SHABBAT (SATURDAY) IN MODERN EGYPT: CUSTOMS AND THEIR REFLECTION IN SPOKEN JUDEO-ARABIC

Gabriel M. Rosenbaum

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Introduction

Egyptian Jews, especially those who lived in working-class neighbourhoods, speak a distinctive Arabic dialect differing in a number of respects from the Arabic spoken by their Muslim and Christian neighbours.[1] This unique variety is described in a larger study which I have carried out in recent years. The materials for that study were mostly collected from a large number of native speakers, many of whom are no longer alive.[2]

Here I describe lexical items originating in both Hebrew and Arabic that are connected to traditions and customs related to the holy day of *Shabbat* (Saturday); some of these items are in a mixed style (Hebrew-Arabic). This vocabulary, shared by the Jews of Egypt, is not understood by their non-Jewish neighbours. I shall focus on vocabulary and customs, but will also refer to some grammatical peculiarities that appear in the vocabulary described below.

The Arabic variety spoken by the Jews of Egypt differs in a number of respects from the variety (or varieties) spoken by their Muslim and Christian neighbours. Haim Blanc, in his pioneering studies on spoken Egyptian Judeo-Arabic,[3] was careful not to label the linguistic variety he was describing as "Jewish Cairene" (Blanc 1974:207). Today, after an intensive study of this variety, with a large

[1] By the second decade of the third millennium only a few Jews remained in Egypt, so that Jewish life in Egypt may be said to be extinct; therefore, I refer to Jewish life in Egypt in the past tense. The language spoken by the Jews, however, is still spoken by many Egyptian Jews outside of Egypt, and I therefore refer to it in the present tense.

[2] Some parts of this study appeared in several articles in Hebrew and in English: see Rosenbaum 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003, 2008, 2013a, 2013b; the entire study is forthcoming by the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem. This article is based on a paper presented at the 10th Congress of *EAJS* (the European Association for Jewish Studies), held in Paris in July 2014.

[3] See Blanc 1974, 1981, 1985.

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number of informants from Cairo, Alexandria and other towns, we may define this variety as "spoken Egyptian Judeo-Arabic" (hence: EJA).

This variety contains many elements – of phonology, morphology, and particularly vocabulary – which are not to be found in the dialects spoken by non-Jews. The focus of this article is the lexicon, and elements from other linguistic levels will therefore not be described, with the exception of the following that are reflected in the quoted vocabulary:

a. The consonant *q* (ق), pronounced as a uvular stop in Standard Arabic, is pronounced as a glottal stop (like *hamza*) in Cairo and the cities of Lower Egypt (*q*>ʾ), and this is true of the Jews as well – often even when uttering words of Hebrew origin. Occasionally, however, this consonant may also be pronounced as a velar stop (*q*>*k*), mostly in words of Hebrew origin.

b. Many speakers of Arabic cannot pronounce the voiceless bilabial consonant *p*, that does not exist in Arabic, and instead pronounce it as the voiced bilabial *b* (*p*>*b*). Many speakers of EJA do pronounce this consonant *p*, but some pronounce it as *b*; thus, the former would say *purím* ("Purim, the Feast of Lots"), the latter *burím*.

c. The consonant *b*, which in Hebrew is pronounced either as a stop [*b*] or as a fricative [*v*], is always pronounced as a stop [*b*] by Egyptian Jews in words of Hebrew origin, as in *kabéd* ("heavy; unpleasant person") versus *kavéd* in Hebrew.

d. Vowels in words of Hebrew origin are usually preserved in Jewish Arabic. *Shewa mobile* at the beginning of a word or syllable is almost always pronounced *e*, as in *tefillá* ("prayer").

e. Gemination of consonants in Hebrew words is also retained, as in *kippúr* ("[Yom] Kippur, the Day of Atonement").

f. The stress in words of Hebrew origin is usually preserved where it would be according to the rules of accentuation in Hebrew, even where these contradict the rules of Egyptian Arabic.[4]

g. Egyptian Jews often prefer the use of the vowel *u* in some verbs and nouns, as against the use of another vowel in the standard dialect, as in *ṭušt* ("tub" or "washtub") in EJA versus *ṭišt* in the standard dialect.

h. Feminine and plural forms are often influenced by the Hebrew forms.

