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### Historical Arabic Dialectology: Interpreting the Sources

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**Publication date**

2019

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Arabic Dialectology

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Zack, L. (2019). Historical Arabic Dialectology: Interpreting the Sources. In W. Arnold, & M. Klimiuk (Eds.), *Arabic Dialectology: Methodology and Field Research* (pp. 207-238). Harrassowitz Verlag.

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Werner Arnold & Maciej Klimiuk (Eds.)  
Arabic Dialectology



Werner Arnold & Maciej Klimiuk (Eds.)

# Arabic Dialectology

Methodology and Field Research

2019

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

The publication of the volume has been supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) under the programme 'Kleine Fächer – Große Potenziale' through the project 'GozoDia: Gemeinschaftsorientierte dialektologische Studien zur Sprachdynamik der Insel Gozo (Malta)', grant no. 01UL1834X.

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek  
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Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet  
über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet  
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Printed on permanent/durable paper.  
Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum AG  
Printed in Germany  
ISBN 978-3-447-11275-8

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# Historical Arabic Dialectology: Interpreting the Sources

Liesbeth Zack

The description of historical Arabic dialects brings with it a whole plethora of challenges. The most important one is that there are no native speakers left of these dialects, with the consequence that researchers have to rely on written sources in order to discover more about the historical stages of Arabic dialects. These sources are often hard to find and even harder to interpret. This chapter will address some of these challenges, from the interpretation of Arabic orthographical habits in writing the dialect, the use of text editions, and the (un)reliability of historical sources, to the use of Latin transcription or alphabets other than the Arabic for writing the Arabic language. The chapter illustrates these issues with samples of Arabic dialect materials from various periods and origins.

## 1 Introduction

The fundamental methodological fact that historical linguists have to face is that they have no control over their data. Texts are produced by a series of historical accidents [...]. The great art of the historical linguist is to make the best of this bad data—'bad' in the sense that it may be fragmentary, corrupted, or many times removed from the actual productions of native speakers. (Labov 1972b: 100)

This chapter deals with conducting research on historical dialectological data. It will focus on written sources dating from before the invention of audio recording devices<sup>1</sup> and their subsequent popularity at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Unlike linguists working on modern dialects, researchers

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1 By Thomas Edison in 1877.

2 As far as I am aware, the first sound recordings of Arabic are those made by the Dutch Orientalist Christaan Snouck Hurgronje in Mecca in 1906–1909 (see Urkevich 2015:



working on historical linguistics cannot elicit data from informants. They have to rely on written materials, with all their imperfections, ambiguities and obscurities, and have no way to ask the long deceased authors what was intended with such and such a phrase. And indeed, the problems of analysing and interpreting such historical sources are plenty. They go from problematic orthography, to inadequate text editions, unreliable informants and not-so-well-instructed authors. This chapter aims to expand on some of the pitfalls to be avoided when studying historical documents of Arabic dialects and to share some lessons I have learned through my own experience in dealing with such documents. The subject is a very extensive one, and therefore some points can only be touched upon briefly, but the references to other works on the subject will provide the reader further reading on how to tackle the complex task of describing a dialect that no longer exists in its previous form.

## 2 My first steps in historical linguistics

It is May 2001, and I am sitting in the dimly lit storage room of the library of the Oriental Department, Saint Petersburg State University, Russia. I am surrounded by shelves filled with precious Arabic, Turkish and Persian manuscripts, and in front of me lies a 400-year-old manuscript from Egypt. I am all alone in the room, pencil and notebook at the ready. I am surprised at, and grateful for, the trust that the librarian has placed in me, a young PhD student from the Netherlands, leaving me alone with the precious manuscripts under her care.

The journey that eventually led me to Saint Petersburg started some two years earlier, with a facsimile of said manuscript, *Dafʿ al-iṣr ʿan kalām ahl Miṣr* by Yūsuf al-Maġribī (156?–1611), which had been published in 1968 in Moscow by ʿAbd al-Salām Aḥmad ʿAwwād. This work was suggested to me by my supervisor, Prof. Manfred Woidich of the University of Amsterdam, as a suitable subject for a PhD thesis, because I was interested in historical sources on the dialect of Cairo. The manuscript is a word list of Egyptian Arabic, in which al-Maġribī compared the dialect of Cairo with dictionaries of Classical Arabic. I had worked through the text as best as I could with the facsimile, whose pictures were quite grainy, making the manuscript pages hard to read. I had typed the text of the work into the computer in order to produce my own edition, and wrote down the passages that were hard to

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220–221 and Witkam 2007: xx). See also the description of the wax rolls in the collection of the library of Leiden University: [http://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl/UBL\\_V1:All\\_Content:UBL\\_ALMA21221505700002711](http://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl/UBL_V1:All_Content:UBL_ALMA21221505700002711). Claims that the sound recordings were made during Snouck Hurgronje's stay in Mecca in 1885 (for instance here: <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/11/11/mecca.hajj.snouck>) are incorrect.

decipher. When I got the chance to go to Saint Petersburg and work with the actual manuscript, I was well-prepared and had a list of all the points that needed to be checked out most urgently. After working with the manuscript in Saint Petersburg for two weeks, I returned home to Egypt, with a more or less completed text, and in the possession of a microfilm of the manuscript. These formed the basis of the text edition and study of seventeenth-century Cairene Arabic which formed my PhD thesis (Zack 2009). In the fifteen years that have passed since my trip to Russia, circumstances have changed considerably. Obtaining old texts has thankfully become easier, enabling researchers to consult them from the comfort of their homes rather than travelling thousands of kilometres (which of course, also has its charms!).

### 3 Arabic manuscripts and old printed works—where to find them

When I started working on my PhD thesis in the late 1990s, the Internet was still in its infancy, and there were no book scans available online yet. Either manuscripts and old printed works had to be consulted in person at the library where they were deposited, or photocopies, a microfilm (on reels) or microfiches (flat sheets) needed to be ordered. The latter two needed special equipment in order to be read.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, the situation is quite different, and the Internet provides a real treasure trove of old manuscripts and printed books. Printed works of which the copyright has expired are often made available online by libraries.<sup>4</sup> A good place to start is Internet Archive, a non-profit website providing scans of books that are in the public domain, as well as music, images and other materials.<sup>5</sup> Another good source for scanned books is HathiTrust Digital Library, but unfortunately, full access to the books is only available for individuals accessing the website from within the United States.<sup>6</sup> There is also Google Books, which has scans of books that are out of copyright.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, some libraries also provide scans of old books and manuscripts on their websites. These include the Middle East

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3 See these images of microfilm and -fiche on Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/microform>.

4 The expiration of copyrights varies from country to country. In most countries, the copyright spans the lifetime of the author + 50–100 years. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries%27\\_copyright\\_lengths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries%27_copyright_lengths) for a list of countries and their copyright duration.

5 Internet Archive. <http://archive.org>.

6 HathiTrust Digital Library. <http://www.hathitrust.org>. There are, of course, ways to bypass this problem, such as by using a proxy server that assigns an American IP-address to your computer.

7 Google Books. <http://books.google.com>.

and North Africa Special Area Collection of the ULB Halle,<sup>8</sup> Universität Heidelberg<sup>9</sup> and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek<sup>10</sup> in Germany. In France there is the Bibliothèque nationale de France<sup>11</sup> and the Institut du Monde Arabe,<sup>12</sup> in the United Kingdom there is the British Library,<sup>13</sup> and the Vatican has the Vatican Library.<sup>14</sup> Of course, this is just a sample, as there are many others, and scanned books and manuscripts are being added every day.

The best way to find out if a physical copy of a book is kept in a library somewhere near you, is by using the website WorldCat.<sup>15</sup> By entering your location, the website tells you where the nearest libraries are located that hold the desired work. The website provides a link to the websites of the libraries. If the closest library is too far away to visit, there are two options: the first is to request an interlibrary loan (ILL), in which your own (university) library requests the item from the other library, and you can then borrow it through your own library. However, many libraries do not allow ILL for works older than, for instance, a hundred years, as these works are often delicate and/or valuable. Very often you cannot borrow these works directly from the library that holds them either, but rather you have to work with them at the library itself. The second option is to request photocopies or, even better, digital images of the book or manuscript you need. It is recommended that you check the price lists of several libraries holding the work, as there are huge differences in the prices for the digitalization of documents from library to library. Usually, advance payment is requested; after payment, the library either sends a CD-ROM with the images, or, more commonly nowadays, uploads them to a website and sends a link through which the requester can download them.

