

THE DARI LANGUAGE PROJECT

2003 Fieldwork Endeavor Summary of Findings

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The Zoroastrians who arrive in Bombay from Yezd and some other districts of Persia speak a peculiar dialect which is never written. Some people think it is a language by itself, but nobody has hitherto taken the trouble to make a collection of phrases; this has now been done, and it will appear that this so-called language is a mere gibberish...which may have been more useful in old times of persecution, but now serves only to disguise paltry commercial transactions.

E. REHATSEK (1873)

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Background

1. THE DARI LANGUAGE

Dari¹ is the first language of some 8,000 to 15,000 persons living in and around the central Iranian cities of Yazd and Kermān (Ethnologue). And while Dari is spoken in a geographical area that is predominately Muslim, it is the proprietary language of the area's Zoroastrians, followers of the world's first monotheistic religion. Genetically, Dari is a member of the Northwestern Iranian language subfamily, which includes several other closely related languages, *e.g.* Kurdish, Gilaki, Balochi. The Northwestern Iranian languages themselves comprise a branch of the larger Iranian language family, which embraces in its Southwestern subgrouping the family's best-known language, Persian. More distantly, Dari is related to European languages like English, French, and German, since the Iranian language group is itself a branch of the Indo-European language family.

Dari is most commonly known by the appellation Gabri, but the Dari Language Project eschews this usage because of its cultural insensitivity. Literally "language of the infidels," Gabri was the name bestowed by Iran's Muslim conquerors upon those few members of Iran's historically Zoroastrian majority who neither fled nor converted following the Muslim invasion of Iran in the seventh century. The speakers of this language, who obviously do not consider themselves infidels, resent the use of Gabri to refer to their language and prefer Dari instead. It must be noted that the Afghani dialect of Persian is also called Dari by its speakers, though the Dari of the Zoroastrians and the Afghani Dari are completely distinct, and only distantly related languages. But they bear the same name for much the same reasons. The language that originally bore the name Dari was the official spoken language of the Sāsāniān court and bureaucracy, a language that approximated the official written language, Pahlavi (Middle Persian). The Arab invasion of Persia in the seventh century resulted in the extension of Dari's usage east into Bactria (ancient northern Afghanistan). At about this same time, Dari, which had previously been an exclusively spoken language, was committed to paper in the Arabic script. The prestige of the Arabic language, which at the time was the language of the Arab ruling class, encouraged borrowing from Arabic at a rapid pace and soon the unaltered Dari gave way to the Arabicized form of the language that we know today as Farsi. In a sense, one could consider Dari and Farsi (New Persian) merely different styles of the same language, the former simple and unadorned and the latter heavily influenced by Arabic borrowings (Frye

¹ SIL Code: GBZ.

1973). Both Zoroastrians and speakers of Afghani Persian chose, for their respective languages, a common name that venerates the cultural richness of their pre-Islamic past.

The Dari language has traditionally been divided into two main dialects: the variety spoken in Yazd and the one spoken in Kermān. This division of the language, based on the division of its speakers into their two main cities of residence, conceals the complexity of the actual dialectical situation. The Yazd dialect is itself comprised of some thirty varieties, each distinct and unique to one of the Zoroastrian neighborhoods in and around Yazd. The variation amongst the Yazd dialects is so great that, were they not for their geographic proximity, we would without a doubt classify them as distinct dialects. Though we are not certain, the Kermān dialect may also contain (or may have contained at one time) a comparable level of dialectical complexity.

Other varieties of Dari may also exist, in particular, varieties spoken in non-Zoroastrian communities. The local speech of the nearby city of Nāin and its surrounding towns, including Tudeshk and Abiyāneh, has been attested to bear striking resemblances to the language of the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kermān. Whether this speech is a distinct language or simply another dialect of Dari has not yet been determined, though the data that we do have indicates a high level of mutual intelligibility between speakers from these areas and speakers of Zoroastrian Dari. Were further study to confirm this result, the local speech of the Nāin area could then be considered a dialect of Dari. In such an event, we would have to reconsider the exclusively Zoroastrian nature of the Dari language, since Nāin and the surrounding areas are largely Muslim in religious character.

2. DARI: AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE

Estimates suggest that half of the world's approximately 6,000 languages will become extinct in the twenty-first century and will no longer have any living speakers (Crystal 1997). Without significant efforts to halt this advance, many of Iran's sixty-nine regional languages—including Dari—may be numbered among those fated for death. The wide-scale language death we are seeing around the world is largely the result of pressures on speakers to substitute for their own language, the language of another, often more dominant, culture. Dari is experiencing, or has experienced in the past, pressures of two types: economic and political.

The pressures affecting the vitality of Dari today are largely economic. In order to obtain an economic advantage, speakers are giving up their traditional language for the dominant language of Iran, Farsi. Parents intentionally do not transmit Dari to their children in order that they may have what is felt to be an advantage in school and in life. The language loss can also occur more indirectly and less visibly when people move to larger urban centers or abroad in pursuit of better economic opportunities; the lack of a complete language environment in which to immerse a child decreases or completely inhibits the transmission of the language to new generations.

In past times, Dari speakers have experienced political pressures to yield up their language as well. The period since the seventh-century Muslim conquest of Persia has been a time of great persecution for the Zoroastrians of Iran. Political pressures have directly resulted in language loss when Zoroastrians have deliberately abandoned their language as a means of hiding their identity so as to escape persecution. Political pressures have also led to language loss indirectly; the oppression the Zoroastrians have been experienced under Iran's various rulers over the past thousand or so years has driven a steady stream of Zoroastrians to more tolerant areas, mostly the capital, Tehrān, or abroad. Again, a complete language environment does not exist in these places, inhibiting the transmission of Dari to new generations.

Linguists currently consider Dari to be in a state of language shift. Many of the language's speakers have assimilated to the dominant culture of the society they live in and have given up—intentionally or unintentionally—their traditional language. Languages like Dari are transitioning from a state of language maintenance, in which a language is being sustained in the face of pressure from a dominant culture, to language death, a state in which the language is no longer spoken.

Many of Dari's dialects are facing extinction at an even more rapid pace than the language as a whole. Since each of Dari's many dialects has a smaller community of speakers, they are more susceptible to the forces driving the language towards extinction. Some dialects have already effectively reached extinction, for example, the Mohammadābād dialect, which, it is reported, possesses only a few speakers living in Tehrān. The Kermān dialect, always susceptible because of the smaller size of its Zoroastrian population, also seems to be largely lost.

3. THE DARI LANGUAGE PROJECT

The current state of the Dari language is imperiled and its future insecure. In Yazd and Kermān, the last strongholds of the Zoroastrian religion and culture, young Zoroastrian are increasingly ignorant of the language of their heritage as they advance socio-economically and the language is transmitted less frequently to new generations. In the other cities of Iran and other countries, young Zoroastrians, confronted with assimilating a new culture, are increasingly turning down Dari in favor of the dominant language.

The Dari Language Project was conceived in order to respond to the current endangered status of the Dari language. Its ultimate purpose is the linguistic study of Dari with the purpose of aiding in its renewal and documentation. To this end, the Dari Language Project has three concrete goals.

GOAL 1 - *Determine the actual vitality of Dari and its component dialects.*

The Dari Language Project's first goal is to carry out a survey of Dari's dialects to assess the spheres of their usage, the number and age of their speakers, and derivatively the language's current and projected vitality. The successful completion of this first goal is a necessary prerequisite of the Project's second and third goals.

GOAL 2 - *Undertake a new theoretical analysis of Dari.*

The antiquated state of the existing body of linguistic literature on Dari requires that a completely new analysis of the language be completed within the framework of more contemporary linguistic theory. The Dari Language Project aims to carry out such a comprehensive analysis with the ambition of writing a complete grammar of the language. The new data that a theoretical inquiry into Dari's grammar would generate will benefit the field of theoretical linguistics generally, and especially, the subfield of linguistic typology, which requires as broad a knowledge base as possible. A grammar of Dari will also have pedagogical applications, as it could be applied to the development of methods for teaching Dari.

Theoretical analysis of Dari would focus on aspects of the Dari's grammar that remain constant across the language's dialects. The differences between dialects, which in Dari are large, are also of importance and are addressed by the Dari Language Project's third goal.

GOAL 3 - *Document the differences among Dari's component dialects.*

The incredible diversity amongst Dari's dialects is an integral component of the Iranian Zoroastrian community's identity. The Dari Language Project holds the study of these intra-linguistic differences to be equally important to the theoretical study of the language. As such, the Project's third goal is to document the variation amongst the dialects that comprise the Dari language.

The ultimate products of the Dari Language Project—a grammar of Dari and a compilation of the language's dialects—will together comprise a comprehensive record of the Dari language, an oeuvre that will form a true “cultural treatise” of the Iranian Zoroastrians. We expect that the eventual publication of this oeuvre, by raising public awareness of the language's plight and through its applications in pedagogy, will aid in the proactive preservation and perpetuation of Dari.

4. THE 2003 FIELDWORK ENDEAVOR

The realization of the Dari Language Project's ultimate purpose will, of course, require an effort spanning many years and involving many dedicated individuals. To this end, the 2003 fieldwork endeavor set three precise objectives.

1. TO LEARN ABOUT THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION AND CULTURE

The Dari Language Project sees its involvement in the Zoroastrian community as dedicated and long-term. Learning about the culture and religion of a linguistic community is an integral component of any linguistic fieldwork project. We therefore actively sought a general understanding of Zoroastrian culture and religion in general, as well as their specific manifestation in the community where we conducted our research.

2. TO ASSESS THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF YAZD'S DIALECTS

The 2003 fieldwork endeavor addressed the Project's first goal, to assess the vitality of Dari's many dialects, by surveying those that are spoken in Yazd. Data on their spheres of usage and on their speakers were collected.

3. TO MAKE A FOCUSED INQUIRY INTO DARI'S GRAMMAR

The current fieldwork venture also began to address the Project's second goal, to complete a grammar of Dari, by making focused inquiries into select areas of the language's grammar. The topics we investigated were confined to two components of Dari's grammar: its phonology (sound structure) and its morphology (patterns of word structure). Attention was also paid to making comparisons with Persian, especially in those areas with which we have comparative experience, *i.e.* vowels and syllable structure. The investigation of Dari's grammar proceeded through elicitation of word lists and other simple language data and the obtaining of texts representing different types of discourse, *e.g.* narratives, formal speeches, informal exchanges, etc.

The focused nature of the 2003 fieldwork endeavor's inquiries into Dari necessitated the consideration of only one of Yazd's many dialects, specifically the variety spoken in the Zoroastrian village of Qāsemābād. This *Summary of Findings* will follow the organization of the 2003 fieldwork endeavor into three parts: 1) Zoroastrian Religion and Culture, 2) Sociolinguistic Observations, and 3) Grammatical Inquiries.

