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The Second Mission of Colonel Flatters to the Ahaggar and Its Role in French Expansion in the Far South of Algeria (November 1880- April 1881)

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Abstract :

This research discusses Colonel Flatters' second mission to the Ahaggar region from November 1880 to April 1881. It includes a definition of Colonel Flatters and the French officials involved in the mission, the conditions and motives behind the mission, a summary of the events and results of Flatters' first mission to the Azjer region, the route of the second mission, its outcomes, and its role in French expansion in the southern part of Algeria.

Keywords: Ahaggar, Azjer, Flatters, Masson, Akhnokhen, Ahitaghel.

Introduction

The desert has always been an enigmatic and unknown space for the French, who attempted at different times and stages to control this vast area, learn about its affairs, and collect information for their colonial expansionist purposes, including political, economic, and social motives. After receiving unexpected resistance that hindered their southward advance, France began to focus on exploring and gathering information about the desert regions to minimize their material and human losses and choose appropriate methods for penetration and expansion. Among these regions were the Tuareg territories of Azjer and Ahaggar, where France organized and encouraged a group of explorers and travelers to visit Azjer and Ahaggar. For example, Hamza Boubaker's visit to Ghardaïa in 1851, Ismail Boudier (1811-1875), and Henry Duvergier (28 February 1840 – 1892), as well as the desert mission led by Mercier, which signed the Ghadames agreement with the

Tuareg of Azjer in November 1862. Colonel Flatters embarked on a mission to Azjer between January 9, 1880, and June 3, 1880, which ended in failure, with him and his mission team fleeing the region. However, he made another attempt, embarking on a second journey toward Ahaggar. This prompts us to ask the question: What drove Flatters to undertake a second trip to the Ahaggar region despite the failure of his first mission to Azjer? What was the objective of the second mission to Ahaggar? And did it play a role in French expansion in southern Algeria? Did it serve the strategy of French colonial expansion?

1- The Key Members of the Second Mission:

Many historical references and studies have discussed the members of exploratory missions sent to undertake reconnaissance tasks, which may have specific focuses such as social, economic, and political aspects, or sometimes one specific purpose. These objectives often branch into multiple angles. For example, the economic aspect may make the mission concerned with caravan routes, markets, water sources, terrain, climate, and other relevant domains connected to the mission's primary objective. Therefore, the composition of the mission was multidisciplinary, and it is crucial to understand the members' interests, specializations, and backgrounds to appreciate the mission's significance. The key members of this mission include:

1-1 Colonel Paul Flatters:

Paul Flatters was born in 1832 in Laval and completed his elementary education there. He joined the French army early, and in April 1855, he was sent to the Crimean Peninsula to participate in the Crimean War, where he was appointed commander of the third division of the Zouaves. After the war, he was promoted to the rank of major. In 1856, following the Crimean War, he entered Algeria with the third division of Zouaves and became one of the most prominent military figures in charge of the affairs of local communities. In 1861, he became commander of the third battalion of Algerian riflemen. On July 22, 1871, he was awarded the Legion of Honor. General Chanzy appointed him as the supreme commander in Laghouat, where he succeeded in dealing with the nomadic tribes, forming friendships and alliances within their circles.

Colonel Flatters served as a member of the High Commission for Desert Missions, and due to his prominent position and knowledge of the nomads, he was appointed as the general commander of the desert missions. He had a fair complexion and an average build, known for his strong personality, straightforwardness, and vitality. He was respected by his Zouave troops due to his military history with them. Flatters was strongly enthusiastic about exploring the desert and its mysteries, having worked on the outskirts of the desert in Laghouat, where he became well-acquainted with the region. His enthusiasm was centered on linking desert trade routes with France. He even sacrificed his personal life, abandoning his wife and child to dedicate himself to exploring the

desert. He also contributed to studying the course of the railroad. He was killed by Tuareg tribes in the Battle of Bir el-Ghrama on February 16, 1881.¹ French sources glorify his character, portraying him as a bringer of French civilization to savage and oppressed peoples, employing rhetoric that highlights French superiority.

