One Fifth of the Tiny Samaritan Community in Nablus Died in the Epidemic of 1786

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A three-page narrative of an epidemic that raged in Nablus in 1786 and its tragic consequences for the Samaritan community is preserved today in the British Library, MS Or. 2691.¹ This epidemic (possibly the plague or cholera) took the lives of approximately four thousand people. Of these, about twenty were Samaritan men, women and children – one fifth of the city’s Samaritan population.²

The author and scribe of the narrative was the well-known Samaritan poet, Torah commentator, grammarian, philanthropist, and historian Ibrāhīm b. Ya˓qūb b. Murğān b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā˓īl al-Danafī (1719-1786), famous by his nickname El-˓Ayyeh, meaning “the pleader” or “the stammerer” and also

1. Folios 29b–30b. This manuscript can be viewed on microfilm number 8437 at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.
2. Some have claimed, although without source citations, that the number of the Samaritans in Nablus at the end of the eighteenth century was less than two hundred. On the other hand, El-˓Ayyeh was an eye witness. See Ben-Zvi 1955, 428; Crown (ed.) 1989, 120; Tsedaka 2001, 76; Tsedaka 2016, 627–636; Schur 2002, 613. The plague affected the coastal town of Acre in 1746, where the well-known Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzato (1707–1746), for instance, met his death. By comparison, in the twelfth century, the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (1130–1173), who visited Nablus three years before his death, mentioned the number of its Samaritans as being one thousand. See Myller n.d., 20, 21; Adler 1907, 20. Benjamin of Tudela writes, “These are the Jews of Shomron, who are called Samaritans … the place is situated in the valley between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and contains about 1,000 Cuthim, who observe the written law of Moses alone and are called Samaritans.” I could not find any other source for this epidemic.
known as Ibrāhīm the Samaritan. Together with his uncle Salāma b. Murğān, El-‘Ayyeh made an exhaustive commentary in Arabic on the first four books of the Torah. In the mid-eighteenth century, El-‘Ayyeh purchased a plot of land on Mount Gerizim in order to celebrate the feast of the Passover there and also to serve as a place to bury Samaritans. After El-‘Ayyeh’s death, Samaritans were forbidden to practice their religious rituals until 1820.

In the eighteenth century, Nablus played a leading role in the trade and industry of Palestine, especially in soap and confectioneries. However, the city was beset by trials. In 1771 and again in 1773 the local Palestinian ruler Zāhir al-.Umar al-Zaydānī (1689–1775) launched campaigns against the rural emirs of the Nablus area, the clans of Māḍī and Ğarrār, and replaced them with notables from the family of Muṣṭafa Bēk Ţūqān, whose banker and secretary served El-‘Ayyeh. And the year 1786 brought not only epidemic to Nablus, but also severe drought. Food was scarce and extremely expensive.

3. Pronounced by the Samaritans today Åbrām ban Yā:qob ban ab Sikkewwa. El-‘Ayyeh died in the year of the epidemic, fifty-eight days after the death of the high priest Ghazlā; see Ben-Zvi 1935, 240, 251. On El-‘Ayyeh, see Hanover 1904; Robertson 1943, 341–350; Ben-Ḥayyim 1957, 22–82; Tsedaka 2016, 632–636. On the numerous epithets attached to El-‘Ayyeh, see Robertson 1938, 1962. On the Danafi family in general, see the composition by Abdallah b. Murğān (d. 1940), preserved as manuscript no. 7073 in the library of the Yad Yizthak Ben-Zvi Institute in West Jerusalem, and its translation into Hebrew in A. B. -Samaritan News 679, 2 February 1997, 31–41. This translation was based on a manuscript owned by Khalīl Fayyād. I thank Benyamim Tsdaka for this information. See Shehadeh 2016, no. 39. According to Baillet 1988, El-‘Ayyeh died in 1787 or 1788, whereas Schur 1993 claims he was born c. 1710 and died in 1783, yet neither author gives a source for this information.

4. See, for example, Robertson 1938, 267, concerning the repair of Eleazar’s courtyard; Ben-Zvi 1935, 251. The eighteenth century witnessed recession and deterioration in the Ottoman Empire in all areas of life; see, for example, Sajdi 2013; Cohen 1973; Doumani 2002; Rafiq 1990, 695–848; Mannā 2003; Bull (ed.) 1989; Schur 1989, 136–138, al-Dabbāġ 2003, al-Nimr 1938.

