People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
General Directorate for Scientific Research and Technological Development
Scientific and Technical Research Center for Social and Cultural Anthropology
Research Unit for Translation and Terminology

Study Day – November 17, 2026, CRASC

Perspectives on Amazighe Literature and its Translation During the Colonial Period

Argument :

The languages, cultures, and literatures of colonized peoples attracted the attention of European scholars from the earliest years of colonial expansion. Their primary objective was to understand the "Other"—to uncover the social organization and psychological foundations of indigenous societies—to consolidate colonial domination and facilitate processes of cultural assimilation and religious conversion. After learning local languages, military officers and missionaries, assisted by indigenous informants, became the first to collect and translate poems, proverbs, and folktales, the principal genres of Amazigh oral literature through which indigenous societies expressed their values, worldview, and collective memory.

Among the pioneers who devoted themselves to the study of *Berber* oral literature in the North African colonies, particularly Algeria, was the military officer Adolphe Hanoteau. In 1867, he published *Poésie populaire de la Kabylie du Djurdjura*, a collection of 621 poems covering a wide range of themes and literary forms. The poems were collected in the field, transcribed in both Latin and Arabic scripts, and translated into French. Hanoteau also translated La Fontaine's fables into Tamazight. His linguistic contributions include *Essai de grammairekabyle* (1858) and *Essai de grammairetamasheq* (1860). It is important to emphasize that his work relied extensively on the invaluable collaboration of indigenous informants, who facilitated fieldwork and assisted in translating the various Tamazight varieties, whose linguistic subtleties and internal logic they understood far better than any outside observer.

The missionary Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916) devoted more than a decade to compiling his four-volume *Dictionnairetouareg-français*, handwritten between 1905 and 1915. In the field of literature, he collected 576 poems in a manuscript completed only three days before his death. Published posthumously in 1930under the title *Poésiestouarègues*, the volume contains approximately 6,000 lines of Tuareg poetry collected around 1907 and translated into French.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, indigenous schoolteachers trained within the French educational system also began documenting and translating their own literary heritage.

Belkassem Ben Sedira (1844–1901) published*Cours de langue kabyle, grammaire et versions* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1887, 430 pp.). The third and fourth sections of the volume include Kabyle literary texts—folktales, legends, poems, and riddles—accompanied by French translations. A substantial proportion of these texts had been collected by the author during a school survey conducted in Kabylia in 1886.

One of Ben Sedira's students, Amar Saïd Boulifa (1865–1931), published several major works on the Amazigh (Berber) language and literature in its Taqbaylit (Kabyle) variety:

- Two pedagogical language manuals:
- *Une première année de langue kabyle* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1898);
- *Méthode de langue kabyle. Cours de deuxième année* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1913).
- *Étude linguistique et sociologique sur la Kabylie du Djurdjura* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1913).
- *Recueil de poésieskabyles* (Algiers: A. Jourdan, 1904), a collection of translated and annotated poems preceded by a study of Kabyle women and an introduction to Kabyle singing. The first section of the volume is devoted to the poet Si MohandUmhend.
- *Textes berbères en dialectes de l'Atlas marocain* (Paris: Leroux, 1908).

Although these pioneering works were, for the most part, shaped by a colonial ideology that frequently portrayed indigenous populations in a demeaning light, they nonetheless played a crucial role in preserving an invaluable linguistic, cultural, and literary heritage. By committing oral traditions to writing, they ensured the transmission of texts that have reached us in forms that remain remarkably close to their original expression.

Themes for Discussion

I. European Perspectives

European perceptions of Amazigh language and literature: between scholarly objectivity, colonial prejudice, and cultural devaluation

- What approaches did European scholars adopt in their study of Amazigh literature?
- What motivated European researchers to learn the different Berber varieties, collect literary texts, and translate them?
- To what extent did the external position occupied by these scholars within the colonial context shape their research, interpretations, and writings?

