

RESEARCH ARTICLE	British Research on the Ancient City of Timgad: The British Traveler James Bruce as a Model
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Abstract The ancient city of Timgad has attracted notable interest from British scholars since the eighteenth century. Their travels and explorations contributed to uncovering the significance of this Roman city located in eastern Algeria and to documenting its archaeological landmarks. With the increasing academic openness of Algerian universities in recent years, historians and archaeologists have been called upon to align with this trend. One of their main goals is to move beyond the limitations of the French academic tradition that has long shaped the history of ancient North Africa. For researchers in Algeria, detaching from the dominance of French studies remains a challenge, mainly because of France's longstanding and ideologically driven focus on Roman-era North African history. This perspective often served political interests during the colonial period. However, alongside French scholarship, there exist other foreign academic contributions, including British studies, which offer valuable insights into the archaeology and history of the region. In this article, I present the city of Timgad through the writings of the British traveler James Bruce. Although his observations on Timgad were limited, he was the first to identify the upper part of the Arch of Triumph. He also described the Byzantine fortress and sketched several of the monuments he encountered. These early contributions are the focus of the discussion in this paper.	
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Introduction:

It is widely acknowledged that early studies on the history of ancient North Africa were largely colonial in nature. The French school of thought was among the first to engage seriously with this historical period. However, these works often reflected underlying political ideologies, which has placed a particular responsibility on Algerian researchers. They must approach French sources with critical caution.

One effective approach to reducing reliance on the French tradition is to engage with other international studies. These may offer more objective perspectives, free from colonial influence. In this context, the British school deserves attention.

This article focuses on the British traveler James Bruce. Although his notes on the ruins of Timgad were limited, he is credited with discovering the upper section of the Arch of Triumph. He also described the Byzantine fortress and produced a number of drawings of the ancient site. These contributions, though modest, remain significant and will be analyzed in the following discussion.

1. Geography of the City of Timgad

1.1. Location

The city of Timgad is situated to the north of the Saharan Atlas, on the northern slopes of the Aurès Mountains. It lies between 6°28'07.9" east longitude and 35°29'03" north latitude⁽¹⁾ Specifically, Timgad is located on the northern slope of Mount Aurès, which rises to over 2,328 meters at its highest peak, known as Chelia. Nearby lies another mountain range called Bouarif, whose highest point reaches 1,746 meters at Ras Fourar. Between the Aurès and Bouarif mountains, there is a narrow plain, no more than 20 kilometers wide. On the southern edge of this plain, the city of Timgad was established.

Timgad is located 36 kilometers east of Batna, the capital of the Aurès region. It can be reached via National Road No. 88, which connects to the towns of Lambèse (Tazoult) and Khenchela.⁽²⁾ This road runs alongside the ancient Roman road⁽³⁾

The climate of Timgad is mild and pleasant throughout the year. Summers are hot, while autumn is warm and sunny. In winter, snow covers the surrounding mountain peaks.⁽⁴⁾

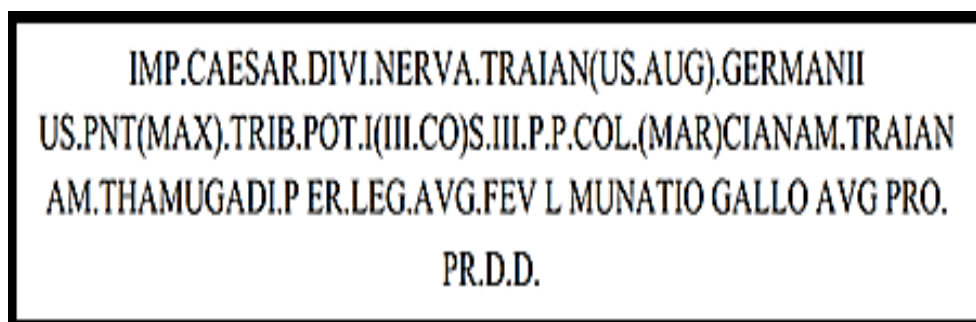
1.2. Naming:

The city had several names. Initially, it was known as "Splendissin Civita." Later, it became known as "Upla Trajan Marciana Thamugadi Colonia." It is mentioned in many ancient texts under the name "Thamugadi"⁽⁵⁾ However, there is some disagreement about the meaning of this name. The French scholar Ballu proposed that the origin of the name "Thamugadi" comes from the Greek word "Topouyosiv"⁽⁶⁾

The scholar Masqueray suggests that the name originates from the word Thamigas, which consists of the feminine prefix Tha and the root MGS, meaning in the Amazigh language a tool, a plant, or something that once existed at the site where the city was built⁽⁷⁾

The officer Louis Rinn suggests that Thamugadi is an Amazigh name, formed from a feminine prefix and the root EGDA, which in the Amazigh language means "goddess" or "mother of happiness, prosperity, and fertility"⁽⁸⁾

The city's name and history are traced back to the oldest inscription found at the site. This inscription was discovered near the northern gate, attached to the old wall, and dates from the period between 100 and 103 AD. The text is in Latin and reads as follows: ⁽⁹⁾



¹ S. Gsel, Atlas Archéologique de l'Algérie, Feuille N 27, Article 225, 1997, p 25.

² F. Boewillwald, R. Cagnat, Timgad une city Africaine sous l'empire romain, Pairs, 1892, p17.

³ Mohamed Al-Eid Matmar, A Journey to Timgad, Dar Al-Huda, Algeria, 2011, p. 28.

⁴ Mohamed Taghlisa, Guide to the Antiquities and Museum of Timgad, Directorate of Antiquities, Museums, Buildings and Historical Sites, Algeria, 1982, p. 7.

⁵ Muhammad Mutmar, the previous reference, pp. 31-32.

⁶ A. Ballu, The ruins of Timgad, Paris 1897, p29.

⁷ E. Masqueray, Voyage dans l'auras, T 12, 1893, p467-468.

⁸ L. Rinn, Géographie Ancienne de l'Algérie, N 211, 1893, p 303.

⁹ Jacques (H), essai sur les origines des Touaregs, Paris, 2003, P 138

The text that contains the ancient name of the city of Timgad (Thamugadi)⁽¹⁾

The translation is as follows: Emperor Caesar Nerva Trajan Augustus, son of the deified Nerva, conqueror of the Germans, chief priest, holder of tribunician power for the fourth time, consul for the third time, father of the nation, founded the colony Colonia Marciana Traiana Thamugadi. It was established by the Third Augustan Legion. The inscription was set up by Lucius Munatius Gallus, imperial legate with the rank of praetor.

2. History of the City

The period preceding the Roman presence in the Aurès region remains largely clear. This is due to the scarcity of studies focusing on local archaeological remains. Many tombs were constructed during that time, containing thousands of funerary monuments spread across the Aurès as a whole. Only a few of these have been documented in archaeological records.

For this reason, the history of the Aurès before the Roman era is still surrounded by uncertainty. It requires thorough research and dedicated academic effort⁽²⁾ However, it is certain that this region was not uninhabited before the arrival of the Romans. Archaeological evidence confirms the presence of cultural remains dating back to ancient times. The Numidians built the city of Ishougan, located about 25 kilometers from Timgad. This Numidian site, situated in the municipality of Oum El Toub, has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention and remains buried under rubble to this day.

The Aurès Mountains are rich in megalithic monuments, which may date back to the Neolithic period. The Ishougan plateau is among the sites discovered and excavated during the nineteenth century⁽³⁾



The Site of Ishougan (Foum El Toub)

This is the ancient city settled by the Numidians thousands of years ago. Today, only a number of tombs remain. These are located in a narrow pass known as Foum Constantine.

¹ Ezzedine Sadiki, Archaeological Study of the Timgad Forum and its Facilities, Master's Thesis, Institute of Archaeology, Algeria.2007-2008

² Mohammed Al Sharif Hussein,Traces of the Roman presence in the Aures,Publications of the National Public Museum, editor,2016,The Aures throughout history, 151-152

³ amaras, I. (s.d.). Ichoukkane: Construction premières et post-neolithic community activities in Aurès.

