

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

**Haseeb Shehadeh**

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

The author and scribe of the narrative was the well-known Samaritan poet, Torah commentator, grammarian, philanthropist, and historian Ibrāhīm b. Ya. qūb b. Murḡān b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā.īl al-Danaḡī (1719-1786), famous by his nickname El-ʿAyyeh, 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-ʿAyyeh 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.<sup>3</sup> Together with his uncle Salāma b. Murǧān, 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 Ṭūqān, whose banker and secretary served El-‘Ayyeh.<sup>5</sup> 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 Ābrām ban Yā:qob ban ab Sikkuwwa. El-‘Ayyeh died in the year of the epidemic, fifty-eight days after the death of the high priest Ghazāl; see Ben-Zvi 1935, 240, 251. On El-‘Ayyeh, see Hanover 1904; Robertson 1943, 341–350; Ben-Hayyim 1957, 32–33; 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. Murǧān (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 Tsedaka 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-Dabbāg 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-Maqdisiyy), “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](http://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 Ṭūqān’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.<sup>6</sup> 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).<sup>7</sup> 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 *لا اتق الله ربك لا ناعتي للعجل اللعين بعباده اتق الله ربك لا* (“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 قالها احقر الوري ارخ السامري ابراهيم واحد اعتقاده* (“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 نرينا من عبادة العجل ونشهد ان فاعليه: وعابديه ملاعين* “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.<sup>8</sup>

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

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: “يا من يروم الوقوف علي الحق المبين للرد علي الفلاسفة وكذا المشبهين: 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.).<sup>11</sup>

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

يا له كل العوالم تخضع      يا من يحب العفو عن من يرجع  
يا من به ارجوا النجات واطمع      يا من يرا ما في الضمير ويسمع  
انت المعد لكلما يتوقع

O He to whom all worlds surrender

8. Cf. Ben-Ḥayyim 1957, ٨٢. 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 كتاب التسابيح, the book of Samaritan hymns edited and published by Ratson Tsedaka (1922–1990),<sup>12</sup> although El-‘Ayyeh’s opening poem is not among them. The manuscript also includes a commentary on Deuteronomy 32 (سورة القيامة/يوم البعث، 72:17) copied by El-‘Ayyeh in 1784. As is usual, the original Hebrew text is presented in Samaritan script, placed on fol. 7a.<sup>13</sup> The opening lines of the manuscript, which also function as its title, are as follows:

هذا مجموع فيه تثنييت عقايد ملة السامرة/14 وفي الوحده الربانية المحضه وفي البعث/وفي البرآة  
 من عبادة العجل/اللعين وفي الرد علي/الفلاسفه والمجبرة/والقدرية وما/عندهم من/الشبهه/المخالف كل  
 هذه المذاهب المومنين من اهل/المذاهب ارباب التوحيد اساله تعالى/حسن التوفيق للتحقيق/امين.

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-

12. See Hassafarey Tsedaq 1970, 296-304, 305-309, 190, 191, 192-193, 194-195, 202, 213, 154, 200-202, 158, 173.

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-Sarāwī, al-Ṭīf, and al-Musallamī. There were also the families of al-Mufarraḡiyyūn (the Marḥīves); the al-Rumahīyyūn who were descendants of Ephraim; al-Maṭariyyūn descendants of Binyamim; and finally al-Ḥarīriyyūn, 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 <sup>15</sup> groush (20 zlots); a jar of

