The Ritualistic And Sociological Functions Of Folk Aurès Songs:A Field Study In Mount Hmer Xeddu – Aith Abdelrahman Akbash Tribe

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Abstract:

The corpus of Folk Aurès songs constitutes a rich repository that enables scholars to explore the enduring anthropological and sociological frameworks undergirding the collective Aurès imaginary and traditional North African thought. By conducting a careful reading and analysis of these song texts, one gains at least a partial understanding of human nature and societal structures in the Aurès region. Moreover, these songs invoke a set of customs and festivities on the brink of extinction—if not already vanished—and illuminate residual social and cultural values that once formed the bedrock of Aurès social organization. They further serve to rationalize various local ideologies and institutions, notably marriage practices predicated on endogamy and tribal affiliations. In addition, they underscore the import of tirougza (manhood), honor, and virginity as key pillars of the region's patriarchal system. This study employs content analysis to draw out and interpret the symbols and meanings suggested by these ritualistic functions, while simultaneously uncovering the sociological values embedded within. In doing so, it offers insight into the historical and social testimonies still discernible in the region.

Keywords: Ritual, Folk Song, Aurès, Hmer Xeddu, Aith Abdelrahman Akbash Tribe.

1. Problem Statement

The earliest Amazigh, much like other peoples of the world, cultivated the art of singing. Their songs mirrored a broad spectrum of beliefs performed through ritualistic forms, often accompanied by incantations, hymns, and dances in the sacred spaces where they worshipped. They revered multiple natural phenomena, consecrating the sun, moon, caves, grottos, stars, and trees, among others. This particular region, strategically situated at the crossroads of Eastern, Mediterranean, African, and European cultural influences, witnessed numerous waves

of invasion, occupation, and intercultural exchange. These successive encounters imprinted themselves on Amazigh memory in the form of layered strata that accumulated without obliterating one another. Such a confluence of traditions and beliefs fostered a fertile environment for mythological thought to thrive, making it somewhat untenable to suggest that the Amazigh were unfamiliar with mythology.

Within this conceptual framework, it is plausible to assert that Aurès inhabitants once embraced a mythic tradition recounting the exploits of various deities. The reluctance of local storytellers to preserve these narratives following the advent of Islam, however, obstructed their transmission. Indeed, the few myths that persist rely on the same symbolic apparatus, reinforcing the notion that the collective repertoire of rituals and beliefs eventually evolved into mythic form.

Consequently, the present work turns to the texts of Folk Aurès songs—performed in the Chaouia dialect—as a vital resource that illuminates facets of Aurès society and reveals the persistence of its anthropological and sociological underpinnings. These songs offer a critical lens for examining traditional North African worldviews and highlight how these cultural formations remain partially intact.

The Folk songs performed by the Aith Abdelrahman Akbash tribe evoke a constellation of customs and festivities now teetering on the brink of extinction—if they have not already disappeared altogether. These traditions, woven into the fabric of Aurès life, reflect residual social values that once served as cornerstones of the region's organizational framework. Moreover, they illuminate a range of ideological foundations and social institutions.

Against this backdrop, the study poses a central research question: What symbolic connotations do the ritualistic and sociological functions embedded in Aurès Folk songs convey?

2. Sub-Research Questions

- What symbolic meanings are manifested in the rituals embedded in Aurès Folk songs within the Aith Abdelrahman Akbash tribe?

- What sociocultural values do these songs convey in the same community context?

3. Methodology

This study draws on content analysis to distill essential symbols and meanings related to the ritualistic functions in Aurès Folk songs, while concurrently examining the sociological values rooted therein. Additionally, it investigates historical indices woven into the texts, providing vivid glimpses into the formative stages of Aurès social history.

From a methodological standpoint, the research employed semi-structured interviews with eight elderly women belonging to the Ayth Abdelrahman Akbash tribe. Participant observation further enriched the data, given the researcher's own affiliation with the tribe under study. This positionality afforded opportunities to engage firsthand in the performance of the songs under examination, typically in the context of weddings, circumcision ceremonies, and betrothal celebrations.

4. Conceptual framework

4.1 Ritual

(A) Liguistically

The lexical item "Rite" derives from the Latin term "Ritus," which denotes "a codified sequence of symbolic activities conducted by a collective within ceremonial contexts" (El-Mahouachi, 2010, p. 2).

(B) Terminologically

In Durkheimian terms, ritual encompasses "the prescriptive norms governing how individuals must engage with the sacred" (Segalen, 1988, p. 11). Edmond Doutté, meanwhile, emphasizes the emotional underpinnings of ritual, contending that "the gesture accompanying desire forms the essence of the ritual," thereby linking ritual to the historical evolution of emotional expression (Zahi, 2011, p. 81). He further categorizes ritual performance into three principal forms: kinesthetic (dance, physical enactments), verbal (prayers, spells), and visual (tattoos, talismans) (Zahi, 2011, p. 81). From a Weberian standpoint, rituals constitute manifestations of human interactions with the metaphysical realm, articulated through prayer, sacrifice, and acts of devotion (Zahi, 2011, p. 81).

Within the parameters of this research, the concept of ritual is broadened to incorporate elements of sorcery, mythology, and religion. Such a synthesis is contextualized within the cultural, imaginative, and temporal specificities of the Aurès region, illuminating how ritual practices are shaped and reshaped over time.

4.2 Function

Function is construed here as "the objective outcome of a social phenomenon, The concept of function, as theorized by Robert King Merton, refers to "the observable outcomes of a social phenomenon, which may manifest as explicit or latent impacts within a community" (Mendras, 1975, p. 262). Malinowski reinforces this position, contending that function signifies the contribution of any constituent activity to the overarching system to which it belongs, invariably addressing a particular need (Mendras, 1975, p. 262).

4.3 Folk Song

(A) Linguistically: Historically, the Arabic adjective "sha'bi" (Folk) connotes "the entirety of a people in a given nation, irrespective of strata or affiliations," an etymon rooted in the social demarcations prevalent among ancient Arab societies (Omran, 2006, p. 70).

(B) Terminologically

Alexander Haggerty Krappe delineates the Folk song as "an anonymous, melodic poem disseminated through past eras, yet still thriving in contemporary practice" (Krappe, 1967, p. 120). Polikawski refines this notion, contending that a Folk song is "one that originates from the people themselves, rather than a mere reflection of popular taste" (Souhali, 2018, p. 112).