5. Neapoli or Neapolis, “the new city,” today has a population of approximately 340,000. Several names and epithets have been given to Nablus, including “the small Damascus” (in the tenth century, by the geographer al-Maqdisiy), “nest of scholars,” “the uncrowned queen of Palestine,” “the city of revolutionaries,” “the martyrs’ factory,” and “the Samaritans’ Qibla” (direction of prayer); see www.voltairenet.org/article151517. Yet the designation “Fire Mountain” probably comes from the end of the eighteenth century, when Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) invaded Palestine. When his returning army passed the plain of Azzūn, warriors from Nablus and its suburbs set fire to the fields and Mount Ebal in the north of the city. Doumani 2002; Doumani 1995. El-‘Ayyeh, who joined the leaders of Ţūqān’s clan against Zāhir al-.Umar’s two invasions, left a chronicle of these invasions. See Ben-Zvi 1934, 139–148; Ben-Zvi, 1935, 220–233, 257. I thank Dr. Ali Watad for examining this reference for me; Schur 1998, 53–79.
Samaritans had lived in the Middle East for centuries and in Nablus since old times until today without interruption, but their numbers had dwindled. The Samaritan presence in Damascus had come to an end more than a century and a half before the Nablus epidemic, specifically, in 1625, during the reign of Governor Pasha Mardam Bey. During that period, 1624–50, Tsedaka b. Tabia b. Yosef served as the high priest. In the middle of the eighteenth century the two Samaritan communities in Cairo and Gaza met their demise. Meanwhile, there is some evidence that in the year 1766 there were Samaritans living in Jerusalem and Jaffa. In late eighteenth-century Nablus, Samaritans were confined to al-Yasmīna quarter in the southwest of the city. Before the outbreak of the epidemic in 1786, the number of Samaritans in Nablus had grown to nearly one hundred. In 1837 an earthquake in Nablus killed twenty Samaritans. Almost a century later, in the year 1927, an earthquake destroyed part of the city, including many houses in the old Samaritan quarter.

The British Library manuscript Or. 2691 consists of 42 folios (not 43, as stated on the verso of its final leaf). It is clear that more than one scribe contributed to the copying of its various contents, including Ibrāhīm El-‘Ayyeh (the Samaritan Ibrāhīm). In the last line of an autograph poem (no. 71, fols. 9a–11a) of the manuscript, El-‘Ayyeh indicated the year of the epidemic, 1201 H. = 1786 A.D., by using the letters of the alphabet according to their numerical value (gematria). El-‘Ayyeh ended his poem with the words ارخ السامري ابراهيم واحد اعتقاده، meaning “fix the date” – 342 + 259 + 19 + 581 = 1201 H. = 1786 A.D. – and on fol. 11a the year of his birth, 1719 can be fixed be-

6. See Niebuhr 1837, 39, 63.

7. As stated in the last line of this poem, beginning with the words ناعتي للعمل العليم بعبادته اتق الله ربك لا تتبع شهاده (“describing me as a worshipper of the cursed calf, be wary of God, do not create a testimony”), fol. 9a and the last line on fol. 11a: “قد قلها امْرُ الْوَرَى ارْخُ السَّامِرِي ابْرَاهِيمُ واحِدُ اعْتِقَادِهُ (“uttered by the most despicable person in the world, Ibrāhīm the Samaritan, who has one faith”). Before this as well as on fol. 5b, line 115, of the first poem, El-‘Ayyeh writes: انا لزؤا من عبادة العجل وشهد ان فاعلله “We are innocent of the worship of the calf and testify that its makers and worshippers are damned.”
cause in the year 1786 he was 67 years old.

