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Nature and Culture in the Land of the Tuareg : A Reading of a Section from Ahmed Zegheb' Book

الطبيعة والثقافة في أرض الطوارق: قراءة لمقطع من كتاب أحمد زغيب

Nature et culture au cœur du désert touareg : lecture d'un extrait de l'œuvre d'Ahmed Zegheb)

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Nature et culture au cœur du désert touareg : lecture d'un extrait de l'œuvre d'Ahmed Zegheb)

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Zoghbi Ahmed., (2022). Nature and Culture in the Land of Algerian Tuareg .Dar Khayel for Edition and Translation

1. About the Author and His Work : Nature and Culture Among the Tuaregs

About the author : Dr. Ahmed Zegheb is a novelist and writer born in November 1960 in El Reguiba, Wadi Souf, Algeria. He is a professor of popular literature, folklore, and anthropology at Hamma Lakhdar University in Wadi Souf. He is an academic researcher and a founding member of the “Thought and Creativity Association” in his region. He obtained his Bachelor’s degree in Languages and Communication Skills from Batna University in 1984. He then earned his Master’s degree in Linguistic Studies from Youcef Ben Khedda University in Algeria in 2001, with a thesis titled “Semantic Evolution in the Dialect of Wadi Souf Region.” In 2007, he obtained his Ph.D. from the same university with a dissertation titled “Aesthetic of Oral Poetry : Towards a Semiotic Stylistic Approach to Oral Poetic Texts.” Some of his creative works include the novels “The White Cemetery,” “Revolution of the Angels”, “The Judges’ Journey”, and “A Dawn Escape Night.” His latest novel is titled “The Blue Devil.” He has completed several books, including “Principles of Anthropology”, “Folklore : Theory, Method, and Application”, “Algerian Folk Poetry from Reform to Revolution”, “Semiotics of Oral Poetry”, “Folk Games : An Attempt at a Historical and Anthropological Approach to Models from the Wadi Souf Region”, “The Feminist Epic”, “Anthropological Reading of Literary Works”, “Nature and Culture in the Algerian Tuareg Lands”, and “Popular Jokes and Cultural Patterns.” He worked on collecting and classifying unrecorded poetry works, including the Diwan of Ibrahim bin Smina, the Diwan of Fatima Mansouri, and the Diwan of Ahmed bin Atallah. He has recently retired and dedicated himself to writing.

In a delightful format, a book titled 'Nature and Culture in the Land of the Tuaregs' was recently published in 2022 by the Algerian Fantasy Publishing House, authored by Dr. Ahmed Zagheb, a researcher in folk heritage. He dedicated a special tourism and scientific journey to delve into the worlds of the Tuareg lands through its natural landmarks known as 'haggar,' revealing their culture derived from their interaction and coexistence with nature. The magical result of his journey gave birth to this valuable book, highlighting the region's heritage and the unique cultural factors. Our focus as researchers is on a chapter from this book, specifically one of its sections titled 'Nature and Culture in the Land of the Tuaregs (Speaking Rocks).' Firstly, we wanted to translate it to provide an opportunity for the reader to directly explore its contents, then analyze its substance and ideas.

1. Study Methodology in the Book : Nature and culture both represent the environment in which humans settle and the surroundings to which they belong. One cannot conceive of a human being without both a natural and a cultural context. Nature provides essential adaptive means, while culture supplies the tools for adaptation and the ability to harmonize. The Tuareg person lives within a unique rocky and mountainous nature with its own charm. The Tuareg individual has contributed numerous labels, myths, legends, and stories from their culture, shaping this distinct rocky and mountainous environment. The book is divided into four chapters : Tuareg Myth and History, The Status of Women in Tuareg Society, Nature and Culture in the Land of the Tuaregs, and The Reflection of Culture on Nature among the Tuaregs of Tassili. The study utilized historical and anthropological methodologies to analyze, presenting its existence through mythology and history. The focus was on the role of women in Tuareg society, in addition to exploring how Tuareg culture is reflected in nature.
2. Details of the Study Chapter : Chapter three is titled 'Nature and Culture (Speaking Rocks),' comprising five subheadings : A. Speaking Rocks : The nature in the land of the Tuaregs is truly remarkable ; rocks speak through all that the Tuareg people added to them in terms of civilization and culture. B. Wonders of Rock Masses in Ahaggar and Tassili : The author expresses the marvel of rocky nature in the Ahaggar and Tassili mountain ranges. These volcanic and eroded rock formations, sometimes dark and scattered, shaped by winds, sands, and deserts, are considered by visitors as an extensive open-air museum, classified as UNESCO World Heritage.

