

Importance of Archaeological Sites and Their Role in the Development of Tourism in the Province of Khenchela

Abdelhalim TAHRI

Laboratory of Historical Studies and
Research in Heritage and Civilisation

Abbès Laghrou University of Khenchela – Algeria

E-mail: tahri.abdelhalim@univ-khenchela.dz

Orcid : 0009-0009-3721-0910

Abstract:

Archaeological sites play a vital role across various fields, including scientific, artistic, and historical domains, and are crucial aspects of the economic dimension. Among the most notable regions distinguished by a high density of archaeological remains is the province of Khenchela, whether in its northern, central, or southern parts. The province's heritage sites possess significant scientific and historical value, particularly in the region's collective memory. Despite their immense value, the current state of these sites is catastrophic: a considerable portion are vulnerable to looting, theft, and destruction. The region's richness at archaeological sites holds great potential for attracting visitors nationwide. Therefore, it has become essential to consider both the preservation of these archaeological assets and their integration into the tourism sector by incorporating them into local development plans as an economic resource contributing to societal progress. This approach aligns with the priorities of many tourist-oriented countries around the world. The state has attempted to capitalise on the significance of its antiquities in Algeria, and the province of Khenchela is among those striving to do so. Hence, it is imperative to conduct theoretical and practical studies of the province's archaeological sites and explore viable strategies for leveraging them within the tourism industry.

Keywords: Archaeological Sites; Tangible Heritage; Tourism Development; Memory; Laws and Legislation; Antiquity Trafficking.

Importance des sites archéologiques et leur rôle dans le développement du tourisme dans la province de Khenchela

Résumé :

Les sites archéologiques jouent un rôle essentiel dans divers domaines, notamment scientifique, artistique et historique, et constituent des aspects cruciaux de la dimension économique. La province de Khenchela, que ce soit dans sa partie septentrionale, centrale ou méridionale, est l'une des régions les plus notables qui se distinguent par une forte densité de vestiges archéologiques. Les sites patrimoniaux de la province possèdent une valeur scientifique et historique importante, notamment dans la mémoire collective de la région. Malgré leur immense valeur, l'état actuel de ces sites est catastrophique : une partie considérable est exposée au pillage, au vol et à la destruction. Il est donc devenu essentiel d'envisager à la fois la préservation de ces biens archéologiques et leur intégration dans le secteur du tourisme en les intégrant dans les plans de développement locaux en tant que ressource économique contribuant au progrès de la société. Cette approche s'aligne sur les priorités de nombreux pays à vocation touristique dans le monde. En Algérie, l'État a tenté de capitaliser sur l'importance de ses antiquités, et la province de Khenchela est l'une de celles qui s'efforcent de le faire. Il est donc impératif de mener des études théoriques et pratiques sur les sites archéologiques de la province et d'explorer des stratégies viables pour les mettre en valeur dans l'industrie du tourisme.

Mots-clés : Sites archéologiques ; Patrimoine matériel ; Développement touristique

Introduction

Archaeological sites represent all the tangible remnants passed down through generations, whether immovable or movable, preserved by public or private entities. These assets can serve as sources of economic return, especially given Algeria's wealth of tangible heritage. Archaeological landmarks are considered cultural treasures and pillars of alternative economic development in Algeria. Thus, responsible authorities must pay attention to preserving, maintaining, and promoting this tangible heritage.

In light of the above, the central research question of this study is as follows:

What is the importance of archaeological sites in the province of Khenchela, and what role do they play in promoting tourism, advancing development, and highlighting the identity of the society in Khenchela?

The present study aims to highlight the significant role that archaeological sites can play in achieving sustainable development in the tourism sector in Algeria in general and in the province of Khenchela in particular. With all its dimensions, this authentic civilisational heritage can contribute meaningfully to sustainable cultural, social, and economic development. It can also support economic development, as cultural heritage constitutes a vital asset for fostering social balance and safe transformation while serving as a source of strength through its productive activities that sustain the livelihoods of local communities.

Furthermore, cultural heritage is a fundamental element and reference point in the tourism industry, encompassing architectural, artistic, civilisational, and cultural components. It can offer substantial contributions and is crucial to society's sus-

tainable development. This study adopts theoretical and practical approaches, including field visits and analyses of the studied sites.

Regrettably, this subject has not received adequate attention from either Western or Algerian researchers. The province of Khenchela remains a largely unexplored area that urgently requires genuine historical and archaeological research conducted by specialists in the field.

1. Local Tangible Heritage of the Province of Khenchela and Methods of Its Preservation

1.1. Importance of Archaeological Sites in the Province of Khenchela

As archaeological sites represent the living historical memory of people and preserve their identity and sense of belonging (Al-Zahrani, 2008, p. 272), they form a vital link between the past and the present. They are an inseparable part of a person's memory, history, and identity (Mestawi, 2011, p. 3). Algeria, in general, and the Khenchela region, in particular, are rich in archaeological sites located in its northern, central, and southern parts, spanning from the prehistoric era in its various stages to the protohistoric period, the beginnings of recorded history, and, through the Phoenician era, the Roman period. One also finds remnants of the Byzantine presence, followed by the Islamic period in its multiple phases, the Ottoman era, and the French colonial period.

