

## **On the relationships between Middle and New Iranian's lexicon: present state and new perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

*With this paper I would like to show how a comparative-historical approach to modern Iranian dialectology could be very useful and helpful for better understanding and preserving the Iranian cultural-linguistic heritage. Assuming this point of view, I am going to discuss two interesting and, in my opinion, paradigmatic examples: the *Abyā-ne 'I* (really related to Pahlavi?) and the *Sorkhe 'i* (really related to Sogdian and middle East Iranian languages?)*

*Furthermore, I would like to take advantage of this very interesting conference to propose to you a jointly international project between my Institute, the Institute of Iranian Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences and Iranian Universities and/or other Iranian academic institutions in order to document and preserve the cultural-linguistic heritage of the *Kāšān* area.*

This paper is aimed at displaying the reasons for carrying out a new project focused on the dialects around the Kāšān area which belong to the northern-central group of the Central dialects. A brief survey of the dialect group, its main features, and previous studies in this field will be followed by a discussion of the methods and goals of the intended study.

## 1. Introduction

According to the main studies on contemporary Iranian dialectology, the area around *Kāšān* constitutes the northern-central group of the Central dialects<sup>i</sup> including Kāšāni, Ārāni-Bīdgoli, Delījāni, Našalji, Abūzaydābādi, Bādrūdi, Qohrūdi, Kāmū'i, Jowšaqāni, Meyma'i, Abyāna'i, Farīzandi, Yārāndi, Sohi, Bādi, Naṭānzi, Kaša'i, Tāri, and Ṭarqi. The internal grouping of the Central dialects is mainly based on Krahnke's PhD dissertation<sup>ii</sup> and consists of: a northwestern group, including Āštīāni, Āmora'i and Kahaki;<sup>iii</sup> a western group consisting of Maḥallāti, Vānišāni etc.; a northern-central group which I am going to speak about; a southern group in the Isfahan area including Gazi, Sedehi, Ardestāni, Zefra'i, Nohūji, Sajzi, Kūhpāya'i, Jarqūya'i, Rūdašti, Kafrūdi etc.; and, finally, an eastern group consisting of Tūdeški, Keyjani, Abčūya'i, Nā'īni, Anā-raki, Yazdi, Kermāni, etc.<sup>iv</sup> Krahnke identified 36 distinctive phonological, morphological and lexical isoglosses as well as two intersecting directions of isoglottic waves: one spreading along a northwest-southeast axis, and another one along a north-south axis starting around Kāšān. The center of this latter isoglottic wave is at Qohrūd, which seems to be a very conservative area. It is noteworthy that this research includes sociolinguistic issues mostly neglected by the previous works.<sup>v</sup> Besides Krahnke (1976), the main studies<sup>vi</sup> regarding the

grouping and the features of the Central dialects by Lecoq (1989), Windfuhr (1992) and Stilo (2008) are based on the synchronic comparative description of the phonology, the morphology, the syntax and the lexical derivations as well as on the documentation of the vocabulary with some references to historical data.<sup>vii</sup>

The Central dialects constitute the southernmost group of the so-called Northwest Iranian languages<sup>viii</sup> studied by D.L. Stilo in Leipzig (Germany). Currently the *Department of Linguistics, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology of Leipzig* is attempting a synchronic comparative work which is aimed at describing the development and the main features of the Northwest Iranian dialects and the relationships with two *mini-Sprachbünde* which are in some way related with it.<sup>ix</sup> Following D.L. Stilo,<sup>x</sup> Northwestern Iranian (NWI) includes seven subgroups: 1. Tatic (“Original”<sup>xi</sup> Tāti which means Southern, Central, Northern Tāti and Tāliši/Tāleši; “aberrant forms and outliers” consisting of Alborz Tāti and “transition dialects to Original Tatic”; Vafsi, “possibly” Alviri, Vidari); 2. Kurdic (Northern Kurdish or Kurmanji; Central Kurdish or Sorani/Mukri; Southern Kurdish or Kermanšahi); 3. Gurani; 4. Zazaki/Dimli; 5. Caspian (Gilaki in the west; the central Caspian “expanse from approximately Tonekabon to Kelardašt”; Mazanderani; Šahmizardi); 6. Central Plateau;<sup>xii</sup> 7. Balochi. On the other side, the two *mini-Sprachbünde* consist of the Tafreš area (Vafsi; Tafreši; Āštīāni, Āmora’i)<sup>xiii</sup> and the Semnan area (Semnani; Sangesari; Sorkhe’i, Lasgerdi and Aftari; Šahmirzadi).

