

## *The Language of the Journal*

THE LANGUAGE OF Alexander's journal has numerous features that make deciphering it a daunting task. Among these features are the number of dialects of Arabic that come into play. For brevity's sake, in writing about Alexander's Arabic we will represent the various dialects as follows:

- IA     Iraqi Colloquial Arabic
- CA     Christian Arabic Dialect
- BCA    Baghdad Christian Arabic Dialect
- MBA    Muslim Baghdad Arabic Dialect
- LA     Literary Arabic

Iraqi colloquial Arabic [IA] in the late 19th century was fragmented into a number of local, ethnic, and confessional dialects that varied more or less widely depending on the relative cohesiveness of the communities that spoke them. We know this to be the case in a general sense but specific information about most of these dialects is lacking because there are few studies—none in the cases of most dialects—and, while many varieties of these dialects survive today, they are not necessarily similar in all respects to their 19th century counterparts. For this reason, although it is not the best practice to read back from today's dialects to earlier versions, in this case, it is all that one can do. We assume that Alexander's Arabic was some form of the Christian Arabic dialect [CA] spoken in Baghdad [BCA]. One of the features of CA is that it incorporates many features of the Muslim Arabic dialect of Baghdad (MBA) but differs from it in significant ways.

## *Language of the Journal*

Alexander's linguistic background is quite diverse, a characteristic of the language competency typical of the educated residents of Eastern Europe and the Austro-Hungarian Empire from whom he is descended. He clearly knew and spoke Arabic fluently. There are records in Joseph's diaries (April 1887-Nov 1887) where he speaks of his son taking Arabic lessons at the age of nine from Shamas Hanna at the Chaldean Church and of his writing to his father in Arabic at the age of 10, (Dec 1888-Sept 1889) just before he entered the Latin Church School in Baghdad run by French monks, where he may also have studied classical Literary Arabic [LA]. We have found evidence that Father Anastas (b.1866), a noted expert in classical LA, began teaching there at the age of 16 but in 1886, he left Baghdad and went to Beirut returning in 1893. Alexander was then 15 years of age but we do not have any evidence that Father Anastas taught him after his return. His father kept his diaries in English and, in addition to Arabic and English, knew Italian, French, Hindustani, and some Persian. One of the JMS diaries (Nov 1887-May 1888), records that Joseph Svoboda interpreted for the Afghan Emir Eyub Khan when traveling onboard the Lynch Steamer which transported the Afghan refugee Prince and his followers. He worked for a British firm (the Lynch Brothers Company), and he was obviously friendly with high-ranking members of the British diplomatic corps, yet they were also French proteges because the French consulate provided diplomatic services for Austrian citizens in Baghdad on behalf of the Austro-Hungarian State. The fragmentary journal of Alexander's return (accompanied by his French wife) is written in English. In short, it is difficult to say what Alexander's native language was, what language was commonly spoken at his home (there may have been several), or what language he was most comfortable speaking, or even why he chose to write his travel journal in Arabic. It is also possible that he was to some extent familiar with languages that he does not mention. For example, we do not know

whether or not conversations with Ottoman officials, military personnel, and travelers were at times carried out in Turkish.

Because we lack adequate information about 19th century BCA, it is impossible to draw definite conclusions about Alexander's language. His writing does not show evidence of a close relation to the Baghdad Christian Arabic discussed by Farida Abu-Haidar in her study entitled *Christian Arabic of Baghdad* (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1991). Moreover, the Arabic script does not accurately represent the phonology of any particular dialect and so any conclusions about dialectal peculiarities that we have reached are highly tentative. It is also likely that Alexander's Arabic in the journal is somewhat idiosyncratically contaminated by the other languages he spoke.

Moreover, the journal is most probably intended as a personal document. It is not necessarily meant to be read by anyone else or, at least, by anyone outside the family. If this is indeed the case, it would not be written—and seems not to have been written—with much care to reflect LA or even the more generally understood Muslim Iraqi Arabic dialect of Baghdad [MBA]. Nonetheless, it is a written text, which distances it to some uncertain degree from actual speech, even considering that its context is personal and informal. The result is a heterogeneous text difficult to translate by appeals to the usual sources: grammars, dictionaries, linguistic analyses, published collections of modern recorded speech, etc. A complete linguistic analysis of the text will be the business of scholars with different training and expertise than ours. For these reasons, our approach depends heavily on the personal expertise of the translators: Nowf Allawi's familiarity with the languages and cultures of Baghdad, including IA, MBA, BCA, LA, French, and English—a linguistic and cultural background that in many ways mirrors that of the Svobodas, combined with Walter G. Andrews' long experience with Ottoman Turkish, Persian,

and LA, as well as his familiarity with the requirements and practices of scholarly translation.

