

<title>Museum-building in nineteenth-century Algeria

<sub-title> Colonial narratives in French collections of classical antiquities

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This essay examines the fate of Roman antiquities in the course of the French conquest and colonization of Algeria, a military undertaking that began in July 1830 and resulted in the destruction of significant numbers of ancient remains over the following decades. Although French officials recognized the ideological significance of Roman remains for the French military and colonial venture, military officers who created the earliest museums to house this ancient material faced significant challenges from both the army and European civilian settlers. Roman monuments, while not anticipated as an integral component of the French campaign in North Africa, supplied not only raw materials but the ideological building blocks of an historiographic project that legitimized French presence in the region.

ON 24 September 1853, the French commander of the subdivision of Aumale (modern Sour-el-Ghozlane in Algeria, and the site of ancient Auzia), reported on antiquities that had been discovered in or near this small city located about 100 kilometers to the southeast of Algiers (Fig.1). The display of the collected material, much of which had been found during construction in the central plaza of the city, was as yet modest:

In Aumale at present, there is just a single collection of antiquities which is located in one of the rooms serving to lodge the engineering officers; close to this location, and in a small plaza of 15 m², all of the stones that might be of some interest as a result of their inscriptions and sculptures have been gathered together. This collection is not very large; we also think that there is nowhere to place it in a special building, so it could, without

any drawback, remain in the location which it is now displayed until its importance is augmented. It is certain that one could make some very intriguing discoveries by launching excavations in various locations in the subdivision of Aumale. However, that would require that the State allocate some funds to support the expenses caused by such works.¹

This letter, a response to a questionnaire issued the previous month by the Governor-General of Algeria at the order of the Ministry of War in Paris, made no further demands on authorities who wanted to gather documentation on the whereabouts of ancient remains in the French colony.

While not particularly revealing in its details, this brief exchange twenty-three years after the conquest of Algeria nonetheless provides an intriguing snapshot of routine French military encounters with Roman antiquities in North Africa. While the finds had generated sufficient interest among officers based in Aumale to inspire them to gather an informal collection of the artefacts and carved stones, they also represented an unanticipated responsibility for the men temporarily stationed in the area who now became the *de facto* caretakers of these ancient fragments. In noting the lack of funding for further excavations and the absence of space to house the collection as it inevitably grew, the report also suggests the unfulfilled potential of archaeological exploration in the Algerian colony. Ancient remains, wrenched from their original context, occupied a precarious position on the margins of a military organization that was not designed to regulate, accommodate, or fund their excavation, study, or conservation.

In the essay that follows, I explore the fate of antiquities in the course of the French conquest of Algeria, the role of Roman symbolism in French military practice and ideology, and the challenges faced by advocates of conservation who created the earliest museums to house this ancient material. In doing so, I argue that Roman archaeology, while not anticipated as an integral component of the French campaign in North Africa, was necessarily a by-product of

extended operations in Algeria. Ancient monuments and artefacts represented multivalent quarries for the officers who oversaw their fate and determined their interpretation for French military and civilian visitors to these sites. Indeed not only did Roman monuments provide raw materials to the military machine and offer a distraction to military officers disillusioned by the brutal tactics of a forceful invasion, but they also supplied the building blocks of an ideological apparatus that legitimized French presence in the region.² The repercussions of this legacy continue to echo today.

<H1>Violence of the French invasion

In the summer of 1830, Charles X of France engineered the invasion of Algiers to bolster support for his faltering regime. While the hastily assembled campaign brought military success, it did not prolong his reign, and the unpopular king fell from power within weeks of the landing of French troops on North African soil. Over the next two decades, Charles's successor, Louis-Philippe, who inherited the war, dramatically expanded French military presence and heightened colonial ambitions for the territory that was officially named Algeria in 1839.³ On 9 December 1848, in an effort to facilitate settlement of French civilians following the unrest of the July Days, the Algerian colony gained departmental status and was divided among the administrative districts of Oran, Algiers, and Constantine. After 1859, strongly influenced by the Saint-Simonian-inspired Arabist, Ismaïl Urbain, Napoleon III also expressed his commitment to the French colonial enterprise in the Maghreb. Rather than relying heavily on military rule, however, he envisioned the future of the Algerian colony as the 'Arab Kingdom', which would have greater independence from the **metropole** than had previously been the case. The untimely end of his regime prevented Napoleon III from achieving this goal.⁴ During each of these regimes,

however, the army dominated the governance of the region. Civil authorities played only a minor role in shaping French activities in Algeria prior to October 1870, when the Third Republic shifted control of much of Algeria north of the Sahara from military to civilian rule.⁵

