

“Filling in the diachronic gaps: the view of Old Iranian from the present”

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Description

Research into the prehistory of Iranian languages is a field doubly blessed: (1) there is a fairly large corpus of Old Avestan dating back between the 1st and 2nd millennia BCE and a small corpus of Old Persian dating back as far as the 6th century BCE (Skjærvø, 2017, 471). Because of the corpora, much is known about Old Iranian, and Old Iranian has played an important role in the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European (PIE). (2) The modern languages of the greater Iranian world are diverse and numerous, preserving features of PIE already lost in the extant Old Iranian texts (e.g., the retention of PIE laryngeals in New Iranian languages following Kümmel, 2014). Despite these archaisms, many of these languages have changed radically and independently along what Stilo (2008) has deemed the reduction and innovation axes. They have lost case and innovated it anew. According to a proposal by Karim, they have lost gender in all but a few facets of the grammar and renovated it anew (Karim, 2021, ch2 and ch4). These radical transformations lead to the inevitable question: what would our picture of Old Iranian be without the extant Old Iranian texts, and to what extent does our reliance on Old Iranian bias our analysis of New Iranian languages? None of the New Iranian languages is the direct descendant of any of the Middle or Old Iranian languages except for New Persian (< Middle Persian < Old Persian following Korn, 2017, 609).

Additional issues affecting the historical analysis of Iranian languages are that Iranian populations were largely nomadic in their early history, and there has been massive borrowing between genetically related languages (Korn, 2017, 611). This situation invokes the analogy of the Rubik's cube: As each group migrates to a new region, its contact languages change, and those languages undergo sprachbund-like shared changes, “mirror[ing] the multilingual situation of the vast majority of speakers of Ir. languages in past and present times” (Korn, 2017, 611). The existence of many phonological convergences due to borrowing suggests that Iranian historical linguists should prefer morphological innovation over regular sound change. Korn (2019, 268) uses morphological isoglosses to develop the current best understanding of the genealogy of Iranian, following Clackson's (2007) assertion that “It is now generally agreed among linguists that the most certain sub-groups are constructed on the basis of unique shared morphological innovations.” This runs contrary to the typical methods of historical linguists that begin with sound change because of Neo-Grammarians regularity; “[s]ound change I, in so far as it takes place mechanically, takes place according to laws that admit no exception” (Zosthoff and Brugmann, 1878, apud Hock & Joseph, 1996). Recently work by Gholami has suggested that phonological changes cannot be dismissed a priori despite the difficulty in establishing cognacy. Additionally, it is hard to compare constructions across the Iranian languages because the pioneering work on many varieties was conducted by scholars with little to no linguistic training. The ultimate result is inconsistent and innovative terminology being used to refer to

well-understood linguistic concepts. For instance, there are at least four terms for definite articles: “definite” (Mackenzie, 1961; MacKenzie, 1966; Mahmoudveysi & Bailey, 2013; Mahmoudveysi, Bailey, Paul, & Haig, 2012; Opengîn, 2016, etc.), “demarcative” (McKinnon, 2011), “determinative” (Windfuhr, 2012), and “deictic” (Windfuhr, 1991) appear in the literature (Karim, 2021, 217); three terms for applicatives: “applicatives” (Karim & Salehi, 2022), “placeholder constructions” (Jügel, 2016), and “absolute prepositions” (Mackenzie, 1961); and there is idiosyncratic terminology for adjectives, possessives, etc.

These issues, migration and borrowing, combined with a lack of documentation and inconsistent terminology, make the study of the genealogical relationships between the New Iranian languages opaque. Originally, the Iranian languages were divided into four geographical distinctions Northwestern, Southwestern, Northeastern, and Southeastern (Schmitt, 1989). These designations were fraught from the beginning, with Northwestern languages like Balochi spoken in the far southeast of the greater Iranian world and Ossetian (NE) spoken in the far northwest. The geographic designation, long-recognized as inadequate, was most recently challenged by Korn, who proposes a Central Iranian core with Bactrian, Sogdian, and Parthian (traditionally NE, NE, and NW) along with the entire Northwestern group (Korn, 2016, 2019). The rest of the Iranian languages form peripheral groups that resist further subcategorization.

