

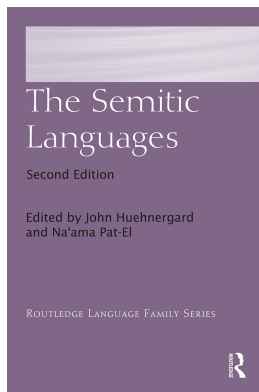
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CHAPTER 11

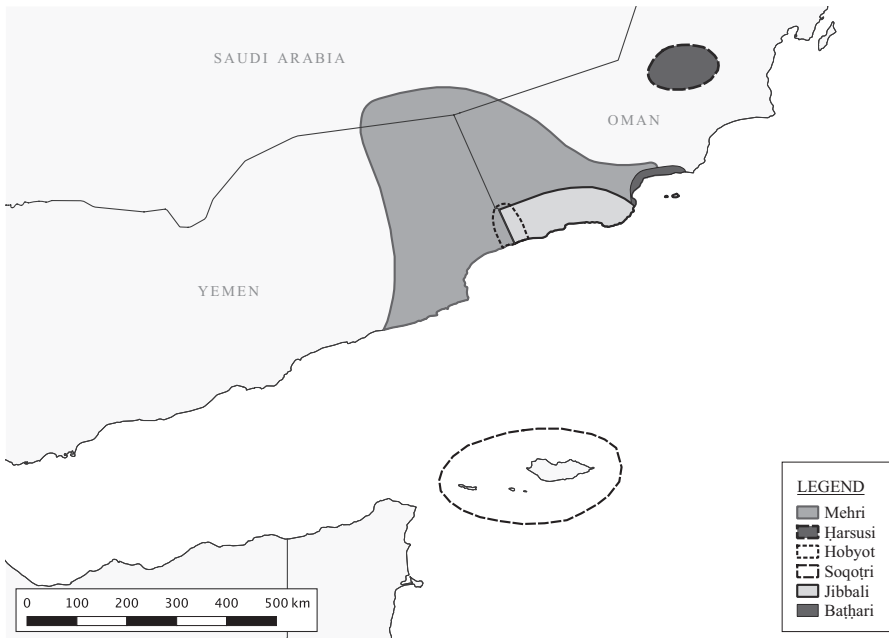
MEHRI

Aaron D. Rubin

1 INTRODUCTION

Mehri is spoken by approximately 130,000 people ($\pm 30,000$) in the eastern part of Yemen (al-Mahra province) and southwestern part of Oman (primarily in the Dhofar province), as well as by a small number of speakers in adjacent areas of Saudi Arabia (see Map 11.1). Mehri has no written tradition, and has been known to scholars only since the 1840s. The language has a number of regional dialects, which can be roughly divided into Yemeni and Omani varieties; all dialects are mutually intelligible.

Mehri is one of the six so-called Modern South Arabian (MSA) languages, along with Jibbali (also called Shaḥri, Šheri or Šherēt), Ḥarsusi, Soqotri, Hobyot and Baḥari. The linguistic domain of the other five MSA languages is restricted to eastern Yemen, western Oman and the island groups of Soqatra and Al-Ḥallaniyāt (formerly Khuriya Muriya). Of all the MSA languages, Mehri is spoken by the greatest number of speakers and is spoken over the widest geographical area.



MAP 11.1 THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE MODERN SOUTH ARABIAN LANGUAGES

Source: Adapted from Rubin (2018).

1.1 History of scholarship

The first published information on Mehri was a short word-list given by Wellsted (1840: 26–7). Other early evidence, including word-lists, short translated texts, and some grammatical details, comes from Krapf (1846), Carter (1847) and von Maltzan (1871, 1873a, 1873b). Unfortunately, none of the 19th-century data on Mehri or any other Modern South Arabian language were collected by a linguist, and so the value of these publications is often limited.

The first serious work on Mehri (and other MSA languages) comes from around 1900, when fieldwork was carried out by the Austrian scholars David Heinrich Müller, Alfred Jahn and Wilhelm Hein. The result of this team's efforts was a great wealth of textual material in Yemeni Mehri, Jibbali and Soqotri, published between 1902 and 1909, which greatly advanced the field of MSA. For Mehri texts, the most relevant publications are Jahn (1902), which also includes a substantial glossary, Müller (1902, 1907) and Hein (1909). From this material also came the grammar of Jahn (1905), the important five-part (published in seven) grammatical study of Bittner (1909–15) and the short linguistic study of Rhodokanakis (1910). These remained the most comprehensive grammatical studies of Mehri until 2010.

Thomas (1937), who was not a trained linguist, published a sketch of four MSA languages, one of which was Mehri. Nevertheless, his original data, which were analyzed later by Leslau (1947), can still be useful. Wagner (1953) is a study of Mehri syntax, though based entirely on the publications of the Austrians (Müller, Jahn and Hein) and on Thomas's sketch.

Fieldwork carried out by T.M. Johnstone in the late 1960s and 1970s resulted in the publication of dictionaries of three MSA languages (Ĥarsusi, Jibbali and Mehri), a number of important articles, and three posthumously published text collections of Mehri, Ĥarsusi and Jibbali. With nearly 500 pages of Mehri–English entries (often including comparative MSA material), a 140-page English–Mehri word-list, 50 pages of verbal paradigms and an additional 10 pages of grammatical discussion, Johnstone's posthumously published *Mehri Lexicon* (1987) was a massively important contribution to the field. Unfortunately, as Johnstone was not able to oversee the publication of his incomplete manuscript, the lexicon is filled with an enormous number of typographical and other errors. The Mehri texts collected by Johnstone were edited and published by Stroomer (1999); based only on Johnstone's preliminary transcriptions, these also contain numerous errors (see Rubin 2017). A completely new edition of his texts, including some previously unpublished ones, was published by Rubin (2018).

In the 1970s, a Japanese researcher named Aki'o Nakano was also pursuing field research in Yemen and Oman, out of which came a comparative lexicon of Yemeni Mehri, Jibbali and Soqotri, published in 1986. The lexicon has value, but must still be used with some caution.

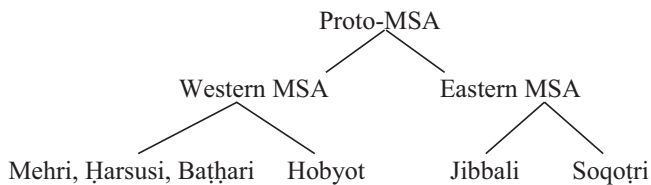
Fieldwork on Yemeni Mehri (as well as Soqotri and Hobyot) was carried out by Antoine Lonnet and Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle in the 1980s. The result has been a number of important investigative articles and surveys, published both as a team and individually, which have added much to the field of MSA studies (e.g., Lonnet 1994a, 1994b, 2005). Alexander Sima conducted fieldwork on Yemeni Mehri in the early 2000s, and he collected a large corpus of Mehri texts. Sadly, Sima was killed in a car accident in Yemen in 2004, only a few months before completing his work. His text corpus, edited by Janet Watson and Werner Arnold, was published in 2009. Sima also wrote a grammar and compiled a glossary, but it is unlikely that these will ever appear.

In the last decade, there have been enormous advances in Mehri scholarship. Besides the aforementioned publication of Sima's texts in 2009 and re-edition of Johnstone's texts by Rubin in 2018, Liebhaber published an edition of some Yemeni poetic texts in 2011. Rubin (2018), which replaces Rubin (2010), is a comprehensive grammar of Omani Mehri, based on the texts collected by Johnstone. Janet Watson, who has done extensive fieldwork in Yemen and Oman, published a grammatical study of Mehri – including both eastern Yemeni and Omani dialects – in 2012. Her book also includes a few original texts. There have also been a number of other studies of Mehri based on both previous scholarship and original fieldwork. Especially noteworthy are the phonological and morphological studies of Bendjaballah and Ségéral (2013, 2014, 2017a, 2017b) and Dufour (2016).

See Rubin (2018) for a more extensive history of Mehri scholarship.