Vocabulary items used exclusively by Jews consist of words and expressions originating in Hebrew and in Arabic, and to a lesser extent in Aramaic and various European languages, mainly French and Italian, as well as Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). All often undergo changes in meaning and sometimes changes in form as well. In the lexicon that is related to the *Shabbat*, however, there is no influence

[4] I have marked the stress in these words with an accent sign.

of words of European origin, and as is often the case with religious context, many words come from Hebrew.

A note on the *Shabbat,* and this article

Shabbat, Saturday, is a sacred day for Jews everywhere. In Egypt, as elsewhere, it was not only a sacred day of rest, prayer and social activity, but also inspired the creation of words and phrases unique to Jews, known only in a partial and limited way also to non-Jews who were in close contact with the Jews. Some parts of the linguistic repertory – in various versions – is shared by other Jewish communities in the East and the West, since it is derived from activities related to *Shabbat* shared by Jews in general, and others are unique to Egyptian Jews only.

Below we discuss concepts and objects related to the Sabbath in chronological order, from the eve of *Shabbat* on Friday afternoon to the end of *Shabbat* on Saturday night.

The term *Shabbat* and the *Shabbat* atmosphere

The Jews of Egypt use two words to denote "Saturday", Hebrew *šabbát* and Arabic *sabt*. To refer to the eve of Saturday and to Saturday night Egyptian Jews use the accepted terms in Egyptian Arabic that refer to Saturday eve and Sunday eve, *lilt is-sabt* and *lilt il-ḥadd*, respectively. Some rabbinical Jews use the mixed version *lilt iš-šabbát* to refer to Saturday night.

A second-form Arab verb, *sabbit*, derived from the Arabic term, means "spend the *Shabbat*", as in *taʿāla sabbit ʿandina* ("come and spend the *Shabbat* with us"). The verb *sabbit* with this meaning does not exist in Egyptian Arabic, but there is a homophonic verb originating in the root T̲BT. Due to the disappearance of inter-dental consonants in Egyptian Arabic, the colloquial verb originating in the Standard Arabic verb *ṯabbata*, meaning "affix, tighten", is *sabbit*; although sounds the same, it is not at all related to the EJA term.

Another verb in the second form connected to *Shabbat* is derived from a Hebrew root: *ḥallil*, in the second form, from the Hebrew verb *ḥillél*, meaning "desecrate (*Shabbat* or a holiday)". In Egyptian Arabic there is a homonymic verb in this form (*ḥallil*) which means "allow, permit, make permissible". It is noteworthy that this verb is used in Egyptian Judeo-Arabic only in the past and the future-present tenses, but in the collocation indicating "a person who desecrates the *Shabbat*" the Hebrew active participle is used: *meḥallél šabbát*, with ultimate stress, versus *miḥallil* in Egyptian Arabic with penultimate stress.

Activities related to the *Shabbat* begin already on Friday afternoon. Wherever there is a prominent Jewish presence the change in the atmosphere can be felt. This was the case in the Jewish quarter and in the textile market "al-Ḥamzāwi" in

Cairo that was under Jewish control, where shops started closing on Friday afternoon and commercial activity stopped until Sunday, and also in the goldsmiths' streets in Egyptian cities and towns where most of the shops were owned by Jews.[5]

In the Jewish quarter in Cairo it was customary to announce before the commencement of *Shabbat*: *īdu ya girān* (lit.: "light, oh neighbours"). The beadles of the synagogues in the quarter would make this call to remind the people that the traditional candle lighting time for *Shabbat* has come.

The special preparations for *Shabbat* and the great respect in which this day is held are summed up in the expression *kabód šabbát* ("dignity of *Shabbat*, honour of *Shabbat*"). This expression is also used euphemistically and in a humoristic tone, to denote having sexual intercourse on Saturday.

Shabbat: artefacts and religious ceremonies – between Kiddush and Havdala

The word *ṭuštiyya* is derived from the EJA word *ṭušt* ("wash-tub", versus *ṭišt* in standard Egyptian Arabic). In Judeo-Arabic it denotes an oil lamp (made of small cup-shaped vessels, in which water is put, oil is put on the water, and in the water a rolled cotton thread is put); *ṭuštiyyit iš-šabbát* is the oil lamp lit before the commencement of the *Shabbat* (by rabbinical Jews only). In Egyptian Arabic the word *ṭištiyya* denotes a deep bowl.