Zoroastrian Religion and Culture

1. ARRIVAL

We traveled to Yazd by overnight sleeper; the relatively smooth nine hour ride was indicative of how much twentieth century technology had changed rural Iran. It was easy to forget that until the 1920s the lack of modern transportation methods made regular contact between Yazd and the capital inconceivable. The relative isolation in which Yazd long existed was, it would seem, among the main factors in its retaining a traditional way of life virtually unchanged for centuries (Boyce 1989: 11). The vast desert plain that confronted us upon our arrival at the train station on the outskirts of Yazd was a forcible reminder of why the last bastion of Zoroastrianism was found here. The harsh desert climate and landscape, while unappealing to the Zoroastrians, was, more importantly, equally unattractive to their Muslim persecutors, who had invaded Persia in the seventh century. It was for this reason that in the fourteenth century, the leader of the Zoroastrian community, the *dastur-e dasturān*, chose to lead his followers to the Yazd plain (Boyce 1984: 25).

Of course, for at least thirteen centuries prior to the Arab invasion, since the sixth century B.C., Zoroastrianism had been the religion of all Iranians. In fact, its founder, Zoroaster, an East Iranian priest thought to have lived between 1400 and 1200 B.C. (Boyce 1984: 22), originally intended his to be a world faith. However, the social and geographic situation in which it arose was not conducive to successful missionary efforts, and by the end of the pre-historic period Zoroastrianism seems to have already become a specifically ethnic religion. The Iranian people today regard their belief system as an integral part of their racial heritage (Boyce 1979: 47). Presumably, this linkage of religion and race was further reinforced by the first Persian imperial leaders' adoption and avocation of the faith. However, Arab Muslims' forceful, often violent conversion techniques were so thoroughly successful in the mass conversion of Iranians that today, while most Iranians see Zoroastrianism as an important part of their heritage, their knowledge of their country's ancient religion is limited at best.

To be sure, the religion's great antiquity, the lack of an authoritative textual source, and the various biased and essentially inaccurate interpretations advanced by Western scholars throughout recent history often work to obscure or muddle the faith's original precepts. This state of affairs we observed firsthand when we engaged in informal theological discussions with our hosts; we received, on more than one occasion, conflicting doctrinal explications from Zoroastrians themselves.

For example, Zoroastrianism is generally regarded as the world's first monotheistic religion, and religious scholars concur that the elevated status Zoroaster accorded to a single beneficent deity was, in retrospect, revolutionary within the context of extant religions. Less well-known, however, is that Zoroaster's cosmology, which includes a supreme deity who created the known universe, was also replete with throwbacks to the previous, strictly pagan Indo-Iranian world view. Contemporary Zoroastrians tend to de-emphasize, if not disregard completely, those aspects of their faith that derive from polytheistic sources, most likely as a result of long contact with Islam, and perhaps also because of the general scorn accorded polytheistic belief systems today.

It is enlightening in this regard to trace the pre-historic origins of Zoroaster's monotheism. In the pagan Iranian tradition, the two most important cult-gods, Fire (Mitrah) and Water (Apam Napat), who held the title of Ahura (Lord), together with the Lord of Wisdom, who was titled Ahura Mazda (Great Lord), formed a triumvirate of highest gods. Ahura Mazda personified the abstractions Wisdom and Ethical Probity, and, as such, was exceptional among the ancient gods in bearing no connection to any physical phenomena. Ahura Mazda had traditionally been the most venerated of the triad even before the revelations of the priest and prophet Zoroaster; it was in his declaration that Ahura Mazda was "the one uncreated God, existing eternally, and Creator of all else that is good, including all other beneficent divinities" that Zoroaster departed radically from tradition and founded the religion known today as Zoroastrianism (Boyce 1979: 20).

While Iran's less than one percent Zoroastrian population is distributed throughout the country, Yazd is still home to the most concentrated population. Yazdi Zoroastrians have, through sheer persistence, succeeded at maintaining their community and way of life in the face of severe hardship, especially after the spread of Islam to the region through Afghan invasion of Iran in the nineteenth century. We were reminded of Yazd's Muslim majority as soon as we disembarked from the train; the sea of black *chādor* formed a stark contrast against the pale dawn sky.

Zoroastrian villagers have been the object of verbal and physical abuse by their neighboring Muslims for centuries. Today, the originally self-contained Zoroastrian villages, through the progressive expansion of the original city of Yazd, have been encircled by Muslim communities. Because of the increased contact between the communities, we would expect everyday persecution by Muslims to have increased accordingly, but our informants told us on numerous occasions that since the 1979 Islamic Revolution daily abuse has actually decreased dramatically. While we personally did not experience or witness such harassment, we did hear of several quite recent cases—ranging in severity from insults and suggestive leers to rape. Of particular cause for concern were the young Muslim men who were given to speeding through the dusty streets of the old village on their motorcycles. Regardless of the depth of the actual threat, the Zoroastrians still felt their village to be a target of scorn. Our hosts insisted that

neither of us walk around the village alone. This was a precaution which one of our informants, a twenty year old female, was also at pains to follow, and we were often obliged to walk her home after an evening session.

During one of these walks, we were rather pleasantly surprised to hear our informant express her love for Qāsemābād, and explain that, though she had been born in the village and had lived there her whole life, she had no desire to travel elsewhere. This attitude must surely be exemplary of the attitude that has enabled Zoroastrian villagers to maintain their traditional way of life and pattern of religious observance in spite of the centuries of religious persecution, financial impoverishment resulting from social and professional exclusion, droughts, and the rise of modernity. The village of Qāsemābād itself attests to these historical misfortunes. The enclosed fields surrounding the village, for example, are today dry and scrub-filled, reflecting the many droughts that have struck the area over the years. In the village proper, once quite formidable *kāhgel* (straw mud) walls are crumbling to reveal overgrown *bāq* (gardens) once kept by the village's wealthier residents. Nonetheless, modernity has been incorporated into the village's centuries-old infrastructure in ways that suggest that the village is still functioning, and that even show that efforts have been taken to prevent it from decaying. Though we still saw the occasional donkey rider traversing the close, one-lane roads that once only hosted camel and foot traffic, the roads were in recent times paved and today accommodate moderate motorcycle and automobile traffic. Though many of the traditional desert style houses are virtually in ruins, a few were being remodeled while we were there. This process we were especially pleased to see since we found the traditional architectural style beautiful.

Our hosts' house is one of only two modern-style houses in Qāsemābād; we conducted our research in the basement apartment of the other one. And though nearly every household has a telephone, our hosts' possession of an air conditioner, computer, and washing machine is atypical. Most residents, of course, live in traditional style houses cooled with marvelous efficiency by *bādgir* (wind towers), the ancient alternative to air conditioning. Modern plumbing now brings water from Isfahān to Qāsemābād, but many of Qāsemābād's residents still wash dishes and do laundry in the *jub* running through the center of the village. In general, the *jub* seems to function as one of the centers of community life, and we often observed people of all ages gathering there to chat as they completed their various chores (see Plate 3).

Indeed, upon arriving in Qāsemābād and beginning our search for linguistic informants, we were struck immediately by how much the spirit of community, built into Zoroastrian religious philosophy, extends into their daily life. We had hardly been in the village a few days, it seemed, before everyone knew who we were. The speed with which news traveled was due in large part to the village's elderly female residents, who comprise the largest segment of the village's population. Attired in their traditional Zoroastrian dress, which includes the *maknu*, a brightly colored shawl pinned around the head and allowed to hang freely to the waist, we often saw them strolling the streets, doing chores in the *jub*, or sitting and chatting on one of

the *sakku* outside each house, greeting, with typical Persian effusiveness, anyone they encountered along the way (see Plate 2). It was a habit of our hostess to take a break from her household chores in the early evening around six or seven o' clock and take a walk through the village in order to exchange greetings with friends.

Because of Qāsemābād's small size, and the difficulties of traveling together as an unmarried man and woman, our hosts suggested that we call ourselves engaged were any villager to enquire regarding the details of our relationship. The historical insular nature of the Zoroastrian villages in Iran has made their residents suspicious of outsiders. In modern times, the Zoroastrian population, like all of Iran's other religious minorities, suffered severe financial and social setbacks in the first years of the 1979 Islamic revolution. However, the way in which they are perceived and treated by Muslims since the Revolution has greatly improved; several Muslims we encountered during our travels expressed only respect and admiration for their Zoroastrian neighbors. In Qāsemābād, every villager welcomed us with kind, genuine enthusiasm and overwhelming hospitality. We in turn did our best to respect the villagers' way of life. We made a conscious effort, for example, to replace *salām*—the Arabic greeting used throughout Iran—with the more authentic Persian *sob bexeir*, *ruz bexeir*, or *shab bexeir*, 'good morning', 'good day', and 'good evening' respectively.

2. THE PIR

The present-day Zoroastrians' desire to maintain a distinct identity within Iran's pervasive Muslim culture is firmly rooted in their history of being persecuted. In our opinion, the most interesting and beautiful religious observances were those devoted to nurturing solidarity among the religion's followers. Foremost among these is pilgrimage to the ancient Zoroastrian *pir*.

There are six major *pir* (pilgrimage sites) located in the mountains around Yazd. Some or all of them may have existed since prehistoric times, when they were the sacred mountain shrines of the pagan Iranian peoples. Since veneration of the natural world is expected of the pious Zoroastrian, the early Zoroastrians followed their pagan forerunners' distaste for artificial structures interceding between the worshipper and the elements being worshipped, and while man-made structures cover all of the sacred rocks today, archaeological evidence suggests that these were not erected until well after the Muslim era (Boyce 1989: 242). The *pir* gained their powerful significance for the Zoroastrian faith through legends invoking the persecution faced by the Zoroastrians at the time of the Muslim invasion. Though the specific story associated with each *pir* varies in detail, all recount the flight from the Arab army by some relative or court member of the last Zoroastrian leader Yazdegird II. Upon reaching a point of utter exhaustion or despair, the hero or heroine of each story appeals to Ahura Mazda, who responds by miraculously parting the mountain face and thus providing a sanctuary for the desperate exile. The second part of the legend involves a process of rediscovery, whereby a spirit or saint

appears to a needy person to reveal the long-forgotten sacred spot, and requests in return that a shrine be built at the miraculous site (Fischer 137).