sesame oil cost 12 groush; a jar of honey cost 18.75 groush; a rotl (! 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 علي هذا التاريخ تعجب في قدرة الله تعالى الواقعة في سنة ١٢٠١/الذي جمطرتها تأرخ كما هي محرره علي الحاشية قدامك ففيها/ غشا البلدة وبا وتوفا منها نحو اربعة الاف روح و كانت عدة/جماعتنا فيها نحو مائة روح توفوا منهم نحو الخمس رجال ونساء واطفال/ وتوجعت العباد وفوق هذا البلا زاد من شدة الغلا والقحط/الذي وقع من اول بيارد الغلال كان صاع الحنطة بنصف غرش/ ووصل زولطه ولولا ان الله يسر مجي الحنطة من نحو بحر بلاد جالطه ومالطه/ كان بلغ الصاع واحد ذهب وصار يجي في كل جمعه مراكب عديده وموسقه/ حنطه وشعير ودره وكرسنه وعجوه وخرنوب وفول وعدس وقضامه/ وبصل وزبيب وقطين ودبس و ارز وشعر؟ متواتر علي اسكلة يافا/عمرها الله تعالى وصارة هذه الأقطار سايراً تتوجه لها المثار؟/واشتدة المجاعة وابتلت غالب الخلق بالفجاعة وباعت غالباً/ متاعها وتعرت الجسد ومجازها غالباً انفسد وصارة تموت/ كمد ولم يدري احداً عن احد وصار المضطر (في الأصل: المتطر) ياكل لحم الموتى من/ الفطائس ويطحنو عظامهم وياكلوهم ربنا يرحمهم وغالب//الناس اطباعها لا علي قياس وذوي الاحتشام/من شدة المجاعة تجاوز تصغير نفسه وصار يسال الخاص/والعام واتا للبلدة رجل غريبه من مصر ومن معان ومن/مدينة سيدنا خليل الرحمن ومن بلاد قبله شحادين كالجراد/المنتشر وصارو يضايقو البيوت بالحاحهم وفي شوارع/البلده ومنهم من يستغفلو الخلق ويسرقو متاعهم/ ومنهم من يعطي ولده ذكر او انثى [في الأصل: انثى] للدلال يبيعه ولم/ يجد المشتري وقد امتلت منهم الازقا والشوارع/ والاسواق وعويلهم يداخل الكرب علي كل من يخشى الرب/وصار يموتو جملة واحاد وهل فصل الثنتا وتاخر عن /وقته مسافه فازادة الناس مخافه قان؟ السبب فيما/هو الواقع في العام الماضي وعدم الثاني فيه وانقطاع/ المنابع ونزح ابار تجمع مع قطع النبع وعدم غلة/الزيت الى أن وصلت جرتة عشرين زولطه وجرة الشيرج /سنة عشر زولطه وجرة العسل خمسة وعشرين زولطه // ورطل السمن باربع زولط ورطل الارز باربعه وعشرين مصريه ورطل/الزبيب باربعه وعشرين مصريه ورطل القطين باربعه وعشرين مصريه/ورطل القضامه باربعه وعشرين مصريه ورطل العجوه باربعه وعشرين/ مصريه ورطل

15. This kind of opening is common in El-‘Ayyeh’s writings; see Robertson 1938, 263, 265-267.

الكسييه؟ باربعه وعشرين مصريه والعدس والبول والدره/كدلك في هذا العام كانه ساير الفواكه يسيره جدًا وكذلك/انواع القبيض والابقال من قلة الماء فان بركة الارض/من بركة السماء ورطل النوع الذي كان يوخذ بمصريه واحده/او بمصريتين بلغ نصف زولطه وقلة الماء صاره بمصريه ونصف/وتزاود ضيق الخلق واضحت غالبًا في ضيق من بعضها/ وصار الرجل يكره ولده من شدة الضايقات ومجاعة كيده/ ومع هذا انقطاع السبب وعدم النتائج ومخازن /التجار تسكرة واصحاب تهمة؟ بعض الدنيا توكرة؟ وصار / الانسان اذا تبين ياكل ليمونه تجتمع عليه لآخذ قشرها عدة/ شحادين واهل القرابا قطعو وجود القبط فانهم صارو/ ياخذوهم وياكلوهم وتظاهرة غالب اهل الخارج في قطع الطرقات'.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> The gematria of this year is [the numerical value of the letters of this word represents  $400+1+200+600 = 1201$  H. = 1786 A.D.], as written here in the margin before you.<sup>17</sup> In it [the year 1201 H. = 1786 A. D.] an epidemic<sup>18</sup> took place<sup>19</sup>! in the town [Nablus] and approximately 4,000 souls<sup>20</sup> died because of it. The number of our group [the Samaritans] in it [Nablus] was about 100<sup>21</sup> 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<sup>22</sup> [a cubic measure of grain and dry materials such as barley, sugar, lentils] of wheat was half a groush and became one zlot.<sup>23</sup> Had it not been for God who facilitated the coming of wheat from the sea of the