The importance of these sites lies in the following:

- They serve as tangible evidence that aids researchers in studying the evolution of the civilisations that have passed through the region.
- The region's rich and distinctive tangible heritage represents a local and national treasure bequeathed by past generations. Many of these sites in the province of

Khenchela have been preserved in good condition; however, recently, they have been subjected to looting and unauthorised excavations, affecting nearly all the sites.

- Tangible heritage allows for the promotion and recognition of the region, especially when the archaeological sites hold great value. The province of Khenchela is home to numerous sites of immense importance, representing various historical periods from prehistory to the colonial era. These sites are distributed across the entire province's territory.
- If archaeological sites are appropriately utilised, they can generate substantial revenues, particularly for residents living near them and tourism agencies within the province. Moreover, they have the potential to attract foreign tourists who bring with them foreign currency, thereby contributing to an increase in the state's foreign exchange income (Haji, 2018, pp. 139-140).
- Furthermore, archaeological sites constitute a key and pivotal factor in sustainable development.

1.2. Factors Leading to the Loss, Decay, and Disappearance of Antiquities in the Province of Khenchela

The loss of antiquities can be attributed to two primary factors:

1. **Natural** factors include earthquakes, floods (Giorgio, 1986, p. 32), lightning, wind erosion, volcanic activity, fluctuations in temperature, thermal expansion, humidity, and other natural phenomena.
2. **Human Factors:** Human activity, whether intentional or unintentional, can cause significant damage to tangible heritage, especially immovable heritage (Al-Banna, 2022, p. 32). Wars between nations, such as the invasion of Iraq, as well as internal conflicts and civil wars, such as

those witnessed in Algeria during the 1990s and those currently occurring in several Arab countries, represent some of the most dangerous threats to the preservation of archaeological heritage. Urban and economic development and the implementation of national infrastructure projects also heavily burden archaeological sites (Qaddous, 2003, p. 248).

While natural causes are often beyond human control, certain types of human-induced damage can be addressed. These include deliberate actions, such as extracting stones from archaeological sites for use in construction, and inadvertent harm resulting from a lack of awareness and archaeological sensitivity.

For example, in the village of Tabardqa, residents have used scattered archaeological finds from nearby sites in construction. Stones have been reused in buildings, and some artefacts have been placed in courtyards and doorways for decorative purposes, leading to the loss of many original site elements. This same phenomenon is observed at numerous archaeological sites in Oued Bagra, which is located in the municipality of Charef. In the villages of Taghit and Zawiya, many stones, particularly from the Roman period, have been reused, some of which bear inscriptions or depictions of animals. This has considerably impacted the archaeological sites, resulting in the loss of important structural components.

It is impossible to assign a monetary value to antiquities, regardless of their type or the historical period to which they belong. For this reason, all nations must work diligently to protect their archaeological sites and all they contain. One effective means of doing so is activating the tourism sector and attracting visitors by promoting heritage and its symbolic, historical, artistic, and mythical dimensions, for example, by organising exhibitions (Moqaddam, 2020, p. 156).

Many experts in archaeology attribute the theft and loss of a vast number of artefacts, statues, and coins at various archaeological sites across Algeria in general and in the province of Khenchela in particular to the absence of even the minimum international standards for the protection of antiquities, as stipulated by numerous international laws and conventions.

Most smuggling and theft operations have occurred through eastern Algeria, transporting the artifacts to Tunisia. Owing to its proximity to the Tunisian border, these operations are carried out by professional networks that possess detailed knowledge of Algeria's archaeological sites, specifically those of the province of Khenchela. Moreover, most thefts from museums follow the same modus operandi.

The absence of awareness and a sense of responsibility towards our history, embodied in the scattered antiquities throughout the region, is among the most significant factors leading to the erosion of people's collective memory. Consequently, the failure to preserve the numerous archaeological remains dispersed across the province of Khenchela has hindered the utilisation, development, and promotion of the tourism sector in these historically rich areas. Numerous examples of this neglect can be found throughout the province, in the north, in the centre, and south.

One such example is the site of Baghai, which is considered among the most renowned archaeological sites in the province and across Algeria. Its fame is attributed primarily to the legendary Amazigh leader Dihya *al-Kahina*. However, the archaeological remains throughout the site suggest that the city is much older. Several lithic artefacts discovered at the site date back to the Palaeolithic period, whereas several others point to its importance during the Numidian era and, more prominently, during the Roman period (Al-Idrissi, 1989, p. 156). Moreo-

ver, the site gained increased importance during the Islamic conquests of the Maghreb (Gsell, 1911, p. 28). (*See Map 1*)

Visitors to this site cannot help but notice the neglect and indifference shown towards archaeological sites in the province. Although the state has erected a wall around part of the site, the more significant portion remains exposed to looting, pillaging, and unauthorised excavations, all of which have significantly contributed to the loss of invaluable archaeological artefacts. Additional artefacts have been discovered by chance either during the construction of dwellings by local inhabitants or through agricultural activities. Regrettably, all such discoveries have been sold to parties unrelated to the Ministry of Culture. As a result, a part of the region's and the nation's identity has been irretrievably lost.

The sites of Zawiya and Taghit, located on the banks of Oued Bagra in Chéchar, have also been subjected to extensive looting, theft, and destruction. They have fallen victim to illegal excavations by antiquities smugglers and treasure hunters. These illicit activities have led to the demolition and destruction of substantial portions of the sites and have stripped them of valuable historical information. (*See Map 1*)

Moreover, one cannot overlook the numerous archaeological sites situated along the banks of this river, which have endured widespread looting and destruction. These include, but are not limited to, Meziane, Taghit, Chir Amrane, Zawiya, El-Amra, and El-Wendoura villages. All these locations contain dozens of archaeological sites, particularly from the Numidian and Roman periods, most of which have been targeted by antiquity traffickers.