During the early decades of French occupation, little consensus existed in the French administration or public as to the future dimensions of the territory under their control. In the 1840s, fierce debate erupted over the question of whether the direction of colonial presence should be mainly military or civilian.⁶ Despite indecisiveness about French objectives in the region and resulting inconsistency in policy, securing the land for European settlement was the common priority that informed military decisions. Considerations for French security required, in turn, that the *armée d'Afrique* establish the force of its authority over a population that refused to embrace its self-appointed overlords.⁷ The French military reacted badly to this resistance and devastated the existing social and economic infrastructure of the Ottoman-ruled Arab and Berber inhabitants of the region.⁸ From the 1840s, under the Governor-General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, the French army liberally employed the *razzia*, a scorched-earth tactic that left their adversaries (just as non-combatants) deprived of food and shelter. In addition to causing widespread famine and disease, the army was responsible in a number of instances of massacring civilians. Most infamous (because the news was leaked to the French press) but certainly not exceptional, was the suffocation by smoke of hundreds of inhabitants of Dahra who had taken refuge in caves to escape the French onslaught.⁹

From the 1840s until at least 1857, and again during the popular uprisings of the mid-1860s, the French campaign in Algeria was shaped by orders to pillage or level whatever lay in the army's path.¹⁰ The brutal nature of French 'pacification' that legitimized the murder, rape, and destruction of the livelihood of thousands of Algerian civilians, contradicted many French

officers' understanding of the workings of a civil society and the rule of law.¹¹ As areas came firmly under French control, moreover, authorities worked quickly to transform the landscape to make it more accommodating to European military and civilian immigrants. They redesigned the topography of prominent cities like Algiers with little attention to their history or the needs of their current inhabitants. Indeed, their models for new and transformed urban centres were cities in the **metropole**, since they desired foremost to make them symbols of successful conquest under French leadership.¹²

Given the force with which such policies were applied in the process of subjugating the Algerian population, it is unsurprising that any historical monuments encountered in Algeria that were not of immediate value to the military scarcely presented an obstacle to the invading army (Fig. 2). To their metropolitan critics, French generals justified the destruction of ancient sites with the argument that military and political concerns took precedence over historical considerations.¹³ Perhaps the intervening centuries of Arab and Ottoman rule had weakened the structures' symbolic connection to ancient Rome. Whatever their rationalization, the scale of the destruction of ancient sites in the new colony, as recently documented by Michael Greenhalgh, is close to incomprehensible. Some notable losses in the 1840s included the decision by the French commander overseeing operations in Philippeville (modern Skikda, built on the remains of ancient Rusicade) to destroy the Roman amphitheatre, theatre, forum, basilica, temple, and water-tower in the process of building fortifications for the French military effort.¹⁴ In Cherchel (modern Cherchell, built on the remains of ancient Iol) the theatre served as a quarry to build barracks and provide material for the local lime-kilns,¹⁵ while in Tipasa ancient stone was used to construct a colonial village as well as providing souvenirs for anyone interested.¹⁶ Despite professed admiration for these reminders of the ingenuity of classical Roman engineering,

French military authorities viewed ancient structures foremost as a source of conveniently prepared construction materials.¹⁷ Some individual witnesses of the period, however, including officers involved in the military venture, regretted the army's destruction of classical Roman monuments. They responded with archaeological activities meant to document and conserve what they considered the most important or accessible antiquities.¹⁸

<H1>The place of the classical past in French colonization

The tension between military operations and interest in the classical past during the nineteenth century has led recent historians to cast a critical eye on the physical and symbolic interactions of the French with Roman archaeological remains during their colonization of Algeria. Patricia Lorcin has shown how the privileging and appropriation of Roman antiquities (as opposed to the remains of the Vandal, Byzantine, Muslim, and Ottoman regimes), was linked not just to French emulation of their Roman predecessors in North Africa but also exhibited a chauvinistic disdain for the 'barbarous' Arab and Berber populations of Algeria and their long-time Ottoman overlords.¹⁹ Differing from French intervention at Egyptian or Persian sites, in which research took a decidedly orientalizing tone,²⁰ and much in contrast to French feminizing of contemporary Algerian cities and domestic spaces,²¹ selective documentation of ancient Roman military accomplishments demonstrated little or no direct engagement with indigenous culture.²² French attitudes reflected confidence that they, as the new conquerors and heirs-apparent, would learn exclusively from ancient Rome's extraordinary military, technological, and architectural accomplishments and the historical reasons for its failure to hold on to the region.