In this research, the term "Folk song" designates compositions performed in the Aurès region—by either men or women—using the Chaouia dialect. These songs resonate with rich ritualistic and sociological symbolism.

4.4 Toponym of Aurès (Awras)

Challenging the presumed link between "Aurès" and the Arabic word "wers," which denotes a yellowish plant, historical sources reveal that the name "Aurès" predates the Islamic conquests. Byzantine historian Procopius, for instance, referenced the area as "Aurassius" while chronicling its opposition to Byzantine incursions (Saad, 2017, p. 52).

Al-Bakri may have been the earliest historian to interpret the semantic scope of "Aurès" in his treatise Al-Maghrib fi Bilad Ifriqiya wal-Maghrib. He alludes to "Tawrast" near M'sila, identifying it as "the red city." He remarks, "Another deserted city, also referred to in Berber as Tawrast, means 'the red one,' built of stone on a fresh riverbank" (Boussaha, 2002, p. 13). This observation aligns with Moroccan scholar Mohammed Chafik's argument that "Aurès" is an Amazigh term referring to a russet hue, especially in horses predominantly white yet tinged with red, described as "Awras" (plural: "iwerrasen"), or alternatively "Aras" (plural: "Arasen"), with "Tarusi" as its lexical root. Whether referring to humans or animals, the term consistently denotes an auburn or russet coloration. To this day, some elders in the Aurès may jokingly call a blond individual "Aras" (Saad, 2017, p. 53).

In Khenchela Province, one finds a landmark known as "Awras," a hill that residents of Batna call taqerbust n wawras and those of Khenchela call ɣill n wawras. This moderately elevated range extends from the village of Aïn Mimoun in the municipality of Tamza, overlooking Khenchela on its far side. Beyond that point, the name shifts to Ixf n userdun, also known as "Ras Sardun." Such evolving nomenclature suggests that "Awras" once referenced the broader chain of mountains

before it became confined to the highlands near Aïn Mimoun (Saad, 2017, p. 30).

Geographically, Aurès constitutes a vast, historically rich mountainous region in eastern Algeria, encompassing approximately 9,000 square kilometers. Its highest peak, Chelia, rises to 2,327 meters and is locally referred to as Kalthoum. Bordered by Ain M'lila, Guelma, and Souk Ahras to the north, Tebessa and Jebel El-Ank to the east, Négrine and Khenguet Sidi Nadji to the south, and Barika to the west, the region is a nexus of historical and cultural significance (Bardo, 2020, p. 8).

4.5. Toponym of Mount Hmer Xeddu

Mount Hmer Xeddu is a prominent mountain range situated in the upper reaches of the Aurès region, encircled by various villages and hamlets within the municipalities of Mchouneche, Ghassira, and Meziraa. Spanning an area of nearly 1,300 square kilometers, its elevation ranges from approximately 400 to 1,984 meters above sea level in the eastern part of Biskra (Bardo, 2020, p. 9).

Scholarly debate surrounds the etymology of Hmer Xeddu, with one prevalent—but arguably superficial—explanation linking its name to the sun-facing slopes that ostensibly imbue the mountain with a reddish hue (Saad, 2017, p. 34). This localized interpretation overlooks the deeper linguistic and historical complexities that may have shaped the toponym over time.

Indeed, Hmer Xeddu appears to have undergone extensive phonetic and semantic shifts, obscuring its original meaning. Notably, the French traveler A. Cibot (1870, p. 12) posited that Xeddu derives from a term signifying "cliff," thereby suggesting that the name likely translates to "the red cliff." In a complementary vein, L. Rinn, tasked in 1866 with a land survey of the area, documented several place names across what he termed the "Hmer Xeddu chain." He identified them as predominantly Amazigh in origin—some of which, like ixdi imesmuden and ixdi nɛbdus, remain in limited use—while others have disappeared from contemporary usage. According to Rinn, the lexeme ixdi denotes "cliff," akin to kaf in colloquial Algerian Arabic (Ben Aider, 2016, p. 109). Rinn further surmised that Hmer Xeddu initially designated only a small site on the western flank of the mountain range before gradually expanding to encompass a broader geographical area (Rinn, 1983, p. 322).

4.6. The Toponym of Akbash (Kbac)

Akbash (Kbac) denotes a rugged mountainous district perched in the upper reaches of the municipality of Meziraa, within Biskra Province, at the southern expanse of the Aurès region.

This locale is historically noted for the Akbash Citadel (Qalʿat Akbash), which stands approximately 30 kilometers north of the municipality's administrative center. Erected along a precipitous slope in an ingenious terrace-like formation, the citadel drew the attention of French explorers, who subsequently studied its distinctive architectural features.

Germaine Tillion (2000, p. 152) posits that the term Akbash derives from the Arabic word for "livestock," a designation later transferred to the citadel itself. This etymological interpretation aligns with the oral testimony of an informant, identified as A.B., who recounted that members of the Aith Abdelrahman tribe, following the pillaging of an older fortress named Habendout, cast two large stones from Lasfah Ichreqyen to determine a suitable construction site. As the stones tumbled downhill, they produced a reverberation akin to colliding rams (Kbash in Arabic), thus inspiring the name Akbash.

Contrastingly, scholar Khadija Saad (2017, p. 151) offers an alternative view grounded in Amazigh linguistics. She argues that Akbash (Kbac) is rooted in the lexeme kbc, which bears no direct relation to the Arabic words kabsh (ram) and kbash (plural: rams). Saad cautions that the association with livestock may obscure the more pertinent reality: the inhabitants' reliance on goats, an animal better suited than sheep to the region's austere topography.

Historically, the nomenclature Kbac transitioned from a mere toponym to a demonym when French colonial authorities first arrived in Algeria, resulting in local residents being referred to as Ath Abdrahman Kbac. Building on this connection to Amazigh etymology, Saad (2017, p. 152) posits that Kbac may relate to the Chaouia verb yekbec, signifying "to cling" (derived from yetekbubic, connoting "clinging" or "holding fast"). The Akbash Citadel itself appears to cling precariously to a steeply inclined mountainside, reflecting both the formidable terrain and the ingenuity of Aurès communities in devising sophisticated defensive edifices.

