

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S WEDDING SONGS IN COLLOQUIAL ARABIC<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Wedding songs are an inherent part of the folklore in the Middle East. In this region men and women sing wedding songs on this festive event individually or in separate or joint groups. We discuss in this study women's wedding songs representing four religion and language communities of the area: the Christian, Druze, Muslim and Jewish communities. We review the similarities and differences among several types of wedding songs of these communities. Examples include Christian and Druze songs from Tur'a:n and Peqi'in (il-Biqe:'a) respectively, Muslim songs from 'Ein Ma:hel, Damascene Judeo-Arab, and Iraqi Judeo-Arab wedding songs. This study refers to song topics, their structures, singing circumstances and certain linguistic and musical elements. Examples are presented with translation into English. A major finding is that many of the songs are common to all the four communities discussed here.

### 1. Introduction

The topic of wedding songs has been studied within the fields of Oriental and general literature (poetry) and folklore studies, and we are certainly not the first to take it up (cf., e.g., Havas, 1970, Zwettler, 1978, Oring, 1987, Libbis, 1989, Caspi and Blessing, 1991). The present paper examines women's songs in Arabic in various places and communities in Israel as a kind of a microcosm that represents the macrocosm. This microcosm involves several factors. From the geographical point of view, these songs are from the Galilee, which is part of a larger area, Israel, and the larger reference area - the Middle East. Another angle is the sociological, communal or religious, one. The songs we are discussing come from Druze and Christian singers in Peqi'in and Tur'a:n, from Muslim singers of 'Ein Ma:hel, and from Damascene and Baghdadi-Jewish singers who live (or lived) in Israel (e.g., Tiberias). These four communities represent the same large religious communities of the Middle East.

From another angle, Arabic folklore art is under study here, with its specific cultural background, since the songs are sung in Arabic. In addition, women's songs relate to one gender, which involves another sociological and socio-linguistic variable. Songs also reflect the local Arabic dialects of the singers, and certain dialect-based differences may be found among them. A study of wedding songs can focus on any of the above points, among others.

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<sup>1</sup>This is an extended version of a paper read at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Middle Eastern Popular Culture, Cambridge, September, 2000.

The following figure is a likely representation of these factors.

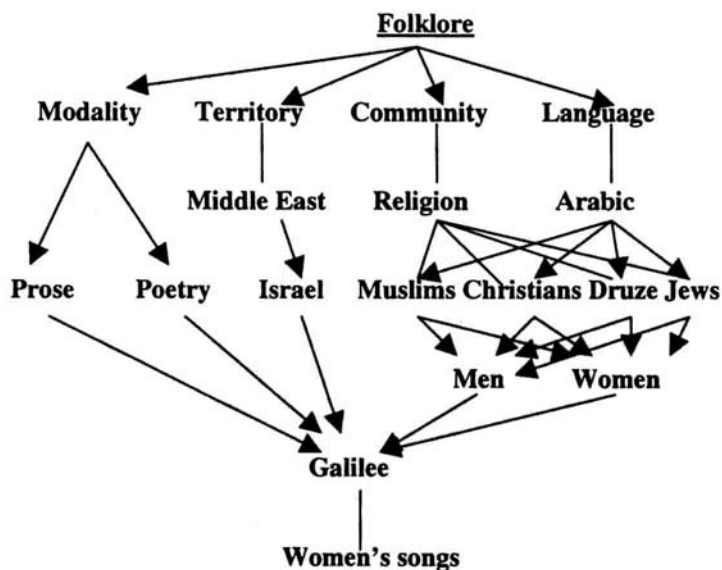


Figure 1. Combined Factors in Women's Songs from the Galilee

The present study reviews various major issues related to weddings songs in Arabic and to their structures in these communities while considering their specific (local, linguistic and topical) features. Song topics and structures, singing events or circumstances and certain linguistic and musical elements are also discussed and examples are presented with translation into English. The goal in this study is to find common and distinctive features of women's wedding songs in Arabic. To the best of our knowledge, such an inter-communal comparison has not been attempted so far.

### 1.1. Arabic Folk Songs

Folk songs have been examined from various academic perspectives, including e.g. folkloristic poetic art, linguistics (representation of the local artistic language and style), and sociolinguistics (e.g., wedding songs of women compared to men's wedding songs). Studies of folk songs (as well as folk tales) are undertaken nowadays by certain Arab scholars also to preserve the local national heritage.

Folk songs usually refer to the life cycle - including childbirth, betrothal, marriage, child rearing (nursery rhymes) and death (mourning), as well as to other topics of interest for the community such as love, farming, seasons, games, war and politics. Folk songs have been also classified into secular and religious songs, and among these, women's songs are usually secular whereas men's songs also deal with religious topics (Avishur, 1987:107, and Shiloah, 1999:181-190, who mentions also women's specific role in mourning songs at present as well as in the past - cf. also Nicholson, 1976).

Numerous genres and sub-genres have been identified in the literary study of colloquial Arabic folk songs and poetry, as in other cultures of the world. These genres have been classified mostly by their structures and topics, although there are also musical studies of folk songs (for references see, for example, Shiloah, 1999). Studies of Arabic folk songs and poetry have been undertaken in the effort to delineate their development in time and space (i.e., during the centuries in different countries; see, e.g., Abu Hadaba, 1976, Nicholson, 1976, Sowayan, 1985, Jargy, 1970, Libbis 1989, Houry, 1999a).

A major problem of the study of Arabic folk songs relates to their being in the colloquial varieties. Since folk songs are not delivered in the prestigious Literary Arabic, Arab scholars have neglected their study for a long time. The fact that these songs use various local dialects requires that researchers who wish to study them master these numerous language varieties; this has been, then, another stumbling block delaying the study of Arabic folk songs by Arabs as well as non-Arabs.

Still, the study of Arabic folk songs has developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the study of Arabic folklore in general (see Al-Gawhari, 1974, 1981). Among them, several studies have been dedicated to the folk songs in Palestine, or presently in Israel, apparently as a result of a combination of many cultural, political geographical, and linguistic factors (cf. Haddad, 1991, 1994).

