



ORMURI

ORMURI is spoken by the Ormur (Ōrmur), as the Pashtuns call them. The term Ōrmur is traditionally interpreted as “extinguishers of fire,” from Pashto *ōr* “fire,” and *mər*, “dead, extinct”; perhaps the term is a malevolent allusion to a pretended past of “extinguishers of fire” (for other interpretations, see Morgenstierne, n.d., p. 16). Ormuri is also known as Baraki, the endonym of its speakers. The native designation Bargistā seems no longer used for the language (cf. Grierson, 1921, p. 123). See also [Afghanistan v. Languages](#).

Location. The majority of Ormuri speakers were located in the following two locations on the eastern frontier of the Iranian plateau. The numerical details given here refer to the situation in the 1970s, when it was last possible to obtain reliable information. (1) In Kānigrām (or Kaniguram; abbreviated here as Kān.), an important village of Waziristan in northwestern Pakistan (Ormuri *šor* “the town,” cf. Pashto *šār*, Pers. *šahr*) between Razmak and Mirānšāh, where some Wazir and Maḥsud [Pashto](#) speakers also lived, there were 2,000 to 3,000 Ormuri speakers, consisted of the Baraki and the Sādāt (pl. of *sayyed* “descendant of the Prophet”). Here, Ormuri was the mother tongue and home language of a prosperous community that dealt with the surrounding Pashtun on an equal footing. All the Ormuri speakers were bilingual or trilingual, in Ormuri, Pashto, and Hindkō or Sindhi. (2) Near [Baraki Barak](#) (abbreviated here as Bar.), the most important place of the province of Lōgar, 80 km south of Kabul and 160 km northwest of Kānigrām, Ormuri was spoken in a few *qal’as* (fortified enclosures), e.g., Čendāl, Sangtuy, and Nur-Allāh. But among the 300 to 400 Ormuri who lived there, less than fifty still spoke the language



and scarcely a dozen spoke it fluently. For the most part these were women or men, especially the elderly, who had practiced strict endogamy. Those of the younger generation, even if they still understood the language, with some exceptions no longer spoke it. Even in this most important place of the province (with the population of ca. 3,000 individuals), Ormuri was no longer used by everyone. All the Ormuri speakers there were bilingual or trilingual: a minority used Ormuri, all the others Manjanəy Pashtu or rural **Kāboli** Persian.

There were other Ormuri groups: in Pakistan, at Bālā, Māyā(n) and Pāyā(n) in the district of Peshawar; some families at Wānna, near Kānigrām, and at Jālandar in the Punjab; and in Afghanistan at Bōtḡāk and Čakari near Kabul, at Ormur-kalay and Ḥakim-ḡel in Wardak, and even at Maymana (see **FĀRYĀB ii**). But these were all relatively recent emigrants, usually Pashto-speaking, originally from Kabul and Baraki Barak respectively.

A residual language, in the course of becoming extinct in Lōgar, Ormuri has remained more vigorous at Kānigrām; but in both places, as throughout the Iranian plateau, economic expansion, growth of mass media and literacy, and the mixing of populations increasingly favor the propagation of national languages. These factors first impose multi-lingualism, then progressively reduce the linguistic diversity by eliminating the dialects that have not succeeded in becoming common or official languages. Formerly, the area of Ormuri was certainly more extensive. Perhaps some toponyms could permit us to delineate its contours: Baraki Rājān close to Baraki Barak, Pingrām (the equivalent of Persian Panj-deh) close to Čarḡ-e Lōgar (see **Čarḡ**), Barakestān/Berkestan southwest of **Ġazni**, and Birk/Barak (as occur in *Bābornāma*, tr. Beveridge, pp. 220, 235) indicate an axis leading southwest from Baraki Barak to Kānigrām.

Phonology. The vowel system is that of Pashto: /a/, /ā/, /ə/ (an allophone in Bar.), /e/, /o/, /i/, /u/. The consonants also resemble those of Pashto: the same series of bilabials /p/, /b/, /m/, /w/; dentals /t/, /d/, /c/ [ts], /j/ [dz], /n/, /l/, /r/, /s/, /z/; prepalatals /č/, /j/, /š/, /ž/, /y/; retroflexes /ṭ/, /ḡ/, /ṇ/, /ṛ/, /ṣ/ (ḡ in Bar.), /ž/ (in Kān.; merged with /g/ in Bar.; postpalatal /k/, /g/, /x/, /ḡ/. Although Pashto does not have any labio-dental, Ormuri has /f/ (in Bar., a voiceless spirant φ ; in *aḡo* only). In Baraki Barak we find /q/ (as in Kāboli Persian), while it is only an allophone of /k/ in Kānigrām. In the latter /šr/ represents *θr, *xr, *fr, and even *mr; this phoneme has become /ḡr/ in Baraki Barak.

