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**LINGUISTIC GEOGRAPHY AND
HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS**

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The earliest instance of linguistic geography within Iranian Studies turns on the river Don, the ancient Tanais. In Herodotus (iv 21) the river separates the Scythians west of it, from the Sauromatians east of it. The language of the Sauromatians, says Herodotus (iv 117), is the Scythian, but they speak it incorrectly (σολοικίζοντες) and have done so ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀρχαίου, since long ago. Herodotus is thus telling us that the Sauromatian language was a Scythian dialect whose area had as western boundary the river Don. We may call it a Scythian dialect, but we are equally entitled to call it a Saka dialect, because elsewhere Herodotus reports (vii 64) that the Persians call all Scythians Saka.

Just as the Don is an important low-lying geographical landmark, so the Caucasian range is a landmark of towering elevation. By the first century B.C. it is the natural barrier said by Strabo (XI, 2, 15) to separate the Sarmatians in the plains north of it, from Iberia, present-day Georgia, south of it. Thus of Sarmatian speech, never recorded, all we are told is, linguistically, that it was a Saka dialect, and geographically, that its western limit was the river Don, its southern limit the Caucasus. Unforeseeably however to Herodotus and Strabo, their geographical information has turned out to be not simply linguistic, but invaluable to historical linguistics. For on the one hand it is in the delta of the Don that an inscription was found, dated in the year 220 A.D., which mentions a man named 'Ραδαμαφουρτος¹; and on the other, *that* part of Georgia which to Strabo was Iberia, has still today the ridge of Caucasus for northern frontier, separating the Georgians from the Ossetes in whose language the word for «son» is *furt*, from Old Iranian *puθra*. *Furt* exhibits three phonological traits, each of which is found by itself also in some Iranian languages other than Ossetic: the stop *p* turned into a fricative, the fricative theta turned into a stop, the liquid *r* suffered metathesis. But to have all three of these traits in one and the

¹ CIRB. P. 765, No. 1278, line 2. Cf. Zgusta, P. 137.

same Iranian language, is an exclusive characteristic of Ossetic. Thus the single shibboleth *φουρτος* by the Don, at a distance of more than 600 km from Mount Kazbek surrounded by Ossetes, constitutes irrefutable proof to the historical linguist, that the Ossetic language is today's representative of ancient Sarmatian.

If Saka languages could vary across the Don, they will have varied, and differed from their Bosporean cognates, also 3000 km east of the Don, where in Chinese Turkestan the best known of the Saka languages is Khotanese, abundantly attested in manuscripts written between the seventh and the tenth centuries A.D. In Khotanese, it is true, the word for «son» was *pūra* from *puhra* from *puθra*, but the language nevertheless shares with Ossetic a noteworthy trait. Indo-European **ki-(e)u-*, seen in Greek *σέυεται* and Sanskrit *cyavate* (cf. POKORNY, 539), results in *šyu* for «to go» in both Avestan and Old Persian. But Khotanese has for it *tsu*² and Ossetic has *cu*. In Avestan and Old Persian the palatal affricate *č* seen in Sanskrit, lost its occlusion, in Khotanese and Ossetic the occlusion was retained, but the affrication changed from palatal to dental. The retention of the occlusion is thus a trait characteristic of Saka, but it is obvious that dentalization need not have followed throughout the Saka domain. And true enough, in the Pamir region the dialect known as Waxi, which has some Saka features, uses *ču* for «to go», with the affricate still palatal.

The verb has a palatal affricate also in Parachi *čhu*³, which appears dentalized in Ormuri *caw*. These are Hindukush dialects. Parachi is spoken in a few villages at about 100 km north-east of Kabul, Ormuri in two localities, one situated half way between Kabul and Ghazni, the other in Waziristan, at about 120 km north-west of Dera Ismail Khan in Pakistan. Parachi and Ormuri were considered by Morgenstierne (P. 13) remains and descendants of the original languages of Afghanistan. That among these the verb for «to go» should have preserved its Indo-Iranian affrication as it did in Saka, comes as no surprise geographically, and agrees with the fact that also in Pashto the present-stem of the verb for «to go» begins with an affricate, *j*, voiced from *c*.

My reason for bringing to your attention Ossetic *cu* and the Iranian languages which much further east share its affrication, is that more needs to be said than is found in handbooks about this verb in Ossetic itself. In September

² The digraph *ts* represents in Khotanese a voiceless aspirate dental affricate, the aspiration having presumably been caused by the no longer visible *y* of **čyu-*, see Emmerick, PP. 209 bottom and 215 top, and cf. according to Emmerick (orally) Parachi *čhu-*, below, n. 3. Where Indo-Iranian initial *č* was antevocalic, its Khotanese outcome is the surd dental affricate expressed by the digraph *tc*, as e.g. in *tcarm* (below, n. 13).

³ On the aspirate of Parachi *čhu-* see note 2.

1990 I was able for the first time in my life, thanks to the generous hospitality and ample facilities offered by the Georgian Academy of Sciences, to inspect and travel in South Ossetia, at that time still an Autonomous Region within the Republic of Georgia, with capital in Tskhinvali. The region, an Ossetic enclave protruding southward from the Caucasian ridge, is dialectologically far more diversified than is the better known North Ossetic Republic with capital in Vladikavkaz. I was delighted to find that in one of its gorges the verb for «to go» is not *cu*, but *ču*.

