

TUAREG MUSIC

Camel Songs
Supplication Dance
Love Songs
Imzhad Solo
Hunting Song
Wedding Songs

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

TUAREG MUSIC of the Southern Sahara / FOLKWAYS FE 4470

TUAREG MUSIC of the Southern Sahara

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Ethnic Folkways Library



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TUAREG MUSIC

of the Southern Sahara

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY FINOLA AND GEOFFREY HOLIDAY

"We are Imohagh, Imocharh, Imajirhen and our language, depending upon the dialect of the tribe, is called Tamahak or Tamachek. All these words derive from the same root, the verb *iohargh*, which means: it is free, it is pure, it is independent And if you ask us more precisely for the origins of each tribe and to distinguish the nobles from the serfs, we would say that our people are blended and interlaced like the fabric of a tent in which is woven the hair of the camel and the wool of the sheep. It would be easier to distinguish between the camel-hair and the sheep's wool. However, we know that each of our numerous tribes has come from a different country. . . ."

These were the words with which Duveyrier, the great Saharan explorer, was answered when he inquired from the Tuareg their origins. They are as valid today as they were 100 years ago.

There are several references in early history, reasonably attributed to the Tuareg. Herodotus records a party of Nasamons, a Libyan tribe, setting out across the desert and reaching the river Niger. There is evidence which relates certain customs of this tribe - particularly the method of preparing flour and the practice of questioning the dead to obtain intelligence of the future - to the Tuareg of today. They are recognisable as the Ifuraces of Corippus who are identified with the Kel Iforas, a branch of the Azger tribes, and with other peoples who inhabited the Garamantian kingdom. Ptolemy, the geographer, has noted the habitats of many of these tribes.

After the fall of the Byzantine empire and with the invasion of the Arabs in the 7th Century AD, the Tuareg seem to reappear

as Lemtuna, Sanhaja, Jedala, Mesufa and Lemta. The Tuareg claim that Lemtuna was the mother of their race. Père Charles de Foucauld in his dictionary of the Ahaggar dialect notes that the legend includes a sister of Lemtuna who was the mother of most of the Berber tribes of Morocco and, particularly, of the Berabish.

In name these tribes were Moslem and in the 11th century the paramount chief of the Sanhaja, Yahia ibn Ibrahim, came under the influence of the preacher Abdullah ibn Yacin who was destined to bring about far reaching changes in Africa and Europe by his founding of the religious sect which came to be known as Almoravids. After a century of religious wars the Almoravids had conquered the Soninke of Ghana (not to be confused with present day Ghana), founded Marrakech, overrun the Arab territories of the Maghreb-el-Acsa and saved the Moslem emirates of Andalusia from the Christian king, Alfonso VI. By the beginning of the 12th century they ruled from the Senegal to the Ebro.

This power was not to last. With the ultimate triumph of Christianity in Europe the Tuareg fell back into the obscurity that was to last until the advent of the French in the 19th century, an obscurity broken only by the writings of the great Arab travellers Ibn Batuta, Ibn Khaldun and Leo Africanus.

During the early part of the 19th century and bound up with the intense interest in the course of the river Niger, with the militant desire to follow up Abolition with effective measures against slavery in Africa, a succession of expeditions followed which indirectly began to throw light upon the existence of

the Tuareg people as they are today. Rene Caille returned alive from Timbuktu, the Clapperton expedition reached Lake Chad from Tripoli, Richardson made his journey as far as Mourzouk which was to result in the epic five years that Heinrich Barth spent travelling through the desert in the middle of the century. Before the end of the century the French exploration and pacification of the Sahara had begun, an epoch that has been written into the history of the desert with names such as Duveyrier, Flatters, Foureau and Lamy.

Out of this cauldron of history the Tuareg of today have emerged, more or less unscathed, their habits, dress, customs, belief and language little different from what they must have been 2,000 years ago.