The Taronset site is among the most prominent archaeological locations in the southern part of the province and is situated within the jurisdiction of the municipality of Chéchar. Most of its remains are either Roman or Byzantine, although one must

also acknowledge the presence of local Numidian architecture. The site covers a relatively large area compared with other sites in the province's central and southern regions. It contains a significant number of scattered artefacts across its expanse. This high density of remains has attracted the greed of looters and antiquities traffickers, making the site vulnerable to uncontrolled and unlawful excavations by treasure hunters.

These unauthorised digs have resulted in the loss of large portions of the site, particularly inscribed stones bearing Latin texts and coins, which constitute one of the most important material sources for historical reconstruction. (*See Image 01 and Map 01*)

Image 01 : *Title: Archaeological Site of Taronset*



Source: Photograph by the researcher.

Several other archaeological sites have also been subjected to looting and destruction, including several sites in the municipality of **Djellal**. In addition, one must not overlook the **Tibaal-in site** in the municipality of **Khiran**, which was officially classified as a national heritage site in **2024**. In the **central regions** of the province, specific sites in the municipality of **Babbar** have also been affected. For the **northern regions**, the situation is even more dire: nearly all sites have been excavated illegally, including **Ras Metoussa**, **Hammam Leknif**, and various sites in the municipalities of **Ouled Archach** and **El-Mahmal**, as well as others in **Bouhmama**.

These findings indicate that **most archaeological sites in the province of Khenchela** are vulnerable to looting, theft, and the trafficking of significant artefacts beyond national borders. **This has resulted in the loss of vital elements of our local history and identity**, which are integral to Algeria's national heritage. This brings us to another critically important topic: **protecting archaeological sites**.

1.3. Protection of Tangible Heritage and Archaeological Sites in the Province of Khenchela

The Algerian state, represented by the Ministry of Culture, has dedicated significant efforts to protecting tangible heritage, particularly archaeological sites. Various programmes have been established for this purpose, especially from **2002** to the present, with substantial financial resources allocated. These initiatives have successfully protected and restored many archaeological sites at risk of complete disappearance. Moreover, several neglected and forgotten sites have been rehabilitated and brought back to the national focus. The issue of safeguarding archaeological sites has become a pressing concern, commanding attention in discussions at multiple levels and receiv-

ing substantial deliberation within state institutions and among civil society organisations (Mejdoub, 2022 & Zerfa, p. 224).

Antiquities represent the **historical memory of nations**, and their protection is thus imperative. The province of **Khenchela** contains many archaeological sites, making it a strong candidate for becoming a **tourist hub** and destination for visitors. These monuments represent the cultural wealth from which the region could greatly benefit. Algeria has made concerted efforts to preserve its archaeological heritage, acting within international legal frameworks established by bodies such as the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)** and the **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)**.

At the national level, Algeria has enacted several legislative texts to preserve and regulate the use of its archaeological assets. Among the key legal instruments are **Ordinance No. 66--62**, dated **4 Dhu al-Hijjah 1358 AH/26 March 1966**, concerning **tourist zones and sites**. This was followed by a series of decrees and laws, the most significant of which is **Law No. 98--04**, dated **20 Safar 1419 AH/15 June 1998**, which pertains to the **protection of cultural heritage** (Belkacem, 2023, pp. 249--263).

The state must protect historical monuments and archaeological sites by all means, including material measures such as maintenance, restoration, monitoring, security protection, and preventive strategies. It is also essential to raise public awareness about antiquity's significant role in reflecting a society's identity, culture, and authenticity (Moqaddam, 2020, pp. 156-158).

Antiquities are among the most vital assets of a nation, possessing historical, religious, and cultural value that necessitates protection and enhancement (Ashraf Saleh, 2009, p. 51). They must be considered a **national security priority** and should

never be left outside the purview of government oversight and protection. These antiquities hold immense significance in people's lives, forming a key part of understanding historical movements and humanity's connection with nature and life. While most material losses can be recovered or replaced, the loss of archaeological artefacts is **irreparable**, with consequences that affect not only a specific period but also the entire course of history and the future.

Raw materials also carry exceptional scientific and artistic value and represent national interest from archaeological, historical, and cultural perspectives. Their importance contributes to the memory and identity of our national heritage.

The key recommendations include the following:

- Educating **children** about antiquities and their vital role in the life of nations.
- Raising awareness among **local populations and authorities** about the importance of archaeological sites and their key role in development.
- **The** antiquities of neglect and isolation should be preserved, and **the antiquities should be transmitted to future generations** in respectful and well-maintained conditions.
- Employing professionals in the tourism and cultural sectors who specialise in archaeology has proven essential. This has indeed taken place within the cultural sector of the province of Khenchela in recent years, resulting in a marked improvement compared with that in the past. Despite their small number, these young archaeologists have made significant contributions to **preserving and promoting** parts of the province's tangible heritage.
- Building **museums** in all regions and provinces of the country that contain archaeological sites is crucial. For example, the **Chéchar region** in the province of

Khenchela is known for its **archaeological density and diversity**, with sites dating back to the **Palaeolithic period**; the **protohistoric era**; and the **Numidian, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods**. This area needs a museum, even a modest one, to safeguard the numerous artefacts scattered across its various sites.

