

The Inheritance of Empire and the Ruins of Rome in French Colonial Algeria

In 1912 Albert Ballu, chief architect of the Service des Monuments Historiques de L'Algérie, described the 'triple task' of the Service, which had been established in 1880—fifty years after the beginning of France's conquest of Algeria—as that of not only excavating the 'secrets' that the ground contained, but also of 'making them presentable to the public' and of 'preserving them from destruction.' ¹ France was not alone in embarking on this archaeological project that sought to explore an antique and more particularly a Roman past in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but Algeria came to occupy a special place in the French historical imagination. ²

Archaeologists and architects had early on accompanied the French military on its campaigns in Algeria, and the work undertaken by them was at first the result of initiatives launched by specific individuals, who included Amable Ravoisié, Charles Texier,...