In this workshop, we do not make any prescriptions as to historical approaches. Comparative, socio-historical, and computational approaches are to be given equal consideration, as well as multidimensional analyses that combine multiple approaches. The goal of this workshop is to reexamine the validity of previous approaches and established methods as applied to the diachronic study of Iranian languages and, when necessary, to develop new approaches that address the difficulties presented by the unique socio-linguistic situation in the greater Iranian world.

Papers presented in this workshop will focus on:

- Establishing cognacy despite massive borrowing from genetically related languages
- The significance of isoglosses (phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic)
- Relation models within the Iranian family
- Waves of contact and migration across time and space in the Iranian world
- The reciprocal influence between Iranian and non-Iranian minority languages
- Innovative methods in historical reconstruction.

Languages represented:

This workshop favors submissions that feature data from and analyses of endangered, minoritized, and understudied languages or those spoken by displaced peoples. Submissions are welcome from all languages with a presence in the greater Iranian world regardless of their genealogy, i.e., papers on Iranian, Neo-Aramaic, Dravidian, Armenian, Turkic, etc. are welcome as long as the paper’s aims match the goals of the workshop.

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Bactrian influence on local languages of Eastern Afghanistan

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While Bactrian has no modern descendants, it has left its traces in local languages of Eastern Afghanistan. Unlike potential Bactrian loanwords in Persian (e.g. Lurje, Yakubovich 2017) or Tocharian (e.g. Tremblay 2005: 435-437), the issue of Bactrian influence on Pamir languages or Pashto have received less or no attention. In many cases, due to the relatively close genetic relationship of the involved languages, differentiating shared inherited features and borrowings is a difficult task. For example, it is hard to tell whether Pashto *walwár* ‘bride price’ should be considered a genuine outcome of **wadū-bāra-* or a loan from Bactrian (ολοβαρο) because both would be possible phonologically (Cheung 2015: 57). But I argue that the situation is different regarding, for example, Pashto *γunǰ*, *γwunǰ* ‘bag’ and Bactrian γωνζο, γονζο ‘bag, sack’. Sims-Williams 2007: 207 derives the Bactrian term from **gaunīčiya-* (cf Sanskrit *goṇī-*, Gandhari *goni*, Khotanese *gūñā-*). While the Pashto word may in origin also go back to **gaunī-čiya-*, the Pashto form is puzzling because one would rather expect **γinj*. In the sequence **-auCī-* (as in **gaunī-*), the final **ī* would lead to umlaut of the preceding vowel, as in Pashto *wína* < **win* (+ secondary *-a*) < **wauni-* < *wahuni-* ‘blood’. Old Iranian **č*, on the other hand, should yield *j* [dz], not *ǰ* [dʒ], in Pashto. While there is occasional umlaut also in Bactrian, it is due to a lack of examples unclear if this also affects lexemes of the shape **-auCī-*. Old Iranian **č* yields, depending on the environment, *σ* or *ζ* in Bactrian. Both the Graeco-Bactrian Sigma and the Zeta represent more than one phoneme, and without keeping in mind the etymology, γωνζο could be interpreted as [γo:ndz], [γo:nʒ] or [γo:ndʒ]. But the front vowel following **č* in **gaunī-čiya-* makes it likely that *ζ* stood for either [ʒ] or [dʒ] here, represented in Pashto *γ(w)unǰ*, a loan from Bactrian.

A Bactrian feature of a different kind which spread into other local languages is the lambdacism **d > *δ > l*. It is found in Munji, Yidgha, Pashto and the Nuristani language Prasun (Kreidl 2021: 176-184). While this makes identifying Bactrian loanwords even harder in languages which participated in the lambdacism, it is, on the other hand, facilitating the search for Bactrianisms in closely related languages which did not. Therefore, I suggest that, e.g., Wakhi *liv*, *liw* ‘cannibal giant; crazy’ and Sanglechi *lēw* ‘demon; madman’ (Steblin-Kamenskij 1999: 225, Morgenstierne 1973: 401), cautiously considered loanwords from Munji by Morgenstierne *ibid*, should be taken as borrowings from Bactrian, a language far more prestigious than Munji. Similarly, Wakhi *məlúng* ‘middle’ < **madana-ka-* and *vul* ‘smell’ < **bauda-* (Steblin-Kamenskij 1999: 237, 383) may likewise be from Bactrian.

