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Cambridge University Library T-S NS 297.236, a Karaite version of the Hebrew Bible (Ezekiel 16.24–40); the Hebrew is written in Arabic script but with Tiberian vowels and cantillation signs (courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

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# COMPARATIVE NOTES ON THE JEWISH ARABIC DIALECTS OF GABES AND DJERBA (TUNISIA)

*Wiktor Gębski*

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The present paper addresses select phonological and syntactic phenomena observed in two neighbouring Jewish Arabic dialects originally spoken in the southern region of Tunisia, specifically the dialects of Gabes and Djerba. The former has been described by Gębski (f.c. a), while the latter was partially discussed by Saada (1963) and Behnstedt (1998) as part of comprehensive studies covering all the confessional varieties of Djerban Arabic. Moreover, the article contains text samples from both dialects, recorded in Israel in December 2022 and August 2023.

The Jewish dialect of Djerba is unique from a socio-linguistic perspective. Notably, it seems to be the only Jewish dialect of North African Arabic still spoken in its natural environment.<sup>1</sup> Speakers of other dialects, including Jewish Gabes, migrated to Israel, France, and other destinations follow-

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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish community in the Moroccan city of Casablanca has a substantial number of members too. However, the use of Jewish dialects in Casablanca has declined, and the majority of Jews in Casablanca predominantly use either French or the Muslim variety.

ing the establishment of Israel in 1948. While many Jews have also left Djerba, particularly after the Yom Kippur War, a community of approximately 700 members persists there (Lasserre and Lechaume 2003, 346). In contrast, all the native speakers of Jewish Gabes currently live in Israel and France.

As will be demonstrated, despite their geographical proximity, the dialects exhibit several differences. These differences encompass significant grammatical categories, such as the future marker. On the other hand, there are also shared tendencies, such as non-resumptive expositions of nouns. This concise linguistic study is dedicated to Prof. Geoffrey Khan, with great admiration and gratitude for years of guidance, teaching, and care.

## 1.0. Sample Texts

### 1.1. The Tale of the Lumberjack (Jewish Gabes)<sup>2</sup>

Speaker: Haya Mazouz, age: 80; Time and place of the recording: Ramle, Israel, August 2023

- (1) *naḥkilkəm ‘al hād əl-ḥaṭṭāb*  
‘I will tell you [a story] about a lumberjack.’
- (2) *yəmši yḥaṭṭab yləmm ḥaška*  
‘He goes to cut down and collect logs.’
- (3) *yāxəd hād əl-aḥṭāb yḥəžžum l-kuwwāš*  
‘He takes those branches and brings them to the baker.’

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<sup>2</sup> The system of transcription used here is morphophonemic and follows Gębski (f.c.). In the translation, I have made an effort to represent the Arabic text as faithfully as possible.

- (4) *ya‘ti nafṣ əl-kūša ya‘ti flūš u nafṣ ət-tāni yəməšī bī əl-dār*  
 ‘He gives half of them to the bakery, [the baker] gives him money, and he goes with the other half home.’
- (5) *yšəxxən bī əl-bīt, əd-dənya barda u yšəxxnu ‘alī əl-mākla wəlla tāy, yəšrbu*  
 ‘They heat with it the house, the weather is cold, and they heat with it the food, or drink tea.’
- (6) *u hāk əl-nafṣ<sup>3</sup> āxar xabža u žitūn, kull yūm kif kif, hādāk li ‘andu*  
 ‘And that other half, [he buys with it] bread and olives, every day the same, this is what he has.’
- (7) *ayya barra ayyām yžīw ayyām mərṭu ḥablət*  
 ‘After some time his wife got pregnant.’
- (8) *qālla kifāš na‘mlu? əl-fraš hūwa yərqaḍ rāšu mən-hna u hiya rāšha mən-hna*  
 ‘He told her: “What are we going to do now?” The bed—he sleeps with his head from this side and her head from that side.’
- (9) *wīn nrəqqdu əl-wləyyəd? u fi šnūwa nləbbšū? wīn nḥaṭtu əl-wləd? ma ‘andnāš blāša*  
 “‘Where will we put the baby to sleep? In what will we dress him? Where will we put the baby? We do not have space.’”
- (10) *šnūwa na‘mlu bī? šnuwa nwəkkli? aḥna nāklu xabža u žitun, mən-nīn nžībūlu əl-ḥləb?*  
 “‘What will we do with him? How will we feed him? We eat bread and olives, where will we bring the milk from?’”

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<sup>3</sup> The interchanges of /f/ and /s/ in this lexeme (compare with verse 4 above) are a common phenomenon in Jewish Gabes.

- (11) *qātlu šnūwa na‘mlu? māla nəmši naqtəl rūḥi ‘ala xāṭru? li yədxəl yəži*  
 ‘She told him: “What will we do? Should I go and kill myself because of him? Whatever happens, happens.”’
- (12) *qā‘dīn hakka yəxammu šnūwa ya‘mlu, mšāt tziḥ əl-ma, mən əl-‘in*  
 ‘They sit like this, thinking about what they will do, she goes to take water from the well.’
- (13) *tamma nāxal <sup>HE</sup>šam kol ha<sup>HE</sup>-nša yətləmmu u ya‘bīw əl-ma fi-l-ḥəllābi akka*  
 ‘There is a brook and all the women gather there and fill their jars with water, like this.’
- (14) *tamma ḥəllābi zḡir u tamma ‘bār kbīr, yḥaṭṭūha ‘ala ktəffa u tzi*  
 ‘There is a small jar and there is a big pot, they put it on the shoulders and go.’
- (15) *yətləmmu bīha nša aaa kifāš qātləm rāzli yḥabb nahḥi l-ḥbāla u ma-‘annāš<sup>4</sup> ma nwəkkū, ma ‘annāš wīn nrəqqdū, ma ‘annāš wīn nḥaṭṭū*  
 ‘Women gather near the brook: “Oh how are you?” She told them: “My husband wants me to abort the pregnancy, and we do not have anything to feed him, we do not have a place for him to sleep, we do not have where to put him.”’

