An annotated bibliography of Arabic and Berber in Libya

“It is to be feared that atlases for such countries as Libya will never see the light of day.”

1. Introduction

Both Arabic and Berber varieties in Libya are among the least studied of their respective linguistic groups. Although numerous works on Arabic and Berber saw the light of publication during the Italian occupation, from that period until the early 2000s only a single monograph-length scholarly publication appeared on any variety of either Arabic or Berber in Libya. Even now, despite a marked increase in the number of scholars who devote linguistic attention to Libya, the documentation and study of language in Libya still lags behind that of neighboring countries. Unfortunately, this state of affairs can largely be attributed to the fact that Libya has been very inaccessible for non-Libyan scholars over the past several decades. Meanwhile, the vast majority of Libyan students who studied linguistics abroad did not publish their work. In fact, we have found a total of 38 PhD theses on Libyan Arabic (37) or Berber (1) by Libyan students in European and American universities, as well as about a dozen master’s-level dissertations, all unpublished. This fact speaks, perhaps, both to the difficulty of Libyan scholars finding work in the West and to conditions in Libya which financially supported education abroad but restricted research and knowledge production at home.

The reasons for compiling the present bibliography are two. Firstly, bringing together references to whatever material exists for the study of these two languages and their varieties will benefit interested scholars. In this way, we also intend this work to be a sort of first step in the eventual compiling of Arabic and Berber dialectological atlases for Libya—a project, however, that will require much future fieldwork. Secondly, while we certainly intend to highlight the comparatively small published amount of work on Libyan Arabic and Berber, we also intend to draw attention to the unpublished studies of numerous Libyan graduate students abroad, as well as to relatively inaccessible works published in Libya. Though we have aimed to give as exhaustive a list as possible of the publications which do exist, we do not intend to comment on every one, but rather to give a general idea of the most important sources and studies while pointing out others which could be of use in further research. In this way, we hope that the main and numerous gaps in research may be seen and future avenues identified. We also initially intended to compile a bibliography containing works on all languages of Libya—perhaps overly ambitious given the paucity of work on Arabic—but were unable to locate even a single work about Libyan varieties of Hausa or Tubu, nor anything about the Greek variety still spoken by the Grāšliya community in eastern Libya.

2. Libyan Arabic

2.1. General

A few publications discuss the linguistic situation in Libya from a general perspective, among which are four main articles. Owens (1983) was the first to give an overview of

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2 The authors wish to thank Jérôme Lentin in particular for substantially enlarging this bibliography with many references and suggestions. We are also grateful to Slavomír Čépló for digging up material in the Slavic languages and to Marijn van Putten for some Berber-related references.
multiple Arabic dialects in Libya; his short account was fieldwork-based and proposed a tentative classification of Libyan dialects into western, eastern, and transitional varieties. It was not until the 2000s that new publications on languages in Libya appeared: Larcher (2001) gives a historical overview of the different languages used in the territory which constitutes modern-day Libya, while Quitout (2004) similarly traces the linguistic situation in Libya throughout history, giving attention to the position of foreign languages such as English, Italian, and French. Pereira (2007) is the latest overview of Arabic dialects in Libya, written from a dialectological point of view and emphasizing comparatively more the description of Arabic.


2.2 Tripoli

The dialect of Tripoli is far and away the best documented variety of Arabic in Libya, whether in linguistic descriptions (the earliest being Stumme 1898, as well as many Italian authors such as Trombetti, Griffini, and Cesàro in the first half of the twentieth century), or works of historical, ethnological, or anthropological focus (notably those of Cerbella, Chiauzzi, and Rossi – see also section 2.7) which provide numerous corpora (poetry, proverbs, songs, sayings, riddles, etc.) that can be used by linguists. Italian researchers were productive during the Italian occupation of Libya, and were as a result of it able to publish works such as languages manuals for military officers, dictionaries (Griffini 1913), language textbooks (Farina 1912), and finally grammars and transcribed texts of a more linguistic approach (Trombetti 1912, Cesàro 1939). The end of Italian influence in Libya also meant that Italian scholarship on Libya decreased (the main exception is Gioia Chiauzzi, who carried out fieldwork from the 1960s to the 1990s). Studies on Libyan Arabic slowly started to appear again in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to some doctoral theses by Libyan students in the USA (especially Abdu 1988, Elfitoury 1976, Elgadi 1986), and have continued to pick up pace as Libyan students complete MA's (e.g. Al-Ageli 1995, Algryani 2010-2014, Laradi 1972/1983) and PhDs (see further section 2.7) abroad. Unfortunately, as we have already mentioned, nearly all of these theses remain unpublished, and most such students return to Libya and do not continue to be active in the field.

