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Aljamiado Greek

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The term 'Aljamiado' denotes vernacular Spanish and other Romance varieties of the Iberic peninsula written in Arabic alphabet and has been extended to all the transcription texts written in Arabic script adopted to languages which do not use Arabic as their "habitual or standard" alphabet. 'Aljamiado Greek' is thus a graphic variety inscribed into the framework of 'syncretistic writing', where religion (here: Islam) is the cultural criterion for (re)graphization. The oldest known Greek texts in Arabic script were produced in Asia Minor in the 13th century, a few texts are known for the 15th and 16th centuries, while 18th and 19th-century sources have their provenance mainly in Epirus and Crete. The interest of these texts includes the cultural re-graphization process of Greek in Arabic script in an Islamic context, and their value as sources for Greek historic dialectology, first of all for Inner Anatolian, Epirot and Cretan varieties.

1. Definition and History of the Term

'Aljamiado' is a well-established though not sufficiently clear term to denote vernacular Spanish and other Romance varieties of the Iberic peninsula written in Arabic alphabet by Spanish-speaking Muslim authors and their converted



descendants (the so-called moriscos) after 1492, mainly in the 15th and 16th centuries (see the Biblioteca Digital Aljamiada [www.arabicaetromanica.com/biblioteca-digital-aljamiada/] of the University of Oviedo for an updated review of published texts). It derives from Arab. *al-ʿajamiyya*, an umbrella term covering ‘everything which is not Arabic’ (and specifically Persian), ‘foreign’ (cf. the Greek term βάρβαρος *bárbaros*). More recently the meaning of ‘aljamiado’ has been extended to all the transcription texts written in Arabic script adopted to languages which do not use Arabic as their ‘habitual or standard’ alphabet (cf. Casassas Canals 2010:374 who even widens the term to any text written in a ‘different’ alphabet). In South-Eastern Europe the term has been applied, first of all, to the Muslim literary production in Bosnian and Albanian, later on also for texts written with the Arabic script in Bulgarian and vernacular Greek (cf. Dedes 2000). Beyond that, many other examples for the use of the Arabic alphabet in languages all over the world for texts of Islamic relevance are known (Hegyí 1979). ‘Aljamiado Greek’ is thus a graphic variety inscribed into the framework of ‘syncretistic writing’, where religion (here: Islam) is the cultural criterion for (re)graphization (cf. [Karamanlidika](#) for the specular phenomenon of Turkish written in Greek characters, and, for a general overview, [Foreign Scripts and Greek](#)). Thus writing, in this sense, assumes a symbolic function and serves to ‘sacralize’ a language which is normally spoken by ‘infidels’. The term is sometimes also used more specifically to denote exclusively religious literature written in Greek, but in an Islamic context, targeted to Hellenophone Muslims (Kotzageorgis 1997), however Greek literature in Arabic script is not necessarily confined to religious texts or themes. In this framework, an argument in the past has been to tacitly exclude the first Greek sources in Arabic script (13th century) from the Aljamiado Greek corpus although these texts have an Islamic religious content (e.g. Theodoridis 1970:81). It is therefore an issue of definition if the term ‘Aljamiado Greek’ should be applied to religious literature only (Dedes 2010, Salakidis 2018), or if the criterion for its definition, as in the case of [Karamanlidika](#) Turkish, is rather a purely graphical one, which would then result in the postulate that every Greek text in Arabic alphabet is an Aljamiado Greek text.

2. Texts in Aljamiado Greek

Greek texts in Arabic script have been studied already in the 19th and early 20th centuries, at least for some geo-cultural areas, such as Asia Minor (Meyer 1895, relying on even earlier notes by J. von Hammer in 1829), or Epirus (Pyrinellas 1932), though these studies do not mention the term ‘aljamiado’ nor do they put Islamic Greek literature in a broader or theoretical context. This has been done only recently, namely from a graphematical and linguistic point of view (Kappler 1999) as well as from a socio-cultural perspective in the framework of a contextualization with Bosnian and Albanian Aljamiado (Dedes 2000).

