

Arnold & Klimiuk (Eds.)

Arabic **D**ialectology

Methodology and Field Research

Harrassowitz

Werner Arnold & Maciej Klimiuk (Eds.)
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Preface

The idea for this book arose from one of the research seminars on Semitic dialectology organised in the Department of Semitic Studies, Heidelberg University. After some heated discussion, we came to the conclusion that there is a need to share our own experiences from the field, but also to talk about the methodology used in our discipline and research. The aim of this volume was to look at field research and its methodology from different perspectives and angles, narrated by active researchers with various backgrounds. That is why we invited both experienced and young researchers.

Obviously, many books and handbooks are used to prepare for linguistic fieldwork (e.g., Kibrik 1977; Werlen 1984; Vaux and Cooper 1999; Newman and Ratliff 2001; Crowley 2007; Sakel and Everett 2012; Thieberger 2012; Bowern 2015). However, these do not describe the specific intricacies of fieldwork within Semitic dialectology and the regions of its concern, especially the Middle East and North Africa. The existing literature in our discipline, on the other hand, often omits the author's own experiences and difficulties they faced during their fieldwork, which keeps the fieldwork methodology out of discussion. But as we review the work of our colleagues, it becomes obvious that their fieldwork methods vary from each another significantly.

Valuable information on fieldwork in Arabic countries can be found in the book *Arabische Dialektgeographie. Eine Einführung* (Behnstedt and Woidich 2005) or some introductions to grammatical descriptions of Arabic dialects. However, a real focus would be more useful. Recordings in Arabic dialects are available at the SemArch. Semitisches Tonarchiv or CORVAM. Corpus oral de variedades magrebíes/Speech corpus of Maghrebi varieties, but many are not available at all.¹ Also, questionnaires, which are prepared by researchers before they leave for field studies, are usually unpublished.² It can, therefore, be concluded that field research resources, tools and materials are not readily available for Arabic dialectologists.

The present volume consists of three parts, which have been separated thematically. The first part *Field Research: Practical Experience* contains articles that focus on field research in Arabic-speaking countries. The authors not only talk about methods they use but also quote from memories, some-

1 SemArch. Semitisches Tonarchiv. <http://semarch.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; CORVAM. Corpus oral de variedades magrebíes/Speech corpus of Maghrebi varieties. <http://corvam.unizar.es>.

2 Dominique Caubet (2000) has published a questionnaire to study North African dialects.

times quite vividly of the problems they had to face. Sharing one's own field experience, although important, is not easy for many researchers.

Peter Behnstedt, known for his light-hearted style, describes a number of stories he encountered in his fieldwork, in Yemen, Syria and Egypt. He concludes by stating that field research as a result of the political situation in the Middle East and North Africa can also be conducted in Europe or the United States. Werner Arnold continues this topic and writes about his fieldwork in Germany on Arabic dialects of the Turkish Hatay Province. Maria Lipnicka and Maciej Klimiuk deal in their article with their current dialectological research on Gozo, the second island of the Maltese archipelago. The article focuses on methodology understood as soft skills. Emilie Zuniga, who conducted research in Syria, Lebanon and Southern Turkey, touches on ethical and social issues from the point of view of the female researcher. Judith Rosenhouse looks at her research through the prism of her own experiences and discusses in her article, e.g., the difficulties encountered by researchers in field research on Arabic dialects in Israel. Aharon Geva-Kleinberger, who besides his fieldwork in Israel and Palestine, describes more broadly the research on Arabic dialects of Jews. Thomas Leddy-Cecere deals with the topic of field research among members of transnational populations on the example of his research with the Sudanese expatriate community of Cairo and Syrian and Egyptian residents of the United States as an example. This part ends with a study by Janet C.E. Watson, Miranda J. Morris, Abdullah al-Mahri, Munira A. al-Azraqi, Saeed al-Mahri and Ali al-Mahri on field research with speakers of the Modern South Arabian languages (MSAL) in southern Oman, eastern Yemen and eastern Saudi Arabia.

The second part of the volume, entitled *Tools, Methods and Historical Sources*, begins with a text by Assaf Bar-Moshe on phonetic analysis of the Jewish dialect of Baghdad, which allowed that author to solve problems with the phonetic system of this dialect. Stefano Manfredi and Suat Istanbulu discuss in their article new solutions for annotating and analyzing plurilingual corpora by means of a multilayered annotation system based on JAXE. Jonathan Owens describes in his text a quantitative treatment of discourse a corpus of Emirati Arabic and argues that the future of the study of spoken Arabic discourse lies in the analysis of large corpora. The article by Jason Schroepfer is a great introduction to the use of some basic tools to start a fieldwork project, conduct interviews, and create maps. The second part ends with Liesbeth Zack's article on the interpretation of historical sources in Arabic dialectology. The author looks at sources in Egyptian Arabic and Judeo-Arabic.

The third part contains samples of questionnaires that have already been used in field research. Peter Behnstedt compiled them and Maciej Klimiuk rewrote them from Behnstedt's notes/sheets, edited and corrected them. The first questionnaire was used in Syria to prepare a dialect atlas, which was

published in 1997 (Behnstedt 1997), and the second one was aimed to gather material for a language atlas of Morocco. Unfortunately, the Moroccan atlas has not been released because the project still is in progress. The last questionnaire in the volume was created to gather vocabulary for the *Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* (Behnstedt and Woidich 2011–2014). We are grateful to Peter Behnstedt for providing us with this valuable material and for his consent to its releasing.

At the end of the volume, three indices follow ('Index of Names', 'Index of Places', 'Index of Subjects and Languages'), prepared by Maciej Klimiuk.

