

# Archaeology and the search for authenticity: Colonialist, Nationalist, and Berberist visions of an Algerian past

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## *Introduction*

On April 18, 2001, Massinissa Guermouh, a high-school student and a Berber, was shot by Algerian police in Kabylia, the mountainous region just east of Algiers. He died shortly afterwards in police custody. On the eve of the twenty-first anniversary of the Berber Spring, the 1980 uprising of Berber speakers demanding Berber cultural and linguistic rights, and in an Algeria already ravaged by ten years of violent civil war and the deaths of over 100,000 people, Guermouh's death catalysed a generalized sense of disillusionment into what became known as the 'Black Spring' (*le printemps noir*), a four-month cycle of social protests, rioting and violent repression in Kabylia and other regions. The protests called for a transition to democracy, the end of political violence in Kabylia and linguistic and cultural pluralism. These demands were prompted by underlying broader socioeconomic issues: mass unemployment, poor educational systems and inadequate housing, for example. These grievances and demands for change were shared by Kabyles and their fellow Algerians alike (Roberts 2001; International Crisis Group 2003). As the protests went on, however, the issue that the world media brought to the fore and that the Algerian government privileged, was the Kabyle activists' demand for the official recognition of Berber language (Tamazight), and Berber cultural identity as an integral part of the Algerian nation (El Khoeur platform, article 8). The complex social problems at stake were reduced to a matter of identity politics and dismissed as the latest expression of a primordial division in Algeria between Arabs and Berbers.

This brief history provides an introduction to the current situation in Algeria. The Arab-Berber binary, an elaborate system of oppositions inscribed in ethno-racial terms, has been invoked to explain Algeria's contemporary and past sociological reality from the descriptions of Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century, through the French colonial period to contemporary academic and political discourses (McDougall 2003; 2006; Silverstein 2002a; 2002b). This split is premised on linguistic and cultural grounds: around 30% of Algeria's population today are Berber speakers, the majority of whom live in dispersed pockets in Kabylia, the Aurès and the Sahara. There is little doubt that in antiquity all of North Africans spoke Berber languages. As Brett and Fentress (1996) have shown, the Berber peoples and their societies were very

heterogeneous in the past, and neither in the past nor the present day should they be considered an ethnically unified people. As they have suggested, the most satisfactory solution is to use the term Berber to refer to those groups who were perceived to be indigenous North Africans, as well as anyone who is still perceived that way today.

The French conquest of Algeria in 1830 and subsequent colonization constructed a detailed set of character myths to underpin the Arab-Berber binary. Race, religion and indigeness were all brought to bear in this endeavour. The mountain-dwelling sedentary Berbers were viewed as the privileged inheritors of Roman civilization, fiercely democratic and only superficially Islamized and therefore much 'closer to Europe' in race, culture and temperament than the degenerate, fanatical nomadic Arab of the plains and interior (Ageron 1960; Lorcin 1995). The Berbers' Roman past, in particular, was used to substantiate colonial claims that the Berbers were more suitable for the French *mission civilisatrice*. Following independence in 1962, this definition of Algeria was countered by a nationalist history which emphasizes and legitimizes an Algerian Arab-Islamic identity. In this modern "official" history taught in schools and underpinning historical and archaeological research, the Berbers are consigned to a distant past or ignored entirely. A notion of a distinct Berber identity and history, antithetical to the nationalist vision, is now a powerful expression of dissent as demonstrated through the events of the 'Berber Spring', the 'Black Spring' and by the Berber cultural movement. The various identity projects in Algeria: colonial, nationalist, Berberist, all draw on the Roman past albeit in very different ways. Archaeology, defined here as the set of practices which identify and interpret material remains, has consequently played a major role in these political projects.

