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MIDDLE AND MIXED ARABIC OVER TIME
AND ACROSS WRITTEN AND ORAL GENRES:
FROM LEGAL DOCUMENTS TO TELEVISION AND INTERNET
THROUGH LITERATURE

MOYEN ARABE ET ARABE MIXTE À TRAVERS LE TEMPS
ET LES GENRES ÉCRITS ET ORAUX:
DES DOCUMENTS LÉGAUX À LA TÉLÉVISION
ET À INTERNET EN PASSANT PAR LA LITTÉRATURE

Proceedings of the IVth AIMA International Conference
(Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA, 12-15 October 2013)

edited by
Jérôme LENTIN and Jacques GRAND'HENRY

UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN
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PEETERS
2022

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MIDDLE ARABIC IN LEGAL AND FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS FROM THE DAKHLA OASIS (EGYPT)*

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Introduction

This paper deals with the linguistic characteristics of a number of legal and financial documents dating from the Ottoman period, from the village of al-Qaṣr in the Dakhla Oasis in Egypt. These documents were discovered during the restoration of one of the traditional mud brick houses in the old quarter of al-Qaṣr. The collection of documents forms a complete family archive, dating between 1579 and 1937, and contains a great variety of texts, such as religious, magical, and personal texts, as well as legal and financial texts such as contracts, wills, and *fatwas*. This paper discusses the legal and financial documents, focusing on two aspects: the Middle Arabic characteristics and the linguistic features that are specific for the dialect(s) of the Dakhla Oasis.

1. *The Dakhla Oasis and the discovery of the documents*

The Dakhla Oasis (Arabic: الواحات الداخلة *al-Wāḥāt al-Dāxila*, “the Inner Oases”) is situated in the Western Desert of Egypt in *al-Wādī al-Ġadīd* governorate, and is located around 550 km¹ south-southwest of Cairo. The Dakhla Oasis measures around 80 km from west to east and has a maximum width of 25 km. On the north, the oasis is bordered by an escarpment. The village of al-Qaṣr (short for Qaṣr al-Dāxila), from which the documents under discussion originate, is in the centre of the oasis, just north-west of the capital. This village, called *madīnat al-Qaṣr* in the documents, used to be the capital of the oasis;² now, its capital is Mūṭ.

* The research for this paper was done as part of a research project titled “The Making of a Capital Dialect: Language Change in 19th-Century Cairo”, funded with a VENI grant from The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research.

¹ Flying distance, or 770 km by road.

² See Beadnell 1901, p. 14.

In 1978, the Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) was founded with the aim to study the oasis from its very first period of habitation until the 21st century.³ A sub-project of the DOP is the Qasr Dakhleh Project, which aims at restoring the traditional mud brick houses located in the old part of al-Qaṣr, some of which date back to at least the 16th century.⁴ The mud brick houses of the Šihābiyya district of al-Qaṣr were dilapidated, some had (partially) collapsed, and most of them were uninhabited, because the population had moved to new concrete houses. The restoration project was initiated in 2002 with the selection of one house as a pilot.⁵ The selected house is known locally as Bayt al-Qāḍī, “the house of the judge”, and dates from the 18th century. By 2010, the restoration of one complete block comprising five houses was completed.⁶ The houses are restored by the local population, using traditional building materials and techniques, such as mud brick and palm trunks.⁷

When restoring Bayt al-Qāḍī in 2003, the rubble of the collapsed neighbouring house needed to be removed in order to erect the scaffolding necessary for doing repairs to the outer walls. This neighbouring house is known by the local population as Bayt al-Qurašī and collapsed somewhere around 1940. When removing the rubble from this ruin, a great number of documents were found, many of which were (nearly) complete. Apparently, the former inhabitants had not tried to retrieve these after the collapse of the house.⁸ More documents were found in the following excavating seasons. The documents form a family archive belonging to the Qurašī family, and include religious

³ See Mills 2014.

⁴ See Leemhuis 2002, p. 52. Prof. Fred Leemhuis, emeritus professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Groningen University in the Netherlands, is the director of the Qasr Dakhleh project. All the reports of the project can be downloaded from <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-cultures/excavations-in-dakhleh-oasis-egypt/>.

⁵ See Leemhuis 2002, p. 53.

⁶ See Leemhuis 2010, p. 26.

⁷ See Leemhuis 2003, p. 18-23.

⁸ See Leemhuis 2003, p. 18-19.

texts, personal letters, magical texts, and financial and legal texts.⁹ The oldest text dates from the year 1579, while the most recent dates from 1937.

2. *The collection of legal and financial documents*

The archive recovered from Bayt al-Quraṣī contains 226 legal and financial texts on 184 sheets (some sheets have been used on both sides).¹⁰ The documents contain all kinds of legal and financial texts, such as contracts, IOUs, receipts of payment, powers of attorney, as well as some *waqfiyyas*, judgements, and fatwas.¹¹ Although the documents are mostly in good condition, some have missing parts, holes, or are broken in the folds. The documents are invaluable sources of information about life in the oasis. Many documents revolve around a very important part of oasis life: agricultural activities and the exploitation of wells. These wells were, and still are, especially important in Dakhla, as they are the only source of water the inhabitants have, the rainfall being nearly 0 mm per year.¹²

Of the legal and financial texts, 163 documents have been edited and published by Rudolph Peters in his monograph *Watāʾiq madīnat al-Qaṣr bi-l-Wāḥāt al-Dāxila maṣḍaran li-tārīx Miṣr fī al-ʿaṣr al-ʿUṯmānī* (2011), and some of their legal aspects have been described in Peters (2008, 2009, 2010, and 2014). Peters (2011) took great care in presenting the texts as closely as possible to the original written texts, i.e. without correcting them, but pointing out corrections in the footnotes. The only alterations he made, are:

- adding the two dots on the *tāʾ marbūʿa*, which were almost completely absent in the documents;

⁹ See Leemhuis 2003, p. 19, Peters 2009, p. 9-10, Peters 2011, p. 24, and Peters 2014, p. 317-318.