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the regressive assimilation of /d/ to /n/, i.e., ‘*andnāš*\* > ‘*annāš*’.

- (16) *qālūla li yži yži, b-qəšmu, ma txammiš, l-wāḥad yži l-əd-dənya, řabbi yžiblu l-qāš ntā'w*  
 'They told her: "Whatever comes, comes, with a blessing, do not overthink, when someone comes to this world, God gives them their share;'"
- (17) *qāṭla nšalla, ma nḥātūš*  
 'She told her: "If God wills," she did not abort.'
- (18) *ayya hādūk tuwwa qa'dīn, yətxabbəṭ əl-mṛa u řāžəl 'al hāk əl-ḥbāla*  
 'So they sit now, the woman and the man quarrel about the pregnancy.'
- (19) *u tamma qahwa kbīra, we <sup>HE</sup>yašvu šama medabrim<sup>HE</sup> l-ḥād u tamma šəltān*  
 'And there is a big cafeteria, and people sit there and talk, and there is a sultan.'
- (20) *əš-šəltān hāda, hūwa wa əl-wžir, yžiw 'al əl-bḥāym, lbāš kif tā' l-ḥād u yḏūru mən blāša əl-blāša, wəšlu əl-qahwa*  
 'That sultan, he and a minister, came on donkeys, dressed like normal people, and they go from one place to another; they arrived at the cafeteria.'
- (21) *'tāwəm yašrbu, <sup>HE</sup>hem lo yodim<sup>HE</sup> ḥšabbu l-ḥād žāw mən <sup>HE</sup>eyze makom<sup>HE</sup>*  
 'They gave them something to drink, they did not know, people thought they came from a place.'
- (22) *tamma wāḥad yxattər bi-l-rəmla, <sup>HE</sup>sam ota al ha-bad<sup>HE</sup>, u yqūllək ma <sup>HE</sup>ha-ṭid šəlxā<sup>HE</sup>*  
 'There is a person who draws in the sand, he puts it on a piece of fabric and tells you your future.'

- (23) *hūwa ka-ya‘māl hakka, šəb‘a hakka, qāllu ta‘rəf šnūwa bəš yšīr?*

‘He would do it like this, with a finger, like this, and he told him: “Do you know what is going to happen?”’

- (24) *əl-ḥaṭṭāb, mərṭu ḥābla u ḥabb tšīb wəld, wa l-wəld<sup>5</sup> ‘andu ḥmāra fi-wədnu li ytwāləd*

“The lumberjack, his wife is pregnant and will give birth to a boy, and the boy will have a birthmark on his ear when he is born.”

- (25) *u l-wəld hādāk əš-šəltān ymūt, ywəlli hūwa šəltān, wa šəltān tuwwa ka-yəšma‘*

“And this boy, the sultan will die, and he will become sultan; and the sultan can hear everything now.”

- (26) *qāllu kifāš? qāllu akka məktūb fi-l-wāḥda*

‘He told him: “How is it possible?” He said: “This is what is written.”’

- (27) *əš-šəltān fərrəks rqa dār əl-ḥaṭṭāb u <sup>HE</sup>məḥake<sup>HE</sup> ḥatta tūləd*

‘The sultan looked for the lumberjack’s house, and he waited until [the woman] gave birth.’

- (28) *ayya wəldət əl-mṛa, wəldət əl-mṛa <sup>HE</sup>mamaš<sup>HE</sup> əl-wəld yḥaṭṭu ‘alīm yərqaḍ*

‘So the woman gave birth, indeed she gave birth to a boy, and they put him to sleep on top of them.’

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<sup>5</sup> The standard form of this word is *wəld*, since short vowels in open syllables are not permitted in Jewish Gəbes. The form *wəld* has likely emerged due to the influence of Modern Hebrew, in which its cognate is *yeled*, i.e., it features a short vowel in the first open syllable.

- (29) *u wāḥad žāblu džāža, wāḥda žābət lbāš, ma ʿndəm šəyy, l-  
ʿbād ʿtāwum*  
‘And someone would bring him a chicken, someone else  
clothes; they do not have anything, the people gave them.’
- (30) *u bda yəkbar l-wləyyəd, wəlla ʿandu arbaʿ šhūr hakka fi  
yədda, u ža əš-šəltān wa əl-wžir <sup>HE</sup>be-tor<sup>HE</sup> ʿbād kif ən-nāš*  
‘And the boy started growing up, he reached the age of  
four months, he is like this in her hands, and the sultan  
and the minister came [dressed] as regular people.’
- (31) *ayya qālḥəm aššlāma, qālu aššlāma, hāda wəldək? qālu: ēy*  
‘So he told them: “Hello.” They said: “Hello. Is this our  
child?” They said: “Yes.”’
- (32) *qālḥəm: akka ʿayšin antūm? ma ʿandkəm šəyy, ayya bīʿūli əl-  
wləyyəd*  
‘He told them: “This is how you live? You do not have  
anything, so sell me the child.”’
- (33) *qālu: kifāš nbīʿlək wəldi?*  
‘He told him: “How will I sell you my child?”’
- (34) *qāllō: mərək ʿām āxor tžīblək <sup>HE</sup>od<sup>HE</sup> wəld wa āna naʿtik flūš  
twəlli məštaḡni, ywəllilək dār ywəllilək mākla wa ənti tʿiš bī,  
šnūwa əl-wəld hādāk yaʿməllək?*  
‘He told him: “Your wife will give birth to one more child,  
and I will give you money, you will become rich, you will  
have a house, and food, and you will live from this money;  
how will this child benefit you?”’
- (35) *qātlu: la, āna ma naʿtīš wəldi, āna ma nbīʿūš*  
‘She told him: “No, I will not give you my child, I will not  
sell him to you.”’