16. In the original, the number is placed above the word سنة (year), a common habit among Arabs today.

17. The substance of the gematria is given in the right margin,

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.

19. In the margin غشى has been added in a different hand. The correct verbal form appears in the text.

20. Usually, the word نسمة is utilized in such a context.

21. In other sources, the number of Samaritans given is 200; see Ben-Zvi 1935, 240.

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 .ilbe and then qinṭār (quintal).

23. Zulfā or zalaṭa is a Turkish silver coin that equals three quarters of a groush; see Frayha 1973, 74; Dahmān 1990, 87 no. 465.



countries of Galite<sup>24</sup> and Malta, the price of one saa of wheat would have been one gold. Every week<sup>25</sup> several boats loaded<sup>26</sup> with wheat, barley, sorghum, lentil vetch, pressed dates, carob, horse-beans, lentils, roasted chickpeas, onion, raisins, dried figs, molasses, rice and vermicelli<sup>27</sup>[?] reached the port<sup>28</sup> of Jaffa. May God the Exalted build it [Jaffa] and [may the people] of these regions begin setting their sights<sup>29</sup> on it. The famine worsened, and the majority of the people suffered because of this catastrophe,<sup>30</sup> sold most of their belongings and went naked.<sup>31</sup> The mood<sup>32</sup> of the people worsened as they began dying of despair. None of them knew anything about one another, and people<sup>33</sup> were forced to eat the meat of the dead, of the stinking corpses.<sup>34</sup> They crushed the bones and ate them. May our God have mercy upon them. The character of most people was not based on principles.<sup>35</sup> Because of the severity of the famine the decent persons<sup>36</sup>[he who have modesty] lowered themselves in the extreme<sup>37</sup> and began begging, both in public and in

24. An island near Sardinia opposite the Tunisian city of Tabarka.

25. In the original جمعه, meaning “a week” in colloquial Arabic.

26. Suddenly, the word موسفة appears, unexpected literary expression here. The usual expression would be محملة.

27. In the manuscript, we find شعر, meaning “hair” or “poetry,” depending on its vocalization; neither meaning fits the context. شَعْرِيَّة or شَعْرِيَّة in standard Arabic or iš.iriyye in Palestinian Arabic, meaning “vermicelli” is reasonable. There is an aphorism in Palestinian Arabic that goes il.izz larruz wišš.iriyye ḥān.a/šān.a ḥāla 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 Tarāblis. The literary form is iskalah.

29. The required word is al-anzār; al-ṣaṭār, given in the text, is meaningless here.

30. In the manuscript, the word bi-l-faḡā.a appears instead of the expected form bi-l-fāḡ.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./kalāmun muqaffan, viz “rhyme”, “assonance”.

31. In the manuscript, the wrong verbal form appears: ta.rrat instead of the transitive verb .arrat.

32. The author uses a wrong form of the required word wa-maḡāzuhā meaning “its metaphor”, mizāḡ/mazāḡ 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 الناس اطباوعها لا علي قياس is unknown to me from any other source, its meaning is obvious. Atbā. in this sense is not attested in Arabic lexicons,

36. In the manuscript, wa-ḡawī appears in the genitive or accusative case instead of the nominative case wa-ḡawu and in the plural; the required form according to the words that follow should be in the singular, wa-ḡu “and the possessor endowed with”.

