

Reversing the Narrative: How the Tuareg Saving Heinrich Barth's Expedition (1849-1856) Upends Prevailing Perceptions

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Introduction

In September 1850, an exploratory expedition funded by the British government involving the prominent German explorer Heinrich Barth (d.1865) found itself in Tintellus, a small town in contemporary central Niger, around 200 kilometers northeast of Agadez.¹⁷⁶ It aimed to reach Bornu in Central Africa, evaluating the lands it traversed for their value to avaricious European powers looking to expand trading influence into Africa. However, in such sparsely populated Saharan desert regions, organized political authority was difficult to establish, and thus, indigenous groups were typically nomadic in nature. These wandering tribes freely exercised power, often in the form of attack and theft, posing a threat to the safety of those using desert networks, like the expedition. As such, Barth laments the presence of some of these wandering tribes, like the Tuareg, who repeatedly harassed their caravans and whom he viewed as barbaric.¹⁷⁷ He produces this admonishment despite that the main mechanism that enabled the safe travel of the expedition was the hired Tuareg guides offering protection and intimate knowledge about the lands they traversed. Employing Tuareg guides as important networks of assistance was paramount to making Barth's expedition, which lasted from 1850 to 1858, possible.

In Timbuktu in 1854, at what can be seen as the climax of Barth's expedition in Africa, Barth was further helped by local authorities who also extensively recruited Tuareg help. After entering Timbuktu, leaders of a nearby kingdom called Hamdullahi demanded Barth's extradition and arrest. Under the pretense that he had a religious obligation to protect a foreign visitor, a prominent noble of Timbuktu, Ahmad Al-Bakkay (d. 1865), moved against Hamdullahi to protect Barth. At the center of Al-Bakkay's move was recruiting the favor of the local Tuareg, who backed and engaged militarily to protect Barth. Despite these various examples of collaboration with the Tuareg across West Africa, the Tuareg's social perception among local groups and onlookers alike situated them as recipients of vitriol and vilification throughout West African history. Outside groups, namely colonizers, have typically characterized the Tuareg as obtruders of civilized society- aggressive, barbaric marauders who aim only to destroy. However, far from a monolithic group, the Tuareg have acted divergently from these negative perceptions. Examining Barth's expedition and his numerous beneficial interactions with the Tuareg

¹⁷⁶ Barth, Heinrich. *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*. D. Appleton, 1857.

¹⁷⁷ Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 12.09.1850," September 12, 1850. Original letter not preserved, printed in: Thaddäus E. Gumprecht, "About Dr. H. Barth and Dr. Overweg's investigative trip to Lake Chad and inner Africa. Second report based on the communications received by May 1, 1852", in: Monthly reports on the negotiations of the Society for Geography in Berlin, 1852, pp. 189–396.

throughout reveals discrepancies between persisting, incomplete, and harmful negative historiographic and cultural perceptions of the Tuareg and their actual collaborative conduct.

Below, I will examine the social perceptions of the Tuareg, namely the widespread negative perceptions of Western observers, and juxtapose them with the Tuareg's interactions with Barth's expedition. I will first give a general overview of the Tuareg to provide a background on who they are. Then, I will examine how the way in which the Tuareg were perceived by foreign actors as lawless marauders resulted in harmful impacts on Tuareg groups. By examining the letters from Barth's expedition, I will show the various ways in which the Tuareg's actions diverged from these harmful perceptions. Instead, their assistance towards Barth shows how the Tuareg helped to uphold systems of trade and political stability in the Saharan world. The sources examined documenting Barth's expedition and interactions between himself and the Tuareg in the 1850s are letters written by Barth during his travels, contained in a database created by the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany.¹⁷⁸

Literature Review

The Tuareg are nomadic people of the Sahara in West Africa, ethnically congruous with Berbers from North Africa. Before the introduction of colonialism, the Tuareg traditionally occupied desert spaces void of an organized political structure. The Tuareg were thrust into their nomadic lifestyles by the geography of the Sahelo-Saharan region they occupied. Rainfall in the region is limited to a few wet months per year, making vegetation, irrigation, and ultimately large, sedentary societies impossible to sustain. As such, the traditional lives of the Tuareg were defined by the stock-breeding of camels, which were used for transport and nourishment, as well as goats, sheep, and cattle.¹⁷⁹ Of paramount importance to the Tuareg was maintaining constant access to water and pastures to sustain their herds, resulting in their nomadism as they practiced transhumance, a process of migrating to where resources are seasonally most abundant.¹⁸⁰ This nomadic nature defines the Tuareg's traditional existence as it forms the basis of their geopolitical and economic strategies.

