A text on bees from James Bynon's Ayt Hdiddu Berber archives

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This paper contributes to advancing the knowledge of Moroccan Berber varieties from the Southern Middle Atlas. It focuses on one such variety, namely the one spoken by the Ayt Hdiddu people. It broadens the corpus of Ayt Hdiddu literature available to English-language readers by providing the translation and analysis of a text first appeared in its original Berber version in Bynon (2015). Centred on local beliefs about bees, the text offers ethnographic insights into the Ayt Hdiddu culture, including the notion of bees having a king rather than a queen. The paper also emphasises the value of Bynon's archives for both linguistic and cultural studies and contributes to the study of Berber ethnolinguistics, particularly within the Southern Middle Atlas region.

Keywords: Berber, traditional knowledge, folk literature, beekeeping, Morocco.

1. Introduction

The knowledge of Moroccan-Berber varieties remains uneven to date. This paper contributes to the study of one such variety, namely the one spoken by the Ayt Hdiddu people¹ of Morocco's central High Atlas. In particular, it aims to add to the growing corpus of Ayt Hdiddu Berber literature available in English translation. The Berber text provided in section 4 is text number 56 from one of the few existing works on Ayt Hdiddu, namely James Bynon's *Berber Prose Texts from the Ayt Hdiddu (Central Morocco), part 1: Transcriptions*, Köln (Rüdiger Köppe Verlag), 2015.² James Bynon's archives represent an important resource for the investigation of the Ayt Hdiddu culture and this contribution also aims to once again³ emphasize their significance (see section 2).

¹ Ayt is the Berber word for 'sons of' equaling bani in Arabic. For information on the Ayt Hdiddu, see Hadiddou (1999).

² The authors of this contribution are in the process of making a translation of this book.

 $^{^{\}scriptscriptstyle 3}$ See Stroomer and Mauri (2018, 2020).

The Ayt Hdiddu people inhabit a wide area situated in the central High Atlas Mountain region. The best-known Ayt Hdiddu town⁴ is Imilchil, which is renowned for its brides' market that takes place on the occasion of the annual fair in honour of the local marabout Sidi Hmad u Lemghenni. Together with the neighbouring Ayt Merghad, Ayt Izdeg and Ayt Ihya (among other groups), the Ayt Hdiddu tribe historically belongs to the Ayt Yafelmane, a tribal confederation that was formed in order to contrast the Ayt Atta (Hart 1984, 45). The Ayt Hdiddu speak a Southern Middle Atlas Tamazight dialect which is linguistically close to the varieties spoken by the Ayt Izdeg, Ayt Merghad and Ayt Ihya, as well as the Ayt Atta.⁵

Generally speaking, the Ayt Hdiddu tribe received considerable attention from anthropologists and scholars interested in customary law, as well as from film-makers interested in the Imilchil brides' market.⁶ Much less attention was given to their language. James Bynon was the first European linguist to study the language and culture of the Ayt Hdiddu people, starting in the 1950s (see below). In more recent years, some French-language works documenting Ayt Hdiddu Berber were written by the Moroccan linguist Driss Azdoud. In particular, Azdoud wrote dissertations in 1985 and 1997 containing a vocabulary and a collection of interesting and well-transcribed texts.⁷ In 2011, Azdoud published a *Dictionnaire berbère-français* which is essentially an Ayt Hdiddu dictionary.

2. James Bynon (1925-2017) and his Ayt Hdiddu studies

James Bynon devoted his life to the study of Berber languages and cultures. He had training in archaeology and cultural anthropology in Edinburgh. From an early age he took a special interest in photography and filming. His first stay in Morocco was in January 1951, when he was immediately fascinated by the Berbers and their culture. In the following years, he started linguistic fieldwork, photographing and filming the Ayt Hdiddu tribe. In 1957, he began to study Berber with Lionel Galand (*École nationale des langues orientales vivantes*, Paris), and Maghrebi Arabic with George S. Colin (Paris, Rabat). He gained his diplomas in Arabic and Berber. In 1961 he was appointed Research Fellow in

⁴ For the various Ayt Hdiddu regions and administrative centers, see Azdoud (2011: 3, fn. 4).

