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Christian Marabout, Soldier Monk: Charles de Foucauld between the French and the Tuareg

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ABSTRACT *The life of Père Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916) epitomized many of the motifs and contradictions of French colonialism in North Africa: a cavalry officer turned incognito explorer of Morocco, he eventually renounced his worldly life and became a deeply ascetic Catholic monk, spending the last fifteen years of his life in the Algerian Sahara, primarily among the Muslim Tuareg population of the Ahaggar region. Foucauld remained close to the French military, but his approach to Christian–Muslim relations changed and matured over his time in Algeria. The present study examines Foucauld’s complex relationship with colonialism and with the Tuareg during his lifetime, as well as his unexpected legacies in the present. In the Maghreb today, he is remembered for his work as a lexicographer and grammarian of the Tuareg language and its unique tifinagh alphabet – a contribution that was taken up and expanded upon by later Amazigh cultural revivalists. In addition, the Vatican in recent years has held Foucauld up as a model for interreligious dialogue and as a bridge between the Catholic Church and the Muslim world.*

As a Christian hermit living in the remote Algerian Sahara in the early twentieth century, Père Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916) played multiple roles in his encounters with his fellow Frenchmen and with the nomadic Muslim Tuareg among whom he lived. From 1901, when he arrived in Algeria as a newly ordained priest, until his death at the hands of a group of Tuareg raiders in December 1916, Foucauld lived in desert areas newly and imperfectly controlled by the French military, as part of the expansion of its Algerian colony south into the Sahara and west to Morocco. Foucauld first took up residence in the oasis town of Beni Abbès, in what was then the disputed border region between French Algeria and the Moroccan sultanate. After 1905, he spent much of his time near Tamanrasset, a village in the Ahaggar region deep within Tuareg territory, less than 200 miles from the modern borders of Niger and Mali.

A former cavalry officer, Foucauld remained on good terms with the French military throughout his life, and in constant correspondence with officers, with whom he shared his assessments of the political situation, possible threats to the French position, and

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military actions he felt they should be taking. Foucauld never entirely abandoned his military past, and as this article will demonstrate, he remained a committed imperialist to the end of his life. However, while some contemporary supporters of colonization advocated Christian proselytization as a useful tool – as ‘the mortar that . . . would turn the desert from conquered territory to complaisant colony’ (Fleming, 2003, p. 141) – Foucauld reversed the equation, considering France’s *mission civilisatrice* as secondary to the ultimate goal of Christianity, since, as he put it, ‘[s]avages cannot be Christians’ (Antier, 1999, p. 290).

While Foucauld occasionally disagreed with his secular counterparts, particularly on the issue of slavery, he most often believed that his own interests coincided with those of French imperialists, specifically with the military authorities that administered French-occupied areas of the Sahara. On several occasions, he accompanied military expeditions on their ‘pacification tours’ of other Tuareg areas. And through his personal relationship with the Ahaggar Tuareg *amenoukhal* (elected chief of the tribal federation), he advocated closer ties with the French, as well as agriculturalism and education, in order to supplant the Tuaregs’ traditional nomadism.

However, while Foucauld’s relations and attitudes toward French colonization remained relatively consistent throughout his life, his approach to Christian–Muslim relations changed and matured over the course of his time in Algeria, particularly during the last decade of his life. In fifteen years in the Sahara, he made only two converts to Christianity (one of them an enslaved child whom he redeemed and then baptized). Like other Christian proselytizers, he soon realized the futility of direct evangelization in a Muslim society. While he eventually found it ‘not necessary . . . to seek isolated conversions’ (*ibid.*, p. 266), he expected that the Tuareg would eventually convert to Christianity after 50 or 100 years.

His approach to the Tuareg language and culture changed as well. Beginning in 1905, he worked on learning Tamahaq (the language of the Ahaggar Tuareg) primarily in order to proselytize. Later, he began compiling a Tamahaq–French grammar and lexicon to help others (specifically, French colonial administrators and missionaries) learn the language. After 1908, he began to appreciate the Tuaregs’ language not solely as a skill to be learned in pursuit of evangelization, but as an interesting cultural artifact worthy of preservation in its own right. With the arrival of the French, the introduction of agriculture, and the development of the salt caravan trade to Niger, traditional Ahaggar Tuareg society in the early twentieth century was undergoing great changes. Foucauld foresaw a loss of Tuareg oral traditions and culture, and devoted his last years to compiling anthologies of Tuareg poems, prose texts and proverbs.

Foucauld’s life encompassed many of the motifs and contradictions that marked French colonialism in Algeria. As a former cavalry officer who shared many of the same aims as the military administrators, Foucauld was a useful ambassador for their interests in the Tuareg regions, helping to ensure a cooperative attitude among the Ahaggar Tuareg. As a witness to the changes taking place within Tuareg society (changes which he was helping to bring about), Foucauld, like other European missionaries and colonial administrators before him, became an ethnographer and a linguist. He collected Tuareg oral poetry and became an authority on the Tuareg language. By examining his relationship with French imperialism as well as his changing understanding of both Islam and Tuareg culture, this article seeks to place this remarkable individual in the context of a changing Tuareg society and an expanding French presence in the Sahara.

The final section of the article aims to address Foucauld's complex and surprising legacy. In a letter to a former military colleague, Henri de Castries, he expressed some doubts about the results of his labors: 'Will the generations that follow us be given the sight of people from North Africa speaking together, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallow'd be thy name . . ."? I don't know.'¹ Ultimately, his vision of a Christianized Algeria under French rule did not come to pass. However, the soldier monk's life and work continue to have an impact, in ways that undoubtedly would have surprised him. In the Maghreb today, he is probably best remembered for his work as a lexicographer and grammarian of the Tuareg language and its unique *tifinagh* alphabet, and his work has been expanded upon by Amazigh nationalists and cultural revivalists. Furthermore, several Catholic lay and religious orders today claim Foucauld as their spiritual founder. The Vatican in recent years has also held Foucauld up as a model for interreligious dialogue and in particular as a bridge to the Muslim world.

