

PEOPLE OF THE VEIL

*Being an Account of the Habits, Organisation
and History of the Wandering Tuareg Tribes
which inhabit the Mountains of Air or Asben
in the Central Sahara*

BY
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"NAUGHT BUT GOOD"

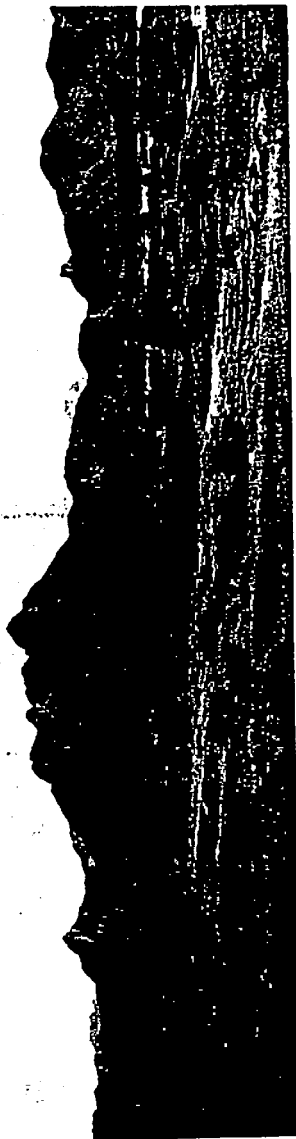
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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PLATE I



From the face

ACELLAL VILLAGE AND MOUNTAINS

few the site proved interesting by reason of the existence of rectangular grass huts constructed at great labour to preserve the traditional type of the Tuareg house. They provided an excellent example of the tenacity of custom, for the material of which they had been built was totally unsuited to their shape or plan.

The upper waters of the Ighazar basin collect in three valleys which unite between T'intaghoda and Seliufet. On the way down the valley from Faodet, the village and palm grove of Iberkom were passed, whence a fine valley runs up into the heart of Tamgak and provides some degree of communication between T'iwilmas or Fares on the desert, and the villages in the Ighazar. Further on we come to Tanutmolet village, remarkable for a modern elaboration of the "B type" house displayed in the strictly rectangular but many-roomed dwelling shown in Plate 27. T'intaghoda is interesting as possessing an early mosque and several fine "A" and "B type" houses covered with a stucco of red earth. Most of the houses had been built on two low hills standing in the bottom of the valley. There are no gardens near them nor any palm grove. The importance of the merchants and holy men who used to live there had made of T'intaghoda the capital of Northern Air. A little further on begins the palm grove of Seliufet, and from there date palms and gardens continue all the way to Iferuan, with a chain of almost contiguous settlements on both sides of the valley bed.

At Iferuan the French established a small fort in 1921 near the site where the Foureau-Lamy expedition had camped and had been attacked some twenty years before. The fort is valueless except for the moral support it may offer to induce the local Tuareg to return to their old villages from the south. The Senegalese soldiers of the garrison are not mounted and would be powerless to do anything in the event of a raid. By the end of 1922 some families, but only a few compared with the numbers who lived there before the war, had returned to their homes.

Iferuan was a very delightful place. The peak of Tamgak stands pointing like a finger to heaven on the edge of the massif. The gardens and the groves of palm trees, some of which, alas! have died through lack of attention during the years of neglect since 1917, give the area a distinctly fertile aspect. It is impossible to say how many palm trees there are in the Ighazar, but they must run into many thousands. There are said to be 4250 at Iferuan alone. This number exceeds the next largest single group at In Gall west of Agades, where there are some 4000 trees, and the former are only a part of the total in the Ighazar.

The date palm is a comparatively late arrival in Air, where it was introduced from the north. The trees are a cross of the Medina and Fezzan varieties. As elsewhere in North Africa, each tree is an immovable asset like a house, and often does not belong to the same man as the ground on which it is grown.

At the foot of the palms were numerous gardens growing vegetables and grain. The fort had a wonderful kitchen garden with all sorts of melons, gourds and welcome European green food. The French officer in command of the post used to declare that Iferuan was the Switzerland of the Sahara, and the cool climate seemed to justify his praise. The Tuareg buildings had nothing remarkable about them with the exception of the large mosque of Tefgun not far away, and the khan or caravanserai built on the Arab plan. The Sudanese habit of making large clay amphoræ and baking them *in situ*, for the storage of wheat and millet grown in the gardens, has been adopted in Iferuan, and to my knowledge not elsewhere in Air.

