



EŠKĀŠ(E)MĪ

EŠKĀŠ(E)MĪ (Ishkashmi), one of the so-called “Pamir group” of the Eastern Iranian languages (q.v.). It is spoken in a few villages of the region of Eškāšem straddling the upper reaches of the Panj, where the river makes a ninety-degree turn from west to north (the “Oxus bend”). On the right bank Eškāšmī is spoken by about one thousand people, mainly in the village Ryn (Ran in Wākī) in the former Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast of Tajikistan. There are also some Eškāsmī-speaking families in the neighboring villages of Nūd (Nad), Sumĵin, Mulvoj, and Namatgut. On the left bank, in the northeastern Afghan province of Badaḡšān (q.v.), there may be more than a thousand Eškāšmī speakers, but their exact distribution is not known. According to older sources (e.g., Grierson), two closely related Eškāšmī dialects were spoken in the valleys of Zēbāk and Sanglēč, near the sources of the Varduĵ, a tributary of the Kokča, which in turn flows into the Panj. Today the local Tajik dialect and Wākī (Wakhi) predominate there.

Eškāšmī speakers designate their language as *škošmī zəvuk* or *rənīzəvuk*. Like other Pamir languages it was not written until recently. For centuries the sole literary language in the region has been Persian, in which works by Isma‘ilis, the predominant religious group there, and some folk tales have been written. In the early 1990s attempts were made to introduce a script for Eškāšmī based on the same Cyrillic alphabet adopted for Tajik.

The earliest information about Eškāšmī appeared in the last quarter of the 19th century, in the works of R. B. Shaw, Wilhelm Tomaschek, and G. A. Grierson. A more detailed description, based mostly on Sanglēčī materials, was



first published by Georg Morgenstierne in 1938 (2nd ed., 1973). A complete modern synchronic description by T. N. Pakhalina appeared in 1959; later she published a reconstruction of the historical development of Eškāšmī (1987).

Phonetics. The Eškāšmī phonetic system was established by I. I. Zarubin, whose conclusions were confirmed by the research of V. S. Sokolova (see also Payne, pp. 423-28). There are seven vowel phonemes: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *u*, and *ə*. They can be divided into three groups: *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *u* (generally long and stable, *u* being intermediate between *u* and *o*); *a* (varying between [a] and [ɑ]); and *ə*, a short vowel, which in some instances is in phonemic opposition to all other vowels. There are thirty-one consonant phonemes: labial *p*, *b*, *w*, *m*, *f*, *v*; dental *t*, *d*, *c* [ts], *j* [dz], *č*, *ǰ*, *s*, *z*, *š*, *ž*, *n*, *l*, *r*; palatal *y*; velar *k*, *g*; uvular *q*, *x*, *ɣ*; retroflex *ʈ*, *ɖ*, *ʂ*, *ʐ*, *č*, *ǰ*. One difference from other Pamir languages is the absence of velar fricative phonemes. A retroflex series is also found in Wākī.

As in the other Eastern Iranian languages, the Old Iranian voiced stops became fricatives, except for **d*, which remained (e.g., *vun-* “to be,” *vond-* “to bind,” *vur* “burden,” *ɣul* “ear,” *ɣundəm* “wheat,” *ɣu* “cow,” *ɣenuk* “hair” but *də(w)* “two,” *did* “smoke,” *dir* “far,” *dond* “tooth”); the Old Iranian clusters **ft* and **xt* are voiced (e.g., *uvd* “seven,” *wuduɣ(d)* “daughter”); and **č* became *c* [ts] (e.g., *cafur* “four,” *com* “eye,” *pac-* “to cook”). Eškāšmī shares with Pashto the change of Old Iranian **št* into *t* (or *t̂*), as in *ot* “eight,” *mət* (< **mušti-*) “fist,” *wat-* (< **vašta-*) “to fall,” *pət* (< **pišta-*) “parched grain ground into meal.”

According to Morgenstierne (p. 305), Old Iranian **θ* resulted in Eškāšmī *s* but in Sanglēcī *t* (e.g., Eškāšmī *saw-*: *səd-*, Sanglēcī *təv-*: *təd-*, Wākī *θaw-*: *θət-* “to burn”). The loss of **θ* and the absence of such specifically Eastern Iranian phonemes as the voiced velar fricative *ɣ* and the dental fricative *ð* are probably the result of the influence of Persian and Indo-Aryan on Eškāšmī throughout its history. The use of *h* is optional in Eškāšmī; it appears mainly in the speech of people fully acquainted with literary Tajik. The stress generally falls on the final syllable of a polysyllabic word, but there are several exceptions. Some words are accented on the first syllable, for example, *rémuzd* “sun,” *ári* “work,” *úškəz* “key,” *úž’dən* “millet,” *úrvəs* “barley.” Some disyllabic and trisyllabic verbs permit free placement of stress, in accordance with the rhythm of the phrase.

Morphology. There is no grammatical gender in Eškāšmī. The plural is formed with the suffix *-ó*, as in *olax-ó* “mountains,” *ɣu-ó* “cows,” *sung-ó* “stones,” *vru-ó* “brothers,” *vruk-ó* “horses.” The suffix *-(y)i* functions as an indefinite article.



Among the derivational suffixes some are of Persian origin, for example, *-don*, *-dor*, *-bon*. Adjectives are invariable and show no distinction in number. Comparatives and superlatives are mainly expressed syntactically or by means of adverbial modifiers. Case relations are expressed by means of prepositions, postpositions, and suffixes.

Personal pronouns include only *az(i)* “I,” *məx(o)* “we,” *tə* “thou,” and *təməx* “you.” As in other Pamir languages, demonstrative pronouns have triple deixis: near, middle, and far or “this (near me),” “that (near you),” and “that (near him/them).” Demonstratives are used for third-person pronouns.

Also as in other Pamir languages, verbal forms are based on present, past, and perfect stems. In present tenses ordinary personal endings are used; in past and perfect tenses the endings are movable and can be attached to different words in the phrase, not necessarily the verbal stem, for example, *yaž-əm* “I say,” *yažd-əm* “I said,” *yažduk-əm* “I have said”; *azi xi non-bo-m yažd* “I said to my mother.”

The only original Eškāšmī numerals are one through nine: *uk(ug)*, *də(w)*, *ru(y)*, *cafur*, *punz*, *xul/lá*, *uvd*, *ot*, *naw/nu*. Ten, *da*, is borrowed from or at least contaminated by the Persian form, and Persian forms are used for higher numbers.

Among Eškāšmī words of special historical interest are *rémuzd* (Â< Ahura Mazdā-) “sun” (cf. Sanglê±^ *ormózd*, Khot. *urmaysdā*– but Munjī *míro* < **miθra* “sun”) and *štənak*, *štənu* “newborn kid” (cf. Av. *scaini*–).

See also [AFGHANISTAN v](#).

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