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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CHAPTER 2

Description of the Manuscript

As far as we know, there is only one manuscript of Daf' al-izr.104 This is the autograph, which is kept in the St. Petersburg University Library, number MS OA 778. This chapter will discuss how it ended up there, as well as its physical condition and appearance.105

2.1 The historical background of the manuscript – from Cairo to St. Petersburg

After the death of Yūsuf al-Maqrīzī in 1611, the autograph of Daf' al-izr came into the possession of Muḥammad ibn Aḥī al-Surūr al-Bakrī al-Šiddīqī (d. 1653?).106 Ibn Aḥī al-Surūr produced an abbreviated version of Daf' al-izr in 1057/1647 and called it al-Qawl al-muqtaṣadḥ firmā wāfine qaṣaṣ luğāt ahl Maṣr min luğāt al-ʿarab.107 The first folio has some owner marks, but these cannot be deciphered, because the page is damaged. On the last page, fol. 134b, one of the subsequent owners wrote his name and the date Ĝumādā 1095 AH (1684 AD). Unfortunately, most of the name has been erased, making it partly illegible.108 At a certain point, Daf' al-izr passed into the hands of Yūsuf al-Mallawī Ibn al-Wakīl.109 No information about the manuscript’s whereabouts can be found for the years after it was with Ibn al-Wakīl; we only know that it finally came into the possession of the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad ‘Ayyād al-Ṭaṭāwī (1810-1861), about a hundred and fifty years later. Not only has al-Ṭaṭāwī been vital to the history of the manuscript, but he is also an important source of information about Egyptian Arabic in the 19th century. Accordingly, al-Ṭaṭāwī will be presented to the reader in the following paragraph.

104 See GAL S II p. 394. The “Abschrift in Halle (ZDMG 45, 480, no. 124)” mentioned there is the abbreviated copy made in the 19th century by the orientalist Thorbecke, see §3.5.
105 I examined the manuscript in May 2001 in the library of the University of St. Petersburg.
107 The relation between Daf' al-izr and al-Qawl al-muqtaṣadḥ will be discussed in §3.4.
108 The only legible part of the name is: "al-fīqīr Muḥammad (...) ibn al-marḥūm al-šayḥ Nūr al-Dīn ibn al-marḥūm al-šayḥ Šaraf al-Dīn 'Allī b. al-marḥūm (...) al-Âḍ̱ām. We do not have any additional information about these people. It is unclear whether they owned the manuscript before or after Ibn al-Wakīl.
109 See Ibn Aḥī al-Surūr (1962) p. 2. This person, also known as Yūsuf b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Wakīl al-Milāwī, was a copyist, translator and historian, who was active at the beginning of the 18th century. He is mentioned in GAL S II pp. 410, 414 and 637. On the title page of the manuscript of one of his works, Buğyāt al-muṣāmir wa-ġūnyāt al-muṣāfīr, his name is written as al-Milāwī. See Rosenthal (1963) p. 452-4.
2.1.1 Muḥammad ʿAyyād al-Ṭaḥṭāwī
Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was born in 1810, in the village of Nağrīd, which is located in the neighbourhood of Ṭaṭṭā, in the Egyptian Delta. He was the son of a travelling salesman, and his full name was Muḥammad b. Saʿd b. Sulaymān ʿAyyād al-Marḫūmī al-Ṭaḥṭāwī al-Ṣāfī. The nisbū al-Marḫūmī refers to the birth place of his father, Mahallat Marḫūm, a village close to Ṭaṭṭā.110 He first went to the local kuttāb, and at the age of 13 moved to Cairo, where he joined al-Azhar University.111 Ibrāhīm al-Bāǧūrī (1783-1861) was his main teacher there.112 The most notable of his fellow students was Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī (1811-1883), bāš-muṣṭahfī (“chief-corrector”) at the Būlāq printing house. He became known because of the assistance he gave to Edward William Lane in compiling the latter’s dictionary.113