4.7. The Aith Abdelrahman Akbash Tribe

The Aith Abdelrahman Akbash tribe, a prominent lineage within the Greater Aurès region, resides in the Akbash territory of Mount Hmer Xeddu. Firmly anchored in their Algerian heritage, the tribe continues to speak Amazigh and uphold the longstanding traditions of their ancestors. The profound historical significance of their homeland is evident in the numerous citadels and archaeological remnants scattered throughout the landscape, with local lore identifying King Bidas as a notable figure originating from this very area (Bardo, 2020, p. 11).

The tribe also holds substantial socio-historical importance in the southern Aurès. Most notably, it afforded refuge to Ahmed Bey, the last Bey of Constantine, whose legacy endures in the environs of the Akbash Citadel. The Aith Abdelrahman Akbash further maintained a local court, where communal matters and legal disputes were adjudicated. Traces of this judicial institution remain visible in Sanef (Bardo, 2020, p. 11).

5. Ritualistic Functions in Aurès Folk Songs

5.1. Symbolic Significance in Rain Invocation Rituals

The centrality of water to the sustenance of human life, agriculture, and livestock has historically imbued it with profound symbolic and ritualistic significance. This symbolism becomes particularly salient in arid regions such as North Africa, where water scarcity is a recurring challenge. Within Amazigh cultural frameworks, water transcends its utilitarian function, emerging as a sacred element that embodies spiritual and ecological dimensions. Rain invocation rituals, deeply rooted in these traditions, vividly express this duality. One such ritualistic articulation is captured in the following poetic verse:

O Anzar, Anzar,	Anzar, a anzar
Adorned in colors bright and bizarre,	Aberbac n lelwan
We plead, O Lord, send rain from afar,	A rebbi sers aman
The fields are dry, they yearn for water.	Tireɛqay xsent aman
May torrents flow,	Aman ad d-yehwan
And let rivers grow.	Ad ssemlalen iɣezran

European ethnographers have extensively documented such ceremonies throughout the Maghreb, Bouganja being among the most vivid examples. One European observer describes that during protracted droughts, elder women traditionally convened to designate a specific day for the Anzar ritual (Ghanem, 2005, p. 130). Women and children would then form a procession, carrying a large ceremonial ladle wrapped in textiles and leather. Others joined en route, offering flour, oil, and meat—ingredients ultimately prepared at a shrine. A pivotal component was a symbolic ball game, known as Zarari, in which virginal young women—emblems of purity—surrounded a chosen girl who represented the bride of Anzar. They split into teams, using sticks to direct the ball into a pit. Upon achieving this goal, the designated bride recited the following verses:

The throng, in thirst's harsh grip, doth moan,	Yudan yenɣi-ten lmeɣran
O Lord, bestow the water we own;	A rebbi sehwa-d aman

For yellowed roots the soil hath shown	Taweryi tečča izuran
Lord, let Thy rains be sown	A rebbi sehwa-d aman

Subsequently, the ball is interred at a specially chosen site, and the women retreat to their villages before dusk, storing the ladle for future festivities.

The origins of this ritual are steeped in the myth of Anzar, a deity associated with rain. According to the legend, Anzar sought to marry a maiden of extraordinary beauty who habitually bathed in a river. When he descended to propose, the maiden, frightened, fled. In his wrath, Anzar turned his magic ring, desiccating of the river and bringing drought to the region. Overcome by despair, the maiden pleaded for forgiveness. Appearing as a flash of lightning, Anzar embraced her, restoring the river's flow and rejuvenating the parched earth (Genevois, 1987, p. 393).

René Basset, a French scholar, asserts that Anzar was anthropomorphized across numerous tribal areas in the Maghreb, particularly Morocco and Algeria, often associated with rainbows as Taslit-n-Anzar (the Bride of Anzar). This personification underscores the enduring mythic framework through which many Amazigh communities have historically solicited rain in times of drought (Hamouda, 2016, p. 143).

In Mots et choses Bèrbères, the etnologist Emile Laoust delved further into the semantic dimensions and symbolic resonance of ceremonial objects like Aganja (the ladle) and Taslith (the bride), This ethnographic scrutiny emphasizes the ritual's cultural precedence over its religious connotations. By invoking the archetype of the woman—traditionally linked with fertility and erotic allure—Laoust elucidates how these rites perpetuate ancient symbols and meanings that resonate deeply within the community's cultural memory (Hamouda, 2016, p. 143).

Equally illuminating are the ethnographic accounts that highlight the anthropological importance of water rituals and their powerful presence in everyday life. In Magic and Religion in North African Societies, Edmond Doutté offers a compelling survey of celebratory practices revolving around water. He transports readers through the Tlemcen region, where customs include sprinkling water on homes, rooftops, walls, and even passersby—acts often accompanied by folkloric songs performed by young women to beseech the heavens for rain. In the Beni Chougrane area, women lead a black cow in procession around or near local shrines. Should the cow urinate before the agricultural festival concludes, local inhabitants regard this event as a symbolic harbinger of divine favor and an indication that rainfall is imminent (Hamouda, 2016, p. 146).

5-2 The Ritual Significance of Arboreal Symbolism

Within the vernacular ritual practices of the Aurès region—particularly among the Aith Abdelrahman Akbash tribe—trees occupy a profound symbolic dimension, a fact consistently illustrated in local Folk songs. Such songs, often performed during circumcision ceremonies or joyous festivities, frequently reference trees or their constituent parts. One noteworthy example features the following lyrical couplet:

Your beauty beams like the break of day,	Lalla d zzin n lefjer
Well-wishers have come your way.	Ibbunda-nnwen usin-d

In this context, the **"Ibbunda"** is conceptualized as a tree trunk sprouting multiple branches, planted in a soil-filled container. Its boughs are then ornamented with various fruits—figs (Tazant), apples (Adeffu), pears (Tafirast), certain varieties of dates (Tiyni), and grapes—rendered in vibrant colors. As folkloric symbolism, the tree itself represents a child, while its fruit-laden branches connote fertility. It is thus deemed taboo to eat or remove any of these fruits, lest one inadvertently diminish the child's future reproductive potential (Hamzawi, 2009, p. 76).