In my contribution, I plan on presenting further evidence for Bactrian loanwords in the Pamir languages and Pashto, as well as Nuristani and Dardic, shedding light on the complex relationship of the Eastern Iranian languages to each other.

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Steppe Iranian in the *longue durée*: contact, relative chronology, and internal reconstruction

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For over a millennium, from c. 900 BC until the early centuries AD, the Eurasian steppe zone from the Pontic region to eastern Central Asia was home to numerous Iranian-speaking peoples whose names and movements are known from the testimony of neighboring civilizations, primarily Greco-Roman and Persian. These historical records, along with the rich archaeological evidence of burial sites from the Danube to the Altai, revealed that groups continuously migrated — generally from east to west and often over considerable distances—linguistic variation. It thus comes as little surprise that despite enormous advances in Iranian philology over the past 50 years, our knowledge of the linguistic history of Steppe Iranian has not progressed greatly beyond that of such seminal works as Abaev (a949) or Harmatta (a970).

Recent developments herald a welcome change, however, such as the appearance of two new studies of Iranian loanwords in Tocharian (Dragoni 2022, Bernard 2023). As the source of the earliest such Iraniana borrowings in Tocharian, Bernard posits an “Old Steppe Iranian” spoken in the Altai region and Dzhungaria, though a location in eastern Central Asia is also imaginable. Of the features ascribed to this “Old Steppe Iranian,” the appearance of [l] for OIr. *r before dentals (cf. TB *melte* ‘pile’, TA *malto* ‘in first place’ ← OIr. *marda- ‘head, top of the body’; TB *speltke*, TA *ratäk* ‘army’ ← OIr. *rata-ka- ‘line, formation’) contrast with Ossetic, where OIr. *r is usually retained except before *l or *y and apocope preceded syncope (Cheung 2002:69-85). Otherwise it exhibits few innovations, corresponding to the meager Scythian evidence (Mayerhofer 2006). The one alleged defining trait of Scythian, the shift of OIr. [ð] > [l] in the name Παράλαται < OIr. *para-dāta-, is not in fact probative but could simply represent an attempt by Greek speakers to render the voiced interdental fricative [ð]; this would square with recent arguments against lambdacism in Sogdian (Lurje & Yakubovich 2017).

It is only from the Sarmatian period that the defining phonological changes ancestral to Ossetic such as voicing of intervocalic stops or palatalization of *ti > *dʲ > [dz] vel sim. Are reflected in the extensive onomastic material (see most recently Palunčić 2019). Importantly, the ethnonym Ἀορσοί, whose etymological connection with Oss. D *ors*, I *urs* ‘white’ and OIr. *aruša- has long been debated, confirms the early syncope of *u required by D *ford*, I *furd* ‘great river’ < OIr. *paruta- and D *mex*, I *mix* ‘stake’ < OIr. *mayuǰxa-.

The absence of connected texts greatly hampers investigation of morphological developments, so that e.g. although the collective suffix *-tā- is known from ethnonyms recorded as far back as Herodotos (Sauromatai/Syrmatai, Thyssagetai, Massagetai, Iaxamatai/Ixibatai), one cannot know when it became generalized as the productive plural formant. Here it is historical-comparative investigation of Ossetic grammar that can offer some guide to the chronology of prehistoric changes. For instance, the Oss. Periphrastic future in -ʒVn- (e.g. D *cær-ʒæn-æn*, I *cær-ʒyn-æn* ‘I will live’) must have its origin in nominal compounds *X-čānāh ‘desiring X_N’ (whence deverbal ‘(be) wanting to X_V’ > ‘X_V-FUT’; Kim fthc. A); given the derivational isolation of *-čānah- in Iranian, this construction must have evolved already in OIr. Times. Another example

is the Oss. Transitive preterite, which with Christol (1990: 43-4) goes back to a periphrasis of past participle + *dā- ‘make.’ As simplex *dā- ‘put’ was already becoming rare in OIr., this construction is likely to be an innovation of the late Sarmation or early Alanic period (Kim fthc. B); the formal resemblance to the Germanic dental (weak) preterite is suggestive and raises the possibility of contact-induced change, but extralinguistic evidence for sufficiently early contacts is so far lacking.