The survival within Ossetic of *ču* in no more than one restricted area, of special interest because the area lies just south of the formidable Caucasian ridge, deserves to be viewed in a perspective for which it is again Herodotus who provides the setting. It is a setting that will be appreciated best, if we first rehearse an important proposal made in the Thirties by Vladimir Minorsky⁴, a scholar of rare wisdom and expertise in matters of western Iranian historical geography.

The proposal was that the present-day Kurds are the descendants of the ancient Medes. The Medes were in antiquity, the Kurds are today, the westernmost Iranian population, conspicuous for their numbers and for their role in Near Eastern history. Kurds occupy today not only vast tracts of western Iran, but also the hilly parts of Iraq, a stretch of northern Syria nearly up to the Mediterranean, a large portion of Turkey from Lake Van northward to Mount Ararat and westward as far as the neighbourhood of Ankara, as well as a few pockets inside Soviet Transcaucasia. This huge ambit corresponds broadly speaking to the range of expansion of the Medes after they destroyed in 610 B.C. the Assyrian kingdom, with the result that Median power came to extend to the borders of Lydia and Median tribes penetrated deep into Asia Minor⁵.

What is missing from the geographical overlap of Medes and Kurds is the Median homeland itself, that is, the two regions known to classical authors respectively as Media Magna, with capital in Ecbatana, today's Hamadan, and as Media Atropatene⁶ north of it, today's Azerbaijan: throughout this homeland of the ancient Medes the language spoken today is not Kurdish.

Its not being Kurdish, however, cannot by itself exclude Minorsky's identification. To exclude it, positive evidence would need to be found, to the effect that one or more of the Iranian dialects spoken today in the former Median homeland are autochthonous, and that their unattested ancestor to be reached by reconstruction, had features incompatible with decisive characteristics

⁴ See MINORSKY. PP. 78 sq. and 80.

⁵ Cf. Diakonoff's map at P. 120.

⁶ See MARTIN. Schwartz's explanation of this name in *CHI*, vol. 2, P. 697.

of the Kurdish language⁷. The precondition is a daunting challenge. How is one to establish autochthony? There could be no candidates for it, other than dialects marked by features distinct from those of any of the non-Kurdish Western Iranian dialects spoken outside ancient Media. The challenge defeated even Henning, one of the foremost Iranologists of the twentieth century. He took it up for the relatively modest purpose of obtaining light on the unknown language he cautiously called «the ancient language of Azerbaijan»⁸, a language unlikely not to have been Median or of the Median type. By the end of his lynx-eyed enquiry, he felt bound to admit that he had drawn but a blank: the Iranian dialects of Azerbaijan bearing marked singularities, had merely proved to be recent imports from another province.

⁷ Two features are mentioned by Mackenzie 1961, 74 sq. as perhaps marking off Kurdish from Median. One is the change, absent from Kurdish, of Old Iranian *hw* to *f*, to which Old Persian *farnah-* «dignity», supposedly borrowed from Median, would be the one example to bear witness as peculiar to Median if, and only if, Avestan *x^varenah-* (< **hwarnah-*) is the older form. In fact, however, the explanation commanding approval is the first of the two considered by Skjærvø 1983, 255, namely that the original form is represented not by the solitary Avestan *x^varenah-*, but by the otherwise pan-Iranian *farnah-*. Skjærvø regards as more likely the reverse, but from the common adjective **farnahwant-* (Sogdian *frnxwnd-*) one reaches **hwarnahwant-* (Avestan *x^varənahvant-*) and hence by subtraction of the suffix *-vant-* Avestan *x^varənah-* as easily by assimilation, as by dissimilation one reaches Avestan *xrafstra-* from **frafstra-* (see GMS, p. 246). The other detail adduced by Mackenzie is the past participle *gmata-* of *gam-* «to come», characteristic of Old Persian. This might be thought to have been characteristic also of Median, if one were to rely on the name of Media's capital city Ecbatana, not mentioned in Assyrian sources (DIAKONOFF, 109 n. 2), which is the name also of a place in Achaemenian Syria, perhaps a recruiting station, mentioned only by Herodotus (iii 62, 64). In Old Persian the Median capital is called *Hangmatāna*, wherefore in the light of the Old Persian past participle *hangmata-* «assembled», the toponym is thought to have meant, as a common noun, «assembly place». In Kurdish the past participle of *gam-* derives from Old Iranian **gata-* (< **gum to-*), not from *gmata-*. But should one therefore conclude from the toponym that the Kurdish past participle conflicts with the unattested Median one, and not rather that Kurdish points to the Median past participle having been **gata-* and therefore the toponym having entered foreign sources (none of which is earlier than the Persian seizure of Media) in a form not Median, but Persian? If Median had a common noun **han-gatāna* «assembly place», Persians would not be slow to equate it with their own common noun **han-gmatāna* «assembly place», and Persianize accordingly any Median toponym reproducing it.

⁸ See W.B. HENNING. *TPS* 1954, 157-177.

In the light of this honourable failure⁹ where Azerbaijan is concerned, it would be unrealistic to expect more positive results from the study of the Iranian dialects spoken today anywhere else in ancient Media. For, ever since that country fell under the sway of the Persians in 550 B.C., she remained exposed to any number of dislocations of Iranoglot population, of which only a very few can be traced in surviving chronicles, and none as far back as the Achaemenian period.

