



Catherine Miller, Alexandrine Barontini, Marie-Aimée Germanos, Jairo Guerrero and Christophe Pereira (dir.)

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An Omani Evolving Lexicon: From Carl Reinhardt (1894) to the Present Day

Ph.d. Roberta Morano

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An Omani Evolving Lexicon: From Carl Reinhardt (1894) to the Present Day

Ph.d. Roberta Morano

1. Carl Reinhardt and his work

- ¹ Carl Reinhardt's work – *Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen in 'Oman und Zanzibar*, dated 1894 – still plays a very prominent role in the linguistic and neo-Arabic dialectological field. In fact, the Omani variety that he describes is different both from the one spoken in the Capital area (described by Jayakar 1889) and the one spoken on the coast.
- ² In the introduction (Reinhardt 1894: VII-XVI), Reinhardt states that it took him five years of hard work to collect all the material presented in the book and that – due to illness – he almost would have given up if his teacher Professor Theodor Noeldeke (1836-1930), the famous orientalist, had not encouraged him to continue. According to Noeldeke, only Reinhardt's data provide a clear overview of Omani Arabic, despite the high value of Jayakar's repertoire.
- ³ The dialect described by Reinhardt is the one spoken in Wādī Banī Ḥarūṣ, today in the al-'Awābī district (northern Oman). The people he employed as informants ('Abdallāh Ḥarūṣī and 'Alī al-'Abrī from al-'Awābī) were natives from Oman who had only been in Zanzibar for a short while. Furthermore, Reinhardt states that this vernacular was spoken, at his time, by the Omani court and 2/3 of the Arabs living in Zanzibar. Thus, we can presume that it was so widespread as to require the writing of a practical and quick guide for German soldiers quartered on the East African colonies.
- ⁴ The Banū Ḥarūṣ played an important role throughout Omani history, primarily in Ibāḍīyya¹: descendants of the Yaḥmad tribe – a branch of al-'Azd –, they moved to Oman during the pre-Islamic period, settling in a valley named after them Wādī Banī Ḥarūṣ. The valley is situated among the western heights of the Ḥaḡar Mountains and is

26 km long, ending in the Ġabal Aḥḍār². The Yaḥmad provided most of the Ibāḍi imams of Oman until the arrival of the Ya‘rubi³ dynasty in XI/XVII century.

- 5 Reinhardt’s work is divided into four parts: 1. Phonology; 2. Morphology; 3. Remarks on the syntax and 4. Texts and stories (including some war songs). The feature that distinguishes this book from other teaching material is the fact that it is almost exclusively written in the Latin alphabet.
- 6 While, on the whole, appreciating the usefulness of Reinhardt’s work, the reviews published by experienced Semitic scholars and Arabists such as Theodor Noeldeke (1895a/b) and Karl Vollers (1895) pointed out a few obscure points in his description. Vollers, in particular, voiced some doubts as to the reliability of Reinhardt’s book because of its educational rather than descriptive purpose.
- 7 Regarding morphology and syntax, Reinhardt’s analysis is fairly accurate and detailed, though the lack of a lexical repertoire somewhat decreases its clarity.

2. Classification of Omani Arabic

- 8 Clive Holes, in his paper on Omani Arabic classification (Holes 1989), analyses features shared by all Omani dialects, both *ḥaḍari* and *badu*:
 - The 2nd feminine singular possessive/object suffix is universally *-/š/*, not *-/č/*, except some Bedouin dialects of North-East where it is realised as *-/č/* and the al-Wahība dialect, where it is not affricated and is realised as *-/k/*;
 - An *-/in(n)/-* infix is obligatorily inserted in all Omani dialects between an active participle having verbal force and a following object pronoun. Some Omani speakers also insert this infix between the imperfect verb and the suffix object, in particular on the Bāṭina coast (Holes 1989: 448);
 - The absence of the “ghawa syndrome”⁴, peculiar of some central, northern and eastern Arabic dialects. Exceptions are some Bedouin vernaculars spoken in the areas at the UAE border (e.g. Buraymi, Oman);
 - Feminine plural verb, adjective and pronoun forms occur regularly⁵;
 - The internal passive of verbs Form I and II is of common occurrence. Holes (1989: 452) classification goes further subdividing these dialects in four main groups, two sedentary (S) and two Bedouin (B), which have some substantial differences, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Holes' classification of Omani Arabic