The origins of this custom may be traced to ancient Maghrebian beliefs, wherein trees were venerated as sanctuaries of the sacred. Writing in the fourth century CE, Arnobe—a Berber author composing in Latin—observed that local inhabitants affixed threads and rags to certain trees as part of a ritual designed to repel malevolent spirits (Ghanem, 2005, p. 69). Remarkably, such practices have endured into the present day. In Ain Draham, near Fernana in Tunisia, for instance, a giant tree—revered by the community as "Lalla Fernana"—is approached by supplicants who tie strips of cloth or other tokens to its trunk while voicing private wishes for themselves or loved ones. No one dares harm this revered tree. Comparable customs surround the Sidra (Christ's thorn jujube) tree in parts of Algeria, where tying threads to its branches is interpreted as a symbolic act of veneration (Ghanem, 2005, p. 69).

Indeed, few territories across the wider Amazigh world lack a modest stone shrine anchored by a carefully protected tree at its core—its branches unharvested and its trunk neither cut nor burned. When such sanctuaries receive visitors, women commonly seek blessings from the tree, and those struggling with infertility sometimes ingest its leaves, hoping to conceive (Ousous, 2008, p. 55).

Servier's analysis highlights the pivotal role of trees in the agrarian cosmologies of North Africa, where they function as a symbolic axis mundus, structuring social organization through a binary framework. This interpretation aligns with

Dermenghem's assertion that sacred trees in the Maghreb evoke profound reverence and affection. The upward flow of sap, originating in the maternal depths of the earth and ascending toward the heavens, serves as a unifying conduit between terrestrial and celestial realms while simultaneously connecting to subterranean domains. In this conceptualization, trees are perceived as sanctuaries for numinous forces, with their roots becoming ritual sites for offerings and sacrifices designed to expel malevolent entities (Ousous, 2008, p. 52).

In the Aurès region, this symbolic resonance is reflected in a local folk song dedicated to brides, portraying the bride as a tree branch enveloped in silk—a powerful metaphor for fertility and renewal:

Taṣeṭṭa n lḥelwa	The Tree of Sweets
Yenneḍ-as leḥrir	Cloaked in Silk

Historically, the inhabitants of the Aurès imbued trees and vegetation with sacred significance, adorning them with textiles symbolizing vows or, in some cases, strips of human skin, representing a ritualized exchange wherein the devotee offers a corporeal token in return for blessings of health and prosperity (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 194). This motif resonates with Roman mythology, where Diana, the goddess of the forest, was venerated as a spirit dwelling within sacred trees. Her essence was symbolically "wed" to the priest who guarded her arboreal sanctuary. This practice, which reflects the intertwining of divine and terrestrial realms, endures in various cultural contexts, such as the ritualistic "marriages" of humans to trees in parts of India and the broader East (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 194).

These practices parallel the sacred rites of Diana's veneration within her sacred grove at Nemi. As explored in the seminal work of James Frazer, this site encapsulates ancient ritualistic practices that have survived through millennia. Diana, as depicted in the statuary from Ephesus, embodies the confluence of nature and divinity. These representations frequently feature the goddess enshrouded in bands that not only signify swaddling but also serve as a canvas for intricate botanical motifs, such as trees and various plants. These elements are not merely decorative but are imbued with profound symbolic meanings, representing the fecundity and sustenance provided by the earth. (Frazer, 2000, p. 22).

Strikingly, the above-referenced song about a silk-wrapped tree trunk may well allude to Diana's archetype, renowned for ensuring fruitful unions and assisting mothers in childbirth. Given that the song is traditionally performed at weddings, its primary objective appears to be the facilitation of fertility and the assurance of successful procreation (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 194).

5-3 The Ritual Significance of Metals

Amidst the folk traditions cherished by the Aith Abdelrahman tribe of Mount hmr Xedu, three metals—iron, copper, and silver—stand foremost in their ritual symbolism. Scholars aver that the advent of iron wrought profound upheavals across industry, society, and especially the sphere of sacred observances (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 200). This section explores the ritualistic implications of these metals through the lyrical texts available to us.

The song states:

Lo, gather ye here	Arwaḥ arwaḥ
O barber	A aḥeğğam
The iron lies cold; the hour draws near.	Yebred uzzal

Traditionally recited at circumcision rites, these lines press upon the urgency of summoning the practitioner before the iron's heat fully wanes. In this context, iron is far more than a mere material artifact; it becomes the liminal instrument of a potent rite of passage. Ethnographic accounts suggest that in the Neolithic age, newly discovered metals were deemed both wondrous and forbidding, with sharp iron implements believed capable of luring or banishing spirits (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 201). The song itself underscores iron's protective virtue when hot, gradually diminishing as it cools—mirroring Frazer's depiction of iron as a "magical" ward against entities, benign or malevolent (Frazer, 2000, p. 50).

Copper likewise appears in festive verse:

Lo, let the powder roar,	Yuta lbarud
With copper bullets evermore	S uqerṭas n nnḥas
Blessings all we implore,	Mebruk mebruk
Blesséd this union	Mebruk lɛers

Rendered thus, the command to "fire the powder with copper cartridges" bespeaks copper's sonorous clang, historically believed to repel nefarious spirits (Frazer, 2000, p. 822). That these words resound in wedding festivities further cements copper's twofold role: an auspicious medium and a bulwark against ill forces. Though copper's initial practical function may have faded, these folk verses—safeguarded in the communal memory—bear enduring witness to intangible cultural heritage (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 202).

Silver emerges with particular brilliance in another folk composition tied to rites of childhood and purification:

A brother like wings of a dove so white,	Uma d afer n udbir

I reckoned him silver in wandering light,	ḥesbeɣ-t d aẓref yeggur
O Lord, preserve his father's might,	a rebbi ḥefḍa-s baba-s
Bestow him long years, in fortune bright.	ṭewwl-as di leɛmer labas

Here, the verses describe preparations for a child's circumcision, insisting upon white garments as tokens of ritual purity. The child's graceful gait is likened unto glimmering silver, aligning with the Amazigh predilection for silver over gold—attributed to silver's presumed power to avert envy and malign influence (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 203). Until recent decades, elderly women throughout the Aurès region fashioned protective amulets (al-hijab n wazref) of pure silver, fastening them at their waist in the belief that such charms warded off peril.

