



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

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

Zack, E.W.A.

**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.

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## CHAPTER 3

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

#### 3.1 The contents of *Daf al-iṣr*

*Daf al-iṣr* is an important source of the Egyptian dialect used at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. It is presented in the form of a list of Egyptian Arabic words, which al-Mağribī checked for consistency with Classical Arabic, referring mainly to al-Fīrūzābādī’s *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*. As the title of *Daf al-iṣr* indicates, al-Mağribī’s aim was to prove that many Egyptian dialect words, which were considered to be “incorrect” Arabic, in fact have their roots in the Classical Arabic language. This makes *Daf al-iṣr* a work of special interest because it is one of very few in this field, as will be shown in §3.3.1.

Since al-Mağribī did not have many precedents to follow, it is interesting to discover more about his motives for writing this work,<sup>136</sup> the books that influenced him,<sup>137</sup> and his methodology, namely what kind of words he discussed, how he examined them, and whether or not he was successful in doing so.<sup>138</sup> *Daf al-iṣr* has attracted scholarly interest over the years, and the studies that have been written about it will be discussed in §3.4 and §3.5.

In this chapter, only *Daf al-iṣr*’s linguistic aspects will be considered. Another element of the book is its poetry, both by al-Mağribī and others, as well as its many (rhyming) riddles. Al-Mağribī used these as a way of proving the validity of a word (if it was found in a poem in Classical Arabic). He also utilized them to demonstrate the use of a word, or simply to enliven the text and highlight his prowess at the art. These poems will be discussed separately, in Chapter 4.

Apart from its linguistic and literary interest, *Daf al-iṣr* contains valuable information about Egyptian culture during the 16th/17th centuries, such as the types of clothing and food that were common, and the new fashion of tobacco and coffee. These aspects will be discussed in Chapter 6.

#### 3.2 Al-Mağribī’s reasons for writing *Daf al-iṣr*

The actual word list starts at fol. 3b. Fols. 1a-3a contain an introduction in which al-Mağribī mentions his reasons for writing *Daf al-iṣr*. His aim was:

---

<sup>136</sup> See §3.2.

<sup>137</sup> See §3.3.

<sup>138</sup> See §3.6 and §3.7.

About *Daf al-Iṣr ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr*

بيان الفاظ يحكم الظاهر بخطائها والحال انها صواب \* وكلمات تظهر صحتها ولم توافق ما عليه  
ذوو الالباب

“Clarifying words which appear to be wrong, while the fact is that they are correct, and other words which appear to be correct, but about which the intellectuals do not agree”.<sup>139</sup>

So, his main aim was to prove that words which the intellectuals thought were incorrect, i.e. not the same as in Classical Arabic, or about which there were doubts, in fact were not “wrong” at all. The way in which he wanted to achieve this is explained on fol. 2a:

ان يرتب هذا الكتاب على ابهج ترتيب \* ويهذب ما يقع من عوام اهل مصر بان يرجعه للصواب  
وهذا هو التعريب \* مغترفا من القاموس والعُباب \* ميّتا لما حكم بخطائه انه صواب  
“To arrange this book in the most splendid way, and improve what is said by the common people of Egypt, by relating it to the correct form, which is *ta’rīb* (“Arabization”), scooping from *al-Qāmūs* and *al-‘Ubāb*, and clarifying that what is considered to be wrong, is correct.”

To check the existence of dialectal words in Classical Arabic, al-Mağribī intended to use *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* by al-Fīrūz’ābādī<sup>140</sup> and *al-‘Ubāb al-zāhir wa l-lubāb al-fāhir* by Raḍī al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Ṣağānī (577/1181-650/1252).<sup>141</sup> Yet, contrary to this statement, al-Mağribī did not actually use *al-‘Ubāb* as a source for *Daf al-iṣr* in the section of the manuscript that is left for us to read.

Al-Mağribī realized that what he intended to do was quite unique, as we can read on fols. 2b-3a:

وكل من هذين اي نظم الالفاظ المشتركة وتطبيق الالفاظ الذي يظهر خطاها على الصواب ما  
صنعه احد في علمي وانما الحريري في درة الغواص يبين أوهام الخواص وغالبها يقبل الاجوبة

<sup>139</sup> Although the sentence *kalimāt...al-albāb* seems grammatically incorrect, the meaning is clear.

<sup>140</sup> See §1.1.1 for full biographical details.

<sup>141</sup> See GAL I pp. 443-4.

About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

“To the best of my knowledge, neither of these i.e. the arrangement of joint words<sup>142</sup> and the application of the words which appear to be wrong in their correct form, has been done by anybody before. However, al-Ḥarīrī demonstrated the errors of the elite in his *Durrat al-ġawwās*,<sup>143</sup> and the majority of these errors need a reply”.

On fol. 3a he tells about an incident which strengthened his determination to pursue this idea:

وسبب هذا الصنع ان بعض متشدين سمع من بعض الاصحاب الفاظا فصار يهزوه به ويستخر منه مع انها تحتل الصواب مثل فلان خرج باقعه في الشئ الفلاني وسمع عند لعبه الشطرنج رسيله يقول مرماذ فضحك عليه وانما المرماذ من الرمذ وكانه يقول له ما رايت في هذا الدست فاستخرت الله في ذلك

“The reason for this work is that a boaster heard one of his friends say certain expressions, so he started to make fun of him and ridicule him, although they [the expressions] conveyed the correct meaning, like ‘so and so turned out to be a sly fox (*bāqī’a*) in this or that case’; and he heard his messenger say *marmād* during a chess-game so he laughed at him, but *marmād* comes from *ramad* ‘inflammation of the eye’, as if he says to him: ‘I did not see in this game,’<sup>144</sup> so I asked God for proper guidance.”

When reading *Durrat al-ġawwās*, al-Maġribī realised that certain words, which were considered to be incorrect, did in fact not deviate from Classical Arabic. Furthermore, he noticed that people who used this kind of language were being laughed at. He, therefore, felt the need to correct this ignorance by investigating which colloquial words had the same meaning in Classical Arabic. However, on fol. 3a he states that he knows he would not always be able to achieve this goal:

---

<sup>142</sup> *muṣṭarik*: al-Maġribī meant: words which have more than one meaning. In the paragraph before this quotation, al-Maġribī discussed the different meanings of the verb ‘*arab*’ (see fol. 2a).

<sup>143</sup> For biographical details, see §1.1. *Durrat al-ġawwās* is a specimen of the *lahn al-‘amma*-literature, see §3.3.1.

<sup>144</sup> Apparently this is an exclamation used when somebody loses a piece or is being checkmated. See §5.4.

About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

وليس المراد أن جميع ما صدر من الناس أصححه وإنما ما قبل الصحة نبينه وما لا يقبل أصرح  
بعدم قبوله

“It is not my intention to correct everything the people say, but to throw light on everything that is acceptable, and to clarify everything that is not acceptable, and why that is the case.”

On fol. 133a, at the end of the work, al-Mağribī gives a completely different reason for writing *Daf al-iṣr*:

وكان الباعث لهذا الأمر الغير الإمر انني قصدت مطالعة القاموس المحيط

“The incentive for this not so painful affair was that I intended to study *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*”.

However, the fact that one reason is given does not mean that any others are invalid. Writing *Daf al-iṣr*, therefore, served al-Mağribī’s purposes well in defending the Egyptian dialect, while at the same time it enabled him to study *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. The outcome of his examination even surprised him on occasions:

ويقولون ويقع كثيرا من النساء فلان على الحال ما يزعق أي سريع الغيظ والعجيب أنه قال في  
القاموس «الزعقوك كعُصْفُور السبيء الخلق» انتهى ومحل التعجب موافقتهم للمعنى اللغوي وهذا  
ومثله حملني على وضع هذا الكتاب فإن غالب كلمات أهالي مصر يوافق اللغة<sup>145</sup>

“They say, and this is heard often from women, so-and-so ‘alā l-ḥāl mā yiza‘qaq, i.e. “he gets angry immediately”, and the amazing thing is that he [= al-Fīrūzābādī] says in *al-Qāmūs* that “*al-zu‘qūq* with the pattern of ‘*uṣfūr* is somebody who has a bad temper”, end of quotation, and the cause of this amazement is their [= the women’s] conformity with the meaning in the Classical language. This and other similar cases induced me to write this book, because the greater proportion of the words of the people of Egypt is in conformity with the [Classical Arabic] language.”