⁵ Willms (1972) gives a survey of the Southern Middle Atlas dialects; this author treats a number of linguistic varieties of the Southern Middle Atlas and gives a parallel presentation of their linguistic data.

⁶ A selection: Bousquet (1956), Denat (without date), Kasriel (1989), Kraus (1991, 2019a, 2019b), Kherdi (2012); films of the brides' market of Imilchil can be found on the Internet and on YouTube.

⁷ The text materials of his dissertation (Azdoud 1985) have not been published so far.

Arabic and Berber at the *School of Oriental and African Studies* (SOAS) of the University of London. Under Galand's supervision he worked on his PhD on the Berber vocabulary of weaving, which he defended in 1963 at the *Sorbonne* in Paris. In 1964 he was given the position of Lecturer at SOAS, first in Arabic and Berber and later in Berber only. He remained at SOAS until his retirement in 1990. In his university career he developed into a great descriptive linguist with a deep interest in the role of language within tribal culture.

As for fieldwork, James Bynon's main focus was and remained the language and culture of the Ayt Hdiddu. He used a study leave in 1964 to deepen his knowledge of this tribe, working with a number of Berber native speakers. He worked most intensively with Zayd u Abbu, who also visited him in London over three extended periods where he acted as his Berber language assistant.

James Bynon died in July 2017. The authors of this contribution visited his archives at his home in Loughton in late November 2018. They were very warmly received by his widow Prof. Theodora Bynon and were given ample opportunity to see James Bynon's enormous archive, encompassing more than 30 years of intensive research with an impressive wealth of material: Ayt Hdiddu Berber folktales, ethnographic texts (descriptions of the daily life and the annual agricultural cycle), songs (for events such as marriage, rainmaking, sheep-shearing, grain-grinding), riddles, proverbs, children's games, etc. In short, a genuine treasure trove from both the cultural as well as the linguistic point of view.

July 2016 marked the appearance of his above-mentioned *Berber Prose Texts*. With the publication of that book, containing 163 Ayt Hdiddu Berber texts, James Bynon provided berberologists with the largest collection of Berber text material ever collected for any of the Southern Middle Atlas varieties, at the same time giving them a first glimpse of a part of the wealth of his archives. However, most of these 163 texts were left without translation, as James Bynon only translated eight of them. A few papers providing translations of individual Bynon's texts have been published in recent years (Stroomer and Mauri, 2018, 2020).

3. About the text

The text given in section 4 is about bees. The text is not entomological but ethnographical and its interest lies in the beliefs about insects rather than the scientific facts about them. Note also that James Bynon's informant Zayd (the narrator) is not a beekeeper and that beekeeping is not a tradition in the Ayt Hdiddu tribe. The text shows some interesting points, three of which are worth mentioning:

- 1. Bees have a king rather than a queen.
- 2. Bees stem from larvae that are found in, creep out of, or originate from honey.

3. The bees owe their proverbial diligence to the fact that they live constantly in the belief that they have an appointment with Prophet Muhammad to serve him a dinner.

The concepts given in points 1. and 2. are ancient and not limited to Berber literature, being found in Roman authors such as Virgil and Columella.

3.1. Transcription and other graphic matters

- the *j* is a voiced alveolar fricative
- the *š* is a voiceless alveolar fricative
- the *h* represents a voiceless pharyngeal fricative
- the Γ is a voiced pharyngeal fricative
- the *ġ* is a voiced uvular fricative
- the *x* is a voiceless uvular fricative
- superscript w indicates labialisation of the preceding consonant
- subscript dots under *d*, *l*, *r*, *s*, *t* and *z* indicate pharyngealisation of the consonant in question

Numbers between < > mark page number in the 2015 edition; numbers between () correspond to the numbers of the text lines of the 2015 edition.

