

# Analysis of Steles with Libyan Inscriptions of Grande Kabylia, Algeria

Samia Ait Ali Yahia

**Abstract**—Several steles with Libyan inscriptions were discovered in Grande Kabylia (Algeria), but very few researchers were interested in these inscriptions. Our work is to list, if possible all these steles in order to do a descriptive study of the corpus. The steles analysis will be focused on the iconographic and epigraphic level and on the different forms of Libyan characters in order to highlight the alphabet used by the Grande Kabylia.

**Keywords**—Epigraphy, stele, Libyan inscription, Grande Kabylia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE discovery of writing in a geometric shapes on rough stones or stele with or without figurines in North Africa, had led many scientists during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to meet the necessary means to try to decipher inscriptions and finding of others to uncover the remains of a lost civilization. The advantage of the latter is growing despite the limited results. The publication of new inscriptions, decryption attempts have hardly slowed, the scientific value of the researches has even improved. Nevertheless, Libyan writing still retains much of its secrets today. Indeed these inscriptions remain largely undeciphered, although some bilinguals brought some light. So it is no surprise that it could reign in some authors [1], [2], a persistent doubt about the relationship of the Libyan and Berber. Hopefully one day the Libyan experts will provide a solution to this problem.

In Algeria, most inscriptions were discovered west of Constantine in Kabylia and around Oran. In Kabylia, presently known documents are few. The collection of Libyan inscriptions [3] cites ten epigraphic stele discovered in Grande Kabylia, subsequently other documents are been added.

## II. METHODOLOGY

To answer to our problematic, we had done a systematic general inventory of the Libyan inscriptions of Grande Kabylia. The descriptive and comparative study of these inscriptions will thus bring us a new light on it.

Our study will be from stele in Libyan inscriptions which are exhibited in the Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts and Bardo which are located in a capital city of Algeria.

The study of missing stele will be based on written available documents. We tried in this work to expand and update the work done by different researchers based largely on

the field because many steles have been studied from copies and this gave several readings for each of them, like the stele of Haut Sebaou. Also to try to find these steles we searched around the museums of Algiers.

## III. ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE STELES

In our previous works [4], [5], we presented the corpus of our study, which consists of a stele with a Libyan inscription, and then we have developed the main lines of this corpus. After that, we tried to analyze each stele on the geographical, geological, and morphological plan and conduct epigraphic and iconographic description. This study allowed us to identify the particularities and specificities of each stele. Then, we tried to study the various forms of signs and the values given by researchers that we have grouped in tables.

We approached the study of frequencies of the signs, where we found it useful to develop a comparative table between Libyan alphabets. From this, it will be observed that certain characters with their values may appear in one or other of the analyzed stele, which has consequently led us to establish the alphabet used by Grande Kabylia.

### A. Discussion

- The corpus of stele of Libyan inscriptions in Grande Kabylia consists of 28 steles, 10 were cited by Chabot in the collection of the Libyan inscriptions [3] those of: Abizar - Boudjima - Thinesouine - Souama n°1 - Souama n°2 - Tizirt - Haute Sebaou - Agouni Goughran and El Kalaa (Fig. 1-10).
- One stele; Agoulmin Toukseleth, is cited by Basset [6], discovered April 9, 1911 (Fig. 2).
- Two steles; Cap Djinet n°1 and Cap Djinet n°2 are cited by Marcillet-Jaubert [7] (Fig. 3).
- Five steles; Agouni Azra - Thala Khelf - Alma Makhlef - Azaghar and Taguemount are cited by Poyto and Musso [8] (Fig. 4).
- The stele of Kerfala was discovered in 1954 (Figs. 19 and 20) [8].
- On 10<sup>th</sup> October 1987, a stele was discovered in Sidi Namane (Fig. 6) [2]
- Other steles were discovered lately [4]; those of Moknéa (Ifigha) (Fig. 7), Athergane (Fig. 8), Ihitocen (Bouzuène) (Fig. 9), Ait Yahia (Ain El Hammam) (Fig. 10) and Takhlidjt (Fig. 11).
- A stele was discovered at Bordj Menail [9], date unknown (Fig. 12).

