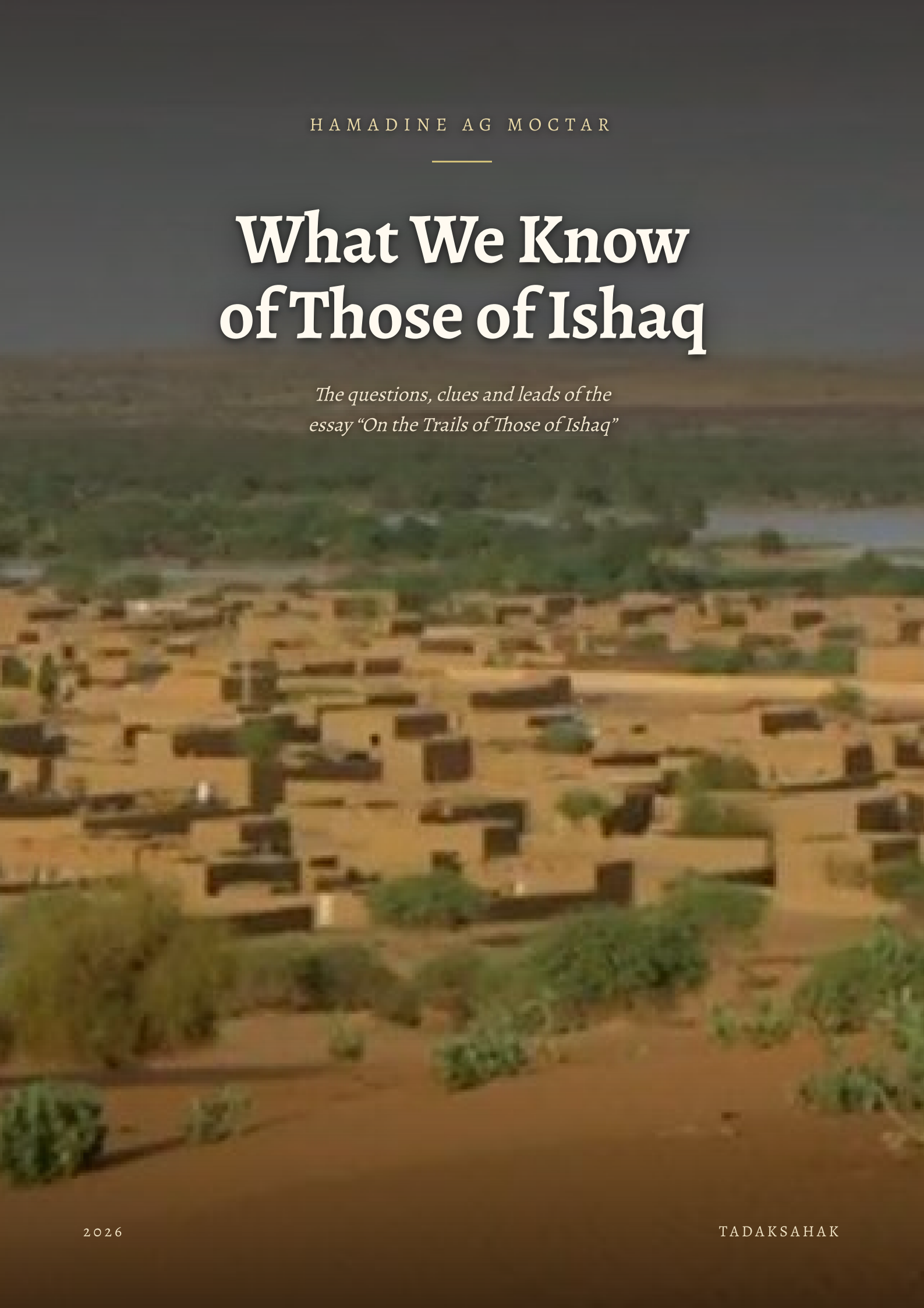


An aerial photograph of a village in Mali, showing numerous small, rectangular, mud-brick houses with dark roofs, clustered together. The village is surrounded by dry, reddish-brown earth and sparse green vegetation. In the background, there is a dense line of green trees and a body of water under a clear sky.

HAMADINE AG MOCTAR

What We Know of Those of Ishaq

*The questions, clues and leads of the
essay “On the Trails of Those of Ishaq”*

Hamadine AG MOCTAR, researcher and developer, founder of the site, member of the research group appointed by the Permanent Secretariat of the Idaksahak community. An abridgement of his personal essay contributed to the group's work: its propositions await the group's decision and do not bind the commission.

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Before You Begin

This little book is the opening of the essay “On the Trails of Those of Ishaq” (Hamadine AG MOCTAR, 2026). It asks the questions, presents the method and shows the clues. The answers, the discussion of each source, the quotations and the unpublished documents are in the full book, which should be consulted before any scholarly citation.

One rule holds for both: always to distinguish what the documents say, what researchers say about them, and what the author concludes.

1. A Question, a Method

Where do the Idaksahak come from — “those of Ishaq”, a people of the Ménaka region (Mali) and the Azawagh (Niger), whose language, Tadaksahak, belongs to Northern Songhay? Tuareg and Songhay neighbours, Kunta scholars, colonial administrators, linguists and Idaksahak families have each given their answer. Those answers contradict one another.

To decide between them, the essay applies a simple rule: a claim is worth only as much as those who make it. Two independent families of sources saying the same thing without copying each other make a convergent fact. A single tradition, however old, remains a tradition. Two texts that quote each other count as one voice.

Applied without indulgence, this rule brings down certainties thought to be settled, and confirms others no one expected.

2. What Is Established

Four points unite all the sources.