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Maciej Klimiuk and Werner Arnold
Heidelberg, June 2019

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List of Abbreviations and Symbols

AIC	Akaike information criterion
EPG	electropalatography
ELAR	Endangered Languages Archive
FL	foreign language
GIF	German-Israeli Foundation
ISF	Israel Science Foundation
JB	Jewish dialect of Baghdad (Jewish Baghdadi)
MPJA	Modern Palestinian Judeo-Arabic
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
MSAL	Modern South Arabian languages
OA	Old Arabic
PREDISC	discursively remarkable phenomena
PREMS	morphosyntactically remarkable phenomena
PRINT	interactionally remarkable phenomena
WOM	World of Mouth
-	morpheme boundary
=	clitic boundary
~	or
/	1. as well as, and 2. minor prosodic boundary
//	major prosodic boundary
/.../	phoneme
[...]	phonetic variant
Ø	zero
#	pause
>	leads to
+	plus, with
*	1. reconstructed form 2. plural form (questionnaire)
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACT.PTCP	see PTCP.ACT
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
ADP	adposition
C	1. consonant

	2. common gender
COL	collective noun
DEF	definite article
DET	determiner
F	feminine
FUT	future particle
HESIT	hesitation marker
K	consonant, Ger Konsonant (questionnaire)
M	masculine
N	noun
NEG	negation, negative
NOM	nominative
O	object
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive function
PREP	preposition
PRN	pronoun
PROG	progressive preverbal proclitic
PROX	proximal (demonstrative pronoun)
PRT	particle
PST	past
PTCP.ACT	participle active
REAL	imperfective preverb (realis mood)
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative
S	subject
SG	singular
V	1. verb
	2. vowel, Ger Vokal (questionnaire)

List of Contributors

Werner Arnold is Professor Emeritus of Semitic Linguistics at Heidelberg University. His research interests include Arabic and Aramaic dialectology. He has been working and publishing extensively on Aramaic dialects of Maʿlūla, Ǧubbʿadin and Baxʿa, and Arabic dialects of Hatay (Turkey). His books include, e.g., *Die arabischen Dialekte Antiochiens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), (with Peter Behnstedt) *Arabisch-Aramäische Sprachbeziehungen im Qalamūn (Syrien)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993), *Das Neuwestaramäische*. 6 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1989–2019), and *Lehrbuch des Neuwestaramäischen* (Second edition. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006).

Munira A. al-Azraqi is Professor of Linguistics at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. She is interested in language documentation where she is currently working on Mehri, as spoken in Saudi Arabia. She has published several papers on language change in some Saudi Arabic dialects. The ancient lateral *ḏād* is one of her interests. She found it occurs in some dialects in Saudi Arabia. She worked with Janet C.E Watson (University of Leeds), Barry Heselwood (University of Leeds), and Samia Naïm (CNRS-Paris) in 2010–2012 to do electropalatography research on this sound. She has received financial funds from different universities and research centers in Saudi Arabia.

Assaf Bar-Moshe gained his PhD from the Department of Linguistics and the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His main area of interest is the Arabic dialect of the Jews in Baghdad, but also Mesopotamian Arabic dialects in general. He spent the academic years 2014–2017 at the Department of Semitic Studies in Heidelberg University.

Peter Behnstedt gained his PhD in Romance Philology at the University of Tübingen, and Dr. habil. in Arabic studies at the University of Hamburg. He lived, worked and conducted his research, among others in Egypt (1974–1979, 1981), Yemen (1981–1983, 1985), Syria (1985–1990, 1993), Tunisia (1996–1998), Israel (1997–1999) and Morocco (1999–now). He has been a research fellow in Heidelberg, Tübingen, Hamburg and Erlangen. He has published widely on Arabic dialects of Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. His books include, e.g., (with Manfred Woidich) *Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte*. 3 vols. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011–2014), (with Manfred Woidich) *Arabische Dialektgeographie. Eine Einführung* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), (with Manfred Woidich) *Die ägyptisch-arabischen Dialekte*. 5 vols. (Wiesbaden:

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Aharon Geva-Kleinberger is Professor and in recent years the Head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Haifa. He pursued his doctoral studies at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg under the supervision of Prof. Otto Jastrow (Semitic Studies), additionally to Islamic Studies and Assyriology. He is a dialectologist and a researcher of modern Semitic languages. His work is not purely of linguistic interest; the texts that he collects can serve historians and anthropologists. He has written several books, e.g., *Die arabischen Stadtdialekte von Haifa in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), and *Autochthonous Texts in the Arabic Dialect of the Jews of Tiberias* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009). He has concentrated on researching Judeo-Arabic dialects: Jewish dialects in Galilee (Safed and Pqī'in) and Jewish dialects in the Far East: India, Burma and Singapore. He has also conducted a study of the Arabic dialects of the Jews of Sudan, Yemen and Lebanon. His research focuses on Arabic dialects that are in imminent danger of extinction. He worked on two large-scale projects on Palestinian dialects in Northern Israel.

Suat Istanbulu (PhD 2017, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Inalco, Paris) is a teacher and research assistant at Inalco and junior researcher at the SeDyL research Centre (UMR8202 of CNRS, the French National Centre for Scientific Research). Her research mainly focuses on multilingual interaction involving Arabic, Turkish and dominant languages within transnational families.

Maciej Klimiuk (PhD 2012, University of Warsaw) is a research assistant at the Department of Semitic Studies, Heidelberg University. His main research foci are Arabic/Maltese dialectology and Semitic linguistics. He conducted field research in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Indonesia, Turkey and Malta. In 2018, he started the *GozoDia* project (with Maria Lipnicka), funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), regarding the dialectal situation of Gozo (Malta).