Despite the potential ideological advantages it offered the French army and government, however, classical archaeology in North Africa was rarely sponsored by the state. Instead, the

prime movers of Roman archaeology were first French officers and later civilian settlers who worked for the most part spontaneously and independently of any governmental initiative.²³ In seeking to understand what motivated officers to engage in archaeological exploration and conservation efforts once in Algeria, Lorcin has explained how some *Polytechniciens* who led French operations in Algeria were disturbed by the military's disregard for Roman monuments that had remained intact for nearly two millennia.²⁴ Although commissioned to perform geographical and cartographic studies of regions of importance to the military campaign, many of these classically trained men sought refuge in the pastime of drawing Roman antiquities during their campaigns. As portrayed by Nadia Bayle, French officers, repelled by the violence perpetrated by the soldiers under their command, used their leisure time to copy the contents of ancient inscriptions, sketch desert ruins, and conduct informal excavations of Roman sites.²⁵ These activities allowed them to create some of the earliest surviving descriptive records of the impressive Roman structures they encountered.

What also motivated senior officers to take an interest in the monuments of ancient Rome was the desire to promote an alternative society governed by men of letters, arts, and sciences. Influenced by the Saint-Simonian tenets promoted at the *École Polytechnique* (founded 1794), the *École d'Application de Metz* (1811), and the *École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr* (1802), many French officers believed that their contributions to the conquest would bring North Africa into the modern age. Osama Abi-Mershed has demonstrated how especially the officers trained as Arabists were convinced that military intervention meant not only that benefits would accrue to the inhabitants of Algeria, but that the colonial laboratory of Algeria represented an important source of revitalization of the French nation as a whole.²⁶ As part of this project, Monique Dondin-Payre has demonstrated how some military officers, along with a small number of

civilian administrators, called for measures to protect and preserve Roman historical monuments in Algeria.²⁷ Structures associated with technological advances, particularly the remains (sometimes still in operation) of ancient roads and aqueducts, received substantial attention in the writings of the period at the same time that indigenous interpretations and uses of these sites were belittled and discounted.

Although few of these activities were officially sanctioned by authorities in either the Ministry of War or the office of the Governor-General of Algeria, officers' contemplation and intermittent exploration of the Roman monuments in Algeria provided ideological weight to their efforts to draw the region back into the sphere of European dominance (Fig. 3). This nostalgia for the classical past -- catalyzed by their interaction with incomplete and crumbling remains -- represented a key element of French efforts to bond with their new land.²⁸ One civilian administrator who visited Algeria in 1844, Léon Blondel, described how he identified with the Roman conquerors of the region two millennia earlier. Not only did his arrival in North Africa awake in him a sense of historical homecoming, but it also offered the possibility of personal and national renewal:

In treading upon this old land, in seeing this part of the Roman Empire, dead since the fifth century, shake off its shroud, leave its tomb and be revived solely through contact with France, I felt in this solitude . . . invincibly protected by the moral strength which victory gave us; I thought of myself as greater and was very proud of my country.²⁹

Although French claims to be engaged in a 'civilizing mission' in North Africa were aided by physical evidence of similar Roman achievements in the region nearly two millennia earlier, the campaign was far from returning the land to its alleged prosperity under Roman leadership.³⁰ Indeed, the arrival of the French in Algeria had the nearly the opposite result for most of the

indigenous population.

As the French colonization of Algeria progressed, civilian settlers like their military predecessors – almost all of whom lacked any previous experience as archaeologists – found themselves in the position of ‘improvised antiquaries’ in North Africa. Recent scholars have emphasized, however, that even if it was not the main objective of their research, these amateurs’ discoveries legitimized French hegemony in North Africa by suggesting that the French were turning the clock back to Roman rule.³¹ They documented precedents for current activities in the ancient Roman conquest of North Africa and thereby justified occupation of the region.³² They likewise played a formidable role in spreading the message of victory and successful colonization to the French public via the monuments transported to France from the mid-1840s,³³ and in the popularized form of songs and printed missives about the Algerian conquest.³⁴ In the latter part of the century, research on the Roman past also informed Algerian displays at the Parisian *Expositions universelles*, and emphasized the Mediterranean bond shared by France and its North African territories.³⁵ Marcel Benabou has argued that this self-serving teleology abolished the intervening events of the last two millennia, and made Roman Africa not just a physical but also a literal quarry from which historians and archaeologists could construct a self-serving foundation for their colonial edifice.³⁶

Aside from the overrepresentation of officers among its practitioners and the ability to confiscate desirable properties, however, archaeology in nineteenth-century Algerian territories, and more specifically the preservation of antiquities, resembled in many ways the conduct of the discipline in France (and Western Europe more generally).³⁷ In North Africa as in Europe, amateurs dominated the practice of archaeology, a field not yet delimited by professional requirements or restrictions.³⁸ As in metropolitan France, the men who sketched classical sites,

copied inscriptions, and more rarely undertook excavations were largely independent hobbyists.³⁹ Because few enthusiasts for Roman antiquities had access to more than a field manual and the background of a classical education to guide their research, their endeavours in Algeria were commonly limited to identifying, transcribing, and exhuming archaeological remains prior to their collection or destruction.⁴⁰ For a venue in which to discuss and publish these finds, many of these same men joined antiquarian societies, which were founded in urban centres in Algeria after the model of those in Europe. These organizations played a leading role in the management and conservation of Roman sites and antiquities in Algeria for more than a century after French conquest.