Abbreviations: D = Digor; I = Iron; OIr. = Old Iranian; Oss. = Ossetic; TA, TB = Tocharian A, B.

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Remarks on the category of copula in Gorani dialects

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Gorani dialects show considerable variation in the formation and derivation of the present copula paradigm. This paper examines these variations across 10 Gorani dialects. The material was gathered from available grammatical descriptions, and a recent questionnaire developed for studying morphosyntactic and phonological variation within Kurdish. Unlike most modern Iranian languages, the copula paradigm in Gorani consists of the element *(a)n-* to which person forms are added. This element can be reconstructed as an erstwhile 3SG *-n* preceded by the stem *ha-*. It will be argued that the paradigm of the enclitic copula in modern dialects is the result of the reanalysis of morphologically coded 3SG inflection as part of the stem, in line with the trend in historical change cross-linguistically (Watkins 1962; Koch 1995). This paradigm is generally attested in modern dialects, except for Gawrajui which has replicated the Kurdish pattern of enclitic copula.

(1)	Orthotone copula		
		Before	After reanalysis
	1SG.	* <i>ha-ā</i>	<i>han-ā</i>
	2SG.	* <i>ha-ī</i>	<i>han-ī</i>
	3SG.M	* <i>ha-n</i>	<i>han-∅</i>
	3SG.F	* <i>ha-n-a</i>	<i>han-a</i>
	1PL.	* <i>ha-mē</i>	<i>han-mē</i>
	2PL.	* <i>ha-dē</i>	<i>han-dē</i>
	3PL.	* <i>ha-ē</i>	<i>han-ē</i>

Another source of variation concerns the derivation of the copula paradigm. Most Gorani dialects are characterised by deriving certain cells of the copula paradigm, most notably third person and 1SG, from the demonstrative pronouns, a profile which was probably developed under long-standing contact with Semitic languages, e.g., Neo-Aramaic (Khan 2022). In some dialects 1PL and 2PL are derived from the paradigm of oblique clitics.

Yet another source of variation is the assimilation of the enclitic copula paradigm to that of the verbal person suffixes of present tense verbs. Here, the dialects are distributed on a continuum, where one end is characterised by a four-way distinction of person forms in the two paradigms (attested in Kandulai), whereas the other end is distinguished by the complete verbalization of the copula paradigm (attested in Gawrajui).

3rd person and 1st person > 3rd person and 1SG > 3rd person only > 3SG and 2PL > no distinction

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Polyptoton for the purpose of emphasizing within Iranian languages

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Polyptoton, basically defined as the repetition of a word in different inflected forms, is originally a rhetorical stylistic device that appears usually in literary genres. The figure is therefore similar to the *figura etymologica*. Polyptoton was a common facet of Latin and Greek poetry, however, modern literature shows also examples of this structure.

There is a special type of polyptoton in different periods of Iranian languages, where an inflected verb is used with another word sharing the same root. Both elements are used in a sentence for the purpose of emphasizing an emotion or idea and highlighting a deeper meaning in the text.

In his article on “Maf’ūl-e moṭlaq dar zabān-e Fārsī” [absolute object in Persian language], Molayi (2002) presents some of these constructions in early New Persian texts under the title of absolute object and criticizes the scholars who consider it as an Arabic influence on Persian.

