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Prasse, Karl-Gottfried & Ghabdouane Mohamed. 2019. *L'Histoire du Niger, transcrit du touareg de l'Ayr. Tome I. Attarix wan Nižer* (229 pp.) – *Tome II. Textes traduits en français.* (204 pp.) – Supplement by Harry Stroomer 'In memoriam Karl-Gottfried Prasse & Ghabdouane Mohamed' (34 pp.)

Berber Studies **vol. 53. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe. ISBN 978-3-89645-953-4. 98€.**

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Review

<1> A shortsighted reader might dismiss Niger as peripheral; at present, it is a strong contender for poorest country in the world, familiar to Westerners mainly from headlines about insurgency or famine. Yet this very rapidly growing country (approaching 26 million people as of 2022) supplies a third of the uranium that fuels the nuclear power plants of its former colonial ruler France, mined almost entirely in the predominantly Tuareg north. Their region is home to some of the oldest written records in West Africa, and has played a key role in the trans-Saharan trade perhaps as far back as Herodotus, making it central to relations between the Mediterranean and West Africa and to the emergence of premodern concepts of race in western Eurasia. Its history should be of interest, not just to students of West Africa, but to anyone seeking to understand how the modern world works and how it got that way.

<2> The book reviewed here presents the history of Niger – more particularly, the history of the Tuareg people of Niger – from the perspective of a leading European student of their language and culture, Karl-G. Prasse, in collaboration with a Tuareg scholar and politician from Amataltal, Ghabdouane Mohamed. According to its preface, it draws especially upon the work of Yves Urvoy and André Salifou; apart from the works listed in its bibliography, specific sections also reflect collaboration with Ahmed Mika'il, Issouf Hadane, and Ismaghile Ilitnine. The work appears in two languages: Tayart Tamajeq (the language of the Tuareg of the Air Mountains), and French. It would be presumptuous for this reviewer to comment in any detail on the Tamajeq version; Prasse's customarily careful transcription makes it a valuable resource for foreign students of Tamajeq as well as for Tuareg readers, despite the unavoidable use of neologisms some of which may not be widely known. A detailed summary of the contents based on the French version, however, is provided below for the benefit of interested Anglophones, with occasional critical remarks. The two volumes are followed by a short pamphlet containing obituaries of the two authors, both deceased in 2018, along with a bibliography of Karl-G. Prasse's works, vital for any student of Berber linguistics.

<3> This book is not intended as original research, but rather as a textbook for French-Tuareg bilingual schools in Niger. It synthesises historians' work for a Tamajeq-speaking popular audience while simultaneously providing a carefully constructed example of how to write about history in Tamajeq, whose speakers – despite preserving an alphabet dating back millennia – have usually resorted to Arabic or French when producing longer works. Some sections are closer to chronology than history, and academic readers will look in vain for footnotes or precise citations despite the presence of a three-page bibliography. This should not be taken to detract from the work's seriousness; it often goes into a level of detail that seems more appropriate to an undergraduate audience than to the high-schoolers it ostensibly targets. However, the lack of citations does make it harder for a non-expert reader to identify its

influences, or to pin down the conceptual difficulties that inevitably accompany a history textbook centred on a contemporary ethnic group and nation-state.

<4> Particularly striking among the latter is the constant projection of medieval or even modern ethnic concepts – Hausa, Tuareg, Berber – back into periods where their cohesion is hardly guaranteed. The historicisation of ethnicities can certainly be taken too far; a historical linguist, for whom an ethnic term is usually just a convenient way of referring to the speakers of a given language, can hardly accept Rouighi's (2019) insistence that, since the name Berber is a coinage of the Islamic era with no precise earlier counterpart attested, its use in reference to pre-Islamic times is anachronistic. But groups of people change language and identity regularly. It is natural to assume that a given people was Hausa or Tuareg a millennium ago because their descendants of the same name are today. The defects of such an assumption, however, become evident when considering better documented regions. "Cumbrian" referred to northerly Welshmen before becoming a subgroup of the English, and "Norman" referred to Scandinavians before it came to mean a subset of the French, to name just two cases.

