



# DĀĠESTĀN

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## DĀĠESTĀN.

*i. Cultural relations with Persia.*

*ii. Linguistic influences.*

### i. Cultural Relations with Persia

The many-faceted relationship between Dāġestān (ancient [Albania](#)), a region in the eastern Caucasus, and Persia since antiquity has yet to be studied as a whole, though there is considerable historical, linguistic, folkloric, literary, and art-historical evidence bearing on it. Cultural contacts were partly dictated by the military and economic history of the region.

Such northern Iranian peoples as the Scythians, Sarmatians, and [Alans](#) began to appear in the northern Caucasus in the 1st millennium, b.c.e. The Caspian tribes, including those inhabiting the territory of Dāġestān, were located in the eleventh satrapy under the Achaemenid emperor [Darius I](#) (522-486 b.c.e.; Herodotus, 3.92). There may also have been Caspians in the army of Xerxes (486-65 b.c.e.; Herodotus, 7.67; *Istoriya Dagestana* I, p. 103; for a differing view, see [caspians](#)). The Greek historian Arrian (*Anabasis* 3.8.4) noted that in the battle at Gaugamela (near Nineveh) in 331 b.c.e. Albanians fought among the troops of [Darius III](#) (336-31 b.c.e.) against the army of [Alexander](#).



Ties between the Sasanian empire and Dāġestān were particularly close from the late 4th to the 6th century c.e., when the geographic and strategic importance of the eastern Caucasus attracted the attention of the Sasanian emperors. Once they had established themselves in northern Azarbaijan (Arrān) and southern Dāġestān (in the territory of former Soviet Azerbaidzhan), they focused particularly on fortifying the pass at **Darband** (*Istoriya narodov severnogo Kavkaza*, 1988a, pp. 100-01), in order to prevent devastating raids by nomads from the north. The Armenian historian Movsēs Kalankatvac'i reported that Persian kings scoured the land, recruiting architects and searching for materials with which to build the monumental wall of Darband (p. 105). Construction of the grandiose Darband fortification complex is particularly linked with the name of Ƙosrow I Anūšīrwān (531-579). The Pahlavi inscriptions dating from his reign and found in the city wall (**Figure 30**) “establish the northernmost boundary of Sasanian cuneiform writing, being unique written relics not only of the eastern Transcaucasus but also of the entire region; their . . . presence underscores the significance of Darband not only as a military bastion but also as a local center of Sasanian culture, in which Sasanian writing, breaking the boundaries of use for state and official occasions only, begins to be used in private life as well” (Pakhomov, 1929, p. 77).

Ancient Iranian language elements were absorbed into the everyday speech of the population of Dāġestān, and many remain current (see ii, below). In fact, a deliberate policy of “persianizing” Darband and the eastern Caucasus in general can be traced over many centuries, from Ƙosrow I to the Safavid shahs Esmā'īl I (907-30/1501-24) and 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629; see *Āqāsī*). According to the account in the later *Darband-nāma* (see below), after construction of the fortifications Ƙosrow “moved much folk here from Persia” (Saidov and Shikhsaidov, pp. 26-27), relocating about 3,000 families from the interior of Persia in the city and neighboring villages. This account seems to be corroborated by the Spanish Arab Ḥamīd Moḥammad Ġarnāṭī, who reported in 524/1130 that Darband was populated by many ethnic groups, including a large Persian-speaking population (Bol'shakov and Mongaīt, p. 26).

The process was nevertheless inconsistent and irregular, owing to such historical events as the defeat of the Sasanian empire in 28/650, the increasing power of the Muslim caliphate, and the “Arab-Khazar” wars of the 7th-8th centuries. Persian interest in the eastern Caucasus arose mainly from its strategic position between Persia and Russia and reflected the shifting



relations between the two countries. In fact, throughout its history Dāġestān has remained a “province,” subject to more powerful neighbors.

