

Rediscovering the Past | The birth of archaeology | Classical archaeology

Europeans saw their cultural roots in Greece and Rome. Many of the more informative sites were in the Arab and Ottoman world.

The Grand Tours of the 18th century saw a parade of (mostly) European gentlemen visit ancient sites in Italy. Greece was little explored even at the turn of the 19th century, although by the turn of the 20th, it would be a focal point for archaeology. The Middle East was so little explored that effectively it was a blank on the map. The 19th century brought to light a wealth of spectacular Greek and Roman remains in North Africa and the Middle East: Carthage and Dougga in Tunisia, Ephesus and Pergamon in Turkey. In the early years of the 20th century, aerial surveys in Tunisia illustrated Roman land-use practices that had been sought for in vain in Europe. Feelings of empathy with the soldiers of ancient empires fostered an interest in life on the frontiers in antiquity among North African colonists. Under Napoleon, France identified with the might of ancient Rome. In Germany, high culture and political fragmentation led to feelings of greater affinity with ancient Greece.



Working Number: TN 027

Name: Carthage archaeological site

Holding Museum: -

Date: Ancient site

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The World Heritage site of Carthage was founded by the Phoenicians in around 814 BC. It remained an important city under Roman, Vandal and Byzantine control until it was abandoned in favour of Tunis after Amir Hasan ibn Nu'man's conquest in 698 AD. Thereafter it served as a source of building materials for other cities.



Working Number: TN 103

Name: Excavation site in Carthage

Holding Museum: Institut National du Patrimoine

Date: 19th century

Materials: Paper

Curator Justification: Photography was a 19th-century invention. It was not long before it was put to use to document archaeological sites. This photo was taken at the excavations of Carthage (Tunisia) by French archaeologist Father Alfred Louis Delattre.



Working Number: TN 093

Name: Temple and fountain of Zaghan

Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie

Date: 19th century

Materials: Paper

Curator Justification: Sir Greenville Temple travelled all around the Mediterranean. This image of the temples and fountains of Zaghouan (Tunisia) was published

in 1840 in his The Shores And Islands Of The Mediterranean. The Nymphaeum was a 30-meter semicircle, lined internally by a vaulted gallery in which several niches were built, from where water flowed to Carthage.



Working Number: TN 091

Name: Amphitheatre at El Jem

Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie

Date: 19th century

Materials: Paper

Curator Justification: The Amphitheatre of El-Jem is considered the hallmark of Roman Tunisia. It is the only amphitheatre outside the famous Colosseum in Rome to retain an intact front three-tier gallery. It was among the monuments recorded by Sir Greenville Temple on his travels in the mid-19th century.



Working Number: TN 031

Name: Dougga archaeological site

Holding Museum: -

Date: Ancient site

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Many of the better-preserved Roman sites are to be found in North Africa and the Middle East. Dougga in north-west Tunisia is a prime example. The site is enormous – 70 hectares – and is superbly well preserved. It is much more than a Roman site, however. It preserves over 1,500 years of settlement, with Punic, Numidian, Roman and Byzantine remains. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Working Number: DZ 154

Name: Roman tomb (columbarium), Marengo gardens, Bab el-Oued

Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités

Date: -

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Colonial administrators also researched their countries of residence. This drawing of a Roman tomb found in the Algerian town of Marengo was made by Albert Devoulx, curator of the Arabic Archives in the land registration section in Algiers. He was also a member of the Algerian Historical Society. His work was published in the Society's journal dedicated to Algerian archaeology: Revue Africaine, founded in 1856.



Working Number: DZ 074

Name: Theatre of Djemila, ancient Cuicul

Holding Museum: Musée National des Beaux-Arts

Date: 1840

Materials: Pencil

Curator Justification: In August 1840, French soldier Adolphe Delamare visited the ruins of the ancient Roman colony at Cuicul (Djémila). He returned in 1848. During his time at the site, he produced multiple sketches, many of which are now in the Sorbonne. This drawing in the Museum of Fine Arts, Algeria, is a detailed field sketch of the second-century ruins.



Working Number: DZ 079

Name: The Christian basilica at Djemila

Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités

Date: 1840–1844

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The remains of ancient churches were of particular interest to the Catholic Church, which hoped to reinvigorate the Catholic faith in North Africa. This drawing of the Basilica at Djémila was published by Amable Ravoisié in his *Exploration scientifique de l'Algérie pendant les années 1840, 1841 et 1842*.



Working Number: DZ 081

Name: Mosaic from the Christian basilica

Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités

Date: 1840–1845

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The remains of ancient churches were of particular interest to the Catholic Church, which hoped to reinvigorate the Catholic faith in North Africa. This drawing of the Basilica at Djémila was published by Amable Ravoisié in his *Exploration scientifique de l'Algérie pendant les années 1840, 1841 et 1842*.



Working Number: DZ 075

Name: Tall Roman bridge, restored by Salah Bey in 1790

Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités

Date: 1840–1842

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Ravoisié also drew this Roman bridge, which had been restored under Salah Bey's rule in 1790.



Working Number: DZ 086

Name: Ruins of Cherchell

Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités

Date: 1840–1849

Materials: -
Curator Ravoisié also drew this image of the site of
Justification: Cherchell, Algeria.



