

**Prasse, Karl-G. and Ghabdouane Mohamed 2019. *L'Histoire du Niger, transcrit du touareg de l'Ayr: Tome I: Āttarix wan Nižer, dəy təmažəq tann Ayər. Textes berbères originaux en touareg de l'Ayr – Tome II: Textes traduits en français – Supplement by Harry Stroomer: In memoriam Karl-G. Prasse and Ghabdouane Mohamed.***

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### Review

<1> The book under review concerns the history of Niger, in the language of the Ayer (*Āttarix wan Nižer, dəy təmažəq tann Ayər*). This is the last and posthumously published book by Prasse and Mohamed; both of them passed away in 2018 (see the supplement by Harry Stroomer containing obituaries and bibliographies). Earlier co-authored publications include *Poèmes tuaregs de l'Ayr* (1989-1990) in Tuareg (French translation in 1990) and the large dictionary *Dictionnaire Touareg – Français; Āl-Qamus Tāmažəq – Tāfrānsist* (together with Ghoubeïd Alojaly) in 2003.

A good way to start reading these texts is using Maarten Kossmann's *A Grammar of Ayer Tuareg* (2011) or Prasse's *Tuareg Elementary Course (Tahāggart)* from 2010<sup>1</sup>. For the Mali variety of Tuareg, Jeffrey Heath's *A Grammar of Tamasek (Tuareg of Mali)* (2005) can be used as an additional source.

<2> Tuareg literature used to be primarily oral literature, which was probably first collected by Charles de Foucauld in *Textes touaregs en prose (Dialecte de l'Ahaggar)* (Foucauld & Calassanti-Motyliniski 1922); Charles de Foucauld (1920-1925) *Poésies touarègues I – II (tahāggart)*, with a French translation by Salem Chaker (et. al. 1987) in the Algerian Ahaggar variety of Tuareg.<sup>2</sup> One may also mention the books *Poésies et chants Touaregs de l'Ayr* by Moussa Albaka and Dominique Casajus (1987), *Peau d'âne et autres contes Touareges* (Casajus 1985) and the article *Poésie et musique touarègues: passé et présent* (Drouin 2011).

<3> Prasse first conceived most parts of the present book in French and then translated it into Tuareg with the help of Mohamed. There is also a section (10.2.2) about droughts and their consequences written solely by Mohamed (see below). Other co-workers on the book were Mrs. Ahmed Mika'il (Introduction), Issouf Hadane (the creation of the Sultanate of the Ayer and the Islamisation of the Ayer), Ismaghile Iilitnine (the revolt of 1916-1917), and again Ghabdouane Mohamed (the period of independence). Other Tuareg people also gave information on certain topics. The book contains two large maps displaying all the towns and regions and countries involved, a glossary and an index.

There are a few preliminaries in the first section of the book, the properties of the land, the administrative structure, geographical and economical aspects and the social and cultural make-up of different kinds of people. As for the latter, one might mention the Songhay people, the Fulfulde, the Kanuri, and the Hausa's. Also, the different Tuareg lived (and battled!) with each other for a long time. The Tuareg people live mostly in five modern countries: Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

<sup>1</sup> Souag (2011) wrote a review of this "learner's grammar".

<sup>2</sup> Prasse provided an accurate phonological re-transcription of both works in 2010.

Niger is a continental country, which is spread over some 1.267.00 square meters, with altitudes of 400-500 meters below the sea (page 6.). It also has a great mountainous massive called the Ayer mountains, which reaches 2.022 meters above sea-level (Bāgzān). Niger belongs to West-Africa and the Tuareg are the southernmost Berber people, although the Berber language Tetseret also exists in Niger (Lux 2013), beside Zénaga in Mauritania (Taine-Cheikh 2008). Most of the country has a tropical, desert climate. There are also several engravings in rocks that are possibly thousands of years old. Agadez and Niamey are the biggest Tuareg towns in the country.

- <4> In this review I will discuss (1) *Esənnəsləm n-Ayəran* ‘The Islamisation of the Ayer’ (5.3 1400-1600 L’islamisation de l’Ayr), (2) the Songhay empire, (3) The period between 1600 until 1800, and finally (4) Droughts and their consequences (written by Ghabdouane Mohamed).

#### ***Introduction of Islam (from 700 AD onwards)***

- <5> The Islamisation of the Tuareg started quite early, just after 700 AD, but because the Tuareg nomads were wandering in the desert, they kept most of the pre-Islamic Berber traditions for a long time, also until the present day. One may note as well, that the Arabic language has had the least influence on Tuareg, certainly when compared to Northern Berber languages like Tarifiyt or Taqbaylit (Kossmann 2013). Tuareg is also one of the few languages who use the indigenous Tifinagh script (see Elghamis 2011), which got introduced in an adapted form in Morocco in recent years.