¹⁰ See Peters 2011, p. 24-25.

¹¹ See Peters 2014, p. 318.

¹² See Kato *et al.* 2010, p. 6. There are two types of wells: the *ʿayn* “spring”, in which the water comes up naturally, and which is called Roman well due to its old age, and the *bīr* “well”, which is drilled. See Kato *et al.* 2012, p. 245 and Beadnell 1901, p. 19-20.

- adding the dots of the *tāʾ* and *šīn*, which were either absent, or written with only one or two dots;
- removing the extra *ʾalif* from ل (see § 3.1. point 4);
- removing the two dots underneath the *ʾalif maqṣūra*.

Most “errors” are preserved in the printed text, of which the most important are:

- confusing *tāʾ marbūṭa* and *tāʾ ṭawīla* at the end of the word;
- elision of the *hamza*;
- adding *ʾalif otiosum* to the final *wāw*;
- omitting the zero from numbers;
- writing the *yāʾ* in nouns of type *tertia infirmae*, e.g. جاري.¹³

Peters’ edition has facilitated my work considerably in that the hard job of deciphering the (sometimes barely legible) handwriting had already been done. However, because of the spelling adjustments made in the edition of the texts, I could not rely solely on the text edition for my linguistic analysis, and for that reason Peters has kindly provided me with the digital photographs of the documents, so as to allow me to study the texts in their original form.¹⁴

3. Middle Arabic features

Most documents were written by court clerks or other educated individuals. These documents show many Middle Arabic features that are generally known and have been previously described.¹⁵ These features will be discussed in this paragraph. There are also some documents that were written by less educated individuals, which becomes clear both from the writing style and the handwriting itself. These are especially interesting, as they show not only Middle Arabic features, but also influences of the local dialect. The dialect features that are specific to the Dakhla Oasis will be discussed in § 4.

¹³ See Peters 2011, p. 71.

¹⁴ These photographs were made by Prof. Fred Leemhuis and Mrs. Verena Leemhuis-Obrecht. I thank Prof. Rudolph Peters and Prof. Fred Leemhuis for kindly allowing me to make use of their materials in order to conduct this research.

¹⁵ I will use Blau 2002 as a reference for the Middle Arabic features.

3.1. Orthography

This paragraph will discuss some interesting orthographical features of the documents.

1. Many documents are (partially) undotted. This is especially the case with standardized legal phrases, presumably because their meaning was well known to people working in the legal profession, as in this fragment from a document dated 1055AH/1645:¹⁶

ويحلى البايع المذكور للمستري المذكور عن ذلك تحلته شرعه واذنه في تسليم ذلك
فاعترف المسر يتسلم ذلك لنفسه الاعتراف السري بالاذن السري بالتحلته
السري بعد النظر والخبره والمعرفه [...]

With dots added:

وتحلى البايع المذكور للمشتري المذكور عن ذلك تخليه شرعية واذنه في تسليم ذلك
فاعترف المشتري بتسليم ذلك لنفسه الاعتراف الشرعي بالاذن الشرعي بالتخليه
الشرعية بعد النظر والخبرة والمعرفة [...]

“The afore-mentioned Seller hereby relinquished all his legal rights in transferring the property of the said [parcel of land] to the afore-mentioned Purchaser. The Purchaser has accepted the said relinquishment after diligently examining and surveying [the relinquished land] through an expert.”

The lack of dots causes difficulties in the interpretation of the linguistic data. For instance, if we find a *dāl* instead of a *dāl*, the question poses itself whether this indicates a loss of interdental, with the implication that we should interpret it as a phonological feature, or if it is merely an orthographic feature. Considering the lack of dots in general, I am inclined to think that in this case we are dealing with an orthographic feature. So as not to make the reading of this paper too complicated, the examples mentioned below are based on the original texts, i.e. the photographic images of the manuscripts, but they have been provided with the dots as indicated in Peters' edition. Exceptions are the undotted *tā' marbūṭa* and the dotted *'alif maqṣūra*, which have

¹⁶ D.05.079r, 5: 115,25-29. The first number starting with the letter D is the registration number of the manuscript; some manuscripts have r (recto) or v (verso) mentioned after this number. This is followed after the comma by the number the document has in Peters' (2011) edition, and, after the colon, the page number and line number(s) in Peters' edition.

been kept as in the original documents, and the interdental *dāl* and *tāʾ*, which have been kept as *dāl* and *tāʾ* when they are written like this in the original.

Sometimes the writer of a document tried to avoid confusion about how a word should be read by adding a description of the way it is written. We find one such example here: قدرها تسعون ذراعا بتقديم التا المشاه: ثمانيه ادرع مكسره “its measure is ninety (*tisʿūn*) cubits, which starts with a *tāʾ* with two dots and a *kasra*” (D.04.234r, 60: 363,19-20).¹⁷ This is done in order to distinguish the word *tisʿūn* from *sabʿūn*, which, when undotted, look remarkably similar: تسعون *tisʿūn* versus تسعون *sabʿūn*.¹⁸

The *tāʾ marbūṭa* is very often undotted, even in the construct state, e.g. ثمانيه ادرع “eight cubits” (D.04.032, 84: 481,5). Often, the *tāʾ* is written with two dots, e.g. بتمن “for the price of” (D.05.004r, 15: 158,24), which can be considered either as an orthographic feature (lack of dots) or a phonological one (pronouncing *t* as *t*), as explained above.

2. The addition of *ʾalif otiosum* to final *wāw*,¹⁹ which happens especially frequently in the words ابوا “father”, e.g. ابوا ناصر “Abū Nāṣir” (D.04.124v,85: 485,11), and تتلوا “they follow”, used in the expression بل عقود و سنون تتلوا بعضها بعضا “contracts and years that follow each other” (e.g. D.05.094r, 65:391,15). A very interesting example is حضرو لدي المذكورين “they were present with the afore mentioned persons” (D.05.064, 73: 425,33) in which the *ʾalif otiosum* is added in the middle of the word المذكورين; note also the absence of the *ʾalif otiosum* in حضرو (see point 5 below).

