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Egyptian Arabic in the seventeenth century : a study and edition of Yusuf al-Magribi's 'Daf al-isr an kalam ahl Misr'

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Publication date

2009

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Zack, E. W. A. (2009). *Egyptian Arabic in the seventeenth century : a study and edition of Yusuf al-Magribi's 'Daf al-isr an kalam ahl Misr'*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam]. LOT.

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Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is a book entitled *Daf al-iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr:¹ “Removing the burden from the speech of the Egyptians”, which was written in the year 1014-5/1606 by the Egyptian writer Yūsuf al-Mağribī (d. 1019/1611).² The work is unique because it was one of the earliest attempts to study colloquial Arabic scientifically. The only surviving manuscript, the autograph, is currently kept in the library of the Oriental Faculty at St. Petersburg University in Russia.³ It has never before been edited, although a facsimile edition, with an introduction and indices, was published in 1968 by ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Aḥmad ‘Awwād. The work has attracted further scholarly attention over the years. Olga Frolova, for example, discussed its dialectal poetry in several articles published in 1982, 1995 and 1997, while Nelly Hanna used some aspects of its many interesting cultural observations in her work, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo’s Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (2003). Having been published in Moscow forty years ago, the facsimile edition of *Daf al-iṣr* is not widely available, which is perhaps why the book is not widely known and has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. It is for this reason that this edition of *Daf al-iṣr* has been written.

The present work is comprised of two parts: the study of the contents of *Daf al-iṣr* for its linguistics and cultural observations, and the text edition. *Daf al-iṣr* is generally considered to be a linguistic document, and in it the author attempts to relate Egyptian Arabic colloquial vocabulary to Classical Arabic, by checking the Egyptian Arabic entries in the appropriate dictionaries, such as al-Fīrūzābādī’s *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*. Many of the entries in *Daf al-iṣr* concern everyday words, such as the names of tools and utensils, food and drink, and the speech of traders and artisans. These entries are often accompanied by anecdotes and lines of (colloquial) poetry. Accordingly, *Daf al-iṣr* is not only a linguistic document, because it also provides us with an insight into the culture and daily life in Egypt at the beginning of the 17th century.

¹ From now on, abbreviated to *Daf al-iṣr*.

² See *GAL* II pp. 367-8 and *GAL* S II pp 394-5. *GAL* incorrectly cites his year of death as 1609 instead of 1611 and *Raf al-iṣr* instead of *Daf al-iṣr*.

³ No. MS OA 778.

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1 The contents of the present study of *Daf al-iṣr*

The present study of *Daf al-iṣr* has two parts: Chapters 1-5 contain background information, while Chapter 6 and the glossary comprise the linguistic study of the text. A brief overview of the contents of the chapters is set out below:

1. *Life and works of Yūsuf al-Mağribī*. In this chapter, al-Mağribī's family background is discussed, as is his education, career, personal life and literary works.
2. *Description of the manuscript*. This chapter describes the current physical appearance and condition of the manuscript. It also looks at its previous owners, and examines the different titles given to the work during the writing process.
3. *About *Daf al-iṣr* 'an kalām ahl Miṣr*. In this chapter, the contents of *Daf al-iṣr* are described, and al-Mağribī's reasons for writing it are explained. *Daf al-iṣr* is placed in its historical context by consideration of the works which influenced al-Mağribī, and an overview of the earlier studies of the book is provided. The final part of this chapter is devoted to al-Mağribī's methodology, such as his placing of entries in context, the use of metalanguage, and the employment of different ways to describe the pronunciation of the entries.
4. *The poetry in *Daf al-iṣr**. This chapter deals with the poetry composed by al-Mağribī, with special focus on a frequently employed dialectal form of the art, the *mawwāl*, as well as some poems called *muṭallaṭāt* and riddles, which were also composed in the form of short poems. An overview of the metres used by al-Mağribī is presented, and the chapter concludes with a description of the non-Arabic (Turkish and Persian) poetry in *Daf al-iṣr*.
5. *Aspects of daily life*. In this chapter, various aspects of daily life which are mentioned in *Daf al-iṣr* are discussed, such as food and drinks, drugs and tobacco, medicine, games, clothing and jewellery, and tools and utensils.
6. *Linguistic analysis*. This chapter is divided into the following subject-matters: Orthography, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, and Vocabulary. The chapter aims to:
 1. Compare the dialectal features of *Daf al-iṣr* with modern Cairo Arabic, and establish which have survived, and which have not. To this end, the Egyptian Arabic dictionary by Hinds and Badawi, the dialect atlas by Behnstedt and Woidich, and Woidich's grammar of Cairo Arabic were utilised.
 2. Provide more information about the dialect in the 16 and 17th centuries, because knowledge of this period is extremely scarce. The main source of comparison is *Hazz al-quḥūf bi-ṣarḥ qaṣīd 'Abī Ṣādūf* by Yūsuf al-Šīrbīnī,