The oldest known Greek texts in Arabic script go back to the 13th century and include verses in the poetical works of Celāl ed-Dīn Rūmī, known as Mevlānā (d. 1273) the founder of the mystical Mevlevī order, and of his son Sultān Veled (1226–1312). Celāl ed-Dīn Rūmī used almost exclusively Persian (along with Arabic) being the predominant Muslim literary language of that time, but intercalated a few Turkic and Greek verses into some of his poems, defined as ‘patch-work poems’ (*mulammaʿ*), pursuing a mainly humorous or folkloristic purpose. On the other hand, Sultān Veled began to write, – beyond Persian that was still the dominating language, and Arabic –, more extensively in Oghuz Turkish, and inserted sporadically Greek verses into his works, most of which have a different function than those of his father, searching to reach a potential religious flock for the spread of Islam, and especially of his father’s ideas of mysticism, in the newly conquered regions of Asia Minor, where Greek was, along with Armenian, the most widely spoken colloquial language. The first edition of the 22 Greek verses contained in Sultān Veled’s *mesnevī* (long poem in coupled rhymes) *Rebābnāme* (1301), as well as a few other verses contained in some of his gazels (short lyrical love poems) by Burguière and Mantran (1952) was completed and corrected by Mertzios (1958), Dedes (1993), and Theodoridis (2004), while the 27 Greek verses in his older *mesnevī*, the *Ibtidānāme* (begun in 1291) were edited much more recently (Kappler 2010). Whereas the verses contained in the two *mesnevīs* have a clearly mystical-religious function, the Greek distichs in the gazels have a lyric love strategy, including vulgar expressions. The language of the verses, which seems to belong to the dialect group of Asia Minor, especially of Cappadocia, is still waiting to be analyzed from the dialectological point of view, though the correct transcription is not always an easy task due to the sometimes defective notation of vowels in the Arabic script (see below in 3).

The outstanding Aljamiado Greek text in the 14th century is the Greek part of a dictionary, the so-called ‘Rasûlid Hexaglot’, composed around 1370 in Yemen, comprising word lists of Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian, and Mongolian (Golden 2000). Its editor, Peter Golden, calls the Greek variety a ‘Byzantine dialect’ at the transition from Late Medieval Greek to Early Modern Demotic (Golden 1985:50–51), and a “local Byzantine Koine of this region” (ibidem: 48), referring to the Anatolian-Cypriot linguistic area, and underlining the spoken source of the material.

Only a few texts are known for the 15th and 16th centuries, namely a distich written by the Ottoman poet Ahmed Pasha between 1453 and 1466 (according to Theodoridis 1965), and the more important Arabic-Persian-Greek-Serbian *Luġat* (‘lexicon’, in reality a conversation book in dialogue form), conserved in two slightly different manuscripts at the Hagia Sophia Museum in Istanbul (Lehfeldt 1989). This work was probably composed at the end of the 15th century, and served as a method to learn Arabic and as a catechism for newly proselytes of the Islamic religion (graphematical analysis of the Greek part by G. S. Henrich in Lehfeldt 1989:53–70). In the Greek section of the *Luġat*, linguistic influences from the Pontic area and (according to the editor) Chios have been found (Henrich 1989 and 1993). Another text of the same period is a codex called *Mulḥaqāt-i dānistān min al-luġati ’l-rūmiyyati wa ’l-serfiyyati*, commissioned by Sultan Mehmed II and consisting in an Arabic description of Greek and ‘Serbian’ (or any Western South Slavic variety), and a Persian-Greek-‘Serbian’ dictionary (Kappler 2023).