#### 4 The challenges of recovering dialect information

Once the necessary sources have been found, the next step will be to recover the information about the dialect you are researching from the works. In order to determine what a dialect looked like in the past, one needs accurate sources describing that dialect. However, the dialect at that time was

8 MENAdoc – Digital Collections, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle. <http://menadoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de>.

9 Heidelberger historische Bestände – digital, Universität Heidelberg. [www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/digi/digilit.html](http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/digi/digilit.html).

10 Münchener Digitalisierungszentrum, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. [www.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=suchen&l=de](http://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=suchen&l=de).

11 Bibliothèque nationale de France. <http://gallica.bnf.fr>.

12 Institut du Monde Arabe. <http://ima.bibalex.org/IMA/presentation/author/list.jsf>.

13 British Library. [www.bl.uk/manuscripts](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts).

14 Vatican Library. <http://digi.vatlib.it>.

15 WorldCat. [www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org).

most probably different than it is today, and at the beginning of the research, the researcher does not know exactly what the dialect looked like. Therefore, the problem is that the researcher cannot know at the outset of the research whether or not the available sources are accurate. There is a risk that the sources are inaccurate, non-representative or incomplete (the ‘bad data’ as described by Labov at the beginning of this chapter). So, how does a researcher describe a dialect if he/she does not know if the original sources describing this dialect are accurate? This is a vicious circle which we hope to break through. The problem has previously been addressed by researchers working in historical sociolinguistics, a discipline that studies the relationship between language and society in history:

The question of sources is a fundamental issue in historical sociolinguistic research: not all surviving written documents are equally useful, and layers of variation have to be extracted from them, each type of source requiring different approaches and treatments. (Hernández-Campoy and Shilling 2012: 63)

Historical research into the Arabic dialects has some added challenges when compared to research on European languages. The Arabic-speaking world is diglossic,<sup>16</sup> which means that the written language is not the same as the spoken language (Classical Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic versus colloquial Arabic). This is obviously a complicating factor in doing historical dialectological research. It is the task of the linguist ‘to filter the consequences of non-dialectal interference, almost unavoidable in written materials’ (Corriente 2012: 1). As Classical Arabic was (and still is, for most types of documents) the language of choice for writing, old sources written in Arabic dialects are scarce. Lentin (2012a: 73–74) points out that documents written in the colloquial were probably much more numerous than we can imagine, but that they were not kept with as much care as texts written in Classical Arabic and therefore disappeared. However, he also insists that many interesting sources still remain unedited and unresearched.

For some dialects, old texts written in the dialect can be found, as will be shown below. However, for many regions, no historical texts written in pure colloquial Arabic exist, and researchers will have to make use of texts written in Middle Arabic<sup>17</sup> or other sources, such as grammars of Classical Arabic.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, even when texts written in the dialect are at hand, the Arabic script complicates the extraction of dialectal features, because short vowels are normally not written in Arabic script, and the quality of long vow-

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16 See Ferguson’s definition (1959) and the discussion about the amendments made by other researchers to Ferguson’s theory in Boussofara-Omar (2011).

17 This is for instance the case of Moroccan Arabic; see Vicente (2012: 103–104).

18 See for instance Owens’ (2013: 457) comments on variations found in eighth-century Arabic in Sibawayh’s *Al-Kitāb*.

els can be ambiguous, while orthographic habits leaning towards a classicizing spelling do not help either. The difficulty of interpreting the orthography of dialectal texts in Arabic script will be discussed in the following paragraph.

## 5 The Arabic script—interpreting dialectal materials

### 5.1 The orthography

The challenge of interpreting dialectal materials is on the one hand that there is no standard orthography for writing the dialects in Arabic script and on the other hand that Arabic script is not always suitable for representing dialectal features. This can be demonstrated by taking the example of *ʾimāla*, which is the raising and fronting of *a* to *e* or *i* and of *ā* to *ē* or *ī*. Levin (1975) gives many examples of *ʾimāla* of *ā* in the Iraqi vernacular poetry of Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (1278–around 1350), which were indicated by writing a *yā* instead of an *ʾalif*. The use of *ʾimāla* was frequent in Baghdadi poetry. Some examples given by Levin (1975: 261–265) are بَرِدٌ ‘cold’ (< بارد) and لِشِيرِبٌ ‘for one who drinks’ (< لِشَارِب) in medial position, and كَذِي ‘like this’ (< كَذَا) and الشَّتِي ‘the winter’ (< الشتاء) in final position. However, the exact pronunciation of these vowels is unclear. For instance, the word شِيرِب mentioned by al-Ḥillī is pronounced as *šērib* in the modern *qəltu*-dialects,<sup>19</sup> but Arabic script does not have a symbol for *ē*, so the exact pronunciation of this phoneme in al-Ḥillī’s time remains uncertain.

Another problematic factor is that many authors tend to use a classicizing orthography. Strictly speaking, there are two ways to approach writing a dialect in Arabic script. The first is a phonetic orthography, with which the author tries to reflect the pronunciation of the dialect as closely as possible. This means, for instance, writing the plosives *d*, *t* and *ḍ*, which are the equivalent of the Classical Arabic interdental *ḍ*, *ṭ* and *ḏ*, with د, ت and ض; writing the *ʾ* (< *q*) with ء (e.g. أصب ‘sugar cane’ < قصب) and writing shortened long vowels without a long vowel. Examples from al-Maḡribī (1606) are نذل ‘despicable’ (< نذل), مثل ‘similar’ (< مثل) and حفة ‘edge’ (< حافة) (see Zack 2009: 82–83). The opposite of the phonetic orthography is an orthography that strictly follows the orthography of Classical Arabic, leaving it to the reader to figure out how to pronounce the text in the colloquial way. This method is called etymological, historical or classicizing orthography or spelling.<sup>20</sup> This method gives the reader a clear and familiar word picture, and

19 See Levin (1975: 263), who compared al-Ḥillī’s text with the dialect of the Jews of Baghdad, the dialect of Mosul and that of Aleppo. Interestingly, Kallas (2012) found hardly any traces of *ʾimāla* of long *ā* in historical sources on Aleppo Arabic from before 1900.

20 Note that the same issues of writing the Arabic dialects still exist today; see for instance Avallone’s study (2016) on the representation of Egyptian Arabic in modern literary works.

therefore makes it easier to read the text, but it lacks phonological information about the dialect. It is needless to say that a text in dialect written with a classicizing spelling makes it much harder to interpret phonological and morphological features. Most texts with dialectal features do not strictly follow either of these two orthographies, but rather use a mix, which can even lead to the same word being spelled in different ways in the same document.<sup>21</sup>

The difference between the two methods can be illustrated with two text fragments from the journal *Al-Ustād*. This journal was published by the Egyptian journalist ‘Abd Allāh al-Nadīm (1843–1896) in 1892–1893. It often includes dialogues between fictional characters, meant to be read aloud to the illiterate, for educational and entertainment purposes. On the left (A) is a dialogue between Laṭīfa and Dimyāna, and on the right (B), a dialogue between Ḥanafi and ‘Afifi.