Kiddush (in Hebrew: קידוש, from the root QDŠ, lit.: "sanctification"), the blessing over a cup of wine recited on the eve of *Shabbat* (and holidays), is called in EJA *iddūs* or *addūs*; Kiddush wine is called *nibīt lil-ʾiddūs*. As is customary in Egyptian Arabic and often in EJA, the uvular stop *q* becomes a glottal stop. The consonant *s* probably originates in the Arab root QDS, that is preferred here over the corresponding Hebrew root QDŠ.

The ceremony that contains the blessing over a cup of wine recited on Saturday night (and holidays) that is meant to separate between the Holy Day and the following weekdays is called in EJA *habdalá* (lit.: "separation"), with the phoneme *b* pronounced as a stop (*b*), as opposed to Hebrew *havdala* in which it is pronounced as a fricative (*v*). Another component of this ceremony is the blessing over fragrances and smelling them (see below).

Greetings for the Shabbat

Egyptian Jews usually use the greetings that are accepted in Egyptian Arabic, to which they add greetings and good wishes of their own, many of which are related

[5] On the goldsmiths in Egypt and their language see Rosenbaum 2002a.

to *Shabbat* and holidays. The most common greeting on Saturday is the Hebrew greeting *šabbát šalóm* ("may you have a *Shabbat* of peace").

Several greeting formulas are used at the end of the *Shabbat*; the most common one is *gumʿítak ḥaḍra* (or *gumʿítkum ḥaḍra* in the plural; lit.: "have a green week", i.e. "may you have a good week"), a greeting used exclusively by Jews. There are several possible responses to this greeting (here we give the singular masculine form only): *wu-gumʿítak ḥaḍra*, and in the shorter version *wu-gumʿítak* ("may you also have a green week"), or *wu-gumʿítak zayy is-salʾ* ("may your week be as green as beetroot leaves"). Other such greetings draw upon similes used by Egyptians generally to greet each other in the morning, such as *full* (jasmine) or *išṭa* (cream made from the foam on milk); for example, *wu-gumʿítak zayy il-full* ("may you have a week [white and clean] like jasmine"); *wu-gumʿítak zayy il-ʾišṭa* ("may you have a week [white] like milk-cream"). A less common version is the greeting *wu-gumʿítak zayy il-laban* ("may you have a week [white] like milk"). In all cases these greetings mean "may you have a wonderful and perfect week". Another greeting is derived from Hebrew: *šabúʿa ṭob* ("may you have a good week"); the reply to this greeting is *ʿaleḫém veʿalénu* (lit: "for you and for us", i.e. "may you have a good week, too").

As mentioned above, a part of the *havdala* (in EJA: *habdalá*) ceremony is the blessing over fragrances and smelling them. The custom in Egypt was to smell myrtle leaves. Jews who go to the synagogue at the end of the *Shabbat* receive myrtle branches there. They rub the scented leaves in their hands and recite the blessing *boré atséy besamím* (lit.: "[Blessed art Thou Lord, king of the universe], who created fragrant trees"), which is a part of the *havdala* ceremony. The word *besamím* ("perfumes, fragrances") sometimes also denotes "myrtle" among rabbinical Jews, for example: *hāt il-besamím* ("give [me] the myrtle leaves"). Myrtle in Arabic is called *marsīn*, sometimes also pronounced *marsīm* in Egyptian Arabic, but many Jews pronounce it *barsīm,* which in Egyptian Arabic denotes a species of clover used as animal feed. Some of my informants told me that they wondered how the same word could refer both to animal feed and to a plant rubbed for its sweet smell at the end of the *Shabbat*. These two words, however, are not related.

The prophet Elijah, who is usually called *Liyáhu -n-nabí* ("Prophet Elijah", from the Hebrew name Eliyáhu) in EJA, is greatly admired in popular tradition and mentioned in several expressions. One such expression is *Liyáhu -n-nabí yitgalla ʿalēna* ("may we see Elijah the Prophet revealed to us"), said on Saturday night.

