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## *iglēt w-šib‘ēt* ‘I ate to satiety’: Southern Iraqi Marshland Episodes in Hebrew and Arabic Letters<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** This article analyzes an unusual document in the Arabic dialect of the marshlands of southern Iraq. Written by a Jewish Iraqi poet, who arrived in Israel from the city of ‘Amāra in the late 1940s, this document consists of two monologues, each repeated twice: first in Hebrew letters and then again in Arabic script. While the writer evidently spoke a *qəltu* dialect as his mother tongue, the monologues demonstrate the *gilit* dialect of the southern Iraqi marshes, and include several idiosyncrasies of that region. The document thus provides linguistic evidence from a dialect area so far documented only partially and insufficiently. We have been able to identify significant differences between the Arabic and Hebrew versions, which led us to view the former as a more reliable attestation of the linguistic reality of the Iraqi marshlands, and the latter as a version produced

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at a later stage. The writer's intention was apparently to demonstrate the close inter-communal relations between the Jews of southern Iraq and the Marsh Arabs, yet his attempt to reproduce a text in the marshland's dialect reveals a more complex picture: While the marshland *gilit* dialect was known to the *qeltu* speakers of the area, the shift between the varieties remained challenging, as is often the case in co-territorial communal dialects.

**Keywords** Iraq, Marshland, Arabic dialects, contact dialectology, *qeltu*, *gilit*

## 1 Background

### 1.1 The Iraqi Marsh Arabs

*‘arab al’ahwār*, also known as *mi‘dān*, are the native inhabitants of the southern Iraqi marshlands. Most of them are Shiite, who largely maintain a traditional semi-nomadic way of life, alongside old customs of various minority groups who have sought refuge in the marshes throughout history. Some have settled in villages, in houses built of reeds on the shores of the marshes or on artificial platforms on the water surface. They engage in buffalo breeding, fishing, waterfowl hunting, and rice and millet cultivation (UNEP 2001: 15–16). Among the marsh dwellers themselves, the term *mi‘dān* is used more specifically to denote the buffalo breeders who live on the reed islands (Ingham 2000: 125).

The marsh Arabs were almost completely isolated from the outside world until the outbreak of the First World War (UNEP 2001: 17). At the beginning of the 20th century, as the influence of the central government in Iraq expanded and trade throughout the country increased, contact between the *mi‘dān* and the inhabitants of cities and villages outside the marshes became more frequent. Migration of individuals from the marshes to the outskirts of the growing cities (Baghdad, ‘Amāra, etc.) probably also contributed to the increasing contact between the *Mi‘dān* and other Iraqis. In the 1970s, marshland society began to see some economical, educational, and medical development, yet it mostly remained an impoverished group within Iraqi society (UNEP 2001: 17). During the 1980s, when the marshes became a combat zone between Iraq and Iran, the Shiite *mi‘dān* were suspected by the Iraqi Sunni regime of harboring Iranian invaders, and the area was bombed. Over the next few decades, the Iraqi regime violently suppressed a revolt initiated by the *mi‘dān*, and subsequently implemented a massive drainage program that caused 90% of the original area of the marshes to disappear (Adriansen 2004). As a result, in the early 1990s the marshland population, which previously numbered about 500,000 people, decreased significantly. Af-

ter the area was partially reflooded, many of the original inhabitants reportedly returned to the marshlands, but there is no clear data on the number of people living there today, or on their spoken language (Walker 2021).

## 1.2 The Arabic dialects of the Iraqi marshlands

The Arabic dialects spoken in the southern Iraqi marshlands are grouped with the south Mesopotamian *gilit* dialects. They differ in several aspects from the central Mesopotamian area, centered around Baghdad, and share certain linguistic traits with the Muslim dialects of Baṣra and 'Amāra (Ingham 1973: 546). Importantly, the dialects of southern Iraq form a continuum with those spoken in Khuzestan in western Iran, and which have been studied quite extensively (see references to Ingham, Gazsi and Leitner), unlike Southern Iraqi Arabic.

The southern Mesopotamian linguistic domain, including the Iraqi marshland and Khuzestan, comprises three distinct dialectal groups, classified according to social and geographical criteria (Ingham 2011): the **urban**, or *haḍar*, including the dialects of Baṣra in Iraq and Khorramshahr in Iran; the **Bedouin**, or 'arab, including the villages and nomad communities between the rivers; and the **marshland**, spreading from around Hōr al-Ḥuwayzah on the Iraq-Iran border, east of 'Amāra, to the area of Hōr al-Ḥammār west of Baṣra.<sup>2</sup> The present article revolves around the third group, namely, the *mi'dān*. It analyzes a document written in the marshland dialect, which—according to recent reports—is disappearing due to the displacement of many of its speakers (Walker 2021). Features of *mi'dān* Arabic that correspond to the other two groups are also discussed.

Importantly, the document examined was produced by a Jew originating from the city of 'Amāra, who—like all other Jewish Iraqis—spoke a *qəltu* dialect as his mother tongue. The implications of this complex picture are discussed in §2.1. and §3 below.

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<sup>2</sup> In a recent article, Leitner (2021) questions the validity of Ingham's distinctions, in light of considerable demographic and social changes that have taken place in southern Iraq in the past decades. It is therefore important to note that the texts discussed here were probably composed independently of those changes, thus reflecting the linguistic reality in southern Iraq of the 1940s and 1950s, or at least their author's perception in relation to that reality.

