**The Vocabulary of Damascus Jews[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

**0. Introduction**

The language of the Jewish community in Damascus, one of the oldest communities in the Levant, going back to the beginning of the Common Era or even earlier, was basically Arabic. Judeo-Damascene (hereafter: JD) had some grammatical features that are not often (or even never) attested in the common dialect of Damascus (hereafter: CD). Besides these grammatical differences,[[2]](#footnote-2) JD differed from CD in the realm of vocabulary as well. Indeed, the vast majority of the vocabulary of JD contains regular Arabic words, but it contains also some Arabic words that were unique to this linguistic variety of the Jews, in addition to words from Hebrew, and words of Romance origin as well. In this paper I will present words and phrases from the three aforementioned categories.[[3]](#footnote-3)

My study is based on material that was gathered from Jewish speakers who were born and grew up in Damascus. The oldest of my thirty-one male and female informants was born in 1930 and the youngest in 1977. Fourteen of them lived in Damascus for more than thirty years. All of the speakers finished elementary school, about a third also finished high school, and some of them had higher education. Two-thirds of the informants now live in Israel, while the others live in Brooklyn, NY. The many lexical items that I discovered were compared with the most renowned linguistic sources, including books, articles, and dictionaries that describe the other relevant dialects, especially Jodeo-Aleppine (hereafter: JAl).[[4]](#footnote-4) In addition, I consulted two Syrian speakers, one is a Muslim from Damascus, who lives in Germany, and the other is a Christian from ḥoms, who lives in France.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**1. Arabic Component**

This section will discuss Arabic lexical items that had a special meaning in the life of Damascus Jews, or that are not typical Damascene. Nonetheless, in order to give a broader scope, I will discuss some terms that have the same meaning as in CD as well.

**1.1 Arabic Component in the Jewish Calendar and Faith**

Occasionally, the Jews, and only Jews, would say *ʾáṃṃa* ‘Allah, God’ instead of *ʾáḷḷa*, due to the holiness of this Arabic word. The word *ʾáṃṃa* was used in spoken and written JAl (Askof 2009:132; Matsa 2015:225 fn. 10) and Judeo-Baghdadi as well (Avishur 2009:I:104-5). However, as I was kindly informed by Prof. G. Rosenbaum, it was not in use in Judeo-Egyptian. The word *ʾaṃṃa* later became a part of the oath word *wúṃṃa* ‘by God’, like in Judeo-Baghdadi (Yosef 2005:25).[[6]](#footnote-6)

In the Jewish calendar we find *l-əmḍaḷḷe*(<*l-miḏ̣allatu*, ‘shed, hut’) as the name of the *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles. The word *mḍalle* served as the name of this feast in spoken and written JAl as well (Nevo 1991:16; Matsa 2015:263 and fn. 257. Cf. Piamenta 1979:253). This name was known also to non-Jews as shown by Barthélemy (1935-1954:462): *l-ihūd daxalu ʿa-l-mḍalle* ‘the Jews started (the Feast of) Tabernacles’.[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Purim*, the Feast of Lots, was named (*ʿīd*) *əl-fūr*, and this word serves as the base for *fūriyye* ‘*Purim* money’ and the denominative verb *fawwar* ‘gave *Purim* money’.[[8]](#footnote-8) Bar-Asher (1999:214) refers to *fūriyye* and *fūr* in JAl, but not in JD (and cf. Maman 2019:593.)[[9]](#footnote-9) *fūr* ‘*Purim*’ was utilized in medieval Judeo-Arabic (Blau 2006:517), and by Jews in Yemen, too, but in their dialect *fawwar* meant ‘to celebrate *Purim*’ (Kara 1994:132; Maman loc. cit., and see there other uses of *Purim* in Jewish languages).[[10]](#footnote-10) Also, Christians in the Holy Land used the name *fūr* for this Jewish feast (Bassal 2004:318, cf. Avishur 2017:31-3, 35-6).[[11]](#footnote-11) However, in Pekiʿīn in the Galilee, and in written Judeo-Egyptian, too, this Holiday was called *ʿid l-masxara* ‘the festival of masquerade’ (Henshke 2017:327-8; Rosenbaum, personal contact. Cf. Elihay 1977:399 s.v.פּורִים ), whereas in Iraq it was called *l-mğálla* ‘the Feast of the Scroll (of Ester)’ (Yosef 2005:266; Avishur 2009:351 s.v. מגׄלא; Maman 2019:417).

In *Sukkot* there is a custom to entwine the Four Species of plants and wave them in the *Sukkah*. Only one of the Four Species,*ʾās*(<*ʾāsun*)‘ myrtle’, had an Arabic name (cf. §2.2 and fn. 77 infra).[[12]](#footnote-12) Like in Istanbul (Arnold 2010:433), the Species were used collectively by the congregation. In *Purim* the children did not wear costumes, as it is customary by many Jews nowadays, but rather made a big fire (*ˀabbīle*)[[13]](#footnote-13) in the Jewish quarter and burnt a doll in the shape of Haman. Before that, the children would pass from door to door and shout *ya ḥaṭbe ya zēt kāz, ya m-ənkasser bāb əd-dār* ‘either (you give us) firewood or fuel, or we are going to smash the house’s door’. While burning the doll, the children would sing cheerfully the following sarcastic stanzas, which were recited with great joy by my consultants:

*hāmān daˀn-o ʿarīḍa, tənzel fī́ əl-ˀarīḍa, yā ḥuzūˀ, yā muzūˀ, yā bū ṭīz mḥannāye, hāt šaʿra mən daˀn-ak ta-nxayyeṭ əṣ-ṣərmāye*

‘Haman has a large beard, may a mischief befall upon him, oh, *ḥuzūˀ*, oh, *muzūˀ*, oh, you with a henna-dyed ass, give me one hair from your beard so that we’ll fix the shoe’.[[14]](#footnote-14)

 The minor Jewish fast days, that were adjacent to the cardinal fast holidays of Kippur and the 9th of Av, had a term that is unknown in other Arabic-speaking communities. They were named after the prime holiday, with the prefix *mrāyet*-(<*mirʾātu-* ‘a mirror’). Thus, the Fast of Gedaliah on the 3rd of Tishrei was called *mrāyet kǝppūr*HB ‘the mirror of Kippur’, and the Fast of 17th of Tammuz was called *mrāyet ʾēxa*HB ‘the mirror of 9th of Av’. The way of calling the minor fast days as relatives of the cardinal ones, usually with words like *bǝn ʿamm* ‘cousin’, *xa/xu* ‘brother’ or *zġīr* ‘little’, is very common in Judeo-Arabic (e.g, Bar-Asher 1998:159, 289; Henshke 2007:262; Tobi 2016:95),[[15]](#footnote-15) but in no other community have I found something similar to JD *mrāyet-* ‘mirror’. Nor have I found this meaning in Arabic in general, so it seems that this is anindigenous JD term. Another unique term is *l-ʿakəs*(<*l-ʿaksu*, lit. ‘the opposite’). This word refers in JD to the three weeks between the 17th of the month of Tammuz and 9th of Av, known in Judaism as *Bein ha-Metzarim* (lit. ‘Between the Straits’), commemorating the three weeks of Babylonian and Roman sieges of Jerusalem until the destruction of the First Temple and The Second Temple in 586/7 BCE and 70 CE, respectively. This sad time of year is believed to be misfortunate and unfavorable, so observant Jews refrain from buying new houses or cars, or opening a new shop etc. during this time. Hence the choice of the name *l-ʿakəs* ‘the opposite’.[[16]](#footnote-16) The nine days between the 1st of Av and the 9th of Av, which are part of *Bein ha-Metzarim*, were called *rafʿ əs-səkkīn*(<*rafʿu s-sakkīni*, lit. ‘lifting the knife’). This idiom is based on the custom not to slaughter animals during this period, as part of the mourning rites that were held by the Jews. In Tunisia, the last day, 9th of Av, in which slaughtering was allowed, was called *eḥəll s-sakken* ‘the knife is permitted’ (Henshke 2007:315 and fn. 1). The Fast of the 10th of Tevet was called *ṣyām nəṣṣ əš-šəte*(<*ṣiyāmu niṣfi š-šitāʾi*, lit. ‘the Fast of Mid-Winter’), resembling its name in Libya and Tunisia (Tobi 2016:95; Tobi 2019:199, 204). The term for the festival intermediate days (*ḥol ha-Moed*)in *Sukkot* and Passoverwas *waṣṭān*(<*wasṭān* ‘intermediate’, sometimes added to the word *l-ʿīd* ‘of the Holiday’). In spoken and written JAl the term was *waṣṭāni*, with a final -*i* (Nevo 1991:139, and note 462 on p. 308; Matsa 2012:159 and fn. 43). In Tunisia they also used *wəsṭān* (Maman 2019:265;[[17]](#footnote-17) Tobi 2019:202 and fn. 29, 205 and fn. 44). The form *waṣṭāniyya* was noted in this meaning already in medieval Judeo-Arabic (Blau 2006:762).

The first hours of a Holiday, which in Judaism begin after sunset, were referred to in the term *lēl(e)t*-(<*laylatu*-) ‘the night of’, as in *lēlet kəppūr*HB ‘Kippur eve’, and *lēlet ʾēxa*HB ‘the eve of the 9th of Av’.This usage is known among the Jews in other places as well (Bar-Asher 1998:320; Piamenta 2000:239; Geva-Kleinberger 2004a:239; Matsa 2015:263), and even in the general spoken Arabic of the Levant (Barthélemy 1935-1954:772).

Apart from *Sukkot* and *Purim*, which had Arabic names, other festivals bore Hebrew names (see §&&&& below). However, at times the consultants referred to New Year Day and Sabbath in their Arabic names. ‘New Year Day’ was called *ṛāṣ əs-səne*(<*raʾsu s-sanati*, lit. ‘the head of the year, i.e., the first day of the year’, cf. Barthélemy 1935-1954:264; Henshke 2017:326), and Sabbath was called (*yōm*) *əs-sabət*(<*yawmu s-sabti*, pl. *sbūt*). ‘Sabbath eve’ was *lēlet* (*yōm*) *əs-sabət*, very similar to its name in Judeo-Egyptian and in Peqiʿīn (Rosenbaum 2021:224; Henshke 2017:324). In JAl they also, used *sabǝt*, but also *sǝbt* (Nevo 1991:76).[[18]](#footnote-18) The first hours after the Sabbath was over were called *lēlet l-ʾaḥad*(<*laylatu l-ʾaḥadi*) ‘Saturday night’,[[19]](#footnote-19) again, in a very similar phrase as in Egypt (Rosenbaum, loc. cit., cf. Nevo 1991:160 *lēlet ǝl-ʾaḥḥa* in JAl, and Cohen 1994:51 ليلة الأحد). In these calm hours, the Jews would come out to the streets of the Jewish Quarter, meet their friends and relatives, and greet them for the new week *žəmʿə́t-kon xaḍra*(<*ğumʿatukum xaḍrāʾu*, lit. ‘have a green week’). Many consultants claimed that this was an exclusively Jewish greeting,[[20]](#footnote-20) same as in Judeo-Egyptian (Rosenbaum 2002a:142; Rosenbaum 2021:225-6). Greetings like *sánt-ak xaḍra* ‘have a green(=good) year’ are rather common in Judeo-Arabic (e.g., Piamenta 2000:94; Geva-Kleinberger 2009:94, text 3.18 sentence 4, 7; Maman 2014:110, 111), and in certain instances also in Arabic in general (e.g., Badawi & Hinds 1986:254), but *žəmʿə́t-kon xaḍra* is known in JD and in Judeo-Egyptian only.

**1.2 Arabic Component in Synagogal and Religious Rites**

Some terms concerning Jewish rites in the synagogue were in Arabic. The synagogue itself was called *knīs*(<*kanīsun*, pl. *kanāyes*)[[21]](#footnote-21) as in Beirut (Geva-Kleinberger 2017:36). The skullcap (*Kippah*) worn by men in the synagogue had different names in the Judeo Arabic dialects in the Levant. In JD it was called *ṭāˀiyye*(*t ṣalā*)(<*ṭāqiyyatu ṣalātin*), as in Jerusalem and Egyptian Judeo-Arabic (Piamenta 2000:156. Cf. Elihay 1977:204 s.v. כּובַע), whereas in JAl it was called *ˀandūse* (Nevo 1991:141,) and in Judeo-Iraqi *ʿaraqğīn* (Avishur 2009:III:243).[[22]](#footnote-22) In the last period before leaving Damascus, Jews used to wear the *ṭāˀiyye* only inside the synagogue, for security reasons.

In the synagogue *s-səfər*(<*s-sifru*) ‘the Torah scroll’ was carried from the Ark (*hēxāl*) to the raised platform with a reading desk (*tēbā*), where one of the men was honored to lift it up open. This act was called *žǝlyān*, as in in JAl (Nevo 1991:46), while Jews in Egypt pronounced the same word *gilyān*,according to their local dialect (Rosenbaum 2021:222, cf. ibid., p. 226-7). In other Jewish communities, terms relatively similar to *žǝlyān*, like *təžlīl*, were used for the same synagogal rite (Maman 2019:170 s.v. גל"י and גלילה; Tobi 2019:198; Rosenbaum 2021:222).[[23]](#footnote-23)

The finger-shaped pointer that is used to point to the words that are being read in the Torah scroll, was termed *dallāle*(<*dallālatun* ‘guide (f.)’). This is a unique Judeo-Damascene name, since in JAl its name was *ḥawwāye*, as I was informed by several Aleppine friends of mine. From the same Aramaic(-Hebrew) root *ḥwy* ‘to show, point’ the words *miḥwi* and *miḥwet* were derived and used in Baghdad and Mosul, respectively (Avishur 1993:14). In Yemen this item was named *muxwāṭ* (Goitein 1931:358).[[24]](#footnote-24) In Tunisia the term was *ṭeḅḅāʿa*, while in Libya it was named *məššaya* (Tobi 2019:198).[[25]](#footnote-25) Returning the Torah scroll to the Ark was called in JD *radde*(<*raddatun*, ‘an act of returning’), and the invitation to do so was *ˀūm rǝdd* ‘get up and return (the scroll)!’.