1.2 Classification of Modern South Arabian

Within West Semitic, MSA appears to constitute an independent branch, distinct from both Ethiopian Semitic and Central Semitic. MSA itself can be divided into two branches, for convenience called western and eastern, the latter including only Jibbali and Soqoṭri. Within the western branch, Mehri, Ḥarsusi and Baḥari form a subgroup separate from Hobyot. Because of language contact, we also find areal features that cross historical (genealogical) boundaries. So, for example, in the Dhofar region, there are features that Jibbali shares with Omani Mehri, which are absent from Yemeni Mehri, for example, a prefixed definite article. See Rubin (2015b) for further discussion of MSA classification.



1.3 Dialects

Mehri can be divided into two basic dialect groups. There is a western group spoken in Yemen, which has been called Yemeni Mehri or Southern Mehri, and there is an eastern group, which has been variously called Omani Mehri, Dhofari Mehri or Northern Mehri. The political boundary between Yemen and Oman may not perfectly correspond to the dialect boundary, but the division is accurate enough. Within Yemeni Mehri, we can also distinguish western, central and eastern (or *farqij:a*) dialects. The dialects in the towns in Yemen (like Qishn and al-Ghaydah) also differ from the dialects of the more rural (bedouin) areas. No one has yet devoted special consideration to dialectal variation within Omani Mehri, but based on available data, the differences seem to be smaller than we find among the Yemeni Mehri varieties. In Oman, the language is natively called *məhraj:ət*, while in Yemen Mahra territory it is *məhrij:o:t* in the east or *məhrij:ət* in the western and central areas. Based on these native designations, a few scholars (e.g., Watson 2012) have adopted the names Mehreyyet for Omani Mehri and Mahriyōt for Eastern Yemeni Mehri.

Differences between the various Mehri dialects exist at the phonological, morphological and lexical levels. Some of the differences are described in Rubin (2011, 2018) and many more in Watson (2012). The data in this chapter come primarily from Omani Mehri.

2 WRITING SYSTEM

Mehri has no tradition of writing, though native speakers may write their language using Arabic characters. With the advent of the internet and, especially, SMS and other forms of mobile messaging, this has become much more prevalent over the last decade or two. There is no standardized system of transcription, however, and so speakers may differ as to how they represent the Mehri vowels, as well as certain sounds not present in Arabic. For example, some choose to represent the lateral fricative *l* with Arabic <ل> (لث), others with Arabic <ث> (ث). A few scholars have also made attempts to represent Mehri in Arabic characters, including Carter (1847) Simeone-Senelle, Lonnet, and Bakheith (1984) and Liebhaber (2011).

3 PHONOLOGY

3.1 Consonants

From a Semitic perspective, the MSA languages are noteworthy in that they retain nearly all of the Proto-Semitic consonants, including the lateral fricatives. The “emphatic” consonants are glottalic (ejective), as was likely the case in Proto-Semitic. In Mehri, the most important sound change from the proto-MSA stage is the shift of Proto-Semitic **s* (perhaps **f* in Proto-MSA) to *h* (e.g., *ham* ‘name’ < PS **səm*; *hi:ma* ‘he heard’ < PS **samiʕa*; and *həbhu:l* ‘he cooked’ < PS **sabsala*). Where Mehri has *ʃ*, it usually reflects a borrowing or, especially in grammatical morphemes, an earlier **k* or **st*. Table 11.1 illustrates the phonemic consonant inventory of Mehri.

TABLE 11.1 MEHRI CONSONANTS

	LABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	INTERDENTAL	DENTAL/ALVEOLAR	LATERAL	PALATO-ALVEOLAR	VELAR	PHARYNGEAL	GLOTTAL
Stops	b			t d t'			k g k'		ʔ
Fricatives		f	θ ð θ'	s z s'	l l l'	ʃ (z) ʃ'	x ɣ	ħ ʕ	h
Nasal	m			n					
Trill				r					
Approx.	w					j			

Notes:

- The consonant ʕ is lost in most environments in Omani Mehri, while ʔ (not from etymological ʔ) is phonemic only in word-final position. Etymological ʔ is lost.
- In Yemeni dialects, *g* is realized as a palatal [ʃ] or [dʒ].
- In Omani Mehri, the consonant *l* is subject to phonetic change (with some exceptions) when it occurs in the environment *CV__C*, whether or not the final *C* is part of the same syllable. When the preceding vowel is stressed, the sequence *lV* becomes *ɛ*: (*a*: after a guttural or glottalic), e.g., *kɛ:θ* ‘speech’ (< **kalθ*); when unstressed, the *l* is realized as *w*, e.g., *kəwθe:t* ‘story’ (< **kəlθe:t*).

- The phoneme *f* is found only in a very small number of words. In some Yemeni dialects this phoneme is an affricate [tʃ].
- The phoneme *ʒ* (also pronounced as an affricate [dʒ]) occurs only in loan words (mainly from Arabic or English).
- The pronunciation of the fricative *g* can be velar (IPA [ɣ]) or uvular (IPA [ʁ]). It can also be pronounced as a glottalic fricative [xʔ] (Dufour 2016: 23).

Transcription of Mehri varies among scholars. The glottalic consonants are most often written with dots below, e.g., *ḳ*, *ʒ̣* and *ṭ*. The interdental fricatives are sometimes transcribed *t̪* and *d̪*. The voiceless lateral *l* is usually transcribed *ʃ* (or *ʃ* by Russian scholars), while the glottalic lateral is usually transcribed *ʃ̣*, *ʃ̣* or *ʃ̣*. The palatal fricative *f* is normally transcribed *ʃ*, and the glottalic version as *ʃ̣* (or *ʃ̣* for the affricated variant). Velar *ɣ* is normally transcribed *g̣*, and pharyngeal *ħ* as *ħ*. *ʕ* and *ʔ* are usually transcribed as ‘and’, respectively.

For further details on Mehri consonants, see Watson (2012), Watson and Heselwood (2016) and Rubin (2018).

3.2 Vowels

Omani Mehri has six long vowels, four short vowels and four diphthongs, though not all are phonemic.

Long vowels: *a: e: i: o: u:*

Short vowels: *a e ə i u*

Diphthongs: *aj aw əj əw*

Long vowels appear only in the following three environments at the surface level: (a) in open, stressed syllables; (b) in word-final, stressed syllables that are closed by only one consonant (-CVC#); (c) From compensatory lengthening as a result of a lost *ʔ*, *ʕ* or contraction of non-final *əw* or *əj*. When an underlying long vowel should be in a closed syllable (or is doubly closed word-finally, i.e., CVCC#), the vowel is reduced. We see the correspondences of long and reduced vowels in Table 11.2.

Examples of vowel reduction are *abəts* ‘your house’ < **abajt-k* and *ktəbk* ‘I wrote’ < *ktu:b-k*. When we find a long vowel in an unstressed syllable, it is the result of compensatory lengthening or contraction, e.g., *ja:’go:b* ‘he loves’ < **jəʕ’go:b*. When we find a short vowel in an open, stressed syllable, the syllable is actually closed in the underlying (phonemic) form. The most common examples of this are forms like *’nakak* ‘I came’,

TABLE 11.2 MEHRI VOWEL REDUCTION

LONG	REDUCED
<i>u:</i>	
<i>i:</i>	
<i>aw</i>	<i>ə</i>
<i>aj</i>	
<i>o:</i>	
<i>a: (e:)</i>	<i>a (e)</i>
<i>e:</i>	

which has the underlying form /'nakʕək/. Word-finally, unstressed long vowels are shortened, with no change in quality, e.g., *ti:ni* 'he saw' < **ti:ni:* < **ti:nəj*.

Nasalized long vowels occur in Mehri in a very few words, and are of dubious phonemic status. The vowel *ō* occurs only in the word *hō* 'where?', which plainly derives from **hō:n* (cf. Ḥarsusi *hō:nəh*, Jibbali *hun*), and in turn from Semitic **ʔa:n* (cf. Biblical Hebrew *ʔa:n* 'where?'). A nasalized *ē* is heard in the particle *ēhē* 'yes'.