### 1.3 The sociolinguistic scene in and around ‘Amāra

The city of ‘Amāra (locally pronounced *‘imāra*) was founded in the 1860s as an Ottoman military outpost on the shores of the Tigris River, south of Baghdad and about 50 kilometers from the Iranian border. It was locally known as الأوردي, after the Turkish *ordu* ‘military’, a term which is rendered into the texts below as الوردی *ilWirdi*. Consequently, along with the old population who had lived in the marshland for centuries, towards the end of the 19th century the area became home to other religious and ethnic groups.

In the 1870s the newly established town of ‘Amāra absorbed emigrants from the old Jewish communities of Baghdad and Bašra who were escaping outbreaks of the plague that were spreading through the large cities, or were looking to settle closer to the pilgrimage site of the tomb of Ezra (Arabic *al‘Uzayr*). The Jews of ‘Amāra maintained an active communal life with two synagogues and a number of public institutions until they immigrated to Israel in the 1950s, when the Iraqi government permitted their departure (Dvori 1999: 15, 17).

In contrast to the urban Shiite population, the attitude of the marshlanders towards the Jews was reportedly less harsh. Al-Baaj, a scholar from ‘Amāra who dedicated a monograph to the Jews of the city (Al-Baaj 2018), depicts close and daily interactions between the Jews of ‘Amāra and the Marsh Arabs that operated on various levels: The Arabs used to deposit their money and valuable assets with the Jewish tradesmen, as their homes on the water were unstable and frequently caught fire or were damaged in some other way. The Jews are reported to have kept an orderly record of the money, and also rewarded those who deposited their money with them. In addition, the Jews made clothes that were sold to the Marsh Arabs, and purchased various consumer products, such as milk, chicken and eggs from them. There is also evidence that Jews were employed inside the marsh villages (Dvori 1999: 162). Most probably, it was these close connections between the Jews and the Marsh Arabs that explains the Jewish poet’s familiarity with the unique dialect of the marshland.

However, despite the positive relations between the two communities, we suspect that the Jews of ‘Amāra shared to some extent the condescending attitude of urban Muslims towards the Marsh Arabs. The latter were perceived by the city dwellers as simpleminded, naive people, who could be deceived easily (Dvori 1999: 32–33; Al-Baaj 2021, personal communication). There are also reports that speakers of the marsh dialect are ridiculed for their accent (Walker 2021). This attitude towards the marshlanders may account for the presentation of the ‘Bedouin’ character in the texts discussed below.

## 2 The document

### 2.1 The writer—a Jew from 'Amāra

The document under consideration was produced by the late Ezra Mourad, an Israeli teacher and poet of Iraqi origin.<sup>3</sup> Mourad was born in 1933 to a Jewish family in 'Amāra. In common with all other Jews in Iraq, Mourad spoke a dialect of the *qəltu* type as his mother tongue. In the following, we give a short extract from an interview we conducted with him in April 2019, where prominent features of his native *qəltu* dialect are apparent, among which are the realization of \**qāf* as *q* and of \**r* as *ḡ*; the MPL imperfect ending *-ōn*; and the 3MSG pronominal suffix *-nu* following vowel-final bases:

1. *dxalna ıla lmadrasa, madrasət əl'Alyans mal-yhūd. wēḥəd kbīg w-wēḥəd zḡayyḡ kəlləm fadd kitta<sup>Hb</sup>, kān yə'əlmōn. ba'dēn dxalna – ana dxaltu lə-ttānawiyya, t'allamtu ma' l'aslām. əddərāsa kānət bə-lluḡa l'arabiyya.*

We started going to school, the Jewish school of Alliance. Older boys, younger boys—they all were in one class, they studied [together]. Then we went—I went to high school, I studied with the Muslims. Classes were held in Arabic.

2. *Ġāzi haya<sup>Hb</sup> sibandi ya'ni. fad yōm, raḡa' mn-əlmadrassa qabl əlwaqt əlli lāzəm yəḡḡa' bīnu. abūy sāyyalu, qal-lu: Ġāzi, lēš ḡit hēkəd? ba'd sā'a, sā'a w-nəšš lāzəm ...? qal-lu: bāba, ləmdarrəs əssā'a mālu waqfət w-mā ya'ḡəf aš əlwaqt, ya'ni w-ṭəlla'na mn-əlmadrassa.*

Ġāzi [i.e., the narrator's brother] was mischievous, you know. One day he came back from school earlier than he was supposed to. My father asked him, he said to him: 'Ġāzi, why did you come like this? There is still an hour, or an hour and a half [until school ends]'. He said: 'Dad, the teacher's watch had stopped, and he did not know the time, so he let us go from school'.

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<sup>3</sup> Mourad passed away in August 2020 and did not know of our intention to publish his materials. We thank his daughter Sigalit for approving the publication of the materials and for providing us with valuable background information.

3. *bə-l'əṭla ṣṣayfiyya*,<sup>4</sup> *bə-ṣṣēf – əḥna mā kənnə 'ašīrim<sup>Hb</sup>*, *ləwlād lāzəm yǧūḥōn*, *yəštāǧlōn*, *ybi'ōn dvarim<sup>Hb</sup>*. *bass t'anu l-Ġāzi*, *axūyi*, *t'ānu*, *abūyi t'ānu səmsəmiyyi*, *qal-lu: gūḥ bi' ḥatta ysiǧ 'əndak flūs təštaǧi bīnu dfātəǧ*, *təštaǧi bīnu ktabāt lə-lmadrasa*.

During the summer vacation, in the summer—we were not rich, [so] children had to go, to work, to sell things. [My father] gave Ġāzi, he gave him sesame sweetmeat and told him: 'Go sell it so you will have money to buy notebooks or books for school'.