The word for a prayer book in JD was *maṣḥaf*(<*maṣḥafun*, pl. *maṣāḥef*) ‘book’. Among the Jews in Jerusalem, *maṣḥaf* referred both to a regular book and a prayer book (Piamenta 2000:15, 218). The act of Ascending the platform to read the Torah in public was called *ṭəleʿ ʿa-s-səfər*, lit. ‘he ascended to (lit., ‘on’) the book’, which was the phrase used also by Jews in Egypt (Rosenbaum 2021:227) and Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:83-4).[[26]](#footnote-26) The verb used for ‘taking out (the Torah scroll from the Ark)’ was *ṭālaʿ*, in form3, rather than *ṭallaʿ*, in form2. E.g. in *ž-žəlyān huwwe b-iṭālʿu sēfer*HB *tōrā*HB *mən əl-hēxāl*HB *b-əṭallʿū́ ʿa-t-tēbā*HB ‘*žəlyān* is that they take out the Torah scroll from the Ark, and lift it up to the platform.’ This verb was used in this meaning in JAl, too (Nevo 1991:195).[[27]](#footnote-27) The word *žōze*(<*ğawzatun*, lit. ‘a walnut’, pl. *žōz-āt*) denoted either the pair of Phylacteries that Jewish men wear in certain occasions on their forehead and on their left hand, e.g., *žōze tabaʿ ʾīd* ‘the hand phylactery’ . In Syrian Arabic *žōze* may also mean ‘a box’ (El-Massarani & Segal 1978:148), which can match with the Phylacteries’ shape.

The last two words that will be discussed in this section are *zafaṛ*, referring to ‘meat diet’, which in Orthodox Judaism is to be totally separated from *laban*, i.e., ‘dairy diet’. *zafaṛ* was used in the same meaning in Judeo-Iraqi (Avishur 2009:I:463) as well.[[28]](#footnote-28) In Syrian Arabic *zafaṛ* can refer to any food that comes from animals, such as meat, eggs and milk, but also to the stinky smell of greasy food (ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:1100, cf. Stowasser & Ani 1964:107 s.v. ‘grease’ and ‘greasy’, especially def. 3, Blau 2006:273, and Klimiuk 2013:41).[[29]](#footnote-29)

**1.3 Arabic Component in the Cycle of Life**

JD has many Arabic terms for personal events in the cycle of life. The word for ‘circumcision’ was *ṭhūr*(<*ṭuhūrun*), which is the word used also by Muslims for their circumcision. The derived forms *ṭahhar* ‘to circumcise’, *ṭṭahhar* ‘was circumcised’, and *mṭahher* ‘circumciser’ were all in use. The term *ṭhūr* was utilized in JAl as well, but Jews in Aleppo used also the Hebrew word *məllā*(<*mīlå* ‘circumcision’, Nevo 1991:4, 142). In more official occasions, namely in written advertisements and invitations, “elevated” words from Classical Arabic √*xtn* were used.[[30]](#footnote-30) It was customary that the grandmother proffers the newborn son to the godfather in the circumcision ceremony. For this act they used the word *mˀaddme*(<*muqaddimatun*) ‘offerer’, to which I did not find an equivalent in other Jewish dialects.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Upon the birth of a girl, a party called *ˀbūl*(<*qubūlun*) was held, apparently for women only. Since this word literally means ‘reception’, it was used for other celebrations too, like *Bar Mitzvah* or when the groom’s relatives came to visit the bride’s family, etc. It was used in the same way in JAl (Nevo 1991:147) and in Judeo-Baghdadi as well (Avishur 2009:III:378).[[32]](#footnote-32) A common greeting for the birth of a child was *ˀdūm-o/-a xēr* (*ʿalē-kon*) ‘his/her arrival is a good sign (for you pl.)’; it seems that this was a “Jewish” formula used also in other happy events, like a purchase of a new house or a car. This greeting was used by the Jews in Jerusalem as well (Piamenta 2000:53).[[33]](#footnote-33)

When a boy reached the age of thirteen, he celebrated his *Bar Mitzvah* donning the Phylacteries. The verb used in this context is *lǝbes* ‘wore’, the same as in Egypt, Jerusalem, and Iraq (Rosenbaum 2021:222; Piamenta 2000:55; Maman 2019:767), but in Tiberias the Jews used *sāwa* ‘made’ to denote the same action (Geva-Kleinberger 2009:23).[[34]](#footnote-34)

The customs concerning a Jewish wedding were very complicated, and each stage had a special term. When a boy and a girl decided that they want to get engaged, their families would meet to negotiate it. This phase, called *bazra*(<*bazratun*) ‘haggling session’, was aimed to reach an agreement concerning the wedding. Although *bazra* is known in Damascus as a mercantile term (Barthélemy 1935-1954:42; Salamé & Lentin 2010:121), it seems that only among the Jews it referred to a specific phase before a marriage.[[35]](#footnote-35) The engagement agreement was called *məsək ˀōl*(<*misku qawlin*) ‘to give an oath’, as it was made orally. According one of the Jewish consultants, the Muslim equivalent was *xaṭabna* ‘we have an engagement agreement’, and indeed, a Muslim, confirmed that he does not know the phrase *məsək ˀōl*.[[36]](#footnote-36) On this occasion the *dotta* ‘dowry’ (see §3.1 below) was set. The visit paid by the fiancée’s family to the fiancé’s home was called *ḥḍūr*(<*ḥuḍūrun*) ‘attendance’ (cf. El-Sahli 2001:300). After that, the bride-to-be’s parents would make a party for their future son-in-law, inviting his friends too. This party was called *ʿazīmet šabāb*(<*ʿazīmatu šabābin*) ‘youth invitation’ (cf. ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:1609). A week before the wedding the groom-to-be used to send his fiancée a very large bouquet, called *ṣaḥn əškūl*(<*ṣaḥnu šukūlin*) ‘a platter of flowers’.[[37]](#footnote-37) The flowers were then given to the ladies attending.

A few days after that, the bride-to-be was accompanied by female members of her own family and of her fiancé’s to the public bath (*ḥammām*), carrying a package (*bǝˀže*) that was called *ṣǝdǝr ḥammām*. This package contained whatever was needed for the bath: towels, sleepers, a robe, cosmetics, etc., as described by Aviv (2007:21) and Banit as well (2009b:244).[[38]](#footnote-38) At times sweets and candies were added. The wedding event was called *ʿǝrǝs*(<*ʿursun*, pl. *ʿrās*). Hence the popular greeting *tšūfū-won ʿǝrsān* ‘may you see them (i.e., your children) married’, which some consultants claimed that it was exclusively Jewish.[[39]](#footnote-39) As customary, the hosts felt obliged to include in the menu certain dishes such as *kbēb-āt əl-bāša* ‘large meat-stuffed *kubbeh*s’, *rəzz əb-taṭbīˀa* ‘rice covered with pine- and pistachio nuts’, and *ḥamḍ əl-lōz* ‘small sour *kubbeh*s with rice’. These dishes were served also in Jewish festivals (Cohen 2006:48).

After the wedding, the bride would move to her husband’s home. The trousseau that she had brought to her new home was called *žhāz*(<*ğihāzun*), and it was exhibited with great pride in what was called *ṣamd* *əž-žhāz*(<*ṣamdu l-ğihāzi* ‘presenting of the trousseau’).[[40]](#footnote-40) After a while, the bride comes to visit her own family. This visit was nicely celebrated, and named *ʿabra*(<*ʿabratun*). This meaning is known in CD (Barthélemy 1935-1954:508, relating this term to Christians; El-Massarani & Segal 1978:330).[[41]](#footnote-41) Muslims, on the other hand, named it *raddet l-ʾǝžǝr* lit. ‘leg returning’ (ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:1019; El-Sahli 2001:303). The happy but intimate atmosphere of the *ʿabra* is described in Hasson’s memories (Hasson 2012:40), who maintains that this term was used for other personal occasions too.

Certainly, there were also sad events, like a death of community member. The word for cemetery was *baṛṛiyye*(<*barriyyatun*) ‘wasteland’, as defined in several dictionaries (e.g., El-Massarani & Segal 1978:76; Salamé & Lentin 2010:90.)[[42]](#footnote-42) In JAl they used *žabbāne* (Nevo 1991:11). The grave itself was called in JD *tərbe*(<*turbatun*), which meant ‘cemetery’ among the Jews of Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:197).[[43]](#footnote-43) On the Friday following the death of the deceased person, his family would give out round loaves of bread called *xəbəz tarḥīm*(<*xubzu tarḥīmin*) ‘intercession bread’, so that whoever eats this bread would invoke mercy (*yǝtraḥḥam*) for the soul of the deceased (cf. Blau:2006:243). This custom is described also by Banit (2009b:247) and Kallash (2013:22).[[44]](#footnote-44) The mourning week was called *l-ʾəsbūʿ*(<*l-ʾusbūʿu*), and entering the state of mourning was expressed by the hybrid phrase *məsek ʾəblūt*HB, in which Arabic *məsek* means ‘to hold’, and Hebrew *ʾəblūt* means ‘mourning’ (see §1.3 above).

**1.4 General Words**

In many cases the Arabic words in JD differ from CD only in pronunciation. For example, my consultants used *ʿašra* for ‘ten’, whereas in CD many sources (e.g., Ferguson 1961:13; Stowasser & Ani 1964:236) attest the pronunciation *ʿašara*. ‘Room’ in CD is usually *ʾūḍa* (e.g., Cantineau & Helbaoui 1953:33, 34; Cowell 1964:143, 221; Behnstedt 1997-2000:I:map 383; Belnap & Haeri 1997:124 fn.), while my consultants used *ʾōḍa*, as in JAl (Nevo 1991:126) and in other dialects (e.g., Jerusalem, see: Piamenta 2000:143). ‘Bitter orange’ is documented in CD as *nārǝnž* (Bergsträsser 1924:79 l. 4, 90 l. 17;Barthélemy 1935-1954:811;[[45]](#footnote-45) ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:2422, and cf. Blau 2006:688; Bunis 2018a:96 and fn. 85,) while my consultants pronounced it *lārənž*.[[46]](#footnote-46) Likewise, ‘a rich man’ in JD is *zangīn*, as pronounced by the Jews in Aleppo, Beirut, and Baghdad as well (see respectively: Nevo 1991:30; Issachar-Glosschneider 2004:26 and fn. 56; Mansour 2011:45), but the vast majority of grammar books, articles, and dictionaries give *zangīl* as the CD form (e.g., Cowell 1964:136, 207; Stowasser & Ani 1964:193; Lentin 2009:153. Cf. Behnstedt 1989:63).[[47]](#footnote-47)

Some of my consultants used *narbīš* ‘elastic tube’ (<Turk.: *marpıç*/ *marpuç*), whereas the regular form in Damascus is *barbīš* (e.g., Stowasser & Ani 1964:119; Bloch & Grotzfeld 1964:205;[[48]](#footnote-48) El-Massarani & Segal 1978:72;[[49]](#footnote-49) ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:2433).[[50]](#footnote-50) According to Lentin (2009:163) and Salamé & Lentin (2010:82), the form *narbīš* is highly marked as a “Christian” form in Damascus.[[51]](#footnote-51)

An interesting case not documented in CD, is the word \**fulān>falān* ‘so-and-so’ (along with the common *flān)*, as in *falān ʿēle* ‘a certain family, family so-and-so.’ In the Syrian dialects the form *falān* is very rare, but it is attested in Ottoman Turkish (e.g., Buğday 2009:27), a fact which raises the question if it could be a linguistic remnant of the Ottoman era.[[52]](#footnote-52)

One significant morpho-lexical item is the verb *ʾarāḥ* ‘went’ that is used along with regular *rāḥ*, as in *ʾarāḥ əš-šarr*, lit. ‘may the badness go away’, said when someone sneeze. This form is known in medieval Judeo-Arabic (Blau 1980:75-7, together with other peculiar verbs; Blau 2006:263), but it is also an exclusive trait of modern Judeo-Egyptian (Hary 2017:25 and fn. 52; Rosenbaum 2021:215).[[53]](#footnote-53)

Apart from the above-mentioned words, which differed from CD mainly in their articulation, there were some words and phrases apparently used by Jews only. Two related idioms were used to refer to a man or a woman that were untidily dressed and looked stupid. The first one, *šēx mášərˀa*(<*šayxu mašriqatin*), is said about a man, who has such characteristics; a woman, who has them was named *šēxa maryam*(<*šayxatun maryamu*). The ironic meaning of the first idiom derives from the combination of *šēx* ‘an elderly respected man’ with *mášərˀa* ‘balcony’, namely ‘he acts as if he were a big boss, but actually he only sits on a balcony’. As to the second idiom, it might be related to *maryam* as a nickname for a woman, who speaks a lot with men, but does not commit adultery (ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:2242).[[54]](#footnote-54) The word *būm* (f. *būme*, pl. *búwam*) in JD and in JAl (Nevo 1991:230) meant ‘bad, ugly (person or deed)’, and it is noted in some dictionaries as “Jewish” (Barthélemy 1935-1954:71, 918 s.v. يهود; Salamé & Lentin 2010:253). However, in the last reference the word is termed in the feminine only, whereas my consultants used it also in the masculine. One example from my recordings is *wēh ʿəlḗ* *šū* *būm!* ‘Oh, how bad he is!’, and it resembles very much the example brought by Salamé and Lentin (loc. cit.). Another example that is found in the materials that I gathered from my Jewish consultants again shows the usage of this word in the masculine: *ḍēf l-būm b-əšrab l-ˀahwe w-b-iˀūm* ‘a bad guest drinks the coffee and (immediately) rises (to leave)’. From the same root of *būm* the elative form *ʾabwam* ‘worse’ was derived (cf. Nevo 1991:135, 307 note 458).[[55]](#footnote-55)