The social organization of the Tuareg people comprises a great number of tribes and factions (the smallest containing, perhaps, only a few families) and divided by allegiance and economic necessity into confederations of which the most important are the Kel Ahaggar, the Kel Azger and the Kel Aïr. Kel in Tamahak means "people of."

Overall, allegiance is to the Amenokal (the king) but, in the case of the tribes of the Sudan, even the existence of local sultans has little influence over the usual state of tribal anarchism which still obtains today. Amongst the great confederations the class structure comprises nobles (Imouchar), vassals (Imr'ar), holy men (Inislmen), artisans (Enaden), and slaves (Ikkan). In the oases and settlements there exists a further class of freed slaves who tend the gardens, called harratin.

No Tuareg of noble birth will stoop to work of any kind and so, with the passing of the rich days of plundered caravans and towns, he is often reduced to the precarious, but always dignified, existence of an aristocratic mendicant. It is this same aristocratic outlook on life and the "protection" they have afforded to Sahara commerce which has earned them the names of jackals, thieves and murderers, and the opprobrium of their Arab enemies.

The Tuareg language (called Tamahak or Tamachek) is considered to be a survival of that of the ancient peoples of Libya, and the alphabet, tifinar', presents similarities to

those of the Phoenicians and South Arabians and to the early Cretan inscriptions. It retains evidence of both Greek and Hebrew influence in such words as ⵓⵏⵊⵏⵉ angelus, angel; ⵓⵓⵇⵉ Jibril, Gabriel. In its written form it is purely consonantal and usually (though, not always) written from right to left.

This lack of evolution of the written language must be considered as one of the factors which have prevented the emergence of any form of recorded history. How short-lived the oral traditions of the Tuareg in relation to the historic must be is instanced by the table of dates compiled by Père de Foucauld in his Dictionaries of the Tamahak language. Thus, ⵓⵓⵉⵜⵉ (year) is qualified by ⵓⵓⵓⵏ ⵏⵓⵏⵉⵏⵉⵏ (in which a non-persistent plant (adrealal) was unusually plentiful, i.e., good pasturage existed) and corresponds to the year 1860 in our calendar. Although nominally a Moslem people the Mohammedan calendar is unknown to the Tuareg as a whole.

On account of their attitude towards women and particularly the appearance of the cross on sword-hilts, camel saddles and ornaments the theory has been put forward that the Tuareg at some time in their history embraced a form of Christianity. No evidence has been produced to support this theory as yet and it is interesting to note that neither Richardson (travels in the Great Desert) nor Heinrich Barth (Travels in North and Central Africa, 1857-58) who both mention this theory and subscribe to it remark upon the cruciform pommel of the saddles and omit this detail in all the illustrations in their published accounts of their travels. Similarly, Barth, who lived for almost a year at Agades does not mention the existence of the "Cross of Agades", a silver ornament representing the constellation in Orion by which the Tuareg navigate the desert. Yet, 60 years later, both these examples of the ornamental use of the cross suddenly appear in ethnological works concerning the Tuareg, not as recent additions but as established forms of Tuareg art.

The music of the Tuareg, according to Henri Lhote (Les Touaregs du Hoggar) may be found to have similarities with that of certain Berber tribes living in the Atlas mountains of Morocco but this theory has not, so far, been explored. The instruments used by the Tuareg are basically no different from those of the Arabs, the Hausa people or the Berbers of, for instance, Gourara in northwestern Algeria. The imzhad (violin) and the tendi (drum), al-



ABOVE: TUAREG DANCE
BELOW: PLAYING THE WATER DRUM

ways played by women (except that the latter is often played by men amongst the southern tribes), are their two main instruments. Each of these has its counterpart with the Arabs and the Hausa. On the southern fringes of the desert the flute and tambourine appear, the former being particularly favoured by the cattle herders of the semi-nomadic tribes of the Sudan who travel as far south as Kano.