Apart from the *qəltu* variety that Mourad spoke as his mother tongue, he was also familiar with two varieties of *gilit*-type dialects, namely the urban Muslim dialect of 'Amāra, and the so-called 'Bedouin' variety of the marshlands surrounding the town. As he himself told us, during his childhood in 'Amāra he had a close relationship with marsh Arabs and he therefore knew their dialect well. At the age of 16, assisted by a marsh lander friend, Mourad crossed the border to Iran through the marshes and began his journey to Israel.

## 2.2 Genre and message

The text examined below was included in Mourad's collection of Iraqi folk songs and narratives, entitled فوك النخل *fōg innaxal* 'Above the Palms' (2003).<sup>5</sup> The booklet was published in Hebrew, thus exposing Israeli readership to the beauty and diversity of Iraqi Arabic. Side by side with the pieces in the *qəltu* Jewish Baghdadi, Mourad offers us texts in 'the Iraqi Bedouin dialect', a term he apparently used to denote Muslim *gilit* dialects as a whole. Here, one finds texts in Muslim Baghdadi, alongside a piece in the dialect of the marshlands. The choice to include samples of the various dialects within one collection seems to have had a specific purpose. Mourad was clearly aware of the considerable linguistic differences within Iraqi Arabic, and in our conversation with him he recounted how he could distinguish between a Muslim and a Jew according to their answer to a simple question like 'Who is at the door?'. Mourad plausibly chose the texts with the intention of presenting his Israeli readers with the heritage

<sup>4</sup> While the quality of the nominal feminine ending in *gilit* varieties is invariably *a*, in Jewish Baghdadi the ending is raised whenever the preceding syllable contains a front high vowel or *y* (Blanc 1964: 68 ff.; Jastrow 2011). In the case at hand, the suffix *a* in *ṣayfiyya*—as opposed to *səmsəmiyyi* in the following sentence—may be accounted for as a literary form. However, it should be noted that some Jews in the southern Iraqi communities exhibited no raising of the feminine ending (Ido Danieli 2022, personal communication).

<sup>5</sup> The expression *fōg innaxal* is used in the Gulf states in the sense of 'fantastic, wonderful' (Holes 2001: 515).

of his homeland, along with its cultural and linguistic diversity. In this way, he has also opened a window on the intercultural and interlingual relations between Muslims and Jews in southern Iraq.

The piece in the marshland dialect—while entitled *דו שיח בְּדוּרִי du siaḥ bed-wi* 'A Bedouin dialogue'—actually consists of the monologues of two *mi'ēdi* men: Ḥamza and 'Abd arRazzāg, each telling an amusing anecdote from his first visit to a big city ('Amāra and Baghdad, respectively). The episodes focus on the narrators' reaction to their encounter with the city's appearance and way of life. In both stories the *mi'ēdi* gets into trouble due to his lack of familiarity with the urban environment: Ḥamza goes into a restaurant and realizes that he is expected to pay for the food he was served, and 'Abd arRazzāg receives an aggressive response from a woman, whom he had reprimanded for her immodest appearance. The stories depict the *mi'ēdi* as a country bumpkin, socially awkward, unsophisticated, and having difficulties deciphering the codes of city life. As mentioned, this depiction of the marsh Arabs is consistent with the view of them as having a socially inferior status (Walker 2021). Folk stories of this kind seem to have been popular among local urban society (Al-Baaj 2021, personal communication).

Interestingly, the language and style of the texts share quite a few characteristics with a series of weekly radio sketches, that were broadcast on Israeli radio during the 1960s. The broadcaster, who for many years identified himself as *ابن الرافدين Ibn ar-Rāfidayn*, was actually called Salmān Dabbi, a Jew born in 1917 in Baghdad. Parts of his radio sketches were published in the 1990s in a booklet entitled *هاي هي القصة تفضلوا اسمعوها Hāy hiyya l-quṣṣa, tfaḍḍalu sma'ūha* 'Here is the story, you are welcome to listen'. It was later translated into Hebrew by Mourad, who published the sketches in 2020 under the title *והגרי הספור לפניכם, אָנָּה הַסְּכִיתוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ Va-hare has-sippur lifnaxem, anna haskitu ve-šim'u* 'Here is the story before you, pay attention and listen'. The orthography of the dialectal Arabic words, along with the use of Persian letters, resembles the one we find in the texts of the document under consideration. However, while the radio sketches were in Muslim Baghdadi, the document in Mourad's booklet reflects the dialect of the Iraqi marshlands.

### 2.3 Monologues in the marshland dialect

Each of the two monologues under discussion is given in three versions: a transcript in vocalized Hebrew letters; a vocalized Arabic handwritten transcript; and a Hebrew translation. Notably, in defining the language of his two speakers as 'Bedouin' the author did not refer to the nomads living in the area between the two rivers (see §1.2 above), but rather to the rural *gilit* variety that is spoken by the Marsh Arabs.