An idiom that was used in JD to express amazementis *šū ṭabbo* (*yā ṛabbo*) lit. ‘what (on earth) has made him upside-down!?’ It is invariable, and used when someone was very surprised to see someone else dressed in a certain manner, goes out in a certain hour, starts to speak about a certain matter etc.[[56]](#footnote-56)Onespeaker even said that *šū ṭabbo* was *ʿarabi yahūdiyye tamām* ‘Judeo-Arabic (expression) *par excellence*,’ and that her Muslim mates in the university did not know this expression.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The Jews in Damascus had some apotropaic incantations, such as *xtǝṣṣo*(<*ʾixtaṣṣa-hu!*, lit. ‘exclude it!’), said when turning to talk about something bad after talking about something good, and vice versa.[[58]](#footnote-58) Other apotropaic phrases in JD were *barrāt l-əbyūt* ‘(may the evil be) out of (our) houses’,[[59]](#footnote-59) and (*ʾa*)*rāḥ* *ǝš-šarr* lit. ‘may the troublesome cause fade away’, said to someone who sneezes. The former idiom appears in Salamé & Lentin (2010:91) in its literal sense, and I found it in the same use on the Web too. *rāḥ* *ǝš-šarr* is apparently rare, if existing at all, in CD. It is mentioned by El-Sahli (2001:430) and by Piamenta (200:135), considering Palestinian Arabic.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Even basic words as ‘ear’ and ‘nose’ were different in JD in comparison with CD. All the consultants that I recorded use *wǝdǝn* (pl. *wdān*) for ‘an ear’. A vast majority of linguistic sources give *ʾədən* for CD, and sometimes add *dēne* (e.g., Cantineau & Helbaoui 1953:49; Cowell 1964:375; Klimiuk 2013:29; Barthélemy 1935-1954:6; Palva 1967:6; El-Massarani & Segal 1978:29, 218).[[61]](#footnote-61) Even native-speaker lexicographers of Syrian Arabic do not mention *wǝdǝn*, but only ادن/اذن, دان or دَينة (Al-Zaʿīm 2011:17, and in many entries, e.g., الحيطان إلها أدان ‘walls have ears’ p. 119, خرملي ادني ‘he pierced my ear’ p. 127; ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:902). Lentin (2009:163) claims that *ʾədən* is used by Muslims, whereas *dēne* is typically “Christian”. In JAl the word is *dān* (Nevo 1991:13, 18). In all these Syrian Arabic forms, and in most dialects of the Galilee (Behnstedt & Geva-Kleinberger 2019:107 and map 52) the historical initial *hamza* of *ʾudhnun* ‘ear’ has either been retained or elided. In the “Jewish” form, *wǝdǝn*, the historical *hamza* became *w*. This is characteristic of North-African dialects, and can be found also in some Palestinian Dialects (Driver 1925:7, 14; Badawi & Hinds 1986:930; Levin 1995:50; Behnstedt & Woidich 2011:103 and map 40. Cf. Elihay 1977:36 s.v. אֹזֶן). The *w*-form is recorded exceptionally in the Jewish dialects of Haifa and Tiberias, and Behnstedt and Geva-Kleinberger (loc. cit.) assume it to be a Maghrebi element. Anyhow, the JD form *wǝdǝn* is certainly unique in Damascus, and maybe in Syria in general.

As to *ʾən*(*ə*)*f* ‘nose’, the broad picture is a little bit more complicated. Some sources give for Damascus and western Syria the word *mənxār* as the main (or sole) form for ‘nose’ (El-Massarani & Segal 1978; Lentin 2009:125; Behnstedt & Woidich 2011:110-1 and map 42), while others give *ʾǝnf* (in various pronunciations) as the dominant urban/Damascene form (e.g., Cantineau & Helbaoui 1953:49; Cowell 1964:33; Behnstedt 1997-2000:map 314; Klimiuk 2013:67). In this contradictory situation, my research can add that one of the oldest groups in Damascus, namely, the Jews, utilized *ʾǝnf*, and not *mǝnxār*, for ‘nose’.

Some consultants used *kālīk* ‘socks’, which is not found in any dictionary. However, according to Behnstedt (1997-2000:map 379) and Behnstedt & Woidich (2011:220 and map 235), *kālīk* and *kalīk* in this sense occur in a few villages to the north and northeast of Damascus, while in Damascus itself the word for ‘socks’ is basically *žṛāb*(*e*, -*āt*, see also: Stowasser & Ani:216).[[62]](#footnote-62)

**2. Hebrew Component**

As in other Jewish Languages, JD had a Hebrew component, in various degrees of absorption.[[63]](#footnote-63) This lexical element is the one that made the main distinction between JD and CD. Some of the Hebrew words were borrowed as-is or with a slight phonological and morphological modification to fit the dialect’s rules. Other Hebrew words had undergone a deeper absorption process, and their roots even produced a verbal conjugation. As in other Jewish Languages, the Hebrew component in JD was used especially for terms in the domain of religion or as a secret language.

**2.1 The Hebrew Component in the Domain of Religion**

Most of the terms concerning the Jewish faith and Jewish rituals were in Hebrew: *bōrē ʿōlām*(<*bōrē ʿōlåm*) ‘The Creator of the World’ was the epithet of God, as in the sentence *ʾaḷḷa yərḍa ʿalē-hon, bōrē*HB *ʿōlām*HB *yərḍa ʿalē-hon* ‘May Allah be satisfied with them, may the Creator of the World be satisfied with them,’ in which the speaker used both the Arabic word ‘Allah’ and the Hebrew *bōrē ʿōlām*. This phrase was in use by the Jews in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:13, 250) and in other communities in the Middle East (Maman 2019:96, 127).[[64]](#footnote-64)

In the world of Jewish prayer and customs there were abundant Hebrew words: *ˀāhāl*(<*qåhǻl*, ‘congregation’) was the term for the congregation attending the synagogue (cf. Maman 2019:639. In Judeo-Spanish: *kāl*, see: Schwarzwald 2018:155; Bunis 2015:406, 410). The cantor, for example, was named *ḥazzān* (<*ḥazzǻn*, hence, the verb *ḥazzan* ‘to serve as a cantor’,)[[65]](#footnote-65) the “holy ark,” i.e., the cabinet that enshrines the sacred Torah scrolls, was named *hēxāl*(<*hēkǻl*), and so on. The Torah scroll, *s-sēfer tōrā* (pl. *sēfer tōrōt*),[[66]](#footnote-66) was taken out of the *hēxāl*, carried to the *tēbā*(<*tēbå*, lit. ‘a box’) ‘a platform’, and lifted up to show it to the prayers in the synagogue. The person in charge of the synagogue, the *barnās*(<*parnǻs*, ‘the Chief Executive’), would tell the *šammōš*(<*šammǻš* ‘caretaker, beadle of a synagogue,’ pl. *šammōšīm*) whom to summon to carry the Torah scroll, who shall be the readers of the Torah, etc. This articulation of the word *šammōš*, where Hebrew *qameṣ* is pronounced *ō*, is known also in JAl (Nevo 1991:55, 67; Bar-Asher 1998:222-3), and in Judeo-Italian as well (Maman 2019:735, the form *samosimmi*). A man could be invited to take a specific part in the Jewish ceremony in the synagogue by the word *xābōd*(<*xåbṓd*<*bǝxåbōd* ‘with honor’,) as in the formulae *xābōd ­kōhēn* ‘let the “cohen”(=a descendent of Aaron, brother of Moses) come’, or *xābōd žǝlyān* ‘let the member lift up the Torah scroll.’ The formula *bǝxābōd* is well known in this sense in many Jewish communities, but only Damascene Jews use it without the initial *bǝ*.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The weekly Torah portion was called *bərāšā~pərāšā*(<*påråšǻ* ‘section’.) This word was pronounced in the same way in JAl (Nevo 1991:142; Bar-Asher 1999:360-1) and in Judeo-Spanish (Schwarzwald 1985:191; Maman 2019:612 [with regard to Tétouan].)[[68]](#footnote-68) The sixth reader of the Torah on Saturdays was named *sā́mux*(<*såmū́k* ‘adjacent’,) and the one who reads the *Hafṭarah* (selective reading from Prophets) was named *mā́fṭir*(<*mafṭī́r* ‘reader of the *Hafṭarah*’.) One should pay attention to the fact that the stress in these two words is on the penultimate syllable (cf. in Judeo-Maghrebi, Maman 2019:535). In JD this stress pattern, which differs from the stress in Israeli Hebrew, is attested in other Hebrew words, e.g., *máṣṣo*(<*maṣṣǻ* ‘Passover’s unleavened bread’,) *ʿrə́bba*(<*ʿarubbǻ* ‘the day before a feast’,) *ʾḗxa*(<*ʾēkǻ* ‘the 9th of Av’,) and so forth.[[69]](#footnote-69) Another term, which was introduced by one consultant, is *məḥzāye*(<√*ḥzy* ‘to see’), which refers to silver engraved plates that were used in the synagogue to invite a member of the congregation to take a specific part in the ceremony.

The prayer shawl was called *ṭaḷḷēt*. In JAl the word was pronounced *ṭāḷēṭ* (with two long vowels, one *ḷ*, and a final emphatic *ṭ* see: Nevo 1991:142), but they also used *ṭēṣān~ṭəlṣān~ṭələsān* to denote this shawl, as I was informed by ḥalabi friends of mine.[[70]](#footnote-70) A religious undergarment with fringes on the four corners is called in JD *ʾárbaʿ bəkanfōt* (Cf. Maman 2019:79.) The original Hebrew term in Deut. 22:12 reads *ʾarbaʿ kanfōt* ‘the four corners (of the cloak)’, without the medial *bǝ*-. The phylacteries were named *t*(*ə*)*fillīm*, with a final *m*, as in other communities both in the Maghreb and the Levant (Maman 2019:767.) However, it seems that when writing this word in Arabic script, the Syrian Jews wrote it with a final *n* (Matsa 2015:257 fn. 214.) The same term was also used in the sense of ‘the age of 13,’ because it is customary in many Jewish communities that a boy on his 13th birthday commemorates his religious adulthood by donning the phylacteries.[[71]](#footnote-71)

On the doorposts of their houses, Jews fix a *məzūzā*(<*mǝzūzǻ*) ‘*Mezuzah*, a small case, which contains a parchment scroll with scriptural verses.’ Some of the speakers I recoded used the form *məžūzā*, which is unique and undocumented in any other Jewish community (cf. Piamenta 2000:261; Maman 2019:431.)[[72]](#footnote-72) Some Jews in Damascus used to wear *tsiyyōnīt~ṣiyyōnīt*(<*ṣiyyōnī́t* ‘related to Zion’), a pendant in the shape of the Star of David, on their necks (Cf. the form *ṣiyōn* in Rosenbaum 2002a:123; Maman 2019:626.)

As historic Arabic *qāf* has shifted in JD into *ˀ* (glottal stop), the Hebrew *qōf* underwent the same shift as well. Therefore, we find this shift, for example, in the words *ˀaddīš*(<*qaddī́š*) ‘*Kaddish*, a hymn praising God, that is recited during Jewish prayer services’ and *pāsūˀ* (<*påsūq*) ‘Biblical verse.’ The word *ˀaddīš* is integrated in the Jewish idiom *ḥazzān*HB *ʿam b-ǝstanna ˀaddīš*HB, literary: “a cantor who awaits to (say) *Kaddish*,” i.e., ‘a person who is anxious to make the best for himself out of the circumstances.’ This idiom was in use in other communities in the Levant as well (Rosenbaum 2021:224; Maman 2019:272).[[73]](#footnote-73)

**2.2 Hebrew Component of the Jewish Annual Cycle**

Most Jewish holidays in JD had Hebrew names. ‘New Year day’ was *rōššānā*(<*rōš haššånǻ*, but see §&&& above.) This Hebrew name was used by Egyptian Jews too (Rosenbaum 2021:222.). However, in other communities it was pronounced somewhat differently (e.g., Blanc 1964:144; Sabar 1974:210 and fn. 21; Kara 1988:129 and fn. 55; Kara 1994:134, 137; Henshke 2007;49).[[74]](#footnote-74) The Day of Atonement was named *kəppūr*(<*kippūr*,)[[75]](#footnote-75) In these holidays it is customary to blow the *Shofar*, a horn-made ritual instrument, and for this act the verb *taˀaʿ*(<*tåqaʿ*) was used. Passover was *pēsaḥ*(<*pésaḥ*,) but sometimes, especially when speaking to Muslims, the Arabic term *ʿīd l-əfṭīr* ‘the feast of unleavened bread’ was also used (see Ferguson 1961:303. Cf. Piamenta 2000:40).[[76]](#footnote-76) The Muslims were acquainted with the Jewish customs regarding Passover, and one consultant told me that the Muslims had a saying: *ʾəža l-pēsaḥHB ʿand əl-yahūd, m-əndaˀˀ l-hawāwen b-əl-əbyūt* ‘when Passover comes, the sounds of the mortar bowls are heard in the houses of the Jews.’ This refers to the Jewish custom to crash spices in mortars especially for Passover, filling the air in the Jewish quarter with the sound of chimes.[[77]](#footnote-77) Jewish Pentecost, *Tu Bishvat* and *Hanukkah* bore Hebrew names too: *šābūʿōt*, *ṭūbǝšbāṭ*[[78]](#footnote-78) and *ḥanə́kka*, respectively.

In Damascus Jews practiced the custom of *tašlīx*(<*tašlīk*,) a ritual ceremony of symbolically tossing one’s sins into a body of water. This ritual was named also by the hybrid expression *kabb* *əl-ʿavōnōt*HB ‘casting off the sins’ (cf. Rosenbaum 2021:212.) The common greeting for the Jewish holidays was the Hebrew idiom *təzkū ləšānīm rabbōt* ‘may you live for many years.’ This formula was used in other Middle-Eastern communities (Piamenta 2000:253; Maman 2019:246-7.) Three of the Four Species of plants used during the Jewish celebration of *Sukkot* were named by their Hebrew names: *ʾətrōg*(<*ʾetrōg*) ‘citron,’ *lūlāb*(<*lūlåb*) ‘ceremonial palm frond,’ and *ʿarābā*(<*ʿaråbå*) ‘willow branches.’[[79]](#footnote-79) The immersion of dishes in boiling water before Passover was called *ʾaġālā*(<*hagʿålå*.) This is similar to its name in other communities too (Maman 2019:202.) The unleavened bread for Passover was called in JD, like in JAl, *máṣṣo* (<*maṣṣǻ*, each unit was called *rāṣ máṣṣo*.)