Alexander's journal is the only example of his Arabic that we have. As a result, we do not have enough samples of the oddities in his writing to draw definite conclusions about their origin. Nonetheless, we will give a few examples (among many) of some of the features of his language that struck us and mention our suggestions as to what these features may represent.

***The Influences of Ottoman Turkish:***

Because Iraq and Baghdad were, for long stretches since the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, under the administration of the Ottoman Empire, all of the Iraqi colloquial dialects show many and varied Turkish influences. In the area of vocabulary many of the borrowings that show up in Alexander's *Journal* are quite ordinary [e.g. [006:25] قوناغ IA, CA *qonağ*, Turkish: *konak* (station, stopping place), [007:17] جول IA, CA *jül*, Turkish: *çöl* (desert), [013:13] طوز IA *tüz*, Turkish: *toz* (dust)]. In several other cases, the vocabulary is tied to the language of Ottoman administration [e.g. [002:09] باليوز IA *bālyōz*, Turkish: *balyos* (foreign consul), [005:03] بيورلدي IA *beyūraldi*, Turkish: *buyuruldu*, *buyurultu* (decree)]. In addition, there are a number of administrative terms that are adaptations from Persian which most likely entered the Iraqi dialects through Ottoman [e.g. [003:06] شهادتنامه IA *ṣhādatnāme*, Turkish: *ṣhādetnāme* (declaration, testimony) from the compound, Arab. شهادة (*ṣhādat*: witness) and Pers. نامه (*nāme*: letter, document)].

In other cases, Alexander appears to have adopted some of the phonetic features of the Ottoman pronunciation of Arabic vocabulary. For example, he writes [001:02] رحلت *rihlat* (journey) with a final “ta” (ta tawil), when the final letter should be “ta marbuta” and be pronounced as the vocalic “ah” (*rihlah*) in the pause

form in Arabic. This is a common way of expressing the “ta marbuta” in Ottoman, however, and Alexander does not do this regularly. His language also seems to reflect Ottoman phonology in some cases. For example, ظريف for ظريف [zarīf pronounced *dharīf* in IA but *zarīfin* in Ottoman] A more complex case is when he writes [005:02] زابطيه *zābitiyah* for “gendarme”. The standard word and spelling is ضابط , which would be pronounced *dhābit* in IA. However in Ottoman the first letter ض is pronounced “z”, which produces *zabit* (and we have no other indication that this pronunciation difference was a regular feature of Alexander’s dialect). In addition, we have not been able to locate a use of the form ضابطيه *ḍābitiyah/zābīya* in either Arabic or Ottoman. Clearly, Alexander was thinking of the Ottoman borrowing from Arabic, ضبطيه (IA. *dhābitiyah*, Turkish: *zaptiye*), which vulgarly comes to mean “gendarme” in Turkish. In this he combines Ottoman influence on the popular language with a form of creative misspelling, of which we will give a few other examples below.

### ***Borrowings from Persian***

The origin of Persian vocabulary in Alexander’s Arabic is difficult to account for with any certainty. Ottoman Turkish borrows copiously from Persian, which makes it difficult to say if Persian borrowings are a result of the many Persian influences in Iraq or of Ottoman occupations. Some examples of Persian vocabulary follow: [004:16] كفشكان *kefeškān* (storage room, cloakroom) from the Persian كفشکن *kefshken* [Pers. *kefsh*: shoe and *kan/kaniden*: to pull off (place where one removes one’s shoes)]; [006:10] جادر *jādir* [Pers. *chādar*, Turkish: *çadır* (tent); [016:21] جاربايات *jārbāyāt* [Pers. *čārpāy*: *čār*: four and *pāy*: foot (iron bedstead) with the Arabic plural *āt*.

### ***Peculiarities of the Baghdad Christian Dialect***

While Alexander's Arabic shows similarities to what we know of the Christian Dialect of Baghdad, for example, the use of عمل 'amala (to do) as an auxiliary verb, we are not in a position to make an accurate assessment of the grammar and morphology of his language.

### ***Spelling Peculiarities***

Alexander's spelling shows several types of deviation from standard writing conventions. The most prominent are the following:

Spellings that reflect his speech: for example, when giving the time he writes [003:19] ساعه with a final vocalic "ah" *sā'ah* (o'clock/hour) instead of the usual ساعة *sā'at* with "ta marbuta" (although in some cases he does write ساعة). [It is interesting to note that the Ottoman influence we suspected in the writing of *rihlat* with a final "ta tawil" instead of "ta marbuta" does not apply here, where Ottoman influence would result in ساعت *sā'at*.] We also see unexpected substitutions of "ta marbuta" (ة) for "ta" in some verb phrases: for example, the standard مطرت *matarat*, 3rd person feminine, (it rained) becomes [009:03] مطرة.