For the following centuries we do have knowledge about several works from different areas, however not always the texts are edited, but only presented in short articles. In this sense, we know about two catechisms, one of them dated 1657 (Theodoridis 1970; 1974), and a series of Greek translations of popular Islamic texts, such as the *Vaṣīyetnāme* (‘testament’), or the *Mevlīd* (poem about the birth of the prophet Muhammad) from the 18th century (Dedes 2005, Okıç 1975–1976:29, Chidiroglu 1993; the latter being an – albeit widely erroneous – edition of the text, while an edition of the sister manuscript has been done by Salakidis 2018). The provenance of these texts is not always known, but with the aid of linguistic criteria most of them can be related to the area of Epirus in northwestern Greece, where an apparently rich, yet mostly inedited Islamic literature developed from the mid-17th century onwards, resulting in a relatively large number of texts, the so-called *ομολογιές omoloyiés* ‘confessions’ (Pyrinellas 1937; Salamangas 1946; Kappler 1996a:87–89; for an overview of the texts see Kotzageorgis 1997:72–75; cf. also Dedes 2000:93–94).

Geographically distant but culturally linked to the products of Hellenophone Muslims in Epirus, popularly known as *Τουρκογιαννιώτες Turkoġianniōtes* ‘Turco-Yianniots’ – from the city of Ioannina, although they probably had no or little knowledge of Turkish), stands a group of works composed in Cretan Greek and written by Cretan Muslims (known correspondingly as *Τουρκοκρήτες Turkokrītes* ‘Turco-Cretans’). According to our knowledge, the Cretan production in Arabic script comprises mostly practical language material, such as rhymed dictionaries or word-lists from the late 18th and 19th centuries for the use of Greek speaking Muslims, one of them even in printed form, but likely includes also religious texts (Chidiroglu 1993 claims his edited *Mevlīd* to be Cretan, but linguistically it must be related rather to Epirus). An exception is a lengthy song on the abolition of the Janissaries, dated 1826 (ed. Dedes 2011). Examples for versified dictionaries are the Bektashi *Luġat-i rūmiyye*, composed probably in the second half of the 19th century (edited by Dedes 2007), and the *Tuḥfe-i Nūriyye* from the end of the 18th–beginning of 19th century (Kappler 1996a), while a glossary with the title *Kelimāt-i türkiyye ve rūmiyye* (‘Turkish and Greek word list’) for the Muslim elementary schools in Crete was printed in 1874, with at least three reprints (Kappler 1996b). Nūrī, the author of the *Tuḥfe-i Nūriyye*, was a Sufi from Chaniá, and explicitly refers to the founder of his confraternity, Celāl ed-Dīn Rūmī and his Greek verses, in order to justify the compilation of the work. This is a very interesting evidence of religiolectal syncretistic writing in the realm of Islam, i.e. of how a language – here Greek –, usually spoken in a Christian cultural context, becomes an ‘Islamic language’, – an epithet commonly reserved for the three classical languages of Islam, Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman –, through re-graphization with the Arabic alphabet.

If we define ‘Aljamiado Greek’ in a strictly graphical sense, i.e. as ‘all Greek language material written in Arabic script’, books for language education addressed to Muslim learners of Greek as a foreign language might also be included into the corpus. An example for this is a Turkish-Greek dialogue book printed in Istanbul (1876 and 1887), where the Greek entries are transcribed in Arabic script for the Ottoman Turkish users (Kappler 1999:703–704).

Separately from the aljamiado products *stricto sensu*, i.e. with the use of the Arabic alphabet, another Islamic Greek corpus may be mentioned in this framework, namely Greek texts composed in a Muslim cultural context though not written in Arabic script but in the Greek alphabet with a simplified orthography. An example of this text genre is an 18th-century *Mi'rācnāme* (poem on the ascension of the prophet Muhammad) from Epirus, edited by Kotzageorgis (1997, see also Kotzageorgis 2010), to which non-religious products from the same area might be added, such as Hadji Sehret's *Alipasiāḏa* (Kappler 1993; though not being conserved in its original form, but only in a learned transcription), but also a large number of documents contained in the Ali Pasha Archive of the Gennadius Library, the Greek State Archives and the Benaki Museum, published between 2007 and 2018. The cultural and linguistic significance of these Islamic products in Greek script, which deviate from the norm to use the 'sacred' alphabet of Islam (or rather the alphabet of the sacred language) even if we deal with religious texts, in the framework of a 'Greek-Islamic' literature has to be studied in future by the comparative analysis of more texts belonging to both typologies.