Samia Ait Ali Yahia is with the Department of Language and Amazigh Culture, University Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria (e-mail: aitali\_61@yahoo.fr).



Abizar

Boudjima

Thinesouine

Souama 1

Souama 2



Tigzirt

Haut Sibaou

Agouni Goughrane (Face a)

Agouni Goughrane (Face b)

El Kalaa

Fig. 1 Corpus of stele of Libyan inscriptions in Grande Kabylia



Fig. 2 Agoulmin Toukseleth



Fig. 3 Cap Djinet n°1 and Cap Djinet n°2



Agouni Azra

Thala khelf

Alma Makhlef

Azaghar

Taguemount

Fig. 4 Steles of Grande Kabylia cited by Poyto and Musso [8]



Fig. 5 The stele of Kerfala (face a) (face b)



Fig. 8 Athargane



Fig. 9 Ihitocen



Fig. 6 Sidi Naamane



Fig. 7 Moknea



Fig. 10 At Yahia n°1 and n°2



Fig. 11 Takhlidjt

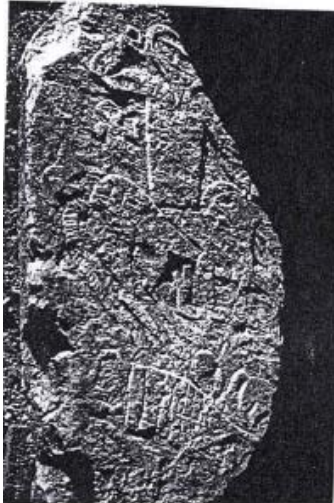


Fig. 12 Bordj Menail

### B. Comments of Libyan Inscriptions on Steles

The study of 28 steles of the Grande Kabylia led to the results below:

- 1- All the steles are composed of sandstone.
- 2- There are two kinds of steles:
  - Stele with Libyan inscriptions without figurines,
  - Stele with Libyan inscriptions with figurines

- 3- The engraving of figurines is drawn as flat relief. On the other hand, engraving inscriptions is achieved in two ways; while one is engraved deeply, the other is in a less profound way.
- 4- Within 28 Libyan steles only 13 include figurines.
- 5- Regarding the figures we can note: The most common pattern is that of a character on a horse holding a shield and spears in his left hand. His face and torso come from the front and occupy the center of the stele. Unlike other steles found in Algeria and Tunisia, which most often represent a standing personage, sometimes holding at the right hand a palm leaf and on the left hand a libation vase.
  - Representation of animals is very rare in the steles of Algeria and Tunisia and non-existent in Morocco. However, this type is widespread in Grande Kabylia. The horse is most often present, followed by other animals such as dogs, poultry, gazelle and cattle.
  - The scheme of a hand is clearly drawn in the stele of Sidi Naaman and Boudjima. It was found in two steles in Tunisia.
- 6- Regarding the inscriptions:
  - All Libyan inscriptions of the Grande Kabylia are arranged vertically with the exception of a stele of Abizar containing both orientations for the same handwriting, horizontal for the word at the top of the stele and vertical for the rest.
  - The alphabet and the length of the texts used differ from one entry to another, the Kerfela text is considered the longest with 45 or 46 characters, the other texts are between 12-22 alphabetic characters.
  - For the Western Berbery (Morocco) texts, they are between 4 and 24 characters.
  - The appearance of writing is very variable, the characters are unequal in size and depth and irregularly spaced. In some inscriptions, the letters are large and reach up to 8 cm for the stele of Thala Khelf and 10 cm for Tigzirt. Smaller between 1.5 and 2 cm, case of stele Souamal.
  - Note that the characters in the Tigzirt region are large, like those found in Morocco in Tetouan region.