5.4. The Ritual Significance of Celestial Bodies

In the intricate tapestry of Amazigh oral traditions, celestial bodies such as stars and planets occupy a profound symbolic and ritualistic dimension. These elements, recurrent in the folk songs of the Aith Abd al-Rahman tribe of the Hmer Xeddu Mountain, evoke layers of archaic eras that transcend mere poetic aesthetics.

Reveal yourself, O Pleiades bright,	Jebba-d a Treyya
The stars have fled into the night,	ɣerben yitran
Ancestral tree, of my kindred,	aṣeṭṭa a ɛmumi
Rooted deep in orchard tendered	deg wul n lejnan

The invocation of the Pleiades (Treyya), paired with lamentations over the stars' retreat, signals a potential cosmological alignment, where celestial phenomena are imbued with sacrosanct attributes. Mohammed Ossous, in Kokra in Berber Mythology, elucidates how Amazigh mythopoetics render stars and constellations as embodiments of archetypal narratives, serving multifaceted roles in temporal calibration, navigation, and agricultural forecasting (Ossous, 2008, p. 114).

The Pleiades, for instance, are mythologized as virginal maidens elevated to the celestial sphere, their luminance attributed to a purifying act of bathing in milk (sirḍent suɣi) However, another version recounts a different origin: their disgraceful act of eating during Ramadan (Cint Ramdan), reflecting their failure to observe the sacred fast, an act seen as

both dishonorable and a defiance of religious duties. Conversely, Orion's Belt—known in Amazigh lore as the "Band of Hunters"—is steeped in moral allegory. The stars are said to represent men condemned for a heinous transgression; their canine companion symbolically enshrined alongside them in the firmament. Among the Tuareg, the Pleiades are revered as Ibnat al-Layl (Daughters of the Night), a constellation signifying fertility and cosmic order, whose seventh star embodies the severed eye of a child, now a celestial talisman (Ossous, 2008, p. 115).

Within another account documented by Germain Tillion, the Pleiades are personified as a princess, pursued by a shepherd—Ali Ben Shwaya—whose own constellation mirrors his amorous quest. She rebuffs him, prompting his advances toward the maidservants, symbolized by yet a third constellation. In turn, they too spurn his interest, aggrieved that he seeks them only after the princess's rejection, effectively consigning them to a "last resort" (le pis-aller). Consequently, the hapless shepherd remains eternally adrift between the princess and her attendants, receiving no acceptance from either (Tillion, 1982, p. 141). Inhabitants of the Aurès region refer to the Pleiades as the "daughter of July," asserting that it appears with the ripening of figs and disappears when the winds surge in February (Tillion, 1982, p. 142).

All that persists of this myth is a saying passed down by the Aith Abdelrahman Akbash tribe:

"Hedras Am Ali Ben Shwaya Oud Yatif La Alassaouat La Ethrya" ("He shared Ali Ben Shwaya's fate, winning neither the maids nor the Pleiades").

From the same community, we also find the text of a lullaby sung to soothe young girls in their cradles:

O moon, grant the gift of slumber	A yur sehwa-d iḍes
Hduda yearns to rest her lumber	Ḥduda texs ad teṭṭes
Moonbeams grace her gentle face	Taziri ɣef wudem-nnes
While silver gleams in her embrace	Aẓref deg ufus-nnes

This lullaby references yur, the moon, underscoring the longstanding Berber reverence for both sun and moon as deities. Herodotus attests that nearly all Libyans offered sacrifices to these celestial bodies, excluding only those residing near Lake Triton (the present-day Gulf of Sirte) (Oussous, 2008, p. 105).

It is noted that the Nasamons would slice off part of one ear from their firstborn livestock, casting the fragment between the victim's shoulders before sacrificing the animal to the sun

(Ghanem, 2005, p. 19). Such rites aimed to dispel malevolent forces, facilitate herd growth, and exalt the sun god, believed by ancient communities to engender warmth, vitality, and the cyclical flourishing of agriculture (Ghanem, 2005, p. 19).

Gabriel Camps highlights a pivotal source from Cicero's record of Masinissa, who purportedly declared upon greeting Scipio Aemilianus (Scipion Emilien):

"I implore you, O most exalted sun, and the other deities of the skies: Before I depart this mortal realm, grant me the favor of hosting Cornelius Scipio under the roof of my kingdom." (Oussous, 2008, p. 105).

By the fourteenth century CE, Ibn Khaldun noted that certain Berber tribes continued to revere the sun, even as they practiced Judaic or Christian rites (Ghanem, 2005, p. 200).

Concerning lunar devotion, third-century accounts by Tertullian (Tertulien) mention three moon deities, including Varsutina, a Moorish goddess worshipped by Africans unassimilated into Roman culture (Ghanem, 2005, p. 200). The moon retained significant ritual prominence in magical practices well into later eras, prompting some historians to posit that lunar worship may have eclipsed solar veneration among the Berbers (Ghanem, 2005, p. 200).

René Basset observes that even nomadic Berbers between Lake Triton and Egypt revered the moon, as documented by Herodotus, and that Berbers in the western regions, along with the Guanches, meticulously followed the lunar phases, paying particular attention to the crescent and the full moon (Oussous, 2008, p. 106).

A vestige of these ancient devotions persists among children of Aith Abdelrahman, who, upon losing a tooth, offer it to the sun, reciting:
"Oushighamdh Heghmast Tauraght, O Shaid Heghmast Tamlalt Am Ghi"

("I give you my yellow tooth; grant me one as white as milk").

This contemporary ritual serves as a symbolic proxy for the sacrifices once presented to the sun by early Berber societies, epitomizing the enduring nexus between ancestral cosmological traditions and modern communal practices.

6. The Sociological Function

6-1 Social Order Songs

One of the primary social values we might consider is linked to the societal structure of the Mount hmer Xeddu region. Historical stages have been captured within the folk songs, which have borne witness to the social system's transformation from one form to another. These songs reflect an important

stage in human social history in general—the transition from a Paleolithic hunting society to a Neolithic agricultural society. The song states:

The gazelle hath emerged	Tadmut terg-d
Unto the plains	Ɣer lqiɛan
Who might she be?	Wi ittyilan
The lions did halt	Bedden yiran

Although this song resonates across various festivities, notably intertwined with nuptial rites where it serenades the bride, it possesses an alternate societal connotation. Herein, the term 'lions' metaphorically represents hunters engaged in a competitive pursuit of the gazelle, thereby illustrating the dynamics of a hunting society (Hamzaoui, 2009, p. 207).

