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THE TĀTI DIALECTS OF RĀMAND

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It is a matter of some surprise that despite more than a hundred years of active study of Iranian dialects, one of the most important groups of these dialects, viz. Tāti, extending from Khalkhāl in Azerbaijan to Sāveh, south-west of Tehran, should, until a few years ago, have remained virtually unknown. The group stands out among the North-Western Iranian dialects by virtue of its many archaisms in morphology, syntax and vocabulary, and by the retention of some grammatical features lost to most of the other related groups. With every new Tāti dialect which comes to light, deeper interest in the group is called for, as my recent explorations in Khalkhāl, Tārom, Zenjān and Kharaqān of Sāveh bear out.

Here I should like to offer a few general remarks about the Tāti dialects of Rāmand, a district to the south-west of Qazvin, which contains the largest Tāti-speaking population in Persia.

Rāmand is a flat country at the base of the Rāmand mountain, limited on the north by the Dashtābi and, on the south, by the Zahrā districts.

The common vernacular of these regions is Turkish, but in Rāmand the main villages have retained their Iranian language. These villages, moving from north to south, are: (1) Tākestān, former Siādohon (abbreviated Tak., pop. 8253), situated some 30 miles to the south-west of Qazvin on the road joining this city to Tabriz and Hamadan. (2) Esfarvarin (abbrev. Esf., pop. 3452), whose people, together with those of Chāl, are known for their quarrelsomeness and recalcitrance. (3) Shāl, popularly Chāl (abbrev. Čal., pop. 4321), a conservative village with one of the most interesting Rāmandi

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1 For population numbers I have followed the Farhang-e Joghrāfā’i-e Irān (FJ), vol. I, which, however, reflects the somewhat imperfect statistics of some 15 years ago. Estimates given me by the local people and authorities are generally much higher.
dialects. Its two main districts, Upper and Lower, show slight
dialectal variations.  
(4) Xiâraj (abbrev. Xia., pop. 2784), a declining
village of past importance, the home of Mira Kuru, the Râmandi poet
who seems to have lived not earlier than the late Safavid period.
(5) Xoznin (abbrev. Xoz., pop. 923), (6) Dânesfâhân (abbrev. Dan.,
pop. 2500). (7) Ebrâhîm-âbâd (abbrev. Ebr., pop. 1637), which has an
exceptionally high level of literacy. (8) Sagz-âbâd, (abbrev. Sagz.,
pop. 2070).  
To these is to be added Eshtehârd (abbrev. Esh., pop.
6267), at 78 kms. north-west of Tehran, which, although it belongs to
Sâvuj-bulâgh, represents by traditional and linguistic affinities an
extension of the Tâti villages of Râmand. Its dialect is grammatically
conservative.  
The serious attention of scholars was first drawn to the Tâti
dialects of Râmand by W. B. Henning, who briefly visited Tâkestan
in 1950, and published his remarks on Tâkestân in an important
paper he read before the Philological Society of London in 1953.  
Earlier brief references to the Tâti of Râmand had failed to arouse
wide or immediate interest.  
Responding to the need for a more thorough study of Râmand,
I visited Tâkestan in the summer of 1955, where I learned of the
other Tâti-speaking villages in Râmand. These I have covered since,
in the course of several intermittent trips, collecting dialect materials.
My notes include folk poems, stories, descriptive pieces, and lexical
and grammatical material.

1 Cf. U. Čal. berbinden “to cut”, veškenja “sparrow”, nângun “pinch”, but
L. Čal. bervindens, mesgenja, nângur. M. Sotudeh’s Châli glosses (see below)
belong to the Upper Châl.
2 Ebr. and Sagz., however, belong administratively to the neighbouring
district of Zâhrâ.
3 Râmandi is also spoken in Qarqasîn, Qanbar-shâh, Xoruzân and Châlin,
small villages with emigrants from Esfarvarin; in Yâr-âbâd, a recently founded
village that has drawn its population from Xiâraj; and in Palang-âbâd, Bâbâ-
jâru, Nekujîr, Shohbat-âbâd and Morâd-tappe, all belonging to Eshtehârd and
generally derived from it. The dialects of Alvir, and Vidar in the Kharqân of
Sâveh, are best treated as a separate group of Tâti. Of all the known Tâti
dialects, Alviri comes closest to Eshtehârd, and Vidari, an attenuated form of
Tâti, to Alviri.
5 Eshtehârdi is mentioned by V. Zhukovsky, Materiali, I, p. IX; he quotes
about 140 Esh. glosses he had found on the margin of an 1844 edition of Borhân-
e jâmâ; see, further, V. Minorsky’s article on “Tâti” in the Encyclopaedia of
brief specimens of the Tâti of Khalkhâl; see Henning, op. cit., p. 160.
Meanwhile a few publications bearing on Rāmāndī have appeared: a manuscript copy of a treatise on Rāmāndī dialect, written about a hundred years ago by a native of an unspecified village of Rāmānd, and discovered in 1954 by I. Afshār, was published in 1955 by M. Sotudeh in the Farhang-e Irem-Zamin, vol. III, part I, with Chalī equivalents in Latin script by the editor. It contains mainly lexical material. In 1958 J. Āl-e Aḥmad published an account of the ways and customs of Sāgz-ābād and Ebrāhīm-ābād that included some texts in the dialects of these villages, as well as a glossary, and some grammatical remarks.

