CHAPTER 21

Fuṣḥā Arabic Vocabulary Borrowed by Mardini
Arabic via Turkish

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1 Introduction

The data analyzed in this paper, which I dedicate to Professor Pierre Larcher, was collected in the framework of my project concerning the developing of a monograph of Arabic spoken in the town of Mardin—situated in Southeast Turkey—and its neighbouring villages. The monograph was published in 2007 (Grigore 2007). All the data which constitute the corpus that the analysis is based on has been recorded by me.

The vocabulary of Mardini Arabic—like the vocabulary of all North-Mesopotamian dialects to which it belongs—was affected by massive borrowings from Turkish, because this language has been for centuries—in the form of Ottoman Turkish and Modern Turkish—the official language of the area. At the same time they were borrowing Turkish vocabulary, these dialects massively borrowed Arabic words as well, which Turkish also took in its turn especially from Fuṣḥā Arabic (fa). A similar situation was pointed out by Geva Kleinberger concerning the Ottoman-Turkish influence on the Arabic dialects spoken in Galilee:

Sometimes an Arabic word penetrated the Ottoman-Turkish and then entered again into the Arabic glossary, e.g., the Arabic word ḥawḍ [trough for the cattle] entered Ottoman Turkish and was changed phonologically into havuz [artificial basin], then returned to the Arabic dialect in the past as trough for cattle, yet has changed its meaning currently into a water basin that is placed on the roof.

Geva Kleinberger 2009: 60

Our study will focus on these words and we will highlight the phonetic and semantic modifications that these words have undergone, thus shedding light on some general issues.
2 Mardini Arabic

Mardini Arabic, a qəltu dialect, belongs to the North-Mesopotamian Dialects, the Anatolian branch—which includes the Mardini group, the Siirti group, the Diyarbakır group, the Kozluk-Sason group, etc. (Jastrow 1994: 121). With regard to phonetics, which interests us in a very particular way in this study, Mardini Arabic kept all the phonemes known in old communal Arabic except the glottal stop /ʾ/—which disappeared completely—and the pharyngealized voiced dental occlusive /ḍ/ shifted to /ẓ/, fusing with it. It must be stressed that Mardini Arabic also retained the old interdentals /ṯ/, /ḏ/ and /ẓ/ as such, as well as the voiced uvular /q/; these sounds are the most likely to undergo change (Grigore 2007: 56–58). The Arabic words that entered Mardini Arabic via Turkish show some changes that would not have occurred if they were inherited directly by this dialect.

3 Arabic Loanwords in Turkish

Arabic loanwords in Turkish present a blurry picture, which is very hard to be clarified satisfactorily. The most difficult aspect concerns their phonetics that vary according to the provenience, i.e. different varieties of Arabic (from Fuṣḥā Arabic—the vehicle of Islamic texts—to Arabic dialects spoken in the contact areas in different periods), ways of borrowing, directly or via Persian, etc.

For our research, we shall focus on the Classical or Fuṣḥā Arabic loanwords. The inventories of phonemes of Arabic and of Turkish are quite different. For instance, the Arabic (either Fuṣḥā or Mardini variety) contains consonants that Turkish does not have, such as the interdental fricatives, the emphatic and laryngeal consonants, etc. In the Arabic loanwords in Turkish, these consonants were assimilated to Turkish phonemes that have at least one feature in common with the replaced Arabic ones.

The interdental fricatives /ṯ/, /ḏ/ and /ẓ/ became the sibilants /s/ and /z/ and the emphatic interdental /ẓ/ became the sibilant /z/ which also lost its pharyngeal features:

/ṯ/ → /s/: tāniya “second”1 → saniye “second”; ṭābit “fixed” → sabit “constant” “fixed”;

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1 For Arabic, I used the dictionaries of Wehr (1980) and Baranov (2006).
2 For Turkish, I used the dictionary of Parker (2008).