Some Remarks on the Topography of the Touat Area

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to study some place-names of the Touat area from an etymological and linguistic stand point. It is important to note that, sometimes, there are no reliable sources of information to explain why certain names are given to some areas and not to others, and what these names refer to. A widely held view is that place-names, villages-hills-valleys-towns, are descriptions of past events or of physical properties of the areas, etc. As an example, the Foggara system of water-spill illustrates the variability of the process of naming areas and/or concepts.

الملخص:

يتطرق موضوع المقال إلى دراسة أصل كلمات أسماء منطقة التوات الكبرى من الناحية اللفظية و اللسانية. كمل يجدر الإشارة إلى انه في بعض الأحيان، لا توجد مصادر علمية تشرح أو تأكد معاني هذه الأسماء، أو تشرح لماذا تعطى هذه الأسماء لمناطق ما و ليس لأخرى. النظرية العامة تقول بان أسماء المناطق، القرى، الجبال،و المد ن تصف حوادث تاريخية أو خاصية المنطقة . نأخذ نظام الفقاقير مثلا للإشارة إلى صعوبة دراسة أسماء الأماكن لتقلبها و تغيرها حسب الظروف و الأزمنة.

Introduction

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1. Theory

The names given to the topography of the Touat area compel us to take into consideration oral tradition as a 'relatively' reliable source of information in the present paper. Because there is a lack of historical evidence, the origin of some names of places is not always explicated and verified scientifically. Due to this lack, some colonial researchers, most particularly, related some Ksour names with Greek homonyms:

Μαλακαι–Malakat 'Melouka'; Μπουνια–Bunta 'Bouda'

The French linguist and dialectologist André Basset (1941:70) acknowledges the merits of toponymy when he says:

> ''C'est un des mérites de la toponymie qui garde toujours sur place des traces des formes anciennes de parler ou maintient des éléments de parlers ou de langues antérieurs'' (It is one merit of toponymy to always keep on the area traces of old forms of dialects or maintains some elements from anterior dialects or languages.)

A striking fact in Adrar's toponymy is the diversity and origin of place-names. Some have Arabic names; others have Berber-Zenete

names, whereas others still carry a Jewish connotation. An important

number of Berber/Zenete names of places, cities, villages, suburbs, and oases are found in the Gourara and Tidikelt. This fact argues in favour of an old Berber settlement, referred to as the Mediterranean group which entered Africa from the northeast. There are also places which have Arabic names to which Berber affixes are added.

1.1 Adrar

The etymology of the word Adrar goes back to the period when the Touat was Zenete. It is found in both occidental and oriental Sahara, such as in Adrar Mauritani and Adrar Shinguetti in Mauritania, Mount Adrar in the Tassili, Adrar-n-Iforas in Mali, Adrar-n-Ebbou in Tamanrasset.

According to Charles Foucauld (1940:32), the word Adrar (pl. idraren) means 'mountain, chain of mountains'. This word is also found in the north of Algeria, in Kabylia where it means 'the mountain' such as in Adrar Bgayet 'mountain of Bejaia'. In Berber, Adrar means also 'plateau'. The original etymology of Adrar as a 'mountain' can not account for present Touat Adrar, for geographically there are no mountains surrounding the region. It certainly means 'plateau', since there are several 'Hamadas' (plateaus in Arabic) in the region, like the Tadmait and the Tidikelt hamadas.

In the Touat area, Adrar is traditionally referred to as an abbreviation of the Berber plural noun Adghaghen (sing. Oudgha), the meaning of which is either 'pebbles' or 'rocks'. In the city of Adrar, a district called Adgha is designated by the natives as the most ancient place built on the area. Twice in the history of the region is reported the destruction of the small village of Oudgha by the wadi Messaoud, also referred to as Oued Essaoura further north. After its passage, the flood

left only pebbles and rocks.

The etymology of this word may be, then, a reflection of a historical event where natural forces erased a whole-inhabited region. The story of the flood has

a strong likelihood to inform us about the right etymology of the word Adrar because a mountain does not allow rivers to flood; whereas a plateau is a suitable geographical condition for such a natural phenomenon.