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which was written in 1097/1686, 80 years later than *Daf al-iṣr*. An extensive study of the dialectal features of *Hazz al-quḥūf* was conducted by Humphrey Davies,⁴ which was an invaluable aid. An earlier source, *Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-muḍḥik al-‘abūs* by ‘Alī Ibn Sūdūn al-Bašbūgānī (1407-1464), into which Arnoud Vrolijk carried out a linguistic study, has also been used for the purpose of comparison, as have some Middle-Arabic texts from the same period.⁵

7. *Glossary*. This glossary contains all the entries from *Daf al-iṣr* with their English translations, as well as references to dictionaries and other sources in which these words can be found. The entries are arranged according to their roots.

2 The edition

The aim of this edition⁶ is to present a text which is as close as possible to that written by al-Maḡribī. This includes retaining the spelling which he used, even though I am aware that it is more common to adjust this to the standards of Classical Arabic.⁷ A few considerations did, however, prevent me from following this course. Firstly, the manuscript is an autograph. The orthography therefore reflects the scribal habits of an educated person from this particular period.⁸ During the *Second International Conference on Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic*, held at the University of Amsterdam 22-25 October 2007, a number of participants⁹ expressed the desire for digital editions which do not normalize the spelling to use in their research into Middle Arabic. By normalizing the spelling, much useful linguistic information is lost. Therefore, I have kept the original script intact as far as possible. Only if the original spelling could lead to confusion have I normalized

⁴ Davies (1981). Some additional remarks about the colloquial features of *Hazz al-quḥūf* can be found in Davies (2005).

⁵ Blanc (1981), Jaritz (1993), Palva (1997), Palva (2000), Cohen (2000).

⁶ The edition of the Arabic text can be downloaded for free from the following website: <http://www.lotpublications.nl/index3.html>.

⁷ See Vrolijk (1998) p. 112.

⁸ In the introduction to the edition of *Kitāb al-ḥikāyāt al-‘aǧība wa al-‘aḥbār al-ǧarība*, which contains some Middle Arabic characteristics, Hans Wehr states that “diese Mischung [i.e. of Classical Arabic and dialect] gehört zur sprachlichen Eigenart des Textes und darf vom Editor nicht durch Korrekturen verwischt werden” (p. xiv). However, Wehr did somewhat normalize the spelling of the *hamza*, as he states on p. xv.

⁹ One of them was Han den Heijer during his concluding remarks.

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it, and added the spelling used in the manuscript to the footnotes,¹⁰ preceded by م (*m(aḥṭūṭ)* “manuscript”). There are two exceptions, which I have adjusted without such a reference, because they occur too frequently and would clutter the footnotes unnecessarily:

1. The spelling of final *yā'* and *alif maqṣūra* has been adjusted, e.g. علي has become على and في has become في, to facilitate the reading of the text. Moreover, al-Mağribī's use of ي and ى seems to be completely arbitrary, and so adjusting this spelling does not interfere with the character of the orthography he used.
2. When the letter *yā'* is the bearer of the *hamza*, for practical reasons this is consequently written as ى, whereas al-Mağribī always uses the variant ِ. When the letter does not show any diacritics or only a *kasra*, I have rendered this as ى, whereas when it is clearly written with diacritic dots ِ, I have retained this spelling. All other instances of the *hamza* which differ to modern spelling standards have been kept as they are.

Words that are red in the manuscript are rendered bold in the text edition. Marginalia have been inserted in the main body of the text between braces { }. An exception is made for marginalia which do not add anything new, e.g. comments like انظر *unzur* “look up” or a comment that repeats what has been said in the text. These have been added in the footnotes preceded by ه *h(āmiš)* “margin”. Also included in the footnotes are comments al-Mağribī makes about lines of poetry, which would interrupt the rhyme and lay-out of the verses if left in the main body of the text. The numbering of the quires is also given in the footnotes, as well as the metres of the poetry. I have corrected obvious mistakes in the text, setting out the original spelling in a footnote preceded by م (*m(aḥṭūṭa)* “manuscript”).

Comments about the contents of *Daḥ al-iṣr* are contained in the endnotes, such as information about persons, books, places, and Qur'anic verses mentioned in the text. We must, however, bear in mind that many of the people mentioned were personal friends of al-Mağribī, who were not necessarily famous, and therefore no information about them could be found. In these cases, the comment “Unknown” is written in the endnote.