#### Persian literary influence in Dāġestān

In literature connections between Persia and Dāġestān continued to develop through the entire medieval period. In addition to a considerable body of “imported” literature, local authors wrote original works in Persian, translated Persian literary classics, and composed works in Dāġestānī languages that in both content and form reflected the influence of Persian poetry in particular. Acquaintance with Persian literary traditions reached Dāġestān through direct contacts and also mediated through Arabic literature (especially Šo‘ūbī writings of the 8th-9th centuries). In the 12th century Ġarnāṭī recounted an episode in which the amir of Darband, Abu’l-Qāsem, “read, under my guidance, the “Satisfying book” by Maġāmelī on *feqh* (Islamic law); he spoke, may Allāh have mercy on him, in a variety of languages, like Lakzanī [Lezgī], Tabalanī, Filanī, Zakalanī, Haidak, Gumik, Sarir, Alanian, Assi, Zariġarānī [Kubaĉī], Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. People from these ethnic groups were present at my readings, and he explained [the contents of the book] to each group in its own language” (Bol’shakov and Mongaīt, p. 26). A 14th-century manuscript of the Qur’ān with an interlinear translation in Persian (ms. F. 14 no. 1970) is preserved in the collection of the Institute of history, languages, and literature (H.L.L. Institute) of the Gamzat (Ĥamza) Tsadasa center of Dāġestān studies, a branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Manuscripts of the great works of Arabic and Persian poetry were particularly appreciated and collected in Dāġestān. The poems of Ferdowsī, ‘Omar Ķayyām, Sa’dī, Neẓāmī, Ĥāfeẓ, ‘Abd-al-Raġmān Ķāmī, ‘Alī-Šīr Navā’ī, Foẓūlī, and others were widely read. Neẓāmī’s *Leylī o Majnūn*, *Ķosrow o Šīrīn*, and *Eskandar-nāma* were available in many parts of the province, and copies were made for local connoisseurs. The well-known Lezgian poet Mīrzā ‘Alī Aġtī (1184-1276/1770-1859) owned a manuscript in Persian (now in the collection of G. M. Sadyky, Makhachkala) containing the *dīvāns* of Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmī and Ĥāfeẓ, which he had copied personally and commented on in Turkish. A basic Arabic grammatical commentary, *Fawā’ed al-ẓiyā’iya* by the Persian poet Ķāmī (d. 898/1492), and the *Esām* (Ĥosām), a supercommentary on this work by Esām-al-Dīn Esfarāyenī, were especially popular in clerical and scholarly circles, largely because of the examples of Persian poetry included in them.

The epigraphic heritage of Dāġestān reveals the extent to which the Persian



language had penetrated the area. The overwhelming majority of 12th- and 13th-century inscriptions are in Arabic, but beginning in the 14th century there were also a number in Persian, and the use of Persian for such purposes appears to have increased in the 15th-17th centuries, particularly in southern Dāġestān around Darband. The earliest such inscription is dated 700/1301 and records the endowment (*waqf*) of a spring at Darband. Other 14th-century Persian inscriptions include a verse of good wishes from the village of Kubachi and a building inscription commemorating the restoration of a mosque at Darband. A distinct characteristic of Persian-language inscriptions in Dāġestān is their “official” tone: They refer mainly to members of the feudal ruling class and the accomplishments of local and Persian rulers (see Shikhsaidov, p. 384). One important exception is a group of memorial inscriptions. For example, on tombs at Darband shaped like storage chests the inscriptions include didactic couplets or quatrains by Sa’dī or ‘Omar Kayyām (see Lavrov; cf. Shikhsaidov, p. 384; Neġmatova, pp. 57-59). Versified aphorisms in Persian also appear on tombs in mountainous Khnov in the Samur river basin (Figure 31) and Kumukh in the Lak region of Dāġestān. Surviving inscriptions in the city of Ikhrek, also near the Samur river (no later than the 14th century) and in Darband (842/1438-39) reveal traces of the legend of Alexander the Great, who was popularly supposed to have built the Naryn-qaġ’a fortress. An epitaph of 867/1462 in Darband contains references to the heroes Gēv, Rostam, and Gōdarz, all from the *Šāh-nāma* (*Istoriya narodov severnogo Kavkaza*, 1988b, p. 253).