James Malarkey has documented the activities and attitudes of colonial administrators and settlers in the Algerian city of Constantine (built upon the remains of ancient Cirta), who oversaw or participated in archaeological research under the umbrella of the Société Archéologique de Constantine. This organization was founded in 1852, just sixteen years after French conquest of the monument-rich city. With the encouragement of the French epigrapher Léon Renier, who was then briefly in Algeria completing a study of the Latin inscriptions of the ancient camp of Lambaesis, the amateur researchers who joined comprised part of a growing number of European emigrants looking to build a new life in French Algeria. The learned society offered them an avenue through which to bond with their new land.⁴¹ They studied ancient Roman achievements in North Africa with which they identified most closely, while giving slight or no notice to remains of the Arab or Turkish past.⁴² In subsequent decades, archaeological societies appealed to second- and third-generation French colonists in Algeria. They developed significant attachment to their adopted homeland, at least in part on the basis of their belief in a connection between their achievements and those of the ancient Roman

Empire.⁴³ Roman archaeology fostered their perceived historical ties with the landscape.

Despite the enthusiasm of these advocates for conservation of the Roman legacy, they enjoyed little influence over and had few resources with which to encourage the military and later civil administration to preserve ancient Roman sites.⁴⁴ Some of the retrenchment imposed by French authorities may be attributed to dysfunctional operations of the early colonial government: miscommunications and disagreements regularly arose between officials in Paris and the military administration in Algiers concerning the fate of Roman remains in North Africa. Moreover, colonial officials in Algeria regularly ignored orders from Paris with excuses pertaining to the exigencies of ruling an incompletely 'pacified' population.⁴⁵ The army's wanton destruction of ancient Roman structures created significant tensions with French metropolitan and colonial archaeologists intent on preserving them. Archaeological standards and conservation policies, when they existed, were disappointingly uneven throughout the century.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, the barriers to archaeological studies and the conservation of antiquities in Algeria were more complex than the bureaucratic entanglements just described. Nabila Oulebsir has documented how, throughout their tenure in Algeria, the French selectively applied the concept of patrimony to their possession of the territory. Only archaeological monuments with symbolic and historical value for the French stood any chance of being studied and protected, regardless of the wishes of the indigenous population.⁴⁷ As we have seen, however, even Roman ruins rarely fared well in competition with the military and civilian settlers' demands for the rapid acquisition of building materials and agricultural lands. Many authorities viewed archaeological activities and efforts to preserve significant monuments as a distraction from (and potentially an impediment to) the objectives of the 'civilizing' mission in North Africa.⁴⁸

<H1>Preserving and displaying the Roman past

While Oulebsir has documented several attempts, some failed, by French authorities to export antiquities to Paris,⁴⁹ far more destructive (and incredibly demoralizing to advocates of conservation in Algeria) was widespread vandalism caused by the military and civilian settlers. Neither the appointment in 1845 of an Inspector-General of Civil Buildings in Algeria nor the creation a decade later of the position of an Inspector-General of Historical Monuments and Archaeological Museums of Algeria, had a marked impact on the preservation of ancient structures.⁵⁰ Charles Texier, who occupied the former position, noted that as quickly as ancient inscriptions were unearthed, they were confiscated for use in military road building or construction projects.⁵¹ Civil officials evidently had little practical authority in conservation matters when pitted opposite military and political priorities of the army and high status French settlers in Algeria.⁵² Unfortunately, even when attempts were made to move monuments to safety, the resources necessary to do so successfully were often not procured. These botched efforts regularly resulted in damage to or destruction of the antiquities in question.⁵³ Looking back on this period, Charles Diehl, who during the early 1890s was teaching archaeology in Nancy and excavating ancient sites in Algeria, berated the French for their disregard for ancient monuments:

For almost fifty years we have given over Algerian monuments to many hazards and abandoned them to all [kinds of] negligence; for fifty years we have left vandalism to express itself freely; and thanks to this guilty carelessness, all, masons, businessmen, settlers, engineers of bridges and roads, officers of engineering, and even the administrators themselves, have sought to outdo one another in zealous destruction.⁵⁴

The first effective legislation classifying and protecting historical monuments in metropolitan France and Algeria was not passed on 31 March 1887. Diehl argued that even this step forward was insufficient to stop pervasive devastation of archaeological sites.⁵⁵

