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The Potential Fossils and Archaeological Materials Available among the KelAdrarTuareg of Northern Mali and Inferences that Can Be Drawn from There

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Abstract

Foreseeable challenges or needs or potentials involved in anthropological studies especially archaeology stand to help us in planning and effecting better development in the different areas of our environment. The problems of such environmental issue as desertification and the effect especially on humans in the areas of its occurrence particularly on the KelAdrarTuareg community in Northern Mali is prospectively and inferentially evaluated. This is a cautionary study aimed at turning the attention of the people and government to a more responsive dealing with the environment and to be rightly focused on the research endeavours in the place.

Preamble

The West African Sahel has been under exploitation by nomads and transhumant including Moors, Tuareg, Berabiche, Fulani and Tebu. Together with the more extensive Sudanese Savannato the South, it has been one of the main cattle raising regions in Africa. One nomad society among the ethnic groups mentioned above is the KelAdrarTuareg of the Adar in Iforas Mountains in Northern Mali. The Kel Adar people live in the Northern border of the Sahel, where it merges with the desert.

From the work done by Smith (1973), on the people, in which although he examined the way they traditionally had been living their life even in the mist of disaster (disaster stemming from their poor environmental circumstances) and drawing conclusions on the immediate and long term action of the 1973 drought situation there, one has insight of their life-ways. So,

retrospect and inferences with regard to these life-ways of the people can thus be made archaeologically in future.

Kel Adar people are nomads who subsist on their livestock having their food and other main economic resources on the animals 'on the hoof' as they sell some to obtain other needs such as grains. They have their Sahel (semi-arid vegetation belt lying between the Sahara and the Sudanese Savannah) environment to contend with in their pastoral nomad lives. The Sahel gets roughly between 100 and 350mm of rain annually and is characterised by thorn trees, shrubs and drought-resistant grasses. It has a monsoon rainy season; but in dry season only the dry Wadi beds have any vegetation left. Much of the land outside the Wadi in the dry season appears like a desert. This particular producer population in this area traditionally deals with certain disaster as a result of the nature of the environment such as drought.

The KelAdrarTuareg people are said to be in Northern Mali, are nomads and not sedentary people. To place them in archaeological record, one expects to see their remains in their places of living. This would comprise their actual home settlement and other sites of occupation sparingly distributed along for example their caravan routes that is if one goes by the definition of archaeological site (the area of activity of hominids where they camped or roamed over in order to obtain basic necessities of life that is – food, water, shelter and to some extent, security, the raw materials for tools and energy resources), or as Binford put it, "fixed places in the topography where men may periodically pause and carry-out action". One is then better disposed to understand the distributional pattern of archaeological material and their potential fossil associates in time and space. Therefore, Binford was able to make deductions about different aspects of culture of such people (as the KelAdrar) who used the site. This is because 'the material consequences of an occupation (site) represent a document regarding an organisational aspect or phase of operation of the cultural system under study' (Binford 1980, p. 79). Hence, with the site knowledge of the 'place', a view of the activities of the people's aspects of the environments and the impact if any, of them on the environment was assessed. To obtain information of their ways of life, one draws inferences in this case based on the potential archaeological record that could be found in the place under study.

The fossil remains and archaeological materials however, will depend much on the taphonomic factors that operated when the various sites were used. Nonetheless, there are potential fossils and archaeological materials available among the KelAdrarTuareg of Northern Mali which are discussed below together with the inferences that can be drawn from them

The Potential Fossils and Archaeological Materials

As nomadic people of such negative circumstances, the main finds expected there-in should be fossilised bones of the animals reared there such as those of cattle, camel, goat, sheep and donkey. Such skeletal remains as the skulls, mandibles, back bone, ribs, bones of the fore and hind legs, sacral, scapula and cervix bones. Apart from those of the domestic animals, there could also be found those of the wild animals hunted as fall-back activity during disaster such as that of gazelle especially (*Gazelladorcas*), also the fossilised human bones of the people (KelAdrar).

Some of the fossilised bones could be found in their Sahel home areas of Adar in Iforas in the northern border where it merges into Sahara desert while others could be along the caravan routes and nomadisation lines. The inference to be drawn from the occurrence of fossilised bones will depend on the rate of occurrence of such bones, and the 'places' of occurrence. From these, one can make inferences on the cause of death such as disease, hunger and or

thirst or adverse climatic condition. For instance, if fauna fossils are found in a large number at a place, for example, around a camp site, the archaeologist would be informed of a crisis-led death. He may need other observations in the site or around it for correlation or confirmation; such as the pollen grains and nature of deposition, otherwise the laboratory analysis will do it. In this case, there could have been disaster year(s) when rain had failed them and some people did not move out on time and had great distance to cover going to where they could find pasture and water (the well area such as Kidal).