## **2. An up-to-date bibliography on individual dialects belonging to the northern-central group**

Having just quoted the main current researches on the Central dialects, considering it as macro-area, it seems useful to list the main existing studies on individual dialects belonging to the northern-eastern group.

Abūzaydābādī: Lecoq, P. (1975) “Le dialecte d’Abu Zeyd Ābād”, in *Monumentum H.S.Nyberg II, Acta Iranica*, 5, Tehran-Liège-Leiden, pp. 15-38; Lecoq, P. *Recherches sur les dialectes du centre de l’Iran*. Thèse non publiée;<sup>xiv</sup> Yarshater, E. (1985) “Abūzaydābādī”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1, ed. by E. Yarshater, London-Boston and Henley, pp. 401-2.

Abyāna’ī: Ivanov, V.– Dodykhudoeva, L. (in press) “Prosody in Abyānei language”, in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Iran’s Desert Area Dialects*, December 1-2, 2010, Semnan, Semnan University Press;<sup>xv</sup> Lecoq, P. (1974) “Le dialecte d’Abyāne”, in *Studia Iranica*, 3, Paris, pp. 51-63; Lecoq, P. *Recherches sur les dialectes du centre de l’Iran*. Thèse non publiée; Yarshater, E. (1985a) “Abyāna’ī”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1, ed. by E. Yarshater, London-Boston and Henley, pp. 404-5.

Ārāni-Bīdgoli: Yarshater, E. (1989) “The Dialects of Ārān and Bīdgol”, in *Etudes irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard*, eds. C.H. de Fouchécour and Ph. Gignoux, Paris, pp. 371-83; Yarshater, E. (1990) “Bīdgol and Bīdgoli”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 4, ed. by E. Yarshater, London-New York, pp. 247-49.

Bādī: no specific studies.

Bādrūdi: Lecoq, P. *Recherches sur les dialectes du centre de l’Iran*. Thèse non publiée; Yarshater, E. (1989a) “Bādrūdi”, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 3, ed. by E. Yarshater, London-New York, pp. 383-85.

Delījāni: no specific studies except for some references in Yarshater, E. (1985b) “Distinction of Grammatical Gender in the Dialects of Kashan Province and the Adjoining Areas”, in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, II, *Acta Iranica*, 25, 1985, pp. 727-45.

Farīzandi: Christensen, A. (1930) *Contributions à la dialectologie iranienne. Dialecte quil?ki de Recht, dialectes de F?riz?nd, de Yaran et de Natanz. Avec un supplément contenant quelques textes dans le persan vulgaire de Teheran*, Kobenhavn.

Jowšaqāni: Borjian, H. (2009) “Jowšaqān. ii. The Dialect”, available at <http://iranica.com/articles/jowsaqan-ii-dialect.>; Lambton, A. (1938) *Three Persian Dialects*, London.

Kāmū'i: no specific studies.

Kāšāni:<sup>xvi</sup> Majidi, M.R. (1354/1975) *Guyešhā-ye pirāmun-e Kāšān va Mahallāt*, Tehrān; Yarshater, E. (1974) “The Jewish communities of Persian and their dialects”, in *Mélanges Jean de Menasce*, Ph. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli eds., Louvain, 1974, pp. 455-66.