- **Activating the fundamental role of associations** is equally important, as they have become among the most vital structures in societies characterised by high levels of civic engagement. These associations are pillars of cultural and ideological belonging, strengthening social identity. Their fundamental role concerning heritage is to **participate in promoting and protecting antiquities**.
- **Modernising information systems** by ensuring continuous training for professionals working in the heritage and tourism sectors.
- **Enforcing legislation** protecting heritage materials is also imperative to strengthen the **legal framework for safeguarding antiquities** (Mohamed Hamed, 2021, pp. 68-73).

2. The Role of Archaeological Sites in Local Development and Preservation of Identity

2.1. The Touristic Dimension of Archaeological Sites in the Khenchela Region

Civilisational landmarks have been among the most important elements attracting tourists since ancient times. According to a 2023 report by the **World Tourism Organisation**, historical and archaeological monuments have gained a prominent position within the global economic system, rivaling even key industries such as telecommunications (Ben Zghadi, 2016, pp. 10-11). All the antiquities spread across Algeria, particular-

ly in the Khenchela region, constitute a valuable resource and a strong foundation for attracting tourism. This type of tourism is commonly referred to as **heritage tourism**.

Antiquities are among the most vital assets of a nation and must be considered a priority on the **national security agenda**. They should not be left without oversight and protection by authorities, as they hold immense value in the lives of nations. It is therefore essential to revitalise and promote tourism at archaeological sites, as such efforts contribute to the **maintenance and restoration** of these monuments, ensuring their preservation. Their continued existence safeguards historical memory, since monuments serve as material witnesses to the history of any given nation. Thus, every individual should be responsible for preserving any archaeological object they encounter because it forms part of our **national identity** (Haj Gouider, 2019, p. 25).

Today, tourism has become one of the fundamental pillars supporting and developing states' financial resources. It also plays a clear role in advancing **political, economic, cultural, and social development**. For these reasons, those responsible for this sector must **prioritise it**.

Archaeological sites and historical landmarks, which are spread across numerous municipalities in the province of Khenchela, represent some of the most significant tools for developing and revitalising the tourism sector. This necessitates investment in these treasures, their effective utilisation, and efforts to ensure their protection, restoration, and maintenance. Additionally, it is crucial to raise public awareness of their value, emphasising that they constitute a **permanent resource** capable of contributing to **sustainable development** and serving both the national and local economies, provided that they are exploited through a scientific approach guided by marketing strategies and targeted tourism development programmes.

These antiquities serve as genuine reflections of a nation's civilisational depth.

The Khenchela region is rich in **tangible heritage**, representing diverse historical periods and civilisations, from the **Palaeolithic age** to the present. These traces, left throughout human history, can be powerful tourist attractions. Their effective promotion could **revitalise the local economy, create job opportunities**, and increase **investment prospects** for residents, particularly **youth**, who represent a high percentage of the population affected by unemployment.

- The arrival of large numbers of tourists to the region can generate significant **revenue for the provincial treasury** and the municipalities housing these sites, benefiting the **local population living near them**.
- The province enjoys remarkable **natural diversity**, comprising mountainous, forested, and desert areas, which allows for the development of **diverse tourism offerings**, including archaeological tourism.
- The **promotion and media marketing** of archaeological sites and the introduction of local heritage, such as traditional customs and practices, are essential to elevating the region's touristic profile.
- The province is known primarily for its agricultural character, with most of its revenues derived from this sector. However, if the tourism sector were to be developed, it would provide an **alternative source of income** beyond the primary economic base.
- Municipal treasuries housing archaeological sites would benefit from **tax revenues** from tourism-related activities, such as **hotel services, restaurants**, and other associated enterprises.

- **Archaeological tourism** contributes to reducing unemployment by creating both **permanent and temporary job opportunities**.
- Promoting **traditional crafts** is also enhanced through direct interaction between **local artisans and visitors of various nationalities**. This allows the selling of a wide range of local artisanal products, such as the **Babbar rug**, traditional jewellery crafted in different municipalities, and miniature models representing regional heritage. These sales **increase financial revenues** for the region and its inhabitants.

In light of the above, the **immense cultural and archaeological wealth** of the province of Khenchela could serve as a powerful driver of development, **provided that appropriate care and attention are given to its tangible heritage and archaeological tourism**. In such a case, these resources could become a **significant alternative source of revenue** for the province and the communities neighboring the archaeological sites.

2.2. Key Measures for the Development of Archaeological Tourism in the Khenchela Region

An archaeologist can contribute significantly to the tourism sector beyond their primary role in excavating, documenting, and restoring antiquities. By applying their expertise, they can help enhance the economic value of heritage and promote the development of archaeological tourism in the Khenchela region. This can be achieved by raising awareness and redefining antiquities not merely as artefacts of historical and cultural value but also as symbols of national history and expressions of collective identity.

1. Integrating heritage education into school curricula will increase children's awareness at the primary and middle

school levels about the importance of tangible heritage in all regions of the country.