The population of the Caucasus, including Dāġestān, includes the Jewish Tats, speakers of Tatī, “one of the new Iranian languages; it is highly probable that they are united not only linguistically but through a common culture and historical destiny to the Iranians, the Tats, and the Tāleš” (Marr, p. 29; see ii, below). Among the Tats of Dāġestān two tales of Rustam-Zaleh and of Bezhon and Menezhon were written down in the 1930s. The second is very similar to the version of *Bīžan o Manīža* in the *Šāh-nāma* (*Tatskii fol’klor*, pp. 110-32) and may have been influenced by it. It is more likely, however, that the Tat tale is one of the oldest surviving versions of the Iranian legend that became the basis for Ferdowsī’s poem (Avshalumova, 1987, pp. 137-45).

*In the Safavid and Afsharid periods.* The rise of the Safavid empire and the intensifying conflict between Persia and Ottoman Turkey resulted in continual political shifts in Dāġestān, which were reflected in the cultural sphere. The status of Arabic as the language of religion ensured its dominance in the



spiritual, scholarly, and business life of Dāġestānī society. Nevertheless, the penetration of Turkish and Persian languages increased, and the appearance of works in these languages and in Dāġestānī brought an end to the monopoly of Arabic in cultural life. There was even a division along geographical lines: Literature produced in Darband was largely in Persian and Azerī Turkish, that in other parts of Dāġestān in Arabic and indigenous languages, though some Persian works were also produced there.

The original version of Moġammad Avābī's *Darband-nāma* (early 17th century) was "an abridged translation of another *Darband-nāma* written in Persian . . . . The author was ordered to recount in pure Turkish the records of selected Arabic and Persian historical works, and the work itself was translated from Arabic and Persian into Turkish" (Bartol'd, 1973, p. 475). There are several known manuscripts of this work in Persian, including a translation from Turkish made in 1825-26 by 'Alī-Yār b. Qāsem, now in the Oriental Institute (formerly the Asiatic Museum; Miklukho-Maklaġ, pp. 396-99) of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg; in the preface to his edition of the text Mġrā A. Kāzem-bek provided a detailed analysis of these manuscripts. Examination of the form and content of the *Darband-nāma* reveals that the author was well versed not only in the history of the city but also in the traditional canons of Persian historical narrative.

As early as the 16th century Persian rulers were conducting official correspondence with the rulers of Dāġestān in Persian. A decree issued by Shah Ṭahmāsb (930-84/1524-76) in 966/1559 released several *maġalls* (districts) in Dāġestān from paying certain taxes. There is also extant an order from Nāder Shah (1148-60/1736-47) instructing the governor of Darband to provide full stipends for the sons of several distinguished families so that they might study writing and the Persian style of business accounting. A collection of letters to Ommo Khan of Avar (1188-1216/1774-1801), written in Persian (H.L.L. Institute, F. 1, Op. 1, D. 501), contains 162 items reflecting the epistolary style of the Safavid period (see [correspondence ii](#)). Unfortunately, the author of these letters has not yet been identified.

A remarkable collection of orders from Persian shahs to rulers (known as *ūsmīs*) of Qaydāq is in the Bibliothēque Nationale, Paris. According to the orientalist J. T. Reinaud, A. P. Berger, a prominent Caucasian scholar and chairman of the Caucasian archival commission, turned over the copies of these orders, more than fifty of them, to the Bibliothēque Impēriale in 1864 (*Moniteur universel* 245, 1 September 1864; microfilm copies at H.L.L.



Institute). They span the period from 1016/1607 to 1216/1801, but most are from the reigns of the Safavid shah Solţān-Ĥosayn (1105-35/1694-1722) and Nāder Shah. They contain a great deal of information on the political and socioeconomic history of Dāġestān (Kozlova, 1987). Another valuable source is a chronograph of events in southern Dāġestān, originally compiled in Shiraz (*Istoriya narodov severnogo Kavkaza*, 1988b, p. 494).