Adghaghen became the capital-city of the Touat in the 18th c. AD, and has kept its name since then. Adgha (or Oudgha) is said to be the origin of the actual name Adrar. When the French colonisers reached the Touat in 1900, it did not change or substitute the word for another one. They simply gave it its present spelling: Adrar.

1.2 The Gourara

Gourara is also a Berber/Zenete name. Originally, it was Tagurart (pl. Tigurarin) and meant 'the thorny enclosure(s)' (DeSlane, 1856-57:288). According to some authors (L.Rinn, 1887), the word Gourara is derived from 'gor', which literally means 'mountain'. As a matter of fact, Gourara is composed of a lot of hamadas 'plateaus' which look like small mountains.

The name of Timimoun, the cultural centre of Gourara, is both Zenete and Arabic. The name is composed of a Berber prefix {ti (n)-}'place' and proper name 'Mimoun'. Therefore, Timimoun means 'the place (city) of Mimoun'. The latter is known to be the most famous religious chiefs of the region during the 14thc. Mimoun was Zenete-Berber, and was among the many Berbers who embraced Judaism. After the coming of Islam to the region, the word Tagurart was arabicized and, with the dropping of the prefix {tin}, itt became feminine Gourara.

Timimoun was nicknamed as l'Oasis Rouge/ the Red Oasis by the French colonisers because of its neo-Sudanese characteristic red-clay constructions. It is famous for its numerous old fortified citadels, the

Kasbah and the Ksours of Aghlad, Lichta and Ighzer. It is important to make unambiguous the meaning of word 'Ksour/ Ksar', which has two different significations in the local language variety. It is first an agricultural village and

palm-garden with waterways, seguias (water spill systems) and foggaras. And second it means a fortified village with defence walls and towers used during wars and battles. For the natives, there is a distinction between a Ksar, where there are gardens, and a city or 'medina' where there are markets, commodities and other opportunities. In the case of the city of Adrar, the natives who live in Ksours (ksourians) prefer using word 'village' to point to it.

1.3 Tamentit

The village of Tamentit is the most famous and most prestigious centre of the Touat region. It is its first cultural, political, and religious capital-city. Tamentit is also known as the ancient Jewish city-centre of the Touat. (cf. Gautier, 1959)

There is also a controversy concerning the etymology of the word Tamentit. Oral tradition makes a correspondence between the local name Tamentit and mythological Egyptian Goddess 'Amentit'. The Goddess is depicted as a protector of the 'Garden of Paradise', which is the residence of the dead Pharaohs. The Berber prefix of place {t/tin} is added to {amentit} to mean 'the place of Amentit', hence 'Tamentit'.

According to another local oral reporting, this Berber word means 'the eyebrow'. It is composed of Berber words {tamen} 'brow' and {tit} 'eye'. For others, it means the 'place/source of water', since composed of {-t/-tin} 'place' + {aman} 'water' + {tit} 'source' "aux sources de l'eau" mot à mot c'est la traduction du toponyme berbère "Tamentit " (composé de aman, eau et tit, source) (J.Oliel, 1994:4). This second definition is closer to the truth, for the village of Tamentit is built over many Foggaras, some of which have their source within the Ksar of

Tamentit itself: foggarat Hannou.

Name Hannou-Henou is also found in the Book of the Dead (P.Barguet, 1967:39). Henou is described as God 'Sokar-Osiris' whose boat is put on a sledge during the funerals of Pharaoh in Memphis. The boat is then put on water

to float with the Pharaoh's body towards Douat. The link between 'foggarat Hannou' and Egypt's God Henou is water; the foggara is a source of subterranean water and God Henou uses his boat to enable the Pharaoh to travel on a subterranean river which will take him to his final rest: Douat. Whether 'foggarat Hannou' and God Henou refer to the same entity remains a domain of anthropology and Egyptology. So, mythology and oral tradition are the only available sources of information even subject to distortions and fabrications.