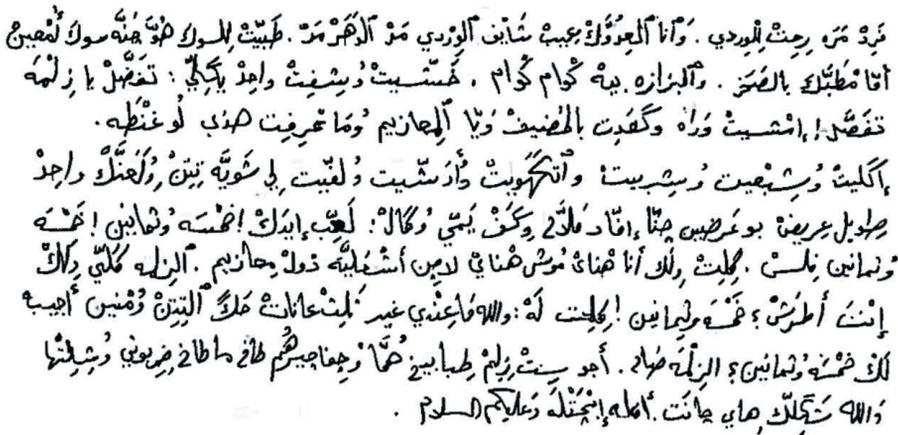
Since the dialect is not usually written, and in the absence of clear writing conventions, inaccuracies in the transition from the spoken word to the written one may be expected. Nevertheless, the linguistic profile of the Arabic transcript largely conforms with the available data on the dialects of the Iraqi marshlands and Khuzestan. We propose to consider these transcripts as reliable attestation of the marshland dialect. At the same time, the Hebrew vocalization is not fully in line with the Arabic one, and a few forms exhibit more than one realization. As further discussed below, our assumption is that the Arabic version was produced first, and the Hebrew version followed, possibly even many years later. The order of formation becomes evident through a list of inconsistencies between the two versions. For instance, Mourad has plausibly misread the handwritten Arabic script in the case of *خَشَيْتُ* *xaššēt* ‘I entered’, which was copied to Hebrew *מָשִׁית* *mšīt* ‘I walked’ (text A).

Below is a photocopy of the Hebrew and Arabic texts, as published in Mourad’s collection, followed by our transcript and English translation. The transcript proposed is principally based on the Arabic version in the booklet, which also makes use of two Persian signs:  $\text{چ}$  stands for the affricate  $*k \rightarrow \check{c}$  (for the conditioning of its occurrence see §3.1 below), and  $\text{گ}$  is used for  $*q \rightarrow g$ . Notably, the sign  $\text{گ}$  is also used in the form *iglēt* ‘I ate’ (root  $\text{ʔkl}$ ), where the voiced realization of  $/k/$  is in all likelihood phonetically motivated. The Hebrew transcript *אִקְלֵת* *iklēt*, on the other hand, reflects the etymological root. Different from the common practice in Judeo-Arabic writings, Hebrew  $\text{ק}$  stands in this text for  $*q$ , which is realized in the dialect under consideration as *g*.

While editing the text we also consulted a recording we had made during our meeting with Mourad in April 2019 as he spontaneously opened the booklet and read the texts aloud. Importantly, on that occasion Mourad did not actually *read* from the written version, but rather paraphrased it, occasionally deviating from the original wording. He made an evident effort to conform to the dialect he was imitating, and adjusted his pronunciation accordingly. For instance, he clearly pronounced  $*\check{g}im$  as  $\check{z}$ , as opposed to his native  $\check{g}$  (see extract in §2.1 above). Finally, we also asked two native speakers of Iraqi *gilit* dialects to read the two texts aloud for us, in order to further confirm our interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, however, in the absence of an authentic recording of the original speaker certain points inevitably remained ambiguous. In the cases where there were differences between the Hebrew and Arabic versions, the transcript follows the latter and the former is given in brackets and marked with ‘H’.

פרד מרה רחת לאלקרדי. נאנא אלענדנד, עיב שאיף אלורדי, מד אדחר מד. טבית ללסוג הנ  
 צ"נה סוג מעין אמא מטבג בלצכיר, ולבזאזה ביה פנאם פנאם.  
 קשית ושפת נאחד וְגִלִי: תפציל נא זלמה, תפציל! אמשית נרה וְגִעַת בלמוציף וְנִא  
 אלקמעאזים, ומא ערפת האדיי לויעקטה.  
 אכלת ושבעת ושקבת ותגהנית ולפית לי שונת תתן. ולענד, נאחד טויל עריץ, אפאדה אבו  
 ערצין, צ"נה אפאד מלאח. ונף נמי ונאל: נאללה לעב אינד! כימסה נתמאנין פלס! גלת: נלד, אנא  
 הנאיי מוש הנאיי לאצין שעלנא! דויל מעאזים!  
 אלקלמה גלי: נלד אנת אטרש? חמסה נתמאנין! גלת לה: נאללה! מא ענדי עייר תלת  
 שאמאת חג אלתתן, ומנין אגיב לך כימסה נתמאנין?  
 אלקלמה צאח. אגיו לי סת זלים, טבאביד חמה וצ'פאפירחם. טאדי מא טאדי. צ'קובני  
 ושילתחא.  
 נללה שגילד! האי צ"אנת אכלה אבצ'תלה, ועליכס אסלאם!