The first *pir* we visited was *pir-e nāraki*, located about an hour's drive outside of Qāsemābād. Though we left early to avoid the mid-day temperatures, the heat was already intense by mid morning as we left the city completely behind and continued along the highway into the heart of the Yazd desert, the sun searing upon the brown dust and the mountains rising dramatically around us. Traditionally, pilgrimage to these sites is considered one of the chief obligations of a pious Zoroastrian, but until the Pahlavi dynasty, the lack of clear, reliable roads and the threat of Muslim harassment made fulfilling this obligation trying at best, treacherous at worst (Boyce 1989: 248-49). Our trip to the *pir*, along a modern, well-paved highway, was obviously a far cry from the hardships faced by previous pilgrims. Still, in the starkness of the desert landscape—strikingly beautiful and yet ominous—it required little imagination to sympathize with the legendary protagonists and to understand why the legends have retained symbolic significance through the centuries.

Even before we saw the cluster of buildings forming the *pir* complex itself, the sudden appearance of green trees and flora amidst the otherwise bare mountains indicated that we had arrived, for *pir-e nāraki* is located, as are most of the major *pir*, atop a natural spring opening into the mountains, though some have dried up (see Plate 1). This fact is of great significance, since water in Zoroastrianism is valued, along with fire, as one of the most sacred of the seven essential creations. Following pagan beliefs, Zoroaster conceived of the world as being composed of seven fundamental creations, namely Sky, Earth, Water, Plants, Cow, Fire, and Man. Moreover, though Zoroaster conceived of Ahura Mazda as the worlds' ultimate creator, he did not regard Ahura Mazda as the world's sole immediate creator; rather, Ahura Mazda's first act of creation was of six lesser divinities (Yazatas or Amesha Spenta), who created the six creations except Man, the especial creation of Ahura Mazda himself. In a further adoption of pagan practices, each of these divinities is linked also with an abstract principle, such as Devotion, Health, or Good Purpose. Ahura Mazda's creation Man, endowed with wisdom and the ability to choose, not only bears a great responsibility to treat the physical aspects of the world with great care and reverence—since offense against the creations is equivalent to offense against the Spenta—but also to act morally and righteously and thus uphold the moral principles represented by each divinity. Zoroaster's philosophy is thus a uniquely comprehensive one, exceptional among monotheistic religions in its linkage of the physical and moral realms (Boyce 1979: 22-23).

As discussed above, fire and water have been venerated since prehistoric times above the other creations, for they are regarded, with good reason, as the most fundamental life sustaining forces. The Greek goddess of love and war, Anahita was assimilated into the Zoroastrian pantheon around the fourth century B.C. and eventually replaced Apam Napat as the lord associated with water. As the yazad of water, Anahita became one of the most beloved figures

in the Zoroastrian pantheon. According to Boyce (1989), the major *pir*, located as they are atop mountain springs, were formerly shrines dedicated to Anahita, known as “the Lady” of the Water (250).

Our appreciation for water—indeed, for the wonder and beauty of the natural world in general—was invoked particularly powerfully by our visit to *pir-e sabz*. This *pir* is perhaps the best known of the major *pir* among non-Zoroastrians and while we had seen photographs, nothing could have prepared us for the actual experience. Though the *pir* itself is situated at an exceptionally high altitude, steps built into the mountain made the sharp ascent manageable.

We were accompanied on our visit to *pir-e sabz* by the twenty year old son of our hosts and his two friends of a similar age. In accordance with what seemed to be the understood custom, they completed their devotional duty in the *pir* itself first. Arriving at the sacred rock, we removed our shoes in a small ante-area at the opening in the mountain, and Maziar and our guides donned the white cap obligatory for males at all times of prayer. Our guides put a few handfuls of incense onto the smoldering fire in the central metal brazier, and then stood facing the swirling smoke to perform their ritual prayers, while we sat in silent reflection (see Plate 6).

The rocks forming one side of the cave-like structure part to reveal a small pool of water surrounded by a miniature oasis of fern, a large tree, and other greenery. The pool is fed by a spring that flows—thinly but steadily—out of the rock face above, and it is from the ever-present sound of dripping water that the *pir* has acquired its other onomatopoeic name of *pir-e chak-chaki*, after the *chak chak* sound of the dripping water. On the opposite side, a larger opening in the rocks provides a breathtaking view of the surrounding mountains. We sat in the quietude of the shrine, in the dappled shade, our back pressed against the cool roughness of the mountain face; each sunbeam was clearly defined in the sweet-smelling smoke of the incense; the immense silence of the huge mountain’s interior was disrupted only by the gentle but incessant trickle of water. It was, without a doubt, the most powerful religious site we visited in Yazd.

Our hosts meanwhile were reading prayers from the Avesta, the Zoroastrian holy book. When our hosts had finished their prayers, we spread a blanket for a picnic breakfast on the patio directly outside the shrine and under the creaking branches of an ancient and venerated willow. The giant tree, so old that its lanky, outstretched arms had to be supported by wooden beams, had reportedly survived an effort to remove it by slicing a six foot section out of its trunk. Even though the upper branches of the tree were completely severed from the root system, it survived. This miracle is attributed to the powers of the *pir*, but more likely, the willow continued to thrive and flourish because of the water splashing onto the severed section from the *pir*’s waterfall (Boyce 1989: 256).

We breakfasted on *lavāsh*, Iranian flat bread, cheese, melon, and cucumbers. We invited the keeper of the *pir*, an elderly, learned man from the village of Sharifābād, to join our picnic, but

he refused our offers of food; clearly more interested in conversing than eating, he sat and talked at considerable length, his conversation spanning a wide range of subjects. A prominent topic of conversation was Dari's various dialects. According to our observations, Zoroastrians are very aware of the differences among Dari's various dialects, and variations in speech often serve to identify the particular village—at times even family—to which a person belongs. Certain dialects are considered especially difficult to understand. That of Sharifābād, for example, is one of more difficult, and our guides remarked afterwards that they had had to pay particular attention in order to catch every thing he had said.

We gathered our belongings and took a hike through the surrounding pavilions. For each *pir*, there is an appointed annual time of pilgrimage, when Zoroastrians from all of Yazd's villages are obligated to gather at the *pir* to worship and to socialize. As these pilgrimages last five days, individuals and villages have over the years raised structures in which to gather for singing, dancing, and storytelling. Each village has a pavilion for its residents, and our enjoyment in noting the differences in design and size among them was marred only by the graffiti of Muslim hoodlums. Traditionally, making the pilgrimage at the appointed time was considered a religious duty of the greatest merit. Unfortunately, *pir-e sabz's* week of pilgrimage drew to a close just as we arrived, and our hosts assured us that it had been crowded and busy.

In addition to the six especially sacred *pir*, there exist numerous other *pir* of varying size and importance. These *pir* also have appointed pilgrimage times, though usually they are no longer than one day in length. While we did not have the chance to observe first hand how well pilgrimage to the major *pir* is observed today, we did have the opportunity to join in the communal pilgrimage to a minor *pir* in Qāsemābād, *pir-e morād*. The high attendance by Zoroastrians of all ages, and from many of Yazd's villages suggested that the Zoroastrian community, at least at the local level, is still vital.

A few minutes outside Qāsemābād, *pir-e morād* essentially consists of a small enclosed garden with a multi-purpose building at one end. To an even greater extent than the major *pir*, the smaller local *pir*, such as *morād*, seem especially important for their social value in addition to their religious significance. They provide opportunities for socializing with others from one's own village as well as neighboring villages. Indeed, during our short walk from the parking area to the *pir*, our host, Parviz, stopped several times to exchange greetings with acquaintances and friends. As soon as we entered the *pir* complex, Parviz led us first to one of several scattered tables onto which a fried, sweet flat bread was piled. This bread, often prepared for Zoroastrian religious festivities, was eaten with ample amounts of *pashmak*, a type of cotton candy made with flour as well as sugar. We helped ourselves directly from the table, and having partaken of the sweet snack, we joined the line leading to the *pir's* prayer area. There, we were thrust into a chaotic crowd, with many worshippers seated around the small flame in the center of the room and even more, standing for lack of room, flowing outside into the corridor beyond. The praying did not seem to follow any pattern, the time and intensity of worship apparently left

up to the discretion of the worshipper, but one act every Zoroastrian performed without fail was a thorough washing of the hands and face at a sink installed outside the prayer area.

Cleanliness plays a central role in Zoroastrian religious and secular practices; ritual cleansing before prayer is only one component of the religion's complex code of purity laws, which demands constant and scrupulous care of the seven creations, including Man. According to Zoroaster's teachings, Ahura Mazda is the creator of all that is good, while all of the world's evil and suffering is the work of the hostile spirit Angra Mainyu. Dirt and decay, because they destroy the perfection of the Amesha Spenta's creations, are among the most despised exponents of this evil, and man must constantly guard against them, since "to prevent or reduce any of these things contributes to the defence of the good creation, and the weakening of its attackers" (Boyce 1979: 43).

After visiting the shrine, we returned to the courtyard where we took bowls and spoons and received portions of *āsh-e rishte*, a hearty Persian soup containing vegetables, beans, and flour noodles. Eating meals in common is a central element of most Zoroastrian gatherings and in addition to religious and social purposes, these Zoroastrian gatherings serve a charitable purpose by providing food for members of the community facing hardship. Men, women, and children were sitting and standing up wherever they could find room in the garden courtyard.

3. GĀHAMBĀR

Communal feasting is also central to the *gāhambār* religious festivals, which have been the preeminent holy days of the Zoroastrian year since Zoroaster's time. They are still regarded as such today, as we saw from the pride and enthusiasm our hosts displayed in insisting we attend the village's ceremonies. The *gāhambār* festivals, which reoccur seven times throughout the year, were originally pagan farming and pastoral celebrations until Zoroaster rededicated each of the feasts to one of the seven Amesha Spenta, so that his faith's fundamental precepts would be reflected in the structure of the year. Though the *gāhambār* were originally only one day in length, calendar reforms imposed at different times in the Persian Empire's history have resulted in their lengthening to celebrations of five days.

Our third week in Qāsemābād coincided with the mid-summer *gāhambār*, *maidhyoishima* (11-15 of the month of *tir*). This second of the seven holy *gāhambār* is devoted to Haurvatat, the Amesha Spenta of Water (who also signifies Wholeness). The feasts are intended to be joyful periods of worship when only necessary work is done, so that in the past they provided an opportunity for well-deserved rest in the village's demanding agricultural lifestyle. The five days of the *gāhambār* celebration showed an increase in the number of gatherings held in private residences and in the *bāshgāh* (community center). The celebratory atmosphere was further heightened by the third *gāhambār* day's coinciding with *jashn-e tiragān* (*tir* day of *tir* month). This celebration of the Western Iranian divinity, *tir*, who was originally the water deity,

but who in modern times has become the yazad of rain, has a variety of associated stories and customs.