So long therefore as the Median language remains beyond reconstruction from modern dialects, or ancient records written in Median language do not come to light, the only factual ground on which one may impugn Minorsky's identification will have to be the ethnical name «Kurd», which clearly is no descendant of Old Persian *Māda* «Median». However, the very fact that Media is not a habitat of Kurds, dilutes the erosive capacity of the onomastic objection. In Media one might claim some entitlement to expect, that if its present inhabitants had retained Median speech in modern guise, their language would still be called «Median» and not «Kurdish». Outside Media such an expectation would have to contend with plenty of examples to the contrary, in circumstances where a given language continued to be spoken under a different name outside its country of origin, centuries after the severance of its speakers' political and cultural ties with the homeland. Severance was inevitably the lot of descendants of Medes left stranded, after the surrender of Ecbatana to Cyrus, in the alloglot or underpopulated territories of Asia Minor where as conquerors or adventurers they had settled during the height of Median power. It is therefore not difficult to accept that, as a result of vicissitudes unmentioned in our sources, the displaced speakers of the Median language came to acquire, and eventually to treat as their own, the collective name «Kurd», of which the origin eludes us.

If this is acceptable, let us ask to what extent one may also accept an interesting consequence that would follow from Minorsky's identification, namely that the initial palatal affricate of the Kurdish verb for «to go», *ču-*, was a feature of this verb already in the unknown ancient language of the Medes. Among the languages dialectologically Western Iranian, Kurdish is unique in having retained this verb's ancient affricate¹⁰, as palatal as it was in Sanskrit. Outside Western Iranian, as we saw, the affricate is found, though mostly in secondarily dentalized form, only in Saka languages, Ossetic and Khotanese, and sporadically in the Hindukush and Pamir area, where the affricate itself

⁹ Honourable, because Henning's article constitutes one of the most instructive studies available of north-west Iranian dialects.

¹⁰ See MACKENZIE. 1961. PP. 71 sq.

suggests that Saka influence, geographically and historically well within the realm of possibility, had at one time been at work.

To suggest, or rather remind you, that Saka influence had been at work also on ground once held by Medes, and thereby turn Kurdish *ču-* into a piece of linguistic confirmation of Minorsky's ethno-geographical identification, is what I propose to do, but not before stressing that the proposal steers clear of the statements we have so far considered of Herodotus and Strabo. From these you will remember that the Scythians and the Sarmatians emerge as having nomadized in Herodotus's days, that is, well after the sixth century Achaemenian seizure of Media, north of both the Black Sea and the Caucasus, with Media well out of their reach. My selection above from Herodotus, was confined strictly to statements relevant to the subsequent, post-Achaemenian evolution of the Sarmatian language into Ossetic.

If instead we turn our attention to the Sakish-looking verb *ču-* of Kurdish, it is about events preceding the Achaemenian seizure of Media that we must consult Herodotus. From him we learn that in the seventh century on the one hand the Medes brought under their dominion «the whole of Asia» up to beyond the river Halys (i 103), and on the other the Scyths, following the Caspian route (literally «keeping the Caucasus on their right») invaded Media, defeated the Medes, deprived them of their empire and, having become masters of «Asia», advanced as far as Syrian Palestine (i 104-5). We see here the Scyths overlording the Medes across roughly the same territories as today are occupied, with the exception of Media herself, by Kurds.

The duration of the Scythian hegemony in «Asia» is given by Herodotus as 28 years (i 106). The span is dated from 652 to 625 B.C. by Diakonoff, with the important rider that when after 625 the Scyths returned to their homeland, «it seems that not all of them went: Jeremiah (51.27) mentions a Scythian kingdom, evidently in Azerbaijan, as late as in 593»¹¹.

The above common knowledge about the Scythian interlude in Median history, summarized here by me because in a gorge of South Ossetia I found Ossetic *cu-* pronounced *ču-*, has never as yet been related to the dialectologically remarkable fact that Kurdish has for «to go» not *šu-*, as has Persian, but *ču-*.

If Kurdish *ču-* were a linguistic relic of the time when Scyths «insolently and scornfully roaming about plundered» (ὑπό τε ὕβριος καὶ ὀλιγωρίας ... ἥρπασον περιελαύνοντες, Her. i 106) the territories nowadays definable as

¹¹ DIAKONOFF. P. 119. On his «evidently in Azerbaijan» see his P. 100. His reference to Herodotus in the immediate sequel to the passage quoted above from him, envisages Book i 73.

«Kurdistan», one would have to ask why it is the only relic, no other Saka trait having so far been recognized in this otherwise dialectologically Western Iranian language.

The answer, applicable perhaps also, *mutatis mutandis*, to the affricate of our verb in Waxi, Parachi, Ormuri and Pashto (see above, p. 166), may be sought in the psychological impact which Scythic *čyu-ing is sure to have made on an entire generation of Median *šyu-ers afflicted by so protracted a presence among them of an overwhelming number of roving (περιελαύνοντες) marauders.

To ancient observers hallmark of the Scythians was their nomadic way of life, comparable to that of the modern Gypsies.