It seems that one of the most significant commemorativedays for Damascus Jews was the 9th of Av, since its name was merged into many idioms in their language. The day itself was named *ʾēxa*(<*ʾēkǻ* ‘how?’,) after the first word in the Book of Lamentations that is read on that day. The name *ʾēxa* was embedded in some phrases known also among other Arabic-speaking Jewish communities (see, e.g., Piamenta 2000:79; Maman 2019:52-5).[[80]](#footnote-80) However, in no other community have I found a phrase like *hablet ʾēxa*HB ‘the extreme heat of *ʾēxa*,’ which describes the high temperature of the season in which this holiday occurs.[[81]](#footnote-81) Nor have I found an equivalent to a phrase such as *mətəl ʾēxa*HB *sāʿet ṭafi š-šəməʿ* ‘like *ʾēxa* when the candles were quenched,’ that means ‘in a very bad condition,’like the condition of the believers after many hours of mourning, crying, and fasting. This is an extensionof the very common saying*mətəl* *ʾēxa*HB ‘like *ʾēxa*,’ i.e., ‘very bad.’ when someone looks absolutely distressed, or if a food being served reminds someone of food of grief, like *mejadra*, then people may ask ironically, *šū, ʾəžet ʾēxa*HB*?* ‘What’s that? Has *ʾēxa* arrived?’.Another phrase with *ʾēxa* is*bass ʾēxa*HB *təži b-əš-šəte*‘as soon as*ʾēxa* arrives in the winter,’ meaning ‘this is never going to happen.’[[82]](#footnote-82) From the noun *ʾēxa* a denominative verb *ʾayyax* ‘wept, sobbed’ was derived.[[83]](#footnote-83)

The day preceding a holiday was called in JD *ʿrǝ́bba*(<*ʿarubbǻ*) or *yōm
l-ʿrǝ́bba*HB, and in construct state: *ʿrǝ́bbet*-, e.g., *ʿrǝbbet*HB *l-ʿīd* ‘the holiday’s eve’ or *ʿrǝ́bbet kǝppūr* ‘the day before *Kippur* (The Day of Atonement).’[[84]](#footnote-84)

Keeping Sabbath laws, and especially the prohibition to light fire, was characteristic of the Jewish community in Damascus, as of many other Jewish communities. However, if a desecrating of the Sabbath happened, this was called *ḥallal*(<√*ḥll*, ‘to desecrate’).[[85]](#footnote-85) The same verb was used in JAl (Nevo 1991:194; Matsa 2015:232) and in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:203), while in Yemen, as stated by Goitein (1931:359-60), *ḥallal* meant ‘to make kosher’ (from Ar. *ḥalāl*), and *ḥill* meant ‘to desecrate (the Sabbath)’.

**2.3 Hebrew Component in the Cycle of Life**

Some words in JD concerning personal events were Hebrew, such as *sandāˀ*(<*sandǻq*) ‘godfather.’ The same term was used in JAl (Nevo 1991:140) and in other Jewish languages (Maman 2019:536.) A month after the birth of the firstborn son, the ceremony of *fǝdyōn*(<*pidyōn*, also *fǝdyōn habbēn*) ‘redemption (of the son)’ was held. This pronunciation is in contrast with Askof’s (2009:130) description, which argues that the pronunciation was *bidyōn*.[[86]](#footnote-86) *fǝdyōn* is an example of altering the Hebrew original root with its Arabic cognate, while still retaining the Hebrew pattern of the word.

The next stage of a boy’s life was when he reached the age of thirteen, celebrating his becoming accountable for his own religious deeds. The hybrid term *ləbs
ət-t*(*ə*)*fillīm*HB ‘donning the phylacteries,’ or just *t*(*ə*)*fillīm*(<*tǝfillīm*/*n*)[[87]](#footnote-87) denoted two things: (1) the *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony of donning the phylacteries, reading the Torah portion, and the celebration held on this occasion, and (2) the age of thirteen (for boys). For example, I recorded the sentence *fī* *walad kān* *təfillīm*HB*-o, žabū-l-o badle* ‘there was a boy, who was celebrating his *Bar Mitzvah*; they brought him a suit’ and another example is *kənt lābes tfillīm*HB ‘(by that time) I had already worn my phylacteries’ i.e., ‘I’ve already been thirteen’. Both meanings of *tǝfillīm* were known also in other communities (Henshke 2007:92-3; Tirosh-Becker 2017:615; Maman 2019:767; Rosenbaum 2021:222).[[88]](#footnote-88) Before this significant event the boy had to prepare a *dārūš*(<*dårūš*, pl. *dawārīš*) ‘homily, sermon’ under the guidance of a Rabbi, and recite it by heart in front of the congregation. The term *dārūš* (in various pronunciations) was in use in other communities both in the Maghreb and the Levant (Piamenta 2000:252; Avishur 2001:182-4; Tirosh-Becker 2017:617 and fns. 33, 34).[[89]](#footnote-89) JD speakers, like in other communities (Maman 2019:195), had derived a denominative verb, *b-adroš* ‘I deliver a sermon’, out of this term.

The nuptial ceremony was called *ˀəddūšīm*(<*qiddūšīm*) ‘betrothal’; the couple would stand under a canopy, which was sometimes made of curtains (*parōxet*) that usually cover the front of the Holy Ark in the synagogue. The act of marriage was named *ˀaddūs*(<*qiddūš*).[[90]](#footnote-90) Before the wedding, the bride-to-be, accompanied by family women, goes to a ritual bath called *məṭbel*~*maṭbel*. Other communities, too, were using this term, although in a slightly different pronunciation (e.g., Nevo 1991:135; Piamenta 2000:83, 221; Maman 2019:441).[[91]](#footnote-91)

When a person passes away, the Jews make *məṣvā*(<*miṣwå*, lit. ‘a religious obligation’), i.e., a funeral to the Jewish cemetery. This was the term in JAl (Nevo 1991:30) and in some other Jewish communities as well (Maman 2019:479-80). The deceased person’s family then starts a period of mourning, named by the hybrid term *mǝsku ʾǝblūt*HB(<*ʾabēlūt*, lit. ‘they hold a mourning’), or by the denominative verb *mǝtʾabǝlt-īn* (cf. Avishur 2001:189; Nevo 2009:129).[[92]](#footnote-92)

**2.4 The Hebrew Component Denoting Social Groups**

As a merchants-based society, rich men in the Damascus community held a high position. Indeed, the word *ʿāšīr*(<*ʿåšīr* ‘rich man’, pl. *ʿāšīrīm*) was often mentioned by the consultants. This word was used in many other communities too (Piamenta 2000:227; Maman 2019:587-8).[[93]](#footnote-93) A prestigious status and veneration were reserved for the Rabbis, whose title *ḥāxām*(<*ḥåkåm* ‘a wise man’, pl. *ḥāxāmīm*) was attached to their forename.The word*ḥāxām*was borrowed by Arabic from Hebrew; the Hebrew plural form *ḥāxāmīm* was used by Jews only, while Muslims used this word with the Arabic f.plural suffix, namely: *ḥāxāmāt*. The title *ḥāxām* was very common among Middle Eastern and Sephardi communities (Maman 2019:286-8). Nevo (1991:55) gives for JAl also the form *ḥāxōm*, and Geva-Kleinberger (2004b:155) gives *ḥǝxām~xām* for Tiberias.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Apart from the common Arabic words like *mǝslem* ‘a Muslim’ (f. *mǝ́sǝlme*, col. pl. *ʾǝslām*), *dǝrzi* ‘a Druze’ etc., Damascus Jews used Hebrew words to denote the religious affiliation of the city’s inhabitants. A (Sunni) Muslim was called *gōy*(<*gōy* ‘a Gentile’, f. *gōyā*, pl. *gōyīm*). This was a common name for Muslims in the Arabic-speaking Jewish communities (Geva-Kleinberger 2017:33; Maman 2019:156-7, also referring to *gōy* in other Jewish languages).

A Christian man was named *ʿārēr*(<*ʿårēl* ‘uncircumcised’, f. *ʿārērtā*, pl. *ʿārērīm*).[[95]](#footnote-95) Wolfer (2007:150) writes that in the argot of the Christian goldsmiths in Damascus, which was greatly influenced by Hebrew, a Christian man was called *ʿōrēr* (cf. Barbot 1974:78), but she mistakenly connects it to *ʿarra* that is given in Barthélemy (1935-1954:520).[[96]](#footnote-96) *ʿārēr* was the word for a Christian also in JAl (Nevo 1991:41), but Maman (2019:585) mentions that in Aleppo this word denoted a Christian or a non-Jew in general. The term *ʿārēl*, in various pronunciations, usually with final *l*, was very common in Jewish languages, as given by Maman (loc. cit.).

A Shiite Muslim was referred to by the Arabic name *rāvḍi*(<*rāfiḍiyyun*, pl. *ʾarfāḍ*) and the Hebrew name *sōʿēf*<(?*såʿēf*. For the meaning see fn. 95). The name *sōʿēfi* (pl. *sōʿafīm*) for a Shiite was known also among Iraqi Jews (Avishur 2001:119-21; Avishur 2009:III:107).[[97]](#footnote-97) I could not find this word in Maman’s dictionary (2019), and I am happy to present it here.

In spite of the generally mutual appreciation between the multifaceted parts of the society, the Jews felt an inherent hostility towards them. This feeling of hostility was expressed with words derived from the Hebrew root *śnʾ* ‘to hate (Jews)’, as in the following examples: *wāḥed sōnē*HB *rāšāʿ*HB *mǝršāʿ*HB ‘one Jews-hater, a real villain’ or *w-s-sǝnʾā*HB *ˀǝwyet* ‘and the hostility (towards Jews) increased’. In Maman’s dictionary (2019:736-7) this nuance of hostility and hatred towards *Jews* in *sōnē*, *sǝnʾā* etc. is not explicitly expressed, but it is attested in Judeo-Egyptian (Rosenbaum 2002a:137).

At times, a non-Jew was referred to as *ṭāmē*(<*ṭåmē*) ‘impure’ (cf. Maman 2019:327), and a harmful person was called *mamzēr*(<*mamzēr*, f. *mamzērtā*) ‘a bustard’, as in *wāḥed sōnē*HB*, mamzēr*HB ‘one Jews-hater, a harmful man’. *mamzēr* could also refer to a policeman or any officer that could harm the Jews (cf. Maman 2019:461-2). The word *ʾīš*(<*ʾīš*) ‘a man’, when combined with another word, denoted a negative person, as in *ʾīš maḥanē*(<*ʾīš maḥanē*. lit. ‘a camp man’, see §2.5.1 below) referred to a person of the Syrian secret police, *ʾīš ṭōmē*(<*ʾīš ṭåmē* lit. ‘impure man’) ‘a filthy man’, *ʾīš nēgaʿ*(<*ʾīš négaʿ* lit. ‘man of pestilence’) ‘a dangerous man’. The feminine form *ʾǝššāye*(<*ʾiššǻ*) ‘a woman’ seems to refer to a non-Jewish woman with bad manners.[[98]](#footnote-98)

**2.5 Hebrew Component as a Secret Language Layer**

The layer of secret language that was utilized by the Jews in the security and trade contexts, was embedded with Hebrew words, as this was the easiest way to use words that were opaque to people outside of the community.[[99]](#footnote-99)

2.5.1 The Security Context

Syrian Jewry lived under a terrifying regime. For that reason, they developed a special vocabulary to hide their discourse from the authorities and the Muslim society in general. A special word in this context is *maḥanē*(<*maḥanē*) ‘a camp’, denoting the Syrian secret services or specific people known as workers of the government. For example, one consultant said about a former Syrian minister of defense Mustafa Tlass *maḥanē*HB *kbīr hād* ‘he must be a big shot in the governmental service’. It seems that *maḥanē* in this meaning was unique to Syrian Jews (in Damascus, Aleppo, and Qamishli), and was not used in this sense by Jews elsewhere.[[100]](#footnote-100)

Other Hebrew words were used to draw the attention of the listener to the presence of undesired persons. The word *ʾǝssūr*(<*ʾissūr*) ‘banning’ meant ‘stop talking about this matter’![[101]](#footnote-101) A consultant said that she warned her children not to talk in front of strangers as follows: *kənna nˀə́l-l-on ʾəssūr*HB*, ʾəssūr*HB*, hād muxābarāt, ʾəssūr*HB*, mā təḥku, ʾəssūr*HB ‘we used to tell them: *ʾəssūr*, *ʾəssūr*, this is *Mukhabarat*(=Syrian secret police), *ʾəssūr*, don’t talk, *ʾəssūr*’.[[102]](#footnote-102) The verb *sattar*(<*histīr* ‘hid’),[[103]](#footnote-103) although not as common, had the same meaning as *ʾǝssūr*, and *tḥazza!*(<*ḥåzå* ‘watched’) meant ‘watch out!’, denoting that someone mean is approaching, and that the conversation must stop immediately. *ḥazza* ‘watch out! beware!’ was one of the many Hebrew words in the argot of the Christian goldsmiths in Damascus (Barbot 1974:80).[[104]](#footnote-104) Another idiom, which had approximately the same meaning as *tḥazza* was *mi bəḥāṣēr?* “Who is in the court?” (Esth. 6:3), said when someone who is unwanted is knocking on the door. This idiom was also used by Jews in Mosul in the same meaning (Reshef 2009:24).