Working Number: DZ 078
Name: Section of a Roman triumphal arch
Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1840–1843
Materials: -
Curator Ravoisié also drew this image of a Roman
Justification: triumphal arch.



Working Number: FR 003
Name: Northern side of the tomb of the Christian woman. Excavations carried out
Holding Museum: by detachment of the Zouave regiments, under the direction of Berbrugger
[curator of the Musée d'Alger].
Date: National Library of France
Materials: 1856–1857
Curator -
Justification: The first use of photography on an archaeological site was in 1855 under Louis-Adrien Berbrugger (1801–69). He had shown that the so-called “Tomb of the Christian” was in fact a royal mausoleum of Mauritania. This photograph comes from an “illustrated report” made by Félix-Jacques-Antoine Moulin while he was in Algiers: in it Berbrugger (next to the door), is seen with John Green (photographer of the archaeological campaign) and a dozen Zouaves who participated in the excavations.



Working Number: JO 005
Name: Umm al-Rasas
Holding Museum: -
Date: Roman-Present; identified in 1896 by J. Germer-Durand
Materials: -
Curator The World Heritage site of Umm al-Rasas (Jordan) contains ruins
Justification: from the Roman, Byzantine and early Muslim periods. The most important monument is the mosaic floor of the Church of St Stephen. Built in 785 AD (during the Abbasid period), it depicts the major cities in Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. It reflects the spirit of tolerance and co-existence between Muslim and Christian communities at that time. Umm al-Rasas was visited by English scholar and traveller Henry Baker Tristram in 1872.



Working Number: UK 083
Name: Archaeological survey
Holding Museum: The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF)

Date: 1873
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: Architectural elevation of the ruins of the Roman aqueducts of Caesarea Maritima in Palestine by C. R. Conder of the British Corps of the Royal Engineers, dated 6 April 1873. In addition to the geographical features of the land, olive groves, other agricultural features and the villages, the Survey of Western Palestine recorded all the visible archaeological remains of the country.



Working Number: UK 079
Name: Beacon to a new world
Holding Museum: The British Museum
Date: c. 1886
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: British archaeologist Flinders Petrie purchased this figurine in Giza (Egypt). He was informed by the seller that it had been unearthed at a site in the western Nile Delta. Petrie, recognising the Cypriot and Egyptian influences, headed to the region where it was said the figurine was found. It was here that he uncovered the town of Naukratis.



Working Number: IT1 001
Name: Uadi-Merdüm [Wadi Merdum]. Count Sforza and the Interpreter Maffei Transcribe a Roman Inscription Brought to their Attention by 'Natives'
Holding Museum: Italian Geographical Society (SGI)
Date: 14–15 July 1911
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: In 1911, Italian Count Sforza and Ignazio Sanfilippo were touring Libya on a mission to assess local resources, sponsored by the Libyan branch of the Banco di Roma. Their parallel interest in Roman archaeology illustrates the connection between Italians' claims of their Roman heritage and Italian colonial ambitions. The discovery of Roman antiquities in Libya was said to support Italy's "historic right" to rule over Libya. Here the team works on a Latin inscription.



Working Number: IT1 090
Name: The Old Woman from Candia [Heraklion, Crete, Greece], the Only Person who Remained in Apollonia on the Day of the Occupation
Holding Museum: Italian Institute for African and Oriental Studies
Date: 1912–13(?)
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The elderly Greek woman in this photo was the only person remaining in the Libyan town of Marsa Susa when the Italian army occupied it in 1911. The Italians referred to the town as Apollonia, the

old Roman town nearby, which by this time was nothing more than an archaeological site. The technique was part of the wider strategy to connect the ancient and modern conquests of Libya.



Working Number: GR 013

Name: The Gate of the Roman

Holding Museum: Benaki Museum

Date: 1845

Materials: Tinted lithograph on paper

Curator Justification: King Otto of Greece (1833–63) transformed ruinous Athens into a European capital worthy of its erstwhile glory. Spectacular changes were made to the appearance and planning of the city. This 1845 view comes from Théodore Du Moncel's *Vues pittoresques des monuments d'Athènes*. We see the Roman Agora, natural continuation of the ancient Agora, and known in Ottoman times as the Bazaar Gate.



Working Number: GR 014

Name: The Library of Hadrian

Holding Museum: Benaki Museum

Date: 1845

Materials: Tinted lithograph on paper

Curator Justification: The Painted Stoa (colonnade depicted on the right here) was known to 19th-century visitors by various names. Its true identity was not discovered until after 1884 with systematic excavations in the area of the Roman Agora. A small Byzantine church is also visible. This is Hagioi Asomatoi sta skalia (Incorporeal Saints at the steps), which was demolished, and exemplifies the misguided antiquarian notion of “purifying” archaeological sites.



Working Number: IT1 142

Name: A postcard of Italian colonial propaganda

Holding Museum: State Library of Modern and Contemporary History

Date: 1910s

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This 1910's propaganda postcard illustrates the connection between ancient Rome and modern Italy, and thus legitimated Italy's “right” to “re-conquer” territories once conquered by Rome.