Although the open desert on the way to Ghat is not reached much before In Azawa, several days further north, now, as in the past, Iferuan is the last permanently inhabited point in Northern Air. Between these points the mountain mass of Fadé has first to be crossed; it contains several watering-points and some pastures, and huts were occasionally built at a pool called Zelim, but they had no permanence.

The mountains and the watering-places have long since been abandoned by their old owners, the Ifadeyen and Kel Fadé and now belong to the Ikazkazan and Kel Tadek tribes.

At Iferuan several important roads meet. The road from Air to Tuat and to Ghat, which is the main north and south caravan track across the Central Sahara, and the Haj road from Timbuctoo to Cairo, all three have a stage in common from Iferuan to In Azawa. The Haj road used to leave the Niger at Gao and enter Air at In Gall, whence it skirted the western edge of the plateau and then turned into the mountains to Iferuan: after passing In Azawa and Ghat it ran through Murzuk, Aujila and Siwa to Cairo. From Iferuan there are also several roads to the west, while the northern of the two alternative eastern roads across the desert to Kawar equally started from there, running, as already stated, by way of Taghmeurt n'Afara, Agamgam and Ashegur.

In seeking to identify Air with the Agisymba Regio of the Roman geographers, Duveyrier presumed that the Fezzanian Garamantes were in the habit of visiting the plateau in ox-drawn chariots or wagons. If they had, in fact, done so, it is logical to suppose the road they used would have come to Iferuan or one of the Ighazar villages. Indeed he states that he heard rumours of a direct road from Murzuk or Garama to Air, a "Garamantian way" which passed through a place called Anai, where there were rock drawings similar to those found in Algeria and Tripolitania. This Anai was south-west of Murzuk and must not be mistaken for the better known Anai of Kawar, which is north of Bilma on the Murzuk-Chad road.

I was at particular pains to inquire into the existence of this road from all the most prominent guides and personages in Air whom I could find. It would have been peculiarly interesting to establish its existence, for Duveyrier says, "*La voie, avec ses anciennes ornières, est encore assez caractérisée pour que les Tebou, mes informateurs, qui en arrivaient, n'aient laissé dans mon esprit aucun doute à ce*

sujet."¹ Other writers, presumably on his authority, have added that where this road crossed the sand, stone flags were laid for the wheels to pass over. Duveyrier's informers stated that the petroglyphs at Anai represented ox-drawn vehicles, and that the road also passed by way of Telizzarhen, where Barth discovered the famous rock drawings depicting men with animal heads.² While the broad valley at T'intellust would afford easy passage for a wheeled vehicle, there is no way to the south for any but pack transport. There are no signs of any road for vehicles ever having existed either east or west of the Bagezan massif. The great Kel Owi road is only fit for pack animals; and although many parallel tracks are visible in the open country there are numerous defiles where a single path only a few inches broad occurs. I am convinced that wheeled transport could never have been used anywhere in Central or Southern Air. But, it may be asked, could chariots have arrived even as far as T'intellust or Iferuan? There are only three ways into the plateau from the north-east that are at all suitable even for loaded camels. They are (a) through the Fadé mountains to Iferuan, (b) by Fares water and the Agwau valley to the great north-east basin, and by Taghmeurt n'Afara to T'intellust. The first two are not practicable for wheeled traffic, and on hearsay evidence the third one is equally out of the question. I do not, therefore, think that wheeled transport could ever have entered Air from the north or north-east, though wagons might, of course, have come as far as the borders of the mountains to points such as Fares or Agamgam, provided the surface of the desert were hard enough. This cannot be determined until Anai and the country between it and Air have been visited.

If any direct road between these areas ever existed, it is

¹ The italics are his. Duveyrier, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

² Barth, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. 197. That the road should have run from Telizzarhen to Anai and then to Air is very doubtful, as this would have entailed a very devious route. What, doubtless, was meant was that it ran from Murzuk or Garama via Anai to Air.