The most substantial fieldwork in recent decades has been that of Christophe Pereira, who has carried out fieldwork in Tripoli since the early 2000s, culminating with the publication of a grammatical sketch of the Tripoli dialect (Pereira 2010a). His corpus of recordings obtained from young men have also allowed for the expansion of Libyan Arabic research into the areas of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Pereira 2007, 2010b, fthc.). Now, thanks to the work of Najah Benmoftah (Benmoftah 2016, Benmoftah & Pereira fthc.), recordings obtained from women have also been brought into the available corpus of Tripoli Arabic.

Abdulaziz, Ashour.


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3 We were able to find a review of this early work: J. Cantineau, *Revue Africaine* 85 (1941) p. 130–134.


Farina, Giulio. 1912. Grammatica araba per la lingua letteraria con un’appendice sul dialetto tripolino. Bologna: Giulio Groos.


Hoenerbach, Wilhelm. 1959. Das nordafrikanische Schattentheater. Mainz: Rheingold Verlag. [Includes a study of shadow plays in Tripoli, with some transcribed and translated texts in Tripoli Arabic (pp. 87–165)]


Pereira, Christophe. 2008. Aperçu du système aspecto-temporel du parler arabe de Tripoli (Libye). In Between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans Studies on Contemporary Arabic


Pereira, Christophe. 2009. Processus de grammaticalisation et innovations dans le parler arabe de Tripoli (Libye). Revue d’Études Berbères. 2009/1. [Online: bit.ly/1So0X0x]


2.3 Tripoli Jewish

The Jewish community of Tripoli, which unfortunately now exists only in diaspora, spoke an urban (“pre-Hilali”) dialect, distinct from that spoken by Muslims by features such as the retention of *q as [q] and the realization of *t as [č] (where the Muslim dialect has [g] and [t] respectively). Initial descriptive overviews were made by the anthropologist Harvey Goldberg (1974, 1983); Cohen (1930) contains some transcribed texts in Judeo-Arabic, and Simon (1989) contains some sociolinguistic observations. The most detailed, and indeed authoritative, study of this dialect is Sumikazu Yoda’s monograph (Yoda 2005), based on fieldwork undertaken among the diaspora in Israel, which includes a lexicon and one transcribed text. Yoda continues to publish research on aspects of the dialect (2012, 2013, 2015). Also needed is research on Judeo-Arabic documents produced in Tripoli over the past hundred years. Yoda (2004) offers a few comments on written texts. An archive of both Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew documents was kept in Tripoli until recently, as some researchers have informed us, and were even known to the orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy, who cited a Judeo-Arabic manuscript from Tripoli in his *Grammaire Arabe* (1830, I, planches IVb, Va, Vb). The Arabic varieties that were once spoken by other Jewish communities in Libya, including that of the second-largest community in Benghazi, have remained completely undocumented. Fieldwork with elderly members of the diaspora communities is urgently needed.


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4 The audio recording of this text may be found online at the *Semitisches TonArchiv*: bit.ly/1nsh2Xi
2.4 Western dialects

Compared to the dialect of the city of Tripoli, documentation and studies scarcely exist for Arabic varieties spoken in the region of Tripolitania, or western Libya. The few existing works mainly provide linguistic descriptions of the vernaculars of urban centers such as Misrata (Elramli 2012, D’Anna fthc.), Al-Khums (Benmoftah & Pereira fthc.) on the Tripolitanian coast, as well as inland towns such as Zliten (Abumdas 1985) and Jadu (Pereira 2012). Thanks to Ras Ali (Ras Ali 2015) who is currently preparing a PhD about the Miṣrāṭa dialect based on a corpus of female consultants (under the direction of Christophe Pereira), a study of the speech of women—on which no study at all exists for Libya—will be available. The brief description of Jadu Arabic was only possible thanks to the texts published by Gioia Chiauzzi (1971). Some new data has come to light based on work with informants resident in Europe: Klimiuk (fthc.) treats a comparative topic and includes data from the dialect of Msallāta near Tripoli, while D’Anna (fthc.) is based on data from the Miṣrāṭa dialect. Of great necessity are studies on Arabic-Berber language contact in Zwara and the Nafusa mountains, as well as further documentation of rural and urban varieties from this area, especially that of Miṣrāṭa, Libya’s third-largest city.


D’Anna, Luca. fthc. Two texts in the Arabic dialect of Miṣrāṭa, with preliminary notes and observations. _Mediterranean Language Review_ 24.