Upon completing his studies, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī held a position as a lecturer at al-Azhar for almost ten years.114 He gave private lessons to foreigners, such as the orientalists Lane, Fresnel, Perron and Weil,115 as well as two Russian diplomats, Mukhin and Frähn. Mukhin had read Oriental Studies at the University of St. Petersburg,116 and in 1839, offered al-Ṭaḥṭāwī the opportunity to teach at the Institute of Oriental Languages in St. Petersburg, when a post became vacant because of the demise of its teacher of Arabic, Demange. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī arrived in St. Petersburg in 1840.117 In 1847, he became the third Professor of the Arabic language at St. Petersburg University, and the first Arab to hold the post.118 He kept this position until his death in Russia in 1861, and was buried in the Volkovo cemetery.119 Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī left us one of the most interesting sources of Egyptian-Arabic from the 19th century, a work called Traité de la langue arabe vulgaire (or in Arabic, Aḥsan al-naḥṭ fi maʿrifat lisān al-ʿarab).120 His manuscript collection, containing about 150 manuscripts among which was Dafʿ al-ʾiṣr, was bequeathed to

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111 Ibid. p. 25.
113 Ibid. p. 27-8 and EI II p. 167a (I. Goldziher).
116 Ibid. p. 41.
117 Ibid. pp. 44-5.
120 A detailed linguistic study of this work can be found in Woidich (1995) pp. 271-287; a concise description of the book can be found in Sharbatov (1984) pp. 72-75.
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the St. Petersburg University library, where they remain. Unfortunately, where and how al-Ṭanṭāwī acquired Daf al-īṣr is still unknown.

2.2 Physical appearance and condition of the manuscript

The manuscript in its present form consists of 134 folios. It was numbered in Arabic numbers by Baron Victor Romanovič Rosen (1849-1908), who catalogued all of the collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts at St. Petersburg University.121 The binding was carried out by the University librarian, Zaleman.122 On its title page is written, in a different handwriting to that of al-Maġribī’s, al- Faḍl al- ‘āmm wa qāmūs al-‘awāmm li-Yūsuf al-Maġribī. In the lower left corner of each verso page, a catchword is inscribed. Each page contains between 18 and 24 lines. The size of the manuscript is 21.5 cm in length and 15.5 cm in width. Part of the manuscript is missing, from kurrāsı (quire) 3 to 13, which equates to 11 quires or 110 pages.123 In its original state, it numbered 25 quires (including those which were lost), the last of which consists of only four folios. Quire 3 (fol. 20b) ends with the word قطرب and quire 14 (fol. 21a) starts with the word جفف.124 Another irregularity can be found in the 23rd quire, which consists of eight folios (111a-118b) instead of the usual ten. However, there is no text missing so it can be assumed that al-Mağribī unintentionally used an incomplete quire.

The manuscript is in fairly good condition. In some places, there is some minor damage to the pages. The first folio has sustained the most damage: it has two holes and the upper margin is missing. Furthermore, the upper margins of fols. 4, 5, and 7 are torn, as is the lower margin of fol. 10.

It seems that the manuscript is a first draft of Daf al-īṣr, because there are large

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121 Rosen himself refers to this in his letter to Thorbecke, published in Kratchkovsky (1955) p. 369.
122 See Kratchkovsky (1955) p. 372.
123 Here Kratchkovsky (1955) p. 373 erroneously mentions that 12 quires, i.e. 120 pages are missing.
124 ʿAwwād (1968) states in the foreword of the facsimile edition that the manuscript after the missing part continues with the word رسف (see p. 11); however, this is incorrect. Indeed the word رسف is mentioned: ويقولون أي الشعراء رسف الحبيب كالدقيق (line 3), but the word which is explained here is جفف, not رسف. This becomes clear starting from line four of the same folio where the different plurals of the word جفف are given. Another indication is that the next explained word is جفف (fol. 21). Furthermore, the final explained word in the missing part is from the root HFF, because the quotation in lines 1-3 of fol. 21a is from the chapter HFF of al-Qāmūs al-Muhīṭ.
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numbers of corrections, additions and comments added in the margins, which are in the same handwriting as the main body of the text. Any subsequent copyist would have incorporated these corrections in the text. Al-Maḡribī wrote Dıf al-ısr between Dū al-Ḥīǧga 1014\(^\text{125}\) (April-May 1606) and half Čumādā al-ʿülā 1015 (half September 1606).\(^\text{126}\) This is a brief period of time considering the size of the work, as he realized himself:

"This book was produced in a short time, may God make his difficulties easy, and the poetry it contains puts the state of the book in proper order with the running of the pen, as if it was written down from an existing copy."