A central figure in the establishment of Islam was Sheikh Zakariyya who, according to legend, was the constructor of the great mosque in Agadez (1513-16): *Ɛmattəwəxlək məqqərən wann əddāt təy, yāmôs-tu əššix Zākārəyya. A ənnən dəmmən ənta a yəkrəsən teməzgədda tann Āgādāz ta zəwwərāt medəy tann əlgəmət* (Tome I, p. 76). In 1490, the illustrious faqīh of Tlemcen (Algeria), named Al-Mayīli, arrived in Tegedda / Ezeleg, and was merciless against the Unbelievers and had a great influence on the governors.

#### **The Songhay Empire (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century)**

- <6> The “Songhai empire, also spelled Songhay, great trading state of West Africa (flourished 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century), centred on the middle reaches of the Niger River in what is now central Mali and eventually extending west to the Atlantic coast and east into Niger and Nigeria.” (source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*)

From 1515 until 1591, the Tuareg of the Ayer mountains were under the domination of the Songhay, including Tegedda-n-Tesemt, Ingal and Agadez. The Songhay languages form a group of languages possibly connected to Nilo-Saharan languages such as Kanuri and Tebu (see Souag 2012 for the sub-classification of Songhay). Later on, after various interventions by the Moroccan army, the Songhay empire went into decline, finally ending up in a situation whereby the Tuareg reigned again in major parts of Niger. After the Songhay empire lost its influence, it was only left with control of the city Gao as a small kingdom until the French conquest.

#### **The period between 1600 and 1800 (chapter 6)**

- <7> The period of 1600 until 1800 was relatively peaceful, because the Songhay and Kanuri empires were weak (Tome I:85, Tome II:77). The Hausas managed to create a small kingdom of Gobir (Tuareg: Gubər). The Sultan of the Ayer, Muxämmäd Ɛlmubarāk, was interested both in Gobir and the Ađār region, so he sent his son Āyabba, who created the dynasty of the sārki of the

Ađār, to the Songhay and Bārno. In the Ađār, however, the Kel-Ayer Tuareg tribe clashed with the kingdom of the Kābi, which had a Hausa population, so they were forced to wage wars against the Hausas. For the Kel-Təmažəq, this entire period is considered a time of con-

tinued social disturbance in the regions dominated by the Ayer, where there was a permanent sense of insecurity. The different Tuareg tribes had conflicts with each-other, while at the same time the Sultan of Agadez waged wars with the people in the south.

### **Droughts and their consequences (10.2.2):**

<8> This part was solely written by Ghabdouane Mohamed. Amongst other publications, Mohamed published *Elqissät ən-təməddurt-in* ‘Le récit de ma vie’ in 1997, which is a great read, and *Imäyyän d-əlqissäten ən-Kel-Fərwan* ‘Contes et récits des Kél-Ferwan’ in 2003 (both edited by Prasse).

This section represents a vivid description of Tuareg life and their hardships. “The year of 1969 was a disaster for the whole of Niger, especially for the nomads it had become a catastrophe.” That year there was a major drought and the rains of earlier years, which provided food for the animals, came at a stop and the animals had nothing to eat anymore. As Mohamed reflects on the earlier years:

<9> “The nomads had a nice life, nothing was missing, they were happy. Voilà, there was milk (*ax dăy*), cheeses (*tikommaren*), grains (*enăle*)! Tobacco (*taba*) and tea<sup>3</sup>, wherever one would go, one would find it. The people did not know droughts, nor winds, and the people did neither know big towns, nor cars.”

“The pastoral nomades did not have any other work besides raising their cattle, looking for water, searching for salt in Bilma and traveling for commerce. In those years, the honourable life really existed. Men and women listened to the single-stringed bow instrument (*imzad*), listened to their poets, and their words were like sermons.”

<10> Summarizing, this book is a welcome addition to the Tuareg literature. It is a comprehensive history of Niger and one gets a good picture of the Tuareg people and their interactions with other people (Songhay, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Hausa, Gur) in the course of centuries. Also, the raise and fall of empires and kingdoms come to light.

Hopefully a new generation will continue the work of Prasse and Mohamed. It would be nice to have written texts with actual recordings to be able to learn Tuareg in a better way.

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<sup>3</sup> The Tuareg text says *taba d-əssuker*, so literally ‘tobacco and sugar’; the French text says ‘le tabac et le thé’. The word for ‘tea’ in Tuareg is *əššahi*.

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