2.5 Benghazi & Eastern dialects

The first study of the Arabic dialect of Benghazi was that of the Italian scholar Ester Panetta, whose fieldwork in the 1930s and 1940s led to a grammatical sketch (Panetta 1943) and were the basis for a later attempt at an Italian-Benghazi Arabic dictionary (Panetta 1958–1980) which only reached the letter E. Meanwhile, her contemporary Elpidio Iannotta provided a description of a rural variety of eastern Libya near al-Bayḍa (Iannotta 1933). Both were classical descriptive works in that they provided a grammar, transcribed texts, and lexical material. The next fieldwork undertaken was that of T.F. Mitchell among Bedouin near Ṣāḥḥāt (Mitchell 1952, 1957, 1960). In the 1970s, Jonathan Owens’ fieldwork in Benghazi resulted in the most recent grammar of an eastern Libyan variety (Owens 1984)—although referring to “Eastern Libyan Arabic” in the title, the variety described therein is more representative of Benghazi than of rural dialects. The only recent fieldwork in Benghazi has been carried out since 2010 by Adam Benkato, who gives accounts of the dialect within the framework of Maghrebi dialectology (Benkato 2014, fthc.). This dialect is then treated in a comparative study of mutual intelligibility, the first of its kind, in Čéplö et al. (fthc.). Finally, if not for a few PhD theses by Libyan authors—Abdunnabi (2000) for the Jabal Akhdar and Aurayieth (1982) for Derna—we would have no data from any other eastern Libyan dialects. As it is, documentation of both rural and urban speech throughout eastern Libya would be a great boon for Arabic dialectology, and sociolinguistic and gender analyses for the Benghazi dialect are completely lacking.


2.6. Dialects of the Fezzan and southern regions

Numerous varieties of Arabic, all largely undocumented, are spoken in the southern regions of Libya, usually referred to as the Fezzān. The main resource for Arabic in this region is the text collection of renowned Arabist Philippe Marçais (2001), which was published posthumously but contains work done between the 1940s and 1970s. It contains a number of transcribed and translated texts representing different nomadic and sedentary varieties, but lacks a substantial grammatical analysis. The wealth of material provided therein has formed the basis for all recent studies of Arabic in the Fezzān; see Caubet (2004) for a dialectological analysis and Bettini (2004), Cauet (fthc), and D’Anna (fthc) for analysis of specific aspects of grammar and morphology.


2.7. Miscellaneous

Finally, we devote a “miscellaneous” section to collect further works for the sake of completeness. Some of these works are linguistic studies which describe “Libyan Arabic” without specifying any variety, and as such are less useful for dialectological research, but may nevertheless be useful for their approaches (e.g. Ahmed 2008, Gaber 2012, Gaddafi 1990, Kriba 2010). Others here are written for general audiences, are too generic to be used in research, or are textbooks which are outdated or impossible to find, again citing “Libyan Arabic” while mixing forms and idioms from different varieties. The two most recent textbooks are Dickinson (2004) and Le Quellec (2006)—pedagogy is yet another area where new materials are an urgent desideratum. A number of proverb collections also exist: see Abdelkafi 1968, Ali 2001, Ashiurakis 1978, Chambard 2002, Elmamri 2013, al-Misrāṭī 2002, Quitout 2006. Chambard’s work especially provides 1957 proverbs transcribed and translated, along with a lengthy French-Arabic glossary. Brief linguistic analyses of some of Qaddafi’s speeches can be found in Larcher (1997) and Mazaani (1997). We mention again that works such as those of Cerbella, Chiuzzi, and Rossi (see 2.2) in particular provide, in their works of primarily ethnological or anthropological focus, corpora in various varieties of Libyan Arabic. The most important resource in this regard, however, may be the 42-volume *Encyclopedia of Accounts of the Jihād (mawsū‘at riwāyāt al-jihād)* published between 1983 and 2002 by the Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli, containing several thousand pages of transcribed interviews with participants in the resistance against the Italian occupation and representing a number of older and previously unrecorded varieties of Libyan Arabic.


Cerbella, Gino. 1955. Mare e marinai in Libia. *Libia* 1, 5-54.
Cerbella, Gino. 1955. Mare e marinai in Libia (continuazione e fine). *Libia* 2, 3-34.
Chiauzzi, Gioia. 1971. Alcune cantilene relative a cerimonie e ricorrenze libiche. *Studi Magrebini* 4, 77–111. [Chiauzzi’s corpus was gathered in several regions, including the Tripolitanian coast, in Ghadames, and in the Fezzan (Sebha, Tadrart Akakus, and the extreme south-west near the Algerian and Tunisian border)]
Chiauzzi, Gioia. 2004 [2005]. *Cibi che han fame: šešibâni, Ūmmuk zeinûba e Nâga*. Ediz. italiana e araba, Naples, Università degli Studi di Napoli L’Orientalè, Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico (*Bollettino dell’AGAM, 2 = Quaderni di AIQN*, Nuova serie, 9). [The corpus of texts forming the basis of this study were gathered mainly in the Fezzan]
Di Tucci, Raffaele. n.d. [1912 ?] *Dizionario italiano-arabo con elementi di grammatica*. Milano: Società Editrice Sonzogno, 271 p. [Data provided is of Tripoli Arabic.]