3. Scriptio plena:

- Writing of *ā* in the words هذا and ذلك, e.g. وصلها ذلك “this arrived at her” (D.04.244, 127: 55,8), هذا المجلس “this council” (D.04.274, 124: 550,15).

¹⁷ This way of describing the dots and vowels is not unusual, see for instance the examples in Zack 2009, p. 46-48.

¹⁸ Even though, in this case, the *tāʾ* of تسعون was dotted, and therefore this extra precaution was not strictly necessary.

¹⁹ See Blau 2002, p. 35.

- Plena writing of final *-a* in the word *dālika* with either *ʔalif* or *hāʔ*, all examples from one document (D.04.161, 92): في نظير ذالكا: “in return for this” (501,4), ودالكه “and that” (501,7), ذالكا “that” (501:8).²⁰

- Plena writing of the final vowel of 2 sg. f., all instances of which were found in one document (D.04.124r, 85), e.g. وتاخذي من اخيكي “and you take from your brother” (483,10), وان كان احدا يشوش عليكى “and if someone complicates it for you” (483,18). These examples are taken from a letter addressed to a woman, which therefore contains many forms in the 2 sg. f. The pronominal suffix for “you” (f.) is *-kē* in the dialect of al-Qaṣr, the ending of the perfect is *-tē* and of the imperfect *-ē*; all these suffixes are stressed.²¹ In the letter, all these are written with a final *yāʔ*. The question is whether this is an indication of the dialectal suffixes or whether they just represent the Classical Arabic final *-i* (e.g. *ʔalayki*) written plena.²²

4. Writing an extra *ʔalif* between the preposition *li-* and the following word starting with an *ʔalif*: تبرع لابراهيم المذكور “he donated to the afore mentioned Ibrāhīm” (D.04.277, 58: 358,14).

5. Missing *ʔalif*: this can either be the *ʔalif otiosum*, e.g. حضرو لدي المذكورين “they were present with the aforementioned persons” (D.05.064, 73: 425,33), or a *hamzatu-l-waṣl* in form VIII of the verb in this example: وستلم القدر المذكور “and he received the afore mentioned amount” (*wa-stalama*) (D.04.184b, 102: 518,6). Also an *ʔalif* which represents a long vowel is sometimes omitted, such as in the examples ولده المشتري “the mother of the buyer”, وولنته “and his mother” (D.05.004r, 15: 157,14-15), and الثلثين “the thirty”²³ (D.05.004r, 15: 157,8). Although Blau relates the omission of the *ʔalif* for *ā* to the ancient orthographic habit,²⁴ it can also be argued that in the cases mentioned here, it reflects the actual short pronunciation of these vowels in the local dialect.

²⁰ All written as ذالك in Peters 2011, p. 501.

²¹ See Woidich 2002, p. 826-827.

²² This occurs frequently in Middle Arabic, see Lentin 2012, p. 214-215, and Grand’Henry 2008, p. 182.

²³ This orthography (for ‘30’ and also for ‘3’) is common in all varieties of Arabic (cf. Wright 1896, vol. I, p. 10, “frequently written defectively”).

²⁴ See Blau 2002, p. 32.

6. Writing *ʿalif ṭawīla* instead of *ʿalif maqṣūra*,²⁵ e.g. جرا ذلك وحرر “this took place and was recorded” (D.05.045r, 56:351,23).

7. Writing *yāʿ* instead of *ʿalif maqṣūra*: this is extremely common, in Middle Arabic as well as in modern written Arabic,²⁶ e.g. مصطفى (D.05.064, 73: 424,9) “Muṣṭafā”.

8. Writing *ʿalif maqṣūra* or *yāʿ* instead of *ʿalif hamza*, e.g. يقوم له بوفي ذلك “he will perform this for him” (D.03.005r, 81: 464,10), عين الزهري “Zahrāʿ Well” (D.05.089, 50: 332,12).

9. Writing a double final *ʿalif*: احنا قمنا علي وكيل صحيح “we have set up a correct power of attorney” (D.03.040v, 97: 511,5-6).

10. Writing *tāʿ ṭawīla* instead of *tāʿ marbūṭa* in the construct state,²⁷ e.g. من زوجت والده “from the wife of his father” (D.05.083v, 64: 388,2), ابنت المرحوم علي “the daughter of the late ‘Alī” (D.05.050, 69:405,12).

11. Writing *tāʿ marbūṭa* instead of *tāʿ ṭawīla*. This occurs frequently with the *tāʿ* of the 3 sg. fem. ending *-at* in the perfect tense, e.g. اشهدت على نفسها “she witnessed for herself” (D.04.125,77: 448,1), استخارة الله “she asked God for proper guidance” (D.03.040r, 97: 509,3-4). An interesting case is الزيتة “the oil” in الحمل الزيتة سبعة وعشرين “the transport of oil [for] twenty-seven piastres” (D.07.026, 118:536,2), in which there is no feminine ending *-at*; it is simply a normal *-t*: *al-zayt*.

12. The loss of *hamza* is very common and can either be caused by defective writing or reflect the loss of *hamza* in the pronunciation. In مسؤولاً في ذلك “responsible for this” (D.03.177, 66:396,32) the *hamza* is placed on the *wāw* instead of on the *yāʿ*.

13. An extra *madda* can be placed on top of an *ʿalif* in the combination *ʿalif hamza* (*-āʿ*), e.g. اربعة امائل ماء “four *amīlas*²⁸ of water” (013:D.04.232r, 13: 149,3).²⁹

²⁵ See Blau 2002, p. 32.

²⁶ Badawi *et al.* 2004, p. 20 conclude from the lack of distinction between final *yāʿ* and *ʿalif maqṣūra* in modern written Arabic that “the [spelling] system is still unstable”.