1-2 Captain Pierre-René Masson:

Pierre-René Masson was born in Rambouillet, France, on December 13, 1845. He received his initial education in his hometown at the Hert institution and then attended high school in Versailles. In October 1864, he entered the Saint-Cyr Military School, and on January 1, 1867, he joined the prestigious École Militaire, graduating as a first lieutenant on January 1, 1869. In June 1870, he participated in battles and was captured, returning to France in April 1871. Later, he was appointed to the French Army General Staff. He was assigned to Algeria and trained with the Zouave infantry in Algiers from September 1870 until September 1873. He also participated in artillery training in Rennes, France, from October 1873 to October 1874, before joining the army divisions in Oran in November 1874. He participated in the Battle of Ouled Ammar in 1876, where he was wounded and subsequently awarded the Legion of Honor. He was killed by resistance forces in Ahaggar during the Battle of Bir el-Ghrama on February 16, 1881.² Masson became acquainted with Colonel Flatters as the leader of the exploratory mission, which included political, military, scientific, and organizational aspects. As the deputy commander in charge of military affairs and a representative of the French general staff, Masson was celebrated in French writings, which described him as someone who sought to bring the light of civilization and progress to the desert.

1-3 Captain Dianous (Joseph Gabriel Henry Dianous):

Joseph Gabriel Henry Dianous was born on July 23, 1845. He joined the French Army on July 12, 1867. On September 1, 1871, he was promoted to lieutenant, and on July 2, 1874, to second lieutenant. He worked in the Arab office in Laghouat for two years, gaining extensive experience dealing with nomadic tribes and desert affairs. He was later assigned to Kabylie as an assistant to the office commander. He participated in both of Colonel Flatters' missions, the first to Azjer and the second to Ahaggar, where he was tasked with topographical responsibilities. After the Battle of Bir el-Ghrama, where Colonel Flatters was killed, Captain Dianous led the retreating French forces and remaining participants toward Ouargla. According to French accounts, he was among the French soldiers who consumed poisoned date flour provided by some Tuaregs during their withdrawal, and he

¹ V. Derregagaix, *Exploration of the Sahara*, The two missions of Lieutenant-Colonel Flatters, Paris, p. 130.

² Ibid., p. 131.

was killed along with the rest of the remaining French troops in the Battle of Hassi Meskine with Tuareg tribes in March 1881.³

1-4 Emile Beringer:

Emile Beringer was born on January 19, 1840, in Strasbourg. He studied there before being appointed as a bridge and road agent on September 19, 1857. In October 1861, he joined French companies in the field of engineering and roads. On May 3, 1866, he joined the Suez Canal Company as the senior assistant to the project manager, where he gained substantial experience in construction. In 1869, he left the Suez Canal Company and participated in the Franco-Prussian War as an assistant engineer in the 35th legion. After the war, he worked in French companies for four years and later took assignments in Brazil as the chief engineer. He was involved in both of Colonel Flatters' missions, and he was killed by resistance forces in Ahaggar during the Battle of Bir el-Ghrama on February 16, 1881.⁴

1-5 Introduction to Dr. Guiard:

Robert Nicolas Jules Guiard was born on February 5, 1851, in Paris. He studied at the Tors high school and in 1869 entered the Strasbourg Military Health School, where he ranked seventh out of eleven. In 1870, he participated in the Franco-Prussian War, and in 1874, he presented his doctoral thesis and joined the Saint-Martin Military Hospital. In 1876, he was promoted to the rank of major in military health. Later, Flatters sent him a letter titled Would you like to accompany me to Timbuktu? Dr. Guiard replied the same day agreeing. He was killed in the Battle of Bir Lagramah on February 16, 1881.⁵

1-6 Engineer Roche: Jules Roche was born on February 14, 1853, in Éguilles. He graduated from the Marseille High School in 1871, then entered the School of Applied Arts and chose mining as his profession. He obtained a degree in mathematics and visited several European countries such as Italy, Austria, Hungary, Southwestern France, and Spain, as well as Algeria. On April 11, 1878, he was appointed a third-degree engineer, then worked as a supervisor in several regions of France, responsible for mining. On May 16, 1879, he was sent to Nice as the supervisor for mining projects. He traveled to Algeria and was impressed by the natural beauty. After the announcement of the Desert Railway project, Engineer Roche offered himself to Flatters to participate in the mission, where he was appointed as a geologist in Flatters' mission. He was killed by the Tuareg tribes in the Battle of Bir Lagramah on February 16, 1881.⁶ Through this diverse composition of the

³ Ibid, p. 130.

⁴ Henri Brosselard, *The Two Missions of Flatters in the Land of the Touareg Azdjer and Ahaggar*, Paris, 1889, p. 66.

⁵ Ibid., p. 269.

⁶ Henri Brosselard, Op. cit., p. 274.

key members of the mission, we can observe and conclude that the mission aimed to study various aspects of the lives of the inhabitants of Azjer and Ahaggar.

