

Reply to Moin Halloun's Review of my Dictionary

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In 2022, I published a dictionary of Palestinian Arabic (full details below). The work was well received by academic readers who have followed my research over the years and welcomed the completion of this long-term project.

To date, the dictionary has been reviewed three times in academic journals. The first review (Klimiuk, *Folia Orientalia* 60, 2023, 462–465) offered a balanced and generally positive assessment, accompanied by constructive criticism. The second review (Ramos, *WZKM* 114, 2024, 375–378) was highly enthusiastic, focusing on the dictionary's place within Arabic lexicography.

The third review, by Moin Halloun, appeared in the *Journal of Semitic Studies* 64/2 (2024), e36–e41. Unfortunately, it contains numerous inaccuracies, unfounded claims, factual errors, poor editing and typographical mistakes.

Given the *JSS*'s prominence in the field of Semitic Studies and its traditionally high scholarly standards, I feel obliged to respond to several of the review's central points.

The title of my work is cited with multiple errors, omissions, and typographical mistakes.

The correct title is:

ULRICH SEEGER, *Wörterbuch Palästinensisch – Deutsch: In Zusammenarbeit mit Rami il-ʿArabi, Latīfe Abu l-ʿAsal und Tahsīn ʿAlāwnih*. Teil 1: ? – Š, Teil 2: Š – Y.

Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2022 (*Semitica Viva*; 61). 4° hardcover, XVII + 1348 pp.

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https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/title_7075.ahtml

Halloun begins his review with the claim:

“This [sic] an accumulative dictionary of the Palestinian dialect that compiles work from a substantial number of existing sources, and supplements these with insights from the compiler and three informants.”

Had the reviewer read the foreword, he would have known the chronological sequence was the reverse: I spent two years collecting original data with my collaborators, all of whom were native speakers of Palestinian Arabic, and only afterward incorporated nearly the entire existing literature on Palestinian Arabic lexicon into the manuscript.

He continues:

“It primarily uses Bauer (1957, 1898), Barġūtī [sic, without year], Halloun (2011, 2019), Elihai (2010–2011), Barthélemy (1939–69 and its Supplement, Denizeau, 1960) and the works of Butros (1964, 1873 [sic]).”

This statement is incorrect in several respects. The list of sources in my dictionary spans three DIN A4 pages and includes 79 works, with over 57,000 references. Of these, some 24,000 are drawn from the works of Leonhard Bauer—by far the most extensively cited

* I thank my friend Mila Neishtadt for her help and advice.

source. Moreover, I did not limit myself to Bauer's 1957 and 1898 publications, as Halloun claims, but also referred to his other works from 1901, 1903 and 1926. Over 3,000 references are from Yohanan Elihai. Contrary to Halloun's claim, my work primarily draws from the first edition of *The Olive Tree Dictionary* (2005), not just the later 2010–2011 works.

As for Barthélemy, his dictionary is dedicated mainly to Syrian Arabic. I cited Barthélemy around twenty times only for the purpose of etymological clarification, not as a source of vocabulary. Similarly, Butros' work is cited in less than 2% of the references—hardly warranting a description as a primary source. Surprisingly, Halloun fails to mention Gustaf Dalman's contributions, even though over 6,000 references in my dictionary are drawn from his works.

So much for the literature used. Halloun also asserts:

“Overall, the entries in the dictionary represent what I estimate as less than 40% of Palestinian dialect varieties, so it cannot be understood as a complete source.”

This view may stem from not consulting the *Hinweise zur Benutzung* ('Instructions for use'). There, for example, I explain how the aforementioned /q/, /k/, and the interdental are realised in rural and urban settings. All dialects of the sedentary population of Palestine are represented in my dictionary. I explicitly noted that the vocabulary of Bedouin dialects is not included, as it represents a typologically different dialect group, which would have caused more confusion than benefit. It should be added that the two other reviewers emphasised the importance of reading the *Hinweise zur Benutzung* and I have provided an English translation of this section as *User Guide for the Palestinian-German Dictionary* on my Academia.edu page.

Halloun further complains that the dictionary “makes little use of proverbs relating to daily life”. I aimed to write a dictionary and not a collection of proverbs. Nonetheless, I analysed the vocabulary of over 6,000 proverbs but quoted them only selectively—when I found them to be particularly illustrative. I gathered a collection of proverbs and published them in a separate volume: *Palästinensische Sprichwörter* (Tredition, 2023; Studien zum palästinensischen Arabisch Vol. 3).

The reviewer further claims that the dictionary largely overlooks a wide range of idiomatic expressions involving body parts, animals, birds, the seasons, and other semantic fields. However, no concrete examples are provided to support this assertion. In the absence of substantiating evidence, the scope and scale of the work must speak for themselves. My work includes the most comprehensive collection of Palestinian vocabulary to date: over 30,000 entries, with more than 800 animal and plant names, which have appeared in a separate volume: *Tier- und Pflanzennamen des palästinensischen Arabisch* (Tredition, 2023; Studien zum palästinensischen Arabisch Vol. 2).

The reviewer notes the absence of certain recent 2021 publications, including the expanded edition of his own *Practical Dictionary*. However, since my manuscript was finalised in 2021, later works could not be incorporated.

Halloun continues the review:

“The compilation also sadly neglects many dissertations written by PhD students in Palestinian universities dealing with the lexicography of the Palestinian dialects.”