Original poetic works written by local authors in Persian can be found in many libraries and collections in Dāġestān. Among them are lyric verses by the Darghīn poets Ebn Yūsuf (16th century) and Dāmādān of Mug (17th century), the later Lezgian poet Mīrzā ‘Alī Aġtī and other recognized founders of the national literary tradition.

The increased prestige of the Persian language and Persian culture in the intellectual life of the entire Near East in the 17th century also had an impact on the social attitudes of the eastern Caucasian peoples, particularly noticeable in folk poetry and literature. For example, *devs* (see \*[daiva](#)) are common characters in the archaic folklore of the peoples of Dāġestān, a complex synthesis in which the dominant influence was Iranian. In the oral poetry of the Avars, Darghins, Turkish Qumuqs, Laks, Lezgians, and others the *devs* usually appear as anthropomorphic one-eyed giant brothers, most often with a mother and one sister; they live in a cave, invincible fortress, or palace and engage in hunting. Sometimes beneficent white *devs* also appear in Dāġestānī folklore. Equally common is the dragon *aġdaġa*, which is, particularly among Turkish-speaking peoples, most closely related to the dragon from the Avesta (cf. Av. Aġi- Dahāka-; see [AġDAHĀ](#)). In the most common version a dragon with three, seven, or nine heads lives in a subterranean realm, guarding a spring and demanding maidens in payment for use of the water. The hero slays the dragon and also saves the young of a magical bird (*sīmorġ*, Turk. *karakuġ*), who then helps him to find his way out of the subterranean realm. The Nart epic, containing elements traceable to Ibero-Caucasian-, Turkish-, and Iranian-speaking tribes, was the common heritage of the varied peoples of the northern Caucasus. Although it is no longer current in Dāġestān, studies of the folklore of Qumuqs, Avars, Laks, and Darghins attest that tales from it were formerly common there. Similarities in features of the Dāġestānī and Ossetic versions apparently reflect the presence of Scythians and Alans in the northern Caucasus and direct contacts between the peoples of Dāġestān with Ossetians.

The invasion of Dāġestān by Nāder Shah with 150,000 troops in



1154-56/1741-43, which ended in a defeat in the mountains, inspired a vast body of legends, fairy tales, and songs. The Avar epic *Srazhenie s Nadir Shakhom* (The battle with Nāder Shah) and the Lak *Pesnya o geroe Murtazaali* (Epic of the hero Mortazā 'Alī) provide a vivid and accurate picture of the triumph over “the scourge of the universe.” These works represent the pinnacle of the Dāġestānī epic genre; their significance to the mountain peoples “can be compared to that of *Slovo o polku Igoreve* [The lay of the army of Igor] in Russian epic poetry” (Kapieva, p. 19).

The terms *bāzār* (market), *tār* (a stringed instrument), *čerāġ* (lamp), *dabīr* (secretary), *bārū* (fortification), *dārū* (medicine), *korjīn* (carrying bag), *zorāb* (stockings), *gorz* (mace), *zahruman* < *zahr-e mār* (snake venom), and many others were borrowed from Persian. The Persian titles *šāh* and *pādešāh* figure prominently in Dāġestānī fairy tales, in certain rituals, and even in everyday usage; for example, among the southern Kumyks the toastmaster at a wedding was called a “shah,” and the Kubachi enjoyed a theatrical “shah show.”

*In the Qajar period.* In the late 18th and 19th centuries a number of authors in Darband were writing in both Turkish and Persian. They left a large body of valuable works, mostly dealing with the history of Darband. Primary among them is the chronicle *Tārīk al-Bāb*, devoted to the history of the city in the 9th-11th centuries. Moġammad-Ĥaydar b. Hāġī Mīrzā Āqāsī (b. 1190/1776), in his *Darband-nāma-ye jadīd* (early 19th century), reported that he had drawn on books written in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic and had selected what he believed to be reliable (Akhundov, p. 246; *Sovremenniki*, p. 61). In addition to reports on the construction of the Naryn-qaġ'a fortress and the inhabitants of his native city, the book contains invaluable information on religious life; by the 1700s Jews, Christians, and both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims coexisted peacefully in Darband, each with its own sanctuaries.