If one tries to work out by which known Iranian verb Scythians might have expressed their «being on the move», čyu- will receive high priority. Its meaning, whether with initial č/c- or š-, is «to go» in all Iranian languages recorded from Avestan and Old Persian onward, including as we saw, the Middle Iranian Saka language Khotanese and the present-day Saka language Ossetic. Originally, however, *čyu- simply meant «to move, stir», intransitively, as alone is its meaning in Sanskrit. This is why, at one whole century preceding the verb's written attestation among sedentary Iranians as šyu- in the derivative sense of «to go», the phonologically conditioned retention of its affrication by the steppe-roaming Iranian nomads, may readily be thought to have been accompanied by semasiological retention of at least a tinge of its original sense. The tinge would scarcely be lost on the šyu-ing Medes (if šyu-ing they were), during the 28 years of almost daily intercourse with uninvited *čyu-ers. Which is what I mean by «psychological impact».

By making this detour, we reduce Median *čyu-, on the supposition that Kurdish ču- derives from Median, to an isolated instance of phonetic Scythification of an earlier Median *šyu-.

Isolated, Median *čyu- will not commit us to assume that also in other words Indo-Iranian initial antevocalic *čy- remained unchanged in Median, let alone that Median was phonologically what Kurdish is not, a Saka language. In its turn, the Sakish-looking ču- of Kurdish, a language otherwise dialectologically as Western Iranian as geographically are its speakers, appreciably gains in explicability from our dating back the basics of the Kurdish dialects of today's «Kurdistan», to the remote time when Scyths demonstrably lorded it over Medes in occupation of it. They certainly impressed the Medes enough to induce Cyaxares to engage Scyths to teach Median boys the Scythian language (HERODOTUS, i 73). In any case, even if it were only the ancient nomads' *č(y)u- which from the Scythian episode in «Asia» all Kurds have retained, let us not forget that the term «Kurd», demonstrably from the ninth century A.D.

onward, and undemonstrably perhaps much earlier, not only denoted in Persia ethnic Kurds, but also served generally as a synonym of «nomad»¹².

The above reflexions on Minorsky's identification, form the background to the perspective (see above, p. 167) in which we may view not only Kurdish *ču-*, but also the contrast between the palatal affrication of Ossetic *ču-* in one gorge of South Ossetia, and the dental affrication of North Ossetic *cu-*. We should not, I think, give preference to the unlikely, even though there is no denying that the unlikely is not impossible, namely that among some proto-Ossetes still *cu-*ing at the time when they crossed the high mountain passes southward perhaps early in the Christian era, the dental affrication of word-initial *c* reverted secondarily over the centuries to its palatal point of departure.

If we discard this supposition, we become free to correlate not only geographically but also linguistically, the separation by the river Don of *fifth* century Scythians west of it from the Sauromatians east of it, with the separation by the ridge of Caucasus of today's North Ossetic *cu-*ers from a few *ču-*ers in South Ossetia. You will remember that the Sauromatians spoke the Scythian language *σολοικίζοντες*. At one at least of their solecisms of nearly twenty-five centuries ago, datable let us say for short in the year 500, I should not think it reckless to venture a guess: the atavistically nomadic wayfaring of the Scythians was a *ču-ing*, that of the Sauromatians a *cu-ing*.

The guess would not be reckless, because in mid-seventh century B.C. there is no need to think that the Scythians had already been driven across the Don by the Sarmatians. The latter will therefore have been at that time geographically closer than where Herodotus knew them to be, to the ancestors of the Khotanese of the seventh century A.D., in whose language we have seen the initial affricate of the «going» verb to have been as dental as it is in North Ossetic. It would then indeed be Scythians, as Herodotus says, and not Sarmatians, who in 652 B.C. invaded Media, not across the Caucasian mountain passes, but «keeping the Caucasus on their right» (see above, p. 170) and therefore proceeding from territories which before the fifth century B.C. we have no reason to think were held by Sarmatians.

To *those* Scythians, if Minorsky's Kurdo-Median identification is valid, the Kurdish language will owe its *ču-*. But of those Scythians not all disappeared after 625 from south of the Caucasus, where we have seen that a Scythian presence is still attested as late as the early sixth century B.C.

That presence of twenty-six centuries ago I would suggest is still with us in South Ossetia, both geographically and linguistically. It is a presence admittedly much diluted by the slow but steady growth over some two millennia, of

¹² See on this MACKENZIE. 1961. P. 69.

direct contact across the high mountain passes between the former Sarmatians north of the ridge, and the descendants of Scythians who had arrived south of the ridge not by crossing it, but by skirting the Caspian.

The direct contact between north and south has led by Soviet times to a «literary language» being used in books and newspapers printed in South Ossetia, which differs only in few respects, and orthographically and typographically not at all, from literary North Ossetic. Below this bland blanket, however, the retention in living speech of *ču-* in one gorge, is but one of the dialectological peculiarities to be found in South Ossetia. The distribution of the dialects of that region, which have so far received little attention in western Iranological literature and since my visit have unfortunately become endangered by political and seismic upheavals, is the subject matter of a report I am engaged in writing, with the help of a map kindly drawn for me by the Georgian Academy's Institute of Geography and complementary material helpfully given me by the South Ossetic Research Institute of Tskhinvali. In that report *ču-* will figure in more detailed phonological context than can be offered on the present occasion¹³.