The set of characters in the region of Kabylia is 382, consisting of 57 different signs (Fig. 13) which six of them are doubtful (Fig. 15). However, if we take into account the remarks we had raised that some signs are only a single variants letters, others are doubtful or badly engraved, and we will have an alphabet of 28 signs and a point (Fig. 15).

It is noted that there are three different types of characters in the Libyan inscriptions of the Grande Kabylia:

- 1- Category of certified signs (Fig. 16).
- 2- Category of certified but rare signs which include signs belonging to the Western alphabet (Fig. 17).
- 3- Category of doubtful and badly engraved signs (Fig. 18).

Category of certified signs (34 characters and a point) is given in Fig. 16. Category of certified signs but rare which include signs belonging to the Western alphabet (15 characters and a point) is given in Fig. 17. Category of doubtful and badly engraved signs is given in Fig. 18.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
•	-	=	≡	≡	∟	∥	∥∥	∥∥∥	∞	∞	∞	∞	∞	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
○	□	□	+	x	u	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	
29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	
∞	∞	w	m	w	T	-	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	
43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57
v	<						∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩

Fig. 13 Libyan characters of Grande Kabylia

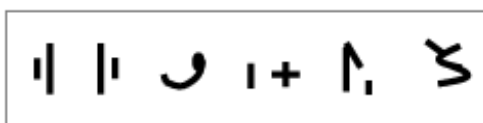


Fig. 14 Doubtful signs

•	-	∟	∥	∥∥	≡	∥∥∥	≡	+ x
□	○	□	⊙	T	-	∩	∩	m w
∩	∩	∩	∩	m	∥∥∥	v	<	>
∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
x	∞	∞			∩	∩	∩	∩

Fig. 15 Libyan alphabet of Grande Kabylia

•	-	=	≡	∟	∥	∥∥
∥∥∥	∞	∞	∞	∞	∞	∞
□	○	x	+	∩	∩	∩
∩	∩	∞	∞	∞	∩	∩
w	m	w	-	T	∩	∩

Fig. 16 Categories of sure characters

∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
∥∥∥	m	∞	∞	≡
∩	∩	>	<	v

Fig. 17 Categories of certified signs

∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
---	---	---	---	---	---

Fig. 18 Categories of doubtful signs

The least frequent characters are those that are doubtful and those belonging to the Western alphabet. The common signs are the pan-Libyan signs.

It is seen that almost all signs of Dougga alphabet (Fig. 19) are found in the Libyan inscriptions of the Grande Kabylia except five missing signs (Fig. 20).

•	-	=	≡	∟	∥	∥∥	∞	∞	∞
+	∞	○	⊙	∩	∩	∞	∞	∩	

Fig. 19 Signs common to Dougga alphabet

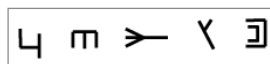


Fig. 20 Missing signs

•	-	=	∥	∥∥	∩	∩	○	□
□	⊙	∩	∩	∩	w	x+	∞	∞

Fig. 21 Libyan inscriptions common with ancient Saharan alphabet

•	∟	-	∥	∥∥	∥∥∥	∞
○	⊙	□	□	∩	>	v
w	+	x	m		∞	∞

Fig. 22 Libyan inscriptions common with Morocco alphabet

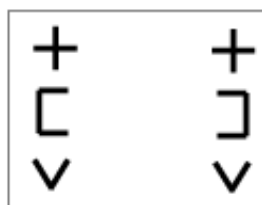


Fig. 23 The two variant formulas

In the Libyan inscriptions of the Kabylia, 12 characters and a point can be found in the ancient Saharan alphabet (Fig. 21).

20 signs and a point are common between the Libyan inscriptions of the Great Kabylia and those of Morocco (Fig. 22).

The texts of the Grande Kabylia are also characterized by the frequency of the formula (2 variants) (Fig. 23).