Unfortunately, this example is based on an error, for *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* mentions *الزعفوق* with the meaning described by al-Mağribī, not *الزعقوك*.<sup>146</sup> However, it demonstrates that al-Mağribī was genuinely pleased when he could relate an Egyptian-Arabic word to Classical Arabic.

<sup>145</sup> Fol. 42a.

<sup>146</sup> See *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* p. 801c.

### 3.3 Works that influenced al-Mağribī

#### 3.3.1 *Laḥn al-‘amma*-literature

Criticizing the language of certain people, like al-Ḥarīrī did in *Durrat al-ğawwās*, was common. Works of this genre, generally known as *laḥn al-‘amma*,<sup>147</sup> or “errors of language made by the common people”, already existed in the second century AH.<sup>148</sup> Their design was “to correct deviations by reference to the contemporary linguistic norm, as determined by the purists”.<sup>149</sup>

Al-Mağribī borrows some of the terminology used in the *laḥn al-‘amma* literature, e.g. he introduces the dialect word with *yaqūlūn* “they say”, and the correct form (if he establishes that the dialect form is not ‘correct’) by *wa al-ṣawāb*... “whereas the norm is...”.<sup>150</sup> This could be an indication that al-Mağribī got his inspiration for *Daf al-iṣr* from the *laḥn al-‘amma* literature. We know that he was familiar with at least one specimen of the genre: al-Ḥarīrī’s *Durrat al-ğawwās fī awḥām al-ḥawāṣṣ*, of which al-Mağribī produced an arrangement and appendix.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, al-Mağribī’s purpose was the opposite of that of the *laḥn al-‘amma* literature, i.e. *defending* the colloquial language, instead of attacking it. He introduces a word without prejudice, and *then* examines whether the word is ‘correct’ Arabic or not. However, this positive attitude does not mean that he completely refrains from pointing out ‘errors’ in the language of the Egyptians.

Maṭar (1966) p. 56 refers to some authors who have devoted part of their *laḥn al-‘amma* work to words that were considered to be incorrect, even though they were not,<sup>152</sup> as well as to authors who devoted a *complete* work to the dialectal words that can be found in Classical Arabic. As well as *Daf al-iṣr*, *Baḥr al-‘awwām fīmā ‘aṣāb fīh al-‘awāmm* by Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Ḥanbalī (d. 971/1563),<sup>153</sup> and *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab fīmā wāfaqa luğāt ‘ahl Miṣr min luğāt al-‘arab* by Ibn abī al-Surūr<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> This expression, or the similar *laḥn al-‘awāmm*, is often used in titles of works of this genre, although different titles can be found as well such as *Kitāb ġalaṭāt al-‘awāmm* or *Kitāb mā tağlat fīhi al-‘awāmm*, see *El*<sup>2</sup> V p. 606a (Ch. Pellat).

<sup>148</sup> According to *El*<sup>2</sup> V p. 607a (Ch. Pellat) the *Kitāb mā talḥan fīhi al-‘awāmm* or *Risāla fī laḥn al-‘amma*, attributed to al-Kisāī (d. 189/805), is probably the first work of the genre.

<sup>149</sup> *El*<sup>2</sup> V p. 605 (Ch. Pellat).

<sup>150</sup> Compare *El*<sup>2</sup> V p. 605 (Ch. Pellat).

<sup>151</sup> See *Daf al-iṣr* fols. 3a, 8b, 9a and §1.4.

<sup>152</sup> E.g. Ibn Hišām al-Laḥmī, Ibn Makkī in *Tatqīf al-lisān*, and Ibn al-Sayyid al-Baṭalyūsī in *Iqtīḍāb*.

<sup>153</sup> See *GAL* S II pp. 495-6.

<sup>154</sup> For the latter see §3.4.

also belong in this category. However, the latter is an abbreviated version of *Daf al-iṣr*.

Al-Mağribī does not include the word ‘amma or ‘awāmm (“the common people”) in the title of his book. He speaks of *kalām ahl Miṣr*, “the language of the people of Egypt”, without specifying any particular group. As mentioned in §2.3, al-Mağribī changed the title during the writing process: The original title of the work was *al-Faḍl al-‘amm wa qāmūs al-‘awāmm*, “The general benefit and the dictionary of the common people”. The word ‘awāmm was often used in the genre of the “language errors” literature, e.g. al-Zubaydī’s *Laḥn al-‘awāmm*, and the *Kitāb mā talḥan fihi al-‘awāmm*, which is attributed to al-Kisāī.<sup>155</sup> However, the ‘awāmm were not always the target, but rather the *ḥawāṣṣ*, whose feelings were spared by the reference in the title to the ‘awāmm. Al-Mağribī does not give a clear indication of whose speech he is describing. Usually, when he discusses a word, he does not specify which group uses it. However, he does sometimes mention this explicitly: “This can be heard from the *ḥawāṣṣ*”, “this occurs from the ‘awāmm”, “this is heard from the peasants”, “that can be heard mostly from the women”, etc. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the words which do not have such a specification were those used by all classes of society. This might also be one of the reasons why al-Mağribī decided to change the title of the book.

Moreover, *Daf al-iṣr* differs from the *Laḥn al-‘amma* literature in that al-Mağribī not only mentions mistakes and deviations made in attempts to write Classical Arabic, but also pure dialect words whose meaning cannot be found in any Arabic source, as well as words that have a foreign origin.

### 3.3.2 *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*

Al-Mağribī admired al-Fīrūzābādī’s *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*. It is almost the only dictionary he refers to in his quest for an explanation of colloquial words.<sup>156</sup> It is safe to say that at least half of *Daf al-iṣr* consists of quotations from *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. Al-Fīrūzābādī was an outstanding and innovative lexicographer, and his dictionary is original in some respects. In order to include as many entries as possible in a limited space, al-Fīrūzābādī left out examples (*ṣawāhid*), and used a system of abbreviations of his own invention, for instance ع for *mawḍi‘* “place” to indicate a place-name in general, ب for *balad* “town”, ق for *qarya* “village”, ج for

<sup>155</sup> See *Et*<sup>2</sup> V p. 605b (Ch. Pellat).

<sup>156</sup> Sometimes, notably more towards the end, al-Mağribī also quotes from *Muḥtaṣar al-Ṣiḥāh*, an abbreviation of *Tāḡ al-luḡa wa ṣiḥāh al-‘arabiya* by Ismā‘īl b. Ḥammād al-Āwḥarī (d. ca. 398/1008). See *GAL* S I p. 196 and *Et*<sup>2</sup> II p. 495b ff. (L. Kopf).

About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

ǧamī “plural”, م for ma‘rūf “known” for entries which need not be explained<sup>157</sup> (for instance the word *raǧul*<sup>158</sup>). In this way, he succeeded in cramming 60,000 entries into two volumes.<sup>159</sup> In *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, al-Fīrūzābādī criticizes al-Ġawharī’s *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, and states in his introduction that: “half the language or more escaped him [al-Ġawharī]”,<sup>160</sup> and adds that it contains “clear delusions and shameful mistakes”.<sup>161</sup> Al-Maǧribī copied these criticisms without any research, and even added some of his own, for instance:

ويقولون على المركب الصغير زورق وهو صحيح قال في القاموس «الزورق السفينة الصغيرة» وهو أوضح من قول المختصر الزورق ضرب من السفن<sup>162</sup>

“They say to a small boat *zawraq*, and this is correct. He said in *al-Qāmūs*: ‘a *zawraq* is a small boat’, which is clearer than the words of *al-Muḥtaṣar*:<sup>163</sup> ‘a *zawraq* is a kind of boat’.”