There is no doubt that the establishment of archaeological museums in Algeria created new opportunities to conserve Roman antiquities locally. Adrien Berbrugger, who started his career as the secretary of General Bertrand Clauzel, founded the earliest of these, the Library-Museum of Algiers (1835)⁵⁶ (Fig. 4). In his capacity as a librarian and curator, Berbrugger argued in favour of more robust French policies for the preservation of Roman antiquities. He asserted that the special measures he advocated were critical to preventing demoralization of French army and its rapid demise in what he described as the most 'primitive' of conditions. Moreover, Berbrugger believed that the newly established colony needed to adopt standard features of metropolitan society if it was to follow a path toward civilization. In his view, this process required, for instance, the creation of libraries and museums that would offer a means of educating citizens.⁵⁷

Achieving this goal, however, proved more difficult than merely producing a location to house such a collection. Since the institution under his charge in Algiers was not given a budget for the purchase of books, its initial acquisition policy entailed Berbrugger's practice of accompanying French military expeditions as they swept across the region. In the name of the Library-Museum of Algiers, he hastily gathered whatever manuscripts and antiquities (mainly fragments of inscriptions) he could get his hands on during French military operations in Mascara, Tlemcen, Médéa, and Constantine between 1835 and 1837. Invoking the name of science, he confiscated Roman antiquities and Arabic manuscripts from their Muslim owners and regretted only that he had not been able to gather more items before soldiers destroyed them.⁵⁸ The French government praised him for his service to the state since they viewed the Library-Museum as a model of patrimonial conservation. However, when Berbrugger petitioned the Minister of War for additional funding in the mid-1850s so that he could initiate excavations of

important sites, he received a negative response. Further resources for this purpose were not allocated since officials in Paris viewed the Algerian material as secondary to that in the Louvre collection and saw Algeria rather as a place where remains too costly or not important enough to transport to Paris might be stored.⁵⁹ None the less, Berbrugger's institution thrived, at least initially, as a consequence of the inventive rapaciousness of its founder and the colonial army in North Africa.⁶⁰

As the population of settlers grew to substantial numbers by mid-century, French officials recognized that they needed to establish clearer policies governing the ownership of ancient remains, the vast bulk of which were Roman antiquities. In 1854 the Governor-General, with the support of the Minister of War, appointed Berbrugger as Inspector-General of Historical Monuments and Archaeological Museums in Algeria. With a modest budget of 2,000 francs, he was charged with cataloguing monuments, most of which, unsurprisingly, were Roman. His responsibility was to determine which of them should enter into public collections and which required further study.⁶¹ Despite being given significant authority in these duties, Berbrugger faced similar challenges to those previously identified by local French colonial officials, namely that European settlers were regularly keeping the antiquities they found in the belief that they were entitled to claim them as personal property. Although the French government from the 1840s reserved the right to claim these artifacts for the state, article 716 of the Napoleonic Civil Code guaranteed the finders of treasures half of what they discovered.⁶² By the mid-1850s, even the Governor-General recognized the necessity of offering compensation to those who willing gave up such items so that they might enter into public collections, whether in Algeria or Paris.⁶³

Where to house such remains proved an additional source of contention. Once granted his authority as an inspector, Berbrugger pushed for the finest Roman antiquities to be gathered and

displayed in Algiers. Unsurprisingly, Berbrugger's travel correspondence of 1855 reads like a laundry list of what he believed should be transferred to enrich the Library-Museum of Algiers. Members of the Société Historique Algérienne in Algiers (1856), an organization in which Berbrugger played a founding role, voiced their support for his promotion of the central housing of artefacts.⁶⁴ While Berbrugger's actions pleased those residing in Algiers, however, they angered constituencies in other Algerian cities like Cherchel, which suffered from his appropriations as will be seen below. Only municipalities that either had few resources with which to open their own museums or had found too few items to justify the creation of an independent collection embraced this proposal.⁶⁵ Similar to actions taken by officials in provincial cities of metropolitan France, patrimonial advocates in cities other than Algiers argued that it was necessary to encourage each population centre rich in antiquities to open its own museum.