Saturday rituals

Selling the readings of the Torah

For many Jews the synagogue is a centre of religious and social activity. Such activities are some of the rituals in the synagogue on the *Shabbat* (and also on holidays) that are performed by members of the congregation, for a fee. On *Shabbat* (and also on holidays) certain rituals called *mitsvót* (lit.: "commandments" in Hebrew, plural of *mitsvá*), are sold to the highest bidder in a kind of a public auction. This term is used by the rabbinical Jews only; the Karaite Jews call these activities *irayāt* (lit.: "readings" in Arabic; see below).

The sums of money that are quoted when selling the commandments often represent in Gematria the following words: 18 (*tamantāšar*) = Living (חי, a common abbreviation in Hebrew of the phrase "Living God", which is one of the names of God); 26 (*sitta wi-ʿišrīn*) = יהוה ("Jehovah, the Tetragrammaton"); 32 (*itnēn wu-talatīn*) = לב ("heart"); 52 (*itnēn wu-ḫamsīn*) = בן ("son", and also twice Tetragrammaton); 101 (*miyya wāḥid*) = מיכאל, the archangel Michael; according to another explanation, the number is 1 more than the perfect number 100, because only God is perfect.

In Egypt the sums of money were usually denominated in piasters *(irš*, pl. *urūš*, one-hundredth of a *ginēh*, an Egyptian pound) or in *ginēh* (see below). Sometimes they appeared in other versions to those mentioned above; for example, they could also be multiples of 18 ("Living"). The price of buying a "commandment" on the holidays skyrocketed, and was quoted in Egyptian pounds. The wealthy people of the congregation used to buy "commandments" for extremely high prices. The highest sum of money was always paid for the *mitsvá* of *kannidré* (a distorted form of *Kol Nidréy*, from Aramaic), taking out the Torah scroll from the Holy Ark before the *Kol Nidre* ("all vows") prayer on Yom Kippur eve, often sold for hundreds of pounds.

The income from the selling of the *mitsvót* or *irayāt* (a practice that still exists in many Jewish congregations) is devoted to the budget of the synagogue, and the sums of money collected are thus regarded as donations. In order to encourage the worshippers to increase their donations, synagogue officials would therefore encourage the congregation to increase the sums of money, and exhort members of the congregation with the Hebrew expression *kol hamosíf yosífu lo*, also *kol hamosíf mosifím lo* ("whoever adds will have added [merit]"). The intent of these expressions is: whoever adds to the amount of the donation for the synagogue will receive a greater reward from God.

One who pays for a *mitsvá* is therefore called *mitnaddéb* ("volunteer"), for example: *mitnaddéb bi-tamantāšar* ("donates eighteen piasters [or Egyptian pounds]"). However, phrases like *yibīʿu -l-mitsvót* ("they sell the commandments") in the rabbinical synagogue or *mīn ištara -s-séfer in-nahārda* ("who

bought the reading of the book today [see below]?") in the Karaite synagogue were commonly used. In the Egyptian Jewish press criticism is sometimes levelled at the process and manner of selling and buying the commandments that turns the synagogue into a marketplace, and at people who organize prayers in private places in order to make money from selling the commandments.[6] Among the people, however, participating in this activity has always been popular and considered a mark of piety.

The process of reading the Torah

The first *mitsvá* sold in the rabbinical synagogue is *petiḥát ha-heḫál* ("opening the Holy Ark"); the Hebrew word *heḫál* (lit.: "palace; a section of the Temple") denotes the Ark in which the *sefarím* (sing.: *séfer*, lit.: "book"), Torah scrolls written by hand are kept. The second *mitsvá* is *gilyān* ("raising the Torah scroll"); this word is derived from the Arab verb *galla* in the phrase *galla -s-séfer* ("shown the Torah, raised the Torah scroll"). The third *mitsvá* is *rimmoním* (lit.: "pomegranates"), pomegranate-shaped silverware that adorns the Torah scrolls which are kept in the Ark. This *mitsvá* is usually sold during the holidays, and often purchased by parents for their children who receive the honour to remove the *rimmonīm* or return them to the Torah scroll. The word *rimmoním* in EJA is also a nickname for a woman's breasts.

In rabbinical synagogues the readings in the Torah are sold when the scroll is out of the Ark and open. They are sold in the order of readers in *parašát ha-šabúʿa*, also *barašát /perašát / berašát ha-šabúʿa* ("weekly portion of the Torah" read in the synagogue).