2. The Speaking Rocks : Names, Myths, and Wonders

2.1. The Speaking Rocks

Mountains and rocks have been a source of sanctity and numerous myths in many cultures. Rocks, trees, and water form a sacred triad that only comes together in sacred places. Primitive humans always believed that rocks were laden with sacredness. Then, no wonder that the remarkable rocks and rock formations carry the culture of the Tuareg people. In Persian culture, for instance, Mithra, the Persian god, was born from a rock on the riverbank. He fought against the spirit of darkness by shooting arrows at a rock, causing water to gush forth (F, String,1992,P :367). Similarly, Prophet Moses, as mentioned in the Quran, was commanded by Allah to strike a rock with his staff to make twelve springs burst forth for his people (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 60). Some sacred creatures also emerged from rocks, such as the she-camel of Prophet Salih mentioned in the Quran (Ibn Kathir, 2000, p :768). Furthermore, Adam was created from clay, which is a type of rock. Distinguished rocks, especially those believed to have fallen from the sky, such as meteorites, are considered sacred. The Black Stone upon which Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) built the Kaaba, around which Muslims perform the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage, holds great sanctity.

2.2. The wonders of the rock formations in Ahaggar and Tassili :

As you delve into the Tassili and Ahaggar mountain ranges, south of the Algerian desert, undoubtedly your eyes will be captivated by those breathtaking landscapes of peculiar rock formations. They differ greatly from the mountains found in other regions. These are volcanic and eroded sandstone chains that sometimes lean towards darkness. Scattered rocks, sculpted by the wind, are surrounded by sand dunes and deserts. They take on various shapes, being pointed at times, rectangular at others, and even forming round domes. They exude mystery and nature's secrets, occasionally resembling animals, humans, or many other enigmatic forms that provoke contemplation and imagination. It is the largest open-air museum in the world, spanning an area of 80,000 square kilometers, carrying within its folds the traces of ancient human presence. For this reason, UNESCO has recognized it as a World Heritage Site (A.ghani Toulbi. The paradise in heaven. Ouvert. tourismeetvoyage.dz).

We wonder about the relationship between these remarkable landscapes and the humans who coexist with them. We will witness their connection with some of the animals present, such as the leopard, gazelle, birds, and

others. However, we ask the Tuareg people about this rock heritage, and we ask this rock heritage about the Tuareg people, hoping that it may reveal its secrets to us. We will postpone the murals that depict a person who lived more than 7,000 years ago in these lands, and instead focus on the Tuareg people and their relationship with the mountainous landscapes and diverse rock formations. When we asked our suppliers in the city of Tamanrasset and its surroundings, we found that they express their language on those rock formations, leaving no detail untouched. They give each rock a name in their language, which reflects their culture.