Charles de Foucauld was born in Strasbourg, France, in 1858. His mother came from a wealthy bourgeois family, while his father was an aristocrat with little money. Like his father, Foucauld held the title 'Viscount'. By the age of six, he had lost, in the space of a year, his parents and paternal grandparents in quick succession (*ibid.*, pp. 22–23). He and his sister were placed in the care of his maternal grandfather. At the age of eighteen, he entered the military academy of St Cyr (*ibid.*, pp. 36–37).

Even before entering the academy, he had developed a reputation for laziness and gluttony, which blossomed once he came into his sizeable inheritance. His behavior worsened when he came into a second inheritance on the death of his grandfather in 1878, and he graduated near the bottom of his class. Despite 'the loss of his first-class stripes, forty-five days of punishments and forty-seven days of confinement for carelessness, laziness and unruliness' (*ibid.*, p. 47) at St Cyr, he was accepted into the Saumur cavalry officers' school.

Nicknamed 'Pig' (*Le Porc*) by his classmates at Saumur, he continued to develop his reputation for undisciplined behavior. He graduated last in his class in 1879, receiving a final report that summarized him as: 'Below average in his entire course of study. Social graces, none' (*ibid.*, p. 50). He was then assigned to a cavalry regiment, which was soon rotated to Sétif, Algeria, near the Tunisian frontier. Because he refused to give up his mistress, whom he had brought with him to Algeria (under the pretext that they were married), the military discharged him and he returned with her to France.

Several months later two events, both sparked by France's continued expansion into North Africa, drew Foucauld back to the Army. In 1879, French plans to continue a railroad line south of Oran had met local resistance, which led a tribal marabout named Bou Amama to call for a jihad against the French. In the spring of 1881, Bou Amama led an army across the Moroccan border and sparked a general uprising in the Oranie region. At the same time, France launched its occupation of Tunisia, and Foucauld learned that his regiment would be deployed there. Foucauld begged to be reinstated, and was allowed to return. However, he ended up being assigned instead to Mascara in the Oran region, where he assisted in putting down the Bou Amama insurrection and by all accounts found military life much more amenable than before (Fleming, 2003, pp. 26–27; Antier, 1999, pp. 56–57). The young officer seems to have enjoyed the deprivations of military campaigning and to have undergone, in the words of one biographer, 'a metamorphosis' (Antier, 1999, p. 59).

Following the suppression of the Bou Amama uprising, Foucauld resigned from the Army again in 1882. Staying on in Algeria, he began learning Arabic, and decided on

exploring Morocco, taking the advice of a longtime Algiers resident and former Saharan traveler, the Irish-born Oscar McCarthy. Since France's invasion of Algeria in 1830, Morocco had closed its borders to Europeans, and the interior of the country, while feeling little allegiance to the *bled al-makhzen* under the Sultan's authority, remained little known to outsiders (Fleming, 2003, pp. 45–46).

In June 1883, Foucauld began an eleven-month journey through Morocco disguised as a Russian Jewish doctor, accompanied by a Moroccan rabbi, who acted as both local guide and plausible cover as the Frenchman traveled incognito. Throughout his journey from Tangier, to the Rif, and through the Atlas mountains, Foucauld made detailed (but surreptitious) topographical and latitudinal measurements with his bag of surveying instruments. His travels won him widespread acclaim, including a gold medal from the Société de Géographie de Paris. In 1888, he published an account of his travels, *Reconnaissance au Maroc*, including detailed maps; it remained a definitive reference for Europeans, and made Foucauld an authority on Morocco for decades (*ibid.*, p. 58; Foucauld, 1888, 1934).

After eleven months in Morocco, 'the sudden reintroduction to European life came as a shock. For almost a year Foucauld had lived on the lower rungs of Moroccan society . . . and he [had] grown accustomed to a mendicant's existence' (Fleming, 2003, p. 56). Returning to Paris, he found life in Paris shallow and, impressed by the piety of Muslims he had lived among in Algeria and Morocco, he briefly flirted with the idea of converting to Islam (*ibid.*, p. 60). In the event, in 1886 he rediscovered the Catholicism he had abandoned in his youth. By 1890, he had entered a Trappist monastery as a novice, embracing the monastic life 'with a morbidity verging on the self-indulgent' (*ibid.*, p. 79).

A reformed branch of the Cistercian monastic order, the Trappists emphasize strict rules of prayer, poverty and manual labor for monks, while encouraging silence and contemplation. From a monastery in France, Foucauld moved to a Trappist outpost in Akbès, Syria, where he seems to have found the monastic rule too limiting, and the Catholic Latin liturgy impractical in the Middle East. At Akbès, he devised a set of rules for a new monastic order, which he proposed to name the Little Brothers of the Sacred Heart (Six, 1965, pp. 51–55).

After spending time in Nazareth and Jerusalem, Foucauld trained for the priesthood in Rome, and was ordained priest in June 1901. Almost immediately, he made plans to return to Algeria, and specifically to set up a hermitage in the Sahara. Making full use of his military connections, Foucauld acquired permission 'to found on the Moroccan frontier, not a Trappist house, not a big monastery, not a centre for agricultural development, but a sort of humble little hermitage where a few poor monks could live . . .' (Fleming, 2003, p. 140). The spot he chose was the garrison town of Beni Abbès, a small village near the Tuat oases south and west of Oran. Beni Abbès lay west of the Algeria–Morocco border that France and Morocco had agreed upon in 1845, but it was not fully under Moroccan control, and had repulsed an expedition led by the Moroccan sultan in 1894 (*ibid.*, p. 137). Beni Abbès had been occupied by French troops in Algeria in 1901. Foucauld's arrival in this area a few months later placed him at the farthest reaches of French control at the time, where the only Europeans besides himself were soldiers.