- (36) <sup>HE</sup>*ba-sof*<sup>HE</sup> *rdāw*, *b'āwlu wləd xdāw buxta flūš*  
 'In the end, they agreed, they sold the boy and they took lots of money.'
- (37) *ša 'məl hāk əl-ħžīn əš-šəltān? xda əl-wləyyəd, ħattū fi-šəndūq, u ləwwəħ əš-šəndūq fi-l-wād, hāk əš-šənddāq yəmši fi l-ma*  
 'What did that miserable sultan do? He took the child, he put him in a box, he left the box on the river; and the river, the box goes on [its] water.'
- (38) <sup>HE</sup>*pitom*<sup>HE</sup> *tamma wāħad fəllāħ yəxdəm, ža yāxəd əl-ma mən əl-wād u yərqa hāk əš-šəndūq māši*  
 'Suddenly, there is a farmer working, he goes to take water from the river, and he finds that box moving [on the water].'
- (39) *žāb əš-šəndūq, ħallū yərqa wləyyəd yəbki*  
 'He brought the box, opened it and found a boy crying.'
- (40) *xda əl-wləyyəd, <sup>HE</sup>miskən<sup>HE</sup>, yər'aš u mša l-mərtu: ya mra ya mra, šūfi šnūwa lqīt fi l-wād*  
 'He took the poor boy, he was trembling, and he went to his wife: "Wife! Wife! Look what I wound in the river!"
- (41) *qātlu: šnūwa lqīt? qālla: wəld!*  
 'She told him: "What did you find?" He told her: "A child!"
- (42) *qātla: žābūna řaḅḅi, aḥna ma 'annāš zğār, ma 'annāš wlād, žābənnā řaḅḅi wəld wa nwəllu wəldna*  
 'She said: "God has brought him to us, we do not have our own children, God has brought us a child and we will make him our own."

- (43) *baṛra wəlla əl-wəld ‘amru šəb‘atāš təmməntāš u yəxdəm m‘a bāḃa u ža hādāk əš-šəltān hūwa yḏūr mən dār əl-dār yšūf šnūwa əl-blād fiha, šnūwa əd-dənya*  
 ‘The boy was seventeen or eighteen years old, and he worked with his father and the sultan came, he was going from one house to the other, he wanted to see how the city was, how everything was.’
- (44) *hūwa wṣaḷ rqa hāk əl-mṛa əl-rāzəl xda wəldu u mša bi əl-dār bəš yāklu, qā‘dīn yərtāḥu taḥt əl-naxla, hūwa ža qāllu: aššlāma*  
 ‘He arrived and found that woman, the man took his son and went home with him to eat, they were sitting under the tree to rest; he [the sultan] came and said: “Hello.”’
- (45) *qāllu: əža ašrab, qāllu: la, la, aḥna mət‘addīn aḥna māšyīn*  
 ‘He told him: “Come and drink,” he said: “No, no, we are just passing by, we are on the way.”’
- (46) *qāllu: hāda wəldək? qāllu: ē, wəldi*  
 ‘He told him: “Is this your son?” He said: “Yes, it is my son.”’
- (47) *hūwa šāf ‘alī rqa əl-ḥmāra fi wədnu*  
 ‘He looked at him and found the birthmark on his ear.’
- (48) *qāllu: hāda wəldək? qāllu: ē, wəldi*  
 ‘He told him: “Is this your son?” He said: “Yes, it is my son.”’
- (49) *u əl-mṛa: hāda wəldək? qātlū: ē, wəldi, šnūwa ən-nəšda hādi?*  
 ‘And to the woman: “Is this your son?” She told him: “Yes, it is my son. What is this question?”’
- (50) *žə ər-rāzəl qāllu: nqūllək əl-ḥaqq, hāda wəld əl-wād*  
 ‘The man went and told him: “I will tell you the truth, this is a child of the river.”’

- (51) *qāllu: kifāš wəld əl-wād?*  
 ‘He told him: “What do you mean a child of the river?”’
- (52) *qāllu: māši āna nāxəd əl-ma, rqiṭ šəndūq, u l-wlāyyəd yəmsi*  
 ‘He told him: “I went to take water, I found a box and the child [inside] moving [on the river].”’
- (53) *aaa hūwa ‘raf tuwwa, qāllu: šūf, ṭhabb wəldək yṭiḥ fi-dənya*  
*bāhya na‘ṭik nəktəblək žwāb, əl-dār əš-šəltān, yqablū y‘allmū*  
*əš-šəna‘, na‘ṭiw flūš, ywəlli rāzəl mən əl-ḥrima*  
 ‘Oh, he understood now, he told him: “Look, do you want your child to grow up in a better world? I will give you, I will write a letter; the house of the sultan will receive him, servants will teach him, they will give him money, he will become a gentleman.”’
- (54) *hūma nəyya, ma fahmūš əd-dənya, qāllu: mniḥ*  
 ‘They were naïve, they did not understand what was happening, they said: “All right.”’
- (55) *hūwa dxəl əl-wəld yšawwəb ḥwāyžu, wa hādāk xda ‘andu žəld*  
*kəbš u ktəb: hāda wəld yūšəl, aqṭlū*  
 ‘The boy went home to take his things, and that one took a piece of sheepskin and wrote: “When this boy arrives, kill him.”’
- (56) *u mən-lūṭa əl-firma ntā‘u u duwwər hakka u ‘ṭālo fi-yəddu*  
 ‘And from beneath his signature, he rolled it like this and gave it into his hand.’
- (57) *u hāk əl-wəld hažž fi yəddu ‘ša yəmsi biha, yəmsi yəmsi yəmsi*  
*yəṭla‘ žbəl, yahbat žbəl, ḥatta wəšəl l-blāša, žbəl u mən-lūṭa mra*  
*qā‘da gādi u ‘āmla tlāta ḥazra kullhəm bi-l-ḥtab u ḥāṭṭa <sup>HE</sup>sir*  
*‘anāk<sup>HE</sup> u qa‘dət ṭṭib*  
 ‘And that boy took in his hand a stick and left, he walked, walked, and walked, he went up the hill, down the hill,

until he arrived at a place, a mountain, and at the foot of it a woman was sitting; she takes three rocks, covers them with logs and puts a massive saucepan and she cooks.’