Nonetheless, al-Maǧribī does not criticize al-Fīrūzābādī when the latter includes in his dictionary words which are obviously not of Arabic origin. A good example is the word *mūm* “wax; candles”, which is Persian.<sup>164</sup> Knowing this language, al-Maǧribī must obviously have realized this. Nevertheless, he quoted the following without criticism:

يقولون ويسمع كثيرا من الترك على الشمع موم ويتوهم انه غير عربي وهو عربي قال في القاموس «الموم بالضم الشمع واداة للحائك يضع فيه الغزل وينسج به واداة الاسكاف والبرسام»<sup>165</sup>

“They say *mūm* for “wax; candles”, and this is often heard from the Turks. It is erroneously believed that this is not Arabic, although it is. He said in *al-Qāmūs*: “*mūm* with *ḍamm* means “wax; candles” and an instrument for the weaver into which he puts the yarn and with which he weaves, and an instrument of the shoemaker; [it also means] the pleurisy”.”

<sup>157</sup> See al-Fīrūzābādī’s introduction to *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* p. 32d.

<sup>158</sup> See *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* p. 903b.

<sup>159</sup> See Haywood (1965) p. 87. The edition I used (published by Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, in 1999) even succeeded in comprising the whole work in one volume.

<sup>160</sup> *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* p. 32c.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32h.

<sup>162</sup> Fol. 42a.

<sup>163</sup> Al-Maǧribī used an abbreviated version of *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*.

<sup>164</sup> Steingass (1975) p. 1348: موم “*mom, mūm, wax; a wax-candle*”.

<sup>165</sup> *Daf al-iṣr* fol. 106a.

About *Daf al-Iṣr ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr*

Al-Mağribī’s friend and colleague, al-Ḥafāğī, was more realistic when he wrote in *Šifā’ al-ğalil fimā fi kalām al-‘arab min al-daḥil* p. 202:

موم بمعنی الشمع فارسي (...) وكلام القاموس يوهم خلافه وهو وهم

“*mūm* meaning “wax, candles” is Persian (...) and the words of *al-Qāmūs* wrongly suggest the contrary, but this is a delusion”.

Another sign of the appreciation al-Mağribī felt for *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* is the fact that he followed the same arrangement for entries in his own work, the so-called rhyme arrangement, which arranges roots according to their last radical. The roots are presented in the normal alphabetical order, with the exception of the *wāw*, which is given before the *hā’*. Each new chapter, based on the last radical of a root, is introduced with the word *ḥarf* or *bāb*. Each first radical is introduced with the word *faṣl*, e.g. the word *ğāšim* “unjust, tyrant” can be found in *ḥarf al-mīm*, *faṣl al-ğayn*. This was the common order in the dictionaries of the time.<sup>166</sup> Although other dictionaries used this system, we can assume that had *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* used a different one, al-Mağribī would have followed suit.

Finally, we can detect the significant influence of *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* in the choice of entries in *Daf al-iṣr*. Sometimes, al-Mağribī mentions a word which he found in *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* but has a different meaning in the Egyptian dialect, i.e. the word *ğubūq* (fol. 50a) which meant “cloudy” in Egyptian Arabic while *ğabūq* means “evening draught” in Classical Arabic. One often gets the impression that al-Mağribī was leafing through *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, and choosing the entries he found interesting even though he had nothing to add to what *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* had written, other than confirming that the Egyptians used the word in the same way. There are many consecutive pages in which al-Mağribī does not introduce any words that cannot be found in *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*. This could be the reason why many of those included in *Daf al-iṣr* are of no interest, or are not even worth mentioning in a dictionary of the spoken Arabic of Cairo. Examples are expressions such as *šā’ir muḥliq* “an outstanding poet”<sup>167</sup> or *al-’awwal wa l-’āḥir* “the first and the last”.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>166</sup> See Haywood (1965) p. 48. This order can be found also in *Lisān al-‘arab*.

<sup>167</sup> fol. 53b.

<sup>168</sup> fol. 93b.

### 3.4 *Daf al-İşr* and *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*

As explained in §2.2, the *Daf al-İşr* manuscript has lost some quires over the course of time. To a certain extent, what was written in the missing section can be reconstructed with the help of another work, known as *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab fīmā wāfaqa luġat ‘ahl Mişr min luġat al-‘Arab* (“The abbreviated speech concerning what corresponds in the language of the people of Egypt with the languages of the Arabs”, hereafter referred to as *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*) by Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī. *Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* is a dictionary of the Egyptian Arabic colloquial, and is based on *Daf al-İşr*, but in an abbreviated form. It was written in 1057/1647, and its author, who at the end of the work states his name as Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Şiddīqī al-Şāfiī Sibṭ ‘Alī al-Ḥasan,<sup>169</sup> was a member of a famous Egyptian family, affiliated to the Bakrīya şūfi order. Ibn Abī al-Surūr was probably born in 998/1589-90.<sup>170</sup> There is disagreement about the exact date of his death. Opinions vary from anywhere between 1060/1650 and 1087/1676, but Rafeq (1975) pp. 25-27 offers 1653 as being the most likely. Ibn Abī al-Surūr is one of the most important historians from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>171</sup>

Fortunately, Ibn Abī al-Surūr’s abbreviation of *Daf al-İşr* is based on the complete manuscript. This helps us to reconstruct some of the entries that were lost. However, he left out all of the words which do not have an Arabic root, depriving linguists of the most interesting aspect of the work. He abbreviated the quotations from *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, and left out the anecdotes and poetry etc. because he believed that al-Maġribī had a habit of elaborating and digressing from the main purpose of the book.<sup>172</sup> *Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* is, therefore, a better arranged and more structured document than *Daf al-İşr*. However, it lacks much of the charm of its predecessor. We should give Ibn Abī al-Surūr credit for checking the entries in *Daf al-İşr* against other dictionaries that were not consulted by al-Maġribī, such as Ibn Manẓūr’s *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Ibn al-‘Anbārī’s *al-Zāhir*<sup>173</sup> and Karā‘ al-Naml’s *al-Muġarrad*.<sup>174</sup> After Ibn Abī al-Surūr, both manuscripts (*Daf al-İşr* and *al-*

---

<sup>169</sup> See Rafeq (1975) p. 25 for his full name.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

<sup>171</sup> Detailed information can be found in Rafeq (1975). He does not, however, mention *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*.

<sup>172</sup> See Ibn Abī al-Surūr (1962) p. 7 in his introduction to *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*.

<sup>173</sup> Full title *al-Zāhir fī ma‘ānī kalimāt al-nās* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Anbārī (231/885-328/940), see GAL S I p. 182.

<sup>174</sup> Full title *al-Muġarrad fī ġarīb kalām al-‘Arab wa luġātihā* by ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Hunāī al-Ru‘āsī, known as Kurā‘ al-Naml (d. 922/1516), see GAL S I p. 201. See e.g. the entry *دُرَابَة* which

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

*Qawl al-muqtaḍab*) fell into the hands of Yūsuf al-Mallawī, known as Ibn al-Wakīl.<sup>175</sup> He copied Ibn Abī al-Surūr’s *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*, while keeping *Daf al-iṣr* open next to it, and added some of the entries that Ibn Abī al-Surūr had left out.<sup>176</sup> The version of *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* referred to hereafter is the version published in 1962 by al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm Sālim, and introduced by Ibrāhīm al-Ibyārī. This version contains Ibn Abī al-Surūr’s text, including that added by Ibn al-Wakīl.

*Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* contains 863 entries. As calculated previously,<sup>177</sup> *Daf al-iṣr* must, originally, have contained around 2560 entries. This means that *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* includes only one third of the entries of *Daf al-iṣr*, since Ibn Abī al-Surūr and Ibn al-Wakīl did not believe that the rest fit the purpose of *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*, and discarded them.