The Tuareg was defined by raiding, partially because it certainly represented a constitutive aspect of Tuareg society. Aided by their nomadic maneuverability, raiding presented a viable opportunity to gain resources, with Tuareg raiders typically striking faraway targets to limit the risk of retribution. Raiding normally occurred after the first rains of the season to ensure their animals' access to water and pasture.¹⁸¹ While raids offered economic opportunities, they also provided participants with a level of honor, as raiding held a degree of significance within Tuareg social hierarchies. The warrior class of the Tuareg, the *Imajeghen*, served as ruling nobles and were the most significant and powerful of the Tuareg classes. The military power of the

¹⁷⁸ Letters from Barth's expedition have been compiled in a database by the University of Duisburg-Essen (<https://heinrich-barth.ub.uni-due.de/>). The database contains around 1,680 letters from sixteen archives around Europe. The University of Duisburg-Essen has made these letters publicly available on a website, where both the original and transcribed versions of the letters can be viewed. The letters remain in their original languages, and are in a variety of languages, though are principally German. I used the transcribed editions of the letters in my research. Translated quotes were done so by myself.

¹⁷⁹ Alesbury, Andrew. "A Society in Motion: The Tuareg from the Pre-Colonial Era to Today." *Nomadic Peoples* 17, no. 1 (2013): pg. 110.

¹⁸⁰ Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): pg. 110.

¹⁸¹ Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): pg. 109.

Imajeghen strengthened their authority, placing them at the top of the social hierarchy.¹⁸² *Imajeghen* militaristic-based social authority would be further boosted given success in raiding, with successful raiders provided additional social clout and prestige. During these raids, raiders took as much as they could carry, focusing on camels but taking other goods, like slaves or valuables.¹⁸³

The perception of the Tuareg for Western observers has been primarily shaped by these raiding practices. A French report from 1896 on Timbuktu, a Saharan city heavily intertwined geopolitically with Tuareg influence, provides insight into perceptions of the Tuareg. The report, written by Felix Dubois, describes the Tuareg as descendants of the Spanish Moors, who, as a result of being forced into nomadic lifestyles, “lost all notions of law and authority” as their “souls and brains became seeped in vice.”¹⁸⁴ For Dubois, the outcome of the claimed incivility of the Tuareg is their tendency to raid: “augmented from the meagerness of their herds,” the Tuareg resorted to “the level of vagabonds, thieves, and brigands.”¹⁸⁵ Dubois’s unsparing depiction is largely consistent with Europeans’ views of the Tuareg throughout their era of colonial involvement in Africa.

These negative perceptions about the Tuareg from European observers had extremely damaging consequences. Tuaregs would have perceived the Europeans as hostile invaders encroaching on their traditionally controlled land, explaining why the majority of interactions between Tuaregs and Europeans would have been hostile in nature. Indeed, much of the hostility that the French experienced during their colonial control in West Africa was retributive raids from Tuaregs. It is important to establish that raids against colonial elements were not indiscriminate attacks, instead more closely resembling organized military efforts attempting to disrupt the French-imposed colonial authority. The Tuareg fought the French with guerrilla warfare, which they saw as the most effective form of combat because it suited their nomadic mobility and familiarity with the terrain of the region.¹⁸⁶ Guerrilla warfare was a fairly common and consistent means by which various colonial subjects resisted colonial authority. However, the Tuareg’s guerrilla action, as a result of their prevailing social stigma, cemented in the eyes of the French their rather atypical steadfast categorization as raiders. Accordingly, the French targeted Tuareg groups with many counterraids serving as retributive action. The resulting violence levelled against the Tuareg was not atypical within colonial Africa. Tuaregs were targeted indiscriminately. Mass killings and public displays of corpses were used to terrorize local populations, cattle and slaves were taken en masse, and dissidents were tortured.¹⁸⁷ The French justified this extent of violence by claiming they were quelling the “hostile Tuareg” who terrorized Timbuktu and the surrounding region. The persistent cultural negative perceptions of the Tuareg most directly provided the platform for this violence to occur.

