

Bactrian influence on local languages of Eastern Afghanistan

Julian Kreidl, Indiana University Bloomington

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.

References

Cheung, Johnny. 2015. “The linguistic and geographic position of Pashto”, In: de Chiara, Matteo; Grassi, Evelin (Eds). *Iranian Languages and Literatures of Central Asia*, 29-65. Leuven: Peeters.

- Kreidl, Julian. 2021. "Lambdacism and the development of Old Iranian *t in Pashto", *Iran and the Caucasus*, 25/2, 175-193.
- Lurje, Pavel; Yakubovich, Ilya. 2017. "The Myth of Sogdian Lambdacism", In: Team „Turfanforschung“ (Hrsg). *Zur lichten Heimat : Studien zu Manichäismus, Iranistik und Zentralasienkunde im Gedenken an Werner Sundermann*, 319-341. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Morgenstierne, Georg. 1973. *Indo-Iranian Frontier Languages, Vol. II: Iranian Pamir Languages: Yidgha-Munji, Sanglechi-Ishkashmi and Wakhi*. 2nd ed. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Sims-Williams, Nicholas. 2007. *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan II: Letters and Buddhist Texts*. London: The Nour Foundation.
- Steblin-Kamenskij, I. M. 1999. *Ètimologičeskij slovar' vaxanskogo jazyka*. Sankt-Peterburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie.
- Tremblay, Xavier. 2005. "Irano-Tocharica et Tocharo-Iranica", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 68/3, 421-449.