The Circumstances and Motivations Behind Flatters' Mission to Ahaggar:

A number of circumstances surrounded the mission that led Flatters to the Ahaggar region. This was a mission within the framework of a French official plan to study the Desert Railway line connecting Algeria to Sudan. The French began thinking about the construction of the Desert Railway to connect their colonies, with the economic goal of changing the entire situation in favor of French occupation.⁷ The French project competed with the US railway expansion project, which led to the activation of French colonial policy, aiming to extend a railway line connecting French colonies in North Africa with French territories in Western Sudan, south of the Sahara. This idea began to take shape clearly among the French starting in 1877, with Adolphe Duponchel being the originator of this French dream.⁸ At the same time, international competition emerged, with railway projects in Russia and England. This negates the French claims that the purpose of the Desert Railway was humanitarian, aimed at serving humanity, desert peoples, and bringing civilization to them.

In these circumstances, the French engineer Duponchel submitted a report on the Desert Railway to the French Minister of Public Works, De Freycinet, who was convinced of the idea and the benefits it could bring to France. Minister De Freycinet quickly sent a letter to French Prime Minister Jules Ferry on July 12, 1879, highlighting the benefits of constructing the Desert Railway for France. Jules Ferry promptly approved the proposal. In December 1879, a committee was tasked with three official missions to study the Desert Railway line from Algeria to Sudan. The first mission, led by Choisy, was assigned to study two routes: the first route from Laghouat to M'Ni'a, and the second from Biskra to Ouargla. The second mission was assigned to Officer Pouyanne, who was tasked with studying a railway route in the southwestern part of Algeria, reaching the oasis of Tiaret before returning. The third and most important mission was assigned to Flatters, which involved studying the railway route from Ouargla to Sudan through Azjer or Ahaggar. The committee left the choice of the route to Flatters, who had two options: one through Azjer and the other through Ahaggar.⁹

Thus, the main purpose of Flatters' mission to Azjer and Ahaggar was to implement the outcomes of the French ministry's committee concerning the Desert Railway. This was the apparent purpose of the project, along with the hidden colonial goals, such as

⁷ O. Mac Carthy, *Les Transsahariens*, Africa Bulletin of the Algerian Geographical Society, 1st year, 1880, p. 52.

⁸ Mohamed El-Taher El-Adwani, *Colonial Projects in the Sahara and National Resistance: The Flatters Expedition of 1880*, Research Journal, November 1986, Issue 4, p. 74.

⁹ P. Vuillot, *Exploration of the Sahara*, Augustin Challamel, Publisher, 1895, p. 175.

expanding influence and exerting control over the resources of the Algerian people by force. We also notice the rapid approval of the Desert Railway project by the French president immediately after the Minister of Public Works presented it. This indicates the haste with which the colonizers were trying to solidify their presence, especially with the spread of popular resistance movements in the Sahara,¹⁰ from the Draâ Valley in the west to Tripoli in the east, and from Laghouat in the north to the Great Desert in the south.

The motivations for Flatters' mission are clearly reflected in a letter from Minister De Freycinet to Flatters dated December 1, 1879. The mission's goals were as follows:

- To show that the mission was peaceful and unarmed, with the goal of negotiating with the inhabitants of the Ahaggar region.
- To explore the region and gather geographic information.
- To seek a long-term and permanent agreement with the leaders of Ahaggar and Azjer.
- To develop and renew trade, and to find a place for a permanent French consulate in the land of the Tuareg.¹¹
- Despite this official statement defining the mission's goals, the hidden objectives were control through force, asserting dominance, and annexing these vast deserts into French possessions in North Africa.
- The mission also aimed to reorganize itself by learning from the failures of the first campaign to Azjer.

4- The Route and Stages of Flatters' Mission to Ahaggar:

After Colonel Flatters presented the results of his first mission, which led him to the Azjer region, to the ministerial committee in Paris in June 1880, he received support to proceed with the second mission towards Ahaggar. In October 1880, Flatters arrived in Algiers, then went to the city of Laghouat, where the second mission was formed. This mission consisted of a group of French officers and soldiers, along with engineers and a scientific mission. The team included Colonel Flatters, Captain Masson, Lieutenant Dionos, Doctor Guiard, engineers Bringer, Roche, and Santin, and Denery, who was responsible for supplies and came from the third French riflemen battalion. Also part of the team were Pobeguïn from the third Zouave battalion, French cook Paul, and Louis Bram, who was Flatters' assistant. Additionally, the mission was made up of a group of local soldiers, camel drivers from the Ouled Naïl in Djelfa, Bedouins from the Labaa tribe in Laghouat, guides from Laghouat, Cha'anba tribes, and Tuaregs.

4-1 First Phase: November 18, 1880 - February 16, 1881:

¹⁰ Ismail El-Arabi, *The Great Sahara and Its Coasts*, Op. cit., p. 163.