<5> The introduction presents a brief overview of the book itself and of the geography of Niger. This is followed by a similarly general Chapter 1 on the early history of the human species, from *Australopithecus* to *Homo sapiens sapiens*, emphasising its African origin. Two very useful maps of northern Africa and of Niger, with place names given mainly in Tamajeq, are provided.

<6> The next two chapters address Berber history, following a narrative in whose contours the influence of Malika Hachid (2001) – and thence of Gabriel Camps – appears prominent. Chapter 2 presents the origins of "the Berbers", defined here by linguistic criteria but, following common practice, identified archeologically with the Capsian culture despite the difficulty of matching prehistoric artefacts to proto-languages. They are deemed to have reached North Africa from the east around 8000 BC, mixing with the local Mechta population (of whose darker skin the Haratin of the oases are said to represent a possible relic.) The drying out of Lake Chad between 3000 and 1000 BC, creating the Tenere Desert, pushed the ancestors of the Tubu, Hausa, and Songhay southwards seeking better farmland. "Capsians" reached the central Sahara by 5000 BC from Libya, accompanied by herds of cows and sheep and building great tumulus tombs (*edăbni*) facing the rising sun.

<7> Chapter 3 continues with an overview of Berber history up to 1000 AD. The introduction of the horse, about 1500 BC transformed the central Sahara, and the effects of advances in metallurgy were felt even further south, with exploitation of the copper resources around Agadez starting by 1700 BC and intensifying around 800 BC. Soon after the turn of the first millennium BC, a Libyan (and therefore presumably Berber) dynasty came to power in Egypt, while the Berber state of the Garamantes emerged in the Fezzan (central Libya), and Phoenicians and Greeks began colonising the North African coast. The Libyco-Berber alphabet, ancestral to the Tifinagh still used by the Tuaregs, would have emerged around this period; dates cited go as far back as "perhaps" 700 BC for the Yagour inscription (Morocco), and 500 BC for Ekăde n-wəššarăn in the Tassili n'Ajjer and Abizar in Kabylie (both in Algeria). (Yet one notes that in the very places where one might have expected to see a new alphabet developing, and where dating is easiest – Numidia and Garama – it shows up only much later around 100 BC, a fact that gives pause.)

<8> While the Punic Wars created a space in which the Berber kingdom of Numidia could flourish for a time, the Roman conquest of Carthage (146 BC) was followed by an occupation of the rest of North Africa. Around the fall of the Western Roman Empire (ca. 500 AD), as camels replace horses, the first signs of Tuareg identity emerge, with rock engravings of veiled men and inscriptions in something approaching modern Tifinagh. Over the 7th century, Muslims conquered the whole of North Africa, taking Cyrenaica and Garama around 642 and founding the new capital of Qayrawan in Tunisia in 670, while Tuareg groups began moving south from the Ahaggar and Ajjer towards the Sahel. Further west in Mauritania and Mali, the pressures

of “white Saharan nomads” on “small black kingdoms” (p.52) provoked the emergence of the “great black empire” of Ghana, brought low by the “Moroccan” (*sic!*) Almoravids in 1054. (In this section especially, one misses the insights of Paulo Moraes Farias (2001) on the historical instability of colour categories in the medieval western Sahara, and the serious doubts raised about the supposed Almoravid conquest of Ghana starting with Conrad and Fisher (1982).)