3.2. Translation

Our purpose in the translation (section 5) is to provide scholars of diverse backgrounds with an English version which is as close as possible to the original text. In other words, our priority is ease of access, with aesthetic concerns being as prominent as that priority allows.

4. Manimš nttgg^a ad nənada tizizwa j Sari

<177> tizizwa hyya yan wbaxxu nna yttarwn taməmt j Sari d yġṛman, ar yssšar iġ^wṛan ar yssšar iġṛman. j llun ns tja tawṛaġt ilin dik s ša n yinẓadn, adday tayll da ^tttini 'bzzzz', ar ^tttras xf ylǧǧijn ayd ġuṛ s ySzzan, da ^tttras xf kulši maš ilǧǧijn (5) a xf ^tttras šijan. da ^tttətt azušnni, asir, ag^wltm, alili, ifssi, ilṭṭzġi, ilǧǧijn n tuja, da ^tttətt kull mayd yjan ššjṛt. adday tili ġur ša j taddart da tssšar iġ^wran adday ggadynt, idd wr ylli xs ywwt da tssšar iġrman, awd adday tili j Sari j tggudy da tssšar ig^wran j ša j yfran. mayd yjan ig^wran, hyya da ^tttddu ard taf (10) yan yfri j Sari nna yrgan, j wr yttili wdfl, j Sari nna ywSrn i awd ywwn ad t ykk s wdar, iwa da ^tttraSa j yfri nnag ard taf adgar nna ytwadan, iwa ar dik s sdurnt taməmt kull tnt j yan wdġar, iwa ar ^tttjmas taməmt nnaġ tqqim. iwa tajrst mš txxa ad wr asnt tili tuja iwa ar ttawgnt i taməmt nnag nna jjmSnt (15) ar ssif, idd wr txxi tjrst tqqim taməmt nnag imšinnag, iwa ddunt imšinnag tasuta xf tsuta. adday tSttr taməmt nnag s lqq^wdra n Mulana ffġn d dik s ybuxxa umlil, iwa qqimin ar ttəttan j taməmt nnağ, ymiqq ar ttbddaln ard jin izazwn. ibuxxa ttx nna d yttffgn j taməmt wr nssin mayd tn yttggan (20) amm ybuxxa ttx nna d yttffgn j wksum adday yx^wmj, maš taməmt wr da tx^wmmj abadn, waxxa tufid ibuxxa ajnsu n taməmt n tzizwa da tnt ^tttkksd tllgd taməmt hat thyya wr dik <178> s ylli awd ymih yšan ša. ibuxxa ttx da txlaqqn zy taməmt amm wksum yx^wmjn s lqq^wdra n Mulana. iwa idd dig tlla (25) gur ša j taddart da yttqqima asgg^was s asgg^was ykks taməmt ard wr asnt yuğği xs aynna ttəttant j tjrst mš txxa, idd wr txxi tqqim dig ar ymal xs mš yra ad ySawd izazwn da yttagga taməmt n yan wsgg^was wr da ts yttkks ffgn d dik s izazwn amm lqqaSida. ylla wyllid gur tzizwa, ayllid nnag yla sin (30) yxfawn, iwa wnna yumzn ayllid nnag i tzizwa da t yggar j yat tġanimt yqqn as azy ttx s taməmt yqqn as azy a, iwa ysrs t j wdġar nnaġ j tlla tzizwa j taddart ns. j ssif a j tili tzizwa j Sari, iwa da nttddu s Sari nmun d yširran nna ag yujrn j lSmr, iwa ar nttnada iġrman n tzizwa. da tbnnu iġrman nnaġ ns s (35) walud da ^tttgg^a imšiddag n wfrran n ššwi xs wnnag da yttmziy. iwa da t tbnnu ard t thyya, iwa ar dik s tsdur, iwa adday ySmmr tqqn as imi s walud tbnu dig wayd tama ns tzdy tn ard yili xmsa, Sšra, Sšriyn ngdd aynna yllan. iwa adday yaf ša tizizwa wr yssin mani j as ylla ygrm ns, iwa da