In terms of genre and topic, we assume that the most popular Arabic wedding songs in Israel are basically similar at least to wedding songs in near-by areas of the Arab world. Another hypothesis is that differences among these songs may be due to specific combinations of local cultural, political, geographical, and linguistic factors.

We wish to add here also the aspect of Judeo-Arabic wedding songs, which are hardly studied by non-Jews. Avishur (1987:107) writes that the Jewish singers in Baghdad used to sing also Muslim wedding songs. This habit is probably true also in other places where Jews lived in Muslim environments. Not much study has been devoted to a comparative study of communal features of wedding songs and we will refer briefly also to this point.

## **1.2. Traditional and Modern Wedding Customs**

Wedding customs are generally similar in the communities of this region, including Peqi'in, Tur'an, Shfa'amr, Bedouins and various "Oriental" Jewish traditional weddings (Granqvist, 1931, Aslan, 1980, Rosenhouse, 1980:32-33, Avishur, 1987, Caspi and Blessing, 1993, Houry, 1999a). The two in-law families undertake the preparations for all the wedding feasts, for different ceremonies are conducted in each family's "territory". The procedures of a wedding include the following main stages:

The first step is asking the girl's hand in marriage from her parents (mainly her father) by a delegacy of adults. Sometimes, the bridegroom's mother prepares for this beforehand through a female family member, and sometimes a male friend of the bridegroom's helps with it. This habit is partly obsolete nowadays where the bride and bridegroom meet beforehand and decide about their future connection by themselves. A meeting of members of the two families at the bride's home, with the bridegroom's party bringing presents to the bride's family is, however, still a necessary procedural step.

If the request is accepted, a date is fixed for the wedding, usually in the summer or autumn. In the Muslim and Druze communities the engagement is formally arranged then, and the couple is officially committed to each other. In the Christian

community the engagement period is not as binding for it is considered a "test period" of the future relationship and may still be annulled. The wedding itself is fixed for a later date, according to the young man's condition, for he has to prepare the new home. In the past, the young couple might live in the bridegroom's parents' home, but nowadays the young couple usually moves to a house or a flat of their own right after the wedding.

About a week before the date of the wedding, the bride's family delivers oral invitations to the relatives and invited guests. Written invitations are prepared by the bridegroom and his family, and are also delivered. The latter is, naturally, a modern habit. At this time (the week is called "ta'li:l") the preparations for the wedding begin, guests are beginning to come every evening to congratulate the bride and the bridegroom's families and the evenings involve songs and dancing as well as food and drinking.

On the day before the wedding the "Henna night" is celebrated (by Christians, for example; in other communities e.g. Jews, this may occur a week before it). This is a ceremony when the bride's and the bridegroom's hands are painted in Henna (a reddish cream made of the plant *Lawsonia Inermis*, symbolizing fertility). Often, the guests' hands are also painted in Henna. In some modern weddings, the bride dips her plastic-covered fingers in the Henna dish to avoid making a mess. The Henna night naturally involves a big feast and celebration with songs, music and dancing.

On the wedding day the singing audience escorts even the preparation of the young couple for the great event (e.g., washing, shaving and dressing up the groom and the bride). In the Christian community, the bride and the bridegroom are led to the church in singing parades in the village (or neighborhood) escorted by their family and friends. This parade in the village is called "zaffe" (and the wedding is the "zafa:f"). The priest conducts the ceremony in the church. When the religious ceremony ends, the young couple is led back to the bridegroom's home escorted by the singing audience. In the Moslem and Druze communities, the bride is taken in a similar parade (called "ṭawa:f" in the Druze community) directly to the bridegroom's home, where the feasting takes place. The religious part of the ceremony, i.e., signing the marriage contract, has been done, as noted, in somewhat less pomp and noise in the betrothal ceremony in the presence of the male members of the two families (cf. Caspi and Blessing, 1993:365). In Jewish weddings signing the marriage contract is done just before the wedding celebrations, and the contract ("ketubah") is read out in front of the whole audience. The wedding may take place in a synagogue or the rabbinate offices. Nowadays, however, it usually takes place in public halls or restaurants large enough to hold all the guests and cater for them. This habit has reached also the Arab communities, mainly the Christian ones. Much singing and dancing is going on in all these ceremonies, with special songs for each stage of the event. After dinner nowadays the young couple leave the bridegroom's home for a honeymoon (possibly even abroad). This habit did not exist in the past. The evening feast was followed in the past by a morning reception and often by additional several days' feasting, depending on the families' financial condition. This habit is still kept some places and mainly Muslim weddings. We see that wedding habits have been changing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the fact that many of the older songs are not sung any more or are transformed to fit the modern ways.

Certain differences between the traditions of each community exist, but basically the feasts and the social elements of singing and dancing are common to all of them.

It is therefore possible to compare the different songs and song types of these communities.

### **1.3. Women's wedding songs**

Women live in the Near East in a usually closed community, relatively separate from the men (and their closed community). Therefore, women's linguistic habits vary in various respects from men's language (see Rosenhouse, 1998). This general observation is supposed to be expressed also in the wedding songs, where men and women do not mingle in certain parts of the ceremonies<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, women's songs (not only in this geographical region) usually treat topics that are relevant to their specific life style and problems, and thus differ from men's songs (Libbis, 1989). As noted, often women's songs do not refer to religious issues (Avishur, 1987:107). The themes, structures and the melodies of women's songs differ from the men's songs. Thus, women's wedding songs can be considered a sub-category within the folk art of wedding songs in the populations of colloquial Arabic speakers in the Middle East.