It is a natural rocky pathway, crossed by a stone wall that separates the city of the living from the city of the dead ⁽¹⁾

The Numidians also built the royal Numidian mausoleum Medghassen in the late third and early second century BCE. This large pyramid-like structure, or massive hill, reflects the level of development and prosperity achieved by Numidian civilization at that time ⁽²⁾



The Royal Numidian Tomb of Medghassen

It would be a mistake to assume that the Romans settled and developed an empty or uninhabited region. In fact, the Aurès massif was already populated and active, with stable and organized communities. This was confirmed by Birebent, who emphasized the importance of irrigation and water management in certain remote areas of the Aurès.³

This relates to the key cultural areas located near the borders of the ancient city of Timgad. As for the city we are discussing, it dates back to the Roman era.

After the Romans secured stability in the Proconsular province, they began to complete their occupation of the Maghreb. This effort aimed to maintain control over the newly acquired territories as part of their expansionist policy in the region. Military leadership shifted eastward according to strategic needs. The Third Augustan Legion was moved to the city of Tafust, known today as Tébessa. From there, a series of military operations commenced to bring the sites north of the Saharan Atlas under control, suppressing revolts that threatened Roman dominance in the area⁽⁴⁾

The Lambèse (Tazoult) camp was established in 81 AD, to which the Third Augustan Legion was transferred. After the Romans conquered the Aurès region and pacified it, the construction of the city of Timgad was delayed until around 100 AD. The city was intended to house veteran soldiers who had settled in the area.

¹ AgencyAAlgerian News, Ishokhan Landmarks, 2010.

² Muhammad Al-Eid Mumatar, the previous reference, pp. 17-18.

³ F. Boewillwald, RC Op.cit, p16.

⁴ Muhammad Taghlisa, the previous reference, p. 8.



Transition from the Lambèse Camp to the City of Timgad

2.1. Construction

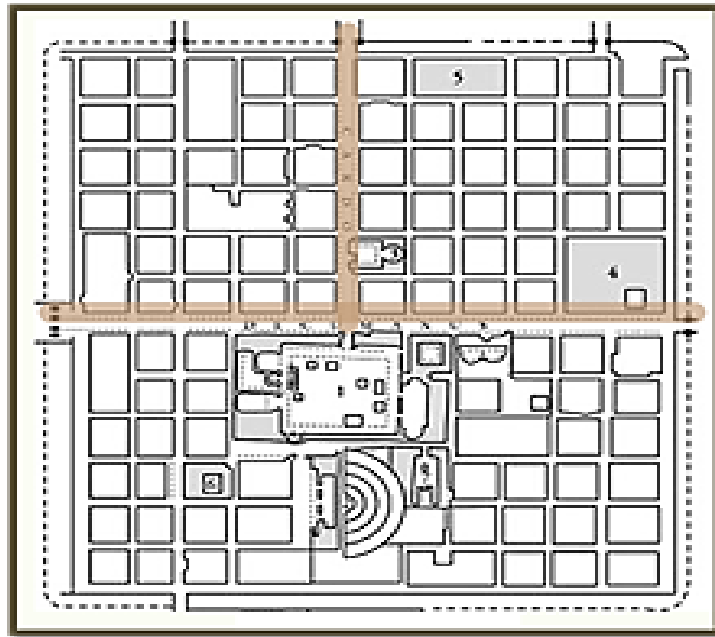
The city of Timgad was built by order of Emperor Trajan under the supervision and oversight of the Third Augustan Legion stationed in Lambèse. However, the actual construction was carried out by Numidian slaves under Roman control.

It was built to receive Roman army veterans, who later became landowners. Over time, it turned into a colony known as Colonia Marciana Traiana Thamugadi. Colonia Marciana Triana Thamugadi ⁽¹⁾

It was built with various facilities in a nearly square shape, measuring 354 by 324 meters. Its layout followed a chessboard pattern, with two main streets at the center. The north-south axis was called the *Cardo* (the main directional axis), while the east-west axis was known as the *Decumanus*⁽²⁾ Each of the two main streets ends with a large structure adorned by massive stone arches and carved columns. Parallel side streets run along both axes, dividing the city into small square blocks—around 36 residential units. Each unit measured approximately 23 meters. Over time, the number of private houses increased on the eastern side..

