broca, 'Sur la classification et la nomenclature craniologique d'après les indices céphaliques', *Revue d'anthropologie* (1872), 1, pp. 385-423; p. 423.

¹⁰³ Émile Cartailhac was one of the few to point out the potential danger of French scholars' use of vocabulary derived from French sites for Algerian megaliths and suggested that they would be well advised to adopt Kabyle or Arab terminology for standing stones. Paul Pallary, 'Les monuments mégalithiques de l'arrondissement de Bel-Abbès', in *Congrès de l'Association française pour l'avancement des sciences. Compte-rendu de la 17^e session à Oran en 1888*, 2 vols., Paris: AFAS, 1888, vol. 1, pp. 199-200.

¹⁰⁴ Nélia Dias, 'Séries de cranes et armée de squelettes: les collections anthropologiques en France dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle', *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris* (1989), nouvelle série 1.3-4, pp. 203-230; p. 217.

¹⁰⁵ Coye, op. cit. (90), pp. 111-12.

¹⁰⁶ Camps, op. cit. (18), pp. 15-20. For statistics on the epidemics that took place in Algeria during this period, see: Frémaux, op. cit. (39), pp. 209-13.

¹⁰⁷ Lorcin, op. cit. (40), pp. 118-119.

¹⁰⁸ Topinard, op. cit. (73), pp. 491-98.

¹⁰⁹ Abi-Mershed, op. cit. (18), pp. 199-204.

¹¹⁰ Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie politique: Histoire et société*, Cahiers de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques 192, Paris: Armand Colin, 1974, pp. 40-43.

¹¹¹ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

¹¹² Ironically, given the cavalier manner in which the French treated the excavation of prehistoric sites, Féraud noted that it was superstitious fear that quelled the natural avidity of local inhabitants who left the megalithic monuments in relatively pristine condition. Féraud, op. cit. (30), p. 230.

¹¹³ For British appropriation of the Mount Elephant megaliths in Australia, see: Ian J. McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology*,

Lanham: Altamira Press, 2005, pp. 104-113.

¹¹⁴ Mahfoud Kaddache, *L'Algérie dans l'antiquité*, Algiers: SNED, 1972, pp. 27-37.

¹¹⁵ Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁶ Brett and Fentress, op. cit. (115), pp. 15-17.

¹¹⁷ Corisande Fenwick, 'Archaeology and the Search for Authenticity: Colonialist, Nationalist, and Berberist Visions of an Algerian Past', in Corisande Fenwick, M. Wiggins, and D. Wythe (eds.), *TRAC 2007: Proceedings of the 17th Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008, pp. 75-88.