SYSTEM S ₁	SYSTEM S ₂	SYSTEM B ₁	SYSTEM B ₂
/q/ < CA /q/	/k/ < CA /q/	/g/ < CA /q/	/g/ < CA /q/
/k/ < CA /k/	/č/ < CA /k/	/k/ < CA /k/	/k/ < CA /k/
/g/ or /ğ/ < CA /ğ/	/ğ/ < CA /ğ/	/y/ < CA /ğ/	/y/ < CA /ğ/
Syllabic structure: CvC(v)Cv(C)	Syllabic structure: CvC(v)Cv(C)	Syllabic structure: CCvCv(C) or CvC(v)Cv(C)	Syllabic structure: CCvCv(C) and CvC(v)Cv(C)
only form <i>qahwa</i>	only form <i>kahwa</i>	forms <i>ghawa</i> and <i>gahwa</i>	only form <i>gahwa</i>
- /š/ 2FS pronoun	- /š/ 2FS pronoun	- /č/ 2FS pronoun	- /š/ 2FS pronoun
distinctive of Omani interior	central areas of Ġabal Aḥḍar	Similar to Gulf dialects	Western and Southern Oman

- 9 According to this classification, the al-‘Awābī district vernacular belongs to the system S₁.

3. Location, methodology and participants

- 10 The al-‘Awābī district is located in the Bāṭina region, north of Oman and consists of al-‘Awābī itself, a town with a population of about 15000, and twenty-four little villages spread between it and the Wādī Banī Ḥarūṣ.
- 11 Wādī Banī Ḥarūṣ is about 26 km long deep in al-Ḥaḡar mountains and ends at Ġabal Aḥḍar, the highest summit of Oman. The area is famous because of its heritage and history: in fact, in the Wādī there are many antique mosques and cave inscriptions, telling the story of great and famous imams of Ibāḍiyya.
- 12 The collection and analysis of lexical items has been one of the richest areas of investigation of al-‘Awābī vernacular. The fieldwork was conducted in the al-‘Awābī district between the months of February and April 2017. Participants were mainly from the al-Ḥarūṣī family, consisting of eleven women between twenty-eight and seventy-five years old, all of them school or university educated. They were born and still live in al-‘Awābī.
- 13 Other participants were from the Wādī Banī Ḥarūṣ, which has a slightly older population (between fifty and sixty-five years old). Some of them were originally from the Wādī and then moved to al-‘Awābī, some others remained in the mountains or in the valleys of the Wādī.

- 14 Participants were chosen according to three main criteria: age, gender and level of education. Based on the age of speakers, people has been divided in three main groups: 20-35 years old (young), 35-60 years old (middle-aged) and over 60 (elders).
- 15 Informants were always ready to provide various items and discuss them with each other. Some of the speakers recalled some items as very old and not in use anymore, or used by their parents' or grandparents' generation.
- 16 People living in the Wādī are usually not university educated and conduct a more traditional lifestyle, farming or breeding goats and sometimes camels.
- 17 Accessing men was more difficult for the researcher, except for elderly ones.
- 18 The research was conducted by submitting word lists divided by categories (food, body parts, plants, animals, tools and diseases) to participants, recording free speech and by direct questions. In some cases, vocal messages on WhatsApp were also used.