¹⁰ E.g. when ما should be read as *mā'* and not as *mā*, I have changed it to ماء with the original spelling in the footnote.

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Because Yūsuf al-Mağribī did not use any kind of layout, it is difficult to see, at a glance, where one entry ends and the next one starts. I have, therefore, emphasised the word يقولون *yaqūlūn* when it is introducing a new entry (or, sometimes, another expression introducing a new entry, such as ومن قولهم *wa min qawlihim* etc.) by using a different font called al-Battar: يقولون.¹¹ Al-Mağribī divided his work into chapters and paragraphs, introduced by headings such as *ḥarf al-bā'* and *faṣl al-hamza*. In cases where he has forgotten these, I have added them without further notice. These chapter headings are also in the al-Battar font. Although al-Mağribī did not place a new chapter or paragraph on a new line, in my text edition, every new chapter and paragraph is preceded by a space. The manuscript contains no form of punctuation, and I have added none.

I will be using the word “manuscript” when talking of the book’s physical properties, and words such as “word list”, or simply “work” when talking of its contents.

3 Technical aspects

Finally, a word on the technical aspects, which mainly concern the fonts used in this study. The search for suitable fonts for this work has not been easy. Working on a PC with Windows, rather than a Mac like many Arabic linguists, meant that it took me a long time to find a transliteration font which suited all of my requirements. The Arabic font was even more problematic, because no standard PC font could handle such anomalies as the *ḥ* or the *ḳ*, while I was also no admirer of the automatic vocalization of the word الله because I wanted the text to be vocalized exactly as in the manuscript, i.e. without the *šadda* and *fatha*: الله. The solution finally came in the shape of SIL International (formerly known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics), an “organization that studies, documents, and assists in developing the world’s lesser-known languages”.¹² On their website they provide a collection of excellent, Open Font-licensed fonts, and so for the Arabic text I used the Scheherazade SIL font, which “is designed in a similar style to traditional typefaces such as Monotype Naskh, extended to cover the full Unicode Arabic repertoire”.¹³ Not only did this font provide me with all of the special

¹¹ Al-Mağribī sometimes uses similar devices, such as making the word larger than those which surround it, or by putting a horizontal dash on top of it, or by writing it in red.

¹² See <http://www.sil.org/sil/>.

¹³ http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=nrsi&item_id=ArabicFonts.

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characters that I needed, but it is also very pleasing on the eye. For the English text, I used Gentium SIL, and my a heart-felt *thanks*, therefore, go out to SIL International.

In the few instances where Coptic is written, I have used the font of the Coptic Orthodox Church Network,¹⁴ while for the hieroglyphs I used GlyphBasic.

4 Symbols used in the text edition

- ... text lost by accident, for instance, because of a hole in the paper, or because it is illegible (the number of dots reflects the approximate number of letters that has been lost)
- [] text which was crossed out by al-Mağribī
- { } text written in the margin or between the lines
- < > quotations from *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*
- ﴿ ﴾ verses from the Qurʾān
- * separates verses and lines of rhymed prose; in many instances al-Mağribī used a (red) comma for this purpose, while on other occasions he did not use any verse separator; in both cases I have placed the symbol *
- \ marks the beginning of a new folio; the folio number is mentioned in the left-hand margin
- م in a footnote precedes the word as it is written in the manuscript when this word has been corrected in the text
- ﷲ in a footnote precedes a comment written in the margin which does not belong in the main body of the text

¹⁴ http://www.copticchurch.net/coptic_fonts/#Download

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5 Transliteration

ا	'a, 'i, 'u, ā	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	ṯ	ع	'
ج	ǧ	غ	ǧ
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	ḫ	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	ḏ	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	š	و	w, ū, ō, aw
ص	ṣ	ي	y, ī, ē, ay

From the Persian alphabet, the following letters are used:

پ p
چ č

Al-Mağribī does not use the letter گ for *g* when writing Persian or Turkish; he instead writes ك, and once uses كپ on fol. 118b.

For technical reasons, the ظ is transcribed with ẓ. This does not, however, imply anything about the pronunciation of the ظ. This also applies to the transliteration of the ق with *q* and the ج with *ǧ*.

The symbol ə is used in the transliteration when we know for certain that a word must contain a vowel, but it is unclear which one it should be, e.g. برشق *baršaq* “belt”. Therefore the letter ə does not indicate any phonetic quality.

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When the letter *ي* is written in a word, but it is unclear whether it should be read as *ī*, *ē* or *ay*, the transliteration used is *y*, for instance, سيف *syf*. The same goes for *و*, which in case of doubt is transcribed with *w*, for instance, هون *hwn*.