In spite of their relative closeness, the Rāmāndī dialects show within themselves interesting variations and divergences in vocabulary, as well as in morphology and syntax.

The most characteristic features of Rāmāndī dialects may be summarized, in morphology, as being the distinction of gender (fem. and masc.), and the retention of the oblique case(s) in nouns and some pronouns, and in syntax, as being the application of the passive construction where a past transitive verb is involved, and the relatively frequent use of postpositions as against the absence or rarity of prepositions.


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1 At the 25th International Congress of Orientalists, I had surmised that, on the basis of comparison and internal evidence, the treatise probably reflected the dialect of Xīārajī. This was borne out by my subsequent study of Xīārajī. 
2 Tāt-nēshīn-hā-ye Boluk-e Zahrah, Tehran. The texts are in fact almost entirely from Sāgz. and fail to bring out the interesting features of Ebrāhīm dialect.
4 In Čal. a number of fem. nouns end in -ī (the unstressed -a seems to have dropped out), e.g. jīli “chick” (Tak. ēllīa), mōjī “young female camel” (Esh. maqīa), māzē “cat”.
The gender of some animals, as well as some adjectives used substantively, is shown by the presence or absence of the above fem. morpheme, e.g. Ebr. xar/xar-a “donkey” (masc. and fem.), Esh. gow/-a “cattle”, Čal. gušak/-a “young camel”, varɡ/-a “wolf”; ferčel/-a “dirty (one)”, sur/-a “red (one)”. Often when the masc. or the base ends in -a, the fem. takes -ia, e.g. Čal., etc. nomaza “fiancée”, nomazia “fiancée”; Esh. Fātemia “Fāţima”; Sagz. šānia “winnowing fork” (cf. Pers. šāne).

In pronouns the gender is marked in the 3rd sg. of the personal and demonstrative pronouns. Examples from Dan.: ā/āya, obl. ji/jia “he/she”, (in both cases used also as demons. pron.); am/ama, obl. jeme/jema “this”; demons. adj.: am/je “this”, ā/jā “that”.

In verbs the gender is invariably marked in the 3rd sg. of the Preterite and Imperfect, and generally also in the Perfect, the Pluperfect (not in Sagz.), the Present, and less frequently in the Subjunctive. Examples: Xoz. buma/bumia “he/she came”, mīā/miẏāya “he/she comes”, bevašt-e/-i “he/she has run”, bumiya/bumiya “he/she had come”; Ebr. miše/mišia “he/she used to go”; Sagz. bevas-e/-iā “(that) he/she runs”.

The distinction of gender in the 1st and 2nd sg. is far less frequent, and seems to be on the decline; Ebr. az-im/-em, Esh. az-im/-eyma, Čal. az yima/yeyma “I am”; Čal. ta yiša/yeyša “you are”; Ebr. bevašt-im/-em, bevašt-iš/-eš “I ran, you ran”; Čal. bettat-e-m/-i-m, bettat-e-š/-i-š “I have, you have run”, bem/bim “I have been”; Esh. bem/-a “(that) I be”.

Only in Ebr. the predicate adj. shows the gender: nāxeš bef/nāxeša fa “he/she was ill”. Interesting are Xia. iya and Čal. ya as the fem. of i “one”.

(2) Nominal declension. At least two cases may be noticed in Rāmandi, direct and oblique. This two case system is generally extended to the plural (but not in Tak., where the dir. plural has disappeared). The fem. nouns do not change in the obl. case, except in Esh.: Marlyama bomya (dir.) “Maryam came”, but Maryamā nun baxārd (obl.) “Maryam ate bread”. In the masc. nouns, the sg. obl. ends in an unstressed -e. In the plural the obl. ending is commonly on, o(n) (Ebr.-en). The plural of the direct case, however, shows

1 In the past tenses the gender distinction is confined to intransitive verbs only; see below.
2 In the following examples the masc. is mentioned first.

The oblique case is used for the genitive, definite direct object, indirect object, object of a postposition, and in Esh., Čal. and Ebr., i.e. the three more conservative dialects, also for the agent of past transitive verbs.

In all Rāmandi dialects an obl. case in -(a)r is employed for nouns denoting family relationships, e.g. Xoz., etc. zomā/zomār “bride-groom, son-in-law”, Esf., etc. teta/tetar “daughter”. This obl. ending is extended in most of the Rāmandi dialects (not, however, in the peripheral Esh. and Tāk.) to genitives and definite direct objects denoting people, e.g. Ebr. čomā razzāt-ar hamberāyā beba “take my farmer with you”, čomā čușun-ar das beškias “our shepherd’s hand was broken”.