For further details on Mehri vowels, see Watson (2012), Rubin (2018) and, especially, Bendjaballah and Ségéral (2017b).

4 MORPHOLOGY

4.1 Personal pronouns

Below (Table 11.3) are the forms of the independent personal pronouns in Omani Mehri.

The 2nd person singular feminine has a distinct form *hi:t* in Eastern Yemeni Mehri. Also in Eastern Yemeni Mehri, the dual forms, which are often replaced by the plurals in all the dialects, have *i:* in place of the diphthong (i.e., *ki:*, *ti:*, and *hi:*), and the 2nd and 3rd person plural forms have *a:* in place of *e:*.

As in other Semitic languages, the independent pronouns are mainly used as the subjects or predicates of non-verbal clauses, or for emphasizing the subject of a verb. An unusual use of the independent pronouns – but one known across the MSA languages, as well as in Ethiopian Semitic – is in conjunction with the genitive exponent *δ*- as possessive pronouns ('mine, yours, ours, etc.'). e.g., *δo:məh δə-ho:h* 'this is mine' (lit. 'this of-I').

For pronominal possession of nouns, there are two sets of pronominal suffixes, one for singular nouns and one for plural nouns (dual nouns cannot take possessive suffixes). In Table 11.4 are the forms found in Omani Mehri.

TABLE 11.3 PERSONAL PRONOUNS

	SING	DUAL	PLURAL
1C	<i>ho:h</i>	<i>(ə)kaj</i>	<i>nəha:h</i>
2M	<i>he:t</i>	<i>(ə)taj</i>	<i>əte:m</i>
2F			<i>əte:n</i>
3M	<i>he:</i>	<i>haj</i>	<i>he:m</i>
3F	<i>se:</i>		<i>se:n</i>

TABLE 11.4 SUFFIXED PRONOUNS

	ON SINGULAR NOUNS			ON PLURAL NOUNS		
	SING	DUAL	PLURAL	SING	DUAL	PLURAL
1C	<i>-i</i>	<i>-əki</i>	<i>-ən</i>	<i>-jē</i>	<i>-iki</i>	<i>-jən</i>
2M	<i>-ək</i>		<i>-əkəm</i>	<i>-kē</i>		<i>-ikəm</i>
2F	<i>-əf</i>	<i>-əki</i>	<i>-əkən</i>	<i>-fē</i>	<i>-iki</i>	<i>-ikən</i>
3M	<i>-əh</i>		<i>-əhəm</i>	<i>-hē</i>		<i>-ihəm</i>
3F	<i>-əs</i>	<i>-əhi</i>	<i>-əsən</i>	<i>-sē</i>	<i>-ihi</i>	<i>-isən</i>

Examples are *hajbi* ‘my father’, *hajbən* ‘our fathers’, *həbjε* ‘my fathers’ (< **hawbjε*) and *həbihəm* ‘their fathers’ (< **hawb-jhəm*). The forms used with plural nouns differ somewhat in Eastern Yemeni Mehri; see Watson (2012: 75).

The suffixes used for marking the objects of verbs and prepositions are more or less the same as those used with nouns, only with some differences in the vowels preceding some of the suffixes. Only for one preposition (*h-* ‘to, for’) do we find a suffix *-ni* for the 1st person singular (*hajni* ‘to/for me’).

Direct object pronouns are indicated either by pronominal suffixes attached to the verb, or with a preposition *t-* plus a pronominal suffix. In Omani Mehri, the forms based on *t-* are not used interchangeably with the verbal object suffixes; rather, the two options are used in complementary distribution. A pronominal object suffix cannot be used if the verb form ends in a consonant other than a root consonant, with the exception of the 3_{FSG} perfect suffix *-t*. In those cases, as well as with all future-tense forms, the forms based on *t-* are used to indicate the direct object. And the forms based on *t-* cannot be used if a pronominal suffix is allowed. So, for example, from the verb *wəzu:m* ‘give’ (root *wzm*), we find *wəzmi:h* ‘he gave him’, *wəzmətəh* ‘she gave him’ (< **wəzmu:t-h*), and *jəwəzməh* ‘he gives him’ (< **jəwu.zəm-h*), but *wəzəmk təh* ‘I gave him’ and *jəwəzməm təh* ‘they give him’. In Yemeni Mehri dialects there is more free variation between the two means of indicating a pronominal object (see Rubin 2011: 73–4, Watson 2012: 201–2). A connection of the preposition *t-* with Hebrew *’e:t*, Aramaic *ja:t*, and Arabic *’ij:at-*, etc., seems very likely, but has not been proven.

4.2 Demonstratives

Mehri distinguishes near and far demonstratives (Tables 11.5 and 11.6). For each type there is a set of longer forms and a set of shorter forms. Only the singular forms exhibit gender marking. The forms vary a bit by dialect.

The short form of the plural near demonstrative (*əlje:h*) is found only in Yemeni Mehri. The short forms of the singular far demonstrative show some free variation, as shown in Table 11.6. In some Yemeni Mehri dialects, the long forms of the far demonstrative are also found with *h* in place of *k*.

When used attributively, the demonstrative can either precede or follow its head noun (i.e., *do:məh əyajg* or *əyajg do:məh* ‘this man’). The former construction is likely the

TABLE 11.5 NEAR DEMONSTRATIVES

	MASC SG	FEM SG	PLURAL
Short	<i>ðεh</i>	<i>ði:h</i>	<i>əlje:h</i>
Long	<i>do:məh</i>	<i>ði:məh</i>	<i>əljo:məh</i>

TABLE 11.6 FAR DEMONSTRATIVES

	MASC SG	FEM SG	PLURAL
Short	<i>ðε:k / ðək</i>	<i>ðajk / ði:k</i>	<i>əlje:k</i>
Long	<i>ðεkəməh</i>	<i>ðəkəməh</i>	<i>əljakəməh</i>

result of Arabic influence. In either case, the noun will have the definite article, at least in those dialects which possess the article (see §4.4).

Watson (2012: 80) has recorded diminutive forms of the demonstratives, formed with infixation of *i:j* following the initial consonant, e.g., *ði:jo:məh* < *ðo:məh*.

4.3 Interrogatives

The interrogatives of Mehri are as follows:

<i>mo:n</i>	who?
<i>hɛ:lən</i>	what? why? what for?
<i>hɛ:lən mən</i>	which? what kind of?
<i>ħō</i>	where?
<i>wə-ko:h (ko:)</i>	why?
<i>hi:bo:h</i>	how? what?
<i>majt</i>	when?
<i>kəm</i>	how many? how much?

Detailed discussion of their usage can be found in Rubin (2018). Dialectal variants of some of these forms can be found in Watson (2012: 80–1, 124).

4.4 Nominal morphology

Mehri has two genders (masculine and feminine) and three numbers (singular, dual and plural). Feminine nouns often have a suffix *-Vt* (*i:t*, *-e:t*, *-a:t* or *-o:t*, or unstressed *-ət*), but many feminine nouns lack any overt marker. Singular nouns ending in *-t* are nearly always feminine, but plural nouns ending in *-t* are most often masculine (e.g., *he:rək* ‘thief’, PL *ħərawk* ‘ət).

The dual suffix *-i* is used almost exclusively in conjunction with a following numeral ‘two’, e.g., *te:θi θrajt* ‘two women’ (‘woman.DU two.F). Native speakers analyze the dual suffix *-i* as part of the numeral (i.e., *te:θi θrajt* ‘two women’), but they do not use the form *iθro:h/iθrajt* for the numeral when used alone or when preceding a noun (see §4.5). Only with a very few nouns can a dual be used alone, namely, *yawgi* ‘two men’ (SG *yajg*), *fak* ‘hi’ ‘halves’ (SG *fak* ‘h), and perhaps one or two others. When it comes to agreement between nouns and verbs, we usually find a dual noun used with a plural verb (e.g., *gəhe:m te:θi θrajt* ‘two women went’, GO.PST.3FPL woman.DU two.F), or a plural noun used with a dual verb (e.g., *gəhənto:h jəni:θ* ‘two women went’, GO.PST.3FDU woman.PL); marking the dual twice appears to be considered redundant. Adjectives are not marked for the dual at all, and so a dual noun agrees with a plural adjective, as in *te:θi θrajt rəhəmtən* ‘two beautiful women’ (woman.DU two.F beautiful.FPL). As noted in §4.1, dual nouns cannot take pronominal possessive suffixes, and in such cases are replaced by plural nouns.

