1. Introduction

The city of Mayadin (l-Miyāḏīn) is located on the right bank of the Euphrates in eastern Syria, at a distance of about 40 km from Dēr ez-Zor, on the way to l-Bu Kmāl, the last city before the Iraqi border, 70 km farther south-east. Between 1976 and 1981, a Franco-Syrian Archaeological Mission carried out excavations in the city and in the neighbouring (4 km south east) medieval fortress of Al-Raḥba (ar-Rḥaba in the local dialect). I was then a Research Fellow at the Institut Français d’Études Arabes of Damascus. Thanks to the kind invitation of Thierry Bianquis, the Director of the Institute at that time, who was also the French Director of the archeological mission, I had the opportunity to join the archeological team and to spend several (enjoyable) weeks in Mayadin every year between 1977 and 1980, which provided the best conditions for an investigation of the dialect and for collecting linguistic material.

In September 1977, a few weeks after my first stay in Mayadin, I visited Mademoiselle Lucie Cantineau, the daughter of Jean Cantineau (1899–1956). She was still living, with her mother, at the family house in Sainte Geneviève des Bois near Paris. She showed me documents left behind by her father and did me the honor to entrust them to me, with a view to (or at least a hope for) their publication. Among these documents were fieldnotes, or more precisely small notebooks consisting of a linguistic questionnaire he had designed to gather data on various Arabic dialects. One of them concerned the dialect of Mayadin. This was of course an unexpected and lucky opportunity to compare my data with those

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collected by the great French linguist, and I am glad to be able to start here the publication of these precious documents.

Thirty-five years have passed since my first fieldwork in Mayadin, and nearly eighty years since Cantineau’s cursory investigation. Even after (or: because) so many years have passed, I thought it would be interesting to publish my data together with his. This first contribution, dedicated to a great connoisseur of Bedouin dialects, is a first step towards a description of the dialect of Mayadin, in the limits of the available material. It is restricted to some lexical data. For my own work, I used the Questionnaire linguistique of Marcel Cohen.

2. Šāwi Dialects

The so-called Šāwi dialects (or dialects of the Şawāya) are distributed over an extremely large area in Syria (Behnstedt 1997 map 517, Behnstedt 2009 map p. 405, where SD = Šāwi dialects). Only a few of them are documented, and often rather poorly. We have some information about the ‘syro-mesopotamian’ dialects of the š(a)wāya (“Ḫadîdîn, people of Rögga [Al-Raqqa], Mawâli, Nêm, Faḏfel”) in Cantineau 1936 and 1937 (see his synthesis in Cantineau 1937 pp. 110–113). Behnstedt 2009 p. 403 and especially Jastrow 1996 provide short lists of characteristic features. Jastrow’s data concern “the neighbourhood of Dêr iz-Zôr”, and seem to have the same origin as the text he published earlier in the Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte where he writes (Jastrow 1980 p. 159): “The text is a sample of the Šāwi dialect as spoken by the rural population of the Middle Euphrates valley. The informant comes from an estate located in the immediate vicinity of Dêr iz-Zôr”. In addition to the numerous information registered in his Sprachatlas von Syrien, Behnstedt has published in his Volkskundliche Texte (Behnstedt 2000 pp. 516–617) 23 texts in various Şawāya dialects, of which I have retained, for the sake of lexical comparison, 9 texts from the eastern region: from Ligrayye (subgroup IIIb like Mayadin to which it is close, point 173 in Behnstedt 1997; pp. 614–617), ‘Adle (in the direction of Ḥasake, subgroup IIIb, point 166; pp. 600–609) and Tall al’Abd (close to

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3 The words occurring in my recordings are not listed in this contribution.

4 It seems, however, that, compared to what can be deduced from Behnstedt’s map, Jastrow’s definition of the area of the Šāwi dialects is more restrictive: “a vast region of northern Syria, on both banks of the Euphrates, from the east of Aleppo to the Syrian-Iraqi border near Al-Bu Kmāl”.