It seems that the examples of this kind of polyptoton are attested at least in one New Iranian spoken language. In their article, Karimi and Naghshbandi (2011) discuss Emphatic Progressive Verbal Constructions in Hawrami. In Hawrami, there is a special type of polyptoton forming progressive aspect and emphasizing the verb. The construction is composed of two conjoined parts: the infinitive plus present continuous, past continuous, and simple past verbs; nothing but agreement clitics (either subject-referring clitics in ergative constructions or object-referring clitics in non-ergative constructions) can separate these two parts:

1. ɾæmən wetiæj mæ-s-u
 I to sleep IPRF-sleep.PRS-1SG
 “I am sleeping” or “I am on the edge of falling asleep”
2. ɾemæ sipaʔæke=man æs-e=ne
 we clothes=1PL buy.PST-3PL=tobe.1PL
 ɾistæ ʃordəj=ʃan mæ-ʃor-me
 now to wash=3PL IMPRF-wash.PST-1PL
 “We have bought the clothes. Now we are washing them.”

However, it is worth mentioning that varieties of Hawrami differ slightly as to how they form the first constituent of this specific construction.

Drawing on data taken from Avesta, Old Persian, Middle Persian and the Pavei variety of Hawrami, this presentation seeks to examine the specific type of polyptoton within these languages. An important question arises: whether the emphatic progressive verbal constructions in Hawrami can be viewed as an archaic feature that originally goes back to the Old Iranian period?

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Semantic Shift and Morphosyntactic Convergence of Tense-Aspect-Mood Categories in Alazan Persian

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“Southwestern” Iranian languages spoken in the Caucasus have long been known to be represented solely by Tat varieties (Grjunberg 1963, Hacıyev 2009, Authier 2012, Suleymanov 2020). A field mission undertaken in summer 2021 in the Alazan Valley, in the very north of the Republic of Azerbaijan, revealed a hitherto undescribed Iranian variety spoken in the area. Unlike Tat, which, albeit closely related to Persian, is not mutually intelligible with it and shows significant grammatical differences, the Iranian variety of the Alazan Valley can be safely classified as a New Persian dialect. The speech community inhabits half a dozen villages scattered across the Districts of Balakən and Qax (and possibly also found in neighbouring Georgia) and claims descent from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants from Persia. There are at least two distinct but mutually intelligible sub-varieties of Alazan Persian (one per district), and the villages maintain active contact with one another.

All Alazan Persian (henceforth AlzP) speakers in Balakən and Qax are bilingual in Azeri, the majority language belonging to the Turkic family and the official language of Azerbaijan. Although there is some tendency for syntactic restructuring as a result of contact, e.g. gradual loss of prepositions (more so than in Tehran Persian), personal clitics reduced to possessive function only, partial suppletion of the paradigms of the verbs *bidān* (cognate of Standard Persian *budan* ‘to be’) and *šidān* (cognate of Standard Persian *šodan* ‘to become’), AlzP does not show novel contact-induced tense-aspect-mood (TAM) categories as do some other Turkic-influenced “Farsic” varieties (Soper 1987). This may certainly be due to a shorter period of contact in comparison to Azeri–Tat and Uzbek–Tajik contact situations.

Instead, AlzP demonstrates different patterns of morphosyntactic convergence of inherited grammatical TAM categories across the two varieties, as seen in (1–2).

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(1) Balakən sub-variety</p> <p>a. <i>mān kitab bu-xun-um.</i>
I book IPFV-read₁-1SG
‘I am reading a book. / I read books.’</p> <p>b. <i>ägär xeyli güp bi-zän-um</i>
if much word IPFV-hit₁-1SG
<i>mān=ä järimä bu-kun-id.</i>
I=DDO fine IPFV-do₁-3
‘If I talk too much, he is (definitely) going to fine me.’</p> <p>c. <i>ägär vaxt=im bi-šid</i>
if time=POSS:1SG IPFV-be_{1.3}
<i>kitab=ä mu-xun-um.</i>
book=DDO EVT-read₁-1SG
‘If I (hypothetically) have time, I will read the book.’</p> | <p>(2) Qax sub-variety</p> <p>a. <i>nun=mun=ä mu-xor-än.</i>
bread=POSS:1PL=DDO IPFV-eat₁-3PL
‘They eat / are eating our bread.’</p> <p>b. <i>umru borun bə-riz-id.</i>
today rain MOD-flow₁-3
‘Today it is going to rain.’</p> <p>c. <i>ayri bi-šin-äd</i>
separate MOD-sit₁-3
<i>ayri mi-šin-äd.</i>
separate IPFV-sit₁-3
‘If he lives apart, he lives apart (and if he does not live apart, he lives with us).’</p> |
|--|--|