Kaša'i: no specific studies except for few references in Zhukovskii (1888-1922) *Materialy I*.

Meyma'i: Lambton, A. (1938) *Three Persian Dialects*, London; Majidi, M.R. (1354/1975) *Guyešhā-ye pirāmun-e Kāšān va Mahallāt*, Tehrān.

Našalji: no specific studies except for some references in Majidi, M.R. (1354/1975) *Guyešhā-ye pirāmun-e Kāšān va Mahallāt*, Tehrān; Yarshater, E. (1985b) “Distinction of Grammatical Gender in the Dialects of Kashan Province and the Adjoining Areas”, in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce, II*, Acta Iranica, 25, 1985, pp. 727-45.

Natānzi: Christensen, A. (1930) *Contributions à la dialectologie iranienne. Dialecte quil?ki de Recht, dialectes de F?riz?nd, de Yaran et de Natanz. Avec un supplement contenant quelques textes dans le persan vulgaire de Teheran*, Kobenhavn; Mann, O. (1926) *Kurdisch-persische Forschungen III*, 1, Berlin.

Qohrūdi: no specific studies except for some references in Browne, E. (1893) *A Year Amongst Persians*, London, pp. 188-93; Lecoq, P. *Recherches sur les dialectes du centre de l'Iran*. Thèse non publiée; Mann, O. (1926) *Kurdisch-persische Forschungen III*, 1, Berlin; Zhukovskii, I. (1888-1922) *Materialy I*.

Sohi: no specific studies but there are some references in Bailey, W. (1935) “Modern western Iranian: infinitives in Gazī and Soī”, in *Transaction of the Philological Society*, pp. 73-4; Mann, O. (1926) *Kurdisch-persische Forschungen III*, 1, Berlin;

Andreas, F.C.- Houtum-Schindler, A. (1884) "Beitr?ge zum kurdischen Wortschatze", in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenl?ndischen Gesellschaft*, 38, pp. 43-116.

T?ri: no specific studies with the exception of few references in Lecoq, P. *Recherches sur les dialectes du centre de l'Iran*. Th?se non publi?e.

Tarqi: no specific studies.

Y?randi: : Christensen, A. (1930) *Contributions ? la dialectologie iranienne. Dialecte quil?ki de Recht, dialectes de F?riz?nd, de Yaran et de Natanz. Avec un supplement contenant quelques textes dans le persan vulgaire de Teheran*, Kobenhavn.

### 3. Why a new project focused on the northern-central group?

Contemporary Iranian dialectology seems to have put its main emphases on three approaches,<sup>xvii</sup> namely, linguistic documentation of ethnic or religious minorities living in Iran, defining linguistic macro-areas, and fieldwork on individual dialects. Linguistic micro-areas, on the other hand, have been rather neglected<sup>xviii</sup>. Research on micro-areas is an urgent desideratum, and zones like that of K?š?n constitute promising starting points. To the best of my knowledge, while there is a remarkable number of questions still to be answered, no comprehensive study on it exists. First of all, it is noteworthy that the area of Qohr?d, the center of one of the two isoglottic waves indentified by Krahnke (1976) has been described as a conservative area.<sup>xix</sup> Previous studies have identified the main features of this group of dialects from a synchronic-descriptive point of view,<sup>xx</sup> sometimes adding sociolinguistic issues,<sup>xxi</sup> and the some zone phenomena<sup>xxii</sup>. Yet there is no exhaustive research which reviews all this material by applying a comparative-historical approach in order to better investigate the relationship between these dialects and their linguistic heritage.<sup>xxiii</sup> For this purpose, one should to take into account the

*fahlavī/fahlavīyāt*, the poetry composed in the old dialects of the western, central and northern *Fahla* regions which are related to the oral Parthian tradition and which, therefore, show certain linguistic affinities with Parthian.<sup>xxiv</sup> According to Tafazzoli (1999: 160), at least one quatrain from Kāšān is preserved.