Since the 1980s, a vast amount of literature has been dedicated to exposing the unavoidably political nature of archaeology (Shanks and Tilley 1987a; 1987b; Trigger 1984; 1989; 1995). Roman archaeologists have also contributed to this project and have done much to illuminate our understanding of the development of Roman archaeology as an academic discipline, especially in the context of Western Europe (Freeman 1996; 1997; Hingley 1996; 2000; 2001; 2005; Marchand 1996; Terrenato 2005; Webster 1996). Similarly scholars working in North Africa have written excellent accounts of the relationship between colonialism and the development of Roman archaeology, and underscored the continued influence of colonial research agendas on contemporary scholarship (Benabou 1977; Laroui 1970; Mattingly 1996; Mattingly and Hitchner 1995; Munzi 2001). Nonetheless, little has been written about the construction of the Roman past within Algeria and by North Africans themselves (c.f. Mahjoubi 1997; Mattingly 1996), nor indeed of the role which Roman material culture plays in contemporary Algeria. This detachment from contemporary social and political concerns on the part of Roman archaeologists is problematic and risks Roman archaeology becoming an abstract and fundamentally ahistorical form of knowledge production. In Algeria, these shortcomings are brought to the fore: the construction of historical narratives has been as much about the exclusion of other histories as it is about arguing for one particular story.

This paper is part of a larger research project which explores the ongoing social upheaval in Algeria in relation to representations of Algeria's past in colonialist, nationalist and Berberist histories, and discusses some of the ways in which archaeology and heritage practices are implicated in these narratives. Here, I focus on the important and often paradoxical roles that references to a Roman past have played and continue to play in the construction of Algerian identities. My aim is to illustrate how complex issues of archaeological practice can be in the twenty-first century and to draw attention to the diversity of voices that must be recognized as part of the knowledge production process. I argue that the different understandings of Algeria's Roman past cannot and

should not be dismissed as ideological distortions of a detectable historical reality, but rather should be seen as examples of the struggle to control, produce and disseminate knowledge. The “authenticity” of these competing narratives is not simply an academic question about the distant past, but a politically and emotionally charged issue. Our challenge as archaeologists is making space for multiple understandings of the past to be heard.

### *Roman Archaeology and French Colonialism*

An interest in antecedents and a sense of history represented through material objects of the past is hardly a modern phenomenon and 19th century scholars, such as Louis Rinn (1884), reported a devotion to the ancestors amongst the contemporary inhabitants of the Maghrib, the cult of saints’ tombs being the dominant material manifestation of this. Nevertheless, the methodologies and paradigms of archaeology, as opposed to these local interactions between past and present, originated in north-western Europe and are linked to the Enlightenment, the rise of capitalist production, the formation of nation-states and European colonialism (Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Kohl 1998). The relation between colonialism and the development of archaeology in Algeria could not have been more direct (see Mattingly 1996). France’s attack on Algiers in 1830 and the subsequent establishment of the Algerian colony opened up vast expanses of uncharted territory to be mapped, recorded and mined for information. Archaeology was just one of the forms of scientific enquiry that mediated the encounter between the agents of colonialism and audiences in France, and the unfamiliar people, cultures and territories with which they came into contact. Scholars and scientists accompanied the French army on the conquest expedition and recorded the land, inhabitants, culture and history of Algeria in the belief that an in-depth understanding of the region would lead to better governance (Lorcin 1995).

The Napoleonic Expedition to Egypt (1789–1800) had already established an association between Rome-in-Africa and France-in-Africa as officers were awed by the splendour and endurance of Rome’s monuments in a hostile Eastern land, their very survival a testimony to Rome’s power and cultural superiority. By 1830, France’s ideological connection with the Roman Empire had already been well-established. While the primary agendas of the French conquest were to restore the safety of Mediterranean shipping routes under threat by the infamous Barbary pirates controlled by the dey of Algiers and to strengthen Charles X’s internal legitimacy; the invasion was justified ideologically through the historical precedent of the Roman empire. Thus, on 20 September 1833, an order from the French king ordered the army “to complete the conquest of Algeria in order to return to the civilized world the bank of the Mediterranean, which has been in the grips of anarchy and barbaric methods since the fall of the Roman empire” (quoted by Lorcin 2002:300). Underpinning this secular *mission civilisatrice* was a religious agenda; the conquest of Algeria was viewed as an opportunity to restore Christianity to its rightful place, to return the birthplace of such luminaries as St. Augustine and St. Cyprian to Christian rule. The Roman ruins, “the sacred souvenirs of the courage, saintliness, and genius of the heroes of our faith”, scattered throughout the Algerian landscape, were drawn upon as material evidence for these claims (Cardinal Lavigerie quoted in Lorcin 2002: 314). This secular and religious *mission civilisatrice* remained a potent ideological justification throughout the colonial period (Huet 1999; Bullard 2000).