<9> The two following chapters shift the focus southwards from an ethnic group – Berbers – to a region, the Air Mountains, and its surroundings, with brief summary information on events in the rest of Niger. Here one observes an influence from the work of Djibo Hamani (2006) in particular, insisting on the (debatable) historical primacy of Hausa in this multiethnic region, and identifying the southern Sahara as the original homeland of the Hausa before their arrival around Kano. According to this narrative (Chapter 4), the first Tuareg tribes reached the Air region between 700 and 1000, mostly from Libya, apart from the Inəssufa (Massoufa), who arrived from the western Sahara. (It cannot safely be assumed that all of these groups would have spoken Tuareg at the time, even those claimed to have come from Libya; for the Igdalăn, see Souag (2015).) After about 1000 AD, as the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym Arabs spread into North Africa, new waves of Berber immigrants reached the Air from the northeast, starting with the Isanḍalăn. Their “slow infiltration” forced the Hausa kingdom of Gobir, and the Hausa Azna (Arna), to move south out of the Air into the more fertile lands between Maradi and Tasawa. (Here again, one may wonder whether these groups had always been Hausa speakers or simply became Hausa after moving south.) The Isanḍalăn were followed by the Kel-Gərəs around 1200-1400. Over the 15th century the seven Hausa states took shape, and the rise of Katsina in modern Nigeria made Agadez a crossroads for the trans-Saharan caravan trade.

<10> Chapter 5 continues the Air’s history up to 1600. Yet more Tuareg tribes arrived around 1400 from modern-day southern Libya and Algeria, and the sultanate of Agadez was founded in 1405, with matrilineal succession. Its influence extended east to Bilma from the 1450s onwards. The region’s towns became centres for Islamic learning, attracting refugee scholars from Arawan, Tadmakkat, and even Tlemcen; exchanging correspondence with the polymathic al-Suyūṭī in Egypt; and developing a Sufi tradition inscribed on the landscape by holy men’s tombs. In 1515, Agadez came under the rule of the Songhay empire. The older urban centre of Teguidda/Azelik (given strikingly short shrift in this account) was destroyed by the Sultan of Agadez in 1561. A second wave of Tuareg immigration from the north in the 16th century brought in the Kel-Ăwăy and Kel-Tămat, and drove the Kel-Gərəs south.

<11> After 1600 (or after the Moroccan conquest of the Songhay Empire in 1591), the book’s focus broadens. Chapter 6 adds histories of the Adar and Azawagh regions to that of the Air. The Adar, southeast of the Air, was traditionally inhabited by animist Hausa Azna (Arna); they came under the rule of the Ilisawăn Tuareg around 1600, who in turn submitted to the Sultan of Agadez in 1689. Over the following century the Sultanate repeatedly attacked Gobir and other lands to its south. Meanwhile, the Kel-Ăwăy continued their advance within the Air, finally taking the region over by 1779. The Azawagh valley, west of the Air – apparently another former home of the Hausa Azna – is noted as remarkable for the presence of a non-Tuareg Berber language, Tetserret (Khamed Attayoub 2001; Lux 2013). The equally remarkable presence there of two heavily Berberised Songhay languages, Tadaksahak and Tagdal (Christiansen-Bolli 2011; Benítez-Torres 2021), is for whatever reason acknowledged neither in this chapter nor in the earlier discussion of the Igdalăn – speakers of Tagdal – on p.56; the presence of a related Songhay variety in Ingal and formerly Agadez was unquestioningly explained as a result of the Songhay Empire’s conquests in the previous chapter, p.74. Dominated by the Ibərkorăyăn in the early 1600s, the Azawagh gradually came under Iwəlləmmədăn rule towards the century’s end, after the destruction of Tadoq around 1685.

<12> From 1800 on, the book begins to look more like a general history of Niger, while still going into particular detail on the chronology of Tuareg areas. Chapter 7 discusses the rise of the