Thomas Leddy-Cecere, PhD, is faculty in Sociolinguistics at Bennington College. His research interests comprise language variation and change in both synchronic and diachronic applications, and his current projects include the study of contact-induced grammatical change in the history of

Arabic and the sociolinguistic analysis of dialect accommodation phenomena among members of transnational Arabic-speaking populations.

Maria Lipnicka (MA 2017, Heidelberg University) is a PhD student at the Department of Semitic Studies, Heidelberg University. In 2018, she started the *GozoDia* project (with Maciej Klimiuk), funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), regarding the dialectal situation of Gozo (Malta).

Abdullah al-Mahri is a speaker of Mehri. He has been working with Janet Watson on the documentation of Mehri since 2010. He has co-presented with Watson at several international conferences and workshops. In recent years, he has gained an interest in phonetics and has worked with Watson on the instrumental phonetics of Mehri, and on a co-authored paper on word stress. He is currently co-authoring a book with Harrassowitz Verlag.

Ali al-Mahri is a bilingual speaker of two Modern South Arabian languages, Mehri and Šherēt. He has been working as a research assistant on Modern South Arabian languages since December 2009. Since this date, he has co-presented with Janet Watson at seven international conferences/workshops and has co-presented five guest lectures at international venues. He has also co-authored two papers currently in press, and is co-authoring two books for publication with Oxford University Press and Harrassowitz Verlag.

Saeed al-Mahri gained his BA in English literature from Dhofar University, and his MA in Arabic/English translation from Salford University, UK. He is also a bilingual speaker of two Modern South Arabian languages, Mehri and Šherēt. He worked as the principal local researcher on the *Documentation and Ethnolinguistic Analysis of the Modern South Arabian Languages* project. He has co-presented workshops and lectures with Janet Watson at two international venues and has produced a web-blog on water in Dhofar for the University of Leeds research group, water@leeds.

Stefano Manfredi (PhD 2010, University of Naples 'L'Orientale') is a CNRS junior researcher at the SeDyL (UMR 8202). His research mainly focuses on language contact involving Arabic, Arabic-based pidgins and creoles, Arabic typological dialectology, and Nilo-Saharan (Daju) languages.

Miranda J. Morris is an independent researcher, whose interests focus on the ethnography and languages of southern Arabia, in particular the group of six pre-literate languages, the Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL): Mehri, Ḥarsūsi, Baṭṭhari, Šherēt and Soḳoṭri. She has worked on a variety of projects in the region, for the Darwin Initiative, UK; the Global Environment Facility (GEF); the European Union (EU); the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). Most recently she has been involved with the Leverhulme-funded project *Documentation and Ethnolinguistic Analysis of the Modern South*

Arabian Languages, and is currently working with a GEF project on Soqatra. Her principal publications include: (with Anthony G. Miller) *Plants of Dhofar: The Southern Region of Oman: Traditional, Economic and Medicinal Uses* (Office of the Adviser for Conservation of the Environment, Diwan of Royal Court, Sultanate of Oman, 1988), (with Pauline Shelton) *Oman Adorned: A Portrait in Silver* (Muscat: Apex Publishing, 1997), *Manual of Traditional Land Use in the Soqatra Archipelago* (Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Garden, 2002), (with Anthony G. Miller) *Ethnoflora of the Soqatra Archipelago* (Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Garden, 2004). Forthcoming works include: (with Tānuf Salim Nuḥ) *Island Voices: The Oral Art of Soqatra*, (with Janet C.E. Watson and Domenyk Eades) *A Comparative Cultural Glossary across the Modern South Arabian Language Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), and a collection of transcribed and translated texts in Baḥari, with glossary and basic grammatical outline, for publication by Harrassowitz, to be followed by a similar collection in Hobyōt.

Jonathan Owens is Professor Emeritus of Arabic Linguistics at Bayreuth University in Germany. His over 100 scholarly articles and 12 books, include *The Foundations of Grammar: An Introduction to Medieval Arabic Grammatical Theory* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1988), *Neighborhood and Ancestry: Variation in the Spoken Arabic of Maiduguri, Nigeria* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998), and *A Linguistic History of Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006/2009). He is the 2018 recipient of the Special Award of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Service to the Arabic language (Dubai).

Judith Rosenhouse, Prof., won BA in Arabic and English (*cum laude*), MA (*cum laude*) and PhD in Arabic from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She specialized in Arabic dialects, also publishing on Hebrew, English and Hungarian. For her works, she won several prizes and awards and visited several universities. She worked first at Haifa University, and later at the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology, from which she retired as Head of the Department of Humanities and Arts. Her research works comprise well above a hundred professional journal papers and book chapters, as well as 11 original and edited books. Her research interests include colloquial Arabic dialects and Literary (Modern Standard) Arabic, Arabic and Hebrew phonetics and acoustic phonetics, Arabic dialects identification in forensic linguistics, language acquisition of first and second language, Arabic and Hebrew speakers' hearing problems, and sociolinguistics. She mentored MA and PhD students at the Technion and other universities. Since her retirement from the Technion, she has been working with SWANTECH Ltd., never neglecting her linguistic research.

Jason Schroepfer, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Arabic at Virginia Military Institute. His research interests revolve around language variation and change in Arabic-speaking societies and Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. One of his current research projects focuses on southern Egyptian dialects.