For these narratives to be effective in colonial Algeria, the contemporary Berber and Arab populations of North Africa had to be disassociated from the glorious past of Roman Africa. The Romans, like the French, were seen as colonizing and ‘civilizing’ the ancient Berbers. Indeed,

they did this so successfully that even the Arab conquest and rule of Africa could not prevent ‘survivals’ of certain aspects of Roman institutions and culture (Broughton 1929; Cagnat 1913; Masqueray 1886). The contrast between French scholarship on the nature of Roman Gaul and Roman Africa is instructive (Dondin-Payre 1991: 149). Whilst the Romans were still thought to have ‘civilized’ Gaul, the Gallic people were granted an active role in this process. The Africans, on the other hand, were either viewed as passive recipients of Roman culture or as barbaric savages, incapable of progress without the intervention of ‘more civilized’ powers. In the same way, the modern populations – Berber or Arab – were regarded as alien and ‘Other’, barbaric and savage, wholly incapable of self-government: “the disconcerting sterility of their nature, incapable, unless constrained by an external power, of surpassing the most primitive forms” (Picard 1954: 37). The Roman ruins, so visible in the North African landscape, provided material evidence for these claims. It was the *duty* of the ‘more civilized’ France to rule, educate and guide these people (Mattingly 1996), just as the Romans had. Such tropes assumed considerable significance as the years passed and were used to claim that Berbers could be assimilated more easily than the Arabs because of their Roman past (Lorcin 1995).

The French were for this reason especially interested in the origin of the Berbers, thought to be the original inhabitants of Africa. Scholars like Emile Masqueray (1886), René Maunier (1922) and Ernest Mercier (1871), drew heavily on Latin and Greek texts and argued from these that the Berber-speaking inhabitants of Kabylia had maintained their Latin roots in their lack of religiosity and ‘democratic’ social organization. Drawing on Tacitus, Edouard Lapène (1839) argued that the Kabyles share many of the same characteristics as the Germanic tribes under the Roman Empire, and thus were more ‘European’ than Arabs. Similarly Masqueray suggested that Kabyle social organization was akin to that of the primitive Romans, and that studying their villages and administration could shed light on the institutional origins of Western civilization (1886:50). The Arabs were considered invaders who had arrived in North Africa in two waves in the seventh and eleventh centuries. Official colonial discourse insisted on the Mediterranean origins of the Berbers: “Anthropologists agree that the Berbers, in their bodily structure and the shape of their skull, are related to southern Italians and southern Spaniards rather than with African and Oriental races’ (Gautier 1931:29). The Kabyles thus were viewed as the natural allies of the French, and as a justification for the French occupation. Indeed, France could claim the role of the guardian of true Latin Mediterranean cultural and spiritual unity, protecting the Berbers from the fanatic and war-like Arabs (Silverstein 2002a:3).

The modern ‘discovery’ of the splendours of Roman Algeria, its towns, temples and churches, emphasized France’s place as the legitimate heir of Ancient Rome. The first archaeological investigations in North Africa were carried out by amateurs connected to the French colonial authorities (soldiers, doctors, priests etc.). Anderson (1991: 163) has argued that the grammar of colonial power was centred around three key concepts – the census, the museum and the map. The monumentality of the Roman past was a cultural resource to be classified, displayed and mapped, and where possible to be brought back to Paris for the edification of the educated and the rich (examples in Oulebsir 2004). This form of intellectual colonialism served to sever the disparate people of Algeria from their past and has resulted in an imbalance of research efforts, with the Roman period prioritized as an area of archaeological and historical inquiry at the expense of other moments in time. It should be stressed that archaeological research was not carried out simply for ideological reasons but as much for practical reasons in the early years of French rule. Much of the initial mapping and recording the Roman settlements, forts, roads, cisterns and aqueducts provided the French with a ready-made infrastructure. The *Armée*

*d'Afrique* was regarded as a direct heir to the *Exercitus Africae* and the French soldiers literally marched in the footsteps of the Roman armies (Dondin-Payre 1991).