A	B
<p>لطيفه ودميانه د. نهارك سعيد. ل. نهارك سعيد مبارك ذا إيه آل علي رأيي اللي آل غيبوا عام ووطنوا يوم. د. كنت عُنْبَال عندك في فرح ام جرجس [...] <sup>22</sup></p>	<p>المعلم حنفي والسيد عفيفي ح. بدنا تخلص الحسبه اللي بينا وبين بعض بقي يا سيدنا وكل انسان أولى بحقه. س. وانت كنت فين المده دي كلها وجاي على آخر العمر تقوي الحسبه والمسبه [...] <sup>23</sup></p>
<p>Laṭīfa and Dimyāna D: Good day. L: Good day to you. What is this; like the famous saying, you disappear for a year and then you reappear for one day. D: I was at the wedding of Umm Girgis, may the same hap- pen to your children. [...].</p>	<p>Ḥanafi the teacher and Mr ‘Afifi Ḥ: We wish to settle the account between us, Sir, because everyo- ne is entitled to his rights. S: Where have you been all this ti- me; now you come at the end of our lives to talk about accounts and so forth. <sup>24</sup> [...].</p>

Both fragments represent the dialect of Cairo. However, on the left, all the Classical Arabic *qāfs* have been replaced by *hamzas* or *maddas*, as in آل <sup>25</sup> *āl* (< قال) ‘he said’ and عُنْبَال <sup>26</sup> *u’bāl* (< عقبال) ‘may the same happen to...’, reflecting the dialect of Cairo, in which the *qāf* is pronounced as a glottal stop. On the right, however, all the *qāfs* have been retained, as in بقى *ba’a* ‘so’.<sup>25</sup> The information that these different orthographies give us is not of a dialectological kind, as the two texts represent the same dialect. Therefore, the

21 For instance, Yūsuf al-Mağribī (1606) writes the word *nisā*’ as نسا, نساء and نسآ (Zack 2009: 78).

22 Al-Nadīm, *Al-Ustād*, year 1 nr. 7, 4 October 1892 (see al-Nadīm 1994).

23 Al-Nadīm, *Al-Ustād*, year 1 nr. 19, 27 December 1892 (see al-Nadīm 1994).

24 *misba* is a nonsense word rhyming to *ḥisba*. These kinds of words often start with the letter *m*, e.g. *xāliṣ māliṣ* ‘very much’, see Zack (2001: 215) and Woidich (2006: 15).

25 See also the analysis of al-Nadīm’s texts in Avallone (2016: 81–82).

change of orthographic style must have some other meaning. The answer lies in the type of characters that are speaking here. The two men are described as *ilmu'allim* 'the teacher' and *issayyid* 'the gentleman'. The two ladies are simply referred to by their names, but they have been presented in the journal before, and we know that they are characters from the lower ranks of society. Therefore, the information being conveyed here is of a sociolinguistic nature, the writing of the glottal stop reflecting lower class or, perhaps, uneducated speech, as opposed to the speech of the teacher and the gentleman. Note, however, that both texts are written mostly using historical spelling. See, for instance, ﺫا 'that' in A, pronounced as *da*, but written with the *dāl* and *'alif* of Classical Arabic هذا. Final long vowels, all shortened in the dialect of Cairo, are written plena, as in في *fi* 'in', بقى *ba'a* 'so' and بينا *benna* 'between us' (with the originally long *ē* of *bēn* shortened because of the following two consonants).

## 5.2 Using text editions

Doing research on historical Arabic dialects will (almost) inevitably bring with it the study of Arabic manuscripts. This is a field in and of itself, too broad and complex to be addressed in this chapter.<sup>26</sup> I will, however, say something about working with editions of Arabic manuscripts. A text edition is a publication of a text based on one or more manuscripts. When using text editions of historical texts, especially Middle-Arabic ones, the researcher has to be aware that very often, text editors feel the need to 'correct' the spelling and language of the text, meaning that the text has been adjusted to the spelling of Standard Arabic.<sup>27</sup> This makes these texts easier to read for a wide public, but it is unfortunate for linguists wishing to reconstruct an earlier stage of the Arabic language, be it a dialect or Middle Arabic. Since the study of Middle Arabic became more popular with the foundation of the International Association for the Study of Middle and Mixed Arabic (AIMA) in 2004, the call for text editions that reproduce the spelling of the original text exactly has been heard.<sup>28</sup> However, when working with text editions for linguistic research, it is imperative to first ascertain whether the original language and spelling of the manuscript(s) has been followed, or if the text has been adjusted to Standard Arabic norms. Normally, this information can be found in the preliminary matter of the edition, although some editions will use 'normalized' spelling without stating this explicitly. Note also, however, that some features are very difficult, if not impossible, to reproduce with modern word processing programmes,<sup>29</sup>

26 For a good beginner's guide, see Gacek (2001, 2009) and Déroche (2000).

27 Lentin (2011) calls these 'artificially normalized editions'.

28 See for instance Den Heijer (2012: 19) and Lentin (2012b: 230).

29 An example is the writing of *yā'* as the seat with the *hamza* on top of it and two dots below.

forcing the editor to make adjustments in the orthography. In such cases, it is best to revert to the original manuscript.

## 6 Colloquial Arabic poetry and prose literature

### 6.1 Prose literature

Arabic prose literature dating from before the nineteenth century written entirely in the dialect is rarely found. Classical Arabic was the standard for writing literature, scientific works, and so forth. However, besides Classical Arabic texts, there are a large number of Middle Arabic texts. These texts combine features of Classical and colloquial Arabic, as well as features that are neither Classical nor colloquial.<sup>30</sup> For a long time, the idea existed that Middle Arabic was written by individuals whose command of Classical Arabic was imperfect, and predominantly by Christians and Jews, as they were 'less subjected ideologically to the requirement of excellence in language teaching and oral and written practice' (Lentin 2011). However, Lentin (2011) argues convincingly that Middle Arabic was written by the learned as well as the semi-literate, and that 'one might reasonably think that the language of Classical Arabic texts [...], often standardized by editors, is to some extent to be assigned to Middle Arabic, more than is usually supposed.' There are many examples of popular literature written in Middle Arabic, such as the *Thousand and One Nights* and the grand epics like *Sīrat al-malik al-Zāhir Baybars*.<sup>31</sup> The following is a fragment from Mahdi's edition of the *Thousand and One Nights*, which is a good example of the Middle Arabic writing style used for popular literature (Mahdi 1984: 164–165):

زعموا ايها العفريت انه كان رجلين في مدينه وكانا ساكنين في بيتين ملتصقين بحايط واحد. وكان احدهما يحسد الاخر ويصيبه بعينه ويبالغ في ادبته، وفي كل وقت يحسده حتى انه زاد به حسده لجاره حتى انه قل من طعامه ولدديد منامه، والمحسود ما يزداد الا خيراً وكلما تقلب فيه زكا ونما.

They relate, O Ifrit, that in a certain city were two men who dwelt in adjoining houses, having a common party wall; and one of them envied the other and looked on him with an evil eye, and did his utmost endeavour to injure him; and, albeit at all times he was jealous of his

30 See Lentin (2011). Note that the term 'Middle Arabic' is not undisputed; see for instance Smith (2014: 469).

31 See Lentin (2012a) for a very detailed overview of the kinds of works in which dialectal elements can be found, such as travel accounts, books on science or even on cooking. Although his article deals with Bilād al-Šām, the information found therein can be applied to other regions of the Arab world. For sources on Morocco, see Vicente (2012) and González Vázquez and Benítez Fernández (2016). For sources on Egypt, see Blanc (1973–1974) and Zack (2009).



neighbour, his malice at last grew on him till he could hardly eat or enjoy the sweet pleasures of sleep. But the Envied did nothing save prosper; and the more the other strove to injure him, the more he got and gained and throve. (translation by Burton 1885: 123)

This fragment shows some very common orthographic features of Middle Arabic, such as the absence of dots on the *tā'* *marbūṭa* in مدينه and the absence of *hamza* and *madda* in for instance الا (إلا <) and الاخر (الأخر <). It also shows the shift of interdental to dental plosives in لديد (لذيذ <) and the shift *hamza* > *yā'* in حايط (حائط <). An excellent reference work for Middle Arabic features is Blau (2002).

Pure colloquial Arabic is seldom found in historical sources. From Egypt, there are two works of special interest, both belonging to the genre of humorous works: al-Bašbuḡāwī's *Nuzhat al-nufūs* (fifteenth century) (see Vrolijk 1998) and Yūsuf al-Širbīnī's *Hazz al-quḥūf* (seventeenth century) (see Davies 1981 and 2005). They contain fragments representing the spoken Arabic of that time. Another interesting category of literature for the study of old dialects is shadow plays.<sup>32</sup> Shadow plays were written to be performed in front of an audience, rather than to be read in silence. As the audiences were comprised of people from all walks of life, including those who were not necessarily educated, it is to be expected that the language of shadow plays was Middle Arabic and contained plenty of colloquial features (see Zack 2012: 335). One such play is *li'ḡb ilmanār* 'The Play of the Lighthouse', which evolves around an attack of foreign forces on the lighthouse of Alexandria. Although written down at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the text is much older than that. It displays Middle Arabic with a heavy colloquial Arabic component.<sup>33</sup> The following fragment in rhymed prose from *li'ḡb ilmanār* shows the way in which Classical Arabic and colloquial features are mixed:<sup>34</sup>