¹¹ Jacques Valette, *Some New Aspects of the Flatters Expedition*, *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, No. 15-16, 1973, p. 25.

The mission, led by Flatters, departed on the second day of Eid al-Adha, November 18, 1880, from Laghouat. It arrived on November 27, 1880, at the Al-Grara oasis.¹² Some sources confirmed that the mission led by Flatters was a military one, composed of many soldiers and more than 100 cannons, aiming to take control of the Tamecins Oasis, which is one of the most important cities for the Tuareg tribes. The goal of the campaign was to prepare the conditions, study, and gather information to enable control of areas still outside French control in the Sahara.¹³

On November 30, 1880, Flatters arrived in Ouargla, where he joined a caravan led by the head of the Tijaniyyah Sufi order in Timimoun. On December 4, Flatters departed from Ouargla heading towards the Wadi Miya. From there, he decided to move toward Amguid, which is an entrance to the Ahaggar region. On December 21, 1880, Flatters met a caravan coming from In Salah. This caravan informed him that Ahitaghel Amenokal of the Ahaggar was in In Salah with 200 Mahari riders. Flatters sent a message to Ahitaghel inviting him to meet near his location in the Tidikelt area.¹⁴ On December 25, 1880, Flatters arrived in the area of Hassi Ain Souki, 150 kilometers from In Salah. A French military report mentioned that the people of the Tidikelt area had exaggerated the size of Flatters' forces, and that the people of Ain Salah had prepared for resistance if Flatters entered the region. Flatters' column approached and camped there for five days, awaiting a response from Ahitaghel.¹⁵ This waiting period was similar to the one he experienced during his first campaign on Azjer, when he awaited the arrival of Akhnokhen.

On January 18, 1881, Flatters reached Amguid and assigned Captain Masson to stay with the column there. Meanwhile, Flatters, accompanied by engineers and 20 armed men, moved ahead to conduct a geographical survey. On January 23, 1881, a message from Flatters was sent to Ahitaghel carrying the latter's response. Ahitaghel refused to meet Flatters but told him he would send a group of guides to take him to Sudan. On January 23, 1881, Flatters left Amguid heading towards Wadi Ighrgher. On January 25, 1881, the last mail from Flatters and the engineers arrived, and after that, news of the mission stopped.

On February 3, the mission reached the Sebkhah of Amadghur, where the Cha'anbah guides became fearful of proceeding.¹⁶ This shows Flatters' overconfidence and

¹² Fernand Patroni, *Accounts of Three Survivors of the Flatters Mission*, Limarle Printing, Constantine, 1884, pp. 4-6.

¹³ M. Bernard, *Second Flatters Mission: History and Report*, Adolphe Jourdan, Bookseller-Publisher, Algiers, 1882, p. 184.

¹⁴ General Bernard, *The Two Trans-Saharan Missions of Lieutenant-Colonel Flatters*, Bulletin of the Algerian Geographical Society and North Africa, 1909, p. 52.

¹⁵ J.V. Barbier, *The Missions of Colonel Flatters*, Paris, Bookseller-Publisher, 1895, p. 136.

¹⁶ J.V. Barbier, *The Missions of Colonel Flatters*, Op. cit., pp. 136-141.

determination to achieve his mission's goals, despite Ahitaghel's refusal to meet or host him.

After receiving Flatters' message, Ahitaghel sent a reply expressing his refusal to meet him and sent Tuareg guides to him.¹⁷ On February 5, 1881, the water supplies for Flatters' caravan ran out, but he decided to continue moving southward. On February 10, some Tuaregs arrived and told Flatters that they were guides sent by Ahitaghel. Starting from February 13, 1881, the behavior of the Cha'anbah guides accompanying Flatters began to alarm him, prompting him to increase night watch in the French column. The mission continued on a route without water, which led to dehydration and exhaustion of the camels.

On the morning of February 16, 1881, the Tuareg guides told Flatters that there was a well in the northwest, which they referred to as the Laghrama well. Flatters decided to go to the well alone with a group of officers and engineers, including Masson, Bringer, Engineer Roche, and Doctor Guiard, along with several soldiers. He left the rest of the column under the command of Lieutenant Dianos. Flatters set off with the Tuareg guides for the entire morning of February 16. The journey was long, and they strayed far from the camp. By midday, the guides informed him that they had made a mistake with the route and needed to change direction. By the afternoon, they were 15 kilometers away from Flatters' camp. The guides announced that they had found the well, which was in a rocky area filled with local trees. The camels approached to drink, and suddenly around 300 Tuareg fighters appeared and attacked Flatters and his companions, killing all the Frenchmen. Leading the attackers were relatives of Ahitaghel Amenokal of the Ahaggar.¹⁸ This reveals that the resistance had set a trap for the French mission, which had previously been informed of their rejection.