¹ Muhammad Mutmar, the previous reference, pp. 23-25.

² A. BOUCHAREB, "Timgad: Renouveau urbain, new urbanite (part of IIe S.)", *Reflexion(s)*, September 2009, p. 1-4.



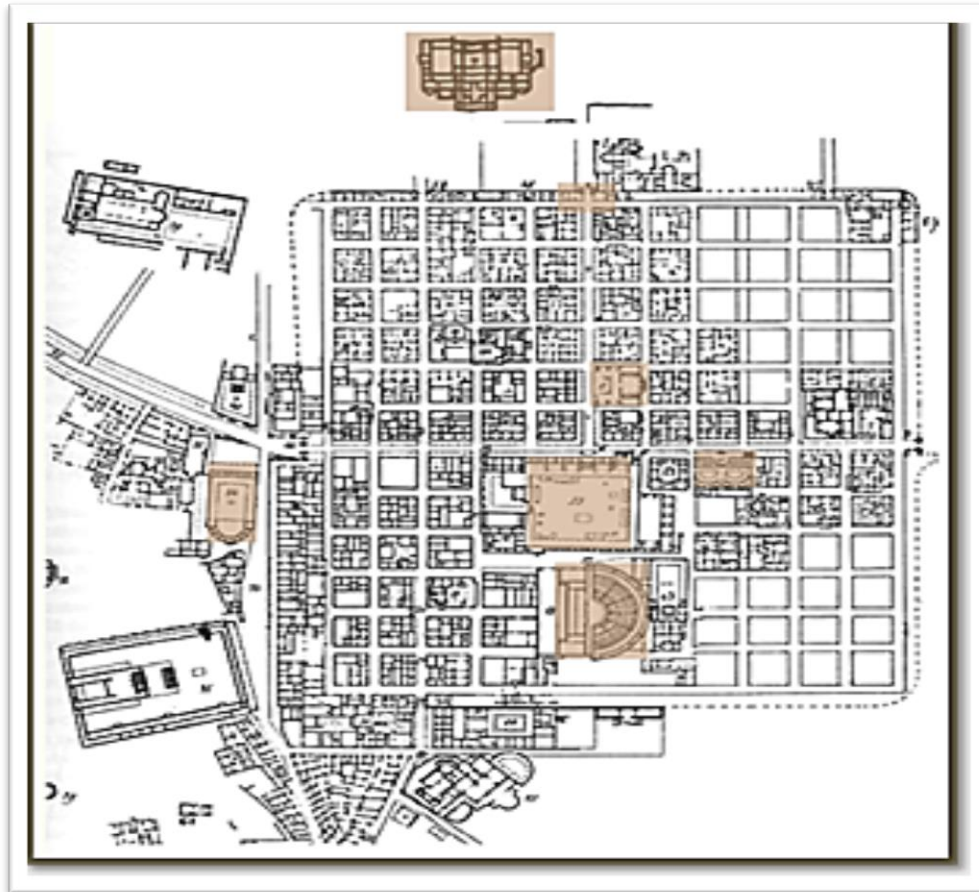
The Chessboard Layout of Timgad

Algeria preserves the finest example of the grid plan of a Roman city, represented by the colony of Timgad. Seen from above, the city resembles a chessboard, similar to the city of Leptis, which was founded during the Severan dynasty. This layout reflects accumulated expertise in planning, construction, architectural decoration, sculpture, and various arts. It stands as evidence of urban development, refined artistic taste, and the diversity of aesthetic preferences among the city's elite¹

The city expanded during the reign of Emperor Septimius. A new commercial center was established to the west of the Arch of Triumph. The residents also built new districts that did not follow the traditional geometric layout of Trajan's city. By the fourth century AD, the city covered more than 50 hectares and had a population of 10,000 to 15,000 people⁽²⁾

¹ Mohamed Al-Basheer Sheniti, Algeria: A Reading into the Roots of History and Evidence of Civilization, Algeria, Dar Al-Huda 2013, p.220.