With nouns and adjectives, we find both external plurals, meaning that an explicit plural-marking suffix is used, and internal plurals, meaning that plurality is indicated by means of internal vowel changes, with or without the addition of an infix or suffix. Internal plurals are far more common in Mehri than external plurals; for masculine nouns they are used almost exclusively. A few nouns have a suppletive plural, meaning that they form their plural from a different base, e.g., *yi:ge:n* ‘boy’ (PL *əmbərawtən*) and *nəho:r* ‘day’ (PL *ju:m*).

The masculine external plural morpheme *-i:n* is actually very rare, and those few nouns that have it nearly all have the pattern *C(ə)Co:C* in the singular; an example is *kto:b* ‘book’ (PL *ktəbi:n*). Even rarer is the masculine external plural morpheme *-o:n*, as in *gūr* ‘slave’ (PL *gərōn*). The feminine external plural marker *-tən/-u:tən/-o:tən/-awtən* (which may derive from Semitic **-a:t(i)* plus nunation) is more common, but still not as common as internal plurals for nouns. With many adjectives and with participles (including the future tense; see §4.6), the feminine external plural is regularly used. Examples of nouns with an external feminine plural are *gəri:t* ‘slave-girl’ (PL *ge:rtən*) and *ħajd* ‘hand’ (PL *ħa:du:tən*). A few masculine nouns use the feminine external plural *-(V)tən*, including the aforementioned *yi:ge:n* ‘boy’ (PL *əmbərawtən*).

Internal plurals are by far the most common method of indicating the plurality of a noun, but the choice of pattern is usually unpredictable. An endeavor to group together nouns whose singular and plural patterns were the same (e.g., *he:xər* ‘old man’, PL *hi:xa:r*; *ne:ħər* ‘wadi’, PL *ni:ħa:r*) would result in dozens of such groups. See Jahn (1905: 35–63) for one attempt to do so.

Some internal plurals consist only of a single vowel change, e.g., *di:d* ‘paternal uncle’ (PL *du:d*) and *ri:ke:b* ‘riding-camel’ (PL *ri:ko:b*). More often we find total pattern replacement, as with *yajg* ‘man’ (PL *γaju:g*) and *warx* ‘month’ (PL *wo:rəx*). Feminine nouns with a suffix *-t* or *-Vt* in the singular usually have no feminine morpheme in the plural, as in *bəhli:t* ‘word’ (PL *bəhe:l*) and *dəgəri:t* ‘bean’ (PL *de:gər*). Sometimes an internal plural includes an infix *w* or *j*, as in *ne:ðər* ‘vow’ (PL *nəðo:wər*) and *rəħbe:t* ‘town’ (PL *rəħo:-jəb*). Some (most often masculine nouns) can have a suffixed *-t*, with or without an infix *w* or *j*, as in *dəl:o:l* ‘guide’ (PL *dəl:o:lət*) and *he:rək* ‘thief’ (PL *ħarəwk’ət*).

Omani Mehri has a productive definite article *a-* (sometimes pronounced *ε-*, always unstressed), the use of which is phonologically conditioned. That is, before certain consonants it does not appear. The article is found before the voiced or glottalic consonants *ʕ, b, d, ð, ð', g, ɣ, k', l, l', m, n, r, s', f', t', w, j, z* and *ʒ* (e.g. *bajt* ‘house’, DEF *abajt*), and before a cluster of voiceless, non-glottalic consonants (e.g., *kto:b* ‘book’, DEF *akto:b*). The consonant *ʕ* is lost in initial position in most words, in which case the definite article may appear (pronounced with a hiatus) or may be assimilated to the initial vowel of the word. So from *a:s'ər* ‘night’ (< **ʕa:s'ər*), we may hear definite *a:s'ər* or *aa:s'ər* ‘the night’.

The definite article *a-* does not occur before the voiceless, non-glottalic consonants *f, h, ħ, k, l, s, f, t, θ* and *x* (except when there is a cluster of two or more, as in *kto:b* ‘book’). Instead there is gemination of the initial consonant. However, the gemination is very often not realized, in which case the article is then not present at all (or, one could say that it has the surface form \emptyset). For example, the definite form of *te:θ* ‘woman’ can be simply *te:θ*, or it can be *(ə)t:e:θ*. An initial geminate is heard more often with a prefixed preposition or the conjunction *wə-* ‘and’, e.g., *wə-t:e:θ* ‘and the woman’.

Some words have a definite article *ħ-* or *h-*. These are lexically determined, and so such forms must be learned individually. Many of these words have an etymological initial *ʔ*, e.g., *gu:r* ‘slave’ (DEF *ħa:gu:r*; cf. Arabic *ʔaji:r* and Akkadian *agru* ‘laborer’ < **ʔagr-*), but the full explanation is rather complex (see Sima 2002 and Rubin 2018 for details).

As discussed in §4.1, pronominal possession of nouns is expressed by means of a pronominal suffix. In such cases, the noun takes the definite article as well as the suffix, e.g., *a-bajt-i* ‘my house’ (DEF-house-1CS), from *bajt* ‘house’. Nominal possession is almost always expressed by means of the genitive exponent *ð-*, e.g., *a-yajg ð-a-ɣəgəno:t* ‘the girl’s husband’ (DEF-man GEN-DEF-girl).

The Semitic construct state survives in Mehri only with a handful of words. These include *bər* ‘son of’ (PL *bəni*), used only in names and compound kinship terms like *bər di:d* ‘cousin’ (lit. ‘son of uncle’); *bət* ‘house of’, restricted to the sense of ‘clan, familial line’; and *ba:l* ‘owner of’ (PL *bəʕajli*), used also in a variety of idioms, including for professions, e.g., *ba:l rawn* ‘goat-herder’. The construct is also sometimes used in phrases involving quantities (partitives), most commonly with *ʕajnat* ‘a little (bit)’, e.g., *ʕajnat təmbo:ku* ‘a little tobacco’.

Diminutive nouns and adjectives are formed in several different ways, but typically either with a suffix (*-o:t*, *-ε:no:t*, or *-ε:Ce:n*) or infixation of *w* between the first and second root consonants, along with changes to the internal vowel pattern. Examples are *ktε:be:n* ‘little book’ (diminutive of *ktob* ‘book’) and *nəwa:ħar* ‘little wadis’ (diminutive of *nε:ħar* ‘wadi’). Plural diminutives sometimes show partial reduplication, as in *nəħra:ħo:r* ‘little wadis’. See further in Johnstone (1973), as well as the grammars of Watson (2012) and Rubin (2018).

4.5 Numerals

Table 11.7 shows the numerals 1–10 in Omani Mehri.

For variant Yemeni Mehri forms, see Watson (2012: 110). Most subject to variation is the masculine form of ‘three’, which is *laʕθajt* in Eastern Yemeni Mehri and *la:ʕajt* or *lay(a)ti:t* in Western Yemeni Mehri. The numeral *t’a:t’* (F *t’ajt*), which can also have the sense of ‘a certain’, normally follows the noun, e.g. *te:θ t’ajt* ‘one woman’. The more historically correct masculine form is *t’a:d*, but *t’a:t’* is more frequent. Interestingly, the numeral *t’a:t’* (F *t’ajt*) comes between a noun and its attributive adjective, as in *te:θ t’ajt rəħajmət* ‘a certain beautiful woman’ (woman one.F beautiful.FSG). The numeral *θro:h* (F *θrajt*) usually follows a dual form of the noun (see §4.4); if it precedes, then the accompanying noun appears in the plural (cf. *te:θi θrajt* ‘two women’, but *θrajt jəni:θ* ‘two women’). On diminutive forms of the numerals in Omani Mehri, see Watson (2012: 111–12).