Each of the main religious buildings in Darband contained a library of manuscripts on theological, philosophical, and ethical subjects; that in the congregational mosque was extraordinarily, rich for its time and still continues to grow through donations. Most of these books, both manuscripts and lithographed editions, are in Persian; the subjects include Shi'ite dogma, logic, lives of Sufi saints, and Shi'ite polemics. Many copies of the Qur'ān include interlinear Persian translations (for other 19th-century Persian manuscripts from Dāġestān, see Shcheglova, esp. nos. 967, 181).

Particularly vivid evidence of the importance of the Persian language in



Dāġestān is provided by a unique Persian-Arabic-Turkish dictionary, *Jāme' al-loġatayn*, compiled in the late 18th century by Moġammad Šafī', known as Dabīrqādī Avārī, of Khunzak (b. 1176/1762) at the suggestion of the Avar ruler Ommo Khan (H.L.L. Institute, ms. F. 14 no. 535; [Figure 32](#)). To prepare the dictionary, Dabīrqādī traveled to Persia and other countries to master the lexical wealth of the three languages. Mīrzā Jamāl Javānšīr (1187-1269/1773--1853), secretary to Ebrāhīm Khan (1169-1221/1756-1806) of Karabagh (Qarābāġ), spent six years in Khunzak after his master's death, studying Arabic with Dabīrqādī; he also mastered the Lezgin and Avar languages. In return he tutored his teacher in Persian, giving him a taste for its vocabulary and style, which helped him in compiling his dictionary. Dabīrqādī noted, "As a result, I achieved, with the help of the Almighty, a level sufficient for understanding and conversing in these two languages [Persian and Turkish] to a degree that the guests of Ommo Khan need no other translator and interpreter but myself in order to translate Persian missives and explain Turkish missives . . . ." (Saidov, pp. 37-40). Dabīrqādī also wrote a manual on Persian conversation and a popular Persian-language textbook. His translations included a rendering of *Kalīla wa Demna* (the "Pañcatantra" version, probably after a Persian translation), which thus became accessible to the Avars for the first time. The plots and motifs of this work were incorporated into fables and tales by many later Dāġestānī poets, particularly the satirist Gamzat Tsadasa (1294-1370/1877-1951). It was also Dabīrqādī who developed the 'ajam system of writing, based on Arabic letters but adapted to the phonetics of Dāġestānī languages; it consists of thirty-eight letter symbols.

Evidence of the growing interest of Dāġestānī scholars in Persian literature can be found in the original manuscript of a collection entitled "Dagestantsy kotorye zanimalis' persidskim yazykom i sozdavali trudy na svoeġ rodine" (Dāġestānīs who have studied the Persian language and created works in their homeland; H.L.L. Institute, M. S. Saidov collection, ms. no. 53). It contains Persian-language texts by such major Dāġestānī writers as Ša'bān 'Obūdī (d. 1078/1667), Mīrzā 'Alī Aġtī (d. 1275/1859), and Ḥasan Qadarī (d. 1328/1910).

A powerful factor in national literary culture was translation. The *Darband-nāma*, for example, was translated, complete or in abridged form, into Turkish, Arabic, Russian, English, and a number of Dāġestānī languages, including even Sirkin (Sirġin) and Kubaċī (now dialects of Dargva). In the early 19th century stories from the *Qābūs-nāma*, excerpts from *Leylī o Majnūn*, and other Persian works were translated into various Dāġestānī languages.



Several lyrical poems by Sa'dī were translated into Lak and Avar by 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Jamāl-al-Dīn Qāzī-qūmūq in the 19th century and into Lak by Yūsof Murkeli (1270-1336/1854-1918). The manuscript collection of Dāḡestān state university includes an original letter from Bugdan of Kumukh, written in the early 19th century to a connoisseur of the Persian language and requesting a copy of 'Omar Ḳayyām's poems. Of particular interest to literary scholars is *Antologiya persidskoī literatury (XVI-XVII vv.)* (Anthology of Persian literature [16th-17th centuries]) with an interlinear Avar translation (in the collection of M. Nurmagomedov, Makhachkala). The well-known Arabic medical treatise *Toḡfat al-mo'menīn* by Moḡammad Deylamī became available to Kumykh readers through a translation from the Persian made by the Avar Nurmagomed of Khunzak; the work was also translated into Lak (H.L.L. Institute, ms. F. 14 no. 189).