### **1.4. Songs Localities: Peqi'in, Tur'a:n, Shfa'amr, Tiberias (Damascus)**

**Peqi'in (in Arabic: Il-Buqe:'a)** This is an old village in the Upper Galilee. Its history goes back to the beginning of the Christian era, and its population is special in the fact that it comprises members of the four religion communities: Christians (about 70%), Muslims (about 20%), Druze (about 10%) and 3 Jewish families<sup>3</sup>. The common language in the village is Arabic. The inhabitants used to live mainly on farming, but during the 20th century circumstances have changed there as elsewhere. Now they mostly work outside the village and only a small proportion of them keep farms. Although the four communities have been leading a peaceful life in the village for centuries, each community has preserved its own independent framework and religious (and linguistic) habits (cf. Haddad, 1980, 1987). Still, after such a long period of neighborhood, these groups may be expected to share some (linguistic and other) features.

**Tur'a:n** is a big village in the eastern Lower Galilee, on the way to Tiberias. Its 9500 inhabitants include about 1500 Christians and the rest are Muslims. It is considered a rich village at present. Most of the population is employed outside the village, i.e., not in farming. Tur'a:n does not have Druze inhabitants.

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<sup>2</sup>Typical male songs in the whole area of Arabic folk songs include the following:

**'Ata:ba songs:** These are Lebanese type songs. The name means "reproach".

**Mi:jana songs:** The source of this name has been interpreted as "ya ma ja:na" (o, what has come upon us), and they are also songs lamenting past sorrows. Khoury (1999) claims the name refers to a workers' hammer called "me:jana". These songs imply the bridegroom's sorrows and troubles as a result of his love for the bride and his being far from her.

**Mho:rabe songs:** These are marching songs; their name comes probably from the root ḥrb (war, fight) and are considered to have originated in Syria.

**Ḥida: songs:** They are considered to be among the oldest Arabic song genres and are usually performed as contests between two professional poets. Their topics vary and include wealth, strength, blessings, congratulations and also politics.

<sup>3</sup> Saarisalo (1932) reported the total number of 50 Jews in this village. One Jewish family is said to have never gone to exile. At present only one Jewish family has remained in old Peqi'in and a modern new Jewish settlement called "New Peqi'in" has been developed in the vicinity of "old" Peqi'in.

**Shfa'amr (Shfar'am, in Hebrew)** is an Arab town to the east of Haifa, inhabited by Christians and Muslims and a few Druze families. Its proximity to Haifa and Acre draws many of the people in the town to employment in these towns, as well as elsewhere.

**Tiberias** is the largest town to the east of the Galilee and is situated on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias in the Jordan Valley area, about 300m below sea level. It is an old town and is known from the first centuries A.D. Its population includes Jews who had been there for centuries, but many have settled there in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The women whose songs are discussed here live in Tiberias, but have immigrated to Israel from Damascus. Thus their dialect is Damascene Judeo-Arabic. We may also mention here the Judeo-Arabic dialect of Baghdadi singers, who originated in Baghdad but lived in various towns in Israel. (Avishur, 1987, also presented songs written down in manuscripts from periods before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)

### 1.5. Classifications of Wedding Songs

Wedding songs in the Arabic folklore generally, and in the Galilee specifically, refer to the traditional stages of this event. The songs can be classified from various respects. A major classification of wedding songs is chronological (also called "circumstantial" in Arabic) i.e., the songs are arranged in the order of the ceremony stages. These are, for example, songs preceding the wedding, such as Henna songs. Other songs are sung to the bridegroom while he is being bathed, shaved and dressed up. Songs are also sung to the bride or the bridegroom when they are escorted in the "zaffe" procession from their homes to the church, if they are Christians, or when the bride is taken to the bridegroom's home if they are Muslim (the "zaffe") or Druze (the "ṭawa:f"). Then there are wedding songs sung at church (for Christians), and songs on the wedding night, during the big celebration at the bridegroom's home. In Jewish weddings there are songs for the Henna night, but on the wedding night the main party (and singing) begins only when the rabbi concludes the legal-religious act of marrying the young couple.

The songs can be classified also according to contents: welcome and blessings for the bride, the bridegroom, the guests and the families; praise ("madi:h") of the guests, the bride, the bridegroom and their relatives, the barber's song ("ḥla:qa," i.e., shaving and preparing the groom); descriptive and love songs (describing the relationship between the bride and the groom, their good looks and good characteristics, etc.), and farewell and parting songs form the bride who is leaving her home and moving to a new environment.

Certain songs have type-names, e.g., "mi:jana", mḥo:rabe," "ita:ba," "qarra:di," etc. and are mainly sung by men. Major women's song types are the "muha:ha:" or "zaḡa:ri:d", which use the well-known high-pitched "lu-lu-lu-li:ṣ" cries. Another type of women's songs is called "tarawi:d" which are usually love songs and parting songs (Libbis, 1989:17).

Another classification is according to performance. The singers and the audience may be young or old, male or female (zaḡa:ri:d, for example, are sung only by women, whereas ḥida: songs - only by men), relatives or friends of the bride or the bridegroom, individuals (solo singers, such as the badda:'a/qawwa:la female singer (Abu Hadaba, 1976), two singers in contest (ḥaddda:ya), or whole groups in chorus (family members, relatives, guests); songs sung by professionals (ḥaddda:ya) or non-professional singers; songs sung to the whole audience (guests and families), or to

individuals (the bride or the groom, the priest, the bride's mother, the bridegroom's mother), etc.

Since wedding habits have been changing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the older songs are not sung any more. For example, the barber's song used to be sung also by women in the past; at present it seems to be sung rather by men. An informant explicitly expressed her opinion that due to these changes some parts of the "old" weddings were better than new ones, but other parts in the modern wedding were better than the old ones. Modern songs are also heard, either sung by professional hired singers and groups, or played by local DJs (mainly in Christian and Jewish weddings). In songs that remain part of the events, the rhythm may be changed and modernized and played by modern musical instruments (among the Christians and Jews, for example). Most of the basic stages of the event including the "basic" songs have, however, survived, although authors refer to these changes, musing about future changes (cf., e.g., Houry, 1999b). Since the time scale of the whole wedding event is shorter now, especially in towns, certain selection (sifting) of the songs must be taking place.