² Muhammad Taghlisa, the previous reference, p. 10.



The City of Timgad After Expansion

This distinction undoubtedly reflects the remarkable urban dynamism that the city has experienced since the second half of the second century AD. This urban "renewal" becomes even clearer when examining the architectural and artistic styles associated with these urban expansions.

There is limited information about the city of Timgad after the Roman period. However, it is certain that the city suffered destruction during the Vandal era, either at the hands of the Vandals or the local inhabitants. What is clear, though, is that the Vandals did not settle in Timgad, as no traces of their presence have been found there.

This contrasts with Timgad during the Byzantine period. The army of Emperor Justinian, led by General Solomon in the fourth decade of the sixth century AD, reoccupied Timgad. The Byzantine emperor instructed his forces to follow Roman strategies and to build military fortifications in cities from the Roman era. In Timgad, they established their camp at the southern end of the city and converted some urban buildings into churches. Notably, the Byzantines used old buildings as quarries to obtain stones for their military constructions. As a result, they damaged important structures such as the theater, the forum, the library, and others. Since that time, Timgad remained neglected and uninhabited⁽¹⁾

2.2. Main Facilities of the City

2.2.1 The Large Northern Bath Before reaching the paved road leading into the city of Timgad, one encounters the northern bath. It was named so because it was built on the northern side of the city in the 3rd century AD, during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus.

¹ The same, pp. 11-12.

2.2.2 The Northern Gate The gate of Cirta is a main entrance located in the northern wall of the square-shaped city.

2.2.3 The Library The library was built in the fifth block on the left. Upon entering the gate, one finds the library hall, which is semi-circular in shape.

2.2.4 The Forum (Public Square) The gate of the public square marks the original center of the city, as it is the intersection point of the two main roads: the Cardo and the Decumanus. From the gate, one enters the square, which is 50 meters long and 43 meters wide. It is paved with blue stones. At the center of the square stands a sundial, made of intersecting lines that indicate the time based on the sun's reflection on these lines.

There is also a paved courtyard decorated with engraved game symbols. These include chess patterns etched using a sharp tool. Between two columns, there is a square panel inscribed with six Latin words, each consisting of six letters:

Venari, Lavari, Ludere, Ridere, Cete, Vivere They translate as: To hunt, to bathe, to laugh, to play—this is life⁽¹⁾.

The forum is considered one of the most important landmarks in the city. In typical Roman urban planning, the public square is usually located at the intersection of the two main roads. However, this is not the case in the city of Timgad.

2.2.5 The Theater The theater was added in 168 AD. It is an open-air structure used by the Romans to host contests, duels, and various forms of competition. The theater could accommodate up to 5,000 spectators⁽²⁾

2.2.6 Markets

2.2.6.1 The Eastern Market This was the meat market. It consisted of two semi-circular courtyards, with shops and wall structures surrounding them.

2.2.6.2 The Western Market Known as the Sertius Market, it was located west of the Capitol building and the main street. It served as the market for vegetables and fruits.

2.2.7 Trajan's Arch (Triumphal Arch) Built during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, this arch is one of the most significant structures in Timgad. It was the first visible landmark to appear from beneath the buried city. The arch was restored with great care, to the point that it closely resembles the original construction.

3. History of Research

The city of Timgad, or Thamugadi, was subjected to a series of wars and conflicts, which caused it to disappear beneath the layers of earth. The first discoveries were made in 1765, when the British traveler James Bruce (J. Bruce) identified Roman remains at the site. He uncovered the upper part of Trajan's Arch, as well as parts of the theater and the Byzantine fortress. In that year, he documented the Byzantine fort and produced several illustrations of its main features⁽³⁾

3.1 James Bruce James Bruce was born on December 14, 1730, in Scotland and died on April 27, 1794. He was an explorer best known for identifying the main source of the Nile, known as the Blue Nile, during his daring journeys in Ethiopia in 1790.

¹ Muhammad Mutmar, the previous reference, pp. 59-61.

² The same, p. 69.

³ F. Boewillwald, R. Cagnat, Op.cit, p16.