We can corroborate this interpretation with another song, depicting a stage of the social system:

The gazelle that grazed	Tadmut iretɛen
In Bouarif, the eastern glade	Deg uɛrif d ugebli
Did taste the bloom, so newly made	Tečča nnewwar s uɣeddi
And onward strode, by fate conveyed	Tuɣa abrid n rebbi

This verse signifies the transitional epoch from the hunting society illustrated in the preceding song to an agrarian society. In this evolution, human focus shifted to a new subsistence strategy—agriculture—marking a gradual departure from hunting practices. This transformation allowed animals to graze freely, symbolizing the relative harmony ushered in by the agricultural paradigm.

The shift to an agrarian society signifies one of the most pivotal socio-economic revolutions in antiquity, fundamentally altering the dynamics of gender roles and familial organization. The domestication of animals and the mastery of agricultural practices, facilitated by the innovation of advanced agronomic tools—markedly superior to the rudimentary lithic implements of earlier epochs—provided men with substantial control over the means of production. This technological ascendancy enabled the consolidation of economic and social hegemony, ensuring protection against scarcity and existential threats. Concurrently, this newfound dominion extended to the regulation of labor within kinship systems, notably over women as integral members of the household economy. This dynamic entrenched the unilateral, patrilineal family structure, wherein polygyny was supplanted by a normative monogamous framework restricting women to a single spouse. Rooted in patriarchal jurisprudence, this model of familial governance

has endured as a foundational social archetype from its nascent stages to contemporary iterations (Saida, 2009, p. 225).

6.2. Love and Marriage in Folk Songs

The folk music of the Aith Abd al-Rahman tribe captures a broad spectrum of human emotions, including the nuanced sentiments of lovers. These songs delve into the nature of affection that bonds individuals and their primary concerns, articulated in a language that is both elegant and respectful, steering clear of vulgarity and disregard for societal norms and customs.

Thou tree upon the steep decline,	A teseṭṭa n uqerqur
O sister, whither shall we wend our way?	Aweltma matta ɣef i neggur
Thy crown adorned with boughs of olive,	Ixef ixel s uzemmur
Across the stream, thou gleamest like the moon,	Ɣef ujemmaḍ ijebba-d yur
I know not which path now to tread.	Ud neẓri matta ɣef I neggur

The lyrics vividly portray the lover’s adoration for his beloved, employing allegorical language typical of Amazigh vocal tradition. He compares her stature and poised figure to a tree rooted on an inaccessible rocky slope, underscoring her unattainability in the first verse. His uncertainty about the path to win her affection reflects his inner conflict, highlighted in the subsequent lines. He further describes the adornments upon her head, olive branches (Souhali, 2018, p. 220). His admiration continues as he extols her virtues, ultimately likening her to the radiant moon, an emblem of purity and beauty.

This song also reflects enduring customs prevalent across the Aurès region, such as adorning hair with branches from a plant locally known as salf-n-tromith (Roman Locks), a tradition observed in the area around Taghit near Arris until recently. The narrative captured in these verses reflects the conservative nature of rural societies, particularly in matters of romantic engagements, which are strictly regulated within the framework of matrimonial institutions.

Moreover, a plethora of folk songs remain embedded in the collective memory of the Chaoui people, including one that narrates:

The mare stood still by the river's bend,	Lɛuda tbedd deg yiɣzer
She took the path leading to the castle,	Tuɣ-d abrid n leqṣer
I inquired where your companion might be,	Nniɣ-as mani yella

O lady, pray, recount to me what transpired.	A lalla waɛa-d s lexber

This lyrical piece is entwined with a local tale of a young woman who fell in love with a man who rode past her castle “taghrmet” daily on horseback. She would eagerly await his arrival, cherishing even the fleeting sight of him. One day, however, the horse appeared riderless, prompting her to sing these verses, imbued with sorrow and yearning. The song poignantly captures the depth of her anguish as she metaphorically questions the horse about the fate of its rider.

Among the corpus of love songs from the Aurès region is the following evocative piece:

Cease thy tears, for I am thy cousin,	Berk-am imeṭṭawen uma-am d uɛemmi-m
Upon thee speaks the gunpowder of the night,	Fella-m ad yessiwel l barud n yiḍ
Thou art wed by the flute and tambourine,	Weltma ad tercel s uqṣeb d ubendir
Yet, sister, the distance compels us to depart.	Lḥal at yebɛed a wetm-a ad nugir

This poignant song narrates the sorrowful tale of a young man enamored with a girl from his village, possibly his paternal cousin, a reflection of the kinship-based marital practices that structure Aurès society. In her seminal work Le Harem et les Cousins, Germaine Tillion underscores the cultural centrality of endogamous marriage in the Maghreb, particularly within Moroccan and Algerian communities. Tillion emphasizes that kinship is deeply intertwined with intrafamilial unions, which are not merely normative but emblematic of prestige and social capital (Tillion, 1982, p. 25).

Tillion elucidates further: “Marriage among paternal cousins is perceived as a mark of nobility. Within Maghrebi communities, nobility is intrinsically linked to endogamous unions, where an individual’s commitment to the lineage becomes more pronounced. Indeed, one’s nobility is augmented through ties to a family steadfast in its adherence to internal marital alliances” (Tillion, 1982, p. 25).

In the narrative of the song, the young man’s lament encapsulates the pain of rejection, rooted in his economic deprivation. The girl’s family, motivated by material considerations, arranged her marriage to a wealthier suitor from outside the village. The young man, resigned to his plight, implores her to stifle her tears and to accept the dictates of fate. His words poignantly reflect the socio-economic disparities and the emotional anguish that hinder the matrimonial prospects of men of modest means.

The socio-economic dimensions of marriage, particularly the institution of the dowry, are recurrent themes in marriage songs from the region. One salient factor reinforcing endogamous unions is the facilitation of marital negotiations, including reduced dowry obligations due to the proximity of familial bonds.