4-2 The Second Phase: 17 February 1881 – 23 March 1881

After the death of Flatters and a group of officers, engineers, and soldiers on 16 February 1881, some of the camel herders accompanying Flatters managed to return to the mission camp, which was 15 km away from the battle site. These herders informed Lieutenant Dianos and the remaining members of the mission that Flatters had been attacked by the Tuareg, and that Flatters, his deputy Captain Masson, and the other members had been killed immediately. In the mission camp, there were 56 individuals left, including the French Lieutenant Dianos, Santini, Bobigen, Margaret, Bram, and 49 soldiers and camel drivers. As soon as the news reached the French camp, the camp commander, Lieutenant Dianos, consulted with the members and decided to flee that very night, on 17 February 1881, heading north towards Ouargla, leaving all supplies, boxes, documents, and maps

¹⁷ M. Bernard, *Second Flatters Mission: History and Report*, Op. cit., pp. 330-332.

¹⁸ Henri Brosselard, *The Flatters Missions in the Land of the Touareg Azdjer and Ahaggar*, Op. cit., pp. 231-232.

behind. Some French officers wanted to attack the Tuareg, but the head of the Tijaniyya order accompanying the mission insisted on leaving. That same night, the Tuareg slaughtered the camels in celebration of Flatters' killing.¹⁹ French accounts of the retreat towards Ouargla in the same night attribute this retreat to the insistence of the head of the Tijaniyya order, Abdelkader Ben Hamida. These sources also mention that the French officers wanted to confront the Tuareg. There is a clear bias in the French writing, glorifying the French soldiers and attributing the retreat and defeat to the request of Abdelkader Ben Hamida, the head of the Tijaniyya order, who may, in fact, be innocent of this retreat since it was not customary for the French to seek advice from Algerians.

The French column began its retreat. At the same time, groups of Tuareg pursued the retreating French column to the north. These Tuareg groups, formed after the Battle of Bir al-Ghrama, consisted of 100 horsemen under the command of Atisi Aq Amelal, who chased the retreating French column, while another group was tasked with punishing and attacking those who had helped bring the French into the desert.²⁰

As the French column withdrew, there were sporadic skirmishes with the Ahaggar resistance. French sources greatly downplay the reasons for their defeat, attributing it to other factors, with an emphasis on avoiding any suggestion of a military defeat by local resisters. Some accounts even reach legendary proportions, mentioning that on 8 March, the column reached Ain el-Karma before Amqid. There, Tuareg envoys arrived to negotiate with the commander of the retreating French column, Dianos. On 9 March, some Tuareg offered the French column ground dates, which the French members ate, except for the Cha'anba and other Arabs who were with the French. After eating the dates, some French soldiers showed signs of madness, firing shots into the air or at other members of the column. These symptoms lasted for three days before stopping. One might question how it was possible for half of the mission to consume these dates while the rest did not, and this strange inconsistency supports our earlier judgment. The French narrative continues by stating that on 10 March, the Tuareg negotiators met with the head of the Tijaniyya order and some other members of the French column, where they were all killed by the Tuareg.

Upon reaching Amqid on 12 March, a battle took place between the Tuareg and the French column, resulting in the death of the commander of the French column, Dianos, and many other French members. Only Bobigen remained, tasked with leading the retreat towards Ouargla. The French column then moved from Amqid to Ain al-Hajjaj, where it arrived on 23 March 1881. From there, the new French commander sent two men from the column to search for the camp of Mohamed Ben Hajj Rajeh, a member of the Ouled Sidi Sheikh tribe who had accompanied Flatters on his mission to Ahaggar but had

¹⁹ Henri Brosselard, *The Flatters Missions in the Land of the Touareg Azdjer and Ahaggar*, Op. cit., pp. 235-236.

²⁰ J.V. Barbier, *The Missions of Colonel Flatters*, Op. cit., p. 153.

withdrawn upon reaching Amqid.²¹ French sources agree that the French column consumed ground dates mixed with a local herb from the Ahaggar region called *Afalhlah* (a plant that induces delirium and poisoning). This French narrative likely serves to downplay the heroism of the resistors who fiercely confronted Flatters' column. With the arrival of the French column and their search for Mohamed Ben Hajj Rajeh's camp, the third phase of the mission began.