مَرَدٌ مِّن رَّحِيئِ الْوَرْدِي. وَأَنَا الْعِدْوُوكُ عَجِبْتُ سَائِبِ الْوَرْدِي مَرَّ الْأَهْرَمَرَّ. طَبَبْتُ لِّلسُوكِ طَوَّاهُ مَهْهُ سَوَكُ لَمْعِينِ  
 أَنَا مَطْبَلُكَ بِالْمَسْر. وَالْبَزَارِ. بِيَهُ كَوَامُ كَوَامُ. خَسَّيْتُ دُسْفِيَّتْ وَأَمَدُ يَكْبَلِي: تَفْعَلُ يَا زِلْمَهُ  
 تَفْعَلُ! أَمْسَيْتْ وَرَأَهُ وَكَفَعْتُ الْمَضِيْفُ دِيَا الْجَازِمِ وَمَا حَمَرِفِتْ هَذِي لَوْ غَنَطَهُ.  
 أَكَلَيْتْ دُسْفِيَّتْ دُسْفِيَّتْ وَأَتَرَكَيْتْ وَأَرَسَيْتْ دَلْقَيْتْ بِإِسْوِيَّةِ زَيْنِ دُلْعَلُكَ وَرَاجِدُ  
 صِدْوِيلِ عَرِيضِ بُوَعْرِيصِ مِيثَا وَأَنَادُ مَلَدِي وَكَفَى أَيْبِي وَكَالَهُ: لَعَبُ أَيَاتُ أَفْسَهُ وَنَهَائِي! عَمَّ  
 وَنَهَائِي نَيْسِي. أَلَيْتْ وَلَكُ أَنَا فُهَائُ مُوشِ عُنَائِي لَدِينِ أَسْتَلْبِيَهُ ذَوْلُ وَحَازِمِ. أَلَزَلَهُ كَلْبِي وَكَأَنَّ  
 إِنْسِي أَطْرُسِي؟ عَمَّ وَنَهَائِي! أَلَيْتْ لَهُ: وَاللَّهِ مَا عَنَدِي غَيْرُ لَيْتِ عَائَاتِ مَلِكِ الْبِتْرِنِ وَفَسِينِ أَيْبِي  
 لَكَ فَمَنْ وَنَهَائِي؟ الزَّلْمَةُ صَالِحُ. أَعُو سَيْتْ زِلْمُ طَبَايِيضُ حَمَّا وَجَمَاعِيصُ طَاغُ مَا طَاغَ مَرْبُوعِي دُسْفِيَّتْ  
 وَاللَّهِ سَكَلْتُ مَا يِ حَائِتْ. أَمَلَهُ إِنْمِجَلَهُ دَعَالِيكُمْ الْحَدَمُ.

Figure 1. Text A: Ḥamza the Bedouin (Mourad 2003: 26–28).

### Transcript and translation of text A

1. *farid marra rihit li-lwirdi. w-ana l-‘iduwwak, ‘eb šāyf ilwirdi, madd id-dahar madd. ṭabbēt li-ssūg huwwa čānna sūg iM‘ēn (H Me‘ēn) amma mṭabbag bi-ššaxar. w-libzāza bī kwām kwām. xaššēt (H mšīt) w-šifit wāhid ygil-li: tfaḏḏal yā zilma (H zalama), tfaḏḏal! imsēt warā w-g‘adit (H g‘idēt) bi-lmuḏiḏ wayya lmi‘āzīm (H l-m‘āzīm) w-mā ‘rifit (H ‘irifit) hādi lūganta.*



The man called out. Six men, cooks, [they beat me] *tāx tāx* with their ladders, they beat me, and I escaped from [the scene]. Oh my, what can I tell you? That was quite a beating, may peace be upon you.

נאני, פרד מרה, רחת מן אלוודי לבגדאד. נאנא אלקענדד, עיב שאיף אבגדאד, מד  
 אלדנהר מד. טבית לחרתה, נאשופן ביהא אלמנתכארת. עיע מא עיע, וחדה בעו אלאכירה. בויה,  
 כון אנתא זלמה, לתלף בשתד עלא אבטד, ותעבר אלחרתה ברפאץ, כון מן שויפד אלמנתכאר,  
 איסויד לא שני ולא נתישה!  
 משית ושפת וחדה סודא טוילה, צ"נהא נכילה מחרונה, וביתה לעליציאת, ביהא חמירה  
 ומקחילה, משופה ומשיט. גתלהא: נא מרה! ולחץ, נין סארת עפאיתץ! נאלת לי: ואנת שעלד!  
 וולד, רוח טבב כישמד אבטיו מרתד ומו בטיאו אמאס. מא תגלי שגול אלהל מרה! ועליכם  
 אסלאם.