In customary practice, the groom is expected to provide a dowry—whether monetary or in kind—to the bride's father. However, exogamous unions are perceived as an economic detriment to the groom's family and a boon to the bride's. In contrast, endogamous marriages mitigate this financial transaction, often resulting in diminished dowry requirements. This dynamic preserves wealth within the familial unit, ensuring its continuity. As Edward Westermarck observes, endogamous marriage consolidates kinship ties, secures family wealth, and fortifies the collective socio-economic stability of the kin group (Bouyala, 2019, p. 202).

Germaine Tillion attributes the preference for endogamous marriage in Maghrebi societies to economic imperatives, particularly social solidarity and familial empathy, which alleviate the financial burdens associated with dowries and wedding expenses (Tillion, 1982, p. 137).

The following folk song serves as a social critique of the excessive dowry demands:

O mother o' mine, What manner of kin doth this age design?	A yema henna Matta d ljil n wass-a
Women now seek riches fine,	Tameṭṭut tcerreḍ labas
Yet a Kechabia weaves a year's entwine.	Aqeccabi yeqqim aseggas

This song encapsulates the growing tension between traditional practices and modern economic realities. By highlighting the material burdens imposed on prospective grooms, it indirectly critiques the societal norms that perpetuate economic disparity and constrain marital possibilities for men of modest means.

During post-wedding rituals, women often sing celebratory songs that extol the groom's masculinity and the bride's chastity. One such song proclaims:

Thy palace, O my sire,	Leqṣer-nnek a sidi
A castle of Constantine's aspire,	Leqṣer n Qsenṭina
Thy morning, O lady, entire,	ṣṣbaḥ-nnem a lalla

Like dawn 'midst the doves' choir.	am ṣṣbaḥ n tedbirin

These lyrics underscore the socio-cultural centrality of honor, a concept deeply enmeshed in the patriarchal fabric of Mediterranean and Maghrebi societies. As Carmel Cassar elucidates, honor is not merely a personal virtue but a socio-economic and sexual construct that governs familial and communal interactions (Carmel, 2005, p. 77).

Virginity occupies a pivotal place in the cultural ethos of the Aurès region. As a social, biological, and moral value, it is imbued with ethical, religious, and aesthetic significance. A virgin woman is considered an asset for family continuity and economic stability, often commanding a higher dowry than her non-virgin counterparts. Conversely, an unmarried woman who has lost her virginity faces severe ostracism and death (real and figurative), with her transgression symbolizing familial dishonor and societal scandal.

This rigid moral framework, as noted in Aurès folk customs, permits leniency toward men's extramarital relations while imposing stringent restrictions on women. A woman's virginity is equated with familial honor, physically manifested in the intactness of the hymen. Malek Chebel observes that "psychological chastity alone is insufficient; societal expectations demand tangible proof, validated through the wedding night" (Chebel, 2007, p. 79).

The societal preoccupation with virginity extends into wedding-night rituals, where the bride's hymen is anticipated as irrefutable evidence of chastity. The cultural dichotomy of emptiness and fullness, blood and honor, pain and celebration encapsulate the multifaceted symbolism of virginity. This tension is mirrored in male anxieties surrounding female sexuality, often expressed through folkloric tropes such as the "biting vulva," symbolizing the perceived danger of female anatomy. Chebel further notes that prospective brides often harbor fears about the physical act of consummation, shaped by societal emphasis on male virility and phallic dominance (Chebel, 2007, p. 80).

6.3. Children's Songs

This genre of oral tradition, deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the Aurès region, is characterized by its tranquil tone and evocative imagery, often traversing realms of imagination. The melodies are predominantly improvised, eschewing structured rhythms, and typically begin with expressions commonly used among women, particularly Chaoui mothers, such as the term Khakho. The following example represents a quintessential lullaby, illustrating this distinct style:

Hush thee now, Ela, hush, my child.	Susem a ɛella susem a memmi
We'll weave a burnous, a kchabaya styled	Ad neg aɛlaw d uqeccabi
Thy father hath ventured into the wilds.	Baba-k iruḥ yenteɛ leɣwabi
Hush thee now, Ela, hush, my child.	Susem a ɛella susem a memmi
For thy sire, a cloak shall be made.	Ad neg aɛlaw i baba-ak
Thy father hath gone, left thee behind.	Baba-ak iruḥ ibeɛd-ak
Hush thee now, Ela, hush, my child.	Susem a ɛella susem a memmi
To France thy father's path is shown.	Baba-ak iruḥ Fṛansa
Returning soon, a trinket for El-Khamsa known.	Ad iruḥ ad yawi axelxal i Lxamsa
Hush thee now, Ela, hush, my lad.	Susem a ɛella susem a memmi
An adorned Bernous shall be made.	Ad neg aɛlaw d aberbac
Amongst the tribes, thy father's path had.	Baba-ak iruḥ yenteɛ leɛrac
Hush thee now, Ela, hush, my lad.	Susem a ɛella susem a memmi
A black burnous for thee I'll weave,	Ad neg aɛlaw d aberkan
sire hath vanished, no trace to grieve.	Baba-ak iruḥ ud iban

This poignant lullaby mirrors the anguish of an Aurèsian mother whose husband migrated to France, leaving her to care for their child. According to the scholar Salim Souhali, this song emerged during the 1920s, a period when the Chaouia people were largely anchored in their villages. Despite widespread resistance among indigenous tribes to French colonialism—which had provoked forced displacements and exiles following uprisings like those of Mohamed Cherif, the Kabylouti Revolt, and the Mokrani Rebellion of 1871-1916—many were ultimately conscripted into compulsory labor or military service.

Following World War I, France's demand for labor intensified, prompting a wave of migration that significantly impacted the Aurès region. As men ventured abroad seeking livelihoods, women were left behind in villages, bearing the brunt of economic, emotional, and social hardships. Out of such profound struggles emerged this lullaby, encapsulating the

solitude, resilience, and hopes of women awaiting their husbands' return (Souhali, 2018, p. 230).