As a city that had lost important Roman monuments to the initial phase of French settlement, Cherchel had strong reasons to found its own collection of antiquities from ancient Iol. The first attempt to launch a museum in this colonial enclave was initiated in 1842 by Amable Ravoisié, who excavated a site referred to by Arabs as the Palais du Sultan and established in this location a collection. Additional finds supplemented the display with materials gathered following the construction of a local military storage depot.⁶⁶ Although relocated in 1844 to a small mosque formerly belonging to the Berkani family, Cherchel's museum was destroyed in an earthquake in November 1846. Officials also exhibited antiquities in a covered gallery in the court of the home that then housed the Service des bâtiments civils, where the collection grew following the discovery of statues in the Roman baths in the west of Cherchel. Just as the baths did not survive their encounter with the French army, however, some of these

classical statues suffered the fate of the lime kiln while others met their end in the 1846 earthquake. Some of those that escaped this unhappy fate, like a statue of the god Jupiter and bust of Ptolemy, were transported directly to the Louvre in Paris, and others entered the Cherchel museum, which was built anew in 1852. In 1853, however, the collection again came under threat when city officials took possession of and demolished the building in which it was housed. The extant pieces were stored for two years in army barracks, where they suffered untold indignities (Fig. 5). Following a report on their perilous situation by Berbrugger, by that time Inspector-General of Historic Monuments, Governor-General Randon finally rectified the situation in 1855 by giving authorization for a permanent and protected location for the surviving collection.⁶⁷

Under the direction of Pierre de Lhotellerie, a local numismatist, the Cherchel Museum enjoyed somewhat easier times. The modest collection of ancient fragments benefitted for the first time from a full-time curator who worked to create a catalogue and sponsored excavations in various parts of the city of Cherchel, including the baths and the Esplanade, to enrich the collection⁶⁸ (Fig. 6). When beset by Berbrugger, who appropriated some of Cherchel's finest pieces for the Library-Museum in Algiers, moreover, the museum found strong local support among European settlers. In 1856, the signatures of more than seventy citizens, including members of the municipal council, testified to their mutual desire that Cherchel retain the artistic riches of which the city was naturally proud. These settlers were weary of seeing their best finds transferred to other locations, even if in Algeria.⁶⁹ Although he lacked funds to contribute to this purpose, the Governor-General ultimately conceded that locally-found antiquities afforded inhabitants (i.e. European settlers) the opportunity to learn something about the intimate past, particularly the ancient Roman past, of their cities.⁷⁰ On 31 December 1858, Prince Jérôme

Napoleon, then serving as Minister of Algeria and the Colonies, issued a circular that protected the Musée de Cherchel against spoliation. The brief existence of the Société Archéologique de Cherchel, founded in 1860, meant, however, that there was no continuous base of scholars actively working on the museum's collection. Discouraged by these defeats, de Lhotellerie lost interest in his curatorial responsibilities and the municipality suppressed his post in 1869. Only in the 1880s were efforts made again to revive the Cherchel Museum.⁷¹

In its desire to form a local collection, Cherchel was far from unique among provincial cities. Another place in which Roman antiquities elicited strong sentiments was in the city of Constantine, conquered by the French in 1837 and rich in antiquities from the ancient city of Cirta. Founded by the epigrapher Léon Renier, General Casimir Creuly, commander of the engineering corps in Constantine, and the Arabist Auguste Cherbonneau in 1852, the Société Archéologique de Constantine served to increase knowledge about the Roman past among European inhabitants of North Africa and a wider community of archaeologists. The learned society included both military men and civilian settlers among its members, many of whom shared a desire to support an archaeological collection.⁷² In 1853, they opened a modest museum, which constituted a relatively late response to destruction of the city's wealth of antiquities over the previous fifteen years. Creuly nonetheless believed that the institution would make an important contribution by educating officers as to the destructiveness of the vandalism perpetrated by French soldiers.⁷³

Faced with the threat posed by Berbrugger in Algiers, amateur archaeologists in Constantine fought to retain Roman remains discovered locally. Although they lacked funding to do so in the manner they desired,⁷⁴ they soon gained the support of the provincial administration of Constantine, which recognized the importance of the city's involvement in publishing and

protecting ancient artefacts.⁷⁵ In 1856, the Conseil Municipal of Constantine added its voice in support of their local museum by approving the purchase for 10,000 francs of a large number of antiquities in the private collection of the Italian settler Lazare Costa.⁷⁶ (Fig.7) This acquisition both enhanced the reputation of and drew public attention to the rich holdings of the nascent institution.

Despite these auspicious beginnings, the museum in Constantine struggled with significant challenges as its holdings grew. Specifically, the size of the collections necessitated several moves from its original location based first at the Place du Caravansérail. In the course of being transferred first to city hall on rue Sassy and then subsequently to the new city hall on the rue Sauzay in 1860, the collection suffered considerable losses. Not only were pieces broken and misplaced, but larger pieces such as stone inscriptions and carvings were deposited in alternate locations, some of which were situated in unprotected, public locations.⁷⁷ The epigrapher Léon Renier recounted one infamous incident in the 1850s, when the mayor of Constantine sold as many as 300 inscribed stones from the museum's open-air installation in the Square Valée. A company responsible for building the road between Constantine and Batna purchased them as raw building material.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, this was not the only case of the misuse of monuments conserved by the museum.⁷⁹ Since there was not yet a catalogue in existence, however, it was difficult for members of the archaeological society to substantiate precisely which items were missing or destroyed.