3. Linguistic Aspects

3.1. Graphematics

Aljamiado Greek, as all syncretistic writing systems, was used as a practical means to re-graphize a linguistic variety according to cultural and religious criteria and, as such, has not developed a standardized form of writing (in this it can be compared to Karamanlidika Turkish). For that reason each author used his own system of graphization, according to his phonetic perception of the language, the variety, and the goals in terms of targeting the readership. Nonetheless, some general trends in the history of writing Greek in Arabic characters can be observed.

First of all, the representation of vowels in the Arabic script is an important issue for the analysis of Aljamiado Greek texts. Because of the phonological distinction between long and short vowels in Arabic, the script uses a clear distribution for the notation of Arabic (and Persian) vowels: full writing, i.e. with an own grapheme (plene writing) for long vowels, and defective writing (with or without diacritic signs, the so-called *hareke*) for short vowels. Since Modern Greek does not distinguish between long and short vowels, the vowel notation naturally undergoes fluctuation. As this is true for Turkic too (in its South-Western varieties used in Anatolia and South-Eastern Europe), Aljamiado Greek shares the same difficulties in vowel notation as Ottoman Turkish, and therefore Ottoman writing practices are automatically transferred when writing in other languages than Ottoman Turkish. Concretely, older texts, such as Rūmī and Sultān Veled (13th century), use a mixed system with usually defective writing, often without diacritic signs (*hareke*), later texts from the 15th to the 18th centuries note vowels either by *hareke* or by plene writing, while the most recent examples, such as the Cretan *Kelimāt-i türkiyye ve rūmiyye* (1874) or the Turkish-Greek Istanbul dialogue book (1876) use systematically plene writing and thus present a more clear-cut writing-sound correspondance. In other words, when transcribing older texts scholars face the problem of vocalic defectiveness. However, there are still instances of dubious writings even in more recent texts, especially concerning the distinction between /o/ and /u/, or /i/ and /e/, due to the use of the same graphemes (<vav <و> and <ye <ع> respectively) to represent the two vowels. On the other hand, the fact that the awareness of long and short vowels in Ottoman literature was stronger before the 19th century (i.e. the time when the first attempts of some intellectuals to reform the language influenced Ottoman writing), is reflected by a frequent practice in older Aljamiado Greek texts, such as Sultān Veled or the *Tuhfe-i Nūrīyye*, namely to transfer the meaning of plene/defective writing from long/short distinction to stressed/unstressed marking. For example, in the the *Tuhfe-i Nūrīyye*, the Greek word *pína* ('hunger') is written as <pīnā> (where <ī> and <ā> stand for plene writing), while *pīná* ('(s)he is hungry') as <pīnā> (where <ī> stands for defective writing with *hareke*) (Kappler 1996a:97). A similar system was adopted also in *Lūgat* (Henrich 1989:365). This graphical transfer is probably triggered by the quantitative metrical scheme, based on Persian models, where long/short distinction is crucial, since the writing corresponds to the metrical foot: <pīnā> metrically /-u/, and <pīnā> metrically /u-/. It has been observed that the practice to adopt Aljamiado Greek writing to the requirements of Persian metrics was systematically applied by Sultān Veled (Kappler 2002).