These issues and approaches will be at the center of my research project. There are also other points which are worthwhile mentioning. For example, it would be interesting to explain in detail the terms used by the local communities to refer to their own dialects. It is well known that the speakers in the Kāšān area<sup>xxv</sup> commonly call their own dialects *rāyejī/rājī* which means either “local, current” or may indicate a relationship with the city of Raga/Ray or, following the main studies on this topic,<sup>xxvi</sup> a relationship between the dialects of this northern-central area and those of the now extinct dialects around Tehran. According to Borjian (2010: 65), the term *dei* “(speech) of the village” is also attested. My questions are: is the usage of these terms equally distributed within the northern-central dialect group or is there a particular distribution? And, in the latter case, what is the *ratio*? In other words, is the different distribution merely due to geographical factors, or may other factors play a role? Moreover, in addition to these general terms, are there also specific terms which identify each single dialect of this group? And what about the term *pahlavi* used by some speakers of this area to identify their own dialect, thus consciously relating it to an older form of Persian? Borjian (2010: 77) asserts that this designation is more commonly used by more educated speakers, but during my visit to the village of Abyāna<sup>7</sup> in May 2010 it seemed to me that this designation is quite common and not particularly dependent on the social situation of the interlocutor. Of course it takes a deeper scientific investigation to gain more precise information about it. Furthermore, according to Kranhke (1976: 55-6), the term *buro-beše* (literally “come-go”)<sup>xxvii</sup> is used by speakers in Abcūya to designate the dialects north of them in the Nažanz area while they use to designate their own dialect as *osme-siga*, literally,

“now-this way”. Windfuhr pointed out (1992: 244) that this distinction made by native speakers just reflects the division between northern-central dialects and southeast-central Nāʿīni-Abcūya-Anāraki dialects which, I quote, “may be the remnant of an old dialect boundary in central Media Major”. Are there any other examples of such a designation in the neighborhood of the Kāšān area? And is it possible to more clearly identify, or at least investigate the boundary supposed by Windfuhr (id.)?

Last, but not least, it has to be considered that a deeper knowledge of the Central dialects, in general, and of the northern-central group, in particular, could be very helpful for a better understanding of their relationship with their immediate neighbours, the dialects spoken in the Dašt-e Kavīr area, as, for example, Khūri and Sīvandi. Windfuhr (1992: 244-5) refers to a number of isoglosses: the prefix *\*fra-* in the verb “to sell” which is attested as *xr-/r-* in the dialects around Kāšān and as *r-* in Khūri and Sīvandi; the perfective prefix *be-* in the dialects around Kāšān and in Khūri; the ending of the first singular present *-ān* in the dialects around Kāšān and in Khūri. Nevertheless, the dialects spoken in this desert area require a deeper investigation too;<sup>xxviii</sup> therefore, there is still much work to be done<sup>xxix</sup>, and every work resulting from cooperation with scholars who are working on these central Desert area dialects is welcomed.

#### 4. Project outline

In the previous paragraphs, I tried to outline the current state of the research on the dialects spoken around Kāšān, giving basic informations about grouping, main features, studies, questions that must still be answered. Now, I should like to take the opportunity of this conference to present a project aimed at the safeguarding of the cultural-linguistic heritage of the Kāšān area, trying to cover a gap in the field of contemporary Iranian dialectology.<sup>xxx</sup> The work will be divided into three phases:

- First phase. The initial phase will focus on gathering and reviewing the scholarly literature with particular regard to the studies published in Iran which are not easy to find in western libraries. It will be followed by collecting primary data (questionnaires, audio and video recordings) through the involvement of the local community in the documentation practice, and, finally, by the accurate recording of each dialect and by linguistic mapping.
- Second phase. It will include the acquisition of oral material (such as proverbs and folk tales) as well as the study of the *fahlavī* from Kāšān<sup>xxxii</sup> in order to better understand the linguistic heritage. In fact, the goal will be an investigation of the linguistic data not only from a synchronic point of view but also through the application of the comparative-historical method in order to be able to answer questions put forth in the previous section.
- Third phase. The final phase will aim at compiling a volume on the northern-central group of the Central dialects which includes documentation and description, typological survey, language history and language contact.