17 Duveyrier, Henri (1820-1851) Explorations du
Sahara: 17, TOMARIS du Nord, 1867

very unlikely to have run straight from Anai to T'intellust, as Duveyrier's map shows. In my inquiries I heard in all of only four roads across the Eastern Desert: (a) the southernmost from Damagarim by Termit;¹ (b) the direct road to Fashi and Bilma from Southern Air, starting at Tabetto; (c) the old Kel Owi Taghalam road from Agamgam to Ashegur, whence one branch goes north to Jado oasis and the other south to Fashi; and (d) a northern road from Fadé to Jado direct. Guides like Efafe, who know every part of the Eastern Desert, state that there is no road from Air direct to Murzuk which does not go either by way of Jado or by way of the usual caravan road between Kawar and the Fezzan. The northernmost road from Fadé to Jado runs through two places called Booz and Ghudet, where water is found a short way below the surface; Efafe travelled this way in his youth. He told me that it was known to and used by Tebu raiders to-day. But there are no deep wells on this track to be filled up to prevent raiders passing down the old Garamantian way, as Duveyrier implies was done. From Jado it, of course, is possible to reach Murzuk either by Anai or by joining the usual Chad road via Tummo. The existence of this northern Anai is certainly substantiated, and Jado, a Tebu oasis with a palm grove, is known to exist. It is called by this name among the Arabs, but Agewas by the Tuareg of Air and Braun by the Tebu themselves. The place has been reconnoitred by certain French officers, one of whom, a commandant of the fort of Bilma, I had the good fortune to meet. He was aware of the story of a flagged road, but after visiting Jado several times found no trace of any such track and did not believe in its existence. That the Garamantes and, indeed, other inhabitants of the Fezzan at one period in history used chariots drawn by oxen is quite likely, but it is highly improbable that they ever ventured so far afield in them as Air.

The existence of a road between Air and the Fezzan may be admitted as possible, but only on condition that it is not

¹ See Appendix III.

made to run direct between these countries. South of Anai it would almost certainly pass through Jado, and thence may have reached the plateau either by Ghudet and Booz to a water-point called Temed¹ on the eastern edge of Fadé north of the Tamgak group, or else by Ashegur and Agamgam north-east of T'intellust. This is not the road of the Garamantes on Duveyrier's map; and beyond this his story cannot be further substantiated. As against this line of argument it must be observed that Von Bary² during this stay in Air collected information which led him to believe that there was a road from Air to Jerma by way of Anai. It is implied that it went direct, but he was never able to learn any details and was probably influenced by Duveyrier's statements. He heard that there were some traces visible, but found no evidence to confirm the report of flagstones, wheel-marks or sculpture along its course.

There is nevertheless one piece of evidence which militates in some measure against my belief that chariots never were seen in Air, and that is a rock drawing which I found in Air on a boulder in the Anu Maqaran valley just west of Mount Arwa. The drawing is reproduced in Plate 41. In the conventional manner adopted in these designs it represents oxen pulling four-wheeled vehicles. The identification of the ox is confirmed from the many other similar pictures of this animal on rocks in Air. The object behind it must apparently be a cart. The whiteness of the marks in the Anu Maqaran drawing appears to indicate that it is a comparatively recent production, although the colour and degree of patination of Saharan drawings are of course no real criteria, for weathering is notoriously uneven in its action. Near the drawing of the ox and chariot, but on a different boulder, was the magic square shown in the same figure. Both drawings were in a very sheltered place and seemed contemporary. The evidence of this picture of the chariot or

¹ Temed is a mountain north of Tamgak: there is a pool below the peak in a cave on which the prophet Elijah is reputed by the Tuareg to have lived.

² Von Bary's diary, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

wagon is too unreliable and slender to establish any theory, but it is certainly difficult to understand where the draughtsman obtained his idea except as a result of seeing chariots drawn by oxen, a condition which does not, I think, obtain in the Fezzan to-day. Wheeled vehicles have only been known in the Sudan since they were imported by Europeans during the last twenty years, and I am not aware that even those are ox-drawn. Furthermore, although the most puzzling point about the Anu Maqaran rock drawing is its apparent modernity, which is paradoxical in view of the disuse of wheeled vehicles in the Sahara, it is almost certainly older than this century. Yet the application of an ox to a cart is not likely to have been imagined by any Tuareg who had not seen an instance of it, and there seems to be no adequate reason for him to reproduce his knowledge on a rock in Air even if chance had taken him so far afield as the Mediterranean littoral, where he might have seen the equipage, unless it had in some way become associated with Air.