سَيِّدٌ وُلِدَ عَدْنَانٌ	يُنصَحُ لِأُمَّتِ مُحَمَّدٍ	يَا خَلِّ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْبِلَادِ	1 دَالْمَغْرِبِيِّ أَدَّى قَدِ اتَّقَى
وَعَصْبِهِ الطُّغْيَانِ	مِنْ دَالْكَلَابِ الْمَلَاعِينِ	وَإِظْهَرْنَا مَا قَدِ خَفَا	2 وَقَدِ اتَّقَى بِالنَّصِيحَةِ
يَا مَعْشَرَ الْخَلَّانِ	وَبِالْعَدَدِ قَدِ تَعَدَّوْا	يَجْهَظُّوْا لِجَلِّ الْقِتَالِ <sup>35</sup>	3 وَآخِرُ بَأْنِ جَمِيعِهِمْ
فِي عَصْبَةِ الْإِيمَانِ	وَقَصْدِهِمْ أَنْ يَنْأَلُوا	وَفِي طَرَايِدِ وَأَغْرِبِهِ	4 وَقَدِ اتَّقَى بِالْقَطَايِعِ
عَلَى مَدَا الْأَزْمَانِ	مَتَعَوِّدِينَ بِالْوَقَايِعِ	وَكُلِّهِمْ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ	5 وَهُمْ جِيُوشٌ مَا يَعْذُوْا
الْوَاْحِدِ الدِّيَانِ	وَفِي الْهَلَاكِ يَرْمِيهِمْ	يَدُلُّ دَالْقَوْمِ اللَّيَامِ	6 لَأَكُنَّ إِلَهَ الْبَرَايَا

32 There are some Egyptian shadow plays extant, the most famous being the three plays written by Ibn Dāniyāl (thirteenth century), which mixes an elevated poetic style with colloquial elements (see Ibn Dāniyāl 1992 for the edited texts). See also Carlson (2013: xxi–xxii).

33 See the edition by Kahle (1930) and a linguistic description by Zack (2012).

34 Text based on Kahle (1930: 20–21), translation Zack (2012: 337–338).

35 = لأجل.

1. This is the North African who has come, o friend, from the most remote country, to advise the nation of Muḥammad, the Lord of the offspring of ʿAdnān.
2. He has brought advice and revealed to us what was hidden about those cursed dogs and the gang of tyrants.
3. He informed us that all of them are making preparations to fight and have made their equipment ready, o company of friends.
4. They came with troops in warships and galleys, intending to harm the people of the Faith.
5. They are countless armies and all of them are men who are used to fighting battles for ages.
6. But the God of the Creation will humiliate these reprehensible people and He will throw them into eternal damnation, the One, the Judge.

The text has some notable colloquial features,<sup>36</sup> such as the preposed demonstrative *دا* (as opposed to preposed *هذا* in Classical Arabic and postposed *da* in modern Cairene Arabic), e.g. *دالمغربي* (l. 1) and *دالكلاب* (l. 2); the relative pronoun *ادّي*; and the disappearance of the *hamza*, e.g. *بالقطايح* (l. 4), *لجل (< لأجل)* (l. 3). However, the text also contains many Classical Arabic elements, such as the use of *قد* and the use of Form IV (*اظهرلنا* l. 2, *اخبر* l. 3). The orthography has elements known from Middle Arabic, such as the writing of the feminine ending *-at* with *tāʾ* instead of *tāʾ marbūʿa* in *أمت محمد* (l. 1), writing *ʿalif* instead of *ʿalif maqṣūra* in *خفا* (l. 1) and *مدا* (l. 5), omitting the dots of the *tāʾ marbūʿa* in *بالنصيحه* (l. 2) and *عصبه* (l. 2), and the writing of the *ʿalif* in *لاكن* (l. 6).

Another literary genre in which dialect features can be found is the so-called *lahn al-ʿamma* literature, which describes language errors made by the common people with the purpose of ‘correct[ing] deviations by reference to the contemporary linguistic norm, as determined by the purists’ (Pellat 2012). It was a popular genre, the first instance of which is probably *Kitāb mā talḥan fihi al-ʿawāmm* by al-Kisāʿī (d. 805) (see Pellat 2012). Krotkoff (1957), in his description of the *Laḥn al-ʿawāmm* by al-Zubaydī (Andalusia, 918–989), gives an extensive overview of the works on *lahn al-ʿamma*. However, Ayoub (2011) points out the difficulties of using *lahn al-ʿamma*-works for reconstructing historical stages of Arabic dialects. First of all, many of the works describe the speech of the *xawāṣṣ*, the literate people, rather than the *ʿawāmm*, the common people. Also, most ‘mistakes’ pointed out are often deviations from Classical Arabic, such as incorrectly placed diacritic marks. However, sometimes information about the local dialects can be found, such as the *niktib/niktibu* paradigm<sup>37</sup> in North Africa.<sup>38</sup> However,

<sup>36</sup> See Zack (2012) for a complete overview.

<sup>37</sup> The most important isogloss that divides the Eastern from the Western dialects is the inflection of 1SG and PL in the imperfect. The Eastern group has *aktib/niktib*, while the Western group has *niktib/niktibu*; see Palva (2011).

such works can be very interesting sources for dialects for which very little documentation exists; one such example is the *Tatqīf al-lisān wa-talqīh al-ḡanān* by Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. Xalaf al-Ṣiqillī al-Makkī (eleventh century), the only work of its kind to deal with the Arabic of Sicily (see Agiūs 1996).

## 6.2 Poetry

There is a respectable body of historical poetry with colloquial features, due to the popularity of the *zaḡal* and the *muwašṣaḥ*. The *zaḡal* is a ‘genre of vernacular strophic poetry that acquired literary status around 500/1100 in al-Andalus’ (Schoeler and Stoetzer 2012). The earliest known example, from Andalusia, dates from the year 913.<sup>39</sup> The popularity of the *zaḡal* spread from Andalusia to North Africa and the Middle East. The *muwašṣaḥ* is a poem that developed in Andalusia as well. It is composed in Classical Arabic, except for the last part, the *xarḡa*, which is either in colloquial Arabic or in colloquial Arabic mixed with Romance (see Schoeler 2012). The following is the *xarḡa* of a *muwašṣaḥ* by Abū al-Qāsim al-Manīšī (twelfth century, Sevilla):

/alḥabīb ḥujīb ‘anni fi dāru |  
wanirīd nasāl ‘annu [li]jāru |  
wanixāf raybat + alḥúbbi |  
wāš na‘māllu, ya rábbi/

The beloved is locked away from me in his house;  
I would like to ask his neighbour about him;  
But I fear my love will be suspected;  
What shall I do for him, Sir? (Corriente 1997: 140)

This poem shows vernacular characteristics, such as phonemic stress<sup>40</sup> and the absence of *hamza* (Corriente 1977: 58) in phonology, the verbal prefix *na-/ni-* for the 1SG imperfect in morphology (Corriente 1977: 100–102) and the lexical item *wāš* ‘what’.

Many of the issues mentioned above under prose literature (§6.1) also apply to poetry. However, interpreting dialectal features in poetry brings with it added difficulties due to the metre. The following fragment is a sample from the colloquial poetry found in al-Bašbuḡāwī’s *Nuzhat al-nufūs* (Egypt, fifteenth century), and highlights some of the issues connected with analysing older colloquial poetry:

38 See Molan (1978: 3) cited in Ayoub (2011). See ‘Abd al-Tawwāb (2000) on the importance of *lahn al-‘amma* works as sources of information on language change and for an annotated bibliography of *lahn al-‘amma* works.

39 See Corriente (1997: 79) for the poem and its translation.

40 See Corriente (1977: 63). This phenomenon was the effect of the Romance language substratum.

وَعَلَى قَدِ طَاهِرَوَانِي	مِنْ زَمَانٍ وَنَا صَغِيرٍ
فِي الرِّفَاقِ دَوَّرُونِي	وَعَلَى فَرَسٍ مُرَوِّقٍ
فَوْقَ فَمَائِثِي سَلْرُونِي	وَبِسَلَارِي كَمَاثَه
نُشُّ بُو الدَّبَانِ تَرِيرِي	وَبَقِيَ مَعِي مُتَبَدِّلُ
قَلْتُ هَشَّ هَشَّ طِيرِي	كَلِمَا جَتَ وَاحِدَه لِي

(from Vrolijk 1998: 82–83)

A long time ago, when I was small, and [people still called me] ‘Ali,  
they circumcised me

and led me around the alley on an adorned horse.