The year 1014 AH is mentioned several times in the manuscript, on fols. 13a and 16b, and the year 1015 AH is referred to on fol. 19a. In 1016 AH, almost a year after its completion, the manuscript was still in al-Maḡribī’s possession, because he wrote in the margin of fol. 89b that someone he had mentioned there, had died that year. He also refers to another event that occurred in 1016.\(^\text{127}\)

Red ink is used in some parts of the manuscript, notably more towards the end. Often the word yaqūlūn “they say”, which is used to introduce a new entry, is written in red ink to make it stand out from the rest of the text. Moreover, the two parts of a line of poetry are often divided by commas in red ink. Some words, such as yaqūlūn or the titles of chapters, are written somewhat larger than the rest, and the word yaqūlūn is sometimes accentuated with a small stroke on top.

Dıf al-ısr contains entries for 1406 words\(^\text{129}\) in 134 folios. Taking into consideration that 110 folios were lost, the original manuscript in its complete state must have contained around 2560 entries.

\(^\text{125}\) Mentioned in Dıf al-ısr on fol. 1a. On fol. 133a he mentions he started the work half Sawwāl 1014 (beginning of February 1606); probably by the time he reached the end of the book he did not remember exactly when he had started it.

\(^\text{126}\) See fol. 133a.

\(^\text{127}\) Fol. 133a.

\(^\text{128}\) In the margin of fol. 43a.

\(^\text{129}\) Awwād (1968) has 1371 entries in his index. This difference is due to the fact that Awwād failed to mention some of the entries, such as the entries ʿaflak, fulāka, maflāk on fol. 61b. Also, some other words, which are not introduced with wa yaqūlūn, escaped his notice, such as al-ḥafalā on fol. 69b and kūki on fol. 62a.
2.3 The title

The title of the book was, initially, *al-Faḍl al-ʿāmm wa qāmūs al-ʿawāmm*, “The general benefit and the dictionary of the common people”, see folio 2a. It is written in its abbreviated form *al-Faḍl al-ʿāmm* at the beginning of the quires on fols. 11a, 21a, 41a and 61a. On fol. 71a we find the abbreviated title, *Qāmūs al-ʿawāmm*. However, al-Maġribī erased this title on folio 2a, and wrote the new title in the margin: *Dafʾ al-iṣrʾ an kalām*¹³⁰ *ahl Miṣr*. On the headings of the quires we find that the old title (*al-Faḍl* etc.) has been changed into the new one.¹³¹ This happens for the last time on folio 111a. On folio 119a, al-Maġribī wrote the new title directly. It is, therefore, clear that he changed the title during the writing process. He probably got the idea for the new title from the poem he wrote on fol. 99b:

“They saw in a vision / a light which removed the burden from you
I said, ‘In the history / Ali Pasha¹³² came to enlighten Egypt’.”

One thing has to be noted: in most places in the manuscript where al-Maġribī has changed the title, it was changed to *Dafʾ al-iṣrʾ an luġāt ıhl Miṣr*,¹³³ while the variant with *kalām* instead of *luġāt* can be found in only one place, on folio 2a. Accordingly, it is not entirely clear which title al-Maġribī preferred. However, it seems likely that, at a certain stage, he decided to change the new title from *luġat* / *luġāt* to *kalām*, but did not take the trouble to go through the whole document to do this. Since the variant with *kalām* is the one the text has become known for, this is the title I will use in this work.

There is some confusion about the title *Dafʾ al-iṣrʾ an kalām ahl Miṣr*. Some authors refer to it, erroneously, as *Rafʾ al-iṣrʾ an quādīt Miṣr*, e.g. GAL II p. 368, including Ibn Abī al-Surūr in his introduction to *al-Qawl al-muqṭadab*, even though he possessed the original.¹³⁴ The confusion is probably due to the existence of a famous work entitled *Rafʾ al-iṣrʾ an quādīt Miṣr* by Ibn Ḥāgar al-ʿAṣqalānī (773/1372-
852/1449). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that al-Maġribī wrote Dā‘ and not Ra‘. Al-Maġribī’s dāl cannot be mistaken for a rā‘. The meaning of the two words is similar, the first being “pushing away”, the second “lifting up”, and therefore “removing”.

\[135\] See GAL II pp. 80-83.