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I now turn, less expansively, to another aspect of the title of this paper. There is no Herodotus or other ancient author to guide us linguistically in the

¹³ Here only the following specification needs to be given. The South Ossetic dialect which corresponding to North Ossetic *cu-* has *ču-*, also has *čarm* «skin» (just as has Kurdish) corresponding to North Ossetic *carm* (*čarman-* in Avestan, Old Persian and Sanskrit). Except in such Saka speech as retained a trace of the *y* of *čyu-* in the form of the affricate's turning into an aspirate affricate (Parachi *čhu-*, Khotanese, with dentalization, *tsu-*, see above, n. 2), the loss of *y* brought the *č* in line with any *č* that already in Indo-Iranian had stood in initial antevocalic position. The dentalization of *ču-* (< **čyu-*) to *cu-* in North Ossetic, must have happened as part of the dentalization of *čarm* to *carm* (to which in Khotanese, because in Indo-Iranian the word began with *ča-* and not *čya-*, corresponds *tcarm*, with dental, un-aspirate affricate, see n. 2 above), just as in both South Ossetic and Kurdish the affrication of *ču-* remained palatal as part of the *č* of *čarm* undergoing no change. The latter word is *čarm* also in Persian, where its initial contrasts with *šu-* < *šyu-* < **čyu-*. Persian, however, also has *šād* «happy» < **čyāta-* (Lat. *quietus*), to which in North Ossetic corresponds, as phonologically is to be expected, the *-cād* of *ancād* «quiet». Kurdish, by contrast, has no **čād* «happy», as phonologically would have authenticated *ču-* for Kurdish, but only *šād* (e.g. Mackenzie 1962, §§ 55, 80), as lends credibility to our declaring *ču-* a Saka intruder from Median times, during which in Median itself we suppose it to have been a Scythian intruder.

region where the Persian Gulf, beyond the Straits of Hormuz, merges in the Gulf of Oman. There, on the Persian side, the long coastline of the Arabian Sea is populated by Baluchis along a stretch running first south-eastward for some 200 km, and next turning resolutely east to continue for approximately one thousand kilometres as far as just short of Karachi.

Inland behind this long coastal strip lies Makran, whose greater part is likewise Baluchi-populated, to such an extent that its western half is known as Persian Baluchistan, its eastern half as Pakistani Baluchistan.

The westernmost part, however, of Inland Makran, beginning just east of the initial, south-eastward running length of Baluchi-populated littoral, and extending eastward inland for no more than about 160 km, is not Baluchi territory. Its Iranian inhabitants, widely dispersed across barren mountain country, call themselves Baškard, wherefore in Persian administrative terminology and on maps, the Arabic broken plural Bašākard is used for this region. From what I have said, it will be appreciated that Baškardia is surrounded by Baluchi territory along three of its four sides, the west side, the south side, and the east side.

We have no specimen written down before the nineteenth century of either Baškardi or Baluchi, two Iranian languages that differ from each other no more, but also not much less, than Spanish for example differs from Italian. We do not know where the speakers of the Middle, let alone Old Iranian forms of Baškardi and Baluchi lived, if indeed *they* already did not live in the Makran. Neither do we know by which names their speakers in antiquity referred to themselves, or were called by others¹⁴. As the Baškardis and the Baluchis may or may not have reached their present location from elsewhere, there is also no telling whether their present-day names, Baškard and Baluchi, or unattested earlier forms of these names, are or were not quite different from those by which in the remote past they might elsewhere have called themselves. All one can say is that the two languages belong classificationwise to the Western, and not the Eastern group of Iranian languages, and that in Western Makran the geographical disposition of the two peoples is likely to have been for many centuries the same as today, seeing that any drastic population-changes even in that out-of-the-way region, would scarcely have passed unnoticed by attentive contemporary Islamic historians.

In such circumstances historical linguistics of necessity has to start from present-day grass-roots. In the case of Baluchi this has been done with conside-

¹⁴ See, however, the interesting attempt by Hansman (especially at PP. 564-570) to connect with the term «Baluch» the country called «Meluḥḥa» in early Mesopotamian texts and the people called «Mleccha» in Sanskrit, though not without taking into account the non-committal linguistic comments offered by H.W. Bailey in the ANNEXE at PP. 584-7.

able success for just over one hundred years, but there still remains much to be done. Let me quote an example where from the present-day grass-roots it is not to be seen how a term of Avestan antiquity could have been reached, were it not for the geographical fact that the Baškardis are living, and very likely have lived for centuries, surrounded on three sides by Baluchis.

When in 1957 I travelled in Baškardia for a dialect reconnaissance¹⁵, I found that in both subdivisions of the Baškardi language, the Northern and the Southern, the word for «grass» corresponding to Persian *giyāh* of until then as yet unknown etymology, is *gīdā*. The internal *d* was an intriguing novelty, because although Old Iranian intervocalic *d* survives unchanged in Northern Baškardi and in Baluchi, it becomes *y* in Southern Baškardi, as it does in Persian. A convincing test was available in respect of the Old Iranian word for «hair», **mauda-*, for an appreciation of which one has to know that the diphthong *au* becomes *ū* in Northern Baškardi, as it does in Persian, but *ī* in Southern Baškardi, as it does in Baluchi. Accordingly the word for «hair» is *mūy* in Persian, *mūd* in Northern Baškardi, *mīd* in Baluchi, and *mī* from **mīy* in Southern Baškardi.