2. Cultural sector officials in the province of Khenchela should organise open heritage days in museums or archaeological sites, especially during cultural occasions such as Heritage Month. A notable example is the Museum of the Martyr Brothers Boulaaziz, which has played a key role in showcasing the province's rich tangible heritage through active engagement and public education efforts in recent years.
3. Unfortunately, no official archaeological excavations were recorded in the province of Khenchela before 2024, despite the region's high archaeological density and rich diversity (Bouhouche, 2017, p. 4). However, in June 2024, excavation work began at the site of Baghai, led by the National Centre for Archaeological Research, following a personal initiative by the Minister of Culture and the Arts.
4. Heritage associations, particularly those focused on archaeology, have substantially promoted awareness of archaeological sites and protected certain artefacts from damage and theft. In recent years, many such associations have emerged across various municipalities in the province, with a general mission to safeguard heritage.
5. Preparing archaeological sites to receive visitors and encouraging private investment in this promising sector is essential (Al-Banna, 2002, p. 27). In the Khenchela region, there has been a notable delay in realising some tourism projects. Nonetheless, the additional budget allocated by the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelmajid Tebboune, includes several important initiatives in this field.

6. Most archaeological sites are located in remote areas, making the construction of access roads essential. Local authorities are responsible for this task. A notable example is the removal of isolation surrounding the Tizgrarin site, which is located approximately 20 kilometers from the municipality of Chéchar in extremely rugged terrain. Local authorities successfully constructed paved roads, significantly improving accessibility to the site.
7. Providing archaeological sites with trained specialist guides is necessary, and partnerships between the Ministry of Tourism and the Institute of Archaeology for the professional training of tour guides can achieve this goal. This remains a critical shortfall in the province of Khenchela.
8. Relevant stakeholders must pay attention to and preserve colonial-era heritage, as a significant portion qualifies as archaeological heritage. Authorities in the heritage sector should also establish collaborative relations with the Ministry of Mujahideen (War Veterans). Many sites from the colonial period still exist, including watch-towers, fortresses, prisons, and colonial towns, notably in Khenchela, which served as the headquarters of the First Historical Wilaya, and in the historic fortress of Tabardqa, among many other sites.
9. Investment in traditional industries is also crucial, as it plays a significant role in supporting the development of the tourism sector nationally and in the province of Khenchela. Moreover, they reduce unemployment in areas adjacent to archaeological sites and generate income for artisans.
10. Establishing a tourist infrastructure, such as hotels, inns, and restaurants near archaeological sites, is essential to ensuring comfort and convenience for visitors. This

should be accompanied by providing transport, security, healthcare, warm hospitality, fast and high-quality service, and affordability, all of which contribute to tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visits (Bousanboura, 2021, p. 123). The state has allocated a significant financial budget to develop tourism facilities to achieve this objective. It has encouraged private sector involvement in significant projects to attract the maximum number of domestic and international tourists.

11. It is imperative to raise public awareness about the value of antiquities and archaeological sites and their role in the economic sector. Citizens must feel a sense of responsibility toward this tangible heritage. Their active participation in governmental and community-based heritage protection committees and institutions will further contribute to the sensitisation of the population.
12. The media plays a pivotal role in fostering cultural tourism awareness within society. This is particularly crucial given that interest in archaeology is relatively new in Algeria, and most specialists are recent graduates. Dedicated programs and campaigns must be developed and broadcast through various platforms, including audio, visual, print, and social media networks (Jaabel, 2012, p. 15).

2.3. The Role of Archaeological Sites in Preserving Identity in the Khenchela Region

Archaeological sites play a significant role in preserving the identity of nations. They hold immense value and importance for future generations across all countries (Cheniti, 2013, p. 169). In developed countries, historical landmarks, archaeological sites, and museums have been surrounded by great care

and attention. Over time, they have become a primary resource for academic studies and research across various fields of knowledge and science. Beyond their scholarly value, they also offer cultural enrichment and recreational experiences, providing visitors with aesthetic enjoyment and access to the profound artistic and intellectual meanings embedded in these monuments, some of which are truly astonishing in their rarity and complexity.

Advanced nations have come to understand the depth and significance of archaeological heritage as a cultural phenomenon and a civilisational product that preserves the identity of communities, states, and civilisations. It has historical, educational, and recreational dimensions and is key in shaping national consciousness.

The Khenchela region stands out nationally in terms of archaeological density and the diversity of civilisations that have left their mark on it. It is one of the most prominent Numidian regions and is known for resisting successive colonial powers and preserving a rich tangible and intangible heritage that reflects the region's enduring identity. The variety of traditions, customs, and broad spectrum of archaeological sites scattered across the province's northern, central, and southern regions are evidence of this diversity and enduring cultural legacy (Sidi Ali, 2022, pp. 107-123).

Regrettably, the vast tangible heritage of the province of Khenchela has not been fully utilised to reflect the actual image of its local population. Most of Algerian society remains largely unaware of the province's rich and deeply rooted history. Even the local inhabitants, many of whom are young, often lack awareness of the identity derived from their heritage, an oversight for which we are all collectively responsible: the academic community, local authorities, the Directorate of Tourism, and the Directorate of Culture alike. Although specific stakeholders

have made some efforts, these initiatives remain insufficient. Preserving local identity clarifies our glorious historical legacy and opens doors to a more promising future.