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Yarshater, E. (1989a) "Bādrūdi", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 3, ed. by E. Yarshater, London-New York, pp. 383-85. Yarshater, E. (1990) "Bīdgol and Bīdgoli", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 4, ed. by E. Yarshater, London-New York, pp. 247-49. Zhukovskii, I. (1888-1922) *Materialy I*.

<sup>i</sup>This designation is due to Geiger (1898-1901).

It is also called Central Plateau dialect group or Median dialects (Borjian: 2008). The last term implies, of course, a diachronic *continuum* with the Median language, even if not yet sufficient analyzed. However that may be, it seems to me that the term "Median dialects" should be cautiously applied since, to the best of my knowledge, no exhaustive study of this topic exists. For this reason, I completely agree with Krahnke who already pointed out, I quote, "I have attempted to maintain terminological neutrality as well as descriptive neutrality. Terminological difficulties of major proportions remain. One of these is certainly the status of the term 'Media` for the dialects of the area. None of the linguistic or historical evidence suggests anything other than that the people and languages of the Central dialect area are a continuation, in some direct or nearly direct way, of earlier median people and languages. I am strongly inclined to accept some versions of that hypothesis. But there are many questions of western Iranian dialectology remaining which bear on this issue and I see no reason to abandon the position of neutrality until such time as such evidence is in". Krahnke wrote this in 1976 (p. 274), and it seems to me that it is not yet time to "abandon the position of neutrality" (id.). I would be careful even assuming the term "Median" as a geographical designation as suggested by Borjian (2009: 70-1) who wrote, I quote, "Even if we choose to ignore language-related arguments altogether, the mere fact that the area covered by Central Dialects and Tatic corresponds roughly to the old Greater and Lesser Media, respectively, provides sufficient grounds to use the designation 'New Median` for these dialects."

In any event, according to Krahnke (1976), the Central dialects area shows, on the one hand, a common background from a morphological-syntactical and lexical point of view, and, on the other hand, a conspicuous number of isoglosses and buffer-zones phenomena (Stilo: 2008; id.: <http://www.linguistik.uni-kiel.de/icil2/abstracts.htm>).

<sup>ii</sup>See Krahnke (1976: 259-65).

<sup>iii</sup> Nevertheless, following the most recent studies of Stilo (2008: 94-5) and id. (work in progress), it seems that these three dialects belong to the Tafreš area.

<sup>iv</sup> About the grouping of the Central dialects, see also Lecoq (1989: p. 313); Stilo (2008: 93-5); Windfuhr (1992: 243-45). It is just to note that- as Stilo (2008: 93-5) has already pointed out- this classification into western, northern-central, southern and eastern groups assumed by Krahnke (1976) and Windfuhr (1992) and adopted in this paper, corresponds to Lecoq's classification (1989) of northwest, northeast, southwest and southeast groups, respectively.

<sup>v</sup> See Krahnke (1976: 265-70).

<sup>vi</sup> At least in Western languages. Considering that I have just started working on this topic, first of all, I have gathered and studied the main works in western languages regarding general studies about the Central dialects and individual dialects belonging to the northern-central group. I hope I will be able to cover this gap adding the works published in *farsi* in Iran during the next period of field research in the country.

<sup>vii</sup> It is noteworthy to quote the recent studies done by Stilo concerning some buffer zones phenomena as, for example, the use of preposition and postposition which seems to be typologically more heterogenous in Central Iran, as opposed a wide use of postposition in northern Iran and an extensive use of preposition in southern Iran. See Stilo (2004); id. (2006); id. (in press).