As far north as Idélès the Hausa word ganga is used to connote a drum and has been adopted locally into Tamahak. What sets the Tuareg apart from both the Hausa and the Arab is the role that the women play in their music and which is the result of their emancipated status in relation to their sisters of Islam. Amongst the pure Tuareg, that is to say amongst the nobles, with the exception of the love songs of the men the entire musical tradition rests with the women. It will be noted that the love songs are closer to the music of the Orient with their mordents and suspended rhythms than the songs of the women

which suggest a greater affinity to the Sudan. Those of the Enaden and the Ilougan reveal marked similarities to the music of the Hausa.

It must be remembered that the essence of social organization amongst the Tuareg is vested in the women; descent is matrilineal. Thus, the head of the family is not the father, but the maternal uncle and only where Islamisation has had its effect among the southern tribes does this cease to be the infallible rule. It is no paradox that the Lemtuna, Sanhaja, Mesufa and Jedla tribes should have supported Ibn Yacin in the jihads of the 11th century, the Holy Wars of the Moslem faith. It is no paradox that the strongest blows for the Faith should have been struck by a people who are opportunist both in relation to God and man. It is for this reason that the Arabs have named them Tuareg - "the Abandoned of God."

Acknowledgments:

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SIDE I, Band 1: AZALE

Tuareg women of the Tamesguidda tribe with tendi, water drum and handclapping.

Azale signifies a song of Aïr: in this instance a typical "camel song," evoking the sway and rhythm of the caravan as it sets out across

the desert.

In the region of Āir (or Azben), and south in Damergu amongst the semi-nomadic pastoralists, Hausa blood has mingled with Tuareg stock and the Hausa language is widely understood and used in dealings with the great market of Kano in Northern Nigeria. It is not surprising to hear at the beginning the women being exhorted in that language to sing. But breaking into the Āir dialect of Tamachek the women themselves take up the cry: Tozale! tozale!

The tendi is a wooden drum with a single head; often it has two short poles attached for carrying. The head is made usually from gazelle skin, sometimes snared and played with the flat of the hands, one hand being used for damping the note.

The water-drum is fairly common in this region but, unlike the tendi, not usually found amongst the Ahaggar Tuareg of Algeria. It comprises a large earthen-ware basin filled with water on the surface of which floats inverted a half calabash. When the calabash is struck with a stick shaped like a hammer it produces a deep note giving emphasis to the accented beats of the metre. The effect is to some extent tonal since the harder the calabash is struck, the greater the displacement of water with the result that the note is pitched higher. This "lift" to the rhythm is a feature of Tuareg drumming and is also apparent with the tendi where the hand is used to "damp" the skin producing an almost tonal effect.

Francis Rennel Rodd in his book People of the Veil - the outcome of almost a year living with the Tuareg of Āir - records that the liquid used was milk instead of water. This is interesting in that he does not mention the possibility of an alternative and remembering that, at the time, he was camped out in the desert with the tribe where water would be scarce but milk from the camel herd probably in abundance.

SIDE I, Band 2: TOHIMO DANCE

Tuareg women of the Kel Issekeneren with tendi, water drum and handclapping.

Although the Tuareg are fundamentally a people who do not dance, the presence of Negro slaves has introduced dances, particularly in Damergu, Tamesna and Āir which

have been modified and shaped to the essentially different rhythm of the tendi. But since the tendi itself is an instrument of Sudanese origin and was introduced into Tuareg music independent of dancing, the dance is merely an embellishment to the singing and does not appear to have any ritual significance.

The Tohimo Dance is supplication on behalf of a person possessed by the devil and illustrates the curious mixture of animism and anthropomorphism that is the basis of Tuareg religious belief.