In recent years, the state, through its local institutions in Khenchela, has attempted to challenge the outdated perception of the province and raise awareness of its heritage through various approaches while also working to safeguard this heritage via several projects, including those spearheaded by the Directorate of Culture, the Directorate of Tourism, and local authorities, such as the following:

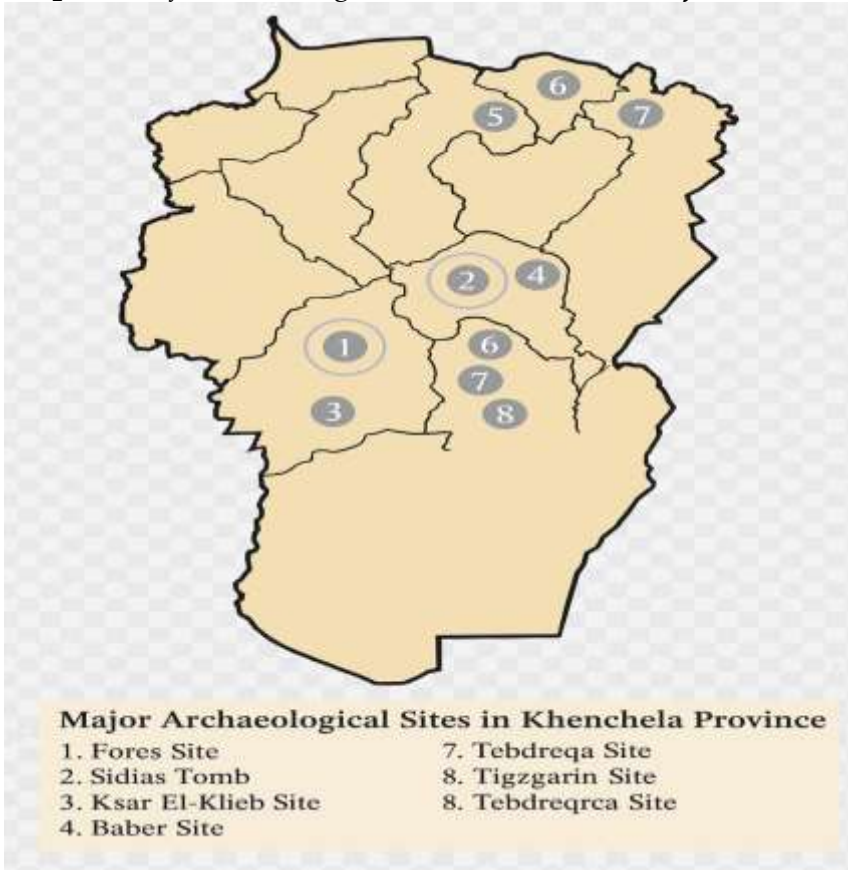
- The classification of numerous archaeological sites across the province, in addition to previously classified sites such as Tabardqa, Tibaalin, and Baghai, as well as other notable locations.
- The isolation from many archaeological sites in the province, such as the Tizgrarin site in the municipality of Chéchar and the Tibaalin site in the municipality of Khiran, among others, was removed.
- Moreover, the Public Museum of Archaeology "Brothers Boulaaziz" has played an essential role in preserving the region's tangible heritage and local identity by collecting artefacts from across the municipalities of Khenchela and exhibiting them, in addition to organising various cultural and educational activities.
- **The province's Directorate of Tourism** has contributed significantly by **approving the construction of several hotels and travel agencies**, which are expected to attract a substantial number of tourists. These initiatives include developing **programmes to visit archaeological sites** across the province and learn more about **the region's identity and cultural heritage**.

➤ .

- The Directorate of Tourism's **promotion of traditional industries** also plays a crucial role in **showcasing the region's tangible heritage and strengthening its cultural identity**.
- In addition to its **economic benefits**, this shift has transformed how people engage with heritage. They adopt **new civilisational concepts and foundations** that align with contemporary changes and are responsive to ongoing **developments and transformations** of the modern era.

2.4. Major archaeological sites in the Province of Khenchela

Archaeological sites play a leading role in what is known as heritage tourism, significantly contributing to the economic revenues of many countries. In the province of Khenchela, several prominent archaeological sites have the potential to support local development through archaeological tourism. Among the most notable are the following:

Map 01: Major archaeological sites in the Province of Khenchela

Source: National Museum of the Boulaaziz Brothers, *Khenchela – adapted.*

▪ **The Site of Fourès:**

Located in the **northern part of the province**, within the municipality of **Ouled Arrachache**, the archaeological site of Fourès spans an extensive area estimated at approximately **20 hectares**. The site is home to various archaeological features

resembling **large and monumental structures**. It also includes a network of **roads** and **water resource systems**.

The site is particularly notable for its numerous **mosaic-paved baths**, adorned with **geometric decorations** in uniform colours and crafted with high technical skill. Many **pottery fragments** and **stone tools**, particularly items made from **flint**, have been recorded at the site (*see Map 1*).

- **Site of the Mausoleum of Sidiass:**

This mausoleum is located in the village of **Ouled Azeddine**, within the municipality of **El Mahmal**. It is also known as "**Qasr al-Jaziya**", about the legend of the famous princess **al-Jaziya**. The monument is considered a symbol and architectural icon, exhibiting features reminiscent of **Carthaginian architecture**. It has a **hexagonal structure**, with a central **recess and two decorated columns** at the top, reaching an approximate height of **7 metres**, and is adorned with **Roman-style ornamentation**.