Spellings that seem to reflect the phonology of his dialect: for example, substitutions of "ta" (ت) for "tha" (ث) as in [024:03] تخين *tikhīn* for ثخين *thikhīn* (thick) or the substitution of "dal" (د) for "dhal" (ذ) as in [002:05] هذا *hadā* for هذا *hadhā* (this), although for instance, in [014:14] Alexander writes هذا.

Misspellings by substitution of letters: for example, he spells the word for "francolin" دراج in two non-standard ways by substituting ط (ta) and ض (dhad) for "dal" (طراج - [008:19], - ضراج - [022:09]) and خ (kha) for غ (ghayn), for example, in the word for "mule" بغال *baghāl* [007:16] resulting in بخال *bakhāl* and in many other cases.

### ***Unknown or Indecipherable Vocabulary***

There are some words in Alexander’s text that are not obvious minor misspellings and yet are not familiar to speakers of contemporary Iraqi dialects. These fall into several categories:

Some of these appear to be vocabulary from LA that Alexander remembers imperfectly: for example, he writes the word [010:10] سحاب *sahāb / sihāb* which in LA, Persian and Turkish usually means “cloud” in a context in which “cloud” makes no sense. (He also uses the common term [013:07] غيوم – غيم *ghīm / ghaym pl. ghuyūm* whenever he mentions “cloud/clouds”). What does make sense in context is that he intends to use the LA word سهوب سهب *sahb pl. suhūb* which means “plains, level land” and simply mistakes the form. The same sort of uncertainty occurs with the word [009:19] تركه *terke/tireke* which in context must mean “remedy or cure”. There is no attestation we have been able to discover for this word in this sense. Our best guess is that Alexander intends ترياق or ترياقي *tiryāq / tiryāqī* (at times spelled تريك in Persian and Turkish) in the sense of “antidote or remedy or theriaca”.

In other cases, indecipherable words seem to be simple spelling problems of the type mentioned above, in which Alexander records what he says and hears rather than the actual spelling of the word (for example, substituting “ghayn” for “qaF” on occasion). Also there are some cases in which he is just making errors in writing: dropping a letter or transposing letters—perhaps a natural consequence of writing hurriedly or under difficult circumstances.

### ***The Transcription of Foreign Words into Arabic***

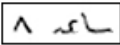
Alexander’s *Journal* contains a significant number of vocabulary items transcribed into Arabic from foreign languages, for the most part from French and English. This is not uncommon for the time. Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish were

borrowing extensively from European languages, primarily from French, during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to fill gaps in the lexicon left by the introduction of European customs and technologies. Alexander is also from a European community and some of his borrowings (and their spellings) may simply have reflected his personal vocabulary. Some of the Europeanisms were widespread such as [015:18] بوسطة *būstah/būstat* (post, mail, posta, Ottoman Turkish, پوسته) or [012:16] تگراف *telegraf* (telegraph), [014:04] فوتغراف *fūtughrāf* (photograph). Others seem more bound to the language of his British travel companions: [002:21] میجر *mayjir* (major), [003:02] کرنل *karnal* (colonel), [010:20] تفن *tifn* (tiffin). Yet others record the Arabic pronunciation of European names: for example, [003:19] هندري *hendry* (Henry) or [014:03] زبويده *zbūyda* (Svoboda).

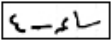
### ***Expressions of Time***

Alexander uses a bewildering variety of scales and notations representing time. Once, he records “Turkish time” [002:17] ساعه تركيه *sā‘ah turkiyah*, which by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century meant 24 standard hours of equal length beginning at sunset (as determined by the official time of the evening prayer). Turkish time required that all clocks be reset every evening. “European time” [002:20] ساعه فرنكيه *sā‘ah firankiyah* was based on a “universal” meridian and, by this time, corrected against “official” clocks in post offices and railway stations.

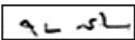
More of a problem is the variety of notations that Alexander uses to record times in his journal. These include:

1. 

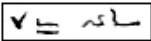
The simple form of registering the hour: (*sā'ah*  $\wedge$  = 8 o'clock).

2. 

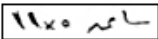
A form with a symbol resembling a small dash before the number (reading left-to-right), indicating the quarter hour (here 4:15).

3. 

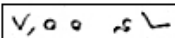
A form with a symbol resembling a dash with an upward stroke before the number (reading left-to-right), indicating the half hour (here 9:30).

4. 

A form with a symbol resembling parallel dashes with an upward stroke on the top dash before the number (left-to-right) indicating the three quarters hour (here 7:45).

5. 

A form that indicates the hour fraction by separating the hour and the fraction with an “x” (here 11:05).

