

Tawgrat Walt Aissa N'Ayt Sokhman
RESISTANCE

Morocco Early 1920s Berber

Tawgrat Walt Aissa N'Ayt Sokhman was blind and illiterate, yet became a renowned professional poet, a master of the ancient Berber tradition of oral poetry and song. Her birth and death dates are not known, although records show that she was very old by 1930. She grew up as an orphan and never married, spending most of her life in the Berber village of Ayt Sokhman in the Middle Atlas, the westernmost of Morocco's Atlas Mountain ranges. Tawgrat celebrated her blindness as a mark of beauty, and her courage and force of personality left a powerful impression on those who met her. Her poetry, recited at performances of the Berber dance *ahidus*, was cherished by her people and recited throughout the Middle Atlas.

Tawgrat's gifts even won the admiration of the French, who came to Morocco in ever larger numbers after 1912, when much of Morocco became a French protectorate. The French historian François Reyniers said that "she was neither a prophet nor a witch, but she had an imagination that astonished people with its extraordinary power," while others compared her to the blind Greek poet Homer.

Tawgrat's poems are a vital record of the armed resistance to French domination in the Middle Atlas region. The resistance movement in the Rif region, bordering the Mediterranean, is far better known, in part because of its proximity to Europe and in part because its leader, Mohamed Abdelkrim Khattabi, was a well-educated and highly cultured man who rubbed shoulders with Europeans and was acquainted with their propaganda strategies, and managed to draw international attention to the cause. The armed resistance in central and southern Morocco, in contrast, remained largely unknown and almost forgotten, because these more remote areas were completely controlled by the French, who managed to keep hidden the fierce battles that took place throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The French used the strategy of separating "rebellious" areas from "subdued" ones, and stopped ammunition from reaching the fighters, who were often isolated in the harsh mountains.

The anticolonial struggles of the Middle Atlas and High Atlas were accompanied by a wealth of oral and written poems in both Arabic and Berber. The official history of this poetry consists primarily of written poems by men. But resistance poetry in Berber was by definition oral, and included women, both literate and illiterate, who were clearly marginalized despite their participation in the fight for independence.

Tawgrat's poems of resistance were composed in the 1920s, often in a Berber genre called *thimawayin*. In this poetry, she incited women to resist the enemy and defend their country, especially after the men of their tribes were overpowered by the French. She clearly sees the independence struggle as a form of *Jihad*, a battle to defend Islam and Islamic principles. Tawgrat was devastated by the defeat of her own tribe, and toward the end of her life she left her home to move to the village of Tunfit, near Midelt. She died feeling bitter hatred in her heart for the colonizers, their Moroccan collaborators, and whoever did not fight them. In

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the poem below, she uses her words as weapons to attack a man named Moha Urriban, apparently a village blacksmith, who was one of the runaways from the battle. The texts of Tawgrat's poems were collected from living people of her generation by Mohamed Chafik and published in 1982.

Fatima Ambennede

♦

You, Moha Urriban,
You surely stained the tribe when you escaped like a rabbit
In front of dogs.
Keep your smithy and shut up.
You are qualified only to touch coal.
How could one be a Muslim
If you visit the unfaithful's office?
The unfaithful came and drank from the oak spring,
And without fear, tied up their horses,
They fixed the stakes and said now we are neighbors.
Look up Itto, Thuda, and Izza; call women to carry the flag
To war, since many Berber men have become inert!
Young men, attack,
Attack the unfaithful!
Advance forward!
Because he who dies in *Jihad*,
Has a shelter in paradise,
And to his relatives
He will leave honor and glory.
Shame on you; you have no manhood,
For you love to be the slaves of the unfaithful.

Translated by Moha Ennaji

Saphia Zagloul
LETTER FROM EXILE

Egypt 1922 French

Saphia Zagloul was an important figure in the Egyptian nationalist and feminist movements—which for her, as for many Egyptian women of her time, were powerfully intertwined. Born in 1878 into a wealthy family in Cairo, she was also daughter and wife to prominent men in Egypt's history: Her father, Mustafa Fahmi Pasha, who was Turkish in origin, served as Egypt's prime minister in 1891 and again in 1895. Her husband, Saad Zagloul, was a nationalist leader who dedicated his life to the struggle for independence from the British.