- (58) *wa hūwa ža, qālla: ya mra, ‘andəkš šwīya ma?*  
 ‘And he came and told her: “O woman, do you have a bit of water?”’
- (59) *qāltu: šnūwa žābək l-hūni ənti? l-ġwāl u l-qatt‘īya tħabb<sup>6</sup> yəqtlūk*  
 ‘She told him: “What brings you here? Wizards and robbers want to kill you.”’
- (60) *qālla: ya mra āna ma na‘rafš, āna ‘ayy məyyət tuwwa ‘andi nahrīn nəmšī ‘ala razlīya, u ‘atšān u žā‘ān, ‘tātlu šrəb əl-ma u qālla: ‘andəkš blāša nərqəd?*  
 ‘He told her: “O woman, I do not know, I am tired, I have been walking for two days, and I am thirsty and hungry;” she gave him a bit of water and he told her: “Do you have a place to sleep?”’
- (61) *ħattətlu ħšīra u rqed ‘alīa kif əl-məyyət, ħatta rāšu ma fāqəš*  
 ‘She laid for him some branches and he slept on them like the dead, he did not wake up.’
- (62) *ħayy žāw əl-qatt‘īya: mmm riħt bnādəm žāt*  
 ‘Here come the robbers: “Mmm there is a human smell.”’
- (63) *qātlu: škūn yžīna blašt əl-ġwāl u qatt‘īya, škūn yži hūni?*  
 ‘She told him: “Who will come to us? It’s a place of wizards and robbers, who will come here?”’

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<sup>6</sup> A rare case of so-called deflected grammatical agreement. In Jewish Gabes, as in many other Jewish dialects of Maghrebi Arabic, plural subjects tend to be in full agreement with their predicates, i.e., one would expect here *yħabbu*. In the Muslim dialects, on the other hand, plural nouns interpreted as inanimate collectives trigger 3FS agreement.

- (64) *qālla: tamma hūni ‘andək wāḥad*  
‘He told her: “There’s someone here.”’
- (65) *ayya xallī xallī*  
“Oh, let it go, let it go.”’
- (66) *‘tāthəm hāk əl-kusksi klāw <sup>HE</sup>kmo ḥazirim<sup>HE</sup>*  
‘She gave them couscous and they ate like pigs.’
- (67) *kəmməl əl-kbīr yḥabb yšūf əl-wəld*  
‘The senior robber finished and he wanted to see the boy.’
- (68) *ža, u fi-yəddu hāk əl-žwāb; xda žwāb, ḥallu: əl-wəld hāda*  
*yūšəl, aqtlū*  
‘He came and in his [boy’s] hand was the letter; he took the letter, opened it: “When this boy arrives, kill him.”’
- (60) *faššəx hādāk, u ktəb: əl-wəld hāda yūšəl a‘wmū, ləbšū, u*  
*šawwbū, wa a‘ṭiwu y‘arrəš m‘a bənti*  
‘He erased that and wrote: “When this boy arrives, wash him, dress him, take care of him, and let him get married to my daughter.”’
- (70) *hūwa mša, wšal l-ḡādi, ma yḥabbūš ydəxxlū, dəžžū*  
‘He left and arrived there, they did not want him to enter, they pushed him.’
- (71) *‘tāw əl-žwāb, hūma dəxxlū, ba‘d žəm‘a ‘amlu ‘arš, darbūka,*  
*mūžika*  
‘He gave them his letter, they brought him in, and after a week they had the wedding, drums and music.’
- (72) *wa əš-šəltān tuwwa yəmsi mən dār əl-dār u fi-līla ža hūwa u*  
*əl-wžīr tā‘u qālu: š-tamma š-tamma? əl-līla əd-dənya xāyda u*  
*zāza*  
‘And the sultan is now going from one house to the other and at night he and his minister come and say: “What is going on? It’s night and the world is full of commotion.”’

- (73) *qālūlu: bənt əṣ-ṣəltān bəš t'arrəš, əṣ-ṣəltān b'aṭəlha rāzəl*  
 'They said: "The sultan's daughter is about to get married, the sultan sent her a man."'
- (74) *bərk hūwa šma' əl-kəlma hūwa māt wa hādāk əl-riš wəlla ṣəltān*  
 'He only heard the news, he died and the groom became the sultan.'
- (75) *əlli məktūb 'al əl-žbīn lāžəm ma tšūfu əl-ʿin*  
 'What is written on the forehead, should not see the eye.'

## 1.2. The Nazi Invasion of Djerba (Jewish Djerba)

Speaker: Dan Hania, age: 85; Time and place of the recording: Safed<sup>7</sup>, Israel, December 2022

- (1) *l-waqt li žāw l-almān l-žərba, kān 'amri 'sar šnīn, tmənya*  
 'When the Germans came to Djerba, I was ten or maybe eight years old.'
- (2) *l-almān, luwwəl, wuqt li žāw l-tūnəš, bdāw yāxdu l-yhūd bəš yəxdmu fi-<sup>HE</sup>avodat parax<sup>HE</sup>*  
 'In the beginning, when Germans came to Tunis, they started taking Jews to forced labour.'
- (3) *u bdāw yhaḏḏru bəš ya'mlu kif 'amlu fi-ērōpa*  
 'And they started getting ready to do what they did in Europe.'