Not only did Ibn Abī al-Surūr choose which entries to include, but he also often reworded them and made considerable changes to the text. Set out below are four examples which demonstrate how he changed the wording and the effect this has on the meaning of the text:

1. In *Daf al-iṣr* fol. 26a: *المجنون وفي اللغة المشغوف المجنون* “they say: so-and-so is *mašǧūf* and in the [Classical Arabic] language *mašǧūf* means ‘crazy’”. *Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* p. 111 rewords this as follows: *يقولون: فلان (شَغَفَهُ) الحب: أَى* “they say: so-and-so, love *šagafahu*, i.e. made him go out of his mind, and it is correct in the Classical Arabic language”.
2. *Daf al-iṣr* fol. 69a: *ويطلق الجميل أيضا على الشتم* “they use the word *ǧamīl* ‘beautiful’ also as an insult”. *Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* p. 134: *يقولون: فلان (جميل) الصورة مثلا* “they say: so-and-so is *ǧamīl* ‘beautiful’ of shape for instance”.
3. *Daf al-iṣr* fol. 107a: *يقولون فلان كثير النيام أي النوم وهو صحيح أيضا مثل الصوم والصيام* “they say: so-and-so sleeps much (*kaṭīr al-niyām*), and it is correct as well, just

---

al-Maǧribī could not find in *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* (see fol. 13b), while Ibn Abī al-Surūr found it in *al-Muǧarrad* (see p. 14 of *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*).

<sup>175</sup> For more information about this person, see §2.1.

<sup>176</sup> See the introduction to the edition of *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*, p. 7, where the introduction which the copist Ibn al-Wakīl added to the work is published. These additions to the text led Ibrāhīm al-Ibyārī, who wrote the introduction to the edition of *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*, to believe that he held in his hands a work which contained the complete contents of *Daf al-iṣr*. This is understandable, because he had not seen *Daf al-iṣr* so could not compare the two, but he was incorrect.

<sup>177</sup> See §2.2.

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

- like *ṣawm* and *ṣiyām*”. *Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* p. 149: *ويقولون: فلان كثير النوم وهو* “they say: so-and-so sleeps much (*kaṭīr al-nawm*), which is correct” صحيح
4. *Daf al-iṣr* fol. 92a *يقولون اتمقل بعينك* “they say *itmaqal* ‘look’ with your eye”.  
*Al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* p. 141 *يقولون (مقل) بعينك* “they say: *maqal* ‘to look’ with your eye”.

In the first example, Ibn Abī al-Surūr simply changed the way in which the word is represented, from the passive participle to active perfect. In the second example, he totally missed the point of mentioning the specific use of the word *ḡamīl* as an insult, and left us with the less interesting, well-known, meaning of “beautiful”. In the third example, he ignored the information that in the Egyptian dialect, two *maṣḍars* of the verb *nām* are used: *niyām* and *nawm*. He only mentioned the second, more common one, while al-Maḡribī’s point was that the more striking *niyām* should be referred to. In the fourth example, Ibn Abī al-Surūr turned the interesting form V with prefix *it-* into an ordinary form I. Unfortunately, these kind of changes happen a lot, and therefore it must be concluded that as a linguistic document, *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab* is far less interesting than *Daf al-iṣr*.

### 3.5 Earlier studies of *Daf al-Iṣr*

Undoubtedly, Ibn Abī al-Surūr and Ibn al-Wakīl were the first to study *Daf al-iṣr*. After these two efforts, it remained unnoticed for almost two centuries, even when it came into the hands of Muḡammad ‘Ayyād al-Ṭanṭawī, who took it with him to Russia, along with the rest of his manuscript collection, but did not, apparently, publish anything about it. This is remarkable, since al-Ṭanṭawī was interested in the Egyptian dialect, as can be seen in his *Traité de la langue arabe vulgaire*.

After *Daf al-iṣr* was added to the collection of the university library in St. Petersburg, the first to note the importance of the work was Victor Romanovič Rosen (1849-1908). In 1875, he wrote a letter to the German orientalist Heinrich Thorbecke (1837-1890), in which he described the manuscript and quoted some interesting passages from it, with the aim of encouraging Thorbecke to study the text. This seemed to work, and Thorbecke copied the manuscript, albeit excluding the quotations from *al-Qāmūs al-muḡīṭ*. After his death, along with Thorbecke’s

About *Daf al-İşr* ‘an kalām ahl Mişr

other scholarly papers, this copy was bequeathed to the library of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft. It is now kept in the University of Halle’s library.<sup>178</sup>

The next person to take an interest in the manuscript was Ignatij Julianovič Kratchkovsky (1883-1951), who wrote an excellent article about *Daf al-İşr* and its author in 1926. Subsequently, it seems that the existence of *Daf al-İşr* escaped the notice of many scholars outside Russia. Ibrāhīm al-Ibyārī, who wrote the introduction to the printed edition of *al-Qawl al-muqtaḍab*, mentions that *Daf al-İşr* had been lost.<sup>179</sup> This was because it had initially been in private hands, and had apparently never been copied and circulated; it was then taken to Russia. If al-Ibyārī had checked Brockelmann’s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, he would have discovered that the manuscript is still in existence.

In 1968, *Daf al-İşr* was published as a facsimile by the Publishing House Nauk (“Science”), in Moscow. The text was introduced by ‘Abd al-Salām Aḥmad ‘Awwād in Russian and Arabic. He also produced extensive indices of the entries, Qur’ān-verses, *ḥadīṭ*, proverbs, poetry by al-Mağribī and others, songs, riddles, famous people, sects and tribes, places, and books by al-Mağribī and other authors. ‘Awwād worked as a teacher of Arabic at the University in St. Petersburg (Leningrad at that time) between 1961 and 1965. In 1964, he received a Doctorate for his introduction to and indices of *Daf al-İşr*.<sup>180</sup> In his nine page Arabic introduction, ‘Awwād provides some information about al-Mağribī’s life, and a description of the manuscript. It was only after the publication of the facsimile edition that the work attracted the attention of scholars. According to some witnesses, it was distributed in a bookshop in Cairo, and a number of reviews and articles were thus published about it. A few are mentioned below:

- In 1969, Sharbatov presented *Daf al-İşr* in a colloque, and an abbreviation of his lecture was published in French, while in 1970 the full text was published in Arabic. In the Arabic article, he discusses several of the linguistic characteristics of the Egyptian dialect which can be found in *Daf al-İşr*, such as placing the interrogatives at the end of the sentence, the frequent use of certain word patterns, such as *fā‘āl*, changes in vowels, proverbs and expressions.

---

<sup>178</sup> See Müller-Socin (1891) p. 480, nr. 124. Ms. Th. A93. I gratefully thank the library of the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg for providing me with a digital image on CD Rom of Thorbecke’s copy of *Daf al-İşr*.

<sup>179</sup> See §3.4.

<sup>180</sup> See Ḥiğāzī (1968) p. 117.