Acting fairly independently of the church hierarchy in assigning himself a distant mission, Father Foucauld nonetheless came under the ecclesiastical authority of the newly appointed Bishop of the Sahara, who was also one of the White Fathers, the religious order founded in 1873 by the French archbishop of Algiers to convert Algerian Muslims to Roman Catholicism. Despite their adoption of white robes and beards in

order to seem less foreign to their intended converts, in the eyes of Muslims, their militant approach made them 'clearly the emissaries of a colonial power', and their forays into Tuareg territory had ended badly (*ibid.*, p. 141).

In 1904, Foucauld accompanied his friend and fellow St Cyr graduate, Colonel Henri Laperrine, on a tour of the newly conquered Ahaggar region in the central Sahara, home of the Ahaggar Tuareg. A year later, Laperrine persuaded him to take up permanent residence among the Ahaggar Tuareg. En route to his new home, he was escorted by a French military delegation that met Moussa ag Amastane, who had been elected *amenou-khal* (chief of the tribal confederation) of the Ahaggar, to accept his formal surrender to French authority (*ibid.*, p. 228). In his official published report, the commanding officer did not mention Foucauld's presence at all, a silence possibly attributable to France's official anti-clericalism, which made the decision to bring Foucauld on military-diplomatic missions a professional risk on Laperrine's part (Pandolfi, 1998, p. 53).

However, in the unpublished diary he kept during the expedition, the officer provides greater details about the plan to leave Foucauld to live among the Tuareg, under the protection of Moussa ag Amastane, without provoking hostile feelings about the Christian holy man: 'Since Father de Foucauld's presence could be badly interpreted, I spoke highly of him; his two great principles: help each other; and requite good for evil. Moussa replied: "That is in our religion also"' (*ibid.*, p. 54).²

Later, the same officer emphasized to Moussa the more practical benefits of Foucauld's presence: his medical skills, his proposed agricultural projects, and his desire to learn the language and customs of the Tuareg. He even made explicit to Moussa that Foucauld would act as an informant for the French: 'He will be in a position to furnish for us the most useful information about the good to be done in the country' (*ibid.*, p. 56).³

Foucauld established himself at the crossroads of Tamanrasset, which Moussa had made his base as well. A rapport soon developed between the two, as Moussa turned to the 'Christian marabout' for advice on how he should approach the new French rulers. In Foucauld's own record of his first conversations with Moussa (only written down in 1912, and thus of questionable accuracy), Foucauld encouraged him to promote farming and French education among the Tuareg. He also encouraged Moussa to develop a personal relationship with the military authorities and to ask them to send skilled Frenchmen (doctors, craftsmen, etc.) who could train the Tuareg in the French way of life. Essentially, he was a spokesman for a program of colonization and Europeanization of Tuareg society (Antier, 1999, p. 239).

The Tuareg, who form a remote branch of North Africa's diverse Amazigh peoples, were traditionally stockbreeders and nomads. Widely scattered across the desert regions of Libya, Algeria, Mali and Niger, they have never been united politically, but are organized into several autonomous federations. When Foucauld arrived in Tamanrasset, Tuareg society was organized by a rigid class structure, made up of the *Ihaggaren*, a 'warrior aristocracy' (Keenan, 2002, p. 6); *kel ulli*, a vassal class of goat-breeders; enslaved *iklan*, who were descended from people taken in raids; and *harratin*, farmers who worked on a sharecropping basis for the *Ihaggaren*.

From his base in Tamanrasset, Foucauld was in frequent correspondence with the French military, including Laperrine and his successors. His detailed journals indicate that his Tamanrasset dwelling – far from being an isolated hermitage – was a center of activity, as he routinely met with Moussa and other Tuareg nobles, distributed food and goods to poor families, and played host to locals and visiting Europeans.

Foucauld returned to France in early 1909 for a brief visit in order to get church approval for his proposed 'Union of the Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Heart', a Catholic lay group that he expected would attract more members than the harshly ascetic monastic order he had tried to found earlier. He also returned to meet a promising potential first member for the lay order, the future Orientalist Louis Massignon, who had undergone a personal religious awakening, and was contemplating joining Foucauld in Tamanrasset (Fleming, 2003, p. 171). Ultimately, however, Massignon declined to join Foucauld in the desert, although he became the director of the Union of the Little Brothers after Foucauld's death (Antier, 1999, p. 331).

The coming of World War I brought instability to the Sahara, as European colonial powers were forced to withdraw some of their troops for fighting elsewhere. Italy, which had only occupied Libya in 1911 and had desert garrisons that 'were little stronger than their Ottoman predecessors', was driven out of the Tripolitanian desert region by a Senoussi uprising, well-equipped and supported by Ottoman Turkey and Germany (Fleming, 2003, p. 271). Taking advantage of the diminished French military presence, the Senoussi uprising moved into the French-occupied Sahara. In March 1916, a sizeable Senoussi force captured the French outpost of Djanet in the Ajjer region east of the Ahaggar. Tamanrasset was only 310 kilometers away (Antier, 1999, pp. 39–40).