Janet C.E. Watson studied Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, and Linguistics and then completed a PhD on the phonology and morphology of Yemeni Arabic dialects at SOAS, London. She has held academic posts at the Universities of Edinburgh, Durham and Salford. She has held visiting posts at the universities of Heidelberg (2003–2004) and Oslo (2004–2005). She took up the Leadership Chair for Language@Leeds at the University of Leeds on 1 May 2013, and was elected Fellow of the British Academy in July 2013. Her main research interests lie in the documentation of Modern South Arabian languages and modern Arabic dialects, with particular focus on theoretical phonological and morphological approaches to language varieties spoken within the south-western Arabian Peninsula. From January 2013, she led a 42-month project funded by the Leverhulme Trust to document the Modern South Arabian languages spoken in mainland Yemen and Oman. Participants in the project included Miranda Morris, St Andrews, Domenyk Eades, Melbourne, and Alex Bellem, Durham, and many members of the language communities. Between October 2017 and July 2019, she has been leading a community-based documentation project in Al-Mahrah, Yemen with Saeed al-Qumairi and other members of the Mehri language community.

Manfred Woidich, Prof. Dr., Corresponding Fellow British Academy, PhD (1969) in Semitic studies, University of Munich, Professor Emeritus of Arabic language at the University of Amsterdam. His publications include *Das Kairenisch-Arabische. Eine Grammatik* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006) and (with Rabha Heinen-Nasr) the textbook *kullu tamām! An Introduction to Egyptian Colloquial Arabic* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), as well as many articles and monographs on Egyptian Arabic dialects in general (Upper Egypt, Oases). He co-authored (with Peter Behnstedt) the five volumes on Egyptian Arabic Dialects (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1984–1999), and the *Arabische Dialektgeographie. Eine Einführung* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), and the three volumes of *Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011–2104). He was also one of the associate editors of the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006–2009).

Liesbeth Zack is an Assistant Professor of Arabic language and culture at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests include Arabic dialectology and sociolinguistics, dialect literature, historical linguistics and Middle Arabic, in particular historical sources of the Egyptian Arabic dialects. She lived and worked in Egypt from 1997 to 2006. She has published exten-

sively on Egyptian Arabic, including an edition and study of Yūsuf al-Mağribī's *Dafʿ al-iṣr ʿan kalām ahl Miṣr*—one of the earliest descriptions of Egyptian Arabic, dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century. Currently she is preparing a grammar of nineteenth-century Cairene Arabic.

Emilie Zuniga obtained her BA in Linguistics and Italian from Brigham Young University (2006), and her MA and PhD in Arabic Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin (2011, 2015). After working as an Assistant Professor of Arabic at Brigham Young University, she became an independent researcher affiliated with the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include Arabic dialectology, sociophonetics and Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language.

Field Research: Practical Experience

The Research-Permit or: *faydítu* 'ē?

Peter Behnstedt

This article deals with one of the crucial problems in Arabic dialectology, namely the research-permit. In Arabic countries you need an official permit if you want to ask people whether they say *a* or *o*. It deals with other problems which can arise during fieldwork such as distrust of the informants, drug addiction, an attempted rape, E.T., and a dialectologist who is a lousy driver.

When Werner Arnold asked me to write a contribution for this book, I refused arguing that writing in English is too time-consuming for me and that I could only tell anecdotes. He told me that I could write in German and that anecdotes would be the salt in the soup.

As for anecdotes, some of them have already been told in the prefaces for the dialect atlases of Egypt and Syria (Behnstedt 1997; Behnstedt and Woidich 1985). This is also true as for the technical side of the enquiries, namely interview techniques, the subjects to be dealt with, the elaboration of a questionnaire, etc. As for smut or filth, Manfred Woidich and me, we have never enquired about it.¹ One of our inspiring examples at the time was Alexander Winkler's *Ägyptische Volkskunde* (1936). He had enquired about the designations of all the details of the female sex (pubic hair, mons veneris, clitoris, labiae majores, labiae minores, etc.), about body excretions like earwax (cerumen), the silent fart (flatus) and the loud fart (crepitus). He had forgotten the 'flutter fart' (*Flutterfurz* in German, no English translation available online. This is a kind of staccato fart like machine gun fire, one shot after the other). As usual at the time he gave the translations not in German but in Latin. Certainly sometimes I was told that I had forgotten to ask for some body parts, but I did not insist. Anyway, Otto Jastrow commented that my questionnaire for Yemen was pornographic enough with a whole page for indirect object suffixes like: 'he showed it to her, he showed it to them (F), they (M) showed them (M) to them (F), she showed it to him, etc.'

1 But meanwhile Manfred Woidich has turned out to be a proctologist. See his article on the designations of the ass in Arabic dialects (Woidich 2018).

When I visited an exhibition on folklore art of the world in Frankfurt and passed by the booth of Egypt, I saw wicker works and ceramics from the oases and told that to the exhibitor in Egyptian Arabic. Then I enumerated all the oases dialect words for these objects. He asked me why I knew that and I answered 'I have studied the dialects of the oases.' He asked me *faydītu 'ē?* ('what is it good for?'). This *faydītu 'ē?* repeated to me at almost each enquiry has haunted me and got on my nerves during my five years in Egypt. The sense of dialectological research is not communicable to an Egyptian and especially not to an Egyptian authority like the police or the secret service. This has to do with the 'dialect—Classical Arabic complex' of most Arabs. If there is such a beautiful language like Classical Arabic, why do foreigners deal with dialects which are considered to be a kind of corrupted Arabic? There must be another reason behind this interest for Arabic dialects. It is impossible in Egypt to get a permit for research on dialects. The only person until now who had managed to get a research-permit for Sinai is Rudolf de Jong. The condition, however, was that he should not get in touch with the local population. He was allowed to consult the library of a local folklore museum which contained forty books. The researcher of Arabic dialects must be a spy who visits the villages in order to sound out the stupid peasants for secret arms factories or military airports. When one day we came back from a field trip in Upper Egypt one of my travel companions in the evening filmed a kitschy oriental scene with the Nile, the sun going down behind palm trees and camels passing in front of the palm trees. Some kilometres later we were stopped by a police roadblock with the commentary 'You have filmed in that and that place, this is forbidden!' We countered that we had only filmed some camels, the sunset and some palm trees. We were told that hidden behind the palm trees there was a power plant. Our video was confiscated. There once was a photo competition in Egypt about 'The Achievements of the Revolution'. A student had photographed all the new bridges. He was arrested as a spy and in jail for a whole week. Also, one of my student collaborators had spent a week in jail because he had interviewed farmers about their traditional ploughs. When we were in 'Amrān/Yemen on a local market for agricultural tools, I asked a guy for the designation of a local harrow (*mušabbar*) made of a wooden board to which long nails were attached and wanted to make a drawing. The seller got angry because he thought this was industrial espionage and that I wanted to copy this device in Germany. The dialectologist is not only a spy; he could also give a wrong impression on Egypt abroad. When I once did an interview with farmers in a village near Damanhūr, of course without a research-permit, some of the persons present during the interview denounced me at the local secret service. Then there came two secret service men. They always come in pairs. They wanted to accompany me to the coroner in Damanhūr. The motor of my car did not start, and I asked them to help me