Portrait of James Bruce

James Bruce studied at Harrow and Edinburgh universities. He initially began studying law, but his marriage to the daughter of a noble merchant led him to enter the trading profession. His wife died in October 1754, nine months after their marriage. Later, Bruce traveled to Portugal and Spain, where he examined Eastern manuscripts. This experience inspired him to study Arabic and geography.

When war broke out with Spain in 1762, Bruce submitted a plan for an attack to the British government. His proposal was not accepted, but he was appointed British consul in Algiers in 1763. He also joined a committee to study the ancient ruins there. Interest in these antiquities had grown following the reports of Thomas Shaw (1694–1751), a consular chaplain in Algiers from 1719 to 173⁽¹⁾.

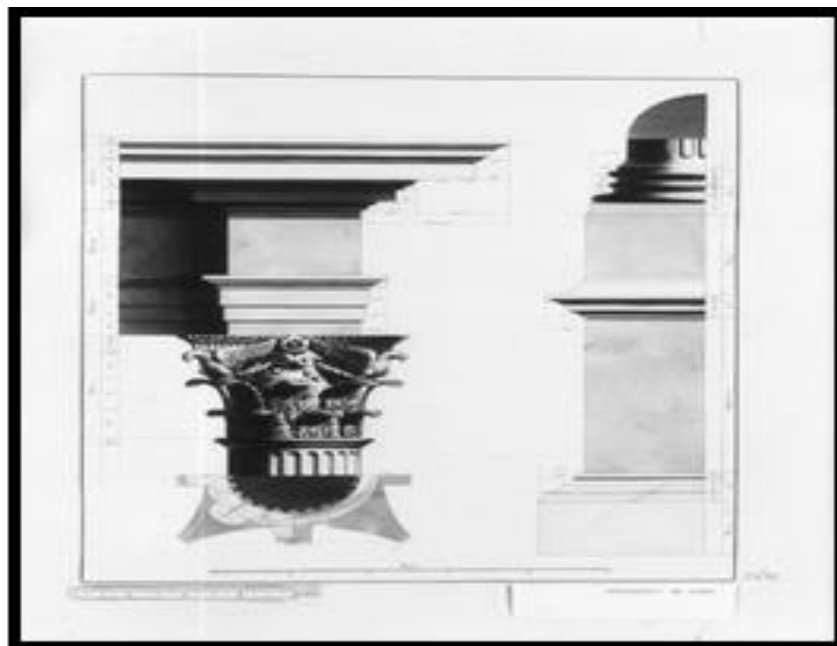
Bruce spent six months in Italy studying antiquities. He arrived in Algiers in March 1763. Most of his time there was dedicated to his consular duties at the court of the Dey. In August 1765, another consul was sent to replace him. This marked the beginning of Bruce's journey to explore Roman ruins in ancient Mauretania. During his travels, he examined many ruins in eastern Algeria, including Timgad, and documented his observations through detailed drawings.

Below, we present the most important of these drawings:

¹ Ahmed Koumas and Chéhrazade Nafa, *Algeria and its patrimoine: French books of the XIX century, patrimoine editions*, 2003, 205 p.



Triumphal Arch (Trajan's Arch) According to a drawing by James Bruce⁽¹⁾



The Capitol According to a drawing by James Bruce⁽²⁾

¹ Bruce, J. (s.d.). The arch of gods Timgad. Royal collection trust.

² Ibid.



Plan of the Corinthian Column in the Capitol According to James Bruce's Drawings⁽¹⁾



Plan of the Capitol's Floor According to James Bruce⁽²⁾

His journey did not end there. He continued traveling to Tunis, then Tripoli, followed by Benghazi. From there, he proceeded to Crete and sailed onward to Sidon. He traveled through Syria and visited Palmyra and Baalbek. Bruce made detailed drawings of many monuments he encountered throughout his travels in the Levant and North Africa.

He had gained sufficient medical knowledge to travel in the East as a physician. In July 1768, he arrived in Alexandria. Determined to reach the source of the Nile River, he left

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

Cairo and embarked on a difficult journey along the Nile, passing through Aswan. Eventually, in 1770, he reached the Ethiopian capital.