Another important feature of Aljamiado Greek is the notation of allophones which cannot be distinguished in the Greek script. An example is the archiphoneme /K/ with its distinction into velar [k] and palatal [k'], both written

with <x> in Greek, whereas the Ottoman writing practice in Arabic script distinguishes graphically palatal [k'] written as <k> (*kef* <ك>) from velar [k] written as <q> (*qaf* <ق>), e.g. <kerōs> ('time' / <καιρός> in Greek writing) vs. <qōnsōlōs> ('consul' / <κόνσολος>) in *Tuḥfe-i Nūriyye* (end of 18th century), <ġrāmāṭīkī> ('grammatical-m.pl', <γραμματικοί>) vs. <ġrāmāṭīqōs> ('grammatical-m.sg.', <γραμματικός>) in *Kelimāt* (1874), or <kōqōzmos> ('the world too' / <κι ο κόσμος>) in *Mevlīd* (18th century) edited by Salakidis (2018:368). Phonological writing is typical for non-standardized writing in general, and can be observed in many other instances, such as for the archiphoneme /S/, realized as [z] before voiced consonants, e.g. <tiz vīvlu> ('of the book') (*Luġat*, 15th century) vs. *<tis vivlu> / <της βίβλου> as written in the standardized Greek script, or <qōzmōs> ('world' (dialogue book from 1876) vs. *<qosmos> / <κόσμος>. In later texts, counterexamples, which presuppose the knowledge of Greek orthography, can be found quite frequently, e.g. <xālāsmēnōs> ('broken'), – instead of a hypothetical *<xālāzmēnōs> –, in *Kelimāt* (1874). The fluctuation between the prevailing phonetic and a rather sporadic morphological writing can be observed in the notation of the sound /d/, usually rendered in Greek with the digraph <nd> (<ντ>), and the sound /b/, written as <mb> (<μπ>). Thus we have <stōn dōpondū> ('in its place', in standardized Greek orthography στον τόπον του *ston tōpon tu*) in Sultān Veled, but also <tōn tāfōn> ('of the graves', for των ταφών *ton tafōn*) in *Luġat*. Generally speaking, the older texts (13th to 15th centuries) use a more phonetic writing, while morphological writing becomes more frequent (but by no means exclusive) in the later centuries. At the same time, a property of the oldest texts in the 13th century (Rūmī and Sultān Veled) is a trend to a simplified graphization, which results, in some cases, in non-phonological writing, such as the non-distinction of palatal and velar K, cf. the writing <k> in both instances (e.g. <keparākālō>, 'and I beg', standardized Greek writing και παρακαλώ *ke parakalō*) in a gazel by Rūmī (Kappler 1999:706).

Although all Greek texts in Arabic script generally use the graphematic repertoire of Ottoman, i.e. the letters of the Arabic alphabet plus some graphemes developed especially for Persian and Turkic phonemes (such as <پ> for /p/, <چ> for /č/ or <ڭ> for /ŋ/), there are a few additional letters. These are *fe* with three dots above (<ف>) for /v/ (in Rūmī and Sultān Veled, whereas in later texts the letter *vav* is used), and *ha* with three dots above (<ح>) for palatal /x'/ (in *Luġat* and the dialogue book 1876), as well as *ġīm* with an additional dot (<ج>) for /ts/ (in *Luġat* where this grapheme was also necessary for the notation of the same phoneme in Serbian). In *Mevlīd*, the three-dotted *kef* (so-called *kāf-i nūnī* or *saġır nūn*) is used for the palatal /n'/ rather than for the velar nasal /ŋ/, as in Ottoman Turkish. The Greek interdentals /θ/ and /ð/ are represented in all texts and periods by the letters *se* <ث> and *zel* <ذ> respectively, but in their original Arabic phonetic realization ([θ] and [ð]), and not as they were pronounced in Ottoman ([s] and [z]), which is noteworthy since it attests a conscient perception of Arabic phonetics even in later times (19th century) when this awareness was essentially fading (cf. Dedes 2007:253).

3.2. Dialect Issues

Greek texts in Arabic script are precious sources for the historical dialectology of Medieval and Modern Greek ([Dialectology \(General Survey\)](#)). Although information at the phonetic level, especially concerning vowels, might be incomplete in some cases due to the peculiarities of the Arabic writing system (see above chapter 3.1.), scholars have revealed a number of dialect influences from different areas according to the provenance of the sources. However, a thorough and systematical dialectological analysis of the few edited Aljamiado Greek texts has not yet been undertaken.