Moslems in name only the Tuareg have peopled the desert with demons. The Kel es Souf, a people of spirits who are invisible during the day, at night appear in every shape and guise including the human form. They appear to be mischievous as well as malevolent - a kind of Saharan leprachaun - to whom the Tuareg attribute all natural phenomena (with the curious exception of the mirage): dust-devils, echoes, land-slides, fire that blazes up suddenly from the sun-scorched vegetation; all these are manifestations of the Kel es Souf. The hour most propitious to their machinations is night-fall and to stumble across one is to risk illness or madness, perhaps both. To counteract their influence amulets are worn - and particularly against the Evil-Eye - and it is essential to carry always some object which contains iron as a sure protection.

It is not surprising amongst a superstitious people to find evidence of black-magic; and the casting of spells and distilling of potions is an art at which the Tuareg women excel. The ingredients of potions most effective betray the repulsiveness usually associated with the black arts: sweat, tears, menstrual blood, semen, urine and so on. Organs from corpses recently dead, stolen from the grave at midnight, are particularly efficacious for philtres to obtain control over another person.

SIDE I, Bands 3,4,5: LOVE SONGS

EZZEL N OUFADA AOUA ETTEB ALES OU
N ABARADH

TARAKEMT

CHIKISHIKISHIN

These three love songs are typical of the music of the Ahal and reveal a marked difference between the musical expression of the two

sexes: the traditions of the Orient as distinct from Africa. The first and third of these is accompanied by the imzhad; the second by handclapping.

Amongst the Tuareg it is the women who are the custodians of tradition, of folklore and, consequently, of music. No Targi (Tuareg man) plays a musical instrument and his participation in musical emotion is restricted largely to the sensuous and the sensual. His songs are invariably love songs and will be accompanied usually by the imzhad, the one-stringed violin played by a woman who is often the subject of his song. This music, in that it is closely connected with the sexual customs of the people, approaches a form of ritual behaviour.

At puberty, the young Targi veils himself as symbol of his break with childhood. The significance of the veil has been lost though it is certain it originated in religious or superstitious practice. (Sir Richmond Palmer in Man xxxiii, 1933, suggests it may be a relic of the cult of Mithras, which had its adherents in the Sahara, and another theory purporting to stem from the Tuareg themselves is that the breath leads directly to the soul so that the mouth and nostrils are covered to protect them from evil spirits entering and taking possession. It is certain, however, that the veil was not adopted as a protection from dust and thirst although the cloth in practice helps greatly to minimise thirst by the effect of condensation of the breath.) As soon as he takes the veil - which he will never remove, even when eating - the young Targi begins his life as an adult member of the tribe: he becomes a warrior and eligible to attend the love-feasts called Ahal.

There is no precise ritual attached to the transition from boyhood to manhood and in no sense is the young Targi initiated into the tribe. Similarly, in the case of girls the occasion of puberty is marked only by a small family celebration and the presents of beautiful clothes - symbol of womanhood. The young people are then in the state of asri, meaning literally "to run with free rein" and, by extension, to signify freedom to partake of sexual licence which is permissible to all but married persons and which is associated with the conduct of an Ahal. Ahal means "a gathering together for the purpose of entertainment" - music, poetry, conversation and love-making.

The music of the Ahal has an emotional direct-

ness that sets apart from other forms of Tuareg music. Listening particularly to Chikishikishin it is difficult to forget that the Almoravids who went to the rescue of the Spanish emirs of Andalusia in the XIth century numbered amongst them many Tuaregs of the Jedala, Lemtuna and Sanhaja tribes: it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the earliest form of the Cante Jondo has its roots in the Sahara Desert.

SIDE I, Band 6: AZEL OUA N KEL OWI

Azel means literally "branch of a tree"; and, by extension an air played solo on the imzhad: thus, azel oua n Kel Owi means "imzhad melody of the Kel Owi tribe. These melodies are usually traditional and often bear extremely beautiful names, such as, azel oua n dat-amoud: "melody of the end of the night"; azel oua m medouten, "melody of the earth drunk with water."