²⁷ See Blau 2002, p. 34.

²⁸ See § 4.2.1. for an explanation of this term.

²⁹ See also Zack 2009, p. 78-79 for the use of *madda* instead of, or in combination with, *hamza*.

14. In three instances the *tāʾ* is written instead of the *šād*, and twice instead of the *dād*.³⁰ These occurrences are all from two documents. It must be noted that the documents from which these examples were taken seem to have been written by people who could not write very well, as can be judged from both the spelling and the handwriting. Examples of *tāʾ* instead of *šād*: محمد ابوا طالح Muḥammad Abū Ṣāliḥ (D.07.026, 118: 536,1), “تسعه قروش ونطف” “nine-and-a-half piastres” (D.07.026, 118: 537,5); *tāʾ* instead of *dād* عمر محبنا محمد عمر “His Eminence our dear Muḥammad ʿUmar Ġawālī (D.04.210r 096: 507,1-2), “وحطره مسطر الاحرف” “and His Eminence the writer of the letters” (D.07.026, 118: 537,13) [see below for مسطر].

15. Double writing of a consonant instead of *šadda*:³¹ from the same document as the examples in point 14: “مسطر الاحرف” “the writer of the letters” (see reference above).

16. Writing *tāʾ* instead of *šin*, again from the same document, in which the word *qirš* “piastre” is four times written as قرث, e.g. سبعة قرث “67 and a half piastres” (D.07.026, 118: 537,7).

17. Writing *tāʾ* instead of *tāʾ*, again from the same document: “والزيت الذي معاهم” “and the oil that is with them” (D.07.026, 118: 537,4).³²

3.2. Morphology

This section will highlight some Middle Arabic morphological aspects found in the documents.

1. Roots *tertiæ infirmæ*: One of the most common features is the writing of the *yāʾ* in nouns ending in *-in*,³³ and especially in جاري in the following frequently used expression: فباعه ما هو جاري في يده وملكه “he sold him his property, which is in his possession and under his control” (e.g. D.05.043r, 4:109,5), but for instance also in ثاني

³⁰ In all these examples, Peters 2011, p. 507 and p. 536-537 has corrected these to *šād* and *dād* without further indication.

³¹ See Bauden 2008, p. 30-31, who mentions some examples by the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī; he mentions the verb *ʿallafa*, which is a form II like مسطر.

³² This feature is quite common in Middle Arabic, see for instance the examples in Grand’Henry 2012, p. 98.

³³ See Blau 2002, p. 41.

“second”, e.g. وهو بمفرده فريق ثاني. “and he on his own is the other party” (D.04.274, 124:550,11).

2. Nunation: Sometimes the *ʿalif* of the accusative is written even though there should be no nunation, as in the expression ولا معارضا “and there is no objection or dispute concerning this” (D.05.007r, 3: 107,27-28), in which the noun following *lā al-nāfiya li-l-ġins* (“*lā* of absolute negation”) is supposed to end with a *fatha* only in Classical Arabic.

3. The *nūn* of the dual or plural is sometimes kept in a word that is the *muḍāf* in the construct state,³⁴ e.g. اميلتين ما سقي. “two *ʿamīlas* of water from a water wheel” (D.05.002, 121:544,16).

4. Imperfect verb 2nd fem. sg.: In one of the documents (D.04.124r, 85), this verbal form has the ending *-ī* instead of Classical Arabic *-īna*,³⁵ e.g. وتاخذي من اخيكي. “and take from your brother” (483,8-9).

3.3. Syntax

In syntax, there are two main categories that do not conform to the rules of Classical Arabic: the use of the cases, and agreement. In the use of the cases, we see the following recurring features:³⁶

1. Marked use of the endings *-ūn* and *-ān* in the regular masculine plural and the dual. This happens especially often in the word مايتان “two hundred” in dates, which almost always has the ending *-ān* e.g. سنة 1223 [AH] “the year 1223 [AH]” (D.07.004v, 83:475,5). The tens sometimes have the ending *-ūn*, e.g. سنة 1283 ثلاثه. “the year 1283 [AH]” (D.05.063, 120: 541,19), علي ثلاثون اميله. “for thirty *ʿamīlas* and ten feet of water” (D.04.161,92:501,6).³⁷

2. The word *ʿabū* often remains invariable, instead of taking the genitive *ʿabī* and the accusative *ʿabā*, e.g. بنت ابوا خليفه. “the daughter of *ʿAbū Khalīfa*” (D.04.184a, 99:513,2), اشترى [...] من بايعه القاضي ابو العز. “he

³⁴ See Blau 2002, p. 42.

³⁵ Or perhaps the ending *-ē* of the dialect of Dakhla, see § 3.1. Orthography point 3.

³⁶ See Blau 2002, p. 44.

³⁷ See Lentin 2008, p. 309-310 for some more examples.

bought [...] from its seller Judge ʿAbū al-ʿIzz” (D.05.084r, 16: 161,8-9).

3. *ʿahadan* is used irrespective of case,³⁸ e.g. وصار كل احدا فريق “everyone is a party” (D.05.095, 117: 536,12) (note also that in فريق the final *ʿalif* of the accusative in Classical Arabic is missing), وان كان احدا, يشوش عليكى ترسلى تعلمنا “and if someone complicates it for you, let us know” (D.04.124r, 85: 483,17-18).

4. In the noun following the numerals 11-99, the *ʿalif* of the accusative is often missing, e.g. التى قدرها ثلاثة وثلاثين دراع “whose value is 23 cubits” (D.05.094r, 65: 390,6).

5. Sometimes the subject, or the predicate of the nominal sentence, in the plural has the gen./acc. ending *-īm* instead of nominative *-ūn*, or in the dual *-ayn* instead of *-ān*, e.g. فاشهدا به هذين الشاهدين “this is what the two witnesses declared” (D.05.064, 73: 424,22), وضبط ما يشهدون به المذكورين في امر ذلك “and that which the afore mentioned persons have declared about the matter was recorded” (D.05.064, 73: 424,13-4), التى قدرها ثلاثة وثلاثين دراع “whose value is 23 cubits” (D.05.094r, 65: 390,6).