As far as I know, this is the only written source regarding the birth year of El-‘Ayyeh.8

Nineteenth-century scribal hands in this manuscript include Amīn b. (as given in the original; later ولد, here meaning “son of”) Jacob b. Shelabī b. Yosef b. Shelabī al-Danafi who belonged to the faith of Moses (الموسوي مذهبا) and who was living in Nablus (النابلسي وطنا); he finished copying his portion of the manuscript in 1293 H. = 1876 A.D.9 Amin’s brother Shelabī b. (ibn = son of) Jacob āl (from the family of) Shelabī āl Yosef āl Ibrahīm al-Danafi the Damascene was another contributor, in the year 1295 H. = 1878 A.D.10

In the addition to the narrative of the epidemic and a discourse on the high cost of living and the famine, the manuscript contains fourteen poems by El-‘Ayyeh, amounting to more than 600 lines. The first poem is the longest, with 212 lines, and is placed at the beginning of the manuscript. The poem’s opening line is: “O he who aims at understanding the obvious truth in order to respond to the philosophers and also to the doubters! at!”.

In addition, there are poems by other authors, some of whom are specified, such as Shelabī b. Jacob āl Shelabī, the Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khammāsh(?) al-Ḍarīr (the Blind), and Abū Nuwās (756–814 A.D.).11

Among the poems are talḥāmīs, five-part poems all having the same rhyme, such as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{يا هـ عل_all the worlds surrender} \\
\text{كل العواط تخضع} \\
\text{يا من يرجع} \\
\text{يا من يرجع} \\
\text{انت المعد لكلما يتوقع}
\end{align*}
\]

O He to whom all worlds surrender

8. Cf. Ben-Ḥayyim 1957, xxi. Ben-Ḥayyim suggested that El-‘Ayyeh was born no later than the beginning of the third decade of the eighteenth century; on the basis of MS Or. 2691 the precise year is now clear, 1719.
9. See fol. 32 of the manuscript.
10. Ibid.
11. See fol. 37a of the manuscript, 1295 H. = 1878 A.D.; fols. 41a and 40b.
O He who loves to forgive the repentant.
O He through whom I hope and desire to survive
O He who sees what is in the conscience (soul) and hears,
You are the maker of whatever is expected.

A significant number of these poems are included in the book of Samaritan hymns edited and published by Ratson Tsedaka (1922–1990), although El-'Ayyeh’s opening poem is not among them. The manuscript also includes a commentary on Deuteronomy 32 (سورۃ القيادة/يوم البعثة، ﷺ) copied by El-'Ayyeh in 1784. As is usual, the original Hebrew text is presented in Samaritan script, placed on fol. 7a. The opening lines of the manuscript, which also function as its title, are as follows:

هذا مجموع فيه ثبتت عقائد ملة السامرية/وفي الوحدة الربانية المحضه وفي البعث/وفي البرأة من عبادة العجل/اللعين وفي الرد علي/الفلاسفة والمجبرة/والقدرية وما/عندهم من/الشبه/المخالف كل هذه المذاهب الموفيين من اهل/المذاهب ارباب التوحيد اسالية/حسن التوفيق للتحقيق/أمين.

This collection has a confirmation of the tenets of the Samaritan denomination, of pure divine unity, of the resurrection, of the exculpation of worshipping the cursed calf, a response to the philosophers, determinists, and people of free will and what resemblance they have to infringements on all these doctrines of the believers in monotheism. I ask the almighty good luck for implementing this. Amen.

After the Ottoman occupation of Palestine in 1517, the country was di-

13. See fols. 17-29.
14. The forward slash indicates the end of one line and the beginning of the next. Two forward slashes indicate the end of one page and the beginning of the following.
vided into six regions (sanjaks/liwā˒s): Safed, Jenin, Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus, and Ajloun. In the second half of the eighteenth century – the time in which El-.Ayyeh lived and the epidemic took place – there were seven Samaritan families. The Ḥiftawi priests who stemmed from the Ethamar of Awertha were situated to the east of Nablus; the Ṣafaris (الصباحيون) were the children of Menashe; the Danfis originated from Damascus and consisted of four branches: al-Shelabī, al-Sarawī, al-Ṭīf, and al-Musallamī. There were also the families of al-Mufarraqiyyūn (the Marḥīves); the al-Rumahīyyūn who were descendants of Ephraim; al-Maṭariyyūn descendants of Binyamim; and finally al-Ḥarirīyyūn, whose origin is unknown to us. The last three families died out in the nineteenth century. Part of MS Or. 2691 was prepared toward the end of the eighteenth century, and the rest was copied at the end of the nineteenth century. The report on the epidemic appears on fols. 29b–30b and is probably incomplete. This Arabic text is given below and then rendered into English, and is also annotated and published for the first time. I have added some fifty linguistic comments in marginal notes and others are at the end of the article. As the reader will observe, some of the words in the report have been indecipherable.