The imzhad is often used as a solo instrument and many women have been renowned throughout the Sahara for their musical skill: the most

ABOVE: PLAYING THE TENDI
BELOW: MEN SINGING MARRIAGE SONG



famous being Dassin, wife of Mousa ag Amastan, king of the Tuareg during the time of Père de Foucauld. The imzhad receives its name from the string made from the hair of the women: imzhaden (𐵓𐵎𐵏) in Tamahak meaning "hair." The imzhad itself is fabricated from a half calabash covered with (usually) stretched gazelle hide with one or two sound-holes. The body of the instrument measures anything between eight to fourteen inches across the diameter and has a neck of curved stick secured into two opposite holes in the calabash. The bridge comprises two short sticks bound together to form an inverted V, the string passing through a small notch. Tuning is achieved by a loop of hair round the string and the neck which may be moved away from or towards the bridge to lower or raise the pitch. The sides of the calabash are often ornamented with intricate engraved designs of a geometrical nature.

SIDE I, Band 7: SONG OF THE ENADEN

Sung by Tuareg man of the Enaden caste from Damergu.

Amongst the Tuareg the caste of the Enaden enjoys an important position and corresponds to that of professional tradesmen the world over. The Enaden are the artisans of the Tuareg people who manufacture most of the material possessions necessary to the daily livelihood and economy of the tribes: the saddles and trappings for the camels, weapons and shields, cooking and eating utensils, ornaments for the women and musical instruments. Like the Harratin (the gardeners of the oases) the Enaden tend to settle into communities living in or close to the scattered towns of the desert.

SIDE II, Band 1: HUNTING SONG

Sung by Tuareg man from Damergu (tribe unknown).

Since the community of the tribes and factions of the Tuareg people does not have its roots in ritual, there are no gods to invoke or propitiate before setting out to hunt gazelle or the fabulous barbary sheep. Strictly speaking, the Tuareg do not hunt; they "forage" for meat. Afterwards there is always the tale of the chase to be recounted; often, as in this case, humorously and bawdily.

SIDE II, Band 2: CAMEL SONG

Sung by Tuareg women from Damergu with tendi and water drum.

Typical of the "camel songs" with their simple melodies and usually unvarying rhythms this tells the story of two camels, their merits and habits. To the Tuareg the camels are their most important possessions and always receive attention first at the wells and water-holes before the men drink.

SIDE II, Band 3: ILOUGAN

Sung by Tuareg men and women of the Kel Issekeneren with tendi, and water drum.

Within the confines of the encampment a group of women and children forms around the tendi player. The young Tuareg men, mounted on magnificent riding camels, provide a "quadrille of camels", two opposing lines of warriors facing each other with the women and the tendi between them. In turn they sweep across the camp, drawing always closer to the circle in the middle and, as the excitement increases, a rider will lean from his mount at full gallop and snatch from the shoulders of one of the women her shawl. Immediately, the other mehari are in pursuit. They head him off and triumphantly return the garment to its owner to be rewarded by the terelilit, the trilling cry of the women that is the mark of admiration and joy.

The song, which is often sung at marriages, expresses the wish (deeply rooted in Saharan economy) that the men will have many fine camels, i.e. become rich.

SIDE II, Band 4, 5: WEDDING SONGS

WEDDING SONG OF THE KEL ISSEKENEREN

Women of the Kel Issekeneren with tendi and water-drum.

AROUA IDAOUA OUF EMRI

Enaden of the Kel Issekeneren with tam-bourines.

Although the customs of the Ahal give sexual licence to the young Tuareg, marriage is regarded as a serious state and is - in spite of the Tuareg's lip-service to Islam - monogamous. Strictly speaking, attendance at an Ahal is permitted only to the unmarried,

the divorced and the widowed: adultery is summarily punishable by death to both parties, the execution being carried out without hindrance by the injured husband.