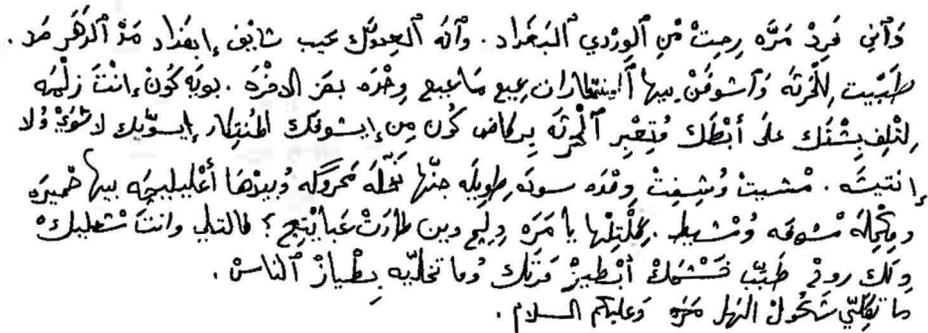

 وَأَنِّي فَرِدُ مَرَّةً رَمَيْتُ مِنَ الْوُرْدِيِّ الْبَغْدَادِ . وَأَنَّهُ الْجِدْوَلُ حَيْبٌ شَائِفٌ ، الْبَغْدَادُ مَدَّ الْكُرْسُ مَدَّ .  
 طَبَّيْتِ ، الْخَرْتَةَ وَأَشْوَمُنْ بِيْرَا الْإِسْطَارَانَ بِيْعِ مَاعِيْعِ وَغَرَمَ بَعْرَ الدَّخْدِ . بُوَيْهْ كُونْ ، أَنْتَ زَلْمُهُ  
 ، لَتَلْفِ بِيْشْتَاكْ عِلْدِ أَبْطَاكْ مُتَعَبِرِ الْخَرْتَةَ بِيْرَا ضَ كُونْ مِّنْ إِسْوَفَاكْ الْمُنْتِكَارِ ، بِإِسْوَفَاكْ لَدَعُوْهُ وَلَا  
 رَا نْتِيْشَهْ . مَشِيْتِ وَسُفِيْتِ وَفَدَهْ سَوَهْ ، طَوِيْلَهْ جَمَلْ مَحْرَمَهْ دِيْبِيْضَا أَعْلِيْلِيْجَهْ بِيْرَا حَمِيْرَهْ  
 دِيْرَا هَ مَسُوْفَهْ وَنَسِيْلَهْ . كَلْتَلْفَا يَا مَرْنِ دِيْبِيْعِ وَبِيْنِ طَارَتْ عِبَايْتِيْجِ ؟ فَالْتَلِيْ وَأَنْتَ شَتْلِيْلَهْ  
 وَذَلِكَ رُوِيْ طَبَّيْتِ شَتْلَاكْ أَوْطِيْرَ مَرْتَاكْ وَمَا تَخْلِيْجِ بَطِيَارَ الْنَاسِ .  
 مَا تَكْلِيْ شَحْوَانَ الرُّوْحِ مَوْجِ وَعَلَيْكُمْ السَّلَامُ .

Figure 2. Text B: 'Abd arRazzāg the Bedouin (Mourad 2003: 26–28).

### Transcript and translation of text B

5. *w-āni farid marra riḥit mn (H min) ilWirḍi la-Bḡadād (H l-Baḡdād), w-ana l-īduwwak, 'ēb šāyif 'Bḡadād madd iddahar madd. ṭabbēt li-lḥarta, w-ašūfan biha lmuntikārāt: 'ē' mā 'ē', wiḥda b-'azz il'ixra. būya! kūn inta zilma, li-tliḥf bištak 'ala abṭak w-ti'bir ilḥarta bi-rkād. kūn min 'yšūfak ilmuntikār 'ysawwik lā šwayy w-la intēša!*

And I went one time from 'Amāra to Baghdad and I—so should it happen to your enemies—have never seen Baghdad before. I turned in the road and saw the cars there [making the sounds of] 'ē', 'ē', one close to the other. Oh my! If you are a [true] man, you would wrap your cloth under

your armpit, and cross the road running. If the car meets you, it will leave you in pieces.

6. *mšēt w-šifit wiḥda sōda tiwīla (H ṭawīla), čannha naxla mahrūga w-b-īdha a‘līlīča (H l‘ēlēčāt), biha ḥmīra (H ḥamīra) w-mikhīla, mšūfa w-mšēt. gilt-īlha (H gitilha): yā mara! wilič, wēn ṭārat ‘abāytič? gālat-li: w-inta š-‘alēk? wilak (H wulak) rūḥ ṭabbib xašmak ‘b-ṭiz martak w-mā txallī (H w-mō) bi-tyāz in-nās. mā tgil-li, š-agūl ‘lhalmara? w-‘alēkum issalām!*

I went and saw some woman, black and tall, as if she were a burned palm tree, with a bag in her hand, and in it there were a lipstick, a case of blue eyeshadow, a mirror and a comb. I said to her: ‘Hey woman! Where did your cloak fly to?’ She said to me: ‘And you, what is it with you? Well, go stick your nose in your wife’s butt and not in [other] people’s butt’. So tell me, what could I say to that woman? May peace be upon you.

### 3 The language of the texts

The linguistic features that emerge from the texts are by and large in line with what is already known about the marshland dialect. Below we provide an overview of the dialect and address some of its unique features as they are revealed in the two monologues. We also account for certain cases of inconsistency between the Arabic and Hebrew versions.

#### 3.1 Phonological features

As with many other *gilit* dialects, the marshland dialect exhibits three short vowels, namely *a*, *u* and *i* (Jastrow 2011). These vowels are represented in the Arabic text using the Arabic vowels signs of *fatha*, *ḍamma* and *kasra* respectively. Raising of *a* → *i* in an open syllable, typical of many eastern Bedouin dialects, is reflected in the Arabic text in *ṭibābīx* ‘cooks’ and in *mi‘āzīm* ‘guests’, yet the Hebrew version gives *ṭabābīx* and *m‘āzīm* respectively. An auxiliary vowel inserted between words is marked as a *hamza* under the Arabic letter ا, e.g., شَائِفِ اِبْغَادَادِ *šāyf* ‘Bḡadād ‘I have seen Baghdad’. In the Hebrew version the three short vowels are marked by the vowel signs of *pataḥ*, *qibbuṣ*, and *hireq*, and the auxiliary vowel between words is rendered as א or אַ, e.g., וְאֲנִי אֶלְעָדָהּ אֶלְעָדָהּ *w-ana* ‘l-‘*aduwwak* ‘and I, so should it happen to your enemies’, אֶלְעָדָהּ אֶלְעָדָהּ אֶלְעָדָהּ *šāyif* ‘Bḡadād ‘I have seen Baghdad’.

