Although the Military Engineers are said to have sometimes protected the existing architecture,¹ both Algiers and Constantine were comprehensively destroyed by the French. This was not for the usual military purpose of devastating the enemy (their razzias and burnt earth excursions in the countryside surely assuaged that thirst)² but, helped by the mindless vandalism of French soldiers,¹ in order to modernise the country. Destruction also occurred in a host of other settlements, some of them considered later in this chapter, all of them militarised because the countryside around both Algiers and Constantine remained unsafe.

New building was also conceived as an important part of the mission civilisatrice, which would introduce admiring locals to the new world the French created. Part of modernisation is clearance of the old and outdated, characterised by the evisceration of Paris by Haussmann,³ who nevertheless exhibits an interest in antiquities in his two-volume autobiography. His boulevards subsequently attracted the relatively benign interpretation of Gucci-land; but they were designed for easy troop manoeuvring, cannon included, and fulfilled this purpose under the Paris Commune of 1871. Public safety was surely one of the reasons for similar modernisation in Algeria. Readers could keep abreast of developments not only in Algeria (“au milieu de ces sauvages montagnes, devant ces hordes barbares, au pied de ces ruines romaines”⁴) but also in Paris thanks to highly illustrated magazines such as (from 1843) *L’Illustration*, using wood-engraving.⁵ Great emphasis therein was placed on the developing railway system in France (including the Paris metro), but also on “modern” Paris, for this periodical published panoramic views of various of the “Boulevards de Paris,” showing provincials and colons just what an up-to-date town should look like.

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Alterations had to start with the main centres where high-ranking soldiers and administrators would live. Arab architecture thereby suffered greatly, sometimes through European rebuilding in towns,\(^4\) so that we know less about its nature in Algeria than the *Description de l’Egypte* provided further east. Hence although there are plenty of accounts in the French 19th-century journals about things Arab, from architecture and literature to inscriptions and ethnography; and although it is impossible to detect any animus against the high points of Moslem architecture seen in North Africa, this did not prevent extensive demolition of native monuments, which leaves a large hole in our knowledge. Whereas we know a lot about Roman villas (which are generally laid out in as predictable a fashion as chain motels), mediaeval Moslem palaces and mosques now have to be studied via surviving remnants. Had the French left Arab Algiers and Constantine alone, and simply tacked their European sections onto the outside of the existing towns (as happened at Tunis), we might well know much more.

Unfortunately, the French conversion of these two towns was extensive, and Moslem monuments suffered along with the remains of Roman ones. Their building of hospitals and barracks has already been introduced in Chapter Two. As Pallary notes in the wider context, “Il semble que tout le monde se soit mis d’accord pour favoriser l’oeuvre de destruction: les uns par cupidité, d’autres par inertie ou ignorance et enfin par plaisir.”\(^5\) Even the lime kilns appeared in picturesque views.\(^4\) As Ibn Khaldun wrote in the late 14th century:

> La grossièreté des mœurs est devenue pour eux une seconde nature . . . Si les Arabes ont besoin de pierres pour servir d’appuis à leurs marmites, ils dégradent les bâtiments afin de se les procurer; s’il leur faut du bois pour en faire des piquets ou des soutiens de tente, ils détruisent les toits des maisons pour en avoir. Par la nature même de leur vie, ils sont hostiles à tout ce qui est édifice; or, construire des édifices, c’est faire le premier pas dans la civilisation.\(^6\)

But then he was writing about nomadic Arabs, not French soldiers and their commanders.

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\(^4\) Bruller 1994, 21: Ferdinand de Trel: Four à chaux dans les environs d’Alger pris de la Porte Bab-el-Oued – and c.5m high.