Scientific archaeology, as distinguished from this earlier mainly antiquarian excavations of sites, dates to the end of the 19th century. Excavation was confined for the most part to cities, cemeteries and military installations and to the period of monumental Roman architecture, the second and third centuries AD (Mattingly and Hitchner 1995). Under the direction of Stephane Gsell, Timgad became the central focus of the Algerian Antiquities Service, and the place of experimentation for methods of excavation, restoration and conservation. This focus was legitimated by the outstanding preservation of the city's plan and buildings: "apart from Pompeii, one cannot find the equivalent to that which we have at Timgad... a town in its entirety" (Ballu 1911:5). Gsell (1901) even wrote a handbook for archaeologists, giving an exact list of monuments which particularly merited excavation temples, forums, triumphal arches and monumental gates, baths, elite houses, churches and military installations. The excavations at Timgad were important not only in establishing a methodology but simultaneously demarcated and justified an Algerian archaeology's primary research focus: the Roman period. This Roman focus was carved out of the ground. As Nadia Abu el-Haj (1998; 2001) has shown for Jerusalem, archaeologists do not simply study material culture but produce their own material culture. The classical city "reflected what the colonialist, given his vicarious identification with the Roman achievement, wished to see in the past" (Shaw: 1995: 34; also Laroui 1977). That is, the classical city provided physical evidence for the progress of history from their florescence in the Roman period, to their decay and destruction as a result of the Arab invasions. In the same way, the collection and publication of Latin inscriptions was inspired not only by intellectual curiosity but by the need to prove the superiority of Western European culture (Dondin-Payre 1988: 33). Latin texts, in particular, were used not only to disassociate the modern Berber and Arab populations from the Romans, but also to emphasise the *cultural* affinity between Romans and the European colonizing powers (Mattingly 1996: 50–51). Equally important was the *spiritual* coupling of France and Rome: Roman Africa had been Christian Africa and it was France's mission to liberate it from the fanaticism of Islam (Silverstein 2002a).

The cultural and spiritual legacy of Rome came together in Louis Bertrand's influential vision of a Latin Africa (Lorcin 2002). For Bertrand (1936), the Roman site of Tipasa was the architectural, cultural and linguistic manifestation of the true North Africa, a Latin Africa, whose existence he had hitherto only imagined. Why, he asked, could the Algerian Arabs not claim with pride their Roman past as the Egyptian Muslims could for their pharaonic past (c.f. Meskell 2000; 2005 on Egypt)? Because Algeria did not belong to them: the Arabs were interlopers. For Bertrand, France had reclaimed a lost Roman province and that gave it precedence over Islam. Faced with usurping Arab or indigenous African (*l'Indigène asservi*), it was the French who were masters of the land, whose symbolic monument was the triumphal arch, not the mosque (Bertrand 1921: 8–9). The archaeological activity set in motion earlier provided the material foundations for Bertrand's arguments. Stones and inscriptions were thus not only a visual remainder of Algeria's Roman past but also represented an essential part of the French colony's historical record, and as such were important symbols for the development of an ideology of Latinity (Lorcin 2002).

### *Roman Archaeology after independence*

The roots of Algerian nationalism can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s although an independent nation-state was not established until 1962 after a bloody civil war. The colonial elaboration