(40) ^tttaylla nkk dar as nhdu ts ar as nttini "huh wubrrm llgg aš t! huh wubrrm llgg aš t!". iwa adday da as nttini ayttx iwa tddu s aynna j as ylla ygrm ns, iwa nhdu ts ard trras, iwa nddu nn s adġar nnaġ j trrus naf nn dik s iġrm ns. iwa da nssšar ša n ykšdan nna s nttllg igrman nnag, iwa nwt igrm nnag s ša n (45) yslli amzzyan ard yrrz walud, iwa tffg d taməmt. iwa ar nttllg <179> nj as tahanutt s tahanutt ard ts akk^w nllġ, iwa nənšr ar nttnada wayd. iwa nddu imšinnag imšinnag ard nggawn tamemt. adday tili tuja d ylěgijn da nttllg ard ag thrru j ymawn. wr da yttllg igrman n tzizwa xs yširran d tširratin, wma iryzn (50) ixatarn wr da ttllġn aynnaġ. da yttqqima ša j yryzn ixatarn yks, ymih yaf igrm n tzizwa. iwa mš ylla ša n lil amzzyan tama ns da as yqqra yini as "addu d, ha igrm n tzizwa llg t!", idd wr yanny adu da as yttasy timiryt mar ad as ySqql s yan wass yadn j ylla ša n lSil gur s. iwa han imšinna nttgg^a adday (55) da nttnada iġṛman n tzizwa. twʕṛ tzizwa adday tjmʕ xf ša da tnqq^a, maš wnna xf tjmS yazzl ydr targ^wa n waman ngdd asif. da ttinin ma s txddm tzizwa amm ssif amm tjrst nnan aš tSrd Nnbi Syydna Muhmmadin (tazallitt gif s abda!) tnna as "addu d ad aš jġ imnsi!", ynn^a aš ynna as "waxxa, ha i ad d (60) Saydg iwa jjwjd!". iwa ynn^a aš yddu Syydna Muhmmadin wr yad d yagul ymmt, iwa tqqim tzizwa ar txddm ar tjjwjad imnsi i Syydna Muhmmad wr tzri is ymmut. nnan aš mr tzri tzizwa is ymmut Syydna Muhmmad wr sar tnni ad tarw taməmt wala txdm, maš tġal is wr ymmut ar txddm ar ^tttini (65) "ass ttx ad d yddu", "askka ad d yddu", iwa tddu imšinnag. iwa han aynna ttSawadn mddn xf tzizwa, han aynna ssng gif s, han imšinna as nttgg^a, wssalam.

5. How we look for bees in the mountains

<177> Bees⁸ are insects that produce honey in the mountains and villages. They make honey combs⁹ and mud-cells.¹⁰ As for their colour, they are yellow. They have some hairs on their body. When they fly they say 'bzzz.' They settle on flowers that they like, (in fact) they settle on many things but on flowers (5) mostly. They 'eat'¹¹ thyme (azušnni), rosemary (asir), ag^wltm¹², oleander (alili), ifssi¹³, ilttzġi,¹⁴ and 'flowers of grass' (*ilǧǧijn n tuja*),¹⁵ they 'eat' all kinds of plants. When someone has them at home (i.e. next to one's house, in one's garden), they make honeycombs when the bees are numerous.¹⁶ If it is only one, it makes mud-cells. Also, when they are in the mountains and when they are numerous, they make honeycombs in caves. What are honeycombs? Bees go until they find (10) a cave in the mountains that is relatively warm, where there is no snow, and (often) on mountains inaccessible to anyone who goes on foot. The bees look for a cave until they find a level (flat, horizontal) place. They 'lay'¹⁷ their honey on it, all of the bees in one place. That honey forms a mass and remains. In winter, when the weather is so bad that there are no bee plants, bees feed on the honey that they collected (15) until the summer. If the weather in the winter is not bad, that honey remains like that. Bees go on like this generation after generation. When that honey has remained for a long time, by God's decision, larvae¹⁸ come out of it. They start eating from that honey. After a while they change into little bees. As for these larvae that come out of the honey, we don't know whether they are (20) similar to these little

⁸ Note that the word *tizizwa* 'bees' is feminine singular collective in Ayt Hdiddu Berber (JB).