They also put on me a sleeveless tunic<sup>41</sup> on top of my cloths

and I had a small handkerchief with me with which to whisk away  
flies, *tiriri*<sup>42</sup>!

Every time one came to me, I said, ‘Shoo, shoo, fly away!’

As Vrolijk’s (1998: 141–156) thorough analysis of the colloquial material in *Nuzhat al-nufūs* shows, the poetry is a rich source of information on Egyptian Arabic in the fifteenth century. In the five lines quoted above, we find interesting morphological information (e.g. *bi* + suffix 3MSG becomes *bū*; the 3FSG of the verb ‘to come’ is *gat*; the use of the diminutive in *ṣuḡayyar* and *munaydil*; etc.), as well as lexical items (e.g. *kamānah* ‘as well’, *sillārī* ‘sleeveless tunic’). However, we have to be careful when extracting dialectological information from this piece. This fragment has some classicizing features, such as the use of *qad* in line 1 and the final short *u* in *nuššu* (l. 4) and *qultu* (l. 5). These latter could be there for two reasons: 1. adding a short syllable demanded by the metre; 2. indicating the epenthetic *schwa*, which is needed in Cairene Arabic in order to avoid a cluster of three consonants. Whether this was a short *u* or had another sound in the fifteenth century is unclear. The ending *-i* in *fi-zzuqāqi* (l. 2) is also due to the metre and does not mean that Cairene Arabic still had genitive case marking (see Vrolijk 1998: 150).

The influence of the metre is also felt in the colloquial poetry of the aforementioned fourteenth-century Iraqi poet Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī. As Hoenerbach (1956: 15–16) points out, the final vowels of words can be written as either long or short according to the needs of the metre. This is demonstrated in the following fragment (from Hoenerbach 1956: 159):

قُلْتُو أَخَافُ مِنْ زَوْجِكَ قَالَتْ مِنْ إِيشِ تَخَافُ  
ذَاكَ الْجَكْرَ طَلَّفْتُو وَأَخَذْتُ لَكَ أَكْبَسَ مِنْو

I said: ‘I fear your husband’; she said: ‘What are you afraid of?’

I’ve divorced that nuisance and taken one better than him.’

41 For this translation of سَلَارِي see Dozy (1881 I: 673a).

42 Kern (1906: 35) explains this as a ‘meaningless expression of joy’.

In these two lines, we see the long vowel in the ending *-tū* in قُلْتُو ‘I said’ and طَلَّقْتُو ‘I’ve divorced’, while وَاحَدْتُ ‘and I’ve taken’ does not end in a long vowel.

## 7 Dialect descriptions

In the previous paragraphs, I have discussed texts written in Arabic containing dialect features, and the challenges of analysing such texts. The following paragraphs will discuss texts describing Arabic dialects, that is, texts written with the purpose of describing a dialect or of teaching a dialect to foreigners. Note that these do not have to be complete books dedicated to this purpose. For instance, information about the Arabic language can often be found in travel accounts,<sup>43</sup> historical works, and so forth. These kinds of texts bring with them a whole new approach to analysis. As an example, we will look at a case discussed by Palva (1997b). He describes how certain features that the Bedouin dialects spoken in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula share with Old Arabic, such as the *tanwīn*, the retention of the interdentals, the retention of feminine plural forms and the internal passive, led some nineteenth-century authors to conclude that those dialects were in fact the Classical Arabic of the Quran, thereby overlooking forms that are obviously not Classical Arabic. This way of thinking brought the British traveller, diplomat and missionary William Gifford Palgrave (1826–1888) to write about the dialect of al-Najd in the description of his travels in Arabia in 1862:

[...] here the smallest and raggedest child that toddles about the streets lisps in the correctest book-Arabic (to use an inexact denomination) that ever De Sacy studied or Sibawee’yah professed. (Palgrave 1865: 311)

This could obviously not be the case. As Palva (1997b: 238) points out, there are several reasons for such inaccuracies. First of all, systematic study of the Arabic dialects was still in its infancy in the nineteenth century. Accounts like the one mentioned above give an impressionistic description of how a dialect sounds, rather than systematic phonological and morphological descriptions. The idea existed, also among Western travellers, that Classical Arabic was the ‘pure’ form of the language and that all linguistic change implied a deterioration. Remote, isolated areas with very limited contact with the outside world were therefore supposed to have kept the ‘purest’ language (see Palva 1997b: 238). This point is made even clearer in the description Palgrave gives of the sedentary dialects of the large towns:

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43 For example, the vocabulary in Egyptian and Yemenite Arabic by Forsskål in Niebuhr (1772: 86–88).

Whether in the Ḥejāz or in Yemen, much more in Egypt and Syria, most at Bagdad and Moṣool, the current speech is very incorrect, defective, clipped, and corrupted, in desinence and in accent, in elocution and in phraseology. It is not a dialect, but a mere degeneration, phonic and grammatical. (Palgrave 1865: 310)

When looking at the available historical descriptions of Arabic dialects, there are some questions to ask before deciding whether a work is a useful and trustworthy source for a dialect. The following are some important points to be considered and will be discussed in the following sections:

1. Which language variety is described/used?
2. How well does the author know the dialect he/she describes?
3. How were the data collected and who were the informants?
4. What was the purpose of the work?
5. Is the transcription system that is used accurate?

As I will explain hereafter, some of these points overlap or influence each other.

### 7.1 Which language variety is described?

Many works claim to describe a certain dialect, while after closer inspection they turn out to describe something else. Sometimes this can be another dialect, or sometimes Classical Arabic. An example that combines these two problems is a conversation guide by Mallouf (1880),<sup>44</sup> titled *Guide de la conversation en trois langues: français, anglais, arabe (dialecte d'Égypte et de Syrie)*. Although the title claims that the book deals with both Syrian and Egyptian Arabic, this is not the case. A closer look at the book reveals that the dialect used is Levantine Arabic. Some examples: on pp. 2–3 'peach' دَرَاقَة *derraqah*<sup>45</sup> and 'plums' خَوْخ *hhaðkh*, which in Egyptian Arabic are *xōx* and *bar'ū'*, respectively, or on p. 17 'a fork' فَرْكَيْطَه *forkaythah* and 'a glass' طَاسَة *thāṣa*, in Egyptian Arabic *šōka* and *kubbāya* respectively. However, influences of Classical Arabic are also found all around, such as p. 153 اترجاك ان لا ترسم بشي مخصوص لاجلي *ataradjjāk an la tarsim bichay makhsous li-adjli* 'Pray, do not order any thing on purpose for me'. In this sentence, we find the Classical Arabic conjunction *'an* as well as Classical Arabic vocabulary (*li-adjli*). According to the work, the future tense is indicated by the prefix *sa-* (pp. 8–9), which is not used in the colloquial. This case demonstrates that it is very important to investigate the background of the author of a dialect description. Mallouf (1823–1865) was born and lived in present-day Lebanon. It is obviously to be expected that the language he used on a daily basis was Levantine Arabic rather than Egyptian. The book title that claims describing the dialect of Egypt as well is likely a

44 Nāṣif b. Ilyās Mun'im Ma'lūf (1823–1865).

45 In the examples, Mallouf's original transcription has been retained. The same is the case for examples from other works.

marketing device, based on the idea that those who know Levantine Arabic can also make themselves understood in, for instance, Egypt. Many vocabularies and textbooks were written in the nineteenth century for travellers to the Middle East and North Africa. These often comprise a combination of several dialects,<sup>46</sup> and are not very useful for making a description of one single dialect due to the mixed language used in them.

Another interesting case is the first systematic study of Cairene Arabic, written by the Egyptian Muḥammad ‘Ayyād al-Ṭaṇṭāwī (1810–1861). He was a scholar who, as his name indicates, originated from the region of the town of Ṭaṇṭā in the Nile Delta and who went to study in Cairo as a teenager. His description of the dialect of Cairo, *Traité de la langue arabe vulgaire* (1848), contains some features that today sound decidedly rural. The question therefore arises as to whether his work describes the dialect of Cairo, or if he, perhaps without realising it, included rural features from his hometown. This problem is discussed by Woidich (1995), who concludes that the rural-sounding features actually were part of the dialect of Cairo of that time, but have disappeared since then. However, this could only be established by comparing al-Ṭaṇṭāwī’s work by other descriptions of the dialect of Cairo written by his contemporaries.