Among the repertoire of children's songs in the Aurès region is a poignant piece traditionally performed during the ceremonial first haircut of a young boy. The verses encapsulate both the ritual's symbolic gravity and the cultural ideals it perpetuates:

Golden locks of thy hair, Shall gleam with gilded flair. Thou art a man, as thy father fair. Mother, moisten the blade with care.	Acenḍuḍ d acuraq Am wureɣ ad yeɣmi D argaz am baba-ak A yemma yellexs uxedmi

This song reflects the enduring significance of the haircutting ritual, an ancient practice deeply ingrained within Amazigh cultural traditions. Conducted when a child reaches a certain age, the act is imbued with symbolism, marking the child's initiation into the realm of masculinity and distancing him from associations with femininity. The performance of this rite is typically reserved for the elders of the dshra (village) or extended family, who are deemed custodians of tradition and thus entrusted with its execution. The rite itself signifies the boy's transition into the social category of men, accompanied by an unequivocal prohibition against adopting hairstyles associated with girls (Souhali, 2018, p. 204).

From this moment onward, the child's socialization adheres to a gendered trajectory, shaped by the patriarchal norms that pervade the familial and societal structures of the Aurès region. Masculinity, within the ideological framework of the patriarchal household, embodies "strength, authority, and dominance," while femininity is associated with "submission and deference". This systematic privileging of boys manifests in various forms, from preferential treatment at birth to the celebration of key milestones in their lives. Ceremonies marking a boy's first haircut, his initial entry into the marketplace, and his circumcision underscore his elevated status and reinforce the collective recognition of his position within the familial hierarchy (Boutefnoucht, 1984, p. 93).

The patriarchal structure of traditional Aurès families reinforces this dichotomy. Men are positioned as the heads of households, wielding authority in public and social domains, while women are relegated to roles of subservience, responsible for child-rearing and the preservation of ancestral traditions. This gendered division of labor entrenches a system where men exercise control over decision-making and resource allocation, leaving women in a state of dependence, bound by societal expectations of obedience and compliance (Boutefnoucht, 1984, p. 94).

The external sphere was unequivocally dominated by men, effectively marginalizing women from participation in public and socio-economic activities. This male hegemony extended to controlling key aspects of social production and leadership within the familial structure. Women were consequently relegated to domestic confines, their roles strictly limited to household management and the service of their spouses. Such socio-spatial segregation stems from the socio-psychological imperatives of the patriarchal kinship system, wherein daughters are perceived as potential liabilities whose futures directly impact the collective integrity of the patriarchal household. This construct necessitated the restriction of women's mobility to preserve familial honor and uphold the sanctity of social reputation, safeguarding it from any form of perceived "defilement" or "dishonor" (Garaudy, 1982, p. 86).

7. Results

7.1 Symbolic Ritualistic Connotations

Rain-invoking Rituals:

The rain-invoking practices documented in the research area, traditionally synchronized with the autumnal full moon or the vernal season of vegetative renewal, embody multilayered symbolic dimensions. The ladle is emblematic of archetypal feminine roles tied to fecundity and erotic magnetism. The act of communal food preparation functions as a ritualistic offering, symbolizing sacrifice and propitiation. The selection of a shrine as the locus for these ceremonies signifies the syncretic assimilation of pre-Islamic mythological heritage into an Islamicized framework of ritual praxis.

Arboreal Symbolism:

The sacrality of trees is evidenced through ritualistic offerings, the suspension of garments on branches, and other symbolic acts. These practices underscore the perceived sanctity and benedictive potency of certain trees, constructing a reciprocal relationship wherein the devotee metaphorically offers their corporeal essence (through garments) to the tree in exchange for health, prosperity, and divine intercession.

Metallurgical Symbolism:

Metals such as iron, copper, and silver are imbued with apotropaic qualities within the cosmology of the ancient Aurès communities. These materials were perceived as conduits of metaphysical energy, capable of warding off malevolent forces, neutralizing the evil eye, and shielding individuals from envy and other forms of spiritual harm.

Celestial Symbolism:

The Pleiades star cluster operates as a locus of mythological and symbolic signification, narrativizing the transformation of

virginal maidens—purified through milk ablutions—into celestial bodies. Similarly, ritual offerings to the sun and moon are emblematic of exorcising malevolent spirits, while the solar rays signify fertility and the vivification of agrarian landscapes.

7.2 Sociological Functions

The first sociological dimension elucidates the epochal transition of ancient Aurès society from a foraging economy to an agrarian mode of production. This seismic shift reconfigured social relations and institutional frameworks, catalyzing the evolution from matrilineal structures to patriarchal systems anchored in male-dominant ideologies and normative gender hierarchies.

The second dimension interrogates the expression of amorous sentiment within the studied cultural milieu, juxtaposing the affective tenderness reflected in folk traditions with the rigidly codified moral economy of Aurès society. This moral framework imposes stringent prohibitions on romantic liaisons outside the institutionalized bounds of marriage.

The third dimension critiques the socio-economic dynamics underlying matrimonial practices, particularly the negotiation of dowries. The prevalence of endogamous unions within the region is attributed to ideologies of kin solidarity, which facilitate reduced economic obligations. These intrafamilial alliances mitigate the financial burdens of marriage, reinforcing the socio-economic cohesion and wealth retention within the lineage.

The fourth dimension examines the valorization of honor as a cornerstone of socio-cultural identity, intricately linked to the regulation of female sexuality. Virginity, as a corporeal and symbolic precondition for matrimonial legitimacy, accrues profound moral, religious, and socio-cultural significance.

Conclusion

The folk songs of the Aurès region serve as a repository of collective memory, encapsulating the region’s ritualistic, mythological, and socio-cultural ethos. They articulate a continuity of pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, preserved within the deep structures of historical, social, and cultural unconsciousness.

These texts not only document rapidly eroding or extinct traditions but also offer a window into the quotidian lifeways and normative structures that have historically shaped Aurès society. They elucidate the ideological underpinnings of key social institutions, including marriage, tribal organization, and clan solidarity, while foregrounding the pervasive influence of patriarchal values, such as the valorization of masculinity, virginity, and strict gender binaries.

Far from being mere expressions of naïveté or creative spontaneity, these songs constitute a sophisticated cultural grammar. They mediate between the tangible and the metaphysical, offering profound insights into the interplay of tradition, identity, and social change. This analysis refutes reductionist claims that folklore is devoid of intellectual substance, demonstrating instead its capacity to encode and transmit complex social, cultural, and historical knowledge.

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