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The speakers of Khalaj settle approximately 250 km to the southwest of Tehran. In the 1960s and 1970s their settlement, sometimes called Ḵalajestān, enclosed 47 villages. The number of the speakers of Khalaj at that time was approximately 20,000 people. There is no concrete data available regarding their present situation. In the mid-1990s Gerhard Doerfer assumed a wide Persianization of this group, and such a process had already been recognizable three decades earlier (Doerfer, 1997b, p. 52).

The origin of the Khalaj is controversial. Arab geographers mentioned them already in the 9th and 10th centuries, and the Khalaj were listed among the Turkic people of the steppes of Central Asia. It is difficult to identify whether the Khalaj mentioned in those accounts are identical with the present people of the same name. Sometimes they were also considered as descendants of the Hephthalites, or as those of turkisized Iranians, or precisely as the Sakas (cf. Bosworth and Clauson, pp. 8 ff.). According to the Arab geographer Ebn Ḵordāḏbeh, their earliest known settlement was located in the Talas region beyond the Syr Darya River (Bosworth, p. 917). Based on the record of another Arab geographer, Moḥammad b. Najib Bakrān, in the 13th century the Khalaj moved from the Qarluq area, where they were involved in conflicts with the GHURIDS, to Zābolestān (cf. Minorsky, 1940-42, pp. 426-34; Idem, 1937, pp. 346-48). In the course of the Mongol conquests, parts of the Khalaj migrated

westwards. Moḥammad b. Najib Bakrān had already mentioned Khalaj settlements in Khorasan in the 13th century (Bosworth, p. 917). The remembrance of this former presence of the Khalaj is still kept in the form of several toponyms. In Kermān and Fārs, the presence of the Khalaj is said to date back to the late Saljuq period (end of the 12th century).

The first information about the Khalaj language was provided by Vladimir Minorsky (1940-42, pp. 417-37). He published three texts and related them to the language of the Khalaj. However, only one of these texts was really Khalaj-related. In addition, Minorsky did not notice that he faced an independent Turkic language or group of languages. After Minorsky, some information about the language of the Khalaj was provided by the Iranian scholar Moḥammad Moqaddam, who had collected materials for the dialects of the region of Āštiān for several years (Moqaddam, 1940). Later, research on the Khalaj language was done by Gerhard Doerfer, as he and his collaborators "rediscovered" this language (or language group) in the course of Turcological expeditions to Iran undertaken by the Department of Turcology of the Georg-August University of Göttingen in 1968, 1969, and 1973 (Doerfer, 1974; Idem, 1981). These provided rich materials, including the recording of Khalaj vocabulary of around 60,000 entries. As a result of further extended research, a grammar (Doerfer, 1988a), a vocabulary of *ca.* 4,000 lemmata (Doerfer et. al., 1980), and a collection of folklore-texts, as well as numerous "smaller" works, were compiled for the Khalaj language (Doerfer, 1994).

One of the conclusions made in the above-mentioned studies was that the language of the Khalaj, which is divided into several dialects, forms an independent group of Turkic languages. Even though the dialectal differences are not considerable, altogether they reveal a remarkable and wide diversion. The language shows a number of archaisms, and this is what makes its discovery important for the study of Turkic languages, since otherwise such archaisms can only be observed in either Old Turkic or distant Turkic languages, like Yakut or Chuvash. They include the preserved *–d–* (cf. Khalaj *hadāḳ*, Old Turkic *adaḳ* 'foot' [in an Old Turkic text written in the Tibetan script *ha-dag*] contrary to Ottoman-Turkish *ayak*; Doerfer, 1989, p. 108), the preserved Old Turkic *t–* (e.g., Khalaj *tāγqa*, Oghuz. *d-*, Doerfer, 1989, p. 108), the preserved future-tense -G- (e. g., Khalaj *–GA*; in Oghuz. *-G-* is omitted, *–A* is used for the optative; Doerfer, 1989, p. 109). The hypothesis of the "preserved three proto-Turkic vowel quantities," which Doerfer is supposed to have found (Doerfer et al., 1971, pp. 183-265), turned out to be unfounded.

In addition to these archaisms, the Khalaj language possesses elements borrowed from different languages with which it has been in contact. One can find an extensive vocabulary borrowed from Persian, like Khalaj *ku'štī tut-* 'wrestle' < Pers. *košti* (Doerfer and Tezcan, p. 156); Khalaj *lāla* 'tulip' < Pers. *lāla* (Idem, p. 157); Khalaj *mäsγärä* 'joke' < Pers./Ar. *masḵara* (Idem, p. 161); Khalaj *mättä* 'drill' < Pers. *matta* (Idem, p. 161). Furthermore, the Khalaj language shows numerous loanwords borrowed from Oghuz (e.g., Khalaj *göčü* 'goat,' cf. Tturk. *keçi*, Az. *keči*, Turkm. *gäči*, etc.; Khalaj *toqmāq* 'hammer,' cf. Tturk. *tokmak*, Az. *toxmaġ*, Turkm. *toqmaq*, etc.; see Doerfer, 1979-80, p. 196) and Tati (e.g., Khalaj *de·lav* ~ *dīlōp* ~ *dōlāv*, etc. 'niche of a wall' < Tati *dōlāb*; Khalaj *summul* ~ *simbil* ~ *simmil* 'ear (grain)' < Tati *sumbul*; see Doerfer, 1990, p. 66).

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