On the Relationship of the Central Asian Arabic Dialects

with a previously unpublished text from South Khorasan

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Translated from the German by

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Lightly edited, with an extended bibliography
translated from the original German article:

Zum Verhältnis der zentralasiatischen arabischen Dialekte.
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The Central Asian Arabic linguistic enclaves

This map shows the regions in which villages with Arabic-speaking inhabitants may, to date, be found [number of villages in square brackets]. Many of the original habitants also live in scattered outlying villages or in cities. The tribe of the Khamse Arabs living close to Shiraz has only recently become settled (cf. Dahlgren 2003) and probably correlates linguistically more with the Central Asian than the Mesopotamian language variety.

Four groups of Central Asian Arabs have, until now, been discovered (cf. the map above): in the region of Bukhara (B), in Qašqa-Daryâ (Q), near Balkh in Afghanistan (A) and in Khorasan/Iran (X). There has been extensive research and speculation regarding their origin. Most researchers believe that they arrived in the Early Period of Islam with the Arab conquerors (Dahlgren, Jastrow, Kiefer, Seeger, Zimmermann). The Arabs themselves believe that they were first resettled in the 14th or 15th century by the Timurids. Some researchers believe that, even later, in the 16th century, they first settled in Central Asia (Akiner, Karmysheva, Spuler). Chikovani (2000, 2003, 2004) considers the Bukhara Arabs to be the descendants of these settlers from the 14th/15th century, but the Qašqa-Darya Arabs to be descendants of the first waves of settlers in the 7th-10th century. It is, in any case, indisputable that the Arabs in Afghanistan are a secession of the Bukhara Arabs (Ingham 2003, 2005). According to Blood and Barfield, they arrived in Afghanistan in the 19th century as refugees from the Bukhara region.

We do not want to go into this discussion further here, but rather compare a few significant linguistic characteristics, in order to be able to assert something about the relationship of these four groups amongst themselves.

The following is a comparative overview of significant linguistic phenomena:

		B	**A**	**Q**	**X**
Affrication of **q/k*		no	no	no	yes
Interdentals		stops/sibilants	*t̲ > s , d̲ > d*	sibilants	sibilants (later > interdentals)
Pers. pronouns	2nd sg./pl.	with *h-*	with *h-*	without *h-*	without *h-*
	1st pl.	with *n-/r-*	with *n-*	with *n-*	without *n-*
	3rd sg.	*dük*	*duk*	*haw, zōk*	*uhū*
Pronom. suffixes	2nd f. sg.	*-ki*	*-ki*	*-ki*	*-ič*
	3rd m. sg.	*-u, -ū(h)/-h*	*-u/-h*	*-a(h)*/lengthening	*-ah/-h*
	2nd f. pl.	*-kin*	*-kin*	*-kinna*	*-čin*
Relative pronoun		*il*	*ki/lidūk*	*ki, li*	*al*
Definite article		no	no	*il*	*al*
Linker *-in* (“Nunation trace”)		yes	yes	yes	yes
Indefinite article		*fat~fad*	*fad*	*fat~fad*	*fal-*
Verba TI(II) = MG(I)		yes	yes	no (?)	yes
Perfect verb 3rd m. pl.		*-u*	*-u*	*-aw*	*-ow*
Perfect verb 3rd f. pl.		*-in*	*-in*	*-anna*	*-an*
Imperfect prefix 3rd masc.		*m-*	*m-*	*y-*	*y-*
Long forms imperfect (*-ūn/-īn*)		yes	yes	yes	yes
Verbal nouns ending in *-ān*		yes	yes	yes	no
Interrogative suffix		*-mi*	*-mi*	*-mi*	no
a > i in short syllables		no	no	yes	yes

