



CHORASMIA III. THE CHORASMIAN LANGUAGE

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Chorasmian, the original Iranian language of Chorasmia, is attested at two stages of its development. Old Chorasmian was written in an indigenous script descended from the Aramaic, brought to the region by the administration of the Achaemenid empire and characterized by heterography, that is, the occasional writing of Aramaic words to represent the corresponding Chorasmian. It is known earliest from coin inscriptions and documents on wood and parchment from about the end of the 2nd century c.e. and latest from inscriptions on some silver vessels but mainly from ossuary inscriptions of the late 7th century. The paucity of this material, however, and its fragmentary nature do not allow an analysis of the language. Late Chorasmian, written in a modified Arabic script, is attested from the 5th/11th to the 8th/14th centuries, by which time the language was evidently well on the way to disuse, having been superseded by Turkish. The earliest examples have been left by the great Chorasmian scholar Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī. In his works on chronology and astronomy (ca. 390-418/1000-28) he recorded such calendrical and astronomical terms as some of the traditional names of days, months, feasts, and signs of the zodiac. By far the greater part of the Chorasmian vocabulary preserved for us is to be found in the form of



interlinear glosses throughout a single manuscript (of ca. 596/1200) of the celebrated Arabic dictionary *Moqaddemat al-adab* by another native Chorasmian, Zamaḡṣarī. Some other manuscripts of the same work contain but a few such glosses. In contrast to these monotonous dictionary entries, the only Chorasmian texts having any life are the 400 odd whole or partial sentences quoted, to illustrate case law, in a series of Arabic law books emanating from Chorasmia: the *Yatīmat al-dahr* by ‘Alā’-al-Dīn Tarjomānī (d. 655/1257), the *Monyat al-foqahā’* by Faḡr-al-Dīn Qobaznī, and an augmented résumé of the latter, the *Qonyat al-monya*, by Moḡtār Zāhedī Ġazmīnī (d. 658/1260). The Chorasmian content of the two latter works was gathered into a compendium by Jamāl-al-Dīn ‘Emādī in ca. 755/1354. Whereas the dictionary material is unvoweled, and to some extent even unpointed, that in the different manuscripts of the law books, though often badly corrupted by scribes ignorant of Chorasmian, is frequently voweled, often unreliably. In general, therefore, it is possible to represent the language only in unvocalized transliteration.

Orthography and phonology. Apart from the Arabic emphatics *ṭ, ḍ, ṣ, ḏ* and the postvelars *q, ḥ, ‘*, the pronunciation of which is unknown, it can be assumed that Chorasmian had the following consonant phonemes: *p, t, c (= ts), k; f, θ (= t), č, x; b, d, j (= dz), g; β (= b), δ (= d), ĵ, γ (= ġ); m, n; s, š, z, ‘; r, l; w, y.* Beside the normal Persian additions to the Arabic alphabet, *β* was written as a three-pointed *f*. The *θ* and *δ* coincided with the Arabic letters *ṭ* and *ḍ* respectively. The *j* was not distinguished in writing from *c*, both being written with three dots above the letter *ḥ* (as formerly in Pashto). The *g* was only very exceptionally distinguished from *k*. The letter *n* was especially labile, often being omitted in final position after a long vowel, e.g., *ḡyn* or ‘y “woman,” and elsewhere alternating with *y*, suggesting its reduction to a nasalized *i*, e.g., *βndk* or *βydk* [**βidik*] “servant.” The sign *šadda* (here, overlining), aside from its normal marking of geminate consonants, as in *ḡaq’* “right,” evidently had another function, possibly of marking a preceding stress, in such words as *byz’r* (Pers. *bīzār*) “free,” *‘xs’d* = *‘xzd* [**uxuzda*] “600.” The letters *w* and *y*, beside representing the semivowels, the long vowels *ū/ō, ī/ē*, and possibly the diphthongs *aw, ay*, were occasionally also written for short **u, i*, e.g., *tym’wm* for Aram. *tym’m, ‘wz’c* [**uzāci*] “he should go out” < **uzyāti*. A special application was in the peculiarity, unique to Chorasmian among Iranian languages, of distinguishing pause spellings of words, generally when they occurred at the ends of sentences. Then a short vowel preceding the last consonant would be written *y* thus *mkd* [**makida*] “he did” became *mkyd, βndk*