2.3. Rock Names and Meanings

For those who are not familiar with the Tuareg language, these unfamiliar names may appear as peculiar as the mountains and rock formations themselves. Examples include : Ihajen, Klaus, Auda, Ikraker, Tadrjst, Ahjarul, Tawahlafet, Amdegh, Tizwiyaq, Haddu, Tindi, and so on. However, those who are well-versed in the Tuareg language, like the suppliers we relied on to interpret these terms (Husseini Nighat, Ahmed Saber, and Ben Abdullah Sarsuf Tamanrasset), know that these names are derived from the shape of the rock or from a story associated with it. For instance, “Tahaat” is the name of the highest peak in the region, visible from hundreds of kilometers away, even from a nearby area like Ain Salah. It is said that “Tahaat” is the name of a wise person who used natural herbal remedies to treat various diseases, and the Tuareg people used to gather around him for this purpose. This is the story behind the rock names in Tuareg culture. It is said that the land became barren, so the Tuareg people, known as the Imugh, were forced to leave. When they approached the lands of Ain Salah, they saw clouds gathering to the south, leading them to believe that rain could water their lands and alleviate their distress. They sent a scout, a young man riding his horse, to travel for several days until he reached the arid region. They agreed on a specific night for him to climb the summit of Tāhāt, gathering as much firewood as he could and lighting a fire on that peak. If they saw the fire, they would know that rain had fallen on their lands and their plight had ended. However, if they did not see the flame of the fire on the summit of Tāhāt, they would know that their land was still barren. As for “Īlāmān,” it is a rugged and branching mountain range that is difficult to traverse without getting injured. They say, “Īlāmān has no Aman” (safety). The word “Aman” in Tuareg and other Amazigh dialects means water. It is said that the people disputed over a woman named “Taht.” One of them threw a spear, which fell in a place where blood flowed. After a while, the conflict subsided, and water started to

flow from the spot where the blood fell. A man from the other side then struck with a sword, severing his shoulder, which resembled the shoulder of the body. The shoulder cracked, and the location was named “Āmbagar.” The detached shoulder and the spot from which water flowed became a lasting trace of that conflict. Acekram is a mountainous plateau characterized by its high elevation. On this plateau, a French monk named Charles de Foucauld built a worship tower. It is currently a shrine for some monks and Christian tourists, and it is said to offer the most beautiful sunrise and sunset views on the plateau. In the Tuareg language, the word “yikram” means to ascend, and at the top of the plateau, there is a knot or a water source that branches out in several directions, reaching various areas, including Niger, as well as the inland regions. The valleys descend from that water source to irrigate different lands. As for “Aghan” accompanied by “Tindi,” it resembles a mortar and pestle in its rotation and elongation, which is why it was given this name. It is a tool used for various purposes, such as crushing spices for food flavoring and even in some traditional industries. Thus, we can catch glimpses of the lifestyle in the names of the mountains. “Timezgad” is a distortion of the Arabic word “masjid” (mosque) due to the dome-like rotation observed on the mountain. It has a hall that resembles a prayer hall. “Amdagh” is a spotted mountain, taking on the color of the African giraffe, indicating the presence of this type of animal in the area until recently. “Taderjist” refers to the shape of a person leaning to one side, as the mountain stands upright but has a large rock that cracked on one side, leaning right or left. This rock was called “Taderjist,” meaning “the shoulder.” Sometimes, names of mountains are derived metaphorically from their partial resemblance to certain objects. For example, the mountain “Tizwiyaq” is named after its resemblance to desert eagles. In the local language, “azayig” refers to a single eagle, and “Tizwiyaq” means eagles (plural). “Klaus” is named after a woman who has a shrine in the heart of the mountain, and it is said that she was a queen in ancient times. “Aduda” or “Adhoudha.” It is a mountain name that indicates the upward erection of the mountain, leaning towards sharpness. The name also refers to the thumb when it is erect after the four fingers are closed. Mountains take on different colors, indicating the diversity of those magnificent landscapes, ranging from dark brown to dark turquoise to bright red. For example, the mountain “Idrar Hagaghen” in Tamanrasset means the red mountain in various Amazigh dialects. In the city of Tamanrasset, there is a mountain that stretches from the far east to the far west, but it is called “Adrian Mountain.” The name is derived from the word “yadreen,” which