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<sup>7</sup> Meaning that people cannot see their destiny and should not look for ways to change it.

- (4) *wa āna na‘qal šabbāt wāḥad, kənnna fi-l-ğrība, kənnna fə-ş-şla u nšūfu əl-<sup>HE</sup>rav<sup>HE</sup> tā‘ l-ḥāra l-kbīra rābbi moše ḥalfōn*  
 ‘And I remember, one Shabbat, we were in Ghriba, we were in the synagogue, and we saw the rabbi of the Great Hara, rabbi Moshe Halfon.’
- (5) *ža fi-l-yūm šabbāt fi-jeep tā‘ l-‘aškər tā‘ l-almān, ža l-ğrība*  
 ‘He came on a Shabbat in a jeep of the German soldiers to Ghriba.’
- (6) *ər-rābbi tā‘na, nwərrilək əl-tšūra tāḥam, xāfu, qālu: š-tamma, rābbi, ‘alāš žit fi-l-nār šabbāt, qālu: gžira kbīra*  
 ‘Our rabbis, I showed you their picture, got scared, they said: “What is happening? Why did you come on a Shabbat?” They said: “Big calamity.”’
- (7) *l-almān yḥabbu xamšīn kilo dhabb*  
 ‘The Germans wanted fifty kilos of gold.’
- (8) *barra rəḥna fi-l-blād, fi-l-ḥāra əl-kbīra, <sup>HE</sup>žə<sup>HE</sup> kull wāḥad li ‘addu dhabb yžīb yḥaṭṭu fi-l-qoffa bāš na‘tīw l-almān, ida ma na‘tīwmš xamšīn kilo, yəqṭlu əl-kəll*  
 ‘We went quickly to the city, to the Great Hara, [asking] that everyone who has gold, bring it and put it in the basket so that they give it to the Germans; if we do not give them fifty kilos, they would kill everyone.’
- (9) *ləmmīna, žma‘na šwīya qəddāš ‘andna dhabb fi-l-ḥāra əl-kbīra, u žīna l-ḥāra əz-žgīra žāda bāš ‘andna*  
 ‘We gathered, we collected a bit of the gold that we had in the Great Hara and we also went to the Small Hara, so that we have [the requested quantity].’

- (10) *əl-yhūd mšākən bdāw yəbkiw u hāda u harbu kull ḥad mša l-dāru*  
 ‘The poor Jews started crying and ran away, everyone went to their home.’
- (11) *na‘qəl wuqt li žit ma‘ būya l-dār wa hūwa məškīn, <sup>HE</sup>aba šeli<sup>HE</sup>, xda hādāk əl-dhabb šəl <sup>HE</sup>ima<sup>HE</sup>, xda li ‘andu qəddāš šwīya dhabb li ‘anda, <sup>HE</sup>az<sup>HE</sup> ḥaṭṭ kullika fi-<sup>HE</sup>mitpaḥat<sup>HE</sup> u mša*  
 ‘I remember when I went home with my poor father, he took mother’s gold, he took what she had, he put it in a kerchief and left.’
- (12) *wa kānu žūž əl-<sup>HE</sup>rabanīm<sup>HE</sup> yšəddu fi-qoffa tā‘ dabb wāḥad mən-hna u wāḥad mən-hna wa žūž gestapo wərrām bi-l-šlāḥ u yədxlu mən-barra l-dār l-dār l-dār u mšākən yhūd kull ḥad ‘ta dabb*  
 ‘And two rabbis would grasp the basket with gold, one from this side and the other from the other, and two armed Gestapo officers from behind, and they would enter every home and all the poor Jews would give gold.’
- (13) *wa hādik əš-šabbāt hādik, fi-l-‘ašiya, xaržət əš-šəbbāt, mšīna nšūfu š-təmma u lqīna l-almān, xaržu bi-l-blād fi-l-līla hādik*  
 ‘And that Shabbat, in the evening, when Shabbat was over, we went to see what was going on and we found the Germans, they left the city on that very night.’
- (14) *wuqt əl-ḥarb kānu mšəlmīn yqūlu: əl-yhūd, ḥa-yžīwna əl-almān ydbaḥ əl-yhūd wa aḥna nāxdu rəzqəm əl-kəll*  
 ‘During the war, the Muslims would say: “The Jews—the Germans will come and slaughter the Jews and we will take all their property.”’

- (15) *wa kānu mšəlmīn y'āwnu l-almān*  
 'And Muslims were helping the Germans.'
- (16) *ba'd wfāt kəmməlt əl-ḥarb, l-ḥkūma tā' frānša šəddət hāk əl-  
 mšəlmīn ḍarbūhəm u mšāw, qaṭlu bi-l-kəll, li 'āwnu l-almān*  
 'After the war was over, when it finished, the French  
 government caught those Muslims, hit them, and left,  
 killing all of them, those who helped the Germans.'
- (17) *u ba'dīn kif qāmət Israel, 'ām əl-twānša xdāw ištəqlāl, l-'ām  
 šəttə u xamšīn, l-yhūd, kān 'andəm xūf kbīr*  
 'And after Israel was created, the year that Tunisians  
 achieved their independence, in the year 1956, many Jews  
 were very scared.'
- (18) *burša yhūd harbu mən-tūnəš u xallāw əl-rəzq tāḥəm, xallāw  
 ḍyār, xallāw kull šəy, žāw hakka bla ḥwāyž tāḥəm*  
 'Many Jews escaped from Tunisia and left their properties,  
 left their homes, everything; they came like this without  
 their things.'
- (19) *u tamma li mšāw l-franša, tamma li mšāw l-italia*  
 'And some of them went to France, others went to Italy.'