## **2. The Method of Work**

A proportion of the song material was collected and recorded by several Technion students as part of a course project. Each student brought material from the discussed communities. The singers were relatives of the students – grandmothers, aunts etc. - and included two Christian women, aged 66 and 86 at the time, a Druze woman who was 48 years old at the time (1998), and two Jewish singers who were 83 and 76 years old at the time (1999). The material analyzed in this paper relies also on published Muslim, Druze, Christian and Jewish songs. The conclusions are my sole responsibility. A few examples of Christian and Jewish women's wedding songs with their translation are presented below.

## **3. Analysis**

### **3.1. Metrical and Structural Features of the songs**

Many studies and collections of songs in Arabic refer to men's songs, some include also women's songs (e.g., Dalman, 1901, Linder, 1952, Saarisalo, 1932, Semah, 1998), and others specifically focus on women's songs (Avishur, 1987, Ratzaby, 1974, Libbis, 1989).

Song homogeneity can be seen as marked by the linguistic structure, i.e., use of pattern repetition, lexical variations, rhythm and rhyme, as well as contents. The contents are discussed in the next subsection, which deals with motives.

Songs can be short and contain 1, 2 (couplets) or 3 lines, each including two hemistiches, or long, and include several lines (stanzas). Also in certain published women's songs various songs include many stanzas. Each line is usually repeated twice. A line of refrain often follows each stanza (or song), but not in all the songs. Sometimes, the refrain heads the song, preceding the first stanza. Rhymes usually occur at the end of the line, sometime at the end of each hemistich, but not always. Rhymes do not need to be fixed for all hemistiches of a song. These variations form different patterns, and are therefore considered different song types in literary analyses of Arabic songs (cf. Sowayan, 1985, Palva, 1992, for example).

These structural elements and strophic structures are typical of folk songs generally (see Shiloah, 1999) as well as of the traditional Arabic songs and poems. Classical poetry, Post-Classical and Modern folk songs abound in many rhythmic

patterns in Arabic, starting with Al-Khalil's 15 patterns at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. Some of the modern songs (Muwaššah, Zajal, Mawwa:l) are new patterns developed from old ones, as scholars have pointed out (cf. Cachia, 1977, Sowayan, 1985, Monroe, 1989, Semah, 1998, Khoury, 1999a).

The traditional analysis of Classical Arabic poem metrics relies on syllable length; but in modern songs also phonetic accentuation and syllable structures seem to be at work (cf. Sowayan, 1985, Palva, 1992, Semah, 1998). Khoury (1999a), who studies poems from the Galilee, claims that the Classical traditional syllable-length based metric analysis is better supported for the Galilee songs than the so-called Syrian accent-based analysis, though the former has to take into consideration added and deleted syllables. In our opinion these difficulties to explain the poetic structures of modern Arabic folk songs suggest that modern colloquial Arabic morpho-phonology as well as melodic requirements are superimposed on the classical metric system, and all of them should be taken into consideration in a metric analysis of the modern songs.

Added syllables, according to Sbeit (1989), fulfill both rhythmical and communicational functions. For example, added syllables may be particles of the vocative group, e.g., "ay, aw," and "al" (Sbeit, 1989:fn. 7) which appear at the end of the line (stanza). In such cases, they mark the chorus' entrance. In the women's "Zaġa:ri:d" songs line-initial vocative syllables occur such as "i:h," "e:h," "a:h," "ya:" "he:" or "a:wiya:" (Khoury, 1999a:153); in the Druze songs which we have heard these are pronounced as "'e:h w-ya:". These cries ("e:h w-ya:") have been described as Lebanese-type ('Uka:ri, 1986:128). These markers of the "Zaġa:ri:d" type of songs gave these songs the name "Muha:ha:"<sup>5</sup> in Arabic. Also the two parts of the frequently occurring refrain "ya: ħala:li, ya: ma:li" (frequent in Ĥida: songs and other men's songs) begin with the vocative "ya:". But such added syllables may also occur within the line (hemistich).

The opposite phenomenon of "deleted syllables" usually refers to deleted vowels, which creates consonant clusters. Such clusters follow the rules of the local colloquial dialects, and there are ample examples of these deletions among published songs.

Many of the women's wedding songs we studied end with a repeated cry "lu-lu-lu-li-š". Sometimes the cry ends with "li:" rather than with "li:š". (In songs of many Jewish communities the "li:š" part of the cries seems to be missing altogether). The cries are considered free and expressive devices of the singers, and therefore vary in melodic structure and rhythm. These "Zaġa:ri:d" are performed by women only. Also Khoury (1999) presents several such songs (cf. below). The Zaġa:ri:d cries "are uttered on happy occasions generally and weddings in particular to express joy, blessing of the bridegroom and his folks, praying for his success and happiness" ('Uka:ri, 1986:127). It appears that since the Zaġa:ri:d songs vary in structure and rhyme patterns, only the Zaġa:ri:d cries unite them. The cries do not occur only in songs, however, and may turn up at any moment in the ceremony by any woman who has a strong and clear voice. These features of the Zaġa:ri:d and Zaġa:ri:d songs are

<sup>4</sup>The 16<sup>th</sup> pattern was added later by other sources (personal communication from Prof. M. Piamenta).

<sup>5</sup>This word has the form of the verbal noun of the third verb measure, where the root is "ha:ha:."



not specific to one community, but are common to all women's songs in Arabic even in North Africa, including Judeo-Arabic women's songs.

In addition to the above description of the added and deleted syllables, we should refer here to dialect variations. The songs we dealt with reflect rural and urban Christian, Muslim, Druze (and Jewish) Arabic dialects in Israel. But since folk songs are conservative to some extent (being orally transmitted from generation to generation, and representing the Artistic Colloquial style), they usually do not differ much from one another in terms of dialect. Moreover, they may reveal linguistic features of Bedouin dialects, which are often used in the Artistic Colloquial register such as in the use of /g/ for Classical Arabic /q/ (cf. Palva, 1992). Still, dialect differences between the Damascene Judeo-Arabic, Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic (Avishur, 1987) and Yemeni Judeo-Arabic dialects (Gamlieli, 1975) and the "local" Arab dialects are considerably larger than inter-communal differences in the Galilean songs. This is mainly due to the larger linguistic differences among these dialects. Thus, in spite of contents and structure similarities, dialectal distance clearly marks different song origins (cf. the songs in the Appendices).