37. Probably El-Ayyeh was thinking of the colloquial phrase waṭṭa nafsū/hālu.

private. Numerous foreign<sup>38</sup> male beggars [pervasive as locusts, in the Arabic original] from Egypt, Maḥān, Hebron [the city of our master, the friend of the Merciful = Abraham = al-khalīl in Arabic, Hebron] and from areas south<sup>39</sup> 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<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup> and the people's fears increased. Verily,<sup>42</sup> the reason for this is what happened during<sup>43</sup> last year [1785], the barrenness of the second year, the depletion of the springs<sup>44</sup> and the emptiness of the wells. All this occurred along with the springs drying up.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the shortage of the olive tree harvest<sup>46</sup> led to the following prices: a jar

38. In the manuscript, raḡul/ruḡul ḡarībe; the required forms are irḡāl ḡurbiyye 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 ḥabbal, biḥabbil, ḥabbil, imḥabbil etc. meaning "turned south" etc.

40. In the manuscript, yudāḥīl instead of the yudḥīl; 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., تعرّت، تبين، تظاهر.

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 faḥinna, فإن < قان.

43. في appears between the lines in the manuscript.

44. Manābī is not attested in literary Arabic dictionaries; the form used is manābi. 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: raḥs al-ḥain, ḥain al-ḥibayān, ḥain bait al-mā, ḥain al-ḥasal, ḥain al-qaryūn, ḥain 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 orientologists 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-ḥifā, "the healing bath", ḥammām al-sumara "the Samaritans' bath" in the Yasmīne quarter, ḥammām al-al-qādī "the judge's bath", also in the Yasmīne quarter, ḥammām al-daraḡa, "the bath of the stair",

of olive oil<sup>47</sup> cost 20 zlots;<sup>48</sup> a jar of sesame oil<sup>49</sup> cost 16 zlots; a jar of honey cost 25 zlots; a rotl<sup>50</sup> [a pound] of butter was priced at four zlots; a rotl of the following items cost 24 mişriyya:<sup>51</sup> rice, raisins, dried figs, roasted chick-peas, pressed dates, chestnut,<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> The price of a rotl of something that was one or two mişriyyah rose to half a zlot, and a jar of water<sup>54</sup> cost one and a half mişriyyah. 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

---

ḥammām al-ḥalīlī “the Hebronite bath”, ḥammām al-baydarah “the bath of the threshing floor”, ḥammām al-tamīmī “the Tamīmī’s bath”, ḥammām al-rīše “the bath of the feather.”

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.

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.

49. Al-sīraḡ in the manuscript or the common form al-sīraḡ in sīn, pronounced today al-sīreḡ by the Samaritans “sesamum indica,” is a loanword from Persian and is common in the Iraqi dialect. Other synonyms are used šimšim and ḡulḡulān and, in southern Saudi Arabia, the literary word al-salīḡ. There is a saying that goes السليط مسلط على كل مرض “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-sīraḡ here means any oil for frying.

50. Its weight differed from one location to another, and its precise amount is unknown today. 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).

51. A copper coin with the Sultan’s monogram; its plural form, maşārī, means “money” in colloquial Arabic. Its name in Damascus is darāhim. Damascus also has the bāra; whereas a proper grouch equals 32 mişriyya, an asaḡī grouch has a lion image, and a bāra is one fortieth of a grouch.

52. It seems that the required word is kastana. In the manuscript, the first four letters are clear الكسد. Surprisingly, El-Ayyeh did not mention basic items such as sugar, salt, coffee, tea, or olives.

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.rāf āya 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.

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 [?] /in the nest [?] And when anyone ate an orange,<sup>55</sup> 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 flavored with many colloquialisms. El-Ayyeh himself admitted his deficiencies in this respect.<sup>56</sup> 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. وتوفاه الموتاء وانا.