The year before, with the approval and assistance of the French army, Foucauld had built for his protection a high-walled fortress that he referred to variously as 'a little refuge', 'a castle' or 'a miniscule qasbah' (Foucauld, 1986, p. 348).⁴ The undermanned garrison of Fort Motylinski entrusted him with a supply of rifles and cartridges, which he kept in his fortified hermitage, and which made him a tempting military target (*ibid.*, p. 393). On 1 December 1916, a group of armed men, having bribed the local postman to persuade Foucauld to open the door, captured Foucauld and Paul, his former servant, who lived nearby. The attackers were primarily disaffected *harratin*, inspired by the Senoussi uprising, although according to testimony given afterward, their intent was to kidnap Foucauld for ransom and rob him of the weapons and the gold they incorrectly believed he held. As two soldiers on camels approached the hermitage on a routine patrol, most of the raiders went to ambush them, leaving Foucauld and Paul tied up with one armed guard. Foucauld apparently moved to shout a warning and the fifteen-year-old guard, panicking, shot him point-blank. On being told that Paul had never agreed to be baptized, and therefore was still a Muslim, the group released him (Fleming, 2003, pp. 278–280). Later in December, an officer from Fort Motylinski recovered Foucauld's journal, the ransacked pages of his Tamahaq dictionary and his anthology of Tuareg myths.

Throughout Foucauld's life outlined above, one element remained constant, as his copious correspondence and personal journals attest: his belief in European colonialism and the benefits it would bring to the Maghreb in general and to the Tuareg in particular. Much of his work had the practical effect of furthering France's political and colonial goals in North Africa. Even before his religious conversion, his trek through Morocco and the acclaimed book he wrote about it made him a classic example of the 'nineteenth-century "heroic explorer"' whose geographical work 'allowed the practical construction of colonial territory as lands previously 'unknown' to western imaginations were transformed into legible, knowable places' (Atkinson, 2005, p. 16).⁵

In the Sahara, the face of French imperialism was the military, and Foucauld in some ways remained the officer he had always been, 'a remarkably militaristic monk' (Fleming, 2003, p. 153). He frequently gave tactical and political advice, although his

suggestions were rarely taken up. In Beni Abbès, for example, he wrote to the director of Native Affairs in Algiers, proposing that France advance another 400 kilometers to the southwest to the oasis of Tabelbalet, since it was a suitable entry point for a conquest of Morocco (*ibid.*, p. 153).

Once installed in Tamanrasset, he regularly sent reports to Colonel Laperrine on the situation among the Ahaggar Tuareg, warning, for example, of growing Islamization and attempts to undermine French authority: 'We need to watch the marabouts more closely than usual, not those of this country but the ones from Tripolitania. The Turks send . . . emissaries of the lowest sort to spread false rumours and stir up the population' (*ibid.*, pp. 227–228). In addition, when the Great War began, he took it upon himself to give military advice to the officers at the undermanned Fort Motylinski, setting up observation posts in the Hoggar, and drawing up plans for general mobilization in the case of an attack (*ibid.*, p. 274).

Occasionally, his soldier past got the better of him, and his writings took on a very un-monk-like vitriol, as in his suggested response to an anti-Ottoman Senoussi uprising in 1911–12 that had led to attacks on French patrols:

Such misdemeanours should be severely punished . . . The inspirer, if not the author, is that cursed marabout Abidine, whom you must have known at Timbuctoo. If I were you, this is what I would do. I would collect all the available *méharistes*. I would take them down to South Morocco, where he is supposed to be [hiding]. I would catch the villain, stand him up immediately against a wall—and plug twelve bullets into his skin. (*Ibid.*, p. 258)

Foucauld's presence in Beni Abbès, and later in Tamanrasset, was only possible because of his good rapport with the military. By contrast, the authorities had little use for the White Fathers, even though, like Foucauld, many Fathers came from military backgrounds or had done military service before entering the priesthood. Part of this hostility can be explained by official government anti-clericalism, which had cut ties between republican France and Catholic institutions, and eventually forced the closure of the White Fathers' schools in Algeria (Shorter, 2006, pp. 14–16). But the White Fathers had at least three failings, which Foucauld enumerated in his journal:

(1) They have caused trouble for the military authorities almost everywhere they have been; (2) while they are decent people, in almost every case they commit blunders, are tactless, get mixed up in what doesn't involve them; (3) they do very little good; there is no desire at all for them to found schools, because the children who have attended them end up usually worse than others. (Foucauld, 1993, p. 170)⁶

On the other hand, the authorities seem to have considered Foucauld 'one of them', particularly since he was a fellow St Cyr graduate and a contemporary of leading officers such as Laperrine, Lyautey, and de Castries. More specifically, they found his presence useful in furthering their more secular goal of bringing the Tuareg to accept French rule. Foucauld had only been in Tamanrasset a few months when the captain who had delivered him there in 1905 wrote of his former charge that 'his reputation for holiness and the results he has already obtained in the healing of the sick are doing more for the

spreading of our influence and the acceptance of our ideas than a permanent occupation of the country' (Antier, 1999, p. 238).

Foucauld had his own reasons for allying his interests with the military. As a monk and missionary, his ultimate goal was that the Muslim Tuareg become Christian. Before that could happen, he believed, they needed to become 'civilized' in the European manner, and the spread of French authority, institutions and customs was the best way to make that happen. One of the first entries in his journal after arriving in Tamanrasset is a list of changes that he thought should be introduced, ranging from educating them in the French language to development of commerce and agriculture, a 'severe repression' of brigandage, and encouraging 'the habit of work' (Foucauld, 1986, pp. 51–56).

He enjoined Moussa to trust Colonel Laperrine in everything: 'the best way of winning the colonel's affection is to open his heart to him as he would to a brother . . . truly, whether among Muslims or among Christians, he can have no friend as true, reliable, good, [and] disinterested as the colonel' (ibid., p. 58).⁷ He also encouraged Moussa to travel abroad, which occurred a few years later, when the commander of nearby Fort Motylinski took him on an officially sponsored visit to France, in order to impress upon him France's power, and discourage the possibility of an uprising (Antier, 1999, p. 278). Foucauld himself accompanied a young heir-apparent to a Tuareg chief on a private tour of France in 1913, hoping he would be impressed by the moral qualities of French family life (ibid., p. 293).