Reading portions of the Torah in the synagogue takes place on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On Mondays and Thursdays the portion read is shorter and is divided into three parts, while on Saturdays it is longer and is divided into seven; only on that day the readings are sold. Traditionally, the first portion is read by a Kohen ("priest"), the second by a Levite, and the rest by any Israelite, called "Israel". The person called up to the reading is called by the Hebrew word *ʿolé*, pl. *ʿolīm* ("one who ascends"). The act of being called up to the reading of the Torah is called *ʿaliyá*, pl. *ʿaliyōt* (lit.: "ascent"). This term also appears as the *nomen regens* in possessive phrases while the *nomen rectum* represents one of the readers. For example: *ʿaliyát kohén* ("ascending of the Kohen to read the Torah"). The verb that refers to being called up to the reading of the Torah is in Arabic, in the mixed phrase *ṭiliʿ ʿas-séfer* ("was called up to the reading of the Torah"); a verb in the second form from the same root means "to call somebody to the

[6] See, e.g., *Israʾīl* 4 November 1921; *al-Šams* 26 November 1943, 22 November 1946, 5 April 1947.

reading of the Torah", as in *ṭallaʿūh ʿas-séfer* ("they called him up to the reading of the Torah").

After the readings on Saturdays are sold the readers are called up to the reading of the Torah in the following order:

Kohén ("Kohen, priest"), the first reader; *Leví* ("Levite"), the second reader; the following readers are all Israelites (in this contexts, an Israelite is any Jew who is not a Kohen or does not belong to the tribe of Levi); *šeliší* (lit.: "third", "Israelite"), the third reader; *rebiʿí* (lit.: "fourth"), the fourth reader; *ḥamišší* (lit.: "fifth"), the fifth reader; *šišší* (lit.: "sixth"), the sixth reader; the sixth reader is also called *samúḫ* (lit.: "adjacent" [to the *mašlīm*]), because he is the last but one reader, before the *mašlīm*; *mašlīm* (lit: "completing"), the seventh reader and the last one who reads a part of *parašát ha-šavúʿa*); *mafṭír* (lit: "concluding"), the very last reader who concludes the reading of the last verses in the weekly Torah portion and then reads the *haftará*, a passage from the *Prophets*.

After reading a portion of the Torah, the reader is congratulated by members of the congregation with the words *ḥazzák wu-barúḫ* ("may you be strong and blessed"). The word *ḥazzák* comes from the Hebrew word *ḥazaq* (a verb in the imperative: "be strong"), with the uvular stop *q* pronounced as the velar stop *k*.

When the reading of the Torah is over, it is customary to say blessings for members of the congregation, to wish recovery to sick people or to mention the names of deceased relatives. These blessings and mentions open with the words *hašém haṭób* ("the good name"), an adjective that precedes the person's name mentioned on this occasion, in the following formula in Hebrew: *mi šeberáḫ avoténu Avrahám Yitshák ve-Yaʿakóv hu yevaréḫ hašém haṭób ploní almoní…* ("He who blessed our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob He will bless the good name so and so…").

Shabbat: Karaite vocabulary

Some terms related to the process of prayer and reading the Torah in the synagogue on Saturday are unique to the Karaites. The term *séfer urbān* (lit.: "book of sacrifice") denotes an additional prayer (in Hebrew: *musáf*) which is recited in honour of an additional Torah scroll taken out from the Holy Ark on Saturdays and holidays. Towards the end of the prayer the Karaites recite liturgical texts called *qedušót* (pronounced *kedušót*) or *edušót* (plural of *qedušá* or *edušá*, lit.: "holiness"), and a liturgical poem called *piyúṭ paraša* or *biyúṭ baraša* (also: *peraša*, *beraša*; "liturgical poem of the [weekly Torah] portion", plural: *piyúṭím*). The contents of this liturgical poem are connected to the weekly Torah portion. These liturgical poems, most of which were written by Rabbi Aharon ben Yoseph (d. 1320), are included in the Karaites' prayer books.

After reciting the *qedušót* and the *piyúṭ paraší*, the *hazzán* (“cantor”) recites a blessing over the congregation and over the people of Israel in general; after that, the cantor recites blessings to commemorate the memory of the deceased; at first the names of great sages are mentioned, then names of relatives of members of the congregation. These blessings are called *ziḫronót* (plural of *zéḫer*, lit.: “memory”, which by the Karaites is also used to denote “memorial service”). Then blessings for the recovery of sick people may be recited, as well as blessings for any merry occasion, for example, a child who has succeeded in an examination.