Soon after the epidemic the situation of the Nablus inhabitants improved, thanks to the arrival in the harbor at Jaffa of provisions from the islands of Galite and Malta. Boats were loaded weekly with various foodstuffs, such as wheat, barley, sorghum, lentil vetch, pressed dates, carob, horse-beans, lentils, roasted chick-peas, onion, raisins, dried figs, molasses and rice. El-.Ayyeh describes miserable and inhuman conditions: people sold their belongings to buy food; some of them were compelled to eat corpses. There were numerous beggars (“like locusts” according to the Arabic original). Crying babies, males and females were offered for sale on the streets, in the markets and in the alleys, but no one could afford to buy them. A few examples will give an idea of the prices of the time: a jar of olive oil cost 15 grouch (20 zlots); a jar of
One Fifth of the Tiny Samaritan Community

Haseeb Shehadeh

sesame oil cost 12 groush; a jar of honey cost 18.75 groush; a rotl (1 a pound) of butter was priced at three groush; a pound of each of the following items cost 0.75 groush (the equivalent of 25 mişriyyah): rice, raisins, dried figs, roasted chick-peas, pressed dates, lentils, horse-beans, sorghum. The same high prices held true for fruits and greens. Finally, the writer mentions that the cats in Nablus were liquidated: they were all eaten by the villagers.

El-Ayyeh’s report on the epidemic:

""بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وبه نستعين"/15 يا واقف على هذا التاريخ تعجب في فرصة الله تعالى الواقعة في سنة 1301/1912 الذي جمّرتها تارخًا كما هي محترمة على الحاشيةقدامك فيها/غشا البلدة وبا وتوفا منها نحو أربعة آلاف روح. وكان أعداء جمعتني فيها نحو مائة روح توفاهُم نحو الخمس رجال ونساء واطفال ونوجدهم وفصواته ووقفاً. هذا البلاز من شدة الغلا والقحط الذي وقع من أول بيادر الغلال كان صاع الحنطة بنصف غرش/ووصل زولطة ولا أن الله يسر مجي الحنطة من نحو بار باد جالطة ومالاته كان الصاع واحد دهب وصار يجي في كل جمعها مراكب عدة وممسية/حنته وثرثرة وعذرة وكسره وعذره وخروجوب وفول وعد وقضاء/وفي وصول وضيقين ودبي ودبر وشرب؟ مواتر على أسكنة يافع/عمرها الله تعالى وصارة هذه الأقطار ساراً تتوجه لها المثار؟/واشتدت المجاعة واتلّت غالب الخلق بالفاجعه وباعت غالباً متاعها وتعرت الجسد ومجازها غالباً انفس وصارة تموت كم ولم يدري أحداً عن أحد وصار المضطر (في الأصل: المنطر) يأكل لحم الموتى من الفطاييس ويبتغون عرضاهم ويأكلون زمناً ب/version/والناس اطباعها لا على قياس وذوي الاشتراك/من شدة المجاعة تجاوز تصغير نفسه وصار يسال الخاص/والعام واتا للبلدة رجل غريبه من مصر ومن معان ومن مدينة سيدنا خليل الرحمن ومن بار قبله شحابين كالجراد/المرتاح وصاراو يضيقو البيوت بالباحهم وفي شوارع/البلدة ومنهم من يستغلو الخلق ويصرفو متاعهم/وهم من يعطي ولده ذكر أو اثني [في الأصل: اثنى] للدلالة يبيع وله/بجد المشتري وقد امتلأ منهم الأزقة والشوارع والأسواق ووعيدهم الداخل الكرب على كل من يخشي الرب/وصار يتموو جمله وحاد وهل فعل الشاب وتأخير عن/وقه مسافة فإزادة الناس مخافه قان؟ السبب فيما هو الواقع في العام الماضي وعدد الثاني فيه وانقطاع المنايب ونزعه إبرار تجمع مع قطع النبع وعدم غلة/الزيت إلى أن وصلته جرة عشرين زولطة وجرة الشيرج/ستة عشر زولطة وجرة العسل خمس عشرين زولطة/ورطل السمن بارع زولطة ورطل الازر بارع وعشرين مصريه ورطل/الزبيب بارع وعشرين مصريه ورطل القطين بارع وعشرين مصريه/ورطل القضماء بارع وعشرين مصريه ورطل العجوز بارع وعشرين/مصريه ورطل