The likeliest reason for the vitriol toward the Tuareg within the Western imagination was not the Tuareg raiding, but instead the underlying resentment of Tuareg resistance to European colonial efforts throughout the 19th century. An American report by anthropologist Horace

¹⁸² Alesbury, “A Society in Motion” (2013): pg. 109.

¹⁸³ Alesbury, “A Society in Motion” (2013): pg. 109.

¹⁸⁴ Dubois, Felix. *Timbuktoo the Mysterious*. Translated by Diana White. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896.

¹⁸⁵ Dubois, *Timbuktoo the Mysterious*, 1896.

¹⁸⁶ Hall, Bruce. *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*. African Studies 115. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011 139-140.

¹⁸⁷ Hall, Bruce. *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 2011, pg. 136-137.

Miner on the history and social condition of Timbuktu and its surrounding region upholds the myth of the “hostile Tuareg.” This is done by framing the history of the Tuareg largely within the context of their military interactions, including their role in capturing Timbuktu before the rise of ruler Sonni Ali in 1468, and in their looting of Timbuktu throughout its subsequent history.¹⁸⁸ The propensity to focus on violent aspects of Tuareg society seemingly arises from the legacy of European experience with Tuaregs throughout their establishment of colonial rule. Miner describes several instances wherein Tuareg aggressiveness served to rebuke European attempts to penetrate into African lands. He describes ‘hostile Tuaregs’ violently pushing British expeditions away in 1806 and 1826, in addition to later instances of French experiences with Tuareg attacks while they attempted to reach Timbuktu in 1887 and 1893.¹⁸⁹ The abundance of negative encounters, from the perspective of Europeans, over the course of several decades with the Tuareg, with comparatively few positive ones, provides the basis for prolonged European antagonism towards the Tuareg people.

Rarely mentioned in colonial-era Western accounts on the Tuareg is that raiding, while valued socially by the Tuareg, certainly did not constitute the entirety of their existence. Their nomadic condition, in addition to maneuverability in conflict, also lent extraordinarily well to participation in the vast trading networks of the Sahara. As Andrew Alesbury asserts, their presence across the Sahara provided widespread access to local markets, a position seemingly taken advantage of by the Tuareg, as their migratory movements often “coincided with the movement of goods” along trade routes.¹⁹⁰ In addition, the Tuareg, being the only group present in large swaths of the otherwise uninhabitable Sahara, had essentially sole authority to dictate trading practices in the desert. Alesbury exemplifies the extent to which the Tuareg used this position to assist Saharan trade, maintaining that “Tuareg nomads controlled the safe passages between the markets of the Mediterranean and Sudan, establishing ‘an infrastructure of brokers, landlords, traders and craftsmen to supply accommodation, banking, brokerage, storage and other services to the trans-Saharan trade.’”¹⁹¹ While this position helped sustain the Tuareg locally, many of whose consumption relied heavily on imported goods, it also enabled the success of the many enterprising foreign traders of the region and the general flow of goods across the system.

The involvement of the Tuareg in regional trading, which required the maintenance of stability and cooperation across the region to succeed, incentivized Tuareg groups to collaborate with other political authorities. Abdelkader Zebadia provides a glimpse into precolonial relationships between the Tuareg and traditional landed political authorities, namely Ahmad Al-Bakkay, a religious and political leader in Timbuktu during the time of Barth’s expedition. During a political schism between Al-Bakkay and the Hamdullahi caliphate, who believed that Barth should be arrested due to his non-Muslim identity, Al-Bakkay moved to protect Barth. The Tuareg backed Al-Bakkay, a move that, as Zebadia notes, both reinforced Al-Bakkay’s decision to protect Barth and enabled his ability to do so.¹⁹² For Zebadia, the Tuareg’s backing of Al-Bakkay in this political crisis highlights the Tuareg’s general cooperative attitude at the time

¹⁸⁸ Miner, Horace. *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953.

¹⁸⁹ Miner, *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*, 1953.

¹⁹⁰ Alesbury, “A Society in Motion” in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): 106–25.

¹⁹¹ Alesbury, “A Society in Motion” in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): 106–25.

¹⁹² Zebadia, Abdelkader. “The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad Al-Bakkay of Timbuctu.” University of London, 1974, pg. 224-267.

with respect to Timbuktu's authority. Al-Bakkay recognized the political authority of the Tuareg in the region, and emphasized maintaining a "good relationship" with them and to "keep peace among them."¹⁹³ Chief among Al-Bakkay's desires was to "keep the northern routes open for caravans," a policy decision that aligned with the Tuareg's political position as controllers of much of the local trade network.¹⁹⁴ Barth's own account of this debacle in Timbuktu provides insight into how the Tuareg's cooperation during this event transcends Tuareg collaboration merely at the direction of Al-Bakkay as suggested above. For the Tuareg, such collaborative efforts were not sporadic, as trading and protection even took precedence over violence throughout Tuareg society.