One *tiragān* custom, the *ābpāshān*, is highly anticipated by the village's children. On this day they are allowed to douse water liberally and heedlessly on passersby in the street without fear of being scolded. It is an opportunity they revel in, as we had no choice but to notice, when, upon returning from our visit to *pir-e sabz*, a laughing young boy flung his bowl of water through the car's open windows, soaking us completely. The custom originates in an old legend that one of our informants recounted for us. Many years ago, a drought that was plaguing the areas was so intense and had lasted for so long that when it finally ended, the residents were so overjoyed that the wealthier among them sprinkled rose water on one another as an offering of thanks to the yazad who brings rain. The less affluent, who could not afford rose water, imitated the wealthy in this celebratory sign of gratitude by substituting plain water.

Another custom associated with *jashn-e tiragān* was the exchange of brightly-colored bracelets by the young women of the village. The woven bracelets contained seven threads of different colors, presumably representing each of the seven creations and/or their associated Amesha Spenta. We observed a few girls participating in this old custom when the village had gathered to celebrate a communal *gāhambār*. They responded to our inquiries about the bracelets by offering Annahita one and instructing her to wear it around her wrist continuously for ten days. According to Boyce (1989), on the tenth day following *tiragān*, the day devoted to the yazad of Wind, the bracelets should be thrown into the wind or into a coursing stream (207).²

Traditionally, the village *gāhambār* observances were endowed by pious individuals from their private resources, but since the Pahlavi dynasty, the local *anjoman* (Zoroastrian governing assemblies) have been largely successful in securing and administering the necessary funding (Boyce 1989: 33). During the five days of the *gāhambār* celebrated during our stay, two *anjoman*-funded ceremonies were held for all of Qāsemābād's residents in the village's *bāshgāh*. The preparation for these ceremonies involved a considerable amount of time and many members of the community. On the second and fifth days of the *gāhambār*, when the *anjoman*-endowed ceremonies were held at the *bāshgāh*, every member of our host family was engaged there from morning, before the guests had arrived, until all the cleaning had been finished, after ten or eleven o'clock at night.

Arriving early to the first of these community ceremonies, our hostess ushered us to the *bāshgāh*'s basement, where several men and women were engaged in casual conversation or in various small tasks left over from the main preparations for the celebration. The special care

² Boyce (1989) further notes, that by 1964 this "pretty Yazdi custom" was unfamiliar in Sharifābād, remembered only by the elderly (206). It is unclear whether its presence in Qāsemābād in 2003 is indicative of its renewal.

that they had quite clearly devoted to their dress and make-up marked the festivity of the occasion. A few elderly men tended huge vats of aromatic rice and *khoresht-e qeimeh*, a common Persian stew of lentils and meat. As the actual *gāhambār* ceremony approached, we ascended to the courtyard where Parviz was busily greeting the stream of arriving guests. Traditionally, when *gāhambār* were held exclusively in private residences, such greetings would have been the duty of him who had endowed the celebration. Today, however, Mr. Sardari, a community member of some rank, took on the role of host. As the ceremony was about to begin, Maziar hurriedly put on the obligatory white cap and we entered the auditorium where we noted that the men and women were seated on separate sides of the room. The Zoroastrian faith regards men and women equally, but social custom often dictates otherwise (see Plate 4). Our hostess confirmed this; when we asked whether or not the men and women attendees were required to sit apart she said that they were by no means obliged to do so religiously, but that it was simply the manner to which they were accustomed.

We also found the informality of the religious ceremony striking. In contrast to the stern silence characterizing the ceremony of many religions, the atmosphere in the auditorium was relaxed and chatty. Even after the priest began reciting, assorted latecomers trickled through the door, and the conversations being held around the room, while they decreased significantly in volume, continued throughout the ceremony. Still, while the relatively casual atmosphere initially struck us as remarkable, it was perhaps to be expected given that multiple *gāhambār* ceremonies in diverse venues are held on each of the celebration's five days.

Surrounding the *mobed* (Zoroastrian priest) on the stage spanning the front of the room, various items were arranged, each associated through ancient symbolic conventions with the seven creations and their related Amesha Spenta. The priest and the Avesta he recited represented Ahura Mazda. The earth on which the priest traditionally sat while enacting the sacred rites represented Spenta Armaiti, the yazad of Earth, and Holy Devotion; in the ceremonies we attended, however, a chair had been placed in the center of the stage for the priest to sit in, indicating that this particular custom had relaxed in modern times. Before the priest, two large candles in metal holders, a vase of greenery and flowers, and a bowl of water were arranged, these honoring Asha Vahishta, Ameretat, and Haurvatat, the yazad of Fire/Best Righteousness, Plants/Long Life, and Water/Wholeness respectively (Boyce 1984: 51). In addition, an ample quantity of fresh melon, cucumbers, and other fruit represented Vohu Mana, the yazad associated with physical nourishment and Good Purpose. The priest's lay assistant (*dahmobed*), an old man wearing a wide white cloth knotted around his waist, brought the fruit to the stage, and seating himself on the floor behind the *mobed* produced a large knife and began to employ it, with impressive adeptness, in peeling and slicing the fruit before him. The fruit was then consecrated by the *mobed* for the community to eat.

Wearing the traditional dress of the Zoroastrian priesthood, a long-sleeved shirt, pants, and a cap—all of pure white—the *mobed* recited the Avesta verses particular to the occasion. Though

the language of the Avesta, Avestan is known today only to the clergy, most Zoroastrians are able to recite the major prayers by memory. They were thus able to follow the service, and at certain moments would halt their conversations to join in a response to the priest's recitation. At several points in the ceremony, the priest paused and picked up a sprig of myrtle, a symbol of immortality; the audience replied by raising the index fingers of their right hands and giving the appropriate liturgical response. The *mobed* then picked up a second myrtle twig and the audience responded by raising two fingers of their right hands. This exchange reaffirmed the congregation's belief in the primacy of Ahura Mazda: one raised finger meant 'God is one' and two fingers 'He is not two' (Boyce 1989: 34).

Like the pilgrimage to the *pir*, the septennial *gāhambār* were instituted with the two-fold purpose of worship and social gathering (Boyce 1989: 38). They were, moreover, meant to be times of renewed friendship and forgiven quarrels, and everyone is by tradition under a strong obligation to attend and to extend only good will towards their fellow community members. The fulfillment of this obligation is reinforced by the sharing of a consecrated meal. Small bags of *lurk*, a combination of raisins, dried dates, and other dried fruits and nuts, were passed around the room immediately after the completion of the ceremony. According to Boyce (1989), *lurk* was originally specific to the *gāhambār* celebrations, but over time was extended to other holy days as well. During our stay in Qāsemābād, however, we only saw it distributed on this one occasion (38). The assembly retired to the *bāshgāh*'s courtyard, where, in the center, several young men from Qāsemābād had just finished setting up long, low tables and covering them with dishes of the rice and *khoresht* we had earlier glimpsed cooking below, as well as bowls of yogurt and bread. Struggling to find an opening in the crowd thronging the generous spread, we filled our plates and joined the guests variously standing and sitting in groups around the courtyard. Portions of this food were also set aside to be distributed later to elderly and sick community members who had not been able to attend. When everyone had eaten to their satisfaction, the *dahmobed* placed the fruit he had sliced during the ceremony on a smaller, elevated table at the end of the buffet, and each guest took a few pieces. Thus, all of the guests shared together in fruit consecrated by the priest in a ritual that seemed to us the perfect conclusion to the *gāhambār* celebration.

Another more somber religious rite, the *dādḡāh-e tir māh*, took place at Yazd's main *ārāmḡāh* (cemetery; lit. place of tranquility), located just outside the city limits. This communal service for the dead was observed on the first day (*ruz hormazd*) of *tir māh* (the fourth month of the year) (Boyce 1989: 202-208).³ In addition to *gāhambār* for individuals who had endowed them, a collective *gāhambār* was celebrated for the souls of all who had died in the past year. The

³ While the services for the dead at the *daxmeh* were, at one time, observed only once a year, *ruz hormazd* of *farvardin māh*, they were later extended to two other days of the year, the first of *tir māh* and the first of *aspandard māh*.

ārāmghāh where the *dādghāh-e tir māh* took place was situated near *mahal-e yazd*'s two, now decommissioned, *daxmeh*.

The burial of dead in a cemetery is a recent innovation in the Iranian Zoroastrian community. From at least the ninth century on, Zoroastrians disposed of their dead by exposing them on *daxmeh* (towers of silence) (see Plate 5). The dead were placed atop these tall, stone funary towers for their flesh to be stripped by vultures. After the bones had been bleached and cleaned by the sun and wind, they were pushed down into an ossuary at the center of the tower. This tradition evolved in order to protect the purity of the earth by creating a barrier between it and the corpse, which was thought to be highly polluting. Until 1937, the dead of Yazd were exposed in this manner, but upon pressure from the Shah of Iran, the Zoroastrians began to construct cemeteries to receive their dead. The purity of the earth was maintained, however, by placing the bodies in thick coffins and placing them in graves lined in concrete.

4. FIRE AND FIRE TEMPLES

Without a doubt, the greatest misconception outsiders have of the Zoroastrian religion is that Zoroastrians are fire-worshippers. While it is true that Zoroastrians pray in the direction of fire, or another source of light if one is not available, they do so as a way of fixing their thoughts on the righteous ordering of the universe (*asha*), and by extension on Ahura Mazda. This view was clearly reflected in our own observation that Zoroastrians are not terribly concerned with the state of the fire in front of which they pray: smoldering embers in a brazier, with or without incense, served adequately.

Of the seven primary creations, Fire, even more than Water, is revered and is regarded as above the other six. For through the ultimate fire of the sun, Fire provides the life breath of all other creations. As such, it was created and is protected by Asha Vahishta, the Spenta of Fire and *asha*, defined by Boyce (1979) as the “[o]rder which should pervade and regulate the world” (23). The idea of such a pervasive world order was originally conceived by the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian pagans, who conceived of “a natural law which ensured that the sun would thus maintain its regular movement, the seasons would change, and existence continue in an orderly way” (Boyce 1979:7). *asha*, the Avestan word for this order, also formed the standards for human conduct, since virtuous elements such as truth, honesty, loyalty, and courage were regarded as belonging to the natural order, while vice disrupted that order. It is this Indo-European concept, with slight modification and expansion, that was incorporated into Zoroastrianism as the most fundamental tenet of its philosophy. Since human ethical conduct is an important component of *asha*, every follower is held responsible for using his own wisdom and good judgment to contribute to the maintenance of the world’s rightful order; the fire is intended to remind the worshipper of this obligation.