refers to a dent or depression in the body of the mountain that appears as if one of its teeth fell out. It is said that the mountain, in this form, resembles a reclining or sleeping Tarqi man, as if it protects the city from the hardships of time. And “Ikirakr” is an isolated, solitary mountain in a vast, flat area, and it was named with this name, meaning a unique, isolated mountain. The poet, Al-Tarqi, recounts the names of the mountains he passed by in his journey, mentioning them in the form of a poem that connects travel with the natural reality. He begins his poem by mentioning the names of the mountains he encountered in his journey : Adrar, Yargh, Imdan, Nukiabtān, Yanour, Hiha, Tazulit, and Biqān. The poet continues, meaning :

We descended in Tibilghalaghin and crossed the valley.
All this while I think of the girl, Oukha, the beautiful woman.
My heart resides with you, living under your necklace.“

2.4. Explanatory myths of rocks

The Tarqi people not only coexist with the mountains but also give them names of animals, birds, tools, or body parts such as shoulder and finger, and mention them in their poems. They used to befriend the mountains and create tales and mythical interpretations for the mountain’s appearance or its location. Their imaginative minds often produce stories of love between the beloved mountains and tales of revenge and conflict over a specific woman. For example, Ilaman loved Tuyuyen, but Tuyuyen was in love with Adrian. Al-Tarqi explains this paradox by describing Adrian as tall, wide, and massive, while Ilaman was short and thin. Ilaman attacked Adrian, dislocating his shoulder and knocking out one of his teeth. As for Adrian, he struck Ilaman in a spot from which blood flowed. Over time, this blood transformed into water that continues to flow to this day. The mountain Ahirher, angered by this, leaped from its place to become a large pit and settled 40 kilometers away in the middle of the valley, obstructing Tuyuyen’s path. Thus, through this mythical tale of the mountains, Al-Tarqi explains the presence of Ahirher in the middle of the valley, with the small mountains of Tuyuyen in front of it, and the existence of the pit that collects rainwater, making it a wellspring for tree groves (F, Babaker, p :32). Some believe that giant beings transformed into mountains after bloody battles. There is also the story of a noble warrior who struck the mountain with his sword, splitting it in half to pass through (G, D, Fatima, 2009, p :35). Another legend claims that Mount Odan is inhabited by genies and instills fear in the hearts of those who pass near it. Travelers can even hear echoes resembling the sound of the “Tindi”, a type of Tarqi music played on an instrument named after it, used to control rhythm. The

instrument resembles a pestle or a mortar. It is said that a Tuareg man found himself in this mountain at night. While he was asleep and without food, he heard the sounds of the Tindi, indicating that a tribe was celebrating nearby. He decided to seek out the people of the celebration in the hope of finding some food. Indeed, he found a tribe celebrating and setting up beautiful colorful tents. The elders of the tribe welcomed him and invited him to join them for a meal on the condition that he doesn't mention the forbidden word while eating. As he began to eat, the man realized that this tribe couldn't be human due to the grandeur and splendor of their belongings. He then realized that he had become a guest in the world of the jinn. Naturally, a Muslim cannot abandon mentioning the name of Allah, especially during meals. He tied his camel to a palm tree and tied himself to the same tree. He then uttered "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful". A violent storm suddenly erupted, destroying everything and turning the tribe and everything in it into palm fronds. The storm lifted his camel and placed it down again while he remained tied to the tree, clinging to it and repeating "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" until the storm subsided. The place turned into an empty space, as if it had never been inhabited before. The man managed to save himself, and his story continued to circulate among the Imuhagh tribes, creating fear of that mountain due to its solitude and the echoes that reverberate within its surroundings (G, D, Fatima, 2009, p :44). The myth emphasizes the magical power of religious ritualistic phrases such as "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" in overcoming malevolent supernatural beings like jinn and demons. The belief in jinn among the Imuhagh is ancient, dating back to past eras. However, the belief that uttering the ritualistic phrase "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" renders them powerless and that it is a forbidden word among the jinn has undoubtedly come with Islamic culture to these societies. Indeed, many Imuhagh of Tassili believe that the city of Sefar (a large area of mountainous formations resembling buildings, corridors, caves, and peculiar shapes, in addition to cave paintings of animals, hunters, and strange creatures) is the city of jinn. Speaking about Sefar and the Imuhagh leads us to discuss the images of animals found in this place, which suggest that it was not a desert in the conventional sense. Elephants, ostriches, giraffes, fish, crocodiles, horses, gazelles, rhinoceroses, and hippos, among other animals, indicate that the region was fertile and teeming with wildlife, along with abundant vegetation and dense forests in a remote era dating back 7,000 to 10,000 years, contrary to the hypotheses of researchers (A. Baatich, 2015).