The old diphthongs *ay*, *aw* are contracted to *ē*, *ō* respectively (Ingham 2000: 130; Jastrow 2011), and along with the three old long vowels the two new monophthongs feature a set of five long vowels, namely *ā*, *ū*, *ī*, *ē*, *ō*. The Arabic text generally renders a long vowel with a mater lectio-

nis, yet while *l* stands for *ā* alone, e.g., *warāh* 'after him', the letter *w* may indicate either *ū* or *ō*, e.g., *sūg* 'market' vs. *sōda* 'black.FSG'. *w* may also stand for *aw*, as in the case of *ažaw* 'they came'. Similarly, the letter *y* stands for both *ī* and *ē*, e.g., *ažīb* 'I bring' vs. *ṭabbēt* 'I entered'. While Ingham (2000: 128) notes that the contraction of *\*ay* → *ī* is a characteristic of the marshland dialect, this pronunciation cannot be established on account of the Arabic script. On the other hand, the Hebrew version clearly marks *\*ay* → *ē* using the Hebrew vocalization mark of *šēre*, e.g., *ṭabbēt* 'I entered', which stands in opposition to, e.g., *ažīb* 'I will bring', where the Hebrew *hireq* was used. In the same manner, the vocalization of *sūg* 'market' is distinguished in the Hebrew version from that of *sōda* 'black.FSG'.

The interdentalals are most plausibly preserved in the marshland dialect (Ingham 2000: 130). The Arabic script clearly indicates the interdental realization of *\*tā*' and *dāl*, e.g., *ṭalit* and *hādi* 'this.F'. However, while the reflexes of *\*dād* and *dā*' have merged in the dialect to yield the interdental *d̪*, the Arabic text renders *\*d̪* as *ḍ*, e.g., *ṭfaḍḍal* 'welcome' and *ilmuḍif* 'guest hall'.

As typical of Najdi Arabic and its offshoots in southern Iraq, the old *k* shifts to *č* in contiguity with front high vowels, and is regularly affricated in the 2FSG pronominal suffix. In the dialect discussed, affrication of *k* → *č* may also occur in the vicinity of *a/ā* (Johnstone 1978: 218). In the Arabic transcript under consideration, the affricate is marked using the Persian letter *č*, e.g., *čannah* 'as if he', *čānat* 'she was', and *abāytič* 'your.FSG cloak'. The Hebrew script renders it as *צ* (different from Modern Hebrew, which marks the same sound with *צ*), and thus *čannah*, *čānat*, and *abāytič*. Notably, in the form *rkād* 'running' it is *ḍ* that is rendered with Hebrew *צ*. Instances of *\*qāf* affricated to *č* do not occur, or are not marked in the texts.

Ingham (2000: 128) reports that the typical realization of *\*jīm* in the marshlands is *ž*. This realization stands in opposition to other south Mesopotamian dialects, which exhibit *y*, and to the realization of *ğ* that characterizes both *qaltu* and *gilit* dialects in central Iraq. In the texts under consideration, the reflex of *\*jīm* is marked with Arabic *ج* and Hebrew *ג*, e.g., *ažīb* 'I will bring'. Since Mourad himself pronounced it as *ž* while paraphrasing the text to us (as opposed to his native *ğ*, see §2.3 above), we transcribed it as *ž*. Notably, the form *yammi* 'by my side' (plausibly from *\*ğanb*, see Kaye 1975: 334), also occurs.

### 3.2 Morphological features

#### 3.2.1 Syllabication

The texts contain two examples of resyllabification processes typical of Bedouin Arabic dialects in general, and of Iraqi *gilit* dialects in particular. Notably, in both cases the texts offer two versions of the same lexeme, each characterizing a distinct *gilit* variety.

The old pattern CaCaCa(C) yields two distinguishable patterns in the Iraqi *gilit* dialects. In both, the vowel of the first two syllables is raised to *i/u*, but each then elides one of the two resultant high vowels. Thus, urban *gilit* loses the second vowel, yielding forms like \**samaka* → \**simiča* → *simča* ‘fish’; whereas rural *gilit* (similar to Najdi Arabic) loses the high vowel in the first syllable, yielding \**samaka* → \**simiča* → *smiča* (Jastrow 2011). The Hebrew version of the texts gives both *zalama* and *zilma* ‘man’, the latter complying with the first type of resyllabification, i.e., that of urban *gilit* (Ingham 2000: 128). The form *zalama*, occurring only once in the Hebrew text and followed by זלמה *zilma* in the next sentence, seems unexpected in the present context and may have unintentionally ‘slipped’ into this version.

Another resyllabified pattern apparently reflected in the texts is the so-called *gahawa* syndrome, where *a* is inserted after a back spirant (X) in the sequence (C)aXC, yielding (C)aXaC. In some varieties of the region discussed—predominantly in Šāwi dialects—it subsequently surfaces as (C)XaC (de Jong 2011), although in Iraqi *gilit* its productivity seems to be declining (Leitner 2021: 6). The Arabic version at hand reflects the reshuffling of CaXC to CXaC in the form بَعْدَاد *Bġadād*, in which a *fatha* is clearly marked above the ġ. This form has indeed been reported as characteristic of rural varieties in this area (Ingham 1973: 544). The Hebrew version gives בַּגְדָּאָד *Baġdād*, apparently reflecting Mourad’s more natural pronunciation, side by side with בְּגַדָּאָד *Bġadād*. On the tape, however, Mourad uttered it twice as *Baġadād*, a mixed form which may be taken to indicate his discomfort in pronouncing this ever-present form in the Marsh dialect.