Hence I was troubled by the word for «grass» having a *d* not only in Northern Baškardi, but also in Southern Baškardi. Of course I asked such Baluchis as came my way in Baškardia, whether in their language, too, *gīdā* was used. But they all firmly maintained that the word was a pan-Baškardian peculiarity.

There was here an impasse, which could only be solved on the working hypothesis that five, ten, or more centuries ago both Northern and Southern Baškardi had borrowed *gīdā* from Baluchi, whereafter in Baluchi itself the word ceased to be used. Accordingly in 1962 I published the proposal that Baluchi, I repeat, Baluchi *gīdā*, attested exclusively as a loanword in Baškardi, goes back to Old Iranian **gau-dāyu-* «cattle-nourisher».

Here the asterisk applies only to the assumption that the compound was used somewhere in ancient Iran to denote grass. For in Avestan, where the compound *is* attested in the spelling *gaodāyu-*, it serves as an adjective qualifying a cattle-breeder, a man, therefore who although he himself is not grass, makes sure that his cattle get it. Phonologically I had to admit that in Persian *giyāh* the disappearance of the diphthong *au* was irregular. But unexpected confirmation of the proposed etymology turned up eleven years later, when in 1973 a Parthian text was published, displaying the previously unknown Parthian word for «grass» in the spelling *gwy*¹⁶.

¹⁵ See GERSHEVITCH 1959.

¹⁶ This was first recognized *apud* GERSHEVITCH. *Philologia Iranica*. Wiesbaden. 1985.

You see here, with languages of whose ancestors we know nothing, an example of linguistic geography at work hand in hand with historical linguistics literally at grass-roots. But at this symposium, eighteen years after the confirmation of **gau-dāyu-*, we may ask a more fundamental question. Northern Baškardi does not have the **gūdā* one expects from **gau-dāyu-*. Southern Baškardi does not have the **gīyā* one expects from **gau-dāyu-*. Baluchi altogether has no descendant of the **gau-dāyu-* which without Baluchi could not have been reached. And *gau-dāyu-* itself, in Avestan does not mean «grass». Are these inconsistencies not due to the fact that we are in Makran, an Iranian subtropical region where grass is in short supply, and the sight of a cow is unusual?

Hair grows on everybody's head, and therefore the behaviour of the word for it in Northern Baškardi, in Southern Baškardi, and in Baluchi, in no way conflicts with the present-day geographical interrelation of the three languages. Grass does *not* grow everywhere, and therefore the glottological inconsistencies besetting *gīdā*, inconsistencies which only historical linguistics is capable of discovering, constitute a forceful pointer to the remote ancestors of both the Baškardis and the Baluchis having lived not in Makran, but in regions where the climate favours grassland.

* * *

In the third and last part of this paper, all I can hope to do is to show why the Soma controversy is relevant to our symposium. It is relevant linguistically because it involves the semantics and etymology of an exclusively Indo-Iranian technical term, namely **Sauma-*. It is relevant geographically because **sauma* denoted a member of the vegetable kingdom. The vegetable growth in question was worshipped by the Indo-Iranians as a god called **Sauma* already in pre-historic times. This follows from the fact that, at the beginning of historic times it is Iranians worshipping *Haoma*, and not *Soma*, and Indo-Aryans worshipping *Soma*, and not *Haoma*, whom we find respectively in the western and the eastern half of the vast spread of land across the southern foothills of Hindukush, Pamir, and the westernmost Himalaya, a vast spread of land which for short let me call the borderland, namely of present-day Afghanistan and North Pakistan.

In this borderland we learn from Vedic hymns and Avestan liturgies that the priests pressed soma/haoma in mortars, so as to extract its juice and drink

(where my 1962 treatment of *gīdā* is reprinted). P. 280 by the editor, Nicholas Sims-Williams. The second letter of the Pahlavi Psalter spelling *gby'* of the word for «grass» (see F.C. Andreas and Kaj Barr in *SPAW*. 1933. 125 a) may also hark back to the original diphthong *au*.

it. The juice had an inebriating effect different from the alcoholic, not mind-perturbing, but clearing the mind and rendering it happy by perfecting wisdom and intelligence.

Western scholars have been expending rivers of ink in search of the botanical identity of **sauma*. The earliest pronouncements, up to the year 1884, recommended the wild rue, *Peganum harmala*, which today grows all over our borderland, as well as far to the west and north of it. After 1884 wild rhubarb was for seventy years considered the most suitable candidate among the plants growing in our borderland.

Of course the proponents of wild rue or rhubarb were aware that nowadays the Zoroastrian priests use Ephedra in their haoma-ceremonies, and that in several present-day Indian and Iranian regions various species of Ephedra bear local names deriving from *soma*, respectively *haoma*. Ephedra, too, grows in our borderland, and if in some Indian dialects it is called *sōm* and in some Iranian dialects *hōm*, the logic of historical linguistics should require already the prehistoric Indo-Iranian **sauma* to have been, a term denoting Ephedra. Nevertheless for ancient soma/haoma Ephedra was discarded as a candidate, because of its bitter taste and the priests deriving no stimulation from it.