4. Omani lexicon

- 19 Lexical data presented by Reinhardt is extremely rich and characterized throughout by some specific traits which make this vernacular different from any other Southern Arabic dialect, mainly due to the geographic position of the country and to its linguistic contacts with different populations during its history.
- 20 Among Reinhardt's lexical items there are some archaic features in the semantics, such as *rām* "to be able to" from the Semitic root RYM, which means "to be high, raise" and also nouns known in other dialects but presented here with unusual meanings (e.g. the root ĠM' "to gather" stands in this variety for "to sweep" and *mǧumma* for "broom").
- 21 An example is provided by fieldwork data:
- (a) *mā yrūm miṭla' li-inna mā fi daraǧ*
 "He couldn't go up because there weren't any stairs"
 In the vernacular the use of the Arabic verb SYR to mean "to go" alongside the dialectal form RWḤ is also attested, as follows:
- (b) *sāyir martīn 'ilā l-mustašfi*
 "He went to the hospital twice"
- (c) *taww asīr ilā l-Rustāq*
 "I am now going to Rustaq"
- 22 The lexical items discussed in this paper are presented according to the format of Behnstedt and Woidich's *Word Atlas of Arabic dialects / Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* of 2011. The categories chosen are: food, house, weather, animals, body and disease.

4.1 Food

- 23 In this category names of spices, seafood, vegetables and fruit are presented.
- 24 Among the spices, we find: *zangabīl* for "ginger", *Ḥardāl* for "mustard", *qranfel* for "clove", *na'na'* for "mint", *hīl* for "cardamom", *zayt* for "oil" and *Ḥall* for "vinegar".
- 25 *Ḥobbār* is the general term used for "squid", but in its plural form *ḥobbārāt* it also means "seafood". The names for "sardines" are interesting to note in this group: alongside the use of the most common *sardīn* and *'ūma*, some elder speakers still use the word *barriyya*, which has been recognised among the youngsters as old and, in some cases, completely unknown.

- 26 Names of fruit and vegetables present many interesting peculiarities of al-‘Awābī vernacular. Examples are the use of the Arabic noun *zaytūn* as “guava”, whilst in other parts of the Arabic-speaking world it means “olive” and the presence of ancient and uncommon words, such as *suḥḥ* for “dates”. There are also nouns specifically used in the al-‘Awābī district, such as *gūḥ* for “watermelon” and *ġurġūr* for “peas” (outside al-‘Awābī people tend to use the Arabic *bāsilla* to be clearer). Table 2 shows the most common names of fruit and vegetables in the al-‘Awābī district:

Table 2. Names of fruit and vegetables in the al-‘Awābī district

Fawākih	Fruit	Ḥoḍrawāt	Vegetables
‘anba	mango	filfil rūmī	green pepper
‘inab	grapes	ṭamāṭin	tomatoes
fifāya	papaya	būbar	pumpkin
kummitrah	pear	wā‘a	squash
sanṭāra	tangerine	kūsa	courgette
šammām	white melon	laymūn	lemon
gūḥ	watermelon	ḥyār	cabbage
suḥḥ	dates	‘ayš / rizz	rice
zaytūn	guava	ġurġūr / bāsilla	peas
rummān	pomegranate	dang	chickpeas
nargīl	coconut	findāl	sweet potatoes
mūz	banana	qamḥa	wheat
tīn	fig	‘adis	red lentils
sta‘fāl	large citrus fruit	zaytūn aḥḍar	olive
furšād	berries	lubyā	beans

4.2 House and Utensils

- 27 Nouns indicating house parts and kitchen stuff tend to differ between al-‘Awābī and Wādī Banī Ḥarūš. Usually in the Wādī it is more likely to find older words or words recognised in the village as ancient. An example of this is the word used for “room”: in al-‘Awābī the noun *ġurfa* is commonly used, whereas in the Wādī the noun *ḥigra* is used instead. The “sitting room” is usually *šala* or *ḍahrīz*, but elder people and people from the Wādī call it *barza*.
- 28 ‘arīš is used in the Wādī to name “open hut made of palm tree branches”, a very common shelter in the mountains. Table 3 shows names of utensils:

Table 3. Names of utensils in the al-‘Awābī district

Muwā‘in	Kitchen Stuff
ḡalla / briq	coffee pot / Arabian coffee pot
mḡamša	spoon
kūb	tea cup
glas	glass (of any kind)
furn	oven
ḡaḡla	jug (used to keep water cold)
mḡumma ⁶	broom
ṭawla	table
kašra / zibbala (<i>middle-aged people</i>)	rubbish
mkabba	tin, plastic box