Numerals from three to ten most often precede the noun (e.g., *ho:ba jəni:θ* ‘seven women’), though occasionally they can follow. They always follow when the noun has a possessive suffix (e.g., *ħəbən-he la:θajt* ‘his three sons’, son.PL-3MSG three.M).

TABLE 11.7 NUMERALS 1–10

	MASCULINE	FEMININE
1	<i>t’a:t’ / t’a:d</i>	<i>t’ajt</i>
2	<i>θro:h</i>	<i>θrajt</i>
3	<i>la:θajt</i>	<i>lħəli:θ</i>
4	<i>ərbo:t</i>	<i>ərba</i>
5	<i>xəm:o:h</i>	<i>xajməħ</i>
6	<i>jəti:t</i>	<i>ħət:</i>
7	<i>jəbajt</i>	<i>ho:ba</i>
8	<i>θəməni:t</i>	<i>θəmo:ni</i>
9	<i>sajt / səʕajt</i>	<i>sε:</i>
10	<i>a:ləri:t</i>	<i>o:lər</i>

TABLE 11.8 CARDINAL NUMERALS WITH THE WORD ‘DAY’

<i>nəho:r t'ajt</i> ‘one day’	<i>ʃi:dəθ ju:m</i> ‘six days’
<i>nəho:ri θrajt</i> ‘two days’	<i>ʃi:ba ju:m</i> ‘seven days’
<i>li:ləθ ju:m</i> ‘three days’	<i>θi:mən ju:m</i> ‘eight days’
<i>ri:ba ju:m</i> ‘four days’	<i>ti:sa ju:m</i> ‘nine days’
<i>xajməh ju:m</i> ‘five days’	<i>ajlər ju:m</i> ‘ten days’

TABLE 11.9 ORDINAL NUMERALS

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	‘days’
1	<i>ħa:wələj</i>	<i>ħa:wəli:t</i>	(no special form)
2	<i>məʃe:yər</i>	<i>məʃəyəri:t</i>	(no special form)
3	<i>lə:ləθ</i>	<i>lə:θət</i>	<i>ləwθi:t</i>
4	<i>ro:bəʔ</i>	<i>rabat</i>	<i>ərbajt</i>
5	<i>xo:məs</i>	<i>xamst</i>	<i>xəmhi:t</i>
6	<i>so:dəs</i>	<i>sad(ə)st</i>	<i>ʃədθi:t</i>
7	<i>so:bəʔ</i>	<i>sabat</i>	<i>ʃəbajt</i>
8	<i>θo:mən</i>	<i>θamnət</i>	<i>θəmni:t</i>
9	<i>to:səʔ</i>	<i>tasat</i>	<i>təsajt</i>
10	<i>o:lər</i>	<i>a:lɾət</i>	<i>a:lri:t</i>

The teens are made by combining ‘ten’ and the digit (e.g., *o:lər wə-xajməh* ‘fifteen’), though these are often replaced by Arabic forms (e.g., *xamsta:ʃər*). The tens all come from Arabic (e.g. *afrajn* ‘twenty’ and *xəmsajn* ‘fifty’), though there has been some phonological adaptation, as in *ləla:θajn* ‘thirty’, which is an Arabic form that has the initial lateral fricative of Mehri *lə:θajt* ‘three’. For larger numbers, Mehri has *mje:t* ‘hundred’ (PL *mi:*) and *ɛ:f* ‘thousand’ (PL *ʃələ:f*).

An interesting feature of the MSA languages is that there is a special form of the numerals three to ten that is used with the word *ju:m* ‘days’, all formed on the pattern *Ci:CəC*. The Omani Mehri forms are found in Table 11.8.

Ordinals are built on the patterns *Co:CəC* for masculine and *CaCCət* for feminine. There are also a special ordinal forms used with ‘days’, whose pattern (*CəCCi:t*) is essentially the feminine of the pattern *Ci:CəC* used as the cardinal with ‘days’. The Omani Mehri forms are found in Table 11.9.

4.6 Verb stems

Like other Semitic languages, Mehri verbal roots are mainly trilateral (that is, they have three root consonants) and appear in a variety of derived verbal stems, each characterized by particular vowel patterns and, in some cases, the addition of certain prefixed or infix elements. The basic stem is designated the G Stem (for German *Grundstamm* ‘basic stem’), which is subdivided into two subtypes: the Ga Stem (corresponding to the Arabic *faʃala* type) and the Gb Stem (corresponding to the Arabic *faʃila* or Hebrew *pa:ʕe:l* stative type). There are six derived verbal stems: the D/L Stem, the H Stem, two Š Stems (Š1 and Š2) and two T Stems (T1 and T2). Remnants of other types, almost

exclusively attested with weak roots, are subsumed under the D/L Stem (not unlike the Hebrew *polet*). In addition, there are also quadriliteral and quineliteral verbs, though these – especially the latter – are very few in number. Of the trilateral derived verbal stems, the H Stem is the most common, while the Š2 Stem is the least.

The Gb Stem is often stative or intransitive, but there are many active/transitive verbs in this stem as well, including the common verbs *ajmāl* ‘do, make’ (root *ʕml*) and *ti:ni* ‘see’ (root *tnj*). There are also Ga Stem verbs that are stative or intransitive, e.g., *wək’awf* ‘be(come) silent’.

The D/L Stem derives from a collapse of the Semitic D and L Stems, though the most common shape of this stem in Omani Mehri comes from the inherited L Stem. Both the D/L and H Stems are characterized by a prefix (*a-* and *h-*, respectively), both likely deriving from a West Semitic **h-*. That the D/L Stem should have a prefix is most likely based on an analogy with the H Stem (Dufour 2016, Rubin 2018). In both stems, the prefix appears only in certain environments. When the first root consonant is voiceless and non-glottalic, then the prefix is lost when it is adjacent to that consonant, and the first root consonant is geminated. The gemination is often simplified when that consonant is in initial position. Compare H Stem *hərku:b* ‘he mounted’ with H Stem *xədu:m* (or *x:ədu:m*) ‘he employed’, and D/L Stem *awo:s’əl* ‘he brought’ with *so:ləm* (or *s:o:ləm*) ‘he saved’.

The D/L Stem has a variety of functions, including as a causative of intransitive or stative verbs and as a denominative. Its description by some scholars as an intensive or conative is misleading. The H Stem, which is the reflex of the Semitic C Stem (Akkadian *šaprus*, Hebrew *hiphʕil*, Arabic *ʔafʕala*), is normally a causative. As in most other Semitic languages, both the D/L and H Stems are often simply lexical, with no clear derived meaning.

The two T Stems, both characterized by an infix morpheme *t*, often have a reflexive, reciprocal or passive function, though again some verbs are simply lexical. The Š Stems are characterized by a prefixed *f-*, which derives from an earlier **st*. The Š1 Stem is sometimes a passive or reflexive of a corresponding H Stem causative verb, but this use is relatively uncommon. It can also occasionally have a meaning ‘believe s.o./s.t. is *X*’, but frequently it is difficult to pinpoint any clear derived value of the Š1 Stem. The relatively rare Š2 Stem most often gives a verb a sense of reciprocity, but a few are also just lexical.

There is also an internal passive of the Ga Stem, and a very rare internal passive of the H Stem. An internal passive of the D/L Stem, found (though rarely) in some other MSA languages, may also exist, but Mehri evidence is meager.

Tables 11.10 and 11.11 show some sample forms of the various trilateral verb stems.