of the Arab/ Berber dichotomy was something that had to be countered by the nascent nation-state. After Algerian independence, the ruling National Liberation Front attempted to gloss over internal cultural differences, drawing heavily on the works of the *salafi* reformist movement from the 1920s, they sought to return to the pure Islam of their ‘pious ancestors’ (Silverstein 2004: 67–8). The foundation of the nation was dated from the Arab conquests in the seventh century AD, which brought “liberation, social improvement, cultural enrichment, prosperity, and tolerance” to a people who had constantly struggled against the “foreign domination” of the Romans, the Vandals and the Byzantines (FLN 1964: 10). Finally, whilst the Muslim identity of Algeria’s population was not in question, the Algerian revolution “restored to Islam its true face, the face of progress” (FLN 1964: 35). The Berbers and the Arabs were presented as united under the banner of Arabic language and Islamic religion, famously stated in the slogan of the early *salafi* reformist movement: ‘Islam is my religion; Algeria is my nation; and Arabic is my language’ (c.f. Kaddache 1980: 227). Algeria’s Berber past is never explicitly mentioned and always relegated to a distant past in early constitutional documents. In this alternative narrative, the French are also rendered invisible, and the worldview inculcated in France’s schools—in which 1830 is an absolute beginning and the pre-invasion Islamic period an inconsequential diversion of the region’s Roman and Christian destiny – is erased.

Tawfiq al-Madani, a *salafi* scholar and key *ulama* figure in the nationalist movement, wrote a number of important historiographic works as part of this re-writing of history. He attacked the French scholars for their misrepresentation of the Berber’s origins, claiming that they “committed a horrendous outrage against history. and... wishing to serve political schemes, have attacked and effaced historical facts; they have said that the Berbers are of Germanic or of Latin origin, that they migrated to Africa from Europe. Those who make such statements have no aim but to influence the Berbers, to distance all that is Asian from them and to convince them that they are of European origin; that they must return to Europe and to all this is European” (al-Madani 1963 [1932]: 9, quoted in McDougall 2006: 194). He nevertheless, appropriated the positivist methods and imagery of colonial scholarship, again depicting the Berbers as noble warriors fiercely protecting their freedom against all foreign invaders (McDougall 2006). Whilst al-Madani mentions the pre-Islamic past of Algeria, most commentators tend to remain “suspicious of its distant, Latin, Berber and Islamic, past, a history altogether too complex, too mixed and plural” (Stora 2003: 18). Instead, the focus is on the Arab-Berber fusion from the seventh century onwards “which, embracing the same faith and adhering to the same system of values, is animated by a love of the same land” (Taleb Ibrahimi 1973:225). The immensity of Algeria’s territory and the vastness of its resources come to the forefront in nationalist rhetoric in order to legitimize the spatial boundaries of the nation-state; the ambiguous and contradictory histories of the successive foreign occupations are pushed to the back (Stora 2003: 15–16). Only recently has the official reading of Algerian history begun to be questioned from within.

The newly independent state engaged in nation-building projects which included explicit articulation of the ideologies of national identity materialized in widely visible symbols like anthems, currency and flags. Because nationalist ideologies are often constructed based upon understandings of its past, history and archaeology make key contributions to its creation. The past legitimates because of the aura of sanctity and power it is given and it gains a particular relevance at times of rapid change or major ruptures, as in the rise of nationalism or the establishment of new political regimes (Anderson 1991; Smith 1986). Fanon wrote “of the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond the self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in

regard to ourselves and in regard to others” (2004 [1967]: 169). The post-colonial process of redressing perceived historical powerlessness by choosing a new chosen people and celebrating a new golden age has been well-documented by scholars in many different contexts. Certain episodes, themes and events become the subject of social memory and remembrance (Fentress and Wickham 1992: 127–37). Unlike other post-colonial nation-states, the Algerian nation-state was not particularly preoccupied with going *far* back in time and choosing a historical epoch for its golden age. The chosen people for Algeria was the victorious, post-independent populations who had thrown off the yoke of French rule and regained their freedom in a bloody struggle which itself produced many patriots and martyrs to be commemorated. In this discourse, a distant, confused and complicated past could be brushed aside.