3. The anthropological dimensions

Those drawings and murals take us to a dimension deeply immersed in the past, to anthropological dimensions that point to theories formulated by scientists based on scattered artifacts and drawings found throughout the ancient world. Among these are the scenes of Sefar and many archaeological sites in Targaet South of Jannet, which depict scenes of the veneration of females and their significance in ancient human societies. Women were respected and held high status, to the point of being deified or worshipped as feminine goddesses (Ben Bouzid Lakhder, p. 226).

In these scenes, we see women with swollen bellies, elaborate body adornments, the representation of the great mother in the form of a grandmother surrounded by children and grandchildren, and a woman combined with a giant red deer (B. Lakhder, p. 223). Anthropologists consider this to be an Amazigh social system that gives women prominence before it is eroded by male dominance in a relatively later stage. Another type of scene depicts animals, and if we were to find that all the depicted animals represent strength, we could interpret it as a belief that humans revered and worshipped these animals, although Arab scholar Faras Al-Sawah suggests that primitive humans did not worship animals. The bull, the ram, and the bison were symbols of cosmic power and strength before they were personified as gods (F. Al-Saweh, 2002, p. 135).

However, there are also animals that symbolize peace and weakness, such as the gazelle, fish, and goat. These animals cannot be considered symbols of power. Therefore, the magical theory is closer to logic. Magic was a primitive religion before humans realized that the primordial power could be personified as gods who govern the universe. Humans had to appease these gods through rituals to obtain their benefits and ward off their harm. Hence, the rituals in the magical stage were called magical rituals. They were laws created by humans that governed the prevailing power in the universe, including the laws of resemblance and contact, as discussed by James Frazer in his book «The Golden Bough.»

Frazer argues that magic is a false science, proposing laws that people believe govern the world. According to these laws, magic assumes that things can influence each other from a distance through a hidden sympathy, where the effect is transmitted from one thing to another through an imagined ethereal medium. Thus, Frazer names these two types, sympathetic and contagious, as sympathetic magic.

Either ideas collapse through contact and proximity, which is contagious magic, where an object that was once connected to another continues to have an effect even after separation. Or the influence occurs through resemblance or similarity, and the principle of sympathetic magic is that the like produces the like. For example, harming an image of a person can result in harm to the person themselves (J. Frazer, 1971, p. 101-102).

It appears from the numerous cave paintings depicting hunting scenes with great precision and detail that humans aimed to acquire and facilitate the hunting of animals, which can be classified as sympathetic magic.

Conclusion

The value of the book is undeniable, especially in the translated section, where readers can truly appreciate the extensive effort made by researcher Ahmed Zagheb. This work serves as a cornerstone for exploring the heritage of the Ahaggar region from both a historical and anthropological standpoint. It calls for greater attention to the area's rich local heritage, appealing to scholars, tourists, and enthusiasts alike. The book stands as the product of an enriching cultural and touristic journey, blending diverse fields of knowledge such as anthropology, sociology, folklore, and history—characteristics that make it stand out. Despite the scarcity of historical records, Dr. Zagheb has successfully explored the history of Ahaggar, providing numerous literary evidences, including myths and legends. Even the natural world takes on a mythical quality, evoking the primordial origins of the universe. This book encapsulates a wide array of knowledge, offering profound cultural insights that enhance its scholarly and cultural value.