push-starting the car. They did it. If I really had been a spy I could have fled leaving Azrael and Asrafil behind me. The coroner in Damanhūr listened to my recordings and confiscated them. He told me that I should not record certain themes, namely such which show the backwardness of the Egyptian peasantry, *‘ašān šūrit Maṣrī fil-xārig* (‘because of the image of Egypt abroad’). The stumbling block were the marriage customs described by the aborigines, especially the fact that the bride can be deflorated in two ways: naturally by the husband (*bil-ḥiḡr*) or by the midwife (*id-dāya*) who does it with her forefinger wrapped in a cloth (*biṣ-ṣōba*) and then shows the bloody cloth to the wedding company which then starts ululating.

The alpha and omega of fieldwork in Arab countries is the research-permit. As said above, in Egypt it is not possible to get one. But it is also possible to do it without such a permit. I will talk about that later. As for Morocco, I have tried to get one through diverse contacts with three universities and different indigenous professors. Getting a research-permit is only possible in the frame of a common official project between a German and a Moroccan university and the financing of course by the German side. One of the counterparts of the first university requested a car and a monthly salary of 1,000 euros (at the time 2,000 Deutsche Marks). When he knew that I did not want to make research in the Western Sahara for political reasons² he accused me of calling into question the territorial unity of Morocco and threatened to denounce me at the police, to sue me and put me into jail if I would not start the research on the dialects of Western Sahara with him immediately. I then cut down the contact and gave up the project with the University of El Jadida, a cooperation project which had already been approved by the senate of the University of Hamburg. After the contacts with two other Moroccan counterparts who could not provide me a research-permit I asked for it at the Ministry of Education. I sent them all kind of documentation and a copy of my contract with the University of Hamburg. They never answered. By the way, many years ago when working for the TAVO I already had got the funds for a six weeks’ field trip to Oman. The head of my department, Prof. Dr. Joseph van Ess, made an application (of course in Arabic) at the responsible authority in Oman. He never got an answer. German politics vis-à-vis Arab countries like for example Saudi Arabia are much too lax: ‘If you want to buy our tanks and other weapons, then build churches and give a research-permit to our dialectologists!’

Let’s go back to Morocco. I finally called the cultural attaché at the Moroccan embassy in Madrid. I only got his secretary. I explained to her my concern. She asked me about the machinery I was using, whether I intended to dig out antiques or to take soil samples. I told her that I used a questionnaire and a tape-recorder and wanted to dig out unknown dialects. I was

2 Annexed by Morocco.

told that with my machinery it was not necessary to have a research-permit. As a matter of fact one can do fieldwork in Morocco without a research-permit. The country is so used to tourists that a dialectologist does not attract the attention. I was asked only twice by some semi-educated idiots to show a research-permit and had to interrupt my research.

As for Tunisia you need a research-permit, and you get one in Tunis at the Ministry of Education. My mistake at the time when I wanted to make a dialect atlas of Tunisia was to ask for a permit for the whole country for five years. I was asked to present a plan for five years with all the towns and villages I wanted to visit and the exact dates of each visit. This was too much, and I gave up Tunisia and switched to Morocco. It would have been wise to ask for a permit for some places, do the research and ask for a permit for other localities. This is the way I got my permit for Djerba and some towns in southern Tunisia. The only condition was to provide the ministry a copy of the respective publication(s). The problem in Syria was to convince the relevant authority, namely the university, of the fact that research on Arabic dialects is not directed against the unity of the Arabic language (*hāḍihi l-'abḥātu muwaḡḡahatun ḍidda wiḥdati l-luḡati l-'arabiyya*). This has to do with the complex created by Lebanese poet Sa'īd 'Aql who had proposed to abolish Classical Arabic and to replace it by dialect written in Latin letters. This complex has also to do with *al-mustašriqin al-muḡriḍin*, the Orientalists with bad intentions who deal with Arabic and Islam in order to refute the Quran or who want to foster the use of dialect instead of Classical Arabic (which no Arab uses in everyday life and speech). Anyway, I could convince the university of my honourable intentions and after three months I had my research-permit. I never had problems in Syria and almost never was obliged to show my permit. This certainly had to do, too, with the fact that all my Syrian student friends worked for the secret service and that one very soon had realized that I was completely harmless.