Keller, Karel. 1972. Slovník a gramatika libyjské hovorové arabskiny se zaměřením pro geologii [A Dictionary and Grammar of Libyan Colloquial Arabic with special focus on Geology]. Prague. [In Czech].


Shagmani, Abulgaseem Muftah. 2002. The structure of Libyan Arabic discourse as depicted in two Arabic intwerviews [sic] recorded by the Libyan Jihād Studies Centre in Tripoli. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 585 p. [Material provided almost unreadable due to an ad hoc transcription system]


n.a. n.d. Tripolitanian Arabic. Petroleum Companies Language Training Center of Libya.


3. Libyan Berber

Languages of the Berber (or Tamazight) family, indigenous to northern Africa, are spoken throughout Libya by a small percentage of the population. The number of Berber speakers in Libya is difficult to estimate, and there are no reliable figures. The most numerically significant, as well as vibrant, Berber-speaking communities are those of Zwara along Libya’s northwest coast and the Nafusa mountains in the west. Other communities include Ghadames and the Touareg in southwestern Libya, and the oases of Sokna el-Foqaha, and Awjila in the central Sahara. It will be noticed that new fieldwork is a necessity for every variety of Libyan Berber and linguistic aspect thereof.

3.1 Berber in Libya – General and Comparative

The following are studies which deal with general aspects of the Berber language in Libya or include significant Libyan Berber data in a comparative study.


Asker, Adel & Marilyn Martin Jones. 2013. ‘A classroom is not a classroom if students are talking to me in Berber’: language ideologies and multilingual resources in secondary school English classes in Libya. Language and Education 27/4, 343–355.


3.2 Zwara

Commensurate with its status as one of the Libyan Berber varieties with the most speakers, the variety of Zwara (Zwari *tawīlult* ‘Zwaran’) has also been the subject of comparably numerous studies. The English scholar T.F. Mitchell carried out fieldwork there in the 1940s and managed to bring informants to London for further work; two studies were published while he was alive (Mitchell 1953, 1957), and his texts were collected and published as monographs posthumously (Mitchell 2007, 2009). In the 1960s, the Italian scholar Luigi Serra also carried out fieldwork there, and has published a number of studies focusing on the Zwaran lexicon and its relationship with other Berber varieties. Both Paradisi (1964) and Serra (1990) discuss the festival of Awussu.


3.3 Jabal Nafusa

The Nafusa mountains (Ar. žabal nafûsa, Nafusi adrar n enfusân) contain a chain of towns and villages many, but not all, of which are Berber speaking. Little is currently known about the exact distribution of speakers and the status of the different dialects, though some information has come to light recently via social media outlets, and more fieldwork is an urgent desideratum. The northernmost Berber-speaking town seems to be Yefren, the variety of which is undocumented save for a few words. Moving southwards, the variety of Jadu has been the subject of the majority of published work (Buselli 1921, 1924; Cesàro 1949; Provasi 1973), including Beguinot (1931), the standard reference grammar for ‘Nafusi’ Berber. The southernmost varieties, also undocumented, of the Nafusa mountains seem to be the towns of Nalut near, and Wazzin on, the Libyan-Tunisian border. Ghadghoud (2013) seems to be the most recent fieldwork-based study of a Nafusi variety.


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3.4 Ghadames

The oasis of Ghadames (Ar. ḡadāmis, Ghadamsi ‘ademas), home to about 10,000 people, is located near where Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria meet. Famed for its unique vernacular architecture, it is also home to a unique variety of Berber. The language was already known to the early Berberologist Calassanti-Motylinski (1903, 1904; for discussion of earlier mentions of the oasis see 1904:171–312) who based his work primarily on written materials. The first extensive in situ study of Ghadamsi was that of Jacques Lanfry, a Catholic missionary who stayed in Ghadames from 1944–45 and produced an ethnographic and linguistic sketch (Lanfry 1968) and a lexicon of about 2,000 words (Lanfry 1973). All subsequent work, including Kossmann’s (2013) detailed grammatical sketch, is based on Lanfry’s materials—with one exception. A hitherto overlooked resource for Ghadamsi is the thesis of Yedder (1982), containing nearly one hundred transcribed texts, detailed ethnological information, and a number of unique color photographs. Finally, Hārūn (n.d.) provides an account of the language in Arabic, along with 484 sayings and prayer formulas.