#### Art and architecture

The influence of contact with Persians can also be observed in the broad sphere of Dāḡestānī material culture and applied arts. As Dāḡestān lies on one of the communications routes between Europe and Asia, scholars have suggested that a tradition of active artistic exchange between Persia and Dāḡestān was initiated in the Sasanian period, thus accounting for the similarity of some regional artifacts to objects from Middle Eastern countries. The extent of Persian influence in the history of the traditional arts of Dāḡestān has been considered by many prominent scholars (e.g., Bashkirov; Orbeli; idem and Trever; Debirov). It is particularly clear in ornament reflecting the themes and motifs of Sasanian art, for example, the pearly band, the lotus with half-palmettes, and the palmette. Many scholars consider carved-stone Sasanian seals (see [glyptic](#)) as particularly revealing of the history of religion and art in Persia and countries linked to it, including Dāḡestān, in the 6th and 7th centuries (M. S. Gadzhiev, p. 139).

I. A. Orbeli and K. V. Trever, and later P. M. Debirov and D. M. Atayev, demonstrated the participation of the peoples of Dāḡestān in the development of the "Sasanian" style and analyzed the survival of Persian artistic traditions in medieval Dāḡestān. Many medieval manuscripts in Persian, usually copies of the Qur'ān or works related to theology, were abundantly decorated with colorful floral ornament. The monuments of Kara-Kureh in the Aḡtī district (9th and 10th centuries; [Figure 33](#)) and Kala-Koreish in the Dakhadaevskii district (11th and 12th centuries) are decorated with carvings of a type that continued to characterize Dāḡestānī art until the 18th century; along with



floral ornament, various animals and birds like the snow leopard, the peacock, the eagle, and the serin are depicted (Figure 34). Floral and animals motifs borrowed from Persian traditions underwent reinterpretation in Dāġestān, however, as original and autonomous styles gradually evolved. Geometric stylizations became common, particularly in weaving (see [carpets xv](#)) and [epigraphy](#). In addition, Persian ornamental painting was common on household objects and everyday utensils in Dāġestān for centuries. A vivid example is the so-called “Kubachi collections”, individual “home museums,” a unique phenomenon in the history of folk art. Dāġestān craftsman, particularly in Kubachi and Kazikumukh, repeatedly participated, as early as the second half of the 19th century, in international exhibitions in Tehran and Tabrīz; many won prizes.

### Music

Persian influence was equally important in the musical culture of Dāġestān, especially among the Tats, direct “carriers” of Persian culture. The links are clearest in conservative household ritual music. The funeral chants of Dāġestānī Tats are closely related in intonation and structure to Shi‘ite funeral chants. More often, however, Persian musical influences reached Dāġestān through intermediaries, especially among the ethnic groups of southern Dāġestān, the Lezgians, Tabasaranians, Rutuls, Agulus, and Tsakhur, who received them from Azarbaijan. This connection is particularly noticeable in the most ancient stratum of folk music: rituals of nature worship, chants for circle dances, and spells directed at natural elements and cataclysms. For example, the traditional “flower celebration” remains popular among the Lezgians to this day, as do the magic rituals connected with pagan worship of the moon and sun. The importance of this material can be linked with pre-Islamic Persian beliefs, including cults of fire, light, darkness, and other natural forces. Common cultural traits are also reflected in the stringed instruments: the *tār*, the *sāz*, and the *kamāñča*.

In the author’s opinion, the culture of the Dāġestānīs in former Soviet Azerbaidzhan, a culture distinct from that of predominantly Sunni Dāġestān itself but having much in common with that of Persia, the ritual and ceremonial traditions of folk music have been particularly shaped by Shi‘ite beliefs.