Despite severe political unrest in Ethiopia, Bruce continued his exploratory journey and arrived at Lake Tana, where the Blue Nile begins. The return voyage home was extremely challenging. He reached Marseille in March 1773 and returned to London in 1774.

After returning to his estate, Bruce began writing about his travels in 1780. His account is considered one of the great epics of African adventure literature. However, it was not published until 1790, when his friend Daines Barrington encouraged him to release his memoirs. His book, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, 1768–1773*, was published in five volumes.

The work gained significant popularity but faced criticism from other travelers who questioned its accuracy. The fact that Bruce wrote the book twelve years after returning from Africa, aside from his personal journals, provided grounds for skepticism. Yet, the remarkable accuracy of his descriptions regarding his Ethiopian travels made the work an important source. He died on April 27, 1794, at the age of 63.

Bruce wrote an autobiography, part of which was published in his book *Travels* in 1805 and 1813. The publication included a note on his biography by the editor, Alexander Murray. The best record of Bruce's travels in Morocco is found in the biography by Lambert Playfair, *Travels in the Footsteps of Bruce* (London, 1877), which features selections of Bruce's drawings published for the first time. Several of Bruce's drawings were presented to King George III and remain in the Royal Collection.

The city of Timgad remained covered and largely unknown until 1848, when French Colonel Carbuccia, commander of the Third Foreign Legion, created a map of the Aurès region that included Timgad. The map was produced for military research purposes.

Between 1850 and 1851, active interest in the archaeological site grew during the colonial period. Renier resided in Thamugadi and recorded eight Latin inscriptions. He later published his findings in a book titled *Les Inscriptions Latines de l'Algerie*.

In 1875, Émile Masqueray visited Timgad and produced a detailed report describing the city. His work appeared in the *Revue Africaine* (issue 26) and included the publication of several new inscriptions, particularly an album of decorative motifs ⁽¹⁾

In 1876, the researcher Masqueray sent a report to General Chanzy, then Governor-General of Algeria. In this report, he discussed his exploratory work in the southern part of the Constantine province. He offered a historical overview of the city of Timgad and described some of its landmarks along with several Latin inscriptions ⁽²⁾

Archaeological excavations began in 1881 under the National Service for Antiquities and Historical Monuments, led by the French engineer Duthoit. The French researcher Poulle published all the findings from these investigations in 1888⁽³⁾

Efforts to revive the city continued under the scholar A. Ballu from 1889 to 1926. During this period, he succeeded in uncovering many significant archaeological sites, including the theater, forum, markets, baths, and houses⁽⁴⁾

In 1901, two basilica-style churches were uncovered, along with a group of residential units known as “insulae” Excavations continued until mid-1903. In June of the same year, the new market area was discovered.

In 1904, excavations proceeded at the small eastern baths. Four additional residential units were uncovered, along with three water reservoirs south of the large southern baths and their attachments, including a fountain connected to the northern wall of these baths. The

¹ Paul-Albert Février 1989, p. 30.

² F. Boewillwald, R. Cagnat, Op. cit, p17

³ S. Gsel, Op.cit., p. 112.

⁴ F. Boewillwald, R. Cagnat, Op. cit, p17

small southern baths located outside the original city were also discovered. That year, the public library was found as well.

In 1905, excavations took place at the Philadelphia baths outside the city walls. Other houses were uncovered southeast of the Capitol, as well as large baths near the clothing market and a group of tombs outside the city walls.

The year 1907 was marked by the discovery of the Christian complex district west of the Capitol temple. A three-aisled church, several streets, and baths in the eastern corner—the eleventh bath discovered—were also uncovered.

In 1908, residential units and the remaining parts of the Christian community, largely excavated starting in 1907, were revealed. Additionally, a collection of mosaic panels was found.

In 1909, baths near the Christian community were discovered. Moreover, a basilica-style church was uncovered, along with several Latin inscriptions.

Excavations on the Capitol temple began in 1923. The following year, work near the theater was undertaken to complete the uncovering of the original city's features.