Musically the song melodies are relatively simple, though varied. Most of the women's songs use the musical measure 2/4 (Libbis, 1989:16) (or 4/4, which is good for marching). Abu Hadaba (1976:34) notes that modern songs composed by the "badda'a" (semi-professional singer) tend to use a faster and shorter tempo than older songs; this is, as noted above, one of the features of modern songs in general. Each line is often repeated twice, both in words and music – often once by the soloist and the second time by the chorus. Sometimes the second time a line is repeated it includes some minor variations of the first line. The refrain melody is fixed for each song and varies among songs. Certain songs have a melody with a gradually falling tone sequence, whereas others keep a steady tone and end with a rising tone. The many repetitions make the songs easy to pick up and join in. The Zaġari:d are spontaneous and thus varied and "creative", although per singer they seem to follow certain fixed patterns, e.g., the same high tone on the rapid short "lu" cries and a rise-fall on the last "liš" part. Although Zaġari:d songs vary in structure and contents, as well as in music and rhythm, many songs are common to the different communities under study, and only minor lexical or melodic differences distinguish them from one another.

### **3.2. The Motifs**

The main motifs are very well known in this folk art and are common to Arabic wedding songs elsewhere. Although the bride may be glad that she is getting united with her lover, she is taken away from her parents' home to a new environment. She is therefore also sad at leaving home and homeland and going, more or less, to exile in a strange, new or foreign place. This sentiment was more acute in the past, when communications between distant villages were not as good as nowadays. Still, even today, after her marriage, the woman in the Arab society joins her husband's family and is basically detached from her parents (Ammar, 1966). In her in-laws' territory she never has the same respect as members of the husband's family (Caspi and Blessing, 1993). So a bride's feeling of going to exile is not unjustified, and her friends and female relatives sympathize with her and try to comfort her. The bridegroom, who stays in his own home, is described (and considered) in many songs a hero, and songs for him never reveal any sorrow, but joy, love, pride and victory.

Some of the songs describe both the bride and the bridegroom - their looks, their beautiful and expensive clothes as well as lovable personalities. Their characteristics are partly "abstract" (e.g., heroism, strength, beauty); but to decrease their abstractness the bride's/bridegroom's name is often mentioned in the song. The descriptions are partly related to the background of the local countryside by similes, some of which are conventional (cheeks like apples, upright like the vines, sweet as honey, flexible like the mastic tree branch, strong and handsome like a pearl sword, etc.). The descriptions may vary according to the different origins of the songs or the singers.

The bride and bridegroom's names (as well as names of other participants in the wedding - family members, guests etc.) are mentioned in the song, usually in a spot where it does not damage the structure. But sometimes the singer has to vary the line or use a different simile to create an adequate rhyme. This, then, is a changing but recurrent element in the song structure that contributes to variations in wedding songs.

The major motifs of the songs - praises, parting, love songs, heroic songs, etc. - have been conventional in Arabic poetry ever since its Classical period and even before, in the pre-Islamic Jahiliyya, and we will not go into them here. But note, for example, a short song for the priest, which mentions in two lines the priest and his religious tasks, adding only that he is like "dry sugar". This song is considered a praising song of the priest. Another song, typical of the Christian community, praises the bridegroom's best man.

A few of the most recurrent similes in the songs of all the communities are the following (and see more examples in Libbis, 1989:32-38): The bride is assimilated to a dove, the apple of the bridegroom's eye, or to a girl picking flowers; the bridegroom is like a valiant warrior who rides a good mare and wins all battles. Another common aspect is riches implying success - she wears rich clothes, he buys her rich clothes, he himself wears expensive clothes, the parents' home or the new home is richly furnished, the families are rich, respectable and respected. Physical beauty is also described: the bridegroom wins the girl's love because he is so handsome (tall, has beautiful black eyes and red cheeks, sometimes described as having a round face); the bride wins the bridegroom's love because she is so beautiful (white, red cheeked, long haired) etc. (cf. Gamlieli, 1975, Piamenta, 1998). Thus, these songs idealize the hero and heroine of the event,<sup>6</sup> as often found in other settings of folklore heroes, e.g., in folk stories.

New elements, especially such as are inherent to modern life, can be found in various songs. Thus, for example, the bridegroom is said to have purchased his expensive clothes and the bride's dowry in London or Paris, i.e., in prestigious European centers, rather than in a local shop; the bride is going to the bridegroom's home in a fancy car instead of on horseback or on the camel, etc. Other modern motifs involve political issues which can be raised by both male and female soloists (the *ḥadda:y* and *badda:'a*) (cf. Abu Hadaba, 1976, Libbis 1989).

These motifs also occur in folk stories and are thus part of the general folklore, being based on the inhabitants' changing environment and habits (at least) in this region of the Middle East (cf. Muhawi and Kanana, 1989, Schmidt and Kahle, 1918, 1930).

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<sup>6</sup>In Yemeni Jewish weddings the bridegroom is called the king of Israel and his bride - the queen (cf. Gamlieli, 1975).

The vocabulary in the songs is usually considered simple and related to the basic daily vocabulary. Certain songs (describing the bride or the bridegroom, for example) use metaphors and similes, which do not use the basic meaning of the lexemes but an extended sense. Another noteworthy lexical feature is the "local color" of certain descriptions, which mention names of places or geographical landscape features, such as Mount Tabor and Tiberias, vineyards or apple orchards, and traditional or modern tools (sickle, stick, sword, gun, etc.). Since times are changing, many of the older tools and habits are becoming obsolete and fall out of use along with the terms which are becoming rare rather than "daily" (e.g., scattering the chaff—cf. Libbis, 1989:32 ff.). In this sense, Palva's definition of the "Artistic Colloquial" register (Palva, 1992) can be adequate also for several of the songs we encountered.