TABLE 11.10 BASIC SUFFIX-CONJUGATION FORMS OF THE TRILITERAL STEMS

	3MSG PRF	3MPL PRF	3FSG PRF	1CSG PRF	
Ga Stem (<i>faʕala</i>)	<i>bəgu:d</i>	<i>bəgawd</i>	<i>bəgədu:t</i>	<i>bəgədk</i>	‘chase’
Gb Stem (<i>faʕila</i>)	<i>ri:kəb</i>	<i>rəkəbəm</i>	<i>rəkbo:t</i>	<i>rəkəbk</i>	‘ride’
G Passive	<i>bəge:d</i>	<i>bəge:dəm</i>	<i>bəgəde:t</i>	<i>bəgədk</i>	‘be chased’
D/L Stem	<i>awo:s’əl</i>	<i>awas’ləm</i>	<i>aws’əle:t</i>	<i>awas’lək</i>	‘bring’
H Stem (C Stem)	<i>hərku:b</i>	<i>hərki:b</i>	<i>hərəkəbu:t</i>	<i>hərəkəbk</i>	‘mount (s.o.)’
Š1 Stem	<i>fəndu:r</i>	<i>fəndi:r</i>	<i>fəndəru:t</i>	<i>fəndərk</i>	‘vow’
Š2 Stem	<i>fəne:səm</i>	<i>fənasməm</i>	<i>fənsəme:t</i>	<i>fənasmək</i>	‘sigh’
T1 Stem	<i>yətbər</i>	<i>yətbərəm</i>	<i>yətbəro:t</i>	<i>yətbərk</i>	‘meet o.a.’
T2 Stem	<i>əxtəlu:f</i>	<i>əxtəli:f</i>	<i>əxtəwfu:t</i>	<i>əxtələfk</i>	‘be different’

TABLE 11.11 BASIC PREFIX-CONJUGATION AND FUTURE FORMS OF THE TRILITERAL STEMS

	3MSG IPRF	3MPL IPRF	3MSG SBJV	MSG FUTURE
Ga Stem (<i>faʕala</i>)	<i>jəbu:ɡəd</i>	<i>jəbəɡdəm</i>	<i>jəbge:d</i>	<i>bəɡdo:na</i>
Gb Stem (<i>faʕila</i>)	<i>jərko:b</i>	<i>jərki:b</i>	<i>jərko:b</i>	<i>rəkbo:na</i>
G Passive	<i>jəkto:b</i>	<i>jəkti:b</i>	<i>jəkto:b</i>	(none)
D/L Stem	<i>jawas'lən</i>	<i>jawas'lən</i>	<i>jawo:s'əl</i>	<i>mawo:s'əl</i>
H Stem (C Stem)	<i>jəhərku:b</i>	<i>jəhərki:b</i>	<i>jəharkəb</i>	<i>məharkəb</i>
Š1 Stem	<i>jəʕənðu:r</i>	<i>jəʕənði:r</i>	<i>jəʕənðər</i>	<i>məʕənðər</i>
Š2 Stem	<i>jəʕnasmən</i>	<i>jəʕnasmən</i>	<i>jəʕne:səm</i>	<i>məʕne:səm</i>
T1 Stem	<i>jəytəbu:r</i>	<i>jəytəbi:r</i>	<i>jəyti:bər</i>	<i>məyti:bər</i>
T2 Stem	<i>jəxtəli:ʕən</i>	<i>jəxtəli:ʕən</i>	<i>jəxtəlo:ʕ</i>	<i>məxtəli:ʕ</i>

TABLE 11.12 BASIC FORMS OF THE Q STEMS

	3MSG PRF	3MPL PRF	3MSG IPRF	3MSG SBJV	
Q Stem	<i>amarhəb</i>	<i>amarhəbəm</i>	<i>jamərhawb</i> (< * <i>jamərhu:b</i>)	<i>jamərhəb</i>	'greet'
Q Stem	<i>adamdəm</i>	<i>adamdəməm</i>	<i>jadəmdu:m</i>	<i>jadamdəm</i>	'grope'
Qw Stem	<i>ləwlu:l</i>	<i>ləwli:l</i>	<i>jələwlu:l</i>	<i>jələw:əl</i>	'sit, stay'

In addition to verbs from trilateral roots, we also find quadrilateral and quinqueliteral verbs. These are overall quite rare, though they include a couple of common verbs. Quadrilateral verbs (Q Stems) can be divided into two types. There are true quadrilaterals, with four different root consonants ($C_1C_2C_3C_4$), though the second root consonant is nearly always a liquid or glide (*r*, *l*, *w* or *j*). There are also reduplicated quadrilaterals, which have just two different consonants ($C_1C_2C_1C_2$). The Q Stems have the same prefix *a-* that is found on the D/L Stem.

All quinqueliteral verbs can be considered trilateral roots with an infix *w* or *j* after the second root consonant, and a reduplicated final root consonant. We can call these Qw and Qy Stems. Such verbs are very few in number, but one is the very common verb *ləwlu:l* 'sit, stay'.

Some sample quadrilateral and quinqueliteral verb forms are found in Table 11.12.

There are also two derived quadrilateral patterns. The rare NQ Stem, characterized by a prefixed *n-*, is often a passive or intransitive of a Q Stem, e.g., *ənʕərxawf* 'slip away, sneak away (intrans.)' (cf. *Q ʕərxawf* 'sneak s.t. to s.o.'). The derivational function of the exceedingly rare ŠQ Stem, characterized by a prefix *ʕ-*, if any, is unclear. An example is *ʕədarbəʕ* 'call a camel by flapping one's lips'.

4.7 Verb tenses and moods

As in all the MSA languages, the Semitic suffix-conjugation (Chapter 3, §3.5.4) is continued in the perfect, the primary function of which is as a past tense. There are also three prefix conjugations. The first of these, the imperfect, has a variety of functions, including a general present and past habitual, among others. It has not yet been satisfactorily proven

whether the imperfect derives from the Semitic **yaqattal* or the Central Semitic **yaqtulu*, though most scholars assume the former.

The subjunctive derives from the West Semitic jussive, and can be used both dependently and independently. The imperative is derived from the subjunctive, as elsewhere in Semitic, while the subjunctive is used for a negative command. Dual imperatives are unattested.

The third prefix-conjugation, the conditional, is quite restricted in use, occurring almost exclusively in the apodosis of unreal conditional sentences. The conditional, which is characterized by the presence of the suffix *-ən* on all forms, would seem to have some etymological connection with the Arabic energetic moods, but this has not yet been conclusively demonstrated. Both the subjunctive and conditional tenses have the prefix *l-* in the 1st person singular and dual.

Below (Table 11.13) is the complete conjugation of the Ga Stem verb *bəgu:d* ‘chase’ in Omani Mehri.

In the perfect, the 3MSG and 3FPL forms are always identical. The 3MPL form of the perfect, imperfect, and subjunctive is formed either by ablaut (as with *bəgu:d* ~ *bəgawd* ‘he/they chased’) or with the suffix *-əm* (e.g., *ri:kəb* ~ *rəkbəm* ‘he/they rode’), depending on the verbal stem and/or root type. In Yemeni Mehri, the suffix *-əm* is used more frequently than in Omani Mehri. Similarly, the 2FSG of the imperfect and subjunctive can have the suffix *-i*, ablaut, or both, and dialects also exhibit differences in this regard. The 3FSG perfect has the suffix *-u:t*, *-o:t*, or (least often) *-e:t*, again depending on verb stem and/or root type. For additional examples, see the 3MPL and 3FSG forms listed in §4.6, Table 11.10.

There is also a future tense in Mehri, which has its origins in the Semitic active participle **CVCC-a.n*. Because of its nominal origins, it conjugates only for gender and number, but pronoun subjects remain optional. In the derived stems (that is, in all but the G Stems), the future is characterized by a prefixed *m-*, and the plural has common gender (with the feminine plural suffix). For nearly all verb types, the base of the future is the same as that of the subjunctive and imperative. Below (Table 11.14) are sample future forms of the G, D/L, H and Qw Stems (see also §4.6, Table 11.11).