The Tuareg and Barth's Expedition

In May 1850, Heinrich Barth's expedition arrived at Murzuq, a city in contemporary southeastern Libya at the gates of the Sahara on the periphery between lands under organized authority and the open, virtually empty, desert. Barth describes Murzuq as "die erste große Station unserer Reise" (the first major stop of our journey), where "hort . . . jede Autorität auf und beginnt ein bloßes Verhandeln" (all authority stops and mere negotiations begin).¹⁹⁵ For Barth, arrival in Murzuq represents a stark contrast in the nature of the expedition. It is in Murzuq that Barth's expedition first meets and "negotiates" the establishment of protective authority with the Tuareg of the Sahara. Through the protective authority Barth negotiated throughout his expedition, the Tuareg acted as guides and guaranteed his passage across the Sahara. This occurred as a function of the Tuareg's general oversight over the Saharan trade routes. The Tuareg exercised authority in other ways to assist Barth as well. For instance, in 1853 they collaborated with the local authority, Ahmad Al-Bakkay in Timbuktu, to provide military protection for Barth against Hamdullahi. Ultimately, the various ways in which the Tuareg assisted Barth throughout his expedition to ensure his safety paints a very different picture of their character than damaging colonial-era Western perceptions suggested. Tuaregs were not subversives who terrorized indiscriminately, but were rather instrumental in maintaining the stability of social and political networks across West Africa.

Prior to Murzuq, within North African lands under political authority, travel was simpler, steadier, and safer. Guides within lands of landed authority, as outlined by Barth when he describes his previous guide on the road to Murzuq, primarily served the role of naturalizing visitors to the local cultural, social, and political conditions of regions. However, the path after Murzuq in the political void of the Sahara becomes considerably more dangerous, with the security for travelers provided by landed regional authorities gone, so the role of the guide was expanded to include providing protective services. These services were obtained by travelers by negotiating deals with whoever was directly capable of providing them safety. Given that the Tuareg were the most prominent group with proper military authority within the desert, travelers, traders, and explorers, like Barth, primarily recruited Tuareg protectors as their guides.

¹⁹³ Zebadia, "The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad Al-Bakkay," 1974.

¹⁹⁴ Zebadia, "The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad Al-Bakkay," 1974.

¹⁹⁵ Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 07.05.1850," Original letter not preserved, excerpts printed in: Ritter, Carl, "About Dr. Barth's and Dr. Overweg's Accompaniment of J. Richardson's Travel Expedition to Lake Chad and Inner Africa: According to the Original Reports Received from Various Quarters to the Society for Geography of Berlin and its members, at the End of July 1850", in: Monthly Reports on the Negotiations of the Society for Geography of Berlin, 12, 1851, pg. 81-132.

As such, Barth's expedition was required to recruit a Tuareg guide in Murzuq to assist them for the next leg of their journey, as "da erst Morgen ein Curier nach Ghat abgeht, um 3 Tuareghauptlinge von dort herzuholen, die uns escortieren sollen" (tomorrow morning a courier from Ghat is leaving to get 3 Tuareg chiefs that should escort us). Barth hired numerous Tuareg guides throughout the course of his expedition.¹⁹⁶ For the expedition, the recruitment of guides was so important that it was considered analogous to the procurement of other life-sustaining resources, like food or camels. New guides were obtained in similar fashion to how other such goods were. When Barth's expedition arrived at new population centers, alongside replenishing supplies, new guides- more adept at providing the authority of security over the next leg of the journey- were hired. They were forced to remain in these population centers until guides were successfully procured and available to join their caravan. Often, delays in the availability of guides would result in lengthy stays of up to several months in population centers. In Murzuq, Barth expresses dismay at having to stay put in the hot desert town for "einen monatlichen Aufenthalt" (a monthly stay) while waiting for the arrival of their Tuareg guides.¹⁹⁷ The necessity of having to delay an expensive expedition for such lengths of time is indicative of how necessary Tuareg guides were in enabling the success of Barth's expedition.