#### 3.2.2 The 1SG perfect

The formation of the 1SG perfect is a hallmark of the marshland dialect, featuring an infix *ē* in the sound verb, analogous to the 3rd-weak and geminate verbal patterns. This unique feature is illustrated in the texts by *iglēt* ‘I ate’,<sup>13</sup> *šib‘ēt* ‘I became sated’, and *širbēt* ‘I drank’. The general-

<sup>13</sup> For the voiced realization of *k* in this word see §2.3. above.

ized *ē*-pattern reportedly alternates with the more conventional *-it* ending (Ingham 1973: 544; Mahdi 1985: 91, 94), and the text above indeed exhibits *'irifit* 'I knew' and *šifit* 'I saw' as well. Various sources indicate that the *ē*-suffix also occurs in the 2MSG (Mahdi 1985; Jastrow 2011; Ingham 2011), yet such forms do not appear in the document at hand. A comparable *ē*-infix has been reported as characteristic of the sedentary dialect of Khuzestan, and it has even been proposed to view it as influenced by the marshland varieties (Ingham 1973: 544). Generalization of the 3rd-weak ending to the 1SG perfect has been documented on the south coast of Iran (Leitner et al. 2021: 246–247), and in the dialects of the old coastal population of the Persian Gulf (Johnstone 1967: 92; Holes 2012; Holes 2018: 136–137). Intriguingly, it is also characteristic of the dialect of Aden in the southernmost corner of the Arabian Peninsula (Shachmon 2022: 228).

### 3.2.3 The 1SG imperfect

For the 1SG imperfect, the text offers the form *ašūfan* 'I see', with an idiosyncratic *-an* suffix that has also been documented in the Arabic dialects of Khuzestan (Gazsi 2006–2007: 47; Ingham 2011; Leitner 2019: 173). The suffix mainly occurs with hollow and geminated verbs, but is also documented with sound verbs before object clitics, e.g., *akəṭban-na* 'I write it.MSG' (Ingham 1973: 548; Ingham 2011). The form plausibly reflects the agglutination of a following 1SG independent pronoun, similar to the agglutination of the 2MSG independent pronoun in some north Yemeni and south Saudi dialects (Ingham 2000: 127, fn.4; Shachmon 2015).

## 3.3 Syntax and Lexicon

### 3.3.1 Verbal negation

The particle *'ēb* is used as a negation marker, probably as a result of a semantic generalization of the original sense of 'shame' (Ingham 2000: 128). The construction with *'ēb*, exemplified in the two monologues by *'ēb šāyif* 'I have not seen', seems to be unique to the Marsh area, and Ingham reports that it is 'often misinterpreted by those not familiar with the dialect' (Ingham 2000: 128; Hassan 2016: 304). While the examples given in the literature demonstrate the use of *'ēb* with the imperfect, e.g., *'ēb nidri* 'we do not know' or *'ēb yīl'an barra* '[the buffalos] do not go out' (Ingham 2000: 128), the example in the text at hand evidences the use of the particle with the participle, denoting the perfective. As with other *gilit* dialects, the active participle is used to express the resultative aspect

(Jastrow 2011), and therefore *šāyif* denotes ‘have seen’. Thus, different from its use in Levantine Arabic, the active participle of verbs denoting senses and perceptions may also express the resultative.

### 3.3.2 Interrogative particles

The texts consist of a few instances of *(a)š-* which is prefixed to verbs or particles, e.g., *š-agil-lak* ‘what would I tell you.MSG’, *(a)š-‘aliyya* ‘what does it have to do with me?’, and *š-‘alēk* ‘what is it with you.MSG?’. This bound morpheme, corresponding to the Iraqi free form *šinu*, was also documented in Khuzestani dialects (Ingham 2011; Leitner 2020: 129).

## 4 Conclusion

In this article we examined two short monologues written in the Arabic dialect of the Iraqi marshlands. The linguistic features that emerge from these texts are similar to those described in the research literature for this region, as well as for the sedentary dialects of Khuzestan, including idiosyncrasies such as: the generalization of the 3rd-weak endings to the 1SG perfect of the sound verb; the agglutinated 1SG imperfect; and the use of the negative particle *‘ēb*. Added to the short extract published by Ingham (2000), these texts deepen our familiarity with an area hitherto studied only fragmentarily, and with a dialect that is reportedly on the verge of vanishing.

While the Arabic version is coherent and systematic, and its features consistent with what is known about the dialects of that region, the Hebrew version exhibits several inconsistencies, as well as forms not expected in the dialect examined. We therefore assume that the Arabic version was written first, and constitutes a more reliable attestation of the Marshland dialect. Most likely, the writer produced the Hebrew version based on the Arabic one. Although he knew the Marsh Arab dialect from his life as a teenager in ‘Amāra, it was by no means his mother tongue, and he therefore either erred in transliterating the handwritten Arabic script, or unintentionally used forms typical of his own native dialect.

Beyond the linguistic data, the document under consideration may also contribute to our understanding of the sociolinguistic scene in southern Iraq during the first half of the 20th century. The texts were included in a booklet aimed at preserving the heritage of Iraqi Jews, and at demonstrating the linguistic reality in which they had lived. Thus, the mere choice to include monologues in the marshland dialect discloses the multilayered mutual relations between the Jews of ‘Amāra and the Marsh

Arabs. The Jews, whose communal language was of the *qeltu* type, lived among speakers of different *gilit* varieties, were in immediate and daily contact with them, and—at least in their perception—also had a good command of their dialects. However, as is usually the case with co-territorial communal dialects, the shift between the varieties remained challenging, and the attempt to switch from one's own dialect to that of the other inevitably yielded an incoherent result.

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