The identification of Air with the Agisymba Regio of the Romans has been accepted by many authorities other than Duveyrier. It raises the whole problem of the Roman penetration of the Sahara. They are known to have administered the Fezzan, and it is even pretended that they reached the Niger, but evidence on this point is more scanty. Doubtless as the exploration of the Central Sahara is carried out systematically further evidence of their penetration will come to light. I am, for instance, not aware that any remains have actually been found at Ghat, though the city, which was known to them as Rapsa, was almost certainly that place and was visited in 19 B.C. by Cornelius Balbus. The Roman remains discovered by Barth on the road from Mizda over the Hammada el Homra to Murzuk are better known. This route seems to have been opened about the time of the Emperor Vespasian, and to have rendered possible or at least easier the occupation of the Fezzan, which had, however, already been visited by military expeditions earlier than that reign. Pliny writes: "Ad Garamantes iter inexplicabile

adhuc fuit. Proximo bello, quod cum Cænsibus Romani gessere auspicii Vespasiani Imperatoris, compendium viæ quadridui prehensum est. Hoc iter vocatur 'Præter caput saxæ.'" Evidently the road was called by the natives, even in those days, by the same name which it now possesses, for the Pass over the Red Rock Desert at 1568 feet above the sea is still known to the Arabs as "Bab Ras el Hammada."¹ In about A.D. 100² Septimius Flaccus penetrated from the Fezzan into Æthiopia at the head of a Roman column; Julius Maternus marching from some point on the coast to Garama had joined forces with the Garamantes in order to proceed southward together against various Æthiopian bands. By this date, then, it is probable that an occupation of the Fezzan had been accomplished, for this alone would justify a further advance or punitive expeditions on such a scale against raiders from the south. Indeed, from the account given by Pliny³ of Cornelius Balbus' expedition of 19 B.C. to the Fezzan, it might be supposed that the occupation of Southern Tripolitania and the Central Sahara had taken place a century earlier. The identification of the cities conquered by Balbus has not been satisfactory except in the case of Cydamus, Cillaba or Cilliba, Tabudium,⁴ Rapsa and Jerma, respectively Ghadames, Zuila,⁵ Tabonie, Ghat and Garama; the last named being the capital of the Garamantes and of the whole Fezzan, a position which later passed on to other places and finally to Murzuk.

These operations of Septimius Flaccus and Julius Maternus have been held to concern Air. The latter, ἀπὸ Γαράμης ἄμα τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Γαρομαντίων ἐπερχομένῳ τοῖς Αἰθίοψιν ὀδεύσαντα τὰ πάντα πρὸς μεσημβρίαν μῆσι τέσσαρασι ἀφικίσθαι εἰς τὴν Ἀγίσυμβα. . . .⁶ It is important to try to identify

¹ "The Gate of the Head of the Desert."

² Ptolemy (Marinus of Tyre), I. 8, sec. 4 seq.

³ Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, V. 5.

⁴ Tabudium and Thuben are both mentioned, either of which might be the well of Tabonie on the Mizda Murzuk road.

⁵ In the Fezzan: there are several places of this name elsewhere.

⁶ Ptolemy, *loc. cit.*

the area, since it appears to be the most southerly point to which Roman geographical knowledge is recorded as having extended. Duveyrier, arguing, on what may in any case be a false premise, that because Pliny mentions no camels in Africa there were no camels, concludes with the fantastic statement that the Romans must have used wheeled transport on their expeditions, and that that is why the "Iter præter caput saxæ" played such an important part in their operations; but I have seen no evidence which might lead one to suppose that this route over the Hammada el Homra was fit for wheeled traffic. The Garamantes were said by Herodotus to have used wagons drawn by four horses.¹ From this Duveyrier concludes that at a later date oxen were substituted for horses, and that in virtue of a perfectly imaginary road from Murzuk by way of Anai Air must be the Agisymba Regio. He gives no convincing reason for the identification, but implies that by a process of elimination it must be so. The name Agisymba and Bagezan have been connected by displacing the terminal and initial syllables respectively of the two words, but undoubtedly it was not this so much as the existence of a Garamantian road which appealed to the learned author.