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* 'an kalām ahl Miṣr

- Ramaḍān 'Abd al-Tawwāb published an article in 1969-1970 about *Daf al-iṣr*, in which he discusses at length several of the linguistic phenomena that appear in it, such as emphasis, metathesis, loss of interdental, change of vowels etc.
- A review of *Daf al-iṣr* was published by Maḥmūd Fahmī Ḥiḡāzī in 1969. He begins with a statement about the title of the manuscript, when it was written, and for what reason. He then proceeds to discuss a number of linguistic characteristics, such as the loss of interdental and *hamza*, the words of foreign origin, and the words that are specific to certain classes, which al-Maḡribī discusses.
- An interesting book by Nāṣir 'Abd Allāh 'Uṭmān, about the sciences in Egypt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was published in 2006. In it, a chapter is devoted to the work of linguists. *Daf al-iṣr* is mentioned as one of the most important linguistic documents of that time. Unfortunately, 'Uṭmān was unable to consult the manuscript or the 'Awwād edition, and therefore only refers to the aforementioned article by Sharbatov.<sup>181</sup>

So far, the interest in *Daf al-iṣr* had been purely linguistical. The first to shed light on another aspect of the work was Olga Frolova, who wrote a number of articles about the *mawāwīl* in *Daf al-iṣr*.<sup>182</sup> The dialectal poetry in *Daf al-iṣr* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. In 2003, Nelly Hanna used *Daf al-iṣr* in her study of the culture of the middle classes in Ottoman Egypt. In this work, she gives us clear insight into the reasons for the rising interest in colloquial language at that time. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the middle classes in Egypt were living very comfortably due to thriving trade and low taxes, which gave them the means to spend more time and money on matters such as education and books. In order to communicate their ideas to these ordinary people, the 'ulamā' started to adapt their style and subject-matters to a non-academic readership.<sup>183</sup> At the same time, the culture of the middle classes also started to influence scholarly work.<sup>184</sup> It therefore seems that al-Maḡribī's *Daf al-iṣr* was part of a wider trend of incorporating non-scholarly content, i.e. the middle class culture, into a scholarly form. The fact that al-Maḡribī was from this class certainly played a part in his choice of subject.

According to Hanna, a similar interest in the dialect appears in three works that were also written during the 17th century, although somewhat later than *Daf al-iṣr*. Two of these concern the loanwords that had entered the Arabic language.

---

<sup>181</sup> See Uṭmān (2006) p. 275 footnote 81.

<sup>182</sup> See Frolova (1982), Frolova (1995) and Frolova (1997).

<sup>183</sup> Hanna (2003) p. 112-113.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. p. 113-114.

One is from Egypt, the aforementioned *Šifā’ al-ġalīl fīmā fi kalām al-‘arab min al-daḥīl* by Šihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥafāġī, and the second, from Syria, is by al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699), *Qaṣd al-sabīl fīmā fi al-luġa al-‘arabīya min al-daḥīl*. Hanna describes the last work as follows: “One of his (al-Muḥibbī’s) aims was to pinpoint colloquial words that were used by the ‘amma. He distinguished them from imported words (*daḥīl*) with the aim of showing them to be distortions (*taḥrīf*), or Arabic words that the ‘amma distorted. He considered the use of the colloquial to be a negative development and one he disapproved of. His work nevertheless indicates that the question had by his lifetime become one of open debate, a significant phenomenon in itself”.<sup>185</sup> Here we see the difference to the approach of al-Maġribī, who did not disapprove of the colloquial.

### 3.6 Al-Maġribī’s methodology

As mentioned in §2.3, the first title al-Maġribī gave to his work was *al-Faḍl al-‘āmm wa qāmūs al-‘awāmm*. The word *qāmūs* “dictionary” implies an attempt at an exhaustive word list, with an explanation of the meaning of every word. Al-Maġribī does not, however, follow the principle of listing all of the words and giving their meanings. For instance, he does not mention personal pronouns in separate entries. Moreover, many simple, everyday objects are left out. For instance, he gives us the words *mi’laqa* “spoon” and *maġrafa* “ladle” but not the one for knife. Apart from using *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* as a source of inspiration, it remains unclear which criteria al-Maġribī used to select the words he went on to discuss. He states that it is his intention to comment on words which were believed to be incorrect, even though they do in fact conform to Classical Arabic. However, this is not always the case, because he also discusses many words which he proved did not so conform, or which are not Arabic at all. Al-Maġribī, probably, discussed words that raised doubts, whatever the result of his research might be. His love of anecdotes and poetry might also have played a role in his choice of material. I assume that if a certain word had inspired him to compose a clever *mawwāl*, it would then be tempting for him to include it in his work, in order to demonstrate his poetical skills.

In certain cases, al-Maġribī mentions a word, followed by his opinion on its correctness by referring to *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, but without explaining its meaning. It remains unclear whether al-Maġribī considered that the meanings of these words were commonly known, or whether he believed that they had the same meaning as given in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, and therefore believed it to be unnecessary

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

About *Daf al-Iṣr ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr*

to explain them. As an example, we can consider the entry *kittān* “linen” (117b). In this case, al-Mağribī omitted to give a definition of it, and simply corrected its form:

يقولون كتان بكسر الكاف وانما هو كتان بفتحها “They say *kittān* with an *i* after the *kāf*, but it is *kattān* with an *a*”.

This case presents no problem because the meaning of the word *kittān* / *kattān* is known, but when the word or expression is not, as in the following example from fol. 123a, it becomes very difficult to guess its meaning:

يقولون فلان ما عنده اداوة ناس ولم يعلم قال «الإداوة بالكسر المطهرة جمع اداوي كفتاوي والاداة الالة جمعه ادوات» فلعل قولهم اداوة ناس اصله ادوات فغيّرت  
“They say: so-and-so has no *idāwāt nās*, and this is unknown.<sup>186</sup> He says:<sup>187</sup> “*idāwa* with an *i* is a washroom, pl. *’adāwā*, like *fatāwā*, and *’adāh* is a tool, pl. *’adawāt*”. So perhaps the origin of their expression *idāwāt nās* is *’adawāt*, which was subject to a change”.

Unfortunately, in most cases al-Mağribī does not vocalize the entries of his word list, which makes it difficult to determine how they should be pronounced. Another problem is the spelling, especially of the *hamza*,<sup>188</sup> as well as the placement of diacritical points, which is sometimes inaccurate.

Al-Mağribī considered any word to be correct Arabic if it could be retraced to an Arabic root, while its meaning has a resemblance, no matter how distant, to the meaning of it. The root should not have undergone any phonetic changes, such as a change from interdental fricative to dental stop.<sup>189</sup> If a word does not have an Arabic root, al-Mağribī normally states that it is “unknown” to him, meaning that he did not find it in the Classical Arabic dictionaries. Al-Mağribī knew Persian and Turkish, as is obvious from the translations he had carried out (see §1.4). Therefore, he was able to trace back some of the dialect words in these languages. When a word was derived from a language like Turkish or Persian, al-Mağribī does not label it “incorrect”, which is a sign that he cannot be considered as a purist who wished to keep the Arabic language “clean” of foreign influences.

<sup>186</sup> I.e., it cannot be found in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*

<sup>187</sup> See *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* p. 1133a.

<sup>188</sup> See §6.1.1.

<sup>189</sup> For instance *mitl* → *mitl*, see *Daf al-iṣr* fol. 91.

About *Daf al-ʿIṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

Al-Maḡribī’s treatment of the interdentalals will serve as an example of his attitude towards language changes. It is known that in al-Maḡribī’s time, the interdentalals had disappeared from the dialect of Cairo.<sup>190</sup> Although he does not make a general statement about this matter, he gives evidence of the shift from interdentalals to dentalals in several entries. The only time he explicitly mentions this change is when, on fol. 11a, he wrote by mistake *fāṣl al-bā’ al-muṭannāh* (“Chapter of the *bā’* with two diacritical points”) and then changed it into *al-muwaḥḥada* (“with one diacritical point”). He then added the following comment in the margin:

المحدثين بالتا المشناة فوق اعنى بهم العوام “The people who say the *tā’* with two diacritical points on top, with them I mean the ‘*awāmm*.”

He therefore acknowledges that the shift *tā’* → *tā* had indeed taken place. Some examples of the loss of interdentalals from *Daf al-ʿIṣr* are:

- يقولون على الشجر اتل بالمشناه وانما هو اثل بالمثلثة - “they call the tree *atl* (“tamarisk”) with two diacritical points, while it is *aṭl* with three points”;<sup>191</sup>

- يقولون توم بالمشناه وانما هو ثوم بالمثلثة - “they say *twm*<sup>192</sup> (“garlic”) with two points while it is *tūm* with three points”;<sup>193</sup>

The following fragment is also interesting, because it is a typical example of al-Maḡribī’s methodology:

ويقولون حنضل على الحنظل بالطاء المشالة وليس له وجه فان الحنضل الغدير الصغير والحنضلة الماء في الصخرة<sup>194</sup>

“They say *ḥaṇḍal* (“colocynth”) to *hanḍal* with the *zā’* with a stroke, and this has no cognate [in the literary language], because *ḥaṇḍal* is a small brook, and *ḥaṇḍala* is water in a rock.”

