

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

### **North Africa (History of Archaeology)**

Archaeology in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) is closely entwined with the region's complex colonial and postcolonial history. Many research agendas and interpretative models from the colonial period have proved remarkably enduring, particularly the bias toward the Roman Period at the expense of the prehistoric, Phoenician, Punic, Vandal, Byzantine, and Islamic Periods.

#### **Early Explorations**

Medieval Arabic texts reveal a scholarly interest in the ruins of earlier North African civilizations among geographers, historians, and occasional rulers, such as the Fatimid caliph al-Mansur (r. 946–953), however, we know little about these early antiquarian efforts. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries publication of the travels of English and French priests, consuls, missionaries, and explorers as well as renewed interest in Greek and Latin texts spurred European scholarly interest in North Africa's archaeology. "Excavations" were even conducted at Carthage in the 1830s by the British and Danish consul-generals, producing a large number of artifacts for European museums. Generally more interested in Roman, Punic, and Phoenician history, early antiquarians held varied attitudes toward local populations and North African history in comparison to the simplistic negative accounts that developed in the colonial period.

#### **Archaeology in the Colonial Period**

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

Antiquarian efforts gained rapid momentum with the French conquest of Algiers in 1830. Archaeology was used to create an imperialist discourse that justified European colonization by stressing the “otherness” of Africa and the barbarity of the North African peoples. North Africa’s Roman past became a primary justification for the French invasion. France (like Italy in the twentieth century) depicted itself as the descendant of the Roman Empire. The Romans, like the French, were seen as colonizing and civilizing the ancient Berbers, the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa. The European “discovery” of the spectacular ruins of Roman Africa, the well-preserved towns, temples, and churches, were used to substantiate these claims. The Berbers were either viewed as passive recipients of Roman culture or as barbaric savages, incapable of progress without the intervention of Rome. In the same way the modern populations—Berber or Arab—were regarded as barbaric and savage, and incapable of self-government. These tropes became more significant as the years passed, and were used to claim that the Berbers could be assimilated more easily than the Arabs because of their Roman past. This form of intellectual colonialism had implications for archaeology, resulting in an imbalance of research efforts with the Roman Period prioritized, as well as skewing the interpretation of archaeological finds.

The Roman Empire provided a model as well as a justification for colonial rule. Roman symbols, titles, and rhetoric were employed by the colonial administrations, Latin and Greek texts about the ancient Berbers were studied to understand the contemporary indigenous population, and to guide colonial policy. The French military deliberately

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

modeled themselves on the Roman army, even copying military tactics from Roman texts. Archaeology also provided pragmatic benefits for the French: mapping and recording of Roman settlements, forts, roads, cisterns, and aqueducts provided the French with a ready-made infrastructure.

Roman archaeology therefore was a priority for the colonial administration for both practical and ideological reasons. Early archaeological investigations were carried out by amateurs connected to the colonial authorities (soldiers, doctors, priests, etc.). Museums were opened early on at Algiers (1838), and over the next few decades, French settlers established local archaeology journals and museums largely devoted to Roman archaeology. The Pere Blancs (White Fathers) were also instrumental in financing and directing archaeological excavations to recover North Africa's Judeo-Christian heritage. An archaeological atlas of all known (pre-medieval) sites in Algeria began to be compiled by French soldiers and government surveying teams, and was completed by archaeologists in the early twentieth century. In the 1880s archaeology became more formalized: antiquities legislation was introduced and an Algerian antiquities department was established to control excavations, run museums, and protect historic monuments of all periods.

The agendas established by the French in Algeria acted as a general model for archaeology in the French protectorates of Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1912), the Spanish protectorate of Morocco (1912), and the Italian colony of Libya (1911).

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

Gazetteers of archaeological sites were compiled, Roman archaeology was prioritized, especially cities, forts, and monumental architecture, and numerous urban sites were cleared down to the more visible second and third century layers. Excavations were restricted to the large-scale exposure and reconstruction of Roman sites and monumental buildings (temples, forts, churches, theaters, etc.), and the collection of mosaics, statuary, and finds. In early twentieth-century Libya, for example, large areas of Roman sites were rebuilt as part of Italian Fascist propaganda, which emphasized Italy's Roman heritage. Archaeological recording was of variable quality, and post-Roman layers were typically destroyed without being recorded.

### **Archaeology after Independence**

Independence and the establishment of the modern nation-states of Libya (1951), Morocco (1956), Tunisia (1957), and Algeria (1962) prompted nationalist narratives emphasizing a united Arab-Islamic heritage rather than Roman and Berber histories. In Algeria, for example, the new state dated the foundation of the nation to the Arab conquests in the seventh century AD. Such narratives initially had limited impact on archaeology; research continued to focus on Roman archaeology and to be dominated by Europeans, and foreign archaeologists even remained as directors of the Moroccan and Libyan antiquities departments.