II. Indigenous intellectual perspectives

- Having been influenced by Western humanist values and literary aesthetics, how did indigenous intellectuals perceive the literature produced within their own societies?
- How should we characterize the position of the first indigenous scholars engaged in the study of Berber language and literature, situated between cultural assimilationism and the literary influence of the "civilized" West, on the one hand, and their belonging to an oral culture and literary tradition that was widely underestimated at the time, on the other?
- In what respects did indigenous approaches to literature and translation differ from those of Western scholars? Did they reproduce colonial perspectives, challenge them, or seek to move beyond them?

III. Evaluating translations

- How should literary translations—particularly poetic translations—produced by Western scholars be assessed?
- How should the translations produced by Ben Sedira, Boulifa, and other indigenous intellectuals be evaluated? Were they, too, assisted by unnamed indigenous informants?

Programme

09h00 - 09h30 **Welcome and Opening Ceremony**

09h00 - 09h10 **Prof. Ammar MANAA, Director of CRASC**

09h10 - 09h20 **Prof. Keltouma AGUIS, Director of URTT**

09h20 - 09h30 **Dr. Boudjema AZIRI, URTT/ CRASC**
«Presentation of the Study Day's Theme»

Session I: 9:30 – 11:50 – Collectors and Translators of Amazigh Literature in the Colonial Context

Chair : Prof. Nadjat LAHDIRI, CRASC

09h30 - 10h00 **Prof. Ouahmi OULD BRAHAM, CERIST / LaMSN – Sorbonne Paris Nord University**
« English-Language Berber Studies (1715-1900) »

10h00 - 10h20 **Dr. Mahmoud AMAOUI, Abderrahmane Mira, University of Bejaia**
« Literary Writings in the Standardization Process of Berber Languages in the 19th Century »

10h20 - 10h40 **Dr. Nadia BERDOUS (Akli Mohand Oulhadj University of Bouira)**
« Ben Sedira and Boulifa Between Western Knowledge and Kabyle Culture: A Study of Their Discourse Through the Introductions to Their Kabyle Teaching Manuals»

10h40 - 11h00 **Dr.Nada BOUCHAOUR, IREMAM – Aix-Marseille University**
« From Early Intermediaries to the Corps of Military Interpreters: Actors and Translation Practices in Colonial Algeria (1830-1872) »

11h00 - 11h20 **Dr. Hakima BELLAL, Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou (UMMTO)**
«In the Shadow of Texts: The Role of Informants in the Collection of Oral Literature in Colonial Context»

11h20 - 11h50 *Discussion*

11h50 - 12h00 *Coffee Break*

Session II: 12:00 – 14:30 – Translating Amazigh Literature: From Early Attempts to Artificial Intelligence

Chair: Dr. Souhila BELABBES, University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed

12h00 - 12h20	**Dr. Kamel CHACHOUA, IREMAM – CNRS / Aix-Marseille University, remote presentation via Zoom** *« The Poet, the Sheikh, and the Colonial Administrator »*
12h20 - 12h40	**Dr. Mokrane CHIKHI, Department of Translation, Abderrahmane Mira University of Bejaia** *« An Experience in Translating a Novel from Arabic into Tamazight: The Case of Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio by Amara Lakhous »*
12h40 - 13h00	**Dr. Ramdane TOUATI, ISM-Interpreting / URTT – CRASC** *«From Interpretation to the Construction of the 'Berber Object': Indigenous Interpreters Facing Colonial Berberology»*
13h00 - 13h30	**Prof. Fatiha SADAT, University of Québec at Montréal (UQAM), Canada – remote presentation via Zoom** *« Machine Translation of Low-Resource and Indigenous Languages in the AI Era: Comparative Perspectives Between Tamazight and Other Indigenous Languages »*
13h30 - 14h00	*Discussion*

Closing & Lunch

14h00 - 14h20	*Closing Remarks and Recommendations*
14h20	*Lunch Break*