In 1925, excavations continued near the theater and around the small western bath. Restoration work was carried out at the "Sertius" market baths. That same year, some mosaics were transferred to the museum. Excavations continued until 1932.

In 1938, the Byzantine fortress began to be excavated by the French researcher Louis Leschi, who was then the director of antiquities in Algeria.

In 1942, curator Goudi uncovered baths inside the fortress. Excavations continued there between 1954 and 1955 under the supervision of Lougli and Lassus until 1959. The entire fortress was uncovered, along with the remains of the great temple "Aqua Septimiana Felix"

Excavation and restoration efforts continued until 1957, when Turane took over the management of Timgad excavations. An area of approximately 60 hectares was uncovered.

Since 1962, all archaeological excavations and digs have ceased. Work at the site has been limited to cleaning and maintenance of some monuments. In 1982, UNESCO designated the Timgad archaeological site as a World Heritage site.

In 1982, Professor Mohammed Taghleesa published the book *Guide to the Monuments and Museum of Timgad*.

In 2007, Professor Haji Yassin Rabah published an annual journal focusing on the basilicas of Timgad.

The annual festival previously held at the archaeological city of Timgad was suspended due to the large number of visitors causing significant strain on the site. Visitors climbing and walking over fragile structures, repeated passage of vehicles and service machines over vulnerable remains, and graffiti on walls all threatened the preservation of the site. Consequently, a new theater was built near the archaeological city

Conclusion:

By tracing the history of research conducted on the ancient city of Timgad, it can be said that the first to unveil this exemplary city of ancient Morocco was the British traveler James Bruce in the 18th century. Through his observations, he provided us with a collection of drawings closely resembling archaeological surveys of both the Arch of Trajan and the Capitol temple. These drawings remain preserved today in the British Royal Collection, having been presented as a gift to King George III.

The British consul in Algeria, Robert Lambert Playfair, also visited Timgad, relying on Bruce's reports. Playfair published a book titled *Travels in the Ruins of Bruce in Algeria and Tunisia*, in which he gave a more detailed description of Timgad. This work contributed significantly to increasing European interest in this archaeological city.

In recent years, British studies have shown renewed interest in Timgad, employing digital tools to analyze the spatial layout of the Roman city. These studies demonstrate how Timgad stands as a unique example of Roman urban planning, reflecting the architectural and cultural development of that era.

Tables and figures :

Figure number	Shape description	source	page
Figure 01	Map locating the city of Timgad	Website	p. 3
Figure 02	The text that contains the ancient name of the city of Timgad (Thamugadi)	Ezzedine Sadiki, Archaeological Study of the Timgad Forum and its Facilities, Master's Thesis, Institute of Archaeology, Algeria, 2007-2008.	p. 4
Figure 03	Ishokhan sites (Fom El Tob)	Photographed by the researcher	p. 5
Figure 04	The Numidian Royal Tomb of Madgasen	Website	p. 5
Figure 05	Transfer from Lambes camp to Timgad city	Website	p. 6
Figure 6	Chessboard map of Timgad city	Mohamed El Bashir Sheniti, Algeria: A Reading into the Roots of History and Evidence of Civilization, Algeria, Dar El Hoda, 2013, p. 221.	p. 7
Figure 07	Timgad city after expansion	Mohamed El Bashir Sheniti, Algeria: A Reading into the Roots of History and Evidence of Civilization, Algeria, Dar El Hoda, 2013, p. 221.	p. 7
Figure 08	Image by James Burris	Website	p. 9
Figure 09	Arch of Triumph (Arch of Trajan) by James Poorse	Bruce, J. (s.d.). The arch of gods Timgad. Royal collection trust.	p. 10
Figure 10	The Capitol, drawn by James Burris	Bruce, J. (s.d.). The arch of gods Timgad. Royal collection trust.	p. 10
Figure 11	Plan of the Corinthian column on the Capitol, according to drawings by James Burse	Bruce, J. (s.d.). The arch of gods Timgad. Royal collection trust.	p. 11
Figure 12	Capitol floor plan by James Burrows	Bruce, J. (s.d.). The arch of gods Timgad. Royal collection trust.	p. 11

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