For Foucauld, civilization – specifically French civilization – was the necessary groundwork for Christianization. For example, he supported the much-discussed, highly unrealistic Trans-Saharan Railway, which was to link up the French colonies of Algeria and West Africa, since 'The railroad is a powerful means for spreading civilization, and civilization aids Christianization' (ibid., p. 290).

One of the few issues on which he differed strongly (and openly) with colonial authorities was slavery, which had long been a part of Tuareg culture, as evidenced by the numerous *iklan*. The military authorities had a long-standing policy of not interfering with the affairs or traditional customs of nomadic tribes, although France had officially abolished slavery in Algeria (Fleming, 2003, p. 147). In his early years in Beni Abbès, Foucauld decried official acceptance of slavery, calling it 'hypocrisy to put on stamps and everything else, "liberty, equality, fraternity, human rights", you who fetter slaves and condemn to the galleys those making a lie of what you print on your banknotes'.⁸ His immediate superior, the Bishop of the Sahara, and church officials in France discouraged him from bringing up the topic, in order to avoid conflict with the colonial authorities. Undaunted, he took up the question with his former classmate, Henri de Castries, head of the Department of Indigenous Affairs: 'The great scourge of this country is slavery. There is no solution for our shame and our injustice except emancipation' (Antier, 1999, p. 191). Nothing came of his efforts to have the matter taken up by the National Assembly in Paris, in part because the White Fathers did not want to risk angering the anti-clerical government, which might retaliate by closing their missions.

Although his angry denunciations of slavery set him at odds with colonial policy and officials, Foucauld remained a colonialist at heart. Ultimately, his quarrel was not with colonialism, but with how it was being carried out. He wanted the French to be better colonizers, more moral, more honest, and less exploitative, in order to sway Muslims to Christianity. In this regard, he resembled other missionaries, such as the White Fathers, who:

although they accepted the assumption of the superiority of European culture and technology, ascribing this to Europe's Christian roots, and believed that contact with whites should be edifying for Africans, they nevertheless deplored the bad example given in practice by Europeans. In many cases, the immorality of European officials was a byword. (Shorter, 2006, p. 26)

On one of his pacification tours with Laperrine, an encounter with some of the more brutal officers from the French Sudan led Foucauld to remark: 'What I see of officers of the Sudan saddens me. They appear to be pillagers, bandits, buccaneers. I fear that this great colonial empire, which could and should give birth to so much good – moral good – is presently only a cause of shame for us' (Foucauld, 1993, p. 96).⁹

Foucauld's frequent statements about the benefits of French colonialism reflect many of the unquestioned assumptions of his era. His own ties to the military only reinforced his sense that his interests paralleled theirs. Interestingly, the one issue over which he parted ways with his secular counterparts – slavery – he deplored from a secular standpoint, as France's hypocritical failure to live up to its own ideals of universal human rights. He also believed that French colonialism, rather than being an end in itself, had as its ultimate purpose the spread of Christianity. To that end, he supported a more moral kind of colonialism, prophetically warning in a letter to his cousin that 'if France does not govern her colony better, she will lose it.'¹⁰

Although Foucauld's support for French imperialism remained constant, his writings indicate that his time living among Muslims changed how he viewed his role as a missionary. From the beginning, his approach differed from the tone-deaf style that marked earlier missionary efforts by the White Fathers. He was happy to adopt more culturally familiar terms such as '*marabout*' for himself, and '*khaoua*' (brotherhood) or '*zawiya*' (religious order) in reference to his hermitage in Beni Abbès. Even before then, his encounter with Islam as a younger man had affected him strongly. As he described it in a letter to de Castries in 1901: 'Islam produced a profound disruption in me . . . the sight of this faith, of these souls living in the continual presence of God, made me glimpse something greater and truer than the affairs of this world' (Casajus, 1999, p. 89).¹¹

However, he seems to have abandoned this ecumenical view of Islam once he converted to his own austere, self-abnegating version of Christianity, finding it too worldly for his tastes, particularly in light of his own renunciation of the world and new-found asceticism: 'At bottom, it was Islam's easy-going nature itself which the intransigent faith of Foucauld in his maturity couldn't accommodate – an intransigence worthy of the inner depths from which his faith had pulled him' (ibid., p. 90).¹²

During his eleven years living as a Christian monk in the Sahara, the soldier monk only baptized two people, both during his early years in Beni Abbès: an elderly *hartani* woman, and a four-year-old he had bought from slavery; he also bought and freed adult slaves, in the hope that they would in gratitude accept Christianity, although none did (Antier, 1999, p. 302). By the time Foucauld came to Tamanrasset, he was beginning to consider Muslims more on their own terms, despite the condescension towards Islam evident in his impressions of Moussa ag Amastane after their first meeting:

a very pious Muslim, wishing others well in the Muslim way, liberal, but at the same time ambitious, fond of money, pleasure, and honor (like Mohammed, the most perfect creature in his eyes; like Mohammed, the model of perfection for him, as

Our Lord Jesus is for us) . . . In sum, Moussa is a good and pious Muslim, possessing ideas and liveliness, the qualities and vices of a rational Muslim, while at the same having as open a spirit as possible. (Foucauld, 1993, p. 178)¹³

In fact, when Foucauld arrived, Moussa was attempting to neutralize possible resentment about his willing submission to the French by adopting a policy of Islamization, as he made plans to build mosques and a madrasa (school) in Tamanrasset. Moussa had come under the influence of an influential marabout of the Adrar region named Sheikh Bei, of whom Foucauld admiringly wrote:

[Moussa] is probably the only one in the Hoggar who is a true, sincere, and firm Moslem, having had this religious fervor instilled by Bei, a Kounti Marabout who lives at Attalia. I have heard only good of Bei . . . He has made himself an apostle of peace and moderation. . . His influence is wide and salutary.¹⁴