Generally, in Rāmandi dialects the vestiges of a different grammatical treatment for animate and inanimate objects are clearly visible, as may be seen in the following examples: Esf. asīja bekat “the apple (fem.) fell”, but, miša bekat-َا “the ewe fell”; Čal. Hasan-e di “give to H.”, but, solo zamān di “give fertilizer to the land”. Cf. further Čal. -ku/-u “from, in, etc.”, postpositions used for animate and inanimate objects respectively.

(3) Postpositions. Of these, some that are single vowels, like Čal., Xia. -u (above), Ebr., Tāk. -a, Sagz. -ā “in, from”, are hardly distinguishable from case endings, and create case-like forms, except that they may also follow the pl. obl. ending and enclitic pronouns, e.g. Čal. razz-م-u “in the gardens”, košte-y-u “in your (sg.) belt”, amberās-م-u begeratem “I took (it) with my clothes”; Tāk. ji āftāvun-َا “in this sunshine (pl.)”; Sagz. ęey-š-ā “in his footsteps”.

Interesting is -ku (Tak. - xo, Sagz. -ču), used also in northern and southern Tāleshi dialects, as well as in Tāti dialects of Khalkhāl and

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1 In most of the Rāmandi dialects the sg. obl. ending serves also to define the defin. dir. obj., but if such a noun is already defined by a possessive adj. or an antecedent genitive, the obl. ending is not used, e.g. Ebr. čomā gandom ārd ka “grind our wheat!”, dādar-em gandom ārd ka “grind my father’s wheat!”, but gandom-e ārd ka “grind the wheat”.

2 Where the definition of such nouns, however, depends on the ending, the common obl. ending -e is employed, e.g. Ebr. čușun-e hamberāyā beba “take with you the shepherd”, čușun-e das beškias “the shepherd’s hand was broken”. The rules governing the use of the obl. endings -e and -(a)r are more complicated than briefly stated here.
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Tārom, but not in Esh., Alviri, and Xo’ini, where -da is used instead.¹

(4) The passive construction.² The most consistent form of the passive construction is found, among the Tāti dialects, in Nowkiāni (Upper Tārom), where the agent is expressed in the oblique, the logical direct object in the direct case, and the verb agrees in number and gender with its logical direct object. In Rāmandi this construction is weakened in various degrees. Closest to Nowkiāni is Esh., the most conservative Rāmandi dialect in this respect, where the above rules are generally observed when the logical direct object is animate. With inanimate objects, the concord of verb is generally abandoned, and the verb (in fact the verbal adjective) is in masc. sg. form: e.g. Hasan-e fur-eš bezā “H. hit his son”, Hasan-e tetia-eš bezā “H. hit his daughter”, Hasan-e lazaḵ-ehā bezandī “H. hit the children”; čemen bezā debasti “I have tethered the goat (fem.)” (masc.: debastā); cf. Hasan-e dāra, dāra-hā buind-eš (masc.) “H. saw the tree (fem.), the trees”.³

The most attenuated form of the passive construction is found in Tak. and Esf., where the agent appears in the direct case, and the logical object is treated as the grammatical direct object, e.g. Esf. Hasan momia-pur-eš bind “H. saw his cousin (the son of his father’s brother)”; Tak. az fel-em ādā Hasan-e “I gave money to H.”.⁴

¹ B. V. Miller’s association of North Tāleshi -ku with Persian ku “where?, street, quarters, etc.”, Tališkī yazīk, pp. 80–1, is hardly convincing. One is led to associate -ku with the Sogdian preposition ku, commonly derived from Av. kam, Vedic kam (Slavic ku) and treated by E. Benveniste, “Une correlation slavo-iranienne”, Festschrift Vasmer, 1956, pp. 70–3, as one of the important isoglosses of Indo-Iranian and Slavic.

² The essential elements in a pass. constr. are: (a) a past transitive verb, (b) the agent, and (c) the logical direct object. Logically, the agent is the verb’s subject; grammatically, however, it does not stand in concord with the verb. It is the logical direct object that is the grammatical subject of the verb, since the verb is in fact built on a past participle and has a passive sense. In Tāti, the agent, if not expressed by an enclitic obl. pronoun, is often resumed by one.

³ The concord of the verb with its logical direct object in Esh. is less frequently observed among the younger generations than among the older. While the older people observe the concord sometimes even with the inanimate objects, the younger neglect it sometimes even with nouns denoting people, and generally with nouns denoting animals.

⁴ Only Čal. has preserved, among the Rāmandi dialects, a set of agential pronouns (also found in Nowkiāni and Xo’ini), as distinct from its general oblique pronouns: men, tu, ay/ay(ā (fem. and masc.), amā, šomā, ayo(n); cf. the obl. personal pronouns: čome(n) ešta, jay-/a (masc. and fem.), čemā, šomā, jayο(n).