Some Hebrew words were referring to the Land (and State) of Israel and to the attempts to escape from Syria to the Jewish state. The Land was named *ʾēreṣ*(<*ʾéreṣ*) ‘land’, the same as by Iraqi Jews (Mansour 2011:96; Maman 2019:82. Cf. Bar-Asher 1998:315 and fn. 304). In JAl a denominative verb, *tʾōraṣ*, was derived from this Hebrew word, meaning ‘fled to Israel’ (Askof 2009:130). Another word for the State of Israel was *ʿǝbriyye* ‘the Hebrew (State)’, but this word became obsolete because of its often use in Syrian broadcasting media. The escape to Israel, which might have led to severe punishments if caught, was secretly called *tahlīx*(<*hålak* ‘went’, the verbal form is *hallax*). Apparently *hallax* was a unique Damascene word, since in Aleppo it meant ‘went’ (Nevo 2009:129). Another way to say discretely that someone had fled to Israel was the verb *bōraḥ*(<*båraḥ* ‘ran away’). According to Maman (2019:134), in JAl *baráḥu* ‘they ran away’ was the camouflage reply when asking about a family that had escaped to Israel.

At times, the phrase *bēt šēˀer*(<*bēt šéqer*, lit. ‘the house of lie’) was said especially to children, but also to non-Jews, in order to signal that the speaker’s promise or saying are of no value. The word *šēˀer* was used by Egyptian Jews in its literal sense ‘lie’ (Rosenbaum 2021:222). As far as I know, Aleppine Jews did not use *bēt šēˀer*, rather they used the hybrid phrase *šǝġǝl šēˀer*HB ‘a bluff’. In Maman’s dictionary (2019:742-4) there are many entries with the Hebrew root *šqr* ‘to lie’, but *bēt šēˀer* is not one of them, what leads to the conclusion that it was a unique Judeo-Damascene idiom.

2.5.2 Trade Context

The Jews in Damascus worked mainly in trade and different kinds of crafts. Many were cloths and fabrics merchants, others worked as carpenters, coppersmiths, goldsmiths and vendors. Their ability to utilize the Hebrew component in their language, which was opaque to non-Jewish listeners, gave the Jews advantage in their trade. For example, when two Jewish merchants saw merchandise in a Muslim shop, and one of them noticed that this merchandise is of poor quality he would praise the merchandise, inserting into his talk the word *nǝgāʿā*(<*négaʿ* ‘pestilence’+-*ā*) in order not to offend the Muslim shopkeeper.[[105]](#footnote-105) When his friend hears this word, he understands that the merchandise isn’t good, and will find an excuse not to make the deal. If an undesirable client enters a Jewish shop, and the shopkeeper wants to get rid of him, he can say to his Jewish partner *hallx*HB-*o!*(<*√hlk* ‘went’), which means ‘make him go! take him with you!’. The same word was used similarly in Judeo-Egyptian. Like in Damascus, in the Christian goldsmiths’ argot in Cairo, the Hebrew root *hlk* turned to *ʾlx* (Barbot 1974:71; Wolfer 2007:148, 151 cf. Rosenbaum 2002b:134). Other words were used to ask for the price. For example, the phrase *kāmā maʿālōt?*(<*kammå maʿalōt?*, lit. ‘how many degrees?’, taken from the Passover *Haggadah*) was used by Jews, and Christians too, to find out the gold’s price. When a Jewish merchant had an opportunity to buy merchandise at a cheap price, his fellow merchants would encourage him to do so quickly, using*ʾabbd*HB-*o!*(<√*ʾbd*, lit. ‘get it perished!, get it lost!’).[[106]](#footnote-106)

2.5.3 Modern Hebrew

Apart from the traditional Hebrew component, which have been discussed so far, in JD there are a few instances of words that were borrowed from Modern Hebrew after its revival in the end of the 19th century.[[107]](#footnote-107) The establishment of a Hebrew kindergarten in Damascus by Zionist leaders and educators brought to the lexicon of JD the word *gān*(<*gan* ‘garden’, abbr. of *gan yǝladīm*). When the children of that generation wanted to mock someone, they would say *lǝssāt-o b-ǝl-gān*HB ‘he is still in K’.[[108]](#footnote-108) This is the case also with *moʿādōn* ‘a club’, referring to the Zionist youth club.

**3. Romance Component**

A considerable number of Damascene Jews is of Iberian origin, who arrived in Syria after the Expulsion (1492).[[109]](#footnote-109) Their Iberic language, Judezmo,[[110]](#footnote-110) left a stamp on their everyday language.[[111]](#footnote-111) The specific origins of the Judezmo lexemes, whether Spanish, Portuguese, Galician, or other Iberian or Romance languages, are hard to trace.[[112]](#footnote-112) For example, one word of Romance origin in JD is *lārǝnž* ‘bitter orange.’[[113]](#footnote-113) In Spanish the relative word is *naranja* ‘an orange,’ maintaining the original initial *n* of Sanskrit *nāraṅga*. However, in Portuguese and Galician the equivalent word is *laranja*, with an initial *l*.[[114]](#footnote-114) Now, should we consider JD *lārǝnž* as of Spanish origin, displaying the very common interchange of *n* and *l* (§&&&& supra), or should we consider it to be of Portuguese or Galician origin, without any sound shift? This methodological question is deep, but for our discussion it would be enough to consider such words as Judezmo, without deciding the exact language that they were borrowed from.

Words of Iberian origin are generally absent from the vocabulary of the non-Jewish inhabitants of the city.[[115]](#footnote-115) However, even among the Jews the use of this component has significantly decreased through the centuries (Elmalih 1912:10; Arad 2009:122; Hasson 2017:16; Bunis 2018a:71).

Some of the few Judezmo words in JD were names of dishes, such as *bəstēles*(<*pasteles*) ‘cylinder-shaped backed stuffed petties’ and *mēdyas*(<*medias*, lit. ‘halves’) ‘stuffed eggplant/courgette halves’. Important data concerning these dishes and their cultural significance, including recipes, can be found in many sources that speak of JD (e.g., Banit 2009a; Mehallalati & Shemer 2006; Melamed 2016; Bunis 2018a:70, 92-6). These Judezmo words were shared with other Sephardi communities. For example, these twodishes are also found in the dialect of the Jews in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:152, 154).

Another dish with a Romance name is *kalsōnes* ‘stuffed dough cases’. Late Hakham Abraham Hamra, the last chief Rabbi of Syria, maintained, in an interview held with him by the Syrian TV in 1991, that the word *kalsōnes* is a remnant of Judeo-Spanish in the language of Damascene Jews (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKiWRscBshQ>: 49:03). In fact, *kalsōnes* is originally an Italian word, *calzone* (Bunis 2018a:93 and fn. 82, p. 94 fn. 97). *Kalsōnes* in the Levant was a dish that was related to Sephardi (“Spanish”) Jews in Syria, as pointed by Bunis (2018a:93) and Marks (2010:87). In the Bulletin of Damascene Jews Melamed (2016:36) gives the recipe for *kalsōnes* under “traditional recipes.” *Kalsōnes* is also documented in the dialect of the Jews of Tiberias (Geva-Kleinberger 2009:27 and fn. 142,) and many cooking sites on the Web say that *kalsōnes* (usually written in Hebrew קלסונס with a medial *s*, not *ts*) were a typical Jewish dish in Tiberias, Safed, Damascus, Aleppo, and Jerusalem. On the other hand, no CD dictionary mentions this kind of pastry, which may assure us that this is a “Jewish” word, unknown to non-Jews in Syria.[[116]](#footnote-116)

A small number of traditional objects had Judezmo names. *korāča*(<*coracha*) was ‘a satchel, a bag used for carrying the prayer book and shawl.’ Bunis (2018a:70 fn. 14, after Nehama. Cf. Kohen & Kohen-Gordon 2000:221) links this Judeo-Syrian word to Salonika Judezmo, but in addition to JD and JAl, this word was used in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:95) and Egypt (Rosenbaum 2021:219) as well. Late Hakham Abraham Hamra, the last Chief Rabbi of Syria, mentioned this word in a Syrian television interview from 1991 (see fn. 114) to prove the Spanish roots of Syrian Jewry. Another traditional item was *fatīko* ‘a special suit for a baby’. This is a diminutive form of Iberian *fató* ‘suit, garment, costume’.[[117]](#footnote-117) *Fató* is documented in Judezmo dictionaries in the sense of ‘a suit for a baby’ (e.g., Nehama 1977:206; Perez & Pimienta 2007:180), but the exact form *fatīko* is not recorded.

A series of words concerning marriage and relatives was also borrowed from Judezmo. These words are: *dotta*(<*dota/dote*) ‘dowry, the amount of money or list of property that the bride’s parents give to the groom’, *bēlo*(<*velo* [*de la novia*]) ‘(bridal) veil’, *kənəswēgro*(<*consuegro*) ‘in-law’, and *mēza franga*(<*mesa franca*, lit. ‘free buffet’) in reference to the stay of a newlywed groom in his wife’s parents home.

The word for ‘dowry’ in Judezmo is *dóta* (e.g., Nehama 1977:146; Hadar 2007:212), and as presented by Bunis (2018a:70), it is one of the Judezmo words that were embedded in the language of Syrian Jews. The word *dōta* was used among the Jews in Tunisia (Tobi 2019:198), and the Jews and Christians in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:55). Piamenta (loc. cit.) claims that it was borrowed from Italian.[[118]](#footnote-118) Italian is probably also the origin of *dōṭa*/*ḍōṭa* ‘dowry’ both in Syrian Christian Arabic (Grotzfeld 1965:8; El-Massarani & Segal 1978:216; ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:978, cf. Piamenta 2000:55), and in Literary Arabic (Wehr 1974:301). However, the exact JD form *dotta* with medial -*tt*- does not appear in any reference book.

*bēlo* ‘bridal veil’ (Perez & Pimienta 2007:457 s.v. *velo*) does not seem to be a Muslim term, since it is not recorded in any dictionary or book about Syria. On the other hand, *vello* is documented in the vernaculars of Jews and Christians in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:159).[[119]](#footnote-119)

*kənəswēgro* is documented in Judezmo in general (e.g., Perez & Pimienta 2007:258), but also specifically among Syrian Jews (Bunis 2018a:70). One consultant told me that “after the wedding we would say to the bride’s family *ṣerna* *kənəswēgro*JU, that is, we became in-laws”.

*mēza franga*, which in modern Spanish means ‘a table where everyone who arrives is fed, without distinction’, turned in the Sephardi tradition, including Syria, to be one of the conditions in a marriage contract (e.g., Perez & Pimienta 2007:302; Hasson 2014:25; Bunis 2018a:70 and fn. 13).[[120]](#footnote-120) The newlywed couple was accommodated in the upper room,[[121]](#footnote-121) and the groom was supplied with everything he needed. That is why the saying *ʿarīs mēza*JU *franga*JU ‘*mēza franga* groom’ was used ironically in JD, when speaking about such groom.

Apart from the Iberian stock, French also contributed words to JD vocabulary. This was caused by the enormous influence that French had in Syria during the mandate time, and because of the French high prestige educational system. Some consultants of mine even considered the use of French in everyday life to be one of the characteristics of JD.[[122]](#footnote-122) Most French words were not exclusively used by the Jews, but they are part and parcel of Syrian Arabic in general. Nonetheless, it seems that Jews preferred to use French words such as *bonjour* and *bonsoir*, whereas the Muslims used the Arabic formulas *marḥaba* ‘welcome’ and *ṣabāḥ əl-xēr* ‘good morning’. Salamé & Lentin (2010:254 s.v. بونجور) maintain that *bonjour* is used by Christians more than it is by Muslims.[[123]](#footnote-123)

The French word *l-ʾalyōns*(<*Alliance*),[[124]](#footnote-124) referring to the school that was established by the French Jewish society *Alliance israélite universelle* can be considered rather unique to JD, since it was known to *all* Jews, but not necessarily to non-Jews. This school had been operative for decades, until the Syrian authorities changed its name to *l-ʾəttiḥād l-ʾahliyye* ‘civil union school’. Nonetheless, a documentation of this name with regard to the Jewish school in Damascus by a non-Jewish source is found in Bergsträsser (1924:55 l. 9-10, written *lʾallians*), and it was known to my ḥomsi Christian consultant. One other term from the educational domain, which was probably borrowed from French, is *ʾāzīn* ‘pre-kindergarten’. Apparently, this word comes from *asile* ‘refuge’, which is short for *salle d’asile*FR ‘hall of refuge’, which was the name of the first modern educational centers for very young children in France. Although a relatively close word is attested in Judezmo (e.g., Perez & Pimienta 2007:51), it seems that *ʾāzīn*, as other terms of the educational system, penetrated JD directly from French.[[125]](#footnote-125) This word is not mentioned by Behnstedt (1996), and it was not known to my ḥomsi Christian consultant, but, surprisingly, *azīl* is noted by Abu-Haidar (1991:184, translated ‘kindergarten’) for Christian Baghdadi. Note that in JD the final consonant of this word is -*n*, whereas in Christian Baghdadi it is -*l*. Some consultants insisted that *ʾāzīn* was used in Damascus by Jews exclusively.

At times the French word was wrongly articulated, as in *sepasē*(<*laissez-passer*) ‘free pass certificate’ or *rabbēšōm*(<*robe de chamber*) ‘a loose garment worn over pajamas’ (cf. Stowasser & Ani 1964:72 s.v. ‘dressing gown’: *rōb-də-šāmbər*).

**4. Miscellanea**

Two words in JD are of obscure origin. The first, *dōti* (pl. *dōtiyye*), referred to a Druze, along with CD *dǝrzi*.[[126]](#footnote-126) The other vague word is *takmīr*, which denoted ‘thorough cleaning of the house, especially before Passover’. It has the infinitive form of form2, and was also used as a verb *kammarna l-bēt* ‘we have thoroughly cleaned the house’. All the Jewish consultants whom I recorded, regardless of age or gender, knew this word,[[127]](#footnote-127) but a Damascene Muslim consultant did not know its meaning.[[128]](#footnote-128) Moreover, *takmīr* was not only a word in the JD vocabulary, it was also used in the two other Jewish communities in Syria, namely Aleppo and Qamishli. However, I don’t know of any community outside of Syria that used this word. As to the etymology of *takmīr*, nothing firm can be said, but I can suggest some assumptions:

1. A Romance base, *kámara*(<*cámara*/*camera*, ‘room’ in Spanish or Italian, respectively) cast into the iterative verbal pattern of Arabic, resulting in *kammar*, meaning ‘(to clean the house) room by room’.
2. The Hebrew root *gmr* ‘to finish, complete’, cast, as usual, into form2 with devoicing of the *g*, and resulting in *kammar*, meaning ‘(to clean the house) completely’. Cf. *gammar*(<√*gmr*HB) ‘to finish’ in the Arabic dialects of the Jews of Tiberias (Geva-Kleinberger 2009:25).
3. Classical Arabic *kamara* ‘to cover’ (Hava 1982:665) in the intensive pattern, meaning ‘to cover (the walls) intensively (with new paint)’.