There are many cases of agreement which do not conform to the rules of Classical Arabic,³⁹ for instance:

1. Female noun with masculine adjective, in the word غشيم “young, new”: وودية صعيدي غشيم وعزبين غشيم ثابتين “a new Ṣaʿīdī palm tree and two firm young palm saplings” (D.04.276r, 40: 283,6-7).

2. The *nisba* adjectives sometimes remain masculine, as is often the case in the dialects, e.g. ودية صعيدي غشيم “a new Ṣaʿīdī palm tree” (D.04.276r, 40: 283,6-7).

3. Lack of agreement between subject and verb, for instance انهما استخاروا الله سبحانه وتعالى “the two of them asked God the Almighty, may He be praised, for proper guidance” (D.04.235, 71: 413,26-27).

4. Plural nouns referring to inanimates with masculine plural agreement: انه يسد الاقدام المذكورين “he pays the afore mentioned feet” (D.07.014v, 90: 498,13), and even with feminine plural agreement: ثمان

³⁸ See Blau 2002, p. 45.

³⁹ See Blau 2002, p. 46.

نخيل منهن فالحق اصفر خمسة وتمر قعقع ثلاثة “eight palm trees, including five yellow dates trees and three of the *qa'qa'*⁴⁰ fruit” (D.05.010, 11: 142,6).

5. Invariable *alladī*:⁴¹ ثمن الجلود الذي اخذتهم “the price of the hides that you took” (D.04.210r, 96: 508,12-13) (note also that the inanimate plural *ḡulūd* is referred to with the resumptive plural pronoun *-hum*).

Some other syntactic features worth mentioning are:

1. Asyndetic clauses,⁴² e.g. وان كان احدا يشوش عليكى ترسلى تعلمنا “and if someone complicates it for you, let us know” (D.04.124r, 85: 483,18), where a conjunction such as *li-* or *kay* “in order to” between the verbs *ترسلى* and *تعلمنا* is missing.

2. Polarity in numbers is often lacking,⁴³ e.g. عشر ريات عاده “ten standard *riyāls*” (D.04.118v, 106:524,2-3), اربعة امائل ماء “four *ʿamīlas* of water” (D.04.232r, 13:149,3).

3. The use of the article before the *mudāf* of the construct state: الحمل الزية سبعة وعشرين قرش “the transport of oil [for] twenty-seven piastres” (D.07.026, 118: 536,2), جميع الحصة لما الشرب “the entirety of the share of drinking water” (D.03.146r, 48: 323,11), ثم تنازع [اخوه] على “and then his brother disputed the piece of land”. The latter construction is not unusual in Egyptian Arabic, if the *mudāf* is a word with the meaning of “a bit” or “a piece”,⁴⁴ and is also quite common in Middle Arabic.

4. Features of the dialect of al-Qaṣr

Besides the Middle Arabic features discussed above, the documents also contain features of the local dialect of the Dakhla Oasis. The phonological and morphological dialectal features can be found mainly in those documents written by authors who did not know Classical Arabic very well, but the local vocabulary is used in court documents as well.

⁴⁰ See § 4.2.2.

⁴¹ The use of *alladī* for all forms of antecedents is a very common occurrence in these texts, as it is in Middle Arabic in general, see Blau 2002, p. 55.

⁴² See Blau 2002, p. 52.

⁴³ See Blau 2002, p. 48.

⁴⁴ See Woidich 2006, p. 206 *ilḥabbīt izzēt* “the bit of oil”, and p. 207 *ilḥittit tillahma* “the piece of meat”.

Together with those of the Farafra Oasis the dialects of Dakhla form a distinct group of dialects that differ more from the dialect of Cairo than the dialects of the two adjoining oases, Kharga and Baḥariyya. The dialects of the Dakhla Oasis have been, and are still being, studied by Manfred Woidich, who has already published several papers on the dialect of various villages.⁴⁵ The Dakhla Oasis is divided into eastern, central, western, and north-western dialects. The dialect of Al-Qaṣr is sufficiently different from the surrounding dialects to merit its own group, the north-western dialect of Dakhla.⁴⁶

4.1. Phonology and morphology

In the orthography section (points 14-17), we have seen examples of authors who did not know how to write very well, for instance confusing the letters *šīn* and *tāʾ*? In the same documents, we find three phonological dialect features which are of interest here.

1. The first feature is found in the word *الافاف* *al-ʿufāf* “baskets” (D.07.026, 118: 537,4) (< *al-qufaf*). This is evidence that the *q was pronounced as a glottal stop, which is typical for Central and Western Dakhla.⁴⁷ This was already observed by Harding King (1917, p. 364):

“[...] in the western part of the oasis they do not pronounce the Q hard but soft, as they do in Cairo, so Qirat = ’irat, which is corrupted to erott.”

In the following example, a hypercorrection can be found where a *qāf* is written instead of an *ʿalif hamza*: *وقديه لمحمد ابو بكر* *wa-qaddīh li-Muḥammad Abū Bakr* “and bring/give it to Muḥammad Abū Bakr” (D.04.124r, 85: 484,21), which also indicates that the dialect pronounced the *qāf* as a glottal stop, or otherwise this confusion would not have taken place.

2. A salient feature of the dialect of Dakhla (and that of Farafra as well) is the stress, which in most cases lies on the final syllable. The

⁴⁵ I thank Prof. Manfred Woidich for sharing his personal observations on the dialects of the Dakhla Oasis with me.

⁴⁶ See Woidich 2008, p. 471.