TABLE 11.13 CONJUGATION OF A GA STEM VERB

	PERFECT	IMPERFECT	SUBJUNCTIVE	CONDITIONAL	IMPERATIVE
1CSG	<i>bəgədk</i>	<i>əbu:gəd</i>	<i>ləbge:d</i>	<i>ləbge:dən</i>	
2MSG	<i>bəgədk</i>	<i>təbu:gəd</i>	<i>təbge:d</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	<i>bəge:d</i>
2FSG	<i>bəgədʃ</i>	<i>təbe:gəd</i>	<i>təbge:di</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	<i>bəge:di</i>
3MSG	<i>bəgu:d</i>	<i>jəbu:gəd</i>	<i>jəbge:d</i>	<i>jəbge:dən</i>	
3FSG	<i>bəg(ə)du:t</i>	<i>təbu:gəd</i>	<i>təbge:d</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	
1CDU	<i>bəgədkɪ</i>	<i>əbəgdə:h</i>	<i>ləbgədə:h</i>	<i>ləbgədəj:ən</i>	
2CDU	<i>bəgədkɪ</i>	<i>təbəgdə:h</i>	<i>təbgədə:h</i>	<i>təbgədəj:ən</i>	
3MDU	<i>bəg(ə)do:h</i>	<i>jəbəgdə:h</i>	<i>jəbgədə:h</i>	<i>jəbgədəj:ən</i>	
3FDU	<i>bəgədto:h</i>	<i>təbəgdə:h</i>	<i>təbgədə:h</i>	<i>təbgədəj:ən</i>	
1CPL	<i>bəgu:dən</i>	<i>nəbu:gəd</i>	<i>nəbge:d</i>	<i>nəbge:dən</i>	
2MPL	<i>bəgədkəm</i>	<i>təbəgdəm</i>	<i>təbge:dəm</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	<i>bəge:dəm</i>
2FPL	<i>bəgədkən</i>	<i>təbəgdən</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	<i>bəge:dən</i>
3MPL	<i>bəgawd</i>	<i>jəbəgdəm</i>	<i>jəbge:dəm</i>	<i>jəbge:dən</i>	
3FPL	<i>bəgu:d</i>	<i>təbəgdən</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	<i>təbge:dən</i>	

TABLE 11.14 FORMS OF THE FUTURE TENSE

	<i>GA STEM</i> 'chase'	<i>D/L STEM</i> 'bring'	<i>H STEM</i> 'mount (s.o.)'	<i>QW STEM</i> 'sit'
MSG	<i>bəgdona</i>	<i>mawo:s'əl</i>	<i>məharkəb</i>	<i>məlxaw:əl</i>
FSG	<i>bəgdi:ta</i>	<i>maws'əle:ta</i>	<i>məharkəbe:ta</i>	<i>məlxawle:ta</i>
MDU	<i>bəgdoni</i>	<i>mawas'li</i>	<i>məharkəbi</i>	<i>məlxaw:əli</i>
FDU	<i>bəgdawti</i>	<i>maws'əle:ti</i>	<i>məharkəbe:ti</i>	<i>məlxawle:ti</i>
MPL	<i>bəgje:da</i>			
FPL	<i>bəgdu:tən</i>	<i>maws'əlu:tən</i>	<i>məharkəbu:tən</i>	<i>məlxawlu:tən</i>

There is also a passive participle that has the pattern *məCCi:C* for the masculine singular. This pattern is used not only for G Stem verbs, but also for H and T Stems. There is no infinitive in Mehri or any of the other MSA languages, nor is there a predictable verbal noun.

4.8 Prepositions

The prepositions of Omani Mehri are as follows:

b- 'in, at; with; for; on'

ba:d 'after'

bərk 'in(to), inside'

δ'a:r 'on; about'

fəno:hən 'before; in front of'

ya:ʃr 'except'

h- 'to; for'

ha:l 'at, by, beside'

(əl-)hi:s 'like, as'

k- 'with'

l- 'to; for'

mən 'from'

əm-mən 'between'

mən δ'a:r 'after'

mən ya:ʃr 'without'

mən k'əde: 'about'

nəxa:li 'under'

səbe:b 'because of'

sa:r 'behind'

tə 'until, up to'

təwo:li 'to, towards'

Some of these can have slightly different forms in other dialects, e.g., *brək* or *bək* 'in(to), inside', *bejn*, *bi:n* or *ba:n* 'between', *nəxa:l* or *lxə:n* 'under' (Rubin 2012), and *twe:l* 'towards'. Watson (2012) includes most of these variants.

As in most other Semitic languages, pronominal objects of prepositions are indicated by means of suffixes (very similar to those in Table 11.4), e.g., *la:ʃ* 'to me', *lu:k* 'to you', *li:s* 'to her'. At least one preposition (*tə*) cannot take suffixes, and a few use a base slightly different from the independent form, e.g., *fa:ʃ* 'with me' (based on *k-* 'with') and *hənu:k* 'by you' (based on *ha:l* 'by').

5 SYNTAX

Only a few details of syntax can be treated here. Much fuller treatments can be found in Wagner (1953), Watson (2012) and Rubin (2018).

5.1 Word order and constituent order

Mehri verbal sentences can have the order Subject–Verb or Verb–Subject. There is quite a bit of free variation, though in certain contexts one or another type dominates. For

example, Subject–Verb order is usual at the beginning of a narrative. See Watson (2012: 256–61) for details.

Within a noun phrase, attributive adjectives always follow their head nouns, as do relative clauses. There is some variation in the placement of demonstratives (§4.2) and numerals (§4.5).

5.2 Negation

Verbal and non-verbal sentences are normally negated by the elements *əl . . . la:*. Most often, both elements are used in tandem (cf. French *ne . . . pas*), though there is some variation with the exact placement of these elements within the sentence, with some differences in usage between verbal and non-verbal sentences. Compare *əl ho:h he:rək' la:* ‘I am not a thief’ (NEG I thief NEG) and *ho:h əl kəsk əha:d la:* ‘I didn’t find anyone’ (I NEG find.PST.1CSG anyone NEG). It is not rare to find the element *la:* used without *əl* (cf. French *pas*), in both verbal and non-verbal sentences. The sentences *əl kəsk əha:d la:* (NEG find.PST.1CSG anyone NEG) and *kəsk əha:d la:* (find.PST.1CSG anyone NEG) ‘I didn’t find anyone’ are both synonymous variants of the earlier sentence.

In certain environments, *əl* is used without a following *la:*, namely, in conjunction with a couple of particles and before certain verbs of swearing or promising. Examples are *əl f-aj ar θroh* ‘I only have two’ (NEG with-1CSG only two.M) (cf. French *ne . . . que*) and *gəzəmu:t əl təffu:k* ‘she swore she wouldn’t marry’ (swear.PST.3FSG NEG marry.IPRF.3FSG).

5.3 Have-possession

As in most other Semitic languages, there is no verb ‘have’ in Mehri. Instead, the concept is expressed with a periphrastic construction using a preposition. Most often the preposition *k-* ‘with’ (which has the base *f-* with pronominal suffixes) is used, for both alienable and inalienable possession. If the possessor is a noun, a resumptive pronominal suffix must be used with the preposition. Examples are *f-aj bajt* ‘I have a house’ (with-1CS house) and *a-yajǧ f-əh k'ərawf* ‘the man has money’ (DEF-man with-3MSG money). Tense is most often left unexpressed, and so these examples could also mean ‘I had a house’ and ‘the man had money’, depending on the context.

The preposition *b-* ‘in; at; on’ is used (with the same syntax as *k-*) to express certain kinds of inalienable possession, in particular those involving parts of the body or bodily conditions (e.g., ‘have hair’, ‘have milk’), states of mind (e.g., ‘have patience’) or parts of plants (e.g., ‘have leaves’).

5.4 Conditionals

There are three conditional particles in Mehri: *ha:m*, *əð* and *lu:*, of which *ha:m* is by far the most common. When any of these is followed by a verbal clause, the verb of the protasis is normally in the perfect tense.

The particle *ha:m* indicates a real condition, and is normally followed by a verb in the perfect tense. An example is:

ha:m fələtk, jəmi:t
 if run.away.PST.1CSG die.IPRF.3MPL
 ‘If I run away, they will die.’