Gahawa syndrome				no	no	1st/2nd stage	1st stage
Active part. with obj. suffix				*zorbinnak*	*?*	*?*	*lâqtunnah*
Active part. with subj. suffix				*zorbin(n)ak*	*kātbinnak*	*zorbin(n)ak*	no
what?				*ēš, eyš, iš*	*iš šay, iš-*	*yēš*	*ēš*
how?				*ištūr*	*ištū(n)*	*kil*	*ištow*
nothing				*qaṭṭiš*	*quttiš*	*gaṭṭiš*	*guttᵊš*
lovely, good				*zīn*	*zīn*	*zeynin*	*ḏēn(in)*
to do				*sawā/misū*	*sava/misi*	*sawā/yisī*	*ṯava/yiṯay*
to go				*ġadāk/miyoġdi*	*ġada(k/k/i/n)*	*ġōdi/yoġadi*	*ġida/yoġodi*
to come				*ǧāk/miǧī*	*ǧak*	*ǧāʾ*	*ǧē/yiǧi, yīǧi*
to give				*anṭā/minṭī*	*anta/minti*	*anṭā/yinṭi* or *aḥṭā/yiḥṭi*	*inta/yinti*
to ask				*našad/minšid*	*našad/minšid*	*sāl, sayyal*	*ṯāyal/yiṯāyil*
Imala feminine ending				no	no	no	yes
Imala pron. suffix *-ha, -na*				no	no	no	yes
Emphasis				partly	no	weakend	no
Compound verbs (as in Persian)				yes	yes	yes	yes
Copula in nominal clauses				rarely, only 3rd p.	yes	?	yes
Devoicing in final position				yes	partly	yes	no
Arabic numerals				yes	until 5 or 6,10	until 4 or 5,10	until 5
Strong verb:							
Perfect	sg.	3rd	m.	*katab*	*katab*	*katab*	*čitab*
			f.	*katabit*	*katabit*	*katabat*	*čitibat*
		2nd	m.	*katabt*	*katabt*	*katabt*	*čitabt*
			f.	*katabti*	*katabti*	*katabti*	*čitabti*
		1st	c.	*katabt*	*katabt*	*katabt*	*čitabt*
	pl.	3rd	m.	*katabu*	*katabu*	*katabaw(-āt)*	*čitibow*
			f.	*katabin*	*katabin*	*katabanna*	*čitiban*
		2nd	m.	*katabtu*	*katabtu*	*katabtu(-wāt)*	*čitabtu*
			f.	*katabtin*	*katabtin*	*katabtinna*	*čitabtan*
		1st	c.	*katabna*	*katabna*	*katabna*	*čitabne*
Imperfect	sg.	3rd	m.	*miktib*	*miktib*	*yuktub*	*yičtib*
			f.	*tiktib*	*tiktib*	*tuktub*	*tičtib*
		2nd	m.	*tiktib*	*tiktib*	*tuktub*	*tičtib*
			f.	*tiktibīn*	*tiktibīn*	*tuktubīn*	*tičⁱtbīn*
		1st	c.	*maktib*	*maktib*	*aktub*	*ačtib*
	pl.	3rd	m.	*miktibūn*	*miktibūn*	*yuktubūn(-āt)*	*yičⁱtbūn*
			f.	*miktibin*	*miktibin*	*yuktubinna*	*yičⁱtban*
		2nd	m.	*tiktibūn*	*tiktibūn*	*tuktubūn(-āt)*	*tičⁱtbūn*
			f.	*tiktibin*	*tiktibin*	*tuktubinna*	*tičⁱtban*
		1st	c.	*niktib*	*niktib*	*nuktub*	*ničtib*

Even at first glance one can see that B and A fully concur in most areas. The single clear difference is the sparing use of the copula in the nominal clause only for third person (B *had išwō* “what is that”, Fischer 1961) in contrast to a fully developed copula system for all persons (A *hintin ʕarab-inkin* “you f. Pl. are Arabs”, Ingham 1994). Otherwise, one is inclined to attribute the few deviations to an insufficient amount of material or to individual (transcription) conventions. Reports of the splitting of A from B in earlier times are, therefore, firmly validated and one can speak, instead of a B- and A-type dialect, of a BA-type dialect.