became *βndyk*, *kb* [**kaba*] “fish” became *kyb*. The short vowels *a*, *i*, mainly unwritten in final position, were represented by the matres lectionis *’*, *y* when followed by suffixes, e.g., in pause *γwnyc* [**γōnici*] “hair” but *γwncyh* [**γōnici-hi*] “his hair”; *k’nb’wyd’h* [**kāmbāwīda-hi*] “he lessened it,” but *k’nb’wyd’hyc* [*-hi-ca*] “he lessened (it) from him.”

The historical phonology exhibits some Eastern Iranian features. Old Iranian *b*, *d*, *g* became *β*, *’*, *γ* in both initial and postvocalic positions, for example, *β’γk* “garden” < **bāgaka-*, *δyn* “religion” < *dainā-*, *(’)γδ* “wound” < **gadā-*. The *δ* was sometimes replaced by *θ*, however, as

in *θ-* “with” < *hada*, *nyθ-* “to sit, become” < **nihida-*, *mθx* “locust” < *ma’axa-*. Corresponding to Western Iranian *ft*, *xt* the voiced groups *βd*, *γd* occur, e.g., *βd* “seven,” *’γd* “daughter,” but also the voiceless, e.g., *kftk* “split,” *rxtk* “red.” Old Iranian *č* generally became *c*, e.g., *cm* “eye” < *čašman-*, *c-* “from” < *hačā*, probably voiced in *pnc* “five” < *pañča*, whereas *ǰ* and *ž* became *z*, e.g., *zyw-* “to live” < *ǰīwa-*, *wzn-* “to kill” < *awaǰana-*, *yyz* “snake” < *ažī-*. There are many examples of differing developments of certain sounds, suggesting either a mixture of dialects or the adoption of loanwords from several neighboring languages. For example, *θr* appears as *š* in *šy* “three” (as in Sogdian) and in *’wš* “shoe” < **auθrā-*, as *hr* in *hr’s* “thirteen” (as in Parthian), but otherwise as *r* in *’rcy’dk* “third” < **θritiya-yāta-*, *pr* “son” < *puθra-*, etc.; *fr* became *š* in *šm’h-* “to command” < **framāya-*, etc., *r* in *rxyz-* “to arise, occur” < **frahāza-*, etc., *f-* in *(’)fy* “dear” < *friya-*, etc., but was retained in *frwf* “flea” < **fruša-*, *wfrk* “snow” < **wafraka-*, etc. The notably different developments of *š*, however, are rather due to the replacement of a lost *’*, e.g., *xnw-* “to sneeze” < **x(š)nauša-*, but *mwf* “mouse,” *γwx* “ear,” *sp’h* “louse” (Pers. *mūš*, *gūš*, *šepeš-*), etc. Palatalization, even at a distance, had a considerable effect on consonant development. Whereas *-t-* was normally voiced, as in *’dr* “fire,” etc. (or occasionally preserved, as in *k’t* “game”), it was palatalized to *c*, e.g., *cyγ* “blade,” Pers. *tīg*, *cy-* “to enter” < **ati-ya-*, *βcy* “second” < *dwitiya-*; *d* became *z*, instead of unpalatalized *’*, e.g., *zyw* “mad” < *daiwya-*, *zrzy* “heart” < *zrdaya-*; *š* was kept voiceless and sibilant, as *-s-*, in *ṇγws-* “to hear” < *nigaušaya-*, *’ws* “sense, understanding” < *uši-*, etc. An *r* context had a palatalizing effect on sibilants, e.g., in *’nbš-* “to ask” < **ham-prsa-*, *βžk* “long” < **brzaka-*, *’nd* “worthy” < **arǰant-*, and also on *t*, e.g., *čfk* “sour” < **trfšaka-*, and **c* < *ti*, e.g. *čyr* “sharp” < *tigra-*. The development of other consonant groups is far too varied to allow the establishment of general patterns.