As for Yemen in the frame of the 'Yemen Project' of the universities of Tübingen and Ṣan'ā', we all had a research-permit but only rarely had to show it to the people. When I was alone on the way in most places I asked for the local *qāt* market either at the police station or somewhere else. When people had learned that I was from Western Germany and not from Eastern Germany or the United States, that means that I came from a friendly and honourable country, then I was asked: *bitxazzin? kayf al-gāt? al-gāt muxaddir?* 'do you chew *qāt*? How is the *qāt*? Is *qāt* a drug?' I always denied the last question and called it *munaššit* ('stimulating') and soon I found myself amongst people in a *qāt* session and could do the interviews. The Yemenis obviously think that we western alcoholics are experts for drugs. Apropos alcohol, in Oujda, in the part of Morocco which a French colonial master had designated as *le Maroc inutile* ('the useless Morocco'), I always stayed in the hotel 'Ibis' near the railway station. In the evenings the local elite of

businessmen came to have beer in the hotel bar. The average Moroccan consumer of alcohol in reality is not a gourmet or epicure; he is a binge drinker who leaves the empty beer bottles on his table just like hunters who at the end of the hunt line up all the deer they have killed.

Once, it was in the month of Šaʿbān all the beer drinkers of Oujda had tea in small teapots. In the month of Šaʿbān, the sale of alcohol is forbidden in Morocco. In the teapots and the teacups, there was no green tea, there was beer!

Qāt in Yemen was so to speak my entry drug. I was never obliged to explain to the Yemenis the *fāyda* of my dialect research. 'I investigate Yemeni dialects because in Yemen they speak the best Arabic' was one of my arguments. It was approved with *ʾihnā l-ʾaṣl* 'we are the origin!' Another argument was that in dialects you can find many old words which might help to decipher the Ḥimyaritic and Sabaeic inscriptions. And especially in Yemen as a German I had 'the Hitler bonus' and therefore a certain entertaining quality for my informants. It was a win win situation. Very often I was asked 'Is Hitler still alive?' or was told 'He was a great warrior' (*kān muḥārib ʿaḍīm!*). Even the Kyffhäuser saga³ had found its way to Yemen. 'Is it true that Hitler is hidden with a million soldiers within a mountain and just waits for the occasion to strike again?' In north-eastern Syria I had a Bedouin informant who presented himself to me with 'Hitler'. I first thought he made fun of me because I was German. This was really his name as I could see from his identity card. He told me that in the neighbouring village there was one called 'Bismarck' and another one 'Berlin'.

One of our Egyptian informants also turned out to be a murderer. Manfred Woidich has published texts of this informant in 'Semitica Viva' (Drop and Woidich 2007). For greed of money he killed a guy for 1,000 Egyptian pounds with his hoe (*baṛwa* in his dialect). He was caught and spent eleven years in jail.

When I was in the region of Šaʿdah in the village of im-Maṭṭah one of my informants was wary. He asked me where Germany was to be found. I drew a rough map of the world and showed him the way to Germany through Saudi Arabia, Italy, etc. but not through the Balkan route. His sceptical commentary was *hādā yaʿrif yixattit* 'this one knows how to draw maps'. That means he thought I was a kind of spy scouting out ways and roads. When in the evening we, him and others, sat in front of TV and watched the news from Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the news the globe appeared with *al-ʾaxbār* 'the news' as a subtitle. I showed it to the sceptic and showed him the different countries on the globe. 'We always have thought that this is a football!' the audience commented, 'but if the earth is round, those at

3 According to this saga the emperor Barbarossa (Frederick I) sleeps in a mountain and one day will wake up to restore the glory of the German 'Reich'.

the bottom will fall from the earth!’ they objected. I then explained to them earth’s gravity by letting fall a matchbox. Then they offered me to stay in their village and be their local primary school teacher, also because my English was better than the English of the two Egyptian teachers they had. They had told the children that *talāta* is *sree* in English. I corrected this in *three*, a pronunciation with which they have no problem because in their dialect there is a correct *th*. The Egyptian teachers in the village behaved like members of the master race. Everyday one of the families of the village had to cook for them: ‘*ayzīn farxa innahārda!*’ (‘today we want a chicken!’).



Figure 1.1: Saudi Arabian newspaper
and the article on *ar-raḡūl at-tu'bān* 'the snake man'

As for another story I could not convince the people of the region of Ṣa'dah of its being a fake. The following had happened in 1985. A Yemeni had bought a house in Saudi Arabia. Officially this is not possible. You need as an official owner a Saudi straw man. This Saudi straw man cheated the Yemeni and kept the house for himself. The Yemeni sued him and the Saudi committed perjury. At the moment he raised his hand for the oath his lower part of his body was transformed into the body of a snake and he bit off the fingers of his oath hand. The whole region talked about it. I did not believe the people. 'It is true, in any copy shop you can buy pictures of 'the snake man' (*ar-raḡūl at-tu'bān*)!' I was told. I went to a copy shop and asked for a picture of 'the snake

man'. I was shown the copy of an article in a Saudi Arabian newspaper in which the history of 'the snake man' was described as nonsense.



Figure 1.2: The drawing of 'the snake man'

Then I asked for the picture of 'the snake man' himself and was shown a copy of a drawing. At the margin was written in Arabic 'This is the man who committed perjury and whom God has transformed into a snake. Praise

the Creator!’ The drawing showed a little man whose lower part of the body was as snake’s tail, he held up his hand with three fingers bitten off, but his face was the face of E.T., the extraterrestrial!

I tried in vain to explain to the people that somebody had made a joke. I could not impart who was E.T. since I did not know what ‘science fiction’ and ‘extraterrestrial’ meant in Arabic. In the German-Arabic dictionary of Götz Schregle (1974) there is nothing about science fiction, extraterrestrials and aliens. In the dictionary of Federico Corriente (2004) for ‘extraterrestre’ we find *nāšī*’ *ʾaw qāʾim xārīğ al-ʾarḍ* and for ‘ciencia ficción’ *xayālun ʾilmī*. If you re-translate it according to Hans Wehr this means ‘phantastic ~ imaginary science’. Manfred Woidich was so kind to search for translations and found *ʾaflām xayāl ʾilmī* for ‘science fiction movies’ and in the Dutch-Arabic dictionary (Hoogland 2003) an extraterrestrial is *kāʾin ġayr ʾarḍī* which theoretically could also be an angel.