15. This kind of opening is common in El-Ayyeh’s writings; see Robertson 1938, 263, 265-267.
In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful, and in Him from whom we seek help. O, he who comes across this date, you may wonder at God’s power, which took place in the year 1201.\textsuperscript{16} The gematria of this year is \textsuperscript{\textit{Tārīkh}} \[the numerical value of the letters of this word represents 400+1+200+600 = 1201 \text{H.} = 1786 \text{A.D.} \], as written here in the margin before you.\textsuperscript{17} In it [the year 1201 \text{H.} = 1786 \text{A. D.}] an epidemic\textsuperscript{18} took place\textsuperscript{19} in the town [Nablus] and approximately 4,000 souls\textsuperscript{20} died because of it. The number of our group [the Samaritans] in it [Nablus] was about 100\textsuperscript{21} souls of whom approximately one fifth died, including men, women and children. The people suffered [literally: felt pain], and in addition to this hardship, prices rose sharply and there was a drought just as crops were being taken to the threshing floors [in Summer]. The price of saa\textsuperscript{22} [a cubic measure of grain and dry materials such as barley, sugar, lentils] of wheat was half a groush and became one zlot.\textsuperscript{23} Had it not been for God who facilitated the coming of wheat from the sea of the

\textsuperscript{16}. In the original, the number is placed above the word سنة (year), a common habit among Arabs today.
\textsuperscript{17}. The substance of the gematria is given in the right margin.
\textsuperscript{18}. The author does not disclose whether the epidemic was the plague or cholera or some other scourge. I was unable to find any information about this event.
\textsuperscript{19}. In the margin عليه has been added in a different hand. The correct verbal form appears in the text.
\textsuperscript{20}. Usually, the word نسمة is utilized in such a context. ’
\textsuperscript{21}. In other sources, the number of Samaritans given is 200; see Ben-Zvi 1935, 240.
\textsuperscript{22}. Saa of wheat is about 2,800 grams; of barley, 2,350 grams; of lentils, 2,600 grams. Four mudds make one saa followed by .\textit{libe} and then \textit{qintār} (quintal).
\textsuperscript{23}. Zulța or zaleța is a Turkish silver coin that equals three quarters of a groush; see Frayha 1973, 74; Dahmān 1990, 87 no. 465.
countries of Galite24 and Malta, the price of one saa of wheat would have been one gold. Every week25 several boats loaded26 with wheat, barley, sorghum, lentil vetch, pressed dates, carob, horse-beans, lentils, roasted chickpeas, onion, raisins, dried figs, molasses, rice and vermicelli27 reached the port28 of Jaffa. May God the Exalted build it [Jaffa] and [may the people] of these regions begin setting their sights29 on it. The famine worsened, and the majority of the people suffered because of this catastrophe,30 sold most of their belongings and went naked.31 The mood32 of the people worsened as they began dying of despair. None of them knew anything about one another, and people33 were forced to eat the meat of the dead, of the stinking corpses.34 They crushed the bones and ate them. May our God have mercy upon them. The character of most people was not based on principles.35 Because of the severity of the famine the decent persons36 lowered themselves in the extreme37 and began begging, both in public and in