Morphology. In the Chorasmian nominal declension two numbers, singular



and plural; two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine; and as many as six cases are distinguished. As the distinctions are mainly marked by final short vowels, however, they make an appearance only in the few voweled texts and otherwise when a suffix is attached to the word. Then the *matres lectionis* betray their presence. Chorasmian (like Digoron Ossetic) has a definite article inherited from the Old Iranian relative pronoun stem *ya-*; it has the forms singular masculine *ÿ* and feminine *y'*, plural *-ÿ* for both genders, which are reduced to *-y* and *-'* when coalescing with prepositions. Masculine nouns and adjectives have the following inflections in the singular: nominative-accusative $-\emptyset$ (no ending), vocative *-a*, possessive *-n*, dative *-(i)*, ablative and locative *-a*. In the feminine declension, with nominative and locative ending in *-a*, the other cases end in *-iya* in the singular or, with words ending in *-ka*, *-ca*. The plural morphemes are *-ina* or *-i*, possessive *-n'n*. In masculine words ending in *-k* it changes to *-ci* in the plural and in feminine words to *-cya*. The dative, as well as a definite direct object, may be marked by the postposition *δr* (< *rādi*, Pers. *rā*). The ablative is used with the prepositions *c-* “from,” *f-* “with,” *pc-* “after,” *pš-* “after” and “near, before,” and *wsn* “for, because of,” and the locative with *f-* “in,” *p-* “for, at” and *pr* “on.” Examples: masc. sing. nom. *ÿ 'wm-h* [**'um-hi*] “its tail,” nom. = acc. *ÿ k'm-h* [**kām-hi*] “his mouth,” voc. *b'b* [*a bāba*] “O father,” poss. *ÿ ywnc ÿ 'wm'n* “the hair of the tail,” dat. *ÿ n'n'mδr* [*nānāmi 'āra*] “for so-and-so,” *ÿ b'bd δr* [**bāb(i)-di 'āra*], abl. *cy k'm'-h* “from his mouth,” loc. *fy k'm'-h* “in his mouth,” fem. sing. nom. *-y'ksnc'yk* “the thick (*ksnk*) beard,” *y'cm'-h* “his eye (*cm*),” *y'rk'-h* “his work (*rk*),” poss. *ÿ spydk y' cmy'-h* “the white of his eye,” dat. *y' cmy'-h δr* “his eye,” *y'rc δr* “for the work,” abl. *c' cmy'-h* “from his eye,” loc. *f bck'-h* “in the palm (*bck*) of his hand”; plur. masc. nom. *ÿ fsydy-mh'wjr'n* “my true (*fsyd*) friends (*h'wjr*),” *zncj'nwrn* “small (*znc*) animals, insects,” abl. *cy ÿ'ln* “from his family-members,” *fy βndcy-h* “with His servants (*βndk*),” loc. *f-ktn'-h* “on his actions (*'kt*);” fem. nom. *ÿ cmn'-h* “his eyes,” *βžcy 'sčn* “long (*βžk*) spears (*'šc*),” poss. **ÿ bfnynk ÿ *βwmn'n* “the Creator of the earths (*βwm*)”, abl. *cy ÿx myncy'-h cw'b* “from her iced (*-mync*) water” (collective plur.). All prepositions are repeated with both parts of a possessive phrase, e.g., *cy b'ys cy llh'n* “from the command of Allah,” *fy pcwγcc fy k'm'n* “in the corners of the mouth.” The personal pronouns *'z*, *n'z* “I,” *'(w)tk* “thou,” *mβy* “we,” *hβy* “you” are also highly inflected, e.g., *tw'r δr* “for thee,” *b-tw'-c* “without thee,” and in enclitic form *-f* “thee,” *-fn-bš* “with thee,” *c-fyk* “from, than thee (in pause),” *-di* “to thee, thy.” The demonstratives *ny(n)*, *n'w*, *nyš* “this,” *n'n*, *n'wr* “that, he, she” share the oblique enclitic forms *-h(y)* “him, her, it,” *-(hy)n(')* “them” only.