1.4 The Tidikelt

Concerning the word Tidikelt, it has the same Berber origin as for former names. The meaning of Tidikelt is ‘the vast region’; it refers to those vast Saharan areas of the Tanezrouft ‘the waterless desert’. Its most important cultural centres are Aoulef and In-Salah. Both cities are situated on the border of the Tanezrouft. They delimit the inhabited zones from the inhospitable ones. In-Salah was the old capital-city of Tidikelt. After the 1986 administrative subdivision of the south into wilayas, In-Salah has become part of the wilaya of Tamenrasset. Now, Aoulef is the cultural and economic centre of Tidikelt.

The area of Aoulef is full of old inscriptions. These are found along archaeological drawings representing animals and people. They are thought to belong to the last archaeological era, i.e. the Neolithic, and that they are in a Libyco-Berber script: the Tifinagh. (R.Basset, 1908)

1.5 The Touat

The etymology of the word Touat is most controversial. Since there are no historical recordings attesting the origin of the name, and oral

tradition supplied opportunities to the debate. An oral tradition parallels between the local name Touat and an old Egyptian name Tuat. Ancient Egyptians called Tuat, Duat or Da’wat (P.Laureano, 1991:168) the garden-oasis-paradise where the dead Pharaoh takes his rest. The name is found in the Book of the Dead and is used to describe the subterranean place where the Pharaoh

lives peacefully as a peasant. On page 40, Douat is: "la région crépusculaire devenue domaine des morts" (Tuat is a shady area domain of the dead) (in P.Barguet, 1967). The Touat is full of waterways and is the final point of a long travel from east to west on a desolated desert land. Geographically, it corresponds to the actual Touat, which survives thanks to waterways and palm-gardens.

For the natives, Touat is a Zenete word meaning 'the (inhabited) place'. For the Tuaregs or 'veiled people' (the Sanhadja 'Mulattamun', or Moors of Berber-Arab origin) Touat is an Arabic name. It derives from 'ouaha' 'oasis, fem.', which refers to a place where there is water and humidity, and Arabic verb 'ouata' 'to suit'. Berber prefix {t-} from {tin} 'place' is added to {ouata} 'to suit'→ {ouaha}+ {tin} + {ouata} 'the suitable place'

De Slane (1856-57:288, note1) backs up the idea of 'oasis', for he says: ' Nous avons déjà fait observer ailleurs que le mot Touat parait etre la form féminine berbérisée du mot arabe ouah (oasis)' (We already noted that the word Touat seems to be the feminine Berber form of the Arabic word ouah (oasis)). This definition is supported by a 6thcAH/12thcAD story, whereby Lamtuna people (cousins of the Sanhadja) fetching for refuge and security in the desert discovered that

land, and found that it was a suitable place for living.

Some Arab authors see the word Touat as the name of a branch of Sanhadja Mulattamun. Al Rassa' says that: "The Mulattamun are the tribes of the Sahara in the south, they are referred to as such because they

wear a blue veil on their face, and they subdivide into Tuaregs, Lamtuna, and Touat". In his manuscript, Attamantiti says that Touat is derived from Arabic 'al-'itawat' (the taxes) which were paid to the Almohads starting from 6thc. AH/12thc.AD. This definition is most improbable, for all the people living around or on the Almohads territories had to pay taxes. If so the word must be

found in various parts of the Maghrib.

Another oral tradition reports that Touat is a Songhay name. It tells the story of a King who went on Pilgrimage walking from Timbuktu to Mecca. When he came back, he fell some pain on his feet. That illness is called Touat in Songhay. To take some rest, the King decided to stay in the place where there was water and humidity. Since then, this area has been referred to as the Touat. (Lt Cancel, 1908:21)

1.6 The Foggara

The Foggara is a man-made subterranean conduit the origin of which is most uncertain and most controversial. For some (D.Moulias, 1927) it is a system brought by the first Jewish immigrants who fled the scourges of Roman emperor Trajan after the destruction of Jerusalem. Concerning their origin L.C Briggs says:

> "Le système des foggaras est très fortement développé dans la partie occidentale du centre du Sahara […] certains estiment que ce sont des Juifs ou des Berbères judaisés réfugiés de la Cyrénaique qui auraient introduit les foggaras au Sahara occidental il y a environ deux milles ans…" (the foggaras' system is well developed in the occidental part of central Sahara […] some believe that the Jews or Judeo-Berbers who sought refuge from Cyrenaica have introduced the foggara to central Sahara two thousand years ago)(In Oliel, 1994:3)