4-3 The Third Phase: 24 March 1881 – 28 April 1881

The French column was left with 16 men, including the only Frenchman, Bobigen, who was killed by the surviving Arabs from the mission. On 2 April, some survivors reached Hassi Msikem, where they met a herder who took them to the camp of Mohamed Ben Hajj Rajeh. This latter individual, along with the remaining members of Flatters' mission, headed towards Ain al-Hajjaj. Meanwhile, two members of the French column had escaped and reached Ouargla on 28 March. The French authorities sent the deputy of Ouargla along with the Ouargla store and 400 Mehari camels towards Hassi Msikem, where they found twelve men rescued by Mohamed Ben Hajj Rajeh. They all returned to Ouargla. On 28 April 1881, the remnants of the mission arrived in Ouargla, after which some of the men who had fled during the retreat were sent to In-Salah and Ghademes.²²

The French military sought quick and decisive revenge against the Ahaggar resistors to maintain France's status and restore the dignity of the French army in the desert. Major Bellen, the commander of the Laghouat region, proposed mobilizing and arming the Cha'anba tribes against the Tuareg. However, the French army command reconsidered the idea of recruiting and arming the Cha'anba to regain the lost glory of the French army at Bir al-Ghrama. Some officers from the French general staff suggested launching a punitive military campaign in Tuareg territory, consisting of 200 armed men, 80 cavalry, and a caravan of 900 camels. However, these proposals were all frozen and stalled due to the French fear of the unknown in Tuareg lands.²³

5- Results of the Second Mission

France formed an investigative committee into the death of Flatters, which concluded that the primary responsibility for the death of the mission and its complete annihilation rested with Colonel Flatters himself. The committee also concluded that the Cha'anba were heavily involved in the killing of Flatters, with key figures among the Cha'anba being the brothers Si Khelifa Ben Ahmed Ben Sheikh, Ali Ben Ahmed Ben Sheikh, and Sheikh Ben

²¹ J.V. Barbier, *The Missions of Colonel Flatters*, Op. cit., pp. 156-160.

²² Henri Brosselard, *The Flatters Missions in the Land of the Touareg Azdjer and Ahaggar*, Op. cit., pp. 251-252.

²³ General Bernard, *The Two Trans-Saharan Missions of Lieutenant-Colonel Flatters*, Bulletin of the Algerian Geographical Society and North Africa, Algiers, 1909, p. 43-60.

Boujmia. The final report confirmed the alliance between the Cha'anba and the Tuareg against Flatters' expedition.²⁴ The French reports also stated that the Cha'anba involved in Flatters' killing were followers of Sheikh Bouamama,²⁵ and that the Ouled Sidi Sheikh were involved in the murder of Flatters. Additionally, the reports revealed the involvement of Tripoli and Ghademes in the killing of Flatters, as well as the involvement of Tidikelt, where there was incitement against Flatters and his campaign towards In-Salah. Remains of Flatters' mission, including boxes, tools, and rifles, were found in In-Salah, and the Ouled Sidi Sheikh obtained rifles from the same mission.²⁶

The killing of Flatters and his mission had a significant impact throughout the Muslim world, delivering a major blow to France's prestige in North Africa.²⁷ The outcome of Flatters' mission to Ahaggar was disastrous for the future of colonial expansion in the desert, causing all attempts at further penetration to stop. The Desert Railway Commission halted its work, and the Ministry of Public Works issued a statement declaring that the Desert Railway project would not proceed, leading to the dissolution of the commission and the final cancellation of the project.²⁸

After the killing of Flatters, general unrest and instability occurred in Tuareg regions, with several Europeans being assassinated in the Tuareg territories. Among these incidents, three French missionaries—Richardson, Morat, and Ballat—were killed near Ghademes on 4 January 1882, with the Tuareg being blamed for the attack. Other consecutive assassinations occurred in Tuareg lands, including the killing of Lieutenant Ballat in 1886, Lieutenant Campbell Doles in 1889 between Oulf and Aqabli on charges of complicity in the murder of Abdelkader Ben Bajouda in the Tidikelt region, the killing of Grambel in the Kuni region by the supporters of Rabah Al-Soudani, and the killing of Marquis Maurice near Ghademes in 1896.²⁹ In 1889, Lieutenant Mohamed Taybeh Ben Ibrahim,³⁰ accompanied by 20 local armed men, was killed by a large desert Arab force,

²⁴ J.V. Barbier, *The Missions of Colonel Flatters*, Op. cit., pp. 164-166.

²⁵ Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, Volume 6, *‘Ālam al-Ma‘rifah*, Algeria, 2011, p. 111.

²⁶ V. Barbier, *The Missions of Colonel Flatters*, Op. cit., p. 173.