<sup>190</sup> Proofs of this can be found in earlier texts than *Daf al-ʿIṣr*, see Davies (1981) p. 66. For more details see §6.2.2.

<sup>191</sup> Fol. 63a.

<sup>192</sup> It is not clear whether al-Maḡribī means *tōm* or *tūm*, since the Arabic script has no way to distinguish between the *ō* and *ū*-sounds.

<sup>193</sup> Fol. 96a.

<sup>194</sup> Fol. 71b.

About *Daf al-Iṣr ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr*

Although al-Mağribī realised that the colloquial حنضل is derived from حنظل, he still insisted on looking up حنضل in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* and, unsurprisingly, reached the conclusion that the description he found there did not fit.

There are other cases in which al-Mağribī *did* write interdentals, although this does not imply that they were actually pronounced as such, for instance:

- قتا *qitta* “Armenian cucumber”<sup>195</sup> (note also the *kasra*, while Davies (1981:437) attests *’attāya* for the late 17<sup>th</sup> century), where one would have expected قتا (nowadays pronounced *’atta* in Cairo);<sup>196</sup>
- نظيف صليف *nazīf ṣalīf* “spotless”,<sup>197</sup> instead of present-day *niḍīf*;
- رذل *raḍil ka-katif*<sup>198</sup> “despicable”.

Due to the fact that the shift from interdental to dental had happened much earlier,<sup>199</sup> we may conclude that the above are examples of historical orthography.

Sometimes, al-Mağribī’s explanation of a word is incorrect, mainly because he did not realise (or did not like to admit) that the word had been subjected to certain phonetic changes.<sup>200</sup> A good example is the word *mil’aqa* “spoon”, which had become *ma’laqa* in the Egyptian dialect of al-Mağribī’s time (see fol. 49b), and is nowadays pronounced *ma’la’a*. Instead of immediately admitting that in the word *mi’laqa* metathesis of the *’ayn* and *lām* has taken place, he gives an explanation that the word has something to do with the verb *’aliqa* “to hang”. He mentions only as an afterthought that it was said to be derived from *mil’aqa*:

ويقولون معلقه لالة يوكل بها ويشرب ولم ارها في القاموس والذي فيه <رجل ذو معلقة كمرحلة يتعلق بكل ما اصابه> انتهى ويمكن بالقياس ان تكون الالة معلقه بالكسر تعلق الطعام والشراب او يقال انها معلقه بتقديم اللام اللعق

<sup>195</sup> Fol. 9b.

<sup>196</sup> See Hinds-Badawi (1986) p. 686a.

<sup>197</sup> Fol. 28a.

<sup>198</sup> Fol. 75b. Sometimes al-Mağribī used a well-known word with the same vowel pattern as the explained word, instead of vocalizing the word; see the next paragraph.

<sup>199</sup> See §6.2.2.

<sup>200</sup> See for instance the example زحلفة and its explanation as mentioned by Hiğāzī (1969) p. 119.

About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

“They say *ma’laqa* to the tool with which they eat and drink. I did not find it in *al-Qāmūs*, but it says: ‘a man endowed with *ma’laqa*, like *marḥala*, hangs on to everything he achieves’, end of the quotation. So perhaps in analogy to this the instrument *mi’laqa* with *kasr* hangs on to the food and drink; or it is said that it is *mil’aqa* with preceding *lām* from ‘licking’ ”.

Therefore, we may conclude that al-Maḡribī knew the proper explanation of the word *ma’laqa*, but in his eagerness to prove the correctness of the Egyptian language, he preferred to retrace the word to the root ‘LQ, and make-up a far-fetched explanation, rather than admit that the Egyptians had ‘corrupted’ the word *mil’aqa*. Later, he mentions the word again (fol. 54b):

وقد علمت ان قول اهل مصر معلقة لا يصح بخلاف قول اهل مكة وملعقة بكسر الميم كما سمعته منهم في مكة وغيرها

“I learnt that the word *ma’laqa* of the Egyptians is incorrect, contrary to the word *mil’aqa* with *kasr* of the *mīm* of the people of Mecca, as I heard them say in Mecca<sup>201</sup> and other places”.

Al-Maḡribī uses this kind of reasoning often. Another example is the following:

يقولون كنّ كذا من المعلوم أن مرادهم كأنّ كذا خفف لكثرة الاستعمال والكنة بالفتح امرأة الابن أو الأخ (...)

“They say *kənn kaḏā*. It is known that they mean *ka’ann kaḏā*, which has become lighter [i.e., the *hamza* has disappeared] because of its frequent use. And ‘*al-kanna* with an *a* is the wife of the son or of the brother’.”

There was no reason for al-Maḡribī to quote the entry KNN from *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, because he had already sufficiently explained the etymology of the word *knn*. It is possible that he used the quotation here to underline the fact that the word did not have an equivalent with the root KNN in Classical Arabic, or simply to enlighten the reader on the ‘real’ meaning of the root KNN.

It is clear that al-Maḡribī had some understanding of the changes that had affected the language. Therefore, it is sometimes surprising that he did not

---

<sup>201</sup> When al-Maḡribī was a child, he went on pilgrimage to Mecca with his father, see *Daf al-ṣr* fol. 70a and §1.1.

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

mention the obvious, as in the following example, where he did not realise (or did not like to mention!) that a verb *tertia* hamza had become *tertia* yā’:

يقولون خَبَيْت الشيء أي سترته وأخفيته وليس في اللغة خَبَيْتَه بهذا المعنى بل بمعنى آخر قال  
«الخباء واحد الأخبية (...) واستخبينا الخباء نصيناه ودخلنا فيه وأخبيت الخباء وخبيته (...)»

“They say, I *ḥabbyt* the thing, i.e. I have hidden it and concealed it. *ḥabbyt* is not in the language with this meaning, but with another meaning. He said: ‘*ḥabā*’ is the singular of ‘*aḥbiya* (...)’; ‘*istahbaynā* the tent, i.e. we pitched it and we entered it, and ‘*aḥbaytu* the tent and *ḥabbaytu* (...)’.”

#### 3.6.1 Entries and their context

Al-Maḡribī often presents the entries in context, in order to demonstrate the use of a word. The following entry will illustrate how useful such a context can be:

ويقولون وَهُمْ العوام الصرف ما احنا من دي القَبْل بفتح القاف والباء ويريدون معنى القبيل أي من  
الجماعة الذين يفعلون مثل هذا<sup>202</sup>

“The pure common folk say, ‘we are not of this type (*qabal*)’, with an *a* after the *qāf* and the *bā*’. They mean *qabīl*, i.e., belonging to the group of people who behave like this”.

The entry here is *qabal*, and the context in dialect is *mā iḥnā min dī-l-qabal*. This sentence provides us with a great deal of information: it contains the words *iḥnā* “we” and *dī* “this, that”, both of which al-Maḡribī does not mention as separate entries in his word list.<sup>203</sup> This example highlights that al-Maḡribī, sometimes, provides us with much more information than he intended to.

Unfortunately, one sometimes has to ask whether al-Maḡribī’s examples always reflect the speech of the day, since he regularly used classicisms, as in the following:

ويقولون ايش هذه الخُزَعْبَلَات أي الأمور التي لا أصل لها

“They say: what are these *ḥuzu‘balāt* (‘superstitions’), which means these things which have no foundation”.

<sup>202</sup> Fol. 88b.

<sup>203</sup> For more details on *iḥnā*, see §6.3.2. For preposed *dī*, see §6.3.3.