The Jewish origin of the foggara is also asserted by other

researchers and scholars, such as E.F.Gautier (in Moulias, 1927:251). For others, the foggara is a Persian system. For example, J.M. Solignac (in J.Oliel, 1994:1) says:

> " … [Le système des foggaras]…semble être originaire de la Perse et remonter à une antiquité reculée. On en trouve déjà la mention au V° siècle av. J.C, dans Hérodote (Melpomène 120)

[…]…" (… [The foggaras' system]…seems to be of a Persian origin and goes as far back as antiquity. It is already mentioned in the 5th c. BC, in Herodotus (Melpomenes 120)).

Muslim scholars accredit this system to the Arabs who came from the Maghrib in the 10th century. Those were the Barmecids of Iraq who reached the area during the first centuries of the Muslim invasion of North Africa. As an argument, some researchers (Ougouag-kezzal, 1978-79) define the word foggara as a derivative of fadjar (to explode) or whose counterpart is faggar (dig the earth over).

For centuries, the foggaras were dug and maintained by thousands of slaves. Consisting of hundreds of subterranean galleries, their length is as long as 3000 kilometres. They extend from the Sebkha of Timimoun in the North-west to the south-east where they reach the Touat and the Tidikelt. The abolition of slavery in Algeria during the 20th c. had drastic consequences on local Touat economy and society. Many foggaras were abandoned. Their former maintainers, the slaves, got independent and emancipated. They were given the right to stay on the

lands where they were born, or to leave the area. Some were allotted pieces of land and became proprietors.

2. Arabic and Zenete Toponyms

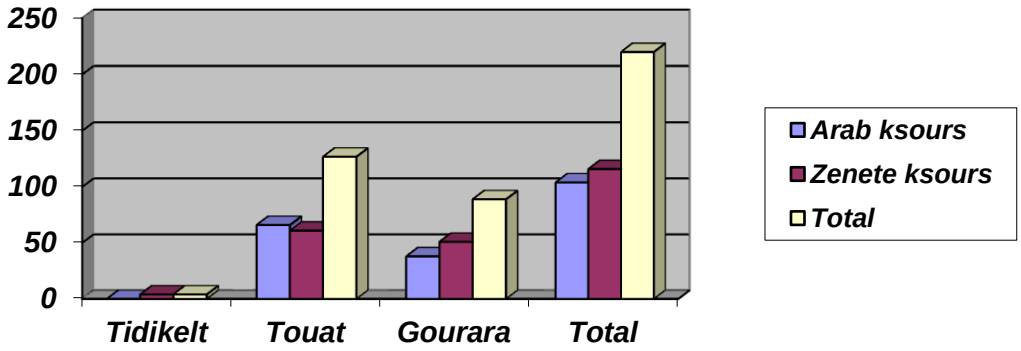
Geographical names of places are a reflection of the cultural and historical heritage of a given society. They convey the mentality of people and reflect their technological development and civilisation. Toponymy refers, most of the time, to particular features of those places. A comparison between Arabic and Zenete named places found in TTG (Touat-Tidikelt-Gourara) reveals that there are two tendencies. The first is that Zenete place-names are more important in number than Arabic ones. Second, there is one area where only Zenete Ksours are found: Tidikelt (Aoulef, 4 out of 4).

In the table below, we notice that there are more Zenete Ksours (116) than Arab ones (104) in TTG, although the difference between them is not important: 12 Ksours. The highest number of Zenete Ksours (51) is found in Gourara; whereas the highest number of Arabic place-names is localised in the Touat (Timmi district) and in Middle-Touat.