It is no coincidence that the main instigators of the recent demonstrations, and consistently the most vociferous opponents to the nationalist narrative, are the Kabyles, who as Berbers have been erased from the historical narratives of the country. Members of today’s Berberist movement in the Maghrib and elsewhere tend to describe themselves as *Amazigh*, a highly political term with a revealing history. Well-attested in various forms in antiquity (*Mazax*, *Mazices* etc.), it is almost always understood to mean ‘free man’, a meaning which can be traced back to the sixteenth-century Arab geographer Leo Africanus who claimed that the term is related to the word for free (Brett and Fentress 1996: 6 c.f. Chaker 1987). *Amazigh* (pl. *Imazighen*) has come to stand for an imagined transnational community that extends from Egypt’s Western Desert to the Canary Islands and includes the diasporic populations in Western Europe and North America (Maddy-Weitzman 2006). At present, a modified version of the ancient Tifnagh script, still in use by the Tourag Berbers of the Sahara, is an important symbol of Berber identity and its usage actively promoted. The Berbers are disenfranchised peoples, not only are their voices not considered in the affairs of the country, but the state has made every effort to erase those voices. The suppression of Berber studies at the University of Algiers in 1962 was the first concrete sign of the lack of room for a Berber identity in independent Algeria. The dominant narrative of Algerian nationalism and its underlying ideology of oppression and exploitation, is dependent upon on the homogeneous essentialized understanding of an indigenous ‘Other’, just as it was with colonialism.

Up until recently, the oral culture focus of the Berbers and the absence of texts in Tamazight hindered the establishment of a written history. Recent events in Algeria and elsewhere in the Maghrib have prompted the emergence of one, largely promulgated on websites, tracts and newspapers by members of the Berberist movement. These histories stress that the Berbers have a pre-Islamic past, and one in which they were active and powerful agents, not simply voiceless, submissive tribesmen. The promotion of Berber history in this sense involves a high degree of myth-making and essentializing of the Berber ‘spirit’, as embodied in Jean Amrouche’s famous poem “The Eternal Jugurtha” (1939). Equally importantly, these accounts stress that the Islamization of North Africa did not bring an end to Berber culture. The stories of legendary or mythologized historical figures, such as those of the Numidian kings Massinissa and Jugurtha who fought against the Roman army, and that of the Kahina, the legendary Berber queen of the middle ages, who opposed the initial Arab invasions in the seventh century. are woven into novels, plays and music in order to counter directly the Arab-Muslim image of Algeria and to call for a Berber nation (Zemmouri 2000). The Kahina is particularly important as the symbol of Berber resistance to Arab invaders. This becomes obvious quickly by using Google to search “Kahina”; is called ‘African patriot’, ‘freedom fighter’, and ‘resistance leader’ in Berber activist websites.

Independence and the establishment of the modern nation-state of Algeria initially had little effect on the nature of archaeology. Archaeological research continued to be carried out by French scholars up to the 1990s and the outbreak of civil war. Indeed, post-independence, foreign archaeologists often dictated the policies and thus determined the research agendas of the Algerian Antiquities Services (Mattingly 1996: 60–1). While Algerians have now successfully taken control of museums, the Antiquities Service and the export of antiquities, Western archaeologists still direct the majority of archaeological projects, albeit in collaboration with their Algerian counterparts. The funding for research is provided largely by foreign institutions and this naturally gives them some power over the research agenda and choice of site-type.

Roman archaeology's research agenda in North Africa, in comparison with prehistoric, Punic and Islamic archaeology, is in many ways much as it was in the colonial period. Indeed, it was not until 1970, with the publication of Abdallah Laroui's seminal work *L'histoire du Maghreb*, that the colonialist vision of North Africa began to be deconstructed. Laroui (1977) had his own 'post-colonial' vision of Roman North Africa, characterized by African resistance to Roman occupation and rule. The Africans were portrayed as partisans and freedom fighters, just like 20th-century North Africans, opposing the occupation of Western colonial powers (Mattingly 1996). This notion of resistance was further developed by Marcel Bénabou (1976), who argued that the indigenous populations not only used military force to resist Rome but also that they passively resisted Rome by maintaining pre-Roman cultural practices, like religion, architecture or language. Unsurprisingly, Benabou's arguments have proved extremely controversial (e.g. Benabou 1978; Leveau 1978; Thébert 1978). The differing reactions of European and North African scholars are revealing. European scholars have tended to dismiss the notion of resistance to Rome completely, whilst North African scholars adopted it with enthusiasm (Mattingly 1996). One could reasonably assert that one reason why so few North African scholars study the Roman period is because the 'colonial vision' of Roman Africa has been so influential. Indeed, although there are an increasing number of North African scholars working on the Roman period, the majority work on the prehistoric or Islamic periods. French scholars are still the major players, and scholarly publication and debate are nearly entirely in French and almost never in Arabic (Mattingly 1996: 61). The result of these trends is that Roman archaeology has become synonymous with the study of the monumental, the elite and the urban and more disturbingly with European colonialism.