Ultimately, the central role of fire in Zoroastrianism can be traced even farther back, to the proto-Indo-Iranian steppe agriculturists, for whom fire was a primary object of cult worship

(Boyce 1979: 4). Presumably, the cult status of fire stemmed from its role in ensuring the daily survival of those who worshipped it, for the hearth fire provided a source of warmth and a means of cooking animal meat. Sacrificial offerings were made to the fire, these consisting of clean dry fuel, aromatic herbs or other plants, and a small amount of animal fat. This ancient method of feeding the fire was refined in Zoroastrianism and incorporated into the faith's complex code of purity laws dictating how the seven holy creations should be respected and venerated (see Section 2 above).

Due to the considerable difficulty of lighting a fire in ancient times, the custom developed of keeping a hearth fire burning constantly. This practice acquired grave symbolic importance in Zoroastrian faith, since all fires were regarded as belonging to the one great Fire and its maintenance symbolized the rigorous discipline needed to follow *asha*. Maintaining a constant fire, especially one of those regarded for various reasons as especially sacred⁴, became a religious obligation of the greatest importance.

For many centuries, families recited their daily prayers in front of the same hearth fire they used to heat their home and to cook their meals. Early Zoroastrians seemed to have had no need for a building especially dedicated to keeping a fire, or for any specialized architectural structures. Greek records from the early Achaemenian period attest that the Persians at this time despised temples and considered it wrong “to keep shut up within walls the gods whose dwelling place was this whole world” (Boyce 1979: 60). Special religious ceremonies were conducted in the home of the priest or the follower who had requested the ceremony, and communal feasts were held outdoors in the open.

Over time, Zoroastrianism developed more elaborate and ostentatious ways of displaying their devotion to and respect for fire. The first development in this line occurred in the sixth century B.C.; Persian priests elevated the hearth fire of the king above others by placing it onto a raised stone-pillar altar. While it was the first development of the fire cult, at first it was limited to the hearth fires of the Achaemenian royalty. The fire temples that we see housing sacred fires today, which are intended for the use of all, were a later innovation. They were introduced late in the Achaemenian dynasty (second century B.C.) in reaction to the increased idolatry of Anahita, the Ahura associated with Water. Those who instituted the temple cult were careful to avoid portraying the fire temples as places of idolatry, desiring instead “to keep the new ‘houses of fire’ simply as places of congregational worship, where fires could be said in the presence of the enthroned fire as naturally as they were said before the hearth fire in the home” (Boyce 1979: 64).

The rise of the fire temple also led to an increase in the endowment of individual fires, for various historical and mythical reasons, with distinctive characteristics. There also developed a

⁴ For further explanation of the stories associated with the religion's holiest fires, see Boyce (1979) pp. 87-88.

scholastic organization of fires, according to which fires of particular age or significance were regarded as more sacred and exalted. Fires of the highest grade are known as Ātash Bahrām, after Verethraghna, the ancient yazad of victory, now known in Dari as Vahram. Three chief fires existed in ancient Iran: Ādur Farnbāg, Ādur Gushnap, and Ādur Burzen-Mihr; today, only Ādur Farnbāg is still burning in the village of Sharifābād.

Though the Ātash Bahrām within it is not as sacred as those now housed in temples at Sharifābād, a much better known landmark of Yazd is its fire temple, the *ātash kade-ye yazd*. The temple's fire was apparently installed in the 1790s (Boyce 1989: 6). We visited Yazd's *ātash kade* one evening and were impressed by the size and understated power of the fire chamber, a glass enclosed room where the fire embers smoldered in a large brass container, called an *āfriganān*. An adjacent room contained a furnace and chopped wood for maintaining the flame, but it was not in use, according to hostess, because of the great expense of running it. Like the interior of the *ātash kade*, the exterior of the building and the courtyard in which it was enclosed had an effective simplicity; the round pool in front of the temple's entrance creating a tranquil, reflective atmosphere.

Over the temple's door the most well-known symbol of Zoroastrianism had been carved: a person seated atop a winged disc. Though it had originally been used by the Egyptians to represent the sun god Horus, the Achaemenian dynasty borrowed it for use in its inscriptions and palaces as symbolizing Divine Grace. The winged symbol again entered into widespread in the twentieth century; today, the person sitting atop the winged disc is called a *farvahar* in Farsi and is associated with the concept of the *fravashi*, the souls of departed heroes, who are "ever present [as] helpers and guardians" (Boyce 1979: 15). The symbol is used in Zoroastrian decoration and is often worn around the neck to remind the wearer of his/her duty as a Zoroastrian, a duty that can be summarized in the three fundamental Zoroastrian precepts: *pendār-e nik*, *goftār-e nik*, and *kerdār-e nik* (good thoughts, good words, and good deeds).

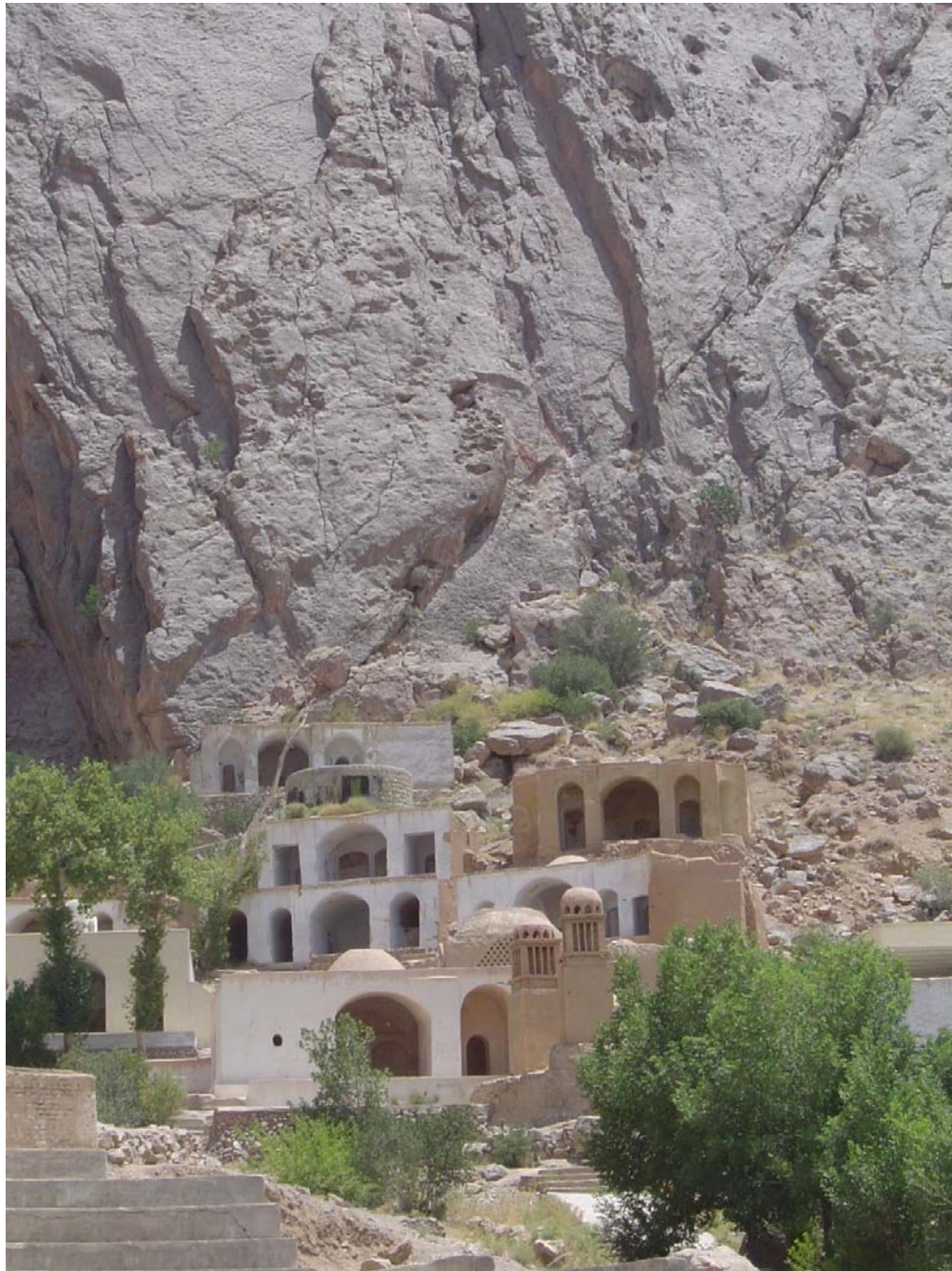


Plate 1 – The village pavilions of pir-e nāraki, clustered at the bottom of a sheer mountain face.



Plate 2 – Two Qāsemābādi women in traditional Zoroastrian dress sitting on their saku.



Plate 3 – The son of an informant wetting grass for his goat in the village jeb while his friends keep him company.



Plate 4 – The gāhambār ceremony in Qāsemābād's bāshgāh; the view from the back of the women's section.



Plate 5 – One of Yazd's main daxmeh situated atop a desolate hill.



Plate 6 – Inside pir-e sabz; its waterfall feeds ferns and other greenery as it descends to a pool hidden behind the railing.

Sociolinguistic Observations

1. DEMOGRAPHICS

The Dari Language Project's 2003 fieldwork endeavor, as we state above, considered only one of Dari's many dialects, namely Qāsemābād Dari. Each of Yazd's 30 varieties is particular to one of the Zoroastrian villages (*deh*) surrounding Yazd, such as Taft, Khorramshāh, Sharifābād, Maryamābād, Kucheh byuk, or Qāsemābād, or to the old city proper (*mahale-ye Yazd*) (today, the city of Yazd has expanded to include the once independent *deh* within its city limits). The high degree of diversity among these dialects—phonological and lexical, as well as morphological—necessitated a focus on a single variety of Yazd Dari.

Qāsemābād currently has a population of approximately 220 Zoroastrians comprising some 75 households. Though the *deh* is still an island of Zoroastrianism in a sea of traditional Islam, the Zoroastrian population of Qāsemābād is declining as a result of increased social mobility and the movement of younger generations to urban areas, phenomena observed throughout the modern world. These socio-economic changes have also had substantial effects on the vitality of the Qāsemābād dialect. Though the status of the dialect is secure amongst the mostly elderly population left behind by the movement of younger generations to urban areas, the imminent decrease in the elderly population foretells a parallel decrease in the vitality of the dialect. In the younger generation remaining in Qāsemābād, we observe the telltale signs of approaching language extinction.