Long tā. is used instead of tā. marbūṭa in verbs; e.g. واشتدة، فازادة، وكنانة، وصارة، واصله، تسكرة، تظاهرة.

Final hā. occurs without the two dots except in the state of construct; e.g. مدينة سيدنا خليل الرحمن. محرره، الحنطه، زولطه، جالطه، مالطه، جمعه، عديده، موسقه، المجاعه، الفجاعه، كرسنه، عجوه، قضامه، البلده، قبله، دره، يسيره.

Dāl appears instead of dāl, as in towns' dialects; e.g. الدي، ذهب، دره، شحاد، هده، كذلك، ياخذوهم.

Dād instead of zā. as in towns' dialects; e.g. عضامهم.

Hamza becomes a vowel; e.g. فطاييس، مايه، and it is omitted at the ends of words; e.g. وبياء، 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 hāmiḍ is “lemon.” In my dialect lamūne and the common word hāmḍa mean “a lemon,” whereas burd.āne is “an orange”.

56. See Robertson 1938, 255.

in one case no trace of hamza is seen as in امتلت instead of امتلأت; in some dialects in Galilee we find انتلت.

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

Long alif instead of tāḥ marbūṭa; e.g. الازقا.

## B) Morphology

The VI verbal form of زود is used instead of the زيد VII; e. g. وتزاود ضيق or instead of the ازداد VIII.

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

## C) Syntax

تعجب من instead of تعجب في colloquial structure.

وأوضحت المراكب تجيء أسبوعيا صار يجي في كل جمعة مراكب

وصارت (الناس، الخلق) تموت كمداً instead of وصارة تموت كمد

Wrong usages of moods and cases: ولم يدري أحداً and the normal structure is

ولم يدري أحداً. ويأكلوهم (العظام) and the normal form is

وذوي الاحتشام instead of وذوو الاحتشام.

وصاروا يضايقون instead of وصارو يضايقو.

ومنهم من يستغفلون instead of ومنهم من يستغفلو.

ولده ذكراً أو أنثى instead of ولده ذكر أو انثى.

للدلال لبيبعه instead of للدلال لبيبعه.

وصاروا يموتون instead of وصارو يموتو.

وصاروا يأخذونها (القطط) ويأكلونها instead of صارو يأخذوهم ويأكلوهم

## 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 *ḡamṭarah* meaning “*gematria*”, “*numerology*,” “*use of the letters of the alphabet according to their numerical value.*”

‘*Idda* = number. Although used in literary Arabic, it is not frequent in comparison with ‘*adad*.

Ḡamā‘atuna = Our community, the Samaritans.

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

‘*Awwal bayādir al-ḡilāl* = The first yield on the threshing floor.

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

Ḡuma = A week.

Muwassaq = *Muhammal* = loaded.

Askila = A port.

Qibla = South.

Laimūna = An orange.

Wafawq hāda = In addition to this.

Ḡumla wa‘āhād = Groups and individuals; the usual expression in Arabic is  
جماعات وفرادى

Finally, a mention should be made of the following infrequent expressions:

مدينة سيدنا خليل الرحمن = The city of our master the friend of the Merciful  
= Hebron.

شحادين كالجراد = Beggars like locusts = Numerous beggars.

وعويلهم يداخل الكرب على كل من يخشى الرب = Their wailing caused distress to every one who feared God.

فإن بركة الأرض من بركة السماء = Since the prosperity of earth depends on the blessing of heaven.