Moreover, sometimes we do not even know precisely which dialect is being described. An interesting case is that of a short treatise on Moroccan Arabic published by the British Orientalist William Price (1771–1830) in 1797, in which a dialogue between two Moroccans is presented. González Vázquez and Benítez Fernández (2016) used information on the modern Moroccan dialects, as well as indications about the surroundings extracted from the text and historical events mentioned therein, to pinpoint the possible origin of these two interlocutors to the Atlantic coastal strip. This shows that sometimes it requires not only linguistic skills, but also some detective work to extract useful (linguistic) information from old documents.

## 7.2 How well does the author know the dialect?

This point is especially important when the author of a dialect description is not a native speaker; however, even with native speakers of Arabic, this issue may arise, as we have seen in the previous section. I will illustrate this point first of all with my own research into the dialect of Cairo in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is a period for which there are numerous sources, as there was a growing interest in Egypt among Westerners, creating a need for textbooks and dictionaries for those intending to go there. The quality of the available sources varies greatly, from high-standard descriptions<sup>47</sup> to works of a very dubious quality.<sup>48</sup> However, many works

46 For instance Wolff (1857) and Marcel (1837).

47 For instance Spitta’s detailed grammar (1880).

are not so straightforward. An example is Betts' *Egyptian Arabic Primer* (1902), which seems to be a fine grammar of Cairene Arabic, written by a medical doctor who spent many years in Egypt's capital. However, sometimes the book contains unexpected errors, such as in the explanation of the conditional sentence: 'if I am here I shall see you' is translated with the ungrammatical *iza k̄ān ak̄ūn hena ašūfak*. Such a glaring error puts in question all the other information in the book, because if this is incorrect, how can we be sure that the other information is correct?

Another problem one has to be aware of, is that sometimes incorrect information was copied by subsequent authors, giving the impression of many sources confirming the same findings. As an example, I will again take my research on nineteenth-century Cairene. Some data can only be found in works by German authors,<sup>49</sup> for instance the *i*-perfect of *'imil* 'to do', *'ifl* 'to close', *bi'i* 'to become', and *hisib* 'to think'. All the other authors only give the forms with *a*. Also the particle *'ammāl* and its shortened forms such as *'a* indicating the direct future is only mentioned by German authors. This use is not found in modern Cairene Arabic,<sup>50</sup> but *'a* as a future marker is found in parts of the Delta and Upper Egypt (see Behnstedt and Woidich 1985: map 224). It seems that in these cases, the source is Spitta (1880), who sometimes included rural features in his description of Cairene Arabic, which were then copied by subsequent German-speaking authors.

However, one should not be too quick in discounting forms that at first sight seem to be incorrect. A good example is given by Corriente (2012: 22): in his description of the colloquial Arabic of Granada (ca. 1505), Pedro de Alcalá, a Spanish Hieronymite priest, writes *çáleb* 'cross' with the stress on the first syllable, instead of the expected second syllable, like in Classical Arabic *šalīb*. At first glance, this could be interpreted as a spelling error. However, when the same form is found in another work as well, and Alcalá gives the plural *çaguđlib* (*šawālib*), it becomes clear that in Andalusian Arabic an innovated *šālib* existed alongside *šalīb*.

Similar difficulties of interpretation were encountered by Zwartjes and Woidich (2012) in Lucas Caballero's description of the vernacular of Damascus (1709). Caballero was a Spanish Jesuit who studied and taught Arabic for some time in Damascus. The Arabic of his *Compendio* often contains vowel signs, but when these coincide with neither modern Damascene Arabic nor with Classical Arabic, it makes the linguistic information difficult to interpret. For instance, in some plurals of the form *MaFā'IL* we find a *kasra*

48 An example is Winckler (1862), whose book is full of mistakes. For example, he writes that 'your two feet' is *riglak* (p. 10), and that *'amar* 'moon' is feminine (p. 10). He writes هذه الكتاب 'this book' (p. 11), برتقان طيبين 'good oranges' (p. 12), and البيوت من المدينة مصر 'the houses of the city of Cairo', to mention a few.

49 E.g. Hagenmacher (1892), Dirr (1893), Seidel (1896).

50 In Cairene Arabic, *'ammāl* expresses duration and intensity, see Woidich (2006: 282–283).



in the first syllable instead of the expected *fatha*, e.g. *qināfid* ‘hedgehogs’, *timāsiḥ* ‘crocodiles’ and so forth. This feature is found neither in Classical Arabic nor in modern Damascene Arabic, and Zwartjes and Woidich (2012: 310) pose the question as to whether we are dealing with an older stage of Damascus Arabic or with the influence of another dialect.

### 7.3 How were the data collected?

When using works written by individuals who were not native speakers of Arabic, the question arises how the data for the work were collected. An interesting insight into the methodology of collecting data is given in Spitta’s *Grammatik* (1880), which is considered to be the first academic description of the Egyptian Arabic dialect. Spitta was an Arabist who lived for some years in Egypt and was the head of the Khedival Library (now *Dār al-Kutub*). In his *Grammatik*, he explains his method of data collection:

I moved from the European quarter of Cairo into the Arab one, and started to live as an Arab and to hunt speech from early until late. In order to be able to write down everything immediately and without being noticed, I got myself used to writing on my cuffs with a small pencil which I hid in my hand. Whatever I collected was added to the collection in the evening. [...] Almost all language materials which are written in this book, were first written on my cuffs.<sup>51</sup>

Spitta wrote down his data straight from the mouths of the people of Cairo and made an effort not to show that he was taking notes, so that people would speak in a natural manner. In this way, he tried to avoid the so-called observer’s paradox, defined by Labov (1972a: 209) as follows:

[...] The aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation.

In other words, the presence of an observer influences the way the informant speaks. In the case of Arabic, this might mean that the informant starts to speak in ‘foreigner Arabic’, in Classical Arabic, or in another (more prestigious) dialect. We know that Spitta avoided this by taking notes furtively, to the detriment of his cuffs. However, we very often are not given this kind of detailed information. It is a fact that there were many Syrians in Cairo in this period and that Syrian teachers were frequently employed by foreigners wanting to learn Arabic. This could contaminate the data and give a higher count of Levantine Arabic features than were really used in Cairo at that time. Of course, the same questions are raised when conducting research on other Arabic dialects. It is therefore very important to find out as much

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<sup>51</sup> Spitta (1880: viii), my translation.

background information on the author as possible: Where did he/she learn Arabic? How long did he/she stay in the Arab world? And so forth.

This question is also raised by Zwartjes and Woidich (2012: 308) in relation to the aforementioned Lucas Caballero and his teacher Bernardino González. As Christian missionaries, would they have taken their information from Muslim informants, or rather from their fellow Christian teachers? This question is especially important as ‘the varieties of Arabic spoken in Levantine towns such as Damascus and Aleppo differ depending on religious affiliations, presumably more so in the past than today’ (Zwartjes and Woidich 2012: 308). This question of informants is extremely important for correctly interpreting historical dialect information. Not only must one keep in mind the informants’ background such as religion, and origins; as Corriente (2012: 20) points out, when Classical Arabic traces are found in works describing a dialect, the reason can be that the author was ‘consulting natives who were not duly informed of or interested in the kind of descriptive aim pursued.’

#### 7.4 What was the purpose of the work?

Another point to bear in mind is the purpose for which the sources were written. For instance, Spitta’s grammar (1880) was written with the intention to describe the dialect spoken in Cairo with all its variations in every little detail. The method of elicitation, as shown above, was accordingly very precise. There are other works, such as Nakhlah’s *New Manual of English and Arabic Conversation* (1874), which was intended for travellers to Egypt who only needed some very basic grammar and some useful sentences. Such works should not be expected to mention all possible varieties of a certain grammatical feature. There are other works which only give the reader the most basic phrases needed in certain situations. A good example is the various vocabularies written for foreign soldiers stationed in the Middle East in the nineteenth century, which often focused on giving various commands and providing some useful standard phrases, but did not aim at teaching the user grammatical structures.<sup>52</sup>

#### 7.5 Which transcription system was used?

As mentioned in §5, the Arabic script can only render the phonology of the Arabic dialects imperfectly. However, the same can also be said for the Latin script. The Arabic language has many phonemes for which the Latin alphabet does not have symbols, such as the emphatics, and some gutturals such as *ħ* and *ʕ*. In modern Arabic linguistics, it has become good practice to stick to the rule of ‘one phoneme, one symbol’.<sup>53</sup> However, this is not the

<sup>52</sup> See Zack (2016) for some samples for British soldiers stationed in Egypt and the Sudan.