2. LINGUISTIC LOSS

A telling sign of language death is the increasing assimilation of constructions and lexical items from the dominant language, in this case Farsi. Most often, this assimilation takes place in the speech of younger speakers with the result that the dominant and minority languages increasingly converge with each new generation. Our experience suggests that this process is proceeding rapidly in Dari, since, as Farsi speakers, we were able to understand a great deal more of the speech of younger speakers than we could that of older speakers.

More concretely, we observed changes in the language involving the substitution of a Farsi structure for a native one. For example, Dari possesses a unique modal verb construction (1a) (see *Grammatical Inquiries*, Section 3) that bears no similarities to Farsi's (1b). A new construction (1c) modeled on that of Farsi has taken the place of the previous one in the speech of younger generations.

- (1) a. original Dari (mɛ) om-veo vot-i
 1SG 1SG-must:PRES tell:PAST-2SG
 ‘I must tell you (sg.)’
- b. Farsi (man) bayad be-t be-gu-am
 1SG must to-2SG SUBJ:tell-1SG
 ‘I must tell you (sg.)’
- c. influenced Dari: (mɛ) be-d buyɛ ve-vedʒ-ɛ
 1SG to-2SG must SUBJ:tell-1SG
 ‘I must tell you (sg.)’

Our informant work suggests that speakers aged twenty and younger never produce the original form (1a), though most understand it; they instead produce (1c). The oldest generation invariably produce the original Dari form (1a), while the form middle-aged speakers produce depends on personal factors including the individual’s family background, occupation, and how much time he/she had spent outside of Qāsemābād.

The other major inter-generational difference we observed was lexical; the use of many words once unique to Dari have been replaced by their Farsi equivalents. Such instances seemed especially numerous among the language’s verbs; original simple verbs have often been replaced by their corresponding Farsi compound verbs.

3. SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

A final important indication that the Dari language faces a bleak future became apparent after we had spent some time in Tehrān. Seeking relief from the persecution of the Qājār and Pahlavi dynasties, large numbers of Zoroastrians settled in Tehrān during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Boyce 1984: 26-27). Today, the Zoroastrian community of the capital numbers much larger than the communities of Yazd and Kermān. Our experiences with the affluent Zoroastrian community in Tehrān—which included small private gatherings, as well as large public ones—suggested that, while the community there is thriving in some respects, it is clearly doing so at the expense of many of the traditional religious customs that were so fundamental to the village observances.

There is a quite progressive Tehrān *anjoman* that is currently making substantial efforts to maintain the structure of the community within Tehrān’s modern, urban lifestyle and during our stay we attended a *jashn* sponsored by this local Zoroastrian council for the purposes of providing a venue for Zoroastrians of all ages to socialize, and perhaps most importantly, for young Zoroastrians to seek suitors. We could not help but notice the stark differences between the impersonality of the paid-admission event and the warm community spirit of the *jashn* in Qāsemābād. Also, virtually no one at the Tehrān *jashn* spoke Dari. This was reflective of the larger linguistic situation of the Zoroastrian population in Tehrān, which is, not surprisingly, dismal. Languages have a general tendency to be replaced by the dominant language when

their speakers relocate to urban centers. Moreover, it is certain that the number of young Zoroastrians living abroad who speak Dari is even fewer.

Grammatical Inquiries

1. WHAT IS LINGUISTICS?

As stated above, a major goal of the Dari Language Project's 2003 endeavor was to undertake theoretical analysis of Dari's grammar. In carrying out this analysis, the theoretical framework we follow is that established by the discipline of linguistics. Linguistics, simply defined, is the scientific study of how language works; it aims to discover the mechanisms underlying Language.⁵ Before considering the specific aspects of Dari's grammar we studied during the 2003 fieldwork endeavor, it is essential to understand how the field of linguistics approaches the study of language.

Main-stream linguists today operate, as we do, largely within the paradigm of generative theory, a framework first put forward by Noam Chomsky in 1957. Central to generative theory is a division between the surface and underlying levels of grammatical structure. The distinction between these two levels is evident in the two phrases, *John is eager to please* and *John is easy to please*. At the surface level, the two phrases can be analyzed in an identical manner. *John*, a proper noun, is the subject of both sentences. *Is*, the verb *to be* conjugated in the third person singular, links the subject with an adjective, *eager* in the first sentence and *easy* in the second. The infinite verb *to please* follows and modifies the adjective. While the arrangement of constituents—noun, verb, adjective, verb—is identical in each, the two sentences are at the underlying level fundamentally different in meaning. In the first sentence, *John* wants to please someone else. In the second, *John* is being pleased by another person. In developing analyses that take into account a language's underlying level of structure, generative theory is trying to shed light on what a speaker knows intuitively about the way his/her language works, a body of instinctive knowledge called *linguistic competence*.

But the role of the generative linguist does not stop at describing the competence of a single language's speakers. Since linguistic competence is viewed as an aspect of human psychological capability, generative theory aims to discover language universals and generalizations that can be integrated into a model of Language which can be used to evaluate different accounts of linguistic competence. The study of language becomes, within the generative framework, an inquiry into the general nature of the human mind.

⁵ For a concise introduction to the generative model of Language, see Crystal (1997) pp. 411-413. We draw much of our information in this section from that source.

⁷ *Personal pronouns* are the grammatical units that can substitute for nouns or noun phrases involved in the action of a sentence, for example as the subject or object of a verb.

It should be clear by now that modern linguistics is a descriptive and analytical discipline; it attempts to discern and to construct an accurate account of the facts behind how a language works. Linguistics today does not attempt to evaluate the variation in language in order to prescribe intrinsic value to one or more varieties. The contrast between the modern linguistic, descriptive, approach and the prescriptive approach, which we are familiar with from grammar lessons in grade school, manifests itself in the difference in how the term “grammar” is defined traditionally and linguistically. According to the prescriptive tradition, a grammar is a set of rules, which, if followed, yields “correct” or “standard” language. Grammar, as linguists use the term, means something vastly different; instead of prescribing what a language *ought to be*, it is a systematic account of the rules governing how a language actually works.

The structure of a language is organized into what are usually described as levels. Each level is studied using techniques appropriate to it, allowing us to analyze sections of the total structure individually while holding the rest constant. The most common model of language structure includes five levels: *phonology*, *morphology*, *syntax*, and *semantics*. The subfield of phonetics studies the physical basis of language, sound, how it is created with the human vocal organs, how it is carried from a speaker to the listener, and how a listener hears and understands it. The subdiscipline of phonology is also concerned with sound, though not physical sound but cognitive, or meaningful, sound. Phonology, in other words, studies how sounds are organized to convey differences in meaning. How these meaningful sounds are organized to form larger units of meaning like the word and the sentence lies within the domains of morphology and syntax respectively. The study of meaning itself forms the subdiscipline of semantics.

Because of time constraints, the 2003 fieldwork endeavor made focused inquiries into precisely defined components of Dari’s phonology and morphology. We investigated two topics: 1) the personal pronoun system and 2) ergativity. We will discuss both of these in more detail below, but before proceeding we should note that linguistics has a large amount of discipline-specific terminology. Because we wish to avoid disrupting the flow of the text to the greatest extent possible, we will attempt to explain all uncommon terms through footnotes instead of including definitions within the text or a glossary at the end of the section.

2. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Dari possesses a system of personal pronouns⁷ more complex than we are used to seeing in European languages, or even in the Iranian languages. In Dari, the personal pronoun system recognizes three categories of person⁸ and two of number⁹ and it is organized into four sets, as shown in (2):

⁸ *Person* is the grammatical category that refers to “the speaker (‘first person’), addressee (‘second person’), or others involved in an interaction (esp. ‘third person’)” (Crystal 434).

⁹ *Number* is the grammatical category that expresses contrasts like singular vs. plural (Crystal 433).

(2) Dari Personal Pronoun System

		1 sg.	2 sg.	3 sg.	1 pl.	2 pl.	3 pl.
a.	<i>independent pronouns</i>	mɛ	ta	in	mʊ	ʃmʊ	iyɛ
b.	<i>object pronouns</i>	om/m-	od/d-	of/f-	mo/mo-	do/do-	ʃo/ʃo-
c.	<i>prepositional object pronouns</i>	om/-m	od/-d	of/-f	mo/-mo	do/-do	ʃo/-ʃo
d.	<i>possessive pronouns</i>	-om/-m	-od/-d	-of/-f	-mo	-do	-ʃo

Except for the independent pronouns, which are able to take on any role in the sentence, each set of pronouns has a specific function. In spite of the similarities the pronouns may bear one another, they behave quite differently. The distinct behaviors of Dari's pronouns enable us to differentiate the four sets of personal pronouns.

INDEPENDENT PRONOUNS

The independent pronouns (2a) appear in sentences primarily as the subjects of verbs as in (3):

- (3) mɛ e-davʊ-e
 1SG:IP CONT-run:PAST-1SG
 'I was running'

No other pronoun is capable of fulfilling this function, though the independent pronouns are capable of taking other roles, as is shown in (4):

- (4) direct object: (in) mɛ-ra dust e-dor-a
 3SG:IP 1SG:IP-RA like CONT-has:PRES-3SG
 'he likes me'
- object of a preposition: be mɛ veva
 to 1SG:IP say:IMP:2SG
 'say it to me!'
- possessive: sva-e mɛ
 dog-EZF 1SG:IP
 'my dog'

OBJECT PRONOUNS

The pronouns that fulfill the object role in the sentence are shown in (2b). Each pronoun has two allomorphs¹⁰, the distribution of which is pragmatically conditioned. One of the allomorphs, the "tonic" variant, forms its own stress domain; we can therefore analyze it as an

¹⁰ An *allomorph* is a variant form of a *morpheme*—the minimal unit of meaning; the allomorphs of a morpheme, while varying in form, maintain the same basic semantic identity (Crystal 421).

independent word¹¹, as opposed to a clitic¹² or affix¹³ (stress in Dari is always on the first syllable of a verb):

- (5) óm áðen
 1SG:OBJP give:IMP:2SG
 'give it to me'

The second allomorph, however, being non-syllabic, does not form its own stress domain. It instead attaches phonologically to the right, to the verb:

- (6) m-áðen
 1SG:OBJP-give:IMP:2SG
 'give it to me'

We can conclude that the non-syllabic allomorph of the object pronoun is a clitic, as opposed to an affix, since it attaches not to the verb stem, as in (6) to /áðen/ 'give!', but on the outside of verbal affixes, such as the continuous aspect marker, /e-/:

- (7) m-e-t-á
 1SG:OBJP-CONT-give:PRES-3SG
 'he gives it to me'

PREPOSITIONAL OBJECT PRONOUNS

The prepositional object pronouns, shown in (2c), also possess two allomorphs each; the variation between them is also pragmatically conditioned. The first allomorph is an independent word; it forms its own stress domain, as shown in (8):

- (8) singular: ba óm bíyo
 with 1SG:PROP come:IMP:2SG
 'come with me'
- plural: be mó e-vén-a
 to 1PL:PROP CONT-throw:PRES-3SG
 'he throws it to us'

The second allomorph is a left-attaching clitic; the clitic variants are included within the stress domain of the preposition (9a-b), and the singular pronouns are reduced to a non-syllabic consonant (9a):

¹¹ A *word* is the smallest grammatical unit that can stand alone as a complete utterance (Crystal 440).