As the years passed in Tamanrasset, the soldier hermit began to renounce the idea of direct proselytization, writing to the Bishop of the Sahara in 1908: 'I don't think the Lord wants me or anyone else to preach Jesus to the Touaregs . . . It would delay their conversion rather than advance it.'¹⁵ Instead, he began to see that the best approach was 'to establish close relations with them, to get to know them and be known by them, to be esteemed and loved enough to remove their prejudices . . . to try by word and example to bring them a better life in harmony with natural religion'. Father Foucauld did not clarify what he meant by 'natural religion', and his ultimate goal was still to convert Muslims to Christianity, but he had come to believe this would be 'a task not of years, but of centuries'.¹⁶ Increasingly, he wanted to be seen as a 'universal brother', in what one scholar has called 'an apostolate of presence and spiritual encounter, an evangelization that renounced proselytism' (Shorter, 2006, p. 46). By 1912, his writings had begun to take on a more ecumenical tone, even stating at one point that conversion was not necessary for the Tuaregs' salvation (Lehureau, 1944, p. 115). His time living among Muslims altered Foucauld's ideas about the nature of his mission, and to some extent caused him to rethink the role that Islam played in the spiritual and moral lives of Muslims.

If the Frenchman's time among the Tuareg affected his views on Islam, it also led him to a deepening interest in Tuareg culture, and in particular their language. Ahaggar Tuareg society was already undergoing marked changes even before the French 'pacified' them, and to his credit Foucauld foresaw that some aspects of Tuareg culture and society would be lost, partly because of the social and cultural changes he was advocating. Until the late nineteenth century, a key part of the Ahaggar economy had been raiding trans-Saharan caravans. The growing French control of oases to the north made raiding more difficult, and encouraged the development of salt caravans, in which the vassal class and the *iklan* played a leading role in extracting salt from the Amadror region about 400 kilometers north of Tamanrasset, and transporting it to Niger for sale (Keenan, 1972, p. 352).

During Foucauld's time there, Tamanrasset was developing into a settled town, and a cash economy was introduced when a store opened there. Manufactured objects from the outside world were becoming desirable items, as extant letters sent to Foucauld from his Tuareg friends suggest. In an attempt to persuade the wavering Louis Massignon

to join him as a lay brother, he gave some advice on how he could endear himself to the Tuareg, through the mundane objects that marked their introduction to the world economy: 'To make the Tuareg love you, you might bring two hundred sewing needles, fifty safety pins, ten thimbles, four pairs of manicure scissors, the 'Au Bon Marché' brand. I recommend Y needles and am enclosing a sample.'¹⁷

Even before his arrival in Tamanrasset, Foucauld had begun learning Tamahaq, in order to preach to the Tuareg, but his immersion in the language led him to expand his interest to the Tuaregs' oral literature as well, and to write extensive linguistic and ethnographic works on the Ahaggar Tuareg. Unlike all other speakers of Tamazight languages, the Tuareg had retained a writing system, using an alphabet known as *tifinagh*, a descendant of the ancient Libyco-Berber script, which dates back to at least the sixth century BC, and which has been found in inscriptions across North Africa and on the Canary Islands (Casajus, 1999, p. 109). During his eleven years in Tamanrasset, Foucauld ended up writing a 2,000-page Tuareg-French dictionary (Foucauld, 1951), a dictionary of proper names, a grammar, and a collection of Tuareg oral poetry, among other works (Foucauld, 1986, pp. 419-421).

In the summer of 1906, the desert father began work on the Tuareg dictionary with Adolphe de Calassanti-Motyliniski, a fellow veteran of the 1881-82 Bou Amama campaign, who had become a professor of Arabic in Constantine, Algeria. Making an ethnographic tour of Tuareg encampments, he and Motyliniski also began collecting oral poems, a project Foucauld continued for the next decade, only finishing the manuscript three days before his death in 1916. Many of his poems came to him from older Tuareg women, including Dassine, the cousin of Moussa ag Amastane, who was a singer; in the matrilineal society of the Tuareg, she functioned as 'the living memory' of the Ahaggar, and by some accounts was the de facto ruler of the tribe when Moussa was away (Antier, 1999, p. 45)¹⁸. At the time of his death, Foucauld also left incomplete a collection of Tuareg prose texts, including stories, proverbs and folklore, as well as a book-length essay on Tuareg grammar.

Like many of his missionary contemporaries, Foucauld found himself becoming a linguist almost by default. In this regard, he shared much in common with the White Fathers, whose founder Cardinal Charles Lavigerie had encouraged language study:

Lavigerie placed great stress on linguistic studies and even the collection of oral literature. As a result, the Missionaries of Africa became notable linguists, recording and using the African vernaculars to a greater extent than colonial officials and many other missionaries, Catholic or Protestant ... Language study was the saving grace of the White Fathers' missionary project and a key to its success. (Shorter, 2006, pp. 155-156)

One scholar has suggested that Foucauld's tour with Motyliniski marked a turning point in his approach to Tuareg culture. He had begun in 1905 by attempting to translate the New Testament into Tamahaq, which demonstrated 'the frame of mind of the beginner missionary' (Chatelard, 1996, p. 175).¹⁹ Even when the soldier monk switched to writing a grammar and dictionary, the goal was still to help colonial authorities and missionaries speak to, not with, the Tuareg. But following his tour with Motyliniski, his new-found interest in putting oral culture on paper suggested that 'it was no longer about translating in order to tell the Tuareg what he wanted to tell them, but about listening

to what they had to say . . . it was about making a literature, a tradition, sentiments understood' (ibid., p. 175).²⁰