## Bibliography

- Adler, Marcus Nathan. 1907. *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela. Critical Text, Translation and Commentary*. London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, Amen Corner, E.C.
- Al-Barghouthi, Abdullatif M., 1993.  
 البرغوثي، عبد اللطيف م. ١٩٩٣. القاموس العربي الشعبي الفلسطيني، اللهجة الفلسطينية الدارجة، ج. ٢. البيرة: جمعية إنعاش الأسرة.
- Baillet, Maurice. 1988. "Commandments et lois (Farā'id et Tūrot) dans quatre manuscrits samaritains" in: Rothschild, Jean-Pierre et Sixdenier, Guy Dominique (ed.), *Études samaritaines Pentateuque et Targum, exégèse et philologie, chroniques. Actes de la table ronde: "Les manuscrits samaritains. Problèmes et méthodes"* (Paris, Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, 7-9 octobre 1985). Louvain-Paris: E. Peters, pp. 259-270.
- Ben-Hayyim, Ze'ev. 1957.  
 בן חיים, זאב. 1957. עברית וארמית נוסח שומרון על פי תעודות שבכתב ועדות שבעל פה. כרך ראשון, מבוא, כתבי הדקדוק. ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק בהשתתפות האקדמיה ללשון העברית.
- Ben-Zvi, Yitzhak. 1934.  
 בן צבי, יצחק. 1934. ט'אהר אל-עמר ובעלי שכם. קטע מכרוניקה שמרונית חדשה מהמאה ה'ח"ח לספירה האירופית. ציון וי, תרצ"ד, עמ' קל"ט-קמ"ח, מהד', שניה ב"ספר השומרונים" עמ' 220-233.
- Ben-Zvi, Yitzhak. 1935, 1970.  
 ספר השומרונים, תולדותיהם, מושבותיהם, דתם וספרותם. תל אביב (מהדורה שניה, ירושלים, תש"ל, בעריכת ש' טלמון).
- Ben-Zvi, Yitzhak. 1955.  
 בן צבי, יצחק, 1955. ארץ ישראל תחת השלטון העותמני. ארבע מאות של היסטוריה. ירושלים: מכון ביאליק
- Bull, George (ed.). 1989. *The Journeys of Pietro della Valle: The Pilgrim*. London: The Folio Society.

Cohen, Amnon. 1973. *Palestine in the 18th Century: Patterns of Government and Administration*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press.

Crown, Alan D., 1989. (ed.), *The Samaritans*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Al-Dabbāg, M. 2003.

الدباغ، م. ٢٠٠٣. *بلادنا فلسطين - الديار النابلسية* (المجلد الثاني، الطبعة الثانية). كفر قرع: دار الهدى للطباعة والنشر.

Dahmān, Muḥammad Aḥmad. 1990.

دهمان، محمد أحمد ١٩٩٠. *معجم الألفاظ التاريخية في العصر المملوكي*. ط. ١، بيروت-دمشق: دار الفكر المعاصر للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع.

Doumani, Beshara. 1995. *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900*. University of California Press Berkeley Los Angeles- London.

Doumani, Beshara. 2002.

دوماني، بشارة. ٢٠٠٢. *إعادة اكتشاف فلسطين: أهالي جبل نابلس ١٧٠٠-١٩٠٠*. بيروت - رام الله: مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية.

Frayha, Anis. 1973.

فريحة، أنيس. ١٩٧٣. *معجم الألفاظ العامية. جمعها وفسرها وردّها إلى أصولها*. بيروت: مكتبة لبنان.

Hanover, S. 1904. *Das Festgesetz der Samaritaner nach Ibrahīm B. Yaq'qūb*.

Berlin. Hassafarey, Tsedaqa. 1970.

הצפרי, רצון צדקה. 1970. *כיתאב אל-תסאבית, ספר התשבחות, מיטב האיחולים, התשבחות והתחנונים לאל נכתבו על ידי סופרים שומרונים בין המאות ה-10 וה-20 אחה"ס*. הועתק בעברית עתיקה ובערבית, שועתק לאותיות עבריות עתיקות. חולון - ישראל.

Mannā' 'Ādil. 2003.

مناع، عادل. ٢٠٠٣. *تاريخ فلسطين في أواخر العهد العثماني* (قراءة جديدة). بيروت: مؤسسة



الدراسات الفلسطينية، ط. ٢.

Myller, A. M. n. d. *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*. New York.