²⁷ M. Bernard, *Second Flatters Mission: History and Report*, Op. cit., p. 335.

²⁸ Habib Khennifar, *The Popular Resistance to French Colonial Expansion in Southeastern Algeria from 1850 to 1914*, PhD Thesis, University of Djilali Liabes, Sidi Bel Abbes, 2019-2020, p. 226.

²⁹ Yahya Bouaziz, *History of Algeria in National and International Conferences*, p. 84.

³⁰ Mohamed Tayeb Ben Ibrahim: His father was the Sheikh of the Qadiriya Order in Nefta in the Tunisian Jerid, and his brother, Hashemi Ben Ibrahim, was the leader of the Qadiriya order in Ammiš, Wadi Souf. Mohamed Tayeb Ben Ibrahim journeyed to Ghadames and left a description of his trip. He was close to the French and aimed to showcase the influence of the Qadiriya order in the Sahara and Ahaggar. He was killed near In-Salah. See: Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, Volume 7, p. 46.

led by approximately 75 armed men, during an expedition to In-Salah.³¹ These events stemming from the Flatters mission had a massive impact on the desert, paralyzing French penetration for a long period, halting the Desert Railway project, delaying the exploration of the central desert, and resulting in the mysterious death of European explorer Charles Solier in Wadi Drâa in 1881.³²

Following the killing of Flatters and in order to allow the French armies to focus on desert expansion and respond to the murder of Flatters, General Thomasin, the governor of Oran, proposed gaining the loyalty of Si Kaddour Ben Hamza, the leader of the Sharaka branch and the fourth leader of the 1864 revolution led by the Ouled Sidi Sheikh against France. France sent Bouhafs El-Agwa to negotiate and sign an agreement with Kaddour Ben Hamza in May 1883. One of the key stipulations of the agreement was that French authorities would rebuild the Sidi Sheikh mausoleum in the village of El-Abied Sidi Sheikh, which had been destroyed by Négrier in the summer of 1881. Additionally, the French would provide an annual compensation of sixty thousand francs to Si Kaddour and his family for what was seized from them since 1864. Furthermore, Si Kaddour Ben Hamza was to be appointed head of a large command in El-Bayadh, with other members of his family appointed to positions under him. Fourthly, Si Kaddour and his family were tasked with convincing all members of the Sidi Sheikh family residing in Morocco to return to Algeria, regardless of their condition. This was successfully achieved a few weeks after the agreement, with the majority of this family returning voluntarily to Algeria and France in 1883.³³ This suggests that after the failure of the French campaign to Ahaggar, the French occupation aimed to resolve all matters to focus on a larger, stronger campaign than expected in the first campaign and to take revenge on the Ahaggar resisters.

Conclusion:

Flatters embarked on a mission to Ahaggar as part of the French Trans-Saharan Railway project. He completely and utterly failed in his expectations regarding Tuareg land, as he was subjected to a massive and devastating attack by the Tuareg on 16 February 1881 at Bir al-Ghrama, which led to the annihilation of the French mission. The remaining survivors were pursued to Ouargla, where they were hunted down and eliminated, except for a few camel drivers who survived and returned to Ouargla, where they delivered the news of Flatters' end. France subsequently attempted a military response to the death of Flatters but was unable to advance in Tuareg territory, delaying the French entry into the desert by about twenty years. Additionally, Flatters failed in his mission scientifically, unlike his first mission, where he achieved some results in geographical aspects, the

³¹ Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, Volume 4, p. 49.

³² Demoulin, *Exploration of the Sahara*, *Annales de Géographie*, t40, No. 226, p. 352.

³³ Yahya Bouaziz, *The Revolutions of Algeria in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 298.

survey of southern Ouargla, and recording information about the wildlife and vegetation of both Azjer and Ahaggar.

Flatters' mission was a complete failure, as he did not succeed in establishing political relations with the Tuareg. His mission also contributed to the resurgence of national spirit and resistance in the greater Sahara region. The Tuareg, the Cha'anba, the Ouled Sidi Sheikh, the inhabitants of In-Salah, Ghademes, and Tuat all participated in the destruction of Flatters. After the killing of Flatters, Ahitaghel sent a direct message to the Sublime Porte, confirming his adoption of the operation and his jihad against the French foreign invasion. Ahitaghel also sought assistance from the Ottoman state, which highlighted the unity of the Islamic world at that time, and the news of Flatters' massacre spread during the Hajj season in Mecca.