The interviews in Yemen were always successful because *qāt* makes you communicative and talkative. It is also good against a hangover because of too much ‘red whisky’ (*wiskī ʾaḥmar*) or ‘white whisky’ (*wiskī ʾabyaḍ* = ‘gin’).

A well-known German dialectologist had elicited all possible verb forms with the word for ‘to kill’ = *qatal*. At the end of the interview the informant dryly commented *al-yawm qatalnā kaṭīr min an-nās* ‘today we have killed many people’.

Once in Yemen I myself had to ask the question *fayḍītu ʾē?*, namely during a campaign with the botanists of our project in the escarpment area of the Tihāmah near aṭ-Ṭōr. For the botanists I interviewed the villagers for the use of the different plants. One evening several of the villagers came to our camp with a pregnant woman and asked us to determine whether the child would be a boy or a girl. They had heard that foreign doctors are able to do that. We explained to them that we were not medical doctors. And furthermore I did not know what ‘ultra sound’ means in Arabic. Such words are not taught in the Arabic classes in Tübingen University and are not found in the *Chrestomathie* of Brünnow and Fischer (1913). In a Yemeni Arabic textbook for clinic personnel ‘gynaecologist’ is translated by *doktōr min taḥt* ‘doctor for beneath’.

The villagers anyway every evening came to our camp with some ailments. The consumption of *qāt* causes amongst others constipation, diarrhea (*taktaktak* in their dialect) and impotence. We always distributed aspirin, valerian drops and vitamin C.

In the region of Mārib, I was accompanied by a young man from the tourist police. In several Bedouin tents I did all my interviews with female informants since their husbands were working in Saudi Arabia. My travel companion made a very direct proposal to one of the ladies and as a compensation he promised her a new dress. He wanted to meet her at ten o’clock in the night behind a dune. She whispered to him that he should not talk about that in my presence. He countered: ‘He does not understand our

dialect! Why do you think he is eliciting words? He still has to learn Arabic!’ Why he took me with him to the dune at ten o’clock in the night, I do not remember anymore. We waited for the lady for an hour. She did not show up. In his police station we slept *al fresco* on the roof. Because of the failed date my companion got a nervous breakdown and wept. I gave him my stomach drops which contained 50% of ethanol as a tranquillizer. He emptied the whole bottle. Probably the alcohol had calmed him down.

In Ṣa’dah at the time, there was a hotel run by Chinese. When I was in Ṣa’dah together with my French friend Nicole (platonic at that time) she did not want to sleep in my Yemeni flophouse nor in the Toyota (where one could sleep on the bench, the car is long enough). So we went to the rather expensive Chinese hotel to get a room for her. The Chinese at the reception only knew two words in Arabic which they repeated: *sadigu sadigu, nōmu nōmu* = ‘friend friend, sleep sleep’. This means ‘Friend, do you need a room?’ I confirmed with *nōmu nōmu!* Then they informed the tourist police, because a tourist has to be registered. A young man came with a Kalashnikov and accompanied Nicole to her room. After half an hour they still were not back, and I was afraid that he might have raped her. I tried to communicate my apprehension to the Chinese—who only knew Chinese and two words of Arabic—by drawing a comic strip of a rape. I first drew a woman and a Yemeni with a Kalashnikov, then I drew the two how they went upstairs, I made a drawing of her sitting on the bed and the Yemeni holding his Kalashnikov onto her breast, then the guy lying on the woman. The Chinese commented this with *sadigu sadigu, nōmu nōmu!* This can be understood also as ‘she has slept with her boyfriend’. They finally came down. Of course he had proposed something indecent to her. But since he did not get a chance and could not score, he explained to her his other gun, the Kalashnikov, disassembled it and reassembled it. How they linguistically got along is mysterious. She only knew a few scraps of Moroccan Arabic, and he did not know French.

Finding informants in Egypt, in the country where dialectology is considered something useless, was different from say the situation in Yemen. How to get informants and information on their dialect in Egypt? It does not work with connections. The vice-president of the Technical Faculty of Alexandria University who was a former minister had written for me a commendatory letter for the governor of Bani Swēf province. The governor read the letter and sent me to the *ḥikimdār*. This is a kind of police officer. He read the letter and sent me to the *ḡabṭ il-mabāḥis*, the security officer. He read the letter and told me that Cairo had to decide whether I could do my research or not. He asked me whether I had already done research in the area and I told him that I did some in the neighbouring Fayyūm province. I had to tell him the names of all the villages I had visited. Then I was told to come next morning. The day after the *ḡabṭ il-mabāḥis* told me that Cairo had

said that my matter has to be decided by the *mabāhis* of Alexandria and that I should return to Alexandria. In Alexandria the *mabāhis* told me that the matter has to be decided in Bani Swēf. I did the shuttle between Bani Swēf and Alexandria three times and finally gave it up. There is another possibility, namely to employ indigenous collaborators and pay money for dialects. For a recording I paid my students I do not remember how many guineas. After each campaign in the Delta (which was not accessible for foreigners at the time) my students came back with bags full of tapes and left my house with thick, dirty and stinking bundles of money. Money in Arab countries like Egypt and Syria is dirty, worn and stinks. It should be laundered in the true meaning of the word. My students gave up smoking local *Kilubaṭra* ('Cleopatra') or *Ṣōbar* ('Super') cigarettes and smoked *Rosman's* and *Winéston*.