6. 

A form indicating the hour and hour fraction separated by a comma, which is used to record train schedules after the party reaches Europe (here 7:55).

In the end, we leave it to historical linguists specializing in the dialects of Iraq to provide a more detailed and satisfactory analysis of Alexander's language.

## *Transcription Chart for Iraqi Arabic*

Readers should be aware that there is no simple way to represent the combination of Standard (Classical) Arabic, Iraqi Arabic dialects, Ottoman Turkish and Persian loan words, and Arabic script spellings of European names and vocabulary all of which are features of the Baghdad Arabic of Alexander Svoboda's day. Each language pronounces some Arabic consonants quite differently and there is no single transcription system that can represent all the possibilities. For our readers who do not know Arabic, we have chosen to try to transcribe in a system that is our best simple approximation of what Alexander's Arabic pronunciation might have been.

The first column represents a single character one to one transliteration of the Arabic script. The second reflects the pronunciation of Iraqi Baghdad Arabic as heard by Nowf Allawi in a form that will be easier for English speakers to pronounce. It does not distinguish letters that would sound the same to English speakers. In some cases we will use both systems. For Journal entries, those who know Arabic can refer to the Arabic text for spelling. In cases of the double letter transcriptions of single Arabic letters, it is possible, for example, that a "d" or "s" and one of the "h"s would come together in a word and be indistinguishable from a double letter transcription. For example, اصحاب (aṣḥāb) which in our transcription would render as "ashāb", even though the "s" and the "h" are separate letters and the word is pronounced "as-hab" and not "ash-ab".

Transcription Chart: Consonants

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Svoboda</i>	<i>English Equivalent Pronunciation</i>
ب	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
پ	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>A Persian letter occasionally used in Iraqi dialect</i>
ت	<i>t</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>t</i>
ث	<i>t̤</i>	<i>th</i>	<i>"th" as in "think" or "thin"</i>
ج	<i>j</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>"dj" as in "jump" or "gym"</i>
چ	<i>ç</i>	<i>ch</i>	<i>"ch" as in "chart" or "much"</i>
ح	<i>ħ</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>A hard "h" with pharyngeal constriction and no English equivalent</i>
خ	<i>ħ</i>	<i>kh</i>	<i>The unvoiced fricative in German "ach", no English equivalent</i>
د	<i>d</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>d</i>
ذ	<i>z̤</i>	<i>dh</i>	<i>"th" as in "there" or "those" (sometimes as "th" in "thin")</i>
ر	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Like a French "r" in some Christian dialects an English "r" in others</i>
ز	<i>z</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>z</i>

Transcription Chart: Consonants

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Svoboda</i>	<i>English Equivalent Pronunciation</i>
س	s	s	s
ش	ʃ	sh	As in "should"
ض	ð	th	"th" as in "think" in Iraqi Arabic, "z" in Ottoman
ص	ʒ	s	A hard "s", no English equivalent, sometimes "ss" in the journal
ط	t̤	t	"th" as in "other" or "father"
ظ	z̤	dh	"th" as in "other" or "father"
ع	ʕ	ʕ	A voiced glottal constriction with no English equivalent
غ	ġ	gh	A voiced fricative like the French "r"
ف	f	f	f
ڤا	v	v	A non-standard letter used to represent European "v"
ق	k̤	q	A back "k" as in "car" or "coke"
ك	k	k	A front "k" as in "kitten" or "Kim"

Transcription Chart: Consonants

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Svoboda</i>	<i>English Equivalent Pronunciation</i>
گ	<i>g</i>	<i>g</i>	"g" as in "girl"
ڭ	<i>ñ or y</i>	<i>n or y</i>	"kef", "nef" used in Turkish only
ل	<i>l</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>l</i>
م	<i>m</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>m</i>
ن	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
ه	<i>h</i>	<i>h</i>	A soft "h" as in English
ء	'		A glottal stop (heard in initial English vowels)
ي	<i>ī, finally, medially</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>
و	<i>w</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>w</i>

Transcription Chart: Vowels

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Svoboda</i>	<i>English Equivalent Pronunciation</i>
ā	ā	a	long "a" as in "ah"
ا	Initially a/e, i, u	a	"a" as in "father", "i" as in "it", short "u" as in "scoot"
و	ū/ō	ou	long "oo" as in "school"
ى	Finally ī, and sometimes ā	i	"ee" as in "beet" or "street", finally at times as long "a" as in "ah"
ي	y	y	"ee" as in "beet" or "street"
'	Represents an omitted vowel in transcription	'	As in "k'rūd" (the pronunciation of a word pronounced "kurūd" in Literary Arabic)
fathā	short vowel	a/e	a/e
kasra	short vowel	i	i
damma	short vowel	u	u/o