⁴⁷ See Woidich 2008, p. 474.

stress causes the vowel in the final syllable to be lengthened.⁴⁸ We find a few traces of this phenomenon in the texts under discussion here. For instance in the word قلب *qalb* “heart” (< قلب)⁴⁹ (D.07.026, 118: 537,10) we see the lengthening of the short stressed *a*. Another example is الحد *al-ḥādd* “the border” (< الحد). This spelling is found four times, all in the same manuscript (D.05.089, 50:331,9,10,12,13).

3. In the afore mentioned word الافاف *al-ʿufāf* “baskets”, the plural pattern is CuCāC as opposed to Cairene Arabic / Modern Standard Arabic CuCaC (*ʿufaf/qufaf*). This is a real long vowel and not a lengthened short vowel. This plural pattern is common in the four oases.⁵⁰

4. In a document dating from around 1880, a receipt for taxes paid (D.04.147b, 111), we find the name of a woman called Ḥalīma ʿUṭmān. She is mentioned in several other documents, as well as on a *xātīm*, “seal”, that was found in the rubble. However, in this particular document her name is not written حليمة Ḥalīma, but حنيمة Ḥanīma with a *nūn*.⁵¹ The shift from *l* to *n* is typical for the dialect of the village of al-Qaṣr, which is called an-ʿĀṣir by its inhabitants.⁵² Here we have a very early witness for this shift.

5. Interesting is the prothetic vowel in the name امبارك, fem. امباركة. The name ساعد امبارك العمامي Sāʿid Imbārak al-ʿAmāmī occurs 25 times; this name is often preceded by the epithet شيخ العرب *šayx al-ʿarab* “head of the Arabs”.⁵³ Once the name عثمان امبارك ʿUṭmān Imbārak is mentioned,⁵⁴ and once the name ابنت المرحوم محمد ابوا فايد المحاجي (ʿ) امباركة ابنت المرحوم محمد ابوا فايد المحاجي (ʿ)

⁴⁸ See Woidich 2002, p. 823-824, who transcribes the lengthening of a vowel through stress by using : rather than a dash on top of the vowel (e.g. *ta:wm* “garlic”). As I am transcribing written texts here, I will adhere to using the dash to indicate a long vowel.

⁴⁹ See *ʿa:lb* in Behnstedt – Woidich 1982, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Personal communication from Manfred Woidich. See also Drop and Woidich 2007, p. 90 fn. 80.

⁵¹ There is another document, a personal letter not included in this collection, in which the name is written حنيمه. An image of it can be found in Leemhuis 2004, p. 61.

⁵² See Woidich 2002, p. 822.

⁵³ e.g. D.04.323v, 79:456,27.

⁵⁴ D.04.323v, 79: 455,14-15.

Imbāraka ibnat al-marḥūm Abū Fāyid al-Maḥāḡī (?), “Imbāraka daughter of the late Abū Fāyid al-Maḥāḡī (?)”.⁵⁵ Such a prothetic vowel is not usually found in Dakhla.⁵⁶ However, it is a characteristic of Bedouin Arabic,⁵⁷ so it is possible that these people were originally not from the Dakhla Oasis. This is supported by the epithet *šayx al-ʿarab*, which indicates that we are dealing with a Bedouin tribe. There were trade contacts between the inhabitants of Dakhla and Bedouins from present-day Libya, and sometimes the oasis was raided.⁵⁸

6. Personal pronouns: Once, the dialectal pronoun *iḥnā* “we” is used: احنا قمنا علي وكيل صحيح “we have set up a correct power of attorney” (D.03.040v, 97: 511,5-6).

4.2. Vocabulary

The documents contain a number of vocabulary items specific for the local dialect. These are mostly (but not exclusively) related to agriculture. Many of the contracts deal with the sale of land, with matters concerning water and irrigation, as well as the types of palm trees and other crops that were planted, and therefore use the terminology that was in use within the agricultural society of the oasis. Beside the agricultural aspect, the documents also include a number of interesting vocabulary items concerning everyday life, such as household utensils.⁵⁹ These, as well as others, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Although the documents are obviously also interesting from a legal point of view, this aspect lies outside the scope of the current research. For more information on the legal aspects of the documents, the reader is kindly referred to the publications of Rudolph Peters in the *References*.

⁵⁵ D.04.291r, 55: 346,12.

⁵⁶ It is not mentioned in Behnstedt and Woidich 1982, Woidich 2002 or Woidich 2008.

⁵⁷ See for instance Rosenhouse 2011.

⁵⁸ See Edmonstone 1822, p. 55.

⁵⁹ Some of the documents include inventories of households or lists of household goods, for instance in the case of an inheritance, e.g. D.05.014, 72, dating from 1143/1730.

4.2.1. Measures

The rights to the use of water could be bought or rented from the owner of a well.⁶⁰ For water usage, the main measurement was the *qadam* “foot” (pl. *ʔaqdām*). This was a measurement of time indicating the period during which a person could let water flow from the well to his land. One *qadam* was the time it took a shadow to move the length of a foot.⁶¹

This measurement gave the following length of a *qadam*: on a mid-winter day 21 minutes, at the equinoxes 24 minutes, and on a mid-summer day 27 minutes.⁶² At night the *qadam* was measured by the movement of the stars: اميله عدہ اقدامها ثلاثون قدما بقياس الظل نهارا وبحساب النجم ليلا “an *ʔamīla* whose number is 30 *qadams* measured by the shadow by day and by the stars by night” (D.05.097, 6: 120,17-18).⁶³

As the previous example already shows, thirty *qadams* made up one *ʔamīla*, pl. *ʔamāyil(a)*: كل اميله من ذلك ثلاثين قدما “every *ʔamīla* of those is 30 *qadam*” (D.05.002, 121: 544,17-18). The etymology of the word *ʔamīla* is unclear; Harding King suggests that either it is not Arabic, or that it refers to the originators of the system.⁶⁴ Although Peters states that an *ʔamīla* equalled 24 hours,⁶⁵ it becomes clear from the other sources that an *ʔamīla* actually equalled half a day, from sunrise to sunset or vice versa.⁶⁶

For dry measures the *mayša* (pl. *miyaš*) was used, which equalled 1.5 litre until the 19th century, and after that 3.3 litre:⁶⁷ الخمسه

⁶⁰ See Peters 2011, p. 36. A well was often owned by many people. One document (D.05.063, 120), which deals with repairing a well, mentions 35 owners of a well called *ʔayn al-dūma*.