The *qedušót* and *ziḫronót* conclude the Saturday prayer. After that there is an intermission during which the readings of *qedušót* and *piyúṭím* for the following Saturday are sold. The readings of the Torah are then sold in the same kind of auction as in the rabbinical synagogue. The Torah readings and related activities which are sold in the synagogue and called *mitsvót* by the rabbinical Jews, are called *irayāt* (lit.: “readings”, plural of *irāya*) by the Karaites.

The first “reading” sold in the Karaite synagogue is *fatḥ is-sitāra* (“opening the curtain”), also in the mixed version *fatḥ il-paróḫet* or *il-baróḫet* (“opening the *paróḫet* [the ornamented curtain that covers the Holy Ark]”); this also refers to the opening of the Ark. This act is sometimes also called *fatḥ il-heḫál* (“opening of the Holy Ark”). In these two cases the Karaites prefer verbal nouns originating in Arabic over words originating in Hebrew: using the Arabic word *irāya* pl. *irayāt* versus the Hebrew *mitsvá* pl. *mitsvót,* and the Arabic word *fatḥ* (“opening”) versus its Hebrew equivalent *petiḥá* (in the *nomen regens* version *petiḥát*).

In order to encourage the audience to increase the sums offered and to continue the process of selling a certain “reading”, the *gabbáy* announces: *ḥanbārik li-fulān* (“we are about to congratulate so and so [for purchasing the “reading”]”). When the reading is finally sold, the *gabbáy* declares: *bārikna li-fulān* (lit.: “we have congratulated so and so”, i.e. “congratulation to so and so”).

The person who is given the first “reading” performs two acts: moving aside the *paróḫet* and opening the Ark. The person who opens the Ark also takes out the Torah scroll and gives it to the performer of the second “reading”, which is called *is-séfer* (“the book”, i.e. “the Torah scroll”). This person holds the Torah, makes a round of the synagogue with it and later puts it back in the Ark. As mentioned above, the Karaites, too, use terms of buying and selling in this regard, for example: *yibīʿu -s-séfer* (“they are selling the [reading of] the Torah”); *mīn ištara -s-séfer in-nahārda?* (“who bought the reading of the book today?”); *ḥa-nbīʿ irāyit is-sabt ig-gāyy* (“we are going to sell the reading of next Saturday”).

Then starts the process of selling the readings of the Torah portions, which are given names similar but not identical to those of the rabbinical Jews. Here, too, the Karaites prefer some Arabic words to the Hebrew ones used by the rabbinical Jews (the names of the third to the sixth reader):

Kohén (“Kohen, priest”), the first reader; *Leví* (“Levite”); the second reader; *it-tālit* (lit.: “third”), “Israelite”, the third reader; *ir-rābiʿ* (lit.: “fourth”), the fourth reader; *il-ḫāmis* (lit.: “fifth”), the fifth reader; *is-sādis* (lit.: “sixth”), the sixth reader; *mašlīm* (lit: “completing”), the seventh reader and the last one who reads a portion of *parašát ha-šavúʿa*; *mafṭír* (lit.: “concluding”), the very last reader.

The term *samúḫ*; that refers to the *sixth reader* among the rabbinical Jews, does not exist among the Karaites.

It is customary for the *mafṭír* to be also the first reader (i.e. the *Kohen*). In this case, the *Kohen* reads all of the *hafṭará* by himself, and may also serve as *soméḫ* (“supporter”), a person who helps other readers to read the Torah. But if the *Kohen* is not proficient in reading the Torah, the job of the *soméḫ* is performed by somebody else who also reads the *hafṭará* instead of the *mafṭír*. If the *Kohen* is only somewhat proficient in reading the Torah, the *soméḫ* starts with reading a few verses, the *Kohen* continues with reading the first part of the *hafṭará*, and then the *soméḫ* completes all of the rest.

The word *ḥazzák* in the greeting *ḥazzák wu-barúḫ* said to those who read the Torah in the synagogue, is pronounced by some of the Karaites *ḥazzáʾ*, with a glottal stop instead of the original uvular stop *q*.