Two signs ∩ ∩ are only in the inscriptions found in Algeria.

The Libyan inscriptions of the Grande Kabylia which is traditionally located in the western area include more signs belonging to the oriental area than the Western one. On the other hand, cave paintings with inscriptions of the Great Kabylia carry mostly the western Libyan.

The stele of Kerfala is the only one found in North Africa that includes two different inscriptions (Eastern and Western).

We note the presence of two bilingual steles only: Latin-Libyan and Punic-Libyan.

We find the initial group of three characters M.S.S which is already known and published by Chabot [3] in its alphabetical directory. The repeating of the M.S.S form is localized only in Central Berbery. On the other hand, the following formulas: M.W.W., N.G.B.H. or N.G.R.H and TMS are located in the east of Algeria (Orientale Berbery).

Although the ages of the steles of the Great Kabylia are difficult to determine, several researchers have tried to date them. Some have opted for a high dating as Camps [10], and Laporte [11], and others to a low dating as Février [12]. Concerning the steles without figurines, they are difficult to date because of lack of archaeological evidence.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

- It can be concluded that the Libyan inscriptions of Great Kabylia are composed of a mixture of Libyan alphabet: Eastern, western and character of ancient Tuareg alphabet.
- Most of the characters are common to Dugga Alphabet.
- Great Kabylia and West Berbery used almost the same alphabet if we do not consider doubtful and badly engraved signs and variants.

The presentation of these steles and analysis is intended to show how it is useful and important to obtain such documents. It is certain that if such documents were added to those we already have, the Libyan knowledge will light gradually. Great Kabylia certainly has many other steles not yet uncovered.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] S. Chaker, « Quelques réflexions générales et méthodologiques sur le déchiffrement du libyque », *Libyca*, T.XXVI-XXVII 1978-1979, P.150.
- [2] S. Chaker, « Note sur la stèle libyque de Sidi Naamane », *Communication au Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Commission Afrique du nord*, lundi 20 janvier, 1997
- [3] J.B. Chabot, « *Recueil des Inscriptions Libyques* », Imprimerie nationale. Paris, 1940.
- [4] S. Ait Ali Yahia, « Etude comparative entre les stèles à inscriptions libyques de la Berbérie Centrale (Algérie) et le Berbérie Occidentale (Maroc) », Thèse de doctorat, Tizi Ouzou, 2012.
- [5] S. Ait Ali Yahia, « The Libyc Writing », *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology. International Journal of Social, Education, Economics and Management Engineering* Vol: 8, No:6, 2014.
- [6] R. Basset, « Découverte de nouvelles inscriptions libyques en Kabylie », *CRAI*, 1911, volume 55, numéro 6, p.p.429-430.
- [7] J. Marcillet-Jaubert, « Musée d'Alger: Inscriptions, libyque », in: *Libyca*, t. VIII.2<sup>ème</sup> semestre 1959, pp. 151-154.
- [8] Poyto, R., et Musso. J.C., Nouvelles stèles libyques de la Grande Kabylie, in: *Libyca*, t.X VIII, 1970, P.24 3- 249
- [9] G. Camps, S. Chaker, J.P. Laporte, « Deux nouvelles stèles Kabyles au cavalier », *Bulletin du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques (Afrique du Nord)*, n.s.1996-1998, 25, pp.19-32.
- [10] G.Camps, « Abizar » dans *Encyclopedie Berbère* t.I,ed. Edisud, 1984.
- [11] J.P. Laporte, « Datation des stèles libyques figurées de la Grande Kabylie », *L'Arca romana-Attidel IX convegnodi stuidio, Nuoro*, 1991, Sassari, Gallizzi, pp.389-423.
- [12] P.A. Février, « L'art funéraire et les images de chef indigènes dans l'Afrique antique », dans *actes du 1er congrès d'études des cultures méditerranéennes, arabo - berbère*, Malte, 1972, pp.152-169.