It is not difficult to see traces of the Roman past in Algeria; quite apart from the many sites and fragments which literally litter the landscape, the French colonial reuse and appropriation of the Roman past still stands out. Examples are found in domestic decoration, civic monuments, bank notes, logos and street plans (Oulebsir 2004). Whilst antiquity is no longer invoked to legitimate the political and cultural status quo to the same degree as it was in the colonial period, it is an unavoidable part of daily life. There is no simple relationship between the modern Algerian state, the diverse peoples of Algeria and their pre-Islamic past. Nonetheless, European archaeologists tend to continue to depict the contemporary population of Algeria as universally uninterested in Algeria's classical past and thus unwilling to preserve the monumental traces of it. Troublingly, this argument is used to justify the continuation of archaeological practices which do not engage with contemporary social and political concerns but instead describe and interpret from the standpoint of the detached outsider.



### *Concluding Thoughts*

As archaeologists, we are necessarily invested in and responsive to the social, political and economic contexts in which we work. So why has Roman archaeology as a discipline still failed to really engage in wider debates about the relationship between archaeological practice, ethics and stewardship in the contemporary world? Ethical discussions amongst Roman archaeologists tend to be limited to questions of how, when and why to preserve sites and artefacts – the implication being that the sole responsibility which archaeologists have to others is to conserve the material remains of the Roman world for future research and for future generations. Central to this configuration of disciplinary responsibility is the assumption that the subjects of archaeological analysis are dead and buried and that the past is merely an academic question (Joyce 2002; Meskell 2005). Such a vision of archaeology can no longer be sustained in the world today, where archaeology is conscripted to validate neo-colonial, national and counter-national mythologies (for examples, see Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Meskell 1998; Bond and Gilliam 1994; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Silberman 1995; Shepherd 2007). Nonetheless, the spectre of a positivist archaeology still lingers in Roman archaeology, as in other world archaeologies, and this has delayed a sustained critique of contemporary archaeological practice (Joyce 2002; Meskell and Preucel 2004; Wylie 1996).

There are several points of friction in the way in which Roman archaeology operates in Algeria and indeed North Africa as a whole. Firstly, archaeology in Algeria has, historically, been carried out by European scholars. It is foreign scholars who have held the economic, social and political power to study and interpret the past, viewing it through a Western framework and creating knowledge for consumption by European public and scholarly audiences. Secondly, the past has differential significance in the different colonial, national and Berberist narratives. Language, objects, places, events and figures are differentially emphasized in each of these discourses to evoke authenticity in the process of constructing and manipulating different visions of Algeria's past, present and future. Thirdly, excavation is a material practice which constructs its own landscape (Abu el-Haj 2001). The structures uncovered, the narratives created by archaeologists are used in tangible ways in the real world. Finally, the discipline of archaeology was built around and relies upon Western knowledge systems and methodologies, and its practice has a strongly colonial history (Smith 1999: 58–72). Roman archaeology in Algeria did not emerge as a neutral means to the “discovery” of pre-existing histories buried in colonial landscapes, but rather as a discipline actively constructing archaeological pasts over and against local conceptions of their past.