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(Gadzhi Gamzatovich Gamzatov)

## ii. Linguistic Influences

The linguistic map of Dāğestān is one of the most varied in the world. Apart from the Dāğestānī languages proper (i.e., the Northeast Caucasian languages), both Turkic (Kumyk in the north, Azerī in the south) and Iranian (Tatī in the east) languages are spoken. In addition, since the early 19th century Russian has become important as the language of administration and education, as well as the lingua franca for communication among ethnic groups.

The Northeast Caucasian languages fall into three groups: the Avar-Andi-Dido group in the northwest; the Lak-Dargva group in the central zone; and the Lezgian (Samurian) group in the south and southeast. Lezgian languages are also spoken in scattered settlements in former Soviet Azerbaidzhan. In all there are about twenty-six languages in these three groups. Although they are all clearly related, the precise nature of the genetic relationship is still a matter of debate. In addition, a remote link between the Dāğestānī and Nakh (North Central Caucasian) languages is likely. On the other hand, there is no evidence for assuming a genetic affiliation with the other languages of the Caucasus (South Caucasian [Kartvelian], Northwest Caucasian), and suggested associations with languages outside the Caucasus reflect pure guesswork.

Five of the Dāğestānī languages have the status of literary languages: Avarian from the first group, Lak and Dargva from the second, and Lezgian and Tabasaran from the third. There is some evidence that Udi, also from the third group and now spoken mainly in Azerbaidzhan and in one small settlement in eastern Georgia, represents the last offshoot of ancient Albanian. Albanian was spoken over a much wider area in southeastern Transcaucasia and was the language of some Christian literature from the 5th-8th centuries (for bibliography, see Schulze). Arabic, which was introduced after the Islamic conquest, was for a long time the official language in the many petty states of the area. Arabic script was also used for recording texts in various languages (Avarian, Dargva, Lak, Lezgian). In the 19th century alphabets were created



for several languages on the basis of the Russian script. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the Arabic script was used for some languages, but later the Latin alphabet was adopted; since 1938 the Cyrillic alphabet has been used, with numerous modifications.

Iranian languages, particularly from the south, have exerted a considerable influence on the languages of Transcaucasia since prehistoric times. It can therefore be assumed that linguistic contacts between Dāġestān and the Iranian peoples extended back into remote antiquity. Specialized studies of whatever mutual borrowings and structural influences may have occurred are lacking. Furthermore, investigations of the chronology of the Iranian loanwords in the Dāġestānī languages and their immediate dialectal sources are still to be carried out.

The majority of Iranian loanwords are Persian names for agricultural tools, plants, animals (especially those of the southern regions), and articles of clothing, as well as words relating to social and religious phenomena, folklore, and the like. Examples include Avarian *nukar*, Dargva and Lezgian *nuker* “servant, bodyguard” (Mong.-Pers. *nowkardušman* “enemy” (Pers. *došmanžan*, Lezgian *čan* “soul” (Pers. *jānpal*, Lezgian *fal* “prophecy” (Pers. *fālrang* “color” (Pers. *rangčiraq*, Dargva and Lezgian *čiraġ* “lamp” (Pers. *čerāġpardav*, Lezgian *perde* “curtain” (Pers. *pardagamuš*, Dargva *gamut*, Lezgian *gamiš* “buffalo” (Pers. *gā(v)mēštut* “mulberry” (Pers. *tūd*, *tūtinar*, Lezgian *(a)nar* “pomegranate” (Pers. *anārkamal* “belt” (Pers. *kamartavxana* “(living) room” (Pers. *tāvkānaazdaġo*, Dargva *aždaġa*, Lezgian *aždaġan* “dragon” (Pers. *aždahā*). To a large extent Persian loanwords in those languages were transmitted through Azerī Turkish, which was formerly a common language of communication among different ethnic groups over wide areas in the northern and eastern Caucasus. Most of these loanwords belong to their common lexical stock, so that the sources may be difficult to determine in each separate instance.