⁹ *aġ^wŗi, iġ^wŗi,* pl. *iġ^wŗan* 'honey-comb' (JB), i.e. the honey-comb (made of wax) of wild or domesticated bees (HS).

¹⁰ *iġṛm*, pl. *iġṛman* (1) 'village' (2) 'mud cell(s) made by bees and attached in groups on stones' (JB). The bees that make mud cell(s) may refer to (a species of) wild bees (HS).

¹¹ They 'eat,' i.e. they collect nectar and pollen from (plants) (HS).

¹² *ag*^w*ltm* 'arbrisseau à petites feuilles vertes au reflet légèrement brillant. Férule?' [Azdoud 2011: 35]. *Agultem (u-)*, pl. *igultmen* 'férule, genêt' [Taïfi 1991: 154]. As mentioned by an anonymous reviewer, Yaagoubi *et al.* (2023: 15) states that the feminine form *tag*^w*ltmt* (spelled *Tagoultemt*) is an instance of 'Adenocarpus bacquei', a broom-like shrub found in North Africa.

¹³ *Ifssi* 'armoise blanche,' on s'en sert comme combustible pour faire cuire les aliments [Taïfi 1991: 135]. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out to us that *ifssi* is 'Artemisia mesatlantica,' a species of wormwood found in North Africa (originally mentioned in Yaagoubi *et al.* 2023: 15).

¹⁴ The name *ilțtzġi* (and its variant *ilḍdẓġi* (JB)) refers to a plant which we were unable to identify. An anonymous reviewer hypothesizes that the name "might be a variant of *îrẓġi*, *îġẓġi* (Imilchil), *îdẓġi* (Wawezguit), 'Ormenis Africana and Ormenis Scariosa' reported in Bellakhdar (1997: 201), namely a sort of Santolina common in Middle and High Atlas."

 $^{^{\}rm 15}$ Not clear whether it refers to a particular plant or it is literally 'the flowers of grass' (HS).

¹⁶ Not entirely clear. Given the feminine plural verb *ggadynt* ('they are numerous'), the understood subject might be the word *tizazwin*, which is the plural form of the collective noun *tizizwa* [Azdoud 2011: 250].

¹⁷ The verb 'to lay eggs (hens)' is used here (JB).

¹⁸ *ibuxxa umlill* 'white insects' (JB).

white larvae that come out of meat when it is rotten.¹⁹ But that honey is never rotten even if you find these larvae in bee honey. You remove them and then lick the honey. It is better that there **<178>** is not the least (pollution) in it.²⁰ These larvae develop out of honey, like (in) rotten meat, by the power of Our Lord. When someone has bees **(25)** near his home, he leaves them year after year and removes honey and only leaves for the bees what they will eat in winter if the weather is bad. If the weather is not bad, the honey also remains until the next year, unless the bee-keeper wants to increase the number of bees, in which case he leaves the honey of one year; he does not take it away and bees come out of it as usual (i.e. as we described).

Bees have a king²¹ and that king has two **(30)** heads.²² Someone who catches the king from the bees, places him in a tube of reed, blocks one side with honey as well as the other side.²³ Then he puts it at the place where the bees are (in the hives that stand) near his home.²⁴

It is in summer that bees are in the mountains. Well, we used to go²⁵ to the mountains in the company of boys who were older than we were. Then we looked for the mud-cells of bees. They build these cells **(35)** with mud.²⁶ They make a kind of grill oven, but it is smaller.²⁷ They build it until it is good. Then they 'lay' honey in it. When the cell is full, they close its opening with mud and they build another next to it. They attach them together until there are five, ten or twenty or whatever number they are.