25. In the original جمعه, meaning “a week” in colloquial Arabic.
26. Suddenly, the word موسقة appears, unexpected literary expression here. The usual expression would be محلة.
27. In the manuscript, we find شعر, meaning “hair” or “poetry,” depending on its vocalization; neither meaning fits the context. شعرية or شعريّة in standard Arabic or iššiриyye in Palestinian Arabic, meaning “vermicelli” is reasonable. There is an aphorism in Palestinian Arabic that goes il ˒izz larruz wišš ˒iryye ṣḥān aḥāla meaning “high rank is to rice and vermicelli is hanging itself” meaning rice is esteemed and vermicelli is despised.
28. Askala is a Turkish word, which has been replaced by the word mīnā. originally from Greek; see Dahmān 1990. From 1289 until 21 December 1979, the port of Lebanese Tripoli was called askalat ˒Tarblis. The literary form is iskalah.
29. The required word is al-anẓār; al-maṣār, given in the text, is meaningless here.
30. In the manuscript, the word bi-l-fāḡa appears instead of the expected form bi-l-faḡ-a because it rhymes with the preceding word al-maḡā-a. One of the striking features of El-˒Ayyeh’s Arabic, which is far from standard, is the use of saḡ-/kalāmūn muqaffān, viz “rhyme”, “assonance”.
31. In the manuscript, the wrong verbal form appears: taʾarrat instead of the transitive verb ṭarrat.
32. The author uses a wrong form of the required word wa-maḡāzuhā meaning “its metaphor”, mizāḡ/mażāḡ became maḡāz.
33. The scribe wrote the word phonetically.
34. The word faṭāyis in colloquial Arabic means “stinking corpses”, whereas faṭā-is in Modern Standard Arabic means simply “corpses”.
35. Though this rhyming expression is unknown to me from any other source, its meaning is obvious. ˒Aṭbā. in this sense is not attested in Arabic lexicons.
36. In the manuscript, wa-ḏawī appears in the genitive or accusative case instead of the nominative case wa-ḏawu and in the plural; the required form according to the words that follow should be in the singular, wa-ḍu “and the possessor endowed with”.
37. Probably El-˒Ayyeh was thinking of the colloquial phrase waṭṭa nafṣu-ḥālu.
private. Numerous foreign male beggars [pervasive as locusts, in the Arabic original] from Egypt, Ma'an, Hebron [the city of our master, the friend of the Merciful = Abraham = al-khalīl in Arabic, Hebron] and from areas south of Nablus were everywhere. They began to harass [the people] in the houses and in the streets of the city [Nablus] with their insistence. Some of them took people by surprise and stole their belongings. Others gave their child, whether boy or girl, to brokers to be sold, but no buyers were to be found. The alleyways, streets and markets were full of them [children for sale]. Their wailing caused distress to every one who feared God. They [the children] began dying en masse and individuals began dying collectively and individually. Winter came after some delay, and the people’s fears increased.

Verily, the reason for this is what happened during last year [1785], the barrenness of the second year, the depletion of the springs and the emptiness of the wells. All this occurred along with the springs drying up. In addition, the shortage of the olive tree harvest led to the following prices: a jar

38. In the manuscript, rağul/ruğul ġarībe; the required forms are irğāl ġurbiyye in Palestinian Arabic, meaning “strangers, outsiders.”
39. Qibla in literary Arabic means “side, direction of prayer which is Makka”, but in spoken Palestinian Arabic it also means “south”. Verbal forms derived from it include ābbal, bi-ābbal, ābbil, im-ābbil etc. meaning “turned south” etc.
40. In the manuscript, yudāḫil instead of the yudḫil; verbal form III is used instead of IV, a feature characteristic of Samaritan Arabic. Other examples are V instead of II or I, and VI instead of I; e.g., تﻈﺎﻫﺮ, تﺒﻴﻦ, تﻌﺮﺕ.
41. In the manuscript, the word used is masāfa “distance”, because it rhymes with the following word maḥāfa “fear”. This delay may mean that the winter of the 1786 came at the end of November or the beginning of December.
42. In the original, qān is used, apparently instead of fa inna، فِإِنْ < فِإِنْ.
43. In the manuscript, ḥammām al-alqāḍī “the judge’s bath”, also in the Yasmīne quarter, ḥammām al-darağā, “the bath of the stair”.
44. Manābhī is not attested in literary Arabic dictionaries; the form used is manābî. Nablus in general and Mount Gerizim in particular are known for their abundance of springs. Among the springs in the Mount Gerizim area are the following: ra:s al-ain, āin al-šibān, āin bait al-mān, āin -al-asal, āin al-qaryūn, āin al-dafnah.
45. Such word usages show an extensive knowledge of Arabic vocabulary on the part of El-Ayyeh and other Samaritan scholars, even though their knowledge of grammar was poor. They had a good sense of Arabic style. Opposite phenomenon is found among orientalists and Arabic language professors at Western universities today.
46. In the manuscript, al-zayt “oil” is given instead of zaytūn “olive trees”. Nablus is famous for its distinctive soap made of pure olive oil. It has also been known for its baths: ḥammām al-šifā, “the healing bath”, ḥammām al-sumara “the Samaritans’ bath” in the Yasmīne quarter, ḥammām al-alqāḍī “the judge’s bath”, also in the Yasmīne quarter, ḥammām al-darağā, “the bath of the stair”.