As noted above, Philippeville, modern Skikda, also suffered significant depredation at the time of its construction by the French army in the 1840s. However, the city was based on the site of ruins dating back to Phoenician colonization, and significant numbers of ancient fragments were found in successive decades. Created in 1859, the Musée de Philippeville was installed at

first in a Roman theatre that was serving as an army barracks (Fig. 8). The mayor of Philippeville, A. Wallet, and the prefect of Constantine, M. de Toulgoet, oversaw the museum in accordance with the directives of Minister Jérôme Napoléon.⁸⁰ However, as the institution attempted to expand, its curator, M. Roger, sought support in 1867 from the imperial administration in Paris. Much to his disappointment, none was forthcoming. Such funds were rarely given for the purpose of improving museum installations.⁸¹

As late as the 1860s, when military operations no longer threatened their survival, classical antiquities were by no means safe from harm. Before 1878, when legal protections were formally established for antiquities, the lack of regulation meant that Roman remains were regularly subjected to confiscation and possibly destruction at the hands of colonial military and civilian authorities. Furthermore, a nearly complete lack of financial support exacerbated the challenge of creating a museum from the often incomplete fragments that had been wrenched from their original housing. The situation was not aided by fierce competition that pitted curators and archaeologists of different cities in Algeria against one another. An influx of funding, for instance, could make the difference between housing monuments in an enclosed, protected environment and an open-air display that left them exposed to the elements and to vandalism from those who passed by.⁸² Government resources for such purposes were so scarce that shutting down a smaller institution such as the Musée de Cherchel, for instance, might translate into additional resources for the larger collection in Algiers.⁸³ No disinterested leadership at the helm of archaeological efforts in Algeria existed to defuse such conflicts. The tensions in the institutional hierarchy differed only in scope from the model of metropolitan France, where provincial museums complained of the Louvre cherry-picking their collections.⁸⁴ In Algeria, conflicting French agendas resulted in desperate circumstances for colonial museums intent on

preserving Roman monuments.

<H1>Conclusions

What, then, can we learn from the challenges of studying, collecting, and preserving ancient monuments in nineteenth-century Algeria? The ineffectual implementation of conservation measures in Algeria was not so different as is commonly assumed from issues faced by contemporary amateur archaeologists in metropolitan France in the course of the Industrial Revolution. Nor was the predilection for Roman antiquities over all others unique to Algeria, since in France, remains of the Gallic and Roman periods were preferred to those of the Germanic conquest.⁸⁵ In neither location did the French government devote significant resources to fund the study of antiquities unless the objective was to enrich Parisian collections and publications.⁸⁶ However, important conditions distinguished archaeological exploration of sites in metropolitan France from those in the Algerian territory. These factors included extensive abuse by the French occupying army and civilian settlers of indigenous, often communal, property rights. French appropriation of the lands, structures and monuments in the hands of Muslim residents nonetheless did not guarantee their safety; as we have seen, French confiscation of ancient sites often resulted in their destruction.

Another important distinction between archaeological practice in metropolitan France and in Algeria had to do with the intangible aspects of the heritage of ancient monuments.⁸⁷ Whereas the collection of Roman antiquities in the former was aimed at promoting interest in local history among the resident population, in the latter, it excluded the Berber and Arab populations from the revised narrative of the newly established colony's past. Museums like those of Algiers, Cherchel, Constantine, and Philippeville, even if modest local institutions run

by amateurs, were by nature colonial edifices intrinsically tied to the mores and sensibilities of the French regime in North Africa. Filled with the proceeds of French military campaigns and the expansion of European settlements, they were intended by their founders to inculcate European immigrants and visitors with a particular view of the close attachment between the French presence in North Africa and that of Rome 2,000 years earlier. They helped define what belonged to the national patrimony in Algeria, namely Roman ruins as opposed to remains from more recent periods, as the conquered territories were integrated into France.⁸⁸ Thus, their humble appearance and holdings should not mask their important role in acculturating French military personnel and European civilians who envisioned a future for themselves in North Africa. As in metropolitan France,⁸⁹ prominent figures in each city in which a museum was established identified with and took pride in local history as residents of Algiers, Constantine, and other urban centres. Tensions that erupted between colonial representatives over guardianship of all-too-fragmentary remains of the Roman past suggest the powerful symbolic presence of Roman monuments for European settlers, and especially members of local antiquarian societies.