### 1.3. Wedding Customs and Life with Muslims (Jewish Djerba)

Speaker: Naomi Cohen, age: 71; Time and place of the recording: Tiberias, Israel, December 2022

- (1) *l-ʿarš, kānu šəbʿa əyyām u šəbʿa əlyāli, kənt nəmši mʿa šhābi nəšūfu l-ʿrūša, kānu yaʿmlu l-ḥanna əz-zgīra u yaʿmlu l-ḥanna əl-kbīra*

‘The wedding—they would do it for seven days and seven nights; I would go with my friends to see the bride; they do the small henna and the big henna.’

- (2) *u kān yaʿmlu təzmīl ḥattān, wuqt əl-mṛa təmši l-ḥammām, əl-rāzəl fə-d-dār yaʿmlūlu təzmīl*

‘And they would have the bachelor party when the woman was in the *ḥammam*, the man would do it at his house—the bachelor party.’

- (3) *wuqt yəmsīw raḥla tāʿ ʿrūša, yži l-ḡannāy, u yaʿmlu mākla, u yədəbḥu l-ʿlāləš, u yžīw yāklu l-kšəkšu, ma kənəš yāklu b-l-mḡārəf, ma kənəš mḡārəf, yāklu b-ydīn*

‘When they brought the bride, a singer would come, and would bring food, and slaughter lambs, and people would come to eat couscous; they did not eat with spoons; they would eat with hands.’

- (4) *la šhānāt u la mġārāf, ya‘mlu qəṣṣ‘a kbira u yəq‘adu ‘al lūta, <sup>HE</sup>rak<sup>HE</sup> əl-‘rūša u l-ḥattān ya‘mlūlūm kif ṭawla u yfərršūa bi-  
zrābi u ya‘mlu bxūr u yžibu əl-kānūn u ybaxxru <sup>HE</sup> neged ha-  
‘āyn ha-ra<sup>HE</sup>*

‘There were no plates and no spoons, they would bring a large wooden bowl and sit on the floor; only the bride and the groom—they would make for them something like a table and they would put on it rugs, and they would light incense and bring a stove and cense against the evil eye.’

- (5) *u yrəff‘u l-mākla, dār l-‘rūša tərfaḍ əl-ḥattān u ba‘d əl-līla ət-  
tānya dār əl-ḥattān yərəf‘u dār əl-‘rūša*

‘And they would raise the food, the bride’s family would lift the groom and after the second night, the groom’s family would lift the bride’s family.’

- (6) *u b‘adalli yəbqāw yədwīw ‘al əṣ-šūra, <sup>HE</sup>še<sup>HE</sup> amṃ l-‘rūša šrāt  
bənta u kān lqāw šūra mūši bāya yāṣər qātla šūwa, hādak  
hūwa li žəbti? məš yāṣər, b‘adalli ḥ-yət‘ārku*

‘And then they would stay to talk about the dowry that the mother of the bride bought her daughter, and if they found the dowry not good enough, she [groom’s mother] would say: “Is this what you brought? It’s not a lot,” and then they would argue.’

- (7) *omḥ ʔl-ḥattān ṭḥabb šūra kbīra yāṣər, <sup>HE</sup>az<sup>HE</sup> qātla: ʔandi wəld wāḥad ʔažiž ʔaliya, u šənnūt<sup>8</sup> bāš nəfraḥ bī u nəžiblu ʔrūša tziḥlu ḥwāyəž bahīn u d-dḥabb u l-fuḍḍa u xəlḫāl, hādāk ūwa li ʔmalti bəntək? āna wəldi ʔažiž ʔaliya yāṣər, ṭḥabbi... taʔmli... šəlfi ʔl-flūš u žīdi fə-š-šūra... <sup>HE</sup>kōdəm<sup>HE</sup> hūmān yṙāw əš-šūra*

‘The groom’s mother wanted a big dowry, so she would say: “I have only one son and he is very dear to me, and I have been waiting to make him happy and so we brought him a bride who was supposed to give him nice things, gold, and silver, and anklet; is this what you gave to your daughter? My son is dear to me, you like... do... borrow money and add to the dowry.” They would first look at the dowry.’

- (8) *yḥəbbu bəššūwa<sup>9</sup> l-ʔrūša təškən mʔa ʔžūžta u bʔadalli yžīw l-ʔrāk, hādi l-bənt tzi l-ḥa təškīla*

‘They wanted the bride to live with her mother-in-law, and after that, they would argue, and the daughter would go to her mother to complain.’

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<sup>8</sup> A variant of *štənnūt* ‘to wait’; it has been attested also in the Jewish dialect of Ghardaïa (based on personal research).

<sup>9</sup> A variant of *bāš*; as pointed out by the informant, it belongs to the higher register.

- (9) *ma ‘alləmti-ši<sup>10</sup> bəntək la taxbəž, la ta‘žən, la tṭəyyəb, la taqdər u yəbdāw bi-l-‘rāk*  
 “‘You did not teach your daughter how to bake, how to knead, how to cook, how to respect,” and they would start arguing.’
- (10) (...) *u kənnə fi-l-qdarr m‘a žirāna fi-šar‘a*  
 ‘We respected our neighbours on the street.’
- (11) *kān šūq qrib ‘al əl-dyār, u ḥatta marra ma qālūna ma dwāw-ši klām dūni wəlla t‘ārəkna, wəlla klām qbāḥ, ḥatta šəy*  
 ‘There was a market near the houses, and they [Muslims] never told us evil words and we never argued, or mean words, nothing.’
- (12) *kənnə šḥāb yāšər, wuqt li māma qālt l-wāḥḍa əz-zārāt li kənət qbāla, māma qālt l-zāra aḥna ḥa-nəmsīw l-franša*  
 ‘We were good friends, when my mother told one of the neighbours who lived in front, my mother told her: “We are going to France.”’
- (13) *qātla: na‘rfu wīn ḥa-təmsīw, ma txabbī-ši ‘aliya, rəḥḥi yḥənnik*  
 ‘She told her: “We know where you will go, do not hide from me, may God protect you.”’