One Fifth of the Tiny Samaritan Community

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of olive oil\textsuperscript{47} cost 20 zlots;\textsuperscript{48} a jar of sesame oil\textsuperscript{49} cost 16 zlots; a jar of honey cost 25 zlots; a rotl\textsuperscript{50} [a pound] of butter was priced at four zlots; a rotl of the following items cost 24 miṣriyya:\textsuperscript{51} rice, raisins, dried figs, roasted chickpeas, pressed dates, chestnut,\textsuperscript{52} lentils, horse-beans and sorghum. Moreover, in this year [1786] the rest of fruits, the kinds of high summer [products] and legumes were scarce because of the lack of water, since the prosperity of earth depends upon the blessing of heaven.\textsuperscript{53} The price of a rotl of something that was one or two miṣriyyah rose to half a zlot, and a jar of water\textsuperscript{54} cost one and a half miṣriyyah. People’s misfortune increased, and they experienced hardship and could not tolerate each other. A man began to hate his child because of the straitened circumstances, starvation, corruption \[?\]. Add to this the cessation of means, lack of products and

\textsuperscript{47} It is difficult to know the capacity of a jar filled with various liquids in eighteenth-century Nablus. Nowadays large cans of aluminum or plastic gallons are common, each of which can hold eighteen litres.

\textsuperscript{48} Literally, “until its jar reached twenty zlots.” The particle \˒an in the manuscript has been added between the lines. This coin was in use in Palestine in the late twenties of the twentieth century in Artas village near Beth Lehem, see Qāsim & Qanānwah 2015, 667.

\textsuperscript{49} A copper coin with the Sultan’s monogram; its plural form, mašārī, means “money” in colloquial Arabic. Its name in Damascus is darāhim. Damascus also has the bāra; whereas a proper grouch equals 32 miṣriyya, an asadī grouch has a lion image, and a bāra is one fortieth of a grouch.

\textsuperscript{50} Al-Barghouthi says that it consisted of twelve ounces, each ounce weighing 240 grams, so one rotl would be 2,880 grams; see al-Barghouthi 1993, 50. In my village – Kufur Yasif in western Galilee – a raṭil (“rotl”) is 2.5 kilograms (a little over 5 pounds).

\textsuperscript{51} Al-Šīraḡ in the manuscript or the common form al-šīraḡ in sīn, pronounced today al-šīrēq by the Samaritans “sesamum indicum,” is a loanword from Persian and is common in the Iraqi dialect. Other synonyms are used šimšim and ḡulวลān and, in southern Saudi Arabia, the literary word al-salīṭ. There is a saying that goes السَّلِيم مَسْتَطِلُ عَلَى كُلِّ مَرَضٍ “sesame oil works for every sickness.” This oil has been used for health purposes since the days of the Pharaohs. It is very likely that al-šīraḡ here means any oil for frying.

\textsuperscript{52} Surprisingly, El-˓Ayyeh did not mention basic items such as sugar, salt, coffee, tea, or olives.

\textsuperscript{53} This expression or phrase was unknown to me before I encountered it in this manuscript; it seems to be very rare. Compare sūrat al-˓A-raf aya 96. An Internet search yielded only the following link: https://www.shasha.ps/news/95930.html. MS Or. 2691 may well be the oldest evidence of this expression.

\textsuperscript{54} Qullah pl. qulal, qilāl, is a pottery jar that usually holds about 100 liters (about 105.5 quarts).
the traders’s shops that closed. The owners of tuhmat [?] of some of the world
were full [?] and when anyone ate an orange,55 several beggars
would hover around to snatch its peelings. The villagers liquidated the cats.
They began taking them and eating them, while most of the outsiders were
seen committing robberies on the highway“.