When someone finds bees and does not know where their mud-cells are, well **(40)** as soon as the bees fly, we follow them and watch them closely until we say: "Huh, turn round,²⁸ I lick the mud-cells for you! Huh, turn round, I lick the mud-cells for you!"²⁹ When we have said this to the bees, the bees

¹⁹ A possible analogy with the larvae originating from rotten meat is put forward, although the narrator clearly states that honey is never rotten. The idea of larvae of bees originating from rotting blood of dead bulls or from rotten meat was mentioned by the Roman author Virgil, *Georgics* (*Georgica*) 4, 282-316. Also, an anonymous reviewer pointed out that the Biblical episode of Samson (Judges 14) shows a similar connection between rotten meat and bees.

²⁰ *išan ša* 'there is something wrong with...' (JB).

²¹ For the concept of bees having a 'king' rather than a 'queen', see the Roman author Columella, *De re rustica*, Book IX, ix.7-x.2 (HS).

²² These heads are at opposite ends. Information given by a bee-keeper at Uttrbatt (JB).

²³ I.e. blocks it also with honey, so that each head can eat (JB).

 $^{^{\}rm 24}$ And leaves it in the tube (informant Zayd does not know why) (JB).

²⁵ Informant Zayd speaks of his own experience (JB).

²⁶ As suggested in earlier notes: the word 'mud' may suggest that the informant talks about a species of bees that is different from the domesticated bees where we would expect cells and lids of cells made from 'wax' (HS).

 $^{^{\}scriptscriptstyle 27}$ It has the size of two peas (JB).

²⁸ 'Turn around (and show me where your mud-cells are)' (HS).

²⁹ In the phrase *huh wubrrm llġġ aš t! huh* is a call specially for bees; the wu part of *wubrrm* remains unexplained (JB).

go to the place where their mud-cells are. We watch them closely until they settle somewhere. Then we go to the place where they settle and find their mud-cells there. Then we make some little bits of wood³⁰ by means of which we lick those cells. Then we tap the lid of that cell with some **(45)** small pebble³¹ until the mud is broken and then the honey comes out. Then we lick it and **<179>** proceed from cell to cell until we have licked all of them. Then we stand up and look for another one.³² We go on like this, we go on like this, until we have had our fill of honey. When there are herbs and flowers we lick until it feels too sharp in our mouth.

Only boys and girls lick honey from mud-cells of bees. As for adult **(50)** men, they don't. Sometimes some adult man is a shepherd and finds a nest of bees. If there is a small child next to him, he calls the child and says: "Come here, there is a nest of bees, lick it!" If he does not see any child around, he makes a heap of stones, so that he remembers its position for another day when he does have a child with him. Well, this is what we do when **(55)** we look for bees' nests.

Bees can be dangerous when they gather on someone in numbers, they can kill someone. The one on whom bees gather runs and throws himself into an irrigation canal or into a river.

They say why bees work both in summer and in winter. Once upon a time they had invited the Prophet Muhammad (may prayer be always on him) saying to him: "Come, we will make a dinner for you." Then the Prophet answered: "Alright, I will **(60)** go and come back, prepare it." Then Muhammad went off and, before he could come back, he died. The bees started working and preparing the meal for Muhammad, they did not know that the Prophet had died. If the bees had known that the Prophet had died, they would no longer have produced honey, nor would they have continued working. But the bees assumed that he was not dead, so they kept on working saying: **(65)** "Today he will come," "Tomorrow he will come," and so on. Well, this is what people say about bees, this is what I know about them, this is how we do it. Greetings.

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 $^{^{\}rm 30}$ Of the size of a toothpick (JB).

 $^{^{\}scriptscriptstyle 31}$ A small stone of the size of a chestnut in this instance (JB).

³² I.e., another place where we would find mud-cells (HS).

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