The name. Idaksahak means “those of Ishaq”. But a name of this kind expresses belonging, not necessarily descent.

A composite people. Kel Abakot, Kel Tabho, Sheriffen, Iduguritan, Ihanakatan, Ibalanghatan: each fraction has its own history. The real question is therefore not “from whom do the Idaksahak descend?” but “from whom does each fraction descend, and when did it join the others?”

A Northern Songhay language, deeply reshaped by Tamasheq, down to its grammar.

A place within the Iwellemmedan order in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Everything else is debated. That is where the inquiry begins.

3. What Tradition Says

Internal tradition links several lineages to a sharif, Muhammad al-Mukhtar, known as Aïta. But the Ifoghas of the Adagh claim the same ancestor. Two peoples for one founder: what happened? The essay shows what the anthropologist Dida Badi discovered about the use of these genealogies — and why the most quoted sentence of a great Kunta scholar on Aïta carries less weight than is thought.

Another tradition brings part of the group from the north, through the Tafilalt and Timbuktu. Yet the Tafilalt is the country of Sijilmasa, head of the route held in the Middle Ages by an almost forgotten Berber people. The essay follows that route.

4. Who Was Ishaq?

The dossier knows at least six Ishaqs: the prophet, son of Abraham; Ishaq al-Awrabi, who welcomed Idris I in the eighth century; the Songhay askias Ishaq I and Ishaq II; and two ancestors of lineages of the Maghreb and the Sahara.

On 8 October 2026, the group's research commission adopted the lead of Ishaq al-Awrabi. The essay explains why it is the best working hypothesis, what is still missing to make it a conclusion, and which questions it leaves open.

It also examines an Israelite origin often repeated among neighbours: it shows where it comes from, and why it proposes to set it aside.

5. Six New Leads

A language beneath the language. Beneath Tamasheq, Tadaksahak keeps words that no neighbouring language explains. A linguist recognises in them the trace of another Berber, called "Western". Which one, and what people spoke it?

Tabelbala. An oasis in south-western Algeria still speaks the sister language of Tadaksahak. A Kunta manuscript brings the ancestor Aïta from there. Coincidence or lead?

Bactou. A Songhay woman of power in Timbuktu, wife of Aïta according to Ifoghas tradition. Do the elders know her name?

The chronicles of Timbuktu. Three works held at the Ahmed Baba Institute, pointed out by Albachar Ag Hamadou. What can be expected of them, and what they must not be made to say.

The road from Gao to Takaddā. In 1353, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa probably crossed the Azawagh. He does not name the Idaksahak, but he describes the world in which their ancestors lived. What he saw, what he left unsaid, and what the autograph manuscript of his account, kept in Paris, will make it possible to check.

A rediscovered manuscript. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Kunta scholar Shaykh Baye wrote a notice on the Dawsahaq, kept in the library of the Institut de France. It calls them “people of peace and of study”, attaches them to the “tribes of Es-Suq” and mentions their “relations” with a neighbouring group. Its photograph, Arabic text and translation are published in an appendix of the full book, in open access; the essay gives its critical reading.

6. Journeys and Exoduses

The ancient paths remain traditions; the recent exoduses are documented. The colonial conquest, when the fractions made opposite choices; the droughts of 1973 and 1984; the rebellion of the 1990s; the wars and the camps. These exoduses scattered the witnesses. The essay follows them, fraction by fraction.

7. A Letter of 1958

On 30 May 1958, chiefs of the Niger Bend wrote to the President of the French Republic. What did they ask, and did the Idaksahak sign? The essay publishes a critical edition of the letter. It also found that three of the four photographs received had been retouched by artificial intelligence — hence a rule for the whole dossier.

8. Twelve Propositions

The essay submits twelve propositions to the research group. Here are three.

1. Idaksahak means “those of Ishaq”: belonging, not necessarily descent.
3. Tadaksahak is a Northern Songhay language, deeply reshaped by Tamasheq.
12. Every digital document is kept raw, with its chain of transmission; a retouched image proves nothing.

The other nine — on Aïta, on Ishaq al-Awrabi, on the Israelite origin, on Western Berber — are argued in the full book.

9. What the Full Book Contains

Eleven chapters and three appendices, some fifty pages, in French, English and Arabic, online and as a PDF.

The discussion of each source, with its quotations and pages; the six leads, each followed as far as the documents allow; the twelve propositions and their reasons; the critical edition of the 1958 letter; a chronology from 951 to 2026; a verified bibliography; and what remains to be investigated, team

by team.

The full book is available on the Tadaksahak website, in the library. This work is carried out at the author's own expense, without any funding: every purchase makes it possible to continue the interviews with the elders.

In One Sentence

The history of the Idaksahak is not a blank page: a few solid certainties, traditions awaiting their proof, and leads no one had yet followed. The full book follows them.

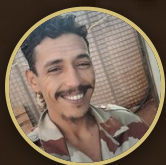
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What We Know of Those of Ishaq

Who are the Idaksahak, “those of Ishaq”, and where do they come from? A name, a language, a disputed ancestor, six possible Ishaqs, a forgotten manuscript in Paris, a traveller of 1353 who may have met their ancestors without naming them.

This little book opens the inquiry and asks the questions. The answers — and the documents on which they rest — are in the full book, “On the Trails of Those of Ishaq”.



Born in the desert, Hamadine AG MOCTAR learned Tadaksahak from his mother, and his other languages on the road: French in government offices, Arabic in mosques, Hausa in markets, English on the roads of exile. He has lived through exile and the camps: the trails of this book are his own as well. An interpreter, translator, developer and writer, he created the Tadaksahak site to “connect our worlds” and keep the memory of his people. He is a member of the research group appointed by the Permanent Secretariat of the Idaksahak community.

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