Sources in Arabic script are a major problem. As is well known, Arabic unvocalised script does not represent short vowels and in any case cannot unambiguously represent the long vowels *ō* and *ē*. For unfamiliar words, verification with native speakers is required. I applied this laborious process for Bargūṭī’s dictionary, because the vocabulary in it was worth the effort, but otherwise I avoided non-vocalised Arabic sources due to these limitations.

Halloun objects to the inclusion of certain English loanwords from Butros’ *English loanwords in the colloquial Arabic of Palestine* (1963), claiming they are not used in contemporary Palestinian Arabic. However, words cited in older sources are sometimes unfamiliar today. In such cases, I always provide the source reference, allowing readers to make their own judgments—a practice in line with academic standards.

Halloun then writes:

“As a non-native speaker of the dialect with limited access to native speakers, the compiler had a strong dependency on his informants, and copied information from the previous work without criticism.”

I believe that being a native speaker is not a prerequisite for compiling an academic dictionary of a given language, or for conducting linguistic research more broadly. From Sībawayh to modern scholars, many significant contributions to Arabic linguistics have come from non-native speakers.

Finding qualified informants is a key challenge in dialectology. I worked with many native speakers and acknowledged three particularly excellent collaborators in the subtitle of the work. The claim that I had “limited access to native speakers” is unfounded.

Now to Halloun’s errata list. Many of the points he raises do indeed require correction. In a dictionary comprising over 30,000 entries compiled single-handedly, a degree of inconsistency is inevitable. For this reason, I made the manuscript available online throughout the project’s development, explicitly inviting feedback and suggestions. In the foreword, I acknowledged and thanked numerous colleagues who responded with valuable input. The reviewer, however, never contacted me during this period, nor did he flag any of the corrections he now cites—despite clearly having accessed the draft prior to publication, as some of his comments refer to the previously available online draft.

To specific points: the note that *hašīr* also denotes ‘dry grass’ is useful and has already been incorporated into the manuscript for the second edition, with source attribution. That *trīš* appears in two separate entries should indeed be corrected. The proposed consolidation of *dipō* and *dabbūya* under a single root, however, is misguided: doing so would hinder

discoverability and run counter to the user-oriented structure and approach which I have consistently followed. Nonetheless, I included cross-references in both entries. It should also be noted that Halloun writes *dīpo* (rather than *dipō*) and cites *dabbūya* incorrectly. His reference to *dipō* is not drawn from the published dictionary but from an earlier online draft, as previously mentioned.

In line with Halloun's suggestion, I have merged the entries *mafragā* and *mafrika*, adding appropriate references. The fact that *afandi* and *afandim* are listed separately is perfectly fine. The duplication of *sbīdāğ* and *asūğ* under different roots is acknowledged and will be corrected; however, here too the reviewer refers not to the published work but to an outdated draft that has long since been taken offline.

Of nearly 300 Hebrew references, Halloun identifies five misspellings. Two are typos; the remaining three concern conventions for writing roots and abbreviations. He questions three Arabic entries that are, ironically, quotations from an earlier version of his own *Practical Dictionary*. The entry *batīšōn* is completely correct: The reviewer misunderstood the German translation.

The reviewer criticises the fact that denominal verb forms of words of foreign origin are often listed under roots different from those of the base nouns. However, neither the etymological relationships nor the base nouns themselves are necessarily known to the user and therefore cannot be assumed. For this reason, the dictionary is organised strictly by root aiming to facilitate user access to the desired lexeme. For the sake of usability, I have consistently listed denominal verb forms under their respective roots, while providing cross-references to the base nouns. For example, the entry *fōdas* / *yfōdis* includes the note: "comp. FWRS, FYDS, FWRŞ and FRŞ".

The alleged omission of the metathesis between *mtakke* and *mkatte* is unfounded. The two entries are listed under TKK and KTT respectively, as they should. Additional inconsistencies are mentioned, though in several instances the criticism remains vague or lacks clear justification.

Halloun also advises that I should follow the method of Hans Wher [sic] for organising loanwords. In fact, I have done so—using transcription instead of Arabic script to indicate root letters, following Wehr's approach.

The review concludes with a list of literature references, including several Arabic sources, some of which are indeed worthy of analysis. The inclusion of a Pahlavi dictionary and an Ottoman-Turkish dictionary, however, is unclear.

The final citation reads:

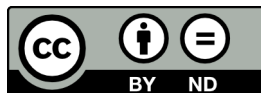
"Ulrich, Seeger. Wörterbuch Palästinensisch–Deutsch. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022. (and earlier online version May 2015 http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/ori/semitistik/seeger_woerterbuch.html)"

This citation is incorrect in several respects. *Seeger* is my surname, and *Ulrich* is my given name. Moreover, the link provided has not been active for many years. I would therefore

like to reiterate the importance of citing only the final, published version of the dictionary, which is over 20% longer than the last online draft version (spring 2019) and includes more than 1,000 additional corrections. The final work is available in both print and e-book formats, and all references to entries and page numbers should be based on this definitive edition.

While critical engagement is essential to scholarly discourse, it must be grounded in accuracy and proportion, without losing sight of the broader purpose of the work. I hope this response clarifies the intentions, methodology, and scope of my dictionary. I trust readers will consult the published edition and form their own informed judgments. Thoughtful and constructive feedback remains welcome, as it always has been. I am currently working on a second edition and remain open to collaboration with fellow scholars and native speakers to further improve and expand the dictionary.

Karlsruhe (Germany), September 2025



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