



IRAN VI. IRANIAN LANGUAGES AND SCRIPTS (6) OLD IRANIAN LANGUAGES

IRAN vi, continued

(6) Old Iranian Languages

Proto-Iranian split into at least four distinct dialect groups, characterized, among other things, by the typical developments of the palatal affricates *č, *ǰ and the groups *čw, *ǰw.

In Old Northwest Iranian, represented by the Alanic dialects and modern Ossetic, at some stage (and in some dialects?), initial *p > f and internal *ry > l). The development of *č, etc. was as in Central Iranian.

Old Northeast Iranian is represented by Khotanese and Wāḳi, in which čw and *ǰw were assimilated to *ś and *ž, e.g., OIr. *acwa- “horse” > Khot. aśśa-, Wāḳi yīš (Av. aspa-, etc.); OIr. *ǰwā- “tongue” > Khot. biśāa- (i.e., βi-žāa- < *ǰwāka-, OPers. ha-zān-, Pers. zabān, etc.).

Old Central Iranian is represented by most of the remaining dialects, including Avestan and Median, in which *č and *ǰ merged with OIr. *s and *z, respectively, but *čw and *ǰw became sp and zb.



Old Southwest (Perside) Iranian is represented in historical times by the dialects of Pārs/Fārs, including Old Persian, in which *ć and *j merged with OIr. *θ and *d, but *ćw and *jw with *s and *z.

The last two groups are represented by Old Persian and the “Median” forms in Old Persian, e.g., OIr. *aćan- “stone” > Med./OPers. *asan-* (+ *dāruv* “tree” = “ivory”) versus OPers. *aθaⁿ-ga* “stone”; OIr. *waj- “*invigorating” > Med./OPers. *vaz-arka-* “great” (cf. *gohort* in southeastern dialects); Med./OPers. *aspa-* “horse” and OPers. *asa-*; OIr. *jwaya- “call upon” > Med./OPers. *-zbaya-* (cf. OInd. *hvaya-*).

In a local area of Southern Persia, *ćw, apparently, became *θ, which survived variously as *s* or *t*, notably in *ćwiśa- “louse” > Lārestāni *heš*, *tiš* in some Fārs dialects (where *θ- also remained or became *t-*, see below), and *siś > *šiš*, *šoš*, etc., in other Perside dialects, but > *spiś > *špiš* in non-Perside dialects (see Morgenstierne, 1958, pp. 174-75; Skjærvø, 1994).

Among morphological isoglosses is the use of the suffix *tā- as plural marker found in Scythian-Alanic (modern Ossetic) and in Sogdian. Originally a suffix expressing a collection of things or the thing in general, as we can infer from the use of its corresponding form *-tāt-* in Avestan (e.g., *kəuuitāt-* “*kauui*-dom, the fact of being called *kauui*, the fact of belonging to the group of *kauuis*), it was used to make ethnic names. Among them are the tribal names *Massagetai* (the form is a Greek plural), which may be for **masaka-tā-* “the great ones,” *Sarmatai*, perhaps the local form of the people called *Saⁱrimas* in the Avesta, and *Paralatai*, tribe descended from Kolaxaiš, the youngest of three legendary brothers, ancestors of the Scythians, perhaps from **para-aryas*, the “first or supreme Aryans” (rather than being the same as Av. *paraδāta* [epithet of Haošiiāha, Pers. Hušang] and having *l* < *δ*).

See also entries under the individual language names.

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