

**Shachmon, Ori. 2022. *Tēmōnit: The Jewish Varieties of Yemeni Arabic*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. XX, 250 pp.
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Ori Shachmon's book is a completely novel and original study on Jewish Arabic, covering a huge gap in previous research on the subject.

While Jewish dialects have a special position in Arabic dialectology, there has been too little research to answer what is constitutive of them. Today, a large proportion of Jewish dialects is extinct. When most of their speakers migrated to Israel in the aftermath of Arab-Israeli wars that followed the formation of the Jewish state in 1948, they had to learn modern Hebrew, which became the national language. Arabic dialects no longer fulfilled their primary role of communication and their users stopped to pass them on to the next generation. Those that remained are now critically endangered.

It has been only in recent years that researchers, also outside Israel, have become increasingly interested in Jewish Arabic and tried to save it from oblivion. Many Jewish dialects have been recorded in sound and film as part of the project 'Leshon ha-bayit' (<https://lashon.org/>) supervised by Yehudit Henshke of the University of Haifa, but research on Jewish Arabic can be listed in just a few lines. Such work has so far been conducted, among others, by Werner Arnold (Hatay), Assaf Bar Moshe (Iraq), Haim Blanc (Iraq), Joshua Blau (Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic), David Cohen (Tunisia), Luca D'Anna (Libya), Felipe Benjamin Francisco (Morocco), Aharon Geva-Kleinberger (Palestine, Sudan), Wiktor Gębski (Tunisia), Jeffrey Heath (Morocco), Otto Jastrow (Iraq), Jacob Mansour (Baghdad Jewish Arabic), Gabriel M. Rosenbaum (Egypt), Lucienne Saada (Tunisia), Jonas Sibony (Morocco) or Sumikazu Yoda (Libya).

This makes Shachmon's book particularly noteworthy as it is the first such study¹ on the Jewish dialects of Yemen.

Shachmon is a professor of Arabic dialectology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, who is

¹ I omit here such an obvious work as the dictionary by Ratzaby (1978).



well recognised among Arabic dialectologists especially for her earlier studies on Palestinian dialects (e.g. Shachmon 2011; 2013a; 2017).

It is the study of Yemeni Jewish dialects, however, that has been the main axis of her research career. She has dealt with the subject in both her master's and a doctoral thesis (Shachmon 1999; 2007) and in her encyclopaedic article published several years later (Shachmon 2013b). It took a longer while to see her research in English finally published in late 2022, but I can say with full conviction that this book was worth waiting for.

Shachmon's work consists of five chapters. They are not of equal length, and it is definitely the last one that is the main focus of the book. The chapters are preceded by 'Foreword' and 'Acknowledgments'. It was somewhat surprising that the author described her field research only briefly in the 'Foreword' instead of a separate introductory chapter, as we would expect from a field researcher. Generally, very little has been written about field research and methodology in Arabic dialectology. Field data acquisition is one of the most complex, if not the most difficult, stages in dialectological research, so describing one's own field research and reflections on what went on during fieldwork cannot be overlooked. I have to admit, however, that Shachmon, in the six pages of her 'Foreword', does speak about the various stages of her work in some detail. In my opinion, however, this should have been included in the main body of the book, if it is based on the material collected during the field research.

Shachmon has been studying Yemeni dialects in Israel for almost 25 years, teaching classes on them at the Hebrew University since 2009 and working with Tom Fogel and Naama Ben-David on collecting data in Lower Yemeni dialects since 2016. In 2018, she started a project funded by the Israel Science Foundation. Her research team visited some 70 villages in Israel. Shachmon also included two texts (text 23 and 25) from the Ephraim Yaakov's archive and one written transcript in Hebrew from Shlomo Dov Goitein's archive, which she then edited into a scholarly transcription and included in her book (text 21).

The first three chapters of Shachmon's work are concisely written and range from seven to nine pages. In the first one, 'The Jewish varieties in their indigenous context', Shachmon addresses three issues: (1) geographical distribution and demography, (2) linguistic typology and (3) dialectal diversity and historical reconstruction. It is interesting to learn that Jews resided in some 1,300 settlements primarily in rural areas, and only about 15% lived in Yemeni cities, mainly Ṣan'ā', and their distribution across the country was uneven. They often moved from one place to another, although as Shachmon points out this was quite limited (p. 4–5)—which is also reflected in the language situation.

The Jewish dialects are classified among the peripheral 'sedentary' varieties of Arabia, whose characteristics are the 3 f.sg. verb form CVCVCVt (*katabat*), the 2 f.sg. pronominal suffix *-iṣ* or *-ič*, and the optional infix *-nn-* between an active participle and a pronominal object. In addition to this, Jewish dialects have fea-

tures that are customarily considered ‘Bedouin’, such as interdental fricatives or the Form IV.

