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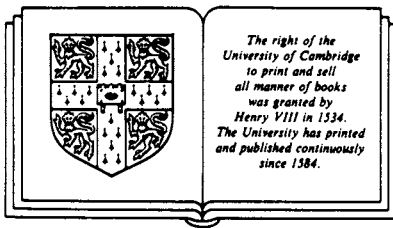
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Making Algeria French

*Colonialism in Bône,
1870 – 1920*

DAVID PROCHASKA

University of Illinois



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For Harry,

*my intellectual and spiritual mentor early on
-who better read it*

and for Mohan Lal Chipa,

*who for no good reason befriended me
-and who will never read it.*

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Abbreviations

AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
AOM	Archives Nationales, Dépôt d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence
APCA	Archives de l'Assemblée Populaire Communale de Annaba (former Archives Municipales de Bône)
AWC	Archives de la Wilaya de Constantine
BNV	Bibliothèque Nationale, Versailles
PP	British Parliamentary Papers, Accounts and Papers
SGA	Gouvernement Général de l'Algérie, <i>Statistique Générale de l'Algérie</i> (Algiers: Imprimerie Algérienne, 1870–1929)
SNED	Société Nationale d'Édition et de Diffusion
TEFA	<i>Tableau d'Etablissements Français en Algérie</i> (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1837–66)

Preface

Albert Camus received the Nobel Prize in 1957. At a press conference afterwards, he was asked about the Algerian Revolution, then raging. “*If I had to choose between justice [independant Algeria] and my mother [Algérie française], I would choose my mother.*” Camus was a Frenchman born in colonial Algeria, a settler or *pied noir* , to use the somewhat pejorative term. Like George Orwell in India, he was a colonial by background. “*At present the Arabs do not alone make up all of Algeria. The size and seniority of the French settlement, in particular, are enough to create a problem that cannot be compared to anything in history. The Algerian French are likewise, and in the strongest meaning of the word, natives.*”

Camus’s father worked as a cellarman in the wine trade. In 1913 the elder Camus was posted to Mondovi in eastern Algeria. Mondovi was located eight miles inland from Bône, the third largest port city in Algeria. The largest, Algiers, was where the Camus family came from, and where Camus set *The Stranger (L’Etranger)*. “*Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can’t be sure.*” The second largest port, Oran, furnished the locale for *The Plague (La Peste)*. “*From dark corners, from basements, from cellars, from sewers, they [rats] came up in long tottering lines to stagger at the light, turn round and die near men.*” Bône itself was situated on the site of St. Augustine’s Hippo. All three of these settler colonial cities were populated by more Europeans than native Algerians.

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi in 1913. Ten years before Jérôme Bertagna, the “boss” of Bône, died in Mondovi. Where Camus’s background was Spanish, Bertagna’s was Italian. Where the Camus were dirt-scrabbling poor, Bertagna made his fortune in colonial Algeria. Elected mayor of Bône in 1888, Bertagna was the single most powerful person in the region until his death in 1903. It was he who was primarily responsible for constructing the port of Bône through which Camus’s father shipped pressed grapes to France. With his economic wealth and

Preface

political clout, Bertagna created a vast 7,500-acre estate in Mondovi, 1,500 acres of which he devoted to vineyards, perhaps including the one where Camus's father worked.

Making Algeria French constitutes a postcolonial look at the colonial past of Bône-become-Annaba. The title is ironic, for the unmaking of French Algeria soon followed its making, a case of the failure of success. Eschewing earlier colonial interpretations, I view the Bône past differently, as French settler colonialism in a colonial city. Furthermore, I have employed elements of a modernist prose structure to convey a sense of my postcolonial perspective as well as to present my substantive findings. In keeping with the shape of a city, therefore, this work is multidimensional and architectonic, rather than one-dimensional and linear. To be sure, we will get from the top of the Cours – the main street in Bône/Annaba – to the port at the foot, and from one side of town to the other, but not before pausing to explore some of the side streets, and taking a few detours to point out the sights. I invite the reader, then, to take a guided tour with me through colonial Bône.

* * *

Given the circumstances under which this book was conceived and carried out, I am happy to acknowledge the aid of the following individuals. First of all, this study simply would not have been possible had it not been for the aid of Jean-Claude Vatin, Directeur, Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Economique Juridique et Sociale, Cairo; R. Ainad Tabet, former director, Archives Nationales d'Algérie, who kindly granted me unrestricted access to the Algerian archives; Brahim Jatni, Secrétaire General, Assemblée Populaire et Communale de Annaba; and Nick Macris, Dravo Corporation. Also in Algeria, Prof. Louis P. Montoy of the Université de Constantine; Abdelkrim Badjadja, director of the Archives de la Wilaya de Constantine; and Prof. James Malarkey facilitated my research.

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A study such as this requires time and money to bring to fruition. The University of California, Berkeley, the French Government, and

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I take responsibility for what is wrong with this work as well as what is right.