All dialects BA, Q, X share

- More or less waning, or already completely disappeared, emphasis
- The loss of interdentals
- An *l*-based relative pronoun, which can probably be traced back to the classical source form **allaḏi* (whereby the Persian-Tadjik *ki* is also detected in A and Q)
- Frequent use of the Linker *-in* (what looks like a trace of nunation)
- Development of an indefinite article *fad/fat/fal*
- The complete coincidence of the paradigm of geminated verbs in the first form and verbs III*y* in the second form (such as X *ḥakka / yḥukk* “to scratch”, *vadda / yivadd* “to bring”). Following Vinnikov 1965, it appears as though Q deviates in this respect, though I hold this to be unlikely
- Long forms in the imperfect, e.g. BA *miktibūn* “they masc. write”, Q *tuktubūn(-āt)* “you masc. pl. write”, X *tičʲtbīn* “you fem. sg. write”
- The existence of feminine plural forms with verbs and the personal pronouns (e.g. the personal pronouns of the 2nd fem. pl. BA *hintin* Q *intinna* X *intan*)
- The derivation of the word “what” from **ay(y) š(ay?)*
- The derivation of the word “how?” from **ay(y) š(ay?) ṭawr*
- The derivation of the word “nothing” from **qaṭṭu š(ay?)*
- The Bedouin word *zēn* as the origin of the word for “lovely, good”
- The roots of the conventional verbs for “to do”, “to go”, “to come”, “to give”
- The formation of compound verbs following a Persian-Tadjik model: *amir sava* “to do a command = to order” (A)
- The use of a copula in nominal sentences (with the aforementioned restrictions for B and missing examples for Q)
- Probably also the attachment of object suffixes onto participle forms through *-inn-* (*zorbinnak* “he hit you”, cf. Holes 2012 and Windfuhr 2005).

Q and X have a series of characteristics in common, which distinguish them from BA:

- Interdentals systematically became sibilants (in the areas described by Seeger 2002, these sibilants subsequently become interdentals again), whilst in BA a somewhat chaotic sound shift, to both sibilants and plosives, has taken place (B *dahab* "to go away" but *zabaḥ* "to slaughter")
- The personal pronouns of the 2nd pers. lack initial *h-* (e.g. *inta, inti, intū, intinna* in Q vs. *hint, hinti, hintu, hintin* in B)
- The personal suffix of the 3rd masc. sg. *-a(h)* compared to *-u(h)* in BA
- Preservation of a definite article (Q *il,* X *al*)
- Verbs ending in a diphthong in the 3rd masc. pl. perfect (Q *katabaw* — BA *katabu*)
- The verb affixes of the 3rd pers. fem. pl. are *-an(na)* instead of *-in* (Q *katabanna,* X *čitiban* — BA *katabin*)
- No innovation in the imperfect prefix, whilst BA uses a new *m-* in some persons (Q *yuktub* — BA *miktib*)
- Short *a* in open syllables is often raised to *i* (X *čitab* — BA *katab*)
- Gahawa-Syndrom, which is unknown in BA (Q *yoġadi* — BA *miyoġdi* "he goes")
- No attached *-k* in the perfect of the verbs for "to go" and "to come" (X *ġida* and *ğē* — B *ġadāk* and *ğāk*)
- For the verb "to ask", forms which go back to the root SYL are used, whilst in BA, *našad* is in use.

This list reveals that Q is closer related to X than BA. It could also be used as indication for the evaluation of the chronologically differing origins of Arabs from B and Q which Chikovani claims. Nevertheless, the relationship between Q and X is, by far, not as close as that of B and A.