Looking back on the early history of these institutions, there is no denying the unexceptional appearance of Algeria's urban archaeological museums, which showcased less-than-pristine monuments that had survived military and civilian depredations. These collections nonetheless conveyed a clear message to visitors through the absence of displays of artefacts valorizing epochs of Algerian history other than ancient Rome – and especially those of the intervening period of Arab and Turkish rule. In reinforcing an exclusively European version of the past, one that focused on the conquerors of the North Africa rather than its inhabitants and entirely discounted the relationship of indigenous peoples with these monuments for more than a

millennium, these plain but emblematic institutions presented a narrative that silenced the possibility of Arab and Berber historical claims to the territories and patrimony of Algeria.⁹⁰ In Tunisia, like Algeria, despite the peaceful symbiosis between living populations and ancient remains for centuries before the arrival of the French, European use of archaeological research to legitimate colonial domination left bitter memories.⁹¹ French appropriation of ancient monuments for ideological purposes indeed negatively coloured their reception among Arabs and Berbers.⁹²

This ambivalent legacy, which was certainly not unique to French colonial archaeology,⁹³ continues in modern Algeria, where great suspicion of French historiographical narratives has led to the near erasure of the events do not fit with post-colonial motifs.⁹⁴ This outlook accounts in part for the shortfall of resources for the preservation of ancient Roman sites in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.⁹⁵ Colonial archaeology proved so effective that it essentially voided these remains of any connection to Arabs and Berbers. Although neglect is very different from the recent, and more theatrical, destruction of ancient archaeological sites in Syria and northern Iraq by supporters of the 'Islamic State; (IS), both suggest that the negative perception of Roman and other pre-Islamic monuments is not exclusive to the Maghreb. Pillage, looting, and the purposeful annihilation of antiquities suggest a breakdown in the moral economy that supports the conservation of world heritage sites.⁹⁶ However, we should not overlook the fact that, for more than a century, Europeans argued that these artefacts had little or no relevance to the Arab inhabitants of these lands.⁹⁷ Local populations paid dearly when Western Europeans and Americans, in pursuit of larger geopolitical ambitions, first identified and appropriated the ancient patrimony of these regions.⁹⁸ While rightly the subject of international condemnation, the orchestrated obliteration of pre-Islamic monuments (not to mention the execution of their

curators) by groups like the IS can be perceived to possess a logic of its own which resonates among hard-core fundamentalists. They are reacting to the fact that the West, acting through UNESCO and other bodies, has invested such sites with heritage status and thus claimed them as their own. This policy has thus rendered them tragically vulnerable to the politics of post-colonial polity building. We can scarcely doubt that such destruction represents, at least in part, a symbolic response to colonial interventions in which these monuments and artefacts were deeply implicated.

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Captions

Fig. 1. Place d'Aumale, Cherchel, Inventory of Roman artefacts from Aumale, inv. no. ANOM 80 F 1587: 'État des antiquités romaines trouvées sur les travaux de la Place d'Aumale', dated 11 November 1853. Reproduced by permission of the Archives nationales d'outre-mer.

Fig. 2. View of the aqueduct of Mustapha Pacha. C.-A. Rozet, *Voyage dans la Régence d'Alger où Description du pays occupé par l'armée française en Afrique* (Paris, 1833).

Fig. 3. An allegorical portrayal of the French invasion of Algeria, *Conquête et civilisation* (5 Juillet 1830), by Adrien Berbrugger. Led by a Roman legionary commander, the French are portrayed as bringing civilization and Christianity to the Arabs and Berbers on the shores of North Africa. A. Berbrugger, *Algérie historique, pittoresque et monumentale ou Recueil de vues, costumes, et portraits faits d'après nature dans les provinces d'Alger, Bône, Constantine et*

Oran, vol. I (Paris, 1843), frontispiece.

Fig. 4. The interior court of the Musée-Bibliothèque d'Alger, created in the former home of the Ottoman Bey Mustapha Pacha. A. Leroux, *L'Algérie illustrée* (Algiers, 1888--92), vol. II.

Fig. 5. Assortment of antiquities in the Musée de Cherchel in the late 1880s or early 1890s. A. Leroux, *L'Algérie illustrée* (Algiers, 1888--92), vol. I.

Fig. 6. Undated photograph of the inner court of the Musée de Cherchel. P. Gauckler, *Musée de Cherchel* (Paris, 1895).

Fig. 7. Inventory list of the collection of the colonist Lazare Costa which was purchased for the Musée de Constantine in 1856, inv. no. ANOM 80 F 1587. Reproduced by permission of the Archives nationales d'outre-mer.

Fig. 8. Antiquities of Philippeville in an open-air display in the ancient theatre of Rusicade (Skikda) in the late 1880s or early 1890s. A. Leroux, *L'Algérie illustrée* (Algiers, 1888--92), vol. II.

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