The entry here is the word *ḥuzu‘balāt*, and the Egyptian Arabic element is the interrogative ‘ayš / ‘ēš “what” (nowadays *ē* in Cairo, but in many parts of Egypt still pronounced as ‘ēš).<sup>204</sup> Note the use of *hāḍihī* in this example, which is a classicism, unlike the word *dī* in the previous example.

### 3.7 Metalanguage

Yūsuf al-Mağribī uses a system of terminology for describing the phonological, orthographical, linguistic and lexicographical phenomena which are encountered in *Daf al-Iṣr*. This terminology, called the metalanguage, will be discussed in this chapter.

#### 3.7.1 Describing the vocalization of a word

Al-Mağribī uses two systems to describe the vocalization of a word:

- Vowel signs and description of the vowels
- Comparison with well-known words with the same pattern as the colloquial words that are described.

These two methods will be enlarged upon in the following two paragraphs.

##### 3.7.1.1 Vowel signs and description of the vowels

Al-Mağribī makes use, albeit infrequently, of the signs *fatha*, *damma*, *kasra*, *šadda* and *sukūn* to indicate the pronunciation of a vernacular word. He also uses a variety of terms to reflect the pronunciation of the colloquial words he describes. This terminology was not invented by him, but was based upon the system of vocalization used by al-Fīrūzābādī in *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, who in turn relied heavily on the system devised by al-Ġawharī in *Tāğ al-luġa wa ṣiḥāḥ al-‘arabiya*.<sup>205</sup>

Al-Mağribī often describes in words which vowel was added to which letter. This can be done with verbs, like *kasara* “to provide with the vowel *i*”, *damma* “to provide with the vowel *u*”; *fataḥa* “to provide with the vowel *a*”, or simply with the following: *bi-l-kasr* “with an *i*”, *bi-l-damm* “with an *u*”, *bi-l-faḥ* “with an *a*”, *bi-l-ḥarakāt* “with two *a*-s”, *bi-l-sukūn* “without a following vowel” etc. The word *muṭallaṭ* is used to indicate that a word can have an *a*, *i* or *u* (note that *muṭallaṭ* can also mean that a letter has three diacritical dots, while al-Mağribī also uses it to describe a certain kind of poem, see §4.2.1). Some examples are:

---

<sup>204</sup> For more details on ‘ayš / ‘ēš, see §6.3.5.2.

<sup>205</sup> See Haywood (1965) pp. 86-87.

About *Daf al-Iṣr ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr*

ويقولون عَنَاب ولكن من كسر عينه لم يصح قال في القاموس عَنَاب كرمان ثمر معروف  
“They say ‘innāb ‘jujube’, but those who pronounce an *i* after the ‘ayn are  
wrong; he says in *al-Qāmūs*: “unnāb like *rummān* is a well-known fruit”;<sup>206</sup>

ويقولون لما يسف سفوف بضم السين “They say to ‘medicinal powder’, *sufūf*, with a  
*u* after the letter *sīn*”;<sup>207</sup>

ويقولون حصلت له نَصَفَه بالحركات “They say, to him happened *naṣafa* ‘justice’,  
with an *a* after the first and second radical”;<sup>208</sup>

ويقولون دمشق الشام فيكسرون الدال والميم والفصيح فتح الميم  
Levant, pronouncing an *i* after the *dāl* and the *mīm*, while in Classical Arabic an  
*a* would be said after the *mīm*”;<sup>209</sup>

ويقولون فلان زنديق فيفتحون الزاي وانما هو بكسرها  
“They say, so-and-so is a *zandīq*  
‘atheist’, pronouncing an *a* after the *zā*, but it is with an *i*”;<sup>210</sup>

ويقولون لُعُوق بضم اللام وانما هو بفتحها  
(54b) “They say *lu‘ūq* ‘electuary’ with a *u*  
after the *lām* while it is with an *a*”;

ويقولون فلان رِطِل بكسرها  
(76b) “They say ‘so-and-so is *riṭil* ‘weak’, pronouncing  
an *i* after both [the *rā* and the *ṭā*]”;

ويقولون مصحف تارة بفتح الميم وتارة بضمها ولكن هو مثلث الميم  
(27a) “They say *mṣḥaf* sometimes with an *a* after the *mīm* and sometimes with a *u*; however, the  
*mīm* can have the three vowels”.

فيقال لا تفتح الخزانة ولا تكسر المخزن  
(112b) “It is said that *ḥizāna* cannot have a  
*fatha* [i.e., be pronounced as *ḥazāna*], and that *maḥzan* cannot have a *kasra* [i.e.,  
be pronounced as *miḥzan*]”;

<sup>206</sup> Fol. 17b.

<sup>207</sup> Fol. 25a.

<sup>208</sup> Fol. 34a.

<sup>209</sup> Fol. 39b.

<sup>210</sup> Fol. 42b.

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

The last example is a pun on the words *kasr* and *fath*, and could also be translated as “it is said that the safe cannot be opened and that the warehouse cannot be broken into”. This is one of the little linguistic jokes that al-Mağribī likes to make.<sup>211</sup>

The word *sahhala* means that a word should be read without a *hamza*. The verbs *šaddada* and *ḥaffafa* and their derivatives, indicate whether a word contains a *šadda* or not:

يقولون مرثيه بالتشديد والصواب التخفيف (8b) “They say *marṭiyya* ‘elegy’ with a *šadda* [of the *yā*], and correct would be without a *šadda*”;

يقولون رثيته مرثية يشدون وانما هي مرثية مخففة (127b) “They say, I lamented him in a *marṭiyya* ‘elegy’, which they pronounce with a *šadda*, while it is *marṭiya* without a *šadda*”.

#### 3.7.1.2 Comparison with well-known words

The second method al-Mağribī employs in order to clarify the vocalization of a word, is to use comparison with well-known words with the same pattern as those he is discussing. When using this method with a noun or adjective, the well-known word which is used to demonstrate the pattern is introduced with *ka-* “like”. A few examples from *Daf al-Iṣr*:

ويقولون رضاب بالكسر للريق والصواب رضاب كغراب (14a) “They say *riḍāb* ‘saliva’ with an *i*, and correct would be *ruḍāb* like *ḡurāb*”;

ويقولون ويقع من الشوام علي الرجل رجال كشدّاد (75a) “They say, and this occurs often from the people of the Levant, *raḡḡāl* ‘man’ like *šaddād*”;

ويقولون فلان رذل ككتف (75b) “They say, so-and-so is *raḍil* ‘despicable’ like *katif*”.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>211</sup> For more jokes of this type, see §6.5.3.

<sup>212</sup> Although for the word كنف the vocalizations *katif*, *katf* and *kitf* are possible (see WKAS I p. 48a), comparison with *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* learns that the vocalization *katif* is meant here.

### About *Daf al-Iṣr* ‘an kalām ahl Miṣr

Although al-Mağribī himself uses this method only sparingly, it is frequently employed in the numerous quotations from *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* that can be found in *Daf al-iṣr*.

When a verb is compared to a well-known verb, the expression (*wa huwa*) *min bāb...* or *wa bābuhu...* “belonging to the category of...” is used alongside the aforementioned *ka-*. An example:

يقولون فلان يكتنم بضم التاء وهو كذلك من باب ينصر (105b) “They say, ‘so-and-so *yiktum*, holds a secret, with a *u* after the *tā*’, and it is indeed like this, belonging to the category of *yanṣur*”.

A list of the most frequently used, well-known words from *Daf al-Iṣr* can be found at the end of this chapter (§3.7.6).