The distinction of Tuareg guides as being "chiefs" is crucial in characterizing the protection provided by Tuareg guides. In November 1850, in Tintellus, Barth's guide, a Tuareg chief named Annur, looked to assist the expedition to the town of Zinder. However, Annur had to attend to a salt caravan, leaving his servant, Zingina, to be Barth's guide. Barth declined this state of affairs. He, and Zingina himself, expressed concern over Zingina's "Ansehen" (reputation) amongst the tribes of the region and thus, his ability to coordinate safe travel within their lands.¹⁹⁸ For the guides to be able to protect travelers from raiders and bandits in the Sahara, they were required to wield a significant amount of military power. Since Tuareg chiefs belonged to the *Imajeghen* and were of a higher, more eminent political status, they had the authority to assemble those under their influence and wield the necessary power to act as guides. Given the necessity of military success for *Imajeghen* to establish these considerable statuses, being able to display militaristic capability, despite potentially being a sign of aggression for onlookers, was important in establishing the efficacy of guides.

The involvement of *Imajeghen* in acting as guides demonstrates the importance of providing protection within the Tuareg social hierarchy, with even their most significant figures seeking to engage in these practices. Protecting travelers and merchants came as a result of economic incentives presented to Tuareg chiefs to maintain trade, rather than disrupting it. This

¹⁹⁶Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 07.05.1850," Original letter not preserved, excerpts printed in: Ritter, Carl, "About Dr. Barth's and Dr. Overweg's Accompaniment of J. Richardson's Travel Expedition to Lake Chad and Inner Africa: According to the Original Reports Received from Various Quarters to the Society for Geography of Berlin and its members, at the End of July 1850", in: Monthly Reports on the Negotiations of the Society for Geography of Berlin, 12, 1851, pg. 81-132.

¹⁹⁷Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 07.05.1850", May 7, 1850. Original letter not preserved, excerpts printed in: Ritter, Carl, "About Dr. Barth's and Dr. Overweg's Accompaniment of J. Richardson's Travel Expedition to Lake Chad and Inner Africa: According to the Original Reports Received from Various Quarters to the Society for Geography of Berlin and its members, at the End of July 1850", in: Monthly Reports on the Negotiations of the Society for Geography of Berlin, 12, 1851, pg. 81-132.

¹⁹⁸Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 22.11.1850," November 22, 1850. Original letter not preserved, printed in: Thaddäus E. Gumprecht, "About Dr. H. Barth and Dr. Overweg's investigative trip to Lake Chad and inner Africa. Second report based on the communications received by May 1, 1852", in: Monthly reports on the negotiations of the Society for Geography in Berlin, 1852, pp. 189-396.

mutually beneficial arrangement ensured the free flow of goods and capital across the Sahara, a crucial trade only able to be sustained by Tuareg protection. The Tuareg, in turn, benefited from the subsistence of local markets as they utilized locally traded goods for their migratory practices. Evidenced by their protective presence at dangerous desert trade routes across the region, thriving for mutually beneficial arrangements defined the Tuareg's outward relations rather than acting in rogue and isolationist ways. Collaboration, not raiding, better helped the Tuareg realize desired outcomes.

It is this context which shows why the Tuareg assisted Barth throughout his journey across the Sahara, with another notable incident again in Timbuktu in 1853. Barth, after Hamdullahi ordered his extradition to their control, was coerced into remaining in Timbuktu. He references the case of Alexander Gordon Laing, the first European to visit Timbuktu, who was killed in 1826 by similar enemies during an attempt to escape the city, believing that he would most likely be killed in the same way should he try a similar maneuver.¹⁹⁹ Instead of attempting to manage the situation independently, Barth put his faith in regional authorities who pledged themselves to his protection, namely Ahmad Al-Bakkay, who had spiritual power within the city, and the Tuareg tribes Al-Bakkay recruited, who provided the military defense against Hamdullahi.