⁶¹ The way of measuring this *qadam* is described in detail by Harding King 1917, p. 361.

⁶² Harding King 1917, p. 362.

⁶³ See also the explanation of how it is calculated by Harding King 1917, p. 362.

⁶⁴ See Harding King 1917, p. 364.

⁶⁵ See Peters 2011, p. 36.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 7b, Kato *et al.* 2010, p. 19, Harding King 1917, p. 360, as well as a teacher-farmer inhabitant of Dakhla quoted in Farağ [2012].

⁶⁷ See Peters 2011, p. 578.

و عشرين ميشه ارز “the 25 *mayšas* of rice” (D.03.040, 97: 511,3-4). The word *mayša* is of Coptic origin, from ⲙⲁⲩⲩⲉ/ⲙⲁⲁⲩⲩⲉ, taking its name from the vessel which was used to measure.⁶⁸ Ten *miyaš* were called a *wayba* (pl. *waybāt*).⁶⁹ The *wayba* was one-sixth of an *ʿardabb*.⁷⁰ The word *wayba* actually means “hopper (of a mill)”, which gave its name to the measurement because the hopper holds about one-sixth of an *ʿardabb*.⁷¹

4.2.2. Palm trees

Palm trees, نخيل *naxīl*, played a large role in agriculture in the oasis and are mentioned frequently. Local names for species of palm trees are used, such as تمر قعقع *tamar qaʿqaʿ*, dates of a lesser quality,⁷² ودي *wudy* “young Ṣaʿīdī palm trees”,⁷³ عزب “palm sapling”,⁷⁴ and فالىق *fāliq* *aṣfar* (the feminine is also mentioned once: نخلة فالقة صفرا, D.04.280r, 22:194,15) and فالىق احمر *fāliq aḥmar*, types of date palms.⁷⁵ Some examples:

⁶⁸ See Behnstedt 1981, p. 90, who only mentions it for the Kharga Oasis. See also Crum 1939, p. 201a ⲙⲁⲩⲩⲉ, ⲙⲁⲩⲩⲉ, ⲙⲁⲩⲩⲉ, ⲙⲁⲩⲩⲉ “balance”.

⁶⁹ See Peters 2011, p. 578.

⁷⁰ See Bishai 1964, p. 46.

⁷¹ See Behnstedt 1981, p. 93.

⁷² See Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 388b, 390a.

⁷³ See Peters 2008, p. 83. Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 499b have “palm cutting”. The word is used for palm saplings of about two or three years old (personal communication from Manfred Woidich). The plural is ودايا (see e.g. D.05.049r, 54: 342,8).

⁷⁴ See Peters 2008, p. 83. Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 309b mention *ʿuzba* “wild palm” and *ʿazīb* “a palm of which one does not know yet, if it is masculine or feminine” (the latter only attested for Baḥariyya). *ʿuzba* is also used in al-Qaṣr for a palm shoot that is still attached to the palm (personal communication from Manfred Woidich).

⁷⁵ The word *fāliq* is also used in Barīs (Kharga) for a type of dates, see Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 359b. The word is related to *falq*, a split palm trunk, which is used for instance as a floor joist, see Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 359a. The word *falq* is also found in the documents: وما يحوي المنزل المذكور من ابواب واعتاب وافلاق وطين ولين وسقف واسطح “all that the afore mentioned house contains of doors, lintels, joists, mud, mud brick, ceilings, and roofs” (D.07.050r, 63: 381,19-20).

قطعة ارض وما فيها من نخلتين تمر قعقع عجوز وودية صعيدي غشيم وعزبين
غشيم ثابتين الجذوع والجذران

“a piece of land and what is on it of two old *qa^ʿqa^ʿ* trees, a new *Ṣaʿīdī* palm tree, and two new palm saplings whose stems and roots are firm” (D.04.276, 40: 283-284,6-7).

خمس نخيل من ذلك فالق اصفر ثلاثة منهم واحدة عجوزة وتمر قعقع ثنتان

“five palm trees, among which are three *fāliq asfar* trees, one of which is old, and two *tamar qa^ʿqa^ʿ* trees” (D.05.043, 4: 110,8-9).

4.2.3. Water

For the word “water”, once *mvyya* is found: ديوان ميه بردمود “account book of the water at Bardamūda” (D.04.147b, 111:530,4), and once *mvwayya*: اخراج مويه بعين بردمودة “the extraction of water at the Bardamūda well” (D.04.146, 112: 530,2). Both are attested now in Dakhla.⁷⁶

4.2.4. The use of the Coptic months

The documents are always dated according to the Islamic calendar. However, the Coptic months, for instance *hatūr*, *bāba*, *amšīr*, and *baramhāt*, are sometimes used when determining the date of the settlement of a debt. This has probably to do with the harvest of a certain crop, which would enable the debtor to pay back the loan.⁷⁷ The Coptic months are still used nowadays by Egyptian farmers in matters related to the weather, sowing and harvesting.⁷⁸ The following is an IOU for a debt of acacia dates:

اقرت واشهدت على نفسها غالية زوجة احمد ابوا صالح ان عندها وفي ذمتها الى
سيدي (؟) عثمان ابن المرحوم ابراهيم جوربجي جميع خمسة وبيات تمر السلم عن
كل وبية اثني عشر فضة تقوم له بوقا القدر المذكور الى شهر باباه القابل سنة تاريخه

“Ġāliya the wife of Aḥmad Abū Ṣāliḥ confirms and testifies for herself that she holds and owes to ‘Uṭmān the son of the late Ibrāhīm Ġūrbaġī the total of five *waybas* of acacia dates, for each

⁷⁶ See Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 461a and 462b.