The high frequency occurrence of fossilised bones of wild animals such as gazelle will inform the archaeologists of a fall-back activity period when there could have been disaster especially to herds, a life-wire and complementarity of the people. For the live stocks which the KelAdrar people may have eaten also, the fossil bones can be distinguished from those that died out of affliction or the other. The former could of course be slaughtered and dismembered before being eaten by the people while the later died but not killed any more often not butchered and consumed but are either buried when the situation permits or just abandoned. The taphonomic processes that the two cases could undergo will vary. The former is preserved in parts while the latter may be found fossilised with most parts of its skeleton or even other parts such as the fore/hairs as the case may be. It may also be together in a place under normal circumstance. To determine the site, the variety and number of individual animals represented on the living-sites shows that these were not places of purely ephemeral occupation but must always have served as a base for at least several days.

There could also be found fossilised pollen grains, spores, seeds, fruits and other parts of plants that happened to be in the area. So also leave impressions and fossilised animal dung such as coprolite. These could act as indicatives of the diet of the people, and the vegetation around there at a particular period. The extent of trade or contact with other people can also be referred from the palynological work that provides an insight of the remains of the plants there: the plant species, the pathogens (that could reflect the sort of disease they were afflicted with) and the dietary pattern of the people at various periods of their life.

The archaeological materials expected to be found among the KelAdrar people will be in the form of artefacts. These could be stone tools; metal objects such as cutlass knives, axes, arrow-heads and may be skins. There could be architectural relicts and or evidence of such, as post-holes, stones used in supporting the shelters. There also could be found among the people hearths, charred stones, charcoal, ornaments and body decorations such as ear and nose rings, beads and charms and amulets.

At a certain level in the stratigraphy of the people (of the land) that should tally with the period of French incursion into the people's life with a different cultural items, could be found such things as parts vehicles and other elements of modern or western technical devices such as bullet used for guns, parts of western guns themselves. In this level, one could also notice the decrease in the use of caravan routes across the Malian/Algerian border as there may be no indications of camping or usage by greener pasture seeking bands of nomads and their cattle. This might in-form the archaeologist of the presence of French colonialists and their artificial boundaries and restriction after long time use of the homadisation routes that passed through large expanse of the area.

The new incursion into the region by the French and new developments due to encroachment of western civilisation and its attributes - cemented well (bore holes) schools, machines and other modern technical items would be objects that signal to the period of incursion of aliens and their culture into the original African setting of this region and the people.

From the evidence of dietary remains of the KelAdrar people already mentioned above, an inference can be made on the extent of trade within a particular period. The trade which may have been the conventional selling and buying means of exchange or through barter would have been carried-out with the itinerant middlemen who could have carried the commodities from a near or far distance. The incidence of certain items of trade would therefore, indicate the extent of the KelAdrar people contact with such people that they traded their live stocks products with. This might have influenced the cultures of the people on the different ends of the trade; in which case there could be diffusion of culture.

The overgrazing of the restricted area for the nomads and their live-stocks, to an area smaller than what they used to have before, by the national government would change the environment of the place (no vegetation cover, draught and desertic soil type). It would lead to decrease in number of species both the plants and animals found in the area.

One can also make inference regarding the socio-political life of the people at different periods. This could come from contact and relation with other communities outside Mali of which they have to have cordiality; so they could be part of a larger political organization controlled elsewhere. Change in the system of rearing the cattle is bound to change with the new developments due to encroachment of western civilization such as the subsequent generation attending modern schools. This may lead to the acquisition of the western education and eventual lack of adequate or in an extreme case, discard of the cattle rearing knowledge. The people may start putting their cattle in enclosures instead of pasturing them. The feeding and breeding ways of the animals may also change in line with the present circumstance. Thus for the archaeologist the inference would be culture change that could be associated with external influence on the people or acculturation.

Conclusion

Archaeologically, a look at the present life of the KelAdrarTuareg of Northern Mali has certain happenings that suggest what potential fossil and archaeological materials that could be therein. This will come from paleontological, palynological, archaeological indications of the study of the sites in the area. Findings in such areas of study with respect to the people would aid in knowing more about their social behaviour through inferences.

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