Almost a century after his death, Foucauld continues to have a meaningful legacy, both within the Catholic Church, and among Amazigh nationalist groups who took inspiration from his linguistic work. In the immediate decades after his death, he was the subject of hagiographies, mostly by French authors, who portrayed him as 'the saint of colonization' – a portrayal to which his former disciple Louis Massignon objected (Casajus, 1999, p. 92). Scholar Dominique Casajus points to a trend among biographers writing around the time of Algerian independence to emphasize Foucauld's willingness to share the life of the downtrodden colonized. That portrait began to change in later decades, 'when the West's self-regard was transformed into guilt, his admirers gave way to prosecutors whose eagerness to convict inadvertently revealed that they were disappointed apologists' (ibid., pp. 51–52).²¹

In the Maghreb, where the population remains almost entirely Muslim, Foucauld is remembered for roles other than his religious one. An Arabic translation of his *Reconnaissance au Maroc*, for example, was published in Morocco in 1998. In the introduction to the Arabic translation, scholar Mohammed Hajji acknowledges the 'suspicious circumstances' surrounding Foucauld's journey, in the context of European imperialism at the time, but notes that: 'He was objective and meticulous in his geographical observations and in most of his historical references, except when his colonial background ran away with him, so he is not free from slanderous critics, who judge without being judged themselves . . .' (Foucauld, 1998, p. 6; my translation).

On a broader scale, there is some circumstantial evidence that his linguistic work on Tamahaq and its written form, *tifinagh*, had an impact on the growing Amazigh nationalist movement across the Maghreb. All his Tuareg manuscripts, including his lexicon and grammar, had been published by 1952. In the 1960s, a group of Amazigh activists in France, calling themselves the Académie Berbère, created a modern version of the *tifinagh* script to serve as the alphabet for all Amazigh languages. The version adopted for the use of 'neo-tifinagh' was that of the Ahaggar, which suggests the possibility that the Académie Berbère, most of whom were Kabyle in origin, made use of Foucauld's published books (Aghali-Zakara, 1994, p. 117). Neo-tifinagh remains a somewhat contrived alphabet, although it has become widespread in Amazigh activist circles as a statement of cultural identity.

Today, advocates of Amazigh culture and nationalism have a prominent presence on the Internet, where there is ample evidence that Foucauld's linguistic work has influenced cultural revivalists. The Amazigh website 'Le monde berbère' (www.mondeberbere.com), for example, posts an essay by Moroccan activist, educator, and grammarian Mohammed Chafik, who describes Foucauld's Tamahaq dictionary as 'an inexhaustible mine of information for scholars as far as Amazigh linguistics is concerned'.²² Another site, Tamazgha (www.tamazgha.fr), pays homage to early *berbérisant* and novelist Mouloud Mammeri, emphasizing his role in modernizing Amazigh languages, and the prominence he gave to the Ahaggar Tuareg dialect in creating neologisms:

[Mammeri] initiated, encouraged, and directed a good part of the work of linguistic (notably lexical) modernization . . . he developed it with a little group of Kabyle students who formed his entourage at the Center for Anthropological, Prehistoric and Ethnographic Research (CRAPE) between 1970 and 1975. Moreover, we

immediately recognize his unique stamp in certain of his choices, in heavily relying on Berber dialects of Morocco (*tacelhit*) and especially on Ahaggar, which he knew well since he had collaborated with Jean-Marie Cortade in developing the reverse index (French–Tuareg) of Charles de Foucauld’s *Dictionnaire Touareg*.²³

While the evidence in Mammeri’s case is circumstantial, it certainly suggests that Foucauld’s work on Tamahaq played a role in the Amazigh linguistic project, and was instrumental in the adoption of neo-tifinagh by Amazigh activists as both an alphabet and a cultural marker. The frequent references to Foucauld’s work on Amazigh websites reflect his somewhat unexpected legacy as a cultural revivalist ahead of his time.

His other enduring legacy is in the Catholic Church. His original plan to form a monastic order was not fulfilled during his lifetime, but in 1933 a group of French monks, inspired by the biographies of him published in the decade after his death, formed the Order of the Little Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Today, the Catholic Church formally recognizes eleven religious communities (both monks and nuns) and eight lay organizations that either follow Foucauld’s monastic rule or draw on his legacy of spirituality (Charles de Foucauld).

On 13 November 2005, Foucauld was beatified by the Vatican, an intermediate step on the path to sainthood. In his statement during the beatification Mass (published on the Vatican’s website), Pope Benedict XVI emphasized Foucauld’s ideal of ‘universal brotherhood’: ‘He discovered that Jesus, who came to join us in our humanity, invites us to universal brotherhood, which he subsequently lived in the Sahara’ (Benedict XVI, 2005).

The Vatican’s official biography of Foucauld emphasizes his relationship with Islam, and the role of Muslims in his own religious awakening:

He lost his faith as an adolescent . . . Seeing the way Muslims expressed their faith questioned him [sic] and he began repeating, ‘My God, if you exist, let me come to know you’ . . . In a great respect for the culture and faith of those among whom he lived, his desire was to ‘shout the Gospel with his life.’ (Charles de Foucauld, 1858–1916)

Benedict XVI’s predecessor, John Paul II, went even farther in claiming Foucauld as a model for dialogue and reconciliation between religions, in particular with Islam, in a statement made in 2001 to the Bishop of Viviers, France, on the centenary of Foucauld’s ordination to the priesthood:

Is not Bro. Charles, who learned the language of the Tuaregs to translate the Gospels and compiled a dictionary and a grammar for them, calling those inspired by his charism [sic] to enter into dialogue with contemporary cultures and take the route that leads to meeting other religious traditions, especially Islam? (John Paul II, 2001)

While Foucauld’s missionary efforts may have yielded few conversions in his lifetime, and he was unsuccessful in finding other monks who would join him in the desert, he has attracted a worldwide group of spiritual followers in more recent decades. There is some irony in the fact that an eccentric monk who often found himself chafing at ecclesiastical rules and had difficulty getting approval to found a monastic order has since

found official recognition from the Vatican, which has appropriated him as a spokesman for intercultural dialogue.