It is at the Ahal that the young Targi seeks his mate, but any declaration of love in terms of marriage must be authorised by application through an intermediary to the father of the girl. In Air the mother and the family are not told until all the arrangements for the marriage have been settled. This is not so among the Ahaggar Tuareg and it is, perhaps, an indication that the matriarchal customs of the southern tribes have to some extent been relaxed through miscegenation since Sudanese women generally do not enjoy the same status, particularly those like the Hausa and the Fulani who are under the domination of Islam.

A dowry has to be provided by the bridegroom which is handed over to the bride's parents. As with bride-price amongst Negro tribes and peoples this custom has tended to fall into disuse and is observed merely as a matter of form, the traditional value of the dowry being considerably reduced. This is undoubtedly a direct result of French penetration into the Sahara and the outlawing of the raids on camel herds since the basis of the dowry was the gift of camels. Amongst the Tuareg there is no community of property and the woman retains as her own whatever wealth she brings into the marriage.

Marriage celebrations last eight days and are held at the camp of the bride's family where the young couple will live for the first year of married life. During these festivities there is much singing and the *iklan* (slaves) dance in honor of the occasion. (See also Ilougan).

After the year is up a further ceremony takes place. The young men from the husband's camp, his brothers and friends, saddle their *mehari* and armed as for war ride down into the camp of the bride's family and demand that the bride be allowed to join her new family. In simulated terror the women of the camp flee as the warriors surround the tent of the bride and bridegroom. The next day they are escorted back together with the bride's parents to her husband's camp where they are received by the chief and the old women.

The first of these two wedding songs, sung by women of the Kel Issekeneren, is in honour

of the marriage of a young noble girl. The second, sung by two men of the Enaden, offers advice on fertility.

SIDE II, Band 6: TAZENKHARET

Tuareg women and Harratin (Africans) from Idélès with handclapping.

North and east of the Atakor massif of the Ahaggar region of Algeria the oasis of Idélès is the scene of a dance, originally imported from Air, but now peculiar to Idélès alone. It is a dance performed only a few times each year and only then, apparently, due to a spontaneous feeling engendered by a gathering of the three factions of the oasis: Tuareg, Arab and African. Each of these is involved: the Tuareg women provide the singing and the *terelilit*; the Africans (Harratin) the dance and a mesmeric chanting that ultimately dominates; and the Arabs, as spectators, form the circle around the dancers and participate in the hand-clapping which is the only measure of time accompanying music.

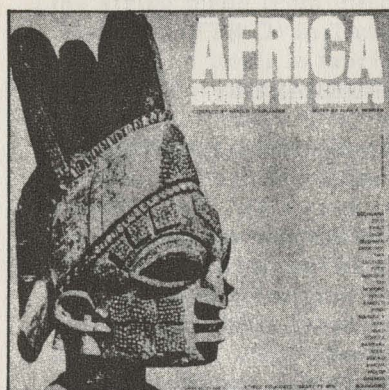
Tazenkharet is only danced at night and, on this occasion, during the period of the full moon before the end of Ramadan. It lasts through the night, developing until a point is reached where the ecstatic solo singing of the Tuareg woman, the *terelilit* of her companions, the chanting and grunts of the dancers achieve a unity and emotional tension where excitement is at fever-pitch. After this point the endurance of Africa prevails, the Tuareg singing becomes submerged beneath the rising tide of the chant, the tempo increases and the dance ends ultimately from exhaustion, and from the self-induced trance of the dancers.

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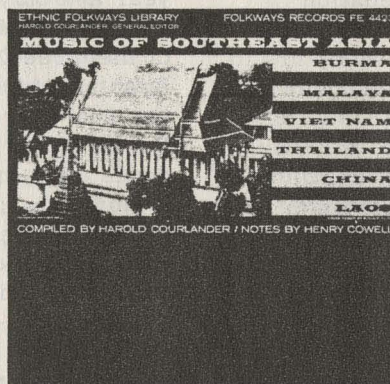
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