The verbal system distinguishes, by means of different stems and personal endings, the following moods and tenses: imperative; present indicative and subjunctive, in both simple and permansive forms; injunctive; imperfect indicative; optative; perfect and pluperfect. Futures and conditionals are formed by means of the suffixes *-k'm* and *-mnc-* with the present and imperfect forms respectively. In the formation of the imperfect from the present stem Chorasmian, like the neighboring Sogdian, has generalized special forms of the old augment. On the analogy of verbs formed with preverbs, like *b-* < *apa-*, *api-*, *β-* < *abi-*, *pc-* < *pati-*, *š-* < *fra-*, nearly all polysyllabic verbs with initial consonant substitute *-ā-* for the vowel of the first syllable, e.g., *bγws* “be silent!” : *b'γwsyd* “he was silent,” *pcmc'* “I should put on” : *p'cmcd* “he put on,” *škšyx* “if you should look” : *š'kšt* “he looked,” but also *k'nb'wyd'-h* “he diminished it,” denominative from *knb* “little.” Verbs with initial vowel, original or prothetic, generally prefix *m-* to this, e.g., *'s-k'm* “you will come” : *m'sd* “he came,” *'kc'* “he makes” : *mkd* “he made.” Compound tenses, formed with the auxiliary *δ'ry-* “have,” are only very sparsely attested, e.g., *γdk* (past participle of *γ-* “go”) *δ'ryd* “she had gone.” A potential is also similarly formed with *'k-* as auxiliary, e.g. *n-yt-kyc* “he would not be able to take” (*yt* participle of *'s-* “take”). Notable among the personal endings are the third person plural forms in *-r* (pres. *-āri*, imperf. *-āra*, opt. *-yr*) and the permansives marked by suffixation to the simple forms, e.g., pres. indic. sing. 1 *-m*, 2 *-∅*, 3 *-c*, plur. 1 *-mn*, 2 *-f*, 3 *-r* : perm. sing. 1 *-myn*, 2 *-y(n)*, 3 *-c'(nw)*, plur. 1 *-mny*, 2 **-fy*, 3 *-ry(n)*.

The most noticeable syntactic feature to be observed in the comparatively simple sentences recorded is that of anticipation. Pronominal objects of verb or preposition are expressed by an enclitic pronoun attached either to a word preceding the verb or to the verb itself, whereby more enclitics than one appear in a fixed order of precedence, e.g., *'m'p'sndyx* “did you approve of me,” *z'f-ms p'cr'zn* “I too (have) accepted thee,” *pr xrk n'w'zyd* “he led them to pasture,” *t'xt hyn'-br mkyd* “he made an attack on them,” *γryd'-hy-n'-br* “he surrounded him with them” (lit. “caused to go round-him-them-on”). When the object is expressed by a noun following the verb, this anticipatory pronominal appearance must be maintained, e.g., *myw'ryd'-hy-n'-br γ' mn* “he rejoiced (-it-them-on) the enemy (plur.) thereby.” Prepositional phrases may also be expressed by anticipatory enclitics, as in *p'ryt'-n'-c γ' cw b c' βwmy* “he extracted (-them-there from) the water (plur.) from the earth,” *mxw'sd'-n'-w fy rzk γ' cw b* “he let (-them-therein) the water into the vineyard.” Other, verbal particles may further complicate the pattern of enclitics, e.g., *-d'* in *hy'd'-hy-n'-d'-br γ'*



sl'm "he recited the greetings before him" (lit. "read-him-them-off-upon").

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