Writing in 1904 to his cousin and spiritual confidante, Marie de Bondy, about his decision to live among the Ahaggar Tuareg, he asked: 'Will they be able to distinguish between soldiers and priests and see in us universal brothers?' (Antier, 1999, p. 220). Examining his life and writings a century later, it is still difficult to completely separate Foucauld's roles as French imperialist, universal brother, Christian missionary and Tuareg ethnographer. His military background left him sympathetic to the French military authorities and their goals, and his frequent communications with them made it clear that he not only supported their advances into the Sahara, but hoped that European civilization would eventually clear the way for Christian conversions. At the same time, he came to a somewhat more tolerant view of Islam and his role as a Christian living among Muslims. As a desert hermit, Foucauld also ceased to view Tuareg society solely as an impediment to European civilization, but found in its language and oral literature subjects worthy of study in their own right. Charles Foucauld's unique life, which in many ways epitomized the European colonial experience, makes him a compelling figure in the history of French Algeria, and has ensured that groups as widely different as Amazigh revivalists, the Vatican, and historians of colonialism will continue to find in him a fascinating object of study.

Notes

1. Letter to Henri de Castries, 10 December 1907, quoted in Six, 1965, p. 202.
2. 'Et la présence du Père de Foucauld pouvant être mal interprétée, on fait son éloge; ses deux grands principes: aidez vous les uns les autres; rendez le bien pour le mal. Moussa riposte: cela est aussi dans notre religion.'
3. 'Il sera à meme de nous fournir les plus utiles renseignements sur le bien à faire dans le pays.'
4. 'un petit refuge', 'une minuscule kasba' ... 'un château.'
5. In fact, the then General of Brigade (later Marshal) Hubert Lyautey, who would go on to occupy Morocco in 1911, came to consult with Foucauld in Beni Abbès in 1905 for advice on that country.
6. '1 ils ont donné des ennuis aux autorités militaires presque partout où ils ont été; 2 tout en étant de braves gens, ils commettent presque partout des maladroitures, des manques de tact, se mêlent de ce qui ne les regarde pas; 3 ils font fort peu de bien; on ne désire nullement qu'ils fondent des écoles, car les enfants qui les ont fréquentés sont, d'ordinaire, pires que les autres.'
7. 'La meilleure manière de gagner l'affection du colonel est de lui ouvrir son coeur comme à son frère ... Vraiment, soit parmi les musulmans, soit parmi les Chrétiens il n'a peut-être pas d'ami aussi vrai, sûr, bon, désintéressé que le colonel' (23 October 1905).
8. Letter to Dom Martin, 2 February 1902, quoted in Antier, 1999, p. 191.
9. 6 April 2004.
10. Cf. to Marie de Bondy, quoted in Antier, 1999, p. 291.
11. 'L'Islam a produit en moi un profond bouleversement ... la vue de cette foi, de ces âmes vivant dans la continuelle présence de Dieu, m'a fait entrevoir quelque chose de plus grand et de plus vrai que les occupations mondaines.'
12. 'Au fond, c'est de la debonnaireté même de l'Islam que ne peut s'accommoder la foi intransigeante du Foucauld de la maturité – une intransigeance à la mesure des abîmes intérieurs auxquels elle la 'arraché.'
13. 'Moussa très bien, très intelligent, très ouvert, très pieux musulman, voulant le bien en musulman, libéral, mais en même temps ambitieux, et aimant argent et plaisir et honneur, (comme Mahomet la plus parfaite des créatures à ses yeux; comme Mahomet, exemplaire de la perfection pour lui, comme N. Seigneur JESUS l'est pour nous) ... En résumé, Moussa est un bon et pieux musulman, ayant les idées et la vie, les qualités et les vices d'un musulman logique, et ayant en même temps l'esprit aussi ouvert que possible.'
14. Cf. letter to Lacroix, quoted in Six, 1965, p. 159.

15. Cf. letter to Bishop Guérin, 6 March 1908, quoted in Six, 1965, p. 168.
16. Cf. Letter to Suzanne Perret, 25 July 1907, quoted in Casajus, 1999, p. 94.
17. Cf. to Massignon, 19 September 1911, quoted in Antier, 1999, p. 288.
18. Calassanti-Motyliniski died of typhus in Constantine a few months after returning from his tour with Foucauld; Fort Motyliniski near Tamanrasset was later named after him.
19. 'la forme d'esprit du missionnaire débutant.'
20. 'Il ne s'agit plus de traduire pour dire aux Touaregs ce qu'il veut leur dire, mais d'écouter ce qu'ils ont à dire . . . il s'agit de faire connaître une littérature, une tradition, des sentiments.'
21. 'Lorsque la suffisance de l'Occident s'est transmuée en mauvaise conscience, les laudateurs ont fait place à des procureurs dont le zèle à rendre leurs sentences trahissait en eux les apologistes déçus.'
22. 'une mine inépuisable de renseignements pour tout chercheur en matière de linguistique amazighienne' (Chafik, n.d.).
23. '[Mammeri] aura initié, encouragé et dirigé une bonne partie du travail de modernisation linguistique (notamment lexicale) . . . il l'a élaboré avec un petit groupe d'étudiants kabyles qui constituaient son entourage au CRAPE, entre 1970 et 1975. On y reconnaît d'ailleurs immédiatement sa patte, dans certains de ses choix, dans le recours prioritaire aux dialectes berbères du Maroc (*tacelhit*) et surtout au touareg Ahaggar qu'il connaissait bien puisqu'il avait collaboré avec Jean-Marie Cortade à l'élaboration de l'index inverse (français/touareg) du *Dictionnaire touareg* de Charles de Foucauld' (Chaker, n.d.).

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