⁷⁷ This is not unusual, see for instance the chapter in Diem 2006 about the forward purchase of agricultural products in Egyptian documents dating from the 8th to the 14th centuries, especially p. 74.

⁷⁸ See Behnstedt 1981, p. 81.

wayba twelve silver coins, and she will pay the aforementioned amount in the coming month of *bābah* in the year of its⁷⁹ date” (D.04.119b, 82: 470,1-6).

4.2.5. The cardinal directions

The *nisba* adjectives indicating the four cardinal directions (قبلي “southern”, بحري “northern”, شرقي “eastern” and غربي “western”) are used as prepositions with the meaning of “south of”, “north of” etc.⁸⁰ Examples: ما عين النجايبين الكاينه ذلك قبلى مدينة القصر “water of the Nağğābīn Well, which is south of the town of al-Qaṣr” (D.05.007r, 3: 106,10), عين الشهابى الكاين هشرقي مدينة القصر “the Šihābī Well, which is east of the town of al-Qaṣr” (D.07.014v, 90: 497,10-11).

4.2.6. Household items

- Jars:

The *dehma*, a large earthen ware jar used for storing pressed dates, is a word that is specific for the dialect of the Dakhla Oasis.⁸¹ It is mentioned a few times in one of the texts, e.g.: وجميع الفخار العتيق الذي في المنزل من دهم وقبوش معدين لكبس الرطب وجميع امطار فخار ومواني (D.05.014r, 72: 421,58) “and all the old pottery that is in the house, such as *dehmas*, and *quyūš* intended for pressing the fresh dates, and all the pottery and enamelled jugs”. The word *quyūš* is unknown; it could be related to *qīšāni* “earthen pottery”,⁸² which was also called *qāšī*.⁸³ The word *امطار* is also mentioned in the singular *مطر maṭr/muṭr* (D.05.014r, 72: 421,32); this is a large jug used to transport water.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ I.e. the date of the IOU.

⁸⁰ See Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 13b, 235b, and 365b.

⁸¹ See Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 146a.

⁸² *Qīšāni* had the meaning of pottery in the 19th century, see Spiro 1895, p. 506a; nowadays it is used with the meaning of glazed tiles, see Badawi and Hinds 1986, p. 700b.

⁸³ See Dozy 1927, II p. 295b.

⁸⁴ See Behnstedt and Woidich 1994, p. 452b, who mention it for the Kharga Oasis and Upper Egypt; in the Delta, it is used for storage.

- Fabrics:

Different types of *baft(a)* “calico” are mentioned in the documents: *بفت محلاوي* *baft maḥallāwī* “calico from Maḥalla”⁸⁵ (D.05.014, 72: 419,36), *بخاريه بيضا* *buxāriyya bēḍa* (D.07.004r, 83:473,34-35) “white [calico] from Buxāra”, *بفت مالطي* *baft mālṭī* “calico from Malta” (D.07.054, 86: 486,4), *ذراع ونصف رومي* “one and a half cubit of Greek [calico]” (D.07.004v, 83: 476,24-25). The word *sudāsī* in *تمن ملايه سداسي* “the price of a *sudāsī* sheet” (D.07.004r, 472,24-25) probably refers to the length of the sheet being six cubits. Lane⁸⁶ mentioned that it is “applied to a garment of the kind called إِزَارٌ, six cubits in length”, and Diem and Radenberg mention “*zawğayn sutūr sudāsī bahnasī musabba*” two pairs of *bahnasī* curtains, each six cubits long and ornamented with figures of lions”.⁸⁷

The meaning of *ḥabb hawwārī* in *ثمن مقطع حب هوارى* “the price of a piece of *ḥabb hawwārī*”⁸⁸ is unclear. As the document contains several IOUs of money to be paid to a certain Muḥammad Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ, and all items concern either fabrics or clothes, we must assume that this person was a vendor of cloth and the *hawwārī* must also have been related to clothing. It likely refers to a place called Hawwāra. There are two such places in Egypt: one in the Fayyūm, where the famous pyramid of Hawwāra is located; the other one is in al-Minyā governorate, close to Bahnasa.⁸⁹ As Bahnasa is famous for its textile industry,⁹⁰ it makes sense that *hawwārī* “from Hawwāra” refers to the place in al-Minyā governorate.

Conclusion

The legal and financial documents from the Dakhla Oasis that were written by professional scribes and court clerks show many well-known Middle Arabic features in orthography, morphology, and syntax. Legal documents and contracts often contained standard

⁸⁵ A famous fabric-producing town in the Delta.

⁸⁶ Lane 1863, II p. 1342c.

⁸⁷ Diem and Radenberg 1994, p. 97.

⁸⁸ Mentioned twice, on D.07.004v, 83: 475,11 and D.07.004r, 83: 471,4-5.

⁸⁹ See Ramzī 1994, p. 103-104.

⁹⁰ See Goitein 1983, p. 120.

phrases that were well known to people working in the legal profession. Therefore, it was not deemed necessary to dot all the letters, resulting in large pieces of texts with only a few dots, or with defective dotting, such as one dot above the *sīn* for indicating *šīn*. It is clear that some phrases that are considered incorrect in Classical Arabic had become standardized to a point that they were repeated again and again in the documents, such as *sanat ʿalf wa-miʿatān* “the year one thousand two hundred”. It is interesting that in documents concerning matters of agriculture, even those documents drafted in the courts, the local vocabulary is used to describe the measurements of water and the various types of palm trees. Especially interesting are the documents which were written by individuals who had not mastered Classical Arabic very well or who sometimes were hardly able to write at all, as indicated by their handwriting. In these documents, we find influences of the local dialect of al-Qaṣr, such as the lengthening of short vowels, the pronunciation of *q as a glottal stop, and, most conspicuous, the pronunciation of *l* as *n*.

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