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<sup>10</sup> In Jewish Gabes, the negating suffix is /-š/, i.e., no final /i/ is audible. It is a grammaticalised and truncated form of the lexeme šəy ‘thing’. The variant found in Djerba, therefore, preserves traces of the source form.

(14) *u wuqt li ytiḥ<sup>HE</sup> mamaš<sup>ME</sup> ḥa-nžiw, bkāw žūž, māma m'a zāra  
al-mšalma*

‘And when the time came to go, they both cried, my mom  
and her Muslim neighbour.’

## 2.0. Linguistic Observations

### 2.1. Phonology

Both Jewish Gabes and Jewish Djerba display isoglosses typically ascribed to sedentary dialects, like loss of interdentalals and uvular realisation of /q/. Nevertheless, the phonology of each of the two dialects exhibits several distinctive features. When it comes to their consonantal inventory, one of the most notable differences is the realisation of sibilants. Although it seems that in both Jewish Gabes and Jewish Djerba, there is no phonemic distinction between alveolar (/s/, /z/) and alveolo-palatal (/š/, /ž/) sibilants, in Jewish Djerba, the alveolar and palatal consonants appear to have merged into a sound with a moderate level of stridency, represented as /ś/ [ç] and /ź/ [j]. On the other hand, in Jewish Gabes, the pronunciation of these consonants is more retroflex, represented as [ʃ] and [ʒ]. The merger of alveolar and palatalised sibilants in Jewish Djerba was first noted by Saada (1963, 16) and later confirmed by Behnstedt (1998, 58). However, in the speech of some Djerban Jews currently living in Israel, the realisation of /ś/ is more retroflex, specifically as /š/. This slight shift in pronunciation appears to have occurred under the influence of the sound system of Modern Hebrew, where the palatalised sibilant /š/ is pronounced with the tongue tip more retracted compared to /ś/.

The differences between Jewish Gabes and Jewish Djerba are also observable within the domain of vowels. The former has three phonemic short vowels, i.e., /ə/, /a/, and /o/ (Gębski f.c. a). On the other hand, Jewish Djerba seems to have only one phonemic short vowel, /ə/, aligning in this respect with Jewish Tripoli (Behnstedt 1998, 60; Yoda 2005, 31). In addition, Jewish Djerba exhibits several types of vowel elision which are not found in Jewish Gabes. One of them is the length reduction /ā/ > /a/ or /ə/, and /ū/ > /ə/. This is particularly the case with short lexemes in which the long vowel is in medial position, e.g., *kān* > *kən* ‘if’, *mūš* > *məš* ‘not’, *tā’həm* > *ṭhōm* ‘of them.’ Similarly, word-final vowels tend to be elided when followed by another word, e.g., *ḥatta hīya* > \**ḥatt hīya*<sup>11</sup> > *ḥattiya* ‘even her’, *ḥa-yži* > *ḥiži* ‘he will come.’

## 2.2. Syntax

### 2.2.1. Expressions of Future

The two dialects in question exhibit different ways of expressing the future tense. Apart from the prefix conjugation, Jewish Gabes utilises two ways involving preverbal particles. The first one entails the particle *bāš/bəš*, as in the following example:<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> /h/ in Jewish Djerba is often dropped.

<sup>12</sup> Abbreviations used in the glossing: PFX: prefix form, SFX: suffix form, MS: masculine singular, FS: feminine singular, PL: plural, AP: active participle.

- (1) *ta'rəf*                      *šnūwa*    *bəš*    *yšīr*  
 know.PFX.2MS    what    to    happen.PFS.3MS  
 'Do you know what is going to happen?' (1.23)

This future marker originates in purposive clauses, in which the action expressed by the subordinate clause is always posterior in reference to the main clause. For instance, in the typically purposive sentence *mša bi əl-dār bəš yāklū* 'he went with him home to eat' (1.45), the action of eating is in the future from the perspective of the action of going. It seems, therefore, that this temporal posteriority embedded in purposive clauses has opened a pathway for the development of *bəš* as the future marker. Moreover, the type of future encoded by *bəš* also seems to indicate its origin in purposive sentences. Namely, this particle usually expresses epistemic future, referring to evidence, reasoning, or beliefs. The speaker is, therefore, fairly sure that the event will indeed take place. Both in the passage above and in (1.74), the speaker makes an assumption about future events based on personal beliefs and evidence. This type of future is likely rooted in purposive clauses, where the common implicature is that the action expressed by the subordinate clause indeed took place (Schmidtke-Bode 2009, 178; Khan 2021). It is worth noting that the same function of the particle *bəš* has been attested in the Algerian Arabic dialect of the Jews of Wad-Souf and in the Malekite dialect of Djerba, which in the Ibadite community is shortened to /b-/ (Behnstedt 1998, 55; Gębski, f.c. b). As far as my data is concerned, the Jews of Djerba do not use this particle to express future.

Moreover, Jewish Gabes utilises an additional means of expressing the future, i.e., the grammaticalised active participle of the verb *ḥabb* ‘like’, as in the following example:

- (2) *əl-ḥaṭṭāb mərt-u ḥābla u ḥabb*  
 the-lumberjack wife-3MS pregnant.AP and will  
*tžīb wəld*  
 bring.PFX.3FS boy  
 ‘The lumberjack, his wife will give birth to a boy.’

As pointed out by Gębski (2022), it appears that this device is used mainly to express predictions of low probability and unverifiable statements. The fact that Jewish Gabes makes use of the *ḥabb* future marker, sheds light on the provenance of the future prefix in Jewish Djerba, i.e., *ḥa*, as demonstrated by the following passage:

- (3) *māma šam‘at li ḥa-y‘alləmni məš yəhūdi*  
 mother hear.SFX.3FS that will-teach.PFX.3MS not Jew  
 ‘Mother heard that a non-Jew would teach me.’<sup>13</sup>

This particle is occasionally realised in fast speech as *ḥ*, especially when the verb form starts with the *yə-* prefix. It appears that it functions as a marker of future events regardless of the level of their probability. In the passage in example (3), it encodes an event that has been planned in advance and is almost sure to take place. On the other hand, in the following example, the probability of the event is unsure and *ḥa* marks a volitive prediction, rather than a fact:

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<sup>13</sup> An excerpt from recordings.