4.3 Weather

- 29 In the al-‘Awābī district some specific names for the cardinal points North and South are used. “North” can be realised as *šamāl* or *‘ālī* in al-‘Awābī, whilst people in Wādī Banī Ḥarūš use the word *sāfil*, generally recognised as old. “South” is *ḡanūb* or *ḡadrā* in al-‘Awābī and *‘ilwā* in Wādī Banī Ḥarūš.
- 30 The names for “rainbow” (*qūs ar-raḡma* / *qūs allāh*) and for “rain” (*sēl* and *maṭar*) are also interesting: *sēl* is more commonly used to indicate the heavy rains of cold season, when wadis floods and big rivers comes down from the mountains, whilst *maṭar* is the noun used generally for “rain”. “Cloud” is realised both as *saḡāb* and *ḡamma*, with no difference in the use. Finally, the noun *bill*, which indicates specifically the blossom of a lemon tree, is also used to mean “spring”.

4.4 Animals

- 31 There are a few studies on the flora and fauna of Oman, especially in recent decades⁶. Specific types of animals and plants are widespread across the entirety of Oman, but others are more peculiar to individual areas of the country. Table 4 presents a list of the most common names for animals and insects in the al-‘Awābī district:

Table 4. Names of animals and insects in the al-‘Awābī district

ba‘ūd	mosquito	luġġa	gecko
sannūr / qaṭ	cat	šaḥlūb / abū barīṣ	small lizard (not poisonous)
nimr	tiger	šamaṣ / ḍabb	big lizard (not poisonous and edible)
ga‘d	ewe	šangūb / garād	grasshopper
ġanem	goat	fanzūz	black and white insect
šaḥl	kid	šaqaṛ / šāhīn	falcon / peregrine
‘agl	calf	nisr	vulture
anqabūt	spider	šarrīḥ	date cricket
qanfād	hedgehog	‘anfūf / ḥafāš	small bat
šarnafa	crysalis	gadal	big bat
yarqa	larva	surṭān al-baḥr šangūb al-baḥr	crab
sannūr al-ginn	hairy caterpillar	ḥalzūn al-ma’	snail
dūdat al-‘arḍ	worm	tūr al-ginn	slug

- 32 The most common name used for “cat” is certainly *sannūr*, but sometimes children and kids up to fifteen or sixteen years old name it *qaṭ*. In al-‘Awābī there are some specific names used for “grasshopper” (*šangūb*) and for a “small and not poisonous lizard” (*abū barīṣ*), which is called *šaḥlūb* in other parts of Oman. Finally, the use in al-‘Awābī of a specific word for “crab” (*šangūb al-baḥr*) is peculiar, since the al-‘Awābī district is in the mountainous region of Northern Oman.

4.5 Body and diseases

- 33 Most of the lexical items presented in this section have been collected in Wādī Banī Ḥarūṣ, where the *wasm*, the traditional method of healing by cauterisation, is still in use. This practice is common among the people living in remote areas of Oman and it consists of cauterizing specific parts of the body in relation to the disease or the illness presented.
- 34 Table 5 shows a list of words used in this practice and in everyday life:

Table 5. Names of parts of the body and disease in the al-‘Awābī district

qafad	nape
muḥra	nose
ṭūm	mouth
šifa/šafāyif	lips
mazbala/mzābil*	
garrīn	throat
‘arq an-nisā	sciatic nerve
šīša	throbbing in the leg
ḥumma al-halāliyya	high and persistent fever
šaqīqa	headache
ḡašya	gastritis
ḥumūḍa	heartburn
lu‘an	nausea
ar-rīḥ	hernia
mu‘ālda	bones pressing on the lungs preventing

* This form has been recognised as old by some young speakers in the Wādī.

5. Remarks

- 35 During the collection of the data, many elderly speakers were able to recognise and detect old words not in use anymore or used much less nowadays. A clear example of this is the verb *yšūm*, only used in its imperfective form, which means “to go (inland)”. The origin of the verb is not certain, a hypothesis might be the Classical Arabic root ŠYM “to go to Syria (Bilād aš-šām)” since “going inland” from Oman would necessarily mean “going north” (towards Syria).
- 36 The adverb *hest* is still in use to mean “very, many”, although not much among young people any more. It comes from the Persian verb *hast* “to exist” and the correlation between the two might also be valid for the more widespread adverb, *wāḡid* (“many, much”) and the Arabic root WĠD (“to exist”).
- 37 *Guḍri* is a name of Hindi origin used in the past to indicate a “woollen blanket”, nowadays it has been replaced by the noun *baṭṭāniyyah*.