### **3.3. Performance**

As mentioned, women's songs (such as Zaġa:ri:d songs) are performed by an individual singer or by the whole group of singing women, with or without a chorus producing the refrain or the Zaġa:ri:d cries. The solo singer is known as qawwa:le in the Galilee and badda:'a in the center of the country (Libbis, 1989) and cf. Abu Hadaba (1976) who describes the badda:'a's personality, role and artistic characteristics at some length. Among the singing women we may find the bride's family (sisters, cousins, mother and aunts), non-family (adult) guests, and the bride's non-family girl friends from the village, as well as members of the bridegroom's family.

The songs are usually composed orally, so that only recently and mainly in the framework of folklore studies have wedding songs begun to be written down. Sometimes a small group of professional musicians (a band) is hired to perform the songs. The noted badda:'a is, however, not a professional singer, if professionalism is considered by working for wages. Avishur (1987) mentions the Baghdadi "daqqa:qa:t" groups who were professional singers accompanied by musical instruments, mainly drums, tambourines and recorders. This profession was not frequent for all (Jewish) communities in Iraq, however, and is assumed to have started there in the large cities. Nowadays, mainly in the Christian (and the Jewish) communities, a DJ may be hired to run tape recordings of the songs all through the evening celebration (though mainly following the "live singers").

### **4. Comparison of women's communal wedding songs**

This comparison is based on partial material, since there is no single comprehensive collection of all the existing wedding songs of any community. Still, certain preliminary features can be already abstracted from the songs we heard and those we saw in the published literature. We have heard many Druze and Christian women's Zaġa:ri:d type wedding songs. These do not differ in principle from those of the Muslims, but their melodies sometimes differ from them. In addition, the motifs seem to get mixed among the songs.

As noted, the Druze Zaġa:ri:d songs begin with "'e:h w-ya:", which has been described as Lebanese-type (Khoury, 1999a: 153); indeed the Galilean Druze are known to have migrated to the Galilee from the Lebanese mountains and their colloquial dialect still differs in certain respects from that of the Galilean Muslim or Christian communities.

Here are two examples of typical similarities and variations of the same topic – welcoming and greeting the arriving guests:

**Christians:**

ya: marḥaba:-bku marḥaba ya sab'-al-mara:ḥeb marḥaba  
'e:ni tšu: fku min b'i:d w-qalbi yqul-lku marḥaba lu-lu-lu-li:š

(translation:

Oh welcome to you, welcome, oh seven welcomes welcome,

My eye sees you from afar and my hear tells you welcome)

**Druze:**

e:h ya sab'i mara:ḥib marḥaba

e:h ya 'e:ni tišu:fo min ib'i:d e:h w-ya qalbi yqul-lek marḥaba lu-lu-lu-li:š

(translation:

Oh, seven welcomes welcome,

Oh, My eye sees you from afar and my hear tells you welcome)

**'E:n Ma:hel (Libbis, 1989: 225):**

marḥaba:-bku marḥaba ri:ḥet tyābku maxlaba:

'e:ni tšu: fku min b'i:d w-qalbi yqul-lku marḥaba lu-lu-lu-li:š

(translation:

Welcome to you, welcome the smell of your clothes is attractive,

My eye sees you from afar and my heart tells you welcome)

Another example:

**Druze:**

e:h w-ya: ahla w-sahla bid-ḥyu:f

e:h law ka:nu miyye wu-'lu:f

e:h ya: kirma:l 'yu:n suha:d

e:h ya za'la mi:t xaru:f<sup>7</sup>

(translation:

Oh, welcome you guests,

Oh even if they are a hundred and thousands

Oh, for the eyes of Suha:d

Oh, a hundred sheep)

**'E:n Ma:hel (Libbis, 1989: 228):**

marḥaba:bku ya: ḥyu:f

law kuntu miyye w-'lu:f

law yidri fi:ku 'abu (fula:n)

ka:n ḍabaḥ-ilku xaru:f

(translation:

Oh, welcome you guests, even if they are a hundred and thousands

if Abu-So-and-so had known about you he'd slaughter for you sheep)

**Damascene Judeo-Arabic:**

a:h ya 'ahla u-sahla ya ḥyu:f

a:h ya mšaqqali:n bis-syu:f

a:h ya ulaw i'riftkom ja:yi:n

u-a:h ya kunna ḍabaḥna:-lkum xaru:f

(translation:

Oh, welcome you guests,

Oh, decorated<sup>8</sup> with swords

Oh, and if we had known you were coming we'd slaughter for you sheep)

<sup>7</sup>In the recording only these syllables are audible. M. Piamenta suggests that maybe the word should be something like "yinzabiḥ-la." i.e., "would be slaughtered for her" (in her honor).

<sup>8</sup>M. Piamenta reminded me that Barthélemy's translation for this word is "laden", "loaded with." Our translation follows the one given by the Jewish informant, however.

A recurrent motive in all these communities is the flexibility of a branch of the mastic tree, which was repeated almost literally in a Druze, a Christian and a Moslem song and was also mentioned in a Judeo-Arabic (Damascene) song.

The types of songs quoted for Peqi'in (Druze and Christian songs) are also very similar, sometimes identical, to songs presented in Khoury (1999a), which are from the Christian and Muslim communities in Tur'a:n.

A communal/religion-based difference is found in Christian songs that praise the priest and the bridegroom's best man, for which we have not found parallels in the other communities. However, other religion-related terms occur in Christian as well as Jewish songs. Among the Muslim communities God's and the Prophet's names are mentioned, e.g., by the ḥadda: when beginning his songs.

The advice given to the bride to take a nail of her father's home was found in a Jewish song and a parallel was found (at least) in the Muslim Arab songs.