The Tuareg participated in the Battle of Bir al-Ghrama on 16 February 1881, and in the pursuit of the remnants of the French column, with the Tuareg tribes playing the largest military role. Additionally, the Cha'anba, from In-Salah, were involved in planning and executing the attack on the French column. The operation demonstrated the military and political strength of the Tuareg tribes, as Flatters failed to anticipate their attack, even though the Tuareg army was moving parallel to the French column.

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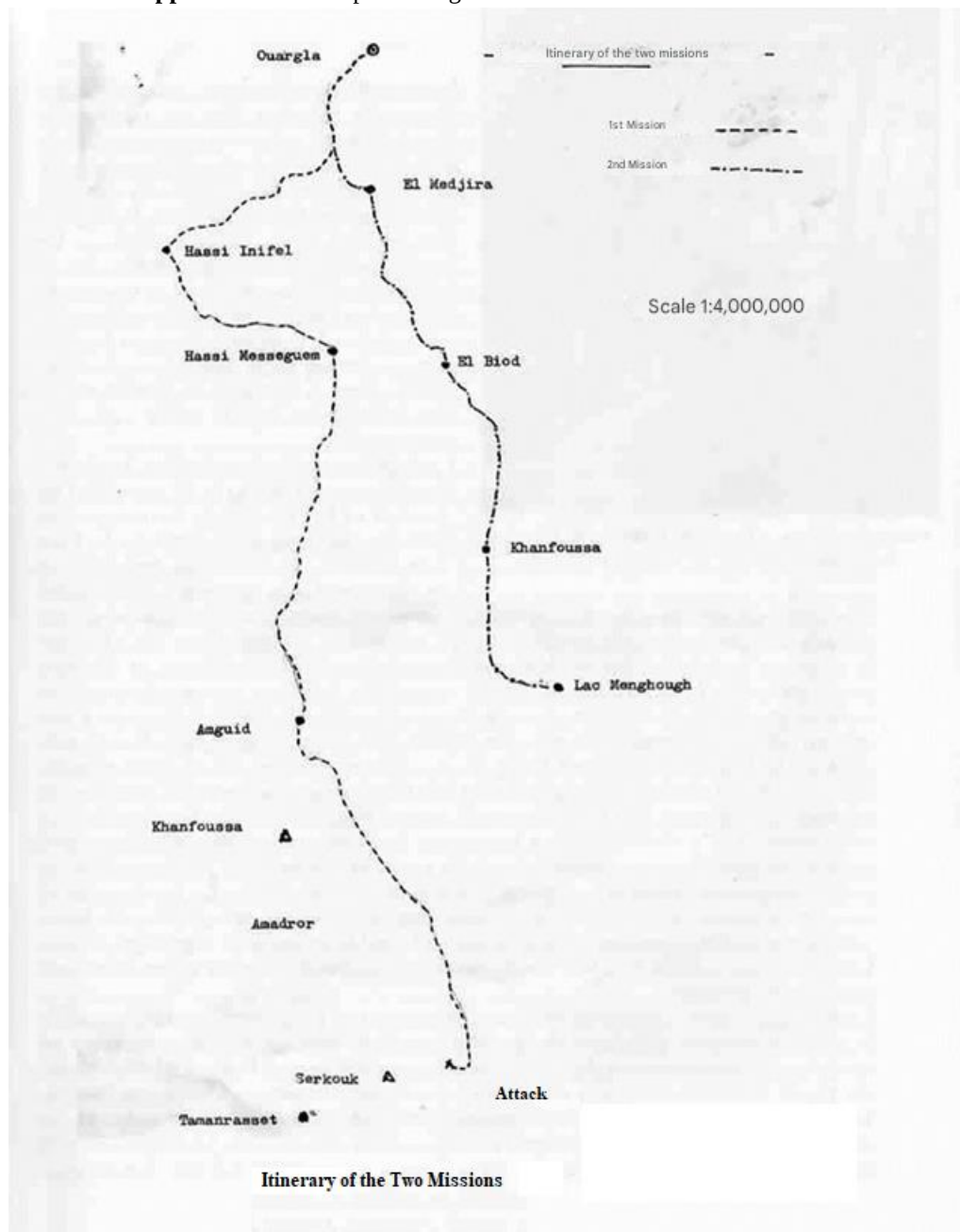
Appendices :

Appendix No. 1: Portrait of Colonel Flatters



Source: Henri Brosselard, *Les Deux Missions Flatters*, Librairie Furme Juvet et Cie, Paris, page de garde

Appendix No. 2: Map Showing the Route of Colonel Flatters' Missions



The Tragic Flatters Mission, Jean-Jacques Bourrette, p. 49

Source: <https://www.cerclealgerianiste-lyon.org/>