The particle *əð* is used for contrasting conditionals, as in

əð he: fɛ:mu:n ho:h nəko:na w-əð he: xəzo:h
 if he agree.PST.3MSG I come.FUT.MSG and-if he refuse.PST.3MSG
səbe:t' təh
 hit.IMP.MSG OBJ.3MSG
 'If he agrees, I will come, and if he refuses, hit him.'

Finally, the particle *lu:* is used for unreal conditionals. As noted in §4.6, the apodosis of unreal conditionals in the one context in which the conditional tense is regularly found. An example is:

lu: əl he: həjwəl la: əl jəshajt'ən həjbi:t la:
 if NEG he crazy NEG NEG kill.COND.3MSG DEF.camel NEG
 'If he wasn't crazy, he wouldn't have killed the camel.'

6 LEXICON

The lexicon of Mehri (and MSA in general) is noteworthy both for the number of common Semitic roots/words that are missing, and for the many roots/words not found elsewhere in Semitic. We also find some interesting semantic shifts of inherited Semitic vocabulary, e.g. *həjawm* 'sun' (< PS **jawm*- 'day'). Kogan (2015: 467–597) is by far the most comprehensive survey of the MSA lexicon to date. Some common Mehri words with unknown etymologies (outside of MSA) include *yajg* 'man', *he:xər* 'old man', *nu:ka* 'come' (root *nkʃ*), *li:ni* 'see' (root *tnj*), and *k'awhəl* 'egg'. Many more common words have only obscure or very uncertain Semitic etymologies, e.g., *yərū:b* 'know' (Bulakh 2013), *ku:sa* 'find', *txo:f* 'milk', and *wəzu:m* 'give'.

The lexicon of Mehri, like that of all MSA languages, has been influenced heavily by Arabic. No thorough study of the Arabic component has yet been attempted, but there is some discussion in Lonnet (2009). Besides many nouns and verbs, which are normally assimilated into the Mehri morpho-phonological system, many of the numerals come from Arabic (see §4.5), as do the names for the days of the week, and a variety of particles, like *am:a* 'as for' and *ɛ:zəm* 'must'. As one might expect, younger speakers of Mehri very frequently insert Arabic words into their Mehri speech (and in informal writing, especially via the internet and SMS). Moreover, specialized vocabulary pertaining to the traditional Mehri lifestyle(s) is being lost following the significant cultural changes that have taken place in the last 40 years (Eades, Watson, and al-Mahri 2013).

7 SAMPLE TEXT

The Slave and His Mistress

The following is an abridged version of a story recounted by Ali Musallam al-Mahri to T.M. Johnstone in the late 1960s. The full version was first published as Text 5 in Stroomer (1999). A corrected full version, based on better manuscripts and an audio recording, appears as Text 5 in Rubin (2018).

xət'əra:t t'ajt te:θ wə-ħa:-gawr-əs də-jəsi:ro:h wə-ħa:-gu:r
 time one.F woman CONJ-DEF-slave-3FSG REL-go.IPRF.3MDU CONJ-DEF-slave

bər k'əro:h mo:h məko:n t'a:t'. te k'ərbəm, hamam
 already hide.PST.3MSG water place one.M when approach.PST.3MPL hear.PST.3MPL

jəyrajb. to:li l'əha:k ha:-gu:r. a:məru:t h-əh a-ba:lət-əh, "mən
 crow then laugh.PST.3MSG DEF-slave say.PST.3FSG to-3MSG DEF-mistress-3MSG from

he:lən təl'ho:k?" a:mur, "hamaf a-jəyrajb he:lən də-jo:mər?"
 what laugh.IPRF.2MSG say.PST.3MSG hear.PST.2FSG DEF-crow what REL-say.IPRF.3MSG

a:məru:t, "hi:bo:h də-jo:mər?" a:mur, "bərək a-mko:n də-fəla:ni mo:h."
 say.PST.3FSG how REL-say.IPRF.3MSG say.PST.3MSG in DEF-place GEN-such water

l'əhko:t a-ba:lət-əh. te wəs'aləm, ku:səm hə-mo:h.
 laugh.PST.3FSG DEF-mistress-3MSG when arrive.PST.3MPL find.PST.3MPL DEF-water

wə-si:ro:h te məko:n t'a:t', hamam a-jəyrajb. bəko:h ha:-gu:r.
 CONJ-go.PST.3MDU until place one.M hear.PST.3MPL DEF-crow cry.PST.3MSG DEF-slave

a:məru:t a-ba:lət-əh, "ko: he:t təbajk?" a:mur ha:-gu:r,
 say.PST.3FSG DEF-mistress-3MSG why you.MSG cry.IPRF.2MSG say.PST.3MSG DEF-slave

"k'ələ:j ləbkeh!" a:məru:t h-əh, "kələ:θ l-aj!" to:li
 leave.IMP.FSG-1CSG cry.SBJV.1CSG say.PST.3FSG to-3MSG tell.IMP.MSG to-1CSG then

a:mur ha:-gu:r, "a:mur h-ajni a-jəyrajb, 'ha:m əl səjərk
 say.PST.3MSG DEF-slave say.PST.3MSG to-1CSG DEF-crow if NEG go.PST.1CSG

k-a-ba:lət-k la:, təmu:t'." to:li a:məru:t h-əh, "nəke
 with-DEF-mistress-2MSG NEG die.IPRF.2MSG then say.PST.3FSG to-3MSG come.IMP.MSG

əw-bo:h, sje:r f-aj." te ge:həməh a-yajg də-t-te:θ kəwlu:l.
 to-here go.IMP.MSG with-1CSG then tomorrow DEF-man GEN-DEF-woman sit.PST.3MSG

a:mur ha:-gu:r, "a-ba:lajt-i, hō:m əl-hi:s jəmfi:h. hō:m
 say.PST.3MSG DEF-slave DEF-mistress-3MSG want.1CSG like yesterday want.1CSG

əlsje:r f-ajf." ja:lu:t a-yajg də-t-te:θ, jəllu:l
 go.SBJV.1CSG with-2FSG arise.IPRF.3MSG DEF-man GEN-DEF-woman draw.IPRF.3MSG

fkaj, wə-jəlu:təy ha:-gu:r wə-t-te:θ.
 sword CONJ-kill.IPRF.3MSG DEF-slave CONJ-DEF-woman

‘Once a woman and her slave were traveling. And the slave had already hidden water in one place. When they got close, they heard a crow. Then the slave laughed. His mistress said to him, “What are you laughing at?” He said, “Did you hear what the crow was saying?” She said, “What was it saying?” He said, “In such-and-such a place is water.” The mistress laughed. Then when they arrived, they found the water. His mistress said, “Why are you crying?” The slave said, “Let me cry!” She said to him, “Tell me!” Then the slave said, “The crow said to me, ‘If you don’t sleep [lit. go] with your mistress, you will die.’” Then she said to him, “Come here, sleep with me.” Then the next day the woman’s husband was sitting. The slave said, “My mistress, I want like yesterday. I want to sleep with you.” The woman’s husband got up, drew a sword, and killed the slave and the woman.’

8 FURTHER STUDY

The standard dictionary of Mehri is that of Johnstone (1987), though, as noted earlier, it is replete with typographical errors. Other dictionaries include Jahn (1902) and Nakano

(1986). The most complete grammatical studies are Watson (2012) and Rubin (2018, replacing Rubin 2010), each of which takes a different approach to language description and has its own strengths. The older grammatical studies of Jahn (1905), Rhodokanakis (1910), Bittner (1909–15) and Wagner (1953) can still be useful. The major text collections are Jahn (1902), Müller (1902, 1907), Hein (1909), Stroomer (1999), Sima (2009), Liebhaber (2011) and Rubin (2018). Rubin (2018) also provides a comprehensive bibliography and history of scholarship. Mehri recordings can be heard on the websites of the Endangered Languages Archive at SOAS University of London and the Semitisches Tonarchiv (SemArch).

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