In the 1970s the situation began to change as archaeological sites and material culture became key symbols in nationalist and postcolonial narratives. In Tunisia, for example,

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

Punic heritage was employed by Tunisia's Ben-Ali regime in state propaganda and there was commensurate investment in Punic archaeology, such as the clearance of whole sites like Kerkouane. North African scholars began to deconstruct colonialist research agendas and paradigms, rewriting history from a North African perspective and emphasizing African military and cultural resistance to ancient and modern colonizers from the Romans to the French. At the same time the dominance of European projects began to wane, and was replaced by a mixture of North African and international projects. Certain periods have become the preserve of North African archaeologists; for example, until recently only Tunisian archaeologists were granted permits to work on Punic Period remains, while Islamic archaeology has tended to be conducted by North Africans.

The 1970s and 1980s also marked changes in archaeological methodology and research agendas. The multi-period United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Save Carthage excavations and Libyan Valleys Survey projects were pivotal in establishing stratigraphic recording, sampling, systematic field survey, and the use of ceramic typologies as standard practice. While Roman cities remained the focus of research, scholars also began to turn their attention to the rural landscape, and the pre-Roman, late antique (Vandal and Byzantine), and Islamic periods. Archaeological research and development has been hampered in Algeria by civil war (1991–2002), and to a lesser extent in Libya by American and United Nations sanctions (1986–2004).

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

Increasingly archaeology and heritage management are driven by economic considerations, namely the need to develop and expand heritage tourism, rather than political agendas. Ambitious projects sponsored by the World Bank in Tunisia, in particular, aim at the mass excavation and reconstruction of major sites like Roman Uthina (Oudhna) as archaeological parks. World Bank investment has proved particularly important for UNESCO-protected Roman sites and medieval medinas in Morocco and Tunisia, while oil companies have provided funding and impetus for research-driven and rescue archaeological projects in Libya and to a lesser extent Algeria. The pace of modern development and oil exploitation since independence also poses a serious threat to archaeology across North Africa, and rescue archaeology projects are rare. In general, North African countries have noticeably increased their investment in archaeological research, site preservation, and museums with the aim of encouraging heritage tourism.

These new developments in North African archaeology have significantly advanced archaeological knowledge of the pre-Roman, late antique, and medieval periods. Nonetheless, Roman archaeology remains the main focus of research and heritage management in North Africa. Equally importantly, despite an initial backlash against North African postcolonial approaches, foreign archaeologists are moving away from colonial paradigms and developing more nuanced interpretations of ancient and medieval North Africa. There are still some problem areas, for example, relatively little research has been conducted on ancient Berbers, although the increasing visibility of dissident

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

Berberist (Amazigh) movements that stress the importance of Berber heritage, may result in change. Archaeology of the Ottoman and colonial periods, too, has yet to begin.

North Africa is currently in political flux. The Arab Spring of 2011 marked revolution in Tunisia and Libya, the lifting of a nineteen-year state of emergency in Algeria, and a new legal constitution in Morocco. The implications for archaeology are unclear, but changes in research agendas as well as cultural heritage management are to be expected.

## **Bibliography**

Fenwick, Corisande. "Archaeology and the Search for Authenticity: Colonialist, Nationalist and Berberist visions of an Algerian Past." In *TRAC 2007: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, edited by Corisande Fenwick, Meredith Wiggins, and David Wythe, pp. 75–88, 2008. An article summarizing different narratives employed to interpret archaeology, with useful bibliography.

Lorcin, Patricia. "Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past." *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (2007): 295–329. An excellent account of how the French used the Roman legacy to justify, and cement, their rule.

Fenwick, C. 2012. 'North Africa' in N. A. Silberman (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Archaeology*. (2nd edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press (in press).

Mattingly, David J. "From One Colonialism to Another: Imperialism and the Maghreb." In *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire*, edited by David Mattingly, pp. 43–75, 2011. The author argues that current interpretations of Roman colonialism are strongly influenced by European colonialism, and examines how this has affected Roman archaeology.

Munzi, Massimiliano. "Italian Archaeology in Libya: From Colonial Romanità to Decolonization of the Past." In *Archaeology under Dictatorship*, edited by Michael. L. Galaty, and Charles Watkinson, pp. 73–108, 2004. A succinct article describing the politics of archaeology in Italian Fascist Libya.

Oulebsir, Nabila. *Les usages du patrimoine: monuments, musées et politique colonial en Algérie (1830–1930)* (The Uses of Cultural Heritage: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Politics in Algeria), 2004. The only systematic account of the development of archaeology in colonial Algeria, especially valuable for its use of archival materials.