¹² A *clitic* is a form that behaves syntactically like a word, but cannot stand alone in an utterance since it is dependent on a neighboring word (Crystal 423). Though there are other tests for cliticness, the most common one tests whether a form constitutes its own phonological unit for phenomena like stress and intonation. We would expect a clitic to be included within the stress or intonation domain of the word to which it attaches.

¹³ An *affix* is a form that can be added to other forms to make a morphologically complex word (Crystal 420). If an affix occurs at the beginning of a word it is called a *prefix*, if at the end a *suffix*.

- (9) a. singular: bá-m bíyo
 with-1SG:PROP come:IMP:2SG
 ‘come with me!’
- b. plural: bé-mo úven
 to-1PL:PROP throw:IMP:2SG
 ‘throw it to us!’

The conditioning of the prepositional object pronoun also may have a phonological element, but the exact nature of the phonological conditioning must remain a subject for future research.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

The possessive pronouns, shown in (2d), have two clitic variants. The distribution of these variants is phonologically conditioned; the syllabic variant is realized when the host ends in a consonant (10a) and the non-syllabic variant when it ends in a vowel (10b):

- (10) a. C-final host: dél-om NOT *dél-m
 stomach-1SG:POSP
 ‘my stomach’
- b. V-final host: svá-m NOT *svá-om
 dog-1SG:POSP
 ‘my dog’

TYPOLICAL AND DIACHRONIC CONSIDERATIONS

The Iranian languages are well known for their use of pronominal clitics in place of independent pronouns. In Farsi, for example, a cliticized personal pronoun may be used in place of an independent pronoun in any syntactic role, as in (11):

- (11) direct object: to-ra miandaz-am miandaz-am-et
 2SG:IP-RA throw:PRES-1SG throw:PRES-1SG-2SG:CLP
 ‘I’ll throw you’¹⁴ ‘I’ll throw you’
- prepositional object: az to migir-e az-et migir-e
 from 2SG:IP take:PRES-3SG from-2SG:CLP take:PRES-3SG
 ‘he takes it from you’ ‘he takes it from you’

¹⁴ What we give as the present tense stem is traditionally analyzed as a combination of the continuous aspect marker /mi-/ plus a stem, here /-andaz-/ ‘throw’. In modern Farsi, however, the present tense does not make a distinction between the continuous and non-continuous aspects. As a result, the /mi-/ prefix does not carry any aspectual meaning in the present tense. It could therefore be analyzed as a morpheme bound obligatorily to the ‘throw’ stem. As both sides of the issue can put forward viable arguments, we decline to take any stance on this issue; we will not attempt to deconstruct verbs in the present tense at all.

possessive:	ketab-e	to	ketab-et
	book-EZF	2SG:IP	book-2SG:CLP
	'your	book'	'your

In Dari, clitic pronouns also vary optionally with independent pronouns in all syntactic roles, e.g. /-m/ with /mε/. But in addition, the clitic pronouns may vary with another type of pronoun different from the independent pronouns, e.g. /-m/ and /om/. These latter pronouns bear striking similarities to the clitic pronouns in form. Ivanow (1935) recognizes this correspondence when he describes them as clitic pronouns that have received “vowel support”:

in case the next word begins with the consonant, the Singular forms have the vowel *û* (rarer *o*) *prefixed* to them, thus becoming *ûm*, *ûd*, *ûf*; but Plur. *mû*, *dû*, *fû* (64).

This variation between a consonantal form and a syllabic form is not unusual in itself. We see the same variation in modern colloquial Farsi’s personal pronoun clitic system, as in (12) (Nye 1954: 85):

- (12) a. C-final stem: pedár-am
 father-1SG:CLP
 ‘my father’
- b. V-final stem: pá-m
 foot-1SG:CLP
 ‘my foot’

In contrast to Farsi’s pronoun system, in which neither of the clitic variants forms its own word, Dari treats the syllabic variant as a word; that is to say, in the case of the object (5) and prepositional object forms (8), the pronouns form their own stress domains and receive their own word stress.

3. ERGATIVITY

Ergativity¹⁵ is a well known characteristic of the verbal morphology of many Iranian languages, (see Payne 1980 on Pamir, Bynon 1980 on Kurdish, Farrell 1995 on Balochi, Skalmowski 1968 on Pashto). Many of the ergative Iranian languages are further characterized by a split in

¹⁵ *Ergativity* is a pattern of marking, in which S—the subject of an intransitive verb (one that does not take an object like *go*)—is marked like O—the *object* of a transitive verb (like the word *fish* in the sentence, *I eat fish*); A—the subject of a transitive verb—is marked differently. In this marking pattern, S and A display *absolutive* marking and O displays *ergative* marking.

Ergative/absolutive marking (E/A) contrasts with *nominative/accusative* marking (N/A), a pattern in which S and A display identical marking (nominative) while O is marked differently (accusative). The N/A pattern is typical of English: verbs always agree with the subject regardless of whether they are transitive or intransitive.

ergativity along tense¹⁶ lines: ergative/absolute marking (E/A) is used in the past and nominative/accusative (N/A) is used in the nonpast. Our research on Dari shows that the language once possessed E/A marking in a non-past tense environment, namely in its modal verb constructions. Today, however, modal verbs have shifted to N/A marking in conformity with the generalization for the family.

PAST TENSE ERGATIVITY

In ordinary past tense environments (including the simple past and the present and past perfect), the Dari E/A pattern is head-marked¹⁷. Agreement with S (the subject of an intransitive verb) and O (the object of a transitive verb) is marked identically, by a verb suffix indicating person and number (13a-b; underlined). Agreement with A (the subject of a transitive verb) is marked differently from S and O, by a pronominal prefix on the verb agreeing in person and number (13b; bolded).

- (13) a. intransitive: S
 (mε) davo-e
 1SG run:PAST-1SG
 'I ran'
- b. transitive: A O
 (mε) **om**-di-i
 1SG **1SG**-see:PAST-2SG
 'I saw you (sg)'

Diachronic Sources of Ergativity

In Dari, as in all split-ergative Iranian languages, ergativity in the past tenses developed through reanalysis of the deverbal perfect aspect construction in Old Iranian.¹⁸ Since Old Iranian is a case-marking language, however, this reanalysis did not yield E/A head-marking alone, as we see in modern Dari; NP arguments in the past tense also patterned E/A. Modern Dari, like many other Iranian languages, including Persian, has lost all traces of NP-marking. This loss of case-marking explains why, in the past tenses, verb agreement with A (through a

¹⁶ *Tense* is the grammatical category that expresses when, in time, an action takes place. For example, the utterance *I run* is in the present tense since the action is taking place in the current time; in contrast, *I ran* is in the past tense since the action has already taken place in some previous time.

¹⁷ The relationships between a verb and its arguments can be expressed on the arguments themselves, as in *case-marking* systems; argument NPs, like the subject and object, bear markers indicating their relationship to the verb.

These relationships can also be expressed through a *head-marking* system, in which the verb bears markers copying the subcategorization of argument NPs, for example their person, number, gender, etc.

¹⁸ Some controversy exists over whether the perfect in Old Iranian was a possessive construction (Beneviste 1952, Anderson 1977) or a passive construction (Cardona 1970, Bynon 1980), but since the E/A pattern we observe in Dari does not provide any support for either of these arguments, we will not touch on this issue.

prefix) is expressed differently formally from how verb agreement is expressed with S and O (through a suffix).

A-agreement markers, at least in the simple past tense, bear a great resemblance to the clitic pronouns we discussed above. Compare, for example, the agreement markers in (14) with the clitic pronouns in (2):

- | | | | | |
|------|----|--|----|---|
| (14) | a. | (mɛ) om-vot-∅
1SG 1SG-tell:PAST-3SG
'I told him' | d. | (mʊ) mo-vot-∅
1PL 1PL-tell:PAST-3SG
'we told him' |
| | b. | (ta) od-vot-∅
2SG 2SG-tell:PAST-3SG
'you (sg.) told him' | e. | (ʃmʊ) do-vot-∅
2PL 2PL-tell:PAST-3SG
'you (pl.) told him' |
| | c. | (in) oʃ-vot-∅
3SG 3SG-tell:PAST-3SG
'he told him' | f. | (iyɛ) ʃo-vot-∅
3PL 3PL-tell:PAST-3SG
'they told him' |

Furthermore, the simple past agreement markers also have non-syllabic variants. To this point, we have given only the underlying, syllabic, forms of the markers; but on the surface, when a singular marker (14a-c) is preceded by a vowel-final word, it loses its vowel and attaches to the left, as in (15). We can see from (15c) that it does not even have to be the subject NP with which it agrees, but any vowel-final word:

- | | | |
|------|----|--|
| (15) | a. | mɛ-m vot-∅
1SG:IP-1SG tell:PAST-3SG
'I told him' |
| | b. | tɑ-d vot-∅
2SG:IP-2SG tell:PAST-3SG
'you (sg.) told him' |
| | c. | annahita mɔhi-ʃ xar-∅
Annahita fish-3SG eat:PAST-3SG
'Annahita ate fish' |

Because of these formal similarities, we can hypothesize that the ergative A markers have their origin in the personal pronouns. Dari's ancestor language originally possessed both head-marking and case-marking E/A patterns, but lost the latter. As the originally-N/A verb agreement pattern does not mark the relationship of the verb with the subject (only with the object through a suffix), the elimination of the case-marking system, coinciding with the elimination of the only way to mark the subject, created pressure to state this relationship explicitly. The verb recruited pronouns for this purpose. These pronouns may have merely been copy pronouns in a transition state (comparable to *John, he told me* in English, where *he* copies the information of the subject *John*); when case-marking was completely eliminated,

however, these pronouns were made obligatory and reanalyzed as part of the verb in order to prevent ambiguity. This shift from pronoun to verbal agreement affix is common among the world's languages, especially within the context of ergativity (Dixon 1994: 42).