On the ground of the hitherto known and edited texts, there are essentially three geographical areas of diatopic interest: Asia Minor, Epirus, and Crete. Sporadically, as mentioned above, influences from varieties of the Black Sea have also been detected.

Instances of Asia Minor (also known as Inner Anatolian) dialects can be found in the early texts of the 13th century. The notation of palatal [x'] as <š>, such as in <pšīšī> ('soul', Sultān Veled, *Ibtidānāme*, SMGk. ψυχή *psixi*) shows the early palatalization of x' in these dialects. This pronunciation is known in modern [Cappadocian](#) dialects, but also in [Cretan \(Cretan, Medieval/Venetian and Modern Period\)](#), which is the reason why we encounter the same writing in 19th century Cretan Aljamiado texts, as well. More examples of Asia Minor Greek (albeit present in other Greek

dialects too) in Sultān Veled's *Ibtidānāme* could be the use of clitic pronouns, such as in <οὔϋος ἔῑλιτῦς> 'God wants them', SMGk. ο Θεός τους θέλει ο Θεός tus θέλι), the pronouns <ōyos> (with the variant <ōyīs>) 'who' and <ōyon> 'which, as', or the e > o change in <ṗorpatῦn> ('they walk', SMGk. περπατούν *perpatῦn*) or <ṗōṗtenī> ('(s)he dies', SMGk. πεθαίνει *peθéni*). Also the use of the particle *na* to mark future tense is noteworthy, as in <ōyos ivrēn esēna miṗōṗtenī> (*ójos ívren esé na mi poθéni*, 'who found Thee will not die') (for all examples see Kappler 2010).

Hints to Epirot dialectal forms have been observed by Kotzageorgis (1997:102) in the 18th-century *Mi'rācnāme* in simplified Greek script, for example in the past tense 1st plural verb ending -aman, such as <ηπαμαν> / *ipaman*, or <εσκοτοσαμαν> / *eskotosaman* (SMGk. είπαμε *ípame*, σκοτώσαμε *skotósame*, 'we said', 'we killed'), but are present also in the pseudo-Cretan though rather Epirot *Mevlīd* edited by Chidiroglou (1993:192, in Arabic script 206), e.g. <keqāčāmān> (SMGk. και κάτσαμε *ke kátsame*, 'and we sat'), transcribed erroneously by Chidiroglou as *ke kátsamen*, or the conjunction <āndā> (SMGk. όταν *ótan*, 'when'; Chidiroglou 1993:196, 211).

Examples for Cretan dialectalisms, apart from the abovementioned writing of <š> for palatal [x'], are <ečā> ('so', SMGk. έτσι *étsi*), or the use of the particle (*e*)*ḏa*, taken from the glossary *Kelīmāt* printed in 1874 (Kappler 1996b:117, 121). Lexical elements which point to Cretan varieties can also be found in the *Tuḥfe-i Nūriyye* (turn of the 18th to 19th centuries), for example *evjá* 'clear sky', *manítis* 'mushroom', or *misévgo* 'I go away' (Kappler 1996a:98).

In the 15th-century *Luġat*, Pontic influence can be observed in the specially invented character 'šīn + háček' for the palatalized [š] (Henrich 1989:365; the presence of other Pontic features are mentioned but not named by the author; see [Pontic Greek](#)). The sister manuscript of this source contains a verb list, which, according to Henrich (1993), would hint to the dialects of the island of Chios, for example the past 2nd plural ending -ete (SMGk. -ατε *-ate*), the past 3rd plural *epíγasin* ('they went'), or the present tense 3rd plural ending -úsīn, but since other Greek varieties (such as Cypriot Greek) share the same features, more research in this direction is needed. Generally speaking, the dialectological analysis of Aljamiado Greek texts remains a desideratum for future research in the framework of Modern Greek studies.

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