In a few significant points, X takes on a special status:

- Split of **q* into *g/ğ* as well as of **k* into *k/č.* This typical characteristic of livestock-rearing Bedouin is only found in Khorasan. All other Central Asian dialects do not use conditioned affrication
- The personal pronouns of the 3rd pers. (X *uhū, ihī, uhumm, ihinn*) have not been replaced by demonstrative pronouns (Q *zōk/haw, zīka/hay, ziklōn/ziklōnāt/zōkāt, ziklānna;* A *duk, duki, duklaw, duklan*)
- The personal pronoun of the 1st pers. pl. is without an initial *n-* (*aḫne, iḫne* or *eḫna* in X but *naḫna* in Q and *niḫna* or *nəḫna* in BA)
- The suffixed pronoun of the 2nd fem. sg. is *-ič* and not *-ki*

- The definite article is *al*, in contrast to *il* in Q and the complete loss of the definite article in BA
- The assimilation of the indefinite (and definite) article to all consonants (*fab-bāğir* “a cow”, *aʕ-ʕarūṯ* “the bride”)
- In the perfect affix of the 3rd fem. pl., X and Q actually have *-an* forms (X *čitiban* — Q *katabanna*, in contrast to the conventional *-in* forms in BA), though they contrast in the perfect 2nd fem. pl. (X *čitabtan* — Q *katabtinna*), imperfect 3rd fem. pl. (X *yičʲtban* — Q *yuktubinna*) and imperfect 2nd fem. pl. (X *tičʲtban* — Q *tuktubinna*) equally through a *-an* (X) — *-in* (Q) contrast
- Whilst BA and Q forms verbal nouns through suffixation of *-ān* (also *-ahān* or *-ayān*) in the first stem, such infinitives do not arise from X in the material
- X is, as only dialect, largely free from Uzbek influence and, therefore in particular, has no interrogative suffix *-mi*
- The newly formed perfect by means of the active participle to which a subject suffix is affixed using the *-in(n)-* infix (*ẓorbinnak* “you m. sg. hit”, cf. Windfuhr 2005) is not found in X, but in all other dialects
- X is the only dialect with an Imala of the feminine ending (*mare* “woman”). Even the old final **-ā* is raised (*-he, -ne* personal suffixes of the 3rd fem. sg. and 1st pl.; *ġide* “he went”)
- There is no devoicing of final consonants in X, which is more or less used in all other dialects (cf. for example in A *šibiḥ* “to be satisfied”, *waqaḥ* “to fall”).

Ingham 2005 thus concludes that “the Arabic dialects of eastern Iran seperated from the main block more recently than those of Afghanistan and Central Asia”. This would mean that BA represents the oldest dialect type, whilst Q is a younger and X, so to speak, the most modern offshoot of Central Asian Arabic.

The following text is from a young man from *Ṯarâb* = آب سر (district *Zir Kuh,* South Khorasan). I made the recording on 16/09/1996 and dedicate it to my teacher Werner Arnold.

1. ᵖḏamân-e ane ṯaġeyruk[1] kunt, ṯaġīr kunt, kunt oġodi il am-ᵖmadreṯe, ᵖhanūl[2] ṯinet taklīf an[3]-nihēt (taklīfin nihēt?) ġidēt il am-ᵖmadreṯe, ubūy rowwonâni[4] il am-ᵖmadreṯe, yā ᵖmašaġatātin[5] ᵖbeṯyâre.[6]

2. ane ᵖfaġat fal-ādim ᵖhaṯṯ, fal-riḏīʕ ubūy ʕindah, ᵖbe humū ǧ-ᵖǧūr darṯ gurēt[7] ġidēt … himāne[8] ᵖpanǧ ᵖṯâl himāne kunt, vâḥid kunt, vâḥid, ᵖpanǧ ᵖṯāl ġidēt il am-ᵖmadreṯe fī himāne, gurēt ič-čitābāt o ᵖanvâ[9] o ᵖaġtâm[10] ič-čitābāt.

3. minū[11] ġidēt it[12] ᵖTaxtavân,[13] ǧarīt al-lūte,[14] darṯ gurēt, ṯū ᵖṯâ hūnak kunt. himad[15] darb ṯū ᵖṯâl kunt oġodi afīy,[16] oġodi afīy. ġidēt, baʕd min ḏâk ᵖġabūl iṯtēt, ᵖġabūl iṯtēt.