Is it ethical for archaeologists to continue to explore and reinforce historical narratives that are used to legitimate structures of dominance and social oppression? As Roman archaeologists, in Algeria or indeed elsewhere in North Africa, is it appropriate for us to focus our efforts on the Roman period, to ask questions about the impact of Roman conquest, indeed to look into romanization or resistance? And if we do so, are we buying into and bolstering the colonial rhetoric? Certainly this is not the intention of archaeologists, nevertheless the narratives that are produced by our work and bolstered by scientific authority do have impact on the lives of real people. Rosemary Joyce puts it well: “archaeology cannot take place outside of politics, and it cannot escape engagement in discourses of identity. But archaeologists can actively seek to identify the silences in which they are complicit, exploring the archaeology of those who have been denied a history” (2003: 96). In Algeria, this means inter-disciplinary projects of the *longue durée* which seek to understand how ancient communities changed over time. For Roman

archaeologists, it means asking questions about the historical trajectories of different social and ethnic groups in the diverse landscapes of Roman Algeria, however difficult these traces may be to document. Most importantly, as archaeologists working in North Africa have stressed, it means abandoning crude binaries, whether of Roman and Native, Berber and Arab, colonizer and colonized, moving beyond simple periodizations, and breaking away from linear, essentializing, homogenizing narratives (especially Mattingly 1996; 1997; Mattingly and Hitchner 1995).

The terrain covered in this paper is necessarily messy and the Algerian example is an extreme one. However, it is only exceptional in its specifics: similar issues are at play wherever we work, home and abroad. Non-archaeologists care deeply about the past and may contest the presumption of privileged control over the production of knowledge about the past. The recent controversies over the Prestwich Street excavations in Cape Town (Shepherd 2007) and the African-American burial ground in New York (La Roche and Blakey 1997) attest to this and also act as pertinent reminders of the power that non-archaeologists can wield over access to archaeological sites and material. As Alison Wylie argues, and these controversies demonstrate, it may not be enough to commit to disseminating our research and results to non-scholarly audiences. Instead, we must involve those whose lives are involved from the start, “as partners, not merely as subjects, as sources of insight, and as progenitors of new lines of evidence” (1995: 267). This is not merely an ethical issue. Community involvement in archaeological projects has the potential to transform our approach to, and understanding of, the archaeological evidence (e.g. Moser et al. 2002). The benefits for us are obvious: local knowledge concerning archaeological sites far exceeds that which is preserved in the scholarly record. This is particularly important for countries like Algeria, where archaeological research has been essentially in hiatus since 1992 – local knowledge is essential if we wish to gain a history of sites through time. Where does this leave us? Are all views of the past equally valid? And if not, who gets to decide which interpretations of the past are good and should be exhibited and taught and those which are bad, and should be dismissed or even silenced?

Academic archaeologists base their claim to authority on their access to the mechanism of science and a preference for the scientific mode of knowing over other procedures (Joyce 2005). As Randall McGuire (1992) has argued, whilst archaeologists do have a special expertise in the skill of deriving knowledge from material traces of the past which should be valued, claims of authority based on the use of scientific procedure can only be seen as an ideological preference for a specific way of knowing the past. Nonetheless, it is our archaeological expertise which entails a special responsibility when it comes to the ways in which the past is represented and interpreted. We can and must critique narratives of assimilation and of essentialized identity that deny the production and reproduction of cultural difference. Equally, as Ian Hodder (1999; 2003; 2004) has stressed in his call for multivocality in archaeology, we have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide the means for diverse groups and individuals to present multiple and even contradictory interpretations of the archaeological past. The role of the archaeologist, then, is not that of judge and jury pronouncing the validity or authenticity of specific narratives, but closer to that of a trustee, defending the archaeological past from adverse interests and most importantly facilitating the involvement of diverse interest groups in the interpretation process (Scham 1998:302–3).

The past, its interpretation, investigation and representation, has never been solely the preserve of scholars, and nor should it be. Yet, there often remains a division between Roman archaeological practice and the concerns of archaeology’s many publics about the interpretation of their heritage. As archaeologists we must attempt to engage with the entanglements of life

wherever we may work – not because this is the price that has to be paid for working in edgy, ‘difficult’ countries like Algeria – but because it is only through engaging with issues relevant to contemporary society that we can justify archaeology as a discipline. In the future, more effort must be made to integrate local concerns and practices, alternative narratives and voices, into a more *socially responsible* Roman archaeology.

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