Linguistic remarks

It is clear that El-‘Ayyeh’s Arabic, like the Arabic of almost all Samaritan
writers from the Middle Ages until today, was far from standard, being fla-
vored with many colloquialisms. El-Ayyeh himself admitted his deficiencies
in this respect.56 Below is a brief description of the non-standard phenomena
in El-’Ayyeh’s text, given in order to complete the remarks in the marginal
notes.

A) Spelling and phonology

Yā˒ is used instead of alif maqṣūra (short alif); e.g. علي.
Long alif is used instead of short alif; e.g. وتوافا، الموت، واتا.
Long tā˒ is used instead of tā˒ marbūta in verbs; e.g. وكاتا، وصارا، وقادة، وصلة، تسكرة، تظاهرة.

Final hā˒ occurs without the two dots except in the state of construct; e.g. مدينة
سيدة خليل الرحمن، محرره، الحنظه، زولله، جالظه، مالظه، جمعه، عديده، موسمه، المجاعه،
الفجاعه، كرسنه، عجوه، قضائه، البلده، قليله، دره، بسيره.

Dāl appears instead of dāl, as in towns’ dialects; e.g. داز، داه، شحاد، ده،
ذلك، ياخذوه.

Ḍād instead of zā˒ as in towns’ dialects; e.g. عضامهم.
Hamza becomes a vowel; e.g. ماه، فطايس، and it is omitted at the ends of
words; e.g. وباء، البلاء، الغلا، مجي، يجي and the word ونساء is the only exception;

55. In the original, laimūnah “an orange” in written Arabic and some dialects, but laimūn ḥāmiḍ is
“lemon.” In my dialect lamūn and the common word ḥāmḍa mean “a lemon,” whereas
burdāne is “an orange”.
56. See Robertson 1938, 255.
in one case no trace of hamza is seen as in امتلت instead of امتلت.

Omission of the separating alif ويطحنو، وصارو، يضايقو، (الألف الفاصلة) ويسرقو، قطعو.

Long alif instead of tā, marbūṭa; e.g. الأزقا.

B) Morphology

The VI verbal form of زود is used instead of the VII; e.g. وتراود ضيقخلق or instead of the VIII ازدادخلق.

Al-qarāyā instead of al-qura = the villages.

C) Syntax

:and the normal structure is: ولم يدر أحدها: Wrong usages of moods and cases

D) Lexicon and style

Since the text of the manuscript is not vocalized, the words are presented
below according to their literary form.

Usage of foreign words through Hebrew, such as ġamṭarah meaning “ge-

matria”, “numerology,” “use of the letters of the alphabet according to their

umerical value.”

‘Idda = number. Although used in literary Arabic, it is not frequent in

comparison with ‘adad.

Ǧamā-atuna = Our community, the Samaritans.

Rūḥ is used instead of nasma, meaning “soul”.

˒Awwal bayādir al-ġilāl = The first yield on the threshing floor.

Baḥr bilād Ġālṭa and Mālṭa = The Sea of Galite and Malta.

Ǧuma = A week.

Muwassaq = Muhammad = loaded.

Askila = A port.

Qibla = South.

Laimūna = An orange.

Wafawq ħāda = In addition to this.

Ǧumla wa-āhād = Groups and individuals; the usual expression in Arabic is

جماعات وفرادى.

Finally, a mention should be made of the following infrequent expres-
sions:

مَدِينَة سَيْدَنَا خَلِیل الرَّحْمَن = The city of our master the friend of the Merciful

= Hebron.

شَحَادَنَاتِ كَالْحَجَرَاد = Beggars like locusts = Numerous beggars.

وَعَوْبِلَهُمْ يَدَاخِلُ الْكَرْبُ عَلَى كُلِّ مِن يَخُشِّى الْرَّب = Their wailing caused distress to
every one who feared God.

فَإِن بَرَكَةِ الْأَرْضِ مِن بَرَكَةِ السَّمَاوَاتِ = Since the prosperity of earth depends on the

blessing of heaven.
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