6. Conclusion

- 38 The main purpose of this paper was to analyse some interesting lexical data collected during the fieldwork and match them with Reinhardt’s lexical core. Going further into the analysis of these data it has been clear that many of them were not valid anymore, since they were recognised only by elder speakers and almost completely unknown to people from middle-age or young groups.
- 39 Broadly speaking, speakers from Wādī Banī Ḥarūš tend to use words perceived as old-fashioned by people in al-‘Awābī or young people in general. Moreover, not school or

university educated speakers use nouns sometimes considered outdated or totally unknown.

- 40 In more recent times, influences from other Omani vernaculars came into use as well as many more English loanwords and expressions.
- 41 The brief description given in this paper wants to be preliminary to a wider study on Omani lexicon, which will involve other semantic categories (e.g. poetic lexicon). Truth is that it does not exist a systematic study of Omani lexicon, which would allow us to have a clear lexical and semantic classification of its varieties. Thus, a deeper and renovated interest in the Omani lexicon is desirable.

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NOTES

1. One of the major ḥariḡite branches, named after its founder 'Abd Allah b. Ibāḍ al-Murri al-Tamīmi.
2. The highest peak in the chain that also includes the ḡabal al-šamm (3018m).
3. The Omani dynasty that reigned between 1024/1615 and 1164/1749.

4. It is a syllabic readjustment: the tonic syllable CaC, where C2 is a guttural /ح ڡ ھ ھ/, becomes CCa (e.g. *qahwa* “coffee” [CA] becomes *ghawa* in Bedouin dialects of Najd). In some other Bedouin varieties, it is possible to find the form *gahawa*, but essential is the insertion of the stressed vowel -a- after the guttural consonant.
 5. This feature is shared with some dialects of central and southern Arabia and make them distinctive from other Gulf dialects, where the gender distinction has been neutralized.
 6. For further details, see works of Shahina Ghazanfar (1994) and Dionisius Agius (2002, 2005).
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ABSTRACTS

Oman is a country in constant evolution linguistically, economically and socially. Most of the linguistic studies carried out so far in the Sultanate are located in specific areas of the country and date back to the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Carl Reinhardt’s work – *Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen in ‘Oman und Zanzibar*, dated 1894 – is one of the most detailed and richest descriptions of Omani Arabic, specifically of the grammar, including the phonology and morphology, of the Banū Kharūṣ vernacular, spoken in the area of Nizwa and Rustāq (northern Oman), but also among the élite of Zanzibar island. The main purpose of his work was to provide a valuable linguistic guide to the German soldiers quartered on the island and in the Tanganyika region, which were an imperial German colony for a short time. The material supplied by Reinhardt still plays an absolutely essential role for neo-Arabic linguistics and dialectology, although it has some significant issues, such as the lack of Arabic original script and of a comprehensive glossary.

Reinhardt’s lexical data, nevertheless, is extremely rich and characterized by some specific traits which make this vernacular different from any other Southern Arabic dialect.

In this paper, I will try to outline this richness of Omani lexicon, starting from some examples in Reinhardt’s nineteenth-century core and exploring the variety and changes they underwent over time. These examples will be presented for specific semantic categories (e.g. body parts, food, animals), following the same format as that of the Behnstedt and Woidich’s *Word Atlas of Arabic dialects / Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* (2011). Furthermore, a group of specific variations between the original meaning of a root and its different use in the Banū Kharūṣ vernacular, and a few borrowings from foreign languages will be presented and analysed.

INDEX

Keywords: Arabic dialectology, Omani Arabic, Oman, Carl Reinhardt, neo-Arabic linguistics, Arabic lexicon.

AUTHOR

PH.D. ROBERTA MORANO

University of Leeds