Hausa-Fulani Caliphate of Sokoto, founded in 1808 by Usman dan Fodio, and Damagaram's gradual wresting of independence from the weakened Bornu Empire over the 19th century. It juxtaposes this with a detailed chronology of Iwəlləmmədăn and Air politics, dominated by internecine battles and punctuated by famines. In 1890, France and England agreed to split among themselves territories neither of them yet ruled, drawing an (ethnically and economically absurd) border on the map between what would become Niger and Nigeria. Between 1891 and 1899, France turned this border into a reality by sending a series of military expeditions to occupy the lands along it, chief among them the 1898 Voulet-Chanoine mission, which did so with a level of brutality that shocked even the French government at the time. It remained, however, for France to occupy the Tuareg regions to the north of this line. Chapter 8 recounts this process, first completed by 1904, and the early struggles to reverse it. World War I was taken by the Sanusi leader Kawəsăn as a propitious moment to lead many of Niger's Tuareg in a major rebellion against French rule between 1916-1917, recounted here in detail by Ismaghile Ilitnine. Its failure left the Air half-emptied, with its principal leaders dead or imprisoned.

<13> Chapter 9 discusses the relatively short period of colonial hegemony from 1920 to 1960. The creation of Niger as a territorial entity ruled from Niamey, uniting a predominantly Tuareg north with a mainly Zarma west and a largely Hausa east, was a French decision taken in 1922, though its western borders were finalised only in 1947. The location of the new capital favoured the rise of a Zarma-dominated Francophone subaltern class, trained to assist the French rulers in colonial administration. The educational system that produced them was bitterly resisted by the Tuareg for religious and cultural reasons. French hegemony had the benefit of preventing internecine warfare, but exacerbated the country's already serious famines by forcing farmers to cultivate cash crops and conscripting them to work on plantations in more profitable coastal colonies. Among the long-independent Tuareg, the imposition of taxation, along with less formal but frequent government requisitions of camels and other wealth, was bitterly resented. New restrictions on movement reduced long-distance trade, while the banning of raiding and slavery, welcome though it was to its victims, strained the Tuareg economy. Larger confederations were systematically fragmented into tribes and subtribes, whose chiefs lost their prestige, reduced in people's eyes to glorified tax collectors. World War II forced France to begin making political concessions to its subjects, abolishing forced labour (in 1952) and allowing the emergence of political parties and elections, while attempting to integrate its West African colonies into a "French Community".

<14> Chapter 10 covers the history of Niger since independence up to 2010. Here the dry syntheses of the rest of the book are enlivened by the second author's vivid memories of growing up in the desert, of seeing famine aid politicised and stolen, and of being arrested and beaten during a rebellion for his ethnicity. Niger became independent in 1960. The principal political leaders among the Tuareg attempted to demand their own state that same year, but finally accepted the situation, despite perceiving it as a takeover by black people (p.157). Its fragile democracy was shaken by the catastrophic famines of 1969-1973, followed in 1974 by Seyni Kountché's coup d'état. A Tuareg-led attempt to replace him in 1976 made their situation all the harder, sending refugees north; in 1980, Qaddafi urged them to revolt, and enlisted many of them in the Libyan army. 1983-1984 saw yet another harsh drought. In 1990, the government reintroduced multiparty democracy, and a Tuareg revolt – with clear racial overtones on both sides – was sparked by tensions around returning refugees. It lasted until 1995, when it was finally resolved through decentralisation policies and government jobs. Military rule resumed in 1996 with Ibrahim Baré's coup, but elections were held again in 1999, bringing Mamadou Tandja to power. The heavily indebted state faced perennial budgetary problems. A second Tuareg revolt broke out in 2007, and was resolved through negotiations and amnesty in 2010. Tandja, who had decided to seek permanent power, was deposed in the same year.

<15> The book concludes with a sort of appendix printed only in Tamajeq (Chapter 11), providing a chronological list of rulers and organisations. It covers the sultans of Air and Damagaram, the chiefs of Adar, the leaders of the Iwəlləmmədăn, the presidents of Niger, and the parties and unions of Niger until 2006. This is followed by a bibliography, an index, and finally (in accordance with usual French practice) the table of contents.

At 98€, this book is unlikely to attract casual readers, however interesting its content might be to a wider public. For university libraries or researchers interested in Saharan history or in Berber linguistics, however, it would make a valuable acquisition. Serious students of Tuareg in particular should not neglect it.

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