The field data illustrates both varieties having a definite/prospective future (1b & 2b), which contrasts with an indefinite/hypothetical future (1c & 2c, glossed as EVT for “eventual”). The prospective category is identical with the subjunctive (shown in conditional contexts in the examples but found elsewhere in the same form), both having the form <bi- + present stem>. In addition, in the Balakən sub-variety, this same category has extended into the present domain (1a), marginalizing the inherited present-future construction <mi- + present stem> into the domain of indefinite/hypothetical future. The Qax sub-variety shows both present and future uses of <mi- + present stem>, similar to Standard Persian, but the latter use is only limited to indefinite/hypothetical future. The typologically common phenomenon of presents grammaticalizing into modal categories such as subjunctives or futures, is not rare in West Asia, including the Iranian Plateau and the South Caucasus (Haspelmath 1998). The eventual vs. prospective future split exists, notably, in most Tat varieties, and, similarly to the Balakən sub-variety of AlzP, in all of them the old present (cognate of the Persian <mi- + present stem> construction) today acts mainly

as a future tense. Cases of subjunctives developing into futures are not uncommon either, with Latin being a notable example (Clackson & Horrocks 2011: 24–25).

In the case of AlzP, the processes by which the constructions <mi- + present stem> and <bi- + present stem> have come to be aligned as they presently are deserve an analysis with a focus on diachrony.

The stability of <mi- + present stem> as a hypothetical future construction is unsurprising given that the semantics it originally conveyed in Persian had largely ceased to be associated strictly with progressivity by the late nineteenth century and became generalised as the gnomic present, yielding also an indefinite/hypothetical future reading (both referring to what “generally expected to happen”). The Balakən sub-variety preserves the latter use while Qax sub-variety preserves both.

The behaviour of <bi- + present stem> is less obvious. Lenepveu-Hotz (2014) traces the development of the verbal prefix bi- from being a mood-independent marker of rhematicity to becoming a modal (subjunctive) marker, change which she dates to the late nineteenth / early twentieth century, i.e. to the time when modern AlzP speakers claim their ancestors left Persia. The rhematic property of bi- could thus quite easily account for the development of <bi- + present stem> (originally conveying a focal action / state in the present) into a prospective category, especially in light of similar semantics being attested in Classical Persian (Jahani 2008: 160) and found in modern languages of the Central Iranian Plateau as a “close future” (Korn 2020: 479, Täheri 2021). Furthermore, AlzP, or at least its Qax sub-variety, seems to have reinterpreted the focal nature of bi- as “perfective”, which is Haspelmath (1998: 55) considers a common property of futures and subjunctives, allowing it to extend <bi- + present stem> to both the prospective/definite future and subjunctive domains.

The remarkable use of <bi- + present stem> for the general present tense in the Balakən sub-variety represents perhaps a slightly different development process. One can hypothesise that bi- never developed into an aspectual marker in this sub-variety and remained purely focal. When the function of <mi- + present stem> as a present category starting weakening and the construction started drifting towards marking the indefinite/hypothetical future (as it happened in Tat), there arose a need to replace it with a more semantically dynamic construction, and a rhematic construction <bi- + present stem> made for a good replacement. In this respect, the semantic distinction between the present, the prospective future and the subjunctive was irrelevant, and the situation, at least by the time of the earliest speakers’ arrival in the Alazan Valley, resembled very much that of pre-modern Persian.

The scope of this paper is limited to presenting and briefly analysing (including within a broader regional context) preliminary data from a peculiar variety of Persian developing outside of its traditional area. A separate study aimed at tracing the origin of AlzP and the movement of its earlier speakers could offer additional clues regarding these changes.

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