Hopefully, future evidences as to the origin of these two words will be discovered, and shed light on their etymology.

**5. Concluding Notes**

The lexical survey of Judeo-Damascene (JD) analyzed in this paper is the first of its kind. The Damascene now perished Jewish community was long neglected in the research of Jewish languages in general, and of Judeo-Arabic specifically.

Apart from its importance in lifting the veil from this undescribed dialect, the vocabulary of JD exhibits a unique communal vernacular *inside* Damascus. Its uniqueness is revealed in all three lexical components that it consists of, namely Hebrew, Arabic, and Romance languages.

The facts described in this paper completely match with Damascus’ geographical location, at the meeting point between the Syrian dialects and the more southern Palestinian and Egyptian dialects, including the Jewish dialects in these territories. However, Damascus was a cultural center of its own, so it is not surprising to find in JD lexis a large number of unique words, that are not documented in any other (Judeo-)Arabic dialect.

Unfortunately, this variant of Judeo-Arabic with its significance and historical background, is now in its last phase of existence. Therefore, the research of this dialect is extremely urgent and will further contribute to the understanding of the broad picture of both CD and modern Judeo-Arabic linguistic heritage.

**Abstract**

This article presents, for the first time, an in-depth survey of the vocabulary of Judeo-Damascene (JD), spoken by the fading Jewish community of Damascus. This description deals with the three main lexical constituent that form this variety, namely Arabic, Hebrew, and Romance. Maybe the most surprising discovery is the unique *Arabic* vocabulary in JD. Some of the Hebrew lexemes were in use in other Jewish communities, but others were unique to JD. The third component, Romance, contains words and phrases borrowed from Judezmo and French, and here, too, JD exposes some unique items. As can be seen in this article, the vocabulary of JD manifests the fact that Damascus was a cultural meeting point between the (Judeo-)Arabic dialects of Syria itself and other, more southern dialects. This article can be considered as a part of an important wave in researching the communal dialects of Syria’s capital, but also as a documentation of its Jewish community that no longer exists.

**Keywords:** Judeo-Arabic; Syrian-Arabic; Damascus-Arabic; Judezmo

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1. \* I wish to thank my consultants, and especially Hakham J.A. and Mrs. O.D., for their valuable assistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Selected phonological and morphological aspects of this variety of Damascene Arabic are surveyed in Matsa 2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The transliteration used in this paper is the common Orientalist one. The only exception is that the glottal stop that reflects Classical Arabic *hamza* is transliterated *ʾ*, whereas a glottal stop that reflects Classical Arabic *qāf* is transliterated *ˀ*. Non-Arabic words in an Arabic context were marked as follows: HB=Hebrew, FR=French, JU=Judezmo. Following the form as said by the speakers, another form, denoting the standard form in the original language, is given in brackets. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A most important source for the written Arabic language of Aleppine Jews is Cohen 1994. This compilation agglomerates many pamphlets written in Aleppo in the 1980s by late Hakham Edmond M. Cohen (1920-2007). Each pamphlet, written in a very elegant Modern Standard Arabic style, with many Hebrew words transcribed and embedded into the Arabic text, deals with several aspects of the Jewish faith and religion. Matsa (2015) examines the compilation from the linguistic point of view. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The information gathered from the first one will be referred to under ‘A Damascene Muslim consultant,’ and the information gathered from the other one will be referred to under ‘A ḥomsi Christian consultant.’ I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Jonathan Reich from the University of Cologne for his help in gaining this most valuable data from his Muslim Damascene consultant. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Even in writing, Damascus Jews had a special orthographic way to write الله, as I was shown by Hakham Jack Attar:  (قال راحمك الله, ‘saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee’, Isa. 54:10). Perhaps this orthographic feature goes back to ancient Jewish practices of writing God’s names in Hebrew, see: Yeivin 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Hebrew name *sukkōt* was not in common use in JD, as explained by one of the consultants: *b-əl-ʿəbrāni ʿīd sukkōt*HB. *bass ləḥna kənna nˀūl l-əmḍaḷḷe, ʿīd l-əmḍaḷḷe, mšān yaʿni əž-žīrān,
l-ʾəslām tabaʿ-na yəʿrfu ʾənno ʿīd l-əmḍaḷḷe ʾəža ʿand əl-yahūd* ‘In Hebrew it is the Feast of *Sukkot*, but we used to say *l-əmḍaḷḷe*, the Feast of *l-əmḍaḷḷe*, in order to let our Muslim neighbors know that the Feast of *l-əmḍaḷḷe* has begun for the Jews.’ Cf. Ferguson 1961:303. In other neighboring Jewish dialects, this holiday had other names: *ʿīd əssəkka* in Baghdad (Blanc 1964:144), *sukkót* in Jerusalem and Tiberias (Piamenta 2000:15; Geva-Kleinberger 2009:22), *ʿid l-ʿorš* in other communities in the Galilee, including Tiberias (Henshke 2017:326-7. Cf. Elihay 1977:348 s.v. סֻכָּה,) and in Jerusalem (Piamenta 1979:253). In Judeo-Tunisian: *ʿīd ləžrīd* (Tobi 2019:199) but in the Maghreb also *sukka, səkka* (in various articulations, Henshke 2007:314-5; Chetrit 2012:564). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In Arabic in general *fawwar* means ‘to boil’, so a non-Jew could mistakenly understand the Jewish *fawwr-o* ‘give him *Purim* money!’ as ‘boil him!’. On the phenomenon of Arabic verbs that were derived from Hebrew and have a different meaning in another culture see, e.g., Piamenta 2000:81-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It seems that a misprint has occurred in the example taken from a Jewish woman from Aleppo, and it should be read *fūríyye* instead of *furríye*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Not only that *purím* (in various pronunciations) referred to the Holiday’s name in some communities, it also meant ‘*Purim* money’. In Greece, Romaniote Jews used the word *purimyátika* for ‘*Purim* Money’. Cf. *purimlīk* in Jerusalem (Piamenta 2000:48). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In some medieval Islamic sources, especially from Egypt, this Feast is called عيد الفوز‘festival of victory’ (e.g., Al-Nuwayri (d. 1332) p. 185; Al-Qalqashandi (d. 1418) vol.2:427-8). In modern Egypt it is brought by Farag (1918:145), who was a Karaite intellectual in the 20th century. Nemoy (1976:104) translates Farag’s phrase as ‘festival of deliverance,’ confirming that the reading *al-fawz* is correct and that this name refers to *Purim*. عيد الفوزappears also in Qasem 1993:77, who states that this Holiday is named also البوريم. Since in the books of Al-Nuwayri and Al-Qalqashandi there are several misprints, no doubt that عيد الفوزis also a misprint of عيد الفور. However, Prof. G. Rosenbaum had kindly informed me that Egyptian Jews *do not* use *ʿīd l-fōz* nor *ʿīd l-fūr* (cf. Hary 1992:137-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. One consultant used *waraˀ l-ḥǝblās*(<*waraq l-ḥiblās*<*ḥabb l-ʾās*) ‘myrtle leaves’. For *ḥǝblās* as the Syrian name of this plant see: Issa 1930:122 s.v. M(yrtus) communis; Al-Zaʿīm 2011:99. On the various ways to translate the Hebrew word (and given name) *Hadas*(*sah*) ‘myrtle’ in Maghrebi and Levantine Judeo-Arabic see: Tirosh-Becker 2006:339-342. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *ˀabbīle* (also *ʾabbīle*) is a Damascene word, see: Al-Massarani & Segal 1978:22, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The stanzas are taken from a longer ironic poem, called *badlet Hāmān* ‘Haman’s suit’. There is also a poem called *badlet Mordexay* ‘Mordechai’s suit’ that praised Mordechai. The texts of these two poems were handed to me by Hakham Jack Attar, to whom I am most grateful. The stanza *hāt šaʿra mən daˀn-ak ta-xayyeṭ* *ǝt-tāsūme* ‘give me one hair from your beard so that I’ll fix the shoe’ in Damascus was a line in a sarcastic Muslim and Christian song aimed against the *Jews* (Barthélemy 1935-1954:918 s.v. يهود). For descriptions of Purim festival in Damascus see: Kalash 2005; Hasson 2011:55. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In Beirut ‘17th of Tammuz’ was named *ʾēxa l-izġīre* ‘little 9th of Av’, cf. Blau 2006:380 s.v. صَوْم. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In medieval Judeo-Arabic, the word *ʿaks* can mean ‘misery’, see: Blau 2006:449. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In Gabès the term is mainly used by women. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Two consultants of mine argued that they did not use the Hebrew word *šabbāt* for security reasons. Unlike (Israeli) Hebrew *šabbát*, *sabǝt* is grammatically masculine, thus, for example *ṭəleʿ s-sabət* ‘Sabbath is over’ rather than *ṭəlʿet s-sabət*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The Hebrew term is *mōṣǝʾē šabbāt*. A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not understand the meaning of *lēlet l-ʾaḥad*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A ḥomsi Christian consultant understood the general meaning of greeting, but did not relate it to any specific time. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Grammatically, *knīs* is feminine, as in *kān ʿan-na knīs ʾəsm-a knīs ər-raˀˀi* ‘we had a synagogue, which (f.) name was *r-raˀˀi* synagogue’. *knīse*(<*kanīsatun*) was ‘a church’, as in *rəḥna
la-ʿand-on ʿa-l-ʿars ʿa-l-əknīse* ‘we went to them, to the wedding in the church’. In the Jewish dialects of the Galilee both *knīs* and *knīse* meant ‘a synagogue’. However, the Druze in liBqēʿa (Peqiʿīn) use *knīse* for ‘synagogue’, while in other Palestinian dialects *knīse* denoted, like in JD, ‘a church’ and *knīs* denoted ‘a synagogue’ (Elihay 1977: 73, 212; Levin 2005:260; Geva-Kleinberger 2009:15, 16). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. As far as I know, this word is pronounced *ʿaraqčīn*, and see: Yosef 2005:140. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. It is interesting that among the Christians in Lebanon (*ʿīd əž-*)*žəlyān* is the name of the Feast of the Transfiguration. Féghali (1918:71 and fn. 1) states that this Syriac(-Hebrew) name has changed to a more Arabic form, namely *ʿīd it-tželli*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Goitein writes it in Hebrew letters. In the Dictionary of Judeo-Yemenite on the website of the Association for the Promotion of the Society and Culture of Yemenite Jews (<https://teman.org.il/content/9125>) the Hebrew transcription can be read as *mxawwaṭ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cf. Maman 2019:436 s.v. מַחֲוֶה. A consultant of mine said that in the past this object was called in JD *mǝḥzāye* (from Hebrew-Aramaic √*ḥzy* ‘to see’), but later it was named *dallāle*. It is worth noting that in Arabic *dallāle* means ‘middlewoman, matchmaker’. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This usage is found also in several places in Cohen 1994 (e.g., pp. 36, 74.) In Baghdad the term was *qām ʿa-l-sefǝr*HB lit. ‘he stood on the book’, see: Yosef 2005:283. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. About the use of *ṭālaʿ* and *ṭallaʿ* in Damascus see: Lentin 2009:146. In my corpus *ṭālaʿ* in the sense ‘to take out’ was attested not only with regard to Torah scrolls. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. Piamenta 1979:251. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. A Muslim woman, Miss Nabha ṭarbūš, who lived in the Jewish Quarter among the Jews between 1988 and 1995, wrote in her memories كانوا يأكلون اللحوم والألبان ولكن لا يخلطونها ‘(The Jews) used to eat kinds of meat and dairy food, but did not mix them’. Note that she used *luḥūm* for ‘meat’, rather than the “Jewish” term *zafaṛ* (cf. Elihay 1977:84 s.v. בָּשָׂר). A ḥomsi Christian consultant maintained that *zafaṛ* means a trace of animal food. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. In the Jewish newspaper *al-ʿālam l-ʾisrāʾīliyy*, which was published in Beirut, but was deeply associated with Syrian Jewry, one can find many advertisements and news items concerning circumcision parties and circumcisers, e.g., issue 668 (21/4/1940) p. 19, and issue 359/360 (4/1/1946), p. 12. In Harel (2009:273) there is an invitation to حفلة ختان ‘a circumcision party’ held in Aleppo in 1987. ʿAbd l-Raḥīm’s definitions for the colloquial entries طَهّر and طَهُوْر (2012:1551(, make use of words from the elevated register of Classical Arabic √*xtn*. Cf. Elihay 1977:257 s.v. מִילָה; El-Sahli 2001:413. In certain communities in Algeria Jews used the “elevated” Christian French words for Jewish events, including ‘circumcision’ (Tirosh-Becker 2017:614). Cf. Maman 2019:444 s.v. (אצלך) במילה, on the distribution of √*mwl*HB, √*ṭhr* and √*xtn* in different Jewish communities. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. A ḥomsi Christian consultant understood this term literally, without saying anything about its connection to a certain ceremony. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. A Damascene Muslim consultant said that the Muslim celebration when a girl is born is called *mūled*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A consultant of mine claimed that the Muslim greeting for a new house was not *ˀdūm-o xēr*, but *manzel əmbārak* (cf. Ferguson 1961:272; Salamé & Lentin 2010:105). When I searched for قدومو خير on the Web, the few results that were retrieved contained the verb يكون as in انشالله يكون اوباما قدومو خير عالعالم ‘God willing, may Obama’s arrival be a good sign for the world’. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. One consultant of mine used *ḥaṭṭ* ‘put’. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. On the haggling character of the bargain before the wedding among the Jews in Syria, see: Aviv 2007:20; Banit 2009b:244. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For *ˀōl*(<*qawlun*, lit. ‘saying’) ‘oath’ in Damascus, see: Bloch & Grotzfeld 1964:212). A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not know the meaning of this phrase. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The meaning ‘flowers’ for *škūl* is not clearly documented for Syrian Arabic, nor for Arabic in general, but see: ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:1358, and especially Elihay 1977:416 s.v. פֶּרַח. A ḥomsi Christian consultant misunderstood it as a plate of various (*ʾaškāl*) pastries. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cf. the terms *šəbbat əttəṣdīr* and *mṣəddra* in Judeo-Tunisian (Tobi 2016:201). I did not find the term *ṣǝdǝr ḥammām* in the dictionaries or on the Web, but I did locate *baqğat ḥammām* ‘a public bath kit’, which probably means the same as *ṣədər ḥammām* (Cf. Piamenta 2000:57). *ṣǝdǝr* in this context apparently refers to a large oval copper plate, that was a part of the kit, and named sometimes طاسة (cf. ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:1434, although according to him, this plate is used for eating and not for bathing; Blau 2006:365). A Damascene Muslim consultant did not know the term *ṣǝdǝr ḥammām.* [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Indeed, the phrase تشوفهم/تشوفوهن عرسان is very little found in posts written by non-Jews on the Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. According to ʿAbd l-Raḥīm (2012:1450-1) the verb صَمَد and the infinitive صَمْد have a slightly different meaning in the colloquial Arabic of Syria, but they both refer to exhibiting things related to wedding. Cf. Barthélemy 1935-1954:445, referring to exhibiting relics in the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The fact that *ʿabra* does not appear in ʿAbd l-Raḥīm’s dictionary may suggest that it was not used by Muslims. A Damascene Muslim consultant did not know the term *ʿabra*. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Salamé & Lentin (2010:90) claim that *barriyye* is obsolete, and has been replaced by *tərbe*, *maqbara*, or *žabbāne*. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. When somebody buys a resting place, while he is still alive, they called it *qəbūrā*́(<*qǝbūrå*HB), cf. *keburá* in Tétouan (Maman 2019:634). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. A ḥomsi Christian consultant assumed that it means the bread baked in memory of the deceased. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Barthélemy does not mention *lārǝnž*. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. It is noteworthy that in Portuguese (and other Iberian languages) this word (in the sense of ‘an orange’) is pronounced *laranja*, with *l*. Cf. Issa 1930:51 s.v. C(itrullus) aurantium. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Researching CD is out of the scope of my work. Therefore, for this matter I relied on the most renownedlinguistic sources. Nonetheless, these sources, however quoted and authoritative, might give only a partial picture of CD. For example, Prof. Jérôme Lentin has kindly informed me that, to the best of his knowledge, for the word ‘ten’ the form in Damascus is always *ʿašra*, although he is aware of the multiple sources that bring *ʿašara*. The same with the word ‘rich’- Prof. Lentin has informed me that as far as he knows, *zangīn* is very common in Damascus, although he is aware of the fact that many sources bring *zangīl*. Note that he himself brings *zǝngīl* in his article. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Bloch and Grotzfeld do not mention *narbīš*. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Al-Massarani and Segal mark بَرْبِيش as a Damascene form. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. One of my Jewish consultants even denied the use of *barbīš*. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. A ḥomsi Christian consultant pronounced *narbīž*. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *falān* is mentioned in Barthélemy (1935-1954:622). His example *falān ǝlflēni* demonstrates *ʾimāla*, so it is probably a non-Damascene example. Other sources (e.g., Grotzfeld 1964:52; Grotzfeld 1965:25, 166; Stowasser & Ani 1964:229 s.v. ‘such and such’; Al-Massarani & Segal 1978:380; Klimiuk 2013:84, and others) do not mention *falān* at all. The “vowelless” form *flēn* was used in JAl (Nevo 1991:5). However, Arnold (2010:433, sentence 5) brings *falān* quoting a Jew from Iskenderun, and Behnstedt & Geva-Kleinberger (2019:97, 175) give it inadvertently, in an example from the Druze village of Yanūḥ in the Galilee. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. This form is also attested in medieval Muslim manuscripts from Egypt from the beginning of the 17th century CE onwards, see: Blanc 1974:215 and fn. 36; Zack 2009:100. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. A Damascene Muslim consultant did not know the idiom *šēxa Maryam*, but he recognized *šēx mášərˀa*, which he pronounced a little differently, though. A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not know the meaning of *mašǝrˀa*, but from the connotation given he understood that the meaning of th idiom is ‘boss.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. In Syrian Arabic *būm*(*e*), and derived forms such as the verb *bawwam*, are usually related to bad luck or ugly face, see: Geva-Kleinberger 2004a:274, 300 s.v. *šml*; ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:433; Klimiuk 2013:32. In JD it referred also to bad deeds and manners of a person. A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not know the meaning of *būm*. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. A Damascene Muslim consultant knew this idiom and its meaning, and recognized it as a Jewish idiom (*masal yahūdi*). On the Web, I was able to find only a few references to the rhyming phrase شو طبو ياربو. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not recognized the idiom. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. This idiom appears in Hebrew letters in Menashe 2020:12. One consultant said that *xtǝṣṣo* is equivalent with the idiom *kəšš barra w-bʿīd*, which is known in Syrian Arabic. For example, on a Facebook page called جمل شامية ‘Damascene phrases’