Kossmann, Maarten. 2001. The origin of the glottal stop in Zenaga and its reflexes in the other Berber Languages. Africa und Übersee 84, 61–100. [ Mostly about Ghadames, with comparative data from other Berber languages]

3.5 Sokna & El-Foqaha

The oases of Sokna and El-Foqaha are located in central Libya. Sokna belongs to a cluster of three oases, the other two being the more populous Houn and Waddan, which lies approximately 250km from both the Mediterranean coast to the north and Sebha to the south. In the 19th-century, European travelers through the Libyan desert stopped by the oasis of Sokna and gathered a few word-lists: Lyon (1821) contains a list of about 142 words constituting the oldest published source, while the vocabularies of Richardson made in 1850 were never published and were only recently rediscovered and analyzed by Souag (ftch a, ftch b). The first and to-date only linguistic fieldwork to have been conducted on Sokni was that of the Italian military ophthalmologist Tommaso Sarnelli in the 1920s. Sarnelli, working with an informant in Tripoli, published six texts, all folk literature, in a detailed though idiomatic phonetic transcription with Italian translation, along with an Italian-Sokni wordlist of some 500 items (Sarnelli 1924). Later sketches of Sokni (Prasse 1982) are based on this material. Recently, a Berber speaker from Yefren travelling to Sokna was able to gather a wordlist of about 200 items from an elderly resident, many of which agree with those in Sarnelli (S’id n Yunes 2010a, 2010b).

Lyon, George Francis. 1821. A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa in the years 1818, 19, 20. John Murray: London. [Sokni words on pp. 314-316]
El-Foqahā is an oasis about 200km to the south of Sokna. Only in 1934 did the Italian orientalist Francesco Beguinot find out that a Berber language was spoken there; working with a woman from El-Foqahā living in Zighen (a town near Sebha), he gathered a short wordlist on the basis of which he suggested the language’s proximity to Sokni (Beguinot 1935 in section 3.1). However, no further research was carried out until 1960, when Umberto Paradisi was able to meet two speakers residing in Tripoli. His fieldwork resulted in the publication of five transcribed folktales with an Italian-Berber lexicon (Paradisi 1961) and a grammatical sketch (Paradisi 1963). He reports that only three people could speak Berber effectively at that time, with ten or so more being able to understand it. Paradisi also provided a brief comparison with Sokni material, confirming the proximity of the two (1961:296–302).

Parasie (1996) is based on Paradisi’s material.


3.6 Awjila

The oasis of Awjila (Ar. awjila, Awjili ašal n awilun) in eastern Libya, about 250 km south of Ajdabia, is home to the easternmost Berber language spoken in Libya. The language was known to early researchers (Basset 1935, 1936, Zanon 1932), but the first extensive work on the language did not appear until Umberto Paradisi’s fieldwork in the late 1950s, which resulted in an Italian-Berber lexicon (Paradisi 1960) and 15 transcribed texts with Italian translation (Paradisi 1961). More recently, Marijn van Putten compiled an extensive grammatical description of the language based on the materials collected by Paradisi (van Putten 2014). The language is certainly still in use, primarily by those middle-aged and older (see van Putten & Souag fthc), but it has been difficult to estimate the number of speakers since recent fieldwork has not been possible.


### 3.7 Libyan Touareg

The Touareg language, a variety of Berber, is spoken throughout southwestern Libya. While varieties outside of Libya have received comparatively greater attention, Touareg in of Libya is scarcely documented and the only published accounts (Krause 1884, Nehlil 1909) are over one hundred years old. These focus on the variety of Touareg spoken in Ghat (Ar. ḡāṭ), a city of about 20,000 inhabitants near Libya’s border with Algeria. Touareg live in many other cities of the region as well, such as Ghadames, Ubari, and Murzuq, but linguistic studies have never been carried out in those locations and the number of Touareg speakers cannot be ascertained. Estimates are further complicated by the fact that many Touareg move across the borders. Regarding Ghat it should also be noted, as Ines Kohl kindly informs us, that Hausa is widely spoken by the different ethnic groups. Finally, Brulard (1958) gives a few lexical items but is mostly an ethnological study, while the Encyclopédie Berbère entry on Ghat contains only historical information (linguistic information on Touareg in general is included under the entry “Ajjer”).


http://encyclopedieberbere.revues.org/1921