In conclusion, Ahmed Zagheb has masterfully illuminated one of Algeria's most expansive and unique regions—the Tassili and Ahaggar areas in the southern Sahara—through its landscape, customs, and belief systems. His goal was to uncover the hidden treasures of nature and art within the desert. The author's command of the Tuareg dialect is essential for understanding the nuances of Tuareg heritage, as it allows for a deeper connection to the language and its links to Arabic. The Tuareg people have long excelled in crafting explanatory myths, particularly those related to natural phenomena. The richness of their heritage, both tangible and intangible, warrants further exploration to uncover its many secrets. Through his work, Dr. Zagheb has effectively highlighted the anthropological dimensions of Tuareg customs, rituals, and myths, demonstrating how nature and culture are intertwined—one shaping the other in a continuous, dynamic process.

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Abstract

Dr. Ahmed Zegheb, a researcher and academic, embarked on a special journey to Algeria to explore the Tuareg lands up close. His travels resulted in a valuable book titled “Nature and Culture in the Tuareg Lands of Algeria,” delving into the unique nature and cultural aspects of Tuareg society. We’ve chosen a section of this book titled “Nature and Culture in the Tuareg Lands : The Speaking Rocks” for its intriguing content and significance. We aim to translate and provide a special reading of its contents, allowing readers to uncover the secrets of this land and its distinct heritage that withstands the test of time, especially considering the marginalization faced by desert regions on various levels. The role of researchers is crucial in unveiling the treasures of their cultural heritage.

Keywords

Tuareg land, Nature, Culture, Rocks, Anthropology, Marvelous.

مستخلص

الدكتور أحمد زغب، الباحث والأكاديمي، قام برحلة خاصة إلى الجزائر لاستكشاف أراضي الطوارق عن كثب. أسفرت رحلته عن كتاب قيم بعنوان “الطبيعة والثقافة في أراضي الطوارق

الجزائرية"، يتناول الطبيعة الفريدة والجوانب الثقافية لمجتمع الطوارق. اخترنا قسمًا من هذا الكتاب بعنوان "الطبيعة والثقافة في أراضي الطوارق: الصخور الناطقة" لمحتواه المثير وأهميته. نهدف إلى ترجمة وتقديم قراءة خاصة لمحتوياته، مما يتيح للقراء اكتشاف أسرار هذه الأرض وتراثها المميز الذي يقاوم اختبار الزمن، خاصة في ظل التهميش الذي تواجهه المناطق الصحراوية على مستويات متعددة. يلعب دور الباحثين دورًا حاسمًا في كشف كنوز تراثهم الثقافي.

كلمات مفتاحية

أراضي الطوارق، الطبيعة، الثقافة، الصخور، الأنثروبولوجيا، العجائبية.

Résumé

Dr. Ahmed Zegheb, chercheur et universitaire, a entrepris un voyage spécial en Algérie pour explorer de près les terres touarègues. Son périple a donné lieu à un ouvrage précieux intitulé "Nature et Culture dans les Terres Touarègues d'Algérie", abordant la nature unique et les aspects culturels de la société touarègue. Nous avons choisi une section de ce livre intitulée "Nature et Culture dans les Terres Touarègues : Les Rochers Parlants" pour son contenu intrigant et sa signification. Nous avons l'intention de traduire et de proposer une lecture spéciale de son contenu, permettant aux lecteurs de découvrir les secrets de cette région et de son patrimoine distinct qui résiste à l'épreuve du temps, surtout compte tenu de la marginalisation des régions désertiques à divers niveaux. Le rôle des chercheurs est crucial pour dévoiler les trésors de leur patrimoine culturel.

Mots-clés

Terres Touarègues, Nature, Culture, Rochers, Anthropologie, Merveille