[(https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2982903865152732&id=118870668222747&set=a.118892018220612&locale=ar\_AR](%28https%3A//www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2982903865152732&id=118870668222747&set=a.118892018220612&locale=ar_AR), retrieved 22 September 2024) كش برا وبعيد is explained: جملة تقال أثناء الحديث عن شخص مريض أو صفة معيبة يملكها شخص ما ( بقصد التمني أن لا يحدث للمتكلم مثله) ‘A phrase that is said when speaking of a sick man or of an unpleasant character that someone has, and the speaker wishes that this will not happen to him.’ Cf. Piamenta 2000:106, for Jerusalem. A ḥomsi Christian consultant assumed that *xtǝṣṣo* means “that he or they have specialized in a certain field (*ʾixtiṣāṣ*).” [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Cf. the Judeo-Italian idiom *fora* *sia lo male da casa nostra* ‘may the evil be out of our house’ brought by Ryzhik 2022:283. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. The ordinary equivalent in CD for ‘God bless you!’ is *yarḥámuka ḷḷāh* (Stowasser & Ani 1964:105 s.v. ‘God’.) [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. ادن for ‘ear’ in Damascus is documented as early as the 18th century, see: Moscoso García 2017:178. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. The word *kālīk* was probably back-formed from *lakālīk*, pl. of *laklūk* ‘wool sock’.
*laklūk/lakālīk* is recorded in Behnstedt 1997-2000:map 379, and in many sites on the Web. In Palestinian Arabic the word *kalkūl* (pl. *kalākīl*) means ‘a small woolen baby shoe’, see: El-Sahli 2001:107. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Many scholars specifically refer in this context also to the Aramaic elements in Jewish languages (see, e.g.: Morag 1999:39 ff.; Morag 2001; Bunis 2018a:96-98; Schwarzwald 2018:154 ff.). In my opinion, although JD has a few Aramaic elements, when discussing JD in general it is unnecessary to specifically talk about “the Hebrew *and Aramaic* words/elements.” This is because, as said, these elements are very few. Likewise, we don’t have to regard *sandāˀ* ‘godfather’ (see: §&&&) as a Greek element in JD, although it was (probably) introduced into Hebrew through Greek. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Maman’s synoptic dictionary is a real treasure for researchers of Jewish languages, and especially Judeo Arabic. As any dictionary, even this huge dictionary is incomplete, and as far as the dialects spoken by the Jews in Syria, this incompleteness is much felt. JAl terms are seldom mentioned, and JD terms are totally absent. I am glad to input my contribution on the Hebrew words in JD to the data that is found in the fascinating work of Prof. Maman. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. A ḥomsi Christian consultant connected this verb to Arabic √*ḥzn* ‘to be sad’. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. This plural form was used also in JAl, see: Nevo 2009:129. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See: Maman 2019:111, 359-61. A friend of mine, a second-generation descendent of a Judeo-Baghdadi family, inattentively told me, that in the synagogue that he used to go to when he was a child, the older Iraqi attendees used the form *xabṓd* in the same meaning as that of JD. However, Dr. Assaf Bar-Moshe, whose expertise is Judeo-Iraqi, kindly told me that he doesn’t know the form *xabṓd* or its variations. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. It is noteworthy that Jews in Aleppo used to write this word بيراشا, thus expressing their actual pronunciation (Cohen 1994:137, 145; Matsa 2012:157; Matsa 2015:258). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. On this phenomenon in Judeo-Arabic see: Henshke 2007:68-77; Bar-Asher 2010:153-4; Mansour 2011:95. In Judeo-Egyptian the stress of some of these examples is on the last syllable, *samúx*, *mafṭír*,*ʿurubbá*, Rosenbaum 2021:222, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The pronunciation *ṭaḷḷēt* with -*ē*- (rather than -*ī*-) is assumed to be the original, see: Berggrün 1995:79-80. This pronunciation is found also in other Jewish languages, see: Maman 2019:327. My parents, who are Romaniote Jews from Greece, pronounced this word *talét* (pl. *taletyót*.) However, in Jerusalem and in parts of Tunisia it is pronounced with -*ī*-, see: Piamenta 2000:13, 256 s.v. *ṭll*; Hanshke 2007:248. The plural form of the “ḥalabi” word *ṭəlṣān*, namely طيالس, is mentioned in a report about thefts from synagogues in Aleppo published in the Jewish Lebanese newspaper العالم الاسرائيلي (‘The Israelite World’, issue 668, 21/4/1940 p. 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See §2.1 supra. On the historical and religious background of this ceremony, named also *Bar Mitzvah*, see: Sabar 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. In several Arabic dialects, especially in the Maghreb, dissimilation, assimilation, and mutual interchange of *z/s*-*ž/š* have been noted (see, e.g., Cantineau 1960:59-61; Fischer & Jastrow 1980:50, 252-253). Dissimilation of sibilants in the Levant is also known, but to a much lesser degree then in the Maghreb, see: Garbell 1958:327. However, evidence from the 19th century indicate for CD the change of *ž* into *z* and of *š* into *s* in a process of *assimilation* (Lentin 2018:175.) Interpreting *mǝžūzā* as a case of *dissimilation* is not likely, since in JD only in *saž*(*a*)*ra* ‘a tree’ do sibilants dissimilate from each other (CD: *šažara*~*sažara*, Classical Arabic: *šağaratun*), whereas in other words that contain two sibilants, e.g., *žēš* ‘army’, *šammōš*HB(<*šammǻš*) ‘caretaker, beadle of a synagogue’, *šərəš* ‘root’, *žāž* ‘chicken’ the original sibilant consonants remain unaffected. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The crossroadof *Tallet il-ḥžāra* and *il-Gadaʿ* street in the Jewish Quarter in Damascus, was named *Tallet il-ˀAddīš* (lit. ‘the hill of the *Kaddish*’), because it was a stopping place for the funerals, where a *Kaddish* prayer was recited (see: Kalash 2000:26.) [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. My parents, Romaniote Jews from Greece, pronounced it *rososaná*. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. I did not encounter the pronunciation *kǝbbūr*. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. A Jewish woman from Beirut pronounced the Arab name of Passover *ʿīd ǝl-fǝṭǝr* (Issachar-Glosschneider 2004:25 sentences 1, 2, and more, p. 49), as if it was the same as the Muslim feast *ʿīd
l-fiṭr* ‘Holiday of Breaking the Fast.’ The name عيد الفطر (also transcribed: *Aid il Phtyre*, maybe meant to be عيد الفطير) for the Jewish feast of Passover appears as early as 1794 in Russell’s report about the Jews of Aleppo, see: Russell 1794:66 fn. 18. A more recent use of فطير in Judeo-Syrian Arabic can be found in a report of the Jewish Communal Committee of Damascus from 1943 (<https://uli.nli.org.il/permalink/972NNL_ULI_C/4upfj/alma99484232708422>, p. 3, where *Matzos* are called خبز الفطير,) and in a modern Passover Haggadah translation made by R. Isaac l-Alou (Aleppo/Israel), see: Matsa 2016:108, 112-3 and fns. 36, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. This atmosphere is described, for example, in Shemer & Hasson 2008:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. In JAl *ʿīd ǝğğār*(<Ar. *ʿīd l-ʾašğār*) ‘Arbor feast’ (Nevo 1991:21; Matsa 2015:263). The children in Damascus used to celebrate this festival with grab bags (*kīs* *ṭūbǝšbāṭ*HB) filled with fresh fruits, sweets, and other presents that they collected from their family members and neighbors. The way of requesting the presents was by saying *ṭūbǝšbāṭ*HB,*ḥǝll l-kīs w-ʿṭī-na* ‘It’s *Tu Bishvat*, untie the bag and give us.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. One consultant used the plural form *lūlābīm*, whereas another used *lūlābōt*. This last consultant called the citron *yətrōg* and *lēmōne* ‘a lemon.’ It is worth noting that in Cohen (1994:80) the names of the Four Species are written اتروك ولولاب وآس وعارابا, which shows that Cohen, too, used Hebrew names for just three species, while the fourth, the myrtle, was named by its Arabic name آس. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. It should be noted that some of the Damascene consultants were not aware of the name *tšəʿbōb*(<*tišʿå bǝʾåb* ‘the 9th of Av’), which was used in JAl for this holiday. On this name see: Nevo 1991:55, 175; Bar-Asher 1998:225; Matsa 2015:259 and fn. 230, and cf. Piamenta 2000:79. According to *Shaar Binyamin* site on the Web, which is dedicated to the traditions and customs of the Damascus community, when the Jewish months of Tammuz and Av were mentioned in writing, they were customarily accompanied with the Hebrew acronym תיה"ל, which means ‘may it become a merry Holiday’. When mentioned in speaking the Arabic formula *tǝˀleb la-ʿīd* (idem) was added. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. For *hable* in the sense of ‘extreme heat’ see: ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:2526. A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not know the meaning of this phrase. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. In other Arabic-speaking communities we find *ʿām ʾīxa* and *sǝnt exá* (see: Maman 2019:54), both meaning literally ‘the year of *ʾēxa*,’, but pragmatically they have the same meaning as the JD phrase *bass ʾēxa*HB *təži b-əš-šəte*. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Cf. Bar-Asher 1998:213, 267 fn. 53; Bar-Asher 2010:241, about JAl. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. One consultant whom I recorded used the Muslim term *waˀfet l-ʿīd*, but she was corrected by her older aunt to *ʿrǝbba*. For JAl, cf. the term جمعة (e.g., جمعة الفور ‘Eve of Purim’, in Cohen 1994:120.) On *ʿrǝbba* (and other variations of this word) in Judeo-Arabic and other Jewish languages see: Goitein 1931:358; Ben-Shammai 1992, especially p. 132; Avishur 1995; Bar-Asher 1998:317-20, 451 fn. 2; Avishur 2001:133-9; Geva-Kleinberger 2017:35; Maman 2019:582, 584. In Aleppo and ʿĀna (western Iraq) the Jews used the Arabic word *ğumʿa*, as mentioned by Avishur (1995:341) and Matsa (2015:263 and fn. 262.) My parents, Romaniote Jews from Greece, used *arbá*, as in *arbá*HB *apó rososaná*HB ‘Jewish New Year’s Eve.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. In Arabic in general *ḥallal* means ‘to analyze’, so a non-Jew may not understand the Jewish phrase *ʿam bǝ-ḥállǝlu s-sabǝt* ‘they desecrate Sabbath’. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. On Hebrew *p* that shifts into *f* in Judeo-Arabic see: Kara 1994:125; Bar-Asher 1998:214 fn. 30; Henshke 2007:403; Matsa 2015:256. On this term in other communities see: Maman 2019:598. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Note the -*m* ending, unlike the common Israeli Hebrew -*n*. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Cf. *ṣiṣít* in some communities in the Maghreb (Maman 2019:627). The form *təfillīm*HB*-o* in the example is similar to an example brought by Blau (1999:141) from medieval Judeo-Arabic. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. The plural form was usually built with the Hebrew plural morpheme -*īm*, whereas in JD we see an Arabic broken plural form. Another consultant said that the plural form of *dārūš* was *mǝdrāšīm*(<*midråšīm*), and that there was also the word *dǝrāšā*(<*dǝråšå*, pl. *dərāšōt*). In a recording ([www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL\_MUSIC\_AL990002269450205171/NLI](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cofra%5CLibrary%5CContainers%5Ccom.apple.mail%5CData%5CLibrary%5CMail%20Downloads%5CE21AEFAC-E691-4DCF-ACEF-CCF37E4010E5%5Cwww.nli.org.il%5Che%5Citems%5CNNL_MUSIC_AL990002269450205171%5CNLI)) of Hakham Yosef Dana, one of Damascus’ last rabbis, he is heard saying in Hebrew *dərāš*(<*dǝråš*) and *darūšē spīdōt*(<*dǝrūšē spīdōt*) ‘sermons, grief homilies’. Some texts containing such sermons can be seen on *Shaar Binyamin* site on the Web (<http://www.shaar-binyamin.com>) commemorating the traditions and customs of the Damascus community. They are written in cursive Hebrew letters (*nuṣṣ qalam*), but some words in Arabic letters can be found, as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. In JD *ˀaddūs* meant also ‘blessing on the wine,’ cf. Nevo 1991:134; Piamenta 2000:82, 232. As already been mentioned concerning *fǝdyōn* (above), *ˀaddūs* too has the Hebrew pattern of *qiddūš*, but the Hebrew root, that ends with *š*, has been arabicized to *s*. The Hebrew *š* in JD is usually preserved, as in *ḥāšūb* ‘distinguished’, *šammōš* ‘caretaker’ and others. For various opinions on this question see, *inter alia*, Friedlaender 1902:90; Blanc 1964:114; Nevo 1991:134; Hary 2009:150, 151; Blau 2017:216 Rosenbaum 2021:223. A rare video clip from the 1980s shows late Hakham Abraham Hamra conducting a wedding ceremony in Damascus (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90YZxnIF58k>). A ḥomsi Christian consultant knew that *ˀaddūs* means a religious service. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Though *mǝṭbel*~*maṭbel* has an Arabic form, the root *ṭbl* is certainly Hebrew, since in Arabic √*ṭbl* has a completely different meaning (‘drum’ etc.). For a description of the Jewish wedding in Damascus see: Aviv 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. The transitive verb *ʾablat* and its synonymic phrase *massak-o* *ʾǝblūt*HB lit. ‘made him hold mourning rituals,’ meant that the family’s friends together with the grieving family perform symbolic acts and rituals concerning the situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Both male and female consultants of mine used this word, and usually added after it the Arabic equivalent *zangīn*. According to Maman 2019:587 top, in ʿAmarah (south-eastern Iraq) *ʿāšīr* was in use only by men, whereas women used *zangīn*. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Only sporadically did my consultants use *rāb*(<*råb* ‘rabbi’). Those in the USA used sometimes *rabbāy*, and when one of them referred to late Abraham ḥamra, the last chief Rabbi of Damascus, he called him *š-šēf rabbāy tabaʿ-na* ‘our chief Rabbi.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Note the Aramaic feminine ending -*tā*. In my corpus the form *ʿārērā*, with the Hebrew feminine ending, was noted, too. Cf. the Hebrew ending in *ʿarerā* / *ʿarila* among Egyptian and Libyan Jews respectively in Rosenbaum 2021:228; Bar-Asher 1998:225. One consultant used *ʿārērī*, apparently because she did not remember the correct form, but cf. Blanc 1964:144 and Avishur 2009:III:236, who gives *ʿarēli*. Avishur even stresses that this form in Iraq was more common than *ʿarēl*. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. *ʿarra* ‘a stranger (to a tribe), an outsider’ is a cognate of Hebrew *ʿarīrī* and not of *ʿårēl*. Cf. also Féghali 1918:45. The Arabic cognate of Hebrew *ʿårēl* is *ʾaġral*. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. As Avishur (loc. cit.) maintains, this peculiar word is based on Ps. 119:113, sometimes translated as ‘double-minded people,’ ‘hypocrites’ or ‘vain thoughts.’ Note that the Judeo-Iraqi forms in *sōʿēfi* and the aforementioned *ʿarēli* end with a vowel, whereas the Damascene forms end with a consonant. The word *sōʿafīm* alongside *ʾarfāḍ* ‘Shiites’ appears in a recording of Hakham Yosef Dana, one of Damascus’ last rabbis (above, fn. 87). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. The ending -*āye* in CD is a regular reflex of Classical Arabic -*ātun* (spelled -اة), e.g., *ḥamā́tun* ‘mother-in-low’>*ḥamāye*. In *ʾǝššāye*, the *Hebrew* feminine ending -*ā́* was confused with the Arabic one, yielding *ʾǝššāye*. In the argot of the Christian goldsmiths in Damascus, which was heavily influenced by Hebrew, ‘a woman’ was *ʾəššo* (Barbot 1974:78, 80 and discussion on p. 82; Wolfer 2007:150). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. A profound survey of secret languages in the Arabic-speaking world can be found in Wolfer 2007. On pp. 145-52 she describes the secret argot of the Christian goldsmiths in Damascus, which was heavily influenced by Hebrew. See: also Bar-Asher 2016:134-5. When the Palestinian refugees came to Syria and dwelt in the Jewish quarter in Damascus, the opportunity to use Hebrew words as a secret language lessened, because they knew Hebrew to some extent. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Maybe the negative meaning of *maḥanē* developed from numerous Biblical verses, where it refers to the hostile army camps of the enemies of the Israelites, e.g., Ex. 14:20; Judg. 4:17; 1Sam. 28:4, or to a sudden fear or danger, e.g., Ezek. 1:24; Ps. 27:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. The word was accompanied with a gesture of biting the lower lip. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. In Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic *ʾaṣṣar*(<√*ʾsr*) meant ‘to ban s.th. due to religious reasons’ (Mansour 2011:92). Cf. Maman 2019:74-5, who brings only *ʾåsūr*, but not *ʾissūr*, again, in the halachic meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Although √*str* is also found in Arabic, in Syrian Arabic there is no verb *sattar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Another meaning, namely ‘to show’, in this argot is brough by Wolfer (2007:147). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Although the word *nǝgāʿā* is a composition of two Hebrew elements, it does not exist in “regular” Hebrew. The method of artificially adding the Hebrew feminine suffix -*ā* to a noun, in order to make it feminine, is a common method in many Jewish languages. See, e.g., Goitein 1931:363; Henshke 2007:91; Rosenbaum 2021:212; Maman 2014:202. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Some consultants said that the meaning was ‘hit him!’, and see: Bar-Asher 1998:165; Maman 2019:27 meaning 5. The other meanings in Maman (loc. cit.) reflect the essential meaning of √*ʾbd* ‘to lose’ in Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Needless to say, that we do not include in this discussion Modern Hebrew words that were adopted *after* the Jews emigrated to Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. One consultant used the word *gān*, but later on he denied the usage of this word in JD. Another speaker used *gān*, but was “corrected” by his son to use *ḥaḍāne*. This Modern Hebrew word was found also in the writings of a Jewish intellectual in Libya by the end of the 19th century, see: Maman 2014:47. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. The main synagogue in Damascus was named *l-ʾǝfrānž* ‘the Europeans,’ in reference to the Jews that arrived from Western Europe, especially from the Iberian Peninsula and Italy. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. On the many names for the language of former Iberian Jews, see: Schwarzwald 2018:145; Bunis 2018b:185-187. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. In this paper I will not discuss the proper names of Romance source that were in use inside the Jewish community of Damascus. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. On the admixture of the Iberian element in “Judeo Spanish” see, e.g., Schwarzwald 2018:150. On the Portuguese substrate in Judeo Spanish, see: Quintana 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. On this word see: §&&&& above [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. For the many Iberian forms of this word, some with *n*- and some with *l*-, see: Corriente 2008:347. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Behnstedt (1996), for example, does not mention Spanish or Portuguese as one of the Romance languages that affected Syrian Arabic. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. On Italian as a component of Judezmo in Syria, see: Bunis 2018a:92. I can add that my parents, Greek-speaking Romaniotes from Greece, used *kaltsonákia* ‘semicircular dough pockets stuffed with cheese or almonds and nuts’. *kaltsonákia* is a diminutive form of *kaltsónia* or *káltses* ‘socks, stockings,’ which is the original meaning of Italian *calzone*. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. The Gothic origin of this Iberian word was *fata* (Dworkin 2012:72.) In Portuguese and Catalan, the word became *fato*, while in Castilian Spanish it shifted into *hato* (Corriente 2008:300.) Since Judezmo, at least in one of its regional divisions, namely Northwest Judezmo, preserved original initial *f* (Bunis 2018b:200, 202; Schwarzwald 2018:153), *fatīko* displays yet another example for the problematic question whether this word was borrowed from pre-Castilian Spanish, before the shift *f*>*h* had occurred, or it was borrowed from Portuguese or Catalan with its original initial *f*. For the representation of *f*>*h* shift in Judezmo documents from the Ottoman era see: Bunis 2018a:87-88. For -*iko* as a diminutive morpheme in “Judeo Spanish” see: Schwarzwald 2018:153. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. The Modern Italian word for ‘dowery’ is *dòte*, but the original word was *dota*. A ḥomsi Christian consultant recognized the word *dotta* as an originally French *dot*, and added that it means what the man or woman brings during marriage. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. In Modern Spanish original *v* merged with original *b* to a single phoneme [b], Judeo-Spanish kept them separated (Bunis 2018b:199; Schwarzwald 2018:152). JD *bēlo* reflects the *Modern* Spanish pronunciation [ˈbe.lo]. Nevertheless, *bēlo*, whether Judeo-Spanish or Modern Spanish, is an Iberian item within JD vocabulary. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Prof. Bunis has kindly shared with me that this term, written in Hebrew *Rashi* letters and spelled מיזה פ'ראנקה, appears in a Responsa compilation about wedding terms from the 17th century CE. According to this condition, the bride’s father must feed and accommodate his son-in-law for *10 years*. Cf. Hadar 2007:213; Ben-Naeh 2018:271. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. However, there is no connection between *mēza franga* and *franga* ‘an upstairs room’, which was known to my consultants, and is documented for CD (e.g., Bloch & Grotzfeld 1964:212; Belnap & Haeri 1997:138). *franga* in this latter sense is borrowed from Turkish *alafranga* (initially from Italian *alla* *franca*), meaning ‘European style’, referring to a room that is on the first floor, overlooks the street and generally furnished with numerous windows, see: Saussey 1929:107. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Another aspect of the influence of French over JD was the proper names variety. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. The same is true for Aleppo, see: Behnstedt 1989:49, and Beirut, see: Germanos 2007, especially pp. 155-7. Cf. Versteegh 2017:63, and fn. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. The consultants usually pronounced it [ʾaljˈõs], cf. Belnap & Haeri 1997:100. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Other French terms of the educational system, such as *žardān danfān*(<*Jardin d’enfants*) ‘kindergarten’, *sərtifīka*(<*certificat*) ‘(elementary school) certificate’, and *brēvē*(<*brevet*) ‘(middle school) certificate of completion’, were mentioned by my consultants, but they were not exclusive to JD. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. One might think that the *ō* in *dōti* is a reflex of Hebrew *qameṣ* (*å*), as if derived from the Hebrew word *dåti* ‘religious man’. In my opinion this is not the case, since in JD the very few instances of such pronunciation with *qameṣ* occur in vicinity of labials or emphatics, e.g., *šammōš*(<*šammåš*) ‘caretaker’, *maṣṣo*(<*maṣṣå*) ‘unleavened bread’. A ḥomsi Christian consultant did not know the meaning of *dōti*. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. *takmīr* is even mentioned in Hebrew letters in Hasson 2014:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. The CD equivalent is *taʿzīl*, see: ʿAbd l-Raḥīm 2012:1608. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)