In chapter two, ‘Yemeni Arabic in Israel’, Shachmon outlines the migration of Jews from Yemen to, primarily, Israel based on material she has obtained from some 70 locations where the newcomers had settled. She discusses ‘heritage language’, written forms of Yemeni Arabic, and how Yemeni Jews quickly adopted Israeli Hebrew as their language of communication immediately upon arrival. The chapter also includes some considerations on the author’s field research.

The third chapter, ‘Communal dialects in Yemen: Jewish and Muslim varieties’, focuses on the indigenous Hebrew component and the contact with Modern Hebrew after the arrival of Yemeni Jews in Israel. Interestingly, this is a process that is still taking place. For example, there is an emergence of compounds that have a Hebrew base but Arabic suffixes, e.g. in verbs. Shachmon also describes in this section the ways in which the language is camouflaged and the methods used to warn, for example, of incoming Muslims. She shows concrete examples from recorded texts, field research and earlier literature.

In the fourth chapter, the author undertakes to characterise selected ‘Grammatical features of the Jewish varieties’ and includes references to many of the issues discussed in the next, most comprehensive chapter, with recorded texts. This makes this part of the work easier to understand and allows the author’s considerations to be grasped in a broader exemplification context. Shachmon begins this chapter with phonological issues, in which she discusses selected consonants, vowels, pausal phenomena and stress patterns.

Thus, for example, the Old Arabic (OA) consonant *ğ* is realised as a velar stop *g* (the southwest part of Yemen), a post-alveolar affricate *ğ* (the central mountains and the high plateau) and a palatalised consonant *gʷ* (the northern villages of the province of *Şa‘dah*; to some extent also in the eastern communities of *Ḥabbān*, *Bēḥān* and *il-Bayḏā’*). As for the OA consonant *q*, on the other hand, it is realised as a voiceless uvular stop *q* in the southern mountain range and Aden, while it is realised by the other communities as a velar stop *g* or *k*, which are allophones can alter even in the same speaker. A similar alternation also applies to OA *t*, which can be realised as either a voiceless consonant *t̤* or a voiced consonant *t̤̣* (close to the consonant *d̤*).

The vowel system basically counts three short vowels (*a*, *i*, *u*) and three long vowels (*ā*, *ī*, *ū*) or two additional vowels (*ē*, *ō*) if there is monophthongisation of diphthongs in a particular dialect. However, it is not entirely clear to me how a vowel such as *ē*, resulting from the raising of the vowel *ā* to *ē*, for example, functions in the vowel system, while at the same time the diphthongs are preserved in the dialect. I can surmise that it is an allophone of the vowel *ā*.

I would like to show here two interesting and very similar cases, which Shachmon classifies as separate phenomena. In the Jewish dialect of *Şan‘ā*, any final vowel *ā* is realised precisely as *ē*. This is unlike the case in the Muslim dia-

lect, where it occurs only in a *pausa* (not in a context). The author considers that the vowels from the Muslim dialect have been ‘generalised’ in the Jewish variant. It is worth emphasising, therefore, that in the Jewish dialect of Ṣan‘ā, the long vowel *ā* should never appear in a coda (its short counterpart *a* also does not occur in this position). However, such examples appear in the texts, e.g. *nigrā* (1:7), *w-tum‘ūnā. tum‘ūnā* (2:9), *fāṣūlyā* (1:13). I suspect that this is purely a typo in the transcription. Also in this dialect, the particle *mā* (not *mē*) is transcribed with the long vowel *ā*, which is in opposition to the assumptions made by the author. Perhaps *mā* should be transcribed with the short vowel *a*, or it does not apply to monosyllabic words. The second case is encountered in other dialects, where, as the author writes, there may be no ‘generalisation’, but simply an *ʔimāla* appearing there in the final open syllable -Cā, e.g. *gʕalasnē* ‘we sat’ (p. 35), but not surrounded by gutturals and the consonant *r*.

Regarding vowels, the following forms from the rural area around Ibb still caught my attention: *ḍarabū* ‘they (m.) hit’ and ‘they (m.) hit him’, *absarkī* ‘you (f.sg.) saw’ and ‘you (f.sg.) saw her’ (p. 36). Are these really homonyms and is there no difference in the realisation of these words? If we also assume that there are forms such as *ḍarabo* ‘he hit him’ and *ḍarabe* ‘he hit her’ (p. 36), then we should include both short vowels *o* and *e* in the vowel system of at least the dialects from which the data comes.

Pausal forms are one of the characteristic phenomena occurring in Yemeni Arabic dialects, among those appearing in Jewish dialects are: vowel raising, glottalisation, diphthongisation, devoicing, stress shifts and silent final sonorants (*l*, *m*, *n*, *r*). Regarding the latter type of pausal forms, particularly little attention has been paid in the literature to date. It is not only sonorants, because in some dialects, e.g. Syrian, other consonants can also undergo a phenomenon I refer to as ‘pausal apocope’. When describing the stress, Shachmon emphasises that ‘a noticeable feature of Yemeni stress is its instability’, hence in transcribed texts it is often marked over the stressed vowel.