Barth's journals indicate the extent to which the Tuareg acted for, and indeed were crucial to maintain, his protection in Timbuktu. While Barth himself attributes credit for his protection from Hamdullahi to Al-Bakkay, it was the Tuareg who, most directly, deterred Hamdullahi's advance on him on the ground. Barth admits that Al-Bakkay "indeed has no military power of any kind at his hand."²⁰⁰ Instead, it is the Tuareg chief Auab of the powerful local *Tingérégíf* tribe, who provided the physical muscle behind Barth's protection, with Barth describing the mobilization of one hundred *Tingérégíf* horses for his protection.²⁰¹ Barth also mentions other Tuareg tribes, such as the *Auelimmiden*, who would likely have extended similar support.²⁰² Establishing the extent of Tuareg military power in Timbuktu is crucial to characterizing their actions with regard to Barth. As the eminent military authority in the region, Tuareg tribes had the autonomy to self-determine how they wanted to act. They certainly were not under Al-Bakkay's thumb, instead, they heeded Al-Bakkay's spiritual authority because they saw tangible benefit in aligning with it- the maintenance of a favorable power ruling the city. While Al-Bakkay was responsible for organizing Tuareg tribes against Hamdullahi, it was the Tuareg's military force, which was voluntarily provided, that offered the actual opposition that was operationally impossible for the weaker Hamdullahi to overcome. It was the Hamdullahi's inability to overcome the Tuareg's military power that prevented their march on Timbuktu and ensured the protection of Barth.

Per Barth's descriptions, the *Tingérégíf's* military power extended throughout the region adjacent to Timbuktu, encompassing much of the Niger River around the city. As an extension of this widespread authority, local Tuareg tribes afforded Barth and those friendly to him protected travel around the region in addition to protection against the Hamdullahi. After Barth left Timbuktu, the Tuareg leaders organized his protection to Gao, a city situated further east along

¹⁹⁹ Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," December 14, 1853. FB Gotha, PGM 39/1.

²⁰⁰ Barth. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," (1853).

²⁰¹ Barth. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," (1853).

²⁰² Barth. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," (1853).

the Niger River. This protection occurred independently of the interests of Al-Bakkay. In 1854, during his approach to Gao, Barth writes about a gathering of Tuareg leaders:

“einen Congreß hier versammelt der vielleicht noch einst in der Geschichte der Aufklärung dieses Welttheiles einen Namen bekommen wird. Die Häupter der Kelissuk oder der gelehrten Klasse der Tuareg sind gestern angekommen und Alkuttabu mit den Vornehmsten der freien Imōshar oder der Kriegerkaste wird morgen erwartet. Gegenstand dieser Conferenz bin theils ich selbst oder vielmehr die den Engländern gewährte und zu gewährende Sicherheit und mein Fortkommen theils Bakay’s eigene Angelegenheiten mit Bezug auf die Verhältnisse Timbuktus und der westlichen Tuareg”²⁰³

(A congress has gathered here that will perhaps be given a name once the history of this continent becomes more known. The head of the Kelissuk, or the scholarly class of the Tuareg, arrived yesterday, and Alkutabu, accompanied by the most distinguished of the free Imoshar, or the warrior caste, will be expected tomorrow. The subject of this conference is partly myself, or rather that of safety to be granted to the explorations of the Englishmen and myself, and partly the leader in Timbuktu who assisted me, El Bakay’s, business with exports, concerning their relationships with Timbuktu and the western Tuareg)

Barth’s protection was not just spurred by opportunism in *Imajeghen* ranks, but from the Tuareg’s social hierarchy, as the social authority of the region, seeking to use their power to provide his safety. The Tuareg’s leadership outside of Timbuktu acted wholly autonomously on Barth’s behalf, motivated by a vested personal interest and not just from either Al-Bakkay’s wishes or geopolitical gains from countering Hamdullahi. As the eminent powers of the region, and acting as their own independent authorities, the Tuareg acted foremostly with altruistic intentions for Barth. This behavior is incompatible with Western depictions of the Tuareg as immoral, uncivilized, or inherently hostile.

Conclusion

Throughout Heinrich Barth’s expedition, Tuareg groups were crucial in maintaining his safety. The Tuareg had several motivations for helping Barth, like the maintenance of beneficial trade routes or adherence to spiritual authorities like Ahmad Al-Bakkay, but ultimately, they chose to display affinity towards Barth. This inclination differs sharply from traditional perspectives on the Tuareg, especially from colonial-era Westerners, who exclusively referred to the Tuareg as hostile, aggressive, and uncivilized. Through these accounts, Westerners dehumanized the Tuareg, justifying their exploitation and wars of conquest against Tuareg groups. Instead, the Tuareg are multifaceted, disregarded, and disparaged throughout history unfairly.

²⁰³ Barth, Heinrich. “Barth an Familie, 28.06.1854,” June 28, 1854 FB Gotha, PGM 39/1.

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