Participle Ergative Marker Pronouns

As in the simple past tense, verb agreement in the present and past participle tenses patterns E/A. O-agreement is expressed through the same suffixal marker on the verb, but A-agreement with a singular subject is expressed through a different set of agreement prefixes, (16a-c) for the present participle and (17a) for the past participle. In the plural, however, the A-agreement prefixes are identical to those of the simple past tense, (16d-f) and (17b):

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|------|-----------------------|--|----|-------|-----------------------|
| (16) | a. | (mɛ) | me -vota-∅ | | d. | (mʊ) | mɔ -vota-∅ |
| | | 1SG | 1SG-say:PRPART-3SG | | | 1PL | 1PL-say:PRPART:3SG |
| | | | 'I have said' | | | | 'we have said' |
| | b. | (ta) | de -vota-∅ | | e. | (ʃmʊ) | do -vota-∅ |
| | | 2SG | 2SG-say:PRPART-3SG | | | 2PL | 2PL-say:PRPART:3SG |
| | | | 'you (sg.) have said' | | | | 'you (pl.) have said' |
| | c. | (in) | ʃe -vota-∅ | | f. | (iyɛ) | ʃo -vota-∅ |
| | | 3SG | 3SG-say:PRPART-3SG | | | 3PL | 3PL-say:PRPART:3SG |
| | | | 'he has said' | | | | 'they have said' |
| (17) | a. | (mɛ) | me -votabo-∅ | | b. | (mʊ) | mɔ -votabo-∅ |
| | | 1SG | 1SG-say:PSTPART-3SG | | | 1PL | 1PL-say:PSTPART:3SG |
| | | | 'I had said' | | | | 'we had said' |
- etc.

Why A is marked differently in the simple past and participle tenses remains to be investigated in future fieldwork projects.

MODAL VERB ERGATIVITY

At variance with the family-wide generalization, Modern Dari constructions with the modals¹⁹ 'must', 'can', and 'want' show strong evidence of historical E/A marking in non-past tenses. For example, in present tense transitive constructions with the modal verb 'must', agreement with A is marked by a pronominal prefix (18a-b; in bold); this marking pattern recapitulates the E/A arrangement of morphemes displayed by transitive verbs in the past tense (13b):

¹⁹ *Modals* are the grammaticalized expression of mood, the grammatical category that describes the factuality, possibility, probability, uncertainty, or likelihood that an action will take place (Crystal 93). English, for example, possesses a series of modal verbs, *i.e. can, may, must, should, would, could*, etc.

- (18) a. (mε) **om**-veo di-i
 1SG **1SG**-must:PRES see:PAST-2SG
 'I must see you (sg.)'
- b. (mε) **om**-vevyust di-i
 1SG **1SG**-must:PAST see:PAST-2SG
 'I had to see you (sg.)'

We hypothesize that ergativity arose in modal verbs through the innovation of a new construction composed of the sequence inflected modal verb-plus-inflected main verb. Because it is the modal verb's inflectional features that specify the tense of the clause as a whole, the tense marker on the main verb, although identical in form to the past (13a-b), no longer conveys tense meaning. It does, however, critically express agreement with A and O through its historically E/A markings (18a-b). The current use of N/A marking in the modal verb system would then have developed when speakers extended the pronominal prefix marking A to mark S as well (19a-b), a shift that is well attested in the world's languages:

- (19) a. (mε) **om**-veo davu
 1SG **1SG**-must:PRES run:PAST
 'I must run'
- b. (mε) **om**-vevyust davu
 1SG **1SG**-must:PAST run:PAST
 'I had to run'

Given this evidence for a historical non-past ergative system in Dari and its subsequent loss, the next question we might ask is why the modal verb constructions alone shifted to N/A marking, while verbs in the past tense retained E/A marking. It is a question that exposes another aspect of the language's grammar to be investigated in future research.

Conclusion

1. THE 2003 FIELDWORK ENDEAVOR

The Dari Language Project's 2003 fieldwork endeavor in Yazd, Iran was a great success; we attained all three of the endeavor's objectives. We acquired a firsthand understanding of Zoroastrian culture and religion by attending numerous religious ceremonies, including a *gahāmbār* and the *dādgāh-e tir-māh* and visiting several religious sites including the Yazd *ātashkadeh*, *pir-e sabz*, and *pir-e nāraki*. With respect to our linguistic objectives, we assessed the vitality of the Qāsemābād dialect as well as the language as a whole, and, by working with several native speakers, investigated Dari's verbal and pronominal morphology.

The 2003 fieldwork endeavor was also a success financially. Through the generous support of the Dari Language Project's founding patrons, the fieldwork endeavor was fully funded. We were also fortunate to receive the hospitality of Parviz and Armaiti Sardari in Qāsemābād, and so were able to significantly reduce the cost of our accommodations in Yazd. The funds raised for the 2003 endeavor were therefore not fully exhausted (see Appendix B for itemization of expenditures).

While the 2003 fieldwork endeavor was highly successful within the time allotted, this summer's research only barely scratched the surface of the language's structure, and we have returned from Yazd with a new understanding of how much remains to be learned. We have also acquired a real appreciation for the dire situation that the Dari language and many of its component dialects face. We therefore plan to continue the Dari Language Project, and in fact, to expand its activities in future fieldwork endeavors. The surplus from this year's budget will, of course, be applied to underwriting the Project's operations in 2004 and to ensuring its long-term survival.

2. THE FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

The Dari Language Project's third goal is the complete documentation of Dari's component dialects. The 2003 fieldwork endeavor took the first step towards attaining this objective by beginning a study of the Qāsemābād dialect within the context of current linguistic theory. We gained from this study a newly conceived appreciation of the diversity exhibited by Yazd Dari's thirty-odd dialects, as well as the dire fate many of these dialects face; the Mohammadābād dialect, for example, which only possesses a few speakers all of whom reside in Tehrān. Examples such as this have encouraged the Project to expand the scope of future fieldwork.

The 2004 fieldwork endeavor, scheduled for summer 2004, will not only continue the research on Qāsemābād Dari begun during the summer of 2003, but will also be expanded to include an additional fieldwork component involving a third researcher that will study one of Dari's most threatened varieties. By investigation the two varieties' grammars concurrently, we hope to make valid cross-dialectical comparisons as well as make further headway in analyzing the language's grammar.

The Dari Language Project has also been invited to present the findings of its research at the North American Zoroastrian Conference to be held in the San Francisco Bay Area in December 2004. We look forward to participating in the conference and sharing our findings, furthering the dissemination of information on Dari, one of the primary purposes of the Dari Language Project.

3. THE FUTURE OF DARI

It is a well-attested linguistic fact that attitudes towards language are of the greatest importance in determining the language's chances of revival or continued vitality in the face of imminent death. In spite of the statistics predicting the demise of the Dari language, we believe that Dari's future is not hopeless, especially when we consider that language is intimately related to the culture and society of its speakers. For example, many argue that Dari was a local dialect that was purposely adopted by the Zoroastrians as an additional means of distinguishing themselves from their Muslim persecutors. Though this remains an unsupported claim, it seems much more likely than the alternate claim, that Dari was consciously "invented" by its speakers in order to prevent outsiders from understanding. Whether or not this view has any basis in reality or not, the fact that it is such a prevalent notion among non-speakers and speakers is indicative of, what seems to us, Dari speakers' general interest in and awareness of their language. The Dari speakers we encountered were not only highly aware of their language's diversity and variation but they also seemed to derive the utmost enjoyment from presenting this diversity to us in the form of words and turns-of-phrase especially different from their own speech.

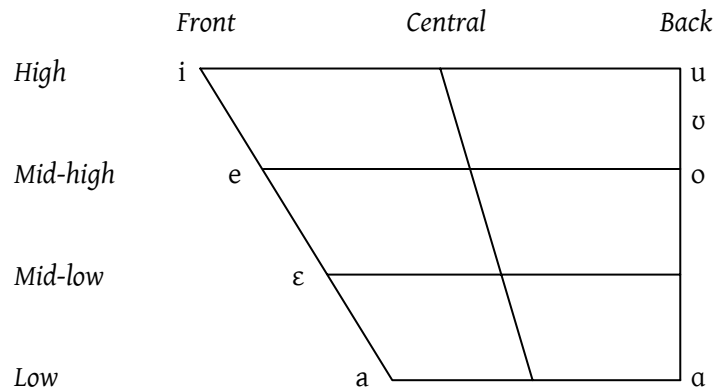
While it would be preposterous to suggest that Dari is not highly threatened today, showing as it does all of the typical signs of imminent death, the beauty of language, like culture, is that it is a dynamic, living system, as capable of progressing in one direction as it is in another, given the appropriate stimuli. Indeed, the fact that, in spite of their vastly diminished numbers, the Zoroastrians have managed to preserve as much of their traditional culture as they have is quite remarkable. Their success is no doubt the result of the strength of their conviction that what they are preserving is an extremely valuable system, worthy of protection even in the face of difficulty. As linguists committed to the preservation of the Dari language, our fondest desire is therefore to convince Dari's speakers, the Zoroastrians of Iran, that their language is a complex and beautiful system equally worthy of protection.

Appendix A

Symbols and Abbreviations

PHONETIC SYMBOLS

In our transcriptions, we follow the conventions of the International Phonetic Alphabet. Qāsemābād Dari possesses eight vowel phonemes, four front and four back:



The language also possesses nineteen consonant phonemes with five points of articulation and five manners of articulation:

	<i>Labial</i>	<i>Alveolar</i>	<i>Palatal</i>	<i>Velar</i>	<i>Glottal</i>
<i>Stops</i>	p	t		k	
	b	d		g	
<i>Affricates</i>			tʃ		
			dʒ		
<i>Fricatives</i>		s	ʃ	x	h
	v	z		q	
<i>Liquids</i>			l r		
<i>Glides</i>	w		y		

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	IMP	imperative	PRES	present tense
2	second person	IP	independent pronoun	PROP	prepositional pronoun
3	third person	OBJ	object pronoun	PRPART	present participle
CLP	clitic pronoun	PAST	past tense	PSTPART	past participle
CONT	continuous aspect	PL	plural	RA	direct object marker
EZF	ezāfe	POSP	possessive	SG	singular

Appendix B

2003 Fieldwork Endeavor Expenditures

Transportation & Communication	
Roundtrip airfare to Tehrān	\$1,874.00
Roundtrip transportation to Yazd	\$61.23
Intracity transportation	\$24.17
Phone Calls	\$3.40
Accommodations	
Room	\$55.15
Board	\$29.45
Materials	
Research Materials	\$69.67
Office Expenses (photocopies, postage, etc.)	\$23.52
Recording Supplies	\$117.03
Gifts for Linguistic Consultants	\$228.75
Equipment	
Sony Minidisc® Recorder	\$374.14
Microphone	\$112.89
CD Burner	\$161.95
Digital Camera	\$429.50
Miscellaneous	\$148.89
Total	\$3,713.75

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