The Damascene-Jewish wedding songs we refer to in this paper differ from the other communal songs in that they do not end with the *Zaḡa:ri:d*. This may be due to the way of their elicitation or to the fact that they really do not end with these cries, and could be different songs types. They also seem to be arranged in quatrains (four line stanzas). However, this could be due to writing conventions, and in fact they are equivalent to the Christian, Muslim and Druze songs with couplets comprised of 2 hemistiches, instead. Avishur (1987) presents only Henna night songs, which can be compared to Galilean Henna songs. At this point the differences seem to be larger than in other wedding songs due to different motifs, mainly, but this could be due to our lack of finding enough local equivalents to the Iraqi songs.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

It is well known that folk songs inevitably keep developing. People pass the songs on, as any other oral message, from one event to the next, from one generation to the next, and from one singer to the next. Deviations and additions are thus bound to appear in such oral transmittal. Caspi and Blessing (1993:356) say the following about this process:

"While oral transmission may be defined as the process of transmitting a song by word of mouth, it does not necessarily require that the exact text performed on location at one point will be performed in an identical manner in another place at another time. Indeed, this mutability is one of the artistic imperatives of oral poetry. Tradition allows for many versions of the same motif, while at the same time enriching the genre of oral poetry and helping to make it a universal medium."

Songs seem also to be transmitted among neighboring communities in this manner. The inter-communal mixture could be greater perhaps in a small place like Peqi'in, than in a larger region such as the Galilee, but the differences between Galilee songs (e.g. Libbis, 1989, Khoury, 1999) and songs from other areas in the country (Al-Barghouthy, 1979, 1987) do not seem to be much larger. Such close contacts must have taken place for centuries almost everywhere in the Middle East among the various religious communities. As a result, the genres and characteristics of Arabic folk songs have transcended the religious communal limits and are now shared by many communities all over this area. We may conclude that also in songs these communities are part of one folk culture, which is not entirely defined by religion differences. As already noted, "Middle Eastern folklore is similar – if not identical – in spite of the different origins of the peoples who live there, and their different

languages, customs, and traditions" (Haddad, 1994:107). Moreover, Jewish and Arab folklores seem to have drawn from each other and influenced each other abundantly during the centuries (Schwarzbaum, 1968, 1975: preface). We see this also in their wedding songs.

From the material we have studied here, it appears that the basic inter-communal difference follows from and refers to the religious aspects of the wedding. In the Christian community the priest runs the ritual at church, where all the community attends. In a Muslim or a Druze wedding a Muslim *Qa:di*, a *Ma'zu:n* or a Druze *'ima:m* runs the actual signing of the marriage contract at the bride's or the bridegroom's home. In a Druze wedding, for example, male members of both families sign the contract after asking the girl's consent and signature, as well as the bridegroom's signature. This can take place in the engagement ceremony or any time later, before the wedding or even on the wedding day.

The following wedding ceremonies hardly bear any religious character. Still we noted that the name of God and the Prophet might be mentioned when the *hadda*: begins his singing and a Christian song refers to the priest and another to the best man (but we have not found similar songs, e.g., about the *Ma'zu:n*, in the Muslim or Druze communities). In Jewish wedding songs, religion-specific terms in Hebrew occur, such as *ha:tá:n* 'bridegroom', *kallá* 'bride', *miqvé* 'public bath', *tei:vá:* 'the cupboard where the sacred books are kept in a synagogue', and even *mi:lá:* 'circumcision.' But I do not know of any songs praising the rabbi who runs the wedding ceremony. Rather like the Christian wedding, the religious part of the Jewish wedding is more pronounced on the wedding evening than it is in Muslim or Druze weddings. Since this point has emerged from the study of women's (vs. men's) wedding songs, it would be interesting to devote a specific study for it.

Saarisalo (1932) collected several Druze songs mainly from *Il-Biqe:'a* (*Peqi'in*). Among his 33 songs, songs nos. 8-13 are apparently women's wedding songs (*zalru:ta, djalwa*),<sup>9</sup> though the singers' names or genders are not given. We may mention here a recent Druze publication (Nasr Al-Din, 1992) entitled "The Vine Bunches," in which several well-known Druze songs appear, including some we have seen for other Arab Galilee communities. A separate study comparing the six old Druze songs in Saarisalo (1932) with more recent ones would be interesting in itself.

We should also point at differences between women's wedding songs and men's wedding songs. These exist, as assumed, since the roles of men and women in weddings differ and men's groups are separate from women's groups in many stages of the celebrations. Separate celebrations are held at the bride's home before she leaves it, and other celebrations are held in the bridegroom's home before and after the bride arrives there and enters to sit in a special room during the day. The social roles thus dictate different kinds of communicative devices (i.e., the songs), performed by the men or women. Among women's songs *Zaḡa:ri:d*, for example, are performed only by women and *djalwa* songs are sung by women during the bride's procession with her friends and relatives from her home to the bridegroom's home. Men sing *hla:qa* songs when they escort the bridegroom to and from his shaving and dressing up (though in the past women used to sing them). They also sing the 'Ata:ba songs ("reproach"), *Me:jana* songs, *Mḥo:rabe* songs, the *Hida:*, the *Qarra:di* and others. The latter five types of songs are sung in the *ta'li:l* week before the wedding

<sup>9</sup>The name *djalwa* is used also in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic songs (Avishur, 1987).

night and the main wedding celebration evening. Certain songs are accompanied by men's dancing (usually during the ta'li:l week). Certain songs are, however, also common to both men and women, who sing them together in the common celebrations and feasts (e.g., also the Henna night and in the zaffe).

Not only topics but also structures differ between men and women's songs. For example, zaġa:ri:d cannot occur in men's songs (though ya: does) for it is specific to women's songs, including Judeo-Arabic women's songs. Also the vocatives in the beginning of verses are typical of women's songs and do not seem to occur in men's songs. Metrical structures of folk songs vary according to more complex rules, which may or may not be related to the singer's gender. This issue has to be studied in some detail for Galilee songs, since for example the Iraqi Naẓm Al-Bana:t has been described as a sub-group of the Rukba:ni: type (Semah, 1998).