#### 3.7.2 Diacritical dots

To indicate either the number of dots on top of or underneath a letter, or the absence of dots, the following terms are used: *muṭallaṭ* “having three diacritical dots”, *muṭannā* “having two diacritical dots”, *muḡam* “having one diacritical dot”, and *muhmal* “having no diacritical dots”. To specify the upward stroke of the *zā*’ the word *muṣāl* is used (although only once in the whole work). Some examples:

يقولون توم بالمشاة وانما هو ثوم بالمشاة (96a) “They say *twm* ‘garlic’ with two dots, but it is *twm* with three dots”;

يقولون ما له متل بالمشاة فوق وانما هو مثل (91b) “They say ‘it has no *mitl* ‘equivalent’ with two dots on top, but it is *mitl*”;

ويقولون زرق الطائر وانما هو ذرق بالذال المعجمة (40a) “They say *zirq aṭ-ṭā’ir* ‘bird droppings’; however, it is *dirq* with a *dāl* with a dot”;

ويقولون حنظل علي الحنظل بالظا المشالة (71b) “They say *ḥanḍal* ‘colocynth’ for *ḥanzal* with the *zā*’ with a stroke”.

#### 3.7.3 Linguistic terms

Some linguistic terminology found in *Daf al-Iṣr* includes words like *متعد muta‘addī* “transitive” and *لازم lāzim* “intransitive” (although only used in quotations from *al-*

Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ), إتياع *itbāʿ* “intensification by repeating a word with its initial consonant changed, such as *kaṭīr baṭīr*”,<sup>213</sup> مشترك *muṣṭarak* “homonym”, and ضد *didd*, pl. أضداد *ʿaddād*: “(a word) having two mutually exclusive meanings”.<sup>214</sup> Al-Maḡribī was very fond of using a تورية *tawriya* or “double-entendre” in his poems.

Al-Maḡribī used the expression التثليث وحكم *wa ḥakam al-taṭlīṭ* “here rules triplication” to indicate that a word exists which can have a *kasr*, *fath* or *ḍamm*, each with its own meaning, which often inspired him to use the three words in a poem. This is the case with, for example, the words ملة *malla* “hot ashes”, *milla* “religion” and *mulla* “basking stitch” (92a), which he arranged in a *mawwāl*.

The expression وهي بهاء *wa hiya bi-hāʾ* means that the regular feminine of a given word takes the *tāʾ marbūṭa*.<sup>215</sup>

The word لغة *luḡa* originally meant “dialect”, “dialectal word” in the Arabic grammatical tradition,<sup>216</sup> but al-Maḡribī uses it with the meaning of the “Classical Arabic language”. Therefore, a dialectal word that, according to him, is *luḡa*, can be found in *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*. He also uses the word *luḡawī* with the same meaning. If a word is *ḡayr luḡawī* this means it is not in accordance with Classical Arabic.

Al-Maḡribī uses the term الجيم الغير العربية *al-ḡīm al-ḡayr al-ʿarabīya* “the un-Arabic *ḡīm*” to indicate the pronunciation /č/ or /g/ (see §6.2.1), and it can therefore be concluded that the Arabic *ḡīm* for al-Maḡribī was /ḡ/.

### 3.7.4 Classification of colloquial words

Al-Maḡribī uses a set of terms to describe the conclusions he reached about the origin of colloquial words used by the Egyptians. When a certain word or expression was used by only one group of people e.g. those from a certain class or profession, he used the expressions *wa yusmaʿ min* “this is heard from”, *wa hādā yaqaʿ min* “this occurs from” and the like. When a word had the same meaning and pronunciation in the Egyptian dialect as in Classical Arabic, he uses such expressions as *wa huwa ṣaḥīḥ* “and this is correct”, *wa lahu munāsaba / nisba* “it has something that corresponds to it [in Classical Arabic]”, *wa lahu ʿaṣl* “it has an origin”. The expression *wa fīh luḡāt* is used to indicate that a word has several meanings. When explaining what the Egyptians meant to say with a certain word,

<sup>213</sup> Wehr (1994) p. 109b.

<sup>214</sup> *EALL* I p. 626 (L. Bettini).

<sup>215</sup> Another borrowed expression from *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, see Haywood (1965) p. 87.

<sup>216</sup> See *EALL* III p. 88ff (T. Iványi) and *EI*<sup>2</sup> V p. 803a ff (A. Hadj-Salah).

he uses *wa yurīdūn* or *wa ya’nūn* “they mean”. When a word diverged from Classical Arabic in meaning or pronunciation, it got the classification *wa laysa luḡawīyan* “this is not linguistically correct”. When al-Maḡribī does not find a word at all in *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, he describes this fact in a number of ways: *wa lam yu’lam* “it is not known” or *wa lam yu’lam min al-luḡa* “it is not known from the [Classical Arabic] language”; *wa lam ‘a’lam lahu munāsaba / nisba* “I do not know anything that corresponds to it”, *wa laysa ka-dālik* “it is not like this”, *wa laysa lahu waḡh* “it does not have a meaning”. When correcting a “deviation” from Classical Arabic, the following expressions are used: *wa al-ṣawāb* “and the correct [form] would be”; *wa innamā huwa* “however, it should be...”. For “to mispronounce / misread”, the verb *ṣaḥḥafa* and its derivatives are used: *yuṣaḥḥifūn* “they mispronounce”, *taṣḥīf ‘an* “[it is a] mispronunciation of”, *muṣaḥḥaf ‘an* “mispronounced from”. Sometimes al-Maḡribī makes use of the “telegram style”, for instance when using the word *luḡa* to indicate that something can be found in Classical Arabic: *والبي لغة الرجل الخسيس* (124a) “and *al-bayy* in Classical Arabic means ‘the contemptible man’.”

### 3.7.5 Other terms and expressions used by al-Maḡribī

When quoting from *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, al-Maḡribī often simply mentions *qāl* “he said”. Every now and then he instead uses a phrase like *wa a’lam ‘anna* “I know that...” (e.g. 78b) or *wa fī al-luḡa* “and in the Classical language [can be found...]” (e.g. 79a). The end of a quotation is marked with *intahā* “[the quotation] is finished”. Al-Fīrūzābādī was the first one to introduce a number of abbreviations, as mentioned in §3.3.2. Even though quotations from *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* form a substantial part of *Daf al-Iṣr*, al-Maḡribī did not follow al-Fīrūzābādī’s example of using abbreviations, instead writing them in full, perhaps for the sake of readability or clarity.

When al-Maḡribī wrote an afterthought or correction in the margin, this is followed by the word *صح ṣaḥḥ* (sometimes abbreviated to *ص* or *ص*),<sup>217</sup> which is very common in manuscripts. The word *فائدة fā’ida* “nota-bene”<sup>218</sup> is often employed by al-Maḡribī to elaborate on topics of interest that are only indirectly connected to the entry under discussion. He used *انظر unẓur* in the margin to indicate that he is unsure of an entry, and wants to double-check it or consult other dictionaries.

<sup>217</sup> “when used for an omission/insertion or evident correction”, *EALL* I p. 2 (A. Gacek).

<sup>218</sup> See *EALL* I p. 2 (A. Gacek).

### 3.7.6 List of common nouns and verbs used to indicate word patterns

#### Verbs

*karuma, yakrumu* “to be noble”  
*mana‘a, yamna‘u* “to hinder”  
*sami‘a, yasma‘u* “to hear”  
*ṭariba, yaṭrabu* “to become affected with emotion”  
*naṣara, yaṣuru* “to render victorious”  
*daḥala, yaḍḥulu* “to enter”  
*ḍaraba, yaḍribu* “to hit”  
*ḡalasa, yaḡlisu* “to sit”  
*radda, yaruddu* “to bring back”  
*wadda, yawaddu* “to love”  
*bā‘a, yabī‘u* “to sell”  
*‘adā, ya‘dū* “to pass”  
*ramā, yarmī* “to throw”  
*ṣadiya, yaṣdā* “to be very thirsty”

#### Nouns

*‘amīr* “prince”  
*katīf* “shoulder”  
*hamza* “the letter hamza”  
*tannūr* “oven”  
*Zubayr* personal name  
*rummān* “pomegranate”  
*kisā’* “garment”  
*‘inab* “grapes”  
*Šaddād* personal name  
*qirtās* “scroll of paper”  
*ṣabūr* “patient”  
*ṣurad* “sparrow-hawk”  
*‘utull* “glutton”  
*nadus* “sharp-minded”