Stress has limited freedom; it falls on one of the last two syllables in nominal or verbal forms. The pronouns are accented, while as the plural marker *-i*, the definite object marker *ku-*, the directional pronominal adverbs, and the personal suffixes are proclitic or enclitic. The stress, according to whether it falls on the stem or ending (syllabic or consonantal), determines the three conjugations. A whole set of contrasts rests on the Ormuri stress system: *díči* “young girls” vs. *dičí* “shoes” (for **dičiyi*), *záy-* “chew” vs. the unstressed verb stem *zay-* “give birth.”

Morphology. The following characteristics are distinctive. Substantives present a complex typology of plurals (the unstressed marker *-i* for inanimate objects, *-in* for animate; marks borrowed from Pashto *-una* or from Pers. *-ān*; umlaut, palatalization, etc.). The personal pronouns are: 1 sg. *-az* < **ázəm* (cf. Pashto *zə* < **azəm*), obl. *mun* (Pashto *mā*); 2 sg. *tu* (Pashto *tə*); 1 pl. *māx* (Pashto *muz*); 2 pl. Kān. *tyōs*, Bar. *tōs* (Pashto *tāsu*, *-i*); 3rd person demonstratives: sg. *afō* (Pashto *hağá*); pl. Kān. *afáy*, Bar. *afōyn* (Pashto *hağúy*). Personal suffixes are: 1 sg. *-am* (Pashto *mē*), 2 sg. *-at* (Pashto *dē*), 3 sg. and pl. *-wa*, *-a* (Pashto *yē*), 1 pl. and 2 pl. *-an* (Pashto *mu*). The pronominal adverbs of direction are: 1st person *er* (Pashto *rā*); 2nd Kān. *dal*, Bar. *dar* (Pashto *dar*); 3rd *al* (Pashto *war*) (“toward/to me, etc.). The verbal endings and the distinction of the copula (*yē*) (Pashto *day*) and of the verb of existence *da-yē* (Pashto *šta*) reveal parallisms between Ormuri and Pashto, which are too basic to be accidental. In Bar., the identity of the 3 sg. and 3 pl. endings is a recent adaptation by analogy with Pashto.

Syntax. In a noun phrase, the determiner precedes the head, e.g., Bar. *ta moālem ta jwān šāgerd a-šer ketāb*, cf. Pashto *da moālem da zwān šagerd šē ketāb* “the good book of the young student of the teacher,” contrasting with Pers. *ketāb-e kub-e šāgerd-e javān-e mo’allem*. The ergative construction occurs in the transitive past. A system of prepositions and postpositions is elaborated. There is contrast between the demonstrative of the distant object, (*h*)*áfō*, and of the anaphoric (*h*)*afō* parallel to that between the demonstrative of the near object, *á* (stressed), and of the definite marker, *á-* (proclitic; cf. that of the demonstratives and anaphorics in Pashto: *dáğa*, *háğa*: *dağá*, *hağá*). But the syntax also bears the mark of Indian influence in Kānigrām, e.g., the particles *aī* and *dī*; see Grierson, 1921, pp. 219-25, whose usage has remained explained. The influence of Kāboli Persian also appears in Baraki, e.g., an unsystematic calque on the *ezāfa*; the functional transfer that makes the preposition *ku* “to,” and the direct object marker, corresponding to Persian -



rā).

Syntax of the sentence is characterized by two features. While there is a complete system of subordinating conjunctions, borrowed or calqued, the collected texts reveal a preference for use of the single particle *ka* or for juxtaposition of independent clauses to express any subordinate relation.

Position among the Iranian languages. Ormuri is closely related to its neighbor Parāči (see [Afghanistan vii. Parāči](#)). Each of the two dialects of Ormuri has been marked, both in the past and more recently, by its linguistic environment. The dialect of Kānigrām bears the imprint of Pashto (see [Afghanistan vi. Paštō](#)) and of Hindkō; that of Baraki Barak, the mark of Kāboli Persian and Manjanəy Pashto. The most striking structural resemblances suggest an ancient coexistence with Pashto. The Ormuri lexicon contains numerous borrowings and imitations, which witness the pressure of the more common surrounding languages and give information about the recent history of the dialects of Kānigrām and Baraki Barak.

But there also appear some semantic areas of greater resistance which conserve the original vocabulary: besides implement words, there are adjectives, numbers, pronouns, some hundred simple verbs, and various blocks of lexemes related to the human body, family, house, nature, rural life, stars, divisions of time, colors, sentiments, religion, morality, etc. This vocabulary reveals, among other things, a Dardic source, today effaced, from which Pashto has probably also borrowed (e.g., *grām* “village”).

The original vocabulary permits us to form several hypotheses about the place of Ormuri among the Iranian languages. It is characterized by preservation of initial voiced stops (*b-*, *d-*, *g-*), a trait that it shared with the Parāči and which distinguishes the southeastern group of Iranian languages (see [Eastern Iranian Languages](#)). These have been gradually reduced to residual status by Pashto, the language to the northeast, which is characterized by initial fricatives (*w-*, *δ-* > *l-*, and *γ-*), and by Persian. The latter was originally the language of the southwest but extended its dominance to the eastern border of the Iranian plateau; it has also preserved initial voiced stops.

See also [Iranian Languages and Scripts vi \(2\). Documentation](#).



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