Niebuhr, Carsten 1837. *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien*, III. Hamburg.

Al-Nimr, Ihsān. 1938.

النمر، إحسان. ١٩٣٨. *تاريخ جبل نابلس والبلقاء*. نابلس: مطبعة ابن زيدون.

Qāsim Kh. & Qanānwah Ikhilāṣ. 2015.

قاسم، خديجة والقنانة إخلاص (مترجمتان، مراجعة عمر الغول)، ٢٠١٥. *هيلما غرانكفست، أحوال الزواج في قرية فلسطينية*. بيروت: المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات.

Granqvist, Hilma. 1931. *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*. Helsingfors: Centraltryckeri och Bokbinderi Aktiebolag.

Rafiq, Abdul Karim. 1990.

رافق، عبد الكريم ١٩٩٠. *فلسطين في عهد العثمانيين: من مطلع القرن العاشر الهجري/السادس عشر الميلادي إلى مطلع القرن الثالث عشر الهجري/التاسع عشر الميلادي، ١٨٠٠-١٥١٦، في الموسوعة الفلسطينية، القسم الثاني، الدراسات الخاصة، المجلد الثاني*. بيروت.

Robertson, Edward. 1943. "Ibrahim al-'Ayya a Samaritan Scholar of the Eighteenth Century," In: Epstein, I., E. Levine & C. Roth (eds.), *Essays in Honour of the very Rev. Dr. J. to J. H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire, on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, September 25, 1942. London: Edward Goldston.

Robertson, Edward. 1938, 1962. *Catalogue of the Samaritan Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library*, Manchester. Vols. 1 & II. Manchester: The Manchester University Press; The John Rylands Library.

Sajdi, Dana. 2013. *The Barber of Damascus. Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant*. Stanford, California: University Press.

Schur, Nathan. 1989, 1992. *History of the Samaritans*. Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums, 18. Frankfurt am Main; Bern; New York; Paris: Peter Lang.

Schur, Nathan. 1993. "Ibrāhīm al-'Ayya" in: Crown, Alan D., Pummer Reinhard & Abraham Tal (ed.), *A Companion to Samaritan Studies*. Tübingen:

J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).

Schur, Nathan, 1998.

שור, נתן. 1998. **מסע אל העבר, מסע על העבר: לתולדות התקופות הממלוכית והעות'מאנית בארץ-ישראל**. ירושלים: הוצאת ספרים אריאל.

Schur, Nathan. 2002

שור, נתן. 2002. "השומרונים בתקופה הממלוכית, העות'מאנית ובמאה העשרים". בתוך: שטרן, אפרים ואשל חנן (עורכים), **ספר השומרונים**. ירושלים: יד יצחק בן-צבי, רשות העתיקות, המנהל האזרחי ליהודה ושומרון, קצין מטה לארכיאולוגיה. עמ' 602–647.

Shehadeh, Haseeb. 2016.

شهادة، حسيب. ٢٠١٦. "المخطوطات السامرية في مكتبة يد يتسحاك بن تسفي في القدس الغربية".

[http://shomron0.tripod.com/articles/jerusalem\\_mss.pdf](http://shomron0.tripod.com/articles/jerusalem_mss.pdf); A. B. - Samaritan News 1217-1218, 10/6/2016, pp. 56-119

Tsedaka, Benyamim. 2001.

צדקה, בנימים, 2001. **קיצור תולדות הישראלים השומרונים, מיציאת מצרים ועד שנת 2000** [+ מפתחות + נספחים]. חולון: הוצאת מכון א. ב. ללימודי שומרונות.

Tsedaka, Benyamim. 2016.

צדקה, בנימים, 2015. **תולדות הישראלים השמרים על פי מקורותיהם העצמיים, מימי יהושע בן-נון עד היום הזה – 2015 לספירה**. חולון: הוצאת מכון א. ב. ללימודי שומרונות-הרג רזים.