Numerous **engraved stones** featuring **ancient Latin inscriptions** and **geometric motifs** surround the monument. The village's layout is **irregular**, and while **Gsell** briefly mentioned the site, his references were rather superficial. The village was believed to have been destroyed during the **late Roman period**, possibly due to **religious conflicts** (*see Map 01*).

- **The Site of Qasr El-Kelb (The Palace of the Dog):**

Located in **Aïn Touila**, this site extends over a **relatively large area** and is marked by numerous **polished stone blocks**. It contains **archaeological remnants** from various civilisations, notably **Numidian, Roman, and Byzantine**. Among the site's features are the **ruins of a church**, the **remains of a Byzantine fortress**, and a **natural spring**. Historically, the site served as a connection between the roads of **Mascula and Tifassen**.

Gsell suggested that Qasr El-Kelb may correspond to the ancient Roman site, "Vegelese", on the basis of inscriptions discovered at the location and supported by several historical sources.

Despite strong Roman and Byzantine architectural influences, the site shows a **distinctive local character**, particularly in its use of **small stones**, in contrast to traditional Roman architecture, which typically employs **large stone blocks**. Although Gsell mentioned a few archaeological sites in the **northern part of Khenchela**, his references were brief and primarily **descriptive**, omitting many significant sites across the province (*See Map 01*).

▪ The Site of Babbar:

Located approximately **15 kilometres from the municipality of Babbar**, this archaeological site is situated on a **slope**. It was initially a **Numidian settlement** that later witnessed the **succession of several civilisations**. The **remaining wall structures** still clearly reveal certain parts of the site, which once included a **group of houses**, some **unidentified facilities**, and a **large water basin**.

Despite its rugged terrain, the site's **strategic location** was ideal for human settlement because of two key factors: the **availability of water** and its **natural defensibility**. Inhabitants in the area increased their defences by constructing an **additional wall**, especially as a protection measure against invaders, particularly **Romans**.

The site reflects typical **Numidian architectural features**, most notably the use of **small stones** in construction. Mortar was employed as a **binding agent**, strengthening the structure of the walls. In addition, several **pottery fragments** were un-

covered, mainly **undecorated and uncoloured ceramic pieces**.
(See Image 02 and Map 01)

Image 02 : *The Archaeological Site of Babbars*



Source: *Photograph by the researcher.*

- **Zawiya site:**

This site is located in the **southern municipality of Chéchar**, approximately **30 kilometres from the municipal centre** and **80 kilometres from the provincial capital**. It is situated in the village known as **Zawiya**, along the banks of **Oued Bagra**. The site is characterised by its **high degree of natural fortification**, making it one of the most **heavily fortified sites in the southern part of the province**, following Taghit and Tizgrarin.

The site contains **many archaeological artefacts**. Among the most notable discoveries are a **series of Roman columns**, the most prominent of which are currently placed in the **courtyard**

of the village school. In addition, a **Roman-era olive press, water wells**, and several **grain mills** have been found at the site. (See Image 03 and Map 01)

Image 03 : *The Archaeological Site of Zawiya*



Source: *Photograph by the researcher.*

Those who closely observe the **course of Oued Bagra**, which encompasses numerous sites such as **Meziane village, Taghit, Hanshir Amrane**, and **Zawiya**, will realise that the **Numidian inhabitants** of these areas consistently favour **seclusion and fortification** to protect themselves from adversaries regardless

of their identity. Reaching these sites is notably tricky because of their **inaccessible and defensive locations**.

▪ **Site of Tabardqa:**

Located in **Chéchar**, Tabardqa is among the most prominent **archaeological and touristic sites** in the southern part of the province. It is characterised by **remarkable diversity**, encompassing several historically significant layers within a single location:

1. The **first area** contains **Palaeolithic remains**, mainly a collection of **lithic tools** discovered **north of the village**.
2. The **second area** includes a series of **Roman-era ruins**.
3. The **third section** features a **French fortress**, a remnant from the colonial period.
4. The **fourth area** houses a **mosque dating from the late Ottoman period** alongside **residential structures** belonging to the local population. (*See Map 1*)

▪ **Tizgrarin site:**

Tizgrarin is an archaeological site in **Chéchar** that is approximately **20 kilometers from the municipal center** and **approximately 70 kilometers from the provincial capital**. It is characterised by **rugged mountainous terrain**, which makes it accessible only via **rough and narrow paths**.

This site dates back to the **Numidian period**. The dwellings were constructed with **small stones** reinforced with **locally produced mortar**. The site also contains **water storage systems**, specifically **rock-carved basins** used for drinking water.

Architecturally, Tizgrarin closely resembles certain archaeological features in **southern Batna**, particularly its **civil architecture**, including **residential housing and urban layout** (Tahraoui, 2018, pp. 180–181).

(*See Map 1*)

▪ **The Site of Tibaalin:**

Located in the **municipality of Khiran**, the archaeological site of **Tibaalin** was officially **classified as part of national heritage in 2024**. It is considered one of the **key historical stations** in the southern part of the **Aurès region**. The Romans used it as a strategic centre to strengthen their hold over the region and support the **Limes line (defensive frontier)**.

The site's **strategic location** gave it immense military and geographical importance. It **overlooks mountain and water access routes**, particularly near **Oued El Arab**, the lifeline of this **semiarid region**. The **surrounding hills** provided the **raw materials** and substantial **sandstone blocks** for constructing the settlement. Many of these **monumental stones still stand today**, bearing witness to the site's historical significance.