4. ᵖvâḏ min hūnkāt ġidēt il ᵖBīrǧan, il al-madīne,[17] ġidēt il ᵖBīrǧan, darṯ gurēt. baʕd ᵖaḏ min[18] ṯalāṯ ṯinīn ubūy ǧē r-ᵖradi,[19] gâl … gult magdur agra. gâl ʕeyb mā ʕindah, taʕāl aǧ-ǧarye ʕind ᵖxudi[20] kūn.

5. ǧēt ᵖye ᵖčan ᵖmodati himāne kunt, baʕd ġidēt il madīnt uxre, madīnat uxra ġidēt. hūnak … ᵖkârin šaxṯi govaḏt[21] ᵖherfe[22] govaḏt, ᵖherfe govaḏt o ᵖčan ᵖmodate kunt ᵖvâḏ ubūy ǧē r-ᵖradi gâl:

6. ane magdur ane ᵖpīr miṯti, viḥeydi magdur akūn. gâl taʕāl il himūnkāt yāy ᵖkomak ṯow. gult ᵖmaṯaltin mā hū, aǧi ʕindak. hūnkāt ᵖdaṯṯgīritak[23] aṯīhe, ᵖpīr miṯti mā yugdur, âxar ᵖham mā ʕindah ġēr ᵖxudi, ᵖfaġat falāḥid[24] vuldhū, ibn vāḥid.

7. gâl magdur, aǧi hāne ʕindak, gâl ᵖmaṯaltin mā hū taʕāl. il hāne aǧ-ǧāy ᵖal-ʔân ġanam … yā

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1 Probably a diminutive form.
2 = *hanūz il,* Pers. هنوز “yet, not yet”, *il* “after”.
3 < *al* “when”.
4 *rowwan* “to send”, 2nd stem of the Persian رفـــتن “to go”; *-ân* Persian participle form. Represents here an action which regularly occurred in the past.
5 Pers. مشقت “difficulty”.
6 Pers. بسیار “many”.
7 Loan translation to the Pers. درس خواندن “to read a lesson = to learn”.
8 Contraction from the Arabic *hāne* “here” and Pers. هم “also”.
9 Pers. نوع / pl. انواع “kind, type, sort”.
10 Pers. قسم / pl. اقسام “kind, way, sort, part”.
11 = *min hūnak* “afterwards”.
12 < *il* “to” with assimilation.
13 Pers. جان تحته , village ca. 3 km south-east, situated below *Sarāb*.
14 “lower village”, in contrast to *Sarâb*, which is called *ǧarīt al-fōg*. *lūte* probably comes from the Standard Arabic root WṬʔ. In Magrebi the word appears as *lōṭa* “below” (Thanks to Peter Behnstedt for this note).
15 = *himal* “the same” with assimilation.
16 *fayya / yifīy* “to come, to walk, to return”, cf. the Standard Arabic root FYʔ.
17 Commonly used for “town”: the Persian word *šah(r)*. He possibly learned this word at school in Birǧand.
18 Tautological, Pers. *aḏ* = Arab. *min.*
19 Pers. رد “Trace”.
20 Pers. خود “themselves, itself”.
21 *gobaḏ / yugbuḏ* “to seize, embrace” < Standard Arabic root QBḌ.
22 Pers. حرفه “handicraft, trade”.
23 Pers. دستگیري “help, support”, دستگیري کردن “to help, to support”.
24 = *fal vāḥid* “a single”.

ġanam oġodi, ᵖgomâr[25] ʕindah, oġodi yā al-ġanam, uhū maxallīh in yoġodi, uhū yugʕod, yugʕod, ᵖpīr miṯṯi.