Foods for Saturday

A typical Jewish dish is *difīna* (“stew”, “cholent”, a dish that contains many ingredients including pulses (in the Egyptian version, mostly chickpeas), commonly put in the oven on the eve of Saturday in order to eat it on Saturday after being slowly cooked for hours. This is an ancient dish that exists in many Jewish communities, in various versions and with different names, following the prohibition to set fire on Saturday. The source of the EJA version of the dish’s name is the Arabic root DFN that is concerned with burial and hiding.

Karaite foods

The Karaites have many distinctive dishes that do not exist among non-Jews or rabbinical Jews. The names of these foods, most of which are in Arabic or derived from Arab roots, do not exist in Egyptian Arabic and most are not known to rabbinical Jews. Many of them are meant to be eaten on Saturday. Because the Karaites are careful not to use fire (or electric stoves) on Saturday, these dishes are prepared before Saturday, and are eaten cold (the only way permitted to heat food is with a thermos, which is mostly used for keeping tea or coffee warm). The following are some examples:

Gōz bi-tōm (lit.: “walnuts with garlic”), a thick chicken soup with green beetroot leaves and garlic, ground and fried. Usually rice, chicken legs or flour are added in order to thicken the soup, and black pepper is added, too. Once the

soup is boiling, it is left to cool until it congeals. This dish is served cold, and it is customary to eat it on Saturday.

Gilda maḥšiyya (lit.: "stuffed skin"). Rice and chicken meat or liver stuffed in chicken skin. The skin is sewn, and the stuffed skin is cooked in a soup. This dish is mainly eaten on Saturday morning.

Ḥāmiḍ (lit.: "sour"). Thick chicken soup that contains a lot of garlic, turmeric, red pepper, and lots of lemon (which gives the soup its sourish flavour). It is customary to eat it on Saturday noon. This dish also has a version with fish, called *samak bi-lamūn* ("fish with lemon").

Maḍfūna (lit.: "buried, hidden"), also pronounced *matfūna*. A kind of pie that contains ground chicken meat, eggs, fried onion and baked coriander. It is customary to eat it on Saturday morning. The name of this dish, like the *diḍīna* of the rabbinical Jews, originates in the Arab root DFN that refers to burial or hiding (but, of course, is not cooked on Saturday like the *difīna* of the rabbinical Jews).

Conclusion

As is the case with other Jewish communities in the Arabic-speaking world, the Jews of Egypt speak a distinct variety of Arabic, different from the variety (or varieties) spoken by their Muslim and Christian neighbours, in morphology, phonology and mainly in the vocabulary.

While the morphological and phonological features are constant, the unique vocabulary is more common among Egyptian Jews when they are communicating with each other than when they communicate with non-Jews, who cannot understand most of this unique vocabulary. Thus most of the unique EJA vocabulary was avoided by the Jews when speaking with their non-Jewish neighbours.

Here I concentrated on the lexicon, showing how a large part of the unique vocabulary of the Jews is closely related to their way of life and traditions, demonstrated by references to *Shabbat* and its traditions, in the synagogue and elsewhere, that inspired the use of special words and phrases borrowed from Hebrew or invented by the local congregation, and sometimes mixed with Arabic. Naturally, the shared traditions, especially in religious practice, led to the creation of some similar lexical items being used by Jews who belonged to other communities, in the East as well as in the West.

The Rabbinical and Karaite Jews in Egypt share many linguistic features, but the theological differences between them also led to linguistic differences. The fact that the Karaites were often socially and linguistically more assimilated into their Arab surroundings – as can be seen, for example, by their tendency to adopt Arab names that are not strongly identified with Islam, as Fārūq, Farag or Gabr –

is also reflected in their religiolect (to use Hary's definition; Hary 2009:12–13) that contained more features of Arabic than that of the Rabbinical Jews.

Some Judeo-Arabic words and expressions, particularly those having to do with religious and community life, may be found in Arabic-language Jewish newspapers published in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century. A few words even appear in earlier written texts, such as those found in the Cairo Geniza. However, many words and phrases used in spoken EJA are not found in written sources, including many of the words and phrases described here; they can be found and described only through intensive work with informants who are native speakers of this language, as was done for this article.

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[7] The main source for this study were informants, native speakers of Egyptian Judeo-Arabic: Egyptian Jews who were born in Egypt, interviewed mostly in Egypt, Israel and France, as well as non-Jewish Egyptians who were interviewed in Egypt.

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