



The survival tubers *Arum italicum* and *Arisarum vulgare*

Names and uses in the
Kabyle mountains



Universiteit Leiden



École Pratique des Hautes Études



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Introduction & problematic

- *Arum italicum* and *Arisarum vulgare* are two wild plants that belong to the Aracea family that were once widely consumed in North Africa
 - In Kabylia, where they are both very common, their preparation can be synonymous with **tasty and traditional dishes** for some, but **painful memories of famines** caused by war and drought for others
- In the context of ethnolinguistic researches on the practices related to **Kabyle “survival foods”**, I realized that these plants names were **frequently borrowed**
 - I wanted to question the phenomena of contact at the origin of these borrowings by collecting their names and associating them with ethnolinguistic data **to see to what extent this allowed me to determine trends in Berber-Arab specific historical contacts in Kabylia**

Methodology & theoretical frame

- As part of my master's degree then of my doctoral thesis, I work on **language contact between Arabic and Berber in the Kabyle mountains**
 - I have been carrying out field surveys in this region since 2018
- As part of this survey, I collected the names of these plants **in 60 kabyle Berber and Arabic-speaking localities** while learning about their different **uses and places in the local cultures**
- Then, I analyzed these **dialectological** and **ethnolinguistic data** with the prism of **contact linguistics** and in particular **historical sociolinguistics**



Denominations: the three main roots

- Arabic root √BQQ ”**entering into flowering, hatching**”
 - It is the main root used in Kabyle, Blidean Atlas and Tasahlit Berber for both species and in Kabyle Arabic for the *Arisarum*
- Berber root YNR (*NYR) ”**forehead**”
 - Berber root It is used in all Djidjelli Arabic and some Collo Arabic and Kabyle Berber varieties for the *Arum*
- √Berber root QRR (Q- *R) “collar” and by derivation “**head**”
 - It is only used in Collo Arabic and eastern Djidjelli Arabic for the *Arum* or the *Arisarum*

Denominations: isolated roots

- Berber root NY(K) “to mount” and by extension "**hearthstone**”
 - Attested in Kabyle Berber for the *Arum*
- Berber root BW “breast” and by extension “**penis**”
 - Attested in Kabyle Berber for the *Arisarum*
- Arabic root ṬRQ “**percussion**”
 - Attested in a Tasahlit Berber for the *Arisarum*

Commune (town or confederation)	Linguistic variety	<i>Arum italicum</i>	<i>Arisatum vulgare</i>
Djurdjura Mountains			
Mizrana (<i>Ṭibeccaṛin</i>)	Extreme-Western Kabyle	<i>aḅquq</i>	<i>taqjunt uḅquq</i>
At Ouasif (<i>Aṭ Wasif</i>)	Western Kabyle	<i>awqi</i>	<i>aḅawaq</i>
Biban mountains and Soumam valley			
Akbou (<i>Aṭ Ebbas</i>)	Eastern Kabyle-South	<i>aḅquq</i>	<i>Imejjan gg°emyar</i>
Tala Hamza (<i>Aṭ Bumeseud</i>)	Eastern Kabyle-East	<i>aḅaqq</i>	<i>taqjunt uḅaqq</i>

Commune (town or confederation)	Linguistic variety	<i>Arum italicum</i>	<i>Arisatum vulgare</i>
Babor mountains			
Tamridjet (<i>Ayt Buysef</i>)	Tasahlit-East	<i>ṭabquqt</i>	<i>abquq</i>
Ziama El-Mansouriah (<i>Bni Eīsa</i>)	Western Djidjelli Arabic	<i>agərni</i>	<i>bəqqūqa</i>
Djamaâ Béni Hbib (<i>Bni Ḥbībi</i>)	Eastern Djidjelli Arabic	<i>ayərni</i>	<i>kərrīwa</i>
Collo mountains			
Oued Zhor (<i>Ulād Aḩīya</i>)	Western Collo Arabic	<i>agərna</i>	<i>qərrīwa</i>

Names of plant parts

➤ Spadix:

- Always composed, it very often has a separate name
- Kabyle Berber *ṭisyit bb°ebquq* “Arum’s bride“, *imejji ggilef* “boar’s ear“

➤ Berries:

- Always composed, it rarely has a separate name
- Kabyle Berber *ṭimellalin wwezrem* “snake eggs“, *zzeriεa wwebquq* “Arum seeds“

➤ Tuber:

- the term is always generic for tubers, the etymons of several of them are mysterious
- Kabyle Berber *ṭawergitt*, *ṭakilmuṭṭ* ; Tasahlit Berber *ṭagernujt*, *ṭakerkurt* “little heard“

Denominations: conclusion

- The etymons at the origin of the different denominations present many semantic features attested in other languages (cf. Scarlat & Signorini 2007)
- Several denominations are based on the description of the spadix and others of the tubers
 - In certain cases, it is possible that before designating the whole plant they were only referring to these parts
- Very surprisingly, the two plants names are more often borrowed from Arabic in Kabyle Berber and taken from Berber substratum in local Arabic
 - How to explain this substrate retentions (= conservation) next to loanwords ?

Uses as food

- Many kind of food can be made from both *Arum* and *Arisarum*:
 - Semolina (to make bread, berkoukes, pancakes) and polenta from the tubers
 - Herb soups and purees from the leaves
- What these recipes have in common is that they all require a long time to prepare, giving that these two species are toxic when eaten raw. Hence, their preparation requires several hours of cooking.
- Throughout Kabylia, *Arum* seems to be more frequently consumed than *Arisarum* due to the larger size of its tubers.
 - That's not the case everywhere in North Africa, especially in the drier regions where *Arisarum* is more common or attested alone

- In the Berber-speaking localities of Kabylia, their consumption is a disappearing practice - with the notable exception of the localities where it is an ingredient of the spring celebration dinner (*imensi n tefsut*) - elsewhere, it is systematically associated with the old days and famine. Younger generations sometimes don't even know it's an edible plant
- In the Babor and Collo Arabic-speaking localities, if their frequent consumption is also associated with the past and poverty, they are still considered a delicacy, from which some of the best-known traditional dishes of the region are made:
 - *əl-εaṣīda d ayərni* “Arum porridge”
 - *Arbiṭ ~ Ḥārbīṭ ~ Bqūl* “wild grass mash” (cf. Garaoun 2020)
 - *Lə-mεarək tāε agərni* “puff pancakes stuffed with arum puree” (Bni Foughal)



Others uses

Medication:

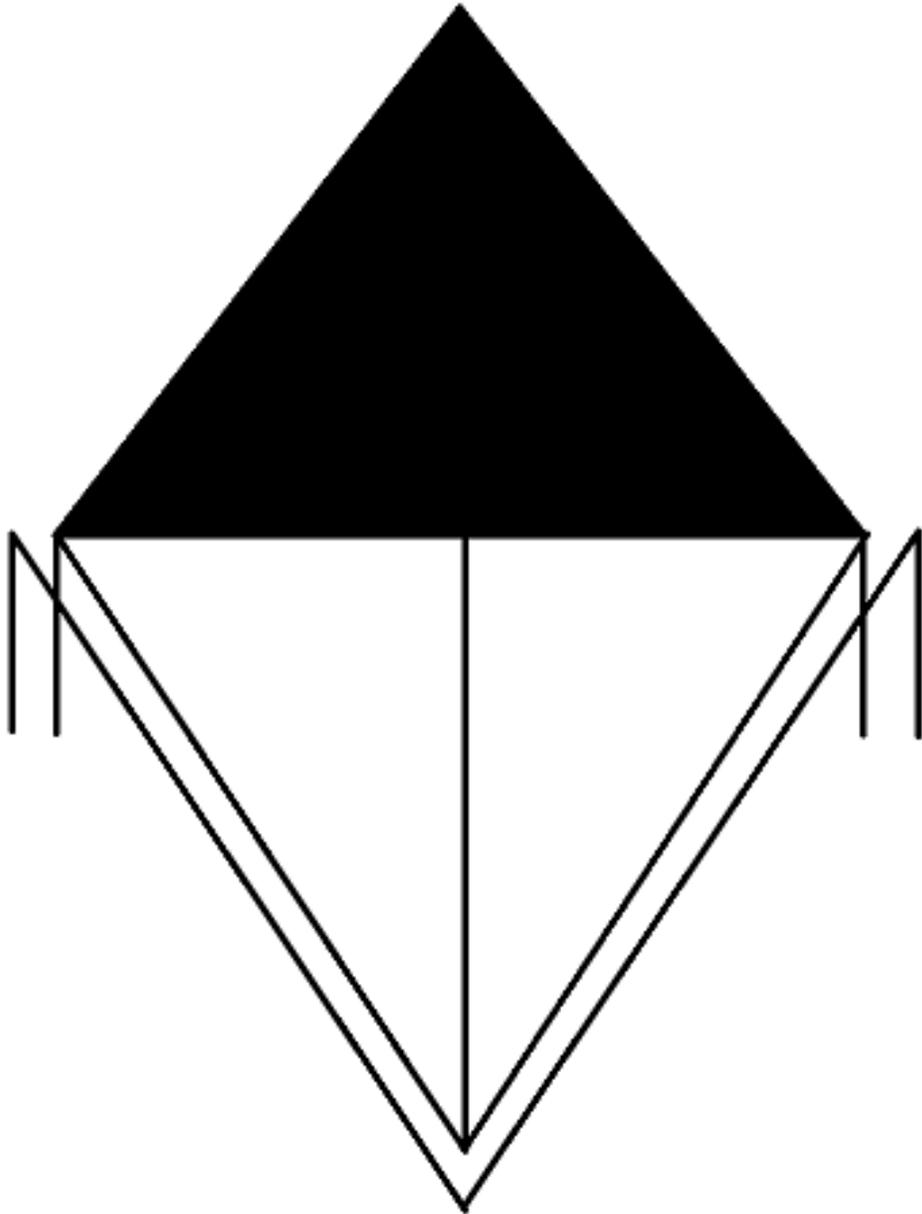
“the tuber is warmed up and covered with olive oil, it is applied to the chest or forehead while sleeping for a night or two” (Collo)

Grafting putty:

“We use its tuber in tree grafting as a kind of mastic. You have to take a tuber and rub it until it is completely consumed.” (Djurdjura)

Firecracker:

“In the old days, when I was little, we made guns out of oleander, we loaded them with Arum leaves. This is how we used to have fun in the past.” (Djurdjura)



Proverbs

Djurdjura mountains (Western Kabyle):

Tif laḥ ayizi tkilmutt

“Hunger is better than snacking on Arum tubers”

Babor mountains (Djidjelli Arabic):

əl-bqūqa bla ma ngəllu-ha

“The arum, without us having to boil it”

General conclusion

- **Berber Arabic varieties have almost everywhere borrowed the *Arum* name from Arabic, while Kabyle Arabic varieties most often preserved it from their Berber substratum**
 - This is here a case where **pre-Hilalian Arabic** (Arabic varieties born after the first wave of Arab conquests of North Africa) **preserved etymologically Berber terms** that have **disappeared in neighboring Berber**
- In both languages, the *Arisarum* name usually got an Arabic etymon ; it is frequently derived from that of *Arum* (diminutive, expressive, composition)
- ❖ The origin of these contact phenomena is probably linked to the local ethnobotanical history of these plants
 - ❖ **Both species are eaten** and participles of other uses, **but the *Arum* is used much more than the *Arisarum***
 - ❖ Their heavy consumption is **associated with starvation**, **but in Arabic-speaking Kabylie, *Arum*-based recipes are considered valued local traditions**

Open questions

- To what extent its use in case of starvation could have played a role in its borrowing?
 - **Should we imagine that it was once marketed between Kabylia and neighboring regions ?**
 - Cf. Blench (2003) theory about the origin of shared names of some famine foods animals in African Languages
- Why *Arum*-based dishes adopted a traditional value almost only in Kabylia Arabic-speaking regions?
 - Could this be because of the influence of rural local cities (Jijel, El-Milia, Collo) where cuisine based on mountain food products is iconic?
 - The rare *Arum* Berber names survivals in Berber-speaking Kabylia could thus find their origin in the fact that it is still locally an ingredient of the “spring dinner” ; **if it were proven, that would allow us to reconsider completely the origin of borrowing and substratum retentions in the lexical fields of plants and foods in North Africa**