8. oġodi ilah aġ-ġanam. hūnkāt lēle yiṯṯi, al-lēl aḏ-ḏiyābe yiğan, ḏiyābe ʕind aġ-ġanam. min aḏ-ḏiyābe yiğan o hūnkât yilugtan[26] aš-šâvī. šâvī(n?) ar-ᵖradhin naʕadi,[27] naʕadi ač-čilāb ᵖham yoġodan yōxḏanhinne yifiyan, yā yimūtan yā mā yimūtan.

9. ᵖagar mātan ᵖxō[28] niḏbaḥhin niğībhinne il ahalhinne iṯ ṯāḥibhinne nintīhinne. ᵖagar lā in lā mātan ᵖxō. ᵖagar damm ᵖxeyli yukūn[29] noġodi ᵖṯan[30] ᵖdâġ[31] niṯīhinne vaṯṯ aġ-ġanam, naxallīhinne ᵖtâ bukrīye. yiği … ᵖyâ ḥiğar,[32] ḥiğar ᵖdâġ niṯīhinne, nidowwuġinne.

10. baʕd min ḏâk niğībhinne, ᵖagar malēš[33] yikūnan il ahalhinne nintīhin, in lā yikūnan (oder ᵖagar lā in himalēš?) yā ġ-ġanam yikūnan bil-âxare ḏēn yiṯṯan âxar, âxare ḏēn yiṯṯan.

Translation

1. When I was small, was small, I went to school, before I reached the age of responsibility, I went to school, my father sent me to school despite many difficulties.

2. I'm just an only child, my father has one son, so I learned, I went … right here, I was right here for five years (in Sarâb), I was alone, alone. For five years I went here to school, read books and all types of books.

3. Then I went to Taxtavân, the lower village, learned, was there three years. The same way I went for three years, back and forth, back and forth. I went [to school in Taxtavân], then I was accepted [in the higher school in Bīrğand], was accepted.

4. So I went from there to Bīrğand, in the town, went to Bīrğand, learned. After three years, my father came to me [and] said … I said: I cannot learn. He said: that's no disgrace, come to the village, be with me.

5. I came, some time I was here, then I went to another town, went to another town. There … I took a personal job, took up a craft, took up a craft and I was [there] some time when my father came to me again [and] said:

6. I cannot [carry on] I have become old, I cannot [carry on] being alone. He said: come here, help me. I said: no problem, I will come to you, he has become old, he cannot [carry on], furthermore he has nobody other than me, there is only a single son there, one son.

7. He said: I cannot [carry on], [I said:] I will come over to you, he said: no problem, come!

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25 Pers. گماشتن o. گماردن / pres. stem گمار "to entrust, authorize".

26 Standard Arabic لَقَطَ "to collect, to pick up".

27 *ʕida / yaʕadi* "to run", cf. the Standard Arabic root ʕDW.

28 < Pers. خوب "good".

29 Informant insists on *yukun* instead of *yukūn*.

30 Pers. سنگ "Stone".

31 The Pers. Word داغ "stigma, brandmark; boiling hot" also exists in Standard Arabic, both as a noun and a verb in the 2nd form.

32 A listener made him aware that he should, in fact, use the Arabic word for "Stone".

33 Short form of *himalēš* "when it behaves like that". *himal* is a demonstrative, *himalēš* actually means "such a, that, which".

Since coming over to him, I go now small livestock … with small livestock, it is a responsibility-filled occupation, I go with the livestock, I do not let him go, he stays at home, he has got become old.

8. I pasture the small livestock for him. When it becomes night there, in the night come wolves, wolves for the small livestock. Some of the wolves come and take there the sheep away. We walk behind the sheep, we walk, the dogs walk too, they collect them, come back, either they die or they don't die.

9. If they are dead, then we slaughter them, bring them to their owners, give them to their owners. If not, when they are not dead, good. When lots of blood flows, we go, lay branding fire stones upon the small livestock, leave it until morning. He comes … with stones, branding fire stones we lay on them, we brand them.

10. Then we bring them, if it is like that, we give them to their people, if it is like that with the small livestock, they finally become healthy, finally, finally they become healthy.

Literature on Central Asian Arabic

collected by

Ulrich Seeger

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