<sup>53</sup> In other areas of Arabic studies, this is not so much an issue, and transcriptions such as *sh* for *ش* and *dj* for *ج* can be found. However, in linguistics this is not an efficient system, as it can cause confusion, e.g.: Does *kh* represent one sound (*x*) or two sounds (*k-h*)?

case in early dialect descriptions. Authors often struggled with the representation of Arabic sounds, and their works therefore often give an imperfect rendering of how the dialect was pronounced. Corriente (2012: 19) describes Alcalá's (c. 1455–post 1508) early attempts to render Arabic with the help of special signs. He devised a system that provided special signs for some Arabic phonemes, such as *k* for /x/, *q* for /d/ and a *c* with three dots above it (*č*) for /ʕ/. However, in other cases, Alcalá did not attempt to use special symbols for Arabic phonemes such as /ħ/ and /ğ/.

Another example is the German knight Arnold von Harff (1471–1505), who went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and wrote a fascinating account of his travels, in which he described nine languages he encountered on his way, including Arabic.<sup>54</sup> His description of Arabic contains 115 items, 19 of which are phrases (see Von Harff 1860: 112–113). Von Harff wrote the Syro-Palestinian<sup>55</sup> Arabic words and phrases down as he heard them, but he had great difficulties with some of the Arabic sounds, as is shown in the way he transcribed them, as is seen in his *kolps* 'bread' (*xubz*), *acktzello* 'wash it' (*ig̃silu*), *este te lopente* 'what do you want?' (*ēš tiṭlub inte*), *elham durylle* 'thank God' (*ilḥamdu lillāh*), etc.<sup>56</sup> The latter two examples also show that in some cases, the word boundaries are not placed correctly, making the linguistic information even more difficult to interpret.

The chosen transcription method is often influenced by the first language (or the first foreign language, if the author's first language is Arabic) of the writer. It is for instance noticeable that the *š* tends to be written as *sch* by German-speaking authors, as *ch* by French-speakers, and as *sh* by English-speakers. The vowels also show such influence; for instance, *ū* is often transcribed with *oo* by English-speakers and as *ou* by the French. As an example of transcription influenced by English, *ana areed à-rooh* 'I want to go' (Nakhlah 1874: 191) shows *ee* for *ī* and *oo* for *ū*, based on English spelling. The phrase *mā tūchbirschi buh ḥadd* 'don't tell anyone about it' (Hassan 1869: 234) shows the influence of German orthography in *ch* for *x* and *sch* for *š*. The third example, *antoum bitisrifou maçârîf kitîreh maa innakoum lastoum aghniâ cawî* 'you spend a lot even though you are not very rich' (Cadri 1868: 216) shows influences of French in *ç* for *s* and *ou* for *u*.<sup>57</sup> These three examples describing Egyptian Arabic in the nineteenth century show a great vari-

54 See Stumme (1914: 127–128). Von Harff's travel account was published in 1860.

55 One of the indications that the dialect recorded by Von Harff is Palestinian is the epenthetic vowel inserted to prevent consonant clusters, e.g. *mele* 'salt' (*miliḥ*) and *alleham* 'meat' (*illaḥim*); see Von Harff (1860: 112). On *getzira* 'an island' (*gizira* with Egyptian *g* for \*ḡ?), see the discussion in Woidich and Zack (2009: 52–53).

56 See Von Harff (1860: 112–113) for more examples, as well as Stumme (1914: 130–135) for their interpretation.

57 There is obviously also influence due to Classical Arabic, as is clear from the use of *lastoum*.

ety in the transcription systems that are used. The third example also shows that, as in texts written in Classical Arabic, texts in transcription can display a classicizing tendency: *ʾawi*, pronounced with glottal stop and short *i* in Cairene Arabic, is here represented as *cawī*, echoing Classical Arabic قوي.

## 8 Using texts written in scripts other than Arabic or Latin: the case of Judeo-Arabic

From Arabic written in the Arabic script, through Arabic transcribed with the Latin alphabet, we now arrive at Arabic transcribed with other scripts. This phenomenon is called ‘allography’, from the Greek for ‘other writing’, and is used here with the meaning of ‘writing a language in the script of another’.<sup>58</sup> Since time immemorial, the Arabic language has been written with scripts other than the Arabic one. The oldest Arabic inscriptions are found in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula and are written in scripts such as the Nabataean, Palmyrene and Safaitic.<sup>59</sup> When the Arabic language started to spread over the Middle East and North Africa, the scripts of the original inhabitants, instead of the Arabic script, were sometimes used to write Arabic, such as Coptic script in Egypt, Garshuni<sup>60</sup> in the Levant, and Hebrew script by the Jews.

As space does not permit for an extensive discussion of these kinds of texts here, I refer to the volume edited by Den Heijer, Schmidt and Patari-dze (2014), an excellent work on allographic traditions in the Mediterranean world and beyond. Here only one allographic tradition will be highlighted, that of Judeo-Arabic. This is probably the most well-known form of allography: Middle Arabic written with the Hebrew script by the Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa. The founding father of Judeo-Arabic studies is Prof. Joshua Blau, and his writings are still the best introduction to the subject.<sup>61</sup> A good introduction to Judeo-Arabic writing practices can also be found in Yeshaya (2014).

An important collection of Judeo-Arabic texts is found in the Genizah collection of the Ben Ezra Mosque in Old Cairo. Although the bulk of the texts is from Egypt, there are also considerable numbers of documents from Palestine and North Africa (see Goitein 1967: 19–23). Around 18,000 have been made available online.<sup>62</sup> The Cairo Genizah documents are especially

58 Den Heijer and Schmidt (2014: 2). The term ‘allograph’ also has several other functions in linguistics, as well as in typography; see the discussion in Kiraz (2014).

59 See Versteegh (2014: 28–33) for an overview and Al-Jallad (2015) for a study of the Safaitic inscriptions.

60 Arabic written with the Syriac script. See Moukarzel (2014) and Mengozzi (2010).

61 See Blau (1999), Blau (2002) and the sources mentioned therein.

62 Cambridge Digital Library. Cairo Genizah. <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/genizah>.

useful for historical dialect research, as many of the documents contain dialect features. The linguistic features of the Cairo Genizah Documents have been studied, among others, by Hary (2009), Khan (2011, and the other references mentioned therein) and Wagner (2010). See also the publications by Blau and by Palva in the *References* below for studies of the colloquial features of individual documents.

### 8.1 The Judeo-Arabic script and writing traditions

Hary (1996: 730–732) distinguishes three types of Judeo-Arabic orthography: phonetic, Arabicized and Hebraized orthography. Phonetic orthography, which was used until the tenth century, has not been influenced by Classical Arabic orthography, but rather stays as close as possible to the pronunciation. For instance, the article is transcribed phonetically, as in אַרְחִימ אַרְחִימ 'the Merciful' (see Hary 1996: 731 and Blau 2002: 21–22). This system was replaced in the tenth century by Arabicized orthography, which imitates the spelling of Classical Arabic (Yeshaya 2014: 530). For instance, diacritic points were used to distinguish between letters, like in the Arabic alphabet. An example is the *ḍ*, which in Arabic is written with the letter ض with a diacritic point on top: ض. In Arabicized Judeo-Arabic orthography, this is imitated by writing the *tsadi* צ with a dot: צ̣. Also, the article *al-* is written אַל, regardless of its pronunciation (i.e. assimilation of the *l* to the sun letters and/or elision of the *a*) (see Hary 1996: 730 and Blau 2002: 21). Finally, Hebraized orthography, which appeared after the fifteenth century and existed alongside Arabicized orthography, was influenced by Hebrew/Aramaic spelling, but also continued to be influenced by Arabicized orthography. One of its characteristics is the spelling of final *ʾalif* and *ʾalif maqṣūra* with ה *h* imitating Hebrew orthography, e.g. תַּעֲטִינָה *tʿtynh* 'you will give us' (Hary 1996: 732).

