

AN ALPHABET FOR CYPRIOT MARONITE ARABIC

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Cypriot Maronite Arabic is a special vernacular traditionally spoken by the former inhabitants of the village of Kormakiti in N.W.Cyprus. Despite its undisputed Arabic origins, this vernacular has evolved independently since the Middle Ages in a Greek-speaking environment. However, its autonomous development appears to have started before its transfer to its present Cypriot habitat; thus the CMA sound system displays what is, from the Arabic standpoint, a unique paradigmatic trait: the absence of a voiced velar spirant continuing Old Arabic *ġayn*; present-day *ʿayn* in CMA is the reflex of the fusion of Arabic *ʿayn* and *ġayn*.

In its Greek socio-cultural environment, CMA has also imbibed a set of phonological, morphological, and lexical features rendering it incomprehensible to native speakers of Arabic. Given its highly distinctive historical development away from the Arabic dialect family and its non-Arabic traits imbibed through language contact, CMA has acquired the status of an independent language resembling, in this respect, other peripheral vernaculars of Arabic: Spanish Arabic, Maltese, Anatolian Arabic, etc.

In view of its relatively small speaker community it has become clear that the survival of CMA cannot be guaranteed via generational transmission as in the past, particularly, since all CMA speakers are natively fluent in Greek and are liable to shift to this majority language within the next few decades. The CMA community has therefore decided to cultivate its language as a written medium and the following alphabet has been proposed for this purpose:

A, a – B, b – C, c – Ć, ć – D, d – Δ, δ – E, e – F, f – G, ġ [or G, g] – X, x – I, i – J, j – K, k – L, l – M, m – N, n – O, o – P, p – R, r – S, s – Ş, ş – T, t – Θ, θ – U, u – V, v – W, w – Y, y – Z, z.

The CMA sound system comprises a set of eighteen consonants, five monophthongs, and five diphthongs. The alphabet being proposed here also includes symbols for sounds occurring exclusively in well-integrated loans from Cypriot Greek, e.g., ⟨ć⟩ and ⟨ġ⟩, corresponding to the sound values of the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols [tʃ] and [dʒ], respectively.

Whereas, unlike most Arabic vernaculars, CMA has no long vowels, it has retained the length component in consonants. Long consonants are represented via gemination which, in CMA is morphologically and syntactically significant: *kadder* ‘he measured,’ *t-tarp* ‘the road’ (*tarp* ‘road, a road’). Thus, for instance, in the second example, gemination of the initial consonant indicates the presence of the definite article.

Word stress in CMA occurs wherever Old Arabic displayed long syllables. In CMA stress falls most often on penultimate syllables and thus need not be indicated in this position. It is here suggested that marking of stress be restricted to cases where it falls

on initial or final syllables *pkýínixtep* ‘he is being inscribed,’ *maxtúp* ‘written.’ Diphthongs should ideally be represented by a vowel + a semivowel [y] and [w]: *payt* ‘house,’ *yawm* ‘today,’ since the sequences [ai] and [au] are best reserved for bisyllabic units: *xaiti* (three syllables) ‘my brother,’ *naús* (two syllables) (placename). The following short text recorded from a native speaker is here transcribed in the proposed alphabet.

A folktext in CMA — *Aşşik mantsáy kişk*

Mancassel l-imcáll, manxottu xost id-dist ma m-moe u mannişcel l-okít. Amma teístvi, mantşilu, manxallíx pkyiprot u mantşammpsu xok mílixve i patania tlix-θkyém. Amma teipes manxawşu, mannaxtu t-taxune, mannítixnu u mantsaíx smit. Mantjipu java u manlaxxpú.

Istera maxxótt l-ixlíp xost piθarui, mannirpot xost exte rokca peða xaiç milx u man-nirmia xost p-piθarui ta lina l-ixlíp. Éxen-xar maxxótt ixlíp u-véxen xar má-manxótt ost teşidd u teaxmað pşik il-lipen.

Istera maxxótt l-ismít pkyimpalla xost id-dist. Amma teivram, mantşilu xost k-kóşşino pşan ta tcassi m-moe.

Mantsáy xmire, manxallita ma ll-ismít m-maplúl u mannimcakon ost teiftax u tesúr pşik x-xalvá, maxxotton xok exen-lóx u mancattion ma kamposa θkyep pşan teáxmaðu, θénixar pale mannimcaka u pale mancattia. Iş-şocol aða mantsaíx tlix-trúk.

Amma ta ttaxmad ik-kişk kaes, mantşila xok is-sotx u mannaxtaxxa zacár-zacár kommaðkya pşan ta ttipes kaes. Fil-ixmenye θkyem mannazzila u manxassika fi exen sakkulli.

Ik-kişk mannakula ş-şitvie ta o part. Pittíniðbex vaxta u pittíniðbex ma l-laxm. Amma marrí antsáy suppa kişk vaxta, manxotta xok l-okít u pittistvi.