The Soma controversy took a new turn when in 1968 Gordon Wasson's magnificent book *Soma* appeared, in which he mustered impressive arguments for soma/haoma having originally been a mushroom, the fly-agaric, *Amanita muscaria*. Fly-agaric used to be ingested by tribesmen in Northern Siberia for its powerful hallucinogenic effect, inducing a state of sublime rapture. Shamans used it for visions. Unlike, however, the wild rue, or rhubarb, or Ephedra, *Amanita muscaria* is not found, as far as is known, in our borderland. There the speakers of Vedic and Avestan would have had to import it, or else take recourse to substitutes growing *in situ*, quite possibly one of the plants I have mentioned.

To Indo-Europeanists, therefore, the great interest of Wasson's proposal, lies in the possibility it holds out, that by taking account of the habitats of fly-agaric, the geographical route might be traced, along which in prehistoric times the haoma-worshipping proto-Iranians and the soma-worshipping proto-Indo-Aryans, might have reached our borderland from the Kirghiz Steppe¹⁷, and beyond from the *sauma*-less homeland of the Indo-Europeans.

Clearly this interest will remain valid also if in future, with improved understanding of the psychotropic properties of an ever-increasing number of vegetable growths, hitherto unthought of candidates should on good grounds be proposed, that happen not to grow within our borderland.

¹⁷ See on this GERSHEVITCH 1974. PP. 54-6.

Meanwhile however an unexpected return to the earliest candidate, the wild rue, has taken place, though in a depth never before achieved, with a volume published two years ago by Flattery and Martin Schwartz. Like Wasson's book, this is a volume well worth studying, or if you have no time to do so, taking the measure of it by reading Gherardo Gnoli's authoritative review in *East and West*, 39 (1989), pp. 320-324. Flattery has gone into every conceivable aspect, botanical, pharmacological, terminological, geographical, of the wild rue, and the 47 pages of Schwartz's historical linguistic commentary are a masterpiece of philological acumen. Each of their arguments, backed by sound erudition, deserves careful consideration.

So does, however, also the reason why they feel so confident of their identification, a reason stated in the volume so often, that one wonders if without it they would have returned to the wild rue at all. The reason is that in Persian the wild rue is called *sipand*, of which word they take for granted the only etymology ever offered, namely descent from Old Iranian **spanta*-, which in its Avestan form *spənta*- is a famous Zoroastrian adjective meaning «holy, sanctus». Being called «sanctus», the two authors think, what else can the wild rue be if not *Haoma*, who in fact is once in the surviving parts of the Avesta called *spənta*, just as many other Avestan divinities are frequently (not only once) called *spənta*¹⁸.

The justification for the adjective «sanctus» having all by itself been retained as name of the plant, at the remote time when the meaning «sanctus» of *spənta* was still known, is seen by the two authors in the apotropaic function which throughout the centuries Iranian popular superstition has been attributing to the wild rue. In order to activate this apotropaic function it is common, and always was common, to throw seeds of wild rue into the fire. In fire the seeds of *sipand* dramatically snap in crepitation, emitting a fat black smoke

¹⁸ HENNING, *AION*, sez. ling., 6, 1965. P. 39, being unaware of the Northern Baškardi name of the wild rue presently to be quoted in the main text above, saw no need to reject the common derivation of Persian *sipand* from *spənta* so long as it was understood, and not otherwise, that it was devil-worshipping practitioners of witchcraft, and not the Avestan followers of the Good Religion, who applied the epithet «sacred» to the plant. For, «the proper place of wild rue was in witchcraft... That a seal of approval was set on this sorcerer's favourite in the Avesta itself by the attribution of semi-divine origin, should not be assumed too readily». Flattery, at P. 46, § 62, duly quotes Henning in full, but his attempt to refute him in § 63 is not free of special pleading (by taking for granted what needs to be proved, viz. the identity of *sipand* and *spənta*, he moves in a vicious circle). We shall presently see that homonymy would provide a simple solution to the difficulty.

with whose soot children are marked against the evil eye¹⁹. This apotropaic superstition, one might agree, could just possibly explain why the plant was called «sanctus», provided, of course, that *sipand* is the same word as Avestan *spānta*. But is it?

In Northern Baškardi, alone among Iranian languages, the wild rue is called not *sipand*, but *espaht*, quoted by Schwartz, p. 144, as *sepaxt*²⁰. Schwartz regards this as a contamination of Middle Iranian *spand* with Middle Persian *spixt* «sprouting, blooming»²¹. But as the Northern Baškardi vocabulary includes many archaisms, the first question that springs to mind is whether *espaht*, which looks incompatible with Avestan *spānta*, may not give us an etymology of *sipand* that would vindicate Henning's distrust (see n. 18) of its derivation from the Avestan word.

Middle Persian *spixt*, invoked by Schwartz, is known to go back via **spixt* to Old Iranian **spṛta*²², past participle of Pokorny's Indo-European

¹⁹ See FLATTERY at PP. 43, 47 and 63.

²⁰ This is what Schwartz must have heard me say on the only occasion ever, when we exchanged a few words on the problem of *sipand* in a cafe in Paris during the 1973 International Congress of Orientalists. I was speaking from memory, and although the gist of what he quotes from me is correct, the impression conveyed by his wording will be apt to mislead: «*sepaxt*», he writes, occurs «in one of the dialects of Bashkardi», while *sepand* «is represented elsewhere in Bashkardia». Here «one of the dialects» in reality means one of the two language groups, Northern Baškardi (NBš), into which the dialects of Baškardia fall (see SKJÆRVØ 1990, P. 846), *espaht* being characteristic of the whole of the NBš group. If any SBš-speaker used it, this could only be as a loanword from NBš, because the SBš phonological counterpart to NBš *-aht* is *-eid*. Being unaware of any **speid*, I assume(d) that in SBš, a group of dialects spoken indeed «elsewhere in (i.e. in the southern half of) Bashkardia», the term used for the wild rue is simply Persian *sepand*. In actual fact I can find no mention of the plant in any SBš sentence recorded by me, nor would the use of *sepand* by any NBš-speaker have attracted my attention, as throughout Baškardia Persian technical terms freely interchange with their native equivalents.