<sup>viii</sup> The primary division in Western Iranian languages is between Northwestern Iranian and Southwestern Iranian. See Arbor-Windfuhr (1989).

<sup>ix</sup> For further information, see: <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/research/northwest-iranian.php>.

<sup>x</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this is the most comprehensive research on this linguistic macro-area in recent years.

<sup>xi</sup> I quote this as well as the following words in quotation marks. See Stilo (work in progress).

<sup>xii</sup> Stilo follows the classification adopted by Lecoq (1989).

<sup>xiii</sup> On the contrary, Lecoq (1989: 313) has classified the Tafreš area as a part of the Central dialects.

<sup>xiv</sup> This work is focused on some dialects belonging to the northern-central group such as Abūzaydābādi, Abyāna'i, Bādrūdi, Qohrūdi, Tāri as well as on some dialects belonging to the eastern group, it means, Anāraki and Nā'īni and Ardestāni, following Krahnke (1976) and Windfuhr (1992) belonging to the southern group in the Isfahan area, following Lecoq (1989) belonging to the eastern group, and, finally, on Varzana'i belonging to the southern group in the Isfahan area. I am following the dialectological classification assumed by Krahnke (1976) and Windfuhr (1992), but see also note 4.

<sup>xv</sup> During this conference, it was a great pleasure to meet Prof. Dr. Vladimir Ivanov and Dr. Leyli Dodykhudoeva, *Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences*. They are working on Abyāne'i, one of the dialects of

the northern-central group of the Central dialects. I hope for a joint effort with the team of Prof. Dr. Ivanov in order to make a deeper linguistic investigation on this area.

<sup>xvi</sup> According to Borjian (2009), Lecoq (1989), Stilo (2008), Windfuhr (1992) and Yarshater (1974), it is only spoken by the Jewish community living in Kāšān.

<sup>xvii</sup> At least, the western scientific literature.

<sup>xviii</sup> Of course, there are always exceptions, including this conference. I am referring in particular to the research on Semnān area being carried out by the University of Uppsala (Sweden) and the Universities of Semnān and Sistān-Baluchistān (Irān) and presented during *The First International Conference on Iran's Desert Area Dialects*.

<sup>xix</sup> Obviously, its quite isolated geographical position also plays a role.

<sup>xx</sup> Krahnke (1976: 131-264); Lecoq (1989: 317-20).

<sup>xxi</sup> Krahnke (1976: 265-270).

<sup>xxii</sup> Stilo (2008: 105-8).

<sup>xxiii</sup> For example the question of a "Median substratum". See also note 1.

<sup>xxiv</sup> By means of an example, following Tafazzoli (1999: 159): the existence of two forms for the first person singular pronoun, namely, *az* "I" as direct form and *ma/mo* as oblique form like Parthian *az/man* and, I add, like Sogdian *z̄w-zw/mn*?

<sup>xxv</sup> One should note that this happens, of course, not only in the whole Central dialect's area. According to Borjian (2010:65), the term *velāti* "provincial" is used in southern Isfahan, the Jewish community of Isfahan identifies its dialect as *jidi* "Jewish", the speakers of Kupā, eastern Isfahan, call their dialect *virže* "belonging to Vir (the historical name of Kupā)".

<sup>xxvi</sup> Borjan (2009a: 65-6); Windfuhr (1992: 244) and Yarshater (1985b).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Typical imperatives in this area. See Yarshater (1985b: 745).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Krahnke (1976: 270); Lecoq (1989: 324-5).

<sup>xxix</sup> This conference testifies to a renewed interest in the study of the Desert areas and has represented a great opportunity to meet scholars in Iran and abroad who are interested in this field. I sincerely hope that it is only the first step for interesting scientific cooperation in the future.

<sup>xxx</sup> As I tried to demonstrate above.

<sup>xxxi</sup> See the previous paragraph.