Direct language contacts between the ancient Iranian-speaking peoples of the northern Caucasus and southern Russia (the Scythians, Sarmatians, and Alans) and the peoples of northern Dāġestān cannot be excluded but are difficult to prove. So far as currently available evidence permits conclusions, lexical borrowings in either direction were usually mediated through the Nakh languages (Chechen, Ingush) or Turkic (formerly Kumyk, as well as Avarian, a language of communication among ethnic groups in northern Dāġestān). Turkic lexical items may also have been transmitted to the Dāġestānī languages through Nakh and Ossetic.



As evidence for early language contact between the Alans, or the later Ossetians, and the Dāğestānīs there is Ossetic *lāg* “man(ly),” which is certainly related to Nakh (Chechen, Ingush) *laj* (Bats *lag*, proto-Nakh \**lag*) “slave,” Avarian *lag* “idem”; from Avarian the word passed into various other Dāğestānī languages (Casanova et al., p. 133). The name Lak also belongs to this complex, as does Old Georgian Lek’i (pl. Lek’ni), designating the inhabitants of Dāğestān (now only the Lezgians). It seems natural to connect this word with the Greek Lēgai, Lēges, the name for the inhabitants of the northeastern Caucasus (Strabo, 11.5; Plutarch, *Pompeius* 36). The word has no convincing Iranian etymology and must be ascribed to the Caucasian substratum of Ossetic (Abaev, II, pp. 19-21). It appears that Ossetic *lāg* occurred as a proper name in the 11th- or 12th-century Alanic Zelenchuk inscription, written in Greek letters *lak* (Zgusta), which would provide a terminus ante quem for the Ossetic adaptation of the word.

Words relating to animal husbandry seem to connect Ossetic with languages of Dāğestān. For example, *fos* (Oss. I.), *fons* (Oss. D.) “cattle, property” must be related to Avarian *panz* “horned cattle” and Dido *poso* “cattle, wealth.” Chechen *hons* and Ingush *fos* “booty” have been borrowed from Ossetic. The Digor form (with *n*) suggests that the word is unlikely to have been derived from an Iranian \**pasu-* “livestock” (Oss. *fīʕs*, *fus* “sheep”). Ossetic *gal* “bull” has been connected with Dargva *q’äl*, Lezgian *kal*, and Udi *käl* “cow” and may ultimately be connected with Persian *kal* “buffalo, a male animal,” Kurdish *kel* “calf, buffalo, ox,” Tāleš *käl* “ox,” *kälə* “steer.” The word seems not to occur in Nakh. The initial *g-* of the Ossetic word shows that it is not an Old Iranian inheritance (Abaev, I, p. 506; Khaïdakov, pp. 21ff.),

It should be stressed that lexical interference from the Iranian languages, mostly those of the south, appears to have been generally limited to technical vocabulary; that is, the words have been borrowed with their referents. Quite a number of these loanwords belong to the vocabulary common to Persian and Arabic; in most instances, however, they have been adopted from Persian into the local languages of Dāğestān.

For further discussion and bibliography, see [CAUCASUS ii](#).

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(Fridrik Thordarson)

**Figure 30.** Pahlavi building inscriptions, Darband, 6th century. After Pakhomov, nos. 1-3.

**Figure 31.** Detail of a tombstone inscription, with Persian verses, Khnov, 14th century. After Shikhsaidov, 1984, p. 210 no. 91a.



**Figure 32.** Page from a manuscript of *Jāme' al-loḡatayn* by Dabīrqādī of Khunzak, early 19th century. Gamzat Tsadasa Institute of History, Languages, and Literature, Dāḡestān Scientific Center, Makhachkala, ms. F. 14 no. 535.

**Figure 33.** Drawing, ornamental stucco panel from the base of one of the supports in the mosque of Kara-Kureh, 10th century. After Shikhsaidov, 1984, p. 103 no. 37b.

**Figure 34.** Drawing, wooden doors from the mosque of Kala-Koreish, 12th-13th century. After *Khudozhestvennaya kul'tura srednevekovogo Dagestana*.