At all events, *espaht* is not a freakish derailment dubiously attested in «one» tiny community only, but needs to be taken seriously as a widespread native alternative to a Persian word which, familiar to all NBš-speakers, was invariably declared by them to be a term exclusively Persian. I may here add that in Ramešk, where I was told that the wild rue does not grow, the term used for it is *espahk*, deriving presumably from **espaht-k*.

²¹ Schwartz does not explain why anybody equipped with the unequivocal term *sipand* for only one, very special plant, should be tempted to replace it with the everyday word *spixt* denoting the «blooming» from which no plant is exempt.

²² See HENNING, BSOAS, 12 (1947), P. 47, who formulated the two rules involved as

base **spre(n)g-* (pp. 996sq.), which denotes both the bursting of buds into blooms, and the noise made by anything bursting.

Remember the dramatic snapping of *sipand* in fire. If Northern Baškardi *espaht* went back via a Middle Iranian **spixt*²³ from an early Middle Iranian **sprixt*, to an Old Iranian *ti*-abstract **sp̥xti-* meaning «the act of snapping», then the name of the plant could originally have meant, by concretization, «that which snaps». The name would have conveyed the property of the wild rue that most vividly catches everybody's imagination.

Let us try out this prescription on Persian *sipand*. *Sipand* would be phonologically regular also if via **sprand* it went back to an Old Iranian **spranti-*. **Spranti-*, in its turn, would be phonologically regular not only if it derived from Indo-European **sprenti-*, but also if its Indo-European ancestor were **sprenkti-* (<**spreng-ti-*), belonging to the very base to which Old Iranian **sp̥xti-*, from Indo-European **sp̥kti-* (<**sp̥g-ti-*), would have to belong. The loss of the velar sandwiched between *n* and *t*, would be the same as is familiar from Avestan *paṇta-hva-* «one fifth»; think of Latin *quintus* from *quinctus*, or indeed of Italian *santo* from *sanctus*.

We must not forget, though, that it was Schwartz himself who brought in Middle Persian *spixt* as midway etymon of Northern Baškardi *espaht*²⁴. He had seen that of the two words for wild rue, *sipand* and *espaht*, only *sipand* can be

follows: (1) *-t-* becomes in early Middle Persian brief vowel plus *r* before a single consonant, but *r* plus brief vowel (generally *i*) before two consonants; and (2), a word may not begin with three consonants.

²³ «Pers. *-a-* from MPers. *-i-* is common», Henning wrote in n. 3 of the page quoted in our preceding note. He was there concerned with the *-a-* of Persian *sabz* «green, fresh, in bloom», from **spaz* < **spiz* < **spriz* < **sp̥jya-*.

²⁴ Note that *spixt* and its Middle and even Old Iranian cognates only refer to the «sprouting» and «blooming» invoked by Schwartz, the audible «snapping» which the base **spre(n)g-* additionally expressed, not being found in the Iranian languages attested. Schwartz's contamination of *spand* with *spixt* cannot therefore be extended to a *spixt* still understood as meaning «that which snaps», this being a sense borne, within our explanation, by *spixt*'s ancestor **sp̥xti-*, but abandoned in common use after the latter became a technical term for the wild rue. Hence if as Schwartz reasonably thinks, *espaht* is from Middle Iranian *spixt*, the latter word would have had two meanings in Middle Iranian, (1) «sprouting, blooming», and (2) «wild rue». Of the reason of (2) the speakers of Middle Persian would have known nothing, just as by Schwartz's own theory they knew nothing of his derivation of *spand* from a word meaning «sacred». Schwartz's contamination (or «blend» as he calls it) would then boil down to an admission that from times prehistoric, two distinct technical terms for the wild rue have come down in Iranian speech, each requiring its own morphological explanation.

connected with the Avestan word *spənta*, which in the Avesta never means «wild rue», but only «sanctus»²⁵. All we have done additionally today, is to look for an etymological connexion between the semantically identical *espaht* and *sipand*, which if it carries conviction, will disconnect even *sipand* from the semantically quite different Avestan word.

But if instead of being La Santa the wild rue is La Crepitante, then we must ask Flattery and Schwartz if they nevertheless still wish *soma/haoma* to have been the wild rue. What their answer will be remains to be seen. My immediate purpose was merely to illustrate by example, that even botanical linguistic geography depends for guidance on historical linguistics.

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²⁵ Phonological support for «sanctus» having been the original meaning also of *sipand*, is sought by Schwartz from supposed cognates of *spand* lacking its *p*, such as Lari *sandolos* and a few more (PP. 142 and 150). But the probative value of the words in question is greatly diluted by Schwartz's own, just reference to the indubitable influence exerted on them by the word for «sandalwood» (Perso-Arabic *şandal*, from Sanskrit *candana*).

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