The debate about the metrical structure of the songs is still undecided. Since colloquial Arabic stress differs from that of Literary Arabic, the latter's metrical rules cannot be exactly copied onto folk songs in colloquial Arabic. Therefore, it has been suggested that syllable stress patterns are more important in folk songs than the traditional vowel length. Different dialects vary, however, their stress structures, and therefore what may be valid for one dialect need not be so for another. How this debate relates to women's vs. men's songs is still an open question.

To sum up, at the present stage we can define only relatively superficial inter-communal differences among women's wedding songs in the studied communities. The available material and the lack of communal distinction among songs in people's consciousness suggest that basic song structures and styles are similar – nearly identical – within the studied communities. The differences we have found seem to refer to communal-religious rather than strictly structural or linguistic factors, i.e., to sociolinguistic issues. Variations of similar song types among the communities are manifest in vocabulary, metaphoric expressions, stanza structures, and melodies. These may be attributed at least partly not to inter-communal differences but to the individual singer's free spirit or creativity, or else to their lack of accuracy, since this art is strictly oral and aural, and is passed on from one professional singer to the next in this manner (Sbait, 1989). This "repetition and variation" (Jakobson, 1986) could be common to many communities and not only to women's songs in the Galilee.

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### **Appendix**

#### **Damascene Judeo-Arabic Songs**

##### **1. For the Bride, sung on the Henna Night and the Wedding Day**

a:h, ya, qu:mi ma'i, 'alla ma'ek

a:h ya u-l-'aqel ma binf'ek

a:h ya u'iza fi:h musma:r be:t 'abu:ki

a:h ya u-iqal'i: u-xudi: ma'ek  
 (translation:  
 Oh, get up with me, and God be with you,  
 Oh, the brain will not help you  
 Oh, and if there is a peg of your father's home,  
 Oh, take it off and take it with you).

**2. For the Bridegroom Sung on the Wedding Day by the Bridegroom's Mother or the Bride's Family**

a:h ya mabru:k ya 'ari:s šayyin 'amilna:-lak  
 a:h ya l-'arđ il-ya:bse tixđarr iqda:mak  
 a:h ya lo:-ma xo:fi min 'ahlak u-đira:nak  
 l-axti xaṭwe u-'abu:s il-'arđ qidda:mak  
 (translation:  
 Oh, congratulations, bridegroom, what we have done for you  
 Oh, the dry earth is going to be green at your feet  
 Oh if it were not for my fear of your family and neighbors  
 I'd make a step (kneel down) and kiss the ground in front of you).

**Druze Song**

**3. Part of the songs sung during shaving and dressing the bridegroom – the melody and the lines are repeated; very similar to Christian and Moslem versions of this song.**

iḥliq ya: ḥalla:q bi-mu:s iq-đahabiyye  
 stanna ya ḥalla:q ta-ti:đi l-'ahliyye  
 stanna ya ḥalla:q ta-ti:đi 'emmo  
 ma:her ya ḥalla:q ta-ti:đi:-lo 'emmo  
 weḥleq ya ḥalla:q ḥayyid-lo 'an 'e:no  
 stanna ya ḥalla:q ta-yi:đi:-le šbi:no  
 (translation:  
 Shave, o barber with the golden razor  
 Wait, o barber, till the family arrives  
 Wait, o barber, until his mother comes  
 Expert, o barber, till his mother comes  
 And shave o barber get away from his eye  
 Wait o barber until his best man comes).

**Christian Songs**

**4. One version of the songs sung during dressing the bridegroom**

qul-li we:n tzayyant sali:m w-ya 'ari:s?  
 zayyantu:ni yamma b-kru:m eš-šari:s  
 qul-li we:n tzayyant sali:m w-ya andu:r?  
 zayyantu:ni yamma 'ala jabal eṭ-ṭu:r  
 qul-li we:n tzayyant sali:m w-ya a:li?  
 zayyantu:ni yamma fi da:r ixwa:li  
 qul-li we:n tzayyant sali:m w-ya falla:h?  
 zayyantu:ni yamma bi-kru:m et-tuffa:h  
 qul-li we:n tzayyant sali:m w-ya a:li?



zayyantu:ni yamma b-fayy ed-dawa:li  
 qul-li we:n tzayyant sali:m w-ya a:li?  
 zayyantu:ni yamma bi-kru:m ed-dawa:li

(translation:

Tell me where did you get adorned, o Salim, o bridegroom?  
 You (pl.) adorned me, o mother, in the vineyards of wild/wicked(?)  
 Tell me where were adorned, o Salim, o dandy?  
 You(pl.) adorned me, o mother, on Mount Tabor  
 Tell me where did you get adorned, o Salim, o dear,  
 You (pl.) adorned me, o mother, in my maternal-uncles' house  
 Tell me where did you get adorned, o Salim, o farmer,  
 You (pl.) adorned me, o mother, in the apple orchards  
 Tell me where did you get adorned, o Salim, o dear,  
 You (pl.) adorned me, o mother, in the shade of the vines  
 Tell me where did you get adorned, o Salim, o dear,  
 You (pl.) adorned me, o mother, in the vineyards).

#### 5. Praising the priest (Sung after the wedding ceremony)

'ah ya: xu:ri w-ya: 'a:bes 'a:h ya: sukkar ya:bes  
 'ah ya: m'ammed eš-šibya:n 'ah w-ya: mkallel el-'ara:yis lu-lu-lu-li:š.

(translation:

O, you priest and you stern, O you dry sugar,  
 O you Baptiser of the boys, O and you who marries the brides off lu-lu-lu-li:š).

#### 6. Joy at the performance of the wedding (blessing the bridegrooms' relations)

šawwazna l-'ari:s imba:rak l-ummo, šawwazna l-'ari:s w-il-'a:qbe la-šbi:no  
 šawwazna l-'ari:s w-il-'a:qbe la-xwa:no, šawwazna l-'ari:s w-yixlif 'a-šha:bo  
 (translation:

We married the bridegroom off, congratulations for his mother;  
 We married the bridegroom off, and the following (wedding is) for his best man  
 We married the bridegroom off, and the following (wedding is) for his brothers  
 We married the bridegroom off, and the following (wedding is) for his friends).

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