In Alexandria there was a popular quarter where mainly people from Upper Egypt lived. I knew a *bawwāb* (*Boab* in the speech of expats, 'a door-keeper') from this quarter and agreed with him that for every *ṣa'īdi* he brought to my house I would pay him two pounds and the *ṣa'īdi* one pound. But the informants had to be 'fresh', i.e. having come to Alexandria only recently or being there just for a visit.

The dialect of the fishermen of Burg Miḡizil was discovered by my friend Yūsuf, a taxi driver. When on the rear seat of his taxi he heard two people always saying *qalli*, *qultū* he directly drove them to my house. During the many sessions with crews from different ships, about 20 tapes could be recorded. The fishermen were excellent informants but lousy seamen. In each story they told a ship capsized, or somebody fell into the water. The village of Burg Miḡizil I could only see it during an excursion on the Nile near Rosetta but I was not allowed to visit the place. After all and after a while, the Nile Valley and the oases were open to foreigners. During the illegal field trips the following tricks were used. All over the country there are to be found ancient ruins guarded by local watchmen, e.g. in il-Ašmunēn (Hermopolis Magna). One starts a conversation with them, realizes that they are from the neighbouring village. Perhaps one is seated under a palm tree and lets them describe the different parts of the tree and asks them about pollination. In order not to forget the words elicited one asks them to be allowed to record the whole interview. Botanists and dialectologists only know that there is a male and a female palm tree. Due to my stay in Egypt, I was so fixed on palm trees that in Syria for the first time I dialectologically really felt at home when I was in Palmyra. Sitting under the palm tree one certainly is offered tea and some bread perhaps with old cheese. Old cheese in Egypt (*mišš*) is rich in proteins abounding in form of maggots within the cheese. What I hated in Egypt was *muluxiyya* (corchorus olitorius), this slimy soup which reminds a certain body excretion. Another horrible and slimy soup was *wēka* in Upper Egypt. This is a green soup made of gumbos (*abelmoschus esculentus*). In order to avoid the consumption of these soups

and tough and rubbery meat, I had my doctor write me a report in Arabic about my stomach problems which I showed to the villagers and in which all the things I did not like were forbidden. So I was always offered vegetables, bread and fresh cheese. Let's come back to the palm tree. When offered cheese and bread under it, this led to the subject 'baking bread and the baking oven'. Of course themes like agriculture, and all type of material culture followed. This part of the enquiry should be done *in situ* and not in a hotel, unless one has a questionnaire with drawings. Once the informants are used to being interviewed, grammatical questions can follow. Of course some of the informants are hard of understanding as for grammar. 'How do you say "he threw"?'—'I say *rama*!' And 'How do you say "she threw"?' 'She also says *rama* "he threw"!', 'We all say *rama*!'



Figure 1.3: Fieldwork in Wādī Mawr

Another trick is just driving across the country with obviously no aim or place to go. The first hitchhiker who comes along, normally a farmer who wants to go to his village and not a western hippy, is picked up and is told that one wants to go to exactly the same village and one already has one's first informant. I did that once also in Yemen in the Nihm area. The hitchhiker was heavily armed, asked me for the price of the four-by-four, opened

the glove box and fiddled about at the car's papers. I did not feel at ease and asked whether we were near his village and wanted to get rid of him. His answer was *garrabnā* 'we are near to it'. He repeated this during five hours. When finally arrived I did my interview there, slept in a room with about twenty heavily armed informants, could not sleep because of the *qāt* which causes insomnia and because all day long people were talking in a dialect of which I only understood *sayyārah* 'car'. I left the village next day, was happy to still have my car and finally knew what was happening in the area. The villagers mutually stole their cars!

Another possibility is to have a travelling companion from the area who knows a lot of people, and who has relatives everywhere.

I have not only sunk a car in the Wādī Mawr in Yemen; I have also almost derailed a train in Egypt. When I was in the region of Luxor on the west bank of the Nile together with Maḥmūd il-Gum', the main informant of Manfred Woidich for the B'ēri dialect, we wanted to cross a railway track and drove over the rails. We got stuck and were not able to lift out the car. There was a village near to the rails and we thought we could get some people there in order to help us. When I told Maḥmūd 'If now there comes a train, we will have a problem' I heard the train coming. I ran up to a hill saw the train coming waved about with the arms and made the stop sign. The train perhaps stopped five metres in front of the car. The two train conductors got out and helped us to lift the car out, had a big laugh and said goodbye to us with *ma'a 'alfī salāma ya bēh!* 'with thousand greetings Mr. le comte!' In Germany I would have been accused of traffic obstruction and certainly be fined if not put to jail. Maḥmūd commented that a saint whose grave was on the hill had saved us.

Getting informants in Syria was insofar easy as during my German courses in Aleppo University one of my first questions was 'What's your name?' (in German), 'Where do you come from?' (in German). One student answered the last question with 'From Albū Kmāl' (in German). He was detached to my home. I found out that he spoke a *qeltu*-dialect. But I have also visited the place later and did some more research there. Of course one can do fieldwork also in a hotel. In il-Minya, where I spent several days in the hotel 'Lotus' I have interviewed the whole personnel from the surrounding villages. Once I was there together with Manfred Woidich. For breakfast, we already had potato chips. Under one of Manfred's chips lay a big dead cockroach. When I was in the Fayyūm with my student Yaḥya il-Gidēli I discovered the '*bukara* syndrome' (the denomination is from Manfred Woidich). Under my bed in the hotel, the fleas were dancing. Yaḥya heard some strange noise in his cupboard, opened it and looked into the eyes of a rat. He was so frightened that he slammed the door shut and decapitated the rat. He could not sleep anymore.