One of the principal objectives which I had in mind in visiting Air was to seek evidence of Roman penetration. In the course of their long historical knowledge and occupation of the Fezzan, it seemed natural for the Romans to have explored the Air road. But I found no remains, nor evidence whatsoever of their penetration, not even at points which had considerable strategic value. Some more fortunate traveller than myself may one day chance upon an inscription or a camp. Such a discovery in so vast and little known a land is quite conceivable, but up till now the weight of evidence is against the Romans ever having come to Air. There is a certain historical analogy in the fact that the Arabs never invaded the country either. Their influence on the Tuareg of Air was confined to an unenthusiastic conversion to Islam

Herodotus, IV. 183.

in comparatively recent times. On the other hand, the Arabs in the first century of the Hijra, like the Romans, seem to have descended the Chad road at least as far as Bilma, and again, Arab influence in Central Africa east of the lake is at least as strong as, and perhaps even greater than, the Western Arab-Moorish influence on the Upper Niger.

I am, however, much more inclined to regard Tibesti and not Air as the Agisymba Regio. We find the Arabs in the Fezzan evidently feeling the same necessity of expansion southwards along the Chad road as did the Romans. By 46 A.H. the Fezzan had already twice been conquered by the Arabs, first in 26 A.H., soon after the occupation of Egypt had been completed and the attention of Islam was turned to North Africa, and again when the inhabitants had cast off their servitude to the Arabs. Okba ibn Nafé was induced by this breach of faith¹ to leave his army, which was on its way to conquer Ifrikiya (Tunisia and Western Algeria), at Sert in the Great Syrtis, and to lead an expedition to reconquer the desert. He took Wadan and Jerma, near Murzuk, and the last strong places of the country, and asking what lay "beyond," learnt of the "people of Hawar,"² who had a fortress on the edge of the desert at the top of an escarpment. It was said to be the capital of a country called Kawar, the name which is borne even to-day by the depression along which the main caravan road passes south through Bilma and other small villages, any one of which may have been their stronghold, which El Bekri³ also calls Jawan. After a march of fifteen nights Okba came to this place and eventually captured it. At one moment his expedition nearly perished of thirst, but according to the story Okba's horse found water in the sand and saved the column, wherefore the place was called Ma el Fares, the

¹ Narrative of Ibn Abd el Hakim in Slane's translation of Ibn Khaldun, *op. cit.*, Appendix I to Book I.

² I think this name has nothing to do with Hawara but is derived from Kawar (see below).

³ *El Bekri*, ed. Slane, 1859, p. 34. Cf. Jawan, جوارن or حوار = Hawar, or خوار = Khawar ? Kawar.

"Water of the Horse." This point is now spelt Mafaras on the Murzuk-Kawar road in about Lat. $21^{\circ} 15' N$.¹

The Romans seem to have had much the same experience as the Arabs, though we can identify the movements of the latter with greater certainty. The expedition of Septimius Flaccus and Julius Maternus started from Garama. Now an expedition from the Fezzan proper to Negroland would normally have proceeded along the Chad road, which runs south, and not in the direction of Air, which lies south-west. Furthermore, we have already seen that there is no direct road from the Fezzan to Air save by making a detour via Jado and crossing the worst part of the desert. Had the Romans intended to use the Air road to Negroland they would assuredly have started from Rapsa (Ghat) and not from Garama; alternately had they started from Garama and proceeded by way of Ghat, it is likely to have been mentioned, nor would the enterprise have been so directly connected with the Garamantes. After marching south from Garama the expedition reached the Agisymba Regio. But if the Air mountains are neither south of Garama nor on a direct road from that place, both these conditions do apply to Tibesti. This country lies due south of the eastern Fezzan and there is a direct road from Garama by way of Tibesti to Negroland, though it is not so well known as the main Chad road. The latter trade road, however, and the Tibesti mountains seem to fit the description of the course taken by the expedition sufficiently well, and clearly better than the Air road and plateau. The Romans, we are told, marched for three months to the south; it may be objected that this would be an inordinately long time to take on a journey to Tibesti and that Air, being somewhat further away from Garama, is the more probable. But expeditions may take longer or shorter times to traverse any particular desert road