Table n°1: Arab and Zenete Names of Ksours in TTG

Area	Districts	Arab Ksours	Zenete Ksours	Total Ksours
Tidikelt	Aoulef	0	4	4
Total	1	0	4	4
Touat and Middle-Touat	Reggane	8	12	20
	Zaouiet Kounta	15	15	30
	Fenoughil	15	12	27
	Adrar	20	18	38
	Tsabit	08	04	12
Total	5	66	61	127
Gourara	Charouine	3	11	14
	Aougrout	17	12	29
	Timimoun	15	24	39
	Tinerkouk	3	4	7
Total	4	38	51	89
Gross Total	10	104	116	220

Graph n°1:Arab and Zenete Ksours of TTG



The Foggara's terminology is also composed of both Arabic and Zenete terms, as is shown in the next lines.

2.1 The Foggara's Terminology

One important feature is the foggara's system. This subterranean man-made irrigation conduit has both Arabic and Zenete names. And the terminology of this system of water spill is both in Arabic and Zenete. The following table shows the amount of Arabic-named and Zenete-named Foggaras

in the whole area. We notice that the number of Arabic named Foggaras is higher than that of the Zenete ones. The difference between them is as high as 170.

In the city of Timimoun, we find an important number of Zenete named Foggaras: 148 vs. 133. However, in the whole Gourara area Arabic-named Foggaras are more important in number (287 vs. 270). In Tidikelt, the number of

Arabic and Zenete named Foggaras is nearly equal: 24 vs. 23, respectively. In the Touat and Middle-Touat areas, Arabic named Foggaras take the lead in the four districts concerned. The maximum number is found in both Fenoughil and Zaouiet Kounta (141 and 128 Arabic-named Foggaras, respectively).

Table n°2: Arabic and Zenete Named Foggaras of TTG

Area	Districts	Foggaras	Arabic named	Zenete named
Tidikelt	Aoulef	47	23	24
Total1	1	47	23	24
Touat/Middle-Touat	Reggane	89	63	26
	Zaouiet Kounta	230	141	89
	Fenoughil	244	128	116
	Adrar	134	78	56
	Tsabit	91	61	30
Total2	5	788	471	317
Gourara	Charouine	110	55	55
	Aougrout	126	76	50
	Timimoun	281	133	148
	Tinerkouk	40	23	17
Total3	4	557	287	270
Gross Total	10	1392	781	611

The Foggara's system of water spill is an important feature of Touat culture. It is still a matter of controversial discussion about its uncertain origin. Although there are proponents of the idea that the Foggara system is either a Jewish or an Arabo-Persian system (J.Oliel, 1994), there are others who, under the upsurge of nationist and nationalist

feelings (Fishman, 1968), classify it as a Ksourian (inhabitant of the Ksours) hydraulic invention. That is, the Zenetes are the inventors of this water spill conduit.

It is worth pointing out that, the terminology of the Foggara, , consists of Arabic terms more than Zenete ones. These are, for instance:

Words	Gloss
Addarka	'measure; step'
Al-chaqfa	'copper-made measure plate'
algelba	'changing the direction of water flow'
Al-gemmoun	'land; lot'
Al-Habba	'measure unit'
Al-Hallafa	'copper-made measure plate'
Al-kial	'Measurer'
Al-kra'	'foot of foggara'
Al-madjen	'reservoir'
Al-majel	'first measure'
Al-qasri	'measure instrument'
Al-qasria	'small measure instrument'
Al-qerat	'measure unit'
Al-qesma	'measure'
Al-zemmam	'register'
amazer	'piece of cloth used to level water flow'
Annaffad	'rivulet'
Annafoukh	'water excess'
Asarou	'water flow'
Assagja	'ditch'
Assba'	'measure unit'
Attabout	'rivulet'
essmama	'cloth used to block water flow in rivulets'

The list of words shows that most terminological items of the Foggara system are Arabic. This permits to draw the conclusion that the Foggara is an Arab invention brought to the Touat area by the first Muslim conquerors. (cf. Ch. Julien, 1961) This deduction is supported by the existence of the 'qanat' canals of Iraq, bearing in mind that among the first Arab Muslims who reached and settled on the area were the Barmecids and the Guedoua of Iraq.

Conclusion

The article shows that some place-names of the Touat area have complex and ambiguous etymological origins. And since there are no fully verifiable sources of information to account for these names, any interpretation is possible. The foggara system instantiates the changeability of the naming process in an area where different cultures

and different categories of people are in close contact.

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