The following table is based on Blau (2002: 21–22):

	Phonetic orthography	Arabicized orthography
ا	א	א
ب	ב	ב
ت	ת	ת
ث	ת	ת
ج	ג	ג
ح	ה	ה
خ	ח	ח
د	ד	ד
ذ	ד	ד
ر	ר	ר
ز	ז	ז
س	ס	ס

ش	ש	ש
ص	ס	ס
ض	צ	צ
ط	ט	ט
ظ	ד	ד
ع	ז	ז
غ	ח	ח
ف	פ	פ
ق	ק	ק
ك	כ	כ
ل	ל	ל
م	מ	מ
ن	נ	נ
ه	ה	ה
ة	ה	ה
و	ו	ו
ي	י	י

Table 2.1: Phonetic and Arabicized Judeo-Arabic orthography

In the following section, a fragment of a Judeo-Arabic text will be presented.

**8.2 Fragment: Genesis 7:1–12 in Gaon’s translation**

The following text is a fragment from Sa’adya Gaon’s Judeo-Arabic translation of the Pentateuch. Sa’adya ben Joseph (882–942) was born in the Fayyūm in Egypt and died in Sura in Iraq, where he was the head (Gaon) of the Jewish religious academy. His translation of the Pentateuch became the standard translation for Arabic-speaking Jews and remains in use to this day (see Blau 2002: 98).

The Hebrew text is taken from Derenbourg’s edition (1893: 13), while the transcription with Arabic script and the English translation are mine. The text fragment starts at Genesis 7:1, when Noah has built the ark according to God’s orders.

<p>1 וקאל לה אללה אדכל אנת וגמיע אלך אלי אלתאבות פאני ראיתך צאלחא בין ידי פי הדא אלגיל: 2 מן נמיע אלבהאים אלשאהרה תאכד סבעה סבעה דכורא ואנאתא ומן אלבהאים אלתי ליסת בטאהרה זונין דכורא ואנאתא: 3 ואיזא מן שאיר אלסמא סבעה סבעה דכורא ואנאתא ליחיא נסלהם עלי גמיע ונה אלארץ: 4 פאן בעד אלסבעה איאם אנא ממטר עלי</p>	<p>1 وقال له الله ادخل انت وجميع الك الي التابوت فاني رايتك صالحا بين يدي في هذا الجيل: 2 من جميع البهائم الطاهرة تاخذ سبعة سبعة ذكورا واناثا ومن البهائم التي ليست بطاهرة زوجين ذكورا واناثا: 3 وايضا من طائر السما سبعة سبعة ذكورا واناثا ليحيا نسلهم علي جميع وجه الارض: 4 فان بعد السبعة ايام انا ممطر علي الارض اربعين يوما واربعين ليلة وامحو جميع الناس الذين صنعتهم عن وجه الارض: 5 وعمل نوح بجميع</p>
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אלארץ ארבעין יומא וארבעין לילה  
 ואמחו נמיע אלנאס אלדין צנעתהם ען  
 וזה אלארץ: 5 ועמל נוח בזמיע מא  
 אמרה אללה בה: 6 וכאן נוח אבן סת  
 מאיה סנה חין כאן מא אלטופאן עלי  
 אלארץ: 7 פרכל נוח ובנוה וזנתה ונסא  
 בניה מעה אלי אלתאבות מן קבל מא  
 אלטופאן: 8 מן אלבהאים אלטאהרה  
 ומן אלבהאים אלתי ליסת בטאהרה ומן  
 אלטאיר וסאיר אלהאב עלי אלארץ: 9  
 אזואנא אזואנא דכלו אלי נוח אלי  
 אלתאבות דכור ואנאת במא אמרה  
 אללה בה: 10 ולמא כאן בעד סבעה  
 איאם כאן מא אלטופאן עלי אלארץ: 11  
 פי סנה סת מאיה מן עמר נוח פי  
 אלשהר אלתאני פי אליום אלסאבע  
 עשר מנה פי דלך אליום תשקקת עיון  
 אלגמר אלעטים ורואזן אלסמא תפתחת:  
 12 ואקאם אלמטר עלי אלארץ ארבעין  
 יומא וארבעין לילה:

1 God said to him,<sup>63</sup> 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous before me in this generation. 2 Take of all the clean animals seven pairs,<sup>64</sup> males and females, and of the animals that are not clean, a pair, males and females, 3 and also of the birds of the sky seven pairs, males and females, so their offspring will live on the whole face of the earth. 4 After seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe all the people I have made from the face of the earth.' 5 And Noah did all that God commanded him. 6 Noah was six hundred years old<sup>65</sup> when the water of the flood was on the earth. 7 So Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark with him before the water of the flood. 8 Of the clean animals, and the animals that are not clean, and of the birds and of everything that crawls on the earth, 9 in pairs,<sup>66</sup> came to Noah and entered the ark, males and females, as God had commanded him. 10 And after seven days the floodwater was on the earth. 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day, on that day the springs of the great deep of water burst open, and the windows of heaven were

63 I.e. Noah.

64 Literally: seven seven.

65 Literally: he was the son of six hundred years.

66 Literally: pairs pairs.

opened. 12 And it continued to rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights.

### 8.2.1 Orthography and phonology

Diacritical marks are used consistently in this text. For instance, ڤ is used for *x*,<sup>67</sup> ځ for *ǧ*, ڌ for *d*, ٲ for *tā' marbūṭa*. Interdentals are consistently indicated with a dot above the letter, as in ڌڪورن وانناتن *ḍukūran wa-ināṭan*.

The *hamza* has disappeared, as in ڌاير ڌاير (*< sā'ir*), ڌلبهائم *al-bahāyim*, ڌاير ڌاير *ṭāyir*, ڌنسا *nisā* (see Blau 2002: 32–33). 'Alif maqṣūra *bi-ṣūrat al-yā'* is written with ڌ, reflecting Arabic orthographic conventions, for instance ڌعلي *alā* and ڌإلي *ilā*. The accusative ending *-an* is written with ڌ, following Arabic writing conventions, e.g. ڌساليهان *ṣāliḥan* and ڌيمان *yawman*. 'Alif faṣila is omitted: ڌڌالو *daxalū* (see Blau 2002: 35).

### 8.2.2 Lexicon

Sa'adya Gaon used the word ڌتابوت *tābūt* to indicate Noah's ark. This is unusual, as the meaning of this word is 'wooden case', 'coffin', as well as 'Ark of the Covenant' (see, e.g., Kazimirski 1860: I 188). In modern Arabic translations of the Pentateuch, words meaning 'ship', 'boat', such as *fulk* and *safīna* are used.<sup>68</sup> Both *fulk* and *safīna* are used to indicate Noah's ark in the Quran (see, for instance, Q 11: 37–38 for the former and Q 29: 15 for the latter). The word *tābūt* is used in the Quran both to indicate the Ark of the Covenant (Q 2: 248) and Moses' ark (Q 20: 39), but not Noah's ark. However, *tābūt* reflects the Hebrew *tēbāh* ڌתבה 'ark', which is the word that is used in the Hebrew Bible to describe Noah's ark. It is therefore likely that this use of the word *tābūt* was influenced by its Hebrew equivalent. Both Arabic *tābūt* and Hebrew *tēbāh* are probably Egyptian<sup>69</sup> loan words from *t-b-t* 'chest, coffin' (see Erman 1892: 123).

For 'windows', the word ڌرازين *rawāzin* (SG *rawzana*) is used, which is of Persian origin (see Kazimirski 1860: I 857).

Two more text fragments of Sa'adya Gaon's Pentateuch translation, including transcription in Arabic and linguistic notes, based on an eleventh-century manuscript, can be found in Blau (2002: 100–106).

67 Except in verse 7, where it is written with ڌ in ڌڌכל *fa-daxal*.

68 E.g. *fulk* in [www.hekme.net/library/pdf/bi12\\_A.pdf](http://www.hekme.net/library/pdf/bi12_A.pdf), p. 15, and *safīna* in Egyptian Arabic; see Badawi and Hinds (1986: 416).

69 I.e. from the language of ancient Egypt.



## 9 Concluding remarks

Research on historical Arabic dialects must, like any historical linguistic research, rely on the use of written sources, as there are no native speakers left to consult. Interpreting the data in these sources is no easy task; it is, as Labov (1972b: 100) describes it so poetically, the ‘great art of the historical linguist’. However, it is also a very rewarding task. In a time when there are still many *modern* Arabic dialects that remain undescribed, the study of *old* dialects has just started to develop, leaving many interesting sources unexplored, and a great deal of historical data undescribed.

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