In the remainder of this chapter, the author devotes a little more space to the discussion of verbs. In addition to the basic paradigm of the verb *kataba* in the perfect in five dialects (Sidum, Sāgēn, Raḡūyah, ‘Uṭmah, Aden) we also have here a small compilation of the basic patterns of Form I in 7 dialects (Ṣan‘ā, Āl Ṣalīl, Baraṭ, Amlaḥ, Ibb, Ḥugariyyah, Aden), which perfectly illustrates the verb variety. The author then moves on to discuss the *t*-perfect and *k*-perfect, as well as the 3 f.sg. ending in the perfect. Thus, there are dialects in which, on the one hand, the endings *-at* and *-it* are preserved, while on the other hand the feminine ending has the form *-a* or corresponds with a stem vowel, but without the final consonant *-h*—as is the case with Behnstedt (2016: 198), who reports the ending *-ah* and *-ih* in his language atlas of Yemen. The description of the verbs concludes with a discussion of vowel prefixes in the imperfect and grammaticalised verbs: *kān*, *‘ād*, *ḡāw*, *zid* and *za‘m*, supported by examples of use in sentences.

Later in this chapter, the author discusses independent and suffixed pronouns, independent pronouns as suffixes (e.g. *gad-anā*, *gad-ant*, *gad-antī* etc.) and then moves on to nouns, where she directs her attention to nominal feminine endings, gender-neutral participles and adjectives, as well as the singulative *-ī*.

Chapter four concludes with comments on syntax, pragmatics and discourse. In Jewish dialects, as in some of the Yemeni dialects described earlier, there is also a genitive exponent (*ḥagg/ḥaqq*) that can precede a noun, e.g. *atrahīh fi-ḥagg ummwi almaxmadih* ‘I would place [the grapes] in my mother’s basket’ (p. 61, 92). One characteristic idiomatic expression in northern dialects is the compounding of the demonstrative *dā/dih/tih* with *‘ind/‘and* + a pronominal suffix (p. 63), which can be translated as ‘just imagine’. Jewish dialects also use the infix *-(i)nn-* before a pronominal object. Shachmon describes two types of constructions for Jewish dialects: (1) active participle + *nn* + pronominal object and (2) verb + *nn* + pronominal object.

The final and most comprehensive chapter of the book contains forty texts recorded in Jewish dialects that focus on the daily life of local communities. The texts are grouped according to the five regions that were inhabited by Jews, which is well illustrated by the general map 1 (p. 71). The chapter is divided into five subchapters, each with a very valuable and clear map indicating the different localities and texts coming from them, by which Shachmon introduces more precise divisions of dialects. Subchapter one is devoted to ‘Central communities—Upper Yemen and the central high plateau’. Shachmon here distinguishes eight dialectal subgroups, for each of which she provides at least one example of a text in transcription and English translation supplemented by information on the speaker, place and sometimes some dialectal features. In the first subchapter, she includes 13 texts. The schema of the subsequent subchapters is identical, which makes the book exceptionally easy to read. Subchapter two provides information on the dialects of the northern communities and distinguishes four dialectal subgroups. The third subchapter deals with the southern communities (five dialectal subgroups), while the fourth with the eastern communities (three dialectal subgroups), and the fifth, the shortest one, discusses the dialect of Aden communities. The legend of the maps is not always consistent with the titles of the sections as, for example, in the legend to map 3 one can read ‘5.2.1 Villages around Ṣa‘dah’ (p. 121), while the title of the section nevertheless reads ‘5.2.1 Ṣa‘dah and Ḥaydān aššām’ (p. 122). This introduces unnecessary confusion.

While reading the earlier chapters, I thought that map 1 should appear at the beginning of the book, as I often had to check the geographical location of individual dialects or localities. It would also definitely be useful to have a comprehensive classification of all dialects in the form of a list with the individual localities that are mentioned on the maps 2–6.

Regarding other comments, for example, Vanhove (2009) is cited on pp. 31, 43, 75, 146 etc., but this publication is not in the bibliography. I must also men-


tion that the notation of Hebrew phonemes using the Hebrew alphabet can cause some confusion, as I cannot always be sure exactly which sound is meant. In addition to this, it is not clear to me why the titles of some Hebrew books are given only in English. It takes an unnecessarily long time to find a Hebrew book by the English title under which it was never published.

In conclusion, the book by Shachmon cannot go unnoticed by researchers of Arabic as well as other Semitic languages. It is simply a wonderful scholarly book and a must-read not only for dialectologists of Arabic and Semitists, but also for Jewish scholars, Hebraists and researchers with a special interest in Yemen. It fills one of the biggest gaps in the study of Jewish Arabic so far, adds to the knowledge of Yemeni Arabic dialects, brings a lot of interesting new data and opens up many topics for further discussion.

Last but not least: written in a splendid style, it is a great pleasure to read.

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