In addition, the site contains many **polished stones**, fragments of **ceramics of various styles**, and a remarkably well-preserved **mausoleum**. This structure is a **refined funerary monument** consisting of a **base surmounted by a tiered level** that enhances its height, forming a **new platform** upon which the **upper level** rests, crowned with a **pyramidal roof**. (*See Map 1*)

Conclusion

The province of Khenchela is among the most prominent regions in Algeria in general and in eastern Algeria in particular, distinguished by its deep historical roots. It is richly endowed with archeological sites, demonstrating high archaeological

density. Although only a portion of this heritage is currently visible, it offers a clear picture of human development in the region throughout history. Through this study, we have reached several key findings:

1. Algerian antiquities, in general, and those in Khenchela are still in the early stages of discovery. While numerous provinces nationwide have undergone archaeological excavations and research, Khenchela remains largely unexplored. Some descriptions from the colonial era remain the only available references for many sites.
2. The region has witnessed several civilisations, even though its history has not been comprehensively documented or the subject of extensive archaeological excavations. Its heritage spans from the Palaeolithic period to the present day.
3. The province of Khenchela contains many archaeological sites dating from various historical periods. This richness and diversity make it a prime tourist destination.
4. There is a strong and intrinsic link between tourism activity, archaeological sites, and local identity to the extent that it can be said that there can be no tourism without tangible heritage, particularly antiquities.
5. Archaeological tourism plays a significant role in local development, generating substantial revenues both for the state and for local populations through what is known as sustainable tourism.
6. Local authorities and archaeology specialists must prioritise the preservation of this tangible heritage through all available means, including implementing deterrent measures against violators.
7. Tangible heritage (archaeological sites) plays a vital role in preserving a region's local identity and is reinforced

by various actions undertaken by state and archaeological experts.

8. In recent years, the state has adopted a series of measures in the province of Khenchela to preserve and use tangible heritage for local development.

References

- Al-Banna, M. (2002). *Historic cities: Restoration and maintenance plans*. Cairo: Zahraa Al-Sharq Library.
- Al-Idrissi. (1989). *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq* [The Delight of the Curious in Penetrating Horizons] (n.p.). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Alam Al-Kitab.
- Belkacem, M. (2023). *The legal framework of the crime of antiquities smuggling*. *Journal of Law and Human Sciences, University of Ziane Achour – Djelfa*, 14(3).
- Bouhouche, G., & Ben Messa, A. (2017). *The impact of cultural events on tourism development in Algerian cities: The case of Constantine, Capital of Arab Culture*. Paper presented at the *International Symposium on Tourism and Sustainable Development in Algeria*, University of Annaba.
- Bousanboura, A. (2021). *Tourism marketing in Algeria: Towards the implementation of a sustainable communication strategy*. *Al-Risala Journal for Humanities and Research*.
- Djebab, B. (2012). *Scientific documentation: A guide to academic publishing*. Amman, Jordan: Dar Al-Manahij for Publishing and Distribution.
- Giorgio, T. (1986). *Porous construction materials: Material science for architectural conservation*. ICCROM.
- Gsell, St. (1911). *Atlas archéologique de l'Algérie*. Paris.

- Haji, Y., & Qejal, N. (2018). *Tangible and intangible cultural heritage and its role in reviving Saharan culture*. *Aesthetics Journal*, Laboratory of Visual Aesthetics in Algerian Artistic Practices, University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis – Mostaganem, (5).
- Hamed, S. M. (2021). *Protection of cultural heritage*. *The International Journal of Arab Architectural Engineering*, (10).
- Jaail, J., & Zahout, I. (2012). *Traditional crafts and industries are opportunities for promoting domestic tourism in Algeria*. Paper presented at the *National Symposium on Opportunities and Risks of Domestic Tourism in Algeria*, University of Batna.
- Mejdoub, S., & Zerfa, K. (2022). *The role of associations in protecting Algeria's tangible heritage*. *Al-Riwaq Journal for Social and Human Studies*, 8(1), Algeria.
- Mestawi, F. (2018). *Traditional housing in the Aurès as a mirror of social values: The village of Menaâ as a model*. Proceedings of the 6th National Symposium "The Aurès Through History", Boulaaziz Brothers National Public Museum Publications, Khenchela, Algeria.
- Mestawi, H. (2011). *International protection of tangible cultural property in armed conflict* (Master's thesis, International Law). University of Biskra.
- Moqaddam Bint Al-Nabi, & Khalfi, J. (n.d.). *The role and importance of archaeological heritage in promoting sustainable development in Algeria*. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences Studies*, University of Algiers 2, 20(1).
- Saaleh, M. A. (2009). *Cultural heritage in the Arab world*. Cairo: Al-Noor Foundation for Culture and Media, Department of Human and Social Studies.
- Shinitti, M. B. (2013). *Archaeology*. Ain M'lila, Algeria: Dar Al-Huda.

- Sidi Ali, D. (2008). *Cultural heritage and its role in preserving Algerian cultural identity*. *Al-Mufakkir Journal*, University of Algiers 2, 6(2).
- Zahrani, A. N. A. (2008). *The experience of King Saud University in heritage management*. In *Contemporary Trends in Cultural Heritage Management (Conference Proceedings)*. Marrakech, Kingdom of Morocco: Arab Administrative Development Organisation.