¹ El Noweiri tells the same story of a later expedition in Morocco led by Okba. If only for the fact that no place of this name can be found on the route of the latter expedition, the attribution of the incident to the Kawar campaign is justified, though there are also other reasons for accepting this identification.



according to the difficulties encountered, the fighting sustained and the pasturage available on the way for the transport animals, and I do not think that any conclusion can be drawn from the reported length of the march. A period of three to four months might as easily bring one expedition from the Fezzan to Tibesti or to Air as it would be insufficient for another under different conditions but on the same road to get more than half-way.

If circumstantial evidence seems to point to Tibesti, there is also that of the place names given in the account. The Agisymba Regio contained the mountains of Bardetus, Mesche and Zipta. No similarity to these names can be found in Air, but in Tibesti the first may well be the area and massif round the village of Bardai, while Mesche may be a Latinised form of Miski, a valley and group south-west of Bardai. For Zipta I can offer no suggestion.

Like the Romans and the Arabs the modern Turks also penetrated Tibesti as a consequence of their occupation of the Fezzan in an attempt to stop the Tebu raiding. History is curiously consistent in that we have no evidence of the Arabs or the Turks having penetrated Air. The Romans, I assume, probably did not do so either.¹

The Romans must have come into contact with the Tuareg in the Fezzan, where the latter, it might be assumed from Arab evidence alone, were early established if they did not actually constitute the majority of the original population. It is possible to trace in Roman records the names of certain well-known Tuareg tribes. The description which Corippus gives of the Ifuraces, the Ifoghas tribe of the Southern Tuareg, corresponds accurately with that of the present-day camel riders of the Sahara. In a description of an encounter with the Byzantine forces under John, the general himself cuts down a camel with his sword and the rider falls with the accoutrements and paraphernalia, which are those of a Tuareg on campaign or in battle to-day.² The activities

¹ See Schirmer's note on Von Bary's diary, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

² Corippus, *Johannis*, IV. 1065-83 *et passim*.

of the Circumcelliones during the troubles described by Opatus¹ during the Donatist heresy in North Africa in the course of the fourth century A.D. remind one irresistibly of those of the Tuareg. These bands of marauders from the desert came into Southern Tunisia and Algeria on swift and remorseless errands of plunder for the greater glory of their heretical Faith. They lived in the barren hills of the outer waste and descended to burn churches, sack houses and carry off live-stock with such deadly efficiency and ease that the motive power of their organisation can only have come from a spirit which considers raiding a national sport. "When they were not resisted they usually contented themselves with plunder, but the slightest opposition provoked them to acts of violence and murder. . . . The spirit of the Circumcellians, armed with a huge and weighty club, as they were indifferently supplied with swords and spears, and waging war to the cry of 'Praise be to God' . . . was not always directed against their defenceless enemies, the peasants of the orthodox belief; they engaged and sometimes defeated the troops of the province, and in the bloody action of Bagai they attacked in the open field, but with unsuccessful valour, the advance guard of the Imperial cavalry."²

So in later years the Tuareg of Ahaggar, disdaining any but *les armes blanches*, fell in ranks under the rifle fire of the French troops at Tit.

But it is curious that in none of these and other early descriptions of the Tuareg is any mention made of their outstanding characteristics, so obvious to the person who sees them for the first time—the Face Veil worn by the men. It seems very strange that none of the classical and post-classical authors should have recorded a feature which so distinguishes these people from other races. There is no reference to the Veil until we come to the first Arab authors, when the whole race is immediately described by this very peculiarity, as the Muleththemin, مَلْثَمِينَ, the "Veiled Ones,"

¹ De Schis. donatistarum, *passim*.

² Gibbon: *Decline and Fall*, Chap. XXI.

a second form plural past participle from the root لَم, which also forms the word *litham*, لَثَم, the Arabic name for the Veil itself. How it came about that the Arabs should be the first to record the use of the Veil is a problem to which I have been able to find no satisfactory solution.