- (4) *l-mšəlmīn*    *ġādi*    *‘arfu*                    *li*            *aḥna*  
 the-Muslims    there    know.SFX.3PL            that            we  
*ḥa-nəməšīw*    *l-israel*  
 will-go.PFX.1PL    to-Israel  
 ‘The Muslims [who were] there knew that we would go to Israel.’

Behnstedt claims that this prefix is a grammaticalised and truncated form of the temporal preposition *ḥatta* ‘until’ (1998, 68). Although one cannot exclude this possibility, considering the data from Gabes, it seems more plausible that it originates in *ḥabb* and was extended from cases of unspecified probability, like in the passage (4), to mark all types of the future.

### 2.2.2. Dislocation and Topicalisation

In this section, I shall discuss two syntactic phenomena related to the extraposition of nouns and pronouns. When delving into cross-linguistic research that centres on the syntax of pronouns and their representation of information structure, linguists frequently draw a clear distinction between two fundamental phenomena: topicalisation and left dislocation (Miller-Naudé and Naudé 2021, 617). Topicalisation, also known as fronting, involves relocating a constituent from its default position to a preverbal one. Importantly, the topicalised element remains embedded within the sentence, obviating the need for resumption. In contrast, left dislocation comprises the extraction of a constituent from the main clause and its placement at the left periphery of the matrix sentence, outside its syntactic boundaries. Simultaneously, it involves resuming this constituent within the matrix

clause (Alexiadou 2006, 668). We will focus here on those cases where a constituent is placed outside the matrix clause.

As the text samples above suggest, left dislocation appears to be a common strategy in both Jewish Gabes, example (5), and Jewish Djerba, example (6). Notably, the dislocated constituent is marked by a distinct prosodic pause, explicitly setting it apart from the matrix sentence:

- (5) *l-wəld hādāk | əṣ-ṣəltān ymūt ywalli*  
 the-boy that the-sultan die.PFX.3MS become.PFX.3MS  
*hūwa ṣəltān*  
 he sultan  
 ‘That boy, when the sultan dies, he will become sultan.’  
 (1.25)

- (6) *āna | wəldi ‘ažž ‘aliya yāṣər*  
 I son.my dear on.me a lot  
 ‘Me, my son is very dear to me.’ (3.7)

As has been mentioned, left dislocations are characterised by two main features: (1) the dislocated element is found outside the matrix clause, which is reflected via a clear prosodic pause separating the two parts of the sentence, and (2) the dislocated constituent is referred to in the main clause, primarily by means of resumption. These two parameters are exemplified by the above passages, where the dislocated constituent is resumed by a personal pronoun, as in (5), or pronominal suffixes, as in (6).

Nevertheless, it seems that both dialects in question utilise yet another expository strategy which does not meet the aforementioned criteria of left dislocation. Let us consider the following examples:

- (7) *əl-fraš* | *hūwa* *yərqaḍ* *ṛāš-u* *mən-hna*  
 the-bed he sleep.PFX.3MS head-3MS from-here  
*u* *hīya* *ṛāša* *mən-hna*  
 and she head.her from-here

The bed—he sleeps from this side, and she sleeps from that side.’ (1.8)

- (8) *l-ʿarš* | *kānu* *šabʿa* *əyyām* *u* *šabʿa* *əlyāli*  
 the-wedding be.SFX.3PL seven days and seven nights  
 ‘The wedding—they were seven days and seven nights.’  
 (2.1)

As can be observed, in contrast to left dislocations, the fronted element in the sentences above is not resumed within the matrix clause; instead, it loosely establishes its thematic frame. This construction is commonly referred to as the ‘Chinese-Style Topic Construction’ (Chafe 1976; Li and Thompson 1976; Westbury 2016, 28). Since no resumption occurs in these constructions, the fronted element is semantically or pragmatically related to the sentence. Consequently, it appears that we are not dealing here with dislocation, meaning that the extraposed element was never an integral part of the matrix sentence, but rather serves as a topic-setting device. The topic, set in this manner, can persist throughout a significant portion of the discourse, as seen in (8), or it can be limited to a single sentence, as in (7). In the latter case, it seems that the function of this

construction is deictic, specifically, the speaker aims to vividly illustrate the described scenery to engage with the listener.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.0. Conclusion

This preliminary study demonstrates that, despite their geographic proximity, the Jewish dialects of Gabes and Djerba exhibit several differences. In the realm of phonology, the most pronounced distinction involves their vowel inventory. While Jewish Gabes seems to have three phonemic vowels, namely /ə/, /a/, and /o/, in Jewish Djerba, the sole phonemic vowel is /ə/. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the realisation of palatal sibilants in this dialect is more fronted compared to Jewish Gabes. The section on syntax discusses two phenomena, namely expressions of the future and dislocations. As argued, the preverbal future marker *ħa-* found in Djerba likely originates from *ħabb*, a marker also attested in Gabes. Indeed, cross-linguistically, volitive verbs often evolve into future markers, as seen in English with *will* and Greek with  $\theta\alpha$  (Gębski 2022). Dislocations, on the other hand, exhibit similar tendencies in both dialects. Of particular typological interest are non-resumptive extrapositions of nouns, resembling topical constructions found in Chinese. Undoubtedly, future studies will shed more light on the points of divergence and convergence between these two dialects.

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<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that this construction is widely used in other Judaeo-Arabic dialects in North Africa as well, such as Wad-Souf (Gębski, f.c. b).

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